The Golden Quiche
by Soph-topus

Summary

For Monsterkind, the Surface represented freedom.
For Frisk, it's a return to some uncomfortable realities.
It all began with a simple wish. When that wish faded, Frisk tried to move on.
Except, 'moving on' was not so simple. Emerging from the Underground had put them in a worldwide spotlight.
From an unknown child, they had become an icon of great value.

The Golden Quiche'

What to expect from this story:

-Mystery Drama
-Anime
-Extensive Surface Worldbuilding
-Expanded History and Backstory
-Magic System
- More Magic
- Both new and old people.
- Feels.
- Gambits.

What to not expect from this story:

- Toby Canon.
- Commonly agreed headcanons (about a certain scientist in particular)
- Slice of life. This is definitely not that.

_This work comes with its own magic science lore in the form of The Magus Compendium_

_Art blog_
_Discord_

Notes

Please leave all headcanons at the door to fully enjoy this story.
You Reset

* * *

You tried saving Asriel.
But you can’t.

You wanted to travel back into the Ruins.
But you can’t.

You wanted to restore his SOUL for good.
But you can’t.

Is there nothing you can do?
You must be brave.
You must be determined.

You RESET.

* * *

You were afraid.
You have never been so afraid.

The wrath of a friend cannot be confined in words.

You stood there. Helpless.
Bones had caged you in.
It was for your sake.
It saved you from the people who claim they are your ‘real parents’.

But just one accident was enough to turn your safety net into a death trap.

You were sure you died.
Even if you didn’t die, Mettaton’s entertainment empire was ruined thanks to the live broadcast.

You didn’t want that.
You want everyone to be happy.
You want everyone to stay happy.

You RESET.

* * *

You hear the wailing.
You smell the dust.

You see the one person who had any clue of your true powers crying over a tattered red scarf.

You were still in your safe cage.
But someone else had taken the blow for you.

You never saw Sans again.

You RESET.

* * *

You tried to avoid any scenario that puts you in danger.

Pretend to be sick.
Skip class.
Trick Toriel into thinking that you went to school, then backtrack to hide in the bathroom.
Plea to Asgore. King Fluffybuns gave in. He always does.

But they always find you.
If not today, tomorrow.
If not tomorrow, next week.

Next month.
Next year.

You were forced into court.
You were taken.

You RESET.

* * *

You RESET.
You don’t want Toriel and Asgore to grieve for outliving you.

You RESET.
You don’t want to be taken away by anyone, legal or otherwise.

You RESET.
You don’t want to grow old.

You RESET.
You don’t want to die.

You RESET.
You don’t want anyone else to die.

You RESET.
You don’t want to remember any of these.

You RESET.
You can’t handle the ‘Floweys’ out there.
Even if you don’t die, others get killed.

You RESET.
The Underground was so much safer.
Sans will hate you for it, but this is for his sake too.

You RESET.
You want to relive the best time of your life.
Forever and ever.

You RESET.

* * *
It’s been months since the monsters moved to the Surface. Their appearance in the modern world first stirred a sense of fear. It turns out the legends were true: there were creatures living under that mountain.

Ambassador Frisk’s first order of business was to ease the local fears. With Asgore’s help, they selected the most harmless-looking bunch for the entourage.

The idea was to go to the nearest town with said fluffy bunch, talk to the mayor, then settle for peace.

It was fine and dandy… until Endogeny showed up uninvited. An Amalgamate was just the thing of horrors that humanity feared.

Frisk quickly turned the tables around. They patted, played and rubbed the amorphous dog into submission. Demonstrated to everyone that this monster can be quelled without violence.

The townsfolk was nothing short of amazed.

Then, out came the gold coins.

The rest was history. Before long, the monster town had all the infrastructure they needed.

They named their new home as ‘Ebott Town’. It’s a nice combination of the Surface’s sensibilities and the monster’s traditionally simple labels.

Despite their prowess, Frisk was still a bit too young to take their role full-time. As the ‘Mom’, Toriel used her political experience to deflect any over-enthusiastic reporters. Any diplomatic work must follow her determined schedule.

That means the child’s well-being must come first: school, playtime, time for regular children’s activities, and privacy.

The human society reluctantly agreed.

All was well, until one day…

During one of Undyne’s private training sessions, Alphys plucked the courage to ask a question. The worry was larger than her timidness.

“Hey guys,” she asked. “I-Is it me, or Frisk is acting extra nervous?”

Undyne was just about to suplex Papyrus into an empty trash can. But the sudden question stopped her. She glanced a confused look. Then she dumped the poor skeleton into the bin anyway.

“What makes ya think so?” The fish lady asked.
“They came into my lab yesterday. Asking if they can do some research at my house. And it was during school hours.”

Papyrus yelled from the bin itself. “TORIEL HAD THE HUMAN UNDERNET INSTALLED, RIGHT?”

“You mean the ‘Internet’. But y-yeah. She did. Bought the kid a PC and all. But for some reason Frisk insisted on using mine.”

Undyne narrowed her eyes. “Wait. You mean the punk skipped school to do research in YOUR lab? That doesn’t make sense! The school had this ‘Internet’ thing too!”

A mittened bony hand raised to the air. “I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, HAVE A THEORY!”

The two ladies facepalmed. Papyrus and his theories were rarely accurate, but he would never accept a no for an answer.

“Go ahead.” Undyne said.

“SANS TOLD ME THAT HUMANS UNDERGO THIS THING CALLED ‘PUBERTY’! I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT MEANS, BUT IT INVOLVED BEING SCANDALOUS!”

“C’mon, Papyrus. The punk’s more mature than that. They won’t skip class just to watch weird stuff.”

But then again, Alphys was the one with all the questionable anime content. Maybe all Frisk needed to do was to dig into her folders. Or use her account to surf adult sites.

…That didn’t sit right with Undyne. They wouldn’t do that, even for ‘Poker Faced Flirtatious Frisk’.

Undyne cracked her knuckles. “Okay. After Frisk returns from school today, I’m gonna WRING the secrets out of them!”

“N-no!” Alphys cried out. “You can’t just confront them without evidence!”

Glance left, glance right. Then, she put on her determined face. “I’m going to search through the history files. Even if they go incognito, I have a secret keylogger to keep track.”

The keylogger was installed to Sans-proof her computer. Or so she tried. Alphys wanted no more pranks of digital hot-dogs in the middle of anime time.

Is there anything that skeleton can’t do?

“Well? What are we waiting for! LET’S GOOOOOO!”

The fish warrior wasted no time. She grabbed Papyrus out of the bin with one hand, and scooped up Alphys with the other. Then hauled all of them back into the lab to embark on today’s new quest.

Well, the science lizard appreciated the sentiment. It was the reason why she loved Undyne in the first place.

But… she wished that they could back off a bit.

The two loud ones hovered over her shoulders. Sheer anticipation exuded from their every pore, waiting for one piece of incriminating information from the pile of ‘jargon’.
It was a little stifling.

“...DID YOU FIND IT?” Papyrus asked. No chill in his voice, ever.

“N-not yet. I'm still searching for yesterday’s timestamp.”

A grumbling grunt fell out of Undyne’s lips. “What’s taking so long???”

“I-I use this computer too, you know.” Alphys hurried past the records of a Toriel-Asgore fanfiction. That was too scandalous even for her own standards.

At last, she reached the time Frisk did their mysterious research. Alphys let out an audible gasp.

“What?”

“What???”

“They’re all deleted.”
Aware

Sans had a terrible night.

Or morning.
Or evening.

Whenever it was, he fell asleep to more disturbing nightmares.

It was fortunate that Papyrus wasn’t home at that moment. He was sure he screamed. He didn’t want to trouble his uber cool brother more than warranted.

Sans stared at the swirling tornado of trash at the corner. Sighed.

The happy ending won’t last forever.
The trash won’t last forever either.

Sooner or later, he’s just going to be reset back into the Underground.

Again.

He’s aware of that much. A part of him wanted to just stay in bed and give up.

But, the prospect of another nightmare did not sound good.

So Sans moved from the bed to the couch. He lay down there and started his own coping routine: brainstorming.

Pranks.
Jokes.
Puns.

The little stupid things that made his dreary existence more amusing.

Sans being Sans, had a mental roulette of friends in his mind.

Who?
When?
What?
How?

Just watching that wheel spin made him grin.

The result ended with ‘Alphys’, ‘her computer’, ‘rig it to trigger during her anime time’, with ‘Digital Lesser Dog’. Make that image extend its neck until it flooded the screen.

At first he chuckled at himself. Then, it turned into another sigh.

Ah, dammit. It’s the same gimmick.
Can’t believe I’m gonna use that twice in a row.
Bepis.

Eh, whatever. I’m a sad sack of bones anyway.
It’s decided. Sans lifted his pet rock to reveal a hidden ‘memory stick’. The human world’s data science was way ahead of his society, much to his pleasure.

Using one of his many ‘shortcuts’, he snuck into Alphys’ lab. She was not home. Most likely hanging out with Undyne and Papyrus. Though, sometimes she had to perform maintenance on Mettaton.

Her brand new PC was always on. Most of the time it was to torrent subbed anime.

At least Alphys was prudent enough to put all her real work into a different PC. Locked and passworded to prevent prying eyes.

Speaking of prying eyes, it didn’t take long for Sans to figure out that Alphys installed a keylogger.

*Heh. Trying to cover your bases, eh?  
Not bad.  
But it’s still rather… beta.*

*…Forget about the dog prank. Let’s see what you’ve been writing.*

Sans and lazybones go hand in hand. Until a subject piqued his interest. He’d then study that to the fullest, sometimes to the point where he’d retain that skill.

He won’t remember the ‘when’, but he’d remember the ‘what’. Quantum physics was one of them. Now it’s silly programming stuff.

He accessed the keylogger data and started scrolling down the pages. It was full of anime searches, blog posts, review ranting…

Oh, fanfiction about Toriel and Asgore. Always a golden find. Sans decided to wait for the finished result. Now that he knew Alphys’ username, he can search for it at his own leisure.

Then all the funny stuff stopped at one sentence.

‘Legal custody without permission of original parents’.

Sans felt a bead of sweat forming on his bony forehead.  
He scrolled down further.  
It got worse.

‘Familial Law’.  
‘Adoption Process’.  
‘Foster family’.  
‘Time required to approve new legal rights’.  
‘DNA testing’.  
‘Self defense laws’.  
‘Accidental death laws’.  
‘Kidnapping sentence’.  
‘How to avoid getting kidnapped’.

He almost lost his ketchup-lined insides at the last line.

*Well, shit.  
This ain’t Alphys.  
Think, Sans. Think.*
Put that quantum noggin to use.

The equation ended at ‘Frisk’. Repeat infinite times. The search choices were so blatant, even Papyrus might figure it out.

Sans selected the entire controversial entry by mouse.
Right-click.
Delete.

He was lucky that the keylogger only recorded keyboard strokes.
Serious Talk

Chapter Notes

I tried my best to proofread it, but I'm not sure if I've caught all the inconsistencies. Cross-fingers that it's nothing major.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

‘Grillby’s makes the best burgers’.

That was true in the Underground. And still true on the Surface. Access to the human market elevated Grillby’s burger making art to new heights.

Or so Sans would like to believe. Some of the other patrons were not as appreciative.

He bought two packs: one for himself and another for Frisk.

Then, he left a voice message on Toriel’s phone. Said that he’s free to coach Frisk on some good ol’ science and math. Dinner provided.

It was a sentiment much appreciated. Most children struggled with those and the special kid was of no exception.

Then it’s off to pick them up from school.

Frisk saw him alright. The kid froze right at the entrance as if they’re a Snowdin snowman. Hah. So they knew they’re in trouble. They must have met like this before. Many, many times.


“Heh, kid. Thought you’ve gotten used to us skellies by now.” He lifted the bag. “Grillby’s. Can’t have class on an empty stomach, y’know.”

More silent squinting from Frisk. Ah, that distrust.

“We can always have tuition at your place if ya want.”

The kid leaned forward and whispered into his ear. Or where his ear should be.

They said: “I am the legendary fartmaster.”

Sans frowned. That’s his ultra super-secret phrase, reserved only to those with ‘special powers’. Heard that too many damn times now.

His eye sockets went dark for a moment. “Is this a game to you?”

Frisk shook their head.
Okay.
Relax.
Calm down.

If they’re using the secret code, it means they know what they’re doing.
Right?

The light in his eyes returned.

“Well then, follow me.” Said Sans. “I know a shortcut.”

And how Ebott Town was riddled with ‘shortcuts’: all thanks to the multiple time shenanigans. It’s still a wonder how the world hasn’t collapsed on itself yet.

One turn around the school later and they were at the skeleton brothers’ new surface house. Above ground, but with the exact same architecture.

Sans preferred it that way. Easier for him to export the underground secret lab to the land under the sky.

He then unlocked the back door with a silver key. Down the stairs they go.

Despite its limited space, he managed to cram in a sofa. The zone nearest to the stairs was labelled as a ‘living room’ of sorts. It’s the only place where non-lab activities can take place.

That included: sleep, eating, reading, tuition, and…

…Serious discussions.

The two sat down on the couch to eat their burger meal. Silence hung overhead as both parties tried to enjoy their food first. Whatever they needed to discuss was a surefire appetite killer.

Frisk did the cleaning up. They’re at least responsible enough to do that by now. With dinner out of the way, it’s time for the real deal.

With a finger, Sans cast his Blue magic on one of the drawers. Yanked that out of its place. He then pulled it over to his lap.

That one drawer, a time capsule, was filled with many memories of other timelines. They belonged to a certain time-travelling human. Fifty copies of the same group photo nestled between assorted postcards and letters. Every one of them had the same phrase written at the beginning.

‘I am the legendary fartmaster’.

Except for the original: the control sample.

Sans had a pretty good idea how they did it. Gave him one copy in every new timeline and have that stored in a safe bubble outside of time. One became two. Two became three. Three became fifty.

A message of sorts, he figured.

Pointing straight down on the pile, Sans said: “It’s high time you explain.”

Crankiness exuded from every pore of his boney self. Despite his standard grin, he’s beyond sick and tired. This time Sans will burn that sentiment into Frisk’s very being.
Frisk’s lips turned into a guilty frown. They lifted the box over to their lap and began sorting through the contents.

Some of these letters appeared older than the others, despite not much true ‘time’ had passed between each writing.

They unfolded one. Skimmed through the contents for context before passing it to Sans.

“Yeah kid, I’ve read that.” Sans replied. “That’s a letter of apology for killing Papyrus. Sorry. Can’t say that I’ve completely forgiven you for that yet. I still have his scarf in the other drawer.”

Then the next letter.

“That’s an apology for killing me. Dark times, eh? It takes a lot of LOVE and EXP to force my hand.”

And another letter.

“…I rather not read that one if I can help it. That’s the problem of too many resets, kid. You start to lose yourself. In more ways than one.”

Frisk scrunched their brows at Sans. Worried.

“I could be a different skeleton before I met you.” Sans responded with his distinctive winking shrug. “Maybe. Maybe not.”

It was heartbreaking to know that Chara turned out to be a maniac. They had a chance of a new life with a loving family. Threw that all away. Ripped it apart in life and in death, all because they had a grudge against humanity.

Sans gestured a pinch with his skeletal fingers. “We were this close to the point of no return. I wasn’t kidding when I said ‘everything ended’. One more step and we wouldn’t be talking here.”

“Chara would have won the devil’s deal.”

The other party showed a reluctant nod.

“I guess after that disaster, you decided to travel the world. Didn’t matter where. As long you’re far away. Figured that would be the logical decision.”

They stacked the postcards and fanned them out. It featured various landmarks all over the world, stretching from east to west.

Frisk hoped to find a place in the world where they ‘should’ belong. The human world stretched to all four corners of the globe. There should be a place for them, right?

No.

The more Frisk stared at the pictures, the more downcast they became. They dropped the postcards and buried their face into their hands.

Sobbing became the only sound in the air.

Sans couldn't maintain his usual grin any more. He just watched the living embodiment of ‘Determination’ break down in despair. That was beyond disconcerting.
If the pain got into Frisk, what chances does he have?

He hovered his hand over Frisk’s back, hesitating. Getting personal with anyone not-Papyrus was not his style.

But in the end, he gave the kid a gentle pat.

“The Surface isn’t kind to you, huh?” he said, “That’s some… heavy research material you got there. In Alphys’ Lab, I mean.”

Frisk sobbed louder in response. They didn’t care how or when Sans read their true troubles. Not anymore.

The predicament left the short skeleton in a pickle.

Great.

What should I do?
What can I do?

If nothing is done, we’ll RESET forever. 
In each round, there’s a chance that Chara will possess Frisk again.

It’s already a miracle that the kid lasted this long. 
I would have snapped a long, long time ago.

Maybe this is fate. 
All things must come to an end. 

Whatever.

...Damn. Giving up before we even started. 
No wonder the kid can’t trust me.

C’mon, there’s more than yourself at stake now. 
Think about your brother. He’s loving the Surface and all their pasta glory.


“Even lazy ol’ me.”

Just offering himself on the plate sent jitters throughout his body. It was more than just a stage-fright.

If he offered help, he’d have expectations. Expectations go hand in hand with hope.

That sparked a host of anxieties.

Sans buckled down his insecurities behind his trademark clown-face.

“Mind giving me some motivation?” he asked.

Frisk peeked out from the corner of their eye.

“You know I hate making promises, kid. But when I do, I follow it through.”
He then offered his pinky finger: the sign of an oath.

“Will you do the same? If we overcome this, promise me that you’ll never RESET again. Keep that power under lock and key. Forever.”

The kid didn’t budge an inch. Looks like they needed a bit more convincing.

“I mean,” Sans continued, “It’s proof that we can face anything life throws at us. There’s no need to hide in a time-loop. Escapism is bad, y’know.”

He knew he was a total hypocrite, but he must try. For once.

Frisk stopped sobbing and wiped their tears away. Still, they did not jump on the offer.

A wise move? Perhaps. Anything and everything can happen on the Surface. For every bit that could go right, it can also go wrong.

“Uh.” Sans said. “Nevermind kid, maybe this is a bad ide–”

Before he could finish his sentence, the human’s soft pinkie finger wrapped around his bony limb.

Sans was surprised. At the same time, he was not. This is Frisk after all. They had the knack of catching him off-guard.

He realised that there’s no turning back now. He couldn’t ‘reset’ the deal and pretend it never happened.

There are words to keep: even if both sides were not too sure if they can.

“Welp. The deed’s done.” Said Sans, “I guess it’s time to have a meeting then. It’s weekend tomorrow. Lunch at your place sounds good?”

Chapter End Notes

Also, I'm aware that there's not enough puns. I promise that the pun density will increase in the next chapter.
Although I'm... not a very good punner.
You helped Mom make lunch.

It’s ravioli. Stuffed with spinach, feta cheese and some chopped snails.

Snails sounded gross at first. And well... they kind of were, for a dozen or so meals.

An acquired taste.

You don’t know when it happened - maybe on the thirteenth try - but they turned out rather delicious in the end. Very delicious, in fact. Overnight, you’ve gained a new appreciation for escargot. Now you’re even looking forward to Grillby’s baked sea snails special; they’re pretty rare to come by.

While Mom seasoned the filling, you took the cold pasta dough out from the fridge, rolling the balls into square sheets and portioning them out.

You wonder how monsters process human food without a standard digestive system.

Likewise, you wonder how it’s possible for humans to gain nourishment from items made of magic.

Despite all those questionable logistics, both sides suffered no ill-effects from cross-consumption. It had become a subject of curious study for Alphys and the local scientists.

You told Mom that you had finished the dough-work.

“Thank you, my child. Mind helping me spoon out the filling?”

You agreed to help. The filling smelled of fragrant brine and herbs. Mouth watering long before it’s finished in the pot. The Toriel Special.

Toriel.

To you, it’s the perfect name for the perfect mother.

Sweet and gentle, yet tough as nails whenever she must. Though if possible, you rather not see that side. It is stressful for her too. Given the choice, she’d rather stay as the warm, loving, almost-smothering matron.

You carefully layer the other sheet of dough on top. Then you told Mom that you’ve finished the first batch.

“Oh, that looks lovely!” Mom exclaimed. “Go ahead and fill the second batch.”

She drew out an all-purpose kitchen knife from the holder and started cutting the sheet into squares.

Kitchen knives now have a whole different meaning to you. Every other kitchen chore was fine… except anything that involved a sharp edge. You rather not fall into the same temptation again.

Mom thought you were too young to use such a dangerous tool anyway. Her overprotectiveness was to your favour.
While you worked on the pasta, you heard someone knocking on the main door.

Two knocks. No more, no less.

“’I’ll answer that.’” Mom placed the knife down on the counter and wiped her hands. Gleeful anticipation stretched across her face. She knew who had arrived: he’s the only one who would ignore the doorbell.

"Knock. Knock." He said.

Can never pass up a chance for a joke, right?

You tried to listen to the full skit from the kitchen, but you were too far away. The exact contents of the exchange weren't important anyway: it’s the fact that it will make Mom laugh.

And laugh she did. Along with a certain short skeleton and a geeky lizard scientist.

Wait, a geeky lizard scientist? That was unexpected. You decided to take a peek.

Alphys and Undyne, the loving couple, had tagged along with Sans much to your surprise.

Alphys carried a black briefcase. That piqued your curiosity, so you kept spying.

Undyne, however, caught wind of your presence, greeting you with her distinctive ear-to-ear-almost-slasher grin. You smiled back in the exact same manner: she likes it when you do that.

In the meantime, Mom and Sans continued talking about you.

“How’s the kid doing, Tori?” he asked.

“Excellent,” Mom answered.

“On their way to becoming a ‘bone’-a-fide chef?”

“I sure hope so! I can’t wait for the day where I get ‘floored’ by their culinary skills.”

“Aww, Tori. Don’t let Papyrus hear that. You’re gonna give him a bad ‘burn’.”

More laughing ensued. Alphys just grinned. Awkward as ever.

“Do you need anything in the meantime?” asked Mom. “It’ll be quite a while before lunch is ready.”

“I’m good,” said Sans. “Just gotta get the list ‘sorted’ before everyone arrives.”

It would have been a totally normal sentence if it wasn’t said by Sans.

Alphys fidgeted a bit. “Uh, a g-glass of water is fine. I don’t want to spoil lunch.”

Undyne wholeheartedly agreed with her partner’s choice: the colder the better.

You cleaned your hands and got their drinks.

“Oh, Frisk! T-thanks. Weren’t you busy in the kitchen?”

You shrugged in response.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to bother you.”
You told her that’s no problem. Then, you tried to head back into the kitchen. But Mom stopped you.

She said, “Frisk, you should review your itinerary. An ambassador must know their meeting details long before it begins. Consider it your career training. I’ll handle the rest of the cooking from here onwards.”

Shouldn’t Mom be the one to prepare? She was once the Queen, and Gerson told you that she’s the backbone of the nation when she was in power.

But she did say that it was ‘training’.

The four of you sat side by side at the table. Alphys opened up her briefcase to reveal a whole lot of printed material.

You recognized the logo on the top of the page. It belonged to Social Services.

“Sans told me about your custody troubles,” she said. “For this meeting, I think it’s best to go through the major details first. Gather questions from everyone. Clarify. Highlight the ones we need expert help. Then we’ll ask the neighbouring mayor for a lawyer.”

For a moment, you wondered if you’re talking to some twin-sister that you never knew.

Undyne and Alphys had a ‘serious mode’ that was an opposite reflection of their usual selves.

For example, on a normal day Undyne was a loud anime-obsessed lady. Her level of basic common sense almost rivalled Papyrus. This was the person who believed mind-control was real.

But in the darkest hour, she could transform into a true knight of heroism. ‘Undyne the Undying’: so fuelled by her own DETERMINATION, she once survived a fatal blow.

Alphys? Archetype Number One of an insecure and awkward nerd. Also anime-obsessed. No one ever expected her to do great things.

Yet you knew she did. When the Underground was in danger, she devised an evacuation plan on massive scale. Her refusal to give in to her own fear saved the lives of many.

She proved to be so capable, the survivors crowned her Queen.

Those took place in a different timeline. Still, knowing their hidden potential put your mind at ease.

You tried to be a good ambassador to read the legal papers. Unfortunately, you can’t grasp the inherent complexity. The confusion was evident in your frustrated expression.

Your three friends helped translate the convoluted sentences. Why must legal papers be so complicated and redundant? How can anyone understand these? It made you realise why lawyer exams were so notorious for their difficulty.

Despite their best effort you still ended up highlighting a quarter of the contents.

You were glad to have their help. These would have been too much to handle alone.

Papyrus made his grand entry about a half an hour later. He wasn’t late: in fact he was punctual. He told you the night before that he will arrive on that point of time, and he did exactly that. Not too early, not too late.
‘Daddy’ Asgore arrived last. You felt Mom’s mood sour the moment he entered your home. Although he brought along a box of his favourite tea, he stayed away from the kitchen. It’s Mom’s space in there and he didn’t want to invade it.

You hoped that they could start anew on the Surface. But, Mom had yet to forgive her husband for his mistakes. Losing dear children to his policies wounded her far deeper than you had realised.

Lunch was served with happiness and smiles, despite the awkward tension between Toriel and Asgore. The inevitable fawning of pasta delights from Papyrus helped maintain the light mood.

It was then you had an uncomfortable revelation. The only poor souls who’re not legal-savvy was Papyrus… and you.

They could have just done everything without your knowledge, but they chose to include you. That sentiment touched the bottom of your heart. Also, you pitied Papyrus for what he had to struggle with.

“OKAY SANS,” said Papyrus. “HOW COULD A COMPLETE STRANGER CLAIM FRISK AGAIN?”

Sans answered: “Let’s say for example, Frisk is a child of Person A and B. Person A divorced Person B, remarried to Person C. Then Person A and C got into a financial pinch. The next of kin who can care for them would be Person D, who is a relative of Person C.”

“...YOU LOST ME AT PERSON A.”

“It is heh, ‘a’ long-winded matter, bro.”

“IT IS A LONG-WINDED INDEE-- ‘A’? DID YOU JUST TURN THAT PIECE OF A DELICATE PUZZLE INTO A PUN, SANS?! I CAN’T BELIEVE IT!” The short skelly snickered and snorted. Some things just don’t change.

You noticed that Mom scrunched her brows in a rather… intense manner.

She said: “I don’t think Frisk had ever told us their background. It would be rude to make assumptions.”

Undyne glanced to the side. She does that whenever she’s troubled or reluctant. Or sympathetic. “Yeah punk. As an urchin, I understand it’s hard to talk about your childhood. But we gotta know where ya stand so we can help.”

Despite the countless resets, you had never confessed your background to your monster family. It’s about time that you did.

Mom held your hand. Her furry fuzz added extra comfort to her warm gesture.

You explained to them that you’re legally an ‘orphan’, a person without any known biological parents. You remembered growing up with plenty of other children in foster homes. After hitting the age milestone that your fosters decided, you would move to a different home.

You were not a difficult child, but they thought you’d be better off elsewhere. Something about different age groups and school requirements.

Some homes were better than others. But they were often overcrowded. On the plus side, you
learned how to act and care for other people.

Deep inside, you felt like some factory line product. The system shipped you around to be ‘grown’ and ‘assembled’ into a proper adult. There was love, but they were rather distant and divided between the other ‘children of the system’.

When you were done, you stared down on the table. Mom reached out to give you a hug.

She’s warm. And soft. You wanted to bury your face into her clothes and forget about the deal.

“Sorry to hear that.” Undyne said. “Were you abandoned? Or your old folks… they didn’t make it?”

You don’t know. The foster parents had the details, but they didn’t tell you the full story. You had never thought to ask either.

“Dear child,” Dad addressed you. “Why were you on Mount Ebott? How did you get there?”

You explained to him that it was a school trip. You got too adventurous for your own good and wandered away from camp. Out of sheer curiosity, you climbed to the top to peek into the huge hole above.

The ground then crumbled beneath your feet.

“Hmm. I find it odd that your society’s guards didn’t search for you,” he said. “When we arrived on the Surface, we found no signs of any human activity.”

Dad had a good point.

“W-what if more time had passed than Frisk realised?” Alphys proposed. “Did you notice any change of ‘seasons’? Like, from ‘spring’ to ‘summer’?”

You tried to recall, but it wasn’t clear. What if you had gone missing for months? The clothes you wore were not quite in season for summer, that’s for certain.

Sans started to sweat a bit. He’s still grinning, but you can see he was uncomfortable. “Uh, what if they thought the kid’s dead? Falling into a pitch black hole isn’t a good sign of survival, y’know. Maybe that’s why they didn’t outright try to jump on the whole custody deal. Probably thought Frisk is some ghostly doppelganger or something.”

Listening to Sans’ theory brought chills up your spine. The whole idea reminded you of Chara in a bad, bad way.

Papyrus raised his mittened hand. Oh, great. He’s going to give more of his special brand of logic. You let him anyway. It could be enlightening, if not entertaining.

“So,” he began, “Frisk is probably maybe apparently like an abandoned quiche. Each of this ‘foster family’ took care of the quiche until they fulfilled their quota, and then passed them to a different person.”

“No one thought they were special. Then one day they fell into the underground. Through the super awesome power of friendship, the quiche saved all of monsterekind!”

“Suddenly they’re a very, very, veeeeryy important special friend.
THEY HAD BECOME EXTRA SHINY. A GOLDEN QUICHE! AND EVERYONE KNOWS HUMANS HAVE A STRANGE OBSESSION WITH SHINY YELLOW THINGS. NOW EVERYONE WANTS TO CLAIM FRISK AS THEIR OWN, BE IT THROUGH TRICKERY OR FORCE.”

Quiche logic aside, that was accurate.

Papyrus gasped, aghast and horrified. “OH MY GOD! THAT IS CHILDNAPPING!”

Said the person who once tried to capture you.

Alphys started writing down the to-do list. Her strokes were fast, furious, and illegible to anyone other than herself.

“Okay. W-we need to get Frisk’s foster history. And we should ask for a registry from Social Services. With that data, we can weed out any fakes who claim to be in the system. Oh! And we should find out more about their ‘biological family’. I think that’s the term.”

What about DNA testing, you asked?

“That is a must!”

Alphys’ spirit was on fire. It’s burning a bit too hot.

Before you know it, the meeting snowballed into a giant pile of suggestions. You were glad that Mom’s around to provide common sense.

You do not want a high-strung Undyne stalking your every moment. Or Papyrus insisting on following you into the bathroom. At school. In front of all the other students.

It may deter kidnappers, but you were not ready to sacrifice the remaining shreds of your social life. Plus the ordeal would tire them out too soon.

By the time they wrapped up the meeting, it was late evening. You were dead tired: to the point where you wanted to lie down in bed until dinner. Homework can wait.

And yet, this was ‘training’? Does that mean the grown-up ambassador work will be more daunting than this?

What in the world did you sign up for? Is there a chance for a career change?

You smacked your cheeks with both hands. Told yourself to get a grip. Working alone obviously did not work out, judging from all the times you’ve reset.

You rolled on your back to face the ceiling. As you closed your eyes, a warm, wide smile refused to go away.

The tenacity of your monster family filled you with the determination to face tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes
My take on Papyrus is that he has a very special brand of logic. He says the most outlandish thing ever. It sounds dumb until you look at his angle. Then it's accurate.

I now call it 'Papyrus Logic'.
Also, puns. I'm still bad at them. That's why I asked a friend to help me out.

Frisk's story will have relevance! By no means the other fan theories and speculations are wrong either. This is my take, and it'll become a big plot point. Hope you don't mind an additional character from the human society.

Even Chara's possession logic will have weight. Stay tuned!
In light of Frisk’s ‘Golden Quiche’ issue, the heroic skeleton decided to protect the kid in the way he knew best.

On the stroke of midnight, ‘The Great Papyrus’ gathered his tools and headed straight out to the one main road into Ebott Town.

His objective: to build the biggest electric maze in history! It didn’t matter if it took him days, weeks, or even months. Once Papyrus set his mind to something, he will do it.

“IT’LL BE ELECTI-FRYING!!! AND INVISIBLE.”

Except there was one minor problem. Or rather, two minor problems.

First, Papyrus was not good with puzzles.
Second, unauthorized puzzles on the Surface had a tendency to cause dire complications.

Midway through construction of the second layer of the maze, multiple human supply trucks interfered. Papyrus tried to stop them from driving on site, but… a certain white fluffy dog tripped him into the snow.

Thus the trucks drove straight into an active half-built electric maze, triggering invisible pressure plate after invisible pressure plate. And Papyrus being Papyrus, he held the connected electric orb in his own pocket.

The collective frizzling knocked him out cold.

He then fell into the realm of strange, disturbing dreams.

He dreamt of Frisk, or rather: a red-eyed version who proclaimed themselves the enemy of humanity and monsterkind alike.

A sadistic grin sketched on their face.

The Great Papyrus granted mercy. Sparing them. And yet, instead of accepting his kindness… they took advantage of it, leaping towards him and lopping off his head.

“W-WELL. THAT’S NOT WHAT I EXPECTED…”

His body turned to dust.

“BUT… ST… STILL! I BELIEVE IN YOU.”

His heart. No. His very SOUL knew that person was not his dear human friend.

It was someone else.
Something else.

The dream shifted. Now Papyrus found himself running through a dark and creepy forest: the stars shining far above the canopy in the overworld sky.

Why?

When?

His magical heart pounded against his chest.

Dreams don’t make sense, do they?

Papyrus saw Sans right ahead. He hunched more than usual, panting from exhaustion.

Frisk was there too. They were locked in a bone cage. Was it imprisonment, or was it protection?

A shadowy figure emerged from the bushes. A man? A woman? Papyrus couldn’t see, yet he sensed intense danger from the silhouette alone.

They drew out a weapon: a toy gun from the looks of it. Toy or not, Sans had only one HP. Anything could kill him. Anything.

Papyrus tried to call for his brother, but no voice came from his larynx.

Then… he heard a terrible bang. It reminded Papyrus of a firecracker.

Sans managed to dodge the bullet. Barely. When he tried to summon one of his ‘special cannons’ to retaliate, he slipped on his footing and spun out of control.

The shining beam of light blasted through the shadow, burned the trees, circling back to Frisk’s cage.

Papyrus did what Papyrus does best: acting on his protective instinct.

He leapt into the fray and put on his best makeshift shield of bones: light-blue, impenetrable by anything that moves.

Alas, even that was not enough to withstand the might of Sans.

Everything then ended in white.

Like the Snowdin snow…

Papyrus snapped wide awake. He found himself safe and sound, tucked under the warm blankets of his car-shaped bed.

“…WOWIE! WHAT A SHOCKER!”

He sat up and discovered himself feeling sore from skull to metatarsus. Looking down, he discovered that he was covered in linen bandages.

They wrapped around his arms, neck, ribs, spine, even his hipbones. How scandalous! Just the thought of someone else other than Sans seeing him naked made Papyrus fluster.
The brand new digital clock on the wall said ‘1:00 AM’.

“I AM? WAIT. DID TIME ROLL BACKWARDS WHILE I WAS OUT COLD?”

Papyrus expected Sans to drop into his room with a pun right about now.

…but things were silent. A bit too silent.

The once cheerful skeleton grew worried. It didn’t help that the nightmare he just had involved his brother.

Once he got out of bed, the soreness didn’t bother him much. Those bruises were nothing compared to his training with Undyne. Maybe. Nonetheless, he just braved through the pain like everything else.

After putting on his ‘battle clothes’, he went to his first stop: Sans’ room.

“SANS? BROTHER?”

Papyrus pressed the side of his skull against the door. He tried listening for life signs. The lazy one’s snoring, the shuffling of trash, or the faint resonance of his magical presence.

None.

He hurried down the stairs to check the kitchen. When he found no trace of Sans there either, Papyrus bolted right out of the house.

Where to?
Where else other than the rebuilt Grillby’s?

Papyrus barged through the entrance. The scent of grease had already began sticking to his scarf. He hated that lingering, obtuse staleness wrapping around his neck.

But now he couldn’t care.

“SANS!?”

The patrons turned their heads towards him and gasped in worry.

“(Papyrus!)” Dogeressa exclaimed. “(You should be in bed!)”

The others agreed. Each chipped in their own statement, a single text box long, describing what happened in the 20 hours Papyrus had lost.

“You got zapped pretty bad there.”
“I’ve never seen Sans so sick with worry my entire life.”
“Frisk too. Poor kid.”
“Undyne splashed an entire bottle of skin ointment on you.”
“They almost turned you into a mummy.”

Papyrus blinked. He didn’t think the electric trap was strong enough to inflict bonely harm. Yet, the bandages and that nagging soreness indicated otherwise.

Again, not important.

“I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, IS FINE AND DANDY THANK YOU VERY MUCH. BUT
WHERE IS SANS? WHERE IS MY LAZY BROTHER?"

Dogamy replied, “He was here before midnight. Ordered a burger, chugged down a bottle of ketchup. Then hurried right back out. How many minutes again, dearest?”

“(Five total, I think?)” Dogeressa answered. “(He’s like a mini tornado.)”

“OKAY. BUT STILL WHERE DID HE GO?”

No one could answer. Mutterings of ‘dunno’ and ‘not sure’ floated in the air. Until Grillby himself spoke up.

“… Rockfall …”

Every patron hushed.

The flaming bartender continued: “… Humans say a part of the south side of Mount Ebott collapsed years ago… He should be there…”

“THANKS!” Papyrus bolted right back out into the snow-blanketed town. Didn’t even close the door behind him.

He knew the path to Mount Ebott. All he needed to do was to make a straight beeline to the towering mountain. Except, he doesn’t know where ‘south’ was. There was no big gas ball in the sky to guide him either.

Not at this hour.
Not in this season.

He figured that he could just run around the edges of the mountain. Sooner or later, he will go full circle and thus bump into Sans.

Papyrus took it as ‘training on the spot’.

To his fortune, he didn’t need to do that. The shrill keen of his brother’s magical cannons echoed from the correct side of the mountain.

With a little bit of magic, Papyrus leapt over the canopy. He didn't need to wave his feet around to propel himself forward, yet he did. Otherwise the ‘air running’ wouldn’t feel authentic.

When he arrived, he witnessed a sight that he never thought possible.

Sans was practicing his magic on the boulders of the collapse site.

Actual. Genuine. EFFORT.

Alone.

For as long as Papyrus can remember, a direct duel was the only time he’d ever got his lazybones brother to do any sort of magic practice. Even then, it was on request. Often accompanied by many puns, much complaining, and an appeasement of ketchup.

Their duelling routine stopped when Undyne took him under her wing.

Papyrus gently landed on a soft patch of snow. His brother was too absorbed in his solo routine to notice.
Sans levitated several similar sized boulders from the pile. Enchanted, they danced to his twirling finger. His left eye burned bright in magic fire.

Round and round and round they went.

“Faster…” Sans muttered. “Faster…”

The rate of spinning increased, kicking up the wind and snow. Sans spun them around until they had reached critical self-sustaining velocity.

He then summoned another ring of boulders.
And another.
One more until five layers of dangerous, circulating rocks surrounded his stout being.

“1…”

“2…”

Sans started to count his seconds. On the tenth, the tornado began to wobble. He lifted up his arms in attempt to stabilize them. Alas, the setup had worn him down too much to maintain.

Two capric skulls materialized above the tornado. Their eyes too burned like their master’s. Papyrus recognized them as his brother’s Gasterblasters.

In one breath of condensed beams the blasters ripped through the tornado, ending this round of training. Any that survived the impact eventually crumbled into sand. No target was safe from the poison of brittleness.

The flames extinguished in his eye, Sans sighed as he wiped the sweat off his skull.

Papyrus went slack-jawed at the display. He knew his brother had the capabilities, but he had never witnessed them with his own two sockets.

“SANS! THAT… THAT WAS JUST A-MA-ZING!”

Sans jolted out of shock. He turned around, requiring a second to let reality sink in.

Then, the fussing began. “P-Papyrus! W-what are you doing out here? You should be in bed!”

“I SHOULD BE ASKING YOU THAT QUESTION.”

“No, no! Paps, you lost half of your HP. You were half-dead, literally. It’s not a joke.”

“REALLY? THAT’S WEIRD. I SET THE VOLTAGE TO JUST STING. LIKE BEES. WHATEVER BEES ARE.”

“Bro, a swarm of bees can kill. Also all it takes is just one bee sting to trigger a fatal allergic reaction in some humans.”

“OH MY GOD IS THAT TRUE???”

“Yes.”

Papyrus’ eyes bugged out of his sockets. “THAT IS ABSOLUTELY TERRIFYING! I NEVER KNEW HUMANS WERE SO FRAGILE!”
He soon returned to normal. His brows wriggled as he tried to recall a fact he learned from the library. “I THOUGHT THEY’RE TOUGHER THAN MONSTERS?”

“That’s only true for their SOULS, bro. When it comes to the body, it ain’t so straightforward. Did you know the police made a huge fuss about your electric maze? Said it could cause cardiac arrest.”

“CARDIAC… ARREST…? YOU MEAN THE POLICE HOLDS YOU IN CAR JAIL?”

Oh poor Papyrus, too sweet for this cruel world.

Sans shook his head. “They’re talking about an organ called a ‘heart’. Keeps a human’s blood pumping. If that stops, they’re deader than dead. Electricity can do that. Even small amounts. Not everyone’s a toughie like Frisk.”

“THIS ‘BLOOD’… THAT’S THE RED STUFF THAT LEAKS OUT OF A HUMAN WHEN THEY GET HURT, RIGHT?”

“Yup. Keeps them alive. So, please don’t make any more electric mazes. Okay?”

“SORRY SANS…” Papyrus felt bad for causing so much trouble.

The elder skeleton brother shuffled back to his training spot. He laid down and looked up into the sky: a cloudy night, few stars in the sky. Plus, at this clearing there won’t be any surprise snow-laden branches falling on their heads either.

“Lie down with me a bit, bro.” Sans patted on the ground. “It’s been awhile since we had a one-on-one chat.”

“OKAY.”

Papyrus plunked himself on the ground next to his brother. The clouds were soft and fluffy. He wondered if they felt like cotton candy; the stars could be the sprinkles.

“Bro,” said Sans.

“YES?” Papyrus answered.

“We can’t depend on the old ways anymore.”

“WHY?”

“Cause we need to integrate into human society. It means trying to blend in. All the puzzles and mazes were designed to separate us from them. Sure, we can build a bunch of puzzle houses to promote fun. But that’s about it.”

“If we’re to survive, we got to get used to human politics. It’s not as simple as going to Undyne for everything. Here it’s a combination of wit, action and words. Lots of words.”

“LIKE… CROSSWORDS?”

“Heh. Kinda. But a whole lot more complicated.”

“WHOA!!!”

“Prepare for a whole lot of talking.”

“…OH OH! YOU MEAN LIKE FRISK? THEY SUSS THEIR WAY OUT OF EVERYTHING!”
Sans chuckled. Sighed. Grinned one more time before sighing again. He’s worried; Papyrus could tell from his heavy expression and a total lack of puns.

“Yeah bro. Yeah. Like that. Frisk’s a master, don’tcha think? Even then, they need to polish their skills at least ten times for their ambassador job. High level bosses everywhere, you know.”

“But if that fails, you need to be able to fight back without killing. That’s why I’m training. For once. Got to get my act together.”

“I AM VERY SURE YOU CAN DO THAT!” Said Papyrus.

The light in Sans’ eyes faded for a moment. “No. I don’t trust myself.”

“WHY NOT? YOU ARE NOT THE GREAT PAPYRUS. BUT YOU ARE SANS: THE GREAT PAPYRUS’ BROTHER! THEREFORE I BELIEVE IN YOU!”

“Paps, you believe in everyone.”

“YES! I BELIEVE THAT ONE DAY YOU WILL BE LESS MESSY. LIKE THE OLD TIMES!”

All Sans had for an answer was a deep, pained stare into the night sky. The winds blew the wispy clouds away, revealing the bright half-moon. It’s silver.

Bringing up the past doesn’t seem to be a good idea. Time for a diversion. “WHAT TRAINING WAS THAT ANYWAY? I’VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE.”

Sans conjured a small snow tornado by his side as an example. “Magic control. The better you are, the longer you can spin. Adding weight to the tornado raises the difficulty. If you can do both, well. It’s first-prize material.”

“Though, it’s tedious. That’s why I never go beyond the trashnado in the room. ‘Cause, what’s the point if I not gonna use it?”

With a wave of a hand, the shorter brother stopped the winds. The snow showered back down to the ground.

“Papyrus,” said Sans. “Do you know why I think you’re super cool?”

“BECAUSE I’M THE GREAT PAPYRUS!” His brother replied. “THERE’S NO OTHER REASON. NYEH HEH HEH!”

Sans burst into laughter. “That’s one way to put it. Bro, you’re the only person I’ll ever duel with. Me. The guy with 1 HP. Feeling totally safe in your hands.”

“You may not be the strongest monster, but you’re surely the most skilled. You had never, ever made an accident. Whenever I’m in danger of getting hit, you’ll stop the fight right on the dot. That’s true talent, bro. Never forget that.”

“I want to be more like you. I need to be more like you. Just one accidental death on the Surface is enough to start a wildfire. You got that?”

“WELL IF YOU WANT TO BE MORE LIKE ME, YOU MUST FOLLOW MY SPECIAL PAPYRUS-TAILORED, CUSTOM-MADE, AND PROFESSIONALLY SEASONED TRAINING REGIMENT! NYEH HEH HEH!”
Trust Papyrus to promote himself in every opportunity. His brother groaned and smacked his own forehead.

Still, he was relieved.

“Heh,” Sans replied. “I can’t believe I’m buying into this, but sure. I’ll give it a shot. Though, it’s ain’t fair that only you get to whip my lazy butt. How about a trade?”

“HM?” The other skeleton raised a brow.

“You teach me your skills… and I’ll teach you how to summon the Gasterblasters.”

“YOU… YOU ARE NOT PULLING MY LEG, ARE YOU?”

“No pranks this time, Papyrus. I’m offering the S-game. Honestly, you could have learned it a long time ago.”

“WOWIE! THIS IS GOING TO BE EXCITING!”

Papyrus paused, rethinking about his brother’s statement. “WHY DIDN’T YOU TEACH ME SOONER?”

“I didn’t think you’d need it. I mean, that kind of firepower is overkill for someone in the Royal Guard.”

“NO POWER IS OVERKILL FOR THE ROYAL GUARD!” He started to whine like a disappointed little kid, thrashing about in the snow. “SAAAAAAAAANS IF I HAD YOUR SPECIAL CANNONS, I’D PASS AGES AGO!”

Sans laughed along. “What’s past is the past, okay? In all seriousness, it’s not as simple as just watching me do it. You first need to unlock your magic eye.”

Papyrus gasped. “I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, HAVE A MAGIC EYE?!?!?!”

“Of course. We’re brothers after all. The magic eye is in your right socket. Orange. I saw it flash once when you were just baby bones. It’s been sleeping since.”

The tall younger brother squealed in excitement.

“But first, you need to recover.” Said Sans.

The happy squeal turned into a sad whine in an instant.

Sans patted his brother in an attempt to console him. “Hey, hey. There’s no way I’m activating that on anything less than full HP. It’s going to hurt like hell, trust me on that. I’ll do my best to keep the pain minimal, okay?”

That sounded worrying. Perhaps it was a good idea to decline. But Papyrus being Papyrus, he accepted the challenge head on.

It still caused concern: less about himself and more about his brother.

“…SANS,” he asked. “IS THAT WHY YOU ONLY HAD ONE HP?”

“Nawh bro. I’m born this way. It can’t go negative, y’know. I had nothing to lose, so I activated it on my first opportunity.”
“WHY DIDN’T I REMEMBER THAT?”

“Uh…” Sans glanced away. “You were too young. Yeah.”

“OH. OKAY. NYEH HEH HEH.” Papyrus didn’t notice a thing.

The two brothers continued lying on the snow to watch the sky. Without skin or warm blood, the cold never bothered them.

It was nostalgic. As if they were at Snowdin again: the place they had called home for so long.

Sans began talking about the celestial sky. He told Papyrus about the moon phases.

The constellations.
The known planets.
The speed of light.

Of how it takes 8 minutes and 20 seconds for sunlight to reach the Earth on average.
Of how the stars of today shone millions, if not billions of years ago. By the time anyone saw them, they might not even exist anymore.

Papyrus had always admired his brother’s scientific knowledge. Sometimes he’d ask for the science of the day instead of his usual bedtime stories. They never failed to conjure a sense of awe and wonder, as if they were fairy tales.

Slowly yet surely, the tall skeleton was lulled into a drowsy stupor.

He blinked once.

Twice.

Then Papyrus started to snore.
Action

Chapter Notes

Anime is real when your name is Undyne.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Someone thought you were an easy target.

It was the old drive-by-and-snatch trick. Wait for you to finish school, stalk the entrance, then snag you like a piece of candy.

You were pretty light. It was easy for a grown gym-trained man to pick you off and stuff you into the van.

However, they did not account for the fact that Undyne exists.
Or the fact that you had experienced the same tactic for a good number of timelines.

You told her to keep watch from the floor above the school entrance.
Right after school.
On a Thursday.

You saw the van.
You saw the goons who will soon grab you.

You tried to run and act distressed. Not because you were afraid, but it was a signal to Undyne.

The moment they nabbed you, Undyne launched herself out of the window. She landed on top of the van.

Upon that moment, you imagined the scene tilt dramatically like a frame shot of an anime. Complete with epic theme song, cool lighting, and the sun shining behind her head.

With a mighty roar, she conjured a spear and stabbed downwards into the driver’s seat. It pierced all the way through the bottom of the van, anchoring the vehicle in place.

You pitied the driver. He screamed like a little girl before rolling right out of the door. Everyone else vacated the vehicle in terror.

“HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!!!!”

Undyne showered down a rain of spears, catching their clothes and pinning them on the cold, freezing ground.

The man who held you hostage tried to flee with you. But to his misfortune, the strongest fish-lady pounced on him and swiped her green spear through his soul.

His soul had turned green and he’s stuck in one place. You wriggled out of his grip and stepped aside to watch the grand finale.
One Undyne-brand suplex later, the guy was out for the count. She then suplexed the empty van itself. Just because she can.

The human police arrived to round up the rabble and take testimonies. They were impressed by Undyne’s professionalism. Despite her anime-fuelled yelling, she did everything a law-enforcer should do: disable suspects without inflicting too much harm.

A bystander recorded the scene and uploaded it on the internet. Undyne was crowned ‘The Suplex Queen’ in less than six hours.

You survived your first kidnapping and the world knew of it.

This is it.
This is the start of uncharted territory.

From today onward, you can no longer rely on your experiences of resets. It could go horribly wrong, but it could also be the breakthrough you’ve yearned for so long.

You are determined to face tomorrow.

* * *

Saturday.
Two days after Undyne’s video went viral.

It attracted a host of couples who wanted to adopt you. There were so many of them, the current town hall couldn’t house them all. Toriel had to unlock the school gates to use the gym.

You recognized some of their faces. In some timelines, they were the ones who dragged you to court to gain custody. You also spotted several of your foster parents shuffled in between the group.

Everyone wanted you, but not all will love you. You had truly become a ‘Golden Quiche’: a symbol of great status.

Mom and Dad protected you while Sans went to fetch the necessary legal advisors. They made sure that there was a comfortable distance between you and them.

He dropped off Alphys first. She lived nearby compared to the other lawyer. Plus, you needed a friend closer to your size.

“W-wow. That’s. A lot of people.” Alphys started to get nervous. You wonder if she could handle the sheer amount unhappy, impatient folks.

You asked if she brought the DNA test results.

“Of course! They’re in the bag.” Alphys lifted her briefcase. “I have some DNA testing kits too. Just in case they request for it. If anyone tries to dismiss your test, we’re certain that they’re not your biological parents.”

You nodded. It made sense: they knew they’re lying. The lab results will only expose them in public.

For a little fun, you requested Alphys to start a number-recording game. To be exact, count the
number of people who tried to assume your gender.

How many would think you’re a boy?
How many would think you’re a girl?
How many would try to be politically correct?

You giggled.

“I guess I can do that.” Alphys smiled. She wouldn’t pass a game of numbers and statistics. “Say, Frisk. You never did tell us if you’re a boy or a girl. Why?”

It’s a surprise, you said: one that would take a few years to unfold. The idea was for your own amusement. You weren’t sure what changes you’d undergo once puberty hits full swing, so you decided to enjoy the mystery while you still can.

Alphys grinned along. “That’s pretty clever. But remember, health comes first. I’ve read that there are some really specific illnesses that are linked to their ‘chromosomes’.”

You understood that and thanked Alphys for her concern.

Sans then arrived with your custody lawyer. Neither looked forward to the parental confrontation. Working on weekends: never a fun thing.

“I’ve brought Mister Jonah here,” Sans said. You noticed a certain tenseness behind his usual grin.

Mister Jonah accepted your case more out of concern and curiosity than money. It’s not every day that one would deal with a child adopted by the denizens of an old myth.

“Hey Al.” Sans said.
“Yeah?” Alphys answered.
“Mind if you watch the kid for me? I don’t wanna stick around for the grilling.”

That request surprised you. Of all people, you expected Sans to be the one ready to rain puns on annoying couples.

“Nah kid. The room’s getting ‘hot’ and I’ll just ‘stoke’ the flames,” he replied. “It’s best to leave this to the pros. See ya later, kid. Don’t get roasted.”

Sans then shuffled himself out of the back door. Or so it seemed.

“He’ll be around. This ordeal is too close to his heart,” commented Alphys. Then she clammed up. Started sweating. A lot. “F-forget I said that. Sorry.”

You wanted to enquire more about this issue, but Jonah the lawyer told you it’s time for you to address the crowd.

At first, it went fine. But as time ticked by, crankiness floated in the air. Too many couples tried to list their credentials to adopt you, causing a massive backlog for everyone else.

Dad provided refreshments of biscuits and tea, but that was not enough.

The cold, sleet rain outside didn’t help. Everyone’s getting cold and there’s not enough heating in the gym.

Poor Alphys got yelled at by someone who claims to be a mom of stellar children. She’s not
convinced that a shy recluse like her was of good influence.

Dad interceded in her place. He’s super patient and he had a longer fuse compared to Mom. You were sure that Alphys silently swooned at ‘King Dreamy’s’ saving act.

Then there was Sans. You knew first-hand that when he snaps, he snaps hard. He’s been more stressed than usual, so you really don’t want an incident.

A part of you wondered how long you could maintain a straight face. The suspense slowly but surely piled up your tiny shoulders.

But you have to be a good ambassador.

It’s either that, or humans will force the monsters back underground.

Just when you were reaching your limit, someone had to insult Mom about her upbringing capabilities. You were reminded of a website that recorded the dumb ways humans get themselves in serious trouble. ‘Insulting Mom’ should be part of the list.

Toriel did that glare.
That. Glare.

“Asgore.” Her tone changed to her ‘serious mode’ voice. Polite, yet assertive. You wondered if you should call for an evacuation.

“Yes, dear?” Dad replied.

“Do you still remember our old trick? One where we used to impress the citizens with.”
“Why of course, Toriel. I treasure our moments every day.”
“Let’s see if we still have that edge after all these years.”

You watched Mom and Dad hold hands for the first time in forever. They walked out of the gym and into the freezing rain.

All past hurts were put aside for your sake.

The two Boss Monsters stood in at the center courtyard of the school’s entrance. After a unified nod, they raise their joined hands up into the air.

The courtyard exploded in a spectacular display of fire magic. Flowers and birds made of fire danced around the ex-couple, as if they themselves were alive.

Then they set fire to the rain. Somehow, the water droplets ignited into bright orange flames as they reached a certain radius.

Snow melted into water.
Water boiled into vapours.
The vapours transformed into gas and further fed your monster parents’ flames.

Parting water into oxygen and hydrogen required a good chunk of energy. You realised that this was quite an intensive display.

The warm heat radiated against your entire being. You loved it, but the humans around you were either in shock, terror, or awe.

Maybe all three.
After the artful show, the flames condensed into multiple rings on the floor. The compact pattern reminded you of onions. Despite the lack of flair, it was still intense enough to vaporise the icy rain.

“…We apologize for wasting your time,” said Mom. “We Monsterkind thought we should try to adapt to your ways.”

Dad continued where Mom left off. “However, we are undermanned and inexperienced. We could not cope with the number of applicants. My… ex and I love Frisk very much, therefore we only want the best for them.”

Then it’s back to Mom again. “Shall we settle this once and for all? Our question is very simple: will you walk through ice and fire for their sake? Will you put your lives on the line, as they had done for us?”

“If you’re unwilling,” Mom drilled her glare into the crowd. “Please go home. And don’t bother Frisk again.”

“We promise a fair consideration if you do cross the flames.” As usual, Dad said it all with a gentle smile. He was the softer diplomat of the two after all.

A bunch of people tried, but they backed away the moment they felt the heat.

The humans did not know your monster parents will never roast them alive. You were sure that if anyone tried, the fire would part beneath their feet.

Everyone backed away and returned home. They no longer dared to mess with the Dreemurrs. Hopefully they won’t try to issue a court order either.

The only human left behind was Jonah the lawyer. You could see fear on his face. That’s not good from the guy who’s help you need to to gain legal support. He must understand that your parents never meant any harm.

You asked Alphys to record you on her phone. When she’s ready, you took Jonah by his hand.

“Frisk? What are you doing?” he asked.

You asked him to trust you, even though you’re his new client. After all, fire was nothing compared to a lizard scientist and a powerful teleporting skeleton.

“I… guess?” He doesn’t know what to think anymore.

You led him towards the roaring flames with trust and love. As you had expected, your parents extinguished the flames before they could hurt either of you. Any remaining heat dissipated into the winter air.

Droplets of frigid rain pelted on Jonah. Yet he remained silent, unable to believe that this whole event was real.

Mom was pleased with your actions. Gone was her stern glare, replaced by the gentle smile you knew and loved. She knew about your little plan… and she’s proud that you took the initiative.

“Thank you for trusting us, Mister Jonah. I don’t think you wish to adopt a child. But, we do need your help.”

Dad hovered his huge hand over his head. “We should seek shelter before the both of you catch a
cold. Shall we discuss over some refreshments?”

They escorted you and the lawyer back into the gym just like any loving parent would do. Mom offered Mister Jonah the remaining biscuits while Dad served a fresh cup of hot tea.

Alphys recorded everything. Now you have hard evidence: just in case anyone tried talk bad about the Dreemurrs on the internet.

She gave you a thumbs up, and you returned the gesture.

Chapter End Notes

Alphys, Toriel and Asgore get their focus today.
Next up... Sans, Frisk and Undyne. Maybe. I do plan to show a softer side of her that's isn't completely gung-ho screaming anime shonen modo.

Ironically, she will be just as anime. Except in a different genre.
One week later.

Your phone’s chatroom exploded with genuine, wonderful, and epic anime-style drawings of Undyne. Not the weird stuff Alphys used to collect as ‘Human History’ either.

Undyne was beyond elated. Before you knew it, she’s filling up a scrapbook of fanart dedicated to her.

Mom and Dad’s fire stunt hit their first million views. Most of the comments were positive. Many wished that they could do the same to test the authenticity for their adoption cases.

There were some, however, who criticized the show of force as excessive. It’s a given that you can’t please everyone. Especially on the internet.

At least Mister Jonah was in complete support. Promised that he’d do anything he can to make your monster adoption official. He deals with dysfunctional families on a daily basis, so meeting such wonderful parents was a ‘crack of sunlight in a grim world’. Quote for quote.

Despite all the good news, there was one problem.

The yellow SAVE star had yet to appear.

Why? Can it only spawn in the Underground? No. Even when you followed Dad back to the throne room to care for the flowers, you couldn’t find a single SAVE.

It’s safe to assume that all the other stars had vanished too. Any attempt of time-altering will send you back to Day One. The very thing you promised Sans you’d never do.

After you finished your homework, you told Mom that you’re going to look for Sans. Science stuff, you said. That was not a lie. You wanted his opinion on the lack of SAVE stars. Mom probably thought it had something to do with your homework.

“Okay dear, but first…”

She wrapped a warm scarf around your neck.

“Now you’re ready to go. Be careful, my child.”

You couldn’t help but to hug back. Toriel wrapped her arms around you like the day you left the Ruins. It’s warm and reassuring.
Time for business. It’s snowing, so you brought along an umbrella. You then started your walk to the skelebros’ house.

But then…

You heard a shower of familiar zings. Undyne’s spears. Lots of them. They came from a trail that led to the base of Mount Ebott.

“ONE STEP FURTHER AND I’LL PIN YOU TO A DAMN TREE!”

Oh uh. Did Undyne bump into a gangster? Or encountered a trespasser? Maybe the paparazzi?

You rushed towards her. If it’s anything to do with humans, it’s your duty to resolve it.

The rain of spears happened again. Your pace hurried. Whatever’s happening didn’t sound good at all.

Then you saw Sans. Dodging the rain of spears. He had his hood up.

You dropped your jaw. Judging from Undyne’s thunderous yelling, this was not a duel either.

It’s a legit fight.

Your first instinct was to hide. Those two were the only ones who could kick your hind when you went axe-crazy. Definitely don’t want to get between the crossfire.

Sans winked at Undyne. “Take a chill pill, hot stuff. I’m just scouting ‘a head’. Heh.”

Then he dodged another flying spear. Until today, you still couldn’t believe that this unfit lazybones had the footwork of an elite martial artist.

Undyne fumed so hard, you could see steam coming from of her ears. You wonder if that was the work of magic.

“YOU! Will you just LISTEN to me for one bloody second???”

“Okay, you got one second. ” Sans replied. “Times u--”

Yet another spear. Sans dodged that one too.

“I DON’T MEAN LITERALLY!” Undyne yelled. “Look! Sans! I am as worried as you are and I want to investigate this person too! But have you considered how much of a clusterfuck it’s going to be if word got out???”

Here comes the swearing. Since they didn’t know you’re around, there was no restriction.

“Frisk’s been working their ass off to maintain a good reputation for us monsters. If you go now, all their effort is going to be for NOTHING!”

Sans sighed. “Jeez, Undyne. You’ve known me longer than that. I won’t get caught.”

“I’m warning you BECAUSE we’re old friends, dammit! You got the hood up, head low, and your damn eye is blue. That’s your hunting-mode, Sans! You’re going to kill her if she doesn’t meet your standards, right?”

He did not deny. That made you shiver under your warm clothing. What happened?
“Look,” Undyne continued. “I can be dense and stubborn, but I’m not an idiot! We’re on the Surface now. The Royal Guard is disbanded and all legal authority now rests in the hands of the humans.”

“Point is, you WON’T get away with murder! Even if you didn’t get caught, the diplomatic bond will be ruined forever. It’s much better if we just wait for her to arrive. We’ll evaluate her there and then.”

Sans scoffed. “And let her convince everyone that she’s Frisk’s aunt?”

You… had an aunt?
If she’s your legal aunt, Sans’ reaction made sense. She had the priority to claim custody and thus become his biggest obstacle.

You remembered the conditions for the pledge you made with Sans. If he could get you to stay in Ebott Town for good… then, and only then, you’d swear never to reset.

Monsterkind -- no, Papyrus will finally be safe.

Just how many strings did he pull in the background?

He’s the one who notified Alphys.
He’s the one who suggested the meeting at your house.
He’s the one who found Jonah’s office number.

Saturday’s flood of adoption applicants was too convenient to be just ‘the closest date’. Why didn’t they come on Friday? Or Monday? Why did everyone flood Ebott Town on that particular Saturday?

What if he spread the news that everyone had only one chance to claim you? That explained a lot: from the volume of people to the foul impatience. Scarcity creates competition, and competition exposed their hearts.

Your grip tightened around the umbrella’s handle, guilty and disturbed. A Sans who gave a damn… was freaking scary.

Undyne lowered her spear and took a deep breath, trying to calm herself down.

“Sans,” she asked, “Do you trust your friends?”

He looked away. Silent. There was no light in his eyes.

“…If you can’t trust us, at least trust Frisk.”


You knew he’s lying for your sake. He couldn’t trust you a hundred percent.

Of course not.

You had killed his brother. Multiple times.
He watched you kill. Multiple times.

Then there were the resets.
There’s no way he could trust you.

Undyne softened further. “If that’s the case, can you trust me? Not as an ex-Captain of the Royal Guard. Not as a friend. Not even as Papyrus’ friend.”
“But as a fellow orphan.”

Sans’ shoulders rounded forward, shrinking further into his coat. You could tell that it’s a hard decision for him to make.

In the end, he breathed out a long and audible sigh. He relaxed, but his hood was still on: a sign of his unhappiness.

“Okay,” he said. “Same situation as Frisk, right? Totally alone. No siblings. So. Yeah. Sure. You two have more in common than me. Welp, I guess I’ll shove myself back home.”

He shuffled himself back to the main road. No shortcuts, no fancy teleportation.

You wanted to follow him, but…

“Punk, you better not. He needs time.”

Undyne noticed you were around after all. Your umbrella did stick out like a sore thumb. It made you wonder if Sans noticed it too.

“Come over here for a moment,” she said. “It’s cold, but we need the privacy.”

You walked over to Undyne. She noticed the worry.

“Sans is really touchy about anyone knowing about his past. That’s why I don’t want to talk about this in town. The less ears, the better.”

You nodded.

“You knew I trained with King Asgore, right? I grew up as a fine person all because of his influence. If he didn’t take me under his wing, I’d end up as a useless, troublemaking scum.”

“I was lucky. Sans, not so.”

It wasn’t every day that Undyne talked as a normal person. No spunk, no excessive energy. Like the time you chose to drink goldenflower tea at her old house.

“It all started when I bumped into him outside of King Asgore’s house. He looked weak, but I could sense some darn strong magic. So dumb kid being dumb, I tried to challenge him. With an ambush.”

“He dodged my blow and almost blasted my face off! With two freaky skull-cannons! You think he’s ruthless now? Jeez, he was a ton worse as a kid.”

You tried to imagine Sans as a skeleton with a bad temper. Somehow, you did. It scared you.

Undyne continued. “The King stopped the fight and saved my butt. I had to apologize to this… tall… skeleton… I think? I don’t remember his face or name, but that dude was Sans’ mentor. Some hot-shot scientist.”

Her face twisted into a scowl. “I wanted to smash him. The way he talked really, really rubbed me the wrong way. It doesn’t matter if I don’t remember his exact words. Just his tone was enough to rile me up. Sans’ mentor SUCKS!”

“But I bit my pride and apologized for the King’s sake. Later that evening, King Asgore told me about that skeleton. Apparently his parents ‘fell down’ young. Papyrus was just a tiny baby. Like a
few months old.”

Didn’t anyone in the monster community tried to adopt them? It’s hard to imagine anyone in Snowdin leaving orphans to fend for themselves.

“No, no, kid. You got it wrong. They were not from Snowdin. They used to live in New Home. Argh, how do I even start? I wanna keep this brief so you don’t freeze your butt off. Toriel will flip.”

You chuckled a bit. The wrath of Toriel keeps everyone in line. You told her that there’s nothing to worry and she can take her time.

Undyne rubbed her shoulders, trying to warm herself up under the snow. She wasn’t as snugly dressed as you.

You offered her your umbrella to keep the snow away.

“Thanks, punk. That’ll help.”

Both of you stand under the shade. Snow fell on top of the umbrella and rolled off the sides.

“Where was I?” Undyne said. “Yeah. Sans. Well, it’s not that nobody wanted to adopt them. Rather, it’s exactly like your situation: everyone wanted a shot. He was the Golden Quiche.”

“You see, Sans’ a total prodigy. He’s got both smarts and power in one package. Mature. Humourous. Responsible enough to work under a mentorship at a young age. He’s a dream kid. But he had a baby brother… that’s when things got complicated.”

“Sans refused to get adopted. Hell, even if you put Toriel and Asgore on the candidate list, he’d still flat out decline. Every adoption process has a chance of sibling separation… and hell, he’s not taking the risk.”

“One of the applicants tried to snatch Papyrus away to show off their baby-caring skills. He immediately activated his magic and tossed everyone out.”

“Since then, he refused to entrust Papyrus to anyone. He ended up raising his baby brother alone: surviving on a mix of soup kitchens, coupons, and mentorship allowance. Kept the house in order too. That’s herculean effort, punk. I can’t do that.”

You couldn’t believe it.

Sans?
The messy lazybones?
As a responsible single parent?!!?!?

It was the total opposite of his current self! You asked Undyne if something happened.

“Well…” Undyne paused for a moment. “Something did happen: a major accident inside the Core itself. Huge enough to shake the entire Underground and cause a nationwide blackout. Many thought that the entire mountain would collapse.”

“We found Sans deep inside. The sole survivor of the maintenance team. Whatever happened down there broke his will.”

“That’s when he became the lazy puntastic joker you know today: a pathetic shadow of himself.” Undyne glanced away in sadness. “But… maybe it would be better if he stayed that way.”
You tilted your head in confusion.

“He’s growing desperate. I can see it.” She replied. “A sad sack of bones is a person devoid of hope. If there’s no hope, there’s nothing to fight for. A person without anything to fight will not become desperate.”

Her attention locked on you.
You started to feel the pressure.

“I don’t know what you told him, Frisk. But Sans had hope for the first time in ages. That’s why I’m worried sick. A man with hope yet without trust… will eventually fall apart.”

Undyne rested her hand on your shoulder.

“Watch over him, okay? He’s gonna act tough, but he’s a wounded man. Don’t be afraid to ask for help either. It’s not something you can do alone.”

You were not sure if it was even possible. After all, you were just a kid. Issues like these… adults sometimes struggle with them all their lives.

But you told Undyne that you’ll try. Finally, her ear-to-ear grin returned.

“That’s the spirit, punk! C’mon, let’s get you home. We gotta pass the news to Toriel anyway. Your aunt’s gonna arrive tomorrow.”
Reflections

Chapter Notes

There are many works where Gaster was assumed the Dad. They’ve done a great job with them.
So,
I decided to go the reverse direction. Basically Sans’ dad is an opposite-Papyrus of some sort. Meek and not that naive. But still simple. (Also I won't be surprised if Paps looks like his dad)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was less of a dream and more of a recollection.
A memory that no one else remembered other than its owner.

Once upon a time there were two skeletons: one a gentleman, another a lady. They were not wealthy or famous, but they were respected. Every day, these two would work hard to prepare and cook the meals to feed a school.

This couple made sure no one goes hungry. And they do it with a good sense of fashion. Skeletons must always be reasonably well-dressed, no matter their job.

“What do you mean ‘turn a blind eye’?!” The lady yelled in distress. “He’s only seven years old! He’s your son! OUR son!”

The gentleman tried to coax her. “Dear, t-that is the nature of the training.”

“Training my metatarsus! Seven-year-olds should be playing hopscotch with other kids, not dodging lasers for their lives!”

“But… he can’t just be a bookworm. The training includes both mind and body. He has to be ready for anything: including the worst case scenario.”

 “…You knew? You knew he’d go through all these hardship? And you never disclosed them to me?”

“I… I… No-- wait! I’m sorry! Dear, don’t…! Sigh, she ran.”

“Sans? Oh. Oh dear. Sorry you had to see that. Don’t worry, Mom will be back later. She needs some time by herself.”

This was the time before Papyrus entered the world.

“Does it still hurt? If it does, I’ll get medicine from the pharmacy tomorrow.”

Young Sans shrugged. The burning soreness still lingered in his left eye, but it no longer inflicted crippling pain.

“Let’s get some fresh air on the rooftop, okay?”
‘Fresh air’ was as ironic as it gets in the Underground. Wind can pass through the barrier: it was the sole reason why nobody suffocated yet. But, there was always a sense of confinement in the air.

Father and son sat down on a bench. They faced out towards the vast, grey complexes of New Home. The nation’s castle situated right in the line of sight, standing tall and steadfast as a symbol of peace.

“Are you mad with Doctor Gaster?”

No reply.

“Please don’t be. He’s strict, but that’s because he wants the best for you. Sans, you have so much potential. A bright future. For yourself, and for our entire race. He told me that if you could get through this, he’d name you as his successor!”

The silence continued. Dear father sighed in response. His son inherited the tendency of simmering rage from his mother after all.

He began telling a story. Hoped that it would distract his child from the pain.

“Before I married your mom, I was a hotdog vendor. Doctor Gaster had been a regular since day one. I couldn’t believe he -- the great Royal Scientist -- would buy hot dogs from a common skeleton like me. But he kept coming back. Loved my ketchup, he said, and he never uses the word ‘love’ lightly.”

“We started talking. At first it just about small stuff. Then, we began to share stories. Like. How his own father used to describe the Surface. About the vast waters of salty water called ‘Oceans’. About different textures of ‘clouds’. And grasslands that stretch as far as the eye can see.”

“Whenever he talked about that, Gaster looked like he turned into a young skeleton again. That sheer glittering wonder that I’d never see otherwise.”

“One day, he declined the usual order of hotdogs. Instead, he told me to meet him at the center of Waterfall’s mushroom maze at midnight. I usually finish work by ten, so I thought why not?”

“I closed my stand. Made my way to the mushroom maze, and there I found him looking mighty sad. Almost devoid of hope.”

“I asked him why. Gaster handed me a chart of sorts. I didn’t understand until he explained it to me.”

“...The average life expectancy fell into a new low. He told me monsters used to live for hundreds of years, no matter the type. Now, some don’t even make it past their forties.”

“It didn’t make sense at first. Everyone complained about the overcrowding problem. If people were dying young, where are the numbers coming from?”

“He answered: Children. If the family had more than one child, the total population would still end up as a net positive. However, there are a growing number of families who lost one or both parents too soon.”

“Then he started going on about possible theories. Lack of sunlight, increased frequencies of disease from overcrowding, contaminated water, toxic run-offs from the Surface garbage. A lot of complicated stuff that I would never have considered.”

“Above all, it was too much stress. The people tried to be positive, but it doesn’t mean they
succeeded. Monsters are tied so closely to emotions, he explained. Prolonged stress can end up fatal.”

“The Doctor confessed that he’s been trying to break the Barrier long before the King ever considered it. Many told him to stop. Called it a fool’s endeavour. But he refused. Insisted that it was his calling as a man of science. Not only to satisfy his thirst for the Surface, but also to save every single one of us.”

“He just wanted someone to understand. I don’t think I was the best choice, but I was his closest friend.”

Alas, the young boy didn’t share the sentiment very much. His father could tell that the kid had started to tune out his story.

The gentleman touched his son’s rounded chin. Gently turned it towards him.

“…Sans, please look at me,” he said. “I never fully understood Gaster’s fears until I.. I had you. I could care less about the Surface. But… but… I don’t…”

Tears welled up in his sockets. “I don’t want to die. I don’t want to leave your Mom behind. I don’t want to leave you behind. I want to see you grow into a fine adult skeleton. Get a partner that you love. Marry. Live life to its fullest.”

Dear gentleman father started to cry before his son. His bones rattled with fear and sadness. How unbecoming, he thought to himself. Sans already struggled with more weight than a child should bear.

“I wish you could have a normal childhood. To live carefree. Comfortable. Even lazy. A life where you only needed to worry about schoolwork and keeping your room clean.”

“But I can’t provide any of that.” The adult hung his head down in apologetic shame, his tears unable to stop. “I’m so sorry, Sans. I’m so very, very sorry.”

Watching a father reduced to a sad sack of bones will leave an impression for life.

Today, Young Sans may be too immature to understand its full implications. In a few years time, he might empathize with the desperation that gripped the Underground for ages.

The least he could do for now was to make his father smile. Funny. The adult wanted to cheer the kid up. But, in the end it was the reverse.

After racking his brain for something, the kid grinned.

Sans then told his first pun.

The sobbings stopped. He told another pun. Wriggled those brows a bit for added dramatic effect.

His father’s tearful eyes started to ‘smile’. A chuckle escaped between his teeth.

By the third pun, he was outright laughing.

“Oh goodness, Sans! That’s so bad, it’s brilliant! Have you been reading the joke books in the library?”

The kid nodded. Dear father responded with the biggest hugs.

“Never stop punning, my son. Never.”
In present day…

Sans found himself staring at the bathroom mirror. Toriel insisted on building bathrooms into homes where Frisk regularly visits. His house was one of them.

Who is this person?
Not what his parents had imagined, for sure.

He quit the life of science.
He neglected his magical training.
He certainly didn’t get married.
His sense of fashion was the faux-pas of the skeleton society. Not that Papyrus ever realised.

He never did save the Underground.
He didn’t become the King’s advisor.
Or the Royal Scientist.

Every single hope his parents had was fulfilled by someone else.

Alphys.
Undyne.
Papyrus.
Even Frisk. A human.

He needed to be pushed around by Papyrus, of all people. At one point, the folks of Snowdin actually thought his sweet little brother was the elder one.

No matter how he tried to rationalize, Sans saw himself as nothing but a disastrous disappointment.

“SAAAAAANS!” Papyrus yelled from the other end of the living room. “DID YOU FALL ASLEEP IN THE BATHROOM? IF WE DON’T LEAVE NOW, WE’RE GONNA BE LATE FOR THE WELCOMING!”

Case in point.

“Nah, Paps. Just making some ‘finishing touches’.” Which involved slapping an ice-cold damp towel on his face.

He pressed his skull into the fabric for a good five seconds. It was tempting to scream into it, but doing so will alert Papyrus.


He hung the towel back on its hoop and straightened out his sleeves.
Then, it’s time to face the sunshine in all its glaring glory.

Chapter End Notes

This issue is very personal for me.

There’s a huge pressure for students to excel in Asia. Folks from my age group (1980s-
1990s) go as far as to say that you have no future at all if you flunk. For many families, just one kid getting a good job was what they need to lift the family out of poverty. I'm sure other nations also have similar issues, but South East Asia had always been behind on the progress scale. Unless you're Singapore.

The better your grades, the bigger the hope. It's the same for prodigies. If a prodigy could secure a good position at the right time (like say a boom economy), then you're financially set for life.

I've been subjected to standards, though fortunately my parents were not obsessed with education. But I still struggle with deep self-worth issues because I was a promising student who crash and failed. Both in my academics and my music education.

Noooo I'm not putting in a self-insert. This is a very, very common phenomenon. I've experienced it too, as I have said.

One more note. In China there are many families who're so deep in poverty that they send their children to specialist schools. Gymnastics and acrobats for example. They go through painful, painful, PAINFUL training for their entire lives. Most don't even see their parents for more than once a year. But, it's either that or they're stuck in menial labour. Even if the training is harsh, they're fed three meals a day and have proper beds to sleep in. They're also guaranteed some semblance of a career in the future.

Many of these parents will cry if you ask them about their kids' life. They will say 'I'm sorry I can't provide them a comfortable life'. It hurts them to see their kids endure that training just for a glimmer of hope.
Aunt

Chapter Notes

Prepare your favourite Bonetrousle remix ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When you heard the word ‘Aunt’, you expected a slightly overweight middle aged lady.

Not a hot momma trenchcoat noir detective. Complete with an appropriate hat.
Your aunt was tall.
Fit.
Brown and beautiful.

Her long, straight black hair stretched all the way to her lower waist. Striking, amber eyes locked on you as if you’re prey.

She’s the hawk.
You’re the mouse.

You’ve survived unspeakable horrors, yet this one human intimidated you more than the entirety of the Underground.

“Well, well, well. Quite an interesting welcoming entourage we have here. A lizard, an undine, a pair of skeletons… and the Boss Monster couple themselves. Makes me feel like I’m attending a royal invitation.”

Not only she was dressed like a noir detective, she talked like one: cool, suave, and a hint of tease.


You don’t like her tone.

It prompted you to shuffle closer to Mom’s side.

The uneasy aura affected your monster relatives as well.

“In other words: one of the folks who sealed you lot ages ago.”

The moment the word ‘Magus’ was mentioned, it was near-pandemonium.

Mom hugged you closer and hurried you back into the backlines. You had a feeling that she forgot that you were not a monster child. Dad meanwhile remained steadfast, his expressions unchanging.

Alphys hid behind Undyne, trying to not quake into jelly. Her strong lover stretched out a protective arm and conjured a spear: ready to put herself on the line.

Then there’s Sans. His left eye shimmered blue. Not blazing, but ever intensifying. A sure sign that he will rip through your aunt the moment she did anything funny. What if he recalled a latent
memory about her? A negative one at that?

Papyrus? Papyrus is Papyrus: he’s still all sunshine and smiles with no idea why everyone got so tensed.

“Stop! Stand your ground!” Dad halted. It was the first time you’ve ever heard him so commanding. He always spoke to you in the gentlest, kindest manner. Even when he forced himself to kill you.

Yet now, he had the voice of a true monarch… as if he commanded an army. He restrained the two most vicious fighters with nothing more than words.

Undyne respected the former king as both her mentor, ruler and father figure. She dispelled the spear on the dot of his order.

Sans seemed a bit more reluctant, but in the end he held back.

Dad softened to a more diplomatic tone as he addressed your aunt. “Magus,” he said, “What do you wish to accomplish from our meeting today?”

She replied, “To get my cousin’s kid back, that’s all. I ain’t got any other hidden agenda. I watched the videos on the net too, you know. Pretty positive impression. No reason to antagonize.”

“But, I swore to watch out for them. So I waited for the storm to pass, then drop in when there ain’t any other pesky wannabes around.”

“I see…” Dad nodded. “Why couldn’t they come visit Frisk by themselves?”

“Cause Frisky’s parents be sleepin’ six feet underground, sir. Been so for their lifetime.”

Your mind and heart skipped a second. Hearing the news with your own ears, after wondering about it for your entire life…

It shocked you in ways you didn’t think possible.

Papyrus blurted out: “THEY’RE HIDING AMONGST MONSTERS AFTER ALL THIS TIME?! IF THAT’S THE CASE, WE SHOULD GO LOOK FOR THEM!”

Sans hesitated for a moment, but it’s his brotherly job to explain to Papyrus. “No bro, she meant that Frisk’s parents are dust now. Fell down. Gone.”

When the details finally sank into Papyrus’ innocent skull, his delightful smile clouded into sadness. “…OH. FRISK, I’M SO VERY SORRY.”

You told Papyrus it’s okay. He wasn’t familiar with human phrases after all.

Dad bowed his head to give your departed parents a moment of silence. “Condolences. If that’s the case… how do you wish to settle this issue?”

“A good old magic duel,” your aunt replied. “It’s not gonna be an all-out fight. Think about it as… a method for Magi to settle silly disputes. Give me your best warrior, and I’ll explain the rules.”

Your Dad further asked: “Surely you must have a victory condition. No duel is complete without a wager.”

“Of course, of course…” Your aunt placed a hand on her cool hat. Then she cocked her head upwards with a strange grin.
There’s something off about her expression. It reminded you of Chara, yet not quite.

“If I win, I’ll exercise my right as next of kin. Effective today.”

“If I lose, I’ll obey to your conditions. Like say… if you want me to scram and never to return, that’s fine. If you want me to stick around to observe, sounds good. If you want me to cease existing from this world, I can accept that too.”

Did she just suggest suicide as a valid option? Goosebumps spread throughout your body.

“Very well,” Dad nodded. “Let’s move to a more level field, Magus.”

Ex-King Asgore motioned his mighty hand to the side. Dad’s suggestion was as literal as his naming schemes: he had pointed to a straight and level sidewalk.

It shouldn’t give any side an advantage. At least, you don’t think so.

The magician who claimed to be your ‘aunt’ stood at one end of the walkway. The other end will then be filled by the ‘warrior’ of your Dad’s choice.

“So,” she asked. “Who will you nominate?”

“Papyrus.” Dad answered.

Your lanky skeleton friend pointed at himself, both puzzled and elated at the same time.

If Mom didn’t carry you in her arms, she would have attempted to slap Dad right here and now. Papyrus, of all the possible choices? Even you question the decision.

“Yes, I’ll pick Papyrus too.” Undyne agreed too?! However, her expression reminded you of the night before.

‘Trust me.’

You decided to support her.

Lacking a better option, Alphys agreed. The sole person who could object would be Papyrus’ elder brother.

After a long silence, Sans started to chuckle. “Heh, Paps. Need me to… ‘fetch’ your ‘am-bone-nution’?”

“SAAAANNS!” Papyrus yelled back. “OH C’MON THIS IS THE FIRST TIME HIS MAJESTY EVER REQUESTED FOR MY EXQUISITE PRESENCE AND YOU JUST HAD TO MAKE IT UN-COOL! BUT YES I NEED MY BONES. ”

More laughing from the short skelly. You breathed a sigh of relief. It’s been a long time since you’ve felt the tension of the unknown. It was both exciting and nerve wrecking at the same time.

Sans shuffled off to the nearest ‘shortcut’. He soon returned with a familiar cardboard box filled with Papyrus’ ammunition.

He once told you that he could conjure more on the fight itself, but that would drain his stamina. So he’d make reusable bones ahead of time. Maybe that’s where all the calcium supplements went.

Papyrus stood at his side of the battlefield. A breeze fluttered the edges of his bright red scarf. He
beamed with confidence.

“MAGUS! I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- SHALL BE YOUR OPPONENT! YOU SHOULD BE HONOURED, NYEH HEH HEH!”

The Magus raised her brow. “Quite full of yourself, hm?”

“WHY OF COURSE! BECAUSE I AM PAPYRUS: THE COOLEST SKELETON IN THE WORLD! I EVEN HAVE A HEDGE TRIMMED TO MY HANDSOME VISAGE!”

“Well, well. Let’s see if you live up to your claims. Bring out your SOUL.”

A shining yellow heart ejected from the Magus’ chest. Unlike a normal human’s soul, angular lines cut segments through her heart. It reminded you of the science-fi ‘Tron’.

Yellow represented justice and accuracy, which befitted her appearance as a noir detective.

Papyrus frowned at the sight. “MAGUS! ARE YOU SICK? WHY IS YOUR HP CAPPED AT 13? THAT’S A REALLY WEIRD NUMBER.”

Your aunt cringed outright. It seemed that Papyrus had just announced a big secret. That’s when you noticed a cheeky pucker on Dad’s lips. The tall skeleton did have a tendency to become an unwitting broadcaster.

She cleared her throat and lowered her hat, embarrassed. “I-it’s nothing. I’m fine. Just the winter season, you know.”

“Anyways, a friendly Magi duel goes like this: overpower your opponent with your SOUL’s colour. When that is done, the loser must play by the winner’s rules. Simple. Don’t worry, the effect is not permanent.”

“OKAY!”

Papyrus’ white SOUL radiated in his chest. It’s an inverted heart, the default for monsterkind. Except, he couldn’t eject it out of his body. “…I THINK WE HAVE A PROBLEM.”

“Huh. That’s interesting.” Your aunt commented. “A monster’s soul is more rooted in their body than expected. That’s fine. I’ll just turn your entire bonely self yellow.”

“AND I HAVE TO ATTEMPT TO CHANGE YOUR SOUL’S COLOUR, RIGHT?”

“That’s right.”

“WHO GOES FIRST?”

“…Why not the challenger?”

The lady isn’t taking any chances. She reached out her hand towards your friend. Her segmented heart conjured three points around Papyrus. The points joined, forming a golden triangular net with your friend in the center.

“YIKES!” His eyes bug out. “I FEEL POSITIVELY TINGLY! OR IS IT NEGATIVELY TINGLY?”

Looking down at his own bones made him freak out even more. “OH MY GOD I’M TURNING INTO A LEMON!”

Papyrus struggled to fight off its influence. He tried to shake the colour off in a literal sense, which
made him look like he’s dancing on the spot.

He tried the shuffle.
Some backflips.
The grind.
A ten second handstand.
Spin on his skull.

Watching him flail around made your aunt chuckle. She teased: “You better fight it, or else you need to play by my rules.”

You really, really wonder if Papyrus could pull this off. Does he even know what he should do?

As time went by, the smile on the Magus’ face slowly faded. Papyrus was not dispelling the magic… but the power of yellow also failed to seep into their target.

He’s resisting without even realising it. Someway, somehow, the match was in a deadlock.

“Hey lady,” Sans asked. “Will giving a tip disqualify Papyrus? I mean, this is taking a bit too long. You wouldn’t want Frisk to get a frostbite. In return, you’ll get an important hint.”

Your aunt pondered for a moment. She’s human, so she’s as susceptible to the cold as you are.

“Sure,” she said. “We’ll trade tips. Papyrus, that’s not how you fight the influence. Get back on your feet.”

“OH?” Papyrus stopped spinning and stood on his boots.

“Calm your body. Still your mind. Gather your magical power at the center of your SOUL. When you’ve concentrated enough, release them in a burst. If you’re strong, you only need to do this once.”

“REALLY? WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL ME THIS SOONER?”

“Because I’m your opponent. Opponents don’t share their secrets. Usually.”

You facepalmed. He didn’t know how to fight the duel after all. Yet, he survived. That was quite a feat.

You watched Papyrus attempt to focus. It was… a bit of a tall order. He’s always been kind of a cloudcuckoolander, with haywire and odd-angled thoughts.

Then, his SOUL started to shine in brilliant blue. It shone so bright that it was glaring to look at.

It’s like looking straight into the sun.

“NYEH!!!” Sheer force exploded from Papyrus’ being.

It smashed the golden triangle.
Blew away the snow around his feet.
And the sudden gust of wind almost flipped you out of Mom’s grip.

It shocked you, Mom and Alphys.

Papyrus struck a victorious pose. “THAT’S SO MUCH EASIER THAN BREAKDANCING!”
NYEH HEH HEH!

Your aunt was no longer so confident. She’s growing nervous, yet trying to maintain her professionalism.

“I’ve given my tip,” she said. “Where’s mine, shorty?”

Sans snorted. He’s enjoying more than he’d like to admit. “Papyrus has two types of attack. White and blue. When his bones are blue, stay still and they’ll pass through you without a single scratch. Avoid the white ones like normal. That’s all.”

“Huh… thanks. Alright. I’m ready.”

Papyrus announced: “I SHALL NOW USE MY FABLED BLUE ATTACK.”

He grabbed a handful of bones from his box, turning them blue in his hands. Then he tossed them towards your aunt’s floating heart.

The bones zipped across much faster than you remembered. Much, much faster. The sheer density of bones left no room for convenient dodging.

Is this Papyrus’ true strength…?

The moment one of the blue bones passed through her heart, your aunt’s expression transformed into panic.

Widened eyes.
Crouched posture.
Tensed body.

She conjured a bubble shield around her soul and started moving it around. She’d rather expend all her mana and tire herself out than to let another of these bones pass through her.

The blue bones collided against its constant movements. You heard a crystalline chime for each hit the shield deflected. Meanwhile, she tried to squirrel between the gaps of Papyrus attacks, but alas your aunt was too slow and her shield too wide.

In the end, the bubble shattered.

She was forced to stop.

Cornered.

Papyrus’ flurry of bones passed through her soul and transformed it into a shade of rich, dark blue. It landed on the snow like a brick.

“YOU’RE BLUE NOW!” said Papyrus. “NYEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH!”

You and Sans laughed your heads off. Take that, scary woman!

Now your aunt lost her cool. “Wait wait wait wait! What are your victory conditions? What’s your game?”

Papyrus posed heroically. “MAGUS! SURVIVE FIFTEEN ROUNDS AND MY SPECIAL ATTACK! IF YOU WIN, YOU SHALL EAT A MEAL OF WHOLESOME SPAGHETTI WITH THE GREAT PAPYRUS.”
“IF YOU LOSE, I WILL COOK YOU MY SPECIAL SPAGHETTI FOR LUNCH. THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS!”

Your aunt’s baffled expression was utterly priceless. “They mean exactly the same thing!!!”

Everyone cracked into assorted guffaws. Ah Papyrus, forever with his spaghetti. Mom whispered to you that she’ll manage the stove for your sake.

The real show began now.

Holy smokes, how different it was. It made your battle in Snowdin like… well… child’s play. Papyrus went easy on you.

But with a professional adult? Not at all. His patterns were fast, furious, and complex. It included the notorious platforming sections from Sans’ routine.

Unlike Sans, you could see that Papyrus still remained fair. He’s here to give someone a ‘hard time’. Not a ‘bad time’.

Your thoughts wandered for a moment. You wondered what’s like to have a real sibling. Someone who cared for you like how the skeleton brothers care for each other.

It must be great.

The Magus who claimed to be your aunt scrambled to keep up with the patterns. Whenever she thinks she couldn’t make it, she’d conjure a shield. It saved her from a direct hit… only for her to get blindsided by a different bone.

You were glad that Papyrus didn’t execute his weavings of white and blue on you.

Fatigue started to eat into her: each shielding attempt was weaker than the ones before. By the end of Round 15, she panted as if she physically jumped the obstacle course itself.

Judging from the amount of times her soul got hit, she didn’t have much HP left.

Papyrus picked up the final bone in his box. “I SHALL NOW USE MY SPECIAL ATTACK! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Oh, it was the one that got stolen by that strange and fluffy dog. You never did get to see its true form. The prospect of having that mystery resolved once and for all filled your heart with excitement.

He made the bone spin in the air.
And it spewed out…
Spaghetti. Spaghetti of all things.

Not the actual noodles, mind you, but rather they were tiny bones arranged in spaghetti-like strings. They whipped towards the Magus’ direction.

Your aunt put all her remaining stamina into her one, final shield. Its thickness reminded you of a heavy snowglobe.

She’s done with running. Instead, she will ground herself and tank it all.

“I will survive.” She declared. “I WILL survive!”

The string crashed against her shield. The bones shattered against the surface, each inflicting tiny
crack after tiny, tiny crack.

Their barrage pushed the bubbled soul across the ground, grinding a trail in its wake.

The dog saved your hind. You now better appreciate its mischief. If you ever saw it again, you swear to give it a treat. Like an entire piece of steak.

Just when there was a clear road to victory, Papyrus stopped his onslaught. The bones remained suspended in mid-air.

“MAGUS!” He said, “YOU’RE STRAINING YOURSELF TOO HARD WITH THAT STRANGE SHIELD. THAT IS EXTREMELY UNHEALTHY! YOU’RE IN NO CONDITION TO CONTINUE. OUR DUEL ENDS NOW!”

“What…?” Your aunt couldn’t believe her ears.

“I MEAN WHAT I SAID. I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- CHOOSE TO SPARE YOU!”

You smiled. That’s the Papyrus you knew best.

“But… why?” She asked back. “I’m… I’m here to take your precious friend away… It would be easier to kill me.”

“ARE YOU SILLY? YOU ARE FRISK’S AUNT! THE GREAT PAPYRUS ISN’T SO CRUEL TO HARM THEIR SOLE LIVING RELATIVE IN THIS HUGE WORLD!”

Glory hogging he may be, his kind heart was always in the right place.

Papyrus called back all his bones and placed them back inside his ammo box.
He also dispelled the blue magic on her soul, letting it return to its original colour.

Your aunt took a few breaths to recover. She still couldn’t believe that she was spared, roped into nothing more than a meal of pasta.

“Ha… haha… Fine. You win, Papyrus. I’ll eat your spaghetti.” The yellow heart floated back into her chest. That marked the end of the battle.

It calls for a celebration. The moment Mom put you back on the ground, you dashed to Papyrus to give him a big hug. As much as you could hug a tall skeleton anyway.

“Bro,” said Sans. “You’re the best.”

“I KNOW!” Papyrus answered.

Come to think of it, your aunt never disclosed her name. You turned around to ask just that. It would be rude to have lunch with someone without knowing their name.

Your aunt’s expression softened a ton. She’s no longer a hawk eyeing on their prey.
Through the power of mercy, she’s now a normal human lady. A tired one to boot.

“Cenna.” She answered. “Cenna Caraway.”

Chapter End Notes
This begins a turning point where we'll attempt to explore human magic.

What transpired before and after the Sealing?
What's their impact on society?
What do they know that the monsters don't?

And what were the monsters like before the Sealing?

Why the heck is Pappy so powerful and nobody knows it?

Edit: Whoops. I misspelled Cenna's name. It's supposed to be Caraway with one R, which is a spice.
Accident

Chapter Notes

Everyone has secrets.

“Sorry if I spooked you guys. That was just an intimidation tactic.”

Cenna Caraway.

“Scared folks are less confident. Makes them trip up more. Hoped that’ll give me some advantage.”

She claimed to be a former detective.

Quit the job to concentrate on becoming a full-time Magus.

“Didn’t turn out well, yeah? I’m kinda glad though. If I succeeded, we wouldn’t be having a fine lunch together.”

To believe, or not to believe?

Undyne munched on a meatball as she observed this new human. It took guts for someone to strut up and declare such a bold challenge. More so after the videos circulated online.

The spaghetti was more than edible: it was actually delicious. ‘Assistant Chef’ Toriel must have done most of the real work. Papyrus’ cooking was improving in leaps and bounds, but he had yet to surpass an experienced wife.

Asgore’s presence prompted Toriel to remain in the kitchen. Her excuse was butterscotch pie… but it was rather obvious to everyone that she didn’t want to be around her ex.

Speaking of Papyrus, he’s too busy eating to talk.

Undyne noticed that Sans kept his left eye on Cenna at all times. He saw her as a threat long before her arrival. It doesn’t look like he’ll let up his stalking anytime soon.

Frisk sat beside Asgore, silent as ever. They weren’t sure on how to approach this young aunt. Yet. Sooner or later they’ll figure it out.

As for Asgore? He chatted with the Magus as if nothing ever happened. Then again, he never wanted to hurt her. That’s why he had Papyrus represent his side during the duel.

“Being the loser can be liberating,” Asgore nodded. “It ends a bad choice, letting you start anew.”

Cenna smirked. “Sounds like you got some personal experience in that.”

“Why yes, I did.”

The fish noticed that Alphys was… particularly fixated on Cenna’s long, straight, black hair. She understood why; those locks looked like they came straight from an anime.

She gave her girlfriend a soft nudge. “Go on. Ask.”
The yellow scales started to turn bright red. After a little more encouragement, she finally broke the question: “M-Miss Caraway. Your h-h-h-hair. Did you. Um. How do you k-keep it so n-nice and long?”

Cenna chuckled with a slight blush on her cheeks. She did not expect such mundane curiosity from monsters. “A bit of money and lots of time. I only started keeping it long after I quit the detective business.”

“How long ago was that?”

“A year.”

“Whoa!” Alphys exclaimed. “Your hair must grow really fast! I’ve read that a human’s full length of hair depends on genetics.”

“Yup. You’re right,” replied Cenna. “You’re well-read for someone living in new territory. The majority of humans don’t know this trivia.”

“R-really? I thought it’s common knowledge. It’s easy to access basic medical information online.”

“Common knowledge ain’t common if folks don’t look for it.”

After more flustering, Alphys picked up the courage to ask the next step: “Can… can I touch your hair?”

Cenna shrugged. “Sure thing.”

The lizard gingerly combed her stubby claws into the luxurious strands. Fangirl mode, on. Full swing. Her eyes sparkled as she started squealing about their texture. Who knows if this experience will inspire Mettaton’s new hairdo?

Papyrus then finished his meal. The peace and quiet ended there.

“SO MISS AUNT, HOW ARE YOU RELATED TO FRISK?”

At least he didn’t ask ‘What is an aunt?’. Chances are, he already learned that in Snowdin.

“It’s a bit complicated,” she replied. “Frisky and I aren’t related by blood at all. You see, my biological parents weren’t good people. Social Services plucked me out from there and passed me to my uncle.”

“He remarried, then he got into financial trouble from a failing business. Borrowed money from illegal sources to try keep it afloat. Couldn’t pay off the debt.”

“My stepmom didn’t think it’s right for me to live on the run. So, she sent me to her maternal cousin. That’s Frisky’s mom.”

“… I HAVE A FEELING THAT I’VE HEARD OF THIS PUZZLING SITUATION BEFORE,” commented Papyrus. His bony brows furrowed as he tried to recall.

It was one of the possible scenarios mentioned back during the lunch meeting. Jonah the lawyer did warn them about this: human family definitions can get… complicated, to say the least.

A warm, nostalgic smile drew on Cenna’s lips, remembering the better times.

“Lovely couple. Reminds me of Asgore and his goat-ex here. It was the first time I ever lived in a
proper home. I remembered skipping school when the big day arrived. Hah, I was so excited for
Baby Frisky.”

Frisk stopped eating to pay full attention. From their expression on their face, this was huge news.

After Undyne swallowed her mouthful of pasta, she decided it’s time to dig for some more
information.

“What happened to Frisk’s old folks?” she asked. “They’re gone, but how?”

“…Perished in a mountain-climbing accident.” Sadness clouded Cenna’s face. “They were
geologists. A quake happened on the job and they got caught in a rockslide. Didn’t make it.”

Upon the disclosure of their unfortunate demise, the air around the dinner table turned solemn.

But…

“Thanks, Aunt Cenna.”

The silence was broken by Frisk. Showing gratitude, of all the possible choices. They were
saddened, but they were also relieved.

“At least I’m not abandoned.” They flashed a quick smile. “Ever since I found the Abandoned
Quiche, I thought it was a reflection of my life.”

“An ‘Abandoned Quiche’?” Cenna asked.

Papyrus’ face lit up, excited that he knew about this fact. “OH YES! FRISK ONCE PHONED ME
TO INQUIRE ABOUT A STRANGE QUICHE LEFT UNDER A BENCH.”

“NEVER WORRY, MY HUMAN FRIEND! THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL NEVER LEAVE
YOU!”

His positivity was infectious. Frisk beamed in warm delight. Knowing just how much love they
always had lifted a great weight off their shoulders.

Undyne continued to think. Her Royal Guard instincts tingled: there was something off about this
woman’s testimony.

But what?

Does it involve her personal connection to Frisk’s parents?
Or the circumstances that landed the kid in foster care?

“Hey lady,” Sans asked. “Where were you when the accident happened?”

“Babysitting Frisky. There’s no school during the weekend.” Cenna replied. “Is something the
matter?”

“Hm? Just wondering what’s their guardian like.” Sans remained casual. He always does.
“Responsible? Funny? Gentle? Or… ‘too cool’ for her own good?”

Undyne shot a glare at the short skeleton. She sensed bitterness.

The human lady propped her head on her arm. “Oh? Why’d you say so?”

“‘Cause you’re one ice cold poultry.”
Undyne slammed her fist on the table. “Sans, watch your mouth. OR ELSE!”

He outright ignored the warning. “Did I ruffle some feathers? Hey, think about it. Our guest here was old enough to brood the nest alone. That would put her somewhere in her late teens? Maybe close to adulthood? And yet, Frisk never heard of her till yesterday.”

“Saaaaans…!” Undyne’s metal fork bent in her tightened grip.

Ignored again. The light in his sockets went out as he dropped a chilling accusation: “Why did you abandon Frisk?”

Frisk’s smile vanished in an instant.

She had enough. Undyne grabbed Sans’ chair and attempted to throw him out of the window.

Alarmed, Papyrus jumped in to save his brother from her unbridled wrath.

“UNDYNE! PLEASE PUT MY BROTHER DOWN!”

“You brother needs a lesson!”

“MAYBE HE’S A BIT RUDE, BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN IT’S OKAY TO EJECT HIM TOGETHER WITH HIS CHAIR!”

Asgore, Alphys and Frisk tried to split them up, but the struggle was too violent to get close.

Toriel rushed out of the kitchen upon hearing the commotion. Needless to say, she was horrified.

Meanwhile, Sans gripped onto the seat for his dear life. Literally.

“If he ever gave a damn maybe he should have just shut up in the first place! Genius my ass!”

“PLEASE KEEP THIS PG-13!” said Papyrus. He noticed Toriel had emerged from the kitchen, and she doesn’t appreciate swearing in front of the kid.

“I don’t fucking care about that anymore!” Undyne yelled back. “Your brother asked the worst question at the worst time in the worst possible manner! HE! NEEDS! TO! GET! OUT! NOW!!!”

A glint of orange ignited in Papyrus’ right socket.

No one knew what happened after.

One moment, everyone tried to stop the rampage.

The next, Papyrus was rolling on the floor in pain. Screaming. He kept clutching the right side of his skull.

Whole seconds had gone missing.

Sans found himself sitting three feet away from the site of commotion. Chair included. Hearing Papyrus’ cries of pain woke him up from the shock. He rushed over as fast as his short legs would take him.

The elder brother held him down. Papyrus could hurt himself from all the trashing, or worse.

Frisk and Asgore joined the effort. The big guy pinned down both legs with all his might, while the
young one helped Sans restrain the upper body.

“Papyrus!” Sans called out. “Paps! Can you hear me?”

Unstable orange wisps of magic burst out from his troubled right socket. It kept flickering, as if something tried to snuff it out. Any words he spoke were in a strange language.

Guilt and confusion rooted Undyne to her spot. For the first time in a long, long while, she was afraid.

Scared out of her wits, to be precise.
Understand

Chapter Notes

Now with the show, there will be some 4th-wall statements. But it's not for jokes.
Edit: Some key elaborations

Your lunch moment was ruined. However, you were too worried about Papyrus to throw a tantrum.
It was childish anyway, unfitting an ambassador.
The entire family rushed Papyrus to the closest thing they had to a hospital: Alphys’ lab.
You made a note to your parents that Ebott Town needed a proper, centralized medical facility.
They agreed.
Your aunt offered to help Alphys, but your friend didn’t want to trouble the guest. In the end, she stayed by the sidelines.
After administering the proper painkillers and sedatives, Papyrus slept in an oversized bed. You recognized it as an import from the True Lab.
Sans wanted to be alone for a while. The first one to give him space was Undyne, in response to her guilt.
Dad excused himself for some reason. Was it guilt as well? Or did he understand the need for solitude better than others?
Alphys, Mom and your aunt stayed around in the living room.
The theme of Alphys' home decorations was ‘anime memorabilia’. Mew Mew Kitty couch, framed posters of various shows, a collector’s case full of models: the list goes on. Much of these were gifts from Mettaton.
It turns out your aunt was also a huge fan of a few titles. The bonding of nerds between the two continued throughout the evening. Alphys offered to put a good word about your aunt to Undyne.
They clicked together faster than you expected.
It's nightfall. Mom thought it’s time to go home, but you told her that you wanted to stay.
School? School can wait.
Usually, Mom would object to you skipping school. She’d make sure your ambassador jobs take place in the weekends so you’d have uninterrupted schooltime.
But… she knew the skeleton brothers were some of your best friends. Tonight, she granted an exception on the promise that you’d keep her updated.
You agreed.
When Mom left the home, Aunt Cenna addressed you.

“Hey,” she asked, “Is your skelly friend alright?”

You nodded. Then, you apologized for putting her in such an awkward situation.

“No problem, Frisky. I was in the crime department of the police force. Let me tell you, I got into muuuuch more intense drama before.”

Does it involve high-speed chases and exchanging gunfire? You asked.

“Stereotypes have to come from somewhere, yeah? There are some nights that make even the movies look lame.”

Sounds like a dangerous way to live. More so when she didn’t have the ability to load SAVES like you do.

You asked your aunt if Sans’ accusation was true, doing your best to keep a neutral tone.

“…Yeah. He’s right. That short skelly is one sharp dude. Sans, right? Gotta remember the names of folks like him.”

Despite the confirmation, you didn’t feel angry. It stirred more curiosity instead. You proceeded to ask ‘why’?

“I was just an emotional teenager back then. One day my biggest worry were silly exams, and the next... I’m holding your fate in my arms. I wasn’t ready for that kind of responsibility.”

“So I gave you up to foster care. Biggest regret in my life. Ain’t a day passed where I wondered if I could have made a better choice.”

You told her that there’s no blame. It’s unfair to expect everyone to be as tough as Sans.

…Oops. Maybe you shouldn’t have said that.

“What about Sans?”

Too late, you’ve caught Cenna’s interest. You summarized his circumstance in the most discreet manner. It’s supposed to be hush-hush after all.

All you said was that Sans’ parents died young. He thus raised Papyrus all by himself. You didn’t mention about the hows, the chaos of the adoption attempt, or his prodigy status.

“Damn. No wonder he thinks I’m a chicken. He did what I should have done for you all those years ago. Hats off to him, really. He’s got guts.”

“Papyrus is stellar too.” She continued. “A bit loopy up in the head, but he’s such a golden heart. His naive charm is irresistible. If only we have more humans with his innocence. I’d have less blood on my hands.”

If she was a cop who dealt with violent criminals, it’s inevitable that she had to shoot someone dead.

“Well, that just motivates me to do better. I’m not gonna vanish from your life anymore. You can count on that.”

She took out her cellphone and showed it to you. “Let’s trade contacts.”
You traded contact numbers with your aunt. Then you asked what she’s going to do now.

“I’ve booked a room in the Bunny Inn. To plunk luggage. I’m gonna go back there and extend a few nights.”

Why not stay with Toriel? Mom’s house was big enough.

“Nawh, I don’t feel comfortable bunking in other folks’ homes. I’d keep Madam Toriel busy all night. Don’t wanna wear her out more than necessary. Well, what about you?”

You told her that you’re going to be here for the skeleton brothers. Even if it takes the entire night. They’ve helped you out so much, it’s only fair to be with them in their darkest hour.

Aunt Cenna gave you a messy rub on the head. “Atta Frisky. That’s the way.”

“You know… you’re really mature for your age. Are you sure you’re a pre-teen? Your character puts a ton of adults to shame.”

You blushed at the compliment.

Aunt Cenna tipped her cool hat and strode right out of the lab. Dang, she had style.

You combed your hair back in place with your fingers.

It’s midnight. Alphys tried to contact Sans through her phone. Most of the time it was ignored, until…

“Frisk?” She said, “Sans wants to speak to you.”

What about Papyrus?

“He’s okay. Just sleeping.”

You asked Alphys if Papyrus won’t prematurely wake up.

“I doubt so. The medicine should keep him asleep for at least four more hours. Why’s that?”

Nothing, you said. Just wanted to know when Sans would have his hands full.

That was not a lie. As long Papyrus stays asleep, you can corner that enigma of a skeleton in a battle of words.

It’s best for Alphys to remain ignorant about your true intentions…

You entered the makeshift ‘ward’.

It smelled of pines and bones. You had expected to see complex monitoring machines, but you found none. It seemed that the monsters didn’t have the same medical tech that defined human hospitals.

Papyrus slept peacefully in his bed. Whether or not he’s unaware of the ordeal, you could not tell. His nearby presence served as a constant reminder of the stakes involved.

The sole source of light came from Sans’ left eye. There was an alternating flicker of yellow and blue. He’s using his powers for something, but what?
He stopped when he heard your footsteps.

Sans turned around to face you. Dark spots tainted the rims of his sockets. He’s been stressing his eyes out, either from magic or from… tears?

“…Hey kid,” he greeted you. “About our deal. Perhaps it’s a bad idea. Can we consider it void?”

You were shocked by that statement. He wasn’t smiling and that worried you.

It didn’t help that there was a serious formality to his tone of voice. If you could picture his words, it was not his usual ‘Comic Sans’.

After all the effort in defying the odds, he wanted to give up? Why?

Sans lowered his head. It reminded you of how Dad refused to look at you, back then, when he tried to kill you.

You asked ‘Why?’ again, this time with more firmness.

He said: “Have you ever wondered if you’re just a character in a game? That we’re supposed to be playing to our assigned roles, and no more?”

“If we act outside of boundaries, we break the ‘code’. All the calculations end up haywire. It bites us back. Hard.”

“So please, Frisk. Just… RESET whenever you think it’s necessary. Forget about our promise.”

You walked up to Sans. Placed both hands on his round cheekbones. Locked the gaze of his skull directly to your face.

“What are you doing?”

You then gave Sans a headbutt, Undyne Style!

Well… more like ‘Undyne Style Super Lite Wimpy Edition’. Sans only had 1 HP. You had to be extra careful with him.

Still, it was enough to give both of you a sore forehead. The next few seconds were spent cringing from the sting.

“Ow… What was that for?!” He’s angry. And he should be angry.

You took this opportunity to yell at Sans for being an IDIOT!

In bold, and all-caps.

Quit now?

After all the cool, casual big bro talk about helping you out?

About making a difference?

About getting everyone together?

About trying something different for once?

You reach out to grip his jacket. Held them tight in your child’s fists so he couldn’t flee from you.

What the hell is with the nihilistic talk?

You ask if this is a game to him?
Sans tried to look away from you. He’s dodging your confrontation in any way he can.

“Frisk. Please, you understand where I’m coming from. You’re the only person who can understand.”

Yes.
You understand.
So you asked Sans if he’s scared of the unknown.

In the Underground, he knew what’s going to happen. RESET. Timelines stopping and starting, until THE END. That was the only outcome permitted for the future…

And he had lived through it too many damn times.

Other incarnations of Sans had seen your best, your worst, and everything in between.

You could tell he no longer had true fear because he had already resigned himself to the apathy of the expected doom and gloom.

There was only boredom.
There was only despair.

You know this, not just by having lived through the doldrums more than he did… rather you made it all happen.

You and your determination.

Sans shouldn’t consciously remember anything. His monster brain can’t hold any memory of past repetitions. Still, he always seemed to know more than he let on. Is it because the remembrance of the SOUL is not so easily erased?

As for you? After a certain point, even the ‘True Reset’ stopped becoming ‘True’ for you.

That’s how you could keep writing coded messages to keep track of your attempts.

That’s how you could write letters of apology.

That’s how you tried, ever so subtly, to manipulate the only man who could offer any help.

Blood rushed to your head. Emotions ran wild. Your vessel dubbed as a ‘physical body’ quivered.

You started to cry.
The anger turned inwards towards yourself.

Despite what everyone says about you, deep inside you knew you’re a terrible coward. You kept dragging everyone back to The Underground because YOU cannot face the unknown, determined to stay forever in a loop.

Sans stopped trying to avoid your face. He’s emotionally tensed, but he observed: listening.

You told him that in this time-skewed world…

You, the Golden Quiche with Godlike powers, trusts him the most.

Please, you beg.
Stop.

You told Sans that he’s a living person.
Not a scripted caricature of a bad joker.

He has feelings.
He has fears.
He has burdens.

Let himself be helped.
For once.

The silence seemed to last for an eternity.

He’s frightened of stepping outside of his comfort zone. You could tell. Sans had lived with the headaches of time travel longer than you. Perhaps long before you were even born.

At last he said: “Three questions.”

You blinked in puzzlement.

“You can ask three questions,” Sans explained, “I’m… I’m not sure if I’m prepared for more than that. But, I will answer them the best I can.”

“Just, I advise caution on applying my experiences as a blanket statement. There are other versions of me out there, in different timelines, with a different history. It’s complicated. In time, you’ll understand. We should start on a fresh, new page.”
First, you let go. A long chat with grabbed clothing won’t be comfortable for either of you.

Second, you imagined your interface changing into the ‘Shop Screen’.

But this time, you won’t be shopping for anything. It had a double purpose as a multiple choice dialogue section. Much like those visual novel investigative games you’ve been playing on an emulator.

There was only one question available in your head so far. You chose that.

> Who are you?

“…I am Sans Serif, Seer and Tactician. ‘Sans’ alone is not my full name.”

He flashed a weak smirk at your surprise.

“Only three others know the truth: Gerson, Grillby, and Asgore. I’d add my mentor on the list… but he’s long gone.”

You wanted to ask how much they know.

But, you realised that you only have three questions. You’ve already used one.

You feel like a shaken soda bottle, trying hard to not explode from the inside.

“Heh, that expression on your face. You wanted to know more, right? Well, kid. I did say I’ll do my best to answer. Don’t worry, I won’t cheat you.”

Soft wisps of blue rose from his blue left eye. Unlike the other times when you witnessed this display, this had no sense of threat.

He’s just showing you his true self.

“Where do we start…?”

“Asgore is too kind and soft to lead a proper war, so someone else had to do the commanding. The first candidate was my mentor, but he declined. He’s more of a tech and science guy. More suitable for support.”

“So he made an agreement with the King. In return for staying in R&D, my mentor will train up an ideal candidate. That person… would be me: a Seer trained to think, act, and fight like a genuine human. Including the swift, unfair brutality.”

“Or so that was the plan. The ideal is always too good to be true, right? I… fell far below standards.
Let’s just say, I don’t care about the nation’s fate.”

“I rather choose a peaceful imprisonment. That’s not a good outlook for someone who’s supposed to lead the charge.”

“Think about it for a moment. Can you imagine the Dog Clan members slicing through someone else’s parent? Or Onion-san pulling battleships into their watery grave, drowning hundreds of crew members?”

“Do you think they can do that?”

You… shook your head.

“I had thought of the same. Those who had never seen the War will not realise the horrors lurking behind their dreams.”

Sans stopped his explanation there. He’s waiting for you to start a new question. You noticed that he did not explain anything about a ‘Seer’.

You had a feeling it’s related to Papyrus.

>Papyrus and his eye.

What’s the deal with that?

If you could quantify the amount of silent dots on the screen, it would have filled an entire dialogue box.

Or two.

“Skeletons… are not usually born. We’re enchantment based monsters. Get a bone -- any bone -- and add magic. Then you’d have a young adult skeleton. During the War, my kind would engineer more of themselves from human corpses. Think of them as Pseudo-Boss Monsters to boost the Royal Guard. They’re supposed to be tough. Maybe tougher than Gerson. In the end, though, they were just as vulnerable to human violence as everyone else.”

“Papyrus and I defy that convention. Those who were ‘born’ instead of ‘made’ are blessed with the ‘Seer’s Eye’. If you ask me, it’s more of a curse. What does it do? It allows these special baby bones to peer into space-time. How much? It depends on their potency.”

“At its weakest level, it grants the bearer some level of precognition. Anticipate the next move and act on it. You noticed that Papyrus and I are excellent dodgers, right?”

“At its strongest level… you get limited space-time manipulation. Observe timelines. Teleport. See and use ‘shortcuts’. Skew perspective. All those fancy things.”

You wanted to ask Sans how many past and future timelines he had seen, remembered, but that was a question… You only had one left.

It frustrated you more than expected.

Again, he caught on. This time it amused Sans enough to grant you a wink.

“I know what you’re thinking, Frisk. You want to know if I retained any memories from a reset. The answer is no: to witness visions of a timeline is a manual process. A rather exhausting one at that. I get the ‘deja vu’, but to know what exactly happened? I’d need to skim through each event.”
“Trying to gather all the information is a mind-breaking process. Plus, it's a literal maze. Over time, I learned to pick and choose. For example: the number of times you died in my hands, without the knowledge of our friendship. Kept me sane, you know.”

You nodded in agreement.

“…Before I called for you, I checked Papyrus’ fate in the other timelines. Visiting Toriel. Playing mascot for the Royal Guard. Talent Agent for Mettaton. Crowned King. Heh, that’s the only time I did my job as an advisor.”

“The alternate scenarios confirmed my worst fears: the electric puzzle incident broke his seal.”

What?
Seal?
Papyrus was sealed?!

You pressed that question faster than you can think it through.

> What do you mean by a ‘seal’?

Sans had expected it.
Rather, he steered the entire conversation to this confession.

“Papyrus is my life. He’s the sole reason why I wasn’t completely cold. He… he gave me a reason to care. You can say he’s my ‘soul’.”

“Before my parents passed away, they told me that he’s going to be super powerful. Maybe stronger than me. My mentor already had plans for him.”

“I got really nervous. But, I reasoned that they can care for Papyrus. Like how they had cared for me.”

“…Then they’re gone. I became outright terrified.”

“I didn’t want Papyrus to undergo the same training as I did. I wanted him to live a normal monster life. To remain innocent, merciful, quirky, silly… everything that I was denied of.”

“So I stole an ancient magic textbook from my mentor. Then used my genius to seal Papyrus’ Eye. It’s supposed to be a life-long secret. By theory. But… as you can see, Papyrus eventually become too strong for it.”

“That’s why I couldn’t let anyone separate us. Imagine what would happen if his powers went haywire on an unsuspecting family? He could hurt himself. Or worse.”

You asked Sans why did such magic exist in the first place? Was it created by humans?

You know you had passed the three question limit, but you needed answers.

To your fortune, he didn’t hold your cheating against you.

“Those who’re born with a Seer’s Eye bear the burden of ‘True History’. The sealing procedure was for those who had gone weary and wanted to live a normal life.”

“That will only work up to a certain level though. I’m way past the point of no return. As you can see, Papyrus had crossed that border too.”
True History…?

“Heh, don’t you think it’s a bit convenient that humans won the war? Think about it. Monsters could easily band together to rain utter destruction on entire cities. There was no real need to fight head on and suffer losses… Yet, that didn’t happen. Why?”

Because the King and Queen thought it’s too cruel…?

Sans chuckled a bit. “Hey, hey, they’re not the only monster monarchs. What about the other nations? They’re not all nice.”

You don’t like where this is going…

“I can read it on your face. That expression… tells me you just realized that the powerhouse ‘mysteriously disappeared’. You are correct.”

“The humans had the ‘ultimate weapon’: a time-travelling assassin. Immortal, too. All they needed was DETERMINATION. Reload that SAVE enough times, and even the toughest magic becomes predictable. You’ve experienced it first hand.”

Someone had the same powers all those years ago. Instead of using it for peace, they used it for murder.

No, it was murder done in the name of peace.

You agreed with Sans that it was a grim revelation. Will Papyrus know that right away?

“…I have no idea. That’s why it’s frightening. What would his Eye see? How will it process information? How will he react to it? Will it change him for better or for worse? Will he lose his innocence?”

The thought alone triggered blue, glowing tears.

“I want Papyrus to remain what you call a ‘cinnamon roll’ forever: sweet and precious. He’s winning over the hearts of jaded folk like Cenna. It’s downright magical whenever that happens.”

“I can’t bear to lose that. If Papyrus became Sans Number Two, that will be my last straw. I know it.”

You told Sans that it will be all okay. Papyrus is Papyrus. He has a unique perception on things.

Trust him.

“…Haha… I’m being schooled in the lesson of trust by a human. That’s some crazy role-reversal there. Humans were defined by a host of negative traits, mistrust was one of them. Here you are, showing the opposite.”

Sans’ smile was weak.

“If… if anything goes wrong and you need to RESET, address me by my full name. I’ll understand.”

Any positivity evaporated faster than boiling water.

“Actually. Don’t. I’d fall into the temptation of keeping Papyrus locked in a time loop forever. I am trained to think as a human after all. Being selfish is a very ‘human’ thing to do.”
“I’m a terrible brother.”

You told him he’s an awesome brother.
It’s clear that he put so much effort to protect Papyrus.
There’s nothing to condemn about that.

Unfortunately, your pep talk was not enough to lighten him up.

“…There’s a fine line between a fort and a gilded prison. In a way, I kept Papyrus in his personal ‘Underground’.”

“Did you know The Underground was the lesser of two evils? The Seers infiltrated human society and founded the Magus Association. Skeletons have a lot in common with humans in terms of physiology. With sensible clothing and masks, they blended in just fine.”

You dropped your jaw.
They had gone into enemy territory and taught humans magic?!

Why???

“Simple: to give them an alternative other than mass genocide. It’s our last resort for survival. I don’t think most of Monsterkind will understand though. We’d be seen as traitors.”

“So, the Seers swore to secrecy. Took that knowledge to their graves. Being a Seer myself, I share that burden. I’m uncertain if Papyrus can carry that weight.”

You encouraged Sans to break Papyrus’ ‘Barrier’.

The eye seal was on the verge of falling apart, right?
Instead of trying to suppress it, maybe it’s time to lead and educate.
It’s better than letting the cinnamon roll fumble in the dark.

The singular blue eye flared from sheer fear. You wondered if you had offended him.

But then… the wisp died back down.

“You’re right, Frisk. There’s no turning back now. It’s time for me to put on the teacher’s mantle again. For Papyrus. Thank you.”

“Why not stand at the foot of the bed for a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle?”

You weren’t sure if he’s making a pun or not.
Nonetheless, you did as you were told.

Sans’s eye burned bright, channeling the magic for the job. He stretched his hand over Papyrus’ right eye. Doing so revealed a hidden lens made out of magic. It was white. And cracked.

The way it covered that eye reminded you of Undyne’s eyepatch.

He started to speak in a strange, cryptic language. It was the same one as Papyrus rambled earlier.

Those skeletal hands kept making signs. You presumed that they corresponded to his speech.

You had a brief flashback of meeting a skeleton taller than Papyrus. That particular reset had gone screwy.
He was in a dapper tuxedo.
His sockets were in the shape of crescent moons. And he had ridges in his skull.
Spoke in the language of hands, just like Sans right now.

Could that mysterious skeleton be Sans’ mentor?

‘Beware of the man who speaks in hands,’ the riverperson warned.

Great, now you have two guys who speak in hands. With a possible third. You wonder which was the dangerous one.

Or…
Did he warn about the Seers in general?

You shoved the speculations aside. They were a distraction.

Papyrus’ sealing lens flaked off piece by piece. They floated upwards into the air before vanishing forever. It reminded you of autumn leaves floating in the wind.

You expected some kind of bombastic light-play. With glass-cracking sound effects to finish off the ritual.

Instead, it happened in sombre silence.

The chanting continued until the last piece was no more. Upon that instant, there was an orange glow underneath Papyrus’ eyelid.

“It’s done.” Sans breathed out a long, exhausted sigh. He had a long day.

You checked the time. It’s not four in the morning. You told Sans that Papyrus wouldn’t wake up until then.

“…Nah. You’ll see.”

Right after he said that, Papyrus’ face began to contort. He struggled with something, even with the medicine still coursing in his bones.

Papyrus opened his eyes. Orange wisps danced from his right socket, free.

“…W…what… what happened?” He asked.

You couldn’t believe it. Papyrus was talking in the capacity of a normal person. It shouldn’t be possible.

When your tall skeleton friend turned towards his brother, his eyes widened in horror. He kept running his mittened hand in a diagonal fashion. On Sans’ chest.

“Oh… oh my god… Sans… are you… are you bleeding…? Is… that …a gash…? Wait… monsters don’t… ketchup?”

The rest of his panicky statements were in a slurry mess.

Sans tucked his brother back to bed. “Hey bro, I’m okay. It’s all a dream. Go back to sleep.”

Papyrus muttered more gibberish before he drifted back to dreamland. The sedatives won this fight.
It doesn’t look good. You asked Sans how you should update your Mom. You got a promise to keep, but…

“Tell her he’s fine. Just. I’ll explain the rest.”

You asked Sans if he’s sure.

“…No, I’m not sure. From the looks of it, Papyrus won’t be able to control his Eye for a while. He’s going to see Toriel’s death soon. Or more.”

You gave Sans the same advice as you had given to Alphys: tell the truth. Time travel is real!

“I tried that before,” said Sans. “Everyone thought I’m nuts. Or pulling their leg. Time shenanigans are not as observable as a botched experiment.”

Good point.

“I guess you have to tell Toriel that Papyrus will suffer hallucinations for the next week or two. By technicality, it’s true. Let’s see how it goes from there.”

There was not much choice. You knew that Mom won’t be able to sleep. She’d keep waiting on the phone for a sliver of news.

You took out your phone and typed the update as suggested. You then pressed ‘send’.

Knowing your sweet friend would wake up to a world of horrors didn’t fill you with determination. Not at all.

Chapter End Notes

I just realised that I’ve been writing this entire fic in Google Drive’s 'Sans Serif' font.
Alphys’ lab was flooded by concerned visitors.

Mom and Dad.
Undyne.
The five Dog Clan members.
Grillby.

Mom asked if you had some sleep. You nodded. Amazingly, you managed to squeeze a nap in between Sans’ confession and their arrival.

Grillby made burgers for everyone. It’s a bit heavy for breakfast, but Mom approved it better than Alphys’ default instant noodle diet.

Dang, you were hungry. You forgot that you didn’t eat anything since the night before.

On the dot of four in the morning, you heard Papyrus screaming from the ward.

“SAAAAAAAAANS! THIS IS WHY I TOLD YOU TO NOT CHUG SO MUCH KETCHUP! LOOK! YOU’RE BURSTING ACROSS YOUR STERNUM!”

That’s some sense of punctuality. On hindsight, his Eye powers might have played a role on that.

Mom was alarmed by the statement. Sans was her joke buddy and her best friend. Thinking that something bad had happened to him, she rushed into the ward ahead of everyone else.

“Sans!” Mom called out.

“I’m fine, Tori.” Sans patted on his perfectly fine chest. His tone of voice was back to his usual social front.

Papyrus faced the rest of you. The wisps of his orange Seer’s Eye showed no signs of fading. It’s bright, and it’s wild.

“Paps is just uh--”
“OH MY GOD TORIEL YOU HAVE A BURST SEAM TOO???”
“He’s--”
“BUT THERE IS NO KETCHUP? DID YOU ACCIDENTALLY CATCH YOUR ROBE ON A SHARP THING AND TEAR IT? PLEASE BE MORE CAREFUL! THOSE CAN BE REALLY PAINFUL!”

Maximum. Papyrus. Logic.

You were not sure to be glad or sad. Papyrus was so innocent, he didn’t recognize his visions of
It said something when his subconscious was more aware of the truth than his consciousness.

Mom was too shocked and confused to respond.

Sans again tried to explain: “He’s having hallucinations from an overload of magic power--”

“FRISK!” Papyrus yelled. “IT IS WAY TOO LATE FOR HALLOWEEN! IF YOU WANT TO COSPLAY AS A DUSTY KNIFE WIELDER, SHOULD HAVE DONE THAT SOONER! ALSO KITCHEN KNIVES ARE NOT TOYS!”

Crap. He saw your psycho side too. You hide behind Mom out of sheer shame. Everyone else thought you got scared from his apparent nonsensical babble.

No. It’s because it was the truth.

“Excuse me,” Alphys squeezed herself to the front. “I need to examine Papyrus--”

“ALPHYS, I DON’T THINK CAVE DIVING IS A VERY SAFE IDEA OF CHEERING YOURSELF UP. WHERE ARE YOUR PARACHUTES?”

The statement creeped your friend so hard, she shuffled back into the group. Papyrus had misunderstood her suicide attempt in the most bizarre manner.

“DOGGO!” Papyrus yelled. “JUST BECAUSE A TRUCK IS NOT MOVING, IT DOESN’T MEAN IT’S SAFE TO STAND BEHIND IT! ALWAYS STAY IN THE FRONT VIEW! LESSON 101 FROM DRIVING SCHOOL!”

That. Was new. You were very sure that there were no trucks in the Underground.

Papyrus’ impromptu advice corner continued.

“DOGAMY, DOGARESSA. RED IS NOT GREEN! GREEN IS NOT RED! IF YOU CAN’T SEE RED AND GREEN, IT’S BETTER TO MEMORIZE THEIR TRAFFIC LIGHT POSITIONS! REMEMBER RED IS ALWAYS ON TOP, GREEN IS AT THE BOTTOM. IF IT’S HORIZONTAL RED IS ALWAYS THE LEFT AND GREEN IS RIGHT. MIDDLE IS ALWAYS YELLOW!”

“GREATER DOG, PLEASE BEWARE OF ELECTRICAL CABLES WHEN YOU’RE PILOTING YOUR AWESOME SUIT OF METAL ARMOUR! THE AMOUNT OF FUN IN AN ELECTRICAL SHOCK IS ACTUALLY REALLY SMALL… TAKE IT FROM ME.”

“LESSER DOG! I KNOW YOU’RE VERY HAPPY WHEN YOU HAVE THE ATTENTION OF MANY SMALL CHILDREN, BUT PLEASE WATCH OUT FOR TINY FLYING TOYS WITH VERY SHARP SPINNING BLADES! THEY HURT MORE THAN YOU’D EXPECT.”

For some reason, Papyrus understood their visions enough to give helpful advice. It triggered a host of reactions from the Clan members.

“(Oh!)” Dogaressa turned towards her husband. “(That explains why the cars suddenly moved! We were reading the lights wrong.)”

“I thought all we needed to do is to mind the zebra crossing,” Dogamy mentioned.

Doggo was not very happy. “Hey, it’s not my fault that I can’t see a stationary truck. Also, who told
you that? It’s supposed to be my secret.”

Greater Dog and Lesser Dog whined.

It had happened before?!
Through luck or some other outside influence, the family escaped fatality.

On hindsight, the visions were a bit too late. It would have been more useful if Papyrus could warn folks before the accident. Not after.

Undyne marched right up to Papyrus’ bed. Silent. You weren't sure what to make out of this.

Papyrus being himself, wasted no time to blurt out his opinion.
He spoke with less energy than before.
Instead, he was concerned.

“UNDYNE…? YOU’RE LOOKING REALLY REGAL. IS THE WEATHER TOO COLD FOR YOUR WARDROBE?”

What.

He’s seeing her as… Queen Undyne?

Or?…

“But it seems that the heavy clothes are warming you up too much. Because. For some reason, you’re looking really goopy.”

“Oh wowie! That’s some really cool armour too! It’s all black like those knights in anime.”

“I’ve always noticed you’re pretty special, Undyne. That’s why I -- the great Papyrus -- will only let myself be trained by the very best!”

“I don’t know what special supplement you’ve been taking. But too much of anything is bad for your health!”

“Please take care of yourself. Okay?”

You were not sure how to compute this. At all.

Papyrus had somehow blended several versions of Undyne into one image. Does that means she left a huge impression on him?

If Undyne knew of Sans as a kid, maybe she was also Papyrus’ childhood friend. And now she’s technically his coach.

She was like a big sister.

The ‘Special Supplement’ was not a supplement. Undyne was one of the rare monsters who could generate her own DETERMINATION. Melting was a sign of her body unable to handle the very thing her created by her essence.

Shouldn’t he know this from the reunion of Amalgamates? Perhaps Papyrus employed coping measures?
The strongest fish lady took a deep breath.

“Papyrus.” She said.
“YES UNDYNE?”

Undyne plucked Papyrus off the bed and started spinning him around.

She then landed a vertical suplex right back into the mattress. The bed’s legs bent from the impact. Luckily for your skeleton friend, the mattress was soft. And he’s all solid bones.

Witnessing this spectacular display of roughhousing, your Mom almost wanted to give Undyne a literal grilling. Alphys quickly grabbed her legs and begged her to not do so.

Things will be fine, you told Mom. Undyne had ‘unique’ ways of communication. No one was harmed.

Undyne smacked her hands on Papyrus’ cheekbones, holding his skull in place. It was a bit of a deja vu since you had done the same for Sans.

Then again, you learned that from her.

“GET A HOLD OF YOURSELF, PAPYRUS!” She yelled. “You’re letting that weird magic screw around with your noggin!”

Undyne took off his mittens. She then guided his skeletal hand to touch her neck, arms, shoulders, even her chest.

“Can you feel the difference? I’m not melting. I’m not wearing any royal garb. I’m not wearing any armour.”

“I’m not dying.”

Papyrus continued to feel the surface of her scales. Whatever he saw, it didn’t match with his other senses.

“CAN I TOUCH SANS?” he whimpered.

“Of course.” Undyne let go of her grip.

The younger skeleton brother’s hand trembled as he reached out to Sans’ chest.

His bony fingers touched the surface of his shirt. He kept running it diagonally across, trying to feel the non-existent gash.

“I CAN’T STICK MY FINGER INSIDE,” said Papyrus. “I SEE THE LIQUID DRIPPING, BUT I CAN’T FEEL IT.”

“Of course, bro.” Sans replied, “It’s just my ‘bone-dry’ shirt.”

“YOU’RE NOT INJURED.”

“Yeah. I’m intact.”

Overwhelmed with joy and relief, Papyrus pulled his brother close for a tearful hug.

Sans wrapped his arms tight in return. “Awh jeez, Paps. You’re turning into a waterfall. I’m gonna
get drenched.”

“THEN WE’LL GET DRENCHED TOGETHER! I THOUGHT... I REALLY THOUGHT SOMETHING WENT WRONG. EVERYTHING LOOKED WEIRD AND TWISTY AND BROKEN AND AND AND I’M SO SCARED---”

It ended in a high-pitched whimper. He’s just a really big child at heart.


With her job as the big sister done, Undyne stepped back to let the brothers comfort each other. She ushered everyone out of the ward and closed the door.

You whispered a question: how did she know what to do?

“I called Gerson,” replied Undyne. “The weird visions are strictly visual, he said. Pap’s other senses aren’t affected.”

Ah. That old turtle. Sans said he knew about the whole Eye business. It would be natural that he had coping advice.

Alphys nodded to the explanation. “I… I think it’s best if Papyrus stays in the lab for now. I’ll work on some machines to further monitor the magic. Mettaton is dropping by later today. I’ll ask him to help too.”

“Meanwhile, Frisk. You better go home and get some proper sleep. We’ll take it from here.”

“Yeah, punk!” Undyne exclaimed. “Otherwise you’re gonna fall sick and we’d have to take care of TWO patients at once! One is already a handful!”

Hospital. Please.
Build that ASAP.

Mom and Dad were both... too quiet. You had a feeling that they’re going to have a long ‘adult’s talk’ once you retire for the morning. Mom had a knack of knowing everything, even when no one said anything.

You were too tired to think straight. After a warm shower, some blow-drying, dental hygiene regimen, and a fresh change of pajamas, you drew the curtains to make your room nice and dark. By the time you tucked in, the sun was rising.

Your mind insisted that you should be in school right now. But with enough determination, you psyched yourself to think it’s still Sunday.

You fell asleep.

For some strange reason, you dreamed that Papyrus was sitting beside your bed. He watched you sleep in silence. Waiting.

Shortly after that, you woke up. You got out to go to the loo. From the corner of your eye, you spotted an orange glow.

Papyrus huddled at the corner of your room. He’s reading one of your encyclopaedias.

You then realised that your dream was not a dream.
Talk about surreal beyond words.

You checked your phone’s clock. It’s been seven hours. Dang. You slept like a log despite the circumstances.

Papyrus noticed you. But, he let you do your business first. Humans need to do what humans do.

Once you returned, you sat down beside him. Asked if he’s okay.

With the softest voice he could muster, Papyrus whispered: “PSST. I’M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE. I GOT REALLY BORED AND SANS IS TAKING HIS SUPER LONG NAP. SO. I USED ONE OF THE ‘SHORTCUTS’ AND SNUCK INTO YOUR ROOM.”

How long had he been here?

“NOT VERY LONG. AN HOUR AT MOST?”

Won’t Alphys freak out if she’s suddenly missing a patient?

“METTATON SAID I CAN GO VISIT YOU IF I WANT.”

Somebody’s gonna be in hot water after this. But eh, Mettaton can charm his way out of that. If not, you could help.

You asked Papyrus what does he need.

The wisps of his still-active Eye flickered when he blinked a few times.

“SOME ADVICE,” he said.

On?

“WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU’RE SUDDENLY BLESSED WITH SCARY AWESOME POWERS THAT’S WAY BEYOND YOUR INITIAL EXPECTATIONS?”

Papyrus tapped the tips of his mittens together, unsure of himself.

“I WAS VERY EXCITED WHEN SANS TOLD ME THAT I CAN MAKE MY OWN SPECIAL CANNONS. I THOUGHT THEY WERE COOL AND POWERFUL, FITTING FOR THE GREAT PAPYRUS.”

“But… I DID NOT EXPECT TO PEER INTO STRANGE SPACE-TIME SHENANIGANS. SANS TRIED TO EXPLAIN, BUT I STILL DON’T UNDERSTAND.”

“FRISK, YOU ARE A VERY SMART HUMAN. AND YOU ARE MY FRIEND. WILL YOU THINK LESS OF ME IF I CONFIDE IN YOU?”

No way, you said. To you, he will always be the one and only Great Papyrus.

Even strong people need someone to talk to.

“THANK YOU,” he said. He’s happy for a moment.

Then, his face turned downcast with worry. “AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TODAY, I’M STARTING TO FEEL REALLY SMALL AND REALLY LOST. LIKE THAT TIME WHEN THE BIG CORE ACCIDENT HAPPENED.”
Wait. You asked Papyrus if it was the same one that caused a major blackout and shook the mountain.

“YES. THAT ONE. YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT INCIDENT?”

As much as Undyne told you.

“I SEE. YES. SHE HANDLED THAT CASE. MY BROTHER ENDED UP AS THE MAIN SUSPECT OF THE MALFUNCTION. BUT THEY COULDN’T FIND ANY EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM, SO HE WAS RELEASED.”

“…AFTER THAT, SANS CHANGED. A LOT. IT’S SUPER SCARY.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for once again cliffhanging at the beginning of more backstory confession. It’s 5.45 AM and the current chapter is already 10 pages long.

This is the beginning of a major case that a certain organization might be interested in...
Spirit

Chapter Notes

Please enjoy a dose of freshly baked Papyrus Rolls.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Two investigative chat sessions in 24 hours? Talk about a busy day.

You won’t complain though. Papyrus always tried to be the enthusiastic, responsible second big brother to you. It’s almost unthinkable that he’d seek help.

Yet, it happened.

A lost-looking Papyrus waited for you to ask the first question.

> Growing Up

What was it like for him? Did he go to school?

“YES. BUT, I DIDN’T LIKE IT THERE. THE CLASSES WERE TOO FAST.”

It didn’t surprise you that Papyrus was a slow learner with academic subjects.

What about friends? Did he get along with his classmates?

You noticed that he’s avoiding direct eye contact. “I KNEW EVERYONE BY NAME, BUT I DIDN’T JOIN THEIR ‘GROUPIES’. THEY DIDN’T INVITE ME EITHER.”

Poor Papyrus. He didn’t mix well with the other kids.

The folks in Snowdin used to refer to Papyrus as ‘Sans’ brother’. They seem to see him more as ‘that eccentric sibling’ than a proper friend. That status quo changed when everyone got on the Surface… but Papyrus gravitated towards you.

“MY FAVOURITE PART OF THE DAY WAS WHEN SANS PICKS ME UP FROM SCHOOL! I CAN TALK WHATEVER I WANT! AND HE’D HELP ME WITH HOMEWORK.”

“EVERY MONDAY, TUESDAY AND FRIDAY WE’D MEET UP WITH UNDYNE AND PLAY TOGETHER! SHE FINDS PUZZLES BORING THOUGH. WHICH IS A SHAME BECAUSE THEY’RE FUN, NYEH HEH HEH!”

Just talking about his brother and his sister figure brightened Papyrus by the tenfold.

“UNDYNE SOMETIMES CHALLENGES MY BROTHER TO A MOCK FIGHT! WHICH ALWAYS ENDS UP AS A STALEMATE OF FOREVER DODGING.”

“SANS AND I WOULD MAKE BETS ON HER PATIENCE. THE PERSON WHO GUESSED THE CLOSEST TIME WINS A SNACK OF HIS CHOICE. MY BROTHER WAS TOO GOOD AT THAT GAME.”
How long Undyne would throw her spears before she rage-qui ts?

“YES, YES! JUST LIKE THAT!”

You snickered together with Papyrus. Yep. You can imagine the sheer exasperation, accompanied by the sound of distressed fish noises.

Maybe it’s time to ask another question.

> What do you remember of Sans as a kid?

“IT’S A PAIN TO GET THAT LAZYBONES TO PRACTICE MAGIC WITH ME! HE’D COMPLAIN, PUN, COMPLAIN AND PUN SOME MORE! I HAD TO BRIBE HIM WITH KETCHUP TO GET ANYTHING DONE.”

Did you sense reluctance? You knew that he was trained to fight beyond child-safe levels. Was he trying to protect his brother from himself? Sounds like an elder brother thing to do. Though, you had a feeling that you’re missing the bigger picture.

“WHICH IS WEIRD, BECAUSE HE WAS NOT LAZY WITH HIS OTHER HOBBIES. LIKE, HE READS A LOT. WAAAAAAAY MORE THAN I DO! HIS ROOM WAS FULL OF COMPLICATED SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING TEXTBOOKS. HE’D STUDY THEM OVER AND OVER.”

“If we find any mechanical treasures from the dump, he’d take it apart to find out what ticks. Made many of my childhood toys from them. It reminds me of what Alphys does! But with less style.”

“My brother is practically barebones! Nyeh heh heh!”

Oh, the pun. It made you snort.

You asked Papyrus of how the brothers managed the house.

“We had a time-table. Like Wednesday for laundry day. My brother and I would play the game of ‘who fills the basket first?’ The winner gets to decide our Saturday activity!”

“Although, I had a suspicion that he keeps a hidden stash somewhere to cheat.”

Your brain almost imploded from the sheer paradoxical information. It’s hard to believe that you were asking about the same person.

In a way, keeping a time-table was both a disciplined and lazy thing to do. As oxymoronic as it sounded. One would need to force oneself to just do that particular chore on that day of the week. Nothing more.

Recalling the fonder times made Papyrus happy. You kinda wanted him to stay that way.

But, those were just memories now. If you want to help both brothers, you must know the truth.

> What happened after the accident?

Papyrus fell silent.
“…SANS LOCKED HIMSELF IN HIS ROOM FOR DAYS. HE STOPPED GOING TO HIS REAL SCIENCE JOB. HE STOPPED TALKING TO ME.”

“HE STOPPED… EVERYTHING. NOT EVEN KETCHUP COULD ENCOURAGE HIM. HE WAS AS IMMOBILE AS HIS PET ROCK.”

“I TRIED TO LOOK FOR HIS FRIENDS, BUT FOR SOME STRANGE REASON HE DOESN’T HAVE ANYONE OTHER THAN ALPHYS AND UNDYNE. I THOUGHT HE KNEW MORE PEOPLE THAN I DID.”

“So!” Papyrus struck a heroic pose. “I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, SWEAR TO HELP SANS OVERCOME HIS BLUES!”

His spike of enthusiasm continued. “TO ADJUST TO OUR NEW LEVEL OF INCOME, I SOUGHT FOR THE CHEAPEST PLACE IN THE UNDERGROUND! WHICH WAS SNOWDIN.”

“ALSO, REVIEWS SAY THAT THE PEOPLE THERE ARE SUPER FRIENDLY! IT’S THE PERFECT PLACE TO START A NEW LIFE! NYEH HEH HEH!”

So that’s how they ‘asserted themselves’ into the town. More like, Papyrus did.

You asked if the plan worked.

“OH YES! IT DID! SANS STARTED HANGING AROUND AT GRILLBYS! I HATE THE GREASE, BUT AT LEAST HE’S NO LONGER A… ‘CLOSET SKELETON’. NYEH.”

More puns. Papyrus likes them more than he’d admit.

“SOON AFTER WE SETTLED DOWN, SANS STARTED A PROJECT! I WAS SO HAPPY FOR HIM! EVEN IF HE ENDED UP SELLING EVERYTHING HE OWNED. AT LEAST HE’S DOING SOMETHING PRODUCTIVE!”

“…OR SO I THOUGHT. AFTER I MET FLOWEY, SANS’ LAZINESS REACHED A NEW LEVEL OF LOW. HE WOULDN’T EVEN PICK UP THAT SOCK IN THE LIVING ROOM. IT’S STILL LYING AROUND IN OUR OLD SNOWDIN HOUSE.”

“I REFUSE TO TOUCH THAT! HIS CLOTHES, HIS RESPONSIBILITY!”

“…………………………”

Papyrus stared at the right side of the floor, as if there was something interesting going on there.

He remained silent for a long, long while.

“He’s not being lazy, isn’t he?”

“I NOTICED THE WRONG. BUT, I WANTED TO BELIEVE IN HIM. TO BELIEVE THAT HE DIDN’T GIVE UP ON LIFE.”

“I TRIED TO PUSH HIM AROUND TO TAKE BETTER CARE OF HIMSELF. LIKE GETTING A PROPER JOB. PICKING UP HIS LAUNDRY. EAT WHOLESOME MEALS.”

“That wasn’t enough. So I set out to lead by example!”

“JOIN THE ROYAL GUARD!”
“BECOME POPULAR!”
“BE COOL!”
“HAVE AWESOME LEVEL OF FRIEND COUNTS!”

“SO SANS CAN SEE THAT WITH ENOUGH EFFORT, ANYONE CAN ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING!”

“...I DON’T KNOW IF THAT EVER WORKED. I GOT TOO CAUGHT UP WITH MYSELF TO NOTICE.”

This cinnamon roll. Too good for this world.

You reached out to your sweet skeleton friend and gave him a big hug. Told him that he did help his brother.

Sure, the results weren’t obvious or life-changing… but you were confident that his positive energy inspired Sans to keep on living.

“IS THAT TRUE, FRISK?” Papyrus’ face shone with delight. Figuratively. “I’M HELPING MY BROTHER?”

You nodded with utmost confidence.

Just be himself, you told him. Show Sans that the Great Papyrus is so cool, he will overcome all the scary stuff!

“YES! AND WHEN I GET USED TO MY WEIRD GLOWING EYE, I SHALL BE A BILLION TIMES COOLER! WHATEVER A BILLION MEANS!”

Papyrus grabbed you by the armpits and abruptly stood up. He’s so overjoyed, he lifted you high above his head.

“THANK YOU, FRISK! I KNEW YOU COULD HELP ME, NYEH HEH HEH!”

The skeleton friend you knew and loved had returned in full swing.

“OKAY! SANS’ TRAINING PLAN IS LONG OVERDUE! THE SETBACK AND DELAYS END RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW! I NEED TO GET BACK TO THE LAB.”

“CAN YOU OPEN THE WINDOW? TORIEL WILL TURN ME INTO REAL ‘SHIN’-GLES IF I BREAK THAT.”

A quick chuckle later, you told him that he needed to put you back on the floor first. Papyrus did so in a swift yet gentle manner.

When you opened the window, frigid winter air chilled your room. Your pajamas were not meant icy temperatures.

You stepped aside.

Papyrus positioned himself to face the opening head on. He grounded his feet to prepare for a classic sprint.

“SEE YOU TOMORROW! OR LATER! COME VISIT WHENEVER YOU LIKE!”

He dashed.
He executed a cannonball jump right out of your window!

Someone’s been adding variations to his ‘stylish-exit’ regiment.

You took a quick peek outside, looking for signs of your friend. Nope. There were no footprints, or an odd orange glow anywhere.

Papyrus had dived into a shortcut.

Your efforts bore fruit faster than you had expected. As you tackled homework around five in the evening, you heard a commotion outside your window.

You opened it up and took a peek.

It’s Papyrus in his Jogboy clothes. Somehow, he managed to get Sans to wear a similar outfit.

“THREE SQUARE MEALS! A BANANA FOR BREAKFAST! 100 PUSH-UPS, 100 SIT-UPS, 100 SQUATS, AND A 10 KILOMETRE RUN! EVERY! DAY!”

“THEN YOU’LL BECOME AS AWESOME AS ME! NYEH HEH HEH!”

…Whatever happened to ‘starting slow’, Papyrus? Plus, ‘anime is not real’. Whatever he proclaimed was a very basic regimen for a human, and that was the joke of the show. You don’t think that routine would work on a skeleton.

“Hey bro, I don’t wanna do that.” Sans replied.

“WHY NOT?” Papyrus asked.

“Because, it’s going to be real boring if I can beat everyone with just one ‘pun’.”

“SAAAAANS! THAT IS NOT THE SPIRIT! THINK POSITIVE! YOUR PUNS SHALL BE SO AWESOME, ONE IS ALL YOU NEED TO KNOCK THE AUDIENCE COLD!”

You cupped your hands over your mouth, trying to muffle your laughter. After all they had been through, it’s great to see their brand of goofy antics again.

Off they went. Knowing that the precious skelebros will be just fine made your heart light and frisk.

You closed the window and resumed tackling your homework.

Five minutes later… your phone chimed. Odd. You had muted all your usual channels for concentration.

Only a new, untagged number would trigger the notification.

You checked your phone.

The message came from Aunt Cenna.

‘Hey Frisky. This is going to be a strange question, but it’s important.’

‘Out of all your friends, who do you trust the most? Other than Sans. That poor guy got too much on his plate already.’

That… was a strangely suspicious question. Repetition intended.
You asked: ‘Why?’

‘I can’t hold down the fort alone, y’know. Since word got out that I’m your legal aunt, every Tom, Dick, Harry and their wives badgered me about you. Talk about real pests.’

Eew. So the wannabe-parents didn’t give up after all. They just shifted to the next target. Aunt Cenna had yet to sign you off to the Dreemurrs, thus she still had technical custody as the nearest next-of-kin.

That means everyone will kiss her butt in hopes that she’d sign you over to them instead.

It seemed that Aunt Cenna trusted your monster family way more than anyone else.

You replied: ‘Mom. She’s no-nonsense when it comes to matters like these. Do you need her number?’

‘Totally. Thanks lots, Frisky.’

Chapter End Notes

I could not resist the One Punch Man reference.
The anime and manga is 100000% awesome. Do check the series out!
Knowledge

Chapter Notes

Toriel chapter?
Toriel chapter.

She's been missing screentime.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Toriel had polished the same plate for twenty minutes, lost in worry.

In front of Frisk she’d pretend the day went by fine… but the moment they retreated for the night, the ex-Queen fell into an absent-minded listlessness.

She couldn’t help but to wonder what other secrets hid right under her nose.

At first, she thought she knew everything.

Sans? He was her long-time joke buddy. Back then, they never saw each other face-to-face, but they shared a close bond. He made a promise to her and kept it, unlike that coward of a husband.

Papyrus? Sans’ adorable little brother. Forever up in the clouds about his greatness, pasta, and the wonders of them both combined. Wherever he walks, a happy sunshine will follow. Provided his over-enthusiasm didn’t override his sense of logic.

…Was that the truth? Toriel once thought she knew her King Fluffybuns through and through. How grave was her error.

It made her think.

What much does she know about Undyne and Alphys other than their relationship and the fondness for anime?

Their family background?
Their childhood?
Their life before they met her?

Toriel tried to recall as much as she could, but… she drew a blank.

“Some mother figure you are…” she chided herself. A part of her wondered if she was too strict with Asgore.

The recent events reminded the ex-Queen that she had failed to live by her own personal standards.

A loud buzz snapped Toriel out of her stupor. The phone vibrated against the kitchen counter. She placed the plate on the drying rack and answered it.

“Hello?”

“Hey there, Madam Toriel. Cenna Caraway here.”
“Oh? How did you get my number?”

“*I asked Frisky for the most trusted adult, sans Sans. The answer was you.*”

Before Toriel could reply, Cenna added: “But, *I need to know something first: do you trust them?*”

That was… more ominous than required. Toriel responded with full honesty. “Of course I do. They’re very matured for their age.”

“Ah, sorry for the strange question. Just checking my bases before I enlist your help. *You see, I have a really tough customer badgering me. He wants Frisky way more than anyone else.*”

“It would help if you hear his side of the story too, yeah? *You’re Frisky’s mom after all. Thought we should make an objective decision together. He’ll make his call at eleven.*”

Eleven in the night? That would take place in five minutes.

Toriel asked, “Where should we meet him?”

“Eh? *Nowhere,*” Cenna replied. “*I’m gonna hook you up to my phone and relay the call. You won’t be able to speak with him, but not like he’s gonna to talk to you anyway.*”

“You want me to… spy on the conversation?”

“Nice to know you’re catching on, Madam Toriel.”

The monster matron’s lips turned downwards. This cunning, forced intel-gathering reminded her too much of the War days. She had a mental image of this Magus grinning ear-to-ear at the other end.

A Queen cannot be too trusting, Toriel told herself: more so when one’s ex-husband had a history of being a softie.

But… Frisk trusted this woman enough to hand out ‘Mom’s’ number.

“Miss Caraway,” she thus said. “*I’ll let you know that my will is not yours to bend.*”

“*Hey, I’m counting on that. Oops, time’s running out. Talk to ya later.*”

Cenna ended the call there. Toriel hurried to the living room to search for her ‘earphones’. Frisk and Sans shared their money to buy these for her as a gift. They proved handy to cut out unwanted noise. She wouldn’t want to miss out a single word of the upcoming conversation.

Breathe in, breathe out. Nerve wrecking it may be, she needed a clear head. So she sat down on the armchair and mentally prepared herself.

The hands of her old-fashioned analog clock ticked closer and closer to the eleventh hour…

Five minutes past the hour, the phone buzzed in her fuzzy hands. She answered it posthaste.

“*Late as usual,*” said Cenna.

The gruff voice of a male human huffed at her statement. “*Says the person who ditched all the paperwork to me. Have a shred of responsibility for once, Judge Cenna Caraway.*”

“*Chill, Judge Mezil Thyme. Being high-strung is bad for sleep. Learned that in the police force.*”
Toriel frowned. They had rather heavy titles. Being called ‘Judges’ indicated that they were far from rank-and-file wizards.

An annoyed sigh breathed through the microphone. “Fine. What’s your verdict?”

Cenna replied: “We should leave Frisky in Ebott Town. The people there are kind, wonderful, and rather colourful: both in a figurative and literal sense. I couldn’t ask for a better place to raise anyone.”

An air of disbelief hung in the air.

“…You’re telling me that we -- the custodians of this era -- should leave humanity’s ultimate weapon in the hands of our former enemies?”

Weapon? Toriel didn’t recall buying any sort of armament, or finding one for the matter.

“Yessir.”

“Preposterous!” Anger resonated through the other end of the line. “Do they even know how to care for a human?”

A casual answer followed right after. “Yep. They did their research. One of them knew that human hair length is genetic in nature. How many humans bothered with that?”

“Hey, hey,” she continued. “Don’t start railing me about allegiance. We can say the same damn thing about every country on the planet. Wars come and go. Nations move on. We shouldn’t be holding a grudge against them just because they’re not blood and flesh.”

Unable to debunk Cenna’s logic, Mezil grumbled under his breath.

Toriel raised a brow out of slight amusement. At least she could confirm that Cenna’s teasing, casual behaviour was not a farce.

Between the two, she was more worried about this ‘Mezil’ fellow. A person in charge of major paperwork tends to have the organization’s respect. Respect translated to influence, and thus support to his cause.

“Did you test them?” Mezil asked.

“Yup,” said Cenna. “I straight up threatened a fight. The Queen immediately tried to protect the kid like a good mom will do. I thought the King would have gotten soft from all those years of peace, but heh. Guess even fluff can fight back when the stakes are high.”

“Then he sent the tall Lichborn against you.”

Toriel realised that Mezil was referring to Papyrus. What a terrible title for such a sweetheart.

“Hah!” Cenna called out, “A confession at last! You sneaky bugger, spying on me even after promising otherwise. I didn’t even report that he’s a Lichborn. And yet you knew. That means you saw his orange Eye?”

She added. “You don’t need to worry about him. Seriously. He’s crazy powerful, yes. But he’s more innocent than a child. Spared me just because I claimed to be Frisky’s aunt. Heck, he didn’t even try to verify the truth.”

“Hmph,” Mezil huffed. He was not convinced, but he had other matters to tackle.
“Let’s assess our next threat then: Undyne the Undine. She intercepted our reclaiming operation. Our scouts detected elevated levels of willpower when she did her… ‘suplex thing’.”

Toriel covered her mouth, trying to muffle her horrified gasp. That kidnapping attempt was not a random grab for money.

“How she suspected you yet?” he further enquired.

A chuckle escaped from Cenna’s lips. “What do you think? I’m the walking definition of ‘suspicious’. We’re both from law-enforcing backgrounds, and that’s double the doubt. Our careful steps were mutual.”

“Don’t worry about me, Mez. Just because I quit the police force, doesn’t mean my skills vanished along with the badge.”

The stern voice grew heavier than before, issuing a grim warning: “Judge Cenna, don’t fall complacent. If I were you, I’d get out of town as soon as possible. That short Lichborn is not like the others. He will kill you.”

The ‘short Lichborn’ must refer to Sans. Toriel wondered why the humans speak such ill about her joke buddy. It was so difficult to imagine that pudgy, eternally-grinning bloke as anyone dangerous.

Cenna snickered in response. “Yeah, yeah. As if he haven’t already tried.”

Sans tried to do what?

When Toriel heard the last line, she stopped breathing for a second. Her fur started to stand and puff up in response to a dark chill in the air.

The heater didn’t malfunction.

“Thanks for the concern,” said the human lady. “But I need to rebuild some long-lost family bonds. Have some proper communication for once. Otherwise I’ll just run into another bad end. Like most of your ideas.”

Mezil groaned in the background, knowing he couldn’t change his stubborn colleague’s mind.

“Did you disclose the child’s background in full?”

“Ahuh,” Cenna replied. “Told everyone that their parents died on a geological job. And also that their idiot, immature-aunt dropped them into ‘The System’.”

“Liar.”

The male Magi outright accused his colleague. No sugar-coating. No mercy.

He said: “You had neglected the key details. For example: you didn’t tell the child that their parents were Magi. Brilliant ones, if I must add. Their dual disciplines with geology played a key role in maintaining the Barrier.”

“Judge Caraway, I hope you realise that their welfare should have been in our hands. Not Monsterkind. The foster parents agreed to keep their true identity a secret for their protection. Once they were of age, they would then be formally invited into our school. …Now the plan is ruined.”

“I ask you again: can Monsterkind truly raise humanity’s greatest weapon without jeopardizing the world as we know it?”
Toriel felt her world sway as magic drained from her head. She would have fallen out of her armchair if she didn’t grip the handles in time.

‘Maintaining the Barrier’
‘Died on the job’.
The details clicked together: the ‘mountain accident’ took place on Mount Ebott itself.

It can’t be true, Toriel thought.
This was too much of a coincidence with that popular wizard movie. Frisk was just a human child. A special human child, but human nonetheless.

They couldn’t -- shouldn’t be a magical weapon of some kind.

How could this happen?


Mezil went silent.

The poor mother’s heart ached.
Why must Chara get involved in this cascade of misfortune?
Was their tragic end not enough?

“You and I don’t agree on a whole lot of things,” she continued, “But hell, we both thought that place was psychoville!”

“Tell me this. How many folks get so bloody scared of their own shadow that they set their own village ablaze? Wait. Scratch that. More like: anywhere with golden flowers.”

“Those fires raged on for days, sir. Us Magi were supposed to prevent such madness. Whatever happened to that? Humanity ain’t infallible, y’know. If Monsterkind suits Frisky’s needs better, it’s better to cooperate. Why should we rip them out of capable hands?”

Toriel didn’t think the tragic deaths of her children affected the Surface as much as it had affected the Underground. A part of her expected life to resume in blissful ignorance.

It didn’t.

Once upon a time, she knew almost nothing. Now she had heard too much.

Toriel breathed deep to regain her composure. For her child’s sake, she will continue to listen to this grim debate…

Chapter End Notes

No, this is not going to be Harry Potter.

Also if I screwed up my italic formatting, feel free to smack me with a fish.
Red

Chapter Notes

More and more details are falling into place.

Edit: Major edits. At this rate I should just wait for the editor to catch up...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Papyrus won’t stop buzzing you with updates about his condition.

He was fine. Mostly. In just two days, he gained enough control of his Eye to tone down the flame effect.

According to Sans, that coolness was ‘inefficient style’. Each particle you could observe was in truth a leak in the wielder's hold.

It’s like trying to cup a handful of water. It’s nice to watch the streams flow between your fingers, but you’d have less water in your hand.

You realised that Sans was really giving his all when you went crazy. He had no flames there. It was supposed to be the point of no return after all…

As for the visions, they became less morbid. Your friend no longer saw dead people walking. Although, he still struggled with assorted other time-delay illusions.

For example, he kept seeing the afterimages of a cucumber sandwich sitting by Alphys’ PC. She ate said sandwich yesterday.

Or he tried talking to Undyne at the couch, when in reality she was on the phone ordering pizza.

A replacement teacher had filled in Mom’s classes for the second day now. You already missed her gentle voice. It’s not that the temporary teacher was bad. It’s just, well, not the same.

You couldn’t focus on your classes. There was still the missing SAVE stars issue to tackle. Aunt Cenna’s untimely interruption had delayed your much-needed discussion with Sans.

Mettaton called you during recess.

“Why, hello darling,” he said. As fantabulous as ever. “When will you drop by and visit little old me? I’ll only be here for a little while before I roam the world once more, radiating my fabulous self to humanity~”

A giggle squeaked out from you. You told Mettaton that you’d love to see him in person. Just that for the past two days, Mom wasn’t feeling well. You’ve been taking care of her.

“Oh? Our primma donna Queen had fallen ill? How terrible! Is she fine now? Shall I get my fans to shower her with well-wishes? I have millions of followers~”

You politely declined the offer and told him that she's getting better -- for her sake. In the back of
your mind, you knew Mom preferred the peace and quiet. Nagging migraines and commotion don’t mesh well.

You planned to invite everyone over for dinner out of the house anyway. At Grillby’s, so Mom doesn’t need to cook and wash for you. If there was anything needed to be done, everyone can help.

“Brilliant plan, my darling ambassador. I’m very sure Papyrus will appreciate the extra housework. He’s so energetic, he must have cleaned the entirety of Alphys’ lab three times over by now.”

Wow. It made sense since Alphys was not the tidiest of folks either. He couldn’t bear to see a house in disarray.

You told Mettaton that you’ll visit the lab after school today. Cue a dramatic gasp of happiness. Ah, he’s a showman both on and off camera.

“Splendid news! I eagerly wait for your arrival, dear. You’ll be treated with a bееееаutiful surprise~~”

That wrapped up the call.

Dang, you wished that school will end right now. Bailing in the middle of recess would hurt your reputation. There’s a set commitment past the school gates: once you enter, you can’t leave other than an emergency.

The days where you don’t enter at all? That’s different. You had urgent business. Sort of. Your personal safety was pretty important, as was Papyrus’ health.

The thought of meeting your friends after school filled you with determination.

As promised, you headed straight to the lab once you were out of the educational grounds.

Mettaton answered the door. Your eyes were immediately assaulted by the sheer glam of his glamorous self. His overall design didn’t change, but he looked… NEW.

The arms.
The face.
The heart belt.
And his legs. Especially his hot-pink legs.

Mettaton’s first line of cologne floated into the air. It’s quite pleasant, but you were not sure if it would worsen Mom’s migraine-addled state.

Your fabulous robot friend flicked his new and improved hair.

“Do you like my upgrades?” asked Mettaton. “Alphys managed to get a whole lot of new tech in recent months. And she met a woman who inspired her to style my gorgeous Locks. It may look the same, but it feels a world’s difference!”

You granted him two thumbs up of sheer approval. You asked if he got the battery upgrade that he always wanted?

“Oh yessss!” He struck a sassy pose. “Now I can be in my exquisite, BEAUTIFUL form for much, muuuuuuch longer! My box body still has a strong following though, so I won’t ditch it.”

The cool and the cute?
“Indeed! Come on in, little star. It’s cold outside.”

Mettaton led you inside and closed the door. At that moment, you saw Papyrus facing an empty wall.

“OH EM GEE METTATON! YOUR UPGRADES LOOK FAN-TA-BU-LOUS! THE HOT LEGS LOOK HOTTER AND YOUR STYLE IS STYLIER!”

He was praising the wall, thinking Mettaton was there. The time-delayed afterimages struck again.

Maybe it’s best to leave him alone for now.

“Oh, that poor darling,” your celebrity friend commented. “It breaks my heart to see one of my biggest fans so confused. Is there not a way to speed up his recovery?”

Shouldn’t Mettaton ask Alphys or Sans about that?

“I did.” He frowned. “They said he’s healing well. But, it’s still too slow in my tastes. If only Papyrus is a robot like me. All he needs is one session on the table. And voila!”

You then heard Alphys scream out of frustration. It came from the ‘office section’ of her house, where she placed all the proper work equipment. That included her non-anime PCs.

For the first time in forever, you saw Alphys storm out in exasperation.

“SANS! Come out right now!” she yelled. “I KNOW you’re the one who installed that dog-hotdog shimeji! Why did you have to do that on my WORK COMP??? You could have totally wrecked something important!”

Alphys proceeded to dash around the house to hunt the culprit down. Your dorky friend might have learned a thing or two from Undyne.

Speaking of whom, you asked where Undyne went.

Mettaton replied: “She’s prepping my Dummy cousins for field testing. Alphys wanted to analyze all of Pappy’s new abilities. There’s apparently more than just those ‘special cannons’ he kept squealing about.”

Mad Dummy and Training Dummy? They’re still in that business?

“Yes, darling! There are a surprising amount of jobs that require a dummy. Haunted houses, clothing stores, children’s parties and so on. Would you like to watch the training session?”

Ab-so-LUTE-ly, you answered. You can’t wait to see Papyrus’ new skills!

The ‘training session’ took place in an empty hall. It was more or less an empty space with reinforced walls and switchable tile floors. You learned from an engineer in Hotland that their local puzzles were built for easy renovations.

Alphys applied the same principle so Undyne could adjust her training regiment in any way she wanted. For now, it’s just the dummies and a lot of empty space.

It’s great to see two of those guys again.

Although they acknowledged you, the Training Dummy was just as silent as ever. Until today, you weren’t sure if that was a guy ghost or a lady ghost. They never answered your curious questions.
And the Mad Dummy? Even before the training began, he’s already throwing stuffing everywhere. Undyne resorted to her classic German suplex to get his temper under control.

You spotted Sans lounging on the side. He leaned against the wall, content and relaxed; it's been a long time since you’ve seen him this way.

Mettaton noticed your eagerness. He patted you on the head and subtly urged you to go ahead. Then he strut off to coax his temperamental cousin.

You sat beside Sans and smiled.

“Hey kid,” he returned the gesture. “How’s school?”

The smile remained, but it’s starting to curl awkward.

Sans winked. “I know that look on your face. Classes are the least of your worries now. Go ahead, shoot. I’ve been in a good mood for a few days now. It’s about time I return the favour.”

Favour? Your tilt your head, puzzled.

“Your talk with Paps,” he answered. “It made him a merry skelly again. Can’t ask for anything more than that.”

That’s right. It didn’t surprise you that Sans found out the truth sooner or later. Well, if he said he’s ready, then he’s ready.

You whispered to him that you’ve not seen a single SAVE star since you’ve stepped out onto the Surface. The Underground had lost all their SAVE stars too. No matter how determined you were, one wouldn’t appear.

Furthermore, any attempt of altering time would trigger a complete RESET. You would be dragged all the way back to that fateful day when you fell unto a bed of golden flowers.

“Hmm…” Sans pondered. “Strange isn’t it? You’d think being alone down there would give you free reign.”

Pardon?

“Every human SOUL has some level of Determination. But only those with the highest quantity would have the power of time-space manipulation. Make SAVES. RESET. Those stuff. It’s hard to achieve that intensity on the Surface due to the sheer number of humans. Think of it as a wireless signal: if there are too many of those in the same place, they’ll crowd each other out.”

That made sense. When you fell into the Underground, you had robbed Flowey of his powers. In other words you had cancelled his ability to SAVE and RESET just by being in proximity.

You weren’t sure if you had shared this important piece of information with Sans before, so you told him about it just in case.

He nodded his skull. “Yup. That confirms it. The person with the most Determination wins the power lottery. By theory.”

Your heart skipped a beat.

If you could rob Flowey…
Another person could rob you.
But wait. Sans said: ‘by theory’? So, things are going against theory now?

“Sort of. You know those stories about how folks got lost in the middle of nowhere? Some got rescued, others were not so fortunate. If isolation is the key, why didn’t they gain the ability to SAVE and RESET? Did they lack determination? Furthermore, what’s the range of this ‘Determination Effect’ anyway? Does it have a radius? Or does it cover the whole planet?”

You thought about it for a moment.

What if a human launched themselves to space? Would the ability work on the moon?

“Maybe. The moon has no other humans around to cause interference, but there are no reports of time-altering abilities from any astronaut. It’s either they’re not aware of the power, or they lacked potential.”

Sans concluded it’s a very rare ability.

You asked him if someone else cancelled out your time-altering abilities.

“Doubt it, kid. If that’s the case, you wouldn’t be able to drag us back to the Underground either. Remember, Flowey couldn’t RESET either. Unless…”

You witnessed the mental gears click together in Sans’ head. He lost that grin almost in an instant. His sockets went dark, staring into your soul from its bleak depths.

“Kid,” he whispered. “What if…”

At the most critical moment, you were then interrupted by the beginning of the training session. Papyrus waved at you with utmost enthusiasm.

Sans put on his usual goofy grin for cover; he then excused himself. It’s time to uphold his word and teach Papyrus the art of ‘special cannons’.

All Papyrus needed was just a little guidance. After a brief explanation and a demonstration later, your tall friend summoned his first Gasterblaster.

You never thought it’s possible for Papyrus to scream with the voice pitch of a schoolgirl. Ecstatic, he hugged the scary dragon-cannon as if it was a brand new puppy.

Seeing his job done, Sans shuffled himself out. “Welp Paps, knock yourself out. Have fun.”

Fun indeed. Papyrus started practicing his shots on the Dummy cousins. The beam’s power was scaled down to safe levels, of course. He wouldn’t want to turn his friends to ash.

“C’mon Papyrus!” Undyne yelled. “Put all your strength into it! Bigger! Stronger! Faster! Better! Send ‘em flying!”

Mettaton huffed. “Crude as ever, my rambunctious fish. Our darling needs more style and flair. Humans loooove a spectacle. Oooh, just IMAGINE the guest star ratings of Paps’ lightshow!”

“Bleh! You and your flaky showbusiness. If Paps follows your advice, he’ll just be wasting his talent!”

“Talent is pointless if there’s no appeal. Mhmm hmm~~~”

Oh uh. Here comes the glaring contest. Papyrus spent the next few moments trying to keep the two
from a potential cat-fight.

Sans plunked his butt down next to you, tucked his hands in the jacket pockets and resumed his lazy slouch.

“Eh, they’ll be fine.” He said. “Back to topic. Let’s try to determine what enabled SAVING in the first place.”

Determination, you said. And the lack of competing sources.

You then remembered one of Sans’ science lessons. Something about the way a person perceives colour. All visible light corresponds to a range of wavelengths. This spectrum could be a mixture of multiple other shades.

You wondered if the colour of your SOUL could be an important factor.

“…Likely.” Sans answered. He’s quite impressed with you. “Can you recite the SOUL colours and their corresponding qualities for me?”

Cyan, Patience.
Orange, Bravery.
Blue, Integrity.
Purple, Perseverance.
Green, Kindness.
Yellow, Justice.

Red… Determination?

“Bingo. And what’s the essence of Determination? It’s the will to keep on living. To change fate. That’s time-travel material there, Frisk. Think about it.”

You don’t like the darkening tone in his voice. This is serious business.

“The moment you lose the will to live, you lose your Number 1 spot. That void will then be filled by a different entity. If I remember right… you RESET at your most stressful moments.”

Sans started counting with his bony fingers. “The kidnapping. Losing the custody case. Being alone in a foreign land. Running out of money. Death of a friend. Unable to change an outcome. Whenever things collapsed beyond your control. That’s when you were at your most vulnerable.”

“Perhaps you had made a conscious decision to RESET in some of those timelines, but are you sure you were in control in every single one?”

Your head felt faint from the revelation. Try as you might, you couldn’t come up with a valid argument to counter his hypothesis.

What if your sense of control was all an illusion?
There was one person who could, and would, play mind tricks on you.

They would wait.
And wait.
And wait.
Until you hit a low point in your life.

Then they would pull the trigger. All the while, they made you believe that it was your own wish to
You were afraid to even mention their name. It could grant them more power than they already had.

Sans shared the same wavelength at you, much to your fortune. “Yeah. Them. None of us are safe until we get rid of that other red kid somehow. Or rather, their husk. Same goes for Flowey.”

Does that mean… killing them?
You don’t want to kill them, even if they’re technically dead.

“Heh, that’s such a Frisk way of thinking. Don’t worry. We’ll look for a non-lethal alternative.”

He then smacked a strong, reassuring pat on your back. “Stay determined, kid.”

That action caught you by surprise. Sans had never given you such a strong pat before. It was more of a Papyrus thing to do. Someone’s really been in a good mood.

You beamed back with delight.

Speaking of Papyrus…

“UM, SANS? HOW DO I GET DOWN FROM HERE? OR IS IT UP? I DON’T KNOW ANYMORE!”

Papyrus had somehow managed to get himself stuck on the ceiling, feet to the roof. He tried to jump back to ground, but whatever magic he had used to get up there kept dragging him back to the top.

You noted that his Eye kept flashing between orange and ultramarine.

“Whoa,” Sans was both surprised and amazed. “I knew Paps had better grips on gravity magic, but wow. This is so awesome. You could say that his abilities are… ‘Through the roof’.”

Bum-pa-dish! You burst into laughter while Papyrus screamed about the pun. Yup. He heard that.

He started throwing a foot-stomping tantrum. While upside down. “NOT FUNNY! SAAAAANS WHY CAN’T I TURN THIS MAGIC OFF??? I JUST WANTED TO BREAKDANCE IN MID AIR!”

Poor guy. He’s just one step away from outright panic.

“Okay, okay. Don’t get your pelvis in a bunch.” Sans replied. “Be right there, bro.”

He beckoned you to join. “Wanna help out, kid?”

That sounds like fun.

The training troubles didn’t end at the ceiling mishap.

Undyne and Mettaton kept jabbing at each other’s values. They were both opposites yet the same: extreme and uncompromisable.

Papyrus tried to satisfy both sides by combining both aspects of strength and style… except his overextended magic went haywire. A large singular Gasterblaster started chasing after anything that moved.
Its first target was Undyne. She would have suplexed it into submission if it didn’t keep flying far out of her reach. The conjured creature circled around her and fired shot after shot square on her butt.

She will need to shop for a new pair of pants after this.

Realising the dangers of the rampaging embodiment of deadly beams, Papyrus jumped on the blaster and tried to pin it down to the ground.

Alas, it turned into an air rodeo session. The wild Gasterblaster flew around the room in sharp, erratic patterns, trying to shake off its own master.

Witness to this chaos, both dummy cousins decided that they had enough of today’s shenanigans. They whisked away without announcing their leave.

Then the Gasterblaster began to charge its beam.

As wise as he was lazy, Sans chucked you into Mettaton’s arms and put all his magic into subduing that construct.

The glamorous robot carried you princess-style and skipped outside like an antelope. That bot had a flamboyant grace in everything he does, including the act of evacuation.

A large explosion followed.

The training room was left in shambles. A comical layer of dusty soot clung on your friends, but otherwise they were fine. It reminded you of the silly slapstick cartoons you used to watch as a kid.

Needless to say, your group dinner plans had to be cancelled. All efforts shall concentrate on fixing Alphys’ place.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: my professional work also utilizes colour theories, quantum physics, and space-time details. I had them in place long before I played Undertale. So I had some idea of how those stuff work.

Some.

It’s deep in meta-science territory there. I can’t confidently say I know all about it.

Kudos to my boyfriend for helping me out with the science logic of Determination. Lots of these are thanks to his help.

Also hats off to user Ottl for reminding me about the hotdog shimeji. Here you go.

P.S Patema Inverted is one of my favourite movies. Beautiful gravity shenanigans ahoy! I can imagine Papyrus doing those kind of stunts.
Guess who's here?

I’m not going do this in a font that no one can read. I’m not even sure if it's possible to format it as such on AO3

If you see a text [that reads like this], imagine it as English translated from Hands.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s three in the morning.

Papyrus woke up from a surreal dream which he couldn’t remember. It involved his childhood days, talking to a skeleton that wasn’t his brother.

He tossed and turned around in the oversized hospital bed, but he couldn’t sleep. He missed the familiar comfort of his own bed: the right texture, the right size, and the right location.

Home.

Looking around, he couldn’t find his brother. Perhaps he had went home to sleep in his own room.

“HMMM…” he thought aloud to himself. “WHY SHOULD I STAY HERE? I FEEL QUITE FINE. PLUS, I CAN CHECK IN AFTER WORK.”

It was then Papyrus realised that he had missed days of honest work. “OH NOES!!! THE CAFETERIA! WHAT DAY IS IT NOW? WHO’S FEEDING THE CHILDREN???”

With that revelation, Papyrus dashed right out of Alphys’ lab. He had a job to do, and the Great Papyrus always takes his work seriously.

The school canteen opened early so some of the less fortunate students could have a hearty breakfast. He doesn’t do the cooking there, for the good fortune of many young ones, but he made sure the place was clean and the children healthy.

For as long as he could remember, Papyrus had the knack of reading another person’s condition. Happy or sad, sick or healthy, rested or tired, and a host of other ‘feelings’ that he couldn’t quite explain.

The volume of snowfall made it hard to see what’s ahead. Papyrus kept running anyway. He had the town’s layout memorized on the back of his hand, or so he’d like to think.

Somehow, however, this road stretched out further than he recalled.

He noticed a silhouette standing at the middle of the path. Thin, slender, dressed in black: this person stared upwards into the dark, snowy sky.

Papyrus slowed down to a stop.
“HELLO?” he asked. “ARE YOU LOST, SIR?”

The figure didn’t reply. Curious, Papyrus took a few more steps forward.

A white head…? It appeared to be the back of a skull. Was it another skeleton? How rare.

He couldn’t shake the strange feeling that he had met this man before. Familiar, as one would say.

“SIR? DO YOU NEED HELP?”

Again, no answer. Maybe he’s hard of hearing? Or was he too lost in the winter spectacle to notice.

Papyrus tried again. “MISTER TALL SKELETON IN FLOWING BLACK CLOTHES, CAN YOU HEAR ME?”

It was only then that the figure realised that he was being addressed. The mystery person turned around.

He was indeed a skeleton. An unusual one. The sockets were uneven: the right one in the shape of a crescent moon. It didn’t match his rounded left.

Two ridges scored through his skull. It gave this person the appearance of a puzzle piece locked together.

What bothered Papyrus the most was his… lack of solidity. Upon closer inspection, this person’s clothes literally ‘flowed’. Ebbed. Shifted.

His entire being was a liquid, always moving.

Papyrus’ brows furrowed with concern. This person was an Amalgamate, but he thought that all of them had already returned to their respective families.

“NEVER WORRY, SIR MYSTERY AMALGAMATE!” Papyrus puffed up his chest. “I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- WILL HELP YOU RETURN HOME SAFE AND SOUND!”

The other man started to speak… in hands. He used a mix of sign language and a cryptic tongue to communicate.

[Can you see me?]

That was a first. Ever since Papyrus had his Eye opened, his noggin could comprehend a language he never thought possible.

Papyrus signed back: [YES MISTER! IS THAT UNUSUAL?]

It felt weird to him. Where did this knowledge come from? Sans tried to teach him some as a baby bone, but it never got anywhere…

Yet here he was, conversing as if it was his native tongue.

The mystery skeleton smiled. [This is the first time in a long, long while that anyone has acknowledged my existence. Let alone converse in The Code. Well. Do you know my name?]

He wanted to sign ‘I don’t know’ -- wanted -- but the more he gazed upon this mysterious figure, the more he recalled a detail…
Without realising it, he signed: [UNCLE GASTER?]

The other skeleton was delighted beyond words. [Amazing, Papyrus. Yes. It is I, Uncle Gaster. Funny. Others addressed me as Doctor, but you insisted on calling me ‘Uncle’.]

[I DID? WHY DON’T I REMEMBER?]

[You were very young when you coined that nick.]

Gaster slid across the snowy road, leaving no trails or footsteps. His attention fixated on Papyrus’ glowing orange Eye.

[This… this is beautiful. Will you let me inspect it.]

Papyrus was more than happy to comply. [OF COURSE, UNCLE! BEHOLD MY AWESOMENESS FOR AS LONG AS YOU WANT! NYEH HEH HEH!]

The older skeleton chuckled. He leaned forward, peering into the right socket for a closer analysis.


[Orange. The essence of Bravery. Its progressive energy allows one to gaze beyond the limitations of his knowledge.]

[Blue. The essence of Integrity. It pulls multiple visions to a single point. Hmm, yours had double the intensity. You could stare death in the face and still remain sane. That’s a very important trait, Papyrus. Nothing is worse than losing your heart to mere possibilities.]

[Green. The essence of Kindness. Its rooted healing allows one to reconstruct memories scattered across space and time. Ah… interesting. Very interesting. That is how you could see me with so little effort. With some practice, you could even mend physical wounds.]

Papyrus was struck with epiphany. [WOWIE! THAT EXPLAINS THE WEIRD VISIONS SO MUCH! YOU KNOW A LOT, UNCLE GASTER.]

He then gasped in excitement, pointing to his own sockets. [OH OH OH! YOU’RE A SKELETON, RIGHT? DOES THAT MEAN YOU HAVE A MAGIC EYE TOO? CAN I SEE IT???]

Gaster laughed. It sounded hoarse and heavy.

[Not all skeletons have the Eye. However, my dear Papyrus. I don’t just have one Eye. I have two.]

One blink later, and Gaster’s eyes lit up in colour. His right was orange, and his left was blue. Just like the skeleton brothers.

Papyrus squealed absolute delight. [YOU HAVE ALL SIX COLOURS COMBINED?! THAT’S MIND-BLOWING!]

[Sorry to disappoint you.] Gaster signed back. [Two I may own, but they do not have any secondary or tertiary properties. These are pure.]

[SO, IT’S JUST LIGHT BLUE AND ORANGE? NOTHING ELSE?]

[Indeed. Mundane, but not useless. They boost my innate analytical foresight to levels beyond merely genius. Do you think the Core is made purely from human refuse? Goodness no! There are
plenty of materials one could extract from the lava pools of Hotland.]

Gaster’s burst of pride soon faded into disappointment. […Which I presume the populace has forgotten over time. Tsk. The Dump was harmful for their long-term health. True riches lay right beneath their feet, and yet they never realised it.]

[That doesn’t matter anymore since we’re on the Surface, isn’t it?] Gaster smirked. [Access to fresh materials are just one business call away.]

Papyrus stared back, lost and confused by the sudden outburst of technical gripes. He didn’t know how to continue the conversation. But, he deemed himself an excellent host.

[UNCLE GASTER! I DON’T THINK YOU HAVEEVER TRIED MY GOURMET SPAGHETTI. I --THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- INVITE YOU TO AN EXQUISITE BREAKFAST!]

How else could he celebrate this long-lost reunion?

The old man laughed some more, causing ripples throughout his dripping being.

[Thank you very much, young man. But aren’t you rushing for work? It’s almost four in the morning.]

[OH MY GOD YOU’RE RIGHT! YES! SO SORRY, UNCLE GASTER. I GUESS WE’LL HAVE OUR REUNIONGHNITTI IN THE WEEKENDS.]

Gaster rose his brows. [Are you so confident that this is not goodbye? Once you leave this space, you may not remember me.]

[‘GOODBYE’ IS FORBIDDEN IN THIS TOWN!] Papyrus exclaimed. [ONLY SEE-YOU-LATERS! WE’LL MEET AGAIN!]

The energetic skeleton then dashed down the dark road.

The snow subsided enough to let Papyrus see the surrounding shops. One of them was Muffet’s bakery. The sweet scent of spider doughnuts floated from the exhaust vents.

It was indeed four in the morning. Not much time left before he needed to check in at the cafeteria. There’s much to prepare and much to clean.

Papyrus made a mental note to bring his newfound uncle to Muffet’s. Her ciders may be to his liking.

Chapter End Notes

Bonus points if you remember what Papyrus says about goodbyes.

If you like my story, please recommend them to your friends! I'm a new person in the writing scene in general, so getting exposure is rather difficult.

My professional work? I was more or less a hermit during those times. Heh.
Here's a link to my non-fan related works if you're curious.
Trying to think like Sans here. Nihilistic Sans. That constant question of ‘why am I bothering to do this?’

I'm aware of the complaints that the fandom bring up the angst level too high for Sans. Angst and anger has its places, but it needs a strong context to support them.

It is very real that you can have elated hope on one day, desperation in another, and apathy in the next.
It's quite a confusing feeling.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s three in the morning.
Sans wondered when was the last time he started research from scratch?

When?

Since the time he quit his career?
Since the time loops happened?
Since Flowey terrorized the Underground?
Since Frisk dropped from the sky?

He couldn’t recall. It’s been so long, his skills had gone rusty.

Never in his lifetime Sans thought he’d care enough to work for something that didn’t cover his immediate bills.

Sans didn’t have his own computer, so he borrowed Papyrus’ desktop PC. The ones they had in the Underground were beyond obsolete by Surface standards, making even a basic internet connection an impossibility.

Updating communication hardware was one of Ebott Town’s top priorities. All those supplies had to come from somewhere. Thus, when Papyrus got his first paycheck, he ordered a new set of PCs along with the rest of town.

Sans wondered how many times that exact transaction took place in the other timelines. He didn’t bother to check.

It wasn’t important.

A lot of things were not important; everything loses its meaning when it could all be erased upon the slightest whims of others.

If it’s not some time-travelling kid, it could be the world’s policies.

Monsterkind now lived under the dominion of humans. So far, all was fine. But what about the next
year? Or ten years? Or a hundred years?

Where and when would they change their mind?

Sans had a ton of excuses to give up, yet he’s toiling over the keyboard, scouring for historical articles about the post-war Surface. Why?

Because of a promise?
Because of hope?
Because it’s… the right thing to do?

Reasons don’t matter either.

Anything of importance was jotted down in an old-fashioned book. It required more effort, but it was easier to hide.

His phone started to buzz. A call in the dead of the morning? Did Frisk get a nightmare and they needed to chat with him?

To his surprise, the call was from Mettaton.

Sans answered it. “Hey.”

“Hello Sansy darling. Beautiful night we’re having, hm?”

“Er, shouldn’t you be sleeping?”

“I’m a ghost and a robot, dearie. Sleep isn’t really our thing. Also, I want to let you know that Papyrus dashed out of the lab just now.”

To his fortune, Sans wasn’t drinking anything when he heard that news. If he were, the contents would have spewed all over Papyrus’ keyboard and he’d be in deep trouble. “You didn’t try to stop him?”

“Oh Sansy, you and I know it’s impossible to halt that hurricane. He’s got better legs than mine. I’d wager that he’s going straight home to fetch his uniform. He yelled something about schoolchildren, meaning that dashing darling going to try to go to work. Didn’t you guys arrange a week’s leave for my biggest fan? You know, so he could recuperate and spend some time with his fabulous idol?”

Sans gulped. Nassarcistic celebrity aside, Papyrus shouldn’t be anywhere near the canteen.

Advised by none other than yours truly, Toriel had arranged a week’s leave for his brother. The cafeteria owner didn’t need much convincing. Everyone along the path to Alphys’ lab heard the screams of agony, and stories spread faster than a fire in Ebott Town.

Sans forgot that Papyrus didn’t have the privilege of a ‘flexi-hour’ lifestyle. The poor brother must have thought that he’s absent without notice.

“Oops. Guess it slipped my mind.”

“Tsk tsk tsk.” He imagined Mettaton waving his finger on the other end. “Do pass the news and send him back to the lab pronto. Dear Alphys would flip if she finds out that her patient fled. I’d rather not damage her new-found self-esteem.”

Was that a subtle threat? Mettaton can grow overprotective when it involved the people he cared for. Napstablook, for example. He had sent scathing warnings to anyone who bullied his ultra-shy
cousin.

Once, the internet was ablaze with news about his aggressive side. Said that this robot celebrity had slapped a prominent music producer across the cheek, in front of the entire studio to boot. All because that person talked smack about Napstablook’s songs.

Sans wanted to end this conversation as soon as possible. “Uh, thanks Mettaton. I’ll send Papyrus back to you. Ok. Bye.”

“Hold on a moment.” said Mettaton. “Don’t you want to know more about Frisk’s darling auntie? I knew what went down during that unfortunate lunch incident. Perhaps you should be less suspicious of her, hmm?”

If this skeleton had a literal stomach, it would be in knots now. This was the kind of situation he wanted to avoid at all cost: a debt with the worst manager in the Underground.

“You’re still on the line, I see? Wonderful. Oh Sansy, relax. I won’t ask for ludicrous demands from an old work partner like you. If you agree to scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.”

Breathe in, breathe out. Play it safe. Be as casual as possible. “Well… you’re not going to throw me a bone for nothing, right? Heh. Do you need some bad puns to spice up your show?”

“Love your keen perception, darling. Before my visit, I signed a collaboration with the humans for a short family-friendly program. Six fabulous one-hour episodes of education, culture, and science. We don’t want our Monster community to harm a human out of ignorance, right? It’ll help me a lot if you agree to be a guest star for one episode.”

Sans was surprised that Mettaton had a grounded idea for once. Maybe Frisk suggested it? Or did he become wiser over the months?

That robot DID travel around the world. He had more first-hand experience with human society than all of Ebott Town combined. A celebrity like him should have access to some rare information.

“So…” said Sans. “When’s the shoot?”

“Four months from now.”

Four months. Knowing his luck, the world might RESET long before that. He decided to take the risk.

“Okay. Sure. It’s a deal. Tell me what you know about Frisk’s aunt.”

“I don’t know much about that lady per say. More about her organization. The Magus Association accused me as a ghost in a robot shell and whatnot, as if it was a very dangerous matter. So I invited their representatives for a personal interview. Clear the hubris, you know?”

“They sent two to settle my case. At first they were wary. We then had a fun dance-off with our SOULS. Their magical capabilities amazed me! It’s almost as if I’m playing with another monster. Almost. Those poor darlings tire out faster than you.”

Sans jotted down the details down in his notebook. The act of advanced magic seemed to tax the human endurance.

“How much HP do they have?” he asked.
“30 I think? Just a rough estimate. I’m no longer a ‘Killer Robot’, darling. There’s no need for brutality.”

An average child had 20 points. An average adult? A little more. Cenna had 13, which was way below the mark. There’s something not right about her.

“Ok,” Sans nodded. “Did you give them a run for their money?”

“Even better, my dear. I proved my innocence! The Magi warmed up to me when I showed them just how much I loooove humanity.”

“We had some chit-chat over some Starfaits and coffee. It turns out their fear was a giant misunderstanding! It didn’t occur to them that there are actual ghost-type monsters with an intact SOUL. Usually when they hear the term ‘ghost’, it dealt with a more... sinister entity.”

“Before they met me, the duo had to clean up a construction site, a children’s home, and some abandoned building lots. Having snacks with my fabulous, wonderous self was a welcome change of pace.”

“Clean?” Sans raised a brow. “What are they, janitors?” He just imagined a pair of wizards wielding a mop instead of a staff.

“They were... what was it again? It sounded very grandiose.” Mettaton paused as he tried to recall. “Ah! ‘Exorcists’!”

It was a word that Sans had only read in spooky stories and outdated human-society records.

“Excuse me...?”

“According to my new Magus fans, humans who died with deep negative emotions can remain long after their SOUL dissipates.”

“They become ‘ghosts’ or ‘demons’, depending on who you talk to. So very pitiful. Those malicious spirits take out their frustrations on the living.”

Determination?
Determination. Confirmed.

Sans kept listening.

“For obvious reasons, physical weapons are useless. So what did they resort to? Magic! If there’s a troubled site, the Magi will go there and try to bring peace to the poor spirit.”

“Either that, or force them into the afterlife. I have some doubts about the ‘afterlife’ bit. But if their job keeps my wonderful living humans safe, I personally have no complaints!”

Just when Sans realised that they had a demon problem... The whole scenario was a little too convenient. There had to be a catch somewhere.

The representatives that had met with Mettaton were most likely rank-and-file. They won’t have influence over administration and policies.

It’s the higher-ups that concerned him the most. Who are they? Where does their allegiance lie? What do they hide from the populace and their main front?

Everyone had secrets. Sans knew this better than anyone else.
“You there, darling?”

He realised that he had remained silent on the line for far too long. “Oh. Sorry. My mind floated off because your info is very en-light-tening.”

Mettaton chuckled over the line. “Well Sansy, I’m holding you to your words. Should you fail, I will ask for a fine compensation. Toodles~”

The call ended there. Instead of rushing right out of the house, Sans continued his research based on the new lead. He had no worries about Papyrus finding his way home. Any minute now, his brother will barge through the door, then make an assumption that Sans was setting up a prank on his PC.

Time ticked by. It’s three thirty in the morning now. Sans noted that his brother was late. With his average running speed, it shouldn’t take him this long to run home.

Maybe he got distracted with helping someone? Sans hoped so. He continued researching, but he was bothered by a nagging feeling on the back of his skull.

It’s past four in the morning. Papyrus had yet to arrive home. Did something happen to him along the way? Did he get into an accident?

Or…
Did his brother fall upwards to the sky?

Terrified by the thought, Sans packed up his study. He turned the PC off and slipped his notebook into his jacket’s internal pocket.

Just when he did so, he heard a familiar ruckus from the living room.

Papyrus had returned.

The elder brother breathed a huge sigh of relief.

As expected, the younger skeleton dashed straight into his own room to change into his work-clothes. He didn’t even bother to shoo Sans out for some privacy.

“Paps?” Sans asked. “Shouldn’t you be at the lab?”

“BROTHER, THIS IS NOT THE TIME!” Papyrus replied, “I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- HAVE STANDARDS! AS LONG MY BONES ARE FIT AND STRONG, I SHALL PERFORM MY RIGHTFUL DUTY!”

“You’re on a week’s leave, bro. Tori approved it.”

Before long, Papyrus had changed into his cafeteria uniform. Scarf included. The red fabric added a splash of colour to an otherwise plain outfit. He had the appearance of an aproned waiter, a chef and a hero all rolled into one.

“THAT LEAVE IS NOW NULL AND VOID!” he said, “PLEASE EXCUSE ME, SANS. THE CHILDREN AWAIT!”

Papyrus’ Eye started flashing between orange and blue at a rapid pace. He doesn’t realise it.

Sans blocked the exit for his sake. “Nope. Nah-uh. Bro, you ain’t going anywhere until the week’s up. C’mon, listen to me.”
The younger skeleton sighed. “SANS. I KNOW YOU CARE ABOUT ME, BUT SOMEONE HAS TO PAY THE BILLS.”

“It’s not about the bills.”

Oblivious of his own condition, the younger skeleton started a well-meaning lecture. “I UNDERSTAND IT’S HARD TO GET INTO THE GROOVE OF PROPER EMPLOYMENT AFTER YEARS OF A LACKADAISICAL LIFESTYLE. I WILL NOT JUDGE.”

Slowly but surely, Papyrus started to float off the ground. He was too busy talking to notice.

“Papyrus,” Sans kept glancing downwards, trying to hint his brother to take one moment to look at his own feet.

“THAT IS WHY I MUST MAINTAIN A GOOD STANDING WITH MY CURRENT EMPLOYER! IF I CAN SECURE A STEADY INCOME, YOU CAN TAKE YOUR TIME TO RECOVER.”

“Please. Look down.”

“NO NO! I’M NOT LOOKING DOWN ON YOU! THE AWAKENING OF MY EYE REVEALED A WHOLE NEW ASPECT ON YOUR BEHAVIOUR. THAT IS WHY THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL SUPPORT YOU UNTIL YOU’RE READY! IT IS THE LEAST I COULD DO!”

“Your feet.”

“SANS, SHRINKING YOURSELF IS NOT GOING TO CHANGE MY MIND! MY DECISION IS FINAL! F-I-N-A--”

Papyrus had floated so far up, the top of his skull bumped on the ceiling. Cue some sad whining.

The elder brother tried his hardest to not burst into laughter. He conscripted a blanket into a makeshift cloth rope. He then tied it around his brother’s waist and… pulled him around like an oversized helium balloon.

Back to the lab they went.

At least he had the decency to employ a shortcut. He wouldn’t want to parade this embarrassing mishap against Papyrus’ will.

Mettaton’s first reaction was to laugh. Or rather, he failed to resist breaking down at this absurd sight. No matter. Shower some attention on his fan and all will be right in the world again.

“Call me if you need anything, bro.” Sans winked. “I’m gonna go have breakfast at Grillbys.”

Alone once more, he took his time to walk down the snow-covered sidewalk. It reminded him of the days in Snowdin.

Cold. Quiet. Refreshing.

Sans thought back about what his brother had said.

Of how he won’t judge.
Of how he would wait for this lazybones to get back on his feet.
“…He’s too sweet.”

How should he feel about this? By logic, he should be grateful. Maybe a bit embarrassed. Guilt should be part of the equation somewhere.

However, if he must be honest with himself… His heart was as frigid as the winter air.

It’s not that Sans was heartless. Rather, he couldn’t see anything beyond the present. All of Papyrus’ plans were so far in a future that he didn’t bother to consider them.

The presence of his notebook rubbed against Sans’ shirt. It served as a reminder of a paradox: putting effort into a world that could just vanish in a blink of an eye.

Maybe. Just maybe. He’s trying to solve the mystery on nothing more than his own whim.

“Jeez,” he muttered, “I don’t even know what I’m doing anymore.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes, Papyrus the balloon. A part of me wants to see a fanart of that.

Also have some very shrewd Mettaton. A person can be charming, friendly and yet cunning at the same time. It's all business, darling~~
Offer

Chapter Notes

Edit: This chapter is now edited. It also shows how many hours spent discussing on lore expansion details.

Also, 'anime is real'. Again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Breakfast at Grillby’s.
What a joke.

The bar doesn’t open until ten in the morning. Sans had arrived at its doorstep way, way earlier than he should.

…And he’s too tired to go home.

Should he teleport inside? Use a shortcut? Grillby won’t be alarmed if he trespassed on the premises. They had a mutual trust that stretched a long way back. How else could he keep raking debt after debt without incurring any wrath?

But… he decided to do it the normal way. Sans leaned against the wall, waiting. The moment he stopped moving, his eyelids started to droop.

Though skeletons had no fear of hypothermia, the cold still had its lulling properties.

One blink later and he drifted off into the land of dreams.

* * *

Once upon a time, there was a cheeky skeleton boy.
He thought of his mentor as a killjoy and a hard driver.

Why must he be monitored for a week?
Why can’t he go home?

He wanted to sleep in his own bed, eat the meals his parents cooked, and read his science books.

But no, he must stay inside an empty room with only a basic bed.
How boring.

So for the next three days, the boy pretended to sleep. He watched his mentor’s every move. Listened to every sound. Remembered the daily monitoring routine.

A conceivable task for a prodigy.

On the fourth night, he made his jailbreak. All barriers serve no purpose if they crumble upon a single touch.
As the boy soon found out… all supports too will serve no purpose if they crumble the same way.

His powers went wild. The floor that was once rock solid dissolved into sinking sand, threatening to engulf him whole.

The boy tried to run. Flee. Outpace the rate of his own destruction. But his physique lagged far behind his brain.

He fell. Cried for help.

Dear mother was first to hear the boy’s cries. She got on her knees and reached her slender, bony arm towards her son.

The boy reached out to her. He grabbed his mother’s hand. To his horror, her bones started to flake.

He remembered how she resisted the pain of having her limb undone.

This shouldn’t be happening. Mother needs her hands to work. To cook, to prepare, to serve.

She spoke to him. Strange. Despite being a woman, her voice was clearly a man’s. His mentor’s.

“Sans, wake up! She’s here!”

“Move!”

* * *

Danger alert. Sans snapped open his eyes just in time to see the silhouette of a certain ‘aunt’: complete with hat and trenchcoat.

Under conventional laws of time, it was an unavoidable blow.

Too fast, too late.

Except, since when does Sans follow the law?

His left Eye flashed between blue and yellow. Upon that moment, the world around him crawled to almost a full stop.

To the perception of others, this was where seconds clipped away from their memory.

He noticed that Cenna had a slip of paper in her hand. It’s emblazoned in green and violet runes. She’s trying to paste that on his face.

A part of him was relieved that it wasn’t a knife. At least she was not trying to assassinate him outright.
Sans stepped aside.
Time resumed at normal pace.

When Cenna pasted the paper on the wall, the runes glowed. A sticky violet web spread from the contact point and crawled across the bar’s brick walls. That thing would have trapped Sans if he didn’t cheat.

“Lichborn,” thus said the Magus. “Descendants of ‘Liches’, the highest order of the enchanted dead, reanimated from humans who had potential to be Magi.”

A yellow shine radiated from the gaps of her trenchcoat. Her segmented SOUL summoned five mechanical drones made up of light.

“Upon creation of their progeny, that residue of humanity gets mixed together with magic, thus gifting the children with the ‘Seer’s Eye’. Since a Monster’s body cannot contain much ‘Determination’ without destroying themselves, all excess was channelled to a single point to be burned as fuel.”

“How else can they gain power over spacetime without losing structural integrity?”

The drones darted around the skeleton, weaving more silken threads of magic. It was an unholy union of spiders and bees.

Sans teleported out of the web’s scope. In turn, he summoned five Gasterblasters to match her drones. They’re quick: one misfire and he’d be in a literal bind.

His aim was true. In just a split second, the beams obliterated them out of existence.

“You’re more powerful than you look, Mister Sans.” Cenna summoned more drones. The same web-spinning type.

The skeleton realised she’s trying to capture him, but why? To take him as a hostage? Even if so, wouldn’t it be easier for Cenna to disable him with physical force?

Unless… she knew of his inherent weakness. Someone’s been gathering information during her stay in Ebott.

He summoned a wall of shifting bones to draw the line. If she tried to go around it, he’ll just extend its reach. Or inflict a couple of scratches that she won’t forget.

“I wouldn’t touch them if I were you,” warned Sans.

The Magus did not advance. A wise move.

Cenna fixed her hat. She then leaned on one leg with that confident, teasing grin.

“Cyan, the essence of Patience.” She said. “Grants its bearer the stillness to meditate on the information he receives. Never mistake it’s lack of action as sloth, for keen observation is the discipline of the wise.”

“Yellow, the essence of Justice. Grants its bearer accurate discernment. No illusion can maintain their falsehood. No stain can escape their watchful gaze. Only truth will stand. Exposes secrets to inflict sinners of their rightful due.”

“Purple, the essence of Perseverance. The need to keep going, no matter what, never to stop. Grants
its bearer instantaneous access to knowledge and skill from the realm of memories. Long-term, short-
term, deja vu, those lost in time and space…”

“But you have a little extra, isn’t it?” Cenna added, “Dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Such is the final
fate of all. Almost as if you’re the incarnate of death. Quite the opposite of your brother.”

Count on this woman to be both annoying and nosy. Where and how did she get all that
information?

Sans tucked his hands into his jacket’s pocket. Acted chill to not rouse any more suspicion.

“Heh,” he huffed. “It’s impolite to snoop around. If you wanted a warm reception, you could have
just talked to me like a normal person. Not initiate an ambush.”

Cenna raised a brow at his statement. “Oh? From the coldest skeleton in Monster society? You’ve
been on guard ever since I arrived. Maybe, just maybe, you’ve killed me before. Multiple times. In a
different place, different time. If I don’t try to restrain you, I’d get nuked in the face.”

Sans realised that she was telling the truth. Why else would she take such careful measures around
him? Binding him would allow her to talk without the risk of injuries.

He doesn’t know how effective the trap would be, and he’s not insane enough to experiment with his
life on the line.

Time to recollect intel. Before he could make his next decision, he must know his opponent.

First, Cenna did her homework on the Seer’s history: to the point where she could recite each
individual properties of the SOUL. Considering the founder skeletons’ status as an ‘enemy’, only the
most trusted of Magi would be graced with this information.

Second, she’s aware of the timeline problem. He doubted that she remembered the details in full
since she doesn’t have a Red SOUL, so it’s possible that their organization had a system to record
and process each RESET.

If he had killed her at any point, that system would have recorded his abilities.

Third, her abilities hinted at multiple disciplines. Cenna had a Yellow SOUL, but she displayed
tricks associated with other colours. Shields should be Green. Traps and webs should be Purple.

It would make her as Yellow main, with sub-abilities of Purple and Green. Sans noted that her
secondary abilities lacked colour. Transparent, even. It’s an indication of weakness, perhaps.

It’s possible that humanity made up for their lack of magic endurance through preparation. For
example, that slip of runic paper. He imagined Cenna had enlisted the help of Purple and Green
Magi to create that.

Thus ended his hypotheses.

Preliminary conclusion: Frisk’s aunt had to be high up the hierarchy scale. She’s skilled, strong, and
knows a bit too much. Rank-and-file won’t have access to such a controversial information.

How high? He doesn’t know.

Feigning innocence, he replied: “I’m in the dark, lady. Mind shedding some light on this situation?”

“I only know what I know,” said the Magus. “Long story short, antagonizing you is a terrible idea.
Why don’t we work together instead? A truce.”

“Work?” Sans huffed. “Nah. I hate work. Go ask someone else.” Truth was, he didn’t want anything to do with her.

“Even if it’s on Madam Toriel’s request?”

That was the last straw. His left Eye ignited as intense anger caused a leak in his grip of power.

Sans reached his hand out to her SOUL. Ripped it out of her chest and turned it blue upon nothing more than a thought.

He dragged her body to the revolving bones. Just one more inch and she would have her being shredded to bits.

In a low, chilling voice he asked: “What did you do to her?”

The human’s eyes widened, nervous from the sudden act, but she maintained her cool-detective front despite the pressure.

“Well, that village had always been a little… kooky. In a bad way.” She chuckled. “Here I thought you’re a dead man inside. Guess I was wrong, huh? Hey. Relax. Madam Toriel is fine. She ain’t a hostage. Though I did give her a little headache from all the info-dumping.”

Wrong answer. The skeleton slowly pulled Cenna closer and closer to certain doom.

“I told her about the ‘Chara Incident’,” she said.

He stopped upon hearing that cursed name.

Grabbing the opportunity to plead her case, Cenna continued: “A village at the base of Mount Ebott reported a monster carrying the corpse of a human child. It was the first sighting since the Sealing. I’m sure you know that story.”

It was the event that started this chain of madness. No one in the Underground escaped that tragedy. Sans included.

This could be his sole chance to get some insider information from someone on the Surface. Cenna was both ex-police and a high-ranking Magi. That’s double the access.

Still, he’s not ready to let her go. Not yet. While maintaining his grip, he said: “Go on.”

“Well, that village had always been a little… kooky. In a bad way.” She explained. “They’re descendants of the folks who wanted to wipe you guys out. The Magus Association may have the then-monarchy’s support, but that doesn’t mean everyone’s happy about it. There are folks who think we’re just delaying the inevitable.”

“So. They built their little settlement at the foot of Mount Ebott, ready for the ‘worst case scenario’. A village of warriors, you know? ‘Kill or be killed’. They had scaled down the martial arts training during the rise of modernization, but that philosophy continued to permeate throughout their culture. I won’t be surprised if a few dabbled in it more seriously than others. That's the kind of environment Chara had been raised in.”

A troubled child raised in a violent warrior culture, further reinforced by bad human media. Both circumstances encouraged determined behaviour free from the guidance of ethics.
It’s a recipe for disaster.

Frisk’s confession letters described Chara as being particularly skilled with a knife. What if they had some level of training? Papyrus’ panic over the phantom sternum gash confirmed that this kid knew where to inflict a fatal wound.

If they were a little older combined with a proper knife, that strike would have sliced through a human’s windpipe. Their opponent would either bleed or suffocate to death.

Still locking his sights on Cenna, Sans asked, “Tell me more about Chara’s community.”

“They trusted no one,” she replied. “Not any outsider, nor any Magi, and of course not any Monster. We told our guys to stay clear of that village. Lest they want to end up in a hospital bed with a massive medical bill. It happened before.”

Mistrustful. Misanthropic. Insular. Worse still, the community may not be as close-knit as they would like to believe.

The Magus continued: “When the Chara Incident happened… well, they thought the sky’s falling down. To prevent any ‘enemies’ from recognizing their surroundings, the community decided to burn every golden flower in the vicinity. It spiralled out of control thanks to the dry season.”

“And that’s how it all exploded into the Great Ebott Razing. Many perished in the fires, both the locals and their neighbours. The Magi took years to clean that mess up.”

The circumstance that led up to the blaze was bordering on the lines of absurdity. If this was taken at face value as the truth, someone in the decision making board had no common sense. None whatsoever.

It was a downright horrifying thought. Nothing’s worse than paranoid idiots in leadership positions.

Sans had one more question. “How does this relate to Tori?”

Cenna replied, “We’ve exorcised every restless spirit in the vicinity except for one: Chara. Her kid.”

“Chara, however, died in the Underground. We’ve had no access to ‘down below’ for ages. Adults cannot pass the Barrier, and there’s no Magi kid with the skill required to perform an exorcism. Nevermind making the return trip.”

“It would have been fine and dandy if Chara had moved on after all these years… but you and I know life’s not that simple. Long story short, Madam Toriel wants to give them the last rites they deserve. Make them rest in peace. Eternal sleep. You get the drift.”

Sans clenched his teeth together. If Cenna had no other ulterior motives, she could prove to be a great ally.

But he still doesn’t trust her. Weighing cost had started to burn his long-cold fuse. It doesn’t help that he’s dead tired and cranky either.

“Uh, Mister Sans?” Cenna glanced at the revolving bones. “Mind dispelling this chainsaw wall thingy? I promise I won’t do anything funny.”

“…Get rid of your drones first,” he said. The yellow bee-like magic had been on standby ever since she brought them out.
With a wave of her hand, Cenna dispelled her magic. “Your turn, sir.”

Sans reluctantly released his grip. Her SOUL returned to its usual yellow shade and sank back into the safety of her body.

“Phew.” She breathed a huge sigh of relief. “That’s one close shave. Have you made up your mind yet?”

“No.” He answered. “I’ll go talk to Tori myself. Give me until midnight.”

“Sounds fine by me. I plan to hang out with Frisky during their breaks anyway. Hmm, I wonder if I can buy breakfast from the school canteen.”

More attempts of trying to warm up with the rest of the monster civilization? Nothing much can be done about that. He would like to observe her behaviour in school anyway.

“Welp. You better be good.” Sans shut off the blue glow in his left eye. He stared back from the shadow of his deep-set sockets. “Otherwise you’re in for a bad time.”

Once Cenna left, he teleported himself inside Grillby’s. There’s no way he’d remain out in the open with this suspicious Magus walking around. The owner will understand.

He put on a gamey tune on the brand new working jukebox. Made a playlist too.

It’s soothing. Perfect background music for a continuation of his nap.

The short skeleton then remembered there was another reason why he’d rather not sleep in his own home…

It’s quiet.

Too quiet.

When it’s too quiet, a long-lost voice will start to whisper in the air. Sometimes, he could even see the person behind it.

“No thanks for me?”

He ignored the question.

“Well. Suit yourself. Just get some rest, for science’s sake. Do it for your brother.”


There was no reply.
Maybe he’s still watching.
Maybe he left.

Sans preferred it that way.

Chapter End Notes
This chapter is too serious to drop puns. I'm very sorry.

The sheer amount of information is enough to make me headdesk for a few days now. It's a hard, hard chapter to write.

...Okay I'm not sorry. When someone tries to ambush you, it's no laughing matter.
School Day

Chapter Notes

At the moment of posting, I'm down with a flu. I think. My ears and throat itch and my body hurts.

Hence the slowness of making this reply.
Also, on the 6th to the 10th of February, I will be away for Chinese New Year. I don't think I'll be writing during that timeframe. I'll try to paste some stuff before I leave.

Meanwhile, please enjoy.

From this chapter onwards, all new chapters will be edited before posting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mom could teach again!

You’re happy that the migraine was gone. She had all the rest she needed from her sick leave.

Though, you noticed that she’s often lost in thought. Whenever you tried to talk to her, she’d smile at you and say she’s fine.

You walked to the school grounds together with Mom, holding her warm fuzzy hand. The both of you decided that breakfast at the cafeteria would be a nice change.

This was not quite your usual morning routine.

On a normal day, Mom would have her breakfast before making yours. Once you had your meals cooked, she would then head to school to prepare for the day’s work. This arrangement allowed you to get some extra precious sleep.

You were glad that she squeezed the time to make you a warm meal every morning.

Really, really glad.

It’s tough being a single mother. Dad would help in a heartbeat, but Mom would rather stay independant. Complicated relationship stuff is complicated.

Apparently in the ‘Life of Frisk’, not a week can go by without at least one random encounter. When you and Mom arrived at the school gates, a staring contest between the two most strong-headed women greeted you.

Undyne and Aunt Cenna.

Mom blinked. “Good Morning. Is there… something the matter?”

Both ladies greeted at the same time, prompting a glance of competitive fire from your fish friend.

Undyne then said, “Weird Magus Lady wants to have breakfast in our school. I can’t comprehend why here of all places.”
“Canteen meals are economical and hearty,” your aunt replied. “Plus, I wanna survey Frisky’s school. I’m sure the facility can accommodate one visitor, right?”

Squinting her eye, Undyne said, “…Did you seriously decide to mooch off discounted meals meant for children?”

You agreed with Undyne. Ebott Town had its own tax system that was carried over from the Underground. It’s meant to maintain infrastructure, such as the school you’re attending now. A part of the money subsidized food costs from the cafeteria.

You joined the squinting team. Aunt Cenna started to feel the heat.

“H-hey, I don’t have much cash on me.” Your aunt tried to defend herself. “And the nearest bank is far away. Gotta be frugal.”

Mom sighed with a smile. “Miss Cenna, why didn’t you say so? We could have helped you out. At the very least, show you where to get a good meal on a budget.”

“I didn’t wanna trouble ya, Madam Toriel.” Was that a blush? It’s hard to see due to her dark skin.

“It’s no trouble, dear. Oh. You will need a visitor’s pass before entering the premises. This way please.”

Your entourage detoured to the security booth. Looks like it’s Doggo’s shift now. On Mom’s request, he granted your aunt a pass to hang around her neck.

Today’s breakfast, ‘Anime Curry Rice Set’. It’s mild curry with rice, accompanied with hot tea. Everyone ordered the same thing.

Ever since the nearby town offered to supply the pre-made cubes, it’s a huge hit in school. For those who didn’t want rice, there’s the ‘Anime Curry Pasta Set’: Papyrus’ Number 2 favourite pasta flavour. Tomato will always be Number 1.

The skelebros sure love their red tangy stuff.

The teachers had a small room to themselves to dine in peace. As much as the students loved your Mom, it’s difficult to eat with endless questioning about homework. As a teacher’s kid and Ambassador, you had a special privilege on invitation.

It’s warm inside here. You took off some of your winter clothes. Aunt Cenna did the same, and it’s the first time you ever saw her without that trenchcoat.

Without all that noir detective getup, your aunt looked surprisingly… normal. She wore a black loose, long-sleeved T-shirt and dark blue jeans. If she walked by you on the street, you wouldn’t know that she’s some badass mage.

…You may have done so during the timelines where you wandered the world.

You didn’t realise that she wore a necklace until now. It was hidden far beneath all the anti-cold fabric.

It caught your attention. It’s a golden pocket watch hung on a black cord. Came with its corresponding key.

Aunt Cenna replied: “Oh? Your parents gave it to me for my twelfth birthday. This one ain’t a
normal pocket watch. Here, check this out.”

She flipped the watch around. It’s completely mirrored. The numbers were flipped, and the hands ticked counter-clockwise. Wow, it’s mind-boggling even by your standards.

“Heh heh, cool isn’t it? If you like it a lot, I can give this to you.”

You declined. It’s your parents’ memento for her, not you.

“Awh man,” she teased. “Can’t trick you like a normal kid, eh?”

Hah! You’re too grown-up to fall for silly trolling!

Your aunt laughed with you.

Seeing how you got along with your aunt made Mom smile.

Undyne munched on her curry rice while staring at your aunt. “Hey, Cenna right? What’s your job anyway?”

“You want the fun part or the boring part?” your Aunt replied.

With a cheeky cat-like smile, the other said: “The fun part.”

“Catchin’ crooks and ghostbustin’, sometimes both in one go.”

Undyne’s expression turned into what you think it’s horror. “Wait, what?! GHOST busting??”

Oh, right. She used to be neighbours with Napstablook. Took care of him too.

Before the tables and chairs started flying, Mom corrected: “Not ghost-type monsters, dear. Miss Cenna gives rest to the dead humans who cannot pass on.”

Wait a minute--

You dropped your jaw. Mom subtly pointed at your mouth to remind you that there are some half-chewed pieces of rice stuck inside. It’s unsightly.

After washing the bits down with luke-warm tea, you resumed your display of shock at your aunt.

Could she help you with your predicament…? You need to discuss this with Sans, ASAP.

“Heh heh,” your aunt leaned over her rice. “Surprised? Having a police background helps a ton. There are a lot of spirits out there with a grudge. Either they were victims, or they’re criminals. I try to solve their cases, but… sometimes it’s better to help them move on first.”

Is there an afterlife, you asked?

Your aunt shrugged. “Maybe? We tell the restless dead that they will reunite with their SOULs on the other side. In the Spirit World. Many of my colleagues believe it. Me? No opinion.”

What about those… who give others a bad time, like hardcore killers?

“They usually try to resist,” she said. “Half of them want to remain in the world to torment the living. Half of them were too scared to pass on. Judgement, Karma, you know. Now those guys are a real pain in the butt.”
Why?

“The more they kill or had killed, the more powerful they become. After a certain point, those spirits will level up into ‘Demons’. That’s when you get the stereotype RPG team of specialists band together for the greater good. Hey, fiction has to get inspired from somewhere.”

‘The more they kill.’
‘The more powerful they become.’

EXP and LOVE become HP, ATK and DEF.

The implications terrified you.

Colour washed from your face.

It must be bad. Because Undyne started fussing over you. She kept patting your cheek and tried to shake you back into reality. “Hey! Punk! Squirt! Are you okay???”

You felt Mom’s warm furry hand on your forehead. She’s trying to check your temperature. “My child, are you alright?”

You’re starting to worry others. After a long, deep breath, you told everyone that you’re okay. Fine. No problemo.

They’re not quite convinced. You racked your brain to gather up the most believable white lie on the spot.

Raising a finger, you asked your aunt a very simple question: did the world almost ever end at a few critical points in history?

“That’s top secret material, Frisky.” She answered. “Well, I can say we averted crisis a few times.”

A nervous laugh escaped from your lips.

What will your aunt do if she found out that you had become a mass-murderer in at least one timeline?

Will she give you a ‘bad time’ like Sans?
Will she close an eye to your sins?
Or she would think you’re just ‘trolling’ with her as the internet says?

Your thoughts were interrupted with the loud clattering of a metal spoon. It bounced off the plate and fell on the floor, spilling a spoonful of curry everywhere.

Aunt Cenna’s right arm started to tremble uncontrollably.

At first, you thought it was the result of indignant rage, but then you saw her pinning her own arm down on the table… as if it was Papyrus’ runaway blaster.

“Whoa!” Undyne exclaimed. “What the hell is wrong with you?!”


Mom frowned with worry. She held your aunt’s arm and massaged it gently. Warm fire magic lined her hands as she worked through those tensed muscles.
“When did this problem start?” asked Undyne. You noticed that her expression had become sympathetic. Rough as she may be, there’s a deep kindness underneath all that raw strength.

Aunt Cenna averted her gaze. “…It started to get really bad last year.”

You realised that your aunt didn’t quit the police force by choice.

The room stayed quiet as Mom continued massaging. You quietly excused yourself to clean up and grab a fresh spoon.

By the time you’re back, you noticed that the haywire arm had relaxed.

“Careful now, Miss Cenna.” Mom said with a slight smile. “Give it time to recover.”

“Thanks Madam Toriel. The massage helped a ton.” She picked up the spoon with her left hand and resumed eating with it.

You were not surprised that she had become skilled in one-handed cutlery use.

Undyne was both puzzled and curious. Perhaps she had seen this in an anime before, but never witnessed one in real life. “What sort of injury could mess you up like that?”

“Uh…” After a long thought, Cenna shrugged. “It could be a bullet wound. It could be a bad fracture. Or one of those childhood traumas that I can’t really remember. Eh, life can get rough.”

Oh no.
That look on Undyne’s face.

If anime is real, you would see a burning aura hot enough to blacken what’s left of your curry rice.

“That’s it!” Undyne yelled. “We’re gonna WHIP DISCIPLINE INTO THOSE MUSCLES! I’ll work out a plan with Alphys to give you the exercise to get all those rebellious lumps into TIP TOP SOLDIERS! Papyrus will deal with the bone department!”

Physical therapy doesn’t work that way!

The rest of the day went by fine. You listened to Mom in and out of class, took your notes, and participated in the usual classroom activities.

Aunt Cenna hung around for lunchtime too. This time she ate together with the kids. For many of your schoolmates, this was the first time they talked to an adult human woman face-to-face.

They flooded the both of you with questions.

For example:

Is it true that humans have skeletons? Does that make them two people in one?

What are those two soft lumps on every woman’s chest? Will Frisk get them too?

Why do other humans refer others as ‘white’ and ‘black’ when they’re actually beige and deep chocolate?

Where do human babies come from? Are they delivered by storks like Papyrus claims?

What are toilets for and why are there everywhere?
Hearing all those questions made you realise that you had a ton more ambassadorial work to do in the future.

Your aunt took all the curiosity in stride. Her casual, cheeky demeanour entertained the children. She didn’t find any of the weirder questions offensive either. Silly kids were nothing compared to the real insults out in the field.

From the corner of your eye, you saw Mom. She’s smiling.

Then, Sans teleported right behind her. He doesn’t look happy. They skipped their usual jokes and started a serious discussion.

He kept throwing suspicious glares at Aunt Cenna.

Mom bowed at Sans. He burst into a fluster and tried his darndest to make her stand straight. But, she kept her head and body down.

She’s begging your friend for a favour.

Sans had a soft spot for Mom. They were close enough to make people gossip that they’re an item, though you know their relationship was platonic.

He relented in the end. After one last glare at your aunt, he vanished. A part of you wonder if he’s secretly a ninja.

When school was done, you stayed behind with Mom. She’s trying to catch up with her work. A pile of workbooks had sat on her table for a few days by now.

“My child,” she asked, “Would you resent me for adopting another child?”

That was a sudden question. You shook your head. In fact, it would be cool to have a sibling.

“Oh dear. Not that way. I meant…” Mom hesitated to finish her statement. “…Adopting after you pass away. I know humans have quite short lifespans compared to a Boss Monster such as myself. Would you think that I’m replacing you?”

Of course not.

Once you’re old and dead, you’re old and dead. Your memory shouldn’t hold her back.

…Although you admitted that you’re more afraid of growing old than dying. You’d be a wrinkly old prune like Gerson. Not to mention the host of health problems you often hear. If you could tour the world teaching archeology like that old turtle, you’d be considered darn lucky.

Mom chuckled a bit. “He is quite a fortunate old coot, isn’t he?”

Her smile then faded. “A long time ago, Asgore and I adopted the first fallen human as our child. Chara was their name. They were great siblings with my son, Asriel.”

“Then… I’m sure you’ve heard of the tragedy. I buried Chara where we first found them… where I found you and the others. I thought that was enough to put them to rest. We Monsters believed a proper burial was all that’s required for a human.”

“It didn’t occur to me that their spirit might linger around despite so. I wonder how they felt when they saw me take in child after child.”

“And now, you.” She said. “Maybe… I am trying to replace a void after all.”
Mom wore guilt like a mask. You reached out for that ugly, invisible thing and ‘yanked’ it off. Then you ‘threw’ it aside like the trash it is.

“What are you doing, Frisk?” asked Mom, confused at your actions.

You told Mom that if this ‘Chara’ person gets mad at her for trying to move on, you’re gonna knock some sense into them.

No one should be weighed down by the past forever.

If Mom adopted another kid after you croaked, you’d be super happy for everyone. It meant that someone else gets to grow up with an awesome mom like her.

Your little speech brought some tears on your mother’s eyes. She’s so touched, she picked you up for a hug.

“Thank you, Frisk.”

Chapter End Notes

I also completely forgot to post the sketch I have for Cenna

http://sophiera.deviantart.com/art/Cenna-585609695

This is how she looks like.
Dinner will be late today, so you decided to go to the cafeteria for a snack.

It’s long after school hours. Most of your schoolmates had gone home. The place was deserted, save for the cafeteria staff and… your aunt.

She sat in the literal middle: the centre bench, the centre table, the centre lamp. It’s a little surreal to see such exact middle-ness.

You noticed that she’s juggling between three flat-screen devices. One was her personal phone. The others appeared to be work-related stuff.

The Nice Cream Man waved at you. Oh, he had yet to leave the school grounds. You asked him how he’s doing.

“Business is better than expected,” he said. “The humans from the next town still buy my wares in the dead of winter. I… can’t understand why, but they do. Especially the chocolate and coffee flavoured ones.”

Well, you’ll be that weird human too for today. You bought two sticks of original-flavour Nice Cream, one for yourself and one for your aunt.

“Oh? That lady is your relative? I thought she’s a replacement teacher.”

Unbelievable, isn’t it? You told him that she’s a law-enforcer of sorts.

“Wow! Like the Royal Guard? That’s cool! Speaking of whom, the bunny and dragon duo are still my two most loyal customers. They even have a permanent membership card! Do you want one too?”

Maybe next time. You paid the money and waved goodbye.

Aunt Cenna was talking on the phone. The moment she saw you, she stopped her conversation and excused herself.

“You Mez, gotta go.” She said. “Call you back later tonight. Dude, I know you sleep late so don’t complain. Bye.”

She shut the call. You asked about this ‘Mez’ person. Just hearing that name made your aunt groan.

“Remember I said something about the ‘boring part of the job’?” said Aunt Cenna. “He’s THE most
boring part of the job. That’s my colleague, Mezil Thyme: very old fashioned and stern. He thinks I’m a young upstart with no respect for him. I think he’s a dusty coot with no respect for others.”

…How did you two end up as partners in the first place?

She rolled her eyes and sighed. “Because we’re the best for the job. The council thought the pros outweigh the cons and… paired us up. Yeah.”

It doesn’t sound like a happy working relationship.

Your Aunt shrugged. “Eh. In life, you sometimes gotta work with people who don’t get along. Remember that Frisky. There are many folks that may make you want to bash their skulls onto the nearest flat surface. Obviously you can’t do that, though.”

Such a description brought back some unpleasant memories about your foster mates. You… told Aunt Cenna that you’ll take that advice to heart. Then, you offered her a Nice Cream to liven up her day.

“Oh, thanks.”

The both of you peeled the wrapper and took a bite. Aunt Cenna almost chewed on the slip of paper that’s inserted into every piece of Nice Cream.

“Oops. It’s one of THOSE icecreams, huh?” She pulled out the message and gave it a read. “What does it say… ‘Is this as sweet as you?’ Awwwh, that’s adorable!”

You giggled and explained to her that it’s called a ‘Nice’ Cream for a reason.

So. Since no one else is around, you asked if Aunt Cenna can share one of her epic Magus tales with you.

The attempt of weaseling out top secret intel from your aunt made you feel like a scumbag. But, you must know.

According to Sans, Monsterkind lost the War because there was a time-traveller on the human’s side.

What happened after that? Was there peace on the Surface? For how long?

Aunt Cenna smirked. Her eyes locked on you like a hawk. Again. It had the uncanny ability to turn you into a tiny mouse.

“Well, well, well.” She said. “Someone pooled all their points into Charisma, huh? Trying to make me spill the beans.”

If it’s that deep a secret, nevermind then.

“Too late Frisky. You passed the check. Your stats and dice-rolls aligned with my mood, so congrats! Story ahoy!”

It happened again. Your imagination closed off the world around you into a focused shop-interface box.

Seems that Aunt Cenna will only give pieces if prompted. How many questions do you have, or how open she will be… you don’t know.

Nonetheless, you tried.
> Post War Life
What happened then?

“You know… the usuals. Heroes get their reward, everyone throws a celebration, and humanity is ‘free from the fear of Monsters’. So goes the theory. You and I know life ain’t that simple, yeah?”

“Once folks lose a common goal, they start to brew their own agenda. Not all heroes stay honourable forever. Some stayed on the straight and narrow. Some grow complacent. Then there’re some who turned bad.”

Your aunt stopped there. A new prompt appeared for you.

> Turned Bad.
What does she mean with that?

“Corruption, Frisky. It comes in many shades. Most stuck to the common vices such as embezzlement, adultery and bribes. A few went down a less glittery path.”

Aunt Cenna dropped all fancy smirking on the bat. “Bloodthirst. The Magi recorded this one fella who grew bored with a life of peace. They wandered the world, looking out for jobs that entertain them.”

“From bandit hunting to high-priced assassinations: if it’s to their fancy, they’ll do it. Nations paid great amounts for their services because of their uncanny luck.”

Uncanny… luck?

“Yep. ‘The Living Victory’ was their title. Try to poison their drink? They’ll skip that cup. Try to stake an ambush? They would reverse-ambush instead. Need someone to free your nation? They will somehow find the cracks and finish the job. Anything they do is a hundred percent success.”

You recognized the phenomena in a heartbeat.

SAVES.

Repeat a scenario enough times, and the unpredictable becomes predictable.

You asked if they ever ‘uncannily’ saved people from disaster. Like an earthquake or a fire.

“Sometimes. If they think the people were worth saving. They pick and choose.”

It seemed that Humanity’s Hero exploited their powers for their own gain. You told Cenna that this Living Victory person sounded pretty arrogant.

“Yes. I totally would want to punch them. But that would just provoke the wrath of their cult on me.”

Cult? What cult?

Great. Your next question prompt was exactly that.

> Cult
You don’t like where this is going.
“Cults were inevitable with the culture of those times. In the olden days, the biggest heroes ‘ascend’ into a patron deity after their death. Honoured to the point where they become a religion in itself: idols, shrines, disciples, what have you.”

“The Magi were against such hero worship. More so for a person with a suspicious, bloodstained history. Remember what I said about Demons, Frisky?”

You nodded. The more they kill or had killed, the more powerful they become.

“Correct. I left out one key information during breakfast for a good reason. Didn’t wanna traumatize your Monster family, you know.”

Those amber eyes locked on you with greater intensity than before. It’s getting beyond uncomfortable from its sheer weight.

“In this case, ‘DEMON’ is not a noun. It’s an acronym for ‘DEtermination MONsters’.”

You almost dropped your Nice Cream. Fortunately you strengthened your fingers just in time before you caused an accident.

This is the worst time to attract any attention. Either from the Nice Cream man or the cleaners. Quickly, you finished what’s left of your dessert before continuing the conversation.

Aunt Cenna took the opportunity to do the same.

After setting the sticks aside, you selected the next question in fear.

> The truth about DEMONs

“Frisky.” She said, “It’s not that they ‘cannot pass on’. They ‘refuse to pass on’. It’s all about persistence. A human spirit without the moral compass of a SOUL becomes a DEMON.”

Your aunt leaned back on the table as you stare at her, dumbfounded.

“Surprised? Monsters and Humans are like distant cousins: different on the outside, same in the inside. Humans are just ‘monsters’ with a physical body and a powerful spirit. Not too strange when you consider how our universe works. Have a SOUL? Have sentience? That’s all you need, really.”

“More about DEMONS for now. You see, there are a few factors in creating a deadly superpower.”

“First, the Determination to persist beyond the death of your body and conscience.”

Self-explanatory.

“Second, the amount of power harvested from the blood of others. Whenever a DEMON kills someone, they rob the victim’s lifeforce to feed their spirit. The more valuable the person, the more the murderer gains.”

It’s ‘EXecution Points’ and ‘Level Of ViolencE’ in an old-fashioned mythical term.

“Third, the number of people who call on upon your name. Each mention, each whisper… multiplies the accumulated power. Calling upon a person’s True Name increases this effect at least double, if not more.”

“Guess who had all three criterias fulfilled?”
You whispered: ‘The Living Victory’.

“You’re real smart, Frisky. I’m glad. Yup. That fella became the first DEMON capable of destroying the continent. From there, they’d rake up enough force to eventually destroy the universe.”

“And you know what’s the kicker? You need a GOD to fight a god-like DEMON. Makes you wonder who had the ‘bright’ idea to exterminate the one solution we had. Talk about stupidity at a cosmic scale.”

Wait a moment…

A ‘GOD’?

Asriel became a ‘god’ when he absorbed Chara’s SOUL. Dad was supposed to do the same to free the Underground.

If the union between Monster and Human was required to defeat a powerful DEMON that threatened to destroy existence…

Would that mean that not all Monsters were rounded up for the Sealing?

Does that mean there were survivors?

You wanted to say something, but Aunt Cenna placed a finger on your lips. Added a wink for good measure.

“Shh. Now that’s the ultimate top-secret material. Na-uh, ya ain’t gonna squeeze anything more out of me. It’s for your safety too.”

Just when Aunt Cenna finished the conversation, Mom came looking for you. Her work for the day was over and it’s time for dinner.

You hurried to pat your cheeks. Gotta get those blood flowing lest Mom think you’re sick again.

Maybe… it’s better to let her think so. It’s the lesser of two worries.

“Hey Frisky.” Said Aunt Cenna. “Take it easy. Don’t want ya to fall sick.”

Then she started packing up her tools. Her time as a visitor will end once you and Mom leave the premises. Any remaining work had to be done elsewhere.

You discarded the two spent Nice Cream stick into the trash bin. Then, you walked up to Mom.

“Frisk…? You don’t look well. Is something the matter?”

Nothing, you told Mom. It’s just been a really long day for you.

Again, she placed her furry hand on your forehead. “Oh dear. I think you’re coming down with a slight fever. We’ll have chicken congee for dinner then.”

That sounded good.

Chapter End Notes

This is how we usually play sandbox open world RPGs, right?
Fear

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s midnight.

Mom had went to bed at least an hour ago.
You couldn’t settle down in yours. The comfort of the warm chicken congee had long passed.

You messaged Sans. Asked if he’s awake.

’yeh kid. what do you need?’

You asked if you could meet him right now.

’sure. i’m at grillbys’

Going out at midnight in the cold may not be such a good idea. Back when you still lived in human society, every child understood that there were hours where children shouldn’t be out.

Things go bump in the night. Your current time was certainly off-limits.

Ebott Town - the nation of monsters - should be safe, right?

Then again… crooks could just drive into your town if they wanted. Maybe it would be better to Sans meet you halfway, so you messaged him just that.

‘ok. use the main road. see you there.’

You changed into your winter clothes.

Walking in silence was an art you learned from watching TV. Heels first, then plant the rest of your foot down in a fluid motion. Repeat until you arrive at the desired destination.

It’s snowing outside. You put on your boots, grabbed the keys and reached for the umbrella. Before heading out, you scanned the darkened house for one last time for signs of sneaky Mom.

She’s not around. You didn’t want to disturb her sleep. She still needed to teach one more day before the weekend began.

You head out. Street lights illuminated the main road that led to Grillbys.

At this hour, anyone who’s awake would be indoors. Winters on the Surface were much colder than Snowdin. Cave temperatures tend to be more consistent.

The silence allowed you to think.
And your thoughts started to spiral downhill.

You remembered what you did.
You recalled Aunt Cenna’s stories.
You wondered if your sins will catch up on you.

The images of your tainted past haunted your mind.
What if your dusty stains crossed over the timelines?
Will it have a compounding effect? Like one of the many animes you watched with Alphys?
The more you thought about it, the more frightened you became.
“Hey kid.”
A familiar deep voice greeted you. When you looked up, it’s Sans. Snow dusted on his jacket. Since he’s a skeleton, he lacked the body heat to melt them.
Crushing guilt gripped your heart.
“Frisk?” He asked you again.
Cowardice got the better of you.
You turned around to retreat, hanging your head low so Sans couldn’t read your face.
“What’s wrong?”
The voice changed locations. When you looked up, he’s there. Standing right in front of you.
Again, you turned around and tried to escape his gaze.
Again, he teleported into your view.
His sockets were dark. “Did something happen?”
You didn’t reply. Instead, you gripped the umbrella’s handle tight and dashed into a random direction.
Sans tried to block your way, but you ran around him.
Left. Right.
Sans in the front. Sans in the back.
No matter where you turned, how fast you ran, or how quick you avoided your blue skeleton friend’s presence…
He’s always there: always one step ahead of you.
He said that he wasn’t always looking at what you did, but you could never tell if he told the truth. Someway, somehow, his eyes always saw through your facade.
When you’re good, when you’re bad.
When you killed on an accident.
When you killed in the name of an experiment.
He knew.
He’s a prodigy. Of course. He had the brains to analyze the smallest of details.
Hiding from him was futile.
And yet here you are, fleeing because you couldn’t look at him in the face.
The umbrella became a burden. You tossed it aside and continued running down the snow.
You kept seeing Sans. He stood by the wayside until he’s out of your view. Then he’d teleport ahead of you again.

And again.
And again.
And again.
And again.

Until at one point he yelled: “Watch out!”

You felt your SOUL turn blue. Sans yanked you backwards against your will. Only when your feet dangled helplessly above the ground, you understood why.

Before you was a steep, icy slope. A busy highway stretched along the base of what was once a hill. Although it’s past midnight, cars continued to drive to and fro.

If the fall didn’t kill you, the traffic would have.

The both of you panted together on solid ground. It was a long run and neither of you were as fit as Undyne. Vapours rose from your warm breath, almost clouding your vision.

Sans’ ‘sweat’ had crystallized from the winter air itself. The way he stared at you… it was more out of confusion than judgement. “Why did you run?”

You tried to find your words, but you couldn’t construct a coherent sentence.

“Uh, we need to bunk in a warm place. It’s cold tonight. You could get really sick.”

No. Please don’t. You can’t explain this in town.
You knew too much.
You don’t want anyone to accidentally hear what you had to say.

“Then we could discuss this in our hideout. The lab.” He replied. “Why… flee?”

A trace of disappointment laced his question. After everything he had done, you still didn’t place full faith in him.

You curled your knees close to your chest. Between fearful sobbing, you explained what you had heard from your aunt about DEMONs.

Their history, their true meaning, the method they gain power…

If your memories persist through all those RESETs, what’s stopping LOVE from being carried over? What if they’re phantoms? What if they come crashing on your head after you die from old age?

You don’t want to hurt anyone.
You don’t want to lose your compassion and mercy.
You don’t want to become a DEMON after you die.

Because once you do, there’s nothing that could stop you from committing atrocious crimes.

That thought terrified you.

Looking at Sans reminded you of how much pain you had inflicted on the people who love and trusted you. The betrayal, the horror.

You broke down into a pathetic wreck, shaking from a mix of guilt, fear, and a worsening fever.
Sans squatted down to match your height. He may be a bony image of death on the virtue of stereotypes, but he's speaking to you in the most sympathetic of voices.

“Hey…” he said. “All I see now is a frightened kid. Your LOVE is still at 1. Nobody died in your hands. What happened in the other timelines don’t matter.”

How would he know?

“C’mon. I’m the resident quantum physicist Seer here. I spent my entire life studying this stuff. Let me tell you something: you’re fine. Anime is not real.”

“Timelines stopping and starting, jumping left and right’. Notice I didn’t say ‘create new paths’? It’s just one timeline being overwritten. Which means you didn’t spawn a tangle of co-existing parallel worlds.”

“The numbers? They’re gone. You’re clean. You’re not going to become a DEMON overnight. Get it?”

Then what about Papyrus? How did he see everyone’s death, and you covered in dust?

“Paps’ Green aspect of his Eye.” Sans explained. “He can see the old timeline’s ‘fragmented data’ and reconstruct them into an image. They’re just dead, leftover illusions. Nothing more.”

…You asked if that’s the truth.

“Kid, I got no reason to lie.”

Sans had a history of being enigmatic, but this time his honesty shone through as clear as a true-blue cloudless sky.

Funny how perception changes from interaction. Skeletons used to be the scariest, spookiest thing in existence. Looking at them gave the heebie jeebies when you were tiny.

And now? Their bony figures represented the comfort of your two best friends.

You smiled a bit and thanked him for everything. He returned the gesture.

“C’mon, let’s have a snack at Grillby’s.” Sans tried to wipe away your tears with his chilly fingers. “I know a shor--”

After touching your cheeks for a few more seconds, he immediately planted his full metacarpus on your forehead.

Wow, you never realised just how nice an icy cold hand can feel on your burning skin.

…Burning?

Sans left eye gleamed blue. He was fraught with worry as he looked up and down, down and up, as if he’s doing a thorough scan of your physical condition.

“I know you’re ‘hot stuff’ compared to us skellies, but this is waaaaay off the charts. You’re gonna give Grillby a run for his money at this rate.”

Great. Your fever flared. You didn’t realise it until your adrenaline rush wore off.

You tried to stand, except your legs were jelly. Either it’s from the sprint or from your poor
condition. Or both.

Sans propped you up on his shoulders. “Frisk. Like it or not, I’m gonna take you to a human hospital.”

No! You mustered the rest of your remaining strength to stand your ground. Just take you home. Some bed rest should be all you need.

“Kid,” he said “Getting such a huge fever is not a good sign for anyone. Worse for a human of your age.”

What if the hospital assumed the worst and thought Sans had hurt you? Remember what happened to Asriel and Chara? It’s going to spark a controversy.

You don’t want the budding diplomatic relationship to die just because you didn’t take care of yourself better.

“…But if we don’t get you checked, you’re in for a bad time. Worse, you might die!” Said Sans.

Well, then you’d just RESET.

You think.

Death so far had never been permanent.

Didn’t he just tell you that you won’t become a DEMON the moment you die? If you croaked from illness in this timeline, you promised Sans that you’re going to lead the entire scenario back to this point… And not endanger your health by running in the snow.

“It’s not about that.”

He continued: “Each RESET, there’s a chance you’ll lose to Chara’s mindgame. That temptation will be there for the entire duration you walk the Underground. The less you die, the less likely the world’s gonna end. Right?”

…You agreed with him.

Sans glanced down on his own feet.

“You always put the welfare of Monsterkind first. We, no… I can never repay that. Taking you to a hospital is the least this lazybones can do.”

Even if it meant putting his life in danger.

If you thought of it hard enough, Sans was an all-or-nothing person. This is the brother who raised his sibling alone.

The thought of mayhem in the hospital fuelled you with determination to protect your friend.

Wait.

What if…

What about…

Aunt Cenna?

Sans cringed upon the mere mention of her name.

You could tell that they’re not on good terms. Still she’s the best safeguard you have against racist knee-jerk reactions. She’s a human adult, after all. Plus, she might have medical contacts from the
time she worked in a police.

“What if she sold us out?” he asked.

You chuckled at the thought and nudged Sans’ ribcage with your fist. If she tried to do any funny business, you trust him to whisk you away to safety.

“…Heh.” He smirked. “That’s living too much on an edge if you ask me. Say Frisk, I have a better idea. The first step of the plan is to head home. Okay?”

Okay, you said. You then pulled your arms closer around his shoulder: sign that you’re ready for his shortcut, and to entrust your life in his hands.

Chapter End Notes

There seems to be two compulsory things in the Undertale fanfic scope.

1. At least one breakdown session about being a dirty brother killer.
2. Frisk getting sick, typically pneumonia.

Somehow through natural progression of stress and hard truths, this chapter had both combined. This is not planned. Yet it happened.

The anime reference for today is Puella Magi Madoka Magica. If you've not checked it out, please do.
The squirt got sick. Pretty bad fever.

When Undyne heard the news from Toriel, she wanted to suplex the desk. ‘Wanted’ was the key word. She didn’t do it. More so when Toriel had piles of homework on said desk. She knew better than others that the ex-Queen shouldn’t be trifled with.

Toriel further explained what happened the night before. According to her, Frisk had a bad nightmare. Tried to meet Sans, but then they suffered a panic attack in the cold. It further aggravated their condition.

By the time Sans brought the kid home, they had a high fever.

Frisk phoned her aunt. Said that they needed a human representative to clear any possible misunderstandings.

Cenna’s duty was to take Frisk to a trusted hospital. She knew a place that would house the Ambassador and their monster escorts without prejudice.

Toriel already had more work than she could chew, and thus was unable to afford another leave. The next candidate… was the designated ‘Dad’ by marriage bonds: Asgore.

So the dad and the blue skelly accompanied Ebott’s ‘Golden Quiche’ out of town for medical treatment.

“How’s the squirt doing?!” Undyne asked. Her nails almost clawed into the woodwork.

“Fine.” The goat-lady answered with a sigh. “They’re given some medicine and placed under observation. Doctors suspected that the fever was from an ear infection.”

“Seriously? But, Frisk didn’t act sick at all.” Kids tend to show more obvious symptoms when they fall ill.

Toriel replied, “Maybe we thought they were just tired.”

Good point. Events happened almost non-stop for the past two or three weeks. It seemed that all the wear and stress had finally collapsed on the poor kid’s shoulders.

“When are we visiting them?” asked the fish teacher.

“Sans will pick me up later tonight. Do you want to come along?” The child’s mother had a weary smile.

With his shortcuts? Undyne thought he’s milking that aspect of his power to the point of exploitation.

“Nah. Not tonight,” answered Undyne. “I gotta help Al take care of Paps. He’s still at the phase where he activates his ‘helium-balloon mode’ at random. We can’t let him go outdoors until we’re certain he’s not going float off into the open sky.”

Toriel couldn’t help but to chuckle. “What about his… visions?”
“Vision problems, pwned!” Undyne proudly announced. She picked up a lingo or two from the Internet. “About time too. Dang. At first it was funny, but the whole ‘talking at the wrong direction’ thing got super annoying by day three.”

“I’m glad to hear Papyrus is recovering well.” Said Toriel. “He should be fine by Sunday, right?”

“Yeah. We hope so. Mettaton has to go back to work on Sunday night. Sooooo…”

Undyne imagined the unfortunate outcome of Papyrus trying to break out of the lab - by jumping through the window - and then floating upside-down toward the sky.

Telling him about Frisk’s hospitalization might trigger the same effect. It’s a bit cruel to withhold such information, especially when that skeleton loved the kid to bits.

Still… Papyrus is Papyrus. He will throw all caution into the wind in a heartbeat.

The fish lady uttered an uncomfortable chuckle. “Yeah. I really, REALLY hope we’re on schedule.”

Homeroom was almost over. The teachers had to get ready to attend their respective classes.

“Oops, it’s almost time. See ya later, Toriel.”

The other teacher nodded in an absent-minded manner.

Just when Undyne turned around…

“Were you the Head of the Royal Guard when the quake happened?”

Toriel’s question stopped her dead in her tracks. If this was anime, this would be the time when the room’s aura turned dark, heavy and oppressive.

Undyne’s gut feeling pointed towards a single direction. But, she had to make sure.

“Which quake…”?

“The huge one that happened many years ago,” Toriel replied. “I remember it toppled some of my kitchenware and bookshelves.”

She figured that she’s going to ask about that particular incident. “Oh, yeah. I was a fresh Captain back then.”

“Did anyone get hurt?”

“Just mass panic, a blackout and a whole lot of damaged buildings. Nobody got hurt, fortunately.”

“Are… you sure?”

“Yeah? We didn’t have any casualties.”

Sadness hung from Toriel’s face. “Was it a natural occurrence?”

That question made Undyne halt her breath. How can she answer that without causing further problems? She didn’t want to lie to Toriel, nor did she want to get Sans into trouble.

During her time on the Surface, she learned that one can be honest without implicating someone’s guilt outright: “No. The Core malfunctioned during one of the routine checkups. Went crazy enough
to shake up the whole Underground. Took a while for the engineers to fix that issue.”

“I see.” Toriel flashed a weak smile. “Thank you, Undyne. For your honesty.”

“No problem. Send my regards to the kiddo!”

The strongest fish-lady Underground strode out of the teacher’s office. When she was sure that she far from Toriel’s sight, she dropped her tough exterior to freak out for a moment.

Alphys mode: On. “Ohmygodthatwasthefreakiestshit---”

Asgore wasn’t joking about his ex-wife’s sharp savviness. If Undyne had lied, she would be in boiling hot soup by now.

What's with the sudden interest about that particular incident, though…? That question continued to bother her throughout the day.

At one point, the kids thought their gym teacher was falling ill like Frisk. She proved them wrong by bench-pressing the weight of 18 schoolchildren.

Frisk’s classmates used their Art and Crafts hour to make some get-well gifts. Most of the children made cards. Paper was plenty, and it allowed the kids to decorate it whichever way they wanted.

The more adventurous ones turned the blank sheets into fake flowers, colouring the petal pieces with crayons before gluing them together.

Undyne overheard a conversation amongst the children. Monster Kid was part of the group.

“I’m gonna make a lily!”

“Noooo, don’t!” said Monster Kid. “They’re flowers for dead people!"

“Really? I saw someone giving lilies to propose before. The super red ones.”

“Those are roses, silly! Lilies look like these.”

With a crayon in his mouth, the kid sketched a flower with five long petals that curve outward.

“See? They’re white and they have pollen stalks in the middle. I saw a lot of them when my family visited the neighbouring town the other day! These flowers surrounded the picture of an old and wrinkly human. It was a ‘wake’ where humans pay their last respects.”

“Wow, you’re smart!”

“That I am! Nyeh heh heh!

Undyne smiled. It looks like Papyrus’ Number One Fan retained his position.

Once the school bell rang to signify the end of their final class, the students placed their get-well gifts in a cardboard box. Toriel arranged them in such a way where the paper flowers won’t get crushed.

“Thank you so much, my dear children.” Said Toriel, “Frisk will be very happy to receive these. Have a safe trip home, and don’t forget your homework.”

Some of the children groaned upon the mention of homework. That reminded Undyne of her own childhood, making her lips curl into a cat-like pout. It was funny in hindsight.
Once she had finished her own duties as a teacher, the fish lady prepared for her evening jog. It’s her usual Friday routine to run a lap around the town before retiring for the weekend.

The path started from the school, turned into the forest trail, skirted the south end of Mount Ebott before circling into the main square. Then finish it with a detour to Alphys’ lab.

Whenever she felt like it, she stopped at the Rockfall. This place was Undyne’s favourite spot to choose her next rocky victim.

One would think it’s easy to find an unclaimed rock with all the space on the Surface, but no, that doesn’t seem to be the case; everything was owned by someone.

Just when she’s about to inspect a nice piece… she stubbed her foot, hard.

“OW!” she exclaimed. It hurt her enough to make her limp for a while. “What the heck was that?!”

Brushing the snow aside revealed a half-melted red candle. The process of melting and refreezing had encrusted it with ice.

“…Huh? There’s more stuff around here.” Undyne muttered to herself as she dug around the site.

Removing the fresh snow revealed another half melted candle and a frostbitten bouquet of flowers. Their petals were white, long, and curved outwards. Each stalk had a long stamen in the middle.

Undyne recalled this as the same flower Monster Kid drew in class.

“Wait a minute. Aren’t these lilies?”

Combined with the candles, it became clear that they were offerings for the dead. A few anime series did the same.

But for whom? The children who fell into Mount Ebott?

The location didn’t make sense. The Rockfall was far away from any main roads, and nestled deep in the woods. Furthermore, any offering for lost children should either be on the big hole above the Ruins, or the exit of what was once the Barrier.

“Did someone die here?” Undyne wondered out loud as she looked upwards.

The collapse happened at a narrow but tall strip, stretching all the way up to the mountain’s midway point.

A death at the mountain. For reasons Undyne couldn’t remember, she thought it was too familiar.

Then, several details clicked in place. She recalled what Cenna had said about Frisk’s birth parents.

“A quake happened on the job and they got caught in a rockslide. Didn’t make it.”

Could it be just a coincidence?

A chilling breeze blew past, rustling the conifers that did not drop their leaves for the winter.

She thought that she heard some humming from the rocks. It could be her ears playing tricks, or the structure caused the wind to resonate.

To Undyne, this felt like anime in a bad way. Horror and mystery were not fun genres to be casted
“Damn. This is waaaay too creepy.”

So she left the items exactly where she found them. Picking out a boulder to suplex can wait another week.

Life had a nasty knack of timing sometimes. Just when she wanted nothing more to do with the potential haunted zone, her phone rang. Undyne jolted with a shocked squeak that she would rather forget.

It’s from Alphys. Did something happen back in the lab? Her girlfriend preferred messaging, and she knew better than to bother during workout hours. Unless a fire happened…

The lab didn’t catch fire, did it?

Undyne answered it. “Hello?”

“Um. W-where are you n-n-now???”

A frantic, stuttering Alphys with mysterious noises of clattering chaos going on in the background. Yes. Perhaps the lab did catch fire.

Undyne started giving her brand of intense instructions: “The fire extinguisher is in the kitchen! Stay calm, take it to the fire and yank the pin with all your might!”

“Nonononono the house is fine!” Alphys replied. “It’s Papyrus! He’s building a pentagram out of bones and talking in a weird weird WEIRD language with hand signals and so on. I’m so scared Undyne please come home now--”

It took her two silent seconds to process the absurd contents of that panic. “What?! What the hell is Mettaton doing? I thought that floofy robot is supposed to keep Papyrus from doing stupid shit!”

“Mettaton is actually helping Papyrus to build the pentagram in the name of spooky fun.”

“GODDAMMIT METTATON!!!”

That yell may have be loud enough to cause an avalanche, but she won’t stay to find out; Undyne sprinted down the trail, post haste.

The uneven mixture of thin ice and snow made it difficult for her to maintain both pace and traction. Either she almost slipped from being too fast, or bogged down by the thick puffy softness.

What was she thinking? Since when could she ever trust that robot? He can’t even keep himself from radiating his nonsensical flamboyance, let alone promote common sense in others.

She heard the whines of her frightened love from the phone speakers. Planting the phone back to her fin-ears, Undyne said: “Al? Al, stay with me! Keep me updated on Paps!”

“S-should I just pass the phone to him?” Alphys asked.

Might as well hear it from the skeleton’s mouth. “Yeah! Do that!”

She heard the shuffling from the other end. Papyrus tried to brush the call away by saying he’s busy, but when Alphys pointed out it’s from Undyne, he dropped everything to get on the line.
Thus he began. “HELLO UNDYNE! GREAT THAT YOU CALLED! I WAS JUST ABOUT TO ASK IF I CAN BORROW YOUR KITCHEN.”

With the sternest growl, Undyne questioned: “Pa. Py. Rus. What the hell are you trying to do?”

“I PROMISED UNCLE GASTER A PLATE OF REUNIONGHETTI FOR THE WEEKEND!” Papyrus replied. “I KNOW IT IS STILL FRIDAY, BUT FRIDAY EVENINGS ARE AS GOOD AS WEEKENDS.”

She had expected nothing less from his nutty logic. “Question one: who the hell is Uncle Gaster? Question two: why the hell does it involve a pentagram??”

“UNCLE GASTER IS UNCLE GASTER! APPARENTLY HE HAD HIS BITS OF EXISTENCE SCATTERED ACROSS TIME AND SPACE. WHATEVER IT MEANS. I DON’T UNDERSTAND, BUT THAT’S WHAT HE TOLD ME.”

It seemed that he turned away from the phone for a while. He started speaking in a strange, distorted language that wasn’t directed to her.

Undyne increased her pace. Some dangerous entity is trying to use Papyrus to do their bidding and he’s too innocent to notice anything wrong.

Back on the call, he continued: “OH! OK! IN SIMPLE ENGLISH, IT MEANS HE WOULDN’T BE ABLE TO STAY IN ONE PLACE LONG ENOUGH TO ENJOY ANY OF THE GREAT PAPYRUS’ CUISINES.”

“But thanks to my specific combination of colours, Uncle Gaster thinks that I could temporarily restore his form by using some ancient skeleton magic! We have no idea if this will work.”

“It’s pretty complicated stuff, but Mettaton helped me write down and rehearse the passcode! I think I can do this! Also you’ve not answered if I can borrow your kitchen.”

“No!” Undyne yelled back. “Not until I get home! And stop that ritual! You might accidentally summon some epic demon from ancient times!”

That’s what happens in anime, right?

“UNCLE GASTER SAID YOU NEED BLOOD AND MERCURY TO SUMMON A REAL DEMON. ALL WE HAVE HERE ARE BONES AND MAGIC, SO NO ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN!”

Undyne screeched. She cannot believe it’s real. It shouldn’t be real. Why must the worst aspects of anime come true today?

“Oh it’s time to start the experiment! I’m passing the phone back to Alphys. Bye!”

“Wait get back here—”

The call ended. He must have accidentally pressed the button while passing it to Alphys, and the lizard lady was too locked in fear to phone back.

At last, Undyne reached the town outskirts. She leapt to the nearest two-storey rooftop. Normal roads
take too long to reach home. There was a parkour route that cut a diagonal path to Alphys’ place.

Scale the window to scramble up to the next rooftop.
Apologize to the pigeon keeper for scaring his birds.
Decline Muffet’s offer of spider cider. There’s no time for that now.
Briefly wave at Snowy’s Mom and his sixteen newly adopted relatives. And reassure them that their son is not in trouble.

After a whole lot of rooftop-dashing, Undyne arrived home. She executed a flying kick to bust down the door at full running speed: no time to fiddle with keys.

Lights in the house flickered as the ritual interrupted the flow of electricity. An eerie glow shimmered from the direction of the newly-repaired training chamber.

Undyne rammed the door with all her might. But alas, she was too late: the ritual had just been completed.

Right now, she was not sure about what she should feel.

Should she be horrified?
Should she be amazed?
Should she be alarmed?

Or all three together.

Memories that she didn’t realise existed assaulted her mind.

Many years ago, a tall skeleton dressed in a custom-tailored coat stared down on her, giving a lecture about fragility and courtesy. How she shouldn’t have ambushed Sans. If it weren’t for his protegé’s gruelling drills in the art of dodging, she might have killed him by mistake.

How the child Undyne wanted to punch him in the face. However, he was an important person to King Asgore.

The Royal Scientist: W. D. Gaster.

Now, that man had become an ever-flowing monstrosity. Oozing and dripping as his squishy form took shape from a black puddle. Once whole, he took a deep breath, savouring the air of this encased space.

“Ah…” he said in a hoarse voice, “It’s great to breathe oxygen once more.”

Undyne realised she was wrong: there were monster casualties in the Core Incident. At least one. After the quake, The Royal Scientist had vanished without a trace.

And the last person who saw him alive was none other than his protegé.

Sans.
Well, well, well. Look who's here at last?

And also Undyne did a whole lot of Assassin Creeding there. That's the mini-reference for this chapter.
Humans

Chapter Notes

Happy Year of the Monkey! Yes, at the time of posting it's 1.30 AM on my end and it's officially the first day of Chinese New Year.

Apparently I couldn't stop myself from writing, so I borrowed my parents' laptop to write in between the festivities.

So here's another chapter. It's long, but there's a surprise waiting for you...

Also, a fair warning. If you struggle with misanthropy, this chapter may be difficult. Please don't listen to the bad stuff, yeah? Just because I write them, doesn't mean they're correct.

Meanwhile, enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Looking at the box of get-well gifts filled you with delight. To the point where your eyes get a little damp.

During your foster home days, you didn’t even dream of getting this much attention. It’s just otherworldly and something that only existed on TV.

Maybe this is why Mettaton loves his fans so much?

You hugged the box. Mom and Dad chuckled at your actions.

“Aww that’s cute,” said Mom.

“It never gets old,” Dad added. “A thousand years ago or now, receiving wishes for good health still warms my heart.”

You grinned ear to ear as you checked the contents, identifying the creator of each card through their design.

Snowy just had to include a snow-related pun in his. And Monster Kid added a drawing of themselves on one of the petals. Those were some of the bits and pieces of children’s creativity that flowed free.

“How are you feeling now, my child?” Mom asked. She looked too worried for something so simple.

You tried to find some words to describe it. The insides of your ears itch all the way to your throat. At the same time you were between too hot and too cold.

Long story short, it was uncomfortable… But the medicines helped you feel better.

“It’ll all be fine, Toriel.” Dad tried to reassure Mom. “The doctors found nothing serious. It’s
Chara died from buttercup poisoning. It took you a few resets to stir enough curiosity to find out their exact effects.

A part of you regretted reading the symptoms to this day.

Knowing this, you understood why your monster family was extra anxious about your illness.

“What’s this?” Mom tried to read the clipboard hung at the end of the bed. Her brows scrunched at the complicated words.

Dad explained, “They’re notes. Sans explained that there are multiple varieties of antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs, so the doctors need to record which works best. And to observe for any allergic reactions.”

Your Mom almost slammed the clipboard on your bed desk as if Dad had made a horrible mistake.

“P-please don’t worry,” he said. “Frisk doesn’t have any allergies, nor their parents had a history of them. The records are all standard operating procedures.”

“Parents?”

“Yes. According to Miss Caraway, Frisk was born in this very same establishment. Their parents’ records were kept despite their passing for their child’s sake.”

You nodded to Mom. It surprised you a ton too. Maybe it’s fate that you once lived so close to Ebott’s borders?

“Hmm…” Mom pondered. “Wouldn’t that mean your human parents, and thus Cenna, once lived in this city too?”

Possible. You saw quite a bit of apartments on the way to the hospital. Then, there were the suburbs around the edges too.

Again, your goat mother became lost in thoughts.

“Is there something wrong, Toriel?” Dad still loved Mom despite her constant rejection.

Mom frowned a bit. “N-nothing. It’s just… I feel a bit guilty for thinking ill about her. She would’ve made a great sister figure for Frisk if they grew up together.”

“…I wish…” she said, “Our son had someone as mature.”

Maybe if ‘that someone’ thought through their actions better, the whole tragedy could have been avoided.

You wondered if one day you could find a way to travel back to the time when Asriel was still alive, warn him about the buttercup plan, and show Chara that humans are not all messed up.

It was an impossible dream, though. The date was long before you were born, and by logic your powers shouldn’t be able to take you back before your existence.

It’s dinner time. Your parents made way for the nurse to put the tray down. He recognized your parents from the internet videos, and happily said hello to them. You were relieved that he was one of the supporters.
The standard hospital food was... bland: both in looks and taste. It's not whetting your already diminished appetite. Your meal today consisted of baked chicken, peas with dill, and a helping of mashed potato.

You missed Mom’s cooking already.

Then, Sans appeared to your rescue. He walked through the front door with a bag from the nearest convenience store.

“Hey kid,” he wriggled his brows. “Heard you’re having some ‘bare-bonemeals’. So, I got you some pudding to liven things up.”

Yay for pudding! Just the thought of having dessert motivated you to finish your main dish.

“Want some ketchup for the chicken?”

Flavour! Glorious flavour! Your short skelly friend ripped a packet of ketchup and squeezed some of the tangy goop next to your baked chicken.

Mom furrowed her brows. “Are you sure it’s okay for Frisk to eat outside of the menu?”

“No sweat Tori,” he replied. “Frisk is not on any dietary restrictions. The caterer just mass cooked the stuff with all patients in mind.”

Your Dad let out a soft laugh as he patted your back. “If a bit of junk food helps them eat better, I don’t mind.”

…Due to the effects of the poison, back then, Chara couldn’t eat or drink. They would have died from dehydration if they didn’t bleed to death. Little wonder why Dad was so happy that you still had your appetite.

Mom and Sans continued to crack jokes while you enjoyed your dinner. By now you’re used to the corniness, so you just carried on eating with a straight face.

You noticed that Dad always kept Mom within view. He could never directly stare at her as it would catch her attention. But, whenever possible… he watched Mom live her new life.

Quietly.

Midway through your dessert, you heard a ruckus going on right outside your door. It involved a woman trying to yell her way past security.

Due to your status as the official Ambassador for Monsterkind, Aunt Cenna pulled in some security. Got you a private ward and stationed two guards in front of the door. Magi guards. If she didn’t tell you about it, you would have thought they’re normal people.

Then…

That voice. It was the woman who insulted your mom about her parenting skills. You hopped off your bed and placed a finger on your lip.

Be very, very quiet. You snuck to the door and planted an ear on the surface. The infection may make you itch, but it hasn’t dampened your ability to listen.

Sans joined you, followed by Mom and Dad. Before you knew it, you’re in a party of four eavesdroppers.
Aunt Cenna said, “Oh hey, look. It’s tomorrow’s problems today. Why are you here, Linda?”

The woman named ‘Linda’ made an audible huff. “I saw a suspicious-looking man in blue slipping junk food onto the premises! And you just let him straight into Miss-- Mister-- The Ambassador’s room. Aren’t you supposed to do your job?”

“’Cause said suspicious-looking man is actually their friend…? At least he has more relevance than you. Well, mind telling me what brought you to this hospital?”

“My son is sick,” Linda replied. “Is it so unusual for a mother to bring her son in for treatment?”

“Nawh, totally not. But are you okay with leaving your husband and kid behind like that?”

“My son is a big boy and my husband isn’t incompetent. Better than a dodgy ex-police officer who sold her soul to witchcraft!”

Despite their public status, there seemed to be a bias against the Magus Association.

“Whoa whoa whoa, taking out the burning pitchforks already? That’s a new record.” Aunt Cenna replied. You could hear the sarcastic tease dripping from her words.

Your aunt continued: “I don’t think you wanna teach your son it’s right to insult others. ’Cause, well, promoting hate is against the law, yeah? The police can concentrate on more important cases if there are less petty drama getting in the way. Speaking from experience here.”

Linda gasped as if she had heard of the worst insult in the world. Talk about being melodramatic.

“That NERVE!” The other woman exclaimed. “It’s your sworn duty to serve the citizens, and yet you’re telling us to make your job easier?! We don’t pay taxes so you guys could loiter around and eat doughnuts all day!”

Dad gave you a questioning look, wondering if the woman’s accusations were true. You shook your head. Police stations were busy places. Sometimes too busy.

How did you know? You visited one before. One of your foster-mates got into trouble with the law, and for some reason the police wanted to talk to all the kids.

It was absolute chaos in there. Parents argued amongst each other, while their children screamed at the top of their lungs like it were a playground. They make Papyrus seem as quiet as a lamb.

“Oookay,” Aunt Cenna responded. You imagined her lifting both arms in the air in a mock surrender. “Whatever you say, madam. Just don’t come crying at the lockup if your son becomes a crime statistic. On the wrong side.”

That burn.
That. Burn.

Needless to say, that Linda lady was far from happy. Her continued fuming prompted the guards to escort her away.

It’s your cue to hurry back to bed. You, Mom and Dad had to sneak the old-fashioned way, while Sans did his teleporting thing. How unfair.

Aunt Cenna opened the door to find the four of you trying to act innocent. You and Sans got the straight-face act down to an art. Mom? Close enough. Dad, however, had a very hard time trying to
hide his funky smile of guilt.

Well, your aunt saw through the act. “Pfft. Oh c’mon folks, ya don’t need to act all coy around me. Linda is a satire goldmine. I’ll never pass up a chance to argue with her.”

Mom chuckled a bit. “She’s… quite a woman. Do you know her?”

“Yup,” answered Aunt Cenna. “Classmates from fourth grade onwards. Believe it or not, she never changed. Always complaining. If it ain’t about school stuff, it’ll be your clothes. If it ain’t your clothes, she’ll whine about your behaviour. There’s no pleasing that lady.”

“But she’s married.”

“That’s the mystery of the century, if you ask me.”

Dad proposed another scenario: “I believe that despite her sharp tongue, she had good points that only her loved ones will know.”

Maybe. You hoped so. Otherwise you wonder how long things will last before it turned into a divorce case.

Aunt Cenna sighed. “Guess so. Considering my relationship with her, I don’t think I’ll ever live to see her good sides. I’m more worried about her son though.”

Why? You asked.

“Let’s just say that… I’ve seen quite a fair bit of kids gone twisted. All expectations and no love erodes someone faster than strong acid.”

She continued. “For her son’s sake, I hope Linda ain’t like my bio parents. You see, they used to beat the hell out of me for whatever reason that pissed them off that day. Yelled about me being useless and annoying. I thought being black and blue was a normal fact of life.”

You clenched the edges of your blanket, crumpling them under your fingers. So that’s what she meant by ‘my parents weren’t good people’.

“Very sorry to hear that,” Dad frowned with sympathy.

“Eh, it’s nothing to me now,” the other lady shrugged. “I don’t remember much of the pain anyway. I was like what, six? Seven? Social Services got me out. Then, my uncle’s wife moved me to Frisky’s home not long after. Their loving care made me forget all about the bad times.”

Aunt Cenna reached for her special double-sided pocket watch and fiddled with it. You noticed a soft, nostalgic warmth on her face.

“Frisky’s parents saved me in more ways than one,” she said. “I owe them lots. That’s why I swear to keep their kid safe and healthy.”

Despite everything, Aunt Cenna watched out for you. No wonder Mom’s embarrassed: she must have felt that she had mistreated her out of prejudice. Doing that made her no better than Linda.

You told your aunt that you’re sorry.

“For what?” she raised her brow. “Being suspicious about me?”

Nod.
Your aunt burst into laughter and rubbed the top of your head. Goodbye neat hair.

“Nawh, ya musn’t be sorry about that at all!” she said. “I’d be waaaaaay more concerned if everyone was fine and dandy after my big intimidation act. Seriously. ‘Cause I would have reacted the same. Protecting you is proof that your family love you lots.”

“Never forget that.”

The last three words were heavier than the other. With all the time-loops going on, it’s far too easy to take your loved ones for granted.

You promised your aunt that you will remember.

At ten at night, visiting hours were over. Again, only your aunt could stay overnight in the pediatrics ward on a legal basis. Everyone else was considered ‘Visitor’ and thus had to leave.

Aunt Cenna still hadn’t transferred the guardian rights to your monster parents. According to Mister Jonah, that’s a wise move. Just having a human name with a strong backing was enough to deter most wannabes from filing a dispute. Nobody wanted to waste time on trivial red tape.

You hope.

Mom fussed over you to the very last minute, making sure you had your necessities in place.

Toothpaste? Checked.
Toothbrush? Checked.
Dental floss? Checked.
A change of socks and underwear? Checked and double checked.

Dad tucked you to bed. Sans does his… Sans thing. Which was just a whole lot of observation on the Dreemurrs. Right after they left, he winked at you and said he’ll be back tomorrow. Maybe with more friends, depending on Papyrus’ condition.

Once they’re gone, the quietness reminded you that you had a fever high enough to be warded. You started to feel tired and sore.

The nurses and doctors checked up on you under Aunt Cenna’s supervision. The male nurse that served you dinner helped paste one of those cooling pads on your head. You took another dose of your medicine, and had some ear drops to soothe the itch.

Good news: the fever didn’t go up.
Bad news: it didn’t go down either. More observation required. They hoped that the blood test results would be done by the night shift guys. Or else you will have to wait until Monday.

Your aunt encouraged you to sleep. She had work to do, and she didn’t want to bother your recovery. So she left the ward to let you rest.

With nothing better to do, you tried to sleep.

“My village was full of humans like Linda, you know.”

Your eyes snapped wide open.
That strong, otherworldly child-like voice. It resonated between your ears, echoing from the interiors of your skull.
You dare not try to turn around in your bed.

Because you knew if you did, you would have seen THEIR face.

Chara's spirit sat on the edge of the bed, in all their green-striped glory.

“**Irritating. Hypocritical. Arrogant. Always thinking they’re right. They’re practically begging to be hated. Admit it. You know how I feel.**”

Ignore them long enough and they’ll go away. The last time you listened to them, Chara convinced you to start killing. Maybe, just maybe, the grief of others would be the answer.

A small sacrifice for the greater good, right? You’ve never been more wrong in your short life.

“**Still employing that tactic, I see.**”

Chara sighed at you.

“**Let’s talk about the Surface.**” They said, “**Have you heard of this phrase: ‘man’s best friend?’ Who do you think it applies to? Or rather, ‘what’?**”

You know the answer, but you refused to respond. Chara filled in the blanks for you.

“A dog. Sometimes a horse. Or maybe a cow. Depending on where you live. It can describe all the animals in the world, yet it never applied to one: a human.”

“A pet gets more love than humanity’s own offspring. What epiphany, isn’t it? If I have a penny for every person doting on their cat or dog, I’d be rich enough to buy a nation!”

You’ve heard it. You’ve seen it. You understand where Chara came from.

You were once less loved than a pet.

“But have you ever wondered why a reject from a different species can replace you? Is it because they’re cute? Endearing? Hmm, those traits help cement feelings... but let me tell you the real reason.”

Chara’s cold, dead breath brushed against your ears.

“Because it makes them feel wanted. Loved. Without the fear of rejection. Without the fear of betrayal.”

Their words alone made you shiver. You pulled up the blanket over your neck and curled tight.

“Don’t you think it’s the same with your monster friends? They think differently compared to humans. So child friendly. So innocent. So naive. Isn’t that right, partner?”

“But the outside world is not like that. It’s complicated. Fraught with hidden agenda and selfishness. So corruptible. So deceitful. Sooner or later, your lovely friends will become tainted just like Asriel.”
“Just like me.”

An icy touch brushed your hot forehead. It didn’t feel anywhere as nice as Sans’. This cold stung with the bleeding bitterness of a troubled child.

“Shall we go back to simpler times, partner?” asked Chara. “Leave this complicated world behind. Don’t forget, you still have one more path to try. To investigate. To complete.”

“Can you really leave our game unfinished? Or will you betray me like Asriel did?”

That was the last straw. Anger filled your heart. You tossed the blanket aside and growled at Chara.

This would be the first time you’ve seen their face. You don’t know if it was their true visage, or a twisted mirror of yourself.

You saw a child who looked almost like you. Almost. Their skin was bleached, their cheeks were rosy, and they had this vacant smile to go with their blood-tinted eyes.

They look happy, even though you know they’re not.

You told Chara to shut up about Asriel. He can be called many things, but a traitor was not one of them.

His single, purest wish was to play with Chara again. His loyalty should never be questioned.

“Greetings.” Thus said the DEMON. “Glad to finally have your attention. Again.”

If attention was what they wanted, fine. They won’t get this for free.

You demand Chara to explain their true feelings about their family. Why go to such extremes? Why do they want everyone dead?

…Maybe you were a bit too threatening. Fortunately for you, Chara laughed it off.

“Have you ever heard of this phrase?” They asked. “Rest. In. Peace.”

You narrowed your thin eyes, both mortified and enraged by their implications.

“Why so furious? I state the truth: only the dead rest in peace. As long you live, you struggle. You suffer.”

“Why wouldn’t I repay the favour of my wonderful monster family by giving them eternal sleep? Their SOULS don’t remain. They don’t haunt like us human spirits. They certainly don’t have the Determination to persist.”

“Just one swift stab with a knife and poof, they’re dust. Reduced to nothing. Remember nothing. So very fragile. All that terror and hate was just ignorance. I’m sure if they were more… open minded, they would have flocked to you to die.”

…it’s too late to talk them out of it. They no longer had a SOUL to serve as moral compass.

Asriel eventually let you go because he regained the capacity to feel mercy for a short while…

Not Chara.
Not after this many resets either.

You had a feeling that Chara had this idea ingrained deep into their mentality long before they fell into Mount Ebott. If you must be honest with yourself, you once thought of these same concepts.

Still, that was the past; you're determined to prove Chara wrong in this timeline. And all the ones to follow.

They leaned forward to your face, too close for comfort. You smelled embalming spices mixed with the stench of dry decay.

“It’s useless. Useless, useless, useless, useless.”


You hold steadfast, refusing to give into fear or anger, or anything that'd fuel Chara.

Yet, they continue to smile.

“Hey partner. Whenever you want to go back to a time where your decisions mattered, call upon my name.”

Chara ran their icy finger down your jawline. They stopped at the chin, then lifting your head ever so slightly so they could stare at you straight in the eye.

“I’ll be there.”

With their blood-chilling message delivered, they’re gone.

You were alone again. Maybe in another timeline, you would have collapsed out of panic.

Now… somehow… you were surprisingly calm. Disturbed, yes. But there were almost no physical reactions to something so horrific.

You dropped yourself back into bed and pulled up the blankets as if nothing happened.

Tomorrow, you will start to think of how to give Chara their ‘eternal peace’.

Chapter End Notes

I did not tag ’them’ for a reason. It's a spoiler, even for my own story.

Of course they'll be there.

Of course.

You can thank my boyfriend for suggesting this scene :) 

Also, obligatory Jojo reference. Muda, muda, muda, muda!

And yes I am aware of the PTA AU of Undertale. Due to Frisk's current circumstance, Linda didn't end up as an authority figure in their education. That doesn't mean Linda and the annoying parent troupe don't exist. They're out there. Somewhere.

Also I should note that this is not Earth as we know it. I kept my countries vague for a
reason. Anime exists, annoying people exists, but this is also the universe where mages openly work with the police.

P.S. No Undertale reference is complete without breaking some 4th walls.

P.P.S The police station story is true. My friend worked there as a tech guy, and he has seen that sort of chaos.
Dejavu and Trash

Chapter Notes

17 pages on Google docs.
It’s so long that it actually lagged the laptop I borrowed.

And I completed this on the very last moment before the day I travel back home.

This is going to be a very heavy chapter.
Have some Metal Gear Sans.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Visiting hours were over. All visitors must leave the wards after a certain time to let the patient rest. Exceptions were made for parents, spouses and legal guardians, even then they had to ask permission.

And monsters got no permission.

Night shift equals to minimum staff. Humans were largely diurnal despite a few exceptions. There would be fewer people around.

Perfect, Sans thought.

He first let himself be seen with Toriel and Asgore. No shortcuts this time.

He was there when they flagged down the taxi.
He was there when Asgore and Toriel argued about who would pay the fees. Toriel winning at the end as usual.
He was there when the Boss Monsters struggled to squeeze into the comparatively tiny vehicle.

Then he sat in the back seat, next to Toriel, until they reached Ebott’s Town Square.

Asgore headed straight home. Toriel accompanied Sans all the way back to the latter’s home as a token of friendship.

They wished each other good night. The ex-queen watched her joke buddy enter his house. She then turned around to return to her dwelling.

Sans’ setup for an alibi was done. This should create enough time discrepancies to fool the police for a while. If, he ever slips up in the first place.

… Sorry Toriel. I’m doing this for the kid.

He felt like a piece of trash for using his friend… Then again, he had degraded into a piece of trash a long time ago. Trash will be trash: that’s what they are.

He searched under his treadmill machine for his secret notebook. That’s one advantage of standard paper: no need to worry about charging their batteries. Just pick up and go.
Armed with a pen, a book, and a sharp mind… Sans lifted his mattress with magic.

Doing so revealed an octogram. It’s drawn in school chalk, a substance that could easily be swept away. Easy to erase. Easy to tell if anyone tempered with it.

Sans prepared the site ever since he started receiving copies of Frisk’s pictures. He realised that something was off, and he might need to dust off some of his neglected studies.

Doctor Gaster taught him everything of relevance, which included Seer magic. Their science, their history, and all the things that could go wrong. Not that his parents had any idea what it entailed. Dear mother in particular would be concerned if she knew the exact details; she could be quite a cynic.

Fortunately for his mentor, she was mostly left in the dark. Maybe he should have shared more, maybe then she could’ve pulled him out of training sooner.

…but that would've make dear father unhappy. Gaster was his best friend. The pain and hassle from making his parents argue was not worth it.

Besides, the lessons served him well. And they will continue to do so no matter which timeline.

Sans summoned his collection of bones. He began placing them down with precise magic, making sure that they’re not misaligned.

It’s hard work setting this up. Thus, best reserved only when it mattered.

He left the ends -- the points of the star -- empty and disconnected.

The hospital had no direct shortcuts. The one I took with Toriel required two jumps: Ebott to the Central Train Station. From the Station to a five minute walk away from the hospital.

Using a stable portal is too risky. Too far, too open. If the Magi had ‘that’, I’m sure they could trace shortcuts. Maybe. I can’t risk it. I need to dig a path that I can destroy later.

If I mess up at any point, all implications should fall square on me. Not on anyone else.

Sans conjured a humerus. He then concentrated a tiny bit of his disintegration powers to the tip of his index finger. With it, he etched down a string of hieroglyphs on the side.

Coordinate Alpha: the canteen. Latitude, longitude, height. X, Y, Z… This should be it.

Once he was satisfied with the code, he floated the large bone over to an empty point of the octogram. Set it down like a key to a keyhole.

The bone clicked in place. It turned yellow: primed for calculation.

Coordinate Beta: Frisk’s ward.

Sans surveyed the hospital ever since he brought Frisk past the doorstep. He committed the layout to memory. Whenever he could, he excused himself. Told Asgore that he’s going to look around, take a break, and buy some snacks for Frisk.

Look around, he did. He noted the paths, remembered the departments, counted the number of rooms per floor, tracked the traffic, the location of vending machines where night shift workers might grab refreshers from…
He observed the general staff, the doctors, the guards. How they behave. When their shift started and when it ended.

The dejavu was strong. As if he had done the exact same thing multiple times in the past.

A boon, in this case. The stronger the dejavu, the quicker he’ll recollect and retain the details.

*Coordinate Gamma: Neurological Department.*

Heard through the hospital’s grapevine: Cenna was a regular customer in the Neurological Department. Used to attend a different doctor before she was forced to resign from the police force one year ago.

They may not know her by name and which doctor she’s visiting, but everyone described her as an ‘ultra-cool lady who kept her hair long over the year.’

What luck. Frisk, Frisk’s parents, and their enigmatic Magus aunt: all their records under the same roof.

*Coordinate Delta: Morgue.*

According to his research on human laws, surviving relatives can request for a post-mortem. A coroner will check the body for a main cause of death. Should they find a criminal element, they will call the police to lodge a report.

Usually, it’s to help grieving families accept the passing of their relatives.

If, by any chance, this hospital performed the post-mortem on Frisk’s parents… their records should be there.

That’s four points on the octogram. Sans filled the rest with clauses and syntaxes. For example: shortest route to the neurological department, far away from Frisk’s ward, and not smack dab in the middle of security. Along with other fine-tuning of mathematical nature.

*If only Pap’s here. He could stabilize this thing.*

…*Nonononono you’re not getting your brother involved in any untested new skeleton rituals, Sans! Especially not of this level! There’s a reason why you sealed him in the first place.*

*Welp. If anything happens to me, the kid will RESET. And I’ll be back here. I hope.*

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Eight humerus locked into place. All he needed to do now was to execute his final command.

His left eye shimmered blue and yellow. Sans then spoke his command in the language of hands. ‘The Code’, as his kind called it.

[Compile coordinates as per syntax. Disintegrate central point. Allow collapse to set perimeters. Hold tethers for three seconds.]

[Activate.]

The bone octogram flashed, puffing into a tri-coloured tornado of charged particulates. Its rotating force blew and scattered the chalk draft into the air, along with everything else he owned.
Not that anyone would notice, as everyone thought he’s just too lazy to clean up.

The tornado grew thinner and thinner at the center, refining themselves into a keen drill. Its purpose was to puncture into spacetime itself and tunnel a path to Sans’ desired destination.

It’s mad science. He knew that if any of his calculations were off by so much as a single digit, it’s going to create a vacuum to the void.

Either that, or explode with enough force to destroy half of his house. He won’t survive either way. That’s the danger of untested spacetime magic.

He muttered to himself three words of self-disbelief: “I’m fucking insane.”

This was a theorem he wrote as his final thesis: a formal graduation from university and his discipleship with Gaster. It was his pitch as an alternative to using the Human SOULS.

But due to its massive dangers, he scrapped the project and filed the writing away. To replace it, he hammered together a shorter piece of work that still got him a pass.

That second thesis helped create the broken machine rusting in his laboratory.

Down the magical drill went, grinding not into the floor but through the observable dimensions of reality.

Once the drill vanished, he would have exactly three seconds to act before his own safety measures let spacetime heal itself.

One: verify the end location.
Two: jump. Prepare to correct positioning once he’s past the hole.
Three: pull the mattress down so that it’ll cover up any evidence of his madness.

The drilling was complete. He peeked into the hole. It’s the hospital ceiling alright, but he had yet to know which floor.

He prepared his SOUL for auto-reorientation. Then he jumped into the hole and pulled the mattress down. It landed on the portal with a huge thud.

As Sans fell through, he felt the fabric of his jacket stand on ends. Static electricity: the currents popped from the sudden change in atmosphere.

He used his gravity magic to try flip himself the right way up. Except, he overestimated the momentum a wee bit.

Instead of graciously landing on his feet, Sans ended up rolling on the floor. Just once. To his fortune, he didn’t slam into the wall or any other objects.

The portal collapsed on the fourth second. There’s no turning back.

*Oof.*

*Okay. That didn’t nick off my measly 1 HP or break any bones. Phew.*

*So… where in the world am I?*

He sat up and took a quick look around his surroundings. It’s dim with only the night lights on. The place smelled of machinery oil despite its sterile-looking ceiling.
I’m outside the loading bay. Jeez, that’s the nearest safe zone I got? It’s quite a walk to the neuro department.

Sans pulled up his hood and started walking down the hall. It’s time to put his stealth-skills to use.

He kept his senses open. All six of them. If he detected any change that didn’t come from himself, there’s someone’s around the corner. Avoid detection. Wait for their presence to pass.

The deja vu grew stronger and stronger.

I’ve done this too many times. But they’re not all on the same day. Or even the same season.

He paused to read an information poster about heart diseases. It’s rather aged.

I have a feeling that they’ll replace this with a new one in the coming Spring.

Left turn. Wait for patrols to pass. Walk behind them until the first right turn. Then head to the staff elevators.

The side walls seem empty. There should be more staff here. Murals, maybe. Or a new billboard for the staff.

On the way, Sans glanced at the staff schedule.

At one point, I’ve read the same name appear in multiple extended shifts. Someone had to fill in for the holiday season. Poor fella. I don’t recall who though.

There were cameras at the elevators. He couldn’t go in, poke a button and hitch a ride. Being a trespasser meant having to take the hard way.

He teleported to a blind spot. Then he started calculating the space he needed to go up.

The Neurological Department is on the fifth floor. I’m on ground level. Do this step by step, or jump straight up?

I better play it safe. The deja vu is not strong enough for a direct multiplication. Don’t wanna get myself in trouble.

Each time Sans teleported a floor upwards, he’d check for any discrepancies. Either in the environment itself, or on his gut feeling. Though he had no gut to speak off.

On the fourth floor, he heard some maintenance work going on right above his head.

Welp. I wonder if lazy me ever thought of taking the easy way and got myself arrested. Probably did. Then Papyrus bailed me out. Or Undyne. Both. Yeah. Both is likely.

The next safe route should be the emergency stairs. Ugh. Echo central. If I use that, I’d burn myself out from all that precision teleporting.

Just as he pondered, he heard the sound of a cart coming through. He quickly hid himself behind a potted plant. His lack of height allowed him to fit in.

It’s the laundry cart. Half-filled with bedsheets, blankets and the like. No hazard warning. It meant that these came from non-infectious patients, and maybe the doctor’s dorms themselves.
They’ll try to collect a full quota before taking them to the loading bay. Dang, I wish one came by earlier. But then again… they would have noticed the shift in weight if the cart was empty.

Break the lights? Or teleport once before using his time-freeze abilities? Fancy or pragmatic?

He must decide fast before the window of opportunity passes.

In the end, he settled for simple sound. Gave the bush a firm shake.

“Wha?!” the staff member exclaimed. “Who’s there?” Out of habit, the worker pulled the cart right behind her. The results were better than expected: he didn’t need to run to his hiding spot after all.

Before she spotted his blue hoodie, Sans teleported away from the bush and to the back of the cart. He shuffled into the fabric pile while the unfortunate staff member continued to investigate.

Seeing no one, she grumbled. “Oh c’mon not another ghost prank. I hate night shifts…”

The worker then resumed their duties, pushing the cart towards the elevator.

One floor up. Please for the love of probability, one floor up and no more.

The stars of timelines must have aligned today, because she did exactly that. The cart got off at the fifth floor.

Sans tried his best to remember the layout. She will make a turn away from the Neurological Department at one point, heading towards the Orthology section where they had some wards.

He will need to create another distraction before teleporting out of the pile. Otherwise, the shift in fabric would be far too noticeable.

At the first junction, he spotted yet another potted plant. With some magic, he made it shake.

“Oh god, really? Really?!” The woman was exasperated. She must have been the victim of butt jokes for a while now. With more anger, she again dragged the cart behind her as she investigated the pot.

This time she searched under the benches for any signs of pranksters. Sans capitalized on the opportunity to slip away.

I’m back on track.

That was the best possible outcome. Better make the most out of it.

There were a few neuro specialist clinics around. Now to read every name for the biggest dejavu.

What if he didn’t get any, though? This could be his first truly successful run. Who knows?

Sans reached for his books and started checking his notes. A part of him regretted not investigating more about Cenna before embarking on his quest.

He stopped at the note ‘13 HP’.

A healthy kid had 20 HP. A healthy adult, somewhere in the 30s. Cenna only had 13. Taking into account her police history and the strength of her powers… her LOVE should be somewhere about 5. But I couldn’t see it at all. It’s likely that she had training to mask her true numbers.
Nonetheless, she should have way, way more HP than 13. What in the field of neurology could degrade an athletic woman in her prime to almost half of a modern human kid?

A lightbulb of epiphany lit up in Sans’ noggin. The key word was ‘degrade’. He remembered Alphys reading up about human diseases, not all of them infectious.

At one point she asked about Frisk’s gender because she was concerned about possible genetic disorders.

Genetic disorders.
Neurology.
Degradation.

Could it be…?

Sans began searching the nameplates for the doctor’s sub-speciality.

Neurosurgeon. Nope. Not this guy.
General Neurology. I’ll come back to this if I can’t find anything specific.
Neuropsychiatry. Nah. She’s a bit suicidal, but that shouldn’t contribute to her low HP.

Then, he hit the jackpot.

Neuromuscular. Nerves and muscles. The building blocks of the human body. This could be the answer.

He placed his skull close to the door and tapped the surface with his fingers. Used the resulting sound to gauge the thickness, density and width. This won’t win him any world record awards, but it’s enough to not get stuck.

Now he must imagine the ‘fold’ of space between point A and point B.

Trying to mesh entire space into compounding halves took too much effort and energy. The more efficient option was to ‘drag’ the distance between two known spaces. It’s like folding the mid-point of a piece of paper.

He could teleport wherever he liked in the Underground because he knew the layout on the back of his hand. The Surface beyond Ebott Town proved a lot trickier. He couldn’t cut through an incomplete map.

That’s what you’ve been doing for your entire life, Sans.
Let’s get this done and over with.

He imagined the space between the door to not exist. Then, he ‘walked’ forward.
Past the door.
Into the unknown darkness.

When he’s back in reality, Sans found himself standing at the doorstep of a deserted clinic. Everyone had gone home. There’s no night shift here.

He breathed a sigh of relief.
Time to investigate.

The easiest computer to access was the one at the receptionist desk. So, Sans started his work there.
More dejavu, but not in the same location. Perhaps he learned more about computers not because he wanted to mess with Alphys… rather, he needed to break into hospital records.

He kept watch of the time. He wanted to get this done before the dawn of Saturday. Clinics can choose to open at a different schedule to accommodate the majority. He didn’t want to find out if this was one of those.

*Let’s look for Cenna Caraway.*

The computer found no name that matched his input. Somehow, he’s not surprised that the Magus used an alias. What a headache.

*Okay. Think again. She claims to be Frisk’s aunt. I was under the assumption that Cenna just bunked there and kept her old family name.*

*What if she had a full adoption, with name change and all? What was Frisk’s surname again? It’s a pretty unusual one.*

The poor kid didn’t even know they had a surname until they were warded. It seems like the foster families kept it a secret for some convoluted reason. Probably to prevent the kid or any other nosy folk from tracing back their roots.

Once he replaced ‘Caraway’ with the presumed surname, the search function found a match. He opened the file. It was… the Magus herself. But the portrait was outdated: she had a short boy’s-cut. Complete with a police uniform.

*This confirms that she’s a patient here. Now I just need to get into the doctor’s PC and read the diagnosis.*

The doctor’s computer was not even protected with a password. All security measures went into the door proper, which Sans bypassed with ease.

*I’m not getting any dejavu here. Damn. If it’s this easy, why didn’t I check this clinic in the other timelines?*

*Unless… life is the greatest password protection. I ended up here because of a unique circumstance. I’ll need to ruminate on that later.*

*So, what ails our hot-shot Magus?*

The answer: ‘young onset progressive neuromuscular degeneration’. The first symptom was recorded three years ago in the form of a chorea.

Brief, abnormal movements that are not repetitive or rhythmic. Bad news for someone in charge with weapons.

*Huh. But she quit the force one year ago. They kept her around for two extra years. Why?*

Sans searched the pages for a clue, but he found nothing but a long list of complicated health issues.

He doesn’t understand everything. But, judging from the context… it’s amazing that Cenna could still strut around in style. Her movement problems should only get worse, but he had yet to witness an episode. Not only that, she could still fight Papyrus and attempt to pick a bone with him.

*Hmm? What is this? ‘Due to connections with the Magus Association via family bonds, the patient...*
sought for intensive treatment outside the field of physical medicine. The Association granted permission to research the effects of Psychia Reinforcement on the physical body'.

...Reads like the base of a new monster thesis. It seems that it’s not just the police force that accepted the aid of magic. Doctors. Scientists. They’re interested too.

Well shit. I guess there goes our presumed advantage. Progress happens. If my society can make progress in science, what’s stopping the humans from improving on their limited magic?

It’s by grace that they didn’t launch an attack the moment they left the Underground.

Sans took out his pen and started writing down notes.

‘Psychia’ may be the human’s formal academic term for SOUL magic. I reckon that they’ve been researching ever since they sealed us Underground. Jeez. We’re complacent to the bone compared to these guys.

So much for superior magic if we’re not efficient in its utilization.

At least I know half of the rumours are wrong. Cenna’s primary doctor never changed. Rather, she had a collaborative treatment with another Magus elsewhere.

When he reached the bottom of the page, Sans noticed that the desk drawer was not pushed in completely. It had a locking mechanism, but it didn’t do its job because of the misalignment. Seems like the doctor was in a hurry.

Sans decided that he shouldn’t be touching more than he needed. So he pulled it open with magic.

It’s full of printed research notes. After memorizing their layout, he started levitating the pages. Once he’s done he had to place everything back in their exact order. Otherwise, he’ll end up as a suspect.

Yup. I was right. The doc’s collaborating with the Magi to conduct a clinical experiment. Quite a few patients volunteered. Cenna was one of them.

Since there are genetic diseases involved, he had their family records too. Hmm? Apparently this preliminary experiment is limited to families with Magus connections. Save for a few controlled cases--

A sudden surge of pain pierced his left temple. He almost dropped the pages all over the floor. Now that would be a disaster.

What the hell was that? A dejavu?

Whenever he glanced at that particular page’s direction, the pain returned. So, Sans began putting aside anything that didn’t trigger a reaction.

The process of elimination continued until he was left with two certificates.

He placed them down on the desk. Ignoring the pain, he tried to read the contents. Whenever did so, however, the words slid off into incomprehensible gibberish.

…As if he was inside a dream.

A blue glow illuminated the room. The fire of his left Eye grew violent and wild, screaming at their owner to cease operations. The more he tried to resist, the more it flared.
The intensity of the wisps had grown bright enough to rival a lamp.

*Every bone in my body is begging me to not read these.*
*Why? Maybe it’s a good idea to listen. Quit before I hurt myself.*

… No. If I’m getting such an extreme reaction, it means they contain key information. I can’t back down here. I will do anything to keep Papyrus safe in this timeline. Even if it means fucking myself up.

*Yeah. I’m insane. There’s no arguing about that.*

Sans forced himself to read. Stare at it. Stare beyond the almost-blinding glow of his own protesting body.

*C’mon, brain. Get your damn act together! Nothing’s worse than watching your brother die over and over and over. You should be fine.*

After an intense amount of concentration, the words stopped sliding away.

They’re death certificates for Frisk’s parents.

‘Cause of death: Work-related falling due to quake-induced structural collapse. Crushing was post mortem.’

‘Time of death: 15:20 approx.’

‘Location of death: Mount Ebott.’

The Ebott Rockfall Quake.
The Core Incident.
The death of Frisk’s parents.

They’re all one and the same.

Sans started to feel faint. His non-existent gut threatened to hurl out his ketchup. Or whatever else.

*No… it can’t be true!*
*It can’t be, this is impossible, why must this be the truth?!!*

Pieces of memories flooded in. Memories from a different timeline, a difference circumstance, a different department of the hospital… Yet he ended with the exact same evidence.

The exact same conclusion.

The truth cannot escape his Eye.
Either about others, or about himself.

With what remaining composure he had, Sans packed the documents back into the drawer. Was it in correct order? He doesn’t know nor care anymore.

If he gets arrested for trespassing come morning, he’ll accept it.
Trash will be trash: trash should get dunked.

He swiped his notebook. Then, he started to flee through space and time. He burst into a series of short teleports: Jumped past the door. Down the hall. Out of the window.
It’s five floors off the ground and he didn’t care. A part of him wished to hit the ground and die. But upon his fine-tuned self-preservation instinct, he applied his gravity-altering magic to cushion his descent.

Why?

He continued making those small jumps. He needed a place to just let his magic loose and not be seen. To scream without being heard.

Why???

His slippers touched sand. It’s a beach. Silent due to the cold weather, surrounded by nothing but sand and salty water.

WHY???

He warped straight into the cold, dark, turbulent waters of the sea. And down there, at the base of the seabed… he let everything go.

The burst of magic erupted into a violent tornado of cyan and yellow. It towered high above the surface, both rising and collapsing in a cycle of self-destruction.

Bone shards sliced through the water, creating pockets of vacuums and bubbles that drowned out the unearthly tormented screams of a man dead inside.

How long did it go on?
He doesn’t know.

Despite all the noise, nobody came.

When he woke up, Sans found himself half-buried on the shore. Seawater rolled around his soaked bones, unable to decide if they should pile more sand on him or drag them away.

He had washed up on the beach along with the other flotsam of the ocean.

Trash. More trash just like him.

The sun had risen high enough to see the daylight looming high over his head.

The sky is grey and cloudy.
On days like these, trash should be trash.

…But if I lie down here for too long, a random human will mistake me for a dead body and call the cops.

I’ll make everyone upset. Especially Papyrus.

Sans pulled himself up from the slurry of wet sand. His exhausted body struggled against the non-Newtonian fluid.

Papyrus. I need to see Papyrus. It’s Saturday. Just one more day before his powers normalize.

Then I can hang out with him at home again. Yeah. It’ll be like the old days in Snowdin. Eat his spaghetti. Crack jokes and puns. Read Fluffy Bunny. Get scolded for not managing my laundry.

I can watch him play with Frisk. Get suplexed by Undyne. Be cool to Monster Kid. Have proper

The thought of seeing Papyrus again motivated this tired bones to walk back home.

To stay alive.
To persevere.

Yeah. That sounds good. Great. A quiet life is great.

A quiet life is great.

Chapter End Notes

Question of today: How do you drive a man insane?

I know Toby is going to make some origin comics as part of the kickstarter. Which makes me feel pretty awkward that I'm building a mystery drama where the past and future are connected. I'm definitely go against the canon grain there.

Well, there's always the path of AU.

Now many people complain about Sans being dark without a proper backing. I hope this is Part 1 explanation that in this AU, the weight is real. And he's not okay. Or sane for the matter.

Did I say Part 1?
Yes.
Part 2 incoming and it involves our goopy scientist.
Memories

Chapter Notes

Now for something fluff after the heartbreak of Metal Gear Sans.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

On Friday evening, when Toriel visited Frisk…

“THERE YOU GO!” Papyrus exclaimed. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS’ GOURMET REUNIONGHETTI, COMING RIGHT UP!”

‘Reunionghetti’ was more or less a carrot spaghetti with a tomato base. Sprinkled with edible sequins. Lots of shredded carrots. Lots of tomato. Lots of sequins.

Typical Papyrus brand.

The tall skeleton proceeded to serve Alphys, Undyne, and Mettaton a plate of the same spaghetti. The only person truly happy to receive it was the robotic star.

“Oh darling,” praised the robot. “You accepted my suggestion after all! I’m so delighted~”

“IT’S A GREAT IDEA, METTATON! REUNIONS SHOULD TASTE OF HAPPINESS!”

Undyne wished she could suplex that robot into the trashcan right here and now. Papyrus’ unsupervised cooking was bad enough without the influence of his needless glam.

Alphys remained as quiet as a mouse ever since the pentagon incident. Her fish lover leaned to her side for a whisper.

“You okay, Al?” she asked.


“If you need me to get you outta here, just let me know alright?”

“Mhmm. Thanks. But I’m okay for now.” Alphys spoke with a quiet resolve beneath her mousy exterior. She’s trying to remember more about this mysterious Doctor Gaster.

‘Uncle Gaster’ stared at the plate with the same expression as anyone else who’d try a Papyrus-brand spaghetti for the first time: uncertain concern about its edibility, coupled with the strong desire to remain polite.

Effort was poured into this. Innocent, passionate effort. Everyone felt that it would be too cruel to critique.

The ever-flowing skeleton man picked up his fork and spoon with a sense of graceful refinement. He twirled a helping of spaghetti and popped it straight in the mouth.

“Hmm.” Gaster commented. “Who taught you to use carrots to sweeten the base?”
Beaming with pride, Papyrus answered: “TORIEL! SHE COULDN’T BEST MY CREATIVITY, BUT SHE COOKS WELL.”

The other skeleton chuckled in response. “Ah, Her Majesty. To be fair she had always been more of a pastry chef. Can never outdo her butterscotch pie. So, who taught you your basic culinary skills?”

“UNDYNE! SHE’S A WALKING STOVE OF PASSIONATE GUSTO!”

Discovering the true culprit behind the terrible cooking, Gaster shot the coldest of narrow glares at Undyne. His gaze of disapproval cut through her like a sharp sword swung at full strength.

There was no mercy for her culinary transgression against monsterkind.

The fish lady tensed up. Sans’ mentor was way more brutal than his protegé.

Gaster continued eating the spaghetti with the same straight-face professionalism as before. It takes a certain man to eat Papyrus’ meals without a single flinch.

“You have some good ideas.” He commented. “But… they’re unrefined. I’m afraid to say that as it is now, your dish will not achieve its fullest happiness quotient.”

Papyrus looked a bit disappointed.

“How about this, Papyrus. Give me a night to refine your recipe, and you will have a product that would truly bring smiles to at least ninety-percent of your audience.”

Ever clueless of the subtext, Papyrus gasped: “ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT I COULD MAKE EVEN MORE PEOPLE HAPPY???”

“Indeed, indeed.” Gaster nodded.

“WOWIE! I DIDN’T KNOW YOU’RE AN ACCOMPLISHED CHEF, UNCLE GASTER!”

“Oh dear, I’m nothing of the sort.” He replied, keeping a cheerful yet humble tone to his speech. “I had learned much of the theories from your parents. All credit should go to them.”

The mere mention of the word ‘parents’ was enough to catch everyone’s attention.

Mettaton asked, “Parents…?”

Alphys echoed the statement. “Parents…? You knew Papyrus’ parents?”

Undyne recalled a strange circumstance in her Core case. The last time she tried to perform a background check on Sans and Papyrus, she found… nothing. As if someone forgot to fill in their details in the monsterkind citizenship registry.

And she was certain that they weren’t abandoned children. Asgore talked about their old folks dying young.

There were plenty of jokes that the brothers just puffed out of thin air. Or hatched from an egg. Or brought to the Underground by storks. Or they were the results of ghastly homunculi experiments from a hidden lab. Some went as far as to claim that they’re lost aliens from a different world.

Whatever stoked their fancy.

By now, Doctor Gaster had finished half of his plate. He’s far ahead of everyone else through sheer
consistency on his consumption rate.

“Why yes,” he said, “Their names are Times Roman and Helvetica. My closest friend and his wife, respectively.”

Papyrus just stood there in silent shock.

No one dared to move. To breathe. To ask any more questions as Gaster continued his obligatory meal.

Well, Mettaton tried, but he was promptly shushed by Alphys kicking his shin.

A full minute passed before Papyrus responded. “THIS… THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I’VE HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT MOM AND DAD.”

“I know,” Gaster replied. “Sans kept it a secret. He didn’t want you to feel sidelined with the knowledge that you’re an orphan. Nor he wanted you to be sad over people that you could never meet. Out of sight, out of mind. So goes the old sayings.”

“DOES THAT MEAN MY BROTHER FELT ALL THOSE COMPLICATED FEELINGS? ALONE?”

“Yes. I understand why he’d rather leave you ignorant. He wanted you to be free from the burdens of death.”

Alphys -- of all people -- spoke up against it. “Sans is wrong.”

Gaster stopped eating and raised a bony brow at the lizard. When he first returned to the physical realm, this lady was a shaking lump of scales. Hardly the candidate to speak out an honest opinion.

“Why do you think so, Doctor Alphys?” the man asked.

With more courage, Alphys replied, “I used to keep secrets. I thought that if I don’t tell anyone, people will forget and move on. But they didn’t. They kept asking. And I kept hiding. Telling the truth and coming clean liberated me from all that stress.”

Undyne reached for her hand under the table. Squeezed it to show her support.

Bolstered by the support of love, Alphys continued: “Papyrus deserves to know about the people who brought him into this world. It didn’t matter whether or not they’re still with us. It’s all about honouring their memory.”

Gaster finished the last of his meal. He set the cutlery down. Rested the fingertips of his hands on each other and… smiled ear-to-ear with pride.

“You’ve come a long way, dear lady.” He said, “I remembered the day when I presented you the award for stellar students. You had brilliant ideas, but you lacked maturity to follow through. Now I can say with confidence that you’ve earned the right to be my fellow peer.”

“T-that was you…?” she gasped. “I thought it’s one of the teachers! Ohmygodohmygod I remember now you were invited as a guest of honour to visit my school ohmygodohmygodohmygod--”

Alphys buried her face into her palms. Her scales turned red, blushing both from embarrassment and delight.

Some things just never change. Such were the wonders of life. Gaster watched the quirky
shenanigans like the old uncle he had become.

He cleaned his mouth with a tissue and stood up. The ends of his form flowed down the chair as it trailed behind. “How would you react if… I told you that Papyrus’ parents were once caterers for Alphys’ school?”

Gasp of surprise filled the air. Mettaton added some dramatic posing to accentuate his expression.

“Hot damn like seriously?!” Undyne couldn’t believe her ears.
“‘They worked at our canteen?!’ Alphys exclaimed.
“‘MY PARENTS WERE CHEFS???’” Papyrus had other priorities as usual.

“Oh that means darling Alphys must have met the parents without realising it!” Mettaton chimed in.

Watching their reactions lifted Gaster’s heart. The wide-eyed wonder of his little juniors tickled his funny bone ever so warmly.

He said, “Alas, Alphys didn’t have that fortune. They passed away when Papyrus was just a tiny baby bone. Since she’s only a little older compared to their son, they were gone long before her school term.”

Now the robot didn’t know who to comfort first: the disappointed lizard friend, or the son of the deceased.

But… Papyrus being Papyrus, had his attention set at a different angle. He did not care about the sadness of their passing. He cared about the joys when they were alive.

“MY PARENTS! DID THEY MAKE DELICIOUS AND WHOLESALE MEALS?”

Watching his enthusiastic curiosity was all the cheer everyone needed.

“A thousand percent ‘yes’, dear boy.” Gaster replied. “I daresay that your father Roman, made the best ketchup in the whole Underground!”

Papyrus’ eyes started to sparkle. “REALLY?!”

“He had found the perfect balance between the tomato’s acidity and the onion’s sweetness, brought together in harmony by the correct proportion of the spices.”

“WOWIE!!!”

“Before he married your mother, he ran the hottest hotdog stand in Hotland! Best hotdog, best ketchup, best bread for years to come! That sentiment was shared by many: arrive too late, and it’s sold out. I once saw a dog walk away with thirty on its head.”

Gaster then winked. “…But he’d always reserve one for me. Very thoughtful man.”

“Oh my,” Mettaton was impressed. “Pap’s dear father should have started a franchise!”

“Well, he preferred quality over quantity.” Gaster replied. “Hence why he kept to that one stall. To him, it’s more of an art than a business. He wanted time to relax. And to talk with me, of course.”

He thought back with a nostalgic smile. “Contrary to his strong-sounding name, Roman was a meek and humble man. Easy-going. A good listener. That’s part of the reason why we clicked together.”

“What about my mom? Was she like Toriel???” To Papyrus, Toriel was the closest
person to a true mother figure.

The old man chuckled and waved a finger before the young one. “My, my, my. If Helvetica was a scientist, she would have made a fine peer! And no, she’s not quite like Her Majesty. Your mother was more of an intellectual than a homemaker. Busy, busy up in the head. A mite cranky at times.”

“Hevetica would always brainstorm for ways to make healthy food appeal to children. Junk had an annoying tendency to win the flavour battle.”

He continued, “Whenever she noticed wastage, she would conduct a survey with the kids. Ask them why they didn’t like their meal. Peas, for example. So nutritious, yet so unpopular. They had a certain taste and a grainy texture that made many little ones cough.”

“So she puréed the lentils, strained them, and mixed the smooth paste into a delicious pasta sauce. Since that day, every child got their portions of peas without even realising it!”

The audience was blown away in awe. Especially the son who never knew her. It’s evident that she was a smart woman.

“SUPER-MEGA-WOWIE-LICIOUS! MY PARENTS ARE AWESOME!” Papyrus puffed up his chest and pointed to himself. “JUST LIKE ME!”

“Are’?” The amalgamate raised his brows without affecting his skull’s ridges.

“YES! NO MATTER WHEN IN TIME, THEY WILL FOREVER BE AWESOME TO THE GREAT PAPYRUS! NYEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH!”

Gaster had the face of a person who was just one step away from weeping tears of joy. He then asked, “Papyrus, would you like to learn your parents’ art?”

Papyrus being Papyrus, his screaming squeals resounded: “YES! YES YES YES YES!!! I WILL GO CLEAN THE KITCHEN SO WE CAN BEGIN LESSONS RIGHT AWAY!”

The energetic skeleton dashed away in a heartbeat.

Once the cinnamon roll was out of sight, Gaster’s happy face flipped into one of sheer disapproval. He glided straight towards Undyne.

His dark, flowing being loomed above the fish lady. It was just like their first meeting so many years ago. Except with less annoyance and more fury.

Undyne understood there and then that she was in hot soup. Double boiled in a pressure cooker.

Gaster glared straight down on her. “I hope you now understand that you had committed a grievous sin against the memory of Papyrus’ dear parents. If I ever find you leading their son astray once more, I will sink you to the deepest abyss of the ocean. Mark. My. Words.”

He did not bother to wait for her response. Her acceptance -- or lack of it -- won’t change his threat. “Now excuse me, my throat requires respite.”

Gaster headed towards the sink to wash up and fill up a glass of water. Once he had his rinse and drink, he unwrapped a cough drop. Popped the candy into his mouth. Their menthol soothed his throat and drowned out the horror of the botched pasta meal.

The scowl was gone as he addressed his new peer. “Doctor Alphys, thank you again for these drops.
They helped tremendously.”

“N-no problem.” Alphys stammered.

Then he left the room, leaving Mettaton, Undyne and Alphys at the dining table.

Whispering with a big grin, Mettaton said: “I like his style.”

Undyne snapped back: “Shut up.”

“U-uh, we still have a door to fix.” said Alphys. She glanced down on the now-cold ‘Reunionghetti’.

“And. Plates to clean.”

The three exchanged glances at each other.

Mettaton said, “I need to feed my fluffy dog, darlings.” It’s his code word for the disposal of bad food. Either into a faraway trash bin or with the aid of the mysterious dog itself.

“I’ll go grab snacks.” Another codeword. Usually, Undyne would either make a reservation, or order takeaway for everyone. Papyrus always thought they’re ‘really large snack sizes’.

Plus, she didn’t want to be in the vicinity of Gaster for another minute. At least, until he cooled down. An angry Gaster was a scary Gaster. Here she thought Toriel was bad enough.

“I’ll do the repairs.” In Alphys’ case, it was the truth. Undyne had kicked down the door in a rush to get back home. Right now, it’s just propped up against a crate to stop the frigid night air from blowing in.

After a nod, the three parted ways to execute their mission.

Chapter End Notes

Don’t piss off the Gaster seriously.
Bonding Simmers

Chapter Notes

Papyrus has much to catch up with his Uncle.

Edit 28 March 2016: I would like to make a disclaimer. The names 'Times Roman' and 'Helvetica' were chosen to fit the Greco-Latin theme. Helvetica in particular was not intended to be a direct reference to J.N. Wiedle's work. I didn't even know his main character is named 'Helvetica' until much, much later. Apologies for the miscommunication.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The next morning…

As Uncle Gaster had promised, he improved on the young skeleton’s recipe. He wrote down a list of required ingredients and the steps to process them.

It was very much like science.

To his relief, Papyrus knew how to shop for groceries. So he had the bloke fetch the required materials from the morning market: the time when the freshest items ship in from the local farms.

And he also reminded him to stay close to places with a roof overhead. Just in case the powers activate outside, though the chances were slim by now.

When Papyrus returned safe and sound, he taught the young skeleton how to make a basic stock. It was from A to Z: dressing the carcass, chopping the aromatic vegetables, tying up the herbs into a bouquet garni, the correct portioning of seasonings for the volume they’ll cook.

And the most important thing of all, the fire.

Gaster adjusted the stove to a gentle flame. “Maintain a simmer for at least twenty minutes. Preferably I’d let this go for two hours.”

Papyrus used the softest volume of his signature voice to not wake the house up. Ah, he’s as thoughtful as his late father.

“That small? That long?” The youngster was genuinely surprised. “I thought cooking is full of gusto and fire. Not silence.”

“There’s a time and place for everything. Time and place.” Gaster slid away from the stove to get another drink of water.

Curse this perpetual sore throat. His mind had readjusted to the common language, but his body still needed more time.

[Excuse me,] he signed. [I hope you don’t mind me switching back to Code for a while]

Papyrus signed back, not minding it a single bit. [IT'S OKAY, UNCLE GASTER! YOUR
HEALTH IS MORE IMPORTANT.

[Why thank you. Anyways, making stock is not the same as baking a roast. A sautée is not the same as a stir-fry. Each have their own rules and principles that lay the foundation of their style.]

Papyrus nodded. [THAT SOUNDS REALLY DEEP. AND COMPLICATED.]

[It is only complicated to the untrained.] He took another sip of his glass in an attempt to moisten his larynx. [Practice them enough, and they will become a part of you.]

[LIKE MAGIC?]

[Yes, Papyrus. Just like magic. Speaking of magic, let me check your Eye.]

The elder skeleton set down his drink and slid over to the young one. His eyes lit up orange and blue as he executed his analysis.

Papyrus’ right Eye no longer burned. Look deep enough and one may catch a glimmer, but otherwise it had grown tame.

[…Well, it’s more or less settled. One day early too.] Signed Gaster. [You had a mild case compared to what Sans and I went through. Other than the initial pain, visions, and floating shenanigans, you required no special containment.]

That statement piqued Papyrus’ curiosity. [WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU ON YOUR FIRST WEEK?]

[I effectively became blind.] Gaster answered. [My visions took me to a different realm: deep into the annals of the cosmos and down the streams of spacetime. They stretched far beyond, yet I could not see the immediate world around me. It was no different than walking in the Void.]

[For my safety, my parents placed me in an empty room for the entire duration. With a bed, of course. But nothing else. They cared for me around the clock and made sure I didn’t hurt myself. It was quite an ordeal for a ten-year-old to go through.]

[…THAT SOUNDS SCARY.] Papyrus commented. How rare it was to be aligned to normal logic.

Gaster chuckled. It made his being ripple. [Yes, it was. At first I thought it was cool to see the fabled stars, moons and lights. Then I became terrified when I realised just how blind I had become. I felt lost and alone, even when my parents were right next to me.]

The youngster tapped the tips of his mittens together. He understood how his Uncle felt. [MY POWERS WERE REALLY SCARY TOO. I SAW MY BROTHER DYING. THE WORLD WAS WEIRD AND BROKEN. AND UNDYNE WAS THIS HALF-MELTING ROYALTY. THEN… IT BECAME FUNNY. SORTA. FLOATY GRAVITY SHENANIGANS.]

[You are quite a light-hearted fellow.] Gaster signed back. [Guess your powers reflect the same.]

They laughed together for a bit.

[WHAT ABOUT MY BROTHER?]

[Within the first hour, he started teleporting.] Said Gaster. [Not time-freeze, mind you. That’s a general power. Teleportation is a whole different beast.]

[His Eye combination allow him to make cuts in the fabric of spacetime. So, cut he did. No wall or
door could contain him. His first practical application was to escape from my lab and… landed himself on the Castle rooftops."

Papyrus dropped his jaw, stretching his arm high above his head. Asgore’s castle towered above the rest of the buildings, and Sans ended up there? The uncle nodded.

[Your mother fainted from the shock. I had to rush her to the hospital, while your father tried to coax the boy to stay put. The Captain of the Royal Guard rescued him in the end.]

Papyrus snorted. Once he could no longer contain himself, he placed his mittens over his teeth to muffle his laughter.

Gaster snickered at the reaction. [I suppose it was indeed quite a scene. Your mother wouldn’t approve the laughter though.]

[I’M SORRY.] The young one signed back. [BUT IT'S FUNNY! SANS, THE LITERAL SHINGLES ON A ROOF!]

The conversation ended with another round of chuckling. The two just hung out together in the kitchen, savouring the aroma of the simmering stock.

[Ah… if only your brother could teleport past the Barrier. Alas, that was not the case. The Barrier was far too powerful even for his abilities. The gap was like the earth and the sky.]

Then, Gaster asked a question. [Papyrus, do you think… my existence is meaningless?]

[WHAT DO YOU MEAN?] Papyrus frowned.

The uncle could see that Papyrus didn’t like the topic of self-deprecation and nihilism. But the boy was nice enough to humour him.

[Well. I was a very important man. And yet, after my being was scattered across space and time I discovered that… life went on. The missing position of Royal Scientist was filled by Doctor Alphys, and she did her job well.]

[No one remembered me. No one knew who penned their theorems. No one wondered who built what. And my magma refinement facility was non-existent. Any personal memories were filled in by proxies. For example, Doctor Alphys thought a random teacher gave her the award.]

[Then…] Gaster lowered his head, downcast. [The ill-fated Determination experiments happened again. Even with a new scientist and a fresh new vision, the study arrived at the same dreadful conclusion.]

[THAT WAS YOUR WORK TOO, UNCLE GASTER?] Papyrus asked.

He nodded. [I was the one who first postulated the theory of Determination and the study on SOULS. With it, the construction of the DT-Extraction Machine. Though, Doctor Alphys applied a number of improvements.]

[Point being, my lack of presence changed nothing. It’s a dreadful revelation.]

Papyrus protested against that. [NO WAY, UNCLE GASTER. NO ONE IS MEANINGLESS! I REFUSE TO BELIEVE IN SUCH NONSENSE!]

An expected answer from the most cinnamon of cinnamon rolls. Gaster smirked as he signed back:
[Mind sharing your theory to these old, tired bones?]

The young skeleton patted his chest, where the SOUL resides.

[IT'S ALL INSIDE HERE, MY DEAR UNCLE!] He signed. [PEOPLE MAY NOT REMEMBER YOU, BUT YOU LEFT AN IMPACT IN THEIR HEARTS. IT CERTAINLY LEFT A MARK IN MINE!]

[I REMEMBER ASKING SANS WHEN HIS MENTOR WILL COME VISIT ME AGAIN. AND, MY BROTHER WOULD TELL ME THAT HE'S SUPER BUSY. BIG PROJECT WITH KING ASGORE AND STUFF.]

[WHEN THE CORE INCIDENT HAPPENED… I… I SOMEHOW REALISED THAT MY BROTHER IS ALONE. NOT BECAUSE HE HAD ALMOST NO CONTACTS ON HIS PHONE. IT'S JUST A GUT FEELING THAT SOMEONE CLOSE HAD SUDDENLY GONE MISSING… SO PLEASE DON'T SAY YOU'RE MEANINGLESS! EVEN IF LIFE LOOKS THE SAME, IT'S NOT.]

[KINDA LIKE, MAKING MAC ‘N CHEESE WITH LINGUINI INSTEAD OF MACARONI. YOU CAN’T CALL A MACARONI DISH ‘MACARONI’ IF THERE’S NO MACARONI. LIN ‘N CHEESE IS NOT THE SAME AS MAC ‘N CHEESE. WITHOUT YOU, UNCLE GASTER, THERE’S NO MACARONI. AND TO BE HONEST, THERE WON’T BE ANY CHEESE FOR THE LINGUINI EITHER.]

Gaster understood Papyrus’ intent. Without his life’s work at the foundation of it all, monster society would never have been able to go on as normal in his absence.

There wouldn’t be a Core.

Nor a DT-Extraction machine.

In fact, Gaster came to realize, Monsterkind would have never reached the Surface.

The amalgamate, a man whose name was as dark as his form, wrapped his left arm around Papyrus’ shoulder. The black substance of his ‘clothing’ trickled down the young skeleton’s back like heavy oil.

Thus Gaster began to speak. His voice quivered: “No word or sign can express my current emotions. I’m not a touchy-feely person but… thank you. You are as sweet as others had claimed.”

He then gave Papyrus a few gentle pats on the ‘SOUL’. Doing so caused the sleeves of his suit to melt off to the bones, revealing a lower arm etched with burn scars. They never healed right.

“Orange, the Essence of Bravery. Blue, the Essence of Integrity. Green, the Essence of Kindness. Please, my dear boy. Don’t lose any of these.”

“The world has far too few souls like you.”

Chapter End Notes

I tried to post at a different hour, hoping to catch the attention of those outside my usual posting times.
If you have fellow Undertale fans that haven't read this story, please share this with them! I don't have channels to promote, since I don't have a dedicated tumblr page for it and the likes.

Maybe I should. But I'm too driven to write to maintain a blog.
The chicken mixing thing is truestory.jpg. The typical combinations is half beef and half pork, but those two can get really strong smelling.

The alternative my mom made would be breast meat combined with a bit of the richer stuff. I think it works that way. I think.

And apparently every work I do will have at least one foodie-heaven entry.

The ‘True Reunionghetti’ was a plate-cleaning success.

It kept all of its original features: a carrot and tomato base, sprinkled with edible sequins. But it tasted a world’s difference.

The trio of Papyrus’ friends couldn’t believe that they’re eating his handiwork.

Papyrus himself couldn’t believe he’s eating something he cooked. Albeit with the help and guidance of his uncle. He always liked his food no matter how bad, but this blew his skull into the stars.

Meanwhile Gaster enjoyed the fruits of hard labour with merriness on his face.

“I’m so getting seconds,” said Undyne. A heavy breakfast tend to start the day sluggish, but she couldn’t resist!

Alphys tried to scrape every bit of the pasta sauce off her empty plate. “Oh my god, this is sooooo good! I-I don’t understand what happened. Is this really the same recipe?”

“WE REPLACED THE WATER WITH DELICIOUS BROTH.” Papyrus explained, as happy and enthusiastic as he can be. “IT ADDED A WHOLE NEW LEVEL OF FLAVOUR!”

“And the meat is so smooth! I know it’s chicken but, minced chicken is usually grainy.”

“WE MIXED WHITE AND DARK MEAT WITH SOME CORNFLOUR. THEN WE BROWNED THEM IN THE PAN BEFORE LETTING THEM SIMMER IN THE SAUCE MIX. APPARENTLY CHICKENS COME IN TWO SHADES. THEY LOOK THE SAME TO ME THOUGH.”

Gaster thus dispensed his words of wisdom. “Poultry -- such as chicken -- have two main categories of muscles. ‘White meat’ comes from the breast, while ‘dark meat’ is found in the wings, thighs and drumsticks.”

“Wow…” Alphys responded. “No wonder they have a different texture. But why?”

He answered: “A bird’s breast muscles primarily gain their energy through a carbohydrate called ‘glycogen’. It requires less oxygen for its metabolism, and thus useful for short bursts of activity. Therefore the end result was a lean, tender muscle that’s prone to overcooking.”
“Leg and wing muscles on the other hand, require more sustained energy. They contain more ‘myoglobin’ and fat for long-term endurance. Combined with physical activity, this creates a robust, fattier muscle.”

“So naturally, they compliment each other,” Gaster nodded. “Roman’s idea. I get finicky with pork and beef sometimes.”

Undyne scooped a big tablespoon of toasted sequins and plopped them on the noodles. “Save the science talk for later, man. First, we shall FEAST!” And feast she did.

This was one of the rare moments where the glam robot star agreed with the strongest fish. He couldn’t get enough of the topping either, adding another helping on his half-finished plate.

“I didn’t know it’s even possible for my MTT-brand edible sequins to be this crunchy!” Mettaton savoured another bite. “Oh, the cheese, garlic and parsley just add SO much more! This is giving me inspirations for a product line~~”

Gaster made no effort to hide his pride. Kind of a ‘I told you so’ manner. “Wonders of what a little education can do, hm?”

To him, everyone else in this room were mere children. They may theoretically be adults, but their knowledge of the world was so naive and shallow. Very cute, he must admit.

The doorbell rang. Papyrus volunteered himself as if he lived here. “I’LL GO GET IT!”

Then off he went.

Gaster just finished his plate of pasta too. He thought to himself that it would be nice to indulge. This was his first proper meal since his return from the Void.

Alas, life had other plans.

“OH MY GOD, SANS!!!” Papyrus screamed. It was not a happy greeting either.

“Sans?” Gaster put his cutlery down without a clatter before hurrying out. Even at the moment of an emergency, he still maintained his manners.

Everyone else stopped eating and followed the old man.

Sans was bundled up in a towel. Papyrus set his brother down on the couch and kept patting the chubby cheekbones. He tried to lightly smack his brother back to the waking world. Or yell. Whichever worked first.

“SANS! SANS, ANSWER ME! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU???”

Grillby closed the door to keep the winter chill out. He then walked over to Papyrus and said, “…He’s fine. Just exhausted…”

“Captain Grillby?” Gaster muttered. He floated over to the fiery bartender to get a closer look. “Oh it really is you, Captain Grillby. What happened to Sans?”

“…I found Sans collapsed on the floor of my bar… Just when I was preparing to open shop…”

Undyne dropped her jaw. “Wait. What. CAPTAIN?! Grillby was an ex-Captain of the Royal Guard?!?! And I didn’t even know?!?!?”
The fiery man’s head glowed brighter, embarrassed by the outburst. “…It’s an old story… You did well, either way…”

“Oh my, a double plot twist,” commented Mettaton. “This is getting really exciting!”

Gaster paid no heed to the background chatter. He slipped towards Sans and checked his condition. As Grillby said, the skeleton was fine… except he slept deader than a log.

A briny scent wafted from the soaked blue jacked. “Seawater?” the old man muttered. Peeling back the towel revealed grains of dirty sand.

Papyrus groaned. “SAAAAANS! IF YOU WANT TO BE A PIRATE, DO IT DURING THE SUMMER! ALL YOU GOT NOW IS A COLD RECEPTION!”

Translation: it’s pointless to go to the beach during winter. Or so Gaster estimated.

“EXCUSE ME EVERYONE, I NEED TO BORROW THE SHOWER!”

Fortunately for the skeleton, Alphys’ lab was one of the ‘regular Frisk visiting zones’ and thus had proper plumbing. Before anyone allowed or denied his request, Papyrus picked up the bundle and whisked his brother away.

Gaster sighed. He turned towards his old friend and asked: “I noticed that he visits your establishment often.”

“…Yes…” Grillby replied. “…I invited him in during his first night in Snowdin… told him it’s a safe place… If he needs anywhere to go, or anything to eat… my doors are open…”

Hearing that confirmation with his own existence brought a huge wave of relief over the old skeleton.

“Oh, my dear friend,” he said, “I thank you from the very bottom of my soul. Being under your watch is certainly much, much safer than loitering out there alone.”

More so after ‘that unfortunate incident’.

“…No problem…” Grillby replied.
“Did he behave?”
“…Yes…He’s a good customer…”

Gaster narrowed his eyes, not quite believing those words.

“…Payments can be late, but they’re always fulfilled…Otherwise he causes no trouble…”

“Good riddance, Sans! How did he get into debt? He was so good at budgeting!”

From here, he could hear the busy sloshing of laundry works. It seemed that the younger brother tried to hit two birds with one stone: washing both his brother and those salt-soaked clothes.

Gaster turned around to Papyrus’ friends, asking: “Is this normal?”

“Normal?” Undyne didn’t quite understand.

“Is this a regular occurrence?” He twirled his finger towards the sounds of water. “Picking up after his brother. Washing. Cleaning. While the elder was out cold.”
The undine thought for a while, trying to recall their routine. “No…? This is a first.”

Yet somehow Papyrus knew exactly what to do. The uncle’s scrutiny then shifted to Mettaton with all their cold, demanding intensity.

“Sansy?” the robot shrugged. “He always delivers his comedy. Guest star material, you know. One of my favourite guys to call.”

Gaster then asked: “Has he ever fallen asleep in the middle of a performance?”

“No, no.” Mettaton replied. “Only after the show. I let the darling take his nap. Showbiz is quite exhausting after all, and he delivered his job anyway.”

In response to that, Undyne groaned. “Sheesh Mettaton, you got lucky. I had to keep an eye on him at all times! Never know when he’s either gonna turn his sentry post into an illegal hotdog stand or slack off.”

That earned the full focus of the most intimidating mentor of monster society. Gaster pinned his attention back at Undyne.

“Excuse me,” he said. “Sans? Sentry? I may be the one stretched across spacetime, but I couldn’t fathom what got him into the guard business in the first place. Did you conscript him?”

Undyne shook her head and slowly pointed her thumb towards the direction of the bathroom. It’s filled with the sound of some nice, hot showers.

The puddle of amalgamation goo around Gaster’s legs began to roil. “Papyrus? Are you serious?”

“Yeeeeah…” she replied. “Sorry Doctor Gaster, but that’s the truth. Papyrus was the one who begged me to give Sans a job. The only position I had available was a sentry. Even that was a stretch.”

“I haven’t started my business yet back then.” Mettaton quickly washed his hands clean, lest he somehow end up in the pot too.

“And what about Papyrus himself…?” asked the old one.

That question will surface sooner or later. The trio of friends and Grillby took the time to explain. Through their testimonies, the elder skeleton made sense of the bits and pieces he had observed…

In between the explanations, the tall skeleton emerged with a pail of wet, wrung out laundry. He had just washed both Sans’ clothes and Grillby’s towel. By hand.

“THE DRIER IS NEXT TO THE WASHING MACHINE, RIGHT?” asked Papyrus

Alphys replied with a confirmation. “Yep. You did use it the day before.”

“JUST CONFIRMING.”

Off he went again.

The stories continued. Grillby explained that the folks in Snowdin were once confused of who was the real older brother.

Sans looked his age, but his sense of responsibility was a bit of a suspect. Kind of a sociable joker bum that needed prodding to move. Not quite the elder brother material there.
On the other hand, Papyrus was a model citizen. Hardworking. Diligent. Energetic. He gunned for the Royal Guard and all its associated ‘cool prestige’.

Except he had one fatal flaw: he’s too naive for the job. Even by monster society standards. Unanimously voted by anyone who knew him.

Gaster buried his face in palm. And how he wished his hands didn’t have holes in the centre. “Good lord, what compelled him so?”

“He wanted to be popular,” said Mettaton. “Just like me~. In his own way. Very admirable I must say.”

“Why does Papyrus even need popularity???”

Everyone shrugged. They were as perplexed as the elder skeleton.

While the poor uncle stressed out over the issue, Papyrus started rearranging Alphys’ manga collection in the correct numerical order.

Then he dusted off the action figures.
Re-stacked the files piling up on Alphys’ PC desk.
Swept the office floor.

He just never stops moving.

In time, the dryer dingged. Papyrus finished up whatever chore he kept himself occupied with and resumed his care for Sans.

Ah, the convenience of Surface technology. Saved plenty of time and hassle. Thanks to their ingenuity it was possible for Papyrus to put Sans back together on the same day. Figuratively.

Pants? Checked.
Slippers? Checked.
T-shirt? Checked.
The iconic blue jacket? Why of course. Sans wouldn’t be half of his image without it.

Once he had finished dressing his brother up, Papyrus tucked him in one of Alphys’ extra beds.

[…]Did you really have to launder his clothes on the spot?] Gaster signed in a whisper.

Papyrus answered back as soft as he could. [YES. WHAT IF HE WAKES UP WHILE I FETCHED HIS EXTRA CLOTHES? I THINK IT WOULD BE POSITIVELY EMBARRASSING. OR NEGATIVELY.]

[Good point. But what about Doctor Alphys’ spare clothing?]

Papyrus glanced sideways, a little horrified by his own imagination. [I THINK IT WOULD BE WORSE IF HE WOKE UP AS A GIRL.]

In a way, Gaster pitied the young one. The only reason he could even make this conclusion was the fact he had never seen a live female skeleton.

[A lady’s bone structure is a little different, Papyrus. It’s hard to explain without a comparison, but rest assured Sans won’t become a woman through clothing choice alone. Not against his will, at the very least.]
Papyrus was relieved. Then, he beckoned his uncle to follow. Wonder where the younger wanted him to go?

There was a marked lack of fire in the living room. According to Undyne, Grillby had gone back to his bar to keep a lookout for information. Who knew if his patrons had heard stories.

Bless that elemental, thought Gaster.

Papyrus led his uncle back to the kitchen, where their Saturday morning first began.

“UNCLE GASTER,” he asked. “DO YOU KNOW HOW TO MAKE SOUP? I HEARD IT’S VERY NOURISHING.”

One of the most basic universal cuisines there. “Of course. We can use the morning’s stock as a base. What do you have in mind?”

“I DON’T KNOW. I’M USUALLY FIT AND HEALTHY, SO I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO MAKE FOR MY BROTHER.”

The young skeleton was… more reserved than usual. How strange for his upbeat persona.

“But… I REMEMBERED… THE ONE TIME I CAUGHT THE SNEEZLES AS A KID. SANS BROUGHT BACK SOME REALLY NICE SOUP. IT MUST BE A SHOP SPECIAL, BECAUSE I COULDN’T FIND IT AGAIN.”

“If I TOLD YOU HOW IT TASTED, DO YOU THINK WE CAN REMAKE IT? LIKE, THE WHOLE REVERSE ENGINEER SCIENCE THING THAT ALPHYS TALKS ABOUT.”

Gaster had a feeling. An intuition, if one must be more specific, that this long-lost mystery dish was something he would recognize.

“Perhaps,” so he answered. “I will do my best to aid you.”
Once upon a time, there were two scientists.
The fate of their civilization rested on their shoulders.
One took it as a burden.
Another, a proud duty.

Their job was to secure the victory of their people. History cannot afford to repeat: this time they will
inflict justice on those who had wronged them so long ago.

After years of trial and error, the two created a machine that will put all fortune tellers to shame.

It was the device to peer into the future with picture-perfect clarity. No more fuzzy guessing. No
more obscure clips. No more emotional blockade.

The most important of all these: the ability to ‘remember’. Everything will be written down, archived,
and sorted for the greatest puzzle of their people’s history.

The elder scientist put on the visors of fate.

Cyan, the Essence of Patience.
Grants the bearer wisdom to ruminate on his observation.

Orange, the Essence of Bravery.
Grants the bearer sight beyond his limited knowledge.

He ascended high into the planes beyond mortality, exploring paths that no one else has tread.
Forward, backwards, jumping left and right.

Yet alas, despite his long travels, the man found no salvation…

Only doom.

In one path he saw the horrors of golden-petalled thorns, killing every man, woman and child. A
laughing flower relished in the dust of the dead jeering: it’s KILL or BE killed.

In another he witnessed an outbreak of a mysterious disease that showed little symptoms. Just
silence, apathy, and eventual breakdown.

The Explorer sought for more. The waters of Waterfall eventually dried to a trickle. Why? Drought?
Construction? Without water, salvage materials cannot flow and the Core cannot be cooled.

Society collapsed without its central support.

The younger scientist cut his heart from the dire situation. Numbed himself from the impending
horrors. Make reasons. Joke about it. Treat the future as an inevitable fact, like the cycle of life and death.

“Nothing mattered in the grand scheme of things anyway.”

It was his sole method of coping.

But the elder scientist refused. “It cannot be. It cannot be! There HAS to be a way!”

Once again the man wore the visors of fate. He poured every bit of determination into his attempt.

If there was a wall, he will smash it down.
If there was a chasm, he will build a bridge to cross it.
If there were vast waters, he will swim to the other side.

Determination. Determination. Determination.
Refuse to give up.
That’s what the humans did. And that’s how they won.

After a long and arduous journey, The Explorer reached the end of the world.
The literal end.
The end.

All timelines, all fates, all attempts…
Lead to nothingness.
Eternal darkness.

Mortified, the Explorer threw down his visors. His entire being quaked and rippled as they screamed without a voice.

This was why the younger scientist distanced himself from his emotions. Too much pain, too much weight. He had enough of suffering.

Even so, the sights of his elder breaking under the revelation will haunt him for life.

First, there was distress. The shock, horror and despair of knowing.
Then, what’s left was desperate madness. That man, the amalgamation, sought for a solution.

Soon, a flash of epiphany… Off to the computer the goo monstrosity went.

“Computer, initiate recording.”

He stood there, arms raised, talking in the language of hands. It became a monologue for the convenience of the others deep within himself.

The screen displayed his final conclusion, archived for eternity.

ENTRY NUMBER SEVENTEEN
DARK DARKER YET DARKER
THE DARKNESS KEEPS Growing
THE SHADOWS CUTTING DEEPER
PHOTON READINGS NEGATIVE
THIS NEXT EXPERIMENT SEEMS VERY
**VERY**
**INTERESTING**
...
**WHAT DO YOU TWO THINK?**

As the younger one watched, a twisted grin stretched across his mandibula.

* * *

Sans woke up to the scent of fresh detergent.

Not to grease, ketchup, or the staleness of his messy room: it’s the smell of soapy cleanliness typically found in washing machines.

This discrepancy threw him off more than the semi-foreign environment. He recognized it as Alphys’ place, but…

“…What the fuck happened?” This situation deserved a swear word.

He thought of sitting up, but his skull throbbed too hard to even attempt it. The dream didn’t help: it played out one of those memories that he wished he had forgotten.

*Well shit. I hope I didn’t just sleep through the whole of Saturday. I’m supposed to visit Frisk with their friends.*

*This is another reminder why I shouldn’t be making promises. Jeez. The kid’s gonna be disappointed.*

…I think I need another nap. This headache’s a killer.

Someone opened the door. Sans quickly closed his eyes, hoping that it would fool the visitor into thinking that he’s still out cold.

*“SAAAAAAANS!” It’s Papyrus. “THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO PLAY SKELETON! C’MON, I KNOW YOU’RE AWAKE.”*

Sans peeked with one eye. “Geez, Paps. There’s no hiding from you anymore, huh?”

Papyrus wasted no time to set down a bed table for his brother. “OF COURSE, I CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FAKE SLEEP AND A REAL ONE!”

The elder brother snorted in response. “That’s so cool. Uh, so. What’s with the table?”

Happy as ever, Papyrus responded: “YOU HAVEN’T HAD BREAKFAST. OR LUNCH, FOR THE MATTER. SO I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- MADE A MEAL SO WARM AND FILLING THAT YOU’D CATCH UP ON YOUR MISSING MEALS IN A SINGLE BOWL!”

This was why he wanted to see his little brother. The things he says and does never fail to provide a moment of respite. Just watching Papyrus do his thing made everything feel right in the world, even if it was just an illusionary distraction.
“Heh. Sure. Hit me right in the gut.” Sans winked, “If I have any.”

“NYEH HEH HEH! I WILL DO MORE THAN HIT YOU IN YOUR MISSING GUT, MY DEAR BROTHER. THE GREAT PAPYRUS’ CUISINES WILL BLOW YOUR SKULL TOWARD THE STARS! I’LL BE RIGHT BACK!”

Sans was surprised by the lack of groaning about his bad jokes. The tall skeleton was so delighted that he missed his cue.

“…Oookay?” Sans wondered if he had accidentally teleported to a whole different dimension. That would be a problem.

Papyrus soon returned with a bowl of soup and two pieces of toasted bread. It’s bright orange colour came from the carotene-rich content of pumpkin.

Wow, Paps finally figured out how to open up a human soup can. Those things are a real bugger.

“‘BONE APPETIT’!” Even by skeleton’s standards, Papyrus had the happiest of grins right now.

He must be in a real smashing mood to use one of my bad puns.
Heh. This is great. A normal life is great.

Sans grabbed the bread and dipped it in the soup. Then he took a bite.

Any of his cheerfulness shattered upon tasting its contents.

It’s not canned.

Pumpkin. Carrots. A dash of thyme sprigs and cinnamon. Roasted bone marrow mixed in to thicken the soup without depending on filler starches.

The last time he had seen, smelled, and tasted this combination of flavours was years and years ago.

Little Papyrus had caught ‘the sneezles’ back then. It was the only time the boy fell ill throughout his childhood.

“…Where did you get this?” Sans asked. He had to.

“I MADE IT FROM SCRATCH!” So the other announced.

“I MADE IT FROM SCRATCH!”” So the other announced.

“I made it from scratch!”

Sans hoped that it was just a coincidental find on the internet. There are billions of humans on the Surface. Surely someone would come up with this exact same dish. It’s one in a billion, but that’s still a chance.

Anything better than the alternative answer.

But no, life still played with him.

“I LEARNED IT FROM UNCLE GASTER! WOWIE HE’S A GENIUS! THE MOMENT I TOLD HIM ABOUT THE TASTE HE’S ALREADY FIGURED IT OU--”

Papyrus’ excited ramblings were interrupted by the loud crunch of toast. Sans had just crushed the wheaty necessity in between his bony fingers. Bits and pieces of crustiness puffed all over the table, blanket and floor.
Papyrus stared back with a gaping jaw. “…OKAY. I KNOW SOUP IS SUPPOSED TO BE NOURISHING, BUT I DIDN’T EXPECT THE ENERGY TO KICK IN SO FAST.”

Sans realised that he had acted out of character. “Oh.” He replied, trying to keep his comical facade. “Sorry. Yeah. Uh. My joints just snapped from the change of temperatures. They get ‘rattled’ over it, sometimes.”

“SAAAANS!” the younger one exclaimed. It was all within expectations.

“Where’s ‘Uncle’ Gaster, by the way?”

“HE TOLD ME THAT HE’S GOING TO BREATHE SOME NICE FRESH AIR OUTSIDE.” So he knew.

Of course he would. They shared a mutual understanding on bone-picking. The fact that the man conveniently excused himself out of an innocent bystander’s home meant only one thing…

“Thanks.” Sans continued to eat his meal. He’s going to need it. “What time is it now?”

“CLOSE TO THREE PM.” Papyrus answered. “Yeah. Okay. Good. I’m not late.”

C’mon Sans. Save the nostalgia tears for later. You’re going to give someone a bad time, and you better have the energy for it.

Once you’re done, take everyone to Frisk and pretend nothing ever happened.

Once the soup was cool enough, he drank them all down in one go. Sans set the bowl down and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Thanks Pap.” He jumped right out of bed. “It’s delicious. Serious. Totally would have second helpings, but not right now.”

His brother was surprised by the eagerness to leave. “WAIT SANS, YOU JUST RECOVERED!”

“Yeah. That’s exactly why I’m moving.”

Move, he did.

He ignored Mettaton’s concerned questioning.

Then stepped around Alphys. She was too slow to react or respond.

Dodged Undyne. Literally. She tried to grab him so they could have a serious talk, but he just avoided it.

His brother started to call for his name.

They noticed his strange behaviour, he didn’t care.

Sans headed straight into the outer world.

Where is he?

There was an arrow drawn in snow pointing to the left. He followed it.
Where is he?

More arrows.
As he walked down the path, Sans remembered the sounds of laughing children during the warmer months.

Where is he?

At the very end, he found the man he had been searching for.

It’s a cold, cloudy day. The skies were as pale as the snowy land beneath. Gaster waited in the middle of the flat field, standing out against the whiteness with his dark ever-flowing self.

He was like a blotch of ink on paper.
A stain.
A strain.

Upon the first opportunity, Sans summoned his Gasterblasters and commanded them to fire at will.

The world went dark. Being a veteran Seer himself, he knew exactly what’s happening to him. He readied every bone in his body to react the moment he regained vision.

The whiteness returned. Gaster faced his wayward protégé with his hands posed in signs.

During the moments time had stopped, his mentor had hijacked Sans’ control. The Gasterblasters turned their aim towards their own summoner.

The methods were the same today as it was so many years ago. Sans had grown wiser since then. Instead of freezing in fear, he teleported out of the laser barrages.

Snow scattered in the air from the forceful opening. His brother and his friends stopped at the edge of the field, shocked.

“No fanciful greetings for me?” said Gaster. “I expected you to say something along the lines of: ‘The clouds are grey, the air is silent. On days like these men like you should die’.”

“You’re not worth it.” Sans left Eye ignited. He reached an arm towards the stolen blasters and made a yanking motion.

That action put the blasters under a spell. While they were dazed, he executed an elaborate chain of hand commands.

Since Gaster cracked the blasters’ programming in frozen time, Sans made sure he could do the same in real time; had to beat his mentor at his own game.

Their ownership switched back to Sans. The armaments he summoned were once again his, and his first action was to return fire upon Gaster.

If Gaster was not an Amalgamate, he would have gotten hit. But alas, apparently being a gooey man bestowed methods of escape otherwise impossible. Before the beam made contact, the scientist collapsed himself into a puddle. He burrowed into the snow and tried to stage a surprise attack.

“Oh c’mon, that’s cheating.” Sans thought of his next move. Gauge the speed, then impale his opponent with a well-aimed bone spike. That should be enough to end the fight.

He was then interrupted by the roars of Papyrus out-of-control giant blaster. The poor summoner and
his friends almost started another air rodeo session.

More disasters, just what exactly he needed.

Gaster emerged from the snow and slid towards the mayhem. “Egads!” He cried out, “THIS is why you can’t apply your training one to one, Sans Serif! Without the necessary mastery, his Orange aspect will make the blasters unruly. Impossible to control.”

Opportunity lay before Sans. His mentor got distracted by his brother’s shenanigans, putting himself in a vulnerable spot.

All he needed to do now was to aim and do something. Anything… yet he cannot. His brother was too close; any action will put Papyrus at risk.

So he watched Gaster take over the controls, waiting for his next opportunity.

With a forceful slam, the old man yelled: “HEEL!”

Heel, the blaster did. It crashed straight down on the sidewalk and stayed there. After dispensing some advice, the man returned to his battlefield.

Undyne looped her arms around Papyrus to hold him back. The young skeleton kept struggling to free himself.

“NO! STOP! THIS IS A BAD FIGHT!”

“Paps, you can’t do anything about it!”

The big sister figure knew that the time for talking had long passed. What they’re witnessing now was a fallout from old festering wounds.

“CAN’T THEY JUST TALK NICELY?” Papyrus asked. “AND I THINK UNCLE GASTER GOT THE WRONG MAN BECAUSE MY BROTHER’S FULL NAME IS NOT SANS SERIF, IT’S COMIC SANS!”

“Ugh. That stage name.” Gaster pointed straight at the poor, clueless skeleton as he addressed Sans. “Look at that. Look. At. That. Your own brother doesn’t know your real name! Do you think I’d let you continue this atrocity???”

Fuelled by anger and emotion, the elder skeleton summoned a rolling wave of bones. Blue, orange, white, all mixed inside.

Sans dodged them as he responded: “He doesn’t need to know. It’s not important.”

“Tsk.” Gaster made a disapproving click with his tongue. “That shows how much you’ve underestimated Papyrus. Do you only see him as a baby bone who can’t handle the truth?”

Sans narrowed his gaze, retorting the hard questions with a warning: “I told you to stay away from Papyrus. Forever.”

“As if I’d listen to the requests of a fool,” Gaster replied.

Bone clashed against bone. Neither side wanted to bring out the cannons, knowing that the other might attempt to steal them yet again.

Gaster lifted his chin, looking down on his diminutive former helper. “Oh, I will recite volumes if that will convey the absolute truth. For example, you stole my textbook and performed an old, old sealing magic on Papyrus.”

He summoned multitudes of small bones, forming hexagrams. They spun overhead in erratic patterns, making it hard to guess where they will stop.

“Doing so at a tender age of eleven months crippled your brother’s mental capabilities. You’re fortunate enough that it wasn’t too serious. Perhaps he’s a little slow in standard academics and quirky in his reasoning, but his physical talents were left intact.”

The talking was a distraction: an auditory and emotional one. Knowing this, Sans tried to ignore…but he couldn’t stop glancing at his brother and his friends.

He noticed a look of horror on those faces. Yet, this was just the beginning.

The blue skeleton seethed, cold and bitter as his colour. “You don’t understand, Gaster. It hurt. It hurt him so much, he cried until he had no voice left and he almost tore the house to pieces. I had no choice but to seal him.”

“You should have brought him to me!” Gaster slapped a hand on his own chest. “I would have applied the proper methods of suppression and provided suitable education for the boy!”

“And turn Papyrus into a living Chronograph?” Sans replied. “I couldn’t let you do that. You’d just put him through the same pain as I did. If not worse. History is an ugly subject.”

Jabbed by the scathing accusation, Gaster stopped the spinning hexagrams. Orange beams then rained down upon the snap of his fingers.

Sans realised that he can’t use his teleports with this colour of magic. He must shuffle about in real time: keep moving as much as he can, without rest. He’s a goner the moment he stops.

The least tiring way to maintain that momentum was to strafe in a perpetual circle.

The elder released his grip on the hexagrams, letting them resume their unpredictable behaviour. He put most of his focus on maintaining the beams themselves.

“Fine,” said Gaster. “If you don’t want Papyrus to claim his rightful birthright, at least provide the rudimentary education suitable for his abilities!”

“I taught him magic. Is that not enough?” Sans said.

“For goodness sake, do you sincerely think that his strengths lay in that repetitive arrangements of white and blue bones?”

“Don’t underestimate the basics.”

In line with his own retaliation, Sans reached his hand out and forced Gaster into the rules of blue gravity magic. He let go a wave of blue and white bones, each and every one of those laced with the destructive poison of ‘Karmic Retribution’.

If Gaster chose to stay, the regular white bones would collide.
If he chose to move, the blue ones will trap him.

A simple yet effective situation.
The old man groaned hard. He was forced to dispel his hexagrams and focus on defense.

Try as he might, Gaster was reminded of why he backed away from the front lines. He didn’t have the reflexes or the reaction for a true battle. One of the blue bones cut through the old man’s shoulder.

Faint, violet particles ate through the wound like embers to wood. They prevented immediate regeneration, thus negating the main strengths of an Amalgamate.

To Sans, it was a simple concept to figure out.

Gaster mustered every bit of his inner strength to muffle his scream. He remained resolute, but his body had started to melt.

“…On some days, I regret teaching you the art of advanced magic combat.” Gaster commented. “This is one of them.”

Sans replied, “Too late.”

But Gaster was not going to give up just yet. He had Determination flowing through him. If he survived ‘The Core Incident’, he will survive this.

“Perhaps by drawing from your personal experience,” So he added. “You should have taught Papyrus how to cook. But no, you didn’t. You still taught him magic. Nothing but magic. I bet it’s because he begged you to do so.”

“Are you so burdened with grief that you cannot bear to watch Papyrus follow in your parents’ footsteps?”

His mentor always had a way to strike where it hurts the most.

Sans shut off his emotions. He cannot afford to lose his focus now, not when he had the upper hand.

His Eye flashed between blue and yellow, trying to manipulate time so he could land his final blow.

The sentiment was mutual. Gasters’ dual-chromatic set burned in greater intensity. Determination coursed through his bones, and thus supplying him with a far deeper source than Sans could ever dream of.

With unquenchable fire in his eyes, the Gaster declared: “You had denied Papyrus of his past, his present, and his future! From today onwards, I refuse to let him wither under your folly!!!”

Sans replied, “Go ahead and try.”

Both mentor and protégé threw caution to the wind. They summoned their biggest guns. Put everything they had into a single, huge Gasterblaster.

No point stealing from each other now.

Ready.
Aim.
Fire.

Two Seers. Two cannons. Two separate wills.

The resulting clash caused reality to fray at its seams. For a moment, snow and light was all anyone
could see.

When the particles settled and the world healed, one emerged victorious.

It was Sans Serif. That nihilistic delinquent of an ‘assistant’ had finally triumphed over his master.

Gaster got his entire lower body blown off. He’s now just half the skeleton he was, lying face-down and broken in the snow. The decaying poison continued to gnaw at the edges of his wounds.

Menacing he may be, the scientist’s combat abilities were never stellar. All he had was knowledge after all. Mere theories. They can’t hold a candle to someone who had practiced them to the bone.

Without a word, Sans walked towards the fallen. He raised his blaster high above his own head with the full intent of finishing the job.

Gaster propped his remaining half up with his hands. “Sans Serif,” so the mentor asked in the most chilling of tones. “Are you going to kill your parents yet again?”

“My parents are dead,” answered Sans. Objective as ever.

“Your mother doesn’t think so.”

The amalgamate showed his right arm, riddled in scars that never healed. “I’m sure you recall this. You were seven. On the fourth day, you escaped from your safety confines and almost drowned in sand.”

“When your mother tried to save you, your powers scored the surface of her arm out of existence. Heney why these wounds never, ever healed. Even with Determination in our bones.”

“Helvetica put her life and career on the line to save you. This is definite proof that they live inside of me. You know it.”

Every bone in Sans’ being rattled from rage internalized.

“W.D. Gaster,” so he said. “You are an abomination. A desecration of their memory. My parents are dead. Nothing more. Nothing less.”

Fire burned in his left eye. His armament followed suit. It opened its maws and began charging up.

“Please die.”

Gaster continued to glare. Even though he was at the last inch of his existence, he refused to surrender.

“STOOOOOOOOOOOOP!!!”

A skeleton with a red scarf skidded across the icy floor on his knees. He stopped right in front of his new-found uncle, arms outstretched to protect him.

Papyrus.

The raised emotions made his Eye glow orange.

What happened? Had he escaped from Undyne’s grip? Maybe she let him go. Who knows? Who cares?
His brother was in the way.

“SANS!” Papyrus pleaded. “DON’T DO A VIOLENCE, PLEASE! THIS IS NOT YOU! NOT YOU AT ALL!”

His brother didn’t know better.
Of course, no one told him anything.

Sans gazed on him with tired eyes. “Gaster is a bad man, Paps. He tried to kill you.”

Gaster huffed at that statement. “Oh good lord, you still don’t get it. I was trying to keep monsterkin ALIVE! Create a utopia!”

“Utopias don’t exist,” the nihilist responded. “They’re just dreams. No one would be happy.”

“Oh, but you’ve never experienced it. How would you know? With dreams, hopes are created. I would have become the seventh and denied The End!”

“STOPSTOPSTOPSTOP! STOP THE ARGUING!” Papyrus cut short the argument, shaking his head and flailing his mittened hands.

“LOOK, SANS. MAYBE UNCLE GASTER WAS A BAD MAN IN THE PAST, BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN HE CAN’T BE GOOD RIGHT NOW! HE CAN GET BETTER. HE ALREADY TRIED TO BE!”

“HE TAUGHT ME NEW MAGIC! HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO COOK! HE MADE FRIENDS! WE HAD FUN TIMES CHATTING WITH EACH OTHER! HE’S REALLY NICE TO ME, IS THAT NOT ENOUGH?”

“No.” Sans denied straight at Papyrus face. “Please move aside.”

“THEN WHAT ABOUT MOM AND DAD??? THEY- THEY’RE INNOCENT!”

“Mom and Dad are dead.”
“NO THEY’RE NOT! THEY’RE HERE WITH UNCLE GASTER!”

Sans’ bones rattled harder. “Papyrus, you don’t understand. It’s not the same.”

“OF COURSE I DON’T! I’VE NEVER MET THEM BEFORE!”

Papyrus started to cry. This time, there’s no way brothers could joke about catching tears, or getting grit in the sockets.

For the first time in a long while, he shed true tears.

“I KNOW YOU’RE IN PAIN BECAUSE YOU HAD WITNESSED OUR SUPER DUPER COOL AWESOME PARENTS IN THEIR FULL GLORY! BUT I DID NOT. I COULD NOT. BECAUSE THEY WERE GONE TOO SOON.”

“But now they’re back! Not in one piece, but they’re still back. I… I want to get to know our parents better, Sans. And Uncle Gaster. And you too… so… so I beg you…”

Papyrus wheezed. His bones, quivering in their joints out of sheer primal fear for his family. “… please, show mercy…”
Sans found his resolve shaking. He may look stoic at the front, but inside he struggled.

_Cut it off._
_Cut it off._
_Cut your heart off, and Papyrus will be safe forever._
_From him. From… them…_

How his outstretched hand trembled. It shook so hard, that he could no longer keep it straight.

In the end, Sans could not pull the trigger. Not because he had mercy, but he couldn’t bear with the thought of Papyrus fearing him -- their parents’ murderer -- for the rest of his sorry existence.

The looming blaster was dispelled along with its charged energy. Still feeling the jitter throughout his being, Sans turned around and slowly walked away.

He heard the aftermath behind him. Papyrus and his friends rushing over to the remnants of Gaster, asking if he’s alright. And the classy skeleton replying that he was fine. Despite having his lower half obliterated.

“Sans Serif,” so he was addressed. The old man won’t let him go about the name thing.

Gaster continued his final retort. “Whenever you let yourself waste away at Grillby’s, your father cried wondering what went wrong. I feel his grief. And he grieves for you right now. Only your mother insisted her dear ‘seraphim’ will one day make him proud.”

There was nothing he could say. If it was merely Gaster’s logic, he would have barked a rebuttal…

…Except this was dear father; he could never snark at his direct family, no matter how he treated others.

Never.

“Your mother named you ‘Sans Serif’ for a reason, you know. When she had you, she was so filled with hope. You were her angel, who will one day guide and protect our kind. And yet… you considered it so much of a shame that you kept it from your own brother.”

Sans gritted his teeth.

He prepared for a teleport. Just right before the jump, he heard his mentor drop one last scathing comment:

“_Yes. Run away, Sans Serif. Run Away. Some things never change. A seer without dreams is but a dead skeleton inside._”

…_Yeah. Some things never change._
_Trash will be trash._

_A tornado of trash…_

_That’s who I am._

Chapter End Notes
How many hearts have I smashed today?

There are no villains here. Just two broken men with a lot of bad blood. And one poor Papyrus.

One of the biggest fandom arguments involved Sans' characterization. There's a distinct difference between his good mood (Truepac) and bad mood (Geno). Some people argued he should behave so and so.

My personal opinion is really all background and context. Throughout the Golden Quiche there are hints of terrible implications that back up his behaviour with Gaster.

Chapter 6 hints at his abilities, and how little Papyrus knows.
Chapter 9 talks about his expectations.
Chapter 12 hints that he's not okay.
Chapter 13 talks about his training to be as human as possible.
Chapter 20 shows just how brutal he can be, if he chooses. And also how he's 'death' and 'dead inside'. Also, the incident with his mom.
Chapter 26 explores on his cunning, and his involvement in the quake at Mount Ebott. Which led to the deaths of Frisk's parents.
Chapter 28 talks about his ability to 'cut' and 'escape'. 'Cutting off your emotions' is another name for distancing yourself to apathy.

I might have missed a few more. It's not Toby canon, but it's Golden Quiche 'canon'. Any writing must be consistent with their own rules. One's behaviour must be supported with a matching world setting. After all, we all are influenced by something in our lives.

Usually I don't ask for comments, but I am very, very curious of what you guys think. This is technically the conclusion of one setup of the family drama. So, I'd like to hear your feedback!

A little polling if I may ask. Do you want to see more Gaster (and thus finishing off the non-hospital scenario) or do we want to see the Goatparents (hospital side when this fallout happened). Just wondering which scenario you guys wanna see first.
As voted, the Gaster conclusion comes first.

I have a feeling that every entry involving Gaster is going to take time due to his persona.

Controversial. Mysterious.

Well I have to admit his serious entries are very, very, very intensive to write. It's one of those situations where you need to re-read and edit multiple times to make sure the facts check out.

Enjoy.

The test results came back positive.

As Gaster had claimed, he was an Amalgamation of two others: Times Roman and Helvetica.

The parents.

Alphys and Undyne stared at the results displayed on the work PC’s monitor. Sans’ Hotdog Dog shimeji continued to animate silliness on the screen, but it did nothing to liven up the situation.

“Oh god…” the lizard lady squeaked. “This is horrible. Sans just tried to kill his elders. I-I never thought he would do this.”

“I think we have a bigger problem than the fight itself,” said the fish. “Like. How? I thought they would have long scattered the dust for the funeral.”

Alphys squeezed her hands together, fretting. “Doctor Gaster must have kept some for himself. Then, he injected Determination while they’re in his possession.”

It was the only possible conclusion.

“But, why???” Undyne questioned.

“…Desperation.” Alphys answered. “I know that feeling too well. Maybe he needed a major breakthrough.”

“If Gaster is a genuine Amalgamation, then why didn’t we hear the skelecouple speak at all? I thought they should be competing in a mess. Like Lemon Bread, for example.”

“Well…” the lizard explained, “The Amalgamation under my care were injected with Determination while they were near death. Whole. They didn’t turn into dust yet. For Roman and Helvetica, most of their original bodies were probably already scattered. As such, they don’t have enough material to reform as a full person.”
Which explained why Sans insisted that it wasn’t the same. In a way, he’s right.

Undyne had another question. A vital one. “Are they… really his parents? If you bring someone back without their SOUL, they’re just gonna be hollow memories.”

Alphys thought of it for a moment. “It seems like they’re sharing Doctor Gaster’s intact SOUL. That means their personalities still have access to the essentials. I guess we can say they are themselves? By technicality…?”

She continued, “B—because they don’t have enough material for a complete reconstruction, they’re stuck as a limb. Also, Doctor Gaster is a very strong-willed person. It’s natural for him to assume full control by default.”

“The parents… they remind me of grafted trees.” All that reading about the Surface sciences paid off. Here Alphys thought that she was just absorbing needless trivia.

A shiver ran across Undyne’s scales. “Yo. I’m so reminded of that fuckton creepy sakura tree episode. Didn’t they used this ‘grafting’ technique too?”

“Y—yes,” Alphys answered. “They did. You can also imagine the parents as cybernetic implants. If. That’s easier to grasp.”

That thought disgusted Undyne. This came from someone who’s used to interacting with Amalgamates. The school had a few of them as parents.

For example, Snowy’s Mom attended as many school events as she could, even if she couldn’t say much.

Yet, this? This was too much. “…I can see why Sans was as bitter as hell. Damn. I pity him.”

The two continued to stare at the results, contemplating on their next move.

“I’m gonna get my armour,” thus said the once Captain of the Royal Guard. “You stay here Alphys. I’m gonna grill him one-on-one.”

She had one unsolved case that had collected dust for too long. Now, she must do whatever it takes to give it a proper closure.

The once-proud gear of their army hung on its armour stand, serving as a glorified decoration for a few months now.

It’s time for her to don it again. By equipping herself with her nations’ old uniform, she made a declaration that she meant serious business.

Serious. Legal. Business.

She stared down on her gauntlets, pondering about the past. When she was an urchin training under Asgore, she’d catch glimpses of the previous Captain.

A stoic man of fire who never showed his face. Very quiet. Spoke no more than he was required of. Yet, he had a warm, glowing kindness. Captain ‘Grillby’ was revered by everyone as a paragon. Not that they ever knew his real face or name.

She once looked up to him too, but then… she realised that it was an impossible standard. In the end she chose her own path: determined to be the best Captain of her generation. The polar opposites of
their personalities didn’t matter as long they protected the nation.

Undyne knew that she doesn’t have the case files right now, but she could record Gaster’s testimonies for a comparison later. Her phone should be enough to do the trick.

Just as she finished strapping up, Mettaton knocked on her door.

“Psst, Undyne darling.” He said. “Can I discuss something with you for a moment?”

She was hesitant at first. That robot was a pit of bad ideas to her. Hang around long enough and she might accidentally subscribe herself to one of those.

But… she’s curious of Papyrus’ condition. Ever since they got home, the star had been comforting his number one fan. Blankets. Hugs. Some of morning’s pasta on standby.

The young skeleton healed his uncle with the same magic that brought him back into the world. Then, Papyrus retreated to a solitary corner away from others.

So Undyne entertained his request and spoke to him face to face.

“How’s Paps?” she asked.

Mettaton answered. “Poor Papyrus needs more time. He stopped crying, but he’s still whining. Very softly. Where’s our skeleton doctor?”

“At the dining table with some goldenflower tea. Provided that blasted man hasn’t tried to run away yet.”

“That’s good. You see darling, I know people like Doctor Gaster. Confident, self assured. He’s not going to answer any of your questions if you don’t win his heart first.”

Undyne furrowed her brows. She noticed a certain professional persuasiveness that belied his usual nonsense. Maybe the planets aligned and Mettaton actually had a sensible idea.

At the very least, she thought that she should listen. “What do you suggest?”

“I noticed that he had tremendous respect for Alphys dear,” said Mettaton. “Perhaps if we stage a conversation instead of an interrogation, he might divulge more information.”

Have Alphys smooth things out? A good idea, but not quite her style. “…Honestly, I just want to suplex him. More so after what he did to Sans and Frisk. I’d use that tactic for a different person next time.”

“Frisk?”

“Yeah. Frisk. Let’s just say I had a hunch.”

If only the real parts of anime were the fun and fantastical bits. But no, it had to be the serious ones.

Gaster sat down at the dinner table, sipping on his second cup of goldenflower tea. He glanced at the armoured fish and knew full well what lay before him.

“Colour me curious,” he said. “I wonder if you are bright as Grillby.”

It was a subtle taunt. Undyne knew that she already had two strikes of negative impressions: one for her ambush on Sans as a kid, the other for Papyrus’ horrible cooking.
But she won’t let Gaster intimidate her anymore. She sat down opposite of the man, facing him square in the face.

“Let me get this straight into your skull.” Undyne began, “Whatever happened earlier was the most fucked up shit I’ve ever seen. And you, sir, are gonna explain what the hell is going on.”

As Mettaton had warned, Gaster was secure in himself almost to the point of arrogance. He sipped his hot tea in silence. Waiting.

True to her nature, she decided to cut straight into the point. “The last person who saw you alive during the Core Incident was Sans.”

“Of course.” Gaster answered.

“You took your assistant to the Core. Alone. With no one else,” she continued. “Was it an experiment?”

Gaster remained silent for a while. “Aren’t we jumping into conclusions? It could have been maintenance work.”

She slammed her gauntlet down on the table. “Like hell you do maintenance without an engineering crew!”

“An accusative conjecture at best, Captain Undyne. I suggest that you first prove to me that you’re capable of handling this information.”

How she wanted to punch him in the face and suplex that damn doctor back into the Void. She knew Gaster’s guilty, but on what charges?

If the serious parts of anime were real, she would draw from those experiences and rip the truth out of his bones.

Think. Try to take a different approach. What would she do if she’s casted as a detective…

Undyne took a deep breath to calm herself down. “Okay. Fine. Let’s start this from the beginning.” That’s what they’d do right? Ask more innocent questions, then slowly use them to corner their suspect.

Lies can only stand for so long.

“What is a ‘Chronograph’?” Sans mentioned that Gaster would have trained Papyrus into that thing if given the opportunity.

Gaster calmly placed down his cup on the saucer. Levelheaded. Assured. “A Chronograph is a time-recording device.”

“Like a clock?”

“More than a clock. A clock only shows the present time. A Chronograph does much, much more. Hmm, how do I explain this in layman terms… have you ever had a deja vu? The feeling that you had experienced something before?”

Undyne tried to recall. She wasn’t sure, but she could just wing it and see where it goes. “Yeah. I get them sometimes.”

Gaster then said, “We’re on the same page then. Well, Captain. Those were not just mere feelings.”
You had indeed experienced similar circumstances before. Repeatedly. Who knows for how long?”

She squinted her single good eye. “…What the fuck are you talking about, old man?”

“Time-travel, my dear simple fish,” he replied. “Rewriting reality. I’m sure some of your ‘anime’ material covers this subject. Not all of them are accurate, but they do give a nice visual to a vague concept.”

The old scientist added some fresh hot tea to his cooled cup. Then, he picked it up for more sips. “Have you ever wondered how we lost the War oh so long ago, Captain? Do you really believe that monsters are so weak that they cannot defend themselves?”

If she must be honest… she had always doubted Waterfall’s history. Since a child, she saw no reason why monsters must stay weak.

They can grow strong. They can be strong, just like their King. Humans could die in so many ways… So why can’t they fight back…?

Perhaps it’s due to her mindset, she was one of the few who could generate their own Determination. Though Alphys warned her that she’d end up melting herself if she pushed it too hard.

“No,” Undyne answered. “I believe monsters can be strong even in the face of violence. Despite what the books say.”

Gaster nodded. “I too believed the same. But strength is pointless if there’s a certain foe who could predict your every move. No, I should say… memorize. Memorize your tactics. Your weakness. Everything about you.”

The more he talked, the less she understood. Undyne thus exclaimed, “Impossible! Unless you’re a genius like Sans, you’d have to repeat something a ton of times to memorize that much!”

“That’s what exactly happened to us during the War.” Gaster kept a stern glare at Undyne as he continued drinking. “One human, fuelled with Determination, repeated time to the point where they achieve guaranteed victory.”

Determination.

As far as she knew, the only person who had Determination beyond hers was… Frisk.

Thus Gaster continued, “Humanity’s ultimate weapon is not a sword or a gun. It’s a ‘person’: the one who rights what’s wrong and wrongs what’s right. Whatever progress you and I have made in our lives are at their mercy.”

After hearing this, Undyne wondered if she should have brought Alphys along. She didn’t quite understand Gaster’s explanation. Yet, a sense of dreadful horror strung around her neck like a noose.

Alphys might just break down in an existential crisis. Perhaps it was for the best to leave her out for now.

She clicked her tongue out of frustration. So much for trying to drive Gaster into the corner. At this rate, he’s steering her to his whims. And he knew it.

Undyne crossed her arms and leaned back against the chair. She’s not ready to give up yet. Let the old man talk for now. Listen and learn.
The scientist continued his speech. “That would be true if we don’t remember. Their strengths will be effectively negated if every bit of their actions are recorded. Turn their own tricks against them. Therefore, a Chronograph is the ultimate defense against the ultimate weapon.”

“Oh, yes,” she nodded. “How can this Chronograph be used as the ‘ultimate defense’ then?”

“Calculation, prediction and exploration,” Gaster answered. “By adjusting your base data, it’s possible to map out all possible outcomes. In short, it grants one the ability to calculate the future.”

“With the right powers and intellectual capacity, one could exploit the Chronograph’s data to reach the far ends of reality. To witness every possible turnout of events.”

“Which… you have,” she concluded.

One quick blink and his Eyes lit up cyan and orange. “That, indeed I do.” He dispelled them a few seconds later.

Something didn’t make sense in Undyne’s head. “Hold up a moment. If you could do that, why did you need Sans to help?”

“Well, just because I planned the Core doesn’t mean I could build it alone. What you enjoy today was the result of teamwork: architects, engineers, material specialists and what have you.”

“For the Chronograph, you can thank your apparently ‘lazy’ friend. Sans has a much better grasp of spacetime sciences than I do. He theorized the foundations. I made it a reality.”

In short, Sans created the Chronograph for Gaster’s use. Similar to how a weaponsmith crafts a spear for a warrior.

“So…” Undyne asked. “If Papyrus was, well, not the guy we know today, you wouldn’t need to build this Chronograph machine?”

“Oh, there’s always a need,” Gaster answered. “It just wouldn’t take its current form. And maybe… life would have been different.”

Ever since Gaster had the liberty of explaining his genius, Undyne noticed a marked reduction of hostility. Maybe this would be the right time to press.

“What did you see?” She asked. A simple question, but a vital one.

The scientist froze. His expression turned blank, devoid of intellectual liveliness. With the heaviest tone he answered: “The death and destruction of the Underground. No matter where I turned, or what I calculated… I found myself standing at ‘The End’.”

“‘Dark darker yet darker, the darkness keeps growing’. I still remember its horrors to this day.”

But the world didn’t end. “We’re here and alive today, sir. Did something go wrong with your machine?”

“Well,” Gaster replied, “The Chronograph does have its limitations. It can only give me futures based on current variables. We’re here on the Surface due to an unexpected anomaly. The game-changer, if you will. I would have identified the exact source if Sans didn’t betra--”

Before he could finish that sentence, he splashed his cup of still-hot tea on his own face.

Gaster yelped from the sting. “EGADS, HELVETICA! What in the world were you thinking???”
Or rather, whoever owned that scarred right arm did it. Sans’ mother. ‘She’ put the cup down and slammed on the table in protest.

“It’s the truth!” said Gaster. “Sans betrayed us—!”

That same right arm then slapped him across the cheekbone. Gaster’s left arm remained rooted in place, refusing to move upon his will.

“Oh no, Roman. Are you serious? You’re going to deny me the right to defend myself from the onslaught of your wife?!”

It devolved into an almost-comedic struggle of a man getting slapped by his own right hand.

Undyne then had an epiphany. If she can’t break through Gaster alone, she could enlist the help of the couple residing deep inside.

So she asked: “Mister Roman? Madam Helvetica? Can you hear me? If you can, drum your fingers on the table.”

The arms jerked around as they fought over control. In the end, love prevailed. ‘Left Roman’ and ‘Right Helvetica’ glued their hands on the surface and drummed their fingers as requested.

They’re listening.

“I’m Undyne,” she introduced herself. “A longtime friend of your son. I need your help to prove his innocence.”

“Sans is not innocent!” Gaster insisted, but Helvetica refused to hear such nonsense. That comment earned the scientist yet another slap.

Good. They’re against Gaster. If she could get the parents to spill the beans as witnesses, then she could finally deliver justice. They must know that she’s on Sans’ side. Their side.

So she continued: “Sans may not always do the right thing, but I know he accounts for everything. He will never take drastic actions unless it’s the absolute last resort.”

“Sir, madam, please tell me what happened down in the Core. There’s a high chance my bestie’s parents died in that incident. Knowing Sans, he will figure this out sooner or later. It’s going to crush him with guilt.”

Pointing straight as Gaster, Undyne said: “Don’t you think a certain someone needs to share the burden?”

“W—wait, a death?” The scientist widened his sockets in shock. “I was very sure that we were the only casualties of that incident!”

“No,” Undyne glared. “There were more. On the Surface. When that quake happened, the south part of Mount Ebott collapsed and killed people. Humans have families too, you know. Like us.”

“Did you just say a human is your best fri—?”

She gave that scientist no time to question. It’s time to dish out the spades. All of them. “If word gets out that Sans is related to this case, the human law enforcers are gonna be after his ass. I’m very, VERY sure our sir and madam will want to avoid that!”

The arms trembled. Out of fear, anger or both… it’s hard to tell.
‘Left Roman’ pointed towards a bottle of salt. Unlike other the Amalgamates who had merged whole bodies, these two only existed as mere limbs. They will need a different method of communication.

Undyne retrieved the salt and handed them over to the parents. Husband and wife then worked together to remove the cap.

They poured out the grains. Spread them out thin to form a white drawing surface. With their bony fingers, the two drew their testimonies within the particulates.

‘7TH SOUL’.

This was definitely Alphys’ field of expertise. To her, that statement was more of a puzzle. And how she hated puzzles.

“Did Gaster kidnap a human and hide them in the Core?”

The hands erased the previous statement to write their clarification.

‘NO.’
‘WE ARE THE 7TH.’

It didn’t make sense. Monsters can’t replace the human SOUL so easily. From what she understood of Alphys’ notes, trying to make a substitute required a ton of energy and the entire population of the Underground.

Then…

The implications hit her like a truck.

“…What. The. Fuck.”

Why oh why must the antagonist parts of anime be real too? This man fit the mad scientist trope to a T.

Undyne kicked back her chair and summoned her spear. She pointed its razor sharp tip right at him. One cannot kill Amalgamates through conventional means, but that won’t stop her from pinning him down by force.

“Doctor Gaster,” so she said. “You’re under arrest for endangering monsterkind! If you try to run, I have every right to turn you into a fucking pincushion.”

“…And how will you punish me?” Gaster asked back. He remained quite calm despite the circumstance. “You have no prison nor legal jurisdiction to execute penance. You may wear the Captain’s gear right now, but does the Surface recognize your authority?”

Undyne grinned ear to ear. “Hah! Are you forgetting someone? I’m gonna take your case to the King! He’ll give you what you deserve, and free Sans once and for all!”

“‘Free Sans’?” replied Gaster. “As I had gathered, you’re not as bright as Grillby. You will only incriminate him further. The Core Incident happened because Sans sabotaged it! He knows. We know. Why do you think his dear parents are so defensive over this subject?”

The confrontation was interrupted by an untimely shriek. Undyne recognized that it belonged to Papyrus.

“Oh god, not now Paps--” She muttered.
Too late. Papyrus in his full extrovert glory barged into the dining room. He’s dressed in his ‘battle costume’ and equipped with a sling bag, ready to go somewhere.

“UNDYNE, WE NEED TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL RIGHT NOW! FRISK IS SICK AND I CAN’T BELIEVE WE NEVER REALISED IT! NO WONDER THEY’VE BEEN QUIET.”

Mettaton gestured from the back that Papyrus had tried to phone Frisk. And thus, the secret was broken forever.

“ONCE I PACK THE SOUP, WE’RE LEAVING! I HAVE ASKED ALPHYSIS TO GET THE SHORTEST ROUTE THERE WITH HER ONLINE MAP THINGY. AND OF COURSE, THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL DRIVE! NO MORE DELAYS! DAYLIGHT IS WANING!”

The tensed scenario completely flew over the young skeleton’s head. Maybe Papyrus did recognize the tension, but the idea of visiting his best human friend in their time of need took priority above all else.


Opportunity. Gaster grabbed it for his life’s worth and played to Papyrus’ tune. “Oh, a friend had taken ill? Mind if I come along?”

Papyrus being Papyrus, will only give one answer: “SURE, UNCLE GASTER! I’M VERY SURE THEY’LL BE DELIGHTED TO MEET YOU. AND MOM! AND DAD!”

“Papyrus, no.” Undyne objected. She kept throwing glances at Gaster just in case he tried to flee. “He’s under arrest! Meaning, I’m capturing him.”

He took a moment to digest her statement. Then, he said, “ALL THE MORE WHY YOU MUST BRING UNCLE GASTER ALONG! THAT WAY, YOU CAN KEEP A WATCHFUL EYE ON HIM AT ALL TIMES. ALSO YOUR COOL ARMOUR WILL CHEER FRISK UP!”

With his message given, Papyrus hurried off to the kitchen. Mettaton decided to follow his fan. Whatever went down with Gaster was too heated even for a star like him.

Undyne growled. “You lucky bastard…”

No choice but to listen to her pupil, she whisked away her spear.

The elder skeleton then got up with a certain smugness in his smile, temporarily freed from her pointy threats.

“It appears there are more urgent matters to attend to.” He said, “Fret not, Captain Undyne. You will soon appreciate my expertise.”

Chapter End Notes

Today's anime reference is Mushishi Zoku Shou episode 6. If you know, good. If you don't know, you may want to check that episode out. Very beautiful yet it's really messed up.

Undyne still thinks through the lens of anime. It's only natural because anime IS inspired
by reality to some extent. More serious works touch on very real human realities.

And also, she's technically living in some form of anime. It's a world of magic. Some fantastical science will definitely be their reality.

Also I won't be surprised if Gaster is now further despised in both the setting and the reader's impressions heheheh.

Onwards to Goatparents.

P.S Papyrus definitely knows what's happening. He's not dumb. He just have a very different logic path, and that's not an euphemism.
Once King

Chapter Notes

I just realised that I've not written an Asgore POV, so here you go.

Because this is Asgore's POV, it'll be one of those rare times that Frisk have proper dialogue text.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Good news greeted the couple this morning. Frisk’s fever had subsided overnight. They could be discharged tomorrow, provided no negative changes happen throughout Saturday.

The monster parents rejoiced. Toriel immediately dialled a specific number on her phone, eager to deliver the good news.

Except, nobody answered. Again and again she called that number. Yet, nothing.

Maybe he’s asleep? He was not quite a morning person.

Afternoon rolled by. Silence followed.
Then early evening. Still no answer.

By now, the Sun had almost set. They had one incoming call from Papyrus, but Sans… he never answered Toriel’s calls.

Their child grew worried too. Frisk was wise beyond their years. The usual tricks that would soothe other children didn’t work on them.

“I’m sure Sans will be fine,” said the goat father. “He can take care of himself. Contrary to his um, usual habits.”

Frisk squinted their already-small eyes in suspicion, but in the end they realised that nothing could be done. All they could do now was to hope and trust.

Toriel excused herself out of the ward. Maybe the phone reception wasn’t good inside, so she decided to try the corridors.

Left alone with his newest child, Asgore asked, “Would you like something to drink?”


“I think I saw some of those in one of the vending machines. Would that satisfy your cravings?”

Frisk nodded.

“If you need anything else, do not hesitate to phone me. Alright?”

A thumbs up from the kid. Ah, how cute.
So Asgore left the ward and headed towards the elevator lobby. He greeted the Magi guards along the way.

He chose to take the long route, selecting the button to where there was an alternative route to the cafeteria. His soft, fluffy presence attracted a tad too much attention. As much as he loved children, he didn’t want to make Frisk wait.

Just as he entered, his phone chimed. It’s a message from Undyne.

It read:

Asgore, I got some bad news. One of our old cases came back burning hot. I’m bringing the suspect to you right now. I know a hospital is probably not the best place, but it’s the only way I can keep Papyrus and the suspect in check at the same time.

Asgore walked straight out of the elevator the moment the door opened. He was too preoccupied to notice that he exited on the wrong floor.

Uh. Yeah. Sorry. She wrote, Paps phoned Frisk, and I guess you heard him screaming over the phone already? Apparently he’s AOK. No more weird eye magic going haywire. At least I’m sure that we’re not gonna crash.

Alphys and Mettaton are tagging along too. So, this is also a Frisk Friendship Team visit.

See you there.

The tiny device in his humongous hands made replying a bit difficult. Maybe he should have bought the larger devices, one more suitable for his size?

Midway his reply, he was interrupted by a string of expletives. It came from a doctor pacing around in circles with a phone to his ear.

Whatever troubled him so much, he didn’t notice the presence of a very large white fluffy monster.

“Judge Mezil, my work is compromised!” exclaimed the doctor. “Someone snuck into my office and rummaged through my files! …Wait. Are you serious? Keep it quiet? What? You’re telling me that you know the culprit? Oh… so they won’t plagiarize my research? W-well if you say so, I guess there is nothing to worry about.”

Asgore glanced to the nearest nameplates. ‘Neurology’. He had no idea what it meant, but it was definitely not the way to the canteen.

He backed away in silence. Should the poor doctor caught wind of his presence, he would be even more troubled. The Fluffybuns didn’t want that.

“Are you going to make sure Judge Cenna won’t find out the truth? I’m so dead if she knew I slipped up. She might just, I dunno, hang me upside down?”

The ex-king’s ears twitched. Secrets shouldn’t surprise him anymore. Just one look at the lady and he knew that Cenna hid plenty. What caught his attention was the fact that a fraction of truth resided in such close proximity.

Whatever it was, he decided to leave the doctor to his own conversation. Asgore backed off and returned to the elevator lobby. This time, he went to the correct floor and bought a packet of pretzel sticks from the vending machine.
Then it’s back to the ward.

His wife had yet to return from her attempts. But, Cenna hung out with Frisk. The dark-skinned woman showed off some string art with her magic-based drones.

She drew a picture of a cat on the table, sleeping next to a ball of yarn.

Frisk’s face lit up with delight at the cute picture. Out of curiosity, they picked up a loop of the magic string from the cat’s tail. Tugged it a bit.

Doing so made it go ‘twang’.

“Strong, huh?” said Cenna. “But mine’s puny compared to some of my colleagues. They could make like, industrial cables. Real handy in rescue operations. Emergencies only though.”

Perhaps that was the reason why the doctor feared that she’d hang him upside down.

“Oh,” Asgore smiled. “Looks like you two are having fun.”

He passed the packet to Frisk.

“Thanks, Dad.” They ripped the packet in no time. After taking one stick for themselves, the kid offered it to their aunt and adoptive father. “Want one?”

“Sure!” The cool aunt plucked out one stick from the bag. After looking at it she groaned. “Ah c’mon, all the salt flakes are gone from this stick.”

“I’d like to try one too.” He had seen and heard of these salty treats, but he had yet to try.

…If he could even grab them in the first place. The opening of the bag was too small for his large hands to comfortably fit. In the end, Frisk had to take one out for him.

Asgore rubbed the back of his head out of embarrassment. “Why thank you, my child.”

His first bite into the snack tingled his mouth with a strange flavour. It made his eyes cross over each other and his lips pucker.

Frisk and Cenna both covered their mouth, chuckling away. They knew this would happen. First-timer’s reaction.

The confused monster then said, “D-did I just bite into salty soap?”

Cenna grinned as she answered, “Thaaaat’s probably the lye.”

“Lye?!” Asgore gasped. “Isn’t that a cleaning agent? Aren’t they toxic?” He remembered using some for a stubborn burn on his stove once. As far as he could remember, they were caustic solutions.

“They could be. Only if they’re concentrated. Food-grade stuff is diluted tons for safe consumption.”

It still left him confused and perplexed. To him, this flavour was not pleasant. “H-how did they end up as ingredients in the first place?”

“Preservation,” answered Cenna. “Unlike magic edibles, physical foodstuff decay over time. Our ancestors experimented with ways to prevent rotting. Some of the discoveries were accidental. Some, well. ‘Necessity is the mother of inventions’, as we say.”
“That’s… quite a stretch of imagination.” Monsterkind would never think of preserving food with such a substance. Any of their known ancient techniques were lost in the Underground anyway. Materials in the ‘down below’ were very different from the ‘up above’.

In the end, Asgore gave his half-eaten pretzel stick to Frisk. The child was fond of the strange taste. Maybe that’s why they could tolerate Papyrus’ spaghetti?

Time to wash the bad taste away with some good-old goldenflower tea. He learned to sew tea bags while he’s on the Surface, allowing him to prepare his favourite brew ahead of time.

After boiling some water from his electric kettle, he poured them into his trusty teapot.

Cenna rose her brows, curious. “You always have that tea around. What is it?”

“Goldenflower tea,” Asgore answered. “Would you like to have some?”

“Goldenflower? Like, ‘Ebott Goldenflower’?”

“Yes.” What else could they be, if they’re named after the mountain itself?

Her eyes widened in amazement. “Whoa, I didn’t know you can make tea out of those!”

“You don’t? Oh dear, you’re missing out.”

That must be rectified. He took out some extra plastic cups from his backpack and made three servings of his favourite drink.

Cenna took a sip, and her mind was blown away. “Daaaaaang, they’re good. I bet if we add honey, they’re gonna be even better! Mezil will love these. He’s a big fan of teas.”

“Too bad Ebott Goldenflowers are rare-ish nowadays.” The Magus took another sip. “Their original habitat got destroyed in a huge fire. What’s left were the samples we had in botanical gardens. Or small plots from plant enthusiasts. They’re hard to grow outside of their native earth.”

“Oh? How strange,” remarked Asgore. “I have a field of these at my throne room. All they required were some watering and pruning, nothing more. They sow themselves and seem to bloom eternal.”

Frisk’s brows furrowed as they thought over this predicament. Then they asked, “Do you think it’s because of magic? There are lots of Echo Flowers down there, and they never grow on the Surface.”

For a prison, Mount Ebott was strangely accommodative. Many of the shelters were already built by their forefathers in the pre-Sealing days. As they explored deeper, they found all four seasons nestled underneath.

“That could be so, my child.” Asgore replied. “Hmm… what are your opinions, Cenna?”

“I ain’t a botanist,” she chuckled. “But yeah, I’ll pass that info to my peers. Learn something new every day, huh?”

Just as they were having a calm evening with warm tea, a car flew past the ward’s window. The only clue Asgore had was a brief buzz of magic before it whizzed out of reception.

And he was sure that he’s at least eight floors off the ground. If not more.

“…What.” Cenna blinked her amber eyes a few times. “Did you just see what I see?”

Frisk replied with the straightest of faces. “A glowing blue car driven by a skeleton with a blazing
orange eye, ferrying terrified passengers that consist of a fish, a lizard, and a robot?"

“I’m amazed your eyes are as sharp as mine, Frisky.”

Frisk shook their head. “Nah. Just a lucky guess.”

Defying expectations, the bizarre display did not follow up by the crunching of crashing metal. Asgore knew that Papyrus was a good driver, but he’s also apparently a competent ‘pilot’.

Asgore opened the window to take a peek. Not too much to let the winter air in, but enough to look outside.

Papyrus’ iconic red car had landed in one of the outdoor parking lots nearby. It sat snug in their proper boundaries, as if he drove it there himself.

Listen hard enough and he could hear Undyne’s screams.

She said: “Oh my god, Papyrus you’re NEVER gonna do that again! EVER!”

“BUT UNDYNE,” the young skeleton replied, “YOU WERE HAVING FUN! AND TRAFFIC CONGESTIONS ARE TERRIBLE. I FEEL YOUR FIERY DESIRE TO SUPLEX THE CAR IN FRONT OF US.”

“Not with five passengers! When did you even have enough magic to lift a freaking CAR in the first place???”

Out of the ‘five’, Asgore saw a face that he had not seen for years.

“…Gaster…?” he muttered.

Memories flooded back. Ones he didn’t realise that he had forgotten. It seemed like yesterday that the Royal Scientist first greeted him as a polite ten-year-old.

King Asgore remembered the days where magic prevailed ahead of science. Gaster’s parents dressed him up in the formal clothes of the old Council, though the organization no longer existed by the time the child was born.

He was the youngest of his generation. Therefore, the only one to live to modern days.

Was this the person who made a cold case hot once more? Asgore hoped not. He had watched the sheepish youngster grow into a man of unbreakable resolution, while inheriting all the graceful ways of his parents.

The day Asgore first stained his hands with the blood of a child still haunted him. As he delivered their SOUL over to the Royal Scientist, the then-King apologized for pushing the burden of research onto others.

But Gaster said:

“Your Majesty, please do not apologize. I swear an oath to never let your sacrifice be in vain. My weight is nothing compared to your pain.”

“We will break the Barrier. We will escape. We will have justice.”

“We will be free.”
Determination burned in the Seer’s eyes. Gaster was not the easiest child to raise, but no one could deny that he had a vision.

Asgore closed the window and turned towards his child. “My child, could you stay here for a moment? I need to guide your friends.”

Frisk nodded. They understand that if left to their own devices, that team might get kicked out of the hospital on grounds of being ‘too loud’.

“I’m going too,” said Cenna. “Gotta give the new faces approval before my guards start questioning.”

Toriel sat down at the bench outside, still dialing the number of her friend. Her attempts remained fruitless.

“Undyne and her friends are here,” said Asgore.

“Is Sans with them?” Toriel’s eyes lit up in hope. Hope that would soon be dashed.

“Sorry madam,” Cenna replied. “Didn’t see the blue shorty when the car flew past the window.”

“…What?” Even for monsters, the idea of a flying car deserved to be under the ‘bizarre’ category.

Asgore cleared his throat to catch some attention. “E-excuse me. I think we should go and meet them post-haste.”

Cenna sent her guards to wait inside together with Frisk. Asgore noticed that she made sure that at least one person was in the child’s sight at any time.

Such arrangements were not the case yesterday. Perhaps she had heard of the hospital break-in?

At the main lobby, Undyne and her gang were there. Plus an extra someone. The entourage of five monsters made every human in the vicinity to stop and watch.

The crowd immediately recognized Mettaton. He’s the most public face of Ebott.

“It’s Mettaton!”
“Oh my god it’s Mettaton!”
“Really? Not a lookalike? This is the real deal?”

Some of the more internet savvy folks recognized Undyne.

“It’s Undyne!”
“Ohemgeeohemgee that’s The Suplex Queen!”
“Man, she looks so damn cool in armour!”

Intimidated by the attention, Alphys more or less glued herself to Undyne’s legs. The shipping fans cheered.

“Oh she’s so cute!”
“Cute couple alert!”
“You mean The Suplex Queen already has her princess?”

Gaster tried his best to look solid in front of all the curious-eyed humans, amused by their positive reception.
“Whoa, look at that guy. Isn’t he a skeleton?”
“He’s so dapper, tuxedo and all!”
“I didn’t know the monster folks got such classic tastes.”

Papyrus happily waved at his former rulers. Then… he squinted at Cenna. The tall skeleton wasted no time to run straight up to her.

“OH MY GOD! MISS AUNT, HOW IN THE WORLD DID YOU LOSE ANOTHER HP?? AT THIS RATE YOU’RE GONNA TURN INTO A TALL GIRLY SANS!”

Cenna cringed and immediately put a finger on her lips. “Shhhh Papyrus, too many people here. Um yes, I lost another HP. Shame, right? Don’t worry, I’ll be okay in Spring.”

In typical Papyrus fashion, he shoved a flask of soup into her hands.

“NEVER FEAR!” He declared. “DRINK THE GREAT PAPYRUS’ SUPER EXTRA NOURISHING PUMPKIN CARROT SOUP AND YOU WILL REGAIN YOUR VITALITY! IT WORKED FOR MY BROTHER. WELL. HE DIDN’T GAIN A HP, BUT HE BECAME SUPER ENERGETIC!”

Toriel immediately asked, “Papyrus, where’s Sans?”

Never would the Dreemurrs expect to see a silent, downcast Papyrus before them.

“Did something happen to him?” Toriel pressed further, close to panic.

“…SANS…” the youngster answered in half of his usual volume. “HE’S ALIVE. JUST, HE HAD A VERY BAD TIME WITH UNCLE GASTER.”

Toriel gave the poor lad a warm hug of consolation.

“I’ll talk to him, alright?” she said.

“THANK YOU.”

From what Asgore could recall, Gaster had an uneasy relationship with his protege. Both were too alike, yet too different. It got worse in the later half of their lives. After Sans’ graduation, in particular.

The short one handed in a letter of resignation. Asgore understood that he wanted to quit his training and revive his father’s hotdog business.

The then-King agreed. As much as he needed a Tactician for the campaign, Asgore was… too soft to reject. To him, the happiness of his citizens mattered more than his regretful ambitions. He will take full responsibility for the charge, as it should have been from the beginning.

But…

One night later, both men changed. Sans withdrew his resignation. Gaster had wandered off the straight and narrow.

Asgore found himself helpless once more.

Will that the same happen here?

Mettaton kept the crowd busy with his celebrity skills. That allowed Undyne to slip away from view and bring Gaster before the King.
She bowed and said: “Your Majesty, I bring you the true culprit behind The Core Incident. The huge quake happened thanks to his experiment.”

Just as Asgore had feared, Gaster was the suspect.

“It was an accident,” the scientist begrudgingly muttered.

Toriel locked her infamous glare on the scientist. He immediately shrank from it. Worse still, Papyrus just told her that he had done something to hurt Sans.

The ex-Queen warned, “Do not try to dismiss anything, W. D. Gaster.” She was far from happy.

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Toriel commanded so much respect that she had turned this willful man into a good little boy.

Asgore sensed an increase in tension from Cenna. Her fists were tight, and her breathing deepened.

It had the signs of personal pain. He placed his hand on Cenna’s shoulder to calm her down.

Addressing to his citizens, Asgore said. “Let’s settle this in private, shall we? Is there a meeting room that we can borrow?”

After couple of deep breaths, Cenna placed her hand on her hat. She tried hard to not show her turmoil of emotions. “Nawh, there ain’t any spare meeting rooms for the public. But. We could use Frisky’s ward as one. We’ll just need to take the kid elsewhere for a while.”

Papyrus already volunteered himself. “I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL FEED DELICIOUS SOUP TO OUR DEAR HUMAN FRIEND!”

“The same one you gave me?” Cenna asked back.

“YES!”

She grinned. “Great idea. King Asgore, shall we appoint him as leader for Team Frisky?”

Asgore noted that since their duel, the lady Magus had a certain fondness for the tall skeleton.

“Very well,” he said. “Papyrus, you’ll accompany Frisk until the meeting is over. Bring along anyone you wish.”

Papyrus immediately sparkled in both joy and enthusiasm. “WOWIE! ANOTHER SPECIAL REQUEST FROM THE KING! YES, I WILL ALSO BE THE BEST COMPANION IN THE WORLD.”

“LEAVE IT ALL TO ME, NYEH HEH HEH!”

Chapter End Notes

Truestory.jpg about the pretzel sticks. To some people the lye tastes like salty soap. Technically correct because lye is a major component in soaps.

Also ENJOY THE FLYING CAR! Mettaton is having a time of his life, I’d think. So much adventure during his break hahaha.
Nobody crosses Toriel. Nobody.
**Strength**

Chapter Notes

Just a note that Papyrus in the Golden Quiche specialises in the physical arts (magic, cooking, signs). He's still terrible with academic subjects and puzzles. He seriously cannot.jpg puzzles despite loving them. Poor fella.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Contrary to your expectations, the soup was delicious. Freaking. Delicious. And you didn’t even think you’d like bone marrow in the first place.

“How are you feeling now, my dear human?” asked Papyrus. He’s extremely worried for you.

You told him that you’re getting better. The doctors said you could go home tomorrow if all goes well.

“Thank goodness!” he exclaimed. “I thought you might not recover without my sparkling support.”

Humans don’t work like that, but you appreciate the sentiment. You asked him where did he get the soup from.

“I made it with my two boney hands!”

You were skeptical.

Alphys then explained, “Papyrus found a super-good cooking teacher on Friday. Ever since then, he’s whipping up some real gourmet stuff!”

Mettaton whistled at that thought. “Oh yesss! You should have seen the teacher totally grilling Undyne darling. So intense, yet so classy."

So this was the magic of Papyrus’ brand food if he had proper lessons. Farewell ‘Badghetti’, you will never be missed!

After you finished your soup in the canteen, Papyrus, Mettaton and Alphys took you to the playroom. Sick or healthy, children will want to play. It distracted them from their illness and helped them recover.

The sole condition was that no patients with infectious diseases can enter. Since you weren’t infectious, you were given a pass.

Once you entered, you understood why. There were many patients who’re far weaker than you. Terminal illnesses and the like.

Alphys had read up about basic human diseases. She made sure everyone washed their hands before making their entry. You included. Don’t want to pass anything from the outside now.
As you had expected, your friends were an instant hit with the children.

Mettaton gave the more able bodied kids an impromptu dance class. Nothing too extreme of course. He had learned quite a bit of children’s songs during his travels, and he had a good idea of their physical limits.

“It doesn’t matter if you miss the beat, darlings~” said the glam bot. “All it matters is that you have splendid FUN! Move that sweet, sweet body! Laugh! Oh yesss~~~”

Some of the children tried to follow, but they eventually gave up. Papyrus to the rescue!

“YOU SHOULD JOIN IN THE FUN!” he said.

They stared back at him in puzzlement. You then realised what’s going on.

You explained to Papyrus that those kids were deaf, and thus they cannot hear the music or his encouraging words.

“OH? THAT’S SO VERY SAD. HOW CAN I DELIVER MY BOLSTERING SPEECH TO THOSE WITH NO EARS?”

Sign language, you answered. One of the parents demonstrated the methods to him.

“WOWIE! HUMANS KNOW HOW TO SPEAK THE CODE TOO? ACTUALLY, IT’S QUITE DIFFERENT, BUT I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, IS A FAST LEARNER!”

‘The Code’? Just what happened while you were away?

Nonetheless, Papyrus lived up to his claims. He picked up the human’s sign language as if it was his second nature. Before long, he started cheering up the group of deaf children in signs. You wonder if he’s secretly a genius or something.

Alphys was more comfortable talking to the parents. She learned more about the children’s condition, and in turn she educated the adults about monsterkind.

Her attention turned towards a small, scrawny boy with twisted limbs. “Oh dear… What’s wrong with him?”

A lady nurse explained, “Cerebral palsy. He has quite the serious case. His biological parents abandoned him soon after birth. So my husband and I ended up adopting him.”

The boy made a happy gurgle. He’s amused by Alphys’ presence, moving his arms around in an attempt to touch her scales.

She reached out her hand. He immediately tried to latch unto her. How cute.

“Ma’am, is it okay if I check the colour of his SOUL?”

“Soul?” The nurse replied.

“Yup! It’s a culmination of his being. The colour that shines represent his strongest trait.”

“Is it invasive?”

“Not at all,” Alphys replied. “I just need to draw it out with a tiny bit of magic.”
Once the nurse approved, Alphys tapped his chest. You watched in awe as an orange light floated upwards.

The boy’s SOUL was as malformed as his body, lopsided and twisted around the edges. It was quite a sad sight.

Though, the kid and his mom didn’t think so. Their faces shone in wonder as they stared at the warm glow.

“Oooh!” Alphys exclaimed. “Orange is the colour of Bravery. He’s got guts! He’s very strong inside, ma’am. That’s good news.”

The boy squealed in joy. He reached out for the SOUL and hugged it. Then the mom started to weep. Perhaps, knowing that her child wasn’t so weak brought some much-needed encouragement.

Everyone had fun. The parents and staff members clapped their hands to the music while watching the antics of the little ones.

Midway through, you felt the urge to go to the loo. You should have done that before entering the playroom. Oops.

You told Papyrus that you needed to excuse yourself.

“OKAY FRISK!” He said, “IF YOU GET LOST, CALL ME. I’LL GO PICK YOU UP!”

Doubt that you would get lost. But okay. Off you went to the nearest toilet. It was supposed to be a normal routine of doing your business and washing up.

Then…

“You think you’re the one in control?”

Your head felt dizzy. Light. You almost fell down on the cold, toilet floor.

“Now now, you don’t want to get hurt before the big fight. Right?”

Chara hijacked your body. You never imagined it was possible!

“Oh, you think I didn’t learn anything from all those RESETs? You and I share memories you know. Eventually I figured out that if you’re sick, I can control you much easier.”

“Well… I couldn’t have done this without you in the first place. I was just lying around in the flowerbed being dead. Then you fell from the sky.”

“I was so confused. Left by my own devices, I don’t have enough Determination to become a DEMON. But then, I realised… it’s destiny. Fate. You will be the vessel of my reincarnation. Or rather ‘should’ be.”

“Frisk, you were doing so, so well. We had almost gathered enough power to destroy the world. You and I. Give everyone true, eternal peace.”

You watch Chara pilot your body out of the toilet. Instead of heading back to the playroom, they went the other way.

To the elevator lobby.
“Then you just had to RESET. Hmph. The people of my village would have called you a weakling.”

Again and again you tried to regain control of your body. It worked just for a few seconds before Chara shoved you aside.

“Why? Why are you such a chicken? You’re supposed to be THE Determinator! The hero of legends, the superpower! And yet you just threw it all away for some dumb school-life drama. Are you serious?”

Right. Getting repeatedly kidnapped not exciting enough for you, Chara?

“That’s exactly the POINT!” They snapped back at you. “You got kidnapped because you’re weak! Frisk, are you an idiot? Can’t you see it? If you followed my way, you would have won. You would have stabbed all those bloody humans who tried.”

And land yourself in juvie?? You scoffed. By now you knew that Chara’s sense of planning tended to be rather shortsighted.

Chara growled at you. Good. It’s about time that you riled them up. You’re sick and tired of their twisted logic.

“We beat Sans, c’mon! Mister Smiley Trashbag? After dunno how many goddamn tries we finally, finally, FINALLY slashed him in half! Dammit, I still remember the sheer frustration just boiling over even after the fight.”

You agreed. Any satisfaction from defeating him was short lived. He’s the master of ‘bad time’, and bad it was. Unfair. Cheating. Frustrating. That was his point.

That’s why you believed him in the end.

“Hah! You’re just like all the other humans. You’re scared of ‘The End’, but still wanted to continue the ‘game’. You and your twisted sentimentality.”

“Today, we’re gonna end this drama for good. Everyone’s here. And there’s no Smiley Trashbag getting in the way.”

It took a long while, but eventually an elevator arrived.

Chara pressed the cafeteria button.

No.
No no no no no no no!

You knew exactly where they wanted to go. What they wanted to do.

You fired up your Determination, but you still couldn’t wrestle back control.

“Don’t you get it, Frisk? I share YOUR Determination: the harder you struggle, the stronger I’ll be!”

The kitchen was a busy, busy place. Adults run to and fro, preparing to serve dinner. Looks like Chara can’t just waltz right in.
“Heh. You think I’m gonna get ourselves busted now? You forget the convenience of humanity.”

Chara detoured away from the kitchen.
You find yourself standing in front of a fire alarm.

Oh no. No. Please don’t do that. It’s a terrible, terrible idea.

They smashed it anyway.

The fire alarm went off. People started vacating the premises. Soon, the adults no longer occupied the kitchen.

That’s when they slipped inside.

“Aaah, look at that. Knife heaven. Long ones, short ones, big ones, small ones. Every shape and size to choose from. This is what I call a treasure trove.”

You watched on in horror as Chara rummaged the area for the perfect knife.

“Cleavers are nice, but we’re too young to use it right. Nah. This one is too heavy. Hmm, if only this is a little longer. Nope, bread knives are just too difficult to hide.”

You hoped that they would never find a suitable knife. Alas, that did not happen.

Chara found a paring knife. Judging from it’s glisten, a chef had just sharpened it. It’s small enough to fit into your pants pocket.

“Now, to get out of here and hide. They’ll figure out the alarm’s a fake soon enough.”

“Then we can kill everyone. We know their tactics, their tricks, their every move. If you forgot, then pass the controls to me; I remember everything.”

Where else to go other than under the cafeteria tables? If anyone found you, Chara would act cute and pretend to be some lost, and frightened kid.

……………………………

Why? You asked again.
Was their life on the Surface so bad?

Chara remained silent for a while.

“No one would love me unless I’m good enough,” they said.

“I always had to be stronger than the other kid. Smarter. Faster. If I don’t become a ‘Golden Quiche’, I might as well not exist.”

“I thought that maybe if I try to throw myself into Mount Ebott, someone would notice me. The humans didn’t care. Funny enough, I ended up with the family of my dreams.”

“The monsterfolk were the first who loved me for who I am. Knowing their history disgusted me. Sealing all them for eternity just because they’re different… typical racist human logic.”
Why did Chara laugh over Dad’s buttercup incident?

“Are you an idiot? You’ve never laughed in the face of fear before? Keeps you… strong.”

So they were afraid after all. So frightened that they resorted to some twisted coping skill.

Chara paused for a moment.

“It started out as a joke. Playing on one of Mom’s dumb puns. Then, I realised… buttercups are poisonous. I had one of those big eureka moments. The surest way to kill myself! Nobody had to stain their hands. Nobody would know what happened.”

Then, what about taking Chara’s corpse into dangerous territory?

“Asriel wouldn’t believe me when I told him that my village was all filled with assholes. So. I made sure he’d feel my pain. Live. Without any room for doubt.”

They made your body curl up, hugging your knees while you continued your talk under the table.

“(… Except Asriel chickened out. Just like you. I felt betrayed. Maybe monsters are no different than humans after all.”

“Didn’t your aunt say we’re like, distant cousins? Your short blue skelly friend pretty much proved the point that monsters can be as brutal as humanity. How can you guarantee they won’t turn into twisted jerks like us?”

“Maybe they already are.”

“By the way. Your aunt. Or rather, your big sister: she’s dying, you know.”

You remained silent.

“Don’t tell me you didn’t notice? I knew it the moment her arm went haywire. My village had someone like that once. It started out with those jerky movements. Then, as the years went by, they turned into a ‘vegetable’. No different than a living corpse.”

“They were pretty much stuffed into an institution to die. Never gave them a proper funeral either.”

‘Vegetable’ was a term for the brain dead or those unable to respond. In a way, it was a worse state than the kid with cerebral palsy you had met earlier.

“‘Survival of the fittest’, ‘kill or be killed’, that’s the paramount truth for my village. After all, we’re supposed to be some front-line defenders against a monster apocalypse.”

“Idiots. Morons. All of them.”

You asked Chara what do they want?

“I just want everything to be done and over with.”

Does that mean they wanted peace?

Chara couldn’t answer.
The both of you heard a drip to your left. It caught your attention, and thus you turned your head.

Black.

The colour of ink dripped down the table towards your left.

“What the heck was that?” Chara asked.

You had no damn idea.

The drips turned into a cascade, rolling down the table’s edge. The puddle of inky substance built upwards into the form of a slender, shapely cylinder. It reminded you of a vase.

Chara started to laugh.
Nervously.
Fearfully.

The dark liquid bent forward. Then, you saw bits of white breaking the pattern of ever-flowing black.

Hands. Skeletal hands.

When the mysterious ever-flowing creature reached down far enough, he locked a pair of shimmering eyes at you.

Right, orange.
Left, cyan.

The Eyes of another Seer stared through every fiber of your being. His piercing gaze went deeper than Sans ever bothered.

Chara’s influence evaporated in an instant. They hid behind you, cowering yet laughing at the same time.

One blink later, the mystery skeleton’s eyes returned to their default white state.

“Oh, there you are Frisk.” He said. His voice reminded you of posh gentlemen. “Your parents were very worried about you. The fire alarm went off, and here you are, too frightened to move.”

You recognized this skeleton, and thus you called him by his name.

Gaster.

“Have we met?” he asked back.

After a thought, you explained to him that you had walked through a wall once. You found him grinning to himself in an empty chamber.

“Aaah, I remember now. I was watching a fine piece of documentary at that moment. Apologies if there were… misunderstandings.”

Chara freaked out. “Oh god oh god Frisk stop you can’t trust this guy he’s an Amalgamate and they can’t be killed he’ll kill you he’ll kill you he’ll--!”

Calm. Please.
Leave all the talking business to you, okay? You’re the professional here.
“Fine! Okay! Just make him go away!”

He had to be serious business if his mere presence instilled terror inside Chara.

You asked Gaster if he’s a Seer.

“So… you know about us?” He seemed impressed. “You are quite a fellow if you had gained the trust of my protégé, Sans.”

“ARE YOU FUCKING SERIOUS? THIS GUY IS THAT TRASHBAG’S TEACHER?? THAT’S A THOUSAND PERCENT WORSE!”

In your mind, you told Chara to just freaking chill. You can’t work your talking magic over all that screaming.

Also, you made sure that you tucked that RESET button under your shirt. Figuratively speaking. You’re determined to have this conversation no matter what.

You asked Gaster an innocent question. Were there more special skeletons in the Underground society?

“Oh no,” Gaster replied. “Sans, Papyrus, and myself are the last of our kind. Only those descended from human bones have the potential to become a Seer. I’m sure you had seen the other skeletons of Ebott, but none of them are in the form of humans.”

No wonder. That sucks. You thought that you could make friends with more awesome-powered skeletons. Always fun to have them around.

The old skeleton chuckled with a sweet smile. See, Chara? He’s not some unreasonable creepo. Stop freaking out.

“… Mind if I join you under the table for a while?” Gaster asked. “A nice private chat before all the ruckus.”

Despite Chara’s protest, you shuffled to make space for the liquid skeleton. He sunk himself down into the puddle until he could just slide in.

Even as half a man, he was still full of class.

So he began, “You see, Frisk. I once made a terrible mistake. A costly one. The King and Queen insisted that I make amends. No more running away, no more denial, just pure honesty.”

How does this relate to you?

“I killed your parents. By accident.”

You gasped.

“If you refuse to forgive me, that’s fine. It is what I deserve. But, I must at least apologize to you. You see, long ago I had a mission: to break the Barrier and bring monsterkind to a new era of glory. Well. Instead, I caused a massive quake.”

Aunt Cenna said your parents died on the job. A quake happened and they got caught in it.

The whole ordeal happened at Mount Ebott itself. You were amazed, telling Gaster that it had come to a full circle.
“Hm?” He raised a brow at you. “I expected anger. Like your aunt.”

You didn’t know your parents. It’s hard to feel personal pain because of that.

Sure, their deaths meant you had a less-than-stellar life as an orphan. Missed out on a whole ton of childhood, and maybe it would affect you psychologically for life.

You can’t bring yourself to hate Gaster, though. The whole event was an accident, as he had said. He just wanted to help his people. You understood the dire conditions of the Underground. After all, you had experienced them in more ways than one.

They may have enough food and water, but they lived on knowing that they’re trapped for life.

Maybe forever.

It’s depressing.

So, you forgive Gaster for your parents’ death.

You astonished the old bony goop. That’s some achievement.

“… I can see how you defrosted Sans’ heart,” so he said. “In many ways, you’re much like his beloved brother. I can tell it didn’t come from mere naivete: despite knowing pain, you chose to forgive.”

Sounds just about right.

“I hope Papyrus can learn such integrity from you.”

You shook your head. Then, you explained that you had instead learned forgiveness from Papyrus.

There was a time when you were bad. Yet, he always believed you could change. Even at your worst.

He never gave up on you.

Gaster laughed in joy. His being rippled along with every ‘ha’ he uttered.

“Bless his sweet, sweet soul!” He said, “Very well then… will you forgive Sans? He had failed you in more ways than one.”

You answered without skipping a heartbeat. Of course you will forgive him. Despite his cynical lazybone self, he’s still your special friend.

… You instead wished that he could forgive himself. People like him tend to be the most self-critical.

Gaster looked sad when you mentioned that. Maybe guilty. “That is true.”

Please be nice to him, you said.

“Uh. It will take time, I suppose. I, he, we… it’s complicated. I’m not sure if I’m ready for reconciliation yet.”

Don’t wait until it’s too late, Gaster. That’s what you told him.

“My, my, my. I had never expected to be lectured by a human child. But. I will consider your advice.
You are as wise as they say. A little above your age scope, don’t you think?

People had started to return to the cafeteria. Life will resume as normal, albeit somewhat annoyed thanks to Chara’s antics.

The old skeleton offered a hand to you, just like a gentleman would do.

“It’s time to return to your ward, young one,” he said. “It’s been quite a hectic day. I’m very sure you’d want some rest. You have a long night ahead of you…”

You accepted his offer. It surprised you that his hands were solid bones despite his form.

He slid out of the table, guiding you out of the cafeteria.

Chara then said: “If you ditch that knife, I'll RESET. There’s no damn way I’m staying defenseless with that guy around!”

Duly noted.

Besides…

You had your own plans.

Chapter End Notes

The plot thickens.

We're almost at the first checkpoint of the endgame. There are three checkpoints by the way. And it'll take a little while longer for things to come fully together.

Yes, my Chara is a yandere. This again follows the Golden Quiche's thematic of worth.

Flowey idolized Chara. It won't surprise me if Chara's non-deity speech is reminiscent of Flowey. Probs where the flower learned 'You IDIOT' from too.
Stardew Valley released. Goodbye life.

I decided to hold this chapter back until 35 is done, so you'll get a full context of what's happening. There will be a few hour gap between the releases though. Reviews and stuff.

Everyone had gone home without an incident. Chara didn’t dare to act with ‘Uncle Gaster’ around. It amused you because they were so confident. If they could kill Sans, they could kill anyone.

Apparently not.

Papyrus being Papyrus, he raved about how his mom and dad are back, now merged with his old family friend.

…You wished that your own parents could be revived the same way. It would be great to meet them. And it would make Aunt Cenna happy.

 Nope. Never gonna happen.

It’s eleven at night. You were dead tired, pun intended.

“Yo Frisky,” said your Aunt. “Wanna have some milk to help you sleep?”

You nodded. But isn’t the cafeteria closed?

“Someone’s gotta go home at the end of their shift, y’know.” She pointed her thumb to one of her colleagues. “Their replacement team will be driving past a 24-hour convenience shop.”

Oh, it could be the same one where Sans bought you your pudding. Alright then, some milk will be great.

You watched your Aunt type her order through the phone. “Aaand there ya go. Milk coming right up! Give it like, an hour maybe?”

Wouldn’t you fall asleep by then?

Aunt Cenna winked at you with a huge grin. “No worries, I’ll keep ya up with some good ol’ pillow talk.”

That totally defeats the point of sleeping early, but okay.

Your Aunt sat down beside your bed. Interestingly enough, it was on the side where Chara hid their knife. She sat so close to you, it was difficult to reach for the hidden weapon.

“Hey,” she said. “Have you ever wondered if there’s someone else ‘out there’ who cares about you?”
Like… space? Aliens?


You told her that you expected her to talk about a deity.

She laughed. “C’mon Frisky, tell me if you ever wondered about that.”

You gave it a thought. Then, you shrugged. It never occurred to you that there would be a generous ninja in the shadows.

Now that you thought about it, perhaps there was someone. Since you were six years old, you remembered receiving a mysterious gift every birthday. Your foster parents told you it’s an anonymous donation.

It was a little too individualized for just a random donation though. Like the striped purple-and-red shirt you’re wearing now. It fits your size just right. More or less.

Your aunt nodded. “Be honest with me with one thing, yeah Frisky? Have any of your fostermates ever got jealous and try to break your gift?”

There was one. When you were eight. It was a cute goat plush. You only enjoyed it for five days before finding it cut up.

You noticed your aunt’s hawk-like eyes twitched in anger. You sensed the all-too-familiar dark aura of someone wanting to give others a bad time.

“Those brats…!” She growled. “I oughtta give them the whoopass of a lifetime!”

Stop. That’s not worth the assault charges. You said that all with a straight face.

“…Yeah. Who cares about a goat plush? Now you got two real goat-parents. A whole family! That’s the ultimate ‘take-that’ if ya ask me.”

Both of you laughed together. You agreed: it’s hard to top the whole goatparents thing.

“You know, Frisky,” said Aunt Cenna. “Can ya believe it’s just been a week since I first strut into Ebott Town? Guns blazing like some cowboy movie. Well. Not literally, but ya get the point.”

Six days and a half to be exact. You told her that she still had about thirteen more hours before hitting the official one week mark.

But, you got the point.

“And here we are, chatting as if we knew each other for a lifetime.”

That’s kinda correct anyway. Aunt Cenna was there when you were born. And she used to babysit you. Might as well be counted as a ‘lifetime’.

Besides, you made friends with the entire Underground in less than a day. One week was slow compared to that.

Your aunt tapped you on the nose. “Sheesh! Seriously, you pumped that Charisma stat waaaay up to the sky.”

If that prevented a war between two races, it’s all worth it.
“Totally.”

Both of you enjoyed each other’s presence in silence. For a moment, anyway. Eventually, you got too curious to keep quiet.

You asked your aunt: why didn’t she proclaim herself as your sister right off the bat?

She was shocked. “Whoa hey hey hey, ain’t that jumping the gun?”

Just a lucky guess.

“By golly, ya pumped all your remaining stat points into Intuition or what?”

You responded with a cheeky grin.

Aunt Cenna took a deep breath and sighed. “Suppose it’s time I explain a bit of your background, eh?”

A bit? Okay, it might be rather late to dump an entire genealogy on your head anyway. So ‘a bit’ was fine.

“It’s because your parents were Magi,” she said.


“Stay with me Frisky, that’s just the tip of the iceberg. Your parents ain’t any random ol’ magicians either! Those two had a long, respectable history. Folks who got stuff done, folks who helped, folks who held important positions at some point or another.”

“But deeds don’t guarantee the name, if you get what I mean. People marry out. Disperse. If folks don’t keep it together, they eventually lose their proof of heritage.”

“Your parents were the only official heirs of their respective lines. So when they died… it’s just you. Me? Yeah, I’m adopted. Under legal definitions, I am the eldest of the line and thus responsible for you. But in reality, I was just a dumb teenager. Too young and immature. I ain’t Sans.”

She paused for a moment. You told her that it’s okay to take her time. It’s quite a painful recollection for her.

“Eh. I’m fine,” said ‘Aunt’ Cenna. You’ll keep that label for familiarity sake. For now.

So she continued: “I had three choices. Become a single parent and put my education on the line. Let another Magus family adopt you. Or hide you in foster care. First point goes without saying, okay? I ain’t Sans. Remember that.”

“If another Magus family adopted you, you’d have a total name change. Maybe even travel outside the country. Your adoptive family will teach you their method of magic, their way of life, and pretty much will make you theirs. You’ll no longer have a chance to carry on your old folks’ name. And, I could never see you again.”

“If I hide you in the foster system, you’d be protected under the guise of a normal kid. I could keep track of your life. Official. Sanctioned. Ain’t stalking. You’d preserve your real name, and thus my status as a legal guardian. I will always be considered your ‘relative’.”

“When you hit the minimum entry age, the Magus Association will invite you to their school. Then, I could become your guardian for real. Both figuratively and literally.”
“…But you and I know life ain’t so simple, right? Everything got thrown upside down. Heh. Now, I trust your Ebott family more than anyone in the world.”

Aunt Cenna crossed her leg and tilted her head back, as if she could see through the ceiling to watch the night stars.

“Your Dad’s right. Being the loser gives you a chance to change. If I had won the duel, I’d be stuck in my ways. A dead end.”

In short, she wouldn’t have a personal relationship with any of your monster friends.

“…Can I ask ya one last question, Frisky?”

What is it?

“What do you trust me?”

You said yes. Your opinions had changed so much since her first appearance.

She’s your big sister after all.

“Thanks. Really needed that.”

Her phone chimed. She checked the message. “Oh lookie, delivery’s here. In a few minutes you’re gonna have a nice carton of fresh milk. Personal size, of course.”

Just as she said, a female colleague knocked on the door of your ward. Aunt Cenna let her in. Her name was ‘Anise’.

Goodness, what’s with Magi and seasoning names? First Caraway, then Thyme, now Anise?

You start to wonder if they were aliases of sorts. It’s impossible to have an entire institution with coincidental surnames fitting a thematic.

Aunt Cenna punched a straw into the box and handed it over to you. “There ya go. Enjoy.”

You started drinking the milk. It was very comforting.

Ahhhhhh~!

Okay. You had heard about milk being a mild relaxant, but for some reason this particular brand made you too relaxed.

You started to get very, very sleepy.

You yawned.
Your eyelids drooped.
You couldn’t think straight anymore.

By the time you finished the contents, your fingers could no longer grip the empty box.

You fell backwards onto your soft pillow. A red glow flooded your eyes, belonging to your SOUL.

“It’ll be okay, Frisky,” said Aunt Cenna. “It’ll all be okay.”

A golden bird stretched its wings, shining bright and yellow like the Sun. Sharpened feathers sliced
through the essence of your being.

You didn’t lose HP. Your SOUL didn’t shatter. Instead, lines of light beamed between hair-thin gaps that you didn’t know existed.

You realised your SOUL had gained partitions.

The partitions of a Magus.

That was the last thing you thought before you fell into dreamless sleep.
Ten at night. Right after the end of the visiting hours.

The group was split into two. Papyrus’ car cannot fit in the two Dreemurrs. He was already at maximum load with his gang.

Gaster followed him back.

Cenna meanwhile arranged a taxi to send the Dreemurrs back. Paid in advance.

The trip itself was as silent as winter.

Gentle snow floated down on as Toriel watched the urban lights of human society pass by. Her thoughts wandered through the frigid weather of this foreign landscape, back into the past…

* * *

Four hours ago, Doctor Gaster finished his extensive testimony of The Core Incident.

The science behind it, the preparations he took, and the people involved. Everything up to the final moment.

Toriel could tell it was subtly biased against Sans. That alone already put her against Gaster, disappointed that he had implicated her dear joke buddy.

Asgore had more authority over this case, however. He was the one who endorsed the project in the first place.

“Hmm, I see. How unfortunate.” Asgore nodded, “There’s not much we can do.”

Undyne crossed her arms. “We can always banish him back to… wherever the hell he got lost in. Lifetime imprisonment.”

“No, no. That’s cruel and pointless.” Asgore replied. “Besides, his knowledge may still benefit us all.”

“Are you serious?” The Captain furrowed her brows. “We got Alphys. She knows her Determination sciences too!”

Gaster then explained, “But she's lacking in experience and confidence.”
‘King’ Asgore raised his hand, asking the two to quiet down. “Sorry, but I’m not quite done yet.” Although on opposite sides, the fish and the skeleton both honoured Asgore. They quickly hushed themselves. So he began: “Doctor Gaster. As much as I appreciate your tireless effort, I can’t let you go just yet. You must apologize to everyone affected by the tragedy.”

“Including Sans,” Toriel glared. Oh she noticed the spike of tenseness in the scientist’s bones when she mentioned that name.

“Yes, yes.” Asgore agreed. His large hand motioned over to the dark-skinned human. “This is Cenna Caraway. Our dear Magus was one of the many victims who lost their loved ones in The Core Incident. You should make amends with her first.”

Gaster bowed deep before his King. “Thank you, your Majesty. I swear will do everything I can to atone for my sins.”

Fanciful as ever. At least he’s honest about it. Toriel watched him slide towards Cenna with a lowered head.

“I apologize for causing much grief and brokenness in your life, Miss Caraway. Is there anything I could do to compensate?”

Cenna huffed. “Yeah. Right, as if ya could bring them back. Makes me wonder how you’re gonna settle this.”

“As I had sworn to the King, I will do anything and everything.”

“Even it means crawling under my boot?”

It seems that the humiliation tactics of days past still existed today. Gaster’s face contorted from the thought, battling against his immense dignity.

In the end, he dropped on his ‘knees’ and said: “Yes. I will. I won’t back down on my oath.”

Cenna threw her head back and let out a short laugh. “Oi oi, who do ya take me for? I ain’t so petty. Stand tall. I was just wondering how far you’re willing to go, is all.”

“My sincerest gratitude.” Gaster got up and dusted himself off. “The Association’s Vanquisher is truly kind.”

The next moment later, there was no more jesting from the Magus. “Heh, surprised someone knows our stuff,” she answered. “Yeah. I’m a Vanquisher. One of the folks who specialize in DEMON extermination. If they refuse to move on, we eradicate them by force.”

He nodded. “Certainly someone such as I could be of assistance in that case. As the former Royal Scientist, Determination and the SOUL are my areas of expertise.”

“How does it correlate to the tragedy?”
Cenna explained, “If my old folks didn’t die, Frisky and I wouldn’t be orphans. The little one wouldn’t attend their foster parents’ camping trip to Mount Ebott. No trip means no wandering off unsupervised and falling down that giant hole.”

“Let me make this plain and clear: the newest generation of ‘humanity’s ultimate weapon’ is none other than our beloved Frisky. Time-traveller extraordinaire. The very same human who saved the Underground from their eternal imprisonment.”

Toriel remained calm. She had already heard the tales over the phone in the conversation with Cenna’s colleague. The time had come where all the puzzle pieces fall together.

On the other hand, Asgore had gone paler than his white fur. “W-what? They… that… that explains why they told me strange things like I had ‘killed them ten times’. Such a power is too huge for their tiny hands.”

Cenna continued, “Age is only part of the problem now. Frisky’s possessed by a damn stubborn DEMON. A parasite. They’re sharing bodies, with that blasted worm leeching off Frisky’s power.”

“I’m amazed they’re still holding it together after all these time. But, if we don’t get rid of that rot sooner than later… we’ll lose Frisky for sure.”

Toriel squeezed her hands. She had an inkling of what this entailed, but she didn’t think it would be quite so turbulent. How strange, the Surface worked: they often had to resort to violence to prevent more violence.

“Do you know the DEMON’s true identity?” asked Gaster.

“…Yeah.” Cenna answered.

“That’s all the confirmation I required. Does anyone have pictures of ‘Frisky’ for reference?”

Asgore, Toriel and Undyne searched for pictures of Frisk on their phones. Those were happier and idyllic times.

“By the way Doctor Gaster, that’s a nickname.” Toriel corrected, “Their proper name is Frisk.”

“Ah, I see. Mind give me a summary of their character?”

Each member of Frisk’s close ones chipped their own testimony. They described the child’s behaviour: kind, charismatic in their own cute way, unusually responsible, and very wise beyond their age.

Gaster committed the details to memory. “Thank you. I must admit that they’re adorable. Now I could tell the difference between our dear ‘Golden Quiche’ and the decay hidden within.”

The fire alarms went off.

Cenna grumbled. “The bugger’s making their move. I’ll be damned if it’s a real fire.”

“I believe we can turn this situation to our advantage,” thus said Gaster. “Allow me to perform a live inspection. Then, we can plan our final assault.”

After his search, the scientist returned with ‘Frisky’ in tow. He remained friendly around the child and played the role of an elegant uncle.

As for Frisk themselves? Toriel saw nothing out of the ordinary. She prayed so hard that this was all
a major misunderstanding.

Alas, her prayers did not come true.

The moment they left Frisk for the night, Gaster’s expression turned stern. He kept his voice low and careful.

“We do not have much time,” he said. “It’s imperative that we resolve this issue tonight. Or else, doom is upon us.”

***

The taxi arrived at Mount Ebott’s town square. The Dreemurrs gave their thanks and watched the transport drive away.

“Will you be fine, Toriel?” asked Asgore.

“Yes,” she replied. Although her face was anything but cheerful. “You should go prepare.”

Asgore nodded to her in silence. Then, the King left to settle his urgent business.

Toriel walked home alone to her own thoughts. It had snowed in Ebott Town as well. Her bare-furred feet pressed down on the soft powdery puffs, crunching and turning into cold slush under the weight of her body.

It dragged her down with every step. The constant trudge reflected the weight of her concerns.

The whole procedure carried a great risk.
Will it go well?
Or will it be a disaster?
No one knows the future.

How she wished that she could hug her child in her arms and never let go. It brought her back to the days in the Underground’s Ruins, when she tried to stop Frisk from leaving.

Just when she was about to reach home, she spotted a snow-covered figure sitting at the front porch.

Small.
A little pudgy.
Blue jacket.

“…Sans?” Toriel muttered.

The white light in his eyes returned upon her voice. His attention shifted to her.

“Oh,” he said. “Hey Tori. How’s it going?”

Whatever irritation she had against the missed calls vanished. Judging from the layer of fresh snow, her friend didn’t move an inch since the flakes fell.

Her maternal instincts sensed deep pain. “Are you alright, Sans?” she asked. “Did something happen?”
Sans remained as silent as a dead man.

“Nothing.” He replied at last. “It’s just another normal day.” A bold lie at its most shameless.

“What about your phone? I couldn’t contact you at all.”

“Gone. Lost. Swimming with the fishes. If it’s not down at the bottom of the ocean, the water would have killed the electronics. Same difference.”

The reply raised more questions than answers. But, Toriel knew better than to pry.

“Do you want to go inside?” she asked.

Sans replied in his faux-happy tone. “Nope. I’m good. Trash belong out here anyway.”

What would get through him?

Toriel stepped around her joke buddy and entered the house proper. Closed the door behind her.

Then, she sat down on the floor.

Gave the door a couple of knocks. “Knock knock,” she said.

The first time was a no show. Toriel tried again.

Second time, nothing either. But she won’t give up just yet.

On the third time, she heard some shuffling from the other side. Snow fell down on the path. Bones thumped down on wood.

“Who’s there?” asked Sans.

“Icy,” Toriel replied.

“Icy who?”

The old lady smiled. “’Icy’ a mirror of myself.”

“Sorry. Can’t agree with that.” Sans responded, “You’re not trash.”

At this point, she couldn’t quite agree. “I met your mentor today. Not by choice, though. Undyne arrested him, and you know how it goes.”

“Papyrus told me you had a ‘bad time’ with him. I don’t know the details. But, whatever it was, I understand how you feel. Because, if I was in your position… I would have tried to do the same.”

Again, it brought back memories of the Ruins. “I would have kept Papyrus in the dark. Confine him to a zone where I thought he’d be safe. Never let him out into the ‘dangerous world’… Just I had once done for Frisk. Love and fear, it’s quite a toxic combination sometimes, isn’t it?”

The two remained quiet. That was fine. They didn’t need to talk to understand each other. After all, they became friends without ever knowing their faces for a long, long while…

Sans mused: “’Tibia’ honest. I’ve always wondered what if the kid chose to stay with you from the beginning. Like, would you let me in?”

Toriel chuckled. Ah, the good old what ifs. “Maybe. I’ve always wanted to see you in person.”

“Aww shucks, you trust me that much? Not afraid that I’m gonna do my job and report to Asgore and the Royal Guard?”
“If you were a spy, you wouldn’t have promised to protect the human,” so she said. “It takes a certain integrity to love bad jokes.”

“…Heh.”

Sans then asked a question she never hoped to hear.

“Tori, how’s the kid doing?”

How could she explain? Her poor friend had gone through so much in one day. Now, she had to deliver worse news.

Should she lie to protect him? No. If she tried, Sans would have noticed. His sense of discernment was almost frightening.

“…Frisk is in critical condition,” Toriel answered. “Their illness is far worse than we anticipated. We won’t know if they will survive the next few hours. There’s nothing we can do but pray.”

The old goat heard a sigh.

“Guess it’s back to square one, huh?” said Sans. “In the end… we can’t do anything.”

Helplessness.

In the Underground, their people had resigned to eternal confinement for aeons. The people had learned to accept that they could do nothing.

With imagination, they made replacements. Gem caves served as false stars. Artificial lighting gave the illusion of sunlight. People decorated their homes. Those in Snowdin went as far as to paint rocks into the fabled trees.

And yet, they still had the nagging feeling of being unable to change their fate.

The replacements weren’t so bad. They provided distractions. Something Sans needed right now.

Again, Toriel knocked on the door. “Knock knock.”

“Who’s there?” Sans answered.

“Needle.”

“Needle who?”

“Needle little money for the movies.”

The skeleton snorted, even though he had no nose. “God, that one never grows old eh? Hey, I found a really nice one from the human internet. Wanna give that a try?”

“Sure,” Toriel chuckled.


“Who’s there?” she answered.

“Banana.”

“Banana who?”

Instead of dropping a punchline, he knocked again. “Knock knock.”
“Who’s there?”
“Banana.”
Toriel started to get a little confused. “Banana… who?”

“Knock knock.”

She had heard so much that Sans was a ‘trollmaster’, but this started to stretch a bit too far. “Who’s there?”

“Orange.” This time, the statement changed
“Orange who?” Toriel answered.
And now he set off the joke like a row of dominoes: “Orange you glad I didn’t say banana?”

The two burst out laughing. They couldn’t help it. An entire minute passed before Toriel caught her breath.

“That was the longest knock knock joke I’ve ever heard!” She exclaimed.

“I know right?” Sans replied. “I tried this on Papyrus. He outright screamed at the end. He was so loud, the birds flew off in all directions. Priceless.”

The two carried on making more knock knock jokes, back and forth with laughs abound. If they can’t do anything about their current situation, might as well make it all a little less heavy.

That’s the monster way of life.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I googled the jokes.

Just a little note, my next update may be late. I’ve not been feeling so well with stiff limbs and brain fog. Then there's Stardew Valley.

The next scene is both major and complex. I'd like to be the top of my game in at least the editing phase. Expect much tension, pagecounts and feels.
Here we go, another 18 pages. The moment we’ve been waiting for. Worked my butt off this.

Edit: Apparently the key plot point is not obvious enough. As such, I’ve added a clarification. Anvils must be dropped. This key point first appeared on Chapter 17 ‘Red’.

The brawns of Team Papyrus hauled the dusty machinery out of their storage chamber. It was an object they never thought they’d use in such a short time, if ever again.

The DT-Extraction Machine.

After plenty of careful instructions from Alphys, Undyne and Mettaton placed the huge skull-like structure on the ground.

“Phew.” She wiped the sweat off her forehead. “It’s not that heavy, but man I had to be so cautious with it.”

Armed with a duster, Papyrus immediately started cleaning the long-neglected machine. “I GUESS IT MAKES SENSE THAT UNCLE GASTER CREATED THIS. SKULL MOTIFS AND ALL.”

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Doctor Gaster smiled.

“MORE LIKE ‘CREEPY-COOL’. WHICH IS JUST AS AWESOME!”

Alphys’ Surface work concentrated on robotics. It was a line that required quite a bit of electrical inputs, so there were no shortage of power sources for the Extraction Machine.

She unplugged all irrelevant equipment. Then, she tried to lift a monitor. But her small size and clumsy gait made the simple task more difficult than usual.

Undyne walked over and picked it up with one hand. Then she carried away a few other extras, not without granting Alphys a wink.

The lizard started to turn red from love.

Gaster raised a brow at the short exchange of romance, which made Alphys blush harder.

He had the expression of an elder commenting on the lines of ‘Ah, young love.’ However, he did not express his thoughts. All focus was poured into making preparations; there was much to draft and more to calculate.

“We’re so fortunate that the convenience store stocked olive oil and salt,” he said, “Not to mention that they’re quite refined. Lack of impurities will make the ritual so much more effective.”
Alphys shuffled over to Doctor Gaster’s side, filled with curiosity. She loved to learn and her idol had troves of hidden informations. “Why do we need them in the first place?”

“The Magi’s Exorcism techniques descended in part from the Seer’s Arcanagram Circuitry. My ancestors noted that by combining substances under a clause transmutes the raw magic power into unique effects.”

‘Arcanagram Circuitry’. Alphys had once read about them in her school library. If she recalled right, they were the earliest magic-based computers. They take the form of ‘Grams’: stars with lines crossing over each other at specific points.

The more complex the calculations, the more points they required. Whole systems could be built by combining separate grams into a single entity.

“Like ‘Bones’ with ‘Magic’?” she asked.

“Yes. The most basic combination contained a single catalyst and heavily relies on the Seer’s colours for their final effect.”

That explained how Papyrus’ pentagram could rebuild Gaster’s scattered body. It didn’t matter if the young skeleton had no inclination for math. All he needed to do was follow instructions: if the formula was correct, the numbers will align.

“The more catalyst you add, the less important the source will be. The final formula depends on its intended purpose.”

“Example: summoning a demon requires a source of ‘Life’ and a source of ‘Corruption’. Essentially, a corrupted lifeform. That’s why the most common combination was ‘Blood’ and ‘Mercury’. Mercury is a very toxic substance, it corrupts an otherwise fine vessel of life.”

“How toxic is ‘very’, you ask? Enough to be illegal on the Surface without a proper licence. As such, many substituted mercury with other toxins. Raw snake venom or wolfsbane extract, or even cyanide.”

“Salt and vegetable oil are both classified as ‘Purification’ substances. They’re common preservatives in human history, thus perfect to counter decay. The humans had some very complex combinations out there to compensate for their lack of magical variety. I’ve read one alchemical experiment that dealt with button mushrooms, cinnamon sticks, sage leaves, black peppercorn, and water from a calcite spring. It was for the purpose of land restoration, if I recall correctly.”

“Our Magus friend gave me the necessary instructions for some powerful binds.” he continued, “Simple, yet effective. We’re fortunate that we live in times of great material refinement. Pure sodium chloride was hard to come by in the olden days.”

Alphys was amazed. This man knew so much. How and when did he study all these?

Then, she had a thought. A question. It was a glaring spot that continued to nag on her, refusing to budge until it was satisfied.

“Doctor Gaster?” asked Alphys.

“Hm?” He flipped the paper for a fresh page to work on.

“C-can I a-ask you a s-somewhat personal question…?”
Gaster replied, “As long it doesn’t involve romance, I think I’d be willing to divulge. Not because I’ve anything to hide. I just have no inclination to that topic.”

That old skeleton was career-minded to the very end. Though her question was not of such nature in the first place. “You said you were scattered across time and space, right? Were you beyond the standard limitations?”

The skeleton nodded. “Correct. The boundaries of physicality became meaningless.”

“D-does that mean you… you could cross the Barrier?”

He halted his calculations. Alphys wondered if she had broken a taboo. Instead of getting a heated grilling, though, her senior just sighed.

“I suppose it’s rather obvious to a fellow peer,” said Gaster. “Yes. The Barrier no longer applied to me. In a sense, I gained omnipresence. Travel wherever I wanted. Study to my heart’s content. A true ghost, you could say.”

The young lizard knew he won’t be happy with her next line of questioning. “Then, why didn’t you come back with the final SOUL and break the Barrier?”

Gaster’s expression turned grim. The writing stopped.

The lizard decided to can the subject. “I-it’s okay. Please forget about my question.”

“Doctor Alphys,” he said, “I’m not angry with you. It’s just, I had to recompose myself for a moment.”

She noticed his fingers tightened their grip on his pen. Consciously or otherwise, he tapped its point at an unused corner on the paper. Each strike was fuelled with silent conflict.

“I… wanted to say that it was due to my lack of tangibility. Unable to influence the world around me. Being removed from reality had their complications after all.”

“But,” Gaster paused. “That would be a lie. In time, I might have found a way. Subtle influence. Suggestions. Mental manipulations. Many, many methods. The possibilities were endless.”

“Yet, I did nothing.”

Alphys stared back, shocked.

“You see, there’s a thin line between a fort and a prison. They’re both confined spaces, yet one is considered a form of protection over the other.”

“While we had our quiet lives for aeons in our own little world, human history continued to fluctuate with dynamic changes. One area would have peace, the other fell into conflict. Nations rebranded. Economies and technology shifting in years instead of decades.”

“Sans was right.” Gaster finished the final stroke of his pen. “We were not prepared to emerge in every possible sense. Not without a proper mediator. Another reason why that child is our ‘Golden Quiche’.”

Frisk.

The peace and privileges monsterkind enjoyed today became reality, all due to their efforts. It was too easy to take that for granted.
Alphys nodded with fire in her spirit. “That’s why we must help Frisk now! They had done so much for us.”

“Agreed,” said the senior.

“…I just wish we could’ve asked first.”

At that moment, someone rang the doorbell. Alphys answered it. Lo and behold, she stood right before ‘King Dreamy’ in his regal suit of armour.

More mental swooning. “O-oh! Your Majesty!”

“Howdy, Doctor Alphys,” Asgore smiled back. He still kept his sweet manners despite the weight of the situation. “How are preparations coming along?”

“Good! We just need to clear out the extra equipment and mount the DT-Extraction Machine to the wall sockets. Then we’ll need to position the steel table underneath it.”

Alphys guided the King to her lab. Half of the extra equipment was plunked down at any available space outside the lab. For now, the anime-themed living room looked more like a storage shed.

“This is a lot of moving on a short notice,” the king commented.

“That’s okay,” Alphys replied. “We have some strong muscle helping us out.”

“Please allow me to assist.”

“W-what?” she exclaimed. “W-we can’t have you do that. You’re the King!”

Asgore shook his head. “I’m only acting as King. Besides, Frisk is my child. Allowing a father to do a little lifting is not too much to ask for, I hope?”

Oh, how could she decline such big-hearted humility? It was why King Dreamy won her heart in the first place. “T-thank you. Um, let’s see what the other guys have done first.”

Alphys took a few steps forward before asking another question. “How are the flowers doing?”

All those flowers from the True Lab had to go somewhere. As much as Alphys liked them, working with machinery demanded a plant-free environment. Those notoriously sticky seeds would cause trouble if they got into the inner workings.

Asgore replied, “They’re growing well along with the others.”

“I’m glad they’ve found a new home with you. Those poor things were stuck in my lab for so long, I’m surprised they survived.”

Any plant in the King’s care will flourish: much like their kingdom. Times may be hard, but no one went hungry.

Alphys led the King Asgore in the room. Undyne and Gaster stopped whatever they were doing and bowed their heads upon his entry.

She noticed those two were the only ones who greeted the old way. Everyone knew Asgore was their King, but few had interacted with him at an official level.

More people talked to him as a friendly school gardener than as a monarch. As such, bowing was not
part of their immediate etiquette.

“Alright, let's do this people. The fate of our dear child, friend and ambassador depends on this!”

After all the extra stuff was moved away, it’s time for the initial setup. First, connecting the hulk called the DT-Extraction Machine to its power source. Asgore and Undyne did the heavy lifting, while Alphys and Mettaton connected the necessary cables to the correct spot.

Papyrus helped his uncle to move the steel worktable with a bit of his gravity-defying magic. Alphys cautioned against using that on sensitive equipment, but a simple table would be fine.

Thanks to Asgore’s strength, the process went smoother than expected. Everyone thanked him for his efforts.

“It’s nothing,” he smiled back. “You all did a great job too.”

Alphys noticed another missing detail. “Doctor Gaster, where are we going to contain all the Determination?”

The elder scientist pointed to the corner where they dumped their shopping items. “We’ll infuse them into the twelve bottles of olive oil over there. We’re going to subdue the demon with the very same power they held hostage.”

“Won’t the bottles explode?” Undyne asked.

“No, no. They won’t. The Determination will be split and diluted between the dozen. But, since they are precious reagents I suppose it’s best to take extra precaution.” Gaster beckoned Papyrus, “Come here, my boy. Your double ‘Integrity’ is vital here.”

Papyrus placed the duster on the table and walked over. “HOW, UNCLE GASTER?”

“Have you heard of this technique called ‘Psychia Reinforcement’?”

“NOPE!”

“Well then, let me teach you.”

Doctor Gaster must have learned tons of new magic from observing the Magi. They couldn’t keep him out, or even realise that he was observing their arts.

Alphys wanted to drop everything and join the impromptu lessons. Alas, she couldn’t. She still had to tune the software and its output. Perhaps she could ask more about the new magic later.

“WOWIE! I CAN’T BELIEVE THIS IS EVEN POSSIBLE!”

Papyrus’ exclamations caught her attention. He’s holding a bottle of oil with ultramarine lines zig-zagged across. After a while, those seeped into the structure and lost their light.

“Reinforcing non-living objects is quite straightforward,” Gaster explained. “All you needed to do was to fill in the molecular weaknesses. On the other hand, reinforcing living beings requires specialized knowledge due to cellular regeneration and interference from the SOUL. Oh, please repeat this for the other eleven bottles.”

The young skeleton got straight to work and enchanted the rest of the oil they had brought.

Someone then repeatedly pressed the doorbell button. That must be Cenna.

“I’ll answer,” Gaster said. “Just concentrate on the tuning, Doctor Alphys.”
Alphys started to sweat some more. Being important to Doctor Gaster was both a huge honour and a huge responsibility. Her stomach started to knot from anxiety.

Can she really pull this off?

Will she cause a mistake and things to go haywire?

She had checked and double checked, but what if it went wrong where everyone would least expect it?

Alphys took a deep breath and patted her cheeks. “Calm down. You can do this…”

The Magus rushed in with a sleeping Frisk in their arms. Gaster followed right behind. The human woman also clutched a rolled up canvas scroll in her left hand, secured in place with a red silk ribbon.

“Ah snap, did I make it in time?” asked Cenna, “There’s still the Gram to set up.”

“We’re still preparing, so you’re fine,” replied Alphys. “Just put Frisk on the table for now.”

She watched the ultra-cool woman lay down her dear sedated friend.

Then, Cenna started searching the sleeping child’s body. She found a pairing knife in the pants pocket.

A weapon. Alphys gasped.

The Magus reached under her coat and pulled out a vial of golden mystery liquid. Emptying its contents revealed a sickly dark-red web that wrapped around the knife.

“Tsk. Just as I thought, it’s already EQUIPPED,” said Cenna. “I can’t throw this cursed weapon away without waking the DEMON. Anyone who guards this knife must stay close to Frisky until the extraction’s done.”

Mettaton scooted over. “I believe I’m the perfect person for the task, darling. My other form is the ultimate strongbox.”

“Great! Protect it with your life, yeah?” Cenna handed the knife over to the robot.

After flipping a mental switch, Mettaton puffed back into his simpler rectangular body. The knife was hidden somewhere inside, with its exact location known only to himself.

“Are you ready, Miss Cenna?” Gaster asked.

She answered: “More ready than ever, doc.”

The Magus untied the ribbon and opened the scroll, revealing a complex multi-layered Arcanagram. In other words she brought the mother computer of the procedure.

She positioned herself at the center point of the lab and faced the person she must save.

Gaster again called Papyrus to be his assistant. The youngster opened the bags of salt, while the elder drew a dodecagram in pure white grains.

Twelve points. One for every hour. The point of origin ran straight under the table.
At the centre of the clock stood Cenna, as if she served as the anchor of its invisible hands.

At last, Alphys finished her fine tuning. “Okay, it’s ready to go!”

The twelve bottles of oil were arranged in a canister. Alphys closed the lid, secured it, and then booted the DT-Extraction Machine.

Frisk’s brilliant Red SOUL floated to the maws of the skeletal mechanism. Its jaws snapped wide open to feast upon its meal. The machine began to consume the SOUL’s glow, sucking streams of red to fill their canister of reagents.

Alphys noticed that the red heart had segments running through it. “Huh? Why is their SOUL cut to pieces? I don’t think that’s part of the extraction procedure.”

The Magus clarified her concerns. “Don’t worry about that, Alphys. I did the partition work. Now Frisky’s a Magus like me. Lucky for us, their SOUL matured faster than their body. The partitions will heal themselves too soon otherwise.”

As proof of her words, Cenna brought out her Yellow SOUL. Hers had much clearer ridges compared to Frisk’s.

“It’s a defense mechanism,” she explained. “If any part of us got compromised, we could break that section off and blow it apart. It’ll grow back whole as long one piece remains. That’s the key to my plan.”

Moments of tensed silence passed as the machine continued to do its job. On a normal child, this procedure would take a minute at most…

But Frisk’s supply was akin to a reservoir. Five minutes passed and the machine was still not done.

This was the calm before the storm. Cenna took the opportunity for some final words. “Hey, quick a reminder. Exorcism is nasty business. There’s gonna be a ton of hateful screaming and maybe some other freaky accusations.”

“If any one of you get uncomfortable, feel free to leave. It’s for the best too. May never know if this bugger feeds on negativity.”

Despite the warnings, Frisk’s friends insisted on staying. Each of them had their own personal reasons.

For Alphys, it’s because she’s the one who knew how to operate the machine. Therefore it was her responsibility.

On the turn of the hour, the machine stopped it’s consumption.

Alphys checked the readings on her console. “I’ve confirmed that Frisk now has the same level of Determination as a normal human child. They’re no longer a superpower. …For the time being, anyway.”

With this Frisk’s time-travelling powers had become defunct, and thereby Chara also lost their power to RESET. Frisk will be able to refill their Determination reservoir, but doing so requires conscious effort; it’s not something that could be done in the duration of the ritual itself.

“Thanks,” Cenna nodded. She placed the scroll on the ground and stomped her right foot onto it. Power flowed from her body to the Arcanagram. From there, it spread across the salty circuitry.
The saline crystals shimmered in the golden aura of a Vanquisher.

“I’m primed,” she said. “Unlock the canister and let’s get this show on the road.”

Closer and closer they’re arriving at the big moment. Alphys couldn’t stop sweating from anxiety.

Still, she had a job to do.

Alphys unlocked the lid and lifted it up. Bottles of imbued oil floated out from the canister, pulled out by the pre-programmed magic of the Grams.

Each bottle came to rest on a point of the star. One had to go underneath the table itself. The blue lines that once reinforced it vanished, its magic overridden by the preset commands.

The glass was now brittle once more. It’s astonishing that they could still contain vast amounts of Determination.

Cenna held onto her hat. “Okay guys. Get behind me now.”

“Me too?” Mettaton asked.

“Yup. Otherwise you’re gonna get caught in the blast.”

The robot and his lizard friend hurried to the backlines with everyone else. Alphys looked at the Magus’ back. It reminded her of the intensely cool scenes in anime.

The pieces of Cenna’s SOUL parted from each other, rearranging into the main body of a bird. Its golden wings of light spread to their its fullest span.

Twelve feathers soon emerged overhead, each ready to pierce an hour on the face of time.

“Activate!”

Upon her command, they shattered the bottles of diluted Determination. Energy spilled forth and surged through the reagents. In moments these were no longer the common grocery store items they had bought off the shelves.

The mixture of glass, oil and salt transformed into chains of solid magic. An almost endless stream of bindings flew towards the possessed, entwining both body and SOUL in the blink of an eye. The ends anchored themselves into any hard surface they could, burrowing themselves into the walls, the ceilings, and the floor.

That entire section of the room got chained together with the target.

The DEMON was rudely awakened from their forced sleep. They had Frisk’s clothes, but their face was not theirs. A mirage with rosy cheeks and blood red eyes replaced that eternally stoic visage.

“W-what’s this? Chains?!?” They struggled and writhed under the unyielding bonds, screaming in an ethereal, twisted voice. “What have you done?! Why can’t I RESET???”

Chara recognized Cenna.“You… YOU!!! I knew it! YOU’RE A DAMN FILTHY WITCH! I should have killed you the moment I saw your fucking face!”

A demon accusing another as a witch, how ironic.

“Eh, but you didn’t,” the Magus replied. “Or rather… you can’t. Frisky’s holding on strong, yeah?
You’re powerless to do anything unless they surrendered to you. After all, you’re just running on borrowed ‘time’.”

Despite the twistedness, their dear father still recognized them. “…Chara?” Asgore muttered. He never thought he’d see that face again.

Alphys covered her mouth. Their target was none other than the first Fallen Human, the King’s adoptive child… And they had become a threat to existence itself.

Doctor Gaster confirmed the terrible news. “Unfortunately, it is indeed Chara. They had become corrupted after their tragic death. Apologies, Your Majesty. This must be difficult to watch.”

When Chara realised that they had just screamed threats in front of their adoptive father, they clammed up. They had just shown everyone their worst.

The child put on a pitiful face. “Dad,” they whimpered, “Dad, please save me! I didn’t do anything wrong. I-I just used some swearwords. I’m not going to hurt anyone, please.”

Asgore stared down on the ground, silent.

“Dad…? Dad, why won’t you look at me?”

“…Chara,” so said the father. “Please don’t struggle. Think of it as a dentist visit. The more you fight, the more you’ll hurt yourself.”

The King will not budge.

With one option down, the child moved on to the next softest person: “Papyrus? Are you going to abandon me now? That’s not you at all! C’mon, you’re The Great Papyrus! You always believed in me!”

The skeleton wanted to reach out to the kid, but Undyne held him back.

She shook her head and said: “That’s not Frisk, Paps. Remember what Doctor Gaster told us. They’re gonna try pull at your heartstrings before stabbing you in the back.”

“BUT…” Papyrus frowned.

“Who do you trust more? Me, or them?”

The skeleton struggled to make a decision. After a whole lot of thinking, Papyrus stepped away.

He chose Undyne over Chara.

The strongest fish glared at the DEMON. “Don’t even bother pleading to me, demon. I don’t know you. Just get outta my bestie and scram.”

“Alphys? Mettaton? Not you guys too!”

Mettaton crossed his arms and huffed. “Darling Undyne is right. None of us know you. All you’ve been doing is riding on Frisk’s coattails of success. That’s plagiarism and I can’t condone that!”

Alphys just looked away.

Frustration twisted the child’s face. Their facade had started to crack.
“You rather believe that goopy mad scientist and a witch over me…? You... YOU MONSTERS ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM THOSE HUMANS!”

Cenna’s magic intensified. “Playtime’s over, kiddo. It’s time for eternal sleep.”

Yellow, the colour of Justice. It exposes secrets, no matter how deep or subtle they are. Nothing can hide under its light.

Another golden feather went straight into Frisk’s SOUL. It seeped into the red substance and forced the globs of black out of hiding. The darkness coursed throughout its host, ebbing in and out against the brilliance of the living.

Cenna reached out her hand, channeling her power to pull all of Chara to a single fragment.

They knew. They understood. The demon screamed out of rage and pain, threatening all sorts of violent deeds as they continued to struggle.

But no matter how hard they tried, the chains stayed strong.

Chara’s illusionary face started to melt. Alphys shut her eyes. When that wasn’t enough, she closed her ears in an attempt to block out the hatred.

This scene reminded her of a show in which the protagonist was forced to watch innocent victims getting beaten to death. It was so horrible, she deleted the episode and put that title on her blacklist.

Undyne knelt by Alphys’ side and wrapped her strong scaly arms around her. “Hey, you wanna step outside?”

A part of her wanted to cower. To flee. To hide and pretend this night never existed.

…In the end, the lizard shook her head. Her resolve refused to quit. Unlike in a video, a friend’s life is on the line.

“No,” Alphys replied. “I must stay. I’m the… I’m the one in charge of the DT-Extraction Machine.”

From the corner of her eye, she noticed bones rattling in place. “Papyrus?” she asked.

The young skeleton trembled from top to bottom, clutching the right side of his skull. His orange Eye burned wild without control, like raw fuel fed the flames.

Doctor Gaster noticed the adverse reaction and hurried over to ask: “Papyrus, my boy, are you alright?”

“IT HURTS,” the younger replied. “I FEEL SICK. I DON’T EVEN HAVE GUTS BUT I FEEL SO SICK.”

“What did you see?” Gaster asked.

“NOTHING.”

“Then what's the problem?”

“NO! I MEAN I LITERALLY SAW NOTHINGNESS!”

As beings of emotion, negative hostility weakened monsters. It was their universal poison, and some of were more sensitive than others.
Papyrus had never faced such distilled hatred before. To add unto that, he was at the epicenter of a massive meltdown just mere hours ago.

He may be strong, but even ‘The Great Papyrus’ could only take so much psychical stress. This entire day was just too much on his sweet, innocent self.

King Asgore offered to help. His huge, gentle hands guided the young man out of the room, far away from the site of conflict.

Doctor Gaster meanwhile fiddled with his skeletal fingers in deep worry. The senior scientist muttered something under his breath, but Alphys couldn’t hear it above the demonic screams.

When the monarch returned, however, he stopped. Whatever it was, he wanted no one else to know, and least of all Asgore.

“That’s every last bit of you in there, kid!” said the Magus. Her statement caught everyone’s focus.

All the darkness now concentrated on the pointed bottom section of the SOUL, more magical chains forced that piece apart from the rest, dragging it away from the other cleansed pieces.

Then… the finale.

The Vanquisher’s sharpened armaments besieged the corrupted fragment from all sides, primed and ready for the sendoff. Each bit that pierced through exploded from the inside, causing crack after crack to burst from pressure.

No escape.

Alphys wondered if Chara could feel pain from each blast. If yes, it was a cruel and unusual way to die. One glance at Asgore and she knew that he had long stopped watching.

No one wanted this. Yet, the vanquishing must be done to protect their saviour.

The DEMON refused to stay quiet.

“I’ll kill you!” they screamed. “I will come back to kill you and you and YOU AND YOU AND YOU AND ALL OF YOU TRAITORS! I am the DEMON of Hyperdeath! THE BE ALL AND END ALL!”

Cenna sighed. “It’s always everyone’s fault, huh? That’s the difference between Frisky and you. They’re all grown up, while you’re still a brat. Forever thinking the world owes you a favour.”

The final feather took the form of a sword, the human’s symbol of capital punishment.

“Goodbye.”

It sliced through the cracked remnants of the DEMON-possessed SOUL, shattering it into fine sand. It rained down in the still-aired room and slowly vanished into nothingness.

A pin-drop silence hung over them.

It seemed to last for eternity.

Vanquisher Cenna Caraway’s SOUL returned to its default shape, receding back into her chest. She then dropped on her knees: exhausted and out of breath.
Without their power source, the magical chains disintegrated into warm salt with some glass mixed inside. The oil had long been burned up together with the Determination.

Just as the expert had claimed, Frisk’s missing fragment of their SOUL began to grow back.

“Man,” said Cenna. “I’m so done for the night. Seriously. Like, give me a flat surface and I’m off to lalaland.”

Asgore whispered, “It’s over…?”

“It better be,” the Magus sighed. “That’s the toughest DEMON in my entire career! It ain’t surprising ‘cause they had leached off Frisky for so long. I reckon it’s years and years worth of time-travelling right there.”

Uncertainty transitioned into relief. Monsterkind celebrated their new victory, although it was subdued with the knowledge that it was not a peaceful death.

Mettaton and Undyne were the first to check up on Frisk, followed by Asgore. Alphys needed to make sure that she properly powered down the machine before joining the team.

She noticed that Gaster existed the lab post-haste, no doubt to check up on Papyrus.

There was a clear frown on his face.

Undyne lightly patted the kid’s soft and slightly moist cheeks. “Yo kid! Punk! Wakey wakey! Are ya feeling alright?”

Frisk shuffled a bit on the cold, hard table. They rubbed their throat and uttered a hoarse reply: “Sore. Everywhere.”

“It doesn’t surprise me, my shining star,” Mettaton replied. “Your other you won’t shut up. But they’re gone now, at long last!”

Asgore helped Cenna up from the floor and towards the table. The father smiled down upon his child.

“Yo Frisky,” said the lady. “Sorry for all the trouble. Hope you could still trust me after whisking you away like that.”

Frisk’s borderline-kidnapping was about as grey as it could get. Alphys realised that it was a necessity though: their key to success was to catch Chara off guard. It wouldn’t work if they had asked Frisk for permission.

Would they get angry? Maybe miffed? Throw a tantrum of mistrust?

However, the sweet child paid no mind. They gave a thumbs-up, while grinning ear to ear.

Alphys and Cenna both sighed in relief. Frisk was a smart kid; they had figured out the plan long before Chara even noticed.

Happy beyond words, the ‘aunt’ rubbed the kid’s head. Goodbye neat hair, please make way for familial affection.

The lizard lady shared the joy. She chuckled at the sight, glad that the storm had finally passed.

At long last, all’s well in the world.
Chapter End Notes

It's a sad fact that there are many people who think everyone else is wrong, and they're the only one right.
Despite of all the wrongs they had done. It's a twisted perspective.
All attempts of calling Sans on quick-dial ended in a service error message.

Then, Papyrus remembered that he couldn’t find a phone anywhere on Sans’ jacket. He checked the pockets before laundering them.

It’s possible that it was lost at the bottom of the ocean.

Papyrus tried to scroll down his contact list for Grillby’s bar. Usually he’d use it to order takeout. This time, he’s searching for his brother.

His hand wouldn’t stop shaking. His Eye wouldn’t stop burning. It’s hard to read with the mixture of glare and movement, let alone to swap to the correct spot.

His first tangent was to look for the nearest flat surface in the living room. If there was one in the first place. As much as he’d like to use the couch or coffee table, there were just too many fragile objects piling on top of each other and getting in the way.

The only sure, secure empty spot was the floor itself, so Papyrus sat down and placed his phone on the ground.

How he wished that he had a fleshy thigh now. They look like a nice place to rest phones on. But then again, his legs would be shaking along with the rest of his being.

After a whole lot of bone-rattling struggles, he finally managed to dial Grillby’s.

Papyrus lied down and pressed the side of his skull on top of the phone.

“…Hello…?”

“G-GRILLBY?” said Papyrus, “C-CAN YOU PASS THE PHONE TO SANS? I. REALLY. REALLY NEED TO TALK TO HIM.”

Did Sans know anything about this ‘nothingness’? Was that the reason why he gave up on living?

His brother was the brightest genius of the Underground. He had to know something.

Anything.

“…Sans is not here…”

The skeleton’s jaw went slack. A Grillby’s without Sans?

“…I’ve not seen him since this morning…”


His words ended with a long, loud whine.
“...Are you still at Alphys’ lab...?” Grillby asked. The man of fire understood the youngster’s fears.

“Y-YES...”

“...I’ll be right there... Then we’ll look for Sans...”

“THANK YOU.”

The call ended there. Knowing that Grillby will come over brought some sense of relief.

He rolled over and let himself collapse.

Soon, all will be well in the world.

Except...

The DEMON refused to stay quiet.

“I'll kill you!” they screamed. “I will come back to kill you and you and YOU AND YOU AND YOU AND ALL OF YOU TRAITORS! I am the DEMON of Hyperdeath! THE BE ALL AND END ALL!”

The screams had yet to end. Papyrus did his best to ignore them. Muffle the sounds. Shift farther away from the entrance to the lab. Pretend it doesn’t exist.

It went on, and on, and on...

Then, it stopped. The sudden silence was deafening.

Uncle Gaster emerged from the lab.

“Papyrus?”

“WHY DID IT GO QUIET?” asked the young one.

“The ritual’s completed,” Gaster answered. “Frisk is safe. Worry not about them, my concern is now on you.”

The elder slid to Papyrus’ side and lowered himself closer to the ground.

“You said you saw ‘Nothingness’. Does this phrase fit the description? ‘Dark, darker yet darker. The shadows cutting deeper’.”

Papyrus nodded. “YES. IT’S JUST. NOTHING. COMPLETELY NOTHING. IT’S WORSE THAN BEING BLIND! W-WHAT WAS THAT...?”

“It’s what I call ‘The End’,” he answered.

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND.”

“The death of existence, Papyrus. It’s the point where all timelines cease to exist.”

“WHY? HOW?” Question after question swam around Papyrus’ poor overworked noggin.

Gaster replied, “I’m afraid I can’t provide an answer. No one knows what causes ‘The End’. Not me. Not even your brother.”
“But fret not. It’s nothing more than just a possibility. Your human friend had proven themselves to be quite responsible. I reckon that as long as they’re not careless with their powers, the worst will not come true.”

“This is what it means to be a Chronograph, my boy. Time and time again, you will see visions of what may or may not come to pass.”

Papyrus realised that Sans had tried to protect him from this fate.

Gaster placed both hands on Papyrus’ cheekbones. The parents residing within wished to hold their son to comfort him. His will aligned with theirs.

“I understand it can be frightening,” he said. “But it’s not all bleak. You will need training as not to be swayed by despair. With courage, kindness and integrity, you can see the path of hopes and dreams.”

“Papyrus. Never lose yourself to mere possibilities. The future is not set in stone. Remember this. Always.”

“OKAY…”

What else could he say? If it was just a passing vision, then there was nothing to worry about.

“Now, take slow breaths. Still your mind. Calm your magic, and the Eye will follow suit.”

Gaster waved over the burning right socket.

As he did so, Papyrus saw a strange substance that doesn’t belong on a skeleton.

“UNCLE GASTER, DID YOU DIP YOUR HANDS IN KETCHUP?”

The old man jerked his arms back. Papyrus could see them clearer now. Both hands were coated in an unfamiliar red liquid.

Offering his hands before the young man, Gaster asked in fear:

“Papyrus, what do you see now?”

“SOME WEIRD RED LIQUID. IT’S REDDER AND DARKER COMPARED TO THE KETCHUP SANS DRINKS. REMINDS ME OF PAINT.”

Then they heard Alphys scream Mettaton’s name.

Gaster bolted straight towards the lab. He didn’t even wait to materialize back to his full height. “Everyone, get out of there!” he yelled.

Then there was another scream. Glass shattered. A struggle followed after, which ended with a loud thud.

Papyrus wanted to get up and run. Wanted. Except his knees refused.

He heard Undyne summoning her spears. “Asgore, take Alphys and --”

…The words were interrupted by a sickening squelch and a howl of pain.

Lots and lots of pain.
He couldn’t believe that voice belonged to Undyne. He had never, ever heard her so vulnerable before: not when she lost her left eye in a training accident, nor when she had set her house on fire.

A sense of urgency welled up within Papyrus’ SOUL. He forced himself on his feet and started running.

Run.
Run towards his friends.
His family.

Papyrus pushed through the lab doors. He found himself standing before utter chaos.

Asgore had his back on the wall with Alphys wrapped in his arms. He drew out his trident, ready to deflect anything that came in his way.

Uncle Gaster meanwhile tried to halt the gushing of that strange red liquid with his hands. It came from a gaping stab wound on Cenna’s chest. To Gaster, it didn’t matter that he had holes in the middle of his palms; he had to try.

Humans leak when they get hurt. That’s what his brother told him.

They call it ‘blood’. Lose too much of those and they will die.

A gash destroyed Undyne’s remaining good eye. She clutched her spear and swung it around, lost in darkness and in panic. She kept yelling in a stream of incomprehensible swearing.

Mettaton’s robotic shell lay broken on the ground. Dust leaked out from a deep cut on his back.

What about Frisk, his favourite human friend?

Cenna was in critical condition and unable to speak. Yet, despite so, she stared at Papyrus and struggled to point to his left.

He glanced there.

The human child leapt from the corner, armed with a glistening knife.

Papyrus stepped backwards just in time to dodge the swipe.

“FRISK!” he called out.

It’s only now he could see the severity of the situation. Frisk’s entire being was trapped in the same webby substance as the knife. They stretched from head to toe, threatening to engulf them whole.

It reminded Papyrus of twisted roots. No, that was too kind… These were the tangles of a puppet’s strings.

Tears of terror streamed down the child’s face. Their throats were bound, cutting off their voice and thus any means of warning others.

The skeleton raised his guard. He readied his bones to dodge and capture. “WHAT ARE THOSE STICKY STUFF?” he asked, “WHAT IS GOING ON???”

“Greetings. Didn’t I tell you I’ll be back?”

Chara’s voice loomed overhead.
It didn’t make sense. Uncle Gaster told him that the ritual was a success.

They should be deader than dead.

Frisk tried to pull away, but the webs curled tighter around their limbs. They forced the child to walk closer and closer to Papyrus.

“As long Frisk lives, I live. Because we’re both one and the same!”

Uncle Gaster yelled from the other end. “Don’t listen to their hubris, Papyrus! They’re just trying to demoralize you!”

Chara’s sneer echoed throughout the air. “Oh? Maybe you should concentrate on saving that bitch first, old man.”

He outright ignored her insults. “The DEMON survived because they had a hidden vessel somewhere! One that is obviously NOT the child. Destroy their link to the world we’ll be rid of this insolence once and for all!”

Then Papyrus asked the most important question of all: “BUT WHERE IS THIS VESSEL?”

“I don’t know!” Gaster answered back. “I don’t have the Yellow Aspect to expose secrets!”

Yellow. Other than Cenna, the only other person who had that level of truesight was… Sans.

Fear threatened to knock Papyrus down. But, he remained steadfast and prepared to defend.

“HELP IS ON THE WAY,” he said, “GRILLBY IS COMING OVER, AND HE’LL FIND SANS FOR SURE! W-WE’LL JUST NEED TO CAPTURE THE HUMAN UNTIL THEN!”

Chara burst into a haunting laughter as Frisk continued to struggle.

“Papyrus, Papyrus, Papyrus… you ARE an idiot after all! Do you really think you could rely on that Trashbag forever? If he’s so capable, he wouldn’t have gone MIA in the first place!”

“Besides, you’re forgetting something, Frisk is not your average kid. They’re the Legendary Hero: Humanity’s Ultimate Weapon! Do you understand what that means?”

Chara forced Frisk to bring out their SOUL. Their brilliant glow intensified more and more as the seconds ticked by.

“I can feel their Determination pouring in like a waterfall! Seeing you so terrified made them even MORE determined to regain control of their body. And in doing so, I -- The DEMON of Hyperdeath -- will soon have the ability to RESET once again!”

“When I drag all you useless lot back Underground, I will kill every single one of you. And then I can finally execute true ‘eternal peace’!”

It happened in a split second.

At the end of Chara’s speech, a knife stabbed straight through the red, glowing heart. The strike caused the SOUL to crack.
“No… NO!” The DEMON did not want this result. “What are you doing?? We don’t have enough Determination yet!”

Frisk grinned. It was not malicious. Rather, it was one steeped in sad goodbyes.

“Sorry,” whispered Frisk. With all their remaining control, the child of mercy pushed the knife further down the essence of their being.

Chara started to panic.

“No no no no no no no no YOU IDIOT stop please not now not now not now!!!”

Their HP fell at breakneck speeds. Papyrus acted on his protective instincts to reach out for the knife. Alas, he was too slow. Frisk’s HP reached zero. Their SOUL snapped in half and exploded into shards.

The pieces fell on the mittened hands of the skeleton. They lasted just for a moment before dissipating into the air.

Frisk’s lifeless body fell into his embrace.

“FRISK…?” he said. “FRISK, YOU’RE NOT TURNING INTO DUST, SO I KNOW YOU’RE ALIVE. YOU ARE ALIVE, RIGHT?”

To Papyrus, there was no reason why Frisk should be dead.

They didn’t bleed out.
They’re not injured or sick.
They’re as whole as a human could be.

“So please, Wake up.”

Humans are stronger than monsters.
They shouldn’t die so easily.
They shouldn’t die without saying a single word.

Without saying goodbye.

“Wake up!”

Yet, the child’s corpse grew cold in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

My friends gave me a nickname.
It’s called ‘Sophtobutcher’.
After ‘Urobutcher’ of Gen Urobochi fame.
This is just the beginning.
Wake

Chapter Notes

My inbox exploded with comments about the big scene.
Well.
Your questions are answered right here! Some of them anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Humans turn to dust at a slow, slow rate.
First, they become cold.
Then, they stiffen.
What comes after that was better left unsaid.

Once the news spread, the undertaker from the next town soon arrived. He was a very patient man. He waited outside and let the loved ones grieve first. After all, he had seen the same scene play out day after day.

The Surface society had an entire system to deal with deaths, both expected and sudden. Have no idea what to do? No worries, just pay a sum of money and they will handle everything.

Mettaton’s celebrity friends pitched in. As their final tribute, they provided both the funds and services for their peer’s passing.

It turns out, the robot had booked a stadium for a live concert a few months down the line. It had to be cancelled due to his unfortunate passing. All downpayments were then shifted to his own funeral.

It’s Monday: the day after the tragedy.

Monsterkind learned what it means to host a ‘wake’.

The colours they should wear.
The type of clothes and jewelry permitted.
And a few other details…

The stadium had opened their gates for grieving fans and VIPs to give their final respects.

Two caskets lay side by side: one sealed with a transparent cover, the other left open to serve as a prop: unlike an organic human, Mettaton left behind a robot shell.

Frisk’s casket was surrounded by the iconic flowers of Mount Ebott. Once upon a time, the bed of flowers saved Frisk from a fall. Now, they rested on the same bed in peace.

Mettaton had them too, of course, but it was soon drowned out by the bouquets of roses and lilies from his fans.

Tributes lay at the foot of both coffins. Monster Kid placed down lilies made out of paper for Frisk.
The boy’s parents helped him light the candles. After paying their last respects, they returned to the stadium seats.

Photographs and memories of the deceased were projected on the large screen. It was usually used to broadcast highlights of whatever game the stadium hosts.

In the hours prior, Uncle Gaster and ex-Captain Grillby helped dress up Papyrus in the proper clothing. The celebrity contacts offered to rent their tuxedo.

It was a sad day, but he had a job to do; Papyrus was part of the ushering team along with Grillby.

No matter the situation, Papyrus saw himself as a good usher. He helped guide the people through the complex to find their seats. The shyer monsterkind folk were too afraid of the human helpers, and that’s when he had to step in.

He won’t rest. He won’t break down. Everyone else was too crippled in either grief or injury for the very important task of maintaining order.

A new group of people entered the stadium grounds. It was his sister-figure. A black sash covered up the bandage work for cosmetic’s sake.

Undyne survived the ordeal, but she had lost much. Her future was as dark as her eyesight.

Alphys and Dogaressa held the once-Captain’s hands as guides. They helped her around the unfamiliar place, describing the sights to make sense of the sounds.

“Damn, that’s a lot of crying.” Undyne commented.

“(Mettaton had lots of fangirls.)” The lady dog explained.

“Yeah… they’re gonna be the most hurt.”

Alphys can’t stop her tears either. Her eyes were moist and her nose stuffy, but she tried her best to sound calm.

Her love asked: “Al? Are you alright?”

“I’m okay,” the lizard answered. Lie through her teeth. Pretend.

It reminded Papyrus of Sans.

The young skeleton rushed right up to them and greeted: “UNDYNE! DOGARESSA! ALPHYS! GOOD TO SEE -- UM, HEAR YOU.”

She replied to him with her trademark toothy grin. “Jeez Paps, I’m not so easily insulted. My eyes are gone but I still got ears.”

Despite what happened, the big sister tried her best to remain positive. “Anime is real, right? Well. Some bits anyway. Since that’s the case, I’m gonna train myself into a blind warrior of justice!”

“Just you watch, Paps!” She exclaimed. “Gimmie some time and we’ll be suplexing each other again. I promise!”

Were those words of encouragement for him, or for herself?

Papyrus glanced at Alphys. She couldn’t look him in the eye.
Both women tried to be strong for each other’s sake, even if it meant hiding their real pain.

“OKAY! I LOOK FORWARD TO IT.” He believed it nonetheless. The strongest fish lady was tough both inside and outside. “PLEASE FOLLOW ME TO YOUR SEATS.”

As one of Frisk’s closest friends, Undyne had a reserved seat right before the caskets. The memorial staff members brought some extra chairs for the bereaved.

Someone already occupied the far right one, facing Mettaton’s open casket.

Poor Napstablook streamed endless tears. He lost not just one family member, but two. “Oh…… oh…… Mettaton… Frisk… I miss you already…”

“Hey Paps,” Undyne asked. “Blooky’s here?”

“YEAH…” he replied. “HE’S VERY, VERY SAD. SHYREN AND HER SISTER ARE WITH HIM THOUGH. OH, I’LL GUIDE YOU TO YOUR SEAT.”

“Paps,” she said. “Go and help Dogaressa and Alphys first. I’ll wait for you here.”

Papyrus asked, “WHY?”

“I got my reasons,” she replied. “Come on, just do it.”

Papyrus did as he was requested. He showed Undyne’s two guides to their seats and then came back for her.

“I’M HERE,” he said.

Undyne reached her hand out to the general direction. Understanding her cue, the young skeleton held her close.

“Take me to a quiet spot,” so was her next instruction.

Papyrus led Undyne to a place far away from the commotion.

“Papyrus, give me a report.”

It was like the old Royal Guard days when the junior had to update his senior. “WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?”

“Toriel and Asgore. How are they?”

Papyrus went silent for a moment. “THE QUEEN REFUSES TO LEAVE FRISK. AND SHE WON’T LET THE KING ANYWHERE NEAR THE COFFIN. BUT, SHE’S NOT HERE NOW. MISTER JONAH THE LAWYER NEEDED TO TALK TO HER ABOUT SOMETHING.”

Undyne sighed. She had expected as much. “She’ll be back soon.”

Just when she said so, Papyrus saw Toriel walking near Frisk’s casket. She knelt by the side and leaned on the woodwork. Silent.

Toriel had closed her heart to the world. The stadium and its business might as well not exist.

“Can you find Asgore anywhere in the spectator seats?” Asked Undyne.
“UNCLE GASTER INVITED HIM TO THE VIP ROW. HE’LL BE SITTING NEXT TO SOME WORLD LEADERS.”

“…At least he’s somewhere. I’m hearing lots of Mettaton’s fans. What about Frisk and Cenna’s guests?”

“HALF OF EBOTT TOWN ARRIVED SO FAR. SOME ARE STILL ON THE WAY. AND, UH, MISS AUNT ISN’T HERE.”

“Huh? I thought we’re having a triple funeral?”

Papyrus glanced down on the ground, worried and downcast. “UNCLE GASTER SAID SHE DIED WITH HER EYES OPEN. IN LOTS OF PAIN. HE TOLD ME THAT’S A BAD SIGN. SO, THE MAGI ARE CONDUCTING HER FUNERAL IN THEIR HQ.”

“IF SHE DIDN’T DIE IN PEACE, DOES THAT MEAN SHE MIGHT TURN INTO A DEMON?” His uncle had briefly explained the process. He wasn’t keen on going too much into detail.

Undyne said, “…Maybe. I understand how she feels. I mean, I wouldn’t be resting in peace either if I was in her position. Let’s just leave her matter to the experts, Paps.”

Her grip squeezed around the bone when she asked the next question. “Where’s Sans?”

“HE…” Papyrus struggled to reply. “HE’S HERE. SOMEWHERE. I CAN FEEL HIS MAGIC BUZZING IN THE AIR. JUST, HE WON’T SIT IN HIS PROPER PLACE.”

“He’s definitely not taking this well.” Undyne gritted her teeth. “Papyrus. You must keep an eye on him at all times. I can’t do that anymore, so I’m passing the torch to you.”

“THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL DO HIS DUTY, BUT I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHY I MUST WATCH SANS.”

She lowered her voice to a whisper and spoke straight at his face. “I… didn’t think I’d ever need to tell you this. Listen Paps: a man with hope yet without trust will eventually fall apart.”

“Sans is on the verge of snapping. If he hasn’t already. Considering the number of animes turning real lately, I have a really bad feeling about this. Just make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid. Okay?”

Papyrus confidently tapped his chest. “YES MADAM! I WILL NOT LET MY BROTHER OUT OF MY SIGHT! WHEN HE’S IN MY VIEW, THAT IS.”

“Good,” Undyne patted his arm. “Take me to Blooky, Paps. I’ll be fine from there.”

Again, he did as he was told. Napstablook cried harder when he noticed Undyne had gone blind. She tried to give him a hug, except her arms just phased through.

Alphys curled up in her own seat. She buried her face in her hands, trying so hard not to make a single noise as that will only further worry her fish lover.

After one last gaze, Papyrus left to continue his job.

The day went on as usual. Then, the voice of a stern man asked for his name.

“Are you Papyrus, the Orange Lichborn?”
The skeleton stopped to face the source. Standing before him was a person wearing fancy clothes.

It was a human male of about fifty years in age, whose hair had long gone grey. He wore a six-button black tailcoat with a matching pair of pants. White laced ruffs hung from the end of his long sleeves, covering the top of an ebony cane.

What stood out the most for Papyrus was the collar area: an elaborate brooch fastened a cravat in place. It took the form of a butterfly, studded with red gemstones.

Here he thought that his Uncle was already on the farthest side of the ‘classy old fashioned clothes’ scale. This stranger took it one step further.

Papyrus blinked a few times in confusion. “YES, THAT IS MY NAME. BUT I HAVE NO IDEA ABOUT THIS ‘LICHBORN’ THING. ARE YOU SURE YOU’RE NOT LOOKING FOR A DIFFERENT PAPYRUS?”

The stranger’s nut-brown eyes locked a strong gaze in return. His posture and poise reminded Papyrus of an olden day university headmaster.

“I suppose you would have gone with a different term,” said the old human. “Is the title ‘Seer’ more familiar to you?”

“OH. OOOOOH! WELL THEN, YOU ARE TALKING TO THE RIGHT PAPYRUS! IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO FOR YOU, MISTER?”

The man introduced himself straight on. “My name is Mezil Thyme. I represent the Magus Association to pay your Ambassador their final respects. May I request your aid for directions?”

Papyrus gasped. This was an important man and he dressed the part. “YES SIR! DO YOU Already HAVE AN ASSIGNED SEAT?”

“Yes. Here is my letter of invitation.”

Mezil handed Papyrus the letter. After a quick read, he knew exactly where to take him. “THANK YOU. PLEASE FOLLOW ME!”

The thought of guiding someone so important made Papyrus both nervous and excited. He had no idea just how high Mezil’s position may be. He could be someone of the lower end of the ranks, just very fancily dressed. But he didn’t care about that; everyone will get the VIP treatment they deserved.

As his mind travelled off to the sky, Mezil commented: “You’re strangely positive for a member of the bereaved.”

“HMM?” The skeleton rose his bony brows. “WHAT DO YOU MEAN?”

“I see brokenness and grief everywhere. A darkness without end. Yet here you are, guiding me in cheer as though I’m attending an orchestra. Where does all that sunshine come from?”

Papyrus hesitated for a moment. Then, he asked back, “…MISTER MAGUS? WOULD YOU LAUGH IF I SHARE WHAT I SAW?”

“No,” Mezil outright answered. “Seers are named so for a reason. I won’t treat any vision as trivial.”

Pointing down the hall, the skeleton said: “I SEE FRISK ALIVE AND WELL. GIVING LAST
MINUTE CHEERS TO METTATON BEFORE HIS BIG CONCERT. THEY LAST ONLY FOR A FEW SECONDS BEFORE FADEING AWAY.”

“Oh?” It caught Mezil’s interest. “Was that the only vision?”

“NO. I’VE SEEN MANY OTHER HAPPY THINGS. EVERYWHERE IN THIS STADIUM.”

Papyrus turned his attention to an empty hot-dog stand. “LIKE OVER THERE. I SAW MYSELF BUYING HOT DOGS FOR MY BROTHER AND FRISK.”

The visions of joy continued all along the escort path. “UNDYNE ALMOST SUPLEXED ME FOR WRESTLING PRACTICE. TORIEL STOPPED HER BEFORE SHE COULD DO THAT. I THINK SHE’S A GUEST STAR OF A SHOW.”

“And there, Alphys fixed up some last minute touches on Mettaton. At the same time a kid asked me for an autograph, nyeh heh heh!”

“Oh! King Asgore had a flower stand here! I see humans helping him! He made new friends and I’m really happy for that.”

One after another, until they were at the entrance to the spectator seats. Papyrus stopped walking there.

“Mister Magus.” Papyrus tapped the tips of his fingers together, confused. “Yesterday, I saw endless nothingness. Today, I’m seeing smiles. I do not understand this power.”

The Magus stood next to the skeleton. Then, he explained, “Your powers specialize in the realm of ‘possibilities’. As long you can see a vision, the pathway to that outcome exists somewhere. Perhaps a change in perspective would help you understand it better.”

“When you are in your best shape, you’ll see the worst to serve as a warning. When you are in the worst shape, you’ll see the best as a reminder of hope. Does this make sense?”

“I think so, yes.” Papyrus answered. “But that sort of power kind of defeats the purpose. It’s not like I can change anything. I don’t have the ability to time travel.”

“As my uncle had said, possibilities are not the present reality. I shouldn’t trip myself over them. Frisk is gone.”

Mezil pondered as he tapped his cane on the ground.

“Well then, Papyrus.” He said, “If you could turn back the flow of time, would you do anything to save your dear friend?”

The youngster was shocked and a little perplexed. “Is this a roleplaying question, Sir?”

“You can say so. A hypothesis. Imagine if you’re ‘humanity’s ultimate weapon’ for a moment. Would you stop at nothing until you achieved the desired result, no matter the hardships and despair?”

“Even if it means discovering the deepest, darkest, secrets of the people you love?”
Mezil Thyme does indeed sound like a university principal to the young skeleton. “THAT SOUNDS REALLY OMNIOUS. AND COMPLICATED.”

“Being the ‘ultimate’ does have its burdens.”

So Papyrus pretended to be in Frisk’s shoes for a moment. He stretched his imagination as far as it could take him.

“OF COURSE!” He answered back with utmost optimism. “I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- WILL DO EVERYTHING AND ANYTHING TO SAVE HIS FRIENDS!”

Their conversation was interrupted by loud scratching. It echoed across the stadium with the aid of their inbuilt sound system broadcast.

“Hm. Someone snatched the microphone.” Mezil marched forward to the entrance. “Let’s see who’s the troublemaker.”

Over the railings, Papyrus saw that the stand was hijacked by some thorny vines. It was there for the family’s final eulogy to the rest of the attendants.

On the very top perched a talking golden flower.

He recognized the figure. “FLOWEY?”

The hijacker was indeed none other than his friend Flowey. The plant tapped the mic with a leaf to make sure it’s working.

“Is this working? Hello? One, two, three? Okay. it’s working.”

Flowey straightened himself up and made his first official announcement:

“Howdy! I’m Flowey the Flower! Your very best friend!”

Mezil frowned. “Tsk, you monsters don’t know anything after all.”

He pointed his cane towards Frisk’s coffin. “That’s the worst possible floral arrangement for a funeral. There’s a reason why Chara’s people set the forests of Ebott ablaze.”

“Ebott Goldenflowers once had different name: ‘Cheaters of Death’. Each and every part of them had the magical capacity to contain the essence of the deceased. That ‘Flowey’ fellow is a proof of concept.”

Papyrus gasped. “MISS AUNT DIDN’T KNOW THAT EITHER!”

“That’s because it’s an old, obscure information lost to human negligence. The ancients who lived in Ebott had a tendency to exclude… ‘inconvenient’ details. I spent weeks in the main library to dig out that page of truth. By then, it was too late.”

Flowey continued his speech. “I told you all. It’s KILL or BE killed. And somehow, you IDIOTS still managed to get two of my friends killed! You’re all useless! Terrible! Horrible! You should be ashamed of yourself!”

“But that’s okay. Because I’m gonna fix everything! The next time, try to keep them alive. Okay?”

The flower started to concentrate on something.
Papyrus wanted to wave and call out to his planty friend, but Mezil stopped him from doing so.

“Hush. Listen to me. I’m not done yet.” Again Mezil looked towards the golden flowerbed. “The DEMON that possessed your friend still lives. Even after Frisk’s body long turns into dust, the essence of their kidnapper will continue to live on. Sleeping. Until their next victim arrives.”

“WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME ALL OF THIS, MISTER MAGUS?” Asked the youngster.

The Magus then replied, “You wish to save your friends no matter what it takes, correct?”

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND.”

“Remember every moment of this day. Every second. Every word. Mine. Yours. That flower’s.”

Flowey started to fidget from confusion and embarrassment. “Why? Why can’t I RESET? They’re dead, so I should be the next one in line for that power!”

Papyrus saw a flash of blue from the distant top floors of the stadium. One second later, Sans appeared right behind Flowey.

The microphone picked up his brother’s voice.

“Give me your Determination, Flowey.”

Flowey screeched in fear. He leapt away from the stand and tried to dive into the ground to flee.

But Sans pierced the ground itself with his bones. They resonated and turned the once solid floors into shifting sand. It surrounded the mic area, turning that location into an isolated island.

The short skeleton reached his arm out to Alphys. Her SOUL turned blue, and he plucked her out of her seat.

“Help!” She cried out.

Undyne reached out in the general direction, but she was helpless. “Alphys! Sans, put her down!”

Gaster saw what’s happening. He rushed down the steps from the VIP area, yelling: “What in the blue blazes are you thinking, Sans Serif?!”

His brother’s response couldn’t be heard from this distance. Papyrus leapt over the railings, using his magic to slow down his fall.

It was just in time to hear San’s ultimate conclusion. “…Then we’ll inject Flowey’s Determination into Frisk to trigger the TRUE RESET.”

Gaster’s entire being started to quake from horror. “Are you serious? Do you have any idea just how flawed your hypothesis is? At this rate, you’ll only resurrect Frisk into a DEMON, Zombie or a Lich! Then we’ll have to deal with the combined might of not one but two!”

“Hey,” his brother replied. “We’ve never tried to inject Determination into a human corpse before. Who’s to say things can’t go right? I mean, look at Flowey. Or should I say… ‘Asriel’.”

Asriel. The lost prince of the Dreemurrs.

The one who passed the Barrier only to die in human hands.
Flowey yelled, “NO! STOP! Don’t say that in front of Mom!”

“I… I told her the truth a long time ago.” Alphys added.

The flower was shocked. It then turned into boiling anger. “You. You’re telling me after I took all
the effort of hiding. After denying myself from hugging my parents. After letting myself fade into
this wretched form alone in the dark… you tell me that THEY KNEW EVERYTHING
ALREADY???”

‘Friendliness pellets’ started to fly all around. One of the bits struck one of the visiting mourners and
inflicted pain.

The cry caused the public to flee in terror.

“I WILL KILL YOU, DOCTOR ALPHYS!” The flower’s face twisted into its twisted sharptoothed form. “RIGHT HERE AND NOW!”

A warm fireball knocked Flowey and the microphone stand away. They were sent flying a few feet
from their island, landing on the fake grass.

All heads turned towards Toriel.

“Run…” she said.

Flowey lifted his petalled face off the ground. “Mom?”

“Run, Asriel. Run. Hide! Don’t let Sans catch you! GO!”

With genuine tears in his eyes, Flowey once again attempted to escape.

More bones scored through the ground. Wherever they went, whatever they touched, all turned into
grains of instability.

The flower found himself routed back to Sans himself.

“No…” Flowey squeaked. “No no no no no no!”

Losing its foundations, the afflicted side of the stadium began to collapse from its own weight. Dogaressa and Grillby tried to evacuate Undyne’s gang before the whole structure caved in.

To the very end, Toriel refused to move away from Frisk’s side. She stayed put even though the temporal quicksand had started to encroach.

Asgore rushed to her side. He tried to pull her away, but she refused to budge. The husband then
lifted the coffin on his shoulder and grabbed her hand.

Alas, it was too late. Debris blocked the only remaining path to safety.

“Your Majesty!” Gaster cried out. He immediately summoned his own blasters to obliterate the
blockade. Yet whenever he destroyed one, another took its place.

“Don’t worry. That place is safe,” Sans replied. “I need Frisk intact after all.”

Gaster snapped back: “Provided they’re not crushed from the debris first!”

Papyrus wanted to dash forward to the rescue, but someone else caught him first. He felt himself
moving backwards and up the concrete stairs.

When he looked back, he noticed it was Mezil the Magus. Lines of white magic coursed through his arm. The magical reinforcement had granted him a boost of strength.

“UNHAND ME!” Papyrus yelled. “ALL MY FRIENDS ARE THERE! FLOWEY TOO! I CAN’T LET MY BROTHER CATCH FLOWEY AND TURN HIM INTO AN EXPERIMENT!”

The Magus refused. “This situation is beyond salvaging.”

“NO! THINGS CAN CHANGE! I MUST TRY!”

That’s how Papyrus lived his life.
That’s how he kept going even when everyone else gave in to despair.

“Remember my questions, Papyrus?” Asked Mezil. “It’s not just for roleplaying’s sake.”

On stable ground, the Magus placed his hand over Papyrus’ chest and forced the skeleton’s SOUL to the surface.

“I -- Humanity’s Ultimate Weapon -- elect The Great Papyrus as his proxy!”

A brilliant red light seeped into the surface of the skeleton’s pure white SOUL. They formed the image of an intricate red butterfly.

The pattern matched the one on Mezil’s brooch.

Upon that instant, the world’s colours washed away into shades of grey. Sounds muted and all motion stopped on the dot.

“Your mind is ‘Marked’,,” thus said the Magus. “Stay determined.”

Mezil Thyme snapped his fingers to initiate his RESET.

When Papyrus came to, he found himself right before Gaster.

The elder’s hands held his cheekbones. He could feel the parents’ love flowing through.

“Papyrus,” said Gaster. “Never lose yourself to mere possibilities. The future is not set in stone. Remember this. Always.”

Remember.
Remember.
Remember.

The young Seer remembered everything.

He had returned to the night of death and darkness with all his memories intact.

Papyrus held Gaster’s shoulders. He tried to talk, but emotions kept him from being clear.

“UNCLE GASTER! I’M FROM THE FUTURE! THE RITUAL FAILED AND METTATON DIED AND FRISK DIED AND UNDYNE LOST HER EYE AND AND AND SANS WENT NUTS AND--”
There’s no time to explain. Papyrus scrambled to his feet and dashed straight towards the lab. He was in such a hurry that he dropped his phone.

He must stop Chara from getting the knife back, no matter what.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter will be a lot more understandable if you remember Sans' talk with Frisk on Chapter 17: Red. http://archiveofourown.org/works/5296460/chapters/13084651
‘The Living Victory’.

The most revered and feared of all titles in the world of magic.

Those who possess this power could come from any background and in any gender.

Riches.
Status.
Colour.
Philosophy.
Age.
Location.
Background.

All those mean nothing.

The criteria to become The Living Victory had one sole requirement: Determination.

They were those who smash the wheel of fate. Their unusual power flowed and burned so much, their SOUL turned into the most volatile of colours:

Red.

Because this power was neutral in the truest sense, it became vulnerable for misuse.

Too many had fallen into its pitfalls.
Too many had turned from hero to demon.
Too many had lost their heart.

Therefore, the once revered title became steeped in dark stigmas: a taboo to mention in fears of reviving all those who had once tarnished it. Nicknames and euphemisms evolved over time to fit the populace’s common language.

If Mezil Thyme had a choice, he preferred the original. He had a certain fondness to the tried, tested and recorded works.

Except… few would understand him. Certainly not a young skeleton fresh out from a different society.

Therefore he had no choice but to begrudgingly adopt this era’s nickname: Humanity’s Ultimate Weapon.

It’s past midnight. Not too late for a borderline ‘vampire’. The roads were clear of Saturday’s nightlife and it would stay as such for the next couple of hours.

Thanks to the advancements of technology, Mezil had a self-driving car. Age had diminished his ability to drive in low-lighting. He could still man the helm if he needed to, but the added safety...
measures were a plus.

So he climbed into the seat and started the engine. Plotted the path to Ebott Town.

Mezil checked his phone time to time. He expected a certain noir detective to call in and yell at him for whatever triggered her temper.

But… it remained silent.

“Hmm. I guess it’s too much to expect things to go right the first time.”

When the car arrived at the town proper, Mezil started driving manually. He followed the instructions of a colleague to Alphys’ Lab.

Upon arrival, a man made up of fire opened the door. Mezil recognized this person as ‘Grillby’ from the wake. Scouts reported that he’s the owner and bartender of his own establishment.

“Hello,” Mezil greeted. “I’m looking for a young skeleton named Papyrus.”

Grillby remained silent for a moment. “…I’m afraid that is not possible… But, please come in… A friend expects you…”

Alphys’ home was a mess in more ways than one. The scent of human blood permeated the living room. For a good reason as well.

A septagram of blood and steel had sealed the entrance to the inner laboratory where the exorcism took place. The person maintaining it was the Seer known as ‘W. D. Gaster’. Papyrus’ apparent uncle, a new entity in this temporal axis.

Cenna’s cold remains leaned at the foot of the lab door. Mezil noticed that the location of the stab wound had shifted. Alas, it was a fatal injury nonetheless. She must have used the last seconds of her life to contain the DEMON by making this Gram.

Blood for ‘Life’, steel casings for ‘Metal’: the basis of a last-resort seal. It was just a level or two away from the infamous ‘Barrier’.

Pounding threatened to break the structure from the inside. Each strike was weighted with great strength.

A terrible sign. The DEMON had harvested too much life force.

Potent as he may be, Gaster had started to show signs of fatigue. Hunched shoulders. Lowered skull. Not long now until he would be forced on his knees.

“Hmph,” the liquid skeleton huffed. “Is it too much to leave some means of contact, Magus? What an unacceptable oversight.”

Papyrus’ ‘uncle’ had a mind as sharp as his tongue.

Mezil answered the best he could. “Apologies, but the circumstances did not permit. Perhaps there’s something in this room that I could use for the future past?”

The next pound had snapped the door hinges. If it weren’t for the seal’s support, the DEMON would have busted through. Gaster grunted as he increased the output of his magic.

“Captain Grillby,” he said, “Please pass Papyrus’ phone to our Magus guest.”
The bartender was not a random civilian monster either. It’s one of those days where all the key players gathered in a single event.

Mezil accepted the phone. “Oh, I know this model. Mid-range. Sufficient for everyday use at an affordable price. Excellent battery life too. This will do just fine.”

In his heart, he hoped that he didn’t have too many needless apps. Clutter drains even the best batteries faster than proper use. He needed this object to last as long as it could.

“Hmm.”

Papyrus doesn’t seem to use the phone much other than for local calls and a group chat. Good.

Mezil recalled how he once tried to mark just a memory card. It corrupted vital evidence. Had to LOAD an older SAVE to undo the damage. Now he knew better than to be too selective.

He keyed in his details and left a note. ‘Call me to RESET’. Then, he ‘Marked’ the entire device for permanence.

“…I’m surprised humans could use magic…” Grillby commented. “…Our historians state… that humans will never know the joy of expressing themselves with magic…”

“Such is true, sir,” said the human with a sigh. “For humankind, magic is not a means of ‘expression’. It’s only a tool. Compare menial labour to dance. Both use the muscles for strength. But one is pure work, the other an art form.”

Passing the phone back to the elemental, Mezil continued his explanation. “Stamina management is a part of the many foundations for our line of work. When we use magic, it must have a purpose. Otherwise, the energy is wasted and waste can be fatal.”

Mezil then crouched down to inspect the body of his dead colleague. At least her eyes were closed this time. “Well. There are talented folks such as our Vanquisher here. Efficient. Your fellow dancer. The envious and the close-minded too often condemned her as a witch. They saw her mastery of magic as a sign that she’s less than human.”

Mezil admired her spirit despite her lack of etiquette. She may not have ‘Determination’ as her most prominent trait, but she had the grit to persevere.

“…I see…” Grillby replied. “…What about you…?”

“Few witness my power and remember it. Soon, the same will be for you.”

Mezil hid in plain sight amongst society. The public knew of his rank, his skill, and his archaic sense of fashion, but none had any idea of his true ability.

Turning towards the elder, the Magus said: “Doctor Gaster, I think your wisdom will help us in this predicament. Shall I mark your memories as well?”

Gaster smirked. “Save your strength, Magus. I’m an Amalgamate. I will remember.”

“Amalgamate?” Mezil asked back.

“Monsters injected with excessive amounts of Determination will lose physical integrity. They merge together until their combined bodies achieve a certain level of stability. I believe your intel would have noticed that some of the residents of Ebott tend to… flow.”
Mezil commented, “I find it a little hard to believe that you are one of them. You’re far more articulate and coherent. Furthermore, your awareness of spacetime supersedes all others.”

Gaster’s face darkened into sorrow. “It’s a long story.”

Their conversation was interrupted by yet another slam on the loosened lab doors.

“Frisk? FRISK! You IDIOT, what the hell are you doing? You’re a demigod now! That flimsy seal is nothing! C’mon, let me show you. Ground your legs, and make sure your arms are straight for the punch.”

“C’mon c’mon c’mon don’t be an idiot and just DO IT! I’m already helping you!”

Just as Mezil had thought, Chara did have martial arts training. It was a part of their village’s culture. From what he had read about their parents… he would be more surprised if they neglected to pass down their family trade.

“Everyone’s DEAD! The survivors will be unhappy! Sans can’t live without his brother, and Mom will break down with him. You MUST finish the job for their sake, Frisk. DO IT! DO IT NOW! WAIT… WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! No no no no no not now not now we don’t have enough Determination STO--!!!”

What followed after were the sounds of a shattering SOUL. It was much like glass. Veteran he may be, that sound still made Mezil wince inside.

A thud against the door followed after.

Gaster breathed a long, deep sigh.

“Well then,” he said. “Shall we conduct our post-mortem?”

Grillby helped his friend move Cenna’s body. They laid her down onto the floor and covered her face with her iconic hat.

It intrigued Mezil that these two elder monsters knew how to treat the remains with respect.

With the doorway cleared, Gaster stopped maintaining the seal. Without energy, the Arcanagram became nothing more than a grisly mural. Quickly, he backed off, avoiding the door as it slammed straight down in his direction. The hinge was broken after all.

Dust floated in the still air of ground zero. Clothing articles lay scattered on the powdery floor, no doubt shifted around during the struggle.

A long streak of human blood stretched all the way to the entrance. Cenna was dragged out by someone. Most likely by Doctor Gaster.

A red tattered scarf lay on the steel table. He remembered that everyone described Papyrus as the skeleton with a red scarf, although he didn’t wear it during the wake.

To think that the youngster wore red. What a strange twist of fate.

Mezil got down to inspect the child’s body. Frisk’s tangled trappings had started to fade away without its lifesource. “I see Cenna once again used a Truesight Potion on the child. It happened in the past timeline too.”
“What are those webs, exactly?” Doctor Gaster asked back.

“A curse,” explained the Magus. “It’s a sign that the DEMON had claimed an object -- or in this case a person -- as their own. Tampering with a cursed object will notify the possessor. This is why the murder weapon couldn’t be discarded before the ritual.”

When the webs faded in full, he noticed tiny bits of stickiness stuck on the child’s clothing. Mezil pinched them out and put on his reading glasses for a closer inspection.

“How familiar are you with the ‘Ebott Goldenflower’?” Mezil asked.

“Not quite,” the skeleton replied. “But King Asgore tends to a garden of golden flowers. The tea brewed from them is his favourite. I personally prefer the bolder black teas, but not many share my sentiment.”

Mezil thought it was bad enough that these flowers were used for a funeral. Now, he learned they had become a part of the local cuisine.

“Seer,” he asked. “Did your ancestors carry down any records from the Surface?”

Gaster hesitated to answer. “My parents had their personal collection. It was never released for public reading. Too much… sensitive information. However, I have committed their entire library to memory.”

The skeleton came from an influential background. That explained his mannerisms.

“Did any of them involve botany or anthropology?” Mezil asked.

“…My father wrote a private journal about nature. If, that’s sufficient. He always preferred the company of trees and rocks over people. Many remarked how it was a miracle that he fell in love with my mother.”

Had he ever written anything about the ‘Cheaters of Death’?

Doctor Gaster held his breath and clenched his bloodstained hands. “In a poem. Father lamented of how flowers forged of brilliant gold draw more dust than the thorns of a rose. I had always thought it was a figurative work about greed.”

Mezil had an idea about the identity of this doctor’s late father. For a Seer to love nature and write poetry about plants, he had to be someone who lived in the pre-Sealing days.

Except, that was a question for a different day.

Mezil explained the true nature of these flowers to the doctor. Armed with new information, Gaster used his Seer’s powers to check every object in the dust-ridden room.

The clothes.
The armour.
The lab equipment.
The DT-Extraction system itself.

Seeds of doom were found glued on every single object.
Gaster muttered in horror, “Oh goodness gracious. They’re everywhere!”

The pieces of the puzzle fell into place. Mezil crossed his arms and presented his hypothesis: “When Cenna destroyed the SOUL fragment, the DEMON’s essence spread onto these flower seeds. They controlled Frisk and waited for an opportune moment to get the knife back. How did they do that is the next question.”

The skeleton doctor tried his hardest to remember. “…The celebrity Mettaton. He had two forms: one as the glamorous celebrity, and the other… a plain box on a unicycle.”

“The knife was hidden inside the body of the box form. Its steel casing protected his true SOUL, thus making him a living strongbox.”

Despite the safeguards, the android form lay broken and empty. Mettaton somehow got forced to switch into his stylish yet vulnerable mode.

“Who else attended the exorcism?” Asked Mezil.

Gaster gave Mezil a list of names. The fire elemental ‘Grillby’ was not part of it: Papyrus had phoned him after a vision, thus prompting his current visitation.

The Magus took another look at the clothes lying on the floor.

There was a marked lack of blue in this picture…

Strange.

That one person had caused more trouble than everyone else combined. And he’s missing when he’s needed the most.

“Whatever happened to the other Lichborn?” Mezil asked, “I believe ‘Sans Serif’ is his name.”

Just the mere mention caused Gaster undue aggravation. ‘Resentful disappointment’ might be a more accurate description.

Acid dripped from the old skeleton’s words. “That sad sack of bones is too busy drowning in despair. I advise against putting any hopes on him.”

“What a shame,” said Mezil. “His analytical ability trumps our best supercomputers. A great asset, if you ask me.”

Gaster responded, “I’d rather not have him around. Sans has no integrity: too often his actions are swayed by extreme logic. He can and will be a heartless machine if he so justifies it. Certainly not someone I’d want in our current predicament.”

Those were strong words… but not baseless.

Mezil surveyed his surroundings. He can’t proceed from here. The current results were worse compared to the previous timeline. Unacceptable.

“There’s not much else I can do here. I think it’s time for a RESET. Hopefully, Papyrus will do a better job next round.”

“Magus, wait,” Gaster said. “You ‘marked’ Papyrus as you wanted to mark me, did you not? I saw a red butterfly escape from his crumbling body.”
Here he thought no one spotted that little detail. Mezil replied, “Yes. I did.”

“Hence why the boy said he came from ‘the future’. I thank you for preserving his life. But, I’m afraid to inform you that Papyrus can’t save anyone in his current state. And I don’t mean about him being dust.”

Gaster slid over to the table and carried Papyrus’ scarf with both hands. “His body may overflow with might, but his mind cannot tap into its fullest potential. No training, no focus. I’m sure you noticed that in your first meeting.”

Mezil agreed with the doctor. It’s unthinkable that an adult Lichborn of such potential had zero understanding about his own abilities.

Of all people, Papyrus had sought advice from a *human*.

The Magus sighed. “What do you propose?”

Gaster started folding the scarf, like what a neat mother would do to keep a piece of clothing. He then slung it over his thin arm.

“There is a place where time does not flow.” said the elder. “I had once wandered in that limbo for what seemed like eternity. I’m sure you know of it. If we could bring our boy there, we might be able to restore Papyrus’ lost years.”

“You provide the location, I’ll provide the expertise. How does that sound, Magus?”

Mezil did not like visitors… but he’ll make an exception this time. Out from his palm, he conjured another red butterfly made of his space-time magic.

It stretched its wings, flapping them twice before it fluttered above old Gaster’s head.

So the Magus said: “I’ll see you there.”

Chapter End Notes

Victory is not going to come so easily.
Scenes of a different life washed past.

Some covered in smiles.
Others covered in dust.

Once upon a time, this young man would rush to his big brother about his nightly terrors. Then the big brother would tell him it’s all just a dream.

Sweet, sweet lies meant to protect the younger’s mind and soul.

NO! DON’T DO THAT!

He watched the human stab Froggit with a toy knife.

VIOLENCE IS BAD!

He watched the human lop off the skull of a skeleton with a red scarf: mercy taken advantage of and scorned.

YOU’RE SUPPOSED TO MAKE FRIENDS, NOT KILL THEM!

The people fled for their lives. Monster Kid got into trouble and Undyne saved him. The big sister transformed into her desperado mode… yet she still failed, melting away.

Melting.

Melting until death.

WHY…?

ARE YOU HURT? ARE YOU IN PAIN? IS THAT WHY YOU’RE DOING VIOLENCE?

Mettaton also had a different body. He clamoured about his power, yet chose not to use it. He wanted to prove that the human was not beyond salvation.

He trusted them.

The human betrayed him.

TALK TO US! WE’LL HELP YOU!

Sans, Monsterkind’s Last Stand, bloodied his hands however many times he needed to stop the onslaught.

Misdirects. Cheats. Traps.

Cold and heartless like the murderer he duelled.

SANS? I… I DON’T RECOGNIZE YOU.
IS THIS WHO YOU REALLY ARE?
The human progressed to Asgore. Flowey began with a praise, but it ended in terror.

The flower fled.

Asgore mistook the human for a monster. The once-best friend of the DEMON killed his own father to prove his loyalty.

Even then, it was not enough. The knife hacked the plant eight times in a row, until only golden-petaled mulch was left.

Chara and Frisk then stood on the edge of reality. At the height of their power, they called each other ‘partners’.

NO…!

Denied. Accepted. Both led to the same result.

‘The End’.

STOP!

When the timeline restarted, there was nothingness. The price of restoring the world and living life again… was to sell one’s SOUL.

The Seer watched the child offer up that glowing red heart to the DEMON.

IT’S NOT WORTH IT, FRISK! STOP! STOOOOO00000000000000OP!

Papyrus snapped wide awake. Orange wisps danced far and high above his right socket.

He gasped, yet somehow he couldn’t feel ‘air’ flowing through his ribs. There was an odd lack of sensation whenever he consciously drew breath.

Wherever he was, it had no ceiling. Specks of light faded in and out against the vast darkness. It reminded him of the insects known as ‘fireflies’.

Papyrus sat up. He realised that he’s not in his own bed. A quick look around and he figured out that he wasn’t in his home either.

Slab-marble flooring. Wallpered maroon walls. Bookshelves all around. A high-tech floor lamp illuminated the room under any setting the user wished for. For now, it mimicked a candle’s glow.

“WHERE AM I?” Papyrus asked out loud.

Someone opened the door. It was none other than his uncle.

“Awake, I see?” Said Gaster. “You’re in the Magus’ hideout. Mezil Thyme is his name, if you remember.”

“OH! IS MISTER MAGUS OKAY?”

The uncle raised a brow. “He wasn’t in any danger in the first place. We should be asking about your condition instead.”
“WHY?”
“You died.”

It happened after all. “OH. IF I’M DEAD, IS THIS THE FABLED AFTERLIFE?”

Gaster chuckled at his innocent conclusion. “No, no. You may be ‘dead’ in the physical realm, but you still ‘live’ outside of time. It’s a little complex. You can thank the Magus for preserving your existence.”

“He’s waiting for us in the living room.”

Papyrus got out of bed and followed his uncle. He looked around in awe at the atmosphere and furnishing. It had a certain sense of elegant class in every corner.

“He is Definitely a University Principal! This place is as Principally as the Movies!”

“Don’t you mean a chancellor?” Gaster said, “My old home was similar to this, except with basalt tiles. My parents didn’t like the brightness of white marble.”

“Come to think of it, I never visited your home before. What happened to it?”

“Hmm… I wonder too. Riddled with cobwebs, if not in disrepair. I just hope that the library is still intact.”

Mezil had made himself a mug of coffee while he waited. He settled down in the living room, surrounded by floating holographic screens.

A strange hybrid of the old and new defined this Magus.

The man set his mug down and stood up with the aid of his cane. “Welcome to the realm beyond time, Seer.”

Papyrus gasped. He expected a fancy video transmission system that connected this strange place to the real world. “OH MY GOD, ARE YOU DEAD TOO?”

“No,” said Mezil. “Free access to the Void are one of the many perks of being the ultimate weapon. It’s my ‘Hub’. I can visit this place anytime, anywhere. And also invite anyone I wish. In the case of your uncle, I just needed to guide him through the darkness. It seems that we’ve been neighbours longer than we expected.”

The young skeleton squealed out of excitement. He spun around in place as he tried to take in all the sights. “Wowie! A Hyperbolic Superhero Hideout Chamber of Space and Time, This Is SOOOOOOOO Cool!”

“Hmph. This is much, much better than that cartoon nonsense. I have all the necessities for a comfortable rest: bedrooms, shower, food, water, a training hall and some recreation. All in a place secluded from time. I can take however long I wish to recover from mental fatigue.”

“Double the Wowie! But, Your House Lacks a Roof.”

Mezil glanced upwards. “Why should I add one? There’s no sky or rain. Also, it’s easier to analyze the timestreams without vertical obstruction.”
Papyrus stopped spinning. “WAIT. YOU’RE TELLING ME THAT’S NOT THE NIGHT SKY AND THOSE ARE NOT FIREFLIES?”

“I did say that we’re in a realm beyond time.”

Gaster tapped the youngster’s shoulder to catch his attention. “Papyrus, The Void is a gap between realities. On its own, it contains nothing but vast darkness. Much like The End. But with Determination, magic and a little knowhow, it’s possible to construct small pockets of reality.”

“I had a ‘room’ of my own too.” Gaster elaborated, “But, I lived in a cold prison compared to the Magus’ hideout.”

He conjured a grey concrete tile and placed the object on the table. “This was all I could make.”

Papyrus picked up the rough artificial stone. His usual joy faded as he contemplated on its meaning. If his genius uncle could only muster a dull rock, what chances does an untrained human child have?

He said, “I GUESS IF YOU’RE STUCK WITH NOTHING, IT’S EASY TO BECOME UNHAPPY. MAYBE THAT’S WHY FRISK STARTED KILLING.”

Mezil furrowed his brows. “You had a vision?”

“BEFORE I WOKE UP, YES.”

“Go ahead and sit down. I’ll get some coffee.”

Over the bittersweet aromas, cream, and sugar, Papyrus explained the last vision before his awakening. The elders listened close from start to end, not letting a single detail slip by…

“So that’s the beginning of ‘The End’,” Gaster commented. “Troubling. However, I noticed that Frisk still kept their SOUL. I don’t think what you witnessed was a mere reconstruction of the past. The results don’t tally.”

The Magus grabbed one of the many screens that surrounded him. It turned into a drawing board and he started plotting a series of branching lines.

“It’s a ‘Possibility’ written in the timelines itself,” he explained, “They’re not as limitless as people would like to think. There will be two constant truths: the extreme ‘positive’ and the extreme ‘negative’. In other words, the best and the worst outcome.”

Once he finished, the Magus flipped the screen around for Gaster and Papyrus to read. One white, one black. The black path ended early, while the white path parted straight ahead toward ‘Today’.

“We’re on the best.” Mezil tapped his finger on the word. “The times when the child did not succumb to misanthropy.”

Switching over to the dark side, he continued his explanation. “Dying in the hands of the DEMON must have caused some sort of resonance. It allowed Papyrus to view the worst. Hence, his latest vision. I won’t be surprised if Chara is a constant value in this path of destruction.”

Gaster closed his eyes in deep contemplation. “‘Relevency’ seems to be the key. If I train Papyrus on exploiting this trait, he could improve his inherent precognition to the point of clairvoyance.”

Papyrus being Papyrus, had no idea what his uncle had just theorized.

“WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?” He asked.
“If all possibilities are written ahead of time based on circumstance and limitations, then you could use your powers to foretell your opponent’s next move in a battle. The result will be a hundred percent dodge rate, like your brother’s.”

It only confused the skeleton more. “UH, SANS CAN’T SEE THE FUTURE, RIGHT?”

“Correct, he can’t. But he’s trained to analyze the present. In other words, he can figure out the range of a person’s choices on the spot. This is further backed up by the ‘Purple’ trait of his Seer’s Eye.”

“Perseverance. He can recall all his personal experiences and dejavu with enough concentration and analysis.”

Papyrus then asked, “DID YOU JUST SAY… ALL? LIKE. EVERYTHING?”

“Only if he wills it,” said Gaster. “Knowing his laziness, he’d be very selective.”

His brother knew so, so, much more than he ever let on. Some of his more mysterious behaviour had started to make sense.

Mezil kept tapping his cane on the smooth marble, deep in thought and incomprehensibly muttering.

“IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG, MISTER MAGUS?”

“Hmm,” said Mezil. “A puzzle’s on my mind. However, I do not have the clue to draw a definite conclusion.”

Confident as ever, Papyrus puffed up his chest and posed. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL HELP YOU SOLVE ALL YOUR PUZZLES! YOU CAN COUNT ON ME, NYEH HEH HEH! BUT WHERE IS IT?”

“You’re in it right now.”

“EH?”

The old man huffed in slight irritation. “Why so clueless? Life is always the greatest puzzle. More so with all these time shenanigans.”

This Magus was a strict principal through and through, complete with fussy impatience.

Uncle Gaster patted Papyrus’ on the back. “Come along, my boy. Your parents are eager to teach you the arts as well. They had learned quite a bit from our time together.”

“Parents?” Mezil raised a brow. But, he declined to ask further. “I see… well then. Don’t keep them waiting either.”

The Magus gently tapped the young skeleton’s femur with his fancy cane. “Go on, hop to it.”

The lessons concentrated on controlling his innate power. It followed a cycle of meditation and combat: ebbing in tides of calmness and action.

He must time his powers right to survive.
Too slow and he won’t catch the window of opportunity.
Too quick and he’d give away his tricks to the enemy.

Uncle Gaster and his parents weren’t pushovers. The power and the randomized patterns they conjured were up to par with Undyne’s skill. Sans just made them look easy.
After what seemed like hours, he had passed the first test. Though, it was still far below Sans’ standards. The elder brother was a true master and it was not something that could be achieved in just one lesson.

Papyrus felt ready, but at the same time he knew that he’ll come back to this hideout again.

Mezil led them out through the front door. He had an outdoor garden. Water flowed in between the zones of greenery, creating soothing streams.

Everything was a digital mimicry. Yet somehow, it calmed the skeleton’s mind for the task ahead.

A console waited at the middle of a stone platform. When the Magus got close to it, the screen lit up.

It read: LOADING SCREEN.

The interface behind the cover reminded Papyrus of a photo album. This man had eleven pages, each displaying nine slots.

This time, only ‘File 1’ had a picture inside: it contained an image taken from Mezil’s point of view.

“What are those?” Papyrus asked.

“My SAVES,” Mezil answered in a plain, matter-of-fact manner. “I started out with just one slot and expanded my capacity from there. This will allow me to make multiple checkpoints for shorter jumps in time.”

“But where are your other saves? I thought you’re an old veteran. You must have accumulated thousands of them by now.”

“Archived. I don’t like clutter. Only those relevant to my current case will be displayed.”

Uncle Gaster stared at the sheer number of options in both awe and terror. “If Frisk survives, will they be able to do the same?”

“If they have appropriate training, then yes. We’ll cross the bridge when we get there, though.”

Mezil selected File 1. The thumbnail expanded to fill the whole screen, giving him both the timestamp and a confirmation button.

“Are you ready, Papyrus?” He asked.

Papyrus being Papyrus, he answered: “YES! I AM READY!”

‘CONFIRM’, his finger pressed. On that moment, anything that was not part of the console disappeared into the darkness.

The hideout.
The garden.
The fireflies of time.

All gone.

Instead, a grey ring appeared at the edge of the platform. It started to spin.

“Oh!” Papyrus exclaimed, “YOU HAVE A SPINNING GREY DONUT JUST LIKE MY COMPUTER!”
Mezil responded, “A spinning grey what?”

Before the skeleton could elaborate, he found himself back in a familiar posture. He was on the floor, with Uncle Gaster holding his cheekbones.

The elder quickly dropped his arms. “Go, Papyrus! Hurry!”

Papyrus scrambled on his feet and dashed into the lab. This time, his orange Eye danced not out of fear…

It burned with determination.

* * *

The knife sliced his SOUL in half across the sternum. It was the same way that Sans died in a different timeline…

Papyrus sat up in the hideout bed. In this round, Mezil Thyme joined Uncle Gaster for the checkup.

“OOPS,” he said. “I DIED AGAIN. BUT, I NOW UNDERSTAND WHY METTATON WAS IN HIS GLAM FORM.”

“Oh?” Gaster said, “Do tell.”

“FRISK. OR RATHER, CHARA CONTROLLING FRISK, FLIPPED HIS SWITCH. THERE’S A SWITCH ON THE BACK THAT FORCES METTATON INTO THE SUPER STYLISH HOT ROBOT MODE.”

Mezil planted his face into his palm and shook his head. “Everyone let their guard down. Why didn’t Judge Caraway check with the Truesight Potion?”

Papyrus again was confused by the new terminology. “WHAT IS THIS TRUESIGHT POTION THING?”

“It’s the essence of Justice mixed in an alcohol-based stabilizer. Vanquishers use them to ferret out a DEMON’s secrets. Vessels, possessions, curses, the life they harvested, and what have you.”

“HMMM…” Papyrus furrowed his brows. “MISS AUNT COULD BARELY STAND WITHOUT KING ASGORE’S HELP. I DON’T THINK SHE’S WELL ENOUGH TO THINK STRAIGHT, LET ALONE DEFEND HERSELF.”

Uncle Gaster’s arms started to move on their own. They spoke to him in signs, and he conversed back in the same language.

The lack of context made it difficult to understand the full conversation. Even if Papyrus could translate the language, he couldn’t make head or tail of their words.

“Good point, Roman,” said Gaster. “I’ll pass them the message.”

“ROMAN IS DAD, RIGHT?”

“Yes. And he said that the Vanquisher had overexerted herself. Burned both ends of a candle, as the
saying goes. The lady’s desire to save Frisk pushed her beyond her limit.”

Experts with experts, Mezil frowned upon the news. “This means we were already at a disadvantage.”

“IT’S OKAY!” Papyrus said, “I’LL JUST TRY AGAIN! THIS TIME I’M GOING TO PROTECT HER! …IF I DON’T DIE FIRST.”

* * *

Papyrus woke up in the realm beyond time again. He immediately got out of bed and headed towards the living room.

He’s not happy.

The elders had turned the east wall into a huge diagram. There, they recorded the attempts and the differences that happened in between.

So far, they had twenty different versions of the same incident. All ended in the youngster’s unfortunate demise.

“This is worrying,” Gaster said. “Despite the training, Papyrus was in a constant setback.”

Mezil then asked, “Did he apply the power of his Eye?”

“Yes. And yet he still failed. Look here, Magus. He repeated the same steps, but the results never matched his expectations. This can only mean one thing: Chara is exploiting dejavu.”

“Hmm,” the old man tapped his cane on the ground. “They were once a Red SOUL child too. I’m not surprised if their lingering Determination was enough to cause issues.”

Hearing the steps, Uncle Gaster turned around. “Papyrus?”

“…I HAD A VISION,” said Papyrus. “THE UNDERGROUND HAD NO KING. WHERE IS EVERYONE? IT WAS TOTAL ANARCHY AND THE PEOPLE LOST HOPE…”

* * *

As Papyrus gained mastery, his visions became clear and frequent.

The probabilities in between the best and the worst had started to fill in. The two black and white paths gradually turned into an entire tree, each with their own story to tell.

“…WHY SO MANY VARIATIONS? WHY SO MANY WAYS OF KILLING? IS IT BECAUSE IT’S FUN FOR FRISK?”

The elders couldn’t bear to answer.
Papyrus walked right out of the ‘indoor’ area. He didn’t greet his uncle, parents, or the human elder.

He sat on the garden swing, curled himself up, rested his skull on his knees, and let it rock him back and forth.

He had just seen the worst of his best friends.

Mettaton ran a brainwashing dystopia. Undyne overthrew Toriel. Sometimes literally. With all her might. Burning hatred against humanity defined her rule. Alphys too was consumed by hatred. She wished to kill Frisk.

Then, he witnessed his own failings.

The nation elected him as the King, but Sans did all the work. Despite their combined efforts… he couldn’t help anyone. The citizens gave in to despair, although they had more than enough to eat.

His latest vision was worse than that.

Once upon a time, Papyrus thanked the human for ‘helping’ him achieve his dreams.

Even if that ‘thanks’ included murder.

“FINALLY!! I'M IMPORTANT. AND IT'S ALL THANKS TO YOU. AND THE HORRIBLE THINGS YOU DID.”

Word for word.

“…HOW CAN I SAY THAT?” He whimpered. “IT’S SO HORRIBLE. HOW CAN I THANK FRISK FOR KILLING ANYONE…? AM I REALLY THAT STUPID?”

Too many complicated feelings roiled within him. They were emotions that he never had to wrestle with in his blissful, fortunate life.

In the midst of his self-pity, Papyrus felt a shift of weight on the swing. When he looked up, he noticed that Mezil had sat down on the opposite side.

“…I did say you will see the deepest and darkest secrets of everyone you love. Considering how much you hold yourself in high esteem, that includes you.”

The Magus’ warnings had come true.

Papyrus huddled tighter. “I WASN’T PERFECT.”

“No one is,” the elder answered. “It’s a fact of life.”

“DON’T YOU GET SCARED OF OTHERS? LIKE, YOU KNEW HOW GOOD OR BAD THEY CAN BE.”

“That’s why I am a man with very few friends.”
“IT SEEMS VERY LONELY.”

“Correct,” Mezil answered. The man tried to keep a stone-cold face, but Papyrus could see the deep sadness within him.

“…MAYBE THAT’S WHY SANS HAD NO FRIENDS EITHER. HE ONLY LOOKED LIKE HE HAD FRIENDS, BUT HE DOESN’T KEEP CONTACT. THEY ONLY SEE HIS LAZY JOKER SIDE.”

Papyrus paused before finishing his conclusion. “I ONLY SEE HIS LAZY JOKER SIDE.”

The human pushed the swing back to make it rock a little more. “Do you still think that every man, woman, and child have the potential to be good? Or have the trials changed you?”

Without much thought, the skeleton answered back: “YES, I STILL BELIEVE. I’M JUST VERY DISAPPOINTED WITH MYSELF. BECAUSE. I FAILED MY OWN STANDARDS. I SHOULD BE THE ONE SETTING AN EXAMPLE.”

Mezil then said, “Standards imposed on the self are the hardest to fulfil. Either through negligence or ignorance, we inevitably make mistakes and fall short.”

He placed his cane across the thigh and leaned forward, resting on the elbows. “Do you know why Caraway and I bear the title of ‘Judge’?”

“NO. IT SOUNDS FANCY THOUGH.”

“It’s because we evaluate others. Some people are too critical, some not enough. Our job is to make sure every person gets a fair and honest assessment. We check not only their abilities… but also their hearts.”

“I’ve encountered many who thought they could do no wrong. Considered themselves as gods walking on earth with the right to manipulate anyone to their whims. Those need to be knocked down a peg or two.”

“Then there are others who thought themselves as squirming worms, when in reality they’re caterpillars waiting to transform into a butterfly. Those need to be nurtured on the correct mental diet.”

“Judge Caraway was the latter. She came from a home who treated her as garbage. Unwanted and an eyesore. Look at her now, a majestic bird who once fought toe-to-toe with a Lichborn.”

“…If only she could improve on her etiquette,” Mezil huffed. “Manners exist for a reason! Sheesh. Calling me by nickname and shoving paperwork to me. Her lack of respect is unbelievable.”

Papyrus couldn’t help but to chuckle at his reaction a bit. “YOU’RE SO TSUNDERE.”

“What is a ‘tsundere’?” At least Mezil got the pronunciation right.

“AN ANIME TERM FOR PEOPLE WHO’RE HARSH ON THE OUTSIDE, BUT SOFT IN THE INSIDE. YOU CARE A LOT ABOUT MISS AUNT. MORE THAN YOU’D LIKE TO ADMIT.”

Mezil’s straightened his back and yelled, “No! Who do you think I am?! I just state the facts!”

“THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT A TSUNDERE WOULD SAY! NYEH HEH HEH! YOU’RE SO
TSUN-TSUN, BUT YOU CAN BE DERE-DERE TOO!"

No comment. Absolutely no comment. Mezil bit his lower lip, trying to stop himself from further digging his own grave.

Papyrus just laughed at his reaction.

“THANKS MISTER MAGUS,” the youngster smiled back. As much as a skeleton could anyway.

Mezil returned to his usual stoic front. “For?”

“TALKING TO ME. I DON’T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHY, BUT LISTENING TO YOUR LECTURE MADE ME FEEL A TON BETTER. SO, THANKS.”

“This is the wonder of education, Papyrus. It’s not as bad as schoolchildren complain. You know, it is entirely possible to learn without ever being educated.”

With a hand on his chest, Mezil said, “True education lies in character building. The SOUL. Right in here. Remember that.”

“OKAY!” Papyrus pumped his arm. “I’LL REMEMBER FOR SURE! LET’S GET BACK TO THE REAL WORLD AND TRY AGAIN.”

“Yes. Let us.”

Chapter End Notes

Failure montage ahoy.
Funnily, this is Chapter 40. And 4 puns with death. And there are lots of deaths.

The fact that Mezil has a PC/PS4 quality minimum hub for his SAVES says something about his sheer level of experience. The mastery he has is a whole different world compared to Frisk.
Chapter Notes

I hope you guys remember Chapter 1

Oh and the beginning half of Chapter 6.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“No, Helvetica. We’re not getting Sans.”

The right arm shoved Papyrus’ dusty red scarf into Gaster’s face. It was the one salvaged from the first night of the youngster’s proxy duty.

Gaster talked straight into the fabric, muffling his words. “I understand your frustrations, but we don’t know the location of your seraphim. Even if we do know, I won’t let our ally set foot anywhere near him. For Judge Thyme’s personal safety.”

The angry missus literally rubbed it in. At some point, her husband had to pry her away.

“Unfortunately, my expectations of Sans are indeed that low. Apologies.”

While dear mother continued to fight with Uncle Gaster, Papyrus lay down on the couch. He hugged a cushion and stayed very silent.

The ever-branching data of timelines had now occupied the entire perimeter of the living room. Just looking at the lines gave Papyrus a headache, let alone to compute the mess.

Mezil squeezed the bridge of his nose. Even the experienced Magus grew fatigued from the sprawling web of recorded maybes.

“Children are creative, as the saying goes.” Said the Magus, “In Chara’s case, they’re too creative. We need to subtract a factor if we want to streamline this mess.”

Roman’s hand made some signs. Gaster translated him while being smothered by the scarf. “He’s asking if you know which factor to subtract.”

“Not yet,” Mezil answered. “I’m still missing a vital clue.”

Papyrus then blurted, “I KEEP HAVING THIS WEIRD FEELING THAT WE’RE MISSING THE OBVIOUS.”

It was the first time the youngster talked since he returned to the Hub. The statement caught everyone’s attention. Even dear mother stopped venting her frustrations on her husband’s best friend.

“What do you mean?” Asked Uncle Gaster.

“UUUH. HOW DO I PUT THIS? IT’S LIKE, RIGHT BEFORE MY EYES. BUT I GOT TOO DISTRACTED WITH ALL THE CHAOS.”

“Is it dejavu?”
“NO. NOT THAT. MMM… IT’S A CROSSWORD PUZZLE. THE CLUES DESCRIBE A WORD YOU SHOULD KNOW, BUT IT’S SO HARD TO GET THE ANSWER. OR. OR JUMBLES. ALL THE CORRECT WORDS ARE HIDDEN INSIDE THE SQUARE OF GIBBERISH ALPHABETS. WHICH MAKES THINGS REALLY HARD TO SEE.”

Gaster pointed at the timeline diagrams. “So you’re saying that we’re having the spacetime version of a jumble and crossword puzzle combined into one?”

“Yes.” Maximum Papyrus Logic, but an apt one.

The details flew right over Mezil’s head. “May… I have a translation on his analogy, Doctor Gaster?”

The other expert replied, “Papyrus said that it’s an answer we should have thought of much, much sooner. But, we’re getting distracted by the noise.”

“And hence the madam’s insistence on finding the elder brother.”

“Yes.” Gaster motioned his hand over the diagrams. “Analysis is his true field of expertise. Not stand-up comedy.”

Mezil sighed. “I’m going to get more coffee.”

His progress was impeded by an outstretched bony right arm, still clutching the red scarf. The person behind it was Papyrus’ mother. She’s a woman with her own brand of feistiness.

Gaster cringed a bit. “Helvetica had grown tired of coffee. And tea. And assorted other pre-generated consumables. She wants a proper kitchen to prepare meals for us all. Her own personal touch. Do you perhaps have a module that matches her requirements…”?

“I do,” the Magus answered. “Please wait for a moment.”

He walked over to a painting and flipped it around. Doing so revealed another console, this time for room management. After pressing some buttons, the living room’s west wing gained an extra door.

The data generated a modest kitchen. Not very fancy, but not under-equipped either. It had all the necessities for a normal family.

Mezil explained, “I don’t usually cook. But, I once had to save the life of someone who does. Hence the kitchen. I hope it’s not too outdated.”

Papyrus being Papyrus, had gone sparkly eyed from the addition. “THIS IS SOOOOO COOL! OH, WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO SAVE YOUR FRIEND FROM?”

“A major conspiracy,” he explained. “In one night, that fellow died in a total of thirteen unique ways.”

“…I CAN IMAGINE THE AMOUNT OF UNFUN INVOLVED. NO WONDER THEY WANTED TO CHILL OUT AND COOK DELICIOUSNESS.”

“Correction. I was the one having the most ‘unfun’. I was forced to mark his memories so he could stop making the same stupid, moronic, idiotic mistakes over and over. He’s an enemy of blood-pressures.”

“OUCHIES,” Even Papyrus understood the pain, “THAT’S DOUBLE THE UNFUN.”
“At least he cooks reasonably well as compensation.”

Both husband and wife clapped their hands in glee. It made the prim and proper Gaster look thoroughly silly. His embarrassment shone through on the expression of his skull.

“W-what would you like to eat?” Asked Gaster.

What else other than good old tomato spaghetti and meatballs? After punching in the required ingredients on the kitchen console, the skeleton parents cooked up three plates of pasta.

Papyrus slurped it up right away, praising its deliciousness. It was as though the grim and glum situation never existed.

“Oh my, it is indeed well-done,” Mezil admitted. “Hats off to you, Sir and Madam.”

Edibles in The Void did nothing in the physical sense, providing no real nourishment as the residents exist in a digital state. But, it helped change the moods and mind.

Determination: it’s a game of resolve.

* * *

The meal’s loving touch must have boosted morale to new heights. Because, for the first time in this long, long night…

Papyrus survived.

Grillby passed the phone back to its rightful owner, saying, “…You should give your friend a call…”

“THANK YOU, GRILLBY!” The youngster read the message, scrolled all the way to his number and dialled it.

One beep later, the Magus answered. “Hello?”

“MISTER MAGUS! I DID NOT DIE!” Papyrus proclaimed his survival with utmost pride.

“Excellent! What about your friends?”

The skeleton then started sweating a bit. “WELL. ABOUT THAT. THEY DIDN’T MAKE IT. MISS AUNT MADE THIS REALLY CREEPY STAR OUT OF HER OWN BLOOD. AND UNCLE GASTER IS USING HIS MAGIC TO STOP CHARA FROM SLAMMING DOWN THE DOOR.”

There was a loud, audible groan from the other end of the phone line. “It’s just like my first meeting with your uncle.”

“What should I do now?”

“Observe. Since you’re there, you might be able to give us a fresh angle. Call back when you’re done.”
A fresh angle. One that the elders had missed due to their attention on the wrong details.

Papyrus walked towards the bloody seal. He kept his ears open for any oddities in dialogue.

By now, he couldn’t quite remember the timeline of when the wake happened. Hazy. It was too far back, and his memory retention isn’t as good as his brother’s.

But he always recalled one detail.

‘Determination’.

Chara was trying to get Frisk to ‘fill their SOUL with Determination’.

Does Frisk know this?
Was that the reason why they commit suicide again and again?
Would they have enough deja vu to remember any changes?

“UNCLE GASTER?” Asked Papyrus.

“Yes?” The uncle replied, albeit strained by the task.

“DO YOU THINK FRISK CAN REMEMBER ALL THESE TIME SHENNAGANS? BECAUSE OF THEIR DETERMINATION?”

“…Perhaps. By default, they would remember everything. But we had drained them to the point of normalcy.”

“THEY’RE GRADUALLY BECOMING NOT-NORMAL THOUGH.”

“That is also true. It doesn’t help that the DEMON is a parasite in and of itself.”

Chara continued to feed reasons for Frisk to do the deed, while Frisk continued to struggle against the possession.

An idea flashed through his mind. It might be outrageous. It sounds nuts even by his own outlandish standards.

But he must try. This could be ‘the other angle’ that they needed.

Papyrus dove to the entrance. He pressed his front cranium bone on the sealed lab door.

“What are you doing?” Asked Gaster.

He knocked on it twice. Then, Papyrus yelled as loud as his ribcages would ever allow.

“FRISK!”

His voice must reach the other side no matter what.

“BE AS LAZY AS SANS! I NEED YOU TO DO DEFINITELY TOTALLY ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!!!!”

“IF YOU KEEP FIGHTING, THE FUTURE GETS TOO COMPLICATED AND I CAN’T HELP YOU!”

In all the timelines, Frisk tried everything they could to subdue Chara. Doing so added an extra factor
to the graphs.

“SO DON’T DO ANYTHING! JUST RELAX! LET IT ALL GO! BE TRASH! I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- WILL SAVE YOU!”

The skeleton drew in breath for one final plea.

“TRUST ME!!!”

The DEMON mocked and jeered him. That didn’t matter. He tuned out all the hate and concentrated on Frisk’s response.

In the tiniest of voices, they said: “Please, save me.”

“OF COURSE!”

“Thank you,” Frisk replied. Soon after, the child forced out their SOUL and shattered it.

Silence fell. But, this time a glimmer of hope shone in the darkness. Gaster’s grin confirmed it.

“My, my, my…” he said. “It was indeed obvious in hindsight.”

Papyrus called Mezil again.

“MISTER MAGUS, I THINK I SOLVED THE FACTOR PROBLEM. CAN WE RESET NOW TO TEST?”

* * *

The experiment was a success.

Chara had mistaken Frisk’s lack of participation as their victory, not realising that it was a trap. Their deja vu was not as strong without extra Determination to leech on.

Now all he needed to see was Chara’s possible moves without Frisk’s struggles.

Papyrus managed to send Mettaton flying to safety right before Chara plunged the knife into his back. He no longer needed to send bones to turn a SOUL blue.

Slowly yet surely, he’s learning Sans’ tricks.

It didn’t stop there. The repeats had further sharpened his mastery over his new Eye magic. He dodged and parried every single one of Chara’s strikes.

As the fight continued, Undyne ran over to Mettaton to check up on him. She had her spear out to guard the dazed celebrity.

Finally, Papyrus managed to disarm the DEMON of their weapon. He used his gravity-defying magic to stab it into the ceiling: a place far out of reach for a human child.

Victory should be at hand.

But, since when life was so simple?
The kid stomped down on his kneecaps. It made him stumble and loosen his grip.

Then the DEMON pounced on Cenna and tried to rob her standard issue gun. The struggle caused a misfire that shot through the woman’s thigh.

“MISS AUNT!” He cried out.

That was his mistake. The DEMON aimed the gun towards Papyrus and pulled the trigger.

Again and again.

Upon his death, Papyrus fell into a vision.

Somehow, this time the vision took place at a very different place…

HUH? WAIT. WHERE AM I?

It took him to a land covered in snow.

Surrounded by real trees.

Under a clear, starry sky.

The Surface.

He witnessed his brother standing at one end. His Eye sputtered between the shades of yellow and blue.

He’s not grinning. That eternally upright curve turned downwards.

SANS? SOMETHING’S NOT RIGHT.

Frisk was jailed in a cage made of bone. They struggled to stand, leaning against the bones for support.

FRISK? WHY ARE YOU FALLING ASLEEP?

His opponent was a masked woman dressed in heavy winter clothes. They had their black hair cut to shoulder length.

“Wow, you’re still standing. I’m impressed.”

Papyrus recognized that voice.

OH MY GOD, MISS AUNT?!?!?!

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR HAIR???

Sans tried to straighten up and focus, but his body swayed. With a low growl he asked, “What the hell did you do to me?!”

Cenna shrugged. “Nothing much. Just, you know, I’ve spiked your usual ketchup supply with sedatives. Like in the previous timeline, or so I was told. This time, there’s no public MTT broadcasting either. Convenient for the both of us, eh?”

Her teasing dropped into dead seriousness on a bat. She summoned her SOUL and transformed it into a hawk.
“There’s no way in hell I’m gonna let a Grim Reaper kidnap my kid.”

Sans flashed a sly grin. “Welp, they ain’t yours either.”

The two duelled. Golden feathers clashed against the bones of decay. Blasters tore through the woods, and bee-like drones danced around the lightshow.

* * *

WAIT, WHY ARE YOU TWO FIGHTING?
SERIOUSLY! IT’S AS IF THE WORLD FORGOT HOW TO TALK THINGS OUT!

In the end, Sans’ aim held true. One of his toxic bones pierced through his opponent’s SOUL. The violet bits of decay consumed the bird. Golden flakes crumbled into bits that soon faded away.

She fell straight onto the snow, still and lifeless.

Papyrus watched the scene in horror. He just beheld his brother kill Frisk’s only remaining relative.

Sans continued to struggle against his condition. Cenna’s sedatives began to override his will as he staggered towards the bone cage. “C’mon kid… Let’s… let’s get you out of here…Just hide a few months. And… I’ll take you home… okay?”

Then Cenna’s body started to move. Grasped in her hand was a small fragment of her SOUL. She had kept it hidden for this moment.

The Magus stood up, drew out her gun… and pointed it square at Sans.

I… I REMEMBER THIS!

I HAD THIS VISION ONCE! WHEN I GOT ELECTROCUTED BY MY MEGALICIOUS ELECTRIC FENCE!

BACK THEN I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST A DREAM. OH NO, IT’S ACTUALLY REAL?!!

Everything went downhill from that point onwards.

Sans retaliated, but the drugs kicked in at the worst possible time. That was when he lost control and slipped his footing.

The blaster went a full circle, following the direction of his arm. First it destroyed Cenna, then the trees…

At the very end was none other than his own brother.

Papyrus.
The one who tried to defend Frisk from the light of death.

* * *

After the youngster’s defeat, both Gaster and Mezil tutored Papyrus in another art of advanced magic. The expertise of the world above and the world below combined for a common purpose.

Papyrus had already mastered his progressive energy of Bravery. Now he must learn to apply his
two other traits: Kindness and Integrity.

To heal, protect, and reinforce. He must perform all these on the dot if he was to conjure the ideal shield.

More hours of training passed by in the realm beyond time.

During one of the break-times, Papyrus took the opportunity to ask some nagging questions, “UNCLE GASTER, CAN I ASK MORE ABOUT MY BROTHER?”

The old skeleton had the face of a man who wanted to speak nothing on the subject. But then, they had come this far. It’s too late to hide: more so from the ‘Living Chronograph’.

He relented in the end. “What do you wish to know about?”

“HIS MAGIC EYE.” Papyrus glanced to the side. “I THOUGHT THEY’RE JUST REALLY COOL SPECIAL EFFECTS. WITH SOME UNIQUE MAGIC.”

Between sips of his custom-spiced coffee, Mezil said, “That would help put some of my cases into context too. Sans had tangled with us Magi for a long, long while… in the other timelines, as Papyrus’ latest vision had confirmed.”

Gaster squinted at the Magus. He then said, “I hope you two understand that under normal circumstances, I’ll be charged for divulging national secrets.”

“I DON’T THINK WE EVER HAD A LAW FOR THAT,” commented Papyrus. “OR MAYBE WE HAD ONE. I CAN’T QUITE REMEMBER.”

“No, no, Papyrus. You wouldn’t know. It’s information so classified that not even your senior Undyne knows anything about it.”

As usual, Papyrus asked: “WHY?”

Gaster hesitated to answer for one odd moment. It was a tall-tale sign of deflection.

So he nonetheless gave a reason. A different one than the heart of the truth, but still valid.

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So the old skeleton said, “Because the exact combinations of a Seer’s Eye is a very personal subject. It’s not something to air in public. Dangerous, even. If the wrong person knows your true colours, they can think up of ways to counter it.”

“Which I’m very sure the Magi had figured out by now.” A suspicious glare intensified at Mezil, the human. “I was there when the Vanquisher tried to trap Sans. She recited all three colours plus their connection with ‘death’. I don’t see why I should elaborate more.”

Mezil lifted his mug towards Papyrus and said, “Well, our young man here is ignorant by no fault of his own. At least give him the basic facts. Otherwise, he’ll forever remain lost and confused.”

To the very end, the stubborn skeleton struggled to spill the beans. Then came Helvetica. She raised her arm all too ready to smack some sense back into the doctor. Dear mother had given this guy no rest.

“Alright, alright! Put that hand down Helvetica,” Gaster surrendered at last. “I tell you, whenever it’s about your sons your willpower multiplies by the hundreds.”

The bony scientist plucked out one of Mezil’s screens of digital light. “Pen, please,” he said, and a
holographic pen appeared for the taking.

Gaster wrote down the list of two people.

Sans Serif
Cyan: Patience.
Yellow: Justice.
Purple: Perseverance.

Cenna Caraway
Yellow: Justice. [MAJOR]
Purple: Perseverance. [MINOR 1]
Green: Kindness. [MINOR 2]

“Judge Thyme,” said Gaster, “In your school, all your practitioners have one dominant and two lesser traits. Am I right?”

“Correct,” Mezil confirmed. “The colour of the SOUL, or ‘Psychia’, determines their ‘Major’. Most of their power will be there. The two other extras are called ‘Minors’. They grant the Magus some extra abilities, but they will always be white. Not to mention they’re weak compared to a Major of the same colour.”

Papyrus remembered his duel with Cenna when she first visited Ebott. “OH! I NOTICED THAT MISS AUNT KEPT USING HER GLASSY BUBBLE SHIELDS TO BLOCK MY BONES! I HAD TO STOP THE FIGHT BECAUSE SHE’LL FAINT IF I CONTINUED. HOSPITAL TRIPS ARE UNFUN.”

“AND MISTER MAGUS, YOUR ARM HAD THESE COOL GLOWY WHITE LINES TOO! LIKE THE OIL BOTTLES UNCLE GASTER TAUGHT ME TO REINFORCE.”

Mezil nodded to the statements and said, “Correct. For someone with no Cyan or Purple, you’re quite observant. By the way, your concern over Judge Caraway’s health is very endearing. No wonder she’s so fond of you.”

Papyrus beamed in both pride and happiness. Getting the correct answer always felt great.

Back to subject. Gaster started to draw lines on Sans’ list, connecting them with each other. “For us Seers, all traits are equal. There are no Majors or Minors. Each and every colour supports each other to their fullest potential. Think of it as a blended canvas painting.”

“Cyan, the essence of Patience. Patience is the root of ‘Wisdom’. Time does not matter for Sans: he’ll wait and observe until he had the best answer to a solution. If he needed years to achieve his goal, he’ll accept it.”

“Yellow, the essence of Justice. Justice is the root of ‘Truth’. His patient wisdom further enhanced his sense of judgement. Accurate problem solving at their most timely point. This is where the scope of our sights differ. I saw the DEMON’s image and only that. Sans would have seen their very heart. Their intent. The reason behind their actions.”

“Purple, the essence of Perseverance. Perseverance is the root of ‘Intellect’. True knowledge comes from a disciplined pursuit of study. One can be ‘smart’, but smarts alone are fragile. You think I’m a genius because I remember details? Goodness. I know he’s capable of outdoing me. This is the power that allows him to will relevant memories from across timelines.”

Gaster dropped the pen and let it sink into the holographic screen. “Once upon a time we lost our
Prince along with our First Human, both the most valuable Golden Quiches of the Underground. Our ‘stars’. Our ‘hopes’ and ‘dreams’. Life was never the same since the tragedy.”

The old skeleton lifted his hands to indicate that he included the parents. “The three of us took Sans’ birth as a sign of new hope. He was our Golden Quiche, one brimming with potential to lead our people to glory.”

He then dropped both hands on the lap in utter disappointment. “…Who now wastes his life in a bar. Some promise he was.” A bitter sigh followed.

Papyrus stared down on his own feet. He doesn’t understand. The details described by Uncle Gaster sounded mind-blowing.

Yet, Sans never seems to see himself that way. It didn’t help that his brother presented himself as a comical caricature all the time.

“SO, SANS IS THE REAL ABANDONED QUICHE?” Asked Papyrus. “WHO QUIT ON HIMSELF?”

Gaster answered, “An accurate analogy.”

Mezil finished the last of his coffee and placed the mug back on the table. “Thank you very much,” he said. “That’s very informative. Well, it’s time to continue our lessons. We still have a long way to go.”

* * *

The reinforced shield blocked Chara’s stomp. Made the kid yelp and hop around for a few seconds too. ‘Get rekt’ as the internet might say.

Papyrus then tossed Cenna into Asgore’s arms. He needed to get the alternative source of a weapon as far away as possible.

Alphys yelped at the sudden incoming body, but King Dreamy dropped his trident just in time to catch the human woman.

“YOUR MAJESTY,” he said, “TAKE THE LADIES AND RUN!”

While he gave the instruction, Chara zipped past his feet.

“WHERE ARE YOU GOING???” Papyrus yelled.

The DEMON picked up Asgore’s trident. They dragged it along the ground as they attempted to swing it. It’s heavy.

Papyrus parried the clumsy blows with his shield. “STOP! YOU’RE GOING TO HURT YOURSELF!”

Chara didn’t care. They kept tossing the weight, crashing the weapon into anything it strikes. Papyrus tried to catch it before they wreck the DT-Extraction Machine.

The DEMON, upon that very moment, used the distraction to slam into Papyrus’ tibia and knocked
him off his feet. He looked up just in time to see the pointed prongs descend upon his skull.

Again, the cause of his death resonated into a vision.

He saw Mezil Thyme talking to a human couple. The bronze plate of a weighing scale hung high above the imposing walls.

**WHAT IS THIS PLACE? IT LOOKS FAMILIAR. HMMM I THINK IT’S THIS ‘COURTHOUSE’ THING I SAW IN ANIME ONCE.**

Papyrus recognized Cenna right away despite her super short boy’s cut. She stood next to her senior, except there was something wrong about her.

**MISS AUNT? WHAT ARE THOSE STRANGE METAL CAGES AROUND YOUR LEGS?**

**AND YOU GOT A REALLY WEIRD CANE. IT’S STRAPPED TO YOUR ARM. IF YOU WANT TO BE STYLISH LIKE MISTER MAGUS, YOU NEED TO GET A FANCY ONE!**

**…YOU LOOK SO SAD. WHY?**

The human couple was happy, but Mezil… not quite. He interrupted the celebration by tapping his own cane on the ground. Loud.

“I’ll have you know that the benefits are NOT for your own enjoyment!” Mezil said. “They’re for Frisk. In two years time they will undergo an initiation trial and it’s your job to prepare them for that.”

The woman quietened down. “Y-yes, Judge Thyme. We understand.”

“…I hope you do. Because I will make you pay for any irresponsibilities in person. Such as the funeral charges and your loss of reputation.”

**OH UH. THEY’RE GETTING GRILLED BY THE PRINCIPAL. BUT… MISTER MAGUS SAID THE MONEY IS FOR FRISK? I DON’T REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT THIS TIMELINE. IT MUST BE VERY BORING.**

Asgore approached the humans. An air of sorrow hung over his head.

The husband of the couple grumbled at the sight. “What now?” He complained, “Is one year not enough for you? We’re done with this custody case too, you know.”

‘Custody’. Papyrus remembered that sometime in his current timeline, the Ebott gang gathered together to talk about complicated human legalities.

**LE GASP! T-THIS IS LEGALIZED CHILDNAPPING!**

Asgore bowed his head to Mezil. “Sir, will you reconsider this? My wife… she can’t take another loss. We promise to do everything we can to raise this child. Please, just give us a chance.”

Mezil turned towards the ex-King. In his most stern professional voice, the Magus said, “Asgore Dreemurr, Frisk is not a pet. I’m very sure your community has many children in need of care. There’s no need to latch onto this human child.”

“Of course we don’t consider Frisk a pet,” said Asgore. “They’re our saviour, they who liberated our entire civilization. They’re more than special to us.”
“Do you even know your child?” Mezil questioned. “Their history, their circumstance, their life before the Underground? Have they ever confessed anything to you?”

The fluffy King was caught off guard by heated pressing. “I… no,” he replied. “We didn’t want to pressure Frisk into disclosing their old life.”

Mezil thumped the cane on the polished stone floors. “If you’re that ignorant, how can I entrust you with the future of humanity?”

The grilling continued. “Do you even know their true potential? This is not about racism or old bad blood, King Asgore. This is about fate.”

“If things continue to go your way, Frisk will die for certain in the trial. They won’t be prepared. Not emotionally, nor mentally.”

Asgore’s fur started to stand on their ends. “W-what? Why would you put a child through such a dangerous thing?”

“If left unchecked, your lovely child could end up being a danger to everyone else. No one stays young. Things change, for better or for worse.”

* * *

Mezil sat at the edge of the bed, waiting for the time when the Seer returned from his walk in time.

For Papyrus, his appearance was one he had come to know as a teacher.
A good guy.
A tsundere.

The man who gave him the precious second chance.

Not a conspirator who robbed the Dreemurrs of their child.

“Seer,” thus said the Magus. “What did you see?”

Papyrus had always faced the truth head on with honesty and courage.

Yet, this time…he rolled to the side and faced away.

“I RATHER NOT TALK ABOUT IT, MISTER MAGUS,” said Papyrus.

“Is it about me? I figured it out when your uncle said you were speared by your King’s trident. The King and I spoke face-to-face once.”

Experts will be experts. The lack of answer might as well be a resounding ‘yes’ broadcasted on a microphone.

“WHY DID YOU DO THAT?” The youngster asked. “IT’S NOT NICE.”

Mezil answered, “I thought it’s the best for everyone.”

“But no one is happy. Including you.”
The Magus had no answer.

Papyrus gathered the blanket sheets and tried to bury himself underneath a pile. “…I STILL DON’T GET IT. WHY PEOPLE KEEP SECRETS. IT JUST. HURTS MORE IN THE LONG RUN.”

“Why are you so puzzled? Your reaction now is proof of concept. Not everyone can handle the truth.”

The human hung his greyed head low in conflicted guilt. “Misunderstandings. Conflicts. Resentment. Condemnation. We lie to protect ourselves from all of those. Half the time it’s done out of love for the other person.”

“AND THE OTHER HALF?”

“Selfish fear. Well. In my case it’s both.”

Mezil leaned his cane against the mattress. He brought his hands together and squeezed them. “When I became Humanity’s Ultimate Weapon, I had to make a choice and live with it. The results are not always pretty or clean. Perhaps that is my biggest flaw.”

“What is this choice?”

“I chose to protect the world from itself. Under my watch, I’m determined to ensure that this era will not collapse from assorted power struggles. Both political and magical, internal and external; I am the Keeper of Peace. Who do you think protects monsterkind from human prejudice and bigotry?”

“This is my lifelong duty. The disaster of the ‘Fallen Hero’ cannot repeat. Can -never- repeat. If I fail, two lives must sacrifice themselves to stop the menace. Monsters and humans must reconcile from past wars. If we do not… we will all cease to exist.”

“It sounds heavy,” the youngster commented.

“Correct.”

Papyrus didn’t know what to think. It’s all so complicated and huge. Never in his life he thought he’d face them outside of the screens of fantasy.

“Can I be alone for a bit?”

“Take your time,” Mezil replied. He took his cane and made his leave.

It would be quite a while before Papyrus got out of bed…

Chapter End Notes

After this post, I'm going to need some days off to take care of my professional stuff. Depending on how it goes, I might be able to finally publish my original work for real!

And I'll let you guys ruminate on the implications of this scene for a while. It's a TON of info with heavy references to the past scenes. I didn't expect it to take this many pages either.

What's with me and long stories, seriously >_>
Beginning

Chapter Notes

I woke up early and very inspired. The professional stuff coming along together nicely. So here, have another chapter.

Also, some warning for people who struggle with suicide. Emotions are high and rationality is low.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Papyrus made a mental note to himself: ‘Tridents pierced at the wrong angle will turn scarves into deadly weapons.’

The DEMON in all their twisted cunning had turned his favourite article of clothing into a noose.

Skeletons don’t breathe, but the cause of death by hanging doesn’t always come from lack of air: it’s the detachment of the spine. With enough weight and force, the effects might as well match decapitation.

Chara forced Papyrus down on the loop of doom with their entire body weight.

As Papyrus struggled in his last moments, he heard the voices of a time long past.

“Father! What are you doing with Mother’s dust?!”

The cries came from Uncle Gaster, but he sounded… younger. About Papyrus’ current age.

“Father, what are you talking about? The Barrier isn’t broken! Get away from there! No! I’m not seeing the sun or sky or trees or anything of that sort! That’s the Barrier, Father. Nothing but the Barrier!”

“Father?”

“Father listen to me! If you try to cross, you’ll die! Please don’t die! Mother is gone and you’re all I have left! Please stop no please why?”

“Am I not good enough for you?”
“Don’t you love me???”
“Father please!”

“NO!!!”

At the height of emotion, Papyrus heard his own neck snap.

The vision began. This time, he found himself in darkness. Unlike the other visions, he’s missing most of the surroundings… as if he stood inside The Void itself.

How strange.
Before his sight was none other than Uncle Gaster. He was of solid bones and he had legs. Some
nicely polished shoes too.

The man stood before an altar. Four portraits lined up on top of a carved stone table, and they were all skeletons.


Papyrus pulled himself closer to observe the pictures.

Helvetica was a tall beauty who wore a bright red scarf. Papyrus noticed that it was the exact same fabric as the one he owned. Except, newer and less tattered.

Roman was the spitting image of his youngest son. The calmer temperament showed on his default expression, but the features almost matched one to one.

The other two portraits belonged to Gaster’s parents. They were dressed in clothes that he had never seen before. They wore flowing black robes accentuated by elaborated embroidery. Very wizard-like.

The one labelled ‘Mother’ used orange threads, while the one labelled ‘Father’ used cyan threads.

As for Gaster himself, Papyrus noticed the strange eye-socket cracks had never changed place. Before, he thought it was the result of being a goopy merged entity.

No, those were scars.

Gaster poured some red tea into the offering cups and lit the candles. He then served the remainder for himself.

Sombre darkness hung overhead. The light may shine, but the isolation remained.

“Good news,” said Gaster. “Sans Serif completed his studies and graduated in full. Just as he promised on his parents’ dust. I let him celebrate with his friends until the day began anew. Took one million photos, I’d surmise. Honestly, watching him so joyful lifted my spirits as well.”

He took one sip of his bitter tea and sighed. “…Then he handed in a letter of resignation to King Asgore. Wanted to revive your hotdog business, Roman. So he said. And of course, our beloved soft-hearted King accepted it.”

One more sip. “Well, he did say that he’ll graduate. And only graduate. He didn’t swear that he’d continue his career path. Oh no, not at all. I got conned by my own protégé on the play of semantics. How shameful.”

Papyrus had no commentary. His uncle was so lonely that he’s monologuing to the dead. The younger knew how that felt: during his sentry days he’d often do the same to rocks and mirrors.

“Helvetica. Roman. I’m sorry, but this is the truth about your son. He turned his back against the nation and chose a quiet life of mediocrity. As he’s said to me, ‘there’s a thin line between a fort and a prison’.”

“Such was the conclusion of his extensive analysis. I suppose that is valid. If a Tactician saw no chances of victory, he has the right to cancel a war before it began. Even… even if the citizens would despair from the decision.”

“But no, Sans didn’t do that. Instead he withdrew himself from the equation. Passed all the duties
back to the King. To me.”

Gaster finished his cup. He tried to pour more tea, but the teapot ran dry. The man set it down and sighed.

“I know Sans hates me. Our relationship was a failure from the very beginning. You’re the only reason he ever tolerated me, Roman. Don’t think I didn’t notice it. I’m not a fool. And when you’re gone... Let’s just say he’d rather seal his baby brother than to seek my help.”

Gaster walked over to the foot of the altar and sat down there. Leaned his back against it. He struggled to blink away the coloured tears that began to gather at his sockets.

“I don’t know what to do anymore. I wish you’re here now. All of you. Mother, Father, my friends. I’m so lost. So alone.”

Deep breaths. Take in deep breaths. With resolve, this broken man kept himself from falling apart.

“I cannot surrender,” he said, “If I give up now, King Asgore’s sacrifices will all be in vain. His Majesty had suffered enough.”

“There’s... one experiment left. If I don’t try this, burden will overcome me.”

Strengthened by conviction, the man stood up. He moved the portraits of Roman and Helvetica. Behind them lay a box, and inside it contained two vials of dust.

One for the husband, one for the wife.

Gaster took the vials and turned away from the altar. The objects faded as he walked alone to a different place.

Again, no walls. Only the most relevant objects exist. Was this a reflection of this man’s psyche?

A bed, a cabinet, and a mirror emerged from the dark nothingness. Papyrus watched Gaster switch into his best formal coat. Made sure everything was perfect and in place.

He strung the vials of dust to a golden chain: the original pendant removed to make way for its new purpose. Then, Gaster wore the remnants of his friends around his neck.

It doesn’t look like he’s retiring for bed. It’s not very comfortable to sleep in those fancy clothes. Pajamas were loose and simple for a reason.

Once he finished, Gaster searched the pockets of his hung-up lab coat.

He pulled out a syringe filled with glowing red liquid. Full capacity.

“...This may be fatal,” said Gaster. “I am well aware about the risks of untested experiments, Roman. But what else do I have to lose? I have no other living friends or family. I’m alone and in solitude. Might as well put that to good use.”

“The King, you say? Well... since Sans resigned, there’s nothing I can do. Live or die, Asgore’s mired in grief and depression. They consumed him as they had consumed my dear departed father.”

“And the Queen? None of us know if she’s still amongst us.”

Gaster chuckled at himself. “Hah. Oh Helvetica, I can imagine your flurry of slaps now. ‘Don’t be such a sad sack of bones’, you’d say. But the thing is... you’re not here anymore.”
The scientist showed the red liquid to the mirror, pretending that he had an audience.

“Do you see this? ‘Determination’, as I dubbed it. The will to keep on living. The will to change fate. The substance that made human SOULS far superior compared to us monsters.”

“What is extracted can also be injected. We monsters cannot generate even a fraction of this volume. And yet, I’m going to force all of these into my SOUL.”

“What will happen, you ask? Well. I don’t know. Other than a potential existential failure through overdose. I could ask for volunteers and cause a major medical controversy but… why do I have to do that? Let’s keep things simple. Keep it personal.”

The man lay down on his bed. He pushed his SOUL up to the surface of his chest. The glowing inverted heart pulsated gently.

“Roman. Helvetica. I think I finally understand. When Mother fell ill. Why Father lost his mind. How he threw himself into the Barrier. All of it.”

He removed the cap of the needle and placed it on the desk. Then, he pointed the sharpened tip over the center of his own SOUL.

 “…If I turn to dust from this, I want nothing more than to be one with the two of you again.”

Doctor W. D. Gaster then stabbed the syringe straight into his being.

* * *

As strange as it sounds, skeletons can vomit. Though, the contents won’t be acid or bile.

Monsters are made of magic. Extreme stress can cause their energy to gather in the wrong location and flow out in the wrong direction. Thus the extras would then be forcefully ejected to re-balance the equilibrium.

At first, Gaster and the skeleparents tried to help. But their presence made the illness worse.

In the end, Mezil stepped in. He was the only other person around anyway.

Papyrus hunched over the kitchen sink and spewed out the masses of magic. The old human patted his back to comfort the youngster.

“There, there. Let it all out,” said Mezil.

There goes another round.

When it finally ended, the two settled down on the dining table with a glass of plain water. Meals won’t be on their mind anytime soon.

Papyrus planted his skull front-first on the table. Other than one gulp, the drink was left untouched.

“You’ve experienced quite a bit of horrors,” Mezil said, “Yet this is the first time I’ve seen such an extreme reaction.”
“REALLY?” Papyrus groaned.

“You don’t remember?”

“MY NOGGIN IS ALL FUZZY NOW. I CAN’T RECALL MUCH OF ANYTHING. OTHER THAN CHARA KICKING MY BUTT. AND A GUTTING SESSION WITH THE SINK.”

Mezil raised a brow. “You were crushed by this ‘DT-Extraction Machine’. You don’t recall that?”

“NOPE.” A single, simple answer.

“I see. To be honest, I thought you’d throw up much sooner. Like the time when you witnessed the doctor’s attempted suicide.”

“I WAS OKAY?”

“You took it well enough. Sad, yes. But you resolved to continue your task.”

“WOWIE. OF COURSE, I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS. BEING COOL IS MY JOB. IN BOTH GOOD AND BAD TIMES. NYEH HEH HEH.” Somehow, Papyrus still managed to be a glory hog even at his lowest point.

The youngster wondered if he still remembered the layout of his own house. He also had a feeling he would need to reset all his passwords because he could no longer recall them. Home life was a distant past by now.

“What happened to me?” He asked.

Mezil answered in the gentlest tone: “You were ‘Blinded’. Intense emotional trauma can cause a Seer to reject details. I believe you had a vision that’s so terrible, your entire existence forced you to forget. This happens to humans too.”

“Oh. Sorry. I guess it must be an important vision too.”

“You can brute force through the shutdown. Should you decide so, I will aid you in both mind and matter.”

Then, he warned: “But do you still want to pursue the truth? We’re talking about an event that caused you to empty your non-existent gut down the sink.”

“It’s a point of no return. You cannot forget what you insist on knowing.”

Papyrus couldn’t give an answer at that moment. Nor did the Magus expect one.

In the realm outside of time, the skeleton decided to ruminate on his choices.

Gaster had holed himself up in one of the guest rooms. Papyrus figured out that the vision involved him, or rather the worst points of his life.

The youngster took his time. Played some pinball in the arcade. Walked in the garden. Listened to the water streams. Sat for what seemed like eternity on the swing.

Staring at the fireflies, he wondered about Frisk.

A child so small literally fell into these complicated adult realities.
What went through their mind as they repeated the Underground?
What went through their mind as they travelled on the Surface?
What went through their mind as they survived trials and tribulations?

The deaths.
The attacks on their SOUL.
The DEMON that haunted them.

Seeing their friends’ true colours?

How did they cope?
Maybe they didn’t, and hence everything went wrong.

They tried everything. From the best to the worst. From the healthiest to the sickest.

Yet, against all odds… Frisk recovered. They still choose to be good.

‘You cannot forget what you insist on knowing.’

To Papyrus, that sounded like a question about ‘Determination’. Is he determined enough to face the discomfort? Or will he turn a blind ‘eye’?

The prospect of permanent personal change frightened him. He won’t lie.

Papyrus went back inside and knocked on Uncle Gaster’s door. He needed someone to talk to for a final consultation.

“Yes?” The uncle answered. He kept his room locked.

“MISTER MAGUS TOLD ME WHAT HAPPENED,” said Papyrus. “AND HE GAVE ME A CHOICE, TO FORGET AND MOVE ON. OR FORCE MYSELF TO REMEMBER.”

“I see.”

“DO YOU THINK THIS EVENT COULD HELP ME SAVE FRISK?”

Gaster answered, “No. No, it won’t. Not in their current situation.”

Here Papyrus thought he could give himself an urgent, heroic reason to walk through the fire.

“WILL IT HELP ANYONE?” He asked again.

“I wouldn’t know. Just think of it this way: you now have the one in a billion chance to witness the true past. Free of bias, free of sugarcoating, free of doubt. Truth doesn’t get any more raw than this. Will you seize the opportunity? Or will you rather let dust remain dust?”

Lies.
Secrecy.

Everyone around Papyrus had resorted to this tactic in one form or the other.

Above all, Sans.

Their intentions were good, but in the end they’re all alone.

He remembered Alphys’ statement. Something about the stress of keeping secrets. How she was
trapped in it, unable to move on and forever frightened.

Papyrus had made his decision. “SECRETS AND LIES HURT PEOPLE IN THE LONG RUN. I REFUSE TO LIVE LIKE THAT. I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- WILL SEE THIS THROUGH!”

“You have my blessings, dear boy. Go. The truth awaits.”

* * *

The Magus lead Papyrus out into The Void: a free canvas in the hands of those with the right abilities.

As the ‘Living Victory’ walked, stone tiles floated up to his feet. They kept going forward until the Hub faded into the dark horizons.

They will need the nothingness for their task.

When Mezil was satisfied with the distance, he stepped aside for Papyrus. “Stand at the edge.”

He nodded and did so.

Endless ceiling, endless horizon, endless bottom. Make one false step and one will be lost.

Mezil began what may be his final lesson in this time loop. “Focus on the central point of the memory you wish to reconstruct: the DT-Extraction Machine. Then, pulsate your SOUL far and wide into The Void. Relevency is the key.”

Papyrus brought his butterfly-marked SOUL to the front. Each beat of life sent out a wave of white, rolling over the floating flakes of time’s memories.

“Bravery, the root of ‘Courage’. Courage is not the absence of fear, but a mastery over it. Go out and search for the those lost in dust and sands. Do not stop for anything or any reason. You will be afraid, but you will not succumb.”

The relevant bits resonated with his thoughts. They turned orange and ignited into wisps of orange flames.

“Integrity, the root of ‘Righteousness’. The stabilizer, the anchor, the quality that prevents drifting and deters corruption. Gravitate the memories to a single point. Call out. Draw them in. No matter how far they are.”

Blue paths connected the wisps. They floated towards the Seer like rivers to the sea.

“Kindness, the root of ‘Altruism’. To give without expecting anything in return. From such charity, you make way for healing. Some will take advantage. But so be it: the lives saved far outweigh the lives scorned. Heal the lost, Seer. Even if it means wounding yourself.”

The flames solidified into green squares, piecing themselves back together into a frame of their original forms.

“Reach. Reinforce. Restore. That is your true power. Still your mind. Focus your heart. And you will
see that fateful day.”

The past came to life upon the final pulse of magic. The two now stood in a one-to-one scale digital mockup of the visions that had caused so much ill.

“SANS?” Papyrus muttered.

The teenage version of the elder brother stood before the liquid skeleton named Doctor Gaster. He had two of his Gasterblasters out, both aimed at his mentor.

On that day many years ago, Sans wore a red scarf over his blue iconic hoodie: his mother’s memento.

This marked the beginning of tragedy.

‘The Core Incident’.

Chapter End Notes

That’s right folks. The next chapter is The Core Incident, the core conspiracy behind this fic. I totally didn't intend to make that pun. OTL

Remember I said that you'll view this from the most trustworthy person in the entire story?
This is it: a complete reconstruction from our cinnamon roll.
Hope you guys remember Chapter 30: Fallout!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Papyrus needed more context.
Rewind.
Replay.
Draw in more memories here, add more details there.

The flexibility of his magic boggled his own skull. He’s making a live documentary. No makeup, no censorship.

It’s the movie of life, frame per frame.

“How old was Sans when he graduated?” Asked Mezil.

“MAYBE SIXTEEN?” Papyrus said, “I WAS ABOUT TO START SCHOOL. AND WE’RE TEN YEARS APART.”

“That’s very young.”

“HE’S A GENIUS, NYEH HEH HEH! I JUST WISH HE’S LESS LAZY.”

It’s Waterfall, the harvesting grounds for waterdogs. Sausages grow on plants in the Underground. Prolific, abundant, and tasty according to the residents.

Sans had rented a small boat from the riverperson. He rowed down the streams with a basket on his lap. Whenever a nice specimen caught his eye, he’d stop and pick that.

All the while, he had a red scarf around his short neck. Half of his face was buried beneath it.

Hiding underneath the fabric was a wide, toothy grin. He was happy. Truly happy.

Mezil tapped his chin, pondering. “Hmm. I think if you put extra focus on him, like a peg, you could also rebuild his thoughts. Audio or visual, it’s up to you.”

“WHICH WOULD BE EASIER FOR YOU, MISTER MAGUS?”

“Subtitles, please. Written words speak clearest.”

With Papyrus’ help, an interface appeared before the Magus. Written down there were Sans’ thoughts. It generated diagrams too, whenever relevant.

Sans’ mind wouldn’t stop planning for the business: the stand, the location, the strategies, the recipe of his father’s famous ketchup. A new life awaits.
Papyrus was amazed with the amount of content filling up the text box. “I NEVER REALISED HIS HEAD COULD BE SO BUSY.”

“I’m not seeing laziness here,” Mezil commented, “He’s very motivated about this business idea.”

After gathering his fill, Sans stopped at the dock with a basket full of waterdogs. He hummed a merry tune as he walked down the ‘rainy’ part of the cave.

Then, the path towards the boathouse was cut off by black goo.

Sans squinted at the substance in suspicion. “Uh,” he muttered, “Did someone just dump a whole lot of putty here?”

The inky substance soon gathered into a tall man of ever-flowing liquid. He towered over the short teen and stared down with great prejudice.

Sans dropped the basket and teleported backwards in a flash. Danger, he sensed. And his trained bones responded to the urgency.

“What the hell are you?” He questioned.

Gaster glared, flashing his Seer’s colours. “Tsk. Straight to the point, I see? I have no name for my condition yet, but I can tell you what it all entails.”

The man dissolved his right sleeve and let the blackness drip. He showed Sans the scars etched into his lower arm.

The teen’s bones started to rattle. “…Why…? Why do you have them? They belong to--”

“You're mother,” Gaster finished the statement for his wayward protégé. “Remember how you weaselled out of your oath by insisting that you swore on your parents’ dust and only their dust?”

The old skeleton exposed his left arm and crossed them both together. “I’ll have you know that they are no longer so.”

Distorted questions of confusion and disgust ripped through the thoughts screen. Sans’ Eye started to flare from the increasing effort to comprehend the truth of Gaster’s body.

When he did so, the mess turned into streams of data.

“I see now,” Mezil commented, “No wonder we kept seeing that blue blaze ever since your brother stepped onto the Surface.”

“HUH?” Papyrus blinked a few times.

“Didn’t you notice he flashed around a speciality that’s supposed to be secret? It’s not because he wants to, but it’s because he must.”

Pointing his cane towards the image of the teenaged Sans, he clarified: “He’s been analyzing everything. Pushed his processing power to the limit. I don’t think he’s in shape, hence the wisps.”

“Upon every repeat, I switched key details around to prevent dejavu. Send out different people, plan out different routes. Had Judge Caraway change hairstyles and cover her face. Yes, the kidnappers were all different contacts too. An elaborate trap against their operation while fulfilling my own goals.”
“And yet I still couldn’t completely mask my tracks. My options were limited and he had seen them all.”

When Sans finished his analysis, the fires intensified. “You… you…! **How dare you???”**

Enraged beyond reason, the youngster summoned two Gasterblasters.

Gaster’s own dual-chromatic set lit up in response. He locked Sans down in a time-freeze and reached out his left hand towards the boy’s weapons.

One yank put them in a daze, then he executed a series of hand signs. It overwrote the ownership and turned the blasters into his own.

Papyrus remembered the huge fallout in the snow field. The hijacking process happened there too. When the time-freeze ended, Gaster pointed the floating skulls back at the boy.

The lack of experience was evident in this scene. Sans froze in fear instead of executing a quick counter.

“Sans Serif,” said the elder. “They are called ‘Gasterblasters’ for a reason. I’m their creator! Of course I’ll know their every trick.”

Gaster summoned two more of his own, adding the total to four. Four weapons of mass destruction confined in a narrow tunnel. There’s no place to run.

“Let me I’ll remind you that Seers are born with the ability to conjure ‘Skull Cannons’. Another manifestation of our human origin. It’s all a matter of improvement and passing them down to the next generation.”

“I’ve taught you everything I knew, which includes my versions of our heritage.”

Sans’ thoughts were filled with concerns for Papyrus. He considered fighting Gaster even if he was at a disadvantage, but who will take care of the little one?

Who’s going to prepare him for school?
Who’s going to feed him?
Who’s going to let him play with Big Sister Undyne?

Instead of attacking, Gaster made a demand: “Take back your letter of resignation from King Asgore. Be my assistant. You have a promise to keep, Sans Serif. Your parents are watching.”

The blasters then dispelled. He turned his back against his student, confident that there will be no reckless ambushes.

“I’ll give you thirty-six hours to report to my lab,” said Gaster. “And that’s generous. Thank your father for the extra time.”

Then that man slid away from the caverns of Waterfall.

Sans picked up whatever’s left in the basket and headed to Undyne’s fish-shaped home: provided by none other than the king, since she’s already his trainee.

Papyrus remembered now. “I WAS AT UNDYNE’S HOUSE, WAITING FOR SANS TO COME BACK WITH THE ‘DOGS. WE’RE SUPPOSED TO BOIL AN ENTIRE POT OF THEM.”
“…BUT THEN, HE CAME BACK WITH PERSONAL-SIZED HELPINGS. I ASKED HIM WHY. HE TOLD ME THAT HE GOT A JOB OFFER THAT HE CAN’T REFUSE.”

The scene played out exactly as Papyrus described. Sans tried to be happy for his cute little brother. Made his job sound awesome.

Little Papyrus was so, so overjoyed for him. On the other hand, the young Undyne noticed something wrong.

“Ah,” Mezil recognized her. “That fish girl grew up into the woman who suplexed the van. Undyne, right?”

“YES!” Papyrus answered, “SHE’S VERY STRONG.”

“Quite keen too.”

Undyne tried to talk to Sans. He continued to sidestep with jokes. Despite his cool front, Sans’ mind was filled with concern.

‘If I tell her anything about this, she’s going to flip out at Gaster. And he’s going to turn her into a grilled fish.’

Stuff like that.

“Stop the playback,” Mezil said.

The images of the past froze in place. The old human then turned to the skeleton and asked an important question: “Do you understand what just transpired?”

Papyrus tapped the tips of his mittens together and said: “I THINK SO. UNCLE GASTER MERGED WITH MOM AND DAD. THEN. HE FORCED MY BROTHER TO WORK FOR HIM AGAIN.”

“Close enough,” Mezil answered. “He’s using them as hostages. The Amalgamation was an accident. But, Doctor Gaster exploited the results for his own gain. Your brother had no choice but to bend to his will. It may seem illogical, but this is love we’re talking about.”

Papyrus could feel more of those complicated emotions coursing through his bones. He couldn’t pinpoint the exact combination, but he knew fear was part of it.

“WHAT IF SANS IGNORED UNCLE GASTER?” He asked.

Mezil answered, “You would be the next target. You are your brother’s ‘Golden Quiche’ after all.”

Realising the stakes made Papyrus sick in his non-existent stomach. Yet, he insisted on pressing on.

“I WANT TO SEE THEIR WORKPLACE. I WANT TO KNOW THEIR REAL JOB.”

The Orange Seer reached out into The Void and drew in everything related to their work. The scene pieced together faster than his first attempt. Squares joined with other squares, until they’re whole once more.

From the caverns of Waterfall, they’re now in the interiors of a laboratory.

It’s dark. Gaster had the tendency to keep lighting low. To reduce eye-fatigue, perhaps? His colour combination may tax his sight more than usual.
Sans sat on a workbench, soldering the base components of what appeared to be an electronic visor. He didn’t wear his mother’s scarf.

Meanwhile, Gaster poured over the data on his computer screen.


Gaster acknowledged the comment with an absent-minded ‘hmm’.

“How’s it going there, Gaster?” The short one asked.

“Address me by my proper title, Sans.”

“Nah.”

The elder just sighed in response. On other days, he would have make a fuss, but tonight he just wanted to get this data done.

He said, “Kindly stop prowling the Underground at night and check in 10 AM for combat training with the Captain. It’s rude to make him wait for every lesson.”

“Oh, so we’re at the stalking phase now?” Sans grumbled.

“Well, your parents’ worry has seeped into me. I lent them my power, then we found you aimlessly wandering around while your brother sleeps. Chugging ketchup.”

“I hope you understand that you’re banned from alcohol. Should your powers go haywire Underground, we’ll have a cave-in.”

“Welp,” the assistant shrugged. “I’m a legal adult now. Can’t tell me what to do.”

“Are you telling that to me, or to your mother?”

Sans shut up.

Gaster started typing down the next step on a new page. He didn’t expect an answer, nor he wanted to hear it. “After your training, we’ll go to the DT-Extraction Chamber. It’s vital that our equipment won’t reverse in time whenever someone meddles with the flow.”

“Sure we got enough of them?”

“We won’t be able to extract the required amount in one go. The Six are not limitless. We’ll drain some, feed the SOULS with energy, then wait for their Determination reservoirs to refill.”

Mezil’s text box stirred, typing down Sans’ thoughts about the situation. ‘Nice. We’re milking Human SOULS like the fabled cows now. And they’re just kids. Some better race we are. I just want to troll Papyrus with more jokes, not do this dirty shit.’

Papyrus wasn’t too impressed by the scene. “THEIR REAL JOB SEEMS REALLY BORING.”

“Well,” he said, “They’re boring for those not in the know. Much of the work is in the data itself. Hours are long, with a lot of small details. We do have a vital clue though.”

The tip of the ebony cane pointed at the visor.

“Time to witness the end result of their hard work.”
Focusing in on the visor took them into the future past. Scenes of daily life zoomed past into a flurry of movement and urban colours. Although there’s no wind, a force made the ends of their clothes flutter.

Dear mother’s tattered scarf waved like a flag of a ship.

A new vision then began at Sans reading a report card. More thought-text typed themselves onto Mezil’s screen.

‘Wow! Papyrus passed on the first try! Oh man, he’s so cool. I thought he’s going to repeat a year, but nope. Phew, I’m so glad he’s going to middle school like the rest of the kids.’

Mezil looked at Papyrus, then back at Sans’ thoughts. “Why was that such an achievement?”

“ACCORDING TO UNCLE GASTER, I GOT MENTALLY CRIPPLED.”

“Nonsense! You’re perfectly fine. I’ve seen plenty of normal humans less bright than you.”

The approval from the walking image of a principal made the bloke shine in happiness. “NYEH HEH HEH! SO YOU DO SEE THE SMARTS OF THE GREAT PAPYRUS!”

Sans kept the report card in his bag. Looking outside the window, he spotted the new Captain Undyne delegating tasks to a patrol squad.

“She’s all grown up too. Jeez, feels like yesterday when she was a squirt who ambushed me. …Heh. Great to see her turn out right. Better than me.’

Gaster called for him. The mood went from joy to bitterness in a split second.

‘Here we go. Work. Better not let Gaster see my grumpy face. He’s gonna nag me to no end if he does.’

So the short skeleton put up his iconic grin and acted fine. Years and years of practice perfected the facade.

Papyrus watched the two scientists put together a complex machine. After they finished the interiors, they fixed in a steel shell to protect the mechanism from environmental damage.

The end result was a fanciful pillar of spacetime technology. The visor Sans built had its own compartment. A docking bay, one could say.

“Huh,” Mezil raised a brow. “Interesting. We Magi have a Chronograph with a similar design, but much bigger and taller. With a lot more server capacity too. Science is more universal than I thought.”

Papyrus gasped and planted his mittens on the sides of his jawbones. “YOU HUMANS HAVE THIS CHRONOGRAPH THING TOO? OH EM GEE! REALLY?!”

“Of course. How else can I do my job?”

Once the tech was complete, Gaster pulled a chair over with magic. He sat down and wore the visor of beyond.

“Initiate attempt No.1,” he said.

Sans began keying the commands into the computer. Graphs and readings appeared on the screen.
He’d observe, adjust the flow, then observe some more.

Next to the short one was an extra monitor. It’s offline for now.

Mezil tapped his cane on the ground and muttered, “I see. Sans is a living computer. There’s no need to waste time testing an automated system.”

Papyrus squinted at the human. “MISTER MAGUS, IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG?”

“Hm?”

“YOU ALWAYS TAP YOUR CANE WHEN YOU’RE TENSED.”

The Magus kept silent for a moment. “You will understand soon enough. Concentrate on the visor. See what your uncle sees. Make an extra screen while you’re at it.”

Papyrus increased his focus. When Gaster dove into the annals of spacetime, a new screen materialized from The Void’s fireflies.

Wherever Gaster went, the extra monitor recorded his sight much like a camera. That allowed Mezil to witness the data.

The prognosis was not good. They found no salvation.

“THAT’S FLOWEY!” Papyrus pointed out, “EXCEPT HE LOOKS A LOT SCARIER. AND BIGGER. AND MURDEROUS. WHAT GOT INTO HIM?”

Wise and experienced, Mezil answered, “Boredom. This is exactly what happens when the power over time falls into the wrong hands. My predecessors and I curbed many of such menaces throughout history.”

Attempt number two. Another screen appeared. This time it showcased a mysterious plague that caused the residents to ‘fall down’ en masse. Anyone affected by it became unresponsive and apathetic.

It’s a sad, frightening sight. People kept sweeping dust after dust.

“EVERYONE’S GETTING SICK…” Papyrus frowned. How he wanted to reach out to help.

Mezil looked away. He had his limits too. “That’s what we humans call a ‘pandemic’. I’m not a doctor, so I’m not sure what’s causing the illness either. Never fails to give me nightmares, though.”

The next attempt showed Waterfall drying up. Without their lifeline, the society slowly died from the lack of resources.

“Hmph, ‘Apocalypse How’,” the human said. “Tsk. Looks like there’s a strong possibility I might fail to convince that power company to change locations after all. In our current point of time, that project has yet to finalize due to the emergence of your monster brethren. I bet they never believed there were people living under the mountain. Or they don’t care.”

What happened ‘above’ can affect ‘below’.

Gaster forcefully removed the visors, almost dropping it in his haste. His body roiled along with his heart when he realised the horrors of their fate.

“No… no…” He curled forward and buried his face into his arms.
Sans coped with the situation with the only way he knew: by putting up a calm, joking front.

“Guess it’s a ‘dead end’ for us, huh?” Said Sans, “I mean, we’re bones. Can’t get any deader than that. Heh.”

“Well. At least we’re prepared right? Go back home, spend time with family. Enjoy the days we have left.”

“Nothing matters in the grand scheme of things anyway.”

‘Except Papyrus’, Mezil’s text box indicated otherwise.

The elder scientist refused. He stood up with so much force, his chair was sent flying all the way to the wall.

“It cannot be.” Every sentence increased in both force and volume. “It cannot be! There HAS to be a way!”

Fuelled with determination, Gaster put on the visors once more. He forced himself to stretch far and wide.

The world around them exploded into screens of possibilities.

Without warning, Papyrus jumped in between the masses of screens.

Mezil almost dropped his cane from shock. “What are you doing?! You might fall--”

Green, glassy platforms chimed whenever Papyrus set down his boots. He used the shields to create paths, allowing him to run and jump.

The Magus sighed in relief. “Well, I suppose that works. What caught your interest, Seer?”

“I CAN’T FIND FRISK!” Papyrus yelled from the other end. “NONE OF THESE VISIONS HAVE FRISK IN IT. THIS IS AWESOME NEWS! IT MEANS FRISK HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ALL THIS BADNESS!”

“Are you sure?”

“A THOUSAND PERCENT SURE!”

In the middle of that confirmation, the screens distorted.

They flashed in blinding red.

Then, an endless sea of nines tore through all the timelines. The monitors shook, thrashing about.

Nine.

Nine nine nine nine nine nine nine nine nine.

Here Papyrus thought he won’t ever be surprised again. How he was proven wrong. “HOLEY MOLEY!” He shrieked, “WHAT’S HAPPENING?!”

“Doctor Gaster’s Chronograph opened the floodgates of The End…”

An aura of violent evil oppressed Papyrus’ SOUL. Its sheer weight threatened to crush his body
“I’M SCARED…!”

The reconstructed visions started to skip and tear.

Mezil held the youngster close. In times like these, experience shines brightest. “Calm down, young Lichborn. Concentrate on maintaining this memory. Remember ‘courage’: you will be afraid, but you will not yield.”

With his cane, he redirected the focus away from the horror. “If you falter now we will miss the most important memory. We must know the doctor’s final conclusion!”

Be brave, Papyrus reminded himself.

It’s only Chara: only a possibility. The future isn’t set in stone.

Bolstered by the encouragement, he focused all his magic on reconstructing the past.

After what seemed like forever, Gaster saw The End. He threw the visor down so hard, the casing cracked.

The screens displayed nothing but darkness. There was no light anywhere to be seen.

Gaster screamed without a voice, his entire being quaking and rippling. It broke Papyrus’ heart to watch his uncle suffer from the revelation. He tried to reach out to him, but his mittened hands just phased through the image.

In the end, the past remained the past.

As for Sans, he didn’t move an inch.

Mezil’s text-screen snapped in half. “This is bad news about your brother’s psyche.” He remarked.

Papyrus pulled back his brows and pointed towards the vision. “UNCLE GASTER’S NOT LOOKING SO GOOD EITHER.”

The goopy skeleton slid away from the Chronograph. The grin he had… it’s twisted by a mixture of hope, desperation, and insanity.

He started speaking in the cryptic language of hands.

Papyrus translated his uncle’s entry: “‘DARK DARKER YET DARKER, THE DARKNESS KEEPS GROWING, THE SHADOWS CUTTING DEEPER. PHOTON READINGS NEGATIVE, THIS NEXT EXPERIMENT SEEMS, VERY, VERY, INTERESTING’.”

“… ‘WHAT DO YOU TWO THINK?’”

Gaster finished his recording. Turned around to face Sans.

“Gaster…?” The protégé gulped.

“Waiting isn’t an option anymore,” thus said the scientist. “But, there is an answer to our predicament. The Seventh SOUL, let’s make it ourselves. We have the science, we have the resources, and we have the methods. The Core shall provide us with all the energy we need.”
Sans asked: “What are you planning?”

The doctor straightened his back and puffed up chest. Placed both of his skeletal hands right over his SOUL.

“We will all become one. The ultimate Amalgamate. We’re talking about every man, woman, and child of our nation. The combined might of our SOULs is on par with a human’s.”

“Together, we will break the Barrier.”

“We will never fear violence again.”
“We will never die.”
“We will never be alone.”

“This, dear Sans, is our Utopia.”

Chapter End Notes

A fun little trivia: Gaster questioned the riverperson for info while Sans went out to get the waterdogs. And yes the riverperson was scared out of their wits. Hence later on, we have the warning 'Beware the man who speaks in hands'.

This is Core part 1. Core part 2 (when we get to see the big event) is currently in the works. I thought of doing a double-chapter... but these entries have a lot of information to process. Therefore I thought it's better to give you guys some time to settle.

P.s I forgot to share a song with you guys. We All Become One
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9O2Rjn1azc

Transistor is beautiful. Check it out.
Gaster’s final conclusion was a stroke of brilliant madness.

A perfect plan, except played with people’s lives.

Papyrus commented with a suspicious squint. “UNCLE GASTER HAS GONE NUTTIER THAN A BAG OF MIXED NUTS. IN A BAD WAY.”

Mezil then explained, “This is why in our protocol, every Chronographer must have ‘Integrity’ as part of their traits. Otherwise the dark side of the future will drive them insane.”

“But, as I understood… the number of Seers in the Underground dwindled to just three. And you weren’t trained for the job. Even if they knew the dangers, they had limited choices. Doctor Gaster was the better candidate.”

‘Limited’, ‘trapped’. Those definitions defined the Underground.

No, it defined anyone stuck in their circumstance. It didn’t matter if they lived ‘above’ or ‘below’, human or monster, young or elderly.

“EVEN IF THIS DOESN’T SAVE FRISK, I UNDERSTAND MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY BETTER. …AND I UNDERSTAND MYSELF BETTER TOO.”

Papyrus reached his arms out towards the annals of space and time.

“WE SHOULD MOVE FORWARD.”

He called out toward the fireflies.
They answered him.
Broken fragments of the past gathered around. They buzzed, and crackled as they attempted to fuse their tattered edges together into one.

A flash of light. When it faded, the two travellers found themselves standing in a large room unlike any other. Blue flooring with blue walls, red lights, and pits of white anywhere without a path.

“Where are we?” Mezil asked.


A long bridge connected the entrance to the central platform. It surrounded a support pillar that stretched from the ceiling to the depths below. Judging from Gaster’s plan, this device served to focus The Core’s energy toward the epicenter.

Papyrus needed a moment to let the grandeur sink in. “I DIDN’T THINK WE HAD THE SPACE FOR SOMETHING SO HUGE.”

“Circular chamber,” Mezil looked around, “Enclosed. Flat flooring. A power source. Come, follow me. There’s something I need to confirm.”

They walked down the long, long bridge.

Mezil stopped at the edge of the platform. He held his breath, mortified by the sight. “Look down.”

Right at their feet was a massive Arcanagram.

Forty-nine points, seven sub-circles made up of seven more stars, all connected to a central source of power.

“What about this oversized complicated drawing?” Asked Papyrus.

“This is a ‘Soul Stealer’: the most forbidden of all Arcanagrams. I had the unfortunate opportunity to witness this firsthand during my career. The effects are one-way.”

Papyrus covered his mouth. His Eye flipped between orange and ultramarine as he struggled to keep his composure. The beloved uncle who taught him so much had once fallen so far.

No wonder Sans warned him that Gaster was a bad man. It’s sickening just to think about it.

Mezil crouched down to inspect the Arcanagram. He traced the lines in deep thought.

“Strange…” he muttered, “I’m seeing wasted strokes. This tiny mark in between the corners, for example. They don’t connect.”

The question served as a good distraction. The magic calmed down and stopped flashing. “HUH? WOULDN’T UNCLE GASTER NOTICE THEM?”

“Only if he does a thorough check on the gram itself. But, I have a feeling that he’s too preoccupied with the big picture to notice the small imperfections.”

They heard the grind of a heavy, metal door sliding open. Gaster led the way, while Sans pushed a trolley with blue magic. It’s loaded with none other than the Chronograph itself.

“Is the Arcanagram ready?” Asked Gaster.
“Yup,” Sans answered. Reluctance resonated in his every word.

“Oh, come on. Soon you’ll be reunited with both your parents and Papyrus. A whole family once more.”

“And merged with one million other people. Right.”

Gaster shot an exasperated glare at Sans before moving on. “You will understand the joys soon enough.”

“Whatever you say. Kinda wish that the gang was here to push this trolley,” Sans mentioned. “It’s heavy. I’m struggling to keep it straight.”

“Use your actual hands, lazybones. You know I can’t have anyone getting cold feet at the last moment. As long they stay home, we’ll complete our task uninterrupted.”

It will take a while to fix the Chronograph to the power source. In the meantime, Mezil continued investigating the environment.

The man tapped his cane on the floor with a loud thud, then reached it over the edge of the platform. The whiteness singed its tip.

It’s not mere illusion; true materialization happened.

“Papyrus,” he said, “We may not be here, but the pitfalls are now real. The Core functions on more than mere geothermal energy. …Such a strong temporal anomaly, it’s bleeding into The Void. If we fall, there’s a high chance we will die for good.”

No response. Papyrus’ attention was locked on his family instead.

“…UNCLE GASTER TRUSTS SANS A LOT.”

All those time loops had turned the once-oblivious youngster into a perceptive person.

“You’re right,” the principal confirmed. “They have a lackluster relationship, but they do have teamwork. The complexity of this setup is no trifling matter.”

“What’s your family like, Mister Magus?” Papyrus asked.

The thought alone was enough to make Mezil groan. “‘Was’ should be the term. My parents were distant and my siblings dysfunctional. I no longer keep contact with them.”

“Why? That’s so sad.”

“My parents passed from old age. Can’t maintain communication with the dead, after all. As for my siblings, hmph. My sister ended up as a drug addict. I don’t know if she’s still alive after all these years. My brother, a habitual gambler. Both saw me as nothing but a pot of money.”

Papyrus couldn’t imagine what it’s like to have a family just by name. To him, his brother was everything. They only had each other, and it’s doubtful that they could live without one another.

“Mister Magus! When everything’s settled down, I’m inviting you to a delicious dinner. Then we’ll do many other fun things! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Mezil responded with a warm smirk. “Let me know in advance.”
The small chatter had to end sooner or later. The two scientists fixed the last piece of Chronograph into the central pillar.

Gaster held the repaired visor in his hands. He took a deep breath and said, “You know what to do, Sans.”

“…Yeah.”

Mentor delved into the dark. 
Protégé manned the console.

Magic coursed through the Gram, lighting the lines up layer by layer. They resonated with power.

Papyrus conjured an extra screen to peer into his uncle’s visions. As expected, there was darkness. Nothingness. An end of ends.

“Increase output to 35%,” Gaster instructed.

Sans continued to work in silence…

A minute passed.

“Increase output to 50%”

Still nothing.

“65%”

Nothing.

“80%”

Then, a speck of gold shimmered in the image of The Void.

“I see a change, Sans!” Gaster exclaimed. Then he started giving instructions to calibrate the pathways.

“Oh!” Papyrus tapped the human’s shoulder, brimming with excitement. “MISTER MAGUS! LOOK, LOOK! A GOLDEN STAR APPEARED!”

Mezil instead said, “Papyrus, your brother.”

The attention turned to Sans. His short, bony fingers typed so fast, his hand was a blur.

“Look, his left Eye isn’t glowing blue. Calm. Collected. Remember how I mentioned that your brother is a living computer?” Said Mezil. “This is him in his prime, when he had yet to rust from wasted years, calculating the necessary calibrations far ahead of your mentor.”

Once Sans made the adjustments, he stepped back from the console…

Turned around…

…and teleported straight towards the entrance of the chamber.

He flipped a wall panel around to reveal the Core’s control console. On the screen, it showed the layout of the chamber.
Sans erased the bridge.

The moment he did so, the physical version disconnected into pieces and shifted away.

“W-what?!” Mezil exclaimed.

“OH YES! UNDYNE TOLD ME THAT THE PARTS OF THE CORE ARE SWAPPABLE. UNCLE GASTER IS SO SMART, HE MADE SURE EVERYTHING CAN BE ADJUSTED ANYTIME!”

One moment later, Papyrus realised the twist to their predicament. His eyes bugged out as he screamed: “OH MY GOD, UNCLE GASTER GOT TRAPPED BY HIS OWN GENIUS!!!”

“…Indeed.” Mezil sensed danger looming on the horizon. He called out for the youngster and beckoned him to return. “Papyrus, hurry to me! We have to stay close to your brother!”

“But, Uncle Gaster…”

“No buts.”

Sans was the sole survivor of the incident. Wherever he goes, they must follow.

The two hurried down a temporary magic-made path. Then, from safety, they continued to observe the unfolding imminent catastrophe.

Gaster’s left hand kept tugging at his own collar. Roman realised that something went wrong and had tried to warn his friend…

Except the Seer was too absorbed in the timestreams to notice.

The golden star in Gaster’s vision grew brighter and brighter.

It shone straight down from the Surface, dropping straight into the Underground.

“I-it’s beautiful…” His voice quivered. “Like an angel.”

It landed on a bed of flowers as bright their light.

In time, the shard of heaven met with monsterkind. Together, they shattered the Barrier.

“Wait. This is… The prophecy, it’s true!”

Thus the Underground went empty.

Salvation.

Moments of stunned silence passed. Tears of joy streamed down.

Then Gaster yelled with utmost ecstasy. “Sans! It’s happening! The future’s changing!”

Then came Helvetica’s signature slap.

It struck him so hard, he staggered from the blow.


The hands yanked the visor off his head and forced Gaster back into reality.
When he turned around, he realised the chamber had begun to shuffle underneath under his feet.

The massive Arcanagram soon became a disconnected, scattered puzzle.

Bits and pieces of the central platform exchanged with select pieces of the wall. Even after that, they continued to shift.

Overpowered by distance and by noise, the mentor began talking in hands. Papyrus quickly conjured a translation box for Mezil. He knew the next exchange will be the most important scene in this long, long vision.

The elder scientist signed The Code together with his friends, the skeleparents. [Sans?]

Sans signed back without a flinch, [You know, Gaster. If you want to see the Surface so much, I’ll send you there. Alone.]

The left Eye emitted a blue glow.

Controlled.
Focused.

It’s so still that it’s eerie even by skeleton standards.

He slammed his fist down on the console. The tiles that replaced the central platform flipped over. It revealed a large octogram, with symbols of the Seer’s secret language filling in the gaps between the giant eight-point star.

[W-what… what’s this? It’s just a basic Gram.]

Sans signed back, [Yeah. But apparently I’m ‘special’.]

The protégé summoned yellow femurs and sent them flying towards the platform. Each one pierced a point on the star, then locked themselves in position like a key.

The whole Arcanagram began to glow cyan. It started to draw power from the Core.

Gaster noticed that the ‘key-bones’ had writings on them. He used his own powers to zoom in for a better read. [Coordinates? Syntaxes? Clauses? Wormhole teleportation…?! I thought that’s mere fictional dribble!]

[Sorry.] Sans replied. [It’s real. You’re looking at my 100% original thesis. The Chronograph behind you? Welp, that’s just the backup plan.]

Sans offered his mentor no means of escape. He pushed another button.

The readjusted walls also flipped around, exposing charged pentagrams with numbers in the center. Each one of them were once part of the original Soul Stealer, shifted and modified into a new form.

The ‘wasted’ lines now connected whole.

The grams resonated with other and conjured up a net of purple. It surrounded the full circumference of the island.

Gaster tested the threads with one of his own magic bones. They disintegrated upon touch.

Mezil was outright impressed. Awed. Disturbed. Anxious of their ever-worsening predicament.
“Sans had rigged the entire room ahead of time. He exploited the architecture, the trust, and even the Soul Stealer itself. His sheer resourcefulness makes my hair stand.”

[Why are you doing this?] The scientist’s asked.

The blue skeleton replied: [I want my little brother to be his happy self. Forever. I will do anything to protect him. His body, his mind, his heart. Everything. Even if it means damning my own future.]

Today, Papyrus witnessed the depths of his brother’s love. Orange streams of tears flowed down his face.

The younger brother tried to hug the image of his brother. Again, it was useless.

“I HAD NO IDEA…” he whimpered. “I’M SO SORRY SANS. I SHOULDN’T HAVE CALLED YOU LAZY. OR GOTTEN ANNOYED AT YOUR PUNS. OR, OR, OR. I SHOULD HAVE TREATED YOU TONS BETTER…!”

The cyan light intensified.

Sans shrugged. [Anytime now, you’re gonna have a fun time. Maybe you’ll end up somewhere on the Surface. Maybe you’ll just get lost in the Barrier. Whatever. I don’t care.]

[As long Papyrus is safe from you.]

Then.

The support pillar snapped in half. Wild energy coursed unabated. The central platform began to crack from the sheer overload of force.

Reality teared at its seams. The ground quaked and the air rippled.

“Uh, okay. That’s not supposed to happen.” A shocked Sans muttered to himself, sweatdrop and all. “Gaster should get flushed out into the yonder by a vortex. End of story.”

The genius’ attention locked straight at the Chronograph. “Great. Feedback loop. Always a feedback loop. Oh well.”

Instead of panicking, Sans… calmed down.

No.

He cut off all and any conscience that defined monsterkind.

Sans was filled with so much hatred, resentment, disgust, and anger, he became like the fabled enemy of his people: ‘Human’, a race defined by their desire for blood.

Under his permission, he let the situation spiral out of control. Pieces of the platform started collapsing into The Core below… reality itself began to rip and tear, while the Arcanagram continued charging without cease.

Gaster eventually had his back against the Chronograph. And even then, the foundations beneath his being had started to crumble.

“SANS SERIF!” He yelled, “Are you really going to abandon us? Your parents?!”

In the language of hands, Sans gave his final judgement:

[Please die.]

As the final piece of the floor crumbled away, the mentor lost his footing. He screamed the traitor’s name as he fell straight into the white death below.

The pain of being undone echoed. Papyrus watched them rip apart from inside out, scattered across existence.

“NO…! NO NO NO! UNCLE GASTER! MOM! DAD!”

He lunged forward. The youngster didn’t care about the possible dangers. All he wanted to do was to save his family from their wretched fate.

To his fortune, he had a guide this round. Mezil’s reinforced arm caught his hand and dragged him back. A mere second slower and the youngster would have tossed himself over the edge.

In panic, Papyrus dug his boots into the ground and attempted to force himself free. “UNHAND ME! I MUST SAVE THEM!”

“Papyrus, stop!!!” Mezil yelled close to his skull, “It’s just a vision. Your uncle and your parents are alive!”

The skeleton quit struggling.

When Mezil knew that he had caught his attention, he softened his tone.

“They survived the incident, remember?” He said, “They’re fine in the present. Your parents and your uncle are waiting for you back in the Hub. If you throw yourself down there now, you’ll die. And the future along with you.”

“Remember. You’re looking at the immutable past. And only the past.”

The words of wisdom brought Papyrus back to his senses. He stepped back from the edge.

“SORRY,” he apologized.

Mezil then said: “Newbie mistake. Happens to the best of us.”

The large Arcanagram swirled into a multicolored vortex of cyan, yellow and purple. It fired out unstable cracks of lightning and further intensified the quake. They were all signs of an imminent violent meltdown.

Sans teleported past the door. He stopped at the console and keyed in the commands to close the security shutters.

Papyrus recognized the urgency. Spacetime around them continued to rip. Whiteness filled the room. It didn’t matter if they’re in the past, present, future, or The Void: anyone in this chamber will ‘vanish’ into darkness if they stay.

The orange one scooped the human off the ground. He dashed towards the gap, but by then his brother had already teleported to each subsequent console.

There’s no time.
“HOLD ON TIGHT! WE’RE GOING TO FALL!”

“Fall where?!” Yelped Mezil.

Papyrus turned his SOUL blue.
Angled it sideways.

“DON’T WORRY. I HAVE EXPERIENCE.”

And gravity shifted head-first into the narrowing windows of escape.

They zipped past the first door.
The second.
Third.

And the fourth final line against the impending disaster.

It was just in time to escape from a blinding explosion. The tremors rippled through The Void, flinging all the fireflies of memories in all directions.

Mezil and Papyrus continued to fall. New visions of the aftermath built around them.

Mount Ebott. On that fateful day, the Core Incident caused a collapse on the south slopes.

Silhouettes of humans weaved amongst the boulders, all meeting certain doom.

Mezil clenched his teeth as he remembered the helplessness. “Frisk’s parents were once my students. I couldn’t save them… no matter how hard I tried.”

“WHY NOT?” Asked Papyrus, saddened by the prospect. He thought the ‘Ultimate Weapon’ could do anything.

“They’re isolated. Power is useless if it can’t reach their recipients.”

The vision dissipated. Now they're falling alongside the fragment of the heavens.

The angel of prophecy.

Frisk.

In panic, the child reached out to anything they could grab on. In this case, it was a golden star.

Their icon.
Their SAVE.

From their own personal angle, it’s easy to mistake it for the sun.

And that’s how their adventure began. Since that day, whenever Frisk RESETS, they were brought back to this very moment: awakened on a bed of goldenflowers.

“Ebott’s salvation is founded on tragedy,” said Mezil. “Because Frisk was orphaned, they ended up in the foster system and participated in a mandatory field trip. From there, they fell into your world.”

“This wouldn’t have happened had Sans not betrayed the Doctor. Hence why all the doomed pre-Core scenarios were devoid of Frisk’s involvement. If they didn’t fall, another child will end up as the DEMON’s vessel. And they may not be as strong as your friend.”
“Your brother discovered this truth over and over. In different timelines. And every single time, he was crushed under the weight of his sins.”

The ocean. Sans tried to muffle his agony in the deep waters. Papyrus now understood why his brother was covered in salt and sand.

Mezil then asked, “Can your society live with the knowledge that your joys are founded on the grief of others?”

Papyrus closed his eyes and took in deep breaths. He could feel his insides churning. If this was what he saw once… no wonder he ended up so troubled.

“I DON’T KNOW, MISTER MAGUS,” he answered. “BUT FIRST… I MUST TALK TO MY PARENTS AND UNCLE GASTER.”

“Take your time.”

Looking upwards, they spotted Mezil’s Hub.

“I SEE HIM AT THE GARDEN,” Papyrus pointed at a black and white figure amongst the greenery.

Gaster stood at the edge of the console area, facing towards the vast beyond. All three skeletons waited for their final verdict.

Papyrus flipped himself right side up and gently flew toward the living room. He set the human back down on his feet.

Mezil’s ebony cane was quite a useful tool. They served as a stress reliever, a ground tester, and now as support for an elderly man whose legs had gone jelly from the adventure.

No wonder he always had it in hand. He staggered on his way to the couch, before dropping himself on it.

“Well,” he said. “I will be resting here. You go do what you need to do.”

The young skeleton nodded. “THANK YOU, MISTER MAGUS. FOR EVERYTHING.”

He walked towards the exit. Toward the garden. Toward his uncle Gaster. Even if it hurts, he must move forward to bring closure to a tragic past.

These are the first steps of rebirth.

Chapter End Notes

I think I need a short break. The build-up to this event kinda shaved on my health.

Oh. Right. Yes. Seer Sans is a wormhole generator. Think his teleportation is cool? Let’s take it up one level higher. He IS very good with what he does.
If this were a bedtime story, it would be written as such:

‘Once upon a time, a scientist had knowledge, opportunity and respect.’

‘But the poor man had no friends. Or rather, he stopped making friends. Grief and loss caused him to close his heart.’

‘He became blind to the emotions of others, hurting them in the name of the greater good.’

‘It cost him everything.’

The rest of the pages were left unwritten.

Papyrus now held the proverbial pen. It will be up to him to continue this story.

He made his way to the SAVE platform, surrounded by gentle streams of digital water. The way Gaster stood at the edge of the grass brought him a sense of unease.

It’s as if he’s ready to jump off the edge.

The opening statement was the hardest. After a long consideration, Papyrus said: “YOU AND SANS WERE NOT VERY NICE TO EACH OTHER.”

Gaster turned around and tried to speak. Each time he tried, he found his voice locked by shame.

Not once he looked Papyrus in the face. He kept his sights indirect: within view yet never in main focus.

[MAYBE WE CAN USE OUR SPECIAL LANGUAGE?] Papyrus wanted to talk despite the discomfort. Be brave.

[It’s not so much about the language.] Gaster signed, [Rather… we cannot bear to face you.]

[WE?]

[The three of us failed in our own ways. Your parents believe they share the blame.]

[I DON’T THINK I UNDERSTAND.] Papyrus knew that he cannot jump to conclusions. Not now. Everything must be crystal clear.

Gaster replied, [I convinced your parents to cooperate with me. I made them see how I see, and thus they let me use despicable methods to control your brother. ‘For the greater good’, I said. ‘We will be free soon enough’.]
[Yes. Your brother and I were terrible to each other. Before another person, I’d justify myself. Push the blame to Sans without even consciously thinking about it. Have others see me as a victim of tragedy. Betrayed…]

[…]But, when the DT-Extraction Machine fell on you, I knew my lying days were over. You, Papyrus, would see the truth as it is. Nothing but the truth. We -- no, I -- can no longer defend myself. Guilty as charged, there’s nowhere left to run or hide.]

The once proud man then hung his head low.

[WHY?] asked Papyrus. [WHY WON’T YOU TRY TO DEFEND YOURSELF?]

The elder skeleton replied with a quivering chuckle. [How could I? Even if you were not the living epitome of the Chronograph, I couldn’t bring myself to do so. I’ve grown so, so very fond of you.]

[...UNCLE GASTER.]

[Did you know, your parents and I were gripped with nervous excitement after our chance meeting? We discussed for long, long hours on how to approach you.]

[Should we tell you the truth up front? What if you reject us as Sans did? If we hide, how long should we hide? One month? One year? Forever?]

[In the end, we took the cautious approach. I would be the front: this classy, amiable uncle who knew your parents.]

[THAT DIDN’T WORK FOR LONG,] Papyrus commented.

[Oh yes, it did not. Of course. We saw this coming from a mile away, yet we took the chance. It’s impossible to hide from Sans. By logic, we should have remained scattered across spacetime. Talk to you from a different plane like a ghost.]

[Hah… but since when does emotion follow logic? How can we resist? Your parents never had the chance to watch you grow up. I barely had the opportunity either. The prospect outweighed all the risks.]

[We never regretted that decision. The hours we spent before the fallout were few, but they’re the sweetest in ages.]

Gaster paused to recompose himself. Took deep breaths to prevent himself from breaking down.

[We will be satisfied with any decision you make. Send us back into the Void, punish us, disown us, what have you. We’ll accept it. No grudges, no resentment.]

Papyrus furrowed his brows and raised his voice: “I WILL NOT ALLOW IT! THAT IS JUST TOO SAD!”

“WHY MUST EVERYTHING BE SO DRAMATIC? THERE’S GOOD DRAMA, LIKE METTATON’S SHOWS. THEN THERE’S BAD DRAMA. WE’RE IN THE BAD DRAMA SIDE FOR TOO LONG!”

“IT’S BAD ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT FRISK LOST SO MUCH FOR OUR SAKE. OR KNOWING MY BROTHER WOULD TAKE DESPERATE MEASURES TO PROTECT ME. OR THE FACT YOU HAD NO FAMILY AND ARE SO VERY ALONE.”
The overflow of emotions made his SOUL glow.

“I DON’T WANT OUR LIFE TO BE ANIME FOR REAL!”

[And how will you do that?] Gaster asked back. [Words are easy. But, what would you do to uphold your statement?]

Papyrus declared his words as bold as he could. Though his voice was strong, his posture showed streaks of fear.

“BY FORGIVING YOU. AND UNDYNE. AND ALPHYS. AND FRISK. AND METTATON. MISTER MAGUS AND MISS AUNT. MOM. DAD. SANS. EVEN CHARA!”

He’s fighting against it. Yes, he’s afraid: all the more why he refuses to cower.

Gaster’s sockets widened from shock. He couldn’t believe what he had just heard. [After witnessing the worst of me? Of everyone?]

“ESPECIALLY BECAUSE I’VE SEEN THE WORST!”

“EVERYONE’S DROWNED IN SO MUCH NEGATIVITY. GIVING INTO THOSE THINGS WILL ONLY CONTINUE THE SADNESS FOREVER AND EVER!”

“I… I WANT TO BREAK THAT CYCLE! I WANT TO HELP OTHERS BREAK THAT CYCLE! I KNOW THAT IF GIVEN A CHANCE, PEOPLE CAN CHOOSE TO BE GOOD!”

“YOU CAN BE GOOD TOO. YOU ALREADY ARE. AND WHEN I TALK TO MY BROTHER AGAIN, I WILL TELL HIM THAT HE CAN STILL BE GOOD BEYOND THE PAIN.”

[What if… they betray your kindness?] Asked Gaster, [Take advantage? Harm you?]

“IT DOESN’T MATTER,” Papyrus answered. “I DON’T EXPECT ANYTHING IN RETURN. IF THEY STILL DECIDE TO BE BAD, I CAN’T STOP THEM. BUT I MUST FIRST GIVE THEM A CHOICE…”

“EVEN IF IT HURTS ME.”

Papyrus made a conscious decision to embrace the very traits that defined his powers.

Reach. Reinforce. Restore.

He’s now aware he’s the biggest fool in the eyes of the world… Yet, he refused to conform to their standards.

All that hurtful sadness didn’t have to be a constant reality. Things can change for the better, one person at a time.

Magic of the heart coursed through his bones. Emotion and conviction converged into one.

Papyrus’ whole being ignited into dancing flames of warm, magical fire. Soon after, the flares reduced into a steady glow of orange.

Gaster couldn’t believe the sights. Nor did the youngster.
Looking down on himself, Papyrus said, “WHAT’S HAPPENING? I FEEL REALLY… POSITIVE! TINGLY!”

When the surprise faded, the old skeleton started to smile in joy, [My word… those flames… I thought those were nothing more than theory.]

“They are more than mere theory.”

Their attention turned to the Magus with the red butterfly. Mezil stood there with his cane in the center.

He had the air of a satisfied principal.

“We Magi call this ‘The Ascension’. It’s when the SOUL achieves unison with the mind, body, and heart. Potential is magnified, and all limits are broken.”

“WOWIE!” Papyrus squealed. “THIS IS SOOOO AWESOME! I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- IS TOTALLY AWESOME NOW! NYEH HEH HEH!”

“Don’t get carried away, please. Maintenance is the hardest part.”

Mezil stood before the console and brought up his SAVE screen. “Well. We should prepare to end our longest night. Anything else before our next attempt?”

The Seer pondered over it for a moment. Then, he said: “TWO THINGS. FIRST, MISTER MAGUS… CAN WE SPARE CHARA?”

Now that raised some brows.

Papyrus further explained, “I HAVE A FEELING THAT THEY’LL BE POWERLESS WITHOUT FRISK. WE DO NOT NEED TO STOOP TO THEIR LEVEL IF THEY CAN’T DO VIOLENCE. BESIDES, FLOWEY NEEDS HIS FRIEND.”

“...Give me some time to think about your suggestion,” Mezil admitted. “I respect you, but there are safety checks to clear. Like making sure that botched exorcism doesn’t repeat itself. Meanwhile, you finish up your other task.”

He nodded back. Papyrus began walking towards the amalgamation of his uncle and his parents.

Then, he wrapped his entire shining self around them.

“MOM. DAD. UNCLE GASTER. I FORGIVE YOU FOR EVERYTHING. WE CAN’T CHANGE THE PAST, BUT THE FUTURE IS NOT SET IN STONE.”

“LET’S MAKE THE BEST HAPPEN. THAT WAY, THE SAD AND BAD STUFF FROM THE PAST WILL HAVE A HAPPY ENDING.”

Gaster hesitated to return the hug.

Papyrus held on. He understood that to his uncle, it seemed too easy. The elder expected years and years of penance that may never end.

But, does Papyrus care?

No.

Forgiveness shouldn’t be earned: it should be given. It’s the ‘key’ to start anew. It’s unreasonable for
someone to walk a locked path without the means of access.

Roman was the first to reach out.
Followed by his wife Helvetica.

Then, upon the encouragement of his friends, Gaster accepted the gift.

So the elder whispered, “Thank you, my boy. Thank you.”

If this were a bedtime story, it would have continued like this:

‘At the bottom of regret, the hero forgave the scientist for the bad things he had done.’

‘There was no need to suffer any more.’

‘It’s not an easy task. The path to recovery will be long and filled with many setbacks, but it needed to start somewhere.’

‘A new chapter of life begins.’

It’s time to go. Mother, father, and uncle placed their hands on the sides of Papyrus’ cheekbones once more.

Together they repeat their mantra for the night:

‘The future is not set in stone.’

Chapter End Notes

I can't help but to see Jesus parallels here if you understand what I mean.
If you don’t understand, feel free to ask.

But hey, it's true in real life. If there's no forgiveness, there's no chance to break the vicious cycle.

Yes, Frisk did achieve Ascension long before they knew the term! That's how Truepac happened in the first place. And that's also another reason why Mezil is really anxious for the kid. Things will make sense in due time.
Decline

Chapter Notes

Chara chapter?
Chara chapter.

What happens when someone refuses mercy?

If they're lucky, nothing happens.
If they're unlucky, bad time happens.

Some trigger warnings for the more sensitive readers. But then again, if you reached this far you've already seen some really dark stuff.

I trust you guys well be fine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Chara.
DEMON of Hyperdeath.

You outsmarted the witch and her useless friends.

That’s what you’d like to think anyway. Truth be told, you didn’t know that those sticky seeds would save your existence. No matter. It’s a plus point for you.

You waited for the celebrations to blow over. Complete with the silly hair-rubbing thing. It's annoying. Everyone’s annoying.

Then, Frisk asked for a comb to straighten out their hair.

That’s a moment of opportunity.

When Mettaton helped, he turned around and exposed his switch to you.

Being the smart kid you are, you flipped the switch. He puffed back into his glaring pink glam-bot form.

The knife dropped out.

You thus swiped the knife from mid air. You remembered how your biological father trained you to do so. Until today, you also remembered the sting of failure: of how your soft child hands were covered in cuts.

After years of practice, you succeeded at a consistent rate. That’s how you survived the gruesome battle with that Smiley Trashbag.

Frisk was a wimp. Untrained and unrefined.

You raised your arm with the intent of plunging the knife into Mettaton’s back. Goodbye stupid shows. Goodbye.
Then.

His SOUL turned blue. Gravity magic sent the robot flying towards the wall and out of your reach.

For a moment you thought the Trashbag saved him. You then noticed an orange glow from the corner of your eye.

You turned your head.

It’s Papyrus.

Why the heck is he glowing???

Is this some new superpower or what?!

Papyrus shouldn’t be anything more than a pasta-loving idiot who’s too dumb to live! This is the guy who befriended Flowey and believed anyone can be good.

Here’s the thing: not everyone WANTS to be good! Being good for the sake of good is stupid, rewardless, and fatal.

That’s what you learned. That’s the real world.

You lunged straight at him. He will gloat about his heroics and you will use that time to slice through his ribs.

Just like what you did to his brother.

You heard no gloat. Instead, he dodged your strike.

Fine, what about your next blow?
And the next.
And the next.

And the… next…?

Why?
When?

Why can’t you land a hit?

The Papyrus you fought back in Snowdin was an utter joke. He treated you like a kid. Hah. Big mistake. You proved your strength by lopping off his skull.

You used to like him.

He’s pretty fun. Amusing. Goofy.

Then he started to get annoying. Forever about his bad pasta. His coolness. His awesomeness.

His kindness.

He reminded you too much of the old Asriel. Before you dragged him to the Surface.

You had lost your original SOUL, but you can still feel pain. You wish to smother out the memories
to numb your agony. Replace it with ‘fun’, whatever that means.

It’s the same reason why you once upon a timeline killed your adoptive goat mother.

Monsters love you more than humans.

They’re so nice.
They’re so disappointing.

If only they just replaced all those useless bags of racist bigot-filled flesh on the face of the earth--

Don’t get distracted now, Chara.

You noticed that Papyrus’ right Eye flashed orange for one second. Then, the impossible happened. In a single swift strike, he knocked the knife out of your hand with a bone.

So much force. So much accuracy. Your wrist stung from the blow.

Strange.
Why does it hurt. You’re supposed to just ‘control’ Frisk, not be them.

And yet, you somehow share whatever their body feels.

As you wondered about it, that damn skeleton sent the knife flying up towards the ceiling.

Great. It’s stuck there.

You still haven’t heard a single word from Papyrus. It’s creeping you out.

You asked Frisk if they knew anything about this unusual behaviour.

They gave no response.

No matter. Cenna, the witch, was an ex-police officer. And you knew the Magi kept her around for her skills. She should have a standard issue gun on her.

You tried to stomp on Papyrus’ kneecaps. You need to knock him down before stealing the gun.

Your biological mother taught you the various weakpoints on the human body. Conveniently for you, Papyrus had a very humanlike anatomy. He’s descended from their bones after all.

…Except he conjured this weird green shield right above said weak point.


First it’s your wrist. Now your foot.

While you cringed, that damn skeleton turned the witch’s SOUL blue and sent her flying towards that cowardly king of a father.

Asgore dropped his trident. You rushed to grab it. Yet again, Papyrus swiped it away before you got close.

He turned it around and plunged the prongs straight into the ground. You tried to pull it out, but it’s too heavy.

Again. Stuck.
Your attention turned towards his red scarf. You always wondered why you never tried to hang or strangle him with that thing.

Just when you almost reached it, Papyrus turned your SOUL blue and pushed YOU away.

You were sent flying to the corner of the room. The velocity was enough to stun you for a few seconds.

With that, he blocked of your path with a side-turned heavy steel table. The same one they used to lay you down under that freaky skull machine.

You don’t get it.

Why?

HOW???

It’s as if he could read your damn mind!

Undyne said it the best: “What the heck? Are you really Papyrus?!!??!”

“YES, I AM,” he replied.

Papyrus kept his entire focus on you and you alone. You know that look: it’s the face of someone who had done this too many times.

Impossible. Monsters will never, ever have the Determination to time travel. And Papyrus isn’t Sans: he cannot recall the past.

You asked Frisk what’s going on.

“I don’t know either. I just have this vague feeling of trust towards him. Don’t you think he’s so cool?”

C’mon Frisk. Of all people, they should know exactly what’s going on. Did they do anything special to Papyrus?

“I’m not the one in control here. Believe it or not, it’s up to you.”

“CHARA,” said the glowing skeleton. “I SUGGEST THAT YOU STAY VERY STILL IN THAT CORNER. A GOOD MAN IS ON HIS WAY TO HELP YOU.”

Help what? Help how?
By vanquishing you in the most brutal way just like that witch?

Why didn’t he stop her before you had to endure that torture?

“I’M VERY SORRY FOR NOT TAKING ACTION SOONER. BUT YOU WILL BE OKAY UNLESS YOU MOVE. THERE WILL BE MINIMAL PAIN. I HOPE.”

“SEE, I HAVE A FEELING THAT IF YOU TRY TO ESCAPE, YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE A VERY BAD TIME.”

“SO PLEASE, MAKE IT EASY FOR YOURSELF.”

No.
No no no no no!
You refuse to trust him! He’s the moron who believes anyone and everyone! You’re sure that this ‘help’ will spell the end of you.

You shoved the table with all your might and dashed towards the exit.

“WAIT, CHARA! STOP!”

To your fortune, Grillby was just about to enter the house. He held the door wide open.

You dashed past him. The freezing winds of midnight winter blasted against your face.

“Where are you going?” asked Frisk.

Mom.
You’re going to look for Mom.

Mom will protect you no matter what. She gets emotional when it comes to children. That’s her primary weakness.

If you told her that you’re their beloved child back from the dead, she won’t let anyone take you away.

“No! Don’t drag Mom into this, please!”

The thought of protecting Mom was enough to trigger the flow of Determination inside of your shared body.

Good. Soon, the power to RESET will be in your hands again.

Papyrus continued to yell his warnings. Not like you could hear anything with all the wind blowing between your ears.

The house was just right ahead. Once you get past the door, you will finally be safe.

Someone opened the door to greet you. Mom must have heard you running from a mile away.

Sweet, sweet hope…

…Dashed to the ground the moment you saw that distinctive flash of burning blue.

A bone pierced through your chest.
Right into your windpipe.

It hurts.
It hurts it hurts it hurts--

You tried to scream, but you had no air. Your lungs had started to liquefy from the poison. Soon your heart will follow.

“Come to think of it, I don’t think I’ve ever hurt your body before.”

It’s Sans.
The Smiley Trashbag.
He teleported right next to you. Just close enough to stab from a blindside.

Now he’s freezing time just to talk to you.
“Or have I?” He shrugged. “Don’t know. It’s not important. Nothing matters in the grand scheme of things anyway, right?”

“Leave the poor old lady out of this. If I see you again, you’re going to have double the bad time. And I’ll keep multiplying that until you wish you’re never born.”

He let time flow again.

You dropped straight on the snow. The pool of corroded blood widened beneath you.

You reached out to the place that should be your home. Tried to call for Mom’s help.

But you can’t.

* * *

By the time you remembered, it’s too late.

You turned around and tried to escape, but Sans was faster than you. This time, he pierced a bone through both your spine and your windpipe. Together.

The pain.
It’s excruciating.

You were torn to pieces so many times back in the Underground, but they never, ever hurt you this much.

He knew the depths of your suffering from the look on your face.

“…Huh,” said Sans. “Figured as much. LOVE numbs you. That’s why you kept going and going and going.”

“It’s different when you’re a normal human, isn’t it?”

* * *

You hid in the forest.
It’s cold.
Too cold.

You demand an explanation from Frisk.

What did they do to make you feel pain?

Frisk shrugged.

“You wanted my body so much. So, I gave it to you.”

When?!
“When I stopped fighting back. I had this feeling that someone told me to do nothing. So, I did nothing. That allowed you to control me a hundred percent. Convenient, right?”

After a brief pause, they continued. “I noticed you’re not getting dejavu before you escaped.”

“You dashed out, full of confidence. Then, suddenly… you got really, really scared.”

“That road leads to my house. Did you try to threaten me with Mom?”

Yes?
No?
Maybe?

You don’t know.

Frisk started to pump Determination into their SOUL. The power flowed until it reached a halfway point…

…Then it stopped completely.

Frisk?
Frisk, please explain.

Please?

“As the old saying goes: It’s kill or be killed. You’ve only done the ‘killing’ part of the equation so far. Never really felt what’s like to be killed. In the body. Against your will.”

“I’ll make you remember. I’ll force you to remember. You want to kill so much? Okay. Then be prepared to ‘feel’ the consequences.”

“This is your world now, Chara. Your philosophy came true. Now, please walk the talk. Live in it.”

Before you could scream back at Frisk, the Trashbag ambushed you. He finished you off with one shot of his Gasterblaster.

You had no HP to withstand a point-blank strike.

* * *

Death comes in shades of white and blue.

Fiction paints Grim Reapers as black and red.

Idiots.
Morons.

They got it all wrong.
You noticed.

You noticed that you travelled back in time. You had reset, back to one minute after you dashed out of Alphys’ lab. It’s a different SAVE point from before.

…There’s someone else pulling the strings.

Papyrus also stopped chasing after you. But you had this feeling that he’s still watching. From afar. With magic.

You imagined him constantly out calling to you.

Offering false safety.
Offering false hope.

“C’mon, Chara. Go back to Papyrus. He honestly wants to help you.”

You tell Frisk that it sounds too good to be true.

* * *

Losing an eye hurts like fuck.

Having your arm decay into some bloody wreck hurts like fuck too.

You can’t decide which is worse. You’re too lightheaded from the blood loss and pain to think straight.

You heard the Trashbag in all his casual glory.

“Whoa, humans get real messy when they’re hurt. I knew that already but… seeing you still alive after all of that. Pretty distasteful. I’m not even going to joke about that.”

The skulls of death loomed over his head.

“Look,” he said. “I don’t want to drag this out. Whatever you feel, Frisk feels it too. I know they’re just clinging on sheer minimal determination to not go insane.”

“…Being forced into something isn’t pleasant, right?”

He fired.

You braced through the pain and dodged. You had to buckle down the same when you were in training.

Toughen.
Strengthen.
Harden.
You tried to strike back. The Trashbag only had 1 HP. All you need to do was to land one strike on his pathetic SOUL and the nightmare will be over.

Frisk would be disabled. It doesn’t matter. You can just find someone else to possess.

You’ll throw them away like a piece of broken trash.

“That look on your face. I know what you’re thinking,” he said, “And I won’t let you.”

Sans then stabbed a bone right into your forehead.

* * *

You ran for your life.

The Surface was too wide. Too big. You couldn’t anticipate where and when that Trashbag will appear.

There’s only one place where you could funnel him into familiar territory.

The Underground.

Get Flowey’s help. Then together, you two will face the Trashbag in the Judgement Hall.

Numbers? Checked. Flowey’s ‘friendliness pellets’ should make the dodging much more difficult, and perhaps open up an opportunity for you to strike.

Location? Checked. The Judgement Hall was a narrow corridor, eliminating most options for an ambush. All you needed to do was to guard your front and back.

You killed Sans there before. You can, and will, do it again.

It's a long way.

If only your host worked out with Undyne more or something. Frisk’s body tires a bit too fast.

Yet. Somehow. You managed to reach the throne room.

There’s no time to rest. You continued running all night, until at last you reached the deserted golden halls.

Hopefully there’s something to eat in New Home. Perhaps left there in one of Asgore’s gardening trips.

But then…

He’s there.

The goddamn Trashbag could teleport. Of course he’d mess with you by waiting at the other end of the corridor, where the box used to be.

“Brings back old memories, huh?” He said. “You and I, duking it out here.”
You’re scared.
But you laughed.

You continued to laugh.

You told the Trashbag that he’s the same deep inside. Same as you: a killer trained from childhood to eliminate the enemy. You were there when he confessed to Frisk after all.

You were there all the while. You saw how he got his hands dirty.

‘A human in the skin of bones,’ you said. No one else in the entire Underground fought as brutal as he did.

The Trashbag snickered back. “Oh, is that an invitation to join the dark side? Sorry, gotta turn it down. I prefer to work alone nowadays.”

No.
It’s a declaration for a duel.

It’s KILL, or BE killed.

“Okay. Guess you like to do things the hard way. Hmm, right. Aren’t you forgetting someone?”

Sans pulled out the head of a flower from his hoodie’s pocket.

He tossed it on the ground as if it was a piece of useless trash.

You asked him what’s that.

“Your best friend. I ran into him on the way.”

His answer rang between your ears.

It cannot be.
It cannot be. He killed Asriel. You’re the only one allowed to kill Asriel. No matter what.

You refused to believe him. You ran up to the flower to inspect it.

You felt the bits of his dust on your hands.

Rage erupted in your empty spirit. You clenched your teeth and balled your fist, ready to go all out against that damn blue skeleton.

However, before you could act, Sans grabbed you by the collar of your shirt and threw you through a shortcut.

You reappeared in Snowdin, on the path to Waterfall, complete with a flowing river.

Snow still covered this place.

White and blue, like Death before you.

“Hey, nostalgic isn’t it?” He asked, “Papyrus challenged you right here.”

You punched.
He dodged.
You executed many swift and consecutive strikes in an attempt to replicate your winning blow. But, he teleported away from you. His Eye flashed between blue and yellow, recalling the outcome of that battle.


The Trashbag conjured a whole set of bones.

Instead of sending them flying, he stabbed them into the ground. You heard a shrill resonance vibrating in the air.

To your horror, anything they touched turned into fucking quicksand.

He ran the bones around you. Stabbed two more on the high cave ceiling far overhead.

You tried to escape, but your feet had nowhere to go. The moment you stepped on the sand, you could feel it attempting to suck you in like some goddamn black hole.

It’s worse than quicksand. You stepped on quicksand before and it didn’t actively consume. Not like this THING.

The ground collapsed beneath you.
The ceiling soon followed.

You found yourself tumbling straight down into a dark cave below.

Amazingly, the rocks didn’t crush you outright. The hollow pocket managed to hold up the bigger boulders and prevented them from falling straight in.

You stumble around in total darkness. It’s too much like your coffin.

“Heh, you’re lucky. For now.”

You heard Sans talking from above.

“Ever wondered why I never tried to drop the ceiling on you when we were stuck Underground? I mean, I could have done this from the very beginning.”

“Well kid, I’m banned from using this power for a good reason. Space is a premium if your nation is just the size of a mountain. Where are we supposed to go if a collapse happens?”

“Killing you with a cave-in is just the same as letting you win. Besides, you’d just come back with all the knowledge of my tricks. I know the truth behind The War after all.”

You imagined him shrugging with that fake goofy grin on his face.

“My options were limited. I had to make the best with what I have. Try to make you quit. That’s the only thing I could have done.”


“Do you know what this means? I have a lot more options. I’ll make you want to quit now. But you know what? You can’t. Because you’re trapped in a loop with the rest of us.”

“Frisk’s cooperation is mine this time. Not yours.”
Something dripped on your head. It’s cold. Wet.

Water.

Ice cold water began washing down on you. The collapse must have broken the bank, and now Snowdin’s river started to flow into your cave.

“So… what would you die from? The cold, or the drowning? Maybe the waters will just stop flowing midway and you’ll eventually run out of oxygen. What about starvation? Nah. That’s too slow. My brother would rescue you long before that happens.”

“I can’t let him save you. Not after all the times you killed him.”

You tried to dig your way out, but your attempts only caused more water to flood in.

“Welp. Time for me to go. Enjoy your last moments.”

The Grim Reaper left you to die.

You felt the water level rise. It’s now at your chest.


The cave continued to flood. You tried to keep yourself afloat. Then you bumped your head on the upper boulders. The pocket of precious air slowly vanished.

You started to cry.

You don’t want to be here. You regret running to the top of the mountain. You regret tripping over that branch, although you wanted to throw yourself off the edge anyway.

You want to turn back time. You don’t care that your home life was harsh with long training hours or that your biological champion parents expected too much or that the villagers are mean or that school sucks or--

Anything other than this terror of getting killed over and over and over.

Anything.

Please.

Your name is Chara. A frightened little kid.

Chapter End Notes

Sans makes one hell of a Vanquisher if he's into that business.

I probably have one of the deadliest versions out there. Probably.
Winter winds howled over the monument known as Mount Ebott. They sang a dirge about futility for a member of their kind.

A fallen angel in blue, bearing a sword in his hand. Again and again he cut down the dark demon in ways befitting their deeds.

Again and again, his efforts came to nothing.

Yet… it is his sworn duty to carry out the judgement. The fallen angel had loved ones to protect.

Sans sat at the edge of the cliff of the Underground entrance, gazing over the land below. Weariness weighed on his shoulders.

Papyrus stood before his brother with a phone clutched in his hand. The battery indicator hovered at one percent, a hint of the amount of true amount of time that passed in this looping night.

Like the batteries, his power of ‘Ascension’ will soon fade. His shining glow had already subsided to more of a gleam. When these resets end, he’ll be normal bones again: indistinguishable from other skeletons.

The elder brother glanced sideways at the younger. In his perpetual grin, he said, “Wow. I take my eyes off you for one day and you came back ten years wiser.”


Papyrus walked over and sat down next to his brother. “WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR PUNS?”

“Heh. Believe it or not, I’m not in the mood for them right now.”

“BUT YOU ALWAYS MAKE THE MOOD.”

That earned a weak laugh. “I never thought I’d live to hear The Great Papyrus wanting my bad puns.”

“I… DO LIKE THEM. IT’S JUST, YOU TEND TO PICK THE MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENTS FOR THE PUNCHLINE.”

“That’s part of the fun, Paps.”

“I KNOW. AND STRANGE AS IT SOUNDS… I MISS YOUR PUNS.”

There was no comeback.

Papyrus then asked, “IS THERE ANY WAY YOU COULD SPARE CHARA? WHAT’S
HAPPENING NOW… IT’S TOO SAD.”

“Nope,” Sans answered.

Straightforward, to the point. How unusual. The younger brother was too used to being spun around for a joke.

Now, it’s a simple reply. As if they’re both real adults dealing with a serious business.

“WHY?” Papyrus asked back. He wasn’t angry.

“A few reasons, not counting the mystery man behind the loops. Remember Paps, that’s Frisk’s body. Any crime Chara commits, Frisk will have to pay. Be it murder, stealing, car-jacking, whatever else they’d do to survive. Goodbye budding ambassador career. Can’t let that happen.”

“Then, all Chara needs to do is to kill one person to start a domino effect. Human or monster. Execution Points and Level of Violence, you know. Can’t let that happen either.”

Papyrus figured that it would be something along those lines. His experiences taught him as much. “I UNDERSTAND.”

Should he call Mezil to try again?

No. It didn’t work.

Chara kept rejecting the offer of mercy. No matter what Papyrus said, they ran.

And no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t catch up. Undyne wasn’t kidding when she said the kid had fast legs.

His shields? They won’t last long enough for Mezil to arrive.

At one point, the Magus made a new SAVE file one minute after Chara’s escape. Said he wanted to observe Frisk and Sans: what they would do, how they would react.

The DEMON? Written off as hopeless.

Papyrus stopped chasing after Chara by then. Instead, he focused his power to track their location and see their future. He needed to report the event in full detail.

Somewhere in the loops, he hoped that his offer of mercy would be accepted. They continued to reject. Hence, they perished in the hands of the seraphim.

Everyone thought that Frisk’s intervention would create a positive result. After this round, it didn’t seem to be the case anymore.

Papyrus raked his mind for a solution to this problem, but he’s drawing a blank.

…Then an idea hit him. Think from another angle. Get a second opinion. Like Mezil did with the jumble-crossword-timeline issue.

“SANS, I NEED YOUR ADVICE. WHAT DO YOU THINK I CAN DO TO PREVENT THIS TRAGEDY?”

The elder brother leaned back in surprise. “Whoa, Paps. You’re asking your lazy trash bro for advice now?”
“I WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU DON’T NEED TO DO A VIOLENCE.” Papyrus then gave a warm, reassuring smile. “IN THE NEXT TIMELINE, OF COURSE.”

Sans chuckled away. “Oh man, you’re such a bright sunshine. When you were born, Dad said that the ‘Moon’ finally had a ‘Sun’ to keep him company. Gaster used to have this old painting with a blue moon and an orange sun.”

“Funny enough, it fits. The moon reflects sunlight, and that’s how it gets its famous silver glow. That thing’s just a dark piece of rock otherwise. Accurate, right? Just like you and me.”

After a relaxed sigh, he gave Papyrus his words of wisdom: “Bro, you need to change the circumstances. As it is, that kid’s gonna drive themselves into a dead end all the time. Can’t trust them to make the right decision.”

“Instead, you gotta make sure they don’t go anywhere. No chance to escape. Maybe lock them in an unbreakable cage? Or chain them down? Do that on the very first opportunity.”

“OKAY. SO I MUST CAPTURE THEM ON THE VERY FIRST--”

Papyrus’ sockets grew wide with epiphany.

The brother replied. “Heh. That look on your face. You figured something out, eh? Go ahead. I’ll be waiting for the results, Papyrus.”

“THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH! I PROMISE YOU THAT, I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- CARRY FRISK HOME SAFE AND SOUND IN THE NEXT RESET! NYEH HEH HEH!”

“Good luck with that, bro. You can do it.”

Without a second thought, Papyrus got on his feet and jumped off the mountain. He floated himself back to town with the aid of gravity magic.

He thought to himself, no more violence.
No more sacrifice.

When he arrived at Alphys’ lab, Papyrus walked into the middle of a loud, screeching scream.

“MEZIL THYYYYYYYYMEEEEEEE!!” Cenna yelled, “I told you to be on fucking standby! Stand! By! Why the hell is your earliest SAVE point AFTER the exorcism???”

“Language, please.” the other replied. It’s none other than Mezil Thyme himself. “It’s not exactly my fault that some urgent business popped up at the same time as your attempt. There are many things that I can’t control.”

The survivors of the night used Alphys’ anime PC to make a video call to Mezil’s address. They huddled around the webcam’s field of view, curious to meet Cenna’s colleague.

Gaster noticed Papyrus’ return. He beckoned the bloke to join the group. “Skip the phone, my boy. We have direct contact now.”

“I STILL NEED TO CHARGE THIS FIRST.” He lifted his dead phone to make his point known.

Alphys then said, “I have a spare wire here, Papyrus. We can hook it up to the computer.”

They did just that. The time-travelling phone now rested on the table, refilling its much needed energy.
With that out of the way, Cenna resumed her grilling. She pointed a demanding finger the camera. “Of all the people you could choose, you had to pick the cinnamonest of cinnamon rolls! WHY???”

Papyrus blurted, “WHO IS THIS CINNAMONEST OF CINNAMON ROLLS?”

Undyne replied, “You, Paps.”

“WHAT IS A CINNAMON ROLL? AND HOW DOES THAT APPLY TO ME?”

Cenna groaned out loud. She showed both hands at Papyrus and said, “See? SEE??? This is exactly what I mean! He doesn’t even know his namesake, Mez! And you put him through a night of hell??!”

Mezil furrowed his brows in displeasure. “In my defense, Seer Papyrus is the ideal candidate for our current mission. He far exceeded my expectations. Achieving Ascension as a monster is no small matter.”

“And what the hell did he have to survive to achieve said Ascension?”

Gaster replied in Mezil’s stead, saying, “He witnessed the truth behind The Core Incident and chose the path of forgiveness.”


“I know, yet that’s what he did.”

Undyne squinted her eye. “The Core Incident? The one that fucked Sans up big time? Killed Frisk’s and Cenna’s parents?”


Undyne immediately shifted her attention to her junior. “Okay Paps, you’re going to tell me exactly what went down that day. The truth and nothing but the truth!”

“SORRY UNDYNE, NOT RIGHT NOW,” Papyrus replied, “THIS TIMELINE WILL RESET. WE’LL RECORD THE TRUTH WHEN FRISK IS SAFE FOR REAL.”

Talking about Frisk prompted Asgore to ask a question. “Where’s Frisk? And Chara?”

The skeleton looked back at the King in sorrow. “THEY’RE NOT HERE ANYMORE, YOUR MAJESTY. IT’S TOO TRAGIC TO SPEAK OF.”

Asgore understood the subtext. He lowered his head and muttered, “I… I see.”

“PLEASE DON’T WORRY. I WILL SAVE THEM BOTH.”

Bleak and nonsensical the prospect may be, the King found himself comforted by Papyrus’ ever shining confidence.

“I’ve yet to understand the situation,” he said, “But I trust you. Thank you so much for your efforts.”

The orange Seer nodded. He walked closer to the webcam and leaned forward to the camera: “MISTER MAGUS, WE MUST USE YOUR THIRD SAVE FILE.”

It was subdued, but Mezil tensed up upon that mention. “I-I believe you’ve miscounted, Papyrus. We have only two SAVES relevant to this incident. One for our starting point, and one after the DEMON
escaped.”

“IT’S NOT GOOD TO LIE,” Papyrus replied, “I THOUGHT WE’VE DISCUSSED ABOUT THIS.”

“Well--”

Hawk-eyed Cenna glared at Mezil. Her body began emitting a yellow, wispy aura: curling the fringes of her hair with the force of magic.

Papyrus gasped, “OH MY GOD, MISS AUNT! YOU CAN GO GLOWY TOO?!”

“Hell yeah I can,” she replied. “I ain’t Judge Vanquisher for nothing, cinnamon roll. Facing this old stubborn coot in denial makes my ‘Justice’ aspect boil hotter than facing a DEMON!”

Cenna slammed the table so hard, one of Alphys’ figurines dropped off the edge. Mettaton managed to catch it before it hit the ground.

Alphys started sweating from the tension.

“Ohemgee ohemgee ohemgee,” she squealed. “Is her hair going to turn spiky and golden???”

“Maybe,” Undyne said. It wouldn’t surprise her if it happened. This one week was more anime than her entire life.

On the top of her lungs, Judge Cenna yelled: “You seriously had Jungle Curry for dinner?! On the night of the most dangerous exorcism in modern history?! Why the fuck do you even torture yourself with that shit???”

Everyone except Gaster bubbled into various varieties of ‘What?’ and ‘Huh?’

Papyrus then asked, “WHAT’S THIS ‘JUNGLE CURRY’?”

With his hands in a steeple, Gaster explained: “It’s a type of dry curry known for their liberal use of hot spices and coconut milk. A speciality of the island tropics. From what I understand, the level of heat… would give Grillby issues.”

“BUT GRILLBY IS MADE OF FIRE.”

“Exactly my point. It’s not for the unacquainted.”

Mezil tried his best to remain stoic, but his cheeks started to go pink from embarrassment.

“This man,” Cenna growled, “His bowels can’t tolerate coconut milk AND excessive chili! Yet he eats the worst possible dish in secret, time and time again!”

“How did you figure that out?” asked Mezil.

“Because it’s fucking SATURDAY! You’ll have the damn curry on Saturday, suffer diarrhea for the night, then use the rest of Sunday to recover from your weird habit!”

One pause. “WAIT. THIS DIARRHEA THING… I’VE HEARD OF IT BEFORE. FRISK DESCRIBED IT AS ‘A VERY BAD TIME IN THE TOILET’. DOES THAT MEAN MISTER MAGUS’ THIRD SAVE FILE WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF THAT BAD TIME?”

“Correction. It’s before. As in, right at the entrance of my toilet.”
Mezil admitted his biggest shame of the night at long last. The monsterfolk gave him a very weird look.

Upon his confession, Cenna’s glow faded away.

“… Look, I’ve not had Jungle Curry since your kind emerged. Not counting the RESETs. It’s very distracting to have a craving unsatisfied.”

Papyrus commented, “WOWIE, THAT’S ABOUT AS UNHEALTHY AS MY BROTHER’S ADDICTION TO KETCHUP.”

Mezil winced in response to that statement. He then explained: “I noticed my level of stress spiked in the past week or two. So, I thought I should wind down by giving myself a long-desired treat.”

Helvetica asked in a series of hand signs. Gaster translated, “The madam wondered why you can’t magically replicate the dish in your Hub. You can refresh your mind without suffering their ill-effects there.”

“I… I tried. Except I don’t know the exact mix of ingredients. It’s not just any Jungle Curry. There’s a store run by a native of that land, and that’s the only place I could get true authentic taste. Other establishments had it either watered down or their spice mix wrong. Such a shame.”

“Anyways,” Mezil resumed, “Upon my savouring of the spice of life, Judge Caraway informed me of her urgent operations.”

“Needless to say, I can’t just un-consume my dinner. This timeline had a string of unique events that led to our best chance yet. I didn’t want to put anything at risk.”

“Can’t you then use your nearest checkpoint?” Asked Alphys, “If, I understand what’s going on.”

“Here’s the thing, I couldn’t make single SAVE, or checkpoint, since your freedom. Frisk as well. Our levels of Determination were so close, we interfered with each other. My last usable spot was on the day when Frisk fell into the Underground.”

“If we go back there now, the DEMON will destroy the universe for certain. Failure is not an option.”

“IT’S TRUE,” Papyrus added. “I SAW THAT OUTCOME IN A VISION.”

“All my SAVES made during their adventure ended up corrupted. Conflict of cause and effect. I can’t access a timeline that doesn’t exist anymore. Hence, unusable.”

Mettaton’s head spun from the overload of information. “Oh my, this is complicated business. Correct timing to use the power of time? Ironic drama at its finest. Reminds me of Blooky’s music sensibilities. It’s all about the timing, he once told me.”

“Only those who’ve experienced it first-hand would know the limitations of being The Living Victory.”

“The gamechanger here is the DT-Extraction Machine. With Frisk drained of their Determination, I finally have my power back at full potential. That’s why we’re here.”

Turning to Papyrus, Mezil then asked a vital question. “Seer. Should I use this third SAVE, what’s your plan? I certainly do not want to spend the next set of loops on the ceramic throne. If I can help it.”
The skeleton lit up his orange Eye and scanned the people around him. When he’s done, he declared his answer with sheer utmost confidence. “MISTER MAGUS, YOU WILL ONLY NEED TO DO THIS ONCE. PROMISE!”

He wrapped an arm around Cenna and pulled her into a sideways-hug.

“Uh, cinnamon roll?” The woman cringed a bit from the awkward and tight angle.

“MISS AUNT, YOU HAVE A MAGICAL WATCH YOU WILL USE IT IN THE FUTURE PAST. THAT’S THE KEY TO SOLVE THIS PUZZLE!”

Cenna rose her brows as far as they could go. “Oi oi, that’s a family secret. I didn’t even tell Frisky yet ’cause they got a bloody parasite in them.”

“THAT’S EXACTLY WHY IT’S PERFECT! NOBODY EXCEPT YOU AND ME AND MAYBE MISTER MAGUS KNOWS WHAT IT DOES.”

Mezil caught on. “I do. Normally I wouldn’t consider it due to its limitations, but it would have garnered enough power by now. I approve of your plan. Meet me at the Hub.”

Papyrus pumped his fist in joy.

“One more thing. May I know Chara’s primary cause of death? When they were human, that is.”

Alphys raised her hand. “I believe it had something to do with ‘buttercups’. Chara asked the Prince to harvest them in secret. I found the VHS recordings for it…”

“I see. Hmm… I’m not sure if I could obtain those in the heart of winter. Nonetheless, it’s helpful information. Thank you, Doctor Alphys.”

“In the next timeline, I’ll meet all of you in person. See you there.”

Mezil snapped his fingers. With that, the young skeleton found himself standing in the Hub.

Papyrus felt sad that they won’t return here anymore. At least, not for the foreseeable future. It’s a place that had become a second home, and now he had to say goodbye.

Goodbyes are forbidden in his town. This place? It’s not his. It belonged to someone else.

Gaster and Mezil waited for Papyrus at the SAVE console.

The uncle said, “Your father asked if you want to walk around the Hub for one last time. Relax, prepare your mind. That sort of thing.”

Papyrus thought about it. He could if he wanted to. Time doesn’t flow here. But he decided against it. If he lingered, he might get too attached and grow reluctant.

“NO, THANK YOU,” he answered. “I MUST MOVE FORWARD. FOR EVERYONE’S SAKE.”

It’s a response that would make any teacher or parent proud. The young man had come a long way.

“Well then, it’s time.” Mezil activated his SAVE console and summoned the file-selection screen. The top number changed whenever he swiped the set left.

The third SAVE occupied slot number ‘50’, well hidden from any curious meddling. Exactly as
Mezil had said, it’s right in front of a toilet.

“This timestamp…” Gaster muttered. “It’s during the exorcism itself. Long before Judge Caraway dealt the final blow, but some time after she first drained Frisk’s DT.”

“I apologize for putting you through so much trouble,” said Mezil. “I hoped that we could find a solution without resorting to this SAVE. Without Judge Caraway’s watch at its current capacity, this checkpoint is useless.”

“She can’t abort the procedure after trapping the DEMON. Neither could I arrive in time to provide an alternative. However, that artifact’s power will solve both of those dead ends.”

He’s reluctant to activate that SAVE. Understandably so. He’d end up at a rather unpleasant point in time, both physically and mentally.

Papyrus gave a reassuring and apologetic pat on the old human’s back. He felt for the other’s suffering, even though the skeleton himself never had terrible times in the toilet before.

His best reference was the session with the kitchen sink, except downwards instead of upwards. Awful times indeed.

“I AM VERY, TRULY, ABSOLUTELY SORRY TO MAKE YOU GO THROUGH THE BAD TIMES AGAIN. AS I HAD SAID BEFORE, I PROMISE THAT YOU ONLY NEED TO GO THROUGH THIS ONCE.”

“PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF I YOU NEED ANY MEDICINE. I CAN ASK ALPHYS TO PREPARE THEM.”

“It’s alright, I have the all medicines I need,” Mezil replied. “It’s sweet for you to offer though. I can see why Judge Caraway calls you the ‘cinnomonest of cinnamon rolls’.”

“Speaking of our spunky Vanquisher,” he said, “There’s something you must know; not all conditions can be cured with medicine. I can’t ever say it in front of her face. She’d probably smash the screen to end the call.”

“OH?” Papyrus blinked.

“Have you noticed her lifeforce? Or rather, the lack of it?”

“YES. SHE HAD 13 HP. A VERY, VERY STRANGE NUMBER. THEN TODAY IT DROPPED TO 12! SHE’S TURNING INTO A TALL GIRLY SANS AND THAT’S BAD.”

Mezil tapped his cane several times. “Papyrus, she’s very sick. Been so for years. Her body will weaken long before old age. In five years, it’s likely that she would end up paralyzed, mute, and bedridden. From there it’s just waiting for a slow death.”

Never before had the youngster heard of such affliction. In the Underground, the worst disease involved ‘falling down’. Plus it was rather painless.

Cenna? Horrific, if not agonizing. As though she’s ‘falling down’ at a snail’s pace with full consciousness.

“WE REALLY CAN’T HELP HER?” He whimpered. “NO MEDICINE? NO HEALING MAGIC? NOTHING?”
The Magus shook his head. “No, there’s no cure for her illness. But there is a method to delay its effects. Used in conjunction with specific drugs, of course.”

“It involves permanent consumption of the SOUL to reinforce her weakening body. Whenever the symptoms return, she must shave off a lifeforce unit to preserve integrity. Also, the procedure cannot go below a value of ‘ten’.”

“You said she has ‘twelve’ now, right? That means she can perform the reinforcement two more times before the disease consumes her.”

“The vision with the court case… You saw her strapped in strange supports. That’s just the beginning of an inevitable decline.”

“Hmm,” Gaster pondered upon this new revelation. “Her predicament does fit with the limitations of Psychia Reinforcement on living beings. It’ll just be a matter of time before the reinforced cells decay, replaced by new ones made from her faulty genes. It’s a losing battle.”

Mezil nodded. “Doctor Gaster is correct. Believe it or not, her SOUL is more brittle than Sans’. Or any monster. If she uses her Ascension at full power now, she will surely die. And she’s very willing to die. So… if possible, don’t give her a reason to do so until Spring.”

All the talk about this whole ‘winter season illness’ was a lie. Papyrus did not approve of that approach. If everyone knew about her true condition, they will do their best to make the most out of their time together.

But, he understood that it was a very personal and heartbreaking situation to explain. Thus, he held no grudges.

“BUT WHY SPRING?” Asked Papyrus.

“Judge Caraway will be going on a very important mission then. It’s something only she can do. I want her to continue living for as long as possible.”

That reason was enough. “LEAVE IT TO ME, MISTER MAGUS! I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- WILL PROTECT MISS AUNT UNTIL HER VERY IMPORTANT MISSION. NYEH HEH HEH!”

“Thank you,” Mezil smiled. “Now I have no hesitations.”

“I DON’T EITHER.”

Together, they selected File 50 and pressed the confirmation button.

Chapter End Notes

The problems of being the ‘ultimate weapon’, you can’t exactly live like a normal person. Somehow, somewhere, something goes wrong and it's your job to resolve it.

If you catch a cold? Or when nature calls at that exact key moment? Or you had food poisoning the day before? Well. Gud ruck, there are no breaks for you. It does suck if you had to live with a perpetual cold for what could be a month's worth of timey-wimey shenanigans.
By the way, 'Jungle Curry' here refers to a real dish! It's 'rendang' of Malaysia/Indonesia speciality. I had to put a 'Bland Name Product' because GQ land is obviously not our Earth.

If you love spice and coconut, google for it! Here's one example:
http://norecipes.com/recipe/beef-rendang-recipe

Rendang is one of the top 50 tastiest dishes according to survey. And judging from what I've seen? Yeah, it's addictive as heck. It's the stuff locals yearn and dream in nostalgia if they're in foreign land.

Anyone who lives in a spice-centric country will tell you that people are willing to suffer for a kick. Truestory.jpg. No lie. My own family does that sometimes. If you're unlucky you'd get a curry so hot that it burns at both ends. First, the mouth. Then, the toilet. I'm sure Mexicans, Indians, Thais, and the American South would know what I'm talking about too.

Me? I can't eat chili. At all. They not only hurt, but also taste extremely bitter. My genes are telling me that chillies are toxic plants that must be purged with great prejudice.

Please don't follow Mezil's example. It's clearly unhealthy. I'm very sure that the Skeleparents are going to try cook a substitute so he can enjoy his meals without the after-effects.

P.S And yes the hair comment is a DBZ reference.
Howdy, I’m Flowey! Flowey the Flower.
You may also know me as Asriel Dreemurr.
Former GOD of Hyperdeath.
Your very best friend.

It’s been a while since everyone went up to the Surface. Don’t tell anyone, but I’ve been watching the developments from afar.

I’m glad Frisk had a happy life. If they’re happy, Chara should be happy too.

…Or so I thought.

Things got a little funky. I’ve seen the usual drama multiple times now, but this takes the cake. It’s like all that stupid ‘human history’ stuff Alphys used to collect. Except believable.

Well, let’s just say both of my best friends ended up dead.

I tried to help. Uh, but, I kinda forgot that the Surface is chock-full of humans. And Frisk isn’t the only human with the power to SAVE and RESET.

Farewell time traveling ability.

Then, the Smiley Trashbag appeared.

Extract my Determination?
Turn the floor into sand??
Collapse the entire stadium??

He’s. AB-SO-LUTE-LY. NUTS!

NUUUUUUUTS!

There’s a reason why I warned them NEVER to let him know ANYTHING!

And also why I made sure he’s knocked out cold when I captured everyone. If I give him even a tiny bit of chance, he’s going to milk the heck out of it!

That’s just the kicker.
It turns out EVERYONE knew my true identity. All my hiding and solitude and crying was for nothing!

…but Mom saved me from her dumb and clearly lethal joke buddy.

I thought she would choose him over me. Well, because I’m not exactly her son anymore. Still Mom is Mom: she’s tough on what she decides on.

I tried to flee, the sky’s falling down, and then… Poof.

RESET.

I found myself back in hiding under Doctor Alphys’ couch. I was so confused.

Who did it? Are they at the stadium? Maybe Frisk or Chara managed to push the button beyond the grave or something?

Things went downhill from there. Papyrus tried to be a hero and he got himself killed. After all, I -- of all people -- know what’s the sound of a monster turning into dust.

Sooooo how is that supposed to help? I know Papyrus is sweet, and frankly I can’t bring myself to hate him, but he’s too dumb to live.

All I saw was Doctor Gaster holding the door with the help of a dead human. That just got surreal, like seriously.

Then HE appeared.

The guy with the RESET button! He’s some… some… old human dude with weird fancy fashion? What’s with his flappy tail coat thing? What’s with the stick? Everything about him reminds me of a Mettaton show for some reason.

The two old guys had their old magic talk. Boring.

Then the RESET happened again.

And again.
And again.
And again.

Idiots. Don’t they know that as long Frisk has Determination, nothing’s ever gonna work? Believe me. I’ve tried.

………………

Okay.
Papyrus got… smarter? He made it out alive after what, two hundred tries? I stopped counting after ten.

And he told Frisk to do nothing.

I almost wanted to jump out from my hiding spot and slap him, but in hindsight it’s brilliant.

Of course Frisk had to do nothing! It’s the only way to deal with Determination! I think everyone else is major dumb for not thinking of that sooner.
Then, the REAL game started.

As a flower, I’ve gained a newfound appreciation for Chara’s creativeness in the art of killing. Not like it helped because we’d get RESET sooner or later, but boy. It’s fantastic. Like anime. Maybe that’s where they learned some of those moves?

………………

Wow. I still don’t really get what’s going on, but with every RESET Papyrus comes back stronger. And extra smarter.

He’s learning new magic too! I think it has something to do with a glowing red butterfly. If I pay close enough attention, I’d see it flying away from his dust.

………………

Ooookay. I think I’ve seen everything now. A glowing Papyrus. Right. Maybe if I smack my head on the ground hard enough, I’ll wake up from this dream.

He tried to capture Chara. By wedging them in a corner. And told them if they ran away, they’re gonna risk having a bad time.

He’s too nice. Of course Chara won’t listen to him. They don’t really listen to anyone if you tell them to stay put.

Chara?
Chara?
Where are you going Chara?

NO CHARA STOP! THE SMILEY TRASHBAG IS AT MOM’S HOUSE!

STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP!

YOU IDIOT!
STOP!!!

………………

I’m not dumb.
I can see that Papyrus tried to save Chara from the Trashbag.

If this was the Underground, I wouldn’t trust Papyrus with his capturing. His head was too much in the clouds to realise that handing a human over to Asgore meant certain death for them: bottled up as a SOUL.

But he’s different now. He’s no longer that ignorant. In fact, he probably knows too much. And I suspect it has something to do with his epic glow and orange eye thing.

C’mon Chara, stop running away! Do you need me to talk to you face to face?

………………

Chara ran to Mount Ebott. Tried to flee to the Underground.

I tunnelled around so I can meet them at a halfway point. Then tell them to listen to Papyrus for once.
'Don’t kill, and don’t be killed’.
That’s the advice I gave to Frisk before I turned back into a soulless flower.

I can’t feel love anymore, but I’m getting darn worried about Chara. Concerned? Out of fear, I’m sure. If they don’t surrender to Papyrus, that Trashbag is gonna kill them over and over.

Then.

The Trashbag found me first.

He cut me down on the spot.

………………

I’m scared.
I’m so scared.

The Trashbag saw me. I’m a target. A big giant target on the radar!

What am I supposed to do???

Huh?

Why am I at the door to the lab?

I had to blink a few times to notice, but this…

This was the moment of the big ritual.

Chara and Frisk, all bound in magic chains.

“You rather believe that goopy mad scientist and a witch over me…? You… YOU MONSTERS ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM THOSE HUMANS!”

No… Are they going to try and kill Chara again?
I-I know they survived but, but they went through so much pain…

Cenna said: “Playtime’s over, kiddo. It’s time for eternal sleep.”

Papyrus, maybe I’ve thought wrong about you. Maybe you’re just like those humans who killed me.

I’m sorry Chara, you’re right. Everyone’s terrible. The world is terrible! Humans, monsters, they’re all the same!

I’m gonna avenge you!

“MISS AUNT, USE THE WATCH!”

The watch? Whatever he meant, it stopped Cenna from continuing the ritual. The witch checked the pocket watch strung around her neck.

Hey, isn’t that the one with a mirrored back? I heard her talking about it when Frisk had breakfast at school. It’s some family heirloom. Normally, the sides tell the same time.

“The heck? It’s desynced hard!”
I just caught a quick glimpse. Each display is different now.

She then pointed the device right at Chara.

WHOA!
WHAT?!
WHAAAAAAT???

The watch shot out like, a ray of red light and… and… and FROZE half of the room?!?!

Chara and Frisk and the chains and the DT Extraction Machine got encased in a bubble of red light. It reminds me of the day I made candied apples with Mom, except this is less sugary and more ‘holographic’. I think that’s the term.

Inside that bubble…

Time has stopped.

What the heck are you planning, Papyrus???

Cenna stepped away from the massive star. She turned to Papyrus and talked to him. “Holy macaroni. Five hours of time freeze? Just how many weeks did Mez loop before we got to this point, cinnamon roll?”

“I DON’T THINK IT’S WEEKS, MISS AUNT. MY PHONE CAN’T LAST THAT LONG. BUT WE DID REPEAT LOTS. AND THERE’S A DAY EXTRA BEFORE OUR FIRST MEETING.”

“Oh? He ‘Marked’ a means of contact, yeah? Guess that made sense.”

Oooooooh, that watch is a magic device! If I got this right, it harvests extra time based on the number of RESETS. Or the duration passed. Or something like that. It’s running on DT at least.

The mirrored side is ticking backwards now. Very cunning, that witch.

She looked at Papyrus, up and down. “Whoa whoa whoa, you achieved Ascension? Get real, sweetheart! So, what’s your conviction to unlock that new level?”

‘Ascension’…? Is that why he’s all glowing?

Papyrus replied, “BY CHOOSING TO FORGIVE EVERYONE DESPITE ALL THE BAD THING THEY’VE DONE. THAT INCLUDES YOU TOO, MISS AUNT. YOU WEREN’T VERY NICE TO SANS.”

“Describe the ‘not nice’ to me, dear cinnamon.”

“YOU ADDED SOME SLEEPY MEDICINE INTO SANS’ KETCHUP. AND TRIED TO CHILDNAP FRISK. EVEN IF YOU’RE REALLY THEIR RELATIVE, IT’S NOT NICE TO SNATCH PEOPLE AWAY.”

She burst into laughter. Not nervous, not afraid, but… glad? Cheerful? What?

“Daaaaaamm. You’re a full-fledged Chronographer now! Yeah, I’ve done that in at least one of the timelines. I admit it. Full surrender. It didn’t work. That got myself and a few other innocents killed. That’s why we ain’t stooping to that anymore.”
“DO YOU REMEMBER THOSE TIMES, MISS AUNT?”

“Nawh, not at all.” Insert playful wink here. “I go to a good friend to get my info. She’s a Chronographer just like you. Mez? By now, you should know that he’s not the most transparent guy on the block.”

Wow. I think I just gave up trying to understand what’s going on.

Undyne said the best about this situation. “Caaaan somebody tell me what the fu-- heck is going on here?”

“Please allow me,” Doctor Gaster offered to explain.

Papyrus started walking towards the door with Cenna following right behind. I quickly hid under the couch. This hiding spot worked in the past timelines, so it should be okay.

I saw him making a beeline to Alphys’ PC. He grabbed one of those ‘chargers’ and plugged his phone in. Then, he started making a phone call.

It doesn’t look like anyone answered.

“HMM, I GUESS HE’S NOT OUT OF THE TOILET YET.”

Cenna said, “He had Jungle Curry, didn’t he?”

“YUP,”

“That explains a ton. Sheesh. I must have grilled him hard in the last reset.”

“YES YOU DID. YOU WENT ALL GLOWY TOO.”

“Oookay that’s more than just grilling. I totally flipped out. No questions there. So, what’s your plan?”

“I'M GOING TO SAVE EVERYONE. CHARA AND FLOWEY TOO.”

Save… me?
I thought they wanted to exterminate us…?

“You gotta tell me more than that, cinnamon roll. Maybe I can help?”

“MISTER MAGUS KNOWS WHAT TO DO. I JUST NEED TO REMIND HIM TO MAKE SPACE FOR FLOWEY TOO. AS LONG THEY LIVE WITH HIM, MY BROTHER WON’T BE FORCED TO DO A VIOLENCE.”

Live with… that old human Magus?
Away from Sans?

“Protective custody, huh?” Said Cenna, “Not bad. Hey, let me give you a little police insider. We lock bad guys behind bars not only to protect the public from them, but also to protect them from the public. It goes both ways. Angry mobs are balls of hatred. You don’t wanna see those in action.”

“OH, YOU KNOW HOW TO MERCY CAPTURE TOO?” Papyrus sounded really happy.

“THAT'S AWESOME! TO BE HONEST, I WAS WORRIED. I THOUGHT THE SURFACE PEOPLE DON’T KNOW HOW TO TALK THINGS OUT.”

“Eeeh prisons aren’t always nice places, cinnamon. Some double as therapy centers, but some of them are pits of darkness by themselves.”
So, the best alternative to getting killed by the Trashbag is to get jailed for life? That doesn’t sound very appealing. Talk about a rock and a hard place.

“I take it you want something less like a ‘prison’ and more like a ‘house arrest’, yeah?”

“OOOH MISS AUNT, YOU’RE SMART! A HOUSE SOUNDS GREAT! I WANT FLOWEY AND CHARA TO BE COMFORTABLE AND HAPPY, SO THEY TOO CAN HAVE A CHANCE TO HEAL. WHEN THEY HEAL, THEY CAN CHOOSE TO BE GOOD. NYEH HEH HEH!”

“NOW I MUST FIND FLOWEY AND TELL HIM THAT EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY.”

Papyrus’ right eye lit up orange. Then, I saw his body shift towards the couch. He got on the floor and peeked under it.

…I never thought I’d be so happy to see that goofy face.

“HELLO FLOWEY.”


“ABSOLUTELY!”

“Even if we’re… soulless?”

“I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- SWEAR TO KEEP HIS WORD. AS LONG YOU STAY BY MY SIDE, SANS WON’T HURT YOU.”

I started to get teary. Of course Papyrus would never kill us. There’s a reason why I can’t hate him. I feel like an idiot now. A big, massive, humongous idiot.

Frisk and Papyrus are both special. And they’re staying special. Nobody can deny that.

He offered his hand. I crawled out of my hiding spot and climbed on it. He then lifted me up with a sense of kind gentleness. Reminds me of Dad.

“Thanks, Papyrus,” I said.

He smiled back and patted me on my petalled head.

I still can’t feel love, don’t get me wrong. But I’m… I’m so relieved. I don’t need to worry about that Trashbag anymore. I’ll be safe. Chara will be safe too.

Cenna the Vanquisher grinned at me. “A flower DEMON made of monster dust? Dang. Never thought that’s possible.”

I put on my scary face to toy with her: “Oooooh, so what do you want to do? ‘Purify’ me with explosives like what you’re gonna do to Chara?”

Instead of getting scared, her grin curled wider. Twisted, she tilted her head back and stared me down.

“An eager customer, eh? It ain’t smart to buy a service without taking a sample. Let’s see, maybe we can start on one of your cute little petals? Or your fancy leaves? Free of charge, flower boy. Just say the word.”
--- I almost pooped sap out of my roots. I dunno who’s worse anymore: the witch, or the Trashbag.

Papyrus squinted his sockets at the both of us. “NO RUDENESS, PLEASE.”

Cenna switched modes. She acted cute with a catty pout, saying: “Oh cinnamon roll, don’t worry. We’re just teasing each other. Ain’t that right, Flowey?”

I caught the subtext, lady. With a nervous chuckle, I replied, “Y-yeah! Just playing! I mean, friends tease each other. That’s what we do, right?”

Papyrus being Papyrus, took it at face value. “I’M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU MAKING NEW FRIENDS, FLOWEY. I’M SURE FRISK WILL BE SUPER HAPPY TOO!”

Some things just don’t change.

Cenna’s phone started to ring. She answered the call.

“Yo Mez,” she said, “How’s consequences working for ya? Seriously though, you should quit that habit. Anyways. You have four hours and forty minutes. …Not enough? Serious? C’mon, I know there’s the big weekly congestion on the way here, but you ain’t gonna be stuck there forever.”

“…Heh, not taking any risks huh? Yeah. Drunk drivers are a pain. Which means you got an hour or so at max. Okay, noted.”

“You need an Ebott Goldenflower from Asgore? No probs. He keeps a bajillion of those. What about Flowey? He’s with Papyrus. So you don’t need to worry about looking for the flower boy. Anything else?… Sure thing. See you soon.”

Alternative setup number two commenced. Undyne accompanied Dad to fetch a pot of ‘Ebott Goldenflower’. I guess the humans have a specific name for my body.

Of course, being the nice King Fluffybuns of fame… Dad brought an empty soil-filled pot for me. Nicely watered too.

I settled down in there and stayed quiet. None of us talked much. The silence messed with Undyne, I can tell from her frustrated scowl.

It’s all about the tired-yet-anxious waiting now.

Doctor Gaster made coffee for everyone. When he’s done, he stayed far away from the rest of the group. Papyrus tried invite him to join us. He declined.

That behaviour, I know all about it. He must have been bad at some point and he’s now feeling darn uncomfortable.

…Frisk also tried to invite me back to the Surface a few times. I know. Even if I don’t remember every instance, I’m sure it’s in their character to try.

So I kept hiding.
And hiding.
And hiding.

Hide long enough and they will be forced to move on.

I gave them no opportunity to talk to me. Made them think I’m dead for good or something. ‘Cause
the moment they start, it’s going to be DETERMINATION all the way to the end.

It worked. They eventually became overwhelmed by other Surface responsibilities and stopped badgering me.

After about an hour, a car stopped in front of Alphys’ lab.

“Finally! God, all that waiting almost drove me nuts.” Undyne opened the door. She did it with so much force, it almost popped off the hinges.

That’s him. The old Magus in all his tailcoat glory. He had this steel box with a skull and crossbones logo on it.

Wait, really? REALLY? I thought we’re supposed to save Chara? Why did he bring a box with a POISON symbol on it?

Nevermind. Papyrus placed faith in these guys, so I’m gonna see where this goes.

“Thank you,” said this Mister Magus. Then he marched like he owned the place. He didn’t even bother to introduce himself.

Papyrus was sooooo happy to see him, though he’s pretty concerned. “MISTER MAGUS, YOU MADE IT! ARE YOU OKAY?”

“I’m fine. Let us end this long night.”

We followed him into the chamber. The red time-freeze stuff still kept everything in place, as if nothing ever happened.

Cenna helped Mister Magus on clockwork.

I asked Papyrus to shift his position so I could take a closer look.

They’re modifying the ritual for Chara. Even if I don’t understand, I want to know every single detail of this procedure.

Okay. First step: place mystery steel box down.

Second step: take out…

A very complicated contraption.

It’s flat: a steel plate with a glass cover. It has one of those ‘Arcanagrams’ carved in. A mysterious silvery liquid flowed in the etches. The whole thing reminds me of a puzzle piece in a way. The amount of symbols and mini-circles on there make my head spin.

I tried counting the number of pointy sections, but I kept messing up.

Doctor Gaster noticed my curiosity. “Seventeen points, Your Highness. Filled with mercury. It’s a very hazardous substance, hence the warning label.”

Great. He knows my real identity too. Figures.

Oh boy, he gets that spark whenever something catches his attention.

“Interesting, interesting…” he muttered, “I suppose it only makes sense. My, my, turning the tables
aren’t we?”

I can’t tell what he’s thinking.
I can’t tell what they’re thinking.

But this should save Chara.

There’s some other stuff inside the box: a bottle of blood, flakes of silver, and some fresh buttercups.

Buttercups…
I’ll never forget that day.

I watched Dad place the normal flower pot in the middle of the magic star.

“We’re ready,” said Mister Magus. “Please step back.”

Everyone moved to the back end of the room except for the two experts. Cenna unhooked the key from the handle of her special watch.

“Ready?” She asked.

The old guy nodded. He brought forth his SOUL. It’s red just like Frisk’s.

It shone bright with magic. Then that ‘mercury’ thing started to resonate together with him, taking on his power’s hue.

Cenna inserted the key into the base of the watch and twisted it. The moment she did so, time returned to normal. I could see the confusion on Chara’s face as the flow of time returned.

“What the hell happened?” they asked. “Who are you anyway? Where did you come from?! I thought the witch is in charge!”

I wanted to call for their attention, but Papyrus whispered a ‘shhh’ next to my head.

‘Mister Magus’ finally introduced himself: “My name is Mezil Thyme. If she’s a witch, I’m a warlock. Alas, those are nothing but labels of the ignorant. Shall we have a short session of enlightenment?”

He picked up the bottle of blood. Unscrewed the cap and lifted it to Chara as if he’s having a toast.

He said, “Blood, the component of ‘Life’. My blood. Determination in its liquid form.”

He poured the whole bottle down on the flower pot. Instead of spilling everywhere, the plant absorbed every drop of liquid.

It’s magic at work here. Getting stronger.

The Magus then scattered the buttercup petals over the pot. “Buttercups, your personal ‘Aspect of Death’. What a cruel and unusual way to suicide…”

Here come the silver flakes. “Silver. A ‘Purification’ reagent. When used in conjunction with Mercury’s ‘Corruption’, it becomes a ‘Neutralizer’. Demons gain their strength from the combination of ‘Life’ and ‘Corruption’. Adding silver prevents their empowerment.”

When he poured the silver flakes, the flower glowed brighter and brighter until it’s pure white.
Winds circulate inside the chamber. Globs of dark-red icky stuff began floating out of Frisk’s SOUL. That’s Chara’s essence.

They struggled in panic. “**W-what are you doing to me???”**

Mezil answered: “Giving a parasite a permanent body, of course. Please don’t think you can escape to a vessel of your choice. The seventeen points of this Arcanagram serve as the number of destruction. Only the Cheater of Death will host your essence, and your hauntings of Ebott will forever cease.”

“I’ll be a flower? A fucking flower? FOREVER?!? NOOOOO I DON’T WANT TO BE A FLOWER! I NEVER WANTED TO BECOME A FUCKING FLOWER!”

“It’s either that, or die in the hands of the blue seraphim. You do not have a choice.”

Mezil the Magus breathed in deep.

Then, with a voice as commanding as Undyne, he yelled:

“Chara, Chara: Warrior of Ebott! I command this vessel as thy body! Cease your wanderings and bind your spirit, now and forevermore!”

Oh, his SOUL created a red glowing butterfly! So he did use his magic on Papyrus after all.

With its flight, the magic activated. The butterfly sucked in every drop of Chara’s oozy essence and gently guided it toward the flower.

Wow.
I can’t believe this is actually happening, but it is.

The transfer of had begun. Chara’s essence failed to resist.

Their screams of protest grow softer and softer, until they’re all gone.

When it landed, it puffed into red sparkly dust.

“Sealing successful. And SAVED.”

It’s done.
When the light faded away, the flower started to move. This is the first time I’ve seen another flower move other than myself.

The other flower started to cry. Just like me when I woke up all alone.

“…No… Noooooo… I can’t feel anything. No hands, no legs…! I’m just a stupid, stupid, STUPID flower!”

It’s Chara’s real voice. Without all that epic demon nonsense.

“SEE?” Papyrus said to me. “MISTER MAGUS SAVED CHARA, JUST LIKE I PROMISED. DO YOU WANT TO SAY HELLO?”

“Of course!” I exclaimed. I’ve never been happier since the Barrier was broken!

Papyrus placed my pot right in front of Chara’s.
They stopped crying and looked at me in surprise.

“Howdy!” I said, “I’m Flowey the flower!”

Then, I changed to my true face. “Your very best friend.”

“Asriel?” Chara muttered.

Ah, I see their famous rosy blush! I danced a bit to welcome them. “Yup! It’s me! I-I understand it’s scary at first. Being a flower and all. But it’s not so bad. There are a lot of cool tricks you can do!”

“How, we can hitch a ride under the car. Or dig really really really fast underground. Oooooor steal cookies from the cookie jar without anyone ever realising it!”

I’m happy.
I’m so happy.
It’s going to be like the old days again. Just the both of us playing together.

I continued, “As a flower, the sunshine feels so super duper awesome! It’s warm and nice and refreshing and it gives this really energetic buzz and nyooooom! It’s just like a sugar rush, but with a little less crazy.”

Chara drooped their head down. “I’m scared, Asriel. I’m going to be killed. We’re all going to be killed. He’s out there. He’s going to hunt us down. He’s going to bury and drown me alive again.”

Not surprised Chara remembered Sans.

“We’re not going to get killed, Chara. We’re gonna go somewhere far away. He won’t find us.”

“Really?” They asked.

“Really!” I smiled and nodded as confident as I can. “Don't kill, and you won’t get killed.”

I can’t feel love, but I remember what it’s like be a friend.
I’m determined to help Chara adapt to their new life.

“In ‘this’ world, it’s live and let live.”

Chapter End Notes

Flowey's been missing on purpose.

I do want to respect Toby's decision that Truepac is the best outcome.
Thus, no saving goatbro from his lack of SOUL. He'll stay as flowerbro.

That doesn't mean that flowerbro can't learn to be a better entity.

Er yes this entry is also another Editing Hell section due to the procedures.
You opened your eyes.

Within the first second, you heard a familiar voice. A thought crossed your mind: did you end up in the Underground?

Silence. There’s silence in your head. You no longer hear Chara’s voice.

It then clicked that you’re in Alphys’ Lab. On the Surface.

You pushed yourself off the cold, steel table.

To your amazement, you saw... two talking flowers.

Two. Talking. Flowers.

Flower. He’s dancing in front of the other golden flower, the one with a rosy blush.

Wait. A blush?
Chara?!

You heard Flower finish his speech with these words: “In ‘this’ world, it’s live and let live."

That’s a thousand percent better than his usual ‘kill or be killed’ line.

Your sister ‘aunt’ noticed that you’re awake.

“Frisky!” Cenna ran straight up to you for the most vigorous hair rub you’ve ever experienced thus far.

By the time she’s done, your head became a messy mat of fluff. Then she hugged you tight.

It’s a huge change compared to her exhausted self in the doomed timelines.

Relief and joy was the theme of the atmosphere now. Except for Chara, who’s still in a sulking mood. Flower invited them to join the welcoming session, but they rather stay away.

Well, you did spite them with some forced memories. It’s going to take a while for them to get over it.

Gaster picked up Chara’s pot so no one would accidentally kick them over. He gave you a warm smile as he watched from a far corner. You could tell that he’s glad, even though he’s just an acquaintance for now.

The rest of your monster family crowded around you. Flower included.

Undyne’s wide grin, how you missed that. “Yooooo squirt, you’re free now! For real!”
That’s going to take some time to adjust.

Then, there’s Dad’s soft voice and his cuddly self. “My child, are you fine?”

Tired, but fine. A warm shower and bedtime sounds great right now.

“We were so worried about you,” said Alphys.

Sorry for making everyone worry.

If Mettaton wasn’t in his box form, he would have showered you with kisses. “Oh darling, I’m so happy that you’re your own person now~”

Looks like everyone knows about your Chara problem. You chuckled at maximum awkward levels.

“Congrats,” Flowey chirped, “You didn’t die!”

Such a typical Flowey statement. You patted him on the head and said it’s great to see him again. You missed him.

Here comes the hero with the iconic red scarf in all his tall, goofy glory; “FRISK, THE GREAT PAPYRUS SAVED YOU. JUST AS PROMISED.”

Upon witnessing your recovery, his awesome glow faded away. He’s normal bones now.

You thanked Papyrus with maximum gratitude. You knew that you wouldn’t be here without his efforts.

“You should thank Mister Magus too! He’s the one who gave me the chance to help.”

Mister Magus?

Flowey pointed a leaf towards the grey-haired man in a tailcoat. “Mezil Thyme. He’s a Magus. Personally, I thought the term ‘warlock’ is way cooler.”

His black ebony cane tapped on the ground as he walked right up to you. A beautiful red butterfly brooch was pinned onto his… folded cloth tie thing? You need to ask Mettaton for the proper fashion term later.

Something about its elegance caught your attention.

“Well,” said Mezil. “We meet at last, Frisk. You’re quite a difficult person to catch.”

The way he carried himself reminded you of a principal. A stern principal. Heck, you felt like you’re called to his office to talk over a major issue.

“Bring out your SOUL. I’d like to inspect it.”

You weren’t sure at first, but Papyrus encouraged it. So you pushed your SOUL out to let him check.

The cuts Cenna made were still there. You had joined the cool-partition club.

Mezil tapped the surface, spun it around, pulled the segmented partitions and watched how they locked back…
His methods reminded you of a clinical examination. You feel a little uncomfortable from the thoroughness.

“Hmm. Excellent colour. Brilliant shine. It’s already healing from the infection. I can say with certainty that you’re clean.”

He then sent the SOUL back into your body. Oh, perhaps he’s not so scary after all.

“Since I’ve verified your condition, I’ll take the two flower DEMONs back to the institute. They’ll live in the greenhouse until further notice.”

Papyrus frowned. “SO SOON? BUT FLOWEY JUST REUNITED WITH US.”

“It’s for their safety, as you should realise.”

“The old man’s right,” said Flowey. “It’s okay, Papyrus! We got these ‘video call’ stuffs nowadays. We’ll keep in touch.”

“OKAY…”

Aww, poor Papyrus. He’s so disappointed. You let him know that if he really wanted to, he can pay his planty friend a visit during the weekends.

Flowey waved goodbye one last time before the old Magus picked him up, then he went over to Doctor Gaster to get Chara.

Since everything’s settled, it’s time to get your hair straightened out.

You asked Mettaton if he had a comb.

That.
Just.
Made.
Papyrus shriek at the top of his ribs. Mittens to the cheeks, eyes bugged out, volume maximum.

“NOOOOOOO! FRISK, YOU WILL NOT BORROW ANYONE’S COMB! ALL NON-FRISK COMBS ARE BANNED UNTIL YOU’RE SAFE AT HOME!”

Undyne’s night just got weirder. “Whoa Paps, it’s just a comb--”

“IT’S NOT JUST A COMB! OH MY GOD METTATON, YOU NEED TO GET RID OF THAT KNIFE RIGHT NOW, NYEH!!!”

Without any further warning, Papyrus swiped the box-shaped celebrity off his wheels: princess style.

“Oh my! I certainly didn’t expect that move, darling~”

Assorted chaos with intense rummaging followed after, accentuated by the melodies of a screaming skeleton. Past midnight.

Ah yes, the sweet sound of Papyrus brand music right there.

Mezil tried his darndest to not laugh, but you could see his lips curling at the ends.

“Poor soul,” he said, “I hope he won’t be traumatized for life. But… I trust that he’ll be fine. He’s much more resilient than he realises. Well, goodnight everyone.”
Out into the night he went. So mysterious.

Papyrus came back with a giant cocoon of tissues, secured in place with industrial duct tape. Mettaton followed right behind.

He handed the bundle over to Undyne.

“Okay,” she said, “Next, you’re gonna tell me that the stolen paring knife is wrapped up in what could be our house’s whole supply of toilet rolls.”

“THAT’S CORRECT, UNDYNE! YOU’RE VERY SMART. YES, I’VE SECURED IT WITH MUCH PADDING. NO ONE SHOULD GET HURT NOW, NYEH HEH HEH!”

Maximum. Papyrus. Logic.

Cenna howled in laughter. “Gosh, cinnamon roll! That’s hilarious yet brilliant at the same time! Oh man toilet rolls are sooooo hard to pick apart when they’re a compact ball.”

“OH, YOU KNOW THE PUZZLING DIFFICULTY OF THE DECEIVINGLY SOFT PAPER TOO?”

“Ahuuh. A pain when Halloween rolls over. My colleagues would split into two camps and start a TP throwing war. Even hardboiled people need a break.”

Undyne then pouted at an irritating memory. “Sans freaking lined my house with those stuff once. They’re trippy little buggers! Like, literally!”

“Heh heh,” Alphys had that cheeky grin on her face now. “We should definitely arrange a toilet roll fight. It sounds like tons of fun!”

For the first time in forever, you could look forward to the future. Chara won’t threaten to press the RESET button anymore. Thus, you’re in control of your own actions.

You’re satisfied with this outcome of your life. You had no reason to go back Underground.

In the midst of excitement, Dad said: “Excuse me, but I think we should discuss our plans tomorrow. Frisk needs some rest from their ordeal.”

Good point. You’re starting to feel mighty drowsy. This time, it’s not from any medication.

Dad wanted to pick you up, but Papyrus offered himself.

“I PROMISED SANS THAT I’LL CARRY FRISK HOME,” he said.

You realised that it’s a code that you’re not possessed anymore. Sans did go all out against Chara’s shenanigans.

…Some of that pain may stick in your subconscious for life, but you had volunteered to go through them. There’s no blame or grudge against your special blue friend.

Instead, you’re in his eternal debt.

You let Dad know that Papyrus wanted to reassure Sans of your safety. He understood the context and stepped aside.

Your tall skeleton hero picked you right up. He’s not soft or warm like Dad, but you felt safe in his
arms.

He led the way. Everyone except Gaster followed a good distance behind. For once, they’ll let him have the spotlight.

The motions tempted you to sleep. No. No sleep yet. There’s something you must do before you could call it a night.

“ARE YOU COLD, FRISK?”

He must have felt you shiver. It’s deep in winter night after all. The clothes you had were not quite enough, so you nodded.

Papyrus unwound his scarf and wrapped you up in them. They’re tattered, but still comfy.

You smiled and said thanks.

“NO PROBLEM.”

There’s a certain wise levelness to his voice now. He’s still Papyrus, but he’s no longer on a constant hyper and overenthusiastic mode.

At last, you arrived home.

Sans opened the door. His wariness gone when he witnessed the success story.

“Hey bro,” he said, “You kept your promise.”

“Yes, I DID.” Papyrus answered.

They’re both happy.

You asked Papyrus to set you down. The moment he did so, you walked over to Sans: careful to not make sudden movements that might startle him.

Then you gave him a huge hug.

You cried a bit and thanked him for saving you. It must be hard for him to go through all of that.

Sans tried to play it off, as usual. “H-hey, kid. I’m the last person you should thank. Cold to the bone, you know. Not something to be proud of.”

You don’t care. No matter how much he devalued himself, you’ll still give him the credit he deserves.

“C’mon, I’m trash.”

One man’s trash is another man’s treasure. And he’s your treasure.

You refuse to let go.

“Determined, huh? Welp. Can’t win against that.”

In the end, he hugged you back.

Mission accomplished. You lost all your drive and fell asleep in Sans’ arms.

Thus ended the longest night.
Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone, we've reached the end of an arc in some major ways.

This will be the last chill chapter. It's time to build up for the finale.

Frisk is finally free.
It's only when they're free, the real test starts.
By the time you woke up, it’s noon.

Maybe you had a little bit too much sleep.

The waking routine went on as usual: bathroom breaks, shower, oral hygiene regimen, then finish off with a fresh change of clothes.

Then it’s time to check the kitchen for lunch.

Mom sat at the dining table with a box before her, but she’s not alone. Napstablook hovered beside her while a goopy skeleton managed the stove.

…Uh, who? Oh, it’s Doctor Gaster.

“‘Morning’ dear,” Mom’s lips curled into a cheeky pout. Despite the teasing, she seemed lethargic.

“Good afternoon, Frisk,” Gaster then flipped the grains of couscous in the pan. Wow. So pro.

You greeted back.

Your white ghosty friend floated up to you, crying tears of joy. “Oh………I don’t know why……… but looking at you makes me so happy……… so very happy………”

Aww Blooky. You told him that he’s so cute. What brings him here today?

“Mettaton told me that you had a rough night……… so I went over to Muffet’s to buy some doughnuts………”

He opened the box for you. It’s an assortment of spider doughnuts, but with new flavours.

Cranberry glaze, vanilla-chocolate, hazelnut coffee, butterscotch cinnamon, chunky apple, and orange cream.

Muffet expanded her selection to fit human tastes. Seems like she’s doing well. Though, you’re definitely reserving the butterscotch cinnamon doughnut for Mom.

You grabbed a plate and a fork. Singled out that piece then placed it in front of Mom.

“Thank you, my child,” she said. “But, I don’t have an appetite for sweets just yet. Maybe after a proper meal.”

That’s a little worrying. On a normal day, she would tell you that deserts are best eaten after lunch. Word for word.

You asked Mom if she’s fine.

“Oh, just drowsy,” she replied back. “Remember the medicine that the doctor gave me for my migraines?”
There were two packets. One medication to stop the migraine early, and the other had painkillers that double as sleeping tablets. Strong side-effects.

You asked her if she had another episode.

She nodded back at you. “It was late and I couldn’t sleep. I felt the sting, so I took both the blocker and the painkillers together. Maybe that combination was too strong.”

Did… Mom just wake up? You asked her about it.

She blushed at your deduction. “That’s right, my child. I woke up about half an hour before you. That’s way past my usual schedule. Not long after, Doctor Gaster knocked on the door and offered to cook for us.”

What’s with everyone and the Sans timing now? Then again, it was a long and stressful night.

Glad that’s over for good.

Doctor Gaster plated the fried couscous. Four servings, Napstablook included. Snails compulsory.

The infamously shy ghost started to fade from embarrassment. “Doctor Gaster……… you didn’t need to cook for me……… I’m so sorry for the trouble………”

“It’s no problem,” he said, “My two friends used to cater for hundreds of children. An extra person in a lunch setting is of no issue. Please, enjoy it without guilt.”

“……I can’t eat human ingredients……they pass right through me……”

There was a day when Napstablook tried to eat a Surface-made sandwich. It dropped straight on the ground, much to his embarrassment. Poor thing.

“Don’t fret about that,” Gaster answered. “These are all magic-based.”

“Oh……… thank you………”

The four of you had lunch together. Maybe ‘six’ would be more accurate, if you count the rumoured skeleparents. You didn’t have a chance to talk to them yet.

Gaster kept glancing at you with a curious gaze. Then again, you’re just as curious about him.

“Your Majesty,” he asked, “Did you notice any changes in Frisk’s health due to their long-term consumption of magic-based facsimiles?”

That. Was a mouthful.

Mom scrunched her brows as she tried to remember. “No, not that I’m aware of.”

“Do they still need to use the bathroom?” Gaster asked.

“Eventually, yes,” Mom nodded. “Come to think of it, Chara would often grab one of Asgore’s shovels before excusing themselves to strange isolated corners. They’d also bring some water and tissue papers. They never told me why.”

Ha ha ha. Okay. So Chara was too ashamed to talk about human bodily needs.

You wondered if the garden bloomed better with them around, but you kept that question to yourself.
“Hmm,” he pondered. “It appears that the human body synthesizes magical matter at a similar rate to their physical counterparts.”

You and Blooky blinked at each other. That just completely flew over your heads.

“Translation, please.” Thank you Mom for the timely request.

Doctor Gaster then explained: “Unlike monsters, humans cannot completely digest what they consume. Not to mention that they require a system to cleanse their cellular makeup. It’s one of the downsides of having a physical organic body.”

He paused for a moment. “I will not go into further detail since we’re having our meal. Thank you for the information, Your Majesty. They’re very helpful.”

Out of sheer curiosity, you asked Gaster why he’s interested in that subject.

“Ah, Judge Mezil Thyme favours a particular dish that hurts him in the long run. Since he had helped us so much, I thought that we could show our gratitude by providing a safer alternative.”

Mom raised her brow in confusion. “You mean it’s worse than junk food?”

“Perhaps,” he replied. “He’s intolerant to excessive levels of hot spice and coconut milk. Yet, he’s addicted to that combination. As a result he… suffers quite a bit.”

You completely understood what Gaster tried to say. And here you thought Sans’ ketchup and grease diet was bad enough.

Mom’s expression changed to one of concern and pity. “Oh dear, that does sound bad. Almost like he’s poisoning himself.”

Doctor Gaster had to ruminate on a few spoonfuls of couscous first. You could tell that he’s not used to explaining details at a layman’s level.

“Well, Your Majesty,” he began. “That’s both true and untrue. To make it understandable, there’s a particular chemical that stimulates the pain receptors on a human’s tongue. In doing so, their brain releases a hormone associated with pleasure.”

No response from Mom. Her mind was blown by the sheer paradoxical science behind humanity’s double-edged love for burning spices.

“Human biology can be strange. Even by their standards.”

After Doctor Gaster’s closing conclusion, lunch went on in relative silence. Nothing much happened other than some small talk.

You tried the butterscotch cinnamon doughnut with Mom. It’s tasty, but it’s not the same as Mom’s famous pie.

Napstablook started to shrink into himself. “Oooh… I’m so sorry…… maybe the doughnut was a bad idea………..”

Mom patted him on the head. Well, as much as she could pat a ghost anyway. “Dear, dear Napstablook. I did enjoy the doughnuts, so please don’t blame yourself.”

“How about this? I’m feeling much better now. I’ll bake some pie for everyone! You could pack a slice for your cousin too.”
Yay for impromptu pies!

You didn’t realise just how much you missed Mom’s pies until now. It’s been over a week since you last had one.

After washing up, you wanted to check your phone. However, you left it in your bedroom. Oops. Hopefully no one tried calling you during lunch.

The chatroom was as lively as ever. You typed in your greetings and informed them of your good health.

Here comes the emote spam celebrations. That made you smile.

Your phone informed you that you had received a mail. It’s a message from Cenna.

‘Frisky. Check yourself ASAP. If you see a red butterfly anywhere on you, don’t panic and message me right away.’

A red butterfly?

Your thoughts flashed back to Mezil’s brooch.

Face? Checked.
Back? Checked.
Belly? Checked.
Arms and legs? Checked and checked.

You messaged back and told her that you didn’t find anything that’s red or a butterfly.

‘Have you checked your SOUL?’

That message made you hold your breath. Nervousness bubbled up from your stomach.

You pushed out your SOUL without a second thought.

Red on top of red isn’t going to be obvious. Your first instinct was to lift it up against the light to look for any discrepancies, but your SOUL glowed too bright.

You recalled how the Magus did his inspection. If something couldn’t be seen, maybe you could touch it.

So you ran your fingers across the surface. You felt the difference. It reminded you of a sticker or a thick layer of glossy paint.

Tracing it revealed the shape of none other than a butterfly.

Breathe in, breathe out.
Don’t panic.

You updated Cenna with the new information.

‘Damn. So it’s on your SOUL after all. Makes sense in hindsight. Okay Frisky, meet me at the Bunny Inn. 4.30 PM. We need to talk. This is major with a capital M.’

‘If you need someone by your side, you can bring one. I don’t recommend any more than that, though. Sensitive information.’
You locked the door and sat down on the edge of your bed.

Again, you told yourself not to panic. Take it one step at a time. Be logical, not emotional.

You pushed yourself closer to the wall, dug your hands into your pockets and slouched just like Sans.

Once upon a time, you were a frightened little kid. Lost in the power of RESEThs.

He noticed. Calmed you down. Analyzed the problems before you, and taught you how to do the same.

Sans became your mentor in more ways than one. Again and again, in all the timelines you decided to approach him.

That’s why he’s forever a treasure to you.

Does he remember?
Maybe. Maybe not.

It didn’t matter. The point was, you learned his thinking skills. Now you must put them into practice.

Cenna said you could bring only one person. By process of elimination, that would be…

Mom? No. She’s not feeling well. You don’t want to trouble her more than required.

Dad? No. Probably would be lost half the time. Let him live in peace.

Alphys? No. No, no, no. You don’t think she’s emotionally strong enough. She’s much better compared to the times in the Underground, but she still had a long way to go.

Undyne? Maybe, leaning to ‘no’. She handled herself quite well thus far. Then again, you don’t know the true meaning behind the red butterfly. One controversial detail without explanation would send tables flying.

Mettaton? No. You don’t think it’s okay to drag him into some complicated magic conspiracy. He won’t understand anyway.

Doctor Gaster? You don’t know enough about him to decide. This is not the time to gamble.

Papyrus? Protect the cinnamon roll. Besides, the hero needs a break from that night of hell.

Sans? The best choice. He had the brains, skills, and education to become your guide.

…………

But he’s worn down to the bone. You, of all people, know just how much the timelines burdened him.

It left you with the only option: to go alone.

This way, you could decide who to share the information with at any time. Prepare the other party in advance. Gently set them down. Then present the most relevant details. That should remove the element of nasty surprises.

The aroma of Mom’s famous butterscotch pie filled your room.
You told Cenna that you’ll meet her by yourself. With a slice of Mom’s pie too. She makes the best.

‘Whoa Frisky. I’m impressed. Guess that’s why he thinks you’re ready.’

‘See ya at the Bunny Inn.’

With that settled, it’s time for you to resume your day. You unlocked the door and returned to the kitchen.

The pie had just started to bake. Mom and Doctor Gaster cleaned up the kitchen while they waited for the deliciousness to complete.

Blooky noticed your absence, saying, “……You took quite a while……”

You chuckled and told him that you were busy on the phone. Sorry about that.

“……Oh……I just wish I could stay longer……I got to follow Mettaton back to the studio tonight…… His break is over……”

“…I almost forgot…… We’ll have our live concert in a few months…… It’s uh… please give me a moment……”

He took out his ghost wallet and placed down a business card. There’s a map on the back side of the card. You recognized the stadium.

That’s a big concert.

“…Yes…” Blooky smiled, “……This is the first time we’re debuting so many original songs…… I’m a bit nervous……”

It’ll be awesome! Keep it up and everything will be alright. Mettaton thrived so well on the Surface after all.

Whatever happened to Burgerpants by the way? Mettaton dragged him into the acting field, then you’ve never heard of him again.

“……He resigned and entered college……Took a theatre course…… Broadways and operas, I think……… Oh, and he made many human friends…… Something to do with his ‘cat’ look I suppose…… He’s happy……”

You’re happy for him too. He was… quite bitter a fellow down in the Underground. Nineteen and wasting his life already? C’mon.

Mom and Doctor Gaster joined you after their chores. All four of you continued merrily chatting away until the timer chimed.

Then it’s time for the star of the show: not Mettaton, but the butterscotch cinnamon pie.

It tasted just as good as the first time you had it.

Chapter End Notes

Frisk learned from the best.
Oh yeah, Toriel did suffer a logic 404 there. Seriously, the stuff humans eat can be mind-bending.
Red Victory

Chapter Notes

First hand testimony that packet dehydrated drinks are awesome. I travel at least yearly to visit my grandparents, and we had to rent a hotel room. Great for suppers and snacks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As appointed, you arrived at the Bunny Inn on 4.30 PM. Alone. You brought along a shopping bag filled with goodies.

At first, you told Mom that you want to give your long-lost sister a slice of her famous pie.

Then Mom thought that Cenna would need more than that. Before you knew it, Mom added a selection of dehydrated sachet drinks: both plain and chocolate milk, 3-in-1 coffee, and some cereal mixes.

These were a godsend for travellers. Most hotel rooms don’t have a kitchen. You utilized many of these products during your world-roaming timelines.

You said hello to the owner and her son.

“How are you feeling now?” He asked, “Will you be going to school tomorrow?”

Much better than Friday for sure. But, you’re not sure if you’re well enough for Monday.

“Take care of yourself then. Shouldn’t you be home? I hear the winter air is bad for humans that are ill.”

You showed him the bag, explaining that you’re here to deliver some stuff to your relative. Remember the cool lady who hung out with everyone at recess?

“Oooooooh! Just make sure you go back home early, okay?”

You nodded and thanked him for the concern.

Just when you finished up the conversation, a taxi stopped in front of the inn. Cenna stepped out, exiting the car in her full noir detective glory.

She didn’t even have to try to be stylish. The way she carried herself cemented the mood by default.

“Oh hey, she’s back!”

Cenna brightened up when she saw you. “Heya, Frisky! Looks like you got quite a bit of stuff there.”
Butterscotch cinnamon pie and drinks, courtesy of the Toriel household.

“Aww thanks. You’re all sweethearts.”

She rubbed your head. This time, you came prepared with a small wooden comb. You straightened out your hair as fast as she messed it up.

You both laughed together.

The innkeeper chuckled along. Then, she told Cenna: “Miss Caraway, I’ve cleaned your room just as requested.”

“Thanks a bunch, madam.” She tipped her hat as a token of gratitude. “C’mon Frisky, let’s have some pie together.”

If only the reason was the pie itself. The two of you knew that it’s not something so simple.

Cenna let you sit on the fresh bed itself, while she pushed a cushioned chair closer.

The chat-shop interface appeared the moment she sat down.

Her expression turned remorseful. “Sorry for keeping you in the dark for so long, Frisky. We couldn’t say much until we’re sure you’re prepared for it. More so with the whole DEMON deal.”

You understand. If you were in her position, you wouldn’t want to disclose too much information either.

“Ask me anything, Frisky. I ain’t got anything to hide anymore. Not at this point.”

> Red Butterfly

What does it mean?

“That’s Mezil Thyme’s SAVE symbol. It’s a link to the Determination of his SOUL. If you got that, it means you caught his attention.”

“Remember the cinnamon roll, Papyrus? Mez planted his symbol on your friend and ‘Marked’ his existence, tying your skelly friend to a state outside of time. That’s how he remembered every loop and became a time-travelling hero.”

So that’s what Papyrus meant by ‘giving a chance to help’. No wonder he suddenly upgraded to ‘super awesome’ status.

The next question appeared before you.

> Who is Mezil Thyme?

Cenna answered, “He’s a ‘Living Victory’. A.k.a ‘Humanity’s Ultimate Weapon’.”

You thought The ‘LivingVictories’ are DEMONS. What about the hero in the demon story?

“Yeah, I couldn’t explain that in detail back then. You see, The Living Victory doesn't just describe one person. It’s a title for anyone with the power over time. Frisky, you’re also a Living Victory.”

“Truth be told, there’s a thin line separating a Living Victory from a DEMON. Both are fuelled by Determination. A sense of conscience is the only thing that makes a difference. A Living Victory
“gone nutty might as well be a DEMON, even if they still have their SOUL.”

“And that’s what happened to the Fallen Hero. They succumbed to their own power and bloodlust. That fella’s already a psycho from the beginning. Having timey-wimey powers just made it all the worse.”

“But don’t get cocky, Frisky. Many, many other Living Victories fell into the same trap. I’ve read case files where they started out as good normal citizens. By the end, wow. They made me wanna guzzle down a whole bottle of mouthwash. Disgusting.”

You too almost fell into the darkest of darkness. It was so close, it’s frightening.

> What does Mezil want?

“You. I ain’t kidding there. To be exact, he wants to judge your heart. That’s exactly why he’s ‘Judge’ Mezil Thyme, you know.”

That explains… so little.

You noticed a new option opening up to you.

> Judges.

What do they do?

“We examine others. For example, I’m a Judge Vanquisher. When it’s exam season, I’d duel my set of candidates and see if they got what it takes to bear that title.”

What about their passing rate?

Cenna lightened up a bit and shrugged. “Eh, I don’t have many years under my belt due to my age. I mean, I ain’t even thirty yet. But I give all my candidates a super hard time. Out of ten, only three ever match my standards. The usual passing rate is twice of that.”

Did it reach a point where the admins ‘subtly’ sent her out on a mission so they could pass more students?

“Hell yeah,” she laughed. “Oh man, it’s so blatant it’s funny. It’s not that I want to be mean or anything. All Magi have basic exorcism abilities. They can send off a low level DEMON or appease harmless spirits anytime.”

“But Vanquishers are specialists. When do you bring out the specialists? When crap hits the fan, of course. We deal with the deadly stuff. If I pass a fella who ain’t prepared, I’m just sending them to their death.”

“…I can’t let that happen. I know what’s it like to lose a family.”

Turns out your situation was so dangerous, they assigned one of the best. And she still died countless times. Dang.

> Mezil’s Exam.

Cenna answered, “He’s to judge the Living Victory: the number one examiner for anyone with power over time. You win the cosmic lottery? He’s gonna check ya through and through.”
“Hey, hey Frisky. You look like you’re gonna explode there. Don’t panic, there are options. I’m here to explain to you all about that.”

“He’s strict, but not cruel. If your power popped up at random and you don’t want anything to do with it, you can choose to surrender. He’ll make the butterfly mark permanent and you’re free to live as a normal person. After some form-filling of course.”

“If you want that power just to solve a case like say, saving someone from death? Okay, he can ‘loan’ you that ability until you’re done. Heck, he’ll even show you the ropes. For these guys, their Determination levels tend to normalize after they completed their mission. He didn’t even need to alter them with magic. Most of the time anyway. After a quick registry, it’s back to normal life.”

“Now, if you think you’re worthy of keeping your power… that’s when things get complicated. You must submit yourselves through the Trial of the Crimson Hall. There are no exceptions.”

There’s nothing else to ask other than the trial itself.

> Trial of the Crimson Hall.

“After the Fallen Hero fiasco, the Magus Association implemented a system to examine those who want to join the Living Victory club.”

“They’ll give you a hard philosophical question. Then, they’ll push you to your physical, mental, and emotional limit. Do you have the ‘determination’ to overcome your trial without succumbing to the darkness?”

“If you fail at any point, the Judge will have the right to kill you on the spot.”

What.
What.
What?!?!!

You dropped your jaw.

Cenna flashed a weak, cynical grin. “Yeah. That’s right, Frisky. The penalty of failure is death. You answer the question wrong? You die. Fail to be determined? You die. Lose yourself? You’re definitely gonna die.”

“There’s more than one reason why that chamber is called the ‘Crimson Hall’. It’s not a game. If you can’t convince Mez, he’s gonna make sure you stay dead. Forever.”

But, why???

“Peace. Ironic, I know. Mez’s whole purpose in life is to make sure no psychopaths gain the power to manipulate time. Can you imagine the hell if a misanthropic chessmaster becomes the primary Living Victory? Mez knows that first hand.”

“He survived it.” Emphasis there.

“We Magi call that event the ‘War of the Red Victory’. One of the ugliest upsets in modern magic history.”

Now you’re curious.
>War of the Red Victory.

What happened back then?

“When Mez was my age, he gained the power of SAVES. Lucky for him, his collegemate came from a Magus background. Explained the circumstances and stakes, you know. Just like me.”

“Mez decided to undergo the trial. Why? I have no idea. He never wanted to share.”

“On the day of his trial, the previous judge -- one of the strongest Living Victories ever -- got murdered by another Living Victory. Dead for good. No RESETS, no LOADS, no revival. Nothing.”

You gasped.

“Without the linchpin, everything collapsed. Eight of the strongest Red SOULS gained full power of time: all at once, all in one place. It became a bloody battle royale to fill the empty throne.”

“One of the eight was Mezil himself. He made a red ally. Then he had to deal with two neutral parties who did whatever the hell they wanted. And the remaining four? Psychos of various levels.”

“One of those four was none other than the twisted ‘demon’ who started that mess. Mind you, they were all living people with their SOULS intact. It ain’t a Chara incident.”

“The mastermind played everyone out. At one point the bugger took advantage of a young girl’s insecurities and put Mez into a deathtrap. You can imagine the tears of regret. Poor lady.”

Talk about being rotten.

What’s the purpose behind all this violence? You don’t understand.

“To eliminate competitors, Frisky. Those manipulative bastards wanted the power all to themselves. If they sat on that throne, nobody could touch them. Imagine how they could play with the world if they became the Living Victory. It’ll be the Fallen Hero incident all over again. Maybe worse.”

And Mezil survived all of that?

“Oh yeah. He did. From what I’ve heard, Mez became so pissed off that he refused to die. Literally. Even when his body got burnt to ashes, his SOUL refused to break.”

Oh em gee.

It’s just like your battle with Asriel in his Hyperdeath mode.

Whenever your SOUL shattered, you forced it back together. Heck, you survived a direct beam blast that would have torn reality apart.

Mezil did the same.

“You know what this means, Frisky? That’s Ascension. For the Reds anyway. He pretty much flipped the tables and rewound time to his will. Since then, the outcome to the War of the Red Victory rested in the hands of two time-travelling determinators.”

“In the end, Mez and his team won. They had no choice but to kill. Too dangerous to keep alive, you know. That bastard’s already a full-fledged DEMON by then anyway. Flowey and Chara are nothing compared to that fella.”
“Obviously, the Association passed Mezil. The whole time-loop war might as well be a giant Crimson Hall. An unexpected and unwanted one, but he proved himself.”

“So they granted him the title of ‘Supreme Judge’ and recognized him as a Living Victory. He’s been at it since.”

The first reply that dropped out of your mouth was this: so Anime is real?

Cenna burst into laughter. “I knew you’re gonna say that! Heh, yeah. The realistic parts at least.”

At this rate, you can’t tell what’s ‘realistic’ anymore.

> Curious bonus question.

Selecting that prompt made Cenna raise one brow. “Huh? What’s that about Frisky?”

You asked her if, hypothetically, you decided to evade the trial while keeping your power. What’s going to happen?

She pulled her head back as if you suggested the worst decision possible. That might be true.

“Whoa. Whoaaa Frisky, I totally don’t recommend you to do that. If you abscond with your power, you’re telling Mez one thing and one thing only: you’re arrogant. The kind of arrogance that created that bastard DEMON of hell royale.”

“Mez will stop at nothing until you’re deader than dead.”

Wow. Someone actually tried to do that after all the warnings?

Cenna nodded at you. “Yup. There’re always jerks who think they’re above it all. They think they can’t be caught or killed just because they have power.”

“Well, they’re all done in by none other than Judge Mezil Thyme. He could either elect a proxy like Papyrus, or kill you with his own two hands. No one escapes his judgement.”

For some reason, you mentioned that it’s ‘just like Sans’.

You covered your mouth out of embarrassment when you realised what you had said. Cenna just smiled back.

“Oh yeah, Mister Blue Lichborn. You know Frisky, I respect him a ton. I mean it. Yeah, we’re not on good terms. But I know a dependable guy when I see one.”

Even if he looks like a ‘trashy lazybone’?

“Heh, don’t judge loot by its boxes. Lots of valuable contraband is packed behind plain fronts.”

Okay, you expected a more traditional idiom. That works well too. Better, if you’re honest.

“I tried to strike a truce with Sans at one point. Well, Mez told me he suffered a huge breakdown not long after. Guess that ain’t gonna go anywhere.”

Cenna passed you her phone. It’s set to Mezil Thyme’s number. All you needed to do was to tap the phone-shaped icon and you’d be on the line.

“Why don’t you talk to Mez for a bit?”
Blood ran from your face.

Who the heck calls the head examiner for more details?!
Isn’t that against student conventions???

Exams weren’t your strong points. As far as you could remember, you turned quieter than a mouse during the exam seasons. Even your friendlist teacher looked intimidating when they graded your stuff.

And that’s just math and assorted paper tests! Now you had to talk to a guy who could kill you???

She nudged you on the shoulder. “Aw c’mon Frisky. He’s a human being just like you and I. Plus, he’s a really big tsundere.”

You watched her lean back against the chair and cross her legs.

“Heh. I’m so casual around Mez ’cause he’s a family friend. He took care of me after the quake killed our parents. Made sure I eat well, study hard, get the right healthcare, don’t go off the rebel path, and a bunch of other stuff. He watched over you too. From a distance, of course.”

So the whole co-worker problem was…?

“Haha! It’s just the both of us getting too used to each other, really. He watched me grow up, and I watched him go grey.”

Insert awkward chuckle from the cool woman here. “…Our yelling competitions ain’t healthy though. Sometimes I get too hot for my own good.”

Papyrus trusts this man too. Maybe it won’t be so bad after all.

You tapped the call icon.

After three beeps, the other side answered. You said hello.

“Evening, Frisk. I presume you’ve listened to Cenna’s explanation?”

Yup, you did.
Calm down. Think logically. If you’re Sans, what would you ask first…?

Time. How much time do you have before your final decision?

“It depends on you.” said Mezil, “There are no minimum ages for the Trial, but we do follow standard consent laws. I believe you remember the timeline where you lost the custody case?”

That was the draggiest timeline ever. It’s an achievement that you held back the RESET button for so long.

You told him you remember.

“We’re on the same page then. I’ll say it upfront: back then, I couldn’t trust your monster family. They see you as a normal child. Too soft to realise the stakes.”

“The idea was to put you in a suitable human family who would coach you for the Trial. When you first emerged from the Underground, I thought to test you when you hit eighteen years of age.”

“But with every RESET, you grow stronger. You don’t feel it since it’s a gradual process, but it’s
obvious to an outsider. Have you noticed that after a certain point, you no longer lose your memories even when you want to?”

You said ‘yes’ and nodded your head, although he won’t be able to see it.

“The same happened to me. For a veteran Living Victory, there’s no such thing as clean slates.”

“As your powers increase, so did the urgency. I was once ready to examine you as a young teen. Now, you haven’t even started puberty.”

“Nevertheless, I would personally ask for your decision. You have the choice to surrender. If you decide to keep your powers, I’d give you extra time to prepare for the Trial of the Crimson Hall. Should you pass… you’ll be trained to take my place.”

A successor?

“I won’t stay young forever, Frisk. Sooner or later I must plan my retirement. Anyone who takes after me must be capable of maintaining the peace. It’s a heavy and demanding job. Maybe you won’t be a Judge, but you’ll certainly hold great responsibility.”

But, why you? Isn’t there another Red SOUL who could fill in the shoes?

“Funny you should ask. It’s because you set Monsterkind free. No normal child is capable of that. Have you realised that the partitions never healed?”

You pushed out your SOUL to check. It’s still in pieces.

“That’s another sign of maturity. The average age to maintain a partition is fourteen years old. Your current actions and your mastery of Determination are on par with an adult in their twenties.”

That’s true. You won’t deny that your mind and experience had developed far beyond your physical age.

“I believe you’re now prepared to make your own decision. Hence, I marked you with my symbol and instructed Cenna to explain our history.”

“It doesn’t change the fact that you’re still legally a minor. I don’t expect you to give up your childhood right away. But, if you’re certain… Cenna will sign the permission you require to enter the Crimson Hall.”

“Papyrus will protect you as my proxy in the meantime. Should any unfortunate accidents happen during your grace period, we’ll set things right.”

“Do you understand?”

Yes. You do.

You asked Mezil if he could give you a week to think.

“Just a week?”

Maybe you’d need more time to prepare, but for now a weekly checkup sounds good. This way, you could seek Mezil’s advice too.

“Very well. That’s a well-thought plan. Though, I would prefer to have your answer before Spring. Cenna will go on a very important mission then. I can’t guarantee the outcome.”
Judging from what you’ve heard about her health, it could be her last mission in more ways than one.

When in Spring itself? Does she have an exact date?

“It’s the season when cherry blossoms bloom. We have quite a few of those trees at the institute.”

You told Mezil that you understand.

Well, you had enough for now. You said good evening to him.

“One more advice before we end the call. Ask Doctor Gaster about the ‘Seven Sages’. I believe you’d find that story interesting, if not relevant to the Trial itself.”

More skeleton history?
More skeleton history. That does sound enticing. Sans did say that his people taught the humans magic. No doubt he learned that fact from his mentor, Gaster.

Now you’re going to have the opportunity to hear from the man himself.

Mezil said his goodbyes and ended the call. You handed the phone back to Cenna, telling her that you’ll contact him again.

“Told ya it ain’t so bad,” she said. “I’m gonna send you his number. Then you could phone in wherever, anytime.”

Thanks for that.

Now, it’s time for the glorious pie. You dug through the bag and presented Mom’s signature dish to Cenna.

“What pie is this?” She asked with great curiosity. “Never seen anything like it before.”

Serious? Cenna had never seen a butterscotch cinnamon pie, let alone eat one?

“Serious, Frisky.”

Then she must totally, absolutely, certainly try this. You helped her get a teaspoon from the counter.

Your eyes locked on her in anticipation for her first bite.

“Mmmm!” Cenna’s expression lit up as you expected. She then cut another small piece. “I ain’t a fan of desserts but this is awesome! Man, the wife would love the cinnamon.”

The wife…? Whose wife?

Here comes the grinning and eyebrow wriggling. It’s just like the girls’ sleepover with Undyne and Alphys: gossiping the latest stories and ranting about anime.

“Mez is married to a lovely lady,” said Cenna. “That butterfly brooch? His version of a wedding ring. The missus wears a matching sapphire-blue one.”

You squealed like the kid you are. That’s so romantic! Will you and your friends ever get the chance to meet her?

“Maaaybe? First, you need to impress Mez by not kicking the bucket.”
She paused for a moment. “You ain’t scared, Frisky? Your life’s on the line. And yet we’re having pie-time like it’s nothing.”

If there’s one thing you learned from this time-looping-underground-monster fiasco, it’s to take it slow.

…To be honest, you were more afraid of falling from grace. You rather die as yourself than to live as a heartless DEMON.

“How close were ya?” She asked.

You pinched the tiniest space with your fingers, then peered in between them.

“Hah. No wonder death ain’t a big deal anymore. Well Frisky, I ain’t gonna leave you high and dry if you wanna take the Trial. I did swear on our parents’ grave that I’ll protect you.”

How will she help? You asked.

“By teaching you everything I know. About magic. The Association. And this!”

She unpocketed her watch and spun it around her finger.

Isn’t that the family heirloom?

“Yup! This, Frisky dear, is gonna be your trump card.”

Chapter End Notes

The War of the Red Victory had heavy inspirations of Fate/Zero + Unlimited Blade Works. And some Mirai Nikki. It's a situation where people participate in a war of wishes, and only one man can survive.

...Theoretically. Not gonna spoiler the outcome. Fate/Zero and Unlimited Blade Works by Ufotable is definitely something fans of Seinen series should watch. Top recommendation.

As for Mirai Nikki? Well, it was engaging. But it got kinda 'wut' at some parts. I prefer the Fate series in the end. Not a single wut moment.

The idea started out in Chapter 47 where Mezil mentioned that his SAVES during the Undertale events were all corrupted. Then we thought, what if there’s a time-travelling battle of SAVES between the Reds?

Then suddenly we have a backstory.
The Bunny Inn lady asked if you wanted to have dinner with your relative. She’s cooking a big pot of vegetable stew tonight, and she thought of sharing some of it.

Conflict moment. On one hand, you wanted to have dinner with Mom. On the other hand, you wanted to spend more time with Cenna. You never really got the chance to bond with her.

So you phoned Mom to ask for her opinion.

“That’s a great idea, my child. You have a lot of lost years catch up with her. I don’t think the previous week gave you much chance. Since… we weren’t sure of her allegiance half the time.”

You noticed something odd about Mom’s voice. It’s as though she’s trying to be peppy for your sake. You swear that you heard Undyne in the background somewhere.

“It’s different now. Go ahead, you have my permission.”

There’s no mention about a curfew. Whenever you hung out with the gang on Sundays, Mom always reminded you to return early for school.

Maybe she thought you should know that by now?

You set aside any suspicion and thanked Mom. Then, you enjoyed your dinner.

Quite a bit of stories were exchanged around the table. The innkeeper’s circle of friends had encountered a bunch of less than pleasant humans in recent weeks. They asked you if it’s normal for your species to behave like that.

No way. They’re the ones with personal issues. To humans or monsters, they’d act out the same.

The innkeeper lady chuckled. “That’s good to know. You know, monsters aren’t always the most chummy either. Remember the old grumpy puzzle-purist in Waterfall?”

Oh yeah, you do. That fella was never satisfied. There are many humans who behave like that too.

“Ain’t so strange if you ask me,” said Cenna, “We have tons of humans, but it’s everyman for himself. Usually.”

“That’s such a shame,” said the innkeeper. “The Surface is wonderful, but I can see how easy it could be to lose your sense of community with all the extra space. I hope we’ll stay together for as long as we can.”

You hope so too. Monsters have their fair share of bullies and broken families, but they’re a small percentage compared to the average human society.

Thinking about ‘family’ stirred concern about Mom’s strange behaviour. Maybe something happened at home and she didn’t want to worry you yet?

After thanking everyone for the warm meal, you decided to head back home.
“Frisky, hold up a sec.”

Cenna buttoned up her coat in preparation for the cold outside. “I’m gonna walk ya back. If I don’t do that, I ain’t performing my duty as a functioning adult. We can agree with that, yeah?”

You noticed an honest casual friendliness on her face. With your freedom from Chara, she could get close to you without worry.

So the two of you walked together in the snow. Well, if she’s really your big sister then you should hold her hands at least once.

You reached out for her hand. To your surprise, it’s rough and leathery.

“What’s with that expression?” She giggled at you. “If you take a physically challenging job like mine, your hands are gonna be covered with calluses. Tool handling, accidental burns, assorted fighting styles, obstacle courses, so on and so on.”

It never occurred to you, but in hindsight it does make sense.

What was her life like when she was your current physical age?

“Adventure!” she told you. “Climb trees, bike around, sneak off into odd corners to catch bugs, swing on the monkey bars in the playground. I love nothing more than getting active.”

Sounds like she would gotten along with Undyne. Besties material for sure!

“Ya think? Yeah, maybe! I noticed she’s the physical sort too. Man, I wish I could race with her, but I can’t. Gotta make sure I don’t get injured before Spring.”

What mission was that anyway?

Cenna placed her a finger on her lips and grinned back at you. “Shhh, top secret.”

Oooh, playing the noir detective role again?

“Totally. Hey, remember I said that your bio parents were important Magi families? Papa descended from a badass line of Vanquishers.”

For real?!

“Yup! Our unusual surname is proof. When you get home, do an internet search and you’re gonna get a list of our ancestors. That’s why the foster homes hid it from you.”

You hung your jaw in awe. Was your human dad a badass demon hunter like the heroes of anime?

“Nope. Sooooorry. It skipped a generation. Papa had magic, but it’s all the wrong skillsets. In the end he broke tradition and took up science. That’s where he met Mama.”

“Hah, his friends more or less threw a celebration when they discovered my talents. They didn’t care if I’m adopted. As long the skills get passed down with the name, they’re stoked.”

Your Ebott home was just up ahead. Aww, and here you thought you get to hear more stories about the parents you never knew.

Maybe tomorrow.
Cenna stopped walking. The abruptness almost tripped you over.

“Frisky, stop.” She said, “Something ain’t right. Trust me on that.”

Just as when you’re about to ask how, Sans stormed out of the door. He covered his left eye with his hand and looked upset.

You saw your goat-father Asgore rushing out soon after. He tried to hug your blue skeleton friend, but instead he caught thin air.

Sans had just teleported out of his reach. Reappeared a few meters away.

Tension flooded the air. Undyne and Alphys stood by Dad’s side.

Strongest fish, angry face.
Nerd lizard, concerned face.

The expressions fit their personal reaction to the drama that just went down inside.

“What the fuck are you doing, Sans?!” Typical Undyne reaction right there.

Alphys then said, “King Asgore just wanted to apologize.”

Sans did not reply. Instead, he tried to walk away. He’s so focused on his escape, he didn’t notice that you’re witnessing the scene.

“SANS!” Undyne yelled. “Get your damn ass back here!!!”

“No.” He replied at last, “Just. No. I can’t accept that. Not after all these years.”

You heard a slight tremble under his voice. Wisps of blue leaked out between the gaps of his finger bones.

Undyne was just one step away from raining down spears. “Why not? Alphys suffered just like you suffered, and yet she accepted the apology and moved on! If she can do it, why can’t you???”


This Is bad. Very bad. Cenna pulled you to the side of the road and stood in front, ready to protect you should a fight break out.

“Undyne,” he said, “I’m a weapon.”

Pointing her thumb to her chest, she proudly declared: “I’m a weapon too!”

“It’s different. You chose that path and stuck to it. Me? I didn’t have a choice.”

Sans shot a resentful glare at Asgore. “My entire life revolved around his careless promise. My routine, my education, my career was decided from the day of my birth.”

“I hit the jackpot of talents, Gaster wanted to see the Surface, and King Asgore swore vengeance over his son’s death. Hooray. Bingo. The stars and planets aligned. More motivation to break the Barrier by any means necessary.”

“I had absolutely no say in it,” said Sans. “Nothing.”
Alphys tried to reach out to him. “But, Sans--”

He didn’t let her. “Do you have any idea what’s life like for me? I have the most fragile SOUL in the entire Underground. I had to give a thousand percent effort every day just to survive my training regiment. There are so many nights where I can’t sleep from the fear that I’d screw up and die.”

“When my parents ‘fell down’, it got worse. I had to worry not only about my own survival, but Paps’ too. Who’s gonna take care of him if anything happens to me?”

“Maybe if I’m truly alone, I don’t mind dying. It’s just. I’m not. If it’s not Mom and Dad, it’s Paps.”

Goatdad breathed in, wanting to say something. Anything. In the end he mustered a mutter that would be something along the lines of: ‘But I didn’t know.’ You couldn’t hear it, but you could guess from the next response.

“Of course you don’t,” Sans answered back. “You don’t know anything. You wouldn’t even know if the entire Underground died behind your back. It happened before. In a different timeline, yes. But it did.”

Undyne vibrated from head to toe as she struggled to not blow up. You could tell that she really, really, wanted to suplex Sans for Asgore’s sake.

“Un… Undyne?” Said Alphys. “I think we should let Sans calm down first. He’s not thinking straight.”

Too late. The strongest fish let out a roar of frustration. Then, she yelled her thoughts at Sans.

“Do you know WHY I’m so bloody pissed off? It’s because you’re not making any damn sense! Half the shit you say don’t match with that you do! You tell everyone that you sleep on the job because you’re lazy. Like fucking hell that’s true!”

“You took FIVE jobs, dammit! Like, WHY??? Lazy people DON’T take five jobs! So what if you rotate them, they’re still JOBS!”

“You think I didn’t notice?! I’ve caught you sleeping at the booth so many times! Sure, I fucking flip out. But in the end I let you go because I KNOW how you work yourself to the bone! You funded not only the house rent, but also Papyrus’ very life!”

“You go on about how nothing matters, yet you still give a damn about Frisk and Papyrus and Toriel and god knows who else you have on your mind! Here’s the news: YOU don’t even believe your own nihilistic shit!”

“Now you’re telling me that we’re still chaining you down??? YOU’RE FUCKING FREE, DAMMIT!!! F-R-E-E! Nobody’s forcing you to do anything anymore, so why the flying fuck are you behaving this way?!”

Sans turned to his side, refusing to look at his one childhood friend.

He then confessed: “I’m not free, Undyne. If being ‘free’ means having a normal life, I don’t think I’ll ever be free.”

“I don’t even know what is a ‘normal’ life. I let Paps make his own goals because it’s the opposite of my regiment. Surely the opposite of ‘abnormal’ is ‘normal’, right?”

“After the Core Incident, I… I drifted. I tried to get my act together. But in the end there’s no
meaning to anything I do.”

“The comedian stuff?” He said, “Pranks? Puns? Pure self-entertainment. My promise to Toriel? That’s my attempt of becoming a normal monster again, not a human in the skin of bones. Monsters are made out of love and compassion, right? I wonder if I’m still capable of those.”

His ribcage expanded as he inhaled the winter air. When he breathed out, there was no vapour. He’s as cold as the world around him.

“…I don’t know how to live. I just exist like a piece of trash. That’s all.”

It hurts you to hear him say that.

Sans shuffled off. Everyone else hung back at your home, lost. No one knew what to say, or how to respond. Papyrus must be in there somewhere, but he knew his limits.

Your friend stopped walking when he spotted you. He darkened his sockets and tried to avoid contact.

You approached him. Asked if he wants company. Hang out at Grillby’s. Or anywhere else.

“Nah, kid.” Sans replied. “You should get ready for school. I mean, you’ve missed quite a bit of days. First Paps, then your fever. If you keep watching out for me, you’re gonna fall behind your studies.”

But…

“Please don’t make me feel guiltier than I already am.”

Though reluctant, you let him go. You wished him goodnight.

“Night. And, thanks.”

He vanished right before you, no doubt teleporting to Grillby’s.

Cenna said nothing as she guided you to your monster family. This isn’t the time for commentary.

“Oh shit,” Undyne blurted. “You heard all of that?”

Seen it too.

“Toriel’s so gonna kill me.”

Nah. It’s not anyone’s fault. You just had the luck to walk in at the ‘best’ time. You patted her on the arm and helped yourself inside.

Mom realised that you had seen a little too much. She hurried you upstairs, using her large body to shield you away from the sadness.

You tried to wave to Papyrus. But he’s staring too hard on the ground to notice. At least he had Mettaton to hug things out.

That glam robot won’t be around for much longer though. He had to return to his studio tonight.

When Mom returned to the living room to address the predicament, you put your sneaking skills to good use. You stopped at the corner to the stairs. Listen hard enough, and you could pick up
whatever went down below. Science was on your side.

You heard Mom say: “Thank you for bringing Frisk home, Cenna.”

“Eh, no probs,” Cenna replied.

“Are you available for consultation tomorrow? I have some concerns to address.”
“Yeah, Miss Toriel. Gimmie a call and we’ll meet up.”
“Thank you.”

Mom then addressed Dad with a much sterner tone: “I don’t want to see you at school tomorrow. Or the entire week. I’ll arrange a replacement gardener in the meantime.”

“…Yes, madam.” Dad had no choice but to comply.

“And Doctor Gaster,” she continued, “You won’t be cooking any meals for me either. I’m placing Undyne in charge of your arrest. You will remain under her watch until the case files are updated in full. That is all until further notice.”

“Thank you for your kindness, Your Majesty.” An appropriate statement.

“The two of you will not approach Sans under any circumstance without my permission. Now please go home, everyone. I need to retire for the night.”

That’s your cue to hurry back into your bedroom. You’re sure that everyone left without any further objections.

“Frisk, I know you’re listening.”

By now, she knew of your busybody habits. You waited for her to climb up the stairs.

Mom gazed down on you in deep worry. “My child, I know you’re our ambassador, and you’re wise beyond your age. However… I don’t think you’re ready to handle this case.”

“You see, a terrible chain of events happened. And I’m very sure the Surface authorities will eventually discover the truth. What Asgore and Doctor Gaster committed could be considered a war crime. I’m not sure what are the modern legal procedures for such cases.”

Is that why Mom wanted Cenna’s advice?

“Yes, I hope the two of us could negotiate penance for their actions. Such as parole and community service. That would be the best outcome.”

You’re afraid to ask, but you must. What would be the worst outcome?

Mom struggled to tell you the truth. You reassured her that you can take it. The anime you watched were not all white and light.

She smiled a bit. But it was short-lived.

“In the worst case scenario, Asgore would be executed for declaring war on humanity. Doctor Gaster, well, since he’s an Amalgamate he might end up being imprisoned for life. Unless they developed a method to execute him too.”

“As for the rest of us, it depends. If human society fears us as much as the ancients, we might be sealed Underground once more. This time, there will be no sweet children to help us.”
No. No, no, no! Not after coming this far! You hugged Mom and sank your face into her belly.

She caressed your hair and held you close. “My child, I’ll do my very best. Please trust me.”

“Tomorrow, you will go to school as usual. Many of your friends are anxious for your return. You do your part, and I’ll do mine. Do you understand?”

You understand.

After that, the both of you prepared for the next day. You checked your homework, packed your schoolbag, and washed up for bed.

You pulled up the blanket close to your chin and pondered about your next plan.

Papyrus.

You should talk to him. At the very least, he could tell you what happened while you were away.

It took a while, but you eventually fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Chara's quote to the monster people:

'Do you really think you're above consequences?'

I really do wanna hear your thoughts about this particular chapter (and all the lead-ups to it). So if you have a comment, do post!
Meeting

Chapter Notes

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Excuse me, my eyes are a bit exhausted. I might miss some errors. Expect small ninja edits if that does happen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s Monday. The beginning of a new week.

The moment you stepped into the room, your classmates crowded around you. Monster Kid and Snowy included.

“Frisk! You’re okay!”
“I don’t know why, but I’m super duper ultra happy to see you in school!”
“Did you get a good rest?”
“Is your fever gone for real?”

Warmness filled your heart. You smiled back ear to ear and told everyone that you’re in good health.

Your classmates cheered.

Mom shone in bright happiness at the scene. It’s right up to her expectations. “There, there children. Let’s not get too overexcited about this. Frisk missed quite a bit of lessons last week. Maybe you could help them with that?”

The next thing you knew, everyone tried to share their school notes. Chaos abounds.

Whoops.

School life resumed as normal. It’s hard to believe that you survived a life-and-death scenario just a day or two ago.

Lunch hour rolled by. After a compulsory visit to the bathroom, you searched for Papyrus. You didn’t even bother getting your food.

He’s mopping. Guess he’s on cleaning duty today. A monster child ran by with a tray of food, unaware of the wet floor.

The kid slipped. Papyrus dropped the mop on instinct, caught the tray and turned the child’s SOUL blue. All in the span of half a second.

You noticed their point of gravity rotated to keep them ‘afloat’. He then set them down on the right side of their feet.

“GOOD THING THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS HERE TO CATCH YOU, NYEH HEH HEH!”

The food had gone a little lopsided, but it could have been a complete mess otherwise. Your tall skeleton friend returned the tray.
“Thank you!” The kid gladly thanked. This time, the fella made sure they avoided the wet zones. Losing a meal sucks for both humans and monsters.

You told Papyrus that was so damn cool.

He picked up the mop without saying another word. That’s odd. The glory hog you knew from Snowdin would have accepted the credit in a heartbeat. Proverbially speaking, of course. Skeletons don’t have a physical heart.

You asked if there’s something wrong.

“I’M STILL TRYING TO GET USED TO MY NEW LEVEL OF COOL. IT FEELS… STRANGE.”

Why? It’s not awesome enough?

“ACTIONALLY, IT’S A LITTLE TOO AWESOME. EVERYTHING LOOKS THE SAME, BUT IT DON’T FEEL THE SAME.”

“FRISK, DID YOU EXPERIENCE THE STRANGENESS TOO?”

You nodded. It’s one of the many reasons why you had difficulties coping with your new Surface life.

“CAN WE MEET UP AFTER MY TRAINING WITH UNDYNE?”

That’s right after school. You told Papyrus that you’ll do more than just ‘meeting up’. You’ll join the session. As a spectator, of course.

He cheered up right away. “SPLENDID! I’LL SEE YOU THEN, MY HUMAN FRIEND.”

With your new appointment made, you resumed your day as usual. You decided to have a nice warm bowl of soup noodles today. Ah, a classic winter comfort.

Every meal in this school was made with magic to accommodate the sheer variety of monster species. The bulk of their contents, at least.

Most could digest Surface-made physical food without issue, but some had Napstablook’s… misfortune. It’s not fair for them to go hungry.

In the middle of your meal, you wondered if your unusual diet played a role in the growth of your power. A whole bunch of details stacked up: your Magi parents and your Red SOUL for example.

Now, you literally eat magic. Even when you’re on the Surface. As long you lived in Ebott Town, a large bulk of your daily consumption consisted of these ‘facsimiles’.

The cafeteria did buy human-made seasoning such as the anime curry mix. Even then, they’re already developing replacements for those who cannot eat physical matter.

Doctor Gaster had a good point. Maybe there is a side-effect after all. A positive one, you hoped.

The day continued on as usual until the final bell rang. You first visited the teacher’s office to notify Mom that you’ll hang out with Papyrus.

She frowned out of concern. “Frisk, are you going to ask him about last night?”
You had to. Otherwise, you can’t help anyone. Especially the skeleton brothers.

Mom remained silent for a while, but in the end she gave you her consent. “Alright, my child. He is indeed the best person to ask anyway.”

“Papyrus, he… he bears a very special power. Even by Seer standards. I think it’s best if I let him explain it himself. But, I can say that it takes a lot of heart to be honest after having witnessed all that pain.”

You watched Mom struggle to speak. “In his shoes, I personally might have pretended those events never existed. Much like how I secluded myself in the Ruins in response to Asgore’s plan.”

She uttered a weak, ironic laugh at herself. Then, she said: “Guess, Mister Fluffybuns and I are not so different after all.”

You hugged Mom for good measure. At least she’s taking initiative now. Will she meet up with Cenna over dinner?

“Yes, my child. Perhaps it’s better that you have dinner with Papyrus tonight.”

You don’t need to crack your head over politics, and your tall cinnamon roll friend will have company. Good plan, Mom. Good plan.

After planting a goodbye kiss on her cheek, it was time to attend to your appointment.

You saw Undyne and Papyrus talking in the school gym. You waved hello to Papyrus and fistbumped Undyne. Then you settled down at one of the many seats.

“How’s Uncle Gaster and Mom and Dad?” he asked.

Undyne answered, “Your parents are fine. Gaster? He’s a ton more cooperative than the last time I tried to question him. How in the world did you talk him into a confession?”

“I forgave him. Uncle Gaster kept lying because he’s afraid of being alone. So I told him no matter how bad he was in the past, I -- The Great Papyrus -- won’t throw him away.”

“Now he has the courage to admit his wrongs.”

Your strongest fish friend was left in shocked speechlessness.

“Is something the matter?” asked Papyrus, oblivious to the reaction as usual.

One blink. Two blinks. Undyne lifted a finger and said: “I’m sooooo gonna need to test your skills, Paps.”

She conjured a spear and shoved it into Papyrus’ hands. Oh, it’s the same one she gave you to defend yourself back in the Underground.

“Are we practicing blocks today?” asked Papyrus.

“Yup,” Undyne summoned a series of spears around her, primed and ready. With her trademark growl she yelled, “I’m not gonna hold back!”

Rows and rows of spears rained down on Papyrus. You’re a bit concerned with the density of the attacks. Some stayed true to their path, others changed directions on the last minute.
Okay, you lost track at that point.

Papyrus’ right Eye glowed orange. He then deflected every single spear that came his way.


Holy macaroni.

At the end of the assault, Papyrus broke a bead or two of sweat. “W-WOWIE. THAT’S REALLY TOUGH! IT’S BEEN A LONG WHILE SINCE I’VE SEEN YOU STRIKE WITH SUCH GUSTO. I AM VERY HAPPY THAT YOU’RE SO SPIRITED TODAY!”

Undyne walked over to Papyrus and squeezed his shoulder joints tight. She locked a wide-eyed stare at her junior with ‘that face’: from the time when you told her anime isn’t real.

“Papyrus,” she said, “Did you… Bump into a mountain hermit sage? And, trained with him in a magical time-desync realm for a decade? Then slipped back into society? All in one night? Because. I totally want to be his disciple.”

He sweated more from the intense questioning than the training itself. “UH. I DON’T THINK UNCLE GASTER KNOWS HOW TO TRAIN NON-SEERS. AND MISTER MAGUS IS THE MAN WITH THE AWESOME ANIME HIDEOUT.”

“Who?”

“MEZIL THYME. THE PRINCIPAL JUDGE GUY.”

“Can you please strike a deal with him? I’ll do anything. Any. Thing.”

“I… I WILL TRY TO ASK. BUT NO GUARANTEES.”

“Good. Thanks a ton, Paps.”

The training continued. You can’t help but to feel that the roles have reversed: Undyne was the one getting practice, not Papyrus.

The session ended after thirty minutes. Your strongest fish friend showed off her toothy grin.

“Looks like I can’t rest on my laurels anymore, huh? Duel with me more often! You’re the only one who’s up to snuff.”

“WHAT ABOUT SANS?” Papyrus asked.

Her grin vanished. You noticed that she glanced off to the side for a moment.

Undyne then said, “Nah. He has the skills, but I understand high-intensity training is dangerous for him.”

“THEN YOU SHOULD TRAIN WITH UNCLE GASTER. HE’S STRONG! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Insert distressed fish noises here.

“Proooobably not a good idea,” she said. “Don’t forget that I pissed him off at least twice. With
maybe a third time.”

“IT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE NOW. I’M VERY SURE YOU’LL LEARN A TON FROM HIM. HE’S A GREAT TEACHER!”

There was a moment of awkward silence.

“I’ll consider it, Paps.” You knew Undyne said that to satisfy Papyrus. “I gotta go back home to update more case files. And stop by at Asgore’s to check up on him.”

“TAKE CARE OF SANS FOR ME, OKAY?”

Undyne nudged her junior with her elbow. “Heh, you don’t need to ask.”

Sans? At Alphys’ place? You hurried off the stands and presented your curiosity to Undyne. Expected him to camp at Grillbys for at least 24 hours.

“Oh man, punk. I don’t think you know this but, Grillby’s the previous Captain of the Royal Guard.”

Whaaaaaaaaaat?!!?!?

“Yeah, that’s my reaction too. A big chunk of yesterday’s drama happened under his watch, so he needs to iron out the legal stuff together with me.”

Papyrus chipped in, saying: “GRILLBY SAVED MY BROTHER FROM SOME ACCIDENTAL ROOFTOP SHENANIGANS A LONG TIME AGO. THEY’VE BEEN FRIENDS EVER SINCE!”

You told them that the amount of ‘wut’ flung around these past few days is going to break your trademark stoic front.

So, Grillby brought Sans along so that he could keep an eye on your troubled friend?

“Yes,” Undyne nodded. “That’s the plan. Well, we all know Sans could have teleported away anytime. But he respects the ex-Captain enough to comply. For now.”

You hope he’ll be okay.

“Same. Anyways, catch ya later nerds!”

The fish left you alone with Papyrus. This is your golden opportunity: time to ask him what the heck happened last night.

“I’LL EXPLAIN IT ON THE WAY,” he answered.

On the way where?

“TO UNCLE GASTER’S PRISON, OF COURSE! YOU’LL TALK TO HIM WITHIN THE NEXT HOUR. FIRST WE NEED TO GRAB THE PORTABLE HEATER FROM THE LOCKERS OR ELSE YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE A COLD TIME, THEN WE’LL NEED TO GET SOME COOKIES AND WATER AND SANDWICHES AND TEA LEAVES AND--”

Papyrus, please slow down.

“What’s wrong? Didn’t Mister Magus tell you to talk to Uncle Gaster?”
You froze in place, shocked that Papyrus knew the contents of a confidential discussion that you embarked on alone.

“STAY CLOSE, FRISK.”

You followed him around as he gathered the required supplies. Then, he led you through a shortcut. The both of you emerged in a secluded trail. You recognized this as one of the many paths that led you to the official entrance of the Underground.

Once he’s sure there are no eavesdroppers, he explained about his powers in whispers. As much as he’s capable of whispering anyway.

Papyrus has the ability to see ‘possibilities’. Past or future, best or worst, it didn’t matter: as long a timeline is still reachable. Sometimes it happens spontaneously, other times he could call for relevant information at will.

He told you that he had seen all the paths you took in the Underground. You squirmed, even when he forgave you for everything you’ve done. It’ll take a while to come to terms with that.

He told you about the wake: about your death. Mettaton’s death. And how the world collapsed without you, both in a figurative and literal sense.

Surreal.

He told you about the breakdown between Sans and Gaster. The lying, the coercing, the loneliness, the despair: all culminated in a complete disaster. For Sans to consider his parents dead twice… it’s too cruel.

He told you about the ‘Core Incident’. It’s a trainwreck tragedy that shook both the Underground and the Surface. In cosmic irony, it paved the path to monsterkind’s freedom.

As if Asriel’s death was not bad enough. Turns out there was a worse follow-up.

You understood why Mom became so worried: many humans lost their lives on that day, including your biological parents. Then there were the six children who fell before you. Their families would want closure too.

It’s too easy to forget that Dad once promised vengeance. War. Decimation of the evil beings who killed their innocent son. When you walked the Underground, the populace whispered hopes of freedom and brutal justice.

You imagined the mass media frenzy that would happen if this revelation reached the ears of humanity. Not even Mezil -- the Supreme Magus Judge -- could hold back the uproar.

If… he would take your side in the first place.

You asked Papyrus why Gaster had to train Sans up to become a weapon? Can’t Dad just zap everything with his godmode powers?

“…I’M AFRAID YOU MUST ASK UNCLE GASTER HIMSELF. I DON’T UNDERSTAND EITHER.”

Papyrus may be able to witness the events, but that doesn’t mean he can comprehend them.

When you arrived at the Underground entrance, Papyrus led you through another shortcut. You
emerged in the now-abandoned Snowdin town.

You noticed Endogeny guarded the entrance of Papyrus’ shed. In some timelines, he had placed you in there after he ‘captured’ you.

…That’s the prison? For THE Doctor Gaster? Are they serious about this? The Underground doesn’t have a proper jail?

You let Papyrus know that you had escaped that shed without a single problem. In fact, the lock is on the inside.

And what’s with the guard of choice? What happened to the rest of the Dog Clan?

Papyrus explained, “WE USED TO HAVE A SMALL LOCKUP, BUT IT’S DISMANTLED FOR PARTS TO BUILD EBOTT TOWN. MY GUEST ROOM IS THE ONLY REMAINING STRUCTURE WITH BARS.”

“TO BE HONEST, WE DON’T HAVE ANY MEANS TO PROPERLY RESTRAIN UNCLE GASTER. HE’S TOO STRONG AND SMART AND INVINCIBLE. BUT WE PLACED HIM HERE FOR HIS OWN PROTECTION.”

Protection? You asked Papyrus what he meant by that.

“MISS AUNT ONCE TOLD ME THAT HUMANS LOCK BAD GUYS AWAY TO PROTECT THEM FROM OTHERS, LIKE AN ANGRY MOB. IT WORKED FOR FLOWEY AND CHARA, SO IT SHOULD WORK FOR UNCLE GASTER TOO. HE DOESN’T NEED ANY MORE STRESS.”

Isolated from the Surface? Checked.
Intimidating merged dog entity? Checked.
Someone to watch over the inmate? Checked.

You see the point now. Judging from what went down in the Core Incident, both monsters and humans could act rash against Doctor Gaster. When emotions are high, logic takes a back seat.

The both of you gave Endogeny some pats and dog biscuits. Once satisfied, they shambled aside to let you in.

The run-down shack housed the infamous ex-Royal Scientist: a man of both great intellect and dogged determination.

He stayed well behind the broken wide-gapped wooden bars. A pile of books were his only company, and he’s content with that.

At least Doctor Gaster had garnered enough respect to not be treated like a dog. The tiny bed that once lay here was replaced with one of Alphys’ many futons. And he didn’t have kibbles for his meals. He also had some basic furnishing, such as a stool and a table imported from Grillby’s old bar.

Papyrus’ canine treatment to you was on ignorance. For dog standards, it’s a swell home. It’s just they didn’t know anything about humans.

The prisoner noticed your presence. “Oh… I wasn’t expecting a guest, Papyrus.”

To your surprise, the man was very gentle to your tall skeleton friend. Perhaps it’s further softened by a sense of guilt. “Is… is Sans alright? Your parents asked the same.”
“GRILLBY IS TAKING CARE OF HIM,” answered Papyrus.

“I see. So you don’t know either.”
“SORRY.”

“It’s alright, my boy.”

Papyrus introduced you to his parents. He did so once before at the hospital, but things were kinda in a rush. Now you had the time to greet them.

You shook Times Roman’s hand first, the father.
Then you shook Helvetica’s hand, the mother.

Though they said no words, you knew that they’re happy to meet you.

Doctor Gaster bowed. “Child of mercy, what do you require of me?”

Doctor Gaster’s general behaviour was straight out of the olden days. High-society to boot. It’s a little imposing for a modern-day person, even if he didn’t mean to make anyone uncomfortable. He reminds you of Judge Mezil in a way.

From the other side of the bars, you told Uncle Gaster that you had some questions.

“What would that be?” he asked back.

You wanted to answer, but then you noticed that you had two question prompts.

>Seven Sages.
>Sans.

The conflict. It’s making you vibrate like a pissed off Undyne. Internally. You knew you’d eventually ask about both, but you had a time limit. There’s homework to deal with.

Papyrus patted you on the head and declared: “THAT IS WHY THE GREAT PAPYRUS PREPARED EVERYTHING FOR A LONG STORY SESSION!”

A portable heater kept you warm and boil the tea at the same time. Dinner? Hearty sandwiches. Dessert? Cookies. There’s enough for everyone.

“You CAN ASK UNCLE GASTER TO HELP YOU WITH YOUR HOMEWORK TOO. NYEH HEH HEH!”

Oh, that’s right. From what you’ve heard, he’s a very educated man. You didn’t need to rush back home to do them after all. That would save a ton of time.

Wow, thanks Papyrus.

“NO PROBLEM AT ALL!” Then he struck a pose. Some things just don’t change.

Gaster’s expression lit up in gladness. “Well then. If knowledge is what you seek, you’ve come to the right place. Please, make yourself at home.”

The gap between the bars was wide enough to squeeze in. Needless to say, your skeleton friend also had absolutely no issues sidestepping into it.

The three of you surrounded the heater and waited for the tea to boil. You and Papyrus sat down on
the wooden floor while Gaster settled on a stool.

In the meantime, the selection between your two choices continued to ping-pong.

It must be obvious because Doctor Gaster then asked you: “May I provide some advice on how to tackle your predicament?”

You nodded.

“Choose a topic that’s quicker to resolve, or one that’s more important to your heart. I’m sure you won’t be still until your anxieties are addressed. If we can’t finish it today, we’ll continue tomorrow. It’s certainly better than standing at the crossroads all night.”

There’s a topic that’s both quick and important. Besides, if you don’t address that now, you might not understand the Seven Sages in full.

You asked Doctor Gaster about Sans.

“…He is indeed very important to you, isn’t he?” Gaster commented. “At this rate, you value him more than he values himself. No, that’s already a given.”

He picked up the kettle and poured the piping hot liquid into three mugs.

“Let’s begin, shall we?”

Chapter End Notes

Papyrus always dreamed of being a cool skeleton.

But as with every other person, when he really becomes ultra cool... he's a little lost. It takes a while to have the reality sink in that you've become beyond what you've dreamed.
Teacher

Chapter Notes

It's been over a week since the previous update.

There's a really good reason for that: intensive backstory chapters.

Two of them, even.
They take the MOST time to edit because it's a story within a story. Exposition chapters hang on a fine balance of information and interest. If there's not enough interest, then something went wrong somewhere.

After lots and lots and loooooooooots of editing, this chapter is finally done. Please enjoy Part 1 of the Golden Quiche verse history lesson.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

This was your first question in the ‘Sans’ branch of discussion:

> Tactician

What’s with the training?
Why must it be so brutal?
What does it mean to be a Tactician?

Papyrus waited together with you for the answer.

Doctor Gaster sipped his tea in an attempt to recollect himself. He then breathed out a quiet sigh.

“Frisk,” he asked, “How much do you know about the concept of war?”

What you learned from media and history books. Lots of fighting, conquering, and heroic limelights. And also suffering.

“But, do you know what goes on behind the battlefield?”

Not much, you had to admit. What you studied in your human school surrounded solely on the events themselves.

“That’s just the tail end, dear child. The results. War begins long before the clashes happen. It’s all about preparation. Logistics and resources must be carefully planned, or else defeat will follow.”

Can’t Dad just zap everything with his seven-soul godhood?

Doctor Gaster shook his head. “Never ever depend on a single method, no matter how powerful it may sound. Too many other monster nations made this mistake and paid the ultimate price.”

“Even if King Asgore broke the Barrier, I wouldn’t want him to take to the front lines. First, he would be targeted by any time-travelling assassins out there. Second, he would not have the heart to end the lives of millions.”
“If possible,” he stopped for a moment. “I wouldn’t want King Asgore to kill any more. The Six had burdened him enough.”

But, what about the war promise…?

“Out of sight, out of mind. I’m sure you’ve heard of that phrase.”

You did. Then you asked: does that mean Dad needs to stay in his private garden, while Doctor Gaster and Sans push the campaign proper?

“Yes, dear child. You are correct. The sheer devotion of his citizens will always be King Asgore’s true strength. Not the SOULs, not godhood, nor his magic. It’s his love for his people, and his people’s love for him. We’re more than willing to sacrifice our lives.”

“But we do not intend to die without meaning. In order to survive our own quest, we need strategists to plan our missions: to handle logistics, survey the terrain, delegate tasks, and ultimately decide our course of action.”

“The best of those minds would bear the title of ‘Tactician’. That is your friend, Sans Serif.”

> Sans’ life.

Is it true that his entire life was decided since he was a baby?

Gaster answered, “Yes. Us Seers can examine a child’s potential while they’re still taking their final form. Think of it as a more thorough and accurate ultrasound procedure.”

“Just the news of the birth itself was a miracle. Roman and Helvetica were so weak in their magic, they never awakened their Seer’s Eye. Let alone expected to have any children. And yet, Sans happened. He was a powerful, powerful child.”

“Around the same time, King Asgore requested me to be his Tactician. I declined. A genius I may be, but I know my own limits. Instead… I offered the child that would one day be named after an angel.”

An angel?

You pointed at yourself. Weren’t you the angel of prophecy?

“Oh no, he’s not an angel of mercy like you,” said Gaster. “The ‘Serif’ part of his name is a reference to ‘Seraphim’. According to human legend, these six-winged angels are the primary guardians of their deity. And that’s what he should be.”

“Sans Serif’s true duty is to protect King Asgore -- and by extension the entire nation-- through any means necessary. Even if it means resorting to human cruelty.”

> Human cruelty.

You’re not sure if you’ll regret it, but you asked that question anyway.

“Guile. Foreknowledge. Sabotage. Assassination. And all the underhandedness that comes from stealth and spying. These too are valid tactics. In fact, they’re the same methods that the ‘Legendary Hero’ used to bring us monsterkind to our knees.”

“Humans often redirect their extensive supply of determination into themselves. This breeds selfishness. Misanthropy. The idea of ‘I, me, and mine’. As such, many would not hesitate to take the
most efficient route to get what they want, whenever they want. Even if it means being cruel.”

“So I trained Sans to think the same: search for a weakness and strike there. Why start small? Why inflict warning wounds? Why explain your powers? Go straight to the point. Find the crack in the enemy’s tactics. Take to the field and break them down from the inside, if that’s the path to secure our survival.”

“Strike the enemy from the shadows, in the shadows.”

Sans was raised to think like an assassin, like the Fallen Hero. That’s why he insisted that he’s ‘human’ in his thoughts.

It’s hard to say that he rejected his purpose. On one hand, he’s a bitter drifter. On the other hand, he always watched out for the people he cares about.

In the end, he’s still a ‘seraphim’. Albeit a fallen one.

The tea had gone cold. Doctor Gaster held the mug closer to the heater in an attempt to warm it up.

“…To be honest, Sans could have gone down the same path without my influence. He had a certain cunningness since his baby bone days, as my dear friends experienced first hand. Not even padlocked drawers were safe. He’d somehow find the keys no matter where you hid them.”

You looked at Papyrus, wondering what his toddler days were like.

Your curious friend used his powers to take a peek. “APPARENTLY I’M LOUD, RESTLESS, AND VERY ACTIVE IN IMAGINATION. BUT OTHERWISE A GOOD BOY. I AM SO RELIEVED THAT I DIDN’T GIVE SANS MUCH TROUBLE.”

The brothers are complete opposites in every way!

“Ah, but what am I rambling about?” Gaster took another sip, “Nurture still goes a long way. If he was raised in a different environment, he wouldn’t be so extreme.”

You drank some of your cold tea. You’re not used to the bitterness, so you asked for a sandwich to mask the taste.

It’s dinnertime anyway. Papyrus offered some to the elder before helping himself.

You thought about your own life while you munched on your meal. Cenna told you about her plans to send you to magic school. Although it involved nothing grander than a family reunion, it’s still a locked path.

The main difference? You never realised it until this timeline. Sans was completely aware of his chains.

It’s hard to imagine that kind of life.

You thanked Doctor Gaster for sharing the story. Then, you promised to him and the skeleparents that you’ll help Sans live like a normal person.

The old goopy skeleton continued to frown. You asked him why.

He answered, “Help is only useful once it’s accepted. More so when it comes to the heart. You saw how he rejected King Asgore’s apology.”
It’s alright.
You’re determined.

“Frisk, Child of Mercy. It’s good that you try, but please don’t neglect your own well-being.”

The questions about Sans ended at the Doctor’s advice. There were no more prompts, only an arrow redirecting you back to the very first page.

It’s greyed out with the word ‘DONE’ now. You took this moment of rest to finish your sandwich.

You stared at the schoolbag at your side. Oh man, you had tons to catch up on your homework. Your timeline adventures taught you most about geography, but that subject doesn’t exist in the monster syllabus. They concentrated on language, art, culture, math, and science.

You’re good with cultural topics and language. Fine with art. Sans helped you a ton with your scientific knowledge. Math? That stuff will eat up HOURS.

The urgency prompted you to check your homework. You’re left with the one subject that bothered you since the first day in school.

Math.

The thought alone made Papyrus rattle his bones, “OH, I REMEMBER THE HORROR OF COMPLICATED NUMBERS. I HAD TO THINK LONG AND HARD TO REALISE THAT I WAS ONCE A DOZEN AWAY FROM A TWO DIGIT NUMBER.”

Papyrus! Can’t he peer into the future and give you the correct answers?

That statement earned you a light chop on the top of your head, executed by none other than Doctor Gaster himself. You squealed. It didn’t hurt though.

With a disapproving glare, he said: “The three of us agree that you shouldn’t depend on Papyrus’ clairvoyance to cheat on your homework.”

But, it’s math. If you don’t cheat, you won’t have time to discuss about the more important topics!

“May I see your work thus far?”

You handed your math workbook over to Doctor Gaster. His mental gears clicked together as he analyzed your handiwork.

“Frisk,” he said, “You went to a human school before your adventures. Am I right?”

You nodded.

“From what age?”

Six, you said.

“How well do you understand the four basic mathematical principles and their application?”

Your inability to answer was all he needed to know. Doctor Gaster set your homework on the table and got up from the stool.

“That explains why you had so much trouble. It’s not that you’re ‘bad’ at math, Frisk. You merely lack understanding. Coincidently, math is my life. By the end of this lesson, you’ll finish your task in
a blink.”

Those are some fancy words of promise. You pulled the stool over and plopped your butt on it.

Challenge accepted. There’s a reason why your teachers had no time to help you.

Gaster smirked. “Do not underestimate me.”

He then asked, “Oh, by the way Papyrus… what were you trying to calculate back then?”

Papyrus answered with great pride: “MY FOLLOWER COUNT, UNCLE GASTER! A POPULAR COOL SKELETON SUCH AS MYSELF MUST HAVE PLENTY OF FANS!”

“My boy, a dozen is a set of twelve. The minimum count for a ‘double digit’ is ten. I don’t think it’s possible to have negative-two followers.”

“WHY NOT?”

“Well, do you think it’s possible for a living person to be less than zero?”

Papyrus’ eyes bugged out. His mind got blown away by sheer revolutionary logic.

The prison soon turned into a maths classroom. Doctor Gaster first taught you addition and subtraction, and then their relations to multiplication and division.

With the aid of an empty scrap exercise book, he showed you a visual calculating method. Just to help you get started. It’s much easier than trying to recall solely on your rickety foundations.

Thanks to his guide, you finished your homework at a speed you never thought possible. You pinched your cheeks in utter disbelief.

Doctor Gaster won. Cue a classy sip of his tea as he checked your answers.


Doctor Gaster was one of the best teachers you’ve met. Mom will always occupy the number one spot in your heart, but this man is a close contender.

Sans didn’t go ‘wrong’, instead he went ‘horribly right’.

Since your homework was out of the way, you returned the stool to him. A teacher must be respected with a proper sitting space.

“Thank you very much, Frisk.” He slid over the seat and rested his goopy self there.

You occupied the floor once more.

Then, you prompted your remaining question for tonight.

> Seven Sages.

The moment you said that, Gaster widened his sockets and leaned backwards. You thought he’s going to fall over.

Both you and Papyrus tried to catch him, but it turns out he didn’t need any help. Still, he appreciated the sentiment.
“W-what…? How…?” Gaster muttered, “The only way you’d know anything about them would be—”

Details clicked in his head. “I see. Judge Thyme sent you to me, didn’t he?”

Papyrus was faster than you. “OH! HOW DID YOU KNOW, UNCLE GASTER?”

Gaster then replied, “I once told him about my father’s love for nature. He knows his history well to notice that small detail. A man like him surely understands the need to learn from the follies of the past.”

After taking a brief moment to regain his composure, Gaster began his story.

“You see, children. In the ancient days, ‘Humans’ and ‘Monsters’ ruled the lands. Rule they both did, but there was no mutual cooperation.”

“Each side lived separately. We monsters noticed early on that we frighten humans with our presence. Their fear was so intense, they retaliated with physical force.”

“It was then we discovered that us monsters are very weak to violence. Further compelled by our distaste for needless conflict, we hid ourselves from sight.”

“We favoured the forests, marshes, mountains: anywhere that’s difficult for humans to traverse. Puzzles, the combinations of contraption and diversion, were installed around our territory to further discourage encounters with their kind.”

“They’re designed to be harmless rerouting schemes. Sometimes, however… accidents happen. Often it’s due to failed safety checks or poor construction. Humans mistook them as death traps, further fuelling paranoia.”

“The intrepid ones began to form adventuring guilds. Mercenaries, treasure hunters, warriors, what have you. Heroes, they were called, working together with the local armed forces to ‘clear the land of possible threats’.”

And thus a monster hunt began.

“Yes. That’s correct.”

“These exceptional humans broke through our puzzles and raided our settlements. Killed every man, woman, and child who failed to escape. Whatever riches and resources we had left behind became a bonus for their efforts. Their LOVE increased unchecked.”

“We responded by further isolating ourselves: building more complex puzzles, creating illusions to confuse intruders, increasing warning patrols so we could evacuate the citizens well ahead of time. We also sent emissaries to other monster nations, plotting escape routes should any of us fall.”

“…Our numbers declined. Too many died too soon. There was a pressing need to replenish our population. Without people, important jobs can’t be completed. Our survival as a community hung at a precarious edge.”

“Thus began the Reanimation Project.”

A new prompt appeared to you. Could this be the beginning of the skeleton people?

> Reanimation Project.
Gaster said, “It began with one nation, far away from our current location. A human civil war broke out nearby. The king witnessed fields of corpses left behind in the aftermath. He thought, ‘What a sad and wasteful tragedy. If only they could have a peaceful second chance within our kingdom’.”

“It was a moment of epiphany. He gathered his wise men and asked if it’s possible to give these poor souls a new lease on life.”

“No one knew what would become of this, but they’re willing to try out of desperation. Scouts brought back six corpses from the edges of the battlefield. Fed those magic, using their own bodies as the catalyst, thereby creating a brand new monster SOUL.”

“Four failed to produce any results. Caught fire, disintegrated, and assorted other mishaps. You can’t expect people to get science right on the first try.”

“Then they managed to reanimate one. You know this being as a ‘Zombie’. Unfortunately, they’re unstable. The first successful subject behaved much like some of the less conscious Amalgamates. To make things worse, both their mind and body broke down at rapid pace.”

“It was then Monsterkind recorded their first extensive study of the decaying process. It was as messy as you can imagine; they ‘fell down’ within a day. None of us were sure if they were even conscious of their own existence.”

“The scholars then discovered that the same corpse cannot be reanimated twice. After giving the poor soul a proper burial, they discussed another possibility.”

“What if we strip the corpse down to the remnants left behind: on these things called ‘bones’? The nation had one last corpse remaining, so they tested their theories on that specimen.”

“The experiment was a success. The enchanted bones awakened with the basic knowledge of a young adult. Identified himself as a male and was fully sentient. In time, he adapted to life just like any other monster.”

“News of this discovery spread across the royal networks. Bolstered with hope, their respective monarchy called for all to donate their collection of human bones. From there, the first skeleton society came into existence overnight.”

“See, a person's essence tends to linger after the destruction of the SOUL. For humans more so than for monsters; it stays near the deceased body, rather than scattering as dust. It's for this very reason that these skeletons managed to retain certain skills prior their first death. Some better than others. Mind you, none of them remember anything of their past selves.”

Your tall cinnamon roll friend screamed out of excitement. “OH MY GOD, IT’S JUST LIKE ANIME!”

Anime is real Papyrus. Get used to it. Well, the realistic historical bits anyway.

Gaster chuckled in response. “Interesting, isn’t it?”

“All of us agreed that we will never kill a human to get their bones, directly or otherwise. So these skeletons were all harvested from crypts, graveyards, battlefields, or secluded accidents that happened near our territory. Success rates differed by how long ago they had passed on.”

“Then one day, we found several humans on the verge of death. Fatal wounds, malnutrition, disease, to name a few causes. Strong-willed they were: still clinging to their human SOUL despite their failing bodies.”
“We took pity on them, offering salvation through application of our rites. The result was a groundbreaking accidental discovery that allowed monsterkind to understand a human’s strength. From these records, I would later refine them into the Determination Sciences you know today.”

“They became what the humans call ‘Liches’, the strongest of all the reanimated dead.”

The next prompt appeared, but you didn’t press it right away. You needed a moment for the details to sink into your head. Drink some tea, munch on a cookie, feed some sugar into your brain…

> Liches and Seers.

What made them special? How could one tell the difference between a Lich and a normal skeleton?

“Colour.” He said. “When a Lich awakens, their eyes glow with the colour of their human SOUL. These cannot be dispelled and they’re purely cosmetic.”

“ARE THEY HUMANS IN A MONSTER BODY???” asked Papyrus.

“Both yes and no. Their SOULs had transformed into the white and fragile forms we’re so familiar with. Complete with the inverted shape. However, they exhibited raw strength greater than any monster ever known. A normal Lich can lift tremendous weights. A warrior can swing around a tree log as if it’s a mere pole. Captain Undyne’s famous suplexes? They’d be right at home.”

“Study their bones under a microscope and you would see the bone tissue, no different from the other skeletons.”

“The secret? It’s the remnants of their human SOUL spread throughout their physical bodies. Its vast innate power boosted their beings to the levels of legends. Hence why they’re considered ‘Pseudo-Boss Monsters’.”

“The same cannot be said for their descendants.”

Descendants? Like Doctor Gaster and Papyrus?

“Indeed. We call ourselves Seers, but that was not our original terminology. Before Seers existed, the descendants of Liches were called ‘Lichborn’. The same goes for subsequent generations of Lichborn children.”

Wait. How are monsters born in the first place? Nevermind skeletons, who are nothing but bone.

“Uhhh…” Doctor Gaster flustered, his cheekbones blushing dual-coloured. “We’re… uhm… the result of a magical union between a male and female skeleton. I don’t have any experience firsthand, but it’s… a beautiful process.”

“A VERY BEAUTIFUL PROCESS!” Papyrus nodded. “UHH, WHAT WAS IT AGAIN? SANS NEVER TOLD ME WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DATING! SHALL I USE MY POWERS TO FIND OUT?”

“NOOOOO!!!” Gaster leapt out of his seat and slapped both hands down on the youngster's shoulders, pinning him down on the spot.

You imagined the skeleparents yelling ‘OBJECTION!’ at the top of their inaudible voices. You were also sure that those arms moved at their own volition to save their son from seeing far too much.

“Papyrus…” He said, “Once you find a proper lady skelly that you like, you will understand. For
now, just know that after a union, there’s a chance that a magical orb will form. That's all.”

Good call.

If it's anything like what humans do, then…

You know.

Papyrus doesn't need ANOTHER lifelong scar.

Gaster soon turned to you with renewed composure: “Child of Mercy, think of it as an egg, if you will. No bird or lizard jokes please. And certainly no chicken jokes. I find them rather degrading.”

Okay. No jokes. You’re fine with that.

Moving on.

“These orbs would be nurtured and protected as the union consolidates into its final form. Once completed, the orb loses its shine, and the newborn’s SOUL absorbs their parents attributes. Naturally with Lich or Lichborn parents, an aspect of their ‘colour’ is also inherited.”

“Because Lichborn are born of magic, we do not have physical bodies. We’re only generated in the likeness of our parents. Thus, we’d be subjected to all the typical weaknesses of other monsters… But, we still bear human roots.”

“These are our primary proof.” Gaster pointed two fingers at his own set of the Seer’s Eyes.

“Unlike the Liches whose colours are cosmetic, our Eyes have special power. Determination is key, except our bodies could never contain the quantities required for such magic.”

“What do we do then? We burn them as fuel.”

Gaster set his Eyes ablaze as a cool visual demonstration of his statement.

“See these flames, children? It’s burning Determination alongside the ‘colours’ of inheritance.”

Both the flames and colours faded back to their default white state. “Now, before I can tell you more about Seers, you must first understand the repercussions of the Reanimation Project; it triggered a tragedy that monsterkind failed to anticipate.”

“As I had told you earlier, Humans and Monsters live apart from each other. They’re ignorant about us, and we’re ignorant about them.”

“One day, a mountain settlement fell to the first security breach in fifty years. There was only one survivor old enough to tell the tale: my mother.”

“She testified that when the humans saw the skeleton people, they went pale from horror. That horror soon turned into indignant fury. They razed the town to ashes and spared none, especially the Lichborn.”

Why? You asked. You just can’t understand. Judging from Papyrus’ shocked expression, he didn’t get it either.

The elder one who knew too much stared back at you with a solemn gaze.

He then closed his eyes in painful confession. “Youth, do you know why we’re called ‘monsters’?”
It’s because our appearances remind humans of their helplessness and fear. What irony.”

“Skeletons are a symbol of death in all human cultures. We mirror their own fleeting and fragile mortality. When they saw the ‘dead’ alive and procreate entire families… well, we were seen as blasphemy. And blasphemy demands a ‘cleansing’ massacre.”

“While my mother brought the children to safety, her father -- my grandfather -- fought the humans by himself. The Lich of Bravery, she called him. He defended the backlines with nothing more than his axe, shield, and sheer skill.”

“The human ‘heroes’, however, recognized my grandfather. They called him by his former name. ‘You wear his gear’, they said. ‘You use his style’, they said. ‘Don't you remember us? Your former comrades?’”

“Futile, of course. My grandfather declared himself a new man, and his family are the ones fleeing in the cave behind him. The humans thus condemned him. Cursed. Evil. Possessed. A desecration of his memory. He only laughed back, prepared to become their worst nightmare if it means that others will see the next sunrise.”

“He then collapsed the tunnel, sealing his own fate.”

“My mother did not see what happened after that. But legends state that he had decimated dozens before a hail of arrows smashed his skull.”

“She described his berserked howlings as the most unearthly thing she had ever heard, and will ever hear. He’s no longer her father: just a killing machine determined to protect his new society.”

“Two things, she learned on that day. One: life can be cruel. Two: everyone has a dark side. Monsters included.”

“Needless to say, the terror of The Lich became imprinted deep within the human psyche.”

The cinnamon roll in the form of bones trembled. His right Eye shone bright: there’s a chance that he’s recalling visions of past human violence.

You tried to shake Papyrus out of the bad stuff.

“I’M OKAY,” he patted your hand.

“Sans said the same about me, didn’t he?” Gaster commented. “‘You’re an abomination. A desecration of their memory.’ That’s exactly what the humans thought of us skeletons.”

“The news about Liches spread amongst human society like wildfire. It spoke of lies that intensified oppression. ‘Monsters steal our human SOULs’. ‘Monsters are making armies of the dead’. ‘Monsters have declared a war’.”

“The Waterfall history plaques state that the War did not last for long. Yes, that’s true… if only for the Dreemurr Nation. We’re the last to experience the horrors of human violence, while the other kingdoms had fallen one by one, across the span of decades.”

“The king who started the Reanimation Project? He was publicly executed in a human capital. Since that day, the human depiction of the ‘Devil’ took on the form of a goat-person, leading an army of Grim Reapers. I’m sure you are familiar with such imagery.”

“In the end, the survivors were pushed to the only remaining kingdom that’s still intact: The
Dreemurrs. Young King Asgore and Queen Toriel accepted everyone. Cared for the refugees as though they’re their own citizens.”

“Our hardships created a unique culture: Everyone work together. Live together. Survive together. No matter the species. No matter the origin. As long we’re good to each other.”

“…But many realised that it would be a matter of time before we’re wiped out by human fear and hatred. Some of the Lichborn were already troubled by visions of calamity.”

“No one will help us. No one could help us. Except… for one. A human. Or rather, a monster who retained all aspects of his past humanity.”

“He's our very first ‘Sage’.”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 55 first draft is done about the same time at 54. But it still needs editing before it's ready.

P.S I can't help but to be reminded of Shingeki no Kyojin's manga. With humans as the titans.
Welcome to editing hell chapter number... I have no clue anymore. Just a lot of hell editing.

But it's finally done! This will be the last huge chunk of lore in a while. After this, it's back to the usual character-driven scenes.

ENJOY!

Okay.

This is starting to boggle your mind. A part of you wanted to stop, go home, and come back another day.

But you sure as heck won’t be able to sleep after reaching this point.

> Convert.

Pardon?

What does Doctor Gaster mean with ‘a monster who retained all aspects of his past humanity’? Was he a Lich?

“Yes, he was.”

Liches were enchanted from humans, right? But they don’t recall their previous lives, so they can’t be counted as ‘human’. At least, that’s what you understand.

“You’re correct, Frisk.” said Doctor Gaster, “But he’s different. This man remembered everything.”

For real?

The elder continued his story.

“During my father’s childhood days, he’d explore the woods together with his younger sister. He wanted discovery, she wanted adventure. They’d do these things in secret.”

“One day, found a hidden trail that led to a ravine. There, they discovered a secluded patch of Ebott Goldenflowers. Half buried under the growth was a skeletonized human corpse. The siblings had never seen a true skeleton before. Not in the form of a Lich, nor in the form of the dead.”

Odd. What happened to all the refugees? There must be some Liches who escaped.

“Well, just because they’re in the kingdom doesn’t mean you’d meet them in person.”

He continued: “Thrilled by the idea of experiments and the prospect of a new friend, the siblings smuggled the conversion rites out of the library. My father laid down the framework. True to his colour of Patience, he’s very careful with his handiwork.”
“They then reanimated the bones. But when his eyes lit up, they realised that things… didn’t quite go as they had expected.”

“He awakened with eyes of intense crimson.”

You gasped.  
The colour red will never mean the same to you again.

Did they ‘accidentally’ resurrect a Red SOUL bone?

“Yes, they did. His SOUL must have survived the destruction of his body. My father and his sister were terrified to the point of immobility. They couldn’t understand why either. Not until many, many years later.”

“It didn’t help that the Red Lich yelled a string of curses to the sky. Quite a frightening first impression as you can imagine.”

“When the man realised that he was not alone, he calmed himself. Anyone could see the sheer frustration flowing in his being as his ribs rose and fell. It was nothing like the books or stories the siblings had heard. As far as they know, Liches woke up confused at most. Never enraged.”

“The sister asked why. He answered the following: ‘I was assassinated. Murdered. That knave stabbed my chest before kicking me down into this pit’.”

“That’s the most unusual. Remember that Liches considered themselves separate from their bones. There are some Purple ones who do recall bits of their past, however they are just distant images. ‘I was this person, this person is not me’.”

“On the other hand, the Red Lich declared: ‘This is me’. He claimed his identity without a single hesitation. He even remembered his own death.”

“My father and his sister explained how they had found him, the magic they used, and their intentions. They meant no harm.”

“The man asked more questions. First about the year, then about the world. Politics. Leaders. Circumstances of the times. Except, monsters live too isolated from human society to know of answers to his detailed enquiries. This prompted the Red Lich to investigate matters by himself.”

“He was no fool. He knew that he could no longer walk straight into human territory and ask around. So he instead asked the children to take him to the Dreemurr Nation. As a token of gratitude, he would use the knowledge of his former life to help us.”

“Under one condition: that he may keep his true identity a secret. Name included. And also, the children may not tell anyone about their discovery. He’ll decide when and where he would disclose himself. Until then, he’d play the role of a travelling hermit.”

“The Red Lich proved his worth soon enough. He improved security and taught monsters the art of advanced intel gathering: spying, stealth, surveying, observation. It allowed the guards to take protective measures much sooner than they ever did.”

“We’re indebted. Since no one knew his name, we called him by a title: ‘Sage’.”

“Then, he studied monsterkind. Learned about us, our magic, and our history. Took a special interest in the Lichborn Eye. He theorized that our human heritage allowed manipulation of ‘the streams of space and time’. He told us about ‘Willpower’, known as ‘Determination’ in modern days, and
declared it as his very reason for survival.”

“The coloured eyes we bear are in truth a filtered lens. The body instinctively knows that it cannot cope with high levels of Determination, so it’s channeled into the Eyes to be burned away as fuel for our traits. This allows us to tap into the depths of time itself.”

“That’s when my father wondered about this man’s history.”

“Magic had always been the domain of monsters since prehistoric times. Many charlatans claim to be wizards and sorcerers, but they’re all trickery: illusions, suggestions, mind-altering substances, what have you. We thought: humans are incapable of magic.”

“Yet, this Sage claimed otherwise. He wasn’t a liar. The lessons he taught to us Lichborn were concrete proof. It’s thanks to him that we now know how to hone our talents. We began to truly ‘see’ a hidden world.”

“It was only then the Lichborn were renamed as ‘Seers’.”

This is some extensive history.

But it was a ton more interesting to you than anything you’ve learned in school. A personal investment made all the difference.

Doctor Gaster continued: “From a pool of students, the Sage hand-picked six of the best ‘Pure Eyed’ Seers. My father, my aunt, and my mother were part of the selection.”

Pure Eyed?
You tilted your head at that term.

“What Papyrus and Sans have is a ‘Mixed Eye’. By no means is a Pure superior to a Mixed, not at all. It’s just that the Sage needed set constants for the task at hand. It’s all about the balance of traits and their intensity.”

What about Gaster’s set?

“Mine are both Pure Eyed. I could either use both at once, or one at a time. It all depends on the situation. Orange ‘Bravery’ allows me to take daring leaps into the future, whereas Cyan ‘Patience’ gives me focus.”

“With fine control, I have the widest range of visions. To put it to understandable terms, I’m a microscope and a telescope combined. Rendered in 3D. Very handy in science. …And also to watch out for slacking staff members.”

You couldn’t help but to laugh out loud. Oh he’s going to be a real terror in the classroom. You imagined a very displeased Gaster sliding over to a sleeping student, waking them up with a chop on the top of their head.

Yep. You don’t want him to be your classroom teacher. Just one-on-one tuition is good enough.

Though, this isn’t a time for comedic tangents.
You do want to listen to the rest of the tale.

Once you settled down, Gaster continued: “Anyways. After a good lot of training, the six Seers combined their diverse talents to peer into the future.”
“I needed a machine, the Chronograph, to do the same. It’s constructed to supplement my missing traits. Papyrus, however, can do all that upon instinct and a fraction of the effort. Do you now understand just how special he is?”

Papyrus struck a proud pose in response.

You didn’t understand the specialness. Why?

“A Seer’s magic is all about the application. Papyrus’ colours are Orange, Blue, and Green: Bravery, Integrity, and Kindness. Sans’ are Cyan, Purple, Yellow: Patience, Perseverance, Justice. Between them, six traits are accounted for.”

“Bravery, to take the leap.”
“Integrity, to draw in relevance.”
“Kindness, to reconstruct the image.”

“Patience, to keep focus.”
“Perseverance, to remember.”
“Justice, to see truth.”

Ah.

So that’s how it is.

Sans is the ultimate microscope, while Papyrus is the ultimate telescope. Again, opposites in every way… Gaster can do both, but nowhere near as well as either. Sort of the middle ground.

Together, the six Seers had the perfect vision. So, what did they see?

The old skeleton took a deep breath and sighed. “Very similar to what I saw: death and destruction. The Dreemurr Nation brought to ruin. Vast human armies at their doorstep. It confirmed the worst fears that plagued the survivors.”

“The Sage did not give up. He instructed his students to look farther. This time, on the fate of the nearest human kingdom. Well. It turns out that they later fell to a dragged-out and very bloody siege. The cycle of war does not discriminate.”

Kill or be killed.
That mantra ruled the land for far too long.

“In the midst of despair, the Sage made one of the craziest suggestions. He told us that if we want to change the future… we must first change our circumstances.”

Papyrus gasped outright. “SANS TOLD ME THAT SAME ADVICE TO SAVE FRISK!”

“Now you know where he learned it from,” said Gaster. “You can imagine the students begging their teacher to show them this path of hope. Alas, it was not something anyone wanted to hear…”

“He said that we monsters must teach the humans magic. Real magic of the SOUL.”

“That proclamation shook everyone down to the core. By theory that would be the most suicidal plan. Humans were already dominating the lands without additional power. And yet, the Sage asked us to grant them our inborn gift.”

“What if they misuse it? What if they turn magic against us? Questions, questions, and more
“The Sage expected that. He bluntly told them to either step out or prepare for the end. He knew he cannot do it all alone, and thus left fate inside their hands.”

“It’s tempting to surrender. To hide. To deny. But after a few days passed, the six students agreed that they’ve nothing left to lose. They rather be deemed as traitors than to wait for death.”

“Thus, the mentor promoted them to bear his title of ‘Sage’, becoming members of ‘The Seven Sages’: each governing their respective colour.”

Does Doctor Gaster remember the names and the colours of these Sages?

“Of course, Child of Mercy. I have committed every bit of history to memory. I love knowledge no matter the source. As long as it’s true, I’ll do my best to keep them.”

“Visigoth, the Cyan Sage of Patience. Also known as the Sky or Light Blue Sage. My dear departed father. Lover of nature, be it flora, fauna, or the mineral realm. He’s defined by patient wisdom and it’s thanks to him that the group didn’t fall apart.”

“Ariella, the Green Sage of Kindness. My aunt. The world itself is wondrous to her. It didn’t matter if we lived in dark times. She had a knack of finding good in any situation and in any person. A very encouraging woman.”

“Shirai, the Orange Sage of Bravery. My dear departed mother. She’s a survivor in more ways than one. She was the one who told us that we had nothing to lose. Of the six, she had the most reasons to fear human society. Yet, she was the first to volunteer.”

“Cyril, the Yellow Sage of Justice. Not the easiest to get along with, but he always meant well. For years he had questioned our acceptance of oppression. He won’t let the opportunity to make a difference slip through his fingers.”

“Geneva, the Blue Sage of Integrity. A nun in demeanour: steadfastness with high moral ethics. This made her a bit emotionally detached from the others, but she always did what’s right.”

“Corsivus, the Purple Sage of Perseverance. Our eccentric genius of the team. He had the tendency to get lost in academic pursuits and his own thoughts. Despite these quirks, he’s a man with a golden heart. Wish I could’ve met him.”

“Then, there’s of course the Red Sage of Willpower: a constant enigma. Stoic, unless something stoked his ire. No one knew what’s going on behind those crimson lights. Whatever it is, he’ll make it a reality.”

You groaned. Such a wasted opportunity. ‘The Red Sage of Determination’ sounds a billion times cooler!

“I AGREE WITH FRISK!” Papyrus exclaimed.

Gaster chuckled at the both of you. “Well, I can’t retcon historical titles. It is what it is.”

“Anyway, after leaving behind a note to the King and Queen, The Seven Sages departed in the middle of the night. The less monsterkind knew of their plan, the better. They didn’t want to frighten the public more than they had to.”

“The team infiltrated the capital with relative ease. The Red Sage knew where to go, down to the
multiple secret entrances that coursed under the city.”

Did anyone ask about it?

“Oh yes, everyone did. And you know what he said? ‘I built them’.”

He must have been a very important man. You asked if he was a prince?

“No. He was not. Royal blood does not guarantee power, dear child. Humans are too determined to let such theories define their hierarchy.”

“When the Seven Sages emerged inside the castle grounds, they wore masks, gloves and shrouds to hide their Lichborn nature. Fanciful coloured embroidery distracted the townsfolk, making them think they’re exotic wizards from a far off land. See, wizards of those times never revealed themselves to others. It’s part of their creed of secrets and mystique.”

“The Red Sage stepped forth and proclaimed his prophecy. He told everyone that within the decade, the kingdom will fall. The six other Sages then pooled their magic to create mirages of their vision. The fires, the starvation, the screams of those dying by the sword…”

You cringed.

Stooooooop!
Too graphic, too graphic!

Gaster smirked at your reaction. “Well, such is the brutal nature of warfare. Witnessing their nation doomed, the people reacted much like you. Horror, disgust, fear. I bet one or two fainted.”

“They demanded proof. After all, many so-called wizards were known charlatans. Why wouldn’t this vision be a lie? That’s when the Red Sage revealed his former self.”

“He said: ‘I am Mezil of House Berendin’. Showed a golden plaque to drive home his point. It was near pandemonium. His name frightened the court more than the future he proclaimed. Corsivus, the most well read of the lot, almost lost his composure too.”

Wait. Mezil?! 
Judge Mezil Thyme?!?

Papyrus screamed in your stead. “OH MY GOD MISTER MAGUS?!?! HE’S REALLY A SKELETON IN HUMAN GUISE???? AND SUPER OLD?????”

“No, no, no,” Gaster shook his head and waved his hand across his face. “My goodness, that’s quite a stretch. The Mezil you know today is just named after Mezil of Berendin.”

“It’s nothing unusual in human culture. Many parents wish their children to gain the success associated with that name. If King Asgore and Queen Toriel were human monarchy, you would no doubt find many little ‘Asgores’ and ‘Toriels’ for generations to come.”

“People of great fame and power leave an imprint that many wish to imitate. No doubt that Mezil of Berendin had the same effect.”

> Mezil of House Berendin.

You asked Doctor Gaster why everyone’s so scared of this man.

Was he super strong? Maybe he’s a little ‘harsh’?
Hint hint wink wink. People from medieval times can be real jerks.

“Fortunately, no. He’s a man of virtue. What made him feared was his sense of foresight: a man who put many intellectuals to shame. He had a knack for making the right decisions, all the time. He had a success rate so high that people thought he’s clairvoyant. As such, he amassed great wealth and influence as a businessman.”

“Do you know why? Think about it for a moment.”

A Red SOUL man who succeeded in anything he does.

You dropped your jaw.

Mezil of House Berendin was none other than a Living Victory.

“You caught on well,” Doctor Gaster confirmed. “If Judge Thyme sent you to me, it means you know that Living Victories can die under specific circumstances. That’s what happened to the Red Sage: robbed of his power to access his SAVES and murdered in cold blood.”

You asked Doctor Gaster if the people believed him.

“No at first. Mezil of Berendin went missing over a decade ago. So they questioned his activities. Where had he been all these years?”

“He spun a convincing tale. Told everyone that he fell into a ravine due to an accident. Survived the fall thanks to the foliage below, heavily injured nonetheless. Traveling wizards nursed him back to health, and demanded he swore fealty to their cause.”

“It was a rare opportunity to gain their trust and knowledge. So, he studied their arts to the highest level and gained six disciples of his own. Upon receiving this dreadful vision from the future, he hurried to the capital to warn his fellow countrymen and king.”

“They believed every word. After all, Mezil of Berendin had the reputation of being never wrong. Almost a prophet.”

“He told them that if they want to avoid their own ‘critical existence failure’, they must heed his counsel. Allow him to teach magic from his own estate. Only then can they fight back.”

“‘But what about the monsters?’ They asked. ‘Those things will steal a human’s soul to ascend to godhood! We must eradicate them for our safety’, they cried out.”

“Fear, fear and more fear. The Sages realised just how twisted their perceptions of monsters were. Humans never realised their true strength. They considered themselves weak, and thus banded together against the unknown.”

“Have you noticed a trend? This human kingdom feared monsters so much, they did not notice that their own territories cracked and crumbled. You’d think that some beings living peacefully in the woods would be a small issue to them, but no, that wasn’t the case.”

“Whether monsters or humans, it is entirely possible to make a mountain out of a molehill on a nation-wide scale. Two different races. The exact same reaction. The exact same mentality of ‘us versus them’. It’s always been like this.”

Hence, Mom’s worst case scenario. She had seen it happen right before her eyes.
Can the Red Sage still time travel like you?

Doctor Gaster answered, “No. Once converted into a Lich, his body cannot accumulate the amount required to travel back time. Most of his Determination was imbued into his bones to support his existence, and hence inaccessible for life. This meant he had only one chance to save everyone. All in a single timeline. It’s quite a task as you can imagine.”

“He proposed the following: seek out seven human children, each bearing the colour of the Sages. He’d train these young men and women in the art of magic, and in five years time let them seal the monster nation underneath the largest mountain in the region.”

“It’s none other than Mount Ebott.”

You and Papyrus stared back, wide-eyed at the revelation.

“This was no mere coincidence,” said Gaster. By now his tea had run out. “Mount Ebott had all the necessities for extended survival: a source of flowing water, high magic density, shelter, and a unique ecosystem. Not to mention that our forefathers once lived there. It may have become sub-par due to the changes of modernity, but back then… it was monsterkind’s best fort.”

What Sans said was true; there’s a thin line between a fort and a prison.

With neither side willing to reconcile, the only alternative was to cut each other off for good.

“The Red Sage soon converted his abandoned manor into a magic school, and they found all seven humans without issues. What followed was a quiet period that allowed the Sages to further refine their craft in an academic setting, creating ‘The Code’, ‘The Skull’ and the ‘The Gram’.”

That weird wingdings language, Sans’ Gasterblasters, and those fancy magic drawings.

“The latter is what made it possible for humans to use high levelled magic, provided they took the time to prepare. Eventually the Seers also discovered little holes in spacetime that you know as ‘shortcuts’. Very convenient.”

“On the fifth year, a ghost of the past returned. The human kingdom hired the ‘Legendary Hero’ to protect their nation from the monster threat. No one except Mezil of Berendin knew the dangers they had invited on themselves…”

“For that person was none other than his murderer.”

You remembered the circumstances that started the War of the Red Victory.

Did Sage Mezil prosecute him? Seek justice?

“…He cannot,” Gaster answered. “Antagonizing the Living Victory will lead to certain doom. Furthermore, he had to keep his cover. So, he feigned ignorance. Stayed away from the Hero, and sacrificed his chance for justice. You can imagine his students were mightily displeased. Alas, there’s just too much at stake.”

“Then, against all advice, humanity declared war toward the Dreemurr Nation. My parents and their friends all thought they had failed. However… This was the trump card they needed.”

“Once a nobleman, the Red Sage knew how his peers think: of their stubborn refusal to listen. If they did, they wouldn’t have hired the Legendary Hero in the first place.”
“With The Legend himself taking the helm of command, all subsequent battles heavily favoured the humans. The Hero only needed to revert time until the ideal outcome had become reality. That meant undoing all scenarios where monsters did indeed steal a human SOUL and turned the tides.”

“Ironically, that kept the monsters’ hands clean. Mezil of Berendin took this opportunity to tell the court that they’re wasting effort on weak, helpless creatures. Finally, they believed his words.”

“The monarchy then issued a command for the first set of human Magi to prepare themselves for The Sealing. Over the span of a week, the remaining monsters were rounded up at the foot of Mount Ebott. There the Red Sage stood next to The Hero, side by side, to end the war. With their mission complete, the Lichborn Seers were given the choice to either remain on the Surface or return to their people.”

“Three remained on the Surface. Four went to the Underground.”

“WHO STAYED? WHO LEFT?” asked Papyrus. It’s a little jarring to realise just how quiet he had been.

“Geneva and Cyril tire of human politics,” said Gaster. “They were happy to get away from this mess and return to simpler times. Packed up for the Underground without a second thought.”

“Mezil of Berendin stayed. That’s a given. He had a siege war to avert… alongside many, many other challenges. The people may not love him back, but he still cared for the country of his origin. There’s an emotional bond.”

“Corsivus stayed as well. He thought the Underground would bore him out of his mind. He had so much to learn and much more to experiment. Not to mention he loved his student as his own son. The duo continued their research together.”

“Then… my aunt, Ariella. She stayed. As much as she wanted to follow her brother to the Underground, she had adopted a human orphan. One of the Seven. Nothing’s more cruel than separating a parent from a child.”

“My father Visigoth encouraged her to keep up the good work. Show humans what’s it like to love and be loved. Maybe then they could move away from their culture of fear.”

“He followed my mother Shirai to the world below. His love for his wife was more than his love for nature. A painful decision, but he did it anyway.”

“Since that day, humanity became further divided into three groups: those who no longer feared differences, those who did not care, and those who perpetuated their own nightmares.”

You feel your brain melting from the sheer information.

Does Sans know all of this?

“Of course. It’s part of his syllabus. He knew the truth and hence attempted to resign from his post as ‘Tactician’.”

You yelled at Doctor Gaster: then why go to war in the first place?!

Gerson told you, in one of the timelines, that he agreed with Dad to stay in the Underground forever. They’re safe from human violence, by theory.

For Dad to make that conclusion, he must have known the truth.
So, why? Why go to war, W. D. Gaster?!

This man -- who knew everything -- embarked on a quest of self-destruction that undermined the sacrifices of his own family!

You didn’t realise it, but you were so frustrated that you shed some tears.

Doctor Gaster lowered his gaze. He’s a guilty prisoner right before you. “…For the same reasons why humans go to war. Isolation. Ignorance. Resentment.”

> Reasons

“When you know nothing about a different community, you start to generalize. One person is bad, all are bad.”

“Monsters. Humans. It's the same. We too are guilty of that sin.”

Roman and Helvetica crossed their arms to huddle Gaster. They’re trying to share their support, with the unintentional effect of making the great man look like he’s about to fall apart.

“Child of Mercy,” he said, “I am coloured against humanity long before the first Fallen Child.”

You understood. The stories of war were so far removed, yet so close.

Doctor Gaster squeezed his sockets shut for a moment. He’s desperately trying not to collapse into a puddle of grief.

> Personal pain.

Maybe he’d feel better if he shared his feelings with Papyrus and you.

It took a while, but eventually Doctor Gaster opened up.

“When Chara appeared, I… noticed that they’re not a sweet child like Prince Asriel. They were toxic. Troubled. And my Eyes spotted countless scars.”

Did he try to warn Mom and Dad?

“Of course, I did. Told them that child could be a spy from the Surface. But they thought that I was too traumatized to think objectively. Overanalyzing. Jumping to conclusions. They told me to give Chara a chance.”

“…I wished I didn’t. My hypothesis was wrong but the results were not much better. Because of that human child’s folly, Prince Asriel died a violent death.”

“Chara confirmed every negative perception I’ve had on humans. They’re a walking symbol of disaster. One that never changed over the millennia.”

“I-if it weren’t for humans, my parents would never need to hide Underground. Mother would be spared from suffering. Father would still live in harmony with the nature that he loved so much, and his wife’s death wouldn’t have driven him insane.”

“So much needless tragedy… If only the humans weren’t human.”

“As for the rest of us? We wouldn’t be condemned to choose between genocide or a slow, eventual suffocation. The King and Queen’s pain added to my own. I caved into the dark side, forgetting my
dear departed mother’s warning only to fall into the same pitfalls as humanity…”

“An abomination, that is what I am.”

You feel sorry for the goopy skeleton. 
You feel really, really, really sorry for the goopy skeleton.

He’s not trying to garner sympathy.

This was his story. 
His family’s story.

It told the impact of war in all its ugly shades.

You bet that if you went on the internet and searched for war survivor testimonies, you’d get similar tales. Or worse.

Definitely worse.

Papyrus got up from the ground and gave his uncle a huge hug. You joined him.

The trio of skeleton elders returned the sentiment.

You apologized to Doctor Gaster for your outburst.

He chuckled back in response. “Dear Frisk, Child of Mercy, I deserved that. If… someone as kind and mature as you had become Prince Asriel’s friend, my perception of humanity might have changed. No, it would have changed for certain.”

You let him know that you will create a better world for everyone.
You’re determined to make a difference.

“AND I WILL HELP FRISK!” Papyrus declared. “IT’S UNFAIR FOR ONE HUMAN TO DO EVERYTHING ALONE. SO I -- THE COOLEST SKELETON -- WILL ASSIST THEM. LIKE AN EMISSARY! NYEH HEH HEH!”

An emissary for an ambassador? Isn’t that a little redundant?

“NO WAY, IT MEANS WE’LL HAVE TWICE THE DIPLOMATIC POSITIVITY! I’M VERY SURE NOTHING CAN GO WRONG WITH THAT.”

In the midst of your high-fives, Gaster said: “I don’t mean to be a party pooper, but I’d expect our time-travelling ambassador and their emissary to be a little more aware of the clock.”

You took out your phone to check the time.

Oh. 
Oh crap. 
OH MASSIVE CRAPNESS!

“WHAT’S WRONG FRISK-- OH GREAT GOOGLY MOOGLY, WE’RE SO TERRIBLY LATE! WE NEED TO GET YOU BACK HOME BEFORE HER MAJESTY TURNS US INTO SHINGLES!!!”

You don’t want to get grounded, not with the entirety of Ebott Town at stake!
Gaster then gave some last-minute instructions to save your sorry hind. “Papyrus. When you exit the Underground, immediately take a left bend around the mountain. There’s a shortcut to the Queen’s current residence right there. It’s on the cliffside, near enough for you to jump with magic.”

He twirled his finger over the heater and the cutlery. “Even including all the extra weights.”

“THANK YOU VERY MUCH UNCLE GASTER! GOODNIGHT TO YOU, AND MOM, AND DAD! I’LL VISIT TOMORROW. AND YOU CAN KEEP THE PORTABLE HEATER!”

You said goodnight too. Then the both of you packed up in a hurry and whisked yourselves out of the room at record speeds.

Thanks to the tip, Papyrus managed to deliver you to Mom just five minutes before your curfew began. It involved one adventurous corner-jump off the cliff. Not that you’d tell anyone.

Phew.

You showed Mom your homework. Despite a suspicious squint, she’s letting it slide.

Must be on purpose.

Your nightly routine resumed as normal. Tucking yourself to bed, you wonder what you will do tomorrow. Other than Mom, who else should you talk to?

Doctor Gaster’s testimony worried you. So much history steeped in violence.

You wonder, has society changed enough to avoid repeating past mistakes?

Again, without Chara haunting the back of your mind, you somehow managed to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

You know... such war stories did happen to my family.

My mom's grandfather was a Qing dynasty officer. The family ruled a pretty big section of land for about... 200 years? Then the Communists came and killed him. Since then everyone fell into deep poverty. His son had to sail all the way to Malaysia and work to the bone.

My mom was pretty poor too. They didn't even have a proper bedroom to sleep in. My poor uncles had to sleep on a literal table. The table is their bed.

Then my mom's mom was a refugee. She rode a truck all the way from China to Malaysia to flee from the Civil War.

On my dad's side? My dad's grandmother died from exhaustion when the family fled from the Japanese. Back in WW2, the Japanese were the crazy fanatics. As such, her daughters were taken in by an aunt who didn't love them. There's a lot of emotional problems that didn't get resolved until she was in her 70s.

It's a bit surreal to think that such violence happened so close yet so far. I certainly wouldn't exist today without those events. But, still, I'm old enough to hear these stories
passed down from my own parents.

I admit that my family history inspired the generational stories. What happened in the past affects the present in one way or another.
Shards

Chapter Summary

Surely you guys want to know how Sans' taking the whole event.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sans had holed himself up in his home since Tuesday midnight. The last time he felt this low was…

…A long time ago. Far longer than he realised.

Then again, it’s been a long time since he felt anything more than a sense of disconnected numbness.

“Never stop punning, my son. Never.”

And yet the puns stopped flowing since the night of hell.

It’s a Friday, according to Papyrus’ promise to spend the weekend together. Time? About 12:37 noon. Windows provide a convenient sundial.

The day and time don’t make a difference for Sans.

What is there to work for?
What does it even mean to work anymore?

There’s no landline phone to this house, and he had yet to replace his mobile. No one could contact him unless they tried to visit the house proper.

Undyne and Alphys did. If it weren’t for Papyrus, the skeleton brothers’ house would have lost their front door. Or all doors for the matter.

But, the lack of boisterous entries doesn’t correlate with surrender; the determined fish would keep glaring from the windows. Even with the curtains drawn.

Grillby paid a visit on Tuesday. After a brief chat, the man of fire understood the need for privacy. Hasn’t visited since. Which was fine because Grillby tended to give a week for Sans to cool off. It’s all within expectations.

Then there’s Toriel. She kept knocking on the door.

He can’t face her anymore. Not after she witnessed the truth of this wretched pile of bones. But for reasons that escape him, he softened his stance for her sake. Entertained her presence. Exchanged more knock knock jokes.

They’d continue until Cenna Caraway dropped by and whisked her away.

No doubt it’s to deal with an ongoing legal matter.

I should be helping her.
Yet I’m just being… nah. That joke’s too old. Even by my standards.

Wonder how’s the kid doing?

For their determination, they’re a bit too quiet.
…Heh. I bet they’re trying to ‘skull-pt’ a perfect method to approach me.

Okay, that’s just forcing it.

Sans checked his room’s drawer. Beneath the collection of trombones was a bottle of brandy: the best money can buy. Spent a whole timeline gathering the cash.

I’ve always wondered what these taste like.

He removed the cap. Drank it straight from the bottle.


“Oh god,” he commented out loud, “Humans are nuts. It’s like chugging down isopropanol.”

Another gulp. This time, the fragrant aromas filled up his nasal cavities. It’s still bitter, but it wasn’t as shocking at his first shot.

“Hey, it’s better than Muffet’s cider at least. Man, if it can warm these cold bones it can warm anything.”

Mom would love a splash of these on her cake.

The thought about his dear mother made him take another swig.

He’s starting to feel tipsy. As far as he could tell, the world around him isn’t dissolving into sand yet.

So he took another.
And another.
Another.

Half a bottle later, his eyelids began to droop. Sans subconsciously screwed the cap back on. Left the unfinished brandy on the table.

Why?

He’s not quite sure either. Too often he would let the contents fall into a massive mess. Papyrus would then freak out and proceed to purge the offending stain. Those tend to be ketchup based, though sometimes it would be burgers, fries or chips.

Maybe in one of the old timelines, the spilled high-alcohol beverage caught fire.

One blink later, Sans fell asleep.

The dreams were stronger now than ever before. No, they were visions. He yet again viewed these vivid recollections of his past.

* * *
Once upon a time, Sans received both exciting and worrying news.

He’s going to have a baby brother.

“Mom, Dad,” asked young Sans. “Are you really keeping him?”

His father nodded. “Of course! Why such a dour face? Are you afraid that you’ll lose your number one spot? Don’t worry, Mom and I will always love both of you the same.”

Nothing escapes the boy’s keen observation. One glance at his mother and he knew that she’s not feeling well: her brilliant red scarf covered her mouth.

Dear mother smiled behind the fabric. “What’s wrong, angel?”

“…I know what happened when you had me,” said the boy. “The both of you almost destabilized and turned to dust.”

“Who told you that?”

“Doctor Gaster.”

She made an audible grunt of frustration. “Tch, that Gaster can be such a gloomy man at times. It’s all a big maybe, Sans. The odds favoured us back then, and they still favour us today! Look as us. We recovered just fine.”

How the son admired his mother’s positive spirit. It’s something he could observe, but couldn’t comprehend.

The family sat down at the couch with a book of skeleton-based names. The latest edition added plenty of new font names that washed down from the surface.

“Is my baby brother going to be strong?” asked Sans.

Dear father lit up in delight. “A powerhouse! But, we have no idea what he’s really capable of…”

“Interestingly, his colours are a direct inversion of yours,” said the mother.

Young Sans grinned wider. “A powerhouse, huh? Maybe look for the letter ‘P’ then?”

One of the first names on the list was ‘Papyrus’. He pointed his little bony finger there.

“What about this one?”

The mother pondered while she fiddled with the end of her scarf. “A little… rough I think? Isn't ‘papyrus’ a type of paper? I fail to see the deep meaning behind the choice.”

“Heh, heh, Mom. You’re thinking too straight. Try saying it in a different way.”

She’s confused, but dear father caught the drift.

“Oh son, you’re as brilliant as ever. Say it out as loud as you can! Don’t leave your mother hanging.”

Thus Sans drew in as much air as his little ribs allowed. On the top of his voice he exclaimed:

“All hail The Great Papyrus!!!”
The loudness made her jolt in her seat. Father and son laughed as she hushed them: “My goodness, we have neighbours!”

“All the more why Sans should shout it out loud and clear,” the father replied. “Sounds powerful, right?”

The scarf fiddling intensified between her fingers. “Well… it does have quite a grandiose ring. Reminds me of a comic book hero…”

“That’s why it’s perfect, Helvetica: a hero is an angel’s best partner! One brother to protect the celestial heavens, and the other to defend the earthly realm.”

Mother dropped her jaw. “Roman. Sans. That. Is the best idea you two ever came up with. A million times better than those silly puns.”

The vision skipped to a over a year later.

Both parents ‘fell down’. Doctor Gaster led the boy into the ward and told him to listen to the last words of the dear departing.

It was the first and last time he had seen his strict mentor so grief stricken.

The parents told their eldest son to be good.
To finish his education.
To love his brother.

And never, never blame little Papyrus for their deaths.

Never.

The parents did not regret their decision. Down to the moment where they turned to dust.

Their sons were just too powerful for them.

* * *

Papyrus struggled hard to pass his middle school exams.
Yet, he quit after The Core Incident.

When Papyrus helped pack Sans’ room, he discovered a brilliant red scarf stashed away in the study desk.

“OOOH! I DIDN’T KNOW YOU HAD A SCARF.”

Sans stared at the fabric.
For some reason, he can’t remember how he got it.

It just ‘felt’ very important…

“ARE YOU ALRIGHT, BROTHER? UNDYNE TOLD ME THAT YOU HIT YOUR SKULL REALLY HARD.”
“I’m fine. Thanks.”

“IT’S GOING TO BE COLD IN SNOWDIN, SO YOU BETTER WEAR THIS.”

Papyrus thus wrapped it around his brother’s neck.

* * *

The vision jumped again. This time it went to sometime after they had moved into Snowdin.

Sans went out treasure hunting in the Garbage Dump. Rent needs paying, his personal lab needed funding.

Though he sold everything he had, it’s still not enough.

The junkyard had a reputation for valuables. Amidst the dirty water, he thought he’d could find anything he so desired.

Survey. Scan. He’ll only stop to dig if he detected anything of worth.

He suddenly suffered a sharp sting on his left temple.

“The hell…?”

Again, the pain repeated whenever his sights passed that general direction.

Every piece of his bone warned him against that particular pile.

Yet.
Yet.
Yet.

Since when does he ever listen? The drive to unlock secrets had always been a fundamental part of his life.

Sans forced himself forward.

Climbing to the top of the pile, his mother’s scarf tattered and tore on the debris. Still, he advanced, tossing aside anything unrelated to the pain.

He then discovered a cracked half of a familiar visor… one made by his own hands.

Wires connected it to a broken machine of great complexity.

The Chronograph.

He stared at the remnants for what it seemed like eternity. The true memories of what went down on that fateful day flooded his sight.

“…Ha…ha…ha ha ha… ahaahahaha!”

Tears accompanied his hollow laughter.
“It’s useless after all,” he said, “A dream. A piece of fiction. Of course, duh. Since when can we get outta here? A wormhole cannot breach the Barrier! What shitty science fiction have you been hoping on, Sans?”

“You’re a just a piece of trash.”

The trash who killed his teacher and parents.

All to save his brother, the hero of his life.

* * *

“BROTHER? WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? I WAS LOOKING HIGH AND LOW FOR YOU!”

Papyrus seemed busy with his new snowy life. Good for him.

He declared that he would be the most prestigious, popular skeleton in the whole Underground. And the surest way to get that goal? To join the Royal Guard.

Those who sign up for that tend to skip standard education.

Sans didn’t have the heart to tell him that things don’t work that way. Let the youngster live in his fantasies before the harsh realities of life crush him.

The Royal Guard don’t actually do much, but they’re the closest things to actual heroes in the Underground.

“Somewhere,” Sans answered. “What’s rattling your bones?”

Flowey had the keys to their fate for a while now. No one ever realised that an apocalypse happened in a different timeline. Sans himself doesn’t recall it in full either, unless he had a reason to remember.

Proud as ever, the younger brother proclaimed: “AFTER PERSISTENTLY PERSUADING UNDYNE FOR AN ENTIRE WEEK, I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- MANAGED TO OBTAIN THE POSITION OF SENTRY ESPECIALLY FOR YOU!”

“NOW YOU ARE ON THE SAME BOAT AS I AM! IT’S A VERY HONOURED PROFESSION MUCH LIKE YOUR OLD SCIENCE JOB.”

No doubt that Undyne caved in out of annoyance. “Oh, hey. You’re a sentry too?”

“MORE THAN THAT! I’M CAPTAIN UNDYNE’S UNDERSTUDY. ONE DAY, I WILL BE QUALIFIED TO JOIN HER RANKS!”

“That’s so cool. Congrats.” He meant it. “Wait here Papyrus. I have something to celebrate our new bone-tastic jobs.”

“SAAAANS! CAN WE HAVE A CONVERSATION WITHOUT LAME PUNS AT LEAST ONCE???”

Dear mother used to complain the same.
“Nope,” he chuckled back.

“NYEEEEEEH!!”
“C’mon Paps, just chill for a moment.”

Sans went to his room. His mother’s scarf lay plunked on the desk, untouched since the day he found the Chronograph.

A thought passed by that he should have taken better care of it.

Perhaps, there’s someone else who will?

He took his mother’s memento to his brother. Offered it as a gift.

“My cool scarf is yours now, bro.”

Papyrus gasped as he sparkled in delight. Ah, life’s worth living with such a bundle of joy by your side.

“FOR ME?? ARE YOU SERIOUS?!”
“Yeah. Looks better on you anyway.”

“THANK YOU, SANS! YOU’RE THE BEST BROTHER!”

From that day onward, everyone knew Papyrus as the skeleton wearing a red scarf.

* * *

“SANS?”

The blue skeleton woke up from his slumber upon hearing his name.

It’s Papyrus’ voice.

If he’s home, it’s almost the beginning of winter night.

The bottle of brandy remained on the table.

Odd.

On any normal day, his younger brother would have made a ruckus about the trappings of alcoholism, then poured the offending drink straight down the sink.

He’s probably done that at least once in a timeline somewhere.

Sans groaned a bit. Could this be the fabled ‘hangover’ drinkers talk about?

“Nngh… did I rip the house apart yet?”

“NO,” Papyrus answered, “IT’S A HUNDRED PERCENT INTACT.”

The younger brother looked at the bottle. “THIS STUFF IS NOT MEANT FOR SOLO DRINKING. WE SHOULD HAVE SHARED IT AFTER YOU FINISHED YOUR DATE
WITH FRISK.”

“Nah, you won’t like it. 60% alcohol. It’s so strong, it’s gonna make your teeth cringe-”

Pause.

“Did… you just say that Frisk wanted a date with me?”

Papyrus nodded.

“…Why?” That’s the only question Sans had in mind.

“BECAUSE YOU’RE THEIR PRECIOUS FRIEND, OF COURSE! AND I’M HERE TO HELP YOU TIDY UP!”

“I could decline, you know.”

Papyrus furrowed his brows and exclaimed: “C’MON, BROTHER! THEY NEED TO HANG OUT WITH YOU AS MUCH AS YOU NEED TO HANG OUT WITH THEM. SO LET’S GET GOING BEFORE IT’S PAST THEIR CURFEW.”

If Sans must be honest, he can’t care about himself. He had gone beyond the point of no return. … But it’s about Frisk. The human who held everyone together, Papyrus included.

“Uh… okay…? I guess there’s no harm in lending a cochlea. Where are we meeting?”

He hoped that it won’t be a place with lots of people.

“THE OLD MTT RESORT IN HOTLAND. FRISK TOLD ME YOU DATED THEM THERE BEFORE.”

Sans was outright relieved. It’s deserted, except for the hours when the engineering crew travel down to maintain The Core.

That fancy hotel had become a pitstop. Ebott Town’s power supply still tapped from The Core itself. Just because they’re free doesn’t mean they’d abandon the facility.

It took a couple of months to rewire the system, but it’s better than depending solely on human society. The Surface’s electrical rates were… pretty dang expensive.

At least they had installed a proper cooling system with Alphys’ help. Ice Wolf could move on with his life now, and not be stuck chucking ice forever.

“…As long there are no surprises,” Sans smirked. “Like Undyne crashing the party.”

Papyrus puffed up his chest and declared, “WORRY NOT, MY DEAR BROTHER! YOUR IMPORTANT DATE WILL BE SMOOTH SAILING AS LONG AS I’M AROUND.”

The older one kept staring at the chest in silence. Even without Papyrus bringing out his SOUL, he could see that red butterfly mark clear as day. Truesight was part of the perks of having ‘Yellow’.

It’s been there ever since the time loops happened. Thought that it might go away once the matter resolved…

But it remained.
Papyrus went on about his plans, oblivious to the lack of attention.

*A red butterfly, huh?*

*Looks like it’s made from Determination.*

*Makes me wonder… what else can it do?*

*If it can preserve memories, then it might possibly lock down other ‘states of time’…*

*Could this be an important key?*

Sans’ ponderings ended when he caught wind of a very annoyed glare from his brother.

“SAAAAAAANS,” Papyrus exclaimed. “THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO SPACE OUT!”

“Whoops. Sorry bro. Still warming up. Just suffered some brand-new ‘branding’ by the best brand of brandy in the world, ya know.”

“THIS IS ALSO NOT THE TIME FOR TONGUE TWISTERS! COME BROTHER, WE’VE GOT TO SUIT YOU UP. LOOK SNAZZY FOR YOUR DATE!”

*Welp. I can’t analyze anything with Papyrus so fired up.*

*Guess I should go listen to what the kid has to say.*

Chapter End Notes

The visions line up with Papyrus' testimony in Chapter 15.

Fun fact: in one of my in-works original fiction, a robot drank isopropanol. I can't resist making that in-joke.

Next chapter is a lot less depressing. It's done and edited. But I'm spacing out my releases to not flood you guys.

P.S Please thank my editor for the brandy line. It's brilliant.
Look! It's a platonic Sans/Frisk date!

Somewhere in the editing process, my boyfriend said some of Sans' lines in the same manner as the Narrator of Bastion/Transistor Logan Cunningham of fame.

Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJmtn6JP7Ug

Ever since that time, I cannot unhear Logan Sans a.k.a the cool mode.

All these jokes were made on the fly. Just. I don't even know how it happened, but it happened.

That… was a dang snazzy suit. Complete with a sleek tie?

For real, Sans. For real. Looking good!

He had that all the while?

Sans rubbed the back of his skull in shyness. “Yeah. For my graduation. I thought I left it behind in my old home, but it turns out Papyrus kept it for me all these years. Surprised that it still fits.”

It’s not like skeletons put on weight anyway.

“Heh, that’s a good point.”

You told Sans a skeleton joke. Then you struck a groovy pose and wriggled your flirty brows. Just because you can.

He facepalmed in response, but at least he’s laughing.

“Jeez, did you really drag me all the way here for that?”

Yup.

“Kid, let me tell you upfront. I ain’t got those kind of feelings for you.”

You know, but you’re doing this for old time’s sake.

You pulled out your best Sans impression and told another bone joke. Then you wiggled your brows in a flirtatious way again.

The sheer ridiculousness of your actions broke through the shell of gloom. Your blue skeleton friend planted his skull on the table, trying to not explode into a pile of funny bones.

“Oh god Frisk, this is waaaaay too absurd,” he said, “When was the last time you flirted with someone, eh?”
Quite a while, you’d admit. On the Surface, it’s rather illegal for a person of your age to throw flirts around. Not to mention that it would leave an awkward impression on other people.

But you’re in the now-quiet MTT Hotland Resort. You had all the liberty to serve Sans all the flirt jokes you’ve collected.

You selected ‘Flirt’ again.

Sans smirked as much as his default grin allowed him to do so. “Hey, you’re not afraid of getting ‘arrested’ for that?”

What’s the penalty?

“An early curfew on Friday night. And no ice cream for the weekend.”

Psh, you can live without ice cream for a week! A weekend’s nothing.


“Kid, you’re beyond illegal now. What’s your plea to the judge?”

Guilty as charged for excessive influx of nonsense.

“You wanna get dunked on with a whole lot of ketchup and fries?”

And eat them too.

Then the both of you burst into laughter. It took a while to settle down.

Sans breathed out a huge, relaxed sigh. “I think you spend too much time with me, Frisk. That’s just. Wow. It’s so bad, it’s good.”

Timeline looping with a comedian quantum scientist Seer does have a unique outcome.

“Can’t deny that,” said Sans. “So. What’s on the menu?”

Papyrus calls it the ‘Reunionghetti’. It’s a recipe he concocted when you were in hospital. Since you and Sans never tried it before, he’s going to serve that for the date.

Sans started sweating a bit. “Are you sure you want that as the main course?”

It’s not the typical Papyrus-brand cooking anymore. This was vouched for brilliance by everyone in the chatroom.

You told Sans that his parents taught Papyrus how to cook. With Gaster’s help of course. Not like a pair of arms can do anything without the rest of the body.

He calmed down and remained silent for a moment. “I guess there’s no other way, huh? My parents were -- are great chefs. It ain’t five star restaurant level, but there’s a sense of homeliness that really warms you up.”

“I’ve always looked forward to their meals by the end of the day. It’s, well, proof that I’m still alive.”

You asked Sans if he’s okay with Papyrus being close to his mentor.

“As much as I dislike him, I can’t deny that he taught my brother valuable skills. I’m very sure that Paps didn’t become a hero on his own. Y’know, his Seer’s Eye and stuff.”
“I wouldn’t trust Gaster. But, I trust Mom, Dad, and Papyrus.”

You nodded in understanding.

Papyrus served two hot plates of his new ‘Reunionghetti’ dish. It’s spaghetti in a tomato-carrot based sauce: stewed with minced chicken and topped crispy fried MTT-brand sequins. You could smell the aromas of parsley and garlic from the garnish.

It came with a bowl of extra sequins, just in case you want more savoury crunch.

Sooooo mouth-watering!

“PLEASE ENJOY MY EXQUISITE CUISINE, NYEH HEH HEH!”

Sans being Sans, snuck in a pun. “‘Bone’-appetit.”

You could see Papyrus trying very hard not to get rattled.

“THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL LET YOU GO THIS TIME, SANS! TODAY IS YOUR DAY AND I WILL NOT CALL YOU OUT ON YOUR PUNNAGE. I SHALL GO AND PREPARE THE DESSERT!”

Off he went, back into the restaurant kitchen. Mettaton must have given him a copy of the keys. When? You don’t know.

You rolled up your first helping of spaghetti and popped it in your mouth.

…How can this not be five-star material, Sans? Just, How? It’s REUNIO-LI-COUS!

Sans tasted it too. Then he said: “Ookay, this is surreal. I just got my skull blown to the stars.”

“Well, I guess it does make sense. This recipe is the combination of Mom’s technique, Dad’s sense of taste, and Pap’s skillful timing. As long he remembers the steps, he’ll more or less get great results.”

Should Papyrus change careers into a top chef?

“Oh,” Sans pondered. “Nah. It may be too stressful for him to go pro, ‘tibia’ honest. Pretty nail-biting field from what I’ve heard. Some kitchens are from hell.”

You clapped. More for us!

“Heh, yeah. We’re so gonna get spoiled.” He winked at you.

The two of you chatted over assorted topics, such as the awesomeness of life without Chara nagging at you all the time. It’s a little quiet though.

Then you showed Sans a video clip of Flowey and Chara’s new life. The talking flowers now live in a hybrid of a garden and a children’s bedroom: equipped with colouring pencils, toys, books, and video games.

For their chores, they helped the gardeners take care of the greenhouse. Though, kids being kids, sometimes they’d play pranks on the unfortunate workers.

Flowey said that one of the pranks got out of hand and broke some important herb pots. Mezil was mighty displeased. Under his command, they had to clean up the mess and do whatever extra non-
gardening chore for an hour.

Sans snorted. “Heh, finally getting some trimming huh? Those kids had gone weedy for far too long.”

Pfft. You can’t disagree with that.

“Glad to see that they’re behaving. And far away from town too.”

Does Sans still have a bone to pick with them?

“…Yeah. I do.”

Does the same extend to you?

“We’re going into the deep philosophical territory now?”

You shrugged.

He fiddled the noodles with his fork. “You’re different, kid. You did cause me a ton of grief but… you changed a lot too. Got better. Grew up. Guess you can say you’ve earned it.”

“…The same can’t be said for me. Deep down, I know I’ve failed you many times. Either by doing too much or doing too little.”

That’s good enough, Sans.

“Nah.” His response was blunt and straightforward.

Your guess was right.

The hardest person to forgive was not the flowers, his mentor, or his king; it’s himself.

But you didn’t say out those thoughts. They’re needless stings.

You noted that the spaghetti’s getting cold. Better finish it up before dessert arrives.

“Right. We shouldn’t keep Papyrus waiting.”

The both of you finished the main course. Then, here’s the sweet stuff. You were half-expecting a cinnamon butterscotch pie courtesy of Mom.

Nope. It’s panna cotta with raspberry sauce. You stared at Papyrus, wondering if he really made it all from scratch.

Papyrus squinted at you. “WHY THE SURPRISE? DESSERTS ARE ALSO PART OF A CHEF’S REPERTOIRE!”

Sans was rather wide-eyed by the professional-looking result. “Whoa bro, where did Mom and Dad learn this? They’re not very versed with desserts.”

“THE SURFACE INTERNET, OF COURSE! THEY UNDERSTOOD IT ALL FROM JUST ONE INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO.”

“That’s so cool.”

The younger brother sparkled in pride. “WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU EXPECT FROM OUR
PARENTS, SANS? COOLNESS RUNS IN OUR BONES! ANYWAYS, PLEASE ENJOY THE DESSERT.”

He practically spun himself back into the kitchen. How does he even do that?

You dug into the soft custard. It’s good, but not as brilliant as the spaghetti. Asked Sans if he thought of the same.

“Haha, yeah. I agree there. It’ll take a while for the unique refinements to happen.”

Sans seemed to have a pretty keen sense of taste. What’s with the weird eating habits then? Worst burgers on the menu. Excessive ketchup consumption. All those fries.

“Hm? What’s so strange? Let me share you a secret: the patrons in the bar can’t taste much. Missed a lot of the subtle layers. Hence why those items are terrible to them. And about my ketchup habits? Just love ketchup as is. Nothing wrong with that. Though, they never come close to Dad’s concoction.”

You crossed your arms and squinted at Sans. Is he telling the truth?

“Heh. If you don’t believe it, that’s fine by me.”

What about Papyrus’ old horrible cooking?

“There’s a reason why I said they’re far from edible. I just eat them for his sake. Scarf them down as soon as possible y’know. Nice to know I don’t need to do that anymore.”

You chuckled. Glad you can say goodbye to badghetti forever.

Then, you asked Sans if he’s happy with this timeline.

“If you’re happy, I’m happy too.”

Even with all the fallout and uncovered secrets?

The sockets darkened. “Guess there’s no fooling ya. Welp. Here’s my honest opinion: it’s one of the most awkward and out-of-control timelines I’ve ever lived in. And also the most painful.”

When his eyes lit up again, he stared at the direction of the kitchen. “But, it’s also the coolest.”

Only cool? You said that he’s finally going to get the justice he deserves. All that big mess in his past will have a resolution.

“Hey kid,” he said. “I’m not a good person. If Asgore and Gaster get their fair share, sooner or later I’ll get mine. I know my own horrible deeds, really. Justice is blind as the saying goes.”

But--

Sans raised his palm to stop your words.

“…I gave up on a lot of things. One of them was vindication. As long Papyrus, Toriel, you, and everyone else gets to live happily ever after, I’m okay.”

Despite having all those scars and emotional baggage chaining him down?

“Yeah,” he answered without a single hesitation. “Frisk. This is my fate. It’s pretty bad, but not
“everyone can get lucky in life.”

That level of sacrifice. It’s making your eyes damp with tears.

“Whoa, hey. Don’t get too sappy. It’s no big deal, really.”

Calm down. For his sake, you don’t want to make him feel terrible.

You told him that you’re just touched by his stance. If he’s okay with that, would he help you keep this reality?

“My opinion ain’t important here. It’s all in your hands.”

Then, you need his help to stay alive.

“…Alright kid. What did you get yourself into this time?”

You explained to Sans about the Living Victories, and how they use the Trial of the Crimson Hall to weed out bad time-travellers. Failure to do so resulted in a huge determinator war.

Death’s the ultimate penalty. Or so you’ve heard.

You showed him your SOUL. From what Gaster taught you, Sans should be able to see the butterfly mark right away.

He needed some time to focus, but he saw it eventually.

“Papyrus had that mark too,” he noted. “But, yours is a little different. You think this Mezil guy is keeping tabs on you?”

Yup. That’s for certain.

“Do you feel anything weird about yourself? Like there’s a limitation on your powers or something?”

You wouldn’t know. There’s nothing in the current situation where you had to use your SOUL. At least not yet. You might notice something off once you take up Cenna’s magic training.

For now, you want his advice on a few things.

Like, what sort of question would Judge Mezil Thyme ask in your Trial?

Sans brought his hands together. His mental gears whirring at top speed, you bet.

“Welp. With our current situation, it’s quite simple actually: ‘Will you choose Humans or Monsters?’ Something to that effect.”

What if you choose humanity?

“A coward’s way. You’re supposed to be our ambassador. So if you bail out like that, he can’t trust you with the world.”

It’s a dead end with the emphasis on ‘dead’?

“Yeah. I don’t doubt that.”

Figures.
What if you choose monsterkind?

“He’s gonna harp on your departed parents. You’re still human, you know. And you gotta respect the people who brought you into the world. If you discard your origin… that’s doing a Chara, and you know how well that turned out.”

Okay, so you’re not going to survive that either.

“Afraid not.”

What if you don’t choose either side?

Sans’ sockets darkened to hammer the sheer ‘nope’ into your skull. Deepened his voice too.

“Kid. That’s a one-way ticket down the DEMON road. Sir Judge’s gonna hand out the execution order in an instant.”

Gulp. Totally, absolutely, certainly not going to pick that.

Which means the only answer you have… is to choose both Humans AND Monsters.

Sans nodded. He’s back to his usual self, thank goodness. “Yup. That’s just the easy part. I bet my entire savings that the real test starts after your answer.”

Why?

“’Cause the Trial of the Crimson Hall is not about ‘what’ you answer. It’s all about the ‘how’. Whether or not you have the determination to stay on the right path. Many people lose their way when the heat gets turned up.”

Yeah. Cenna did talk about case files where the Living Victories had gone twisted like that. Turned into DEMONs with a SOUL. Does Sans think any one of them are still alive?

He shook his head. “Kid, that Mezil Thyme is about as dangerous as I am. If you want my advice, it’s best that you surrender your power. At least you get to live.”

…You thought about that before. After all, you had no reason to rewind time anymore.

But…

You’re legally a minor. Your current ‘Monster Ambassador’ status was nothing more than a curious amusement. Something that the media found cute and charming, and hence played along.

In order to save the whole of monsterkind, you must remain a Living Victory.

“Frisk,” said Sans. “That look on your face… you want to take the Trial. Am I right?”

Correct.

You’ve not registered yet, as you have until Sunday before you make the call.

“Tell me about your plan.”

If you become the youngest approved Judge in history, you’d be heralded as a prodigy.

You’d stop becoming a novelty. You’ll have proper recognition. Then, you’ll resolve the war issue
with real diplomatic leverage.

Sans cringed. “No. No, no, no, please don’t resort to that. Seriously. Just grow up first, kid. Then you’ll get all the respect you need.”

That would take eight to ten years.
You don’t have that much time.

“Hey, are things going bad on Toriel’s end? Is that why you’re taking such a crazy leap?”

Mom told you that she’s trying her best. Sounds like the relations are still okay, though you don’t know the full details.

“Did you ask that Caraway lady?”

Not yet. But, you must prepare ahead of time; that’s what you’ve learned from all the times Sans helped you out.

He’s somewhat relieved. “So, you want me to help you make the final decision. With research.”

Nod. If there’s anyone you’d trust to find an alternative, it would be him.

You need as much insider information as you can get. If one day isn’t enough, you’ll tell Mezil that you need another week to consider.

As for what kind of information takes priority, it’s Sans’ decision.

“You trust me that much, huh?”

Just make sure nobody gets hurt. Emphasis on ‘nobody’. You don’t want to be disqualified before the match begins.

Sans leaned forward and raised his bony brows in a cheeky way. “Have you been studying behind my back?”

Lots.
Lots and lots of studying.

Chapter End Notes

That’s all for my backlog.

Yeah. It’s back to the semi-irregular schedule of ‘I’ll post when I’m done’ :P
Chapter Notes

Say, we've never seen Cenna's side of things have we?

I've been pretty sick this week. First the haze, then the mystery joint pains. Furthermore there are quite a bit of worldbuilding here. Descriptions always eat up a chunk of page counts.

Here you go, through the eyes of our lady Magus.

Also remember the sedatives? They have a source.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alias: Cenna Caraway
Class: Vanquisher.

Those who take up the title of Vanquisher mask their true names as a defensive measure. Some opt for a full alias, while others hide their surnames.

Many of those who chose this path carry the legacy of their forefathers. Obscuring their lineage is thus required to made it difficult for their targets to identify their style and modus operandi.

Some, like Cenna, work straight in the field.
Others, like Anise, lean more on extensive preparation.

So far, Cenna’s usual police investigation methods weren’t yielding results. Too many knew too little.

She had a proverbial jigsaw puzzle with a ton of missing pieces, demanding the help of someone more logic oriented. Instinct can only go so far.

Cenna plugged her earphones into one of the many tablet devices that she had brought along for the mission.

She sought up the communications tab and flipped through the list of names.

The first call: to her colleague. Voice channel, one-way video cam.

A Magi’s lab must be kept discreet.

“Yo Anise,” said Cenna. “You free?”

“Yeah. Just finished the last batch for the day. Please don’t tell me you need another of my special sleeping potions. A child-safe, tasteless version costs a bomb!”

“Nah. Nothing like that. I wanna thank ya for all the stuff you’ve done, with good ol’ cash.”

“Judge Thyme covered the cost waaaaay before you. Plus I won’t take your money. You’re broke enough to mooch off school cafeterias. A monster school nonetheless.”
Cenna yelped, “What the hell?! How did you know???”

Anise laughed at the other end. “Dude. I’ve known you since our freshie days! You think I don’t know your cost-saving tactics? I’m glad they’ve fed you well.”

There was a spike of excitement in the next question. “So, is it true that almost every edible stuff there is made out of magic?”

“Oh yeah. Totally. They got some physical goods, but I think ninety percent are clones. Still tasty and nutritious! Hey, lookit this.”

Cenna showed a cinnamon bunny at the camera. “Believe it or not, this is a hundred percent magic.”

There was a huge squeal on the other end. “Kyaaaaa~~~! It’s so cute!”

“They call this a ‘cinnamon bunny’. As you can see, it’s a bunnified cinnamon roll. Tastes just like the real thing. I got six of these as gifts from the innkeeper lady. Three for you, three for Lucy.”

“I can’t wait to analyze them at the Research Department!”

Cenna thought it’s about time to get to business. “Hey Anise, mind hooking me up to Lucy? I need her help.”

“…Dude. Really? Can’t you just call bossman for that? You want me to walk aaaaall the way to the main spire and look for her in the Records Room? It’s bloody far from here.”

“I don’t want Mez to know this. Please, Anise. I really, really, reeeeeally need to talk to her.”

“Well, there’s one way... Give me five minutes.”

She raised a brow. “So fast?”

“Yeeeah. I’ve had this ‘secret weapon’ in my desk for a while now, just waiting for the opportunity to trade. This is sure to grab her attention, hehehe, I’m sure she’ll have a tough time explaining to ‘Mezzy’ why she owes me 50 bucks for a digital item.”

Amateur, Cenna thought. She waved the cinnamon bunny at the camera and threatened: “If you insist on taking advantage of our dear lady, I will eat your share. Right in front of you!”

Anise gasped. A bunch of mutterings went on the other end, trying to decide between childish greed and responsible research.

“How about a deal?” said Anise. “I’ll get off my butt and walk to Lady Lucidia. In return you will buy me Ebott’s specialities. I’ll even pay you. Just. Transport them in pristine condition.”

Proud of her success, the Vanquisher leaned against her chair with a smug grin. “Should have done this from the beginning, eh?”

“Meh. Expect her in twenty minutes.”

The call ended there. Cenna burst out laughing.

“Hah. Anise failed online market speculations again. I’m sure. That’s the only reason she’s trying to pawn off an in-game item for stupid prices.”

If it had any real value, Lucidia would have used her huge in-game wealth to buy that item for
herself. Not that Anise would know. There were only two other people who had seen her total assets, and one of them was Cenna.

The lady took one of the tablet devices to her messy bed. It looks terrible, but it’s comfortable. She then dropped on the sheets and stared at the ceiling.

Once upon a time, this woman graduated top in her class. People spoke well of her athletics and praised her gift of magic. Thought she had a bright future ahead, all the way to retirement age.

Then one day… her arm went out of control. A chorea. Her promise extinguished like a blown-out candle.

She took the news about as well as anyone in their early twenties: which involved a ton of drama, drinking, and reckless driving.

If it weren’t for Mezil and his wife, who knew if she survived the first year?

“I wonder what’s the Spirit Realm like,” she muttered, “If it even exist.”

*If only I could rewind time and raise Frisky like that Cinnamon Roll’s brother.*

*Nah. An impossible dream at its most impossible there.*

*Maybe I should try something more realistic. Like, spend more time with the Ebott folk.*

*Yeah. That’s doable. Use all my leaves, and take more unpaid ones. My final vacation.*

That positive thought didn’t last long. A tear rolled down the sides of her eyes.

*I wish I had more time.*

Buzzing interrupted her thoughts.

When Cenna picked it up, she noticed that twenty-two minutes had passed. Complete with two missed-calls.

They came from no other than ‘Lucidia B’.

“Damn, I fell asleep? I’m really turning into a tall girly Sans at this rate.”

She answered it.

A gentle young woman’s voice opened the floodgates of concerned questions: “*Judge Caraway? Are you alright? You didn’t answer.*”

“Eh. Dozed off.” Casual level, maximum.

“*Have you been getting enough rest? Are you still bothered by that constant snoring orchestra? Did you change rooms yet?*”

Cenna always found it amusing how Lucidia could sound so polite, demure, and yet completely frantic at the same time.

“Yes, yeah, Lucy. I’m sleeping enough hours. Changed rooms. Not hearing the orchestra anymore, don’t worry.”
Well, she could still hear them a tiny bit at the quietest moment of the night. But Lucidia didn’t need to know that. Otherwise, her friend would fuss over her more than Miss Toriel.

“Anyways. Think ya could be honest about my fate?”

“For certain, Judge Caraway.” said Lucidia, “When is your requested time period?”

“Frisky’s exorcism. I wanna know how I ended up with five hours worth of loops. That’s a damn lot of timey-wimey shenanigans. As usual Mez ain’t tellin’ me a blip.”

“Well…”

Lucidia told her the full story of what happened in the original timeline:

Of how Cenna attempted to vanquish the DEMON named Chara;
Of her failure to double-check with her remaining Truesight Potion;
Of her death through a stab wound that cut into her heart’s arteries; Of her funeral at the institute.

Cenna had become a DEMON herself. The Vanquishers chained down the essence of their former colleague and attempted to perform the rites of peace. No one knew if it turned out successful since Mezil had found Papyrus by then.

The loops continued with more deaths until the Seer requested for an earlier SAVE.

“Shiiiiiiiiiti!” Cenna exclaimed. “I didn’t check for lingering essence, like fucking seriously?! God, that’s such a beginner’s mistake! I would have failed any applicant who failed to follow through.”


“T-to be fair, your family’s ‘Vanquishing Arts’ concentrates on total elimination. The implanting of internal explosives should disperse a DEMON’s essence enough to prevent reconstruction.”

“Judge Thyme confirmed that the source of Chara’s survival was due to the presence of Ebott Goldenflower seeds. Cheaters of Death. It had nothing to do with your magic.”

“No, no, no, Lucy. I know I’m dying, but don’t defend me out of pity.”

“There’s a damn good reason why I brought TWO Truesight Potions. One for before the exorcism and one for after. Minimum. Standard procedure. A VERY important standard procedure that I fucked up so hard it ain’t even funny.”

Cenna then screamed into her pillow out of sheer shame.

Slightly annoyed, Lucidia said: “I’m still on the line, miss. Please save your dramatic responses after we finish our business.”

“Fuck. Sorry.” She tossed the pillow aside. “So Mez made Papyrus his proxy and… things happened. Did he tell you anything about what went down in his Hub?”

“No. Not yet, at least. He’s been busy with the DEMON flowers. Or rather, trying to keep them in line.”

Chara and Flowey. They’re naughty brats in their own right.
“Right,” Cenna sighed. “Okay. I need your smarts for the follow up of the Chara case. This is major with a big M, so I can’t say it out loud. Sending ya my report right now.”

The report contained testimonies collected from Toriel. Encrypted for extra security.

After the other end processed the data, Lucidia faltered.

“Oh no. This. This is terrible news. Are you serious, Judge Caraway?”

“Serious,” she replied. “Think you could use this information?”

“I can give it a test run, but I don’t think it’ll yield any results. This timeline is too new for me. But… I don’t need the Orange Aspect to know that we might be heading straight toward a dead end.”

“Hah. Speaking from experience?”

“Speaking from experience. Oh dear… what’s Judge Thyme going to do?”

Cenna shrugged. “Same thing as always. Trial and error, change the circumstance, gambit his the way to the sky, yadda yadda.”

“Provided he could keep doing so. Frisk’s presence had interfered with his ability to manipulate time for a long while. Furthermore…” Lucidia hesitated for a moment. “There’s no guarantee for his safety. All it takes is just one bad turn to be killed for good.”

“Hmm,” the Vanquisher pondered. “If we can’t see the future… what about the past? Think ya can reconstruct that without depending on either Mez or the Cinnamon Roll?”

“Please give me a moment to check.” After some typing and clicking, she replied, “Insufficient data. I’m afraid I must enquire more information from Judge Thyme before I can provide anything useful. Apologies.”

“Figures that Miss Toriel ain’t telling the full story. Sheesh, this is a giant headache.”

She’s trying to get penance for her ex-husband after all. In other words, she would do her best to lessen the severity of his actions.

Asgore may be a gentle giant, but his lack of supervision caused a whole ton of mess. Negligence could be one of the many possible charges. Perhaps the best result.

Doctor Gaster? He’s supposed to be the first person to advise against any form of war. Yet he did the opposite. In human society, he would have become the ultimate scapegoat for the royalty. Shove all the heavy sentencing on him.

Except, Toriel pleaded for that goopy scientist too. She’s a mother all the way through.

If Cenna had a choice, she wouldn’t want Gaster to be tossed into maximum security prison for life. No amount of punishment would bring back her dear adoptive parents.

He repented and devoted himself to the right path. That’s all it mattered to her: much better than the hardcores who learned nothing from their incarceration.

But… would the other victims of the tragedy be as kind as her?

“Um,” Lucidia said, “Excuse me, I just received a message. Please wait a moment.”
One second later…

“Judge Thyme wants you to meet him at 9.00 PM. He said it is of critical importance.”

Later that evening, Cenna boarded a taxi.

Mez’s back in the timey-wimey game, right? I should check my watch.

The mirrored side of her pocket watch told the same time as the normal front. No desynchronization. 

Cenna sighed. The most annoying part of her job was trying to figure out that old man’s plans.

An hour later, she arrived at the Magus Association’s Headquarters: otherwise dubbed as ‘The Institute’ by many.

Here was the original birthplace of modern magic. It started with a manor, then it upgraded in size and height to accommodate that era’s facilities.

Now it encompassed offices, universities, campuses, laboratories, greenhouses, a lake park, and assorted other maintenance structures.

After paying the fee, Cenna stood on the main path. She looked up into the sky while holding her hat. The Spire towered against the orange sunset clouds, shadowed by the twilight.

Improvements in architectural skyscraping technology made it possible to construct a space-efficient central facility. At its core it was no different than any other building, but its decorations made it look like a fantastical spirally wizard’s spire.

The old Berendin Manor was shifted to the flat rooftops, far above its original ground level. It’s now the primary residence of the Magi’s Supreme Judge. In this case, Mezil Thyme.

And that’s where she had to meet him.

“Damn,” she muttered to herself. “It’s hard to believe that The Spire’s only eighty years old. The first-tier school is like ten times the age or something.”

Cenna walked onto the grounds proper. Cherry blossom trees lined the entrance walkway. Though, they’re now bare in their winter slumber.

At least I will get to see them bloom one more time before I go.

People en-route recognized her: said their hellos and goodbyes. For most, it’s past office hours and hence it’s time to go home for the weekend.

The same can’t be said for those either on-call or shift workers. She’s in the former category.

The lobby itself was nothing like the whimsical imaginations of the ignorant public. They functioned just like any other organization: which means they had a clean, spacious, and professional greeting space.

No fancy mancy floating objects for cool-points. They tried that once in aeons past, but visitors kept plucking the deco out of levitation range.

Cenna found Anise pouting away at a sofa, waiting for her delivery of cinnamon bunnies. Three of those buns were placed into the colleague’s hands. Just as promised.
Then it’s off to the cafeteria. There’s no way she wants to meet Mezil on an empty stomach.

Beef salad, water, and a nice helping of pilaf: that should be sustainable until midnight.

While she had her meal, another message chimed in her pocket. It’s from Mezil Thyme.

_Huh, the greenhouse? That’s where the flower kids live. A chat with them would be nice._

All agricultural-related works were at the south side of the complex. That’s where they get the most sunlight. It’s not far from her current location.

The greenhouses were separated into two main categories: ‘Tropical’ and ‘Temperate’. Plants are not universal: some require cooler temperatures than others. This is where the Magi grow their flora for both alchemical and laboratory studies.

No one said they can’t import their reagents, but there will always be a need for live study.

Cenna entered the Temperate zone. There, she found two sentient Ebott Goldenflowers playing a console game at the greenhouse benches. They had finished their chores for the day and were thus rewarded with playtime.

They had managed to turn their vines into ‘hands’, allowing them use of the control buttons.

Flowey asked, “Hey Chara, what else do you need for your collection?”

Chara replied, “Truffles and the legendary Poripom Fruit.”

Upon hearing the name ‘Poripom Fruit’, Cenna realised that Lucidia had introduced her favourite game to the two flowers.

It’s good: that title had no violence involved. Perfect for rehabilitation.

“I got truffles!” Flowey exclaimed. “I found a forest with lots of them. Doooooo you have Honey Melons?”

Chara smirked. “Heh, you’re asking someone who grows that stuff.”

The other flower huffed. “You’re just lucky that you looted the seeds from that cave. It’s a rare spawn you know.”

“Yes. That’s why I’m gonna farm lots of them for profit. Then I could buy not one but two Poripom Fruits from the market. Come, let’s trade.”

*Looks like they’re recovering. It’s just like what the Cinnamon Roll wanted.*

“Yo!” Cenna called out and tipped her cool hat. “How’s life treating ya?”

Flowey brightened up and waved a leaf to greet back. “Howdy! Life’s great. Well, other than our tiny little oopsie. Otherwise it’s great, really!”

“Nice to hear that, flower boy.” She patted him on the head.

On the other hand, Chara tried to avoid direct eye contact. They kept their focus on their game. Not that anyone could blame them: trying to talk to an ex-enemy takes some getting used to.

Cenna sat down next to Chara on purpose. “No need to be so sour around me, yeah? We’re totally
fine now.”

Flowey nudged his friend with a leaf, trying to encourage them to respond.

“Okay, okay, okay, stop poking me.” Chara glanced at the human lady and said, “It’s good. I get to do my own stuff and not depend on Frisk. And life in wizardland is pretty chill too. Better than my original home that’s for sure.”

With a smile, Cenna commented: “You sound really different when you’re not off the rockers. I like that.”

“Heh. You’re not half bad either,” they said. “Also, you guys are nothing like what my bio parents told me: from the facility, to the behaviour, to the magic itself.”

“This place is a lot more mundane than I imagined too. I mean, if you told me this is a normal greenhouse I would have believed it.”

Cenna snorted in response. “Oh boy, I get what ya mean. It ain’t anything like TV. You see… all the fancy stuff eats into our budget. If they serve no practical purpose, we try to not use those.”

“Smart.” The rosy-cheeked flower curled their lips into a grin. “Hey Asriel, tell her about Mettaton’s dumb fountain. Sometimes that guy owns no logic whatsoever.”

Flowey burst out laughing. “Oh yeah, that one. Parading a statue of his box-mode on the fountain is fine and all, but that thing spouts water OUTSIDE of the pool! So the floor is forever drenched.”

“Ya serious?!” Cenna exclaimed.

“Seeerious! I’m amazed that he didn’t make similarly dumb decisions with his new MTT empire. I think getting on the Surface might have fed him some common sense.”

Chara added, “Then again, maybe there’s someone behind the scenes managing his stuff. Napstablook, maybe?”

Flowey furrowed his brows and thought hard. “Kinda… difficult to imagine. Especially when they vanish on the slightest hint of embarrassment.”

In between their gaming, the two flowers continued to share bits and pieces of the Ebott folk.

The people had completely misconstrued a ton of human culture with hilarious results. After all, their only reference were washed down trash. Add imagination to the mix and one would end up with the weirdest weirdness.

Better than picking up the wrong habits. Entertainment content had age limits for a reason, and sometimes things can get unwholesome even for adults.

The greenhouse echoed with laughter over Undyne’s anime antics. Cenna almost couldn’t believe it. The Undyne she knew was a good policewoman, albeit rather hotheaded. Pinning down the kidnappers without inflicting major injuries takes skill.

Not… someone so eager for excitement that she would set up a creepy atmosphere in advance with Echo Flowers. Or believe that humans had mind control.

“Life must be really boring down there,” Cenna commented.

The flower children glanced at each other.
“Golly, you have no idea,” said Flowey. “Making your own amusement only goes so far. It’s part of the reason why Mettaton shot straight up to stardom.”

Chara nodded with their leaves crossed, knowing the feeling all too well. “Imagine a millenia of not-much-new. Then add a few hundred time loops. Great reason to go crazy there.”

They frowned at the thought. “The Underground adventure… for a long time that’s our best life. Frisk and mine, together. It’s exciting and free of the usual kiddy limitations of our lives, you know.”

“You Magi didn’t make things any better. I’ll be frank about that. What the hell were you guys thinking anyway? Can’t you just explain stuff to the kid like a normal person?”

Cenna raised a brow. “With YOU around, kiddo? No offence, Chara. But you were seriously mad high. Like you’re drugged twenty-four-seven.”

With a huff, Chara replied. “Well, I think there’s a saying down in the Underground that goes, ‘Determination is one hell of a drug’. Or something.”

“There’s a reason for that.” The noir detective leaned back on the bench and crossed her leg over. “Frisky and Mez had something in common. Have ya noticed it?”

The flowers pondered. Whispered among themselves to try and solve this riddle together.

“They’re stone-faced?” said Flowey. “Like, you can never really tell what’s going on in their mind.”

“I think we call that a ‘stoic’,” Chara added.

Cenna confirmed, “Yup! Bingo right there! You need a strong anchor to not get swept away by their insane amounts of Determination. Ain’t saying that they can’t break, but stoic folk have a certain inner stability.”

“The Judge before Mez? He’s full of might and heart. He ain’t a cold stone-face. The opposite, really. But, he had great inner strength. I bet he went through a few bad ends and apocalyptic scenarios. Never gave up making the best future for everyone though.”

“Oooooh,” Flowey widened his eyes in awe. “So, Chara didn’t have the right personality, and that’s why they went cray-cray with Frisk’s level of Determination?”

Someone got offended. “What the hell, you went nuts too… God of Hyperdeeeeeeaaaath!”

“Shut up!” the boy yelled back.

The next few moments involved two children teasing each other about their shortcomings. Typical childish scenario.

Just a little earlier before nine at night, a man entered the greenhouse. The taps of an ebony cane caught everyone’s attention.

It’s Mezil Thyme. He had a slightly different sense of fashion today. He still had his cravat and butterfly brooch, but he swapped out to a business coat.

“What a ruckus,” he commented.

Cenna wasted no time to badger him. “Yoooo, what’s with the modern getup?”

“Guest lecturer,” he replied. “The Grandmaster wanted to stir this year’s final batch. They had grown
complacent in their seniority.”

“Bet everyone pooped their pants when they saw ya.”

Mezil replied, “Quite. Well, since we’re all here, we should start the game.”

“Game?” Cenna asked.

*Is that a codeword?*

He reached for his pocket and showed a box of playing cards. Still sealed in plastic.

The woman felt her eye twitch from anger.

*If you called me all the way here to play a stupid card game, I’m so gonna kick your fucking ass.*

“I know what you’re thinking, Cenna,” said Mezil. Calm as ever. “Rest assured, your time won’t be wasted. You’ve known me for over a decade after all.”

“I always have a reason.”

Chapter End Notes

The quote 'Determination is one hell of a drug' is a nod to Geno!Sans from AfterTale.
This took a while to write. This was once two separate scenes that got merged in the editing phase.

After the date, the skeleton brothers invited Frisk to hang out in their home. Toriel trusted Sans and it was a Friday.

The elder one made a note to himself: Papyrus cannot hold his alcohol.

Three shots of brandy later, the younger brother climbed on the table and sang a drunk man’s opera.

It went about as well as one would expect: lots and LOTS of out of tune ‘singing’.

“O SOLE MIO~~~”
“NFRONTE A TE~~~”
“O SOLE, O SOLE MIO, STA NFRONTE A TE~~~”

At least he got the lyrics right.

Frisk and Sans tried their very best to not roll on the floor in a roar of laughter. They didn’t want to interrupt the show. Smashed Papyrus may be, he'd still notice.

“Frisk,” Sans asked, “You think Papyrus can sing?”

“Maybe.” Frisk answered.

The kid then sipped on their hot cocoa. It had a teaspoon of brandy added for flavour. Nothing more.

“Should we stop him?”

Sans snorted. “Naaaah. This is fun.”

“Agreed,” they chuckled. “Not gonna record it?”

“Can’t do that, kid. Lost my phone in the ocean. It’s a long story.”

Frisk then gave Sans theirs. Wiggled their eyebrows as a hint.

“You’re a lifesaver.”

The two started recording Papyrus’ solo debut.

Frisk whispered next to the blue skeleton’s skull: “Do you think we should show this to him later?”

“Absolutely,” Sans replied. He tried his best to keep his voice low so the in-built microphone won’t pick up their discussion. “I’ll send this video straight to him.”

Papyrus then skipped an entire portion of the song, changing the lyrics.
Wait.
That strange feeling.

*It’s a déjàvu. I’m sure of it.*
*He just kept singing without realising a time-loop happened.*

Sans ended the recording and sent it to Papyrus’ account. He looked forward to a loud scream of embarrassment to commemorate the beginning of Saturday.

*Now to figure out this random reset.*

He took note of the timestamp.

Handing the phone back to Frisk, he asked: “Kid, noticed anything different?”

Frisk shook their head.

*That’s a nope.*

*High chance that the butterfly capped Frisk’s DT, forcing them to remain at a normal human’s level. It’s different from Papyrus’.*

*I can’t let them know yet. Otherwise I won’t have a control sample in my observations.*

He poured the last of the brandy. Filled his shot-glass to the brim before he gulped it down.

“How’s it’s just the booze getting to my skull.”

A lie: but a necessary one for now.

Sans continued his watch for clues. He may not have permanence of memories like full-powered Frisk, but he had the ability to observe the nearest timeline. His Eye worked best in moments of quick succession.

*The last time this happened... was that night of hell.*
*Yeah. Back then. After Tori went to bed.*

*...I was powerless to act. Same as during Chara’s genocide. Always helpless. Always useless.*

*Never again. I’m gonna get this shit sorted before I lose my options.*

How he perceived the world had always been different at a fundamental level. To a normal person, a chair was nothing more than a chair.

To Sans, the chair was an object of detail: material, dimensions, structure, parts, center of gravity, down to the estimated age since its production.

If anyone shifted that chair even by a millimeter, he’d be the first to notice it.

Whenever time starts spinning in circles, every action causes objects to add hidden values to their ‘déjàvu counter’. With his traits, he could accurately perceive that obscurity.

*Papyrus skipped forward twenty times. Repeated the song too. It’s hard to hear the differences with all the slurring off-note tunes, but he did.*

*Frisk checked their latest message seven times. But they replied thirteen.*
That mug of hot chocolate reached its halfway point nine times.

Hmm… the number of dejavus aren’t even. Seems like the Magus can choose to rewind time in smaller increments. Very close checkpoints. SAVE at any time, anywhere. Nothing like Frisk’s location-specific requirements. Pretty scary thought.

Moments passed. The number of resets spiked at one point, everything began anew, then the sequence stopped.

* * *

Five of Spades.
LOAD.
Six of Clubs.
LOAD.

Seven of Diamonds. Matching pair found.
Proceed as normal.

Three of Hearts. Matching pair found.
Proceed as normal.

Three of Spades.
LOAD.
King of Diamonds.
LOAD.
Queen of Clubs.

Insufficient number of cards to win the game.

RESET from the beginning.

“Hey, Chara.” Flowey asked: “You seeing what I’m seeing?”

“Yeah. He’s toying with us.”

“NOBODY toys with us!”

Friendliness Pellets.
LOAD.
Vine Whips.
LOAD.
LOAD.

LOAD.
Cards scattered in the air.

Flowey twisted his face into a sharp-toothed monstrosity of his former self. Chara’s eyes glowed red with the taste for blood.

Cenna? She just sat back on her chair and watched the show with a straight face.

The flowers yelled in alternating successions:

“STOP!”
“CHEATING!”
“THE GAME!”

And in unison they cried out, “YOU IDIOT!!”

No response from Judge Mezil Thyme.

The flowers put every effort into their rain of magic and vines, but the man moved nary an inch.

Instead, he bent time to his will with nothing more than a snap of his finger.

It’s futile. No matter how swift or crafty the flowers tried to be, they’re always reset back to the beginning.

“STOOOOOOOOOOOOOOP!!!!” Flowey screamed. He’s so frustrated, he’s almost to the point of tears.

Mezil once again paid no heed to the plea. This time he gave no visual indication of his actions. Never needed to in the first place.

All those fancy motions served as messages for the other party, not himself.

Chara attempted to strategize. “Okay Flowey, in the next loop we’re gonna flip the table at his face. Then, I will grab him by the legs and throw him at the wall. While he’s stunned, you fire every pellet you have. Agreed? Deal?”

“Deal!”

“I heard everything,” said Mezil. “It’s useless anyway. I won’t give you a chance to execute your attack.”

They’re pushed further back. The cards they once scattered all over the place returned into a sealed, unopened box.

“Not under my will.”

The flowers tried to flip the table with their vines, but Cenna’s hearty laughter interrupted them.

“What’s wrong with YOU?” Flowey snapped.
“Oh boy,” she said, “I know what’s happening. Mez messed ya up with his timey-wimey powers, am I right?”

His face changed out of astonishment. “H-how’d you know? Can you remember?”

“No way,” Cenna replied. “But your reactions told me everything. Hell, I know how ya feel. ‘Cause Mez done the same trick on me at least once.”

“Wanna know how I first found out about this man’s powers? He used his magic on me and I got stuck in a losing game. Just like the both of you.”

One second.
Two seconds.

Then Chara slapped their own face with a leaf. “Of COURSE! Duh. We’re the fucking idiots here. He’s testing us and we fell right for it.”

Flowey squinted his eyes, brimming with sheer annoyance. “Why? Just, WHY? That’s the most aggravating method EVER!”

“Apologies,” Mezil replied. “I needed to examine the extent of your memories. Some recall better than others. In your case, the permanence shows not a single disconnect.”

“Plain English, please,” the flowers grumbled.

“You two remember everything in real time. As proven by your overtly murderous responses. Yes, the game is unwinnable from the start. However…”

Mezil sent a message through his phone. “Victory was never the goal. Check your in-game mail. You know which one.”

The two flowers switched on their consoles. Lo and behold, they squealed from delight.

“Oh em geeeeeee! Chara, it’s the legendary Poripom Fruit!”

“I got one too! You know what this means, Asriel? We can save the cash for next month! Finish the collection early and explore waaay more places.”

Mezil’s lips curled in amusement. How quick their moods change over a much-desired gift. “Be sure to thank the lady for her kindness. She thought it would be too cruel for your ordeal to go unrewarded.”

Both Flowey and Chara stuck their tongue out at the grey-haired man. Synchronized as well.

“Your wife is a ton nicer than you,” said Chara.

“Yeah,” Flowey concurred. “Meanie.”

In response, Mezil said: “Further neglect of your etiquette and I will add one hour to your chores. I’m certain you still wish to prove that you’re capable of managing yourself.”

The flowers’ stems stiffened on the subtle threat. The little fun they had from jabbing at this man wasn't worth the penalty.

So, they put on their good-kid faces and danced in their pot.
“Sorry for the rudeness Mister Mezil,” said Flowey, “We went a little over the top. Live and let live, right? There’s no need to get violent.”

“Yup, yup,” Chara joined in. “The ways of my village are a thing of the past. I’m turning over a new leaf.”

The mention of their old community made the ex-human flower pause for a moment. Then, they asked: “Say, what happened to them anyway? I heard that they set the entire forest on fire, but I’m sure not everyone burned to a crisp.”

“Dispersed,” said Mezil. “Some broke away from tradition, others resettled as clans elsewhere. Loyallists continue to be a thorn in the side for Magi worldwide.”

“Expected. Meh, I don’t care about their stupid ways anymore. As long they stay away from me and Asriel.”

Though soulless, their bond of friendship knows no bounds. It’s both a touching and disturbing thought.

If they’re good, there’s nothing to worry about. But if any of them slip back to their twisted and thoughtless ways… The Living Victory wondered if he could still keep his promise to Papyrus.

“So… the ‘game’ is all wrapped up right?” asked Cenna, “If there’s nothing else, I’m gonna go to Lucy’s. She’ll love the cinnamon bunnies.”

“Do so.” Mezil pocketed his unopened deck of cards. “It’s been a while since she's had a magic treat. Goodnight to all of you.”

Everyone went their separate ways. Cenna checked her watch one last time before she headed towards the Spire. As for the flower children themselves, they retreated back to their screens for another quest of digital adventure.

Outside, Mezil stood under the dull skylight of urban night. For much of his life, the windows to the galaxies were clouded in a singular shade. One could say that he was living under a dome. An ‘underground’ compared to the vastness of the yonder.

He never minded it. The planets, stars, and nebulas of the celestial never struck his interest. His priorities live attached to this humble earth.

Glowing red butterflies of time fluttered around the cold, silent air. It’s a sight that only he could see.

To this man, the butterflies represent his very life.

Once upon a time he was a caterpillar: a wandering all-consuming creature, identified by the common demographic of disconnected youth. He moved through life in a haze of independence and drab mindless standards.

A season of change triggered the chrysalis phase. The wormy muncher broke down to be rebuilt into an entirely different being.

The butterfly emerged: a symbol of beauty and rebirth. It spends the rest of its life stirring the growth of new seeds, a far cry from its former self.

In the realm of time travel, it represented a theory: that something as insignificant as the flap of a butterfly’s wings could snowball into a disastrous hurricane. Chaos theory at its most chaotic.
Though he eschewed this ludicrousness, it does remind him of a single point: he’s a Living Victory.

The gamechanger.
The gambit master.

Every action counts.

If change was within his grasp, he’s determined to make the best out of it.

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and lifted his head towards the sky.

“Three.”
“Two.”
“One.”

“SAVED.”

“Save, LOADED.”

When he opened them again, he had the eyes of a different man.

Starting from this point, Mezil Thyme will attempt to change fate. He must do so for the safety of those he holds dear. They’re few, but those few are all the reason he will ever need.

He hurried his way to his skytop home before the flowers badgered him. There’s much to discuss and more to plan.

* * *

It had happened once more. This reset felt distant compared to the rest, as though it was an echo from beyond.

Weird. Such a huge gap.  
*I have a feeling that I should check Papyrus.*

He set his focus on the younger one and attempted to analyze his brother’s state of existence.

Then the world blacked out.

A sharp, intense pain shot through the left side of his skull. Distorted strips of cyan, yellow, and purple frizzled across the blank darkness.

He heard the crashing of wood and glass.

“Sans!”
“BROTHER, WHAT’S WRONG???”

When his sight returned, Sans found himself leaning against Frisk.

*The kid caught me?*

His immediate reaction was to scan the surroundings.
The table had flipped on its side.
An empty bottle of brandy lay broken on the floor.
The glass he held in hand, had rolled off the couch and shattered right next to his feet.

At least Frisk still held their mug of hot chocolate. It would be bad if that spilled on their lap.

*There’s something missing.*

The kid asked if he’s okay. When he focused on them, he noticed something very, very, wrong.

*I can’t see their details.*
*Level of Violence. Execution Points.*

**Nothing.**

Papyrus? Same result. He could see his brother at a surface level and *only* at a surface level. As if he’s an image on a screen.

*No, no, no, no, no, no!*  
*What the hell happened to me?!*

Sans pushed himself off the couch and attempted to teleport.

The painful distorted tri-colour shearing happened again. This time, he forced himself to remain conscious.

Sway. Stagger. His shoulder bumped against the wall while he tried to rush to the closest room with a mirror.

The human-approved bathroom.

Sans slammed the door behind him.  
Locked it.

He headed straight towards the sink. Stared back at his own reflection.

*Shit. I can’t read anything about myself either.*  
*What the hell happened?*  
*Okay. There’s only one way to find out. It’s going to hurt but I have to do it.*

He took a deep breath and burned his Seer’s Eye with Determination.

Darken. Rip. Tear.  
His trademark colours blotted out his visibility. Jabbing a knife through his skull might be less painful that this.

But he buckled down.

*More.*  
*More.*  
*More!*

*Don’t stop until you hit max capacity!*

At the very last second, he saw a white shine plastered over his left Eye.
It’s a thirteen-point Arcanagram.  
The exact same pattern he used on Papyrus when he was a mere baby bone.

\textit{That’s a Seer’s Seal.  
I’m so fucked.}

Overcome by pain and clogged magic, Sans emptied his gut down the sink. The contents were red with prismatic bits.

\textit{Oh god, I just puked my internal ketchup supply. Bet some Determination is mixed inside too.  
Maybe. Not surprised if that’s the case.}

Papyrus screamed at the top of his ribs. “SANS?! DID YOU JUST THROW UP??? I WENT THROUGH THAT ONCE AND IT WAS THE WORST OF BAD TIMES!”

\textit{Shit shit shit! Papyrus heard that c’mon think up of a good excuse--}

Round number two. He turned on the tap to wash the truth away. If anyone saw he’s ejecting raw magic and not just the contents of his incorporeal stomach, they’ll realise that he had a worse problem than unintentional food poisoning.

Frisk knocked on the door and said, “Please let us in, Sans.”

“Can’t do that kid,” he replied. “Moving from the sink is hard enough. Just give me some time, okay?”

Third time’s the charm as the old saying goes. If Chara sliced through him now, they wouldn’t find any red liquid. It’s all gone down the spiralling waters.

He rinsed his mouth. Washed his face.

A dull ache lingered on the left half of his head.

\textit{………..  
The last time I felt this much pain was my Awakening.  
It’s hell to go through as a seven-year-old. It’s still hell today.}

He had recovered enough to walk. Sans unlocked the door. But he’s so weakened by the mishap, he could barely open it.

Papyrus, however, wasted no time to do so for his brother. It’s amazing how sober he had become.

As for Frisk, they stared at him with their breath held.

“Guess…” the blue one muttered. “…Alcohol and ketchup don’t mix well, eh? Like. Too much of a good thing is, uh, a bad thing.”

Papyrus said, “BROTHER, YOU’RE SLEEPING ON MY BED TONIGHT. I WILL KEEP MY SOCKETS PEELED UNTIL WE CAN TAKE YOU TO A DOCTOR!”

Sans tensed up inside. That’s the worst person to visit: if anyone found out about the seal, it’s going to be a controversy in itself.

“Thanks. But, you don’t need to do that. Just. Need some sleep. On my own bed. No doctors either.”

“THEN I WILL SLEEP NEXT TO YOU IN YOUR ROOM!”
He had no energy to argue, so he just complied to the suggestion. “Okay. Don’t wake me up though. I really need some shut eye.”

His attention shifted to Frisk. “Kid. Um. Sorry that our date night went south.”

Frisk smiled back. “It’s okay. We had fun. Just rest for now, alright?”

“Yeah… and not mix the wrong foodstuff together. Gotcha. Some things are learned the hard way, huh?”

Sans winked at the kid. Tried to be jovial for their sake.

He then attempted to retreat to his room on his own. Midway through his snail’s pace, Papyrus picked him up and carried him for the rest of the way.

The tall one then laid Sans down on the mattress. Tucked him in.


“Mmkay.”

In this moment of silence, Sans turned towards the wall. His mental gears did not spiral into panic or self-pity. Far from it.

*I still have my experience and intellect.*

*Locking my Eye isn’t going to change how I think.*

*Stay calm, Sans. Stay logical.*

*Analyze. Assess. Archive.*

Chapter End Notes

Well, you might ask why this Sans didn't try to vary his attacks in the Geno Run? Why stay predictable?

It's because those specific moves kept him alive the longest. His calculations predicted that if he tried to change, he would leave himself open for a finisher much sooner. What you saw was literally the best bet in all his environmental limitations.

When he said he had no choice, he meant it.
You fastened the last button on your winter coat. Then you went over your desk to grab a red marker pen. With it, you crossed out yesterday’s number on your wall calendar.

A thought prompted you to check your past records. A few weeks back, you had filled in one of the squares in a light blue colour pencil.

It’s the day you made the pinky-finger promise with Sans. Your adventure started right after the New Years.

Now… Spring was just around the corner.

Time flies. Yet, it also crawls.

Mezil said you must make your final decision before the cherry blossoms bloom.

You managed to ask Dad about it. With Undyne’s help, of course. Mom won’t want to see you speaking to him in person.

With his updated knowledge on all things about plants, he told you that the cherry blossom trees of Ebott bloom about Mid Spring due to climate zones. Trees planted in this district had a history of flowering late due to the harsher winters. But, it’s still not the slowest on the worldwide list.

You wished that you were in the far-north. It meant that Cenna had more days to hang out with you and your monster family.

Mom knocked on your bedroom’s door and asked, “My child, are you ready?”

It snapped you out of your pondering. You went out to greet her, showing that you’re more than ready to visit the skeleton brothers.

Like any good mother, she asked you if your date went well. You wished you could tell her that it was pure fun and you had a really good time. Alas, that was not the case.

So the both of you decided to pay a get-well visit the next day. Mom planned to make some spring onion chicken soup. That’s a true classic.

After she locked the main door, you held her hand and started walking together in the snow. The icy crystals crunched into a slush under your feet.

You asked Mom if you could ask a possibly offensive question.

She chuckled. “Oh my, what would that be? I have the right to remain silent if it’s that bad.”

You asked if she’s ever afraid of Sans.

“No. Why should I be afraid?”

Although you hesitated, you told Mom that you had seen what he’s capable of. In a nutshell… he made Dad the King of all Monsters look like a true fluff. Mom too.
Both of your goat-parents may be the strongest of Monsterkind, but they never went all out. Always held back. Even when Dad did his war thing.

Sans?

…………

If he wasn’t your special friend, you’d be darn scared.

Mom chuckled at you. “Perceptive as always, Frisk. Well… if I must be honest, I was once afraid that he might be a spy. But then I remembered that Asgore would never have the will to organize such underhandedness.”

“If Doctor Gaster was around, perhaps I would be more careful. But, as you know, all of us forgot about him.”

You watched her smile in nostalgia.

“I suppose we sensed that we’re kindred spirits without realising it. Both of us lived in isolation, either in a literal or a figurative sense. Since we couldn’t see each other… we didn’t have any direct first impressions. It’s like making friends over the internet.”

Does Mom know that Sans and Papyrus are Seers?

“No,” she answered, “My child, most of the Seers gave up their special powers. They used a very specific magic to seal their Eyes, making themselves ‘normal’ like the rest.”

“They don’t call themselves Lichborn either. It’s an intimidating label that they’d rather do without. Generations of disuse caused their powers to vanish from public memory and their people. Only a few chose keep their Seer’s Eye.”

What about their kids? No one noticed anything strange?

You remembered Papyrus’ seal.
What if it’s done too early?
What if it’s done too late?

Toriel returned a sheepish smile. “I’m afraid you’d have to ask Doctor Gaster about it. I don’t know the specifics, but I’m aware that their parents would take their children to The Council.”

The Council?

“They’re Seers who served as the nation’s primary advisors. They too eventually faded into history.”

You thought Mom was the one who handled everything.

“Even I need a second opinion!” she laughed. “Remember, wisdom is more precious than gold. More so when you’re in a position of power. Always seek wise counsel.”

Mom then shot a glare at the general direction of Dad’s house. “It’s an advice Asgore failed to heed. That’s why we’re in this mess in the first place. Not to mention, Gaster was a disappointment compared to his parents.”

Shirai and Visigoth?

She widened her eyes out of surprise. “You know them? They were the primary leaders of The
Council, and also the best. I think the only bunch of folks who even remember their names were Gerson, Asgore, Doctor Gaster and myself. When did you study so deep into our history?”

The past week.

“You’re making me very proud. Don’t stop learning.”

You blushed from her praise.

What happened to all the normal skeletons? You asked. Including the ones made out of non-human bone. You really don’t see anyone else other than the brothers and Doctor Gaster.

Mom replied with a sad frown. “My child, who told you that?”

Sans.

“Oh sweetheart, I’m so sorry to say that he had misled you. There are no cat or dog or bird skeleton people. At least, not anymore. Same goes for the human ones.”

You gasped. Then, the whole talk about a small skeleton community scattered around Ebott Town was a lie?

Mom nodded. “…Yes. When I abdicated, there were only three skeletons left in the Underground. You had met all of them as the current Doctor Gaster.”

“Please don’t blame him. Knowing Sans, he wouldn’t want his brother to realise that they’re the last of their kind. I know how he feels. At this point, I think he actually believed his own story.”

You understand: high mortality combined with low birth rate. It reminded you of all those last-human post-apocalyptic scenarios.

If that’s the case, why did those two brothers end up superpowered? Sounds like their parents descended from those who became normal.

“Well, if I had a Surface example for you… it would be the equivalent of striking the national first prize lottery. Twice.”

Wow. Surreal. Their parents are the luckiest of lucky people in history! No one else can claim they created the two most awesome brothers in the world. Against all odds too. No amount of money can ever value them: they’re price-less!

…You shrunk into yourself, feeling way too nerdy even for your own tastes.

But Mom smiled at you in utmost delight. She said, “I’m both happy and relieved that you love your friends so much. You’d make a fine ambassador no matter the age.”

You smiled back.

When you arrived at the skelehouse proper, Papyrus answered the door before Mom could even ring the bell.

He looked a little haggard. That says a ton for a bunch of bones.

“GOOD MORNING FRISK. GOOD MORNING YOUR MAJESTY. SANS IS FINE. I’M FINE. I THINK.”
You asked Papyrus if he’s sure.

“WELL. APPARENTLY I SANG OPERA LAST NIGHT. AND--”

His explanations were interrupted by a very aggravated Undyne in the background.

Oh no.

Mom sighed. “I believe I understand your concerns now."

Papyrus nodded. Then he showed you into the house.

Undyne had backed Sans into a literal corner. She’s performing the notorious cicada-block move of internet fame.

That blue skeleton had avoided her for far too long. Now all her pent-up frustrations from the entire week blew off like an over-boiled steam kettle.

A half-asleep Alphys waved at you from the couch, eating her breakfast of instant cup noodles. You imagined that her girlfriend had carried her over the head all the way to this house for... reasons.

“Okay,” said the strongest fish. “First, Papyrus ended up in Alphys’ lab a.k.a our closest thing to a hospital. Then, TORIEL had a migraine so bad she had to take a medical leave!”

“And then Frisk happened. We all know what the hell we went through for THAT!”

“Now YOU?! Who’s next? Asgore? Alphys? Me?? Why the fuck is everyone getting sick dammit???”

Here comes the rain of swearwords. It grated your ears, but you didn’t want to interrupt.

You noticed Mom held back too. She placed a finger on her lips to request silence from everyone else.

Sans answered in his typical Sans style. “Hey, hey, aren’t we getting a little too hasty? I mean, it’s morning. You know I’m not quite the morning skelly.”

“It’s. Ten. O. Clock.”

“Still morning. Look at Alphys. She’s not all rise and shine either.”

“That’s NOT the point!” Undyne barked. “Why the hell is Papyrus looking weird? And why did he tell me that he had to stay up all night because YOU puked your non-existent gut down the sink? How the hell can you puke in the first place?? You have no stomach!”

“Magic,” Sans answered.

“Give me any more cheeky one-liners and I swear I’m gonna suplex the TV, because I can’t suplex you. Even if I tried.”

He groaned. “Papyrus is hanging over a hangover. He’ll be fine after a while. Me? I just shouldn’t mix too much alcohol with ketchup. Look. Undyne. Really, there’s no big deal.”

“...You drank alcohol.”

“Yup.”

“Strong enough to make you sick.”

“Yup.”
Undyne growled harder. “You know you’re fucking banned from alcohol or ANY mind-altering substances, right? It’s written in bold and underlined red in your personal records! For a good damn reason!”

Sans replied, “Only in the Underground. The Surface is fair game. Besides, the hypothesis is wrong. The house is in one piece, see? My powers didn’t go haywire from getting drunk.”

“They didn’t go haywire THIS TIME! What about the next? And the next next? And the next next next? What if you end up in a drunken brawl and seriously hurt someone? ONE ATTACK was all you need to completely obliterate someone’s limb! Or destroy the fucking establishment!”

“C’mon Undyne, I may be bald but I’m not that powerful. I have only 1 HP.”

“More reasons why you shouldn’t be SO FUCKING CAREFREE!!”

Undyne in all her Undyne-brand of rage, punched a hole into the wall with her bare fist.

Sans faceplanted. Now he’s the exasperated one. “And you just wrecked my house. While sober.”

She didn’t listen. “Fine! Papyrus, where’s the trash bin? I’m gonna take whatever’s left of that drink and tell them humans that their shit made a skeleton puke!”

That’s when Mom had heard enough. “No!”

Undyne tensed up in an instant. Nobody wanted to get in trouble with Mom, especially not your fish friend. She stopped doing her cicada thing and stood up straight like a good soldier.

“Ma’am?” she muttered. “You cannot tell the humans that their product is a problem. More so with your trademark temper,” said Mom. “Causing a ruckus will give the extremists more reasons to further demonize our kind.”

Everyone froze.


You couldn’t believe your ears either.

“Yes, I did,” said Mom. “Miss Caraway warned me about them. To be exact, they’re anti-Magi extremists.”

“These people had long believed that the Sealing was a ploy. Trickery. The main propaganda states that they’re keeping weapons of mass-destruction underneath Mount Ebott, waiting for a day to unleash them on the common populace.”

What. But, the Magi had always been the front-line defenders of humanity.

Mom nodded at you. “I know. But these people never trusted anyone with the power of magic. If word gets out that Asgore once declared war, it will only confirm their worst fears. They won’t hesitate to twist the story to fit their agenda. The same goes for any perceived violent behaviour from our side.”

“But until our legal civic rights are secure on the Surface, it’ll be wise to not take any rash actions.”

So that’s what she’s been discussing with ‘Aunt’ Cenna? Or rather, ‘Sister’ Cenna.
“That and many other things, my child.”

You saw Alphys lift her hand in the slowest, shiest way imaginable. “M-m-may I have a word, everyone…?”

“Yes,” said Mom.

Undyne crossed her arms and sighed. How can she decline? “Go ahead, Al.”

“That and many other things, my child.”

You agreed with the smart lizard. In the back of your head, you crossed your fingers hoping that Undyne would come to her senses.

Thankfully, she did.

“Oh, I get the point. But I’m not done yet.”

Undyne turned to her childhood friend. “Look, Sans. I know you don’t have a high opinion of yourself. And I’m finally understanding why. But. People care about you, Sans. All of us in this room right now? We give a damn.”

“I just don’t want you to fall into an endless spiral of this thing humans call ‘depression’. You’ve been showing some really, really, REALLY worrying signs, mister!”

After taking a deep breath, she finished her speech with the following statement: “As a friend, I want you to get better. Not worse. That’s all.”

“Sorry,” Sans replied. Though, you’re not sure if the words got through to his heart.

“I’m gonna go outside,” said Undyne. “Be back for lunch.”

The next thing you know, she’s suplexing boulders. You had a suspicion that she moved them to the yard over the week for this very purpose.

You whispered Papyrus a question. Didn’t Undyne fall into depression in one of the timelines? A very bad one until she became a Sans?

He nodded. “I THINK SHE HAS SUBCONSCIOUS PERSONAL FEELINGS ABOUT THIS ISSUE.”

You think so too.

Papyrus helped Mom make the chicken soup. You had to sit outside since the kitchen isn’t big enough for three people, more so when Mom technically occupied the space of one and a half.

He’s no longer the bad-chef of the Underground anyway. You still thank Gaster and the skeleparents for guiding him down the path of true deliciousness.

You watched TV with Sans and Alphys. It’s showing some Saturday morning cartoons that don’t quite interest you. The anime you stream online aligned much better to your tastes.

There’s also a promotion for Mettaton’s upcoming concert. He’s really making use of the Surface’s
advertising system. You wonder how his preparations are coming along.

Alphys tried to talk to Sans. He replied in his typical manner.

By now he would be tired of questions about his health, so you decided to take a different approach.

You asked Sans about the ‘big quiz’. That’s the most you could conjure without triggering alarms.

He caught the drift. “Uh, kid. I’m afraid you got to postpone that. I’m really not feeling up to snuff right now. Sorry.”

“What’s the quiz about?” asked your lizard friend.

“Human history stuff. An ambassador’s gotta know both sides, y’know.”

“Aaaah.”

Smooth, Sans. Smooth.

You noticed that he’s not paying attention to the show. Half the time, his eyelids were closed. You don’t know if he’s sleeping or thinking. Maybe both.

At the stroke of noon…

“LUNCH IS READY!” Papyrus announced. He then went out to get Undyne.

She returned from her two-hour boulder wrestling workout. That’s more than enough to make a fish person sweat even in the chill of winter. At least she’s happy enough to call you punk and ask if you finished your homework.

You tell her that you’ll start working on it the moment you get home.

The pot of chicken soup was reserved for the skeleton brothers. Everyone else had vegetable macaroni.

In the middle of the meal, Sans spoke up the most shocking of all shocking statements: “Papyrus, I want to talk to Mom and Dad.”

The younger brother dropped his spoon. You watched his shock and surprise turn into pure ecstatic joy.

“Oh! My! God! Are you serious, Sans???”

Sans nodded.

You squealed together with the tall guy. That’s a nice change from the grim tension of this morning. Everyone’s happy about this new development. After all these years, Sans finally accepted that his parents are well and alive.

“That reminds me…” Alphys muttered. “I should call my parents tonight. Um, come to think of it, I’ve not introduced Undyne to them yet. Oops.”

The couple immediately started discussions that should have happened months ago.

You asked Sans if he’s nervous.

“Heh. Of course.”
Being the good brother, Papyrus offered: “I SHALL KEEP YOU COMPANY AND HELP YOU BRIDGE THE GAP!”

“Nah,” he replied. “I wanna talk with them alone. Just. Prodigal son with his parents. And one annoying mentor.”

Mom frowned in worry. “Are you sure you’ll be fine? Doctor Gaster…”

“I’m okay Tori. I can handle him. Did so for my entire pre-Core life.”

When it comes to Sans, it’s hard to tell if he’s telling the truth or not. But… no pressure.

You wished him good luck in his familial rebonding.

Chapter End Notes

Just because Chara is no longer a threat to the universe...
... Doesn't mean the outside world changed.
The day began the same always.

After breakfast, the great former Royal Scientist continued his work in deciphering the mystery of human cuisines. Capsaicin was the key source of pleasure. Unfortunately, it also served its original purpose as an irritant.

How can one stimulate the tastebuds without being a built-in hazard? The ‘three’ continued to brainstorm over this.

Then, Doctor Gaster’s ponderings were interrupted by the walking sunshine from above.

Papyrus charged into the prison with all the praises of a family reunion. He had Sans practically tucked under his arm. Being small had their perks.

Oh that sweet, sweet boy. How he wished that his simplicity was the universal truth.

He played along. Smiled to the tall one when he placed Sans before the bars, as if he was gift on Christmas.

“I’LL BE BACK IN TWO HOURS!” Papyrus exclaimed. And off the youngster went.

Gaster could feel the boy’s presence fade as soon as Papyrus entered one of the many shortcuts. He kept his word for privacy to the letter, too overjoyed to consider eavesdropping.

“Is he gone?” Sans asked.

Strange and worrying question from someone of his track record.

“Papyrus has left the Underground,” Gaster answered.

“Good.” Sans squeezed himself between the gaps. “W. D. Gaster. I don’t like you. You don’t like me. But let’s get this business done and over with.”

The old scientist noticed the oddity right off the bat. Not to mention that his usually reluctant student was too eager to move on to the next step.

“You didn’t teleport,” he noted.
“More like I can’t teleport. Literally.”

The parents within gasped. Something bad had happened to their son.

Gaster was more annoyed than horrified. “Did you really just exploit Papyrus’ trust to turn him into a glorified taxi? Really, Sans?”

“Welp,” said Sans. “Walking takes forever for someone of short stature. And it’s boring with no one along the way to talk to. Besides, Undyne’s gonna notice. She knows my habits all too well.”

“No one’s aware my real situation except for you now. Just like the old days.”

That bitterness. It never lost its edge over time. Gaster then jabbed: “So you lied to your brother. Again.”

“Nah. Not exactly. I do wanna talk with Mom and Dad. After our business. So, the sooner we get this done, the more quality family time we’ll get.”

Sans headed straight towards the neat futon and laid down on the mattress. “I need you to examine my Seer’s Eye, Gaster. Grab a pen and paper if you have those.”

“…Indeed I do.”

A replacement for the notorious Jungle Curry won’t happen on its own. That meant plenty of note taking.

Gaster activated his dual-chromatic set and prepared a glowing bone. He shone it over Sans’ left socket.

He noticed the glassy gleam. His Eyes zoomed in and he discovered the distinctive transparent lens of a Seer’s Seal.

“A tridecagram lined with runes. How in the world did you get sealed?” Gaster asked.

Sans replied, “If I know what the hell is going on, I wouldn’t be here. Gaster. If you sealed my Eye, I swear…”

“You’ll give me a bad time?” The doctor finished the sentence. “Egads, Sans. You’ve given me bad times since the day you were born.”

It just so happen that he held the bone tool in his right hand, and Helvetica wasted no time to bonk him on the skull.

“Like that.” Gaster grumbled.

Sans chuckled at the antics. “Nice one, Mom.”

“Don’t encourage her. You have no idea how many times she ran to my house or lab to give me one of her signature slaps. Or at least shake her fist at the camera.”

“Whoa, she did that?”

“I’m sure you noticed her tendency to vanish after certain arguments. Those that surround you. Where do you think she went? The park? Waterfall? Goodness, no. There’s a huge reason why she married your father and not me.”
Sans remarked, “I can’t imagine you being my dad.”

“Likewise, I can’t imagine you as my son.” It’s a sentiment shared.

However, there was a marked improvement. Back in the Underground, Sans never, ever directly addressed his parents post-Amalgamation. The fact that he praised his mom was a sign of change.

Back to work now. There’s no point dredging up bygone emotions. Gaster had his own vested interest for the mystery seal.

His vision zoomed in closer on the surface of this minute magic. He’d cycle the glow between pure white, cyan, and orange to see different aspects of this handiwork.

Gaster copied what he saw the best he could, noting down every minute detail on the gram. Records are important, more so for someone without the memory-retaining gift of the Purple Aspect.

“Rest assured, Sans Serif,” he said, “I’m not the one who sabotaged you. If you want to look for a culprit, start with someone of the fairer gender.”


“This is where life experience shines. This seal is delicate and refined. With a personal touch. More akin to embroidery instead of a mechanical glass etching.”

Skeptical as always, the blue skeleton asked: “Isn’t that a little too stereotypical? Men can be just as delicate.”

“There’s always a difference. Trust me on that. You will understand one day. Now, to read these runes…”

Gaster noticed that they were not written in English. Or Code for the matter. None of the symbols matched the hieroglyphs of the Seers.

But he had learned quite a bit during his days removed from the physical realm. Computerization made it much easier to access information. Why bother with books when he could read everything straight from the database?

“’Ithflem iarin. Astorio tilra. Ilmeen uno avis iarin’. This lady is not to be trifled with. She hid The Code behind her own code: a mix of human runes and a custom lexicon.”

Sans translated, “A made up language?”

“Yes,” Gaster confirmed. “Think of it as a three-layer encryption. A nuisance to break. On top of that, she made sure that her Seal is strong enough to cap even a full-fledged Seer.”

“On the bright side, your abilities should return to normal once it’s removed. Provided you could solve the puzzle first.”

Cue Sans slamming his fist down on the side: how unusual to see a bearer of Patience so aggravated.

“Dammit! I know something happened in that last reset. A really big one too. But with my Eye shut down like this, I can’t figure out what and why.”

The ex-protégé stared at Gaster. “…You’re pumped with Determination. You should remember. Tell me, what happened in the past timeline?”
Even without his signature abilities, Sans was still keen and perceptive.

“It’s not that I don’t want to help you,” the old scientist replied. “Rather, I can’t. I had never left this prison and the affairs of the Surface can’t reach this silent space.”

“Papyrus didn’t say anything? He’s like a walking news program.”

Gaster and the parents within hesitated. “His behaviour changed come Spring. But, he never once told me about anything of grave concern. You would have advised him to keep silent.”

“…Yeah,” Sans admitted. “I definitely would have done so. Argh, I’m such a fucking bepis.”

How grating, thought Gaster. What’s with the young generation and their liberal use of swearing? “Language, please. That foul word and its associations have nothing to do with our current situation.”

“Okay, now you’re just rubbing it in.”
“’I’ll do so as many times as I need to wake you up from your self-loathing.’”
“Noooot working.”

Dealing with a grumpy and snappy Sans always made Gaster’s metaphorical blood pressure rise. Huffing in annoyance, he slapped the notes on the blue skeleton’s chest.

“Just read this and see if you can figure something out.”

Gaster bowed out the equation. From now on, it’ll be up to Sans and his ability to recall the scattered details. Without the aid of his traits.

Time and time again, he would read diagrams and shut his eyes to focus. Incomprehensible muttering facilitated the flow of thoughts.

*Well, I don’t need any Yellow Aspect to know that he’s thinking very hard.*

*In all honesty, when does he ever stop?*

*When the Child of Mercy walked the Underground?*  
*No. Of course not. Observing is not the same as idling.*

*After our demise in the Core?*  
*No. I doubt so. He’s always, always looking for ways to support Papyrus.*

*Good lord, Roman. Remember when he was just a little toddler? You strung your key around your neck, thinking that it’d be safe if you kept it on your body at all times.*

*What did he do? Waited for you to sleep. Snuggled between his parents in the middle of the night like any other kid. Then he cut the cord with scissors that he had smuggled in his mouth. By the time you woke up, he had already looted the contents of your drawer.*

*Since then, you stopped trying to childproof anything. Breaking the system was his reward, his game.*

*It’s incredibly… human.*

“I saw these runes before.”

Sans’ statement snapped Gaster out of his reminiscence. “Oh?”
“You were there too,” he said, “I was waiting for Grillby to open shop. Fell asleep. Then that lady Magus tried to ambush me. She had these exact runes written down on a piece of paper. Spotted a mix of Purple and Green in that stuff.”

“Hmm, you are correct. We presumed that the Vanquisher had made it, but it’s also possible that she enlisted some assistance.”

“Didn’t the Seven Sages first develop that tech?” Sans asked.

“Yes, they did,” Gaster confirmed. “Sage Corsivus discovered that by imbuing magic into wood pulp or threads, it’s possible to create a charged base to store the necessary spell codes. They remain dormant until a pulse of power triggers their effects.”

“Okay. Next question: do you think it’s possible for a human to become a Chronographer?”

Gaster replied, “Only if the humans created a machine that could completely replace a Seer.”

More thinking. Sans concluded, “Possible. But not feasible with the current tech level. They can’t do that yet.”

“Which brings me to the next question,” he continued. “Gaster, do you think it’s possible for a human to craft a Seer’s Seal?”

“…No.”

It’s both the best and worst answer.

“The Seer’s Seal is formulated in a way where only a Seer could create it. Call it a safety feature to prevent others from shutting us down. And also to narrow the list of suspects if anything does happen.”

Sans sat up from the futon. “Cenna talked about someone ‘telling’ her about what she did in the past timelines. There are only two possible sources out of this: Mister Living Victory, or a Chronographer. But Mezil isn’t the guy who’d spill the beans. Which leaves us with the other option…”

“…The Magi have a Lichborn. A lady Lichborn who’s also their Chronographer. She imprinted the Seal unto a scroll, then had someone else use it on my Eye. Hmm…”

The short one pondered: “Purple and Green… What else?”

“Blue.” Gaster said, “Any Chronographer worth their while will have the Aspect of Integrity. Like Papyrus.”

Sans then planted his face into his hand for the second time of the day. “To draw in relevance. To reconstruct images. To remember. Tri-colour. Mid-range. Information based. The lady is a dataminer. Welp, that certainly explains how the Magi knew everything about me. I’m fucked beyond fucks.”

Roman moved on his own will. He gestured Gaster to follow his lead.

“Hm?” his friend raised a brow, “How rare for you to take initiative. Very well, I’ll do as you say.”

So the left arm led the rest of the body to the futon. Settled down. Then, positioned himself next to his son.

The gentle father poked Sans’ temple.
“Dad?” he asked. The action caught his attention.

Roman began ‘speaking’ in hand gestures.

“Sorry Dad, but I can’t understand what you’re trying to say. Signing with one hand is like speaking half a word. And I can’t decipher it without my Eye.”

Gaster understood what his friend was trying to do. “Allow me to translate.”

“Roman said: Son, you’re looking at this the wrong way. The seal itself is a ‘red herring’, as the humans say. When you were a baby bone, I once tried to confuse you by mixing the right key with multiple false ones.”

“It didn’t work. Not at all. You didn’t take the usual approach of trying every key. Instead, you inspected the lock itself. By looking through the keyhole, you knew what shape you needed to look for.”

Sans laughed. “Wow, I was one scary toddler. Sounds fun too. Too bad I can’t remember those days.”

Dear father patted his son on the skull.

Then, the translation continued. “You’re an adult now. And sometimes adults think too straight. Instead of worrying about breaking the Gram, you should consider how you would construct it.”

Gaster was struck with epiphany. “Roman is right! Sans, you and I know the science behind these seals. We don’t need to figure out the lady’s code: we can reverse-engineer the solution by focusing on its intended target!”

“…Which is me,” said Sans. His face lit up with hope. “Dad. You’re seriously awesome. Heh heh, did hanging out with the doc made you extra smart?”

The left hand showed a thumbs-up.

“He said it’s the same with figuring out recipies.”

The estranged mentor and protégé laughed together for the first time since their first meeting.

Helvetica didn’t want to miss out. She pointed at the pile of papers and made some hand signs as well.

“Communicate through writing? Brilliant. That will allow the both of you to speak your thoughts without my aid.”

The work began. The three elders may not be a supercomputer like Sans, but they had their own wisdom.

Helvetica wrote down a string of lines. She had it numbered, taking into account several possible probabilities.

“Mom, you got the numbers wrong.” Her son pointed out, “Right here. They’re switched. Yeah, I understand they start to melt together after a while.”

She pointed a finger at her son. Mom’s displeased and she’s not shy on showing it.

“Uh, pun not intended,” her son chuckled. “Honest. I’m not making fun of your amalgamated state.”
Here comes Roman. The father tried to write down his attempt of punnage on a fresh piece of paper. But dear wife would rather not have needless distractions, so she kept trying to pluck away his pen.

“Goodness gracious everyone, please focus!” Gaster cried out. But he’s not frowning.

He’s smiling. Too many years he had existed without the liveliness of a family.

So, this is how your son looks like when he’s happy?

My oh my, he’s a goofy fellow when he so desires. I understand why you two love him so much.

...Though, it’s quite an unfitting for the image of a guardian angel. But I suppose this allows him to hide in plain sight. That’s the best way to protect someone.

It’s unfair for you two to be glued to me forever. More so if I’m sentenced to eternal imprisonment. Perhaps the Magi can figure out a way to give you artificial bodies. I don’t mind cutting my SOUL if that’s what it takes.

Roman? You’re inviting me to be a true brother? Oh, the ‘Uncle Gaster’ statement inspired you, did it not?

...I don’t think I’ve earned that right yet...

After all, I had done terrible things to your dear son. He’s not going to forgive me so soon.

If ever.

At long last, they had completed a possible solution.

Sans rubbed his tired sockets with the back of his bony hand. “Dang, talk about intensive. Papyrus’ Seal is cakewalk compared to this.”

“Well,” said Gaster, “You copied that Seal straight from the book, right? The one you used was meant to be implanted before a child’s Awakening.”

“If done too late, it’s only a matter of time before it weakens from the buildup of power. It says something if a mere electric maze could shatter it.”

The blue one stared down on his own hands. “So. Even if he didn’t get himself zapped… it’s gonna break?”

“Yes. I estimate that it had about two to three years left.”

“Figures.”

Sans did his best to slow the erosion.

If things went according to his way, he wouldn’t have taught Papyrus any form of combat magic. The less that young one uses his powers, the longer the seal would’ve lasted.

But he cannot do that. How can he say no to that sweetheart?

What’s the next best solution? To stick to the basics. Nothing but the basics. Staying at the bottom level puts the least strain on the seal.

Goodness, cyan bones? They’re not even the correct colour.
...I had a feeling that Papyrus unlocked his gravity magic on his own. Spontaneous. Yes, possibly during his teenage days.

*What am I thinking? We’re running out of time. If anyone catches us in the act, panic will prevail.*

“We should begin,” said Gaster.

They stashed away anything of no importance. Then, Sans lay down on the mattress. After taking a deep breath, he nodded to signal that he’s ready.

The elder one stretched both hands over the seal and focused his magic. His Eyes lit up orange and cyan.

In the tongue of those who peer into space and time, he said: [Initiate Removal Procedure.]

The thirteen-point star shone bright in response to the command. It sent out forceful pulses that threatened to push away the temperer.

Papers scattered. Pens rolled away. Books fell off the table and flipped their pages open.

*Tsk! This woman knew her arts very well. Her custom lexicon bypasses this security feature. Anyone else would have to struggle through assorted inconveniences.*

*But I’m determined.*

Gaster remained steadfast. He continued channeling his magic into the seal and recite the termination clauses.

As long Sans doesn’t show any pain, there should be no issues.

*Almost there!*

At the end of the chain of commands, the gram dissolved into tiny flakes of magic. They floated upwards as if they’re fallen leaves swept up in the wind.

“Hey, it worked!” Sans exclaimed.

But then, a complication happened.

The shards turned red. They hovered still for a moment before the entire structure slammed back unto Sans’ left socket.

“Ack!” he yelped.

“Sans!” Gaster cried out. He wasted no time to zoom his vision on the Seal.

The broken pieces melded together in the span of a second. At the center of the Seal was none other than an elaborate red butterfly.

Mezil’s Mark.

“Egads…” he muttered. “Sans, are you alright?”

“Yup,” the short one answered. “I’m okay. Just uh, felt like someone smacked me in the face.”

A swift examination revealed that Sans suffered no damage despite the shocking display. No
destabilization. Nothing hurt his Eye. Other than a rebuilt seal, everything was fine.

Gaster sighed in relief. “Judge Mezil Thyme had Marked your Seal, Sans. Made it irremovable. Unless we get rid of that butterfly, you’re nothing more than a normal genius.”

“Welp,” Sans shrugged. “I know I have a hard life, but this is really pushing the limits.”

“Goodness gracious.” The elder groaned. “Did you try to tangle with him in the past timeline or something?”

“Many timelines, Gaster. Nothing new to me. But… how? If we tried to fight, I’ll definitely dodge everything and anything. I don’t think his fighting capabilities are that great either.”

The scientist began to ponder.

He does have a point. Sans is a one-hit wonder trained to never take a blow.

So how did that Magus manage to trap him?
What exactly went down in the last timeline?

…Do I dare ask Papyrus to seek the truth?

“Papyrus…” Gaster held his breath.


“No Sans, look around you! We need to put everything back in order before your brother sees this mess! I can sense his presence coming closer.”

“…Oh. Right.”

The two scrambled to tidy up the prison. If Papyrus spotted anything upturned, he’d assume that they got into a fight. Or try to use his powers to see the past. Goodbye anti-panic measures.

Gaster folded up the notes and stuffed them into Sans’ hoodie pockets.

It surprised the short one. “Huh? What are you doing?”

“Remember, you’re sealed.” he said. “There’s no telling how it’s going to affect your memory retention. Never hurts to have refreshers.”

“Um, thanks.”

An awkward silence hung over as they continued cleaning the cell.

The elder knew he didn’t have the reputation for being good to his protégé. If he must be honest, he felt just as awkward.

But he can’t just leave Sans empty handed.

They finished the job right before Papyrus swooped back into the shed. It’s looking better than before.

How the young one sparkled in delight. “OH GOODNESS ME! UNCLE GASTER, YOU MANAGED TO GET MY LAZY BROTHER TO HELP CLEAN YOUR CELL?!?”
“Why yes,” Gaster answered. “He wanted your parents to be as comfortable as possible. Isn’t that right, Sans?”

“Yup,” Sans answered. “Hey, this is the first time in years I get to do anything for Mom and Dad. Gotta put in some effort.”

The joy intensified with a lot of squealing. “THIS IS THE HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE! I CAN’T WAIT TO TELL EVERYONE ABOUT THIS!”

A walking news program indeed.

“BUT VISITING HOURS ARE OVER,” Papyrus frowned. “UNDYNE’S ORDERS.”

“Yeah bro, I understand,” replied Sans. “I’m beat anyway.”

Gaster and the skeleton parents within watched the small one squeeze between the bars.

“Mom. Dad. Uh, and you too. See ya.”

With that said, the blue seraphim followed his brother out of the Underground.

*Sans Serif.*

*For your sake, I hope you’re not going to embark on some insane quest.*

In silence, Gaster sat down to think. Ponder. Ruminate.

*…I have a terrible premonition about this…*

*I’m sure that butterfly is a message. Sans would have realized this too.*

*Judge Thyme, what are you trying to tell us?*

Chapter End Notes

They’re not alone.
After this I think I need a day or two of rest.

Saturday evening.

Cenna came back from her HQ not too long ago. She brought back a toolbox. Asked for the largest flat surface you have.

You guided her to the dining table. During that time, Alphys and Undyne were discussing matters with Mom.

When Cenna unpacked the stuff, you’re reminded of an alchemist’s apothecary.

Beakers? Checked.
Flasks? Checked.
Reagents and solvents? Checked.
Seven-colour magic chart? Checked too.

You, Undyne, Alphys, and Mom watched the setup with great curiosity.

“This is soooooo wizard alchemist stuff,” Undyne commented.

You and Alphys nodded.

“Doctor Alphys,” said Cenna, “You know how to handle equipment like these, right?”

“Y-yes. I do.”

Cenna then passed over a sheet filled with instructions. “Mind helping me out? Usually my colleague Anise would do all the lab stuff, but she works normal office hours. So she loaned me this portable set instead.”

“Sure.” Alphys gave it a read. “Psychia Identification?”

“Psychia is our scientific term for SOULS. Before I can teach Frisky any form of magic, I need to know what their Major and Minors are.”

“Oh, okay. Gimmie some time to read this through.”

Mom focused her attention on the chart. You took a peek too.

The chart explained what were the expected abilities associated with the colour. Green for shields and healing, for example.

But for the red portion, all it said were the following words: ‘Please consult the Supreme Judge for more information’.

They really want to make sure that all the Red SOUL people were accounted for. As many as they
could find anyway.

“Frisk’s parents are also Magi, right?” asked Mom.

“Yup, madam! A true Magus lineage from both sides.”

You told Mom that your biological father was part of a really cool Vanquisher family, and Cenna carried their legacy. They keep the peace for both the living and the dead.

She seemed a little uncomfortable by the thought. Maybe it reminded her of Chara? Oops.

On the other hand, Undyne thought it was awesome. “Vanquishers, huh? Heh heh that’s why Frisk is such a strong kid! Was their human mom full of action and gusto too?”

Cenna grinned. “Nah, she ain’t part of the gun-toting team. Mama’s more like Doctor Alphys here.”

Your lizard friend looked up from the paper in surprise. “Eh?!”

“They’re ‘Artificers’. Inventors. Toolmakers. All the engineering and science stuff. The family’s best invention? This watch right here.”

Cenna dangled the magic pocket watch in front of everyone. You explained to everyone that it has a mirrored back.

With both lids open, it does kinda remind you of a clam.

Mom put on her reading glasses for a closer look. “Oh my, the numbers are reversed. And it doesn’t even read the same time.”

You noticed a change of expression on Cenna’s face. She quickly checked both sides, her eyes darting left and right.

She seemed concerned. But, she decided to play it cool.

“This fella is called ‘Trap Harvester’,” explained Cenna. “Whenever someone out there does a large-scale timey-wimey thing, it gathers a tiny bit of Determination from the universe.”

“Point the mirrored side at someone, send out a pulse of magic and bam! You encase the target in a bubble removed from reality. The bigger the time discrepancy, the greater its reserves, the longer the freeze lasts.”

Cool level: COSMIC!!! Mom giggled at your joke.

Undyne squinted with her single good eye. “How old is this thing anyway? Looks antique.”

“The insides are modern, but the casing goes all the way back to the 1830s.”

“Dayum.”

Agreed.

“I better get back to reading,” said Alphys.

Her expression lightened up soon after. “This is pretty simple. All I need to do is…”
Alphys got right to work. She arranged the necessary equipment and began identifying the labels of the reagents. Next thing you know, she’s mixing stuff like a true alchemist.

You smelled alcohol. Not the fancy drink version. It’s proper distilled alcohol used for lab stuff. For cleaning, or as a solvent: things like that.

Out of curiosity, you peeked at the instructions. Your eyes crossed over. It’s not as simple as she said.

Then Alphys took out a scalpel.

“Okay, I need to cut a tiny piece of your SOUL.”

You went pale and inched away. With a straight face.

Cenna burst into laughter and gently nudged you back. “No need to be scared, Frisky! You’re a Magus now. It ain’t gonna hurt and the piece will grow back in no time.”

If she said so. You pushed out your SOUL and moved it closer to the scientist.

You watched Alphys slice the pointy bottom of the heart and drop the piece into a flask. As your sister had said, it grew back right before your eyes.

Also, you didn’t feel a single thing. That’s the most important part.

Alphys poured the alcohol mixture into the flask. Gently swirling it, she dissolved your SOUL.

The liquid glowed bright red.

You asked her if this is the same method they used to extract Determination.

“Nope,” said Alphys. “Whatever the DT-Extraction Machine churns out is pure, distilled Determination. It has the consistency of thick oil.”

Interesting. Is it red?

“Very, very red. Glowing too. Like this sample here. Okay. I think we’re ready for the next step…”

She poured out the contents into a measuring beaker. There’s about 100ml.

“Now we wait for the properties to separate. Each of the colours have a different density. The most prominent trait will take up the most volume, followed by their secondaries. It should take about five minutes or less.”

Everyone waited with anticipation…

But nothing happened.

“Uh,” Undyne muttered, “Is the kit busted?”

Alphys scratched her head. “I don’t know. Contamination maybe? Hmm, Miss Cenna. You know your traits right?”

“Yeah,” she answered.

“Then you should know the results. If you don’t mind, I’d like to test your SOUL as a control sample.”
“No problem!”

Alphys rinsed the equipment with the supplied distilled water. She then repeated the procedure with Cenna’s fragment.

When she poured the results out into a fresh beaker, it started to separate. Yellow had the thickest layer, followed by purple, then green.

Cenna confirmed: “Yep. That’s exactly how it looked like when I got tested as a teen.”

Meanwhile… your sample showed no change.

“I think I know what’s going on,” said Alphys. “There’s nothing for the mixture to separate. Frisk’s SOUL is the purest Red. A hundred percent!”

Seriously?!

Wait, what does it mean for you?

Cenna slapped her hands down on your shoulders and piloted you to the living room.

“It meeeeeeans lessons starts now! Hoo boy, can’t believe Mez’s gonna get beaten flat by a preteen.”

You laughed at that thought too. But at the same time, you tell Cenna that you really don’t want to fight him.

“Eeeh you ain’t gonna get any real offensive magic like us Yellows,” she said. “You see, Reds are the gambit masters. Their skillsets are utility. It’s gonna be all about how you use them.”

You heard Mom breathe a sigh of relief. She’s glad that your magic won’t concentrate on hurting others.

“Stay where you are, Frisky.”

Okay. You watched Cenna walk to the other end of the room.

“Take a look around and remember your position. Once you’re done, walk towards me.”

You’re standing next to the couch. Mom, Undyne, and Alphys were close by. You remembered that. Then, you walked towards Cenna.

“Now… I want you to return to that couch.”

You tried to walk backwards, but she stopped you. “Na-uh. Ya need to do that without walking. Or any movement for the matter.”

Huh???

She’s asking you to teleport like Sans?!

Cenna grinned ear to ear at your confusion. “Say Frisky, do you know your Mark?”

You pointed at yourself. Is it the butterfly?

“Nay. That’s Mez’s. I’m talking about yours. Whenever you make a SAVE, what do you see?”

Oh!

You get it now!
It's a golden star. Whenever you feel determined in the Underground, a bright light will hover at a specific spot. All you needed to do was simply touch it.

“A shining star huh? Aw, that’s real sweet. Does it follow you around?”

No. It stays at a single spot. Why does she ask?

“Every Living Victory has a SAVE method unique to their persona. It’s your signature. It tells everyone who you are and what are your priorities.”

You’re surprised to hear that. Judge Mezil certainly looks the part. His stylish and frilly clothes do remind you of a fancy butterfly.

Cenna laughed at the imagery. “You can say so! But there are deeper reasons than that.”

“You see, Mez didn’t come from a Magus family. He never thought of joining one either. Before the big hoo-hah started, he was just your average college tsundere. All he cared about were grades, future career prospects, and surviving on a part-time job.”

He was… a normal guy?

“About as normal as a stoic tsundere can be. Hard to believe he ‘transformed’ into a Supreme Judge, huh? A butterfly seriously fits him.”

Well, people have to start from somewhere. You were more or less a normal kid before you fell into the Underground too.

But lessons first. Okay. Your symbol is a star. What do you need to do next?

“Imagine it hovering right where you stood."

You put all your power into imagining it… …And nothing happened. You’re getting a mite frustrated.

Cenna snorted. “Newbie mistake number one, Frisky: trying to make an actual SAVE. That’s waaaaay too much Determination. You gotta scale it down like, a million.”

“The trick is ‘marking’ the ‘state’ of your position, without making an actual full-fledged SAVE. You already did that on a subconscious level when I told you to remember your spot. Now all you gotta do is LOAD it. Think of it as accessing temporary data if that helps.”

Maybe. You remembered how computers would make these transparent ‘temp files’ whenever you access certain programs.

Perhaps you need to concentrate on a ‘shadow’ of sorts…

You closed your eyes to focus.
Focus.
Focus.
Focus.

Then, in the back of your mind, you ‘saw’ a tiny glimmer in the distance.

“Oh my god, punk! Nerd! OH MY GOD!”

Undyne’s exclamation was much… closer?
When you opened your eyes, you found yourself standing beside the couch. You had returned to your starting position without moving an inch.

The freakout continued. Undyne screamed, “You just TELEPORTED like Sans! Like, POOF!”

Alphys? She became a puddle of ‘OH EM GEE’s repeated over and over. Mom just stood there, too stunned to react.

Cenna gave you a big, slow clap: brimming with all the pride of a family member. “Welcome to the wizard club, Frisky. This is just the beginning of your awesomeness.”

“Remember, there are always limitations to an ability. That’s why you need smarts. Try to jump back to me. Or teleport to the left or right.”

You did your focusing thing again.

Try as you might, nothing happened. Did something go wrong?

“Nope. Everything went right. You cannot return to something that doesn’t exist. You may remember walking towards me, but to your body? You’ve never moved from that spot at all.”

You put your noggin to use.

You told Cenna that you just rolled back to a specific moment of time. Localized in your body. Without affecting the rest of the universe. Was that correct?

“Bingo! I’ve seen Mez fight before. It’s really similar to your blue skelly friend, but with a key difference. He can only ‘teleport’ in the path he once traversed: backwards, never forwards.”

“Pick the wrong path at the wrong time, and you might land yourself in a serious pickle. Especially if the terrain changed. Imagine what’s gonna happen if you rewind yourself onto a freshly collapsed bridge. You’re so gonna fall to your doom.”

“Another limitation?” She continued. “Physical boundaries. Remember the collapsed bridge example? Now, imagine a cave in. You can’t rewind to places that have become blocked off. You’ll stop short on any obstruction denser than mere air. Really risky if you don’t know what you’re doing.”

Gulp.

Sounds like a double-edged sword.

“Well, as the saying goes: a tool is only as good as its user. That why I said you gotta be reeeeeeal smart with your powers.”

Would it be possible to do the reverse? Like, rewind your surroundings without resetting yourself.

“Possible. You need more skill and DT for that though. At your current state, you got neither.”

What about super speed? Bullet time dodges?
What about all that time manipulation stuff you’ve seen in anime?

“Judging from your pure Red status, maybe! All you need is time, practice, and a passing grade.”

You squeal in excitement. That’s so cooooooooool!

“Pardon my intrusion,” said Mom. “But you said something about… ‘passing’? Frisk is supposed to
take an exam?”

Oh snap. You didn’t tell anyone other than Sans about the Trial of the Crimson Hall. For a good reason too: you don’t want them to freak out and deny you of the opportunity.

To your fortune, Cenna caught on. “Mez’s gotta do the rest of the teaching, madam. All the stuff I recited? Learned them from him. Naturally when you have classes, you gotta have exams.”

“Oh my, more classes?” Mom frowned. “They’re already so preoccupied with school and their diplomatic work. How can we find the time to fit in all these magic lessons?”

“No need to worry about that yet. That’s gonna take some time. For now, just ten minutes of the position-rewind exercise is enough. Can’t let the kid overextend themselves either.”

Let’s practice a little more! Maybe you can walk from the other side of the couch? Or roll back to the mid point instead of the beginning?

“Eager, aren’t ya? Sure! I’m gonna go stand over th--”

Then you heard the sound of breaking glass, followed by repeated hollow smashing onto metal. It triggered a car alarm.

Alphys mentioned, “I think that’s from the main road.”

Cenna muttered, “Dammit, don’t tell me…!”

She dashed straight out of the house. The urgency prompted Undyne to swipe her winter coat and chase after your sister.

You did the same. Before Mom or Alphys could say anything, you were already running down the snowy road.

You heard Undyne yelling more swear words. Then, you saw her spears rain down.

A group of teenagers fled on motorbikes, whisked between the spiky downpour. They carried baseball bats and spray cans. Helmets concealed their faces.

Your heart skipped a beat. You hoped that this wasn’t what you think it was. However, when you arrived at the scene proper… it only confirmed your worst fears.

A cab got smashed and vandalized. Cenna tended to the injured driver by the sidewalk. Now you understood why Undyne flipped out so hard.

“What the heck was that for?!” she exclaimed.

The driver suffered a pretty nasty head wound. It’s bleeding. You were sure that he had plenty of bruises under his arm too.

You asked if he’s okay.

“I-I’m fine,” he answered. “I think.”

Mom and Alphys caught up to you by now. They gasped at the horrific sight.

You reassured them that the guy is fine. Although the same couldn’t be said for the car. With that kind of damage, there’s no way it could be road-worthy again.
By now, the ruckus had attracted quite a bit of bystanders.

Cenna asked, “What happened man? I thought you went back to the HQ.”

The driver winced as he tried to touch his wound. He explained: “I was calling my kids if they want to buy anything from Ebott Town. Snacks, Mettaton merch, or any other monster speciality.”

“Then those thugs went right up to my car and started smashing it. I tried to stop them. Well, they bashed me too.”

Cenna then asked, “Do you recognize any of those kids? Clothing articles? Or maybe the bikes they used?”

“The day’s too dark and the actions too fast. Sorry.”

“I’m gonna call the hospital.”

“Naaaah. Just leave that to me.” He said, “I’m in the taxi business, you know.”

The driver then messaged his buddies. Told them what happened, and asked if there’s anyone nearby to pick him up.

In the meantime, Mom used her healing magic to soothe his wounds. It works wonders on minor injuries. Used them a few times on you both in the Underground and on the Surface. It’s very comforting.

“There,” she said, “That should stop the bleeding. But do check with a doctor. I’m afraid to say that I’m not well-versed enough in human physiology to heal internal injuries.”

He’s amazed. “Wow, thanks. I feel a lot better now. Especially my arms. Don’t worry, ma’am. I gotta check in the hospital for insurance stuff anyway.”

Since the driver’s fine, Cenna joined Undyne in the wreckage inspection.

Your fish friend asked, “What’s with all the zig-zag scrawling? Spray paint?”

They were all over the back end of the car.

“Well fuck. That ain’t any random graffiti, Captain. You’re looking at the emblem of the lightning-heads. These are crappily drawn but I know it’s them.”

“Lightning-heads?”

“Yeah. Anti-Magi extremists. They target both the Magi and anyone who works with us. As you can see, they won’t even spare a simple cab driver.”

Mom just talked about them this morning… And now, the threat is real.

You marched up to the car and tried to touch it. You closed your eyes to focus. Wished very, very hard for the damage to be reversed.

Cenna lowered your arm and shook her head. “Sorry Frisky, it ain’t gonna work. If you wanna save the car, you gotta plant your mark long before the tragedy happened.”

Looking at the destruction fills you with Determination. You wish you could just jump back a bit in time and warn the man about the thugs.
Instead you felt a dull pain in your chest. In the back of your mind, you sensed that the butterfly mark closed off all sources of your power.

“Frisky, listen.”

Cenna squatted down to your level and whispered into your ear.

“I know Mez capped your power,” she said, “He ain’t doing that to sabotage you. It’s the opposite really: he’s trying to protect you. From yourself. It’s too easy to bite off more than you can chew. More so when you’re a freshie.”

What does he want you to learn?

“Your limits. What you can or cannot do. When. How. Why. This is super important. If you don’t learn this right, the maybes are gonna haunt you for life. And that’s one step closer to becoming a DEMON for eternity.”

…Though reluctant, you understand the intent. This is not the Underground, where it’s the same scenario repeating itself from start to finish.

You balled your hands into a fist. It’s frustrating, but Cenna had a point.

After taking a couple of deep breaths, you told her that you understand. Things can get a whole lot more complicated on the Surface.

Never hurts to be more careful.
After a discussion we discovered that there's not a single Mettaton POV yet. This must be rectified.

So here you go, a Mettaton POV scene. He's actually tricky to write due to his gratuitous use of praises. Props to people who got him right the first time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Mettaton.
The most fabulous celebrity of monsterkind. So he’d like to think. Positive thinking is vital for his business.

He expected to begin his Sunday morning with a hearty breakfast: joyful smiles with the rest of the family before they resume their plans for the concert.

Instead…

He found himself standing before the ugliest of ugly scenes.

Broken windows.
Chipped walls.
Bags of stinking garbage.

And an eyesore of a graffiti, filled with messages of hatred. The words they used were so strong that Mettaton refused to acknowledge their existence.

His studio was vandalized overnight. To make matters worse, the mayhem shook his family.

Blooky wouldn’t stop crying.
Mad Dummy almost made the situation worse by flipping out, throwing stuffing everywhere.
Shyren swam straight to Lemon Bread’s room and refused to emerge since.

Then there's the media.

If Mettaton had a choice, he rather spend all day comforting his traumatized family. But he’s the front face, the brand name. All his fans would want to hear his thoughts.

He had a job to do and people to protect.

Reporters crowded the front line. Station-quality microphones loomed over the hot-pink glam bot’s head.

“Mettaton, do you know who did this?”

He shook his head. “Oh no, darling. I don’t.”

Another reporter asked, “In the past, you’ve disagreed with quite a few major parties from the
entertainment industry. Think any of those could be the culprit?"

“Disagreements happen all the time, dear,” Mettaton replied. “I’m confident that my talented peers would never resort to such pettiness. If they do, well, I pity them. This is so juvenile that it’s beneath actual juveniles. Absolutely lacking in class!”

“Mister Mettaton, you don’t recognize that symbol?”

“A symbol?” he turned back to look at his messed up walls. “Well darling dearest, it’s quite a cacophony of symbols here. Would you be so kind to point out the one that caught your eye?”

“Over there, sir.” The reporter pointed his finger to a red bolt of lightning. All cameras shifted their attention there.

Mettaton tilted his head in puzzlement. “Is there something special about that one? I thought they’re just being edgy.”

A shocked gasp washed over the media crew.

“That’s Gungnir’s emblem. You don’t know anything about them?”

“I’m afraid not, sweetie,” the robot frowned. “Could you enlighten me?”

A voice from the far back answered before the reporter could say anything: “They’re extremists. The lowest of lowlifes. These people fear anything they do not understand.”

All attention turned towards the source. There stood a man in a tailcoat and an ebony cane.

Mettaton recognized him as the Magus with the red brooch. Papyrus’ trusted friend, and the one who saved Frisk from the torment of the DEMON Chara.

He’s not alone this time; he brought some bodyguards to keep the crowd from smothering him.

Without saying a word or even glancing at the reporters, he cut through all the way to his intended destination. This is a man experienced in dealing with the press.

“Good morning, Mister Mezil.” Mettaton greeted with his usual charm. “I’m sorry that my establishment is rather… embellished at the moment.”

The old man replied, “It’s fine. We should talk inside.”

“Oh? That’s quick. Please offer me a moment for a closing statement to the press. At least so those poor darlings will have something to write about.”

Being a newscaster once himself, Mettaton understood their hardships. He walked up to the front and beckoned the crowd toward his side.

When he had their attention, he began his speech:

“To my darling fans, this has been quite an upsetting day,” he said. “My house of creativity got vandalized and my family traumatized. Of course, I am both angry and disappointed. At the same time I’m very sad for the perpetrators. What compelled them to do such a thing? They must be miserable people.”

“My time on the Surface has taught me plenty of things. The wonder! The splendour! The glitz and glamour! The fabulousness of humanity! Freedom of expression and freedom of taste. Anyone has
the right not to like my work.”

“I’m fine with that, baby! I have matured both as a celebrity and a person. But there’s no need to resort to such destructive methods of voicing your opinions. Look at this mess. I cannot believe this is healthy for anyone, even for the vandalizers. Especially the vandalizers.”

He smiled, he sparkled, and he posed. “If you need more information, or someone to lend you an ear, my hotline is always open. Maybe we could smooth out the roilings of your heart.”

“And to rest of my fabulous darlings out there, please don’t do anything rash! I understand your outrage. Oh how could anyone do such a dastardly deed? No one hurts my crew, that sort of thing. But that’s exactly why we should remain calm.”

“I don’t want any of you sweethearts out there getting hurt. Or hurting others for the matter. I appreciate your concern, but let the good police handle this matter. Thank you for listening to me~”

The robot celebrity set his attention on the reporters themselves. “No cuts, please. No editing or whatnot. My message must reach the ears and eyes of every single lovely beauties out there. Toodles for now.”

With his statements made, Mettaton strut back to the studio. Mezil’s bodyguards escorted both of them in and prevented anyone from following.

The group slipped past the doors, shutting it tight, though they’re not out of the woods yet. They must reach inner chambers before they can breathe.

Mettaton led Mezil to his sound recording room. It’s far away from the entrance and it’s isolated by default.

Finally, the glam bot dropped his front. He leaned against the wall and whined, “This is the worst morning ever.”

The old man commented, “You handled it very well, Mister Mettaton. Despite your nervousness.”

Mezil Thyme.
The epitome of a ‘sharp tsundere principal’, as Papyrus had described. It’s rather intimidating.

Still, Mettaton put on a good show.

“Thank you…” he said, “So what brings you here Mister Mezil? Are you interested in the progress of my magnificent work? An offer for a promotion in your circles, perhaps?”

“I’m more interested in you,” he replied. With a straight face.

That one sentence sent a jolt through the glam bot’s SOUL.

GASP! Is he flirting with me?? That’s such a Frisky thing to do!
Oh no, I must quickly clarify this situation before his passion burns blazing hot.

Mettaton chuckled and waved a hand across his face. “I’m sorry, sir. You certainly have a splendid fancy style, but I’m not looking for a partner yet.”

Mezil squinted at the statement. “Has humanity corrupted your mind so soon? I don’t mean it that way, Mister Mettaton. I’m talking about your philosophy. Ideals. The reason why you became a celebrity.”
“…Oh, my bad about the misunderstanding.” Now he felt rather embarrassed. “Fans. You know. They can get pretty carried away. And I am quite a popular individual.”

*Phew. I’m glad that it’s nothing flirtatious.*

*It’s just an interview. Something that I’ve done a billion times by now. It’ll be a breeze.*

*Now, to make things a little less awkward.*

Mettaton said, “If that’s the case, I should provide the necessary refreshments. Do you prefer coffee or tea?”

“No preference,” Mezil replied, “I enjoy both. Sometimes combined.”

*Tea and coffee combined? That’s a Far East speciality, so I’ve heard. He’s more open to new things than he looks.*

“Very well. Please follow me to the guest area.”

The ‘guest area’ was more of a corner in the relaxation lounge. It’s comfortable enough to invite guests for both interviews and business discussions.

The usual studio crew doesn’t check in on Sundays. With the rest of the family still reeling from the mishap, he had to handle all the preparations alone.

Being the boss, Mettaton was not quite used to service work. Usually a secretary or one of his other staff members would prepare these.

He flipped the switch on the coffee maker machine. As it brewed, he took out his phone and searched for Burgerpants’ number.

*I should give him a call. He’s living so far away from the rest of us.*

*What if… What if he’s attacked?*

After four beeps, the cat monster answered the call.

“*Uh. Hi? W-what do you need?*”

“Burgerpants, are you alright?!” he asked, “Has anyone tried to hurt you?!”

“I’m okay…? Well, I did get smacked by a foam prop on stage. As a donkey. But. I’m okay!”

“Are you sure?”

“*Yes! Yes! I mean, all I’m doing now is cooking hash-browns for my roommates. I can’t believe my food prep and burger flipping skills are godsend in the human college world. You have no idea how many students don’t know how to boil water.*”

“Thank god you’re alright, Burgerpants.”

The cat on the other end of the line started to get worried. “*Did… uh… did something happen?*”

Mettaton found that he didn’t have the heart to break the news to his former employee; “Please stay safe, darling.” He said, ending the call.
Hmm… Didn’t Alphys-darling mention something about an extremist group? Smashed a poor cab driver’s car, she said.

It prompted him to check yesterday’s chat messages. The lack of activity indicated that the latest news had yet reach the Ebott Gang.

This silent status quo won’t last for long.

He found the message he was looking for. Tagged along the 7.09 PM message was a picture of a smashed car riddled with haphazard lightning marks.

The coffee machine chimed. The celebrity left behind a message saying that he’s fine. Then, set the device on mute. He can’t have it ringing and buzzing in the middle of an interview.

Coffee poured into a mug, sugar and cream prepared, while the only remaining Starfait in the fridge lay readied on a plate.

It’s time to serve the guest.

Mezil was on the phone, talking about something money-related.

He seems busy. I wonder what’s the topic?

Placing down the items, the bot said, “Here you go, Mister Mezil. Please enjoy.”

The human glanced up to Mettaton and nodded. His business continued on for a couple more seconds.

“Sorry about that,” said Mezil. “The cleaning company enquired about additional costs. I told them not to worry and carry on their work as required per contract.”

“A cleaning company?” Mettaton asked back.

“What’s so surprising?” the man replied. “The mess in your front yard won’t undo itself. And I don’t expect your staff to do everything alone.”

Cue a dramatic gasp. “M-mister Mezil, you’re helping us? Oh I’m SO grateful! Please let me foot some of the bill, darling. It’s not fair for you to pay for everything.”

“Denied. The transaction is already completed in full.”

What Papyrus said was true: this man is a bonafide tsundere.

Mettaton sat down on a single-person sofa and crossed over his legs, radiating glam in every moment. “My body is ready, baby. What do you wish to know?”

Thus began the interview.

“Are you not afraid of humans?” the Magus asked. He cut right into the heart of the topic.

“Afraid? Why?”
“‘They’re the unknown for your kind, steeped in a history of unspeakable violence.”’

The celebrity chuckled and brushed off the thought. “That’s ancient tales, sweetheart. I’ve always known humanity’s changed plenty since The Sealing.”
“How did you know? Mezil asked back.

Mettaton replied, “From all the fabulous media washed down the river, of course! That’s our only hint to what’s going on ‘up-there’. When I played those tapes and CDs, I didn’t see an enemy to our existence. Oh no, no…”

There was a spark in his eyes. “I saw potential. Immense, exciting, and BEAUTIFUL creative potential! It blew me away~”

“Props, lights, action! It’s so hard to believe they didn’t use a single bit of magic. Just special effects. Our history taught us that humans are pretty dull. But the proof is in the pudding as people say: they’re anything but boring!”

“I started practicing their style. Study their shows. Made a human fanclub! Well, the only person who shared my taste was the brilliant Doctor Alphys. Ah, that sweetheart, such a brilliant nerd.”

Mezil raised his brows. “A fanclub. For humans. You like us that much?”


“Even when they want you and your family dead?”

The bot was caught off guard. Less about the question and more by Mezil’s stare.

It’s heavy. Almost like a statue.

...Is it me, or there’s a chill in the air?
Oh dear me, I’m no good with complicated philosophy. If only the little human star is here to help. That stuff’s much more up their alley.

Mettaton smiled back. “A blanket treatment is just too unfair, Mister Mezil. Just because there are some hideous ones out there doesn’t mean everyone is terrible. There are so, so, soooo many genuine sweethearts. You included.”

“I think that compliment is far too soon for me,” said Mezil.

“Psh, that’s exactly what a tsundere would say.”

The old man was left in utter disbelief. “Is that what I am now? A ‘tsundere’?” Mezil discreetly coughed to clear both his throat and mind. “The reason I ask is this: you’re now a target of the Gungnir. Ignorant extremists. What will you do about them?”

“Who are those people anyway?” Mettaton asked.

“As I had mentioned, they’re the lowliest of lowlifes. They’re those who believe that might makes right. Named after a spear of myth, the lightning is their symbol. Swift. Powerful. They believe all social ills will only cease if humanity’s finest reach their full potential. A flawed principal at best.”

Mettaton was not sure if he could comprehend the scope laid out before him. His knowledge of history wasn’t the best, and things went down the deep end faster than the blink of an eye.

“You seem a little lost,” Mezil noted. “Well then, perhaps a change of perspective might help: do you believe only the strong should survive? Is it acceptable to leave the weak majority behind for the sake of the elite minority?”

The Magus’ words once again pierced through the glam bot’s SOUL. This time it wasn’t anything
flirty or comical, it was a serious accusation. As though the old man had pointed a gun into his very being and fired the bullet.

“No!” Mettaton exclaimed without a second thought. “Never! T—that’s wrong on so many levels!”

Once upon a time, he made that same mistake.

He left dear Blooky behind.  
Broke his promise to Shyren.  
Upturned Alphys’ plans and made them his own.

When he realised what he had done, he rushed back the entire way home and apologized for his selfishness posthaste.

Mezil explained. “The Gungnir believe the weak are at fault, deserving abandonment lest they catch up with the strong. After all, only the strongest can stand against threats toward peace. Criminals. Misdemeanour. Magic. Monsters. That’s what they believe.”

“Monsters?” The celebrity placed a hand on his chest, “A threat against humanity? But how? We just want to live in harmony.”

“…Here’s the thing, Mister Mettaton,” the other replied, “Humanity has never lived in harmony since the dawn of civilization. Conflict exists everywhere, all the time. If it’s not between nations, it’s between families. If not between families, it’s between individuals. If not between individuals, they struggle with themselves.”

“As you can see, human relations are generally tenuous. To have an extra factor so radically different tipping this delicate scale… this is what they see as a threat to their survival.”

“Remember, you are monsterkind’s most public face. The impact your entertainment company has had is undeniable. Because of your family-friendly media, the modern world accepted monsters better than the ancients. They saw nothing wrong with your kind and thus allowed curious freedom. After all, your ex-employee managed to enroll into college without the usual documentations required for humans.”

“A pen is mightier than a sword. You’re the living proof of that concept.”

Never did the celebrity expect an interview to be this blazing hot, burning with implications.

“W-wait a moment!” Mettaton exclaimed, “Isn’t this going into our dear ambassador’s territory? Oh my, all I wanted to do is to spread happiness!”

Mezil rose a brow. “Is that so?”

“Why yes! When I migrated to the Surface, one of the first things I noticed was that there are many, many, unhappy humans who’re unsatisfied with themselves.”

“Oh how I know that feeling, darling. For the longest time I couldn’t feel like ‘myself’. I was a ghost, just like dear cousin Blooky. Exactly like him! As time went by, I realised that I wanted to be more than just an incorporeal snail farmer.”

“I was wonderfully fortunate,” said Mettaton. “I’m here today because of the support of others. So, I wanted to give my wondrous human fans that same ‘oomph’! Tell them that they’re full of BEAUTIFUL potential.”
Pose. “Don’t give up!”
Pose. “Tomorrow will be better!”
Pose. “Enjoy life, even if it means trying hard!”
Pose. “Dance your way out of the rut, day in and out. Never forget to look at the bright side.”

More outlandish poses. By now the couch had become a prop of his glamour. Then Mettaton resumed to normal sitting position before the law of physics take over.

“You know, Mister Mezil,” he said, “When the callers tell me just how much my shows have brightened up their life… I feel so accomplished. Made someone’s day. Gave them the strength to face tomorrow. The dreariness of being trapped under a mountain? Absolutely forgotten.”

“I feel most ‘myself’ when I inspire others, knowing that these small caterpillars will one day transform into beautiful butterflies thanks to my wonderful effort. That’s all, sweetheart.”

Once Mettaton finished that sentence, there was a ‘spark’.

Not the bright and pleasant kind often associated with the creative field. No, it was an ember that ignited the ash-covered coals of an old past. They burned, yet remained dim.

“Beautiful?” Mezil said, “Are you aware of what happens between those stages?”

Mettaton replied, “Sleep for two weeks, then tada~.”

“As I had suspected, you’re ignorant. Just like those Gungnir. Let me tell you this, Mister Mettaton: metamorphosis is anything but beautiful. It’s gruesome. Brutal. Painful to look at, and painful to experience.”

“Those cute caterpillars? They do not merely sleep. They break down. Liquefy. Reduced into a slush before they can even begin the process of change. Should anything go wrong in the process, death awaits.”

Hearing the gritty details, the mortified robot leaned back. Snails do not undergo such a process. They just turn from small ones into big ones, and from there they’d be harvested for sale.

Maybe the whole butterfly analogy is a bust. Dreams take plenty of hard work, I know. But I don’t want my darlings to suffer that way!

“Mister Mezil,” so he said, “This seems a bit… personal, I’d say.”

“It is,” the other replied. “You might end up writing a grim music video if you had even an inkling of what I went through.”

“Does it involve violence?”
“Yes.”
“Does it involve deception?”
“Plenty.”
“Betrayal?”
“A staple landmine. No one escapes it.”

“Does it involve death?”
“I was once incinerated. Burned to ashes.”

Mettaton drew a dramatic gasp. “B-but you’re here today? Not as a ghost either.”
“When someone turns into a butterfly,” Mezil questioned back: “Can you truly say that they’re the same as the caterpillar? That is how it was for me.”

There was only a baffled silence. It’s a creepy riddle.

The old Magus continued, “If you’re wondering if I’ve ever had a dream as a young man, my answer is ‘No’. Simple survival would be more accurate description of day to day life: to earn enough money to get a place on my own, with some to spare for leisure.”

“All that changed in a single night.”

So mysterious, thought Mettaton. “Tell me more, darling. You have quite an interesting story.”

“I met someone who loves me for who I am. Love deep enough to be tricked by the worst of demons. Since that night, I swore that I will not let a wish so pure be twisted by the whims of false gods and bigots.”

“Your significant other?” the robot asked.

“My wife.”

Cue the most dramatic of dramatic gasps. “Oh wonderful baby darling, you are the sweetest of sweethearts! This is just like the movies! I would have never guessed that you’re such a romantic fellow.”

“Please save the compliments,” Mezil replied. He’s growing a little pink despite his stone-cold expression.

“Anyways,” he continued. “Joining the Magus Association as the ‘humanity’s ultimate weapon’ was the natural progression. It’s the best way I could do my job to provide a safe world for her. Since I never had any personal ambition, I had no regrets in leaving my civilian life behind.”

It’s then that the glam bot started to giggle.

“Is there an issue, Mister Mettaton?” Mezil frowned.

“Oh no, not at all,” Mettaton replied. “It’s just, I thought you sported the butterfly because it’s all fabulous and fancy. It’s quite a luxurious symbol, and your old upper-class sense of fashion screams of refinement. But, after hearing your side of the story, I understand there’s more to it than expected. Never judge a book by its covers.”

“Indeed.” Mezil said. “I believe duty calls, the cleaners should be here by now. And after that, I will need to finish the assignment of your Magi guards. They’ll keep a lookout for any further Gungnir presence.”

“Also, I’ve hired some kind caregivers to assist your family. They typically work with traumatized children, but their experience should prove beneficial. I understand that you have some especially timid ones on board?”

How thorough. It’s as though this man knew exactly what they needed.

For reasons that he couldn’t explain, it made the glam bot’s heart swell up in happiness.

The Magus tried to leave as sudden as he came. But then, Mettaton noticed that the refreshments were left untouched.
“Oh dear, Mister Mezil. You’re forgetting something.”

One second later, the old man turned back to finish his forgotten snack. He drank the cooled coffee straight with no sugar or cream added.

That was quite an eye-widening display. “Now that’s what I call hardcore, baby.”

“What is this dessert called?” asked Mezil.

“A Starfait.”

“Hmm… I think it’s too sweet for my wife’s taste.”

“If she prefers something more savoury, I suggest Glamagrams. Or maybe even an MTT-brand Face Steak. Ask and you shall receive.”

“Thank you, that will be a nice gift when I get back home.”

After a quick wipe of the mouth with a tissue, it’s time for more serious business.

Chapter End Notes


Also, Golden Quiche now has an extra lore sidework! It’s not complete yet at the time of posting, since it’s gonna take a while to compile everything into an in-setting format.

If you want to give it a read, head over to The Magus Compendium: http://archiveofourown.org/works/6902341
Many things are falling into place.

On that day, monsterkind received a grim reminder: humanity still feared the differences between us and them.

Sans Serif had expected such a reaction since his days in the Underground.

Levels of concern propelled to new heights when the news of Mettaton’s studio reached Ebott Town. It’s the second extremist incident within twenty-four hours.

The vandalism was a warning for what’s to come.

Under Toriel’s orders, Undyne summoned an emergency meeting with all the former members of the Royal Guard. By permission of the local police, the team got reinstated effective immediately.

Since Papyrus was technically still a member of the Royal Guard, he had to join the patrols as well. The little brother promised that he’ll be back about five in the evening. Provided there were no further incidents.

The big brother’s been preparing since the failed seal-breaking attempt. Snuck to the general store to buy a bag, notebooks, and more stationery.

Now he had to think of how he’ll collect data.

Things aren’t looking good. 
I need to break that butterfly before relations worsen. Find out what happened in the past timeline. 

...Since I’m unable to teleport, I will need to take travelling time into account.

I should first talk to Alphys. She manned the Dr-Extraction Machine and has scientific training. Other than Gaster, she would know what really happened in Frisk’s exorcism.

He slung the bag over his shoulder and slipped out of the house. Tried his best to avoid meeting anyone… or else they’ll notice his lack of powers.

Sans rang the doorbell of Alphys’ lab.

She answered.

If there’s a face of a person who had a rough start of the day, that’s Alphys. Her glasses were slanted and her coat unstraightened.

“Hey, you okay?” Sans asked.

“W-well…” Alphys glanced around, trying to find clarity. “I’m better now. Mettaton told me that he’s under Magi protection. So. He’s safe.”
“I’d like to ask some questions, if you don’t mind.”
“About?”
“Frisk’s ritual.”

“Oh. Okay, please come in.” The lizard straightened her glasses and tidied her collar. Consciously or otherwise, she prepared herself for business.

They settled down on the couch. Sans asked the questions, Alphys answered the best she could. He wrote down anything of interest in his notebook.

Mezil’s interception caught his attention.

“Whoa, really?” said Sans. “He used his own blood? That’s hardcore.”

Alphys nodded. “It’s quite freaky too. He mentioned it as ‘Determination in liquid form’. Humans don’t have a DT-Extraction machine. So, their own blood is the next best thing they have.”

“That’s really interesting. Mezil’s actions confirm that the human body stores Determination. I’ve considered it before, but I didn’t have the means or motivation to study deep.”

*How am I even going to get his blood for experiments? Should I ask Frisk to donate some?*

*That’s gonna be awkward. Maybe I should let the kid know that I got sabotaged. Yeah. Otherwise they’ll think I’m abandoning them at their greatest need.*

“Sans?”

Alphys interrupted his thoughts.

*Oh uh, she’s me giving that deeply concerned stare.*

He grinned back and said, “‘Sup? Never seen me hitting the books before?”

“No.”

“No.”

“Welp. I used to do this all the time.”

Back to scribbling he goes.

“Have you always known about Chara? And Flowey?” Alphys asked.

Here comes the complicated questions. Sans replied, “Both yes and no. I don’t remember them from past timelines unless something triggers a link of sorts.”

“Is… is there a reason why you kept behaving the same?”

Of course she knew. Or rather, Papyrus told everything to the gang. From A to Z. Left no detail out.

Sans was there. Had to endure through the whole thing. He had predicted it ever since Papyrus broke his Seal. Told himself to just be himself and stay calm.

He managed to do so until King Asgore tried to apologize. That was the straw that broke the camel’s back.

In the most frank, nonchalant manner he answered: “That’s my best bet. And I really didn’t want to break my promise to Toriel.”
“When you fought to the death, you used the same patterns too?” There was a quiver in Alphys’ voice.

“…Yeah,” answered Sans. “That was my best defense against Chara. If I tried to change, I would have opened myself up for an early finishing blow. Can’t have that.”

“I don’t think I understand. Why didn’t you fight to win?”

“Like Undyne? Nah. I know I can’t win, so I did my best to stall. The longer I survive, the longer we exist, y’know.”

“It seems so futile.”

“It is.”

This is getting uncomfortable. I should finish my notes and bail as soon as possible.

But… she has something that I need.

Sans glanced at the direction of the inner lab where the Dt-Extraction Machine stood installed. With all the mayhem going on, there’s a high chance that Alphys had yet to disassemble the set and stash it back into the storeroom.

With a bit more volume, Alphys said, “I-I know you found the Chronograph in the dump!”

The skeleton finished his last stroke with a little too much force: the tip of the pen almost ripped through the paper.

“I don’t think Papyrus knew that,” Sans replied.

“No. He doesn’t,” said Alphys, “But. I noticed that you used to buy very specific pieces of scrap from me. At premium price too. And. And. And how you tried to motivate me with perks.”

“Getting my phone number. Introducing me to Undyne. Giving assorted anime goods. Anything to make sure I won’t sell them to anyone else.”

He then asked, “…When did you realise this?”

“After listening to the Gaster-sensei’s testimony of the Core Incident,” she answered. “The timeframe matches up. Since nothing can cross the Barrier, well… there’s only one other outcome.”

“Also, it’s not like any other scrap. High quality steel. No rust. I’m not even sure if it’s really made out of iron. To be honest, I wanted to keep them for myself to build Mettaton’s first body.”

Heh. Just as I thought, Alphys is really smart.

Man, I was a nervous wreck when she found the pieces. If she knew anything about the Chronograph back then, I would be in quite a pickle.

Sans chuckled. “Luckily you didn’t. Because that could be pretty toxic for our pink celeb. The steel won’t degrade because it’s imbued with Determination. I have no idea how uncontrolled long-term exposure is going to affect a monster.”

Alphys gasped. “What?!”

“Yup. Long story short, if you add DT, a few other additives, and control the solidifying process, the substance binds together with the molecules. That’s how you get a time-defying piece of material.”
“Maybe you don’t remember it anymore, but we used to have a lava-refinement facility. The hot stuff in Hotland is rich in more ways than one. Especially in iron and silica. That’s where we get our high quality steel without depending on questionable junk. Gaster was reeeeal picky about his material source.”

Alphys dropped her jaw. “When did he build this facility? And what happened to it?”

“Before The Core,” Sans explained. “Heh, you think we made The Core from junk? Man, don’t let the old man hear you say that. He’s the biggest anti-junk guy in the entire nation.”

“As for what happened to that place? Well. The big quake sent it sinking back into the lava. Iron-nic, I know. There were no casualties because Gaster made sure everyone stayed home that day.”

“You’d think it’ll make headlines, but the explosion messed with a fair bit of existence. Some of the details regarding Gaster and my parents got erased from memory.”

Alphys asked, “How did you find out?”

“Welp. For a good number of weeks I couldn’t even remember Mom and Dad. Not to mention that Undyne failed to find any of our birth-related documentations. The notes she had about me? Incomplete.”

“T-that explains so much…” The lizard scientist fidgeted in her seat. “And you told no one about these?”

“Eh, too controversial.”

“Doesn’t it eat into you?”

Sans wanted to say ‘no’.

Except, he couldn’t.

Alphys furrowed her brows. She worked up the courage to speak despite the discomfort: “Sans, you can’t keep living like this. Y-you insisted that you’re a piece of trash. Well. I am a piece of trash too! And that’s why I want… I want to help you.”

“Oh, I’m fine?” he said.

She shook her head. “No, you’re not fine. I know you’re hiding something from us. I can see it as clear as day. It’s a trash thing.”

*Heh, good point.*

*But c’mon you’re nowhere my level, Alphys. There’s a huge difference between an insecure person and a certified killer.*

“Under one condition,” she continued. “If I help you, I will not keep secrets. No more hiding. Everyone has the right to know. So. So they can help you too. You’ve acted alone long enough.”

It’s an offer that he couldn’t take. Without a second thought, Sans closed his eyes and turned away from Alphys.

“Then, don’t help me.”

“But--”

“Please.”
Before Alphys could persuade, Undyne barged into the living room with Cenna in tow.

“Al,” said the fish. “We gotta pack up ASAP! Right now!”


Both hands in her pockets, the Magus explained: “Intel says your lab is next on the hit list, Doctor. We gotta move you to a safer place for the time being. Take only what you need.”

“I-I understand. We’ll be done soon enough.”

Undyne helped her girlfriend pack up. It would have been easier if they didn’t have so many vital documents.

Sans flipped to the back end of the book, ready to jot down more notes. He then walked right up to Cenna. “Mind if I ask a few more questions?”

“No probs,” she replied. “What do you want to know?”

It’s rather unnerving to see that teasing Magus so serious. She never dropped her cheeky flair, even in the face of death.

Now it’s all serious business.

*It reached that level, huh?*

*Exactly within calculations. Sigh. If only I’m wrong for once.*

A new piece of information caught Sans’ attention. “Interesting. None of the Gungnir are locals?”

Cenna nodded. “Ahuh. Also, I’m sure you noticed that the nearest human town is a fair distance away from the mountain. You’d expect people to settle closer after all these years. Well, they used to. Then the Great Ebott Razing happened.”

“I remember that,” he said. “The people from Chara’s village set the forest ablaze over the fear of golden flowers. I thought the humans would try to rebuild. Never did. Why?”

“It’s because this land might as well be a nuclear fallout zone after that fire. It looks fine on the surface, but damn the amount of DEMONs? Up the wazoo.”

“We initially thought the mass hauntings were the result of a violent death. Anywhere with a huge catastrophe? You’ll get lots of lingering spirits. Nothing unusual. But, we dealt with more than just victims of the fire here. Some of the DEMONs date waaaaay back to medieval times. It’s weird. But thanks to Mez’s new info, we finally understood why.”

“Ebott Goldenflowers,” said Sans.

“Yup,” Cenna confirmed. “The plants themselves may get burned to ashes, but those things make a ton of seeds. Imagine millions of those little buggers hiding underground. Everywhere. Escaping the flames.”

“Truth is you never needed an actual flower: all you need is just a part of that plant. Seeds, leaves, roots, whatever. So this entire land was condemned from the very beginning.”

“Everyone who lived and died here? High chance they never moved on either. It really doesn’t help that it became our local suicide forest. It’s isolated, haunted, and lots of DEMONs doing weird shit.”
Flowey, Chara, and the Ebott Razing have more in common than I realised. Hmm. I wonder why? What makes this plant so special? It’s worth taking a closer look.

Hang on… we’re assuming that Chara’s people were ignorant about the true properties of these flowers.

What if it’s the reverse? If they had partial knowledge, their absurd actions would be a little less insane. It’s most likely passed down as an oral legend. Those get corrupted reeeeal quick.

Inaccurate data is just as dangerous as having none. Maybe worse. They put so much faith in whatever little knowledge they had.

“You thinking of something, Sans?”

“Too much,” he replied. “Are the kids gonna go to school tomorrow?”

“Nah. Everyone’s gotta stay home for maximum safety. Those lightning-heads may turn up at any moment. So far, we issued three days. But if another attack happens within the grace period, we’ll extend it to a week.”

“What if it gets worse?” Sans asked.

“Time to summon the cavalry, as we say up here. Don’t worry. Us Magi are gonna do everything to protect you guys.”

That’s what I’m worried about.

It’s not a matter if they ‘will’ protect us. It’s whether or not they ‘can’.

Undyne had strapped an entire cabinet on her back. Her strength knows no bounds.

Cenna was left speechless for a moment. “Yo, Captain. I thought I told you guys to only bring the essentials.”

“Like hell we’re leaving Alphys’ precious research behind!” So said the fish lady. “This is her life work right here! Plus a whole lot of details about the Core Incident. I ain’t letting some grubby punks destroy our biggest case.”

“That ain’t gonna fit into the boot.”

“Who says we’re doing that? We’re gonna strap the whole thing on the top!”

Immediate facepalm from Cenna. Sans laughed in his heart. That’s pure Underground-level logic right there.

“Where’s the good doctor anyway?” Cenna asked.

“Setting up the defenses and making some final backups,” Undyne explained.

If I stay any longer, Alphys might suspect me.
Better make my leave first.

Sans shuffled himself to the exit. “Guys, I’m gonna go home first. Good luck with the house moving. Thanks for all the info by the way.”

He could feel Undyne fixating a suspicious glare upon his back.
I don’t have a good reputation. I know that.

Undyne will message one of the Dog Clan members to keep an eye on me. Make sure I go home and not snoop around for a chance to break in.

Welp. I’m gonna be a good boy then.

He trudged all the way back home. The first thing he did upon arrival was to go toward his room.

For a moment, he stared at the spot where the trashnado used to be. It collapsed last Friday. After the date. The same time when Sans discovered he was sealed.

Papyrus? Didn’t notice the oddity, too focused on Sans’ health.

Somehow a mysterious white fluffy dog invaded his room and slept in the middle of the nest of trash.

“Sorry buddy, you can’t stay here.”

Sans reached out his arm and moved the pup elsewhere with telekinesis. Put it down safely on the couch, unwilling to wake the critter. He could sympathize: nobody likes rude awakenings.

Looks like my gravity magic isn’t affected. Phew.

Man, I remembered the day when Papyrus suddenly turned my SOUL Blue. He freaked out so hard. I almost lost it too, but I had to act calm for his sake.

Gaster was gone by then. Not that I’d ever ask for his help. So I had to hammer together whatever I knew about Sage Geneva and her magic.

Still can’t believe I managed to make an artificial version of the Blue Aspect. It’s good enough to coach Paps, but it pales compared to the real thing.

Sans then resumed his mission. He dug into his drawers and started emptying the contents.

Beneath all those trombones, scrap paper, books, brandy, and toy bones, was a box labelled ‘Alphys’.

It’s filled with lockpicking tools that would make a cat burglar proud: from the standard manual picks, to master keycards, to self-made hacking consoles.

Much of her security systems were based off Gaster’s work. Well, she pretty much just moved into his Hotland Lab. Since he was my ‘sensei’ too, I know how they’re made. Their strengths. Their weaknesses.

Usually, these are just toys. Yeah, I could just teleport in but where’s the fun in that? Whenever Alphys figures out the ‘how’, she always has the cutest face, filled with frustration.

Getting Undyne riled up? A double plus. Making sure Alphys’ place is truly secure? Now that’s the best part.

Her lab contains Ebott’s most sensitive information. If anyone broke in and discovered the Determination Projects… welp. We’re done for.

Sans started selecting the tools he might need. The most important was a cloned master keycard. Provided there were no manual locks, this should make it a breeze.
...I can’t believe I’m doing this.
Alphys. If you end up hating me, I understand. Won’t hold it against you.

After all, there's a reason why I’m a true blue piece of trash.

He positioned his stargazing telescope at the windowsill. 53 degrees to the right -- between the buildings -- existed a narrow gap where he could see Ebott’s main highway. If his speculations were correct, they’d be driving on that particular stretch.

The telescope was a little too powerful for land surveying, but it’s better than no help at all.

From the windows, he watched out for signs of the ladies’ evacuation.

And watched.
And watched.
And watched.

Then he caught a glimpse of their car. It had a cabinet strapped onto the roof. Just as Undyne wanted.

*Coast is clear. Gotta finish the job before Papyrus comes home.*

When he snuck out via the window, Sans found no signs of the Dog Clan members. High chance that they had to resume patrols: they had bigger things to worry about than one lone skeleton.

Without his Seer’s Eye, vigilance must be maintained at all times.

It’s exhausting.

Sans heard Papyrus from a mile away. He’s more enthusiastic about his job than ever, yelling whatever catches his attention at the top of his non-existent lungs.

*Haha! Oh man, he’s a walking siren. Any troublemaker is gonna bail before he sees them.*

*That’s for the best too. I don’t want him to get tarnished. Papyrus makes his own ideal world without realising it.*

After many detours, Sans finally reached Alphys’ lab.

A bunch of humans stalked the gates. They’re somewhere around late teens to young adults, armed with baseball bats, paints, crowbars, and goodness knows what else stashed in their pickup truck.

*Cenna’s intel was spot on. Gungnir showed up.*

*Let’s see what’s on their mind…*

A woman tried to smash the console panel with her crowbar, but it bounced off a transparent tile.

“What the heck?!” she exclaimed.

Her other lady friend was not surprised. “This IS a lab after all. You think a mad doctor won’t beef up her security to the max?”

*Ah. Magical Glass. So, she managed to make them stand upright after all. That’s gonna make the perfect wall.*

A guy tried to spray some paint. The glass blew the stuff right back at his face. Started to cough and
hack with all sorts of expletives inserted in between.

Sans rolled his eyes. If he wanted to test it, he should have positioned the spray-can in a way where it won’t backfire in his face.

They tried a few other methods. None worked.

*At least I know these kids aren’t very bright. That’s a relief.*
*I’d love to see them fail all day, except I don’t have that luxury.*

Sans raised his hood, slipped his hands into his pockets and emerged from his hiding spot. Took heed of the camera’s field of view. He knew most of their placements, but knowing Alphys she might have them fixed in every possible location.

It’s too late to care.

“Hey,” he said.

Caught their attention right away. The skeleton continued to play casual.

“Looks like you guys are having a hard time. Why not just go home? The town’s crawling with cops and I’m sure you don’t want to get arrested.”

As expected, they’re not cooperative. The lady with the crowbar spat, “Who the fuck are you?”

“Me?” Sans replied, “Just a local passerby. Don’t worry though, missy. I won’t say anything. Nothing broke, right? Not even a single scratch on the walls or whatnot.”

He finished his statement with a stern warning: “Just don’t do anything that’ll change my mind.”

“Hey shortie,” said the guy. “How about you just fucking scram before we beat you down? You think you can just scare us away? We’re Gungnir! We fear nothing!”

The others laughed and chipped in their own insults.

“Yeah, you look weaksauce. Not like that fish monster.”

“Heh, my little brother is taller than you.”

“What’s a pile of bones gonna do to us anyway, huh?”

Sans picked up a small rock from the ground. Perhaps it’s a leftover from Undyne’s boulder workout. It’s about the size of his palm, just nice for his intended demonstration.

“Heh. You’re right. I’m just a weak short skeleton. What am I going to do, huh?”

He summoned one of his trademark weapons. It’s a bone. “Look at the ends, all roundy and cartoony. Makes you wonder how’s that gonna hurt.”

Then Sans skewered the rock. He twisted the immobile victim as if he’s making a kebab.

There was a stunned silence.

Sans darkened his sockets. “Wanna try?”

The humans lost all of their false courage posthaste. They fled into the truck and drove off without a single snarky remark.
“So much for fearing nothing.”

The master keycard did its job.

_Alright. Now I really hope Alphys’ defenses aren’t going to spring up right under my feet._

_Step one. Close the door._
_Step two, look out for blue-and-orange sensor lasers._
_Step three, find the light swi--_

Five seconds after he walked into the lab, he felt a sticky squish under his slippers.

“Oh fu--”

Spider webs dragged him upside down and towards the ceiling. A swarm of arachnids then weaved their silk around their victim, encasing him in a cocoon.

“Oh you ‘scummy humans’. You think the brilliant Doctor Alphys would leave her nest unguarded? Ahuhu~~”

It’s Muffet. Turns out, part of the ‘defense systems’ involved hiring guards.

“Hi,” said Sans.

“That voice! Sans?!”

One of the spiders turned on a flashlight and shined it on him. He stayed chill and casual. Muffet knew about his involvement in Mettaton’s business, so she’s no stranger to him.

The spider lady asked, “Why’d you sneak in here like a thief in the night?”

“Thieves don’t use the front door, lady,” Sans replied. “I’m just dropping in as a normal member of society. I mean, it’s pretty boneheaded to use the most obvious and guarded path. If I’m a real thief, I’d crawl through the vents.”

_Heh, maybe I should have done that._
_Actually, no. It’s going to be filled with spiders and guilt. At least the front door gives me an excuse._

“Ahuhuhuhuhuhuhuh… I’m not ignorant of your chronic trespassing habits, Mister Comedian. When you run a café, you hear all sorts of stories.”

_Am I screwed: yes, or no?_

Somehow the planets and star aligned again, because Muffet then said: “I admire your skills! Sneaking’s a niche art so few know how to appreciate. So what brings you here? Are you setting up the latest prank?”

Sans breathed a sigh of relief. “Nah. I need to use one of Alphys’ big machines. She didn’t have time to help, so I thought of helping myself. Is that alright?”

“Of course, ahuhu--! As long you don’t break anything.”


Muffet lowered Sans back to the ground and cut the webs as much as she could. There will always be some stubborn bits.
“Thanks,” he said. “You keep watching the lab, alright? I’ll be done in a jiffy.”

“Okay, ahuhu~. Good luck with your experiment!”

...Yeah. I’m gonna need all the luck I can get.
*Thanks Muffet. You have no idea how much of a lifesaver you really are.*

Chapter End Notes

My editor noted that there's a marked lack of Muffet, so here she is. Ahuhu~~
Mom told you to stay behind to watch the house. If Gungnir appears, you must lock yourself in your room and phone the Royal Guard. It’s too dangerous for a lone child to fight head-to-head against a group of violent adults.

You agreed. But you took it a step further, drawing out a rough layout of your house and noting down any possible escape routes in case your room became no longer safe. It’s something you learned from Sans in the crazier timelines.

You can’t quite remember what transpired back then due to its relative age, but it felt like a thriller movie. He was the bodyguard and you were the escort.

Despite your preparations, you’re not sure if you can pull it all off. Even with your new wizard magic.

You heard the doorbell. Instead of answering it right away, you tried to check the front yard from the second floor.

It’s Sans. He’s waving back at you. That’s a clause to open the door.

You hurried down to let him in. For some reason, he’s covered in spider webs. You asked him if he tangled with a certain eight-limbed baker?

“Yup.” Sans picked off some of the sticky threads. “Muffet’s a little too fired up about the whole ‘defending against scummy humans, ahahu~’ deal. We’re good now. Just a simple misunderstanding.”

He looks exhausted too.

You crossed your arms and puffed up your cheeks. What did he do? Where did he go? Did he attempt to prank someone again? Alphys? Papyrus? There’s no time for that!

Sans shook his head. “Kid, kid, I’m not fooling around. Look at this.”

He handed you a folded piece of paper. When you opened it up, it showed a diagram of a complicated magic star. Those ‘Arcanagram’ things. It’s all written in hand glyphs.

What’s this?

“A Seer’s Seal,” Sans explained. “Remember Papyrus? Someone gave me a taste of my own medicine.”


“I know you have a lot of questions, kid. Unfortunately, I’m wondering about the same thing.”

Sans took the paper back. He folded it up and slipped it into his jacket’s pocket.

Can’t he or Doctor Gaster break the seal? They got the smarts.

“We did. But, Mezil planted that butterfly Mark thing on the Seal itself. It preserves states. Papyrus, his memory. You, your reduced Determination. Me? The dang Seal.”
“With my Eye shut down, I can’t teleport, view past timelines, get accurate data, use half of my magic, or summon my Gasterblasters. I don’t even have my hundred percent dodge rate anymore.”

He extended a hand. “Try to slap it. Be as creative as you can.”

You slapped, he avoided. Then you remembered his memo.

You repeated the same steps, but this time you followed up your slap with a side-strike.

It came in contact.

You managed to hit his hand!

The Sans you knew would have avoided you at least ten times before you even had a fighting chance. The thought of a gimped Sans filled you with fear for his safety.

Does anyone else know?

“Only Doctor Gaster, for obvious reasons. I’d appreciate it if you keep this low-key.”

You understand.

Wait, the butterfly is made out of DT right? There’s Alphys’ machine! Maybe it’s possible to drain the Mark and vacuum-suck it dry?

Sans shook his head. “Been there. Done that. It’s a huge ‘nope’. I drained 50 containers of DT and it still refuses to break. Didn’t show a single moment of weakness either.”

Serious?

“Serious. I suspect that it’s being resupplied live over long distances. Maybe through that place Papyrus called The Void. It’s all hypothesis right now though. There’s not enough information to draw a concrete conclusion.”

The sockets darkened. “Kid. That Magus fellow, he’s way more powerful than ever expected. You’re strong, yeah. But he’s a ton more experienced. Do not fight him head-on, no matter what.”

Noted. Noted with one million extra notes. What should we do now?

“Keep your ears open, Frisk. Take note of any details of interest. Pay special attention whenever Mezil talks. He knows what’s up and he will attempt to control the flow of information.”

“As for me, I gotta get to the Magi’s main library before the borders close.”

Their main library?

“Of course. These guys started out as scholars. They’re definitely gonna have an extensive database. We need to learn more about the history of the Crimson Hall before we can take the next course of action.”

Mezil. Right. Today is Sunday, your first week. The Judge’s gonna ask soon if you’re ready.

Sans patted you on the shoulder. “Kid, don’t worry. I bet the old man’s up to his neck with this lightning-head problem. Even if you’re ready today, he’s not.”

So, it’ll get postponed regardless of your answer?
“Yeah. Lucky for us. Anyways Frisk, did Tori make any new pie?”

There’s a fresh batch in the fridge. She started making it yesterday night for the poor driver, but it got repurposed into welcoming gifts for Cenna’s team. There’s one slice left for you.

“Sorry buddy, but mind donating that to me? I need to give Papyrus a reason to drive to their headquarters in five seconds flat. He’s fond of this Mezil guy. Since he visited Mettaton personally, Paps would wanna give him a token of thanks for all the trouble.”

Wouldn’t ‘shortcuts’ be more convenient?

“And do more walking?” Sans groaned. “This day’s full of madness already. I want some quiet space for once. And an excuse to sleep. Besides it’ll be much safer for Paps. Cars are pretty much steel casings with wheels.”

You agreed and told Sans about the flying car incident. It happened while you were in hospital. Whizzed past your window as if it had rocket thrusters.

Congratulations, you’ve made the calmest skeleton in town drop his proverbial jaw.

“That. Is. Cool. Beyond words. Really. Wow. He made a car fly and treated it as if it’s a zero effort matter? My parents are right: he’s a powerhouse. That’s why he’s truly The Great Papyrus!”

Happier than before, Sans said, “Welp, I don’t need to worry about the car ride then. We can just fly if things get hot. Thanks for the tip, Frisk.”

No problem. You then went to the kitchen to pack up that slice of pie.

He accepted the plastic container. “Thanks. Send a message to Papyrus and tell him that I got pie for our good Judge. And, uh, I’ll be waiting at home.”

Sans, get a new phone already. Please.

“Yeah, yeah, I will. Just not right now.”

You waved goodbye and locked the door.

At five in the evening, you hear Papyrus’ over-enthusiastic yelling whiz past your home. It’s the end of his patrol shift. No doubt he’s heading home to start his pie delivery quest.

That’s when you heard your phone ring. It’s none other than Judge Thyme. As Sans said, you need to take heed of his words.

You answered it.

“Good Evening, Frisk.”

Good evening to him too.

“Have you made your decision yet?”

You told him ‘no’. It’s still too soon. But, you want to know what’s going on.

How are things?

“About as fine as a crisis can be, thank you. I trust that Judge Caraway had guarded the town
Seems so. You’re stuck at home and your local news feed has said nothing. It doesn’t look like the gangsters showed up.

“They’re around. Perhaps they’ve tried to act, but failed.”

How does he know?

“When you deal with certain people on a daily basis, you know how they think.”

These are the guys you’d had to wrestle with in the future…?

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

You pondered. Do they have a leader?

If they have one, you could try to convince them that the Ebott folk are not dangerous.

“No. They do not have a leader. I was forced to kill him a long time ago.”

Can’t Mezil rewind time and find out how to spare him?

“By now, Cenna would have told you about the nature of the Marks. Correct?”

You said yes.

“You’ve heard about the War of the Red Victory. But do really you think there were only eight of us in the entire world?”

No. Definitely not. There had to be more out there.

“Indeed. There was one who refused to join. Determined to stay out of the battle and wait for the outcome. He’s none other than the leader of the Gungnir. Mouthpiece of The Hero’s propaganda. And Chara’s replacement.”

Ah! That makes sense! They’re that cult Cenna once told you about. Or at least descended from those who worshipped the Legendary Hero.

Chara was once part of Gungnir, it sounds like. Destined to lead. Their people’s ‘Golden Quiche’. You can’t say you’re surprised.

From what they had told you, their parents put a great deal of pressure on them.

...Being a Red SOUL is suffering.

No wonder they’re so Determined to destroy the world.

Mezil continued: “The Legendary Hero and the deceased Gungnir Leader had one thing in common: they both had a red lightning bolt as their Mark.”

Heh, you thought all Marks are unique.

“Yes, they are. But ages had passed since the DEMON’s demise. It’s not unusual if a person in the future adopted a similar mindset, hence recreating an old Mark.”

But then, why did you have to kill him? No imprisonment? Rehab?
“Unfortunately, no. He had crafted a situation where I had only one choice: Kill or be killed. Their own philosophy. I hope you asked Doctor Gaster about The Seven Sages.”

Huh?
Wait…

Does this have anything to do with Mezil of Berendin?

He’s a Living Victory who was killed by The Legendary Hero. They’re both Red SOULS. It seems that only Reds can kill Reds, but… how?

Mezil did not answer your inquiries.

“Back to topic,” the Judge said. “Since the elimination of their leader, I’ve kept the Gungnir disorganized. Worked with law enforcement to remove, divert, or incarcerate potential unification candidates. Most my old targets are reformed members of society today.”

“What we have now is a loose mob linked via an online network. They’re headless and leaderless. More like a mass of drones than a proper army. It may not bring much consolation, but from my experience it’s better than worrying about competent spies lurking around every corner.”

“It doesn’t stop some parties from being… quite cunning. Your status as an astounding prodigy attracted their attention too. Imagine what would happen if someone who adhered to the Gungnir ideology adopted you?”

A dark aura loomed overhead. You realised what this means. They would no doubt attempt to brainwash you, for lack of a better description.

You’d become Chara in their stead.

Still, your childlike idealistic side refuses to believe that they’re all bad people. There had to be some who mean well.

There was a pause on Mezil’s side.

“…Interesting. By no means are you wrong: there are moderate and good-hearted people in Gungnir. But the problems don’t lie in just their members. It’s the foundation.”

“The Red Sage, our founder, is a much kinder man than the people gave him credit for. When he helps, he never expect his deeds to be returned. Though he’d be disappointed if they misused or wasted it, they’re free to do whatever they want with their newfound blessing. This value of freedom is central to our organization.”

“The Gungnir, however, do not believe in charity. Every deed must be returned. The help they give is more of an investment: those who take it must eventually contribute to their cause. Refuse to do so and be shunned by the rest. If not ‘disciplined’. A close-minded clause.”

“The Legendary Hero expected rewards for his actions. That contributed to his ultimate downfall.”

You’re not sure what to think of it. Perhaps it’s time for you to do some reading. Go online and review the encyclopedia entries about them.

Maybe ask Cenna why she thinks that the Legendary Hero was a psycho from the beginning? Though, you had a feeling that her statements would be coloured with a bias.
You asked Mezil if there’s anything else for today. Maybe an assignment?

“Hmm. You should further hone your magic skills with Judge Caraway. They will be useful in the future, provided you can pass.”

Okay. You wished him goodbye for now. And have a good night.

“Goodnight to you too, Frisk.”
Hints

Chapter Notes

It's about time that we get a Papyrus chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It is not every day that a tall, loud skeleton walked right up to the front office counter with a slice of pie in hand. Just his presence alone caused everyone to stop and watch.

“Can I help you with anything?” the front office receptionist asked. He’s having a very strange day, right here and now.

Papyrus being Papyrus, answered: “I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- IS HERE TO DELIVER OUR QUEEN’S MOST TREASURED CINNAMON BUTTERSCOTCH PIE!”

“Who are you delivering it to…?”
“MISTER MAGUS!”
“Sorry, but everyone is a Magus here. Do you have a specific name?”

“OH, VERY SORRY! I MEANT JUDGE MEZIL THYME. THE ONE WITH THE FANCY BLACK CANE AND THE RED BUTTERFLY BROOCH. WHO IS ALSO A TSUNDERE PRINCIPAL!”

The receptionist blinked a few times in both shock and bewilderment. The pie-delivering skeleton had just described one of their most important figures. Concerned, he tried to inch his hand below the desk to call for backup.

“I WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU DON’T TRY TO CALL THESE ‘SECURITY’ PEOPLE,” said Papyrus. “BECAUSE CAUSING A COMMOTION WOULD MAKE MISTER MAGUS VERY UNHAPPY.”

“How’d you know?”
“I JUST HAD A FEELING.”

A very awkward silence lingered between the two.

“Uh, Mister Papyrus. Right?” said the receptionist.

“YES! THE ONE AND ONLY GREAT PAPYRUS!”

“J-Judge Mezil Thyme isn’t in. Please wait at the lobby. The canteen is open until nine at night if you need any refreshments.”

“OKAY!” Papyrus chirped, “THANK YOU VERY MUCH!”

He marched towards the couch and sat down. Even when he’s in one place, he never quite did stop moving. There’s always something to look at: from the grand windows, to the polished stone floors, to the high ceilings, to the humans that surround him.
…The number of young humans standing around had increased exponentially. They kept whispering to each other.

Papyrus noticed that. “HELLO LITTLE AND NOT-SO-LITTLE HUMANS!”

The children shuffled around. Papyrus saw no fear in their eyes. Instead, they were overflowing with sheepish excitement.

One of the senior students stepped out to represent the youth. “S-sir, are you a skeleton from Ebott?”

“Yes, I am,” Papyrus replied.

“Can we… talk to you?”

“Of course!” He beckoned the group over, “THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS ALWAYS WILLING TO LEND AN EAR! ALTHOUGH I HAVE NONE.”

It’s as though the floodgates opened. They flocked to him without a second thought and swamped him with questions.

Lots of questions.
Too many questions!

Papyrus couldn’t sort through the bubbly mass of sheer curiosity. In the past he would have tried to quell the noise with a whole lot of yelling… But now, a different instinct welled up within him.

He jumped on the couch, turned his SOUL blue, and then somersaulted to the tall windows behind him. He landed right on the glass without causing a single crack.

The pie in his container was glued to the base with gravity magic too. It’s intact despite the grandiose display of acrobatics.

Every person in the lobby and the outer courtyards dropped their jaws, astounded.

Papyrus stood sideways on his boots and crossed his arms. In an irritated tone, he chided the chaos: “HUMANS, THAT WAS VERY RUDE OF YOU. PLEASE ASK ONE QUESTION AT A TIME!”

The whole group of children replied with several versions of ‘Sorry’. All at once.

One of the juniors then suggested, “Maybe we should raise our hands? Like in class. Then he can pick and choose.”

“That is an excellent idea!” Papyrus brightened up. “SHOW YOUR HANDS, HUMANS. LET THE GREAT PAPYRUS DECIDE!”

He walked down from the window all the way to ground level. This time, the band of youth gave him some space.

“QUESTION TIME BEGINS, NOW!”

Almost everyone raised their hands. Some waved around, others jumped in an attempt to catch the skeleton’s attention.

“HMMMM, THE BOY WITH THOSE HEADPHONE THINGS! WHAT’S YOUR QUESTION?”
The teenager asked, “Are there more magical skeletons like you?”

“Yes, there’s my brother Sans! He wanted to check out the library. He’s about half my height, chubby, and dresses in a blue hoodie. Then there’s my mom and dad and uncle Gaster! Their situation is a little complicated, but they’re made of bones just like me.”

“That’s so cool! Okay, I’m done.”

The shenanigans continue. Papyrus noticed a girl in the midst who once raised her hand, but had since dropped it down.

“The young miss over there,” he pointed square at her direction. “You wanted to ask a question, right?”

She lowered her head and shrank into her own self.

“There’s no need to be shy like Shyren. I -- The Great Papyrus -- do not discriminate!”

Her friends encouraged her to speak up. After some coaxing, she finally asked: “W-why do you call yourself ‘The Great Papyrus’? Is it a title from your people?”

“Why? Because I am great by default!”

“Isn’t that… arrogant?”

“No, dear human. Everyone is born great, whether they realise it or not! Only when you refuse to learn new things is when you become arrogant.”

“But I don’t feel great,” she muttered. “I’m not good at anything.”

In the most gusto and motivational manner, Papyrus said: “There’s no need to ‘feel’ great, human. You only need to ‘be’ great! Being a good person is the greatest you can be anywhere, anytime!”

A sense of awe swept over the group. The girl lifted her eyes at him. Once downcast, they now sparkled with inspiration.

“Thank you, sir!” she replied.

Papyrus answered more questions. Some silly, some poignant. Adults hung at the back and watched the proceedings with a smile.

One of the adults walked up to the group and said, “It’s late, kids. Time to go home.”

More said the same. They unleashed a big, disappointed ‘aww’ for the good majority of kids. The group started to disperse as they followed their respective grownups. Only a handful stayed behind, which included the first two folks he answered to.

It was then that Papyrus realised he had no idea who these young humans were and where they came from.

“Excuse me,” he asked, “But why are you all here in Mister Magus’ headquarters?”
The remaining youth chuckled at him.

“We’re students,” one said.
“Yup, the next generation of Magi!”

The boy with headphones further explained, “Some of us come from really far away, so we live in the dorms here.”

Papyrus brightened up. “OOOOH! DOES THAT MEAN YOU ALL CAN USE MAGIC LIKE US MONSTERS?!”

They shrugged.

“Monsters are way better than us according to the books.”
“Only the super talented people like Judge Caraway are on the same par.”

“OH I SEE! WAIT. TODAY IS A SUNDAY. SUNDAYS SHOULD HAVE NO SCHOOL, SO WHY ARE ALL YOUR NON-DORM FRIENDS HERE?”

“School events,” the boy answered. “We just had our magic-duelling semifinals. It’s an inter-school sports thing.”

“THAT SOUNDS FUN! SAY, HEADPHONE HUMAN. WHAT MAGIC CAN YOU DO?”

“Me? I’m a Blue Major. Lookie.”

His chest shone in a bright sapphire light. In one hop, the boy managed to jump three times higher than the average human. He then slowed down his fall with the same magic.

Papyrus squealed in delight. “THAT’S SO COOL!”

“No way, man! You’re the cool dude here,” the boy laughed. “You freaking walked on the windows like you’re a spider. I can’t compare with that.”

“THANK YOU FOR THE COMPLIMENTS, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I’VE SEEN A NOT-SO-SMALL HUMAN DO BLUE MAGIC. IT’S AMAZING! ALSO WE HAVE AN ACTUAL SPIDER IN TOWN. HER NAME IS MUFFET.”

Now he’s the curious one. Turning towards the shy girl, Papyrus asked, “WHAT ABOUT YOU, MISS? WHAT’S YOUR MAGIC?”

“I-I’m Green. I’m not very strong though…” she replied. Taking a step back, she demonstrated her powers. With a lot of effort, she conjured a thin pane of green-tinted glass before her.

Papyrus wanted to compliment her efforts. ‘Wanted’ was the word. Before he could do so, a vision flashed past his sight.

The girl he spoke to had glass shards embedded in her arms and her face. Red liquid flowed without cease. Papyrus had learned that humans leaking red was assuredly a bad sign.

He heard her voice echoing from a realm beyond time:

“Evacuate the juniors! I’m going back to escort some more. I-I don’t care if my shields are weak, it’s better than none!”

"More bombs incoming! Run!"
The students stared back, stunned. One of them pointed to their own face and said, “H-hey, Mister Papyrus? Are you okay? Your eye suddenly glowed orange and you look… horrified.”

Papyrus started to shiver. “I-I DON’T KNOW. I’M… I’M GETTING THESE STRANGE VISIONS.”

Illusionary flames engulfed his surroundings. Furniture upturned, windows smashed. Shadows of an angry mob barged through the front door with guns and assorted other homemade weapons.

It’s getting harder and harder to tell the difference between the present and the possibilities.

“Papyrus,” said a familiar voice. “Look at me.”

When he turned his head towards that direction, he saw a man who looks like Mezil Thyme. Except, he was much younger. Complete with black hair.

“MISTER MAGUS?” asked Papyrus. “YOU’RE NOT GREY.”

Mezil said: “I know you’re witness to overlapping visions of both the past and future. It’s the curse of those with the Orange Aspect. You will fear, but you will not yield. Seer, I need your courage now more than ever. From your expression it's easy to tell you’ve seen the worst.”

“Remember our lessons. What you’ve seen may never come to pass. Use what you’ve learned to search for the path to the best outcome. Follow it, no matter how strange it may seem.”

Intense fire engulfed the man. They consumed his flesh in a matter of seconds, leaving behind the silhouette of a charred skeleton in the center of the inferno.

Papyrus gasped. “OH MY GOD MISTER MAGUS, YOU HAVE DASHING HANDSOME BONES!!! EVEN IF YOU’RE NOT AS COOL AS I AM, YOU MAKE UP FOR IT WITH SHEER LEVELS OF CLASS.”

The blackened skeleton chuckled: “Is that so? Well, that’s very sweet of you.”

“SPEAKING OF SWEETS, HERE IS YOUR PIE.”

When the tall one offered his gift to Mezil, the visions vanished.

No fire.
No charred skeleton.
No injured humans.

“OH, YOU’RE BACK TO YOUR USUAL GREY SELF.”

“The visions subsided, I see. That’s good. You need proper sight to drive back home.” Mezil accepted the container of pie and inspected it. “Butterscotch cinnamon, hm? She’d love this.”

“What just happened, Judge Thyme?” a student asked.

“Papyrus is a ‘Seer’, one with the power to peer into spacetime,” explained the old Magus. “His cryptic responses may perturb you, but consider it as an opportunity of a lifetime. There’s no telling if you will ever meet a Seer so openly in the future.”

Oblivious to the interaction, the tall skeleton announced the completion of his quest: “PIE SAFELY DELIVERED! WHAT TIME DOES THE LIBRARY CLOSE? WHAT IF MY BROTHER FALLS ASLEEP PAST OPENING HOURS AND THE LIBRARIANS ACCIDENTALLY
“About Sans Serif,” said Mezil. “This is a house of education. Let him stay here for the night. He has much to study and much more to learn.”

“But, Undyne ordered us to stay home because of the Lightning-Heads.”

“That’s fine. We’ll take care of his protection.”

“You promise?” Papyrus lit up in gladness.

“As long he lets us do so.”

“Thank you very much Mister Magus! It’s soooo awesome to see him studying again after all those years of lethargy.”

He then said goodbye to the Magi of both young and old. “Stay well, Mister Magus! And be good, my newfound human friends! I’d love to meet you all again!”

The energetic skeleton dashed towards the stairs so he could descend down to the parking lot. Elevators were far too slow: he had no ‘patience’ to wait. He doesn’t need to use the steps either. All he needed to do was to jump and float down with the power of his magic.

The parking lot felt much like his old Underground home: dark, silent, echoey. It brought a sense of nostalgia that hailed back to his childhood days.

But does he ever want to retreat down there? No. Never.

He’s worried for the future. Still, there’s always hope.

After Papyrus drove up the ramp to the main road, he had a feeling that he should look toward the sky. There, he spotted a shortcut hovering about fifteen floors off the ground on the east side. Who says that they only exist on ground level?

“That looks a bit high up, but… I accept the challenge!”

He revved up his magic. A thick film of blue light enveloped the red car and it started levitating off the ground.

Before long, he had a crowd of astonished Magi gathering at the bottom. It’s a jaw-dropping display even for those who deal with magic every day. It’s not so much about the feat itself, but its deceptive ease.

On the fifteenth floor, the student dorms, Papyrus saw the young Magi again. They jumped excitedly and waved at him from behind the large glass panes.

Seeing their happiness uplifted his heart more so than his flying car. He lowered the window and hollered back to the kids. “Goodnight to you too, humans. Remember: always be good!”

Then off he went onto the highway of spacetime, car and all, toward a future free of tragedy.

Chapter End Notes
Count on Papyrus to take weird, disturbing visions with a positive (if not oblivious) stride.
Rain

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone. This scene took forever because I had my attention split between 4 pieces of work. This scene, the next, and two Compendium entries.

And of course planning. Too much mad planning! D: It involves a giant timeline spreadsheet and a lot of thinking.

I hope it'll all pay off in the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Since Mezil’s call, you booted up your computer and searched the net for information. It’s not as helpful as you might think.

Their official pages exist, but you’re certain that there’s elements of propaganda from both sides. Not that you blame them: anyone who wants to promote their group would advertise the best of themselves as much as possible.

The criticisms? You couldn’t tell if it’s a scholarly critique or a grudge match, more so from Gungnir’s side considering their common demographic.

Is this what Sans has to sort through whenever you ask for his help? You gained a newfound respect for his analytical skull.

You couldn’t find anything useful from the encyclopaedia sites either. They are neutral. Perhaps too neutral. They try to be as fair as possible.

Those research attempts soon relaxed into casual reading. As you browsed through the Magi’s ‘Notable People’ list, you spotted your biological family’s name.

The thought that your foreparents contributed so much to history filled you with familial pride.

What about the Gungnir? What sort of notable people do they have? What defines their history? You searched the paedia website for a list.

…No surprise they had a fair bit of assassins in their lineage. There’s a big reason why Chara’s so dang good with knives.

‘Persona’?

It seems that the best of the cultists rename themselves ‘Persona’. They believe it’s proof of their transcendence beyond the limitations of common humans. After their renaming ceremony, these people become the true leaders of Gungnir.

In a way this reminded you of the ‘Living Victory’ title, except way more specific.

If ‘Chara’ was a pun of ‘Character’, it’s likely that their parents really expected them to become this ‘Persona’ figure when they grow up. Though according to themself, their name was supposed to
mean ‘Joy’ or ‘Happiness’.

The last name on the list caught your eye. It’s less about the dude’s real identity but more about his date of death.

You remember Mezil said the following: "I was forced to kill him a long time ago." And no one else had filled in his position since...

The tsundere didn’t lie. It was indeed a long time ago. The last true Gungnir leader died a few months after your birth.

The day your parents died.

Clicking on the page further confirmed the testimonies. It’s stated that Judge Mezil Thyme dealt the finishing blow together with a veteran Vanquisher.

…But they left the details about the death vague. You kinda expected that.

The last Persona reminded you of an energetic anime protagonist. He looks quite hip and cool in his younger days complete with dyed hair highlights. Later in his life he became way more rugged, but there’s something about his confidence that radiated untarnished youth.

You wondered more about Mezil himself. What does the internet say about him? You decided to investigate.

Dang. Young Mezil was a bishounen. Actually, he’s a biseinen since he had that matured look to his face. Still a very handsome chap. He aged well in hindsight despite the sheer amount of crap he had to endure as Mister Red.

But you heard his voice. Met him face to face. The pictures could never capture his sense of underlying gravity.

The situation reminded you of your group photograph. You were there. Sans was there. Dad was there. Mom was there. Everyone looked fine on the pictures. No one would suspect the burdens you and your friends bear.

The page about Mezil might as well belong in a mystery novel. There were so many things implied but never specified. His wife, for example. No one had ever seen her despite multiple evidences of a romantic connection.

You read about his pre-Magus life. He came from a family of five: parents, an elder sister, himself, and a younger brother. It doesn’t sound like he’s close to them, though.

Your phone rang. It’s from Cenna.

“Yo there, Frisky! You peachy on your side of the fence?” It sounds like she’s munching on a sandwich.

You replied with a big ‘Yo!’ too. As for peachy… Mezil kinda indirectly maybe definitely assigned you to some researching homework. It’s kicking your butt. You asked if Cenna is free for a chat?

“Yup. I’m on dinner break at the moment.” Munch munch.

Since you’re using your desktop PC, you decided to reroute the phone call there. It’s less tiring to use your headset than to hold the phone. Integrated communication systems were a blessing.
You put on your gaming headphones. They’re comfy, but comically huge on your small head.

As you adjusted the microphone, you asked if Cenna can hear you.

“Loud and clear. So, what do ya wanna know?”

Your intense focus clipped out the surrounding world, and brought up the ‘shop-question-answer’ interface in your mental visualizations.

> Public perceptions about Magi and Gungnir.

You told her that you tried to read stuff on the internet. But, it’s hard to find any objective information. Maybe it’ll be better if you sought for more first-hand testimonies. You know that Cenna won’t mince her words, so you trust her.

“Oh man, I’m honoured Frisky. Ya sure you wanna do that? I mean, I’m Magi. That means I’ll be suspected for bias by default. Not to mention I’m trained to withhold information.”

Says the person engaged in yelling competitions with mister tsundere. With that much open chiding, there's no way she’ll be reserved.

“Jeez kid you really have a way with words. Okay! I’m gonna ask you a simple question: what do you think of us Magi before you found out the truth?”

You thought they’re spice wizard cultists. Both of you burst into laughter.

“Holy! Now that’s some real crazy misconception there. First off, only Vanquishers mask their names with assorted spice. Nobody else. Second, we’re the anti-cultists people here so don’t lump us together with those buggers!”

“Still, this pretty much explains our predicament. You ain’t the only one who thinks we’re fishy, Frisky. Other than some demon-busting activities, most civilians out there have no dang clue about what we do. We deal with a lot of confidential details.”

> Confidentiality.

Why keep so many things from the public? Wouldn’t education be better in the long run?

“Depends on the kind of info, really. The police and military do the same too. Some secrets are there to protect the Magi. Others exist to prevent the public from going nuts.”

“Paranoid witch-hunt mobs with burning pitchforks? Those were real, Frisky. Those were real. After a certain point, nobody’s gonna listen to any reason. They ain’t got any faith.”

“Really doesn’t help that we participate in some shady activity too.”

> Shady activity.

From your time-travelling adventures, you noticed that the Magi would use any means necessary to get their job done. What’s with the enlistment of kidnappers? Isn’t that against the law?

“Yeeeeeah, I honestly hated that deal. From what my Chronographer told me, Mez first used our legit agents. Then you got kidnapped for real! That’s when he got this so-called bright idea to stage one for our own benefit.”

Wow.
Explain, please. This is getting complicated.

“He contacted his police friends. They linked him to undercovers. The guy who nabbed you? He’s a cop. His real job was to make sure you stay alive. You know, arrange proper food and water. Keep you calm. No accidental deaths from stupidness. Stuff like that.”

“There were two clients that day: one of them a rich crook from beyond the country’s borders. The other Mez. The idea was to kidnap and transport you safely to their hideout. Meanwhile, the undercover agent informs the police about your location.”

“Law enforcers would then rescue ya from their grasp. Preferably right before they ship you off so they can catch the transporters red handed too. The real bad guys? Grilled for more intel before getting tossed into prison. Killing two birds with one stone.”

You dropped your jaw. That’s an elaborate plan. You never stayed in a timeline long enough to see it come to fruition.

Now you feel terri-bad. What about the undercover dude? He got freaking suplexed by Undyne! Is he alright???

“Other than some suplex-induced bruises, he’s fine. His team got all the intel they needed and finished up their assignment, so the cops flew him back to his original post far away from this region.”

Phew. You’re so glad that your strong fish friend didn’t kill anyone by accident. Things could have gone so much uglier. Like a spear through his SOUL.

Please pass this message to Judge Thyme: don’t do this mad stunt ever again.

Cenna laughed out loud, “Now you understand why he riles me up!”

Totally.

> Public Relations.

So the Magus Association, despite having government support, were seen as more suspicious than Gungnir by the general public?

You heard a grumbled sigh from the other side. “Those lightning-heads got it easy, man! Their philosophies appeal to the public. Especially to young idiots who don’t know any better.”

Philosophies?

“Mmmmggh, how do I put this…? Ever heard of this saying? ‘Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime’.”

Yep. You certainly heard that before.

“Well, it’s something like that. Think short term versus long term. Most folks want to solve their immediate problems in the shortest time-frame possible. The easy way out.”

“But life ain’t so simple, Frisky. There’s a lot of stuff that requires foresight: get to the root of the problem, plan, investigate, experiment, and wrestle with ongoing issues that may never have a proper resolution.”

“For a lot of common people, it’s a bit too out-there. It’s hard to understand if you’re not thinking
on the same level."

So, what about the Gungnir? How are they more popular?

“One, they’re a lot more motivational. Two, they appeal to personal desires.”

“Yeah sure their martial arts training regiment is as tough as nails, but they’re straightforward. Their philosophy is essentially ‘be strong, get strong, stay strong’. Why? To help defend humanity of course.”

“Now imagine if that supposed ‘help’ depends on violence. There are no limitations other than being ‘able’ of doing what you think is necessary.”

It struck you like a ton of bricks. The gangs who’re attacking Ebott believed they’ll help humanity by chasing the monsters away. If that happened in a large scale, it would result in war.

You told Cenna that you got the point. Is this why Mezil really doesn’t like those lightning-heads?

“You can say that Mez knows just how dangerous they can be. Their leader was a Red SOUL dude too. Two Reds fighting each other over decades is gonna result in a whole lotta hurt.”

“A little bit of trivia for ya, Frisky. The last ‘Persona’ was Mez’s classmate. They ain’t friends, but they ain’t strangers either. Kinda sad to see someone you know go down the drain.”

…You agreed with her. You wouldn’t know what to think if you encountered someone in the same predicament.

“Hey, sorry to cut short but I gotta get back to work now. Talk to ya later, Frisky.”

Okay. You wish her good luck on her duties. You then ended the call.

You pondered about your next best step. Isn’t Papyrus the epic living Chronograph fella now? He’ll be perfect for the job, provided you understand his unique explanations.

You tried calling him, but he didn’t answer. Instead you received a message that said the following:

‘I APOLOGIZE FOR NOT ANSWERING YOUR CALL, FRISK. BUT THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS ON A GRAND FETCH QUEST FOR UNCLE GASTER! I’LL GET BACK TO YOU WHEN I’M DONE.’

A fetch quest for the incarcerated goopy scientist? Is that even legal? Oh well, it piqued your curiosity enough to not alert Undyne about it. Not like that’s a good idea to begin with.

Your night continued as usual. Mom cooked dinner despite her exhaustion. You suggested eating out at Grillbys, but she told you that the establishment is closed; that fiery bartender will have to take part in the patrols.

She showed you a picture of him in his Captain’s uniform. With his helmet on, he’s literally a burning hot piece of armour. No wonder nobody recognized him.

You thus had a simple meal of buttered snails with macaroni. After your dinner, you practiced your time magic under Mom’s supervision.

It felt natural to you despite learning it only just a day ago. Remember point A, walk to point B, revert to point A. Rinse and repeat.
“You’re a natural at this, Frisk!” Mom commented.

You grinned back.

Then you started to think. Maybe by tomorrow, or the day after, you could try to do this ‘Marking’ thing you kept hearing about.

You retired for the night at the usual time. At about two in the morning, you got up to use the washroom.

A rush of droplets pattered on the shingles of your house. It’s a sound you’ve not heard in a long while.

Wait.

You dashed towards the window and pulled the curtain aside.

It’s raining. That only meant one thing:

Spring is coming.

Here you thought it’s still so far away.

You spotted an odd shadow walking within view of your window. It’s huge. There’s something protruding from the top of its head.

Are those horns…?
It’s Dad?!

When you took a closer look, you realised that it really was Dad. He stared at your house in a great longing.

Then he began walking down the path that led to Mount Ebott.

Your gut feeling warned you that something isn’t right.

Not right at all.

Again, you put your sneaking skills to use. You equipped your warm clothes, raincoat, and inched down to the entrance of your home.

The rain got heavier. A coat won’t be enough, so you grabbed an umbrella from the stand.

Then, just when you were about to strap on your boots…

“Where are you going, my child?”

Crap. Mom caught you red-handed, complete with her famous Mom-squint.

“I know you’re up to something, Frisk.”

Since she’s here, you told her that you saw Dad from your bedroom. He stared at the house before walking towards the mountain.

“. . .I see. It’s dangerous to go out alone in this weather. I’ll accompany you.”

Her statement surprised you. Won’t Mom try to keep you home?
She smiled back. “Well, you have that distinctive fire in your eye. You’re determined to follow Asgore no matter what I say.”

You chuckled back. That’s Mom alright. She knows your habits.

Mom hurried to put on her raincoat. Once she pulled up the hood, she took the umbrella for herself. She then held your hand.

The both of you set out into the rainy darkness together.

You and Mom followed the soft light of Dad’s magical embers. Each orb of fire served as lanterns for the long journey ahead. The both of you always walked a fair distance behind, though. Not too far so you couldn’t see Dad, and not too close that he would notice.

Rainclouds meanwhile blocked any sources of celestial nightlight. The downpour melted the snow into slush, mixing with the dirt to become slippery mud.

Mom was right, it’s dangerous to go alone. In this weather, if it weren’t for her guiding hand, you would have already slipped and tripped.

Thank god for Mom!

The winds blew the sky’s tears all over you and your mother. The umbrella couldn’t shield you from it all. Cold seeped into your bones. It’s frigid.

You thus inched closer to her, hoping to find some warm relief in her furry body. Alas, her damp raincoat prevented you from doing so.

Dad continued his stride through the rain. He didn’t wear a raincoat nor did he carry an umbrella. Only His Royal Highness’ cape concealed his standard floral Surface-wear from direct contact with the raindrops.

He’s been down since Sans rejected his apology. You could guess as much, but to see him so dejected right before you… was just plain heartbreaking.

Mom whispered to you, “Are you alright, my child?”

You nodded despite a slight shiver.

“If you need me to carry you, just let me know.”

You thanked Mom, but you’ll be fine. At least you hope so. There’s someone you need to stay strong for. Besides, you’ve survived worse colds.

After what seemed like forever, you witnessed Dad head into the Underground.

Why did he go back there at this hour?

Your anxious grip tightened around Mom’s hand.

Drenched from head to toe, Dad left behind a trail of cold regrets.

Dammit Frisk, this is not the time to make witty imagery. There’s something wrong with Dad, but you couldn’t tell what or why.

He went to the throne room. Despite the change of seasons, the cave shielded it from the extreme
weather outside. There, the golden flowers bloomed eternal.

Then.

He lifted his trembling arms high over his head.

“No…!” Mom muttered.

You wanted to ask why, but it’s too late.

Dad conjured up a giant ball of white fire: an artificial sun. A blast of hot air soon slammed on your entire being. You could feel the damp coldness evaporate in just a blink.

The flowers around Dad wilted and dried. Their papery leaves and flowers then kicked off the ground from the sheer might of his magic. Those that touched his flames ignited like dry tinder.

Mom launched her own fireball at Dad. It knocked him off his feet, like the time when she saved you. His magic dissipated as he tumbled at the wall.

“Oof!” Dad’s eyes spun. “T-Toriel?”

You ran up to him. In bewilderment, he muttered: “Frisk? Why are you here?”

Mom stormed right up to her lifelong mate and yelled: “You useless fool! Why would you try to incinerate them?! You love these flowers like your children!”

“I…” Dad turned his head away. “…Because you’re right. I am a useless fool.”

You don’t understand.

Grabbing his arm, you coaxed him to answer.

After a long silence, he confessed, “Doctor Alphys told me everything about the Ebott Goldenflowers. The ‘Cheaters of Death’. Why they did what they did in the ritual. Their violent history. The Great Ebott Razing. All of it.”

What is Dad talking about?

“Frisk,” he explained, “They’re spirit vessels. SOUL Eaters. They’ll store the essence of those who die near them, either as dust or as a corpse. The Determination Project wouldn’t have been a success had Asriel’s dust scattered on any other flower.”

Gasp. They’re DEMON catalysts?!

“You could say so. If… if I had to choose between my garden or my family, I’ll choose family. Destroying the Ebott Goldenflowers is the only way I can guarantee everyone’s safety. That includes you, Frisk. And …You too, Toriel.”

Mom dropped on her knees. A complex mix of frustration, grief, and compassion whirled within.

Tears streamed down his face. “I promised war. I promised vengeance. Yet I failed to stop Gaster on his mad quest. I agreed to raise Sans Serif as our Tactician. I did nothing, despite witnessing that young man’s growing alienation.”

“I could have talked to the young man when he borrowed my kitchen to cook for his brother. I could have found out more about his training. Gaster would listen if I told him to stop. Yet, I did nothing
“Then there’s Asriel and Chara,” he sobbed. “If only I had paid more attention to our children. If only I noticed Chara’s troubles. None of this would have happened.”

“You can’t change the past,” said Mom. Her eyes turned damp.

Dad nodded. “That is why I’m taking the initiative for a better future. I have enough power to turn this very earth to ash, along with all the hidden seeds. Without those flowers we won’t need to worry about restless spirits anymore.”

“Asgore, that’s no better than the humans who ruined this land!” She said, “You have the best intentions for everyone, yet you always, ALWAYS make the stupidest decisions.”

“I know,” he replied, “I know that better than anyone.”

“Then let me make the hard choices!”

Dad lifted his head for the first time in this night.

Mom reached out her hand and squeezed his tight. “I’m sorry, Asgore. I’ve been too harsh on you. Yes, I was upset and I still think you made the worst decision. But, I shouldn’t have left you high and dry for all this time, too afraid to face reality. It’s too much for me to expect you to take over my duties overnight, yet I abandoned you when you needed me the most. And…”

“Honestly… with our survival at stake, I might have ended up conscripting Sans as our Tactician too.”

…You remembered Doctor Gaster’s tales. The other monster nations who depended solely on magic succumbed to the human armies. Mom, being the smart one, would know the dire need for strategy.

You tossed yourself on Dad and hugged him tight.

You told him that the flowers are innocent. They’re just vessels. Vessels are good or bad depending on what people put inside of them.

Sure, they caused grief once. But it’s thanks to them that the Barrier could be broken in the first place.

They saved Chara and Asriel too. If they didn’t exist, Mom and Dad would have lost their children for good.

The Magi gave them their own room.
Provided toys and chores so that they’ll never get bored.
Made new friends.

They’re happy despite lacking a true SOUL. They’re not suffering anymore.

‘So please, stop hurting yourself.’

That’s what you told Dad.

The great King of Monsterkind finally moved. He wrapped his massive arms around Mom. You’re in the middle of the hug sandwich.
It’s so warm. So nice.

“I’m sorry,” said Dad. “I’m sorry too, dear,” Mom replied.

You tell Mom and Dad you’re sorry for all the bad times across each and every timeline.

The three of you huddled together in the garden of golden flowers what what seemed like an eternity.

You then heard a muffled, high-pitched ‘NNNNNNNG’ in the background. Mom and Dad loosened their grip in response to the mystery sound as well.

It’s Papyrus. He’s trying his absolute best to not scream out of joy at the scene before him.

Bless that sweet skeleton.

Hmm… He’s carrying a ton of bags. They’re filled with… electronic equipment?

Mom being Mom, said: “You have permission to respond.”

Papyrus squealed at the top of his ribs: “THIS IS THE MOST TOUCHING MOMENT OF MY LIFE!”

Nah, Papyrus. He’ll get more touching moments in the future.

You then asked him if all those bags were for Gaster’s grand fetch quest.

“YES INDEED! UNCLE GASTER WANTED TO STUDY SOMETHING VERY, VERY IMPORTANT. I OFFERED TO EXPLAIN, BUT HE’D RATHER SEE THE PAST FOR HIMSELF.”

How?

Papyrus scrunched his brows. It’s clear that he doesn’t quite understand what’s going on. “SOMETHING ABOUT ‘PROJECTING WHAT I SEE ON A SCREEN’. MY POWERS ARE AWESOME, BUT TRYING TO RECREATE THE AWESOMENESS OUTSIDE OF THE VOID IS EXHAUSTING. EVEN FOR THE GREAT PAPYRUS.”

“So Uncle Gaster thought of a brilliant plan. Let’s make a machine to help me!”

That explains the tech stuff. But, it doesn’t explain anything else. Mom, Dad, and you stared at each other.

“I…” Mom hesitated at first. “I’m actually curious. If it’s something that would help Papyrus, I doubt it’ll be dangerous. But is it wise to let him make another contraption?”

“Gaster is a new man, Toriel,” said Dad. “I trust his aid.”

You nodded to Mom. Remember the night when you almost missed your curfew? He taught you how to do math, along with a few other things. You’re certain that he’s a stable individual on the path to redemption.

Mom smiled. “Alright then. Papyrus, when will this machine be ready?”
His right Eye lit up orange as he took a peek into the possible future. “OH! UNCLE GASTER WILL FINISH THE JOB ONCE I DELIVER THIS BATCH. I CAN SEE YOU’RE ALL THERE TOO.”

Well then, what are we waiting for? Let’s go!

Chapter End Notes

Keep an eye out on The Magus Compendium for all the science! URL right below.

http://archiveofourown.org/works/6902341

To enjoy the most of GQ's events, it's important to understand the reason why and how things work. The Magus Compendium provides a concise overview without having to piece together scattered clues across the entire story.

...Or so I hope. Really hope. Lots of hope.

And yes, Determination will be one of the major subjects when we peg down the exact science and history.
Sans sighed as he slammed his last book shut.

“Another bust,” he muttered to himself. “Damn, they should have information somewhere.”

The Spire’s Grand Library was divided into two sections.

One: the public ‘outer’ library accessible to both visitors and students alike.
Two: the private ‘inner’ library restricted to professors and other high-ranking staff.

The information he sought for would be impossible to find in the public zones, so he broke into the staff-restricted area with the tools he had once made to weasel into Alphys’ Lab.

Despite being roughly half the size of the public zone, the private section still covered about five floors of nothing but books, computers, chairs, and tables.

After six hours, he had scoured the entire pin-drop silent library. To his fortune, not a single person came inside.

Odd, right? Sans couldn’t help but to feel like he’s being lured into a trap.

_ Jeez, I’m feeling tired. Been going on nonstop for an entire day now. My bones aren’t made for this._

Two books caught his personal interest. One of it was a geographical survey of the region, the other an Arcanagram engineering compendium.

_I’ve always wondered if there’s anything underneath our feet in the Underground. We never had the means or motivation to find out. I should take a peek and see what they discovered about Ebott._

After taking the extra books, he dragged himself to a quiet corner with his backpack. The results of his research piled around in an organized mess.

Sans popped open a fresh bottle of ketchup and started drinking it to replenish his stamina.

He felt like guzzling at least half the bottle down. But after taking only two gulps, he screwed the lid back on and stashed it in his bag. It clanked with another empty bottle of ketchup.

_There’s no telling how long I’ll be here. Better be conservative._

He read the geography book. The first thing he checked on was the year of publication. This book was written about two years ago. It’s still reasonably new, hence the information should still be serviceable.

The first chapter elaborated on mountain elevation.
The second chapter discussed about the flow of water.

_Hm? What’s this? It’s a map of the region’s groundwater. Successive drought has prompted the surrounding settlements to drill more wells._

_Not all of them are safe for consumption. The ones along the coast are too brackish. The west side_
has contamination from natural arsenic deposits…

What’s the scale of the Barrier in the first place? It’s huge, but what’s the exact diameter? If Waterfall dries up, would we still have a source of clean groundwater within reach of the Underground?

…Sigh. Why am I even thinking about this? We’re free now. There’s no pressing need to answer those questions.

He switched to the Arcanagram engineering book. It detailed attempts of hybridizing physical science with magic. Some efforts succeeded enough for practical use, while others remain experimental.

Production’s small scale due to the limitations of magical energy sources. Conventional electricity is much easier to generate with the technology of humans.

I hate to admit it, but reading this makes me appreciate Gaster’s Core. That one structure pumped out more magic-based power than the entire Surface.

Exhaustion started to overtake him. Sans tried his best to remain awake, but his eyelids kept on drooping.

In the end he fell asleep. It’s more of a light nap. Semi-conscious. He’s in a restricted zone after all. He must be ready to flee or suss his way out of the library the moment someone spots him.

It reminded him of his battle with Chara. He still had to dodge, even at the brink of exhaustion.

For the first time in a long while, he had no dreams or visions to haunt him. He thought he might get a good rest for once.

Then he heard a woman’s voice whisper into his mind.

“Wake up.”

Sans snapped wide awake.

That’s not Mom’s.
Toriel? No no no, definitely not Toriel. Not Undyne or Alphys either.

Who the fuck?

He sensed a familiar hum in the air.
It’s magic.

Cautious, Sans picked up his bag and investigated the source.

It’s coming from the center of the library. There’s an airwell there. From that point, you can see all five levels of the library at once…

When he arrived, he found himself staring at a disk-shaped floating platform.

Okay. That thing was definitely part of the ceiling when I first broke in.

Hmm… Sans pondered.

Will this take him somewhere gently?
Or will it attempt to crush him on the ceiling?

*Welp. If anything happens, I'll turn my SOUL blue and fall sideways. I still have that option.*

Sans stepped on the platform. Vigilance hid behind his relaxed grin.

To his relief, it floated upwards at a stable, constant rate akin to an elevator.

*Heh. Maybe it'll instead attempt to crush me at a slow and peaceful pace? ‘LOL’, as Alphys would say.*

None of his fatalistic expectations came true: the false ceiling parted ways to reveal a pitch-black shaft.

*This is a claustrophobic’s nightmare, I tell you.*

The platform continued to ascend. When the ceiling shut beneath him, he was greeted by the soft glow of rainbow-coloured guiding lights. He could sense that they’re all fuelled by magic.

It’s enchanting even for a monster’s standard. They left Sans too stunned to make any witty personal remarks.

The vertical tunnel stretched on. From the amount of time passed, he sensed that he’s at least twenty floors above ground now… if not more.

Then, the platform slowed to a stop. The north wall slid aside to reveal a whole new library.

“Holy hotdogs.” Sans muttered to himself. “It’s a hidden library inside a private library. These guys are serious.”

*I have a feeling that I’m going to trigger a trap if I step off the platform. But… I don’t feel safe standing on this floating disc either.*

Despite the risks, he entered the hidden library. The elevator descended back down the moment it detected no more passengers.

Contrary to his expectations… nothing happened. Again.

Sans knew he can’t go back now. Finding an escape route will have to wait.

He ran the tip of his skeletal fingertip along the shelves. The books were all bound in the same reddish-brown canvas, identified by a serial number instead of a title.

He stopped and curled his hand into a fist. Then, he tapped his knucklebone on the shelf twice.

“Knock, knock,” he said.

No reply.

Sans resumed his walk along the shelves. Time and time again he’d pause to repeat the Knock Knock joke.

He did it again.
And again.
And again…
Until he’s back at where he started.

At long last, he said: “Knock, knock. I know you’re there, lady.”

Seconds passed before he received a response at last.

“When did you notice?” she answered. It’s the same voice as the one who woke him up.

*Perhaps a maiden in her twenties?*

No. I can’t guess her age. If she’s a Seer, her expected lifespan stretches on for centuries. She won’t age anywhere as fast as a human or a normal skelly.

“Since the beginning,” Sans replied with a slight chuckle. “Let’s have a little ice-breaking session, eh? ‘Knock knock’.”

The woman shut down his attempt on the spot. “This is not the situation for subpar corny jokes, young Lichborn! I refuse to participate in your nonsense!”

That shocked him. Sans never, ever had a joke rejected in such a vehement manner. The most he’d get was some annoyed yelling from Papyrus, and his younger brother secretly enjoyed it.


“Assassin, I know what you’re capable of. You won’t lull me with your amiable front.”

*Her voice is full of defensiveness.*

*She’s scared.*


“Even if I stand in your way?” she questioned.

Sans gulped. This was the first time he ever met another person who thought on the same wavelength. It’s… unnerving.

“May I offer you my hypothesis?” He asked. If she’s not the kind to joke, maybe he could impress her with a serious analysis.

After a brief hesitation, she agreed: “…You may.”

He leaned back against the shelf. “This entire library is trapped with hidden binding seals. If I were you, I’d have placed an extra strong one at the elevator entrance. You could either trigger it the moment someone steps in, or when someone attempts to escape.”

“So, if I try to do anything funny, you’ll tie me down tighter than a Sunday roast, right? I won’t be able to run. Nor would I be able to strike. My cannons? Unavailable because I’m sealed.”

“You’re a real expert when it comes to Arcanagrams. No doubt you could write a clause to completely lock the rest of my magical ability as well. Once immobilized, you could shoot me with your gun. Either at close distance, or point blank.”

“Why a gun? First of all, I doubt you’d want to wreck the place. Secondly, it’s loud as hell. It doubles as signal for all the hidden bodyguards you’ve stationed nearby. Maybe the floor above us? Or under? I don’t know. Oh. You emptied the private library for the staff members’ safety, I bet.”
“No offense, but I don’t think you could pull any of that off. Sure, you probably know how to maintain and wield a gun. It’s just that you’ve never fired it other than in training. The only reason we’re having this conversation now is due to your own curiosity. I don’t think we ever talked in the past timelines.”

The lady behind the shelves neither confirmed nor denied.

“State my colours, please.” she said.


“Your main strength comes from gathering intel and piecing them together to form a bigger picture. The more you know, the better your analysis. Handy when time starts looping, but you cannot predict the future.”

“See, Judge Thyme may be a sneaky cheater, but it’s impossible for him to scrutinize every tiny detail. …That’s where you come in.”

A tensed silence hung in the air.

“You are correct,” she answered at last. “Down to the final statement. Your greatest asset is not your magic. Rather, it’s your mind. Sealing your Eye won’t change that fact.”

“Hey, hey. You’re no slouch either,” said Sans. “What you did there, that’s some crazy prepared stuff.”

“It’s only logical.”

“Yup. I understand. We both have ‘Perseverance’ as a defining feature. Logic is our forte.”

He heard a soft, cynical giggle.

Guess my plan worked. Sorta.

Oh man, I can’t believe she’s Lichborn. The way she thinks chills me to the bone. I’m so lucky that she also has Kindness as her trait. Things would have gotten much worse otherwise.

Huh… should I?

Sans decided to grab the rare opportunity. “Maaaaybe this question is a bit too personal. You don’t have to answer it if you’re uncomfortable. But. Were you raised to think like humans?”

“No,” The lady answered, “I was raised by humans. My nanny was a human. My teachers were human. The few playmates I had were also human. My grandfather too… he might as well be human.”

Well fuck. That explains everything. Here I hoped that her monster heritage would cut me some slack.

Stay calm, Sans. Just. Stay calm. Put all those PR skills to use. And no jokes. She takes those as an insult.

“Oh, okay then. Have I proven my trustworthiness yet? I’m not hurting you despite knowing everything.” Sans winked even though he knew she can’t see it.

The slow, hesitant responses stirred more uneasy tension than he expected.
“What do you seek?” the lady asked. He noted a slight relaxation in her tone of voice. “Which book?”

“The one about that big Living Victory skirmish. There has to be a reason behind that upset. Frisk told me that the Supreme Judge before Mezil Thyme was one of the strongest in history. Yet, he got overpowered by some random chessmaster. The whole scenario screams of secrets.”

She said, “…You are correct once more.”

One of the many books glowed blue. It floated to Sans and hovered there, waiting for him to grip it.

“This is the ‘War of the Red Victory’ in its entirety.”

He took the book and read it posthaste. The covers may be traditional, but its contents were about as modern as it got. It’s printed text on acid-free paper. Complete with colour, whenever applicable.

The lady broke the silence this time. “Your colours,” she said, “Cyan. Yellow. Purple. I told Judge Caraway that your magic deals with the ‘death of existence’. The End.”

“Huh, she did mention something like that.” Not that Sans would deny.

“That’s just a simplified explanation. Judge Caraway… She’s not very good with science. But you… you would understand. Do you wish to listen?”

“Shoot, lady.” Then Sans hoped so hard that she won’t take his pun literally and attempt to fire a loaded gun.

Fortunately, she did not take advantage of his loosened tongue. “You can accurately perceive the strengths and weaknesses of everything you see. The shelves. The walls. Spacetime itself. All have cracks otherwise invisible to others.”

“But you don’t merely see. You understand the very nature of reality, subconsciously or otherwise. It is due to this knowledge, you can cut space to teleport and create a ‘poison’ that disintegrates matter into the tiniest particulates.”

“These powers have made you into the ultimate weapon, Sans Serif: the last defense against the creation of the Seven SOUL DEMON-GOD. Sealing you was the correct choice. Still, your colours wouldn’t be anywhere as effective if you didn’t also have the mind of a supercomputer.”

Sans laughed out loud. “Ooooh boy, that’s the most accurate description ever! Hell, not even Gaster nailed it. He’s close but not close enough. You got it spot on. Props to you, lady. Props to you.”

“Thank you,” She seemed happy. “I wasn’t sure until I analyzed your wormhole mechanics. It’s a very specific science that’s beyond my comprehension.”

“Meh, it’s nothing great,” Sans replied, “The wormhole looks cool. But frankly, it’s useless. Besides, it’s not like anybody remembers that I’ve saved the world.”

“…Sans Serif, you underestimate yourself.”

“Nah. I’m trash. Trash can’t go any lower than being trash.”

“It infuriates me to hear such negative opinions of oneself, more so after you’ve openly demonstrated your superior intellectual capabilities.”

Sans started sweating bullets.
Did she snap at me again? Yes. She did.

Help me, this woman is waaaaaaay too stressed out. It's like I’m walking on eggshells here. I really should shut up before I make the situation worse.

Shut up, he did. He focused square on his reading material without making any excuses or witty comebacks. Not even an apology.

It’s not that he wanted to be rude… he just doesn’t trust himself to sound sincere. There’s been enough misunderstandings for the day.

He heard another hum of magic. The lady withdrew a different book from the shelves. She read it to pass the time and to suppress her own anxiety.

Sans’ grin slowly faded as he got deeper and deeper into the most well-kept secrets of the Red SOUL skirmish.

When he finished his reading, he put the book down on the ground. He then slapped his own face to chide himself for his own tunnel vision.

“…That’s it?” said Sans. “That’s the secret? It’s so damn simple, I can’t believe I didn’t consider it until now.”

“Do you want to read my book?” the lady asked. “It’s all about Determination.”

Sans turned the offer down. “Nah. I’m good. I understand what’s going on now. All I need to do is get back home and start the real lab work.”

“And the Trial of the Crimson Hall?”
“Figured that out too.”

She giggled. “And you say you’re a piece of refuse? As I have said, you underestimate yourself.”

Time to make my exit.
...Actually, no. There’s one more question.

It’s something he won’t find in any book.

“Why are you helping me anyway?” he asked back. “Of all the people in the world, you should know just how much of a wildcard I can be. Who says I won’t use this information against you and your boss?”

“Insufficient data to formulate a concrete conclusion,” she replied. “However, there are some scenarios of which I’m certain. For example: if the continuance of Sans Serif changes from true to false, Judge Thyme will reset.”

What the--?!
Her speech patterns flipped from ‘polite lady’ to a full blown ‘mother computer’!

This is teeth-chattering level of freaky, man. No way this is normal human behaviour.

“And what if you die?” Sans asked. He’s curious to know more about the man behind this dangerous gamble.

“…He will reset, even if my death ensures a thousand percent chance of attaining certain victory. Therefore, my danger quotient must remain at zero.”
It's all within Sans' expectations. “Yup. Thought so. Don’t worry, you’re safe. Wrecking my best bet is the last thing I want to do.”

His eyes shifted left and right. As far as he could tell, the hidden library had no alternative exits. “Uh. I'd like to go home now. Mind helping me take out the trash?”

No reply.

“Lady…?” Sans asked.

There and then, the smoothest skeleton in Ebott realised he had screwed up yet again. Sans’ every bone was ready to bolt through the elevator shaft despite the certain trap. Anything to get away from a ticking bomb of goodness-knows what magic.

*Crap crap crap crap I pushed the wrong button!*

*This is a recipe for disaster!*

Sans felt his SOUL turn blue. He thought he’d get used to it by now, except… this lady’s magic was stronger. *Different.*

He never felt lighter in his life. The lack of weight was so numbing, he thought he had turned into an incorporeal ghost like Napstablook.

*Fuck.*

Drenched in cold-sweat, Sans pitched his chill-act for all its worth. “Wh-whoa. Lady, please. This is not worth getting worked up over--”

She snapped back: “You are NOT worthless!”

The short skeleton then found himself flung into a shortcut. He emerged in a place where crystallized vapours blew with the wind and the sprawling lights of heaven stretched overhead. The horizon that separates land from sky gleamed far away in the golden light of rising dawn.

He’s upside down, high above the clouds, more than twenty kilometres off the ground…

Winds rushed through his bone cavities. The elements played him as a trombone while the weight of world dragged him down to certain doom.

Never before had Sans cursed so much at his own puntastic habits.

Never before had Sans screamed louder than Papyrus either.

…He didn’t think it was even possible until this very moment.

His Blue magic can't save him now.

*Oh god oh god oh god oh god--*

*FUCK.*

*MY.*

*LIFE.*
Just when he thought his day couldn’t get any worse, a pair of crane skulls flew by. They snapped their beaks wide open and fired their charged magic at Sans Serif.

To his surprise, the beams of magical light didn’t hurt him at all. Instead they turned his SOUL Purple, binding him to their grip. They slowed him to a gentle descent before stopping his fall.

They then dragged the defenseless skeleton back up above the clouds, where the silhouette of that long-haired woman blocked the rays of dawn.

_Ah. There she is._

Her elaborate sapphire dress fluttered against the twilight sky. Long black hair flowed in the wind, still maintaining their large curls despite the constant blasts of air.

_Sans Serif, you’ve gotten yourself into some astronomical trouble._

_You’re about as dead as a dead bone can be._

Her cannons drew him ever closer.

Closer and closer.

The magical bindings shifted his back against the sun. He’s face to face with the mysterious Seer of the Sky now.

A human-featured white porcelain mask hid her true face. It appeared custom made.

Perhaps a recreation of what she would look like were she born of flesh? He wondered.

Behind it, in the dark depths, two fires lit up: one of rich blue and the other one of brilliant green.

_Two Seer’s Eyes? Like Gaster?_

_Left Blue, Right Green. One of them should be a Pure. Which is the Mixed?_

_Ah. What difference does it make?_

The tip of her gloved fingers then touched his SOUL. Point blank, ready for the killing blow. As a 1 HP wonder, Sans knew that a single jab was all she needed to shatter his dust across the sky.

Except, she didn't.

_C’mon Lady, you’re gonna kill me or what?!_

Again, another contradiction. Instead of finishing him off as he expected, she drew a nine-point Arcanagram at the center of his cordate monster essence.

_An imbuement Gram?_

Then, Sans felt another change in his bones. His bindings loosened.

Instincts told him to back away from the lady. And…

His airborne body obeyed to his wishes.

When he wanted to move left, he moved left.
When he wanted to move right, he moved right.
I… I can fly?!

The woman explained in the language of hands: [Do not panic. I did not do this to lash out against you. The sky is home to many stable portals, and it’s also the only place where I could travel without being seen.]

[I’ve imbued you with the ability of flight. Once I stop channeling my power, you’ll have ten minutes. It’s more than enough to return to safety.]

[Oh. Uh. Thanks for not killing me?] Sans signed back, [I mean, I’m sorry to rile you up with my own issues.]

[I am not that petty.] She replied. [Besides, as I had said: if the continuance of Sans Serif changes from true to false, Judge Thyme will reset.]

The lady clenched her hands to a fist, trying to muster herself to say what bothered her heart.

[Sans Serif,] she said, [I envy you.]

[You’re blessed with a gift many can only dream in fiction. And yet, you deride yourself. It’s as though you’re not grateful for what you have. Frustrating, Infuriating.]

[If only I have what’s yours… I could have spared Judge Thyme of countless suffering.]

Sans now understood the context behind her behaviour in more ways than one.

He shook his head. [Lady, it’s all about luck and circumstance. If the cards of fate stack against you, no power or genius is going to help. I’m serious here. I mean… reality almost ended despite my best efforts…]

[I’m sure Judge Thyme would have said the same. He wouldn’t want to see a brilliant woman so down in the dumps.]

Though Sans couldn’t hear it, her body language told him that she’s giggling.

[You certainly have a way with words. Is that part of your Tactician training?]

[Nah. That’s just cold, hard experience.]

Sans looked past his feet. Stars glimmered in the yonder, soon to be outshined by the scattered rays of the sun.

When he was a boy, he wondered if some monsters launched themselves to the fantastical world of space.

What if they resettled on the moon?
Or the neighbouring planets?
Or even beyond the galaxy?

These thoughts he had long since dismissed as childish fantasies. But now, he’s facing a prospect that’s almost too good to be real.

What if monsters were more resilient than history ever gave them credit for?

Sans let his growing curiosity loose. [Just… how many of us are still out there?]
[Confidential.] The lady replied.

It was an answer without giving one.


It filled Sans with both hope and horror.

[May I at least know your name?] he signed back.

The lady removed her mask.

It stunned Sans too much for words to see there’s no real difference between her true face and the mask. Sure, it’s wide-socketed and missing a nose, but everything else might as well be the same.

Refined cheekbones. Delicate jawline.

Sans noted that she lined her upper sockets with purple to give the illusion of elegant eyelashes: choices that reflected her upbringing.

She’s the ‘threaded-teeth’ type. It’s skeleton lingo for a closed-jaw structure that showed only the tips, mimicking the stitches of a doll’s mouth. Dear mother had that too. It’s considered a trait of ethereal, delicate beauty among women. An accurate description for the female Seer before him, he thought.

Against the magnificent celestial backdrop, she looked less of a skeleton and more like a surreal fairy.

[Please address me as Lady Lucidia of Berendin. Spouse to Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme.]

Sans realized then and there. His attention went towards the white cravat around her neck, no doubt wrapped there to hide any hint of bone.

Pinned on it was a sapphire butterfly brooch.

…The design matched one-to-one with Judge Thyme’s mark of power.

Is this for real? How the heck did I miss the most important clue?!

With a kind and genuine smile she bid goodbye: [It was nice meeting you, Sans Serif.]

One moment, she flew before him.
The next, he passed through another shortcut.

The sapphire lady did not follow.

I’m still upside down though.

When he looked toward the ground, Sans saw his own house. He’s in the skies above Ebott, but far below the cloud line.

He touched his sternum.

I see. She used the imbuenment Gram to maintain the enchantment without her presence. This particular design has a battery life of ten minutes. But, if she made a few adjustments here and there…
...I can see where the Living Victories learned their tricks.

Hmm. I don’t want to go home though. There’s another place I need to be.

Sans set his sights at a different direction: right at Alphys’ Lab.

I really hope Muffet didn’t try to make doughnuts out of the Determination I left in her care.

Chapter End Notes

I'm surprised that nobody got completely offended by Sans' jokes and attitude. Other than Gaster. But we all know that he has high standards.

Well, we now have someone who gets even more offended than Gaster. I thought it would be ironically funny to see Sans' usual methods backfire so hard.

The reveal is here! If you figured out Lucidia's identity before this chapter, I am super proud of you.

Look closely and you will see another reveal that will change how we view this setting.

P.S Yes I listened to Fi's Theme for hours to write this.
Papyrus managed to convince Endogeny to shift Doctor Gaster out of the shed. The barebones shell of the skeleton brother’s former Underground house had become the new jail.

With it came access to electricity and the space to set up the scientist’s latest invention. It’s like a home movie theater, except with a ton more complicated mechanisms than you could comprehend.

You thought that you’d witness the magnificence of the great Former Royal Scientist Doctor Gaster live. Except… you accidentally walked in front of him as he was transporting what appeared to be a large power supply unit. It dropped on the floor and, well, you might have broke something.

You apologized as profusely as an anime character, complete with constant bowing.

“I-it’s alright, Child of Mercy,” Gaster replied. The skeleparents stopped your dipping too. “You wouldn’t know the limitations of magical telekinesis.”

Papyrus, Mom, and Dad stared at the machine. It’s hard to gauge the damage if it’s all contained in a faded case.

“SHOULD… SHOULD I USE MY SAVINGS TO BUY A FRESH NEW ONE, UNCLE GASTER?” asked your tall friend.

“Oh dear boy, please don’t waste your budget. I did ask you to search the scrapyard after all. Cost issues. The bane of all projects.”

After a long, drawn-out sigh the goopy scientist picked up an electronic screwdriver. “I suppose we won’t know if it’s salvageable until I open it up. Papyrus, please escort the Royal Family back to their homes. I do not want to keep them waiting.”

“OKAY UNCLE GASTER!”

Any shortcut shenanigans had to be done three times. Papyrus can’t escort more than one person through it at a time. Something about ‘tunnel size’, or so he tried to explain.

You saw Mom whispering to your tall skeleton friend. He’s ultra delighted. At first you wondered what that is about, but when you got home you understood.

Mom told Papyrus to escort Dad to your house! After the flower incident, she finally welcomed Dad back. Usually he’d had to tag along with someone else to even get past the door.

“SAFE AND SOUND!”

Again, you apologized to Papyrus for breaking the equipment.

“IT’S FINE FRISK. EVEN IF IT WON’T BE FIXED TODAY, IT’LL BE FIXED TOMORROW! I’M VERY SURE OF IT.”

He looked up towards the sky. The day grew brighter as dawn rose from the horizon. “I SHOULD PREPARE FOR MY PATROLS NOW.”

Did he… sleep? At all?

“NOPE! I HAVE NOT SLEPT FOR OVER TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, BUT SLEEP IS
“It’s not optional, Papyrus! Even if you’re a skeleton.”

Here’s the infamous Mom-glare: feared far and wide even amongst the strongest of Ebott. It’s enough to make anyone quake in their boots.

Mom then continued: “You need rest so you can help Doctor Gaster, especially if he requires extra parts. What if you collapse in the middle of nowhere?”

“Uh… Erm… you do have a point, Your Majesty.” Nobody dared to object to Mom.

A proverbial lightbulb lit up above your head.

You remembered there’s a spare pillow and blanket in the cupboard. Should you get them for Papyrus so he can sleep at his old home?

“Why yes,” Dad nodded. “That’s a good idea.”

Off you go. You soon returned with the goods and handed them over to your friend.

“Thank you, Frisk!” Turning to Mom, he asked, “But Your Majesty, how am I going to explain my absence to Undyne? I don’t remember getting her permission.”

She returned a cheeky smirk. “About that, just leave it to me. Consider this official business.”

The amount of thanks heaped on you and your family should be quantified by the mountainful. Wasting no time, Papyrus vanished into a shortcut.

“Asgore, could you take care of breakfast?”

You gasped. This is the first time Mom ever asked for Dad’s favour since… forever!

“Y-yes, dear,” he exclaimed, teary eyed. “I will!”

“Don’t get too sappy now. I don’t want you to drop anything. Good kitchen cutlery is costly.” Then she went off to make a bunch of phone calls.

No breakfast can go wrong with toast and scrambled eggs. And snails. This house thrives on snails.

You helped Dad open the can of snails and tomato puree with an electronic can opener. Then you helped out in the seasoning department, just in case Mom starts to nitpick on Dad. At least she’ll have one less issue to complain about.

Your eyes glanced at the knife rack. It immediately filled you with discomfort. Fortunately this meal won’t have use for them.

That morning, you sat together at the table as a full family: it’s just you with your parents and no one else.

You… never had the chance before. Never dreamed of that chance.

If only Cenna was here, it’ll be perfect.
Midway in your breakfast, Mom reminded you of something important. “Oh, Frisk. Next time if you see someone lifting an object with magic, don’t walk in between them. You’ll block the flow.”

“That’s right,” Dad chipped in. “Skillful monsters like Doctor Gaster can channel their magical power over a short distance. It’s like making an extension of your arm.”

Whoops. That explains what happened back there. Can Mom and Dad perform that stunt?

“Well, I can,” said Mom. “But I’m not very good at it.”

She used a square of tissue paper as an example. With magic, she made it hover just a centimeter over the table.

“Now, if I try to move it…”

The lightweight paper just flopped over and floated down to the floor. Any hold over it was far too fragile. “In the end, I prefer to use my hands.”

What happens if Dad tries?

“It’ll just catch fire,” he admitted. About as sheepish as a real sheep.

What about Sans then? He can turn people’s SOULS Blue and use some really awesome telekinesis. Makes everything look so effortless!

Mom and Dad stared at each other.

“Remind me of something, Asgore,” said Mom. “Didn’t Gaster once experimented on Seer Magic? His first project while his parents were still alive.”

“Oh yes, he did,” Dad replied. “He was very deep in his studies ever since his Awakening.”

“But he never completed it, right?”

“Indeed. Their deaths were too much to bear. He switched fields after their passing.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if Sans took what’s left of that research and continued it.”

You’re lost and confused, as though you landed in the middle of a network of spaghetti roads.

Mom then said, “Oh Frisk, I’m sorry. You see, Doctor Gaster had always been a scientist at heart. He noticed his people’s looming extinction and thought it would be a waste if the knowledge died with him. So he tried to preserve the Seer’s legacy by artificial means.”

“Tried, was the word.” Dad frowned. “His mother fell down from illness and grief drove his father insane. Very tragic. That event broke his spirit in more ways than one.”

Mom said. “He almost killed himself.”

“Yes. I will never forget that day, Toriel. Never.”

What did he do?

The atmosphere darkened a notch, as if clouds flew across a sunny sky...

Dad began his story. “The poor man attempted to break the Barrier without a single Human SOUL.
One day, Toriel and I found him standing in the middle of his construct. He surrounded himself with fake Seer Aspects. It contained every color that he didn’t have.”

So, it’s everything minus Orange and Cyan? Including the legendary Red?

Your parents nodded. Mom then explained, “Gaster inherited plenty of exclusive information since his parents were founding members of the Seven Sages. He thought that if we could never get a real human SOUL, why not replicate one? Alas, it was impossible: a wrong theory that will always remain wrong.”

Sliding a finger on his face, Dad said, “Have you noticed the ridges? They’re scars from that incident, Frisk. His failed attempt backfired and split his face in half. We… weren’t sure if he’d survive. It was quite a precarious moment.”

“As King of the Dreemurr Nation, it’s my personal responsibility to care for my people. Directly or otherwise. So I took some leave to attend to Gaster’s injuries.”

Mom placed a hand on her chest and nodded. “In the meantime, I managed the office. It was a unanimous decision. Asgore had better knowledge of long-term wound care than myself.”

Oooooh, that explains why Doctor Gaster was so furiously loyal to Dad.

…it’s kinda sad. It doesn’t sound like he ever truly moved on from that incident.

You tried to change the subject by noting that the food is getting cold.

“You’re right,” said Dad. “We should finish our meal.”

Mom then said, “I think it’s better for Frisk to live with you for a while. I won’t be home for long periods of time, and I don’t want to put them in any more risk.”

“Alright, dear. I’ll do my best.”

That’s fast. You expected maybe a few more months before she entrusted you into Dad’s care. Then again, these are dangerous times to be alone. It’s the most practical course of action.

Since you’ll be there for at least a few days, Mom helped pack your luggage.

All important items? Checked.

Not gonna elaborate on the checklist. You’re feeling a bit too tired for that.

Then, you phone buzzed like heck. The local chatroom stirred alive in activity.

**StrongFish91:**
OKAY PAPYRUS!
Explain to me right now why the heck TORIEL endorsed a project by Doctor Gaster?
You know.
The guy who’s supposed to be BEHIND BARS???

**ALPHYS:**
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
GASP omg really really really?
can i join pls?
StrongFish91:
I...
I don’t think it’s a good idea.
Sorry Al.

FabulousMTT:
Oh my~~ sounds like you sweethearts are having an exciting time.

ALPHYS:
how are you mettaton? :o
are you okay D:

FabulousMTT:
Splendid, thank you for asking darling.
The Magi hired therapists for dear Blooky and Shyren. Maddie too, maybe.
Lots of hugs and comforting meals for everyone. They even brought some board games to play! Just
to keep our minds off the problem, you know.

StrongFish91:
Papyrus!
Paaapyyyyrruuuuuuusss!

FabulousMTT:
Some indignified riffraff tried to badger us. Arrested pronto without incident–
My precious family had a good night’s sleep considering the chaos. Oh, and Burgerpants is fine.
There are no incidents of violence in his town.

StrongFish91:
PAPYRUS ANSWER ME!!!

You told everyone in the chatroom that Papyrus is sleeping in his old Snowdin home, near Doctor
Gaster. Mom sent him to a compulsory snooze.

FabulousMTT:
Ah, so our primadonna noticed our darling’s tendency to skip his sleep.

ALPHYS:
wow pap’s actually sleeping for once :O?!

StrongFish91:
There was one time where he didn’t sleep for THREE DAYS!
And he was as hyper as heck.
Not to mention effing DELIRIOUS!
I was like.
Dude.
You’re going off the rockers.
Go home.
SLEEP!

**ALPHYS:**
should we make a new chatroom?
i don’t know if he set his notifs off.
don’t wanna wake him up :( 

**FabulousMTT:**
I think we’re fine since the cinnamon roll didn’t answer his phone at all. Maybe the skeleparents are holding it for him?

**ALPHYS:**
O_O;;;
does that mean they can read this chat?
and.
gaster-sensei too?

**StrongFish91:**
FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF
Mister and Misses Skeleparents please let Papyrus sleep!
I apologize for my outbursts!
I’ll be quiet now.

**ALPHYS:**
GASTER-SENSEI! please let me help you!
OTL OTL OTL
onegaishimasu!

You received a private message from ‘CoolSkeleton95’. It’s under Papyrus’ name, but the speech patterns clearly belonged to Doctor Gaster.

It said the following: ‘I think Doctor Alphys’ mechanical knowledge will be of great assistance for the project. If it is not too much of a trouble, could you deliver my request to the Queen? ’

What if Mom declines?

‘Her Majesty understands the circumstances better. If she thinks Doctor Alphys should remain in the world above, I will obey.’

Mom locked down the luggage and grabbed the handle. “It’s ready, my child.”

You passed Doctor Gaster’s request. She pondered.

“I’ll allow Doctor Alphys to be his assistant only if Papyrus escorts her home afterward. Either that, or she camps Underground under Endogeny’s watch. I do not want her to be outside of the designated safety zones.”

That’s oddly specific.

Mom frowned, glancing left and right in uneasiness. “Frisk… I have a strong feeling that Doctor Alphys might get hurt if she remains on the Surface. Call it a mother’s instinct. If anything happens to her, you can imagine Captain Undyne’s rage. Someone could get killed.”
Wait. What?
Was that a dejavu…?

You asked Mom about the matter. When did she first feel this weirdness? And is it still strong?

“It’s fading now, but I had this huge spike of concern on Sunday. Perhaps it’s because everyone’s on high alert. I was so relieved when I heard that they had evacuated out of the Lab.”

You held your breath for a moment. If that was not Mom’s instincts and a real dejavu, it meant that Alphys got hurt in the past timeline. And Undyne? Probably suplexed a building.

…Or worse.

The worrying can wait. Right now, you just need to move to Dad’s home.

When the warmer seasons arrive, he will have the most beautiful house in the entire town. Once, you had seen the myriads of flowers of Ebott bloom in this season during a school trip that’s compulsory for those from foster homes.

It’s been a long, long, long while. The beginning of your Underground adventure began after that.

You can’t remember what’s it like to attend a human school anymore. How much ‘time’ had really passed for you?

Come to think of it…

…You can’t remember when you had your latest birthday either.

You were born in Spring, at the end of the long-delayed season, after the Trial of the Crimson Hall. And…

Another buzz then freed you from your thoughts.

Its Cenna! You added her in the Ebott Gang group chat when the patrols began. Let’s see what she had to say.

**HotAndSpicy:**
Yo! What's this I hear about that ole goopy doc doing an experiment?

**ALPHYS:**
gaster-sensei wants to try to materialize papyrus’ seer visions.
very complicated determination sciences.
but we might just learn a thing or two about those gungnir people.

**HotAndSpicy**
Oooooh. That sounds like fun.
Not to mention we’ll finally have the full story for once.
Count me in folks!
ALPHYS:
omg lol guys guys guys
you won’t believe this
gaster-sensei and the skeleparents are arguing over what to cook for dinner
with papyrus
like srsly

StrongFish91:
Pfft! Tell me more about it, Al!

ALPHYS:
i brought my stock of instant noodles for the project
gaster-sensei kinda just sighed and he said he’s okay with shortcuts
because we’re on crunch time
helvetica went like nope.jpg
when he tried to argue, the madam slapped him
it’s so hilarious i tried to not laugh
and failed

StrongFish91:
Oh man, Al. When I questioned him, she freaking splashed a cup of hot tea at his face.
That skelemom showed NO MERCY!

ALPHYS:
OMG!!!! :O
isn’t this kinda abusive though?

StrongFish91:
Eh, I think it’s overdue.
We’re talking about a mad goop who fucked up Sans and almost turned the entire Underground into
some weird mass-cthulhu thing.
Can you imagine merging with JERRY????
FOREVER??????

ALPHYS:
oh god teh horror.

FabulousMTT:
About Jerry, the horror indeed.
Papyrus’ mother is one feisty chili pepper right there.
I like it~~~~~
I can see where our cinnamon roll got his dashing energy~
Please tell her I said this: ‘Knock ‘em dead, darling!’

ALPHYS:
pls dun kill sensei
although he can’t actually die…

**HotAndSpicy:**
Who’s Jerry?

**FabulousMTT:**
The most unmentionably annoying monster in the entire universe!
Oh darling, just the mere thought makes me cringe in disgust.

**HotAndSpicy:**
Oooookay. I get the idea.

**Shining Star:**
Mom gave you guys a care package though, didn’t she?
She bought some physical vegetables from a human farmer who set up a stall at the local market.
They won’t last long, so it’s best to finish them before they go bad.

**ALPHYS:**
o-oh!
you’re right, toriel packed the physical vegetables together with the cooking tools!
roman decided to make minestrone out of them.
gotta keep the vitamins flowing for maximum brainpower capacity!

**CoolSkeleton95:**
THAT’S AB-SO-LUTE-LY RIGHT!
NUTRITIOUS FOOD LEADS TO HEALTHY BONES!
AND HEALTHY BONES TO A HEALTHY BRAIN!

**StrongFish91:**
I… I think that only applies to you, Paps.

Sans burst out laughing at the conversation. “Oh man, I really miss reading their slice-of-life comedy skits.”

‘**HotAndSpicy’? I can guess but… if that’s who I think it is, I’m not sure what to say.**

“Enjoying your new phone, Mister Comedian?” Muffet hummed.

“Yeah. Thanks a bunch. Where did you get this anyway? It’s still sealed in its box.”

The spider woman laughed in her distinguished dignified style. “I won third prize in a sugar company’s lottery draw, ahuhu~~!”

“Wow, that’s lucky.”

“Lucky indeed, ahuhu! I was just waiting for the day where I can resell it to someone else. This model is lower than mine and I don’t need two phones.”

Muffet reached out one of her six arms toward Sans, wriggling her eyebrows in cheeky expectation.

If he must be honest with himself, he wondered if this was a good idea. But he owed it to the spider baker for helping out so much.
“Alright, one bottle of Determination coming right up.”

Sans passed the one whole canister of red glowing liquid to her. Be damned if he requires exactly 50 of those, because now he had one less. He would have made more if the container supply didn’t run out of stock.

“Handle it with care, Muffet,” he said. “I don’t wanna hear the news that you became a DT-flavoured icing spider on a cake.”

The lady wasted no time in securing her cut of the goods. Spiders crawled over the bottle and encased it in a soft cocoon of silk to protect the deadly shipment.

She said, “Ahuhuhu~~ You underestimate the safety records of a baker, mad scientist. Hot oil and sugar glazes are some of the most hazardous substances around!”

The thought of nasty burns reminded Sans why he never wanted to handle deep-frying on his own. Better leave the dangerous culinary procedures to experts like Grillby.

“Well,” said Sans, “Let’s get this show on the road.”

Swarms of spiders hauled the containers from Alphys’ lab with a mixture of webbing and manual lifting power. With a little telekinetic assistance from Sans, they had managed to position Muffet’s van near enough to the warm zone of the entrance.

Joke?
Why not? After that incident in the sky, some funny bones need tickling.

“Hey Muffet. Hope ya don’t get ‘antsy’ with me but dang, if you told me they only have six legs I’ll totally believe you. ‘Cause your friends are certainly ‘handy’.” Finished it off with his classic wink.

The spiders stopped whatever they’re doing and stared in utter disbelief.

“Sans,” Muffet huffed. “That was so bad, it’s brilliant. Did you actually get better over the last month? Or worse?”

“Only goat knows.”

Muffet awarded Sans a 50% discount coupon as an offering for silence. “No more puns, or else the deal’s void. Ahuhu~~”

“Welp. It’s fun while it lasted.” Better than falling from the clouds at maximum velocity… But she didn’t need to know that.

At the back of the van, a team of spiders dusted the cocoons with flour so their shipment won’t stick together: a trick oft employed in candy making. Once they tallied all 49 bottles, the critters crammed themselves into any remaining space. They then locked the door from the inside.

“Take a seat, Sansypants. Don’t forget to buckle up~~”

Thus the duo and their swarm sped off onto the streets of Ebott.

Muffet was one of the few monsters who applied for a driving licence. Papyrus always dreamed of driving a car. On the other hand, the eight-limbed lady had a more practical idea. Running a cafe-bakery required her to buy ingredients in bulk and mail order wasn’t always an option.

“Ahuhuhu~ I’m so happy that the weather is warming up! Soon we can bask in the sun again.
We’ve heard all sorts of exciting things about the upcoming season and we can’t wait to see them!”

Everywhere they went, water dripped, trickled and rolled off from the edges of the rooftops. It’s a visual reminder of the inevitable passing of time.

“Are you excited?”

Sans shrugged. “Eh. No comment until I see the real thing.”

It’s good that Muffet’s a chatty person. It kept him awake. Who knows when he’d wake up again if he fell asleep now.

“We’re here~~”

It’s his Surface home. Sans unbuckled the safety belt, saying, “Wait for me. I gotta make sure we’re in the clear.”

First thing he did was to check for Papyrus’ presence. The tall skeleton should still be in the Underground, but one may never know if he popped back home to get supplies.

“Let’s see what’s going on in chat.” Sans muttered to himself.

It’s quiet. Everyone seemed busy, and that’s the best time to act.

He beckoned Muffet to his backyard, but there’s a choke point where the van can’t enter. That’s fine since he’s not going to show her the interiors of his secret lab anyway. Too much confidential data lying about.

“Sorry if it’s chilly,” Sans said as he unlocked the door with his silver key. “But it’s really cramped here. Just pass them over and I’ll do the final arranging.”

“It’s alright, ahuhu~~” Muffet replied. “I’ll turn up the heater and have them rotate in teams. That way my little friends will have a chance to warm up.”

It’s a flawless arrangement of teamwork at its finest: the spiders unloaded the canisters in the orderly fashion of a living conveyor belt.

Maybe they’re a bit too efficient. Sans almost couldn’t keep up with the rate of transport. It’s tiring to float down so many cocoons and arrange them at the same time. At least the soft padding protected his precious cargo.

By the time he’s done, he had left just enough space to walk to the couch and to the shrouded remnants of the Chronograph.

“Job’s done, darling.” Muffet hummed. “It’s time for me to prepare my baking experiment, ahuhu~~”

“Good luck.” Sans replied, “Oh, and here’s a little something for your time.”

The skeleton placed a nice bundle of paper cash into Muffet’s hand. Her face lit up in sheer delight. Gold may be valuable, but the extra step of converting it into proper currency can be a hassle. It isn’t instant money.

“Ooooooh! Thank you very, very much you sweet skeleton you. Ahuhuhuhuhuhu~~~ I’ll send a message once the goods are done.”
Then off she went. It’s silence at last, and silence equals to some much needed shut-eye.

After he completed his routine stock inspection, the skeleton collapsed on his secret lab’s couch. Times like these he wondered how his brother skipped sleep and still managed to function.

Surreal dreams of Papyrus’ high-school graduation mixed with the setting of Mew Mew Kissy Cute. Undyne and Alphys cosplayed as those characters to celebrate. Why? No reason. Dreams didn’t have to make sense.

Sans knew at a subconscious level that Papyrus never completed standard education. That’s about as wishful as it gets. But the two anime-fuelled ladies? Possible outcomes. Maybe. One day, if they take up tailoring. Or buy the costumes from the internet.

Toriel arrived with her famous cinnamon butterscotch pie. Placed it next to Papyrus’ iconic spaghetti meatballs.

‘Time to start the party,’ she said. Or she’s supposed to say. To think that she used to appear only as a disembodied voice. Ever since Sans had put a face behind her words, she’s a welcome sight.

Toriel was everything Sans could never be, and that’s why held her in high regards.

Love?
Admiration?
Honour?

All three?

Some teased that he’s in love. They may be right, but acting on any romantic feelings would only disgrace her. Boss Monsters are made for Boss Monsters. Playing into the speculations of others would hurt her in the long run.

He doesn’t want to do that.
He doesn’t want Toriel to live with the burden of such negativity.

Deep inside, he knew that she would never be truly at peace unless she made amends with Asgore.

Sans loves her so much that he would do anything to give this best friend true happiness. Even if it means forgoing a life together.

The rest of his being may be tainted with violence, but his love for Papyrus and Toriel remained pure.

When everything was right in his world of dreams…

…A hail of knives pierced the ceiling. Their sharp cuts will turn everything to dust.

Sans’ bones worked on instinct to avoid the downpour. He could see where they’ll land first, the brevity of his safe spots, and how to navigate the hazardous terrain.

Is this one of those situations where he can only save a single person?
Can he even save anyone?

He reached out to Papyrus first… and watched a knife zip through his brother’s neck, lopping off the skull like in too many of those doomed timelines.

Sans snatched the dusty scarf in midair. There’s no time to grieve: he still had Toriel to save. Undyne
will protect Alphys in the meantime.

No. Since when do his efforts ever go right?

Try as he might, he couldn’t reach Toriel in time. The knives pierced her being and she exploded into dust.

As for the two star-struck lovers? Undyne endured the best she could, but eventually she too succumbed to her wounds. The ladies huddled together until their brutal demise.

The assault stopped. When Sans looked up he witnessed a shadow of humanity, complete with glowing Red SOUL.

They laughed, cacophonous: a unity of every man, woman, and child.

You think you’ll win just because you’re strong, huh?
Joke’s on you, buddy.
I know your weakness.

He reached down for one of the many weapons on the ground and yanked it out. It dripped red with the glow of Determination-infused blood.

I’m gonna **FORCE** you to quit, forever!

The laziest skeleton of all Ebott thus launched himself off the ground with humanity’s blade in hand.

His sole objective: elimination.

Sans then woke up to a whole lot of phone notification chimes. His bones, stiff and sore from bad couch-sleeping positions.

“Guh, more nightmares,” he groaned. “A fucked up one too.”

When Sans read the date on his phone, he rolled to his side to bury his face into the cushion.

It’s almost Tuesday afternoon.

**Why? Why did I sleep for so many damn hours?**
**Just. Fucking. Why.**
**I don’t have time to be a piece of trash! Not right now!**

Papyrus. If he tries to look for me in this lab, I am toastier than a Hotland toast. And what about Muffet?

There was nothing from Muffet. It seems that she’s still working on her new culinary discovery.

**Huh, come to think of it… Paps’ being way too chill. Usually he’d fret over me from a mile away. Over 24 hours of absolutely no panic whatsoever? That’s a mystery in itself.**

**Man. I need to get up, get some grub and tell everyone I’m okay or something. Then start the lab work for real.**

So Sans set his phone on mute and dragged himself up the stairs.

When he opened the backdoor, a tall shadow loomed over him. It wouldn’t surprise him if Papyrus
stalked the entrance. Sounds exactly what his over-enthusiastic little brother would do.

Instead, he heard the voice of a familiar noir detective.

“Yo, ‘assassino’. Ya look beat.”

It’s the Cenna Caraway. Sans almost slammed the door shut in her face, and he would have done so if she didn’t show him an envelope.

A lovely calligraphic handwriting addressed the contents to ‘Sans Serif’.

“Uh,” he muttered. “Mail for me?”

“Yup!” Cenna replied, “From none other than my good friend, Lucy. You know. The lady who dropped you from the sky.”

“Jeez, you know about that too?”

“Well duh. If she could tell me all the ways I died without a blink, yesterday’s shenanigans ain’t a big issue.”

Sans stepped out, locked the door behind him and cautiously accepted the envelope. After a brief check of the cover, he slipped it into the inner pocket of his jacket.

“Hm?” Cenna raised a brow. “Not gonna check it out?”

“Nah,” he sighed. “Letters should be read in private anyways. So… why are you stalking my backyard? Trying to uncover some skeletons in my closet?”

“Har har, very funny. Have you been keeping contact with home lately? Like, get a new phone? Frisky told me you’ve been on radio silence for a good long while now. Makes me wonder if you’re in hiding or something.”

Sans snorted. “I think you’re way too caught up in your detective biz, lady. I’m just your standard lazybone. Too much effort to get a new one.”

*Cenna’s sense of intuition is a little too spot on sometimes. Scary. Either way, it’s a sign that I should check the chat. Scroll back up a little bit and figure out what the big ruckus is about.*

**ALPHYS:**
has anyone seen sans?
because
i think we really need his help

**StrongFish91:**
…Sometimes, I wish I’m in an alternate universe where I honestly thought Sans was just a normal lazybone.
So I could yell ‘Sans is a scientist?!?!?’
Instead of this burning NGAAAAH forming between my teeth that screams:
WHERE THE FUCK IS SANS WHEN WE NEED HIM????????
WHERE??????
FabulousMTT:
Pipe down, you silly rambunctious fish. 
Sansy darling will turn up whenever you least expect him to. 
He always does. In his own wonderful way~

CoolSkeleton95:
OH! SANS WENT TO STUDY AT MISTER MAGUS’ HEADQUARTERS! THEY HAVE THIS AWESOME COOL BUILDING WITH AN EVEN AWESOMER LIBRARY!

StrongFish91:
What?!

CoolSkeleton95:
YES! HE SAID IT’S SOMETHING FOR FRISK’S EXAM.

FabulousMTT:
Gasp! You don’t say, darling!

CoolSkeleton95:
I’M SO HAPPY! HE’S GETTING HIS LIFE BACK TOGETHER BIT BY BIT! MISTER MAGUS TOLD ME THAT THEY’LL TAKE CARE OF ALL OF HIS NEEDS, INCLUDING ROUND THE CLOCK PROTECTION! SO I’LL LET SANS STUDY THERE FOR AS LONG AS HE NEEDS.

HotAndSpicy:
Serious, cinnamon roll? Mez told ya that?

CoolSkeleton95:
YES MISS AUNT!

Shining Star:
Lol Papyrus! You still call her that? Cenna is my legit big sis. It took a while for me to accept that, but facts are facts.

CoolSkeleton95:
I KNOW. BUT IT’S THE GREAT PAPYRUS’ TITLE OF FOND FIRST IMPRESSIONS! LIKE I STILL CALL YOU ‘HUMAN’ EVEN THOUGH I KNOW YOUR NAME IS FRISK. …UNLESS MISS AUNT IS UNHAPPY WITH HER NICKNAME AND WISHES TO APPLY FOR A NEW ONE.

HotAndSpicy:
What are ya talking about? I love it! It reminds me of how my life turned around for the better, yeah? Totally keeping that.
Sans stared at Cenna for a long, long while. “Damn, you climbed up that social ladder fast. Just like
the hot spice you named yourself.”

The Magus threw her head back and laughed out loud. Amazing how her hat didn’t fall off.

“Wonders of connections, eh?” she said, “C’mon, assassino. Let’s have lunch and meet up with the
rest of the gang. I bet hanging out with me will be a thousand percent easier to explain than your little
sky adventure.”

“Yup. I can’t disagree with that,” said Sans. He’s grateful for the convenient alibi. “Hey, uh, you
sure it’s okay to address me as an assassin so blatantly in public?”

“Pull your hood up.”

A strange request, but the blue skeleton did it anyway. Cenna then showed him a picture from her
phone.

Sans was delightfully surprised. “Is that… a game character? Whoa, damn. Cowls and hoodies as
their uniforms? They do look like what I’m wearing, but my colour doesn’t match.”

Cenna then said, “It’s all about the style! If I’m the noir detective, you’re the assassino. With the ‘no’
emphasised at the end. It’s our code you know.”

“The rest of the world is gonna think we’re just big nerds.”

Chapter End Notes

By that era, Assassin's Creed would be a dang old title. Classic remixes expected.

Then again, this is not the same universe. People who come up with the ideas, its
interpretations, version, location, ect ect would be very different from what we know.
Maybe in a totally different time scale too.

Next chapter will have so much science, I'm too intimidated to start. Eventually I'll get to
it of course. But first, got to make sure I get my facts right.
I know I mentioned that I wanted to jump into science.

Then, I remembered that we're due for some heart-to-heart talk with a certain flower.

Dad asked if you had a good night’s sleep.

You laughed back and said perhaps you had too much. It’s been a long time since you had conked out for twelve hours straight. That’s Sans level of sleeping right there!

Or rather, you thought it was a long while ago. But you had a feeling that it happened pretty recent in real time. Must be all the looping getting to you.

He chuckled back. “I noticed that you didn’t nap at all yesterday.”

Yep. The fatigue caught up to you in the end.

“Although I know you look up to the skeleton brothers, I don’t think their sleeping patterns are healthy for a human.”

True. Those guys tend to go to both extremes.

Without Alphys and Undyne, the house seemed a bit too silent. Lonely.

At least Undyne visits him at a regular basis. Dad’s her ‘dad figure’ after all.

Heh. Your phone buzzed like crazy. What’s going on?

Oh uh. They’re looking for Sans. You knew where he went, but chances are Papyrus will answer that question for you.

It happened exactly as you anticipated. Then, you chuckled.

Dad asked you, “Oh? What’s going on?”

You explained Cenna’s nickname to Dad. He smiled back.

“Frisk, I think it’s time for me to let you know a little secret: I realised that she wasn’t merely an aunt ever since we had our spaghetti lunch together.”

The first one all the way back?

He nodded. “The way she speaks about you can only come from someone very close, like a sister. Or at least a sister figure. But I didn’t pry because she must have her reasons to create the illusion of distance.”

You told Dad that it’s a mix of personal guilt and a character test for the monsters. Some people
would try to exploit legal loopholes for distant relatives. High chance that she wouldn’t be happy if Mom and Dad took that approach.

“I understand. I wouldn’t want my child to be given into questionable hands either. But it is all cleared up now, isn’t it?”

The thought about family made his ears droop. “Frisk,” he said, “I deeply apologize for the hardships my children had put you through. Especially Chara.”

Dad, it’s okay. It’s all in the past. They’re doing much better at the Magus’ HQ now.

“I know. I’ve received their video messages. But… I wonder if there’s any way to make up for my failures as a father.”

He glanced to the side. “When Doctor Gaster completes his experiment, I thought of asking him to look into Chara’s life. To understand their upbringing and community better.”

That’s the same idea you had. Chara gave you hints, but they’d never tell you the full details.

“Oh, you still care about them despite everything?” His voice wavered in emotion. “Thank you, Frisk. Your support means much to me.”

Dad then went off to settle the daily chores: making lunch, brewing tea, checking up on the Magi guards, and other stuff.

You noticed that the guards were wary at first due to Dad’s politically sensitive status, but his genuine gentleness alleviated some concerns.

Your phone rang. It’s from an unknown number that you don’t recognize. Maybe the other person dialled it wrong.

When you answered it, you were met with surprise.

“Frisk, we need to talk in private.”

It’s Chara.

Maybe they remembered something from the past timeline and needed to discuss about it. You hurried to a quiet spot in the house.

What’s the matter?

Chara huffed. “If we’re living in a giant fanfiction where anime is real, I don’t wanna sabotage my own ending with ill-timed spoilers.”

You’re very sure that they’re not phoning you just to give meta-existential commentary.

Did Cenna tell them that you’re snooping into Gungnir’s past?

“That’s right. And I’m here to propose you an offer.”

Groan.

Is it about destroying humanity again?

“…Sheesh, since when are you such a smartass? But, yeah. It’s related. But hear me out first, okay?”
Maybe you’ll regret it, but right now Chara is your biggest lead on this whole mystery. You asked for elaboration.

“Long story short, the worst case scenario happened. I won’t tell you how or why. But, I can tell you that I’ve seen crap hit the fan really hard.”

Because of Gungnir?

“No. Because of humans.”

“Humans won’t change. Maybe it’s safer to say that they can’t change. There’re just too many people determined to impose their ideals on others. You’re never going to be able to unite or satisfy them. So, it’s all futile. Don’t make the same mistake as the former Supreme Judges.”

You know it’s impossible, but the alternative of complete destruction isn’t any better.

“Figures you’re gonna say that. Well, let me tell you a story about my ancestor: the Legendary Hero.”

Whoa. Direct or indirect?

“Well, I wouldn’t know. It’s too far back and genealogies can get very fiddly. I had never really put it together until your Magus ‘aunty’ helped us fill in some of the blanks.”

Ah.

“Anyways. Like any other hero, they put their life and limb at risk for others. But humans are pretty ungrateful as a whole. Legends say most of the common folk betrayed them at the end. Shunned or blamed or forgotten, whatever you fancy. They died a bitter person, surrounded only by illusions of past honour.”

“By now you’ve heard quite a bit about Gungnir, right? That’s where I came from. The name didn’t change since its inception. They think they’re the solution to all the world’s problems. But, hmph. I knew better from the very beginning. We’re just another symptom.”

“Never told my bio parents that though. They’d beat the hell out of me for mentioning such blasphemy. Zealous fools. Forever stuck in their strict orthodox ways.”

“See, I told you why I ran away toward the mountain, right? If they cared, they’d start a search. But no help ever came. That's when I grew bitter, hellbent on revenge. I thought: what if? What if the monsters could help?"

“My people whispered all the time about superweapons buried underneath the mountain, just waiting for the right day to destroy the world. Fierce. Ruthless. Monstrous.”

Except, the monsters were absolutely nothing like the legends paint them to be.

“Yep. They’re all fluffy loaves of bread. Lovely, but dang weak! Then one day, I read the Waterfall plaques. It turns out that a monster gains great power when they merge with a human SOUL. Together, Asriel and I, we could give everyone ‘eternal peace’. Or at least die trying.”

‘Eternal peace’. Which in this case means the erasure of existence. Talk about a twisted perception right there.

You remembered that when The Legendary Hero turned into a DEMON, they had tried to the same.
“Yeah. Exactly. Now you know why I still think it’s the best idea. Imagine this: the god of my people understood that the human race is fucked up beyond saving long before we came into existence. Nice to know nothing changed.”

“So… are you just going to repeat history? Perpetuate this cycle of stupidity? Don’t tell me that you’ll make a difference, because that’s outright impossible. The problem is never just my people: it’s humanity itself.”

Again, you told Chara that you won’t agree to their plans. It’s not that you don’t understand them. Or want to chide their feelings from your high horse.

You had experienced humanity’s brokenness too. Once upon a time, your interests aligned with Chara’s.

But such a thing… it’s empty. Futile. Pointless. Even if you two destroyed reality, you’d just end up alone. Together in The Void. What are you going to do there? Just lie down forever like some corpse?

“Heh,” Chara replied, “I guess my lifestyle isn’t for everyone. If you ask me, yeah. I could really just lie down in nothingness forever. It’s better than worrying about humanity’s shit.”

Sorry, but that doesn’t appeal to you anymore. You’d be bored to hell. Emphasis on the ‘hell’ part.

“I guess I could take Asriel’s approach and watch how you tackle each obstacle. You’d make a lifelong live-action soap opera for us, with a time travel twist! When we were one, I did quite enjoy how we made those Magi squirm under the threat of RESET. Heh heh.”

Speaking of Asriel, you asked Chara if they’re still sore about his choice to spare their Gungnir brethren.

“Nah. I did throw him off the deep end and under the bus. But, Frisk. He’s not a total cinnamon roll either.”

“Asriel had always fantasized about defeating humans. He heard a fair share of heroics from that old turtle dude. Mister ‘Hammer of Justice’, remember?”

Yup, you remember. He inspired Undyne too.

“Whenever he tried to share his ideas of might and adventure with his parents, they… think it’s just a kiddy phase. Not exactly very approving, you know. A Dreemurr Prince shouldn’t be entertaining thoughts of violence.”

“But I’m not like Mom and Dad. I thought he’s cool! Honest. Asriel had the potential to be the armed hero of his dreams. Except, he’s a soft crybaby thanks to his coddled upbringing. He’s not going to get anything done that way. So, I thought to help provide that ‘push’.”

Chara uttered a cynical snicker over the line. “Well. They’re called ‘fantasies’ for a good reason.”

You snickered back. Then you told Chara that their gambit was set up to fail from the very beginning. There were too many factors unaccounted for.

“Hmph, I hate it when you’re right.”

There’s one more thing on your mind. You wondered: would Sans like Asriel if he was still the cute goatbro and not the murderous flower?
“...Believe it or not, I’d say ‘no’.”

Wha?! You’re surprised. Asriel was very much a fluffy mini Papyrus minus the energy. What can go wrong?

“I can’t put my leaf on exactly why he’d dislike Asriel, but trust me on this: he will. We’re talking about the man who once killed the Prince of Monsters just to distract me.”

“Remember Frisk, he knew of Flowey’s true identity. Since when? I don’t know. Maybe long before our Underground adventure. Yet, he didn’t show a single shred of respect and honour befitting of royalty. Compare that to how he worshiped Mom.”

“You better stay away from him until you find out why. Who knows if you’re next on his hitlist?”

Now that’s paranoid talk there, Chara.


They then ended the call.

It’s about time you checked the group chat.

Oh, Cenna’s having lunch with Sans. Turns out he got a new phone too.

Hmm, you don’t think he had the time yet to reinstall his human-approved Surface number. Ebott Town’s local communication system works a bit differently. You’re not sure about the specifics, but it had something to do with a unique cloud ID system.

…Which means he’ll only have proper reception within monster territory.

After their meal, Papyrus will pick them up to assist Doctor Gaster. Undyne won’t be available until she finished her day-shift patrols. Then they’ll have at least the whole day to hammer something together.

You hurried to look for Dad.

“What’s the matter, my child?” he asked.

You want to watch the science guys do their science stuff! Math may be your nemesis, but science? Science is cool! Magic science? Even cooler!

That must be the Artificer blood in you talking.

Dad smiled at your enthusiasm. “Let’s start packing for your day trip then. Oh, don’t forget to let your mother know about your whereabouts. We’ll be visiting the experiment grounds after the first round of patrols end.”

Okay!

You let Mom and Papyrus know that you’re getting ready for the Underground.
Chapter Notes

Hey, remember Chapter 10?

Wow, look at all that machinery! It’s hard to walk anywhere that’s not the entrance and the path to the kitchen. If it weren’t for the colour of the carpet, you wouldn’t believe that you’re standing in the skelebrothers’ Snowdin home.

Gaster exploited the maximum flexibility of his goop to squeeze between the narrow gaps of the machinery. You noticed that his Eyes lit up in colour whenever he tinkered with the small parts.

He seemed too absorbed in his work to notice you.

Alphys was tying some copper wires together. She had her work apron on. It’s stained with streaks of black from all the dirty secondhand or junk equipment.

“Frisk!” her face lit up in joy. “I didn’t expect you to be here so soon.”

A Mini Box Mettaton popped out from her front pocket! They’re autonomous extensions of the glam bot, but they’re not sentient.

You waved at it. The robot responded with the same gesture.

Why is it here?

“Oh, we need to archive Papyrus’ visions for future reference. These little guys are perfect for the job.”

MTT-brand recording devices donated by the big man himself, huh?

“Yup. Data storage technology on the Surface is phenomenal! Mettaton gushed so hard over the improvements, I can’t wait to try it out!”

No kidding. She’s practically hugging it to death.

Hmm, there’s a big screen television hanging from the second floor. It’s anchored to the railings with some heavy duty cables. The display looks rather old, as expected from something picked up from the dump, yet somehow it’s not cracked or broken.

Papyrus proclaimed: “I RESTORED THE SCREEN TO ITS PROPER FORM!”

He could actually do that?!?

“Yes! Just like the time I brought Uncle Gaster back from the void.”

That’s sooo cool! Your first instinct was to reach out your hand in an attempt to touch his handiwork.

Alphys yelped, “Wait, Frisk! Stop!”
You drew back posthaste. Phew. Sounds like you almost broke something again.

“Yeah, you almost did. Papyrus can’t completely restore inanimate objects. He doesn’t have the ability to properly meld the atomic particles together. They will look fine on the surface, but they’ll crumble under excessive external force. Even a simple poke suffices.”

“ALPHYS ADDED SOME OF THIS ‘POLYMER CEMENT’ INTO MY MAGIC STAR AS A ‘REAGENT’,” Papyrus explained. “I AM NOT SURE HOW IT WORKS, BUT THE SCREEN ISN’T A TRANSPARENT SANDCASTLE ANYMORE. NOW, IT’S MORE LIKE A THIN COOKIE. I THINK. NO POKINGS ALLOWED.”

In other words, the objects he reconstructs will end up brittle?

The lizard scientist nodded. “Exactly! Wow, Frisk. Sounds like Sans taught you quite a lot of science.”

He sure did. But, what about Doctor Gaster? He’s certainly not crumbling. Is this why he’s such a fluid goop?

“Nope. Gaster-sensei is fine because he’s an Amalgamate. They have self-healing properties. Papyrus just needed to gather the bits of his existence close enough for them to merge on their own.”

…She’s really calling him Gaster-sensei?

You heard a loud scoff in between the tight gaps of machinery. “What’s with that mocking tone? ‘Sensei’ is an honourable title reserved for the skilled and knowledgeable! Respect is respect regardless of the language. Plus I’d say Doctor Alphys makes for a wonderful student. She’s better than my last protégé at least.”

Whoa, he’s serious about this.

Alphys blushed pink in the sheer joy of approval. She then leaned closer to you and whispered: “He accepted the title the very moment I explained its true meaning. I-I think Sensei is very accepting of new ideas! I wonder if it has something to do with the colours of his SOUL.”

Huh? Why would his ‘colour’ make such a huge difference?

She seemed surprised at your confusion. “Oh? Hang on. I’ll explain, after I finish this wiring.”

You nodded and let Alphys do her job, which involved plugging the Mini MTT into the system.

Papyrus received another call in the meantime. Sounds like Cenna and Sans were ready for their pickup.

“Gaster-sensei!” said Alphys, “I’m done with my task.”

“Good, good,” the doctor replied. “Take a break for now. When Sans arrives, we’ll be busy again.”

“Okay!”

Alphys led you to the kitchen. By verdict of the skeleparents, there’s no machinery in there.

“Have you ever wondered why a monster’s SOUL is white?” she asked.

Good question. You had pondered about it, but there’s no one who could explain. Did the brilliant Doctor Alphys learn something new from the Magi?
She fidgeted at your high-flying title. “P-please don’t call me that. It feels weird if it doesn’t come from Mettaton. Uh, anyways. Back on topic. Yes, I learned a lot of new stuff from Miss Cenna.”

“The Magi refer these SOUL colours as ‘Aspects’. A Yellow SOUL contains a Yellow ‘Aspect’, for example. The reason why humans have colour is because that particular Aspect outshines all their other traits.”

The Yellow Cenna also had a mix of Purple and Green, but it’s invisible without all those science mumbo jumbo. Does that mean her Yellow is so strong it drowns out the rest from plain sight?

“That’s correct. Monsters on the other hand have all of these Aspects in perfect balance. This is the main reason why we think and act differently compared to your average human.”

…To be honest, you had never seen these ‘differences’. Alphys’ insecurities were perfectly relatable. Burgerpants was about as close to a whiny pre-college student as he could get. Undyne? There are actually humans as NGAAAH as her.

Alphys chuckled. “That’s sweet of you, Frisk. But differences do exist. It’s just very subtle.”

“If a monster’s SOUL is the result of perfect balance, then even the slightest shift can tip the scales. This is why people like Undyne and Gaster-sensei have extreme personalities despite showing up as ‘white’ on any SOUL scanners. Think of it as a ‘hidden colour’ of sorts.”

Wow. That actually made sense. So, does that make Undyne a hidden Green? A lot of Red too? So much Determination!

“Maybe! Cool, isn’t it? Though these imbalances are more obvious on a Seer due to their Eye magic. That’s why Papyrus is, um, a constant locomotive of activity.”

Showing their true colours in a literal sense, huh?

“Yes, yep. You’re catching on really well, Frisk. Anyway, there’s also another a reason why I wanted to talk to you in private.”

Huh? What’s the big hush about?

“It’s about Sans,” Alphys frowned. “He’s… he’s acting alone again.”

You reassured her that he’s being your agent and thus not going solo. Sorry if that worried her.

She’s surprised, but it didn’t set her at ease. “I-I see. But, has he ever reported the results of his research back to you?”

…You realised that you couldn’t answer.

“I figured as much.” Alphys fiddled the tips of her claws. “P-people of a certain personality tend to be chosen for certain jobs. L-like becoming an inventor requires a person with creative forethought. An entertainer such as Mettaton can’t be camera-shy.”

You’re not sure if you’ve understood what Alphys is trying to say.

For a long while, she stayed silent. You could see her trying hard to come up with a proper explanation.

At last she took a deep breath. “If Papyrus was raised by humans, he’d more or less behave the same as his current self. He’s the kind of guy who keeps moving forward in his own unique way. E-even
if he came from a harsh background.”

Uhhh... doesn’t that mean Sans’ efforts to protect his brother from a radical Doctor Gaster were all for nothing?

“N-no, not at all! Sans fought hard to protect his brother for a very good reason. See, Papyrus’ personality makes for a poor fit with Gaster-sensei’s educational philosophy; he wouldn’t have had a happy childhood. Also, his oblivious nature can be dangerous without proper guidance. Imagine what would happen he’d been successfully conditioned to kill humans.”

Oh. Right. You didn’t tell Alphys about it, but there were some timelines where Papyrus thanked you for murder because those actions made his dreams come true.

The thought of an innocently evil Papyrus filled you with some deep, dark chills.

How does this link to Sans then? All that comparison had to lead somewhere.

Alphys clenched her claws tight. “Sans was chosen to be a Tactician not only on the grounds of his genius, but also his behaviour. Testimonies from the skeleparents and Gaster-sensei revealed that Sans exhibited oddities since his toddler days.”

Like, how?

“Stealing keys and cookies, lock-picking, pranking, getting into places where he doesn't belong, just to name a few. Lots of rule-breaking.”

How is that weird? It’s normal for kids to break rules.

“That’s the thing, Frisk. Naughtiness at such a young age is normal for humans. Not monsters.”

That doesn’t make sense! What about poor Gyftrot? He’s heckled by monster teenagers all the time. Not to mention the number of times you had to stop Loox from causing trouble.

You just can’t wrap your head why a cheeky toddler Sans would be considered THAT unusual.

Alphys looked at you with concern. You could tell that she hadn’t expected this intense level of questioning.

“Frisk, a toddler is not the same as a teen. For us monsters, our time for questioning and exploration comes much later in life. Our toddlerhood is marked by docile compliance: we naturally stay within the boundaries set by our parents.

“Any ‘naughty’ behaviour starts around six years old, when a child becomes self-aware enough to make their own decisions.”

You’re starting to understand what Alphys meant with ‘differences’. A monster naturally generates less Determination than a human, hence why they’re less inclined to impose their will on others. Contrast that with humans who start pushing the envelope the moment they can walk.

In other words, Sans had the tendency to act ‘human’ from the very beginning?

Alphys shrugged. “I’m not sure. But, I’ve noticed that he shares a special bond with you. Perhaps he feels more comfortable with a real human. That is, if he could…”

Pardon? The rest of her statements were drowned in muttering.
Before Alphys could answer, you heard Papyrus’ distinctive announcement of return.

“We should get back to work,” said Alphys. She then quickly shuffled herself out of the kitchen.

You patted your cheeks and went on to initiate the greeting ceremony.

Cenna messed up your hair with a huge grin on her face, as usual. You combed it back in no time. Then the both of you laughed together.

For Sans, you asked if he wants a hug.

“Heh,” he replied. “Sure, kid.”

You squeezed him nice and tight.

Welcome back! How did the study go?

“Mind-blowing. All the way to the sky, if you get what I mean. Coincidently I need Gaster’s machine to work for the final phase of my study.”

Really?!

“Yup. Can’t wait to get it done.”

Papyrus squealed, “THAT’S THE SPIRIT, SANS! I’M ELATED THAT YOU FINALLY REALISED THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEEDY WORK! OR RATHER, REDISCOVERING IT.”

Cenna rose a brow at the machinery around her. “Dang, what’s with all the gadgets?”

Sans said, “Looks like we’re building a new Chronograph from junk.”

The sludge of blackness known as ‘Doctor Gaster’ oozed onto the floor as if he’s a creature from a horror movie. But you’re not afraid due to the familiarity.

After a brief moment of reconstruction, he corrected: “No, no! This is a ‘Chronoviewer’, people! We’re building system to project Papyrus’ visions on a screen.”

Sans raised a brow. “And how is that different compared to our old Chronograph?”

“A Chronograph concentrates on guidance and internal recording. A Chronoviewer translates a Chronographer’s vision into a readable digital format for conventional graphic modules to process. Ergo, this system would need no Determination imbued parts and that’s the most important detail for our circumstance.”

Surprisingly, you understood all of that despite the brain-melting technical talk.

“Gotcha,” Sans nodded. “So, where’s the problem?”

Doctor Gaster groaned. “Whenever we attempt to channel a vision, it lacks focus. Lots of shearing and stuttering. Which is an expected complication due to the lack of Cyan. We’re also missing some key features that tremendously helped Papyrus during his partnership with Judge Thyme.”

“Which is?”

Papyrus jumped into the conversation. “OH! OH! OH! I COULD READ YOUR MIND, SANS!
THE THOUGHTS APPEARED INSIDE A FLOATING HOLOGRAPHIC TEXTBOX TABLET LIKE THING. I SAW YOUR PLANS FOR THE HOTDOG STAND TOO!"

"Whoa wait," your short skelly friend exclaimed. "That shouldn’t be possible. You don’t have the right colour combination for that. Gotta have at least Yellow in the mix."

"I can confirm his statements as true," said Cenna.

Everyone immediately stared at the cool noir detective. She raised both hands and said, "Hey, hey, what’s with all the funny looks? I got a hella good intuition, but that’s more about smart guessing. Besides, I ain’t a Seer."

The attention then shifted to Sans.

"Nope, sorry," he shrugged. "I can’t do that either. The ideal colours for a true mind reader would be Yellow - Cyan - Green. Yellow - Cyan - Blue might work too. But I’m Cyan - Yellow - Purple, so that’s a no go."

Alphys then asked, "W-what if you combine Yellow with Blue and Green?"

"Possible," Sans answered, "But it’s gonna be noisy. Like trying to listen to a room full of chatty schoolchildren."

You then crossed your arms and tossed in a casual guess: what if you add ‘Mezil Thyme’? You said Papyrus did his epic thing in The Void, right?

"As long he’s in there, Mez can double-tag with his Chronographer like a true Seer. He’s been doing that since forever. His colours are Red, Yellow, Cyan, I think? Yellow for Truesight. Cyan for focus. Add Determination. Bam! You got your mind-reading textbox."

That explains a lot. You then dropped your jaw and pointed a finger at yourself.

If you’re a Living Victory, does that means this ‘Void’ thing will also be yours? And you could do awesome cool Seer stuff???

"Sounds like it. Don’t ask me how it works though. Anything more than this, and it’s deep science territory for me. I ain’t good with that."

Your blue skelly friend closed his eyes for well over three seconds. When he opened them again, he had the spark of a guy who got the full picture.

"Okay, I know what to do. Gaster, I’ll handle the planning and you’ll do the implementation. Alphys is in charge of the hardware."

The goopy doctor grumbled. "Oh, we’re already at the barking orders phase, are we?"

"Well, you technically have to take orders from Endogeny sitting at the porch, so yeah. We’re already there."

"WHAT ABOUT ME?" Papyrus raised his hand, as enthusiastic as ever.

Sans chuckled and patted his brother on the arm. "You rest, bro. Can’t wear you out just yet. We need you in tip-top condition for the vision dive, alright?"
“ARE YOU TELLING ME TO DO NOTHING?”

“Yup.”

“BUT… BUT THE GREAT PAPYRUS CANNOT JUST DO NOTHING! THAT’S SO VERY UN-PAPYRUS.”

“Sleep?”

Papyrus was semi-insulted by the suggestion. “MY NAME IS NOT SANS, SANS!”

“Why not play with Frisk or the lady noir detective here? Ask them what they wanna do.”

Your sister’s lips stretched a wide, mischievous grin. Predator mode right there.

“Did someone say ‘play’? Hell yeah, it’s been a damn long while since I get to stretch my Aspect muscles! C’mon, Cinnamon Roll. Let’s have a friendly match!”

A match?!

Hang on, doesn’t she have patrols to handle on the Surface?

“I’m sick of those, Frisky. As long I stay down here, folks are gonna assume I’m gathering intel. They’ll handle it in my stead.”

Did she just ditch all her responsibility?!?!?

“Nawh man, I’m just waiting for stuff to get ready. Why not wind down while I still can?”

That is totally absolutely definitely a ditch.

“Hah! Ya haven’t started puberty and you sound just like Mez! Good lord Frisky, don’t go grey on me now.”

Nooooooo! Your precious hair!
Touch wood on premature greying! Touch wood!

Is this what’s like to get teased by a sibling? It’s both annoying and amusing at the same time.

You followed the two outside. They occupied the main road of the abandoned Snowdin grounds. The entire town might as well be their playground.

Cenna brought out her SOUL. “Ever wondered what would have happened if I turned you into a lemon, Cinnamon Roll?”

Papyrus pondered. “NOW THAT YOU’VE MENTIONED IT, YOU DID TRY TO CONFINE ME INSIDE OF THIS WEIRD TRIANGLE. WHAT DOES IT DO?”

“That’s a Gram. Triangles are the symbol for monsters. I was trying to impose my colour on you. Dueling a human, I would’ve made a square instead.”

“OOOH! I WONDER WHAT A YELLOW ME IS LIKE!”

“Why not give it a try now?”

The tall skeleton puffed up his chest and declared: “THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS ALWAYS
Cenna summoned her bee drones again and drew a triangle around him. Since he put up no resistance, the Aspect magic seeped straight into his bones.

A white target crosshair spawned before Papyrus. With some guidance from his hands, he could aim it in any direction.

Cenna had the same floating device too.

“HOW DO I USE THIS?” Just as he asked, he shot a bullet of magic from the crosshair. It struck the shortcut igloo and chipped off a piece upon impact.

Both you and Papyrus dropped your jaws.

“HOLY MACARONI, THIS IS AWESOME!!!!”

That’s SUPER awesome! Does that mean it’ll end up as a shooter game?

“Bingo, Frisky!” said Cenna, “I’ll definitely have the advantage if that happened. I’m a long-range specialist, ya know.”

“Obviously I ain’t gonna host a deathmatch now. So, Cinnamon Roll… can you lend me your bones? Make them like, an inch tall. About ten for starters.”

Papyrus conjured the magic bones as requested. But to your surprise, Cenna was the one who sent them floating into a pattern! How does she do that???

“It’s all the Gram’s doing, Frisky. I made it so that it links our control of magic together. This way, we get to play a shootout without anyone getting hurt.”

Next thing you know, Cenna and Papyrus took turns trying to outdo each other in a fantastical target practice. The goal was to shoot down as many bones as possible before they vanish.

Your inner child bubbled wild. You hopped up and down, begging your tall friend to let you try.

He let you move his arms around like a fancy arcade prop to control the crosshair. You aimed, he fired.

It’s sooooo much fun!

In the middle of the session, Papyrus said, “WE SHOULD STOP NOW.”

Huh? Why?

“I HAVE A FEELING THAT UNCLE GASTER NEEDS OUR HELP.”

“Is that so?” Cenna remarked, “Let’s pack up then.”

When she moved her SOUL back into her body, the enchantment on Papyrus faded away. He’s back to his usual white self.

The three of you bumped into Alphys on the way back.

“Ah!” she exclaimed. “Great timing. According to Sans’ calculations, we’ll need both Frisk’s and Cenna’s SOUL for the best effects.”
Huh?! Does he need the whole thing?

“Nope. Just a tiny piece. Come, it’ll make sense when you see it.”
You expected cool magic science, but this takes the cake. Circuitry sat in the middle of a glowing, complicated white magic star. So many hand glyphs. Trying to read them made your eyes spin.

How many points are there anyway…?

“Nine,” Sans answered you. “That’s the minimum in this case.”

Only nine?

Is this really the time to be lazy?

“Nah. When it comes to Arcanagrams, you wanna keep things as streamlined as possible. It’s all about minimizing risks. Errors can get explosive. You really don’t want that to happen.”

You glanced at Doctor Gaster’s facial scars. They’re so deep that not even his goopy state could heal them.

Noted, Sans. Noted. So, what’s the plan?

“We’re going to turn that pile of electronics into a proxy Seer.”

Gasp. With ‘Fake Aspects’? Mom and Dad told you about it.

“Huh, so you’ve heard the story? Well that saves a paragraph of explanation. You can’t make a fake without a proper basis though. That’s what we’re missing.”

So, what are they?

“Our good ol’ Yellow Aspect and something to boost Doctor Gaster’s Cyan.”

He pointed at the black lump of goop sitting in a small triangle. “That’s a part of the doc. We’re gonna use that as another reagent.”

Then he shifted to the two empty squares. “Your fragment is gonna be next to Gaster’s. We need to push his Pure Cyan more than what it is now. An Amalgamate is still a monster in the end, thus it’s a bit diluted.”

“We’ll place Cenna’s fragment further away so that there’s no interference. Since she’s human, it comes packed with all the DT it needs. No extra boost required.”

What about the extra colours?

“Filtered out. That’s one reason why I had Gaster offer a piece of himself instead of using my SOUL. Think of him as a split flavoured Nice Cream: his entire left side is Cyan. Paps and I are swirly mixes.”

Doctor Gaster squinted at Sans for the imagery. To be honest, you thought it’s both funny and appropriate.

“After we imbue the right stuff into the machine, it’s time for testing. Ready for coolness to commence?”
Heck yeah!
You popped out your SOUL without a second thought. Should you pick out one of the partitions?

“Nah. That’s too much,” Sans replied. “I’ll leave the surgical procedures to Alphys.”
Your lizard friend cried out, “D-don’t say it like I’m going to cut them up! Even. If that’s technically true…”
She took out a small knife from her apron’s pockets.
Oh. You get it now. It’s the same method used to test your Aspects.

Alphys placed the fragments in the correct locations. Now, it’s time for the big implementation.

Doctor Gaster slid forth. “Children, please step back. For your safety.”

The rest of you huddled as close to the exit as possible. You’re confident that nothing will go wrong, but precaution is always a compulsory procedure.

The man from another world stood before the group in all his tall, classy glory.

You have to admit, there’s something grand and mysterious about his inky blackness. It’s the illusion of eternity. Never beginning, never ending.

What about white then? If white’s the opposite of black, would it be both the beginning and the end?

That’s getting a bit too meta there.

Doctor Gaster then commanded the Arcanagram with swift and fluid hand signs. The distorted tongue of the Seers resonated in the air: an eerie and grating chant to your human ears.

Your fragment jumped sideways to merge with the goop. Colour theory be damned, because the resulting mix of red and black somehow turned into a brilliant cyan.

At least Cenna’s fragment refinement made more sense. You spotted bits of purple and green float away, leaving behind a refined golden product.

Pure yellow and pure cyan filled the magic star, before collapsing into the machinery in a single go. The Aspects glowed for a short while before the rest of the magic seeped into the system.

“It’s ready for testing,” said Doctor Gaster. “Sans, would you do the honours? Your telekinesis is certainly much better than mine.”

Being true to his ‘lazy’ perception, Sans sighed in the most reluctant manner. You know he’s just tired from all the crazy studying.

But a job is still a job. He shifted the entire structure closer to the rest of the equipment.

The goopy doctor slid towards Papyrus. He held a visor-like device attached to a whole lot of wires. You noticed that Alphys connected the output ends to the enchanted machine.

Papyrus seemed to recognize it. “UNCLE GASTER, DIDN’T YOU WEAR THIS COOL GADGET WHEN YOU USED THE OTHER VISION MACHINE?”

“No, my boy. As similar as it looks, this serves a completely different function. Instead of feeding
information to you, you’ll instead feed information into it.”

Both you and Papyrus uttered a big ‘oooh’.

“Gaster-sensei, please don’t forget this,” Alphys rushed up to her new teacher with a gamepad. Once she completed her delivery, she went back to the wire works.

“Oh, right. Thank you very much,” he said, “Sans was very kind to program a user-friendly interface to manage the external Yellow and Cyan Aspects.”

Sans added, “Press the tiny triangle for the options menu, bro. All the button instructions are there too.”

That’s the ‘Start’ button.

“LE GASP, IT’S JUST LIKE A REAL VIDEO GAME! I CAN’T WAIT TO TRY IT OUT.”

You asked the doc if you could see this menu too.

“Yes, Child of Mercy. They’ll be displayed together with the vision to provide the fullest context.”

That means you can help Papyrus whenever? Awesome.

Alphys turned on the power. Fans whirred, electricity coursed. Items once discarded as broken breathed a second life in their new purpose. Who knows how long they’ll last before they surrender?

The screen lit up. It’s a simple black and white menu written in the font called Comic Sans.

Gaster facepalmed. “Sans, won’t you provide a more professional font? We’re going to pry into some of history’s best kept secrets and I can’t take it seriously with that… casual comedian thing.”

“But you can accept Alphys calling you Gaster-sensei,” Sans commented.

“Of course. I’m aware of the stigma, but that is truly a genuine title its land of origin. Now, could you please fix the interface?”

“Maaaybe.” He snickered. “If only Tori’s here. This is definitely the best time for a tu-Toriel.”

Groan. Cringe. Chuckle. Cenna actually had to turn around and bury her face into her hat. That’s a new reaction.

Papyrus screamed, “SAAAAAAAAAAANS!”

“Remember the little triangle button I talked about, bro?”

At first he tried to press it, but the mittens got in the way. In the end he had to take them off to use the controller properly.

When he pressed the button, the options screen popped up. Currently the font was set to ‘Comic Sans’. One tap to the left and the whole thing changed into ‘Helvetica’.

Dang, that’s so cool. He began cycling through the list. There’s ‘Papyrus’ too. As much as Papyrus wanted to use that, it’s not the easiest to read.

In the end, everyone settled for ‘8bitOperator JVE’.
“Now,” said Doctor Gaster. “We’ll need a situation where we can test the accuracy of our construct. Does anyone here have a suggestion?”

Cenna raised her hand, “I got one, doc. I was told that it’s the perfect test.”

She faced the new ‘Chronographer’ of the team. “Hey, Cinnamon Roll. Ya remember the ‘not-nice’ scenario? The one where I tried to shoot your brother?”

Papyrus voiced out his displeasure without hesitation. “WE SHALL NOT TALK ABOUT THAT HORRIBLE INCIDENT AGAIN!”

“Sorry, but you gotta. The vision you witnessed was my second attempt. In order to test our machine, you have to show everyone the first round too.”

You spoke up. Was it the one that involved a bone cage?

“Yup, Frisky.”

For some reason, you can’t quite recall what happened back then. Something about a couple claiming to be your real parents. Then Sans, he--

Hesitation clogged your throat.

Sans then said it in the most frank and nonchalant manner possible, “I kidnapped Frisk. At least twice.”

Everyone gasped in utter horror.

“You did WHAT?!” Gaster looked like he’s ready to give someone a terrible time.

You hurried to explain that Sans tried to get you out of a bad situation. Humans kept harassing Mom to hand you over.

B-besides it can’t be called a kidnapping if you’re in cahoots. More like, you, uh, tried to escape with him.

Please don’t blame Sans.

Insert awkward moment here. You shifted the conversation back to your spotty memory. As a Living Victory, shouldn’t you have awesome recollection or so?

Cenna patted you on the shoulder. “You’re still human, Frisky. Ya think I can remember every bit of my childhood? That happened real early in your time-loops.”

In other words, your older memories can fade in time. Gotta be careful about that.

“Besides, I spiked Sans’ ketchup with sedatives back then. If he shared it with ya, then you got drugged too. That’s definitely going to affect your memory.”

What?!?!

…Come to think of it, you did ask for his ketchup to flavour your food. It had become a habit for you, and thus you didn’t think twice about it.

Everything’s starting to make sense.

You tell Papyrus that he’ll have to compare both of the bad times. You want to know the truth
behind the circumstances too. That’s the whole point of this project.

He frowned his brows in worry at you. “ARE YOU SURE? PROMISE ME THAT YOU WON’T THINK BAD ABOUT MISS AUNT OR MY BROTHER. THOSE EVENTS TECHNICALLY DON’T EXIST.”

You promised.

Just like that, he’s back to his gusto self. “OKAY, I WILL DO MY BEST!”

Papyrus put on the visors and began channeling his power into the system.

The images started to take shape. Blue lines built a framework mesh, orange filled in the models, and green squares planted the correct textures to recreate a lost timeline.

Wow, this is crazy cool.

Sans asked, “Bro, can you rebuild two images at once and put them side by side? Like a split screen.”

“How, let’s try that.”

Sans’ interface was a lot more flexible than expected, and Papyrus had enough skill to execute the suggestion. Now you’re looking at two screens displaying the same area. The left screen is ‘1’, the right ‘2’.

“Nice job, bro,” said Sans. “You’re awesome.”

Your attention shifted to Doctor Gaster. He’s smiling in awe. You bet the parents were just as amazed at their sons’ united capabilities.

“Damn, I can’t believe you guys built this out of junk!” Said Cenna. “Our Artificers really oughta learn this art from you Ebott folk.”

You presented the brilliant Doctor Alphys! When it comes to salvage-work, she’s the woman to look for.

As expected, Alphys turned red from the praise. “I-i-it wouldn’t be possible without Sans and Gaster-sensei.”

Before you could continue the teasing, Papyrus exclaimed: “I SEE LOTS OF MINI METTATONS FLYING AROUND!”

Screen 1 had an MTT-brand live broadcast, while in Screen 2 the night sky remained dark and silent.

You heard the typical Mettaton hot-story coverage. Harped about the kidnapping of monsterkind’s ambassador.

The vision’s attention shifted to a masked person in a trenchcoat and familiar hat. You noted that the hairstyles were different: one had a ponytail, while the other had a shoulder-cut.

Who’s that?

“MISS AUNT,” Papyrus answered. “MISTER MAGUS HAD HER CHANGE HER HAIRDO SO OTHERS DON’T GET THIS DEJAVU FEELING THINGAMABOB.”
Just how far back had the Magi targeted you?!

Cenna shrugged. “Since the first loop, according to Mez. We ain’t alone on this. Ah, you’ll see why.”

You watched the two versions of your cool sister stalk the icy woods. In the timeline where Mettaton got involved, she’s trying to hide from the spotlights.

Somehow it led her to a couple who’s also trying to traverse the forest. When the two crossed paths, they asked if she’s a law-enforcer on the case. If not, they’ll call the real police and report her.

The masked Cenna had no choice but to show her Vanquisher badge. The couple latched unto her the moment she did so.

“Those two claim to be your real parents,” she said, “Bollocks! I know the truth. But I can’t call out their foul and stuff because of…”

Mettaton’s spotlight shone over her and the couple.

“…That. Any violence on the broadcast brings a bad name to both the police and the Magi. So I had to play along and ‘help’ them. I planned to expose their crap later at the station.”

What about the quiet timeline? You asked Papyrus if there’s a way to pause or rewind.

The screen stopped for a moment when he paused the vision, but he couldn’t do anything more than that. Buttons clicked away as he randomly pressed the gamepad.

Nothing happened. “HMM, I GUESS I CAN ONLY PAUSE.”

Gaster noted, “It seems that Papyrus doesn’t have much fluid control. But that’s fine. He’s registering clues at a subconscious level. Once he finishes his vision, we can jump to any point relevant to our question.”

Relevant?

“Yes, Papyrus works on ‘Relevance’ and ‘Possibilities’. He’s like a living search engine.”

Papyrus let the visions flow. The same couple appeared on Screen 2, asking for help from the masked detective. Instead of listening to their pleas, the Magus summoned her drones and tied them up!

They yelled angry curses with all the usual threats of siccing the cops. Your cool sister from another time just shrugged everything off. She hung a signal beacon on a branch and then slipped away.

Cenna laughed at the outcome. “Tooootally what I’d do if nobody’s watching. Take that you fakes!”

Eventually, both scenes met at a common point. Alternate Sans realised that there’s something wrong. He’s struggling to walk, let alone teleport. The past you started to get wobbly too. For your safety, he encased you in a cage of bone.

“Yup, all within expectations,” he commented about his own actions. “Since I got drugged, I couldn’t escape or maintain a hundred percent awareness of my surroundings. It’ll be too easy for someone to swipe the kid away while I’m on the defensive.”

On Screen 2, you noticed that Sans took out his phone and tried to contact someone. That’s absent in Screen 1.
A small, triple-dot bubble popped over Sans’ head.

“…I know what’s going on now. Papyrus, see that bubble? Press ‘A’ to read my mind there.”

“OKAY.”

When Papyrus did so, a dialogue text-box appeared. It read the following:

‘Shit, this is not good. I’m found out. I have to tell Mettaton to destroy the fodder phone and leave the meeting point. He can’t get caught together with me.’

You, Papyrus and Alphys dropped your jaws.

Alphys shrieked, “Sans! You roped Mettaton in to abscond Frisk?!”

“Ahuh,” he nodded. “That’s what I would have done. Logical, too. See, our celeb thought he had a hot story the first time around. The best way to catch a criminal is to expose them on public TV, right? I’m sure he had no idea that I was the main suspect. If he did, he wouldn’t have pulled that stunt.”

“I must have gotten a bad feeling about keeping him the dark. So, I made Mettaton my accomplice. With a little surveying from his celebrity inner-circle, he got us a safe hiding home. Probably on some far off island somewhere.”

Hence the silence on Screen 2.

If word got out that a monster was the true kidnapper of the ambassador, the controversy will ruin their brittle diplomatic relationship with the humans!

“Guess what killed our reputation in the first timeline?”

The masked Cenna and Sans met face to face. In the first screen, the fake parents tried to convince you to accept them.

Sans being Sans, he took no crap. He summoned his notorious Gasterblasters and initiated his strongest attack. The masked Magus managed to yank them out of the way with her strings before the beams came into contact.

Despite the drastic measures, you’re no longer shocked by his choices.

Sans and Cenna duelled in both timelines. The patterns, timing, and sequence differed but the end was more or less the same.

It’s a close shave of victory for Sans: his aim remained true despite his compromised condition.

Then, the accident happened. The medication finally kicked in and he fell asleep at the worst possible time.

What happened after was a forgone conclusion. You died the first round, followed by Papyrus in the second loop.

The playback ended there. The menu interface popped up with a few options. The top said ‘Replay’, presumably from the beginning. The one after that said, ‘Select’.

Choosing the ‘Select’ option highlighted the people or objects that caught Papyrus’ attention. Subconsciously or otherwise. In this case, it’s the fake parents.
They did kinda come out of nowhere.

Papyrus nodded. “I WOULD HAVE BELIEVED THEM IF I DIDN’T WITNESS THE CORE INCIDENT.”

In other words, he had the proper info to raise a flag of suspicion. You asked him if he could focus on any detail that’s not listed on the screen.

“YES! YOU NEED TO INSTRUCT ME THOUGH. LIKE WHAT SANS DID.”

You asked the group if they noticed any other discrepancies.

No one else had anything to add.

Papyrus refocused his vision on the couple…

They met a man by the roadside who informed them of monsterkind’s ambassador having been kidnapped by a blue skeleton.

“Hey,” Cenna spoke up, “That informant looks familiar. I think I saw his face in the HQ before. Let’s see… after I delivered the cinnamon bunnies to my good friend, she started reviewing profiles. Didn’t wanna tell me why though.”

Ding! The informant now appeared on the selection list. Now Papyrus had the option to peer into that person’s relevant past, present, or future at any time.

Oooh, so that’s how it works.

Gaster rubbed his chin. “Hmm, what if we go back a bit further? What does the couple and this informant have in common?”

“I AGREE!” Papyrus selected the option without a single hesitation.

The screen shifted into a… news broadcasting station? Reporters?

Everyone working in that shift received news that a lady goat-monster had barged into a police station, begging everyone to look for her child.

That’s Mom!

The field reporters rushed out into the night to catch the latest news, the informant included. While he’s in the car, he made a call…

He said: “They’re taking action. We need to get the kid before they do. I think we’re dealing with two separate parties in this case. The monsters don’t trust the Magi.”

“The kid doesn’t seem to know anything about the quake incident either. If you can convince them that you’re their parents, we’ll have a huge advantage.”

“So far, there are no signs of Mezil Thyme. I bet he’ll send out an agent. He always does.”

Mezil Thyme?

Why did his name appear?

You gasped as you remembered what the man once said:
‘Imagine what would happen if someone who adhered to the Gungnir ideology adopted you?’

You flailed your arms around as you tried to tell everyone the big link between the cases, but you couldn’t piece together a comprehensive statement.

Sans understood your jumbling and translated: “There’s a high chance that the reporter and the couple are members of Gungnir. Paps, remember Mettaton’s vandalism case? Let’s see if he’s there.”

The screen skipped to the current timeline. You saw the same man in the front lines, pointing out Gungnir’s emblem to Mettaton.

Mezil interrupted the explanation like the boss he is.

After the Magi escorted Mettaton into the studio, the reporter became disgruntled. He excused himself to the side and made a call.

“The Magi boss arrived. Dissed us as usual, that bastard. There’s nothing else I can do there.”

Oh. Em. Gee. Deep cover agents infiltrating as regular upright citizens into key positions. That’s freaky!

Papyrus took off the visors and squeezed his eyes shut, showing clear signs of fatigue from his magic. His family attended to him.

You don’t blame him: he’s been running nonstop for days.

Cenna slammed the side of her fist against the nearest wall. “Damn those lightning-heads! Even after all these years, we still can’t break their network!”

Weren’t they leaderless?

“Yeah, they are. Ain’t gonna stop the smarter folk from banding together though. There’re guys who’re still alive from their more organized times.”

So, they’re more like disjointed cell groups now. Gotcha.

You pondered about the next course of action. Perhaps it’s time to look into Gungnir’s origins. Trace their roots, then follow the outcome.

Sans agreed with you, “I’m going with the kid’s idea. But, can we have a break first?”

That kind of fatigue weighing down on Papyrus… you’ve never seen it before.

“NNGH,” he grunted. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS FINE.”

No, Papyrus. This isn’t normal. Drink some water. Lie down. Take a break for once.

Everyone will have to wait for the day shift to end anyway. Mom, Dad, and Undyne wanted to check out the new invention. That’s in about three or so hours.

“DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?!”

You nod.

“IF THAT’S THE CASE, I SHALL PUT ALL MY EFFORT INTO BEING SANS SO I’LL HAVE THE STRENGTH TO SERVE!”
The tall guy pushed himself off the ground. You noticed a worrying wobble in the way he walked. Somehow, he managed to climb the stairs and retreat to his old room.

“I’ll prepare some refreshments,” said Gaster. He’s trying to avoid direct eye contact with Sans as he slipped into the kitchen.

Your friend gave you a nod of gratitude. “Thanks for giving Paps a reason to slow down. Deep inside, he wants to see the truth more than anyone else.”

No problem. Friends look out for each other. Besides, Papyrus would have attempted the same maybe-reverse psychology shenanigans if you switched positions.

“Heh, nice one. So. What are you gonna do in the meantime?”

You reached out for your sister’s hand. Told Sans that it’s long overdue for a tour around Snowdin and the Ruins. Maybe add Waterfall to the agenda if you have time.

“Sounds good. Go have fun. We’ll meet up later, ‘kay?”

Okay. You wasted no time to drag Cenna out of the door.

She laughed. “Getting frisky aren’t ya, Frisky? Mama’s naming scheme hit right on point!”

Well, you have to make it up to your stoic face somehow.
Ruins

Chapter Notes

Nowadays, I have to check the chapter list to make sure I don’t use the same title twice.

You took your sister for a stroll in the Ruins. The first stop, Mom’s old home. Rather, what’s left of it. Most of the furniture was imported to the Surface.

Time had started to take its toll here. Non-lethal dust piled up on anywhere it could land. Soon, it’ll turn into a self-made carpet of neglect.

The strange tree continued to produce only red autumn leaves. Without Mom to keep the place clean, they scattered in a haphazard circle around its roots.

In the places where water gathered, algae and mold had started to creep along the edges. You wonder how the place looked like when the monsters first moved in for the Sealing. It must have been a huge mess.

Then, there’s that cool view of the old city. It’s dead silent.

You asked Cenna if the place spooked her.

“Nawh,” she answered. “It’s empty, but it ain’t haunted. Pretty peaceful if you ask me.”

No bad spirits?

“Yeah.”

Even if children were buried nearby?

She widened her eyes in surprise.

You explained to her what happened to the Six Children who fell before you. After extracting their SOULS, Dad had them mummified and stored in their respective colour-coded coffins.

After the Barrier broke, Mom buried them in the place where they all first fell in.

Isn’t that creepy?

“A corpse is just a shell waiting to become plant food. As long their spirits ain’t lingering, there’s no problem.”

You asked Cenna if she could check just to make sure.

“Sure, Frisky. Take me to their resting place.”

You took her to the infamous bed of golden flowers. Or rather, it should be. Right now, it’s just a patch of untouched snow. With the Barrier gone, that chamber followed the patterns of the world above.
That’s Chara’s grave. Right in the middle. You then showed her the locations of the six other gravesites too.

You expected her to take out a bell or some other strange instrument for a thorough examination. But, she just walked one circle before handing out her verdict.

“The place’s clean, Frisky. All the non-Chara kids moved on just fine. Breaking the Barrier satisfied them, I guess.”

She could tell?

“Yup. I’m already sharp by default, and my training made me a walking spirit-detection machine.”

How does it feel like? To sense a DEMON?

“It feels like there’s someone in the room, staring at ya. Yeah, I totally felt Chara. That’s why I had to play the mystery game you know. Keep everyone in the dark so psycho kid don’t know I’m a Vanquisher.”

“With that said, this room is about as empty as it gets. Ain’t got no ghost.”

Phew, that’s good. Here you thought that their SOULS moved on without their spirit.

Pointing upwards, you showed her the legendary hole. That’s where it all started.

Cenna tilted her head so far back, you’re afraid that she’s going to pull a nerve.

“Daaaayum, that’s a long drop. I’m a thousand percent sure that nobody’s gonna survive that fall if it ain’t for the Barrier.”

Oh? You mean the Ebott Goldenflowers didn’t save you?

“Nope. Not at all. Think of the Barrier as a floating lake. You don’t feel it, but it slowed ya down.”

“If a bed of flowers is enough, I wouldn’t have had to once use the Trap Harvester to save Mez’s hind.”

The magic watch? When?

“It was my first real timey-wimey mission with him. Some major crime stuff. Long story short, he fell off the building in a struggle. I had to catch Mez in a time-freeze bubble long enough to lasso him to safety like some cowgirl.”

You giggled. Does he know?

“Hell yeah! Boy, he hated it sooooo much. Complained that it’s a constant state of near suffocation. About as unpleasant as it sounds.”

Cenna gripped her watch tight.

Her voice darkened. “Hey Frisky, originally… I wanted ya to threaten Mezil with this thing. If you show the Trap Harvester, he’ll do anything to avoid it. That ‘anything’ includes listening to your plea on the case. You’re real good with talking things out.”

“But life ain’t that simple, yeah? A big reset happened. Bet you’ve seen all the signs. Heard the stories too. Now, we’re gonna try to get the Cinnamon Roll to uncover a whole lotta truths. That’s a
Huge gamechanger.”

Had the tsundere Judge told her anything yet?

Cenna shook her head. “He’s been silent to me. That’s when I know that we’re in deep, deep trouble.”

“… As much as I wanna hand over Mama’s memento to her child, I can’t. Not until I’m sure I don’t need it. The Trap Harvester is my only clue and weapon against any time-shenanigans. Without this trinket, I won’t notice a thing. That could put me in a really bad spot.”

Agreed. You told her that you understand.

She returned a weak smirk at you. “Thanks Frisky.”

It looks like something’s bothering her. You asked if there’s anything else she wanted to say.

“I’m honestly worried for Papyrus,” she replied.

Papyrus?

Why?

“Monsters… are supposed to be super in-tune with their emotions, right? Heard from the bunny-inn lady that strong killing intent weakens them.”

That’s true. Their emotions reflect the strength of their SOUL. Happy monsters are healthy monsters.

“Thought so. See, being a Chrongrapher means going to places where no one should. My friend had to analyze stuff that could make a human sick, let alone a monster.”

“She perseveres until the case’s over. Then, depending on the crap, she could end up in bed for days. If not over a week.”

Papyrus almost couldn’t walk after the last attempt. Is this going to affect him in the long term?

“Eh…” Cenna scrunched her brows, thinking. “I wouldn’t worry about that. He’s a ton more robust. Still, even athletes need proper rest. What you saw earlier? That’s overextension right there.”

“Call this a police gut feeling, Frisky. In my personal opinion, Cinnamon Roll can’t see everything even if he has the biggest vision range. There’s just some stuff he’s not gonna brain.”

“It’ll be like, uh…” More thinking. She crossed her arms and tapped her fingers. “Trying to do an internet search with Safe Mode on.”

Oh! You get it! Papyrus would subconsciously filter out things that he doesn’t want to see.

“Bingo,” Cenna replied. “So, if that happens… I don’t want ya to force him. We can hold his hand if he’s really, really, reeeeeally prepared to follow through. But if he breaks down? That’s the ultimate nay. Got that?”

You gave her a huge thumbs up. Leave the Papyrus protection squad to you!

“Atta Frisky!” Here comes the head-rub. Goodbye neatness. “Le assassino and the skeleparents will thank ya lots.”
Assassino?
Is it from that game franchise with the cool hoodies?

“Yup!”

You never told Sans about it, but you noticed the resemblance ever since you first met him. Parkour fans hung out near your foster home once. At least one of them would sport that kind of fashion.

“Glad to know I ain’t the only one who thought of that!”

Both of you laughed together. A cool nerd for a sister. Awesome equals to maximum.

Your gladness didn’t last long. There’s something you’ve been meaning to ask, but you didn’t want to do it in front of everyone else. It’s supposed to be top secret after all.

Since you’re alone under the mountain, you took the opportunity:

What is this big mission in Spring?

Cenna stared at you in shock for a few seconds. Then, she tipped her hat down and smirked. “Mez told ya about that, huh? Guess you deserve to know.”

She leaned on one leg. Tried to be cool and casual. Maybe it’s to soothe her own nerves.

“Don’t ya think it’s unfair that monsters get all the finger-pointing? Goat Dad. Doctor Goop. ‘Sif they’re the only ones capable of all that mad science.’”

You nodded.

“Well, we’re in luck. Humans screwed something up major. With a big M. An M so big, it’s monstrous!”

Is this going into anime territory again?

Cenna laughed. Instead of cocking her head upwards for a confident, almost suicidal cackle… she kept her sights on the ground. Away from you.

“Fiction’s gotta be inspired from somewhere. C’mon, you’re living in a town of magical monsters and you think it’s bizarre to have anime shenanigans elsewhere?”

It’s still a hard fact to swallow sometimes.

So… How does this big issue tie in to her?

“Ever wondered why I didn’t come strutting to town on the first opportunity? It’s because Mez and I did a whole lot of negotiating nonsense first. Lotsa plane-hopping and all.”

“Mez has a ton of connections. The number of friends he has can be counted with fingers. But, that doesn't mean he got no influence. He saved and helped a ton of people. Many of them in positions of power today.”

You thought politicians can’t be trusted.

“Lesser of two evils, Frisky. Hey, hey, you’re gonna be part of the politics in the future. Does that mean you can’t be trusted?”
Maybe. But you’re determined not to lose yourself.

“Heh, it does help that you can rewind time once you realise you got conned. That’s what Mez did anyway: cheating the cheaters. Kicked out the bullshit folk while putting in the ones on his side.”

What if they betrayed him or fall short?

“Good luck surviving the death of your career.”

Okay. He’s merciless. So chilling.

Basically, he manipulated politics for the Magi’s gain. Why does he need to do that?

“To squash out Gungnir influence, gain legal authority, preventing the big fuck-up that’s threatening to eat the world, and a bunch of other stuff.”

Wait what?

A screw up that’s threatening to what?!

“Yeah. That’s what I’m getting at. You see, the War of the Red Victory was at the tail end of a whole lotta bad stuff. A train wreck at its most wrecked.”

“Corrupt people in power initiated a heretical experiment. Since they had authority, they either bought over or oppressed anyone who tried to get the truth. You can imagine that there were plenty of ‘accidents’ during that time.”

The thriller genre at its finest. Dang.

“The mighty Supreme Judge before Mez was on the case. Even so, it’s hard for him to make any headway because of deep corruption. Nothing’s gonna move if nobody wanna cooperate, you know.”

“Then he got murdered. When a Supreme Judge dies without a successor, it becomes total anarchy. Everyone corrupts each other’s SAVES. And that means whatever shit went down during that period stays permanent.”

“Long story short, the heretical experiment backfired, a city got destroyed, and now we have a world-ending calamity that nobody could rewind because of the war. It’s sealed under the ocean, but the lid’s on the verge of falling apart. Yay.”

That’s the most sarcastic ‘yay’ ever to come out from her. You got the point.

“So,” said Cenna, “Mez and I made a wager with the big wigs. Presidents, monarchy, world leaders, everyone. It’s time to repay the favour.”

“If the Magus Association can solve their massive mistake, the nations will grant us an absolute wish in return. Mez made sure nobody tried anything funny. No backpedalling. No schemy loopholes. No weird bullshit. Own up, or face the consequences.”

And that’s the big Springtime mission?

“Bingo.”

Does it involve DEMONS?

Cenna fanned her hand across her face. “Nay. Ya think that’s the only force in the universe? Kinda
wish that’s the case though…”

You scratched your head. A DEMONless world-threatening threat? Had this been tackled in any of the other timelines before?

She shook her head.

That’s a no.

Is this why the tsundere Judge is so anxious to get your Trial done and over with?

You finally received a nod.

“It’s a critical mission as you can imagine. He needs to make sure he has the full right to his SAVES. Or handled by a successor he can trust. Also, he needs to make sure Gungnir don’t flip their shit and sabotage everything in the meantime.”

Cenna shifted her weight to the other leg. Remained silent as she continued to avoid eye contact.

“We’re thinking of asking for the Ebott folk’s help. It’s good PR, you know. If everyone knew that the monsters here played a huge role in saving the world… that’ll solve a lot of issues.”

“All we need is permission from King Asgore and Queen Toriel to lend us their best. That includes Doctor Gaster. All parties involved in the attempted war effort will have a chance to redeem themselves.”

You frowned. It doesn’t seem right that they have to do so much to fix a problem they never started.

“Eh, it ain’t a matter of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. It’s all about public perception. I know it sucks, but that’s a part of life.”

The sunrays dimmed into a deep, orange hue as the sun set over the horizon. It marked the end of the day shift. It won’t be long before the real vision dive.

It’s time to head back. On the way, you tried to put the serious topics aside and chat about the nerdy things in life.

Cenna livened up, but you could tell that she’s troubled. Her fake face doesn’t match up to Sans’. If you could see through him, you can see through her.

When you returned, you arrived at a snowy picnic your parents had set up.

Table? Checked.
Benches? Checked.
Flasks of tea? Checked.

Food for dogs and non-dogs? Checked and double checked. Endogeny already started their meal way ahead of everyone else.

You half-expected something like this to happen. With Dad and Undyne combining their physical prowess, there’s nothing that they can’t transport.

Everyone thought that it would be best to have an early dinner. There’s Mom and her famous butterscotch-cinnamon pie for dessert, of course.

It gave ample time to rest, recover, and prepare for the unknown ahead. You had a feeling that no
Another peaceful day had passed according to Undyne. Spotted a bunch of suspicious vehicles in the distance at most. Nobody dared to make an issue in broad daylight, more so with the strongest fish lady herself leading the charge.

The evening and night shift patrols will have to be vigilant. Intel sources suggest that smarter groups might try to use the cover of night to infiltrate.

A long nap did wonders for Papyrus. Though he didn’t shine or sparkle, he’s well enough to yell at Sans over his bad puns.

You’d be worried if he didn’t respond. As the internet says, ‘OOC Is Serious Business’. A silent Papyrus would either mean there’s something terrible looming ahead, or he’s too sick to respond. They’re both bad omens.

After the group dinner, everyone sat in a circle on the floor.

You.
Sans.
Cenna.
Gaster.
Dad Asgore.
Mom Toriel.
Alphys
Undyne.

With Papyrus in the middle.

Nine people in total. It’s as though everyone’s joining in on a big movie night. Except, it’s going to be an unedited live documentary.

Alphys ran through some final checkups before giving a thumbs-up. Papyrus put on his visor with great pride and purpose, as if he’s going to pilot a fighter plane to the sky.

“FRISK, WHERE SHOULD WE START?”

Seems that while you took your stroll, everyone agreed you should be the main director.

It’s a task you’ll accept without hesitation. That was your intention from the start.

You told Papyrus to seek for the Legendary Hero, the one who initiated the war against the Dreemurr Nation and killed Mezil of Berendin.

…Come to think of it, they really don't deserve to be called a ‘Hero’. They're more of an assassin, like Sans but worse. From now on, you’ll call them by a more appropriate title:

‘Genocider’.
Meanwhile, feel free to comment, analyze or ask questions! They're important feedback. Helps us figure out where something isn't clear.

Edit: Oh, I forgot to mention that I intend to slowly draw some character art. Here's Cenna for example. I'm not a professional artist, but it's good enough to give some ideas of how the folks look like. Follow click the blog's "The Golden Quiche" tag in the future to sort out GQ related art.
This certainly took a long while to complete.

Here comes the lore! This is just part one.

Also have a picture of Mezil Thyme.

Everyone stared at the screen without a single commentary. You’re viewing things that had happened, and yet they’re still uncharted realms.

The sun was shining.
The birds were singing.
In days like these, a silent confrontation goes unnoticed.

Two prominent people faced each other by a lake of water lilies.

One, the Red Sage.
The other, his murderer.

This scenario took place after the Sealing.

The Red Sage wore his guise: a wizard’s cloaked garb of black fabric, decorated in elaborate scarlet embroidery. A painted wooden mask hid his skeletal face from the humans. Wherever he walked, he carried a magic staff.

As for the Genocider, he-- she-- they donned the warrior’s gear of that era. Of all their equipment, the spear looked the newest. Most likely granted as a gift for their ‘heroic’ deeds. Bearing the emblem of a bolt of lightning, it’s none other than the original Gungnir itself.

The Red Sage’s clothes fluttered against the breeze.

“Congratulations,” so said the wizard. “The world is now free from the threat of monsters. Minstrels sing of how the kingdom’s mightiest reign victorious: you and I, at the front lines, the symbol of might and magic combined.”

“A great accolade for your career, is it not?”

An undercurrent of spite laced his every word.

Undyne whistled. “Holy crap, that guy BURNS! Who is that anyway?”

“The true founder of the Magus Association,” said Cenna. “Yeah. You don’t wanna mess with the old Mezil either.”

“Wait, what?”

You explained that Mezil Thyme was named after a nobleman from House Berendin. Very important figure for the ancients.
“This is getting weird. And confusing,” she remarked.

Agreed. That’s why you decided to just call him on a surname basis from now on.

The Genocider said: “I know what you are, creature.”

Wow, racist sentiments right off the bat.

The man of House Berendin huffed at the statement. “May I ask how you arrived at such a conclusion?”

“You can’t hide from the wind. They blow right through.”

Sans looked down on his own non-existent belly. “Can’t deny that. Remember our first summer storm?”

Yeah. It’s the wet-dog syndrome. Sans’ apparent ‘chubbliness’ was all due to his fluffy clothes. Nothing to do with his actual weight. When drenched, he’s about as bony as Papyrus.

The Red Sage huffed. Glowing crimson eyes shifted towards the human. “Observant. I suppose that’s how you’ve survived all those impossible scenarios. Or is that truly the case?”

“What’s your scheme?” the human asked. “Bones never recall their real selves. What makes you different?”

“The same reason why you stand apart from other humans, mercenary,” answered the Lich.
“Those with the Keys of Fate preserve their sense of self no matter where the cosmos turns. I was the previous wielder, therefore I am who I am.”

Keys of Fate?
What?

“I think he’s talking about your ability to time-travel,” Sans explained.

Dad blinked in confusion. “Isn’t that man… the mysterious skeleton who helped us? He appeared out of nowhere and in rags. Yet, he’s highly educated.”


“That explains why he didn’t return to us…”

“Your Majesty,” Gaster bowed before Dad. “I apologize in my father’s stead.”

“Oh no, it’s quite alright. I remember The Sage as a kind and genuine man. Considering the circumstances of our times, keeping his identity a secret was the most considerate action.”

The Genocider furrowed their brows, ready to reach for their weapons on the first sign of danger. “Is this about revenge?”

“Hmph, revenge.” He huffed loud and clear. “The most pointless of all endeavours. Justice takes shape in many ways. I need not partake directly in it.”

“Mercenary,” he continued, “I know why you ended my previous life. I had heard of your deeds before I turned back the seasons. Valiant. Swift. The people sang praises of your name for years. I
commend those efforts. If I lost my career on the decision of others, I'd be just as irate. But…”

“Have you ever wondered why our countryside was plagued with bandits to begin with?”

The human asked back, “What do you mean?”

“It is as I anticipated: you lack foresight. Perhaps your deeds secured the lands for a year or two, but soon enough another criminal will terrorize the citizens once more.”

”Tsk, that’s rich coming from a noble bastard,” the human snapped back. “I risked my life and limb to squash those criminals! Lost many good partners. Friends. Family. And you just made their sacrifices pointless with just the snap of a finger!”

“You posh lords never understand the hardships of the common and the poor. All you care about are riches! You’re the real criminal in this picture!”

The Red Sage replied, “Well then, tell me what do I gain from the prevention of a massive flood?”

“The preservation of your lands.”

“Who lives there?”

“Your slaves.”

“Is it wrong for me, as their master, to protect and nurture those under my charge? The peasantry may be ‘slaves’ by the standards of society, but I do not treat them as such.”

“My wealth did not come from exorbitant taxes. They come from wise management and hard work. I did not lord over my people: I cooperated with them."

It’s clear that the apparent ‘hero’ in the picture refused to believe. Berendin sighed and shook his head.

“‘Hero’, tell me. After my death, who took over my lands? What did they do? What happened in the years that passed in my absence?”

The Genocider couldn’t answer, instead he replied, “I had left the kingdom by then.”

“Very well. Let me summarize with this: the new nobility in charge did nothing to prevent a massive flood that wiped out entire towns. Not even an evacuation plan to warn and lead the people to higher ground.”

“It is as you had said: most nobles don’t know the hardships of those beneath their feet. That family was led by a fool who lacked the wisdom and education to manage his own household, let alone handle a disaster.”

“Bereft of their homes, purpose, and assistance, the survivors of the flood flocked to the cities for hope. Many succumbed to a pitiful beggar’s existence. Many more resorted to crime: thievery, swindling, banditry, what have you.”

“Corruption and poverty: those are the true roots of many ills. Kill as many as you like. But if you don’t resolve the source, the problem will perpetuate forever.”

“I used my Keys of Fate to ensure that my people do not starve. Record the weather, anticipate attacks, device emergency procedures, decide trade routes, build economies to provide jobs, and so much more.”
“Whenever a mistake happens, I take note and eventually turn back time. Sometimes that meant reliving whole years of my life again and again. What have you done with your power, mercenary?”

The human stood firm, replying without hesitation: “I fought to rescue victims from the hands of the wicked!”

You swear that you saw a light of anger fired up in those crimson eyes. Berendin pointed his staff towards the looming heights of Mount Ebott.

“By waging war against whole families?!” he yelled. “Someone's father, mother, sister, brother, cousin, lost forever in your hands!”

The human scoffed: “Typical convert talk. If we don’t subdue them first, those monsters will destroy our families in time!”

The Sage snapped back: “If a possibility is enough reason for you to condemn an entire nation, where do you draw the line? What will your next excuse be? Religion? Race? Culture? Ideology? O Great Hero, are all your enemies mere ‘monsters’ to you?”

Instead of answering with an eloquent defense, the warrior turned their back against the wizard.

“You talk too much,” They replied. “I’ll show my way through deeds and action. You noblemen can keep the podium chatter to yourselves.”

Humanity’s mightiest left the lakeside. Though they kept a cool front, their hands shivered ever so slightly.

The playback ended there.

You did not regret renaming this fella ‘Genocider’.

Undyne tensed up in deep conflict. You asked her why.

“That Genocider dude,” she said, “I like their style. I mean, I would have just stormed off too. That wizard won’t shut up and he’s getting on my nerves. But. There’s something… wrong.”

Angry Doctor Gaster in three, two, one--

“Ugh, Captain Undyne!” he exclaimed right on cue. “I cannot believe you discarded the Red Sage’s wisdom in the same manner as that human! What good are heroic deeds if the citizens drown in poverty?”

Mom nodded with a low, monotone hum. “Wise is certainly how I’d describe him. I remember the times when the Sage proposed many detailed plans to me. We’d revise them together plenty of times.”

The usual Undyne would bark back. This time, she clenched her fists with a lowered head.

“Hey squirt,” She's talking to you. “You’re this time-travelling superweapon, right?”

The Living Victory? Yes.

“That means you remember everything, correct?”

Everything related to the Underground itself, at least.
Pointing her finger at the screen, Undyne asked: “Did I ever screw up like that jerk?”

You’re not sure how to answer.


You curled your lips inward, but in the end you gave in to her request.

You told her that she became Empress Undyne. Described her iron-fisted rule set to wage war against humans. How exactly she’s planning to do that? You don’t know, since you lost contact with reality after a certain point.

Undyne’s head fins drooped in a combination of shock, disbelief, and horror.

“It can’t be,” she muttered. “I… I did that? No way! B-but the squirt remembers everything--”

Alphys tried to comfort her. She’s in denial as expected. You wouldn’t believe you’re capable of destroying the Underground either, yet it happened.

“Mind if I have a word?” said Sans.

Undyne glared at him. “Better not make me regret that.”

“Heh, I’ll take that as a yes. Welp,” he shrugged. “Most people think the best of themselves, y’know. They see a wrong and they say ‘nah, I’m never gonna do that’.”

“But we’re all a product of circumstance. I’m aware of all the paths I could possibly take, both good and bad. It’s one of the many reasons why I call myself a piece of trash.”

“If someone walked up to me and said, ‘Sans, you’re terrible’ I’d just agree. Can’t deny a cold, hard fact.”

Her eye-narrowing intensified, “So, you knew I was going down the drain. And you did nothing about it?”

“Would you listen to me?” Sans asked back.

The cringing intensified. That there’s a definite checkmate and she’s smart enough to notice.

Sans chuckled. “Hey, chill. Paps steered you back to the straight and narrow, right? If it weren’t for that silly besties date, you wouldn’t have realised that humans value kindness.”

Hearing his name, Papyrus dropped his jaw. “SANS, ARE YOU SAYING THAT I SAVED UNDYNE FROM HERSELF??!!”

“Apparently.”

Oh em gee. The Great Papyrus did something great and he didn’t even realise it.

“I JUST GAVE THEM THE INCENTIVE! IT’S THEIR WONDERFUL CHEMISTRY THAT PREVAILED IN THE END!”

Just as planned?

“JUST AS PLANNED, NYEH HEH HEH!”
Typical Papyrus Logic right there.

Your happiness was marred by the memories of the time you betrayed Undyne. They don’t exist anymore, but the consequences that played out will stick to you forever.

Undyne gripped Papyrus’ shoulders and gave it some good shakes. “PAPYRUS! Show me the rest of this Genocider’s life! I wanna see where they end up!!!”

“WHOA! WHOA! I CAN’T ACTUALLY SEE YOU WITH THE VISORS ON.”

Gaster’s right hand inflicted a sharp slap on Undyne’s wrist. “Helvetica disapproves of your overexcited rough handling of Papyrus. I agree with her, for once.”

“O-oh, right. Sorry.” She released her grip as if she held a hot potato.

You let Undyne know that Papyrus had to go to the selection screen to pick the next scene anyway. We’ll reach there sooner or later.

Papyrus picked up something, but it’s labelled as “???”.

What’s with the question marks?

“I DON’T KNOW. BUT IT FEELS IMPORTANT.”

Cenna said, “Careful, Cinnamon Roll. Don’t dive too deep.”

After a nod of acknowledgement, he selected the unknown label.

This vision was… different. It’s not quite stable and it’s missing much of the surroundings.

There’s a fort wedged in a mountain valley. It had all the accompanying flags and banners hanging on the front. It seems like you’re looking at a border checkpoint.

You heard the galloping of horses from a distance. After a while, they materialized into view.

It’s the Red Sage again. He brought along a squad of knights from the castle. Robed human Magi remained on the back lines, protected by the armoured troops.

The fort’s opposing archers hurried into positions and drew their bows. Witnessing those signs of aggression, the Red Sage raised his hand and ordered everyone to stop dead in their tracks.

It’s a precarious situation for both flesh and bone.

“What’s the meaning of this?” He hollered. “Your nation requested aid to apprehend a wanted criminal! Why are you stopping us?”

“They don’t need you anymore.”

Lo and behold, The Genocider stepped forward to greet his old nemesis.

“You…” Berendin muttered. All he needed was just one word to summarize his feelings. Raising his voice again, he questioned: “What role did you play now, mercenary?”

The people of the fort shouted back.

“Show some respect, warlock!”
“How dare you degrade our saviour!”
“We’re under threat of sorcery thanks to ilk like you!”

This isn’t looking good.

Berendin’s loyal men got riled up, but their lord had them stay back with nothing more than a hand signal.

The Genocider continued to observe from his high vantage point.

“I see,” said Berendin, “You had converted an entire nation to your cause in such a short time. Swift, like a bolt of lightning. Well, I’m not here to reopen old wounds. Please allow us to apprehend the criminal. We will not meddle with further affairs.”

The human replied, “You want her back so much? Fine.”

Upon command, the folk of the fort tossed mysterious sacks over the balcony. They landed on the ground with a slight clatter.

You could see from the knights’ expressions that they had expected the worst. Berendin allowed some of his men to bring the bags close. All the while, the army kept a vigilant eye on the archers.

Once they hauled it back to safer lines, they untied the sacks posthaste.

The contents were filled with grey ash and charred bones.

Then there’s the skulls.
…Multiple intact skulls. Human. Some smaller than the rest.

You heard soft gasps from the monster family around you. Mom tried to shield your eyes from the horrifying sight, but you let her know you’re okay. History isn’t always child-friendly. You’re prepared for this.

In the end, she just held you tight.

Enraged and mortified, the Sage yelled at humanity’s hero, “What have you done?!"

He knew the answer. Only he had yet to confirm it from the source itself.

So the Genocider replied: “That foul witch toyed with human lives. All those ‘experiments’ in the name of ‘science’? Sheer glorified horrors: torture, I say. She and her heathen family thus paid the ultimate price.”

There was an uproar amongst the knights and Magi. Not even the steady Red Lich could hold back his disgust.

“Including the children?!” The Sage exclaimed.

Calm yet determined, the human replied: “Of course. The king had ordered ALL witches and warlocks to be burned at the stake, along with their knowledge. Only luxurious posh folk like you would start late. Fifteen years old? Hmph. So slow. I performed my first heroic deeds when I was ten.”

“Lord Berendin.” The Genocider pointed an accusatory finger at The Sage. “The introduction of magic is your greatest sin against mankind. Never forget that! Consider this a warning to you and your ilk!”
You saw those gloved skeletal hands squeeze the reins of his horse. They trembled, they quaked. Yet he still kept his heart in check. One wrong action, and he’d lose the lives of many he held dear.

“…I see.” he said, “You’ve not only grown in eloquence, but also in madness. Very well. Men, retreat!”

“But Lord Berendin--” a knight objected.

“Please remember, Captain Eldin. We’re here to retrieve someone, not to start a war. That whole kingdom is against us now. I will not lose any more of us tonight.”

They collected the remains and left the fort. The recording ended there.

Cenna took off her hat. Grim, she explained, “What you’ve just witnessed is the beginning of a long history of witch-hunts. Fair trial? As if. You could get accused for any damn reason. Hell, I’ve read that some of the cases involved making painkillers or asking for divorce.”

You asked Papyrus if he could check out the criminal’s experiment, but your sister denied it.

She warned: “Don’t look there. It’s ugly. Ain’t safe for viewing by any standard. Though, I can tell the details. The suspect was dubbed the ‘Wisteria Witch’. Her research dealt with Psychia: what makes them tick, how they gain power, and how that power can be transferred.”

Ding! Somehow, her statement raised a flag of interest in Papyrus’ review menu. Everyone stared at the word ‘Power’.

At the corner of your eye, you noticed Sans drilling a glare into Cenna.

“Tooootally was not expecting that, folks,” she said. “I was trying to satiate the Cinnamon Roll’s curiosity so he didn’t need to dive there. Not activate a pathway.”

Does that mean Papyrus had a hunch? All attention now fixated on the Orange Seer.

He paused for quite a while. It lasted long enough to put everyone on the edge of their seats.

Alphys peeped, “Papyrus? Are you alright?”

Then he finally replied: “I WONDER IF THE GENOCIDER UNDERSTOOD WHAT THE WISTERIA WITCH TRIED TO DO.”

“What do you mean, bro?” Sans asked. He had to.

“CAN THEY READ?”

Strange question. Why wouldn’t they know how to read?

Doctor Gaster explained: “In that era, most of the common human populace were illiterate.”

“That’s true,” said Mom. “On the other hand, every citizen in the Dreemurr Nation could read and write. We’d be in quite a bind if we forgot the solution to our puzzles.”

Dad nodded to Mom’s statements, adding, “That’s why our forefathers made basic education compulsory for everyone.”

She chuckled a bit. “I think the Sage was oft ashamed that his people couldn’t do something so simple. That’s the vibe I got.”
Not many could read. But what if the Genocider could comprehend the witch’s notes before their inevitable destruction?…

Sans continued your hypothesis: “…It means they had exclusive knowledge of forbidden magic.”

“How do I check?” asked Papyrus.

“Set your mind on the fella and press ‘Y’. It should bring up that person’s skills and stats.”

That Genocider dude had a ton of skills. Most of them were combat-orientated as you expected. There’s not a weapon that they can’t use.

After scrolling to the letter ‘R’, it confirmed the hunch: they could read the land’s main script with maximum proficiency. They had some ability to read other languages and secret codes as well.

Sans snorted. “Heh, this skill is vital for their level of spy work. Good call there, Paps.”

Papyrus nodded, yet he remained silent.

Oh no.

That’s not a good sign.

You told Papyrus that it’s okay to stop here if he’s feeling uncomfortable.

Instead, he replied, “No. I will press forward.”

In quite a literal manner too. Selecting the ‘Power’ option sent the visions scrolling forward toward the relative future.

Scenes of the Genocider’s life rolled by in the background as a slideshow. How they rose in fame as they rewound time to counteract adversity.

It sounds great on paper. But as Berendin had foretold…

Humanity was humanity’s own worst enemy.

Friends? Family? Society?

No one could be trusted. Treachery always lurked beneath the shadows; it’s kill or be killed.

One word, one action.

That’s all it takes to twist fate toward betrayal: for noble men to become murderers.

Sometimes it’s the result of lies from an opposing camp.

Sometimes it’s the result of circumstance and error.

Sometimes it’s the result of trials made by the Genocider themselves.

Heart-broken by the pitfalls of treason, they responded in the only way they knew: elimination. Once their traitor was either dead or distanced, time marched on.

Only regret remained.

The years took their toll on the Genocider’s human mortal body. They aged, and with age came illness. On the brink of death, they settled in a small village at the foot of Mount Ebott, right in Magi heartland.
There, they kept reading a selection of books as their health declined. A dotted text bubble appeared over their head.

Selecting it revealed plenty of complicated text that you don’t understand. That is, until they mentioned a seven-pointed star.

It’s all about magic.

“What the fuck?!” Undyne yelled, forgetting about Mom’s PG-13 language limit. “I thought they’re AGAINST magic!”

Sans tossed a casual glance. “Uh, ‘knowing is half the battle’? You studied humans via all that anime stuff too.”

“But--”

“If I’m in the Genocider’s shoes, I’d keep all those Magi books as trophies. Explain to others that the best way to kill a wizard is to know their arts. Their strengths. Their weaknesses.”

If you had a dollar for every time Sans checkmated Undyne, you’d have enough to put all Temmies through graduate school.

Why would the Genocider take such an action?

You had your answers in their final phase of life.

The human, now at their last moments of their life, rested on a stone seat. An airwell overhead let in the sunlit rays of light. It painted the illusion of divinity and fed the plants that grew at their feet.

They’re none other than Ebott Goldenflowers.

A teenaged boy dressed in white entered the chamber. He knelt at the feet of his supposed deity with a small lit lamp in his hand.

“My lord, I am here.” he said.

The Genocider started to speak. Their voice had grown weak compared to their speech against Berendin. Almost gentle despite their weary, apathetic state.

“You… have done well to be chosen. Take it as great honour for your family and our community. Now, I shall pass on all that I know. My skills. My secrets. And the most important of all, my true name.”

“Call upon it for power. Pray. That’s the privilege of the faithful. But beware, the witches and warlocks can twist this to their gain. You must never disclose your true name, and of all those who came before you.”

They placed a dry, wrinkled hand on top of the boy’s head.

“From now on you are ‘Persona’, the vessel of humanity’s god, bearer of the Keys of Fate.”

Huh. Funny that they used Berendin’s label in the end.

Upon that command, the Genocider’s Red SOUL then floated high overhead. It shattered into a million flakes, showering itself over the boy and the throne of golden flowers.
And thus the Gungnir came into existence…

The legendary hero bound themselves to their successor, like how Chara haunted you.
Now onward to the actual script. This is a direct tie to Chapter 22’s Demon Story.

Cenna slammed her fists on the ground and muttered a string of furious curse words. You can’t tell if it’s towards The Genocider, or at herself for not figuring this out sooner.

“I-I don’t quite understand what’s going on…” said Mom.

If you must be honest, the details kinda flew over your head too. It seems to be a Vanquisher subject. So, everyone waited for Cenna to chill for a comprehensive explanation.

After a few deep breaths, she began.

“That bastard used the heretics’ research to stage that ceremony! That’s why they kept reading all those pillaged books!”

Alphys asked, “W-what does it take to become this Persona figure?”

“The strength to triumph above all others,” Cenna answered. “Gotta be smarter, stronger, faster than the rest. I bet everyone gave it a shot at first. But as the years went by, they refined the candidate selection process to only include those with a Red Psychia.”

Why?

“Mez told me that only Reds have a fighting chance against other Reds. Plus, they’ll train harder than their non-Red counterparts. So even if you include the non-Reds, they’re gonna get outclassed by sheer determined effort.”

“I thought combat was the primary reason. But after witnessing this, damn I know I’m wrong. The original purpose of the Persona system was to train the perfect puppet. They’re walking, breathing DEMON vessels!”

You found that strange. Won’t their Determination conflict with their purpose?

“Nay Frisky. They would be ‘determined’ to fulfill their purpose. In other words, they will insist on being an empty vessel to house whatever ancestral spirit they can call upon.”

Undyne furrowed her brows. “Damn. I’ve heard that ancestral worship is a big thing in many human cultures, but this is taking it way too far. Why did that jerk take so much effort in possessing others?”

You suspect that it had something to do with ‘Eternal Peace’.
That exact same statement popped up on Papyrus’ selection. Dang. Has he ever heard of that before?

“OF COURSE!” he chirped. “THAT’S THE AFTERLIFE! SANS TOLD ME THAT WHEN WE DIE, WE PASS ON TO A PLACE WHERE EVERYTHING IS NICE AND PEACEFUL.”

Sans started sweating in the background. It’s clear that he said those things just to make his brother happy. Papyrus being Papyrus took it all at face value.

Oh sweet cinnamon roll. You didn’t want the Genocider or Chara to tarnish this preciously innocent image.

You told Papyrus that he should be aware that the Gungnir’s founder had lost their marbles a long time ago. Therefore, whatever nonsense they spout shouldn’t be believed.

“I UNDERSTAND. THIS HUMAN… THEY REMIND ME OF UNCLE GASTER DURING HIS BAD TIMES. IT’S SO VERY SAD THAT NO ONE COULD REACH THEM.”

He’s right. Solitude was their greatest tragedy.

You had once lost all faith and hope in yourself. And yet, Papyrus continued to believe. You’re forever grateful that he trusted you even at your worst.

Let’s move on to the next page.

“YES. LET’S GO.”

He pressed the button.

Time passed since the rise of the first Persona. They gained popularity as their disciples went out into the world, helping people through swift might.

Many of their believers had good hearts. Some even put sensible thought in their actions. But it didn’t change the fact that it fed into The Genocider’s ultimate plan…

If only their founder was less of a nutcase.

After generations, the Gungnir god announced that it’s time to initiate their grand plan. Sent out a message to their disciples to choose the best of the six non-Red categories, tested by the Persona themselves.

With more people in their cult, they had a bigger pool of candidates to choose from. The Persona surveyed the populace with their ancestor haunting from their shoulders.

You can’t tell if this person was a guy or girl either. They’re almost always concealed in a dark-red hood. You tried to identify the person through their facial features, but you can’t. They had some pretty teal eyes though.

The Magi caught wind of this strange change of behaviour. It’s too much like the Sealing. They sent out spies and agents to investigate. Not everyone made it out alive.

Once they gathered in one place, the Gungnir’s chosen travelled southwest. Their most loyal and skilled warriors guarded the sacred cargo with their lives.

A young knight, copper-haired, chased after them on the back of a really big white wolf.

The knight wore leather and chainmail to protect himself. The wolf sported a cyan garb of sorts. It
reminded you of jousting horses, but with practicality in mind. Both bear the heraldic emblem of possibly the Eldins.

They crossed the grasslands, the forests, the mountains. It’s clear that they’re far behind.

The sun slowly set across the horizon…

Then the wolf spoke:

“*My Lord, we’ll never make it in time.*”

“…*Never say never, Roger!*”

Mom covered her mouth in shock. Dad froze too.

“A Boss Monster?!!” she exclaimed.

That wolf was a Boss Monster?!!?!!

Alphys, Undyne, Papyrus, and Doctor Goop reacted with the same shock… but Sans didn’t budge an inch.

“Yes, my child,” said Mom. “They call themselves the ‘Tundra Dire Wolves’. I thought they were lost to wars oh so long ago.”

Dad further explained, “As Toriel and I govern over fire, the Dire Wolves govern over all things ice. They visited my father’s kingdom once when I was but a small child. Their Queen made some fruit sherbert for me as a treat. It was quite the experience!”

Cenna chuckled. “Hey Frisky, remembered that Demon Story I told ya at the canteen?”

If you must be honest, that story had gone somewhat fuzzy now.

“Feels like a long time ago, yeah? Remember I told ya something along the lines of, ‘whenever crap hits the fan, two will have to sacrifice themselves to save the world’?”

After she mentioned it, you recalled a similar detail.

Does that mean that the knight and the big white wolf were the two who vanquished the Genocider’s DEMON?!

Undyne fixated on the screen more than usual. The bloke on the wolf was the *true* hero. He too made a spear the weapon of his choice.

Two spearmasters going against each other, huh? You know she’s going to feel a certain bond with the copper-haired one. He had the guts, the energy, and her trademark weapon.

Here comes the fire welling up inside her being. She yelled: “Okay! Who is that guy?! And the Boss Monster too! Tell me all about them!”

To Undyne, he must be a beacon of hope that her dreams weren’t doomed to a twisted seinen fate.

Cenna couldn’t help but laugh.
That super-wide grin showed off her almost-pearly whites.

“Eager, yeah? No problemo, Captain Undyne. Mister Orange there is Sir Philip Eldin. Remember
the knights that accompanied The Red Sage in the previous visions?”

A photograph popped up on the monitor, courtesy of Papyrus. There stood a man who Berendin had addressed as ‘Captain Eldin’.

This Philip hero was a descendant of that person?

“Bingo! House Eldin swore loyalty to House Berendin ever since the Red Sage still had his flesh and blood. This extends to the Magus Association too. Not all of them are blessed with magic, but there’s ones that do hybridize their military training with Magi skills. Like our Philip fellow here.”

In other words, he’s a ‘Magic Knight’ sort of person. Does that make him a Vanquisher?

“Nay, Frisky. Organized Vanquishers didn’t exist back then. Fun fact: A Supreme Judge started the profession. He travelled from halfway across the world. That’s a story for a different day though.”

“Now the fluffy wolf Boss? He’s Prince Skavvimolniya. Nicknamed ‘Roger’ because people can’t say his name to save their lives. You guys know how Boss Monsters create the next generation, right?”

Everyone nodded. The parents will pass their life down to their child as they mature. Literally.

“Yup. The Dire Wolves of that nation ended up with two boys. Cousins. The elder cousin became King, while the younger one moved to the Magus Association as a diplomat. He lived many years there as a ‘huge tundra dog’. Only a handful knew his true identity.”

“This Prince,” Sans wondered, “If he’s a diplomat, why did he go on a fatal quest? The relations between Magi and monsters are vital for his kingdom’s survival.”

Cenna answered, “Because that DEMON bastard still held the Keys of Fate. Gungnir had the power to rewind time at their beck and call.”

“Sir Philip Eldin ain’t a Living Victory either. He’s an Orange Major with a Red and Yellow Minor. On his own, he’s gonna get gutted alive by Persona in no time flat. The only way anyone would have a fighting chance was to…”

She’s reluctant to finish the sentence.

“What about the Supreme Judges?” he asked back. “Don’t they have their special brand of magic?”

“Outclassed by Persona’s combat skill. Our pool of candidates was tiny thanks to Gungnir influence. Many people who would otherwise be the ideal Supreme Judge gave their lives to the cult. In the end, those two were our best bet.”

Sans breathed a heavy sigh. “…I hope the fluffy guy thought this through before he volunteered.”

The way Sans talked troubled you. You asked him if there’s something wrong?

“Nah. It's nothing, kid. It's just when you’re in important positions, it’s your number one duty to stay alive. I know folks will tell you that integrity and wisdom are paramount. But, you can’t lead or help anyone if you’re dead.”

“The only acceptable reason to sacrifice yourself, ever, is to secure the lives of countless others. Even then, that’s reserved for the very worst outcome. If you could come back alive by a miracle, for the love of all things good, please do so.”
“Don’t promise anything, kid. Don’tcha think you’re carrying enough weight on your tiny little shoulders already?”

…That’s true. Thanks for the thought.

“No problem.”

Papyrus blurted out, “THE WOLF KNIGHT IS RUNNING UP THE PATH OF THIS REALLY BIG AND FLAT MOUNTAINTOP! AS IF UNDYNE CHOPPED OFF THE POINTY BITS WITH A GIANT SPEAR.”

Ever knowledgeable Gaster then said, “That is called a ‘plateau’, my boy. Not all mountains are triangular like Ebott. In fact, the—”

“Shh,” Sans said, “The show’s starting.”

The warriors of Gungnir heard the gallops of the wolf Prince and the knight. They grabbed their weapons and drew their bows.

Phillip armed his spear. You knew from his expression that he’s prepared to kill.

Not that Roger would allow it. He conjured a massive ice wall that separated the two opposing forces from each other.

Despite carrying a passenger, the wolf prince scaled the heights with swiftness. From the tops, he used his magic again to force the humans aside. Then, he planted another ice wall in the clearing. They served both as isolators, and as platforms.

“Beware,” said Roger, “The enemy rules by shedded blood. Staining your hands only grants them power. Remain pure! Only purity alone can stand a chance against corruption.”

Philip nodded to his friend’s wisdom. “I understand. Thanks. Almost made a terrible mistake there.”

“That is why I am here and not a simple horse.”

Arrows flew from below.

Shields of compact ice stopped them all in place.

Except for one.

“Watch out!”

For a brief moment, Philip’s chest glowed orange. He then swiped the incoming shot out of thin air.

Undyne cheered the heck out of that. “Holy smokes! That kid is FAST!”

It’s like that training at the school gym!

“That’s what Orange Majors do,” said Cenna. “Superspeed and limited precog. As a Yellow Minor he’s got a keen eye too. Different skills compared to the Cinnamon Roll, but similar end results.”

The two jumped over the back lines and into a bottleneck. It’s the perfect place to plant the biggest ice wall of all ice walls:
A meter thick;
And a hundred times as tall.

Steep cliffs by the side. Crystallized water in front. The warriors won’t catch up anytime soon.

Once they’re in the clear, the young knight said: “That’s amazing, Roger! I never knew you’re that powerful.”

“Why the surprise, My Lord? We monsters command the elements with full knowledge of their might. It’s a power not to be thrown around in careless wanton, contrary to human sensibilities.”

At the far end of the plateau, a square stone platform basked under the moonlight. Engraved on top was none other than a seven-point star. One point for each Aspect of the SOUL.

Six of the Gungnir Chosen knelt inside the Gram. The Persona, hidden underneath their deep-red hood, took out a knife and placed it on the edges of one of their throats.

The screen blacked out, but you could still hear the sickening slices of slaughter.

One then became six.

When the vision stabilized once more, the blood of each of the Chosens filled the ridges of the magic star. Their SOULs floated high above their lifeless corpses, ready for the next phase of the spell.

Philip and Roger arrived too late. Nonetheless, the knight jumped off the back of his companion and yelled out to Persona.

“Madina, stop!” he yelled.

Madina? So that means he knew this Persona was a woman.

Pulling back the hood revealed the complete picture: light brown hair, braided and tucked into a bun. The clothes really hid her girly features.

She looked at him and replied, “I’m no longer Madina, knight. I’m Persona: the vessel of the Legendary Hero.”

“Enough with this Persona crap! Are you telling me that our childhood means nothing to you?!”

Cenna raised a brow. “Okay, I didn’t know that. Childhood friends, huh? Fate is one cruel bugger.”

Gazing straight on the ground, she replied: “Yes.”

Philip yelled back. “You always stare at your feet when you lie!”

He reached out an upturned hand towards her: a sign of reconciliation. The wolf whispered a warning in response. “Careful, My Lord. She’s a hostage in more ways than one. Nothing belongs to her anymore. Not even her SOUL.”

The ghost of the Genocider loomed over her shoulders. They watched the proceedings in eerie silence.

Refusing to give up, Philip pleaded, “If you surrender, I swear I’ll do everything I can to save you! I’ll get rid of that bastard, beg the Grandmaster to spare your life, and, and, and… whatever it takes! I’ll help you no matter what!”
Undyne forgot that she’s witnessing the past. She stood up, stomped her feet and cheered at the top of her lungs: “YEAAAAAAAAH!!!! That’s how you do it! GO PHILIP!”

There was a glimmer of hope. But, it got squashed flat.

Madina let the blood of sacrifice continue dripping on the magic circle. “Then what? Perish from plague like my parents did? Toil under the sun until I turn into dust? Have my life ended on the whims of tyranny?”

“Life is meaningless. We’re born to die. Every other religion promises freedom of hardships and pain. Yet, this world remains unchanged. Only my god is taking active steps to fulfil our dreams.”

“We, Gungnir, shall end the source of life and death: existence itself.”

She pointed the bloodied knife towards the knight. “I’m doing this for your sake too, Philip. You and I… we’ll find everlasting peace at last.”

The Genocider’s DEMON patted Madina on her head, praising her stance on the matter. Their disembodied voice of strength boomed in the air. “Excellent, Persona. You understand. Ignore that fool. Let us finish this together.”

Philip brandished his spear. “Not if I get to you first!”

“Hmph. If you truly wish to end me, you must kill your ‘precious’ friend.”

As hot and rash as his colours, Philip stood ready to jump into the fray. Roger then snapped his mighty jaw onto his clothes.

“Oh c’mon, what now Roger?!”

“It’s a trap, My Lord! If you attack, you’ll be covered in their blood. That’s certain death!”

“I’m not gonna kill her, duh! I’m gonna split them apart and then kick that bastard’s ass!”

The DEMON scoffed. “Such folly. Typical. Try as you will.”

You watched the spirit seep into Madina’s body. Strings of dark red wrapped around her from head to toe, showing that the DEMON had EQUIPPED her as their weapon. It’s possession at its most blatant.

She walked backwards and stood right in the middle of the square. Lifting her hands to the sky, her Red SOUL rose against the starry moonlit night.

Magic coursed through the blood-soaked code embedded in stone. The other colours disintegrated into fine powder and collapsed into the singular intact resonating heart.

The air quaked. The surroundings peeled and flaked as though they’re paper backdrops. Is it interfering with Papyrus’ power?

Doctor Gaster’s gooey being quivered at the sight. “No… they’re tearing reality apart. But this isn’t right. A human cannot absorb another human’s SOUL, no matter what. It’s trying to mix oil and water without emulsification.”

Imminent meltdown in 3, 2, 1…?
A tortuous screech confirmed your guesses. The six other colours that don’t belong threatened to rip their host’s SOUL apart from the inside out.

Papyrus covered his non-existent ears, but it’s futile. He’s not hearing the voices from the outside. The vision started to tear into tri-colour lines of orange, blue, and green.

The fire of his magic Eye seeped between the gaps of the visor. It’s growing wilder and wilder.

“Bro!” Sans yelped. His first instinct was to try yank the device off his brother’s head.

But the younger brother stopped him. He gently lowered Sans’ hand and said: “I’M OKAY. JUST STARTLED. THAT’S ALL.”

“You’re not okay, Paps. You’re rattling.”

It’s true. You could hear the clatter of his bones from where you’re sitting.

“It’S SCARY,” he admitted, “BUT I WANT TO SEE THE TRUTH.”

Conviction calmed the flames. With that, the vision stabilized.

A spooked and intimidated Philip took a step back. “Uh, Roger? What’s going on?”

The wolf bowed to a combat stance. “Stay on guard, My Lord. The false god will soon realise the truth. That’s when our real battle begins.”

The strings of demonic curses grew into solid chains born from magic. They crawled over the ripping SOUL and bound all the conflicting aspects in place.

“This pain… this pain…! Give me your soul, creature!”

The Persona and their possessor leaped forward in a blink: their knife held high above the head of the wolf prince.

Ice formed beneath Roger’s paws. He’s ready to counter, however…

…Philip leapt into the fray. The knife stabbed straight into his left shoulder. He braced through the sting and slashed his spear towards the cursed chains of the DEMON.

Like glass, they shattered.

“Sorry,” he said. Then pushed his possessed friend back with a swift magic-enhanced kick in the gut.

She skidded a few feet across, almost falling off the ledge of the plateau. The Persona struggled to stand due to the unstable mishmash of their SOUL.

Blood won’t stop flowing. Seems to have cut a major vein. There’s no such thing as blood transfusions back then, and you’re not sure if magic could help. Was this to be the inevitable cause of his demise?

“Sir Eldin!” Roger exclaimed.

“Ah crap. I’m bleeding out.”

The knight winced from the pain. He forced out his SOUL and hovered it right before Roger. “Take
“it. Hurry. We have a chance: their curse is weaker than I thought.”

“But--”
“There’s no time. The moment Madina recovers, that bastard’s gonna grab your SOUL. My body’s as good as gone. Really.”

The wolf prince understood what’s at stake. “It’s a pleasure to serve, My Lord.”

“Heh. I should be saying that to you, Prince Skavvimolniya.” Philip showed his final smirk.
“Thanks for being my best friend.”

When the two united as one, a great light radiated from the top of the plateau. Out from that light leapt out a lone armoured wolf, missing its rider.

Then there was a blackout.

Lights gone. Machines hiccuped. Denied of their power source, the screen died at the introduction of the battle.

Undyne groaned, “OH C’MON! That’s like the BEST part! I was ready to cheer--”

Her complaints were interrupted by a hasty clunk on the floor. Papyrus had dashed to the kitchen.
His brother followed right behind.

“Is that what I think it is???”

Here comes the disgusting hurling sounds of someone emptying his non-existent gut contents down the sink. Goodbye dinner. At least for monsters, it would just be in the form of magic and not undigested bits of mystery.

Concerned friends and family huddled at the kitchen. You’re glad that the house still had running water despite its long-abandoned state.

After a good rinse, Sans escorted his brother out. The house’s electricity returned around the same time.

“Can we call it done for the night?” he asked.

“I agree,” Cenna added. “Throwing up is a bad sign for anyone, human or monster.”

You thought so too. C’mon Papyrus, let’s go home.

The Orange Seer stared at the direction of the visor in great concern. Instead of agreeing with his friends, he slipped between everyone and sat down at his diving spot.

“What the heck are you doing?” Undyne narrowed her gaze.

“I MUST KEEP GOING,” he replied.

Doctor Gaster straightened his back. In utmost conviction, he said, “I agree with Papyrus.”

It’s utter chaos. Mom drilled in her distinctive glare, Undyne flipped out, Sans looked like he’s ready to give the goopy doc a bad time, and Dad struggled to talk sense above all the noise.

But Doctor Gaster refused to waver.
“Apologies,” he said, “To uncover secrets, one must have courage. Courage is the bravery to press on despite fears, hardships and pain.”

“And what,” Sans snapped back, “Go fucking insane like you did?”

“I trust Papyrus to know his own limits. He’s... he’s no longer a child.”

Only two other people in this room knew of Sans’ sealed eye.

Doctor Gaster.
And... you.

In other words, the doctor realised that they’re lacking options to gather information.

Papyrus placed a firm hand on his brother’s shoulder. “SANS, I KNOW YOU’RE TRYING TO PROTECT ME. BUT, I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DO THIS.”

“Bro--”
“I FEEL LIKE WE DON’T HAVE MUCH TIME LEFT.”

He let go of Sans and strapped the visor back on. The kind of aura he exuded was of a person knowing that they’re heading into dangerous territory; he won’t come out unscathed.

Yet the skeleton shafted it all to the back for the sake of others.

You watched from the backlines in amazement.

Since when did the sweetest dumbcake grow up to become such a hero?

The screen booted up once more. You watched blue, orange, and green weave into another piece of history.

“What are you doing?”

That’s Asriel’s voice.

Fluffy goat hands carried the greyed corpse of a young child. Blisters lined the edges of their mouth: one of the many signs of buttercup poisoning.

“Stop! Let me control my own body!”

“Give it back!”

“Please!”

“I beg you, Chara!!!”

Chapter End Notes

Oops I forgot to mention.

The concept art for Lucidia and Sans was posted on the art blog over the week. I should
be (trying) to draw Paps next. Or maybe I'll try someone else.

Art is really slow because I'm usually too busy writing.
LOVE

Chapter Notes

Let's continue with Chara's story. This is where it gets into the really creepy territory, so reader's discretion advised.

Papyrus wrote down the following story in his mind:

‘Once upon a time, Prince Asriel made friends with a human named Chara. They grew very close.’

‘But Chara fell ill. Rather, they were already sick in their mind and heart. They set a plan in motion… driven by resentment and all sorts of negativity.’

‘The little prince was none the wiser.’

It’s a story long past that continued to resonate into the present day.

The villagers were hitting the goat-prince with everything they had: brooms, sticks, punches and kicks. The beauty of nature marred by the cruelty and fear of others.

Papyrus remembered a statement Cenna once said:

“Angry mobs are balls of ugly hatred.”

“STOP THIS VIOLENCE!” He tried to grab one of the humans, alas they were but images. His hands passed through them.

Asriel cried and cried, begging the villagers for mercy. He ended up curling over Chara’s body, trying to shield his face and the corpse of his beloved friend.

The boy’s poor mother tossed logic out of the window. Papyrus heard slight scuffling sounds, as if someone tried to restrain her from dashing straight into the screen.

“Asriel! No! Stop hitting him, please!”

Gaster said, “Queen Toriel, this is the past! Calm down, I beg of you!”

The vision flickered into Asriel’s mind. Chara, glowing as red as their SOUL, tried to shake him out of his paralyzed state.

“Get up! Fight!” they yelled.

“Why???” Asriel whined.

Chara replied: “This is the chance for you to be the REAL hero you’ve always dreamed of!”

“But I don’t wanna!”

“Okay, okay, fine let me help you.”
Chara’s spirit tried to pry control over Asriel’s body. They managed to raise a hand. Conjured a puff of fire.

“NO!!” Asriel screamed. He wrestled back the control of his body and dispelled the flames. “I don’t want to hurt anybody!”

“How the heck are you going to free your people if you don’t fight? How else are you going to harvest six more SOULS? You think that they’re just gonna hand them over to you?!”

The prince sank too deep into panic to respond.

“Humans don’t CARE about you! They don’t give a damn about anyone else other than themselves! So. Just. DO IT!”

Chara stole back control and tried to conjure a rain of fire. Yet again, their efforts were thwarted by Asriel himself.

Though they had ascended into godhood, their HP steadily spiralled down the drain.

The human got so fed up, they screamed: “Don’t be an idiot, dammit. In this world, it’s kill or BE killed!!!”

Papyrus heard a cry out from the backlines of the human villagers.

“Stand aside!” said a man.

Everyone turned their heads in that direction. They dispersed as fast as they could.

He had a spark of hope. Maybe someone here had common sense!

Then, he heard multiple metallic clicks. When he turned around, he did not find mercy: instead he found the village’s firing squad.

Rifles.
Shotguns.
Pistols.

“Fire!”

The images blacked out. But, he still heard the sounds. It’s as though someone set off a multitude of fireworks at once.

Papyrus’ bones jolted and quaked. It never crossed his innocent mind that such loudness could be this terrifying.

After the first volley, there was nothing but silence.

“Papyrus?” Alphys asked. “Are you okay?”

No words could come out from his larynx as the vision’s materialization resumed.

He did not return to the fateful day where the Prince died.

Instead, he went further back.

It’s a house: a small cottage.
Someone had mounted a prized shotgun on the wall. Beneath it were several trophies and certificates of recognition.


Framed family photographs filled the right side of the wall. Papyrus recognized the child with rosy cheeks right away.

It’s Chara.

The home looked cosy enough. It’s well kept and clean: passes Papyrus’ high housekeeping standards any day, any time. But it seemed a bit cluttered with all the achievement-related decorations.

“I’M CONFLICTED,” he said, “THEY HAD TONS OF COOL STUFF. BUT I WONDERED IF THERE’S TOO MANY OF THEM.”

The moment of peace ended there.

“Chara!” a woman yelled. “Get back here!”

Papyrus followed the source. The small kid in their distinctive green and yellow sweater dashed up the stairs, scraped up and in tears.

The woman, presumed to be their mother, tried to catch them. But Chara had slammed the bedroom door shut and locked it from the inside.

The vision skipped a few hours ahead. The woman and her husband sat down at the dinner table, grim.

“…IS IT ME, OR CHARA’S ACTUAL FATHER WAS AS BURLY AS KING ASGORE?”

“Yeah, damn.” Undyne mentioned, “If you turn that hair from black to gold and shave off some of that tough-man edge, he really does look like Asgore.”

“THE MOM DOESN’T LOOK LIKE THE QUEEN THOUGH. SHE’S… A GROWN UP VERSION OF CHARA? MUST BE THE ROSY CHEEKS. AND THE BROWN HAIR.”

“Chara got bullied in school again,” said the mother.

“What is it this time?” the father asked back.

The woman slid a report card towards her husband. After one glance, he threw it down on the table in dismay.

“Are you fucking serious, Kylie?” He grumbled.

She replied, “Yes, Trion. The teachers summoned me today to discuss about our child’s terrible grades. Heard the neighbours talking bad about us too. The usual ‘Chara is not their real kid’ routine.”

“Why the fuck do they care?!” Trion exclaimed, “Especially Yozna! She’s the one with a real bastard child!”

“Who’s also the best martial artist in grade school. If her son is a Red Child, he would be on the top of the candidate list by now.”
Kylie continued, “Look at all those trophies: we’re Gungnir’s best, yet some out-of-wedlock kid scored better than our offspring. Talk about utter shame.”

“Don’t remind me,” Trion grumbled. “I punched Loric in the gut over that insult last week.”

The father combed his fingers into his hair, frustrated and worried. “If Chara fails the exam… I don’t know what the Persona would try to do.”

Papyrus frowned at the exchange. “I DON’T UNDERSTAND. WHY DID THEY BULLY CHARA’S PARENTS TOO? I THOUGHT BEING A COMMUNITY MEANS SUPPORTING EACH OTHER.”

“Not everyone on the Surface is close-knit like us,” Sans explained. “They run on different values. Doesn’t mean it’s right, but that’s how they live.”

Clips of their life passed by. Chara’s parents tried to protect their beloved child in the only way they knew: through harsh, rigorous training. They tried to teach Chara their distinctive arts of the knife, from the basic strikes to skillful recovery.

Prove the world wrong.

Be stronger, smarter, faster than the bullies who tried to suffocate them.

Survival of the fittest. That’s the way of Gungnir.

A dull ache gripped the young skeleton’s ribs as he watched the seasons pass. It’s not the harsh training that bothered him the most. Rather, it’s the growing rift between parent and child.

Chara rebelled. Snapped back. In doing so, they further frustrated their stressed parents. High on emotion, the punishments were often more severe than they should be.

Nobody knew how to talk things through. It reminded him too much of a different pair much closer to home…

Papyrus asked: “WAS SANS’ TRAINING LIKE THIS? A LOT OF CUTS AND BRUISES?”

There was an uncomfortable cough in the background. Neither side wanted to disclose the details in full.

In the end, Gaster did the tough answering: “No. It’s not. Chara’s training was painful, but not dangerous. The parents were very careful to not inflict critical injuries. Even in anger.”

“On the other hand, I… I did my best to simulate true battle scenarios. A taste of real war. That includes— Oh? What is it, Child of Mercy?”

Frisk hushed gently, “Shh, we understand.”

“…Thank you.”

Papyrus didn’t get it. Though, he had a feeling that it would hurt Sans’ feelings, so he let the subject slide.

One day, Chara got into another screaming match with their parents. The child ended up so angry, they tossed the knife on the floor. Hard. It bounced across the surface and almost cut their parents’ feet.
“NOTHING is ever good enough for any of you!” the child screamed, “Nobody would give a fuck that I’m gone!”

In the heat of the moment, the father yelled back: “Go ahead and fucking try!”

Chara ran out of the house. The parents didn’t follow because they’re used to such outbursts. They expected their child to cool off somewhere and turn up for dinner. That was the pattern for a long while now.

They waited.
And waited.
And waited.

Chara never returned home.

The villagers scoffed at the disappearance. To them, it was the proof of weakness in the family. The truly strong would never snap that way.

“What are you people doing?!” Papyrus exclaimed. “You should be helping your fellow members look for Chara! Not rub it in!”

But they didn’t. They left Trion and Kylie to find their child alone.

So the parents got into the car. Drove to the nearest cities. Searched high and low in places where children frequent. Game shops, internet cafes, parks, playgrounds…

Everywhere except the mountain.

Regret. Regret, regret. Papyrus saw the pain reflected on the couple’s faces. They slept late and woke up early, growing haggard from their worries.

In the end they had to swallow their pride and file a missing person’s report at the police station. It’s the ultimate shame since everyone in the area knew of the Gungnir’s isolated ways.

Chara thus became yet another statistic of runaway children.

By the time they had an official search party, Chara had long fallen into the Underground. All the parents’ efforts were for naught.

Then, one day, a monster emerged from under the mountain.

In his hands lay the cold corpse of their missing child.

Grief and anger overwhelmed the parents. Their thoughts were filled with revenge against poor Prince Asriel.

‘That goat killed Chara!’
‘How dare you, fiend!’

Trion, the father, ran back home to grab the shotgun on the wall. He loaded it as fast as possible.

Other villagers put their training to use. All differences must be set aside to tackle the adversary their foreparents once warned of. They soon became the firing squad Papyrus had witnessed earlier.

Chara’s greatest tragedy was not that they were unloved.
It’s the fact that they never knew just how much their parents truly loved them.

Skip. Tear. His Seer’s Eye couldn’t maintain integrity in the face of extreme violence. Papyrus now realised just how much Mezil had supported him for The Core Incident’s dive. It made a world of difference.

He saw a glimpse of Prince Asriel escaping with Chara’s body. By then, it already was too late for him.

No prompt. No rest. The visions kept flowing. Papyrus knew at a subconscious level that he must keep going: the moment he stops, fear will catch up.

The Gungnir searched the fields and forest for signs of their fleeing enemy. They eventually found a trail. At the end, they expected to bump into two corpses: one human and one monster.

Instead, it led them to the Barrier-sealed entrance to the Underground.

Spirits faded into view. Their faces were blocked out by glitched squares of orange, blue and green.

Unlike Napstablook or Mettaton, these ghosts don’t ‘feel’ right.

They exuded rage. Disgust. Anger.

His sights shifted to a dark forest. More glitched spirits lurked between the trees. Their whispers were written down in chalk.

‘Our blood given to witchcraft.’
‘Unforgivable.’

Strange incidents happened across the countryside. One person spoke of someone electrocuted by a broken power line. Another mentioned a person drowning in their own bathtub. Hikers went missing, only to be found dead at the base of the mountain.

The local police filed the events as suicides or accidents, while the Gungnir drew another conclusion: they had angered the spirits of their ancestors.

An old, long-bearded man in his eighties thus stepped into the interiors of an ancient stone temple. The medieval design made it stand out from the rest of the Surface architecture.

Many urns sat on the bed of golden flowers surrounding their dead deity’s stone throne. Each housed the DEMON of their champions.

He asked them for advice.

‘Choose a successor’ they said.
‘Your time is up.’
‘This summer is your limit.’

Cenna mentioned, “That old guy’s the second-to-last Persona. Damn, that room gives me the creeps. You wanna know what real occult looks like? It’s right there: dealing with the dead. Those cultists are the true witches and warlocks in my book.”

Summer soon arrived. Papyrus knew it as the season when families take breaks and go to the beach. At least, that’s what he understood.
But it’s different for the Gungnir. It’s the moment for them to retreat from the eyes of the government and enact an ancient ritual.

Children with Red SOULS gathered at the ancient stone temple. Their one mission was to prove themselves worthy of carrying on the torch.

That didn’t happen. None made the cut.

Papyrus’ vision darkened again. Only text remained on the screen.

‘Failures.’
‘Tainted.’
‘All of you.’

Fire erupted across the flat horizon. Embers danced upwards into the smoke-covered sky. The familiar shape of Mount Ebott stood against the shadows of blackened evening, looming high above the inferno.

He had a bad feeling about this. The last time he felt such a sensation… was in a timeline that doesn’t exist anymore.

“Oh shit, Cinnamon Roll get outta there!”

He’s sure that he heard Cenna’s voice. However, it was distant. Muted. As if he’s listening to an old radio.

“I WILL NOT,” Papyrus replied faster than he could think.

“Serious, dude. Leave this to us!”

“NO. IF I STOP HERE, ANOTHER PERSON WILL HAVE TO GO THROUGH THIS MESS.”

“Our Chronographer is a pro. She’ll view your recordings and continue from there. Trust us, okay?”

Doctor Gaster questioned: “Are you absolutely certain? As much as I’m grateful for your concern over Papyrus, I doubt you’ll uncover anything new… Even with the help of another capable Chronographer such as your friend.”

Besides, is Chara’s personal life truly the missing key to the puzzle? I think not!”

“Don’t push it, old man,” Sans snapped back.

Unease behind. Hostility ahead. No matter where he turned, the young skeleton found himself sandwiched between two difficult choices.

“What do you think, Frisk?” Papyrus had a feeling that it’s very important for them.

Maybe it wasn’t a good idea to hand over such a heavy decision to a tiny child. It’s unfair and a little embarrassing. Yet, Papyrus had faith. They always had a good head on their shoulders.

“I…” Frisk muttered, “I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“Is that all?”
“Yes.”


Deep down inside, he knew that everyone expected him to return.

Still… Papyrus turned away from his friends and family. Headlong and head-first, he charged towards the distant inferno.

He could hear everyone screaming for his name, demanding that he stop.

‘Don’t be foolish.’
‘Don’t be an idiot.’

Flowey would have emphasized the ‘idiot’ part.

Papyrus imagined the pages of his life flipping backwards to the day of Frisk’s wake. It said the following:

‘Once upon a time, a wizard offered a young man the chance to become the hero of his dreams. Told him that he had the talents to make a difference.’

‘The wizard then warned that there will be many trials. Hardships. Pitfalls. The gritty details of which were often left unsaid in tales of glory.’

‘Brave of heart, the young man stepped up to the plate. Though ever naive to the depths of his decision… he understood the one and only truth:’

‘There’s no turning back.’

He ran.

And ran.
And ran.
Forward, straight into the flames.

It’s hot. Searing hot. He shouldn’t be feeling this much heat from a mere vision, yet his bones stiffened and rattled.

Nonetheless, he kept on going.

Papyrus walked past a strange imagery. It’s a huge barren tree ‘decorated’ with the bodies of small humans. The top half was glitched out in the tri-colour squares of his Seer’s Eye.

Crimson cords bound their legs to a stone weight.

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND,” he said outright. “ARE THOSE CHILDREN?”

“…Hoping you didn’t need to see that, Cinnamon Roll.” said Cenna. “Fuck those spirits, seriously.”

“Argh, I can’t believe we bought their stupid cover story for decades! ‘Make the landscape unrecognizable to the enemy’? It made no damn sense and yet it fits with their absurd MO.”

“WHAT WERE THEY TRYING TO HIDE?”
Sans answered, “Infighting, Paps. Their group got ripped up from the inside. You can imagine it’s really embarrassing for such independant folk. So they cooked up a tale that put them in better light.”

“Oh… I think we better move on. It’s not safe for Frisk.”

Or himself. As Papyrus journeyed into the interiors of the temple, he felt a hint of the terror left behind. Poor, poor children: born in the wrong place, on the wrong time.

The old Persona had to make a decision to save his people. He handed out a torch to Chara’s parents. Demanded one more act to redeem themselves.

“Burn the flowers. Don’t come back until it’s done.”

“But, leader…” Kylie said, “A fire of that scale means we’ll burn too. Die the very death of witches and warlocks.”

“Why do you think our ancestors are so enraged? Thanks to Chara, they think all of us dabble in such treachery.”

The old Persona stretched out the torch-bearing arm once more.

Trion reached out to grab it, and then… he stopped, overwhelmed by intense fear and humiliation. In their lore, this brutal divine judgement was reserved solely for the worst.

The time of mercy passed. Persona withdrew the torch and turned his back against the couple.

“Little wonder why your child strayed. You will be executed by poison far away from the community. Don’t fret, you will get a proper government burial: that’s our last acknowledgement of your great deeds.”

“Take them away.”

The couple’s pleas landed on deaf ears. The strong folk of the village pinned them to the ground, tied them up, and hauled them off to a certain ignoble death.

The Persona led the rest of the volunteers out into the field. They set ablaze anywhere with Ebott Goldenflowers. Fire soon spread across the ground and up the trees, sending skyward a thick smoke that blotted out the celestial blue.

Once again, the great mountain sat in the middle of a hell on earth.


Ashes were all that’s left behind. The scene reminded the young skeleton too much of monster dust. For a human, it’s the same as standing in the middle of a field of corpses.

Papyrus wondered if he bit off more than he could chew.

Dear brother called from a distance. Said something along the lines of: “You can stop now, bro. Take off the visors.”

Enough is enough. Papyrus knew that he had seen things through to a proper conclusion. Chara’s story ended here, along with the demise of their community.

He touched the front of his skull, trying to grab something that should be on his face.
Except…

That’s all he touched. His face. There was no visor. Cold sweat streamed off the top of his cranium.

“UH. I THINK. SOMETHING IS WRONG.”

Silence.
Pin-drop silence.

Papyrus couldn’t hear or sense anyone from the present world anymore.
Titans

Chapter Notes

Viewer discretion advised. This is still T-rated but it's certainly on the Shounen Anime end of things.

You might want to keep this OST prepared for the upcoming battle (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RN5fx3_7OxY)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

‘For a time, the young hero thought the phrase ‘there’s no turning back’ applied only to his general life. The idyllic days of fantasy were long past: he’s living the dream along with all its responsibilities.’

‘He didn’t think it had… deeper implications.’

Blackened trees loomed across the distance. Smoke and heavy clouds blotted out the beautiful stars of Ebott night.

His red boots sank into the layer of warm ash. It should have crushed a charred beetle beneath, yet the soles phased through it like any other image.

How much true time had passed? Papyrus does not know. In a dead world like this, even ten minutes felt too long.

“SANS?”

His booming voice echoed into nothingness.

“SANS?” Papyrus furrowed his brows, “SANS, IF THIS IS YOUR IDEA OF A JAPE IT’S OFFICIALLY UN-FUNNY!”

Still nothing.

He wanted to believe that it was a joke: an off-shoot of his brother’s famous treadmill-dark-room prank.

Sans can be so immature and his ideas totally classless. It’s irritating and grating and annoying and plain old terrible.

Yet, it’s harmless. Nothing more than a few irritated minutes of ‘NYEH!’.

“UNCLE GASTER? MOM? DAD?”

That no-nonsense scientist and his parents will have better taste, won’t they? Papyrus imagined his mom and Doctor Gaster giving Sans a smack on the bottom before answering the call.

Nothing.

What about his friends? They’re not so cruel, right?

“ANYONE?”

If only this was a tasteless jape.

Lost. Alone. Papyrus uttered a tearful whimper. It’s tempting to give up and cry.

But he didn’t.

“…I CAN’T JUST STAND HERE…”

So he continued walking down the ashen fields. Wiped away any tears with the back of his hand and pressed on…

Winds howled past, cold. It’s not Snowdin. Yet, it had a deep, lonesome chill that seeped straight into the marrow.

Papyrus clutched his mother’s scarf for comfort of the soul and warmth of the mind.

The world skipped and flickered: as if it switched channels on his old TV.

Nature had reclaimed the dead remnants. Leaves coated the canopy of newborn trees. Grasses swayed beneath the sunny blue sky.

Just the sights themselves made Papyrus forget that he’s lost. It had become more of a wondrous stroll than anything else.

In the middle of the field, stood two humans: a young lady and a caramel-haired boy. He had copper eyes that shone with a sense of charismatic confidence.

Maybe he’s seeing things, but Papyrus thought they’re almost… red.

The adult said to the child: “This is where our village used to be.”

The child replied, “It looks like any other countryside.”

“Well, it is now. But when I was a little girl, we had these beautiful golden flowers that stretched as far as the eyes could see.”

The child scraped the grassy dirt with the tip of his shoe. “We learned in science class that mass fires can change ecosystems. Is that why there are no more golden flowers?”

“Yes. But, I’m here to tell you what your schoolteachers don’t know.”

“You see, those flowers are divine. They’re vessels of the gods: housing the people who lived and died here before us. They’re powerful and should be respected.”

“Alas, a foolish child of ours took up sorcery. That act angered our ancestors to the point where they wanted to eradicate their own descendants. In order to protect those who’re living, the previous Persona thus burned the vessels.”

“The land became barren and tainted. Those spirits who survived were eventually picked off by the Magi. That’s how this land had lost its blessing.”

The boy let out a confident laugh. “Hah! Weaklings, all of ‘em. When I grow up, I’ll build a new
legacy, free of superstition!”

“I’ll make everyone wanna join Gungnir. Adopt our ways, and reclaim our former status! Just like our founder: mark my words!”

This boy was the child Chara failed to be. Swift, strong, clever, and popular. Always knowing how to play his cards without resorting to RESETS or SAVES.

He was a true social genius.

At the age of twelve, the Gungnir crowned him as the new Persona. His parents changed his name so he could blend into normal school society.

The vision skipped ahead to the time when the boy became a man. He lived in a nice condominium with a good view: a place for working professionals with a sizable income.

His caramel hair now had streaks of bright red highlights. This guy loves his colours, it seems.

Those strong muscles reminded Papyrus of Aaron from Waterfall. A little less bulky, but much more powerful. Just looking at them gave the vibe that this person could smash bone with his bare fist.

On the stroke of ten at night, he heard the beeping calls from the Persona’s PC.

He answered it.

“Greetings, Persona.” The person masked their true voice behind a voice-distorting program.

The man raised a brow. “Who are you?”

“A name is of no importance. You should know this the best.”

Persona laughed, amused by the reaction. “Well said, well said. So, what do ‘you’ want from me?”

“I formally invite you to the War of the Red Victory. It’s a battle royale for the grand prize: the Keys of Fate. And a little something extra. It starts twenty-six hours from now. That should give you ample time to prepare.”

“Where will this take place?”

“The city where the Magi first planted their roots.”

Smug as ever, the Persona leaned back in his chair. “I decline.”

“Oh? Are you sure about that? The Gungnir had vied for the Keys of Fate ever since they lost it to the Magi in ages past. This is the perfect opportunity.”

“I’ll be frank: this reeks of a trap. Home territory advantage and whatnot. Besides, it’s not worth the trouble.”

“Excuse me?”

“I don’t know who you are, but I’m certain you’re a Magus. A crazy one too. Who else would so blatantly invite the number one of Gungnir?”

The person on the other end of the line went silent for a moment. Then, they started cackling.
“As expected from you!” The caller said, “But think about it. If I win the war, you too will become a plaything in my hands. When the Gungnir die like flies in my wake, all your attempts to counter me shall be for naught.”

“Heh,” the Persona smirked. “Zip your fucking lips right now, Mister Mastermind. Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.”

“How about this? I will duel the champion. If you truly are the top dog, then I will taste defeat by your hands. Fail and I’ll pluck the Keys straight out of your cold, dead corpse. Simple. Clean. Effective.”

Papyrus gulped. He understood their desire to be popular, but does it have to be so violent? It’s as though insanity defined the Surface.

“Fine, Persona. Have it your way.”

When the call ended, so did the scene.

There were two things that Papyrus learned in this solo dive.

One, control was not his forte. He thought he could do it, but it turned out that it’s all due to Mezil’s aid.

Two, the visions won’t stop until they reached their proper conclusion.

I DON’T UNDERSTAND.

WHY DO I WANT TO SEE THIS THROUGH?

THIS PERSONA IS A STRANGE STRANGER. WHY IS HE RELEVANT TO THE CHAOS SURROUNDING EBOTT? HOW WILL THIS HELP FRISK?

Questions, questions everywhere.
Yet, he cannot escape.
Ignorance was not an option.

MISTER MAGUS TOLD ME TO KEEP GOING, EVEN IF IT DOESN’T MAKE SENSE. HE’S VERY SMART. AND EXPERIENCED. I SHOULD LISTEN TO HIM.

Papyrus returned to the same apartment. Dawn cracked over the horizon. The Persona was in the middle of some morning exercise when his phone rang.

“Any updates?” he asked. After the other side explained, the Persona rose his brows in interest. “Oh really? Took them long enough. Hmph, as I had expected. That mastermind was full of hot air.”

He sat down at his computer to receive the full report. Switched his communication lines there too.

Papyrus snuck up from behind to try peek on the screen. The screen was pixelated from distortions caused by his own imperfect rendering.

“Hmm… What’s this? Mezil Winston?”

“You know this person, sir?” the informant said.

“We were in the same class for five years. Except, he avoided everyone like the plague. Not the most sociable. He willingly shoved himself to the farthest corner of the canteen just to eat in his lonesome.
Average grades, nothing to speak off in PE classes. Always writing stuff in his secret diary.”

“A recluse that not even the local bullies bothered to mess with. He’s literally a walking target and yet somehow they stayed the fuck away. He might as well not exist.”

“I see. That is indeed very unusual. Also, our intel suggests that he’s getting married soon after the skirmish. In about a week.”

“Married…?”

Persona broke into a bellowing laughter. A holler so hard, he could hardly keep himself on the chair.

“Sir?”

“Ha ha ha! I can’t BELIEVE it! Wallflower Winston tying the knot?! Is this a romance movie?!“

It took a while for him to calm down. But, when the Persona did, he asked: “So, what’s his Mark?”

“A butterfly, sir.”

The young skeleton gasped. He had heard that humans change their ‘family names’ after they get married. This means the tsundere principal’s original name was ‘Mezil Winston’.

“Is that so? Well then, interesting. Begin preparations. I want to meet his lovely spouse in person.”

The end is just the beginning of a new chapter.

For a moment, Papyrus thought the materialization of his vision froze midway.

No. It completed: it’s just that he’s looking at an intricate stained glass ceiling.

The myriad of shapes, patterns, and colours took his non-existent breath away. He had heard about the intricacy of the Surface’s ‘glass art’ from his brother, but he had never seen it up-close and personal before.

It’s like the stars of celestial night, except a thousand times more vibrant.

The patterns led his eyes to the center. Red bolts of lightning formed a ring against strips of white and gold, radiating outwards into a great sun.

“So you’ve come, monster.”

Attention shifted from the ceiling straight toward the ground.

It’s the Persona.

He stood under the light of day, within this room of pristine white.

Their eyes met.

“ARE YOU… TALKING TO ME?”

Papyrus had a hard time believing that this was the same hot-shot. If it weren’t for the Persona’s distinctive caramel hair and streaks of crimson, he wouldn’t have recognized him.

“I’m surprised the sun didn’t burn you to ash.”
He looked… rugged. Muscular. The military-camo style gear cemented the impression further. Though he’s no longer in his prime, those eyes still exuded the valour of youth.

Papyrus sensed a dangerous, oppressive aura emanating from his very being. Just the gaze alone threatened to strangle the life out of him. Not even Chara at their worst made him feel this way.

What were his deeds to muster up so much killing intent? How many fell at his hand?

Papyrus couldn’t see the exact LOVE and EXP residing within. Still, every bone in his body warned him to maintain distance. He’s on guard, just in case the visions start to inflict real harm.

There’s a promise to be kept: Frisk counted on him for it.

“I-I DO NOT WANT TO FIGHT,” so said the skeleton. “BUT IF YOU INSIST ON VIOLENCE, I WILL CAPTURE YOU.”

The Persona reached to the back and drew out a strange dagger. It had a hook at the end, unlike the familiar kitchen knife.

Papyrus in turn conjured a femur to serve as a baton. He didn’t think about why he could use magic in a vision to begin with. All he thought was this:

*I NEED TO DEFLECT THAT WEIRD BLADE.*

He put all his reinforcement magic into it. Tried to make his weapon stronger than steel.

But, was that possible?

“That face. Ah, no matter how hard I try, you just come back with the exact same expression. Sometimes I wonder if you were ever even human.”

Papyrus took another step back. “SORRY IF MY APPEARANCES DECEIVE YOU, BUT I’VE ALWAYS BEEN A MONSTER. I-IF YOU STEP FORWARD, W-WE’LL HAVE A VERY BAD TIME!”

A great crimson lightning struck the Persona, empowering his being. Its sheer crackling boom tattered reality at its seams.

Papyrus couldn’t act. He’s too stunned to jump back, even though he knew he should have done so.

“You know how this goes. Kill or be killed. Let’s end this right here and now, Vampire of Time.”

“WAIT, WHO?”

Another person whizzed past. It’s a man with well-combed wavy-hair, dressed in a tailcoat darker than The Void. There’s only one person who’d charge into battle in such formal clothes.

“MISTER MAGUS…?”

The two began their duel. Only then, Papyrus truly confirmed the identity of Persona’s adversary.

Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme.

Gungnir’s final Persona prefered the swift slices of a knife. The Magi’s grimmest Judge favoured the accuracy of a gun.
At this point in time he still had his jet-black strands, but Mezil’s face had all the battle-weary marks of the middle-aged veteran.

Papyrus was sure that Judge Thyme had nut-brown eyes. Then, why did they now match the gems of his distinctive brooch?

When in history was this?

Mezil fired his shot.
It missed.

The Persona punched Mezil’s gut. When he did so, his fist flashed red and planted a bolt of lightning at the impact point.

It sent the Magus flying across the chamber, slamming him into the wall with a loud snap.

Such strength. There’s something abnormal about it. Papyrus expected it for Undyne, but for a human?

Anime? Live action fantasy? A show of entertainment for kids? How wrong that was. This was the secret battle of false gods and magic: titans clashing head to head.

No cuts.
No censorship.

It’s terrifying.

Mezil coughed out blood as he writhed on the ground.

The Persona dashed forward. He raised his hooked knife in the air with the intent of plunging it down for the killing blow.

“MISTER MAGUS!!”

Papyrus rushed forward. It’s a vision, and Mezil surely survived the horrible times. Except, he couldn’t just idly sit by.

Both men then vanished. Reality again frizzled at the edges.

“HUH? WHERE DID THEY GO?”

He turned around and witnessed the beginning of the battle. Persona stood at the center of the chamber, right under the jagged sun.

In other words, Mezil loaded a SAVE.

From this new angle, Papyrus noticed a clear entrance. Mezil stood there, right behind the Seer’s previous position.

The Persona didn’t address Papyrus at all. Never before was the youngster so grateful for being ignored.

But something’s wrong.

And above all, the lightning-mark remained.

“So,” said the Persona, “Only a bruise carried over? I was sure I broke a few bones. Seems like you’ve trained your abs well. Or are you trying to hide something? The gut has always been your weak point.”

The Magus grunted. He refused to answer, instead opting to initiate a quickdraw.

Again, the Persona dodged the bullet with a swiftness that betrayed his physique. He attempted to close his distance with a…

…TELEPORT?

Papyrus thought it’s a magic exclusive to his brother. But, it’s different. Whenever Sans made his jump, he’d leave no trace. But the Persona seemed to ‘fill’ in a shadow of the past.

Maybe his brother could see it better? Sans always had the more analytical eye, literally or otherwise.

Mezil avoided the strike by teleporting close to the center of the room. He tried to fire, but the enemy was not called Gungnir’s best for nothing.

The Persona charged up his blade with a strange power before throwing it by the handle. It stabbed the Magus’ left thigh, embedding its symbol deep into the cut.

Mezil cried out in pain.

Papyrus covered his mouth. Getting nicked by Undyne’s spears was painful enough, what more a knife stabbed so far in?

LOAD.

The men returned to their original position once more. The Persona remained in tip-top shape, while the damp patch around Mezil’s wound grew larger and larger…

“Trying to aim for the perfect kill, huh?” said the Persona. “It’s been almost fifteen years and yet you never learn.”

White circuit lines encased Mezil’s entire left leg. In addition to that, a small pentagram grew over the cut. It stitched the gaping wound shut to prevent excessive blood loss.

“Resorting to witchcraft so soon,” scoffed the strongman.

Mezil replied, “What else do you expect from a vampire?”

The dance of death continued. The same pattern repeated: Mezil would try to land a hit, only to be punished by Persona.

Beaten.
Sliced.
Smashed.

Papyrus backed himself against the wall, frightened by the fierce brutality before him. Watching Sans tear Chara apart was bad enough. At least his brother didn’t find enjoyment in the battle.

But here? The Persona seemed to relish every sadistic, savage moment.
Was this what his tsundere principal friend had to endure as the ‘Keeper of Peace’?

Hints and implications flashed by. They never stayed too long to make sense. Nonetheless, the Seer felt that they’re filled with twisted negativity.

LOAD number 4. Mezil had used all his body-supporting magic to keep him in fighting condition.

By LOAD number 11. That same magic started to flicker and fade. Too much lost blood. Too little strength to maintain.

The Persona felt confident enough to talk down to his opponent.

He said: “I hear the Vanquishers undergo a cleansing ritual before they embark on their so-called exorcism. You, on the other hand, never did so. Hilarious. Do you think you could defeat me drenched in blood? Your stains feed me power, Magus. That’s the law since ancient days.”

Mezil coughed up blood. The ruby glow in his eyes intensified in response to the taunt.

Determination coursed through his veins, pushing his body beyond sanity.

“Yours too,” said the Magus, “I shall consume every drop, be it on me or on you. Ever since I won the War of the Red Victory, I know I’m no longer human. We are both DEMONS. The worst of heretics.”

He began teleporting around the chamber to mask his tracks. He may not be able to run, but he could flutter about in displaced time.

Fire.
Miss.

The Persona countered by teleporting up close. Drove the hook deep into Mezil’s left arm, and yanked it out at an odd angle for maximum destruction.

LOAD number 12. Mezil’s damaged arm limped by the side, paralyzed. More blood flowed down.

“STOP…” Papyrus whimpered. Cried. “MISTER MAGUS, RUN AWAY. STOP. PLEASE. YOU’RE HURT. NO MORE VIOLENCE. PLEASE RUN AWAY. PLEASE!”

It’s useless. The past had happened. This is nothing more than a replay.

One more gunshot.
One more injury.

LOAD number 13.

Mezil could no longer stand. He’s on his knees. Pallid. Shaking. He’s running dry. Yet despite so, the red glow in his eyes still refused to fade.

Persona scoffed at the sight, juggling his knife to show how confident and relaxed he is.

“Here I thought the infamous Vampire of Time will come up with a final gambit. Maybe you really are nothing more than the reclusive nerd of our schooldays. Disappointing.”

“Well, as they say in the retro stuff you like so much: ‘Game Over’.”

Mezil paid zero attention to the words of his nemesis. He can’t afford to channel what remaining focus he had on petty insults.

Thirteen butterflies flashed all around the chamber. Papyrus noticed one shining beside him. Upon a closer look, he realised that it came from a bullet embedded in the wall.

Mezil never missed his shots. On the contrary: his aim held true. Each bullet, across different timelines, struck every single one of their true targets.

Multiple intricate grams shone through the Magus’ clothes. Through, not on. This man had magic code tattooed into his entire being.

The most prominent one of all was a thirteen-pointed star on the chest.

The Persona realised it’s a trap. In a final desperate move, the Gungnir raised his arm with the intent to sink the knife deep into Mezil’s skull.

Too slow.

A magnified thirteen-point Gram spread across the floor. What followed after was a scream unlike anything Papyrus had heard before: twisted, broken, ripped and torn.

And the loudest source… was from himself.

Papyrus didn’t understand what’s going on. Neither he did he notice that he’s affected to begin with.

What is this sensation?
Hot?
Burning?

There’s no time or sense or logic or conscious thought to form together a description.

Orange flames tinted with blue and green erupted from every hollow bone it could escape from: from his sockets, to the nose, to his mouth. It blotted out his very view.

Though he could no longer see, Papyrus could still hear the howl of the Persona. Whatever magic Mezil had used, it inflicted unspeakable agony against him.

He yelled: “Argh! I can’t. Move! My power, gone!”

There was a metallic click of a loaded gun.

“How…? You should be the one to suffer most!”

Mezil answered the question with a single statement: “Die ignorant, Persona.”

Two fatal gunshots later, the last of Gungnir’s false gods ceased to be.

The headache and flames intensified. Papyrus could see nothing but the myriad of shades. His hands grabbed the air in a desperate attempt to escape.

Alas, he instead fell straight into a mass of static.

Chapter End Notes
Now this is the second most crucial step to the Trial of the Crimson Hall. The most crucial step is Sans unsealing his Eye, in case you're wondering.

Also the dagger the Persona used is reminiscent of a Corvo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corvo_(knife)

It's a commando dagger used for both fighting and survival stuff. As I've learned from reading other material, any weapon with a hook can inflict some nasty wounds.

P.S Mezil used a double-stack magazine which loads 15 bullets. The amount of bullets used in this scene is exactly 15.

Edit: Thanks to KarbonKevin in the comments, we've confirmed that Mezil's gun is actually a 15+1. So there's still ONE more bullet inside the gun... just in case Persona tries to do a zombie surprise.
Fire

Chapter Notes

It's been a while since we've viewed things from Undyne's POV.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Fire.

In school, they explained it as a chemical reaction of sorts. All it required was fuel and oxygen to cause combustion.

Fire.

It’s also the symbol of the Dreemurr: the power of her adoptive father. It brings warmth. Cooked meals. Lighting a beacon of hope for the citizens.

But that’s just the positive side. Uncontrolled, it becomes a source of relentless destruction.

Sheer, suffocating heat.

Undyne became acquainted with that concept a little too well. After all, bad fire had once consumed her home. It pretty much lived there for ages before finally running out fuel.

Now, she’s in the middle of a different kind of ‘fire’. It’s one that had build up over the years, just waiting for one unfortunate spark to set all hell loose.

It’s bad enough that Papyrus got lost in the past. Everyone heard him talk, but no one could reach him.

Slaps, shakes, not even a pinprick on the humerus brought him back.

Why not just smash the machine? Or take off the visor? The goopy doctor would never let that happen. Argued that a premature halt to the experiment could end up in a life-threatening backfire.

The terror of the Persona played out on screen. Mezil’s Thyme’s nickname was as dark as the foe he faced.

‘The Vampire of Time’. ‘Not human’.

Those terms, what do they mean in the grand scope of things?

How does any part of this vision help them deal with Gungnir?

Why put Papyrus through these trials?

Then, things went bad.

The screams.
The flames.
When Papyrus collapsed on the floor, it set off a figurative ignition.

A chaos of concern took off like a blazing inferno. In response, Doctor Gaster tried to administer medical magic.

That’s when bad became worse, and everything spiralled downhill.

Sans put all his might into his telekinesis and slammed the goopy doctor straight into the screen. The resulting force caused the entire installation to crash right on top of the victim.

The Mini-Mettaton had enough autonomy to unplug itself from the mainframe and flee from danger. It leapt straight into Alphys’ apron pockets, the safest place in this building. Undyne herself will make sure that’s the case.

The Captain’s first instincts were to protect the royal couple, their child, the Magus guest, and her scaly lover. Evacuated them out of the house pronto.

“Sans!” Frisk cried out. Both Toriel and Asgore held the kid back by the shoulders.

“No, my child,” said the mother. “It’s too dangerous!”

Asgore added, “I- I wholeheartedly agree with your mother.”

So did Undyne. She had seen those two Seers fight before. If things devolved to that level, it’s time to kiss the old Snowdin home goodbye.

“What the fuck, Sans!” Undyne yelled.

He ignored her, ripping off Papyrus’ visor as if it’s a curse to be erased. Proceeded to turn his brother’s SOUL blue, carrying him on his back despite the huge mismatch of size between the brothers.

Undyne noticed something’s off. The Sans she knew would have teleported away on the first opportunity. Why would he take the slow, roundabout, and laborious method of a piggyback ride?

Why?

Being a liquid entity, Gaster’s body flowed out from under the mess. He’s back to his usual form in no time.

“Gaster!” Asgore yelled from afar. “Are you alright?!”

“I am fine, Your Majesty!” He reassured, “Please leave this wayward soul to me.”

Sans hurried his way out of the house, but his mentor conjured two Gasterblasters to block their escape.

“Undyne,” said Sans. “I need to get Papyrus far away from that man. The further, the better.”

The doctor responded: “Don’t be a fool, Sans Serif! Your brother needs immediate attention from a medical professional. I’m the only one here with the expertise to properly examine him!”

He shot the sternest of glares. “Yeah, and who kept pushing Paps forward instead of telling him to stop?! It’s because of you he’s in this state! Alphys can handle the med stuff.”

“As brilliant as Doctor Alphys is, she does not have the required experience to assess Seer related
“Then I’ll hand him over to Cenna,” Sans replied. “They have a Chronographer there. A really good one. I trust her more than you.”

In deep urgency, Gaster pled his case to the woman in charge. “Captain Undyne, I humbly apologize for the mishap. However, I implore you to let me examine Papyrus. The Magi may have the facilities but time is not on our side!”

Why the concern over time? Sans can teleport. Not to mention he could use all those shortcuts to get anywhere he wants.

Unless…

Undyne had yet to put her finger on the exact nature of their predicament, but the oddities began to click into place.

She recalled the one time when she managed to corner Sans in his own home.

Sans. Cornered.

Was he simply too lazy to get out of wrath’s way?

Then Sans offered to visit his parents. Asked Papyrus to drop him off at the mad scientist’s cell.

And ONLY to drop him off. Papyrus didn’t actually stay for the family reunion. He announced, in all his innocence, that they’re getting some much needed quality time.

If Sans wanted to meet his parents alone, why must he rope his little brother to play taxi? Can’t he just go there himself?

Was it all really just to make Papyrus happy?

Undyne clenched her jaws, struggling with the difficult decision.

What should she do?

Who should she believe?

She summoned her spear and walked back into the house.

Instead of destroying the Gasterblasters… she joined them.

Sans frowned. No, he’s growling at her. The light in his eyes went out too.

“You too?” he muttered.

“Look,” said Undyne. Tried her best to be firm yet calm. “I don’t like this guy either. Gaster should have stopped Papyrus before the whole mess happened. But he’s got a point. If Paps is in critical condition, we need to stabilize him first.”

Sans summoned a ring of bones with the full intent of barraging his way out.

The Captain raised her weapon in alarm. It’s been a long, long time she had seen Sans so blinded by rage.

“Do. Not.” She warned with a narrow glare. “I care about your brother as much as you do, Sans.
You know it. You know everything."

“Please, trust me.”

Was it wise to ask for trust from a man who trusted nobody?

Still nothing. Undyne gritted her teeth. It’s hard to tell what’s going on in Sans’ mind on a normal
day. In a tensed situation? It’s a lot worse.

She told herself to think like Frisk: what act would douse the flames of irrational anger?

“I’ll stay with you,” said Undyne. “If Gaster tries to do anything funny, you have the right to yank
Paps out of the way. And I’ll help you escape. Okay?”

In her mind, Undyne crossed her fingers and hoped to fate that he would take the wisest route.

Sans answered: “Tell that man to get rid of the blasters first. Clear the entrance.”

His tone of voice still chilled her to the literal bone. At least it’s a positive development. She signalled
to the worried family members to step aside. It’s more important for Sans to feel safe.

The Captain noticed Toriel more or less had a steel-grip on the kid. It’s very subtle, but it’s there.
She’s so worried that they’re determined to rush headlong into danger.

It’s time to address Gaster: “Disarm yourself. That’s an order.”

“A fair compromise.” Gaster replied. With a wave of his hand, the magic vanished. “Thank you very
much, Captain Undyne.”

“I got my eye on you, doc. No tricks.”

Undyne helped Sans lay Papyrus down on the ground. His sockets were open, plus there were some
specks of residual magic. What does this mean? She doesn’t know.

Gaster began his examination, explaining the issues and the required procedures as he worked. It’s
more or less a formal audio report. The flood of technical details turned into mush in her brain.
They’re empty labels to her.

Apparently he’s been affected by something called a ‘Seer’s Seal’?

At the very least, as long Sans sat still in his spot, she knew that the doctor’s telling the truth.

Doctor Gaster began writing down tiny hand glyphs around Papyrus’ right socket. Connected it to a
nearby set of grams.

“Can’t the Queen’s healing magic fix him up?” asked Undyne.

The doctor answered, “Treating wounds is easy. Ensuring that they heal right is the difficult, yet
crucial part.”

He then placed his hand over Papyrus’ chest to pull up his SOUL. The doctor’s hand trembled over
the plain, white essence.

“It’s gone,” he said.

Undyne blinked. “What’s gone?”
“…That certainly explains his change of behaviour. Or rather, the lack of it.”

More cryptic messages. “Old man, you’re talking hands. Except in English.”

Gaster shook his head. “P-please disregard my rambling.”

He began applying the precise, programmed Codes. It’s so foreign compared to the freeform, instinctive ways she’s familiar with.

Monsters express themselves with magic. Tossed them around like smiles and words. On the other hand, this procedure seemed almost unnatural: a methodological construct that made more sense in a machine.

Anxiety twisted a tight cord in her heart. If she’s getting worked up, what more of Sans?

“Is he going to live?” she asked.

“Of course,” Gaster answered. “To our fortune, his injuries aren’t life threatening. Not a single fracture either. However, I must make sure Papyrus doesn’t lose even the most minute percent of his potential.”

“Have you done this before?”

He glanced at Sans. “Yes. A few times. When the elder brother was a child. H-his control wasn’t the best back then.”

His claims of experience weren’t baseless.

At long last, it’s done. Doctor Gaster ran his hand over the patient’s face to close his sockets. Then, he slid backwards to give space.

“I have done what I can. Papyrus is stable, but he needs to recover in a proper facility. He’s fine in physical terms. Though, I cannot say anything about his mental state. We won’t know until he wakes up.”

With a bow, he offered: “Would you allow me to escort you through the shortcuts?”

Undyne had a nagging feeling that Sans won’t be able to be the taxi-person.

Doubt the blue guy wanted to be anywhere near the doctor now anyway. Taking that into account, she said: “I think we better walk home on our own. To clear our heads at least.”

They did just that. At first, Sans insisted on carrying his brother. Sooner than later, however, fatigue weighed down on his back like blocks of lead.

Toriel offered to help her joke buddy, but he turned it down. Tossed a pun to make her feel better too.

Undyne huffed and pretty much plucked the unconscious Papyrus off Sans’ back.

He didn’t argue or fight.

This was something she had done since her youth. Sometimes little Paps would play too hard, trip over a bunch of rocks, and get a sprain. It’ll then be up to either the bone brother or fish sister-figure to carry the tyke home for treatment.
Undyne hoped that Papyrus would wake up exactly the same: filled with sparkling naivete. A lovable glory hog, too innocent for this world.

Otherwise, she wouldn’t know how Sans would ever cope. If she must be honest, she wouldn’t know how to cope either.

They arrived at the Throne Room. It’s one of the more frequented places in the Underground due to Asgore’s gardening habits.

There’s a spot of charred land smack dab in the middle of the field of gold.

Alphys gasped at the destruction. “W-what happened here?”

The king stared down on the earth, downcast. “I… I tried to destroy the flowers. I thought it would be best to prevent another tragedy. Toriel and Frisk stopped me before I made another foolish error.”

“Hey Asgore. I’m glad they stopped you.” Undyne couldn’t believe she’s saying those words; she just couldn’t stand to see anyone frown any more.

“Because,” she continued, “I’ve been thinking. Maybe we’ll find a way to give these flowers a proper use. Like, medicine? We’ve already made tea out of them. Something other than housing dead people.”

Frisk smiled and gave her a huge thumbs up, saying, “That’s the spirit.”

“Yeah! Determination, punk!”

Cenna hesitated to wade through the Cheaters of Death. For a good reason too: they’re associated with DEMONS, the very entities she’s trained to fight.

“Uh, there ain’t any other way around this?” she asked.

“Nope,” Frisk answered.

“Aww shucks. I should have asked the doc to warp me out. Maybe I’ll turn back and--.”

A distinct bubble of light enveloped the Magus. She was then hurled all the way towards the old Barrier entrance.

Every single person in the room locked their attentions on Sans. He chuckled in his usual goofy manner.

“Are you freaking serious?!” If Undyne wasn’t carrying Papyrus, she might have bonked his skull. Frisk objected too, “Humans are not that tough!”

“Nah, she’ll be fine,” Sans answered. “Just giving her a much needed ‘air-lift’.”

Cenna yelled from the other end. “That’s an awesome ride, assassino! Thank ya lots!”

Here comes that wink. “See? Our daredevil’s best friend is fond of ‘high-flying’ travel. That garden toss ain’t nothing to hoot. Bet they do a fair number of skydiving as a hobby.”

On one hand, Undyne was glad he still had the mood to joke. On the other hand, she’s not sure if it’s an opportunistic farce.
“You sound like you have experience with this,” she commented.

There was a long stream of uncomfortable ‘hehs’, complete with nervous sweating.

Cenna hollered once more. This time it’s a message. “Hey, Captain Grillby’s waiting for ya at the entrance!”

Grillby? The ex-Captain manned the helm while Undyne checked out Doctor Gaster’s contraption. Why would he come all the way over here?

Sure enough, the man of fire stood there in full armour. He removed his helmet and bowed to the entourage. The presence of an unconscious Papyrus stirred concern.

“…Did something happen…?”

Sans interjected before anyone could explain. “He’s just bone tired, Grillbs. What’s up?”

“…A group of humans tried to sneak into the Underground… Police considered this as trespassing… so we’re holding them at the town hall… They brought digging tools… Said they’re looking for the six missing children…”

Something Papyrus’ had said then struck a troubled chord.

“I FEEL LIKE WE DON’T HAVE MUCH TIME LEFT.”

At first, Undyne thought he expressed it out of sheer impatience.

But, what if he sensed an omen from the future?

Did he realise this might happen? One could never tell with him.

The full ramifications reared their ugly head. Everyone knew that if the Gungnir unearthed those remains, monsterkind’s name will be forever tainted.

Chapter End Notes

P.S Remember the Friday date and Papayrus’ Drunk Opera singing session.

Remember what he’s supposed to have on his SOUL.
Grillby didn’t expect to meet so many people. Just the weight alone overburdened the borrowed driving service.

He came with only one car and they have an injured person. Priority goes to those who need medical attention. The rest will thus have to wait for round two.

Cenna knocked on the glass to ask the driver to wind down his window. Explained that the tall skeleton needed to go straight to the Magus Association’s Headquarters.

“No delays, and don’t take the scenic route!”

The cool man of fire walked over to Undyne and said, “…Please pass Papyrus to me… I’ll accompany Sans…”

“Ah, right. Thanks.” Grillby should be on Sans’ good side, so she passed the bloke over without any hesitations.

He gently carried the tall one into the car. The big brother followed right after. Undyne thanked her senior for the kind deed and watched the car drive off into the distance.

Cenna excused herself to use her phone. Called her contacts, arranged for more rides, and assorted other logistics that needed ironing.

Once she’s done, she explained to the rest of the group. “I managed to get two more cars. One will take Doctor Alphys, Asgore, and Frisky back to the garden home. Then the other will fetch myself, Toriel, and the Captain here. Sounds good?”

“It is,” Toriel nodded, “Thank you very much.”

Not much went on during the waiting period. There were some quiet, hushed questions, followed by equally quiet reassurance.

Undyne looked at Ebott Town’s sleepy night lights. Undercurrents of uncertainty lay beneath.

She’s determined to protect her people.

The other two police cars arrived at the mountain trail soon enough. The group split up according to their agreed arrangement.

Cenna managed to steal one more head rub on Frisk before she hopped back to duty. Looking at the little bits of friendly gestures uplifted the fish lady’s heart.

To the Town Hall! One of the first buildings to pop up in Ebott Town. Before, it was nothing more
than the ivy-ridden remains of a burnt barn.

In true Underground fashion, the monsters scraped the remnants and built a new building. Planned the rest of the Ebott Town from there onwards. Giving new life to the old had been their thing for ages.

On most days, it’s an official house of government. Right now it’s a makeshift police station.

Dogamy and Dogressa said that their police partners placed the trespassing humans in the meeting room.

The Magus stormed right in.

Undyne wondered what’s wrong: the reaction seemed a bit more personal than expected. However, duty distracted her concern and curiosity.

In the meantime, the Queen and the Captain attended to their respective duties in different areas of the Hall. There’s much ground to cover.

Just when the buff bunny and dragon couple presented their report, Undyne heard a small explosion.

It came from the holding room.

“Dude. That’s, like, totally magic,” said the bunny.

“Any monsters in there?” Undyne asked.

The dragon shook his head. “...No.”

The bunny nodded, “Heard from the Magi fellows that they may be lightning-head punks. Pretty dangerous for us. So, like, we let the humans deal with each other.”

Undyne’s detective anime protagonist instincts kicked in. “I’m gonna check it out. Watch my back, okay?”

After they saluted, she headed straight to the source.

She walked right into utter chaos.

Cenna’s fellow colleagues had glued her transformed SOUL to the wall with a mixture of purple and green seals. They required the full focus of their casters just to keep it there.

Two others tried to restrain her physical body the old-fashioned grappling way.

The far end of the table and a few unfortunate chairs now lay about as toothpick-sized splinters. The kind of damage left behind fit the description of an explosion-based magic.

On the other side, the group of terrified criminals huddled together in a tight ball. They stayed far away from the site of destruction.

“P-police brutality! This is police brutality!” a woman exclaimed. “Magic should be banned!”

Cenna yelled back: “Might as well ban breathing all together, yeah?! I feel fucking sorry for your kid, Linda.”

“Hey, I wasn’t the one who abandoned her sibling to foster care!”
The bird-shaped SOUL then broke free from its restraints. From its beak, it fired a yellow hailstorm of bullets.

Now the lopsided table had more holes than a mouse-approved cheese. Anime was real once more.

“You dare say that again?” so said the Magus.

This Linda must be either stupid, gutsy, or both. There’s a sense of defiance in her pose and she’s not backing down.

“It’s the truth,” said Linda. “You want to kill me? Go right ahead. That’ll just prove Gungnir is right!”

As if the fallout between Sans and Gaster hadn’t soured the day enough. Now it’s two human ladies who had their own brand of bad bones to pick on.

Undyne knew she had to act fast. She could see in Cenna’s eyes that she will answer the provocation without mercy.

What should she do? Throw a spear at the skeptics, turning them green? No way. They’ll just accuse her for inflicting harm, even if it gives them shielding.

Grab the bird? No, Cenna was an experienced fighter. If she could fight Sans with her magic, there’s no way an ambush of that kind will work.

Then there’s only one other option.

Target the body.

“Get away from her!” Undyne yelled. She then charged forward like her life depended on it.

The Magi let go of their grip just in time. If they’re any slower, they would have a first-hand taste of The Suplex Queen’s might.

Wham! One swift throw on the floor and Cenna was down for the count.

Without the caster’s conscious focus, pieces of the bird-shaped SOUL returned to their original form. The yellow heart then floated back into her chest.

“She’ll be alright.” Contrary to popular belief, Undyne knew how to fight without inflicting harm. It was one of King Asgore’s earliest lessons.

Instead of being thankful, Linda seemed discomfited by the monster’s presence. Maybe even disgusted. “…Did you really have to butt in?”

Undyne clicked her tongue. This woman is a piece of work. No wonder Cenna blew her top.

So she said, “It’s either I butt in, or you get a trip to the ER. Look lady, sounds like you got a kid waiting for you at home. How would they feel if Mommy ended up dead because she can’t keep her fucking mouth shut?”

“‘He’,” the other lady grumbled. “He’s a boy. Don’t bring your third-gender nonsense into the picture. I can’t believe you let your Ambassador embrace the queer culture.”

“Okay. Fine. Your son won’t be happy either way. Also leave Frisk out of this. I still have no damn idea about their gender and you know what, it’s not important. All that matters now is that
NOBODY dies under my watch. You included.”

Undyne scooped the downed Magus off the ground and hurled her over the shoulder. Glaring at Linda’s gang, she gave one last warning:

“Don’t make my job difficult. Just. Don’t.”

What a toxic atmosphere. No wonder none of the Royal Guard members wanted to stay.

Undyne carried the dazed Cenna all the way to the cafeteria. Set her down on the bench and waited for her to recover.

The Magus soon groaned, slinging her arm over her eyes to block out the light. “Guh. I don’t wanna get up.”

“Are you Sans or what?” the fish lady asked back.

It prompted a laugh. “Oh god, not you too. Cinnamon Roll called me a tall girly Sans once, and I can’t believe just how damn right he is.”

“You wanna chug down some ketchup?”

“Nah man. I hate that stuff to be honest.”

“Good. Then you’re only half of a tall girly Sans.”

More bitter laughter. Undyne squinted. This woman had her own share of major issues. She wondered if it’s possible to get her to talk about them…

Too bad the kid didn’t follow. Frisk would be a ton better in the talking game, but it’s unreasonable to depend on them all the time.

What would they do?

Food and drink are the best icebreakers. Might as well try that.

“You want a drink?” Undyne asked.

“Sure. But, I’m actually more hungry than anything else.”

The Popato Chisps vending machine stood right next to the regular drinking fare. That should do it.

Undyne bought two cans of cold coffee and some chisps. Drank one can for herself, and set the rest down on the table. The sound of rustling salty treats motivated Cenna to sit up.

“Thanks.”

The human lady ate the chips one at a time, but they vanished quick. Then there’s the coffee: it’s as though she’s guzzling down some high-alcohol liquor.

“You know this Linda woman?” asked Undyne.


There goes another shot.

“How old is her kid anyway?”
“About a year younger than Frisky.”

The fish started counting the years. If those two ladies were classmates, and they were still in school when Frisk was born… “Wait. Are you telling me she’s a teenaged mom?”

“Bingo.” Cenna took out her wallet and smacked it down on the table. “Buy me a few more cans, will ya? And an extra bag of chips. Use everything in there if you need to.”

Looking inside the wallet, it’s clear that this woman didn’t carry much money. Was she underpaid? It couldn’t be. Someone with rare talent like hers should have a pretty good paycheck.

Where did all that cash go?

Undyne’s conscience wouldn’t let her use the limited funds in peace. She folded the wallet and passed it back to its owner.

Flash her huge trademark grin, she said, “Don’t worry, treat’s on me. And ‘no’ is not an answer!”

“Awww thank ya lots, Captain.”

Hopefully, she didn’t need to buy any more than requested.

The empty cafeteria echoed from the metallic pop. Cenna started her story. “I found that out on my first PR field trip. I’m good with kids apparently. Pretty face. Sporting personality. Fresh and talented Vanquisher. So, the brass paired me up with a senior to educate the little ones.”

“It’s all fine and dandy until I saw her pick up her tyke. That’s when it hit me: Linda was a mom. Raised him together with her parents and some friends. Fucking lightning-head friends.”

Undyne commented, “Let me guess. She met them from those teenaged-parents support groups.”

“Yup. Just great, isn’t it? The best time to rope someone into your bullshit. They helped her lots. And that’s why she thinks they’re the best in the world. Logical, yeah? I mean, I ain’t any different.”

Half a can gone in three seconds. “Yo Captain, ever wondered how I became a witch?”

“No,” Undyne replied, “But you got me curious now.”

She began her tale with her debt-ridden uncle. Undyne had heard that story before, but this human lady repeated it anyway.

Cenna then talked about her first birthday cake. How she cried not because of the generosity, but the fact that she didn’t know her own birthday to begin with.

Undyne wanted to say that it wasn’t a big deal. She doesn’t know her own birthday either. But… she relented. Her life was pretty good despite being an orphan. The Underground watched out for children one way or another, and she’s lucky to be fed for free. Then, things got better when Asgore took her under his wing.

The first can, finished. Soon, right after that, it’s the second. The monster was pretty sure that it’s not healthy for humans to drink that fast.

Cenna talked about how she discovered her talent for magic. Grew curious of her Magi family’s work and tried to emulate them. Ended up as a big success. Everyone threw a celebration. For the first time, she felt valued. Empowered.
She would go out to the playground and use her powers to scare the bullies away. Tossed them around as free and effortlessly as the monsters of myth.

The ignorant non-Magi people of the neighbourhood feared her. Accused her as a witch.

But she laughed.
Laughed like a true witch of fantasy.
Laughed in the same borderline psychotic streak she had became famous for today.

She confessed: “When they called me less than human, I was fucking stoked! I hated being a vanilla human. Powerless… It’s boring, it’s frustrating, it’s way too bloody close to my biological parents!”

There goes the third can of coffee and the second packet of Popato Chisps. This human had unhealthy levels of sodium, sugar, and caffeine running through her systems now.

“I was like what, six?” she said, “Seven? Not even in school, and I ain’t sure if my bio parents gave enough fucks to put me in one.”

“My home was like, a trash dump disguised as an apartment. And I exist only because of an accident. I ain’t even sure who’re my real Mom and Dad. I just slap those titles on the one male and one female adult that I remember, just to keep things convenient.”

“They’re always drunk or high. And they’d beat the shit outta me because I’m a hungry mouth to feed. Sucking away their precious cash, you know. When you’re poor everything’s so dang bloody expensive that it costs blood.”

Undyne had no words. It’s the kind of background she had only heard from fiction washed down from the river. She thought it’s just angsty, edgy stuff to pull on the heartstrings of readers.

To think it was based on real stories… it blew her mind. If that’s all Chara heard about, no wonder they became so bitter.

Does Frisk know anything about human society’s dark side?

Of course they do.

Cenna continued her story: “One day, they forgot to lock the door. So this sick little kid thought, ‘I can finally go to a place where kind people will give me icecream for free’. And, ‘I’ll get a real bed to sleep in, complete with nice hot meals’.”

“I don’t even know what it’s called. But I knew what it’s supposed to look like. So I walked aaaaall the way there.”

She started to cackle.

“It’s a hospital,” Cenna said, “A damn HOSPITAL! This filthy brat thought a hospital is heaven on earth. Do you know how fucked up that is?!’

“And you know what’s the kicker? If I wasn’t so stupid, I’d be dead by sunrise. God, the docs were amazed I could even walk to begin with.”

“Yeah. I got my icecream, bed, and hot food for free. That’s ‘cause Social Services paid them for me. I even got my first teddy bear. Never had real toy before that. Sad, yeah?”

Then.
All that front came crashing down.

The hot-headed, ever-confident, cool Magus broke down into a puddle of tears. Right before the Suplex Queen, of all people.

She confessed between the sobs. “I know myself. I can see where things went wrong. God, I made Mez the freaking stoic vampire flip shit over me! You know how much it takes for him to do that? Lots.”

“If I could punch him over his stupid shit, what makes you think I won’t do the same with Frisky?”

“When I heard Sans and god damn Linda raised their little tykes, I was fucking ashamed of myself. If they could do it then why the fuck can’t I? I bet Mez and Lucy would be more than happy to help me out and yet… yet I gave them up to foster care!”

“I’m scared. I’m scared that I’d… I’d… I’d hate them for being a burden. Like how. My old folks. Used to beat me up for just existing.”

For Undyne, it’s a moment of epiphany. Hearing just how bad things were in Cenna’s past put her actions in perspective.

In the end, she chose to secure Frisk’s safety at the cost of their relationship.

The urge of action spurred Undyne to smack her hands on Cenna’s teary cheeks. Held them tight and turned her head so they met eye-to-eye.

So the strongest fish said: “You need to stop putting those two on a pedestal. And I mean it. Stop. S. T. O. P.”

“Eh?” Cenna was more confused by the action than the statement.

“Linda kept her kid. So what? Do you think it’s healthy for anyone to stay long term with her brand of overt racism? Hell, I’m not even sure if her kid can stand her!”

“And Sans. Goddammit Sans. That guy is more opaque than a freaking brick wall. He could pull it off because he’s a genius with Gaster’s support. But I’ll be frank, he’s nuts. I’m sure something may have snapped in the background and Paps is too damn innocent to notice.”

“Like you said, YOU know yourself! Not Linda. Not Sans. Not any other damn critic out there. Raising a baby is NOT easy! I know it’s a hard decision and you struggled like hell for Frisk’s well-being. But the most important thing is the NOW!”

“You’re here for the kid. You’re helping us, making sure those freaking lightning-head punks don’t tear the town apart.”

“You’re doing the right things, right now! THAT is waaaay more important than your perceived past mistakes!”

Undyne’s softened to a sympathetic gaze. Toned down her volume to match. “Got it?”

It turns out that Cenna’s monster-like side was more than just her magic. Though she nodded to acknowledge the hopeful speech, she wailed louder: the dam of professionalism had burst in all its entirety.

“You okay with a hug?” asked Undyne.
Cenna let her body lean forward. That’s a yes. So she wrapped her arms around the human and let her cry it out.

Though her cold, scaly skin won’t have the same warming effect as Toriel’s fur, it’s the thought that counts.

The clock ticked past Midnight. It’s Wednesday now.

The Queen returned from her important business.

The Magi made an agreement with the police, Toriel explained. In return for securing Mount Ebott, they promised to provide a proper resolution to the missing children’s case.

With that agreement signed and in paper, the non-magical cops sent the trespassers back to their homes.

“That’s the best we can do,” said Cenna. “Otherwise, sensationalists will set the world ablaze with their crackpot nonsense.”

The goat nodded in acknowledgement. “Thank you so much, Miss Cenna. I apologize for putting your people in a difficult situation.”

“Eh, it’s a lose-lose situation for everyone involved. Us humans get bloody paranoid over the wrong things sometimes.”

Undyne nodded. She then asked, “Any news about Paps?”

“He’s fine. Our Chronographer is taking care of him,” Cenna answered.

The Magus rubbed the back of her neck, feeling downright awkward. “Hey, Miss Toriel, er, I mean, Your Majesty. I wanna confess something.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. Um. Remember that time when I asked ya to spy on my convo with Mez?”

If Undyne had a dollar for every brow-raising moment, she’d be set for months.

“Yes,” said Toriel.

The awkwardness intensified. “It’s, uh, an act. Mez decided to play the bad guy’s role. Be the punching bag. If you guys went up against Gungnir or some other crappy political group, it might…”

With a smile, the queen said, “It might get blown out of proportion, right? I figured that out a long while ago. If I decided to fight against the Magi, no doubt he’ll explain the full story whenever appropriate.”

“In hindsight, it’s the only time you ever addressed him by a proper title. Rather unnatural there.”

“Aww shucks. You’re sharp.”

Undyne wondered if it might be better for the town if Toriel returned to politics. She had the skills for management. But then, she was so much happier being a teacher. Would it be right to sacrifice her dream for the good of the community?

Only Toriel herself could answer this question.
They said their goodnights and went back to their resting stops. Cenna, the inn. Toriel, her home. And Undyne, Asgore’s house.

Undyne kept thinking about the events that transpired today…

The Genocider’s story.
Sir Philip’s plea.
Chara’s background.

And the final Persona’s fight with the Vampire of Time.

From what she understood, humans were not supposed to have strong magic. Yet that battle took all the preconceived notions and shoved them down a shredder.

Were they talented people like Cenna, or is there more to it?

*Cenna is strong. I won’t deny that.
But her firepower is nothing against my spear. I could deflect them without any problems. Is it because she lacks determination?

* Determination is a Living Victory thing, right? Makes me wonder if it had a role in making that Persona’s punch so dang super powerful.

Undyne stared at her own hands.

Alphys had already examined her physiology. Noted Undyne had elevated levels of Determination for a monster, and how it could kill her if she pumped out too much.

What if someone with more experience examined her? A person with a cross discipline of combat, medicine, and magic…

There’s only one that fit the bill. Unfortunately, it’s also the one man with a worse track record than Sans.

*God, must all the good info be in the hands of Doctor Gaster? Seriously.

Still, I can’t rest on my laurels. It’s time to hammer together my new training plan. Even freaking Papyrus is now ahead of me…

*If I don’t improve myself, I’ll be as bad as that Genocider jerk!

Chapter End Notes

I did not forget Chapter 16 :P Yep. We're looking at intentional OOC-ness from Mezil.

This... well, I guess if PTA Linda lived in GQ verse, she would be a Gungnir sympathiser. That's the impression I got. I actually had to find some PTA Sans fics to get a feel of how Linda should be. I hope the original creators are not mad at GQ AU Linda D:

*About abuse stories. I've... heard... some super weird ones. Like a boy who's confined to a cardboard box and the adults would beat him whenever he pops his head out the lid
line. It's like a very violent and twisted whackamole. It's just. What even. It's crazy.
On mornings like these, Cenna understood why Mezil slept at vampire hours. The exhaustion from miniscule amounts of sleep was nothing short of the worst.

And she already woke up later than usual. Eight in the morning instead of her usual six. Had to clock in for the morning patrol shift in an hour.

“Gah, I barely have enough time to get my shit together!”

The morning routine went by the same as ever. That included the time she had to take her medicines.

Cenna pulled out the desk’s drawers, revealing bottles of prescription drugs arranged in a two by three grid.

There’s one to slow the decay in her nerves. Her primary medication.

Another serves to deal with her muscles. Part of the symptoms include spasms; these lessen the chances.

Some are also of the magical variety. They make the reinforcement spell on her SOUL stretch as far as it possibly can.

The rest of the bottles were miscellaneous emotion regulators: antidepressants and such. Doctors said those afflicted by her condition may experience extreme swings of emotion.

And how she lost it.

…Almost killed Linda over a dumb provocation. Unacceptable. She owed her peace today to Captain Undyne.

Cenna groaned. “Ugh. What did the doc say about this again? Should I increase my dosage? But they said they could affect my aim. Dammit. I can’t have my aim become crapshoot, yet I can’t blow off my top either.”

Frustration flared. How tempting it was to slam the desk shut and skip the medication. Years had passed, yet she still felt the constant sting of humiliation.

The disease was a mockery against her gift and active lifestyle. Born so swift only to wither before time. It’s also a testament to her broken past. If her parents were as loving as Frisk’s, or even Chara’s… they would have sought treatment at infancy. Only those caught early had a chance to live until old age.
“Fuck this.”

She shook out her usual dosage, popped the pills into her mouth, and washed them down with a glass of water.

Now she could forget about the slow death sentence until the next day.

As per protocol, one cannot leave for duty until all gear checked out. The most complex item she had was her handgun. She gave it a cleaning last night, so all she needed to do now was a routine checkup.

In the middle of the procedure, her phone rang.

It’s from ‘Lucidia B.’

Cenna immediately answered it. “Yo, Lucy. How’s the Cinnamon Roll?”

“I’m more concerned about you, Judge Caraway. I had received a report that you almost ended a life over some petty insults.”

Stern mode, on. If the long night wasn’t enough, she’s going to get grilled by Mezil’s wife.

When Mezil lectures she tunes the music out as yet another tsundere spell. But if it’s the missus who got angry? Cenna knew she screwed up good.

“S-sorry. I. Uh…”

There’s no way she could excuse herself.

“As long you’re aware of your poor decisions, young lady. That matter is not important at the moment. I’m here to warn you about Sans Serif. I do not suggest you to get any closer to him than you already are.”

“Message from Mez?” Cenna asked.

“No. I’m issuing this word of caution on my own volition.”

That’s news. That husband and wife team had always been the true brains behind the operations. They tell her where to go, what to do, and when she had the freedom to act on her own.

Cenna sat down on the side of the bed to stabilize herself. “Hey, Lucy. You gotta tell me what’s troubling ya.”

“Papyrus may be fine, but he isn’t sleeping. My weapon… had disturbed the fire in his Eye while he’s in the world of visions. As a result, he’s in a state between consciousness and sleep.”

“In human terms, I am detecting brain activity associated with an active, waking person. Whether or not he remembers his visions, it is still too soon to confirm.”

“There’s no guarantee that he will wake up the same. Knowledge can twist hearts beyond repair. Sans Serif and I know this more than anyone else.”

“Furthermore, the data I collected about Ebott’s Tactician… points to a dark path. It is the reason why I agreed to Seal him in the first place.”

“Wait.” Said Cenna. “Just. Hold up a sec. You did WHAT to him?! D-does Mez know this? When?
Why???”

Lucidia refused to answer.

The Magus checked her family watch. Until now, she had yet to unleash the Determination stored within. That huge desynchronized gap had bothered her ever since Toriel pointed it out.

Mezil showed up at Mettaton’s Studio, just in time to intercept both the reporter and to calm the monsters.

He informed her that Alphys’ Lab was next on the hitlist.

Then he insisted on initiating patrols, with extra attention on the mountain itself.

Cenna thought her morning couldn’t get any worse. “How… how bad did shit go down in the last timeline?”

“Confidential.”

“Oh c’mon Lucy this ain’t the time for that!”

“I am not at liberty to explain, but you have enough experience to guess.”

The human lady clenched her fist tight. “Yeah, you’re right. I get what ya mean. But, what does this have anything to do with our short assassino?”

“Sans Serif’s primary self-imposed directive is to preserve the safety of his brother, Papyrus. What he considers ‘safe’ is undetermined still.”

Cenna asked back, “Why? I thought you had like at least fifty timelines on this guy.”

“His choices in the Underground still perplex me. My scope of vision of his pre-Surface actions are limited to the prevention of the Seven SOUL DEMON-GOD and Judge Thyme’s report on The End.”

“Predicament: Why did he allow Papyrus to duel Frisk despite the risks? It does not line up with his current actions.”

“So, you’re telling me that there’s an unknown factor in this whole mess?”

“Correct. I do not believe it is mere apathy. This is why I am delivering my caution, Judge Caraway. This timeline is foreign territory. For all of us.

“Shit…” Cenna covered her mouth. “I trusted him lots, Lucy. Told Frisky about that too. Goddammit, I made a really bad decision now.”

“No, it’s a wise action. Making him at ease with you is the best safeguard on your life. Maintain your current cordiality, but stay your lips on sensitive information.”

“One problem there, Lucy.”

“What would it be?”

“Frisky,” Cenna replied. “Our kid got full trust in that bloke. What if they try to include him in everything? If I back off, both of them are gonna notice.”
“If that’s the case, continue as usual. It can’t be helped. Encounters on your own volitions are the ones I would discourage.”

“In other words, I shouldn’t meet the guy alone.”

“Correct.”

She breathed a long sigh. “Sure. Can do. I’ll keep you updated.”

“Thank you. And, please stay safe.”

Lucidia then ended the call. Any appetite for breakfast had evaporated. It crossed her mind to get a smoothie and have an early lunch.

Or maybe a quick 3-in-1 cereal mix? It’s the faster option of the two. So she mixed a sachet in a glass and guzzled that down whole.

The Magus finished up her routine and slipped the gun into its holster. Time to greet the sunshine.

It’s another morning of watching from the sidecar of a police motorbike. She would have been the driver, if only her wretched disease hadn’t condemned her to the fate of a passenger. Auto-pilot tech had their merits, but she didn’t like the idea of letting a machine control her path. Perhaps she’s old-school when it comes to the road.

There’s a ruckus up ahead. Looks like humans have flooded the Town Hall, again. Worse still, she recognized Linda’s car in the parking lot.

Cenna groaned. More PR problems. As if there weren’t enough of those to begin with.

Why’d they let that grating woman out of detention in the first place?

It is tempting to charge straight into the crowd and chase them out. But if she did that, Linda will raise hell and rally the rest to her side.

Her partner frowned at the scene. “I think we should stay out of this, Judge Caraway.”

“Yeah,” Cenna nodded. “Drive me elsewhere, please.”

The bike turned around for a detour. Ended up in front of Muffet’s Bakery.

It’s open. Odd. It should be closed because of the curfew, but the owner had enough guts to set up shop nonetheless. As a result, it’s far from quiet. Customers filled the place. Everyone wanted to get their choice food before the establishment closes again for the week.

Cenna recalled that the pastries from this shop were pretty tasty. Because they contained real spiders, they’re also protein rich. Or so bug-food theories go. That kind of nutrition might make up for her skipped breakfast.

“Hey, want a snack?” asked Cenna.

“Sure. What’s good in there?” The partner answered.

“The doughnuts and croissants. But they’ve got some savoury stuff like pork in a bun too.”

“Oooh porkies! Get those. I don’t like sweets while on duty.”

“Guess that makes two of us.”

“Thanks!”
Delicious scents of baked goods and coffee paired together with the warmness of the spider café. Despite its choice of arachnid decoration, the large windows let in plenty of sunlight.

The otherwise pleasant atmosphere was overcrowded by the sheer amount of people. She headed straight to the bread corner and managed to nab the remaining two sausage buns.

‘Made with real Surface sausages’ was apparently a major selling point in this town.

The owner of the establishment also doubled as the cashier. Muffet recognized the Magus on sight. She passed her duties to a bunch of spiders and straight up approached the human.

She said, “Oh! Judge Caraway, right? You didn’t get held up in the Town Hall, dearie? I thought all the human Magi folks got stuck there, ahuhu~~”

Now that’s unexpected. Cenna asked back, “How’d ya know?”

“A little birdie offered to fly food packages over to that place. Nobody could leave because of all those pestering folk, but stomachs cannot wait ahuhu~~~

“So me and my spider friends thought we could try out a delivery service! Phone orders, you know. Ahuhuhuhuhu~~~”

Maybe she didn't need to call her colleagues after all. Cenna appreciated the convenience.

“Enterprising, eh?” the Magus smiled back, “I like that. Say, mind if ya tell me what's with the fuss over there?”

Muffet explained, “Those pesky parent-wannabes insist that Ebott Town had become too dangerous for our little ambassador. They want Frisk to be placed under their protective care. Temporarily, so they claim.”

Cenna outright scoffed at the idea. “Yeah right! They’re the one causing the chaos in the first place. Temporarily, hah! I bet they’re gonna file for ‘permanently’ the moment they stuff the kid into the car.”

It was a good idea not to step inside after all. She knew she'd blow off her top right away.

“You’re their relative I heard?” Muffet asked.

The human tensed up. She saw friendly curiosity in all four of the spider woman’s eyes, ignorant about the uncomfortable details.

Cenna tried to hide under her hat. “Uh. Yeah. I am. That’s why I ain’t handing the kid over to some random stranger. Besides, Ebott’s really the safest place for them right now.”

The moment they leave the protection of monsters, Gungnir and other parties would seize Frisk like a bar of pure gold.

Muffet exclaimed, “That’s wonderful, ahuhu! Oh it’s good to know Frisk is so well-connected. By the way, if you see Sansypants please tell him that his order is ready. I haven’t been able to contact him for ages despite selling him a new phone.”

“Sansypants?”

“A.k.a Mister Comedian! You know, Sans.”
That skeleton does have an intricate network of connections. It didn’t surprise Cenna that this woman knows him. Furthermore, Lucidia would find the little trivia about the phone deal very interesting.

How much does this spider lady know about Sans? What if she shared the baker a piece of insider information? How would she react?

The Magus decided to test the waters.

“Sure, no probs,” she replied. “I dunno if I could catch him either if I must be honest. His brother ended up in hospital. That’s why he didn’t answer ya.”

Muffet covered her mouth with her many pairs of arms.

“How terrible!” said the spider. “And he just recovered from that other hospital visit. Oh poor, poor, Papyrus. That explains why our tiny ambassador looked so distraught.”

In other words, nobody had seen Sans since yesterday’s mishap. And Frisk visited the bakery?

“Sucks right?” Cenna sighed. “Hey, sorry to cut the chat short but my colleague is waiting for me out there.”

“Oh of course. Let’s wrap things up, shall we? Ahuhuhuhu~~~”

Buns, bagged and paid.

Since then, Cenna kept a lookout for that skeleton. Lucidia advised against meeting him in person, alone. It doesn’t mean that she can’t visit him with Frisk in tow.

The plan was to spot the guy from afar, notify the kid, then meet up. Deliver Muffet’s message too.

_Huh? I sensed something that shouldn’t belong here._

_Or rather… someone._

There’s a skinny man in a full denim set perched on a tree: had a long-sleeved jacket with a matching pair jeans. He wore full gloves and a sturdy outdoorsman’s boots. Topped the whole thing off with a motorcycle helmet.

To others, he looked like a biker with a very strange viewing point.

To Cenna, he’s a walking spoiler.

“Really?” she grumbled, “Like, bloody really?”

She asked the driver to stop nearby. Got off the sidecar and stormed straight towards the one particular tree where the mystery fellow occupied.

Boot, to the tree. The branches rustled.

Kicked it the second time. Still no response.

She refused to play that game. Cenna summoned her drones and threatened: “If you don’t explain yourself, I’m gonna hang you upside down and call your cousin!”

The man tensed up over the threat. “Oy, oy, why do ya need to go that way? I was never here! Ne! Ver!”
Cenna snapped back, “We’re on high fucking alert you doof! If the Royal Guard saw you perching like some goddamn bird, they’re gonna think you’re either paparazzi or Gungnir. Now get down here already!”

“Sheesh, ya be blowin’ off yer fuse again. Fine, fine, have it yer way.”

The mystery man crawled down the tree in an unusual manner: he had the grace of a cat yet the stickiness of a gecko. It’s a bizarre method that clashed with his clothing of choice.

Once he got his feet on the ground, he stood on his feet like an actual person and started explaining himself.

“Thought ah should survey this timeline live, ya see. Fer the first time in forever we got a real development in this loopin’ mess. Cor Blimey, all of us Perseverance folk no longer remember what’s like to pass a full year without a blasted hiccup! Bet Sir Mezil feels the same.”

Cenna sighed, “I understand it’s tough. Heard a large number of Seers sealed themselves until we solve this case. You sure ain’t one of them, loony bin.”

The man chuckled. “To me, life’s interesting no matter where it spins. Like now! Oh lookit them Gungnir. Bein’ smart. Usin’ their scrubby gangster ranks to cause trouble, then let the misguided parents swoop in to play hero.”

A disgusted growl overshadowed the jolly disposition for one second. “Aye, it makes me wanna spit.”

He then resumed his usual tone. “Besides, Sealing meself be mighty uncomfortable. Ya think it’d be like wearin’ a simple patch on yer skin? No, no!”

“Tis be like tying yer hand to yer back. Or seein’ the world in a perpetual blur. Hated that numbness! Me Eye be a part of me. I rather deal with dejavu than to cripple meself. Even if it be temporary.”

The man waved his hand across his face. “Let’s change topics, aye? Ah still dunno how Sir Mezil managed to hold off the missing children case until now. Didn’t the ‘caring’ parents o’ Gungnir always try to make an expedition to dig them bones?”

Cenna pondered about that. “Well, you’re asking the wrong person. I don’t know what’s going on half the time too. I guess Mez managed to steer their attention away. And now, we have freaking Linda making a mess.”

“If ya wanna hear me opinion, it be those internet videos,” said the man. “’Cause the world saw how the goat royalty burn rain, they no longer think Ebott’s full o’ harmless funny creatures. They be shows o’ might. Confirmed them conspiracy fears.”

She groaned because he’s right. Her jaw dropped the floor when the videos circulated online. The Dreemurrs put on a fancy fire display while Undyne suplexed a freaking van.

They’re supposed to show that monsters are good people who use their might to protect others. But there will always be paranoid idiots taking things the wrong way.

Cenna crossed her arms. “Hey, you better get outta here ASAP. Lucy issued a warning today, and it sure as hell applies to you.”

“A warning from the fairest lady?”
“Yup. Sans Serif… he’s on her red list. Like, ‘stay the hell away’ level.”

The man gasped. “Cor Blimey all the way to the Sun! That be bad, bad news. Aye. I shall hide me skinny self until the ‘tornado’ blows over. B-but please don’t tell anyone I’m here. I was never in Ebott Town. Nope. Noooope.”

“Fine, I won’t say anything. But you can’t run away from Lucy.”

“She be a close friend and certainly not me cousin,” he said. “That’s solace enough fer me.”

The Seer was about to make a swift bend around the tree, but Cenna stopped him. “Hang on. I gotta ask something.”

“Oh? Shoot, madam.”

“How’s the ocean holding up?”

She’s sure that he’s frowning underneath that helmet. His tone turned serious. Grim. Nothing but bad news. “…It be turnin’ rickety and weak like a worm-eaten driftwood. If we don’t do somethin’ about it, there dark days loom ahead.”

“I dinnae think it be best if ya charge in alone, Judge Caraway. Even with yer Ascension. ‘Cause, the last time ya did that… we aborted the mission and pulled ya out from the waters.”

Cenna bit her lower lip. It’s exactly what Lucidia had said. There were a few timelines where Spring did arrive. From the sounds of it, all versions of that one mission ended in failure.

“Noted. Thanks,” she said, “In return, I won’t tell your folks that you sneaked your pelvis to Ebott without permission.”

“Thank ya too, madam.” Showed his gratitude with a good old salute. “Take care.”

He vanished behind the tree. Went into a shortcut, and hopefully headed straight back to his home on foreign soil.

Three hours later, her round stopped her in front of the bunny inn. Frisk exited from the premise and started searching the perimeters. Seems like they’re looking for someone.

“Yo Frisky!” Cenna greeted. Tried to squeeze in some of her usual pep to not make the kid worried.

“Yo Cenna,” Frisk greeted back. The kid didn’t have as much energy, despite being more well rested. Or so the big sister hoped.

“What’s wrong? Did ya get any sleep last night?”

The kid replied in their quiet yet sturdy manner. “I slept well, but I’m worried about Sans.”

It just had to be the guy Lucidia warned about.

Cenna asked, “What makes ya think he’ll stop by here?”

“Mom and I tried to look for him at his home, but he’s not in. Grillby’s still closed too. Since the Magi have Papyrus I thought he might try to talk to you about the current events.”

Come to think of it, he should. Perhaps that’s why Lucidia contacted her in the first place.
Cenna laughed a bit. “I’m still on day shift for a few more hours! Even if he dropped by, he’d leave real soon.”

Serious business now. “Hey, Frisky. Mind meeting me at the inn after my shift ends? We have some super important things to talk about. It’s about your upcoming exam.”

“…I gotta test ya on something. If my hunch is right, Mez’s gonna school ya extra hard this round. In the meantime I’ll keep a lookout for Sans too.”

“Okay,” Frisk nodded. “See you in the evening?”

“Yup. See ya then.”

After waving goodbye it’s back to the patrols. When she’s well out of the child’s sight, she clutched her magic watch tight.

_Mama, I pray your heirloom can get Frisky out of this trouble. If not…_ 
_…………_
_…Hell no. I don’t wanna fail them a second time!_

Chapter End Notes

Those who RPed with me on tumblr would recognize a certain accented man ;)

Those not, here’s a short explanation: I once RPed a character that had a Scottish-Aussie-whatever twist on his dialogue. Very interesting fella to play, complete with unusual worldview and mannerisms.

I needed someone to really leave an impression in most likely his only appearance in GQ. So I decided to salvage the characterization for this entry. The only trait I can confirm is Purple. The rest, I'm still not so sure.

I didn't forget that neurological diseases can affect emotion. It's part of the early symptoms too. Cenna is already an expressive person. To have those factors tossed in caused a Linda scenario to happen.

In the meantime, development ahoy! Feel free to post your thoughts in the comments box.
Cenna resumed her day in the most low-key, normal way possible. Kept it up until the orange evening sky loomed overhead. The moment her shift ended, she rushed to the bunny inn.

Frisk arrived first. Chatted with the innkeeper’s son in the meantime. Poor kids. They just got to the Surface after hearing the wonders, only to be holed up in their homes in deep uncertainty.

In true Frisky fashion, the kid politely excused themselves.

They skipped the greetings. Both sides were anxious to get their business going. Cenna invited them straight to her room.

The mess was plain embarrassing. Clothes strewn over the chair, dirty laundry stuffed in cupboards, and the blankets more or less crumpled half-folded into a lump of warmness.

“Sorry about my slop,” she apologized.

Frisk shook their head. “It’s okay. I’m used to it.”

“What?”

“Sans never tidies his place. Then again, I didn’t tidy mine either when I was travelling. It’s the nature of being a hotel guest.”

The kid then plopped themselves on the edge of the mattress.

Cenna couldn’t believe that she had just heard such wisdom from a prepubescent kid. Then again, Frisk is a Living Victory with lots of time-travelling experience under their belt.

What was the kid like in the first time loop? Their speech and behaviour would be different compared to their current state. But, by how much?

She shoved the thoughts away. There were more important questions that needed answers.

“How did your rollback-teleportation training go?”

“Good.” Frisk nodded, “It’s nowhere near as awesome as the big Judge though.”

“C’mon, that guy’s a master. Mighty unfair to compare with him. Show me a bit, yeah?”

Frisk walked to the other end of the room. In a snap, they reappeared back at the side of the bed. In the same sitting position too.

“So far, so good,” said Cenna. “Can you do the same in multiple spots? Like, having more SAVES between point A to point B.”
The kid rolled themselves across the bed, ran towards the chair near the window, and climbed on it. Then they became a living reverse slideshow montage of their little skit. Five shots in a span of two seconds.

When Frisk ended up at the side of the bed again, they then struck a Mettaton-approved pose.

*Holy…! That’s damn impressive!*
*Maybe I’m getting worried sick for nothing.*

The big sister clapped her hands. “That’s goooooood! Okay, time to start the next lesson.”

Holding her palm upwards towards the kid, the Magus said, “Plant your Mark on my hand. Think, ‘I want to preserve this state with my will’.”

As expected, the kid stared at her in confusion.

“You saw Mez’s fight with the Persona, right? Noticed how all the lightning-marked wounds never went away?”

Frisk nodded.

“That’s because they’re imbued with the Persona’s Determination. I taught you the basic maneuvering arts of a Living Victory. Now you must learn how to impose your ‘will’ on others. There’s a reason why it was once named ‘Willpower’ and not ‘Determination’.”

“Be ‘determined’ to maintain your ‘will’. That’s what a Mark does to others. Now, place your signature on my hand. Transfer it from your body to mine with a pat.”

Brows furrowed in intense focus, Frisk hovered their hand over Cenna’s. When they came into contact, a faint yellow light flashed between the gaps.

Yellow?

Cenna thought she’s seeing things, but no. When Frisk withdrew their arm, it revealed a yellow star shimmering on the surface of the upturned palm.

The kid was puzzled too. “Maybe mine has a special colour?”

After a few seconds, the star burned itself into nothingness.

Frisk muttered, “Or not.”

*Shit. Shit shit shit shit shit!*  
*What’s happening?! I thought every Living Victory can do this on instinct!*

“Try again,” said Cenna. Tried to remain calm for the kid’s sake.

It all resulted in the same. Every single one of Frisk’s attempts ended up with a yellow star that evaporated in a matter of seconds.

“…Am I in trouble?” The kid asked, perturbed by the development.

Cenna bit her lower lip. “I’m afraid so, Frisky. Dammit. This is bad. Really, really bad. How does your SAVE look like again?”
“A shining yellow star. Like the stuff I put on your hand, but much bigger. And they float at specific spots.”

“Kid, you have no idea how lucky you are. That star was literally eating itself. All properly functioning Marks are red. If you weren’t such a crazy powerful Pure Red, you wouldn’t be able to maintain them. Those stars? The moment they burn up all that DT, you’re gonna lose your SAVES too.”

“Um. I did… I did lose them,” the kid admitted. “Ever since the Barrier broke, I couldn’t make any new SAVES either. Whenever I try to time travel, it would take me back to the beginning of my Underground adventure.”

It horrified Cenna to think that her sibling had survived so long on such an unstable power. As if they sailed the seas on a tiny, rickety boat.

“Oh god, I had no idea. Dammit, I should have given you this much, much sooner.”

She wasted no time to unclasp the Trap Harvester and fix the cord around Frisk’s neck. It’s a little long for a kid.

“Mama’s watch belongs to you now,” said Cenna.

“Don’t you need it?” Oh sweet child, still thinking about the big sister even in times like these.

“Nah. Not anymore. You need this way, way, waaaaay more than me.”

“From now on, train your focus by pumping Determination into the Trap Harvester. You want to fill it up at a consistent rate for as long as you can. If you do this right, the mirrored-side of the watch will start to move. Aim for a minute per second. Watch the big hand.”

Frisk had no problem pumping Determination into the watch.

Maintaining a slow and steady pace? In other words, consistency: that’s a whole different ballgame. The hands on the watch jerked at an erratic rate. Stumbled. Sometimes skipping whole hours forward. In physical terms, Frisk was running before they learned how to walk.

The child growled in frustration. They’re growing impatient. For a good reason too: Ebott Town’s public relations hung in the balance.

Cenna stopped Frisk. “That’s enough for now. You should take short, frequent practice sessions. Five minutes of focus, rest for ten. Repeat that three more times then stop for at least an hour.”

“What happens if I practice too much?” asked Frisk.

The Magus swirled a finger on the side of her head. “You’ll become Chara: drugged mad all the way to the sky. Too many Living Victories neglect self-regulation and go insane. That’s why we have the Crimson Hall, you know.”

“Frisky, listen. The problem ain’t that you’re weak. On the contrary, you’re too damn strong. Like letting you drive a speedboat without lessons. You gotta learn how to control the flow or else you’re gonna crash. Get it?”

It’s hard to tell what they’re thinking behind that stoic face. Lack of reactions doesn’t mean they’re emotionless.
Nodding at Cenna, they said: “Okay. I understand.”

When they shifted their body, the watch’s key clicked against the metallic surface. It caught the child’s curiosity. “What’s this for?” they asked.

“See that keyhole at the bottom of the watch? That’s linked to a mechanism that releases all the stored Determination in one go, making both sides move in sync again. Use it only when you want to cancel the effects early.”

“Early? Does that mean there’s a time limit?” they asked back.

“Yeah. The time discrepancy between the two sides indicate the total time you have before you run out of DT. You know the watch is active when the mirrored side starts ticking backwards.”

“Okay…” Frisk scrunched their brows, trying hard to remember all that information. “But wouldn’t it make more sense if the real-side caught up with it instead?”

Cenna shrugged. “That, you gotta ask our foreparents. They designed the watch this way.”

“Are there any other magic tools that use Determination?”

“Yup. There’s a few but I’m not at liberty to talk about it. Lock and key, you know.”

It’s tempting to spill the beans about the Grandmaster. Frisk doesn’t realise it yet, but they had already heard and seen the life of this truly great man.

After all, he will be Frisk’s other mentor. All Supreme Judges train under him at some point of their lives. No exceptions.

“Anyway, lesson done! You’re doing great kid. Keep it up!”

The child looked up to their big sister and asked: “Can we look for Sans now? I have something to tell him.”

“Uh, about that,” the lady rubbed the back of her neck and sighed. “I’ve not seen him at all. It ain’t smart to keep wandering all day.”

Frisk lowered their head, hesitating. “There’s one place that I haven’t checked. But, I really hope he’s not there.”

So the kid knew where he might be, yet wished he wouldn’t be?

Cenna let them lead the way. As she walked, Lucidia’s warning continued to ring in her mind.

“Sans Serif’s primary self-imposed directive is to preserve the safety of his brother, Papyrus. What he considers ‘safe’ is undetermined still.”

“Making him at ease with you is the best safeguard on your life. Maintain your current cordiality, but stay your lips on sensitive information.”

Before she knew it, The Magus found herself standing before the skeleton brothers’ home. She expected the kid to knock. But…

…They turned away from the entrance and walked around the corner. Twice.

Before her was a familiar backdoor.
The Magus recognized this place. It’s where she delivered the letter. Lucidia told her that if no one answered the front, go around to the back and wait.

Sans was the one who had then opened the door.

Her hairs stood on their ends.

“What’s behind there?” Cenna asked.

“A secret,” Frisk answered. They dug into their pockets for a silver key and poked it into the keyhole.

It won’t turn. The confused kid tried to insert it again, but it wouldn’t work. “Odd. Is it jammed? Maybe the lock got rusted…”

*Or, he’s changed the locks…*

The Magus placed a finger over her lips. In silent steps, she inched towards the door and pressed her ears against it.

She heard the roars of fire. The high-pitched grind of steel sawing steel. The drilling, the hammering…

*A workshop? No. It’s a lab? Lucy has one too. For SANS to have a personal lab, of all people…*

*He’s inside. I can sense him. Seems like he’s building something. What’s he working on?*

The voice of a man then whispered into her ears:

“Didn’t anyone tell you it’s rude to spy?”

Cenna’s first instinct, reach for the gun.

Second instinct, point it at the source of the deep, creepy voice.

Third instinct, determine target.

Sans held his hands up in the air. “Whoa, whoa, whoa, easy there. It’s just a joke.”

The poorest taste of jokes ever in her book. Maybe Papyrus had the right to scream at his brother’s sense of humour after all.

*Something’s wrong.*

*I’m not putting my gun down.*

*My breathing is getting faster. Too fast. I’m jittering.*

“Hey, no need to get so ‘rattled’ over a bag of funny bones like me.” Sans winked his right eye. “C’mon. Breathe in, breathe out. Chillax. Or maybe you need more puns?”

A worried Frisk had their arms raised, ready to push the gun away if anything happens. “C-Cenna…? Are you alright?”

*Calm down. Calm. Down. The kid is here. If I panic, he’ll rat me out in a blitz.*

A few seconds later, she slipped the weapon back into its holster.

“What the fuck, really?” Cenna snapped, “Just REALLY?! I’m sure outta everyone in this town, YOU know it’s bloody dangerous to sneak up on armed personnel. I thought you’re some lightning-
head punk trying to ambush me!

Sans apologized with a shrug. “Sorry, my bad there. Thing’s been pretty high-strung after all. I mean, Papyrus is not okay. You’re not okay. Nobody’s okay. Except me, of course. I’m completely fine.”

Cenna squinted at him. “You’re like, the last person I expect to be fine.”

The short skeleton snickered at that statement, as if the ups and downs of life were nothing but sources of laughter.

“Hoo boy, do you take me as a bad bone made up of angst? I know the edge is in the rage lately, but that’s not my style.”

“Oooookay,” There’s no choice but to accept that answer. Refuse, and it’ll rouse suspicion.

Pointing to the door behind her, Cenna asked, “May I ask you what’s with the racket down there then?”

Sans pulled out a vial of thin, sky-blue liquid from his hoodie’s pockets.

Brow, raised. “What’s that?”

“Echo Flower extract. Heard from the grapevine that Doctor Gaster is trying to make a gut-friendly curry for your boss. I figured, if these flowers record sounds, maybe they can record flavours too? Taste is all about playing with receptor signals after all. What you’re hearing down there were leftovers from my distilling attempts.”

Sans, helping out Gaster? After that fallout?

No way in hell I’m buying that statement.

“I know that look,” so said the skeleton. “It’s the face of someone disbelieving me.”

Again, he winked. “I don’t blame ya. I have absolutely no reason to help him after all. He can rot into bone dust for all I care. But, my old folks are stuck in there. Cruel, isn’t it? So as a good son I have to alleviate some of their bad lot in life.”

Cenna noticed he's only winking with the right eye; he’s fixating the left on her.

And only the left.

His attention turned to Frisk. “Hey buddy, sorry for making you worry. So, what’s up?”

Frisk being Frisk, showed Sans their parents’ memento without hesitation. Explained its functions, their unstable Determination problem, and why Cenna gave it to them.

“Oh yeah, it's called the ‘Trap Harvester’ right? Appropriate. Watch it work like clockwork on trapping the big Judge at his own timey-wimey game.”

Sans then began cracking more clock jokes. The kid laughed.

Wait a minute.
Just hold on a fucking minute!
I’m sure as hell I’ve never told him the name!
In the most discreet manner possible, The Magus pumped magic into her eyes. Right now, she’s counting on her thick clothes to hide the faint gleam.

Yellow is the colour of Truesight: the magic to expose secrets and to perceive truths beyond optical illusions. However, there were two little snags.

One, she’ll see a translucent image at best. She is human after all. Only Seers will receive a crisp, clear picture of the hidden magic. Truesight potions exist for a reason; they force hidden magic to be visible via the naked eye, and thus give full clarity to those born of physical flesh.

Two, channel the power too fast and her chest will glow too bright. Getting caught red-handed by Sans was the last thing she wanted.

He’s starting to examine the device with his own two skeletal hands. Cenna slipped her hands into her coat to hide their tension.

*Just a little more…!*

At last, she managed to channel the bare minimum to activate her Yellow magic. A faint image of cyan, yellow, and purple sat layered over Sans’ left eye.

It’s unsealed.

*When?*
*Where?*
*How?!*

For a split second, Sans’ incorporeal irises stared square at her.

He said: “**Didn’t anyone tell you it’s rude to spy?**”

Cenna’s heart skipped a beat. She staggered backwards and slammed against the door. Her yelp rewarded the prankster.

“Geez,” said Sans. “Did you see a ghost or something? You look pale despite being dark skinned. Heh. Always found that paradoxical about humans. Why not grab a grub and catch some ‘Z’s? Give that poor overworked noggin some rest.”

Cenna began doubting herself. She’s exhausted and she still had yet to recover from her fallout with Linda.

…A hallucination?

**Guh. Did… did my condition reach to that stage already? It couldn’t be; I’ve been taking my meds on time.**

*I don’t know what to believe anymore.*

She squeezed her eyes shut for just a second.

“Yeah,” said Cenna, “Yeah, I should. Thanks. I’m gonna head back to the inn now. Oh, Muffet is looking for you Sans. Said something about an order.”

“Heh,” Sans replied. “Thanks for informing me, lady. I should get my lazy butt over there. Hey Frisk, why not come with me? I’ll join you for dinner. Tori included, of course.”
The Magus slowed her steps on purpose. Leaned against the wall with her head low to feign illness, though at this rate it might as well be real.

Nngh, I don’t want to leave Frisky alone with him. But I don’t wanna get caught either.

That was so close. Too close. 
I could be dead where I stand.

“I’m going to take the Trial of the Crimson Hall.”

How Cenna wished that it was just a dizzy spell messing with her head. When she turned around, she saw her younger sibling standing resolute in their choice.

Sans furrowed his brows. “You sure, kid?”

Frisk nodded. “Yes. No more delays. I know I don’t need to be certified by the Magi to become an ambassador. But, passing the Trial at my age would impress the public. I have to win them over before Gungnir does.”

The skeleton darkened his sockets. “In other words, your objective hasn't changed.”

“I’m afraid so.”

Moments later, Sans was back to his genial self. “Welp, looks like you’ve made up your mind. All the best kid. I’m rootin’ for ya.”

The kid tossed their arms around his faux-pudgy figure. They’re so happy together.

Cenna felt her heart-rate rising.

W-what? No way! I expected him to reason with them or something. 
Frisky ain’t ready for that shit yet!

Frisk looked up at her with big, confident smile. “Will you sign the letter of approval for me?”

I promised them.

Yeah. Yeah, I did.

The circumstances that piled up to this day demanded a decision on Frisk’s part. She had no choice in this matter.

“Yeah Frisky,” Cenna nodded. “I’ll do that. Issue an official statement for your goat parents too.”

Old man, you better know what you’re doing.

If you screw this up I swear, I’ll plant a damn stake through your heart. Doesn’t matter if you rewind time as long you remember the pain!

Chapter End Notes

Complete with a cliffhanger. As usual, your thoughts and speculations will be much appreciated ;)

Is your mind blown yet? Is the next chapter THE chapter we've been waiting for? Yes: the next chapter will feature Sans.
Seraphim

Chapter Notes

Here we go.

It's the long awaited Sans chapter.

81, 82, and 83 were done roughly the same time. Hence the fast posting. 84 will take a while.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hours before, right in the darkest of the night…

The elder brother sat in the shadows of his atelier, stripped of the power that once defined his being.

After handing over the living sunshine to the Magi, he retreated to his secret laboratory. Kept the lights shut to focus his thoughts.

Sans slumped over on the sofa. Hands, gripping together. Tight.

This is exactly what I tried to prevent.

I knew what those colours meant ever since I read Paps’ records.
I knew what he could become.
I knew ‘that man’ would attempt to push my brother to the limit under the ideal of unleashing his potential.

I knew it would end up this way.

It’s all within expectations. Within calculations.

Everything.

And yet I teamed up with Gaster to build the Chronoviewer.

All because I cannot cheat an investigation without my Eye.

Acidic chuckles echoed in the dead air.

“I am such a terrible brother.”

He got on his feet, walking past the flour-dusted cocoons of bottled Determination.

Sans pulled down the dusty sheets that hid the wreckage beneath. He tossed the fabric aside, letting it fall into a useless haphazard lump.

The mangled skeletal remains of the Chronograph continued to mock him to this day. For a long time, he wanted to fix this. Tune it to his own colours so he could use it to analyze the past, present, and future.
He wanted this fixed so much. So, so very much. Not because he wanted change fate or to bring back the lost Gaster, as many would assume.

It’s so that Papyrus would never, ever need to rise as a true hero.

Until now, the machine froze at a certain state of time. There’s no electrical input, but the broken side-screen continued to display an eternal string of nines. Red, from top to bottom.

Sans used telekinesis to move the machine aside. His grip had always been strong for as long as he could remember.

He had caused his parents much confusion. Whenever he spied on their nightly discussions, he’d hear assorted questions.

‘Isn’t that supposed to be Blue magic?’, they would ask.

‘Why does he have 1 HP?’
‘How could he be so weak yet so powerful?’
‘How could he be so sluggish yet so quick?’

His entire existence had been a cheating paradox.

Hidden behind the wreck was none other than a complex arcanagram, mounted on the wall. At its core, a small switch rested in the open maws of a human skull.

Sans conjured a bone with hand glyphs written all over. This mechanism was designed to recognize his magic alone, similar to the fingerprint or iris scanners of human society. The glyphs contain multiple passwords, just in case someone decided that stealing a piece of his magic was a valid choice of action.

He inserted the key into the keyhole; the jawbones snapped shut and pumped energy into the rest of the gram. It lit up, turning pieces in their places like gears on a clockwork.

The wall slid aside to reveal a hidden workshop; his personal ‘True Lab’.

On the left it’s the research corner: the place for thinking, drafting, and calculating. Whiteboards more or less replaced the walls in that section. Provided all the space he’d ever need.

He had more drawers here, though they all exist on regular time. It’s where he stored his prototype blueprints, stationery, and a host of other supplies.

On the right side, it’s the crafting zone: a forge, mechanical saws, electronics station, mould makers and casts, tool racks, an anvil, a workshop bench, even a power hammer that he stole from Gaster’s lab before Alphys moved in.

How else could he have made Papyrus’ ‘battle body’? It may look like a lightweight costume, but it’s pretty sturdy. It's why that DEMON brat aimed for the neck.

With his magic, Sans transported all 49 cocoons of bottled Determination into the chamber. Set them down on the far left corner for the next phase of his plan.

When he stepped into the workshop, the gears of the Arcanagram rolled back to their default position and became a wall once more. It sealed this place away from the rest of the world.

“Let’s get to work,” he said to himself.
He switched on the lights. Pulled out a voice recorder from the drawers and loaded it with some batteries. All audio comments were for his own references alone.

Sans fixed the microphone on his jacket and turned on the device. At least the batteries still work. Then, he took out a marker pen from the desk drawers. Made it float with telekinesis so he could reach places beyond his short stature.

“Entry number 1.”

“‘Determination is a battle of wills’,” he said. “As stated by Lucidia of House Berendin, the prime chronicler of the ‘War of the Red Victory’.”

“Red Majors whose Aspects had come to maturity are known as the ‘Living Victories’. Every Living Victory has the potential to own the ‘Keys of Fate’. In other words, the ability to manipulate time at a cosmic scale.”

“Each Living Victory bears a signature that defines their character. They’re called ‘Marks’. A person’s Mark determines the method of their SAVES and their possible skillsets.”

The pen drew the shape of a lightning bolt facing a butterfly. Surrounded that with a large circle to represent the arena Mezil once fought in.

“Subject A: The Last Persona. Subject B: Mezil Thyme.”

“When Living Victories have competing levels of Determination, the ownership of time blurs. It is entirely possible for one Living Victory to force the other into his or her ‘game’. A scenario, a stage, a campaign that must be seen through to the end.”

“Subject A did exactly that. Striking himself with a bolt of lightning is his method to SAVE. With that much Determination, he forced Subject B into an inescapable scenario.”

“Though Subject B holds the Keys of Fate, the location and timing of his SAVES are at the mercy of Subject A.”

Sans wanted to recreate all thirteen rounds of that time-looping battle. Wanted, was the word. Right now, he doesn’t trust his memory. He would have a much stronger recollection if he had his Eye.

More frustration welled up in his empty, tornado heart.

He commanded the pen to fill the tridecagram in the arena.

“Subject B’s wife, Lucidia Berendin, is an Arcanagram specialist. She provides all the support Subject B requires to fight against a physically superior opponent. One of her many grand works included the weaponization of the Seer’s Seal. From now on, I will refer it as ‘WESS’.”

“The standard Seer’s Seal does the following: Draws and channels all Seven Aspects for input. Reserves one point to burn Determination as a reagent. Reroutes the remaining six untouched Aspects back to the target. A WESS applies this same logic, except it’s expanded to cover an area as opposed to the targeted location of a standard Seal.”

“This affects everyone and anyone within that circle: both in the present and on any Seer who gazes into the past. This conceals Subject B’s final execution method against Subject A.”

“In other words, his finishing move would only be known to two people: his wife and himself.”
Sans crossed out the lightning mark.

“My observation indicates that this WESS paralyzed Subject A by stripping him of all Determination. A human body contains levels of Determination beyond monster capacity. However, it is possible to drain them.”

“When I was an assistant for Doctor Gaster, I noticed that SOULS become slow and sluggish when drained of their Determination. A Red SOUL is defined by this substance, and Living Victories have these pumping in their bloodstream.”

“To have it all burned away in a second will in no doubt inflict intense physiological shock. The screams of agony from Subject A further cement this theory.”

“Despite that, Subject B could still act.”

“Why?”

Sans drew a question mark beside the butterfly.

He capped the pen and stared at the diagram for an entire minute. His mind racing at a mile a second, expanding to all possibilities based everything he had learned up to this point.

After one deep breath, he resumed his analysis.

“Determination is a battle of wills. Volume plays an integral role. But, it’s not the only factor.”

“Subject C: Frisk. Lucidia Berendin’s chronicles indicate that all stable Marks are red. The shape is a unique signature, but the colour is not. Subject C’s confession mails described their SAVES to be a yellow star. Stars… burn themselves to shine.”

“It is possible that they failed to make their Mark -- and therefore multiple SAVES -- due to their unstable output of Determination. Judging from the number of Marks Subject B makes, it indicates little effort for an expert. What if these Marks require a small, yet steady supply to maintain their existence?”

“This correlates with my attempts of draining Subject B’s Mark. They refill at a consistent rate from an inexhaustible source.”

“If this is the case, do Marks have an upper limit? Instead of draining the container, what if I push it beyond its intended capacity? End recording.”

With that, he shut off the microphone. He placed the marker pen aside. Searched the drawers for drafting tools: ball-point pens, paper, rulers, and assorted geometric aid. Anything to sketch a concept Gram.

Sans calculated without cease. He’s so close to a breakthrough. Too close.

Once he finished the sketch phase, he began arranging the 49 bottles of Determination into the widest circle his workshop could provide. It provided a literal outline of his available space.

His mind wrote down the necessary calculations bone per bone. Conjured the numbers together with the magical substrate. Left no surface blank in waste.

Beads of sweat trickled down the surface of his skull. What time is it now? Can he let fatigue get the better of him again?
Sans refused. Not now. Not with his brother at stake. He can’t afford to be lazy now.

What was the exact method to break Lucidia’s Seal again? In the midst of his ponderings, his hand touched a folded piece of paper in his pockets.

It’s Gaster’s notes.

Without hesitation, he integrated them into his current calculations.

After a ton of paradoxical effort, the Seer completed the most forbidden of all Arcanagrams: a 49-point star. A Quadraginta Nova. Otherwise known as the ‘Soul Stealer’.

“…Heh,” he smirked. “Funny coincidence. It wouldn’t take this shape if I didn’t give Muffet that other bottle of DT.”

Turning the recording device back on, Sans said: “Entry number 2. I had modified the Soul Stealer in a similar manner to WESS. At the same time, I had layered an extra code on top of this. It’s Doctor Gaster’s solution to Lucidia Berendin’s Seer’s Seal.”

“First, the Gram will attempt to break the Seer’s Seal on my Eye. Subject B’s Mark will activate upon shattering, and thus exposing itself in full view. I speculate this is when the Mark will be at its most vulnerable state.”

“This is where the Soul Stealer comes in: instead of consolidating SOULS, the code will now merge and condense Determination. They will be prepared ahead of time.”

He used a little Blue magic to jump over the bottles. Landed in the middle of a small square. There’s a concentrated circle of glyphs between his feet: an activation point.

“Now, inserting DT straight into my bonely self will inflict a state worse than death. But, I programmed the Gram to redirect all 49 canisters of Determination into a ‘human entity’. The only human entity on my being is Subject B’s Mark: the butterfly.”

“Although if we were to take his nickname as ‘The Vampire of Time’ at face value, Mezil Thyme had discarded his humanity a long time ago. Only a sense of conscience separates a Living Victory from a Determination Monster.”

“What does it mean to be human? I wouldn’t know. End recording.”

Microphone, off. The activation will be too noisy to record.

Sans wrote down the final piece of his equation on a single, long femur. He raised it high above his head and pierced it straight into the gap of his Arcanagram.

The workshop shone bright in the light of magic.

The Gram ripped away the silk cocoons and shattered the canister glass. Determination spilled on the floor, yet they did not spread. They formed a tight circle of crimson at the perimeters, primed for the final phase.

Lucidia’s Seal pulsed shockwaves of force into the room. Any lightweight objects were blown off their surface and shoved into the corners of the wall.

*Almost there.*

*Almost.*
I can hear it crack.

The Seer’s Seal shattered. Flakes floated away, and soon after they turned red. As he had expected, the butterfly attempted to revert them to their pristine state.

Now!

All in one go, forty-nine streams of condensed Determination pierced the butterfly. It reminded Sans of Undyne’s spears shooting down a creature in mid-flight.

There’s a certain sense of irony in this picture. It’s from this Mark that Sans had drained so much DT…

Now, that very same quantity became a weapon for his goals.

How appropriate.

The plan worked: the Mark combusted, cannibalizing itself like Frisk’s unstable star.

Red gave way to the tricolour flames. Sans’ Seer’s Eye ignited upon the first opportunity of freedom.

He clutched the socket. It’s going out of control from the sudden release, flashing as the roaring flames leaked between his finger bones.

Sans landed on his knees and let out a loud cry.

* * *

It’s a timeline that had ceased to exist.

Papyrus’ sobbing could be heard all around.

Dense trees got in the way. The translucent canopy of fresh leaves blocked out the sky in their ever-sprawling confusion.

“Papyrus!”

The Sans of that time yelled for his brother’s name.

He searched and searched. The crying grew louder, meaning that he’s getting warmer.

Suddenly, it stopped.

“Papyrus? Papyrus! Bro, where are you?”

Did the humans get him?

Please.

Please don’t die.

Not on the Surface.

He heard the voice of a stern man. Recognized it right away.
Sans teleported towards that direction. He found his brother curled up under a tree, covered in leaves, twigs, and streaks of mud.

Fear rattled his bones. He had his mother’s scarf wrapped around his skull, trying to hide from the world.

But, he’s not alone. There were two other people. Sans observed from the covers of the foliage.

Mezil Thyme knelt before Papyrus. Standing right beside the old human was a woman in a sapphire dress. She had long, curly hair and wore a white mask to conceal her face.

They both had a butterfly brooch with the exact same design. Except, one in red and the other in blue.

“I’M SCARED, MISTER MAGUS!” Papyrus whimpered. “THERE’S SO MUCH VIOLENCE AND HATRED AND NEGATIVITY EVERYWHERE! T-THE ASGORE CLONE, I-I MEAN QUEEN TORIEL SHE’S…! SHE’S…!”

Papyrus broke down crying again.

Mezil reached out for the young skeleton’s shoulder. “Listen well, Papyrus. This timeline is beyond salvaging. I need your courage now more than ever.”

A single tap on the chest brought the monster’s white SOUL to the surface. It had Mezil’s Mark, still as bright as the day he planted it.

“Remember our promise? We can prevent this bad future from happening. Together.”

“B-BUT, HOW?” Papyrus asked.

“I will protect your community. This time, for certain. I had recorded all of the enemy’s moves and I will ensure their interception.”

“You will bear the vital role of convincing Frisk -- and consequently the local monsterkind -- to trust the Magus Association. This timeline crumbled because we failed to cooperate.”

Papyrus shrank deeper into himself. Sans knew the signs of a true breakdown and he’s seeing all the red flags right now.

“I… I CAN’T. I CAN’T DO THIS!” He said, “I-I’M A NOBODY, MISTER MAGUS! ALL MY CLAIMS ABOUT BEING SUPER POPULAR AND AWESOME AND GREAT ARE JUST WHAT I WANTED TO BELIEVE. THEY’RE NOT TRUE!”

“I TRIED SO SO SO VERY HARD TO TELL EVERYONE THAT YOU’RE GOOD, BUT THEY REFUSE TO BELIEVE! NOT EVEN FRISK WOULD LISTEN TO ME!”

Sans rather be slashed in half than to watch his brother’s optimism shattered.

The sapphire woman lowered herself down to his level. Yet, she never quite touched the ground.

Magic?


Could she be… a Seer?
The past Sans couldn’t believe he’d ever see another member of his kind.

The woman said with a gentle voice, “You’re not nothing, Papyrus. My husband and I consider you the best candidate for a reason. They didn’t listen to you in this timeline. But in the next, you will have much better chances. Look at my eyes.”

Papyrus wiped the tears away with the back of his gloves and obeyed the instruction.

The woman’s eyes lit up in colour. Right green, left blue. Both bore an underlying shade of purple.

Both?

Sans froze. He thought his Eye had fooled him, but he’s born with Truesight. He sees nothing but the truth.

The data he read was this:

Right: Green / Purple
Left: Blue / Purple

No Seer or human can have more than three functioning Aspects at a time. Hence, the general rule was that a Dichromatic Seer would either have two Pures, or one Mixed and one Pure.

Yet, this woman had two Mixed Eyes that conform to the three-trait rule. She’s a rare spawn of an already rare spawn. Her true colours were literally hidden from plain sight.

Papyrus gasped. “OH MY GOD! YOU HAVE MAGIC EYES TOO??! D-DOES THAT MEAN YOU’RE A SKELLY LIKE ME? AND YOU’RE MISTER MAGUS’ SPECIAL SOMEONE??!!?”

She nodded. “Yes, I am. And I’m also a Chronographer. I’ll train you in our ways, Papyrus. From the basics and beyond.”

He cheered up almost in an instant. Instead of crying tears of fear, he shed them out of joy. “WE’RE PRACTICALLY FAMILY! I’M SO SO SO SO HAPPY TO MEET YOU MISS SEER!”

The woman giggled. “It’s Lady Lucidia, dear.”

“My wife will be your mentor,” said Mezil. “When I LOAD my SAVE, gather your closest ones and explain to them what you’ve seen. My wife would then show you the shortcuts to the Magus Association and train you in any way she sees fit. Do you understand?”

Papyrus took a deep breath to calm himself down. Filled with newfound courage, he answered in the most enthusiastic yells: “YES!!!”

Sans then teleported out from his hiding spot and objected to the plan. With darkened sockets, he said: “I won’t let you.”

“SANS?” his brother blurted. “BUT, WHY? I’M MISTER MAGUS’ PROXY. IT’S MY JOB!”

“Papyrus, I won’t. I can’t. I can’t let you be a hero.”

Mezil stood up tall and faced square against the most dangerous skeleton in Ebott. His wife floated behind her husband, ready to defend him if required.

“May I enquire why do you insist so?” he asked.
“I don’t want him to remember any of this,” Sans argued. “It’s too much. You saw him break down, Magus. He just went through horrors that traumatize humans for life, let alone monsters! Do you think it’s a good idea for him to bear those scars forever?”

The younger brother spoke up. “SANS, MISTER MAGUS IS TRYING HIS UBER BEST TO HELP US! CAN’T YOU SEE THAT?”

“I don’t want you to end up broken like me!”

His brother stared back in shocked silence. Sans had never snapped at his brother before. Never. Never ever. The afterthought alone screamed ‘trash’ in his mind.

“Papyrus,” he said, “I… I want you to remain pure. Untarnished. Pristine. You throw around dark humour like I make puns. You have no idea how horrible the world really is and that makes me happy.”

“I wish… I wish I could live that way. I wish I could take war and violence as fantasy and fiction, like Alphys’ anime collection. I wish I could honestly believe that getting an electric shock would just result in frizzly clothes and a little soot.”

“But I can’t. I had never been able to! I see the truth and death in everything, Papyrus. Everything. Everyone. Including you.”

His stocky ribs rose and fell. What is this sensation? Shame? Hurt?

“…I don’t take eight-hour naps because I want to,” he said. “I get lost in dreams. Nightmares. Every now and then, I see you die. Most of the time it’s by decapitation, but I’ve dreamt of worse. Much, much worse.”

There’s never a sleep cycle where he didn’t dream these nightmares.

But after his parents’ death, they grew longer and frequent. They became real, and he had control. Which made things even more frustrating as his efforts always were for naught.

He’s struggling to wake up when he sleeps. And he’s struggling to stay awake when he doesn’t sleep.

It had become extra noticeable after Flowey started his ‘game’. The usually oblivious Papyrus started chiding him on his ‘laziness’.

He didn’t want to be lazy.

But each RESET made it more difficult to ACT.

Why bother when The End draws nigh? Why bother when it all amounts to nothing?

“What alternative do you propose?”

Mezil’s question grabbed his attention.

That’s right. There’s still a brother to save.

Stretching his arms wide, Sans offered himself. “Make me your proxy. Remove your butterfly mark on Papyrus and plant that on me.”
That statement earned him a narrowed glare. Mezil replied: “Why should I trust a man who trusts no one?”

An offer of self alone was not good enough. If that’s the case, it’s time to raise the stakes.

“Sheal me,” said Sans. “If your intel is as good as you say, you’ll notice that I depend on my Seer’s Eye way too much. Sealing it will be your only guarantee that I won’t fall back to old habits. It’ll also cut down my combat potential to a tenth.”

“My actions will thus ‘butterfly’ out into the great unknown. Perhaps it’s a terrible idea. But maybe it’s the breakthrough we need to avoid another damn time loop. What do you think?”

He hoped to anyone out there that Mezil will take up his offer. Anything to spare Papyrus from the burden. Anything.

Husband and wife whispered to each other, discussing the validity of the offer.

“We have come to a decision,” said Mezil. “My wife will seal you. But, under the condition that you will not remember what happened in this timeline either.”

“My Mark will instead be on the Seal. As long it remains there, our contract is valid.”

Sans furrowed his brows. “Are you sure? If I don’t remember my own deal, I’ll do everything in my power to free myself.”

“When or if you do, you will remember this moment of time. It will be up to you to honour your intentions. Fits the chaos theory of my Mark, does it not?”

The skeleton could feel the edges of his mouth curl up into a grin.

“Heh. I like that. It’s a deal. And one more thing: tell no one that it’s my own idea.”

“Your wish is my command,” said Mezil. Sarcasm dripped from every word. “Sometimes I wonder who your ‘god’ is, seraphim.”

Lucidia began to speak in the language of hands. Her conjured bones formed the thirteen-point star of the Seer’s Seal, which she then imbued into his vision.

That’s all he remembered from this timeline.

Whatever happened after his blindness didn’t matter. A RESET would soon follow. The next timeline will begin by the mechanisms of his making.

* * *

Sans Serif was unsure which shocked him more.

His self-inflicted suffering.
Or the desperation of his gambit.

In a stupor, he reached for the microphone and switched it on.
“…Entry number 3,” he said. Cold, stoic, monotone. “The experiment was a success. My hypothesis true, and my theories sound.”

“The past timeline indicates a societal fallout at its worst possible. It’s likely fuelled by the discovery of the Fallen Children’s graves in the Underground.”

“Monsterkind’s inability to handle this situation reignited the xenophobia of ancient days. Humans are further empowered by the science of firearms and explosives. This gives them the kind of ranged attack once exclusive to magic.”

“All within calculations. Within expectations.”

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

There should be new emotions now. A tornado of them. He had felt this once before: when he found out that he had murdered Frisk’s parents.

Should. Should. Should is the word. He should feel lots of things.

Rage.
Hatred.
Vengeance.
Fear.
Worry.
Despair.

Yet, his heart remained silent. Numb. Hollow. The tornado was not made of wind: it’s a wall of bones. Rotating forevermore.

Where is the line between genuine feelings and emulation?

Sans asked himself a question: “…Will legal rights protect us?”

A moment later, he answered it himself: “No, it will not. Humans can break laws all on their own. And there’s no guarantee the government will honour such legality. It can be undermined either by corruption, or overturned by the future ruling heads themselves.”

“Will ideals about the sanctity of life protect us? No. Nothing is sacred. Humankind had enacted policies to oppress or purge the minority too many times to count, either through marginalization or literal genocide. If they can’t get along with folks of similar biology or even the same colour, what hope do we monsters have?”

“Let’s narrow it down. Can the Magus Association protect us as they had protected the other survivors? No. If the past timeline is of any indication, enemies can outsmart them despite their best efforts.”

“…It would not surprise me that betrayal destroyed some of the protected nations. Rulers can be upright people, but the same cannot be said for others under their command. If anyone with reasonable power conspired to cover up their bad deeds, time may naturally flow past the point of no return. The damage is done and no SAVES to prevent the tragedy exist.”

“Can Subject B, the current holder of the Keys of Fate, protect us then? Perhaps. He’s sharp, and he had the additional support of a Chronographer for a spouse. But, he’s growing old. He could fight tooth and nail to secure Ebott… but what can a man do when age claims him? If he’s in his fifties
now. He might have two more decades at best.”

“What of his presumed successor, Subject C?”

The words stopped flowing. Sans pondered over that person for a long time.

It’s the face of a friend.
It’s the face of an enemy.
It’s the face of his best student.
It’s the face of his worst traitor.

Many would ask, ‘Which is the real Frisk?’

But Sans would not consider that question.

Those are all potential faces of Frisk. They could be anyone they so desire.

Anyone.

“The potential of this entity are too great to consider for long term security. End recording.”

*Sorry kid. That’s an objective observation.*
*Despite all the trust you’ve placed in me…*

*I still can’t return the favour.*
*I just... can’t.*

Sans stood up. Dragged himself across the floor as if he’s the shambling undead of myth.

He faced a fresh, blank whiteboard. Uncapped the marker pen. Made it float with magic.

Sans began writing down the basis for his next experiment. Data filled the space at the rate of a computer.

“Entry number 4. Supreme Judge James Pashowar was murdered by a lesser Living Victory named Kisei Yuzukitsui. Subject D and Subject E respectively.”

“Subject E contacted Subject A with an invitation to an all-out time-traveller’s war. This tells me that Subject E believed he had a method to kill Gungnir’s faux-god, different from the WESS Subject B relied on. I’m inclined there’s more to this than overconfidence.”

“After all, Subject E had already eliminated Subject D… the strongest of all Living Victories ever to have lived. Subject A does not compare.”

“History repeats itself through ignorance or active recreation. In my case, it won’t be a mere repetition. It will instead be inspiration. End recording.”

Sans paused his writing for a moment to think.

“I need a sample…”

He turned around to look at the center of the Gram. Tiny glowing shards lay scattered within the radius of where he once stood, smoldering in the aftermath.

“Huh. That’s a clear sign of a master’s handicraft. Determined to survive, literally.”
Sans prepared a test tube and a pair of tweezers. As he knelt down to pick up the pieces, he spotted a flat, rectangular object lying at the foot of the forge. White.

It’s Lucidia’s letter. Still in the envelope, unopened. Addressed to ‘Sans Serif.’

Sans stared at the beautiful calligraphic handwriting. He knew right away it’s not her default style. The lady in sapphire put deliberate care and effort into this item.

Care. Effort. On such a small thing to a relative stranger? It’s an idealistic, dreamy concept, foreign to this nihilistic cynic.

*That’s right. That hot-shot Magus delivered this to me. It feels like a long time ago.*

*I guess it fell out of my coat while I was busy.*

“Entry number 5. Lucidia Berendin,” said Sans. “I know what she’s trying to tell me. Insists that I’m not trash. That I’m important. That my talents aren’t useless. That I matter in this meaningless universe.”

Instead of opening it to confirm his thoughts, a charged bone skewered the envelope square down the centre.

Purple flakes ate through the message like embers. Words of kindness disintegrated, ashes flowing between the gaps of his loose grip.

“Sorry lady, you’re wrong.”

“…I’m the worst kind of trash.”

“End recording.”

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**Chapter End Notes**

You can start screaming now.

For reading reference:

Subject A = Last Persona
Subject B = Mezil Thyme
Subject C = Frisk
Subject D = James Pashowar
Subject E = Kisei Yuzukitsui

If you really, really want to understand Sans' thought process... you need to understand his subtext.
This chapter took a long time due to the amount of concepts and even more worldbuilding. Also, not getting enough sleep for 2 days and an itchy eye hampers proofchecking. I'll post this for you guys to read first before uploading the ff.net version the next day.

Hopefully there are no weird leftover snippets that I missed.

As soon as Undyne arrived home, she found Alphys surfing the internet to quell her own anxiety. The recent events had weighed down heavy on the lizard scientist.

It’s of no surprise since she inherited Doctor Gaster’s controversial research about human SOULS. Then, there were her own scientific mishaps piled on top of that.

Nonetheless, Alphys was determined to do the right thing for her girlfriend. She tidied up all of Undyne’s medical records before retiring for the night.

If only hugs can solve everything. Alas, they can’t.

It’s now Wednesday afternoon.

With the King’s approval, Captain Undyne issued an official summoning for prisoner Doctor W.D. Gaster.

It’s quite clear that he’s just a prisoner by name. The skeleton had to transport his ward Endogeny to the Surface, not the other way round.

More so, it’s part of his chores to care for the mass of dogs. Real prisoners don’t feed and groom their wards. Or play fetch with them.

Endogeny started wobbling out of joy at the sight of Alphys. They recognized an old friend.

Alphys smiled and gave them some well-loved pats. “Hey there, how are you doing?”

Their bark echoed in the air.

“Y-you wanna get some sun?”

More happy barks.

“Sure, let’s go.”

Alphys nodded to Undyne. It’s a silent acknowledgement that she will keep the dogs busy while they discuss some serious matters.

They settled down at the dinner table. Asgore then served up his last remaining sachet of Goldenflower Tea. He yet had the time and heart to make a new batch ever since the fiasco began.
Hot streams of fragrant water filled three cups: one for the King, another for the prisoner, and lastly for the Captain.

“Thanks,” Undyne took a sip. The flowers still taste great despite their dark and brooding history.

“My deepest gratitude, Your Majesty.” Gaster accepted the drink with a head lowered in guilt.

Asgore frowned. “Gaster, please look at me.”

“I dare not,” he replied. “Once again I’ve failed you. No, more than that. I cannot face dear Roman either. Helvetica, she outright withdrew from my presence. Young Papyrus suffers greatly for my oversight and I have no excuse.”

Undyne could feel the sincerity behind his words. Gone was any prideful conviction that defined him otherwise. This man stood at the edge of devastation.

Asgore said, “What’s past is past. I summoned you here because I need your vast knowledge.”

Presenting his hand to Undyne, he said, “The Captain believes that you’re the best person to do a thorough examination on her SOUL. Have you read her medical records?”

Gaster replied, “No, sir. But I have heard tales about her strength. It is quite unique.”

“That is correct,” so said the King. He placed down a medical file before the doctor. “Undyne is one of the rare non-Seer monsters who generate true Determination. Her training regiment and Alphys’ notes are included in the document.”

The doctor almost reached out for the file. Almost. It piqued his interest, but his heart stayed his hand. “I am honoured, yet I question the discernment. I had turned an angel into a demon, with the possibility of extinguishing the brightest soul to grace our time.”

“My Lord and King, why entrust your finest to this deplorable soul?”

The level of poetic language reached a point where Undyne wanted to flip the table. She’s not used to this level of old, elaborate, and formal language. Though she knew it’s the goopy scientist’s method of showing sincerity to Asgore, she can’t help but to feel awkward.

Gaster sighed. “Perhaps it’s better if you seek out a Lich in Ebott. Have Doctor Alphys study their physiology for new insights. Though a different species, their abilities rely greatly on Determination.”

Blink blink. Undyne considered that to be absolute crazy talk. First, what in the world are ‘Liches’. Second, they’re in Ebott? When? Where?

She turned to Asgore. The monster king looked just as confused.

“Did he lose his marbles for real???” asked Undyne.

“No. I think there’s a misunderstanding. Doctor Gaster believes I had reinstated the Reanimation Project.”

“What?”

“You see, Undyne. The skeleton people are monsters converted from the human dead. In anime terms… think of it as implanting sentience into a robot body. Except the robots are organic. Liches are the strongest of their kind.”
With widened eyes, she exclaimed, “You mean skeletons are not natural?! Like, Androids? Cyborgs? BONEBORGS?!?! Then how do they make children???”

“T-that is a topic for a different time.” Asgore coughed.

Turning his attention to Gaster, he explained, “That project is too controversial for any era to consider. In our current state of affairs… I wouldn’t even dare to propose the idea, let alone get the permission to do so.”

The goopy skeleton started to flow and melt. He’s mortified, as if Asgore mentioned the impossible.

Gaster tried to push his skull back toward its proper place. “I-I swear on my existence that I had seen members of my kin! Roaming around town! T-they’re behind veils, hoods and masks: the proper attire to protect themselves from ignorants.”

“I’ve heard our tongue spoken in ripples. Multitudes. It’s hard to pick out their exact words, but they’re there. I had also told the Child of Mercy that a community of skeletons exists. Somewhere in the more reclusive zones in town. That’s how certain I am.”

Undyne expected that scientist to be a little bit unhinged from all that solitude scattered across spacetime, but this? Had his madness progressed far enough to create ghosts and illusions out of pure desire?

“Okay, doc.” She crossed her arms. “Explain why you think we have a secret skelly society right under our noses?”

So Gaster began: “It was the time when the air grew cold and the leaves fell. Autumn, if I remember the term right. There seems to be a festival where the people on the Surface masquerade in costumes.”

He huffed in indignation. “Many of the designs are a mockery of monsters. Such poor, hideous taste.”

The other two recognized the description right away.

“That’s Halloween!” Undyne remarked. The thought alone brought her some cheer. “I dressed up as a pirate last year. Yar har! Man it’s so fun to walk door to door asking for candy. Even if you’re an adult.”

Asgore nodded with a touch of glee in his heart. “Our human neighbours taught us how to set up our first Autumn Fair too. It’s the liveliest event I’ve seen in ages, brimming with visitors everywhere you turn.”

“Well, it’s nice to finally have a proper name for those despicable events.” Focusing back on the matter at hand, Gaster continued: “It’s one of the rare exceptions when identity-hiding costumes are allowed in public, right? That’s when I saw ‘them’, mingling amongst the other non-bone residents of Ebott.”

There were lots of people in costumes during the festivities. Monsters participated too, and the humans had a hard time telling which were which.

Now that Gaster mentioned it… Undyne remembered a peculiar sight.

“Hey, I think I know what you’re talking about.” She said, “I saw a row of busses dropping off a whole lotta guys wearing the stuff you described. Like, they’re trying to cosplay an army or
something.”

“It’s pretty spooky. Had to make sure they’re not gang members or something. So, I talked to them. Turns out they’re university folks who agreed on a common theme. Supposed to be wizards, I think?”

“Nice people. Caused no trouble and enjoyed themselves like any other visitor.”


“Wizards from a university…” he muttered. “Lichborn and Seers. By the busloads. Other human-like monsters could wear the same garbs too. Egads…! It never crossed my mind that the survivors on the Surface could visit us!”

The King and Captain grew concerned. They might lose him for real if they don’t stabilize him soon, literally or otherwise.

“Uh, doc?” asked Undyne. “What’s wrong? Why are you turning into a puddle?”

“Your Majesty,” Gaster continued, “The world. Humans. Monsters. They’ve been watching the Dreemurr Nation’s every move. Our decisions today will change the face of global politics… for better or worse.”

Asgore himself had grown pale underneath his white fur. He understood the ramifications more so than anyone else. If his thoughtless declaration of revenge did come to fruition, the hidden nations would suffer more by the ever spreading seeds of hatred.

By now Gaster had completely drained off the chair. His black being and hollow skull stretched out underneath the shadow cast by Asgore’s furniture.

The puddle thus said, “…Captain, please contact the Magi. The teacher you seek will be amongst them. I’m certain that there will be far more qualified Seers within their ranks.”

The puddle started to slink away. Undyne jumped on her feet and tried to scoop the liquid man off the ground. Gaster felt like soft, silken putty in her hands.

“Wait!” she yelled, “Wait wait wait wait HOLD ON A MOMENT! Get yourself together, and I mean it literally!”

He replied, “Leave me to my own misery. I had encouraged an act that would lead to worldwide ruin. I cannot be trusted with another life.”

Undyne wanted to seek help from the King, yet he too had wilted.

She felt the world had gone upside down. Usually, someone else will try to quell her fiery personality with reason. Now she’s the rational soul trying to keep others from falling apart.

Frustration levels reached a critical point. She wants to get that important evaluation done right now before anyone else gets hurt.

Fear? Fear can kick the curb! The strongest fish refused to let the complicated social perceptions of the world get in the way.

There was a huge ‘NGAAAAAH’. Against all norms of liquid physics, she managed to rip the puddle of Gaster off the floor and suplex his entire goopy being.
He splatted. In a literal sense. Bits and pieces of his being splashed all over: the wall, the ceiling, the guests in the room. It’s like the unfortunate tomatoes from her cooking attempts.

At least he’s still alive. The disconnected bits crawled back to their main body.

Undyne scooped up a handful. Imagined she’s going to drill him with words.

“Doctor. W. D. Gaster. I DON’T like you! You’re the most fucking controversial man EVER! And it disgusts me to think you had so much influence back in the Underground!”

“Yet, I’m asking for your help because Papyrus told me you’re a great teacher. I believe him. Why? Because I am a teacher too!”

“In case you missed the memo, I’m in charge of gym classes at Toriel’s school. Plus, I used to train the members of the Royal Guard. I know the ups and downs. Sometimes you look at a person and you KNOW they have talent, but they can’t seem to get the lessons right.”

“And you,” Undyne pressed her face closer to the goop. “Despite the fact you have no EQ what so ever, you managed to turn the most innocent goof from zero to hero in one damn night!”

Before Gaster could object, she corrected herself. “Okay. It’s not literally one night. The point being: Paps learned a ton more from the short moment with you than a lifetime with me! Hell, his cooking skills speak volumes!”

“Now Paps is down and out. Sans is on the verge of snapping in half. Mettaton is confined to his own studio. Alphys isn’t sleeping. Then Cenna almost killed someone because some Gungnir moron can’t shut up!”

“The King is in quasi-house arrest on the Queen’s orders and she’s working overtime! Frisk? I wonder how they could even BREATHE!”

“The ENTIRE town is in trouble! I really, really, REALLY cannot just sit around and do nothing!”

Undyne returned the piece of Gaster to the rest of his being. Then, she got on her knees. Placed both hands on the ground and bowed before him.

From what she understood of anime, this is the humblest stance in existence.

“Please, teach me,” she said, “I need to get stronger. I need to know how to use my gifts better. I cannot lose myself like that freaking Genocider scum. And above all, I can’t do it alone.”

Doctor Gaster remained silent for a long, long while. It felt like an eternity.

His voice quivered, touched and humbled by the speech. “I… I was so wrong. You deserve the title of Captain of the Royal Guard more than anyone else. Once again I have proven myself to be a poor judge of character. Lacking in ‘EQ’ as you say.”

“I vow that I will bring out the best potential within you with the best of my abilities. Pride will not hinder me this time.”

He rose from the puddle, solidifying back to his proper form. His rematerialized hands urged the Captain to stand.

“That position ill-fits you, Captain,” said Gaster. “The chair is a more suitable place. I shall now read your medical records and see what we can do to refine your strength.”
Undyne had a feeling that she’ll need to get used to the ultra-polite side of this man. For better or for worse, she’s at the same level of reverence as King Asgore.

A part of her missed the critical bite already. It seemed more ‘natural’ for a radical doctor of great notoriety to look down on her, not up.

Within the hour, Doctor Gaster finished his reading. He closed the file and set it aside.

“It is fortunate that you still live today, Captain Undyne,” he said. “Perhaps there were some timelines where you did not. The recorded highs of your Determination levels are just one step away from internal destabilization.”

Maybe her wish for a frank criticism arrived too soon. “Whoa. That close? Does Alphys know this?”

“Certainly.” He said, “Considering Doctor Alphys’ romantic interest in you, it would be difficult for her to disclose anything beyond a general warning.”

“I-I had no idea…” Guilt twisted her stomach. She felt responsible for adding more background stress on her poor lizard lover.

“On the plus side, there’s a clear source for your unbridled strength. Determination in low quantities serves as a magnifier. I had experienced this first-hand before.”

Asgore blinked. “Come again?”

The former Royal Scientist placed his holed-hands in a steeple, filled with seriousness. “Your Majesty, remember the time where I tried to break the Barrier with substitutes for human SOULS?”

“Yes, I do,” the king replied. “You never did disclose your theories… Despite our deepest concerns.”

Gaster nodded twice. “Well, I was young and beset by tragedy. But, it’s about time I explain. This is very relevant to Captain Undyne’s request.”

He summoned multitudes of small bones and drew a simple pentagram on the table. A small bone floated in the center of the star, awaiting the next step of this demonstration.

“Your Majesty, please set the bone alight with your sacred flame.”

With a wave of his huge hands, Asgore lit the tip like a wick on a candle. The white flames burned hot, yet they did not disintegrate their target.

Gaster explained, “The Gram is programmed to process my magic as fuel for the fire, while containing any unwanted flares. Now, watch what happens if I add raw Determination from my Amalgamated self.”

The moment he did so, the tiny fire exploded into a roaring inferno. It surprised even Asgore enough to make him jolt in his seat.

“OH MY GOD!!!” Undyne screamed. Appropriate reaction in her opinion. It reminded her of that one time when she splashed oil on the stove by accident.

Ear to ear, the doctor’s grin grew. “Wondrous, is it not? The Seer’s magic is more intensive than it looks. Meddling with space and time doesn’t come cheap, yet we do not feel as much strain as we should.”
He dispelled the Gram. Along with it, the fire went out as quick as it ignited.

“This realization inspired me to maximize the efficiency of Aspects with Determination. In simple words… I tried to ascend to the level of a Seven Soul GOD with nothing but proxies and a magnifier.”

The hopeful smile faded in the face of reality. “Alas, the use of such power overloaded my being. Unable to contain it, my Eyes tried to burn away the excess. The force then split apart my skull.”

“Wait a moment,” Asgore raised his hand. “Gaster, you’re telling us that it’s not the Fake Aspects that backfired on you?”

“Not directly.” Gaster answered. “Though much lesser compared to their true counterparts, they functioned fine. It’s how I utilized them.”

“Whatever data I salvaged from my failed attempts inspired The Core. It took decades of testing to find the right balance of Aspects to convert geothermal energy into magical electricity, allowing the creation of a nationwide power grid.”

“Okay…” Undyne asked: “So what does it got to do with me?”

“Do not make the same mistake as I did, dear Captain. If you want to exploit your Determination to the fullest, you must externalize it. Channel the mixture outside of your body. Never inside. Be ‘The Core’ and not a ‘GOD’.”

More cryptic statements? “Doc, please stop talking in hands translated to English. I really can’t get you.”

“Please stretch out your arm.”

Undyne did so. The doctor planted a similar pentagram on the surface of her palm.

“You’ve been internalizing Determination to raise your stats. That’s limiting and dangerous. You should instead channel your will outward together with your magic.”

“Feel the difference.”

When the Gram activated, Undyne felt a surge of foreign power coursing through her body. It’s similar to a small electrical current, flowing towards the enchantment.

“Conjure your spear,” he instructed.

When she did so, she could conjure no more than an orb of water that twisted and roiled with the thundering force of an ocean storm. The wild Determination within threatened to tear the magic apart, refusing to be tamed.

“Wow. This is like. Epic cool.” That’s all Undyne could say. She stared at the chaos, mesmerized.

Gaster cleared his throat. “Excuse me, but that little storm won’t be able to do much on its own. Refine it.”

“Right, right.” The fish attempted to focus. Her muscles trembled. This woman had trained in her art for a lifetime. Yet, she’s struggling against this tiny spell.

Ever-churning. Ever-twirling.
Undyne slammed a fist on the table with her sharp teeth chomping down. “Aaaargh!! You don’t wanna listen to me? TOO BAD!! I’m the boss around here and I’m gonna make you UNDERSTAND!”

The roaring grew more violent in response.

Velocity kicked up. The Gram’s confines stretched like a high-pressurized balloon. Should it burst, well, she’d rather not think of the outcome.

Asgore gulped. “Gaster, are you sure it’s safe to do this indoors?”

“The Gram will contain it,” said the scientist. After a brief pause, he added: “I hope.”

“This is the result of magic magnified beyond its threshold. In other words, her spear is ‘melting’ from excessive DT into this chaotic sea. Your Majesty, I think you can see the issue here. Perhaps some advice from you would be better for our Captain?”

Asgore nodded in understanding. “Yes. I believe so.”

“Huh?” Undyne blinked.

“When you were a little girl, you were very much like the magic in your hand now: restless, full of energy, with no idea how to channel your strength. Suppressing that wildness only make things worse. That’s why I nurtured you instead, so you could bloom and bless the people around you.”

“Remember, determination doesn’t need to be violent. It can be peaceful too. Frisk is a wonderful example.”

For reasons she couldn’t explain, listening to Asgore opened her mind to a new yet familiar angle. Maybe in one of the timelines she understood her true power. Alas, she had yet to rediscover it.

Undyne breathed in deep. “In other words, I gotta treat it like a real person. Respecting my magic -- no matter what -- is the same as respecting myself.”

She tried to be a dictator. Little wonder why her magic refused to submit.

*Hey, anime is real right? I just gotta calm myself and…*

Contrary to her expectations, the spear did not stabilize upon the ascent to a peaceful plateau. It instead vanished as though she turned the faucet off.

“…Eh?” Undyne blurted.

“Ah, the balance was lost,” said Gaster.

Disappointment soaked in. “Aww maaaaaan! I thought I had it.”

“It’s certainly not an overnight matter, Captain Undyne. Beginnings are always the hardest. Not even Sans, in all his prodigy, grasped his skills right off the bat. Remember…”

Asgore’s phone rang.

He mouthed the word ‘Toriel’ to everyone and requested for their silence.

“Hello, dear? Hm? … Everything is fine here. Oh… Sorry to hear that you’re stuck in the Town Hall. Perhaps I could prepare some warm water to soak your feet? Huh, butterscotch or cinnamon?
Oh!

“…You want to talk to Frisk? What do you mean they’re not picking up? They’re…”

Wait.

What time is it?

All three members at the table glanced at the wall clock. It’s thirty minutes past five and they had not heard a beep of Frisk since lunch. They were so focused on the moment, no one realised the sun outside had begun to set over the horizon…

With genuine terror of the marital kind in the King’s eyes, he muttered: ‘Where?’

Panic mode, on. Undyne whipped out her phone posthaste.

StrongFish91
OKAY LISTEN UP EVERYONE THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!!!
Has ANYONE seen Frisk?!?!
Toriel wants to talk to the kid and we have no damn idea why they’re aren’t home yet!

HotAndSpicy
Chill there, Captain.
Frisky’s with me.

ALPHYS
i met them on the way back too!

She shoved the conversation to Asgore’s face for his life’s worth. One could see the wave of relief washed over his fluffy being.

“Frisk is with their sister, Cenna,” he answered. “It appears that they’ve met Alphys on the way as well. N-no! I didn’t forget about them. Of course not.”

Asgore’s troubled expression betrayed otherwise. He’s still adjusting to the life of a father. For a long time, he didn’t need to worry about a child’s safety. The Underground was always a relatively safe place and young Undyne showed great independence for her age.

Frisk, though a child wise beyond their years, lived in a world where terrible things can happen in the blink of an eye. More so with their celebrity status.

While Asgore continued talking to Toriel, Undyne typed back, scowling:

StrongFish91
Jeez kid, what took you so long?!
It’s dangerous out there!

Shining Star
Sorry for being quiet. I was looking for someone.
Had to keep my eyes peeled at all times.
And I’m kinda squinty by default.

StrongFish91
That’s NO excuse!
Notify us, squirt!
Your dad almost got into some hot grilling from mom thanks to your silence!
Besides those dumb Gungnir could be right around at any corner.
Aren’t you afraid of them?

Shining Star
I keep a lookout for them too.
So far the Royal Guard and Magi are doing an awesome job :D
The town is 100% safe.

sans
or vacant
but hey
i like my town deserted when it comes to a crisis
with a cheer-ry on top

Undyne couldn’t believe it. That name didn’t pop up in the group chat for ages. Didn’t he lose his phone in some underwater shenanigans? Maybe he bought a new one sometime in the week?

Not important. She needs to know what he’s up to since Papyrus’ accident.

StrongFish91
Oh god Sans
WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?!?!?!

sans
making something for mom and dad
why not pass the message for me?
tell the doc i have something that might help in his curry-making quest.

Curry? Come to think of it, Gaster requested lots of culinary books about tropical island cuisine. Said that Judge Mezil Thyme loved this ‘Jungle Curry’ so much, he’s willing to sacrifice his health for that spicy kick.

When Undyne passed the message, the goopy scientist stared back at her in silence.

“Uh, what’s wrong?” she asked.

He shook his head. “…Nothing. Just, I didn’t expect him to be so gracious after what happened to his brother. Sans is not known to be kind. Please pass my thanks to him.”

For once, she’s on the same page. “Yeah. I get what you mean.”

Sans had a fuzzy record with the Royal Guard. He’s powerful, but always ditched his job for other
jobs. Everyone knew he turned sentry posts into hot dog stands. Sells them at borderline criminal prices too.

But that’s the least of her worries. Once in awhile, Undyne would hear news of small-time swindling from that man. It often involved possibly rigged gambling games.

Most people don’t bother reporting because they believed they had lost fair and square.

And maybe they did. Who knows? He’s smart.

It’s what came after the games that bothered her the most.

When she asked around, they’d explain that Sans would treat the loser to their favourite snack, using but a fraction of his earnings. Act all buddy buddy so that they’d play with him again some day.

It’s as though he’s taking advantage of their gullibility.

When Papyrus discovered the schemes, he cried foul. It’s one of the rare pre-Seer times that he’s right.

The news stopped since.

**StrongFish91**

They said thanks.
I bet your parents wanna know if you’re okay too.

**sans**
nice
i’m fine, really

“Excuse me, dear? Dinner? At my place?”

Asgore got up off the chair and rushed over to his fridge. It’s delightfully understocked.

“Um, Toriel, I don’t have enough to cook for everyone. Are there any shops open in this hour? Oh… I guess we can buy bulk from the fast food store. No burgers?”

He chuckled a bit. “I guess you’re tired of them. What about some deep fried chicken then? The humans say one can never go wrong with those. Except… we don’t have an outlet in Ebott yet.”

His ears perked up. “Sans? Are you sure?… I-if you think he could. He didn’t use his teleport at all yesterday. I’m not sure why either… Alright. Please let me know.”

Undyne’s phone chimed.

**sans**
welp. looks like i’m on take-out duty.
gonna go meet up with tori.
catch you guys later. see ya.

“…Huh?” Undyne muttered to herself. “I thought he…?”
‘Sans had somehow lost his ability to teleport.’ Or that’s how it’s supposed to be. And yet, he’s using it right now to fetch a mundane dinner.

Nothing made sense anymore. The only sure grasp she had on this puzzle was the fact that Sans never does anything without a reason.

And how she hated puzzles.

She’s so frustrated… it almost made her blood boil with determination.
Hello everyone, it's time for a new update. I'm trying to keep a minimum weekly release schedule. There are a bunch of first drafts done, so content isn't the issue. It's always the refinement process that takes time. And with refinement comes quality!

Also I've set up an ask blog where you can ask me pretty much anything, either story related or general questions (nothing explicit, of course). So if you want to scratch your curiosity or want to communicate with me, feel free to poke. I'm not sure if you need a tumblr account though.

Meanwhile, enjoy.

Time.

At its simplest, it’s the measurement of the passing reality.

That which had once happened is called the ‘past’.
That which had yet to arrive is called the ‘future’.

Sentient life obsessed much over these concepts. Except, the most important moments lay in between.

It’s called the ‘present’.

Lucidia of House Berendin understood this more than others. She collects the past to speculate the future, yet the data meant nothing without the processing effort of the ‘here and now’.

It’s been exactly twenty-one hours since Papyrus arrived at the institute. The clock’s ticking and she can’t afford to dally.

There’s a Gram she needed to build, and a person to heal from the inside. She’s putting the finishing touches on her draft. Like most Seers, she preferred to do mind-intensive work in the dark.

The annoyed yells of a child disturbed her concentration.

It’s Chara, the once-human flower. They said: “Asrieeelll what’s taking you so long?!”

“The teapot’s HOT you idiot!” Followed by Asriel, the once-prince of the monsters. For anyone who’s not Chara, he preferred to be addressed as ‘Flowey’.

“You could grab a whole bunch of grown adults and yet you tell me you can barely lift a teapot?!”

Flowey snapped, “Well I wanna see YOU try using your vines on this tiny handle!”

“Hah!” Chara scoffed, “I can totally do that!”

“FINE! TAKE THIS!”
“Wait wait wait wait stop Asriel don’t throw it!—”

Too late. What followed after was a yelp and the shatterings of ceramic.

Lucidia sighed and got up from the chair. It’s time to investigate the mayhem.

Sure enough, a smashed teapot lay in a puddle of hot tea.

“You,” said Chara, “Are an idiot.”

“You,” Flowey replied, “Are an idiot too.”

Lucidia crossed her arms, glaring at the two flowers. “Do you want me to contact Mezil about this?”

Both flowers pointed at each other with their leaves and said: “It’s their fault!”

She won’t take this nonsense. Not at such a critical hour. Lucidia floated off the ground in an increasing magic aura of intimidation, lifting her voluminous curls in the process.

The bright yellow petals drooped backwards. Both changed their stance in almost an instant: “We’re sorry, Lady Lucidia.”

“Do you know why we’re having this conversation?”

Flowey pouted, “I lost my temper and tossed the teapot.”

Chara tried to pull a smug smirk, but that lost its appeal once the woman cleared her throat at them. In the end they admitted: “I provoked Asriel into a dumb challenge.”

“Good,” said Lucidia, “Now, what should you do to take responsibility?”

“Clean up the mess,” said Flowey.

“And apologize,” Chara added.

Though they admitted their wrongs, they sounded unsatisfied.

Lucidia knew what they’re trying to do. She reached down to the children and patted them on their petalled heads. “Dears, I know you’re trying alleviate some of my burdens with a nice spot of tea. I truly appreciate that. But, throwing a temper won’t help anyone.”

Looking at the shards, she understood why Flowey had so much trouble. “Besides, that pot does have a faulty handle design.”

“Really?” Flowey squinted in disbelief. “Then why keep it?”

“Mezil received it as a Teacher’s Day gift from a student. She knew he loves tea, but had no idea how to buy a proper teapot. It’s not nice to discard such a heartfelt gift despite its faults.”

Chara mused at the thought. “I guess you have no problems thanks to your ‘true blue’ magic.”

How she felt sorry for them. By theory, the flower children’s lack of SOULS should make them selfish, yet they took the conscious effort to be good to her.

“May I offer a proposal?” Lucidia smiled. “I’ll clean up the mess. In exchange, you two transport Papyrus to the room behind me.”
The flowers perked up in gladness. Papyrus had a positive impression on the children, and it shows.

“That’s a chore I can get by,” said Chara.

“Anything for Papyrus!” Flowey agreed.

Off the children went, discussing between each other how to best transport their unexpected hero. Their teamwork warms the heart despite the occasional spat.

As reward for their recent good behaviour, Lucidia gave them some ‘movement aids’ for the soilless areas. They’re saucers with her flight Gram etched underneath. As long their pot stays secure in its lock, they could go anywhere they want… provided they don’t run out of battery power first.

Lucidia floated towards the mess. Her hands ‘coaxed’ the broken mess off the ground, forming it into an amorphous mix of spilled tea and porcelain shards. All that spot required now was a damp cloth to wipe off the edges.

*I better hurry.*

En-route to the kitchen, Lucidia entered the memorial hall.

Here the legacy of the Supreme Judges decorated the walls. Each one had left their ‘mark’ in more ways than one.

The stained glass windows for example. Supreme Judge ‘Saar Glasblazer’ grew up learning the trade of her father and her father’s father. Though her peaceful fate got flipped upside down, she kept her skills as a hobby.

Then there’s this ancient bow. It’s the famed weapon of choice for ‘Teraun Wanderstar’, the Vanquisher’s founder. His original name of ‘Nokluirvanoic’ had caused too many tongues to trip, so they translated it to the closest local approximate. Thanks to his efforts, the appeasement rituals for false gods became nothing more than history.

At the end of the trip hung a brass plaque. It’s for James Pashowar, the one who played the role of her second father. Before his career as Supreme Judge began, he was an architect.

The Seers told him that they will present a special child for the Grandmaster. Said that one day, she could fly as though she was born from the sky itself. So he rolled up his sleeves and put his renovating skills to good use.

With their assistance, he took note of the numerous local holes in spacetime and readjusted their structure to accommodate the new member of the family.

It’s an entire building just for her… and for any future Chronographers who chooses to live amongst the humans.

On the ceiling, there were twelve shortcuts arranged in a circle. Shortcut number five took her straight to the kitchen. It’s much faster than walking all the way to the north end of the manor. Living in a huge house had its downsides.

The cupboards flew open the moment she arrived at her destination. Tools floated overhead in search for the proper utensil of her purpose.

In the end, she found a sieve. Lucidia placed the rest of the items back in their place in proper order.
With the sieve, she drained the broken shards. Gave it an extra rinse too.

Mezil walked right up to her side.

“Oh!” she exclaimed in surprise, “Dear, you’re as silent as a cat.”

He answered back, “Not a butterfly?”

“How about a butterfly-cat?”

“No.”

Lucidia giggled.

Looking at the shards, the husband sighed. “This is the fifth time that same pot had met its unfortunate end. How did it break?”

“The children got into an argument.”

Mezil groaned. He reached under the sink for a rough rag. For floor-only use. He placed it under the tap for a rinse before he wrung out the excess water. “Where is it?”

“In front of the Arcanagram Atelier,” she answered.

“I hope you had disciplined them as we agreed.”

The woman chirped, “Yes, I did. Though in a slightly different manner. I ordered them to transport Papyrus.”

“That’s… a reward,” said Mezil.

“Dear, dear, they know they’re wrong and they intend to follow through. That’s all that matters, right?”

If Mezil didn’t have a rag in his hands, he would have planted his face into his palm. “I’m worried that they’ll take advantage of you one day.”

“Oh Mezzy,” Lucidia smiled, “You’re talking to someone who made it her career analyzing the deluded. I know how to set boundaries.”

“Hm,” he replied. “Just leave the shards in the sieve. That thing is low priority.”

Lucidia furrowed her bony brow. “I need a warmup, you know.”

“Right. Sorry. I’ll be going to clean up the mess now.”

Right before Mezil took his first step, the wife planted a smooch on his cheek. The husband returned the favour.

“Love you, Mezzy.”

“Love you too.”

The world saw him as a cold stoic who’s best left alone, never knowing of his loving side. It’s a privilege reserved for his wife alone. It made her feel special. They’re married for over two decades and her heart still burns with the warmthness of a new bride.

She wrote a pentagram on the counter, poured the shards in the center and lit her Eyes with colour.
When the Gram activated, the broken remnants began to piece themselves back together.

Blue, to gather.
Green, to restore.
Purple, to understand.

With these three colours, Lucidia sewed the cracks together at an atomic level. She understood the science behind ceramics and was therefore able to make the necessary adjustments.

In a minute, the teapot returned to its pre-broken state. The notorious handle could only fit in a finger or two at most, far too little support for the volume it’s meant to contain.

Like she told the flower children: this defective product could only bring more harm than good.

Yet, it had sentimental value.

It's not ‘trash.’

The thought reminded her of Sans. Why would he equate himself to damaged refuse? By all technical standpoints, he’s one of the world’s rarest treasures.

_I wonder if he ever read my letter?_  
_Somehow, I have a feeling there’s a 70 to 90 percent rate of failure._

She left the fixed pot in the sink - it still needed a wash after all - then returned to her workshop.

The flower children announced the results of their hard work in glee. Chara narrated, Flowey presented.

So, the ex-human began: “Papyrus lies peacefully on a sheet of warm mattress. It looks suspiciously like a futon without a blanket. Also, he’s dressed in simple PJs.”

The other flower boy patted the mattress with his leaf. “Totally fluffy.”

“His neck is also supported by a skeleton-approved pillow.”

Flowey noticed the mentioned pillow was a little mispositioned. He nudged it in place with a sneaky vine.

“There’s a fresh, clean, folded up blanket for use after the job is done. It’s a little bit thin, but I guess it makes for easy transport.”

“Ta-da!” the ex-goat pointed both leaves towards the soft square of fabric.

“In other words,” Chara said, “The flower children got everything done without a hitch! Isn’t that right, Azzie?”

“Yeah!”

Lucidia clapped her hands. How they lifted her heart. “You two did an excellent job! Thank you so very, very much.”

The children cheered, high-fiving each other.

“Okay, so what’s next?” asked Flowey.
She explained, “I will need to establish a means of contact within his visions. I created that weapon, and therefore it’s my responsibility to heal him from the damages.”

“But that’s an accident,” Chara said. “You told us that Papyrus just needed to show my origins to Frisk, and that’s the key to changing this timeline. As far as I remember, there’s nothing in there that should cause some weird spacetime feedback.”

“That’s right. Your life story shouldn’t inflict any recoil. That’s because… I wasn’t born yet.”

Lucidia’s feet touched the floor. She knelt down by the young skeleton’s side and caressed his skull. Poor, poor fellow to witness that point of time. What other dangers did he walk into in the hours prior?

“I know when and where he ended up in,” she said. “Just looking at his current condition feeds me with the required information.”

“So, he screwed up?”

“…On the contrary, he succeeded beyond expectations. It’s clear that I’m wrong: your history is not enough to change the actions of Frisk and Sans Serif.”

Chara frowned in disappointment. “Great to know I meant nothing.”

“Oh no. Please don’t think that way. I’m sure it left significant impact. It’s just that there’s a more suitable piece of information.”

The rosy-cheeked flower responded with a slight, wry smirk. “I guess it’s better than being too important. That didn’t work out at all with me and Azzie. Not to mention that Trashb— Sans broke under pressure too.”

Flowey waved himself left and right, showing his impatience without shame. “C’mooon! Enough with the sad stuff. I wanna see the awesome happening!”

“Jeez, Azzie. You were a ton more patient back in the Underground.”

“Well that’s because there’s nothing better to do down there. Up here, it’s too much stuff with too little time!”

“You know that we’re not actually gonna see any of mister pasta-lover’s visions, right?”

“Wha?!” he exclaimed.

Chara sighed at his reaction. “Azzie, this is ultra-serious business. Lady Lucidia said she’s gonna go heal him. Not give us a movie to watch.”

Their eyes glanced to the side, trying to hide their own discomfort. “Besides we don’t want to hurt Papyrus by infringing on his privacy. He had suffered enough. I-I don’t care about him. But, I know you do.”

Flowey gazed on the unconscious Papyrus. His eyes drooped a bit from the thoughts of troubled sadness. “Okay. I get it. I’ll just have to wait for him to confess to us the old-fashioned way.”

How interesting to observe consideration in an entity that lacks ‘Love’ and ‘Compassion’. Was it on an intellectual basis, or did the soulless children learn from example?

Curious, curious.
“You could watch over me, young man,” said the lady. “There’s the possibility that I might get trapped despite my best preventive measures. If that happens, you need to alert Mezil or Grandpa immediately. Whoever you can find first. Do you understand?”

“Roger!” Flowey replied with a winking salute.

“Since Azzie’s staying, I’ll hang around too,” said Chara. “I got nothing better to do anyway.”

“Thank you, sweethearts. I shall now activate the sequence.”

“Huh?” Flowey blinked. “But you didn’t draw any of those fancy stars.”

“They’re already primed in the systems. A full digitalization requires specialized equipment, hence why I can only do this in the Atelier.”

Lucidia bounced to her keyboard in a single fairy-like hop. Everything she does had an aura of lightness. It’s as though she’s a mermaid in the sky.

The atelier lit up section-per-section. Wherever the amber circuitry lights coursed, the embedded machines woke from their slumber.

For a woman who swims through the air, there’s no angle too difficult to reach. Therefore she fit her tools in every space the four walls could provide.

When the power reached the ceiling, the complex machinery shifted around. They built themselves into a downward spire of intricate machinations.

The flower children dropped their jaws. Chara said: “I thought that shifty-shifty tech exists only in the Underground.”

Lucidia chuckled. “It looks the same, but the basis is different. The Core and my Atelier are akin to oranges and apples.”

She rose to the ceiling spire for some final adjustments. Got to make sure the tools were securely locked in place. Once satisfied, she gripped a handle and lowered the complex structure down to ground level.

The tip squared right over Papyrus’ chest, where his SOUL ought to be.

Flowey commented, “I really expected it to point over his right socket. Now that’s some disturbing horror movie material.”

Giggles chirped from the lady. “The Psychia is more convenient solution in this case.”

“I, on the other hand…”

She summoned a visor docked in the wall.

“Will be the one using my Eyes. Once I put this on, I will disconnect from this world in its entirety. Nothing will reach me until I end the session. Anything else you wish to say before I begin?”

“Good luck, Lady Lucidia,” said Flowey. “Make sure you come back!”

“Yep,” Chara added. “Don’t get lost and turn into Papyrus number 2.”

The once-goat transformed his face into the creepy toothed version, teasing her, “Because if you do,
we’ll take matters in our own hands.”

“Yeah. You may never know what diabolical plans Azzie and I will come up with to deal with this timeline. Hehehe.”

The lady smiled at their sweet thoughts. “That’s certainly a great motivational speech. Thank you for your kindness, children.”

Visors, on. When it activated, a boot screen written in The Code greeted her sight.

[WELCOME, SEER LUCIDIA]

[ESTABLISHING CONNECTION]

[BLUE: READY]
[GREEN: READY]
[PURPLE: READY]

[VITAL SIGNS: ALL CLEAR]

[PROCESSING CLAUSES…]
[CALIBRATING TO SUBJECT: PAPYRUS. MIX, RIGHT (ORANGE, BLUE, GREEN)]

[SYSTEMS READY FOR INITIALIZATION]

“See you soon, dears.”

Chapter End Notes

I cannot unsee Butterfly Cat Mezil anymore thanks to Anonymous_Vermin_Invader's epic dream experience, forever chronicled in Chapter 83’s comments. I just cannot XD
Valley of Darkness

Chapter Notes

It's one week again. Well, this chapter certainly needed all the days it could get because it's a long ride. Also you might want this soundtrack to accompany you at some point of the story.

Onwards to the valley of darkness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s dark.

Purplish rocks lined all around. Any wind blowing through turned cool, damp and humid.

Her home of the sky was nowhere in sight.

Lucidia understood that the linking process had succeeded. She found herself looking at a split path. Curious sounds echoed down the one on the left.

First order of business: she examined her own hands and feet, confirming her presence of self.

She’s a floating wisp. As if skeletons can’t fit the ‘undead’ image enough. At least she could still move around.

Traversing the subterranean corridors inflicted a sense of claustrophobia. Constricted. Cooped. She grew up with the notion that tight spaces equated to hiding holes or panic rooms.

It’s an unpleasant association.

In her opinion, being trapped Underground might as well be a death sentence.

At the end of that path stood a fish-shaped house. Looking through the window, she spotted the Papyrus of the past convincing Captain Undyne to befriend Frisk.

He made his dramatic exit by jumping through the glass.

Blink. Blink. She had no words for that absurdity.

The Papyrus of the past sped off to give his friends some privacy.

But the Papyrus of the present… sat down by the side, back against the wall. He’s curled up against his knees. Red, glowing scars of fire covered the right side of his skull.

As Lucidia had feared, he’s covered in remnants of burned Determination. She’s sure that there’s more of those underneath his distinctive ‘battle body’.

“Hello?” she asked.

Papyrus glanced towards her voice. His expression lit up in happiness.
“OH! ARE YOU A FAIRY?” he asked. “MAYBE A FAIRY GODMOTHER?!”

Lucidia giggled. Despite everything, he still retained that shining charm.

“I suppose you can consider me as one for now.” Floating closer, she then asked, “Do you feel any pain?”

“… IT STINGS. BUT IT DOESN’T HURT AS MUCH AS MY HEART.”

“What do you mean?”

“YOU’LL SEE.”

The Undyne of the past smashed the table with her spear. Lucidia wasn’t sure if she should laugh or sigh at the blatant chaos. Who in the world thought it’s acceptable to use a weapon to point out their favoured beverage?

The two sat down with some tea. And that’s when she heard what Undyne had to say:

“But, um, to be honest… I don’t know if… I can ever let Papyrus into the Royal Guard. Don’t tell him I said that!”

Lucidia’s heart ached with empathy. As far as she understood, that was Papyrus’ number one dream when he lived in the Underground.

The Undyne of the past continued, “He’s just… Well… I mean, it’s not that he’s weak. He’s actually pretty freaking tough! It’s just that he’s… he’s… He’s too innocent and nice!!!”

“I mean, look, he’s SUPPOSED to capture you… And he ended up being FRIENDS with you instead! I could NEVER send him into battle! He’d get ripped into little smiling shreds.”

“That’s part of why… I started teaching him how to cook, you know? So, um, maybe he can do something else with his life.”

It’s a wise, logical decision. War on any scale is brutal: it’s the place where innocence goes to die.

Lucidia could not blame the Captain. It’s her duty to protect those under her charge. If she thinks Papyrus would only get himself killed on the front lines…

Yes. There’s no other way.

“THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I’VE OVERHEARD THIS CONVERSATION.”

Her attention returned to the young one. Whatever hijinks that went on inside the fish house no longer mattered.

“IT’S LIKE A LOOPSING VIDEO,” said Papyrus. “WHEN THE HOUSE CATCHES FIRE AND UNDYNE LEAVES FOR SNOWDIN, THIS SECTION WILL REPEAT AGAIN.”

“Fire?!” Lucidia exclaimed.

“Yes. It’s, um, Undyne brand cooking lessons. Don’t worry! They don’t hurt. It’s visions after all.”

It appears that Papyrus processes his visions in ‘chunks’: sections of specific events. It’s different compared to how Lucidia herself does it. She can only rebuild what she knows. In turn, she decides
where everything begins and ends. Much more precise.

“Shall we move elsewhere?” she asked. “It’s not good for you to remain here.”

Papyrus stared at the ground for the next few moments. “COULD YOU TAKE ME HOME, MISS FAIRY GODMOTHER?”

“Of course, that’s what I’m here for. But, I can’t do that until I’ve healed you.”

“THEN, CAN YOU TAKE ME TO MY OTHER HOME?”

“Certainly,” Lucidia said. “Snowdin, is that correct?”

“No. My brother and I used to live in new home. I want to go there.”

“Oh, apologies. Let’s first see if I can use my magic.”

It would be trouble if she can’t. She needed all her Aspects at their fullest to restore Papyrus.

To her immense relief, Lucidia managed to levitate the bloke with little effort. Now she’s confident that she could accomplish her mission.

Though he couldn’t see her as anything more than a wisp, she ‘carried’ him like a child. Her thoughts drifted towards the faces of her nieces and nephews for a moment.

“Please show the way.”

Papyrus directed her to a nearby shortcut. The images of Undyne’s flaming house faded into nothingness when they phased through the gate.

They emerged out into a city made of light grey bricks. It’s sombre, unlike the more tranquil Waterfall.

Do the buildings reflect the heart of its inhabitants?

She sensed that they had stable, yet hopeless lives. It’s hard to believe that Papyrus came from a world devoid of colour. Perhaps he really was the lucky exception.

“THERE’S A SMALL FOUNTAIN SQUARE NEARBY. PLEASE TAKE ME TO THE BENCHES THERE.”

Those were some oddly specific instructions. Curiosity drove her to obey.

The square lay empty. As he had asked, she set him down on one of the benches.

“Shall we?”

“NOT YET,” he said. “KEEP LOOKING.”

His gaze fixated on the fountain itself.

It’s a simple scene: rushing waters, glistening underneath the city lights.

A cute skeleton boy rushed towards the structure, filled with childlike excitement. His sockets were mismatched, with the right slightly bigger than the left.

It’s none other than Papyrus in his tiny days.
She squealed inside. Here Lucidia thought he couldn’t get any more adorable.

The little boy -- about four to five years old -- zoomed everywhere. He conjured a bone and pretended that it was a sword, striking down imaginary enemies like the heroes of yore.

“NYEH HEH HEH!” So proclaimed the boy. “I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS! A LOVABLE HERO SHOWERED BY LOTS OF FAN KISSES!”

The adult version echoed the exact same words in whispers. Lucidia saw a soft, nostalgic smile on his face.

“What will you do to be a hero, young man?”

Little Papyrus yelped. He didn’t expect anyone to pay heed to any of his fantasies, let alone comment on them.

A fellow skeleton in a black coat walked towards the boy. Split-scars and a smooth face: it’s the new-found entity named Doctor Gaster.

“Oh, he’s a human-type.” She commented. “A little on the thin side, but he fits the criteria. Corresponds to the golden ratio. Very similar to myself. Considering legs, this moment appears to be in pre-Amalgamated times.”

“HUMAN-TYPE?” The adult Papyrus asked back.

“Yes. Lichborn have physical variations from the second generation onwards. They range from ‘human’ to ‘monstrous’. You, for example, are of the monstrous-type with your atypical anatomy.”

It piqued his interest. “WHAT ABOUT MY BROTHER?”

Lucidia answered, “Monstrous-type also, down to to the illusion that he has an overweight paunch despite being all bones.”

“WOWIE!” Papyrus was honestly impressed. “IT ALL SOUNDS SO SMART AND SCIENCY. ARE YOU A SCIENTIST TOO?”

“That… depends on what you consider a ‘science’.”

The child had been staring at the doctor for a long while. It prompted a question of concern from the elder.

He asked, “What’s wrong?”

With a sparkle, the boy said: “ARE YOU A SKELETON LIKE ME? YOUR HANDS ARE ALL BONY.”

Gaster snickered. He seemed relieved. “Why yes, my boy. I am indeed a skeleton.”


“Of course. He’s my student.”

The boy smacked both hands on his cheekbones and gasped loud. “THAT’S SO AWESOME!”

“Well then,” Gaster asked, “Do you know who I am?”
“NOPE.”

He straightened his back with pride. “I am Doctor W. D. Gaster, the Royal Scientist.”

The gasping intensified. Nothing could withhold this child’s excitement. The grown up Papyrus chuckled at his younger self.

“What is a Royal Scientist?” asked the little boy. “It sounds so cool! Oh, oh, if you’re a Doctor does that mean you make people feel better?”

The elder skeleton smiled. “I’m not really that kind of ‘doctor’, but I do have experience in medicine. People address me so more due to my smarts and knowledge. As for my job, I invent things to improve the lives of the citizens. Like you, and your brother.”

“Come to think of it,” he added, “You haven’t answered my question yet.”

“Are you gonna ask my name?”

“Well, I had already heard you loud and clear that you’re the ‘Great Papyrus’. Rather… I’m curious to know how you’re going to become a hero. What will you do?”

Little Papyrus thought about the question for a moment. Then, raising his bone high in the air, he declared: “I’m gonna do whatever!”

“Whatever?”

“Yes! Anything to make people happy. If they need someone to protect them, I’ll do it! If they need me to go on a journey, I’ll do it! If I need to save people, I’ll do it!”

“Would you capture an enemy if necessary?”

The boy tilted his head, puzzled. “What is ‘capture’?”

Gaster explained, “It’s containing something or someone for the safety of others. Have you tried to catch bugs with a bottle before? Maybe some snails? It’s the same principle.”

He nodded. “You mean like, collecting something? And then releasing them back later?”

“You can say so.”

The confusion cleared away to brimming enthusiasm. “I’ll do it!!!”

Delighted, the scientist patted the boy’s shoulder. “Very good. Very, very good. You’re on the right path, my boy. Never give up.”

“Can I call you Uncle Gaster?”

Gaster’s sockets widened in surprise. Placing a hand on his chest, he asked: “Why? There’s no relation between us.”

“You’re a skeleton,” said Little Papyrus. “That means we’re family. Calling you ‘Doctor’ is like making you a stranger. You’re not a stranger!”

“Then certainly, Papyrus! You may call me Uncle Gaster. Say, I have something that you might find
fun. It’s called a ‘featherdisk’. It’s one of my inventions.”

The toy was exactly as described: it’s a weighted disk with some feathers glued to it. She used to play a similar game while still a child. It required a sense of balance and good reflexes. That kind of athleticism never was her favoured activity.

Before long, Little Papyrus and Doctor Gaster took turns to bounce the disc around. Both had Orange Aspects, giving them a natural gift for the physical arts.

With this simple act, the child did not know how much he had moved that man’s heart. It’s a sentiment that would one day save this lonely soul from the madness of despair.

However, Lucidia also recognized a dangerous preposition. According to her husband, Doctor Gaster had strayed from righteousness since the death of Prince Asriel. It’s too easy for him to manipulate the innocent boy toward his ideals.

Most abusers are not strangers: they’re people a child knows.

“You’re very lucky,” she said to the grown-up one.

“I KNOW,” said Papyrus. “IT’S BECAUSE MY BROTHER WATCHES OVER ME. HE’S AT THE WEST CORNER. LOOK.”

Sure enough, Lucidia spotted the teenaged Sans spying on the event. He’s more than ready to intercept if Gaster crosses the line.

The fairy turned her sight away from the guardian angel. Her opinionated thoughts must wait.

“I’ll work on you now,” she said.

Papyrus nodded. He lay down still and stared into the yonder.

She extended her magic over his skull, recalling every bit of information she could gather about the young seer: his structure, his balance of colours, his being before this unfortunate accident.

Thanks to Mezil’s observations, Lucidia knew she could heal this youngster…

…If, he’d let her. Whatever she tried to stitch and weave got undone by his own will. It’s similar to a person picking underneath the threads before tugging them out.

The more she tried, the more blatant the signs became: eyelids flinched and limbs tensed.

Active refusal would only worsen the scars. Therefore, she withdrew.

“Papyrus,” said Lucidia, “Please let me heal you.”

He remained silent.

“Don’t punish yourself.”

He removed his mittens and touched the burned side of his face. At first, his hand jerked back from the lightest contact. But the second time around, he forced himself to maintain it.

Then, the sharp tips of his fingerbones dug deep into the glowing red burns of residual Determination.
Lucidia pushed the hand away with her telekinesis. Held it down for his life’s worth.

“Stop,” she said with a stern tone. “I will not let you inflict further self-harm. If you try again, I will tie you down with my Purple Aspect. And I guarantee that I will do it in a way where you won’t be able to shift around to further aggravate your wounds.”

It’s always the same pattern.  
It starts with a touch.  
Followed by a scratch.  
Then it spirals into mutilation.

It’s an extreme coping mechanism that she had observed in too many profiles. Lucidia refused to let this cinnamon roll become another terrible statistic.

Papyrus continued his empty stare towards the high ceilings of his cavernous homeland. A few seconds later he confessed:

“THIS PAIN IS THE REALIST THING I’VE FELT IN MY ENTIRE LIFE.”

“EVERYTHING ELSE WAS LIKE A DREAM. HAPPY DREAMS. SAD DREAMS. ANNOYING DREAMS. BUT STILL DREAMS. ILLUSIONS. LIES. LIKE MY PROCLAMATIONS OF GREATNESS AND FAME.”

“THE WEIRD BURNS HURT. A LOT. BUT THEY’RE HONEST. REAL. HONESTLY REAL.”

Orange tears dripped from his Eye, flowing down onto the bench.

“BEFORE I MET FRISK,” he said, “I HAD NO FRIENDS. I ONLY HAD FAMILY. BROTHER SANS, AND UNDYNE.”

“PEOPLE WOULD SMILE AT THE FRONT, THEN GOSSIP BEHIND MY BACK ABOUT MY WEIRDNESS. MOST OF THE TIME I WAS JUST KNOWN AS ‘HIM’ OR ‘SANS’ BROTHER’.”

“I KNEW THAT. BUT I REFUSED TO BELIEVE THEY’RE BAD PEOPLE. IF PEOPLE CAN CHOOSE TO BE GOOD. TO BE NICE. THEN… THEN MAYBE ONE DAY THEY CAN BE GOOD TO ME TOO.”

“THAT DIDN’T HAPPEN.”

His entire being rattled, trying so hard to remain coherent and still. It’s tempting to give in and wail.

“I… I WISH NO ONE NEEDED TO LIE TO ME,” he whimpered. “I’M SO HURT AND ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED. NOT AT THEM, BUT AT MYSELF. THEY KNOW I CAN’T HANDLE THE TRUTH. THAT’S WHY THEY DID EVERYTHING TO HIDE IT.”

“I REALLY AM A STUPID, STUPID PERSON.”

Papyrus said no more.

He curled up and buried his face against the back of the seat. The muffled sobbing intensified.

He called her a ‘Fairy Godmother’.

Now Lucidia worried if she could ever live up to the title.
She let him cry for a little while longer.

“Do you want to hear a story?” she eventually asked. A last ditch effort. Papyrus liked stories. Perhaps this was the anchor he needed to brace through the storm.

After a sniffle, he agreed with a simple nod.

“Once upon a time, there was a princess who lived in the sky. She had the best view, the best clothes, the best education, the best loving family. The girl had everything a child ever asked for, except for one complication: friends.”

“The title of princess added an unfair value on her life. As much as she wanted to mingle with children of her age, too many of ill-repute preyed on her. To trouble matters more, she knew that her people were seen as legends to those who lived on land.”

“When she gazed down the world below, she saw not beauty. No. She perceived it as a dangerous, deceptive maze where intentions hid behind amicable masks.”

“The princess tried to connect to her fellow kin who lived at the ocean. Alas, her thinking and ways were like night to day: a polar opposite further exacerbated by her upbringing. Disappointed, disillusioned, the lonely princess thus locked herself up in the clouds of home. Focused on nothing but the studies of her magic.”

“One fateful night, her life got tossed upside-down. A demon murdered the world’s guardian, forcing her to flee into the labyrinthian cities far below.”

“It was then,” she smiled, “The princess met her saviour. He was just a normal citizen who lived a secluded existence amongst the crowd. Ah, he looked so stern and scary. But… he’s a man true to his heart.”

The tale enthralled Papyrus. It’s too soon to say he had forgotten about his own pain. Nonetheless, he no longer focused on himself.

“OH, OH! THAT MAN BECAME THE PRINCESS’ PERSONAL KNIGHT! I’M SUPER SURE, BECAUSE THAT’S HOW FAIRY TALES GO! NYEH!”

Lucidia nodded, despite realising that Papyrus may not see the motion. “Mhmm, he did become the princess’ personal knight. She was smitten by his subtle kindness. If she had one wish… it’s to devote her entire life to him.”

“Yes. She fell in love. However, not just her alone. Another woman tried to compete for the affections of their reclusive hero. And who knows, there might have been a man or two who vied for his attention too.”

“…Though she had fine clothes and a high status, insecurity haunted the princess. A gilded coward. He’s born of the earth and she’s of the sky. It’d only be natural for him to choose a member of his own kind.”

“Love turned into an obsession. At her weakest… the demon who once drove her from her home offered a deal. He told her that if she cooperated, her beloved knight will know the depths of her desire.”

With a twinge of pain in her voice, Lucidia said: “The princess agreed to those schemes. Her ethics and morals reasoned away with twisted logic. Indeed, she just wanted the competitors to leave her knight alone… But a demon’s deal always takes a turn for the worst. One by one, her rivals ‘left’: in
untimely and often gruesome deaths.”

“The princess protested. ‘This isn’t part of the deal’. ‘It’s not supposed to be this way’.

“Except this is what you wished for.’ The demon told her in the face.”

“The lie became an uncomfortable reality. Contemplation, useless: left no more than the consequences of her sins. Once her knight meets his demise, the demon will devour her as payment for his services.”

“The demon then trapped the knight in the fires of Hell. In sadistic mercy, he kept his promise to the princess: she had one chance to confess her heart’s content. The knight will know her love… but he won’t live to return it.”

“That’s what she did. Her love made itself known in tears of regret and despair. It’s the end. Unavoidable fate. There’s no hope of undoing her folly.”

“I DON’T BELIEVE IT!” Papyrus exclaimed. “THE KNIGHT SURVIVED! HE DIDN’T DIE!”

“Why not?” Lucidia asked back. “Do you already have a ‘fanfiction’ in mind?”

He shook his head. “NO! IT’S THE TRUTH! HE UPGRADED FROM A NORMAL KNIGHT INTO A WIZARD KNIGHT! AND THEN HE TURNED BACK TIME TO GIVE EVERYONE A HAPPY ENDING!”

“I KNOW BECAUSE I MET HIM IN THE FLESH!!!”

Papyrus blushed orange, embarrassed from his intense outburst. “I…UH… SORRY. MAYBE I GOT THE IDENTITY WRONG.”

“Tell me,” said the fairy. “What’s his name?”

“MEZIL THYME,” he answered. “OR RATHER, MEZIL WINSTON. BACK THEN HE STILL HAD HIS OLD NAME.”

She chuckled. “Papyrus, you’re far from dimwitted. That is indeed the correct answer.”

He uttered the loudest gasps. “I’M RIGHT?!?! OH MY GOD!!! BUT I THOUGHT I’M THE IDIOT? I-I MEAN I CALLED QUEEN TORIEL AN ASGORE CLONE.”

“Well, it’s possible to be conventionally smart yet terribly unwise. Such as the princess who sold her soul to the devil. Such as your Uncle Gaster, who almost consumed the lives of an entire nation in the name of salvation. The greatest crimes are born from desperation and delusion.”

“But Mister Magus rescued you.”

It shocked Lucidia. Sure, her husband’s identity was blatant enough. But herself?

“How?” she must ask. “Your Eye is still not fully functional…”

Papyrus smiled back. “THAT’S TRUE, FAIRY GODMOTHER. I STILL DON’T KNOW YOUR NAME. I DON’T KNOW YOUR FACE EITHER. IT’S JUST THAT, THE WAY YOU TOLD YOUR STORY… IT’S EXTRA PERSONAL.”

“So, the real ending of the story is this: the bad guy’s gone, everything’s okay, and the princess married her one true hero! The
How she wished it’s that simple.
If only Persona didn’t exist.
That reality was too painful for her own heart to admit.
Lucidia remained silent, unable to confirm or deny.

“…EXCEPT IT’S NOT, RIGHT?” Papyrus appended. “I’M SORRY. YOU TWO HAD A VERY HARD LIFE. I THOUGHT IT’LL CHEER YOU UP, NOT MAKE YOU FEEL WORSE.”

There’s something about that blessed skeleton’s precious face tempted her to sugarcoat her feelings. Except, playing along with his wishful thinking would be lying to him all over again. It will perpetuate the searing scars embedded in his being.

“PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF IT HURTS YOU. I DON’T WANT TO REMAIN IGNORANT ANYMORE.”

In the end, she chose to respect his wishes. “It hurts.” she said, “But. You didn’t mean any harm. Apology accepted. Query: what exactly did you see in my husband’s past?”


“Accurate. They are as raw as you describe,” said Lucidia. “Since we of magic lack ‘determination’, the Persona considered us to be weak abominations: devoid of human resilience and ripe for the slaughter.”

“When he found out that Mezil had married me, he did everything he could to destroy the sanctity of our union.”

“And I meant ‘everything’.”

She paused for a moment to recollect herself. “I will always remember his arrogant demeanor. He once drove Mezil to a dead end in hopes that he’d break down and lose his will to fight. The Persona will then be next in line to possess the Keys of Fate.”

“…If there’s one thing I learned from my husband, it is to defy evil. Refuse to be enslaved by cynics. Fight for my dream. Embrace my humanity. I never had the luxury to entertain nihilism: the moment I’d falter, the Persona would rip us apart like the beast he was.”

“Papyrus,” thus said Lucidia. “Pain is not the realest feeling in the world, physical or emotional. It’s just the most glaring: grabbing your attention while distracting you from everything and everyone around you.”

“Perhaps you had lived a constructed, sheltered life. But the moments you experienced were not falsehoods, nor illusions. The joy, the love, the sadness, and the little frustrations of your daily chores… they all count as bonafide truths.”

“It is unfair to equate naivete with optimism. It’s possible to be both naive and pessimistic. Take it from someone who had experienced such first hand.”
“I HAVE A VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION,” so Papyrus asked.

Lucidía answered: “Yes?”

“ARE YOU HAPPY?”

The reply came swift, without hesitation. “Of course.” She said, “If I didn’t dare to love, I would continue to be the lonely princess of the sky.”

“If I must be honest, I do wish we could have had a quieter life. But, what doesn’t kill us… doesn’t kill us. We cope. We learn. And we try to help others who were wounded just the same.”

“It’s strange, isn’t it? Both my husband and I bear scars that might never heal. Yet, we’re living better than our so-called ideal youth.”

A sense of deep peace reflected on Papyrus’ visage.

“THANK YOU,” he said. “I… I UNDERSTAND NOW THAT YOU CAN ONLY HEAL MY POWERS. YOU WON’T MAKE ME GO BACK TO MY OLD SELF.”

“About that subject,” she added. “By technicality, my husband could fix your memories--”

“NO RESETS.”

His statement surprised her.

Papyrus glanced to and fro as he wrestled with his own decision. “I DON’T WANT TO FORGET ANYTHING. I WANT TO SEE THE WORLD FOR WHAT IT IS… SO I CAN HELP OTHERS BETTER.”

“COULD YOU PASS THAT MESSAGE TO MISTER MAGUS?”

Lucidía expected him to at least struggle for a few more weeks before coming to that conclusion. Most people take time to come to terms. Some never do.

Then again, she wondered why she’d be so astonished.

He is a child of ‘courage’ after all.

“Certainly.”

Her magic flowed into the young man. Section per section, flakes of reconstructed bone replaced the fiery blood-red glow.

No resistance.

“Alright, I hope that didn’t itch too much.”

The past stopped looping altogether. First, the images froze. Then the false world began to vanish from the farthest edges of the drab city.

Bit by bit, as the wounds in his heart healed, the rampant visions scattered off into the void.

* * *
She’s back in reality. Breathing a tired sigh, she removed the visors and placed them back in their docking bay.

The flower children rushed up to her.

“Welcome back!” said Flowey. “How did it go?”

Chara in their ever-sarcastic slant added: “We certainly had a moment here.”

Lucidia placed a finger on her mouth and uttered a soft shush.

It’s a universal symbol, so the flowers quieted themselves.

“What happened?” the woman asked.

“Nothing big,” Chara responded with a whisper. “Just mister sleepy skelly moving his body all on his own. And… well… you know.”

Flowey frowned. “He tried to claw his face off. We tied him up with our vines until he relaxed. It’s another day in creepy sleepwalking land alright.”

“…Papyrus was in deep pain.” Lucidia said with a tinge of sadness.

Then, she cheered up. “It’s different now. He had found new peace and resolve. Because of that, I could heal him of his injuries.”

The children uttered a soft ‘yay’.

Then, Flowey brought up a good question: “What now?”

“To prepare for the Trial of the Crimson Hall. But first… I think all of us need a good night’s rest. I’ll stay here for a little while longer to watch over Papyrus.”

That young man was already snoring away. Did the healing process soothe him so much that it lulled him to sleep? Or did his newfound peace release him from the grips of restlessness?

It didn’t matter now.

“Meh, if that’s the case Chara and I are gonna play that silly fighting game.”

“Ooooh are you sure Azzie?” the other flower wriggled their brows. “You? Against me?”

“Hah, games and reality are two different things. I’m sooo gonna beat your rooty butt this time.”
“Game, on.”

Off the flower children went.

When she’s sure that there were no prying eyes, Lucidia floated over to the sleeping one. She unfolded a blanket and spread it out over his being.

Then… she gently lifted his head and pushed aside the pillow. Rested his skull on her lap.

Lucidia hummed a lullaby and caressed his temple.

It’s the same tune her nanny used to sing to her when she was a little girl.

The smile refused to fade.

*He’s adorable. Somehow, despite his asymmetric sockets and goofy demeanour, Papyrus is one handsome skeleton. He certainly fits that kind ‘cinnamon roll’ vibe.*

…*Just like Uncle James.*

She sang:

“Hush, hush, little one. Rest for the ‘morrow.’”
“Rest, rest, sleeping youth. Sleep under the hallow.”
“May your dreams be fair and light, reflecting of a righteous heart.”
“Guided by colours of the seven virtues, the sacred works of art.”
“Grow, grow, my precious hero. Angels sing of valiant tales.”
“On a mighty ship of love, with compassion as your sails.”

*Hmm. If Mezil and I could bear children, our firstborn might be around the same age.*

“Sleep tight, young Papyrus.”

Chapter End Notes

Undyne's explanation is taken directly from the game script itself.

Well then. Paps made his decision and we learn more about Lucidia's past. Do you sense a spanner in the works? I do.

I'm eager to hear your discussions about the scenario! It's the best part post-release after all ;)

A part of me want to clip the lullaby and export it somewhere in my future works. It's too sweet to be forgotten. Makes me wonder how it'll sound like.

123seven3 is so kind to make a [Discord Server](https://discord.com) for us . I'm not sure where this channel would go, but feel free to chat on Discord with me. If I'm online. Got to remember to log in.

I'm not quite at liberty to discuss further details on AO3 due to their TOS (oops), but you can always contact me via other channels such as [my ask blog](https://example.com).
Idol

Chapter Notes

Well here we go. It's time to question Sans. I listened to Red Eyes of the Crowd a lot when I wrote the confrontation proper. You might want to play that music when you reach there.

Durarara's soundtracks are awesome. One of my long-time favourites.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sans teleported himself to a big city far away from Ebott and the Magus Association.

It took a few of the lesser-used shortcuts and a city map. No one would question where he bought dinner as long he arrived on time.

The girl behind the counter wasn’t sure how to respond to a short skeleton. It’s not every day a monster would walk in to order fried chicken.

He sensed a clear unease from her body language. Not that he could blame her. His appearance isn’t the most socially acceptable to human society.

Skeletons are their symbols of death. It will always be.

“W-what would you like to order…?” she asked.

He answered it with a different question: “Any recommendations for a big group? Like, eight people?”

“Including yourself?”

“Yup. Need to get the energy to live from somewhere. I understand that’s hard to believe coming from a guy made out of bones.”

More awkward nods from the cashier. “Okay… why not take the party bucket set?”

The portioning was fit for eight to ten people. “Looks good. Sure. I’ll have one of that.”

“Anything else you’d like to add?”

Sans added some side orders as requested. After paying the money, he stepped aside to wait for the staff to pack his order.

Cold sweat trickled down his neck.

I feel like I’m being watched. And I don’t mean by members of the public.

He scanned the fast-food joint. He ignored the curious and the judgemental: they’re not the ones raising a flag on his radar.

I can’t nail it down... Whoever it is, they’re not inside the building. I would have spotted them if they
are.

Fast-food restaurants were called ‘fast’ for a reason. Before long, they had the huge meal boxed up, bagged, and ready to go. It’s a bit bulky to carry without a subtle aid of magic.

“Will that be all?”

Sans remembered. “If you don’t mind, can I have more packets of ketchup?”

“No problem.” The cashier then dropped a big handful in the gaps of the package. Since not everyone asks for extras, they don’t mind being generous.

“Thanks,” he said, “Have a good night.”

Then he teleported away as fast as he could. The last thing he wanted was to lose the gang’s dinner in some weird chase sequence.

He reappeared at an alleyway, the location of his first shortcut back home. The uncomfortable sensation stopped.

_Huh, I guess I managed to shake off the trail._

Back to home, he hurried…

When he arrived at Asgore’s place, the gang was trying to figure out the seating arrangements.

Frisk lifted a finger and asked everyone to wait. The kid sped off to the the bedrooms upstairs.

Moments later, they reappeared where they once stood. It’s one of those Living Victory roll-back teleports. They donned Asgore’s top-hat: a leftover from the previous Halloween.

“This reminds me of a puzzle,” said Frisk. Everyone who got the joke laughed, including Sans.

*Man, that series is such a huge hit with monsterkind. Who would thought that humans could make crazy puzzles, huh? Everyone at Grillbys owns a copy.*

The kid’s puzzle was to seat everyone down with minimum discomfort.

However, there’s a catch.

Folks with poor relations to each other must not sit next to each other, while others cannot be separated.

After a long ponder, they arrived at their answer.

Going in a circle, it’s the following:
Toriel, Frisk, Cenna, Asgore, Gaster, Alphys, Undyne, Sans. Then back to Toriel again.

Sweet Frisk knew their family enough to get this puzzle right on the first try.

If Toriel and Asgore were too close together, the estranged wife may get a little snappy. Hence why the kid wedged themselves in between the couple.

Cenna would want to eat next to her long-lost sibling. From what Sans observed, she’s on good terms with Asgore too.
Sans would prefer Alphys to swap places with Undyne. The strongest fish had exuded some intense aura lately.

But then, Alphys considers Gaster to be her ‘sensei’. Sandwiched between two people she admired… that would be her ideal.

Besides, setting Undyne next to the doctor might trigger some sparks. Not quite wise to put them together. Lord knows Sans would rather vacate the table than to sit next to his mentor.

_Sigh. W. D. Gaster… If only I can talk to Mom and Dad without an unwanted third party._

Speaking of which, there’s still the Echo Flower extract.

“Hey, dinner’s served.” Sans plunked the bag on the table.

The hungry friends untied the bag and started opening the boxes. Delicious scents of greasy, seasoned chicken filled the air. It’s mouthwatering.

Asgore distributed the plates.

Sans scooted towards Gaster. But, he didn’t even try looking at the man. He talked to the skelemom residing in the right arm.

“Mom,” he said. “Remember the Echo Flowers?”

She signed back ‘Yes’. Just being addressed as a mother was enough to make her happy.

He presented a vial of light-blue liquid. “Welp. I think this extract may help mimic specific flavours. No clue how well, since I haven’t tested it yet. I’ll need to further purify the active ingredient first.”

Dear mother accepted it without a thought.

Gaster, however, had his doubts. He snatched the bottle away for a closer look. Even took a little sip of the unknown, confident in his invincibility.

“Ugh, that’s dastardly bitter,” he said. “Sans, you should know their echoing properties don’t lie in their chemical structure. But if your Truesight sees something I can't, who am I to judge?”

Sir Supercomputer had a suspicion that it won’t work, but there’s no harm trying. A success would make his parents happy. If it failed, then he’d have the treat of watching Gaster suffer for a bit.

“Whoops,” Sans shrugged. “Guess that didn’t work out. Sorry.”

He then shuffled to his designated seat and plunked his pelvis down.

Time to start eating. But… he didn’t have much of an appetite, that’s with ketchup included. There’s someone missing in this picture. One person that’s very dear to him.

Papyrus.

This get-together seemed so silent without his constant burst of energy.

Frisk and Toriel noticed the extra lethargy. The kid patted him on the back.

“’s okay.” He replied. “Paps will be back in no time. Right?”
They smiled back. “Yup. He always does.”

“Sans,” said Toriel, “You’re welcomed to talk to me whenever you need. I’m always available to lend an ear.”

“Yeah. Thanks. No guarantees if I’ll return it though, so I hope you have spares.” Wink.

She winked back. “I don’t mind you ‘phoning in’ through the little ear you stole.”

“That sounds a little ‘phoney’ to me. Sure you won’t serve me a gigantic bill on a plate the next day?”

“If that’s the case, I guess you can put it on my tab.”

This woman. What’s not to love about her?

The storytelling began with just a simple question from Alphys: “C-could you tell me more about the skeleparents, Gaster-sensei? Please?”

“Ah, for certain. You see, Roman and I met Helvetica on pure chance. It was Gyftmas season. We were having rootbeer on higher ground, scouting the events from better vantage. How old were we, Roman?”

The left hand made some motions. “That’s right. I’m eighty years your senior. And you were a man still early in your prime.”

Frisk gasped. “That’s a huge age gap!”

“Ah, Child of Mercy. Perhaps you didn’t notice due to the sub-par conditions of the Underground. But, certain monsters’ average lifespans stretch far longer than a human’s in comparison. The recorded census of a powerless Lichborn is 140 to 150 years old. That’s twice the human average, with true Seers reaching even greater heights.”

Being a lover of science, Alphys listened to the trivia with wide eyes of enlightenment.

“Anyways,” Gaster continued, “They had a special event that year. New Home’s Dance Club decided to put on a show at the fountain square below us. That’s when we saw Helvetica for the first time.”

He breathed a nostalgic sigh with a clear smile. “Oh, how elegant she was. She need not magic to turn her fan twirling-skills into a solo show of enchantment. Roman and I were shocked to meet a female kin in the first place, let alone a beautiful one!”

“When the performance finished, the group started to pack up. We two silly men scrambled to catch her. Goodness, we thought that if we lose her now we’d never see her again!”

“I tracked her movements with the combined powers of my Eyes. Since doing so would efficiently render me blind to my immediate surroundings, Roman had to lead me through the city. I still can’t believe this is the act of two adult men.”

Everyone started snickering at the image. Gaster included.

“We found the clubhouse itself,” he said, “Fuelled by rash panic, I summoned my Blasters to destroy any obstacle that got in the way. And that’s how we ended up in the women’s changing room.”

Guffaws and howling laughter followed.
Undyne pounded the table so hard, her chicken flopped out of her plate. “Oh! My! God! Really?! The great Doctor Gaster blowing the door down to the women’s changing room?!?!?! This is so ANIME!!!”

Cenna caught the drift. “Okay doc, who’s the one who got slapped and who’s the one who had clothes tossed in his face?”

Gaster answered, “Roman was the lucky man: he’s the one who only had to deal with costume fabric. I, on the other hand, had the misfortune of receiving the first of many Helvetica-style slaps across my cheek.”

“Are you bloody serious?!” The Magus exclaimed, “Holy smokes it really IS anime! Duuuude what the heck went in your mind? The changing room is like, banned forever!”

The embarrassed doctor protested. “I-I don’t sexualize a woman’s body! Risque it may seem, my intentions were anything but perverse!”

Toriel’s lips curled a cheeky pout. “Gaster had always been a little out of touch with social norms. That’s the result of spending too much time in his studies, I say.”

“Mom could dance…?” Sans asked.

When he spoke, the entire table hushed out of respect.

Gaster replied with a sad, gentle tone. “Yes. That was well before you were born. Eventually, life priorities prevented her from attending the club. Fell out of practice. Shame that you’ve never witnessed it…”

“Oh.” Sans stared down on his plate. “At least it’s not from an injury. Like, a sprain or a broken ankle.”

“Rest assured, it’s nothing traumatic.”

“That’s good.”

Sans returned to his meal, withdrawing from the conversations that continued to circulate around the table. He started to think. Ruminate.

I can’t restore Mom and Dad. Amalgamation’s permanent.

I should focus on what I can change. Let’s see…

The kid wants to break the news after we finished dinner. Convince everyone to let them undergo the Trial. Cenna’s on their side, of course.

Tori and Undyne would be the biggest objectors. I don’t think I’ll have a problem with Tori. Undyne? That’s a different case.

…No one believed Papyrus in the past timeline, huh? I bet I had a key involvement in that outcome.

Sorry bro. I guess I’m a bit too influential.

It returned, that unmistakable sensation of being watched. Sans’ mind switched to high-alert, scanning the entire household for hints of a spy.
At the corner of the window, he spotted a guy in denim clothes and a motorcycle helmet. He’s stalking the corner upside-down like some house lizard.

The person’s stats popped into view.

Name: ???
ATK: 4
DEF: 1
AGI: 9
Right: Purple / Orange.
Left: None.

A Seer.

*Dammit, really?! It’s as though the Surface is crawling with these guys.*

*Memory persistence. Intel based. Long range. That explains how he could watch me from afar.*

*He doesn’t have a Cyan or Yellow Aspect to lock his focus. Easy to slip away from with sudden or erratic change of paths, like a teleport. That’s a lot less annoying than Gaster’s combo.*

The mysterious Seer knew Sans had noticed him. He started to sign.

*Is that The Code? I can’t read it. Maybe some sort of Surface variation?*

*Wait. No. He’s making shadow animals?!*

Sans grimaced. This man, mocking from afar. Ballsy nerve.

Then it read the following:

[You broke the contract.]

[Those who judge others will be judged themselves. So as the judger of judges, I question: what is your objective?]

Sans lowered his hands under the table, trying to hide from the rest in a discreet manner. He signed back: [No business for me to answer. You can hang there all day. I won’t do anything.]

The other replied, [Soon you’ll have a reason.]

That bugger plopped off the clasps of his helmet. Gravity threatened to pull the heavy object down.

The blue skeleton clenched his jaw.

[You. Don’t. Dare.]

Too late. The helmet dropped into the yard with a loud thump. It alarmed the gang: all their attention snapped towards the window.

Then the man scuttled away before anyone could get a proper glimpse.

“What the heck was that?” said Undyne.

“Did a roof tile fall off?” Asgore pondered.
Alphys shivered. “I-I saw something at the window before it ran away!”

“Me too,” added Frisk. They rushed over to the window and opened it. “Hey, it’s a biker’s helmet.”

Great. Just great. I’m stuck in that man’s game.

Sans stood up. His magic poison, ‘Karma’, consumed the oily remnants in his hands. “I’m gonna give chase.”

Before anyone could object, he teleported to the roof. No one in sight. Sans lit his Eye and initiated an intensive scan around his immediate surroundings.

There, he spotted the Seer scurrying between the trees. A streak of purple and orange trailed between the covers of budding branches.

You want a bad time? Be my guest.

Sans sliced through spacetime to get above the canopy. The fleeing foe was quite fast, but it’s pointless if Sans can estimate the trajectory.

Furthermore, Sans knew that he’s superior when it comes to the quickdraw. His own agility is higher than his target.

He summoned his Blaster, then aimed for the hipbone with the intention of letting the poison cripple the escapee waist-down.

This isn’t the right time to kill.

There were too many unanswered questions.

The laser ripped through an unfortunate tree, rotting it into brittle splinters. Yet, the true target escaped deeper into the woods unscathed.

Weird.

That should have landed a hit.

Welp, nobody said it’s gonna be easy. I’m dealing with an experienced Seer after all. There has to be some sort of trick up his sleeve.

Sans began a series of teleports. Did nothing but observe the enemy Seer’s movements and reactions.

Let’s see. He’s going max power just to outrun me. Not exactly efficient, but he has stamina to burn. By exploiting the sticky properties of purple web-style magic -- closer to Muffet’s than Lucidia’s -- he can traverse literally any surface…

I need to see how he dodges my next blow.

Sans conjured some bones and sent them flying into the canopy.

As expected, the other hopped down a tree and up a cliff. Another miss. Sans noticed an oddity in that man’s movements, though he had yet to identify its exact nature.

…The darkness of night and dense foliage makes it hard to expose him even with my Yellow.

Where is he taking me? This could lead me to a trap.
The thought of Lucidia flashed through his mind.

...I hope she’s not at the end of this chase. That would be awkward.

Despite the risks, he decided to follow.

The Purple one led him to a clearing. Then, the light of fire extinguished.

Sans found himself alone in the dark, surrounded by potential climbing spots.

“Good evenin’, mate.”

Location identified.

Sans snapped his sights there and saw the mystery spy perched on a strong branch.

His active Eye exposed the outlines of a serpentine skull: whatever rounded, human shape the bold man was born with hid under the crafted slopes of the beast he embraced.

Unnerving. This man underwent extensive cosmetic modifications. Possibly permanent.

“Me name’s Gaelic. ‘Tis been a long time ah wanna strike a chat with ya. In private.”

The way this slithering snake talked was miles different compared to his sign language. Understandable. The Code can’t really translate slangs well.

“Ah know what yer thinkin’, sir. Well, whether or not this be a trap depends on yer actions. Really.”

“So,” Gaelic continued, “Mind answerin’ me question? What’s yer objective?”

Sans slipped his hands in his pockets, trying to relax in hopes that Gaelic would let down his guard.

He replied, “Nothing important.”


The blue one shrugged. “Nothing really matters in the grand scheme of things. We all die one day, so why bother fighting? Just live a peaceful life and be nice to others.”

“So yer sayin’… that I be a paranoid coot thinkin’ yer got a sinister brew behind that grin?”

“Yup.” Sans answered plain and simple. “You’re overthinking it.”

Gaelic continued to question. “Nothing ever matters, ya say. Be at peace with everyone, ya say. Fine then, if futility is how we define our lives then why should ah be nice to anyone? ‘Cause bein’ cruel attracts trouble? Oy, if that be the reason then it’s all just a matter o’ convenience… is it not?”

The reptile growled, accompanied by a brief flare of violet. “Aye, that defeatist vision… It makes me wanna spit.”

“Oh ‘tis be why yer a husk o’ a being, seraphim,” said Gaelic. “Yer carry the stance o’ a brittle coward. If life be nothing, then why are ya slavin’ away fer yer brother’s sake?”

Sans responded, “That’s a personal matter. Don’t think you’ll understand.”

“Aye, ya underestimate me. Ya think I be a cold-blooded fooker just ‘cause I behave like a beast? Tsk, tsk. The Ebott folk recite that monsters be made o’ Love and Compassion, but do ya ever
understand what that means?"

Gaelic continued to stalk around his prey. Tree after tree, branch after branch…

“There be a difference between bein’ nice and bein’ kind, and between bein’ kind and bein’ loving! It’s commitment! It takes little to be nice. A bit more to be kind.”

“But love? Love be a steep mountain. Love be goin’ against all hardships fer the betterment o’ those dear to ya. Love be both persevering and determined. Love be fighting the entropy and despair even at the brink o’ death. Love be hoppin’ along crippled together with yer fellow wounded souls hand in hand. Love tells nothingness to go to hell!”

“Great things never come from nihilism. Aye, I dare say it be an insult to life itself.”

The blue skeleton chuckled. Laughed as if Gaelic had told the worst joke in the world.

Perhaps it is.

With a shrug, Sans said: “And yet everything ends someday. Even the greatest folks can’t evade death. Even if it’s not physical death, it’s emotional. If it’s not that, then it’s cosmic death. Basic Thermodynamics.”

“Maybe you knew this already, but I used to be a quantum physicist. I know what’s eventually gonna happen to the Sun, to the universe. Even if Boss Monsters are practically immortal, they will still die at the end of time itself. Provided nothing else kills them first.”

“As the Surface’s saying goes: everything is meaningless. So, all that talk about living? Eh. It’s just passing the time. You seem to have a pro-life slant. That’s okay. It makes you happy, right? Don’t let me ruin your day.”

Here came a full, venomous hiss. Gaelic opened his maws in a show of absolute disdain. He flicked his glowing, purple tongue. It’s made up of magic. Long. Forked at the tips.

He’s more of a monster than an actual monster.

A bead of sweat rolled down the side of Sans’ skull. Cursed his own poor luck. He understood that Lichborn were known for their odd behaviour, but why must he keep meeting the borderline insane?

Do all Seers have a screw loose?

*Normal people don’t hiss like that.*

*Stay calm. Stay vigilant.*

Gaelic crawled with a hunched back. “Me day’s been ruined ever since I hear that blasphemy fallin’ out of yer slobberin’ mouth! Do ya dare say that in yer brother’s face? That all his efforts are fer naught?”

Sans clenched his hand under his pockets.

“Aye, aye. Ah see now. Yer thought o’ it. But ya didn’t wanna break yer brother’s precious heart.”

“Unless that defeatist stance just be a skin to hide yer true faith.”

Sans felt light-headedness rushing to his skull. What is this sensation? He doesn’t have an identifying clause for it. He questioned: “…What are you getting at, reptile?”

Purple flames illuminated the canopy in an eerie, subtle glow. The reptilian lips curled upwards to expose his beastlike fangs.

So the snake said: “Ya have a god, seraphim. His hallowed name be none other than The Great Papyrus!”

Something snapped.

Blasters, summoned.
Aim.
Fire.

A beam of magic sawed through the trunks of six trees. They collapsed and crashed, succumbing under the all-consuming wrath of the offended angel.

Why?

Sans clutched his chest. His outstretched arm shaking from the inferno ignited in his hollow heart.

Why did I do that?
No. Stop. Stay cool. This guy’s riling you up and you know it.

The bone reptile had long since escaped back into woods.

Gaelic’s voice echoed in the darkness. He continued to haunt Sans like a ghost.

“Oh how cute. That be the actions o’ a fervent zealot right there. Ya acted the same when a certain trenchcoat Vanquisher implied yer lovely ol’ goddess suffered harm. Toriel, was it?”

Recalibrating trajectory.
More trees fell as victims of indignance.

That snake was never amongst them.

Don’t listen to him!

.......... 

No.

I must listen to him like my life depends on it.

Ignore the way he moves.

“Hah!” said Gaelic. “Offended, aye? Ya should. ‘Cause they be your everything! Yer a dead husk o’ a man, so yer cling to anything that gives ya the illusion o’ living.”

“Wanna know what ah find ironic, seraphim? In yer mighty effort to protect yer lil’ bro from the burden o’ a hero, ya handed him the heaviest, biggest, and most impossible o’ them all:”

He resurfaced from the shadows to point an accusing finger square at Sans Serif.
“You.”

Sans froze, stunned by the proclamation.

“Aye. That be it. Aren’t we lucky yer brother’s fookin’ oblivious? If he be a bit more perceptive, he woulda noticed. In yer heart, Papyrus **must** remain pure, ‘cause if he loses the light he be no different from yerself. Ya think if yer god has to leave this sinful earth before it stains and corrupts him… so be it.”

When the shock faded…

The Seraphim began to chuckle.

He dimmed his sockets before breathing out a long, drawn out sigh.

“You really like to ramble, huh? Welp. Whatever suits ya. But…”

Sans whipped out his left hand, pointing it five degrees to the right of the taunter’s very being.

“You’re blue now. That’s my rebuttal.”

Earth’s gravity lost its hold on Gaelic’s SOUL.

The surprise ambush shattered the illusion that once made him so elusive.

Gaelic gasped. He tried to scratch the enchanted colour off his being, but it’s useless. “W-wait. How?!”

“Seers can’t maintain time-freeze forever,” said Sans, “You’ve been running on a rapid switch. By staggering the freeze with your Aspects, you’ve created lagging visuals to conceal your real position.”

“Neat trick. But, there’s one little problem: sound’s slower than light, and its perception asynchronous. The more you talk, the better I can pinpoint the difference.”

“**Let’s see how you’re gonna slither your way out of this one, scaly-ton.**”

Sans swung his arm towards the night sky, tossing his unfortunate victim high above the safety of the canopies. Meanwhile he recalled how he had tried to smash the kid into submission down in Judgement Hall. Alas, that spot was far too narrow.

On the Surface? The sky’s the limit.

Gaelic flew upwards so far, he shot past the maximum limit of the cheated blue magic.

It’s going exactly as intended.

The bone lizard flailed, desperate for grip. Panicked ‘no’s’ stretched across the starlit night as he descended from grace.

*He can latch onto walls. It’s possible he would try to throw a safety line when he reaches the canopy…*

*Like hell I’m gonna give him that chance.*

The moment Gaelic fell in range, Sans latched on his enchantment again. Flipped him on the side
before slamming him down onto the rough wilderness dirt below. It’s the combination of natural physics and the pressure of magic for maximum brutality.

A blood curdling cry overpowered the sickening snaps of fractured, dislocated bones.

Sans just stood there, contemplating on his next course of action.

*I don’t get it. Why do some humans get a kick out of torture? It’s loud and honestly grating.*

*Power? Control? Too much of a hassle. I shouldn’t have taken this approach anyway. Lost my temper when he turned Paps into some human-history idol.*

..........................

Agony racked his body, yet Gaelic attempted to crawl his way to safety with the unbroken half of his being.

*The logical action now would be to peg him down.*

So the assassin in blue pulled Gaelic close and pierced a bone through the metatarsus.

Again, more cries of trauma. The hunter had become the hunted.

“How about we make things simple for the both of us?” Said Sans, “Tell me who sent you here, and why.”

Bones rattling, Gaelic snickered. Between grunts and heavy breathing, he answered: “Ha… ah came here on me own accord. Heard yer name again and again… over multiple timelines. So. Thought I should see ya fer meself, aye?”


“Indeed… many call me a fool. But. Heh, heh, heh… ah be a survivor. That’s me job.”

When Gaelic’s Eye flared up, the ground began to shake and loosen. Sans’ slippered feet struggled to find a balance in the localized quake.

A giant skeletal snake erupted from the earth. Gaelic managed to grab on the creature’s empty socket with his only remaining good limb. Used all his strength to pull himself onto the safety of his steed.

Each segment of the spine was as tall and long as a racehorse. There’s ten of them, not counting the massive head and its tapering tail.

Sans couldn’t believe it’s happening for real.

*What the fuck, THAT’S his Blaster?!*

The bone snake unhinged its jaws to spew out a thick cloud of glowing purple smoke.

Immediately Sans covered his nasal opening with a sleeve. His preliminary analysis indicated that it’s denser than air: made up of vapourized paralytics and irritants. Any monster or human who gets caught in it would be both immobile and in tears.

He teleported upwards before the smoke filled the whole clearing. Going vertical was the safest and surest way to avoid the chemical attack.
From above, Sans spotted the outlines of an orange spiral.

A beam?!

This guy really wants a bad time. Sans summoned four Gasterblasters, set them on full power, and initiated a series of quick rapid fires at the cloudy mess.

The force of the blasts cleared away the miasma.

Except Gaelic was nowhere to be seen.

Only an unstable collapsed burrow remained where he once stood.

Back on solid ground, Sans pressed the side of his skull, trying to estimate the tunneling snake’s exact location. Alas, the earth all sounded the same.

How the tables had turned: the prankster had became the pranked.

“Damn,” the shortie muttered to himself. “That guy got me good. What’s his name again? ‘Gaelic’? Isn’t that from some old human language?”

“Sheesh, I’m so scared now.” Despite his statement, Sans chortled. “You Surface Seers are sure something else. This is what we call adaptation, huh?”

Sans dusted his hands and turned towards Ebott Town.

I’ve wasted too much time.
I need to refocus my efforts.
Soon, everyone will be safe from the threats of the Surface.

Tori. Papyrus.

Please wait a little while longer.

Chapter End Notes

Positive nihilism? Other stories might cover that, but this one is taking a different route: a dark and troubled one. I just can’t see how nihilism all jives with the level of devotion this Sans has.

It's all about circumstance and events. They can really change a person. Betrayed Undyne ending really exemplifies that.

The frontlines of Surface’s monsters are not pushovers. Don't mess with them. Especially the weird ones. Because they're under constant threat of humans mucking something up, they must take 'creative measures' to survive. There are many soft civilians of course. But the fighters? Those are the dangerous ones.

Oh yes, Helvetica was quite an 'idol' in her youth too ;)

Remember that the mixture of colours really affects the skillsets Seers have. Combination, life experience, and personality all affect the outcome of their powers.
They have some basic stuff in common (all Purples are intel-based), but they all have unique alterations as well. Lucidia's purple specializes in binds, Gaelic's leans more to sticky webs and chemical poisons.

Sans? The name 'Karma' is so misleading. The original term did NOT come from good or bad results. That's ethicalisation. The original name for 'Karma' stands for 'Consequence'. It deals nothing with deeds. It's simply the result of an action.

So what are the results of 'actions'? What are the consequences of 'existing'?
Well, well, guys, we have a surprise early entry!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sans still isn’t back.

Everyone finished their dinner by now. Mom saved two pieces of chicken for her joker friend. Reheating won’t be an issue: she’d just use her fire magic.

You hung out on the sofa, letting the motorcycle helmet rest on your lap. It’s pretty well-worn and it smells of earth.

Cenna glared at it with a hawk’s gaze.

You don’t sense hostility. More like… aggravation.

Dad asked gently: “Do you know the eavesdropper?”

She squeezed her eye shut and drew a deep breath.

“I… I guess my body language is showing.” She squeezed her hands tighter. “It’s just. Ugh. That idiot.”

Could she tell you his name, at least?

“I can’t. I don’t know what level of clearance he obtained, if he had any in the first place. He doesn’t mean any harm though. That’s what I can vouch for. But damn, I question his choice of prey.”

Prey?

“Yeah,” said Cenna. “He lives and breathes the hunter’s way. When I saw you pick up that helmet, I realised he provoked Sans. Like. Why?”

Knowing what Sans is capable of, you agree that’s a terrible idea.

You sat around for a little while more. Then, you plopped the helmet on Cenna’s lap.

“Where are ya going?” she asked.

To the bathroom. All that soda needs to go somewhere.

No one questioned it. After all, you DID need to do your business. The detour will begin after you wash up.

You sort through your mind’s files. If Mezil’s big battle was of any indication, the trick relies on personal experience. As long you made a mental bookmark at that location in any timeline…

…You could teleport there.
This destination was a little on the far side, but you’re gonna give it a shot.

You closed your eyes to concentrate. Imagined the location.

You saw a red star.
You jumped to it.

The sudden change of temperature confirmed your success: you are now in front of Sans’ backyard secret lab.

As you had expected, he’s there.

“No breach of security,” he muttered, “The disruptor is still intact too. I guess that Gaelic guy didn’t visit here at all…”

Sans breathed a huge sigh of relief, planting the front of his cranium on the door.

You called out for his name. Not too loud that it’ll startle him.

He jolted right back up and turned around. Was that nervous, guilty sweating?

Squint mode, on. Where did he go? What took him so long? And what’s with the whole security talk? Is this why he changed locks? Explain, please.

“Kid,” he said, “I’m more worried that you’re outside. How did you manage to slip past the gang?”

Living Victory Brand Teleport.
You were here in the evening. Made a mini-SAVE just in case.

He facepalmed. “Figures. We can’t talk here though. It’s too open.”

You let Sans know that you need help getting back home. Two-way connections weren’t your thing just yet.

“So, where was your last valid location?”

The toilet at Dad’s place.

“Yup. I know where it is. Play it cool, alright? Let me do the talking.”

One trip across spacetime later, you’re back in the bathroom. Sans went ahead of you to explain his absence. You’re supposed to be ‘waiting’ back at home too, after all.

When you rejoined the group, there’s a… tensed atmosphere in the air.

Cenna and Sans had a subtle interrogation match. Well, not really. But it sure looked like it. They’re giving intense stares at each other, arguing in subtext.

“What did you do with the trespasser?” your sister asked.

Sans replied, “Hmm, I didn’t think you’re the type to care about folks who break the law.”

“I sure give a damn about how it’s handled. How the hell am I gonna explain to my boss if shit hits the fan?”

“Eh, don’t worry.” The skeleton shrugged. “He’s alive. That’s what’s important, right?”
Cenna can’t openly defend a questionable breach of privacy. In the end, she relented: “Yeah. You’re right.”

“Now that we got the small stuff out of the way, it’s time for another roundtable discussion. I’m gonna resume my meal while Frisk explains some critical stuff.”

That’s your cue. You called everyone to the table. They sat down in the same arrangement as before.

You took the time to explain about the Trial of the Crimson Hall. Any gaps were filled in by none other than Cenna.

As you had expected, you received various responses of fear and deep concern.

Doctor Gaster was the first to chide. “Egads, sweet mercy! You should have told us this sooner! Did you keep quiet because a certain secretive friend dispensed questionable advice?”

That’s definitely a direct jab at Sans.

The doctor was right, but that’s not the point. You didn’t want to make others worry and you needed time to think.

Mom exclaimed: “Frisk! I understand your good intentions, but this is not something a child should decide on their own!”

Not even Dad would take your side now: “Toriel is right. I know you want to grow up. Or rather, you already consider yourself a grown-up. But, even adults need consultation over this big an issue. More so when it involves your life.”

Undyne crossed her arms. “Sorry squirt, I really gotta agree with the King and Queen this time.”

Alphys continued staring at you in utter speechlessness.

You’re starting to feel the consequences of your poor decisions.

“Hey, hey, I’m part of the blame too,” said Cenna. She’s trying her best to defend you. “Instead of discussing with you guys, I left the final decision in their hands. You can say I failed to do my big sis duties.”

Sans sighed at the commotion. “Welp, this is exactly why I told Frisk to lay low. Gotta give me time to do my research so we don’t get all rattled.”

Here comes the fed-up eye rolling from the goopy doctor. “Ugh, Sans. I hope you’ve unearthed substantial relevant information to justify this unwise secrecy. Tell us what you know.”

Sans explained: “The Trial of the Crimson Hall isn’t run by a single Supreme Judge. Think of it as a fancy courtroom. You can’t have a session without witnesses. That’s illegal.”

“So, the whole event is monitored by at least three members of the Jury. Maximum, twelve. The Magi would never disclose this upfront because all members of the Jury are monsters. Isn’t that right, Miss Vanquisher?”

Cenna nodded. “Right on point, sir.”

“If Mezil Thyme tries to do anything out of line, the Jurors have the right to stop the Trial.”

You gasped. Here you thought it’s going to be a secret showdown of time travellers. It’s a relief to
hear that they have a fair system.

Mom scrunched her brows, ever suspicious. “Then why do they insist that the price of failure is death?”

“Welp, Tori. It all starts in the head. Deliberate misinformation discourages those who’re not serious about their powers. If they value their life enough, they’ll surrender. Saves everyone time.”

“What happens if they surrender?” she asked.

Good question. You had no idea how that works.

Sans explained, “You literally submit to the big judge. Swear that you’ll never be more determined than him. With paper contract and all.”

“It’s… that simple?”

“Yup.”

You’re about as skeptical as Mom. If it’s really that straightforward, then why was Cenna so worried about you? More so with the whole ‘Mark’ deal…

“You know,” he continued, “If any Reds fail his test, he can forcefully de-power them forever. That’s the proverbial ‘death’ of a person’s time-travelling ability. It’s all semantics. It doesn’t have to be a literal loss of life.”

Before you realised it, you’re gripping the Trap Harvester. Hearing this talk made you nervous.

Dad lifted his hand to get some attention. “I think we should let Frisk enter the exam. With company, of course. Think of it as a much needed dental appointment: it’s scary, but they need to go through with it.”

“I-I agree with Asgore,” said Alphys. “It doesn’t sound like Frisk can flee from this. They need to face it head on!”

That’s the first comment from your shy lizard friend since this session started.

You imagined Undyne to agree with her with utmost enthusiasm, but…

…She’s pondering instead. Tossed unsure glances at Sans.

“When should the squirt take this dang Trial?” she asked.

“As soon as possible,” Sans answered.

“When is this ‘soon’?” Her singular eye narrowed.

“The earliest date Judge Thyme can fix. I think he’s more anxious than all of us to get it done. Setting the date and time is just one phone call away.”

Undyne then snapped her attention square on you.

“FRISK! Do it now! And set the phone on speakers so we can hear whatever he says!”

O-okay.
Wow, she’s way too fired up on the wrong angle. What's got into her?

You phoned the big guy posthaste. Placing your finger on your lips, you requested pin-drop silence from everyone.

Don’t say anything, no matter what.

It rang three times. Then, Mezil answered the call.

“Good evening, Frisk.”

Good evening, Judge. You told him that you’re ready for the Trial.

When would it take place?

“This coming Sunday, 4 PM. It’s best that we settle this issue posthaste.”

You asked him about the case of the Six Children. Are they going to exhume the corpses?

“Yes. The forensic anthropologists will descend to the Underground tomorrow. After that, they’ll check the remains for cause of death. It will take a while before we get a full report.”

“There will be no press conference until then.”

Hopefully, you could address this issue as an official Ambassador before the internet sets it on fire.

“Could you be honest with something, Frisk?”

Yes?

“Do you know the specific causes of their demise?”

It’s THE burning hot question. Everyone looked at each other, which eventually trailed to Dad.

He lowered his head and shook them. Then, his attention shifted to Doctor Gaster.

Distant silence was his sole response. That man can be a block of ice if he wants to. He knew the truth, yet he refused to elaborate on anything.

Dad is innocent after all.

You told Mezil that you don’t know how the children died. By the time you got there, they’re already harvested. Nobody recognized you as a human other than certain avid media consumers, and those who had met Chara in the past.

“Interesting. You’re saying that no monster of the current generation had ever met a live human face-to-face. Until you appeared?”

As far as you can tell, yes.

You then gave various examples of their innocence. Example: rolling yourself in the snow and dirt made the nearsighted Dog Clan couple think that you’re a puppy.

Then there’s Undyne’s outrageous belief that humans are capable of mind control. Because, anime. Stuff found in the trash dump. Same for Mettaton and Alphys.

You noticed the two main culprits of human misinformation trying to hide their faces from the rest of
the world. Sorry Alphys. Sorry Undyne. Please bear with this embarrassment for a little while longer.

“Hm? What about Sans Serif? I expected Doctor Gaster to pass down that aspect of his knowledge. I’m sure his family had multiple graphical references on humanity.”

Yes, but it’s still not the same as meeting one in person. If someone placed a wolf-like dog breed next to a real canis lupus, you might not be able to tell the difference either.

“Perhaps the case can favour Ebott after all. We’ll manage that after the Trial, provided you pass. Goodnight to you.”

When the call ended, a huge weight lifted off your ribs. Air. Sweet, sweet air. You could finally breathe again.

“So,” Undyne coughed. “This whole Trial thing. Yeah. It’s legit. You know what? I believe the punk will beat that stupid exam down into pulp! Frisk, get in there and kick the old man’s butt for me!”

You’re going to take that expression on a purely proverbial sense. If possible, you want no fights at all.

…Then you realised the unrealistic idealism of your wish.

Cenna pinched the bridge of her nose. Her long day isn’t gonna end anytime soon. “That’s my cue to go back to Mez and sign the legal papers. Ugh, not looking forward to that two-hour ride.”

Mom objected with a flat, stern, ‘No.’

“Why?” asked Cenna. “I thought we agreed that they can’t avoid this?”

“Frisk is still too young. Can’t we postpone the trial a few more years? I’d think they should be at least seventeen before we could consider any of these!”

Fear gripped her heart. More than during your Underground adventures…

Ever smooth with his words, Sans stepped in for you. “Tori, Tori. Everything’s gonna be fine.”

“How could you be so sure!” She snapped back. Wow. You don’t think she had ever raised her voice against him before.

“Cause they’re not alone,” he replied. “You got me. Asgore. Undyne. And many more. I’m sure Cenna doesn’t want the kid to croak either. Maybe we can arrange for a second person to accompany Frisk.”

“Oh?” Now that caught Mom’s attention.

“Yeah. Two is better than one. If anything turns ugly, we’ll defend Frisk until the Jury calls it quits.”

That thought alone sparked a cheerful shine on Mom’s face. “Will you be joining me then?”

“Nah. I think Asgore is a better fit.”

Did.

Sans.

Really just say that?
The shock was real. Dad pointed to himself with a slightly loose jaw, unable to believe it’s happening. You expected him to be at the bottom of the candidate list after the huge breakdown between king and subject.

“What’s so surprising?” Sans said. “You’re one of the oldest living couples on the planet. With that much time spent together, I’m sure they’ll be in perfect sync.”

Both goatparents burst into nervous flustering.

If fur could blush, Mom and Dad would both be bright pink now. They exuded the embarrassed glows of two lovers trying to come to terms with each other.

“T-this is too soon!”
“Yes, it is too soon.”
“We need to take it slow.”
“Agreed.”

Both then said in unison: “One day at a time.”

Sans winked. “Nothing beats a strong foundation.”

The short blue skeleton then finished the last of his chicken and plunked the bone on his plate. “Welp, I’m done. Thanks for the meal.”

You know that body language. He’s about to bail ASAP. Instead of letting him go scot-free, you grabbed his sleeve and insisted that he should wash his dang hands.

“Huh? I don’t need to--”

Sans immediately shut up when he sensed the sheer aura of disapproval from the skelemom. It’s amazing to think that Helvetica didn’t need a face -- or the rest of her body -- to make a point.

The less extroverted skeledad won’t back down this time either. Roman pointed at the plate and trailed it towards the chicken box. It’s where bony trash belongs.

Wow. You had never seen Sans so clean with his post-dinner routine before. That’s parent-power right there.

“Off to the sink, I go.” he announced to his parents. Sans then headed to the kitchen with the empty plate in hand.

You took this opportunity to follow him for a private chat.

As Sans deposited the dirty dishes, you whispered a string of serious questions.

Those cryptic security mumbles bothered you still.

What’s the big deal? You asked. It’s a matter of trust.

“Frisk,” he said, “Check your keyring.”

Huh. What is he talking about? You checked.

The silver key had vanished. When you looked back up, you found it in Sans’ clean and dried hands.

“That cheeky fellow who spied on us… he’s a Seer. If I can snatch the key from you in a blink,
others can do the same. I can’t let that happen.”

Okay. That’s just genuine paranoia fuel. Then again, we have nothing to hide. So what’s with all the extra precautions?

“…He’s not an ordinary run-on-the-bone dude, Frisk. That man is definitely a Juror. He got the right colours for the job. The last thing we need now is an info leak that puts us at a disadvantage.”

The secret monster observers?
Why so certain?

“It’s mandatory to have a certified Seer as one of the panel members. Purples have the strongest deja vu recollection. Since you’re the epicenter of a huge time-travelling case, the possible candidates will lean towards that colour.”

That makes a ton of sense!
To think that there are more Sans-like Seers out there…

That thought filled you with guilt. How many others suffered in this dragging time loop? They have families too.

Your guilt transformed into determination: you swear that you’ll put an end to this conundrum.

“Heh. That’s good, kid.” Said Sans. He then pocketed the silver key. “I’ll hang unto this in the meantime.”

“And one more thing, Frisk. Your butterfly mark? It isn't what you think it is.”

Pardon?

“Let’s just say that Mister Judge won’t let you go so easily.”

Explanation, please?

“You’ll understand when you get there. Welp, I gotta get back to work. Running late as is. Let Mom and Dad know I said goodnight.”

Wait, Sans. What work--

Too late. He vanished right before your eyes. For a guy of ‘Patience’, he’s sure in a deep hurry.

Chapter End Notes

I am aware that Gaelic’s shenanigans could cause controversy, but he decided to do it anyway. He’s not exactly a great life example :P
I'm not sure if I should call this on-time for the one week gap, or early because it's not a Sunday. I'll let you decide on that.

More worldbuilding ahoy. I don't think there's a chapter without worldbuilding. There's always something, no matter how small.

Papyrus woke up in the atelier alone.

A mild headache gripped his noggin. It reminded him of his first hangover from chugging down all that brandy.

Still in a daze, he tried to rub his eyes with the back of his hand. It’s only then he noticed that he’s not wearing his usual clothes.

“…WHAT TIME IS IT?”

After a brief check on his body, he realised that he didn’t have his phone either.

“MAYBE I SHOULD WAIT FOR THE FAIRY GODMOTHER TO COME BACK.”

In the meantime, he observed the sheer intricate technology in his surroundings. In a way it reminded him of The Core.

Papyrus heard someone knocking on the door.

“COME ON IN!” he chirped. Then, he remembered that he’s not the host. How embarrassing.

More knocks followed.

“…SANS? IF YOU’RE TRYING TO DO A KNOCK-KNOCK JOKE IN SOMEONE ELSE’S HOUSE, I’M SO GOING TO SCREAM. THAT’S ABSOLUTELY IMPOLITE!”

The visitor opened the door from the outside…

…But there was nobody there. The hinges rolled on their own, unassisted other than the initial push.

Papyrus pondered about his next course of action. Should he stay in the safety of his bed, or explore at the risk of being rude?

Then, an idea struck him. “OH! I’M A GUEST, RIGHT? THEN MAYBE MISTER MAGUS IS TRYING TO GUIDE ME SOMEWHERE! I NEED TO FOLLOW PRONTO!”

Without a single hesitation, he jumped to his feet and exited the atelier.

“HELLO?”
Silence greeted him back.

The confusion soon gave way to awe. The architecture reminded Papyrus of Mezil’s hideout in the Void. Except, fancier. Taller. Older. With a whole lot more rooms.

Dim nightlights illuminated the arching pathways in all their sleepy amber shades. They mimic torches. Only the ones in close proximity to Papyrus ever lit up.

A part of him wondered if he’s standing in a museum of sorts. The air in this building felt ‘different’ compared to Ebott, or even the Magus Spire itself.

If he could describe it… it’s like sampling a taste of undiluted cordial: thick, rich, and intense.

The flavour? ‘Time and History’.

A second glow illuminated the junction. The shadow of a cloaked humanoid figure stretched against the walls.

“MISTER MAGUS?”

The person turned away, causing the lights to dim upon every step.

“WAIT!”

Papyrus dashed down the halls. The lamps’ glow rolled by as fast as he moved.

For some strange reason, he couldn’t catch up to the mystery visitor no matter how hard he tried. Papyrus suspected Sans-level teleportation played a large role in this person’s elusiveness.

On a normal day, he wouldn’t mind the jog, but he just woke up from goodness knows what.

“SIR? MADAM?? I DON’T MEAN TO BE RUDE, BUT COULD YOU PLEASE SLOW DOWN???”

Papyrus paused to catch a quick breath. When he did so, the mystery person vanished.

Now he’s left alone to traverse the foreign hallways of the house, if he should even call it one. The sheer size reminded him more of Asgore’s castle, though he never went anywhere beyond the King’s immediate living quarters.

There’s a doorway up ahead on the left. When he arrived there, Papyrus found himself looking down at a living room…

The tables and desks bore the hallmark elegance of historical movies. Somewhere between the ‘18th’ and ‘19th’ centuries, whatever it meant. They’re either detailed, had curvy legs, or both. It exemplified the craftsmanship of carvers and carpenters.

A casual comfy couch set surrounded said table, dressed-down with a simplistic design from the modern era as if it’s purchased a few months ago from some boutique shop.

Oddly, the most ubiquitous and vital piece of furniture known as the television was nowhere to be seen.

WHY WOULD ANYONE NEED SO MUCH SPACE?

MAYBE THERE ARE LOTS OF PEOPLE HERE AND EVERYONE’S JUST ASLEEP?
A plethora of art hung on the wall, preserved behind thin sheets of glass and wooden frames. There’s a drawing on yellowed parchment that depicted a human siege battle: with the defenders aided by wizards. He could tell that it came from a time before the study of anatomy, as everyone looked like a kid’s drawing.

Next was an impressionist’s painting of a grand school. The people of that era started to experiment more on colour and the art of capturing the ‘moment’. It’s looser compared to the realistic portraits, yet it seemed to ‘live’ in ever repeated moments of time.

Finally, a true-to-life realistic painting followed right after. It depicted a red-haired nobleman wearing the robes of a priest, albeit with a wizard’s touch. His choice of moustache and a well-trimmed beard also screamed the fashion of ‘ye olden days’.

Contrary to his choice of strong colours and imposing form, this man hid patient wisdom behind his hazel eyes.

This was further exemplified by his choice of arms: a gem-decorated wooden staff. According to what Papyrus learned from Alphys, most human nobility showed their power with swords, spears, or shields.

The plaque below it reads: ‘Grandmaster of the Magi’. Name, conveniently left out.

THAT’S STRANGE… I THINK I’VE SEEN THIS MAN BEFORE! THE WAY HE STANDS IS SO FAMILIAR. HE’S GOT A STRONG BONE STRUCTURE.

BUT I DON’T KNOW WHO. HMMM… WHAT A PUZZLE.

Papyrus then heard familiar sounds echoing from the distance. It’s the hums of an exhaust hood combined with the sizzles of ingredients.

In other words, they’re the welcoming melodies of the culinary world.

So he charged right into the kitchen.

He spotted Mezil cooking himself a simple breakfast of scrambled eggs. He didn’t wear his fancy coat, instead opting for a grey elbow-length T-shirt and a pair of comfortable slacks. His cane was nowhere to be seen either.

Papyrus wasted no time to announce his arrival: “MISTER MAGUS!!! YOU WERE THE GUIDE ALL THE WHILE! WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO PLAY ALL SUPER MYSTERIOUS? ARE WE DOING SOME SPECIAL FRIENDSHIP THING?”

Mezil looked back with a raised brow. Then he started plating his meal. “Good morning, Papyrus. Sorry to disappoint you but that wasn’t me.”

“HUH?”

“My father-in-law led you here.”

More mental head-scratching. “WHAT IS A ‘FATHER-IN-LAW’?”

“In-laws are members of a spouse’s family. In other words, he’s my wife’s father.”

“OH.” Papyrus then asked, “WHY DIDN’T HE WANT TO BE SEEN? IS HE SHY? I’M NOT
“On the contrary. He just thinks that you’re not ready to meet him yet. Nothing against you. Say, would you like to eat with me?”

Despite not having a visible stomach, Papyrus heard a faint growl coming from his belly. “DO YOU HAVE ANY MILK?”

Breakfast, served. The two men sat down at the dining table with a spread of toast: some butter, a selection of jams, and a glass of milk. Mezil split the single portion of eggs in half.

Papyrus was reluctant to accept the offer.

“I DON’T FEEL RIGHT TAKING YOUR FOOD, MISTER MAGUS,” he said.

“It’s fine,” Mezil answered, “I shouldn’t eat too much either.”

“WHY NOT? BREAKFAST IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MEAL OF THE DAY!”

“Except…” One hesitant moment later, the old man admitted: “This is my supper.”

Up on the wall, a digital wall clock told the time. The numbers read: ‘4:20 AM’. It’s night, well before sunrise.

It took a while for Papyrus to connect the statements with the odd hours. When they puzzle clicked in place, the youngster cried out like a distraught mother. “YOU HAVEN’T SLEPT?!”

“Yes,” Mezil replied. He then bit into his first toast. “Preparations are taking longer than expected.”

Up-close, Papyrus noticed that black tattoos decorated Mezil’s arms. Where do they begin? Where do they end?

Pointing to his own left side, the youngster asked: “MAY I SEE YOUR ARM?”

Mezil’s default face didn’t help to ease the atmosphere. He looks stern all the time, so it’s difficult to know if he’s offended or not.

After dusting off the crumbs, the grizzled Magus rolled up his left sleeve. Tucked the fabric on the shoulder so that it won’t roll off. He then resumed his meal.

Complex grams wrapped the entire arm, making use of whatever limited canvas it had available. Encrypted runic notes and circuit lines weaved the geometric shapes together into a singular entity. It further extended beyond the shoulder, indicating that he had more hidden underneath his clothes.

Papyrus’s jaw slacked from the sheer ‘badass cool’. He tried to snap himself out of it. There’s something he wanted to inspect.

Soon enough, he found what he had searched for: a long, vertical scar that stretched across the elbow to the upper arm.

“What are these weird dots? They seem to come in pairs.”

Mezil answered, “They’re stitch marks. Do you have experience with tailoring?”

“Some. I know how to make sweaters!”
“Well then, I can skip some explanations. My severe battle injuries were sewn up like a piece of fabric. Ghastly, but necessary. It keeps vital fluids in and infections out. Minimizes scarring too.”

He’s never going to see tailoring the same ever again. Papyrus then asked, “DOES IT HURT?”

“I would be numbed for surgery, of course. There’s no pain there. The recovery process however… that’s the worst. Thankfully, that’s done and over with.”

Mezil continued, “You may not realise it, but humans are nowhere as invincible as you Ebott folk make us out to be. Do you know why the Persona targeted my left arm?”

Come to think of it, that action struck Papyrus as an oddity. As far as he knew, most humans favoured the right side of their body.

“ARE YOU A LEFTIE LIKE MY BROTHER?” he asked.

The Magus nodded. “Yes, we’re both ‘sinisters’.”

“I NEVER NOTICED THAT. YOU SEEM TO SWITCH AROUND A LOT. LIKE, YOU’RE EATING WITH YOUR RIGHT NOW! AND, I THINK YOU HOLD THE CANE ON THE RIGHT TOO.”

“That’s because I’m forced to do so. Over the years, the Persona had attempted to cripple my marksmanship by targeting my dominant arm.”

Mezil finished his toast. He reached for the glass of milk with his left. When he tried to lift it, his hand shivered: struggling to carry the weight.

The old man’s brows furrowed.

“In the end, that bastard succeeded. He had ripped through some of my key nerves. Despite having the best medical care within reach, the damages never recovered in full. This weakness could spell life or death in a battle.”

“My wife had implanted extensive aid to support me. It’s perfect, but I may not be able to depend on it for every situation.”

“I suppose I should demonstrate.” With a thought, The Magus channeled some magic into his troubled arm, lighting a chain of code from black to white. Most of the relevant magic concentrated on the ugly scar.

Mezil now downed his milk with ease. When he set the glass back on the table, the tattoo’s light faded.

“I cannot emphasise just how much luck you had, Papyrus. If Doctor Gaster didn’t administer emergency aid, your recovery process could end up much more complicated. Perhaps crippled for life, lest we rewind time to an event before the accident.”

The thought chilled Papyrus to the bone.

“Which brings us to the next question: are you really going to let your breakfast go cold?”

That’s Mezil in all his tsundere glory.

It’s true. The curiosity had become a complete distraction. “OOPS. SORRY, MISTER MAGUS! I’LL EAT NOW.”
Though cold, the meal was hearty and comforting. Papyrus wondered in silence how people could tolerate his old cooking. He had to admit it’s terrible compared to what he’s capable of today.

He could make a joke about skeletons not having tongues to taste, but that would be an insult to his career-chef parents.

After both men finished their meal. Papyrus offered to wash up.

Mezil shook his head. “Leave it. There are more important issues to address.”

‘No’, however, refused to be an answer. Let no housework be left undone!

In a blink, the stacked plates ended up in the sink. And the cutlery. And the cooking pan too. He soaped up the sponge to begin.

Since Mezil can’t argue with that level of enthusiasm, the magus leaned against the counter in wait.

“EXCUSE ME, BUT WHAT IS THIS ‘IMPORTANT ISSUE’ AGAIN?” What could be more important than cleanliness?

“Your life-changing decision.”

“WHICH LIFE CHANGING DECIDE– OH. THE FAIRY GODMOTHER DELIVERED MY MESSAGE, DIDN’T SHE?”

“F-fairy Godmother?” Mezil cleared his throat, trying to not chuckle at the image. “Yes. She told me that you didn’t want to lose any of your experiences.”

Papyrus nodded.

“Are you certain? In this round, you had heard words that should have never reached your ears.”

More nods.

“Why go to such lengths to preserve your mental scars?”

Sir Tsundere Principal asked a good question. People try to live life with as little pain as possible. Some were permitted as part of growing up: like learning to walk or studying for an exam.

Otherwise… why?

Papyrus tightened his grip on the plate. Surely Mezil had heard the reasons from his dear wife, yet he still wanted a personal confirmation.

It’s a test. Like any teacher, he wanted to make sure his students can survive the outside world.

“I WANT TO GROW, LIKE FRISK DID,” he answered.

“What if there’s nothing you can do? What if the person rejects you?”

“THEN I’LL JUST TRY TO UNDERSTAND. LET THEM KNOW THAT… THAT THEY’RE NOT ALONE. AND THEY DON’T HAVE TO STAY ALONE.”

“And what if the cards of fate stack against you?”

“I WILL LIVE THE BEST I CAN.”
The stern Magus contemplated the decision. “…Your courage continues to impress me. You had made the same decision in the past timeline too.”

Watching how hard Papyrus scrubbed the eggy bits off the frying pan, the old man let out a discreet cough. “We do have a dishwasher, young man.”

“LE GASPL, YOU HAD TO EMPLOY A PERSON TO DO THE DISHES FOR YOU?! THAT’S SANS LEVEL OF LAZY!”

“No, it’s a machine.” Mezil pulled out the dishwashing rack to prove his point. “Think of it as a launderer for cutlery.”

“THAT’S EVEN LAZIER!”

“It’s a standard household tool. Are you saying that none of you Ebott folk have it?”

“I… UM… IT NEVER CROSSED MY MIND. MAYBE TORIEL WOULD. OR ALPHYS!”

“Since you’re such a big fan of cooking, I suggest that you invest in one. Saves plenty of time washing up.”

Papyrus then asked, “ARE YOU AN ASPIRING STUDENT OF THE CULINARY ARTS, MISTER MAGUS?”

Mezil answered, “No. I only cook when necessary. My father-in-law is the one who enjoys it as a hobby. The jam and butter we had earlier? His handiwork.”

“THAT’S SO COOL!”

When the dishes were all cleaned, wiped and stacked on the drying rack, Mezil beckoned the skeleton to follow. “Come. You wish to grow like Frisk? Then you must know their place in this era.”

He led Papyrus through the house’s many chambers. The youngster had a feeling that he’s being watched from afar. When he looked back, he spotted the shadows of the cloaked man around the corner.

There was a red gleam. It slipped away as fast as it appeared.

_HUH? DID HE POINT A LASER LIGHT AT ME?_

He felt no malice, so he shrugged it off.

One would expect to be taken to an office for a debriefing. Or at least a command center. Certainly not a medical bay.

The west side contained standard beds and assorted other furnishings that Papyrus had seen in a human hospital. It’s nothing unique compared to the east area.

They had pods there. Lots of smooth, segmented pods, like pillbugs. About two dozen of those lined up against the wall, each with their own number. Each of the pod’s segments could either be moved up or down to reveal the glass beneath.

There’s an empty space between Pod 21 and 23. It’s in use.

What purpose do these pods serve?
Papyrus received a partial answer beyond the double-swing door. A sapphire-clad lady with long black hair toiled over the room’s mainframe console. Tubes and wires connected to ‘Pod 22’, standing right beside it.

A strange Lichborn lay suspended inside the glass bubble of green, illuminated liquid. This person’s skull seemed malformed by Papyrus’ standards. He’s hooked up to an oxygen mask. Do skeletons need to breathe?

Threads and pegs of magic held his shattered bones together. The damage stretched all along the left side, with an extra hole punctured through the right foot.

The sight made Papyrus feel queasy.

“Fairy Godmother,” said Mezil.

The woman responded, “Not now, Mezil! We’re not in a situation for cute nicknames.”

Papyrus blinked in confusion. She sounds like the kind wisp, but her tone of voice had a sense of command befitting a noblewoman.

When her mind clicked, she turned around posthaste.

“Oh!” she gasped. “Papyrus, you’re awake at last! H-how improper of me to be so harsh. Are you feeling fine? Any nausea? Lingering migraines? A mild headache is normal, but it shouldn’t last for more than an hour.”

“I’M FINE,” he answered with a tired smile. “THE HEADACHE WENT AWAY AFTER I HAD BREAKFAST WITH MISTER MAGUS. UM, MAY I KNOW YOUR NAME?”

She bowed a curtsy and introduced herself: “I am Lady Lucidia of House Berendin, spouse of Mezil Thyme.”

Lucidia: a name as pretty as her appearance. Fairy Godmothers are real, at least in appearance. Papyrus sparkled at the thought.

“I will check up on you once I finish tuning the IRP-- Oh dear!”

In a flustered hurry, Lucidia shifted the lower half of the pod’s segmented cover back into place.

Question marks popped over the youngster’s head. “WHAT’S THE MATTER?”

Mezil explained, “The patient is naked.”

Realising what happened, Papyrus had the sudden urge to wash his sockets. He turned aside with a giant orange blush on his face. “OH MY GOD, I’M SO SORRY FOR THE ACCIDENTAL BREACH OF PRIVACY!”

“Fret not. Gaelic is not one who’d feel that kind of shame. He’d laugh at your reaction instead.”

“He’s quite… a naturalist.” Lucidia cleared her throat. “Anyways, please wait for a moment. Mezil will answer any questions you have.”

She returned to the consoles. The curious youngster inched closer to the pod in the meantime.

‘Gaelic’ was the strange skeleton’s name. He couldn’t put a finger on it, but he noticed that the man’s form was quite unusual.
“IS HE ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE ‘MONSTROUS’ TYPES?”

That piqued Mezil’s interest. “Oh, so my wife had explained the anatomical variations of Lichborn. Yes, you are correct. His proportions are lankier and his joints are much, much more flexible than the norm.”

“OH, SO THAT’S WHY HIS SKULL IS SO WEIRD. LOOKS LIKE A DOG.”

There was a muffled laughter from Lucidia. Mezil chuckled too.

“No. Lichborn will always have a human skull. What you see here is the result of extensive cosmetic surgery: bone grafts and the like. Also that’s not a dog.”

“What is it then?”

“That. I think you should ask the owner.”

The tale fascinated Papyrus. If there were more of his kind, how would they look like? He can’t wait to meet them all.

That’s still not the end of his curiosity. Everything was so new to his mind. All this tech, beyond the Underground’s dreams. “WHAT IS THIS WEIRD LIQUID? WHY IS HE IN THIS TOTALLY SCI-FI THING?”

Mezil explained, “You’re looking at an Intensive Recovery Pod, or ‘IRP’. You were in one of these too.”

“REALLY?!”

“Indeed. The liquid is a suspension solution designed to maximize the healing of physical injuries. What it contains depends on the patient. For Liches and Lichborn, it’s a magic-imbued calcium solution. Other species of monsters have different requirements, and humans too have their own.”

“Monsters can stay in the pod for as long as they need. Humans can’t. The maximum is two hours: any more than that and complications will follow.”

“WHY DIDN’T I SEE MORE OF THESE IN HUMAN HOSPITALS?”

“It’s still in the clinical trial phase,” said Mezil. “The first time I used this was right after the final battle with Persona. My body didn’t respond to it as well as it should, which placed me back into conventional medical care soon after.”

Lucidia interjected with a trivia. “They’re a common sight in monster nations. Though, the solutions can get rather costly. Therefore they’re reserved only for critical cases.”

A tired sigh marked the end of her task. “Alright,” she said, “It’s time for your inspection.”

Her delicate fingers held his jawbone, gently tilting his head to get a better look on his condition. The sense of detailed care reminded him of Uncle Gaster and his parents.

…Papyrus wondered if they’re okay back in Ebott.

As she performed her analysis, Lucidia’s eyes switched from a heterochromatic blue-green combination to an even purple pair. They then mixed together into layered, blended rings of colour.

Her attention moved from top to bottom: systematically running her fingers on his bones like a living
It’s unnerving and a little ticklish, but he remained still. Questions can wait.

Lucidia frowned. “I wish you had more time, young one. You are healed in full. But... I can’t pronounce you battle ready just yet. Your Eye still needs to reawaken.”

“BATTLE?” he blurted. “WHY? ARE WE GONNA GET INTO A FIGHT?”

“...Our current calculations indicate a high possibility that Sans Serif will initiate combat in the coming days.”

The mere idea stunned Papyrus so much that he staggered backwards. “MY BROTHER? W- WHY?”

“Motive: uncertain,” she replied, “But he has inflicted grievous injuries on Gaelic. Projections are grim.”

The youngster tensed up, ready to jump into the fray at a moment’s notice. “I... I DON’T WANT TO HURT SANS. I DON’T WANT ANYONE TO HURT HIM EITHER! I IF ANYONE WANTS TO FIGHT MY BROTHER, THEY HAVE TO GO THROUGH ME FIRST!”

His brother had sacrificed so much. It’s only fair that he returned the favour.

“Calm down, young man,” said Mezil. “None of us wish to see him harmed either. That’s why my wife prepared an excellent capturing tool for you.”

Lucidia bowed in preparation to leave. “Please excuse me, I must fetch it from my room.”

“There’s no need, dear. Look behind you.”

Lucidia turned around to face the consoles. “Oh! That’s so sneaky. Hehe~ how typical of Grandpa to do so.”

She picked up a familiar red bundle of fabric. Papyrus’ heart lifted in joy when he recognized it as his scarf.

The lady placed it in his hands. There’s a small piece of cardboard tucked into the folds. The angled corner begged to be picked out.

“What’s this?”

It’s a playing card featuring a red Ace of Spades.

Lucidia smiled wide with a child-like fondness. “That’s Grandpa’s calling card. Looks like you caught his attention.”

Papyrus flipped the card around. Checked the back, front, then back again. He’s trying his darndest to look for something.

“What good is a calling card that doesn’t have a phone number? Or a name? Or even a photo? Now I have two guys that I really want to meet!”

“Two?”
“MISTER MAGUS’ FATHER-IN-LAW AND YOUR GRANDPA.”

The couple chuckled together.

Mezil thought he should clear the confusion before Papyrus embarrassed himself. “They’re one and the same. My wife has two fathers by technicality. Out of respect for her birth father, she nicknames her adoptive one as ‘Grandpa’.”

“Oh.”

He kept staring at the symbol. He had played with these cards before and he’s sure spades are supposed to be black. Why is this one red?

Lucidia’s explanations interrupted his ponder.

“I hope you don’t mind the repairs,” she said, “Your scarf was on the verge of falling apart. I tried to keep the ‘cool’ frayed edges though.”

The scarf itself was as soft as he remembered. But, he noticed there’s something different about it.

Papyrus checked the ends. The little holes and rips were there, but they won’t tear any further. He always had to hand-wash the scarf because it was too fragile for standard machine laundering. Though he never mentioned it, he was worried that one day it would rip upon the slightest touch.

Now, it had the integrity of steel. Holding the preserved memento of his mother’s memory almost made Papyrus burst into tears of happiness.

“THANK YOU, LADY LUCIDIA! THIS IS SO AWESOME!”

That simple expression of joy warmed her heart. It reflected on her smiling face. “Try charging it with magic.”

He did as he was told. Lo and behold, a hidden magic circuit came to life. It’s the Delta Rune connected to a network of smaller Arcanagrams.

A closer inspection revealed that codes filled the interiors of the familiar design.

Triangles, squares, circles, hidden words weaved around the base lines to make whole stars: symbols embedded inside a larger symbol. The level of intricacy made his head spin.

“What does this do?”

Lucidia explained: “You always had the desire to end combat with non-lethal means, but you lacked the tools to do so. Therefore I weaved my colours into your scarf. If this is fine, my arts will be at your disposal.”

“This design will safely bind, root, and disable its intended target. It will also nullify all magic. This works on both humans and monsters.”

“WOWIE!”

“There… is one condition though,” she frowned. “The spell must be applied close-range. Directly. It’s quite risky as you can imagine.”

“That’s alright,” Papyrus chipped, “I am quite the close-combat specialist! Thank you so very, very much.”
His joyous reunion was short lived. Mezil’s phone rang and he picked it up. Turned away to talk in private.

Ending the call, he asked: “When can we wake Gaelic up? Since he got himself involved, I want him to be included in the meeting.”

Lucidia answered, “Approximate time: 30 hours and 23 minutes from now. I presume that call came from Cenna?”

“Yes,” Mezil replied, “Complained about sleeplessness. She’s concerned about the Dreemurr matron’s stance against the Trial. I told her to lay down the worries and rest some more. Another long day awaits.”

“It does concern me,” said the wife. “Her sleep quality has been poor.”

“MISS AUNT IS HERE?!” To Papyrus, it felt like forever since he last talked to her.

“No. But she will be sooner or later. She’s a vital member on our case after all. By the way Papyrus, you will attend the briefing too.”

The skeleton stared back, speechless for a few seconds. He then blurted: “WHAT? ME?”

It’s strange. Surreal. Scary. For his entire life, he was excluded from important decision making moments. No one trusted that he could handle the responsibility.

That all changed. He must now attend the same roundtable discussions that dictated the fate of others.

“You’ve chosen the path of a hero, young man. It’s time for you to prepare yourself for the road ahead: both in mind and body.”

Mezil spoke truth. Stakes will not favour the idle. Goodness needs action, and action needs council.

“YESSIR! I WILL JOIN YOU!”

Chapter End Notes

Those who know their blue robot lore would understand why Gaelic is in Pod 22 ;)

-
Dance

Chapter Summary

Prepare this soundtrack for your ship-related pleasure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On the beginning of Thursday, you turned on the TV to catch Mettaton’s channel. He might have some vital news about the current events.

There he is, in all his flamboyant glam-bot glory. Looks like he’s not going to use the box form this time around.

“Good Mooooorning, darlings!”

Ah. It’s so good to see him doing his Mettaton business as if nothing happened.

“Today, I bring you some wonderful news! More so for my lovely fans in Ebott Town. Curfews and uncertainty getting you down? Fret not! This will turn your gloomy day right side up in no time!”

“We’re on the first day of Spring! Yes, it’s official! Approved and signed by the National Weather Council themselves!”

Mettaton clapped his hands.

“What do you know what this calls for?” Pose! “A CELEBRATION! Humans of this region celebrate the arrival of Spring by having a dance session with the ones they love most. I think that’s an EXCELLENT idea!”

“So go out there, hold a hand, and have some fun! If you’re dancing outside, please remember to return home by sundown. Curfews are there to protect you from unwanted incidents. Don’t wander alone and always walk in groups~~~”

“There’s no limit for a private session at home though. So, if you’re a nightbird or prefer a more quiet setting, no one can stop you from breaking out the moves in the comforts of indoors.”

“That is all for now, darlings! Tune in to my channel at noon for more hot news. Oh, don’t forget to stock up on groceries. Mornings are the best time to shop for the freshest goods~”

“Toodles~”

“This news was brought to you by MTT Brand Glam-Soda, filled with pizzaz to sparkle your day!”

Okay. You really expected something more… nevermind. Monsters have different priorities.

Dad almost dropped his cup of tea. “S-Spring? Now?! W-who can I dance with?! M-maybe Undyne, but…”
You told Dad outright that he wants to dance with Mom.

“O-of course! This is the first time in aeons that she had opened her heart. I-I-I can’t let this chance
slip by! Think of all the anniversaries and festivals that I have to make up to her.”

Your phone buzzed. It’s the group chat.

**HotAndSpicy**
Okay I think I have a little cultural shock but.
Why is everyone setting up for a public dance?!?
In the middle of a curfew?!?!?!

**StrongFish91**
Sigh.
It’s Mettaton. He just announced it’s the first day of Spring and told everyone to celebrate.

**HotAndSpicy**
Are you bloody serious?!?
I'm doubling patrols!

**FabulousMTT**
Oh beauties, why so glum?
Things had been peaceful other than the usurping Linda lady.
So why can’t everyone just forget their worries for a while and let loose?
Same goes to my fabulous Magi soon-to-be fans~~

**HotAndSpicy**
I don’t think I can relax knowing the lightning-heads might be lurking at the edge of town.
Actual bombings do happen.
And the more crowded the place, the more people are gonna get hurt.

**sans**
nah
it’s too spontaneous
terrorist acts need a certain level of premeditation
considering how ignorant they are about monsters in general, i don’t think they expected the sudden
dance club.
safety measures are always a plus of course.
just don’t sweat too much, kay?

Sans is awake super early for his standards. Strange.

**sans**
besides, tori thought having a dance would be a good idea.
hope you guys are ready because she wants that to happen tonight.
What.

You can’t believe it, but the Ebott gang ended up preparing for a small dance night. Anyone who’s not Mom or Dad had an early dinner. That way, the team could focus on the couple without a growling stomach.

Undyne managed to haul her piano all the way from her home. Why? Because she can. Bits of cobwebs stuck around the feet and underside. Apparently, Muffet was the guard-for-hire. Her idea of protecting the place involved a bajillion webs - everywhere.

She set down on the chair and began practicing the music sheets provided by Mettaton. They’re sent via the almighty wonder of the internet.

The glam bot had made sure the scores were within Undyne’s level of skill. She plays piano as a hobby, not a career. You shouldn’t expect grand concertos from her. Still, she's determined.

As far as you knew, Mettaton did receive the unedited footage of Papyrus’ vision-diving adventures. Though… you’re not sure if he had viewed them yet. Even if he did, he might not want to comment.

Dad and Cenna meanwhile moved the furniture aside to make some dance space. Arguably, Dad did most of the heavy-duty lifting without much help. Your sister concentrated on moving the smaller objects aside to speed things up.

Alphys tried her best to help by vacuuming the place. There was no time for fancy decorations.

Doctor Gaster got conscripted into cooking duty. It’s a task the skeleparents willingly accepted.

You were in charge of helping Mom dress up. With Sans’ help. That’s because you roped him into it.

It’s still a bit early, so you took the time to catch up. You invited him to your temporary bedroom, took a deep breath, and asked:

‘How the heck will a dance help us?’

He snorted and chuckled. “Jeez, kid. You don’t trust me?”

You told Sans that you do. But isn’t this a waste of time?

“No at all. Tori still isn’t convinced yet. She tries to act strong, but I know she’s a nervous wreck inside. You really need her to feel secure if you want to get in the Crimson Hall.”

You pointed at yourself.

“Sorry kid,” Sans shrugged. “You can’t be her support this time. She’d be way more worried than comforted with you alone.”

“So. That’s why we’re gonna put our two lovebird fluffybuns together. Mend their relationship as much as we can. That way, Tori will let Asgore accompany her for your big exam.”

The family shattered because of the death of their children.
Now, you as their child, will reunite them as husband and wife.

It had come to a full circle.

“Fitting, isn’t it?” Sans said. “Hey, let me ask you something… this is the first timeline they ever got
together, right?"

You thought about it….

Yes. You nodded. This would be the only timeline that Mom didn’t chew out Dad on sight.

Did anything happen while you went out travelling? Sans got his badass powers back. Surely he remembers something.

Sans shook his head. “Frisk, you’re overestimating me way too much. Purples have memory retention, but it’s not universal. I only recall the important bits. Provided I have a deja vu trigger. Most of the recollections feel impersonal anyway. Like, viewing a recording with amnesia.”

……………

A personal question comes to mind.

“Curious as ever, huh? Welp. Shoot.”

You asked Sans if he ever fell in love.

He closed his eyes and lowered his head for a moment. When he looked at you again, he answered: “Nah. I’m too lazy anyway.”

Glare mode, on. This is not the time to joke, Sans! If he pairs Mom and Dad together, he’ll lose all chances of becoming your new ‘Dad’.

“Kid, I’m flattered that you want me as a parent. But, really. I don’t love Tori like Asgore loves her. You can say that I’m all cold bones you know. Not exactly capable of romance.”

He nudged you with a friendly smack on the arm. “Aww, no need to look so sad. I can always be that slacking uncle. Or your lazy buddy. Whichever makes you happier.”

If… if he’s a hundred and one percent okay with this.

“I’m fine, kid.” Sans winked. “C’mon, I think it’s time to start the dressup game. Let’s go meet Tori.”

Into a shortcut you go. It’s been a while since you slept in your own home. You skipped all the way upstairs and knocked on Mom’s door. Said hello to let her know it’s you.

“Please hang on a moment, my child.”

When Mom opened the door, she’s in a stunning purple gown. You never knew she had this!


Mom chuckled at the reactions. “I understand that you two are here for the finishing touches?”

Yup!

Mom pulled out a stool and sat down in front of the mirror. You grabbed the brush and began running the bristles through her fur. Gotta make it super silky and well-groomed for the dance night ahead. She handled the rest of the makeup herself.
Where’s Sans?

You find him standing around in complete silence. Frankly, you don’t know why you think he’d do anything. Papyrus and Mettaton are the fashion nerds.

Oh.
Right.

It’s hard to believe that Papyrus isn’t around. You’re so used to his loud presence, you kept thinking that he’s participating somewhere: ever enthusiastic.

…He’s strangely invisible for someone who leaves such a strong impression.

Was he really that forgettable?

“Sans, any news about your brother?” asked Mom.

“Nope,” he answered. “No news is good news though. It means that he’s not dying.”

“Hmm… Is it me or you seem a little too cheerful?”

“Welp, thought it’s best to take it easy, y’know. There’s nothing I can do to speed up his recovery. Those things take time.”

“I suppose.”

You wanted to lighten the mood. You offered your brush to Sans and asked if he wants to try.

“Nah kid. Never brushed hair or fur before. I mean, I’m as bald as a bone. Where do I even get the practice?”

You puffed up your cheeks. Told him that he needs to earn his keep! Besides, you’re here to help if he makes any mistakes.

Sans snickered. “If you insist.”

You switched positions and placed the brush in his hand. He worked, you directed. Overall, he’s doing a good job for a first-timer.

Maybe this was a huge mistake. If he ever had a romantic slant towards Mom, this is huge temptation fuel.

But, this could be the first and last time Sans would have any chance to brush her fur.

You want to give him that golden opportunity. That’s the least you could do to compensate for all the trouble.

His expression softened. You tried your darndest to decipher the hidden subtleties on his face.

…Sans cares about Mom more than he’d like to admit, but you’re not certain if it’s romance or something more platonic.

No goat jokes?
No fur jokes?
No plush jokes?
None?

Somehow, you imagined a melancholic note-running Romantic Era piano piece rolling in the air. It’s somewhat tragic.

“Good enough, Frisk?” Sans asked.

His question snapped you out of it. You inspected his handiwork and gave him a thumbs up. Sure he’s a first-timer?

“Well, I learn through observation.”

Mom stood up and turned away from the mirror. She faced the both of you as a woman fit to be a queen. As the kid you are, you clapped with happy squeals.

You told Mom she looks BE-A-U-TI-'FULL’! With emphasis on the pun!

“Yeah, Tori,” said Sans. “The kid’s right.”

However, his words just… stopped there. You frowned and asked if he’s okay.

“I’m trying to think of a joke,” he said. “But I can’t see anything. You know. Blinded by Tori’s ‘radiant’ beauty.” Wink.

That’s totally a joke! Here you thought he’s acting too ‘OOC’, as the internet calls it.

Mom laughed at the antics. “Now, now. As much fun as it is to goat around, I don’t want to keep the rest waiting. A mother needs to set a good example for the future generation.”

Yes! No tardiness. Let’s move on to the main show!

Sans sent you back to Dad’s home. Showing his phone, he said: “Text me when the other side’s ready for the big event.”

Okay! Then you watched him vanish.

You checked up on Dad. Let him know that Mom’s all ready for the grand entry.

To your relief, it seems that Team Asgore managed to suit him up just in time. They had given him Frisk-approved brushing on his glorious golden mane too.

You told Dad he looks awesome in his three-piece suit. All the money invested into it wasn’t for waste. He bought it for the school opening and you’ve not seen it since. He had to get it custom-made because no human matched his size, and thus he can’t just rent a set.

“W-well. I-if you say so…”

Cenna patted him on the back, “C’mon, you can do it sir! Just act natural and it’ll all be A-OK.”

“Yeah!” Alphys chirped in. “Y-your Majesty, I-I’m sure you’ll get the hang of it!”

Undyne said nothing. She’s practicing so furiously, she ignored anything that didn’t involve the piano. You could tell that she’s putting a thousand percent of effort into this. Seeing her father-figure reunite with his rightful wife was a small dream fulfilled.

“I just wish Gerson is here,” Dad sighed. “He’s one of my closest friends, yet he can’t witness this
moment.”

The old turtle? How is he doing?

“Oh. He’s well and healthy. His contract ended yesterday, but… as you can see, the town isn’t quite ready to welcome him back. Besides, the cold weather won’t be kind to his old joints. So I told him to take a well-earned vacation in the sun.”

What was he supposed to do again?

“Historians of that university wanted to hear monsterkind’s side of the pre-Sealing days. And also to double check their records for accuracy.”

Dad smiled at the thought of a funny story. “Apparently, they didn’t know that one of the human princes switched with a lookalike and fled the country. Gerson knew the truth because he witnessed the exchange.”

Wow! You’re more amazed that no one noticed that in the first place.

Doctor Gaster slid out to inform the good news: “Preparations are complete, Your Majesty. We’ll begin upon your signal.”

Dad breathed in deep. “I… I am ready.”

You buzzed Sans. He soon showed up with with Mom.

It’s like a wedding all over again. Mom as the bride, Dad as the groom, and Sans the escort. The bride’s father usually takes up escorting role. But, well, Mom’s parents are long gone.

You watched the short guy lead the first lady closer and closer to her husband. For every step Sans took closer to Dad, it’s another mile away from a dream life with Mom.

The two giant fluffy hands met under a comedian’s approval. After giving some pats, Sans retreated to let the two be.

It’s kinda bittersweet: sweet that your goat-parents will be on the road to a proper reconciliation, bitter that it meant the end of a different relationship.

Sure, Mom and Sans could still be friends. By theory. But, if TV and anime are anything to go by… you wonder if it’s still possible for Sans to maintain the status quo.

There are consequences to everything.

Time went on. The air itself was a little too formal for your taste, but these were two old royalties rekindling their love - or at least trying to rekindle it.

They had a romantic candlelight dinner together.
They talked.
They tried to pun and joke, though Dad was way out of practice to get anywhere.
They danced to the gentle waltz of the piano.

Today filled all the checkboxes of the perfect romantic evening: from staring each other in the eyes, to the gentle sways around the makeshift ballroom space.

At last, the impossible happened: Mom and Dad nuzzled their noses together for the first time since their children’s deaths.
Alphys squealed, trying so hard not to interrupt the moment. She’s the one who thought Mom and Dad are the ‘OTP’. In a way, her fanfic became reality.

Any celebration can come later, Al. Chill.

Sans scooted up to your side. Whispering into your ear, he said: “My job here is done. I’m gonna go catch some Zs back home. It’s been a long day after all. Don’t interrupt Tori, ‘kay?”

You nodded and wished him goodnight.

“Night. Sleep tight, kid.”

After the dance session came to a close, you helped shift the furniture back. Undyne and Doctor Gaster handled the heavy stuff, while the rest of the inhabitants rearranged the deco.

Soon after, it’s bedtime.

You did your nightly routine, practiced on your heirloom watch, then tucked yourself to bed. It’s still nice to have your parents tuck you in, but you’re a big kid now.

You placed the phone right under your pillow so it’ll buzz without waking the rest of the house. No one should peek on what you plan to do next morning.

………………

Right on schedule, the alarm buzzed at four in the morning. You managed to squeeze in six hours of sleep. That should be enough.

Down to the kitchen you went. First, some water. Hydration is important for a fleshy human such as yourself.

Then…

You opened the kitchen drawer. This is where Dad keeps his knives. Whenever they’re not used, they’re in their cardboard sleeves.

There’s this secret that you’ve kept to yourself for a long, long while. It’s a bloody, dusty one that you’d rather not face. If you had a choice, you’d bury it forever.

Except, the Trial of the Crimson Hall may turn ugly. Without the power to RESET, you need to cover all your bases.

Under Chara’s possession, you had become the unwitting Persona. Thanks to Papyrus, you now understand the logic behind their system: those who call upon the name of their haunting predecessor will inherit all their combat skill. If the host had the physical fitness to execute them, it would mean skipping years of training to achieve that same level of mastery.

You yourself had called upon Chara’s name once, it gave you the knowledge to select the right weapon, to take the proper stance, and to perform the deadliest of moves.

Suitable knife, found. It’s time to start practicing. You admit that it’s a last-minute idea, but it’s better than nothing.

You snuck into the backyard and locked the door. Stretched your arm and your core muscles for a warm-up. Getting a sprain or pulling a nerve now could cost you too much. Better be safe than sorry.
Now to start with some basic eight-directional swipes. There’s no Chara to badger you on what you did wrong, so you had to be self-critical and evaluate the quality of your attacks.


With a sharpened piece of steel in hand, you danced.

You’ve got a hunch that if you put your mind to it, your skills might end up better than the DEMON who had once possessed you.

After all…

…It’s you, not Chara, who ended the lives of the Underground’s greatest.

Chapter End Notes

Sans now sails the Flying Dutchman named Soriel, the ghost ship that will never arrive at port.

Frisk is training too! Yes, I am curious to read how you feel about this development.
Friday.
1 PM in the afternoon.

Lucidia stared at the colourful, cartoonish box cover. It featured a dinosaur eating a delight of oatmeal and mixed-in dinosaur eggs.

She read the ingredient list. Then, she set the empty carton down with a thump.

Papyrus, Flowey, and Chara enjoyed their bowls of cereal too much to notice the lack of chill.

The rosy-cheeked flower took the sugar content to the next level by shaving a bar of chocolate every time they run out of their preferred garnishing. They could get away with it because of their now-plant form. They technically thrive on simple sugars.

“Papyrus,” said Lucidia. “This is your favourite food?”

He nodded and continued stuffing spoonfuls of oatmeal into his mouth. He’s still in his pajamas since that’s the only clothing article to fit his size.

“How pasta?”

Flowey rolled his eyes and groaned. “Sheesh, EVERYONE thinks it’s pasta. Okay, I don’t mean to be rude, but this is too much. Pasta is his SECOND most favourite food. He discovered that later thanks to Frisk. They took everyone on a night out to a restaurant and then it was history.”

The flower wrapped his vines around the cereal packaging and pulled it back to his side. “This? This is his first favourite. The stuff he grew up on as a kid.”

In the most straight and deadpan manner, Lucidia pointed out: “But it has candies in them.”

“THAT’S THE FUN PART!” said Papyrus. “THE CRUNCHES OF DISCOVERY WITH EVERY SCOOP!”

“Your choice of comfort food rivals my husband’s.”
“WHAT ABOUT MISTER MAGUS?”

“If left to his own devices, Mezil makes terrible, terrible, dietary decisions.”

Flowey patted a vine on Papyrus’ arm, “Don’t mind her. Lady Lucidia has reeeeally high standards when it comes to food. Everything has to be as original as possible. The only box cereal in this house are cornflakes.”

Chara nodded. “When I first arrived here, this entire mansion is devoid of candy. After a lot of searching, I discovered a small bag of chocolate chips at the back end of the fridge. And they’re for baking. Also it was untouched for months. Finished that in three days.”

They waved the bar of chocolate. “See this here? Special order on my allowance. I’m the chocolate landlord of this house!”

It confused Papyrus even more. “BUT THIS OATMEAL IS GOOD FOR BONES. LOTS OF CALCIUM AND VITAMIN D.”

“But it has candies.” Lucidia insisted, “I question the use of candy as a part of a main meal. Sweets should only be part of a dessert course and in small quantities. There are so many other means to achieve the same level of nutrition.”

“I am letting you go off the hook this time because you’re a guest, Papyrus. But while we live under the same roof, I would keep this as a special treat.”

Leaning closer to Flowey, Papyrus asked: “I RESPECT HER HIGH STANDARDS. BUT, WHAT’S THE STORY BEHIND THIS PARTICULARITY?”

“I should ask YOU,” the flower boy huffed. “Apparently Chara’s looping exorcism had something to do with the old man’s ‘terrible decision’.”

“Oh! That’s right. Mister Magus had jungle curry, which gave him a very bad time in the toilet. It happened in the middle of the violent and complicated ritual.”

Chara stared in disbelief. “Are you telling me that I got tortured by the Smiley Trashbag because Mister Time Traveller is intolerant to curry?!”

“WHO’S THE SMILEY TRASHBAG?”

“Your brother.”

Papyrus responded, “OH. YES, UNFORTUNATELY.”

“Do you now understand why I’m so strict?” said Lucidia. “Mezil has Irritable Bowel Syndrome, therefore his digestive systems are more sensitive than the general populace. Yet, he’s determined to keep making choices that are detrimental to his health.”

“What… exactly are his food sins?” Chara just had to know.

“Anything with excessive spice such as Jungle Curry. He loves the fire a bit too much. Also, he can’t properly digest edibles with high levels of fat. Like that dreaded microwavable macaroni and cheese. It tastes awful and I’m horrified to discover that it was once a semi-regular part of his diet.”

“Alcohol is another major offender. The gastritis kicks in faster than drunkenness. Whenever he gets roped into binge drinking, expect half of the contents to eject upwards. And he would be in pain for
the remainder of the day.”

The rosy cheeked one snickered. “He’s sooooo banned from Grillby’s.”


Lucidia gathered that Ebott Town’s bar establishment was notorious for greasy foods. Indeed, she wouldn’t let her husband go there if she could help it.

Most of the time he’d have enough discipline to not sabotage himself. ‘Most’ was the keyword. There were moments when he gave into his strange cravings and paid the price.

_Hmm… Mezzy should’ve been up half an hour ago. He needs time to dress and eat. Maybe I should wake him?

Her thoughts were interrupted by a surprise pat on the shoulder.

“Yo, Lucy!”

It’s Cenna in all her cheerful spunk. Seeing her again brought much joy in Lucidia’s heart. They hugged each other for a brief moment.

Papyrus dropped his spoon as he jumped out of his seat. True to their previous life’s training, Chara managed to catch the stray cutlery before it messed up the floor. They then placed it back into the half-eaten bowl of oatmeal.

He rushed up to the Vanquisher with the eagerness of a puppy: still adorable and innocently charming despite everything.

“Cinnamon Roll, you’re okay!” Cenna cried out. A hearty hug followed soon after. “God, I was so worried about you. How long you’ve been up?”

The two updated each other. In the meantime, Lucidia decided that it’s time to check up on her husband. It’s possible that he overslept.

She excused herself and slipped out of the dining area. The sapphire lady traversed the shortest path of portals to the bedroom.

Gaelic stalked the entrance, aided by crutches. At the very least, he kept his clothes on… unlike that incident in a different timeline when he stripped himself naked from sheer drunkenness.

“You should be resting,” Lucidia huffed.

The snake placed a finger on his lips. “Me tongue be tasting Determination in the air.”

Her irritation soon turned into worry. When she touched the door, she detected unnatural levels of that time-bending power.

Flakes of red wisps escaped from underneath the gaps. Gaelic’s cautious instincts compelled him to step away.

“Do ya need help?” he asked.

Lucidia shook her head. “I’ll be fine. Please head down to the dining hall to entertain the guests. Distraction is required.”
“Yes, m’lady.”

Gaelic hobbled to the nearest shortcut and vanished through it.

Alone, the sapphire Seer faced the entrance of her bedroom. This place of loving solace had become a radioactive den of evil.

Her Eyes of power lit up. As she levitated off the ground, the air bent and ripped around her into a protective sphere.

Lucidia twisted the knob via telekinesis. Pushed the door open, knowing full well what awaited her.

Corrupted Determination spewed forth. Bleak red spikes threatened to kill, but the force of her protective sphere pushed the flow aside like water to rock.

*This foulness doesn’t belong to my husband.*

*There is only one source of this stench…*

She floated into the room. It’s dark. Those heavy curtains had never been drawn ever since Mezil Thyme claimed this place as his refuge.

Mezil sat up on his side of the bed without his shirt. Gone were his default nut-brown irises, replaced by an ominous ruby sheen.

Square on his abdomen, a red bolt of lightning glowed bright. Ever mocking, ever taunting. It declared ‘I will haunt you forever from the depths of Hell’, seared into his body’s weakest point.

They had purged every other Mark except this. It’s a ‘gut punch’ in more ways than one.

“Mezzy?” Lucidia called out.

No response.

How she wished to reach out for her love. Alas it’s still too dangerous to touch.

If it’s not the corruption melting away her magical being, Mezil might lash out on defensive instinct.

Again, she whispered. “Mezil, my light and dark…. come back to me. Please, don’t fight the Persona alone. I am here. We are all here. Waiting for you.”

His lips moved, trying to speak. Yet no words could escape.

“Follow my voice. Let my song be your guide.”

So Lucidia sang as the beacon, the lighthouse, the guiding light in a maze of the blind.

Slowly yet surely, the crimson glow faded.

Mezil coughed and gasped for air. Drastic it may be, that’s the surest sign of safety.

The wife lowered her shields and grabbed the water bottle by the bedside. She helped her husband take some much needed sips.

Once he settled down, Mezil grumbled: “I still can’t erase that *stain* from my SAVES.”

“The one with Persona’s curse?” she asked.
“Nngh. What else?” He drank some more. “I went to the Hub to train. Thought I could draw in enough Determination to shatter it once and forever. Instead--!”

Mezil slammed his fist down on the mattress, frustrated beyond words.

“Did you try to retain the world inside yourself again?” asked Lucidia.

“Yes,” he answered.

“Mezzy dear, your Psychia cannot withstand that. When I came into this room, you’re a nuclear reactor in meltdown. Our analysis confirms that it takes someone like Uncle James to break that curse. God bless his soul.”

“And…” The wife glanced to the side. “The only person with his capacity is Frisk. Perhaps it would be wiser to wait?”

Shaking his head, Mezil breathed out a long sigh. “They may not pass. Then, there’s the matter of Ebott’s seraphim. This curse is a weakness. Though I cannot guess how it could be exploited… my experience tells me it’s a risk.”

“I understand.” Resting her cranium to his forehead, she said, “But please, take care of yourself. Not just because it’ll give us the best chance of victory… but also because I love you.”

He held her close for a much-needed embrace. “Sorry,” Mezil whispered.

“It’s fine.”

Lucidia cherished every moment. If they had more time and privacy, she would have given him comfort. Alas, this isn’t the case. They had to hurry down to the dining area before anyone grew suspicious.

She turned on a lamp and helped her husband change into his distinctive tailcoat uniform. They’re stylish, but they take a while to set up.

“Could you bring me my cane?” he asked.

In one flick of her finger, Lucidia opened the storage case and pulled the ebony cane close.

Mezil held it horizontal to the mirror. He then twisted the top side to pop a hidden handle off its locks.

That’s not an ordinary walking tool: it’s a sword concealed inside an icon of fanciness.

After examining the edges, he locked it back in its sheathe. “It’s still sharp.”

“Not surprising,” Lucidia stated. “You’ve not engaged in a sword duel for a while now. And I hope you’ve polished off some of your rust with Grandpa.”

Mezil clicked his tongue. “Who do you take me for? Of course I did. Chara may not be as skillful as the Persona, but I’m not taking any chances with Frisk.”

She giggled. “That child is really something else, hm?”

The original Gungnir founded some of the most effective weapon arts in the land. When new laws limited the ownership of weapons, the craftier ones masked their arts as dances.
Those who understood their true purpose became some of the world’s most efficient killers.

Hair, combed. Coat, straightened. It’s time to meet the gang.

It started off with Gaelic planting a facepalm at Papyrus’ question. What a turn of events.

“Cor Blimey, how the heck ya think I’m a scallywag mangy dog?!” he exclaimed. “Oy ya city sticklers seriously need to know there be more than cats and dogs in this world!”

Papyrus then asked: “IF YOU’RE NOT A DOG, THEN WHAT ARE YOU?”

“A snake, lad! Y’know, the scaly ones with no legs that slither on the ground? Forked tongue like mine?”

“I THINK I REMEMBER SEEING ONE IN ‘PEEK-A-BOO WITH FLUFFY BUNNY’. EXCEPT HER HEAD WAS A LOT FLATTER. AND GREEN. WITH A YELLOW BELLY."

“Guessin’ that she’s a typical green vine snake. Canna say for sure, since artistic liberalism be a bane to accurate representation. Bah. So tame. Pythons win anytime. Have ya ever seen one o’ them? They grow meters!”

“WOWIE!”

While Gaelic educated Papyrus about the wonders of the natural world, Cenna scooted up close to the couple. That grin. Oh, she’s a cheeky little fox.

“Sooso Mez. You’re looking kinda pale.” She asked, “Did you end up contemplating on the ceramic throne again?”

The grizzled knight grunted in annoyance.

“What is it this time? Curry? Shoddy processed junk food? Or did you steal a shot of whiskey on an empty stomach?”

Mezil brushed the badgering aside. “Doesn’t matter. I need to have my lunch now. Then we’ll start the meeting.”

“Aww c’mon you’re no fun.” She then walked off to grab her lunch from the kitchen. Soon after, Cenna returned with a big helping of fried rice. Chowed it down as if she’s in her own home.

There’s never a dull day with Cenna around, Lucidia thought. There’s either comical teasing, critical discussions, or violent screaming matches. To think that this girl could rile up her ever-stoic husband.

It may be strange, but she appreciated Cenna’s brand of rude wake-up calls. That lady won’t take nonsense and she’s not afraid to express it.

There were times when Mezil treaded a darker path. There’s only so much family members could help, more so for a man defined by his determination. He needed correction as much as anyone else.

Flowey waved in good cheer. “Howdy!”

Chara just glanced up and said, “Greetings. Wanna eat?” They then shaved more chocolate on the last quarter of their meal.

“Good afternoon,” the old man replied. “What’s for lunch?”
The ex-prince answered, “You got two choices. Boring ol’ fried rice, or fun oatmeal with dinosaur eggs!”

“Oh?” Mezil picked up the box and recognized it right away. “This is nostalgic. Reminds me of my schooling days.”

Papyrus exclaimed, “IS THIS YOUR FAVOURITE TOO?”

“Favourite? No. But it’s a part of my childhood diet.”

Cenna and Gaelic both grimaced at the statement.

“Eeew, I hate oatmeal,” said the young spunk. “No offence everyone. Give me fried rice any day!”

Gaelic tossed in his own opinion. “Rice fer me too. Ah prefer me oats with just honey and milk, thank ya. Especially if that honey came straight from a wild hive. Comb and larvae included. Mmm~”

Now it’s the flower childrens’ turn to cringe. In a deadpan manner, Chara said, “Warning, warning, we have a baby eater in the room.”

“Are you from the jungle or what?” said Flowey.

Gaelic laughed at their reactions. “Prefer the forests, to be honest. But ah could live in the thick o’ the jungle ‘till ah turn to dust if I have to.”


“This box is empty,” Mezil stated. “Do you have another one?”

Lucidia felt her sockets twitch at the corner. “Mezzy, do not.”

Too late. Flowey grabbed a new box from the counter and started tearing the lid. Papyrus wasted no time setting down a spoon, a bowl, and a jug of hot milk.

The wife sighed at the sight.

Her husband, the head of the Magus Association, decided to have candied cereal for lunch… which was actually his breakfast.

_Hmmm… there’s nothing in the ingredient list that would cause him to rush to the loo. I guess I have no choice but to accept. For now._

_He could tolerate sugars better than me at least. Ah, I didn’t have the heart to tell Papyrus that his beloved Queen’s pie was too sweet for me. If she cut the sugar content by half, then it’ll be just right._

_It’s quite a curse to be sensitive to sweets… At least Mezil enjoyed it._

_I should start my meal. It’s getting very late._

Lucidia joined the lunch with own her savoury choice of fried rice. Served a portion for Gaelic too, since she knew he hasn’t eaten yet. Grandpa’s cooking’s the best.

She watched her husband interact with the merry folk around him. Seeing the natural recluse enjoying the melodies of life warmed her heart. Mezil needs friends who’d keep him on the right path. Not that he’d openly admit it ever.
I want to keep this timeline.

I want him to make friends without worrying about betrayal.

I want him to be silly. To laugh free. And to eat whatever he wants at any time, with or without consequence.

Last bowl, finished. To his wife’s dismay, Mezil turned to the flower children and asked: “May I have seconds?”

“Mezzy!!! Mind your blood sugar levels, please! It has CANDIES in them!”

Maybe one day, we can walk together in the light without burning to ashes.

Chapter End Notes

Prepare your brains for the next entry, because it’s time for intensive facts.

P.S IBS is way more common than people realise, with reported cases somewhere around 10-15% of the world. Most go undiagnosed.
Debriefing

Chapter Notes

Grab your thinking/comprehension cap because this is going to be a boatload of information.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

An imposing black tapestry hung from the ceiling. Crimson threads weaved a chain of endless loops, forming a ring that had no beginning nor end.

Mezil’s Mark -- the red butterfly -- stood seared into the center of that circle. It glowed with the Determination of life.

Cane in hand, the Supreme Judge walked towards his seat under the flag of time.

Papyrus gawked at the fine threadwork. From this meeting onwards, he’ll be in his ‘battle body’. The design may be cartoonish, but Lucidia’s analysis indicated that it’s not a prop. It will provide protection for the uncertain days ahead.

He carried the two flower pots in his arms. They tried to snap the hero out of his daze.

“Earth to Papyrus,” said Chara. “Do you read me?”

Flowey grumbled from the lack of response. “You’re blocking the way. This is not the time to be an idiot.”

Those three provide an endless source of amusement. Mezil wouldn’t show it on his face, but he did welcome the slight banter. He’s not looking forward to the briefing either.

“What is that?” Papyrus asked.

Gaelic sighed as he slipped between the tight gaps. “Me nick fer that thing be ‘The Omen’: as bleak and glum as its dark shades.”

Pointing his cane upwards, Mezil explained: “See my Mark? As long it’s there, it tells everyone in the know that we’re dealing with an active time loop. Only The Spire and the Seers’ Headquarters have these installed.”

“We got ours in the lobby, aye,” Said Gaelic. “The moment our Grams detect that Mark, it sends out a signal. That way, us o’ bone won’t ever miss the memo.”

Lucidia placed her hand on the rounded pauldrons. “This way, Papyrus. I’ll lead you to your seat.”

Mezil waited for the rest to settle down first. Cenna and Gaelic sat down on the left side of the table. His wife, Papyrus, and the two flower children occupied the right seats.

Everyone now in place, Mezil himself settled down to chair the meeting.

So he began with the following statement: “We are now at a critical junction. The Trial of the
Crimson Hall must be completed in a single pass.”

“Single pass, huh?” Cenna crossed her arms. “As if things can’t get any worse.”

Papyrus asked: “WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?”

She explained, “An all-or-nothing situation, Cinnamon Roll. One chance, one life, no continues remaining. No SAVES or RESETS either.”

Flowey frowned, skeptical. “Is that even possible?”

“It happens more often than you think, flower boy.”

Mezil nodded in agreement. “I am here to explain the events that led up to this day. Consider it a primer for everyone involved. Seer Lucidia, would you please?”

“Yes.”

Serving as lady secretary, Lucidia tapped her tablet to initiate some commands. Projectors shone down on the table, recreating 3D holographic images of their agenda.

It’s a miniature scale of Mount Ebott.

“As you all know,” said Mezil, “Chara fell into the Underground in the early years of the 21st century.”

The computer displayed a police photograph of the rosy-cheeked child. Their future flower version was visibly discomforted by the reminder of their past.

“It led to the breakdown of the last remaining old Gungnir cult. With their ancestral spirits pitted against their descendants, the Persona of that time initiated the Great Ebott Razing.”

Fire consumed the once serene greenery of the model scale. It left behind a charred land of ash and despair. Icons of ghosts littered the land. Their hauntings drew humans from the outside, transforming them into the members of the dead one way or another.

“Many who visited the site post-fire reported frequent incidents of the supernatural. While Vanquishers worked around the clock to destroy the remnants of Gungnir’s spirits, civilians flocked to the site for their own reasons: the thrill for the unknown, the mystery of the occults, the greed for fame, and so on. They continued to trespass despite restrictions and warnings.”

“Restless spirits prey on the weak-hearted and the arrogant. They trap the living to their doom, or encourage the vulnerable to end their own lives. It inspired horror stories that added unto the preexisting legend of Mount Ebott.”

Chara recited: “Those who climb the mountain never return’.”

“Indeed,” said Mezil. “The highest death count happened in the first ten years after the fire, gradually tapering down to present day’s low records. Please present the numbers, Seer Lucidia.”

The sapphire lady created multiple copies of a bar chart to be distributed to the rest. Flowey and Chara shared Papyrus’ copy.

While they read, he observed their reactions together with his wife. Cenna and Gaelic took the statistics as plain facts. They’re professionals used to harsh realities.
Papyrus on the other hand… he’s disturbed. “TWENTY PEOPLE DIED THE YEAR BEFORE WE EMERGED? AND THEY’RE MOSTLY SUICIDES? WITH MORE REPORTED MISSING? BUT, WHY?! I THOUGHT HUMANS ARE DETERMINED COMPARED TO US MONSTERS!”

“Another common misconception,” said Mezil. “There are many factors. None pleasant nor relevant to this meeting. The crucial fact is this: children are not the only casualties in that region.”

“And yet the troublemakers demanded specifically for the corpses of ‘Six Children’. Excluding Chara.”

“Okay,” Flowey frowned. “Now THAT is fishy!”

“Never trusted those lightning-head’s shit for a reason.” Typical Cenna talk right there.

Angry swearing aside, Mezil agreed with her. “Seer Lucidia traced this demand to its original source: an internet conspiracy site. I believe it’s her jurisdiction to further elaborate.”

“Thank you, sir.” Lucidia bowed her head as part of the proper meeting procedure. She then began the explanation of her findings.

“Cenna’s interview with Queen Toriel confirmed that she had cared a total of eight human children, with six passing on beyond this world. She explained that they all fell from a specific hole right above The Ruins.”

“Cross-examining her testimony, I had found reports of numerous personal belongings scattered around the perimeters of the Surface breach. For example: handkerchiefs, photos, phones, shoes, wallets, toys, and so on.”

Gaelic lifted his hand. “Sorry to interrupt, m’lady. But ah got a question on me mind.”

“Please present your query,” Lucidia replied.

“How many o’ these deaths over the years were other wee curious ones? Ah mean, besides the Six?”

“4.04 percent. Speculations indicate ‘exploration mishaps’ to be the most likely cause of child fatalities, though suicides remain a definite possibility.”

He remained silent for a moment. “Cannae say if that soothed me heart a single bit.”

“It makes no damn sense either,” said Cenna. “I learned from Mez that The Barrier is designed to prevent anyone with a SOUL from crossing either side. Keeps the monsters in and the humans out. So how the heck did Chara survive in the first place, let alone seven others?”

Chara tossed an insulted glance at Cenna. “I bet my entire chocolate stash that it’s got something to do with Determination. That’s the go-to answer for anything weird nowadays.”

“Adults have Determination too.”

Lucidia interjected the argument. “Chara is half-accurate. The answer lies in the children’s Psychia. Chara and Frisk are Red Majors. The six others are Red Minors. And chances are Gungnir knows this too, lending credit to the rumours.”

There was a small uproar from the left side of the table.

“What the heck, Lucy?! All Reds???”
“Cor Blimey, how are ya sure?!”

The flower children blinked at the commotion. Flowey quipped: “Can someone explain what are they talking about?”

Mezil wanted to speak up, but Papyrus beat him to it. The youngster did his best to provide a detailed yet understandable explanations to the flower kids.

With the short tutorial done, the flower children were brought up to speed.

“That’s interesting,” said Flowey. “So humans are like puzzle pieces of colour. And a ‘Red Minor’ means they have a small piece of ‘Determination Magic’ that makes up their SOUL as a whole. Right?”

“That is correct,” Lucidia confirmed. “I can confirm the the Six are each Red Minors based on numerous key factors.”

“Because they all had the power to RESET?”

“Yes. But it’s more than so.”

She wiped away the image of Mount Ebott, replacing them with a different image. A 3D scale model of Doctor Gaster accompanied a pillar-like hexagonal device.

“What’s that?” Cenna tilted her head, curious.

In a grim, serious manner Papyrus answered her: “UNCLE GASTER’S CHRONOGRAPH.”

Gaelic ran his hands up the skull, troubled and in disbelief. “Oy, oy, oy, are ya fookin’ me in two ways? Yer saying doctor goop built a miniature Chronograph without a Living Victory? How?!”

Mezil spotted a tension from the young one. The events that led up to the Core Incident were unpleasant to recall.

To lighten his burden, the judge interceded. “Papyrus. I’ll explain, if you don’t mind.”

“GO AHEAD. I THINK YOU UNDERSTAND BETTER.”

“Thank you.” Mezil then continued, “Gaelic, Doctor Gaster had built a Determination Extraction Machine. He then used it to extract DT from the Psychia of the Six. After a period of rest, he’d repeat the process until he had enough to construct the Chronograph proper. Think of it as a blood bank system.”

“Seer Lucidia confirmed that the rate of replenishing and the extracted volume corresponds with Red Minors.”

“Have any of ya seen this machine?” Gaelic asked.

Pointing to herself, Cenna replied: “I didn’t only just ‘see’ it Snakey, I watched it work! That machine could drain Frisky all the way to normal. Frisky!”

“They got these canisters to collect DT too,” she continued, “Back then, we stuffed it all into the exorcism reagents. But Doctor Alphys told me that they’d normally distill them pure. If I remember it right, it’s a glowing red liquid with the consistency of thin oil.”

Gaelic’s bones started to rattle. Still, he had enough composure to remain seated. “Me screams o’
baffled horror can wait. Carry on with yer reports, aye.”

Again, Mezil passed the baton to Lucidia to resume the briefing. The woman switched the images to a diagram of a bubble underneath a mountain, representing the mythical Barrier that isolated the Dreemurr Kingdom.

“For the proper conclusion, I must first explain the circumstances behind the Barrier’s construction.”

The holograms generated the faces of the first Seven Human Magi with their corresponding SOUL colour.

“The Seven Sages scouted seven humans of magical potential. However, one almost did not meet the minimum requirements.”

Lucidia isolated the Red Magi: a young girl with freckles and dark hair.

“This girl would one day become the Magi’s first Supreme Judge. Her name: Azali Yurum Ariella. Though she is a Red Major, constant suppression from the Legendary Hero’s tainted Keys of Fate prevented her from growing at the expected rate.”

“As a result, she’s much weaker compared to her peers. This mismatch of strength created a flaw in an otherwise impenetrable system. In time, cracks form at the points of least resistance. No one noticed it because layers of rock and earth served as a physical shell around the Barrier itself.”

“What if this shell failed too? A section above the Ruins crumbled, exposing this weakness to the world of humans.”

“For a person to survive, they must fulfill the following criteria:”

“First, they must be a pre-adolescent child. Any older and their bodies would be too large to slip through the cracks. Thus, they will disintegrate within the Barrier itself.”

“Second, they must have Determination as one of their Psychia traits. Without this as either a Major or Minor, their SOUL will dissolve at a much more rapid pace.”

“Third, they must pass through this crack at a certain safe velocity. Too slow and the density will trap them within certain doom. Too fast, and inevitable collision on the ground will inflict fatal injuries.”

“The only place where all three requirements are fulfilled was the hole above the Ruins.”

Flower Chara placed a thoughtful leaf over their supposed chin. “Huh. No wonder Frisk and I could never walk out of the Barrier alone. We kept dying because we were too slow.”

Mezil nodded. “Even a Red Minor can initiate time travel in an environment devoid of Determination. As Supreme Judge, it is part of my duties to report incidents of temporal nature. Every Magi and Seer will then attempt to identify the responsible individual. We succeed most of the time. However…”

Taking the cue, Lucidia changed the presentation. She showed everyone the photographs of the suspected missing children and laid out a time chart.

Red arrows indicated the moment they used their time-travelling powers. Some children used it more than others.

They’re dubbed the ‘Fallen Children’, numbered ‘2’ to ‘7’. Chara was the first and Frisk the eighth,
“We were unable to reach those who had gone beyond the Barrier.”

Mezil pointed to the date written on the base of the portraits. “Here’s the date when they were last seen.”

His finger then moved to the time-chart. “And this is the first recorded time-loop for that specific child. As you can see, each began soon after their respective vanishing. The Persona and I had lived through two of such incidents within our lifetime.”

Lucidia nodded. “I can confirm Judge Thyme’s testimony.”

“As you are all aware,” Mezil continued, “It takes the union of one human and one monster to pass the Barrier without any risk. The Magi waited at the entrance hoping to properly receive one of these merged entities to initiate diplomacy talks.”

“That day never arrived. When more children vanished, the likelihood of breaking the Barrier from the inside increased.”

“The last child fell during my time as Supreme Judge.” Mezil said, “None of us knew if the Dreemurr Nation managed to salvage the First Fallen Child’s Psychia. On the err of caution, I issued an alert of a possible breach.”

“I also arranged surveying teams to check Mount Ebott for any suspicious changes. Tasked my best Artificers, both Red Majors, with reinforcing any weak spots.”

Cenna widened her eyes at Mezil. He knew he had to face this sooner or later. Despite being a member of a Magus family, she was just a normal civilian during that time. She didn’t have the authorization to know the full story.

Now, she does. The judge hoped that he won’t need to buy a new table for revealing such a painful fact.

“Papa and Mama… They… they started hiking Mount Ebott three years before Frisky was born. Said it’s a new job assignment. Mez, you’re telling me that they were checking the Barrier’s stability all the while?”

“Yes.” Mezil answered. “Your parents were some of the best candidates for the task at hand. They thought so too.”

“I bet there’s NDA involved.”

“That’s right. It’s standard protocol.”


“MISS AUNT?” Papyrus asked, “DO YOU NEED TO LEAVE THE ROOM?”

“Naaaaah, no need.” The spunky one leaned back against her chair and grinned. “I ain’t dumb. Pretty much figured it out when I heard all about the Core Incident. It’s just. Uh…”

Incomprehensible mutterings flowed out under her breath. Try as she might, Cenna won’t fool the man who watched her grow up.
He’s sure she said something along the lines of: ‘It fucking hurts to hear it in person.’

It didn’t take her long to settle down. No furniture met their untimely end despite everything.

“Right,” she said, “Where were we again? Time-wimey shenanigans. Okay. So… Whenever one of the surviving kids played with time, you notice it right?”

“Correct,” Mezil replied. “There’s a certain goat boy in this room who knows this better than anyone else. Isn’t that right, Prince Asriel?”

Mezil replaced the images of human children with Flowey’s flowery face. His timeline chart was riddled with more red arrows than anything else so far.

How the plant wilted under the Supreme Judge’s glare: a fitting reaction for his ignorant carelessness.

The judge continued to turn up the heat. Let that brat suffer for a little longer. His voice lowered to a tone of severity, which says plenty considering his default reputation.

“The primary trait of us Red Majors is ‘memory permanence’: that means wherever the cosmos turns, we will know. We will remember. Under special circumstances, two copies of the Keys of Fate may exist but there is only one ‘clock’ to rewind. The result is an inevitable deadlock.”

Flowey cleared his throat, uncomfortable from the attention. The boy tried to argue his case. “I-if I’m the problem, why didn’t you just rewind time before I was created?”

“I did,” Mezil replied. “But it’s pointless. The events that led up to your creation were set in motion long ago when we cast the Barrier. They’re impossible to change from the outside.”

Chara slapped a vine down on the table. “Objection! Azzie doesn’t remember any of that!”

“But it’s pointless. The events that led up to your creation were set in motion long ago when we cast the Barrier. They’re impossible to change from the outside.”

Chara slapped a vine down on the table. “Objection! Azzie doesn’t remember any of that!”

“Of course he doesn’t. No one remembers the time before they existed. Due to this, you ended up repeating the exact same pattern of RESETS.”

Flowey read the chart again. He muttered to himself the approximate events that made him push time’s buttons. It’s not clear, but Mezil was sure he mentioned something about his parents, a fanclub, and getting trashed by the ‘trashbag’.


There’s no escape. Try as he might to whitewash his actions, the judge refused to be swayed. In the end the guilty flower zipped his little mouth shut.

“Well,” Mezil continued, “It doesn’t change the fact that this issue had been a longstanding thorn in my side. Magi worldwide worked around the clock to find a cause. A futile endeavour as we now know.”

“Seer Lucidia and I eventually began to reconsider the scenarios surrounding the Ebott disappearances. If the monsters lacked one human SOUL, they might attempt to create an artificial one. We presumed that you were the results of Psychia experiments.”

Lucidia reported: “Doctor W.D. Gaster’s attempts confirmed our hypothesis, though his methods differed. He chose the path of mass Amalgamation. The current population of the Dreemurr Nation matches the requirement for one human Psychia or SOUL. Papyrus and Judge Thyme both
witnessed the past first hand.”

“Aye,” Gaelic acknowledged it. “That be bad science right there. Not that I’m all surprised though. Our good sir had Bravery as part o’ his traits. Without guidance, he’s gonna go radical.”

“Like you,” Flowey pointed out.

Sir Snake hissed and let out a crow’s caw, of all the possible responses. The flower decided that the subject about his man’s sanity was not worth pursuing.

Instead, the boy turned his attention back to the matter at hand. “What about Frisk? I bet you mapped them out too.”

Frisk’s time-chart did not lay on a horizontal plane. It had to be propped upwards as a three-dimensional model of an entire tree. All branches except one looped back towards the ‘root’, which was the beginning of their Underground adventure.

Flowey once again regretted asking. “I think I’m gonna get a headache.”

“Same here, flower boy,” said Cenna. “Can I say ‘holy shit’? Because that deserves a holy shit. I knew it’s gonna be lots of looping, but hell I did not expect THAT much! How do you even make sense of this??!”

“OH, IT’S EASY,” Papyrus exclaimed. “FRISK’S ACTIONS ARE SPLIT INTO CLUSTERS REPRESENTED BY ONE OF THESE THICK BRANCHES. SEE THIS TINY FINE PRINT? THAT’S A LABEL.”

“This one here is the dark dusty path. And this one on the opposite end tells the bright peace path. Then there’s all the experimental times in between. They sure broke the barrier a ton!”

“OH. WOWIE. FRISK REALLY WENT PLACES AFTER THE BADNESS! THERE ARE SO MANY FOREIGN NAMES ON THESE LAST COUPLE OF BRANCHES. SOME OF THEM SOUND LIKE SOMETHING FROM ALPHYS’ ANIME COLLECTION.”

Lucidia leaned closer to Mezil to drop in a whisper. “I must say his ability to comprehend complex technical details betrays his usual demeanour. Though, his crafting skills definitely require training.”

Mezil glanced at that direction one more time to make sure they’re kept occupied. He then responded: “He’s quite a savant.”

“CHARA, WHY DID FRISK KILL EVERYONE?” Papyrus asked.

The young Seer presented a vital question. It’s next on the agenda list anyway.

Now the attention moved towards Chara, the ex-possessor of Frisk’s body. If there’s anyone in this room who knows Frisk’s inner secrets… it’s definitely that child.

They took the pressure with a slight sense of defiance: grounded compared to the more emotional Flowey.

Crossing over their leaves, Chara said, “Hmph. You guys want the facts? I’ll give you the facts only if you ask the right questions. Why did they kill everyone, Papy? Because they can.”

They’re not going to blab everything in one go. No matter. Mezil had his mental shovel ready to dig
“Because they ‘can’?” Mezil said, “Surely there’s more behind that. How much influence did you have over them?”

Chara scoffed, “I expected you to ask better questions than that.”

“How much influence did you have over them?”

“Hmph. So you weren’t anywhere as strong as you’d like to believe.”

“Wha?! I-I didn’t say anything!”

There’s something he learned from all these years of judging: a little educated guessing and a straight face goes a long way. People’s reactions tell more about themselves than they’d like to believe.

“Your deflection of answers indicates shame. Shame has links to powerlessness. If Frisk is sound in mind and body, you have very little influence over their actions. Their illness was the only reason you could puppet them. I do know the limitations of DEMON possessions, mind you.”

Chara grumbled. “Who are you, Sans? Guh. Yeah, yeah, I can only control Frisk if they are weak. Or, if they let me do so.”

“When… ‘problems’ start happening on the Surface -- which you guys definitely played a huge part of with your adoption nonsense -- they started to understand my bitterness against humanity. We talked. I reasoned. Then I gave them a suggestion: if you’re not strong enough, why not try killing one or two folks for a change?”

“That,” Cenna pointed out, “Is definitely Gungnir shit right there. The Ubermensch logic or whatever we call nowadays.”

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND,” said Papyrus.

“It’s another language for ‘The Ultimate Human’. That so-called ideal of the strongest. Part of their philosophy is to throw away anyone who’s ‘useless’ to their goals.”

Unconvinced, Chara argued: “Isn’t that the same with you guys? Every agent you deploy puts their lives at risk.”

“But we don’t demand redemption from suicide!”

Mezil cleared his throat to get their attention. “Excuse me, but we’re running off topic. Back to our question. So, what did you two discover? Who was your first victim?”

“…Papyrus.” Chara glanced left and right. “We chose him because we know that he’s the only one in the Underground who won’t kill Frisk for real. A literal safe bet. That’s also when I took over Frisk’s body for the first time. Or rather, they gave me the controls. They didn’t know how to decapitate someone. I do.”

“I expected Toriel to be the answer. She was the first blockade, isn’t she?”

“Frisk couldn’t bring themselves to kill Mom. At first.”

“I see. Carry on.”

Chara continued, “Well, that changed stuff a tiny bit. Undyne railed on us. Refused to reconcile. Trashbag Comedian was nowhere to be seen. We didn’t meet him until the Judgement Hall. Pissed off alright. Called us a dirty brother killer and told us to shove off.”
“I can imagine.”

Risky and borderline suicidal it may be, Gaelic’s confrontation exposed the depths of Sans’ seraphic inclination. They care nothing other than the will of their deity.

Mezil then said: “Then you two attempted to cross the Barrier without the necessary requirements.”

“Ahuu,” Chara nodded. “Omega Flowey happened again, we rode through the mindscrew event, the Six saved our butts, we get a phone call from Sans, then we’re back at the beginning. This time, Frisk killed just one Froggit.”

“You’re saying that Frisk decided that?” Troubling implications. Very troubling.

“Yup. They negotiated with me. Pick the smallest, most insignificant guy and see if that does anything. Well, yeah. Undyne railed on us again. But because Papyrus didn’t die we didn’t get called a dirty brother killer, whee. He called us gross for experimenting though.”

Sans’ combination of colours allowed him to perceive the exact density of stains on a person. That Cyan aspect would narrow down an otherwise giant text of needless information.

Mezil wondered if the seraphim noticed the curse planted on his abdomen. His wife tried to conceal it but… did he manage to pry past the blinds?

He snapped himself out of it. Focus on Frisk. No other distractions.

“Did you encourage them to ramp up the killing?”

Chara shook their head. “Frisk scaled things up on their own. Anything that’s too tough for them to handle, they called for me and we’d switch. Like that time when we had to kill Mom.”

“I showed them how assassinations work in reality. Earn the target’s trust. Get close. Then wham, plunge the blade.”

“Frisk took the lessons to heart. The crazy old me was soooo proud that they finally transcended their weakness. That’s… when things started to get a little creepy even by my standards.”

“Why?” asked Mezil.

“I started to get super excited for no reason. I think Cenna told me before that I became drugged high with Determination? All that epic demonic Persona-like talk? Yeah. Started from there.”

Chara admitted. “I became ecstatic and obsessed, while Frisk turned cold like a literal machine.”

Overdose, confirmed. Mezil addressed his aide. “Could you bring up their Psychia details?”

Lucidia did as requested. She brought up an image of Frisk’s SOUL. It read: ‘100% Red’.

The Seer explained, “Cenna’s reports confirmed that Frisk is a Pure Red Major. They therefore have no secondary traits to guide their actions. They can be determined to be kind, yet determined to be cruel. It confirms our speculations, Judge Thyme.”

“ …Indeed. Frisk had once devolved into an egomaniac: blinded by their power. What made them turn around?”

Chara groaned out loud. “The Trashbag. Unfortunately. Frisk found hope in the most hopeless guy in the entire Underground. Like, ‘finally there’s some to help me!’ Har har, very funny. First, you
got to get him to MOVE. Problem with him is that he doesn’t move unless you really push him to do so.”

“If you ask me, Undyne the Undying was a million times more satisfying an opponent. At least it’s a challenge to fight her. Sans? He’s distilled frustration.”

It’s time to recollect some thoughts.

Frisk bore great potential. If there’s a description that befits that child, it would be ‘gold’. Precious, malleable, conductible. It’s the only metal that could be rolled out thinner than a sheet of paper, and yet be one of the best conductors in electronics.

However, gold also became the root of many evils. Its vibrant history sank deep in the blood of innocents, inflicted by those who saw it as a conduit of might.

Mezil had come to a decision.

“It’s clear now that Frisk would excel in anything they put their minds to. All the more why I must put them through the fire. Burn off the slag, so to speak. Such is the purpose of the Crimson Hall.”

“What if they fail this time?” asked Flowey.

“…They will be treated as a DEMON. I can’t stuff them into a flower, or any vessel for the matter. Containments will only work if I’m stronger than my target. Not the inverse.”

“DON’T BE SO NEGATIVE.” Papyrus exclaimed, ever positive. “FRISK WILL PASS. I KNOW IT! THEIR HEART IS RIGHT AND TRUE EVER SINCE THEY STOPPED DOING A VIOLENCE!”

Pointing towards an unfinished branch on the top of the massive tree, he said: “LOOK, THE FUTURE IS NOT YET SET IN STONE!”

His glove then reached just too close.

Mezil wanted to stop the young Seer. ‘Wanted’, was the key word. Alas he was too slow, distracted by the speech.

When those fingertips made contact, an orange fire erupted from his right socket. Papyrus reeled. Groaned. Cried out from a struggle that he may or may not be conscious about.

“Papyrus!” The flower tried to shake him out of it. “Snap out of it! You just recovered, danggit. Don’t go flopping on us right now!”

The fire extinguished the instant Flowey finished his sentence. Yet, the youngster had the expression of a man who had witnessed trouble in the realm of possibility.

In a daze, Papyrus asked out loud: “WHERE IS ‘LEMURIA’?”

A stunned silence froze in the air. Mezil made sure not a single soul leaked out the names of any of the hidden monster nations.

“Seer, what did you see?” Now, more than ever, Mezil must know.

“I SAW… THEIR ROYAL GUARDS HURRYING A LOT OF MONSTERS. LED THEM TO A PLACE FACING THE OCEAN. THEY HAD PLENTY OF GIANT SHIPS WAITING FOR THEM, AND EVERYONE CLIMBED THE RAMPS. THERE’S A LOT OF
LOUDSPEAKERS INSTALLED IN THE CITY. I THINK I HEARD THEIR CAPTAIN YELLING TO ‘EVACUATE LEMURIA’.”

“No…” Cenna shook her head in disbelief. “No, no, no, no, it can’t be! Cinnamon Roll, tell me that I didn’t fail the Spring Mission. Please!”

“ACTUALLY, I DIDN’T SEE YOU AT ALL. OR ANY HUMANS FOR THAT MATTER.”

“Har?” She furrowed her brows. “Wait, no Magi? Like? None at all?”

“NOPE.”

Mezil felt a burning, sinking sensation in his stomach.

Though he does not know the cause, a dire possibility existed beyond the inevitability of Frisk’s Trial:

The annihilation of the Magi.

Chapter End Notes

Yup. That’s the entire Undertale event in GQ perspective. The Dog couple is quite old in hindsight. Then again, we have Gerson.

For those who’re in the old Megaman circles might recognise the name ‘Zan Sidera’. He was (and probably still is) very well known for charting the Megaman timeline.

Guess what he made for Golden Quiche? A timeline flow chart which you can view by clicking this link. Yes. We spent like 8-9 hours on this chart.

Edit: Yes, the picture is a bit blurry because we ran into program issues that pasted obtrusive watermarks all over the graph. So screenshotting this was the temporary patch fix.
Bonfire Memories

You were about to retire for what could be your last night of training.

That’s when you saw him.

Sans.

He’s dragging a travelling suitcase. Considering its bright red colour, you’re sure it’s one of Papyrus’ impulse buys for ‘possible future travels’.

Is he going somewhere? Now? Right before your trial?

You called for his name. His head turned towards your voice.

“Hey kid, sup?”

What’s with the dodgy secret possible-escape sequence?

He chuckled back at you. “Says the person with the knife.”

You hid it behind your back.

“Chill Frisk. I know you’re just training. Smart too. I mean, that old man isn’t a pushover.”

Sans approached you and reached out his hand. “Wanna keep me company for one last time?”

You hesitated at first. His behaviour went weird ever since Papyrus burned himself in the vision dive.

Then again… that’s when people need company the most. So you slipped the knife back in its covers and accepted his offer.

A few shortcut jumps later, the cold winds of the ocean blew against your face. You stood on dry rock. Looking around, it’s far away from the nearest public beach. Quite a secluded place.

Sans passed you the handle of the suitcase. “Hold it for me, okay?”

Okay.

Then he teleported off somewhere. Maybe to get hotdogs?

To your disappointment, he didn’t come back with food. He plunked down an armful’s supply of firewood instead.

…We’re making a campfire?

“Yup,” Sans replied. “A cosy one. You know how to build one?”

Sorta. That’s the first thing they taught you on that fateful camping trip.

“Can you help me out? If you need fuel and tinder, I got them right here.” He tapped the suitcase
It’s too dark, silly. You can’t see squat.

“Oops. Sorry.” Sans then conjured a glowing cyan bone to help. “I’ll open the case.”

When he did so, your heart skipped a beat.

The contents included a bottle of firestarter, dry newspaper, and… a pile of photos and letters. They’re your coded time-travelling mementos.

You understood what he’s trying to do. The thought alone made your eyes well up in tears.

You started to cry. Asked Sans if you did anything wrong.

Did you make a bad decision?

Is he angry?

Does he need someone to talk to? Please, don’t be dumb. Even if life is depressing and terrible and bad, you tell him that you’re his friend.

Sans patted you on the shoulder. “Hey, hey, hey, calm down. You’re jumping to conclusions, kid. I’m not gonna dust myself. We… I just wanna prepare for the big day. Mentally.”

By destroying evidence?! What if a RESET happens again?! Sans would be left without any clues and--

Your words stopped there.

Sans sighed, still with his constant grin. “You’re thinking way too much, Frisk. If we RESET, Chara will be back in your body. There’s no way Mister Judge will let that happen.”

True, but…

“…I’ve kept them for far too long, Frisk. I have to leave the past behind.”

You understand how he feels. These items were nothing more than constant reminders of his helplessness.

So you you arranged the wood into a campfire. Add a bit of newspaper here, some fuel there…

A small bonfire welcomed your efforts. The ocean winds blew the smoke inland. You avoided that area for good reasons.

Sans started burning the photographs one by one. He offered you a piece. You declined.

Despite putting in the effort, this whole scenario still felt ‘off’.

“…Mind if I make a confession?”

That’s the whole reason why you agreed to this crazy plan in the first place. Sans can pour his entire heart out. No judgement.

Sans glanced at you before condemning another memory into the flames. “I don’t feel much of anything. Maybe it’s more accurate to say I ‘can’t’. I’m a literal cold bone.”

He tapped his sternum twice with his knuckles. “There’s nothing inside here.”
Impossible. He’s not Flowey. He had a complete SOUL, and therefore owns all the required building blocks of a sentient being.

“Humans have SOULS too,” he said, “Yet they’re known to be cruel. Heartless. You can have a SOUL without a conscience. In other words, I’m much closer to a ‘human’ than anyone can imagine.”

But he made a lot of friends.

Sans stared at you as if you just made the worst joke imaginable. “Just because people know me by name doesn’t mean they’re my friends. Making a social network is a valid tactic. Know who could provide what, and how they’ll help you secure your place.”

Pointing at yourself, you asked if you’re also part of the grand plan.

“Hoo boy. You’re the prime example. Maybe in one of the past timelines, I was sincere. Now, it’s complicated. I couldn’t tell what’s on your mind. Getting chummy with you was my best safeguard. As long you’re happy… we’re not doomed.”

“I just know how to act around people. Know when to say what, and how to bend their habits to my favour. I tried to teach Paps these social skills but, uh, I failed. It takes a certain character to trick others that way. He’s too good-hearted.”

That’s. Cold.
Like ice-chilling cold.

“Told you so.”

No. You mean that’s TOO close to certain scummy humans. It makes you want to kick him in the shin.

You crossed your arms and huffed. Is this a subtle mental manipulation to sow disgust into your heart? If that’s the case, it won’t work.

“Heh, why not?”

Because you know Sans’ tendency to self-depreciate himself. Always painting himself worse than reality.

He expected you to be angry or hurt. You’re too determined to fall into his manipulation.

Winking back, Sans said: “Welp, kid. Trust me at your own risk. Don’t say I didn’t warn ya.”

Half of the photo pile was gone now.

…Wait, that’s not a photo.

That scrap of paper looks like it came from a torn notebook. You snatched it out of his grip before it’s lost forever.

What’s this? It’s a recipe for ‘Jungle Curry’. There’s a vague feeling that you’ve heard of it from somewhere before.

It’s written by several hands. There’s only one that you recognize: Papyrus’ handiwork.

Sans took it back from you. He explained: “Mister Judge has a rather masochistic relationship with
spice. Mom, Dad, and Paps really wanted to make a docile version as a token of gratitude.”

“From the looks of things… welp. They never succeeded.”

The proof of failure received its untimely end, charred into utter black.

“Monster kids start out very considerate,” he continued. “Love and Compassion, right? Heh, I gave Mom and Dad more trouble than they ever bargained for. I’d act naughty just to get their reaction.”

Didn’t he ever get punished?

“I did. And I’d cry of course. But… the lessons don’t stick. I craved for ‘fun’: anything to satisfy my mind, both good and bad. Unlike our little prince, I don’t fear punishment. Whatever happens, happens.”

“The planning, the action, the unpredictability, the anticipation, the results: they’re all exciting. Man, my kid self scares the hell outta me. I was too ignorant to know all the wrongs that could happen.”

“Reality then came crashing in. Sooner or later I had to learn my lesson the hard way.”

By getting whooped by his parents?

Sans shook his head. “Nah. That’s nothing for me. It’s… when my Eye first activated. You saw what happened to Paps, right? All out of control and stuff. He’s lucky that his combination isn’t dangerous to others.”

“Mine was -- and still is -- very, very destructive.”

The light in his sockets went out. “I broke out of confinement by turning the door to sand. Since I had zero control over my abilities, the floor gave way too. Little ole me started to sink into destabilized ground.”

Didn’t he try to teleport out?

“Tried. Didn’t work. I was a seven-year-old in my first week of awakening. You know. It’s full-on crazy mode.”

“I cried for help just like any other scared kid. The grownups heard me. Mom arrived first. She got on her knees and reached out. The moment I grabbed her hand, her entire arm started to rot. Just like the ground.”

You uttered a soft gasp.

“Despite the pain, Mom managed to pull me out. Gaster immediately nullified my magic with his Gram thing. But, by then the damage was already done. I scarred my Mom’s arm forever because I behaved like a brat. Not even Amalgamation could mend it.”

“For the first time, I faced the true consequences of my sins. Along with it, fear and guilt. My first intense emotion.”

“Remember all the times when I talked to you about being responsible with your power? Welp. They came from first-hand experience. How did that saying go again? ‘It takes one to know one’?”

By now, he had burned the original control copy of the group photograph. Next up, your personal letters for Sans.

Wow. Sans. That’s dripping in bitter malice.

“Might as well be. See, kid… you don’t need to ‘feel’ love to ‘know’ that you’re loved. You just need to observe it.”

Observe?

“Yeah. Parents love their kids by providing for their needs. Good food, a comfortable bed, hugs. You know. Whatever parents do.”

“If your letters are accurate, Asriel had all of that love given to him even as a flower. And yet his reason for going down the dark path was the inability to ‘feel’ it. God, really? Just really?”

He started to laugh. It’s not a good one either. He tossed the letter into the fire.

“If that’s the excuse, what’s keeping me from murdering the entire Underground? Especially the ones who alienated my brother? Oh, right. It’s moronic. I’d get into trouble. Others would cry over their loved ones. If I make others cry, Papyrus won’t be happy. That alone is more trouble than it’s worth. See? Simple. You Living Victories always overcomplicate things, I tell you.”

Sans…?

Maybe, just maybe, he’s not as emotionless as he claims to be.

“By logic, I should be angry.”

Pardon? You don’t get it.

“Over the years, I learned when I should feel what, and why. When I get a gift, I should be happy. Why? Because someone took the effort for my sake. When I see my brother cry, I should be sad too. Why? Because he’s hurt. Therefore, I should comfort him. When I see injustice, I should get angry. Why? Because it robs others of their rights.”

“But do I really feel anything out of it? I don’t know anymore.”

You told Sans that he felt everything. For real.

“Heh. You’re adamant about that.”

Of course. There are many humans out there who don’t perceive things the same as the majority. Does that make them any less valid?

No.

The real problem starts with negative coping methods. You let Sans know that excessive suppression is one of them.

You poked him on the ribs. Made it super clear that if he keeps bottling up, it’s all going to explode in the worst way possible.

Humans do that a lot.

“…Heh,” Sans replied. “You’re an odd kid. Weren’t you angry at me for killing your parents, robbing you and Cenna of a happy family life together?”
It’s an accident, Sans. An. Accident.


“I was so afraid that you’d RESET after learning that news: afraid that this time, The End would come for real. Pain. Revenge. All those things. By logic, that’s what you should have done. Right?”

Wrong.

That won't bring your human parents back. It's pointless.

Nothing short of time travel could do so.

You expected a smart remark. Instead, you received silence.

There goes the last of your letters. You peeked into the suitcase: it’s still not empty.

Sans picked up his badge. “Hey, look. The proof of my graduation and employment. Another bad memory to dispose of.”

It went into the bonfire, just like that.

“T ook a ton of photos with the science gang. They’re dispersed now. I think one of them ‘fell down’ too. Turned into an Amalgamate. Pointless to keep these.”

After setting those on fire, he took out a badly drawn picture of three people. ‘Never forget’ was his memo.

You asked about their identities.

“Not important.”

With that, the secret went up in smoke. You tried to guess. It should be Doctor Gaster and the skelleparents. Right?

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

He started pouring extra firestarter on a piece of fabric.

It’s a labcoat. There’s more folded clothes at the bottom of the suitcase.

…He’s going to burn his entire wardrobe?

“Why not?” Sans shrugged. “I’m starting over. I can’t be naked though. So, I’ll keep to what I’m wearing right now until I can shop for new stuff.”

One telekinetic toss later, the white fabric lit ablaze. The bonfire’s getting too hot for comfort. You shuffled back a bit. Tugging on Sans’ coat, you urged him to move too.

“I need this real hot,” he said, “Otherwise it won’t burn all the way through.” He then proceeded to destroy the rest of his collection.

A jokebook was next on the list. It’s not just any ol’ comedy material: this used to sit at the corner of the living room. It was your first written hint of Sans’ one true expertise.
Keep it! Isn’t that one of his most prized possessions?!

“Nah. It’s just rehashed entertainment.”

Really? Sure?!?

“Yup.”

He flung the entire thing into the bonfire. It burped embers into the cold, salty air.

At the very bottom of the suitcase lay the most precious memento of all: the remnants of Papyrus’ tattered red scarf.

You watched him stretch the fabric out against the light. Did your eyes play tricks? For some reason, it’s much shorter than you remembered. You never realised it until now because it was always lumped up.

Sans lowered it, gathering the softness between his segmented fingers.

“Nope. You’re not seeing things. The scarf had lost a third of its length. It’s from when I killed Papyrus by accident. See the lack of charring at the edges? That’s disintegration at work.”

“…Whenever I looked at this, I refused to use my Eye to remember. My first rationalization was to pin the blame on you. And, you were more than ready to accept it.”

“That’s all old stories now, huh? I’m the dirty liar this time. Kid, sorry for making you shoulder this guilt for my own personal convenience.”

“It’s time to put that behind me.”

Unlike the book that got unceremoniously tossed aside like a piece of trash, Sans treated the scarf with reverence. He placed it down gently at the foot of the fire. Almost burned his own hand in doing so.

There was no cheating telekinesis. No Blue magic. None of that.

That’s the last item.

Sans, the hidden pyromaniac: willing to dispose of every possession that isn’t on his body right now. You should be concerned. You should be smacking him across the cheek and giving him a headbutt.

However…

You didn’t. Could it be the shock of his actions? It’s not subtle. Sans always chooses the least obvious route. For him to resort to this blatant display raises more red flags than you know what to do with.

You told him that therapy is mandatory. Get it after the Trial fiasco.

He tilted his head back, breathing in the smoky air of deleted history.

“I don’t care. I can’t care. Despite everything you’ve said to me, I still feel nothing. I’m not suffering in my apathy like Asriel. So… I won’t act on it.”

“Just promise me one thing, kid. Sorry. I know it’s a lot to ask. But, I really wanna make sure.”
…Sigh. What is it, Sans?

“Never enter the Underground again.”

You don’t plan to…?

No RESETS, remember?


Okay…? You’re confused, but you promised anyway.

“Thanks.”

Chapter End Notes

Just to be clear, the most spanking baby Sans would get was a rolled up newspaper on the butt. Nothing painful and certainly nothing abusive.

So, is Sans really telling the truth? It's up to interpretation. Remember that real people can say a lot of things about themselves that don't line up with reality.

I can confirm that he IS honest about Papyrus' scarf. Nope, this isn't the fanart where Sans keeps it from the Underground. You expected that? :P

Revenge via genocide may seem silly, but there are many folks who resort to that. I'm looking at you now, Copen (The antihero from Gunvolt Series).

By the way, if you've not seen the GQ timeline yet here's the link.

Enjoy. Looking forward to hear your comments.
10 PM. Eighteen hours before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

Mezil placed a protected box down on his office desk and ran his fingers on the serial number.

The text looks generic, but the numbers were not. Those in the know will realise that his weapon did not come from any conventional sources. They’re made by Magi for Magi.

The office door swung open. Cenna didn’t bother to knock. No manners for the old family friend, as usual. She just strut in with a paper file in hand.

Trying to hide the box would earn him a sharp yell. Not that he had any reason to do so anymore.

“Got the approval from the Dreemurr couple. We recognize wax emblems, right?”

“Yes.”

Mezil opened the envelope and inspected the documents. Both Toriel and Asgore’s papers had a classic red beeswax seal in place of the usual pen signature. It’s about as official as ‘official’ could get.

He placed them back into the envelope and said: “I’ll submit these to the Grandmaster soon, thank you.”

However, the trenchcoat lady didn’t leave. He wished she did.

“Anything on your mind, Miss Caraway?”

“Promise me you won’t hurt Frisk, okay?”

“Don’t worry, I won’t.”

A hard slam slapped straight down on the table, right next to the box.

“Are you for fucking real, Mez?” so Cenna yelled. “After all of that shit, you can still say THAT to my face?!”

Truth be told, he could not; keeping her in view was not the same as looking at her.

Cenna knew. She had the hawk’s eye after all. Nothing escapes from her, at least when it comes to his own guilty self.

He looked up. Her head lowered, she too cannot meet him at the eye.
Cenna tried to keep her cool. She always does. It’s a 50-50 chance. Inaccurate. Perhaps she never quite succeeded.

“Listen,” she said. “Frisky is a good kid. Don’t… don’t punish them because of me.”

Mezil narrowed his eyes, glaring without direct contact. “It had nothing to do with you, Cenna. It all boils down to…”

Frisk?
Himself?
Both?

“…the outcome of the Trial,” he finished. “You should leave.”

It’s a little rude, but it’s the best for both sides.

Cenna said, “Yeah. I get ya. Sleep early tonight, ‘kay? Like seriously, your hours are so fucked up I don’t even.”

“I had set it in the afternoon for a reason. Gives me ample amount of time to prepare should I fail to readjust.”

A chuckle escaped her lips. “Heh. Figured you’d do that. I’m gonna call the goatparents and tell them you approved the docs.”

“Do so. And one more thing: inform no one in Ebott that Papyrus is awake.”

“Yeah, got that memo a long time ago.”

Cenna turned around and strutted her way out, eager to leave the office as soon as possible. Loud, tensed footsteps shook the air.

Then Mezil uttered something he shouldn't have.

“I’m sorry.”

A rare sign of weakness.

The Vanquisher stopped in her tracks.

“I lost sight of Frisk.” He said, “I should have watched them closer. If they didn’t fall, none of this would’ve happened.”

“ …What were you trying to do?” She asked back. “Do you even remember?”

Does he?
It’s so long ago.

What was he doing when Frisk fell into the Underground?
When the shamed foster home called him to report that the Magi’s special child went missing?

“I was looking for volunteers to become a Merged Entity. They would then walk past the Barrier and find the root of the problem. Pun not intended.”

“If there’s none?” she said, “Like, if Frisk didn’t drop into that damn hole and nobody gave two shits about it?”
…I would’ve merged with Lucidia and entered together. A Red Minor would lose to Flowey. It takes a Living Victory to combat another Living Victory.”

Cenna huffed. “Sounds like you alright. Hey, that didn’t happen. So, enjoy your body for a little while longer. Provided you don’t fucking sabotage yourself with Jungle Curry or whatnot.”

She waved without looking back. “Ciao for now.”

There she goes, letting the door shut itself right behind her.

Mezil then opened the box. It contains a pneumatic handgun that uses pellets for ammunition: a modified model based on Lucidia’s design and his weapon of choice for the Trial.

To think he has to use this on a child…

The Judge’s thoughts wandered into a recent past that no longer existed. Over a game of chess, his father-in-law once questioned:

“Have you considered asking one of the Ebott monsters for help?”

As much as he respected his elder, Mezil rejected the suggestion.

“No. What can they do, Father? They’re like naive children in an adult’s body. Their royalty is no different. None of them would understand the stakes.”

“Well, I know that relationships aren’t your forte. Perhaps… you should approach someone who’d reach out to you instead.”

“Meaning?”

“They do have a spirited young man with a heart of gold amongst their midst. I believe Lucidia calls him ‘Papyrus’. Other than Frisk, he’ll be the most eager to befriend you.”

“Him? Are you serious? He’s the most childish of the lot.”

“Remember our tenets, Winston. Nobody jumps from point A to Z within a single bound. Give it a try. You’ve already exhausted all your options, including that year-long custody case.”

Another checkmate. Years of experience showed, both in actions and advice.

“A Living Victory needs to keep their mind open. If an opportunity rolls by, grab it no matter how absurd it seems. That may be our much-needed solution.”

“…Alright, Father.”

The moment arrived that fateful wake at the stadium. Far from his initial expectations, the hypothetical man-child bloomed into a courageous hero.

Mezil wondered if things would be different if he’d involved Papyrus’ sooner.

Alas, time took on a different course.

Mezil felt his sins crawl on his back. Claws, digging deep into his flesh. Weight, bearing down on his shoulders.
His plan almost ended existence itself.

Unforgivable.

Depending on where this Trial goes, who will be the one judged in the end? Frisk or himself? Tomorrow could become his long-overdue punishment.

The supplier added a spare magazine. Again, as requested. Mezil set it aside as he inspected the rest of the gun.

Nothing must go wrong. The risk of malfunction: zero. Everything must go as perfect as it can be.

Otherwise, there will be consequences.

Once the gun passed all his scrutiny, he reached for the magazine and channeled his magic before slotting it in.

“Mark: applied.” He said as the butterfly took flight.

* * *

MIDNIGHT. Sixteen hours before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

Papyrus made himself a checklist.

A hero must be completely ready for anything that may come in his way, be it good or bad.

Mezil and Lucidia already had their hands full with Frisk’s upcoming exam. For their sake, he didn’t want to bother them anymore.

They provided an empty hall for him to stretch and train. That’s enough. Once he’s done, he’ll rest in the atelier.

Armour, checked. Extra polished. One must look his best even on short notice.

Magic, checked. Just a few months before, Papyrus was more than eager to show off his skills. Now… not quite. He hoped that the events will proceed without the need for his powers.

Melee stances, practiced. Whatever he developed now was the result of countless sparring: self-taught at its most practical.

How effective would his homegrown methods pit against a master?

He does not know.

One by one the checklist filled. At the very bottom, it said the following:

‘Blasters’.

Papyrus conjured the normal ones just fine. Fired those beams in multiple patterns as though they’re his second nature.

The ease felt foreign. Papyrus couldn’t believe that he was just learning the ropes a few weeks ago.
Had one of those completely blow up in his face as well.

“Show me yer Orange one.”

Papyrus recognized the accent. When he turned around, he found the kooky Seer hobbling in with a crutch.

Concern, intensified. “GAELIC? WHY ARE YOU HERE? YOU SHOULD BE RESTING!”

One snicker and snort later, the other replied: “What about ya? We of Bravery be restless by nature. Sittin’ around ain’t our thing.”

“Besides, I dinnae walk all the way here on me own. Ah got a convenient aide by me side…”

Gaelic let himself lean backwards. Papyrus almost jumped in to catch him, but a strange magic materialized from the ground.

A giant bone snake caught its caster just in time. It then gently coiled itself into a convenient seat.

If Papyrus could disconnect his jaw, he would have let it drop dead on the ground. “WHAT SORCERY IS THIS?!?!?”

“‘Tis be my Skull Cannon, lad. Yer nation call ‘em Blasters. Frankly, I like yer term better.”

“T-THAT… THAT’S SO COOL!!! AND CREEPY! CREEPY COOL.”

Gaelic licked his teeth with his forked tongue. “As it should! Ah can summon only one o’ these at a time. But hell, I make it the grandest o’ them all.”

“ONLY ONE? BUT WHY?”

The other shrugged. “Life gave me this lot. Cannae question that, hmm? Anyways. Seems like ya got quite an arsenal there. But yer still not using your Orange signature.”

“SIGNATURE…?” This man’s accent made it difficult enough to understand. Throw in some foreign terminologies and Papyrus ended up as lost as a lamb.

“Have ya ever had a situation where ya tried to summon this huge sized skull and it gone totally outta whack? Trashin’ about and stuff?”

The details clicked. Papyrus replied, “OH MY GOD, HOW DID YOU KNOW?! I HAD THAT BEFORE. I DUBBED IT THE AIR RODEO SESSION!”

“Air rodeo it be! That’s exactly what happens when yer a greenhorn. But let me tell ya somethin’ good: it pays off. Get that Orange mode right and yer blessed with a sweet ride.”

Gaelic patted the segmented coils like a proud parent. “Like mine here.”

Squeal mode, on.

“Willing to show me yer Blaster now?” said the snake.

Papyrus wasted no time to conjure a large Gasterblaster of the Orange Aspect. In the past, it would fight back and trash around in all unruliness.

This time, nothing happened. It floated in one place. No rebellion.
The youngster was both elated and puzzled at the same time. “I DON’T UNDERSTAND? I DIDN’T PRACTICE AT ALL! WHAT CHANGED?”

Gaelic laughed at the response. “Says the lad who drove a flying car! Guess ya never tried summoning it since yer Ascension, aye? Ya got yer basics straightened out. That’s why yer steed obeys. Treat them with respect like you’d respect yerself. Now try fly a few laps ‘round me head.”

The youngster jumped right into action. Took off just like a rocket. It’s a different sensation compared to a car: the winds blew through him from head to toe. The pressure almost shoved him off the fun -- despite being all bones.

A while later, Papyrus floated back down to ground. Still sitting on the Gasterblaster, he asked: “DID I DO GOOD?”

Gaelic clapped his hands. “Aye, aye, ya did! But ya can do even better. First thing’s first, ditch that scallywag dog form. It ain’t aerodynamic at all: there be too much wind drag slowin’ ya down.”

“I COULD CHANGE MY BLASTER’S DESIGN???” Insert anime sparkles here.


He dug into his pockets and tossed it to Papyrus. The youngster caught it in midair without any issues.

It’s a mini tablet. When he swiped away the lock screen, it revealed a paused video of a strange long… cat?

A sleek, lightweight, spot-furred cat with skinny legs. It’s somewhat… familiar. Where’d he see this before?

When he pressed play, the video explained its name. It’s a ‘cheetah’. Now he recognized it as one of the many Surface animals that made a permanent home in the region’s largest zoo. They’d walk around and play with the enclosure’s toys, but most of the time they just paraded themselves.

It’s a far cry from the wild. Out in the open savannah, cheetahs live fast and furious: dashing at speeds that put Alphys’ jetpack to utter shame.

How is this possible? The documentary further explained: it’s all in the skeletal structure. Every single inch on its body catered to its single hunting method, from the shape of the skull, to the claws, to the tailbone.

But, it all came with a price. The cheetah lacked the bite power of a lion and it’s prone to overheating. In other words, they’re the fragile speedster of the cat world.

“Wanna know the secret to survival, lad?” said Gaelic, “Exploit yer strengths, even in weakness. Compared to beasts, humans are pretty weak. More so in the modern era.”

“But they be smart. Cunning. Resourceful. Aye, give the right tools to the ruthlessly determined and they will come up top. That’s why they seem ‘strong’. Even if it’s us magic folk who have the firepower.”

Papyrus looked up to the eccentric man, blinking in puzzlement. “I APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN, SIR. BUT… WHAT’S WITH THE OMINOUS STATEMENTS? I MAY NOT EVEN---”
He couldn’t finish his words. It’s impossible. The storm had long begun. It just hadn’t hit the shores yet.

“NEVERMIND…” He stared down on the ground. “I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, HE… HE TOO WILL USE HIS STRENGTHS TO COVER UP HIS WEAKNESSES. I CANNOT COUNT ON LETHARGY OR LAZINESS TO PLAY IN MY FAVOUR.”

“Good,” Gaelic nodded. “Ya get the stakes. Likewise, ya need to do the same. Ya sure ain’t a supercomputer. Maybe not even half as cunning. But lad, ya got things he doesn’t have. Never forget that. Act swift. Act bold.”

“THANK YOU,” Papyrus nodded.

With his grand speech over, he climbed on the snake’s head. Blessed the youngster with a salute while he still could do so. “Godspeed to ya.”

Off the odd man went, slithering away on his unconventional mode of transport.

There’s not much time left.

Papyrus had to figure out how to turn this ‘cheetah’ animal into an applicable mode of transport. With a skeletal structure this specialised, he can’t just slap on a saddle and a handlebar before calling it a day.

It had to be tailored to his needs.

* * *

0700. Nine hours before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

“Whaaaaat?!” Flowey whined. “We got to stay in this stupid mansion?! No peeks? At all???”

Lucidia nodded.

“But why?!? This is a once in a LIFETIME event!”

Chara fumed along with their sibling. “Yeah! I seriously want to see Frisk kick the tsundere’s butt.”

“I promise to make a recording,” said Lucidia.

“No!” Flowey threw his leaves up in the air. “It’s not the same! Besides, YOU need protection, Lady Lucidia. Don’t underestimate us just because we’re kids!”

Lucidia frowned. “Negative. On the contrary, you and Chara will be second on his hitlist.”

Skeptical, Chara questioned: “Second? I thought even Papyrus would rank higher than us.”

“As for Papyrus,” she added, “He’s our final safety net. As long as Sans Serif is kept in the dark about his condition, we will not need to worry about countermeasures.”
“I’m going to prepare the Crimson Hall now. Please children, stay inside. You can play as many videogames as you want today.”

The flower children sighed, clearly unhappy. But what can they do? So both of them said: “We promise.”

She patted both of them on the head and left them alone.

They whipped out their consoles and played a bit. But they kept watching the inbuilt clock in their games.

Ten minutes passed. Now, they’re sure that Lucidia won’t pounce a surprise check-up on them. She’s not exactly Toriel.

“Coast is clear?” asked Chara.

“Yup,” Flowey answered.

“Okay. Now. Do you really think we’re just gonna be pretty houseplants?”

“No way. We’re determined flowers!”

“So,” Chara began, “What do you think we need to do to make the Smiley Trashbag stay a useless bag of trash?”

Flowey said, “We’re are gonna trap him! Good ol’ monster style.”

“And how are we gonna trap him? Gotta remember that he teleports.”

“Well Chara, do you know his secret? Like, did he ever disclose his powers to Frisk?”

More pondering. In the meantime, they harvested their plot of Honey Melons in their game world.

“I can’t quite remember, Azzie,” they admitted. “What about you? Spied anything special while Frisk was away?”

Flowey’s avatar continued digging down a cave to gather some ores. “Oh! I remember. Doctor Gaster got into a really big fight with the Trashbag once. He actually managed to push Mister Comedian into a hilarious pickle!”

“Oooooh? Tell me all about it, Azzie.” Melons, into the shipping box. A huge chunk of money rolled into their ingame bank account.

“He made lots and lots of orange beams. Orange magic hurts if you don’t keep moving, right? You’d think that Sans would teleport out, but he didn’t do so. Instead he kept moving in small circles like this.”

Flowey demonstrated the movements with his avatar. Chara understood it right away.

“Huh, so he’s forced to strafe around. Interesting. That means Sans had to actually stop to… what do you call it, ‘cross the portal’? Whatever Sci-Fi jargon they use in anime.”

“Something like that,” he confirmed. “It’s like this background door here. You gotta stop walking first before you get the prompt.”

“Makes sense, makes sense,” Chara nodded. They started planting a new crop of rare magical
vegetables. “So, it’s possible to physically stop the Comedian from ‘crossing’ the border.”

The rosy-cheeked child started to grin. “You know what I’m thinking?”

They expected their fellow sibling to grin along with their schemes… but Flowey responded with a worried, nervous look.


“Why didn’t you try that on Papyrus? I mean, back in the Underground of course. You two were so close and he’s such an easy target.”

“If that could work, our hotshot Magi wouldn’t be walking on eggshells now. You really think I’d be safe if I tried to use the golden brother as a shield?”

“…Okay, I get it. We are dealing with a cold-boned killer after all.”

The two continued their gaming in silence, trying to figure out their next step at the same time.

“Azzie, there’s two of us now,” said Chara. “Back then, you’re alone. Now you’re not. I think it’s worth to give it a shot. We’ll rig ourselves with alert beacons just in case it backfires.”

“I dunno…” Flowey muttered. He’s afraid.

The other flower was afraid too. So much so, they started to chuckle. “C’mon, we’re not normal ol’ flowers! You’re the Prince of Monsters, I am a trained Gungnir elite! Theoretically. T-the point being we’re not weaklings.”

“Everyone’s life is on the line now. Mom, Dad, the tsundere, his wife, and above all, Frisk. We need to do something about it.”

Flowey pumped himself up. He’s so determined, he almost tossed the game over his head. “You’re right. If Frisk can survive his worst, we can do it too!”

Chara wriggled their brows. “Ready to save the world for real?”

“Yeah!”

* * *

Sunday morning. Six and a half hours before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

Asgore blinked his bleary eyes towards the empty side of his double bed.

He was sure that Toriel accompanied him that night. Their relationship had yet to reach the point where they did anything physical, but just being here was a huge step forward.

The empty side was still warm. She just woke up too.

First, he removed the woolen caps off his horn. The citizens knitted him some so that he don’t keep destroying the bedpost and pillows when he slept. It’s a sweet, thoughtful gesture.
Still in his nightclothes, he began to look for his wife.

He found her brewing some coffee in the kitchen. Like red wine, it’s one of the new beverages that Toriel had gained a taste for.

Against the backdrop of glowing morning windows, the Queen rested her chin on her hand. She stared absentminded into the far yonder as her drink slowly grew cold.

“Toriel?” asked Asgore.

Without turning her head, she replied: “Did we make a mistake?”

“Is this about Frisk’s trial?”

Toriel breathed a long, drawn out sigh.

“It’ll go well,” the husband tried to reassure. “I’m sure of it. Frisk… Frisk knows what they’re doing.”

A tear rolled down the sides, dampening the fur around the edges of Toriel’s eyes.

Watching her this vulnerable pricked Asgore’s heart. He pulled the chair and sat down by her side. He’s not too sure if it’s okay for him to hold her arm. At least, not yet.

“I can’t help but to think about what happened to our children,” she admitted. “We took our eyes off them for a moment. And then… they…”

They thought Asriel and Chara were safe together, ignorant of what went behind their backs.

“This isn’t the same, Tori,” said Asgore. “We’ll be watching Frisk together. That’s what we insisted on before planting our wax seals.”

“And what if we’re helpless to help?” she asked back. “What if, Frisk dies right in front of us while we can’t do anything about it? Just like Chara did.”

It’s every parent’s worst nightmare.

“…May I admit something, Tori? I… I’m just as scared as you are. If I’m alone, I don’t think I could let them go either. But, we can’t quite let our fears put the town at risk.”

Toriel didn’t reply. What’s going on in her mind? Did she accept his reasoning? Or was she simmering in resentful anger?

She lifted her head off her chin and reached out for her husband. He grabbed her hand without hesitation.

“Can you promise me something, Asgore?”

“Yes?” he kept his sights on her, watching for any changes of expression.

“Whatever happens… we stay together. No more running away for us.”

From the bottom of his heart, he made a solemn oath of love: “I promise.”
Stone

Chapter Notes

After this, you may need to wait for a bit for the big event.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Doctor W.D. Gaster.

Former Royal Scientist of the Dreemurr Nation. Hailed for decades as one of the brightest minds in the past two centuries.

Now he’s just a humble teacher imparting his knowledge to the next generation. This time, he made sure that they learned to steer clear from his poor life choices.

The King and Queen donned their royal garbs as a declaration of official business: their authority respected by those who mattered. It showed from the choice of transport and the number of bodyguards assigned to escort the royal couple.

Frisk -- the child under their charge -- might as well sit on a throne. Power does come with a price. In this case, the lack of freedom to choose one’s life.

Even if the they didn’t get adopted by the Dreemurrs, they will always be monsterkind’s ambassador.

Not that the child minded it. They’re determined to succeed: with or without the fabled ‘Keys of Fate’.

It’s noon, four hours before their final exam.

Queen Toriel had packed the last of their travelling itinerary into her handbag. In the meantime, King Asgore fetched Frisk from their temporary bedroom.

Of all the clothes they picked, it’s that silly striped blue and purple shirt. Gaster would have preferred them to wear more… proper attire. But, there’s a thematic appropriateness to end this time loop in their iconic choice of fashion.

“Are you ready, Frisk?” so asked the King.

Frisk shook their head. “Not yet.”

They then proceeded to hug Alphys. The nervous wreck of scales hugged back. When she did so, her worries melted away. At least a little bit.

Then Frisk proceeded to fist-bump Undyne. It’s an opposite contrast compared to Alphys, full of fiery gusto and encouragement.

How is this a ‘quiet’ child? They may not be the chattiest, but they’re certainly active.

They approached Gaster and said, “Thank you for all the history lessons.”

Doctor Gaster noted that Frisk had some dark rings around their eyes. He decided to not question it
just yet. With a bow, he replied: “Much obliged, Child of Mercy.”

To Roman, they said, “I look forward to your special ketchup.”
To Helvetica, they said, “If Papyrus is okay, I’ll bring him back home today.”

The two signed their gratitude. Gaster translated, “They thank you from the bottom of their hearts. As do I.”

“May I hug you too?”

True physical contact had always been a rarity for this skeleton, more so in recent years. It’s about time he appreciate the slower paces of life.

“You may.” he answered.

So the child hugged him around the waist. A sense of warmness radiated over his cold, liquid body.

Once they let go, the doctor took the opportunity to examine their face. “Oh dear, you really do look tired. Had your sleep quality been poor?”

They nodded.

“I think it’s best that you try take a nap in the car. Usually I don’t condone Sans’ habits, but you need to be fresh for the Trial.”

“I know,” they said. “Thanks.”

“Now off you go. Take care and good luck.”

Frisk then left home with the company of the royal couple. Alphys and Undyne joined the send-off team. The goopy doctor chose to stay behind: his controversy shouldn’t tarnish the occasion.

Back in the kitchen, he began an internal conversation.

_We discovered nothing about the Gungnir in the past timeline._

_Oh, I certainly remember that they didn’t visit us after the Seven Sages. Not even once. This means they had taken action without proper understanding of the world we live in._

_Furthermore, if the events happened as I speculated, no one realised The Red Sage’s deeper involvement with the Magus Association._

_Sans? Well. It all depends if he thinks history still applies today._

_This bothers me deeply, my friends. But we shouldn’t burden them with this realisation. Their Trial takes precedence…_

In the midst of his volunteered washing chores, Alphys returned with her phone in hand.

“G-Gaster-sensei,” she said, “I received a private PM from Sans and uh, I think it’s best that you read this for yourself.”

“Oh? Please give me a moment.”

As he dried his hands, the doctor wondered:
What could it be? Doctor Alphys seems more skittish than usual.

He too had a reason for nervousness when he read the contents of the phone itself.

Egads, Sans! You SOLD Determination to a baker?!

And she made doughnuts out of those?!?!

He then started to ponder about the theories presented in the message box.

Hmm. Enhancement instead of mimicry… He does have a point. By altering the signal strength received by the tastebuds, it’s possible to fool the brain into thinking that less is more. Making the components persist is one of the possible methods.

If Echo Flowers won’t work, perhaps Determination will? The dosage he proposes is nothing for a human to consume. More so for a Living Victory such as Judge Thyme.

Then again, I question…

How does he even know of our miniscule culinary quest?

Who first told him about it? When? I certainly didn’t disclose the details to Sans in person, be it the past timeline or this one.

What is it, Helvetica? Well. Yes, Papyrus’ announcements are certainly the best possibility.

But, humour me a thought. If Sans broke the Seer’s Seal… what do you think was his ultimate revelation?

“Sensei?”

Gaster snapped out of his rumination. “Yes, Doctor Alphys?”

“Will you meet up with Sans?”

He read the query again.

Sans is giving me the final say. Should I meet him here in King Asgore’s home? Or return to my Underground cell?

If I stay up here, Captain Undyne would need to watch over me. If she does, she can’t be on grounds to manage the rest of the Royal Guard.

Today is the last day of the curfew. Nothing must happen within this precious timeframe.

Well, she could just leave me in Endogeny’s custody.

Unease swirled within Gaster’s being. He stared at his new student with a sense of dawning horror.

Gaster put up his usual prim, gentlemanly front. Returning the phone to Alphys, he said: “Please tell Sans to meet me at the Snowdin house. I’ll be heading there right now.”

“N-now?” Alphys asked.

“Yes. Now. It will be a quick transfer, so we need not bother poor Endogeny. Let them sleep under the warm sun in peace.”
“Wait, sensei! That’s illegal--”

The doctor sped off into a shortcut. Perhaps that wasn’t the most elegant of exits, but it’s for her own good.

He arrived on the other side. Settled himself down in the middle of the mess their latest experiment had left behind. Cold silence and lifeless machinery surrounded him.

I am no fool.

In Captain Undyne’s absence, Doctor Alphys will be left unprotected. A prime hostage target. Especially with ‘him’.

Roman. Helvetica. I know you still have faith in your son. I pray to the powers that be that I am wrong.

But if I am right… I refuse to put my junior at risk.

The less Doctor Alphys knows, the safer she will be.

Sans teleported right in front of the entrance, holding a box with Muffet’s logo. It contained the ‘contraband’ in question.

“‘Sup doc?” he asked, “How’s the butler life treating you?”

Doctor Gaster cleared his throat at the remark. “I don’t appreciate that statement, Sans. Serving the King and Queen is an honour no matter how menial the task.”

With a wink Sans said: “Hey, just stating the facts. There’s no need to get defensive. I mean, bet Mom and Dad are thrilled to put their cooking skills to use again.”

Groan. “Where’s that questionable doughnut? I’d like to finish our arrangement as soon as possible.”

“Sheesh, what’s the rush? Did you sneak out?”

“Yes.”

“Whoa. Wasn’t expecting that.”

Gaster grumbled, “Since you know I’m performing a directly illegal act, could you just please get this deal done and over with?”

“Sure,” Sans replied. “As long you eat it right in front of me. I got my powers back. So, would definitely want to do a live analysis of its effects.”

“Sounds reasonable enough. I’ll agree to your terms.”

The transaction was made. Opening the box, Gaster revealed one strawberry flavoured Muffet-brand doughnut that’s supposed to be imbued with Determination.

Ah… the sweetness of a freshly baked doughnut. Or rather, fried. I don’t get why people categorize them as ‘baked goods’ when they involve no baking at all.

The texture and aroma does fit a fresh produce made no less than ten minutes ago. It’s even slightly warm still. My, my, this could revolutionize the food preservation scene!
In it goes.

Gaster took a bite. It tasted good but average by his standards. Thanks to the combined knowledge from his friends, the doctor’s sure he could make a better version for private consumption. Some lime zest would make a nice tropical twist.

Other than that… nothing remarkable happened. It tasted the same from the beginning to the end. Where’s the fabled Determination? By all accounts, this was nothing more than a mundane edible. He finished the morsel soon enough.

After finding a tissue to wipe off the sugar around his lips, Gaster said: “Sans, if the baker did include Determination in her recipe I’m afraid to say that she had used too little. It’s pretty much nothing. I daresay that even monsters could eat this.”

“Huh, really?” the blue one replied. “That’s good. Working exactly as intended.”

“Working exactly as intended…?” Gaster muttered.

It happened in a flash.

One moment, the doctor tried to make sense of the puzzling statement.

The next, he felt a sharp pain on his chest.

Strips of cyan and orange squares distorted his vision. In shock, Gaster looked down to see the source of the mystery pain. What he saw was the right sleeve of a blue hoodie, a white skeletal fist, and…

…the base end of a narrow steel blade. It’s attached to a device hidden underneath the fabric, though Gaster couldn’t see the actual design.

It dawned on him that he -- the Great W.D. Gaster -- was stabbed by the assassin of his own making.

He observed the ominous glow of a red six-winged symbol emitting from his wounds. There’s no mistake: this was none other than a ‘Mark’, the signature of the Living Victories.

Sans teleported back. A trail of vaporized Determination flowed to the blade strapped to his arm.

*What in the world…?*

*He’s draining Determination. MY Determination!*

*Does this mean that doughnut was nothing more than a test subject for this function?!*

Gaster couldn't muster even one bone to defend himself before his vision clouded into more glitched squares.

Colour faded from the surroundings. Only two sources remain untouched: the wisps of Determination and the shine of Sans’ Eye.

In the midst of inner chaos, Sans said: “I wouldn’t recommend struggling. You no longer have the physical integrity to channel magic. Oh. That means no Seer’s Eyes either.”

Nonchalant. Calm. As though he’s having a casual conversation about the weather.

It’s rightfully *chilling.*
Sans added: “If you think you’re gonna flee, I suggest that you check for any sensation before you try.”

Gaster tried to move forward, but nothing happened. The base of his being had turned into a grey rough stone. No different compared to the cold cell during his Void-lost days.

“I’m… petrifying?!”

“Yup,” Sans answered. “Ever wondered what would happen if you remove Determination from an Amalgamate? Certainly not separation. I mean, if it’s that easy Alphys would have done it a long time ago. So, welp. Consider yourself lucky, Doctor Gaster. You always wanted to contribute to science.”

“Let’s see… According to my observations, the molecules in your extremities will stop flowing first. Not surprising since they’re the farthest away from your SOUL.”

Horror trembled throughout Gaster’s being. Understanding the implications, he checked on his friends on the first notice.

“Roman? Helvetica?” he muttered.

Silence answered him back. His hands began to petrify, starting from his fingertips. It spread at a rapid pace that he’s far from ready to face. “No, don’t fade on me! Please!”

“They’ll be alright,” Sans interjected. “I can still see them there. Sleeping with their eyes open, but alive.”

Gaster couldn’t believe the events that just transpired. Questions swam in his head, fighting for priority before the malaise engulfed his entire being.

What should one ask, if they have only one opportunity?

“Why?…”

Simple and perhaps not the best choice… but it’s the most glaring.

Sans stood there for a moment, pondering if it’s worth his time.

“You know too much, Gaster.” So answered the assassin. “That’s all I need to say.”

*Knowledge.*

*Knowledge is the sole reason Sans targeted me.*

*That’s right. It makes sense now.*

*I’m the one who laid the foundations of Determination studies in the Underground. I… I would understand the mystery behind this six-winged Mark. By theory, I could reverse engineer it to find its weakness.*

*No. It has to be more than that.*

*What else would belong to my exclusive knowledge?*

Gaster didn’t like this implication one single bit.
“You… you can’t be serious, Sans…”

Sans huffed behind his grin. “Heh. Expected nothing less from the famous W.D. Gaster. I guess I
don’t need to break out into science jargon after all. Won’t do that anyway.”

That’s a non-direct confirmation of his worst fears. “Egads, you’ve outdone me in the insanity
department.”

“Desperate measures for desperate times.” Sans shrugged. “No hard feelings.”

*Is there anyone out there who can stop him?* Gaster wondered.

*The King? The Queen?*

*Have mercy. Sans’ tactical genius will spin them around in circles, if not to dust within three turns.
Might is nothing if they’re too slow.*

*Captain Undyne?*

*Her mind is sharp and her spears are sharper, but I don’t think she could stay ahead of this
maddened seraphim.*

*Cenna Caraway? No, she died at least twice to a drugged Sans. She stands no chance against a
sober one.*

*Judge Thyme? I don’t know enough of his current physical condition to be certain. He’s aging and
I’m sure the scars of his battles have taken their toll.*

The curse of stone had crawled towards his chest, stretching around the SOUL. It struggled to keep
the effects at bay in an ever-losing battle.

The Seraphim’s Mark continued to shine bright on the rock-crusted surface.

*What about the Child of Mercy?*

*Yes. That’s right. They had once survived a direct battle and won. They have the best chance.*

*…But can I truly say so? That cursed blade is part of a complex system. Created a false Mark, of all
things!*

*That’s right. I see now. This might be the reason why the Persona calls Judge Mezil the ‘Vampire of
Time.’ What’s the use of SAVES if one lacks the Determination to access them?*

It spread to his lower neck now. He couldn’t turn away even if he wished to.

*Is there no one who can save us?*

*A person in their prime, with the ability to always be a step ahead.
Someone who’d never lose themselves to mere possibilities…*

All seemed bleak. That is, until Gaster realised he had one last person unaccounted for.

He thus began to laugh.

And laugh.

And laugh.

Gaster hadn’t laughed this way since the day he wrote that fateful Entry Number 17.

“What’s wrong with you?” Sans asked. He rose a brow, both amused and puzzled.
Sans. Questioning the laughter. Nothing else gave Gaster more satisfaction than to see his assailant so confused.

This determined doctor will not sleep with his eyes open like his friends. He refused! He will go out with a smile.

So, he put on his best face. Sockets, widened, his black toothless grin stretched as wide as it could go. Gaster then uttered his final words:

"Rejoice, Sans Serif! Your efforts won't be in vain. The future is not set in stone. Remember this. Always!"

With that, he immortalized the face of ironic ecstasy.

Chapter End Notes

You may now scream.

Edit: I screwed something up with the timelines. Whoops. I had edited Gaster's dialogue to properly fit with what I wrote from chapter 50 onwards. Now the focus is properly on Gungnir.

Time-travel gets to you after a while.
Armored cars on the left and right.
Guiding bikes on the front and back.

You, Mom, and Dad sat in the passenger side of the limousine. Three more bodyguards lined up on the opposite seat, armed and ready to protect you if an ambush happens. The group consisted of one lady and two guys. Dressed smart, of course.

It’s clear traffic on the highway, but the presence of three posh cars and two heavy bikes blocking the road made anyone think twice about getting too close.

Mom peeked past the one-way tinted windows. They’re designed to keep people from snapping unwanted pictures.

“Is this normal for VIPs on the Surface?” she asked.

The lady bodyguard nodded. “Yes, madam. For important political figures such as presidents and royalty, this is already considered a small entourage.”

“Rest assured, this limousine is equipped with bulletproof windows and a shock-absorbent hull.”

Dad blinked at the details. “Isn’t that a bit excessive?”

“No, sir.” You expected that answer. “We’ve received intel that Gungnir may strike at any moment. Extra precaution is necessary.”

You told your parents that assassination attempts had killed important people in human history. It happened enough for beefy security to be the norm.

Dad frowned. “This brings back unpleasant memories of the warring days…”

Sitting still made you drowsy. Maybe you should have timed your training regiment better. You slowly leaned against mom’s side with droopy eyes.

“Oh dear, you seem tired.” She held you close and caressed your cheek. Turning to the guards, she asked: “Is it alright if Frisk sleeps for the journey?”

The lady smiled in response. “Of course. Please leave the worrying to us. Do they need a blanket?”

“That would be nice! Thank you.”

Wow, they really have everything prepared for long car rides.

It’s a thin airline blanket. Surprisingly cosy. You bundled yourself up in the fabric and took a nap. It’s awkward with the seatbelts, but you’re tired enough to konk out anyway.

* * *
You began to dream of a faraway memory.

It’s the summer camping trip organized by your foster home and the school. The idea was to have the unfortunate parentless kids make new friends and give them some good memories to hold onto.

Before you left the doors, they sorted you into groups with the same letter. You can no longer remember your exact code.

Finding the kid with the same letter was fun nonetheless.

It’s nightfall. This year’s summer was colder than usual, which was the perfect weather for your striped shirt. Your group’s task was to help the adults cook. Some of you did prep work. Some watched the campfire.

You’re fortunate enough to get the easy job.

Embers smoldered under the mesmerizing flames.

The bunch of you sat down in a circle. It’s a gathering.

One of the kids started to tell a story. They said, “Hey, you heard? Legends say those who climb the mountain won’t come back. Like never!”

When you looked up, you saw the shadow of Mount Ebott looming against the setting sun.

It’s… bigger than you remembered. Then again, dreams don’t scale one to one.

Another member chimed in. “Yeah! I heard this entire area was a suicide zone too. Loooooots of restless ghosts. Ooooo~~~”

“Yeah. Many, many years ago, they found lots of dead people in the woods. All rotten bones! Worms everywhere!”

“Pushed off the cliff by bad spirits.”
“Hanged themselves.”
“Pills for those who want to take the easy way out.”

Then, there’s always that one skeptic. “Hmph. If this place is really that haunted, why are we camping here? There’s no such thing as ghosts. They’re just silly fake stories grownups scare themselves with.”

“The wizards didn’t think so,” the other objected. “Did you read the notice? They warned everyone against playing with ouija boards.”

“The wizards are fake too.”

Ah, forever the skeptic indeed.

“Okay, what about monsters? Big, scary monsters under the mountain! RAWR!”

“You wanna know a better answer? It’s because this place costs zilch. Other camping sites charge money.”
“The beach is free.”
“We already went to the beach last year!”
“My foster dad thinks we should toughen ourselves up in the wild. And this is the nearest truly ‘wild’ spot we got. I mean, where else can you find a huge space of pristine, untouched forest?”

“It’s called the national park, and those have very limited camping spots. People are not supposed to be there after all.”

They turned towards you, the one who had yet to make a single comment.

“Hey Frisk, what do you think?”

You just shrugged.

“Aww c’mon, don’t be such a bore.”

What are their names? You can’t quite remember anymore. At first, you did. Even addressed some of them in person. But as the loops extended longer and longer… they had become nothing more than a presence. If you had met them on the street, you wouldn’t recognize them.

That must be strange for them. In their perspective, you transformed into a completely different person overnight.

One moment, you’re just a kid.
The next, you’re an important ambassadorial figure: surrounded by wizards, guards, and magic.

Maybe the kids think you ditched them for your new family of unusual monsters. Arrogant, perhaps.

That’s not good. You made a note -- in your dream -- to at least explain your lack of recollection.

But what can you say? That you’re a time-traveller? You had a feeling that it’s not supposed to be public knowledge.

Maybe… you can just say that you knocked your head really hard?

It’s kind of true, except not really. You don’t want to lie if you could help it. How can you be a spokesperson if no one trusts your words?

For reasons lost in time, you thought it would be a good idea to climb Mount Ebott alone. Your PE teacher in school once said: ‘If a wild animal appears, you need to make yourself look big and scary. When in doubt, grab a big stick. Don’t throw a Poké Ball!’.

Apparently you looked high and low to get a strong and sturdy one. Pretend that you’re one of those cool monk fighters from TV. Alas, you lacked the physical strength to carry it. So you settled for a wind-blown branch.

You were confident that there were no dangerous animals lurking around. The forest was silent except for the chirps of insects and birds.

The shadow of the mountain reached the sky; it’s still so far away.

But you’re determined to hike.
To make your own adventure.
To explore the ‘haunted’ mountain.

Alone.
“Frisk?”
“We’re almost there, my child.”

The voices of your goatparents stirred you from the edges of a dream.


You saw The Magus HQ in the distance a.k.a ‘The Institute’. You also understand why it earned the nickname of ‘The Spire’.

It’s… freaking huge.

That’s all you could really say. It stretched high into the sky like the wizard towers from fantasy. With a modern twist. The amount of buildings that surrounded the ground level might as well make it a mini city of its own.

Your bleary imagination juxtaposed the shadow of the mountain over the tall structure.

…Huh… The grandness of The Spire did sort of remind you of Ebott. It makes you want to explore it, though you’re sure that they will have a ton more security checks than a desolate mountain.

You combed your hair and straightened up your shirt. The hour draws near. You checked the Trap Harvester for the time. One of the sides was a normal clock.

Traffic must be slow somewhere, because it’s three hours in the afternoon. The online maps said you should arrive at two o’clock sharp.

Oh well. There’s still plenty of time to wake up and recover from your really long nap.

You can’t help but to notice that the Magi bodyguards seem somewhat tensed.

What’s wrong?

They’re hesitant to answer. You’re a child under their charge and it’s their job to keep you worry free. You actually had to convince them that you need to know what’s going on for the trial. Otherwise, the maybes will distract you too much.

One of the male bodyguards then said: “We had to take a few detours due to unforeseen changes in the traffic flow. It’s uncertain if there’s a mastermind behind the job, or if it’s just a bad day in the streets.”

“We apologize for the delay,” The lady added, “From this point onward, it’s straight to the HQ.”

That’s good. As long you arrive with punctuality, everything’s fine. You started the journey early for a reason. Traffic can get unpredictable.

The bodyguards were astonished by your statements.

Dad smiled proud. “As we had said, Frisk is very wise for their age.”

Looks like your reputation is growing. You’re not too sure if you could keep it up. Being ‘old’ is not the same as being ‘wise’.
“I’m sure you’ll do just fine, Sir… Madam…”

Looks like nobody briefed your proper biological chromosome to them. You told the bodyguards that just ‘Frisk’ will do for now.

…You sure hope that you’ll arrive soon because it’s about time to go to the loo.

“Oh. I guess that’s our first order of business upon arrival then.”

Sounds great.

As you passed through the streets of the big city, you wondered about a lot of things. Most of them surrounded the dream you had.

How are the kids doing?
Are they healthy?
Will you meet them again? If yes, how different would your experience be?

If you introduced them to your monster friends, would it go well?

…

Will Ebott Town be okay in your absence? Is Undyne holding down the fort? What about Alphys? And Mettaton? What about Monster Kid, the Temmies, and your new non-human schoolmates?

Is Papyrus alright? The silence started to bother you. His phone was off ever since he got submitted to the Magus Headquarters.

And…

Where’s Sans? He promised to help, but you don’t see him anywhere. You hope that he didn’t stress himself out too much. He was really not okay when he burned his possessions.

You just want everyone to live in peace again.

* * *

Big Sister Cenna stood at the foot of a giant stone door. Grams and circuits carved an elaborate geometrical pattern within its frames. It reminded you of stained glass, except it worked its art with texture and shadows.

The sheer size made you drop your jaw. From your perspective, it’s the height of ten Dads with the width of maybe five.

And they have this entire thing at the lowest basement of The Spire?!

“Yo, Frisky! Yo, Royal family! Ready for the big day?”

She greeted you with the same casual sunniness as always. Maybe. It’s somewhat clouded by the severity laid before you.

You greeted back in the same manner and said you’re ready.
“That’s great! Well, you’re a bit early though. The guys inside are still doing the finishing touches.”

Presenting it from top to bottom, she said: “In the meantime, why don’t you admire our one and only entrance to the Crimson Hall?”

Admire, you did. You noticed that your parents had grown curious too.

Mom traced her fingers in the air. “Is that… an upside-down tree? Maybe roots?”

You peered harder and tried to follow the shape.

Oh. That’s not a tree, it’s a double-sided key! The linking circuits gave it the illusion of roots.

Cenna’s grin confirmed your answer. “Heh heh, keen eye you got there. Must be your Vanquisher blood speaking. Yup. You’re seeing the representation of the Keys of Fate.”

What’s with the diamonds containing strange glyphs in them? They’re connected to the fancy key.

“They’re the Aspects written in the Magi script: Wisdom, Courage, Righteousness, Intellect, Altruism, Truth.”

Huh? They… don’t match up with the values you knew. What happened to Patience, Bravery and so on?

Cenna explained, “The stuff on the door are the ideal results of the basics. Each colour has their own tenets. Like, mine goes like this: ‘Truth is the root of Justice. Those who dispense justice must seek out the truth, otherwise the act becomes corrupted vindication’. Get it?”

Ooooh that’s super cool!

Dad rubbed his chin and read over the runes again. “Hmm, I think we’re missing one of these ‘Aspects’. There are only six here.”

“Look up.” The Magus pointed her finger to the head top of the key.

There’s another glyph up there. What does it read?

“Victory,” she replied. “The motive behind all ‘Determination’. This is a carving of the Keys of Fate after all.”

Something caught her attention. When you looked close, you noticed that she’s wearing an earpiece. Ah, so that’s how they communicated.

“Yup. Frisky’s here. You ready, Mez? Okay.” Transmission, end. Turning her attention back towards you, she said: “Prep work is all done. Anything else you wanna ask?”

Nope. Let’s not keep the tsunderjudge waiting.

“Atta Frisky. That’s… how you should do it. You’re really a good kid. Wish I could spend more time with you.”

There a tinge of sadness in her words.

You told her that we’ll have more time to hang out after the Trial. Like at dinnertime.

“Yeah, you’re right. Let me open it for ya.”
Cenna faced the door and ejected her SOUL. It’s been a while since you had seen that glowing, golden segmented heart in action.

It touched the stone door. The grams lit up white in response. Then, the SOUL continued to push the two panels apart. You could hear the slabs grinding against the floor.

Whoa! Isn’t this door made out of heavy stone?

Cenna chuckled. “If you try to use your bare hands, yeah. It’s impossible. Only SOULS can open this special brand of magic doors.”

Dad mentioned, “Magic indeed. Technology had come a long way since the Sealing.”

Beyond that stood an empty round room carved out of pure white. It looks one seamless slab of ceramic.

You spotted Mezil standing at the far end, with his back facing towards you.

“Good luck, Frisky,” said Cenna.

You responded with a confident thumbs-up.

Upon entering the chamber proper, the mighty slabs ground shut. You’re alone in the chamber with your parents and the Supreme Judge.

“Howdy,” said Dad. “We’re here with Frisk, Judge Thyme.”

Mezil replied, “Mhmm. Thank you for bringing them here.”

He’s talking in the other direction, back turned to you, but you hear his voice all around. Do they have an audio system installed? If that’s the case, they did a really good job in hiding the speakers.

“Please come forward to the center of the hall.”

The three of you walked towards the centre. Mom stood by your right, and Dad to your left.

You expected Mezil to turn around and start the Trial with a huge question, yet he remained silent. Is he testing your patience? Maybe delaying you on purpose to test your ability to endure pressure?

It pays to be extra paranoid. He wanted to test the whole ‘you’ after all.

The place… unsettled you. Most of the light came from a series of panels that loomed over your head. The lack of visible corners distorted your sense of space. The only reason why you could tell up from down was the long shadow of Judge Thyme cast against the back wall.

Where’s the ‘Crimson’…? There’s not a single speck of red.

So Mezil began: “Welcome to the Trial of the Crimson Hall. This is where the Supreme Judge tests the hearts of every Living Victory. Some may object it as mere simulation. Excuses. Should they fail here, how can they be trusted with the world?”

“This event will be overseen by a panel of Jurors. It’s the Jury’s task to ensure a fair trial. This means should I act out of bounds, they have the right to cancel the proceedings. Today, seven shall watch our every move.”

So far, it lines up with Sans’ intel.
Mezil looked upwards for a moment. “The Magus Association’s Grandmaster will have one card to veto the Jury’s vote. If that happens, the Trial of the Crimson Hall will continue uninterrupted… until my next transgression.”

“Jurors, you may introduce yourselves.”

You don’t know where they are, but they’re watching. Maybe behind the walls?

One by one, they introduced themselves.

“Juror Number 1 speaking. You may proceed.”

“Aye, Juror Number 2 be watchin’ ya today. What will yer heart choose? Lookin’ forward to the answer. Godspeed.”

“Juror Number 3 on duty. Number 2, please cut the accent. It’s unprofessional.”

“…Juror Number 4. I wish you good luck, child…”

“Teehee, I’m Juror Number 5! Wow, you’re cuter than the photos. If you pass this, you’re gonna be the youngest recorded participant in history!”

“Juror Number 6 pays his greetings. My, my, this is certainly fascinating. Wa ha ha!”

“Juror Number 7 wonders what’s wrong with the world. A child so young, forced to take on burdens that most adults cannot bear. She worries for the future. Please prove her wrong.”

Huh. 4, 5, and 7 were ladies. The rest were guys.

6 sounds somewhat familiar. You know it’s an old guy, but that’s about it. There’s a nagging feeling that you should recognize this voice.

They’re a colourful bunch. Expected nothing less from a group of monsters. You smiled knowing that some things don’t change.

A few more seconds passed by. Mezil then asked: “Do you desire to keep your power, Frisk?”

You opened your mouth… but you could form no words. It’s a complicated subject.

There’s a feeling that you’re too unprepared for this.

“Interesting. You used to be more determined. Perhaps a little wake-up call is required.”

Huh?

You felt something hit your chest. Like a small pebble kicked up by a car’s tyre.

Mom shrieked. You wondered why at first. Then, when you looked down you realised that something had gone horribly wrong.

Blood spread around a small puncture wound on your chest.

What the heck?!

When?
Why?
How?

You heard an uproar. The Jury panel expressed their shock on the turn of events.

“EEK!”
“Woah there!”
“Judge Thyme, what’s the meaning of this?!”
“Cor Blimey! I knew ya had a plan but what’s with THAT?”
“Please cancel the Trial, Grandmaster! Premature violence against this child is illegal!”

One of the wall panels flipped around to show a red spade. That’s the veto card.

“Grandmaster…? Are you serious?”
“Expecting that, aye. Judge Thyme M’lord will never play a fool. Have some faith, will ya?”
“Tsk, you say that because you’re his close confident. Enough to call him ‘M’lord’ of all things.”

Whoa. You’re sure you heard a snake-like hiss through the sound system. “Mind yer manners. That be borderline slander.”

“Number 7 agrees that personal squabbles should be left outside the court. Number 2 provides valuable insight of judgement despite his eccentricity. His recollection is the strongest amongst us. The non-Seers have to rely on the chronograph recordings.”

The banter hushed soon after. Number 2 and 3 don’t get along with each other, it seems. Interesting…

…Ugh.

Man, the sting. The wound’s getting more and more obvious. What exactly did he do?!

Mezil still had his back turned towards you.

“…Apologies,” he said, “It seems that my battleworn past had caught up to me. Worry not, the next shot won’t be a miss.”

A series of grams ignited throughout his left arm.

He’s fast.
About as fast as Sans, if you could dare say so.

In one swift motion, his magic grabbed your SOUL and yanked it out of your chest. It’s an action you once thought exclusive to monsters.

A gun aimed square towards you.

Mezil fired. The shot hit straight in the center of your Psychia.

It nicked off 1 HP. Your head felt light for a moment.

Wait, only 1?

“You may check your Psychia now.”

When you flipped it around, you noticed a small white bullet embedded into the surface of your SOUL. It didn’t go very deep.
Inspecting yourself, you found the exact same type of ammunition. It’s a pellet: the ones used for non-lethal arms like riot control.

You tried to dig the bullet out. But, a red butterfly stopped you. The same happened for the one stuck in your chest.

They’re both Marked.

What was that for?!

Mezil replied, “I’m granting you back a gift that we Reds share. Don’t close your eyes.”

He shot the lights. Dad used his huge body to shield you from the shards.

You then saw the world turn grey. Time froze in place. You held your breath when Judge Thyme lifted his arm to snap his fingers.

Just Like that, everything returned to their former pristine state. The lights were never broken.

Mom once again shrieked at the sight of the bleeding wound. The Marked bullets persisted through time travel.

“W-wait. The Grandmaster’s card is already out?!”
“Time loop, ahoy.”
“Wah ha, if only I’m blessed to see the truth…”

That red spade panel appears to be a Mark too.

Wait…

The Grandmaster is a Living Victory too?!

“That is indeed correct,” Mezil confirmed. “The Grandmaster may not hold the Keys of Fate, but he is the heart of the Magus Association.”

“Now then. Shall we have a short session of enlightenment?”

Mezil pointed the barrel at you once more.

“Once upon a time, Determination was known as ‘Willpower’. The Grandmaster and the founder of Vanquishers thought it’s best to update the term to conceal its more dangerous nature to the unacquainted.”

“I find it very amusing that the monsters of Ebott came to the same term from a different conclusion. Yes, ‘Determination’ is the will to live. Because their terminology focuses on the lighter side of the Red's magic, the discoveries record only the life-preserving aspect of this power.”

“But any tool in existence can be used as a weapon. Frisk, you had used both the light and dark without ever realising the difference.”

“It is not the one more ‘Determined’ who comes out on top. Rather, it’s the one who successfully imposes their authority over the other. This desire for superiority is the root of many human conflict.”

“In other words: ‘Victory’.”

“…Allow me to demonstrate.”
Two more shots fired. You heard your parents yelp. Mezil’s red butterfly spread out from the point of impact: their SOULS.

“That particular Mark says: ‘I impose my will to preserve your memories’.”

Another shot. Sensing danger, Dad tried to dodge. But Mezil’s aim lived up to the legend. The bullet struck his lower leg.

“This time I’ve imposed my will to erase half of your lifeforce.”

A green bar appeared over his head. It’s a hologram that displayed his HP to the public. Dad just lost half of his total life, just as Mezil dictated.

“Asgore!” Mom caught her husband.

She tried to heal him, but the Mark repelled her magic. Half remained half.

You heard another click of the gun. You’re sure Mezil’s doing it on purpose to give you an audio cue. He’s demanding your fullest attention.

“I impose my will to blind you for ten seconds.”

This time, Mom suffered the hit. Her eyes widened in horror. She reached her hand out to the air and waved it around.

“Frisk? Asgore? W-where are you?! I can’t see!”

“Tori, I’m here!” said Dad.

You called to her and grabbed her hand. Mom held onto the both of you for her life’s worth, crying from the terror of eternal darkness.

Ten seconds passed.

Then suddenly, she looked at you. Then Dad. Her maternal instincts told her to shield you from this dangerous man.

Mezil had expected this reaction. He remained calm. Stoic. Not a single shred of emotion on his face.

“Frisk,” he said, “Do you really expect a Boss Monster to be so weak that a stick or a toy knife can kill them? No. If you weren’t a Pure Red child, your ‘weapons’ would remain nothing more than harmless objects.”

“‘Killing Intent’ is just a fanciful name for corruptive Determination. It lays the foundation of ‘Curses’: the art of DEMONS and the vengeful spirits. It so happens that I am in the former category. Therefore…”

“I impose my will of death.”

Before you could so much as to object, you heard two more shots.

Your monster parents’ dust showered over you.

Mom! Dad!
No…!
No, no, no!
This can’t be real!
You expected some crazy fight but certainly not THIS!

The world turned grey and ground into a halt again. Once more, Judge Thyme snapped his fingers to cue another LOAD.

Just like that, your parents were back to their fluffy selves. This time, they both quaked in their feet.

“Those faces…”
“Aye, no doubt about it. M’lord sent our two royalty o’er to the Spirit Realm and back.”
“…Scary…”

The Jury knew of Mezil’s full potential.

“Peaceful Determination stills the heart. Corruptive Determination destroys life. Monsters lack defenses to actively resist this aura, and hence why you could manipulate the outcomes of your battles without much trouble.”

“Do you now understand the true weight of your power, Frisk?” asked the Judge. “I had fought many evildoers with the Determination to kill a Magus in a single Mark. Physical resistance can only go so far.”

W-was the Last Persona one of them?

“Yes. This is why I must execute every Living Victory who loses themselves to bloodthirst. It’s a power too great to be left alone. That’s not counting the possibility of them acquiring the Keys of Fate.”

Then how did Mezil survive until today?

“Simple: I am determined. Determination’s greatest weakness is Determination. It’s all about resisting another person’s will with your own.”

Wait, hang on. You don’t quite get something.

How do you kill a self-reviving time traveller?!

“Hmm, perhaps I’ve not been clear enough. The only way to kill a Living Victory is to impose your will where it truly matters: their Psychia. Or ‘SOUL’, as you’re more familiar with. In other words, you curse them to remain dead.”

You asked Judge Thyme if he’s really going to kill you. But, Sans said…

“Under normal circumstances, I could pronounce the end of your time-travelling abilities. Right here, right now. But you are anything but ‘normal’.”

“Have you forgotten? Perhaps so.”

He locked the sternest glares on you to pronounce the most severe of verdicts:

“Once upon a timeline, you had rejected the Trial of the Crimson Hall. I believe Judge Caraway warned you that such arrogant behaviour warrants immediate execution upon my sole discretion.”

What?
What?
WHAT?!!?!!

You did that?! After all the warnings?! Like, really?!

Blood drained from your head. White noise ringed between your ears. You’re feeling faint for a good reason.

That’s the dumbest move you could ever pull off with this guy.

But when? Why can’t you remember?

You heard a loud stomp on the ground.

“Let my child go.”

It’s hard to believe that growl came from Dad. It sounds so deep. Guttural. So far away from the big softie you both know and love.

“I see the King has made his stand. However, I’m afraid I cannot honour your request.”

“The humans have this saying,” said Dad. “‘Those who kill must be prepared to get killed themselves’. Isn’t that correct?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Then are you prepared to die?”

“No,” Mezil replied. “I am prepared to win at any cost. Even if this means turning into cinder and ash, I shall not waver.”

“Boastful words. Can you back them up?”

Dad’s voice softened when he addressed Mom. “Toriel. Please protect our child.”

Huh?

Mom thus grabbed you and ran as far as she could. Along the way, she whispered instructions into your ear.

“Frisk, stay with me at all times. I alone am fireproof. Whatever you do: do not peek. The light will blind you.”

Mom? How powerful is Dad?

“…More than you realise.”

You felt yourself sink into her huge, soft body: face brushing against her clothes. Glimpsing to the side, you noticed that she’s putting all her magic to create a shield.

Then, you heard the air roar into flames.

Fire, fire and more fire.

In a flash, Dad transformed the Crimson Hall into a blast furnace.

Intense heat permeated, like you’re standing in front of a hot stove. Imagine how much worse it would be without Mom’s shield.
No human could survive that. But you know Mezil always has some trick up his sleeve. Maybe… maybe this is your test?

If he dies, you will have the Keys of Fate.

Then he might want to see if you’d revive him or--

You heard Dad scream. What followed after were the sandy shimmers of collapsing dust.

“Asgore?” Mom muttered. She turned around to look. You saw her cover her mouth in horror. She stood up, planted her feet down, and conjured fire in her hands.

She’s ready to fight. Mom, what’s wrong?

“Don’t look, my child. It’s too much even for you.”

Too late. You caught a glimpse and you couldn’t take your sights away.

That’s a skeleton.
A charred, ember-streaked, blackened skeleton standing over the remains of Dad’s royal garments.

Mezil’s red SOUL shone bright within the ribcage: a glow so strong that it bathed the hall in crimson.

Is that…
A Lich?!)

Mezil began to talk despite being all bones. His voice had a slight reverb.

“King Asgore’s power fits the legends. Still, I can feel the penitence in his resolve. His flames are like warm candles to humanity’s Hell. That’s a good sign: a King should value life no matter which side of the coin they’re on.”

“Hmm. It’ll be inconvenient if I convert right now. I should turn back time while my Psychia still shines.”

He snapped his very skeletal fingers.

Everything went back to normal. Dad isn’t dust, and Judge Mezil is back in the flesh.

In your midst of shock, you felt a more muscular furry arm lifting you off the floor.

The distance between you and Mezil widened. You hear the Jury commenting on the scene.

“I certainly didn’t expect that.”
“If ya didn’t, ya know nothin’ about the heart.”
“Says the outcast.”
“Seriously Number 3, if I’m a parent I’d grab my kid and run for my life too! Judge Thyme IS a terrifying dude when he wants to be. No contest.”

We’re… running away?

When you snapped out of your daze, you realised that Dad carried you in one arm and held Mom with the other. He’s making a mad dash to the massive stone door.

“Fleeing, are you?” asked Mezil.
“Yes!” Dad yelled back.

“What do you intend to gain from this?”

“A few years! I’ll teach Frisk the art of combat. And how to fight a human without hurting them. I’ll be their father until they’re old enough to face you!”

“As will I!” Mom declared.

Mom and Dad pushed open the stone doors with all their might. They’re too heavy for a human, but for Boss Monsters that’s another story.

The stone slabs ground against the base. Then, you heard nothing.

Mom gasped. “W-what is this…?”

You turned around and realised why.

Beyond the door lay… nothingness. Literal nothingness. It’s a black void as far as the eye can see.

Mezil said, “If you throw a coin down there, it will fall to the center of this chamber. Try it if you wish. Or you just take my word as truth.”

“Where are we?” Dad asked.

“You’re in the realm between reality. The gap of space and time. The bridge between life and death. The dimension Doctor W.D. Gaster once roamed: none other than ‘The Void’ itself. The magnificent stone door you crossed on the way in was more than just a show of splendour. It’s a type of ‘Spirit Gate’, a fancy name for a converter.”

“It’s rather complicated. In summary, your minds are transferred into a digital mockup for the Crimson Hall. Matter becomes data. Your SOULS are real. Your bodies… not quite.”

…There’s no escape.

Patting on Dad’s shoulder, you asked him to put you down on the ground.

“Frisk? Are you sure?” He’s looking at you with eyes moist with tears.

Yup. Don’t worry. Everything will be okay. Planted a smooch on his snout for extra measure.

After a lot of reluctance, Dad let you walk up to Judge Mezil.

Along the way, you eject your SOUL.

Encounter, initiate.

All four options are available.

**FIGHT - ACT - ITEM - MERCY**

It’s been a long time since you’ve put yourself in this state of mind.

You wished it didn’t need to come to this.
The releases look fast, but in reality I was working in advance. The draft count had caught up to me at last. I have no more extra chapters in my disposal.

The battle proceedings will be time-consuming because first, we need to write down all the key dialogue. Then we need to space them out into phases. Then write the actual battle flow. That's gonna take a while.

Meanwhile feel free to digest the Laws of Determination. If you are lost about the story flow, I suggest re-reading the relevant chapters to see how they fit in the big picture. There's time for that now.
Revelations

Chapter Notes

21 pages of Living Victory fighting. This chapter upped the difficulty scale in writing.

Good news! The Golden Quiche now has an official TVTropes page!

It's still pretty barebones at the moment of posting and I was too busy writing this chapter to properly fill it. So if you're itching to fill in something (especially hints from the earliest chapters), now it's time to write to your heart's content! I really need some help.

I will check it of course. And if I have time, add entries too.

At the moment our eyes have burned too much from working on this 21 pages to spot typos. If there's any, probably will only be found out... tomorrow or so.

Also, I made a major error in Gaster's statements in Chapter 95. Changed that to focus on Gungnir instead of the Seven Sages... because I messed up my timeline. It's all fixed now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Judge Thyme said nothing as he waited for your next move.

First thing you checked, your item stash. It’s a free turn so it should be safe. Maybe. As long he doesn’t pull a Sans.

* ITEM
* T. Harv. - ‘The Trap Harvester’, your family heirloom. It’s a huge DT battery in the shape of a double-sided pocketwatch. You’ve been storing it up for days now.

Oh no! Where are your monster candies?! You pocketed some food and a knife for this big day and they’re not there!
Somehow, only The Trap Harvester survived the transfer…

* ACT
* Check * Negotiate

You chose to check.

* Mezil Thyme, the Vampire of Time.
* A man burdened with fate. Tsunderjudge extraordinaire.

* ACT
* Check * Negotiate

You chose to negotiate.

You told him that you will take the Trial properly this time, but under a number of conditions. This is
supposed to be a place of justice, right?

Mezil responded: “If your requests are reasonable, I will consider them.”

You asked Mezil if he could remove all the bullets from you and your parents. It’s uncomfortable to have a solid object embedded in one’s being.

“Fair enough. But I warn you that your chest wound will remain open.”

That’s okay. As long it’s gone. It’s pretty shallow anyway. Look, the flow stopped.

“Also, the memory bullet must remain in your Psychia for the remainder for the Trial.”

That’s fine too.

He reached out his right hand, palm facing up. “Return.”

It a simple command that did its job. All shots minus the one in your SOUL returned to his hand. That’s three in total, including the blood-soaked bit.

“I can do this because I have a Cyan Minor,” he explained. “This trait allows me to insert two commands in the space of one. A person’s colour affects their magic. Living Victories are no different. Since you are a Pure Red, I do not suggest you to copy any of my tricks.”

Noted.

* ACT
* Check

* HP ATK DEF… guess you can’t read those stats without Chara’s help. Not that it’s important anyway.
* You should note down what you know about him.
* Red / Cyan / Yellow?
* You have a feeling it’s Yellow since he’s so good with a gun.

* ACT
* Negotiate

You asked Mezil to send your parents to a safe space. This is your Trial, not theirs.

What about the Jury chamber?

“A wise decision.”

One of the side walls slid open. You hear the Jury beckoning your parents to join them. They’re not on their microphones, so it’s hard to grasp their exact words.

Dad seems surprised. Does he recognize someone in there?

You encouraged Mom and Dad to go. Reassured them that you’ll be fine. They’re reluctant, as you expected. But they don't have much of a choice.

Once they’re inside, the wall slid back in place. Everything seemed so seamless.

* ACT
* Check
You’re not sure about it, but you had a feeling that Mezil is trying to teach you the Red Arts.
Papyrus described him as a tsundere principal for a reason.

ACT
Negotiate

You requested a weapon to defend yourself. Preferably your own.

Mezil narrowed his eyes. “Frisk. This means you’re openly admitting your criminal potential. No one can object based on your tender age anymore. Not the Jury. Not even the Grandmaster. I will have the right to judge you as a fully responsible adult.”

You agree to those terms.

“Very well. Chronographer, if you please.”

A masterfully crafted knife materialized before you. It’s floating in mid-air, waiting to be picked up.

You equipped the ‘Knife’. It spun between your nimble fingers as you showed your slashing skills. Deadly style points, off the charts.

Gasps of shock and astonishment came from the Jury chamber.

“Huh? The lil’ whippersnapper’s a Gungnir Knife Dancer?! Number 1. You’re the resident expert, ain’t that right? What can you tell us about ‘em?”

“Yes, Number 6. You had just observed the first six steps of the routine. The complete movesets consists of 92 steps, which teaches the practitioner all the necessary combat skills: from the basics to assassination.”

“I believe Frisk had once called upon the name of their kin. Chara, was it not? Could you confirm, Judge Thyme?”

“Yes, Number 1,” he answered. “Frisk had once become the Persona of the deceased Chara, almost destroying existence as a Seven SOUL DEMON-GOD. You’re witnessing the proof of their skill.”

“The DEMON may be contained, but the knowledge remained. I see.”

ACT
Check

Mezil Thyme, the Vampire of Time.
His stoic face makes it hard to tell if he’s losing his patience.

ACT
Negotiate

You want to know what happened in the past timeline.

Mezil huffed. “It’s rather tedious to play it like a standard documentary. Why don’t we raise the stakes? Fight. And we will see if you’re worthy of the burden.”

…You don’t want to use the FIGHT button at all. The knife you had was just for self-defense. You don’t intend to strike unless he does.

You reached out for the ACT button. But then, you heard yet another gunshot.
Another Marked pellet dug into your SOUL. A butterfly Mark blocked all access to both your ACT and MERCY options.

A weird sensation tickled your throat. When you tried to ask, you realised that you could say nothing.

“I impose my will to deny you of your usual tactics.”

Oh crap.
Oh. Crap.

He had just robbed you of your voice! In RPG terms this is a definite ‘Mute’ status!

So, this is how he wants to play?

That’s fine.

Dad forced you into a similar corner before. It doesn’t phase you.

Your sights locked on the gun. There's your target. If you could get rid of that, you win. Most likely. Hopefully.

Here you go!

* FIGHT

You dashed straight forward with the knife. The sooner you finish this fight, the better.

Mezil vanished. When he did so, you quickly turned around. It makes the most logical sense for your enemy to teleport right behind you.

Bingo! He’s there--

And then he’s gone again.

He just teleported twice in a split second!

The next thing you knew, one of the bullets grazed the tip of your ear.

Huh?

What’s happening?

You felt like someone slapped a screen right in front of your face.

One moment you’re in the Crimson Hall… the next, you’re looking at a news report?

Mettaton?

He’s hounded by reporters. In a fit of frustration, he cancelled the concert and retreated back to Ebott.

Wait, what?

You couldn’t wipe away the daze of witnessing that vision. Blood dripped down your ear and you even didn’t realise it.

“How does it feel to be Sans Serif?”
That question snapped you back to reality. Your shocked expression asked a universal question: what the hell did he just do?

Mezil noticed it despite the lack of words.

He said: “I’ve imposed the Chronographer’s data straight into your memory.”

Dammit. You got so caught up with Mezil, you forgot that he’s working as a tag team!

“If you recall, Ebott Town experienced a few months of fragile peace. At the time, The Gungnir thought that the Magi would oppose the Dreemurr Nation on the grounds of bad blood. When titans fight, it’s best to stay on the sidelines after all. That changed when they realised that I had played them for the fools they are.”

“Well. As you can see, Mettaton fell into their trap like a moth to a flame. They twisted his fanciful, superlative statements as anti-human sentiment.”

Mettaton told everyone in the chat that Judge Thyme helped settle the vandalism issue.

Mezil just showed you the result if he hadn't intervened.

…You’ve got a bad feeling about this.

You SAVED your current position. This time, you’re going to use the Judge’s tricks against him.

Be more cautious.

Anticipate his next move!

Remember, Mezil’s trained to counter every time you strike.

* FIGHT

He blinked away as expected. You teleported back to your previous position as soon as possible to gauge his new location.

It turns out, he’s always a step ahead. By the time you noticed the side-shot, it’s too late.

This time it hit your non-dominant arm.

Another vision flooded your sight. If this is what Seers feel on a daily basis, it sucks. Big time.

Undyne stood over the dead body of a teenager. His heart stopped beating the moment her spear shattered his SOUL.

It made headlines. Said that a monster inflicted unfair retribution for a simple break in. They argued that Doctor Alphys only suffered a slight head injury. Why must murder be the answer?

Mezil added: “Strength becomes meaningless when politics conspire against the strong. Behold: this is Undyne’s fate. Behind bars. Her spirit broken. The life she had taken in a fit of fury further fuelled the flames of hatred. More and more took Gungnir’s side.”

No…

No!

Be determined, Frisk! Don’t lose hope!
You know he's trying to get you worked up, hoping you’ll make a mistake. Relax your muscles. This isn’t a good time to get a spasm or a sprain.

…Ngh. A part of you wished that you had Sans’ physical laxness. You gained a new appreciation for his hyper-efficient fluid dodging.

There has to be a weakness on Mezil! You need to understand how he moves. In order to do that, you must ramp up the pressure.

* FIGHT

You decided to be more active with your teleport markers. You ran all around the room, planting as many mini-SAVES as you possibly can.

Mezil realised what you’re trying to do and opened fire without mercy.

You blink back and successfully dodged the bullet. He switched his aim, but he’s a moment too slow. The next plastic bit smashed into the floor.

Aha, that’s it!

Mezil’s still human! A 50-year-old human to boot. No amount of badassery can change the fact that he will slow down with age.

Each dodge must be taking its toll on his body. This whole mini-SAVE business is quite stamina draining.

Confidence levels rose in your heart.

For each success, you inched yourself closer and closer to Mezil.

You’re almost in range.

It doesn’t matter if he starts another chain of teleports.

One strike.

After all of that…

One strike is all you need to win!

You drew back your arm to slash.

The circuitry in Mezil’s legs then lit up bright. He jumped high above your head, flipped himself upside down and glued his feet firmly on the ceiling.

Huh?!

He’s doing a Papyrus?!?!

Wait, that’s definitely not a Yellow trait! Isn’t that a Blue?!

Can he have four colours? No way! Maybe? You don’t know! What is his other colour? Red, Cyan, then--???

He’s taking aim for another shot. Move, move, move, move!
Zigzag around.
Stay erratic.
Don't stop!

...Crap. You have no spots on the ceiling to teleport to. Not to mention that it’s a literal pain in the neck to keep track of his movements!

While you panicked, Mezil struck you on the shoulder.

He forced yet another vision. This time, you’re looking at an epic showdown.

It’s the battle of the ages.

The whole town joined Sans to protect you. The Judge Thyme of the past dodged a massive storm of lazers, roaring fire, and a variety of bones.

You heard him narrating in the real world. The judge thus said:

“Anger and disappointment fed into your Determination to the point where you overpowered my initial Mark. It was about time anyway. I knew I could not keep you capped forever.”

“So, what did you seek with your newfound resolution? Independence. You demanded that the Dreemurr Nation remain a sovereign entity unaffiliated with the Magi: upheld by the Keys of Fate within your hands.”

“‘Why trust those who failed?’ That’s the summary of your choice. Admirable, but foolish.”

“If you were alone, I would’ve just ‘fetched’ you and ran the Trial right away. But, of course life is never so simple. You refused to fight me: instead you sent your best warrior to do the job.”

“Indeed, he's none other than the Seraphim. Your confidant. And your most trusted. Before I realised it, the whole of Ebott had turned against me. Some participated, others cheered.”

Papyrus tried to stop the conflict. If Mezil didn’t force him to stay back with his Mark, your cinnamon roll friend would have thrown himself right into the crossfire.

In the end, Sans managed to land multiple blasts on Mezil. Flakes of Karma chewed through the edges of his segmented SOUL. It also destroyed all clothing articles that wasn’t his underwear.

Sans tried to be cheeky. You could tell.

Humiliation was a valid battle tactic. It made a point that if you weren’t so merciful, Mezil could end up as atomic dust.

Except… things didn’t quite go as expected.

Mezil had all sorts of Gram circuitry tattooed into his skin. Magic code lay infused in anything that wasn’t his hands or his face. That sight frightened most of the Ebott citizens: just what kind of a person had they tried to tangle with?

You recognized the thirteen-point star on his chest. That’s the one he used to finish off Persona. It’s still there, ready to be summoned again.

“You seem mortified. As you should. You are no longer ignorant about the weapons embedded in my being.”
“Upon your foolish defiance, I had prepped the same bullets I utilized against Persona. Laid down the foundations while the brawl commenced. Imagine what would happen to the townsfolk caught in the trap? I’ll be honest with you: without so much as a fraction of Determination they would have died of a broken heart.”

“Yes. I was prepared to kill all who stood in my way for a better tomorrow. Why should I be concerned? I’m a DEMON, am I not? If I wrestled the Keys out of your hands, the lost would return with no memory of their demise. I could settle that mess under my terms.”

“Yet, in the end I retreated. Hoped for peaceful diplomacy no matter how nonsensical it seemed. Did my actions not puzzle you at all? The most feared Magi of my time, letting you go scott free? If you are still too dull to notice, let me jog your mental gears… “

“Don’t you remember the one friend who believed in you despite your darkest moments?”

The moment the recording ended, Judge Thyme of the Crimson Hall stood right in front of your face. His imposing self loomed over your head.

He reminded you of thunderclouds.

“Do you?” he asked.

Startled, you swung your knife across Mezil’s body.

* FIGHT

Wait, no, this is not what you want--

The sharp knife glanced off an invisible force with a loud ‘pling’. Mezil had a magic shield, a Green trait.

A part of you felt relieved. At least he didn’t get hurt, you thought, while the rest of you got ready to flip out. What the heck was his third magic colour?! You need to know that to come up with a plan!

Mezil tried to shoot your leg next. You braced for impact.

Instead, you heard the clicks of an empty gun.

…You actually made him run out of ammo. Is it over?

No way. He had to have some trick up his sleeve.

Will he try to use the whole DT-consuming Gram?

That compelled you to put your back against the curved wall. You really, really, really don’t want to be in the center of THAT spell.

“Hmph.” He huffed as he lowered his gun. “To think that you lasted this long. Here I thought that I could finish this in a single clip. I suppose I have proven my case to the Jury then. You are not a mere helpless child, despite appearances.”

The Judge blinked back to the same position as the beginning of this fight. He pushed a part of his coat away to reveal a slim belt pouch strapped to his belt. It contained a fresh magazine of plastic pellets.

Okay. It’s… a conventional reload?
Cautious, you raised your knife in preparation for what’s to come.

Then Mezil reached out his right hand towards you.

“Return.” His voice boomed through the hall.

With that command, he yanked out the bullets he had embedded into you.

Ouch! That hurt.

He held two bloody bits in his hand.

“Only so few… You’re better than expected. But, not good enough.”

“Blood. Determination in liquid form.”

Nope. It’s not conventional at all!

He smeared your blood over the top of the gun. You think it’s called a ‘slide’. Doing so turned the grooves of his pistol red with determination…

…Determination?!

“Determination’s greatest weakness is itself. I shall hound the life that courses through your veins. From now on, not a single shot will miss its target.”

“You are already ‘marked’.”

IS HE FREAKING SERIOUS?!?!?!

He fired a red glowing bullet. You tried to flee, but your tricks fell flat on their face. The bit slowed down and changed trajectory along with you. Ever homing.

You swung your knife towards the glow. Crossed your fingers and prayed to the stars that Chara’s knife skill was good enough to slice the bit in half.

It worked!

But it’s pointless because the follow-up came without delay.

A direct hit.

Linda’s group managed to excavate the corpses of the Six Children. It set the news portals on fire. The world reported on the heinous conspiracy of monsters hiding their murders under the mountain.

Reports suggested that the victims had suffered extreme levels of violence before they breathed their last. Some died in a single overpowered strike, others… not so fortunate.

Is this what Doctor Gaster tried to hide?

Another bullet knocked you off your feet.

Fire danced all the way up to the sky.

Angry mobs stormed through the flames, and into the lobby of the Magi’s Spire. Anyone who tried to stop them were beaten in a fit of rage. Students, staff members, and bystanders… the crowd spared no one.
It’s a modern-day witch hunt.

You took the third one without much chance to retaliate.

The scene switched over to Ebott Town. Screams of terror echoed into the smoke-darkened clouds.

Monsters died left and right to the brutal efficiency of gunfire.

An unfortunate Froggit was trampled underfoot. Popped into a puff of dust in a single step. You watched the mighty Dog Clan succumb to the masses.

While you staggered forward, you had become the bullseye again.

Dust of the fallen kicked up in the air, carried away on the embers of their burning homes.

You tried to evacuate with Mom. Cenna covered your back as you fled. There was hardly any backup.

Did law enforcement betray the Magi too?

Cenna had enough of the ensuing chaos. She threw caution to the wind and rained hell on the rioters. Many lost their limbs, if not their very lives.

In the end, she too got gunned down. The mob continued to charge forward, while the traditional Gungnir pulled her aside. They set her corpse ablaze to finish their ritualistic purging.

All the Magi who died in the defense suffered the same fate.

Mezil’s next bullet crashed into your back.

It’s intentional poetic irony. Mom in the past suffered the same. You tried to protect her with your body. And she refused to let you do so.

You argued that they won’t hurt you. They need you alive for their brainwashing plans.

Mom would rather die than to let you fall into their hands.

Tears dripped down your chin. No wonder Chara tried to convince you to destroy the world.

“Behold. The price of your independence. In an attempt to escape history, you only repeated it.”

“What is your answer now, Frisk?” thus asked Mezil.

“Do you still want to bear the responsibility of Ambassador? Not every outcome has the fortune of being this instant. Sometimes, it takes years before you realise the error of your ways. Though you could undo whole sections of your life, not everyone will cooperate. An ignorant self-justified ‘hero’ may try to take your life. What will you do then?”

…Hopelessness threatened to engulf you.

No matter what you did, or how hard you tried, you couldn’t land a single blow on Mezil.

He’s invincible. Experienced and mighty.

While you’re puny. Weak and outmaneuvered.

………………
No! Stay determined. There’s always hope: that’s the only way Mezil could endure this history of time-travel induced despair.

He’s not alone.

And neither were you!

* ITEM
* T. Harv.
* Use.

Your Big Sis gave you this watch for a reason: to protect yourself from this man!

You pointed the reversed-side of the watch at his general direction and released the stored Determination. The intense red glare blinded you.

You imagined that you’re gonna encapsulate everything except his gun. While he’s frozen, you’re gonna rush up and chop that weapon off once and for all!

The Jury’s screams of horror interrupted you.

“Frisk, stop!”
“Let go o’ M’lord this instant!”
“…Oh no… his legs are going to rot…”

Legs?
Rot?

When you peered past the light, you realised that your arm wasn’t straight: it’s tilting slightly downwards.

The red bubble of spacetime trapped only Mezil’s legs.

He’s in deep agony. Sweating bullets. Grinding his teeth. Trying his darnedest to not scream. It’s a stark contrast compared to his calm composure from before.

He tried to fire the gun. Mark you to ban the use and effects of that item no doubt. But the pain was so great, he dropped the weapon instead.

You heard a new voice that you don’t recognize. A lady. Sounds very refined.

She said: “Cancel the Trap Harvester! A partial encapsulation inflicts ischemia to the afflicted zones! It causes embolism, leading to necrosis or cardiac arrest!”

This is not the time to use super-technical terms. What in the world are ‘ischemia’ and ‘embolism’?!

Did she just say ‘necrosis’? You had heard about it on crime shows before. It’s a fancy term for… tissue decay? The quiet Juror said his legs were going to ‘rot’.

…Oh god, what have you done?

You heard the hissy snake guy yell: “Why the fook are ya standin’ there ya doof? Let him go! Do somethin’ or I’ll get down there to whoop yer sorry ass!”

It’s not that you don’t want to. You can’t. Judge Thyme himself imposed the rule of ‘No Mercy’.
Using the item again doesn’t cancel it out. You need to ACT. Worse still, you can’t communicate your issues to the Jury because your voicebox got locked up.

You rushed up to Mezil.

“Release me…!” he growled.

You shook your head. As much as you wanted to do so. Until this battle is over, all you can do is…

* FIGHT

You raised the knife.

Right now, you probably just gave everyone a major heart attack, but it’s not your plan to attack Mezil while he’s down.

Instead. You plunged the blade into the gun with all your might. Dang. It’s so sharp that it pierced through the floor. You’re glad that nobody got stabbed or slashed by this.

Clause of victory: fulfilled. The fight is officially ‘over’. Now you need to get Mezil to release the lockdown so the both of you could spare each other.

You rolled your lips inward. Your pained expression begged him to stop this game and free you from his rules.

“Nngh…! Fine…”

The moment he said that, the butterfly Mark on your ACT and MERCY shattered. You hammered on the non-violent options as fast as you could.

* ACT
* Release

The bubble vanished the moment you selected that option.

Mezil collapsed on his knees, huffing and puffing. It took his remaining stamina to raise his arm and snap his fingers.

Time rewound. It looks like he’s not willing to risk any permanent injuries.

You were back at the other end of the Hall, but with a few key differences.

First, your voicebox was free of any forced limitations.

Second, Mezil leaned against the wall. Looks like his brain had yet to catch up with his functioning legs.

And the third most important detail: his gun remained stabbed and stuck on the floor. A red star shimmered at the point of impact. That prevented the weapon from returning to its original state.

You… you did it? You actually did it!

You managed to make a REAL Mark! On the eleventh hour too.

“Chronographer… My cane, please.”

On request, a black cane materialized. Much like your knife. It floated right towards the Judge, and
he took it without hesitation. Now he’s using it to support himself.

Huh, come to think of it… he had that fancy prop when you first met him at the whole exorcism hooplah. Then, it kinda vanished? If it’s a walking aid, shouldn’t it be by his side at all times?

You approached him.

* MERCY
* Spare. It’s yellow.

Finally, you could breathe a sigh of relief.

The victory resulted in 0 EXP and 0 GOLD of course.

“…Well played,” he said. “It may be accidental, but you were nonetheless resourceful enough to turn the tables. To think you’ve mastered the Mark on such a short notice. And I can’t say I’m surprised that Cenna gave you the Trap Harvester. It would be yours sooner or later.”

You apologized for trapping his legs like that. It was an accident. You wanted to catch the whole him just as Cenna taught you to do so.

Mezil didn’t respond.

You’re not sure if he accepted your excuse. You then asked if you can go home now.

A glint of severity flashed in his eyes. “Not yet.”

Huh? But the fight is over. You won. That’s… that’s the whole point, right?

“Disarmament: the removal of an opponent’s weapon. A valiant effort. But a temporary measure, nonetheless. Against the determined who’d rely on underhanded tricks, your naive ideals shall become your own undoing.”

Mezil straightened his back, making it clear that his strength returned.

“Yet here you are… ready to condemn me as a dictator.”

“Do you have what it takes to change the world? The more I observe, the more I’m inclined to say ‘no’. Yet, a so-called ‘forgettable’ person insists otherwise. If I stop now, I won’t be able to face him.”

Papyrus?
Did something happen to him in the past timeline?

An aura of simmering anger emitted from Mezil’s every being.

His eyes… th-they’re turning red!

“Secrets. Truth and lies. The principles of power for both the oppressor and oppressed. Nothing is as it seems. Yet reality remains undisputed. In such a world, the obvious is often overlooked.”

“This is the ‘Crimson Hall’. And I am called the ‘Vampire of Time’. You must have heard of it before. At least once. With little explanation. Allow me to educate you on the hidden meanings of those terms.”

Mezil tapped his cane on the ground. Square by square, from floor to ceiling, the opaque whiteness
flipped into transparent glass.

Butterflies.

Hundreds of thousands of red butterflies fluttered above your head and underneath your feet. Maybe even a million. They’re so numerous, they formed an ocean of crimson within the void of black.

Optical illusion or not…

It's. Freaking. Scary.

Mezil pointed his cane towards the swarm as he explained: “Every butterfly you see within these walls represents those who had surrendered. Voluntary or otherwise. Consider them containers of determination, if that’s easier to imagine.”

“I made sure every single Red Major out there belongs to me. Otherwise, Gungnir could turn any one of them into their next Persona in a moment’s notice.”

One of the butterflies fluttered down. It touched ground on Mezil’s outstretched palm. This would have been a fairytale moment if he’s not a guy chock-full of killing intent.

“This one represents you. Your very own ‘Claimed Mark’.”

Holy bananas on a caramel stick! You’re a part of the system and you never even realise it?!

In hindsight, it all makes sense.

The lack of memories, the weird sensations, Sans’ seal…

It’s all connected to the fact that Mezil had already made your Determination his.

“The ‘Claim of Conquest’ is the primary method for a Supreme Judge to secure the Keys of Fate. This particular process requires access to The Void: the source of our power. In other words, here within this ‘Crimson Hall’. Nevertheless, I’m the only one who carries the moniker ‘Vampire of Time’. For a good reason.”

He crushed the butterfly in his hand. No, that’s inaccurate. He transformed it into raw power and absorbed it!

Your head spun.
Knees, jelly.

You imagined a pair of vampire fangs biting down on your neck, sucking the life out of you.

Mezil twisted the top of his cane, popping off the handle. You saw the gleam of sharpened steel. It turns out that the gentlemanly gear was not for show: it’s a sword in disguise.

You feel heavy.
Too heavy.

You dropped. Tried to prop yourself up with your arms. You failed and almost kissed the ground.

From the floor, Mezil’s footsteps echoed like the drums of war.

You looked up. He’s getting closer and closer. Cold sweat rolled down your skin. Drenched your back. Soaking through your shirt.
You imagined Chara mocking you from afar. It’s in character for them to do so, you think. If they still possessed your body, maybe -- just maybe -- they might whisper this into your ear:

‘Welcome to the real world, Frisk.’

Chapter End Notes

> Halloween season.
> Vampire of Time.
> Vampire of Time being very serious.

I certainly didn't plan this to happen.
Assassin

Chapter Notes

Did I miss Halloween? Or am I on time?

Sorry for being a little bit late. The new Magus Compendium entry pushed the workload around a bit.

I'll also be taking a short break to rest my brain for the upcoming events. A few days to a week at most. Also, I Cave Story to attend to. Yes. I've not played Cave Story at this moment of writing. For shame. I need to remedy that.

Meanwhile... Enjoy the read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

3.15 PM.
Forty five minutes before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

Sans swapped out his usual slippers for a pair of sneakers. It's something he kept in reserve for moments like these. There's no telling when he needed a firm grip on whatever he's standing on.

He took a moment to peer down the windows of a false ceiling. From here, he could observe the flow of activity of the Magus Association’s main lobby.

The HQ is full of these hidden observation pockets. I guess I now know how Lucidia keeps track of life on the ground.

Man, the Surface Seers managed to figure out a way to wire entire shortcuts. Not surprising since the Supreme Judges are all Reds.

Speaking of red, they rolled out an appropriately-fitting carpet for the VVIP of the day.

Frisk seems tired. They better freshen up for the big day. Asgore, no change. Tori... she's still beautiful.

His thoughts hung in mid air. Sans can’t take his sights off her. Is this love or guilt? He doesn’t know.

He shook himself out of the daze.

I gave her to Asgore. It’s final.

There’s no turning back.

Frisk’s first destination: the nearest toilet. Human biology does have their own share of inconveniences. Sans chuckled a bit.

He stayed back to keep track of the royal couple. He needs to find out the path to the Crimson Hall, and following them would be his surest bet. He could teleport out of the hiding spots whenever he
needed.

Then something caught his attention.

His sights snapped to a human lady within the crowd. Judging from her uniform, she’s an in-house technician of sorts.

*The way she’s looking at Tori isn’t right. It’s not out of curiosity or wonder like the rest.*

*It’s contempt.*

That same person tried to slip past the crowd. Headed towards the toilet area too.

...*I gotta tail her on site. There are no pockets in the bathroom area.*

Sans pulled up his hood and ripped through spacetime. He reappeared on a chandelier. Hoped that it could support his weight.

*Can’t let anyone see me. Security cams included. I bet Lucidia placed my name on the top of the trespasser list by now. Let’s see, my next target location should be…*

Sans warped from one blindspot to another. It’s tight, tough, and he might lose the gap if he’s a second too slow.

But he’s used to such scenarios. Had Gaster to thank for that. Maybe the old man was right after all: those hellish times weren’t for nothing.

Midway in his stalk, he saw Frisk leaving the bathroom area. There was a slight sense of relief. At least he won’t risk meeting them at a bottleneck with all those extra bodyguards.

The suspicious technician skipped the bathroom. She continued walking to a quiet place.

Then, she took out her phone. Started typing something.

Sans activated the Seer’s time-freeze power right there and then. It’s clear that she’s trying to send a message, but what?

It’s risky to divide his focus. So, he cleared the distance with some old-fashioned footwork. Peeked over her shoulder to read the exact message.

‘Meet me at the generator.’

The Spire’s ‘Core’.

Sans raced through the folds of reality to get there. He knew its general location, but not the exact layout. Sabotaging the power supply was one of his many, many possible break-in plans.

*Up in this room, turn to the left, teleport three floors down, right, down the staff elevator…*

He faced the generator’s entrance. Set his next teleport to mid-air so he could readjust his position as required.

In a blink, he’s inside the facility’s main power-management center. It doesn’t look anything like a conventional electrical generator. It’s more like a room of batteries: multiple encased tanks of mystery machinery took in electricity from an external source.
He could sense magic residue in the air, very much like the Core’s internal workings.

Sans activated his Eye for a quick scan.

*Hmm, they’re connected to multiple sources of energy. Some from the public grid, others from their in-house generation system. Then these machines convert the output into magical energy for storage.*

*It’s not the time to marvel at their technical wonder though. That suspicious woman hid something in this place.*

After a swift, comprehensive search… Sans discovered the worst outcome. Gungnir weapon caches. Four of them.

“Medium to long range guns, smoke bombs, flares, bulletproof armour… Welp, I can’t say I’m surprised anymore.”

Underneath all of that, tanks of gasoline. They’re ready to burn the place down: the telltale sign of their involvement.

Sans sighed at the pile of headache before him.

*Oh boy. They’re prepared for a full raid. The Magi themselves are probably also armed to the teeth. The magic potential of most humans is pretty substandard, save for the talented few like Cenna. It makes sense for them to rely more on conventional weapons.*

*Hmm. You need a pretty high clearance to get into this place. Security, electrical technicians, and the like. Since the majority of their mundane electrical equipment run on electricity, they need to hire non-Magi employees to maintain the place. Perfect entry point.*

*Then there’s the possibility of an inside job. I suspect that there are a fair amount of magical folks unhappy with Mister Judge. Being a good man means offending plenty of crooks.*

*I’m sure Lucidia is aware of the problem. But, her powers won’t help if she’s missing intel. Identity. Job position. So on.*

…………

*If Gungnir can’t do their shit in the open, they’ll resort to covert ops. I can see it now. Assassinate Tori and Asgore. Then, abduct Frisk in the midst of chaos.*

*I can’t let Tori die this way. Yes, I need her alive for Frisk to enter the Hall. But even if I don’t… there’s no way I’m letting her suffer.*

He doesn’t have much time. If he dallied too long, the Gungnir might catch him red handed.

*If I destroy these weapons caches, that will force them to consider an alternative. That would be… yeah. I’d do the same.*

*This should give me all the distraction I need.*

Sans first removed the gasoline tanks. Set them aside as a taunt. Then, he summoned a series of bones to rip through the rest of their gear.

*Done. Gungnir will check in soon. Not gonna waste my time on them.*

His job done, Sans teleported out of the area.
He made his way to the library’s hiding pockets. Peered into the window to observe for activity.

It’s busier than he expected. Students and teachers alike took the opportunity of Sunday evening to hang out in the library, blissfully unaware of the stakes that will go down in less than an hour.

*Of all days... it had to be a weekend. Welp, it’s not all bad. Most would be too distracted to notice me. All I need to do is get that one particular book.*

Sans proceeded to take cover in the shadows of bookshelves. Kept his hood up to hide his face. Unlike security guards, it’s possible that the students won’t take note of a short man in blue.

He’d just have to keep in mind about the teachers. They might have received the warning. As for security cameras: that goes without saying.

A series of short-distance teleports followed. Behind books, on top of the shelves, under the tables, or anywhere without watchful eyes…

He did so until he’s at the correct shelf. Found the book he was looking for and grabbed it without hesitation.

It’s about aquifers: sources of underground water in the region, including Mount Ebott.

Sans warped back to the pocket chamber. He had thought of checking the secret elevator that leads up to the Living Victory records, but he didn’t want to risk getting nabbed.

Furthermore, ‘she’ might expect him to infiltrate there.

Joke’s on them, thought Sans. He had read all the relevant books about the Reds before this moment. It’s doubtful that anyone suspected his schemes before Gaelic confronted him.

*Let’s see if we have a source of clean water within the radius of the Barrier. I have a feeling that’s a ‘yes’, but still need to confirm it.*

When he found the page…

*Wow. We have that much accessible clean water right under our feet? All the way to the bottom too. Didn’t need to depend on Waterfall after all.*

*This is awesome. Super awesome! Okay. Sans, chill. We’re not in the clear yet. You need to see if this aquifer is connected to any other sources. Hmm… Looks good so far.*

*It’s probably best to check the time now.*

Sans pulled back his right sleeve, exposing an electronic bracer made of DT-imbued steel. Sending a pulse of magic through the system lit up the flat screen.

It’s written in Seer script. His attention focused on a digital clock. It reads, ‘1548’.

Then, he moved on to another batch of text:

**SERAPH SYSTEM**

**ACTIVE: C / Y / P**

**INACTIVE : O / B / G**

**DT: 87 %**
To think that this is all I could salvage from the Chronograph: the steel, screen, and some Determination. Most of the inner electronics were fried beyond recognition. Had to replace them with Surface tech.

If I didn’t examine Frisk’s watch for hybridization ideas, I don’t think I would’ve made the deadline.

Let’s see… using more than three colours right away will be taxing to my Eye. I need Cyan for focus. Yellow for truth. Won’t need persistence of memory here, so it’s best to filter out the Purple.

Sans used his telekinesis to shift the ‘ACTIVE’ letters around. He didn’t have time to make it user-friendly with touch screens and whatnot.

**ACTIVE: C / Y / O**
**INACTIVE : P / B / G**

A small pentagram formed over his spectral pupil, creating a lens to filter his powers.

After all that effort, Sans finally achieved a breakthrough: the ultimate ‘Chronograph’. It’s a machine that allows a Seer to change their perspective of spacetime. Anyone with the right know-how could take the job. There’s no need to pool all hopes on a single person from birth.

By theory, anyway. Sans soon learned that he still had miles to go.

First, using the contraption brought discomfort. A dull ache, similar to a low-level migraine that’s neither here-nor-there: crawling underneath the bone.

Second, it’s nowhere as clear as the visions of a true Seer of the same colour. His Cyan struggled to focus the imperfect implement. The images were blurry and the edges split into blue and red lines reminiscent of a stereogram.

In short, it’s too distorted to fix a proper coordinate for teleportation.

*Sheesh, this is prime motion-sickness material.*

*Good thing I’m using an external DT source.*

The ‘DT’ meter on his bracer ticked down by one percent. It will continue to drain as long he pushed the fakes beyond their limit.

*C’mon. Focus. Find Tori.*

She came to view. The Magi escorted Frisk and the Dreemurrs through a specific pathway, leading them a lone elevator far from the rest of the public facilities.

The bodyguard slotted in a keycard and punched in the password. Then, the ‘down’ indicator lit up. Nothing special, as far as he could tell.

*Seems like all I need to do is skirt the elevator shaft. Hmm. Is it connected to anything else?*

*Nope. It’s straight down to the lowest level.*

He then watched the family march down a long, straight corridor. It reminded Sans of the path towards the Barrier. He wished his visions had better clarity so he could spot whatever security traps the Magi had installed along the way.

The family arrived safe and sound. They started talking to Cenna.
Great. Of course she’ll end up as the primary guardian.

Meanwhile…

Sans switched focus.

*I better check up on the Gungnir folk and see what are they up to.*

As long as he remembered the face of that tech lady, he could watch her activities.

With nothing left but tanks of gasoline in their possession, they adapted from a raid to outright arson. Positioned the fuel in a way where most wouldn’t pick up their distinct scent.

They had at least one electrical expert in the team. Starting a mass fire shouldn’t be a problem.

*All going according to plan.*

*Nice to know something’s going right for once. Even if it’s wrong.*

Sans reached his limit. He commanded the machine to stop channelling fuel, and thus ended the vision.

Deep breaths. Dampened skull. They’re all the marks of exhaustion.

The DT meter said he still had 80% fuel at his disposal. It seems much to a layman, but he knew otherwise.

*I’m seriously cutting it close. If I use up too much in spying, I won’t have enough for the important stuff.*

Five more minutes before the clock hits the hour. He took the opportunity to rest.

When it’s time, he activated the bracers once more. Set his attention on the Dreemurrs.

He arrived just in time to watch Cenna open the door. Used her SOUL to move the massive slabs. It hinted the works of a complex mechanism.

It opened to… a black wall of nothingness.

*…What the hell?*

*What the hell is with that door?!!*

Sans knew there’s something special to that stone cover, but it’s distorting his Truesight. Rendered white, glitching squares instead.

A pang of panic gripped his hollow heart when he beheld Toriel walk off into the unknown.

TORI!!!

The shadow engulfed her, and yet she showed no signs of anything amiss. Just like that, the entire family vanished into the yonder. The door closed right behind them.

The Eye’s light extinguished along with his focus.

*Hold on. Calm down. Take a deep breath. Black does not equate to doom. It simply means I’m unable to render what I see.*
That leaves me no other choice but to investigate in person. That’s my next destination anyway.

Sans slammed the book shut and placed it flat on his side. It fulfilled its purpose and had thus become useless to him.

The angel then began his infiltration into the depths of the wizard’s spire. Avoided every detection spot along the way.

He didn’t have the right keycard. No matter, since he could just teleport past the door. Sans prepared a glowing bone to light up an otherwise dark world.

The initial plan was just to jump straight into the shaft, power himself up with Blue Magic, and then try to cut down on the float time teleporting straight to the bottom.

But then, there’s no way a magic-based facility would leave such an obvious space unguarded.

!!!

He gasped.

The air--!

A thick, smothering aura threatened to choke him. His vision threatened to twist and distort, as if he stared into murky glass.

He grabbed the taut elevator cables and clung to them for his life.

Focus, Sans. Focus.

There’s some odd machinery lining the sides of the shaft, pulsing out disruptive magic.

I need to get out of here fast. If the weird magic doesn’t kill me, the drop sure will.

He ground himself with the cable: it’s the most constant variable in this hazy mess. Tried his best to peer through the dimness.

Once he spotted the top covers to the interior of the elevator, he jumped straight in. It released him from oppression.

He never thought that skeletons had a need for air. And yet, he leaned against the wall to catch his breath. Count on the Surface to prove him wrong.

Beyond the opened elevator doors, a long corridor stretched to the massive stone entrance of the Crimson Hall.

At the very end, stood the Magus known as Cenna Caraway.

Frisk’s adoptive elder sister and Judge Vanquisher of the Exorcist branch: a person blessed with power outside the norms of their kind. In other words, one of the many ‘Undynes’ of humanity.

Sans glanced around. It pays to be paranoid at this point. Never know if they had another trap installed within these walls.

It’s best for me to think in portals: cut through the path and skip any surprises.

One jump, and he’s in the chamber.
“Yo, Seraphim,” greeted Cenna. “Always wondered why you’re referred to in plural.”

*Heh, chatter. The good ol’ time-wasting tactic.*

*I can tell she’s on guard. Back, against the wall. Let’s see if I can get any hints out of her.*

Sans relaxed. Tucked his hands in his pockets and shrugged back. “‘Cause I do the job of many, I guess.”

Cenna let out a huge laugh. “Good one there! Real good. Shame that we’re on the opposite sides, huh?”

“So, you know why I’m here?” he asked back.

“Sorta. It’s dangerous business, that’s all I can tell. But ya know… I ain’t gonna demonize you as a traitor. I still trust you.”

Sans raised a brow, curious and amused by her statement.

“Why? By all accounts, you shouldn’t.”

Cenna smirked. “Heh. C’mon, don’t go forgetting my background now. Remember, undercover agents infiltrate criminal groups with the intent of ratting them out. If they don’t betray their targets, they’re the real traitors to the Law.”

“Think yourself as a fallen angel all ya want, but truth is… ya never changed sides.”

“You sure?” asked Sans. “I didn’t look for Paps. That’s the hallmark of a turncoat right there.”

The Magus waved her finger at him. “Oh no, no, no. Your self-deprecating talk ain’t gonna work on me, sir. Wanna know what I think? You’re hoping that your brother would just sleep through this mess.”

“Even if he’s awake, you won’t risk meeting him either. Because he’s the only guy in the world who could change your directive. After all, you’re the Seraphim of The Great Papyrus. Our fault for not realising this sooner, yeah? If you’re moving mountains and skies for his sake, it can only mean one thing: we’re in a dead end."

Golden eyes of the hawk pierced through Sans Serif’s calm front. Cenna’s people-sense always unnerved the skeleton. It’s a bit too accurate.

Sweat crawled over his cold bones.

Sans said, “Welp. If you know so much, why not just let me through?”

“Har har, no way.” Cenna replied, “There’s a whole bunch of people I wanna protect back there. Knowing them… they might just find that special ‘good end’ flag.”

“You probably didn’t realise this ‘cause ya went down the elevator route, but Mez probably went through quite a few mini loops by now. Trial’s underway.”

Sans switched on his Eye to scan Cenna.

*Dejavu Counter: 2*

Mezil had rewind time at least twice while they had their chat.
Interesting detail. Sans so deduced: “Huh, you mean you have security against Seers?”

“Bingo, Seraphim. You’re not the first Seer to go rogue. Bet you can’t Truesight the mechanism behind me either.”

Sans glanced at the door.

*Dang. She’s right. I can’t.*

He sighed.

“In the end, history repeats.”

A pair of Gasterblasters materialized by his side. “Let’s get this done and over with.”

“Yeah. Let us.” Cenna summoned out her SOUL and morphed it into a bird.

*That look on her face… is someone ready to die for a cause.*

*Maybe if things were different, we’d be friends.*

………………

*Nah.*

Sans and Cenna charged up their magic for a quickdraw. The faster hand will emerge victorious.

Or so that’s what they thought.

A squeaky battle cry hollered from the air vents. “FRIENDLINESS PELLETS!!!”

White seed-like bits of magic showered all over the place. It forced the two duelling parties to call off their showdown to go on the defensive.

Cenna summoned a shield while Sans dismissed the big guns to focus on dodging.

*Heh. Figures those brats will try to do something.*

That’s not all. Another set of vines busted from the grills. The rosy-cheeked flower child crawled out of their infiltration spot and started throwing vine whips at the blue skeleton.

*That makes a ton of sense.*

*Asriel was a monster. Projectile magic will be his staple.*

*Chara was a human. Gungnir, even. They’ll focus on physical attacks.*

“Whip him good, Chara!”

“Bring on the rain, Azzie!”

The two flowers worked as the perfect team. They covered for each other’s weaknesses, putting immense pressure on the Lichborn’s footwork.

The windows of escape come and go in the blink of an eye.

Sans wondered how much longer he can keep up the pace. Any slower and he might end up as dust.

In the midst of a deadly game of jump-rodgeball, he kept a close eye on their attack patterns.
They’re not aiming for a kill. On the contrary, they’re trying to… catch me?

Then, just when he completed his conclusion, Chara’s vines snapped against his tibia. It wound around the base and curled into a tight grip.

The child wasted no time to flip Sans upside down. Spun him around to disorientate his aim.

Chara yelled: “Azzy, now! Get him!”

Vines, vines, and more vines. They locked his arms and legs together into a tight bind.

If that’s not disturbing enough, their collective spiked tendrils scraped against the interiors of his ribs. Proceeded to crawl up his throat and gagged him from the back of his mouth.

In the back of his mind, he envisioned his very SOUL invaded by the tangled briars.

He heard their voices up close.

“We did it?” Flowey asked.

Chara replied: “Yup. See? The Trashbag’s not invincible. He died to me at least once you know.”

“Okay. Time for a full body check! …After we release his arms.”

When the vines slipped away, Sans watched himself peel back his own sleeves.

*They’re moving without my input.*

*It’s like a dream… Or a mandatory cutscene.*

Flowey lifted the right arm, exposing the blade mechanisms for all to view. The kid hovered upside down over Sans’ eyesocket with a face full of irritated unamusement.

“Really? Seriously?” the flower grumbled. “You actually went there? This is copyright infringement, I tell you!”

Pointing a vine over the Magus, he added: “Golly, just because Miss Nerd over there calls you an assassin doesn’t mean YOU have to BE one! Exchange those stupid blue ketchup clothes for white and you’re the real deal. Sad. Pathetic.”

“I know what you’re thinking,” said Chara. “‘It’s just inspiration and it’s practical. Don’t judge me.’ Well let me tell you that I’m a professional possessor, so I know how to read your mind. I agree with Azzie. This is just too blatant.”

The ex-Gungnir continued their complaining: “…What’s with all that ketchup in your body? Did you replace your marrows with that junk or what?”

Flowey noticed another oddity: “Hey, there’s this weird compartment with a hole in it. What’s that for?” He tapped the device with the tip of his vines.

“Azzie, I can’t find any spring or button mechanisms on his ripoff blade.”

“Try telekinesis. Sans depends a lot on that.”

“Eh. You do it. I got zero experience in magic.”

Flowey dug deeper into Sans’ SOUL.
With a pulse of magic, the blade popped out of its sheath.

The little kid huffed in pride. “Hah! I knew it! Easy peasy cake for a monster to use, impossible for a human. Well. Most humans anyway.”

Cenna then asked: “Kids, what did you do to him?”

She had the face of an adult who had seen two brats play with fire.

In all their innocently-sociopathic demeanour, the flowers danced to their own answer.

“We possessed him!” said Chara.

“Yup, aaaall the way through. We can even control his magic, see?” Flowey snapped the blade back and forth to demonstrate. “You don’t need to worry anymore. We got this.”

Red Alert. Instead of praising them, Cenna yelled: “Release him, hurry!”

“Why should I do that? We worked so hard to capture him and you’re telling us--”

“Purples are immune to their own poison! If you stay, he’s gonna burn you alive!”

“Which part of ‘control his magic’ didn’t you get? Look, he’s not resisting.”

Cenna almost blew a fuse. “Can’t you see he’s baiting you?!”

The rosy-cheeked one nudged Flowey with a leaf. “Azzie? Is it normal to feel a slowly intensifying heat running through your vines…?”

“No?” he replied.

Panicked, the flower children untangled themselves from the trap. They released the grip on his SOUL and tried so hard to get out of their own mess.

Too late for them. The ketchup slowed their escape.

The moment their control wavered… they had sealed their fate.

With just a single thought, Sans flooded the poison called ‘Karma’ through his bones. His power of disintegration burned away the ketchup like fuel to the flame. This time, he didn’t exclude the meddling plants from the equation.

So they cried. Screamed. Wailed like the childish fools they are.

Cenna rushed forward in an attempt to save them. A Vanquisher, seeking to rescue two little DEMONS. Sans thought it’s irony at its finest. Made it easier for him too.

Hands free and blade already drawn, one swift strike to the heart was all he needed.

Human SOULS may persist after death, but they won’t have enough power left to retaliate no matter what.

Sans drew his hands back. Cenna reached under her coat to grab a spell.

Upon that very moment, the lights died and plunged everyone into near-total darkness. Only the faint glow of magic remained.
Now?! Really?

If his Eye can’t receive light, it’s as good as being blind.

_Dammit, I have no choice then!_

Sans executed a frontal stab and hoped it made contact.

He heard a yelp followed by a heavy thud.

Then it’s pure silence. He did a quick check by touching the blade itself. Warm liquid substance, confirmed.

_I managed to strike her, but the blade didn’t stick. I don’t think I hit the heart._

_Nonetheless, she’s out cold. Or playing dead? Welp. That suits me just fine._

Sans got on his feet, ripping away any leftover vines that miraculously escaped his ‘Karma’.

_Immune to my own poison, huh? I suppose that’s sort of true. Always suspected an oddity behind my eternal 1 HP. Gaster’s attempts of improving my numbers never worked. Ended in ‘extended bed-rest’ each and every time._

_That Gaelic guy… He spewed all that gas without a damn. Guess we’re similar in that regard. Heh. Learn something new every day. Not that it matters now._

_This blackout must mean Gungnir’s finally initiated their arson. Nah. Probably started earlier. Nobody would know if the smoke alarms got sabotaged._

_The fire will spread here. I have to crack the code behind this door before that happens._

_Steady. Don’t walk around in circles…_

The tips of his fingers touched the carved ridges of that door. He pressed his cranium against the surface in an attempt to pulse focused magic through.

_Damn. Not working._

They had rigged the system to block all manners of magical convenience.

_Think reverse, Sans. You had read hints about the true nature of the Crimson Hall. Why can’t you see anything beyond the entrance? It’s because you can’t perceive it._

_Which means… what you saw was a realm beyond reality. The Void. The mechanisms of this entrance should still hold the exact coordinates to the Crimson Hall._

_All you need to do is to shove it open with the correct key. Which you don’t have. Unless, you do… I do have something that’ll function as a master key…_

It’s now or nothing. Sans focused on a single command to insert into the Determination-charged bracers on his arm.

_Allow entry for Sans Serif, and Sans Serif only._

The blade glowed red.
Sans plunged it deep in the crevices of the slabs and spawned his Mark: the distinctive symbol of the Seraphim, six wings with two pairs folded over themselves.

It’s easy to force one’s volition on a lifeless object.

The stone slabs then began grinding against the floor as it gave way to its new master.

“Sorry,” he muttered.

Sorry to his acquaintances back at the foot of the mountain. 
Sorry to the human who depended on him. 
Sorry to the queen of his miserable life.

Sorry to his brother, his personal Almighty.

There and then, Sans forfeited his life of idyllic laziness.

Chapter End Notes

I am aware about the complaints of OP Sans.

It may be unpopular opinion to say this but... OPness is okay -- ONLY if you have a proper buildup to that state. Many story progressions have the character go through stages where they either grow, or gain new equipment.

You experience these yourselves too. Think of any game you play. Metroid is one great example (Varia Suit and Screw Attack, I'm looking at you). As your own skill improves, you're taking on challenges that the old you would be overwhelmed with. The ability to overcome these challenges would make you look OP to the untrained.

The Seraph System is the ultimate conclusion of his theories hinted way back with his times in Gaster. He mentions it again in Chapter 83.

As you can see, it's pretty dangerous.
Old and NEO

Chapter Notes

I'm back from my break. Muchos Halloween event, and some Cave Story. Haven't completed CS yet.

Now for a few updates. One, I made some music for Lucidia's Lullaby. Beware of volume.

And then I have something of great hilarity to show. Those who read the comments box might come across an awesome dream sequence. For those who’re not aware, here’s the context.

Anonymous Vermin Invader actually drew that dream. Here. Witness its crazy awesomeness in all its glory.

And let's not forget the 100% accurate description of Lucidia with Sans.

AVI, I thank you so so so so so very much for illustrating your illustrious dream. It's the best.

Onwards to our regular programme!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

2.10 PM. One hour and fifty minutes before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

Undyne learned that she needed to be a little less bull-headed at times.

All the while, she tried to turn her DT-enhanced magic into a full spear. Imagined all the potential and power at her fingertips if she managed to get it right.

Problem was… she never did.

The night before, Alphys remarked that she needed only a sharp tip to be effective. It soon got drowned out by a whole lot of physics jargon.

But that tip became her ‘eureka’ moment. Since then, Undyne put all concentration on making a good spearhead… in the middle of her patrol shift.

Today, at this exact minute, she succeeded. Her joy thundered through the air without restraint.

“YEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAHHH!!!!”

It startled everyone at first, but she soon had an excited crowd around her. Both human and monster alike sensed an unusual force emanating from her new handiwork.

“That’s SO cool!”
“The power levels are over 9000!”
“(When did you learn this new magic?)”
“Woof! BARK! Woof!”

Then the bunny asked: “Captain, like, what does it do?”

Undyne answered: “I have no dang idea. Doctor Gaster gave me some coaching on how to improve my magic. Said something about mixing my ‘output with Determination’.”

“…Did you say Doctor Gaster coached you?…”

Her head turned towards the incoming source of warm, orange light. It’s Captain Grillby. Ex-Captain Grillby now. He’s been helping out ever since the curfew started.

It’s hard to gauge his facial expressions, but he sounded a little wary.

“Yeah,” said Undyne, “Is something the matter?”

“…Can we talk in private?…”

“Right now?”

“…Yes… Follow me…”

The Dog Clan folks were more than happy to take over for a moment. Undyne followed the man of fire down the road.

They stopped in front of his bar. Grillby took out the keys and unlocked the door. Then, he invited Undyne inside.

What troubled him so much that they needed to be indoors? At least, it’s not too far from her station.

He walked behind the counter: his usual spot. It’s odd to see him standing there in armour.

“…Please take a seat…”

Undyne furrowed her brows as she plunked herself on the stool. Wondered if it could support the weight of her gear. “Uh, okay Grillbz. Is this major top secret or something?”

Grillby nodded. “…You can say so…”

“Well, out with it. I can take it.”

“…Has Doctor Gaster been good to you?…”

“Meaning?” Everything seemed so sudden.

“…Did he ever force you to answer… difficult questions…?”

The fish shook her head. “It’s straightforward training. Courteous, clear, and really informative. Didn’t ask me to answer any weird stuff.”

The flames glowed bright in a huge relief. “…That’s good… He didn’t slip back… to old habits…”

Undyne didn’t need to be a genius to piece the puzzle together. “You were worried about his methods?”

“…Yes…”

“And it’s confidential because it involves Sans.”
“…Yes…” Grillby replied. “…I signed an NDA for the Tactician project… But maybe it’s not effective anymore…”

Whatever plans they had for Sans were supposed to be top secret. For a good reason. From what she could gather, it involved details that would make most monsters cry foul.

“What were you in charge of?” she asked.

“…Combat training…” he answered. “…After his parents fell down… I prepared snacks for him… We’d eat together after class…”

“Huh, so you’ve been feeding him burgers and fries since a kid? No wonder he’s so comfortable with you. That means you knew what happened behind the scenes?”

The light flickered upon the thoughts of those dark, conflicted times. “…I tried to talk to Doctor Gaster… Maybe he’s being too harsh… Sometimes he listened… but not much… Can you show me your special spearhead again?…”

Undyne accepted the request. With a bit of concentration, she managed to recreate the Determination-laced magic once more.

The man of fire took a step back. His flames shuddered from the thought of being so near to such a deadly force of condensed water.

For his sake, she dispelled the magic. “You okay?”

He just walked back to the front. “…I’ll be fine… That’s definitely Doctor Gaster’s idea… Very radical… like the Chronograph…”

After a brief silence, the man of fire made his worries known. “…Sans is strangely absent… Do you know what he’s been up to?…”

Undyne flipped her mental table. “Ugh. I have no damn idea! There was a point where he SEEMED to lose his powers, then he got them back again?! That man’s a total puzzle and I HATE puzzles!”

“…As I thought…” Grillby sighed. “… Tried to tell the doctor… but he wouldn’t listen…”

“What exactly did mister goop do?”

“…He once forced upon Sans an impossible question… It’s about war… Prison… Something like this: …say Papyrus is captured… and the executioners put him on death row… You have a choice… Kill him yourself … or watch him die in the hands of his captors… Never approved that training… Too cruel…”

Undyne gulped.

That mental conditioning went deep. Too deep. It’s not the question that disturbed Undyne: it’s the realistic plausibility of the given outcomes. That’s the cost of defeat.

She had a feeling that if she’s in a position of power, she might force her human enemies into a similar deadlock.

Undyne didn’t care to know Sans’ answer. Both options had issues that point toward a grim direction.

“So, Sans thinks we’re stuck in a similar scenario now?”
“...I won’t be surprised...”

“That explains why he’s behaving so weird. Probably, no, DEFINITELY thought he needed to take matters into his own hands.”

Undyne understood the following: before the Barrier broke, Sans firmly believed that he couldn’t change anything back in the Underground. Hence the apathy.

But what if he had a golden opportunity?

A man with hope yet without trust...

Undyne’s phone rang. It’s from Alphys. She excused herself and answered the call.

“Hello?”

“U-Undyne! Gaster-sensei! H-h-h-he’s missing!!!”

Alphys hyperventilating. The Captain knew there and then that her day took a turn for the worst. She put the call on speakers for Grillby to hear. He deserves to know what his old colleague was up to.

“Breathe, Al,” said Undyne. Tried her best to be supportive under stress. “What do you mean he’s missing? Did Doctor Gaster fade back into The Void?”

One could hear the sheer panicked breaths on the other side of the line.

“N-no! He ran into a shortcut after Sans asked to meet him in Snowdin. Everyone’s too busy with the patrols and I didn’t want to cause trouble so I sent another Mini-Mettaton down the river to get to Waterfall and from there go to Snowdin and, and, and HE’S NOT THERE!!!”

“You mean Doctor Gaster fucking escaped?!” Undyne imagined Toriel suplexing her upon return for her failure at keeping the convict contained. Plus, how many Minis did Mettaton give Alphys anyway?

“Nononono impossible muri daiyo! Gaster-sensei won’t do that! H-he became super nervous after Sans’ message about DT experiments... oh my god Sans SOLD DT to Muffet I can’t believe he did that!”

Alphys had gone on a rant. Why the heck did Sans sell Determination to a baker in the first place? But that’s not the pressing issue now. As long they find Gaster, they’ll get answers.

“Maybe I’m thinking too much... it’s a stretch, but do you think Sans kidnapped Gaster-sensei?!?!?”

A huge possibility. More so after viewing Papyrus’ old-timeline feed. He had absconded Frisk at least twice.

Undyne rubbed her temple. “I’m gonna get a team and search for clues. I’ll keep you updated. Maybe he just got sidetracked by something somewhere. For his sake I really, really, REALLY hope so.”

Because the alternatives were so much worse.

“O-kay!” said Alphys, “I’ll continue monitoring the Underground. Good luck, Undyne.”
2.30 PM. One hour and thirty minutes before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

A certain pink celebrity had enough of being a shut-in. With the help of his charisma and some willing hands, he managed to get the clearance to leave his studio.

Mettaton’s plan: to make a surprise party. He knew Frisk will soon enter this ‘Trial of the Crimson Hall’ and he had utmost faith that they’ll succeed.

To have them return without a hero’s celebration? Unthinkable.

Then there’s Papyrus.

Poor, poor Papyrus.

He had watched Alphys’ recordings with great interest at first. To him, it’s like a live-action movie: Death! Drama! Bloodshed! Mettaton forgot that it wasn’t a show.

But then, all suspension of disbelief extinguished when he heard his number one fan scream in agony.

Reality hit him hard: true and raw without any scripting. Many hours of ceiling-staring with Blooky followed after.

Mettaton knew he cannot stay in the dumps forever. After all, he had crafted an entire career within the business of cheering-up.

Still…

“…Mettaton?…” Napstablook asked. “……Are you okay……?”

The mechanical one continued his blank stare out beyond the widows of his fabulous limousine.

In true Blooky fashion, they started to fade. “…Ooooh… I’m sorry…… I didn’t mean to bother you……”

“W-what?” When Mettaton realised what happened, he tried his best to coax his poor cousin back into visibility. “Oh no no no! It’s not your fault, Blooky darling. This whole fiction-in-reality fiasco drained me. That’s all.”

He glanced at the pair of water-monster sisters. Surprisingly enough, Shyren and Lemon Bread slept through the exclamation. They’re just that tired.

Mettaton hoped by tomorrow, the town would at least return to its usual self. Seeing everyone freed of their week-long curfew will lift their spirits.

One week ago, Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme lended a hand: his portrayal and poise as grim as his background.

If Papyrus embraced his power to the fullest, how many more dark valleys will he come to endure?

“Blooky, do you think it’s fair for Papyrus to carry that kind of responsibility?” asked Mettaton.
“…Huh?…” The white ghost blinked. “…What do you mean?…”

“Looking into time like a movie. Knowing it's all real, both good and bad. I can sympathize with Sansy in this matter. Perhaps some things should just stay as fantasy.”

Blooky pondered about it. “…I dunno… I don’t really know much about him… Did Papyrus’s behaviour change…?”

Mettaton tried to recall. Memories flipped through his mind. Others may think that the energetic skeleton seemed the same. He too thought so until Napstablook asked in more detail.

“He did change,” he answered. “I dare say that our wonderful dashing skeleton became happier! Reminds me of myself when I got this splendid body from the Doctor Alphys, that brilliant sweetheart.”

“It’s like Papyrus finally found his place in this world.”

For a long time, he was a wanderer of the monster society. Trying so hard to fit in and yet never belonging.

That’s not the case anymore.

Napstablook smiled. “…Then we should be happy for him too.........Like you always tell me....... every job has their ups and downs...... If things get bad....... we should show support.......”

His own words…

Mettaton almost took the opportunity to fan himself with some guilty narcissistic pleasure. But he’s not so cruel to deny the shy ghost a much needed confidence boost.

“That’s a sparkling answer, dear! Let’s make this surprise party ab-so-LUTE-ly beautiful, hmm?”

“Yup…”

Mettaton then noticed an increasing crawl of cars on the city-bound lanes. Perhaps they have a hot event there. He counted himself lucky for riding opposite of the flow.

Their good spirits remained high for the rest of the trip. It didn’t matter to Mettaton if the Royal Guard appeared to be searching the town at a frantic pace. He had his mind set on hammering together the best surprise party on the few limited hours he had.

Once he arrived at Alphys’ Lab, he helped unload boxes of in-beta MTT-Brand Omurice from the boot. It’s more than enough for the festivities and any leftovers would be passed around town as a promotional taste-test pack. With survey slips included, of course.

When he turned on the lights, he discovered… cobwebs strewn everywhere. “Goodness! Seems that Muffet sweetie was on security duty.”

Cleaning would eat into his time. How terrible. But first, he must plunk whatever remaining luggage he had in his bedroom.

Just when he thought he’d have a calm day…

…The rock-solid form of Doctor Gaster greeted Mettaton with a rude surprise.
“OH MY GOD!!! Who in the world thought it’s a good idea to make a statue replica of HIM?! With this crazy spooky smile too. Sheesh.”

He then noticed a strange glowing red symbol surrounding a thin, narrow hole. Curiosity prompted the glambot to take a closer look.

“Six wings? Two pairs folded… hmm… It’s like one of those tattoo templates. It doesn’t suit the doctor’s style. Now, where did I keep that nail polish remover…?”

Thinking that the red markings were the hallmark of poor taste, Mettaton tried to wipe them off with an alcohol swab.

But the moment he dabbed that area, cracks snapped across the surface.

“Huh? I don’t think that’s supposed to happen--”

Cracks turned into fractures and fissures. The stone sculpture crumbled into chunks.

Resting in the middle of the pile was the inverse cordate shape of a monster SOUL. White. Glassy. It had the same six-winged symbol plastered on its surface.

Mettaton dropped whatever he held in his hands. Arms trembling, he scooped up the stone heart from the pile.

He felt life flowing in his hand.

This was not a statue.
It’s Doctor W. D. Gaster himself.

The pink celebrity shrieked at a pitch far beyond his vocal range.

* * *

3.15 PM. Forty five minutes before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

Times like these, it’s tempting to just give up and curl into a ball.

It’s too overwhelming.
Too hectic.
Too urgent.

But that’s impossible. More so with her mentor’s life on the line.

Besides, she’d never let her.

Undyne barged through the lab doors with Alphys slung over her shoulder. Who had time for key cards with Mettaton’s news flash?

“WHERE IS HE?!!?!” Undyne screamed.

Alphys winced from the sudden spike of volume. Her left ear will ring for a while.
The white ghost appeared before their former neighbour, beckoning her to follow. “…Over here…”

When they arrived at the crime scene, Alphys almost fainted. She’s looking at a pile of rocks that was definitely once Doctor Gaster.

“Ohemgeohemgee!” Alphys rushed over, but dared not touch anything lest it breaks. “W-what happened to him?!”

“If I had any idea, I wouldn’t be on the verge of panic!” said Mettaton. “What should we do with his SOUL?!?! Is it supposed to be solid???”

“Solid?” Alphys blinked. As far as she knew, only Boss Monsters can persist after death. And yet Mettaton claimed that the doctor’s remnants had physical form.

Mettaton then presented his softly glowing SOUL swaddled in a blanket.

It’s as tangible as a matte piece of glass. Worst of all, she’s very certain that it’s ‘Marked’ by one of those ‘Living Victories’.

“What about the rest of him?” Undyne asked.

“W-we need to get a box. As a precautionary measure, the doctor’s SOUL should stay in close proximity to his body. Only then can I begin my analysis.”

Thankfully, the Lab was never in short supply of cardboard boxes. So they scooped him into one and hauled the load all the way to the scanners.

The results were both marvelous, mysterious, and reassuring all at once. Alphys breathed a huge sigh of relief.

She explained: “The current Doctor Gaster has unusually low levels of Determination for an Amalgamate, but he's still alive. The Mark is preserving his essence by fixing his SOUL to a physical form. In other words, he’s in a very stable condition. Despite everything.”

After reading through more pages of data, she added: “Furthermore… I’m detecting strange magical activity. As if he’s awake somewhere else.”

Undyne furrowed her brows. “Didn’t Paps bring all of him back from The Void or something?”

Mettaton shook his head. “I think the genius gentleman hinted that our dashing darling brought back just enough for him to take corporeal form. Us ghosties know that ‘most’ is not the same as ‘all’.”

“Talk about a weird situation.” The captain remarked. “I’m not sure if he’s lucky or unlucky. First he survived a drop into The Core, now he won’t croak from turning into stone. It’s like nothing can kill him.”

“Touch wood, you rambunctious fish! That’s the worst possible statement in this situation. His life hangs at a precarious thread that could snap at any moment!”

“……But what do we do now?………”

Everyone forgot about Napstablook until they spoke up. They did have a very valid point: what now?

An increase of background chatter indicated that the rest of the patrol force arrived at the lobby, both human and monster. Undyne went out to address the crowd. She came back with Grillby in tow.
“Hey Al,” said Undyne. “Grillby wants to see the doc’s SOUL. He thinks he might recognize that weird symbol.”

It’s hard to believe that he’s the ex-Captain. She had dined at the bar a few times on the Surface. Never showed any signs of his old military life.

“O-oh! Of course! He’s in this machine here…” Alphys showed him the canister fixed to a scanner. It’s the same type of container used to stabilize and store the human SOULS for extended periods of time.

Grillby’s flames roiled and trembled. Peer hard enough at his illuminated face and one could see terror.

“…Seraph wings…” He muttered.

“Seraph?” Mettaton asked. “Didn’t we hear something like that before…?”

Alphys’ mind dipped into her extensive collection of trivia. “Oh! A seraph is a six-winged angel tasked to sing about the glory of their god. Some believe that they serve as protectors, but that’s kinda not true because in human lore their god is all-powerful. I guess that works if the angel was sent to guard a mortal though.”

“…‘Seraph’ means ‘to burn’…Gaster once told me…”

A cold chill spread under her lab coat. Alphys started to shiver. Sweat. She heard this pun before. “Seraph. Serif. Oh god. Don’t tell me it’s…”

There’s no doubt about it anymore.
That was the symbol of none other than Sans.

Grillby rushed out of the room. Never seen that patient man move so fast before. Undyne followed suit.

Mettaton joined too. For reasons. Alphys sometimes can’t tell what went on in his head. If everyone’s going, she better catch up too.

All the Magi were either on their phones, or gathered around their tech specialist’s computer. They’re passing information back and forth with alarmed concern.

“That… doesn’t look good.” Alphys noted. More and more of her red anime flags popped up. “What’s the problem?”

One of the technicians looked up to her with a clear frown. “The Dreemurr’s bodyguards informed us that the city’s traffic systems have gone offline. The police are having a tough time trying to keep the flow going manually.”

Alphys blinked. “I thought the roads tend to be free during the weekends? They lack rush hours and standard office commuting.”

“That is true,” the Magus confirmed. “But that’s not the same for our city. It’s the region’s largest commerce center with a good density of entertainment establishments. We get crowds all week round.”

“The escort vehicle managed to escape the jam through alternative pathways. But even those are clogged up by now.”
“Oh?” Mettaton rubbed his chin. “I think I remember seeing a line on my way back to Ebott Town. That makes sense now.”

Undyne slapped her hands on the techie’s shoulders and squeezed them. “Tell your dudes to abort the Trial! NOW! Someone dangerous is trying to hijack it and we need to catch him ASAP!!!”

“Are we talking about Gungnir?”

“No,” she growled. “He’s a skeleton. And he’s much, much worse than them. Now get to it!!”

“Y-yes madam!”

Though she’s not their superior, they agreed that safety takes precedence.

“Hello? HQ? Do you read us? Oh no, not the communication lines too! At this rate, we can’t even ask for backup.”

It’s too late. The gears of sabotage had already began to turn. It’s doubtful that Sans pulled this off all by himself. It won’t surprise Alphys if he just exploited Gungnir’s plans.

“…We need to get there… Fast…” said Grillby. “…Sans is on the move…”

Undyne turned her attention towards Alphys. “Al! Can we use the trains?”

Alphys shook her head. “T-the nearest station isn’t anywhere near town. Even if we manage to get on board, they’ll be overloaded. Plus, travelling time will take too long!”

By road on clear traffic, it takes two hours to reach The Spire.

By train, give or take the commuting in between, would also clock around the same. Precious hours they didn’t have.

The Spire was not connected to Ebott’s river by a direct waterway, so they can’t just plunk the Riverperson onto a boat.

The fastest way would be to utilize ‘shortcuts’, but only Seers can traverse those. There had to be a way to cut through that huge distance without any spacetime shenanigans.

Alphys’ thoughts then hit a jackpot. They do have one! A whole person too. Alphys grabbed Mettaton’s hand and dragged him into the mechanics section of the lab.

“Darling?!” he exclaimed.

“We need your NEO Form!” Determined fire backed her every word.

“I have a NEO Form?!”

“Yes! All it needs now are a bunch of tweaks and you’re ready for Version 1.0! It comes with new and improved jet systems. Plus awesome horsepower!”

“Oh why didn’t you say so sooner, dear sweetheart~~~” That won his cooperation in a blink. New toys and new styles never fail to catch his attention.

The robot threw himself on the table and powered down his body for final adjustments.

Alphys wasted no time to start her work.
3.45 PM. Fifteen minutes before the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

...Mettaton being Mettaton, sparkled with glam...

...Mettaton being Mettaton, posed with utmost ham...

Grillby made a mental note to write those two lines down in his poetry book.

This ‘NEO Form’ was built with combat sensibilities in mind. According to Alphys, this was her backup plan if Frisk turned out to be a dangerous entity.

It’s an armour with a keen edge. Ridges deflect direct melee strikes, and an energy armcannon replaced the lower right arm. Wings of pink magic jet-streams further cemented its nitty-gritty purpose.

The war plans were all put behind. Nonetheless, the design was cool and appealing to the public. Hence, Alphys kept working on this secret ‘NEO Form’ for Mettaton’s future live shows.

Mettaton continued to bask in his showering of swoons and cheers.

...It’s already a hit with the humans...

Fated or otherwise, it seems that both Royal Scientists had a taste for flair.

“Excuse me.” The Magus squad leader coughed. “But we’re in an emergency situation here. The autograph sessions can come later.”

“He’s right!” Undyne exclaimed. “Okay. I’m going! Who else wanna come with me???”

Though he had sworn to never meddle in national affairs again, this is a duty he must see through now.

Grillby raised his hand. “...I’ll go...”

“Yeah, I agree. You’re the best person.” They didn’t need any more explanation.

The strongest fish lady then lifted Grillby off the floor and made him sit on her shoulders. “Man, you’re light! Mettaton, we're gonna piggyback on top of you to form a robot-fish-fire totem of EPICNESS!!!”

“...What?...” Acrophobia meter, rising.

One of the Royal Guards said: “That’s unsafe, yo.”

“I... agree.” Bless Alphys for sanity.

That prompted another fish-level idea. “We’ll hang unto Mettaton’s legs then.”

Now it’s the owner’s turn to reject: “Oh my god! My BEAUTIFUL legs are NOT your ad hoc transport! Besides, they’re not even connected directly to my fabulous body. You’ll both be left
behind, kissing my feet, while I take to the skies~”

Undyne may have the sense to manage the armed forces, but her ideas don’t always take into personal safety into account, or practicality for that matter. After all, this is the woman who leaps from the highest of places on a regular basis… when she’s not suplexing a boulder.

Grillby thought he better speak up before things get crazier. “…We need proper seats…”

Undyne pondered for a moment, still hoisting the man of fire on her shoulders like it’s no big deal. “What about a motorbike?”

Acrophobia meter, add another 500 points. Plus he dreaded to think what strong winds could do to his flaming body. “…No… Still too dangerous… I suggest a car… Better wind protection…”

“Wow Grillbz, I can’t believe you’re gonna do a Papyrus too. Flying cars became his default mode of transport ever since he unlocked his magic eye powers.”

“…He did that?…” Just what happened behind his back?

The glam bot puffed his chest. “If we need a car, then my wondrous new body will get one! Be right back, darlings~!”

Alas, he had bragged beyond his capabilities. While Mettaton easily managed to carry a car over his head with just one functioning hand, his wings failed to generate enough lift to get him off the ground.

“Oh no…” Alphys placed her hands over her mouth. She’s on the verge of a small breakdown. “He doesn’t have enough thrust for any more than two people. I’m sorry. I-I wasted everyone’s precious time with my half-baked plan!”

Undyne calmed her down. “It’s no big deal, Al! Mettaton can carry me alone, right? As long he holds me tight while I ride on his shoulders, we’ll be okay. That means Grillbz have to stay behind though.”

Tilting her head up towards him, she asked: “You okay with that?”

Grillby pondered about the situation. Undyne alone could definitely hitch a ride on the robot’s shoulders without issue. Maybe it would be best for him to stay behind?

His mind wandered.

“Egads, Sir Grilenn! What’s with that dour face? Such an expression does not fit THE Captain of the Royal Guard!”

For reasons he couldn’t quite pinpoint, Grillby recalled his younger days.

It’s just so happen that Gaster saw the face under the helmet. Over tea, as per King Asgore’s famous hospitality. They’re discussing some important life decisions.

Grillby’s ancestor was one of the few surviving veterans of the war. It earned the Grilenn family a title and a duty, passed down across descendants.

When it’s time for the young man to carry the proverbial torch, he visited the King’s home to request for re-election. There had to be someone better out there, he suggested.

It’s an idea Gaster shot down in an instant. That skeleton’s inner flames burned brighter than any fire
elemental he had met.

“You worry that you lack knowledge? The privilege of inheritance exists for a reason. Be proud of your origins, good sir! I, W. D. Gaster, son of Council members Visigoth and Shirai, offer you an entire library of human military tactics. Request, and you shall receive!”

That one outburst motivated ‘Grillbz Grillenn’ enough to keep his position… for a while. Though he disagreed on Sans’ harsh training, he reluctantly accepted the necessity.

Everything changed when Gaster turned into an Amalgamate. From then onward, circumstances went from bad to worse.

Nothing could prepare him for the day when monsterkind spotted the Sixth Fallen Human. While the guards cornered the enemy, Gaster gave Grillby a special instruction:

“First, call out their SOUL for a duel. Then put all your magic to strike their body and only their body. Otherwise, you risk damaging the goods.”

“And one more thing, Sir Grillenn: make sure no other monster witnesses this process. Even the King himself does not know of its exact steps. You… will soon understand.”

Strange instructions, but he wouldn’t doubt the Royal Scientist.

Grillby expected a tough fight. He thought that this small human could take more than a few hits of his fire magic. After all, they’re humans. And humans were these strong, invincible creatures that can survive all odds.

How wrong he was. Never will he forget the tortured screams of a person burned alive. Their charred remains continued to haunt him to the present. He had just put another person’s child through unspeakable horrors.

Their supposedly ‘superior’ physical bodies had no resistance to magic whatsoever. That was the truth behind the extraction process.

Worse yet were the Determination experiments that followed… Grillby’s conscience won’t allow him to keep his knightly name any longer.

“You wish me to call you ‘Grillby’? Why? That sounds so pedestrian. As if you’re the owner of some run-down bar in the boondocks.”

“…Good lord, why does that make you smile? I suppose it does sound like a quiet retirement plan. Very well. As a token of our friendship, I shall accept your request.”

Beneath all of Gaster’s extreme and blood-ridden methods… lay the same thoughtful visionary Grillby met long ago.

On the day he passed the torch to his successor, the former scientist turned morose: “Grillenn… Grillby… I have my doubts about your retirement. Unlike you, this ‘Undyne’ is severely lacking in experience. I can’t guarantee she’ll be the first on the scene when the situation calls for her.”

“Oh, you think my praise is too lofty? You have a good sense of deduction, if I do say so myself. Should anything ever happen to me -- whether it’s as a search for my dust or as a guide in my absence -- I trust you’ll be able to think in my stead.”

It goes without saying that Undyne had very much disproven the doctor’s initial concerns. After all,
it’s her determined, youthful spirit that motivates the Royal Guard to face the great unknowns of the human world.

Still, there’s a time and a place for an old veteran like him.

Grillby wondered: what would Gaster do in this situation? What kind of mad, radical, borderline insane proposal would he present, before making it work?

“Oh, is that a yes or a--”

Snapping out of his reminiscence, he asked: “…Does Mister Mettaton have… enough physical matter to use Determination?…”

That one query alone set off a chain of ideas. Undyne almost shook Grillby off her shoulders from sheer gusto.

“THAT’S RIGHT!!!” she yelled. “Alphys, remember my new magic? Determination won’t melt monsters if it’s not injected straight into their bodies!”

The scientist gasped. “Since Mettaton is mostly made of metal he would have the physical buffer required for a power boost. T-this might work!”

She turned to address the humans: “Excuse me, who here has the most Determination? Preferably someone with a ‘Red Minor’ or ‘Red Major’. We need to extract a bit of their power.”

The Magi’s squad leader offered himself. “I’m a Red Minor, doctor. I’ll donate.”

Humans tend to look alike in their uniforms. Despite so, Grillby could see a spark of stubbornness behind that man’s stoic eyes.

Doctor Alphys started explaining the possible side effects of the donation process. Drowsiness with slight to moderate depression was the most common reaction, but they had never extracted a live non-Red human before.

It’s good ethics, thought Grillby. The donor must know what they’re getting into.

The leader accepted the clause without hesitation. He then followed Doctor Alphys for the extraction process.

Moments later, it’s done. Alphys returned with a small vial of Determination-imbued fuel. The human donor seemed exhausted, but he’s healthy enough to walk. That’s a good sign.

“Okay,” she said. “Mettaton, I need to slot this booster into your arm cannon. That particular circuit is designed to charge only your external systems. So, you’ll be safe.”

He opened a small hatch. “Load ‘em up, sweetheart~~”

Booster, loaded.

“OOOOOHH YES~~~!!!!”

Mettaton burst out an intense ten-fold shine of sheer hot pink. If Grillby wasn’t a fire elemental, he too would be blinded.

The robot posed and twirled. Showed off the fabulousness of his upgrades.
“I feel spectacularly STELLAR, baby!” he exclaimed. “And maybe a little bit too fizzly. Like my MTT-Brand Soda.”

Count on Alphys to bring back some sense: “You only have thirty minutes worth of DT, so please be conservative. Which means you better start moving.”

“Oh, of course! Hop into the car and strap up, my wonderful darlings. We’re going on a fabulous ride~”

Such confidence. At the very least, Grillby’s feet touched solid ground once more.

When the two Captains sat in the front and buckled up, she gave the signal.

It's liftoff!

Grillby heard the roar of the charged-up robot’s jets from underneath.

Undyne seemed used to it. Then again, she hung out with Papyrus. Even the spectacular will become mundane after a while.

“Pro-tip, Grillbz.”
“...Hm?...”
“Sit straight with your head facing front.”
“...Why is thaaa--”

The next thing he knew, his entire being got pressed into his seat. Learned the effects of G-force in the flame.

Acrophobia meter, maximum.

Chapter End Notes

Ooooh yes~~~ Here is some Mettaton NEO!

Is it too late for some Grillby POV? I had the idea of showing his perspective for a while for some insights on pre-Undyne days. Hopefully he feels like a person despite his short appearance.

The team takes off to the skies. What awaits them there?

Uh, trying to understand Sans is often described as a 'mental gymnastics' XD. In all seriousness, I think we can agree that he's in a weird feedback loop of everything-wrong. He's not quite sane for a long while.
Chapter Notes

Chapter. 100. I cannot believe it, but here we are. The big moment.

It took us 9 long days to do this. It totalled about 26 pages. This is what everything is leading up to. This is why we have 100 chapters.

Please enjoy.

Edit: Little fun fact, I listened to Suzuha's theme and Abyss Watchers for this scene.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Mezil Thyme of House Berendin.
The Vampire of Time.

Each grave of victims added unto the weight of unfulfilled dreams.

The Supreme Judge’s power is great.
The responsibility, even greater: for they carry the hopes of all who didn’t survive.

Many would wonder if a child should hold such a responsibilities. Those were once his only thoughts, but not anymore.

Now he had another question:

‘Can I trust this person with anything at all?’

Lying face-down on the ground was the child who set the monsters free.

Saviour.
Murderer.

Both at once.

The judge stood over the judged, sword in hand. The blade he wields represent the authority of his words.

He rested the cold, sharpened edge on Frisk’s dampened neck.

“Does this feel familiar to you?” said Mezil. “It should. There is a spirited young man who’s always believed in you. And yet… your rampant RESETS dragged him away from the sun. Imprisoned him back under the Earth, and set his head on a guillotine with your name on it. You ended his life. Again and again.”

“Yet, despite everything, he still believed in you.”

Frisk squirmed. Just a minute in, and they’re regaining control of their basic motor functions.

They’re refilling their Determination faster than I can consume.
Such is the power of a Pure Red. Little wonder why everyone wants a claim on their life.

...Fools.

Mezil pushed the edge closer. Not enough to prick the skin, yet enough to make the kid feel the pressure.

Frisk stopped struggling. A wise action. Any movement would earn them a shallow cut across the neck.

The judge heard a soft mutter.

‘Is Papyrus okay?’

They had asked the same question before.

How could this person show concern for Papyrus in one world, then execute him in the next?

“Let me be clear, Frisk. I do not understand you. Your motives. Your aspirations. Your desire. None of them. You’re the purest Red I’ve ever encountered, filled with nothing but Determination.”

“Allow me to explain. The majority of Red Majors do not come pure. Our Minor traits shift our resolute, determined nature to their inclinations. Victory is always anchored to the other six Aspects.”

“So, tell me, what are you?”

Silence from Frisk. Was it the fact that they could not reply, or refused to answer? Defiance? Confusion? Mezil doesn’t know.

“Perhaps you need some help. Very well, I shall provide some. Let me tell you about those whom I had judged.”

Mezil pondered where he should begin.

There had been so many.

He needed a variety of motivations, accompanied by dire consequences, each connected to the threads of fate.

He recalled one such an event, unfolding in the span of a few days:

The War of the Red Victory.

He began: “Do you desire to protect your king and country?”

“I once met a soldier from an oppressed minority. He was noble as he was kind, going to any lengths to provide his people much needed security. Alas, his love was limited to a few: he won’t hesitate to eradicate others if it meant the betterment of his people. In the end, he’s no different from his oppressors.”

No response.

“Do you desire exclusive knowledge?”

“Some wish to possess the Keys of Fate to study the cosmos. Nothing wrong in itself. But, is this pursuit worth the cost of lives? There was one who considered life to be the greatest simulation.
Action. Inaction. All numerics and data. The fate of humanity cannot rest on such a person.”

No response.

“Do you desire to escape from the shackles of mundanity?”

“I once met a simple housewife who gave up her career to manage a home. Dreamed of the power and excitement that came with the world of magic. Alas, her nightmares turned true as well. The wicked hunted her down like predator to prey. Ill-prepared both in body and mind, her magic failed to save her from their hands.”

No response.

“Do you desire power?”

“To become an unstoppable force with the perfect cover, that was the path of the Legendary Hero, no-- Genocider: founder of Gungnir and creator of the Persona system. Always victorious, in battle and in escape. Many die for this fruitless mindset. Many more consumed by me.”

No response.

“Do you desire control?”

“Is reality a game to you? Where people are pawns and life is all but a stage? That you could play without consequence? If that is your answer, I will end you without hesitation. It is against my creed to let such manipulators live.”

Still, no response.

“Hmm… Have you ever heard of the ‘Ascension’? Perhaps you did. Perhaps you had forgotten. Nonetheless, I shall explain again: when a person’s mind, body, and heart achieve unison, their Psychia unleashes the pinnacle of power. Potential is magnified, and all limits are broken.”

“That is how I -- a man of no magical training -- survived the fires of Hell and turned back time.”

“The Ascension is often summarized as an oath. In my case, it’s something like this: ‘As long I walk on this Earth, I shall preserve peace. No schemer nor manipulator shall tarnish the hearts of the pure for their sick and twisted amusement. My loved ones must be protected, no matter what’.”

His loved ones…

His thoughts wandered to Lucidia, that shy and delicate crystal. She reflected the many facets of brilliant radiance. The beauty of life that Mezil once considered a mere fantasy.

He then watched that same prism shattered in the toying hands of the wicked. Hacked into a weapon with lies, stained and tarnished by blood.

Papyrus, sunshine personified, would surely suffer the same.

His loud and egocentric outbursts are like blinding glares to the unacquainted, but his wife took a liking to the young man nonetheless. In time, he will shine much-needed light in an otherwise dark world.

Question is, can he handle it?

The powerful and the self-centered believe they’re above consequences. They mock the good and
exploit the pure for their own gain. Evil personified; they cannot risk having their wretchedness exposed by the Seer’s Eye.

Then there’s the weak and disbelieving. They also fear those words of prophecy. Hide their heads in the sand. Hearing nothing but their own delusions. Ignorance personified; they know no counter to the coming storm.

Once upon a past timeline, such cynicisms already threatened to drown out hope.

* * *

Lucidia paced before Mezil’s desk, fuming so hard that her being defied gravity. The ends of her massive curly hair and the fabric of her sapphire dress danced as though she’s under the sea.

Loose coin change floated around her. They didn’t remain as usable currency for long: bending and squeezing into tiny lumps of compressed metal.

Dear husband hadn’t seen his wife so furious since… he can’t recall. Lucidia may be fussy and moody at times, but this temper was a whole different reality.

“How DARE they!” She huffed. “No one strips my husband in public! I don’t care if they’re humans or monsters or even a deity, such humiliation is unforgivable!”

Mezil replied, “I’m not affected by it. In fact, it would be safer to say that their stunt backfired. Full-body tattoos had a tendency of inflicting fear into the hearts of others.”

He meant every word. At the very least, he could take comfort knowing that his underwear was left intact. In the end, it’s no different from going to the beach.

Getting caught in Sans’ blasters was the more frightening experience in retrospect. One more hit and he’d be dead if it weren’t for Frisk’s non-lethal stance.

“I’m more concerned about the young Seer. The way the town treated him, it’s either he’s a child or he doesn’t exist. That troubles me.”

Lucidia said: “Papaya attempts to catch attention by being loud and self-glorifying at all times. Unfortunately, this results in an unconscious desensitization to his presence. It’s like white noise: it eventually fades into the background.”

Mezil rose a brow. “Did you just call him ‘Papaya’? He's not a sweet tropical fruit, dear.”

“I-I mean Papyrus!” She flustered. “Mmgh, how unprofessional of me. I shouldn’t be making this mistake.”

Lucidia had misheard his name in the first timeline. As a result, his data folder was not named ‘Papyrus’, but ‘Papaya’. The name stuck, despite subsequent corrections in the files themselves.

“It’s alright,” he replied. “It’s a cute nickname. Would you address him as such when you meet face-to-face?”

The wife flustered. “No! Not at all! U-unless he wants to.”
Lucidia stared down on the ground, sad and downcast. “I never had the chance to speak to him before. Or, anyone from Ebott Town for the matter. I hoped that this timeline would be different…”

“Maybe you’ll get a chance in the next one.”

“Will there be a next one? You no longer have the Keys of Fate. If Frisk RESETS again, the world might end. The likelihood is very high.”

What should he say?

Her concerns were valid. On the accounts of honesty, Mezil knew he too dreaded that possibility. However, he wouldn’t be alive today if he gave into despair. He had to be strong; for his wife and himself.

“I’ll figure something out,” so said the husband. “As long the Barrier remains broken, I can reclaim my powers.”

His phone started to ring. The number came from none other than Papyrus.

Mezil answered the call: “Yes? Mezil Thyme here.”

“MISTER MAGUS… DO YOU HAVE TIME FOR A CHAT?”

There’s a strange unstable quality to Papyrus’ voice. Almost as if he’s on the verge of slurring.

“I do. Please give me a moment to set things up.”

Husband and wife nodded to each other. Lucidia gathered all the crushed coins before she retreated to a hidden chamber. There, she will monitor the call without causing any accidental interference.

Mezil never liked spending any longer than ten minutes on a direct phone call. The awkward arm position in combination with some old scars caused more irritation than its worth.

He put on a wireless headset and activated the microphone. “I’m done now. Sorry about the wait.”

“IT’S ALRIGHT.” Said Papyrus, “It’s… alright…”

“Excuse me?” For a moment, Mezil thought that someone impersonated his proxy.

“Um. I know… you’re not used to hearing this voice. I am usually very energetic. This is just me, minus the energy.”

“The last time I had this… was Alphys’ lab? When I got my superpowers. But. It hurt so much they had to give me lots of medicine. Then there’s another time I had the sneezles.”

Something’s wrong. Mezil could tell. It’s still Papyrus’ speech patterns, but without his usual boom.

He heard the unmistakable clink of glass in the background. It soon got followed up by glugs of liquid.

It’s a rhythm he had heard too often back in his old home and at his post-school part-time job.

“Papyrus. Are you drinking?”

“Uh… I-it’s important to stay hydrated! Even if. I’m. All bones.”
Mezil couldn’t decide if that’s the worst lie or the best diversion.

“Even if you look like a skeleton, it doesn’t mean you’re the same as the dead shells of humans. You’re a living being. Life needs proper nourishment.”

“Yes! Yes. You got that right. You really are very smart, Mister Magus.”

Mezil frowned. “There’s no need to lie to me, young man.”

“Lie? Why would I do that to you? Lying is... is...” Papyrus couldn’t finish his statement.

With a firm yet reassuring voice, Mezil repeated: “You don’t need to lie to me.”

“I...”

“Hmph. Who do you take me for? Even if you try, I can perceive the truth.”

In his heart, Mezil bit his tongue. Some bad habits refuse to die. He’s fully aware that this isn’t the time for him to sound harsh.

…Yet, he did it anyway. The close and the perceptive could read between the lines. Anyone else would have misunderstood his well-meaning intentions.

Papyrus chuckled from the other side of the line. It quietened down.

“Was that normal?” Mezil asked.

“Huh?”

“The way the town treated you. Was that normal?”

“No? I-I mean, they’re nice to me! Things got better since I got on the Surface. People started calling me by my name! Usually. Usually it would be ‘Sans’ brother’. Undyne never did that. But she’s not here now. She. She really cares about me. A-and then there’s Monster Kid! They know my name! Um. I don’t... I don’t know theirs.”

There’s something off about the whole situation. As far as he could tell, Sans held his brother in high regards. Frisk did too.

Why didn’t the others?

Why didn’t they support Papyrus when he needed it the most?

“What about Frisk? And your brother, Sans. Is this how they treat you too?”

“No. Sans. Sans is very good to me. I mean, he never got mad, even if I break something. He’s always very patient.”

“And Frisk is my best human friend! The... the very best. That’s because they’re the only one. Wait... Oh! I’m so sorry, Mister Magus. You are human too! You are the second best! Yes. Right next to Frisk. Not number two, but the second number one. Miss Aunt can be the third number one!”

Papyrus started to sob.

“I’m sorry.”
The young man’s words shook more and more with every apology.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“Everyone treated you so bad. They set you up for the worst jape. They ganged up and wrecked your fancy clothes. I—it must be expensive and time-consuming to make! And they ruined it!”

“I failed to get the town to like me, Mister Magus. To trust me. Because they can’t trust me, they refuse to believe you’re good. You made me your all-important proxy and I failed you. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

“I’m so… sorry.”

Stop. Saying. Sorry.

Mezil urged himself to comment. Carefully, because he didn’t want the wrong words to further deepen those wounds.

Relationships had never been his forte.

“Papyrus,” he answered at last. “It’s nothing. I’ve been through worse.”

The sobbing intensified. That attempt of reassurance backfired. In hindsight it was a half-baked effort still.

“We’re supposed to be the better people! The library books said that monsters are made of Love, Hope, and Compassion. So… so… why?”

Mezil grit his teeth at the sheer injustice of this situation. Why the hell should Papyrus -- the sole person who didn’t participate in the mockery -- shoulder the blame?

He slammed his fist on the table and exclaimed: “Enough about them! I’m worried about you more than anyone else! Didn’t I tell you already? Perceiving the truth is my job!”

Whether or not he realised it, Mezil had lost his cool. “One, you’re drowning your sorrows with alcohol. Two, the whole town looked down on you! Unacceptable!”

“I don’t care if one kid, or some friends, or even your family hail you as great on a normal basis! The true test comes when a storm rolls by! If they’re not there when you fall, then what’s the whole bloody point?!!”

Mezil’s vision had gone blurry from the well of tears. It reminded him too much of his own childhood, of how his unhappy parents would waste their time behind a bottle.


But with that kind of silence, they might as well not exist.

The dysfunction grew more and more obvious as Mezil grew older. They stopped running the house. His own siblings? Hopeless addicts to their own vices.

In the end, it was his job to pick up their mess. It eventually became his life’s description. Always having to fix the stupidity of humanity with his time-travelling powers…

Mezil couldn’t give a damn about ‘humanity’. He just wanted a peaceful world for his loved ones.
Papyrus started to laugh. It’s soft, but delighted.

“You only get angry at the people you care about. I’m so happy.”

Again, Mezil lived up to his newly-crowned tsundere title.

He wiped the tears away with the back of his hand. “If you want to show your gratitude, put that bottle away. I won’t let you become an alcoholic. Face the future with determination!”

“Actually… I can’t,” answered the young man. “I’m telling you this because you’re the only one who’d believe me.”

“I looked forward in time. Before I made this call, that is. I wanted to see… what I could do to help you.”

“…It’s a dead end, Mister Magus. So much fire. So much violence. Blood and dust, everywhere. And I can’t do anything to change our current course. You can’t either.”

“You have… um… until tomorrow. Sorry. It’s kinda short notice.”

Mezil heard a swish of that legalized drug through the microphone.

“Apparently, strong alcohol makes me forget things. I wouldn’t know I sang a drunk opera if Sans didn’t record my shenanigans. So. I have to forget. Otherwise, I can’t be myself. And if I’m not myself, everyone will notice. They will think you had done bad things to me.”

Another glug went down. Followed by more sobbing.

“…I can’t deal. I’m not my brother. No, my brother can’t deal with it either. We don’t know how. We don’t know anything. We’re just two immature, pretending kids, keeping each other happy with sweet lies.”

“You’re right, Mister Magus. You’re right on so many levels. No wonder you can’t trust us with Frisk.”

Why does it break his heart to be right?

Finally, finally someone admitted that the monsters weren’t prepared for the Surface. He should be glad.

Yet…

It’s so bitter.

“Mister Magus?” Papyrus asked. “Can I ask a favour? I… I won’t remember it when I wake up tomorrow. But…”

“For certain,” Mezil answered. “I will honour it, even if you don’t recall your own request.”

“Teach me. Guide me. Help me grow. I want to be someone who can deal with the bad things. To face them without needing lies or questionable bitter liquids. Please.”

How could any teacher decline such sincerity? Mezil replied: “I will do everything within my power to provide the best education for you.”

“Thank you.” Sweet, genuine gratitude resonated from his every word. “And one more thing.”
“Hm?”

“Mister Magus… please believe in Frisk. Please believe in Sans. I know they’re not nice to you in this timeline. But, they can choose to be good. They just need a little encouragement.”

The skeptical judge scrunched his brows. “Even after all of that, you’re still on their side?”

“Of course! I’m their coolest friend and brother after all! If I don’t believe in their goodness… who will?”

“Hmph. They have to return the sentiment. Otherwise it’ll just end up in a cycle of betrayal. I will not have any of that nonsense.”

Mezil imagined Papyrus smiling on the other side. He knows the youngster enough to be certain.

“You won’t hear this side of me anymore. I guess… the ‘OOC Papyrus’ will be ‘dead’ by morning. So…”

“Please, save us. I believe in you.”

Papyrus choked as he uttered his tearful farewell. “Goodbye.”

The call ended there.

Mezil stared at his phone for what seemed to be eternity.

“Mezzy?”

The voice of his dear wife caught his attention. Her lineage may be of bone, but her soul beats the life of any other human.

She smiled. “It’s been a long time since I’ve seen you so emotional over a new person.”

He responded: “It’s been a long time since someone new believed in me.”

Faith.

Mountains move and sky parts on such a small, often-scorned seed. The world will attempt to trample it again and again… only for it to sprout elsewhere.

The Vampire of Time then made his decision. If this timeline cannot be salvaged, he must do everything he can to make the next one count.

This could very well be his final chance.

“Lucidia, contact Gaelic. We need to map the safest route to Ebott. By sunrise, all hell will break loose.”

* * *

A true prophet ignored.

Such blasphemy.
Never again.
Never.

Let his own hands stain. Not others.

Mezil pulled his sword upwards. The razor sharp slice made a shallow cut on the skin and implanted another Mark of memories.

He thus narrated the playback, as he had done before this moment.

“There were three known survivors of Ebott’s massacre. Sans Serif, Papyrus, and you. No more. The Gungnir plucked their golden child from the dusty battlefield as a prize of victory. They call it ‘rescue’. You know better than that.”

“With the Magi in forsaken ashes, it became difficult to track you down. Lack of manpower and equipment greatly complicated matters. Papyrus tried his best, but the Gungnir kept you in total darkness to hamper any Seer-related efforts.”

“Hours turned into days, days turned into a week. Only then, the combined efforts of my surviving Seers managed establish contact with a willing informant.”

“Are you surprised? Yes, it’s Linda: the one who constantly riled Cenna with her Gungnir-poisoned statements. The madness finally opened her eyes to the true ugliness of Persona’s remnants.”

“Linda told us that your captors planned to smuggle you out to their stronghold in a different country. Did a poor job in keeping you healthy as well. Despite all her unpleasanties, she’s still a mother at heart. Your maltreatment must have bothered her deeply to turn against her former allies.”

“With new information, we stormed their hideout. We managed to break you free from their dungeon. As we feared, you were malnourished and dehydrated.”

“It’s amazing that you did not RESET, for you had done so over less. Was it because of a half-baked promise? Perhaps guilt from your failure? Or maybe, fear of the DEMON?”

“I hurried you to the Crimson Hall via a makeshift Spirit Gate. Only there is it possible for me to plant a Claimed Mark. The Keys of Fate were then returned to me. And here we are today.”

Mezil took a deep breath. So much to question, too little time.

“Back then, before the clock rewound, we didn’t get much chance to talk. Yet there’s so much to discuss. Tell me, ‘Child of Mercy’, why did you kill him? Why did you kill Papyrus? Was it because he’s easy? Because he’s trusting? Innocent? The so-called ‘idiot’ brave enough to fight without violence? Is that it?”

Frisk yelled: “No!!!”

“No? Does that mean you killed him because his purity aggravates your darkness? Is his light too bright for you? Or maybe, you thought it might fun?”

“Which is it, ‘Child of Mercy’?!”

Frisk got back on their feet. Will they fight back, or remain silent?

The two engaged in a glaring standoff.

They’re upright now. Growing agitated. Desperate. Which means soon... I will need to put my
“You did not respond with words,” he said. “Should I take that as a confirmation of your sins? Very well then, show me your darkness!”

His soles tapped on the ground. Upon which his Mark shifted his position to close in the distance. Aimed the tip of his blade off to the side so he’d just graze their cheeks at most.

Frisk dodged it despite their handicap. Impressive. He wondered if they can keep it up.

“Is it abandonment? The belief that you were thrown away into a care institute? Therefore, you had no need to bother with those who live and breathe?”

No response.

Mezil executed a series of slashes. The kid hopped back, avoiding each one.

However, by the fifth attack they lost their footing and fell. It’s a lapse in defense the cruel will surely take advantage of. Right now, the Judge must play this role; he leapt forward for a downward strike.

Living up to their reputation, Frisk rolled aside. They’re athletic enough to recover, swinging their legs upward to execute a swift hop back to their feet.

“Is it betrayal? Do you resent your friends and family for failing you in your greatest time of need?”

Another slash. Another dodge.

“Is it hypocrisy? No one is perfect in this world. No one can fully understand each other. No one. You are no different. So why do you blame?”

Frisk had too much ground. Very well. The Crimson Hall exists in the Void where everything was digital. As such, the standard laws of material physics don’t apply.

In a single swing, Mezil cleaved the ground beside him. That entire section collapsed into the sea of crimson.

“Do you remember the exorcism, Frisk? Did you know that you once died, and the nation held a wake for you? Did you know Papyrus offered himself to save your life on the first opportunity? You don’t. But, I do.”

“That young man struggled countless times to save you. He stared at the darkness of everyone he knew. How they became twisted images of themselves under the circumstances you put them through!”

He cut away another section. It’s now half of its original size.

“Papyrus cried over his own flaws. Witnessed the worst of his brother, his parents, and his uncle. Discovered the truth behind his own isolation and the gifts he was denied.”

Slice.

“You think you’re abandoned? You think you’re betrayed? You think others are liars? From what I see, you and his miserable excuse of a brother are the real traitors! I had never seen such disrespect for a true clairvoyant Seer in my life!”

Slice.
“You ignored his pleas! You ignored his warnings! You treated him as though he’s a forgettable child when he’s doing his damndest to save you!”

Slice.

“Yet, despite everything. He. Still. Believed!”

By the time Mezil’s done, there’s only enough space for two people standing face to face.

Frisk looked around in distraught. There’s nowhere left to run. Nowhere to hide.

“Prove to me that you will not betray the world on your whims! Prove to me that darkness will not consume you! Prove to me that you are worthy!”

Still no answer.

Only silence.

Why?

The Gungnir believed that they could own Frisk.

Fools. Shortsighted fools. Do they really think it’s possible to bend a Pure Red to their will? Impossible. Mezil knew there’s no guarantee that Frisk would adhere to the Magi tenets either.

Who knows if they will become a person deadlier than Persona in the coming decades?

Frisk must come to terms with themselves… or pay the ultimate price.

Reinforcement, activated. Mezil’s charged arm grabbed the child by the shirt. Lifted them off the ground to stare at them in the face.

No matter how they struggled, he refused to let go. He cannot let go. Not until he’s certain that his decision to preserve this life won’t bring future calamity.

“So I ask you now: why did you Ascend? What is your oath? Tell me!”

There and then, Mezil felt a sharp force striking him square in his gut. In the midst of their trashing, Frisk had kicked the most cursed spot on his body.

It’s none other than the Persona’s Mark.

The wounds inflicted on that fateful day returned. Fresh. Raw. The lightning gored through his innards like it had done so many years ago.

Blood ejected up his throat. It sprayed on Frisk’s horrified face. That was the last thing he saw before the corrupted Determination skewed with his mind.

Mezil fell to his knees. Stabbed his sword to the ground to stabilize himself. When he did so, he noticed that his legs sank into black quagmire.

Mud. Tainted, filthy, mud.

The symbol of those who had lost their Love and Compassion: the substance of the restless dead.

It first consumed his blade.
“No…” he muttered. “Why now?”

Gone were his trademark butterflies. Sickly red thunderclouds loomed overhead, pulsing scarlet whenever lightning leapt across their playground.

“It appears you never believed I’m dead.”

Standing before him was the shadow of his nemesis and the creator of this demonic realm.

The Persona.

His eyes and mouth glowed with sheer Determination.

“It’s Gungnir tradition.” So said the confident shadow. “As long as this Hex exists, ‘I’ still live.”


“Oh? If that’s the case why didn’t you just turn yourself into a Lich sooner? I know you, Mezil. More than you’d like to admit. You fear that I might hijack your remnants during the conversion ritual.”

“I wonder… what would be the first joy of my new life? If she’s human, I’d want to ravage her as I had done to you. Lucidia, was it? Alas, she’s all bones. It’ll probably be much more satisfying to crush her piece by piece.”

A surge of righteous rage numbed the pain from those internal injuries. Mezil put all his might to push himself off the ground. Stand tall, stand ready to deliver death to the deathless.

“I’ll deny you.”


“Tsk. They had it coming.” Mezil retorted, though deep inside he knew had no right to vilify their demises. Dear Lucidia always wondered if there was a better way.

“And now you’re testing a mere child? Talk about a fucking joke. They won’t help. You know this deep inside. If they’re as gracious as everyone claims, this ‘Frisk’ would have tried talking to you. Instead, they chose MY path. Tried to rid the world of those puny monster lot. Says everything, hm?”

The Persona crossed his arms and leaned to one side. Cocky. Arrogant. Some things refuse to change.

“You know what? Who cares about your weak excuse of a body anyway? All you have is your good aim. No strength nor athleticism. If it weren’t for your witchcraft, you’d be nothing. But here we have someone who surpasses you before even hitting puberty.”

Lightning flashed overhead.

A star emerged from the nothingness. It appeared right next to Persona. When the shine faded away, it was none other than Frisk.
The child sat up. Confused. Terrified. Realised that they’re in mucky goop.

They looked up at Mezil and asked: “Where are we? I can’t shake this stuff off...”

Frisk’s Psychia popped out of their chest against their will. The child grabbed it, trying their very best to squeeze the magic back into their body.

It refused.

Mezil felt his heart sink.

*Is this still a hallucination?*

*Please let it be a mad nightmare. Please don’t make this real. Please, God. Let him stay dead.*

The Persona rested his hands on Frisk’s shoulders. They froze upon contact. The controlling had begun.

“Well, well, already penned your signature I see. Always so greedy, Mezil Thyme. Claimed all the Reds as your own and left none to make their choice. How infuriating.”

“That’s different now. You and I share the same body. Which means... I can rebrand your frilly design with something better.”

Currents of electricity zapped across the butterfly mark. Each pass corrupted it into a whole new image, one that fit the DEMON’s reign of terror.

Mezil urged his body to move: to reach out so he may reinforce his will upon his calling card.

His strength failed. Completely. Utterly.

A bolt of lightning now controlled the very essence of Frisk’s being.

The Persona laughed out of joy. “*Now THIS is what I call willpower! It truly is the purest Red. Little wonder why you’re so desperate to keep them out of Gungnir hands. Oh? What about this little trinket?*”

Against their will, Frisk displayed the Trap Harvester.

“Hah. So they’re the new owner of this stupid watch? What a rich legacy. Wonderful! Not only I have the perfect host, I will also gain one of the most lethal Magi weapons in existence!”

Mezil felt his chances of survival slipping away.

If Frisk becomes fully possessed by the Persona, the end is nigh.

“Frisk!” he called out, “Fight the influence! Be determined! Do NOT let that man own you!”

To his horror, The Persona gripped Frisk’s arm and forced them to use the Trap Harvester.

“So meddlesome. I wish you stayed a near-mute like during our schooldays. Made life so much easier for the both of us.”
“Now, my new Persona,” so he said. “Why don’t you enact some sweet revenge for all the nasty things the ‘Supreme Judge’ had done to you? Look at him, halfway in the grave. Yet he’s telling you what to do with your life. Don’t you feel stifled?”

Frisk’s arm trembled.

Try as they might, they can’t escape the DEMON’s clutches.

Mezil too continued his struggle to act. It’ll be a matter of time before The Persona drops his fatherly facade. This moment of suggestion will be his sole opportunity to retaliate.

“You can’t decide? I have a few suggestions. His dominant hand is the left side. Which means it’s also the deadliest. Why not remove that?”

The child shook their head.

“Is that too much? What about his right then? I’m sure a person can live without a limb or two.”

Again, Frisk declined.

“We should go back to your leg idea. See them rot all the way through. Or shall we raise the bar and rid ourselves of the lower half of his body? Doesn’t the prospect make you even the slightest bit curious?”

“...Please. Target the SOUL.” They proposed.

“Hmm? You wish for me to have this body? Interesting. Let’s draw it out then.”

The Persona claimed Frisk and charged up the Trap Harvester.

Aimed it at Mezil’s Psychia -- or SOUL -- as the monsters dictated. When the beam comes into contact, it will temporarily disconnect Mezil’s body from his will, thereby allowing complete control by the Persona. Or so he concluded.

_Papyrus. Your faith in others will have to remain a mere dream._

_Curse me to Hell if you must. That is where I belong. It’s where all of us DEMONS belong._

_Blood for Blood, was it? The consequences of our dark ways._

Mezil yanked his sword out of the mud. Lifted its glimmering edge high above his head with the intent to strike through both Frisk’s and his own SOUL in a single swift blow.

_Father. Gaelic. Please take care of Lucidia. Papyrus too._

_We will meet no more._

At the very last moment, Mezil’s sharp eyesight spotted a radical change of events.

Despite the legendary strength of humanity’s worst DEMON, The Child of Mercy slammed the reversed side of the Trap Harvester right into their Psychia.

The quagmire quaked. The air trembled. Time itself began to slow as the child glowed brighter and brighter from the feedback loop.
At the peak of their brilliance, a massive light exploded outward.

Not merely a star.

Brighter than the sun.

A supernova.

Mezil wasn’t sure what happened next. Did he get knocked off his feet? Somehow, he didn’t think so. He didn’t feel a flat hard surface slam against his back like usual.

When he came to, he found himself squinting at the shine of a red-blessed child. Sometime between his consciousness, Frisk had hugged him. Buried their face deep into his coat to boot.

The titular ‘Child of Mercy’ had become the embodiment of their Mark: a powerhouse of Determination, burning itself to bless others.

Emptied of its contents, the Trap Harvester resonated its ticks like any normal pocket watch. The serenity of peaceful DT suppressed Persona’s curse in a stillness that seemed like an eternity.

“I’m sorry.”

At long last, Frisk looked at Mezil to speak. Their eyes glowed red: a proof of their Ascension.

“I’m so sorry.” The child sobbed. “I can’t answer your questions. Ever. What did I want? I don’t know. I think… I was trying to look for a solution. A golden path where everyone can be saved and live happily ever after. But… the more I tried… the more hopeless Surface life became. Everything directed me to what I thought was the truth: ‘You must sacrifice some to save others’. That’s how it began. The killing.”

“I think I pitied Papyrus. He’s trying so hard. Always trying so, so, so very hard. But, he never really got anywhere. He didn’t hold any important jobs. No friends either. So I thought maybe… maybe he’s in pain. He said he wanted to meet ‘Death’. I wondered if he meant it literally.”

“Maybe it’s because he believes in me. Believe that I could make a change. But maybe you’re right, he’s easy because he would never kill someone.”

“Maybe I thought he’s insignificant. Forgettable. I… I can’t remember anymore.”

Mezil said: “But he’s not.”


“I was too selfish to realise that the Surface needed help too. Not just the monsters of Ebott. When you won the custody case, I could have waited longer and listened to your story. Of all the painful fighting you endured to protect the world. Instead, I did all sorts of stupid and crazy and idiotic things…”

Frisk admitted: “I really don’t know what I was thinking, Mister Thyme. You said I’m a Pure Red. Just ‘determination’. I guess if I set my mind to it, that’s what I’ll do.”

“When I reached this ‘Ascension’ you talked about, I only had one thing on my mind: ‘Be
Determined. I guess that’s my ‘oath’. I was determined to save monsterkind. Now, I’m determined to save you.”

Mezil still didn’t understand. “Me?” he asked. “What about me? I…”

The metallic taste of hemoglobin served as a stark reminder of his current condition.

“Please stop the Trial,” Frisk pleaded. “You need to go to a hospital and get your insides checked. I don’t want you to die because I can’t decide. If you’re not happy, I’m willing to try again. For now, please… just end this.”

Such sweet concern.

Mezil activated the Grams on his body. Without Persona’s curse getting in the way, he had the liberty to patch himself right up. Soon enough, the pain subsided to just a mild, nagging sensation.

Meanwhile, he had also restored the Crimson Hall to its original form. Pristine. Clean. Spotless.

“You need not worry,” he said. “Remember what I said? The Crimson Hall creates digital replacements of anyone who enters this chamber. Only the Psychia is real. When we walk out of that door, we will return to our uninjured bodies.”

“We?” Frisk blurted? They stared at him with the innocent wide-eyed gaze of a child.

“Of course.” The Judge replied. “You think I’d leave the most powerful of Crimson Keepers idle in The Void?”

“Crimson Keeper?” A few seconds later, Frisk cupped their hands over their mouths in utter disbelief. “I… I passed? Really?”

“Check your ‘SOUL’.”

They popped it out. Rubbed the surface for any signs of a butterfly or lightning bolt. Mezil knew that they would find none: no Mark could survive that explosion at point blank.

The kid held their breath. Kept pinching their cheeks. Tossed glances at Mezil trying to ascertain that he’s not throwing a bluff.

The Supreme Judge responded with a slight yet approving smile.

“We have a lot of work to do, Frisk.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes.

**This is the conclusion for the Crimson Hall!**

But that doesn't mean that's the end of the story. We still have someone out there.... someone who needs this Trial done.
Today (the 27th) is the anniversary of The Golden Quiche.

Yes people. An entire YEAR! 365 ish days since I posted the first chapter of this mad time-travel quest. And how much Frisk had grown since the beginning.

It's been one of my best years, creative wise. Never before I had so many people reading my stuff at the same time. For that, I really thank you guys. Especially those who had supported me since the beginning. You fellows brought back so much faith in my craft.

Meanwhile, Lucidia now has an official Lullaby midi! It's meant to be looped. You can listen to it here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You did it!
YOU DID IT!!!

You screamed the joy of victory at the top of your lungs.

After all that drama and fighting and crazy shenanigans, you passed the final final of all finals! A huge weight lifted off your shoulders, enabling you to jump like a happy baby goat despite your exhaustion.

Moooooom! Daaaaaad! Look at you, a full fledged Magus ready to take on the ambassadorial role for real!

“That’s wonderful, my child!”
“I’m so proud of you.”

Daww. Dad cried actual tears over the microphone. It must have been stressful for them to watch you take on such a tough dude.

“I knew you could do it, kid. Wahahaha! Heard they’re gonna throw a party for ya. Maybe next week.”

The rest of the Jury wasted no time in joining the celebration; they cheered and clapped on your behalf.

“Ya blew me foo-- freakin’ mind away!” Said Juror Number 2. “Survived the trial o’ fire and livin’ to tell the tale? Heh, heh, I be lookin’ forward to workin’ with ya.”

“Good show. Congratulations.” Number 1. A man of few words.

“EEEEEE YOU DID IT!! The youngest, cutest, tiniest, Crimson Keeper ever in history!”

“Number 7 forgets that she needs to breathe. Oh dear, is Number 4 alright? The madam looks pale. But it is alright, for the Queen of Monsters now attends her mild dizziness. She is happy for your
victory.”

“…Judge Thyme, are you okay?…”

You heard an awkward cough from the Tsunderjudge. “I’m fine, thank you. Excuse me. Festivities can wait until we return to the real world.”

“What happened there, Judge Thyme?” asked Number 3. “That child kicked your Hex and our feed went offline! Thank the Chronographer’s foresight for a backup system. Even so, it was only just in time to witness the end.”

It did? You described to Number 3 what you had experienced. What is a ‘Hex’ anyway?

You heard a tired sigh. “Long story short, a foul creature almost hijacked the trial. Quite a lethal handicap. Judge Thyme, I sincerely hope you won’t pull such a stunt ever again. And consider a proper retirement soon.”

Oh here comes another hissy fight between Number 2 and 3. “M’lord had no damn choice! Yer think it be a good idea to elect a scrub out o’ urgency?”

“I’m very sure there are other Crimson Keepers of his calibre.”

“Settle down, men,” said Mezil. “Please keep internal issues as ‘internal’. At the very least, a whole new treatment option is now open to me.”

Mezil tried to walk, but the exhaustion made him stagger. All that adrenaline had seeped out of his body. You rushed over and offered a helping hand.

“Hmm? I would rather have my cane. I’m not even sure if you can walk by yourself either, let alone help me.”

Aww, that’s sweet. You told him that you’ll be fine.

Nonetheless, he insisted on his own way. He didn’t want to trouble you at all.

“Chronographer, sheathe please.”

By chance, is this ‘Chronographer’ his lovely wife? Since you’ve passed the test, there’s no point in keeping juicy secrets anymore.

If he was in a better condition, he would have blushed. Right now all you got was an irritated frown.

Doesn’t matter. You replied with a cheeky grin.

“Yes. She is,” he answered. “You will meet her soon.”

Nothing happened.

“Chronographer? Lucidia?”

Realising something went wrong, Mezil switched right into his cautious mode. He made sure you stayed close by his side.

You spotted a sudden blur on the ceiling right above his head. Pointed in that direction to alert him.

Right after that, you felt your world going sideways. Mezil had just shoved you aside in a rough
manner.

Ouch! What the heck was that for?! You got angry. But when you sat up, you realised why he did so.

It’s Sans.

Hood, hanging over his skull.

At first, you couldn’t wait to get out of this room and start your new life.

But then…

Chaos cut your celebrations short.

Sans forced Mezil’s SOUL out into the open. The Judge’s Psychia reminded you of detailed glasswork, unlike your simpler chunks.

The skeleton let himself drop from above, flipping right side up, ready to strike.

Mezil countered. Too bad Sans was faster, swifter.

A narrow blade plunged straight into the old man’s glowing Red SOUL. You gasped, expecting it to explode.

Instead, a crimson flash collapsed on top of it. You spotted the faint shape of six wings.

Wait, was that a Mark?

It’s holding Mezil’s SOUL together?


What’s going on?

Why did he stab Mezil? The whole thing’s over and he--

“Thanks for safekeeping the final component. The casing is yours. I’ll give the rest back to you when I'm done.”

Huh?

For some reason, your Trap Harvester felt… lighter?

When you inspected it, you realised that you’re left with only the brass outer shell of the pocket watch.

Then you saw him roll up his right sleeve.

Is that a super high tech hidden blade?

Yes. Yes it is.

While you gawked, he inserted the remains of the Trap Harvester into an empty slot. It’s made snug to the size.

Streams of Determination started flowing from Mezil’s SOUL to Sans’ blade. The hands on the
watch ticked at a steady pace.

You stood there in deep shock. You didn’t get it.

Why, Sans?
Why is he draining Mezil of Determination?
Why is he storing them in the Trap Harvester?

Why?

Sans put up his guard. He looked like his usual slacking self, but you could tell the subtle difference. “Sorry kid, don’t have time to explain. Incoming trouble.”

Trouble?

You heard the slight swish of a sliding door. When you turned around for that you spotted a… a…

Holy crap. What you saw gave you goosebumps. Who in the world was that?

A man?
A snake?
A skeleton?

All three?

What’s with his face? You can’t believe it’s not a mask. The dark stripes and the little pockmarks reminded you of a python.

He opened his maw to hiss, showing off his rows of thin, sharp teeth. From the sounds, you recognized this weird skeleton to be Juror Number 2.

That long forked ecto-like tongue tasted the air. From this distance, you caught a glimpse of what looked like a second mouth. It lacked singular teeth: more ‘mechanical’.

Are those freaky features implants…?

He dashed past you and lunged an immediate offensive on Sans. Fingerbones straight, each quick strike aimed for the joints and eyes.

Sans dodged in all his familiar fluidity, summoning his blasters to counter at will. The barrage of lasers hammered against the white tiles of the Hall.

“Frisk, move!”

Judge Mezil ran past you and grabbed your arm. He’s fleeing like a normal person: not exploiting his teleports. That’s super worrisome.

If the pro starts running, you sure as heck better follow.

As you ran, you almost had your pants shaved off by a few stray blaster shots. You think they’re stray. Then again, with Sans you never know.

Mezil conjured a handful of thin white needles. They floated above his palm.

Wow, he still has that much fight left in him?
He then sent the spray into the duelling skeletons. Sans called off his attack and teleported a good
distance away.

The battle must be intense even by his standards, because he’s sweating bullets in a hunched
position. He never, ever hunched before you.

Both Seers locked their sights on each other. Eyes, active. Either side stayed still for their opponent’s
next course of action.

“…Gaelic, was it? Welp, I thought that martial art style is just the stuff of movies.”

This ‘Gaelic’ fellow grinned, flicking his tongue. “Nay, ya mad zealot. Fancied up fer the silver
screens, but it be real. Existed way longer than us o’ bone.”

That stance… his arms look like a snake too. This is getting a bit too scaly, even for your standards.

Sans furrowed his brows. “I don’t think it’s very effective. They’re made by humans to fight against
other humans. Don’t think your hunting skills are valid for a skeleton like me. No tender spots and
whatnot.”

“Say that again once ah snap yer joints and gouge out yer eyes.”

“Heh. If you can catch me first.”

Sans sent some bones crawling on the floor. Gaelic countered them with rows of sharp predatory
teeth.

!!!!

But Sans only has 1 HP! If anything lands a hit he’ll--

“Worry not,” Mezil replied. “Gaelic knows his limits. Deeper analysis suggests that injuries to the
arms, legs, and bone surface will not inflict physical trauma on the SOUL.”

That statements stirred a morbid curiosity. You whispered a question to Mezil: what if the Eye is
damaged? What happens to Seers who go blind?

He glanced at you before dishing out a blunt reply. “They die. Eventually.”

‘Eventually’?

Mezil then cast another ring of needles. About forty of them. “That’s the least of our concerns now.
Escape to the Jury Chamber. Stay there. If you linger, he will soon target you.”

He showered them at Sans, forcing him out of the ideal spots. By keeping him on the defensive, he
won’t be at liberty to execute a lethal strike.

…You hate to admit it, but the Tsunderjudge might be right. The only way you’d get answers out of
this confusion was to keep yourself safe.

Sorry Sans. It’s for his own good.

You turned around and noticed that the entrance to the Jury Chamber was wide open. Sprinted there
as fast as you can.

You almost knocked right into Mom. Forgetting all about your escape, you turned around to call out
for her.

Stop! It’s too dangerous!

“Sans!” she yelled. “What are you doing?!”

Upon Mom’s voice, everything just stopped. Figuratively. But literal too: it’s an immediate ceasefire.

No one moved an inch before the presence of the Queen of Monsters. Including Sans.

The way he stared at her with a shocked, conflicted expression…

That’s absolutely certainly positively the face of a troubled admirer!

Whatever happened to his comedic pun-face?
What’s with the edgy gear and the drama stare and so on?!

Oh no.
Oh. No.

What have you done?!

You realised that you made a horrible mistake. A few days ago, you had invited Sans to brush Mom’s fur. That must have smashed some inner wall of the heart!

Dad and Gerson caught up. Wait, what?! The old turtle is here, with his hammer to boot?!

He chuckled at you. “Wa ha… I’m not sure if I can still fight, kid. But I’ll try.”

It’s okay. He’s not alone. There’s Mom, Dad, and others.

You shuffled behind Dad. Made sure you stay close.

Mom once again tried to placate Sans. “What is wrong? Are you alright? If there is anything bothering you, please talk to me.”

“I’m fine, Tori…” he replied.

“Then, will you stand down?” Mom did her best to be gentle.

Sans lowered his head and darkened his sockets. “I can’t. Not with your life on the line.”

“Me? In danger? I am not hurt at all.” She spread her arms to show herself. “See? Not a single scratch.”

“What about next month? Or the year after? Or ten years down the road?”

“Sans, that is too far into the future.”

“Exactly.” He said. “I can’t… I can’t protect you. And Papyrus. There’s just only so much I can do. Which, is almost nothing.”

The streams of Determination never stopped flowing. Just how much does Mezil have anyway?

Hang on…

You should have more than him. So, why didn’t it run out? Where are all the rest coming from?
Sans gave a fond smile to Mom. “Tori. I’ll look for you. We’ll pun together again. Same time, same place. Always.”

He vanished.

You felt an arm wrap around your waist. Your hair brushed against Dad’s cape as the sudden force pulled you away from safety.

Mom reached out for you. Called for your name. Magic filled the air for an attack to save you.

But in a blink, everyone faded into a miniscule horizon.

Sans had just whisked you away. Kidnapped you.

This time, it’s for real.

…………………

You ruffled through your hair in a brief bout of panic. Holy shit, this can’t be happening. After all of that, SANS had to be the bad guy?!?

“Kid, do you know where to go?” he asked.

That nerve. You yelled right in his face.

What the fuck does he mean ‘Where’?!?!

This is in the middle of the fucking VOID, like literal EMPTY SPACE OF EMPTY NOTHINGNESS and he doesn’t fucking know where to go?!?!?!

Sans pulled his head back at your outburst. “A kid of your age shouldn’t be swearing like that.”

A man of his age shouldn’t be doing whatever he’s doing now!

“…I know I’m an immature slob. If you’re trying to piss me off, that’s not gonna work. Besides, it’s a good deal for you too.”

Explain.

“Later, kid. Wish I could, but right now we’re still ‘left hanging’, if you get what I mean. Help me look around.”

You growled.

There’s not much choice now, is there? You tried your best, but no dice so far.

Sans activated his Eye, switching it between cyan and yellow to scan the great nothingness.

You squinted in suspicion. His powers involved super-perception, right? Could it be possible that he’s seeing something you don’t?

“I think I see something.” Sans pointed down.

You told him it’s blackness all the way for you.

“Huh. Is that so? Welp, hang on tight kid. Huge distance to cover.”
One teleport jump and bam, you’re in front of a strange yet familiar place.

It’s… your SAVE screen.

Sans landed on the small patch of grass. He stared at the life-sized replicas of your monster friends, unnerved by the sight. All the while his cyan Eye stayed lit.

You could tell he’s analysing everything.

“W-whoa… kid. Is this really what you see whenever you LOAD your SAVES?”

Yup. And RESET too.

Too lazy to walk, Sans warped to his doll counterpart. “You built these or something? Like a command prompt?”

You shrugged. Whenever you made a new friend, a new doll appeared. Sometimes they would even pose for you. Oh, and hear the chiptune music in the background? That gets more and more elaborate too. Cool stuff.

“I’m kinda flattered. I mean hey, that means I’m important enough to stand in this little hall of fame.”

He jumped towards the replica of Mom. Touched her sleeves. Ran them down to her hand.

“Jeez. Even the texture is right. Really deep in the uncanny valley for me though. Freaky.”

Sans went on to examine the rest of the figurines. “Say kid, remember our chat about Thermodynamics?”

Sorta? It kinda melted your brain, but you get the gist of it.

“What’s the First Law?”

You tried to recall. It’s something along the lines of ‘you cannot create something out of nothing’. Something to do with energy.

“Yup. That’s correct. The First Law of Thermodynamics states that you cannot create or destroy energy in an isolated system. But what if you import energy from an external source?”

If that’s the case, a person would have extra material to work with.

“Exactly. Kid, every single thing in here is made of Determination. The dolls… grass… even the music too.”

Wait. What?!

“Yeah. That Crimson Hall? DT. All of it. This explains a lot. I was there when you two fell into a weird trance. Then I witnessed how the old Judge restored that place in a blink.”

You noticed a spike of delight on Sans’ face. “This is so cool. There’s so, so, so much more you can do with Determination than just time travel. I bet the couple made ideal test chambers with this knowledge.”

That excitement quickly flattened when Sans looked at Papyrus’ replica. He couldn’t keep his eyes on it for long.
Mister blue skeleton still had you tucked under his arms. Maybe you should just punch him and run?

…Better not.

Getting lost in nothingness is a fate worse than death. Speaking from experience.

You bet your entire bank account that Mezil and his folks are organizing a rescue team as of this moment. You’d have the best chance if you stayed close to the culprit.

His attention turned towards the Ruins entrance. “Anything beyond there?”

You shrugged. Never did try walking through that place.

Could he just put you down already?

Like, seriously? You’re getting tired of being lugged around like a piece of dead weight.

“Sure you won’t try to flee?”

For fuck’s sake...

You motioned your arm out into the great darkness and glared. Which part of ‘the goddamn empty nothingness of the bloody Void’ did he not fucking get? Does it even LOOK like you have anywhere to run?

“Welp. Mental note: you’re a real pottymouth when you’re pissed off.”

Learned that from Chara.

“Oh one condition. I’m gonna hold your hand until we’re safe. You never know with you Determinators.”

Yes sir. Just do it already.

So he set you back on your feet. You immediately grabbed HIS hand as a not-so subtle show of independence. Sans may be your captor but like hell you’ll let him treat you like a hostage.

He didn’t get annoyed. Not at all. Instead, he’s happy.

“Heh. You had gotten a lot stronger in this timeline. Imagined you were just a scared little kid once. Not that I really recall.”

“…I really respect this version of Frisk. Not lying. But respect doesn’t equate to trust.”

He chuckled bitterly at himself.

“I’m such a mess, huh? I share to you stuff that I don’t want my brother or Tori to ever know, yet I still have the gall to say I don’t trust you. If that’s not trust, what is?”

Sans’ sockets darkened. “Sorry. Life’s a big cruel comedy.”

…………………

If only you could read his mind, you’d understand what’s bothering him. Except, you can’t. Not that you want to either. Sans needs to come out of his shell sooner or later.

The both of you walked past the fake Ruin’s gate. As you expected, there’s absolutely zilch content
beyond. At least, as far as you can tell.

Sans seemed to survey the area. This had to be the longest time you’ve seen his coloured Eye remain active.

“I think I can build around the edges. Better turn back first, though.”

Although you have no idea why he’s talking about ‘building’, you agreed. Let’s go back.

The gate was gone. It’s replaced by a familiar grey door.

“Oh man, really?...” You could feel Sans tensing up. After a brief contemplation, he relaxed. “Don’t think he can do much though. Other than being a nag.”

Who?

“You’ll see. Depends if he’s gutsy enough to show his face in front of me.”

Sans led you to the grey door. Turned the knob and pushed on through.

A chill wind swept past, shivering you down to the bone. Cold, cold, cold!

…Sans didn’t drop an ice joke. It’s scary to see him so cautious. You wondered if there’s anything super dangerous lurking behind the darkness.

“Coast’s clear, kid.”

Phew. You relaxed and breathed a sigh of relief. Looking around, you noticed that you’re standing in front of a concrete walkway.

Oh! You recognize this chamber!

It’s where you met Doctor Gaster way back in the Underground days!

“Huh, you’ve been here before? ” said Sans. “Suppose it makes sense that Gaster can have his own private place. Brilliant scientist spread across spacetime. Stuck in the Void. Minimum level of Determination. Yup. This is his ‘house’ alright.”

Hey, if this is Doctor Gaster’s home...

You’re absolutely sure that Sans is gonna get spanked in the pelvis!

Sans laughed. “Good one, kid! But nah. The Doc may not even be tangible. You see, I froze most of his body in the real world. Can’t recompile what you can’t retrieve.”

“I knew he’ll play hero if he catches wind of my activities. So, I took preemptive measures to lock him up first.”

Crap. Here you thought the man who speaks in hands could save you.

“I thought things through, you know. Not that much of a bonehead.”

Sans closed the door. It vanished when he did so, leaving the fake Ruins gate as it should be.

His attention turned towards his hidden blade device. You tried to read the screen, but it’s all in weird symbols. What’s that?
“This?” Sans showed the bracer. “Top secret. Not ready to explain it just yet.”

“Welp. As I thought, being far away from the source makes the DT drain slow down to a crawl. Fortunately I am ‘Patience’. All I need to do is to waste time.”

“Hmm…” he pondered. “It’s probably too much for any human to build complex structures without aid. Your SAVE room was pretty bare, no offence.”

You puffed up your cheeks and huffed. It served its purpose!

“Heh. I know. But that kind of bareness isn’t Mister Judge’s thing. If my hunch is right, his sweet wife would code a management system and implant that into his SOUL. Maybe if I take a peek, I’d find what I need…”

A holographic panel appeared before him.

Wait, what?!

Since when does he have such leet powers?!

“Nah. This ain’t mine. It’s Mezil’s. It seems he handles all the construction in holo-consoles like these. Boy, Lady Lucidia sure knows her stuff.”

Wait wait wait wait wait wait hold on a moment there, Sans!

What exactly did he do to the Tsunderjudge?!

In the most casual manner ever, he answered: “I hijacked his powers.”

You dropped your jaw. Say what? When??

“When I stabbed him with this blade.” He showed you the red, gleaming metal. “Never wanted to kill him, y’know. I need his powers. And for that, he has to stay alive.”

“I own his SOUL now. By technicality. That includes his DT, the massive butterfly swarm, and whatever tools he had.”

Is he bloody serious?
Did Sans just cross the dirty hacker line?!

You’re definitely sure this is a thousand percent illegal!

Oh good lord... is there anything he can’t do?

“Stay awake, I guess? I don’t look like it, but I am on the verge of collapsing. There are only so many 2-hour sleep nights I can tolerate.”

Sans poked at the options.
He went to ‘Objects’ and flipped through the list by alphabet.

“Nice. All I need to do is modify these presets and we’ll have a good foundation to work from.”

A few more taps and a beanbag materialized out of pixelated bits. Block by block, the object built itself up into existence like some special effects movie.

You reached your hand out to touch it.
That thing feels just like a real beanbag in all its soft, cushiony glory.

“Oh this is godsend. Hey Frisk, you gotta see this. You can even spawn food!” Sans exclaimed. “Monster-friendly too! They figured out how to make these DT mockups safe for consumption.”

“Oh, let’s have some hot dogs, orange juice, and a bowl of potato chips. Oh and never forget ketchup. I’ll need a table for this. And… there.”

The table appeared.
The food appeared.
The drinks appeared.

What. In the world. Are you looking at? This is so surreal, you’re not sure if you’re dreaming.

“Welp…” said Sans. “That reminds me of one more important detail: you.”

He summoned out a pair of Gasterblasters.

You watched their aim turn away and towards the life-like replicas of your friends.

No.
No no no no no no no!!!

You let go of his hand and ran towards the dolls. Tried to grab them. Lift. Pull. Push them out of danger’s zone.

They’re too heavy. It turns out their weight was realistic too.

Sans’ aim stayed true to the end. His laser beams obliterated them one by one.

Asgore, Monster Kid and the ghost cousins were the first to go. He started off with those with the least connections in his life.

Alphys and Undyne, the two ngaah-crossed lovers followed right after. One was his childhood friend, the other a fellow nerdy science peer. You knew they were on good terms on the Surface. So why?!

You then watched him wreck his own replica without a flicker in his sockets. You remembered the bonfire, of how he burned every possession he could cram into that luggage case. Any hesitation about himself? Long gone.

What’s left were the figures of his beloved brother and queen. You spread your arms in a flimsy attempt to shield them.

Sans. Don’t do this.

That’s Mom.
That’s Papyrus.

Don’t they matter? Stop hurting himself, please!

Two Gasterblasters hovered over his head, waiting for their master’s command.

“…Nah.” Sans lowered his head. “They’re just dolls. I’ll meet the real deal soon enough.”

Two white laser beams zipped past your ears.
Everyone had turned to dust.

Desperate, you tried to scoop their leftover bits from the floor. You started to cry over the loss of your mementos.

It’s illogical. You don’t visit this place anymore. Yet, the thought of loss still hurts you.

“Sentimental, aren’t ya?”

Your sadness turned into anger. You got up, stamped your foot and yelled. Sans! Why the hell did he do that?!

“Remember the promise you made, Frisk?” said Sans. “If I solve your problems, you’ll never RESET again. And you’ll never return to the Underground either.”

“You don’t need those memories anymore.”

Sans pressed a button on the screen. A transparent dome raised from the ground and hovered right over your head.

Before you realised it, you’re trapped.

“Don’t worry kid. I’m not gonna leave you hungry.”

He generated a water cooler, more hotdogs, a table, a chair, and a bed. Plus a portable toilet stand just because he can.

All these amenities doesn’t change the fact that it’s a prison. A comfortable one, but still a ‘bad situation’ in your book.

“Maybe I went a bit overkill there. I mean, I doubt it’ll take more than few hours to fully charge up. But whatever, it’s a test.”

Sans plopped himself on the beanbag and started munching on the generated food. As he did so, he continued to play around the console panels.

So casual. As if he’s having one of his many breaks.


Blocks of stone spawned all around the edges of your little space. They stacked, climbed, and melded into a legit structure upon nothing more than a command.

“And done. Phew. It’s a waiting game now.”

The moment he wound down, his eyelids started to droop. “I’m gonna… take a nap… I’ll wake up just fine… don’t worry about me…”

That’s it. He fell asleep and snoring away. You can’t believe he’s napping in the middle of a crisis of his own creation.

The first thing you did was to pick up the chair and try to throw it at the walls of your prison.

If it’s glass, you can smash it!

Nope. Not a good idea. The chair bounced off the surface and almost hit you in the face. Turns out
that it’s some high-density plastic of sorts. The extra curve certainly didn’t help.

You tried to think of other means to escape. 
Nope. You’re stuck.

You decided that the best plan was just to take care of your health. Eat. Drink. Rest. Sans didn’t tie you up like the Gungnir.

Plus, if what he said was true, you won’t be stuck here for days on end. It’s only about an hour or two before his mysterious plans come to fruition.

A part of you doesn’t want know the results.

The clock’s ticking.

Rescue team, please hurry. For your sake and everyone else’s.

Chapter End Notes

The thematic echo to Chapter 1 on the actual anniversary is a complete coincidence here. Dang.
Rescue Efforts

Chapter Notes

I know I should have some notices. But I can't remember what I'm supposed to post here. Other than the fact that I'm almost late. And the fact that I need to research plumbing more...

Nonetheless, please enjoy this chapter! It's rather hard putting this together because I'm still on and off sickness. One moment okay, another moment not okay.

Oh! I want to say that you don't need my permission to draw fanart! Draw away! Tag me on 'sophtopus' on Tumblr if you have that. My only request is nothing Rule 34. Don't be afraid to ask for references too. I will try to supply you the necessary art (within my hobbyist art capabilities of course). It gives me an excuse to illustrate my work too.

Enjoy the chapter!

Beneath the Berendin Manor, deep in the Spire’s Record Rooms…

Beyond all the books, files, and digital storage was one chamber accessible only to those with the highest security clearance.

The Magi’s Chronograph towered seven floors high: a testament of the Seers’ cumulative knowledge of science, magic, and the cosmos.

Its form and complexity changed over the eras, but its purpose remained the same: to record, preserve, and manage the visions of a Seer.

Two of such Seers sat before a console, connected to the device via a visor. Papyrus’ job was to monitor a specific vision: the mass evacuation of Lemuria.

As of now, it’s a distant, faded playback of an event that might not happen: a mere possibility. When would it become a definite future? Only Papyrus had the instincts to sense this shift.

Meanwhile, he observed Frisk’s trial via a small sidescreen. Papyrus became the topic of the battle. Hearing others talk about him in such a manner… discomforted him more than the loops of chaos.

“Is this too much for you?” asked Lucidia.

“NO. MAYBE.” Papyrus tried to sound mature for her sake.

The experienced Seer knew better. “I apologize in my husband’s stead. Perhaps it would be better if you focus on Lemuria?”

“IT’S ALRIGHT. I HAVE TO KNOW.”

“I see…’
Papyrus told himself again and again that Mezil had to act scary for his job. It’s just another facet of this man. A dark one, but it doesn’t change the fact that he’s a good friend.

Still… his actions struck fear into Papyrus’ heart.

The youngster asked, “WERE ALL THE EXAMS THIS HARSH?”

“Depends.” Lucidia replied. “My husband is a fair man. He tailors the test according to the candidate’s personality and experience. With that said, Frisk is definitely on the severe end.”

They remained silent to focus on the Trial of the Crimson Hall again.

Frisk got on their feet. Avoided every blow.
Mezil raised the stakes by slicing apart the hall itself.

Then the man lifted the child up by the collar. In the midst of their struggle, Frisk kicked Mezil in the gut.

The small screen vanished. At that point… Papyrus felt his vision shift.

The sounds became crystal clear, down to the waves crashing against the docks. People sobbed. Panicked. Filled with fear as they fled from their homes.

The Sun’s scorching rays shone down on his bones. He could feel the humid heat in the air despite being a skeleton. It’s different compared to Hotland.

Was this the fabled ‘Summer’?

Papyrus now must trace back this reality to the ‘possibility’ that would bring about this horrible outcome.

Focus. Concentrate. Leap into the unknown. Run beyond the fog of doom.

When he told himself to do so, his sights distorted into a raw mess of red and black.

Faster. Further. Don’t stop. Reach the goal.

At the very end… Papyrus found his answer.

Underneath the shine of stained glass, humanity’s greatest warrior had vanquished The Vampire of Time.

It’s a classic stab through the heart. In doing so, a massive red bolt of lightning shattered the Magus’ existence.

Papyrus watched his future friend fall face first on the ground. A pool of blood spread beneath the corpse.

Mezil still had black hair back then.

With the Keys of Fate now in his hand, the Persona marched forth to conquer the world.

“Papyrus!”

He woke up to the concerned urgings of the Fairy Godmother - the Chronograph’s visor removed. He’s lying down on the polished ground.
It’s dark. The room’s all black except for the faint glow of Lucidia’s magic and the distant emergency lights.


“Oh? That means you managed to maintain your vision despite the power failure. Your natural endurance is quite a boon.”

The facility lost electricity right when Frisk did the kick. Papyrus pushed himself off the ground as soon as possible.

“LADY LUCIDIA, MISTER MAGUS IS IN DANGER! THIS BLACKOUT IS THE START OF A WHOLE LOT OF BADNESS!!!”

“Huh?”

“I APOLOGIZE FOR THE AWKWARD, BUT THIS IS THE FASTEST WAY.”

The sense of urgency prompted Papyrus to sweep Lucidia off the ground, princess style.

Papyrus could feel his Eye shine involuntarily. It’s feeding him information for the best escape, except he’s not familiar with the term.

“WHERE’S THIS THING CALLED ‘THE FIRE EXIT’?”

Lucidia’s sockets widened. “East side, up ahead. Follow my magic and we’ll arrive there.”

Papyrus followed her guidance. Used a bit of telekinesis to push open the door.

Choking scents of acrid smoke filled the air: it’s a telltale sign of a fire. The boom of an explosion echoed throughout the structure. Papyrus felt the grounds and walls quiver.

Lucidia closed her eyes, drawing upon her years of experience. “Papyrus, we are in a dire situation. Gungnir has successfully infiltrated the facility. The lack of power suggests that electrical faults are the cause of this blaze. Sabotage of the water supply for the sprinklers is also a hundred percent guaranteed.”

“If we don’t extinguish the fire, the entire Spire may collapse from structural failure. We’re fitted with proper fireproofing supports but… the enemy has a long history of cunning exploits. I must assume the worst.”

A grim situation indeed. Papyrus frowned. “I CERTAINLY HOPE YOU HAVE AN EMERGENCY FOR AN EMERGENCY.”

“There is one,” said Lucidia. “My home has an evacuation system connected to a backup generator, but it will mean abandoning the rest of The Spire. Once I activate the clause, the core components of the Chronograph will detach from the main building and take flight along with the Berendin Manor. Anyone who’s stranded on the floors farthest from us will be left behind. Since time is short, we must ‘prioritize’.”
“WHY?! WE CAN’T JUST LEAVE EVERYONE! WHAT ABOUT MISTER MAGUS? MISS AUNT?? FRISK???” he exclaimed. Naive he may be, but Lucidia’s manner of speech made the point as clear as day.

The woman tensed in his grip. Her kind heart didn’t want such an outcome either. “Grandpa, the Grandmaster, is in the manor right now. He’s the heart of the Magus Association. If his continued existence turns from true to false, the chances of recovery will be almost nil.”

“As for those in the Crimson Hall: they’re safe. I can reconstruct a new Spirit Gate elsewhere.”

“…But I will not make the evacuation call yet,” said Lucidia. “You have the gift of prophecy. If you see a possibility to save our current establishment, please show us the way.”

Anxiety and fear weighed down on Papyrus’ shoulders. The lives of hundreds -- if not millions down the road -- now rest on his decisions.

Who knows how many were cornered by the flames, slowly dying of a cruel and painful death?

How many more would he condemn to such a fate if he wasn’t competent enough?

What if he made the worst decision of all and contributed to the fall of the Magi?

WHAT IF I FAIL THIS?

That was his thought.

NO.

I WILL FEAR, BUT I WILL NOT YIELD. BE BRAVE!

Papyrus put all his power into his Eye: to search for the golden path where the most lives could be saved. All his training points to times like these.

To his surprise, he did not see a cunning plan executed by his solo handsome self.

He instead witnessed the arrival of an unlikely team. A hot pink robot with jet wings flew towards The Spire with a car over his head. The strongest fish and the calmest fire occupied the front seats.

Papyrus squealed out of delight.

“Pardon me?” Lucidia exclaimed, perplexed by the positivity.

“I HAVE FRIENDS!!!” he yelled with utmost hope. “WE CAN SAVE THE PEOPLE AND THIS FANCY BUILDING AT THE SAME TIME!”

“I see. You said, friends? Which friends?”

“THE STRONGEST OF COURSE!!”

* * *

Undyne peeked out of her window. Locked traffic meant no ambulance or firetrucks could answer
the call for help. Without flight, they’re about as stuck as everyone else.

Meanwhile, fire threatened to become a permanent resident of the Magus Association headquarters. It’s a scene a little too close to home.

She said, “The next time someone tells me anime isn’t real, I’m gonna punch them in the face.”

“…I hope you meant that figuratively…” Grillby replied.

“At this rate, I don’t know. Reality is imitating fiction a bit TOO much.”

An explosion erupted from one of higher floors. The boom was much louder than Undyne ever expected.

“Like now.” She cringed.

Mettaton chose to land at the main entrance of the headquarters. The humans vacated from that spot. They weren’t sure if they could withstand the full blast of those pink magical jet streams.

He placed down the car. Undyne and Grillby hopped out of their seats to assess the situation.

Both sides stared at each other, clearly uncomfortable.

Nudging her elbow at the glambot, she said: “C’mon Mettaton, suss them or something.”

“Oh. I-I’m right on it.” He cleared his throat and straightened his back. “Hello darlings! The fabulous Mettaton and his team of wonderful beauties are here to help. May one of you precious folks explain us the situation?”

The surprised crowd stirred. The more hysterical ones tossed themselves at the monsters’ feet, begging for their legendary powers. Those had to be wrestled away by the calmer members of the Magi.

“Mister Mettaton! You’re really going to help us?!”
“Can he really do that?”
“Is that a cool battle body upgrade?!”
“The Suplex Queen is here too!”
“My friend’s still trapped inside!”
“Save us!”

A woman in a neat black suit approached them. Undyne recognized her as a member of Frisk’s bodyguard squad.

The lady explained, “Monsters of Ebott, someone sabotaged both our power and water supply. This includes the backup system.”

Talk about a crisis. Undyne asked, “Any casualties?”

“Unknown at the moment. We’re fortunate that it’s a Sunday, meaning most of the staff is absent. But many boarding students and visitors remain on the premises.”

“All the active Crafters had gone ahead to search for the sabotage point. Healers are trying to treat the injured here while we wait for air support.”

She guessed that’s Magus talk for ‘technicians’ and ‘medics’ respectively.
Undyne looked at towering building before her.

There were at least thirty floors on fire, if not more.

The traffic gridlock made it all the worse. Nobody could get in to fight the flames. Nobody could get out for help.

It'll take a while for helicopters to arrive. They may bring some fire-fighting equipment or carry off the casualties, but then what? By then the flames would spread to goodness knows where.

Her mind raced to think of a plan. Be damned if she’ll just sit around as a helpless gasping fish.

“Mettaton, take out all your Minis and call Alphys! Help the tech dudes fix their damn water!”

“Roger that, darling~” The pink glambot summoned his entire stock of Mini Mettantons. He passed three of them into Undyne’s arms.

“Huh?” she blurted.

“Sweetheart, what’s with the confused face? Communications shine best in a crisis.”

In her heart, Undyne thought: Of course I know that. Didn’t expect that amount of common sense coming from you, though.

After a quick wink, Mettaton asked for directions to assist the tech team. He jet-setted to the west side of the Spire’s grounds.

She turned her attention back to the guard and said: “We’re gonna go in and save the kids. I’ll clear the debris and try to extinguish the fires with my spears. Anyone who wants to join can follow me.”

The woman nodded. “Agreed.”

For some reason, Grillby ditched his armour. He just tossed them into the car’s back seat posthaste. He’s now in his basic pants and tunic.

Then he removed his glasses and stored them in the dashboard drawer.

It’s ultra serious business.

“…Stay here…” The ex-Captain then ran straight towards the lobby. Roaring flames spewed through the broken windows and thick black smoke obscured its intensity.

He’ll be fine, right? He’s a man made out of fire after all. But why did he ask them to stay?

The inferno began to pull inwards. It didn’t travel, nor retreated voluntarily. The flames clawed, kicked, and screamed against their will as they’re dragged away by force.

A very poetic, anime-like description… and also the truth. In a few seconds, an entire section of the lobby was freed of destructive combustion.

She doesn’t recognize the person who just emerged from the building.

“…Stand back…”

In one swift uppercut, Grillby released all his captured flames into the open air. Fire without fuel will vanish in mere seconds.
Everyone gawked in awe.

“…Please hurry….” he said. “…The flames will spread again… if we delay too long…”

It took Undyne three full seconds to grasp reality.

“Grillbz,” she asked, “What the fuck are you?”

He blinked twice. “…Just a simple bartender…”

“Yeah right, Sir ex-Captain.”

He sure as hell doesn’t fit the image behind a grease establishment.

* * *

When Grillby was a young flame, he didn’t know much about the war days. Whatever he learned about the monster’s past came from the school syllabus.

Monsters, weak.
Humans, strong.
They lost the war and were thus sealed under the mountain.

His elders taught him the art of sparring and their kind’s magic. But that’s just about it.

Gaster then offered his family’s private library. They’re filled with ‘controversial’ knowledge that’s best kept out of monster eyes. The Seer’s parents gathered, recorded, and preserved knowledge exclusive to humans: from their military tactics to their politics, to the testimonies of adventurers who once fought monsters.

It was only then that Grillby gained a glimpse into a different side of history: one where Monsters were feared far and wide for feats that the magic-folk considered mundane.

The ancients sang ballads of terror about the ‘Fire Eaters’, elementals who consumed infernos to bolster their strength.

Some the details were rather hyperbolic. But, in application… they were right.

Grillby heard cries for help behind a corridor. It’s possible that all exit paths had collapsed, threatening to bake the victims alive.

He reached his hand out towards the rubble, tearing the flames away from their source. It left behind embers that were subsequently quenched by Undyne’s water spears.

The residual heat would bog down anyone in metal armour. Undyne had long ditched them for some more fire-appropriate gear like a gas mask and gloves.

That fish lady had cleared the way at record speeds. Smashed the bigger pieces, tossed aside the smaller ones, and kicked away whatever’s left behind.

...Impressive…
For someone who really, really dislikes heat, she’s holding her own quite well.

...So Determined...

...Is this… because of Gaster’s training?...

A huge puff of smoke then burped out from their latest conquest.

She coughed twice. “God, that’s nasty even with the mask.”

“…Agreed… …Let us carry on…”

The man of fire led the charge. He wrestled and captured every one of those untamed forces of destruction.

They don’t belong here. Don’t live here. They should stay within the confines of heaters and the stove.

Nowhere else.

As with all captures, there will be resistance. Every flame imprisoned threatened to escape. This was of no issue in the battlefield where their untamed wanton demanded exploitation.

In a rescue situation however… Grillby hated to imagine the aftermath of an uncontrolled explosion. He could worsen the crisis, or inflict severe burns on anyone nearby.

He paused to witness the results of his efforts. Undyne and the human volunteers directed the evacuees to a safe place without a problem.

For now, he’s fortunate enough to stand near a window. He punched the glass. The erupting blast smashed it without issue.

Grillby sighed in relief. He’s in the clear now. But, what about the times when he’ll have no convenient outlets?

To make matters worse, it had been ages since he needed to call upon such intensive use of magic.

...I’m out of practice...

...I don’t know… how long I can keep this up...

...Determination… only goes so far...

“You okay, Grillbz?”

It’s Undyne. She’s giving him a concerned look.

Grillby wanted to answer that he’s fine, but a slight wobble let the cat out of the bag.

“Dude, how much does that magic tax you anyway?! You’re pushing yourself too hard!”

“…There’s no time for breaks…”

The haunted image of that burnt child refused to let him rest. He wouldn’t want anyone in this building to suffer the same fate.

“Yeah, but if you K.O. now I’ll have even MORE problems!”
Undyne does have a point. If he collapses now, he would have to join the evacuees.

So she suggested: “I can extinguish the smaller ones with my spears. You just concentrate on the big stuff. Okay?”

“…Alright…”

The two pressed on.

* * *

The Princess of the Sky did not fly because she was light. Rather, she manipulated the laws of physics to her will.


What she lacked in power was backed up with knowledge.

Lucidia pushed the combination of her magic to smother the flames. She either pulled combustible gasses away from the fuel, or forced a bubble of limited air around them. Whichever method used, it ended in deoxygenation.

In addition to that, she had to push away smoke and excessive heat. She now understood why Papyrus insisted on carrying her on the way. It would take too much multitasking processes to move and focus on her magic at the same time.

The young Seer used his Blasters to destroy any fallen debris that got in the way. Thanks to his Orange Eye, they could prioritize on saving lives, skipping empty offices and other such non-vital areas.

If they found anyone, Lucidia would plant a gram that allowed humans to see one of her secret pathways and use them once. She’d then direct them to the nearest fire exit.

Dear departed Uncle James was an architect: he’d think ahead about fire hazard.

Papyrus heard the cries of help from a broom closet. He tried to force the locks with telekinesis, but it failed.

“Oh NO! THE DOOR JAMMED!”

He’s about to fire his blasters, but Lucidia stopped him. “Save your strength, young one. I can handle this.”

The lock mechanisms had expanded from the heat, making them jam against each other. The only way get get this thing open on short notice was to crush the root of the problem.

Lucidia slipped in a small orb of condensed gravity magic into the keyhole. The interiors immediately collapsed under its sheer weight, popping and snapping until the rest of the door was freed of its restraints.

The four humans inside were stunned to see the appearance of two skeletons.
“AAAH!! Skeletons!!”
“Are we dead…?”

“OF COURSE NOT!” Papyrus answered with an irritated frown. “WE DIDN’T COME ALL THE WAY HERE TO PLAY DEATH.”

Lucidia cleared her throat to catch their attention. “Please allow me to send you through a portal to safety.”

The humans recognized her voice. “Lady Lucidia?”

“Is that how you look like under the mask? It’s not very different. Which is good! You’re very pretty.”

The compliments made her blush purple. “Thank you, but this is not the time for that.”

She planted the Gram and sent them on their way.

“Run to the fire exit and look for a distortion on the wall to your right. Whatever you do, enter it in a line. Hurry.”

The humans thanked her and rushed to the nearest exit.

Another explosion went off over their heads. Pieces of the ceiling collapsed around them. Fortunately for Lucidia, Papyrus had mastered the footwork of dodging.

“The fire is eating through the outer layers…”

By now, she had noticed a pattern. “I believe the Gungnir have rigged specific locations with combustibles. They will explode when touched by flames, and thus perpetuating the destruction. Should we remove them to prevent further harm?”

Papyrus checked the future. He then frowned. “IT’S A GOOD PLAN, BUT I’M AFRAID THAT WAS THE LAST ONE. THEY RAN OUT OF MATERIALS.”

Cheering up a bit, he added: “AT LEAST WE DON’T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THOSE DANGEROUS TIMED JAPES FOR A WHILE.”

Contrary to his lighthearted metaphors, there’s a grim severity on Papyrus’ face.

“I’m worried about Cenna,” said Lucidia. “It’s possible she met The Seraphim. Survival: uncertain.”

“MISS AUNT IS FINE. SHE’S A SURVIVOR.”

“…LADY LUCIDIA, IS THERE A SHORTCUT TO THE LIBRARY?”

It’s dangerous to use static portals in a crisis. They could be blocked by debris, or the user might emerge right in the middle of a collapse. It’s an unknown passage.

But if Papyrus asked for it, Lucidia understood that getting there was of paramount importance.

“Follow my lead.”

Lucidia guided them through the Library’s shortcut. When the two Seers emerged from the exit, they found themselves standing on the fourth floor of a half-burnt library.
Smoke lingered in the air, but there was no fire. Someone had already extinguished the place.

Why’d they come here?

It’s a sad sight. Annals of history, reduced to ashen remnants.

Papyrus placed Lucidia back down on her feet. He got right to the task of scouring the toppled bookcases. He’s looking for something… or someone.

Lucidia heard the faint cries of struggle coming from the corner. He must have heard it too.

There, she spotted a boy with headphones. That’s Yorik, one of the boarding school students. A Blue Major from one of the main Vanquisher families. His chest shone bright, trying his darnedest to use his magic alleviate the weight of one of the fallen bookshelves. The hot, charred debris complicated his efforts.

Green light shone between the gaps. It’s the trait of kindness, the basis of many shields.

Someone’s under the rubble.

“HEADPHONE HUMAN!!” Papyrus called out. A pretty obvious nickname in hindsight. “DO NOT FEAR. THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS HERE. YOU ARE SAFE NOW!”

Yorik paused his efforts. “H-hey! You’re that skeleton from Ebott! Thank God!”

Papyrus wasted no time to help him with the load. “WHEN I SAY ‘GO’, WE LIFT THE HEAVY TOGETHER! OKAY?”

“Yes sir!”

On cue, the two’s combined might managed to flip the bookshelf aside.

The debris collapsed, but they rolled off the curves of a magical shield. Lucidia levitated the pieces and placed them aside.

Papyrus gasped at another familiar face. “GLASSES HUMAN! SO IT’S YOU!”

The girl chuckled despite the situation. She had two little eight-year olds under her wing. The small ones must have gotten lost in the chaos.

“Her name is Ines, dear.” Lucidia explained. “The young man you helped here is Yorik.”

“INES AND YORIK? THOSE ARE VERY COOL NAMES FOR TWO AWESOME HUMANS!”

Papyrus gave both of them a huge congratulatory hug.

“Great Papyrus,” Ines asked, “Is there anyone else trapped in the library?”

He used a few seconds to check with his Eye.

“AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, YOU HAD FOUND THE LAST ONES ON THIS FLOOR. CONGRATULATIONS! THAT’S VERY BRAVE OF YOU TWO TO SAVE OTHERS.”

“SEE? I KNEW YOU’RE GREAT! THE RESULTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES! IF YOU DIDN’T BELIEVE IN YOUR COOLNESS, MANY SMALL AND NOT-SO-SMALL
HUMANS WOULD HAVE VISITED GOD PREMATURELY.”

Apparently he had become quite a motivational figure as of late. Lucidia smiled at the growing confidence of the students.

“We’ll take it from here,” Lucidia said, “You’ve done an excellent job. Now, please get to safety.”

After giving the kids the same instructions of escape, the duo hurried back to the main airwell, arriving there just in time to witness the results of the mystery rescue team. Members of the education faculty hurried out of the mayhem: the able-bodied carrying the injured.

She noted that some of them suffered minor burns. Others struggled with cuts, bruises. Otherwise, they appeared fine.

“Grillby!!!”

Speaker identified: Captain Undyne.

She’s talking to… Grillbz Grilenn?

He’s the ex-Captain of the Royal Guard and owner of his own establishment.

Lucidia understood why Captain Undyne would be here, but the retiree?

They hurried to the scene. It’s not a good situation. Ten unconscious victims balanced on Undyne’s shoulders, yet she’s trying to go back to get one more.

That person was none other than Grillby. He’s on all fours. Trembling. Rippling. The untamed fires crawled out from his being, threatening to lash out in all directions.

He urged Undyne to flee. “…Save them… Go!…”

A section of the ceiling collapsed next to the downed man.

“But you’re gonna blow up like a fucking reactor!”

It turns out that this supposed simple bartender was a member of the Fire Eater tribe. The few who evaded death and capture eventually migrated to the Southern Hemisphere. Understandable, since the islands of Lemuria were ill-suited for their kind.

He had absorbed far beyond his limit. How much? Lucidia does not know. Should nothing be done, the sudden blast will cause a cave-in.

What should she do?

Where should she go?

While she pondered, Papyrus called out for Undyne: “ESCAPE WITH THE HUMANS!”

The fish captain turned around in surprise. “Paps?! You’re okay?! Who’s that skelly lady?”

“NO TIME TO EXPLAIN.” He replied, “GRILLBY WILL BE OKAY IN HER HANDS.”

Lucidia didn’t expect to be thrown straight into an active role. Making quick decisions in the middle of a crisis was not her thing: she specializes in the rumination of information. Everything she had done so far were well-prepared applications of theory.
The puzzled gaze from Undyne further added discomfort.

“Papyrus?” said Lucidia, “I think you may need to reconsider.”

“I BELIEVE IN YOU!” so the youngster insisted. “AFTER ALL, YOU ARE THE FAIRY GODMOTHER OF THE SKY!”

The sky: the blue yonder above with free space all around.

“Understood.”

_I can do this. If little Ines can give it her all, then I can too. I know my powers._

In one hop, Lucidia propelled herself towards the man of fire. Eyes activated, skull cranes summoned, she’s prepared to execute a move she once used on a certain pun-cracking skeleton.

She turned Grillby’s SOUL blue and lifted him off the ground. Encasing a Fire Eater in a zero gravity bubble had a history of complications which she would rather avoid.

“Can you count to three?” she asked.

He nodded. That’s his absolute limit.

One. She flew straight up into the portal that led to the hidden library. There were no safe direct escapes to the sky from her current location.

Two. One dash between the bookshelves later, the coldness of the stratosphere blasted against her face. It’s the realm where the sky and land had a clear parting.

Three. She let Grillby go. Lucidia pulled her crane skulls close. With her tools in formation, she conjured a force-deflecting shield.

For a moment, she heard nothing. Felt nothing: her consciousness engulfed by the luminosity of rampant combustion.

The fires died a second later. Grillby started to fall straight into the cityscape beneath him. He screamed, like anyone else in this situation would.

She sent her cannons down to catch the poor man. They turned his essence purple and slowed him down to a gentle descent.

It would have been a direct dejavu if it wasn’t a very different person.

_Estimated absorption: 2000%
The average best records of Fire Eaters can hold up to a 1000% of their physical capacity. The numbers are not adding up. Certainly, he pushed beyond his limit, but that much?!_

_It’s not possible unless he’s…_

The woman of the sky floated down to Grillby’s side. Bowed a curtsy in full respect.

“I am Lady Lucidia,” she introduced herself. “Thank you for rescuing our people.”

He tried to say something, but he lacked the volume to convey his words. In the end he just returned a nod.
It won’t do to discuss matters in such a windy atmosphere. So, Lucidia guided Grillby back to solid ground. She chose the koi lake: far away from the public eye.

From there, they gazed up on the monument that she called home. Despite all their best efforts… the destruction continued unchecked. Even if the flames weren’t hot enough to melt the supports, they continued to climb upwards to the literal heart of their organization.

*Grandpa… We’ve failed.*

The retired knight beside her must have thought of the same. He leaned against a lamp pole, in despair and defeat.

“…I wasn’t strong enough…” he confessed.

“Sir Grillenn,” said Lucidia. “It’s unreasonable to take on a task of this magnitude alone. You had already saved the student body and more. Please do not feel dejected.”

When all seemed bleak…

…A groovy tune started to play. The source came from Grillby’s pocket.

“…Oh… that’s Mettaton…”

He took out a miniature version of the celebrity, box-form. They serve as communication and recording devices outside of battle.

The Mini started airing a broadcast.

*“Beauties and Gentlebeauties~~~ Mettaton live on the channel! Your dashing celebrity brings you good news: the wonderful combined brains of our Crafter fellows -- with the remote assistance of the brilliant Doctor Alphys -- have almost completed the repairs! Motivated by yours truly, of course~”*

Lucidia thought that was a needlessly eloquent and self-glorifying way to deliver the good news, but it was welcomed nonetheless.

*“Oh look, backup has arrived. Kiss that fire goodbye, folks!”*

The Mini Mettaton then transmitted a yelp of pain. Sparks of magical electricity zapped the tiny floating calculator.

Sounds of scuffle followed.

*“W-what?! Put that knife down! Oh no darling, I’m not going to let you do that--”*

The transmission ended in a static and the Mini fell flat on the ground.

“It’s a Gungnir ambush!” Lucidia gasped. “If the Crafters let their guard down, it means the enemy must wear our uniform. That explains the sabotage…”

“If Mister Mettaton is fortunate, they’re members of the unskilled lower echelon. I dare not consider the alternative.”

The mighty roars of Undyne’s trademark battlecry flew over her head. Papyrus had turned someone’s mundane motorbike into a hovercraft of science fiction. Sitting at the back was none other than the fishy Captain.
They too must have heard the distressing twist of events. Zoomed away to solve the problem. Just like that, they’re gone.

Grillby then politely asked: “…Lady Lucidia… are you a target…?”

He raised a good point. She’s outside of the building, far away from the protective confines of her household. “Possible, Sir Grillenn. I am, without a doubt, one of the most valued targets of our enemies. They will take any opportunity to assassinate me.”

“…Then being out in the open is dangerous…” He said.

“…Please allow me… to protect you…”
Chapter Notes

A little late today due to complicated sequence of plot.

I won't be around this weekend due to family events (17th to 19th Dec). It's likely that we'll have a delay in releases. Even if I can write 104 fast, I'm not sure if my editor can edit in time.

In the meantime, enjoy this.

When Undyne got to the Surface, she didn't think that she’d ever have to worry about Mettaton’s well being.

Yet, he’d managed to get himself caught in a violent ambush.

His last signal came from the main water regulation building. The Spire alone required an engineering feat to get anything done. It’s the downside of massive structures.

Papyrus landed the bike at the side of the entrance. It’s wide open. No lights due to lack of electricity.

The duo of best friends hopped off and pressed their backs against the wall. Peeked around the corner just in case the assailants came equipped with guns.

She’s not sure if she’s smelling rust or blood in the air. Waterworks and iron don’t mix, plus she had no idea what humans use for their plumbing nowadays.

“See anything, Paps?” she whispered.

He shook his head.

“Can’t you use your new awesome powers to find out?”

“IT’S TOO DARK,” he explained. “AND I DON’T KNOW THE LAYOUT. EVEN IF I COULD FIND THE RIGHT PATH, IT’S POINTLESS IF I CAN’T PERFORM A RECOGNIZE.”

So Seers have limitations after all. It’s easy to forget that with their notorious near-perfect defenses.

From what Undyne understood, guns reign supreme on the Surface. They can deal massive damage from a great distance. If those things can kill an apparently ‘superior’ human in a single hit, then…

“Try to see if they have guns.”

The Seer peered through the timelines for her request. Midway, he winced from the recoil and buried his face in those bright red mittens.

Alarmed, she grabbed his shoulder. “Whoa, hey! You ok?”
“OWIE…” Papyrus muttered. “I’M FINE. ABOUT YOUR QUESTION, THEY HAVE NO GUNS. THAT’S BECAUSE SOMEONE DESTROYED ALL THEIR WEAPONS.”

“Can you identify this person?”

“I CAN’T. ALL I SEE ARE WEIRD GLITCH SQUARES. IT HURTS TO FOCUS ON THE SCENE TOO. ONE MOMENT I SEE MANY CRATES OF BADNESS. THE NEXT, THEY’RE GONE. ONLY GASOLINE REMAINED.”

“I see…” Undyne had a nagging feeling that she knew this mystery person. After all, ‘he’ would be the only one capable of sabotaging the saboteur.

But she kept those thoughts to herself. That man was the least of her concerns right now. When this whole nonsense is done and over with, she made a point to kick him on the chin. Or something to that effect.

It’s still silent. One glance at the burning Spire reminded her of the severity of her mission. “We gotta go in. Time’s running out.”

The two traversed the facility’s interiors in silent caution. Networks of pipes, tanks, and assorted engineering surrounded all around. The Surface’s engineering may not be as high-tech as The Core, but their sheer massiveness never failed to inspire awe.

Down, down, down the stairs they descended. Much of this piping situated underground.

Undyne heard a snap. The duo stood back to back, each conjuring their trademark weapon of choice.

A teenager with a glowstick emerged around the corner, armed with a baseball bat.

*Hey, they’re just kids!*

More snaps echoed in the air.

More lights illuminated the darkness.

*We’re getting surrounded. But if they’re just normal teen scrubs, then there shouldn’t be a problem.*

One of the teenagers stirred a strange sense of familiarity. Strong. But she couldn’t pinpoint which one.

The sole adult approached them with a hostage. Judging from her uniform, she’s a fellow techie.

Now this woman had her own colleague on knifepoint. The cold, sharp edge threatened to cut into the victim’s arteries.

*Damn. Deep infiltration. This is so fucking anime, I regret wishing it’s real.*

Undyne scowled. “Let him go! If you wanna fight us, do it like a real warrior! Isn’t that all part of your schtick?”

The woman huffed. “What do you know, monster? Creatures like you don’t deserve the honour.”

“Heh, dishing out the big talk already?” The fish raised her spear and narrowed her good eye. “I’m so gonna prove you wrong.”

*I have two options. Either I strike the hostage’s SOUL to give them a shield, or stab the knife hand.*
Maybe if I use my DT-imbued spearhead, I can make the spear teleport like Frisk? Or mess with their perception of time so they can’t react correctly? Something like Sans.

Well shit. I wish I knew what exactly my new magic could do.

“UNDYNE, DON’T.”

Papyrus’ warning snapped her out of the tactical contemplation. “Huh?!”

“IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO HER, ALL THE OTHER HOSTAGES WILL DIE.”

“You’re telling me there’s more?!”

The skeleton nodded. “YES. ALSO, WE’RE BEING RECORDED LIVE BY THE NOT-SO-SMALL HUMANS AROUND US.”

A quick glance to the side confirmed Papyrus’ report. Undyne realised that she’s too focused on the leader to notice the phone cameras.

Cenna had warned monsterkind about Gungnir’s aptitude in social media. They had experts who knew how to promote their cause, with or without ‘clever editing’.

The Gungnir woman frowned. “Hey you -- the monster behind that fish lady -- put your hands behind your head and show yourself. Come out. Slowly.”

Papyrus dismissed his weapon and surrendered to the demands.

Fear struck the heart of the criminal when she saw his glowing eye. It took her a few seconds to regain her composure. But even so, she’s breaking into a cold sweat.

“You’re a ‘Coloured One’,” she said. “Why didn’t you try to kill me, Lichborn?”

Huh, interesting. Seems like Paps’ kind has a notorious reputation on the Surface…

Papyrus replied, “I HAVE NO BUSINESS IN GIVING THE GRIM REAPER OVERTIME. ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU LET THE WATER FLOW.”

The other smirked. Grew a little more confident. “Are you a moron or something? We want the heretics to burn. Why should I let you guys fix the system?”

“DON’T YOU CARE ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS?”

It triggered a reaction.

He continued: “I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, GUARANTEE THAT NO ONE WILL DIE IF YOU LET US REPAIR THE WATER. OTHERWISE YOUR FELLOWS ARE ON THEIR WAY TO A VERY BAD TIME.”

“You’re threatening me?!”

“NO. MY PERSON CANNOT CHANGE THIS FUTURE. IT’S UP TO YOU TO SAVE THEM.”

Undyne realised that there were more Gungnir in The Spire. Why? What compelled them to brave the heat?
Was it The Crimson Hall? Will they try to break in there? Or do the Magi have another backup plan in case they can’t extinguish the flames in time?

The warrior laughed at Papyrus’ sincerity. ‘God, I can’t believe I’m so scared over this naive idiot. In case you’re too stupid to understand how the world works, we’re here to avenge the death of our master. So what if we die trying? It’s now or never!”

“Dayton!” she called out to one of the teenagers. “The Coloured One is all yours. If he tries to do anything funny, kill him.”

That boy drew out his weapon and walked over to Papyrus. It’s a strange yet familiar blade, nothing like Frisk’s straight edge.

Hey. Isn’t that the same design as Persona’s hooked dagger?

He then kicked Papyrus behind the knees to get him on the ground. He latched the curved end on the thin, skeletal neck: ready to reap his skull like a stalk of reed.

That made Undyne’s blood boil. Nobody -- and she meant nobody -- had the permission to hurt Papyrus. She yearned to rain down a hail of spears. Right now, show no mercy, just as…

Wait. This weird feeling. It’s… on this kid?

It’s as though she had met this boy before. Somewhere. Someplace. Accompanied by this exact same rage, filled with murderous intent.

Papyrus’ tearful pleas snapped her out of it. “PLEASE. DON’T FIGHT.”

Now the Gungnir had one more hostage. Twice the risk, twice the fatality. The moment she tries to retaliate, the captors will start the massacre.

In the end, she surrendered too.

Undyne dismissed her spear and placed her hands behind her head.

Relieved, the Gungnir woman instructed her underlings to tie them up with pilfered cables. Handed over the poor, defenseless Crafter to one of the other kids.

“I see you’re smarter than your partner,” she said, “Why don’t you spend some time teaching him the hard knocks of life?”

Undyne scowled.

You arrogant scum! If it weren’t for the fucking hostage situation, I’d rip right through these lame binds!

It’s the truth. Even though her hands were tied, she could still conjure all the sharp spears she needed to cut free.

Papyrus remained silent throughout the walk of shame. If he had nothing to say, she doesn’t either.

The Gungnir threw the two into a makeshift prison: the toilet area.

The other Crafters were there too, unconscious with their limbs bound.

As for the robot celebrity named Mettaton… his limp, lifeless shell lay at the furthest end of the
smelly facility.

Once they’re inside, the kids proceeded to apply the universal containment treatment on their two new victims. Meanwhile, they knocked the unfortunate Crafter out cold.

The leader of the team signalled the resident guardian to follow her. Undyne bet it’s some debriefing.

She took the opportunity to check up on Papyrus. “You alright?”

The skeleton pushed himself up against the wall. Curled up. Downcast. He couldn’t maintain his bravado anymore.

“…DID I MESS UP?” asked Papyrus. He’s trying his best to keep his voice low.

Undyne knew that she had to be gentle now. “What do you mean?”

“WE’RE CAUGHT. TRAPPED. SO MANY ARE DEPENDING ON ME TO BE THE HERO. AND YET…”

“Paps, you know these puny cables are nothing to the both of us? They don’t bind our magic at all.”

“YES. BUT IF WE ESCAPE, OTHERS WILL DIE.”

The greatest lock: lives. Real lives with real families waiting for them at home.

Undyne bit her lower lip.

“What do you think Sans would have done in this situation?”

That man. She sighed at the mention of his name. “I think he would be a lot more cautious than us. Maybe save the hostages first.”

“WOULD HE KILL? PLEASE BE HONEST WITH ME.”

Undyne wanted to avoid that question. But, she can’t. Not with that sorry face.

After a reluctant sigh, she answered: “Yeah. He won’t show any mercy against the pros. That guard? Dead. That arrogant bitch? Dead. If she had tried to pull that hostage trick on him, he’d stab her through the skull.”

“All the scrub kids? He’d make them wish they’re dead. That ‘Karma’ poison is no joke. Even if they live, they’ll be traumatized for life.”

“I THOUGHT SO TOO,” Papyrus confessed. “I DON’T WANT TO HURT ANY OF THEM. NOR DO I WANT MY BROTHER TO HAVE TO HURT THEM. EVEN IF THEY HAVE HURT ME. I KNOW IT SOUNDS SO STUPID BUT…”

She shook her head. “Papyrus. Listen to me. You’re not stupid. If any of these humans die, good or bad, the media will make a huge fucking deal out of it.”

Pause. “That sounds super familiar for some reason….”

The Seer then explained: “THAT’S BECAUSE YOU EXPERIENCED THE BAD FIRST HAND. THE BOY WHO HAD HIS KNIFE ON ME, HE DIED TO YOUR SPEARS ONCE.”

That weird feeling. It’s that ‘dejavu’ Sans kept talking about. Resulted in the worst possible outcome
“Holy shit!” Undyne exclaimed. “What happened after that?! Wait wait wait, are we even supposed to be talking about that stuff in the open? They could hear us.”

“OH. RIGHT.”

“Either way, you saved my butt by stopping me.”

“BUT…” He lowered his skull further. “WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?”

The Gungnir gang returned before Undyne could make her suggestion. Did the annoying intimidation routine right away.

“No talking!” The woman barked. “Don’t think you can get outta here. If you try…” She drew a finger across the neck.

*I can’t believe the leader of this operation is a brat in an adult’s body. Sheesh. Why are we even having trouble with them in the first place?*

Then her phone rang. For some reason, whatever arrogant spunk she had flew right out of the window, then and there.

“It’s the leader,” she said. “You there, get the comm systems up! Dayton, watch the Coloured One! Don’t fucking let him out of your sight. If he’s not a retard, we would have been dead!”

They dragged the monster-specific hostages and lined them up on the front. Undyne growled and snarled, displeased of this maltreatment.

“Hurry you dumbasses! Don’t make him wait!” Anxiety levels, off the roof. She’s taking it out on the underlings.

*Okay. So she has a superior. Wonder what kind of a guy he is…*

Transmission, on. The other side did not show his face.

*“Sister. Updates on the water facility, if you please.”*

Undyne raised her brows. Every word this man spoke exuded authority. Very professional, calm, and far above the thugs that surrounded her. That deep voice cemented authority. It brought up the image of King Asgore minus the warmth.

“I’ve captured the Crafters who tried to repair the key systems, brother. And we got these hero-wannabes too.”

*“Show me.”*

They focused the camera on the monster captives.

*“Mettaton the celebrity? And isn’t that Undyne the ‘Suplex Queen’? These are champions from under the mountain.”*

“Champions? If these are their champs, their standard is so low.” She nudged Papyrus with a boot. “Like this Coloured One, he’s a bonafide fool--”

The boss barked: “*Do NOT take any of bone lightly!*”
All the Gungnir almost had a heart attack.

“Do you even know his colours?”

“He has an orange Eye.” The woman answered.

“And what else?”

She couldn’t answer.

“You’re the true fool here, sister. That negligence may cost you your life.”

“Show vigilant caution around a Coloured One at all times. The same goes for all the other champions. Should you continue to underestimate them, I will leave you to your fate. Understand?”

“…Yes sir.”

The transmission was interrupted by a different call. Whatever language used over the line, it’s foreign. Undyne couldn’t understand a word.

When that’s done, the boss issued an order to all his available men. “We’ve spotted the Sky Witch. She’s on her way to the central atrium with a man made out of fire. Gather those who’re prepared to fight and meet up at point Beta.”

“Our final battle is at hand. You have ten minutes. Transmission, over.”

Just when things couldn’t get any more anime. That description matched Grillby. In other words, the retired Captain-come-bartender would be smack dab in the middle of Gungnir’s endgame.

He didn’t have time to brush up on his skills. Could he survive this?

Talk about a worsening situation. If only Sans didn’t turn his back against the world for his solo quest of madness.

Being the local boss, the criminal technician left the toilet prison to bark her orders. Thumps of boots resonated in the air, mobilizing their march towards the big fight.

Opportunity. If she could be left with the kids alone, any escape attempts should be a breeze.

C’mon Miss Big-shot Supervisor. Leave already.

In the end, she came back.

“You’re not going to help?” the kids asked.

“Tsk,” she replied. Clearly unhappy. “I can’t leave this damn Lichborn alone with you scrubs. Dayton! Knife, on his neck at all times.”

Drats. There goes the easy mode.

She glanced at Papyrus. Judging from the complete lack of mobility, it’s clear that he’s suffering an internal breakdown.

…………

Paps, I’m sorry. I wish you didn’t need to go through this.
Something tapped her butt.

Undyne turned there thinking it’s a brave rat trying to mock her.

Instead, she spotted a stubby little hand. Pink. Glowing. And very incorporeal.

*Mettaton?!*

The celebrity wasn’t knocked out after all: he’s well and free in his true original form.

Mettaton pointed Undyne to one of the toilet cubicles. Any discussion had to be away from the prying eyes.

Considering how little these humans know about monsters, maybe she could pull a little bluff…

“Hey kids,” Undyne chuckled. “This is kinda embarrassing but… I need to use the little girl’s room.”

They groaned. “Aww man really? Do we need to undress you too?”

Everyone took the bait hook, line, and sinker. Even the adult. “Nah. Just plunk me in there and I’ll do the rest.”

So they shoved her into one of the stalls without any further questions. Papyrus still remained silent: the skeleton she knew would have already blurted out that monsters don’t need toilets.

And yet…

Undyne shook that thought aside. She pulled down the toilet seat cover and sat on top of it. “Psst, Mettaton. You can come out now.”

The pink ghost emerged from the wall. Frowning, he said: “We are certainly in quite a pickle, darling.”

“Yeah…” Undyne sighed. “Papyrus isn’t taking this well. I mean. Look at him now.”

“Indeed, my rambunctious fish. Oh that poor, poor, darling. I had witnessed the drama from the beginning. As much as I wanted to help, there’s not much I can do in my original un-fabulous incorporeal form.”

“Is your mecha damaged?” asked Undyne.

“Oh no. It’s very much functional, darling. I had a momentary ejection when they overloaded my systems with that nasty taser. Got dazed and whatnot. I wanted to get right back in, but then I saw you fellows. I didn’t have the heart to cause trouble.”

“But! Seeing that it’s a do or die moment now…” Mettaton then suggested a plan. “This may be a wondrous time to make a jailbreak. Beating down those punks shouldn’t be a problem with the two of us. You’re THE Captain of the Royal Guard, darling. If anything else, I still have a minute’s worth of Doctor Alphys’ wonderful Determination boosters.”

Narrowing her eye, Undyne asked: “And how are we gonna make sure nobody dies from this shit?”

“Well. In life… there are no guarantees.” Mettaton cleared his throat. “There’s a ton of piping and railings, sweetheart. Things break. Fly. Maybe someone might lose footing in the middle of the rumble. Collateral damage is… ‘unavoidable’. Leave the convincing cover story to me. I’m a celebrity after all.”
“You can’t be fucking serious. Papyrus trashed his dignity to protect their lives and you are suggesting to waste that on staged violence?!”

That sheer intensity spooked the spooker. “I don’t like this idea either, darling,” he said. “There’s a huge reason why I didn’t just fire my arm cannons in great wanton. This baby packs a punch! Their poor untrained SOULS would shatter in a hit or two. If not their bodies. My poor future fans~”

“But sweetheart, think about it: is it fair to push all the burden on Papyrus just because he can see the future? Look what happened to King Asgore, Frisk, and Sansy. Maybe he’s not ready to face the grimness of being a hero…”

On one hand, Mettaton had a point. How she wished that he had the same common sense in things that don’t involve people.

On the other hand… Undyne wanted to respect Papyrus. She didn’t want to kick him down more than life already had.

Looking at the pink ghost again, an idea struck her.

Wait. He said he had a minute of DT left, right?
When he first activated that thing, I got flooded with pink! Maaan that really burned my eye.

“There’s another way.” Undyne grinned ear to ear. “YOU are gonna do the jailbreak. Alone. Help Grillbz in our stead.”

Mettaton gasped. “Me?!”

“Yeah! Use that DT. Show off your glam. Draw the crowd. Then make a stylish exit: the most dramatic, fastest outro you can think of!”

“I never thought you’d ever agree to my sensibilities, darling~~”

“Only for today,” she added. Don’t want that celebrity get too carried away with himself now. “I’m counting on you Mettaton. Don’t screw this up.”

“Leave it to me. I’m going to go untie myself~”

The pink ghost then slipped back into the wall.

Undyne cut the cables with a spear. They’re quite heavy, so she made sure to hold on to them. Otherwise they’d fall with a loud thud and alert the captors outside.

A slight whirr hummed in the air. That’s her signal.

Mettaton NEO: Online. The loosened ropes dropped on the ground as soon as he started strutting in his boots.

“Fuck!” One of the kids cried out. “The robot!!”

He put his charm right to work. “Why hello beauties and gentlebeauties, are you here to see my wonderful self?”

“Get the bats! Whack him!”

If Undyne had her instincts right, all the kids would have their sights on Mettaton.
“Not this time, baby~~” Right on cue, the entire toilet area was filled with a blinding pink glare.

“My eyes!!!”
“I can’t see!!”
“Why the fuck is he so bright?!!?”

Undyne escaped the shenanigans thanks to the cubicle. Even then, that light really stung.

“Looks like my glam is too much for you. That’s okay! Maybe in the future, you’ll join my growing fanclub. Toodles~~~”

She then heard a shrill charge. It’s something that involved an arm cannon.

There was a mighty a boom in the confined airspace. A part of the ceiling collapsed, followed by the roars of jet streams as Mettaton made his grand flying escape. More screams and expletives followed right after.

And while they’re disorientated and frightened…

…It’s time to dish out the spears of justice!

Undyne kicked down the toilet cubicle door. Hard. The flimsy hinge snapped and sent the entire board crashing into an unfortunate kid or two.

It won’t hurt them much other than a bruise. The mess will prevent others from moving as quick as they should.

The singular entrance only allowed one opponent through at a time. All she needed to do was focus forward.

And focus she did. The strongest fish struck the first human’s soul with her spear and turned it green.

“W-what?! I can’t move!”

It’s that nasty woman in technician clothes: the local boss.

“Damn right!!” Undyne yelled back. “See how you like that!”

The fish then picked her up by the collar and slammed her against the wall. The force put her in a winded daze.

Another kid turned green.
Another kid disabled with a punch to the gut.
Yet another got a kick that sent them curling on the floor.

Seeing how outclassed they were, the smarter ones retreated.

Undyne stepped out of her hiding spot, confident that the fallen foes won’t be breaking out of their Green Mode any time soon.

“Let me handle her!”

Dayton stood in the front lines with that strange knife drawn. The kid yelled a battle cry, lunging himself forward. Undyne prepared for a counter.
But then, the blade shone blue. The boy’s arm snapped straight up.

“Argh! What the hell?! W-why can’t I pull it down??!”

“EVERYONE, PLEASE STOP DOING A VIOLENCE.”

It’s Papyrus with his Eye activated. Still tied up as before.

Anyone who tried to retaliate had their weapons sent straight towards the ceiling.

The baffled teenagers stared at the scene with their jaws slack.

Undyne then said: “You know, he can do that to anyone and anything without any direct contact.”

Dayton still refused to let go of the blade. At least she could respect his resolve.

This was her first opportunity to properly observe this kid. His skin tone didn’t raise any odd flags: best described as ‘ambiguously brown’. Compared to Cenna’s dark hue, he’s quite light. If that Magus was coffee, he’s cappuccino.

The biggest detail that made him stand out from the rest of the kids was… was a gold ornament. An earring. On his right side, there’s a diamond-shaped tile with a sun motif unlike anything she’d seen before. It looks home-made.

His friends tried to coax him out of it.

“C’mon Day, let it go.”

“Yeah… You’re gonna hurt your arm.”

“No!” Dayton snapped back. “Dad said my weapon is my life!”

Undyne pointed out: “You’re wide open, kid. I could punch or kick at all your soft parts. Don’t be a moron and LET. IT. GO.”

“…Why are you giving me advice?!?”

Barring her teeth, she asked: “Would you rather FEEL that advice???”

“PLEASE STOP SCARING THE HUMAN.” Papyrus shook his head. “IT’S BAD ENOUGH THAT THEY NOW HAVE NEGATIVE ASSOCIATIONS WITH METTATON’S WONDROUS GLAM. LET’S NOT MAKE THINGS WORSE.”

“We could resolve this faster by talking things out. And yes I am aware that the fancy Magus building is on fire.”

“What do you want, Coloured One?” the human boy asked.

“I want to understand,” so said the skeleton. “Why are you so afraid of magic and monsters? Why do you talk with violence at the first opportunity? What did Lady Lucidia and Mister Magus do to make you so filled with negativity?”

“Did you know that everyone in the underground considered the surface as heaven? We were desperate. Many generations died wishing for a freedom that they had only heard in storybooks.”
“YOU LIVE IN A WONDERFUL WORLD! THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT AND THE STARS ARE BEAUTIFUL. THE AIR IS DIFFERENT, RICHER. THE PLANTS AND ANIMALS ARE FULL OF LIFE. YET, SO FEW STOP TO ADMIRE IT.”

“I INSTEAD SEE ALL SORTS OF BLOODY MADNESS. THE WARRING. THE PAIN. THE HATRED. THE FEAR. SO MANY BAD THINGS. MY BROTHER HAD GONE INSANE TRYING TO PROTECT ME FROM KNOWING THIS SORROW.”

Sorrow. That’s what’s on Papyrus’ face.

He grieved for the chaos that defined the reality of today.

“WHY?” he asked.

Chapter End Notes

A reminder that GQ Sans is a trained assassin, meaning that he copes with low lighting much better than Papyrus.

...I have a feeling that my next story is going to be a another web of complicated events. I like doing such stuff but I wonder if you guys can bear with me on this XD;;;
Amazingly, we managed to get this chapter done during the Christmas season.

So, Merry Christmas to you all~

Hellfire Phase 2 from FF15 is a great battle music

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Grillby didn’t expect Lucidia to lead him back into the charred Spire.

The blue-green Seer repelled any debris that got in the way. Here he thought Sans was a prodigy when it came to telekinetic-related skills; this woman was miles better.

He can’t help but to grow curious about her decisions. “…Where are we heading…?”

“The atrium.” She explained. “The previous Supreme Judge had considered a scenario where neither evacuation nor control are possible. I hesitate to use it. But…”

…”Are the sprinklers not enough?…”

“The repair operation failed the moment it turned into a hostage situation. Sir Grillenn, I’ll be honest with you: I wouldn’t consider this option if you weren’t here.”

The man of fire blinked twice. It was awkward to be thrust straight into someone's grand plan. “…Pardon?…”

Lucidia asked: “You are of Champion Class, are you not?”

More unfamiliar terminology. “…I don’t understand… Apologies…”

The lady paused her steps. She turned towards him and said, “Forgive me for my intrusion.”

The woman then grabbed his hand. Grillby sensed a strange wave of magic pulsing through his being.

When he gazed at the woman’s face, he noticed that her Dichromatic Eyes switched to a strong purple sheen. It overpowered her initial mismatched combination.

The way she used her powers unnerved him. Monsters express themselves with magic, yet Lucidia did not do so: Grillby sensed that she’s working separately from her heart.

It reminded him too much of a specific debt-accumulating patron who hung out in his bar.

When she finished her scan, the purple faded away. Lucidia continued her journey. “Cross-check analysis: Positive. You are of Champion Class. In other words, you generate more Determination than the average monster. Captain Undyne belongs in this same category as well.”

“No one is stronger than a Boss Monster in terms of raw strength. However, power is not everything.
Clever guile can turn the tides.”

More details that made his head spin. From what he understood, Lucidia required his fire-wrangling abilities.

“…How… do you intend to extinguish the fire?…” asked Grillby.

“By activating a Gram that allows me to connect this country’s static portals as I see fit. I’ll be able to draw in large quantities of water from distant lakes, reservoirs, even the ocean, but doing so will also flood all areas unaffected by the fire. Much closer to a self-destruct clause, if you will.”

“To our fortune, you are a Champion Fire Eater. With some adjustments, I can change the command to skip the water sources and open only the local portals. Then we’ll draw in the flames, floor by floor, and extinguish them in a controlled manner.”

Something doesn’t add up. By now, the fire would have climbed at least halfway up the tower. Grillby knew this Seer had immense power, but even so…

By all conceivable sense, it’s impossible for a single monster.

“…What gives you the confidence?…” he asked.

Lady Lucidia clutched her sapphire butterfly brooch. “…Before my husband battled the Persona for the final time, he granted me a purified distillation of his Psychia. It’s a painful process… unlike the ease of your nation’s ‘DT Extraction Machine’.”

“If he lost, this would then serve as my final safeguard against the enemy.”

It didn’t faze Grillby that the Surface exploited Determination sooner than the Underground. They had humans everywhere after all. Furthermore, they appear to have close collaborations between species.

“…You intend to use that Determination… to turn yourself into a living force manipulator?…”

Lucidia was surprised by the statement. “Oh? You are aware of its amplifying properties?”

“…Yes… Doctor Gaster taught Captain Undyne this new magic… He told her to channel it outward… not inward…”

“That is indeed the correct application.”

Grillby stared down at his own hands. “…I don’t think I know… how to exploit that…”

“Since your nation lacks training, there are not many options. You will need to rely on your increased capacity. Your maximum is roughly 2000%, twice of a normal top-tier Fire Eater.”

“…Wow…” It’s rather frightening to think he had that sort of destructive talent. He’s grateful that he never needed to call upon that power in the Underground.

They arrived at the half-charred atrium. Here he thought that Asgore’s castle was dizzying enough. The Spire’s airwell stretched so tall, it threatened to throw off his sense of balance. Optical illusion blended the railings together into a false spiral.

It would have been a beautiful sight if it weren’t for the flames obscuring the golden sunlight above.

Lucidia stood at the center. She raised both arms towards the sky, floating in suspension.
Seven pillars emerged from the polished flooring, each covered with the secret writings of her kind. They’re keyholes, attuned to her magic.

So she conjured seven complete spinal columns. They resemble actual keys: intricate yet elegant, a choice that befits her style. Locked in their respective place, she then lowered the system back into the ground. A great multi-layered polygon of mechanized magic spread underneath the knight’s feet.

How many points? What do they mean? It’s too complex for a layman. All he knew was that their technology took a different route than Gaster’s ways.

The air above their head rippled. It’s a sign that the Gram had began its work.

The Seer removed her butterfly brooch from her cravat. After a kiss, she let it float. The gem shifted its hue from a sapphire blue to a brilliant crimson.

“It is ready,” so she said. “All I need now is your cooperation, Sir Grillenn. Stand in the center of the Arcanagram.”

Lucidia squeezed her hands together. In stress and in doubt, the tips of her gloved fingers almost scratched through the fabric.

“If we…” she paused. “If we’re in a battle of unfavourable odds, you should pull all the flames to yourself at once. The sheer heat will eliminate our threat in a matter of seconds. The sooner we execute this, the safer it will be.”

Hearing that, the knight of fire refused to step forth.

“If you…” she asked.

“…Pardon me, Lady Lucidia… But I need clarification…”

“You may question.”

Grillby then said, “…Did you just suggest a massacre?…”

“Yes.” Lucidia replied in a factual yet grim manner. Sans would have veiled it in wit to dismiss the severity.

“…Have you killed before…” He must ask.

The woman lowered her skull, unable to look at him.

“Sans Serif said that I had not killed anyone with a gun. That is true. But this doesn’t mean that my hands are not stained via other means.”

“I have committed sanctioned murder many times, Sir Grillenn. Directly or otherwise. After all, I am my husband’s personal Tactician. He is guile and I am knowledge. Together, we analyze the situation for the best outcome: victory.”

“As much as we try to keep our targets alive, rehabilitation is not always an option. Therefore… many of our foes lose their lives in their gamble against us.”

The decisions weighed down on her head. From what Grillby remembered, the colours of a Seer’s Eyes reflect their hearts.

Lucidia had ‘Kindness’ as one of her traits. She won’t be able to completely distance herself from the
lives she had ended.

“…Lady Lucidia…” said Grillby. “…I had killed once… It’s enough to haunt me forever… If you insist on taking that approach… I will not help you…”

That statement shocked Lucidia, if not angered. “Are you telling me that we should let The Spire burn?!?”

“…Yes… it might as well be the same…” he answered. “…Gaster and Sans… I failed to stop them… They spiraled down into the darkness… while I watched as a helpless coward…”

“…I will not let that happen to you… Enough is enough…”

Realising his goodwill, her tone softened; “Sir Grilenn, please save your compassion. There’s no turning back for us.”

“…Our King thought the same…” he replied. “…As did I… And yet… Frisk set all of us free… If they can do it… we can too…”

Lucidia smiled with a glimmer of hope.

“For the longest time, I’ve wondered if the preservation of life could be a viable answer. Perhaps my prayers will see their light today. Knight, we shall extinguish the flames without a single casualty: is this agreeable?”

“…Yes…” Grillby nodded.

The air rumbled with the footsteps of many. It had a sense of disciplined order not found in the common masses.

Many young adults dressed in military urban camo gear surrounded the atrium from the numerous extinguished floors. Each of them wore a cloth mask to conceal their true identity.

One of them stood out from the rest, brazen enough to show his full face. A strong, brownish male with a strong jaw, slightly taller than Grillby himself. He wore an unusual cloak over his shoulders. The rich vibrancy of coloured beads on black cloth made the patterns pop to life.

Though angled into squares, the motif reminded Grillby of stormclouds and the wind.

He made sure to stand close to the floating lady. As she had said: she’s the real target.

“You--!” Lucidia exclaimed. “You’re an Aratet.”

The man thus announced: “I am as you claim. My name is Aiden of Aratet, son of The Last Persona.”

For a moment Grillby thought he’s listening to King Asgore. They may not have the exact same voice, but this person had the qualities of a king.

He’s looking at the true face of Gungnir: incomparable to the internet masses.

Aiden began his speech: “Decades ago, a red-blessed member of my kin had come to this city to retrieve the legendary Keys of Fate. Our people’s greatest hope, murdered by the Vampire of Time and his consort: the Sky Witch.”

“My sire, The Chosen One of the ancestral spirits, suffered the same brutal fate by your hands.
Though I have no intention of following his exact footsteps, I must at least pay my final respects with offerings of dust and blood.”

Lucidia asked in return: “Do you desire vengeance?”

To everyone’s surprise, he answered: “No.”

He drew out his knife and pointed its hooked end towards the skeleton. “I desire a future for our children!”

“Your peaceful world is a mere illusion, witch. The resurgence of monsters is my proof: today it’s the sealed nation of Mount Ebott, tomorrow it may be that abomination buried deep under the ocean!”

That statement shocked Grillby.

An abomination. Not many, but one.

What single entity could be something so disastrous that it had to be sealed away?

Aiden continued his speech: “Is there any guarantee that you or your ilk won’t exploit these creatures for your personal gain? We’ve already experienced the dominion of power from those descended of bone. And yet you Magi still refuse to cease! Who’s to say that you will not attempt to control the abomination as a weapon?”

“Again and again, your fellow comrades plot against each other for influence over the Supreme Judge. Us Gungnir wouldn’t be able to infiltrate if your hearts were as united as you claim!”

“I’ve had enough of this charade. We want to live without constant fear, free from the terrors of magic! Therefore, I must eliminate the three pillars that maintain the current status quo: The Sky Witch, The Vampire… and The Grandmaster!”

“So it has come to this,” said Lucidia, her voice stained by sadness and regret. “Our efforts in maintaining peace have failed. I’m sorry.”

Grillby wondered why this scenario seemed so familiar. It reminded him of the plaques in Waterfall, followed by the constant chants of twisted hope.

‘We’ll be free’.
‘Humanity will pay’.
‘We will get justice’.

…This man…
…He must be a father…

“…Excuse me…” said Grillby, “…If I may speak…”

At the very least, Aiden was respectful enough to grant a voice. “Speak.”

“…In days past… my people thought humans didn’t need Love and Compassion… Therefore they are cruel without care…”

“…Then a human child showed us that we… Monsters and Humans… are not so different… Despite our violence against them… they grant us mercy…”
Grillby took a step back into the centre of Lucidia’s Gram. It began to resonate with his presence.

“…Today… we shall end the flames… without death or bloodshed… I will not kill… and neither will you…”

“Boastful words, creature.” Said the human. “Is there any guarantee that the rest of your kind can keep their words? Especially the witch?”

“…Yes…”

Aiden twirled his knife and danced to the beats of war. He’s preparing himself for the battle against the avatars of nature.

“To arms!”

Grillby then stretched his arm towards the air. He wrangled inward a stream of flames from the network of invisible portals above his head.

Lucida summoned a green, translucent shield to protect herself: just in case.

…I need to fight without harm… Can’t go full power…

The warriors did not charge in all at once. They gathered around the fire knight for a coordinated attack: a dangerous position without his armour.

In response, Grillby stomped his foot on the ground to release a blast of compressed air and fire. The warriors may brave the flame, but the pressure will knock them off their feet.

It did. They were sent gliding across the atrium grounds. Comrades immediately covered for their downfall and weaved in to take their place.

Grillby was concerned at first. He wondered if he put too much punch into his attack. But soon enough, the first bunch recovered without issues.

He’s relieved.

...There are many floors left to go...
...This is merely the beginning...

Draw in more fire. This time, he decided to not use any of his powers.

It’s time for some good ol’ brawling.

The warriors tried to stab from all sides. He dodged. They follow up. The thoroughness of their attacks made it difficult to initiate a counter.

It reminded Grillby of his training with Sans. When that skeleton was a young boy, he was much less lazy. Efficient. Cunning. Sharp. Put in the effort when his life was on the line.

Strange as it was… it forced Grillby to sharpen his own skills too. Learned more as a coach than in his student days.

There was one certainty he then discovered: no matter how complex the pattern, there will always be an opening.

Grillby spotted the opportunity. He grappled the arm of a warrior.
Using his bodily strength, he turned one of the humans into an ad hoc weapon. Took the guy for a spin, literally.

Not even the most hardened of fighters want to get whacked by the full weight of a human, so they cancelled their offensive.

Once he had cleared enough space, Grillby tossed the fellow back to his friends. He drew in more fire before firing a straight uppercut of flames over his head.

Lucidia shaped the blast into a thin pillar. Superheated. Almost plasma. But since it’s confined, nothing flammable caught fire. This included their human foes.

…”It’s as I thought… I either have to do this in small releases… or rely on physical brawling while I store the flames…”

…”The plan will work… As long I can keep up the pace…”

…”Be determined…”

They refuse to give up. Neither will he.

So the brawl continued. The knight of fire focused on deflecting his enemies.

“Sir Grillenn,” Lucida reported, “The inferno hastens. We need to increase capacity. But beware, temperature in the atrium is rising. The human body is more vulnerable to extreme heat than the opposite.”

That’s news to him. Between the maneuvering he asked: “…How so?…”

“If their core body temperature rises above 39 centigrades, we risk heat stroke, dehydration, and other similar complications. It’s potentially lethal. Plus we do not have the usual liberty of cold air circulation due to the fires above us.”

Aiden’s men retreated from the heat. On his command, they hurried out of the atrium and swapped out with a wholly different unit.

Now Grillby and Lucidia had to face many fresh troops, each with full stamina.

Looking at the upper floors, the knight noticed that they’re preparing to use… reed stalks?

The Seer recognized the danger: “Blowguns!”

She conjured a shield in the nick of time. A hail of sharp darts pierced through the glass-like surface. Their pointed ends reminded Grillby what would have happened if Lucidia didn’t recognize the threat in time.

The woman explained: “Low-tech traditional weapons are easy to conceal and carry. No doubt Aiden had the foresight to bypass modern security.”

Lucidia then dismissed the shield and collected the darts with levitation. Her lack of disposal was a cause of concern.

“Sir Grillenn, I could aid in your defense, but doing so I may lose concentration.”

…”Don’t kill…” reminded Grillby. “…Please…”
No verbal response. Nonetheless, she heeded his wishes: snapped the darts into fine splinters so that the enemy can’t salvage them either.

More warriors charged ahead.

Grillby found himself imprisoning more fire than he could dispose of in a non-lethal manner.

The strain of his magic hampered his movements. He could feel the creeping slowness in his limbs.

One of the knives cut his lower arm. The wound ignited in violent flames as the captive inferno found a means of escape. It blew up right in the human’s face, burning through her skin.

She screamed in turmoil, blinded. One of her comrades pulled her back to safety.

Grillby covered the wound, trying his damndest to suppress the outburst. He called upon more Determination to control it. But, in doing so he slowed down even more.

“Stand back!” Aiden warned. “I’ll take it from here.”

The human leader entered the fray with his blade brandished. Killing intent radiated from his being, further enhanced by the stark colours of war that decorated his clothes.

Terror. Fear. Despair.

The knight felt his own strength sapped and smothered by this accursed aura.

Instincts prompted his feet to shift. In doing so, Grillby sidestepped a strike. Giving into the fear of the enemy right now will cost him everything.


Aiden’s skill put his foes on a razor’s edge of uncertainty. He deserved the title as the leader of a warrior cult.

In one swift strike, the curved edge struck a deep cut on the thigh. A burst of fire erupted from the gap, but the Gungnir warrior showed himself nimble enough to avoid that counterblow.

Grillby struggled to stand. The force of the recoil, the pain, and the threat of a meltdown, each inflicted agony that he deemed unimaginable.

This human was akin to those whispered in legends: the unstoppable beings of physicality who crushed monsterkind during the War days.

It’s tempting to give up. Surrender.

But the choice isn't his.

The danse-macabre continued. Relentless. Merciless. Each swipe flashed orange, reflecting the light of Hell high above their heads.

Try as he might, Grillby failed to keep up. Slice after slice came into contact: triggering dangerous geysers of combustion.

“Do you seek death?!” Lucidia snapped at Aiden. “In his current state, you will cause a massive explosion!”
Aiden replied: “Pathetic. You Monsters are creatures made out of magic: living and breathing personifications of power. Yet, while even you fail to control your strength, the Magus Association grants countless humans permission to toy with those same dangers!”

“I’m not brainwashed, Sky Witch. I’ve survived enough violence to know this philosophy as truth! Humanity’s ingenuity alone has already destroyed so much: we don’t need magic in this world!”

Aiden stood over the wounded monster. “You said that that we will not kill each other. Brave words. But you forgot a minor detail…”

He raised his knife high into the air.

“I can choose the path of martyrdom.”

Hooked point, down. It plunged with the full intent of finishing the old era once and for all.

…Denied.

Instead of taking the blow, Grillby put all his will into catching the blade between his hands. It’s so sharp that it’s cutting into the base of his palm. Leaking flames escaped from the gaps, turning the steel knife red hot.

Aiden locked a stern glare. “Interesting. So you’re one of the few who struggle. The witch had chosen a fine champion.”

Slowly yet surely…

…The instrument of death inched closer and closer between his eyes.

Lucidia’s warnings rang in his mind.

“If we’re in a battle of unfavourable odds, you should pull all the flames to yourself at once.”

“The sheer heat will eliminate our threat in a matter of seconds.”

“The sooner we execute this, the safer it will be.”

The fire knight clenched his jaw. Arms, trembling. He had to make the final call: to keep his word at the risk of his life, or to conform to Gungnir’s prejudice.

Again, the image of the dead child flashed before his thoughts. How many of these Gungnir had families waiting for them to return home?

Mothers? Fathers?
Brothers? Sisters?
Cousins? Friends?

…Is this the price we pay… for the children we’ve killed?…

…Are we… the feared monsters of myth after all?…

…Please…Show us hope…

…That violence is not the only answer…

Just when he finished his desperate prayer, a miracle happened. A great force punched a hole from one of the upper floors.

Debris fell from above. Sensing danger, Aiden let go of his knife to avoid the rain of concrete and rebar.
Lucidia once again showcased her expertise. Tapping into her husband’s distilled Determination, she bolstered her Blue Magic to suspend the chunks. Then she gently set them down on the atrium’s floor.

The sudden influx of cold air became the ventilation they sorely needed.

A pink shine loomed from the hole. Along with it, a voice well-integrated in the world of media.

It’s none other than Mettaton.

“Oh my~~” so he said, fanning himself. “It’s getting hot here, baby! Sorry for taking so long, sweet darlings. I ran out of booster fuel right away! Oh the horror of blasting down one wall at a time!”

Mettaton’s presence alone filled Grillby with hope. With his help... perhaps it’s possible to escape from this dire situation.

“…Lady Lucidia…” Grillby took a deep breath. “…I’m ready… to execute the final clause… while honouring my wish… Can I trust you…?”

Lucidia nodded. “Yes.”

“Mister Mettaton,” the Seer instructed, “Keep the humans away from the Gram or else they’ll die!”

Though confused at first, the bot understood the severity when he saw the shining complexity beneath his feet.

He said, “I have no idea what’s going on but leave it to me, sweetheart~~”

Mettaton scattered his magical bombs at the feet of the human warriors. Thinking that it had the same power as a grenade, they retreated posthaste.

While fear misdirected them, the glam bot deployed multiple rotating lights. Lasers, both cyan and white.

“Disco inferno, baby~!”

The bombs exploded without causing much harm. Some of the more foolhardy members of Gungnir tried to cross the beaming maze, but they were slapped with a sting on their SOULS.

Mettaton huffed. “Tsk, tsk, tsk, silly Gungnir. You think I’m all flash and no substance?”

He summoned a horde of Minis. They flew amongst the enemy and attempted to grab anywhere they could reach. Ears, nose, collars, ankles, the indecent places: nothing escaped.

Grillby admitted that it’s rather amusing to watch these hardened fighters get overwhelmed by tiny robots. Not even Aiden was spared from the mayhem. It’s like trying to swat a swarm of insects. The bugs will always win.

Again, the woman called out: “Mister Mettaton, defend me! Hurry!”

“My pleasure!”

With his jets, he flew down to her side. He charged up his arm cannon and aimed it square at the Gungnir to keep them in check. Never enough deterrent for the stubborn ones.

...It’s time...
The Champion Fire Eater forced himself to stand. He raised his wounded arms towards the sky. Stretched out his magic as far as he could do so.

...Sans... Gaster... King Asgore...

...We were wrong all the while...
...We are not helpless creatures...
...War is not inevitable!...

Grillbz Grillenn let out a loud cry, summoning the last of his might to fulfill his wish.

The inferno collapsed unto his being.

One moment, he saw nothing but the grim blaze of black and orange.

The next...

Silence. It’s a long, long silence.

...Am I dead?...

...Maybe I pushed myself too hard... Became an accidental martyr in Aiden's stead ...

...That’s not a nice way to go...

Then again, can the dead think about themselves? Talks about the afterlife were far and few in his nation. People scatter the dust of the deceased on objects, believing that the spirit of their loved ones will live on nearby. But no one mentioned if they would be conscious or if it’s more like a wakeless sleep.

He heard voices from the far edges of reality. They’re faint, but...

“Sir Grillenn, can you hear me?”

A warm red sheen spread over the darkness.

When he opened his eyes, Grillby was greeted by the setting sun.

He’s lying down on the stone ground. Clouds loomed overhead, unhindered by glass or other decorations. It’s possible that they were shattered in their mad plan.

To his right, was the Seer lady. Her brooch was blue once more and pinned in its rightful place.

To his left, the glam celebrity. He’s a little singed at the edges.

“...What happened?...” He muttered.

Mettaton paused for a moment. “Ka-BOOM red hot baby darling! I never thought you had that kind of RAWR in you!”

Lucidia chuckled. Smiling, she said: “You fought well, valiant knight. The Spire is safe without the loss of a single life. What’s more, the Gungnir have fled the scene.”

When he tried to sit up, he noticed something odd about himself. First, his wounds were healed: nothing more than a fading ache. Also, he found himself in a bartender’s uniform.
He did not arrive on the scene in these clothes. Also, the pants were a little too long. “…Uh…?”

Mettaton chuckled. “The fireshow left you almost stark naked, dear. Our beloved Princess Sugar Skull here fetched some spare clothes to preserve your dignity. She’s also the one who patched you up.”

It appears that she’s not used to praise. The woman turned her head aside, bashful.

“…Milady…” he said, “…Thank you…”

Chapter End Notes

Grillby got the epic battle he expected… over a decade later. I still can’t believe how he ended up being in one of the hottest positions.

In case you’re wondering: yes he CAN throw vending machines like Shizuo Heiwajima. And also rip out signposts. But he’s not Undyne. He also doesn’t have an anger issue. Therefore, he had no reason to be a Shizuo.

I’m sure you guys are wondering about Sans. Yep. We’re going to have his chapter next. There are a lot of small bridging bits that lead to him that I intend to do in his POV. Hopefully it will move things along in an interesting manner.

Mezil did mention the Red War participant in Chapter 100. It’s the soldier.
Fatum

Chapter Notes

Happy year 2017! Hope you guys have a good start in the past week!

First up, art features! JoeAdok made some surprise GQ sprites for the story! Go and check out his works :D

The trio of Underground Seers
The Magus fellows! (kids design there canon now)
And some folks from Ebott! complete with college-going Burgerpants on the phone.

Thanks so much for the contribution, Joe!

I've been doing some character expression memes. At this point of posting, I still have 5 more folks to draw. If you have a request, you can send them in. You can even suggest an entirely different SFW expression meme too! Writing takes priority though.

Onwards to content we go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sans had a dream.

It’s not the ‘dream’ of ambition or whatnot. Rather, it’s from the bizarre realm of slumber.

Sleep…

A place of rest?
Death simulator?
A stroll in the mindscape?

Who knows?
Who cares?

It’s compulsory anyway.

In this cycle, Sans watched himself in third person. Perched on his head was a little sapphire bird with a white face. Purple highlights around the eyes.

Sans’ expression reflected the groaning in the back of his mind. He knew right away this bird represented Lucidia. Though they had only met once, it’s enough to make her haunt him.

The little bird chirped. She then yelled: “You are not trash, Sans!”

“Ok.” Sans replied.
The bird pecked the bones of his cranium. Again and again, without cease.

“YOU.”

“ARE.”

“SPECIAL.”

“SANS!”

“Ok.”

“SPECIAL.”

“Ya, ya, enough already.”

Incoming headache?
Incoming headache.

[You are indeed special, Sans Serif. A masterful piece of work.]

Sans snapped wide awake when he heard his mentor’s voice. Gentlemanly with an undertone of poison… that’s Gaster in a nutshell.

He wiped off the sweat with the back of his palm.
That’s just a dream, right?
He’s out of the picture for good.

Then that voice spoke to him again. This time in the language of Seers.

[Alas, I am not a mere figment of imagination. Perhaps you would have preferred it that way. Mind you, I can hear your every thought.]

Sans groaned. “Wendell Dominic Gaster. You are fucking persistent. So, you decided to stoop down to the level of a DEMON parasite?”

Gaster’s disembodied voice replied: [Hmph, pot calling the kettle black. Are you not the same in this scenario? Strapped on your right arm is Judge Mezil Thyme’s power. Emphasis on his name. That makes you a parasite as well.]

Sans knew exactly when this man of space and time latched unto his being. When Frisk opened the grey door, they released a gust of cold wind. It was then that Gaster’s lingering essence took the opportunity to hitch a ride.

“I prefer the term ‘hijacker’, thanks.” the short skeleton replied. “I don’t intend to overstay my welcome. Unlike you.”

The elder burst out into a mocking laugh. [Playing on semantics again? One day, your words will bite you in the coccyx.]

Though Sans knew those words rang true, he brushed them aside. “Whatever.”

[By the by, Sans. Why didn’t you even bother changing Judge Thyme’s default choice of tiles? They’re too refined for you.]

Upon further inspection, Gaster was right: this place had all the hallmarks of a vampire’s hideout.

Fancy white marble floor? Checked.

Elegant dark wallpaper befitting the home of fanciness? Checked.

A built-in ceiling lamp set to the rich warm hues of flame? Thank goodness it’s not chandeliers. They’re a hazard with the current low-set walls. Praise technology.

“At least it’s functional,” he commented. “I’m not gonna bother changing all of that. It’s not to my taste, but my time is better spent elsewhere.”

“That reminds me, I need to check up on Frisk.”

He got up from the beanbag and looked into their transparent prison. The kid was fast asleep in bed. They ate their food. Judging from the used paper cup, they had their drink too.

“Heh. They’re taking after me more than I thought.”

[Not by choice, mind you. Their battle was fierce and draining. Your shenanigans certainly did not help.]

Sans checked Frisk’s status with his Eye. They’re in REM sleep and not expected to wake up in the next half hour.
“Good. I can concentrate on more important things… like spying on everyone else.”

He plunked himself back on the beanbag and made himself comfortable. It’s time to check his harvest of Determination.

**SERAPH SYSTEM**

**ACTIVE:** C / Y / P  
**INACTIVE:** O / B / G  
**DT:** >100%

**Progress:** 30%

“Heh. Not too bad. Wish it could be faster, but I won’t put a dent in that.”

With a wave of his hand, Sans turned the ceiling transparent.

The fireflies of memories floated amongst the branching roads of time. Each path charted a possibility that could happen within the limitations of that reality.

“Can you see what I see?” asked Sans.

[Only when I borrow your sight.] Gaster replied. [There is a reason why you are special, Sans Serif. It appears that you are the only living person in this era with the ability to perceive The Void.]

[I had wandered in this realm for over a decade, and yet all I could comprehend were disjointed bits of data. Envious ability, you have.]

“That makes sense,” said Sans. “I noticed something was off when Frisk kept insisting that it’s pure ‘nothingness’. They’re just blind to its mechanisms.”

He paused for a moment. “It feels like I’m looking at the cosmos. Instead of stars and planets, it’s time and realities.”

[An apt description. Love for the vast unknown has always been a common denominator in your vested interests.]

Sans hadn’t felt this fascinated in a long while. Didn’t have the time to gaze the stars ever since Papyrus got zapped by his own electric maze.

But fun can wait. Peer as he might, Sans realised that he couldn’t pry into the internals of the datastream with his current combination of colours. Statistics was all he could read, and he couldn’t be damned to sort through all of that text.

…I need to make this more efficient. CGP might work best in this case. Focus, reconstruction, persistence of memories--

[May I have a word as a more experienced man and not just some old coot rambling nonsense? I CAN hear your thoughts, you know.]

Sans groaned. No escape from this nagging teacher. “Go ahead.”

[Remember Sans, any Chronographer worth their salt must have Blue. Integrity. More so in The Void. Since we are removed from our specific timeline, lacking Blue will just give us a
mess of endless possibilities.]

[For a long, long while, I saw both everything and nothing at the same time. It took much practice to focus my Cyan just enough to make some sense in this massive cluster.]

_Hmm. If that’s the case, I’m locked down with B by default. Maybe this should do it…_

So he switched the Seraph System to his new combination.

**ACTIVE: C / B / P**
**INACTIVE : O / Y / G**

Cyan to focus.

Blue to trace the path with Wendell Dominic Gaster’s name on it. Only his reality and nothing more.

Purple to preserve his links to the experiences of the past. Who knows, he might get new clues that require this wealth of knowledge.

Sans’ visions led him to the rock-solid remnants of that man. His pieces were piled up inside a cardboard box.

“Huh. Here I thought Mettaton won’t make a trip back to Ebott Town until Monday. Something prompted a surprise visit. Must be Paps’ recordings.”

If Mettaton didn’t return to his bedroom, the victim would never have been found on time. The Royal Guard would have spent all their manpower searching near Gaster’s last known location.

The elder responded with a proud huff. [Fortune smiles on me, my wayward one. It appears that your perfectly calculated plans were thrown off by the whims of others.]

“…”

Alphys answered a call.

She seemed fine at first, but her expression soon changed to horror.

Now, Sans realised that he had a problem: he couldn’t hear a thing. All he had were visuals. No audio.

“Dammit. I need to hear that conversation.”

The Seraph System didn’t have the luxury of a testrun, so any hiccups have to be troubleshooted on the spot.

He tried to adjust the magic-DT ratio. The visions clarified, but he still had no sound.

Alphys ended the call, then carefully picked through Gaster’s petrified remains. Took out a small pebble about the size of a penny.

She grabbed a hammer to smash it. Sprinkled the resulting sand on a glass sheet for microscopic examination.

The poor lizard scientist showed clear signs of distress: hyperventilation, shaky hands, and furious writing. It all pointed to major bad news.
“She’s… researching you.” Sans commented. “Why?”

After loading a scanning machine with another sample, she ran off. Returned with a small pail filled with water.

Gaster’s SOUL got lowered into the liquid. It floated like a piece of cork as her face lit up in both wonder and hope.

[It appears that a petrified Amalgamate SOUL is buoyant. Though I have no context as to why this finding is so important to her.]

The vision froze, signifying the end of a relevant playback. But…

Sans was not ready to leave yet.

“I think I have an idea.”

If changing colours isn’t an option, the next step is to add a new one.

[Are you sure it’s safe?] asked Gaster.

“Of course. Who do you take me for? I was your student after all.”

ACTIVE: C / B / P / G
INACTIVE : O / Y

Green’s reconstructing factor might rebuild the missing sounds. Yellow relies on direct optical feeds and is therefore unsuited to fix the flaw.

“Hopefully that’s enough.” Sans took a deep breath. “Here goes nothing.”

Despite the intensity of processing four colours, Sans noticed that the induced headache was not as strong as before. He had a feeling that he’s getting used to the system. It’s an interesting finding in itself.

“Who’s on the other end of the call, I wonder?”

Target, locked.

The scenery changed from Alphys’ lab to Undyne.

She’s in a dark place with plenty of piping.

“Got that, Al?” she said. “Think of this as a head-start. I’m sure you’ll get a lot more help once this anime moment is over. Don’t panic, okay? …Yeah. See you later.”

Footsteps echoed overhead. Paramedics. Undyne beckoned and led the team to a toilet area full of unconscious hostages. One by one, the victims were hauled back up to safety.

“Huh,” Sans muttered. “I think I’m at the tail end of the conversation. Weird. What if I try to rewind to the beginning?”

Sans attempted to mentally reverse the playback. But he encountered yet another problem: control. Scenes flipped by like a reel of mixed-up film shots: his device still a long way from perfection.

His sights stumbled upon Papyrus. He accompanied a human boy. They both stood by the waters of
a koi fish lake, watching the half-burnt Spire. Aerial firefighters rushed in to quench the last remaining embers.

For a moment, Sans stopped breathing. The presence of his brother being well and healthy stunned him for whole seconds that seemed to last for hours.

“Oh my god.” He muttered. “Papyrus is okay. He’s okay!”

The elder brother laughed in joy.

[So you do care about your little brother after all.] Gaster remarked in a bitter tone. [Here I thought you intend to forget about him.]

“What’s with the killjoy remark?”

[Look at Papyrus again and tell me if he’s the same poor sheltered soul you once knew.]

Sans gazed at his brother.

Yes, Gaster’s right. From posture to expression, it’s all different.

He noted the first big change when the Magi tried to exorcise Chara. Now, his brother took one more leap further to greatness. Papyrus had grown from an awkward fledging to a fine adult almost overnight.

The elder brother couldn’t be happier. “Yeah… he’s not. All the more why I think he’s the coolest. Always knew he’ll end up better than me.”

Sans rewound further back and focused on the Spire. “Fire is vanishing floor by floor. Not your usual extinguishing pattern. Don’t we know someone who fits the bill? Let’s hop over there for a moment.”

He cranked up the Seraph System one step further. There were two things that Sans wanted to know: the limits of his invention, and the people behind the attack.

**ACTIVE: C / B / P / O / G**
**INACTIVE : Y**

Five colours. It’s starting to feel like a hangover after a night of binge drinking.

Gaster wasn’t pleased by the excessive strain; [Egads, Sans! Isn’t it enough to use Papyrus’ colours alone?]

“Nah. He can’t see everything. You know that. That’s why we made proxies, remember?”

The Spire’s heroic battle played from the beginning. Sans listened to Lucidia’s confession, Grillby’s resolve, and Aiden’s speech…

Nothing new. Nothing special. It confirmed many suspicions he had about the Surface.

At the very least, Grillby initiated a spectacular finish. The condensed pillar of plasma shot past the airwell and wrecked the Spire’s pointed tip.

The pillar continued to fly into the sky.
By the time it dissipated, it’s well past the stratosphere.


“Maybe they’ll be fine for a few decades, or maybe a hundred years… then one day a madman takes the lead. Next thing you know, they’re warring over the same old deal: resources, power, riches, ideology, whatever. Too determined to have their own way.”

[My goodness gracious, did you not notice that?] There was a spike of anxiety in Gaster’s words.

“Mind pointing out which detail?” He had a hunch. Just wanted Gaster to admit it.

[Ugh, you--] He knew that too well. [The abomination under the ocean, Sans! I bet they’re talking about a colossal Amalgamate! I have no idea what’s the exact scale, but I can imagine it to be absolutely dangerous.]

“Which explains why Doctor Alphys is so furiously studying your body. We could have been that thing if I didn’t drop you into The Core. No regrets.”

Another jab into the old man’s mistakes. Never grows tiring.

[I don’t mean to brag, but I am certain that I would have had enough willpower to steer our results. But I digress! What concerns me is not the ‘what’, nor the ‘why’, but the ‘who’.]

Sans raised a brow. “You’re manipulating me into checking out the deep end, aren’t you?”

[That’s the most logical step. We need to find out who exactly is controlling that massive collective of a doomsday weapon!]

“…Probably unnecessary. The Magi are keeping a tight lid on it. Whatever happens, it’s in their hands.”

[Sans, have you not considered the worst case scenario?!

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

Gaster refused to give in. He’s always the one more forward in his stubbornness. [I’ll be damned if I let you give up now. Jump back to your brother this instant! At the very least I want to see how HE settles this situation.]

The old man did bring up a valid point. Sans wanted to see the full extent of his brother’s changes. Did events make him jaded? Cynical? Or the total opposite?

Sans refocused his vision back on Papyrus. Aiden, the Gungnir leader, had detoured from the rest of the fleeing army. Brought along two of his best men to guard his life.

Unlike the Persona, Sans sensed genuine care from this man. Found it comically ironic that a good man like Aiden ended up as the leader of a terrorist cult.

Now that Sans was not distracted by his brother’s glory, he realised that he had seen this teenager before. A strong sense of deja vu emitted from the boy’s presence.

He tapped into his Purple to make a link. “Gaster, I know this kid. He was in the ‘Alphys harassment
partly. In the past timeline, Undyne stabbed him right through his SOUL. Murder case on a Gungnir kid. Never good for diplomacy there.”

“I didn’t see him at all when I stepped in. Strange. It’s as though his boss dad here knew that joining the riff-raff was too dangerous.”

“Hmm… if only I have my Yellow, I could identify Aiden’s SOUL. I’m certain he’s not a Red Major, though. Mezil would have clamped him down. A Red Minor, perhaps? According to Lucidia’s notes, those can make educated guesses based on dejavus.”

Sans pulled more links together. He’s seeing a playback of bits, pieces, and their implications… it all led to the massacre that forced the previous timeline to reset.

“The oath of destruction… A father’s love can be a dangerous thing, huh?”

The war of words began.

“What do you want with my son, Coloured One?” Aiden questioned: his bodyguards ready to fight should the situation go south.

“I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- WILL RETURN YOUR BOY UNDER ONE CONDITION.”


“NONE.” With the most sparkling, confident, and toothy smile he could pull off, Papyrus said: “BE MY FRIEND!”

“…”

“YES! JOIN MY EVER-GROWING FRIENDCOUNT! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Aiden wasn’t sure if he should be confused or insulted.

Sans laughed so hard, he almost fell off his beanbag. Some things just don’t change.

“Is this some sort of a ploy?” the father asked. “Trickery? I’m not so moronic to fall into your honey trap!”

“AS YOU CLAIM, I AM A CUNNING MASTER OF JAPES, RIDDLES, AND PUZZLES! PERHAPS YOU ARE RIGHT THAT I AM LAYING OUT A WONDROUS TRAP MADE TO BEDONGGLE YOUR MIND.”

“But stay your hand, Human! I mean no harm. I genuinely absolutely certainly want to be your friend. Not only to you, but also to your wife, your first son, your second son, your daughter, and one more little one coming soon! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Jaw, dropped. Aiden frowned at his son and said: “Dayton, did you tell him any of this?!”

“Nope,” Dayton replied. Tried to shy away from the loud skeleton, all awkward and weirded out. “He’s an oracle. Used his magic to check on our family back home.”

The Gungnir drew their blades. Papyrus had just seen their leader’s family. Such a person must be silenced… or so they thought.
Aiden held them back. It’s clear that he feared for his son’s life. “What if I refuse to be your friend? Will you summon the police on us? Will you kill my son? My family?”

Papyrus huffed in annoyance. “WHY WOULD I DO SUCH A VIOLENCE? THE GREAT PAPYRUS WOULD NOT BE GREAT IF HE RESORTED TO A MESSY METHOD!”

“I WILL STILL GIVE YOUR SON BACK, OF COURSE! BUT I SHALL WAIT IN FRONT OF YOUR DOORSTEP EVERY DAY UNTIL YOU AGREE TO LET ME IN FOR THE DELICIOUS MEAL OF THE HOUR!”

Aiden couldn’t believe his ears. “So you will be a stalker. …Of friendship.”

“It worked with Undyne, so I’m sure it will work for you too.” Every word of his radiated straightforward sincerity.

“No police?”

“NO POLICE. NO MAGIC PEOPLE. NO ROYAL GUARDS OF BOTH FLESHY AND UNFLESHY KIND. JUST ME, THE GREAT PAPYRUS! I CERTAINLY HOPE THAT YOU WILL OPEN YOUR HEART TO MY FRIENDS, BUT I UNDERSTAND IF YOU’RE NOT READY. WE’LL DO THIS FRIENDSHIP THING ONE STEP AT A TIME!”

The Papyrus logic was so far removed from their worldview, the Gungnir had no idea how to handle it.

In the end, Aiden lost yet another battle. He decided that his family’s privacy was more important than his personal pride. “What… would you accept as an agreement to your terms?”

Papyrus showed his phone. “WE SHALL EXCHANGE NUMBERS FOR LONG-DISTANCE CONTACT! THAT WAY, I DO NOT NEED TO CAMP IN FRONT OF YOUR HOUSE! ISN’T TECHNOLOGY BRILLIANT???”

“Only if you don’t share this with anyone else. That includes everything you’ve learned today.”

“THE GREAT PAPYRUS PROMISES THE PRESERVATION OF YOUR SECRET CONFIDENTIALITIES. NYEH HEH HEH HEH HEH!!!”

So they exchanged and confirmed their contact numbers. Keeping to his word, Papyrus gave the boy back to his father. He watched the last remaining Gungnir vanish into the concrete jungle beyond.

Sans then disengaged the vision dive to rest. While looking at the map of possibilities above his head, he breathed a long, pleasant sigh. So glad, so relieved… yet so worried at the same time.

[Open your eyes, for heaven’s sake!] Gaster exclaimed, [A historic moment had transpired right before us. By fate and fortune, your brother is paving the way toward peace unheard of since the founding of these two organizations!]

“He will get himself killed.”

[Can you put aside that nihilistic fatalism for once?] “You drilled that into me.”

[FINE!] The old man tossed his invisible arms to the air. [I admit to my follies through and through! But can you please be the better monster and see the possible bright future ahead of
us??]
“…James Pashowar. What do you know about him?” said Sans.

[It’s an unfamiliar name.]

“That’s the Supreme Judge before Mezil. Before the War of the Red Victory. Great man. Big heart. Pushed for integration of science and magic, founded schools, and did many heroic things. He’s the type of person Papyrus could become under the right circumstance.”

“Magic is kinda public knowledge today thanks to that fellow. You’d think that he’ll have lots of friends… right? Welp. Apparently not. He died from betrayal.”

“One of the brightest Magus of that era was a manipulative psycho. All he needed to do was to look for other like-minded people, pull some strings, and then trap the ol’ Judge with his own goodwill.”

Sans shrugged. “There’s a reason why Mister Butterfly is as tough as nails. Maybe too tough. Sure, he’s alert at all times, but he antagonizes a lot of the wrong crowd. That’s a ticking time-bomb right there.”

“There are just too many factors crossing over each other. The Surface… is as complex as the materials we had recovered. I don’t want Papyrus to live in such an uncertain, dangerous world. Tori too.”

[…Do you even realise what you’re talking about? By far, this is the only timeline where Papyrus bloomed into his true greatness! Is it really worth discarding all of that for some semblance of tranquility?!]

“So…” His sockets darkened. “You caught on.”

[I understood your intentions from the moment you petrified my body. Egads, Sans! Have you forgotten about the Child of Mercy?]

His gaze turned towards Frisk. They had just turned around in bed. Grumbled something in their sleep.

“What about them?”

[They’re on your side! I daresay they look up to you and your brother more than anyone else. I’m sure the future will be bright as long they have trusted friends watching their backs!]

“Gaster.” Sans uttered that name in such a low manner, it’s almost a growl.

He pointed straight at the bed. “That is a prepubescent child, and yet we’re going to make them shoulder the entire world? Have we not learned anything from Asriel and Chara? Don’t you know what caused The End…”

“That’s about far as you can get in the ‘despair event horizon’. Are we really prepared to risk everything by putting them through that pain all over again?”

“Frisk needs the childhood that I’ve never experienced.”

A long, uncomfortable silence hung between them.

[I had hoped that the string of positive events might change your mind. Apparently I’m a
bigger fool than I've ever realised.] Sans imagined Gaster pacing around, exasperated and fed up. He sounded like it.

“Sorry old man, I can’t turn back now. Made sure I had no reason to do so.”

He burned his clothes. His belongings. His connections.

[Very well. What will you do if fate continues to conspire against you?]

“I will change that fate.” The skeleton stared down on the screen of the Seraph System. “I still have one last trump card. But, if I use that… heh. We’re all gonna have a really bad time. I might turn into a literal angel.”

Breathe in, breathe out.

Sans told the system to conjure a glass of milk. Chugged that down in one go. He then disintegrated the empty remains with a pulse of magic.

“Papyrus… what will you do from here on?”

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to Anonymous_Vermin_Invader for contributing the bird fanart a loooong time ago. Finally it had a time to be featured in script XD
Oops. I’m a little late. Last week I came down with migraine and a really bad arm strain. Sorry for the delays!

Originally this is going to be a multi-part. But then, a certain flower boy took centerstage. Enjoy the floweriness.

Another meme answered. If you want to know my current queue, head over here!

Edit: I forgot to show Undyne’s version of the meme. NGAAH INTENSIFIES!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I can’t even remember what the pain felt like, but I do know I don’t ever want to experience it again. That purple fire will haunt me forever.

I woke up to a dark, red-tinged room. Is this whatever humans call ‘Hell’?

Then I had that dumb detective-wannabe face looking over me.

“Howdy…?”

I can’t see very well, but Cenna sure sounded tired. I guess if she’s alive, I’m not thrown into the land of dead people.

“What the heck are you talking about?” I tried to sit up. Well, however much a flower can ‘sit’.

When I looked down, I noticed that I’m in the middle of a seven-point star. It’s drawn with blood and it’s sending life magic into me. And me alone…

“Chara!” I cried out. “Wake up, Chara!”

They’re outside the Gram, wilted and unconscious. They don’t even have a face anymore!

Miss Magus patted me on the head and said: “My magic ain’t working on them. Dunno why… But the kid’s not dead yet. So keep that precious water content inside of ya. Nngh… Can’t say the same about me though.”

“Why?”

“You can operate a phone, right?”

“Yeah?” Okay, why does she need me to do the job? Nevermind. She passed it to me anyway.

I tapped the torchlight function with my vine.
It’s all flowing out from the side of her chest. Dark red. The cut isn’t deep enough to have hit one of those ‘arteries’, but that doesn’t look like it’s gonna stop anytime soon.

“You IDIOT!” I yelled, “You didn’t bandage yourself up?! Y-you should have done that before taking care of me! I’m gonna call for help!”

“Sorry, flower boy… Zero bars.”

Great. She’s right. There’s absolutely no reception down here.

“I got an idea,” said Cenna. “…Could you… make some sort of makeshift bandage out of plant material? …I hope ya can.”

She’s right. We got to plug that dumb leak first. “I’ll try…”

I tried to make some blunt vines. Big Fail. Had to yank the sharp bits out with my teeth. It may seem gruesome, but it doesn’t hurt at all.

I then helped Cenna paste a bunch of leaves over the cut. Strapped them in place.

“Did that help?” I asked.

“Yeah.” She smiled back at me. “I’ll be good for a while. Thanks a ton.”

“Now that I’m not spewing a waterfall… Why not shine that little light on the Spirit Gate?”

I pointed the torch at it. As if the day cannot get worse. I’m looking at moronic idiocy personified in the form of a six-winged red Mark.

Yup. I flipped out. Hard.

“THAT USELESS SMILEY TRASHBAG!!! Of ALL the times he chose to be not-lazy, it’s on some stupid, idiotic, gambit NONSENSE poo-poohedness!”

Cenna chuckled.

“What? This isn’t the time to laugh!”

The nerve. This is a serious situation after all.

More snort and giggles. “Poo-poo head? …Hahaha! So cute… Great to see you so fired up. That’s a clear sign you’re healthy.”

I grumbled under my breath. Nevermind. I gotta be the mature flower here! “Can you walk?”

Cenna answered, “Even if I could, I won’t be able to get outta here. …The blackout we experienced ain’t a normal one. More so after the few ka-booms you slept through.”

“Excuse me?” I blurted. “That last part didn’t make sense.”

“Go shine in the direction of the elevator.”

I did that. There’s no corridor. Instead, there’s a huge block of reinforced steel plunked right in the middle: complete with yellow and black warning stripes.
“See what I mean?” she said, “Security measures kicked in and locked down the Crimson Hall tighter than a fort. …We’re talking vault-level here. …See this ain’t the first time someone tried to hijack the Trial, flower boy. After all, this is the Supreme Judge’s most vulnerable moment…”

I tilted my head at her, confused.

“Let’s start from the top.” I heard a grunt or two as she tried to make herself comfortable.

“On a normal day, Lucy controls the Spirit Gate…. Everyone thinks all you need is a SOUL to pass. Na-uh, ain’t gonna happen. …Only folks with authorization can open the door. Like me.”

“My job is to take down any intruders from the outside and drop the lockdown on command. …Unfortunately…” She glanced at the big stone door. “We’ve got a real cunning assassino this round. …That blackout gave him a window where Lucy’s cut off from the systems. Forced the door open with a Mark while she’s not looking, then sealed it right behind him.”

Things looked bad. Super bad.

I frowned. “So what now? We’re gonna sit here until we run out of air?”

“Nah. Air vents exist for a reason. Y’know, the one you and Chara busted out from.”

It’s still open at least. I can easily crawl back in there and find my way out.

“Flowey,” said Cenna. Serious mode too. “Sorry for dumping all this on ya but… you’re the only one who can go get help.”

That made me feel a little… nervous. The last time someone depended on me, they--

………………………………

“Why do you trust me?” I asked. I had to.

I can understand if it’s Frisk. That kid is a kid, and a determined one too.

But Cenna? She’s a Vanquisher. An Exorcist to be exact.

In case anyone forgot, it’s her JOB to kill DEMONS like me!

The lady huffed. “Well… Let me give you a lil’ secret, flower boy. There are times where I honestly don’t wanna be kind. …Or do the right thing… But I kept to the right side… even if it’s a little bendy. You kids chose to be good despite being DEMONS. Tried to save my hind despite everything. That puts the both of ya in better light than my usual targets. You can say Cinnamon Roll and Frisky’s vouches paid off.”

“Besides… ya gave me a vital clue on how to kick Sans’ butt.”

That’s a lot to take in. I think she’s trying to say that love and compassion are active choices. I don’t need to actively ‘feel’ it to relate to them.

Of course I know that! I mean, I realise it now. Thanks to Frisk.

I drooped my head. “But if I leave… what if Chara dies while I’m away? What if you die?”

Cenna laughed. Again. She’s a witch for a reason. Scoffing on the brink of death… so annoying.
She said: “If I die, someone’s gotta house my SOUL… Also, you’re taking Chara with you. …Look for Lucy…”

I see!

I made more vines. Cenna gently picked up Chara and tied them on my back.

She shouldn’t be moving, but she did so anyway.

“…Get them… to safety. It’s… all… Up to… you… now.”

The way she talks… it’s getting more and more fragmented. She’s getting weak despite the bandages.

Then, she collapsed on the ground.

“Cenna!”

She replied: “Eh. Feeling… lightheaded. I’m gonna… lie down… for a while.”

With a smile and a slight poke on my forehead, the Magus told me this: “Flowey, you can do it… Be… determined.”

Be determined.
BE!
DETERMINED!

I puffed myself up with courage and determination.

“Okay. I’ll do it. B-but… Don’t you DARE die on me! If you die I’ll… I’ll!”

I tried my best to put on the scary face, but I failed. Instead I just threw a short tantrum.

“I’ll! I’ll kill you after the stupid Spring Mission! I’ll wreck your fragile SOUL because you’re can’t stay alive for more than one timeline!”

With that said, I climbed back up to the air vent. Left the phone behind because it’s too bulky.

From above, I took a deep breath to yell one last insult:

“YOU IDIOT!!”

Cenna didn’t laugh back. Didn’t wave. Just grinned.

I rushed into the vents with tears in my eyes.

I’m scared. I’m still scared.
But I can’t stay as a crybaby forever. People are depending on me.

I won’t make that same mistake again.

When I reached ground level, I smelled the lingering remains of smoke.

Eeew, there’s soot on the walls too! …That’s bad. Looks like the building caught fire recently. No way I’m gonna drag Chara through the icky aftermath. I’m betting there’re a billion and one toxic byproducts littered everywhere.
…I checked their leaf. It’s all limp and wilted. They need water.

Find a way out… find a way out…
C’mon Flowey you can do this!

Aha! I see light!

Without electricity, none of the ventilation fans worked.

Good. Getting chopped up by spiny blades is the last thing I want to experience. Can’t load my SAVE anyway. Do anything stupid and the both of us will end up deader than dead.

So I crawled around it, squeezed through the gaps, and breathed some glorious fresh air. If the leftover fumes from the fire didn’t taint it. Ugh.

I heard a ton of commotion echoing in from outside.

It’s not too far away from where I am, so I went to take a peek.

Sirens blared. Ambulances, fire trucks and police cars tried to pass through the congested main gate.

Then there are some humans being all happy that their loved ones are safe.

And…

I recognize that flair from anywhere.

Mettaton showed off his glitzy self in front of a horde of impatient reporters.

They badgered him with questions. He answered them without… really answering much of anything. Instead he’s gracefully deflecting the complicated details with gratuitous self-promotion.

Some things never change.

Huh? What’s this? Terrorists? Hostages? IN THE MIDDLE OF A FIRE?!

What the heck even happened here?!

………………

Calm down Flowey.

It’s just another day in the land of magic drama. There’s no time for this dumbness. We’re just going to have to go far, far away…

Wait.

Wait wait wait! Isn’t there that lake filled with colourful fish at the northwest side?

Water!
Sunlight!
Soil!

I need to get Chara there quick! It’s my closest source of water and the open sky. That’s the best way to revive a flower. From personal experience, of course.

I slipped out of the grills and hurried north. As long the sun is on my left, I know I’m heading the
right direction.

The Sun’s angle is pretty low. Man, it’s late already?

There’s no one around the lake. Phew. That’s good.

I dipped my roots into the water for a taste test. Doubtful that it’s contaminated because of the rich fish life. But, hey it never hurts to be careful.

A school of koi immediately swam at my direction.

“NO! GO AWAY YOU STUPID FISH!!”
“I'M NOT YOUR FOOD!!!”

I showered friendliness pellets on them. That will show them who’s boss!

“SHOO! SCRAM!”

The dumb fish darted away in all directions.

Sigh. I guess I can’t dip Chara straight. I need to either plant them in a grassy spot, or wrap their roots with moisture.

Now, before I plant them, I’ve got to make sure that the soil is just right. They’re really weak now: a sucky spot will hurt more than help.

Eeeew! There’s too much clay in the grass!

That’s the WORST!

I’d rather take sand over this choking, smelly mud.

There goes the planting plan. The only place guaranteed to have good soil is the greenhouse. But… I don’t think it’s safe to go there yet.

You know, with the FIRE, HOSTAGES and TERRORISTS!

The best I can do now is to dampen some leaves and wrap them around their roots.

It’s better than nothing…

DARNIT. Isn't there another way???

“OH! FLOWER THE FLOWEY!”

Huh? Is that…?

“Papyrus!” I cried out. Chuckled a bit too. “Jeez, you’re getting my name wrong again?”

He finally got my name right in recent days, but I guess he can still slip up from time to time.

The little fun time is over. There are bigger things to settle. “T-that’s not important now. Cenna’s hurt really bad. And Sans--”

“I KNOW. WE HAVE TO BRING YOU TO THE FAIRY GODMOTHER.”

In the Underground, I would think he’s talking nonsense.
Now… he means what he says. It’s actually really cool.

Papyrus scooped us flower children off the ground and jumped over the lake. Turns out there’s a shortcut hanging right over the waters.

He landed feet first inside the massive airwell. The Magi call the Atrium. This place makes me dizzy to be honest. It’s all the spirals.

I see Lady Lucidia and… Grillby? I’m not going to question why he’s here. My attention is on the one and only person who can help Chara now.

The blue lady muttered: “Flowey?”

Just one look at us and she understood everything. I knew I’m in trouble. She told us to stay far, far away from Sans for a reason.

And we… we went against her advice. Just like the dumb rebellious kids we are.

Still… that silly witch trusted me. I have to put others first, before myself.

“Cenna is in trouble!” I said, “Sans cut her pretty deep. Like, over here.” I motioned my leaf to where the wound would be. “I made some bandage, but she’s clearly bleeding out. And Chara. They…”

I couldn’t finish the sentence.

Lady Lucidia attended to us without any extra lectures; “Hold Chara for us, little prince. Papyrus, assist me.”

I held Chara’s wilted form in my leaves. Both skellies worked their healing magic on my friend. They’re no longer as limp, but…

Lucidia furrowed her brows. “They’re resisting.”

Papyrus flipped out. “CHARA! WE CAN’T HELP YOU IF YOU INSIST ON BEING A SANS!”

Hmm. Wasn’t there a time when Papyrus refused to wake up? Lady Lucidia had to do a whole lot of fancy things to enter his mindscape.

I asked: “You mean Chara doesn’t want to get better?”

Papyrus nodded. “YES. MY BROTHER’S LETHARGIC POISON IS RUBBING TOO MUCH INTO THEM! OH MY GOD, HE’S THOROUGHLY INFECTIOUS!”

“I understand what you mean, but the statements are misleading. This not bacterial or viral,” said the lady. “It would be clearer to say that Chara has a similar response to negative stimuli as Sans Serif. Both of them withdraw. Though, their directions do differ.”

Language, too obscure. “I… don’t get it…?”

With a kind tone she explained: “Chara’s determined refusal is repelling our healing magic. They have little regard for their own life.”

“No…” I cried. “Don’t be an idiot, Chara. Wake up! I DEMAND you to wake up!”

I tried shaking them back to life.
It’s just like that fateful day when they ate those buttercups.

Papyrus tapped my stem to get my attention. He said: “FLOWEY, YOU’RE THEIR BEST FRIEND. ONLY YOU CAN REACH OUT TO THEM.”

“Is that a hint?” I asked back, skeptical.

“YES. YOU HAVE A DIFFICULT PUZZLE AHEAD OF YOU.”

I heard the screeching of wheels coming down from the hallway. Undyne had somehow borrowed a motorbike. Rode that thing all the way inside like some anime hero--

Oh, what am I talking about? It’s Undyne. I should have expected this.

She shut off the engine. Looked at Papyrus, at me, and then towards Lady Lucidia. “Let me guess: we’re not out of the woods yet.”

Lucidia nodded. “If Gaelic was here, he’d say we’re in a jungle. Please give me a moment.”

She conjured one of those magic stars and planted it on the back of our heads. I started to see ripples in the air behind her.

The images behind were so familiar. After a while, it clicked in my head. “Is that… the greenhouse?”

I muttered.

“Chara may reject magic, but their physical plant body will react to the presence of appropriate nutrients. We will attend to Cenna and stop Sans Serif, therefore their care is now your primary task.”

“I BELIEVE IN YOU,” Papyrus added.

I don’t get it.
I really, really, don’t get it.

Why does everyone trust me?!?

That crazy witch…
Lady Lucidia…
Papyrus…

News flash: I don’t have a SOUL!

Tears welled in my eyes again. I jumped out of Papyrus’ palm and straight towards the shortcut.

I heard Undyne yell something along the lines of ‘LET’S SAVE THE DAY LIKE REAL ANIME!’. That’s not important now; I set my mind to the mission ahead of me.

The balmy air greeted us. There may be no electricity here, but everything else is still intact.

I hurried to the herb gardening area. It turns out chores are not a stupid waste of time. Thanks to them, I know where they keep all the stuff. And I know what to do!

Okay. Chara’s roots are contaminated with fish water, so I got to rinse it off first.

I tried to turn on the tap. Nothing came out.
REALLY?!! No water AND no power at the same time?! Today sucks so hard! Oh well, gotta make do with what I have.

Pot. Checked.

I slapped a red warning sticker on it so the botanists don’t muck it up.

Botanical quality sterilized soil mix, found that too. Don’t forget to add some coconut husk to improve drainage.

And I popped the cap of a bottle of distilled water. Too much of those can make plants sick, so I have to be careful with it.

I compiled all of them together in a way that’d make Dad proud.

Can Chara hear me? Do they even want to listen?

“…Look,” I began, “Maybe you weren’t the perfect friend. In hindsight, you were pretty mean. And hurtful.”

“But now, I made up my mind to BE your very best friend. That means sticking around even if you aren’t perfect. Especially if you aren’t.”

“So what if we can’t ‘feel’ love and compassion anymore? You heard Cenna: we still have our minds. And my mind tells me to take care of you. Okay? I’ll lead by example!”

Then… I placed them under the setting sun. Plants need time to photosynthesize and every little bit helps.

“Hopefully those idiots can stop the Trashbag in time.”

Chapter End Notes

Next up on the drawing queue is Mezil. I am really not sure if I could make it in time for the Sunday deadline, in terms of writing. Still feeling a bit meh. Not to mention it’s getting hotter in Malaysia now.

I need to finish Golden Quiche before May 2017. That's because I am planning to travel to Europe for a holiday. Touch wood of anything happening over long trips like that, but better safe than sorry. Besides, you don't want to hang on a giant cliffhanger while I'm in the middle of a trip right? :P

So, I have a self imposed deadline. This whole thing must finish by the end of April. I have a feeling I'll need to rev up the writing rate.
Chapter Notes

Asgore POV? Yes. Goatdad this is a goatdad POV. I really hope that it's good. I've not written him much, so no guarantees on lack of mistakes.

Well... after counting the number of weeks I have left before May, I'm seriously doubting if I can meet my own deadline. I hope that I can at least finish this Sans arc.

In the meantime Mezil shows off his memeing skills! Sort of. I'm not accepting any more art requests until I'm done with my backlog.

If you like my work, check out my Art and Ask blogs. If you somehow want more regular reblogs, uh, feel free to follow my personal too. I don't mind.

Onwards to the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Asgore Dreemurr, “King Under the Mountain”. That’s what the Surface referred to him as.

He found himself staring at nothing in a blank numbness. Shocked? Perhaps. He had just witnessed his child whisked away by one of his nation’s strongest defenders.

What in the world went wrong?
Where?
How?

“Asgore?”

Gerson’s voice snapped him out of the daze.

He turned towards the old Hammer of Justice, the only living survivor of the War that wasn’t a Boss Monster.

Gerson is a wrinkly turtle now. Who knows how many years he has left.

“Oh… I’m sorry,” said Asgore. “It’s too sudden.”

“I understand old friend,” the turtle replied. “But, ‘fraid the Queen alone can’t handle this chaos.”

‘Chaos’ was an apt description. Number 4, a small white ‘chinchilla’ monster, was in tears. Toriel tried to comfort her with a cradling hug, but it’s not working.

Number 5 repeated a string of ‘oh my god~’ over and over. For a moment, Asgore thought he’s looking at Undyne. For good reasons too: she shared the same species of monster as the Underground’s gusto captain. Though a tropical cousin with shimmering lime-green scales, blue markings, and neon orange hair… she still had those trademark razor-sharp teeth.

As for Number 7 the ‘giraffe’ monster, she’s in an argument with a Lichborn colleague. Both of
them wore identical uniforms: white wizard-like robes, long and sleek, capped off by a gemmed circlet on their heads.

“Number Seven thinks we should break down the walls and search for Sans Serif.”

The Seer replied: “And WHO exactly do we send out?”

“Number One and Two are both some of the best Observers in the world. Number Seven thinks their combined cooperation is sufficient.”

“Garamond alone is enough for the job, Zakari! And quit using the number codes now. Anonymity is out of the window.”

The giraffe woman huffed. “Very well. Zakari thinks that Sir Latinoros would serve well to put aside his personal prejudices!”

Then a strong hiss cut through the conversation:

“Could BOTH of ya shut the fook up already?!”

It’s Number 2.

Asgore had to admit that he was a little frightened by Gaelic’s appearance. His features were fierce and wild: more like a permanent war mask than a face. How does he eat with that partial split on his lower jaw?

As for Judge Mezil Thyme… he had seen better days. Stripped from the bulk of his power, he’s now leaning on a cane to keep standing.

Gaelic attended to the Judge once more. “M’lord, pardon the intrusion but ya look like ya should sit.”

Mezil shook his head. Whispered something into his aide’s ear.

“…Understood. Mondie, Judge Thyme need yer Eyes!”

Another skeleton stood before the Spirit Gate. He hasn’t said a word since the incident unfolded: mysterious, serious, and silent. Apparently he’s Gaelic’s cousin.

Contrary to the wild snake and the traditional wizard, Garamond wore an attire more similar to Cenna’s. Combined with his strong, straight features, it gave him the visage of a dependable detective. Perhaps her inspiration?

He walked over to Judge Thyme. As Garamond passed King Asgore and Gerson, he honoured them with a respectful bow.

The goat king grew curious about the conversation. He followed behind, tuning his ears towards the talk.

“I’m afraid the exit is sealed from the outside.” Garamond reported.

“As I thought…” Mezil replied. “Scout the perimeters, Garamond. And see if you can find any clues left behind by the Seraphim. If you please, Gaelic…”

The human winced and tried to clutch his stomach.

“Say no more M’lord. Save yer strength.”
What transpired next made the King raise his brows. In his life, he had seen many versions of those floating skull armaments. None of them included the rest of the skeletal body.

Asgore’s comment rolled out of his mouth; “You must be very talented, young man.”

The praise made Gaelic blush, avoiding eye contact with a slightly nervous tone. “N-nay, Your Majesty. Ah can only do one. And. Uh. I be not young anymore. 45 springs old.”

“Oh, I see.”

Strange. That skittish behaviour was the complete opposite of Gaelic’s usual brazen, aggressive attitude; Asgore wondered if it’s due to his status as King… Or maybe his huge body size.

In the midst of his pondering, Garamond faced the bone snake with both Eyes lit: right Cyan, left Yellow. Those born Dichromatic were rare, and yet one stood in their midst. The Surface is huge indeed.

He performed a strange ritual on the summoned bone snake. First, a yanking motion. Then while the creature was under a daze, he made a chain of hand signals.

Asgore remembered now.

In the ancient days, the Seers discovered that they could ‘borrow’ the armaments of their fellow kin. Gaster had utilized it more as a subjugating method…

It’s nice to see that same technique used for cooperation instead.

“Sure ya got the stamina, Mondie?” asked Gaelic.

The cousin nodded. “I’ll be back soon.”

Garamond hopped into the cockpit and summoned his own brand of armaments. It took the form of a cyclopean arm-mounted skull gun.

He blasted a rough hole downward with a chain of repeated shots. Chunks of ceramic and fine powder rained about from the point of impact.

Off the bone snake then went, swimming into the vast darkness beyond.

At that point… Judge Thyme could stand no more. His cane clattered on the ground and the mighty fell.

Everyone cried out for his name. Terror rang in the air. Gaelic had caught Mezil’s body, but the morale was dashed to pieces.

Mezil started coughing up blood.

“This isn’t looking good at all, King Fluffybuns.” Gerson added.

He agreed. This scenario brought Asgore to a very dark place. Once upon a time bloody blisters erupted within Chara. He will never forget the smells nor the sights of that slow, cruel death.

The poor father didn’t know what to do at all. Would Judge Thyme meet the same end?

Appearances deceive, as the old saying goes. Gaelic immediately laid the ailing man on the floor and
tilted his head to the side. Worked quick to loosen up the Judge’s clothing: unbuttoning the coat and unfurling the cravat to give him room to breathe.

A cursed red lightning bolt flared through the thin, white undershirt. The people of the Surface called it a ‘Hex’, a dark human-specific magic that inflicted great ill. It somewhat resembles Mezil’s Butterfly Mark, but much, much worse.

Gaelic meanwhile started removing his own denim jacket, rolling it up into a bundle to prop up Mezil’s feet.

The actions puzzled Asgore. “What are you doing?”

“Shock procedure, Your Majesty,” the other replied. “Buys us some reprieve from doom. If it be fine, may I ask fer yer cape as a blanket? We need to keep him warm.”

Warm.
That became his only direction.

He took off his cape and draped it over Mezil’s body.

Asgore’s thoughts snapped to Toriel. Called her name with an outstretched hand in a sense of disconnected surrealism.

For the first time in years, his wife long-lost answered his pleas. Together they used their fire magic to keep the Supreme Judge’s life aflame.

Lost and confused, the ex-missus asked: “Earlier, he turned into a Lich just fine! W-what’s wrong with him now?”

The snake hissed at the thought. “He did? Aye, so it happened. Queen Toriel, that fallen angel stole his power. Without it, M’lord cannae keep a lid on that filthy bastard.”

“Sans?”

“Nay. The Persona. Though at this rate, both o’ those men deserve me most venomous spit!”

“I… I do not understand. I thought the Persona died ages ago! There is no vessel to sustain his essence, unlike my children. Can someone please explain?”

How it pained Asgore to see Toriel so distraught.

After an audible wheeze, the Judge grumbled under his breath. “…That roach… can’t he just die for good…?”

“How lord, save yer strength for the battle!” Gaelic pleaded. “Fight it. Stay determined! Replace the willpower bleeding out o’ ya!”

Fight, he did. Those nut-brown eyes flashed red for a moment. However, they soon sputtered out like a broken screen.

“…I can’t… I don’t have… the connection anymore ….I’m losing too much blood…”

Asgore recalled that horrible fight. Mezil had lost so much more of his life-giving liquid, but he could brave it through because he had his power as a vampire.

Now, all of that was gone.
The King felt a surge of magic across Mezil’s skin. It’s a familiar one that brought him back to the early days of his reign.

“Is that the Lich ritual magic?” he asked.

Alarmed, Gaelic tried to suppress it. Judging from his expression… his efforts were far from enough.

“M’lord Mezil please, ah beg ya to suppress that fiend.”

Toriel searched for signs of that ritual. “Where is it? Which item did you imbue that spell into? We need to get rid of it right now!”

The human answered: “It’s part of my skin… tattooed… irremovable.”

“You did what?!”

“…I made sure I will always convert… when the end draws near…”

One more key question had bugged Asgore since the beginning. It’s best to ask that now.

“What… should we do if you lose this battle?”

“…Execute me twice… To ensure my bones don’t live again… Otherwise the Persona will own this very body…”

A dark chill descended upon Asgore’s fluffy mane. Who in this room could compete against a Red Lich? Other than himself, there’s Gaelic. But banking on a lone backup fighter would be far too risky.

Toriel’s combat capabilities wouldn’t be enough. Garamond was still away on his scouting mission. Gerson had lost much of his bite to age. What’s worse, the rest of the Jurors don’t appear to be trained for battle.

The King realised that if the situation fell to that point, he must bear arms to kill.

Mezil tried to reach out to someone. Asgore wanted to grab it out of fatherly instinct, but the Seer was quicker.

“Gaelic…” thus said the Judge. “…If Lucidia wills… you may marry her…”

Did he hear that right?
Did this man just offer someone his wife’s hand in marriage?

“Nonsense!” Gaelic responded. “She be yours and yours forever, in this life and the next!”

“…I know you love her too… I don’t… Nngh… trust anyone else…”

“Cor Blimey, heaven forbid her to unite with someone as filthy as me! She be the fae o’ the sky and me a crawling critter. Ya know what ah do and where I’ve been. How could ya conceive of this idea?!”

Mezil smirked. “…I’m a demon after all…”

Just when things couldn’t get crazier, a certain man who went by name of Sir Latinoros jumped into the fray.
He said: “For once I agree with that ‘wildling’. Judge Thyme, your mind must have been addled to hand over the esteemed Lady Lucidia to someone like HIM! Gaelic has a history of many vices and will only bring her grief! There are plenty of other suitors ready to give the secure life she deserves.”

More gasps in the background. An invisible line was crossed twice.

The snake locked a glare at the proverbial ‘intruder’. “What the fook did ya suggest?”

“I’m just being practical.” Latinoros stood his ground. “As the daughter of House Berendin, anyone who marries Lady Lucidia will have immense influence in both the human and the monster world.”

Gaelic stood up. He’s outright snarling. “Over me pile o’ dust! ‘Tis be how ya ’honour’ her? By treatin’ her like some chess piece? M’lady be her own person! Let her decide who she weds, if ever! Here ya wonder why M’lord cannae hand her over to ya lot.”

The Lichborn in white crossed his arms and huffed.

“Ha! You dare claim that you’ve never wished for her to conveniently fall onto your lap?”

“NEVER!” The other snapped back. Tensions running high. “Which twisted fook would ever wish a husband’s death?!”

Latinoros insisted: “Plenty! History proves so, again and again!”

“I be not one o’ those scallywag bastards!”

“Can anyone trust the words of a man who literally turned himself into a predator?!”

“DO NOT lump me with those scummy mangy fuckton o’ twats! I love BOTH M’lady and M’lord from the bottom o’ me soul. Ya cannae have one without the other!”

The sheer awkwardness in this room could kill someone.

“I see. Not only do you pine for a married woman, but her husband too? There is no one sicker than you!”

Bones rattled in the air.

Gaelic’s fire in his Eye flared in a mix of violet and orange: filled with untamed violence.

Gerson readied his hammer. Old he may be, he’s not going to stand by in the face of an imminent meltdown.

“Ya call me sick? Hah. Fine. Since I be nothin’ more than a beast o’ prey.” The forked tongue licked over the outer row of teeth, spreading a thin violet substance over it. “Ah should just eat ya alive!!!”

It all happened in a split second.

Bystanders screamed.

The angered soul dashed forward with his maws ready to bite.

And the King Under the Mountain jumped into action.

Asgore didn’t think of how he’d stop this ball of anger. He just knew that he must.
He first tried to yank Gaelic out of the line of attack. Faced massive resistance. For someone so thin and lanky, this skeleton had the strength of a bull. With no other choice, he wrapped a muscular arm around Gaelic’s neck in a desperate attempt to reel him in.

Then, he felt something prick into his skin. What followed after was a second wave of screams. This time, his old friend and his wife yelled the loudest.

Looking down, he realised that the snake had sank his teeth into his forearm. It started going numb from the poison.

The struggle continued.

Every faint movement caused the fangs to dig deeper and deeper into their victim.

Despite so, Asgore announced: “I’m fine. Please let me handle this.”

Gerson supported the notion. “Do as he says, kiddos. After all, there’s a reason why he’s our beloved King Fluffybuns. Wa ha ha!”

“Thank you, my friend.”

How strange it was to have a clear mind at this dire moment. The King remained still, yet firm and resolute.

In a gentle tone, he asked: “Are you frightened?”

“To be honest… I am too. Gaelic, was it?” Asgore smiled. “Judge Thyme and his wife are very lucky to have such a trusted comrade at their side. Your devotion is worthy of respect.”

He could feel the magic ebb a little, but the clamp on his arm remained. What else could he say to soothe the soul? The King pondered…

“I understand what it’s like to have someone you love be with a different person. In a fit of anger, I made a grave mistake. Just like that… my wife left me. It wasn’t until mere days ago that I could begin to talk to her without reopening old wounds.”

“All I could do was watch from a distance. There, I saw Sans made her laugh and smile in ways I had never seen before. I do admit that it made me a little jealous. But, I love my dearest more than my own pride.”

“If she wishes to remain single, I respect that. If she wishes to marry another man, I’ll give her my blessing. If she wishes to return to my side… my arms are open. No matter how many seasons have passed.”

“I did notice that you were a little nervous in my presence. Were you afraid that I’d find you repulsive?”

Gaelic shuffled a bit.

Asgore chuckled. “Oh no, I won’t give you a roasting. When this event is over, allow me to offer you a cup of tea instead. How does that sound?”

He heard a murmur, but it’s muffled by his arm. Seems the bloke’s considering it.

Toriel added, “Right now, Judge Thyme needs you at your best. Love advice and other issues can come later.”
At long last, the bite loosened. Asgore let the man go too.

Gaelic held his head low, refusing to look at anyone.

“There… be nothing else I can do,” he admitted. “Judge Thyme needs to leave the Crimson Hall. Back to his uninjured body. But we cannae do that unless…”

The King then said, “Unless someone breaks us out?”

That caught Gaelic’s attention. Now, Asgore had a good look at his eccentric face without the bravado. There’s a kindred spirit underneath that fierce visage.

Smiling, the King reassured: “Do not fret. Someone will save us.”

“…Ya not just saying this to give false faith, aye?” Gaelic stated.

“Not at all. Us Boss Monsters have some sixth sense too. Even in these dire circumstances, I’m feeling a ray of hope that wasn’t there when my children died.”

“For now, let us stay calm and ‘ride out’ the turbulence.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m not sure how many Togore shippers are reading this story. And I’m not sure how many are against this ship and/or don’t think it’s possible. It’s all about the sequence of events in the end. GQ’s crazy event kinda put everyone in a situation where they had to face their issues.

I have a feeling that Gaelic and Alphys would get along in the shipper’s club—

I did draw Garamond’s concept. Tentatively, he looks something like this. He’s mentioned in the Magus Compendium, actually! Look for ‘Garamond Blanc’ in Chapter 2.

Edit: Whoops. I think we had his name removed in the edits. I did note it down in the first draft.
I wish I have more stamina. So many stuff to do. I still have 4 memes left to draw and I was already struggling with writing alone. Not to mention it would be one of the most anticipated batch since it involves Sans.

I have the May thing. Super Adventure Box in April. Chinese New Year next week. Seriously, I remember writing Golden Quiche during the previous year's Chinese New Year. Now I'm going to have a second Chinese New Year with GQ still not done XD;;;

Perhaps I won't be writing during the trip this year. Maybe next week I'll dedicate to finishing the Memes. Or try to write 109 as much as a can. Really not sure.

Meanwhile, I did manage to finish this request.

A great wall blocked that path toward the Crimson Hall from the outside world. If it weren’t for the reflective hazard lines, Undyne would have ran straight into it.

It’s a good thing Grillby tagged along: he provided some much needed lighting in a pitch-dark zone.

Squinting, she said: “I know the Surface doesn't use puzzles for security anymore, but isn’t this too straightforward? It’s just a slab of steel.”

“We still use ‘puzzles’,” Lucidia replied. “Except not in the way you are familiar with. Also, only the outer casing is made of reinforced steel. There are several layers of other materials that are ten times the strength of its shell. The walls, flooring, and ceiling are made of this same composition. Attempts of tunnelling in without appropriate equipment is ill-advised.”

“Okay?” The random trivia reminded her of her beloved Doctor Alphys.

Her Eyes activated, pulling out a hidden console behind a wall hatch. A spinal key then powered up the device in the presence of her magic.

It’s quite a complex piece of equipment. Undyne tried to read the interface, but it’s all in unfamiliar rune symbols.

Lady Lucidia, huh? I didn’t have much chance to ask about her. All I could tell is that she’s a Seer like Sans. And she’s totally an ojou-sama.

Papyrus paced back and forth at the wall, restless. He asked, “WHY DO YOU HAVE SO MUCH SECURITY?”

Lucidia explained: “This is not the first time someone tried to breach the Crimson Hall. Both humans and monsters alike.”

“And’ monsters?” noted Undyne.
“That is correct. Sans Serif is not the first.”

As Lucidia worked on the console, she resumed her explanation. “The Keys of Fate control the world. This privilege extends to the wielder’s closest social sphere. Friends. Family. Custodians. Benefactors.”

“Many had attempted to push my husband into an early retirement. Alas, he found none suitable to take his place. As you can imagine, not everyone will surrender their chance for influence without a fight.”

“In the Crimson Hall, the Supreme Judges will simultaneously be at their most powerful and most vulnerable state. Many tried to murder them during this period. Sometimes… they succeeded.”

“H-hang on,” said Undyne. “You’re married to THE Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme?!”

“Yes, I am. Apologies, I must concentrate.”

The fish captain spotted a cryptic puzzle on screen. She may not be able to understand the text, but the sheer number of patterned grids hinted to her that it’s related to math.

She leaned close to Papyrus and whispered: “Is she for real?”

Though he’s still eager, he’s much more subdued than Undyne remembered. “YES. SHE IS INDEED MISTER MAGUS’ LOVELY WIFE.”

Grillby nodded along.

Undyne almost took the events at face value. A second later, she noticed the oddity.

“Wait Grillby, how the heck did YOU know?!”

The man of fire blinked twice. “…Oh… Context…”

Undyne will not further question how Grillby managed to connect the dots. That’s not important compared to the crisis at hand.

Looking at the barricade, she wondered if her spear could bust it down. She’s confident that answer would be a ‘yes’ if it’s weaker than the Barrier: more so with her new DT-laced magic.

“Maybe we can skip the puzzles and--”

The skeleton placed a hand on her shoulder. “NO. THERE’S SOMETHING EVEN STRONGER BEHIND THIS WALL. WE’LL NEED YOUR AWESOMENESS THEN.”

Cringe mode, on. “Are you serious, Papyrus? There’s ANOTHER wall behind this one?!”

“THERE’S ALWAYS ANOTHER WALL!”

Upon the completion of the passcode, the internal mechanisms lifted the massive structure off the ground. It was then that Undyne understood that the big vault-like blockade was the least of their worries.

Now they had a bloody human on the floor, and one heck of an annoying signature on a place where it really shouldn’t be.

Staring at the Mark, she asked Grillby a question. “That’s… the exact same pattern as the one on
Doctor Gaster, right?"

“…Yes…” he replied.

Breathe in.
Hold breath.
Breathe out while resisting the urge to suplex something.

Sans had been here. Dealt some hefty damage too.

Lady Lucidia wasted no time to attend to Cenna. Humans were way more fragile than the history books described.

Yet despite so, luck was on Cenna’s side. That Magus still had the strength to smile and talk.

“Hey…” she said, “…Glad my little drama show sped things up. Though. At this rate… nng… it’s gonna be for real.”

Still crazy and semi-suicidal as always.

Papyrus asked, “IS IT BAD?”

Lucidia replied, “I estimate fifteen minutes before she enters shock. Using shortcuts, we may be able to deliver her to a hospital in time—”

A tight, bloodied grip on her sleeve interrupted the conversation. Cenna shook her head. “Na-uh, Lucy. I ain’t leaving… I can take down Sans.”

“Cenna! Don’t be silly!”

“I’m serious…” The Magus pointed her thumb at the massive stone door. “Get me in there…”

Undyne perked up. “You have super medical facilities behind that door?”

“No,” the Seer answered. “But Cenna will certainly be safe. It’s easier seen than explained. But first, we must destroy that False Mark.”

Those bright red wings glowed with an eerie sense of calmness. It’s so still. Silent. Much like its owner.

Undyne summoned a spear and tried to poke it. A slippery force pushed aside the presence of anything foreign.

**Huh?**

Another poke.
Once more, the same result.

**Hnnng!**

Her great flurry also failed to land a single blow. Strike after strike bounced off.

**Whoa. That felt WEIRD! It’s like… like I’m fighting Sans with all his constant dodging. This Mark’s weakness is freaking eluding me!**

At the very least, the Mark didn’t explode. She had enough of explosions for the month.
“UNDYNE!” Papyrus exclaimed. “YOU’RE DOING IT WRONG! RED’S BIGGEST WEAKNESS IS RED ITSELF. USE YOUR NEW SPECIAL MAGIC!”

“Red?” she blurted out.

Come to think of it, my new magic did deal with Determination.

“Okay Paps. I got it.”

Undyne dismissed her old weapon. After taking a deep breath, she put all her effort into conjuring a new DT-laced spearhead.

Papyrus spoke the truth. Unlike the normal spear, her special one cut through the repulsion like hot knife to butter. It went all the way until she heard a slight ‘clink’. Her spearhead had made direct contact on the Mark.

Except, it won't budge.

Undyne pulled back. “Not good. I need more force behind this. If I don’t fire myself up, I won’t be able to overpower that bugger.”

Lady Lucidia gave a grim warning: “Whatever you do, don’t destroy the Spirit Gate itself. We don’t have time for any intensive repairs.”

“Got it…”

How do I even do this?!

Of all the moments to doubt, it had to be in the middle of a crisis. The fear of failure crept up against her back.

A slap on her shoulder snapped her out of it. It's her best friend’s gloves.

Papyrus said: “FOLLOW YOUR HEART.”

He then went to assist Lady Lucidia. The team had Cenna lie down on the ground. She gave some specific instructions to follow.

Papyrus helped keep the legs propped up, Grillby used his fire magic to keep her warm, and the lady applied compressing force on the plant-bandaged wound.

Everyone is giving their best shot.

If that’s the case, I’m gonna do the same!

Undyne began taking another crack against the Mark. First, she tried to divide her magic. Determination on the front, magic as the shaft for propulsion. Turn it into a Missile of Justice!

Her first strike… had the spear ricochet at a 45 degree angle over her head. It struck the ceiling behind her.

“OH MY GOD!!!” Undyne yelped. “Maaaaybe it’s a bad idea to throw it.”

“…Too unfocused…”

When Grillby suddenly spoke up, that gave her a slight fright. He’s been quiet until now.
“Still? Dammit. What else can I do? Sharpen the spearhead?”

The shape of his eyes curled backwards, along with his invisible brow. “…That won’t help…”

“Sir Grillenn is right,” said Lady Lucidia. “Willpower for the sake of willpower alone will not give the cutting edge you need.”

Grillby seemed to know what he’s talking about. Undyne stepped aside and asked: “Wanna try breaking that Mark? You managed to make fire shoot to the sky. I saw that!”

The fiery ex-captain shook his head. “…Round peg, square hole… Explosives are not the key here…”

Again, Lucidia added: “I apologize for the false hope, Captain Undyne. But, the pillar you witnessed was the accumulation of multiple factors that we lack at this moment. Sir Grillenn’s techniques focuses on retaliation rather than offense.”

Papyrus had grown impatient. He cried out: “UNDYNE! YOU DID THIS BEFORE, REMEMBER? YOU MADE THIS GRAND EPIC SPEECH ABOUT DEFENDING THE WORLD, AND THEN YOU TRANSFORMED INTO A KNIGHT WITH AWESOME COOL BLACK ARMOUR!”

Undyne ended up staring at Papyrus in utter puzzlement. She heard something like that before: back when Papyrus re-awakened his Eye.

“TAP INTO YOUR BURNING PASSION AND FIND THAT SPARK AGAIN!”

“Papaya!” Lucidia yelled.

Papyrus started sweating by the buckets. “DID I SAY SOMETHING WRONG? AND WHO IS THIS ‘PAPAYA’?”

Her eyes switched to a strong purple. The moment she did so, Undyne sensed a spike of impending trouble for her best skeleton friend. This lady now occupied the ‘do not anger’ list right under Toriel.

“Subject: Papyrus. You have just committed the gravest of all Chronographer errors. Details of defunct timelines must never be applied one-to-one to the present.”

The young Seer raised his hands up high. “P-PLEASE HOLD ON, FAIRY GODMOTHER! I MAY HAVE STUMBLED A TINY BIT, BUT I DID SEE THE FUTURE WHERE UNDYNE ACHIEVES HER GRAND AWESOMENESS IN TIME! WITHOUT THE SAD FATALITY TOO.”

“Query: do the prerequisites for Captain Undyne to unlock her true power exists before Cenna’s terminal exsanguination?”

“YES! WE JUST NEED TO REMIND HER! IN A WAY.”

Her eyes faded back to white. That’s always a good sign when it comes to the skelly people.

Grillby turned his successor back towards the Spirit Gate in a gentle, discreet fashion. He signalled her to maintain focus.

Lucidia took a deep breath. “Captain, there is a method my husband utilizes to raise his Determination in critical times like these.”
“And that is?” Undyne asked.

“He envisions the cost of his defeat.”

“TURN NEGATIVITY INTO POSITIVITY!” said the other Seer.

“If the Magus Association falls, the Surface’s remaining monster nations will lose their primary defenders.”

“WHEN FRISK INSISTED ON DOING A VIOLENCE, YOU STEPPED UP TO STOP THEM! PROTECTED MONSTER KID AT THE COST OF YOUR LIFE! EVERYONE WOULD DIE WITHOUT YOU!!”

“Our legal and civil rights will be void. In other words, we will become vulnerable to organized attacks from any human nation. We are looking at a mass genocide that will bring monsterkind to extinction.”

“YOU ALMOST TURNED TO DUST, BUT YOU REFUSED TO DIE! YOU INSTEAD TRANSFORMED INTO A TRUE HERO! I COULD HEAR SPACETIME ITSELF SING AN EPIC BATTLE THEME FOR THAT SHEER BADASS COOL!”

“If that is not dire enough, please consider this: humanity will no longer have anyone to tackle any future magical fallouts. Magic will not vanish upon our species’ death. It is universal constant, much like gravity. It can, and most likely will, be experimented upon again.”

“SADLY TO SAY YOU FAILED, AND ENDED UP IN FOREVER-VACATION AT GOOPLAND. THERE IS A FINE BALANCE TO EVERYTHING! TODAY YOU MUST BE AWESOME WITHOUT MELTING! IF NOT…”

“The abomination under the ocean will break free and consume the planet.”

“THE END WILL COME AGAIN.”

“Captain Undyne, you are our only hope.”

“WE NEED YOU! DON’T GIVE UP!!”

The crunch descended on Undyne’s head. They really, really, really need to get past this door before Cenna bled out at her feet.

_Shit, shit, shit! _
_I know what I need to do but I don’t know how. And it’s. So. Fucking. FRUSTRATING!!!

“NGYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!”

In a fit of rage, Undyne tossed her DT-enhanced spear towards the Mark.

This time, it didn’t bounce off. The tip managed to drill itself into the target for a few seconds… but it exhausted its power before a successful breakthrough.

The results amazed everyone. Even Undyne herself.

Grillby the said, “…You found it… Remember this feeling… and focus…”

_This feeling…? _
_Of wanting to punch someone in the face?_
No. It’s more than that. Grillbz’s right. I gotta focus.

Undyne shut herself out from the outside world for a moment. Filtered out the noise. When she did so, she sensed a strange force welling up from the bottom of her heart.

It beats.
It burns.

It refuses to die.

“…………………………”

“I see the stakes now. This isn’t about just the monsters of Ebott anymore, is it? If we fail here… we’ll all lose our future.”

“Monsters…”
“Humans…”
“Everyone…”

“Everyone’s hopes. Everyone’s dreams. Vanquished in an instant.”

“But I WON’T let that happen!”

A surge of power filled her veins. Its sudden force ruptured out from her hollow left socket and ripped through her eyepatch.

“…Right now, I can feel everyone’s hearts beating as one. And we all share the same goal: a better tomorrow!”

“Watch out, Sans! For the sake of the whole world… I, UNDYNE, will strike you down!!!”

A great spear was thus born; so great that the air stormed in its wake. In one mighty blow, she drove the charged spear straight into the heart of the Seraph’s Mark.

It shattered into a hundred glassy shards of red. Destabilized, the remnants burned themselves to nothingness.

The light from her left socket frizzled out. Undyne felt a little wobbly after her stunt. Whatever she did ate a huge chunk of her stamina.

She recalled the notes that excessive internal Determination will kill her. If that happened… she won’t live long enough to apologize to Alphys.

“Uh… I’m not melting, right?”

Papyrus was sparkling in awe. “Wowie!!! That’s sooooo cool! I can still hear your epic battle theme of justice! And yes you’re not melting. Just winded.”

“…Good job…”

“Congratulations, Captain.”

Undyne felt like the luckiest woman in the world.

“Let’s hurry,” she said, “Who knows what the hell is going on in there.”
Chapter End Notes

Yes. I adapted the actual Undyne the Undying speech. True power: Unlocked!

If I don't get to post a new chapter before CNY, I'd like to wish all a happy Year of the Rooster!
I was home somewhere around the 31st January, but I didn't have any content ready for posting until today.

Okay gonna make the announcement official: I'm home! Yay! It took a while to get back into gear though.

I also want to announce a new lore content title. It was originally supposed to be part of the Magus Compendium, but editor-san said it's the wrong format. Therefore say hello to the Chronographer Records. This one is open to requests, but there's no guarantee that I can fulfil them all. I'll still write backstory tidbits whenever I feel like it (in hopes that it will clear my fatigue from building the main writing. I love it but sometimes my brain needs a different picture.)

Speaking of requests... GG me. I still have memes to draw, but I'm still trying to catch up on my writing. Words take priority. I apologize for the slowness of my art.

Mezil Winston never had much of a choice. Everything boiled down to two decisions: do, or die.

Run the house, or sit in the filth of his dysfunctional family.
Raise money in advance, or join the swarths of debt-laden graduates.
Pull the trigger, or others will pull theirs.

Remain as Supreme Judge, or pass the torch to another person -- ill-prepared to carry the burden.

The answer was as clear as day.

From the beginning, Mezil had the feeling that he's not so different compared to The Seraphim. It was exactly why he considered that short skeleton to be the most dangerous monster in the known world.

And how right he was.

The King Under the Mountain held Mezil’s hand. ‘Be determined’, the gentle giant urged.

Again, the man was presented with a clear choice.

Fight… or the Persona reigns victorious.

So he struggled. It had reached a point where he comprehended nothing else other than that one sole desire to exist.

Live.
Live.
Live.
Yet due to his powerless state, his consciousness slipped. Perhaps at some point he had blinked for too long.

He heard voices: the kind king, the sweet queen, and his wild brother of a different mother. They talked, but he did not understand what the words meant.

Everything became a muted mess of rumbling…

…Until at its most silent moment, he heard ‘her’ call for his name.

Mezil stirred from the brink of darkness.

“Lucidia…?”

Warmth filled his veins. Beats of his heart strengthened. The man began to recall the meaning behind the sensations of existence.

He had risen from the abyss of death and washed back to the shores of life.

Breathe. Breathe he did. Each cough and gasp granted him foothold.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself sitting against the wall. Any source of light came from the Crimson Hall. A gloved skeletal hand soothed his chest.

“Are you feeling better?” asked Lucidia.

Dear wife did this routine for years. Where would he be without her support?

“I’m… uncertain.” Mezil replied. “Maybe even a little confused.”

Disorientation shouldn’t be his answer.

“Well fuck. You reeeeally don’t look good, Mez. Thought putting ya back into your real body would at least add some colour to your face.”

He turned towards the only person who’d call him by that name.

Cenna stood at the entrance of the Spirit Gate, right beyond the line as well. She sported a hairstyle that Mezil had not seen in over a year.

It's a short boy's cut.

The Ebott people may always remember Cenna as a hotshot with long, flowing locks. But that’s not her preferred sense of fashion.

After a brief wobble on his feet, Mezil managed to stand. He faced Cenna to say: “It’s been a while since I last saw you this radiant.”

“Three years, at least?” Cenna replied. She then shook her head. “I’m asking the wrong person. Time stretches on a ton longer for you.”

Right as always. The battle with Persona ended a decade ago, but the whole ‘Undertale’ fiasco added more illusionary years than he could recall.
She asked, “Did Frisky pass?”

Mezil huffed. “Of course. A pure Red descended from two Crimson Keepers… What else did you expect?”

“Hah! Finally! Looks like I can pass over to the Spirit World in peace.”

“Tsk, what’s with that nonsense? You’re not dying before the big mission. We need the strength of your Ascension.”

Cenna chuckled. “Then ya really oughta get the med team here. ‘Cause I’m like, one minute away from bleeding out. Seriously.”

The Vanquisher stretched her arm beyond the borders of the stone gate. It's covered in blood.

It doesn’t take much to connect the cause of her perilous state. “I’m amazed you survived the Seraphim this time.”


Mezil huffed. “That goes without saying. I’ll get them done as soon as possible.”

“No rush.” Cenna pointed her thumb over her back. “I’ve still got bigger fish to fry. That’ll take a while.”

Her gesture coincided with Jury Number 5 nerding out about Undyne. Clearly not the intended target.

Mezil furrowed his brows. “Are you sure? Even with access to your full might, it’s wasted effort if you don’t have a strategy.”

Cenna cocked back her head for a hearty laugh. “Of course I do! I may not be the brightest bulb compared to you and Lucy, but I ain’t a total dumbnut.”

“Trust me, Mez. I got this one.”

Lucidia said: “Judge Caraway, I shall get the Chronograph up and running ASAP. Equipment and medical support are vital against someone of Sans Serif’s notoriety.”

“Sweet!” The Vanquisher chirped. “I’ll let the others know too.”

Leaning a little forward for a whisper, Cenna added: “You better have an antidote for King Goatdad. Last thing I wanna deal with now is an internal fallout.”

In the background, King Asgore tried to prevent a certain someone from skewering a guilt-ridden Gaelic with her trademark spears.

Mezil also noticed that Captain Grillby wore one of his own personal bartender uniforms, a reminiscence of his pre-college days. He questioned the how and the why, but at the very least the humanoid fire helped maintain order.

Lucidia stared at the scenario in annoyance.

“I see Sir Latinoros’ prejudicial stance has once again stirred the hornet’s nest.”
“I’d rather describe it as releasing a crate of angry mambas, to be honest. Snake thematic and all.”

Mezil agreed with Cenna’s imagery, but kept to his own thoughts. He will deal with Latinoros in due time.

“An apt description,” Lucidia continued, “Gaelic’s concoctions are notoriously difficult to delete without his own antidote. I shall try my best, but I can’t guarantee a full recovery until King Asgore Dreemurr leaves the Crimson Hall.”

The woman of magic wrapped her hands around her husband’s arm. Her powers lightened some of his body weight so he could walk without wasting precious energy.

“Judge Thyme, it’s imperative that we make our leave now.”

He nodded.

“Good luck to you, Vanquisher.” Mezil blessed Cenna, “Preserve your life in this skirmish.”

She saluted in the fashion of a police officer. Mezil returned the gesture.

Lucida then shut the stone gates for everyone’s safety. The couple thus made their way up towards the surface. Good thing the elevator’s upper maintenance hatch was already open. Most likely to transport backup down from above, Mezil guessed. Saves them some time.

Lucidia scooped her husband into her arms, princess-style. Should Cenna witness this, she would never pass up the chance to jab at their switched roles.

Sadness weighed down on the wife’s face as they floated up towards ground level.

“Judge Thyme,” she said. “Please steel your heart. Much has happened during the Trial.”

Dear husband started to feel his stomach knot. But, for her sake… he maintained his stoic visage.

It still wasn’t enough to prepare him for reality.

Under his watch, the headquarters of the Magus Association suffered a great razing.

Lower half of the Spire, gone.

All immediate education facilities, gone.

Core infrastructure such as water and electricity, severely damaged.

All that remained intact were auxiliary facilities such as the greenhouse.

Inspecting the damages, Mezil recalled how he walked through the cold, charred streets of years past. It’s a fateful day that continued to haunt him.

On the year of Frisk’s birth, the Vampire of Time crushed the Gungnir’s ‘god’.

Many thought it’s the end of a legacy, but they were wrong.

The Persona issued a decree long before the battle. Should he depart from the physical world, his cultists had one duty to fulfill:

‘Expose their weakness.’
They thus targeted the city’s Magus affiliated areas, creating a daytime blaze that the masses will never forget. Many dead, more injured.

However, the public did not remember it as a terrorist attack. On 1520 hours, a freak earthquake stemming from Mount Ebott shook the region. It caused industrial malfunctions on massive squale, further exacerbated by Gungnir sabotage.

All ‘scrutiny’ accused the Magi for failing to quake-proof their facilities. Watchdogs and activists questioned the safety of magitek. Malpractice they called it. Fear of magic spread. With that, more and more people agreed to Gungnir ideology.

A new generation of Gungnir thus rose from the Persona’s ashes: one made of anonymous faces from ordinary backgrounds. They’re ignorant, gullible participants in an ancient conflict far beyond their comprehension.

The lines blurred. Persecute anyone, and the naysayers will accuse Mezil as a cold dictator.

But the Supreme Judge refused to let public opinion tie his hands as they had done to his predecessors. Choice was a luxury. Do the dirty work, or more innocents die from his perceived negligence. He can’t afford the latter. Not again.

Never again.

Despair and helplessness threatened to gnaw on his bones. Chased them away without a second thought. Lack of willpower be damned.

Lucidia debriefed as succinctly as she could. When she described the Gungnir’s current leader, poor Mezil almost flipped his top.

“Yet another son?!” he exclaimed. “Just how many damn bastards does that DEMON have?”

She replied: “About as many as an Emperor could bear, I imagine. He did adopt the ‘productive’ lifestyle of the historical greats after all.”

“Tsk. The fact that Aiden is an Aratet worries me further. If word got out that their tribe has modern Gungnir ties, that country will explode into yet another ethnic war.”

Mezil forecasted his own future to be rather grim. Condemnation sank claws into his back. He was reminded of the textbook definition of insanity: repeating the same faulty actions while expecting different results in the end.

It made him wonder if escaping from the Persona’s clutches again would only lead him down a different deathtrap… one more political and annoying in nature.

“Perhaps I should address the press,” said Mezil.

Lucidia held him back. “No dear, you’re wounded.”

“Am not.”

“I don’t mean the physical sort. With or without your Determination, you are too exhausted to present a solid case. Let Mister Mettaton handle the reporters for now.”

Mezil wasn’t sure if he should be glad or horrified to have that glambot as an elaborate decoy. “Are
“You certain he’s not going to raise a riot again?”

“I gave him some guidelines.” Dear wife winked. “As long he’s aware of the media’s trappings, he’ll have his way of weaselling around.”

“I thought excessive cunning is a human thing.”

“There’s apparently a saying in Ebott: ‘Mettaton will be Mettaton’. It appears that he's the exception to every rule.”

“Shallow yet shrewd,” Mezil mused out loud. “Frisk’s circle of friends is a rare combination of talent and danger. All in a concentrated spot. It’s somewhat frightening.”

Mezil slouched at the end of his sentence. Tired. Drained. Whatever remaining Determination in his bloodstream had waned…

“…We need to get you to Grandpa,” said Lucidia.

She led him through the path back to the Berendin Manor, straight into the silent darkness of their bedroom.

Lucidia planted a kiss on his forehead. “I need to attend to my duties. Try to relax, dear. Conserve.”

He flashed a weak smile. “Do what you must.”

The sapphire lady shut the door behind her. As soon as the locks clicked, a shadowed figure appeared out of thin air. The glow of crimson ethereal eyes peered beyond the slits of a mask.

Step forward. The bottom end of the staff tapped against the ground.

Another step forward. The golden gem encrusted top lit in scarlet flame.

As the mysterious figure walked, the fabric of his clothes brushed here and there.

“What restlessness,” the figure commented. He had a male voice and a slight echoing timbre in his speech. “Until today, The Persona clings to his miserable existence.”

The charged staff tapped Mezil’s afflicted abdomen. The red flames of this wizard’s magic leapt to the Hex. It flared tall and bright.

Seconds later, this unusual power condensed into the ember-like glows of a Mark.

It’s the Ace of Spades: the Grandmaster’s signature itself. It chained down the destructive tempers of the lightning bolt, granting Mezil relief for the time being.

The one with glowing eyes sat down by the bedside.

“It's rare of you to be this downcast, Winston.”

Mezil stared at the ceiling and sighed. “This is your son-in-law without his stubborn grit.”

“Yet still sharp of tongue. Perhaps more. I gave you some of my Determination. Are you then well enough for a debriefing?”

“Anything to distract me from the silent wallows of my failures, Father.” Mezil responded.
“Even if it means discussing them?”

“Of course. Constructive criticism is better than emotional ruminating. You taught me this throughout the many timelines.”

“That, I did.” said the Grandmaster. “I think it’s clearer than ever that we’re harboring turncoats in our midst.”

“How bad?” Mezil enquired.

After a brief musing, he answered: “Not as dire as the War of the Red Victory, but it might be more complex. It’s still too soon to gauge the full extent.”

“I think I am losing the Seers’ support.”

“Why do you say so?”

The son-in-law replied: “Sir Lawyer insisted that Lucidia should remarry some other ‘worthier’ men after my death.”

“In front of you?”

“Yes, Father. Pissed off Gaelic as usual. I’d honestly let that prick suffer a bite or two.”

“Now, now, Winston. The way of teeth is never the appropriate rebuttal to poor rhetorics. Even if it’s mighty tempting.”

Mezil snickered. Ah, how accurate.

The Grandmaster then commented: “Perhaps your lack of popularity could make a nice catalyst for change.”

“And not spell doom?”

“Monopoly breeds complacency. Should the Lemurian Council cease to change their ways, the Dreemurr Nation will provide valuable competition in all the three major areas: economy, technology, and diplomacy.”

“Go enjoy the company of Ebott. Let the ocean folk know they’re not the only rope to cling on. Soon enough, you will witness many a person’s true colours.”

The Grandmaster rested his staff across the thigh. “With all things considered… I certainly hope the future will give you a new lease on life.”

Mezil pointed at his own face with a skeptical brow. His wife’s father didn’t need to look at him to notice the disbelief.

“You’ve walked a bloodstained path for the entirety of your career. As a result, your victories rarely satisfy. If ever. I know you’ll choose to steep in darkness if it means your loved ones may see the light of dawn.”

“But as your father-in-law, I refuse to abandon you to the fate of demons. Heaven had sent that young Seer to build a bridge of peace for you. Take faith and cross it.”

Faith. It’s a concept that Mezil struggled at a personal level. The notion that he wasn’t limited to just do-or-die was almost too good to be true.
“You never give up, do you?” he commented.

The dark room echoed with soft, hopeful laughing.

“Of course not,” the Grandmaster replied. “Those with the Keys of Fate preserve our sense of self no matter where the cosmos turns.”

Chapter End Notes

Mezil's life really sucked. The circumstances that coincided with the death of Frisk's parents is complicated, in addition to his critically injured state (getting cut up and bleeding to death is unfun).

Time-travelling powers have their own limitations. Much of it is circumstantial. There are so many events that are still out of a time-traveller's control.

Then there's the wielder's own personality and flaws. Nobody's perfect after all.

Let's see how many of you recall a certain catchphrase heh heh

Edit: Apparently people weren't sure which particular catchphrase I'm referring to. It's the Grandmaster's very last line, about the Keys of Fate.
It's been a rough week health-wise for me. Migraines are a literal pain in the head. But, we're not here to talk about the unhappy stuff.

JoeAdok strikes again with his really cool mugshots. Check out This set of sprites and the Jury members!

Joe, thank you again for the awesome work.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

‘The mighty hero saved his friends in time. People cheered upon his arrival; they thanked and they rejoiced.’

‘And yet.’

‘He withdrew from the celebration. Visions troubled him. Despite all the progress he had done…’

‘…The future refused to change.’

The Jury’s private chamber consisted of a long table and a row of cushioned chairs, all facing towards a large movie-like screen. Each seat had a number tacked behind them. Number 1 situated the farthest from the entrance, and 12 the nearest.

Papyrus chose to sit down at number 1. There’s a bottle of water before him, half-consumed by its original occupant.

He unscrewed the cap and guzzled it down anyway. It’s not hygienic, but he’s parched. Didn’t bother to screw it back on.

WHY ISN’T IT CHANGING?

MISTER MAGUS IS SAVED.
MISS AUNT DIDN’T DIE.
UNDYNE ACHIEVED HER FULL AWESOMENESS.

SO THEN, WHY?

The visions didn’t fade upon every step toward victory. No, they only became clearer. Listen hard enough, and he could hear the evacuation calls echo between his skull.

He remembered what Lucidia said moments ago.

“Subject: Papyrus. You had committed the gravest of all Chronographer errors. Details of defunct timelines must never be applied one-to-one to the present.”

‘Never.’

So, so, so many lives rested on his shoulder now. Was that why Asgore retreated to his garden
alone?
Papyrus tried. As Asgore had tried.
Yet…
…It all seemed futile. How he wished that he could mimic his king to forget all about this madness.
The youngster buried his face into his beloved scarf. It’s an heirloom of his mother, passed down by his brother. It’s a symbol of love. Comfort. Safety.
The neighbouring chair rustled. When Papyrus lifted his skull, he’s looking at the familiar flaming bartender.
Could he really be considered a ‘friend’? Papyrus didn’t like his cooking. Too greasy. The milkshake was good though. That's the only item he’d order from the bar.
Grillby asked: “…You alright?…”
The skeleton snapped his back straight. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS FINE! AS FINE AS ANYONE CAN BE IN A SITUATION WHERE EVERYTHING EITHER GOES HORRIBLY RIGHT OR TREMENDOUSLY WRONG.”
It took him a moment to realise that he had just double-crossed his own attempt at sugarcoating.
“…Your Eye is on fire…”
“IT INDEED BLAZES WITH THE PASSION OF HEROIC PREVENTION.”
“…It’s not stabilizing…”
“WELL THAT’S BECAUSE IT’S PROCESSING FOR THE BEST OF THE BEST.”
“…You can be honest with me, Papyrus… I used to work with Gaster… and I trained your brother…”
“BUT IF I’M HONEST, YOUR SPIRIT MAY BE CRUSHED BEYOND RECOVERY LIKE UNDYNE’S DID!”
Papyrus covered his mouth. “I—I’M SORRY. THAT WAS A TIMELINE THAT DIDN’T EXIST. FAIRY GODMOTHER WARNED AGAINST MIX-UPS FOR A FOR A GOOD REASON.”
He gripped his humeri tight. This room seemed colder than all the times he lived in Snowdin.
“…MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE TALKED TO MISTER MAGUS. HE’S VERY SMART. NO NONSENSE. HE HELPED ME SO MANY TIMES. BUT THEN, I’M AN ADULT. ADULTS SHOULD HANDLE ISSUES ON THEIR OWN.”
Papyrus expected to bump into Mezil as a grumpy man with some scratches and bruises. Not someone clinging on a brittle thread of life, threatening to snap at any moment.
Just getting the outside world back in order was a hefty task. He didn’t want to add himself to the pile of burdens.
So he kept quiet.
“I WISH UNCLE GASTER WAS HERE.” Papyrus blurted. Again, not a statement he wanted to say out loud.

Grillby then responded, “…Then… Imagine me as Doctor Gaster…”

“ARE YOU GONNA ROLEPLAY?”

The bartender scratched the back of his head. “…Not quite… but I’ll listen…”

Papyrus took a deep breath and began his explanation. “MY SPECIAL MAGIC COMES WITH TWO SIDES. ONE IS TO CONNECT THE DOTS OF THE PAST LIKE A PUZZLE. ANOTHER IS TO SENSE THE POSSIBLE FUTURE. THE MORE REAL MY VISIONS ARE, THE MORE LIKELY THAT THEY WILL HAPPEN.”

He told the bartender what he had seen. Where it’s headed, and how they’re still on the road to certain doom.

By the time he’s done, Papyrus wanted to break down and cry. It’s so frustrating. Helpless.

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT I AM MISSING,” he confessed.

“…Have you tried spying on your brother?… Check his actions…”

Papyrus hesitated. He sensed that attempting such would be a bad idea, as if he’s going to stick a finger into a boiling pot of water.

Nonetheless, he gave it a try. The feedback returned a mess of ripped images and glitched white squares. Sound was distorted into scratchy incomprehensibility.

The sheer unpleasantry forced the Seer out of his attempts. He looked at Grillby and shook his head.

“IT’S ALL JANKY AND SCREECHY.” He said, doing his best to mimic the horrible sounds.

“…I see… We can’t look at his cards then…” Grillby picked up the empty bottle. He held the object at the base and started rotating it within his fingers. It’s as though he’s cleaning an empty glass. Must be a force of habit.

“…Your power depends on clues… Correct?…”

“YES.” Papyrus nodded.

“…Your brother doesn’t think of everything at once either… It’s layer by layer… Very logical.”

“But THAT’S HIS THING.”

“…No… it’s a universal skill… He just does it faster… and more efficient… Perhaps it’s better if I ask… Will fighting Sans one-on-one work?…”

Papyrus closed his eyes to focus.

He saw nothing. Shook his head.

“…What about a team effort?…”

Nothing again. “NO.”
…Anything related to Frisk?…

Frisk. That’s right.

The human is the ultimate trump card. Anything should be possible with their help.

Papyrus tried to focus on Frisk. He’s getting something, but… it’s so faded. Hazy.

He instead responded: “FRISK MIGHT HELP. BUT THE PATH IS STILL NOT CLEAR.”

…Can they talk to Sans?…

That path… doesn’t exist?

Frisk should be able to talk to anyone and everyone. After all, they’re the ultimate ambassador.

Right?

Try as he might, he saw nothing. “I THINK SANS SHUT HIMSELF OUT FROM FRISK TOO.”

…What about you?…

That question struck him through the ‘soul’ in more ways than one. Papyrus found himself looking down at his own chest.

He saw the right sleeve of a familiar blue jacket, although torn at the lower half. It exposed a strange device with a blade attached to it.

In one well-placed strike… his beloved elder brother drove that implement into the very essence of Papyrus’ being. Turned to dust right after.

“I WILL DIE.”

Flames flickered wild and that flimsy plastic bottle got crushed in the bartender’s grip. The sudden crunch made Papyrus jolt a bit.

…Sorry… It’s rather grim news… But I sort of expected it…”

SORT OF?” Papyrus asked.

…”Doctor Gaster once gave Sans some cruel questions… They both lead to dead ends… To teach him that he cannot weasel out of everything… Once trapped in a certain situation… there may be no second chances…”

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHY MUST SANS LEARN THIS.”

…”So that your brother… will make wise and prudent decisions… so he won’t get caught at any cost…”

“WHAT HAPPEN IF HE DOES?”

…”He pays the price…”

There’s a fire deep inside Papyrus that refused to give up. “BUT THERE HAS TO BE AN OPPORTUNITY! I MEAN, SANS IS THE MASTER OF OPPORTUNISTIC SHENANIGANS. IT’S UNTHINKABLE THAT HE’D LET ANYTHING SLIP BY!”
“…And that is exactly why we’re here…” Grillby answered, “…This is his window… he’s not letting it go… for you… and himself…”

“DO I HAVE TO SHIP MYSELF TO FOREVER VACATION LAND TO MAKE SANS HAPPY? I’M MORE THAN WILLING TO DO THAT. I’M SURE THAT I’LL HAVE A NICE TIME—”

Papyrus had never seen Grillby spout out so many ‘No’s in a single breath.

Once he settled down, the elder monster replied: “…Being rash will only prove Sans right…”

“OH.” More disappointing news.

Papyrus lowered his head, squeezing his hands together in an attempt to find some sense of security.

“IT FEELS A LITTLE SILLY NOW. SUPERFLUOUS. DEFINITELY PUERILE.”

“…What is?…” Grillby asked.

“MY OUTDATED QUEST FOR POPULARITY AND STATUS,” Papyrus admitted.

“EVERYONE KNEW SANS. HE’S FAMOUS. POPULAR. YOU SAW HOW HE MADE FRIENDS WITH EVERYONE AT YOUR BAR, GRILLBY. HE’S A NATURAL.”

“SO I THOUGHT THAT IF I HAVE A HIGH FRIENDCOUNT LIKE HE DID, I WOULD KNOW WHO TO SEEK HELP FROM DURING TROUBLING TIMES. I COULD GET A GOOD JOB. MANAGE THE HOUSE. PAY THE BILLS.”

Papyrus remembered his time in the capitol. Their idyllic world peeled and cracked after The Core Incident. Life was never the same again.

He kept knocking on his brother’s locked door. Begged Sans for a response.

Pun.
Cry.
Laugh.

Anything…

Papyrus remembered staring at the numbers directory, wondering who he should call. There’s Undyne, yes. But she’s always busy with her Royal Guard business. He didn’t want to bother her.

The young boy then realised that he didn’t know who else to call. Nowadays he knows he needed help from a ‘locksmith’, but back then… he didn’t.

Papyrus knew nobody.
And nobody knew him.

“I TOLD EVERYONE THAT I WANTED TO SET A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR SANS. MAYBE THAT’S JUST AN EXCUSE. I THINK… I JUST WANTED TO CATCH UP TO HIM. TO PROVE THAT I’M NO LONGER A BABYBONE.”

“THAT WAY… SANS CAN STOP THIS GUARDIAN ANGEL ROUTINE. LIVE HIS OWN LIFE. GET BETTER AND PICK UP THE PIECES.”

“BUT HONESTLY, GRILLBY… I WOULDN’T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITHOUT HIM.
AND HE DOESN’T SEEM TO HAVE ANY LIFE OUTSIDE OF MINE.”

Grillby shook his head. “…I think… that’s what you brothers need… independance…”

“THE END OF OUR FRATERNAL BONDS?”

“…No…” The man of fire furrowed his brows as he tried to think of a metaphor. “…It’s like rowing a boat… with two oars… If one breaks… the other can still row the boat alone…”

“…Teamwork is like that… It’s important to be independent… in case the other falls… Otherwise, your boat goes adrift…”

Papyrus blinked. He can’t recall if he ever used a rowboat before. He had seen pictures of it and recordings on the human internet…

Then again, he didn’t remember what the back of his hand looked like after wearing gloves for a few weeks straight. Certain bits of his long-term memory were a little suspect.

“But doesn’t that mean two oars are redundant?”

“…Not at all… they give better control… it’s also faster…”

A thought made Grillby pause. “…But in the event someone steers you wrong… like Gaster… you can use your oar to give them a thwacking… then return to correct course…”

The youngster giggled at the imagery. “YOU HAVE A STREAK OF VIOLENCE TOO.”

“…It’s a slap on the wrist…”

Grillby had tied the strip of crushed, softened plastic into a ribbon. He glanced left and right in uncertain guilt.

“…Have you ever wished… to go back to the past… and relive the good old days…?”

Papyrus pondered over that question for the grand total of three seconds. “NO! ABSOLUTELY NOT!”

“…Really?…”

The questioning gaze perplexed Papyrus even more. What’s so strange about his response?

“…Don’t you want to go back… to a time where you didn’t need to worry… about anything?…”

“WHY DO PEOPLE ALWAYS THINK BABYBONES DON’T HAVE WORRIES?”

Papyrus didn’t like feeling negative. If possible, he wouldn’t want to ever admit it.

…Yet his journey had taught him that he had to be honest with himself.

He continued, “BACK THEN I DIDN’T KNOW WHO I WAS. I MEAN, I KNOW MY NAME. BUT I HAD NO IDEA WHAT WERE MY PERKS AND DE-PERKS. I TRIED EVERYTHING THAT I COULD THINK OF. AND NOTHING REALLY WORKED.”

“I WAS FRUSTRATED. LONELY. FRUSTRATINGLY LONELY. I KEPT SMILING WITH ALL THE POSITIVITY I COULD MUSTER BECAUSE I HOPED THAT TOMORROW I’LL DISCOVER WHO I’M MEANT TO BE.”
“GRILLBY, I FOUND MY DESTINY. IT CAN BE HARD AND SAD AND TERRIFYING
AND I MAY NEVER HAVE A DREAMLESS SLEEP EVER AGAIN… BUT I’M
SATISFIED. HAPPY.”

Just the thought of going back to his ignorant days… it made his sockets moist.

Papyrus then heard some strange, heavy breathing from the bartender. He’s trying to keep down a
mixture of complicated emotions.

Who’s consoling who now? How strange the tables turned.

“…Papyrus… I murdered a child…” so confessed Grillby. “…For years I wondered if I could…
have done something different… What if I had the power to undo my mistakes?…”

At last, Papyrus understood the grief and anger.

The Seer decided to gaze into the timestream. Possibility may give this man peace.

Lava surrounded the end corner of Hotland’s many islands. Grillby was there in full armour, facing a
child wearing a cowboy hat.

The results of that violence were too gruesome for Papyrus to render.

He wondered… what if the knight declined his duty? Would that child’s fate change? Would
Grillby’s fate change along with it?

The scenarios played by in quick succession. Papyrus didn’t need to linger to make his conclusion.

So he declared: “YOU’D STILL BLAME YOURSELF.”

That’s the harsh reality.

“…I know…”

Whatever choice he would make… the child would soon succumb to the nation’s order. The
problem lay in Grillby’s heart, and not his actions.

“…I know that now… but I think Sans is attempting the same…”

The moment when Sans stole Mezil’s Determination flashed by the Seer’s vision. The Persona’s
victory against a younger version of the Vampire followed right after.

Another piece of the puzzle fit into place. The resonance of fate grew stronger.

“…From what I gathered… Sans stole Judge Thyme’s power… There has to be a reason… Frisk is
stronger… but too young…”

“THAT’S RIGHT!” The youngster exclaimed: “MISTER MAGUS WAS IN THE JOB FOR A
LONG TIME! HE HAD A HUNDRED Saves. THAT’S A HUNDRED DIFFERENT POINTS
OF TIME!”

“…That many?… It’s more than enough… But we don’t know… where Mezil SAVED… and how
far back in time they’ll go… or why…”

Papyrus scrambled to stand on top of his chair. Started making beeping noises.
“…What are you doing?…” Grillby asked.

“TRYING TO THINK LIKE SANS,” the other replied. “THE BIGGER PICTURE! THE HIGH PLACE! THE WHOLE STORY! LOGICALLY AND IN PIECES!”

 “…He's not a computer…”

Papyrus told himself to remember his brother. His joys, and his pain…

“WILL SANS BRING BACK MOM AND DAD?”

Grillby frowned further. It’s not one of anger or worry. Rather, it’s of pity.

 “…If he chooses to restore your parents… it would mean sacrificing you… Forever…”

“HUH?”

 “…So they never told you…”

After a sigh, the old colleague of Uncle Gaster revealed another dark secret.

 “…Your parents didn’t have enough magic for a second child… They already had complications with Sans… The next time would be worse…”

 “…Gaster suggested an abortion for their safety… Your parents refused… They took the chance… and lost…”

 “…They died trying bring you into the world…”

The fact that Papyrus could still stand was a feat in itself.

“HAS SANS EVER BLAMED ME?”

Grillby shook his head. “…No… he never did… and never will… He loves you too much for that… But will he think you’re too good for this world?… That’s a different matter…”

It was then, a new vision weaved in. Though the moment faded and blotched like an old painting, Papyrus once again found himself staring down on his brother’s sleeves.

The blade no longer pierced through his SOUL. That latest conversation had somehow provided a vital clue.

“CAN’T HE TRY TO SAVE BOTH OF US?” Papyrus asked.

 “…Maybe… But I don’t think it’s possible…”

For as long as Papyrus could remember, his brother raised him with the kind of dedicated love that many would envy. To think that devotion may be rooted in tragedy.

The future showed a glimmer of hope.

But, as a whole…

Papyrus had yet to find the golden path.
Foreboding, isn't it.

There's a bonus content this week over in the second entry of the Chronographer Records. That is technically open to requests, but discretion applies.
Lost

Chapter Notes

The title has nothing to do with epileptic trees.

Anyhow, I received this spritework as a gift for Valentines. As we know from Fate/Stay Night, having a date in the middle of a cutthroat battle is absolutely viable /bricked.

Chapter 111 and 112 is really kicking my butt. Therefore the release is a little bit slower.

And I still have absolutely no stamina left to draw art. T_T

Lost.
It’s the worst situation in enemy territory. Being injured was still not as bad if one knew his way of escape.

Lost.
Garamond tried to focus his Truesight to find a way out. He knew that his Dichromatic set was not made for pathfinding, but he didn’t have much of a choice.

Lost.
North and south.
East and west.
Up and down.

Directions had no meaning in The Void.

His only clue -- the trail of Mezil’s DT -- faded fast.

Fatigue gnawed on Garamond’s bones. He’s been flying about in absolute darkness for too long.

His Yellow feedback returned strings of gibberish data that he couldn’t translate. It’s tiring to read, let alone comprehend.

Gaelic’s armaments also demanded stamina that matched its original robust owner. It’s the kind of energy Garamond couldn’t maintain for long stretches of time. Yet without this borrowed ride, he cannot survive.

What a terrible, terrible situation.

“Lost?”

It’s the voice of Sans Serif, The Seraphim.

Garamond switched to high-alert. He charged his arm-mounted skull cannon. Its singular yellow eye maintained a dim, glow: ready to fire upon the slightest threat.

“Maybe you need to loosen up a bit.”

The source of the sound came from ontop of the snake’s skull.
Without hesitation, Garamond aimed there and opened fire. A thin laser punctured a clean hole through the roof.

Sans reappeared at the snake’s left socket. He stood sideways, peering through it as though he’s looking into some interesting pothole in the garden.

Garamond fired again. Sans teleported to the opposite end.

“Shoot first, talk later?” The short one commented. “Guess you’re as humourless as Judge Thyme.”

Aiming square for Sans’ forehead, the quiet one responded: “I can see your ill-intent.”

“See’, huh? Guess we have our ‘true sights’ on each other then.”

In a blink, The Seraphim summoned a row of bones.

Garamond put all his magic into the controls. Ramped up the ‘turn’ function of the bone snake as sharply as he could.

The whole vehicle swerved to the side. It threw Sans off his feet. Along with it, the dangerous set of bones.

High flow magic. Down on the mental pedal. He must escape no matter what.

Despite the distance, he could still hear Sans. Not surprising since he hijacked Judge Thyme’s systems.

“Jeez buddy, you really don’t have the guts to hear me out, do you? C’mon. I just wanna have a quick chat.”

Garamond refused to listen.

Two centuries of dealing with danger taught him plenty. He knew he’s not in the position for any talk. If death was not Sans’ intent, he will either turn him into a hostage… or worse.

Neither were desirable options.

“Welp, I guess I should have known that you Surface Seers will always choose the hard way.”

The Dichromatic Seer then heard the chants of his kind.

Invasive code threatened to spread through the main nervous system.

And once it does, Garamond will lose control over a behemoth loaded with an arsenal of poisons.

The man tried to fight back. He conjured a mixture of bones and Grams, pinning them onto the spinal cords to block the overwriting codes.

It worked for a while.

Then, came the flood of Determination. The augmenting factor smashed through the defenses with nary a resistance.

Lost.

A synonym for ‘defeat’.
Such is the current fate of Seer Garamond Blanc.

* * *

Cenna didn’t like waiting. Patience was not her trait. At the very least, she perseveres.

Though, she’s not as dogged as the ‘loony bin’ squatting at the edge of the hole-in-the-wall. That wannabe snake stared into the dark nothingness with enough intensity to drill through steel.

The chinchilla monster scurried up on Cenna’s coat with little effort. Perching on her shoulder, the shy creature whispered: “…Judge Caraway… is he alright?…”

“You are…?” She needed a name.

“…Miss Chinchinchan, Jury Number 4…”

Cenna responded, “Ah. Right, you’re asking about Gaelic? He’s on hyper alert search mode. Just don’t touch him. Getting startled ain’t fun for anyone.”

“…Can you keep his jacket?… It’s on the ground…”

She looked down, and behold it’s a rolled up bundle of Gaelic’s denim jacket.

It was the tool used to prop up Mezil’s feet. Number 4, Chinchinchan, took the effort to drag it along despite her small size.

Gaelic may not care about clothes in general, but he can’t strut around like a Halloween prop all year round. It’d scare too many people. So, Cenna bought this set for him, along with the biker’s helmet. Thought it’d fit his sensibilities while maintaining a modern touch.

“Hey, thanks Chinny! You’re sweet.” The Magus picked up the bundle and slung it over her arm. “I’ll deliver it later.”

The not-Undyne hopped over. She’s also curious about that purple-orange Seer, but she’s too afraid to step out of Cenna’s shadow.

“I hear he eats people. Is that true?” Tried to whisper. Absolutely failed.


“No?”

“Then you never need to worry about Gaelic turning you into a real doria.”

Her fins drooped in disbelief. “You’re not letting that go aren’t you? It’s Passidoria, not ‘Doria’!”

Cenna tilted her head upwards to let out a great laugh. How unfortunate for her to share a punny nickname with a rice gratin.

“Hey, hey! This may be the last time I can crack jokes. Gotta make the best outta it.”

She heard a loud groan coming from the other end of the Crimson Hall. It’s good ol’ Sir Latinoros,
the knighted lawyer.

“Judge Caraway PLEASE be more serious!” he exclaimed. “Sir Garamond’s continued absence is great cause for concern!”

Next to him was the giraffe lady, Zakari. Also a member of the law body like Sir Latinoros, but versed in a different speciality. “Zakari wonders if it’s possible to initiate a search.”

Cenna shook her head. “Sorry madam. Gaelic can only conjure one Skull Armament at a time. Unless, you want to have my senior plunge unwittingly into the Void or something.”

“Zakari knows. But Zakari wonders if Papyrus can help. He is of Orange too.”

Good question. Gaelic did coach the bloke after all. Any Seer with the Orange Aspect had the ability to conjure and maintain a mode of transport.

She looked around. Not a single tall cinnamon roll in sight. Whatever happened to him?

The nearest Ebott folk was none other than King Asgore, accompanied by Queen Toriel and the Hammer of Justice. Cenna didn’t expect an ancient non-Boss monster to see the light of the modern era. And yet, Gerson defied all expectations.

Tipping her hat, she greeted: “Hey there, anyone know where Mister Cinnamon Roll went?”

“Oh, Papyrus?” Asgore replied, “He retreated into the Jury Chamber. Sir Grillenn is checking up on him, but they have yet to emerge.”

*Oh dear. Guy with clairvoyance isolating himself? Bad news for sure.*

Cenna tried to keep a neutral face.

Her attention focused on the bite marks. “How’s your affliction?”

“Fine, I think,” the King answered. “It’s hard to tell since I can’t feel my lower arm at all. This really reminds me of a dental visit…”

“Mind if ya let me check it out?”

“Please, go ahead.” Asgore offered his outstretched arm.

The Magus’ chest glowed strong. Her eyes gained a yellow sheen, an indicator that she’s focusing her powers on her Truesight.

The monsters gasped in astonishment. After all, they’re more sensitive to the ebb and flow of magic. Humans wouldn’t notice the difference from the performance arts.

Toriel said, “This power… you always had it?”

“’Had’ is the right word, Your Majesty. I’m now in a proxy body of my prime. Lucy brand backup data. Think it’s like, when I was twenty years old? The one in the real world… it’s pretty much on its last legs.”

Once she’s done with the treatment, the glow faded. Better conserve power for the upcoming fight. She let the arm go.

“Good news, it’s just local anesthesia. No neurotoxins or other dangerous stuff. Your body cells are
definitely not necrotizing. Pretty wicked dose though. You ain’t gonna feel anything for hours.”

Gerson squinted. “So… it was just a fright?”

“Nah. Gaelic really wanted to bite that guy. I call him the loony bin for a reason. Point being though, he never intended to kill.”

“That’s a relief, wahaha!”

King Asgore nodded along. “Indeed. That’s the most important part.”

Being the practical mother of the trio, Queen Toriel added: “If only I have some ingredients and kitchen equipment, I’d make him some butterscotch pie. And give some life advice.”

Sweet as ever. No wonder Frisk wished to stay with them.

*Looks like I won’t need to worry about the guys I’m leaving behind.*

*Hmm. I think I should talk to Captain Undyne next. She’s the only one I haven’t checked on yet.*

Cenna walked over. They exchanged greetings.

“Thanks for the timely rescue, Captain,” said the Magus. “None of us would be here without ya.”

Undyne grinned ear to ear. “No problem! I mean, if anime is so real… there’s no way in hell I’ll just sit behind and do nothing!”

“Speaking of that…” said Cenna. “What made you guys come charging here anyway?”

Serious mode, on. “Ready for a long story?”

Captain Undyne explained how Mettaton discovered a petrified Gaster in his own bedroom. Marked with the same symbol as the Spirit Gate’s blockade.

“…And that’s how we’re in this mess together.”

Cenna dropped her jaw. “Wait. Wait, wait, wait, wait. You’re telling me the freaking assassino turned an AMALGAMATE to stone?!”

Undyne nodded. “Yup. Alphys is still trying to figure out how it all exactly works. But, I trust that she’ll crack the code! Heck, in my book she’s SMARTER than Sans! She’s super brainy. Don’t let her social awkwardness fool you.”

“Speaking of Amalgamates by the way,” she continued. “I think it’s about time you Magi tell us more about that obviously-goopy-abomination under the ocean. How the heck did the bad side of anime become so real?”

The day just got worse for the Magus. “Er… who said it?”

“Papyrus.”

*Sigh. The ocean. The big thorn in our side. Guess secrets can never be kept forever, huh?*

“I owe ya one, I suppose. Know about the War of the Red Victory? It all started when—”

Just as she was about to get into the meat of the conversation…
A massive bone snake crashed into the room. It smashed. It skidded. And then flipped on the side. Ceramic dust scattered everywhere.

It’s Gaelic’s Skull Armament, cracked and damaged.

Garamond struggled to crawl out of the socket cockpit. Unable to stand, the man rolled out unto the rubble-strewn floor. The mount dissolved into nothingness soon after.

His cousin Gaelic snapped out of his search and scurried over.

The event attracted a crowd, Papyrus and Grillby included. Cenna tried to make sure that folks don’t smother too much. Both patient and medic needed space to breathe.

“Mondie!” Gaelic examined his patient.

Flicks of his forked tongue tested the air around his cousin for changes.

“…Foul. Tastes o’ ketchup, steel, M’lord’s Determination, and… Cor Blimey all the way to the Sun. Yer poisoned by me own! Did that fallen angel hitch me ride??!”

He reached for a vial of antidote from his belt. It’s a potion made with distilled Kindness. Poured that straight into Garamond’s mouth.

Garamond nodded. “…That he did. Made a wormhole. Set trajectory here.”

“Aye. ’But there be those thin thread o’ M’lord stretching into the yonder. Ever draining, ever consuming. Now that ah tasted a sample, me very being can track the false angel’s adobe.”

Gaelic’s right Eye flared. “Who here volunteers to join ‘tis quest o’ mine?”

“No! Don’t…” Said Garamond, “You’d just get lost. Like I did. Besides… The Seraphim sends a warning.”

Cenna clenched her fists. The moment she saw her senior end up like this, she could guess the contents of the message word for word:

“‘Papyrus must come by himself. Alone.’”

Jackpot.

Papyrus didn’t think twice. Maybe he did. But he’s just too kind to let others get hurt in his stead.

Sans had banked on this behaviour for certain.

Papyrus almost conjured the fruit of his tireless efforts, but Undyne jumped on him.

“PLEASE LET ME GO,” said Papyrus. His tone firm and sombre.

“Fuck no!!!” Undyne yelled back. “C’mon Paps, can’t you see what Sans is trying to do?! If you go alone, he’ll manipulate you to his whims!”

“THE GREAT PAPYRUS WON’T LET HIMSELF GET CONTROLLED.”

“You don’t have to ‘let’ him! Look, he raised you since a babybone. That means he knows everything about you. Every! Single! Thing!”
Cenna thought it’s best to step in with her professional opinion. “Captain Undyne is right, Cinnamon Roll. Rule number one, never go alone. The one time Mez went alone he--”

She stopped herself a little too late. Shouldn’t have mentioned that moment. However, since she dropped that name, she had to conclude her statement in the most discreet way possible.

“…He fell into the worst trap of his life. Like hell we’re letting you get into that kind of danger!”

“Yeah!” Undyne echoed the sentiment. “Besides, we don’t even know WHERE to look!”

Papyrus lowered his head. “THAT’S FINE. I CAN USE MY SPECIAL POWERS TO ‘SEE’ THE PATH I NEED TO TAKE.”

“No! I will SUPLEX you until you quit!”

“I WON’T QUIT,” he said. “I CAN’T!”

Undyne’s Psychia turned Blue. She slipped off her feet and her entire body dangled parallel over the floor. Though she tried her best to keep a grip on the bones, Papyrus’ magic peeled off her fingers one by one.

“Papyrus!!!” Undyne screeched.

“…I’M SORRY.” That was his sole answer.

Her own weight thus sent her flying straight towards King Asgore. He caught the Captain in the nick of time within his fluffy, muscular arms.

An alarmed Cenna summoned twelve binding string drones posthaste. She knew it won’t be nice to his wishes, but she refused to let him go on a suicide mission.

They’d bind his arms and legs. Deny him of any opportunity to leave.

Except, the drones suffered the same fate as Undyne. Papyrus embedded them straight into the walls.

Her senses then detected another spike of magic energy coming from Papyrus.

She heard the people scream. All summarized as a single warning:

‘Behind you!’

Cenna leapt to the side.

Whizzing past her were the howls and roars of a high-powered engine.

At first, she thought she’s seeing things. It took a second for her to register it’s real.

The magical object that had almost rammed her at full speed was none other than a hoverbike with a cheetah skull for headlights. The choice reflected his upbringing as an energetic youngster in a modern, mechanical society.

Papyrus jumped onto the oncoming vehicle. He grabbed the handlebars with a level of accuracy and skill that would make stuntmen green with envy.

Then he blasted off straight into the yonder of the Void, too fast and furious for anyone to react.
Cenna tried to catch up on foot. A futile effort. She had no means to chase after him.

This is beyond bad…

This is really fucking bad.

C’mon Lucy, hurry up!
Overseer

Chapter Notes

The weekly update arrives with more art!

The wonderful Polaris had completed a commission for the one and only Lady Lucidia. In one of her fancier clothes too! Thank you lots Polly~

There's also Cenna in her short hair form. Maybe I might use this in a later chapter. Maybe.

Come to think of it, there's still a Chronographer Records request that I've not done yet. It's Grilly with the Yellow SOUL. I remember. Just health not up to standards again OTL.

Meanwhile please enjoy the pictures and this update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At long last, Lucidia managed to reroute the backup generator to feed their powers away from the evacuation system.

She made a mental note to herself that she would need to reset the emergency systems after this mayhem.

For now, she equipped her visors for her next duty.

[WELCOME, SEER LUCIDIA]

[ESTABLISHING CONNECTION]

[BLUE: READY]
[GREEN: READY]
[PURPLE: READY]

[VITAL SIGNS: ALL CLEAR]

[SYSTEMS READY FOR INITIALIZATION]

[ACCESSING LOCATION: THE CRIMSON HALL]

By the time she logged in, the damage was done. Sans Serif had already taken action.

What chaos…

Lucidia switched on the sound interface on her end. She told herself to focus on the job and not let insecurities get the best of her.

“Initiating communication tests, one, two, three. Can anyone hear me, over?”

The occupants of the chamber responded to her words. Passidoria overpowered Chinchinchan’s soft
voice, but both expressed gladness.

“Yep, Lucy!” said Cenna. “Hearing ya loud and clear.”

Sir Latinoros interjected: “Lady Lucidia, I request an immediate evacuation for Sir Garamond. He’s poisoned by Gaelic’s Skull Armaments.”

There was a reluctant grunt coming from its original owner. “Aye, M’lady. ‘Fraid ah have to agree with that man. Fed Mondie me antidote, but his recovery be impeded by exhaustion.”

Troubling. Garamond’s experience and magical potential should be enough to counter any attempts of hijacking.

Unless… Yes. Subjugation is entirely possible with my husband’s power rebranded to his cause.

“I’m afraid I cannot authorize a leave,” she responded. “The Magus Association is in disarray from a massive Gungnir attack. No electricity. No water. And The Spire’s heavily damaged. We cannot guarantee your safety in the physical realm.”

Sir Latinoros widened his sockets. The tips of his fingers trembled upon that news. “T-that can’t be true…”

Undyne shook her head. “Sorry sir, but she’s right. It’s become a movie in the worst way.”

Poor Chinchinchan. She looked like she’s about to burst into tears again. The dire situation was traumatic for a meek chinchilla monster, more so with her relative youth.

“Hey! Don’t cry!” The fishy captain pumped her fist. “The transport came back, right? We just need to catch up to Papyrus and BUST SOME SHORT SKELLY BUTTS!!!”

She’s right. We don’t have the luxury to stall any further. I must make my commands as the Tactician on duty.

Lucidia took a deep breath. “Sir Latinoros and Miss Chinchinchan can I entrust Sir Garamond’s safety in your hands?”

“Certainly.” The man bowed.

The chinchilla monster uttered one more sob. “…O-of course. Homeopathy does cover basic care…”

“I’ll help you, friend!” Passidoria offered.

The giraffe also volunteered. “Zakari will do her best as well.”

Despite the willingness, Gaelic fidgeted with a slight growl. This combination of protectiveness and mistrust doesn’t mesh well. But, he’d never object to her direct command.

He laid Garamond on the ground and waited upon the next order.

“Calm down, Gaelic. I need you to team up with Papyrus to track down Sans.”

Everyone tensed upon the mention of the young one’s name. There and then, she realised something wasn’t right.

“M’lady,” Gaelic lowered his head, “The false angel summoned his one god. And the most gracious one answered his plea….”
“Papyrus went alone…?!”

He nodded.

Lucidia gasped. “That’s walking straight into a trap! Why did he do that?!”

The knight of fire lifted his hand. “…It’s my fault… I asked him to look into the future and… a group effort apparently will fail…”

“Did he see the cause?” she asked back, preparing herself to record every minute detail.

“…No… he saw nothing…”

“A gap in his visions?”

Lucidia took a moment to ponder. The silences weren’t foreign to her: they’re the result of missing information.

All of Papyrus’ power cannot predict an impossible future, be it positive or negative. If he can’t see anything at all…

“There’s still hope, Sir Grillenn. It’s not that our teamwork is doomed to fail. Rather, we have yet to create a clear outcome.”

The sapphire one extended her reach into her Chronograph’s extensive item-creation database.

*I will need a communication system outside of the grounds of the Crimson Hall. Let’s see, these should do the trick…*

Holographic images of a gemmed pendant and an electronic earpiece hovered before everyone.

Both tools connected directly to the Chronograph, allowing Lucidia to oversee their actions without the necessary Orange or Cyan Aspect. She could generate and deliver any extra equipment as long this link doesn’t break.

Being familiar with her inventory, Cenna was more than pleased.

“Booyah, now we’re talking!” Without hesitation, she grabbed both. The holograms materialized into proper objects in her grip.

Hunched and anxious, Gaelic refused to budge.

“Hello? Get a set, Gael.”

He locked his focus on his barely-conscious cousin. “I cannae leave Mondie. If ah join the skirmish, there be no one to defend the Hall. What’s stoppin’ the false angel from making a quick jump back here to dust ‘em all?”

The bony lawyer wanted to raise an objection, but the snake cut him off with a loud hiss. “Like fook ah consider yer ceremonial fencing to be sufficient! If he smashed half o’ me body without mercy, ya all be dust in a blink!”

He pointed towards the Spirit Gate. “Once everyone’s dead, he can make his grand escape. If that be what he desires.”

Another tough decision. But, it’s a straightforward one. “You’re correct. We need to stand guard.
Could I request one or two able bodied men from the Dreemurr Nation to remain?"

The good-natured ol’ Gerson said, “That’s the problem, eh? Worry not, Lady Lucidia. You have me and my hammer on your side, wa ha ha!”

Discrimination against age was not her intent, but Lucidia had some serious doubts about Gerson’s ability to stand against Sans Serif. Long gone were The Hammer of Justice’s days of glory.

“Thank you, Jury Gerson. Is there anyone else who wishes to remain here?”

Asgore spoke up: “I will stay, Lady Lucidia.”

It was then the tortoise showed his inner fire. Frowning, the man said: “Oh no, King Fluffybuns! Not this time.”

“Gerson?” The King didn’t expect such a reaction.

“I may be as wrinkly as a prune and my memory’s all spotty, but I sure as heck never recall abolishing that tyke’s position as the Royal Tactician. You got a high-ranking official running amok! It’s your duty as King to straighten him out.”

“Besides,” Gerson added, “It’s unfair for Queen Toriel to go alone.”

Toriel couldn’t stop glancing at the Void. Beyond the horizon were two lost dearest. One was her taken child, the other a dear jokebuddy who had gone astray.

Asgore agreed. “Thank you, old friend. I’ll take your advice.”

By operations logic, it would be better for King Asgore to concentrate on the defense. Though injured, his strength and skill as a Boss Monster stood leagues above anyone else.

But… this was a matter of the heart. Include Asgore with the chance for Sans to exploit their estranged status? Or exclude him at the risk of leaving Toriel vulnerable to the art of silver tongues?

Lucidia chose to not object. Perhaps someone else could stay behind? “Any other volunteers?”

Undyne shook her head. “No offense, lady. But I really, really, REALLY want to rescue Frisk, protect Papyrus, and give that damn blue idiot a whoop.”

Will Grillby stay then? Unfortunately, no. The fire knight had other plans in mind. “…I share the same sentiments as Captain Undyne…”

Cenna? No. In her pristine state, she’s the team’s best bet. Considerations to put her on the back line: nil.

Frustration began to well in Lucidia’s heart. She had to secure the Crimson Hall, but the odds seemed to stack against her.

*If only they could see the stakes--*

A warm, hearty laugh interrupted her tensed thoughts.

“Wahahahaha! That’s the spirit.” he said, “Go and rescue that whippersnapper for me!”

Such steadfast confidence. Was he doing this to set the people’s hearts at ease, or was there bite to his bark?
Lucidia objected: “Hammer of Justice. With all due respect, leaving you alone here is suicidal. Sans Serif will attack this place the moment he wishes to make his escape.”

“Oh boy Madam, calm down there a lil’ bit.” Said the tortoise. “I thought that if more people wanted to stay behind, they could try to wrestle Sans down. Make capture easy, y’know.”

“As it is now, nothing can stop him.” The woman clarified, “A combination of decay, warp magic, and Determination will render all forms of physical boundaries useless. Only a skilled combatant can give him trouble, but even then…”

Gerson shook his head. “That’s really not a problem at all, lady. Let me demonstrate.”

The veteran lifted his hammer and slammed its weighted head against the ground. A field of unusual monster magic rippled outwards, forming a thin, translucent ring around the perimeters.

This power… Did Gerson learn it from a sect lost in time? She’s familiar with the tortoise-folk of her nation, and yet somehow this foreign skill surprised her.

King Asgore smiled in reminiscence; “Ah… it’s been a long time since I witnessed this beauty, old friend.”

“Ain’t that right?” So he chuckled. Turning towards Gaelic, he said, “Alright young’un, try to punch me in the face. Give it all ya got!”

An interesting proposal.

Gaelic tilted his head in wariness, but the old man continued to beckon for the strike. So he went ahead.

He straightened his palm for a stab straight in between the eyes.

The attack stopped short. If the astonished expression was an indication, it’s against Gaelic’s will.

Puzzled, he attempted a few more hits. Kicks, claws, punches… all shy of a full impact.

The result shocked everyone other than the royal couple.

Gaelic leapt back with his back hunched deep, extremely cautious in the face of this puzzlement. “I dinnae get it… yer a being o’ magic. How can ya have the power o’ a Mark?”

The old tortoise laughed. “Strange, right? I assure you there’re no Mark shenanigans here! You’re standing in what I call ‘The Law’. My special brand of boundary fields. Can’t seem to teach it to the younger generation, but at least it didn’t get moth-eaten by age.”

“Anyone who stands in The Law must follow the rules. Yours truly included,” he continued. “If i make it say: ‘You may not inflict harm’, any magic will frizzle, and all attacks will stop dead in their tracks. It’s an absolute defense. That’s how I protect my little shop, y’know! Can’t run a business if riff-raff keep stealing my stuff.”

“Does Sans know anything about this power?” Lucidia asked.

“Oh yeah. He does. He knows everything to be honest. That’s why I’m confident that Sans won’t try to meddle with me. He can’t anyway. Only limitation is that I can’t move out of my own field. If I do, I gotta plant a new one.”

“Does that mean you’re a living bastion? If any determination-blessed human rampaged against your
nation, you could at least protect yourself and others by staying inside this boundary field.”

“That’s right! I’d hole up in my safe zone and keep that ‘hero’ bugger busy for as long as I can. Wa ha ha! You’re as smart as everyone says, Lady Lucidia.”

Gaelic knelt down before Gerson’s feet. He bowed so low that his frontal cranium kissed the ground itself. He did that for a total of three times before taking his share of Lucidia’s equipment. All was done without a single spoken word.

He went ahead to summon his ride. It’s noticeable that he’s keeping his face away from the rest of the group.

That expressive action confused the old tortoise. “What was that for?”

Lucidia answered: “He’s giving his most honoured gratitude to an elder. I guess he’s too awestruck to explain.”

“Oh, like the Far East cultures? Wa ha! I’ll accept that. Just come back in one piece, ya hear?”

_Without a doubt, Gerson too is of Champion-class. That kind of power stems from Determination. Unlike a true Mark, it's not mobile._

_I’m amazed that the Dreemurr Nation has such a high percentage of Champions. You’d think that their halcyon existence would dim their potential. Yet, it didn’t._

“Judge Caraway, care to handle the debriefing? There’s something extra that I need to prepare for the mission.”

The human Magus chuckled. “Gotta be Miss Exposition again? No probs. Do whatever ya need.”

Lucidia shifted her focus away from the Hall and towards the digitized interfaces of the Chronograph. In the background, she could hear Cenna explaining the purpose of their equipment to the rest of the offensive team.

While they prepared for the voyage, the woman accessed her pool of secret constructions. It contained a collection of unfinished Arcanagrams. Whenever the situation permitted, she’d work with her husband to create new formulas.

She pulled out an unfinished thirteen-point Gram. Before the fated battle with the Persona, she had concocted two proposals. One was further developed into the ‘Weaponized Seer’s Seal’ that ended her foe’s physical existence.

The other work did not see the light of day. Instead, it was tinkered on during her spare time. Lucidia always wondered if this could have spared her husband from further needless suffering.

The Princess of the Sky remembered the imbue ment in Papyrus’ scarf. If she could combine that system with this unfinished concept… perhaps she could beat The Seraphim at his own game.

_Sans Serif… you shall not be the only one to exploit Determination._

So she got to work, weaving and constructing threads of coded magic into the Gram’s remaining empty slots.

_[INCOMING TRANSMISSION]_

Lucidia opened the channel.
“M’lady, we be following the trail o’ magic Papyrus left behind in his jet streams.”

“It’s blind flying from here on if it not for the Cinnamon Roll. Even with Truesight, I still can’t see shit.”

“’Tis be why Mondie lost his way. Gah. No ground. No sky. No ground to touch nor horizon to perceive. ‘Tis splittin’ me head and churning me nonexistent belly.”

“Dooooon’t puke on me this time. Face the OTHER way!”

She asked: “How are we certain that Papyrus won’t lead us astray? Sans may not welcome our presence.”

“No seein’ any double-back or side-routes. Just a straight path to his destination. Methinks he dinnae have any time for distractions either…”

“I see. Please carry on, over.”

Time is of the essence.

While they continued their travels, Lucidia finished her first prototype. She imbued it on a sheet of digital paper and rolled it up into a scroll.

_I don’t expect this to be free of faults, nor is it foolproofed. Nevertheless, I won’t get any fresh data if I don’t put it to the test._

“Judge Caraway, I’m going to send you a prototype Gram. Please plant this on Gaelic.”

“Roger that!”

[INITIATING COPY PROCEDURE]

[SCANNING…]

[SCAN COMPLETE. SENDING DATA TO TARGET: CENNA CARAWAY]

By now, the object should spawn before Cenna. Somewhere in the background, Undyne and Asgore squealed about the ‘coolness’. At least they could still appreciate the lighter points of life.

It’s the calm before the storm. Lucidia took this opportunity to contemplate.

_I suspect Sans Serif is putting Mezil’s Determination to use._

_To what extent? That’s the mystery._

The silence didn’t last. Cenna paged in.

“…Can I say ‘Fuck’?” she said, “Like. A big F. You seriously ain’t gonna like this, Lucy. Enabling video feed.”

And how Cenna nailed her dread on the head.

Floating before the team was an artificial planetoid, covered in nothing but mazes, puzzles, and devious traps.

_The Labyrinth…_
Situated at the north pole was a simple stone tower from medieval times. Rich in cannons, and heavily fortified. Aerial approach impossible.

What an unholy combination of time-wasters.

Lucidia knew first-hand just how cumbersome a skyscraper infiltration can be, nevermind the rest.

There’s a dock at the opposite end. Papyrus’ trail led there, and waiting to welcome them was none other than Sans Serif himself. Grinning as usual. It reminded Lucidia of a certain baneful trickster cat from her childhood storybooks.

The six who had volunteered for the offensive disembarked from their ride. Gaelic dispelled it post-haste for caution’s sake.

“Welcome to ‘Megalovania’,” said Sans. He’s not taking his sights off anyone. “Ready for the puzzle of all puzzles?”

Undyne cut through the chase. “Where’s Papyrus???”

“Far ahead of ya.” Sans pointed to the pathway behind him. “Man, what’s with the entourage? Papyrus put so much effort to come alone, and yet everyone crashed in. Can’t you see it’s for your own good?”

“LIKE HECK IT IS!!!”

“Don’t you respect him at all, Undyne?”

“Respect? RESPECT?!” How the hothead blew a fuse. Undyne seethed with magic steam coming out from her ear fins. “YOU don’t have ANY right to lecture ME about respect! Papyrus would never put anyone in danger and you EXPLOITED that to its fullest!!!”

“I know. That’s why I have to do the dirty job.”

Asgore tried to be diplomatic. He spoke with a calm but powerful timbre. “Sans Serif, please stand down. If you surrender now, we can negotiate a proper pardon.”

“Nope. Can’t do that. I’m bound by a different oath now.”

Sans summoned a holographic screen. He placed it before the rest of the group and played back his previous meeting with Papyrus.

“Hey Paps… glad to see you healthy and shining like the Sun.”

Papyrus stayed silent.

“I’m the Moon, right? Just like what Mom and Dad used to say.” so spoke the Sans of the past. “Welp. I have a ‘moon’ of puzzles right here. The stuff you can do with DT and the Void is straight out of a videogame. Real fun.”

Again, silence.

“So… you wanna give it a try? Or are you gonna take the actiony Undyne route?”

Papyrus spoke up at last. “SANS. A LONG TIME AGO, YOU TOLD ME THAT WHEN WE’RE ON THE SURFACE, WE HAVE TO DO WHAT THE SURFACE DOES. INTEGRATE WITH THE LOCAL PEOPLE. DON’T BUILD ILLEGAL TRAPS.”
“I said that, didn’t I? It was a somewhat cloudy night. You caught me doing last-minute practice.”

“THEN… DO ALSO YOU REMEMBER MY FIRST BATTLE WITH MISS AUNT?”

“As clear as day, bro.”

“IF THAT’S HOW THE SURFACE HANDLES THEIR CONFLICTS, WILL YOU AGREE TO A WAGER?”

Lucidia stopped her breath. Her heart screamed against the idea. A wager? With this man, of all people!

The Sans of minutes past chuckled. “Sure thing, bro. Let’s see. How does this work? Why don’t I hear your conditions first?”

So the Great Papyrus said: “I WILL TROUBLE MYSELF WITH YOUR TASTELESS JAPES, TRAPS, AND LACKLUSTER PUZZLES IF YOU SWEAR THAT YOU WILL NOT KILL ANY OF MY FRIENDS.”

“So are your friends?”

“EVERYONE THAT I LEFT BEHIND. UNDYNE. GRILLBY. KING ASGORE AND THE FEMALE ASGORE CLONE. MISS AUNT, MISTER MAGUS, AND THE FAIRY GODMOTHER. ALL THE JURY MEMBERS TOO. I SHALL INCLUDE FRISK AS WELL.”

“You’re being awfully specific about this.”

“C’MON SANS, I’M TALKING TO THE MAN WHO INTENTIONALLY LEAVES A SOCK IN OUR NEW HOUSE JUST SO WE CAN CONTINUE OUR POST-IT SHenanigans.”

“Heh. You’re right. So are you in?”

“NAME THE CLAUSES FOR VICTORY AND DEFEAT.”

He pointed towards the foreboding construction of ascent. “Meet me at the top floor. Real simple, right? I don’t ask for much. In fact, I don’t really care about how you solve those puzzles either. Cheat if you wanna. All up to you. You know the stakes already. I don’t need to elaborate any further.”

“VERY WELL. THE GREAT PAPYRUS ACCEPTS THIS DEAL. AND HE WILL NOT GIVE ANY WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR NEEDLESS ENDING OF LIVES.”

“Cool. See ya there bro.”

The recording ended with Papyrus braving the labyrinth’s deep unknown. The present Sans swiped away the screen.

“Welp,” he said. “As you can see, the only reason why we’re having this conversation is because of Papyrus. Otherwise…”

His sockets darkened. “…You’d be dead where you stand.”

To prove his point, Sans teleported right before Gaelic. Drove the blade of the Seraph System straight into his sternum. Didn’t even bother bringing out his target’s Psychia. Didn’t need to anyway. The six-winged Mark claimed his body just the same.
True to his beastly theme, Gaelic tried to bite back. Alas, his teeth snapped at thin air. Still too slow compared to Sans.

Bracing through the sting, he hissed and growled. “What did ya do to me?”

“Don’t get me wrong,” Sans replied. “I got nothing against tactical smarts. But, I have to prioritize my own objective. Your massive snake Blaster thingy? Can’t have that drilling through the entire tower. Pretty hazardous. Never know if that’s gonna cause a collapse.”

“Speaking of which, nice write-protection Gram you have there. I could have broken it again, but eh. It’s way easier to just deny you of the summoning ability altogether.”

A spike of magical power surged from Cenna, charging up close to her Ascension.

Lucidía switched to a private channel upon that instant.

“Disengage, Judge Caraway!” she yelled, “Keep your powers hidden.”

Cenna stopped dead in her tracks.

Vanquishers never reveal their lineage for a reason: their family names indicate a unique brand of magic specific to them, built and refined for generations. Its mastery requires the practitioner to first attain Ascension.

The moment she shows her hand… she can’t let her foe escape.

“Exercise caution. Remain silent. Treat him as a DEMON,” Lucidía instructed. “Strike down the false angel when he soars the highest.”

So the Magus withheld action.

*Just a little while longer, Cenna. I promise that you will have your moment…*

Toriel spoke up after a long and unusual silence. “What are the rules of this mega-puzzle?” she asked. “Is it the same as Papyrus’?”

“Yep.” Sans answered. “Just meet me at the top of the tower. Simple.”

“Are you sure there’s nothing else?”

The two stared each other in the eye. Once upon a time, they were fond of each other. Now… ‘it’s complicated’.

Sans shrugged. “There’s the usual commitment stuff. Unless someone finds a solution, nobody’s getting out.”

The brows on Queen Toriel’s head frowned in suspicion.

“All it takes is one person, Tori,” said Sans. “I know trust is a paradox with me at the moment but… I’m being honest here. Besides, you don’t really have any other choice to save the kiddo. Right?”

“Regretfully so.” Toriel answered.

“Well then. Let’s get on with the show.”

Sans vanished. He had teleported away so that the party of five monsters and one human could enter
his labyrinth without worry.

They thus proceeded with utmost caution.

Undyne led the way with Grillby watching her back. Cenna accompanied the Marked Gaelic. In turn, these two groups protected the Dreemurr Couple.

So far, all they trod through was a straight, empty corridor.

*There has to be a trick up his sleeve.*

Lucidia watched. Waited. Anticipated. Patience was not her trait, but experience taught her to be vigilant.

After a minute of walking, she heard the owner’s voice vibrate in the air.

“You know, King Asgore... it’s a shame Gaster concluded that his Fake Aspect research was a dead end. He was close. So close. If only Doctor Alphys was alive back then to help him understand Determination better.”

Sans continued, “As long we could store the extract safely, it was theoretically possible back then to harvest the necessary quantity for an early escape. Non-lethal at that.”

“But I digress. It’s not like the Surface has been kind to us. Still it’s not a complete lost cause. Magi research data suggests that Determination can function as a substitute for just about anything. It’s an imitation, yes... but a great imitation can become almost indistinguishable from the original.”

“That’s what Doctor Alphys tried to do, right?”

“Kinda yes. Kinda no. The difference is, she tried to make new life. That’s a whole different ballgame. Me? I’m just attempting to replicate functions. Like how mechanization replaces the bulk of manual labour.”

“I... don’t quite understand,” Asgore admitted. Shame had started to weigh on his head.

“I guess some things in life are better demonstrated than explained.”

One loud clang of a lever later, the planet rumbled.

“No!” Lucidia cried out.

The connection to the group went dark. Cut off. Her Eyes pushed close to its limit as she did everything imaginable to re-establish that vital link.

Control panel, summoned.
Tweaking macros, activated.
Magic flow, maximum.

Still nothing. Few things could block her so thoroughly, and she spent twenty-five years making sure the last tragedy caused by lost communication won’t repeat itself.

Yet, no progress.

*Please.*

*Please. Someone. Anyone, answer me!*
The frustration. The fear. She slammed her hands against the walls of the Chronograph.

Then…

She heard a buzz from the audio feed.

“…Lucy…?” Pop. “Lucy …can you read me?…Over…” Crack.

“She heard a buzz from the audio feed.

“…Lucy…?” Pop. “Lucy …can you read me?…Over…” Crack.

“Cenna?” Hope welled in her heart. They’re alive after all. “I read you. But it’s not clear.”

“…Left…no… Right… A little bit more to the right!”

It appears that Cenna was yelling instructions to someone.

“Okay! I think that’s the best we can get!”

Lowering her volume, Cenna explained: “For context Lucy, Gael climbed 30 feet above my head with a signal amplifier linked to my earpiece. Never thought I’d need to bust that out.”

“What happened?”

“The group got split up. We’re stuck in these weird perspective-defying puzzle rooms. But that’s not the worst of it. Sans sealed the entire labyrinth within an imitation Seven-Soul Barrier.”

The woman’s head felt faint. “C-come again? Repeat?”

“I repeat: Sans sealed the entire labyrinth within an imitation Seven-Soul Barrier. We. Are. So trapped.”

The Barrier.
The Seven-Soul Barrier.

Many had considered the possibility of mechanizing it, but the ramifications were too frightening to pursue. Imagine sealing whole opposing nations to certain doom with nothing more than science.

What should I do?

What can I do?

Her memory began to list the available tactics. She singled them out one by one, hampered either by failing infrastructure or the Barrier’s blockade.

It all seemed hopeless...

Until she remembered how Sans praised this person he called ‘Doctor Alphys’.

She delved into her database and pulled up an information sheet. It detailed all their intel on that yellow-scaled scientist, phone number included.

The flower children’s testimonies after the exorcism had fed her crucial updates on Ebott’s brightest mind.

Appearances deceive. Who would have ever thought that this socially-awkward nerdy woman was one of the primary drivers of the Underground’s technology?

That’s right. I can’t do this alone.
“Stay put, Judge Caraway. I'm contacting Doctor Alphys for assistance as we speak.”

[OUTGOING TRANSMISSION: ALPHYS LABS]

Chapter End Notes

Yes, even Gerson had something special. C'mon he's the Hammer of Justice and one of the few surviving fighters of Pre-Sealing days XD
Early chapter bonus this week! That's because I have one of the chronographer requests in editing. It's Grillby with the Yellow Kid.

Finally I got two more art memes answered with the help of my new Huion. It's here and here. That leaves me with Mettaton left.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The black wind howled.

Toriel and Asgore watched Undyne’s spears pierce the heavens. One by one they exploded into a mass of magic, anger, and frustration.

Alas, the heavens swallowed her might whole, unbudging. Breaking a Mark was of a whole different magnitude compared to a false Barrier.

It’s a great imitation indeed.

Soon the noise died down; even Undyne could run out of energy.

Asgore sighed. “I think we should go.”

Past their starting chamber was a land covered in snow. Tall, dead trees lined the path ahead.

“Snowdin…?” Toriel muttered.

“It seems that Sans has recreated the region,” said Asgore.

They continued down the straight path until they reached a curious structure. It’s a ball-course surrounded by a transparent plastic border. The only way in was through an electronic sliding door.

A wall-mounted sign explained the rules:

‘One person may attempt the puzzle at a time. Anyone else can only instruct from the sidelines.’

The golden-maned goat offered himself to accomplish the task. Toriel stayed behind.

“Good luck, dear.”

However…

Asgore kicked the ball too hard. It flew straight toward the Barrier itself, disintegrating into nothingness over their heads.

“Asgore, for goodness sake. Be more gentle!”

When the ball respawned at the beginning of the course, the King tried his best to heed his wife’s advice.
Except the result refused to change. Another ball lost forever.

He grumbled out of irritation.

She glared.

*That man, seriously.*

*A king shouldn’t be behaving like a child.*

When he realised what he had done, the man hung his sorry head low to apologize. “Sorry. Having the Barrier over my head… it’s clouding my judgement.”

At the very least, she understood how her estranged husband felt. Waves of prismatic light pulsated over the black sky. It’s a power filled with bad memories… a reminder of their thousand-year imprisonment.

She knew better than anyone else about Asgore’s weakness. He’s a gentle giant through and through. But, whenever his anger or anxiety go past a certain threshold, he succumbs to outbursts.

The last time he behaved like this… was their children’s death.

“Switch out with me,” she said.

“But--”

“No buts.”

“O-okay…”

Asgore walked back to the entrance. Detecting his presence, the gate door slid open. It remained so until Toriel entered the chamber.

She proceeded to guide the ball with her feet, careful to apply just enough force for it to go where it needed to.

Meanwhile, Asgore sat down by the side, remaining silent in deep self-pity.

*That man… Seriously. Do I have to do everything myself?*

Since the beginning of their marriage, she was the one who buckled up and took charge of the political scene.

The refugees hailed her as the ‘Mother Queen’ for a reason. She was the one who made sure the shelters were well-built, the food distributed fairly, and that no cheeky fellows took advantage of the less fortunate.

On the other hand, ‘Father King’ Asgore handled the integration. He gave people a place and a purpose. Mediated differences between the different species. Provided medicine for the sick and healing for the injured.

One logical, one holistic. Together they were the dream team.

For a long time, Toriel thought the same. Thought that her marriage was strong enough to withstand anything.

How wrong she was.
The ball fell into the hole, a coloured flag popped up. It played a short message.

**Green, for Kindness.**
**Your concern and care for “Ball” led to a delicious victory.**

It’s a sign of completion. The barricade lowered itself and the ball didn’t respawn.

“We’re done,” said Toriel. “Let’s go.”

He didn’t move. Kept staring at his bitten arm, ever doleful.

“Asgore?”

*That man… will he be alright?*

Toriel walked over and laid a hand on his broad shoulders. It’s only then Asgore snapped out of his daze.

“S-sorry about that.”

Asgore stood too quick. His eyes glazed over. Backwards, he fell.

She gasped, catching him just in the nick of time. “Gorey?!”

It was a nickname she hadn’t used for ages. The couple exchanged a few moments of awkward silence.

After a while, Asgore broke the ice. “Ah… I’m feeling rather lightheaded. Been so since I got bit…”

The overhead speakers then activated.

“Tori, you might want to ask that scaly-ton more about the anesthesia he used. Well. If you ever get a chance to do so anyway. King Asgore is showing signs of sensitivity. Dizziness. Minor disorientation. He should try to avoid that chemical next time.”

“Sans?” Toriel muttered.

“Remember back in hospital, the doctors had a clipboard detailing Frisk’s medication? There’s a reason for that. Some folks get more side-effects than others. Let’s just say King Fluffybuns isn’t very lucky with whatever that was injected into his systems.”

“Can you help him?”

Sans didn’t respond.

Toriel squeezed her hands together. She looked up towards the Barrier-filled sky and pleaded for mercy.

“Please, Sans. I know he could have handled your case better. And, I understand if you don’t want to help. But I… I can’t just watch him suffer.”

“I’m not a doctor, Tori,” Sans replied. “The wrong medication might make things worse. I could conjure something to alleviate the symptoms, though. Show your palm.”

When she did so, a salted lemon candy drop materialized in her possession. It’s a common human remedy for mild malaise.
“Here, this might help.” Toriel unwrapped the sweet and fed it straight into Asgore’s mouth. Like how they used to do when they were still happily married.

Asgore lightened up upon the taste of delicious candy. “Oh my~! I didn’t think salt, lemon, and sugar went so well together.”

Without realising it, she smiled.

At least he cheered up a little.
Oh, what am I thinking? We don’t have time to dawdle.

“Let’s carry on. And, Sans… thank you.”

The couple continued wading through the digital snow.

This time, Toriel kept a close watch on Asgore. Her heart began to ache over her own failings.

...We must have been apart for far too long. I should have noticed the weakness in his steps.

They arrived at a long, suspended bridge. Or rather, a rock formation painted to mimic a bridge. Toriel had crossed the original construct in the real Snowdin before. The level of detail in this reconstruction baffled her.

The creator, Sans, stood at the other end of the bridge. Not a hologram.

“Hey there,” he said. “Ready for a ‘cliffhanger’?”

Toriel forced herself to suppress a snicker. That was such a bad pun. Maybe too bad, considering the ominous tone behind it.

She took a deep breath and asked: “What are we supposed to do here?”

“Cross the bridge. Easy, right? I thought so too… so why don’t we spice it up?”

Sans clapped his hands twice.

Both goat monarchs gasped in terror when the ropes lowered an assortment of deadly implements.

Spike balls.
Sharpened spears.
Flamethrowing bellows.
Cannons.
Even a small, white, fluffy dog at the very end. It wagged its excited tail with a high-pitched bark.

Sans chuckled at their stunned expression. “Welcome to the Gauntlet of Deadly Terror. Made by Papyrus himself. As you know, his estimations of physical abilities are pretty… ‘sky high’.”

“Only one person needs to get to my side to deactivate the trap. There’s no sensors, so you’d have to use this red button.”

Stepping aside, he revealed a convenient stand with the alleged input device.

“Press that and all the dangerous stuff will go away. So. What’s your plan? I’ll wait.”

So far, nothing had happened. Toriel wondered: will it activate when they get close? At the end, the beginning, the midway?
Questions, and more questions. Toriel stood paralyzed from sheer hesitation.

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She felt a brush against her arm. It’s Asgore, trying to press forward while still somewhat dazed in the head.

“What are you doing?!”

The man stopped. He looked back at her with a sad smile.

“If anything happens to me… please take care of Frisk. You are the better parent between us.”

Her heart sank. Did he just suggest suicide? Sacrifice? Martyrdom?

“What are you talking about? You’re in no condition to go through that danger!”

“I know,” Asgore nodded. “At the very least, you will learn how it works. The timing. The way the ropes swing. Maybe you could destroy them from the sidelines. You have that power too.”

Toriel blew her top. Anger. Grief. Disappointment. It all erupted like one of those legendary volcanoes.

Grabbing Asgore’s unnumbed arm, she put her entire might in dragging him back away from the bridge. The further, the better.

“T-Tori?” he muttered.

Toriel scolded: “Don’t you DARE call me by that name! Not after that! Do you think Frisk would be happy knowing that their father gave up his life over a stupid bridge trap?! Could you actually think with your head for ONCE???”

Confusion defined her husband’s face. “I am. Like how you would want me to.”

“I don’t want you to die!”

“But you want me to rule. And this… this is what it means to be a good, loving ruler. To put the lives of others before oneself. You have opened my eyes, Toriel. A king must lay his life down for his subjects. For too long I’ve been hiding between living and existing.”

“I should have stepped out into the unknown with the first human SOUL we obtained. By delaying the war… all I did was prolong the suffering of my citizens. They hoped, and yet hope never arrived. It’s the worst state of life for anyone.”

“I have to own up to my failures now.”

Toriel’s head spun. Why did Asgore insist that it was for her sake? As far as she could remember, she didn’t--

Or did she? Maybe it did cross her mind. But she wasn’t sure anymore.

“Sorry, Tori. Asgore made the better choice.”

Her train of thought stopped at Sans’ comment.

Him?
Of all people?
The one who judged Asgore for doing nothing?

Is now judging her?

Sans leaned against the switch. His hands tucked into the pockets of his jacket, very casual.

“…Your idea got me thinking for a long while,” he said. “It sounds nice on paper. But, I’m afraid that’s just a pipe dream.”

“The moment Asgore begins his attack, both the Magi and the national security forces will be on high alert. I give a maximum of two hours before we have an opposing army mobilized at the foot of the mountain. Of course, led by none other than the Supreme Judge of that time.”

“None of us knew just how much humanity’s firearms had advanced. Not even myself. I had theories and could make a rough estimate… but it’s still not the same.”

Sans pointed towards a nearby snowy cliffside. “See that? I’m going to simulate some expected firepower from the era when the second child fell. Just to give an idea what all-out war with humanity might look like.”

By the end of the barrage, only charred shallow craters remained. It took mere seconds.

Toriel felt a shaky warmth enveloping her. It’s Asgore, unconsciously trying to shield her from the destruction.

“And that’s just the ‘tip of the iceberg’. The days of swords and arrows have long passed. Oh, and there’s always that nasty nuclear factor. Contrary to fiction, it never gives you superpowers. Only a very painful death.”

Sans continued his explanation. “Maybe by theory a Seven-SOUL Asgore could make quick work of the humans. That is… if the human SOULS don’t rebel first. Frisk’s testimonies and Papyrus’ vision dive confirm that control can be usurped if the SOULS have enough Determination. How much is ‘enough’? Apparently a Red Minor has enough to vacate on will.”

“The moment Asgore claims a true Red, the control will become an even split. Think Asriel and Chara; there’s nothing to stop them from hijacking The King and turning him against his own people.”

“And the biggest factor of all,” said Sans. “The Supreme Judges. Welp. You know what they can do. The Magi won’t spare us if we’re going on a full offensive. The public already would’ve had the notion that monsters want them dead.”

“Destroying us is a small price to pay to protect the other hidden nations under their custody. All because we struck without warning. Is that really the best option?”

When the truth sank into Toriel’s head, her knees weakened. Asgore did his best to support her with his one functioning arm.

“King Asgore is still a ruler who puts his citizens first. Even if it’s at the cost of everyone’s general well-being, his own included. I have my gripes, but they’re over a different issue. Not relevant to our current conversation.”
The bridge had yet to be crossed.
Frisk still waited for their rescue.
And the angel of judgement stood between them and their goals.

Imprisoned hope was locked far away.

“Why are you doing this?!” Toriel cried out in tears. “What do you want from us???”

Sans breathed out a relaxed sigh. Or so it seemed. “Stop trying to do everything all by yourself, Tori. That’s a good start. Guide each other, perhaps? Do whatever couples do. I’m not too sure about it myself. I didn’t get to witness much of this dynamic before my own parents passed away.”

“Other than that, I want you to trust me. Because… I’m putting in real effort for the first time in my wasteful life.”

“I have a goal. And this time I have the means to accomplish it. Maybe you won’t agree with me. Maybe you won’t even forgive me. But, I must.”

He turned around, preventing Toriel from looking at his face.

“I hope you don’t mind that we start the pun routine a little later. Or less frequent. In the beginning at least, I’m gonna be real busy, y’know. Managing resources. Building new facilities. Getting the aquifer running as soon as possible.”

“Life under the Barrier may be safer, but it ain’t perfect. There’s still lots of work needed to be done. Gotta get self-sufficient.”

Toriel stared with her jaw agape.

That man… has he gone mad?

Or…

If luck was of any indication, it would be the latter. A proverbial lump formed in her throat. She swallowed it down for the golden question:

“Sans, are you trying to manipulate time?”

He didn’t answer. Instead, he responded with a different statement altogether. “Want a hint to the puzzle? Let’s see how Papyrus accomplished it.”

With a wave of his hand, Sans summoned a holographic image of his taller younger brother.

Papyrus paused at the beginning of the bridge. He groaned. Shook his head.

…Then he charged straight down the path without a single hindrance.

When he reached the end, the youngster grumbled out loud: “REALLY SANS? YOU INCLUDED THIS? I’M THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS THE PASSWORD, WHICH ALSO MEANS I CAN CHOOSE TO NOT ACTIVATE IT!”

“Heh bro, thought you might want to make it challenging for yourself.”

“MAYBE WHEN I DON’T HAVE A TICKING CLOCK BREATHING DOWN MY TRACHEA.”

The Gauntlet of Deadly Terrors was nothing more than an illusion of danger. It’s harmless without
the master key.

Toriel felt cheated. Sans had played her for a fool.

“Come out and face me, coward!!!”

The short skeleton was long gone. Papyrus’ hologram served as the perfect distraction.

Toriel stormed down the bridge. She ignited rope after rope in her wake, causing the implements of doom to free-fall into the chasm below.

…but she spared the fluffy dog. Her motherly nature refused to destroy it, even though it may just be a digital recreation of the actual animal.

“Oh, you poor thing. Brought into this world to be another person’s toy…”

Leaving it hanging here would be too cruel, so she untied the critter from its binds and carried it in her arms.

Wagging its short tail, the dog licked her face in gratitude.

“Aren’t you the annoying dog who stole my phone? Or at least, The Void’s version of it.”

The dog barked once.

Toriel couldn’t help but to smile at its inherent cuteness. She tapped it on the nose and said: “Well then. As long you behave, we’ll make sure you don’t turn into dust. Be a good dog for your own sake.”

Oh look at me. Lost all my rage because of one cute pup.

How can I forgive anyone if I can’t forgive myself?

An arm of strength guided her steps. When she looked up, it was none other than Asgore.

“We have this in ‘the bag’, Toriel.” He encouraged.

“But I--”

Her husband for a thousand years beamed. “Please understand that I don’t blame you for anything. I know you always mean well. Always.”

Between the two, Asgore was the more forgiving one. It’s a fact that Toriel had taken for granted -- both in marriage and in her self-imposed exile.

She leaned her head against his chest.

Her heart ached with a mixed cauldron of emotions that she had yet to successfully describe.

For some reason, she had insisted in bringing up all these old, irrelevant hurts.

Why did they matter to her? The past should stay the past.

“…Thank you, Fluffybuns.”
I'm really not used to Asgore and Toriel on the same page, doing something together. Such a rare moment.

Well.... Toriel's suggestion had bugged me for a long time. Bear in mind that Sans is postulating the worst case scenario. Also the most likely one though, considering what was the original plan...

Also, trying to treat local anaesthesia complications is apparently not simple. But that's today's 2010 standards. Who knows what's like in the future.
It's a new week.

In case you've not seen it yet, I had completed Ray 01’s request about *Grillby and the Yellow Kid*. Definitely should read if you want to understand more about his history.

That's all for extra content. No new art unfortunately :P

Enjoy the read.

Undyne hates puzzles for many reasons.

First, they give her a headache.

Second, they’re a waste of time. For everyone involved.

Third, they’re inefficient. What’s the point of making puzzles that are solvable by the people they’re trying to keep out? A wall would be enough.

After getting the life-sized block puzzle wrong for the fifth time, Undyne had enough. She punched the block to smithereens with the intent of bulldozing her way through.

Except… the offending blockade just respawned.

“COME! ON!” she screamed. “Why can’t you just stay wrecked?!?”

It’s not like the puzzle or its owner would give into her demands anyway; she's left to just sigh at the predicament.

*At least it can be broken. Unlike that dang Barrier.*

“Where’s Grillby anyway?” she wondered out loud. He’s a real ninja for a man who shines.

She heard loud stomp on the ceiling. Looking up, she spotted a crack. Undyne summoned her spear and stepped back. Was that a friend or a foe? Better to be safe than sorry.

One more stomp, and the ceiling gave way. Grillby took the effort to carefully hang-drop instead of jumping like a standard anime protagonist.

The hole soon closed up into its pristine state. Just like everything else in this labyrinth.

“Oh, it’s you.” That’s a relief. She put away her spear. “Found anything?”

Grillby nodded. “…Two things…”

He handed Undyne a rolled up piece of paper. Opening it revealed an overhead map of the puzzle. It’s drawn in a black, powdery substance.
Squinting, she commented: “Whoa, where did you get this? Looks like wallpaper.”

“…Because it is… Some chambers have wallpapers… They regenerate… but they don’t revert…”

Thus Undyne noticed that Grillby had stuffed his pockets with folded pieces of flammables. They might come in handy.

“What’s the second piece of info?” she asked.

“…The walls and floors… feel like hardtack…”

“Hardtack?”

“…Biscuits…” he explained. “…Relatively easy to break compared to concrete… I didn’t even need to muster any Determination…”

“Huh. So we’re practically walking on super tough cookies? Does that mean this entire labyrinth is edible?”

Grillby shook his head. “…Don’t know… One thing is for sure… this labyrinth is made to be broken…”

It made even less sense for Undyne. “So, we can just punch our way out of here? That’s the most pointless trap ever.”

“…No… If everything is brittle… it means the floor can also give way… If that happens… we’ll fall forever…”

“Huh? Can’t just grip on a ledge and--”

Then, it clicked. Those would break on impact. In fact, even a heavy run might cause the ground to crack. It now made sense why Grillby was so cautious.

Suddenly the idea of a punchable labyrinth didn’t sound so good after all.

“Gimme a moment.”

Undyne proceeded to break off a corner of a puzzle block. Sank her huge spiky teeth into it. It’s chewable. Savoury. And despite its dryness, it had a distinctive aroma of baked flour goods.

“…Grillby, they really are biscuits. Oh my god. An edible trap. This is so Sans, I don’t even.”

She read the layout again. “We should try to solve this without causing a collapse, I guess.”

Together, they completed the puzzle with just half of the time required for Undyne’s previous attempt.

A section of the wall vanished upon completion, prompting the duo to traverse a new pathway leading left. It’s hard to tell what’s around the bend.

“…Think we’ll get more puzzles?” asked Undyne.

Grillby shrugged in return.

Without an alternative non-violent option, the two monsters had no choice but to advance. The road
led them onto a platform suspended over a long drop into darkness.

Knowing that she’s standing on wheat flour made her stomach queasy.

“Hey guys. ‘Savouring’ my labyrinth?”

It’s Sans. All sense of fear was replaced with anger.

“Come out and show your ugly mug, PUNK!!!” she roared.

“Sure.”

Sans teleported into view. Being a woman of shoot-first-talk-later, Undyne summoned a hail of spears. Rained them down with great prejudice.

She was sure she heard Grillby yell ‘no’.

Her water spears smashed through the biscuit world and soaked into any edge that didn’t get obliterated.

Wet and softened biscuits will NOT hold anyone’s weight.

“Aaah crap!” Together with Grillby, she retreated back to the dry entrance.

The drenched platforms collapsed upon themselves, falling straight into the deep drop below.

The pieces then melded back together far away. It’s floating in the middle of the darkness, further mocking them with sheer impractical distance.

Sans soon resurfaced. Hands always in the pockets of his jackets, alongside that all-knowing grin…

If only she could suplex the guy…

Undyne yelled: “Damn you Sans! What are you trying to do?!”

“Teaching you that you can’t just brute force your way through everything. Sometimes, you gotta solve the puzzles of life on their own terms. Cheat only if you think you won’t get caught. But…”

Wink.

“Maybe it’s safer to just follow the rules.”

“I don’t have time for your philosophical bullshit!” Undyne fumed. “Stop this madness and give Frisk back!”

He shrugged. “Welp, too bad. It’s my mission to waste all your precious time.”

Grillby stepped forward to ask a question; “…How do we progress…?”

“Turn back,” Sans replied. “When you can’t see a way forward, you’ve got to retrace your steps sometimes. Contemplate past actions. That’ll lead you down the correct path.”

“…Thank you…” The man of fire did as he was told, returning to the corridor from whence they came.

Undyne protested against the decision. “Wait, what?! We’re giving up already???”
“…You heard him… The more we resist… the more time we’ll waste… We should hurry to the next puzzle…”

“How are we sure that he won’t lead us astray?”

Without looking back at her, the man replied: “…Knowing Sans… that’s the least of our worries… Let’s go…”

Undyne now had a fourth reason to hate puzzles. They’re playgrounds for the manipulators, mocking and oppressing from their lofty distance.

A familiar sight replaced the previous puzzle block chamber.

It’s cold. Snowy.
Complete with a straight road cutting through the sheets of white.

Up ahead, a plate of spaghetti sat on top of a table. It filled Undyne with sheer dread.

Oh god. Is that what I think it is?

She caught a whiff of the sauce’s unmistakable ‘aroma’. It’s one she thought gone and dead forever. The goop doctor saw to that.

Instructions lay by the side of the plate. It detailed the rules and conditions to pass this particular trial.

Consume the meal to pass.

Undyne grimaced. “That’s ‘wonderfully’ vague.”

There doesn’t seem to be any visible traps around. So she pondered what would happen if she tried to skip it.

“C’mon Grillby, let’s ignore the plate.”

So the two continued walking.
And walking…
And walking…

Right up ahead, it’s that very same table.

“Did Sans just spawn another one? Seriously? He really wants to waste our time.”

“…Wait…” said the fire knight. “…I’ll stay here… If you don’t see me… turn around…”

I have a bad feeling about this.

Undyne quickened her pace down the road. A part of her hoped that Grillby was wrong, but her current true-to-anime life will surely dictate otherwise.

Lo and behold, at the end of the path stood none other than her senior.

Fish stared at fire.
Fire stared at fish.

“Fuck,” Undyne said, “It’s a loop, isn’t it?”
Grillby nodded.

“God. There’s a thin line between a jokester and a sadist.”

Megalovania’s owner spoke through the sound systems: “Looks like you figured it out. Yup. You’re stuck here as long that plate of spaghetti still exists. It’s not a hard puzzle anyway. Nothing is too much for Ultimate Undyne, right?”

Ugh. Sans has a point. I can’t let a dumb pasta get the better of me.

But Undyne had a flashback of eating Papyrus’ hard work for the first time.

She didn’t want to remember that ever again. Not the taste. Nor the smell. Nor the texture. Nor anything about it.

Grillby reached out for the fork, but Undyne snatched it away from him. “Spare yourself, sir. It’s. Bad! And I mean really, really BAD. Like really!”

“…Huh?… But he always barged into my bar… touting his culinary mastery…”

All these years, he lived in ignorance.

“…Could it really be ‘that’ bad?…”

“YES!!!”

Undyne inhaled. Held her breath, and then explained: “OKAY! I tried to teach Papyrus how to cook so he could have a different career option. Except, I can’t cook either! So. SO! Anything pre-Gaster is as horrible as shit no matter what he tells you.”

Grillby narrowed his eyes.

“…And Sans didn’t teach him how to cook?…”

“That slob can actually DO that?! What the fuck I don’t even-- Okay, okay, nevermind. Point being, Papyrus is now BETTER than you! No offense. But back then? No way! Nothing was edible until the doc taught him some real skills.”

“…He never tried his own meals?…”

Undyne gave that a thought. “…I dunno. Maybe he just scarfs it down?! Like how I eat my own crappy cooking.”

“…Nobody ever told him the truth?…”

A deep sense of shame turned Undyne’s face pink.

“Sorry Grillbz,” said Sans. “I’m part of the blame for that ‘badghetti’ too. None of us had the heart to break the news. Oh, right. You guys might want another fork.”

Sans spawned replacement cutlery for Grillby. There’s no saving him now.

The man of fire poked his utensil into the noodles and twirled a helping. He popped it straight into his mouth.

His face contorted in an instant.
“…Why?…” he asked. “…How?…”

Undyne avoided direct eye contact with profuse sweating.

Now she too had to swallow down the most intimidating roll of pasta on the planet.

*C’mon. Eat the ‘badghetti’. Force it down with determination or something.*

The closer her hand moved towards her mouth, the more it trembled. At this rate, the slippery noodles will slide off her fork first.

Slid it did. Splatted into a mess on the table as well. A few seconds later, it respawned back onto the plate.

The metal grip began to bend in Undyne’s stressed grip. In the end, she can’t make herself do it. She stabbed the fork into the table and walked away.

Sans must have expected this reaction. “I guess you need a little motivation. Stand aside for a while. I’ll show you what Papyrus did.”

A hologram of Papyrus stood before the plate in silence.

The Sans of the past said, “*Just a reminder bro, there are other ways to solve this puzzle.*”

“I WANT TO EAT IT.” Papyrus replied. “*BECAUSE I NEED TO KNOW WHAT I’VE BEEN SERVING TO OTHERS ALL THIS WHILE.*”

Papyrus slurped right in. His bony face winced at his own disaster.

“Oh God. Is this my plate of friendship? It’s so… so… so unfriendly!”

“It’s the thought that counts.”

“No, it’s not. This is a cuisine of unwelcoming misunderstandings! No wonder nobody wanted to be my friend.”

“It’s not because of that, bro. It’s not. Think of it this way: if people befriend you only because you make good food, they’re not sincere.”

“SANS. I APPRECIATE THAT YOU’RE TRYING TO PROTECT MY FEELINGS. BUT, I CAN’T IMPROVE IF I DON’T KNOW ANYTHING. SURE, YOU, UNDYNE, AND FRISK CAN LOOK PAST SUCH MISTAKES BECAUSE OF OUR HISTORY. BUT MY POTENTIAL FUTURE FRIENDS CAN’T BE EXPECTED TO.”

Papyrus forced himself to continue eating. Orange tears streamed down his skull while he whimpered from every bite.

Watching her best friend suffer like this… made her boil over in rage. She couldn’t find a reason why Sans mandated this puzzle. Why put Papyrus through all this?

“Bro. You really don’t need to finish that. Enough is enough. I’m the boss here. I can give you leeway.”

“PLEASE DON’T.” Papyrus replied. “*I MUST KNOW WHAT I PUT MY FRIENDS THROUGH. I MUST KNOW WHAT I PUT YOU THROUGH. YOU ALWAYS FINISH MY COOKING. HOW?*”
“I just do. Guess being a cold killer helps.”

“DOES THIS MEAN ALL MY OTHER DISHES WERE BAD TOO? HOW DID ANYONE TOLERATE THIS? MAYBE NO ONE ATE THIS PARTICULAR SPAGHETTI BUT…”

“We’re used to it.”

“What about the times I became king? Did I really feed this atrocity to all my citizens⁈?!”

“Nope. Upscale mass production had to be standardized. Fixed everything to a set portion and method. Tastiness guaranteed. Besides, your name was on the line.”

The younger brother sobbed harder. “Thank you. I mean it. I wouldn’t want to give anyone an accidental poison.”

By the time he finished, Papyrus looked a little green. He didn’t move from his spot. Rather, he didn’t dare to do so. Step in the wrong direction and his inner magic contents might just eject upwards.

The Sans of the past spawned a bowl of mint chocolates and a glass of water. Undyne recognized them as classic mouth fresheners of their region.

“Take some of that, bro. It’ll help. If you want something leaner, I can conjure something else from Judge Thyme’s stash. Hmm, sugar coated seeds with dried coconut. Fennel, anise, and sesame. That sounds awesome.”

“It appears that he’s got a long list of gastrointestinal medicines too. Do antacids work with skeletons? We don’t have any real acid. Uh… what is an ‘antiemetic’? Oh, so that’s what they’re for. Yup. I think that will do.”

“I’m making a room for you to rest, bro. Complete with a sink if you need it. Let that gut settle down. I know we don’t technically have a visible one but… we’ve both been through those bad times now.”

The playback ended there.

“How could you…” Undyne’s mutterings soon escalated into an all-out scream. “How could you?!? Why didn’t you just make the plate vanish with your stupid godmode powers?? Why must you watch Papyrus suffer like some freaking psycho??”

The Sans of the present paused to mull over her query. “You’re right. I ‘could’ have done that. Paps would have been offended, though. Besides, I was too shocked. Didn’t… didn’t expect him to finish it all.”

“Hey, that’s why we all love him. Right? He’s so brave. So wonderful. Ever since he was a little babybone, he was the only one who’d surprise me in areas that matter. It’s a miracle watching him grow up so happy.”

“…That is, until I messed up hard. I could have done so much better. Hmm. Maybe he should have gotten into science after all. I do the planning and research, he brainstorms and builds. That’s a good combo. At the very least he’ll see the fruits of his efforts sooner than that whole Royal Guard plan.”

“Welp. Enough of my rambling. You two still need to finish that meal.”
Red warning flags. Everywhere. Sans had all the hallmarks of a misguided anime antagonist.

“God, Sans…” said Undyne. “What the fuck happened to you?”

“Nothing.” Sans replied. “It’s just a side you don’t see often.”

She yanked the pierced fork off the table. This man must be stopped at all cost.

That’s what her heart says anyway. When push came to shove, however, she still found herself intimidated by the sheer horrors of botched gastronomy.

*Be determined. BE! DETERMINED!*

Grillby snatched the plate away from her.

“Uh what are you doin—”

A menacing, rage-filled aura exuded from his being. She had never, EVER seen Grillby anywhere near this state. Not even heard rumors during his time as Captain of the Royal Guard.

Steam wafted from the offending meal. The bottom side started to sizzle. Grillby had turned the plate in his hand into a hot pan.

It didn’t stop there. The heating process continued unchecked until the charring noodles reached ignition point. They’re now on fire.

The plate cracked from the rapid increase of heat. When that happened, Grillby smashed the whole thing against the wooden table. Set that ablaze too.

Slowly yet surely, he made a funeral pyre of ancient human lore out of a piece of furniture.

In all her limited wisdom, Undyne chose to back away: the right decision.

Even Sans had not a single word left to exchange.


Once the longest minute had passed, Grillby himself broke the silence.

“…I ‘consumed’ it in flames…” he said, “May we proceed?…”

“…Welp. You made your point.”

Sans commanded the systems to shift the landscape, replacing the next section of the looping path with the Ruin’s exit.

“One more puzzle remains. See you on the other side.”

Chapter End Notes

The bowl of sugared spice exists in real life. It's *Mukhwas*.

Did Sans really eat Pap's cooking? I have no clue. The game states it really vaguely.
Plus, we have the unreliable narrator factor tossed in now.

Sans: “actually, that spaghetti from earlier...”
Sans: “it wasn't too bad for my brother.”
Sans: “since he started cooking lessons, he's been improving a lot.”
Sans: “i bet if he keeps it up, next year he'll even make something edible.”

And we have this from the bird patron.

“Sans is interesting. He has told me about all kinds of incredible foods. But, despite his knowledge, he always orders the worst burger off the menu.”
Hey! A bonus chapter. Maybe at this rate I can finish before May.

Behold, it's an ALPHYS CHAPTER! Enjoy!

Really hope that I didn't miss any typos this time.

It’s been a long while since her beloved Undyne passed the message.

By theory, Alphys knew she should continue her research on the remains of Doctor Gaster. But she’s both tired and hungry. So she retreated to her office to make some chicken-flavoured cup noodles.

Then, she wondered if the rest of the Magi on standby had anything to eat. They were prepared to guard the town for one more night, but the recent attack might disrupt their upcoming shift.

Alphys stared at the unopened warehouse-sized cardboard box. It was an impulse purchase. She reasoned that there’s no way she could finish all these anyway, so she started pushing it out into the lounge area.

Her lab had become a news center. Both civilian and security members gathered around the large TV set, keeping themselves up to date on the big fire at The Spire.

Morale had picked up a little when the flames were extinguished in a spectacular pillar of hotness. Then, Mettaton’s appearance made some of his younger fans cheer.

However, the overall mood remained grim. There were no signs of the Magi’s Supreme Judge. Neither were there any news of Captain Undyne and ex-Captain Grillby.

Above all, the Royal Family remained missing.

All attention snapped to her the moment she became noticeable. As the lizard had expected, people started flocking to her in hopes of updates.

“Any news from Captain Undyne?” one asked.
“Where is she?”
“Why aren’t they back yet?”
“The King and Queen? Frisk? Are they okay?”

Alphys shook her head. “Sorry, I don't know. I've not heard anything either.”

Any hope deflated.

“I-it's getting late,” she said. “If you want something warm, I have some cup noodles for everyone. There’s hot water in the kitchen sink. And you can use the stove too.”

In a blink, it became a cup noodle party. Though calling it a ‘party’ right now would be an insult to
the severity of the situation.

She noted that there was a new collection of people since she had last stepped out. They’re humanoid fire-elementals, very much like Grillby.

A young green-flamed teen girl asked her mother: “Will Uncle Grillby be okay?”

*Oh my, his family is here.*

She wanted to approach them at first… but then she decided it’s better to slip away. She had no positive news after all.

*I-I can’t take this. I should eat in private.*

Alphys hurried back into her office with her share. With the almighty convenience of an electric kettle, she boiled some water.

*Sigh…*

*If only I could do something to help. Right now, I’m just an anxious ball of trash.*

Her phone rang.

Alphys dug into her pocket as soon as possible. She expected to see Undyne’s name but…

…it said ‘Private Number’.

*Weird. Could it be a misdial?*

She answered it anyway.

“Hello?”

“*May I confirm that this number belongs to Doctor Alphys?***”

“That’s… me?” The prim woman’s voice stunned Alphys. Furthermore, she’s a stranger.

“My name is Lady Lucidia of House Berendin. I am the Magi’s assigned Chronographer. You may or may not have heard of my existence through Judge Cenna Caraway.”

Alphys recalled Cenna and Sans mentioning a skilled lady at the Magus Headquarters.

“A-are you the one who took care of Papyrus?”

“*Accurate assessment. Since our identities are confirmed, may I request the commencement of our operations?***”

It took Alphys a moment to understand her odd technical speech. “I’m in my office right now. If. That’s what you’re asking.”

“Is your laboratory and workstation accessible privy to privacy?”

“Uh. Yes. I-I need the privacy to work on my projects. Why do you ask?”

“Please lock all your doors. If you require assistance, you may ask for the lead communications technician to assist. One or two extra personnel at best. Other than that, it is vital to not let anyone unrelated to the incident get involved.”
“I’m certain you understand what I mean.”

Alphys felt her tongue trip before she could even speak.

“Is it t-t-t-that bad?” Anxiety rising.

“It will devolve into the worst case scenario if we don’t solve this predicament posthaste.”

Alphys wasted no time to rush over to her computer. Dinner can wait. With a few simple clicks, she locked the doors via remote control.

“What do you need help with?”

“I hear that you are the current Royal Scientist. This means you have your foundational knowledge about The Seven Soul Barrier, am I right?”

“Yes! B-but why?”

“Please listen carefully.”

Lucidia proceeded to explain about what went down in The Crimson Hall. All that information -- crammed straight into her head -- made Alphys want to hide under the table.

“…And that concludes our current circumstance. I am unable to devise a counterplan due to broken communication. I have lost sight of the rescue team, and Cenna’s signal lasted for only five minutes before it went silent.”

“You couldn’t get them back?”

“Negative. All subsequent attempts ended in failure. I did instruct her to remain on standby, so at the very least I can rely on her last-known coordinates.”

“We need to re-establish communications if we are to have any chance of stopping ‘his’ plans.”

Alphys didn’t know she could sweat this much on such a cold day. She grabbed a piece of tissue to wipe her forehead. It soon became soaked.

Ohmygodohmygodohmygodohmygod this is terrible no wonder she told me to lock the doors what are we supposed to do how can anyone pass a message into the BARRIER ITSELF--

Then she smacked herself on the cheek to snap herself out of it.

Lucidia must have heard it. “Are you alright, Doctor Alphys?”

“Yes. No. Maybe. Actually I’m in a mess.”

“Understandable. I, too, had a bout of panic. Doctor Alphys, it appears that your nation has superior knowledge in the art of Determination extraction. Perhaps this might help us. I would like to hear your theories.”

Alphys gulped. She had zero mental preparation for this. Then again, since when is she really ever ‘ready’?

Pull yourself together. Everyone you love is in trouble!

“Um. About that. I-I’m afraid we don’t know as much as you think. Maybe we have better extraction
methods, but only that. We don’t really know how to apply them as a science.”

“I—I’m more of a machine nerd. I—I mean… all I did was to keep injecting Determination into my patients…”

It’s a painful admission to someone as esteemed as the Magi’s primary Chronographer, but this was not the time to pretend.

“Acknowledged. Query: How fast can you read?”

“Q-quite fast. I think. I mean, I can read hundreds of manga chapters per sitting.”

“Please check your e-mail. I will send you an encrypted file with all the details you need.”

“Alright! Gimmie a moment to set things up.”

Alphys rushed to compile her cup noodles. She’s going to be in for the long haul. Wouldn’t want to get sleepy from a lack of energy.

Also, she wanted to switch to her headset. Leaves one’s hands free to multitask.

Food, obtained.
Status, online.
Mail, found.

“O-okay. I’m back,” said Alphys. “What’s the password?”

“It’s the name of the gyudon shop that appeared in episode five of the recent Mew Mew Kissy Reboot series.”

The lizard dropped her jaw. “A-are you a fan too?!?!”

“No. But you had watched that show at least once for 52 timelines by now. I prefer titles with a stronger narrative and less emphasis on spectacle.”

“Oh… W-wait. How do you know of my habits in the first place?”

“My duty involves gathering intelligence on the Dreemurr Nation’s most prominent figures: Frisk’s circle of friends. We have many ways. Nonetheless, I apologize for the invasion of your personal space. It is a disturbing notion and I fully acknowledge it.”

Perhaps it was a taste of her own medicine. Alphys did install cameras everywhere in the Underground in the name of surveillance. Concept wise, it’s not that different… though Lady Lucidia’s findings were on a whole different level.

“I-it’s okay as long as you don’t misuse it…”

Alphys keyed in the name of the shop. It unlocked an access through a host of DT-related documents.

Slurping her noodles away, Alphys’ eyes darted across the page at an almost mechanical pace. She read as fast as she could without tripping over the details.

“I can feel my brain turning into mush…”

That’s what she said, but her mental gears continued working at a subconscious level.
An idea popped in her mind by the time she set down the empty cup. Judging from the flood of new information, the Lichborn had a deeper connection to Determination than she ever imagined.

“Lady Lucidia, may I ask for confirmation on how the Seer’s Eye work?”

“Please proceed.”

“If the Barrier is designed to cut us off from the world, how did you manage to gather data from our Underground times? T-this battle between Sans and Frisk in particular.”

“A good question. Similar to Papyrus, my powers depends on clues ‘linked’ together.”

“Because of the Integrity and Kindness factor, right?” Alphys asked.

“Correct.” Lucidia replied. “The main difference is that I have no clairvoyance. Therefore, I can only study events that have already happened. Data-related archiving is a Perseverance speciality.”

“So, you have a super strong link with Sans because of his constant involvement in Frisk’s surface life?”

“That is accurate.”

“What about King Asgore? Queen Toriel? Me? Frisk themselves?”

“I do not have the same amount of data to work with. Out of everyone involved, Frisk and Sans are the ones who knew the truth. It is this truth that maintained my ties to the past.”

“Hmmm… I-it really puzzles me that you could see past the actual Barrier to begin with! What about Papyrus? If, uh, if he had awakened into a superpowered skeleton back then… does that mean he could see the Surface?”

“Judging from our current data… I will have to say ‘yes’, unfortunately.”

“Unfortunately?” Alphys blurted. It was an unusual negative confirmation.

“He can, and will, see all of human history as long as there is some manner of relevancy. Considering your nation’s abandoned goals and the poor moral state of Doctor Gaster, his powers as a Chronographer would have further alienated Papyrus from your society.”

“He would have spoken. He would have prophesied. And your nation would not have believed any of his words.”

“…I hate to imagine the results of living with that burden long before he’s ready. Just as I had experienced in my own childhood.”

Alphys gasped. Does that mean Sans was right after all?

She shook it aside. Told herself to be professional. Personal questions can come later.

“The Barrier is antagonistic to life,” muttered Alphys. “According to your report, only SOULS with enough Determination can escape immediate disintegration. In addition to that, the Seer’s Eye can also bypass it. This means…”

An eureka moment clicked together in her head. She tried to explain, her words fumbled over themselves.
“May I send my research findings on sensei-- I mean Doctor Gaster! Uh, can I send the data over to you?”

“Doctor Gaster? You have intel that I lack?”

“Absolutely! That’s. Um. Because I just wrote it down an hour ago. H-here, let me send you an encrypted document. It’s the same password…”

Alphys sent a mail back to Lucidia and waited for her response.

“Astonishing,” she replied. “He is neither here nor there…”

“Right,” Alphys nodded. “Since I am getting active readings from Gaster-sensei, I can confirm that he’s still alive somewhere. And… communicating.”

“Understood. However, where is this ‘somewhere’?”

“I-I-I hypothesize that Gaster-sensei is with Sans himself.”

“Oh? Why do you think so?”

“Because Sans stabbed him. Drained most of his Determination. His will. Y-you see, that’s why he’s a pile of stones now. Wouldn’t this mean that Sans has a large portion of sensei inside his machine?”

“Considering how Sans Serif hijacked Judge Thyme’s systems, it’s not impossible for the doctor to be taken hostage as well.”

“That’s right! This also means that sensei is currently INSIDE the Barrier! Thereby we can bypass the whole connection issue by using him as a conduit. Like a… Like a Gaster phone!”

“Analysing hypothesis. Plausibility: positive. Determination does share certain properties with radio waves. As such, anyone in the receptive area will be able to acquire the signal. Query: wouldn’t this pose a security risk? Sans Serif might sense that we are transmitting foreign data. There’s no guarantee that Doctor Gaster can prevent a leak.”

Lady Lucidia raised a serious question.

It’s ‘game over’ for them the moment Sans notices.

“Well… our data is rather miniscule in the larger scope of the existing flow. A tree in the forest, or a drop of water in a stream. Still, subterfuge only gets us so far. We will need to mask or encrypt it.”

Alphys concluded.

“Do you have anything in mind? DES? AES? Oh, oh, what about RSA?”

“My intended receiver is not a computer. It’s a person, and therefore the message has to remain as understandable language. Hmm… In hindsight, it’s fortunate that ‘he’ joined the team. His colours are a poor combination for a man with too many choices. That… shall be our gain.”

It’s strange and unnerving to go from computer speech to something more poetic. And intense.

“D-Do… you need a-any help?” Alphys asked.

“Pardon the outburst.” Lucidia replied, mellowing her tone. “I will handle the finer details. Ideal clause: construct a functional prototype within fifteen minutes.”
Fifteen?
Only fifteen?

No pressure.

Doctor Alphys’ lips curled upwards. Now that’s something she’s confident about.

“T’ll get it done in less than that!”

The lizard hopped off her chair and hurried to the workshop. Sleeves, rolled up. She already knew which component goes where.

After all, machines are her specialty.

The combined efforts of her magic hammer, almighty chainsaw, and sonic screwdriver thus concocted an unholy chimera of machine parts.

Where did they come from? What was their purpose? It’s a secret to everybody. Only Alphys herself knows the answer.

The sole recognizable item of this frankenstein creation was a container once used to keep the human SOULS. It had everything it needed to transfer magic to and from Gaster’s remains.

She flipped on the power. The machine emitted a low hum of activity.

Gaster’s petrified Psychia glowed softly in response.

“All clear,” Alphys nodded. “Now I just need to connect this cable to the main PC.”

When she did, her computer’s interface completely changed.

“D-did you just hack my computer?” the scientist asked.

Lucidia replied, “Technically, yes. It’s a remote connection to the Chronograph. Sharing my findings with you will ease our attempts of teamwork. I apologize again for raising any alarms.”

“I will attempt to initiate the connection now.”

The languages of hands rolled across the screen.

She muttered, “Initiating command… waiting for receiver…”

“You can read our script?” Lucidia asked in keen interest.

“Y-yes. Doctor Gaster’s blueprints and technical manuals were all written in these. Sans just lent me a cipher. So, I had to learn a whole new alphabet to read the fine details. I wouldn’t know how to operate the Lab otherwise.”

“You are quite the scholar, Doctor Alphys. Few non-Seers undertake the effort to learn our language. Fewer still succeed without guidance. I will keep your skills in mind.”

The text continued to flow until it hit the word ‘Connected’.

And just like that, the monitor changed its display.

“W-we did it!” she exclaimed. “I’m seeing colour. But. It’s. Kinda blurry?”
Her first thought was to hold her glasses up against the light. Got to wipe off those smears from time to time.

“I ought to tune this a little more. Please give me a moment.”

The details shifted around as Lady Lucidia did her work. Alphys wondered to herself if she could one day ask this woman to teach her some of this advanced technical stuff.

And then… they hit the sweet spot. They got both a clear audio and visuals.

It’s Cenna. What a relief to see her alive.

Though, what happened to her glorious long hair?

Alphys had a slight shock when a bunch of skeletal fingers blocked the view.

“W-wow! You really mean it when you said it’s a ‘person’. This is a success, right?”

“Indeed. We shall commence our countermeasures now.”

“Gaelic. Gaelic. Do you read me?”
Hello.

You may notice that we missed last week's weekend post. There was a bonus mid-week entry, but usually I would make it for the deadline. Not this time.

This scene has 3 different versions with 6 partial revisions here and there. Took the entire week to both write and edit, at the same time to boot! A killer of killers, this one.

The end result is about 22 pages (5400 ish words). You need to think cinematic here. That's all I can say.

What should one do when they’re trapped in a puzzle box endorsed by a ‘troll’?

Why, troll him back with their own brand of games! A wonderful insult back to the mocker.

Or that’s what Gaelic would like to believe. He had a hunch that Sans might not care enough to get his bones rattled in the first place.

It’s still a better alternative than to just sit around, doing nothing. The heavens know that having two bored idiots in the same room is a recipe for terrible decisions.

Gaelic dug out a piece of the wall. Some of the structure consisted of true stone. Others betray their biscuity nature by colour and appearance.

He snapped the pieces into smaller chunks.

They sat across each other, cross-legged. The skeleton had removed his gloves for a little more sleight of hand.

With that, the two nutcases played a children’s game in enemy territory.

Round five.

Cenna tossed the even-sized chunks upwards and attempted to catch them with the back of her hand. Two managed to stay. The rest of them scattered far apart from each other.

She groaned.

Gaelic laughed so hard that he planted his boney fingers on the right side of his face.

“Oy, ya shouldn’t have thrown them that high. Ah git yer be bad with science, but standard applied physics? How do ya keep yerself alive? Wait. Ne’ermind. Ya kicked more buckets than M’lord by now.”

Cenna stuck out her tongue. “Meh, whatever. I got my old body back. I should be able to do this.”
It’s been a little over ten years since he first met Cenna as a spunky teenager. Maybe she matured here and there, but whenever she’s in Gaelic’s company… it’s as though nothing had ever changed.

“How many, aye?” he asked.

“As many as I can grab in one swipe!”

She launched the two pieces in the air. Her bright yellow eyes locked on them like a hawk.

With a confident grin, she swiped across the floor. Seven pieces in a single attempt.

Bold, Gaelic thought. But this IS Cenna Caraway.

Lo and behold, she caught the two falling pieces without a single spill.

“Booyah!” The Magus cheered. “See? I didn’t game over. Think you can top that, Gael?”

“Heh heh heh.” He snickered. “If ah can… we be playin’ cat’s cradle next. ‘Cause I’ll eat all yer bits here.”

“Whaaaaat?! Oh c’mon, I can’t cat’s cradle worth for shit!”

It was then he heard a sweet voice.

“…Gaelic…”

Gaelic raised his hand. “Hush. Ah heard someone. Sure o’ it.”

Cenna checked her earpiece. “Errrr… Dude, this thing’s dead.”

“Nay, nay, not from the gizmo.”

He cupped both hands over his earhole. No signs of an electronic feed. Nor did it mute the rush of empty noise echoing within his skull.

“Gaelic. Do… read …?” Again, the same voice. “Hold … There’s a lot …… static…… Initiating… adjustment protocol.”

“Ah think ‘tis be in me head!” he exclaimed.

Cenna looked like she’s going to fall over with worry. “Good lord. Don’t go to the loony bin for real. Not right now.”

Was it a dream?
A hallucination?

Has he gone too far into the deep end? Gaelic wondered. He’s more than aware that he teeters the edge of sanity. There were days when the line blurred like a dense fog.

Lady Lucidia spoke once more, loud and clear.

“If you can read me, tap your forehead three times.”

He hurried to do just that.

“I see you’ve been keeping yourself preoccupied. It’s time to get back to your mission.”
“Gaelic, please listen. You’re the only one we can re-establish a connection to due to your Seer’s Eye. Doctor Alphys assisted in the workaround and she’s online with us.”

He heard the voice of an unfamiliar person. It’s quirky with a slight nasal tone.

“H-hi! I’m Doctor Alphys. Um. It’s exactly as Lady Lucidia said. I-I-I know this sounds really crazy and all but um… please bear with us. It’s super, SUPER important that we don’t let Sans know about this. If he catches you before we break the fake Barrier, we’re gonna be worse than burnt toast.”

Lucidia added: “You will be my eyes and ears, as you have always been for me. I’ll see what you see. I’ll hear what you hear.”

His heart sang in joy with the thought of being useful to Lady Lucidia. But there’s a more serious predicament to address: the false angel cannot be graced with as much as a single hint.

So he had to feign his madness. Besides, Cenna knew better. He’d bet on his meal that the Vanquisher will understand the subtext.

“Aye, Miss Demon Hunter,” he said. “’Fraid the sterile silence had gotten into me. False alarm. Ah… what wouldn't I give to hear the heavenly chords o’ M’lady from the sky?”

His friend playfully tossed one of the chunks at his direction. “Hey, keep your ship at the docks! We’re in a possibly apocalyptic scenario here. It’s no time for the poetic mush.”

“Is he your your special s-s-s-s----” If blushing had a sound, Doctor Alphys would be making it.

“No, he’s not my husband. Gaelic is like a younger brother to me. Kindly do not implicate that I’m in an affair to begin with. Any fannish-shipping logic should be shoved aside. Please.”

“…Wait. You’re married?”

“I suppose that I did not divulge about my marital status. Please allow me to clarify: Judge Mezil Thyme is my husband.”

Doctor Alphys uttered the loudest of dramatic gasps over the line. “Oh my gaaaaaaaawddd you’re in a cross-species relationship?! T-t-that’s! That’s! That’s SO CUTE I cannot stop squealing right now--”

“Doctor Alphys!!! You are in no liberty to pair fantastical romance between people! Even if we are indeed married.”

“S-s-sorry. B-but still I t-think a threesome is not a bad thing because a triangle is one of the strongest structures---”

“No.”

It had all the hallmarks of Lucidia all over it. Firm. Resolute. Intense.

Doctor Alphys squeaked the smallest ‘okay’ over the line.

The hilarity slayed Gaelic. Killed. Butchered. He’s on the floor laughing his pelvis off. Cenna described Doctor Alphys as a nerd, but he wasn’t prepared for the fact that she’s also a prolific ‘shipper’.

He likes this Alphys lady already. She’s like a tiny puppy waiting to be poked and teased.
“Ah gonna wander fer a while,” said Gaelic. Re-equipped his gloves for good measure. “Clear me head. Mind givin’ me the snacks?”

“Open your mouth, you doof.”

That he did. Cenna heaped the rest of the chunks straight into the opening. Talk about free feeding. It’s a bit hard to chew with this volume… but he’ll manage.

“Don’t take too long!” she said, “Like hell I’m gonna go look for ya in this crazy maze. And watch out for the ‘real’ stone slabs. Those weigh a fucking ton compared to your nibbles.”

Unable to speak under his chewing, Gaelic responded with the ‘OK’ sign. He got back on his feet to climb his way up of the puzzle room’s many topsy-turvy stairways. It’s serious business from here onwards.

Lucidia gave the instructions: “We will need to confirm the true nature of this labyrinth, the location of the Dreemurrs, and the Captains. Choose your path as you see fit.”

“Aye, that be why I took the high ground,” Gaelic replied. He breathed in deep to brace himself for his upcoming task. The stakes were dire, and he’s growing hungry.

His Eye blazed. His vision cut through the walls and exposed its intricacies for all to view.

The charming nasally lady over the line burst into questions: “W-wow! Is this what Sans sees on a regular basis?”

“Negative,” the lady answered, “Gaelic is of Perseverance and Bravery. Long-distance vision, some level instinctive clairvoyance, and great data comprehension. It makes him sensitive to changes in the air as well. That’s why he could receive our transmission.”

“Ooooh!”

Far west of his location, he spotted the presence of the Dreemurr couple. They’re accompanied by a fluffy white dog.

There’s something wrong. One of them is lying down in the snow. It’s too far to judge who.

Gaelic pushed his mind to zoom in. Many would call that adjustment a trait of the Cyans, but he managed to force his Purple to work at a similar level.

It’s Asgore! Toriel held his hand and kept trying to speak to him, eyes damp from concern.

“No… no, no, no,” Gaelic muttered. “It cannae be. He was alright earlier! Ah checked fer toxic reactions and King Asgore showed none o’ those!”

“Please remain calm.” ordered the sky maiden, “Queen Toriel has a history of excessive worry. In addition, she has a layperson’s knowledge of medicines at best. It may not be as serious as it seems.”

“Please don’t dwell on this any further.”

Follow her voice.

“Ah better look fer the Captains.”
The fire of his Eye burned once more. Gaelic scanned through the remainder of the labyrinth.

So many dead end rooms.
So many unused chambers.

“Ah see… the false angel shifts this maze around to his liking.”

Far away in the Northeast end of Megalovania, near the pole, Gaelic spotted the fish and fire struggling to eat… spaghetti.

“What in the blazing fook am I seein’ there?” he asked out loud. “Ah don’t get what’s intimidating about a plate o’ noodles.”

Alphys gasped in horror. “It’s… It’s Papyrus’ old spaghetti! Mister Gaelic, you have no idea. His cooking used to be inedible. Enough to be literal torture!”

“Intel from previous timelines supports this notion. Doctor Gaster’s honest lessons changed a key variable.” Lucidia confirmed.

“Curious, curious.” His tongue flicked and slurped. “Ah want a bite fer meself. Gettin’ hungrier by the second.”

“Query: Do you see any exit points? Or a clue about the false Barrier’s mechanisms?”

“…Nay,” answered Gaelic. “‘Tis labyrinth be a trap. No way out. Not back. Nor forward. Methinks the road had long since been swapped out.”

“W-what about that big tower?” Alphys said, “Did I see a path? I-I’m pressing my face on the screen. It looks somewhat accessible.”

Gaelic zoomed in. He spotted it right away: a path leading upwards from somewhere below ground… cut off near the top by the Barrier itself.

“A sneaky bastard if there ever be one,” he commented. “The ultimate blockade that separates land from the heavens. If that be where The Child of Mercy sleeps, it be utterly pointless to try jailbreaking ’em…”

“Suggestion: Seek Papyrus. He went ahead, therefore he should be well on his way towards the access point of Frisk’s prison.”

“Aye, aye. Ah reckon that too.”

The scout scanned all around. He moved clockwise in a circle.

No signs of Papyrus anywhere.

Counter-clockwise now.

Still nothing.

There’s one last place left to inspect, and it’s right under his feet: on the other side of this puny planetoid.

Thus he stared down.

From deep inside flashed a bright, invasive light right back at him. Whatever lurked beneath jabbed
sheer pain into his Eye.

He felt himself knocking into the wall. Slid down against it.

Lucidia’s voice muted and echoed. Her sweet voice so far away.

"…Gaelic!… Gaelic!…"

She kept crying out for the language of an ancient people, lost in the annals of time. How strange. How curious. How easily he forgot that said lost language was his name.

"Gaelic! Do you read me? Speak to me, Gaelic!"

The haze cleared.

In times like these, he cursed the weakness of his being. All that needless worry over him.

“…Caught off guard,” he replied. “There be this weird distortion right below me feet.”

“Please don’t push yourself too hard,” said the fair maiden. “You still need your strength to traverse this labyrinth. It’s unwise to spend it all here.”

A long trek awaits. By survival sensibilities, she’d be right; he should ration his energy. Stretch out his reserves as long as possible.

But…

“Nay. We have to find him.”

Gaelic whispered a prayer of fortitude.

“O Almighty Creator o’ Love and Compassion. Grant mercy upon this poor soul. Please strengthen these weak bones with thy word o’ power. Yer blessing be needed in this darkest hour.”

Most monsters considered it to be a strange human tradition. Where do the words go? They’d ask. Why speak to a person that's invisible?

The Grandmaster taught him there’s more to existence than the material.

“From dust to sky. From blood to earth. Thy will be done.”

Once he mentally prepared himself… the brave one gave it another shot.

Into the depths of the abyss, he dove.

How would he describe this sensation to the women behind their safe screens?

Unpleasant. Irritating. It’s like wading head first into a blizzard, or a sandstorm. But unlike how those flying particulates graze the skin, this white light assaults the mind.

Gaelic’s sense of identity threatened to melt away within the onslaught.

Until…

He sensed someone in the yonder.

Another fire, Orange, like his own.
Their Eyes met.

It was brief. A mere glance. Yet, the vibe was unmistakably Papyrus.

Stop, he did. His bones quivered between breaths. “Papyrus. There. In the heart o’ the moon.”

“A-are you okay?” Alphys asked. “That… that was really trippy.”

Gaelic thought it’s better to ignore. The walls have ears.

Anytime, any moment, the false angel might appear.

Maybe Sans already lurked around the corner. Never hurts to have a little paranoia when dealing with the short one.

Lucidia requested his fullest attention. “Urgent clause: retrieve Papyrus. Return to Judge Cenna Caraway ASAP!”

The sky maiden’s words renewed his strength. He had a target now, and it demanded a full pursuit of devotion: to never stop until the deed is done.

“Aye.”

He stood up. To Hurry. Before the saboteur takes action.

Alas, he was too slow.

Gaelic sensed the chambers shift. They rolled. They rumbled and tremored. Some transformed along the way.

“Cor Blimey…” he cursed. “The false angel hath found me.”

Gaelic’s vantage point began to descend along with the stairwell. Step after step disappeared underground.

Meanwhile, Sans himself took the liberty to pay him a live visit. He stayed far away, riding along the shifting tiles of his personal labyrinth.

“Wondered when you’re gonna make your move.” He said. “Playing a kid’s game at the starting point? Really? I have to admit, it’s interesting. In an annoying way.”

The two ladies kept silent to lay low. It doesn’t appear that Sans had discovered Lucidia’s ploy.

Gaelic snorted in response. “Here I thought yer stone cold heart o’ jade be impervious to mockery.”

Sans replied; “Somehow, just looking at your face grates me. Must be the creepy mods.”

“Hah! Well then, ah be good boy and remove meself out o’ yer sight.”

The sly snake leapt through an opening in the shifting floor. He used his purple magic to latch on the underside, saving him from a straight plunge into a vast nothingness.

“…Ah ain’t losin’ me mind, am I?” he muttered to himself.

He’s sure he's on the ceiling now. Gravity’s trying to peel him away from the surface.

Chunks, tiles, whole chambers flew over his head. They reshuffled and rearranged into whole new
rooms by the whims of their master.

“Oh. My God.” said Alphys. “A puzzle within a puzzle. T-this is beyond anime: it’s a real life video game! My hands are getting clammy please help me--”

Lucidia on the other hand, remained as analytical as ever; “Current hypothesis suggests that Sans Serif uses this open space for renovations on-the-fly. High probability that Papyrus is much further down, outside our vision. Proceed with caution.”

As if on cue, tiles of true stone detached from nearby randomized segments. They spun in their place before launching themselves straight towards the escapee.

Gaelic channeled his Orange Aspect into his bones for an extra boost of strength.

“A-a-are we gonna j-j-jump?!” Alphys squeaked.

Why not let the results speak for themselves? He grinned.

Two incoming tiles approached fast. He had a split second to gauge all the necessities to avoid certain doom.

Broken bones in front. Check.

Certain doom below. Check.

As for opportunity…

Check!

Just in the nick of time, he leapt toward a passing platform. The dodged projectiles smashed into each other: a reminder of what would happen had he hesitated.

The drop stretched out beneath them. Poor Doctor Alphys screamed over the line. Maybe she’s no longer looking. Ah, the standard reaction of a timid civilian.

Grab, success! He managed to latch onto the edge. Clawed his magic-laced fingers into the surface for extra grip.

But the dangers were far from over. The attacking stone tiles refused to cease.

Gaelic continued to hop from one piece of the puzzle to another, dodging along the way. Swift. Flexible.

“Whatever happened to yer no-kill promise, Seraphim?” Questioned the serpent.

Sans answered in all his matter-of-fact manner. “Should have thought of that before you slithered off. Either way, as long I don’t hit your skull or torso, you’ll live.”

“Goin’ fer me limbs again?”

“Always.”

More stone tiles ejected from the inner labyrinth. They continued their relentless zoom on their target. Crash. Smash. Scatter. One misstep and it’s over.
Gaelic knew he can’t keep this up forever. The hurdle taxed his remaining strength. He already used too much, too soon.

“There’s a biscuit section up ahead.” Lucidia instructed.

That’s enough information to work with. He kept his tongue out to taste the air.

There it is. That aroma of salted wheat.

He let the incoming tiles make a hole into the softer ceiling. Before it regenerated, he climbed into the gap for a smooth escape back to the surface.

Alphys must have held her breath all the while. He heard a wheeze. “Too close! I-I think I’m getting dizzy.”

“Too early to celebrate,” he replied. His gaze darted back and forth, keeping a lookout for the Seraphim’s next action. Poor Doctor Alphys had to bear with the motion-sickness.

A spike of magic power gathered beneath his feet. He swooped out of the way before a great beam of light ripped through the floor.

From the inflicted damages, the poison dubbed as ‘Karma’ spread its touch of decay.

“I-I-I don’t think we’re supposed to have purple ominous lights crawling ANYWHERE!”

Gaelic got on his feet and ran.

“Ah cannae run blind!” he spoke out loud.

He scanned his surroundings for a strategy. Found Cenna in the upper floors, while fish and fire rode a seated elevator down toward Papyrus. Everyone’s cautious demeanour indicated that they could hear the chaos.

“Get to Undyne, hurry!” the doctor exclaimed.

But Lucidia denied: “No! Sans Serif knows too much about her to be an effective counter. I apologize, but Judge Caraway is the better candidate.”

“Aye, agreed.” Gaelic replied. That’s his intended target from the beginning.

Sans’ bones zoomed past his face. Anywhere they pegged, the spread of decay further rippled like a pebble to water.

Left, he turned. Sensed another false wall made out of baked goods. His own brand of magic punctured through it as he climbed upwards in an attempt to get closer to Cenna.

She’s getting agitated. He could see that she had begun blasting her surroundings in search for him too.

Faster, faster, he told himself. Onward to his goal: straight ahead, taking the shortest route, digging and smashing through biscuit walls with nothing more than his raw limbs. He will not rest until he reaches there.

That’s how he survived to this day.

Now he must outmaneuver the environment itself. Gaelic could feel the cursed touch of Karma
trailing near his feet. He has tasted it once before, never wanting to experience it again.

Alphys then noticed an oddity: the number of holes in Cenna’s vicinity had increased. Anything she destroyed remained so.

“W-what’s this? The structures... are not regenerating!”

“I expected as much.” said Lucidia. “This is a great boon.”

Gaelic himself tuned out the voices. Focused on the immediate matters.

He punched down one more of those wheaty obstructions. Cried out for her name. Except the constant grind drowned out the message.

He's almost at the border. Sweet rescue close within his reach.

Another flying wall charged straight at him. Gaelic’s immediate instincts summoned a row of teeth to smash it bits.

And that was his mistake.

One moment, the chunks flew past.

The next, it regenerated -- converging around his upper torso, arms included.

Worse still, Sans had changed its material properties to concrete: embedding him into the infrastructure as a heavy stockade.

Gaelic struggled to break free using his magic. In response, multiple Grams lit up within the trap.

He knew this smothering sensation all too well. They’re magic nullifiers. The Seraphim had access to Lucidia’s handiwork and he won’t hesitate to exploit it.

Powerless, he beheld his one source of salvation drift further and further as the structure dragged him away.

“Cenna! CENNA!!!”

Did she hear?
Can she hear?

He doesn’t know.

The labyrinth built an empty cell around him. Placed him in the center of it all as the accused prisoner.

When it’s done, the tremors finally died down.

Sans teleported right before Gaelic, carrying with him the distinct smell of tomatoes, spices, salt, and vinegar.

“Finally,” he said. “I have one more reason to dislike you now. It’s a huge chase sequence whenever we meet. Too much effort.”

The predator hissed.
“…Whoah. Are you really a snake? I’m not great on my zoology, but I’m sure real snakes don’t go nuts like that. They’re cold-blooded creatures, no? You seem more like a dog to me.”

“Why the fook do ya care?” He replied.

“You’re right, I don’t. You probably got those mods just because they look fierce. Eh, whatever. Just chillax, pal.”

Sans slipped his hands into his pockets. Gaelic doesn’t like that. Not one bit. It’s the unknown.

“That expression on your face… tells me you’ve seen some of my secrets and tasted the forbidden fruit. Checked the back end of the puzzle book for answers, didn’t you? Smart. Too bad you got caught.”

The ensnared Seer grumbled. “Bloody double standard ya have there. Aye, what else could ah expect from the worst o’ city slickers?”

“‘City slicker’, huh? Let’s not resort to name calling. Though I guess I can’t say I expected better. See, I heard all about it. Your little love triangle. Hey, I thought I’m the sickest bone here. Yet you… You took that dynamic to the next level. More scandalous than socks.”

Sans shrugged. “Speaking of Mezil Thyme. I’m helping him too, y’know. Browsed through his records while you flew through The Void. Interesting stuff.”

The short skeleton conjured a series holographic screens, displaying images of widespread chaos. Infrastructure burned. Lives were lost. And the Magi’s name, forever tarnished.

“That got my mental gears churning. Why didn’t he undo these damages? I’m sure it’s not because he’s lazy. He’s the Supreme Judge after all. Plenty of determination to go around.”

“Rather, the man’s got cold feet. That’s what I think. It’s a sad satire: a man who judges others shouldn’t be afraid to face his own demons. Pathetic, really.”

“Welp. Good luck to him. I’m more than prepared to face mine.”

Gaelic gritted his teeth.

He knew exactly where and when the Seraphim intended to go.

“Heavens no. Over me pile o’ dust…”!

His bones rattled. Putting all his might into breaking free from his constraints, he yanked and tug.

A futile effort.

“Mark me words, Seraphim.” said Gaelic.

Rage exhaled in every heated breath.

“I will dig down fer ya. Dig! Dig past the bloody Barrier if ah have to! I WILL gouge out yer blasted Eye and leave ya to rot!!!”

Sans chuckled, shaking his head in pity.

“Digging past the Barrier? Really? Man, I can’t believe you have less common sense than Undyne.”
“Maybe you should save that energy for Lady Lucidia. She’s gonna need a new knight by her side. Win her heart this ‘time’, okay?”

Upon that very moment, Gaelic’s mind went red. The hunger demanded to be satiated. Sans Serif started to look like a delicious meal: served with built-in condiment from all that ketchup in his marrows.

Lucidia would talk him out of it. Except he can’t comprehend her anymore above his own howling. There’s but one objective in whatever little mental faculties remained.

It demanded he eat this offending pudgy mocker alive.

Then… a snap.
A crack.

Sans Serif’s smug grin turned downwards at the edges.

Stone crumbled and rock rolled off his being as the restraints loosened. The relief of pressure surged through his arms and lower body until a great sudden freedom spurred him into a lunge.

What followed after was a surreal blur of hungering fury.

A small hop right and another to the left. That wee pest dodged each bite by a hair’s breath.

Gaelic’s forked tongue could taste trace amounts of fearful sweat in the air. Flavourful, further whetting his insatiable appetite.

It appears that the Seraphim was nowhere near as nasty as the stereotypical slob. Ketchup, hamburgers, fries: they’re all tailored by civilization for palatability. Why should he be any less appetizing than the meals he consumed?

On the umpteenth chomp, his bare teeth sank into the Seraphim’s right arm. However, instead of chomping through delicious monster matter, he clashed against glass, steel and cloth.

Inedibles, those were the real disgusting stuff. They must be discarded. He wished to tear away more, but the prey vanished right under his nose only to reappear on the ceiling.

Doesn’t matter. There’s no place he cannot traverse.

When he commended his pursuit, chrome and iron whipped at his arms.

Chains, the most hated of all trappings. They coil around and grind against his bones. They smell of shame and defeat, yet embody the very essence of his beloved reptilian species.

More and more chains erupted from all sides, weaving over each other and making themselves stronger. The binding bundle pulled him up. Spread his limbs.

The beast screeched at his uncomfortable vulnerability.

The rush faded. Along with it, his boost of might. Gaelic’s Eye simmered down to a soft glow.

Though jittery, a semblance of sanity slowly returned. At the very least he could comprehend Lucidia’s words of concerns.

“Gaelic Blanc, compose yourself!” she commanded.
Gaelic grunted in response. Guilt strangled him just like these restraints. Time and again Mezil had warned him against losing his ‘human’ mind. Failing to do so puts him at the mercy of the cunning.

Sans rolled up his sleeve to inspect his gadget for any damages. Wiped off the saliva while he’s at it. Moisture and electronics often don’t mix.

His secret weapon was an electronic bracer written in the runes of Seerkind. It had a screen to manage the details, a sheath hiding a blade, and… the face of a pocket watch.

Satisfied of its integrity, Sans let his tattered sleeve drop back in place.

“Okay buddy. Guess you’re the real thing after all. Maybe it’s best if you just ‘hang’ in there for everyone’s safety. Don’t go ‘snaking’ away, k?”

“Phew, at least the hard part is done,” he said. “All I need to do next is to deal with Miss Demon Hunter. She should be cake.”

Curious, the snake aficionado tilted his head to the side.

“…Cenna? Cake? Oy, did ah hear that right?”

“Yup. Fought her in many timelines. Can more or less predict her patterns.”

“Heh, ya ever look up the history behind her true surname?”

“Wanderstar?” Sans replied. “I thought it’s kinda weird. Certainly unique enough for it to become a brand name in the Vanquisher field.”

“And nothin’ more?”

Sans couldn’t answer.

The trapped one laughed to his heart’s content. How the tables had turned. Or perhaps fortune had always been in their favour.

“Praise be to God Almighty!” hollered Gaelic. “Ordainer o’ the past, present, and future! Ye blinded the false angel from thy wisdom! O’ blessed be! Let this fiend fall in wretched ignorance!”

“Excuse me--?”

The Seraphim’s Eye flared on its own. The screen came alive with a spur of activity, and an Arcanagram spread over Sans’ left iris.

“Welp. Papyrus is awake. Got no time to play with ya.”

Sans vanished in that instant.

Soon after, the sound system clicked on. Looks like the short skeleton didn’t want to leave without a final say.

“Y’know, scaly-ton...” he said. “Both of us are kinda similar in retrospect. Me, Paps and Tori. You, Mezil and Lucidia. Thanks for the ‘education’. Helped set me on the right track.”

“Wonder who’s the better zealot for our ‘gods’, eh?”

Another click, ending in pin-drop silence.
Alone in his predicament, whatever bravado Gaelic had put up was washed away by self-resentment. Gaelic wept over his perceived failure.

"I'm sorry, M'lady." He sobbed in tears of purple. "Screwed it all up. What good is a trapped Tracker? Ah cannae be yer eyes and ears…"

Lucidia kept her tone gentle. "Gaelic. I have seen Sans Serif's gear up-close and personal. ...Pun not intended."

"It's called the 'Seraph System'. It's a combination of several components. One: a condensed DT Extraction machine in the form of a Mark. Unlike contemporary methods, this permits prolonged operation at long distance."

"Two: a False Aspect manager. By fuelling fakes with Determination, Sans applies 'lenses' that change the functions of the Seer's Eye. That's the Arcanagram over his iris."

"Three: a battery. He had pilfered the Trap Harvester to expand his capacity to infinity. Without it, he can't claim my husband's world in full."

The new information did little to soothe Gaelic's heart. It made him cry harder.

Alphys failed to put her thoughts to words. After a few false starts, she said: "I-I think… Lady Lucidia is trying to say that it's not a complete loss."

"Yes," she replied. "She's right. I see few advancements that can't be derived from a tech trade between Ebott and the Magi. This leads me to believe the Seraph System can be recreated in the future."

"As for Sans himself... He can be dealt with, if necessary."

A blast from the front wall interrupted the conversation. A lady in a trenchcoat strut right in.

"Yo~" Cenna waved. "You're a sight for sore eyes! Man. When the maze went nuts, I thought he's gonna dust you for sure."

Gaelic hung his head low. Still weeping.

"Uh... Guess the assassino got more than one way to stab a person where it counts." Cenna summoned her drones. "I better get you down first."

She weaved their threads around the target. Can't have her partner falling flat on his face.

Once he's secured, Yellow feathers pierced the chains. After a series of small blasts, the bindings lost the Determination that held them together; they dissolved into the void.

"Ah let that scoundrel get the better o’ me," said Gaelic, back on the ground and on his feet. "Some partner I am. In all me life, ah keep messing things up…"

Cenna pulled him in for a warm hug. "Don't say that, Gael. You did great. Bet you found something important too. Otherwise, our short skelly wouldn't be tearing the place apart to trap ya. So, chin up! I'm sure Mez would give ya the same praise if he's here."

"...Ya think?"

"Yeah! Sooooo what are we waiting for?"
That’s right. This would be his chance for redemption.

Gaelic let go of her. Took in some few breaths to re-orient himself back to a more professional mindset.

“Sans be directing everyone to his inner sanctum.” He explained. “Well, everyone who passed his test. Saw our beloved Cinnamon Roll down there too.”

“Oh really? Update me along the way. Saves time.”

She walked towards the exit. Gaelic tried to follow her, but he staggered. Good thing she managed to catch him in time.

“Whoa, steady there! You look beyond beat.”

“Aye,” he replied. “Ah had a wild ride. Took a huge chunk outta me.”

Cenna wasted no time to crouch and show her back, beckoning him to piggyback.

“Up ya go,” she said. “You be my eyes, and I’ll be your feet! No objections!”

“You skelly people are super light compared to humans anyway.”

Chapter End Notes

Really wondering what’s your response to this chapter. We both worked extra hard on this!

I honestly have no idea what mental disorder Gaelic has, if there's one. All I know is that his sense of identity is completely whacked.

I'm sure I missed a bajillion typos despite our week-long effort XD. If you see some, don't be afraid to point it out.
Past the Ruins’ entrance was an elevator, with chairs inside. It would be more accurate to say that it’s a tiny train in the shape of an elevator.

Undyne stared at ‘her’ chair. With Sans, she should be suspicious of everything.

“…That’s not a trap, I hope.”

“…Same here…” Grillby nodded.

Any buttons?
No buttons.

“I guess it ain’t gonna move unless we play along.”

“…Agreed…”

Both captains sat down. When the sensors registered their actions, the elevator sounded a beep before descending.

Then they heard it: the rumbles of nearby shifting rooms.

Grillby’s brows furrowed. “…Wonder what’s going on…”

“Nothing major, I hope.” Undyne added.

What followed after were clashes of mayhem. Stone crashed. Structures shattered. Some explosions too.

“Whoa. Sounds like Sans got into a fight.”

“…With who… I wonder…”

Undyne focused on the trail of sounds. “Probably mister snakeface. You weren’t there, Grillbz, but Sans did this before.”

During that fried chicken night, Frisk had found a motorbike helmet by the window. Thinking back, she wondered if it belonged to this Gaelic fellow. He could certainly use that to hide his identity.

It wasn’t long before the elevator moved past the hot combat zone. The roars of bloodlust tapered off into the distance.
They’re alone again. The uncomfortable silence continued until the elevator came to full stop. It doesn’t look like it’ll open until they get off their seats.

“I guess… this is the moment of truth,” Undyne commented.

Grillby responded with a soft ‘mhmm’.

They stood up.
Beep.
The door opened.

And Undyne didn’t like the scenery before her one single bit.

Nudging Grillby, she asked: “Light blue flooring. Dark blue walls. I’m not seeing things, right?”

“…Yes… They’re blue…”

“Shiftable architecture?”

“…Mhmm…”

“Electronics hidden everywhere?”

“…Possible…”

“White pits of doom?”

“…The most obvious feature…”

“We’re in a mockup of the bloody Core, aren’t we?”

“…Unfortunately…”

Levels of dread, increasing.

As soon as they stepped out of the elevator, it vanished behind their backs. There’s only one way forward now, into the maws of the unknown.

The pervasive white aura deterred visibility. It’s hard to see much beyond that glare.

“Great. Exactly what we need. More rooms. More compulsory trappings.” Sarcasm dripped from every word. It’s not her style to stoop to this level, but she’s grown tired of Sans.

The two pressed on. Their footsteps echoed off the mechanical walls, bringing a deep chill to an otherwise warm place.

What secrets did the shadows hide?
What bigger secrets lay beyond the light?

Undyne had a feeling that every move was under the scrutiny of the dungeonmaster. It’s not beneath him to stalk his targets.

The further they walked…

…The more she noticed a familiar silhouette in the distance.

It’s an object in the shape of a car. Not just any car either. It’s…
“Pap’s bed?” she muttered to herself.

Her steps quickened. That red was unmistakable. She will recognize it from a mile away.

It really was Papyrus’ car-bed. He’s tucked in, facing away.

“Papyrus? PAPYRUS!!”

Papyrus stirred in response to the fish-level yelling. He rolled over and started to open his sockets.

“IS SOMEONE THERE?” he asked.

It’s Papyrus. It’s really Papyrus in the bone.

“It’s me, Undyne! Are you okay???”

The tall skeleton sat up in his bed, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand. “I’M FINE NOW. ERM. I… I NEED TO APOLOGIZE FOR ALL THE YEARS OF BADGHETTI.”

“I’M… I’M REALLY GLAD I DIDN’T GIVE THAT TO MISTER MAGUS. HE WOULD HAVE SUFFERED MANY BAD TIMES IN THE TOILET. HOW DID FRISK MANAGE? I GUESS THEY HAVE A STRONGER GUT.”

“That’s the least of our concerns now!” she answered. “Did Sans do anything bad to you?”

“NO. NOT AT ALL. HE GAVE ME A NICE FLUFFY BED AND QUALITY MEDICINE. I FEEL MUCH BETTER NOW.”

“Really?” She couldn’t believe it.

“REALLY.” Papyrus replied. “I APOLOGIZE IN ADVANCE IF HE WAS VERY MEAN TO YOU.”

“No way Paps. You don’t need to apologize. HE needs to do it! Right in my damn face!”

Grillby then asked: “…Have you seen the King and Queen?…”

The tall skeleton shook his head. As it is, it appears that they’re the only one from the main team to complete the labyrinth.

But despite so, they’re farther away from Frisk than ever before.

_Dammit Sans! What exactly are you planning?_

Speaking of whom, Sans teleported onto a small platform. Undyne dropped her jaw. Considering his dodge rate, he always emerged from battles squeaky clean.

Now? On his right arm, half of his sleeve was ripped off by someone.

Papyrus shrieked. “SANS! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?!”

The short one replied in his usual casual manner. “Eh. Nothing much. Just got pounced on by a crazed beast in a bone body.”

“THIS IS EXACTLY WHY YOU SHOULD BE NICE TO OTHERS! IF THE SURFACE IS AS DANGEROUS AS YOU CLAIM, WHY DID YOU GET ON THEIR BAD SIDE?!”
“Heh. Good point. That’s all moot by now, though.”

Sans tucked his hands into his pockets. “As you can see, only you three completed the puzzle. Congrats.”

As if he knew what would be the next question, he said: “Don’t worry about Tori and Asgore. They’re fine, just resting somewhere. Not that I blame them. They got other priorities.”

“As for the two Magi reps? Welp. As you can see on my boney self, they do things their own way. I’m not sure how they differ from the Gungnir. Maybe that’s the whole point, huh? They’ve been at each other’s necks since the dawn of time.”

“Sooner or later, you become who you fight. I’m pretty much the proof in the pudding.”

Sans winked. He always does that. Never any less punch-baiting, either. If only a hit can be landed without killing him.

If only.

“Right,” he said. “Why don’t we move on to the final puzzle? See ya there.”

Sans vanished. On cue, the walls parted away. New paths rose from the whiteness. It joined the two chambers, leading them deeper into the technological sanctum.

Papyrus wasted no time to jump off the bed.

“Wait!” Undyne rushed over to his side. She grabbed his arm out of caution. “There might be traps!”

“THERE ARE NO JAPES UP AHEAD.” Papyrus replied. “MY BROTHER WANTS HONESTY GOING FORWARD.”

How many times in the past did Undyne misunderstand Papyrus’ cryptic wisdom as naivety, she wondered? Perhaps it was more often than she realised.

Loosening her grip, the fish conceded. “If you say so…”

The three of them thus went across the steps. The pits murmured an uneasy drone: they needed no words to convey their intent of judgement.

Sans stood at the edge of a large, circular platform. Complex lines of a massive Arcanagram decorated the surface.

“Wellcome,” said Sans. “To my Magnum Opus.”

“…Huh?” That’s all Undyne had to say. “It’s not the Chronograph?”

“Nah. That was just the backup plan. And this here?” Sans showed the electronic bracer. “It’s a last minute mashup. The big star you’re looking at? That’s my real dream.”

She counted the number of points. Eight. Papyrus had once described how Sans attempted to eject Gaster out of the Underground with the mother of all eight-point wormholes.

Then it hit her. “Are you fucking serious? You recreated THE device that scattered Doctor Gaster?!”

“Heh. It’s more than a rebuild. You can say this is the completed version of my theory. The Surface’s SOUL science is way ahead of the Underground, but their applied quantum mechanics lag
far behind. Combine those together, and voila.”

Sans shuffled to the centre of the diagram. “In retrospect… I made a huge mistake concluding that my theories were a failure. I found the wreck in the dump. Thought it never left the Underground.”

“But, what if it succeeded? What if I really did send something beyond the Barrier? I could never know what environment surrounded my target coordinates, and if the stuff landed in the river above it’ll eventually get washed back down.”

Undyne turned to Papyrus, hoping to hear an explanation of any kind. She had no context what so ever and it’s starting to raise her blood pressure.

He remained silent.

Her attention shifted to Grillby, but he shook his head. He was as lost as her.

Great. So I have to shut up and listen to a mad scientist ramble.

…I can’t believe how much Doctor Gaster has rubbed off on him.

“I’ve already obtained enough data from several live-tests.” Sans continued, “Don’t worry, I didn’t use any unwilling participants. I’m both the creator and the tester. Not a recommended move… for obvious reasons.”

“Still, everything worked like a charm. Therefore, the next step of the plan is to add a passenger. And… this is where we have our final puzzle. I did say that all it takes is ‘one’ person. Not ‘three in one’.”

Undyne got it.

Judging from Grillby’s flickering flames, he understood the con too.

Megalovania was rigged from the very beginning.

Spear, summoned. She shall wreck this puzzle before Sans traps anyone in it.

The skeleton’s sockets darkened.

His voice deepened a notch, just enough to make her stop from the sheer chill. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you. Don’t want to start a chain reaction. It might kill everyone in this room. Except my teleporting self.”

Believe?
Don’t believe?

Undyne doesn’t know anymore. In the end, she had to dismiss her magic on the err of caution. Can’t get too reckless now: Alphys waits for her back home.

Sans returned to his normal self. “Hey, I’m not the one making the final decision. It’s still in your hands. All you need to do is accept the challenge. Be the hero. But, if you do so… Papyrus will stay behind. One person is one person. I’m being fair here.”

“And then if you’re still unsatisfied, we’ll duke it out at the tower-top arena. Just like anime, huh?”

The fish narrowed her eye. “After I possibly kill myself first with a quantum shredder?”
“Welp,” he did his infamous shrug-wink combo. “Do you trust me?”

“Like hell I can trust you after all the shit you’ve done.”

“Stay behind then. It’s that simple.”

Sans turned his attention to Grillby. “What about you, Grillbz? We go all the way back.”

The fire captain refused. “…I trust Papyrus more…”

“Thanks. That means a lot to me.”

“Grillby, are you fucking NUTS!!” Undyne cried out. “That’s too dangerous for Papyrus! If there’s anyone’s gonna set Sans straight, it’ll be ME!”

Undyne stomped her foot forward.
Cold sweat trickled down her forehead.

_Goddammit, why am I being such a chicken?_

_All I gotta do is eject myself up to the tower._
_Then I’ll fight him to the death at the arena._

Another step forward. It’s heavy.

Be determined. Be! Determined!

_I managed to muster all that shit up to bust down that stupid Mark!_
_I should be able to do this. I must!_

_For Papyrus!_
_For Alphys! Asgore! Kid!_

_Everyone!_

Despite her bolstering mindset, her muscles shivered.

Why?
Why am I getting scared?

_Uh… well… I’ve never actually landed a proper strike on Sans’ CLOTHES to begin with._

_I can’t touch him._

…What if I can?

She stared at Sans’ chest, where his SOUL lies.

_All it takes is a single hit. Then he’s dust. And once he’s dead… what’s gonna happen to Papyrus?_

_Can he live with the fact that his best friend killed his only brother?_

_Can he live without Sans at all?_

Undyne grit her teeth.

_OF COURSE HE CAN!!!_
Papyrus is STRONG!

He’ll get over it. He’ll rebuild his life.

He doesn’t NEED Sans to chain him down!
Papyrus deserves to be free. FREE!

I bet the Magus Association will provide him a GREAT job! If that doesn’t work, then I’ll help him find something else. Anything!

I--

She stopped.

I lied to Paps for years.
I couldn’t tell him the real reason why he couldn’t join the Royal Guard.

I tried to keep him safe in his little bubble because I was so afraid for his life.

Now I’m trying to rationalize the murder of his family.

If I continue forward, I’ll save the world.

...But I’ll become a villain forever.

Right upon that moment…
…Her sins crawled on her back.

I’m no different from Sans.

That realisation drained Undyne’s courage dry. Her legs refused to move any further, as though they had already decayed from the touch of ‘karmic retribution’.

“That look on your face,” said Sans. “Tells me you had an epiphany.”

He didn’t need any Blue Magic.
He didn’t need to use his stolen Marks.
He didn’t need to do anything.

He just stood there as a mirror… and that was enough to break her resolve.

Undyne felt a soft fabric brush against the surface of her arm. When she turned around, the trails of a red scarf followed behind.

She grabbed the skeletal owner’s lower arm. Muttered, “Don’t go…”

In sombre sobriety Papyrus looked at her and said: “I FORGIVE YOU FOR KEEPING ME IN THE DARK. AS I HAVE FORGIVEN UNCLE GASTER, FRISK, AND MANY MORE.”

He gently pushed her hand aside. Didn’t need to pry, as her strength was already sapped and lost.

“UNDYNE,” he said, “YOU’RE ALWAYS A HERO TO ME. I BELIEVE IN YOU.”

Life had a funny way to shorten the perception of time.

One moment, Papyrus was a tiny boy who had too much energy and not enough sense. The then-
reckless child Undyne had to dial back for her junior’s safety. Ever the responsible one.

In a blink, Papyrus grew up. Tall. Mighty. Great. Those seemingly immature proclamations became true.

Undyne dropped on her knees, completely overshadowed by his glory. A dull pain throbbed against her chest. She gripped it.

Papyrus continued walking until he’s face-to-face with Sans.

“Bro,” asked Sans. “You’d trust me when no else will?”

The younger brother spoke with a sense of poignant understanding.

“THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT I STILL NEED TO MONITOR, BROTHER. I'M STILL THE PRIMARY CARETAKER OF YOUR PET ROCK AFTER ALL. BUT YOU HAVE MY FULLEST ABSOLUTE TRUST IN ALL MANNERS OF MATH AND SCIENCE. ESPECIALLY WITH THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE NUANCES OF SPACETIME.”

“IT IS IN OUR BONES AFTER ALL. YOU AND I, THE DESCENDANTS OF HUMAN CONVERTS, ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT DOMAIN.”

“Whoa Paps, where did you learn that?”

“IT’S MY CONCLUSION FROM ALL THE HISTORY I’VE WITNESSED.”

“You’re right. Knowledge of spacetime is exclusively a Lichborn thing. It’s a scary thought… Almost affirms that we are the abominations humanity claims us to be. Too much power in anyone’s hands, really.”

Sans summoned eight yellow femurs written in glyphs. They floated towards the points of the giant Gram and locked themselves in place.

Magic coursed through the diagram, emitting a soft glow.

The air rumbled. Flakes of cyan, yellow, and purple floated about. Grillby hurried to drag Undyne away from ground zero.

She returned no resistance.

“Sit tight, Papyrus,” said Sans. “We might encounter some turbulence along the way.”

Papyrus crossed his arms. “THAT IS OF NO ISSUE! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, AM NOWHERE AS INFLEXIBLE AS THAT STATIC MACHINE.”

“You knew what went wrong during The Core Incident, huh?”

“IT’S JUST A HUNCH.”

At the height of power, the diagram activated its magic. A tornado of colour engulfed the brothers and ripped them away from this place.

That moment seemed to last forever. Undyne’s life and times with Papyrus echoed in a collage of memories. She wondered if it’s her own imagination, or it’s the Void creating a feedback with the wormhole.
In a flash, the display dissipated. Left behind nothing but unscathed ground, devoid of the Skelebros. Shifting tiles soon started erasing what remained of Sans’ Arcanagram handiwork.

Undyne just… stared blank. Unresponsive. Her brain had shut down, sinking into the bottomless mud of despair.

Why?

Why, Papyrus?

Why do you still believe?

I can’t be the hero anymore.

…Not after what I did to you.
You Reset?

Chapter Notes

The voice auditions are open! Tentatively, it won't be closed until Mid-May. Incoming trip to Europe, which I hope it will go well.

In the meantime... let's check out what happened to Frisk when the whole Megalovania drama went down. See if you could piece together the timestamp.

(Also expecting a whole lot of typos that I missed)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Despite everything, you had a surprisingly good nap. Perhaps you should add ‘sleeps through storms’ as part of your Frisk-brand traits.

…You kinda needed it anyway. All those late-night trainings bit you in the back.

How long had it been? You sure hope that it wasn’t a full night.

You looked around to get your bearings. The room’s changed a lot from what you remembered. The glass cage had vanished into thin air, and there’s now fancy maroon wallpaper all around you.

You got off the bed. Your shoes tapped on white marble tiles.

Above your head, you heard blocks clicking together. Stone? Steel? You can’t quite tell, but something’s happening.

There’s a sticky note stuck to the table. It’s written in Sans’ terrible handwriting.

‘Meet me upstairs’.

Curiosity got the better of you. Strange. You should be wary. And yet, you behaved as though you’re in your own house.

Maybe it’s the lack of restraints.

You headed to a flight of stairs. No doors? No gates? Really?

There’s nowhere else to go but up.

The first thing you noticed was the vast emptiness of the Void. It stretched over your head like a starless, cloudless night.

When you got on the last step… you found yourself standing at the edge of an arena.

Sans imbued bone after bone into the ground’s central platform. He noticed your presence, greeting you in his classic casual tone.

“Hey kid. How are ya feeling? Gimmie a moment. I’m almost done.” Once he had set in place the last bit, he dusted his bony hands.
You asked just what the heck he is planning.

“Have you ever wondered if it’s possible to cross the Barrier without a sacrifice?”

Uh… you told Sans it would be great to have a bloodless way out, but you’re not sure if it’s possible.

“Pretty unknown territory, huh? Yup. That’s what I thought too.”

There ‘were’ times when the gang tried to do that. Though, Dad died for sure.

“We did, huh? After everyone realised that humans could be good, they didn’t want to kill anymore. Nice to know. Well… what if I told you that a clean method is possible?”

What does he mean?

“You’ll see. It’s the final theorem I want to confirm before the ‘big jump’. I’m waiting for the last component to arrive. In the meantime, we have more important things to talk about.”

Such as…?

Sans showed you his pinky finger. “This is where it all started. Right here. With our pinkies. I hate making promises because I know myself: takes a lot for me to give up on something that I choose to commit to.”

………

He slipped his hands back in his pockets. “I’ve not forgotten my oath to you, Frisk. I’m going to give you exactly the life you wish for.”

How?

How?! You won the Trial of the Crimson Hall! Ebott’s adoption is pretty much guaranteed! Sans is THE culprit for causing this current chaos! He’s taking you further and further away from the damn promise!

Sans being Sans, was completely unfazed by your outbursts. He instead explained: “That’s just the journey to get there.”

You heard something roaring in the distance.

His left Eye flashed cyan. “About time. Guess the message finally arrived. Feel free to walk around, kid. Just don’t stand inside the Gram. Don’t wanna turn you into a human Gaster, k?”

Wait, Sans. What is he talking about--

Too late. He had teleported off to goodness knows where.

You’re starting to regret making that promise.

…No point moping about it now!

In times like this, it’s better to explore and observe. Stay calm, and keep your five senses peeled. Maybe his slop accidentally left behind a way out.

You thus checked the central platform.
The complexities of this Gram made your eyes spin. All you could tell was that it had eight-points. That’s… familiar.

Better stay faaaaaar away from that spot.

Back at the edge of the arena, the stone walls stood about as tall as your chin. Safe, but cumbersome. It's impossible for you to look over the edge.

So, if you’re Sans, you’d… make sure you’re in an inescapable yet comfortable prison. Even if there might be something, it’s most likely a trap to reroute you back to your room.

Unless…

You went downstairs to look for items. Maybe you’d have your adventure game moment there. Combine item A and B to create C, then use C on object X to unlock a secret passage.

How about a makeshift mirror for your edge predicament? Any transparent or reflective surface will do.

Hmm… the plastic from water cooler is too clouded for any use.

Paper cups, nah.

Okay. Moving on.

You could technically make a cloth rope with the blankets and bedsheets. But, you’d first need find a place to attach it to.

Oh hey, it’s the chair you tried to smash your way out with. It still exists.

Eureka! You didn’t need to make anything convoluted after all. Just take the chair to the roof and stand on it. That should give you all the height you need.

You lifted the unbreakable piece of furniture over your head and sped up the stairs. Plunked it down on the nearest flat ground. Climbed it. Adjusted your height so you could peer down without the risk of falling over.

Things weren't looking good. You’re on top of a really tall cannon-lined stone tower. Worst of all, no windows. It’s built like a fortress.

Assorted Undyne-level expletives flew across your mind. You’re looking down at a planet full of puzzles!

AN ENTIRE PLANET!

It cannot get any more anime than this! Straight out of some mahou shoujo show or something!

Just when you thought you had seen everything, Sans proved you wrong.

A small quake rumbled through the maze. You hurried to get off the chair before you accidentally tripped to certain death.

Then, there was a great flash of light.

It’s quite a while before your eyes finally stopped stinging.
You think you lost an entire minute in a blank stare, trying to comprehend the magnitude of your predicament.

Pulsating opaque energy ebbed close to the top of the tower. It’s cutting right beneath your ‘bedroom’.

It’s the Barrier.
It’s none other than the Barrier.

HOW THE BLOODY HELL IS THE BARRIER HERE?!!??!!??!

WHAT MAD SCIENCE IS THIS???

There’s absolutely NO way he nabbed seven human SOULS! Does he even know how to cast the spell?

Fakes? Fakes. Please be fakes, otherwise you’d have yet another seven murders to deal with. The Six is bad enough!

Power corrupts, right? So this is what a corrupted Sans looks like. Good freaking riddance.

You want to get out.
You want to get out of this tower and kick some sense into Sans’ skull!

SOUL Magic radiated from your chest.

You’re feeling it! You’re getting closer to that high when you had to stop the God of Hyperdeath.

C’mon c’mon c’mon c’mooooon!

You are DETERMINED!

There’s that shine! The light condensed into a yellow star right before your very eyes.

Huh?

Why are you making that unstable Mark again? This is not the time for that!

Wait a minute. It looks… Calm. You don’t remember it being this way.

You reached out to touch it before anything else happened.

SAVE.

File saved.

A sudden blast of magic pierced your being. Warmth filled your SOUL.

That’s strange. You ejected your Psychia from your chest to take a closer look.

It’s Yellow now?! And the star had turned red…

You’ve absorbed its colour, huh.

…Memories of Mezil’s gunshots returned. He’s a Yellow Minor, right? If that’s all it took to do such cool Mark tricks, what does this mean for you?
Your thoughts were interrupted by a ‘zing!’ If this was a comic panel, your head-hair would have stood on ends.

The star vanished.

You turned around. The central Gram erupted into a tornado of cyan, purple, and yellow.

Aren’t those Sans’ colours? What… what did he make?!

When the rush poofed into the air, at the center of it all stood… Sans himself?!

“Phew,” he said. “The failsafe worked at least. Took me a few tries to get it right. Need more testing to guarantee a smooth ride.”

You stood there with your mouth slightly agape.

“Kid, I know you have a ton of questions. But I’m kinda in a hurry at the moment. Since the Barrier is up, I can’t use my usual space-cutting techniques so… gotta go back the same way I came from.”

The Gram activated. The tornado returned. And just like that, he’s gone.

Was that a wormhole? Or a teleport pad? How does it work? Explain? Please? Anyone?

Huh?

The power of Determination formed before you again. The red star returned.

Something… isn’t right. You remembered that Mezil had a ton of issues with your accidental competition for the Keys of Fate.

A dreadful hunch rose in your heart. It’s too early to say for certain. You need Sans to come back from whatever he’s trying to do.

The Gram activated once more.

When the silhouette of Sans turned visible, your SAVE star vanished.

Oh no.

This is bad, bad news. There is something on Sans that’s overwriting your power!

Sans appeared to be too distracted by the success of his invention to notice your mixed feelings. Fingers crossed.

“Heh. Guess it works two-ways now. The Surface’s SOUL science sure is something else.”

He looked at you. “Amazed?” he asked.

You nodded many times. This is gonna solve the world’s transportation problems! Imagine all the instant travel. No more stupid long hours for flights. You’re sick of those from your world-travelling timelines.

…Provided Sans lets you out of here first.

“About that… Sorry kid, but I’m not handing this tech over to the Surface. It’s gonna be for the Dreemurr people. Emergencies only.”
Huh?

“Still can’t explain yet. Things are getting really heated downstairs. I want to get at least three more rounds in before anything happens. Be right back.”

There he goes.

You’re starting to notice a trend. Your star will only spawn in his absence.

It’s quite… unsettling. It made you wonder if Mezil felt the same. He had his butterfly for a good chunk of his life, and then it went poof because of you.

After the fifth try, Sans didn’t come back. You’re getting worried. What’s happening down there? Did the rescue team arrive and he’s trying to intercept them?

What happened to Mom and Dad?
Tsunderjudge?
Cenna?
Everyone?

You tried to LOAD your SAVE. Maybe you can jump on Sans on the first notice. Plant a no-move Mark on him!

You brought up your interface but… it’s not legible. At all. It’s written in hands, and even that was glitched into fragmented squares.

The sense of dread intensified. What are you gonna do? What CAN you do?

You ended up wandering around on the platform. Maybe you hoped that you’d stumble upon a chance to escape.

That didn’t happen.

How long had it been? An hour? Seems like forever. You could feel the damning hands of the clock ticking ever onward.

When you least expected it, the Gram activated once again.

This time, you had to double-take to comprehend what’s going on.

Sans didn’t come back alone. He brought along Papyrus.

The one and only Great Papyrus.

Your tall, loud, and immensely warm skeleton friend wasted no time to hug you.

“HUMAN!” he said, “YOU DID SPECTACULAR IN YOUR TRIAL! YOU SEE NOW? THIS IS WHY THE GREAT PAPYRUS BELIEVES IN YOU!”

He saw everything?

“YES, OF COURSE! I HAD THE AWESOME PRIVILEGE OF BECOMING LADY LUCIDIA’S STUDENT. IT’S NOT OFFICIAL YET, BUT SOON IT WILL BE.”

You hugged him tight and apologized. Added some tears too. Can’t hug him without those.
Papyrus didn’t ask why. There was no need for that. He comforted you with some gentle pats on your back.

“I’m usually not the one to interrupt,” said Sans. “But we have six angry people left behind at ground level. Not sure when they’ll reach up here. They’ll make too much noise. We should get down to business.”

Ok. Shoot.

“It’s gonna get a bit technical, Frisk. Hope you can comprehend the majority of it. Alright, first things first. Do you understand why The Core Incident happened?”

Kinda? Doctor Gaster tried to condense the entire Underground into one SOUL to replace the seventh fallen human. And Sans… put a stop to that.

“That’s half the story. Yes, I wanted him gone. But things didn't quite go according to plan.” He stepped aside to show you his masterpiece. “The real cause? A feedback loop between Gaster’s mechanical Chronograph and my wormhole Gram.”

“Living Chronographers such as Papyrus and Lucidia would have instinctively adjusted their powers to the circumstances. The machine we had? It couldn't do that. Too primitive, not enough failsafes. The resulting chain reaction caused a massive meltdown.”

“Now for the next part.”

Sans rolled up his… right sleeve. What happened to it? Boy, it got shredded.

No. Don’t let that detail distract you from the big issue. You’re looking at a very high tech gadget: the one that’s holding your Trap Harvester hostage.

“I call this the ‘Seraph System’. This is the ultra-secret project that I hammered together over the week. A DT-Extraction Machine, a Fake Aspect manager, and a weapon. All rolled into one. It can hijack the controls of any Living Victory I target.”

Right. Determination’s greatest weakness is Determination itself.

That’s why he stabbed Judge Thyme and stole the Trap Harvester?

“Yup. That little magic watch has a battery as limitless as The Void itself. With it, it becomes possible to store up enough Determination to rewind entire years.”

“Determination is person-specific, though. If I wanted vast quantities of raw DT, I would have picked you. But I need more than that. I need the old man’s SAVES. Which one, you wonder? It’s this.”

Sans summoned a holographic screen. It’s in red and black with some graphical glitches. Streaks of lightning covered the background…

Your eyes tried to focus past the mess.

The Persona? Isn’t that… Mezil’s epic final boss battle against that jerk?!

“Read the time.”

The timestamp read: 1200 Hours. Noon.
10 years ago?!

“Look, Frisk, I found the death certificate of your parents over many timelines. Their time of death was roughly around 1520 Hours. 3.20 PM. Three hours later…”

In other words, Mezil had a SAVE where your parents were still alive.

“It messed me up hard. So hard. That’s because I realised they died because of my idiocy. Now, I’m gonna give them back to you.”

Your biological parents…

I-is Sans for real?

Papyrus rebutted with a warning. “SANS, MISTER MAGUS MIGHT DIE FOR REAL! IF THAT HAPPENS, THE WORLD WILL BE IN CHAOS AND FRISK WON’T HAVE A HAPPY LIFE AT ALL!”

“Are you sure about that?” Sans asked again.

“YES! THE MASS EVACUATION OF LEMURIA CONTINUES TO HAUNT ME TO THIS HOUR.”

“Bro, bro, bro… you’re looking at the worst possible outcome. That’s like saying Frisk’s presence in the Underground will always result in a mass murder. That didn’t happen, right?”

“Ask yourself, is Mezil Thyme really the lynchpin keeping civilization together? I think not. What if he survived? And even if he didn’t, others will pick up the slack.”

Sans winked at him. “You’re the Chronographer now. Why don’t you take a peek at Frisk’s life instead?”

Papyrus’ Eye lit up. You see his concerned expression soften into wonder.

What did he see? Please tell.

“I SEE…” he muttered. “BLUE SKY. GREEN GRASS. SOME FARMS. LUSH FORESTS.”

And?

“I SEE A BABY HUMAN WITH TWO ADULTS, LIVING IN A QUIET VILLAGE. I THINK THAT’S YOU! OH WOWIE, YOU’RE SUCH A CUTE TINY BEAN. I CAN SEE WHERE YOU GOT YOUR FEATURES FROM!”

Really…? How… how did they look like?

“YOU SHARE MORE WITH YOUR MOM THAN YOUR DAD, INHERITING HER EYES AND SKIN TONE. BUT YOU HAVE YOUR DAD’S HAIR!”

“I’M SEEING YOU AS A TODDLER NOW.” He giggled. “LEARNING TO WALK IN YOUR BLUE ONESIE. OH MY GOD, YOU KEPT THROWING PEAS AT YOUR DAD! YOU’RE SO DETERMINEDLY NAUGHTY!”

You laughed along with him.

Papyrus, tell more!
“LIVING SO FAR AWAY FROM TOWN MADE IT DIFFICULT TO GET ANYTHING. BUT! YOUR DAD SOMEHOW MANAGED TO ARRANGE A SHIPMENT FOR A PLUSH TOY ON YOUR EIGHTH BIRTHDAY!”

“IT’S A CUTE GOAT IN A STRIPED SWEATER. A SPITTING IMAGE OF OUR PRINCE. YOU TOOK THAT PLUSH EVERYWHERE.”

Your eyes felt a bit moist. Your biological parents sound like great people.

“OH! LOOK! YOU’RE ABOUT THE SAME AGE AS WE KNOW YOU NOW! LOOKS LIKE THE COMMUNITY IS PLANNING AN EVENT.”

What were you doing?

“YOU’RE GOING TO JOIN THE OTHER VILLAGE KIDS FOR BERRY PICKING. EACH OF YOU HAD A CUTE BASKET! AND THE ADULTS TOLD YOU HOW AVOID POISONOUS ONES.”

“…YOUR MOM IS HOLDING YOUR HAND. YOU LOOK FORWARD TO SOME FUN TIMES.”

“See?” said Sans. “You survived the apocalypse. With your family intact too. No Core Incident, no accidental deaths.”

You had your parents.
You had friends.

Not to mention an entire village taking an active role in caring for each other.

It’s a dream come true.

“Yup. Great, isn’t it? There’s but one issue: Mezil’s Determination. It's filling up too slowly for my liking. Distance and dilution, y’know.”

Sans stretched out his arm. “But you can speed that up without a hitch.”

You have more questions first.

“Go ahead,” Sans answered.

What about the Underground? How is he going to convince Doctor Gaster not to use the Soul Stealer?

“Oh, that’s easy. I planted a Memory Mark on myself while you were asleep.”

He showed his SOUL for a brief moment. The symbol of the Seraphim lay plastered right on top, as he had claimed.

“And with that, I’ll rebuild the completed wormhole Gram. Show Doctor Gaster that it actually works. Then, we’ll have a nice walk on the Surface. Gather intel. Bring it all back to the Underground and convince King Asgore to abort his plans. Really don’t wanna emerge in a world with nukes, ya dig?”

Nod. Nod.

“We’ll of course be needing proper infrastructure for long term stay. I already memorized the
circumference of the Barrier and the nearby water tables. All easily accessible with some drilling. An aquifer will solve a whole lot of our current issues. Plus, now that I know how much real estate we really have, we can also start digging around for extra housing. It'll alleviate the overcrowding problem.”

“Now, if for some reason the bunkering plan fails, we can use the same Gram to evacuate the Underground. Maybe teleport to some remote island to begin anew. Or a different underground.”

“Long story short: we’ll be fine, kid.”

You asked Papyrus check for Sans’ success.

He nodded at you. You saw a flicker in his Eye as he switched focus.

“HE… DID EVERYTHING RIGHT. THE UNDERGROUND IS SAVED FROM ALL THE BAD ENDS OF DROUGHT AND PLAGUE. EVERYONE STOPPED OBSESSING ABOUT THE SURFACE. HAPPINESS RETURNED.”

What about Mom and Dad?

“I THOUGHT HUMANS DON’T GO TO THE UNDERGROUND?”

No, no, your OTHER parents! The furry ones.

“Oh, right. They… they’re back together again. After a long while. Sans had to carefully ease Queen Toriel back into the new kingdom.”

Undyne?

“She’s still the Captain of the Royal Guard. They’re no longer gearing for the war effort, but they still need to apprehend the occasional swindler.”

Alphys? Mettaton?

“Part of the tech team. Lead mechanical engineer too! She helped Mettaton become his glamorous pink self in the entertainment business.”

What about Papyrus?

“I’m… a scientist?! Working together with Uncle Gaster?!!” It’s a scenario that Papyrus himself couldn’t believe.

Sans chuckled. “Yeah. I’m thinking of letting the Doc teach you. As long he agrees to keep you Sealed, that is. There’s no longer a pressing need to turn you into a Chronograph in the new future. If we need to check anything, we’ll consult the machine. Or send some good ol’ scouts.”

“You understand what this means, Paps? You will get to live a fruitful life free from weird visions. No hero’s burden. No sudden horror trips. All this diplomatic headache will be a thing of the past.”

W-what about Asriel and Chara?

Papyrus replied: “I see two flowers growing side by side in King Asgore’s garden. One is covered in monster dust. The other isn’t.”
“Ah, those two kids,” sighed Sans. “Since, Asriel would never become that tortured soulless brat, we save ourselves from a large chunk of the drama.”

“Chara? I’ll dig out the possessed Cheater and transplant it next to the prince. If they’re moved out from the drop-zone… they won’t latch on to some unfortunate Red Child.”

Eternal rest for the departed…

You can’t think of anything better.

Everything does sound ideal. Almost too peachy.

You want to trust Sans. You really do. Papyrus wouldn't lie: so far, it’s all been brilliant news.

The choice is yours. Sans is offering it without force. All you needed to do was to grab his hand and channel your Determination into the Seraph System.

You can finally ‘save’ Asriel from a soulless existence.

You won’t need to deal with complicated interracial politics.

You won’t need to worry about any more genocides and riots.

You don’t need to deal with the high-level Floweys of the world.

You get to grow up with your rightful family, living out your life in peace, at the very place where you belong.

Everyone will be happy.
Everyone will stay happy.

Therefore…

You… RESET?

Chapter End Notes

If you're in Frisk's shoes, what would you do?
Happy Easter, everyone!

This is a really big chapter. Three POVs. All relevant in some way. It would be nice to hear the commentaries of all three sections and not get clouded over by the awesomeness of the last third portion. Also hopefully I am not as riddled with typos.

Also Did a full body art of Cenna last week.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s game over.

Undyne didn’t move an inch since her massive defeat.

Why?
There’s nothing left to fight for.

Be the hero? Save the day? Papyrus became a far better candidate.

Now Undyne was the one who felt like a moron. Shield him from the world? Such a silly, silly thought.

He’s the last stand against a terrible event. Provided he doesn’t fall for Sans’ silver tongue first.

She continued to stare at the empty white hall. Thought that she’d shrivel up like some dried fish snack that Alphys once bought from an Eastern Food Fair.

Footsteps approached her. Probably Grillby’s. Maybe he thought it’s time to go.

Then she saw a hand wave over her face. Dark, with a distinct lack of flame-light. For a moment, Undyne thought she had burned her remaining good eye from all that Core glare.

Her gaze trailed upwards; she’s looking at a certain trench coat lady. She’s carrying someone on her back.

Who’re they?…

Ah. Why does it matter? Sans’ plans will erase everything anyway. If she understood his subtext right.

A discussion went on before her.

“Dude, she’s zonked.”
“How may we rouse her?”
“Maybe we should have Captain Grillby roast her.”
“Nay. Fish be best when raw and fresh.”
“Oi! You better not stain my coat! Get off!”
Warm, slimy liquid then dripped on Undyne’s shoulder.

Something’s… not quite right.

The mental alarm bells rang.

A slobbering bone beast loomed over her head. Tongue out and teeth bared, magical saliva dribbled from his jaw.

He’s… drooling. A lot.

“GAH!!!!” The fish rolled backwards from sheer surprise. She got on her feet and summoned a handful of spears in preparation for retaliation.

What followed after was a high pitched yelp. “HALT! CEASEFIRE! TIMEOUT!”

It’s the snakeface named ‘Gaelic’, crossing his arms in a desperate attempt to stop a pointy bit barrage.

It appears that Team Cenna had finally arrived.

Undyne called off her attack, and everyone sighed in relief.

Gaelic wasn’t too happy with the reaction. “Gadzooks,” He grumbled, “what’s it with ya?”

“You tell me!!” said Undyne. “You're DROOLING!!!”

“…Ya smell delicious. Like fresh sushi.”

Grimacing, she asked: “Why the fuck are you considering monster cannibalism?!”

“Ah ate a human before,” so he answered with an utmost sincere twinkle in his eyes.

Undyne summoned her spear again. That level of crazy crossed the line.

“I dinnae hunt anyone as me dinner on purpose, ah swear!!!”

Before the situation spiralled out of control, Cenna put a stop to the uncomfortable topic. “Gael, chill. We’re not salvaging her as food. No. Just, no.”

“Okay…” He sounded almost disappointed. Almost.

Turning back to Undyne, Cenna further explained. “You were really, really unresponsive. Like, I stood in front of ya. Waved a bit. Almost tap danced. Got nothing. Nein, nicht, nada.”

“Uh…” Undyne rubbed the back of her neck. “Sorry about that…”

“The false angel dragged yer heart through the mud o’ yer sins, aye?”

Another surprise. Gaelic had a sense of poetic flair in his speech, as though he’s from an ancient human play. It was the complete opposite of the savage stereotype.

No point in keeping up appearances anymore. Undyne lowered her head and admitted her failings: “More or less. Guess I’m not that great of a hero after all.”

“What about you?” Cenna asked, turning toward Grillby. “Did he give ya a hard time?”
The fire captain responded with great wisdom: “…No… Sans knows too much about me… I’m not giving him free shots…”

So much for a hidden trump card.

“Glad to see you guys here, but you’re too late,” said Undyne. “Paps… he… he stepped into some magic tornado thing. Sans built it. I’m not even sure if he’s still alive.”

“I bet he is,” said Cenna.

“How’d you know?” Undyne grumbled. “He got himself killed before, didn’t he? With all that timey-wimey shit. That’s what he told me.”

“The false angel would never release the guillotine on himself,” said the snake.

Good point. The stakes were too high for the mastermind to execute an accidental suicide.

“Ugh. Yeah. You’re right about that.” She then sighed. “But I don’t think we can ever catch up to them. Barrier over the head and so on.”

Just the mere thought of Sans was enough to make the skelesnake called Gaelic hiss.

He turned aside, seemingly distracted. The fish decided not to question what’s going on inside his mind.

Moments later, he announced: “M’Lady suggests that the Seraphim had rigged a machine to mimic the Barrier. ‘Tis all be mechanical trickery. Once we destroy the source, the trappings will fall.”

“Oh. Well. If that’s the case, you guys better take Grillbz and head there. I’m just… gonna bum around here.”

“Har?!?!?” exclaimed Cenna. “Why? C’mon Captain, we need your spear!”

“I can’t muster a single bit of my special DT magic right now. I mean… if we get up there… We might get in Paps’ way.”

“Hold it right there!” The Magus stomped her boot. “The Captain I know wouldn’t give up like that. She’d charge in roaring!”

That’s what others think of the woman named Undyne? Quite accurate, but not enough.

She grit her teeth. “Look. I don’t want to hurt Papyrus anymore. It’s bad enough that I did that overprotective shit to him. I’m supposed to be his best friend. And Sans… he’s his one and only brother. I can’t bring myself to fight him, if you know what I mean.”

The awkward silence aggravated the beastial skeleton. He couldn’t keep his thoughts in anymore. “Cor Blimey, ya think we’d get anywhere better if we faff around?!?”

“Ah dinnae care if the false angel be me friend, me brother, or even me elder! If he fooks with M’lord or M’lady, ah will fook them back. Ah care nothing fer a Fallen!”

New ominous terminology? Checked. Undyne thought it’d be better to ask; “…Fallen?”

The Magus seemed… tense? She hurried to pull Gaelic by the back collar of his jacket, as though he were a puppy.
“Whoa whoa whoa! Okay, your stomach is really taking over your brain, sir,” said Cenna. “I know you have some serious beef with our pudgy assassino, but we have bigger fish to fry. Like delivering the anti-hijack Gram to Papyrus.”

Gaelic raised a skeptical brow at her. “As far as I know, ya can’t extract the Code out o’ me bones. Ah dinnae have that skill either.”

“Well duh! That’s why we need to break the Barrier. So Lucy can mail us a fresh copy.”

_Oh fuck, she’s right! If Papyrus is gonna have a showdown against Sans… he can’t use his Blasters!_ A twinkle of vigor returned to her eye. Seeing her spirits lifted, Grillby placed his hand on Undyne’s shoulder.

“…You have a mission now…” He noted.

“…It's best we search for the King and Queen… Might need their strength to break the Barrier…”

“Don’t forget to bring Gaelic along,” said Cenna, “He’s the best Tracker we’ve got. His Eye will lead the way. As for me…”

She pointed straight up. “I wanna find out what’s on top of that tower, pronto.”

“So… we meet you there after we’re done?”

“Yup.”

Undyne grinned. Showed her fist before Cenna.

“For good luck.”

“Ey, Frisky taught ya well. I like that.”

Though they’re both law enforcers tied to the smallest ambassador, both are from completely opposite sides of life.

Humans and monsters.

For the first time ever, those tough women bumped their fists together toward a common goal.

* * *

Asgore lay down on the snowy path, staring at the pulsating sky for what felt like eternity.

Black.
White.
Black.
White.

It’s quite hypnotizing. Almost lulled him into a deep sleep. Would have done so if Toriel wasn’t sitting by his side to shake him back to the land of the waking.
“I feel tired, Tori…” he mumbled.

“Asgore, please stay determined. How strong was the medication anyway?”

“Much stronger than my usual dental visits… Oh dear… I’m not dreaming, am I?”

“What silliness are you talking about?”

With tearful puppy-dog eyes, Asgore said: “You, by my side. After all these years. I don’t… I don’t want this to end.”

Toriel huffed as the ever well-meaning pragmatic. “If you don’t want that to happen, you ought to get yourself together. Who knows what Sans is up to?”

The sternness didn’t last long. Gently, she stroked his golden beard. “You… lost weight since last I saw you.”

“Without your wonderful pies, I’m not surprised.”

“The humans do talk often about a healthy weight range. Maybe you could afford to shed a bit.”

The couple chuckled. There was much to heal, but for now… they could laugh again.

Asgore forced himself off the ground. “You do bring up a good point, dear. We ought to catch up with the rest.”

“Are you sure you will be fine?” asked Toriel.

“I’ll manage.”

The two journeyed on. Toriel’s fluffy dog followed close behind in anticipation for adventure.

They arrived at the next phase of the puzzle: none other than Papyrus’ old spaghetti.

Toriel glared at it. “That. Inspired me never to leave Papyrus alone in the kitchen.”

“…His cooking was quite ‘something’,” Asgore commented.

“The ‘mother’ lode of poor choices.”

“Was that why you started packing cheese sandwiches and apples for him?”

“Part of the reason,” Toriel replied. “He really needed a better diet than whatever he made on a regular basis. I’m so glad Doctor Gaster sorted him out.”

Thus, the two sighed.

“I suppose we have to eat this to advance.” said Asgore.

“That seems to be the objective of this puzzle.”

An overpowering aroma of questionable content continued to haunt the goats.

Toriel shook her head.

“Perhaps, we should just throw the whole thing into the flames?”
Asgore tried to be positive. “The extreme sour kick from the tomato sauce may be what I need.”

The King of Monsters twirled a helping of the pasta. Took a deep breath. He braced himself for the inevitable.

Papyrus’ old cooking was notoriously terrible. Words could not describe. But, a king wouldn’t be king if he couldn’t lead by example. There’s no way he wanted his wife to suffer through this.

Then--

“W-wha?” Asgore’s fork went missing. The plate was gone too. Last he recalled, there was a blurry whiz of white.

His first reaction was to look for the small canine. Maybe the dog had stolen the plate at the last minute.

Nope. It’s still sitting there with its tongue lolled out. No spaghetti in sight.

When he checked on Toriel, she’s staring in horror at another direction. Undyne and Grillby soon joined the occasion. When did they arrive?

Asgore turned around. He finally understood the context behind their disturbed expression. He’ll recognize that lanky slightly-hunched pose anywhere.

It’s Gaelic, wolfing down the pasta face-first. The fork got chucked aside as if it was a piece of trash.

“Oh…” the king blinked. “Where did you come from?”

The man paused. There was tomato sauce all over the lower half of his face, painting him in the strong crimson shades of a horror creature.

“Yer fine!” Gaelic exclaimed in joy. “Ah got so worried about ya, lyin’ down like that. Thought ya got a toxic reaction or worse. Gave me a scare, Yer Majesty.”

“Sorry about that, good sir. I just felt a little hazy.”

The feasting continued. Ferocious. Savage. And a choking risk.

Asgore’s fatherly instincts tried to calm the man down. Nobody should be eating that quickly. “There, there. Careful. Give yourself some time to chew.”

Undyne scooted up to the King and whispered: “You know. Earlier. He actually considered eating me.”

That was a brow-raiser. “Oh really?”

“Yeah, really,” she nodded. “Good thing Cenna stopped him. Like. He outright confessed that he ate a human before. I thought cannibals no longer exist!”

Gaelic stopped for a moment. “Again, not me regular diet. Call it makin’ the most out o’ a long mission.”

Everyone agreed in silence that they wouldn’t ask about the exact nature of ‘that’ job.

Undyne shuddered. “I dunno how I should feel. He’s hungry to the point he’d chow on…” She motioned her hand to the unmentionable spaghetti. “THAT.”
“Oy, ‘tis not half-bad. Sure, the noodles be an old soggy mass rolled in calcium powder, while the sauce reeks o’ excessive citric acid, and the meatballs be raw on the inside. But there be nothing wrong in its nutrient content. Definitely full o’ energy.”

“Dude. Papyrus HIMSELF got sick from eating that shit!”

“He did? Suppose the lad had grown accustomed to more goodly things. Well, ‘tis be guaranteed poison fer M’lord anyway. Too much bacterial contamination. Not human safe.”

“And you’re absolutely okay?!”

“Have ya ever eaten live maggots before? Or earthworms? Woodlice, perhaps? Straight out o’ wherever they come from.”

‘Dinner’ resumed without further objections.

Cringe moment, on. Asgore once had an unfortunate run-in with fly larvae when a student accidentally left a non-magic meatloaf in the school lockers. The memory of that stench bothered him more than the squirm.

Eating bugs was nothing new to Monsterkind. Both the King and Queen loved snails. Fried mealworms and crickets had gained popularity in Ebott Town, well on their way in becoming the top importer nation-wide.

But having them still live and kicking on the plate? That’s Muffet’s level of acquired taste.

Not his ‘cup of tea’. Pun intended, for once.

He looked at his two Captains. They’re now busy trying to protect Queen Toriel. Was it the menu that bothered them, or the sheer feeding frenzy?

For everyone’s sake, the king took the time for some ice breaking.

“Maggots are edible?” asked Asgore.

“Aye!” Gaelic perked up. He’s down to the last handful of pasta. “Full o’ juicy fat. Precious in places where large prey be hard to come by.”

“What do you think of snail pies?”

“Hmm, pies not quite be me thing. But if ya place it in front o’ me, I’ll gobble ‘em up just the same. Cooking the buggers fer hours in a pastry crust makes it deader than dead. Mite sad. See, ah like the taste o’ life itself.”

“Oh. So, Papyrus’ pasta fits your criteria?”

“Nay. Not by a million miles. Ah place this recipe deep in the chem-factory level.” He licked his face with that long forked tongue, effectively cleaning himself. “Fit or no fit, ‘tis better than starving.”

Asgore thought it was a pleasant conversation. The bloke had unusual perceptions. Then again, all monsters had their quirks.

Woshuas for example. They’re the ultimate cleaners, to the point where they’re neurotic. Then there were the Vulkins who insist on hugging others with their too-hot bodies. Caused quite a bit of tension between the more flammable folk, but not insurmountably so.
In the end, ‘love and compassion’ unifies all.

With renewed understanding, both warriors lowered their guard. They’re no longer concerned about becoming the next course on the menu.

Toriel proceeded with what she does best: being a Mom. Using her sleeve, she wiped away any remaining tomato sauce from Gaelic’s jaw.

“Goodness,” she said, “Even if you are in a rush, you didn’t need to plant your face into your meal. I think even the Dog Clan eats with better manners.”

Gaelic grinned, satisfied for both the meal and the warm care. It reminded Asgore of the many children he had encountered over his thousand year reign.

Children…

Reality hammered into Asgore’s dazed noggin. It’s been too long since he had seen little Frisk. He got so distracted by the immediate events, he lost track of time.

The King started counting the number of heads. “Wait, if we’re all here… who’s looking for Frisk?”

“Papyrus went ahead, while Cenna’s taking the tower route,” Undyne said. “The rest of us need to find the actual location of The Barrier. Snakeface here explained how Sans made some sort of a mechanical fake. As long we destroy that machine, the thing’s turned off. No SOULS needed.”

Grillby nodded. “…Problem is… we need to pinpoint a location… There’s too little time for a conventional top-to-bottom search… Soon Sans will RESET…”

A location.

Asgore looked up towards the pulsating sky again. What obvious detail did he miss?

He traced the movement of the waves with his finger. He started from the tower then gradually angled down towards a far off horizon.

“Which direction is that?” He asked.

After Gaelic swallowed a handful of refreshing snow, he answered: “South, Yer Majesty.”

It’s the complete opposite direction from Frisk’s prison.

“There.” Thus said the King. “The Barrier is unlike a rippling pond. The pulses will always go toward the source. We must make haste. Time is of the essence.”

Asgore quickened his pace. Determined in the fact that his entire nation rests on his shoulders, and that he had already dawdled for too long.

Alas, he soon stumbled.

The ex-Captain caught him just in time. The warmth from the fire elemental spread relief over his body.

“Thank you, Sir Grillenn.” It’s been a long time since he had addressed Grillby that way.

Toriel joined the assistance. “Dear, you can’t just charge in blindly.”
Gaelic hopped ahead, beckoning for the rest of the team to follow. “Aye, aye. ‘Tis why it be me blessed duty to be yer guide. With me sense and sight, the labyrinth loses its confusion. We’ll be there before the false angel makes his move.”

Asgore beamed in joy; hope shimmers even on this grim hour.

“Thank you so very much.” he said.

***

You reached out your hand towards Sans.

…

But then you retracted it.

“What’s up, kid?” the short skeleton asked. “Getting cold feet?”

You shook your head. Told him that there are too many unanswered questions. Blanks. Unknowns. You want to ask Papyrus for confirmation first.

“Why not me?”

Is he kidding? He can’t see the future!

Furthermore, there’s nothing to stop him from lying.

“Point A… is a little outdated. But you got me on Point B. Sure then, I’ll wait.”

You looked up to Papyrus and asked more about this possible timeline. How’s your sister, Cenna? She had a genetic disease. You bet that she’ll require more care than the village can provide.

Papyrus nodded to you. “A WISE QUESTION. I WONDERED THE SAME TOO.”

His Eye lit up. You almost held your breath to hear the answer.

Wait…

Why…

Why does he look troubled?

After many wordless moments of searching, he asked: “WHERE’S MISS AUNT?”

Where? Isn’t that supposed to be your question???

“NO, I’M SERIOUS! I CAN’T FIND HER! I’M LOOKING THROUGH ALL YOUR HAPPY MOMENTS WITH YOUR PARENTS AND I DON’T SEE HER ANYWHERE.”

You were outright stunned. These folk… were they really your parents?

“DON’T BE SILLY, FRISK! THEY’RE THE VERY SAME COUPLE THAT GAVE BIRTH TO YOU.”
Okay. You… you believe Papyrus.

Please, keep searching.

“I WILL.”

You waited.
And waited.
And waited.

At last, Papyrus spoke these words: “IT’S SLIGHTLY PAST NOON. YOUR PARENTS ARE ABOUT TO START THEIR HIKE ON MOUNT EBOTT, BUT… THEY RECEIVED A SUDDEN TEXT MESSAGE? I CAN’T READ THE CONTENTS.”

“LOOKS LIKE THE TRIP’S CANCELLED. THEY DROPPED EVERYTHING AND DROVE BACK HOME TO PACK THEIR BAGS. THE TEENAGED VERSION OF MISS AUNT IS THERE TOO, HELPING THEM OUT.”

Finally, a confirmation. But where are they planning to go?

“THE ANCESTRAL LANDS OF YOUR MOTHER’S SIDE. EASTWARD, IT SEEMS.”

Does it have anything to do with Gungnir?

“YES. THEY’RE… EVERYWHERE. THE PEOPLE OF VIOLENT LIGHTNING ARE BEHAVING AS THOUGH THEY OWN THE COUNTRY.”

“THEIR INFLUENCE HAS YET TO SPREAD BEYOND THE BORDERS, THOUGH. THAT’S WHY YOUR PARENTS WANT TO TAKE THE NEXT BEST FLIGHT.”

“HUH? MISS AUNT ISN’T GOING WITH THEM. SHE… LEFT BEHIND A LETTER OF GOODBYE, TOGETHER WITH THE MAGIC WATCH. WONDER WHAT IT SAYS.”

You wonder that too.

“I SEE. SO SHE JOINED THE RESISTANCE. TOLD YOUR PARENTS NEVER TO TALK ABOUT HER. THAT WAS THE LAST TIME THEY HAD EVER HEARD FROM YOUR SISTER.”

Why?! How?!

“MISTER MAGUS DIDN’T SURVIVE. AND THE MAGUS ASSOCIATION LOST THEIR KEYS OF FATE. DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT HE SAID, FRISK? IF HE DIES, THE NEXT IN LINE IS…”

Wait. Wouldn't it be you? He insisted on this whole trial business, after all.

“YOU ARE STILL TOO YOUNG. AT THIS TIMEFRAME, IT IS NONE OTHER THAN PERSONA.”

That’s the worst possible option.

Horrified. You took a step back.

Anger filled your veins. You rushed up to Sans. Tried to grab his coat, except he kept teleporting right out of your reach.
You yelled at his face.

Isn’t this supposed to be your golden path?!
Isn’t this the result of Sans saving your parents from certain doom?!


That’s not the same! You want happiness for everyone!

His offer, DENIED!

“How sweet,” he replied. “But, didn’t I tell you this a long time ago? Sometimes it's better to accept what's given to you’.”

His eyelid shut. So confident that he’d detect your movements.

“The most important thing I learned about life is this: ‘you can’t save everyone’. Every choice you make will leave others to the consequences. So…”

“How about I make this easier on you?”

One moment, you saw him open his left Eye.

The next moment, he’s gone.
Disappeared.
Vanished.
Papyrus!

You turned around in an attempt to reach out to your skelefriend…

It’s too late, Sans had already resurfaced at point blank. He forced Papyrus’ SOUL out of his chest. Blade, drawn and ready to deal the final blow on the Living Chronographer.

Your body refused to move faster than the speed of light.

No!
NO!!!!

The Great Papyrus thus spoke:

“I KNOW OUR DARKEST SECRET, BROTHER.”

By a miracle, Sans hesitated. He’s trembling from head to toe.

That’s the closest call to ever be close. You don’t really get what’s going on, but you must act fast!

Sans shook his head. Steeled his resolve; he’s not backing down.

You focus upon a single thought:

‘You impose your will to SAVE Papyrus!’

A yellow blast thus shot out of your outstretched palm. It left behind a trail, like a shooting star.
It struck Papyrus in the nick of time. The Mark implanted itself firmly on his SOUL. Then it…
turned green?

Green?!

A magic shield stopped the imminent sharp point.

Sans still didn’t budge. You puffed up your cheeks and made another command.

The Mark switched from green to blue.

Your jaw dropped as you beheld Sans fly across the arena from the repulsing force. All the way to
the other end to boot.

He rebalanced himself and landed on his feet. Skidded across the ground thereafter. Had to use one
hand to break the slide, giving him that classic cool anime pose.

You ran to Papyrus. Spread your arms in an attempt to protect him with your body.

The real deal won’t be destroyed.
Not today.

Sans straightened up. Wiped the dirt off his hand. Then, he slipped them back into his pockets.

In a blink, he’s back in speaking range.

“Huh,” he muttered. “That’s new. Lucky that you didn’t hit me. Could have have been dust. Welp.”

The attention shifted to his brother. “Papyrus… What did you just say?”

You don’t get it either. What is this darkest secret? How dark is dark?

Papyrus responded, “IT IS ONE AS BLEAK AS THE ABYSS OF WATERFALL. MAYBE TO
YOU IT’S NOT SO SERIOUS, BUT TO MY BROTHER… IT’S EVERYTHING. THAT’S
WHY HE’S AFRAID THAT I WOULD ONE DAY DISCOVER THIS FACT WITH MY
SUPER AWESOME POWERS.”

Well, what is it? Don’t leave others in suspense.

“A LONG TIME AGO, MY PARENTS HAD A HARD CHOICE TO MAKE: TO RISK
DEATH BY BRINGING THEIR WONDROUS BOY INTO THE WORLD, OR TO END HIS
EXISTENCE TO PRESERVE THEIR VERY LIVES.”

“AS YOU CAN SEE, IT WAS NOT UNCLE GASTER WHO DESTROYED MY
BROTHER’S CHILDHOOD.” You watched his expression cloud over. “IT WAS ME.”

Sans tried hard to not show his distraught, but it’s bubbling over.

“No, Paps,” the elder brother denied. “Please. Don’t blame yourself. It’s not your fault. You didn’t
ask to be born. It’s one of those things that just happen, y’know.”

“SANS, IT DOESN’T CHANGE THE FACT THAT SINCE OUR PARENTS DIED, YOU
HAD TO FEED ME. CLOTHE ME. RAISE ME. WHILE DOING ALL SORTS OF JOBS.
FIVE AT ONCE EVEN.”

Cyan tears rolled down Sans’ face. He’s actually crying. This is the man who didn’t bat an eyelid
when he watched his brother die.

It really was ‘everything’ for Sans.

“Papyrus,” he said, “I don’t care about any of that. As long you’re happy, I’m happy. You’re my shining star. Watching you grow and play helped me through my personal hell. You kept being you. That’s… that’s the most beautiful thing in the universe.”

“So, please. Don’t. Don’t carry that burden. I beg of you.”

Papyrus too started to shed tears of intense emotion. He’s the empathetic one, and he had unearthed the forbidden.

“…I KNOW WHAT YOU DREAD THE MOST, BROTHER. IT’S NOT THE DEATH OF MY PHYSICAL EXISTENCE. RATHER, IT’S THE DEATH OF MY HEART. TO YOU… WITNESSING THE HUSK OF MY FORMER SELF, SHUFFLING FROM DAY TO DAY, IS THE WORST OF FATES.”

“YOU’VE CORRECTLY NOTICED THAT I CAN SLIP INTO DESTRUCTIVE HABITS GIVEN THE RIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES. THAT’S WHY YOU WILL NOT HESITATE TO KILL AND REWIND… IF THAT’S WHAT IT TAKES TO KEEP ME AWAY FROM THE DARKNESS.”

Papyrus…

The tall skeleton paused to recompose himself.

These were difficult things to admit, and worse to confess.

“YOU HAD TO BE MY FATHER, MY MOTHER, MY BROTHER, AND MY GUARDIAN ANGEL ALL AT THE SAME TIME. AND YET, I… I KNOW THAT I TOOK IT ALL FOR GRANTED… ALL THAT CHIDING… ALL THAT DEMANDING.”

“I AM NOT A GOOD BROTHER IN COMPARISON TO WHAT YOU HAVE DONE FOR ME.”

“No!!!” Sans yelled back.

It shocked you. That much raw emotion coming from Sans… you didn’t think it’s possible.

“That’s not true! I- I needed that. C’mon, I’m a bone-a-fide apathetic slob. If you didn’t push me around or cover for my laziness, maybe I’d never leave the house. Or Grillby’s bar.”

“Papyrus, you’re fine the way you are. I don’t resent you. I’d NEVER resent you!”

“I THANK YOU FOR THAT, SANS.”

Your friend looked at you. “HUMAN, PLEASE REMOVE THIS MARK. I HAVE NO NEED FOR YOUR PROTECTION.”

?!?!?!

But, what if he fails? What if--

“NO MATTER WHAT, DO NOT INTERFERE. PLEASE. STAY FAR AWAY AND KEEP YOURSELF SAFE.”
…You told him that you’re afraid for his life.

He shook his head. “IF I DON’T PROVE MYSELF NOW, THE VICIOUS CYCLE WILL ONLY REPEAT.”

..........................

Reluctantly, you removed the symbol of your will.

“DO YOU TRUST ME?”

You couldn’t answer. There’s just too much at stake here. If an apathetic Sans could give you so much trouble, a motivated one would be so much worse.

Despite that, Papyrus didn’t hold your faithlessness against you. He smiled and patted your head.

“THAT’S FINE. IF I FAIL HERE, IT JUST PROVES I’M STILL A BABYBONE.”

He stepped forth. His red scarf flapped in the winds of The Void.

“I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- ACKNOWLEDGE THE EVILS OF THIS WORLD. YET, I SWEAR THAT I WILL NOT SUCCUMB TO THEM. I SHALL NOT BE DEFENCELESS. I SHALL NOT BE GULLIBLE. I SHALL BE THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT YOU FEAR.”

“I SEE, THEREFORE I SHINE!”

Shine, he did. His Eye burned, while a bright orange light cloaked his body. You could feel sheer power radiating from his being. It condensed deep into his bones.

You had to back away. It’s hard to describe. It’s intense to the point where it stings to stand close.

Papyrus summoned his dual bone batons. Posed ready for battle.

“TODAY, BROTHER, YOU WILL WITNESS THE FRUITS OF YOUR EFFORTS.”

“TEST ME! CHALLENGE ME! DON’T HOLD BACK! OTHERWISE YOU WON’T BASK IN MY FULL GLORY! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Sans stared at Papyrus with wide-open sockets. “All out? You mean it?”

“YES.”

You watched the elder brother’s expression slowly change from awe to ecstasy. The way he grinned sent goosebumps across your skin.

“I never thought this day would come. I didn’t even dare to dream it. Yet… it’s happening. I don’t think I’ve ever felt so alive before.”

Blasters, summoned.

“Let’s go, bro.”

Chapter End Notes
Gaelic confirmed Extreme Omnivore. Taboo? What is taboo? He won't think twice. He'll definitely enjoy Muffet's fare too.

Yep. Here's the big moment. It's the showdown everyone's been waiting for other than The Crimson Hall.

Hmm... I am curious about something. If you are to write a recommendation about GQ, what are my main strengths? What sets me apart from the other UT fics out there? See, I'm not quite sure what makes me really special as a writer. As far as I can gather, it's characterization and worldbuilding. But, what else other than that? artistproblem.jpg

Why do I ask? Writing is quite a crowded field. Knowing what makes one's personal style really works helps an artist to further refine it.
Butterfly Brothers

Chapter Notes

Fun fact: 'Butterfly Lovers' is a Chinese tragic love story. It's named that way because eventually the couple ended up as a pair of butterflies. Therefore, it became synonymous to ill-fated relationships.

"But Soph, the title is 'Butterfly Brothers' and not 'Butterfly Lovers'!"

Exactly. Brothers. If 'butterfly lovers' refer to ill-fated lovers, 'butterfly brothers' would be ill-fated brothers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Since time immemorial, one truth was passed down across generations: ‘Monsters express themselves through magic’.

The forms they conjure reflect their SOUL, therefore each person’s magic is unique. Their signature so to speak.

For Sans… it’s as cold and pragmatic as his heart. Or so he thought.

He summoned his Gasterblasters for the grand opening. Even now, he noticed that they felt different.

Strong.

Intense.

Burning with anticipation.

Determined to fight.

Papyrus, I wonder…
What can you do?

“Let’s go, bro.”

Sans gripped Papyrus’ SOUL. Turned it Blue. Lifted his opponent with his left hand in preparation for the slam.

Should I use the Seraph System?
No. Not yet.

Down he goes.

Papyrus landed feet first, cushioning his fall. He then leapt up right before a set of spikes erupted from the ground.

As expected.

Template 1.
Rows of bones rose upwards like the waves of an ocean. They rushed towards Papyrus. It takes someone with top-notch observation and reaction to spot that small safe path weaved inside.

Sans watched his brother make a narrow escape with the grace of a gymnast. So fluid, so beautiful in its practical simplicity.

*Formation 1, 2, 1, 3.*

The first four Gasterblasters moved into position around their designated target.

Fire.

A pair of powerful lasers crossed over the centre. Did Papyrus make it out unharmed? It’s too soon to check.

First team, dismissed.

Second team, cover the gaps.

Fire.

Second team, dismissed.

First team, fire again.

To top off, Sans summoned two larger blasters to flank his target. The repeated cross-strike served to lure them where the next safe-spot is sure be.

Third team, fire.

Magic tore through the air, so strong that it kicked up particulates from the floor of the arena.

When the cloud settled… there stood a deeply annoyed, uninjured Papyrus.

“**REALLY?!?!?!?!**” he exclaimed. **“OF ALL THE POSSIBLE CHOICES, YOU PICKED THE BABYBONES OPENING?!?!?”**

That sweet, sweet innocent reply. Of course it’s too easy for Papyrus. He grew up training on that particular pattern.

“For old time’s sake.” Sans chuckled. “The real thing starts now.”

*Let’s see. How about Template 3? Maybe Template 6? Nah, he’ll expect that... I should give him a taste of his own repertoire.*

Meanwhile, Gaster’s ghost weighed down on Sans’ shoulder. The man whispered the following words:

[The guardian had turned against his ward.]

[What am I to feel? You turned out so right yet so wrong at the same time.]

[Your mother trembles in grief, watching her two precious sons embroiled in battle.]

[Your father is dumbfounded in terror, yet struck with awe and pride, to think that the two of you were birthed from his humble bones.]
Shut up, Gaster. You're a distraction.

Watch closely.

Sans prepared to summon a massive wall of bones and charge them forward.

In turn, his brother’s eye flared. He too summoned the same pattern. Ten times the density of Sans’ lot.

What. The fuck. It shocked the elder brother.

Bone crashed against bone. Splinters and shards scattered all around.

The poison called Karma failed to hold its own. Its purple glow managed only to weaken the first few rows, before their host bones fractured from repeated impact. Papyrus’ sturdier masses plowed over them, winning this skirmish with sheer power overwhelming.

Onward, they rolled.

Crap! Switching to turret mode.

Sans ordered one Blaster to hover over his right shoulder. Fired at will, cleaving a clean path through the wall in the nick of the time.

At the tail end, Papyrus ran behind his magic, effortlessly sidestepping the beam. That’s when Sans realised that his brother doesn’t intend to play by the standard rules of monster combat.

In this battle, there’s no such thing as turns.

They’re in melee range now. The batons swung towards his knees.

Alarmed, Sans teleported backwards.

I see. Of course Papyrus will never kill me. Murder isn’t his objective.

It’s capture.

...I didn’t want to exploit my teleports yet. Not until I get a feel of his new MO. But I can’t let him get close. It doesn’t matter if I miss my shots. As long he can’t strike me, I’ll have time to set up a sure-fire plan.


Thin, green platforms turned the arena into a three-layered battleground. Sans conjured another set of Blasters, tuned for auto-targeting. Then he made his way to the highest vantage point.

According to expectations, Papyrus began jumping up to close the distance.

Template 10. Mod to Cyan.

The good old vertical revolving bone trick, coloured cyan to collide upon movement.

Stay still and the hounds will bite.

Keep moving and suffer Karmic Retribution.

It’s both a rock and a hard place.
Heh. Should have used this on the kid ages ago.

What will you do now, brother?

In response, the orange-eyed one crossed his weapons together to project a shield. He let the cyan bones pass through his being while bracing for the incoming laser.

The action piqued Sans’ curiosity. As far as he could recall, this magic should slice through such shielding like a hot knife to butter. He activated his Truesight to observe.

The Gasterblaster attacked. Yet its beam stopped dead at the blockade.

Huh, interesting.

It’s not standard solidification, either. Papyrus combined multiple levels of Kindness to create a self-renewing shield. Same rate as my decay, huh?

Amazing.

When Papyrus reached the top. He stood there tall, unfazed.

“SANS!” he said, “I WILL ALLOW YOU TO REWIND TIME ONLY IF YOU AGREE TO ONE CONDITION. THAT YOU’LL SAVE MOM AND DAD WITH THEIR TRUE, REAL, ORIGINAL BODIES.”

A talk? Sans halted his armaments. Perhaps Papyrus had something interesting to say.

“When would that be?” He asked.

“MISTER MAGUS’ TRUE RESET. DURING THE WAR OF THE RED VICTORY.”

That’s… twenty-five years ago.

“No way, Paps. That’s too far back. I’d just be 8 years old. Nobody would listen to me. We’d only repeat history, trapped in the Underground forever and whatnot.”

“ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT? YOUR BODY MAY BE PUERILE, BUT YOUR MIND WILL CERTAINLY BE THAT OF AN ADULT. WITH YOUR CUNNING SMARTS AND THE SILVEREST OF SILVER TONGUES, YOU COULD CONVINCE ANYONE ABOUT YOUR PORTAL TECH!”

Papyrus narrowed his gaze. “BUT YOUR TENDER AGE IS NOT THE REAL REASON, ISN’T IT?”

Heh. To think that his younger brother caught on. “…Say it bro. Let me cross-examine.”

“IT’S BECAUSE THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL CEASE TO EXIST.”

“Guilty as charged. You’d be gone for good. Erased. And I’ll be the only one who’ll remember. I can’t live with that.”

“THEN HOW CAN YOU IMPOSE THAT BURDEN UNTO FRISK? YOU’RE ASKING THEM TO THROW AWAY THEIR LOVELY EXPERIENCE WITH US! ABSOLUTELY AND THOROUGHLY UNFAIR!”

“But you’d still be alive.”
“IT WON’T BE THE SAME!!!”

The hero’s outburst sent a shockwave of magic. The last time Sans felt this sensation… was in the presence of the Sky Goddess. Without a doubt, it’s genuine Blue magic.

Fallen bone shards floated off the ground. They rose towards their caster.

…Both Paps’ and mine?

The bits and pieces formed a large ring overhead. Sans’ cyan bones rattled in the air. Soon enough, they were forced out of their lanes. They too joined the swirling mass of white in the air.

Papyrus smirked in pride.

Sans couldn’t believe what’s happening.

He was at a lost for words.

“…D-did you just steal my attack?”

“CONSIDERING YOUR RECENT KLEPTOMANIAC SHENANIGANS, I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD HAVE A PERSONALIZED TASTE OF YOUR OWN NONSENSE!”

He then swung his arms downward. Sent the cloud flying at Sans.

Sans knew Papyrus won’t kill him. Doesn’t mean that he won’t hand out a whooping.

The elder brother began his teleporting dodge maneuvers.

The battle intensified. Skewers. Lasers. Flights and footsteps. Over the course of conflict, Sans began to notice a disturbing trend.

By logic, his teleporting ability should give him the upper hand. But under close observation… the gap between them had all but disappeared.

Papyrus’ interception went beyond the speed of his mental calculations. He had foreseen Sans’ path of escape to the point where the cloud of broken bones stalked closer and closer.

Last-minute changes turned from exception to the norm. If Sans reacted so much as a little slower, he’d warp straight into the expected outcome.

Until he found himself doing just that.

“Huh--?!”

The irritating debris scraped against his throat, making him cough. They forced him to shut his eyes. Leftover Karma from the old bones nicked small rips on his clothes. Only his body was immune to its effects.


Still, the storm offered no escape.

In that moment of panic, he leaned a little too far forward and rolled on the ground.

A bone spiked right into the space between his legs. A few centimeters in any direction and it would
have left him crippled.

Sans scurried backwards. Hopped back to his feet. However, as soon as he stood, he heard the air whistle.

Incoming strike from the right.

He ducked. Sure enough, a bone baton whizzed past where his skull would have been.

*He’s foreseeing where I’d land.*
*How I’d dodge.*
*Where I’d fall. In what manner I’d recover.*

*Everything.*

Bone baton incoming from the left. Right. Vertical slash. Warning from above.

Relentless. Papyrus showed no signs of slowing down or stopping. His legendary stamina lived up to its name.

Cold sweat trickled down Sans’ skull. He’s already getting drenched.

Sans noticed it. The mentor haunting his mind saw that development too.

[Tsk, tsk, tsk. Looks like you’ve finally bitten off more than you can chew.]

*Welp. Mind not adding more to my plate then?*

[You fancy yourself a comedian. Don’t you, Sans Serif? Did you honestly think your cheap premade tricks will work against one who is witness to the dark annals of history?]

[Such arrogance. Your brother’s not some parlour magician; he’s a true clairvoyant Seer!]

*God, Gaster. Can’t you do anything else than to spout poetic crap?*

Still, the old man’s right. Whatever moves he used for Frisk won’t work on Papyrus.

*The future… moments that have yet to come, huh? Is there a way to make him blind to that possibility?*

He recalled how he couldn’t read the mechanisms of the Spirit Gate. Or the elevator shaft lined with distorters. Then there were the anti-Seer defenses for his secret lab too.

He glanced at the wormhole gram he had left embedded in the floor. Ideas began to click together.

*Papyrus’ biggest weakness… is his lack of literacy in the arcane.*

*I need that upper hand… I must make a future that he cannot comprehend.*

*And for that, I need the Seraph System.*

Sans retreated to the far end of the arena. Thought it made a good opportunity to access his supply of Determination.

But then.
He spotted a glint in the distance. Bright. White. And filled with enough destructive power to plow through concrete.

A… Blaster?!

Sans leapt to the side. Lo and behold, an instantaneous streak of magic sliced ahead.

Scored the ground.
Smashed the tower’s railings.
Flew deep into the vast empty sky.

All in a blink.

I gotta take that away from him!

He prepared for a hijack. Yet, the weapon was nowhere to be seen.

Papyrus yelled at the top of his ribs. “I TOLD YOU SANS! I WILL NOT BE DEFENCELESS, I WILL NOT BE GULLIBLE! I WILL PROTECT MYSELF TO PROTECT YOU!!”

Papyrus executed another slashing movement. Downwards.

Watch closely.

Sans rolled out of the way. Kept his eye on the caster. More collateral damage tore through the battlefield. This time it punched a hole through Frisk’s bedroom.

The Gasterblaster vanished as quickly as it appeared.

A quickdraw?

When did he learn this? Who taught him?


Did Papyrus come up with this tactic on his own?!

The tower had yet to repair itself. Worrisome. Will Papyrus be the one to shatter the supports? There’s a reason why Sans banned Gaelic’s steed.

[There IS something I can do, my dear protégé.] Gaster intruded. [All I need is your explicit permission to control the Seraph System.]

…Give me one reason why I should give a shred of trust to you.

Sans felt a pair of hands holding the sides of his face, caressing. Filled with the love and fear of his two silent parents.

[This would have been so much easier if you had explained your plan sooner. Here I thought you intend to assassinate us on the first opportunity. Right when we’d be on our way to The Core.]

[But no… you matured. Remembered your elders for who they were and not by their appearances. Colour me astonished. Furthermore, you are correct: it’s pointless to erase your little brother’s existence.]
[A world where I teach Papyrus the ways of science, and your parents cook your daily meals… it sounds like paradise. I will do anything, as long you keep your end of the bargain.]

Tempting logical reason: the worst kind of deal with.

You’re up to something, old man. I can tell.

[Suit yourself.]

Sans wanted to continue the battle on his own…

If only he could see past his blurring vision to begin with. The last person who pushed him to this limit was that darn pint-sized Living Victory: the merger of Frisk and Chara.

I… I can’t focus…

“NOW BEHOLD,” Papyrus hollered. “MY SPECIAL ATTACK!”

Sans watched that large femur tossed toward his direction. It’s spinning faster and shining brighter than he ever remembered.

“VERSION 2!”

Version 2?!

“TRY NOT TO GET BLASTED TO SMITHEREENS!”

Sans shook his head in an attempt to get rid of the fatigue. His vision improved just enough to comprehend his Truesight.

Then, he realised that it’s not the gattling-bone shard.

It’s a bomb!

Gaster questioned, [Do you wish to play some more, Sans Serif? Or will you let your brother win?]

The ‘Sans’ everyone knew would have given up there and then. They say he’s the sort of lazy good-for-nothing slob who can’t even be bothered to clean his bedroom.

But now.

Now.

He’s far from satisfied. Papyrus was capable of so, so much more.

He didn’t want this dream to end.

Not yet.

Gaster. Give me Blue - Green - Purple.

Both brothers enveloped themselves within green shields.

DT Boost, now!

His Eye’s fire intensified in Lucidia’s hue.
The ‘special attack’ exploded into a forceful display of dazzling light. It’s strong enough to blind, while the resulting shockwave cracked and crumbled the wormhole Gram into minuscule fragments of concrete.

Sans tried to anchor himself with Purple, but it's not enough to stop his momentum; he flew across the arena. Smashed right through the stone railing.

The bubble protected him from collateral damage, but it shattered upon impact.

What the--

Sans looked down. The white ebbs of The Barrier flowed dangerously close to his feet.

*Gaster, default now! Hurry! Before both of us get shredded into atoms!*

*[Egads! Fly with your Blue, you silly goose! Have you forgotten so soon?!!]*

Right before he dropped, a large bone hook snagged his feet. In one steady tug it dragged Sans back to safety.

The railings regenerated. The threat of an accidental death ended.

“I’M SORRY.” Papyrus hollered. “RING-OUTS NOT ALLOWED. BUT I WILL GIVE YOU A CHOICE: CONTINUE, OR SURRENDER TO MY AWESOMENESS.”

“Surrender?…” Sans laughed between his panting. “Oh no. No, no, no. I’m not done yet. There’s still so much to discover. So much to learn. I want to know your limits.”

“VERY WELL THEN. DO YOU NEED TO CATCH A BREATH?”

Sans waved a hand across his face. Let his opponent know that he didn’t need to rest. Not much anyway.

*OK. Here's the plan.*


*[Interesting. Please, decide where to implant this.]*

*Just embed the component into the exact tiles I destroy. Meanwhile, forget about the basics. No more default colours. Add Cyan - Orange - Yellow.*

*[You’re going that far?!]*

*It’s now or never. None of this shall exist when it's over, right?*

*[…Indeed. Act as you will.]*

Sans laid eyes on his bracer. An enneagram spread over his iris as he confirmed Gaster’s actions on the screen.

**SERAPH SYSTEM**

ACTIVE: C / O / Y / B / G / P

INACTIVE: NONE
The flames of his Eye burned with all six colours available to his kind.
The resulting sensation was worse than a hangover. Worse than migraines too.
It wouldn’t be too much of a stretch to say it threatened to consume his very lifespan itself.
Would this have any long-term side effects? He wondered.
He wouldn’t know, nor did he want to know.
Sans then drew his hidden blade and summoned one last Gasterblaster. That’s all he needed.
Papyrus grimaced.
"FIGHT WITH YOUR OWN POWER!" he demanded.

Did he know?
No… it’s likely Papyrus is taking cue of the gaps in his futuresight too.
He won’t know the exact nature of my plan, but he’ll suspect that I’m trying to cheat.
Sans smirked back. “Sorry, bro. I’m giving it my all. Tools included.”
So the battle continued.
Sans kept to close-quarters, exploiting traditional melee skills with quick short-range teleports. Positioning was his objective.
Papyrus blocked a stab. Countered with a swipe to the spine.
Sans dodged in a last-ditch leap, catching unto the jaw of his own skull cannon.
I see. Possibilities vanish when a person commits to a certain tactic.
When its owner released his grip, the armament spewed out its deadly discharge.
Papyrus rolled out of the way toward safety.
The first floor tile got vapourized. Fresh rock healed over a newly-spawned circuit made from the four requested metals.
The key difference between a savage brute and a skilled warrior lies in one’s cunning. It’s all about making the situation turn in your favour.
You learned that well, Papyrus.
I’m so proud of you.
The younger brother conjured more hooks, using them to snag Sans’ arms.
The elder one let his opponent do so, knowing he’s skilled enough to control his Blaster with a single thought. He then pushed his weapon close to Papyrus’ cranium for a point-blank shot.
Between certain doom and a fleeing target, the hero chose self-preservation.
Another tile vapourized. Before long, they were back in each others range again.
As the two clashed bones like the sword-fighting movies of yore, images of the past and present melded together in a haze of Orange.

*I’m… hallucinating?*

One moment, Papyrus was a tiny boy. The next, he’s the shining adult in all his glory.

The surroundings too. They melted. Meshed. Ebbed between times.

They’re at arena in The Void. They’re at the New Home fountain square.

*Is this how Papyrus sees the world?*

*How does he comprehend what is real and what is not?*

The past mirrored the present. They had played pretend swordsmen many times before. Laughter. Joy. Jokes and puns. They’re not found here anymore.

Sans caught Papyrus’ weapon with his hand. Injected Karma. Rotted it to sandy bits of calcium. He attempted to initiate another flank by the side.

Papyrus leapt out of firing zone, ever swift.

Another floor tile succumbed. Another floor tile trapped.

Sans pressured his opponent by summoning his trademark spikes from the ground. They’re never going to land a hit, but they control the flow of combat nonetheless: making Papyrus stand where Sans wanted him to stand.

The background scenery changed to Snowdin’s cold, white landscape. Played out their memories like a panorama.

Sans recognized this too. It was once upon a Gyftmas. The brothers had found a huge plank in the dump. Snuck all the way to snowy zone to look for a good slope. Turned that piece of wood into a sled.

Regular slopes soon became boring by their standards, so Sans used a well-timed clump of blunted spikes to launch them into the air. Good thing they both had Blue Magic.

The board splintered into pieces when it hit the ground.

Sans told Papyrus that it had already been falling apart. It wasn’t a total lie, but the traces of Karma certainly didn’t help.

Poor Gaster almost had a proverbial heart attack when he found that out. Fun times.

*This surrealism is nauseating.*
I don’t want Papyrus to live with this. Ever.

More sprays of Blaster light hammered the ground, peppering spots of sprawling decay.

Papyrus leapt and twirled around like a ballet dancer. Wherever his feet touched, green shielding magic created glassy platforms.

Nonetheless, the barrage enabled the doctor to plant multiple traps in one go.

Twelve tiles now. One to go.

“I KNOW WHAT YOU’RE TRYING TO DO, SANS,” said Papyrus. “AS UNORIGINAL AS EVER.”

Sans shrugged back. “Hey, if it works, it works. Won’t you try to prevent it?”

“I CAN’T. YOUR PLAN IS FOOLPROOF.”

“No, it’s not. The guaranteed method is to kill me.”

“I’LL NEVER KILL YOU.”

“Welp. What will you do then?”

“I’LL SURVIVE,” answered Papyrus.

Sans knew his brother won’t joke about a matter this dire. When Papyrus was a little babybone, he wouldn’t stop badgering him for combat practice. The older one couldn’t bring out the big guns, though, so he improvised using a torchlight.

They played a game where the little one had to avoid the chasing spotlight. Sometimes, little Papyrus would intentionally stand in the ‘danger zone’ and boast about his future greatness.

An illusionary spotlight thus shone down over their heads. Magnified. Intensified.

He could hear the young one’s proclamation: “AFTER ALL, I’M THE GREAT PAPYRUS. NYEH HEH HEH.”

“Papyrus,” he whispered. “I love you, bro.”

“I LOVE YOU TOO.”

One more blast.
One more push.

And the final thirteenth tile was set in place.

Got the last component ready?

Gaster replied: [Affirmative. Primed and charged.]

Papyrus, I’m sorry. I promise… you’ll wake up in a nice and cozy bed.

All of this will become a mere dream.
Chanting in the language of his kind, his hands weaved together the command to set the mechanisms deep into the very spot he stood on.

Not stopping.
Not hesitating.
Not turning back.

The thirteen points of his risky gambit shone bright, sprawling over the inner two-thirds of the arena.

Sans teleported backwards to the border.

*Do it!*

A vial of pure Determination materialized in the air. With a simple push of telekinesis, the final catalyst crashed against the battleground.

It initialized an eruption of tri-coloured flames. A massive inferno, dancing to the Aspects of Papyrus’ Eye. Said little brother’s fragile form flickered within like the blackened wick of a candle.

Sans turned his head away. Couldn’t bear to watch. Couldn’t bear to listen to those pained yet willful screams.

*[So much for being a cold Tactician, Sans Serif. Turns out you do have a heart. Albeit it’s far too late.]*

The pain.
The suffering.
The failure that haunted Papyrus so much in this life.

The sole consolation Sans had was that Papyrus wouldn’t remember any of this.

“…Report on the DT meter, please.”

*[Ten more minutes before we have enough. That last attack added at least another 50 seconds to the clock.]*

Sans checked the Seraph System. Gaster was right.

“That’s far too long.”

Sans hoped that it would be full by now. If it was, he could ask Gaster to rewind before he had to sear the ugly result of his decision into memory.

Bereft of fuel, the blaze died down.

The hero struggled to stand, clutching his mother's scarf.

Red glowing scars covered the right side of his skull. More spread beneath his armour. They’re the remnants of burned Determination.

Each pant was accompanied by subtle wincing, yet Papyrus refused to show any true signs of weakness.

Isn’t that what Papyrus always does?

Always optimistic. Always hopeful.
On the third breath, however, The Great Papyrus collapsed.

Sans felt his hands tremble, but he clenched them into fists. Shoved his emotions aside.

“…I told you, brother.” said Sans, “There are no guarantees in life. It’s all a matter of chance. You may have all the right abilities. You may even see the best future. Ultimately, others dictate the outcome.”

‘Others’ indeed.

A new vision trailed into view.

In it, ‘Future Frisk’ emerged out of their hiding spot beneath the arena. Ran over to Papyrus. But after learning that the injured skeleton couldn’t answer their pleas, the kid turned their attention towards their opponent. Jumped into action.

Those nimble limbs and uncanny instincts.

“Heh. The kid’s got good moves.”

A lights-out uppercut to the mandible sought a swift conclusion…

…Except the imaginary fist phased right through.

Such an outcome, denied.

Sans spotted them peeking out from the stairwell and launched an immediate pre-emptive strike.

He warped in close. Forced their SOUL out of their chest.

While they’re still trying to get a grip on the current development of events…

…The Seraph System’s blade drove deep inside.

That expression on Frisk’s face…

They realised all too late that they had played right into his hand.

The damage had been done.

Sans smirked a little.

“Your power’s mine.” he said.

The Mark of the Seraphim spread from the contact point, sealing their fate.

A river of Determination flowed out from the reservoir of power. It filled the Seraph System like a broken dam.

*Three seconds.*


He saw that coming. Avoided their blow. Moved to a different spot of the arena. It’s not safe to stand near a Living Victory.

*Two.*
A human’s estimated max speed in sprint lay somewhere near forty five kilometres per hour. Frisk won’t be able to match that. And unlike Papyrus, they don’t have a Blaster.

One.

What if they utilized their quicksave teleports? Their reaction time wouldn’t be sufficient either.

No matter what, they cannot outplay time itself.

“Remember your promise, kid.”

Zero.

The scene slowed down.
Turned red.

And then, everything went dark.

***

When light flooded back into his Eye, the melodious rush of running water circled around his being.

Sans Serif woke up in a field of Echo Flowers, staring at the gem-encrusted ceiling of Waterfall’s many caves. A reed basket with some freshly picked waterdogs lay by the side.

He’s not wearing his usual blue hoodie either. It’s… a standard office suit?

Where am I?

When he sat up, he spotted a signboard in the distance.

It read: ‘The Font Family Waterworks’.

He breathed a sigh of relief. Let himself fall flat on his back. Petals puffed up from the weight of his fall and scattered all over his being.

…It’s over.

It’s a beautiful day under the mountain, he thought.

Froggits are croaking.

Goldenflowers are sleeping.

“On days like these, that dang DEMON kid better stay the hell away.”

Chapter End Notes

Please trust me. I know what I’m doing.
The details are there if you pay really close attention.
Butterfly Redo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

How long had he been sleeping?

It’s a tranquil moment that felt like eternity, yet not.

Slow.
Relaxing.
Distant.

That is, until a familiar boom in the air yelled for his name.

“SAAAAAAAAAAAAANS!!!”

Music to his ears. When Sans opened his eyes, he witnessed not the glitter of gems… but face of The Great Scientist, Papyrus.

Face wise, he looks just the same. Though his clothes were a different story. Doctor Gaster’s sense of ‘proper fashion’ had bled over.

Not that Sans would complain: suits look gorgeous on Papyrus.

_Haha, he still has mom’s red scarf._

“Hi,” said Sans.

Papyrus frowned. “I HAVE TOLD YOU MANY TIMES TO NOT ABUSE YOUR FLEXI-HOUR PRIVILEGES FOR EXCESSIVE BREAKS! YES, I KNOW YOU CAN TELEPORT AND THUS TRAVEL TIME IS NOT AN ISSUE BUT STILL! HAVE SOME INTEGRITY, FOR GOODNESS SAKE.”

“AND WHY ARE YOU SLEEPING SO CLOSE TO THE FRONT ENTRANCE? I KNOW YOU HAVE PEOPLE ON THE PAYROLL. BUT IT SETS NOT A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES. ALTHOUGH, EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT YOUR ODD HABITS ANYWAY.”

Some things don’t change. Sans chuckled.

“It’s the best spot, bro. Hey, why don’t you lie down for a moment too?”

“ARE YOU KIDDING ME???? MOM AND DAD DRAGGED UNCLE GASTER OUT OF HIS LAB FOR OUR WEEKEND DINNER! BY THE COLLAR! I’LL BE DAMNED IF I LET YOU RUIN THE OCCASION WITH YOUR INFECTIOUS LACK OF ENTHUSIASM.”

“Wow. They managed to bust the workaholic doc out of his own prison?”

Papyrus smiled. “YOU BET! AFTER ALL, THEY’RE OUR SUPER AWESOME COOL PARENTS. BEING A PAIR OF HANDS WON’T STOP THEM FROM GIVING UNCLE GASTER A MUCH NEEDED BREAK.”

The tall brother began to rub his chin. “NOW, IF ONLY I CAN BUILD A MACHINE TO
EQUALIZE YOUR WORK HABITS. HE NEEDS TO CHILL, WHILE YOU NEED TO GET HEATED UP.”

“No way. ‘Lukewarm’ is the worst, yo. Ever tried drinking something that’s neither hot nor cold? It sucks. You really don’t wanna be just warm like Luke.”

Papyrus groaned. “SAVE YOUR WORD SHENANIGANS AFTER WE FINISH OUR INGREDIENT FETCH QUEST. YOU GOT THE WATERDOGS DAD WANTED?”

“Yup. Best of the crop.” Sans dragged the wicker basket and balanced it on his chest.

“THEN WHY ARE YOU LOLLYGAGGING ABOUT FOR? C’MON, LET’S GO!”

_I’m right in front of the waterworks, huh? I wanna see how it turned out. Detouring a little bit won’t hurt since I can teleport and all._

_I think I’ll tell Paps to go ahead._

“Welp. If I have to.” said Sans. “Don’t wanna keep everyone waiting.”

_Huh? Why… why did I say that?_

_Nevermind. I’ll see it soon enough._

* * *

It’s another fine workday.

The water refinement facility came out better than expected. It had everything Sans wanted and more.

It turned out to be a wetter version of ‘The Core’. It had the same swappable flooring, plus a fully customizable pipe system on top of that. The usual human plumbing problems don’t exist here.

The Waterworks consisted of three main sections: processing, distribution, and wastewater management.

The heart of the facility was none other than a massive drill-pump, made entirely out of Gaster-approved steel. Since the quake didn’t happen in this timeline, the forges remained wholly intact.

Every day, this massive pillar draws out enough water to supply the entire Underground for centuries to come. The raw resources go straight into refinement filters, removing any sediment and excess minerals, while a massive network of pipes distributes the end product to the end consumers. The old system that linked to Waterfall’s polluted rivers had long been decommissioned.

As for the waste? It’s no longer unceremoniously dumped. Instead, it all flows back neatly through the sewers.

From there, the process involves a ton of automated Karma in a simple concept of expedited decay. Meshes of Purple-magic serve to break down everything into harmless non-toxic compounds. These would then be deposited into settlement tanks. Sludge sinks to the bottom, leaving behind reasonably purified liquids to help cool The Core.
In short, the Underground was never healthier.

Since Sans was the one who thought up the idea, he wound up as the boss of sorts, with relatives in key positions. His family didn’t have a surname, though, so they had to come up with a term that unified them all.

And thus, ‘The Font Family Waterworks’ was born.

Though, Doctor Gaster’s real name was ‘Wendell Dominic’. Not ‘Windings’ as most assumed. He played along anyway.

As for housing arrangements… Gaster insisted that the brothers move into his mansion. No blame on the old man: he had a vast library that’s too good to be neglected.

Also, Papyrus insisted that his lab should be situated far from Hotland and closer to home. Which, turned out to be one of the mansion’s secret rooms.

Sans finished reading the monthly accounts. Everything checked out, from profits to repair costs.

“And done. Phew. That’s quite something.”

The office walls rumbled with the excited thumping of a certain energetic brother.

“Huh. Wonder what’s up with Paps?”

Papyrus slammed the door wide open with telekinesis. Busted it down hard. He had his hands hidden behind his back.

“SHE’S HOME!!!”

“Uh, who? Queen Toriel?”

Why did I ask about Tori?

After one big groan, Papyrus replied: “NO! UNDYNE! SHE’S BACK FROM HER LATEST MISSION!!!”

Mission?

Sans raised his brows. “Ooh boy, it’s already one month? Time sure flies. So, did she manage to get that sweet limited edition miniature car collector’s set?”

Papyrus pulled out the clean, unopened box.

Both brothers squealed in delight.

“ISN’T IT AWESOME?!?!?! I’M FINALLY CAUGHT UP TO DATE!”

“Tooool cool! I really hope she didn’t smash the shop windows to get that.”

“OF COURSE NOT!” The tall skeleton struck a heroic pose. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS SUPPLIED HER WITH ENOUGH FUNDS. HE WILL HAVE NO BUSINESS WITH NEEDLESS SHOP VANDALISMS!”

“OH. AND ONE MORE THING, SANS: SHE WANTS TO MEET YOU AT GRILLBY’S. MIDNIGHT. SOUNDS LIKE SERIOUS BUSINESS.”
Ah. So I still hang out there even though we didn’t move to Snowdin?

“Right,” Sans nodded. “Thanks for passing along the message.”

Papyrus crossed his arms, unsatisfied over something.

“…Why are you giving me that look, bro?”

“I’VE BEEN HEARING UNSAVOURY STORIES ABOUT YOU LATELY. I WONDER IF UNDYNE IS FINALLY GOING TO CONFRONT YOUR FANFICTION FUEL!”

“Pardon wha--?”

“OH DON’T PLAY IGNORANT WITH ME, SANS! IT’S ABOUT KING ASGORE’S FEMALE CLONE. I MEAN QUEEN TORIEL!”

“Okay…”

“METTATON’S LATEST GOSSIP CORNER IS SPREADING JUICY RUMOURS THAT YOU’RE THE SOLE REASON SHE RETURNED FROM HER LENGTHY-SELF EXILE! DOCTOR ALPHYS WON’T STOP WRITING ABOUT HER ONE TRUE PAIRING TO COUNTER THE SPECULATION!”

“Surely I’m not the ‘SOUL’ reason.” The short skeleton shrugged. “But so what if that’s the case? She’s back on her throne, King Asgore is happy, and everyone’s a nation again.”

“Isn’t that the most important detail?”

“OH MY GOD!” Papyrus fumed. “I CAN’T BELIEVE MY BROTHER JUST BRUSHED OFF SOMETHING MORE SCANDALOUS THAN SOCKS! SHE’S A MARRIED WOMAN, FOR GOODNESS SAKE!”

“Whoa man. Why are you so uptight about it? Did Gaster drill his standards of an ideal marriage into you or something? Not everyone is like Mom and Dad.”

“UGH SANS, AT LEAST HE HAS GOOD TASTE. YOU’RE BEING A THIRD PAIR OF WHEELS ON A CAR! NOTE THAT I DID NOT SAY ‘A THIRD WHEEL’ TO PREVENT YOU FROM GLORIFYING A TRICYCLE.”

Papyrus took a deep breath to calm down. When he did, his vast energy sapped into sorrow.

“KING ASGORE ISN’T AS HAPPY AS YOU THINK.” he admitted, “THEY’RE TOGETHER, BUT THEY’RE NOT TALKING. QUEEN TORIEL WOULD RATHER HANG OUT WITH YOU.”

“That…” Sans paused for a moment.

“That depends on her. I’d only end up as a cruel friend if I push her away now.”

…She can’t seem to get over the past.

I guess at the same time… I can’t let her go either.

* * *
Sans zipped to Snowdin’s lone bar.

*Whoa. I guess he caught up with the new building standards too.*

It’s classier than he remembered. The old Grillby’s had an aged, worn-down feeling. Rustic in a way. This? He had brand-new bricks and windows in the front. Then there’s the sparkling fresh-cut signboard…

*I have a feeling Grillby didn’t voluntarily renovate this place. Maybe the patrons got too excited and demolished the front entrance?*

Sans stepped in. Waved hello to his fellow barmates. Tossed a pun or two.

The red bird and the spinny-eyed rabbit were there too. Some things really don’t change.

“Hey, Snasss!” greeted the bird. “How’s the bosslife?”


“Yep! I finally got these human ‘oreos’.”

They showed the bag; “Captain Undyne said the Surface was reviving early 21st century classics. Especially for the Halloween season. This is one of them. Want some?”

“Sure.”

The red bird gave him a black-and-white cream sandwich cookie.

“Love them dunked in milk.” they said.

Sans took a bite.

“Dang, these are good. I give it like two months before Mettaton releases his own MTT-brand knockoff, complete with his MTT-brand face plastered on ‘em.”

“Heh. More for us monsters! Oh, and about the Captain. She’s waiting for you upstairs. Private room number 3.”

*Odd. Grillby should be the one passing such information to me.*

He turned towards the fiery bartender. Grillby was quite a stoic one, therefore few understood his real emotions.

But Sans knew him long enough to pick up on the subtle cues: Grillby wasn’t happy. Anxious. Maybe even angry. Whatever it was, he refused to directly talk to him.

*Uh... Wonder what his deal is. Maybe I can suss it out later. Don’t want to keep the fish waiting.*

The second floor led to Grillby’s living quarters and four private VIP lounges. Sans went to the one with the correct number. Opened it.

There’s Undyne with her hair down. Looking tired too. It was a long, long day. Welcome-back celebrations to attend, reports to write, news to catch up...
And the way she glared at him… that long, long day is about to get longer.

“‘Sup? Why’d you call me out at the sleepy hours?”

Undyne growled. “I had a super fine day throwing candy at kids, then I come back home only to get that scandalous article pressed right in my face. Really, Sans. You and Queen Toriel reeeeeally need to work something out.”

“C’mon. You know I can’t do anything about that.”

“But I CAN. If you do ONE thing for me--”

“Denied.”

Undyne yelled, “I didn’t even get to say anything!”

“Because I know what you want to ask.” Sans replied. “The Deep Ocean Colony Development Project. I’m the last board member preventing you from getting unanimous approval.”

She bared her teeth. “Fine. Saves me half the explanation. C’mon Sans! Have you SEEN the ocean?! It’s fucking HUGE! There’s unlimited real estate space down there and I’m sure as hell Alphys will be able to build whatever shit we need to solve the pressure problem!”

“And it’s also super unsafe.” Sans darkened his sockets. “Humans have the tech to explore deep oceans. All it takes is one rogue scientist to bump into our New New Home, and the secret is out. Next thing we know, Gungnir will launch an extermination campaign against us.”

Not to mention that there’s an abomination hiding under there.

“How are you so certain about that?” The fish questioned. “It’s almost as if you know the future.”

“The Chronograph exists for a reason.”

“No. It’s not that.”

Undyne stood up. Walked over the low table as though it’s just a small step in her way. In a single straight line, she made a beeline towards Sans and towered right over his head.

It’s rather imposing. More so when she’s a little taller than Papyrus.

Glaring down with her one eye, she said: “You know too damn fucking much.”

“Example?” Sans asked back.

“GUNGNIR. Their organizational tree. The PERSONA system. CRAZY HUMAN SOUL MAGIC and all that jazz! Your newest thesis blew the minds of the nation’s scientific greats. No fucking way you assessed all that from scouting report and the Chronograph alone!”

“Ugh, Undyne. Pipe down. The walls have ears.”

“DON’T CARE!!!” she raged. “Sans, come clean! Did you plagiarize someone’s work?!”

Pause.

Sans burst into laughter. After all of that tension, that was her conclusion?
The continued laughter made Undyne fume between her ears. Magic steam already wafted from the side.

“This is no joking matter!! Your credibility as Tactician is SUPER at stake!”

Finally Sans spoke. “I’m just really good at processing intel. Don’t worry. I didn’t steal anyone’s credit. Among monsterkind, that is.”

“Are you fucking sure your sources are purely human?”

Undyne grabbed a knapsack out from under the table. She unzipped it right in front of Sans and poured its contents onto the flat surface.

The skeleton stopped breathing when he saw what fell out of it.

They were wanted posters of ‘The Sky Witch’.

Lucidia of House Berendin.

Undyne tossed the bag aside. “You wanna know why Grillby’s acting weird? You’re looking right at it. He’s been DREAMING about HER!”

She sorted through the pile and pulled out a coloured drawing. It’s not the most accurate of references, but it gave Undyne enough idea who to look for.

“It’s always the same dream!” she said, “He’d be falling from the sky and this woman in blue… she’d swoop in to save him. Night after night after night. I thought he was going crazy until I saw these posters!”

“Explain to me, how the hell GRILLLBY of all people is dreaming about someone he has never met! WHO IS ALSO APPARENTLY REAL! Isn’t that vision shit a Seer thing?”

Sans tried to come up with an explanation. She did have a point; Grillbz’s shouldn’t be remembering any of these. It’s too clear.

“I think he needs more rest,” he said. “Maybe work’s got the better of him.”

Undyne saw that dismissal coming from a mile away. “Fine. You got an excuse for that. As expected. Then what about me? I actually RECOGNIZE that lady! Somehow…”

Oh god, Undyne too?

Does this have anything to do with their elevated levels of DT?

Hmm. I do recall something about these ‘Champion Level’ monsters having more Determination than usual.

He began to worry about Papyrus. His brother should have a permanent, watertight seal on his Eye now. Gaster made the appropriate adjustments. …Right?

She continued her rant: “Blue dress, black hair with huge curls, and dual coloured glowing eyes! OBVIOUSLY A SKELETON! At first, I thought I’m suffering from an anime overdose. She’s totally the ojou-sama type, y’know! Then I saw those wanted posters.”

“You are hiding something. I know it.”
Sans didn’t want to be in this room anymore. Instead, he said: “Welp, too bad for you. I intend to take my secrets with my dust. Anything else?”

Undyne’s fist trembled. He expected her to smash it into the nearest punchable object in the vicinity: either the table or the wall. Something that can’t dodge. Knowing her, she’d prefer to sock it square in his face.

Yet… none of that happened.

“Fine,” Undyne huffed. “Have it your way.”

Quietly seething, she turned her back on an old friend.

* * *

_I should have paid more attention._

It’s been two weeks since Undyne’s accusation. Grillby’s mood did not improve. Whenever Sans tried to strike a conversation, he’d let the red-feathered patron be his mouthpiece.

Then one early morning, the bar’s lights were left turned off. His usual customers crowded at the entrance in confused muttering.

There’s a notice pasted on the door.

It’s going to be closed for an unknown length of time. Maybe permanent.

The Snowdin Innkeeper told Sans that Grillby had donated all the leftover kitchen supplies to her a few hours ago. That was the last time anyone saw him.

Sans warped into Grillby’s apartment to investigate. Scanned every nook and cranny with his Eye for clues of his whereabouts.

The cupboard was almost devoid of clothes. Fridge, also emptied. Any edible items were cleaned out too, raising more red flags for a prolonged absence.

Then he found the final piece of the puzzle. Inside the trash bin lay a half-burnt piece of a terrain map.

Sans blitzed all the way to The Core, which housed the sole exit to the Surface world: the Wormhole Gram.

He knew exactly where to go. Except, beyond the main gateway it’s too dangerous to make a straight cut through space-time.

There, a blockade also prevented any form of manual entry. Before him stood none other than Captain Undyne of the Royal Guard.

Sans glared at her. “Out of the way.”

Undyne showed him a letter with Asgore’s royal stamp. “You gotta do better than THAT!”
“When the hell--?!”

The Captain grinned ear to ear. “Section D3 of Special Ops states that both the Tactician AND the Captain of the Royal Guard have the right to authorize special agents at their own discretion. With the permission of the King, of course.”

Sans said, “And I bet King Asgore placed his seal without reading through the details.”

“Well, sucks for you that Queen Toriel isn’t even home. Maybe she’s out in the Underground somewhere inspecting construction. Or baking pies for children. How would I know? That’s your thing.”

The Dreemurr’s poor marital state bit him in the pelvis so hard.

He can’t challenge Undyne without causing more ruckus on the Queen’s reputation.

Not to mention that he’s no longer some rogue loafer without a penny to his name. He owned a business. Papyrus and his parents depended on him to keep it running.

In other words, he had responsibilities. They chained his options.

*I can’t do anything against a legal backing.*

Sans heard the mechanisms of the wormhole charging up.

“Why Grillby?” he asked. “He’s a civilian. You shouldn’t involve him at all.”

“Hey. He’s got the right physique. Humanoid, average height, and lacking extra appendages. As long as he keeps his flames under literal wraps he can blend into human society no problem!”

*That explains why he emptied out his wardrobe. Bet he purchased a ton of linen bandages too.*

“And here I thought I’m the comedian. Welp.”

The captain crossed her arms. Glanced to the side.

“Sans. I don’t know the reason… but that dream about The Sky Witch kept haunting him.”

“You can see it in his eyes. Determined. Almost like a madman. He would have attempted to leave on his own if I didn’t help. You really don’t want unauthorized leave.”

Fully charged, the wormhole chamber rumbled.

Then… silence.

Grillby was well on his way to the land under the sky.

“I just hope he’ll be back soon…” said Undyne.

Chapter End Notes

More hints, more twists.
Man, I can’t believe we managed to pump out two releases in one week. A long entry too!

As a reminder, I won’t be home from the 7th to the 19th. I can’t quite remember if I’m back in Malaysia on the 18th or the 19th. All I know is that I’m not home for half of May.

I remember at one point I said the following in the comment box: “If Mezil dies, Lucy and the rest will too.”

That was originally the case... until we had the emergency system to make the Berendin Manor float away. Somewhere down the line Editor-sama suggested that we turn that into a Cave Story island.

We went that way and never turned back.

Beware the wrath of a smart and capable widow. **Beware.** She will make you beyond sorry.

Meanwhile, I tried working on a full-body art of Mezil. Didn’t have time to complete it before I need to fly. For now, I have the linework and flats for Young Mezil Thyme.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Grillby had yet to return.

Life in the Underground continued as usual. Muffet’s cafe became the new hangout spot. The Grillby-shaped gap in everyone’s heart slowly faded into the standard routine of waking up, working, eating, and going back to bed…

But there was a lingering sense of unease. More so for people who knew him in person. Family members. Sans. Papyrus. Undyne.

Doctor Gaster.

The goopy skeleton stared at the date on his computer’s monitor. Sighed.

Sans rose a brow. “I thought you two parted on cold terms?”

“Not that cold, for goodness sake! It was amicable.” Gaster replied. “And, I… still think of him as a dear friend. In the past, I knew he would be safe in Snowdin. In his dingy bar, doing his ‘hobby’. Now I have no clue whether or not he still lives. It’s eating into me, Sans.”

“How long has it been?” he asked back.

“Let’s see. When Undyne finished her mission, it was right after that hideous Halloween festival. Today, it’s the beginning of Summer. That’s about eight months.”
“Eight months already? Damn. That’s quick.”

*Yeah… The whole deal felt like yesterday.*

“Welp. Life goes on.”

Sans left Gaster ruminating at his screen. That man… he’s not paying attention to his surroundings anymore; his mind can sure wander to strange places.

* * *

After work, Sans went to the Ruin’s gate at Snowdin.

Sat down by the door.
Leaned against it.

Then, he knocked it twice with the back of his knuckles.

“Knock knock.”

“Who’s there?” an old woman replied from the other side.

“Mikey,” Sans answered.

“Mikey who?”
“Mikey doesn’t fit into the keyhole.”

Both of them broke into laughter. Just like the old days.

Sans then asked. “How’s it going, Tori?”

“The expansion project is going well. What about you?”

“Same old, same old. Welp. As much as it could be the same without Grillby’s.”

Toriel’s turned a little morose. “Did the humans get him, I wonder?”

Sans snorted. “Probably not. He looks gentle, but dang he can give a real whoop. Something like uh… King Asgore, I guess.”

Awkwardness lingered in the air.

Sans leaned his skull against the door. “Tori. If you need any help, I’m here.”

“No,” she replied. “I had troubled you enough. Sans, I appreciate your efforts. But… I just can’t bring myself to talk to Asgore.”

“When was the last time he tried striking a new conversation?”

Toriel remained silent.

Sans grunted. “He just kept to his damn garden again, didn’t he? Undyne and I are the ones practically running the state now. Look, say the word and I’ll--”
“Please,” the queen replied. “Do not. Asgore and I… We… We made an agreement. He said he would patiently wait for me to return to him.”

“Sans, do not worry. I would not be so irresponsible as to vacate without a word. The people have placed their hopes in me.”

In the end, it’s for nothing?

………………

Welp. Guess they had bad dice rolls, picked the negative dialogue choices…

Sans shrugged. “Okay. If that’s what you want. Hey Tori, it’s your turn to make a joke.”

Toriel cleared her throat. Then, two knocks.

“Knock, knock,” she said.

“Who’s there?” he answered.

“A broken pencil.”

I know where this leads.

Don’t want to go there, but… since when do I have the final say?

He replied, “A broken pencil who?”

Toriel responded with the expected punchline. “Never mind. It’s pointless.”

“Aww c’mon Tori, you stole my thunder. That quasi-nihilistic stuff is my specialty.”

She burst into a giggle.

“Oh, don’t be so greedy. Can’t you throw a bone to a little ol’ lady like me?”

…I love this woman.

* * *

Sans fell asleep on his table. Burned too much midnight oil trying to juggle both business and national administration.

By now, Asgore had become too despondent to rule on his own.

“SAAAAAAAAANS!”

There’s the classic wakeup call.

Papyrus never fails to brighten up the day with his booming voice.

He felt his brother shaking him. But, Sans wanted to rest for a little while longer. He could attend to matters later.
Maybe another piece of equipment broke down.
Maybe the orders came late.
Maybe Queen Toriel called for him again.

It can wait. Everything can wait.

Except…

“GRILLBY IS BACK!!”

Sans shot up so fast, he almost knocked his skull into his brother’s face.

“Wait. Wait what? He’s back??”

“INDEED. AFTER A TOTAL OF 9 MONTHS, 21 DAYS, 12 HOURS, 27 MINUTES, AND 31 SECONDS!!”

Papyrus started sparkling in admiration. “THE SCOUTS TOLD US THAT HE’S DONNING THIS AWESOME ARMOUR AND AN ILLUSTRIOUS CAPE! WISH I HAVE THE AUTHORIZATION TO SEE HIM FOR MYSELF.”

Armour? He left his old gear behind.

“And for some reason he has a broadsword now. I thought the humans long ditched their old war weapons! is he doing this ‘cosplaying’ thing? maybe he found a bustling new career on the surface!”

A… sword…?

In ancient Surface tradition, swords symbolize authority. Military authority.

Sans had a bad feeling about this. To confirm his suspicions, he must inspect the symbols and decorations of this new gear.

If it’s of Dreemurr design, he won’t have anything to worry about.

But if Grillby wore any other symbols…

“Either way, you better get going before Undyne wrecks the office. I refuse to let our documents suffer unnecessary recycling!”

“Thanks bro. Tell Mom and Dad I’ll be late, ok? Cya! Bye--”

Sans was sure that his brother yelled something about straightening his tie.

But it was too late: he had already begun warping his way to The Core.

* * *

When the tornado of colours settled down, Sans found himself standing in a hollowed out cavern. The sole source of lighting came from a hanging ceiling lamp.
Though dim, Sans recognized this place by its interiors.

This looks familiar.

The ‘exit end’ of the wormhole system was situated inside of a neighbouring mountain.

I saw this in one of Gaster’s books. Sage Shirai’s testimony.

Way back during the warring times, refugees had settled at the fringes of the Dreemurr Nation while they waited for integration. Some opted for the trees, while the more earth-loving folk dug out places such as these to live in.

...Until they were forcefully rounded up for The Sealing.

He began to follow Undyne out through a root-encrusted tunnel.

Sans knew it’s not a natural structure due to its straight path. An observant person could also still find many remnants of the old wooden supports.

Then there’s the cameras. Cameras everywhere. Alphys sure as hell didn’t take any chances.

At the far end of the tunnel, they arrived at what ‘appeared’ to be a solid rock wall.

Sensors recognized their presence and confirmed their identity. In response, the barricade parted down the middle to let the duo through before closing back up. Mechanized and camouflaged, this secret door ensured nary an adventurer would ever find the one true path toward to the Gram.

Convenient.

Not much later, sunlight flooded their eyes. There, on the Surface, they met their surprise guest standing near the steep mountain edge.

It’s a knight.

An actual knight.

His back faced them; he’s looking over the land, toward the horizon where Mount Ebott rests under the hues of the setting sun.

Is it out of boredom? Sans wondered.

Curiosity? Wonder?

Or perhaps… nostalgia?

Scouts state that this person should be Grillby… but they’re not seeing any signs of his distinctive orange flame.

In contrast to the man made of literal fire, this knight of mystery clad himself in dark armour.

Face, hidden.

Helmet, equipped. And decorated with fanciful winged plates.

While he waited, cold winds blew against his ink-black cape. Crimson filigree of oak-leaf ivy lined the flapping edges, screaming high craftsmanship with each and every breeze.
The currents soon halted, letting the cape rest. It revealed the ornate details in crystal clarity. Sans now saw how the patterns converged toward the middle, weaving those twisting, delicate fractals into a distinct shape.

The Ace of Spades.

_Huh? I think… I think I’ve seen this symbol before._

_Plainly, it must be a symbol of great importance._

_Where was it again? The Crimson Hall?_

_Who does it belong to?_

The man in armour turned around. Platinum-white engravings of wind and flame contrasted against the polished black metal, glimmering under the evening sun. It gave the illusion of intense fires burning within a vast, imperceivable void.

_Could it be an impostor? I’m hoping that’s the case._

Elaborate gear often served as a proud statement of the host nation. It’s the best of their culture, expertise, and wealth condensed on a representative. The higher the rank, the more they will invest.

_But, what else can it do?_

Sans tried to scan ‘Grillby’ with his Truesight. He couldn’t retrieve much data: most of it were gibberish strings of glitched text.

_Defensive systems, huh. That gear’s not just for show._

_Just how important is this guy?_

Finally, the man of mystery spoke: “…Salutations… I am Sir Grillbz Grillenn… Knight of House Berendin…”

Undyne and Sans stared at him in shock. They’re trying to wrap their heads around the new development.

_What in the world happened? Where did it all go wrong? Why?_

After a long pause, Undyne broke through the silence with a disbelieving question.

_“Grillby?” she asked, “Is. Is that really you?”_

The man replied: “…Yes… I used to go by that name… Although that is in the past…”

_“But, you said you’re a knight of… something or another? I think… that technically makes you a traitor?!”?!?!”_

_“…Captain Undyne… I apologize… You sent me as a Dreemurr Agent… but I returned as a Berendin Knight…”_

Sans narrowed his gaze. “Depending on the circumstances, the punishment for treason is either life imprisonment, exile, or the death penalty. You’re also banned from entering our nation at this moment, of course.”
“…Heh… Funny ‘you’ should say that, comedian…”

His tone completely changed when he turned towards Sans. Lifted his chin to stare down in vindictive disdain.

He then unsheathed his broadsword and pointed it at the short one. A gleam of white light radiated from the razor sharp edge.

“What the fuck is the meaning of this?!?” Undyne sneered. “I’m giving you three seconds to explain your shit. You can’t just accuse people out of nowhere!”

She grit her teeth. Breathing rate, rising.

“…The Council of Lemuria holds Sans Serif responsible for high treason against magic-kind… For he had single-handedly destroyed The Magus Association… and caused the death of countless innocents…”

“I DON’T BELIEVE IT!!! Sans… Sans would NEVER betray anyone. And neither would Grillby!”

Spears, summoned. They spun around in mid-air, preparing to rain down upon her unfortunate target.

“En garde, you fake!”

There they go. Sans let Undyne jump in head first. Nothing he’d say could stop her anyway. Plus he wanted to see what sort of technology hid under that medieval-esque design.

In one swift swing of his broadsword, the knight sent out a strong gust of embered wind. It’s forceful enough to knock each spear out of their oncoming trajectory.

Water splashed by the side, none hitting their intended target.

The dying sparks floated down like snow. Sans’ Eye identified the magic to match his old trainer.

Undyne wanted to have a second go, but this time he stopped her.

“It really is Grillby.” Said the skeleton. “I’m getting a positive ID on his magic.”

The knight halted his offensive and stabbed his broadsword into the earth. With his hands free, he removed his helmet.

As Sans had said, it really was Grillby.

Skeleton to fire, fire to skeleton. The fishy captain didn’t know what to think. Her lips opened and closed a few times as she struggled hard to build a coherent sentence.


Grillby lowered his head to his former comrade. The guilt does exist. “…I know it looks bad… And I don’t have a good excuse… But… it’s complicated…”

“Well, quit beating around the bush then.” She yelled in his face: “Start explaining! NOW!”

A true professional through and through, Grillby didn’t flinch.
“…From the beginning?…”

“YEAH! From the beginning!”

“…It’s too long a story… Let me just ask you this… Do you still remember the woman who haunted my dreams?…”

“The curly-haired skelly ojou-sama?”

“…None other…” Grillby replied, “…The dreams grew stronger as I travelled… They became more vivid… Real… Until they stopped being mere dreams… She began to relay messages… Guiding me… Telling where to go and what to do… Protected me from Gungnir when they’re on my trail…”

“…We finally met at the tail end of my journey… And she told me the truth of this world… Of the bright future that once was… Since then I consider Sans Serif as an enemy…”

It all made sense now. Sans furrowed his brows.


_I think I know what happened. Other than Papyrus, Grillby spent the most time by her side. **Defended** her from Gungnir._

_She must have augmented his dejavu into recurring dreams. Probably counted on their positive interactions to draw out Sir Fire. Exploited the circumstances like a real RPG princess._

_It’s… super effective._

The skeleton chuckled. Shook his head. Couldn’t resist commenting on this turn of events.

“So,” he said, “You sold yourself to an influential family. Thought they could provide the proper leverage? I had hoped you’d have a bit more pride as the ex-Captain of the Royal Guard.”

That biting remark earned a piercing glare from Sir Grillen. “…Coming from you, that’s poor taste… Try saying the same before my Lady… The lonely widow whom you had created…”

…………

_I don’t have a valid comeback against that. Lucidia won’t be showing her ‘Kindness’ to the man who got her husband killed._

Undyne sighed. She had calmed down, though it’s difficult to tell if she’s simply disheartened from the turn of events.

“Okay…. ‘Sir’ Grillenn. Your new nation, what’s their goal? I don’t think you came here just to pick a fight with Sans. Not by your lonesome at least.”

Grillby answered: “…Correct… I also bring a warning to the entire Dreemurr Nation… For you see, your days are numbered…”

“…The Persona knows about the legend… In seven days he will arrive… It is inevitable…”

“…But not all hope is lost…”

He pointed towards the sky above Mount Ebott.
“…Keep your sights there…”

Sans and Undyne did as they were told.

A section of the sky began to ripple. The shadow of a tremendous structure soon materialized into full view.

They dropped their jaws.

A floating island hovered high above Mount Ebott: a fortress and a city combined into one. There’s no telling what kind of military technology they’re equipped with to survive the monster-hostile Surface for so long.

Undyne lifted a finger. “W-what’s that?”

“…It’s the last stronghold of magic-kind… remnant of The Spire… Lemuria’s lifeline…”

“…You may call it ‘The Bastion’…”

“…Captain Undyne… Sans Serif…” Grillby continued, “…The Bastion offers refuge for all monsterkind, yourself included… That said, I shall return at dawn to deliver the necessary documents…”

“…I pray that you'll put the lives of your citizens first…”

* * *

Sans sat at his office desk, reviewing the terms and conditions presented by Sir Grillenn.

In summary, Lemuria requested that the Dreemurrs calibrate the Wormhole Gram to the coordinates of their floating fortress. All those who choose to migrate to The Bastion will be given Lemurian citizenship. They can bring anything they want… as long they can carry it.

It sounds good. But Ebott’s true riches don’t lie in coins: rather it’s their resources and facilities. Gold is pointless if there’s nothing useful to trade for.

Those who choose to stay will be responsible for their own safety when Persona strikes. They now have less than a week to decide.

Then…

There were the other terms.

Lemuria and the Magi remnants will imprison and prosecute three people the moment they step onto their grounds.

First, Doctor Wendell Dominic Gaster. A major accomplice in the war against humanity. It appears that Lucidia still had records on the children’s cause of death.

Second, King Asgore Dreemurr: the other guilty party. The Lemurians state that in exchange for the safety of his citizens, he must lay down his crown. He will be put on trial with the social status of a normal monster.
Quite a fair preposition in the scope of things, Sans thought. During ancient times, the conquering humans would often punish entire nations for their defeat. Exile. Enslavement. Oppression.

At least the Lemurians don’t intend to go down that dusty path. It offered some relief.

The last name on the list was none other than his own: ‘Sans Serif’. The charges were about as grim as one would expect. Treason was not even the worst one on the list.

They’re declaring him as a ‘Category 3: Fallen’, a criminal entity who would abuse Determination in the name of personal gain.

In other words, it’s an immediate death sentence.

However, as far as Sans knew, ‘Fallen’ is a status reserved only for Living Victories under the control of their excessive power. Cases where reason is no longer possible.

He wasn’t ruled by excessive DT; none of that nasty stuff circulated in his mind. His actions were all deliberate, and that was a discrepancy that Lemuria acknowledged.

The floating nation thus offered them a simple exchange. They would give a lighter sentence to each of these three individuals, but only if the Dreemurrs collaborate against a bigger enemy. In other words, mercy for the expertise of the Underground’s brightest scientists.

Beyond Gaster, they explicitly mentioned the names of Doctor Alphys and… Papyrus.

*Signed by The Grandmaster, Lucidia of House Berendin, and Supreme Judge ‘Caraway’, huh? Surprised Cenna didn’t kick the bucket.*

*Guess if they don’t have a Living Victory, anyone with a sense of leadership can take the role. Vanquishers make good proxies with their DEMON busting capabilities.*

*Papyrus’ name concerns me. He’s awesome, but he lacks the technical genius of Doctor Alphys. I’m betting everything that the real reason they requested him is for his Eye. Two Chronographers will give them the edge they need against Persona.*

............

*A real DEMON will soon descend upon us.*

*What should I do?*

Sans opened his drawer. Reached for the underside to push a button.

A shelf soon slid aside to reveal a hidden safe bound in chains, with a skull-shaped padlock to boot. Were this a digital file, the security level translated to having multiple layers of encryption.

*Key bone, summoned.*

It glowed in a distinct rotating spiral of cyan, yellow, purple, containing Sans Serif’s unique brand of identification. When the skull padlock consumed the key, it snapped in half and let the bindings fall to the wayside.

The door opened with a slight creak.

Inside the safe rested an electronic bracer, sleeker and cleaner than the prototype. It’s clear that more time and resources were invested into this model.
The Seraph System… with all its SAVE, LOAD mechanisms intact. Even has an integrated Trap Harvester.

It's… magnificent.

It makes sense that I'd build this just in case a DEMON fell into the Underground.

Sans equipped the bracer. Tested the retracting mechanism a few times, then booted the interface.

**SERAPH SYSTEM**

**CALIBRATING**

**ACTIVE: C / Y / P**
**INACTIVE: O / B / G**

Works like a charm.

*Only problem is… the fuel supply.*

**DT: 10%**

Damn. That little, huh? Nowhere near enough to time travel.

…Hmm, might as well check if the island can survive in the first place. No point running there if Persona brings it down.

**ACTIVE: O / B / G**
**INACTIVE: C / Y / P**

The fire in his Eye burned.

However…

He did not witness the events that were about to transpire on the island.

Instead, he found himself back in the family mansion. The Chronograph was smoking. Sparking. And Gaster lay on the floor, reduced to a babbling pile of goop.

“UNCLE GASTER!” Papyrus cried out. “MOM?! DAD?!”

The old man’s dual Eyes burned wild.

No control.

No respite.

He jabbered on about ‘The End’.

Incomprehensible.

It’s a madman’s ravings through and through.

**GASTER!!! You old fool, you know DAMN WELL that you should NEVER use that thing without me!**

Papyrus went to the kitchen to grab a large clothes pail. He scooped up the whole of Gaster and
“The Chronograph…” Gaster muttered. “It’s BROKEN! Neither of you can fix it, no matter how hard you try. No one can!”

The youngster listened intently to his traumatized elder, nodding as he tried to comprehend the poor man’s rambling.

At the end, he hung the pail onto the coat rack and struck a heroic pose.

“DO NOT WORRY! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS FONT -- COOLEST HANSOMEST MOST MAGNANIMOUS VISIONARY OF THE SCIENTIFIC WORLD -- SHALL PUT HIS WORDS TO PRACTICE!”

"FROM NOW ON WE WON'T NEED GASTER GADGET #2 ANYMORE. MY AMAZING SOLUTION WILL HELP US AVOID ALL THE BAD WORLD LINES AND STEER US BACK TO ALPHA. NYEH HEH HEH HEEEEEH!!!”

“EL! PSY! CONGROO!!!”

Papyrus marched to the door.

He then looked back at Gaster one more time with his brows furrowed.

His fingers squeezed the handle. It’s as though he’s…

…Afraid.

“PLEASE ‘HANG’ IN THERE. WE’LL HAVE A CUP OF YOUR FAVOURITE TEA SOON ENOUGH.”

Thus the great scientist ran.

He ran out of the bedroom…
Down the stairs…
Past the broken Chronograph…
And straight into a room of utter pitch-black.

It’s just like that time when Tori walked into the Crimson Hall.

The secret lab…/

Sans switched back to his default colours and warped straight home.

“Papyrus!” the elder brother yelled. His entire being hoped that he saw the future soon enough to prevent tragedy.

He knew the location of Papyrus’ lab. Went there in another quick hop.

Wait.

I can’t see.

Why can’t I see anything?!

For a whole moment… he heard and saw nothing.
Nothing at all.

Papyrus?

Papyrus!

Why can't I hear my own voice?!

What's going on?!

The next thing Sans knew, he’s dragging the unconscious body of his younger brother out of the lab.

“Gaster!” Sans yelled at the top of his ribs. “Gaster, GET THE FUCK DOWN HERE RIGHT NOW!”

The elder scientist rolled down the steps. The momentary rush returned his clarity.

“Oh no,” so he muttered. “No, no, no! My boy, what have you done?”

Gaster inspected the fallen man. The more he examined, the more his liquid being quaked.

“Determination levels rising unchecked.”

“I know that already! But, WHY?!”

The more experienced man inspected the youngster’s right socket.

“The Seer’s Eye… It’s gone. Destroyed. Oh no. Papyrus must have tried to unseal himself.”

Sans felt his anger rise so fast, it’s starting to colour his own Eye.

“We both agreed that you'd keep him Sealed FOREVER!”

“I did!” The elder retorted. His hand pointed towards the secret lab. “I didn’t help him!”

“Then how the hell does he know?!”

“Your brother is not a moron, Sans! He is an independant man of agency with the ability to do his own research!”

That stark reality struck Sans like a ton of bricks.

Papyrus will always be a hero at heart. It doesn’t matter which profession he chooses, two of his behaviours remained consistent:

His glory-hog statements.
And his genuine love for others.

In his now-scientifically tuned mindset, Papyrus realised that one day the machine alone won’t be enough, so he studied how to break the Seal all by himself. To disastrous results.

“W-What… what happens to Seers who go blind?”

Gaster trembled as he answered. “The Eye is our proof of human descent. Upon awakening, we start generating levels of Determination that our magic-based bodies could never withstand. If… if we lose it… it means we’re unable return to safe levels. Ever.”

Papyrus began to ripple. It’s one of the signs of an imminent DT overdose.
“No. That’s not true.” Sans said, resolute. “I have a way.”

The Blade of the Seraph snapped out of its sheath.

* * *

Sans took Papyrus’ immobile body to the Hotland Lab. Alphys immediately attended.

They did the scans. Administered medication. Then put him under observation in their medical bay.

The elder brother hadn’t moved from his seat for the past 15 hours. He kept staring at the red six-winged Mark planted on Papyrus’ sternum.

*He looks so peaceful.*

With whatever reserves he had, he commanded the Mark to ‘burn’ Determination. It’s feeding on its host to maintain itself.

Can it last indefinitely? He wanted it to, but the System’s reserves slowly ticked down:

3% remaining.

Doctor Alphys returned with a clipboard. She stood by Sans’ side and looked at Papyrus in sad silence.

“T-that… that is quite an impressive piece of tech.” she said, “The, um, result of your thesis. Right?”

“Yeah,” Sans answered. He showed Alphys the bracer strapped on his arm. “It’s the ultimate Aspect emulator.”

“This ‘Mark’… D-do all humans know how to use this magic?”

“Only those with a Red SOUL.”

“I… I see… Then, Chara. They could have done this too? Had they lived longer?”

“Maybe,” Sans replied. “It takes a certain level of proficiency to manifest that symbol. Nevertheless, they were groomed by Gungnir, so the potential is there.”

He glanced at Alphys.

“So. What about Papyrus?”

She winced. Gripped the clipboard tighter. Hesitated to answer.

He kept his tone casual. Tried to not pile any more sadness onto her shoulders. “C’mon Al. Out with it. Let’s not waste any more time.”

With shaking hands, she handed over the data.

He read the diagnostics. Understood why she’s so reluctant to speak.

“No hope, huh?” He replied.
Alphys started to cry. “I—I’m sorry. Papyrus failed to respond to any stimuli. This is worse than ‘falling down’. He. He’s a vegetable.”

“More vegetable than Vegetoid?”

The weeping intensified. Alphys buried her face into her hands.

“Sorry,” said Sans. “That was bad.”

“I’m sorry too.” The poor lizard hiccuped between her sobs. “I—I shouldn’t be crying.”

“Nah. You’re his friend.”

*Maybe it’s better for her to take leave.*

Sans said: “Mind leaving us alone for a while?”

“O-of course…” Alphys shuffled herself out of the room on first notice. Ran straight into Undyne’s arms and started hugging her.

The doors closed.

Sans began to contemplate on how this save his little brother.

*…RESET is out of the question.*

*Amalgamation’s the only way to go.*

*Now, if what Gaster said is true, a blinded Seer generates enough DT for the body to lose structural integrity in a matter of minutes.*

*Fatal for a monster. But, nowhere near the levels needed to maintain the Mark.*

He inspected the Determination gauge:

2% remaining.

*...I’m running a net negative here. Maybe I should let him go in peace. I mean, having him converge with Gaster… it won’t be the same.*

*He wouldn’t be free either. Stuck to that old man and so on.*

*…What about Mom and Dad? They’ll miss him…*

*No. The future’s looking grim. Maybe it’s a blessing in disguise if he leaves this world first.*

*Better act quick. Before the geezer returns.*

He got off the chair. Stared at the underside of the Seraph System and took one deep, long breath.

*Sor—Sorry Paps. I… did my best.*

*Goodbye.*

His brother’s SOUL moved to the surface of his chest.

Then…
The blade plunged within. Rewrote the Mark to instead consume what little points of health remained.

In one short moment, The Great Papyrus was no more. The only clues to his former self lay in a leftover pile of clothes.

Sans expected to call Alphys in to prepare for the funeral. Instead, his Eye switched on. Scanned the remains for distinct signs.

*I’m looking for an ‘essence’?*

The dust in the chest area sparkled brighter than the rest.

He unfurled the scarf, folded it over, and dug under the pile clothes to scoop up Papyrus’ dusty remains. Tied the red fabric into a bag and cradled it in his arms.

Undyne and Alphys then met him in the lobby area.

“Sans?” The fish asked, “What happened? …Did you really give up? Don’t tell me you let your brother die?!?”

“Nope. I’m taking him home to Mom and Dad,” answered the skeleton.

*What?*

“Don’t worry. He won’t become a disfigured suffering goop. There’s not enough dust for that. He will simply live on as another part of Doctor Gaster. Come and visit us tonight for some spaghetti.”

The girls began crying in joy.

*Wait. What?*

*What am I doing?*

*Am I willingly amalgamating Papyrus…?!*

*No no no no! What the hell, me?! Stop it! If you merge Paps with Gaster he’s just going to overpower him! He’s a prison in the shape of a man!*

*He did that for YEARS to Mom and Dad!*

*How can you forget?!!*

*STOP!!!*

No matter how hard he tried, Sans watched this look-alike stranger walk further and further away.

*This isn’t real.*

He told himself: *This CAN’T be real!*

*I’m in a vision.*

*I’m in a vision.*

*I’m in a vision.*

*I’m in a vision.*
[Why so surprised?]

The elder whispered in the back of his mind.

[After all, I did request for your explicit permission to control the Seraph System.]

[Now… Don’t you worry, child.]

[This ‘Play of Possibilities’ is only just beginning.]

Chapter End Notes

And yes Papyrus went full on Hououin Kyouma from Stein's Gate. If you've watched that show, you will get all the references. You haven't... try it. Quite a slow startup but it's a good time-travel anime.

P.S As tempting it is to comment about the cliffhanger, I do wonder about your thoughts with the rest of the scene. Grillby, Paps, ect.
Butterfly Trick

Chapter Notes

I AM HOME!

More like, I've been home for a while but I didn't have any new content to post until today. The trip in the Netherlands is great! Tulips. Tulips everywhere.

Now first thing's first.

(Bleep tornado fang bleep) rhymes. Seriously rhymes. I argh don't even gnfjdngjfdsgdf I've never rhymed for so long before. Editing them was even worse. Thanks to Congar and Editor-sama for helping out.

On a lighter note, have some young Mezil Thyme. He still sports the same design today, except greyer haired. (He seriously looks biseinen)

It's going to take a while for me to get back into gear. Apologies if things are moving slower than expected.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You couldn’t believe you’re still ‘in the game’.

When Sans told you to remember your promise, you had thought you lost the battle for sure: time rewinding and so forth.

But instead, he got encapsulated in a shell of red light.

It’s the Trap Harvester. But unlike your botched attempt of using it on Mezil, it swallowed him whole.

Why is this happening?

Did Tsunderjudge come back with a vengeance?

Your curiosity made you walk closer. But then, a loud pop startled you.

Okay. THAT is definitely not a part of his plan.

Was it… a sign of malfunction?

Red electrical sparks ran across the surface of the bubble, threatening to leap out at any unfortunate bystander.

Yep. You called it.

It would be wise to step back now. You really, really, REALLY don’t want that swirling mass of Determination blowing up in your face.

…You’re a little afraid of what’s going to happen next.
You wonder: what should you do with Papyrus?
How are you going to get off this tower?

Nevertheless, you thought that you should try to help your friend. Somehow. Maybe by making him lie on his back?

You knelt beside Papyrus.

He looks… severely injured.

Now you’re wondering if you should touch him at all. Your monster first aid knowledge is kind of lacking, after all.

Papyrus. He smiled despite the dire situation. Did he zap his brain or something?

He tried to speak. You leaned over to listen.

“UNCLE GASTER…” Said Papyrus, “HE MADE IT THROUGH.”

Gaster? What about Doctor Gaster? Isn't he waiting back in Ebott Town?

Despite asking, Papyrus couldn’t answer.

You then heard footsteps against the stone arena. Help is finally here! Thank the stars.

But when you turned around… There’s no-one. Odd.

Your heart skipped a beat when you felt something brush against your arm.

The heck?!

A familiar cold, dark wind blew through you. Chilling.

Figures of grey soon ebbed into your view. Misshapen. Blank-faced. They faded in and out of reality as they walked past.

In their short moments of visibility, you made out the following shapes:

A shortie with a round head.
A tall lanky figure.
A goopy head… and nothing else.

Were they Amalgamates? Halfmalgamates? Ghosts?

Not the backup you expected… If they’re friendly to begin with.

“Hey Frisk. It's been a while.”

You gasped! You tried to focus your sights on this new translucent shadow of a person.

…Goner Kid? You asked if it’s really them!

The kid chuckled. “So you remembered me after all. You didn’t need to. But, I’m grateful.”

The two of you hugged, but your arms phased through.

Oh well. You’re used to that with Napstablook.
Soon your antics attracted the attention of the other grey figures. When you greeted them, their forms solidified and stabilized.

Oh. You recognize them now. Gaster’s followers, right?

The short guy nodded. “Nice surprise, right?”

The tall one stood next you and held out his empty hand. You shook it back. He’s the one who speaks in rhymes.

He smiled at you. “It’s hard to be blue when your memory holds true.”

You noticed that he’s still carrying a head around.

Wasn’t that ‘a piece of him’?

“There is little ponder for your wonder. It is indeed my master, the Great Doctor Gaster.”

Right on cue, the head huffed. “It’s rude to talk about someone who’s listening. Goodness, Child of Mercy. Didn’t anyone teach you that?”

Mister Goopdoc! You never thought that you’d be so happy to see him.

“No apology?” Gaster said. Nitpicky as ever. “Oh well, your sweet enthusiasm is enough for now. Papyrus needs immediate attention. Gentlemen, let’s get to work!”

The followers tended to Papyrus.

Gaster furrowed his brows in sorrow and guilt. “My dear boy, we apologise for putting you through this. You’ll be better soon enough.”

The doctor conjured many pairs of detached hands, all made up of his special brand of magic. Got right to work with the healing, writing glyphs around Papyrus’ Eye. You had seen this procedure before. It was after witnessing Mezil’s battle with Persona.

His assistants meanwhile built a Gram on the floor. You started counting the number of major points, followed by the smaller ones layered on top.

…Things got complicated really fast. Guess you won't be describing this set.

You asked the doctor if he’ll break the Barrier after stabilizing Papyrus. Return Tsunderjudge’s timey wimey powers too.

Half of your answer was on his troubled expression. “Child of Mercy, that’s the first thing I tried. Unfortunately, the quirks of Determination dictate that I don’t have the strength to break Sans’ Marks. I thus concentrated on keeping him preoccupied within an immersive illusion.”

And hence the red bubble?

“Indeed. During the battle with Papyrus, I took the opportunity to request explicit control over the Seraph System. Fighting on his side… allowed me to regain his trust.”

…You understand. Carry on.

“I then rigged the system to trigger the Trap Harvester on himself, effectively encasing him in his own prison. It’s far from perfect though. There is a key weakness in your heirloom.”
Which is?

“Negative feedback. The Trap Harvester is meant to remain outside its own field of influence. Never inside. I’m relieving some of the strain by keeping Sans inactive. But, it’ll be a literal matter of time before he discovers my ploy.”

When that happens, he’ll try to escape.

“Indeed. For now I’ll try to exploit his sense of curiosity to lengthen the duration. Even then… there’s a limit.”

“Excuse me, I must concentrate.”

You let the team resume their work.

Moments of intense medical magic passed. Not a single word was exchanged.

Goner Kid got worried. “Doctor, is there something wrong?”

You focused on his expression. You hate to admit that the kid was right.

What’s happening?

Gaster realized that he couldn’t hide the facts anymore.

He said: “These burns are more severe than I expected. Worse still, they’ve etched into his SOUL. And my healing capabilities are nowhere near the level of the Magi’s Chronographer.”

They sighed. “Guess that’s the end of his career. Maybe it’s not too bad. He’ll keep his normal job at the cafeteria at least.”

You heard the little head grumble.

“Ugh, some ‘positive’ statements you have there, young lady.”

She returned Gaster’s words with a sad smile. “I learned to be realistic a long time ago.”

A girl, huh? You had a hunch, but you weren’t sure.

“Hogwash! I’ve had enough dealing with Sans’ nihilism as is. Do you have ANY idea how stressful it was? One can only balance the promise of victory against the stark bleakness of ‘reality’ so much.”

Gaster’s right. You too refused to surrender. There has to be a solution somewhere! It’s so close. Maybe too close. Like, right under your nose.

Right under your nose…

A mental lightbulb switched on in your mind. Waved your hands around trying to explain how your SAVE star could change colours.

You made a green star and showed it to Doctor Gaster.

This one’s for healing, right?

You watched his frown turn upside down. He’s hopeful.

“That sounds promising.” He said. “But first, get rid of that terrible seraphim stain.”
He pointed at your chest. Oh! That's right, Sans had planted his brand on you.

You stepped aside. Don’t wanna get anyone caught in your supernova.

Charge up! Psyche! Fill yourself with Determination!

Your SOUL shone bright.

Three.
Two.
One.

Boom!

With your sheer inner fire, you shattered Sans’ Mark.

Heh. That took a lot less than Mezil’s.

“Good, good. Now, come here you two, I think we have a possible solution.”

“Me?” Asked Goner. She’s as surprised as you are.

“Indeed. You were once born a monster after all. Those magical senses of yours will be miles more sensitive than Frisk’s.”

Born…?

Goner Kid was not another fragment of the goopy doctor?

“Another time, young one. Papyrus comes first.”

Right. What do you need to do?

“Child of Mercy, this is the time you show your namesake.” He pointed at the nasty glowing burns. “Conjure a Cyan Mark for me.”

Huh? You expected him to ask for Green instead.

“Rushed healing will cripple my boy for life. Therefore it’s imperative that we do this right. Deliberate focus is required.”

Cyan, the colour of Patience.
It’s tough to be patient in times like these, but that’s when you need to be the most.

You puffed your cheeks as you switched the star into Cyan mode. A sky blue shine now sat in the palm your hand in a distinct stoic manner. It’s cool to the touch.

What’s next?

“Apply this unto his wounds. Despite its differing hue, that Mark still contains plentiful Determination. Make sure you taint nothing with killing intent. Not even an indirect one toward Sans. That’s the worst of poisons.”

Got it. Keep a pure heart.

Turning to the grey child, Gaster said: “Trace my framework as close as you can. The human won't
“As for me,” he continued. “I’ll be assisting our rescue team.”

How?

“By untangling Sans’ intentional convolution. Alright then, I’ll leave Papyrus in the hands of you responsible folk. No nihilism allowed. Stay determined.”

Goner Kid nodded. “Okay doc. We’ll do our best.”

You gave him a thumbs-up of positivity.

The Gaster Head froze. Unmoving and lifeless. It seems he’s gone back inside the Seraph System.

You told her that you two should get to work.

“Yup.” She agreed. The grey child then summoned a couple of spikes, hovering them over Papyrus’ wounds. “Ready? Stay on point.”

You stretched out your hands, showing your most determined face.

Let’s do this!

Goner Kid’s magic moved at a slow, steady pace. You applied your power in their general direction.

It reminded you of painting within the boundaries of a colouring book.

The act of ‘casting’ was hard to put into words. It’s like trying to explain to someone what goes through your mind when you walk. Or when you move your arm. It’s something neurological that just sort of happens.

Concentrate. Focus. Follow the guide and everything will be alright.

It’s working! Your power’s slowly dimming the intensity of the red zones. They’re fading back into his usual bone-white colour, as it should be.

Just when everything seemed fine, Goner Kid said: “Frisk, you’re using too much.”

Your star flickered. Oh, crap! You forgot to control the flow! Calm down and scale it back--

“Too little.”

Oh crap oh crap oh crap. Gah! You thought all that crunchtime with Cenna would have resolved this beginner’s problem.

You managed to get your act together… Now, moving on to the torso.

Still, Gaster’s question crept into your mind. It’s like a mosquito bite, irritating and itchy.

You glanced at the Gaster Followers. Other than the mud-head, the rest of the guys resembled people you had come across before.

You always assumed that they were just illusions created by Gaster’s mind.

But, if Goner Kid was born a monster…
Your control began to slip again.

“Please calm down, Frisk,” Goner said. “You’re making me nervous too.”

S-sorry!

The trio of followers caught on to your anxiety. Their blankness stared square at you, further adding pressure.

“We’re open to questions, so you know,” said the short one.

The rhymer added, “Tell us what you ail, and we’ll confess from head to tail.”

Really?

The mud-head smiled. “Doctor Gaster trusts you!”

You took a deep breath, before asking the all-important questions:

Who are they?
Where do they come from?
What’s their connection to Gaster?
Why do they look like people you know?
Why are they ghosty-ghosty grey?

Why is Goner Kid a girl?

Answers, please?!?!?!

The followers looked at each other for a moment.

Pointing his stubby arm at the rhymer, the shortie said: “You want to do the honours?”

You’re not sure if you’d prefer to have rhymes for exposition, but whatever. You want to get back to Papyrus ASAP.

So the tall dude began:

“Who are we your questions chime? We are those trapped in this realm beyond time. Once the clock unwound, some are never found. Replaced, but not erased.”

“As the cause for our existence ceased, we became like the deceased. Devoid of the living’s breath, our SOUL forever tethers on the brink of death.”

“To us the mortal coil was nothing but a memory: fond recollections of moments that will never be. For as far as we could calculate, we saw ourselves constrained by fate.”

“No hope, nor way to cope. In the endless void, there is naught to be enjoyed.”

That sounds. Sad…

Papyrus also mentioned something of the sort: the possibility of reverting before one’s conception…

“Then, one day, the Great Gaster scattered. Surprise, surprise, he led us all to meet. It was then the fetters of our doldrum shattered. Our plan was quite a cheat.”
A… cheat?

“Yeah.” The mud head exclaimed. Plain and simple. “It’s all about the FUN!”

FUN?

“Never heard of FUN values?”

Uh, no?

“It stands for the Functional Universe Number,” explained the shortie. “Think of it like tuning to the right radio signal. Every timeline has its own unique signature ID. If you manage to find a valid number, you can start building pathways to get from point A to point B.”

“At least, that was Doctor Gaster’s proposition. It seems the actual technology is not new and jazz. The Magi have a different name: the Spirit Gate.”

Whoa. It’s like the entrance to The Crimson Hall?

“By concept. But… that’s like comparing a simple wooden door to an electronic gate; the Magi added lots of extras.”

Ahuh. And that’s how they met you?

“Yes,” said the rhymer. “It is as you assess. Many doors of grey we made, allowing us to leave the shade.”

But, if that’s the case… why didn’t they just come back? They made a Spirit Gate! That’s the converter they need!

“Upon arrival, we did not get a full revival. Strange as it may be. No one else but you could really see. Perhaps it’s me, but I wager it has to do with your brilliant red DT.”

The head too, shook his head. “I… I think we entered a timeline in which we had never existed. Free of traces of our original selves. No physical body, no identity.”

“It’s not like I intentionally eavesdropped or anything… but remember what that bigshot Magus told you? The thing about matter becoming data?”

Judge Thyme’s words echoed in between your ears:

“Your minds are transferred into a digital mockup for the Crimson Hall. Your SOULS are real. Your bodies… not quite.”

“Conversion is a one way street: you simply can’t turn data back into matter. Right now your real body is in some form of suspended animation. Meaning, you still have somewhere to return to.”

“…We don’t have that luxury.” Goner Kid added.

You dropped your jaw.

Their sad faces explained everything. Your heart ached.

She shrugged her armless shoulder. “It’s okay, Frisk. We’re used to it.”

…No! Not on your watch!
You turned to Papyrus. Told him that once everything has settled down… once everything is back to normal… you’ll do whatever it takes to SAVE Gaster’s followers. Maybe ask Alphys to give them a shiny robot body just like Mettaton!

Then, they can rebuild their lives in Ebott Town.

“NYEH. HEH. HEH.” He struggled to laugh in the midst of his twitching. “I… THE GREAT PAPYRUS. NEVER… REGRETTED BELIEVING IN YOU. HUMAN.”

Filled with renewed conviction, you refocused on your skelefriend’s affliction.

Once more, you ready your palm. Your heart is calm.

Though you had a feeling the real battle’s only just beginning, you need to stop your head from spinning.

No time to mope; there’s always hope.

Crap. Now you’re doing it too.

This is worse than those bad puns ‘certain’ people do.

…………………………

Never. Mind.

Chapter End Notes

I’m convinced that my editor secretly likes rhyming puns, despite the grievances.
Chapter Notes

This was originally written as a part of Chapter 123, then we thought it would be better if it's split. Content and flow reasons, so on.

First thing's first, the commissioned piece for Young Mezil is complete! Behold his tsunderness.

Some warning for this chapter. This is Gaelic's POV, which means looking through the perspective of someone with serious mental issues. It's not even a standard problem, so no googlable diagnostics can apply here. Certainly by no means he is representative of all people with mental issues. It can be painful to read. It can even make you try scream 'Stop that!'

But if everything can be solved with normal talking, we wouldn't have therapists.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The thought of Sans Serif made Gaelic’s spine shiver. It sickened him more than a rotting, maggot-less corpse.

Of all the skeletons in the world, that pudgy city slicker had to be his direct comparison.

Disgusting to look at.
Worse to tangle with.

And yet they shared too much in common.

The labyrinth stretched on. Its twists and turns made traversing more time consuming than it should be.

Floor above.
Ledge below.
Stairs. More stairs. Always more stairs.

Undyne had to lift poor King Asgore on her back, lest he gets left behind.

Groaning, she said. “One more fucking STEP and I’m gonna NGAAAAAAAH!!”

It’s a sentiment shared by everyone.

I’m being useful now, aye?

Silly, silly thought. Ah be doing what M’lord and M’lady wishes. Of course!

Leading the gang through the maze made Gaelic happy. Perhaps a little bit too much.

At least he felt as if he had some sort of purpose. Nothing’s worse than having none.

In the midst of their traversal, the chambers began to shift.
“What now?” Queen Toriel exclaimed.

The walls slid away.
The stairs levelled.
The ground straightened.

The world of Megalovania transformed into a white, flat plain of nothingness. It stretched on as far as the eye can see in an almost truly empty space.

Disorientating.

Fortunately for the team, Gaelic had the eyes and senses to keep them on the straight path--

His remaining pride was then dashed to pieces by the sudden formation of a gigantic biscuit statue of… Doctor W.D. Gaster. His gentlemanly form provided a towering, smug landmark.

“Gaster-sensei?!?!?” Alphys gasped. “How did he? When did he? Oh, right. We, uhm, used him as a glorified radio.”

Lucidia commented, “It appears that he’s aware of our plans and had obtained the means to assist us.”

“THANK YOU SENSEI YOU ARE SO COOL!!!”

Whether or not he realised it, Gaelic slowed down while Undyne charged right ahead, with Asgore involuntarily tagging along.

A memory floated by. An echo.

Gaelic remembered the day when he first laid his eyes on the legendary princess of the sky. She was fourteen and he was nine, and the mere vision of her enough to seal his love beyond a fleeting infatuation.

The youngster moved Heaven and Earth for her attention. Climbed up a chestnut tree to shake some of its fruit loose. Showed off his skill in making a fire with nothing more than a stick, a branch, and the chestnut’s fallen leaves.

Delighted, she was. They shared the snack together, while having an engaging conversation about the nutritional qualities of chestnuts and the importance of their lumber.

Both kind and smart: how he wanted to live with her forever.

The elders, however, told him that she’s destined to marry a man outside of Lemuria. Even without the future insight, he had neither name nor fortune to court her.

He agreed.

Years later, he sold all to have his face remade. Gave his remaining wealth to Garamond. This new look is a ‘more suitable’ one, the naysayers whispered.

He agreed.

What else should he be than a beast? After all, he mauled a schoolmate for insulting his mother. Bit off fingers. Ripped the flesh with his teeth. Surely he doesn’t belong in normal society.

He agreed.
So he abandoned the life of a person: to embrace the wilderness once limited to the novels in his parents’ bookshop.

It’s exhilarating as it is harsh. Addictive, one might say.

The deep, degrading hunger never ended, dragging him further down the rocky waves between sanity and depravity, toward the realm of unadulterated instinct…

That concluded the tale of Gaelic Blanc.

…Until he saw the man whom Lucidia was promised to.

He fell in love all over again.

Back then, Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme had taken office for only a few months. Gaelic came to him upon the private request of Lady Lucidia.

The couple had two distinct reactions to his pledge of service. One of confusion, the other of alarm.

“Shackles? For me? What am I supposed to do with these?” the human asked, unintentionally innocent. Mezil had yet to know the full scope of magic history.

On the other hand, Lucidia was a learned scholar through and through: “Young man, I’ll have you know that slavery is illegal! Even if it’s voluntary.”

He remembered how he refused to let the opportunity pass by. Offered his entire being to the wedded Berendin couple. It didn’t matter if his methods were questionable or dangerous: he had nothing to lose.

The couple discussed in private. The wait was long and agonizing.

Will they accept? Or will they reject?

The lack of answers gnawed at him more than what the future may or may not bring.

At last, they returned. Lucidia carried a paper folder, while Mezil brought a box to keep the shackles.

Thus Mezil said: “My wife and I have come to a decision. We will accept your offer, but we will not keep you chained as a beast. You had saved me from the clutches of Persona before. I refuse to let those talents go to waste.”

Lucidia handed him the folder.

“If you sign these papers, you’ll become a Knight of House Berendin. Of course, we will provide all the necessary training for your newly assigned role.”

In print, he had read the promised words: lifelong employment as a ‘Tracker’, one of the many specialist classes of the Magus Association. They focus on wilderness survival, scouting, and hunting down targets.

Gaelic remembered crying out of joy, kissing both their feet and the ground they stood on. It’s a twisted loyalty, befitting him, like a pup bowing down before its master.

*That cinnamon roll had once asked if ah be a dog, that mangiest o’ scallywags. Hit me heart so close. Too close.*
denied any trace o’ those eternal-juvenile dumbfook wannabe-wolves.

What the fook was ah thinkin’?

Snakes care fer none other than themselves. Ah care too much.


In the midst of his reminiscence, they arrived at the South Pole.

Toriel’s strange fluffy canine companion ran straight right up to the Gaster statue. It jumped around,
barking and growling at the towering man: ready to sink those tiny teeth into its oversized prey.

The Queen of Monsters picked up the dog and tried to calm it down.

“Shush, you naughty dog. There’s nothing to fight.”

Undyne set her King down on solid ground. One could see the caution in her movements as she
surveyed the surroundings. “Ooookay I'm getting creeped out by this,” she said. “Is this a trap?”

Gaelic slapped a hand on his skull.

“No offence, but ya should have asked that question before ya ran all the way here.”

Doctor W.D. Gaster, huh? Ain’t that the criminal who supported war? If he ever was a foe, the
bounty on his skull will be great.

But he be on our side now… Along with the rest o’ this chummy gang.

He switched on his Eye. Scanned the sky, the land, and the rock beneath.

Good news: no traps. All clear. No hidden scumbaggery, characteristic of Sans Serif.

Furthermore, the False Barrier’s mechanisms didn’t change positions, remaining firm at the entrance
to the labyrinth.

Bad news that might invalidate the good: Sans had buried the mock Aspects deep beneath multitudes
of stone-hard annoyance in true lazy yet resourceful fashion. Sealed by the stolen Determination of
Gaelic’s master, nonetheless.

What weaselry be this?!

Damn ya through the grinder, Sans Serif. Be trampled plant food fer eternity!

If it weren’t fer yer thieving tricks, the goopy doc would have brought up yer infernal machine in a
jiffy.

If only he had his steed to dig through. Gaelic’s sharp phalanges tried to claw into the Mark on his
chest.

This curse o’ mine, how wretched it be.

If only ah could tear out me Psychia and live.

If frowning had a sound, it would have come from Alphys. “I-I don’t think we can manually tunnel
down. The ground regenerates too fast for any attempt.”

Lucidia then said: “We may not need any extra tools. According to my estimations, we have all the manpower required to destroy The Barrier in a single strike. Doctor Alphys, care to assist?”

“O-of course! What do you need?”

What followed after were a whole lot of math and physics. Gaelic’s mind tuned out from the numbers.

He was more of a language person. Poetry. Prose. Lyrics. Scriptures. The deeper they express the heart, the better. Read many works of Romance in his lifetime.

Did ah feel the frustrations o’ M’lady?

He sensed a scratch against the drawing board. Lucidia’s current temper was much like the undercurrents of the ocean: calm on the surface, roiling underneath.

“Is there something wrong?” Asked Alphys.

“Yes.” Lucidia declared, “I am unable to ascertain a satisfactory success rate. There are factors that are either missing or below par.”

“M’lady, what impedes us?”

“We are agreeing on the following setup: first, a heat drill to burn away the blockade and expose the false Barrier. Second, Captain Undyne’s ultimate spear to dive straight into the hole.”

“For the setup, we need two power cells, a focused amplifier, and a targeting system. I have my fullest trust in Gaelic’s scouting capabilities and Captain Grillenn’s Champion strength. However, since King Asgore is still under the influence of local anesthesia, I’ve been trying to estimate if Queen Toriel could provide the necessary backup…”

Gaelic understood the context now. He had served Lady Lucidia long enough to know her train of thought.

“Should the King fail, it might be too exhausting for Queen Toriel to carry the weight. She may not be able to deliver the proper output.”

“If that happens, we won’t drill nearly deep enough for Captain Undyne’s spear to reach target. And none of them have enough stamina for a second attempt.”

All it took was one moment, one snap,
One wrong move… to put the lives he cared for in danger.

If King Asgore was at his peak, they wouldn’t have this conversation.

How Gaelic’s heart ached with guilt.

The people under his care focused on him. Their worried expressions further added pressure.

What can he say?
What should he say?

Where should he even begin? That the plan might be doomed because of his poor response to Sir
Latinoros, the exemplar of right living?

Because he failed to detect the fallen angel before that filth descended upon Judge Thyme?

Because as lowly a creature as himself masqueraded under the guise of ferocity and skill?

Gaelic felt his bones shiver. His instincts wound tighter and tighter, wanting nothing more but to hide from these… faces.

Who were they again? The confusion crept in.

“Gaelic Blanc!”

Lady Lucidia’s command snapped him back the right way.

“Recite your identity.”

Those words…

His lord Mezil used the same phrase many, many times before. Always brought him back.

Gaelic breathed in deep. “Me name be Gaelic Blanc, House Berendin’s Tracker. Me purpose be to hunt me Master’s prey and to ensure the survival o’ the lost.”

“Recite your current mission.”

“Ah be yer eyes and ears, a messenger to relay ye plans.”

“Good.” Said Lucidia. “Please explain the circumstances and prepare them for the operation. We shall take the risk. Perhaps King Asgore’s ‘will’ can overcome this predicament.”

Gaelic’s emotions calmed down. At least, for now.

He did everything as he was told. Not a single detail missed or rushed.

The Ebott folk stared back with wide-open eyes. They’re amazed. Baffled, even.

Undyne pointed at herself, asking: “Dude. Seriously? We have enough power to turn ourselves into some epic awesome weapon that pierces the earth?!?”

“Aye,” the snake nodded. “Ah know what yer history books say: that we monsters be weaker than men. ‘Tis was true fer us too, until the rise o’ science. Since then, those who remained on the Surface learned how to refine our magic.”

“That’s so scary cool!”

Toriel shook her head at the comment.

Meanwhile the rhythmic glows of the false Barrier continued to taunt.

Gaelic conjured the simplest of Grams: a mere triangle within a circle.

For as long as he could remember, he had no talent in the art of Arcanagrams. Never quite progressed beyond the rudimental elementaries, far below the minimum standard for Seers.

“Right in the centre here,” he said.
The man of fire nodded to the instructions. “…Noted…”

Gaelic recognized those clothes ever since Sir Grillenn entered the picture. He donned Mezil Thyme's bartender uniform, complete with the scents he had come to love.

*Interesting. ‘Tis knight o' fire carries himself well. Quiet and courteous. Methinks the Lord and Lady might consider him a good friend.*

*Aye, how fates twist and turn. Pity M'lady banned his establishment fer M'lord’s sake. Ah can see him having to visit the place in the future on the grounds o’ honour.*

………………………

*Ah wonder…*

*How does M'lord fare now?*

*Is he well?*

*Is he in pain?*

The royal couple and the captains began their discussion. Gaelic kept watch, but it's nothing that he didn't already know.

Queen on the far left. King on the far right. Knight Bartender in the centre.

His senses remained sharp despite the wandering. The wild favours the alert. He noticed that Captain Undyne stood a little too close to ground zero.

Gaelic asked, “Anything else yer need to know?”

“Me?” the fishy captain grinned. “Naw. I’m just prepping for the big strike!”

Lady Lucidia marked a note of caution on Undyne’s profile. Reports suggest that the ‘uncommon sense’ sometimes get the better of her.

“Forgive me fer ruinin’ yer dreams, but if ya stand there yer gonna be a roasted fish on a stick.”

“Oh…” The flash of disappointment lasted for only half a second. Then, with all her gusto she proclaimed: “Then I’ll just JUMP from a safe spot! Yeah! I think I can do that!”

Gaelic didn’t need to be an educated scientist to realise that said distance was too far away to strike in time. But any nearer and she’d only end up getting herself killed.

An impasse…

Then, the adorable Doctor Alphys spoke up. “Mister Gaelic? Will you help me pass a message to Undyne?”

He replied, “Aye, sure thing.”

*“Instead of jumping from afar, make a heat shield! Y-you see, heat travels upwards. All she needs to do is to brace the initial impact. Like… the rival from that most recent anime we watched! Yeah! It’s that battle against the fire woman! Tell that to Undyne. She’ll know what I'm talking about.”*

Cenna’s guilty pleasure, aye? She’s a huge nerd with media.
Gaelic had watched some of that spunk’s recommendations before. Fun, but a bit too taxing on his nature-tuned senses.

“Okay…” He’s not sure what will come out of it, but it’s not his place to question.

The moment he delivered Alphys’ tip, Undyne had a twinkle of inspiration in her eye.

“Holy hell, she’s right!!” Exclaimed the fish. “Alright snakeface, tell me where I should stand!!”

Gaelic planted a bone stake at the most suitable distance.

The captain went straight there. Used her spear to cut out a big, rectangular slice of the ground and charged it up with Kindness.

The whole thing was then piledrived straight into the reverting cracks. It healed around the base, turning the piece into a sturdy wall.

Undyne had the sparkle of a kid who completed her first crafts project.

“Is this good enough?”

Bony brow, raised. “Colour me impressed!”

*Good synergy. Doctor Alphys be the brain and Captain Undyne be the brawn.*

*Oy Cor blimey, this couple. They be giving me cavities. Lovable dorks.*

*…Wish me love fer M’lord and M’lady ain’t so tainted…*

“Well then, ‘tis be the cue fer me to skedaddle far away.”

But consequences decided that his due had yet to be paid. The King lost balance once again, setting himself on the floor so that he doesn’t hurt himself in a fall.

The worst had begun to unfurl.

Gaelic rushed over to Asgore.

“Yer Majesty!” he yelled.

“Sorry to trouble you again, good sir.” The king replied. “I can’t seem to lift my arms. Could you hold them up?”

“Won’t ah be cinder, dust, and ash in thy presence? If that be the cost fer me penance…”

“Oh no. My wife and I decided to conjure the sun directly above Sir Grillenn’s head, far away from us. Though I apologize in advance should it still sting.”

“It be fine, Yer Majesty.”

At this rate, Gaelic wouldn't mind dying. Perhaps the naysayers were right…

But he had yet to complete his duty.

Gaelic stood behind Asgore and lifted the mighty arms up high: intimidating compared to his own scrawny limbs. Boss Monsters project a sense of awe, whether they realise it or not.
The King said his thanks. Steadied his feet. Asked if everyone was ready for the final step.

They confirmed. Lo and behold, the Dreemurrs showed why they’re the bosses.

A great white sun then hovered over the knight of fire: its glare shone so bright, it reflected off the plane of white.

Sir Grillbz Grillenn lifted both arms towards the flaming orb. He consumed it whole, turning his being into a radiant elemental power. No signs of his bartender outfit remained intact.

“D-d-d-did he just lose all his clothes?!”

Oh sweet, awkward Doctor Alphys. Of all the possible questions, it made Gaelic laugh.

“What’s wrong?” he snickered. “The body itself be fine. Born in our skinnies and all. ‘Tis nothing to be ashamed of. Better than being clothed in humiliation.”

The champion Fire Eater bent his knees, careful to not slip in the wake of so much power.

He made a fist. Leaned forward. Raised his arm in the air for a single precise strike.

A huge boom followed after, accompanied with a blinding light.

The blast of heated air slammed against the exposed bones of Gaelic’s being. It definitely stung. The osseous surface felt sore, but not charred nor ablaze.

In contrast, Undyne’s makeshift shield melted at the edges. Her green magic only prevented it from instantly breaking apart, doing nothing to cut the temperature’s relentless assault. She braced the blast of superheated air by a lot of psyched up yelling.

Was it a success? Gaelic couldn’t see past the glare of Gaster’s wheaty burning effigy.

The fire soon ascended, dissipating the light along with the heat. What’s left behind was a deep hole with molten remnants gnawing at the edges.

The fishy Captain leapt out from her hiding spot. Her famous weapon formed in her hand, armed with a spearhead gleaming red.

“NGAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!”

She used all her strength to throw her weapon down the hole.

Regeneration then started its battle for supremacy. Growth threatened to overpower destruction. It smothered the flames and the path began to shrink.

*How deep did he really punch?*

Gaelic scanned the abyss for a confirmation.

Sir Grillenn’s attempt stopped a few layers above the target.

In other words, King Asgore had failed to summon enough power to make a breakthrough.

He squeezed his sockets shut. Pressed his forehead into Asgore’s cape. Wept in sorrow for the oncoming doom. They’re trapped beneath this Barrier forever.
“‘Tis all me fault,” he whimpered. “I’m sorry. M’lord, Mlady. Everyone.”

Asgore heard it, and said: “Good sir. I think… it’s a bit too early to surrender.”

“How’d ya know?”

“I can sense things, remember? Call it ‘trust’, in others and oneself. Undyne knows what to do.”

Right on cue, when the King of Monsters finished his little speech…

…A geyser of magic erupted from the depths.

It struck the pulsating sky, causing the celestial prison to crack.

The spread started slow. Then, it sprawled in all directions. Faster and larger until the whole structure cascaded under its own weight.

The dissipating shards of the Barrier fell like rain. White shining fragments fluttered down before they evaporated into invisible energy.

“I suppose this was what Frisk had witnessed,” said the goat. “It’s beautiful.”

Gaelic spotted a flake of destabilized Determination. He stretched out his gloved hand to catch it before the bit consumed itself in a tiny ember.

“WE DID IT!!” Undyne cheered. “We did it, we did it! Fuhuhuhuhuhuhuhuhu! Sans got nothing on us! NOTHING!!”

The snake grinned.

Ah. Gladness fills me heart. They be fine folk.

Perhaps when this be over, M’lord and M’lady dinnae need to depend square on me alone. Ah can finally do what they always wanted of me: to build me own life.

............... 

Aye. ‘Tis fer the best.

Chapter End Notes

Papyrus continues to hit the target from the most unconventional angles. Must be his colours at work.
It so happen that this chapter is released on my birthday (14th June). Happy birthday to me?

This is a major chapter. The next one is pretty big too, so I’m not sure if I can make it to the Sunday deadline. It’s already overshot by 3 days. As usual, comments, thoughts and analysis are very much welcomed.

The Play of Possibilities continued unabated.

Hours passed like seconds. Days passed like minutes. And here Sans Serif was to watch through it from beginning to end.

Wasn’t that what he had always done? Watching. Observing. Analyzing.

Stayed firmly put while that ‘Child of Calamity’ traversed the Underground…

Now, in this different time and place, he beheld a political crisis that firmly split the Dreemurr Nation in two.

One side favoured the evacuation clause, the other did not.

Asgore was more than ready to quit his job as King. He went live on MTT-NEWS to apologize to the masses, and then declared that he’d lead them one last time on an exodus to the sky.

Those who listened packed as much as they could carry. Brought along everything that fits in a bag.

The other camp stayed behind. They had many reasons: some wanted to defend their sovereignty. Others deemed themselves too old to bother leaving. Then there were those who worried about Queen Toriel.

It’s been a long time since anyone outside of the Ruins had seen her. A growing sense of unease lingered in the air.

The waterworks had stopped all production by now. There’s no one else in the office other than Sans.

He read over the documents one more time.

_Tonight marks the end of the grace period._

_‘Those who stay behind are responsible for their own safety.’_

_It pretty much means anyone who refuses to comply will be left for the dead._

.................
Is Cenna really the kind of person to call this shot?

I’m certain Mezil will issue an order like this. But, that noir detective? It doesn’t feel right. With her personality, she’d sooner fight against this notion than condone it.

It makes me wonder if this ‘Supreme Judge’ actually exists.

In Lucidia’s position, I would consider a puppet proxy to support my decisions. Scummy, but it works. Hmm. Nah. She’s not that kind of a person either…

Sans was then interrupted by three knocks. Three aggressive knocks.

“Come on in, Undyne,” said Sans. “It’s wide open.”

Turned out to be Alphys.

Ugh. Okay. A fired up Alphys. May be worse than dealing with Undyne. I wonder how much backbone she gained in this version?

“I thought you had long evacuated. You’re part of the mercy agreement, after all.”

Doctor Alphys slapped down a document onto his desk. Signed by King Asgore. What’s left unaccounted for was Queen Toriel’s signature.

“There!” she said. “Right here! With the written permission of BOTH the King and Queen, The Royal Guard will have the legal authority to initiate a forced evacuation.

“That’s a little redundant isn’t it?” Sans questioned.

“No, it’s not! It means we can literally drag everyone to Lemuria by hook or by crook. That’s a huge difference!”

He read the reference number. It pointed to an old system. Ancient. It existed well before The Sealing. Due to some fine print, it’s still applicable in present day.

The only person who would even think of looking that far back would be…

“Did Gaster give this to you?” Sans asked.

Alphys clammed up. The doc must have asked her to keep it confidential.

“It’s okay. I get it anyway. So, you want me to go look for Tori right now?”

“O-of course!” she nodded. “You’re the only person who speaks to her on a regular basis.”

“What is that old man doing anyway?”


“Nope. Gaster is Gaster. Always makes sure I have my three square meals.”

“Oh.”

Awkward seconds past. The lizard fiddled with the tips of her claws. Her behavior screamed of bottled up questions, too self-conscious to ask.
“C’mon Al,” said Sans. “You’ve known me for years. I can take it. Ask away.”

Alphys remained still for a moment. Then, she couldn’t hold it anymore and blurted her concerns: “Is Papyrus REALLY in there? What does it mean to ‘merge’ with Doctor Gaster? If he is still alive and well, why doesn’t he talk to us at all?”

“All I see is Doctor Gaster! Ever since that spaghetti night, Papyrus seemed to basically… vanish into the background.”

“I… I miss his presence. His wackiness. …His zany exclamations. More so for Undyne. It all feels so weird.”

_Told ya, other me._

_He’s a prison in the shape of a man…_

That reality’s Sans replied: “He’s there. For sure. Ol’ G is just taking charge now due to our dire situation. I’m sure he’ll will loosen up once the danger passes. Don’t sweat too much about it, m’kay?”

“As for the forced evacuation plan, tell Undyne to prepare. Get the guards ready. Round up the civilians and take them to the Lab. That’s technically still the Underground, so they shouldn’t have any objections. If I don’t announce the good news by the final hour… lead them down the secret entrance.”

Alphys was shocked. “W-wait. But that’s more or less a forced evac-”

“By the time I meet Tori, it’ll be too late.”

“But can’t you just teleport into the Ruins and find her?!?”

“Gotta understand her heart, Al. She doesn’t like being shoved into the corner. And what are you gonna do if she refuses to sign?”

Alphys dropped her jaw. “W-what? Why wouldn’t she sign?! Everyone is in danger from this… this ‘Persona’ thing!”

Sans replied, “She could think that it’s a hoax concocted by Lemuria. We don’t exactly know their intentions. That’s a possible reason for Queen Toriel to reject.”

“But YOU know! Why can’t you convince her???”

“Still too late.”

Sans began folding up the document, neither confirming nor denying the lizard lady’s queries. “You better get going,” he said, “Don’t let the red tape kill you, or anyone else. If there’s any issues, just pin them on me.”

“What about you?” she asked. “Are you surrendering?”

“I’ll take care of myself.”

* * *

“* * *
According to the clock, there’s little more than two hours left before the gate to the sky closes.

*It’s D-day.*

Sans opened his cupboard, swapped his attire and strapped the Seraph System onto his right arm. After concealing the weapon under his sleeve, he pulled up his hood.

*To think that in this alternate reality I've left such a different impression on people.*

As the owner of a prestigious water plant, Sans Serif the Skeleton certainly wasn't known as the bum who’d wear a sky-blue hoodie, a white tanktop, black short pants, and a pair of pink slippers.

*Welp. Some things never change.*

One cut through spacetime later, he’s standing before the entrance to the Ruins.

*“Knock knock?”*

It’s silent.

He kept knocking a few more times, hoping that she’s just upstairs. Maybe reading about snails over tea and crumpets.

Still silent.

*She’s not here.*

*If I’m not a moron, I will teleport into the Ruins and search for Tori right now.*

*Use that noggin. Please.*

Before long he stood before the bed of Goldenflowers. It’s well-kept and healthy thanks to Toriel’s care.

*...Not here either.*

Sans began searching for Toriel through the entirety of the Ruins.

The puzzles.

The hallways.

The emptied town of Old Home.

Not a single monster remained anywhere, except for their motherly Queen.

*Where could she be?*

*Did I miss her?*

Maybe she had already made her way to Undyne and Alphys? Sans checked his phone for messages from the scaly couple.

There were none.

He reached the chamber with the ever-autumn tree. Dry brown leaves crunched beneath his slippers.

There…
His nasal cavities were filled with the aroma of a freshly baked cinnamon butterscotch pie.

*Pie? At a time like this?*

*Is she trying to have a last supper or something?*

Sans hurried to the front entrance. Knocked on the door.

And…

Toriel answered it.

“Sans!” she exclaimed. “I didn’t expect you to come from the front door. You tried to look for me at the flower patch?”

It took Sans a moment to register her presence.

“Tori,” he said. “Y-you’re safe. I kept knocking at the Snowdin entrance and you didn’t answer. I thought something might have happened…”

The goat covered her mouth and gasped.

“Oh dear, I deeply apologize! You see, I was making some fresh Cinnamon Butterscotch Pie for an esteemed guest.”

“An esteemed… guest?”

“Yes. They claim to be the Supreme Judge of the Magus Association. At first, I thought they’re joking. Maybe hit their head a little too hard in the fall. But then they performed genuine magic before me! Caraway, was it? Ah, yes. It’s after that spice.”

“They’…? Cenna is obviously a woman. How’d she even get past the Barrier? Did she merge with a monster? Or, a monster merged with her?"

While Sans pondered, Toriel continued: “It’s a little sad to see someone so young taking on such a heavy burden. I wouldn’t think someone of their age would try to convince me that their offers of evacuation are genuine!”

That statement caught his attention. “Young? How young?”

“Hmmmm, since they’re about your height… I would say somewhere around ten?”

Every bone in his being froze.

Sans grabbed her by the arm. He told himself to flee. Run away. Get out. Exit the Underground. Before **that kid** takes any further action.

Her confused gaze snapped into a shocked gasp.

It’s too late. Life drained out of her eyes. Her body lost integrity and turned into a shower of dust.

The Boss Monster’s SOUL floated in midair. Got plucked from its spot by a small human hand.

A burst of fire forced Sans to retreat to the ever-autumn tree. A certain stoic-faced human child emerged from the flames, armed with a knife.
It’s Frisk. Supreme Judge Frisk Caraway.


Toriel, dead. Right before his eyes.
Papyrus, imprisoned. Wrought by his hands.

The one human that he worked for so hard to restore their childhood… came back stronger.
Deadlier.

A red star burst forth on their forehead, burning bright and intense. It’s far from the static yellow glimmer that the old Frisk depended on. This overt display of power indicated that the young Magus had long mastered their Red Magic.

He can’t read their stats. Lucidia must have packed them up with lots of protection. It’s clear that they dropped into the Underground with the intent to kill.

Their target: anyone who refuses to leave.

Sans staggered back. Hit the tree trunk. More leaves shook off.

His right arm trembled. Rattled. Dying to get out of that damned pocket to unleash the might of the Seraph System.

His logical mind forced it to stay. All he could do was to resist with a clenched fist.

Sans darkened his sockets. “…Got any excuses, kid?”

Frisk replied: “You didn’t solve anything.”

“Guess not. So, what are you gonna do?”

“Finish the job.”

“Determined as ever.”

Sans summoned his blaster.

Frisk in turn stretched out their arm, eyes glowing crimson.

Then, without warning, a screech rang between his ears.

W-what… what’s happening?!

Innumerable images of his defeats flashed by. Each at the hands of this bite-sized Supreme Judge.

His stomach churned. Sick. Its contents threatened to surge upwards.

Skull, heavy.
Knees, jelly.

Sans fell face first on the leaf-covered floor. Hacked and wheezed from the sheer onslaught of visions.

An overload?!

God! Why does this have to hurt like the real thing?…
He flipped himself over to get a better look at the kid. Still as straight-faced as ever.

“…Heh. That silence of yours, it speaks volumes. How many times have you killed me?”

“At least a thousand in the span of a minute,” they replied. “Lady Lucidia estimated that’s the limit of your Perseverance. Called it a ‘Link Cascade’.”

* Lucidia of House Berendin. *

* Truly, an outright frightening woman. *

“This is… revenge. Isn’t it?”

“Not important,” Frisk replied. “Where are the Six?”

* We still have them? *

Sans snorted. “Too late, kid. We set them free a long time ago.”

* After making the Seraph System, that’s for sure. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been able to get the DT I required. Not without targeting random live humans. *

“Is that the truth?”

“What do I gain from lying? You’re gonna dust me anyway.”

They frowned. “Then someone else lied to you.”

* Huh? *

* Hang on. The kid’s got a point. How exactly did the ‘other me’ let go of them? *

* In front of everyone in the form of a ceremony? *
* In private? *
* Alone? *

* The kid is super confident… Which means-- *

“Nevermind.”

They pulled out a gun. It’s the exact same model as the one Mezil used for the Crimson Hall.

“I’m determined to take you with me!”

Shot fired. A round plastic bullet hit his left arm, applying the Supreme Judge’s distinctive Mark over the point of impact.

And that’s when his eyelids grew heavy.

Off to sleep he went.

This too, is what he always does…

* * *
Sans felt a splash of cold water on his face.

*Welp. That’s a rude awakening.*

Looking down upon his own two feet, he saw that Frisk had wrapped him snug in Toriel’s hallway carpet. Fashioned a rope out of blankets and bedsheets so they could drag him along through the snow.

*Gotta give props to the kid for resourcefulness.*

The bobbing sway and the scent of water informed Sans that he’s on a boat. In other words, he’s on one of the riverways that connect Snowdin to the rest of the Underground.

“…‘sup?” He asked.

Frisk answered, “We’re gonna look for the Six in Hotland.”

“What make you think they’re there and not at the throne room?”

“Only the True Lab has the means for long-term storage. Plus, it’s on the way.”

“Point taken.”

They grabbed an oar. Tried to steer it, but their inexperience showed in their wobbliness.

Sans then said, “…I know how to row a boat, y’know.”

“No. You stay put.”

“Okay.”

A few silent minutes passed. Doesn’t look like the kid will talk unless spoken to.

“Why do you need the Six anyway?” questioned Sans.

“To become the Seven SOUL DEMON-GOD. That’s why I saved Mom. A monster is needed to stabilize the mix.”

His voice deepened a notch. “You killed her.”

“No,” Frisk replied. “She’s alive. Inside of me.” There was not much conviction in that sentence. They knew it won’t ever be the same.

“There’s no need to break The Barrier anymore.”

“It’s not for that,” said the Magus kid. “I need them in the fight against Persona.”

“That doesn’t make sense. On the power scale, you beat him by a mile. I’m certain you’re the one with the Keys of Fate. Your Pure Red’s not enough?”

“I have the Keys. But, he has the army. I cannot win without the Six. Or your expertise.”

“What kind of army are we talking about?”

Frisk fell silent.

The transport continued to bob left and right. It’s making Sans feel uneasy. Not from the motion, but from the possible chances of a crash.

“…Kid, we won’t get anywhere this way. Except into a shipwreck.”

Frisk being Frisk, puffed their cheeks in determination.

“Teach me,” they insisted.

Well, that’s one possible solution. “Sure. Follow my instructions.”

After a few hints, Frisk gained the skill to properly steer the rowboat. They’re happy in a relieved way. It’s as though they had went through considerable frustration somewhere….

I think they may have reloaded their SAVE a few times to get things right.

Dang. I’m not reading a dejavu counter anywhere. My Eye got busted bad…

“We’re almost there,” said Frisk. “But. I can’t shake this ‘feeling’, you know.”

“Let me guess: something genre savvy is gonna swoop in soon, right?”

A mysterious object fell from the ceiling. More water to the face.

Tightening their grip on the oar, Frisk confirmed: “Yeah.”

A strange mass smashed through the middle of the boat, snapping it in half.

Down the tumble Sans went.

Strong currents washed him away like a log in the rapids.

The rug and cloth bindings absorbed blow after blow before they unfurled and set him free.

At the very end…

He fell into the underground’s largest collection of rubbish, landing on top of a soft bed of Ebott Goldenflowers to boot. The Cheaters of Death somehow managed to thrive at these depths, removed from the sun.

It took him a few seconds to register that he’s not dust.

“Can’t believe I survived that with my measly 1HP,” he said out loud.

Trash will be trash.

He sat upright. Rubbed his noggin a bit.

“It’s raining… Better get moving.”

It’s a long wade through the murky waters of The Dump. Walked past literal mountains of human-made refuse, the contents of which had completely changed compared to the past timeline.

Persona’s influence… It’s everywhere.
A surprise splotch then fell on his clothes.

_Huh?_

It’s not water. Not this time. It’s made up of this strange, white, sticky mucus… It didn’t soak into the fabric nor did it roll off. Clung to him instead.

He tried to pick it off.

Except, it moved.

It groaned.

It cried.

A scrawny half-melted arm reached out for his face.

_An… an Amalgamate…?!_

Sans swatted the piece away. Looked around for any others who might want to latch onto his clothes... only to discover that a literal ‘downpour’ of merged monsters had drenched the trash from top to bottom.

Before long, distorted features warped the zone.

Faces.

Mouths.

Eyes.

They floated to the surface of the water as misshapen limbs flailed all around.

The muddled mutterings murmured the words of millions. Sans managed to pick out some of the more prominent:

‘Save us.’
‘Free us.’
‘Join us.’
‘Go away.’
‘I hate you.’
‘It hurts.’

Thus he ran. Water or no water, he must get out of this deadly land of goo.

Into the caverns, he stumbled. Without his Eye, he couldn’t see any shortcuts either.

_Where… where’s the exit again?_
_Left? Right?_

_I’m lost._

Was he disorientated from the migraine?
Was he thrown off by this misadventure?

Or did he depend on the myriad of shortcuts way too much?

Maybe it’s all three combined.

His pink slippers were gone.
Maybe they got washed away.
Maybe they got stuck in the mud somewhere.
Maybe an Amalgamate ate it.

Don’t care. Can do without them, more so with a looming threat hot on his heels.

He arrived at a clearing. It’s the overlooking view where one can see both the Royal Castle and New Home.

Sans slowed to a stop when he heard the deep, echoing groans.

There, in the distance, he witnessed the ultimate culmination of his errors.

“What the hell…?”

White goo covered every building. Filled every crevice. Overflowed from the windows. And dripped off the highest peak of the castle.

Not even the cavern walls were spared. The mega-Amalgamate had claimed almost all of New Home’s upper ceiling.

It other words, it consumed the city whole.

*Damn. I can’t run anymore.*

Sans faced the growing ocean. Primed his Seraph System to drain Determination.

A great red lightning then struck the top of the castle spire. The colossal viscous goop fell down in one go. It’s a waterfall as white as snow. The rumbles of their agony reminded him of the bellows of a hot forge.

They rose.
They leaned.

And they crashed towards Sans in the form of a great tidal wave.

Fortunately for him, he had the mind of a supercomputer. Knew where to stand. When to strike. Above all, this alternate self still had the skills to pull it off.

The blade plunged deep into the colossus.

Bullseye. The Seraph’s Mark formed on contact.

In an instant, the river of Determination began to flow: filling up the inbuilt Trap Harvester.

Petrification spread from the point of impact. Alarmed, the abomination tried to withdraw, except the curse of stone spread faster than ever before.

‘Who is he?’
‘What is he?’
‘How did he?’
‘Is he really a monster?’
‘Impossible.’

*Wow. Is this the capacity of a full-version?*
It’s… it’s amazing. Scarily so.

Sans asked: “Anyone else?”

Just when he thought that he’d have a slight breather…

The voice of a DEMON answered Sans’ cocky inquiry. Curse his smart-alec ways.

“I accept your challenge.”

Disturbance rang in the air. Static grew heavier. Almost muggy. It reminded him of the times when he demonstrated the properties of static electricity to Papyrus.

Spark after spark strained the winged symbol. The cracks grew bigger upon each zap.

On the final strike, a great burst of red shattered the whole structure into burning smithereens.

Sense of dread, rising.

A human emerged from the Amalgamate’s main body. Male. Walked out without a single struggle, as though he passed through but a simple door.

His adversary was a muscle-bound warrior in military camo-style gear. Strong. Scarlet highlights decorated the front of his grey hair. Though his face wrinkled from age, the aura of youthful valour cemented his identity.

It’s none other than The Persona. And his eyes… they shone in the DEMON’s shade.


“So, I wasn’t dreaming after all. You’re that Lichborn who meddled with divinity.”

“Not bad for an underground cretin. I’m not sure to call you unfortunate or fortunate to have come this far. Probably the former.”

After a brief inspection, the Persona laughed.

“What’s with your fashion choice? Are you a street hoodlum?”


“You champions are precisely why I will never rest. Your kind has been a long-standing thorn in my side.”

The Persona unsheathed his trademark weapon. It’s a hooked knife.

“Interesting mechanism you have there. A device that allows Seers to play the victor’s role… I’ll take that. It’s wasted on a bag of bones.”

Sans raised a brow.

“Oh, rob the creator and claim it as your own? Typical. As if I’d let you.”

“Then I’ll pluck it right out from your lifeless pile of dust.”

The god of Gungnir touched the abomination, planting a brilliant red bolt of lightning. It resonated
with the other smaller pieces.

They fell into a trance. Hypnotized. Like a mental haze.

“Your god commands you… devour that sorry runt!”

And thus, they mobilized. Marched towards Sans with the synchronized order of a battalion.

Since Frisk frizzled out his Eye, he couldn’t zip his way out of there. His Gasterblasters: also disabled. Neither could he use any of the colour-switching magic that half the Seraph System depended on.

So it boiled down to his physical abilities, and a DT-draining knife.

The skeleton attempted to fight his way through the horde. Mark, drain, stab, slice, anything to keep them at bay.

But it’s useless. There’s just far too many. Any that succumbed to stone were swiftly replaced.

Mucky tendrils tied his legs.
Muddy limbs secured his arms.
Marsh fluids filled his ribs.

They whispered: ‘One, we all become.’

“No!!!” Sans coughed the muck out. Struggled. Continued to channel power into the Seraph System even though he’s bound.

He refused to get assimilated.

Refuse.
Refuse.
REFUSE.

Through sheer force of will, the fire in his Eye sputtered.

The decaying poison of Karma flowed out of his being. It consumed the ever-changing flesh of the Amalgamate, bringing the taste of death to the deathless.

They screamed in pain. Terrified. But they feared their cruel god more.

“Surprisingly feisty for a calm talker;” commented Persona. “This won’t do.”

“Your god commands you… prepare for execution!”

Bony hands -- the remnants of his people -- smothered his face. Bent him backwards and spread his arms wide to expose his being to their master.

The dripping fingers forced his left socket to stay open.

Persona’s mighty steps vibrated throughout the zombified army... until at last, he stood right above the skeleton, his blade charged with lighting.

“By the way,” said the human. “Thanks for this second chance at life. I suppose you could say that a swift death is your just reward.”
“Your god commands you to die.”

The final blow pierced straight through the back of his skull. Both the Eye and that measly 1HP, gone in a snap.

That last merciless act ‘Marked’ the end of Sans Serif.

Chapter End Notes

* You think you're above consequences?
Karmic Retribution

Chapter Notes

Credit Editor-sama for picking the POV for this scene.

First thing’s first, you may want to liven yourself up with this silly comic strip.

Okay. Had your moment of lightheartedness? Good.

Are you ready for some mental gymnastics? Editor-sama and I went through a fair number of cross-checking with the old script for this chapter. And also the canon stuff.

So…

Prepare your brain. We’re talking about the end result of all the theories we’ve laid out in GQ to date.

Prepare for mad DT science!

Also happy Aidilfitri to my Muslim readers. This chapter coincides with 2017’s celebrations.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It wasn’t supposed to be this way.

Doctor W.D. Gaster stared at his trembling hands, distraught. The inner voices of his friends begged him to stop.

But he can’t: they've long passed the point of no return.

Helvetica, you misunderstand! I didn’t want this to happen either!

I swear, it’s an honest to goodness accident! I wasn’t trying to kill your eldest son. The past is in the past. I am a man of changed heart!

Roman? Roman, no, no, no. Please don’t cry. If you do, I might not be able to resist! Reducing ourselves to sobs will only worsen matters.

Gaster lifted his eyes. Gazed on the destruction his carelessness had wrought.

His wayward student lay embedded in a mechanical pillar, ever-burning in shades of purple, yellow, and cyan.

A thirteen-point Gram made sure that the flames will never stop. For the moment they do…

…Sans Serif will be no more.

Fine dust trickled from the Seraphim’s left eye socket. It’s a stark reminder of what once was. For certain, the inside had completely lost its shine.
I needed a prison for your son: a bonafide escape master. What better place to create than the trap I myself once fell into?

So he rebuilt the Soul Stealer chamber. Without any form of exit. It’s just the room, the pillar, and the platform above an endless field of white.

Never would he consider having to use a Weaponized Seer’s Seal in this place…

What went wrong?

It was supposed to be a mere vision. An illusion. A play. How did that become reality?

The scientist’s mind raced through his mental records. It felt so recent, yet so distant.

Chara’s exorcism. The Red Sage. They’re the same circumstance.

When we attempted to vanquish that cretin without help from Judge Thyme… they continued to survive despite being blasted to oblivion.

What if there’s a way to survive without relying on the Cheaters? Like an artificial version to retain a disembodied will?

…The Mark of Volition! Yes. Yes, indeed. After all, The Persona’s rituals had roots in the arcane.

If that’s true, it means Judge Thyme is also haunted by the dead. And if DEMONS can taint the host’s source ever so slightly…

Oh no.

Sans Serif, you moron. Did you really not notice that impurity?! You’re the one with Truesight!

Gaster shook his head.

Perhaps he considered it a calculated risk.
Perhaps he had made a subtle trace when he set his sights on that corrupted SAVE.
Perhaps Sans hoped that the humans will never bother the Underground again.

This mayhem benefits Persona, as the visions showed. Without a doubt.

An uneasy aura weighed on Gaster’s shoulders. He clenched his jaw. He won’t let a malevolent spirit get the better of him.

A series of coughing and hacking interrupted his contemplation.

Sans writhed in his prison, showing signs of regaining consciousness.

Heavy breathing. Excessive sweating.

It wouldn’t surprise me if this WESS inflicts great pain despite its low intensity; it was originally designed as a weapon, after all. Not a control measure. Like appropriating a dagger for surgery.

…Panic can come later. Right now, I must play the role of mentor.

Gaster prepared to present his case. Straightened his back and strengthened his voice.

[How does it feel, Sans Serif?]
More groaning. More struggling.

The constant low-burn tormented its victim more than Gaster had anticipated.

[How does it feel to remember? To watch your world crumble? To lose your loved ones? To have friends turn into enemies?]

[How does it feel… to die?]

Despite so, his student grit his teeth and mustered through the agony just enough to speak: ‘Heh. Nothing new, really. Like this fire. Just a dull ache at most.’

The scientist could ‘feel’ the inner skeleparents mourning. But, he put all his efforts in ignoring them. Of all times, he can’t drop his facade now.

It’s too dangerous.

Sans’ working eye scanned his surroundings.

“I’m in ‘that’ part of The Core, huh…?” he said, “Some sick sense of irony you have there. This place. It brings back memories.”

Gaster replied, [Well, I think it's appropriate for the man who desired to become the Chronograph itself.]

[Before you struggle any further, I need to remind you about your current… condition.]

[Close your right eye.]

Sans did as suggested. His expression changed to one of shock. Confusion.

His reactions soon settled down to a quiet contemplation. Sans managed to keep his cool despite the circumstances.

He’s too quiet.

I need to approach this predicament with caution.

If I’m not careful, he will instead rope me into his schemes.

[You make a poor judge, Sans Serif.] Gaster began his lesson. [Nevermind a replacement for the Supreme Judge.]

[First you abscond a higher authority, then you return to resting on your laurels thinking that change is just a one-off deal: work tirelessly towards a goal, achieve it, and then let life take its proper course. As if nothing will come to challenge your position at the top.]

[Alas, as a Living Victory you’re forever chained to fate. Duty-bound, in this life and the next, to guide time to its proper conclusion. Retirement is but a pipe dream.]

[Remember what I taught you a long time ago? ‘If a person is blessed with a special power, it’s their responsibility to do the right thing’. I heard you dispensed this nugget of wisdom to the Child of Mercy at one point as well.]

“Yup,” Sans replied. “I did.”
[Then why didn’t you follow your own advice? Just what in the WORLD were you thinking when you started this mad plan?!!]

No answer. Gaster’s ire simmered.

[Fine. Then let me spell it out for you. You could have rallied behind the people around you. The Magus Association. Frisk. Papyrus. Me. Even Queen Toriel, I dare say!]

[But you chose to act alone? Why?!!]

All he got was a shrug… as much as Sans could do so while entombed.

The elder summoned a screen. Set the sights on Judge Cenna Caraway.

[Behold! An exemplar Magus! We’re talking about a human with the magical strength of a monster.] She zipped through a non-Newtonian gel puzzle in a single try. Didn’t get stuck, nor did she pause to think through the riddle.

[Already halfway up the tower in less than fifteen minutes. A witful head on an athletic body is a great boon, I do say. Is she not a valuable ally?!!]

Sans snickered. “Gee, doc. You sure she solved every one legit?”

Cenna arrived at a multi-coloured tile puzzle. It sprouted the rules on a nearby display. A long, ridiculous list of rules.

The Magus shook her head. “Ain’t nobody got time for that.”

Without a care in the world, she charged right in.

“Ah crap. This pushed me back.”

“Eh?! An invisible wall? Okay.”

“The green… does nothing? The pink does nothing either? Why design TWO tiles of nothing?! Absolute game design fail.”

“What in the nine hells does ‘orange flavoured’ even mean? I smell like an orange?!!”

“OW!!! Electric tiles?!! Dude like, WHAT?! Frisky had to go through this?!! That’s potentially lethal, dammit!”

Then a bunch of piranhas jumped out of a blue tile and gnawed at her boot. She shot that critter dead on the first opportunity.

“WHY THE IN GODDAMN HELLFIRE BLAZES ARE THERE PIRANHAS?!! Animal cruelty, I tell ya!”

“Argh, fuck this shit! I think I’m in range anyway.”

She stretched out her hand towards the faraway control panel. Conjured a golden feather. That one shot was all she needed to turn the maze into a plain bridge.

Onwards she went. Puzzle after puzzle got blasted to smithereens by those miniature missiles. Who cares about shut, inactive doors if she can punch a hole through them?

Sans said: “If you think I have a bad mouth, you should listen to her. That tile puzzle isn’t even hard to begin with. So much for wit.”
Gaster raised a brow. [A bit of a potty mouth is the least of my concerns. She’s no worse than Captain Undyne.]

“What about her sneaky cool-detective nonsense?”

[Necessary to not get killed by you. Or Chara.]

*Tsk. Not going well. It’s unfortunate that Judge Caraway has a history with him.*

*I have to change subjects quick.*

The scientist switched views to Team Undyne. Gaelic had led them far enough to reach Megalovania’s south pole. Undyne lugged Asgore on her back without any issues.

[Look at that. Despite his condition, King Asgore still charges forward to rescue his child from your clutches. He could have sat back and let his more than capable knights do his bidding, but no, he nurtures the kingdom much like a garden: hands on in the dirt.]

[Then there’s Captain Undyne. She brims with spirit to face the new future. It’s an utter mistake to think that she lacks rationale at all. Her heart is in the right place, and her tireless energy can move mountains.]

[Grillbz Grillen, my old friend. Finally left his dingy bar and put his true talents to use. Humanity will remember him as a hero who saved many from a blaze. No matter where he goes, he will be honoured.]

Sans cut in the middle of the conversation. “Ahuh, and all three of them are war criminals. The guy who started it all. Overenthusiastic genocide supporter. And an actual murderer. Great start, eh?”

Gaster clenched his fist.

That smartmouth… *Is he getting used to the pain?*

[Then how about the Queen? Her levelheaded thinking will give the nation the backbone they need without resorting to war. She makes the perfect head of operations… should you choose to aid her.]

“Welp,” Sans replied. “She may be innocent on the war deal… but abandoning her kingdom? That’s a different sort of crime. Heh. Not a good track record either.”

[Hmph, says the secret admirer. You intend to repeat history by forsaking the Queen when she requires you the most?]

Silence. Did the cat get his tongue, or did he consider it pointless to argue?

*I can’t get through him. How frustrating.*

The mentor dismissed the displays. He will keep to his words from now on.

*What else can I say?*

Gaster settled his heart with a deep breath.

[Very well. If we want to debate on reputation, there is a man with considerable influence in the human world. His name is Mezil Thyme.]

[‘Supreme Judge’ Mezil Thyme.]
“Knew you’re gonna bring him up,” so commented the other.

[Why not? He has twenty-five years of experience, if I’m not mistaken. That’s half of his life dedicated to the proper management of his time-travelling powers. His continued survival proves his abilities as a Living Victory, does it not?]

Sans sighed. Shook his head as though he’s talking to an utter idiot.

“Gaster. Now I know why you couldn’t be a Tactician. You can’t read politics to save your life.”

It stung…

Of all people to figure out his greatest weakness, it had to be that protégé.

“Survivor’s bias, through and through. Just because Mezil is alive today doesn’t mean he’s not heading toward a dead end of his own making. The Supreme Judge’s influence is nowhere near as watertight as you think.”

“Did you know the Gungnir successfully managed to infiltrate the Magi’s HQ? Posed as key staff. Security. Electricians. Even managed to smuggle guns into the storerooms. Whatever happened to background checks?”

Sans narrowed his gaze at Gaster.

“Doesn’t take a genius to figure out that it’s an inside job. There are factions within the Magus Association who want to see the Supreme Judge fall.”

“A man like him… he’s too good. Fair. Just. No compromise, and no corruption. Cheating the cheaters.”

“That’s the problem. Humans want their bread buttered, if you get what I mean.”

“Benefits. Perks. Favours. The little things that separate the ‘haves’ from the ‘have-nots’. I bet there are many who want to crown their own little Supreme Judge, but he rejected all of them.”

“Long story short, Mezil pissed off too many of the wrong people. Sucks to be him.”

Humanity’s history had always been full of backstabbing. Esteemed Mother and Father often told tales of the medieval courts. They’re… intriguing in a morbid sense.

[Monsterkind is better than that.] Gaster retorted. [What about Lemuria? I’m certain they’re grateful for Judge Thyme’s tireless efforts.]

Sans replied in his usual casual deadpan manner, “Nah.”

“Think about it for a moment. Cenna’s mission is to tackle that massive Amalgamate. Except we haven’t heard a single mention of its success. Not even a complaint that Frisk had undone everything.”

[Is it .. because their efforts have failed in every known timeline to date?]

“Ayup.” Sans continued, “Now, you’d think that a world ending monstrosity would call for an emergency merger. Y’know. Like the wolf Boss Monster and that Eldin knight. But… that didn’t happen. Why?”

“It’s simple: they got nobody. Any merger that’s not a Boss Monster won’t have enough power to
“As for the surviving Bosses? It’s either they had grown soft… or they belong to a new generation. With all those years of hiding, it’s possible that they never fought a real battle in their lives. King Asgore may be the only one with the guts and knowhow to lead an army.”

“On top of that… If the dispute between the Jurors is of any indication, there’s a split loyalty going on. Should the Lemurian government mistrust Mezil for any perceived fault… they’re not gonna send support. Even if it means their nation is in danger.”

It’s a grim outlook.

How Helvetica wanted to slap the Surface monster leadership. Their own safety is at stake, and they don’t trust the only man capable of tackling it?

P-please calm down, Helvi. I feel the same as you do at the moment. It is indeed infuriatingly stupid. Egads, woman, where did you learn to be so violent? Your parents weren’t this feisty.

There’s one last card left.

[If reputation is your main concern, then what of Frisk, the Child of Mercy? Are they not your close friend? You’re their mentor, aren’t you?]

“I suppose.”

[Now… should they become the next Supreme Judge, their clean slate may be the factor we need to rekindle the trust of both monster and man.]

Sans Serif laughed. It was a full on ‘ha’ and not the mischievous ‘heh’.

He laughed.
And laughed.
And laughed.

For a good half a minute, nothing but his outburst echoed through the air. That’s a long time for an eternally tired slob on fire.

The demeanour unnerved Gaster. It’s enough to make him melt, though he tried his best to remain in solid form.

Sans huffed and puffed once he finished laughing, still keeping a genuine grin on his mug.

[What’s so amusing?] Gaster questioned.

“Oh Gaster,” Sans chortled. “You never learn, huh? Always keeping tabs on the big picture while obsessing over the smallest details, yet failing to grasp the hidden truth.”

“You don’t know what caused ‘The End’, do ya? Or rather, ‘who’.”

The man blinked in confusion.

[Frisk is not Chara.] He said, [That Gungnir child’s misanthropy was the real root of the problem.]

“Get it in your skull already, Ol’ G. Frisk is a fort. Chara could not possess them if they didn’t open the door first.”
The two parts of the puzzle clicked together. A sense of horror dawned upon the old man…

That child was so well-mannered. Understanding. They didn’t fear nor judge his ghastly appearance. Forgave him for causing the accidental death of their parents.

How could it be?


[Impossible…] Gaster muttered in denial.

“Better believe it. Though that other kid wasn’t too happy to have their cohort bail out on the last minute. That’s why we have this current drama, y’know.”

Sans sighed. “Hey old man, let me tell you something: I honestly wanted to be their friend. Wanted to trust the kid. Believe in them. But they gave me little reason to do so.”

“That’s what you get for being nothing but Determination. It’s the trait that allows humans to cut off from Love and Compassion. Frisk isn’t immune to pitfalls.”

“Can you really entrust the world to someone like that?”

Old prejudices threatened to pull Gaster back to the hateful way of thinking.

How the elder wanted to believe in the greater good… but Sans had a point.

In the midst of his pondering, Roman whispered his grounded and humble thoughts.

Why yes, Frisk is still young. And they do appear to be very teachable.
You are right. This is not the end of the road for them. They had repented… unlike my student.

Upon that moment, the chamber sounded a siren.

Sans tilted his head. Somewhat amused by the new turn of events.

“They did it after all, huh?”

Gaster hurried to peer into the outside world, screen and all.

He witnessed in time for the magnificent success of the Barrier’s shattering. The combined efforts of Team Undyne pulled through. What wonder!

The elder and his friends couldn’t contain their cheer. They clapped, while Gaster let out a yell of joy. It’s the second wind that he had hoped for.

Renewed, he turned towards the prisoner. [Did you see that? They prevailed against all odds! Smashed your nihilistic expectations!]

Cenna marched up the tower’s last flight of stairs.

Her eyes were filled with resolution.

[With the Barrier down, the Vanquisher can finally bring you to justice.]

[You’ve lost, Sans Serif!]
Once again… a delayed response. What went on in that mind of his? It’s like trying to comprehend a supercomputer’s unique means of processing.

In the end, Sans conceded.

“Yup. My mission failed. Lost cause. Dunked into the trash.”

Gaster focused his gaze in deep suspicion.

*This seems too easy.*

*He put up so much resistance before the Barrier shattered.*

“…You’re aborting your plans to rewind time?”

“Yeah. There’s no point going back there. It’s a deader than dead. Plus, that Persona fellow is a bastard. Can’t trust that guy. No go.”

“So, if that’s the case, why don’t you show me ‘your’ alternative?”

[Pardon?] Gaster replied.

“You heard me right,” said Sans. “Doctor Wendell Dominic Gaster is in complete control of the Seraph System. Go ahead. Show me the light.”

That challenge triggered a surge of confidence. If the wayward one wants to see to believe, he shall see. Gaster linked the monitor to his Eyes.

[Very well!] so exclaimed the Royal Scientist. [I shall change your mind, right here and now, with the future itself!]

**SERAPH SYSTEM**

**ACTIVE:** [L] C - [R] O / B / G

**INACTIVE:** Y / P

The flare activated. He peered into the realm of endless possibilities, searching for the golden path where all was well.

It came up…

…Empty.

Black filled the monitor from corner to corner.

*What in the stars? Is there an error somewhere?*

Again, Gaster tried. His mind called out to the annals of spacetime for an answer. Yet, they did not respond.

“Still a nope, doc?” Sans asked.

The elder clicked his tongue. [Hush, you’re interrupting. Give me a moment!]

“Sure. I’m not going anywhere.”
Perhaps I need to modify the clause? How do I do this?

Judge Thyme? Could his fate be changed if we assist him?
Do I need to focus more on Frisk?
Papyrus?

Gaster exhausted all his options… and it forever resulted in futility. The doctor then cancelled the Eye modifications to save strength.

Hope, dashed to pieces.

[How can this be?]

“Thought so,” said Sans. “I didn’t need to use the Chronograph to reach that conclusion. Just pure observation is enough.”

“We’re heading straight toward ‘The End’.”

And thus, the mentor’s emotions caught up to him. Sank into a pile of goop that’s neither a skeleton nor a puddle. [No… no it cannot be… We have everything and yet…]

“Yup. It’s all pointless. Which isn’t a bad thing, really.”

Gaster was afraid to ask: [Why do you say so?]

The edges of Sans’ lips curled upwards.

“I know you hate my nihilism,” he said. “Call it depressing and whatnot. But, old man… it’s more than simply being apathetic.”

Gaster slid closer to Sans. Cautious. [Explain.]

“Y’know, since everything was going to be RESET anyway, it was hard to give it my all. Unable to care, I just couldn’t burden myself with the emotions of decisionmaking. Whatever happens, happens. Maybe it’s just an excuse to be lazy? Probably was.”

“Back then, when I first looked at that human… they reminded me of my younger self. So curious. So persistent. So lonely too. But, unlike me, they stayed determined. Because they think they ‘can’… they ‘had to’. Otherwise the illusion of meaning falls apart.”

The old man retorted, [Aren’t you contradicting yourself?]

“Again, doc,” said Sans. “You’re terrible at reading between the lines.”

“If nothing matters, why should anyone care about my actions? When there’s no future, there’s no one left to deliver judgement. And consequences cease to be.”

“I started thinking… If the literal end of the universe approaches, why not do anything and everything? Why not be like Frisk? What I lack in DT, I make up for with PV. I’ll just persevere through the whole deal.”

[The way you talk implies a possible escape.]

“Welp. I did say I gave up on the whole time travel deal. But only the time travel deal.”

That was Gaster’s worst fear. Someway, somehow, Sans already had a plan to break out…
“Hey old man… remember that ‘impossible’ question? The one about the prisoners? I told you it makes no difference if the bad guys kill my loved ones, or if I do it myself: they’re dead anyway. Except, I never told you what happens afterwards.”

“It’s simple, really, the moment I get an opportunity… I’ll dunk the murderers in Hell. I’ll cause ‘accidents’. I’ll get them hanged. I’ll pull any strings necessary to see to their demise. They’ve already destroyed any reason for me to give a shit anyway.”

“So yeah, W.D. Gaster, you can’t keep me here forever. You can be damn sure I’ll find a way to escape this WESS. Blast away this pillar. And then burn this world to ashes. That’s how you made me.”

“You reap what you sow. Karma’s a bitch, ain’t it?”

Something snapped within Gaster. Patience hit his limit. That said plenty for a man who’s left half should represent the Aspect.

In one swipe of his arm, the Seer’s Seal burned with the intensity of an inferno.

The scientist does not know which howled louder: the victim, the fire, or his unfortunate friends who’re forced to watch.

Soon, the flames extinguished. Tri-coloured scars had seared deep into their victim, just as Papyrus once suffered.

Gaster couldn’t take it any more. Uncontrollable tears streamed down his face. Regret, anger, and plenty other unpleasantries filled his heart… directed at both himself and Sans.

He said: [It’s all my fault. All. Mine. For being so WEAK!]

His holed hands wiped away the tears.

It’s now or never.

[Very well. Very, very, well. Then, it shall be my duty to end your misery.]

As he approached his wayward protégé, the mentor raised his left hand with an undeniable killing intent. The act materialized a massive Gasterblaster over his shoulder, charging a collection of power in its maws.

Cyan, the colour of focus.
It tripled the armament’s capacity with its condensing trait to the point where reality tattered at the seams. However, the drawback is that he must fire it up-close and personal.

He thus towered over Sans Serif. Aimed the gun square at his being.

Yet… he failed to pull the trigger.

[Roman?]
That left arm reached out for the blaster’s mandible.

[Roman, what are you doing…? Roman!]

“Enough is enough, friend.”
“We won’t let you hurt our son any longer!”
“It’s not you who made him.”
“It’s us!”

“And we refuse to let him die!”

Gaster heard them in all their physicality. It wasn’t a mere feeling, or a mental whisper, no…

It’s the first time in twenty-three years that he had heard the actual voices of his departed friends, Times Roman and Helvetica.

The right arm joined her husband. Together, they pushed the weapon upwards - shifting it away from their child… instead pointing it at the pillar that had kept him imprisoned.

“We’ll save you, son.”
“Hang in there!”

Gaster struggled to regain control over his own body. Whatever will he had was insufficient to overpower the love and devotion of two parents.

That’s when he realised… he had once again failed to read between the lines.

[It’s a trap! Stop! STOP!!!]

It’s too late. The magic was wasted on the tomb that kept the fallen angel at bay.

Roman and Helvetica pried away the broken mechanisms. The body’s owner got shafted to the back seat, helplessly watching them make the most unwise decision.

How long had he subjected them to that same treatment in the name of goodwill?

The cost of his sins crawled on his back.

After they pulled off the last restraint, Sans fell into their nurturing arms. They held him dear despite everything.

Unstable rippling had already begun to plague their boy.

In unison, they said: “We’ll become one. No more pain.”

Sans gathered his remaining might to push himself apart from them.

“Mom. Dad.” He said. “Don’t! I’m toxic.”

“Don’t say such things! You were in the wrong, but we still love you.”

Sans replied: “I mean it. If… if we merge… you’ll join my personal hell. Karma will burn us inside out. That’s why The Persona executed me. Besides…”

“I gotta do what I gotta do. I’m the last stand once again. Or else: The End.”

“Son, please,” they pleaded. “Enough. Rest.”

He stared them in the face with genuine sadness.

“I can’t. I’m sorry.”

A red shine appeared on the palm of Sans’ hand. The six-winged Mark of Volition had formed
without the system’s aid.

[I-impossible!] Exclaimed Gaster.

Sans defied his mentor with one last smirk.

“I did it, huh? Just needed the bare minimum level of DT to pull it off.”

He rose to his feet and declared:

“I impose my will… to expel Wendell Dominic Gaster!”

Chapter End Notes

My own brain hurt from the mental gymnastics involved. I really hope it makes sense, and consolidates the in-game narrative as well.

If there’s any confusion of how Determination works, please consult Chapter 5 of the Magus Compendium and Chara’s exorcism arc. And also GQ Chapter 122 for the fate of Seers who lose their Eye.
Vanquisher

Chapter Notes

Special effects chapter. Special. Effects. Chapter. They’re as bad as stairs.

Editing this made me want to crai for several reasons. Oh by the way, if you noticed that I had non-functioning links or half-hanging sentences, please let me know. Sometimes I flunk my HTML coding. It's quite embarrassing.

Last week I tried to share this but I derped my HTML:

It’s also on Sophtoart tumblr if you want to reblog.

I would like to announce that I am taking a week break after posting this. For several reasons:

One, I’ve been on the wire way too much. Fresh hot off the stove before the sun rises. Week after week. Wears down after a while.

Two, I need time for some serious design planning.

Three, the stress is making me snappy in real life which is never a good sign.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You finished restoring the last of the burns.

Phew. That’s a ton of work. The sheer concentration made you break a sweat at the edges of your forehead.

The Gram deactivated, leaving behind an unlit star.

You asked Papyrus if he can sit up.

To your relief, he did.

“WOWIE! YOU’RE A NATURAL!” said Papyrus. “I WOULD TOTALLY BELIEVE YOU IF YOU CLAIM TO BE A MONSTER.”

You sheepishly rubbed the back of your head. Aww shucks, that’s a super compliment.

Besides, you told Papyrus that HE is the great one! That battle with Sans! It’s SO AWESOME! That quickdraw was the best!

Hype level, off the charts.

“NYEH HEH HEH, OF COURSE -- I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS AFTER ALL! I MEAN WHAT I SAY. AT LEAST, WHEN IT COMES TO MY GREATNESS.”
You never told him, but you realised that you would be deader than dead if Papyrus didn’t stick with his true pacifist route back then.

“But, what now?” Goner Kid asked.

Good point. You turned towards Sans, wondering what’s going on in his mind.

The bubble started to ripple.

Uh. Bad sign. Bad, bad sign. The Trap Harvester is slowly failing.

Papyrus picked you up. You’re surprised that he’s healed enough to do so.

“WE SHOULD HIDE.”

Agreed. But, where? Other than your ‘bedroom’, there’s nowhere else to go.

Actually… that’s an excellent idea. As long as someone watches the entrance, Sans won’t be able to strike an ambush too easily.

The shortie reassured. “We can keep watch. Stay low, alright?”

Thanks a bunch.

Papyrus made his dashing escape with you along. But, when he arrived near the stairwell… you heard a rumble in the distance.

“WHAT WAS THAT?” he asked.

You asked Papyrus to put you on his shoulders for extra height.

“OKAY, FRISK.”

Sitting on his shoulders, you tried to peer far into the horizon.

You spotted a crack.
A crawling, sprawling crack.

It’s approaching you at breakneck speeds.

The Barrier! It’s breaking apart!
The rescue team did it!!!

The crystalline shards snapped apart and fell down in a cascading shower.

You never get tired of this. It’s as beautiful and enchanting as your first successful attempt.

You stole a glance at Papyrus. You smiled at his sense of wonder. Almost made you forget about what he went through.

“WOWIE… IT’S SO PRETTY.”

Yup. Rewarding, isn’t it?

The Gaster followers started to shiver. You asked what’s wrong.

Rhymer burst out: “The Vanquisher cometh! The Vanquisher cometh!”
The Vanquisher… cometh? Cometh?!
You can’t just rhyme a word with itself and get away with it!
Wait, could it be…?!
It’s Cenna!
Your grey time-displaced friends ran off, screaming in fear.
Drats. You didn’t get to tell them that the Vanquisher is your big sis. And an ally.
“MISS AUNT MADE IT AFTER ALL! I’M SO HAPPY. AND ALSO WORRIED.”
…You understand why. The moment she reaches to your rescue, she’s either going to arrest Sans, or have a final showdown.
It’s not going to be easy for anyone…

* * *

Cenna stopped midway her ascend. Lifted her communications pendant and waved it around. By theory, destroying the Barrier should immediately reestablish her connection to Lucidia.
Except…
It’s not happening as fast as she’d like.
“C’mon, get a signal already.”
Just when she wanted to grumble a string of expletives, she heard an incoming broadcast on her earpiece.
Lucidia of House Berendin had finally come through.
“Seer Lucidia speaking. Do you copy? Over.”
“Copy that, over!” Cenna exclaimed. “Oh thank God. Can ya see me?”
“Confirmation: Yes, I can. Requesting update on your current status.”
“Condition green, other than a minor zap. Fresh water would be nice.”
“Caution: Consuming any liquids on the job poses a risk. Not recommended.”
“If you can give me a lift, though, I’d be stoked. Because. Fuck stairs. Like seriously fuck ‘em. There’s no end in sight.”
“A sentiment shared with Captain Undyne. Please give me a moment.”
“Any other updates in the meantime?”
“Observation: I am detecting a strong disruption of spacetime on the rooftop. It appears that
someone triggered the Trap Harvester.”

Cenna furrowed her brows. “Did Sans use it on Frisky?”

“Negative.”

“Cinnamon Roll?”

“Negative as well,” confirmed Lucidia. “Preliminary scanning indicates those two are not in the disruption. Odd. I am unable to mine more data due to the presence of an unknown interference.”

Knowing that Lucy’s watching, Cenna stuck her hands in her pockets and flashed a confident smile.

“That’s why you got me, Cenna, in the field!”

“I’m glad. Sending the enchantment scroll now.”

A rolled up bundle of cloth materialized before her. Snatched it right out of the air and opened it. One look was all she needed to confirm its contents.

“Booyah! Wingboots, here I come!”

She wasted no time unwrapping the Gram onto the steps.

“Correction: Blue magic doesn’t actually give you wings.”

“Feels like it.”

“Please hurry, Judge Caraway.”

“Alright, alright.”

The soles of Cenna’s boots shone with magic. A simple spark triggered the imbue. Cobalt ink lines vanished upon the completion of its purpose.

“Now to take the fast lane.”

Green shields, activated. That should protect her from the inevitable ceiling-bust.

One jump later and she’s flying high over the roof.

Expectation: 20 or so floors to go
Reality: 2 floors to the rooftop arena.

Jaw, drop.

“What the shit!?” she exclaimed. “I SWEAR I ran up at least a dozen before I paged ya, Lucy!”

Lucidia replied, “It would not surprise me if Sans Serif rigged an eternal-stairway as a final trap. It fits his MO.”

Realising that she got conned, Cenna let out an exasperated groan. “I fell for a freakin’ STEPMILL?!?! Fuck that! Seriously!”

From the high-view, she spotted Sans below. He’s encased in a vast bubble of Determination.

“Lucy, I identified the source of your distortion. It’s Sans. And he’s the one trapped!”
“Oh? Hypothesis: sabotage. Encasing oneself in frozen time is counterproductive. If I do say so myself.”

“Sis, you’re here!”

“MISS AUNT!”

Her attention shifted to Frisk and Papyrus. Both alive and well. Welcomed her with plenty of hand-waving and happy greetings.

The ‘wingboots’ lowered Cenna down at a slow and steady pace. The moment she’s on solid matter… she rushed straight to hug her younger sibling.

It’s tempting to not let go. But, she can’t glue herself there forever. Gotta be the big sister. Check for any injuries.

“You alright, Frisky?” she asked.

The kid nodded. “I’m okay. Sans treated me well.”

“No fights? Really expecting you to tangle with Mister Assassino.”

“Nope,” Frisk turned their head towards their friend with a frown. “Paps was the one who duelled Sans.”

Cenna peered at Papyrus. There’s something wrong about the way he stood. Reminded her of the many times when she’s discharged from the hospital: somewhat okay, yet not fully healed.

Truesight, activated. The results made her bite her lower lip.

“Well shit, we’re too late. That bad, huh? Lucy, what’s the strongest painkiller you can send over?”

Papyrus asked, “WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I’M FEELING POSITIVELY FINE.”

“Noooot taking any chances. Trust me on that, Cinnamon Roll.”

Cenna turned away from the group. Lowered her voice to a whisper. “These Seal Scars are the worst I’ve ever seen. Give me everything and more. Someone patched him up just enough to not be an ER case, though.”

“Noted. Continued healing outside of an Intensive Repair Pod will do more harm than good. Please deliver the proper medication to Papyrus.”

“Gotcha.”

The lady Chronographer sent a potion bottle. Medication, straight into Papyrus’ hands.

“Bottoms up. It’s a sweet mix of Kindness, Perseverance, and a whole lot of other sciency stuff.”

He downed the contents in one gulp. “GADZOOKS, IT’S DELIGHTFULLY GRAPEY. AND I’M FEELING BETTER THAN I EVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE!”

“Told ya.” The Magus chuckled. “Now take it easy. Leave the rest to the pros.”

With that out of the way, Cenna turned to the short skeleton trapped in a plan of his own making.
She planted her face into her palm. “That pose… it’s straight out from a cover art! Getting some pretty deep regrets about crowning him as Sir Assassinio.”

“Too cool?” Frisk stated.

“Totally,” she replied. “He’s gonna be that one guy with a bajillion overdrawn fanart. Guh, I can imagine the internet frenzy and all those out-of-context materials.”

The time for funny commentary had passed. Cenna lowered her head. Grim.

“Sorry, but you guys gotta make some distance. Can’t have you guys get caught up.”

Frisk frowned. “I understand. But, can you promise me one thing?”

“Not to kill your friend?”

The kid nodded many times.

Cenna rubbed their head. Messed up that hair. Smiled while doing so.

They’re a bit happier now. “Thanks. C’mon Paps, let’s give her some space.”

“LET’S GO DOWNSTAIRS.”

“No. I wanna see what happens.” Frisk pointed at the opposite end of the arena. “Why not over there?”

While the two relocated themselves, the Magus discussed the matter with Lucidia.

“Lucy. If you have no other suggestions, I’m making my call.”

So the Lady of House Berendin commanded: “Do as you must.”

“Thanks.”

Cenna planted her boots firmly on the floor. The soles ground against the rough concrete when she prepared her fighting stance.

*It’s been a long, long while since I recited this prayer. Forgive me for being doubtful, Almighty. I know I’ve not been sailing steady.*

*Please… guide my hand. Now more than ever.*

Golden wisps surrounded the Vanquisher. Magic curled the ends of her short hair.

*Glowing kindness be our shield;*  
*Persevere and never yield.*

The updraft of force danced with her trenchcoat.

*Sacred Justice heed my call;*  
*Smite this evil, make them fall!*

Upon that moment, her Psychia infused itself into every portion of her being.

A bow conjured in her outstretched arm: the icon of skill and precision for thousands of years.
One of the wisps floated close to her free hand. Transformed into an arrow, shining bright in retribution’s light.

Cenna then rested the nock on the bowstring.

She recalled a brief talk she had with Captain Undyne, right before they parted ways for their respective missions.

“Cenna… can I ask you for a favour?”

“Sure thing, Cap. What’s up?”

“Please promise to spare Sans.”

“…No guarantees on that. Sorry.”

“I know this is a tall order. But, I realised that killing him for the sake of convenience isn’t justice. We’ll just become the real villains. And… and… that really got me.”

“If ya put it that way. Keep your fingers crossed. It all depends on our options.”

Mentally prepared, she drew far back. Aimed her weapon not at Sans: instead her bullseye fell onto the Seraph System.

Okay. So. There are two separate components. The control panel, and the Trap Harvester containing Mezil’s ‘World’.

Right now, I just need the right amount of power to wreck that bracer alone. Doing that will destroy Sans’ access to that wellspring of DT.

…God forbid I hit the Trap Harvester. With what it has now, it’ll will blow up like a nuke. Right in Sans’ face. Cinnamon Roll won’t have anyone left to call ‘brother’.

She took care to fine-tune the point and its power.
Too little, and it might not damage the system enough.
Too much, and it’s bye-bye Sans Serif.

One shot to set things right.

Only a little bit more…

The bubble shattered much sooner than anticipated.

“What the hell?!”

Sans’s consciousness had yet to catch up, but he’s locking his sights on her.

She expected his left Eye to burn. Yet, it looked dull. Almost… grey?

But Cenna didn’t think twice about it. No luxury for contemplation.

Shit!

She released the bowstring. Let her shot fly. Hoped that she reacted fast enough to accomplish her mission.
At the very last second, Sans dropped his arm… exposing his chest to the direct line of fire.

The arrow pierced straight through the sternum and his spine. It’s meant for Determination imbued matter, too powerful for mere magical bone.

It continued to fly until it hit the concrete railing. From the impact point, that entire section instantly disintegrated. It didn’t revert either. Stayed broken like a normal, physical phenomenon.

With his meagre lifeforce gone, the skeleton began to crumble to dust. His clothes fluttered down, and the Seraph System dropped with a metallic clang.

The screams of the victim’s loved ones hollered in the air.

Cenna stood there. Shocked. Failure slapped her in the face.

What…?

It doesn’t make sense! He should have kept the device up to protect himself.

I expected top-notch self-preservation from that guy. He got that track record.

As the last particle fell, Cenna spotted something that shouldn’t be there: It’s a Psychia, a monster’s SOUL.

Among their kind, none but a Boss should leave these behind.

Alarms soon overrode her senses. She spotted Frisk and Papyrus already trying to run up to the dead man. Two quick arrows at the ground before their feet stopped them dead in their tracks. They looked up at her with a puzzled expression.

“Stay back!” She warned.

The cordate heart floated above the dusty remains, lingering.

It’s not shaking, nor breaking apart.

This whole deal is abnormal to the bone.

Just when Cenna thought things couldn’t get any worse…

Sans’ Psychia dyed scarlet.

Dust and clothes reversed in time.

Whatever scattered, gathered. Whatever lost, restored.

At the very end, Sans Serif returned from the brink of death. Complete with the Seraph System strapped back at its original place.

He staggered forward, engulfed in an eerie cyan aura, resembling a Grim Reaper through and through.

No way… an Ascension?

Him, of all people?!

Cenna prepared another arrow, just in case.
Sans meanwhile looked at his own hands. Muttered to himself.

“So. ‘In The End, I persevere’…”

“Guess that’s the ‘real me’. Who would have thought? I’m supposed to be the lazy trashbag here.”

He examined the screen of the device. “Error. No output device detected?”

“…My Eye’s still gone, eh? Welp. No problem.”

With his other hand, he waved over the empty socket. Restored the organ to full functionality in the blink of an Eye.

Except… it wasn’t the Cyan-Yellow-Purple mix that everyone had learned to fear.

This one. It burned---

“White? Wha?” Cenna blurted. She’s used to the various shades of red that DEMONS flaunt around as a symbol of might. ‘White’ had associations with Monsterkind’s’ weakness more than anything else.

Why would Sans Serif choose that colour?

“Judge Caraway, said Lucidia, “Do not be fooled.”

“Explanations, please?”

“You’re looking at all the seven Psychia colours combined. That’s why it’s white. In other words… a true ‘Seven Aspect Eye’.”

Sans replied: “The lady’s right.”

By Lucidia’s assumptions, Sans now has the power to examine any event at his disposal. Be it past, present, or future. Distant or nearby. That includes their secure communication feeds. Combine that with his genius… it’s bad news all over.

The short guy continued: “Determination is essentially spacetime magic. But there’s no such thing as Red Seers because only six of the seven types of Liches can reproduce.

“So what if I make this hypothetical Red Eye possible to have? Combine that with the rest… heh. The wonders of engineering. It’s a life saver.”

Cenna furrowed her brows. Narrowed her gaze. The grip tightened on her bow.

“I see it now. ‘The Victor’s Phylactery’. That little machine of yours… it forever restores your body to pristine condition so it can never Amalgamate. Red Eye or no Eye. Your ‘1 HP’ might as well be ‘infinite’.”

“Yup,” he confirmed. “Huh. You’re brighter than you act.”

“That reminds me. Snakeface mentioned something about a ‘Wanderstar’ speciality. Guess that’s it, huh? No wonder you’re the top dog.”

“That arrow. It destabilizes DT and triggers self-cannibalization, like my Karma. Not surprising since they share the same roots: Justice and Perseverance.”
Interesting, Cenna thought. The founder created this power out of Justice and Determination. Perseverance was the closest match for non-Reds to replicate his skill.

Always something new to learn, as the old saying goes.

“Hey,” said the Vanquisher. “Remember what I said before this fiasco started? I know you don’t do shit without a reason. Spill the beans. Give us your thoughts.”

Sans shrugged. “Does it matter? I’ve hurt people. Hurt Papyrus. Committed crimes beyond compare. All to amass a power greater than any Living Victory. For what end?”

“Sure, I could tell you that I think your Spring Mission is destined to fail. But whatever I say would just be brushed aside. Declared insane.”

“People only want convenient justice’, to quote your boss. I’m currently the most inconvenient obstacle around. Keeping me alive would be a real downer.”

“Hey now, don’t leave me hanging.” said Cenna. “I wanna at least hear some opinions about ‘me’.”

Sans shrugged. “Heh. Okay. Since you asked…”

“I do think you’ve got a serious hero-complex going on. It’s fine if you’re honest about it, like some folks I know. But hell, you try to play coy. Cheeky, cocky, with a dose of fake humility on top. Leaves a big distaste in my mouth.”

“To make matters worse… you’re actually in terrible, terrible shape. I mean, I knew you were sick. But I didn’t expect your condition to be THAT bad.”

“How ‘bad’ is this bad, O’ Great Seraphim?” Cenna teased.

“You’re on your last legs. Your physical self, that is. Most of your nerves? Gone. Hence why you don’t feel as much pain as you should. The only thing keeping you mobile is that network of magical puppet strings throughout your body. As a result, you gotta balance between physical integrity and magic output.”

“Right on the money, as usual.” she confirmed. “Anything else?”

“To fight the Abomination, you require your Ascension at the cost of everything else. Even then… the mission will never succeed.”

The Magus responded with a bitter smirk. “That’s what I heard.”

“It’s ‘The End’. Again. The future refused to change. Wouldn’t it better if you give up and leave it to me? Increase your chances, and so on.”

“Hah. Give me a moment.” Cenna just wanted to mock Sans while she still can. Tilted her head right. Then left. Finished it all with a big eye-roll.

“Sorry hun. I ain’t that kind of complicated girl. I’m just gonna do my job one step at a time… Starting with you.”

Sans raised a brow at her. “Don’t wanna be friends?”

The Magus huffed. “Na-uh. No deal.”

“Thought you said you could trust me.”
“Well, I trust Sans, Papyrus’ brother. Not Sans, the guy who reverted his death with a machine.”

“Fair point. I’m a true DEMON now. And you’re a Vanquisher. We don’t mix. Welp, gotta take what’s given to you.”

The white Seer’s Eye flared. Its presence alone… made it difficult to remain composed.

But she must.

“Ready for a rematch?” asked Sans Serif.

*Sorry guys. It doesn’t look like I can keep that promise.*

*Gotta take what’s given to you.* Cenna Wanderstar agreed.

“And bring it on!”

Chapter End Notes

Don’t worry. I’ll be back. See you guys in two week’s time!
The week’s break is over, and now I’m back.

I have a Wattpad account now. Same name, Sophtopus. If for some reason you have friends who prefer a Wattpad… sure, show them my profile. That also will be the place where I can properly post my original works. I’ll make an announcement here first of course.

Also, the ‘Chronographer Records’ now has a 4th entry. It’s still not the Purple Kid yet. But if you want to know more about Mezil’s past, this is the entry for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

‘One year ago, if someone told the hero that his own brother would become his greatest adversary… he would have dismissed it as a terrible joke.’

‘How could that sloppy lovable lazybone ever be a formidable foe?’

‘Fate answered with a cruel laugh right in his face.’

The Great Papyrus stared in disbelief.

What went wrong?
How?

He knew he’s stronger than Sans. Agreed with Gaster’s gambit to fight without killing. Traded his clairvoyance to trip his slippery brother on his own slimy schemes.

Everything went how it should go.

Everything!

And yet…

It all failed at the very last second.

The Trap Harvester's bubble shattered way too soon. Cenna tried her best to salvage the situation, but her effort backfired.

The arrow shot right through Sans.

A life taken cannot be returned.

Papyrus didn’t know why he’s running.

Was it a futile attempt to grasp the last memories of his brother?

Perhaps.
Perhaps not.
A volley of shots stopped his progress. Cenna yelled a warning.

There was a monster SOUL lingering.

Before long, it dyed itself in the bright red of their mother’s scarf.

And Sans returned, enveloped in cyan flames.

He mentioned something about his Eye being ‘gone’, so he had to use the Seraph System to make a brand new one.

It’s pure white, sharing the same colour as their default glow. Yet, its vast power created a great chasm between past, present and future.

This renewed man behaved like his brother. Spoke with all the smooth spins that Papyrus both hated and loved.

It had to be him… right?

Papyrus tried to perceive the flow of time, seeking the right path to stop this maddening spiral.

Instead, he got slapped with an awful sting. Glitchy squares clouded his sight. Whole seconds skipped by.

He heard the human calling out for him. “Papyrus,” said Frisk. “Your face!”

“What about my face?”

“You’re making weird glowy lines. There!”

Frisk touched the surface with a finger, causing a familiar pain to surge through Papyrus’ memories. Although greatly dulled by the medication, it’s the same sensation.

The last time he felt it… he was lost in the valley of darkness.

“OWIE!” Papyrus recoiled. “P-please don’t touch them.”

“Oh. Sorry. W-what are those?”

“I DON’T KNOW.” That fact that it’s unknown factor further worried him. It reminded the young skeleton of his breakfast with Judge Thyme. That man still had the scars from when the Persona crippled his dominant arm.

Meanwhile, Sans and Cenna prepared for battle. Papyrus couldn’t stand by anymore.

“SAAAAAAAANSSS!!!” he screamed. Launched himself forward.

Frisk grabbed him around the mid-spine. Rooted their friend with a Green Star, as Undyne would have done.

Still, The Great Papyrus refused to stay quiet.

“WHY ARE YOU PICKING FIGHTS?? I KNOW BATTLES ARE FUN, BUT YOU’RE PUTTING YOURSELF IN GRIEVOUS DANGER!”

“YOU DIED! AND THEN YOU CAME BACK! AND YOU’RE TRYING TO DIE AGAIN??
WHAT… WHAT IS THIS TOMFOOLERY???

No response from the intended recipient.

“SANS, JUST STOP. WHY CAN’T YOU BE LAZY THIS ONE TIME?”

“You heard the lady, bro,” Sans replied. “I’m a DEMON now. A bone-a-fide Determinator. Got no reason to quit. Nor do I want to anyway.”

The elder brother turned away from the edge of the chasm.

“Welp. I guess apologies don’t matter anymore. What’s done is done.”

“Bye.”

Sans took off into the sky of nothingness, followed right behind by Cenna. The trails of cyan and yellow entwined and entangled until they resulted in a huge display of magical fireworks.


Papyrus’ first thought was to stop the fight. He prepared his legs for the big jump.

“No!” Frisk explained: “You can’t use your superpowers yet.”

“WHY?” he asked back.


“I MUST GO!”

Frisk furrowed their brows. “If you force yourself, all of Goopdoc’s efforts will have been for nothing!”

Papyrus backed down. Defeated.

Frisk placed their small hands on the sides of his face.

“Listen,” they said, “I have to help my sister now. Cenna’s not immortal. If she dies, she stays dead.”

Midway through their heartfelt talk, a great bolt of gold smashed through its target. One shine of red later, and the cyan one had reverted his death once more.

It happened again.

And again.
And again.
And again.

The Vanquisher lived up to her legend. With that level of skill, it’s hard to imagine she’s not a monster.

“Thought so. Paps, stay safe. That’s the only way you can help us.”

“H-HOW?”

“Dunno. Someway, somehow… You’ve always been lucky.”
Frisk let him go, before planting a Blue Star on their own chest.

As they floated up to the sky, they hollered back a quote once pegged to his name:

“I believe in you!”

And off they went. It didn’t take long before they joined hands with Cenna, weaving between the surreal pattern of lasers and bones together.

The density increased twofold. Papyrus gasped, thinking that they were cornered for sure… until a red supernova of Determination blew the obstacles apart.

The projectiles that survived were thrown in all directions. They fell like a great storm of hails. Bone fragments -- both fine and large -- pierced anywhere they landed.

A spinning jawbone of Sans’ Blaster zipped over the top of his head, smashing against the concrete with a loud crack.

Karma spread across the ground. Worse yet, more showers of destruction were on the way.

Papyrus dashed towards the stairs and hurried down the steps. Made it just in time to escape the brunt of the rain.

The ceiling shook and thundered from the impact. The larger bones stuck halfway through the top while the rot of Karma continued unabated. At this rate, the whole structure might crumble.

There was a conveniently placed table in the room. Judging from the leftover paper plate, Sans had left food on there for Frisk.

Papyrus hid underneath. It’s what he did during the massive Core quake. Everything shook and the lights flickered. It was a surreal, unpleasant memory.

And then, whole pieces of debris began to fall down. Papyrus had experienced collapses in the Spire’s fire too, but he wasn’t frightened because he’d know where and when they’d be.

Now? He’s normal. A blank. He wouldn’t know.

He cannot know.

It’s a scary, scary thing.

With all this chaos surrounding him, Papyrus only had a single thought playing through his head.

I FAILED.

I FAILED I FAILED I FAILED I FAILED--

Until the voice of a child interrupted him. “Are you okay?”

“YIPES!!!” The surprise was so great, he almost rolled out of his safe zone.

He’s looking at… a… grey Monster Kid?

“OH MY GOD! MONSTER KID?!? WHY ARE YOU HERE? AND WHY ARE YOU COVERED IN GREY PAINT?!?!!?!”
Papyrus fussed over the child, checking for injuries and other signs of ill-health.

“DID YOU HITCHIKE ON FRISK’S CAR? MAYBE ON METTATON?? HOW DID YOU EVEN GET PAST THE CHAOTIC FIRE AND TOP-NOTCH SECURITY?! HOW DID YOU CROSS OVER INTO THE VOID???”

“THIS PLACE IS TOO DANGEROUS EVEN FOR A STUNNING BRAVE ADVENTURER LIKE YOU!”

The strange monster stared back with its mouth agape.

“…I’m not Monster Kid. I’m, uh, Doctor Gaster’s friend?”

Papyrus gasped. “UNCLE GASTER?! THE ONE AND ONLY MAGNIFICENT ROYAL SCIENTIST DOCTOR W.D. GASTER?”

The child nodded. “Yes.”

“IS HE OKAY?!?”

“Y-yeah. He’s okay. Most of the doc ended up back at the lab after Sans ejected him from the System. Anyways, I have a piece of him right here.”

The grey monster turned around. Lo and behold, the miniature head of W.D. Gaster rested inside a small wire lantern hung from their tail’s end.

“Thank you, young lady,” said the head.

It really was Uncle Gaster. Papyrus unhooked the lantern and started hugging it. He cried. Whimpered.

The second round of bombardment caused the ceiling to crumble further. More chunks collapsed.

“My boy, why are you crying?” the doctor asked.

“I’M SCARED! I DON’T HAVE MY MAGIC EYE. A-AND I FAILED. NO, WORSE THAN FAILED! I POWERED UP SANS!!!”

Between the sobs, he said: “MAYBE… I AM REALLY JUST A BABYBONE.”

“Egads! Don’t believe that nonsense!” Gaster retorted, “You’re not done yet. Far from it. I daresay the Chara situation was more grim than this.”

Ghostly, detached hands wiped away the youngster’s tears.

“You have plenty of other skills that don’t depend on your Eye. As long you keep moving forward, you can -- and will -- pick up the pieces. With some help from your allies, of course! You have me. You have your parents. And you have so, so many other friends!”

Hope. Glorious hope. Papyrus felt like he could smile again.

The strange grey girl crawled closer. “Don’t let her juvenile form fool you.” Gaster said, “She’s a trusted assistant of mine. You see, I taught her how to make these special doors that cut between space and time. Portable shortcuts, if you will.”

“I had already sent two of my other followers to guide Captain Undyne’s rescue team. Regroup, and
we’ll figure out the next step from there.”

“Now, if you’d excuse me. I have to coordinate my efforts with Doctor Alphys. I’m leaving Papyrus to you, Goner dear.”

“Okay doc,” said the girl.

Papyrus thought that it was a strange name, ‘Goner’. She’s after all not ‘gone’.

Maybe she would appreciate getting a new one in the near future?

The girl focused her magic to create a door as ashen as her disembodied form.

“It’s done.” She wriggled out of her hiding spot. Peeked through the crack to confirm her destination. Satisfied, she beckoned to him.

“C’mon Papyrus, let’s go.”

At first, he wanted to follow her.

But then Papyrus heard another boom in the air. His instincts propelled him into action. He reached out for the grey child and turned her SOUL Blue. Yanked her away from the door in an instant.

A second after, a fresh torrent of souped up magic cleaved through the tower.

Goner screamed. Papyrus screamed too.

The chaotic multi-coloured mixture of death flew by as the aerial dogfight swept right though. Sans continued his reaper’s rain, while Cenna chased after him with Frisk in tow.

That poor grey child was dumbstruck from fear. She didn’t know what to do. How to react. She just sat there, doing nothing.

At least she’s alive. If he hadn’t snagged the kid out to safety, she would’ve been caught in the crossfire instead. Obliterated.

Papyrus looked down at his hands. Realised what he must do.

“MISS GONER!” he said.

The kid yelped. “Y-yes?”

“WE NEED A NEW DOOR!”

“W-where?” asked Goner. “I need solid ground! W-we don’t have space!”

“YES WE DO!”

Papyrus pointed downwards. The nearest intact floor was so far below, it looked like a tiny square.

“WE MUST JUMP!”

“Are you crazy?!?”

More waves of elaborate patterns exploded in the backdrop of The Void.

“IT’S CRAZIER TO STAY.” He replied in a deadpan manner.
“B-But the doorknob! It’s not automatic. You need to turn it yourself! And crashing through will break the mechanisms!”

“NEVER WORRY, LITTLE ONE! I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- HAVE MANY TRICKS UP HIS SLEEVES. BUT FIRST… DOES THE KNOB TURN CLOCKWISE OR ANTICLOCKWISE?”

“Clockwise.”

“THANK YOU.”

Papyrus secured the monster child in his arms. Collected himself for a moment. Then, he made a great leap.

They dropped fast.

Approaching terminal velocity.

Black winds howled against their eardrums. However, they can’t let that distract them.

The moment she’s within casting range, Goner hurried to conjure a new side-ways door on solid ground. It’s now or never.

Papyrus only had a split second to turn the knob. To put his basic training to good use. Otherwise… he’d rather not think about the consequences.


Open sesame.

They made it in the nick of time. One moment, they’re falling. The next, they’re zooming sideways over the labyrinth.

Papyrus flipped. Spun. Executed a slew of somersaulting acrobatics as he tried to find the right balance. It’s a shame that no one recorded his stunts.

With utmost grace, he landed perfectly on a thick layer of snow.

No injuries. No ugliness. 10/10. It’s the safest landing one could get.

Goner blinked. “Wow… That was. AWESOME! Heh. Now I see why my living twin brother looks up to you.”

Another boom in the sky. Both turned north toward the tower.

The collateral damage destroyed the last of the remaining supports. The whole thing succumbed under its own weight; a grim reminder of what would have happened if Papyrus didn’t take the risk.

“…WE SHOULD GET GOING,” he said. “WHERE TO?”

“Doc said we need to head south.”

They thus turned around, 180 degrees. The path ahead was a flat plane as far as the eyes could see; Gaster had been quite the busybody.

‘The hero and his uncle’s assistant continued onward in a race against the clock. The Magi siblings
tire the longer they delay. Yet, the road was still long… and their destination uncertain.’

‘No one ever said the hero’s journey would be easy.’

Chapter End Notes

By now, I'm sure I'm typo blind. Gonna let this sit here for a few hours while I get some much needed sleep.
‘Determination’, once known as ‘Willpower’, had a strange tendency to resonate with those perceptive of it.

The imposement of wills comes in many ways. At the most basic level, it’s physical force: brutish, unrefined. Those who depended solely on it were of the lowest denominator.

A level above stood the persuasion through words. Why trouble oneself with fists if one could acquire a new ally? From mystics to politicians, their tongue was their blade.

At the highest level, it revolved around direct transfer of the mind. Hopes and dreams. The power to change fate. It could either become the greatest comfort, or the most surreal disturbance.

Nightmares now plagued the ‘vampire’.

He dreamed of a world where the Gungnir’s god had won the war. Persona thought it would be nice to gloat a little. Torment his nemesis with the result of his failure.

However, what pained him the most was not the expected bloodshed… It was the solitary loneliness of his wife.

She became part of a machine, bone and steel melded as one. Bound to the immense circuitry of The Bastion, her Eyes burned day and night to keep countless lives afloat in the sky.

The heart of the nation… was also her coffin.

Where did her ferocious knight go? Mezil wondered.

Gaelic. Did he survive at all?

Lucidia? Lucy dearest?

The husband tried to hold his beloved’s face. Talk to her. Reassure his love. Treat her as a person, not as an automaton.

But at the last moment, he was drawn away by the sounds of an alarm.

Mezil Thyme thus woke up.

What time is it?

He checked his phone. Realised that he had slept through seven earlier attempts at waking. Not to mention that he had a killer migraine.

…My nap was supposed to last just twenty minutes.

Tapping on the weather report app revealed that it’s a cloudy night. The sun had already gone down.

The room was dark. He tried switching on the lights, but none of them worked except for a low-energy emergency bulb.

Still running on backups, I see…
Mezil got out of bed. Found himself limping to the bathroom. He’s dizzy. Lightheaded. Kept the door open to let some light in at least.

Persona’s dark shadow meanwhile loomed in the mirror.

At least he wasn’t visible in full human form. That’d be a sure sign of takeover.

“You again?” Mezil grumbled.

The spirit laughed. “Typical Winston greeting right there. Aren’t you glad I’m still with you today?”

“Tsk. If not for young Frisk’s mercy, I doubt you would be.”

“Hah! Nonsense. I’m a god and you’re a vampire. Unlike your ilk, I dare stand within the rays of the sun.”

Again with his egoistic tripe.

Mezil shook his head and went about his business. He’s in a rush to meet up with the Grandmaster. Perhaps ask the elder to strengthen the prison.

Noticing something wrong, Mezil opened the mirror cabinet for a thermometer. Rinsed the tip. Stuck it in his mouth.

‘39C’, it read.

“What the hell?” Mezil blurted.

“If you actually bothered to get out of your comfort zone, you would have gotten your answer already.”

“I’m no moron. This has to be Sans Serif’s doing. Transferring the World’s DT through me and burning it for his schemes.”

“You know, that new world of his… it’s quite beautiful. Pity your wife continues to be a thorn in my side. Without her, humanity can finally move on to the next step.”

“You don’t care about humanity, Persona. You only care about yourself.”

“Isn’t that the same for you? For all the other Supreme Judges? You tout about greater ideals such as altruism, yet in reality you act the same as us Gungnir. At least we’re honest about it.”

“…Please burn together with your pathetic philosophy.”

Upon finishing his routine, Mezil staggered out of the bathroom. Picked up his phone again to check the news online. The worst always happens whenever he is forced to rest.

Mettaton continued to hog the proverbial spotlight with his overly flashy self. For heaven’s sake, he hoped that Lucidia’s preparations provided that glam celebrity with ample information.

So far, so good. No one hounded him for anti-human sentiments yet.

Then…
“You know what? I invite all you beautiful darlings to come watch my upcoming Spring Concert! You, and you, and you there too~. Yes, the gorgeous cameraman in the back as well! Of course I appreciate the sound crew. My cousin’s a musician.”

The reporters were stunned. One of them asked if it’s not a security risk.

“Terrorists want us to fear.” Mettaton answered, “They want us to cower. To cry. Well baby, we’re not giving in to them. We shall answer their brutish actions with a stadium full of wondrous smiles! My show shall be the most glamorous, fantastical, and dashing event of the season! Oooh yes!”

“Monsters. Humans. Everyone’s welcomed to participate~! Seats are limited, but my broadcasting channel is free to register. Please call in the MTT Hotline at--”

Page, closed. He had heard enough.

“…This is a mistake.”

How the Persona laughed. “A mistake indeed! Crowded zones are always best for maximum casualties. I’m sure my remnants will be eager to answer that call.”

“I need to calm that bot down…”

The grandmaster would have to wait.

Mezil grabbed his cane. Searched through his drawers for a folded list. Inside, it detailed the Spire’s many portals and their respective rooms. He needed to find the one that would lead him as close to Mettaton as possible.

“Portal ID: 0F-03W,” he muttered, “That’s the… third portal on the ground floor of the West Wing. I… I think I know where it is. It’s the exit facing the police station.”

So began his journey.

Whenever he passed a light, as faint as it may be, the shadow of his nemesis appeared on each reflective surface. Haunting. Taunting.

“That skeleton… not only did he overturn your entire operation, he nailed everything about you. Your weaknesses. Your eventual doom. A wonderful asset.”

“Forget it,” Mezil scoffed. “He will never be loyal to a false god like you. Nor can you earn his trust by pledging allegiance with his deity.”

“Shame that he’s born of toxic bone. Had to put him out of his misery.”

Sans alone could perceive the composition of the Abomination at a glance. That’s why Mezil wanted to keep that man alive as much as possible.

But, if he does fall prey to evil… they will have to figure out an alternative.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Sigh.

…It’s difficult to walk. Mezil could feel his face getting damp from sweat. The nausea rumbling in his weak stomach didn’t help either.

West… west…
People may laugh if he confessed that he doesn’t remember every nook and cranny of his own house. They didn't realise that it’s a mansion that once served as a school. There are too many rooms for him to use regularly, if at all.

He arrived at the living room’s stairwell.

*From here, I need to go down and--*

An assault of the mind added to his list of woes. His head hurt from the weight, and his vision drenched in crimson.

Mezil felt his being knock against the railing. He caught it for dear life.

Voices rang between his ears. The hearts that the vampire had claimed resonated from the back of his mind.

They said:

‘I should have this power to save others.’
‘I wish I am more determined.’
‘Why did he rob me of a better chance at life?’

‘Who is he to judge me? Who gave him that right?’
‘He has no right!’
‘It’s his fault I’m a mess.’

‘It’s his fault!’
‘It’s his fault!’
‘It’s his fault!’

“Quiet!” he yelled.

The voices dissolved into incomprehensible murmurs. He didn’t need to understand their words to know they’re cursing him.

It's uncomfortable. Disorienting.

Mezil continued navigating down the steps on the basis of touch alone. As long he kept to the railings, he shouldn’t slip.

“Did you hear that?” said Persona. “The bitter cries of those you’ve robbed. Each one of them once blessed with the power to change the world. But you nipped them in the bud. Denied their bloom.”

“You’re detestable, Winston.”

“Tsk. As short-sighted as ever. I left behind enough Determination for them to lead fruitful lives. Nothing stops the Claimed from becoming successful human beings. They themselves choose to waste it on obsession!”

“If it’s such an ideal, why not surrender your own power? Monitoring the world must be an exhausting job.”
“Says the source of the problem. I swear to never let the Keys of Fate fall into the hands of your kind. Gungnir. Magi. Human. Monster. Extremists are all the same.”

Flat ground, at last. Now… to make sure he doesn’t bump into any furniture.

“I know your game, Persona. You’re trying to weaken me for possession. Futile.”

Persona’s shadow reflected off a polished table. He had his arms crossed, shaking his head in mocking disapproval.

“So paranoid. How do you even enjoy life?”

“Hmph. I don’t need to tell you.”

“Have you ever honestly spent a single day without worrying about the schemes of others?” said the Persona, “When was the last time you took a vacation? I don’t think you had any since the mountain monsters broke free from their confinement.”

Mezil’s cane thumped against the ground. He resisted the urge to lash out. Any response would become ammunition to further beat him down with guilt.

He has always valued the quiet moments with his friends and family.

Don’t miss them.
Don’t forget them.

They’re a treasure to never let anyone sully.

By a miracle or otherwise, Mezil managed to drag himself to the West Wing. This was the lounge where he had discussed many a recent affair with the authorities.

“Finally…”

A small Arcanagram over his heart shone bright. Once invisible portals rippled into view.

There were more of those than he remembered. One on the floor. One on the ceiling. Two on each wall. It’s always a marvel of how Lucidia knew every path like the back of her hand.

The portals appeared black and ominous due to his disturbed vision. Where do they connect to? None looked familiar.

“…Great.” He muttered. He read the list again. “Which one is it?”

It’s a 1 in 10 chance. Mezil chose and committed. Doesn’t matter which.

I can always turn back anyway.

The sudden change of air temperature was very noticeable.

It felt…

Warm? Wait a minute. The sun has long gone down. There’s no heating anywhere, except--

His other senses soon caught up with his thought.

He heard the nearby rumbles of a backup generator. Smelled the scent of gardening equipment and
the fumes of burning biodiesel. Saw the silhouette of plant life.

It’s the Greenhouse: far, far away from Mettaton.

When he tried to turn back, that’s when Mezil realised that his body refused to listen.

Step by step, he’s helpless. Not enough ‘determination’ to defeat Persona’s will.

“You--!”

Persona burst into a laugh.

“This is hilarious. Again, I have to thank that Lichborn for this opportunity. You’d really think that I’d let you accomplish your objective?”

“Since when were you the one in control?”

Wherever Mezil turned, Persona’s shadow walked. He haunted the glass walls. The high ceilings. Off anywhere where what little light would touch.

So the DEMON taunted. “I feel fear flowing through your veins.”

Mezil clicked his tongue.

“Only fools don’t fear you. Caution is what kept me alive to this day.”

“Well of course. I suppose by now you’re the only one who knew me at an intimate level.”

The thought disgusted Mezil. But, he couldn’t deny it. Most of Persona’s closest kin were either dead, imprisoned, or one foot into the grave from age.

Then there was that one loop… some scars remain regardless of time.

“One more word, and I will turn you into an Ebott Goldenflower. Be that damn DEMON plant for all eternity!”

“I’d love to see you try.”

Mezil then heard a hinge turn. Right after, an intense flood of light almost blinded him.

The Magus shielded his eyes. It’s an artificial sunlight lamp repurposed for use against intruders.

“You?!!”

That high-pitched ever-bratty voice. He’d recognize it from a mile away.

“Flowey, get that out of my face this instant.” Mezil grunted.

“What the heck are you doing here?!” said the flower. “…Whatever. Chara needs me.”

Flowey flipped off the switch before leaping back into the darkness from whence he came. The rustling led Mezil and Persona to a different compartment of the facility.

“We have our next destination, it seems.”

The involuntary walk continued.
Mezil tried to calm his mind. Think. Decide what his next plan of action should be.

Flowey’s life may depend on it.

He spotted the ex-prince at the seedling area, moving one of the trays aside and replacing it with a potted Ebott Goldenflower.

It had to be Chara. But, they lacked their distinctive rosy cheeks.

A worrying turn of events. Mezil noticed that the flower children always kept their faces, even when they sleep. For Chara to have none meant they could either be in coma… or worse.

“C’mon Chara,” Flowey whined. “Wake up already. I’m so sick of waiting! You already made me wait since… since FOREVER!”

The child turned around to the taps of Mezil’s cane, and broke a cold sweat. Uncertain. Unnerved.

“Uh… there’s… there’s this weird aura coming out from you. It’s like static electricity.”

“Hah! The puny plant recognizes my presence.”

“Step aside, little one. Let me pay my respects!”

The sudden boom of an unknown voice startled Flowey. “W-who the heck are you?! What’s happening???”

“Flowey, listen.” Said Mezil. “Sans stole my powers. As a result, I don’t have enough Determination to fight Persona’s ghost.”

“What?!” the boy exclaimed. “I thought he’s DEAD! I mean, deader than dead!”

“I wish.”

Mezil lifted his clothes, showing Flowey the glowing bolt of lightning. “The Grandmaster’s magic is preventing a full takeover. However, I’m weakened to the point where I’m no longer in control of my own legs.”

The plant straightened his stalk. “O-okay. What does this stupid ghost mean by ‘paying respects’?”

Pointing at Chara, Mezil explained: “He desires to meet his ancestor.”

It immediately put Flowey on the defensive.

“NO! I’m not letting that idiot get ANYWHERE near Chara! He might hurt them.”

“Hurt?” Persona snickered. “This is too heartwarming.”

“Little flower, I don’t mean any harm. On the contrary, I’m here to help. Don’t you want your friend returned to you in good health?”

Mezil furrowed his brows. Whenever the Persona grants a favour, he expects something in return one way or another.

“What are you up to?” asked the Magus.

“It’s Gungnir matters. Go on, explain like the good teacher you are.”
He rolled his eyes. “Don’t worry, Flowey. The Gungnir exalt the elders they deem worthy. For some reason, your friend demands enough honour to drag me all the way here.”

Flowey asked, “Why? What do they have in common?”

“Both belong to the original Ebott Mountain Sect. It won’t surprise me they’re related in some manner.”

The boy muttered to himself, struggling between suspicion and hope.

In the end, he inched Chara’s pot forward.

“Do whatever you must. Before I change my mind,” said Flowey. The boy didn’t drop that glare at all. Understandable. It were the Gungnir who had killed him all those years ago.

Persona nodded in approval. “Good, good. Now Winston, stretch your hand over their head.”

Despite the deep reluctance, Mezil did as he was told.

“I -- The Persona of Mount Ebott’s golden fields -- command you to live!”

His entire left arm sparked. The intensity increased until it burst out into a small bolt of electrified Determination.

The shock zapped Chara wide awake. Even at its friendliest, that Mark never ceases to provoke extremes.


Flowey wasted no time to give his friend a big scolding.

“You idiot!” He ranted. “We’re supposed to be in the plan TOGETHER! Then you refused to wake up when everything went sour! Were you going to leave me alone again?”

At the end of his rant, he hugged Chara close with his tendrils. “Golly, I’m so glad you’re okay.”

“Azzie… I…” The rosy-cheeked one turned their head away from guilt. “I thought you’re better off without me. I was a failure in life. I was a failure in death. And I’m still a failure in post-death… I can’t even be a proper dumb flower.”

“You’re too entrenched in the old generation’s narrow ways, ancestor.” Persona said.

Chara narrowed their gaze, as Flowey had done. “You… You have the same power as the Legendary Hero.”

“Indeed. I am the most recent Persona. Or as the Magi would prefer to call me: ‘The Last’.”

“…You’re here to gloat about your success?”

“If I thought you’re a reject, I wouldn’t have troubled myself to come. I’ll cut to the chase: the Gungnir of old were all hopeless fools. No wonder they produced nothing of value.”

That statement surprised everyone.

Persona bellowed: “They deserved to be purged. Eradicated in the flames of truth! An end
beffiting their blindness.”

“You -- Chara of Mount Ebott’s golden fields -- had sacrificed your life to achieve a greater goal. That’s the true essence of Gungnir. You didn’t grow soft. You didn’t choose comfort. You gave it your all, transcending into godhood!”

“The previous useless Persona? He should be the one to drink his poison! On that day, the people should have gone on their knees in recognition of your radiance!”

“You’re the underdog who reached the closest to our original founder. That should be the ultimate proof of your worthiness as the next successor.”

Chara snapped back: “I was planning to kill them, idiot! Everyone! I didn’t care about that succession shit anymore.”

“I hated humanity so much, I rather have the monsters win!”

“And you’d be absolutely right. Our sect claimed they’re ‘the original’, but they had become entrenched in traditions of their own imagination. If tormenting your family merely served to puff up their ego, they were the true weaklings.”

“I too would hate humanity if that’s all I see.”

If Mezil must be honest with himself… he had a warped view of people before meeting Lucidia as well. His own family was dysfunctional: populated with liars and addicts. Conscious or otherwise, he did detest humanity in a way.

The Magus sighed. “…Such reasoning is just fertile soil for further bloodshed.”

“You’d do the same if you were in the minority, Winston.”

“Through terrorism? Targeting a stadium full of innocents just because the singer is a monster?”

“The Magi too have their sins. Don’t play coy with me.”

“But do you see me eradicate pro-Gungnir tribes like the Aratet? No!”

“Ahh, yes. Instead you sanctioned the government of their oppressors.”

“Limited by their constitution! If I didn’t stop the war, the whole region would have collapsed into anarchy--”

Flowey interrupted the argument with a concerned question. “A stadium? In spring?”

“Yeah, what’s this about a stadium?” Chara added.

“It’s THAT show, isn’t it?”

Mezil wasted no time to explain: “Yes. Mettaton plans to turn his Spring Concert into a celebratory event for peace. That’s the Gungnir’s next target.”

Both flowers erupted into an uproar. Frisk had built a relationship with those two. They won’t stand by if that child’s life was at risk.

“DO! NOT! TOUCH! FRISK!” yelled Flowey. “You moron! They’re attending that concert too!”
Chara was so infuriated, their eyes glowed crimson.

“Listen here, descendant! If you don’t tell your people to stay the hell away… I will disown you!”

“You want a reason why? Because Frisk became my Persona at one point. If you honour me, you have to honour them too. Disobey, and feel my wrath.”

“I’m the only one allowed to hurt them. Heh. I’m sure they’ll put up a great fight anyway.”

The other flower nodded. “Same goes for me!”

Persona was outright shocked.

None of that annoying arrogance for a full minute, that’s an achievement in itself.

The DEMON chuckled. “This ‘Frisk’ truly is a golden child, hm? Very well. I will accept the command of my fellow god.”

That resulted in a better fortune than expected. If this message could reach the Gungnir’s current leaders, maybe he didn’t need to worry about Mettaton after all.

Alas the question of ‘How’ had to wait for another day. Urgent matters first.

“Are we done here yet?” grumbled Mezil. “We need to tackle the matter of Sans Serif before he breaks the world in half.”

“Of course, of course. Lead the way. Have your precious legs back.”

The human’s knees relaxed, almost dropping him face first. Luckily his reflexes were still quick enough.

“Thank you.” he said.

Uttering words of gratitude to the god of Gungnir? Unthinkable.

Then again, recent events had upturned all preconceptions.

Mezil was just about to make his leave when vines coiled around his arms.

“Wait,” said Flowey. “You gotta bring us.”

Chara nodded. “We have personal business with the Smiley Trashbag.”
Hi I’m alive.

Sorry for the delay. Migraines are a pain and that seriously bumped off a lot of productivity time. The next entry might also be delayed. I’m still not completely okay. Plus final boss moments are always difficult.

Hopefully it doesn’t take too long, though. I want to reach the ending too.

I’m definitely not going to hit the 6 August release date. Crossed fingers that I don’t miss 13 August.

Is anime real? Depends on the genre.

A bad slice of life can be realistic in its setting, yet unrealistic in its human interaction.

A good slice of life can be set in a fantastical setting, yet be realistic in its application.

Right now you might be in an ‘action adventure’ with some ‘mystery’ elements. Add a sprinkling of ‘Psychological Drama’, considering your current antagonist.

The tower collapsed under its own weight.

Wakeup call: a whole tower! Gone in a blink!

A chill of fear and awe crawled across your skin.

**FIGHT - ACT - ITEM - MERCY**

MERCY, you can’t escape.

ITEM, you don’t have any items to use.

ACT, no further explanation needed.

FIGHT…

You miss your trusty knife. But now’s not the time to follow the path of the Gungnir.

You’re a Magus. You’ll do this the Magus way, through and through.

You switched out the FIGHT option.

**MARK - ACT - ITEM - MERCY**

…Selecting MARK overwhelmed you with options. It’s a freaking skill tree.

Seven colours? Each of them with alternate functions?
The Red branch was easy enough to grasp. Without a charge, you plant a Mark of your will. When charged, it releases a powerful Determination supernova.

Huh. So that means all the other colours have their charged versions as well…

Wonder what you could do with those.

“Focus, Frisky!”

Cenna’s warning snapped you back to action. It’s just in time to witness Sans’ next attempt of raining skeletal hell.

Three spirals of fingerbones surrounded him.

Outer layer, white.
Middle layer, cyan.
Inner layer, orange.

Damage on collision, damage when moving, damage when not moving--

Cenna grabbed you by the waist. Next thing you know, the bones began their dance.

They spread. Scattered. Each type at different speeds. Formed hypnotic vortexes that remind you of chrysanthemums.

The two of you squeezed between the gaps. Moving, stopping, then moving again. Those toxic bones almost nicked you!

Why no shields, sis?

“Not yet,” Cenna answered. “Even in Ascension, they ain’t gonna last forever. Using it right now will be a waste.”

Right. They provide protection, but they also expand her ‘hitbox’ by a good margin.

The last of the flowery patterns passed behind you.

“Sounds like you played shmups before,” noted Cenna. “The non-fans wouldn’t use those terms to describe our situation.”

You nodded. It’s one of your favourite genres. Super difficult after a certain point. Understandable why it’s not popular with the rest of the kids.

“Hah. Papa would be proud of ya.”

Sans interrupted your conversation.

“Touching, but don’t think you should get distracted by nostalgia.”

Here comes the next attack. Blasters everywhere. You held your breath as they prepared to fire.

The both of you flew upwards, zipping around to dodge a lightshow of hurt. Thank goodness for 3D space. But how long before Sans corners you? You’re starting to panic a bit.

“Frisky,” Cenna instructed. “Stick your hand into my left coat pocket. Hurry.”
So you did. There’s… an earpiece and a crystal pendant?

* ITEM
* Earpiece * Crystal Pendant.

You equipped them both.

“Connection successful: Greetings, Crimson Keeper Frisk.”

It’s a lady! She reminds you of a mother-computer. Firm, robotic, yet gentle.

“I am Lady Lucidia of House Berendin, The Magus Association’s official Chronographer. I’m also Judge Thyme’s personal Tactician.”

A Tactician?!

Ohemgee! Is she gonna supply you with cool tips for you to escape this predicament?

“Negative: I’m afraid as long Sans can hear us, we are unable to formulate our counterattack.”

“However, that doesn’t mean you are unable to gather information.”

“Other than Papyrus, you’re the person closest to Sans Serif. Knowing what a DEMON values the most is one way to find their weakness.”

What does Sans value? He values Papyrus! Right?

Cenna raised an eyebrow. “Sorry to burst your bubble, Frisky. But what exactly about Papyrus does he value? We gotta be specific.”

She drew her arrow and let it go.

It struck Sans right through his skull. Dusted. Though, The Seraph System already worked to put him back together.

In the meantime, you had a moment of silence. No bullets or lasers to dodge.

You pondered.
And pondered.
And pondered some more…

It’s no good. You’re drawing a total blank!

“Proposition: Marks are a window to one’s heart. Example: Chara. With their obsession on knives, it wouldn’t surprise me if their Mark would take that particular shape.”

“However, knives serve as more than weapons. They’re an essential tool for cooking, butchering, leatherworking, farming, and so on. Countless life activities depend on it. Without this sharp edge, societies won’t exist.”

You recalled the whole buttercup incident and the length they’re willing to suffer for victory… perhaps Chara just wanted to be ‘Indispensable’.

…You hope your babbling made sense.

“Indeed. Now consider Sans Serif: he’s slothful to the point of poor hygiene. His diet is beyond
questionable. And he cares little about the thoughts of others, for better or for worse. And yet, he’s risking a death sentence on calculated gambles of motive unknown."

“What then is the meaning of the ‘Seraph’? Angels are created in service to God. One hypothesis states Papyrus fulfils the deity role in question. I’m inclined to agree. As would Cenna.”

“Heads up!” Your big sis warned. “He’s back. Get ready for the next round!”

…You can’t keep repeating the same phase forever. He’s the one with the infinite continue coin. Not Cenna.

You had to do something.

If communicating with Lady Lucidia will put all your plans out in the open. Maybe… you had to think one up on your own.

* MARK
* Yellow

You slapped a Yellow Star on your palm. Be Determined!

Here comes another army of Blasters. You scrunched your brows and took aim.

Rapid bullets of magic shot out. Smashed through the cannons without problems.

Wow, they’re way stronger than those you conjured in Mettaton’s debut.

Sans noticed your efforts. Tried to trouble you with more complex patterns of poisonous bones.

Hmph! You had a bajillion practice on those!

You maneuvered between the gaps, seeking an opening. And…

There! You found your window. You fired a shot square at his direction.

He dodged it.

No matter! There’s other opportunities.

You fired.
And fired.
And--

Argh dammit he dodged all of them!

Cenna noticed your frustration. “Yo, Frisky. You ain’t gonna land a hit that way.”

Why not?

“You’re way, way too obvious. Shooting is about more than having good vision and finding an opening. There’s a whole bunch of other things involved. Like… judging movements based on habits.”

You watched her draw her bow. At that very instant, Sans started to sweat.

The skeleton knew he’s in trouble. Tried to obscure his trail with erratic teleports.
Upon the decisive moment, Cenna let her arrow fly.

It’s a clean hit! He’s a scattering pile of clothes and dust yet again.

Jaw, drop. You couldn’t wrap your head around it. How? Somehow, she perceived the exact timing where Sans couldn’t escape at all.

Lady Lucidia then said: “Query: Judge Caraway, I do not understand your lack of follow-up.”

Huh?

“You’re waiting for Sans Serif to reform. By battle logistics, you have the capability to shoot twice. Once at the wielder, once more at the Trap Harvester.”

…The lady’s right.

Cenna put up a nervous grin. “C’mon Lucy. You’re the last person I need to explain my actions to, yeah?”

“Query.”

“Okay, okay. I get ya. I’m… I’m done with setting bad examples. Not gonna take the easy way out. As long there’s hope, I’m sticking to Frisky’s way.”

“…Acknowledged. Sir Grillenn shared similar sentiments.”

They’re going through all this trouble because of you?

Thanks, sis…

“Warning: Crimson Keeper Frisk. Don’t be lulled by mercy. Sans Serif grows more powerful by the second.”

You understand.

He’s back for the umpteenth time. Okay gals! You have a plan. If it works, he’s gonna get stuffed into jail.

“That’s what I like to hear!” said Cenna. “So, what’s my role here?”

You tell her to proceed as usual. The difference will be on your actions alone.

“Right on it.”

The aerial dogfight between Seer and Vanquisher spun across the pitch-black sky. You’re determined to wait for the right moment with Patience, like in that Ball Game all the way back in Snowdin.

Even if Sans sees the outcome, he might not be able to react to it. Papyrus being exhibit A of this theory.

You concentrated on your defense until the might of Justice smote the skeleton out of the air.

* MARK
* Charged Orange
Rocket mode, activate!

Orange magic propelled you towards the falling remains.

You know that the Seraph System has too much Determination for you to Mark as-is. But, if you could yank the Trap Harvester out, you’ll leave him high and dry. It’s the ultimate nerf-bat!

The device was right before you.

Yes!
You can do this!


Alas, the bracer slipped away at the last moment. You had misjudged the reach of your arms versus the rate of his revival.

Next, everything went black for that one second.

Oh no. It’s that time-skip power of his at work.

You broke out of the spell through sheer conscious will. You’re amazed that it works to begin with.

But Sans already had his blade held high over your head, ready to strike for blood.

* MARK
* Charged Green

You conjured a shield around yourself. The force of impact combined with the lack of friction sent you hurling downwards.

“Frisky!!!”

Cenna’s scream kicked your mental defenses into second gear. You’re NOT going to smash into the ground like an anime protagonist.

* MARK
* Charged Orange

You darted away from danger.

Phew. Good thing your existing Blue Star grants you a good sense of balance. Really wouldn’t want to accidentally propel yourself toward the planetoid.

You returned to your sister’s side.

“Good lord Frisky, you okay?”
“Requesting Status Update: Are you fine?”

Both ladies popped their questions at the same time.

You told them that you’re just a little shaken. And, super frustrated.

Darn.

You can’t run away…
You can’t MARK or FIGHT either…

Hmm. If that’s the case, there’s one thing left to do!

* ACT  
* Check * Talk

You tell Sans that you want to talk.

Sans raised his brow at you in near-disbelief.

“Really?” he asked. “Right now?”

What’s so weird about that? You’re Frisk, the person who set the Underground free by refusing to FIGHT.

“Welp. I have nothing to say.”

With a wave of his hand, more bones materialized in midair. He added a mix of long and short ones to his repertoire. Now it’s spinning like a sunflower’s head.

You clung close to your sister and started the maneuvering procedure.

One of the longer bones nicked the edge of your sleeve. Another sliced through the base of Cenna’s coat and cut off the ends of your hair!

That was a super, super, super close shave.

You told Cenna to remain on the defensive. You’re gonna try talking to him again.

“…Determined aren’t ya, Frisky?”

You nodded.

* ACT  
* Check * Talk

You tried to talk again, but Lady Lucidia halted you.

“Query: Sans Serif, aren’t you going to attempt to rewind time again?”

Sans shook his head. “Nah. That timeline’s a dead end. No point in going back there.”

Then, why? Why keep on fighting?

He winked back. “Hey, hey. Where’s the fun in spoilers? All you need to know is that I still need a ton more DT to make the magic happen.”

“Request: Confront Sans Serif about his new Eye.”

You suddenly gained a new option.

* ACT  
* Check * Talk  
* Confront

Here goes nothing.
You puffed your cheeks and yelled at him. He DOES have something to say! Instead of keeping it to himself, let it out!

“Can you even comprehend it?” Sans snickered.

Maybe you can’t. But the skelly lady will! You trust her smarts.

“I know you can hear me, Sans Serif,” she said. “Life is full of new discoveries. As you’re aware, the Red Eye never existed in a natural state. We know what the other Six Aspects are capable of. How they synergize with other virtues.”

“Now here we are… observing a new frontier of science. I’m sure you have plenty to say about this subject.”

Sans began to… get super excited? His face lightened up, akin to a kid who found another nerd to geek out with.

“Wow. I’m not used to have anyone THAT interested in my research. I mean, there’s Gaster. But we don’t exactly get along. You, lady? I respect you.”

“It’s as you say. Each Aspect has a known Seer-specific power, summarized in keywords. Let’s review…”

“Ascertain.”

Cyan spells filled the space. They’re fast and ironically erratic, demanding Patience from those they fly through. You unconsciously held your breath in an attempt to stay completely still.

“Reach.”

Orange bones marched forth with Bravery. Cenna made sure you stayed close to her as she kept moving in the opposite direction. Made one big circle.

“Archive.”

Grams spawned around you. When they activated, you and Cenna got trapped in dangerous purple nets.

There’s no choice but to Persevere.

“Appraise.”

Skulls of doom circled around. Then the maws of Justice opened. No escape!

But your Magus sister hugged you tight. She summoned her shields. You heard them cracking when the firing squad hammered against the protective layer.

At last, it’s done. It seems that the mayhem destroyed the netting too.

“Restore.”

He rained down leaves of Kindness. They don't hurt and are… quite refreshing.

You feel super uneasy. It’s like he’s preparing for the grand finale.
“Reinforce.”

Sans reached out his left hand. You heard a fizzle coming from Cenna’s boots.

“The wingboots!” She exclaimed.

With their Integrity compromised, your sister could no longer float.

You quickly grabbed her by the arms. Put more Determination into your Blue Star. While you did so, she conjured a bunch of those string drones. They secured a binding net between you two.

Yet, you’re still descending… FAST. As a fully-grown adult, she outweighs you by far.

To see her legs pulled straight down toward the half-broken planetoid below… it made your hands go clammy.

“Urgent: make another Mark on Cenna! Make her float like you!”

How?! Can you make duplicates? There’s no limit?

“Multiple Marks of the same colour can exist at a time. They can even be applied on the same person. You noticed that in the battle with Judge Thyme, yes?”

But… you’re not her husband!

How can you be sure? If it fails, you might both end up falling to your doom.

Besides, your hands were occupied. And you don’t dare to let go.

You’re trying your best to counter her weight, to be the reverse-anchor.

Cenna asked, “You think you can plant a Mark using your head? Like, literally?”

It’s worth a shot.

“Be Brave, Frisky. You can do it.”

* MARK
* Orange

Strength empowered your arms. You’re ready.

After taking a deep breath, Cenna made a huge swing with her legs. The return momentum was large enough to help her pull her entire body upwards.

You readied yourself for a whooping headbutt.

* MARK
* Charged Blue

It’s a success! A Blue Star got firmly planted on Cenna’s chest.

…Though, that blow really winded her. It’s still one of your headbutts in the end. They’re not to be trifled with.

“Thanks Frisky.” she said, “Knew you could do it…”
Two more coughs. Cenna tried her best to smile.

You turned to Sans again. Oh, you’re fuming so hard.

“Heh. That was actually really cool,” he said. “Did not foresee that. I could have stopped the moment. But, nah, that’s no fun. Besides, I learned something new too.”

“Anyway, that’s all the stock colours. So, what about our brand new shade? Red. Which ‘Keyword’ gets the concept of Determination down to the bone?”

Lucidia replied, “Hypothesis: It’s ‘hope’ is it not? The drive for a better tomorrow.”

“That’s your personal delusion, lady.” Sans replied, “Sounds sweet, but also kinda strange. Why would you care about a better world that you don’t get to live in? Cra-zey.”

You heard a small gasp over the microphone.

“HEY!!!” Cenna flipped out so hard, you got a startle.

She readied her bow. Teeth, grinding.

“Look, Mister Chronograph, I salute you for raising the Cinnamon Roll all on your own. But you know JACK SHIT about Lucy! Drag her through the mud one more time, and--!”

“Judge Caraway, please stand down.”

Her voice shook a tiny bit. What unmentionable things happened in the past? You’re worried for Lady Lucidia.

”…Query: Sans Serif, what is your conclusion? What is the ‘Keyword’?”

“The keyword is… Dream.”

The Seraph System charged red. He pointed his arm towards you and…

…Fired a beam of time-freezing light.

Your sister pushed you aside with everything she got.

No!!!

It’s too late. The beam came into contact and encased her in the world’s strongest prison. Her eye-wide alarm, sealed in place.

You tried to punch her out with your fists.


“…Heh. Guess she learned her lesson,” said Sans. “Once upon a time, she dropped her baby sibling into foster care. That coward.”

“Now she’s living her ‘Dream’ to be the best big sister. Protecting lil’ Frisky at all cost.”

Regret filled your heart.

If only you trusted her sooner.

All those wasted days doubting her intentions.
Why? Why is Sans doing this?

“To prove a point, really. Dreams are closer to lies, you see. They’re possible goals that may or may not ever be achievable. Maybe sometimes you can get away with denying reality. More often than not, it bites you in the hind."

“Let’s see. What’s yours…” he breathed a nostalgic sigh. “Welp, guess it never changed. You want to save everyone. One way or another. Including dirty ol’ me.”

“Say, Frisk. What does it mean to ‘save’ someone? Is it just keeping them out of trouble? Giving hugs to console them from poor life choices?”

By stopping them from doing bad things, duh!

“What is ‘bad’, then? When it hurts others? What does it mean to ‘hurt’ someone? There are some humans out there who think that giving birth is an evil of itself.”

“Heh. I can understand the reasoning. You may never know if your kid turns out to be a great guy like our Paps… or absolute trash like me. It’s all a mad gamble.”

No, Sans! Stop!

You had enough of self-deprecating talk from Alphys! Just stop this!

“Hey. I’m being honest here.”

* ACT
* Vent * Rage
* Flip table * FFFFF

That’s a lie!!!

Does he care about the universe?
No!

Does he care about nature and whatever??
No!

Does he care about other people???
No!

Does he care about himself????
Hell no!!!

He doesn’t give a shit about anything! His goddamn nihilism is more annoying than Jerry ever was!

If nothing fucking matters, why the hell is he now so damn DETERMINED?!!

He didn’t even give two shits when you killed Papyrus! All he did was to condemn you as a ‘dirty brother killer’. And then what? Let you go???

The only time he actually moved his bony butt was when you threatened existence itself! Even then, his god-brother Papyrus was already DEAD! Why bother?!

“…Mysterious, right?”
Mysterious his ass!

YOU are gonna tell him EXACTLY what it means!

He’s just SCARED!

Putting on such big talk about being the last defender, while in reality he’s just afraid of The End!

“What am I even supposed to be afraid of?” he asked back.

Losing everything The Great Papyrus ever loved! From spaghetti to dinosaur oatmeal to awesome cars. Nevermind the people!

He IS too good for this world.

There are indeed many who would jump on the closest opportunity to take advantage of his kindness.

Flowey did it! You did that too!

But Papyrus would have wanted Sans to let his offenders live.

Despite their cruelty.
Despite their failure.
Despite his absence.

It’s ALWAYS live and let live!

The End? Now THAT’s a problem! It would utterly destroy everything Papyrus stands for!

“Yup. You’re right. Heh. Guess it really takes one to know one.”

You watched him tap the screen. You knew he didn’t require manual input. He’s doing this for spectacle’s sake: an announcement to everyone watching.

“‘The Angel…’” he declared, “‘The One Who Has Seen The Surface’… they will return. And the underground will go empty.’”

“Mom knew about the Prophecy. Heard of Gaster’s tales of human myth. Named me after an angel… I guess she really thought I’d make the cut. Quite a disappointment, dontcha think?”

He stopped fiddling. A strange aura grew around him. Made sure to he put up his hoodie.

“Welp. If you all insist I’m a bone-a-fide Seraph, I might as well turn into my namesake.”

A great burst of light then flashed. You shielded your face with your arms.

You last witnessed this when Asriel went Hyperdeath.

When the light cleared, you gazed upon the results of his transformation.

White fire flared not from the socket, but around him. It burned forever like a sacred torch.

Gone was the casual slop. He’s wearing angel’s robes, true to form. It made his mended blue hoodie become a proper cowl.

Six wings of bone had sprouted from his back. A grand succession of plumage hung from the
skeletal frames. On each, a motif of eyes adorned their vanes.

And then they…

….They blinked. That’s when a deep sense of horror smacked you across the head.

*Every single ‘feather’ is a Seer’s Eye!*

**SANS SERAPH**

The true ‘End Boss’ has finally reared its ugly head.

You’re convinced now…

It’s not that ‘anime is real’. Rather, reality is just a game.
Fallen History

Chapter Notes

Guess who completely missed the deadline twice? /sigh

Apologies for the long wait. I was struck with a nasty case of flu. Those take a while to recover. Here’s hoping that it didn’t derail the schedule more than it already did.

I have art for this scene! First, my original design.

Some close up shots...

And then Mnstrcndy’s awesome rendition. I nerd out so hard because Candy-sama’s linework is one of my favs. I had permission to upload it on my art blog.

Tragedy and Fate from Fate/Zero is a good soundtrack to prepare.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Sans Serif studied the Surface’s culture, he noted a certain fixation on the ‘expansion of the mind’.

Many claimed to have exclusive knowledge to go beyond. Rituals. Substances. Machines.

Forget all that ignorant talk. It will never compare to the truth.

His six wings spread apart. They gazed. They blinked. The ‘Fire of Humanity’ burned in each Eye.

Sans found himself afloat in empty space. For that moment, all was silent.

He breathed in.

I see everything.

...Yet I see nothing.

The annals of time reach far too deep.

‘The Void’. Such an ironic name, he thought. Others saw it as vast expanse of nothingness. In truth it consisted of countless invisible highways. A map of reality, one could say.

When he exhaled, the stillness was broken by the downpour of endless noise.

It’s the roars of the river.
It’s the song of the mountains.
It’s the screams of the damned.
It’s the melodies of life.

Altogether, they’re a jumbled mess.

Knew that’s gonna happen. Focus, Gaster’s number one complaint.
You can do it, Sans. It’s what you’re best at.

Focus, he did. Tuned out each irrelevant detail. ‘Everything’ was put aside to face the Child of Calamity.

As expected, the angel’s sight couldn’t see Frisk past their aura of Determination. It’s whirling a maelstrom of hope and despair.

Nightmares… Dreams… forever in flux.

Their sheer power wrapped around the shadowed human, giving the impression of a burning star.

“Heh,” Sans began. “That look on your face… nah. I can’t see it at all.”

Frisk checked themselves, puzzled by the statement.

“Corrupt Determination enshrouds and obscures. Don’t bother making yourself pure. It’s humanly impossible.”

I wonder…

Sans played his card: chose to test the kid. “Maybe as the battle goes by, your killing intent will grow. Don’t blame ya for that, really. But you still gotta take responsibility.”

The aura darkened. Frisk’s human-form began distorting into a more demonic version of themselves.

Lucidia quickly halted the child. “Warning: Sans Serif is engaging in psychological warfare. Your anger is what he wants. Refuse to give in. It is imperative.”

Frisk muttered a soft ‘okay’. They calmed themselves down.

Thought so. The Eye of Dreams perceives Determination itself. Their ‘wishes’ and ‘curses’.

Frisk’s patience is wearing thin. I just froze Cenna too. Not expecting their corruption levels to remain stable for long.

Possibility one, they’ll become reckless and give me an opening.

Possibility two, they’ll become deadlier… and I’ll be in deep shit.

Before the kid could do anything else, he flapped his wings to trap them in a net of Purple.

Damn. In Seraph Mode, it’s one instant cast after another. No complex setups, no incantations. Magic flows instinctively, no matter how foreign.

If only I had this power in the Underground…

Frisk was not amused. “Come back here you fucking fartmaster!!!”

Voice, twisting. And they passed the Trial of the Crimson Hall?

“Dunno why your husband approved this kid.” Sans said, addressing Lucidia. “Look at them. They’ve lost their way.”

“………………”

No reply.
“‘Icy’…”

Puns aside, her mannerisms were cold enough to make the air freeze. Still she had a point; this was not the time for petty banter. Frisk could break free at any moment. Lingering only brought unnecessary risk.

The angel thus floated up high. Then, before the full breadth of all possibilities, he stretched all six of his wings. The Void’s howling black winds danced with the fabric of his new robes.

“Here we go. Show me. Show me why it’s impossible to avoid ‘The End’!”

The universe answered on behalf of his behest.

Relevant history flipped by like the pages of a book.

He understood the ramifications.

_Welp, thought so. Now I need to make this clear to everyone--_

Sans was interrupted by a host of unpleasant symptoms: a headache, coupled with a strange burning sensation building up around his sockets. The smarting stings made it difficult to see.

_What the hell?_

It’s tempting to touch, but chemical safety classes taught him not to contact an unknown substance. More so if it’s already on his face.

He turned the view of his visions to himself. Have them function like a camera.

That’s when he realised that he’s crying tears of glowing purple.

_Tears?_

_No. Tears match a Seer’s main colour. Purple isn't Cyan._

He did not weep the waters of emotion. No, he’s leaking liquidized Karma.

_Wait a moment. How much HP do I have?_

**SANS SERIF**

**HP:** ∞

**ATK:** ∞

**DEF:** ∞

_Infinite?!?_

…………………………

I should at least try to bring my KR back to manageable levels. For now.

The forced expulsion of poison set him ablaze.

It’s one thing to be the embodiment of sacred fire. It’s a whole other thing to become the very fuel to feed it.

The flames extinguished a few seconds later. He felt his bones shiver from the strain. Wiped the
sweat off his cranium.

_Ugh. That’s nasty. Mental note: do NOT let Karma build up to those levels._

Sans then heard a high-pitched nerdy voice in the distance. It’s familiar: invoking the image of someone with a huge collection of anime merchandise.

“Alphys?”

He turned around. Frisk had broken out of the trap; they’re jetting towards him.

“Oh. My. God.” It was indeed Alphys over the line. “An angelic final form? With creepy eye wings?! Did he actually grow taller?!”

If she’s here… Doctor Gaster should be near.

“Egads, we’re at the point of no return and THAT was your first thought?!”

Frisk responded, “I can’t believe he’s taller than me! I should be the one to have a growth spurt, not Sans!”

“You too?! Whatever happened to priorities?”

Sans chuckled at their reaction. In reality, he didn’t grow at all. The long robes hid his dangling legs. Combined with his wingspan and the lack of a concrete floor, it created the illusion of increased height.

Amusing. But he can’t fall for distractions.

Where did Lucidia go? I know she’s not the kind to take a break in the middle of a battle. By tactical means, she’s Frisk’s best guide. Swapping out with this zero-experience pair is suicidal. …Unless.

He was rudely interrupted by an ominous orchestra. It’s a classic epic by now, having inspired many to study the older roots and update them with new styles.

Here comes the choir. True to his wordy ways, Sans snuck in some custom lyrics for his situation.

“Estuans oculi--”
“Joci vehementi--”

Doctor Gaster must have facepalmed on the other end. “Why???” he wailed.

“Er. A-a-a-atmosphere?” Alphys stammered. “S-should I turn it off?”

“No.” The music added fire to Frisk’s heart. “It fits the mood.”

They planted a renewed Yellow Star on their hand. Ready to fight. Tried to shoot Sans down in a chain of rapid fire. Their grasp on magic grew by the minute.

Instead of teleporting away, Sans’ instincts told him to shield the Seraph System. He folded his wings together and deflected the bullets with ease.

The kid dropped their jaw. How amusing.
Sans asked. “What, you think these extra limbs are just for show?”

Just when things began heating up, a grumpy scientist cut the battle short. Shut off the music as well.

“Enough!” Gaster exclaimed. “Let me talk.”

“Talking is pointless,” said Frisk. “He won’t listen.”

“Oh, but he will. I shall make a plea that he cannot deny! Sans Serif, why don’t you educate the Child of Mercy about what will CAUSE The End?”

“Declaring the guilty verdict first without reading out their crimes? How unbecoming of a judge!”

Give in?
Don’t give in?

Gaster had a point. Sans wanted to publicize his findings anyway.

“Welp. I guess as the saying goes… ‘seeing is believing’.”

He snapped his fingers.

Tiles began to build an enclosed world around the summoner and his opponent. Formed a ‘globe’ for a terrarium of history.

By the time it’s done, they’re on a mockup of a tropical island. It’s night. The scents of the ocean mixed with the warm air. Not a single detail was left out.

Frisk’s foot shuffled in the fine beach sand. They’re astonished.

“W-where are we?” asked Alphys.

“The Nation of Mu,” Sans answered. “Back in the day, they had three major islands. Lemuria, Atlantis, and the one you’re standing on.”

“Let’s skip to the fun part.”

Another snap, and the scenery shifted from the beachside to the city.

The streets were full of life-like dolls of its citizens. Upon command, they began to ‘live’ as they would in that era.

Sans tucked his wings and floated to Frisk’s side. The fabric on the lower half of his body slid on the ground. That’s fine: it won’t dirty or tear.

Hands in the pockets, he relaxed. “Go on. Lead the way. I’ll follow your pace.”

Frisk replied, “Are you serious?”

“Serious enough to give you money. Go buy yourself some snacks.”

A purse spawned in their hands. It’s filled to the brim with Mu currency.

Gaster grumbled. “Resist the temptation, Child of Mercy. He’s trying to con you into having feeling things that you shouldn’t have.”

Sans wasted no opportunity to throw a retort: “You keep calling them that, old man. But I don’t think
you know what mercy means.”

Echoes of the past continued to play.

Wooden bamboo stalls of all kinds lined a crowded walkway. They bustled with advertising and merrymaking. Countless vendors sold their wares, from edibles to souvenirs, to jewelry and flowers, to other festive knick-knacks.

Every stall had their own style of lighting. Some opted for a more mysterious interior. Others thought a large electricity bill was the least of their concerns.

Likewise, one festive clothing stall played some hot beats, while another featured classic Rock. The owners tried their best to overpower each other by raising the volume. Around the bend, a band of buskers performed live for donations.

Lights and sounds.

What a chaotic mess. But, that’s half the fun.

Advanced technology existed side by side with the traditional nature decor. One stall was completely automated. It served ‘Sliced Noodles’. Customers select their desired meal, pay the money, and a system of robotics prepared the rest.

It’s close to a factory production: a dough-maker, a noodle-cutting robot, a soup dispenser, and more mechanical arms to arrange the toppings. All the owner had to do was to maintain quality. And maybe hire people to move the equipment on occasion.

Everything was done behind a transparent screen to serve as an attraction. Attract the youth, it did. Like bees to flowers. Sans understood the appeal.

Along the way, he spotted a pair of lovers walking down the street. Hands together. How sweet.

More children played at a balcony. They had cardboard model planes in their hands. One cheeky bugger kept trying to ‘crash’ his toy into his playmate’s butt. The other boy was far from happy. Nevertheless, their antics made their elders laugh.

A group of friends toasted beer together. Ah, a Moldsmol’s part of the gang. Others started joking about their similarities to a friend’s jelly dessert.

‘Don’t get eaten by accident!’, they said.

But the gelatin monster jiggled in confident protest. Insisted that they’re way too chewy.

Then, while the kid didn’t pay attention, they walked straight into a running child.

Frisk’s power puffed away from the shock. What’s left was a faint red glow, thin enough to see their true face through.

“Ow!” they exclaimed.

The monster child responded with a quick bow of apology before hurrying off to catch up with their friends. Too stunned for words.

“Oh dear, a lone human child.” A clam monster noticed their presence. She asked, “Where are your parents?”
Alphys gasped. "Oh. My. God. They're actually talking to you! I thought they're just dolls!"

Ah, that superfast speech. It's been a while. "Fits the atmosphere, no? By the way, I'm invisible to them. Non-existent. They'll only respond to Frisk."

The kid froze. They didn't know how to reply.

"Are you lost?"

Frisk shook their head. "No. I-I... I know my way home."

"Oh. That's good. If you need any help, talk to those guys in uniform. Remember, don't follow strangers."

She motioned to a pair of nearby monsters: one skeleton and a fishman. Their police gear showed the clear influence of human society.

"Okay, thanks." Frisk replied.

"You're welcome. Enjoy the festival!"

The walk continued. More and more people reacted to Frisk’s presence. Vendors tried to catch their attention with their wares. Particularly those who sell toys.

An excited deer toddler exclaimed to their dad that they had seen a human. Embarrassed, the father apologized to Frisk. He picked up his child and excused himself to a quieter spot.

Groups of assorted monsters whispered between themselves. Adult humans were already a rare sight. An unescorted child amidst their festival? The most unusual.

Frisk finally stopped at a stand selling grilled fishcakes. ‘A Mu speciality’. The store owner asked if they wanted to buy any.

After a brief contemplation, the human shook their head and thankfully declined the offer.

The realism had begun to sunk into their mind. Everything’s going according to plan.

*Time to raise the heat.*

"You feel it, don’cha? Their hopes and dreams. I mean, these may be dolls... but they all represent real people. Someone who once breathed the same air as you."

"Ever wondered what happened to these good folk?"

Frisk tensed up. Rightfully so. They had good instincts on their head.

Of the trio, Sans pitied Alphys the most. She had endured enough horrors with her botched experiments. From now, things will only get worse.

Snap. The world switched from the delights of festivities to a cold dark corridor.

Magic hummed in the air.

"This sounds familiar." Gaster muttered.

"It feels familiar too." Frisk agreed.
Onward, they went.

The mechanical sliding door opened up to a vast complex of technology. Intense whiteness radiated from below, supplying endless light to the myriad of walkways.

“The Core?!” Both scientists exclaimed at the same time.

“Half-right,” said Sans. “You’re inside Mu’s ocean-based power facility. Similar to our geothermal plant, except without the tile-switching mechanisms.”

Ever-curious, Frisk peered over the railings.

“Don’t wanna fall there, kid. You’ll either die, or get scattered in The Void.”

They asked back. “I thought we’re in an illusion?”

“Nope. Spacetime distortions are guaranteed whenever you see that white stuff. Not surprising, since it’s a key component in building Spirit Gates.”

“What?!!?” Gaster flipped.

“...Sensei, what’s a Spirit Gate?”

“I’ll explain later, Doctor Alphys. My god, if that’s the case... How much potential energy does the ocean have?”

“Too much for one island.” Sans said, “I used to think that the Surface lagged behind in the magical energy department. But with this data, I think it’s safer to say that they lost most of their tech.”

A loud bang echoed in the air. It sounds like a gunshot.

Frisk got on their feet. They hurried to the source further down the facility.

They ended up at a long drawbridge connected to a circular platform. It’s suspended above the mass of white, supported by a pillar at the center.

A humanoid creature stood at the end. Light had no effect on him. If it weren’t for the glow of crimson outlines, he would have been a complete shadow.

“That’s young Mezil right there,” Sans pointed out. “Heh. No wonder he calls himself a DEMON. He’s almost all corrupt DT.”

Was that a bartender’s uniform?

It was indeed. That man had a very specific taste in clothing, no matter his earning bracket.

“I-i-is that a... a... dead body...?” asked Alphys.

When Young Mezil stepped aside, her worst fears were confirmed.

“Frisk, don’t look!”

Too late. The kid couldn’t take their eyes away from the grisly sight. A headless corpse lay front-down on the ground, soaked in its own growing puddle of blood.

Sans asked. “Too messy, heh? Funny, Monster dust didn’t phase you at all.”

Frisk wanted to answer back. But, their voice attracted the attention of the DEMON.
The illusionary Mezil pointed his gun.

Startled, the kid raised their hands. They had already gotten a taste of this man’s gun skills. Not going to risk eating a proper bullet.

“A child?” the vampire questioned. “What are you doing here? This is no playground.”

Mezil’s deep, stern voice hadn’t changed a single bit with the passing of time: an impossibility under any normal circumstance. His way of magic may have age-deterring side effects.

“I’ve come to help!” replied Frisk. “I’m a Magus too!”

They conjured a Yellow Star as proof of their power.

_Yellow, not Red. Smart. This Mezil is on high alert. If he thinks of the kid as another participant in the war, they might just lose their head._

Gun, lowered. The man was nonetheless displeased. “Magus or not, you should leave. Escape before you suffer a fate worse than death.”

“What about you?” they asked.

“I have my ways.”

Mezil hurried over to the central pillar and armed his gun. Charged it with magic. Poised to obliterate this mechanism before it triggers the apocalypse.

Magic intensified. The scores of the platform’s flooring lit up, fully exposing its true nature…

A massive Arcanagram.

Gaster muttered disbelief over the line. “It can’t be…”

It’s a reaction Sans had long expected. “Yup. Who would have thought science could be so universal? Of course the humans would try to build a Soul Stealer.”

“Why?!”

“Why wouldn’t they? They have their reasons. And because they can, they have to.”

A magic-charged bullet shot out from Mezil’s pistol. The impact so great, it smashed a hole through reinforced metal. That explained how his unfortunate victim lost their head.

But… once he broke through to the pillar’s true mechanisms, Mezil was repelled by a flash of red.

“Argh!” He cried out. Staggered backwards. When he got his bearings back, he checked his chest.

It’s stamped with the symbol of a Queen: the ultimate Chesspiece.

When that happened, the DEMON’s aura dissipated. Drained. That Mark ate through all of Mezil’s reserves. Sans could finally see his face without any interference. A handsome chap in those days past.

“What the hell…? My Keys are gone!”

The younger Lucidia replied: “That Mark… is the false construct that killed Judge Pashowar. The
‘queen’ to his ‘king.’ How? It should only be limited to the Crimson Hall.”

“Hmph. For a Claim to be applicable, the reverse must also be possible. I’ll break it!”

Mezil focused his thoughts. Charged his SOUL with the most powerful butterfly that he could muster.

Alas, he failed. The attempt only drained his stamina.

“I hoped I would be wrong. As it stands, there were none stronger than Judge Pashowar. If he couldn’t do it, then…”

Fumes of Determination leaked between the gaps of Mezil’s teeth. “Dammit! Is there a kill switch?”

“T-there…” Lucidia’s voice wavered. “There isn’t any.”

“…Do we have any other methods that don’t depend on time travel?”

Only sobbing could be heard from the other end.

“I understand. We… can mourn another day. Damage control is our current priority. Good thing I still have my teleports. Recalling to base.”

Mezil used the last of his butterflies for the retreat.

“No, wait!” Frisk yelled. “I can break your Claim! Come back!”

“It’s pointless.” Sans had to remind them. “That’s the unchangeable past, kid. There’s nothing you can do.”

They didn’t listen. That ominous maelstrom of Determination returned, swirling around Frisk as they conjured their true Mark with the intent of smashing it straight into the pillar.

A great white light then flashed upon collision. The impact reset the entire simulation back to blank ceramic tiles.

“Uh… what happened?” asked Alphys.


He rose up high and stretched his folded wings. One last snap kickstarted the system.

Fumes of burnt fuel soon soured the sights and scents. Fire floated on the surface of the waves. Parts of broken battleships and aircraft bobbed around, waiting for their inevitable burial in the watery grave.

The deep blue ocean roiled around the Abomination, whose sheer amount of corrupt Determination dyed the white goo in bloody mud.

Frisk stood at the prow of the sole remaining battleship. The suffering monstrosity towered high into the grey, clouded skies.

It howled the broken dreams of all its victims.

A string of anime-jabbering droned over the intercom. Alphys repeated the word ‘muri’. It means
“impossible’.

“Dust…?” the kid muttered as they looked around. “It’s everywhere.”

“What else did you expect?” Sans responded. “We’re talking about war here. Horrible isn’t it?”

“Fun fact: You’re looking at the Spring Mission of our current timeline. A future in which King Asgore absorbed Cenna’s SOUL and the Magi led a massive fleet to end the threat of the Abomination. Once and for all.”

“I gotta say, lots of money sure went into this. Bet Mezil spent decades getting this much backup. Welp. Sunken cash is sunken cash.”

The kid furrowed their brows and turned towards Sans; “If that’s the case, where’s Dad? Where’s Sis???”

“Good question.”

He floated back. Soon after, a great crimson trident fell from the sky. The sharp prongs pierced deep into the ship’s flooring.

Frisk jolted from the shock.

“Don’t tell me…”

Thus, the angel announced a grim declaration: “The King is dead. Long live the King. Take this trident as the symbol of inheriting his SOUL.”

“No!” They exclaimed. “T-this can’t be happening!”

The weapon began to peel. Papery flakes akin to dried flower petals scattered in the wind.

“Time is ticking, Frisk. If you don’t grab it, their death will be in vain. You don’t want that. Right?”

Panicked, the child grabbed the trident. The flaking stopped and the cracks healed.

Sans continued his narration. “You were one of the seven Magi chosen to cast The Seven Soul Barrier should things go south. A proper one. Not like ours and it’s Red-deficiency. Too weak, y’know.”

“Too bad your new friends didn’t make it out alive.”

Six human SOULS spawned before the child.

“You’re the world’s last hope…”

“So, answer me this: What does it mean to ‘save’ everyone?”

“Can you even save anyone?” Sans asked. “Just because you ‘have to’, doesn’t mean you ‘can’. But even though you ‘can’t’, you ‘must’. Sound familiar?”

“It’s the same deal since our days in The Underground. A destructive self-fulfilling prophecy, boiling down to your twisted sentimentality.”

“THAT is the true cause of The End. There’s just no sugarcoating it, lil’ DEMON.”
Frisk ripped their father’s weapon off the ground. Their silhouette twisted further and further.

They pointed the tip square at Sans Serif’s face.

“**SHUT! UP!**” they yelled.

“That’s your best answer?” The angel snickered. “It’s all within expectations.”

“You’re not cut out to be the Supreme Judge, Frisk. You never were.”

At last, the human broke under the pressure. They raged. They screamed. Their crimson aura burst like a solar flare.

They are the sun, wishing upon the stars to heed their call.

Specks of shimmering yellow dispelled the obscuring clouds. They shone so bright, so numerous, that they turned the whole sky gold.

That’s when Sans realised he had made a grave error in his calculations.

Maybe it’s a knee-jerk reaction. Perhaps he sensed that his lifeline -- the Seraph System -- was in danger.

Whichever it was, he cut a Sans-shaped hole in spacetime and dropped head first into the gap between realities. Anything that didn’t fit through the emergency exit got sliced off without mercy.

His six wings, gone.

It was Sans’ closest shave thus far. His White Eye showed the aftermath. The extra limbs he discarded burst into Karmic flame, consuming all of its Red fuel.

From the starlit sky, great beams of magic rained down upon the simulation: each with power greater than Papyrus’ Gasterblaster.

The total obliteration didn’t stop there; each laser tore apart whatever’s left of Megalovania until it ceased to be.

*Bye-bye, Mister Moon. Nice knowing ya.*

And so Sans eventually found himself in total darkness.

*Where’s up?* He wondered. *Where’s down? Strange. I can’t tell the difference.*

*How far am I anyway?*

Sans blinked once… he fell asleep. Lost his focus. The waves of vision worlds swept him away to wherever they flowed.

In the faded past, Sans saw himself as a young man just past his twenties. Doctor Gaster had him study the mechanisms of the Soul Stealer.

It’s fortunate that Alphys was an invisible teenager back then. The weight of this sin would be too much for her to bear. It’s worse than the botched experiments.

But Sans Serif?
He doesn’t feel anything. Nor he had the right for it.

That’s what he told himself. Day in, day out.

“SAAAAAAAANS! IT’S DINNER TIME!”

“K, bro.” Sans covered the doomed plans with all sorts of bad jokes. Papyrus finds them so repulsive, the mere sight would deter him.

Good. He doesn’t need to know.

It’s burgers and fries from the local joint today. Milk instead of soda. Little brother insisted. Papyrus got taller, fast. He had his first growth spurt a few months ago. Just 13-years-old and he’s already half a head above his elder brother.

“Hey Paps, mind if I ask you some questions?”

“HM? WHAT IS IT, SANS? THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS READY TO ANSWER! NYEH HEH HEH!”


Little Papyrus frowned. “…I DON’T LIKE THAT BOOK ALREADY.”

“Me neither,” Sans replied. “But it got me thinking. For example: one smart cookie thought that merging people into a singularity is gonna save everyone.”

“What is this ‘SINGULARITY’?”

“There are several different forms of singularities. But, in this case… Everyone is everybody. Nobody dies. But you trade away your personal identity.”

“DOES THAT MEAN EVERYONE BECOMES THE GREAT PAPYRUS?”

“Nah. It means nobody gets to be anybody. I wouldn’t be Sans. You wouldn’t be Papyrus. Undyne won’t be Undyne anymore either. We’d just be alive. In a constant dream-like state.”

Papyrus took an aggressive bite out of his burger. “THAT COOKIE IS A STUPID COOKIE! IF NOBODY IS ANYBODY, WHO’S GOING TO MAKE ALL THE COOL PUZZLES???”

Sans snorted. He’ll take any jabs against Gaster, consciously dispensed or not.

“You’re right, bro. Okay. Now, the final chapter is where things get interesting. This is more mythical, so prepare your suspension of disbelief.”

“OOOOOH THAT SOUNDS EXCITING. DISBELIEF SUSPENDED!”

“Alright. Once upon a time, there lived a wonderful young man. He was brave. Smart. Kind. But also wealthy. The people didn’t understand him. They thought he’s a weirdo. Some bad guys thought he’s an easy target because he’s always alone. They killed him without a second thought, just to loot his treasures.”

“The man went to Heaven. An angel came to meet him. Said that his boss took pity and he’s given one wish. The only catch? Bloke can’t revive himself. Why would he want to go back to that crappy
The little brother asked: “IS THERE ANY LIMIT TO THE WISH?”

“Nope.” Sans replied. “If he really wanted to, he could ask the entire army of Heaven to storm the world. Wipe it clean. Why should he care? They never appreciated him anyway.”

“THAT’S WRONG!!! E-EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN LIVES! EVEN THE BAD GUYS. MAYBE THEY’RE BAD NOW, BUT THEY CAN BE GOOD LATER.”

“IF THIS PERSON IS TRULY AS GREAT AS DESCRIBED, HE WON’T TAKE OFFENSE TO SUCH PETTINESS!”

“Murder is petty? Heh. That guy was denied of a full life because of greedy idiots.”

“PETTY IS NOT THE ACT. BUT THE REACTION! NEVER STOOP TO THEIR LEVEL.”

“Eh. Still need to use the wish though. Heaven won’t budge until he does.”

“THEN... THEN...!”

After a whole lot of skull-wrecking, Papyrus came up with his final answer.

“HE WOULD ASK HEAVEN TO PROTECT THE WORLD HE LEFT BEHIND. IS THAT HOW THE STORY ENDED?”

“I dunno. The last pages were lost. I like your version, though. Heh, mind if I add my own spin to it?”

Papyrus groaned. “IS IT GOING TO BE A BAD PUN?”

“Nope.”

The elder brother showed his oily pinkie finger to Papyrus. “The angel seals the deal with a pinkie swear. On behalf of his boss, of course.”

“HMMM... THAT’S ONE OF YOUR BETTER PLOTS. OKAY, BROTHER! IN OUR VERSION OF THE STORY, THE DEAL IS SEALED! NYEH HEH HEH!”

“Ayup. It's a promise.”

Their greasy pinkies locked a binding oath. Little did Papyrus know that this ‘wish’ would one day save the entire Underground from the apocalypse.

I made that promise, didn’t I?

The Core Incident shook my skull pretty hard. That whole week ended up fuzzy. Spent many hours at Grillby’s wondering what I had lost.

I knew it was important, but I couldn’t recall what. Got the details wrong in so many ways...

Papyrus, I’m so, so sorry.

Sans then sensed the oppressive smother of nearing killing intent. On high alert, he snapped wide awake.
The mass of dark Determination stood over him. They summoned a shining star, filled with a pure ‘Will’ of destruction.

“I will END you!!!”

The DEMON had spoken.
The Judgement was cast.

Sans readied his blade. One swift strike to the SOUL was all he needed to extinguish this anomaly.

He can’t let fear overwhelm him now.

‘Be Determined.’

But then, the roars of an engine fast approached. It swerved to Frisk’s side, and a familiar face plucked the pint-sized Living Victory out of the way.

“I got the punk!” Undyne lifted Frisk over her head like a trophy.

“GREAT JOB!”

That’s the voice of the god-brother.

The cavalry had arrived. It’s… Papyrus’ car? With jet engines?

It’s filled to the brim with everyone Sans had offended in the past few hours.


Even Grillby. He’s certain that the ex-Captain wasn’t here to settle a monetary matter. There’s a different kind of ‘debt’ between them now.

Then there was that mysterious fluffy dog. Sans noticed a distorting aura around it.

Is that… Determination?

Frisk struggled in the fish captain’s grip. She passed them straight into Asgore’s arms. Stats indicate that he’s cured of Gaelic’s toxins.

“Golly! Please, calm down.”

“My child. Mother’s here.”

When they realised that they’re in their parents’ presence, their anger and corrupt Determination plummeted. What’s left behind was a ball of violent emotions expressed in the most befitting manner.

They cried. Loud. They’ll calm down soon.

“There, there…” Asgore patted the child’s back.

Cenna was there too. Although she had her Ascension interrupted while inside the bubble prison. No 100% Hit bow on her. At least, for now.

She slumped. “Thank God. If Frisky became a Fallen… fuck, I’d be too ashamed to face Mama and Papa in heaven.”

“Language!” Toriel disapproved of the swearing. Mom will always be moms.
Gaelic laughed. “Oy, oy, methinks we be havin’ worse concerns than a smidgen o’ foulness.”
Followed up with an immediate beastial hiss at Sans Serif: a complete 180.

Grillby didn’t need to say anything. That glare of his was enough to make a point.

Best get ready for the next phase. Sans thought. He thus commanded the system to build a brand-new set of wings.

Papyrus turned the car around to face his brother. He took a deep breath. Recollected himself. Tried to stay calm.

“SANS,” he coaxed. “IT’S NOT TOO LATE. LAY DOWN YOUR WEAPONS AND SURRENDER. STOP THIS MADNESS.”

“I PROMISE I’LL TALK TO MISTER MAGUS. WE’LL GET THE HELP YOU NEED.”

A part of him wanted to surrender. It’s easier. And he had hurt his god-brother enough.

But…

“…I can’t,” he replied, pained. “I made a promise to you. I can’t let the world die. I have to keep it alive. No matter what it takes.”

“THEN JOIN US. YOU’RE INCREDISUPEGENIOUSLY SMART. I’M SURE WITH THE POWER OF TEAMWORK, WE’LL COME UP WITH THE MOST GENIUS OF PLANS!”

“I don’t see that future. It doesn’t exist.”

The fishy captain fumed. “Oh that’s just negative talk! Tell him that, Paps!”

“ACTUALLY, HE’S RIGHT,” Papyrus replied.

“What?!?!?”

“HE HAD ALL OF MY COLOURS. AND MORE. OUR LIMITS DICTATE THAT WE CANNOT SEE SOMETHING THAT DOESN’T EXIST. THEREFORE THE RESULTS SHOULD BE THE SAME.”

Frisk nodded, sombre. “Everyone died in the ocean battle. The Abomination is too powerful.”

“…BUT THAT’S BECAUSE WE’RE MISSING THE SECRET UNLOCKABLE PATH FOR THE GOLDEN ENDING!”

Sans sighed. “I’m the one with a Seven Aspect Eye here, bro. Peered into the code. Full walkthrough revealed. There is no golden ending. It’s futile.”

“We’re left with two options.” He showed the corresponding number of fingers. “Rewrite the entire game. Or abandon it for a new one.”

“If you ask me, forget about editing the past. Messing with broken code is a BAD idea. Break one thing, and you get a million other errors. Too much butterfly effect.”

“Which leaves us with option two. So, guys. Do you believe in alternate realities?”

That look on their faces… Didn’t need to pay attention to them to know they disapprove of his plans.
“That’s my last resort: finding a brand new world. One without the apocalyptic bits.”


“Let this old doomed world stay buried forever.”

Chapter End Notes

‘Estuans oculi, ioci vehementi’ means ‘Burning eyes, with violent jokes’.

I know I said this before. Again, please trust me.
Lucidia’s avatar -- a digital extension of herself -- sat within the mindspace of the Chronograph. This direct connection allowed her to take on tasks without being encumbered by the availability of physical equipment.

She could summon as many screens as she desired, arranging them at will. Menu panels. Video feeds. Voice channels. Everything at her fingertips.

The usual laws of gravity don’t apply.

It’s one thing to step around a rival Tactician. It’s another to battle against a near-omniscient angel.

Who is the one with a higher celestial ranking? The Princess of the Sky, or the Seraphim?

Analysis: Judge Caraway’s imprisonment triggered Frisk’s emotional destabilization.

A common and understandable clause for failure. Cruel. Unfair. There’s a reason why Judge Thyme prefers to test his candidates in other ways.

Sans provoked the child. Lucidia stepped to counter his statements.

“Warning: Sans Serif is engaging in psychological warfare. Your anger is what he wants. Refuse to give in. It is imperative.”

It’s worked… for now.

However, Frisk doesn’t have the integrity to withstand his silver tongue for long. Without a doubt, he will use their close bond to break their composure.

The systems picked up sound activity from Doctor Alphys’ intercom. Clatters of crashing mechanical equipment and the shrieks of a frightened woman resonated through the speakers.

Lucidia shut off all voice contact with Frisk. Shifted her communication lines to her lizard peer.

“Query: what’s going on?”

“S-sensei??!!”

Doctor W.D. Gaster? Wasn’t he petrified by the Seraph System? How did he manage to escape? The Surface’s study on Amalgamates lagged too far behind to provide a definite answer.

“Doctor Alphys!” he exclaimed in a hurry. “Are you still online with Lady Lucidia??”

“How did you know?” she asked back.

“Of course I know what’s going on! Heard the whole drama and more. Please tell the good lady to prepare for Papyrus’ arrival!”

Meanwhile, Sans Serif attempted to talk to Lucidia.
“Look at them.” he said, They’ve lost their way.”

Sans waited for her reply. In other words, he failed to notice she had cut off contact.

Hypothesis: Sans Serif lacks the training and equipment to multitask.

‘Opportunity’, as her husband might say.

Lucidia didn’t give the two scientists time to converse. It made her feel a little rude.

“Request: Exchange intercoms with me. Assist Frisk while I coordinate backup.”

“Eh?” Alphys bubbled over in anxiety. “Us? Frisk?! Against Sans??? But but but--”

“Experience unnecessary,” she replied. “Apologies, Doctor Alphys. I’m requesting you to become a distraction.”

“I-I understand.” Alphys replied. “Leave it to us!”

“Affirmative.”

The Chronographer rerouted Frisk’s communications to Alphys. She will monitor events, but she will not speak.

“Query: Brave Champions and Royalty, please submit your requests for equipment and essentials.”

Queen Toriel stepped forward. Waved at the invisible camera in the sky.

“Yes, Your Majesty?”

“Lady Lucidia, is it possible to conjure some spare clothes for our friend here?”

The Queen directed her toward the underdressed knight of fire.

Sir Grillenn had burned his clothes to cinders. Again. Thank goodness for Asgore’s cape.

“Noted. Next?”

“M’Lady, an antidote fer King Asgore. I… dinnae prepare any.”

“Do you remember the formula?”

“…Nay.” He replied with an elevated sense of shame.


“Noted. Next?”

Undyne pointed a thumb to herself. “I need my armour if I want to kick that skellybutt! Think you could recreate it?”

“Analysis: your current gear is outdated. It does nothing to improve your abilities. I shall build a better version.”

“Whoa, you’re serious?”
“Yes.”

“Awesome!!!”

“Noted. Next?”

“Gerson…” said Asgore. “May we know if he’s well? I’m worried about the other skeleton too. Garamond, was it? We don’t know if Sans attacked them yet…”

“Noted. Next?”

The small fluffy white dog barked a few times. Spun around. And then wagged its tail.

“Yes, transport will be top priority. Noted. Next?”

Nothing else? Time to execute the tasks.

The current queue in order of priority is:
Transport.
Undyne’s armour.
New clothes for Sir Grillenn.
Updates on the Crimson Hall.
Asgore’s Antidote.

Judge Caraway said that Seal Scars have afflicted Papyrus; his strain must be kept to a minimum.

Optimum scenario: Assign Papyrus to the pilot’s role. Incentive required.

Perhaps she could make use of a familiar design and modify it to ensure success? The current ‘Papyrus car’ may be stylish, but it’s certainly not battle-worthy.

The woman pulled up a few other resources.

Blue Magic systems -- a stronger hull -- flame-fuelled boosters -- Gyro stabilizers -- and a pilot’s dashboard for three-dimensional movement, all the while maintaining regular car controls. Anything too foreign and Papyrus won’t be able to tap into his precise driving skills.

Next on the list is Undyne’s armour: Champion-class magic tends to be inefficient without technological aid. Her new gear requires electronics to regulate her casting power.

The Undying… I shall use that as a template to save time.

Lucidia pasted the exterior design over a dummy frame of Undyne’s body. Now she just had to concentrate on the internal mechanisms.

Mu’s survivors brought along their technology for powered armours. They resumed their research in their new Lemurian homes, further improving their craft long after the fall of their civilization.

It’s thanks to them that Champions can tap their full potential without suffering fatalities.

[INCOMING VOICE CHANNEL]

That particular window held the emblem of Beredin: the Ace of Spades.

She pushed the rescue team’s requests aside and answered the call.
“Yes, Grandmaster?”

“Do you have a moment to spare? It’s about the medication for King Asgore’s unfortunate ‘accident’.

“Query: What have you found?”

“The exact antidote, I believe.”

The Grandmaster submitted a handwritten page from his private research.

“As you know, young Gaelic always had the unique ability to synthesize poisons based on his consumption, provided he survives the dosage. He must have copied the active ingredient in Silvermare. The symptoms match the King’s past tea brewing mishaps.”

“To our fortune, the cure is easy to synthesize once you know the source. Though Magic is ‘magic’, there’s always rhyme and reason.”

“Thank you for the assistance, Grandmaster.”

“One more thing… Please keep my contribution silent, dear. It’s still too soon.”

“Understood.”

“Take care. Signing off.”

The Grandmaster’s channel went offline. Lucidia resumed the task at hand.

Moving up priority on antidote synthesis.

Redirecting processing power from Transport and Armour to Antidote.

Transport 23.67%. Armour 14.0%. Antidote 0.7%. Clothing 0%. Update 0%.

Lucidia sensed a disturbance in The Void.

Unknown entity detected. Initiating trace to source. Reconstructing results on screen.

Another monitor appeared.

It’s Papyrus. He’s being led by a… strange grey girl?

Preliminary analysis: a spirit-like entity.
Reconstructing sound.

Papyrus exclaimed, “I SEE THEM! UNDYNE! KING ASGORE! EVERYONE!”

“That’s good,” the girl replied. “You go on ahead. I gotta meet up with the others.”

“YouRE NOT FOLLOWING US?”

“None of us can fight. We’ll just get in the way.”

She then conjured a… Spirit Gate?

More grey entities appeared: a lanky cat-based monster, A talking head, and a small humanoid male.
Papyrus bid goodbye and parted ways.

Lucidia’s eyes widened at the sight.

*What are they? Where do they come from? Threat level: Low. They appear to be friendly.*

*Adding profile to database. Tagging as ‘Greys’. Computing ‘Links’.*

*Transport 35.67%. Armour 14.07%. Antidote 25%. Clothing 0%. Update 0%. Greys 1%.*

*I should contact Gerson in the meantime.*

She commanded a screen. Set it on The Hammer of Justice and the stranded Jurors.

All parties stayed within The Law’s safe boundaries. The old turtle held up fine, well enough to share some tea with the others.

*Status: Condition Green.*

Lucidia was then disrupted by the happenings over at Frisk’s screen.

It’s the rushes of the ocean. White coral sand and coconut trees alongside flowers that bloom all year round…

The Island of Mu, where she studied the final tiers of magitek for three whole years.

*Warning. Processing capacity near maximum.*

A dark memory rippled through her mind: a stain on her record so early in her career.

Every bone in her being rattled. Quaked. She covered her cochlea in a futile attempt to block out the invading noise.

She couldn’t stop the Soul Stealer in Mu.

*Abort memory.*

She couldn’t force the generator to shut down.

*Abort memory.*


*Abort. Memory.*

She couldn’t save her beloved. Kidnapped under her watch. Suffered a fate many considered worse than death.

It shouldn’t happen to him.
He shouldn’t pay for the price of her failure.
He can’t forget.

Ever.
Lucidia shut off her emotional receptors using a controversial technique she adapted from the once-proud militaristic Atlanteans. Emotions were Monsterkind’s primary weakness in battle, therefore the qualified few must be able to numb their heart at will.

She can’t let the flaws of her inexperienced days cause any more catastrophes.
Never again.

Never.

Abort. She commanded.

Abort.
Abort.
Abort.
Abort.

Abort.

“Lucidia.”

Mezil’s distinct voice snapped her out of the loop. He had yanked the visor off. Let it swing on its cable, slamming it against the hull of the Chronograph with a loud clang.

Her husband pulled her close for a warm embrace. All done with that stern, stoic face.

The dam that held back her emotions broke. It flooded. Crashed.

“Mezzy!” she exclaimed. “What are you doing here?! You should be resting!”

“Dearest, I--”

“Don’t ‘dearest’ me! Look at you! Profuse sweating, an elevated body temperature, dipping blood pressure: all these are signs that you should be back in bed!”

Lucidia hated this. Hated it so much. Tears trickled down her cheekbones. She didn’t want to yell at him like that.

A mental marble fell out of her clutches. In an attempt to catch it, she had spilled them all.

“What will I do if anything happens to you…?"

He said: “Didn’t I tell you this already? I won’t let you become a machine. Teamwork is our forte. We can’t let anyone tear us apart. I refuse it.”

Many people thought of Mezil as a cold man, best observed from a distance. They dare not approach because his reactions frighten them.

What a wasteful misunderstanding. Lucidia understood the subtle truth: it’s just his way of being a steady rock in a tumultuous world.

She buried her face into his chest. Breathed in the scents unique to his being.

“You’re right, dear.” The wife smiled. “Thank you.”

That sweet moment was interrupted by the outraged whines of bratty children.

“Whaaaa?!?” exclaimed Flowey. “Mister Meanie Principal is a mushy romantic?! No way!”
Chara covered their eyes with their leaves. “What is seen, cannot be unseen.”

“It’s so… sickeningly sweet! It’s as bad as that Nose Nuzzling Championship!”

“Worse, Azzie. Much worse. It’s a human and a skelly. Scandalous. Disgusting. Wrong on all levels.”

The old man pointed his cane at them and grumbled. “Do your job. Or else.”

That was enough to shut them up for now. The flower children used their vines to haul in a cardboard box. It held water bottles, medication, biscuits, a pair of gamepads, and some data sticks.

“Huh?” Lucidia wondered. “What are these for?”

“The children fared fairly well in certain titles. So, I thought two attack drones may put pressure on our jokester.”

Those were pre-written data. All the machine needed to do was to clone them from the database.

A vine pushed the cool bottle of water against Mezil’s head. “Stay hydrated, you idiot.” Typical Flowey statement.

Mezil accepted the drink, both thankful and irritated at the same time.

“Where do we plug these in?” Chara lifted the ends of their gamepad.

“Please give me a moment.” Lucidia picked up her visor.

“Wait,” said Mezil. “There’s something I must discuss with you first.”

“Oh? What would it be?”

He took in a deep breath, apprehensive at first. “Connect me to The Chronograph.”

The wife gasped. “I cannot allow that! The protection on the Hex is damaged. Connecting you to The Chronograph now will compromise our data. And…”

“…Above all, Persona almost claimed your life. I won’t let it happen again.”

Mezil bit his lower lip. “I knew you’d say that. But… this may be our only chance of defeating Sans Serif.”

He explained: “When I was asleep, nightmares tormented me. It’s the scenario where Sans Serif succeeded in his mad time-travelling gambit.”

“You had… a vision?” asked Lucidia.

“Yes. Straight from that damn skeleton. Furthermore, I’m starting to hear the hearts of all those I’ve Claimed. Bitter as always.”

The woman contemplated on this new information. Her mind began connecting the dots. Every event that led up to this moment… she must recall their clues.

“…Visions of Sans Serif’s hypothetical timeline. …The collective’s will. It’s reminiscent of our exploitation of Doctor Gaster’s Determination trail. Sans Serif must have expelled the Doctor from the Seraph System. That’s the main reason why he’s back in the material world again.”
“Most likely.” Mezil nodded. “The cheater is distracted. Complacent. As long as he’s ignorant of my return, we can set up an ambush.”

Lucidia asked back: “What about Papyrus? He’s adamant on preserving his brother’s life. Plus, you yourself had stated that we need Sans Serif’s expertise for the Spring Mission.”

“That’s why it’s imperative that we give Papyrus every opportunity we can provide. Otherwise his duty is doomed to fail. And us along with it.”

“You will not replace Sans Serif with Doctor Alphys and W.D. Gaster?”

Mezil raised a brow. “Do you think they’re good enough?”

“…My bias wants to believe so.” The woman glanced to the side. “But my objective analysis is uncertain of their capabilities.”

“Then don’t take the risk. It’s not worth it.”

Her husband raised a fair point. Personal grudges shouldn’t sway her decisions.

“What of Crimson Keeper Frisk?” she asked. “Their power is beyond anything we have on records. Won’t their involvement be sufficient?”

“No. That child is too inexperienced and unpredictable. Everything could go wrong in a blink.”

“That is true. But there’s still one more issue to resolve. Data security. How can we prevent Persona from pilfering or damaging our database?”

“Flowey,” Mezil opened his palm toward the flower children. “Datastick Q4-89, if you please.”

A vine placed the requested item as instructed. “Here you go, you lovey-dovey vampire you. Sheesh.”

Lucidia recognized the device. “Oh…”

“You will need to spend a day or two to revert the encryption. But, this should prevent Persona from messing with the system. I apologize for the inconvenience in advance.”

The wife chuckled in delight. “I have no more objections. Honey, you really think through everything.”

Mezil huffed. “I don’t gamble blind like my moronic brother. You should know that by now.”

“I do. That’s why I love you. Shall we commence?”

“Let’s.”

The Chronographer returned to the virtual world. She commanded the machine to open more ports for additional input devices. Plus, two physical screens for the little plants back in the real world.

“Azzie, Azzie. Psst, look at the Tsun. You can see light coming from underneath his clothes.”

“Ooh, you’re right Chara! It’s really faint.”

“Isn’t that too strenuous?”
“Nah. He’ll be fine. I can feel the magic feedback with his wife.”

“Eww. More romance.”

“Yup. Eww.”

Mezil’s avatar now walked the command center alongside her. Gone were his silver hairs and the wrinkles of age: he appeared as the youth Lucidia fell in love with. It invoked a nostalgic sense of security.

She chuckled. “What’s with the crimson eyes, dear?”

“I thought they suit me better.”

“It does. They’re… beautiful.”

A second seat spawned in response to his presence. It’s situated right next to the woman’s station.

Mezil sat down. Reached out a hand to his wife.

She accepted the support.

Together as one, they tackled the task ahead.

The first order of business was to give Mezil a quick update.

He’s of Patience and Justice. Many matters may seem important, all at once… until they’re put under the lense of discernment.

Mezil bore the judge’s mantle for a reason.

“You’re taking up too much at once.” he said, “Put full focus on ‘Transport’. No matter how complex, our first priority is to provide mobility. Undyne’s ‘Undying Armour’ can wait. …What’s these ‘Greys’ about?”

“Papyrus was accompanied by strange entities. They don’t seem to be hostile.”

“Hmm. Remove that from your queue. We can always ask Papyrus later.”

“Acknowledged.”

Lucidia diverted all her magic to constructing the transport. The Ebott crew appeared to be too preoccupied with their reunion with Papyrus to notice her brief absence.

“Please pass Frisk’s screen to me,” said Mezil.

The wife hesitated. “Will you be fine, dear?”

“Of course.”

In the transfer, she saw a glimpse of Mu’s year-end festival.

Mezil set the screen far away from his wife’s side. “Don’t let the past distract you.”

“Now, to set up the next part of the plan,” he said. “Use me to build a connection to Sans Serif. Cancel if you think we’ll get discovered. You have my heartfelt trust.”

“I’ll do my best.”
With discretion, Lucidia tapped into Mezil’s Determination. Imagined the flow as a river of strings…
She picked out a thin thread…
…and tied it to the Chronograph…
Success. A new screen came online, showing Sans Serif’s point of view.
“Are you alright…?” Lucidia asked. Just to make sure.
Mezil nodded. “Yes. Thank you. Now we can see and hear as he does. Past, present and future: it makes no difference. Don’t forget to fit the attack drones underneath our transport, by the way.”
“Understood.” She launched the pre-loaded data and fixed them in place.
“Flowey. Chara.” The man instructed, “I don’t want you to put everyone in danger by flinging needless taunts at The Seraphim. You will stay quiet until you’re summoned.”
The flowers complained. But, they weren’t stupid enough to disobey.
40%
………………
41%
………………
42%
………………
75%.
………………
90%
………………
Task complete.
Lucidia delivered the finished result to the Ebott crew.
The whole team gawked in awe. Papyrus in particular. He exuded so much excitement, he’s covered in sparkles.
Undyne slung her arm around him. “Oh my god it’s a freaking JETCAR!!”
“It’S MAXIMUM AWESOMENESS!!” Papyrus replied. “IF ONLY I HAVE MY COLLECTION OF COOL SHADES! I’D WEAR THEM ALL AT ONCE!!”
“I know, right???”
Cute, though their timing couldn’t be more misplaced. “Excuse me, but a crisis does not wait.”
“S-SORRY. I’LL HOP TO IT RIGHT AWAY!”
“Don’t forget to buckle up.”

That’s one problem out of the way. Lucidia wanted to arrange the optimum seating space, except Mezil held her back.

“Let them handle that,” he said. “It’s time to finish the antidote.”

“Certainly.”

While she worked on the cure, Mezil accessed a menu of his own. Searched for the ‘Bartender’ template. Slipped the data to his wife.

“I added a ‘fireproof’ trait. Clothing damage jokes can only go so far.”

“Thank you, dear. I’m sure he’ll appreciate that.”

Within seconds, the knight of fire had a proper attire again. Grillby returned the cape to his King. Proceeded to tidy himself up.

Then, upon completion, Lucidia dispensed the bottled cure to Gaelic. King Asgore’s condition improved the very moment he drank it.

“Oh my, this has a nice taste. I expected it to be nastier.”

As for the Boss Monster’s request: “Good news, Your Majesty. All is fine in the Crimson Hall.”

“Ah. I see. Thank you for everything.”

The ‘jetcar’ soon launched off the planet, evacuating everyone from the crumbling labyrinth.

Sitting in the shotgun seat, Undyne checked the dashboard.

She asked: “Lady Lucidia, what’s this ‘Fire Boost’ for?”

“Oh dear, how careless of me. Please press that button.”

When Undyne pushed it, the front hatch popped open. It revealed an electronic bangle.

Lucidia explained her plan to conserve Papyrus’ powers. Divide tasks. Delegate. The Ebott folk understood it well.

‘Boost Bangle’, equipped on Sir Grillenn.

“We should give this a test run, no?” Toriel mused out loud.

“Indeed. That will allow Sir Grillenn to get used to the systems as well.”

So the Queen fed him a ball of fire. The transport zoomed ahead through the black winds of The Void, transcending all known speed limits like a breakneck rollercoaster. Screams of fear and excitement followed.

Contrary to her usual motherly self, even Queen Toriel loved the rush of speed.

Mezil blinked twice. “I’m reminded of the time when Father rode his bike down the unrestricted highway. Up the hill. Down the slopes. Over the railings. …He’s a literal ‘Speed Demon.’

“Ah, didn’t he say that a motorcycle is just like a horse? He rode a lot in his youth.”
The thought of fond memories brought a brief moment of joy.

Alas, fate decided there’s no rest to be had. Lucidia picked up a spike of Determination in the system.


The reddest Red summoned a sky of stars, each of the Yellow Aspect: capable of mass destruction. They ripped through what’s left of the broken planetoid they had left behind.

‘Megalovania’ was reduced to little more than floating specks of concrete.

“Such power…” the woman muttered. “I pray that they can only perform this feat in metaspace. It’s too much for anyone to handle.”

The Supreme Judge then pondered out loud. “Frisk’s parents warned me about this. As a pure Red, their potential is limitless. Who would’ve thought they’d be this violent without formal training?… The Wanderstar is truly terrifying.”

A streak of orange then flashed in the far distance. It’s Frisk.

Mezil pushed himself off the seat to take a closer look at the screen.

“Tsk. I don’t see the angel. We must give chase, or else we might lose the both of them.”

“Indeed.” Lucidia agreed.

Cenna’s voice channel activated. At the same time, Mezil groaned out loud from the strain. It’s a sign that Sans Serif had reallocated large quantities of Determination to himself.

The Vanquisher paged in: “Lucy? Lucy, do you read me?”

Good news: the bubble prison had expired much sooner than anticipated.

Bad news: her Ascension got interrupted. Even at peak condition, it’ll take a while for her to muster the strength to reactivate it.


Another passenger was added to the rescue entourage.

Over the intercom, she issued new instructions. “Follow that trail, Papyrus. Frisk is in grave danger! You must save them before they become a Fallen. By any means necessary!”

Everyone chipped in with suggestions. It’s a good thing that they could hatch a plan quick. Adversity breeds innovation, as some would say.

The trio of fire monsters maintained top speed to chase after the comet.

Cenna teamed up with Gaelic as a targeting monitor, making sure that they don’t stray off course.

Undyne flexed her fingers and rubbed her palms, preparing her mind and body for the task.

Papyrus drove like his life depended on it. Any delay, and someone will get killed.

The two overseers watched the events with stilled breaths.
Can Team Ebott save the day?

“O’er there! Ah see the false angel!” Gaelic reported.

The fire monsters halted, while Papyrus lifted the pressure off the acceleration pedal. The car had to slow down just enough for Undyne to grab Frisk without hurting anyone.

Closer.

Closer.

Closer…!

Papyrus turned the steering wheel. Swerved the car sideways…

…And then the fish captain frisked Frisk away.

“I got the punk!”

“GREAT JOB!”

Mission accomplished.

A huge wave of relief washed over Mezil and Lucidia.

Until…

Slow, loud claps echoed within the Chronograph’s control room. They cut the celebrations short.


His voice had no direction nor source. Footsteps of his heavy combat boots echoed all around, giving no hints to his presence.

Then from behind… his great musclebound arms almost gave them a ‘friendly’ sling over their shoulders.

“If you touch my husband, I will—”

“If you touch my wife, I will—”

On a knee-jerk moment, both doled out the same threat before he laid a single touch.

The intruder burst into laughter at the serendipity.

“Such sickeningly sweet lovebirds. No wonder you two gave me so much trouble in life. You make quite the team.”

The Persona circled around the Chronograph’s control room as if he owned the place.

He appeared as his 40-year-old self, unchanged since the day he died.

“Well,” he asked. “Can I touch these, at least? Fancy equipment you have here.”

Lucidia pulled the screens closer out of spite. She refused to acknowledge ‘his’ presence as anything more than a forced tolerance in their private sanctuary.

“Please do not meddle,” she warned. “The Seraphim is still at large. We must pay attention to his next move.”
“Might as well. I too want to know.”

Persona leaned over to witness the unfolding drama.

When Sans Serif revealed his last-resort… Lucidia wondered if she’s dreaming. Such concepts only existed in mere fantasy. They shouldn’t be real.

“Replacing reality.” said Mezil, deadpan. “Of all things, it had to be that. How ‘original’.”

Persona treated it with smug amusement. “A world without you, Vampire. Sounds great. Of course, my own existence is also on the line. I suppose this is where we call a truce?… If your beloved doll agrees.”

Lucidia clenched her fist. After all, the god of Gungnir had a long history of brutal cunning.

But… she chose to trust her husband. He would have thought of the same, yet he’s taking the risk. So she answered: “…Acknowledged. We need all the help we can get.”

Chapter End Notes

Mezil and Lucidia is the Surface's best team for a reason.

Next scene is going to be huge. Really huge. How huge is huge? I’m not sure if I can make it on the 9th at all. It's that big.

If you don't see a new post by the next weekend, then it means it's still not done. Either it would be the week after, or even the third week. It's vital to get the next entry right.

See you next post!
Chapter Notes

My goodness, it took me 21 days to complete this. More showdown of feels to come.

The next update will also be run on 'whenever it's done' schedule.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ugh. It's one bad surprise after another.

Like. What the heck? First time travel. Now this???

The sheer crazy is making your head spin.

Sans Serif --the Seraph incarnate -- floats before you and your friends, cocky as ever.

Undyne’s singular remaining eye glared. She grinded her teeth and pointed the tip of her spear at Sans.

“Did you hear your own shit?” she said. “There’s a limit to realistic anime.”

“I did. Heard it loud and clear.”

“Then realize that you NEVER actually told us HOW or WHY we’re heading for this unavoidable dead end! It has something to do with the pipsqueak, no? But you’re suggesting to keep them around? EXPLAIN!!!”

“Geez,” he rolled his eyes. “Look. I know the kiddo isn’t all bad. By themselves they’re not a threat; The Abomination is the real problem here.”

Sans placed a large monitor before you, playing out a visual aid for his tale.

“You see, it's an amalgamate driven purely by instinct, incapable of anything resembling cohesive thought. The collective hungers, therefore they eat. But the more they eat, the worse the hunger becomes: a never-ending cycle.”

“As is, millions of lives have already been devoured. The amount of energy in there… heh, it’s one big piñata. ‘Take a stick and knock it off. Pop goes the weasel’.”

“It’s the feedback, y’know. If a mere two Seers going neck-to-neck is enough to glitch the immediate surroundings, imagine the clash between two nuclear reactors. They’ll rip the cosmos apart.”

“That includes The Living Victory -- anyone with the Seraph System -- and you, Undyne the Undying.”

The fish fins drooped. “You… you can’t just erase it? With whatever godlike crap you got?”

Sans shrugged.

“Nope. Not without the rest of the world tumbling down together in mutual destruction. Double
“I’ll be honest, I wouldn’t be dabbling in alternate realities if it’s not my last of last resorts. There’s no guarantee that I’ll remember anything. Or exist as the same person.”

“It’s all about constants and variables. Sans X might one day wake up as Sans Y. Keep the same name and wear the same clothes. But... nothing else.”

“Heh. Maybe it’s for the better. Transforming back into that lazy ol’ skelly who falls asleep anywhere. Easier to manage, no?”

Alphys screamed a massive ‘NANI?!’ over the line. Dang. She can get loud when she’s on fire.

“SANS! Are you serious?! You want to REPLACE living breathing people?! WITH US?!?!?!”

“Depends,” he replied. “Replace or recreate, whichever is more feasible.”

“W-what do you mean by ‘depends’???”

That’s not the answer you want to hear!

Mom spoke up. “Sans, please stop! I’m done with losses. A whole new life... it’s too much--”

He cut her words short; “Sorry Tori. When push comes to shove, one’s gotta have to take risks.”

“..........”

C’mon, there has to be someone else who can talk some sense into him!

Undyne? No, she just gave her best shot. Cenna? Uh... not close enough. Dad? Grillby?

Papyrus? What about Papyrus? You shook his arm, pleading for him to say the magic word to end all this.

He frowned back.

Why?

“FRISK,” he said, “WHEN YOU KEPT REWINDING TIME... WHAT WERE YOU LOOKING FOR?”

Uh...

A new outcome. You suppose.

“ISN’T THAT THE SAME AS REWRITING REALITY?”

It is. Sort off.

“HAVE YOU EVER WISHED FOR A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WORLD?”

...You wanted to lie, but you can’t. Not to that face.

‘Yes’. You nodded.

In other words, you were as guilty as Sans. The main difference is efficiency.
“THEN WE CAN’T CONVINCE HIM WITH PURE WORDS. NOT EVEN THE GREAT PAPYRUS CAN.”

…This scenario is going to be extra difficult. Worse than dealing with the God of Hyperdeath.

Your Determination levels plummeted to a negative.

What should we do?

“LET HIM TRY.”

Is he serious? That might undo everything!
His cool powers!
His superb wisdom!
His awesome hero development!

…Back to the naive cinnamon roll!

“I KNOW MY BROTHER,” he replied. “THE PERSONA TIMELINE BURNED HIM. HE’S MORE CAUTIOUS NOW. THAT MEANS SANS WON’T COMMIT TO A REALITY UNTIL HE’S ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN.”

But…!

Dad patted you on the shoulder.

“Papyrus is right.” he said, “I don’t know what will happen. But, I do know we can’t stop him. Not yet at least.”

Sans seemed relieved. The expression on his face lightened.

“Nice to have things easy for once. Maybe you guys can suggest a few scenarios? After all, you’re gonna move house too. Along with the rest of Ebott Town, of course.”

You watch him fiddle with the Seraph System. “First thing’s first…”

Magical math codes installed into his being.

“Welp. Try to catch me.”

Sans then flew off into The Void. He left behind a trail of light, stretching across the blank space like a road.

Oh no.
Oh. No.

We gotta chase after him!

…Hang on a moment. Is it you, or is the back seat a little bit TOO tight?

You sat on Dad’s lap. Next to you is Cenna, then Mom. Grillby got crammed at the door’s side with the Annoying Dog.

For some reason, Cenna is sitting on the same lap-raised level as you. Weird, shouldn’t she squeezing on the seat itself?
You heard a half-muffled moan of contentment from the gaps between your parents.  
“Aah… that warm, soft fur. On all sides. Sinkin’ into me bones…”

Juror Number 2?!?! He’s that scary looking guy! What’s his name again?  
Cenna scrunched her brows. “Doooon’t get too comfy in there, Gael.”

“Ah can also smell the sweet fragrance of M’lord’s clothes from here. The fire brings them out, aye.”

Grillby shuffled further to the side, discomfited by the… ‘implications’. You wondered if you should make a mature pun. To your better judgement, you resisted.

“Oy Cenna, yer got a real nice bum. Ya sure you wanna die a virgin? Yer chances o’ getting a partner be nil by now. ‘Tis been a while since ah put me skills to use, but ah sure I’ll manage.”

Both Mom and Cenna went full on Papyrus-scream mode. Dad covered your ears with his huge hands.

Mom exclaimed: “There are CHILDREN here!”

“Okay, Gaelic Blanc.” Cenna squinted. “First. Yes, I really DO want to die a virgin. Second, you’re on abstinence. And third, FRISKY IS HERE!!! What in the flying fish made you think this conversation was a good idea???”

…You wanted to say that you’re not that ignorant. But then, you thought it’s best to keep silent. Don’t wanna cause more misunderstandings.

“My apologies for the oversight.” said Lady Lucidia. “Please stay still as I rectify the problem.”

The ultra-packed back end of the car split apart into separate squares. Dad held you tight as the cool mecha-rearranging sequence happened.

Papyrus’ car extended in length, now equipped with three rows of seats instead of two. Small wings were added to the back. Must be for stabilization.

The current seating arrangement was as follows:

Front, Undyne and Papyrus.
Second row, Cenna and ‘Gael’.
Third row, Mom and Dad.

Grillby had his own compartment at the far back, complete with control panel.

There’s an empty space between your goatparents. Odd. Where should you sit, then?

“That is for you, Crimson Keeper Frisk.”

A unique seat spawned at that very spot. The armrest had three buttons on it, labelled ‘1’, ‘2’, ‘3’ for ‘Front’, ‘Middle’ and ‘Back’.

Metal grooves ran across the centre of the car, stretching all the way from engine to taillights.

Ooooooooh! You get it now!

Excited, you hopped off Dad’s lap. Plunked yourself on the seat and buckled up.
Pressing the first button!

The mechanisms kicked into gear. Your seat rolled all the way to Papyrus and Undyne, surprising everyone with the cool.

“Ohmygod this is brilliant!” Of course Alphys will nerd out.

Why this setup though?

The skelly lady explained, “Analysis: your Mark has the potential to synergize well with anyone. This shifting seat will enable you to relay support however you see fit.”

Got it. Thanks for all the help.

“You’re welcome. I’ve also linked all local communication to a single channel. That way the increased distance shouldn’t be an issue.”

“That’s the last of our setup phase. Please make haste!”

Right. There’s that guy. You returned to your parents’ row. If there are any traps ahead, it will most likely collide with the front first.

As a Crimson Keeper, you’re in a leadership position. You must keep yourself safe at all cost, lest things fall apart because you’re out of commission.

…Sans told you that a long time ago. To think you’d use that same wisdom against him.

The dog decided to snuggle up with you. That’s fine. Strange it may seem, its presence had a soothing effect.

Papyrus wasted no time. He pushed his foot down the pedal and drove over the lit path.

“What is this… light?” asked Mom. “It’s making my fur stand.”

You told Mom that it’s the same type of magic as the one that filled the Core. Sans mentioned that they’re the base material for ‘Spirit Gates’.

Dad blinked. “You mean the entrance of The Crimson Hall?”

The suspicions were confirmed by Lady Lucidia: “By composition, yes.”

“Spirit Gates are connections between reality and ‘The Void’, a metaspace beyond the laws of standard Thermodynamics. In The Void, each path of possibility is identified by a unique identification.”

“The Functional Universe Number. Fascinating!” chimed Doctor Gaster. “Despite being apart for aeons, Surface and Underground arrive at the same conclusion. Such is the ubiquitous nature of science!”

“So…” said Undyne. “You’re saying alternate universes are real?!”

“Uncertain. Some would insist such. Others hypothesize that they’re merely simulations based on predefined clauses. We lack empirical data to determine either or.”

“In the best case scenario -- when Sans Serif grafts your data onto counterparts from his preferred world -- life will resume unaffected.”
You heard a huge slam on the table over the intercom.

Doctor Gaster yelled: “I object! Life will NOT resume unaffected!”

He’s right! You had met them all: Goner Kid. Rhymer. Mudhead. Shortie. All the grey monsters were people permanently removed from reality.

If Sans succeeds…

Your ‘other selves’… they’ll become Greys. Gomers.

That’s the worst case scenario, right? Right?

“Affirmative, Crimson Keeper Frisk.”

No damn way!
You can’t let any of that happen!

You are once again filled with DETERMINATION!

Papyrus shook his head at you. “I KNOW YOU’RE IMPATIENT, BUT YOU CAN’T SOLVE A PUZZLE WITHOUT THINKING THINGS THROUGH FIRST.”

He’s right. How about… being ‘determined’ to solve the riddle? Yeah. That’s better.

Grillby’s rippling flames then caught your attention. You noticed that the monster folk’s expression changed. They’re more sensitive to magic after all.

The road of white led you to a massive mockup of a mountainside tunnel.

Really Sans, being cheeky at this critical point?!

“I KNOW, RIGHT?!” Papyrus replied. “THAT’S WHY HE ANNOYS ME SO MUCH! SOMETIMES.”

Past the tunnel, the car drove out into a thick, dense fog of white. It reminded you of Mu’s memory reconstruction.

Papyrus? Why is he slowing down?

“I CAN’T SEE WHERE I’M GOING. AND I’M FORBIDDEN FROM USING MY AWESOME EYE. SAFETY FIRST!”

Before long, you find yourself on a highway.

You heard Alphys muttering about something. You asked what’s wrong.

She exclaimed: “Why is Mettaton white and blue? And wearing a cap backwards? He’d NEVER do that!”

Where?

“Look to your left, Frisk. There’s a huge billboard!”

Hang on a moment… the name reads ‘Napstaton’.
Napsta… Ton?

That’s Blooky??!

“Oh my god. Now that you mention it, you’re right! He’s mixing music at a DJ stand!”

That’s totally a Blooky thing!

The scenery changed. You saw your monster friends hanging out at the park… except everyone had switched personalities.

Mom became Dad.
Dad became Mom.
A lazy Papyrus, a hyper Sans.
It feels WEIRD to see a timid Undyne and a ferocious Alphys!
There’s Mettaton too! He’s a shy pink ghost!
And the kid that hung out with all of them was none other than the rosy-cheeked Chara.

…Does that mean you were the one who died first?

You heard the six-winged angel speak. There’s no source to his voice, so you can’t pinpoint his position with your ears. Rats!

“Don’t think too much,” he said. “This is a simple test run. Not the most refined stuff.”

What in the world is he doing??

“Presenting my findings. Now for a new scenario: what if monsters lived up to their name? Creatures feared for legit reasons: like a tendency for violence.”

The scenery switched to a different kind of Ebott. It’s darker. Grimmer. And--

Cenna blurted out: “Why hell is everyone so goddamn edgy? Like, Mezil colours! Without the class!”

“…Except for the other me, it seems…” The fiery bartender shook his head. “…Too gaudy for my taste…”

Now that’s an extravagant fur coat. How’s it not catching fire? That’s a question best left for another day.

Despite the tensions from human society, you still don’t see any Magi: only regular police.


“I wonder…” pondered Cenna. “You think you’d survive in that kinda society? Might makes right kinda deal?”

“Pah, ne’er in a million years! Those be the worst o’ the lot. The moment they decide to hunt me down.” He drew a line across his throat. “Ah be dust.”

…You noticed a deep bitterness in his answer.

Sans hummed to himself. “Yup. Curiosity satisfied. Don’t fancy it either. But, it proves the point. Wanna see what else I’ve found?”
Next world. It’s Mount Ebott in all its glory.

Further down, you noticed a dust cloud. Is that Papyrus and Undyne competing for who can jog the fastest?

No. It sounds too… metallic.

A wheelbarrow with Mettaton legs jumped right out of the cloud. It posed in the air. Mount Ebott’s mineral-rich rocks glittered against the light of the setting sun, providing the most sparkling backdrop for the glammest of glams.

And even then, the sheer fabulousness of Mettaton’s legs overpowered the majesty of nature. You were not prepared to witness this show.

Cenna pointed back and asked: “No comment about the rider?”

Rider? What Rider?

“Yeah. There’s someone in there. Short brown hair, rosy cheeks, pale skin…”

Chara?!!

“That human does look similar…” said Dad.

Mom shook her head. “But they’re not the same person.”

Whoa, Mom could tell the difference at this speed!?

“Of course, dear.” She winked. “I’m a mother, after all.”

Gaelic looked back, his right Eye burning. “Hope that chap has brakes, ‘cause that way be the cliffs.”

“…I don’t know which is worse,” said Undyne. “That wheelbarrow having pink heels, or it ‘roadrunning’ straight into danger.”

Papyrus rubbed his chin. “HMMM, I FAIL TO SEE THE PROBLEM. THEY BOTH DO A TREMENDOUS JOB IN COMBINING THE FACTORS OF ‘SPECTACULAR’ AND ‘FUN’!”

“Erm. Whatever you say, Paps.”

A series of panicked screams followed shortly after. Sound can travel surprisingly far.

“Aaaand off they go.”

Despite everything, the Papyrus Logic is still intact. Thinking about it brought you some slight comfort. Not so much for the unfortunate rider, though.

The fog was now thicker than ever.

Papyrus looked around, leery about the unknown. “I CAN’T HELP BUT TO EXPECT A JAPE.”

How soon?

“SOON!”

Maybe he should slow down? NEVERMIND, INCOMING INCONVENIENT SHOPFRONT!!!
He slammed on the brakes. At that moment, a shield enveloped the car.

What followed after were the sounds of broken glass and falling knick-knacks. Thank goodness you had your seatbelt on.

The impact was… much softer than expected. Like a bumper car. Did the shield absorb most of the shock?

When you looked upwards, you noticed bits of broken concrete rolling off to the side.

Undyne read the dashboard. “Shields 85%? Wow. This is spaceship-level tech. Why hasn’t the Surface colonized the moon yet?”

Poor Papyrus. He sounds embarrassed. “OH MY GOD, I’M TERRIBLY SORRY EVERYONE! IT APPEARS THAT MY FOG DRIVING SKILLS STILL HAVE A LONG WAYS TO GO.”

Where did you end up anyway?

You’re inside a shop filled with peculiar magic trinkets. …Glowing medallions, plates with moving ornaments, colorful balls that jump around on their own…

A Sans in a red jacket walked onto the scene, enchanted by the wares. The residents of that world did not notice that you had destroyed a large section of the establishment. For them, your little accident didn’t happen at all.

He bumped into a huge hen monster, wearing a bright and colourful dress contrasting her white, speckled feathers.

They exchanged courtesies. Then… the chicken lady recognized him. Called out his name and gave the petite skelly a huge hug.

Sans? Care to explain what’s going on? Who even is this person?

“Dunno,” he commented. “Never seen her before. I think she’s supposed to be our nanny? Interesting how social connections vary tremendously between worlds.”

Papyrus yelled at the top of his ribs. “A NORMAL LOOKING SANS IN RED?!?!?! IMPOSSIBLE!!!!”

Whoa. We just saw a glambarrow doing a slapstick cartoon routine, and Sans being hugged by a giant hen. Yet THAT is what Papyrus consider the weirdest of the weird?

“Yes!” Papyrus answered without a single drop of irony. “THE BROTHER I KNOW WILL NEVER WEAR RED!”

But you clearly heard his name…

Lady Lucidia then said: “Detecting anomaly in subject Sans, Red Jacket.”

Huh? She’s noticed something? What is it?

“I’m sorry, Crimson Keeper Frisk. Since that timeline is not our own, I can’t create any Links to provide a comprehensive analysis. However his aura differs from a normal monster. He’s not a Seer either.”

A world where Sans is the anomaly… you can only ponder what it means.
Papyrus reversed the car out of the crash zone with some careful maneuvering. Then, it’s off into the reality reel again.

Yet another fresh new world. For once it’s a normal slice of life scenario. You hung out with the gang at a fast-food joint.

Hey, it’s one of those Far West franchises. Cowboy style fried chicken. In addition to fries, they also serve ‘biscuits’. They’re actually savoury scones. Super delicious.

After that, you excused yourself to go to the toilet. Entered the girl’s room.

The scene repeated. This time you went to the boy’s room!

‘Master Troll Frisk in their natural habitat’. You nodded to that thought.

The scene skipped to the grown-up versions of those two worlds. It’s the exact same scenario in both: a celebration for completing your studies. One version of you wore a formal evening dress, while the other wore a man’s three piece suit.

Papyrus started gushing over your good taste in style. “SUCH ELEGANCE! SUCH DASHINGNESS! LIKE THE FAIRY GODMOTHER AND MISTER MAGUS COMBINED!”

And you’re not just cross-dressing either; you really were a girl in one world, and a boy in another… How does that even work????

The whole deal confused Undyne enough to pop the question: “Punk, really. Are you a gal or a dude?”

It’s a secret.

“Okay. I’ll ask your sister then… Which is it???”

Cenna chortled. “No spoilers! It'll ruin the surprise. Also don’t bother asking Mez, Gael, or Lucy either. It’s a pact.”

The strongfish grumbled.

“…Easy for you to say. I got chewed out by that pro-Gungnir mom for not knowing.”

“Ugh, Linda right? She’s super stressful.”

Next, you drove into a world chock full of weird buildings. Judging from the clouds of the sky, it’s the Surface. But the architecture is miles different compared to Ebott Town. The houses looked like plant bulbs.

You managed to catch a glimpse of the town’s name: ‘Greenlake’.

Cenna pointed at a direction. “Hey Frisky, isn’t that your shirt?”

The colour checks out, but it’s on a chocolate-fur goat monster. They were at the receiving end of a good ol’ Papyrus hug.

Maybe the fashion caught on? Regular Sans was there. Alphys and Undyne too. Alongside… Asriel?
Despite their Papyrus’ jovial cheer, everyone else seemed quite unhappy. There’s something off about the whole scenario.

“Rightfully so,” Sans explained. “Monsters in that world managed to find a way to turn humans into their own.”

“Wait, so THAT brown goat is their Frisky?!?” Cenna exclaimed.

“Ayup.”

How? Explain??!

“Crazy magic science shenanigans, really. By draining their SOUL’s Determination until it reaches a white-state, the body changes in accordance. Too bad the laws of our universe are too different to allow for such an outcome. The closest thing we had were Lich Conversion spells. But, considering the requirements, I’m not sure if that’s half or double the controversy.”

“Sure, you don’t need a dead human. But do you think prisoners of war would be happy with being violated at the molecular level? Difficult subject.”

Your team drove through a brand new tunnel, not knowing what’s beyond the horizon.

It’s uneasy.

For the next ten minutes, you traversed nothing but the thickest fog. It’s now fully white as far as the eye can see.

…You expected a smartypants comment from Sans by now. But he remained… silent?

“SANS?” Papyrus asked, genuinely worried. “SANS, ARE YOU ALIVE?”


You tell Sans that you’re not convinced. He sounds tired. Bone tired.

“Welp, what do ya expect? I’m running on fumes. Anyways… I think this might interest you. Remember your first wish? Y’know… the one that started this mad time travelling adventure to begin with?”

No Sans, you’re not falling for his temptations.

“Heh kid. Don’t count your ‘goats’ yet.”

The jetcar drove into a new scenery. It’s the surface in all its sunny glory.

There, you saw Asriel having a picnic with the rest of the Ebott Gang.

Mom and Dad already started tearing up at the idyllic scene. You couldn’t help it too.

Everyone was so happy.

Lady Lucidia snapped you out of the daze. “Stop. You do not know the cost.”

Calm down. Think.

She’s right. What IS the cost?
You don’t want to know…

You thought back to Sans’ time travel proposal. Your parents survived the ‘incident’, but The Magus Association fell.

‘No’, ‘Nope’, and ‘Denied’. Crossed your arms together into an ‘X’!

“Frisk, don’t be so rude!” Mom scolded, “You should let him finish.”

Mom? Mom, no! Don’t give in!

Listening to this con-job salesman is the worst thing anyone can do!

“I will have to side with Toriel here,” said Dad. He had his disappointed face. “I too want to know.”

Dad!

You explained to your parents that Sans had pulled the exact same crap on you. Tried to paint a happy world where you lived together with your biological parents.

Except in that timeline, Cenna was gone. The world fell under Gungnir control. And…

The End was nigh.

Your goat parents struggled to accept your testimony.

Deep down, they had a wish.
A dream.
A hope.
That there’s something out there that could undo the worst moment in their lives.

Sans decided their silence was a sign of approval.

“Lucky us, there are several different methods to choose from. Why not take a gander?”

The first method shown to you… was giving up your SOUL to Flowey. He accepted and returned to his true self.

“That’s option number one. Frisk will die, of course. But, they get to live on within Prince Asriel. Two kids in one.”

Whoa. Cenna shook her fist. Her rage was comparable to Undyne’s. “Like hell I’ll let you do that!”

“Oh, so your sibling is more precious? Try telling that to ‘Azzy’s’ parents.”

It’s a trap. An obvious but inescapable one. Cenna can’t disagree without making her stance sound worse than it is.

Doctor Gaster asked: “Why didn’t you do so, Child of Mercy? When you had the chance?”

You sensed melancholy in his voice.

You told the doc that you’ve considered it before. Except… you were too afraid to give up your time-travelling powers. If things didn’t work out, there’s no going back.

“It pains me to say this, but you made a wise choice.”
Huh? He… is not angry at you?

“We don’t know the effects of a long-term merger. And without an existing monster SOUL, our dear prince might end up with… human inclinations. Apologies for my prejudice.”

I-it’s alright. Humans have an unpleasant history. You understand his reservations.

“Guess that’s a bust,” said Sans. “If a full SOUL is too extreme, maybe go with half?”

The scene changed again. You saw yourself alongside Asriel: each sharing your human SOUL.

This version of ‘you’ wore a blue jacket and a red scarf. It seems you adopted the skelebros’ fashion sense.

“See? Both kids alive and well. You know what? This could work. Look at Doctor Gaster---”

Lucidia interjected: “Such a procedure will only weaken one’s resistance against DEMONS. Your proposal is no different from death.”

“E-excuse me…” said Alphys. “If that’s the case… wouldn’t that Frisk suffer a major Chara possession problem? The very same one we solved after so many, many, many attempts?”

“Indeed.”

Baffled lizard mode, on. “Sans are you out of your mind?!? We’re not putting Frisk through that trouble again! Papyrus too!”

Sans being Sans, replied in a most nonchalant manner: “Welp. Knew you’re gonna notice that. Want something less invasive? Stop by the next place. Don’t crash, ok?”

You spotted a half-formed room in the distance. It’s an alternate version of Alphys’ Surface lab, sporting the retro aesthetic of a past-century Sci-fi set: a complete contrast with the more anime-based and clinical decor you’re familiar with.

Flowey was in his pot. Doctor Alphys explained that even though he had lost his past, he could still have a future.

She suggested a medication plan to gradually restore his SOUL over time.

It… it reminds you of modern psychiatry.

Why didn’t you think of this sooner? This is genius!

Nonononono. That’s no excuse to switch worlds!

Cenna agreed. “C’mon Frisky! You got more than Alphys in this world. Remember Anise? The Vanquisher who preps my tools? And Lucy? Lucy’s awesome! Nevermind that creepy goop doc.”

“Oi! I heard that!”

“Point being. With these brilliant minds combined, you’re gonna get way faster AND better results.”

That is so true! Too bad, Sans. This attempt is a complete bust!

“Expected,” he said. “It’s about time I show you the jackpot anyway. Stayed out of trouble for good reason, y’know.”
“Keep moving forward.”

Silence.

Unlike the initial rush of urgency, this last part of the journey held a sombre tone above your heads.

You wondered…

What’s this special final offer?

Questions, questions and more questions.

At the end of the road… the angel waits in person. Behind him stood a child sized object draped in tablecloth.

You pressed ‘1’ and rolled your seat to the front. From there, you had an up-close point of view.

“Welcome! Welcome!” said Sans. “I have one premium item on sale. Cost is negligible.” Wink.

Undyne growled. “Get on with it.”

“Confident, huh? Well, you asked for it.” With a single touch, Karma consumed the fabric.


His best offer is… a faux body?


It’s a challenge that Lady Lucidia can’t turn down.

“Beginning analysis.”

You waited in great anxiety. It’s too quiet for your taste. Lucidia strikes you as a woman who dislikes low-effort humour.

“Analysis complete.”

And then she fell silent still.

Alphys poked. “Uh. L-Lady Lucidia?”

“…Is there a flaw in my processing? How could it be? I know this is a false construct, yet… Conclusion: genuine.”

Sans chuckled at her lost reaction. “I’m sure you’re familiar with this concept. A fake that matches the original might as well be the real thing.”

Doctor Gaster questioned: “If you could conjure a perfect clone… What’s preventing you from making us a safe haven inside The Void itself? Why must you ruin innocent lives that have nothing to do with our plight?”

“Simple,” answered Sans. “Unlike you, our real bodies remain tethered to the physical world. Should anyone take aggressive action, our blissful snowglobe will end in a blink.”
“WAIT A MOMENT! I DIDN’T HAVE A BODY WHEN I HAD TO DISCIPLINE CHARA.”

“Oh that? Judge Thyme served as your anchor. You were ‘alive’ only because you had become his Proxy. The Void just isn’t that stable an existence. Hence, the migration plan.”

“Somewhere out there, there’s a world where everything is right: loved ones resurrected, children growing up together, no politics hanging above our heads, no cataclysmic time bomb… you get the drift.”

You wanted to argue against him… But how? You don’t have an alternative to anything. Plea on ethics and morality? He doesn’t care about them!

“Sir Serif, can you truly bring back my son?”

All attention locked on Dad, King Asgore Dreemurr. His voice, shaky. His eyes, watery. “All those years… I kept thinking, that I’d give everything to see my loved ones again.”

“Might there be a way for our Magi friends to continue to exist? Separate from us?”

“What’s your idea, Your Majesty?” asked Sans.

“There’s no need to leave anyone behind. We just need to… split up. I’m sure there’s at least one world with the closest match. Could you send them there instead?”

“Not so keen on the extra workload. But, you’ll all leave me alone if I do that? By royal decree?”

“Yes,” he said. “A peaceful resolution, is it not?”

“Deal.”

The car soon erupted into a mess of protests.

“King Asgore, that’s MURDER! INJUSTICE!”

“…Without our memories, we won’t be the same…”

“I’d rather die as myself than to live on as, I dunno, Jane Doe??”

“Understandable. However, Vanquisher, becoming an unconscious parasite may yet be preferred over absolute erasure.

“Wendell Dominic Gaster, listen to yourself! Are you going to push my husband into making yet another terrible decision?!”

“Apologies, My Queen. But his Majesty’s wishes…”

“Reminder: there’s no guarantee that the Seraphim will even keep his promise.”

“Cor Blimey, I REFUSE! Life hath no meaning without me masters!”

“I-I’m so not okay with this, but if I don’t remember at all how am I going to complain???”

“EVERYONE, PLEASE STAY CALM. ARGUING WILL NOT HELP!”

Nobody listened to you or Papyrus. Emotions continued to escalate like a summer wildfire.

Then, the mayhem got interrupted by a long, frustrated screech over the mic. It spouted a string of

That high-pitched temper tantrum…!

It’s… It’s… Flowey!

“Was wondering when you’d show up, ‘Prince Asriel’.” Sans smirked. “Here I thought you’d continue to cower and weep like a crybaby.”

Time for an earful. “YOU don’t deserve to call me that, you stupid Smiley Trashbag! Or I should say Smiley EDGEBAG? You’re a bag full of razors!”

Next was the king’s turn. “Dad! You big massive DOOFUS! What sort of a King would give up everything to reunite with his family? EVER HEARD OF RESPONSIBILITIES?! You almost let this two-bit comedian sell you the most obvious con!”

Oh boy, his rant is so intense that the mighty King of Monsters reeled back. “S-son. I was just…”

“Trying to save me? Is your name Frisk now?? You heard ‘The Snas’! This whole drama started because THAT BLOCKHEAD refused to give up!”

As expected. The heat landed square upon you. His condescending voice rung between your ears.

“Yes, I’m talking about YOU. Those alternate worlds just make me so MAD! Why can’t any of you just let me be a goshdarn flower???”

You told Asriel that his story broke your heart. The thought of leaving him alone and forgotten was too much to bear.

“And your answer is to hurt everyone else for my sake? Without my permission?? Hmph. No wonder Chara hates humanity.”

Your throat tensed.

“Okay, fine. I’ll make this clear for EVERYONE to hear. If saving me requires some stupid deal with the devil, STOP! I don’t care if it’s a sketchy trade, weird occult magic, spacetime editing nonsense, or whatever! Just DON’T!”

Even if… someone hands the opportunity on a silver platter?

“…You really are an idiot.”

The truth can bite you, hard.

“Welp,” Sans shrugged. “It’s a breakdown in negotiations. Back to square one. Looks like our little prince is determined to rest in peace.”

You watched him send the cloned body back into the fog.

You can't help but feel like you’ve wasted a golden opportunity. Judging from your parents’ expression, they must have thought the same.

To think that you’d never see Asriel’s kind-hearted, fuzzy self again.

It hurts.
But, you must move on.

Chapter End Notes

If there are any loose threads that’s been bugging you, perhaps this is a good time to comment. The next chapter or two will address the majority of the setups. Of course, this request won’t be valid when I complete this story.

List of cameos works by order of appearance:

- Underswap
- Underfell
- One Falls Anthology by Congar
- You are Sans Now by Greyshi
- Soul Dichromatism by Blackrazorbill
- Any AU that uses Frisk’s full SOUL
- Endertale by TC-96
- Long Road by WolvenOne
- One by One… maybe?
I think this scene took 3 or so revisions. And also editor-sama was ill for the entire week.

We tried to write the next sequence as well, but it dragged the scene too long. Got to do it a different way for 135.

‘Though battered and bruised, the hero knew there’s no time to rest. Dear brother had made the universe his enemy.’

‘Heartbeats thundered as drums of war. The bounty price piled by the minute.’

‘Yet the young hero was not perturbed. Rather, joyful relief filled his heart. The coolest brother that Papyrus had admired still existed: not lost to the slobbish caricature of a wannabe comedian.’

‘That alone inspired The Great Papyrus to believe in the smallest glimmer of hope.’

Since Papyrus was a little babybone, Sans had always been a major part of his life.

The parents of other children tend to look at him with a sense of pity. Papyrus didn’t understand why. The teachers tried to explain with great reluctance, so afraid to break his heart.

‘It’s because you’re an orphan.’

He still didn’t get it. Why should he be sad over folk he had never met?

After all, he had the coolest brother in the world.

There was nothing that Sans couldn’t do. He knew everything like the back of his hand, from head knowledge to application, and never failed to inspire.

Papyrus did his best to imitate him. Learn his skills and tricks. Ended up with the top-three students in magic class.

Then one day… Sans stopped functioning. He wasted his days at the bar. Never cleaned his room. Slept more than he should. The coolest brother he knew ‘vanished’ under slothful ways.

It was only then Papyrus understood the pain of orphanhood.

For ten long years, Papyrus tried to get Sans back on his feet. For ten long years, Papyrus tried to be living proof of all things right. For ten long years, Papyrus tried to catch up to his brother's legend.

If he must be honest with himself, he thought his labour would never bear fruit.

Then, today, the younger brother gazed upon more than a mere return of that lost glory. The impossibly lazy one transcended beyond the limits of ordinary mortals.
It brought forth a mountain of complex emotions.

Anger.
Fear.
Confusion.
Worry.
Annoyance.
Despair.

Papyrus’ bones quaked. Their marrows were filled with grief over that man’s dark decisions, and joyful pride for his accomplishments.

“Are you alright?”

He looked to the side. Frisk had their brows frowned in worry.

After a whole lot of mental fiddling, he let the roaring ocean of complication settle into a still lake of realisation: as smooth as glass.

“I’M HAPPY.” He said.

Everyone gave him funny looks.

“Have you gone nuts?” Flowey put them to words. “Do you honestly approve of Smiley Trashbag’s plans?!”

“OH COURSE NOT!” Papyrus replied. “I’M HAPPY FOR PERSONAL REASONS.”

“What?! I don’t get you!”

Undyne’s face changed. “I do. But, Paps… is that really a good thing? I mean. He makes the worst enemy.”

“THAT’S AN EXCELLENT IDEA!”

“Wait!”

Papyrus yelled his challenge straight at Sans’ face. The furnace of passion reignited in his SOUL.

“SAAAAAAAAAAAAAANS!!!”

“I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL CATCH UP TO YOUR NEWFOUND AWESOMENESS! IN RETURN, YOU WILL NOT SETTLE FOR ANYTHING HALF-BAKED!”

“NO LAZINESS!”
“NO SLOPPINESS!”
“NO SHRUGGING APATHY!”

“YOU MUST USE ONLY THE BEST OF THE BEST WORLDS!!!”

“FIGHT US! DON’T HOLD BACK! OTHERWISE YOU WON’T BASK IN MY FULL GLORY! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Flowey exclaimed, “You can’t be serious!”

“You know what, I’m gonna agree.” Undyne grinned fin to fin, filled with anticipation for battle.
“No more stupid running!”

Sans meanwhile... laughed. It wasn’t maniacal or cynical. ‘Impressed’ might be the closest match.

“I see what you did there, bro.” He said, “You know how I work, and you’re gaming it to the max. Challenge accepted. Won’t settle for anything less than the best.”

“In return, you guys have to work together. Pool together your hopes. Dreams. Power of friendship and so on. Heh, that’s a nice cliché, ain’t it?”

“WE PROMISE.” Papyrus replied.

“A promise it is.” Sans began to retreat into the fog. “See you on the other side, brother.”

“WHICH SIDE?” Papyrus hollered back.

“That depends on you.”

He vanished. More exclamations of frustration filled the air. But, Papyrus paid no heed.

**DID SANS JUST GIVE ME A CLUE?**
**YES. THAT’S RIGHT. WE CAN STILL MEET HIM AT OUR SIDE OF REALITY!**

Without warning, he pressed down the acceleration pedal. Inertia jolted all eight other passengers in the car.

Frisk’s face didn’t change. But, their tone of voice did. They said: “A warning would have been nice.”

“I’M VERY SORRY,” Papyrus replied, “BUT WE CANNOT DALLY IN THE SLIGHTEST. WE MUST CATCH UP WITH SANS!”

“And do what?”

“BE THE BEST PEST IN HISTORY, NYEH HEH HEH!”

The human chuckled. At least they found that funny.

“...We still have a chance of victory?” asked Toriel, concerned.

“YES, QUEEN TORIEL. BECAUSE OUR REALITY IS THE BEST REALITY.”

“It is?”

“ONLY IF WE MAKE IT SO!”

King Asgore thought this was the best opportunity to make a formal apology. “Oh... In that case, I’m deeply sorry. I shouldn’t have surrendered so soon.”

The Great Papyrus didn’t mind. “THAT’S FINE, YOUR MAJESTY! THE TRADE DIDN’T HAPPEN.”

The car continued to zip down the road. As time went by, the gang began to notice a certain... oddity.

No matter how far or fast they drove, Sans Serif was nowhere in sight.
“THAT’S WEIRD. I’M VERY SURE MY BROTHER COULDN’T HAVE FLOWN VERY FAR WITH THOSE UNWIELDY WINGS.”

Gaelic searched high and low. The fire burned bright enough for Papyrus to see the light reflected on the dashboard.

The attempt ended in frustration. “Argh that hollow bonerot! Ah cannae find a speck o’ the angel anywhere. This accursed fog be far too thick.”

“It bothers me too.” Gaster mused. “It’s such an unnatural presence in The Void.”

“Agreed.” Lucidia responded, “Query: how big is this nebula?”

Nebulae, or ‘colorful space clouds’ as Papyrus calls them, are full of dust, hydrogen, helium and other ionized gases. Much like this fog.

Alphys stammered, “I really hope this anime moment isn’t real. But w-w-what if we’re trapped?”

“B-b-because the fog only thickened after you travelled PAST the last tunnel and we have not seen a new one since then so maybe maybe just maybe we’ve been driving in circles???”

Papyrus tightened his grip on the steering wheel. “YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.”

If the dashboard wasn’t full of vital equipment, Undyne would have punched it. “More timewasters??! Is Sans still trying to toy with us??”

“NO. THIS ISN’T A JAPE. IT’S TOO COMPLICATED TO BE ONE.”

Frisk stared back, dumbfounded. “What do you mean, Papyrus?”

“HE’S TESTING US. FORTUNATELY SO. OTHERWISE, HE WOULD HAVE BLASTED US TO OBLIVION FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.”


“YES, FRISK! YOUR GENIUS MATCHES MINE, NYEH HEH HEH!”

“SANS WANTS TO KNOW IF WE HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO CHANGE THE FUTURE. AND HE’S PUTTING US ON A STRICT TIMER. BUT, I’M CONFIDENT WE CAN PULL THROUGH!”

“FIRST THING’S FIRST, DO WE HAVE ANYTHING TO GET RID OF THIS IRRITATING FOG?”

More pondering from the human.

“I have an idea!” Frisk pressed a button and retreated all the way to the backmost row. Papyrus kept watch of their actions through the rear-view mirror.

“Mom. Can you make a lantern?”

“Of course, my child.”

The Boss Monsters combined their efforts to create a stable ball of flame. Then, Frisk imbued it with a Yellow Mark. The white monster magic gained a golden sheen.

“Okay Dad. We’re gonna poke this onto the trident. Turn it into a lamp.”
“Golly, that sounds interesting.”
King Asgore raised the tip up high. Within moments, the shine of Justice revealed Truth.
Vast twisting and turning roads curled over their heads.
Where’s the beginning?
Where’s the end?
Nobody knows.
Alphys gasped. “A-a Mobius Strip!”
Cenna dropped her jaw. “The heck?! We’ve been driving on that all the while?”
“Affirmative.” added Lucidia. “As long as Sans Serif maintains a set central gravity point for our vehicle, we’re tricked into believing this continuous surface is a single flat path.”
“Then what about the weird worlds?”
For a moment, both tech-minded women talked at the same time.
“Please go ahead, Doctor Alphys.”
“Thanks? I-it’s like the a theme park ride! With the right adjustments, Sans can match the scenery to our perception. An illusion in an illusion!”
“Uuuuh,” Undyne questioned: “Does that have anything to do with that wibbly-wobbly forcefield up ahead?”
Before anyone could answer, Papyrus drove straight through.
The scenery changed. Ebott Goldenflowers -- Cheaters of Death -- stretched as far as the eyes can see. They covered the grasslands and the rolling hills, basking under the sun. A beautiful sight of serenity to behold.
They then turned heads towards the car. They all had the same face, greeting in unison.
‘Howdy!’
Flowey’s trademark echoed in the air.
‘Howdy!’ ‘Howdy!’ ‘Howdy!’ ‘Howdy!’
“What. The. Eff…?” The flower prince asked, shaken by the sights. “Why are there a million ‘me’s?!”
‘Howdy!’ ‘Howdy!’ ‘Howdy!’
Papyrus had a thought. It’s a crazy idea. And for once, he hoped that he’s wrong.
He asked: “IS IT POSSIBLE TO GET DETERMINATION WITHOUT HUMANS?”
The three brainiacs of the team began to discuss.
“F-Flowey can generate his own Determination as a DEMON, right?”
“Affirmative. The quantities are lower than a Red Major, however.”
“And Ebott Goldenflowers have this special property of storing the essence of the deceased…”
“S-sensei, what if they can they store ANY data??? Like nature’s solid state drive!”
“Hypothesis: the Ebott Goldenflower do not discriminate the source. It is thereby possible to imbue false identities with the aid of a HVM.”
“Egads, a farm of clones!?”

“YES!!!” Alphys shouted with gusto. “A-all you need to do is to inject a faux-personality and a Determination starter seed. Then you’ll have a renewable supply without ever depending on a human. This is classic scifi crazy brilliance!”

“I wonder…” Gaster muttered to himself. “If that might prove to be a better solution than stealing SOULs.”

Flowey yelled, “Of course NOT, you stupid goopy mad scientist!”

Like mentor, like student. Little wonder why Papyrus had to deal with two men of questionable morals.

“I’M AFRAID I HAVE TO TAKE FLOWERY’S STANCE HERE, UNCLE GASTER. TREATING MY FRIEND AS A VEGETABLE… I CAN’T ALLOW THAT!”

“…I see. Prince Asriel, please forgive my careless tongue.”

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever doc. Just don’t be dumb again.”

Flowey soon became distraught. Whined. His voice shook and it’s rather out of tune. In a way, he slipped back into his pre-death mannerisms.

“Papyrus, can we please get out of here? I don’t… I don’t like this place.”

“SURE THING,” he replied. He won’t let his oldest friend suffer any more needless creepy. “GRILLBY, WE’RE GONNA BOOST OUT OF THIS ILLUSION.”

The request was granted in a heartbeat. Nobody wanted to stay in a realm filled with Floweys.

Alas, they were too quick to act on their discomfort. The jet’s intense heat incinerated some unfortunate flowers.

‘YOU IDIOT!’ ‘YOU IDIOT!’ ‘YOU IDIOT!’ ‘YOU IDIOT!’

Every plant sprayed their ‘Friendliness Pellets into the air in retribution for their scorched kin. It’s one thing to get hit by a pebble, it’s another to get rained on by a billion.

Fortunately the boost of speed was enough to evade the immediate shots. But, how long can it last? Those deadly fragments of LOVE still trailed behind.

‘YOU IDIOT!’ ‘YOU IDIOT!’

Papyrus wondered about the strange, terrifying world of flowers.

SANS, ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME SOMETHING? THAT MAYBE EVEN IF WE AVOID ‘THE END’, UNSPEAKABLE WRONGNESS MAY STILL HAPPEN?

IF THAT IS TRUE, I’M GLAD YOU’RE SHARING YOUR THOUGHTS WITH ME.
IT MEANS I’M ONE STEP CLOSER TO BECOMING YOUR EQUAL.

Just when he had this epiphany, that damn annoying dog started barking like mad. It ruined whatever ‘zen revelation’ Papyrus had achieved.

“OH YOU DASTARDLY LITTLE CANINE!! WHY CAN’T YOU LET ME HAVE MY MOMENT OF ULTIMATE COOL???”

Undyne grabbed the back of his skull and redirected him from the road to the dashboard. That sudden jump was far from appreciated.

“THAT’S SO DANGEROUS!”
“Paps, look!”

She pointed at the shield display. It read:

**SHEilds 70%**

70%! IT WAS 85 EARLIER! WHAT’S HAPPENING?!

Then the number ticked down one more to ‘69’. Then to ‘68’. ‘67’. ‘66’.

“ARE WE GETTING HIT BY STRAY UNWANTED FRIENDLINESS?”

“I don’t know.” Undyne replied. “Grillbz can’t hold on forever either. We gotta get outta here!”

She’s right. Stalwart the ex-Captain may be, he’s struggling to maintain this intense pace.

Papyrus tried to use his Blue magic to lift the car off the ground, but it refused to budge. Strange. It worked just fine when they escaped the crumbling planetoid.

“FRISK, COULD YOU GIVE ME A HAND? USE YOUR BLUE MARK ON THE CAR ITSELF.”

“Where should I put it?” they asked back.

“AS MIDDLE AS YOU CAN. JUST IN CASE YOUR POWERS DON’T BALANCE OUT RIGHT.”

Frisk moved to the mid-row.

Papyrus felt the thump of them planting a Mark with their boot.

A frightened yelp soon caught his attention. Did his human friend trigger a trap? When he looked back, he saw the final moments of a shattered Mark.

“Well shit,” said Cenna. “Should’ve expected that level of sneakiness. If I’m Sans… I’d trap the road itself.”

Gaelic leaned over the side. He had his head down and tongue out, reaching for the source of the problem.

He coughed away while pushing himself back out of the fray.

“What’s wrong?”
Between the hacking, he uttered one key word: “Karma.”

“Wait, isn’t that a poison?” asked Frisk.

“Yeah, it is.” Cenna confirmed. “Doesn’t mean he can’t combine it with other traits to make specific clauses. Such as tethering the car to a set path by any means necessary.”

Undyne unbuckled her seatbelt and stood up above the windscreen. She conjured a number of spears. Tried to pierce through the road with them.

Sans being Sans, however, had taken her destructive habits into account. The road engulfed her spears and redirected them. They joined the rain of Friendliness Pellets.

One big spear zipped over poor Grillby’s head. He glared in displeasure from the sheer number of close shaves.

Undyne sat down, buckled up, and clawed the side door. Her grip was so filled with frustration, she crunched the chassis. “Fucking Sans.”

Papyrus pitied her. She had the face of an angry kicked puppy: humiliated and helpless.

Meanwhile, the Magi started strategizing. “Lucy, what if Gael and I team up?—”

The discussion was disrupted by some ‘friendly’ pellet pelting against the shield.

‘YOU IDIOT!’ ‘YOU IDIOT!’

Negative news spread faster than the wind. The Floweys further down the road jumped on the offensive as soon as they heard of the threat.

‘YOU IDIOT!’ ‘YOU IDIOT!’ ‘YOU IDIOT!’ ‘YOU IDIOT!’

Shields, failing. It’s getting close to the low thirties.

Lucidia commanded: “Redirecting power to the underside.”

“What?!” said Frisk. “If you do that we’re gonna…!”

“I am aware. But if Karma grinds the mechanisms, we’ll compromise structural integrity. It leads to a zero chance of survival.”

They’re left with ten percent on the top, and fifty below.

The density of the Friendliness Pellets increased from dozens to hundreds. Hundreds to thousands. Sheer overwhelming numbers.

The dashboard screen flashed red, blaring warnings before the last of their protection gave out.

Top hull: Five percent.
Four.
Three.
Two.
One.

Undyne summoned her spear. Sitting duck syndrome be damned. She raised her weapon high above her head and channeled every bit of her Green to the tip.
Zero.

It created a new shield in the nick of time. The pellets shattered upon the surface.

“GREAT JOB, UNDYNE!” Papyrus praised. She grinned back ear to ear.

**HMM, WHAT’S HER MAXIMUM RANGE AGAIN?**

As it turns out, it wasn’t enough to protect the full length of the vehicle. Both royal goats fought hard to defend the back end with their bubble of compressed flames. It incinerated all incoming attacks that escaped the frontal guard.

Asgore grunted as he struggled to maintain integrity. “T-there’s too many…!”

“Mom! Dad!” Frisk cried out, “You have to burn the field!”

“They’re right.” Flowey agreed “And you gotta do it together. Like that rain-fire stunt at the adoption fiasco.”

The Dreemurrrs hesitated. Toriel said, “But, my son…”

“No you silly goose. One, they’re illusions. Two, they’re not really ’me’. T-they’re just mass produced fakes!”

“L-look. I wish the world could be live and let live. It’s just… now isn’t the right time. Okay?”

Papyrus recalled the hostage situation at the water plant. There’s a difference between being kind and being unwise. Besides, Flowey had a point. Illusions will remain illusions. One cannot be fooled by their realism.

“…Papyrus, can you stop the car? Or at least slow down.” The sombre command weighted the Queen’s words. “The spell will be ineffective otherwise.”

Asgore tried to put on a smile. “Please bear with us a little longer.”

All military members echoed a resounding ‘Yes’. Grillby stopped pushing the boosters while Papyrus put on the gentle breaks. And Undyne continued to bear with the assault.

The moment they slowed down to a crawl, a great wall of fire surrounded the car. It then spiralled outwards into the fields. The collective scream lasted only for a second before they were replaced by crackling embers.

Smoke smoldered from the remains. The earth lay covered in the blackened char of scorched earth and the greyness of ash. Remnants continued to burn at the far edges, echoing a child’s wailings into the doomed land.

This level of destruction… it rivalled the Great Ebott Fire.

“…Damn.” Cenna shook her head. “That didn’t wreck the illusion at all. Gael, anything up ahead?”

One quick scout later, and Gaelic answered in a deadpan manner. “Flowers and more flowers. They be angry: a ne’er ending sea o’ spite.”

“What the hell? Just how big is this bloody field anyway?!”

“It ain’t that. ‘Tis be a loopin’ world. Up ahead be the beginning o’ our nightmare.”
“Argh! So we’re STILL trapped!”

Hopelessness threatened to sink in.

Everyone then heard a muffled sob from the real world.

“Al?…” Undyne asked.

“W-what have I done…? My research will lead to this? I… I… I’m scared…” That poor lizard. Since Papyrus met her, she battled with anxiety and guilt.

“No erroneous presupposition.” Lucidia responded. “Even if the flower experiment was not under your name, another scientist may discover the same principles.”

“Discovery is both a curse and a blessing. At least, you get to decide if your applications are for good or evil.”

A cold, logical approach. Perhaps a forced one. Lady Lucidia had responsibilities unimaginable… it’s clear that she spoke from experience.

Papyrus thought hard about their current predicament.

Sans, who can foresee their counterattack, would set things up in a way where they’d lose no matter what.

Karma. ‘Inevitability’.

How appropriate a trap. At least his naming schemes were on point.

Papyrus reminisced back to his first meeting with Mezil. Back then, the visions of a happy outcome bothered him. Frisk was dead, yet he kept seeing them alive.

**WAIT.**
**METTATON'S CONCERT IS SUPPOSED TO TAKE PLACE CLOSE TO FRISK'S BIRTHDAY. RIGHT BEFORE SUMMER. IF 'THE END' WAS A CERTAIN OUTCOME, WHY DID I RECEIVE THOSE HAPPY TIMES IN THE FIRST PLACE?…**

**THE GOLDEN PATH DOES EXIST! THE FUTURE IS NOT SET IN STONE!**

He clutched his scarf.

Papyrus wanted to save his most secret of weapons for the final takedown. But…

“FAIRY GODMOTHER, WHY CAN'T I USE MY SPECIAL EYE AGAIN?”

“Good question,” added Undyne. “We won’t have such a giant headache if he could jump straight to the answer-page of our problem.”

One could hear the woman take a troubled breath at the other end of the microphone.

“…Those ‘Seal Scars’ you exhibit are a phenomenon where the body can no longer safely regulate the power that your Eye demands. Should you activate it now, the unregulated Determination will burst from the cracks and… kill you.”

Doctor Gaster added: “Once you pass a certain threshold healing becomes impossible. My stopgap measure served to prevent extensive scarring, but only that. It does not remove the root cause of the
issue. Proceed with caution, my boy.”

“IT WILL BE FINE IF I KEEP THE LEVELS SAFE?”

“By theory, yes. But… young man, won’t you lose your main trump card?”

“CARDS ARE MEANT TO BE USED WHEN THEY ARE NEEDED.”

Papyrus stopped the car. He unwound his mother’s scarf from around his neck.

That worn yet vibrant red fabric… the symbol of his family’s affection. How blessed he was without even realising it.

Once it was a normal cloth at the end of its lifespan.
Now, it’s going to be the binds that support his wounds.

He began crisscrossing the fabric around his skull. Papyrus wasn’t deaf. He could hear the questions of confusion from all sides, but he won’t answer to any of those yet.

It’s better to show first before telling anything. If needed.

The frayed ends were secured with a loose knot. He made sure his right socket remained unobstructed.

When he activated the hidden codes, the voices of questioning turned into reactions of awe.

“Whoa. Badass!”

“Is it even the same scarf?”

“What’s with the magic circuit lines?”

“When did you upgrade it?”

Gaster cleared his throat. "Your mother wonders if it can still be counted as a ‘scarf’ and not a ‘scroll’. And… whether or not it’s still hers to begin with."

“Doctor Gaster, if you have any issues please direct those to me.”

“Oh no, Lady Lucidia! S-she’s not angry. It’s just… peculiar. What is it anyway?"

She answered, “It’s an Arcanagram to safely bind, root, and disable its intended target. It will also nullify all magic. The effects are complete once it wraps around the torso or the Psychia. Elsewhere it’s localized to the area it covers.”

“AND THAT IS THE KEY TO MY PLAN! NYEH HEH HEH HEH HEH!”

REACH. REINFORCE. RESTORE.

Eye, activated.

The orange flames burned bright, tinged with streaks of blue and green. Papyrus felt a flash of heat on his face. But, the woven threads of red suppressed the harmful scars.

“Hey Paps…”

“YES, FRISK?”

“You’re glowing.”
They’re right. His body once again resonated with his heart and mind. In doing so, it unleashed his full potential.

*I SEE, THEREFORE I SHINE.*

Thus so the hero proclaimed:

“SANS. BROTHER. HERE I COME.”

“THIS TIME I WON’T LOSE.”
Spirits rang high. Super Papyrus had returned!

This means he can see the best way to beat Sans, right? Right?

“YES INDEED!” Papyrus answered. “I’M DIVING IN NOW. BE RIGHT BACK.”

His eye burned bright beneath the cloth. The colour and intensity reminded you of a fireplace: warm, and hopeful.

It was the complete opposite of Sans’ last powerup moment. You remembered how eerie that was. Otherworldly and unreal, he had the shades of the will-o-wisps.

You wanted to ask about this ‘Ascension’ and how it works. But then, this may not be the best time. All that matters was the fact that you could activate your power on command.

Papyrus’ face contorted? He appears to be struggling.

Worried, Undyne called out: “Papyrus? Paps! What’s wrong???”

Oh no! Is he stuck?!

The Gram on the red scarf intensified. Its nullifying properties cut the vision short and saved his life.

Wow. That’s handy!

Papyrus shook his head. Blinked. His bones rattled and he appeared to be sweating.

“H-hey. You okay?” asked Undyne.

“I… I CAN’T RECALL MUCH OF IT,” he replied. “I KNOW I SAW MORE THAN THE BEGINNING. BUT BEYOND THAT… IT’S A HAZE.”

You remembered the Snowdin vision dive. Back then, he had a difficult time rendering one moment in Genocider’s history. Does that mean he saw something unspeakably horrible again?

“NO FRISK. THE OPPOSITE. IT WAS… THE BEST OF THE VERY BEST. GREAT BEYOND COMPREHENSION! THAT’S HOW I FELT.”

You tilted your head in confusion.

“I’M AFRAID I CAN’T EXPLAIN MORE.”

Recovered in full, he puffed up his chest for his announcement. “ANYHOW! WE SHOULD INITIATE OUR ESCAPE! FIRST THING’S FIRST, WE NEED TO GATHER OUR EQUIPMENT.”

“LADY LUCIDIA, UNDYNE’S ARMOUR SHOULD BE DONE SOON. YES?”

“Status: 95% complete. Once fitted, she will require a moment of calibration.”
Undyne raised a brow. “I’m not a robot…?”

“NEXT…” Papyrus’ Eye lit up before he could finish the sentence. “HOLD ON. I APPARENTLY DON’T HAVE ALL THE PUZZLE PIECES YET.”

You hope that this time he will come back safe and sound.

The dive was much shorter than expected. He looked back at the Snakeface with sheer concern.

“…YOU TWO NEED A SERIOUS DOSE OF FRIENDLY HANGOUTS WITH EACH OTHER. THOSE ULTRA-VIOLENT JAPES WERE SIMPLY UNACCEPTABLE!”

“Japes?” the other responded. “Nay, nay, nay. Yer brother and I be bitter foes. ‘Tis war. Ah rather grind his bones fer me meal, aye.”

“ALL THE MORE WHY FRIENDSHIP IS IN ORDER! MY BROTHER HAD MANY UNSAVOURY HABITS, BUT HE’S THE NUMBER TWO TO MY NUMBER ONE, NYEH HEH HEH~”

Cenna burst into a cackle. “Oh man Gael, there’s no turning back for ya. Hey, hey, hey. Don’t look so sour.”

You heard a displeased grunt.

Papyrus turned to you. “FRISK, MISTER GAELIC NEEDS YOUR HELP. MY CUNNING BROTHER HAD STOPPED HIM FROM USING HIS AWESOME DRAGON STEED.”

“…a dragon?!”

“What?” The owner was just as baffled. “Nay, it ain’t a dragon. It be a snake.”

“A GIANT DRAGON-SNAKE THEN. IT’S HUGE! WERE YOU TOO SHY TO SHOW ME? NYEH HEH HEH. I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, DO NOT DISCRIMINATE!”

Stern, Lady Lucidia interjected: “The full size Armament would have destroyed my house. I for one am glad he kept it within boundaries.”

You moved yourself to the mid-section of the car. Arriving there, you noticed that Gaelic was flustered beyond words. Tried to look away to hide his growing purple blush.

“Ah cannae deny.” He said, “But… a dragon… ‘tis a name too grand fer me. A snake be more down-to-earth, aye?”

“OH NO, I THINK IT FITS YOU TO A ‘T’! WE NEED YOU TO GO MAXIMUM. NO RESTRAINTS.”

A curious glint flashed in your eye.

Now you’re just dying to find out. What did Sans do this time?

Just the mere mention of Sans was enough to make Gaelic snarl. “That scurvy bastard! He planted this curse on me being.”

He pried open a cut on his black t-shirt. There it sat, on top of his white ribs. An angel’s Mark.

Well then, that shouldn’t be that much of a problem. After all, you had successfully busted
Tsunderjudge’s Claimed Mark. A fake shouldn’t give you any issues.

Deep breaths.

Focus.

From the bottom of your heart, you’re determined to free Mister Gaelic!

You tried to nicely pat the Mark. But, it repelled your palm like a bouncy balloon.

What the heck?! Oh that made you so, so, MAD! Mad Dummy level mad!

Want to do things the hard way??? Fine!

You balled the same hand into a fist and executed a precise punch right on the sternum!

The Mark shattered right on impact. And your ‘frisky punch’ also knocked the wind out of your unfortunate victim.

You winced. Oops. Asked if he’s alright.

Gaelic did his best to smile. “N-nay. Cor Blimey, ya pack as much punch as yer sis.”

“Of course!” Cenna slung her shoulder over you. “They’re my little sibling after all.”

“Yer ain’t e’en related by blood. But. Heh. Ah get ya.”

“*Notice: Armour synthesis at 100%. Equipping now.*”

In a snap, she fitted the strongest fish with a set of cool armour. You were taken aback by the design. The last time you saw that… you weren’t in a good place.

Undyne’s singular eye widened. “Whoa. Whoaaaaaa!”

“This feels weird,” she said, “Like… the last time I guzzled down a mug full of Robusta.”

“As part of the initialization procedure, the systems pushes your magic beyond the levels of conscious use to calibrate its output. Do not worry: it’s not harmful.”

“Your energy efficiency should have increased ten-fold.”

“That’s… that’s oddly refreshing.” You noted Undyne’s face shift from surprise to excitement. “Empowering. I feel like I can take on the world now! YEAH!!!”

A form more powerful than Undyne the Undying… that’s insane.

“*Would you be interested in testing a military prototype?*”

“Sure,” She answered with an excited face. “Gimmie all your extra weapons, ma’am!”

Lady Lucidia installed something in Undyne’s empty eyesocket. It’s an eyepatch?

“Was not expecting a cyborg eye.”

“I noticed you had quite a huge leak from there. It’s a waste if left untapped. Since you lean to Justice, perhaps this ocular implant may assist you?”
Undyne asked: “If this works, can I get one in the real world too?”

“Certainly. And it will be further improved from the data I gather here. You’ll have to hide it under an eyepatch though. It’s weapons-grade material after all.”

“This is sooooo anime. I LOVE IT!”

“Also, Gaelic, this is for you.” A large flask of orange potion spawned in front of the skeleton. That’s the biggest bottle you have seen so far.

“This should help ease some of the energy demands.”

The man was so happy, he started singing praises in a foreign language.

You didn’t find him too weird. After all, you had done the following: dated Papyrus, set Undyne’s house on fire, and orchestrated a role-playing date session with Alphys in a garbage dump.

Oh. And also you had once petted Lesser Dog to where no dog has gone before. Yep. Just a normal day in Ebottland.

You watched Gaelic guzzle down the potion. Contents gone, he lobbed the flask toward the charred field and unbuckled.

He stood: head facing towards the sky, spine arching back. From there, he let out a howling screech.

You covered your ears, but it did little to muffle the noise.

The biggest Blaster you had ever seen rose up from the earth below.

Jaw, meet floor. Floor, meet jaw. Now you understood Lady Lucidia’s concerns. Imagine a train of bone towering above you. Then make it slightly larger. And a thousand percent deadlier.

Papyrus was right. That’s not a snake at all. It’s definitely a creature from some unmentionable part of the ocean. A macabre version of the legendary wyrm.

Flowey commented, “This is on a whole other level of crazy, you crazy!”

…Huh? He’s not glowing. No Ascension? And he could summon that?

Before you could satisfy your curiosity, Gaelic leapt toward his Blaster. The creature snapped him out of the air mid-jump with its jaws wide open.

Did you just see him get eaten!?!?!

Cenna patted your shoulder. “Calm down, Frisky. The skull is his cockpit. Though, I’m worried about other things.”

Such as?

“His energy expenditure. See, it takes lots of effort for him to maintain basic mental functions. So, the more he spends on magic, the more the wild goes to his head.”

Berserker mode, on?

“Ayup.”
Another beastly cry confirmed your suspicions. It's already trashing the field by digging its skull underneath the soil.

How is this supposed to help???

“Worry not,” said Lucidia. “I’ll do my best to guide him. We have the bond--”

“I wanna ride that too.”

Oh. Oh no. Undyne looked like a kid in line for a theme park, brimming with wondrous excitement for all the thrills that await her.

Wild sea wyrm plus crazy fish. Double the salty calamity.

Is that really a good thing?!

Papyrus said: “GO AHEAD! WE’LL BRACE FOR IMPACT.”

…That sounds like a disaster waiting to happen.

The behemoth skirted next to the car. You felt the earth rumble as the bone ground against the side of the fixed ‘road’.

Undyne also abandoned all car-related safety measures. She leapt straight into the fray, grabbing one of the spines.

Feeling the presence of the unwanted hitchhiker, the Blaster thrashed around MORE. The Great Wyrm of the Deep totally absolutely certainly didn’t like that at all.

You heard Undyne scream past you: “Alphys how do you tame a dragooooooooooooooooonnnnn???”

Good question. One that should have been asked before making the jump!

You could hear the pressure on Alphys from a mile away. “Um. P-pet him? Maybe show who’s the boss? Or. We need a leash…?”

The Karma imbued road shook from the relentless assault, but not even the sundered earth could knock you off. You wondered if that’s a good or bad thing.

“HMMMM… THAT’S NOT ENOUGH.” Papyrus mused out loud.

“…Are you trying to break the road using this chaos?…” Grillby asked. He’s so quiet, you forgot he’s there.

“YES!”

Grillby replied: “…I think we’re over-complicating this…”

“OH? HOW SO?"

“…Can’t Sir Gaelic simply tear us away from the path itself?…”

You saw the orange Eye flash. Then, Papyrus slapped both hands on his face.

“A VALID POSSIBILITY! THANK YOU VERY MUCH. YOU DO HAVE A GOOD HEAD ON YOUR SHOULDERS. NO WONDER UNCLE GASTER CONSIDERS YOU A
“VALUABLE FRIEND!”

You heard the doc murmur over the line.

“Please, Papyrus. I've been a poor friend to Grillby.”

“…The past is past…” the fire replied. “…Lady Lucidia, you said you could guide Sir Gaelic, no? …”

“Positive.” she replied.

“…Thank you… Everyone… adopt the brace position…”

That’s a common airplane safety precaution. You did as suggested, while your white fluffy companion hid under the seat.

You could hear the massive rumbling approaching. Fast. As for Undyne, she’s still trying to break in her impromptu ride with much gusto and ‘NGAAAAH’.

Then, a great shadow loomed over you. Rows of thin, pointed teeth crunched the sides of your vehicle. It was just deep enough to get a grip.

You yelped. So did Flowey.

“What are you guys doing?!!?!”

You felt the transport swing left and right as the beast tried to pry you apart from the road with sheer force.

“C’mon, you can do it! PULL HARDER!!!”

Undyne? She’s much nearer than you thought. Somehow, she managed to climb into the skull. That’s the cockpit, right?

“Go, go, go, go!”

You heard a loud snap. It was soon followed by a constant rise of elevation.

You’re free!

“YEEEEAAAAH! Good boy!!” Undyne praised.

Good… good boy?! Isn’t that--???

Oh well. As long it works. You just hope that Mister Gaelic didn’t get offended.

Papyrus can now use his Blue to levitate again. The light of Integrity enwrapped the car as the beast loosened its grip.

“WE’RE SAFE NOW,” said Papyrus.

You sat up, allowing you to peer inside the sockets.

Gaelic wasn’t piloting it with telekinesis or some conventional method. He’s on all fours, with osseous matter wrapped around his being.

In other words, he’s one with his Blaster.
Creepy flavour: Mild.

Undyne climbed out and pulled her way up to the top-side of the skull. This was the first time you get to see The Undying in all her glory.

You were awestruck. The solid black armour glistened. Intense magic coursed through hidden circuits, causing the large heart on her armour to glow a stable sheen. Her bright red ponytail danced in the circulating aura of amplified power.

She’s full of life. Compared to the last-ditch effort in the Underground… It’s not a dying star burning both ends of a candle.

Tall and proud she stood. Spear ready for action.

You heard Alphys swooning over the microphone. In her distinctive geeky way, of course.

Understandable. Because this is Sheer. Knightly. Badass.

The captain got down on one knee to pat the wyrm. “Okay buddy. We’re gonna WRECK SOME SHIT! You’re with me?”

The beast responded with a roar.

“Let’s GO! NGAAAAAAAH!”

You watch them inflict utter mayhem on the environment. Anywhere that wasn’t upturned got speared without delay.

Cracks began to show in the false sky. All the while, the air echoed with maniacal laughter.

“JUSTICE!” She yelled. “JUUUUSTICE!!! HUFUFUFUFUFUFUFUUUUUUU!”

Cenna snorted. “I’m glad Gael made a new friend.”

“Honestly,” said Flowey. “The worst possible one.”

“Aw flowerboy, you’re just worrying too much.”

Nope. He had a point. You told Cenna about your ‘unique’ cooking session with Undyne.

The news shook some of that confidence. Scratching the back of her head, she replied, “Uh… I guess they can match each other’s energy?”

What does Lady Lucidia think about this? You asked for her opinion.

“Hmm, Captain Undyne’s commanding aura is focused enough to translate her thoughts. Though trust may be an issue.”

“I have known Gaelic for over twenty years, and yet there are still times where he cannot hear me.”

“The real test will take occur in battle with Sans Serif.”

…You were expecting a less technical commentary. But, great points.

“Don’t worry, Lady Lucidia!” said Alphys. “If Undyne can manage the Royal Guard, she can keep a dragon in check.”
“...I fail to see the connection.”

Papyrus flew further and further away from the rampage.

“SHE SHOULD NOTICE THE ODDITY SOON...”

An oddity? What oddity?

“DON'T YOU THINK IT'S WEIRD THAT MY BROTHER WOULD LET US DESTROY HIS TRAP WITHOUT ANY RESISTANCE?”

Now that he brought it up... he’s right. It’s super strange. You would have rigged an alarm to alert yourself of any funny business.

But yet, he remained completely silent.

From the clouds of mayhem, you spotted a glimmer of gold.

Your sister grinned. “Homing spears, booyah!”

“JUUUUSTIIIIICE!!!!” so screamed Undyne.

Golden streaks of sharpness zipped across the sky. Hey, those are the ones that turn around at the last moment!

Papyrus steered the car according to the flight path, trailing right behind.

They continued to fly... until they swerved around an empty spot on the tallest hill.

The pinpoint barrage landed their strikes. A light-bending shell shattered, exposing the secret for all to see.

White fire.
Six pairs of skeletal wings.

The Seraphim. Sans. He was here all the while?!

“I can’t focus...”
“Avert your eyes, Tori. It might induce a migraine.”

Mom? Dad? Are they alright?

“You don’t find it strenuous, my child? Perhaps it is because you’re a human. Could you... describe his appearance to me?”

You told Mom that the angel burns bright with white flames. It’s intense enough to make a skyward beam, illuminating the specks of floating ash.

His wings folded over themselves. A shield. Or a cocoon.

Discomfort levels, rising. Your eyes strained from the increasing oversaturation.

You shut them. Gave your head a good shake. That didn’t help much.

The wings opened up like a blooming flower. Sans’ body language seemed lax. Serene.

The hood obscured the upper portion of his face. You couldn’t tell what’s going on inside his mind.
You raised your guard when he lifted his head. He’s crying? In purple?

The way it flowed reminded you of thin oil. Much thicker than tears.

Karma?

His shut eyelids slowly opened.

Sans sighed at your direction. “Guys, really?… I banned that guy for a reason, y’know.”

More of Undyne’s spears hailed upon him. Some yellow. Some not.

You expected Sans to teleport. Instead, he repelled all the hits.

The cranky groaning intensified. “Undyne, you’re making my job way more difficult than it needs to be. …Not like you care …Not like it matters.”

Didn’t care indeed. Her killer grin had no intent on showing mercy.

You imagined the headlines now: ‘Spears of Justice clashes against Skeletal Divinity for the final showdown of The End.’

The great wyrm let out a screech. Undyne jumped inside the cockpit just before it burrowed deep underground. From the rumbles, you could tell its drilling straight ahead to the enemy’s location.

Alphys then stated, “I-is it me… or is Sans being really sluggish?”

“Why yes, you’re right.” Gaster confirmed. “Could it be that his celestial form has massive drawbacks?”

The cavalry arrived. From the depths of the loamy sea, the serpentine bone dragon leapt out. It opened its jaw wide with the fullest intent of devouring its foe.

Sans teleported out of danger at the last second. He left behind all six of his wings, each one of them filled with the same mysterious purple liquid.

The caustic substance splattered all over the skull. Upon contact, it ate through the osseous surface. Layer by layer.

The beast screeched. Thrashed about. Whined in pain.

That immediate decay… It’s none other than Karma.

From the channels, you heard Undyne trying to calm Gaelic down. “Whoa whoa whoa steady boy! It’s okay. It’s okay.”

All the other Blasters acted as a machine detached from their owner. For the snakeface, merged as one, everything hurt like his real body.

You cringed at the thought.

Incoming Lucidia: “Sans Serif appears to be generating Karma far beyond normal capacity.”

“Is that so?” Doctor Gaster mused out loud. “A similar phenomenon occurred whenever I tried to increase his HP. Karma would eat it all away. Symptoms vary in proportional severity.”
Yeah. You had seen this before too! After going berserk, you found him unconscious, bleeding from his sliced off extra limbs.

“Hypothesis: Sans Serif’s lifeforce may be near-infinite. However, it comes at the cost of his own immunity.”

Wait, wait, wait. So he’s incurring a stacking debuff?

You see it now. He cut his wings on purpose!

“A boon for us. What celestial irony.” The goopdoc was in good cheer.

The illusionary world then rippled. A new reality replaced the old.

You pinched your nose. The air was plasticky and sour. Smells like the burning modern age.

Where did Sans go?

You’re surrounded by shattered buildings, engulfed in a thick inferno.

It’s a complete warzone.

Bright streaks of white light flared in the sky. They pelted against a district in the distance. The weakened skyscrapers crumbled under their own weight.

Undyne exclaimed, “Again?! What the hell is with today and stupid fires???”

Sans spoke from his new hiding place. “Oh boy, Papyrus. You sure know how to make a riddle. Worse than crosswords. I’ll be frank. Under normal circumstances, I would’ve given up. But… the nightmare continues.”

“Red Alert! Missiles inbound!”

Shit! It’s one of those worlds that respond to your presence!

Drive, Papyrus! Drive!

Huh? You felt something dislodge from the underside of the car.

It’s two small aerial drones, equipped with mini-guns and magic-shields. Their tailwings had a decal of a golden flower.

“Open fire!!!”
“Time to kick some butt.”

Flowey?! Chara?!

The agile weapons flew up towards the oncoming missile barrage. They shot it down without a hitch.

Sans huffed. “Was wondering when the ex-human would show their ugly mug.”

“Shut up, idiot.” Chara grumbled back.

“Ok. You do you. I’m gonna continue my exposition here.”

“Look around,” he said, “Believe it or not, this is one of the better places. It’s the year 2142. Well
ahead of our time. But there’s no Abomination in the ocean. The Red Victory War never happened. No Core Incident. No ‘Undertale’. Perfect, right?"

The flower children shot down another batch of missiles.

“Except the world still burns. That’s because, heh… lil’ Chara got their ‘bloody’ way.”

“FRISK, THE SKY.”

You looked upwards. Magical rainbow stars arched over your head. Your face froze in horror when you recognized their true nature.

‘Star Blazing’!

Papyrus sped off as fast as he could. The flower planes kept up easily but…

The knight and her steed lagged far behind.

Undyne!!!
Snakeface!!!

A great explosion of light almost blinded you. Great gusts of wind and rock pelted on your back as you tried to duck behind the protection of your seat.

What’s going on?

The unknown frightened you.

The car stopped. The first thing you noticed was the terror on your family’s faces. You then understood why.

You’re at the side of an ocean. A large chunk of the shoreline had vanished, sunken into a wide crater. As for the buildings within the diameter… only rubble lives there now.

As water flooded into the city, you heard something akin to large hollow metallic objects crashing into each other.

Massive battleships then rippled into view. Whoa, they were all cloaked in invisibility magic! No wonder you couldn’t see them at first sight.

The sudden change of currents had created a whirlpool. The ships tried to regain control. Propell back. Anchor. Anything. Yet the water was too shallow, and the force too great.

Jagged, rocky rubble ripped through each hull. They began to sink deeper and deeper into the flooded city.

“Atlantean ships…?” Lucidia muttered. “Why are they attacking humanity?!”

“Are you sure it's just humanity? After all, this is the world where The Seven Soul God reigns supreme.”

The flower kids gasped.

“No fucking way!” Chara yelled.
“You're saying I didn’t stop Chara?!?” Flowey followed.
“Apparently not. Somehow, you two struck a bargain. Chara gets to kill all the village jerks. In return, humanity gets a new godking. Let's call him ‘Charasriel’ or ‘Chasriel’. Either way works.”

“Don’t ship us, goshdarnit!” Flowey is not amused.

“So yeah, a Gungnir genocider on the throne, partnered with the Prince of Monsters, upturning modern society in a blink… I think you can see why some refused to bend their knee.”

A fleet of smaller ships made it to shore safely. The hatches opened and an army of monsters marched out.

In addition to their Undying-level gear, the best of the best had human SOULS. Countless Magi sacrificed their lives for this day.

“Makes it pretty clear about what they think about their god, hm? Who’s right? Who’s wrong? It doesn’t matter. The resulting clash will bring forth yet another End.”

Lightning stormed the beach. It’s the ‘Shocker Breaker’, except more potent.

Any who failed to avoid the god’s wrath was dusted in an instant. Not even the husk of their armour remained.

Yet, some survived. They braved against the might of human artillery with their SOUL-infused magic: the elements, electricity, bones, insects, sickles, whatever they were born with.

What’s left after the mayhem were the strongest and the luckiest.

…You looked away. Gore was one of the things best left unsaid.

Then, a great light appeared in the sky. It shone so bright, the night turned into day.

And there they were: the combined might of Chara and Asriel, wielding a pair of Chaos Sabers in hand.

You heard the following praise, announced for all to hear: ‘The Godking has come! He will save us!’

One swing of the blade, and mighty monsters scattered into the wind. Another swing, and ruined buildings toppled down upon their graves.

Papyrus managed to avoid the danger with his mad piloting skills.

You hear the cries of the monsters from the ocean. Their spirits rose, but for a different reason.

‘The DEMON is here! Fire!’

Red symbols flashed from every battleship. Each a unique sign. You gasped. Those were Living Victories: Crimson Keepers.

They’re charging up their magic.

Papyrus’ Eye flared in alarm. “FRISK, I CAN’T OUTMANEUVER THIS. YOU NEED TO PROTECT US! ASCEND!”

Panic gripped your throat for a moment, but you gulped it down. There’s no time for fear!
Push your SOUL to the max!
Be. Determined.
You were glowing crimson. Yes! It’s working!

**You’re DETERMINED to defend!**

Charged Green, go!

A second later, you and your friends got caught in a massive crossfire between Hyperdeath and the combined might of many Living Victories.

Great pressure threatened to crush you from all sides. But you have to stay determined.

YOU MUST!!!

You channelled your inner Undyne. Screamed ‘NGAAAAAAAH!’ at the top of your lungs.

The assault soon ended. To your amazement, the immediate environment remained intact. Relatively. You thought that you’d end up back in The Void proper, or some other weird blank space.

It’s… eerily silent. Gone were the armies and their associated thunder.

Sans emerged from his hiding spot, hovering right before you. He had all his wings back. Again, the intense strange glow was messing with your head.


“Welp, I’ve seen world after world… yet not a single one survived The End. It either happens within my lifetime, or a little further down the line.”

“Call me a pessimist. Call me a nihilist. It doesn’t change the fact that it’s far too easy to gain godlike power with our laws of magic physics. Heh, look at yours truly.”

“The fragile peace you’ve enjoyed until today was an agreement between Monsters and Magi: to never merge unless a calamity hangs over the horizon. But even so, we’re on a one way trip to sayonara-ville. Or byebye-town. You get the gist.”

“Meanwhile, The Determined say: ‘The dream can SAVE the world. Ours is the power to change fate’. And yeah, sure, the Red Aspect is like super duper awesome. It prevents discobiscuits. Rewinds time. Reverts entropy. Flips Thermodynamics on its head. And therein lies the problem.”

“Whether you realise it or not, each generation of Reds has gotten stronger and stronger. Less so in the ancient era. But once they cracked the science of DT? The graph shot straight up to the ‘stars’. Heh, it’s a never ending arms-race.”

“The Persona. The Abomination. Sir Vampire of Time. Maybe by the next generation we’ll have a succession of pipsqueaks running around. World-killing Seven Soul Gods in the making.”

Sans shook his head, chuckling.

“It’s a divine comedy, I tell you. A very, very lame one.”

“In this fragile multiverse of Bad Times, I’m beginning to wonder if ‘the best world’ is a trick
“IMPOSSIBLE!” Papyrus insisted. “I HAVE SEEN THE GOLDEN PATH! KEEP SEARCHING, SANS. MY EYE DOES NOT LIE.”

“Oh? If that’s the case, I must persevere no matter what. It’s the reason why my pathetic self exists.”

The lowest pair of wings folded over.


You refuse to believe Undyne and Gaelic were dead. However, that doesn’t change the fact that you’re undermanned.

Dammit. Can you really do this?

Oddly, Sans did not summon any additional magic to defend himself. No Gasterblasters. No nothing. You couldn’t tell what tricks he’s hiding up his sleeves.

“Well. Shall we?”

…Yeah.

You’re ready.

You tell Sans to give it his best shot.

Without a warning, you blacked out.

By the time you returned to your senses, it’s too late. You heard a loud crash as an entire set of Karmic bones skewered your vehicle from below.

It rotted at a rapid pace. The seat mechanisms failed. The steering wheel locked up, and the engine stuttered.

The dog barked. Your sister cursed.

Mom and Dad held each other close.

Alphys’ panic overruled Lucidia’s instructions, while Papyrus and Grillbz struggled to descend safely before the whole car falls apart.

Chapter End Notes

I can’t confidently say when 136 will be released. Health hasn’t been good lately.

So… next chapter will be released when it’s done.

Curious. Have you understood the Determination mechanics, or Sans’ rant? Discussions are cool. I’d like to hear your thoughts.
Chaos.

Pure, utter chaos. That's what Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme dictated from his observations.

Mistake number one: Challenging the opponent with such little preparation.

‘Give it your best shot’? A needless provocation.

Mistake number two: The failure to stay calm. Too much screaming, not enough control.

Mistake number three: Failing to capitalize on the strength of allies. Lucidia’s thoughtful construction had gone to waste.

Thus, the jet-car crashed straight into the broken landscape. Tore through the earth.

Doctor Alphys broke down in tears. Her lover, her king, her ambassador, her friends… she doesn’t know if they survived or not.

Persona snorted. “So much for being ‘heroes’. Even with an oracle on their side, they hit the ground with a splat.”

Mezil planted his face into his hand. “You don’t need to state the obvious.”

It’s time for a damage report. “Any casualties, Lucidia?”

His wife analyzed the data before her.

“Captain Undyne: unknown. Gaelic: unknown. Frisk’s entourage: survival confirmed. But the team is scattered throughout multiple locations. Displaying map on screen.”

Lucidia presented a simplified map of that area of the city. Glowing dots signified a member of the team.

Screens popped up. Showed the Ebottians’ process of recovering from shock.

Mezil commented: “It appears that Papyrus managed to toss them to safety at the last minute.”

Toriel and Asgore wound up on the rubble-littered streets. Landed quite close to each other too. They were fine… save for some scrapes. Not to mention their white fur had taken on a shade of grey.

“Flowey. Chara. Protect your parents.”

“Yeah, yeah.”
“Already on it, old man.”

Off the planes flew.

Sometimes, Mezil wished he didn’t need to deal with anyone other than his wife.

Grillby walked out the remains of a burning bar. Was it coincidence or irony? He’s alone, and quite a distance from the Dreemurrs. A dangerous situation: solitude could spell death on the battlefield.

The knight of fire moved in a careful yet swift manner. He knew enough to not stay put in one place.

Elsewhere, deep inside an abandoned subway complex… Frisk, Cenna, Papyrus, and the mysterious dog survived the crash thanks to a reinforced protective shell of bones. Praise Papyrus that they’re fine. Though, it’ll take a while for them to find an exit.

As for Undyne… the screen showed total darkness. Dead? Not dead? Only time will tell.

“Could you analyze the pre-crash moment again?”

“Yes,” Lucidia replied. Her Eyes lit up in colour as she attempted to recreate the scene on a separate panel.

The scenario played out… then suddenly there was nothing.

“Detecting missing frames,” she said. “It’s a 1.24 second gap. Hypothesis: time-distortion powers interrupted the signal.”

“Seer Time Manipulation, hmm?”

Mezil recalled his days of duelling Seers. Though in theory they had a set of universal abilities, their application differed. It’s a guarded secret. After all, tactics lose their effectiveness if the enemy knows how to counter them.

I know its weaknesses.

Potent as that time-freeze may be, it’s limited to a specific range. Too close, and the effects can be resisted. Too far and it’s outside the sphere of influence.

Not to mention that it limits his own movements. In combat, it’s often used as a disorientation tactic. There’s not much practical application otherwise.

A poor-man’s Keys of Fate. Yet, Team Ebott fell for it. Frustrating.

Mezil switched his attention to the spying window he had wired to Sans’ Eye. For some strange reason… it had showed little to no recent changes. No visions. Nothing unusual beyond that momentary skip in time.

…Is this a joke? He wiped out a team without so much as using his Future Sight?

Unless…

“Lucidia, expand the sub-channels,” he ordered. “Put them in separate screens. Make them small.”

“Where are we linking them to?”

“The Seraph’s wings. They’re not just for show.”
Lucidia did as instructed. Postcard-sized screens appeared and vanished at a rapid rate. The wings seemed to scan for possible realities, only to discard them for their inability to avoid death.

“This is not making any damn sense,” said Mezil. “It’s futile. It’s hurting the people he loves. Above all, he’s damning the ‘god’ he so feverently serves. For what purpose?”

Persona leaned against the chair. Arms crossed. Confident.

“Why is it so unusual to you?” he asked. “We’re Living Victories. If anything, we’re determined to see our paths through.”

“Look at that.” He pointed at the monitors, “It reeks of desperation. Even if it’s a one in a million shot, Sans Serif truly believes there’s no other solution than his own.”

Mezil shook his head. He hated to admit it, but his nemesis was right. Too many times needless blood was spilled because of a supposed deadlock.

The woman wondered out loud: “Should we still call him Sans Serif, Papyrus’ brother? Determination does influence the psyche in ways outside of the norm.”

“Yes,” her husband replied. “It’s just a different side of him exposed to the world.”

The Crimson Hall had taught him such. Both about himself and others…

The angel meanwhile raised both arms towards the false night sky. There, he summoned a vortex of bones. The pieces snapped together en masse, forming a three-dimensional matrix of Arcanagrams.

“What in the world? Is he trying to build something?”

“Still slow on the uptake, Vampire?” Persona interrupted, arrogant as ever. How Mezil detested that man.

“If all you have are petty insults, then stay quiet.”

“Tsk, tsk. If you can’t see his ploy, it means your edge really has dulled. Has age caught up to you? Or is it the fever?”

Mezil can’t let a dead ghost get the better of him. So, he reexamined the situation.

*Think like Sans. Be efficient to the point of being lazy.*

“Were I Sans Serif, I’d capitalize on any known variable: a certain input with an uncertain output. In other words…”

“…He’s building a Spirit Gate.”

Sans’ Eye flared. The glyphs of his kind glowed bright while the spy monitor reacted. Obscure data filled the screen. None of it containing anything Mezil could read.

*Is this really how he sees the world? Like a machine. No different from Lucidia…*

*Seems to me that he’s checking the integrity of his calculations.*

Satisfied, the skeleton compressed the arcane framework to its breaking point. With one snap of his fingers, a massive doorway appeared in its stead.
Mezil groaned at the sight. “Issue an immediate evacuation call on Ebott Town.”

“Affirmative,” the wife nodded. Addressing the two doctors, she said: “Red Alert: Evacuate Ebott Town ASAP.”

“Y-yes, madam!”

“Alphys? Where are you going?”

“Getting something important!”


A visual feed came online. It turns out, Doctor Alphys had pinned a camera on a hiking hat.

“Can you see anything?”

“Yes,” said Lucidia. “Visuals confirmed.”

Good thinking. Visual input will help coordinate evacuation efforts.

Doctor Alphys could barely hold herself together in day-to-day activities, and yet she had a strong intuition for technical details.

Perhaps she did learn something from all that media consumption, however small. It begs the question: how long can she remain calm under pressure?

A strange, glowing fog had filled the town. It’s bright enough to illuminate the interiors of Alphys’ bedroom.

“Huh? What’s happening?”

She walked up close to the pane. At the corner of the camera, something… moved. Like a shadow.

There was a yelp. “What was that?”

Lucidia separated a freeze frame. It was just a fuzzy silhouette, too blurry to be useful.

Alphys’ friends called for her. A lanky green crocodile and a purple fat cat. Both girls.

Though unnerved by the strange happenings, she joined them for the evacuation.

Magi personnel led in a quick and calm manner. They had to: all it takes was a single panicked moment to start a stampede.

“Stick together and move according to your groups!” she yelled. “Hold each other’s limbs!”

“Bloody?! C’mon, this is not the time to cry on the floor.”

“…She’s not running,” Mezil noted.

“Indeed. Analysis suggests that Doctor Alphys will not leave until everyone is safe.”

“Braver than expected.”

The rumbles of fear brewed at the edge of town. Voices grew louder. Frantic. The flow of traffic outright stopped.
One of the Magi guards reported in: “Doctor Alphys, we have a problem. There’s an invisible wall at the perimeters of town. No exit points found.”

“We’re trapped? Oh no. No no no no no--”

There was her limit. Not that Mezil could blame her. A whole town, trapped. Even the most staunch of hearts would falter under the weight of this fact.

The bone-themed Spirit Gate spawned high above Ebott’s town square for all to see. It’s… sideways. Gravity be damned.

“The sky!”
“What the heck is that???”
“Oh my god is the world, like, going to end?!”

When the hinges rolled and the doors opened, The Seraphim revealed himself.

A red birdman stepped forward. “Sans…?”

“Hey, ‘sup?” Sans replied. “Sorry for the out-of-season Halloween vibes. It’s part of the prep.”

“Prep? Prep for what?!”

“Escaping the apocalypse and all that jazz. It looks scary, but don’t worry. You won’t remember a thing once it’s over and done.”

“Where is the real Sans? What have you done to him???”

Question, ignored. An expected response by this point.

From now onward, it’s full-on pandemonium. The people jostled. Pushed. Screamed. Wailed. They used their magic in a haphazard attempt to break free, to wasted efforts.

“Sensei? Sensei, where are you???” Alphys looked around. Doctor Gaster was nowhere to be seen. Where could he have gone at a time like this?

The silhouette of a monster child ran deeper into the fog.

Alphys started chasing after them. “Hey! Where are you going? That’s dangerous, come back!”

Mezil put the screen aside. He decided that attentions were better spent elsewhere.

“Lucidia, prioritize the search for Undyne. If there’s anyone who could keep that damn angel busy, it would be them.”

“Them?” Persona raised a brow. “You mean just ‘her’.”


“You of all people should know how broken and useless your dog has always been.”

Persona leaned closer. Whispered straight into his ear. “How many times have you used the Keys of Fate for his pitiful sake?”

‘How many?’
Again and again, the doubters asked. Each with differing motives.


No one would object if the Keys were used to protect his wife, Lady Lucidia. She was one of the central figures of the Magus Association. It made sense to twist fate around her life, be it for personal or political reasons.

Gaelic? What worth does he have in their eyes?

Nothing, they say.
Replaceable, they say.
Unworthy, they say.

Nonsense through and through. Who are they to judge? As if Mezil Thyme will ever abandon the man who rescued him from the deepest pits of the abyss.

“Hmph,” Mezil huffed. “And yet your ilk fear every bone on his ‘useless’ being.”

The Persona laughed back. “Corrosive as ever. It doesn’t change the fact that your mutt was absent during our final battle. Makes me wonder… what happened to him?”

“None of your business.”

Mezil noticed his wife had clenched her fists, trying to suppress her own outbursts.

In the end, she said: “Please minimize idle chatter. It’s a distraction.”

The Gungnir god shrugged in response.

“Fine, fine. Just making sure I’m not damned for eternity due to a bunch of greenhorns.”

As if you weren’t condemned to begin with.

Mezil kept that thought to himself, however. Answering back would only prolong needless noise.

“Gaelic, do you read me?” Lucidia pleaded.

Silence.

“Are you there? Can you hear my voice?”

Static.

“Wake up. Come back to us. Please.”

The continued silence was an ill omen. If he’s not dead, he’s regressing. Both meant bad news.

...Ten years of hard work. Gone.

What followed after was an effort in the Seer’s tongue. No human could truly understand their words. But, he sensed the growing worry in her voice.

Mortality was a strange thing. Everyone dies someday. And yet, the timing made a world of difference.

Lucidia’s speech patterns repeated over and over. Mezil recognized the phrase.
It was: ‘I love you’.

Type, unspecified. It could be the romantic kind, or the one reserved for families. Either which way, it embodied the depths of her compassion for their outcast knight.

*Gaelic. Don’t die on us now.*

*Not yet.*

At the very last second… they heard the whining creaks of steel. Concrete rumbled. Bubbles roiled.

Sans Serif’s screen shifted. He set his sights on the whirlpool crater left behind by the Merged Being.

The wyrm then burst straight out from the watery rubble. He announced his return with a huge deafening roar.

Sweet, sweet relief. Questions about Gaelic’s mental condition can come later. Sans Serif remained the primary target.

Undyne’s screen kicked back to life.

“Hellooooo? Anyone there?” she asked.

Lucidia answered: “Captain Undyne, we read you. Oh dear, I don’t have an output.”

The blast from Hyperdeath had destroyed all forms of communication toward The Undying… except for her cybernetic implant.

Keyboard, summoned. She typed in her message. The exact text showed up on Undyne’s screen.

“Damn. We really got wrecked, huh?”

‘Query: Update on your condition’.

“I’m more than ready to KICKASS!”

“As for snakeface…” Undyne’s tone dipped straight down in the next line. “It’s one big giant ‘fuck’.”

An appropriate swearword. A rebar had impaled Gaelic through the right side of his upper body, missing his Eye by too narrow a margin.

The captain wanted to yank it out. But, Lucidia stopped her.

‘Do not. It’s too dangerous. Focus on combat instead.’

Bone matter grew around the foreign object. This coating was part of Gaelic’s protective instincts. At the very least, it wouldn’t jostle around more than it already had.

How does it look like on the exterior?

Mezil bit his lower lip. Not good at all.

Karmic chemical burns.
Impact cracks across the upper spine.
The lower jaws, broken apart.
On the Karma-eaten side, there was a round hole: the entry point for that impalement. That bit of steel would have stopped at the bone otherwise.

Was it luck, or did Sans foresee that future?

Undyne the Undying swung herself to the top of the skull. Her left robotic eye shone gold with Justice. Working much better than intended.

“You’re still alive? After all that?” The skeletal angel said: “Really living up to your name now, eh?”

“Hell yeah!” She yelled, crossing her arms with the most intense of glares. “You gotta try harder than THAT!”

“Unlike you, I’m not alone!!”

More stupid Frisk-like taunts? Mezil wanted to slap her across the face. There’s no telling what Sans Serif would do to obtain victory.


Undyne summoned spear after spear in the air. Rained it all down on the false angel. Lucidia got right to work to guide their assault.

“Vampire,” said Persona. “That skeletal heretic is holding your blood hostage, is he not?”

“Unfortunately,” Mezil grumbled back.

“Hah! How appropriate. I own one end of the chain and he holds the other.”

“Then there's you -- our mutual prisoner -- right in the middle.”

Tiny sparks of red electricity jumped on the god of Gungnir’s fingertips: a reminder of his capabilities.

………..

Though the sparks disappeared as soon as they appeared, Mezil understood the ramifications.

It's a solid plan to weaken his defenses.

All we need to do is to make The Seraphim falter only once.

But who then would finish the deed?

Gaelic?
The Dreemurrs?
Undyne the Undying?
Sir Grillenn?
Frisk?
Cenna?
Papyrus?

“Just keep your eyes peeled, Persona.”
Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: Sans entered the Spirit Gate at Chapter 98, which was also posted exactly on Halloween 2016. Quite a coincidence that the Spirit Gate is the main feature in this chapter as well.

Updates are again 'when it's done'. Editor-sama will be visiting me in Malaysia on November 14th. That means more schedule questionmarks in the air :P

P.S Looks wise, I imagined Last Persona to look something like Damon Gant from Ace Attorney. Though with a very different and militaristic sense of fashion.
Toriel Dreemurr had lived a long, long life. She had seen countless generations come and go, from their infant days to their aging deathbeds.

Never would she have considered getting roped up in a mad adventure of fantastical proportions.

‘A secret admirer on a quest to switch realities for the sake of avoiding the apocalypse’?

If this was all a mere dream, Toriel would be more than thankful.

The wyrm continued to rampage through the cityscape. Lasers, bones, and spears clashed, leaving a trail of spectacular destruction wherever they went.

Undyne’s heart raged along with her desire to right what’s wrong.

Toriel shook her head. “Dear me, what a mess.”

She noticed Asgore beamed with pride. Smiling at a time like this? That man needed a good poke.

And poke she did. Elbow to the rib. “Asgore! What ARE you doing?!”

“Oh, sorry Tori,” he replied. “It’s Undyne. She… she grew up so wonderfully. Look at her. I’ve not seen anyone fight with such ferocity and skill since The War.”

“Ah… That’s right. You were like a father to her.” Toriel could relate.

“Mom! Dad!”

That’s her son’s voice. Although… he sounds much more forceful: not anywhere as gentle as she remembered.

“Paging skelly lady, we found them.” said Chara. The human, however, hadn’t changed a single bit since the day they died.

The two planes scooted up up close.

“You’re alive.” said Asriel. “I’m glad.”

He then switched straight back to his ‘Flowey’ mode. “But this isn’t the time to dilly dally! We gotta regroup with Frisk.”

“We’ll protect you.” Chara replied, “Let’s keep moving.”

“Thank you, dear children…” said Toriel.

Asgore led her by the hand. Traversed through the maze of danger. All the while, the roars of battle rumbled against the flashing sky.

Run away?

Is that all The Queen of Monsters could do?
When was the last time Toriel felt this weighted gloom? A long time ago. So long that she had almost forgotten the details.

Her memories brought her back to a board room. There, a wise Lich taught her the intricacies of human warfare.

The Red Sage. Lord Mezil Berendin. She wouldn’t know his true identity until the viewings of the past. And even then, there’s no guarantee he still lives today.

“Sir, if I may ask…”

“Certainly, Your Majesty. Questions are the foundation of learning.”

“Will all this intel-gathering help us survive?”

“To a certain extent. We can formulate much, but there’s always a chance that your opponent may outsmart you.”

“So. It’s futile in the end? We don’t have anywhere else to run should the human forces continue to grow. They’re just… stronger than us.”

“Queen Toriel,” said the Sage. “Nothing is more fatal than ignorance. Knowledge is imperative. More so in a disadvantageous situation.”

“Soon, I won’t be here to guide you anymore. But I believe you have a sound mind for strategy.”

“Always remember:”

“Ignorance about yourself and your foe spells certain loss.”
“Ignorance about your foe is as good as a gamble.”
“Knowing your foe, as well as yourself, victory will be yours to claim.”

Toriel pulled her hand away.

“Tori?” asked a puzzled Asgore.

“We will not meet up with Frisk.”

The flower children protested, but Toriel put her foot down with her classic glare.

“Lady Lucidia,” Toriel continued. “I need to discuss with you.”

The Magi’s Tactician replied: “Warning: Sans Serif can eavesdrop on our formulations.”

Smiling, she reassured the younger woman. “If he’s truly omniscient, he would know anyway. I, on the other hand, will end up being blind about our current predicament. It’s a bad place to be.”

“…Affirmative. Flowey, Chara, please guide the Dreemurrs to this updated coordinate.”

It’s the remains of a children’s playground, far removed from any collapsing skyscrapers.

Toriel tried to calm herself down with deep breaths.

“Please transmit our conversation to the others.”

“…Task, complete.”
Onwards to the next question.

“What’s our situation?”

“Poor. The team is scattered. I had hoped that Frisk would have had the opportunity to use their Mark to boost their ally’s monster magic to maximum synergy. However, that is no longer possible.”

Toriel could only think of one reason why Sans prevented it outright. “Perhaps if that happened, we would have already won.”

“Hypothetically.”

Chara huffed an annoyed grumble. “Trashbag.”

“What could you tell me about Sans?” she asked. “I… was his friend for so long, and yet I knew nothing about him. Nothing more than what he chose to reveal anyway.”

“Certainly,” said Lucidia, “We shall begin with The White Eye. It is a combination of all seven ‘Psychia Aspects’. You may know them more as ‘SOUL colours’. The Red Eye does not exist in nature. Therefore, my data on its influences are limited.”

“The following had been observed: One, perceiving the shape of Determination beyond the levels of standard Truesight. Two, reading people’s dreams and curses alongside the extent of their influence on predetermined fate. Three, the ability to observe timelines outside of this realm’s possibilities.”

The information flew over the queen’s poor noggin: too technical and foreign. Perhaps she had overestimated herself. The presentation of information had changed much over the past millennia.

“I-I’m sorry, dear. I don’t think I understand.”

Asgore then suggested: “What if we are more specific? For example… Lady Lucidia, can Sans read our hearts?”

“Yes.” She replied.

“Thoughts too?”

“Limited application. He has no training in the field of mind reading and lacks the computing power to decipher brainwaves. Even for the natural born, the process is difficult.”

Toriel understood what her husband meant. Left on her own, Lady Lucidia will drop all information at once. She needed some guidance to make bite-sized portions.

“Could you read Sans’ mind?” It’s wishful thinking, but it’s worth a shot.

“Negative. The minds of Living Victories are guarded by their extreme quantities of Determination. Sans Serif stopped being a mere monster, for better or for worse.”

“I see.”

Those knock knock jokes would never be the same again. They’re now separated by a different kind of door.

“Hmm… Could you tell me more about his wings? How do they work?”
“Each individual ‘feather’ is a false Seer’s Eye. They’re semi-autonomous processing units connected to a central command.”

“Your Majesty, please imagine a room full of computers. They each act independent of each other, except the user can alter their executing program at will.”

Good information. Although, Toriel still felt that she had yet to identify all the missing puzzle pieces.

“You mentioned that Sans’ body is filled up with ‘Karma’. What does that mean?”

“The poison known as Karma acts as a disintegrator. It breaks the bonds between atoms, separating matter into its base particles, hence the sand-sized remains. The destruction is thorough and complete. Entropy in practice.”

“However, anything with the conscious will to live can resist its finality. The target will survive despite the torment, for life is the antithesis to entropy.”

Asgore raised his brows. “The resolve to keep living… That’s ‘determination’!”

“Warning: the afflicted target remains in critical condition. Karma may not deal the final blow, but other factors will. For example, the destruction of key internal organs such as the heart, lungs, brain--”

Toriel felt her gut twist from hearing that grisly list. “W-we get the idea, dear. So. Sans is full of this deadly poison of his own creation.”

“Affirmative. Furthermore, it has turned against him. Sans Serif now bears infinite lifeforce, which leads to infinite fuel. He burns both inside and out.”

“His sense of pain has not dulled with his ascent. Resisting this internal conflict will slow down his movements. It would be in his best interest to rid himself of Karma whenever possible.”

“Observation: his teleporting magic is limited to his base humanoid form. All auxiliary limbs will be sliced off should he otherwise try, spilling liquidized Karma at his opponent while relieving him of strain.”

“The liquid form must not be underestimated. Its rate of decay is… terrifying.”

In other words, getting up close and personal would be too dangerous. Almost unthinkable.

“Lady Lucidia…” Toriel frowned. “You are a Tactician just like Sans, yes? If you’re in his position, who would be your next target?”

“The King and Queen of Monsters.”

That confirmation made her heart sink.

“Queen Toriel. His training as an assassin makes full use of his swiftness. Despite your great strength, you and King Asgore are the slowest in terms of footwork. This puts you at a severe disadvantage. In addition, eliminating The Royal Family will lower morale more than it already has.”

It’s a painful reality to accept. But, she can’t let that get the better of her.

“There’s something I don’t understand, dear,” said Toriel. “If Sans is so powerful, why string us along? Why not destroy us right away?”
Chara’s plane swayed around, expressing the owner’s inner child. “She’s right. I would have done the deed already.”

“You idiot.” Flowey grumbled back. “He’s a trash! Traaaaash! I refuse to believe that he could just blow up the universe with his junky fakes!”

Asgore stroked his beard. “Hmmm, but his combat abilities are more than sufficient to get rid of us. Like, spraying insecticide on garden pests. Wait, that’s not a good analogy.”

Toriel tilted her head. “Why not?”

“It’s never a one-off deal. Life can be quite stubborn. Any treatment requires multiple applications over time.”

The Legendary Hero came to mind. Papyrus had confirmed their status as Living Victory. So vulnerable to age and disease, yet outright invincible in battle…

“The Legendary Hero. I mean, Genocider. No, The First Persona! How many times did they… lose? How many times did they reset?”

Lady Lucidia began her count.

Long ago, two races ruled the earth: Humans and Monsters. One day, war broke out between the two races.

After a long battle, the humans lost… again, and again.

Yet, with every reset, the Legendary Hero intercepted the monster’s plans:

Backup hindered.
Tactics overturned.
The mighty, cut down
A union of fire, denied.

“Verdict: Innumerable.”

Thanks to the Hero, Humans obtained victory. Such was the power of the Keys of Fate.

Yet, Sans Serif did not use it. Was it a ‘did not’ or a ‘can not’?

Toriel didn’t get any sense of deja vu. There was no reaction from Frisk either. If time did rewind, there would have been a sudden change of behaviour from her Living Victory child.

In other words…

“Do you think something is preventing Sans from making these ‘SAVES’?” asked Toriel.

“Possible. Frisk’s competing levels of Determination put the Keys of Fate in flux, denying access to both parties.”

There’s hope. This was not the Sealing War. Far from it.

Thus, the Queen of Monsters laughed.

“Tori…?”

“Mom?”
“Oh that sly, cunning skeleton,” said Toriel. “No wonder he refuses to engage us.”

Then, distant rumbles of fighting ceased. And… Gaelic seemed to have slithered away from the battle.


Flowey and Chara groaned together in sync.

“I hope he doesn’t come this way.”

“Great. Nice jinxing it, Azzie. He’s gonna roll in our direction now.”

“Oh c’mon, Chara! You jinxed it DOUBLE by saying THAT!”

“Children, please.” Toriel shook her head. “He’s still far away. I’m sure Lady Lucidia will warn us if we are truly in danger.”

Lucidia remained silent for a moment. Then, she said: “This. Is rather bizarre. Sans Serif has splashed ketchup on Undyne.”

“What?…” said the little prince.

“Confused by the stronger scents, Gaelic now thinks that she’s his target. Undyne is fleeing towards the ocean to wash off the sauce… before she becomes an accidental tasty snack.”

Flowey flipped out. “THAT IDIOT!!! See? This is what happens when you don’t use your brain! Isn’t he a Seer?? Why is he acting like a smell-centric dog???”

“Azzie, hold your temper.” said Chara, “If that oversized snake isn’t gonna steamroll us, it means that the Trashbag is gonna show up anytime now. Do we have a plan?”

“Does we look like we have TIME to cook a plan?!”

“Okay. Fine. We’ll think of something. Uh… I can’t think of anything.”

“Let him come to us,” said Toriel. “Your father and I survived the War for a reason. Besides. Sans is my friend.”

Toriel had a history. A positive one. They exchanged jokes. Puns. The little ignorant joys of life.

Her husband was the thorn. Sans was the flower.

Everything’s reversed now.

No, rather, it’s all been put back in its rightful place. Toriel had pledged a bond with Asgore a thousand years ago. It’s about time she upheld it.

Sans floated down to ground level. Those massive wings prevented him from touching the earth. Too cumbersome; they’re not meant for it.

Asgore stood in front of Toriel, trident at the ready. He became the ‘door’ that separated Toriel from her former joke buddy. Firm and unmoving.

“Knock, knock,” said Sans.

Toriel replied, “Who’s there?”
“Lady.”

“Lady who?”

“Ladies, mind if ya stop handing out my secrets?” Sans chuckled. “Jeez. All of that, exposed in a couple of minutes? That’s shocking. Super shocking. Chill up my spine and all.”

He continued: “I know you guys are trying to force my hand by taking risks. Gambling. Delaying my search. Well then, you succeeded. What are you gonna do now?”

The edge of Toriel’s mouth curled upwards. “Knock knock, dear.”

“Huh. Who’s there?” Sans replied back.

“Capri.” The Queen steadied her feet. Conjured the flames of life all around her.

“Capri who?” Bones circled behind his head.

“‘Capri’talizing on our opportunity, of course. Like the stubborn goats we are.”

“Heh, nice one Tori. Don’t mind me being a bonehead then.”

Who will have the last laugh? She wondered.

Toriel was determined to make that last laugh hers. It doesn’t matter if she stood or fell, as long as she paved the road for the next generation.

After all, that’s what mothers do.

Chapter End Notes

Well. It doesn’t look like I can finish this arc before the vacation after all. To make things worse I don’t think we have time to edit next week due to the preparations.

Unfortunately again I have to say 138 is ‘whenever it’s done’. So if you don’t see 138 this week, next release date would be… uh…the last week of November.

The Red Sage’s advice came from Sun Tzu’s ‘Art of War’. I can’t copy pasta whatever’s straight from there, so I had to come up with its equivalent.

And yes the knock knock jokes are absolutely horrible here. So bad. So so bad.
‘The hero and his friends rode within in the dark veins of a dead city. Their initial goal was to regroup.’

‘United they stand, divided they fall.’

‘Alas… the future warned him against it. Pointed him towards the ocean.’

‘Why? He does not yet know.’

Papyrus rode his bonebike on the subway rail. He needed to make some practical adjustments for it to support more passengers.

The modifications turned the vehicle from a single-seater to something more robust. A stronger frame. Wider seats. The only real ‘cheetah’ feature left was at the headlights. Though at this rate, it would be more likely to pass off as a lion or a sabertooth.

Cenna guarded the back. Papyrus sat in the middle. Frisk, right in the front. And that blasted dog perched on top of his skull.

The human child remained quiet throughout Queen Toriel’s transmission. They’re trying hard to not cry.

They had made a mistake. One they couldn’t undo. They’re forced to face the possible consequences in linear time. It’s something Frisk hadn’t tackled in a while.

Papyrus empathized with the child. He was just as guilty. Why didn’t he warn them against Sans’ time-freeze sooner?

Did his Eye fail? Had he become complacent?

Or…

Did he desire Sans’ different future?

Cenna’s voice snapped him out of it. “Hey! I see the station up ahead.”

The cracked station platform had fallen slabs of concrete scattered about. But other than that, it was intact enough for safe travelling.

Up the stairs, he went. They emerged at the beachside exit.

“The beach…?” The Vanquisher turned her head around. “What the heck?! Dude! That’s totally the wrong direction!”

Papyrus replied: “WE’RE NOT LOST.”

The skeletal hero was pressured to lie. A little white one. He wanted to tell Frisk that he had it all figured out.

Then he remembered Sans.

Remembered Mezil.

Not good examples of trust-building there. Frisk needed integrity the most. Not false sweet nothings.

Being as gentle as he could be, he said, “I’M NOT SURE YET, FRISK. BUT IT PAYS TO BE PATIENT.”

Cenna backed him up with her own words of wisdom. “Yup Frisky. In situations like these, best to keep watch and wait for the next action.”

Having strong adults around them motivated the human child.

“You’re right.” They nodded.

The fluffy dog started to whimper.

“OH, WHAT IS IT NOW?” Papyrus took the canine off his skull.

Just looking at its cunningly cute face annoyed him so much. It would’ve been a tolerable dog if it didn’t cause a long history of embarrassing embarrassments.

“I think the dog needs to poop,” Frisk said.

“…I’M NOT SURE IF IT’S A NON-MONSTER DOG.”

The kid pouted back: “Do you want to get Dog Residue all over your bike?”

Internal gasping intensified. “I GUESS WE CAN DO THIS FOR SANITATION’S SAKE.”

Papyrus put the pooch down. The dog ran to the nearest remains of a water hydrant for a squat. It vibrated. A lot.

Then…

…A big, red, crystalline orb pooped out from its hinds. It sat on the object for a moment before rolling off the polished surface.

Speechless. Outright speechless. That thing was almost size of the dog’s body. If Papyrus had a detachable jaw, it would have hit the ground.

Frisk gasped. “The Legendary Artifact?!”

Cenna jumped off her seat and zipped straight there. Picked up the item with her bare hands. Did not question the possibility of it being contaminated with… ‘residue’.

“Holy shit,” she exclaimed. “Holy! Shit! Like literally. That fluffy thing had this all the while?!”

“What about it, Sis?”

“Frisky, it’s the original Trap Harvester!”

He still doesn’t grasp what went on, but just hearing that name was enough to make Papyrus scream.
“EXCUSE MEEEEEEE?!?!?”


Cenna continued: “Blood Crystals are a key component for DT-based magitek. Mama’s heirloom? Had this as the battery. That’s how it could absorb so much DT in the first place.”

Her eyes glowed yellow, inspecting the orb of questionable origins. “Hmm. It’s just an unrefined crystal. Can’t get any more basic. I wonder if we can take it to the real world. Anise would loooooooove to make something out of this.”

The pebbles on the road rattled with increasing ferocity. Something huge was charging towards the beach. To their fortune, they were not in its direct path.

A loud child-unfriendly swear word escaped the quake; it’s a voice Papyrus knew very, very well.

Making a mad dash towards the waves was indeed none other than… a red Undyne? Was that a new person?

WAIT. DIDN’T FAIRY GODMOTHER SAY SANS HAD SPLASHED KETCHUP AS A JAPE?

In the midst of his contemplation, a massive bone wyrm ripped right through the very road she had left in her wake.

It matched the reports. Always seeing the positive side of life, Papyrus exclaimed: “THEY’RE ALIVE!”

“Uh, Paps.” Frisk pointed at the blaster’s jaw. Or rather, its lack of one. “I don’t think Snakeface is okay.”

With the initial optimism deflated, harsh reality sank in.

They watched the massive being crawl over the sand. There, it slowed down. In the end… exhaustion took over and it collapsed.

Without the user’s support, the wyrm crumbled apart.

“Ah damn. That’s reeeally bad.” Cenna replied. “We gotta check up on them.”

The humans ran to the beach on foot. Papyrus followed their pace, though he kept his bike around: parked it by the beachside just like a normal vehicle.

Gaelic lay face down. A rebar had impaled through his right side. If it was angled a little bit more to the left, his spine would have been severed from the hip down.

Frisk was right; he’s in terrible shape.

Cenna got down on her knees. “Gael. Gael! You recognize me? Can ya talk?”

The downed man responded with a high-pitched whine.

“Stay with me, buddy. You ain’t gonna fly over to the Spirit Realm before me. You promised!”

Undyne emerged from the ocean. She’s no longer dredged in red condiment.
“Hey!” The senior smiled ear to ear, showing off her teeth. “Oh man, I’ve never been happier to see you punks! But, uh, celebratory suplexes can wait.”

Papyrus nodded.

Should he ask Lady Lucidia? No. She already had her hands full with Sans.

Cenna lifted her head to ask. “Cap, did you see any fish? Dead or alive, either’s fine.”

“I think there’s a whole row of them at shore. Must have died from the shockwaves earlier.”

“Get some. Gael needs ‘em. Urgent.”

“YOSH!” Undyne dashed back to the waters without an extra word.

The whole scene sickened Papyrus. It looks wrong. Painful. In all the worst ways.

“SHOULD WE PULL IT OUT?”

Cenna responded: “Noooooo. You’d open the wound.”

“THEN, WE SHOULD TAKE HIM OUT OF THE VOID! WE’RE ALL IN FAKE BODIES, RIGHT? THAT IRON BAR IS NOT A DETERMINATION INJURY EITHER.”

“The Crimson Hall’s way too far away. If he dies mid-transport, it’s permanent.”

Always the one with bright ideas, Frisk summoned a Green Star. “If that’s the case, we have to seal it in.”

Is there really no other way? Out of curiosity, he checked the possible outcomes of disregarding expert advice.

In one scenario, Frisk couldn’t heal the wounds fast enough. Too much dust was spilled, and hence a life was lost.

In another, Gaelic became paralyzed from the waist down because the botched operation severed his spine.

That’s enough gruesome what-ifs.

“HMMMM,” Papyrus rubbed his chin. “WE NEED TO GET RID OF THE EXTRAS FIRST. ALL THESE PARTS JUTTING OUT… IT’S ASKING FOR AN UNFORTUNATE ACCIDENT.”

Undyne returned from her fish-gathering operation. She dropped the whole pile on the sand. It’s more than any one person could eat, but it’s better than having too few.

“Okay, now what?” she asked.

“UNDYNE, COULD YOU CUT THE REBAR WITH YOUR AWESOME SKILLS? GET AS CLOSE TO HIS BODY AS YOU CAN. YOU MUST BE SUPER SWIFT. OTHERWISE MISTER GAELIC WILL HURT FROM THE VIBRATIONS.”

“No problemo! The world is a pudding with this wicked armour.”

Spear, summoned.
With swift motions, Undyne succeeded. The hazardous extras fell on the sand and were tossed aside posthaste.

“My turn,” said Frisk. With their determined stoic face, they shone their healing magic on the stubs. Papyrus expected the action to soothe Gaelic. Like applying balm on a bite.

Except. That didn’t happen. The whole ordeal turned ugly in a snap.

Gaelic screeched. Loud. His spine arched. The shock of the pain and panic bolstered his dying strength.

“Shit shit shit shit shit!” Cenna summoned her drones in a hurry, weaving her strings in an attempt to reel him back. He, however, ripped right out of his bindings.

Frisk switched to a Red Star. They made it radiate with peaceful ‘Mercy’ in an attempt to calm down the wild one.

But, the child’s good intentions were not understood. The bright shine further agitated Gaelic, and all his attentions zoomed towards the kid. He lunged forward with poisonous drool dripping out from between his teeth.

“FRISK!!!” yelled Papyrus.

Undyne jumped on Gaelic. Did a standard police-style pin-down. Front on the ground, arms against the back. He yielded after a brief struggle.

Frisk resumed their work. They managed to seal the bar into the bones… but it wasn’t smooth or seamless. It was a lumpy mess. More like a horrible, disfiguring scar.

Frowning, the kid turned to Papyrus. “…I feel lucky that we’re in the Void. Doctor Gaster was so worried about this happening to you.”

Papyrus had a new level of respect for Lady Lucidia and Doctor Gaster. They made the art of intense healing look so easy.

He decided to step back to give Cenna and Frisk some space. For a moment, his knees wobbled. Uneasiness twisted his chest, and he wondered if he had made a worse mistake out of ignorance.

**WHAT JUST HAPPENED?**

I… I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT’S GOING ON. HE WAS OKAY IN THE CAR. I THOUGHT HIS BERSERK MODE WAS MEANT TO BE TEMPORARY…

A slight nudge came from the side. It was Undyne.

“Paps, you alright?” she asked.

“I. UM. I’M ALRIGHT.”

“I see. I hope you don’t mind me asking this now, but what the hell is that thing in the sky? Sans refused to say anything about it. No more than puns at least.”

She pointed towards a bone-white door floating up high. It’s open. Looking at the top-down view of
Ebott’s town square.

“OH WOWIE!” Papyrus brightened up in sheer delight. “SANS INTENDS TO BRING THE WHOLE TOWN ALONG! HERE I THOUGHT HE DOESN’T CARE ABOUT THEM.”

“Bring the whole town…?” Undyne blinked twice.

“YES! THAT’S ONE OF THOSE ‘SPIRIT GATE’ THINGIES. IT CONNECTS THE VOID TO THE REAL WORLD JUST LIKE THE CRIMSON HALL! NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I WONDER HOW GERSON AND THE REST ARE DOING? WILL THEY BE INCLUDED IN THE TRANSFER TOO?”

“Papyrus, that’s BAD news!” she exclaimed, “Sans is gonna hijack an alternate dimension’s worth of Ebott monsters!!! The body-stealing shtick, remember?!”

When the true ramifications clicked together in his noggin, Papyrus bugged out. “OH MY GOD! YOU’RE RIGHT!!! DOES THAT MEAN SANS HAD ALREADY FOUND AN IDEAL NEW WORLD?”

“Don’t think so. We wouldn’t be standing here if he did. Though… he’s definitely making preparations.”

At the corner of his sight, Papyrus spotted Frisk. They picked up a small fish by the tailfin.

The kid waved the morsel in front of Gaelic. “Here’s a tasty fish. Fishy fishy fish~”

Undyne grimaced. “Shouldn’t we remove their guts first?”

“Sis said he needs them. He’s critically low on nutrients right now.”

“…Okay, I can believe that. You should’ve seen how he devoured the badghetti. Total annihilation.”

The sudden reminder of his culinary disaster made Papyrus blush in embarrassment.

Gaelic took the bite. But that’s it. He was too exhausted to chew his precious food.

Frisk turned to Papyrus: “Maybe we should make a mortar and pestle? The top half of a skull would be perfect.”

“THAT’S BRILLIANT!”

Frisk soon filled up the Papyrus-made bowl with fish. Undyne proceeded to pound the ingredients to a pulp, mixed with some purified water to thin it. They ‘cooked’ with much gusto… just like the good old days.

Finally, by the aid of a hollowed femur, they managed to pour the slurry down his gullet.

Frisk tried to offer the leftovers to the Annoying Dog. It shuddered at the mere whiff of it. Flat out rejected. Guess even that canine has higher standards than Gaelic when it comes to seafood.

“Now what?” asked Undyne.

“I GUESS WE WAIT,” Papyrus answered. “EVEN FOR SKELETONS, DIGESTION IS NOT INSTANT.”

Meanwhile, white fire rained at the far distance. It set that portion of the city alight in an inferno of
intense orange. Ominous plumes of black smoke rose up into the air.

The Royal Dreemurrs’ battle had begun.

“Papyrus,” said Undyne. “I gotta go. Can I leave the rest to you?”

“OF COURSE. WE’LL CATCH UP SOON.”

They exchanged fist bumps. It’s a mild replacement for their suplex routine. But that’s fine. Those can wait for the big celebration once this was all over.

The Undying rushed back to the battlefield.

In the meantime, Papyrus considered his next course of action.

Should he take Gaelic and escape to the Crimson Hall? He’d be fine once he returned to his unbroken body.

“I know what you’re thinking, Cinnamon Roll,” said Cenna. “Bad idea.”

“WHY NOT?” asked Papyrus.

“It won’t restore his mind. In fact, that’ll just put the crazy at max-strength. He might end up injuring others. And himself.”

The Annoying Dog tried to sniff and poke the patient. Gaelic locked his sights, salivating with bottomless hunger.

The timely toss of a fish saved the poor pooch. He snapped the morsel instead of the dog, allowing Frisk to whisk the canine toward safety.

“POINT TAKEN… SORRY,” said Papyrus, filled with regret.

Cenna got down on her knees. Gaelic’s expression changed in her presence, recognizing her as a friend.

“Jeez, you went deep in the loony bin huh?” She began to pet Gaelic. Tried to get him to relax.

“Almighty Creator of Love and Compassion,” she said, “Redeemer of Life, please heal this child of yours. Dispel the dark chaos from his mind. Thy will be done.”

Love and compassion? It’s familiar.

Papyrus sat down on the sand. Frisk did so too. They stared at Cenna with widened eyes, expecting an explanation.

“Never heard of a prayer before?” she asked, grinning back.

“Not in that style. It’s usually a lot simpler.”

“I THINK I HEARD FAINT WHISPERS OF THAT KIND WHEN I HAD A MOMENTARY FOOD POISONING FROM THE BADGHETTI. IS THIS ALMIGHTY A HUMAN-MONSTER MERGER?”

“No way!” She snickered. “We’re talking about the one with the Big G here. ‘He is who he is’. Never created and never ending. Eternity, man.”
That was the most outlandish thing he had ever heard. Papyrus stared at Frisk. The human shrugged in turn. They’re just as clueless.

“…Guess I should have explained this sooner, huh? It’s an old faith that us Vanquishers align with. Or, well, we’re supposed to. You’re always gonna get people who’re just in it for the cash.”

“So, what do you guys know about Heaven and Hell?”

Papyrus blurted out the first image on his mind: “HEAVEN IS A BRIGHT, PEACEFUL WORLD WITH LOTS OF FLUFFY CLOUDS. AND HARPS!”

The child giggled. “That’s so old-fashioned. It’s the ‘Good Place’ where people go after they die.”

“ISN’T THE FLUFFY CLOUD LAND GOOD ENOUGH?”

“I think it’ll get boring if we played harps all day, no?”

“Well, we can have cloud statues, cloud bowling, cloud guitars, cloud bouncy pads… It’s like snow, Frisk! The most malleable matter in the universe!”

“Okay. You got a point.” said Frisk. “As for Hell, it’s is the ‘Bad Place’ where troublemaking kids go to burn. According to Sans anyway.”

“Really? I thought it’s a lava-filled realm where cat ghosts live. They pass the time by shooting exploding fireballs at each other.”

“That’s… from a video game isn’t it?”

“It’s definitely less ridiculous than Red Asgores with lesser tridents! You can tell those were made by people who don’t know anything about the awesomeness of boss monsters.”

Cenna tried to stifle her laughter. She didn’t want to startle her friend after all.

“Sorry folks. But that’s beyond wrong. Where do I even start?”

“Imagine a place where nobody dies and everyone loves one another. Don’t ya think that sounds like Heaven?”

Both Frisk and Papyrus nodded.

“Believe it or not, that used to be planet Earth.”

“Really?!” Papyrus asked.

Here he thought that such a place had always been a mere fantasy. Why would the humans think he’s childish otherwise?

“Really! The Almighty made everything good. Including the people. That’s why we have ‘Love’ and ‘Compassion’: the ability to care for each other.”

“That sounds awesome! But, what happened? Why is the world full of despair now?”

“Long story short, the people rejected the Almighty’s standards. Started fighting over selfish reasons.
Love? Gone. Compassion? Double gone. The end result… is Hell.”

Cenna motioned her hand towards the city. “You’re looking at one right now. War is a form of Hell. Broken families? That’s Hell too. I know, since I escaped from both.”

“It all begins here.” She tapped her chest. “In the heart.”

“Is that why you kill DEMONS?” asked Frisk.

“Yeah…” the sister replied. “DEMONS twist their haunts into pockets of ‘Hell on Earth’. All that weird shit? Reflects their personal corruption. That’s why we gotta send them off.”

The kid rubbed their sleeves. They had their head down, looking rather guilty.

“I… I know how that feels,” they said.

“WHERE DO THEY GO?”

“Same place as the non-DEMON folk. The Spirit Realm. Afterlife. Whatever’s the term nowadays. There, they’ll meet the Almighty for the final time.”

“From then onwards it’s either a joint venture for His final project… or to forever rot in their own misery.”

“WHAT IS THIS FINAL PROJECT?”

“To reunite Heaven with Earth. Get rid of the sad and the bad, replacing it with the best of the best. That’s how one of my mentors explained it.”

Epiphany struck Papyrus like a truck. A bolt of lightning. Or Undyne’s surprise wrestling moves. Whichever packed the most punch.

A world where everyone loves each other in the presence of their Creator?

It really sounds like ‘the best of the best’.

“THIS ABSOLUTELY TOTALLY CERTAINLY MAKES ALL THE SENSE IN THE UNIVERSE!!! FRISK, WE NEED TO GET TO SANS RIGHT NOW!”

“Huh?!” Frisk exclaimed.

“THAT’S THE ONLY WAY WE CAN STOP HIS CHARADE!”

Chapter End Notes

Amazing. We managed to release a chapter right before vacation! Wow, didn’t think we could do it.

There’s one bad news though.

I regretfully have to inform everyone that the audiobook project is postponed indefinitely.
Unfortunately due to missing manpower and my own lack of technical knowledge, I can’t make this work. Also, I rather not get into a project that I won't be able to progress on in the foreseeable future.

Thank you to everyone who wishes to help. I'm grateful for your enthusiasm. Perhaps some day in the future I'll be able to proceed. But for now, I'd rather close it down amicably.

Vacation is two weeks. As a result, there won’t be any new updates until early December. I’ll still check my inbox though.

Which means… it’s theorycrafting time! Go nuts! Have a good second half of November, everyone.
I'm back from my vacation :) It was good.

And now we have a new chapter right on schedule. Enjoy!

Also, GQ is officially 2 years old now!

Friends turning into enemies. Checked.

The crumbled remains of a lost city. Checked.

His own body locked in a cycle of decay and restoration. Checked.

Death all around. Death in the future, the past, and the present. Checked.

The shadow of a man-goat towered over the tiny stature of Sans Serif, foretelling an ill-omen.

The crimson trident danced in a flurry, faster than Sans remembered. Asgore cut the Seraphim’s wings in one simple turn.

Karma splashed unto the cracked asphalt roads. Anything touched by the rot collapsed on itself, leaving behind liquid-shaped holes.

A direct, deliberate attack. That’s what Sans could conclude for certain. As for Toriel’s other plans? He had his guesses, but he considered them low priority for now.

It’s a surreal predicament. The reality of this situation did not correlate with any of his prior observations.

Sure, Asgore held back when he had trained Undyne. Did the same when Frisk battled him. But this much? The difference was staggering. No wonder he survived countless battles against Genocider.

The King’s biggest weakness was always his big heart. That’s not the case anymore.

Sans attempted to initiate a counterattack. His blasters summoned to the command of his left arm.

Mode: Full Karma.
Precision: Mandatory.
His goal: To cripple the royal couple.

Except a spray of bullets from the side disrupted his attempt. Sans watched his arm shatter and tear into a liquefying mass of poisoned shards.

The ordeal hurt less than it should have. Then again, he had already resisted worse…

“Take THAT, Trashbag!!!” so mocked Asriel, the rotten prince.

The two little plane drones whizzed around. They continued raining their bullets on him.
Such a nuisance.

The skeleton thus teleported away from the meddlesome pests to gain some distance. Within seconds, his blasted arm restored itself back to its original state.

*Tsk. The flower kids.*

*My Eye didn’t warn me.*
*Of course, of course.*
*I have infinite HP. By technicality nothing is lethal. Therefore, there’s no reason to avoid anything.*

Sans tried to focus on the happenings at Lucidia’s channel, but the two brats kept yelling over her. The mix of insults, childish orders, and minor reports covered possible vital information.

Meanwhile, the King of Monsters approached: his very stride exuding power. Despite so, his running speed was slow compared to Sans’ recent foes.

He wanted to take full advantage of that weakness, but once again the pesky planes refused to let him do so.

A warning of his demise then flashed by his vision. If the flower children successfully compromise the Seraph System, death becomes permanent.

So he took protective measures. Shielded the crucial parts. As long as it remains intact, the rest of his being was nothing short of secondary.

This behaviour did not go unnoticed.

*“I knew it! Your life is linked to that dumb thing!”*

Chara laughed. *“Pathetic. Utterly pathetic.”*

*“Isn’t he? The high and mighty Comedian, reduced to a ghost in a machine. Everything else is just for show!”*

*“That’s what a performer’s all about.”*

By the time they finished their banter, Asgore had caught up. He lunged at Sans with a piercing attack, aimed for the Seraph System as expected.

Dodge. Teleport. Retaliate. Waves of corrosive bones dissolved the ground, forcing Asgore to retreat lest he falls through the gaps.

*Didn’t I do this before?* Sans wondered.

The White Eye fed him memories of Frisk’s wake.

It happened so, so long ago.

*Right, I tried to trap that plantry twerp.*

*I also figured, that if there was a superpower other than Frisk… he or she would not let the collapse of the stadium grounds remain permanent. Hello, Mezil Thyme.*

“Hey, Tori,” he said to the woman by the sidelines. “You think you’re invincible? Protected? Because you’re you?”

“Why not? We’re best joke buddies, after all.”

“I’m a DEMON now, y’know. Heartless. Ruthless. A true nihilist. Love and attachments… they don’t mean anything anymore. I can kill you with a snap of my finger.”

She shook her head. “But that will go against everything you’re fighting for.”

“Heh. I’m a lazy bag of bones. Integrity is not my tune. When it comes down to it, I’ll finish the job.”

So the Queen challenged: “I dare you.”

Asgore pierced the trident into the ground. And when the husband calls, the wife answers. Queen Toriel lifted her arms, sending out resonance. Their magic sang united in a rolling shockwave of living flame.

Fire everywhere. Anything touched by their magic burned, even if there’s no fuel to sustain them. Should he have expected anything less from the couple who could ignite the rain itself?

_Hot…!

Sans warped himself out to the edge of the radius. It'll take a while for the Dreemurr couple to shift their new position. That should give him some time to analyze.

If the children would allow him to do so. Their small, fast planes made ideal harassers. They continued to pester him with potshots on his bones.

A splash of Karma here, a puddle of poison there. That’s not counting the constant flow from his wrecked wings…

At this rate, the city will crumble beneath his feet.

What about flight? Heavy suppressive fire complicated matters.

Sans had to keep afloat, close to the ground and out of the decay. Otherwise, he would sink into the dry quicksand of his own making.

_“Hey Trashbag,”_ said Chara. _“Don’t you know that the final boss always loses? Look at you. Powering up. Being uber cool. That’s all gonna fall flat.”_

Asriel joined the mockery: _“Been there, done that. So why don’t you just give up? That’s what the old Sans would have done.”_

The skeleton replied: “What are you talking about? I gave up on giving up. All in character.” Capped the remark with his usual wink.

It earned the grimace of the ex-human. _“I can’t believe you insist on maintaining that fucking act!”_

_“Welp, little Persona… I got nothing else to say to you.”_

Between the two, Chara’s flight path was the more predictable one. He had seen this behaviour too many times. Some bad habits refuse to die.

Sans capitalized on their weakness. All it took was just one well-timed bone to eliminate Chara’s
drone, smashing it to smithereens against a wall.

\textit{Incoming flip in three, two, one.}

Right on cue, the prince seethed. “\textit{YOUUUUUU--!}"

“Alright Azzie, let’s go with Plan B. I fly, you fire.

The two kids teamed up to control a single plane. Asriel focused on the shooting while Chara kept their ‘vines’ on the steering wheel.

They continued to maintain pressure. A shot punctured his ribcage. Should have lost his 1 HP right there.

How strange it was to survive these otherwise fatal wounds. The sense of false immortality threatened to lull him into complacency.

\ldots\textit{I need to break their teamwork.}

\textit{Hmm. I don’t even need the Eye of Dreams to read these kids.}

“So, Prince Asriel.” he said, “What if I tell you that your suffering is wholly self-inflicted?”

The firing rate intensified. More holes in his ribs.

Hot button, discovered. Sans is gonna press it for his life’s worth.

“The problem was never about your lack of a SOUL.” Sans tapped his cranium. “It’s right up here. You had no proper understanding of love to begin with. Limited. Twisted. No wonder you couldn’t recognize it as a flower and fell into genocidal despair.”

“Azzie, don’t listen to him!”

“SOUL or no SOUL, you’ve always failed to connect to others in a meaningful way.”

“\textit{W-we’re best friends!}”

“Nah. You’re both parasites manipulating each other. All you cared about was Chara. Nothing but Chara. The person who gave the least damn about your well being. And your ‘best friend’ wanted the perfect tool for their revenge.”

“\textit{YOU won’t understand, you... you...! You FILTHY PSYCHOPATH!}”

Despite the fury, none of the hits landed. Emotions had taken over his senses. Now all it took was just one final push.

“That reaction…” said Sans. “Tells me you knew about it all along. Subconscious or otherwise. Makes me wonder when your beloved Chara is gonna rob you of control again.”

“\textit{Shut up shut up shut up SHUT UP!}”

“\textit{Argh dammit! You always break under pressure. Give it to me!”}

“\textit{NO! STAY OUT OF THIS!!!}”

The kids took the bait. Hook, line, and sinker. It’s an immediate breakdown. The plane teetered around as they squabbled, until another bone cleaved them down right through the center.
Like that, they’re down for the count.

Free of distractions, Sans had the Seraph System restore his being to completion. No more Karma leaks. At least, for the time being.

“…So, Lady Lucidica,” said Sans. “What’s up with the silence? Thought you’d slap some sense into those brats.”

No response.

“Was it not a part of your plan? Or maybe, you’re not in charge of this battle?”

Shadows lengthened, the air warmed.

The King of Monsters had arrived. Glowing fire perched on his back.

Asgore’s heated breath trickled between his clenched teeth. His back was hunched, and his arms trembled.

“Is that… what you think of my children?” The King asked.

As for Queen Toriel, her stern gaze locked square on her target. Unmoving.

So, they heard the full conversation.
Tori... what are you thinking? Maintaining morale would have been better.

“Yes,” said Sans. “I pity you, King Asgore. Your wife too. You had such big plans for those two. Together, the future of monsterkind… It must have hurt to realise they had fallen so far short of your lofty hopes and dreams.”

“Well then, Sans Serif. Tell me. Who is at fault here? The parent, or the child?”

He pondered about this age old question.

When children don’t grow up right, who bears the ultimate responsibility?
Would it be nature? Or nurture?

“Both,” the skeleton replied.

“You yourselves were good kids to your parents. Made the right choices under hardship. As a result, you had an idealized image of parenthood. Didn’t realise the possibility of going bad with a cute face. Asriel was not lil’ Toriel or lil’ Asgore. Neither was Chara.”

“Ah… I see,” said the King. “I remember the days my father took me through his daily routine. Meeting the officers, visiting the citizens, striking dummies made out of straw…”

“Those were my fondest memories. But as I grew older, I wished that my own children could have a more carefree childhood.”

Sans shrugged. “It’s natural. Flowers always bloom brighter from the other side.”

Asgore pointed his trident at his foe. His arms, steadied. “You and I share much in common. Yet how different the outcome was.”

“None of that matters anymore. Ready for round two?”
“No. This shall be your end.”

Sans heard the rupture of metal. Multiple sources. It’s followed by the rushes of depressurization.

A dangerous scent began to fill the air. King Asgore covered his snout with his cape, coughing away.

*Gas…?*

The threat of infrastructural collapse was worse than expected. His Karma had consumed the active gas pipes, releasing mass volumes of flammable fumes into the ruins.

Toriel smiled. It had a sense of twisted morbidity that belonged only in the darkest shadow.

“My, my, my,” she said. “Fortune is on our side. This will be easier than I had ever expected.”

The Queen joined her King, gripping onto the trident’s handle. Their united might formed a brilliant sun on the edge of the prongs.

Larger and larger it grew. Soon it will reach critical mass.

The action set off a ton of alarm bells in Sans Serif’s skull. The goats may be fireproof. But, they are not blast-resistant.

Sans yelled. “Tori, stop! You’re going to--”


Gasterblaster, summoned.


One shot was all he needed to prevent a colossal disaster.
One shot to obliterate the entities named Toriel and Asgore Dreemurr.

One.

Yet, despite all his claims about his descent to madness…

…He couldn’t pull the final trigger.

Husband. Wife.
The Underground’s ‘light’.
Together, they destroy the status quo.

Hot plasma plunged straight toward the fuel.

It set off a chain reaction of quaking proportions. For a moment, nothing made sense. Light and shadow rolled together, devoid of any sound other than a keen shrill.

His cochlea must have shattered. Along with it, all sense of balance.

Sans Serif lay broken on the baking ground, surrounded by inferno. Fractures crawled across every piece of his being. The only thing that survived wholly intact… was his heretical lifeline.

*Damn.*
I should have teleported instead.

Just when he thought it couldn’t get any worse, he heard a series of beeps.

**THE SERAPH SYSTEM**

**WARNING: OVERHEATING.**  
**CRITICAL FAILURE IMMINENT**

Heat. Electronic’s worst enemy.

“System, erase fire.”

**ERROR**

“System, cancel vision world.”

**ERROR**

“System, reboot.”

**ERROR**

Sans sighed at his predicament.

*The flames are blooming.  
The winds are howling.  
On nights like these…  
Trash like me should burn in Hell.*

“System, report.”

Only the medium and low intensity functions were available. Even then… their capacity was limited.

His bones mended just enough to stand. It’s awkward. Not to mention painful. Still, he forced himself to move forward. Urgency compelled him.

A sinking trail of sand followed his step.

Pieces of shattered armour lay scattered about. Where’s Asgore? It’s hard to see.

*Am I too late?*

Just a little further down… the King of Monsters had fallen next to his trident.

A closer inspection revealed critical internal injuries. Expected lifespan: 1 more minute.

...*You’re lucky, big guy. For being a Boss Monster…*

With Lucidia’s item-creating system under his grasp, Sans began tapping into its reserves to conjure a tool.

It’s a capsule: Gaster’s SOUL container reshaped into a palm-sized ball for easy transport.

Asgore, contained. The rest of the body dissolved into dust.
“I impose my will to…” Cough. Hack. Such ailments were never a good sign.

“‘Keep you alive.’”

The system planted a Seraph on the pod. It was a complete success. While the Living Victory survives, he will too.

Sans glanced at the weapon.

_I see the trident outlives its owner yet again. Welp. I’m not gonna bother lugging that around._

Not too far from Asgore’s location lay Toriel, leaning against the rubble. She’s still breathing. But, there’s not much left in her either.

_I can’t believe it._

_That crazy woman. Always sending shocks through me._

_The sudden knocks._
_That pun level._
_The drinking sessions._

_And now… this._


Toriel replied with a different question: “…Do you care?…”

_Do I?_  
_Do I not?_  

……………………

_I don’t feel the difference anymore. It’s one of the signs of becoming a DEMON._

_That’s how Frisk could justify killing everyone, right?_  

“Mind satisfying my last shred of sentimentality?”

The Queen tried to laugh. It’s broken. Choked. Choppy.

“…You can’t rewind time… Any mistakes… You… I… Anyone… they stay…”

It’s the one flaw in his plan that he hoped no one would try to exploit. He expected Lucidia to do so if push came to shove. One of the main reasons why Sans was so careful around her.

And yet, it was Toriel who made the gamble: the most cautious, overprotective mother of the Kingdom.


“…Ha ha ha… Think you could… escape from a mother?…”

“Guess not.”
Sans knelt by her side. Created another capsule, ready for use.

“I’m still determined to save you. Whether you like it or not.”

Life had started to fade from Toriel. Her limbs crumbled, starting from the hands and feet.

“…Then… will you please… hate me…?”

“Denied.” Sans didn’t even need to think twice. “Even if you had forced my hand in the worst possible way.”

“…Maybe… you’ll soon change your mind…”

In her dying breath, her expression changed to one befitting a malicious witch.

“Beware.”

Sans bottled Toriel’s SOUL in the second capsule. Planted the Mark for preservation.

He stared at it with a sense of emptiness: a familiar sensation that existed since the Underground days.

Then, the scorching air shifted. It’s not a random change of air pressure. Order permeated their movements, like a force marching through the windows, the alleys, and the streets.

There’s only one man in this skirmish capable of that.

Sans turned around. Clad in black and white, the personification of flame picked up the fallen king’s trident.

When he did so… the weapon released the united piece of lifeforce through its new wielder. His stature changed to one of single-minded conviction.

The city’s fires united under one banner.

Their commander, their captain.

Sir Grillbz Grillenn - Knight Infernal - bearer of the Dreemurr’s final ‘Will’.

I see now, Tori.

You knew you wouldn’t make it. So you used your life to cripple me… while rallying your fighting force.

You are a dangerous woman. Heh. I like that. I like that a lot.

Humans named those of magic ‘Monsters’. Creatures of terror and destruction. For a long time, it was considered the result of senseless xenophobia. Perhaps they were right after all. Their forms reflected their hearts: be it good or bad.

How many adventurers fell to those who don the mantle of wrath?

I’m running out of chances.
Hello. It's another week.

The pieces are moving into place...

Thanks to Polaris for completing this really cool commish! The collection of official GQ art grows :)

**FLAMES OF WRATH**

...Why?...

Grillby’s SOUL pounded against his chest.

Fear, it compelled him to run through the broken streets.
Hope, it fuelled his stamina to leap over the ruins.

Lady Lucidia informed him of Queen Toriel’s final order: one Sir Grillenn hoped to never execute.

A suicide?

No knight worth his grain of salt will allow such. If saving their lives would make him a traitor, then so be it.

Why?

Yet, he had failed.

The King is dead.
The Queen is dead.
Their SOULS, captured.

When he picked up the trident, an intense emotion ignited. It’s not anger. Neither was it simple rage. Perhaps indignance? Fury?

No.

Those terms were too shallow to describe the depths.

Sir Grillbz Grillenn wanted to tell his King that war could be avoided. Report his bloodless victory against Gungnir’s leader. Encourage others that Frisk’s ideal for a peaceful reconciliation was more than a fantasy.

Then Sans Serif broke that fragile dream of peace.

Even if he could rescue the Dreemurrs from the angel’s grasp, there’s tarnish in the eyes of The Magi. All efforts of diplomacy could end in naught.
That thought was too painful to bear.

WHY???

A crusader of wrath sprouted from the seeds of grief.

Questions, the knight had many.
Answers, he won’t receive.

It’s not that he would want to listen any more either.

* * *

PRECARIOUS TENACITY

“Is everything ready, my assistants?”

“Yes, sir!”
“Status clear, as you would like to hear.”

Doctor Gaster took a deep breath. He tried wiping the sweat off his brow with the back of his sleeve, only to remember that it’s not true fabric. He ended up having black-dyed goop stuck to his face.

“Egads, of all times to destabilize.”

While the rest of Ebott fled, he had summoned his assistants from the yonder. The fog was a sign that realities blurred at the seams.

A bane to the residents. But, a potential boon for him.

The team built a massive Arcanagram on the town’s square. It’s a 3D matrix compressed to a flat plane. No doubt that Sans used a similar pattern for his gate.

The girl -- crowned ‘Goner’ by the Child of Mercy -- seemed worried. She’s the youngest of the lot. It’s understandable why she’s spooked by the impending crisis.

“Will this work, Doctor?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” Gaster replied. “We’re the only experts around. If it’s not us, then who?”

Who, indeed?

“Lady and gents, get into positions!”

Gaster stood in the middle of his contraption. His assistants each occupied their respective triangles around the first inner layer.

The idea was simple: connect the Gram to The Core’s electrical network to amplify their inborn magic, then use this power to force Sans’ Spirit Gate shut.

Gaster activated the commands with the language of his kind. Lights filled the lines, and the mechanisms came to life.

Six giant replicas of the doctor’s hands conjured before the gate. They began their attempts to close the gap in the sky.
“Heavy…!” he grunted. The gate itself resisted his efforts. If he wavered or stopped at any point, it would snap wide open yet again.

“But Doctor, it’s working!” the mudhead exclaimed.

Hopes were high. Perhaps this team of brilliant minds can do the job after all.

Then, Roman’s left arm tugged at his collar.

“Yes, my friend? Is there a leak somewhere?”

Helvetica’s right arm pointed towards an approaching figure. Short. Somewhat spiky.

It’s Doctor Alphys. She stopped at the edge of the Arcanagram, shocked and puzzled by the proceedings.

“Sensei!!? What are you doing?” she exclaimed. “Who are those grey monsters???”

“I thought you’re evacuating the citizens!” said Doctor Gaster.

“We’re trapped in some weird dome!”

The doctor didn’t expect anything less; “Ugh, thought so. Nevertheless! Please keep the citizens calm and far away from this site.”

Then… just when things couldn’t get any worse, their discussions were disrupted by the thunders of a huge explosion.

Both doctors witnessed the fake city burn. The light so bright that it drenched the town square in an ominous glow of orange.

War began anew.

Fires united into superheated plasma. Ripped through the landscape, chasing after their target.

“What in the nine hells…?”

Gaster used his Eyes to zoom in.

It’s his old friend, Grillbz Grillen. He held King Asgore’s trident. Armed with new skills, he tore through everything and anything that got in his way.

…To think the mellow captain was capable of unbridled rampage.

Sans Serif, my wayward protégé. What have you gotten yourself into now? Aren’t you god-like and invincible?

When Gaster focused his attention on Sans… he froze.

Boss Monster SOULS. Captured. Sealed with a Mark.

He leaned backwards from the shock. If it weren’t for his assistants, he would have splatted on the pavement.

“Doctor!”

“Sensei!”
That slip was enough to disrupt the proceedings. Thus the hands in the sky vanished, and the gate rolled wide open.

“Forgive me, everyone. Let’s start over.”

They tried again. This time… Gaster found himself in a predicament. A monster’s magic depended on their spirit. Amalgamates were no different.

“Roman? Helvi? Friends, we’ve just been witness to a horrible event. But that’s all the more why we can’t give up!”

The skeleparents were too crippled from grief. Their eldest son had committed the unforgivable. The unredeemable. Their shining youngest, nowhere to be seen.

Gaster tried to bear the weight alone. Alas, it was too much. With its main caster exhausted, the Gram lost light.

He dropped into a puddle of goop. Alphys and the assistants reshaped him back into his proper humanoid form.

“Sensei?” Alphys asked. “What happened? I-I can tell it’s something major. Like, SUPER major!”

How could he break the news to her? Would she lose her heart too?

The hesitance was enough of a hint for that smart cookie. “Please,” she said. “Tell me. I… I want to help. But I can’t if I don’t know what’s going on.”

Ah, what else is there to lose?

Gaster told Alphys everything. He had to be concise. With every second passed, the risk of getting sucked into The Void increased.

Poor girl. She’s hyperventilating.

Perhaps it was all too much for her…

At the last moment, Alphys yelled: “SENSEI!! I have an idea!”

That was a surprise. Such an Undyne-level volume. Then again, they were bound to rub off on each other.

“Please continue, dear. With less shouting.”

“Make it connect to ALL of us.”

“‘It’? You mean my Arcanagram?”

“Yes! Every child and adult, monster and human. We’ll pool our strength together as one! Is that possible?”

Gaster’s frown turned into an immediate smile. It’s always nice to have a like-minded peer, more so one who shared a sense of tenacity. Already he could feel the spirits of his friends lift.

“Of course! Doctor Alphys, I’ll handle the construction. I’m leaving the coordination and instruction to you.”
ANCIENT ONE

Things were quiet in the Crimson Hall.

On one hand, it had been a while since the rescue team departed. On the other hand, there was an old saying that goes ‘No news is good news’.

All was fine… until a strange fog crawled through the gaping hole in the wall.

Poor Gerson almost choked on his tea. The old hero ditched his cup posthaste. Readied his hammer in case the criminal returned victorious.

Garamond stood up as well, Skull Cannon equipped and prepared to defend.

“What’s that?!” Miss Passidoria exclaimed.

“Whatever it is, Zakari does not think it’s a good omen.”

Miss Chinchinchan hid behind Sir Latinoros, who himself was on a cautious edge. He would face either an amorphous fog of doom, or a trained combatant far beyond his league. Valid reasons for concern.

“Sir Garamond?” he said, “I hope you can identify this… this… thing!”

The other Seer replied, “It’s a trapping mechanism. Please do not get caught in it.”

To their fortune, The Law’s boundaries kept the fog out. They gathered around the borders with no signs of forced entry.

Yet.

Gerson turned towards the Spirit Gate. They had to choose between accidental human encounters and the gripping trap from The Void. Both a non-ideal situation.

He decided to take the risk. If they did meet any unauthorized humans, he could just pass them off as fellow Ebott monsters. Maybe.

“Young’uns, follow me! I’ll keep the nasties out.”

The old turtle straightened his back. He’s going to have to put in some serious work. It’s been a long while since he had to pave a road with The Law.

He lead, the rest followed. After a certain distance from the center, he pounded a fresh field.

Rinse. Repeat. He's working up a sweat.

Midway through their operation, the heavy stone door exit opened.

It’s full of suspense.

Who’s on the other side?

Human?

Monster?
Magi?
Firemen?

No. It was a character that Gerson thought he would never meet again.

Those clothes. That mask. That war-spade.

The old turtle couldn’t believe his eyes.

To think he had been around all the while, hiding behind a different title and an organized force.

The Jurors each had varied reactions to the appearance of this man. Miss Chinchinchan and Miss Passidoria greeted him in a respectful yet casual manner. The two lawyers, Sir Latinoros and Zakari, bowed down with their arms by the side. Formal to a ‘T’.

As for Sir Garamond, he placed one arm on his chest. If Gerson remembered right, it’s a traditional gesture of reverence among the spiritual.

“It’s you…!” Gerson muttered.

The chinchilla monster asked: “…You met the Grandmaster before?…”

“Of course!” he replied, narrowing his eye at the figure before him. “Was a lively youngun’ back then. A man like him is hard to forget.”

The design of his cowled robe had changed little over the centuries. It’s still pitch black with linings of crimson. Perhaps he had fancier outfits for official diplomatic meetings… but he’s not wearing them to a crisis.

“It’s been a long, long time, Hammer of Justice,” said the Grandmaster. “Colour me surprised that old age has yet to claim your SOUL.”

“Same here. I’ll be honest now, I have mixed feelings about ya. Helped us shore up the military and whatnot. But then, you were on the other side of the battlefield… helping the enemy.”

“I apologize. It was the lesser of two evils. Though there’s no excusing me from the suffering I have inflicted upon your people.”

The turtle burst out laughing. “At least you still have a sincere heart. Hey, it wasn’t all that bad. Better than mass genocide any day. Y’know. For the longest time, King Asgore and I agreed it was best to stay down there.”

“Is that so?” said the Grandmaster.

“Ayup. Great to know that you didn’t go down the same path as that so-called ‘hero’.”

“Hmm, I sometimes wonder about that.”

The Grandmaster walked into the Crimson Hall.

“Members of the Jury,” he announced, “The grounds are secured at last. Escorts will take you to safety.”

A mini celebration followed. The Jurors thanked the Grandmaster as they passed by.

“Me? Leaving? Wahahahahaha! No way! I won’t step out until my King and Queen return. Duty calls and stuff.”

Garamond nodded. “I also must see this through to the end.”

“Understood. I’ll report in your stead.”

“Thank you.”

The doors shut once the Jury left. Gerson sighed in relief. The less bystanders involved, the better.

“So Grandmaster,” he asked, “Any ideas?”

“Spacetime has gone loose by the Seraphim’s efforts. This fog. It traps like quagmire, yet it is malleable within the trained hands of a master. Treacherous these conditions may be, they’re perfect for our shortcut.”

“Really? Good luck to you then, wa ha ha ha~”

“What about you, Hammer of Justice? Won’t you join us?”

“Nah. I’ll be holding the fort,” Gerson replied. “Can’t have that whippersnapper skedaddle out this way.”

“I thank you for that.”

The turtle sat back. He’s glad to catch a break for now, resting his old, weary body. There’s no telling what comes next in the battlefield.

Gerson watched the proceedings with great curiosity. What had this man -- the teacher of teachers -- learned over the course of millennia?

Red light shone on the tip of the Grandmaster’s weapon, so potent that it appeared like a flame.

The man thus said: “I seek those blessed and cursed with the mysteries of time. One with the Gift, the other with the Keys. Bring me to wherever they may be.”

“Let my will be done.”

The Grandmaster planted his Mark:

The Ace of Spades.
Graveyard

Chapter Notes

Might have a chapter out before Christmas. Maybe. Hopefully.

If not, then Merry Christmas to you all!

Undyne expected to brave the flames head-on ala the Spire ordeal. The silver lining in this situation had to be her awesome armour.

Super.
Duper.
Awesome.
Armour.

It’s so awesome, that it had a heat and smoke protection bubble built in. There’s even an interface warning her when it’s too hot for her defences to deal with.

From the nice vantage point of a leaning radio tower, the fish Captain surveyed the mayhem wrought by Grillby. His shots of concentrated plasma ignited anywhere that wasn’t already burning.

The flames spread and spread and spread to no end…

Fire populated this whole city; there’s no place free of its influence.

“Damn,” said Undyne. “I never thought that he’s capable of this.”

But what now? Small amounts of water were useless in this heat. It’d evaporate almost instantly.

The best thing to do would be to catch up on some intel. Lady Lucidia was still connected to her cybernetic eye. As for Sans, he’s too damn busy avoiding the most pissed off bartender in the universe.

“What’s the situation, madam?”

‘Delicate’. The text read. Maintaining a direct feed straight into the implant prevented Sans from eavesdropping somehow. Undyne didn’t know the specifics, but if it works she won’t question it.

‘Please don’t lose heart. The rescue plan can only succeed if all parties execute their duties on point.’

“R-rescue?”

Hearing Lucidia’s report, Undyne was most astonished that she didn’t flip out into a ball of rage over the news. It must be real-life anime overload.

“Okay, I can see why Grillbz totally lost his shit. But you said we can rescue them, right?”

‘Affirmative. As per Queen Toriel’s plans, we need to trick Sans Serif into thinking he has the upper hand. His proverbial blindness will provide the cover we require.’
‘The Seraph System’s functions are currently compromised by excessive heat build-up. He will thereby be quick to attempt to lower its core temperature in order to regain full access.’

‘This narrows his choices down to two locations: the ocean, and the flooded crater left behind by the Merged Being.’

“Can’t Sans just fly? Or teleport really deep into The Void?”

‘Taking flight will only allow Sir Grillenn to shoot him down. In addition, destruction of the Trap Harvester -- the fuel source -- will trigger a DT-explosion. It’s certain suicide.’

‘As for a retreat toward the Crimson Hall: time is not on his side. Thanks to Mettaton’s efforts of distracting the media, The Magus Association has had the freedom to regain control of the Institute’s grounds. Further delay is detrimental to his goals.’

“Whoa, really? Great to know that.” For once, that grape-eating piano-leaning leg-flaunting glambot did something important.

Meanwhile, the battle between master and ex-student was in clear view. Both had wicked moves. It’s at the level where it’s hard to tell who’s better.

Sans tried to execute a backstab, while Grillby will have none of that. The trident’s pole-end slammed square on the sternum.

A backward stagger turned into a swift hop. Contrary to his slobby lifestyle, Sans always had the uncanny ability to recover his footwork.

Telekinesis then shoved Grillby to a row of spikes. The man managed to escape impalation by stopping his fall with Asgore’s trident. That’s some serious core muscles at work.

The admiration of skill and might can wait, however. There’s always the Chronograph for future references.

“I… should go.”

Undyne began her parkour toward the flooded crater. Jumped across the lower building tops. Climbed into the windows. Sprint. Anything to keep moving forward.

“Sans is not teleporting to the waters right away,” Undyne noted. Knowing Sans, he would try to take the shortest route.

Lucidia explained: ‘Due to the current state of the Seraph System, his White Eye may not be fully accessible. This would limit him to his default colours. It’s dangerous for regular Sans to teleport into unstable and unknown terrain.’

“I see. In other words, he’s gonna do it inch by inch.” She hurried her steps.

“…By the way, where are the fire hydrants? I expected him to knock some over along the way and use their water supply.”

‘Insufficient. The city’s fire hydrant system is currently draining below The Void from accidental Karma spills.’

“Sans really dug his own grave this time, didn't he?” Even Undyne felt sorry for the little guy.

Soon after, she arrived at the crater. Right on schedule.
There, she made her way to the lifted prow of a sunken ship: high enough to serve as her new vantage point, and far away from the hot stuff.

Assorted debris pushed along the flow of water. The whirlpool slowed compared to the beginning, but it had remained just as deadly. A heavy structure could tip over to crush her. Or the currents could drag down their unfortunate victim onto a sharp point.

Lots could go wrong at any time.

To Undyne, this was more exciting than she wanted to admit. She’s living her anime dream at long last.

…If only the stakes didn’t involve body-hijacking with people of another dimension.

‘Captain Undyne, are you capable of striking Sans Serif in his current state?’

She wanted to say yes. Then, she remembered all those years of never landing a hit.

Never.

Not even once.

This is not the time to rely on wishful thinking. Undyne shook her head and replied: “Nope. My spears are too slow and predictable for that guy.”

‘Then, we must consider an alternative.’

A broken bow passed by.

‘Captain Undyne, have you tried manipulating liquids other than water?’

Good question. “Nope.”

‘Your kind’s magic affects a certain range of viscosity. Oil and alcohol are within the range. Honey is not. This graveyard of ships should have plenty of liquid fuel to lay our trap.’

“How can you be sure of that?”

‘Atlantean sense of economics. All magical energy will be diverted to the weapons system. Therefore propulsion will depend on more conventional alternatives.’

‘New Objective: break all the sunken ship’s fuel tanks. I will assist you in identifying their locations. Sir Grillenn will then ignite them from ashore. With this, we will give Sans Serif no refuge.’

‘He will be forced to either surrender… or suffer the consequences of his defiance. It’s victory for us either way.’

“Wait, what about Asgore and Toriel?”

‘Frisk’s team will handle their recovery.’

“Phew. That’s a relief.”

A terrifying thought crossed her mind.

“Uh. Random question, madam. If we… didn’t change our minds on the whole war effort, does that mean we would’ve ended up fighting you?”
‘Affirmative. Without doubt, I will be the Magus Association’s Tactician.’

“With epic space tech power armours on your super-leet fighters? Plus access to trained human SOULS?”

‘Although the application may differ depending on the outcome of war, it is an apt description.’

Gulp. “I’m so glad we’re friends.”

‘Friends…?’


There was a long pause. Somehow, that statement flustered Lady Lucidia.

‘I apologize. Please concentrate on the task at hand.’

“Right, right. Sunken ship hunting, here we go! Gosh, that sounds like some pirate adventure.”

When Undyne leapt into the water, she noticed that her shields were still active.

Confused, she said: “What’s with the bubble? I can breathe in water just fine.”

‘Your sensors are detecting elevated levels of liquid contaminants. Urban destruction often releases a host of unpleasant water-soluble chemicals. Bleach, for example.’

“Uh. Yeah. I don’t wanna get THAT into my lungs. So. If Sans falls in here, will he get poisoned too?”

‘Perhaps. At the current concentration, the symptoms would be mild. Non-fatal. Though, that’s not my deepest concern.’

‘I worry about the Seraph System. If at any point his waterproofing systems break… The Dreemurrs would also be at risk.’

“And we’re gonna set this place ablaze too, huh?”

The cybernetic Justice-imbued ocular implant marked down the sunken fuel tanks with an illuminated yellow outline. There’s enough to set quite a big area on fire.

Now, if her kind really could bend oil to their will… Undyne would just need to shift the flaming spill to wherever Sans would try to flee.

“Dang, Toriel. Your plan is too good.”

‘Alert: Sans Serif will soon reach the banks. Please stand by.’

“Roger.”

Undyne wondered if she could keep her promise to Papyrus at all…

Yet, they can’t turn back.

She swam into position. With a strong kick, she propelled herself out of the water and landed ashore. There Undyne the Undying waited…
At last, Sans teleported to the banks. He so was taken aback by the fish’s presence, he stopped in his tracks.

Sir Grillbz Grillenn caught up to his target in due time.

Smoke formed a dark cloud overhead. Every step he took left behind utter destruction.

Undyne couldn’t believe that this true warrior had been taking her food orders in a dingy bar. She didn’t even know that he’s her senior until recent events.

And now, an entire city burned in his hands; the amount of collective heat caused weaker substances to melt or incinerate.

Anyone who said water trumps fire should get a smack on the head.

His luminous army marched toward the edge of the water.

Undyne demanded: “Surrender! Remember your brother!”


“Can’t you see he wants you to LIVE? I’m trying to show you mercy, dammit!”

“…Not taking it. Sorry.”

“Ugh,” she grunted. “So, you really wanna be a hero so damn much?”

“Well, If being a hero means becoming a fucking sleazeball like you… I DON’T WANT IT! I’m gonna be the MOST HARDCORE OF HARDCORE VILLAINS INSTEAD!”

Spears of water hovered overhead. Since Sans insisted on going down this path, it’s time to suffer the consequences.

“Fufufufu… FUFUFUFUFUFUUUUU!!! Yeah! I see it now. Your whole stupid talk about ideals and stuff? It’s all confusing bullshit! Well, ‘thanks’ mister. I realise that now!”

Undyne laughed. Could it be from the rush of her armour’s magic-amplifying properties, or from her moment of epiphany?

Both. Why not both?

“I, Undyne the Undying, will strike you down! Behold… the SPEARS OF INJUSTICE!!!”

Sans remarked: “Dude, you’re just gonna do the usual.”

He’s not stupid. Undyne knew as much. But, that’s exactly why pride will be his downfall; there’s always a blind spot.

She thus rained spiky hell upon the skeleton, fully expecting for him to dodge them all.

In truth, these ‘extras’ masked her true intent.

The real ones had already plunged into the water, striking the bellies of the dead ships below.

Flammable fuel bubbled to the surface. Undyne used her kind’s magic to shape them by her will.
Spears of oil soon rose to her call.

Fire then sailed the whirlpool, flagging their bright hot sails into the black winds.

“Oh,” Sans sighed. “I see now. Wrath and justice combined, huh? Welp. I’m a dead man walking.”

Undyne summoned the almighty red-tipped spear. The perfect weapon against Determination itself. She therefore announced her verdict:

“You have only yourself to blame for this.”
‘Hurt’.  
‘Tired’.  
‘Hungry’.  

There were no words in Gaelic’s current state of mind. Only sensations. Only instinct.  

He heard three voices. One belonged to a human friend: the one with a nice smell. Friends always smell good.  

The other two? Can’t recognize. He had a feeling that he should. But, it’s not clicking together at all.  

They also had a dog. More fur than meat. Still good eating. Very appetizing. His mouth watered at the thought.  

Add poison. Paralyze.  
Don’t let it escape.  

Gaelic snapped at the dog. Instead, he caught a fish. One of the unknown voices -- a small human child -- tossed it straight into his mouth.  

‘Fish is food. Food is good’.  

He’s not picky. So, he settled for the fish instead.  

The friend-smelling one started patting him. She spoke in comforting sound-symbols, devoid of any meaning.  

In the sea of songs, there was only one word that he recognized:  

‘Almighty’.  

It’s a name… belonging to someone. Except he’s not connecting the dots again.  

The three voices began to exchange tunes. Their efforts were not as melodic as the chirps of birds and insects. Not so pleasant a listen, but not distasteful either.  

At the end of their tune, the tall bony one stood up. He tried to get everyone to move to the city.  

Then, there was a loud bang. Heat. Light. Fire. Fumes of wrath. The rampage continued unabated.  

Danger compelled him to pull his friend to safety.  

‘Go to the ocean. Swim home,’ he tried to say.
She resisted. Why?

‘First, live. Later, ask.’ So he continued to drag her across the sand.

The skeletal stranger wrestled him away from his friend. Strong, that person’s arms wrapped around his pelvis.

Then, the sky turned to sand, and sand turned to the sky.

It’s like that land fish all over again…

Ground… on the back.

A sense of alarmed vulnerability kicked in.

Gaelic screeched.

Thrashed.

Lashed out against his attacker, whoever he may be.

Amidst his distress, a gloved hand touched his skull. It’s not red, therefore it did not belong to the unknown aggressor.

The voice commanded: “Come out of the darkness, child. You don’t belong there. Everyone here is a kindred spirit.”

A gentle warmth rushed through his bones. The sound-symbols -- ‘words’ -- they now have meaning. It’s as though someone lit up a torch, bringing light into his mind.

Gaelic stopped struggling. Clarity returned. The tall one let him go in response.

“Hey, look at that.” It’s the friend-smelling one. “You didn’t bite me this time. Grade ‘A’ improvement! Okay, who am I?”

Gaelic answered: “Cenna.”

“Good. Remember this guy?” She pointed at the male skeleton in a trenchcoat.


His efforts earned him a praise and a pat on the head. “Hey, look at that. You’re recovering your speech back within the hour. New record there!”

The fingers moved on to the small human. Gaelic shook his head. He doesn’t remember.

Next was the suplex skeleton whose face was wrapped in a red magic-imbued scarf. He had a vague feeling that they had met before. Talked about something over a cheetah.

“Cheetah,” so he answered.

“I’LL GIVE THAT AN ‘A+’ FOR EFFORT, NYEH HEH HEH!”

“BY THE WAY, THE NAME IS PAPYRUS.”

“P… Papaya,” Gaelic muttered. He recalled that they had a nice lunch together. It’s a good memory.
“I’M NOT A TROPICAL FRUIT!”

“Okay, last guy on the list.” Cenna pointed towards the masked man in robes.

The recognition was almost instantaneous. It’s the ‘Grandmaster’, father to his most beloved. The awareness of his shameful misconduct made Gaelic want to bury himself into the sand and die.

And that’s exactly what he tried to do.

The snake rolled over and submerged his body into the grains.

Such a screw-up from start to end.

“Leave me,” he whimpered.

“Don’t be silly,” said the Grandmaster. “Your Lord and Lady still need you.”

Why?…

They had so many other options.

Why this excuse of a slave who can’t ever get things right?

That particular mystery was one of the many reasons that kept the flame of love alive. He doesn’t understand. Yet, because of that, he can’t resist.

“The false angel, Sans Serif.” Replied the Grandmaster. “He has captured the SOULS of our precious allies. We must retrieve them before they’re put in grave danger.”

That man.

That man.

That man.

Just hearing the name ‘Sans Serif’ reminded Gaelic of the troubles that blue shorty had caused. Especially on Cenna.

How many times had her blood been spilt? One timeline after another, she died because of him.

The desire to express his hatred boiled over. Words, he could not find. It frustrated him because he knew they existed somewhere in his head.

Growl. Snarl. He wanted to rip that heretic apart. Crush his bones to dust and lick the remainder off his hands.

Cenna’s touch snapped him out of it.

“Whoa whoa whoa, calm down buddy. I know you’re not happy. But we got a job to do, yeah?”

“Job?” That’s right. “Job!”

At the corner of his eye, Gaelic noticed the unknown human inched closer to ‘Papaya’. They’re trying to hide behind their friend.

Was it concern? Worry? Fear? Discomfort? Uncertainty?

Whatever it was, it’s the same anywhere his beastly self went. Can he blame that child?
The Grandmaster explained the plan to everyone in the meantime. Some of the fancier words slipped through the gaps. But, he understood the key idea.

Trap Sans Serif.
Rescue the monster Psychia.
Return to the living world with the prisoner in tow.

Papaya’s Eye glowed. Instead of accepting the plan, he shook his head. Refused.

“I CANNOT ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN. IT’S DOOMED TO FAIL.”

The Grandmaster asked: “Why is it so, Gifted One?”

“THERE’S RED LIGHTNING. IN THE WATER.”

‘Red lightning?’

Gaelic knew only one man signified by that very symbol, and he was none other than the worst of worst:

Persona.

They first crossed paths a long time ago. Even before his becoming a Tracker, Gaelic was always around to protect his Lord from the shadows.

Dark recollections of that fateful day crawled out from the depths.

“Hah!” that man huffed. “The Vampire got himself a pet. How appropriate. What is your name?”

“Gaelic? That’s not a name. That’s a label given by your parents for convenience.”

“Wild beasts don’t have names.”

“Nameless.”
“Useless.”
“Vile.”

“Pathetic creature. Nothing more than a mangy vile excuse of a nameless, useless dog.”

“You have no reason to exist. Therefore… this is where you’ll die.”

That thundering flash of his Mark will never leave Gaelic’s memory.

“Your god commands you!”

Cenna’s screaming distracted him from his internal downward spiral.

“OLD MAAAAAAAAAAN!!! Why in the damn fuck did you include HIM?!?!?”

Persona and Mezil working together? Impossible. There’s no such thing as ‘teamwork’ between them. Only one forcing the other’s hand.

“Is there any way to avoid the bad outcome?” asked the human child.

“I HAVE TO TALK TO MY BROTHER,” said Papaya. “ONE ON ONE.”
“But will Sans listen?”

“I HOPE SO. MY EYE COULDN’T SEE ANYTHING BEYOND THAT.”

“We have to try.”

Turning to the rest of the group, Papaya said: “I’M SORRY, BUT WE CAN’T JOIN YOU.”

The two strangers started running towards their steed, rejecting the Grandmaster’s plans without room for discussion.

Such arrogance. Talk? What is this ‘talk’?

Already foul in mood, Gaelic grabbed Papaya by his short blue pants. It resulted in a minor tug-of-war.

Papaya yelped. “WHAT THE?! CEASE THIS INDECENCY AT ONCE!!!”

“You’re being hasty,” Garamond criticized.

“Ahuh, my senior is right.” Nodded Cenna, “Becaaaause if you run off now you’re not gonna get this sweet, sweet piece of protection.”

The Vanquisher friend pasted a Gram on Papaya’s back.

Gaelic remembered. It was the reason why they had chased him across The Void, through the labyrinth, and up the tower.

“What was that for?” Papaya asked, confused.

“Something to keep your bike safe.”

It turned into delight soon enough. “OH. THANK YOU VERY MUCH, MISS AUNT!”

“Still going with that nick, huh?”

Cenna’s scent changed. Her body language too, it slanted toward the emotion called ‘embarrassment’.

Curious, curious.

“You. Forgot?” Gaelic asked.

She tensed up. “Shhhh!”

Her fluster made him chuckle. They had been friends long enough. What he didn’t expect… was that the human child joined in their merriment.

“Figures!” They said.

“Awh c’mon Frisky, not you too!”

‘Frisky’ was their name? Wasn’t that a word?

When he switched his attention to the child, Gaelic expected them to shrink back behind the adult skeleton. But they didn’t. Not this time.
Was their bravery genuine? Or had they forgotten their fear?

Questions, questions.

The Grandmaster tapped his war-spade on the sand to catch their attention. It’s a habit shared with his son-in-law.

“I’m afraid we will have to postpone the comedy skit. Gifted One. Crimson Keeper Frisk. Do you realise the implications of your proposal? An answer sought is not always an answer accepted.”

Papaya glanced at Frisk. “WHY NOT? IT'S THE BEST OF THE BEST. HE’LL HAVE TO ACCEPT IT SOONER OR LATER. OTHERWISE, I CAN NO LONGER CONSIDER HIM A SCIENTIST!”

“Very well. In lieu of this vital information, we must change the roster. Garamond, you are now in charge of the rescue. Gaelic and Judge Caraway will stay with me.”

“Yes, Sir.” The other Blanc bowed, and rushed toward the bike posthaste.

Gaelic waited in anticipation for his cousin to show his ultimate skill. Sans Serif doesn’t have it, and how fortunate that was.

When Garamond sat down on the back end of the seat, his Dichromatic Eyes lit up once. His form vanished into thin air soon after.

Papaya and Frisky dropped their jaws.

“Invisibility?!”

“What trickery is this?!”

Cenna grinned at their reactions. “Oh man, it’s SOOOO much more than mere invisibility. He’s neither here, nor there, if you get my drift. I think Lucy called it a ‘frequency-shift’? My senior’s one of the few who’s super good at it.”

“That’s cool!” The child exclaimed.

Renewed with optimistic spirit, they tugged at Papaya’s arm; “C’mon, let’s go!”

The bone bike -- mounted by Mondie, Papaya, and Frisky -- thus sped off towards the direction of the crater. It’s fast. Gaelic wondered if he too could hitch a ride someday.

“Judge Cenna Caraway.”

“Yeah, Grandmaster?”

“I’m afraid I must make an unreasonable demand on you.”

She raised a brow. “What level of ‘unreasonable’ are we talking here?”

He pointed his spade towards the distant crater.

For a moment, it was dark…

The next, fire had claimed that place too.

“Ascend to the stars and beyond, Judge Vanquisher. Strike Sans Serif from this very beach. It’s too
dangerous to search for a closer point.”

But. But. There’s no way she could do that!

The terrain stood too low for her mere human eyesight, and too far to make an accurate estimate of any sort.

Gaelic offered himself without hesitation. “Scout, ah go.”

He tried to run but stumbled. The fall on the soft sand brought more pain than he had anticipated.

The ache came from his right side. The shoulder. Looking there, he realised that he had large pieces of metal sealed into his bones.

“Frustrating!” He hissed.

The Grandmaster helped him up.

“Hold on a little longer, valiant knight. Become Judge Caraway’s eyes. That way her duty may not be too impossible.”

Cenna stretched her arms and neck, preparing herself for the task at hand.

“In other words, tag team time!”

Golden wisps of sacred power blessed her being. Floated and fluttered about as the very air around her tasted sweet from the output of her magic.

It’s been ten years since he first saw her Justice shine. Back then, Cenna was just a teenager. Lord Mezil brought her to the Berendin Manor for official reasons.

At first, Gaelic didn’t care. Humans come and go all the time.

Until, Lady Lucidia assigned her as a temporary assistant. Said she needed a place to stay after the ‘tragedy’.

Here Gaelic thought he would never make a friend again. Not at his worst. Her positive energy captivated his curiosity, making him leave the safety of the wilderness.

She was a fresh wind of motivation to serve his masters better.

“Hey Gael, mind helping out? I need a mantra to psyche myself up. Mez complained that I’m not able of activating my Ascension reliably.”

“Meh. I’m not like that old man! He’s super talented and he’s got yeeeeeears of experience! I swear, he’s not human.”

“What if we make this a pleasant surprise for Lucy too? Ahuh? Yup! You two love poetry, right?”

Offering her hand, Cenna invited him to join her for her superior’s tall order.

He accepted.

Gaelic decided it’s best to act before the curse of madness reclaims him. It could happen tomorrow, or once he leaves The Void. But, that was the unknown future: not the immediate moment.
“You know how it goes, right?” she asked.

“Aye.”

They held the magical bow together.

Cenna acted as the string’s release, while he’s the bow’s scope.

Due to her Ascended Justice trait, she just needed a general zone of impact. It compensated for Gaelic’s lack of Cyan.

The Grandmaster then touched The Vanquisher’s shoulder. A Mark appeared on her right arm.

“One more blessing,” he said. “That Ace will imbue a piece of my lifeforce into your next shot. Karma won’t be able to consume our efforts.”

Cenna laughed out loud. “Here I thought you’re gonna leave me high and dry.”

“No matter where the cosmos turns, I’ll be here to guide the best I can.”

Arrow, summoned. The Light of Victory travelled down to her fingers, giving the yellow magic a warm and reddish tint.

Gaelic breathed in the beautiful scent of what he identified as ‘life’. It smells of fresh blood: pumping through the body of a healthy individual. Others find it detestable. To him, it’s something that will never tire.

After one final breath to steady himself… the wildling burned his Eye.

There, in the distance, the detestable false angel fought against the delicious land-fish woman. Concentrated beams of magic rained upon their foes. His Skull Cannons lived up to their fame: plentiful and destructive.

In return, the fish and fire tried to pin him down. Rains of water spears. Spikes of flaming oil. Ropes of compressed flames.

But something’s wrong. There’s two Monster Psychia in palm-sized capsules within the Seraphim’s possession.

Gaelic hissed. They cannot deal the final blow. Not while he has hostages.

How he hated the criminals who use others as a shield.


That bugger refused to stay still. Erratic.

If Cenna could see, she would have made instinctive adjustments. He, however, doesn’t have her level of skill.

Cenna’s arm had already started to shake from the strain. There’s a limit a human could bear, more so for weapons magical in nature.

She tried to say something. However, her words had turned into illegible sound-symbols again.
Did that happen the moment he activated his sight? Most likely. His powers come at a hefty cost.

Not good. He must sing the right tune to give the signal.

Gaelic tried to produce the sounds of Cenna’s mantra. Mimicked it. Hoped that with action he’ll recall their meaning.

“Glowing kindness. Persevere.”

That didn’t sound right. He tried again, but failed.

The friend-smelling one began her song. She kept it slow and in small parts, which made it much easier to follow.

“Glowing kindness,” said Gaelic. “Be our shield.”

He heard a positive response. Laughter. Praise. It means he got it right.

“Persevere. And never yield.”

The all-obscuring mental fog began to clear.

“Sacred Justice heed my call.”

They’re in sync.

“Smite this evil, make them fall!”

Gaelic meant every word.

Sans Serif had since reached the ocean’s edge, ready to dip his magic gadget into the cool, cool waters.

Angle, correct. Trajectory, confirmed.

Then, the visuals cut short. Blacked out. Time had distorted around Sans Serif.

It’s the Seer’s time-freeze. Activated on the perfect moment for trickery, and also at their last chance of ending his ploys.

“Now!!!” Gaelic screamed.

Cenna let the arrow fly. It zipped in an arc, faster than any bullet in existence.
Heaven

Chapter Notes

The day has arrived.
We’re at the conclusion of this arc.

Here’s some cool art of Mezil and Frisk.

Then, please enjoy the rest of the scene.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Drive faster, Papyrus!

“This IS THE FASTEST FRISK-SAFE SPEED I CAN MUSTER!!!”

Try the not-safe speeds!

“I CANNOT ALLOW THAT! FIRST, THE FASTER BIKE IS A ONE-SEATER. SECOND, YOU HAVE NO HELMET.”

Oh, c’mon, it’s not like we’d get into an accident with the Papyrus-brand super awesome driving skills!

“…WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT MY EYE WARNED ME AGAINST OVERENTHUSIASTIC SPEEDING?”

Seriously?!?!

Look over there, Papyrus!
See those lasers?
See those spears?
See those beams of fire?

We both know what that means. Sans is gonna escape to the sea and get himself killed!

Just when you said that, a golden streak of light whizzed over your head. It formed an arc.

That magic… it belongs to Cenna.

The arrow split apart into a spray of light, bombarding the crater’s inlet entry.

It all happened in a blink.

When your bike finally arrived at your destination, you found arrows stuck into almost every surface you can think of. Anywhere that was not water had become a field of gold, with arrows as the blades of grass.

Jaw, drop. Wow.

This is… Unlimited Arrow Works!
Your sister’s capable of such magic? Now that’s what you call ‘mad skillz’!

“SANS!”

You looked in Papyrus’ direction. It really is Sans. Five arrows pinned him against the slanted deck of a broken ship. It’s clear that ‘killing’ was not the objective.

Sans… It’s an understatement to say he had seen better days. The Seraph System healed most of his injuries. But his clothes? They’re ragged.

Undyne and Grillby locked him down with their respective weapons. It’s the classic crossed arrest.

Holy marshmallows on a campfire stick. That Grillby, he’s hotter than ever. And you don’t mean just his body temperature. Even without his armour, he had the posture of a true knight. Super cool.

Papyrus slowed down his bike and parked it on solid ground. “FRISK, PLEASE STAY HERE. THE WHIRLPOOL IS TOO DANGEROUS FOR YOU.”

The connecting point between the ocean and crater had become more treacherous than you imagined. Capsized ships, rushing currents, unknown debris…

Yup, you don’t want to get anywhere near THAT pit of death.

You hopped off the ride. Maybe Mister Garamond disembarked too. You couldn’t tell since he’s still invisible.

Papyrus made a big jump straight towards the ship, using his natural Blue to skip over the hazards.

Undyne was both surprised and relieved by her friend’s presence.

She asked: “Papyrus? Why are you here?”

“TO TALK WITH MY BROTHER.”

“…If we were still in the Underground, I would have yelled at you.”

“I KNOW. BUT, VIOLENCE WON’T HELP US NOW. COULD YOU PLEASE PROTECT FRISK?”

You know she’s sceptical. But, in the end, she resigned to his decision. “Fine. I don’t trust Sans enough to leave the squirt alone anyway.”

Ah yes, he could try to kidnap you again. Always better to have a bodyguard.

“Don’t come any closer, bro.” Sans warned. “I still have these in my possession.”

The capsules that contained the SOULS of your parents were clipped on his pants, within arm’s reach.

“You wouldn’t want anything happen to them. So, why don’t we negotiate?”

“I’M NOT HERE FOR THAT SORT OF BUSINESS,” Papyrus answered. “I’M HERE TO TALK TO YOU. HEART-TO-HEART.”

“Do you think we can still do that? You and I? We… we never did discuss the important stuff. Not as much as we should.”
“IT HAS TO START SOMEWHERE.”

“Welp. As long as Tori and Asgore are with me, I’m not interested.”

Just when he said so, the capsules were swiped away from his very body.

Not long after, Mister Invisibone revealed himself by your side. He had both Mom and Dad safe in his possession.

Whoa! Does that mean anything he touches gets the same vanishing effect?

Sans sighed. Glaring at the thief, he grumbled: “Dude. I took you out for a reason…”

“So, you knew,” said Garamond.

“Had a hunch,” Sans replied. “Still on active duty at 238 years old? Welp, didn’t want to find out why.”

Papyrus being Papyrus interjected: “YOU KNOW BROTHER, I COULD JUST CAPTURE YOU RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW WITH MY SECRET WEAPON. BUT I CHOOSE NOT TO. I WANT US TO BE ON EQUAL TERMS.”

“If you really want that, you will have to tell Grillbz here to leave me alone. ‘Cause right now I’m beneath your level.”

“WRONG. WHEN IT COMES TO THE ART OF KILLING, YOU’VE ALWAYS BEEN ABOVE ME. GRILLBY IS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY TO EQUALIZE THE FIELD.”

Sans chuckled. No matter what, he always had an opportunity to laugh. You wonder if it was amusement, or it’s his learned response to specific situations…

“Touché. Fine. I’ll agree to your proposal. So, where do we start?”

“SANS, HAVE YOU FOUND ANYTHING YET?”

“Nope. I’ve hit a dead end. Just like I thought, really. Searching through the haystack brought into perspective how insignificant we really are. Just a blink and we’re gone, while the universe continues on as usual.”

At this point, you never thought you’d witness Papyrus’ screech mode again. Yet, it happened.

He spun around. Stomped his foot. Papyrus-level aggravation, off the roof.

“SAAAAAAAAAAANS, YOU’VE BEEN LOOKING AT THE WRONG DIRECTION THIS WHOLE TIME! DID YOU REALLY EXPECT TO FIND CLOTHES IN THE SOUP STORE???”

“You always think of the worst and only the worst! How are you ever going to find the best with that mentality?!”

Papyrus tried to calm himself down after his outburst. It took a while.

“BROTHER. I SAW A PLACE WHERE DEATH DOES NOT EXIST.”

“ENTROPY. THE BROKENNESS. THE DOWNING DUMPS. GONE. NONE OF THE SAD AND THE BAD. THERE IS ONLY LIFE. THERE IS ONLY LOVE…” FOR ALL
“ETERNITY.”

“IT’S WHAT HUMANS CALL ‘HEAVEN’.”

Sans was not impressed.

“I know what you’re talking about,” he said.

“YOU DO?!”

“Yup. I looked up on the source of my namesake, y’know. It’s not what you think it is, Paps.”

“WHY NOT?”

“Simple. You believe there’s good in everyone. You’re right. But, the reality is this: there’s also evil.”

“That expression on your face. Heh. Tells me you already knew the connection between Heaven and Hell. I’ll cut to the chase.”

“For Heaven to exist, anything and everyone that causes Hell must be purged. I mean ‘everyone’. Big bads. Small crooks. Masked fakes. The slightest stain, thrown out like trash.”

“INCLUDING ME, THE GREAT PAPYRUS?!”

“Yup. That’s how it goes. I know lots of humans claim that you just need to be a good person. But… heh, they live in self-delusion.”

Discomfort crept around you. Papyrus, the purest cinnamon roll on Earth, would be disqualified?! You refuse to believe that’s true! Okay, whatever legend Sans is speaking about SUCKS!

“FRISK, I’M NOT PERFECT.”

But…!

“I KNOW MY OWN FAULTS. AND, I KNOW WHAT I DID IN THE OTHER TIMELINES.”

That? Back then, he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. You don’t blame him for his zany logic!

“IT DOESN’T CHANGE THE FACT THAT MY OLD SELF WAS NOT AS GREAT AS I THOUGHT. WE AGREED ON THIS BEFORE, RIGHT?”

…You remember. It was before Doctor Gaster’s history lesson.

“WHEN I WAS IN THE UNDERGROUND, I WANTED FAME. I WANTED FANKISSES EVERY MORNING. I WANTED EVERYONE TO KNOW I EXIST. IT’S PUERILE IN HINDSIGHT.”

“MY INTENTIONS WERE WAY OFF THE MARK. I WAS IGNORANT ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FAME. I HAD AN IDEA. BUT ONLY JUST AN IDEA.”

“I FAILED TO BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE, UNABLE TO PROVE TO YOU THAT LIFE IS MEANINGFUL.”

Papyrus…
You wanted to tell him that he had done more than he’s ever realised.

He changed your life. And you bet he changed Tsumudж judge’s life too. The Trial speaks for itself.

Turning back to Sans, Papyrus asked: “BROTHER, YOU WON’T BELIEVE UNLESS YOU SEE?”

“Yup,” Sans replied. “Empirical evidence is always preferred.”

“OKAY, I’LL SHOW YOU. IS YOUR AWESOME ARTIFICIALLY ENHANCED MAGIC EYE STILL FUNCTIONAL?”


“THAT’S FINE. THE GREAT PAPYRUS TRUSTS THAT YOU CAN DO IT WITH YOUR REGULAR COLOURS.”

He placed his gloves on Sans’ cheeks. Then, he leaned forward until his frontal cranium connected with his brother’s.

“BETWEEN US, WE HAVE ALL SIX SHADES OF OUR PEOPLE. I WILL HELP YOU.”

That’s true.

Sans is Cyan-Yellow-Purple.

Papyrus is Orange-Blue-Green.

Add some Red and it’s a full set.

“I HAD SEEN, YET I COULDN’T UNDERSTAND. YOU COULDN’T FIND, YET YOU WILL COMPREHEND.”

“PATIENT PERCEIVEMENT OF THE TRUTH… YOU HAVE WHAT I DON’T.”

Sans and Papyrus both ignited their Eyes in close proximity. They shared their power, uniting the ‘Fire of Humanity’ into a flame of pure white.

The feedback of magic intensified.

The whirlpool, stilled.

The fire, extinguished.

The air, silenced.

You’re not sure how much time had passed. You were too awed by the display to check. Monsters do express themselves with magic in more ways than one.

You secretly planted a rewind-teleport Mark underneath your shoe. If anything does go wrong, you’re prepared to initiate a rescue.

Sans asked. “Is this for real?”

“YES.”

“Everything checks out, Paps. Whole laws were rewritten. And, there’s pure love everywhere. Nothing twisted. Nothing broken.”

“It’s… it’s wonderful.”
“RIGHT?” said Papyrus, “SANS. YOU DIDN’T NEED TO TRANSFER TIMELINES. YOU DIDN’T NEED TO BECOME A DEMON. WE WILL BUILD HEAVEN THE SLOW, STEADY WAY.”

“PLEASE. JOIN US. YOU AND I. TOGETHER. I… I WANT TO WALK THIS JOURNEY AS BROTHERS. NO MORE OF THIS WEIRD CELESTIAL RELATIONSHIP.”

“I NOW UNDERSTAND THAT BEING YOUR ‘GOD’ DOESN’T DO YOU JUSTICE.”

Yes!
This is it!
This has gotta by THE moment of Sans’ redemption! Asriel too gave up his diabolical plans after he saw the light.

Aaah… you can’t wait to eat Mom’s pie and sleep in your own bed again.

Anything’s better than this chaos.

Cheers of a crowd resonated in the air. They echoed: ‘Heave! Ho! Heave! Ho!’

Wait. What’s going on?

Your attention snapped to the Spirit Gate. Multiple gigantic hands with holes tried to push the opening shut.

Lady Lucidia remarked with subdued astonishment: “Doctor Alphys and Doctor Gaster have united the whole of Ebott to close the door? It… it might be possible.”

You puffed your chest, proud. This Ebott level teamwork is how they broke the Barrier!

…You didn’t tell her that they were technically under Asriel’s control at the time. But, why fret the small details?

‘Heave!’
‘Ho!’
‘Heave!’
‘Ho!’

Since the closing efforts started, the brothers remained in a standstill…

Sans breathed out a long sigh. “…C’mon bro, let’s get you home.”

Wait. Is this for real? Seriously?!

Papyrus was so elated with joy, he didn’t think twice. He began unwinding the protective scarf around his skull.

“SPLENDID! THINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN A TON EASIER IF YOU SURRENDERED SOONER. WE SHALL GET YOU PROPERLY BUNDLED UP FOR CAPTURE.”

Sans declared:

“I impose my will…”

You realised there and then that you had celebrated your victory too soon.
“...to override at any cost!”

WHAT?!?!?

Crimson light erupted from his body, stretching out into the shadow of his symbol.

You gasped. He used a Mark on himself?!

Sans rattled. Like mad. Oh my god, he’s shaking so hard, he ripped the arrows out of the deck!

You heard a loud snap. His ribs had split down from the middle, the shine radiating more and more.

His screams. They terrified you. It sounded like the voices of the whole world resonating as one.

Papyrus tried to get close with the scarf. Yes! Plug the hole!

“Stop! There’s too much Determination! You’ll die!”

Lady Lucidia’s warnings were enough to prompt Sir Grillby into action. He swiped Papyrus off the deck and hurried him towards you.

It’s a small relief compared to the unfolding nuclear meltdown. The sudden sprouting of The Seraphim’s six wings destroyed the deck, setting him free.

You watched him float upwards into the sky, declaring:

“O Almighty LORD of Lords, Alpha and Omega, hear my prayer!”

“I burn my wretched heart on your altar, ignited by the Fire of Humanity!”

“Open the Gates of Heaven: our One True Home!”

A wink capped off the moment.

“What? You thought we’re going back to that tiny house?”

“SANS!!!” Papyrus tried to reach out for his brother, pleading for his return.

“SAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAANS!!!”

Light flooded The Void, engulfing The Seraphim whole.

A strange, massive, and almost unbearable force pushed you down on your knees. You screamed from the sudden weight.

Undyne? Papyrus? Everyone? Are they alright?

No. No, they’re not. They’re on the ground in agony. To your horror, you noticed thin streams of dust seeping out from their beings.

Mister Garamond tried to shield your parent’s SOUL capsules with his dispersing body. Alas, the glass had already started to break.

This can’t be happening...! Isn’t there anything you can do???

“Crimson Keeper, offer your Blood Crystal.”
Grandmaster? Is he referring to The Legendary Artifact?

“Yes. Lift it up high. Sacrifice this symbol of life. Otherwise, you and your friends will pay the ultimate price.”

An object of ancient value, versus the life of the present…

You get it now. You’re holding something precious. But it’s nowhere near as valuable as your friends!

You raised the Legendary Artifact, offering a gift to the Heavens.

Please, accept this!

Upon that very instant, the force stopped pushing your body

The orb in your hand glowed bright red. It’s drawing Determination from your body, amplifying it into a massive bubble.

Anything outside of the protection of the Legendary Artifact fell apart. Bit by bit. The buildings, the ships, the blazing inferno, the ocean water itself… everything crumbled into nothingness.

All that’s left was your tiny piece of covered shore.

You stood up. Your friends got back on their feet too.

Grillby looked back into where the city once stood. “…It’s gone…”

Undyne shook her head. “W-what the heck was that?”

Good question. Lady Lucidia? Grandmaster?

“I… I don’t understand…” the lady muttered. “It doesn’t match the scriptures. Heaven couldn’t arrive like this.”

The Grandmaster replied: “You’re indeed right, dear daughter. Have faith. The Almighty won’t sit idle.”

Uh. Can anyone explain why Heaven is fatal if it’s supposed to be, well, GOOD???

Lady Lucidia explained: “It is as Sans Serif had said. Nothing impure can withstand the divine light.”

“This truth may be harsh,” added The Grandmaster, “But please listen. Our known reality and all its residents are tainted by corruption of the Will. Those without the blessing of His Mercy are unable to withstand His holiness; death becomes their fate.”

“The ‘Legendary Artifact’ acts as your temporary substitute by absorbing all blemish. It renders you ‘pure’… but only for so long.”

Then, what about Sans?

The Grandmaster paused for a moment. “Dear child, he has gone beyond the point of no return. It’s safe to say that the friend you know will die. Whether it’s figurative or not, that depends on the Almighty.”
In the end, Sans chose to fight against the cosmos itself. Is this the inevitable end of every Living Victory?

Must it always be such a big controversy?

You were lucky. Sans? Maybe not.
You told Papyrus that you’re sorry.
This mission is a failure.

“When… who are you?”

Sans?

“What… do you mean… ‘not ready’?”

Lady Lucidia! Papyrus! Sans is alive!

“I-hey… I’m… I’m not bringing the place down… Just… handing you more residents…”

You heard Flowey in the background. He’s yelling something about ‘a fog’.
What is this fog about?

“Let them in.”

“Please.”

An intense struggle happened over the intercom. Lots of yelling. Glass crashing. Chairs flipping.

In the midst of confusion, you understood one sentence:

‘Don’t touch my husband!’

At the final moment, a crack of thunder cut off all communications.

The light of ‘Heaven’ vanished in an instant. Its absence revealed the harbinger of this next crisis.
Oh no.
Oh.
No.

It’s Persona.

Sans dangled from his arm. Limp and broken. His many Eyes, gone. His wings, plucked. Only bare skeletal branches were left behind.

Baleful dark-red thunderclouds had taken over the sky. Crimson streams of electricity wound around the Seraph System and connected it straight into Persona’s dark domain.

…It goes without saying that The Last Persona will hijack the sound system. From what little interaction you had, you realised that he’s not the quiet type.

“Are you honestly willing to believe in that defeatist faith? Not even the Grandmaster’s own family adhere to his teachings!”

“They’re unrealistic. Useless. Pathetic!”

Hey! Hey! That’s not right!

Sans was totally absolutely obviously speaking to someone just now.

What gives?

“That is your proof? The mere mutters of a heretic? The manifestation of his desperate imagination?”

“Still, a fine weapon he had made. If only he was born of flesh, I might have considered him a possible candidate for my succession.”

“Such a pity.”

Persona began reeling Sans upwards into the clouds. He’s trying to STEAL the Seraph System.

“Listen here, feeble magicians! The puny Coloured One spoke a universal truth. Ascend to godhood, or wither and die!”

“Prove your strength to me!”

You sensed a spike of magical aura from Undyne. Oh man, that face. It has CHALLENGE written all over it. She is freaking pissed.

You understand, but you stopped her nevertheless; there’s a much better alternative.

After all, the Legendary Artifact remains intact.

“Sure you can do this, punk?” asked Undyne.

With brows furrowed in confidence, you’re DETERMINED to see this through!

* MARK
* Purple

The power of Perseverance enabled you to glue the crystal onto the top of your head. It looks silly, but who the hell cares at this point?!

“You want your ‘ascension’, Persona????”

Undyne picked you up without hesitation.

“THEN TAKE THIS!!!”

Backed by the loudest ‘NGAAAH’ of the day, Undyne tossed you at Sans with all her might.

* MARK
* Blue

For stability.
Lightning attempted to strike you down. Your first reaction was to put up a green shield, but then you noticed the Legendary Artifact absorbing each of the attacks.

You grabbed onto Sans. His sockets were pitch black.

Sans!
Sans, is he awake??

No response.

You tried to unbuckle the Seraph System. It’s a no go. The bindings had turned into a half-melted mess. That won’t do!

* MARK
* Red

_You’re determined to set Sans free!_

Your Mark shone, ready to peel the bracer away from the bones.

Huh?! The Seraph System itself is resisting?!

Persona scoffed at your efforts. _“Hah! How naive. Did you really think the collective Determination of The World will bow to you?”_

B—but Sans and Tsunderjudge! They could use that power without problems!

“Your heart is too soft. The men you fought are much alike; merely different sides of the same coin.”

Frustration levels, rising. You grit your teeth and pumped more DT into your Mark.

C’mon, World! Don’t be a stupid doodoobutt! If they don’t let go of whatever stubborn grudges they have, they’re gonna get controlled by a worse idiot!

“Your pleas fall on deaf ears, little ex-Persona.”

“If you’re so noble, claim the Machine of the Gods under your own name! Only then can you guarantee your ‘righteousness’!”

“FIGHT!”

Your gut feeling tells you that Persona is not a good man. If he owns the Seraph System… that’s way too much power for any one person. Even for you.

You planted your forehead against Sans. Yelled right in his face.

Still no response.

Oh, come on! You KNOW he’s listening! Heck, even if he’s completely unconscious you’re gonna
rant anyway.

Listen up, Sans! He hasn’t tasted your consequential boot yet!

You’re gonna drag him back in chains, throw him in prison, and write out a list of punishments with your friends to make sure everyone gets their fair share.

And after that, Sans will help take down the Ocean Abomination!

He will put his goddamn supercomputer brain to good use!
He will help you to become the best ambassador you can be!
He will protect the world for Mom and Papyrus to live in!
He will be a REAL guardian angel!

Hear that, Sans?? No easy way out ever!

Now, there’s a key component that has preserved Sans all the while. Ironically, it’s also what’s keeping him trapped. It’s a tool that doesn’t distinguish between good and evil. It exists to gather the efforts of a time-traveller and use it against them.

You yelled upward into the approaching clouds.

Persona! You’re not gonna play his game!

Therefore!

* MARK
* Charged Red

In your heart, you apologized to your biological parents for what you’re about to do.

You placed your hand on your family heirloom: The Trap Harvester.

**You’re Determined to END this!**

**DESTROY!!!**

This star was much more potent. Violent. So much so that you had trouble keeping it in check. You weren’t expecting this much power.

Your Mark snapped the Trap Harvester in half, releasing The World’s worth of Determination.

A huge explosion caught you at point blank. When you shielded your face with your arms, you spotted the Legendary Artifact floating in between the gaps.

It protected you… for a while. But the punishment was too much for it to take.

First, it cracked. Then, the fractures grew greater.

In the end, the Legendary Artifact shattered into fine, crystalline shards.

The remnants of the blast poured onto your being.

Disappointments;
Despair;
Curses and Nightmares.
They’re overpowering your will with theirs.

You felt the segments of your Magus SOUL split apart under the strain.

Emptiness remained. Void.

Are you still a human being?
Are you a DEMON now?
An amorphous fragment of sentience in a cloud of dreams?

No!

You refuse!

Despite everything, you are still you!

You’re a kid from Ebott!

You’re monsterkind’s ambassador: The Golden Quiche!

Living Victory Extraordinaire!

Your True Name is…

**FRISK!!!**

Chapter End Notes

We still need to round off some details and bridge to the Ocean Battle. But, the Seraphim fiasco is now considered done.

I don’t want to debate about faith in the comments box though. I can answer some questions, but that’s about it. This is not a good place for lengthy discussions.

Dayum, Papyrus really grew up.
Sans the Comedian died on that day.

His purpose once was to entertain people. To incite laughter, or annoyance. To make people forget about their worries for a while, no matter how futile it all seems.

An ill-fit figure for the tumultuous path of a Living Victory.

Now, this monster had gambled and lost. What remained of his body was held hostage by Persona. Frisk, that little squirt -- the subject of his judgement -- never gave up on their twisted sentimentality.

That’s right. They did their best, refusing to play Persona’s game. They destroyed the ‘Machine of the Gods’.

Destroy, they did. Took out the angel’s arm along with it.

Sans Serif thus dropped into The Void.

As he fell, his clothes fluttered against the empty winds, and he gazed upwards into the maelstrom of wills that desperately sought to consume Frisk as their own.

His mind wandered.

*Game Over, huh?*

*Aah…*

*Maybe I should have stayed as a caricature after all.*

*Be that lazy oaf. Cracking jokes. Researching cars. Spinning my mental wheel for the next victim to troll.*

*Instead, I stepped out of my bounds. Became… someone more than a sidelinier.*

*I had seen the unseeable.*

*Met the unbelievable.*

*What am I thinking?*

*My old life is too boring to bear.*

Sans looked to his right. There’s nothing there: gone up to his shoulder joint.

*Welp. Everyone dies someday. It’s just a matter of ‘when’ and ‘how’.*

Then came Papyrus. He’s riding his cheetah bike. It’s the leaner, faster model.

Red markings bloomed on his face: a sign of Determination seeping through the unhealed gaps.

*Don’t bother, bro. Just let me be.*
A dying dumpster fire ain’t worth saving.

Sans reached his remaining arm out towards the bike’s skull. An override requires direct eye contact with the summoned Blaster in question.

Papyrus was within range. He didn’t move to dodge either.

*Initiate!*

However, a shine radiated from Papyrus’ back. It created a spark that slapped Sans’ hand away.

*So, they applied that Gram on him after all…*

*Heh, I hoped that they forgot about it, really.*

Determined, Sans tried yet again.

His palm now shone with the Mark of the Seraph.

*I impose my will--*

The ripples of Amalgamation rolled through his injured body, cutting his thoughts short mid-sentence. His symbol extinguished.

*Damn it. I… I’m burning out…*

Helpless, Sans dropped straight into the perfect catch. He’s blue now.

Sans took a moment to admire his little brother. What a fine person he had grown up to be. Way, way better than he could have ever dreamed.

“SANS, HANG IN THERE!” Papyrus shook, trying hard not to cry. “THANK GOODNESS YOU’RE AS LIGHT AS A FEATHER.”

At shore, his brother wrapped him in the enchanted scarf that once belonged to their mother. Experiencing it first hand, Sans started to understand its functions better.

It’s a life-maintaining capture tool. Anyone caught in it would be bound with trappings stronger than steel: powers nullified, and vital functions slowed.

Despite so… the symptoms of Amalgamation continued to creep.

*The Seraph System is gone. My SOUL... heh. It’s never gonna revert.*

*There’s nothing to regulate that overflowing Determination anymore. The scarf ain’t enough to stop it. Levels gonna keep on rising. I’m already feeling ultra sleepy.*

Eyelids, heavy. They began to droop.

A fishy hand smacked his cheek.

“Don’t sleep!” Undyne yelled. “Tell us how to keep Toriel and Asgore alive!!!”

Sans tried to speak. It took a lot of effort for a quiet voice. Not a good sign.

“Power source,” he said. “Without it, ten minutes. Battery life.”
“And how do we do that???”

“Mark. Command: ‘Keep them alive’.”

Undyne pointed upwards towards the huge maelstrom of pure Determination. “We DON’T have that right now! The squirt is fighting whatever crap is in there!”

Grillby offered his hand towards Garamond. “…May I?… I still have some reserves…”

The half-cracked capsules of the Dreemurrs were handed over to the knight of fire.

From the palm of his hand, soft white flames fed vital energy into the containers. The strength they had lent him prior would be used to keep the monarch’s alive for the time being.

Their own power, huh? It’s poetic karma.

“…Will this do?…” he asked back.

“Yup,” answered Sans.

The second ripple was stronger than the first. Didn’t surprise him. Amalgamation would be near-instant on its own.

His eyelids drooped again. It’s getting more and more difficult to stay awake.

“BROTHER,” said Papyrus.

“Yeah, bro?”

“DON’T LEAVE ME BEHIND.”

“Sorry. No guarantees.”

“PLEASE TRY. HANG IN THERE UNTIL HELP ARRIVES.”

A brilliant star of scarlet dispelled the collective mass of Determination. Falling from the centre of that shine…

…Was none other than Frisk.

Kid. You have a dysfunctional relationship with gravity, you know that?

Frisk vanished mid-fall. They reappeared by Sans’ side. Planted a Mark on safe grounds before attempting an adventure? Smart cookie.

Upon the third ripple, Sans looked at his own hand. It’s dripping white goo. Once a monster reaches that stage… there’s no turning back.

Sans blinked and failed to open his eyes again. He had fallen asleep, drifting deeper and deeper into the inner abyss.

Voices, fading.

Senses, failing.

At the very last moment, he heard one sentence from the human:

“I -- Frisk -- am Determined to Claim you with my Mercy!”
Sans Serif woke up to a world of liquid. It’s a… soothing sensation. It seeped deep within the marrows of his skeletal self.

He didn’t feel any clothing on his being. No surprise there. Everyone enters the world naked. They would leave as such too. At least, that’s how he reasoned it.

[INITIATING DIAGNOSTICS.]

[EYE STATUS:]

[CYAN, ALL CLEAR]
[YELLOW, ALL CLEAR]
[PURPLE, ALL CLEAR]

[PSYCHIA STATUS: RED.]

[ERROR. MISMATCH DETECTED.]

[MAGICAL INTEGRITY: UNKNOWN. REMOVAL FROM INTENSIVE RECOVERY POD 01 DENIED.]

‘Intensive Recovery Pod 01’…?

Hang on. I’m inside a machine?

The interior lights switched on, illuminating the fluid world in green.

It was then that Sans realised that he’s suspended inside a container of glass, covered in segmented plates to prevent him from looking outside.

The liquid? A magic-imbued solution. Likely calcium based; he’s a skeleton after all.

An oxygen mask covered the lower half of his face. Every breath he took drew in a mixture of vapours formulated to keep him alive.

He heard some shuffling from the outside. It’s muffled.

First, he tried to move. Nothing responded. It’s possible that they had bound his motor functions. Likely to prevent escape attempts. Or, any action that could endanger his own health.

He observed his own reflection.

*still have all my limbs, huh?*

*Whatever happened in The Void didn’t damage my real body.*

The upper half of plates then rolled up, letting outside light wash in.

It’s… Lady Lucidia.

“How do you feel?” she asked. Though her voice came through the audio system, it sounded natural.

“Not dead,” he answered back.

“Nope.”

Lucidia went away for a while.

Soon the woman returned; [RELEASING LEVEL 1 BINDING]

Upon that command, Sans felt freedom in the furthest proximity of his limbs.

They had him locked up tighter than a maximum-security prison. Yet, there was not a single chain in sight. Unnerving.

“Query: can you move your toes and fingers?”

He did so. That’s when he realised his entire right arm had been paralyzed.

No sensation. No movement. It was as though it wasn’t there at all.

“The computer failed to detect any nerve activity inside your right arm. Not surprising, since it was caught in that DT-explosion.”

“Am I handicapped for life now?” he asked.

“Depends on your fortune. Luck. Physiotherapy will be your best case scenario. The worst: amputation and prosthetics.”

Not the most reassuring news.

“Is everyone else alright?”

That question earned an intense glare from Lucidia. Shot down without a second thought. However, her expression softened soon after.

“…There are no fatalities, if that eases your heart.”


“None required. Those are the facts.”

“Anyway, since you appear to be conscious enough; there’s someone here who wishes to speak with you.”

Slow taps vibrated through the solution. Liquids carry ground vibrations better than air.

That’s… a cane?

Lo and behold, none other than Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme walked into the ward.

Pallid skin.
Dark eyes.
Silver hair.
Intense scowl.

All that in addition to his stylish black tailcoat. It’s no wonder why he earned the nickname of a ‘vampire’.

Neither side said anything for a long while. Both waited for each other to make the first statement.
“Hmph,” Mezil huffed at last. “Do you only show off your smart mouth before my wife? How unsightly.”


Mezil thwacked the top of the cane on the pod. That was much louder than Sans expected. No wonder aquariums have belligerent warnings against tapping.

Off to the side, Lucidia reminded: “Dear, please don’t punish the IRP. The machine is innocent.”

“…Sorry.” Mezil cleared his throat. “Sans Serif, please remember you and I will remain enemies. You are not getting off my hook anytime soon.”

“Welp. Okay,” replied Sans. “I assume you have questions then. Go ahead.”

“First, I don’t need your permission. Second, what in the bloody blazes were you thinking? Transferring residents to Heaven? Spiting the Almighty?”

“I tell you right here and now, false angel: until Heaven arrives on Earth, the living are nowhere prepared for the afterlife. Had you succeeded, you would’ve discovered ‘Death’ is the name of your supposed salvation.”

“As it stands, you’re no better than Frisk.”

Sans contemplated on Mezil’s ruling. Examined the facts against his own judgement of Frisk.

False god-like power, checked.
Premature ending of lives by unnatural means, checked.
Ripping apart reality as they know it, checked.

The old Magus was spot on.

A part of me says I should be feeling wrecked by this. I mean, my heart got crushed for lesser reasons.

The accidental death of Frisk’s parents…
My brother finding out the truth…
The awakening of his Eye…

Yeah. Those broke me. The mass murder accusation? All I have right now is a straightforward acknowledgement of my failures. It’s impersonal. Cold.

Did I change for the worse? Or is the scale is too massive for me to comprehend at an emotional level? It’s too soon to tell.

“I don’t know what to say,” said Sans. “It’s an accurate assessment: I’m a hypocrite through and through. By your laws, I should be executed as a DEMON.”

“…But then, why am I alive?”

Mezil twisted the top of his cane. He pulled the sword out of its sheath, reflecting the ceiling lights against the polished surface.

“Make no mistake. If it was solely up to me, you’d be long dead. I’ve executed countless others for less.”
“However,” He snapped the blade back into its place. “My will is not the key to your survival. You breathe today upon the mercy of three: Frisk, The Grandmaster, and the Almighty Himself.”

Sans blinked twice. “…You saw the light?”

“Yes, I did.”

“And you didn’t think I was going insane?”

“Tsk! Who do you take me for? Persona? That moron is so blinded by pride that he wouldn’t recognize the truth right at his feet.”

“Nah, I take you as someone who doesn’t have faith in anything. We’re similar.”

Irritation boiled behind that stoic grump. Look close enough, and one might catch a glimpse of inner fire.

“‘Similar’ is not the ‘same’,” grumbled the old man. “You’re a fool to think otherwise.”

“Interesting. Because, heh, if you ask me… I still find the whole ordeal hard to believe.”

Mezil asked Lucidia: “Can he use Truesight in this condition?”

“Yes. Please give me a moment.”

A few clicks and keyboard strokes later, the machine announced:

[RELEASING EYE BINDING]

Mezil rested both hands on his cane.

“Go ahead. Perceive the truth. Or choose to ignore. It’s up to you.”

To Sans’ surprise, he did not pick up a hint of reverse psychology. Mezil had laid the options bare; it was indeed up to Sans’ own discretion.

“Wow, you’re dead honest about this. Here I thought you’re gonna guilt trip me.”

“This is why I say ‘similar’ is not the ‘same’, Sans Serif. I dislike conniving wordplays. If I could live without them, I would.”

Welp. I can’t let the opportunity slip by.

So… what am I gonna see?

Sans activated his Truesight on his own reflection.

The paralyzed arm had nothing unusual going on. It’s just numb. Dead. He expected to see some DT-related cracks, but there’s nothing there.

As for his SOUL, it’s still red. Except not upright like a human’s.

On it, Frisk’s ‘Claim of Conquest’ shone gold. It’s far too red to match the true yellow of Justice.

From what he had read in Lucidia’s book, The Claim required a Living Victory within The Void to apply a heightened quantity of ‘clean’ Determination to the target.
In other words, ‘Mercy’.

Talk about the explanation not matching the title. Sans expected the opposite with the whole ‘conquest’ motif.

“Guess the kid’s still inexperienced?”

Mezil instructed: “Look deeper. Beyond the Mark.”

The thought of checking further inside made him feel a twinge of nervousness.

“You mean it gets worse?”

“See for yourself.”

Getting cold feet would be pointless. So, he peered straight into the core of his being.

Crimson script wrapped around the surface, hidden in plain sight. He doesn’t recognize the alphabet. The shapes appear to form a sentence.

“What the heck,” said Sans. Deadpan in tone, serious in meaning.

“Let me translate that Magi script. It reads: ‘Holy, holy, holy, LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory’. It’s the song the true seraphim sing without cease.”

“Did you inscribe this on me?” the skeleton asked. “That’s a bad joke, y’know.”

The Supreme Judge huffed. “Of course not! I’d consider it blasphemous. But it appears that God thought it would serve as the perfect reminder for an immature nihilist.”

“Heh, a ‘cosmic’ joke then. I guess The Almighty is more ‘humerus’ than you.”

The unamused elder stepped closer. Stern, never letting up.

“A word of warning, Sans Serif,” said Mezil, “Live in the light. I don’t care if you want to do so as a human, a monster, or some ascended guardian of both. Anything but an ‘angel’.”

Sans commented: “That’s ultra-specific. May I ask why?”

“The offer of redemption is limited to man and monster. Angels who rebel become demons. They’re destined for eternal condemnation.”

“Fall into darkness once again…” The Judge pointed his cane towards the Frisk-claimed SOUL.

“And I will terminate you with extreme prejudice.”

That was not a conversation, as Lucidia claimed. More like a lecture. Borderline a threat.

Sans wondered what he should answer. Just ‘okay’? Maybe joke or pun?

No, he already tried being funny and it was not appreciated.

In the end, he simply nodded: “Duly noted.”

“We shall see if you mean what you say.”

Mezil turned around to make his leave. A few steps later, the old man stopped to look back.
“One more thing,” he said.

“…Yup?”

“Mercy given to the innocent is not simply ‘mercy’. It’s ‘justice’. Blessings and goodness are their right.”

“True mercy is forgiveness of the undeserving. Only fools mock this gift, be it by exploitation or by wilful unrepentance.”

“Goodnight.”

As the Magus said farewell, Lucidia pulled down the covers. It left Sans to contemplate alone.

True mercy is forgiveness for the undeserving… huh?

Then, where do I fit in the grand scheme of things?

Chapter End Notes

Death? Death is too easy.

Much better to have him eat his own words. Live with the consequences.
Monday Blues

Chapter Notes

This took longer than expected. Welcome back to the physical world, everyone.

Now for something more serious. I didn’t think that I had to apply moderation rules in my own story. Turns out, it needs one.

In the previous chapter, a reader showed up and spewed a NSFW vitriol tantrum in the comments box. Very NSFW.

Here’s the screencap of what happened so far: https://imgur.com/a/vUvuA
Skip this if you’re not comfortable with crass language and explicit unmentionable things.

Please remember this is a T-rated story. This extends to the comments. No explicit NSFW imagery is allowed.

The moment I see any of this nonsense, I will delete the offending post.
And, I will also delete the most recent -- if not all -- comments under the offender’s name.

The failure to respect the ratings will result in the removal of voice. This will be done without prior warning.

Remember, being critical is different from being childish. I will accept disagreements if they’re done in a respectful manner. Insults? It’s not cool to insult authors.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cenna laid down on her hospital bed. She hovered the phone over her face.

0740, the displayed clock read. In other words: it’s the start of a new morning.

Alas, by weight and gravity, the phone slipped out of her hand. It slapped her square on her nose before it rolled off the left side of her bed.

“Ow,” she said. “Dammit, I fell so far from grace.”

In an attempt to pick it up without getting up from bed, she rolled to the side. Which so happens to be the wounded part of her body.

“FFFFFFFF----”

Cenna aborted her attempt posthaste. Though stab wounds tend to seal themselves up to a certain degree, she didn’t want to open her stitches over something as silly as a phone drop.

So, she had to do it the normal way.

Sit up.
Groan.
Get off the bed.

And then pick up the fallen item, slowly. The wound hurt no matter how she moved.

“I’m so damn tired…”

She slipped back under the covers and tried to go back to sleep. That didn’t work. Despite her fatigue, her body thought that it had enough snooze.

*Oh c’mon decide already! Are you tired or are you not tired? Jeez.*

An odd sense of nostalgia for yesterday washed over her.

*That Assassinio incident was stressful, but mighty fun. I got to fly again and stuff.*

*…It’s been far too long.*

It’s still a while before breakfast, so she decided to scroll through her messages.

First to be read: Mezil’s. Renamed ‘Grumpy Herb’, just because she can.

---

**Grumpy Herb**
Mister Mackenzie will meet you at 1000.
At the hospital cafeteria.

Blink blink. The message was sent only a few minutes ago. He’s online? At this hour?

Cenna typed back:

---

**HotAndSpicy**
OMG YOU HAVEN’T SLEPT YET OLD MAN????

**Grumpy Herb**
No. No time.

**HotAndSpicy**
WTF????
Uh… you mean Jonah? Right?

**Grumpy Herb**
Yes. You don’t remember?
He’s the lawyer for your case, for goodness sake.

**HotAndSpicy**
Of course I remember!
Omg seriously you called someone over for legal shit and you didn’t have any sleep?!
How the fuck are you gonna handle that???
Grumpy Herb
You will do it in my stead.
I told him that I have given you full authority.
Your aunt story has long been dismantled. He has no reason to play along anymore.

HotAndSpicy
Oi oi oi oi don’t just dump everything on me because you’re a vampire!

Grumpy Herb
Tsk. Not by choice, mind you.
I’ve been handling this whole Sans Serif fiasco the whole night.

HotAndSpicy
Okay but have you considered this fact?
I NEARLY DIED!!!(}{:

Grumpy Herb
Hmph, this is nothing. As if you’re that fragile.
The Cenna I knew kicked me in the shins at the end of a successful mission.

HotAndSpicy
I kicked you because you place zero value on your own well being, nevermind mine.
Like what the fuck was that helicopter stunt even for?
That shit should stay in movies dammit

Grumpy Herb
What nonsense are you talking about?
I got you the best doctors and healers. How do I not care about your health?
As for myself: as long it’s not another Living Victory, death is only a nuisance.

HotAndSpicy
Whatever happened to the whole ‘single pass’ shit?
And what about Persona???

Grumpy Herb
Imprisoned and contained.
I have my powers back. He’s no longer a threat.

HotAndSpicy
You seriously want me to believe that?
Mark my words: he’s gonna talk shit the moment you get a tummy ache.

Grumpy Herb
Let him.

HotAndSpicy
Omg Mez you’re hopeless.
One day you’re gonna die of karoshi.
I swear.

Grumpy Herb
Watch your mouth, Judge Vanquisher.
You have ‘superb’ luck when it comes to random premonitions.
Work calls. Good day.

If she wasn’t in a quiet ward right now, Cenna would have screamed ‘Old Man!!!’ with maximum exasperation.

“I didn’t even get to ask anything about the others! Wait… I’m in the ‘Undertale’ group chat.”

Nothing beats a direct connection.

**HotAndSpicy**
Morning… guys?

**FabulousMTT**
Good mooooooooooooorning darlings~~~

**HotAndSpicy**
Whoah was not expecting a reply so soon.
Uh. Did you sleep?
Wait.
Do robot ghosts need sleep anyway?

**FabulousMTT**
Oh hot sauce, a high flying busy entertainer such as yours truly knows how to take a rest under any circumstance.

**HotAndSpicy**
Is everyone alright?
What about Frisky?

**FabulousMTT**
Frisk is doing fabulous, sugarbird.
Sleeping like a log too. Though, breakfast is soon.

**HotAndSpicy**
Can give me a lowdown on the others?

**FabulousMTT**
Good news: nobody died.
Bad news: my fabulous robot body suffered some electrical damages. I’m haunting the hospital until Alphys-darling fixes it!
The woes of not having a body! Tragic!

*Only about himself? Then again, it’s Mettaton.*

**HotAndSpicy**
Aww shucks. Hope you’ll get that sorted soon. 
I gotta wait for the nurses to change my dressings first. 
After that, I’ll let you know how it goes.

**FabulousMTT**
Alright, honeybaby. You take care.

**HotAndSpicy**
Oh, right. Please tell Frisk that Jonah Mackenzie a.k.a Lawyerman will visit us at 10AM. 
Hospital cafeteria. 
Sorry for the short notice.

**FabulousMTT**
Don’t worry about that~
With my fantabulous self around, I will make sure our dearest star is prepared for the meeting.

**HotAndSpicy**
Thanks!

---

I bet Lucy is helping Mez. She won’t have any time to reply.

What about Gael? The Grandmaster would have taken care of him by now.


So next is... Anise?

No new messages.

Guess she’s still sleeping.

The sound of rolling carts then alerted Cenna of breakfast time. Three senior nurses distributed the food to the patients. She recognized one of them.

“Good morning, Miss Caraway.”

“Morning, Loris,” Cenna greeted back. “What are the chances of meeting you on your shift?”

“Too high,” Loris replied back. “When we know each other by face and name, that’s a not a good sign for a young lady like yourself.”

Cue an awkward chuckle. Time to switch topics. “What’s on the menu today?”

“Chicken sandwiches, corn soup, an apple, and some supplements.”

Oh, the Vanquisher could almost hear the choir of angels singing in the back of her head. “I’ll take anything that’s not dinosaur oatmeal. Anything!”

“Lucky you,” said the nurse. “Alright, do take your time with your food. I think it’ll be around an hour before your examination. Maybe add another half.”

That jolted her wide awake.

“Haaarr!?!?” Cenna exclaimed. “That’s too long!”
“What’s the rush? It’s not like you’ve got anywhere else you need to be. …Do you?”

A curious glint of suspicion saw right through the Vanquisher.

“Nonono. It’s just… you know how Mez gets. Dumped a surprise business appointment on me this early on the morning.”

“Well, yesterday’s big terrorist attack caused a huge influx of patients. We’re swamped for time. Be glad Judge Thyme at least made sure you didn’t get the corridor beds.”

“He did?” Cenna scratched the back of her head.

She didn’t remember much from after she left The Crimson Hall. Her real body was on the brink of exsanguination, so she refused to cross over until the EMT arrived. Blood bags included.

After the exit, life was quite a haze. The last thing she remembered was the interior of an ambulance.

Then, it’s already morning. Lots of lost hours in between.

“Heh. I guess I owe him one.”

Loris chuckled. “Maybe you could stand to be nicer to your boss. The folks on the graveyard shift told me he jumped straight to work after only a brief examination.”

“Guess he expects the same of his staff. It may seem harsh considering the circumstances, but a bit of busywork won’t kill you as long as you stay tucked in.”

*Unfortunately Loris, you don’t know Mez enough.*

“I could rant ten thousand reasons why the old man drives me up the wall… but I don’t wanna hold ya up,” said Cenna.

“Alright, alright. You have a good breakfast.”

Once the nurses left, she started her meal.

*I better eat first before the news makes me lose my appetite.*

Her phone buzzed.

Again.

And again.

And again…

“Hm? Is it the grumpy herb?”

Nope. It was Anise.

---

**Anise Anise**

Judge Thyme ordered me to babysit the flower children

I don’t wanna babysit them

They’re cranky and mean and they make me question my life choices

He warned me that they had a friendship meltdown between the two

Which means things are already on the wrong foot
What followed after was a spam of crying emotes.

**HotAndSpicy**
Sorry friend.
Welcome to Monday.

**Anise Anise**
I hate Mondays crai crai crai

**HotAndSpicy**
Good luck to you.
That’s all I can say.

**Anise Anise**
Noooooooooooooooooo I just want to do my science stuff in my lab
I haz maximum sads
Should i bring a football to keep them busy?
I don’t have a football
They’re flowers that need the sun but weatherman says it’s gonna be cloudy all day
If only I have a red giant. I need a red giant
Only a red giant is entertaining enough!

*Oh no. It’s the ‘Anise Spaz’. I have no damn idea what she’s talking about. She snapped before the day even started.*

Cenna thought it’s best to let her friend settle down on her own devices.

With her nice breakfast consumed, she checked the web to see if the world was on fire yet.

The first headline of the day: ‘Terrorists strike the heart of the Association. Gungnir claims responsibility. Hundreds injured, no fatalities. Many believe the involvement of Mount Ebott’s monsters helped save lives.’

Next: ‘Mayor questioned about the collapse of traffic infrastructure. Corruption involved?’

Cenna smirked. Neither the Magi nor the police liked that guy. After the quake incident, that opportunist jumped in with promises of safety. Standard politician stuff.

Then he had to frustrate Mezil to no end. If it weren’t for the good Commissioner, the Vanquishers might have lost their standing as genuine law enforcement.

‘Ambassador’ Frisk passes the Trial of the Crimson Hall. Initiated as the first new Crimson Keeper in over a decade.’

*Oh hey, Mez made it official!*
Phew! This means Frisky is now more than an icon of curiosity. They’ve attained some real influence.

‘Magus Trial surrounded by chaos: an ill-omen for the future? Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme unavailable for further commentary.’

Enough politics. She moved on to the more social side of the sphere.

‘Popularity of the Suplex Queen soars across the net, proving to the world that heroes are real.’

Included was a phone video of Undyne carrying out loads of unconscious people on her shoulders.

‘Enigmatic fiery comrade of the Suplex Queen rumoured to be Ebott’s local bartender. A secret master behind a stylish disguise?’

Cenna’s outburst of laughter caused a few turned heads in the ward, to her embarrassment. She apologized for the disturbance of peace and sunk back to the privacy of her phone.

‘Mettaton to the rescue! Mount Ebott’s superstar employed high-tech robotics to aid recovery efforts.’

‘In response to the violence, MTT aims to make his return concert a public peace declaration. Quote, “It’ll be bigger and better than ever, baby!”’

‘Amid fan approval, some question why a celebrity would be equipped with combat capabilities.’

They’re an internet sensation, huh?

That’s legit worrisome… Terrorists aside, there are a bunch of Magi out there who would do anything for a duel with the powerful.

Sigh. I had my fair share of challengers too. Makes me wonder what happened to some of them.

Those buggers better have quit trying to become master Vanquishers. Had the power, but not the heart.

The doctor and nurses arrived at last. More acquaintances thanks to her affiliation with Mezil. Being his go-to Vanquisher meant lots of adventures, and getting injured every now and then.

Not all results can be rewound.

Makes me wonder if Mez is gonna make a surprise appointment with the neurologist.

Yeah. Probably. Definitely. Sure as hell he’s gonna get involved for the Ocean Battle prep.

Medication, administered.

Dressings, changed.

Wounds, examined.

It’s almost 10 by the end of it. The verdict? Lots and lots of bedrest. Physical activity? Banned.

However, when the medical team left the ward, Cenna put on her trench coat over her hospital gown. Proper attire for official business.
Cenna rushed out of bed. But the moment she tried to stand, her legs jerked.

Backwards on the mattress she fell. Fortunately, she hadn't crashed onto the floor. Or hit her head against the desk. That would have caused commotion from the fellow ward occupants.

*A chorea? Now? At the most urgent moment? Seriously?*

Her arms. Her face. The mocking dance of disease travelled all around.

*What should I do?*

*Wait this out?*

*Gah if the nurses see me like this, I'm gonna get delayed!*

*Crap. I can’t be late for the meeting. Not with THAT fourth person.*

*...I still have twelve units of lifeforce. Ten is my minimum before I start turning into a puppet.*

*Should I...*

*I must!*

Cenna focused her magic toward an Arcanagram implanted onto her Psychia.

*Vive Convert!*

A twelfth of her Psychia broke off inside. It spread throughout the body.

There, the mixture of Justice, Perseverance, and Kindness formed new faux-nerves to replace those claimed by the disease.

With her signals fixed, the issues stopped.

Cenna ran out of the ward, dodging patients, tables, beds, and angry staff members. She then barged straight through the doors using her uninjured side.

She’s not stopping for anything.

*Blah, I’m slow. I can feel it.*

Her heart thumped harder than it should.
She’s well aware of the competition. Most of them had already withdrawn, but with the kid’s election as a Crimson Keeper, today could be that person’s final chance in securing any form of custody.

*Please, please, please don’t let anything happen to Frisky please.*

At last, she arrived at the cafeteria.

Frisk was there.
Jonah was there.
And…

Linda.

All three heads turned towards her presence.

Frisk in all their usual cheer waved hello.

“Hi sis!”

“‘Sis’?…” Linda crossed her arms.

“Oh I see. NOW you’ve finally acknowledged that! On the final day of appeal, right after the whole magical trial? How convenient.”

A dead tired Cenna pointed a finger at her old schoolmate. Between the pants, she said: “I… I ain’t got time to deal with your shit!”

“Well too bad, because I’m here for yours.”

“Ladies, ladies,” Jonah spoke up. “Please calm down. Frisk themselves wanted to discuss with Mrs. Buttons.”

“Frisky did?”

The kid nodded. “Yup.”

“See?” said Linda. “They’re already more mature than you.”

Frisk then addressed the other woman: “Please don’t aggravate my sister. We almost died yesterday. It’s normal to be more protective than usual.”

The embarrassment on Linda’s face was priceless.

After clearing her throat, she asked: “Are you alright?”

Frisk gave a thumbs up. “Tired. But otherwise fine. Doctors are putting me under observation for the time being.”

*They did use a lot of magic.*

*No doubt, it’s Psychia exhaustion.*

“Oh. I see,” said Linda. “Would you like some water? Maybe a snack?”

“Sure, thanks.”
Hey… did Linda get a deja vu?

Lucy told me she once ratted out the Gungnir because Frisky wasn’t getting fed. Her standards as a mom prevailed in the end.

Four cups of water for everyone.
One small basket of potato fries for Frisk.

Then it’s time for business.

Jonah placed the related documents on the table. He kept one paper for himself. Must be the notes. “Mrs. Buttons. Miss Wanderstar. Here’s a recap of our situation.”

“The Wanderstar’s last will states that in the event of their untimely death, all custody of their children would go to their superior and close friend, Mezil Winston. Otherwise known as Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme.”

“However, Sir Winston rescinded his custody of Frisk Wanderstar on the grounds that the nature of his job is detrimental to their safety.”

“Meanwhile, Cenna Wanderstar at age 15 was old enough to defend herself should the need arise, as proven by her enlistment into an intensive Vanquisher training course. Therefore Judge Thyme did not put her into the system.”

“He also decided at the time that she -- the closest next of kin -- would become Frisk’s legal guardian at the age of 21. That’s why Frisk was not open for adoption in their early years.”


“Hmm, the Wanderstars follow a specific tradition. I’m not too sure on the details myself. Miss?”

Cenna rubbed the back of her neck. “Oh. That. Uh, how do I put this? It may sound weird or cruel, but only those who inherit the family magic may carry the name. Those who don’t gotta follow the other parent. Long story short, we lost contact with everyone else. I’m the last one standing.”

“Yes. That’s right.” Jonah continued, “But at age 22, Miss Wanderstar was diagnosed with a terminal genetic neuromuscular disease. In combination with her high-risk Vanquisher duties, she agreed with the legal advisors that she’s not capable of fulfilling her role.”

“Hang on a moment!” Linda pointed out an oddity: “That’s a year past the minimum age. Why didn’t she take the kid sooner?”

“Super busy year, that one. I wasn’t even in the country half the time,” replied Cenna.

Jonah added: “The alternative was to invite Frisk Wanderstar into the Magus Association’s school at 13 years old, eventually leading to a direct mentorship under Judge Thyme.”

“That plan was uh, turned upside down due to young Frisk’s mountain misadventure. Toriel Dreemurr, The Queen of Monsters, ended up as their accidental primary caregiver.”

“I had inspected the Queen’s home myself and it fits all the necessary criteria. Neither I nor Miss Wanderstar have any objections to their long-term stay.”

“Either way, according to all known laws of custody… Cenna Wanderstar is to be considered Frisk’s legal guardian. She has the final say.”
Linda frowned. “And you’re all gonna let her hand the child over to a bunch of magical creatures? These so-called ‘Monsters’?”

Cenna raised a brow. “You got a problem with that?”

“Of course!” the other woman replied. “Do monsters even know how to raise human children? What about their community? Is Frisk going to grow up right if they don’t interact with their own kind at all?”

“Okay gal, what about your son?”

“Don’t bring my son into this!”

Cenna clenched her hand into a fist. “I will! ‘Cause he started throwing goddamn rocks, calling me a ‘witch’. Like hell I’ll let Frisky live under the same roof as that snot-nosed good for nothing punk reject!”

Linda gasped. “I-it was you?”

“Yeah, and a bunch of other non-Magi police officers. He’s not a teenager yet and he’s already picking a fight with the Law? Like seriously? You think that it’s just a made up story? An accident? A prank? I wasn’t kidding when I said he’s gonna end up in prison if he doesn’t change.”

Linda’s face went white. “M-my husband didn’t tell me that. I knew he was being naughty. But…”

“Is your hubby Gungnir too?”

“No,” the other shook her head. “Not at all.”

“Okay, let’s talk Gungnir then. Are you even aware of what shit they’re teaching the next generation? Like, I KNOW the Magi ain’t perfect and we got problems up to our necks. But you really want a violent ideology to ruin your son’s future?”

Frisk interjected: “Rock-throwing is not justice.” They then munched on another piece of potato.

For a moment, Cenna could see Linda struggling, her ethics in conflict. But she was a strong woman in her own right.

Linda rebutted without further delay: “The police should have known better than to enlist the help of witchcraft. Remember that huge industrial fire ten years ago? Experiments gone wrong. Those were Magi facilities!”

“You think they blew up for no goddamn reason?! PERSONA was the one who ordered it!”

“What the hell is a ‘Persona’?”

“You joined his fucking cult without even knowing?!?”

Jonah had to step in to prevent the two hot-headed women from starting a catfight.

“Ladies, please!” he said, “This is not the place to hurl accusations at each other.”

Now Cenna felt bad about losing her temper. She could act cool with so many others. But, Linda? She had the unique ability to push all the wrong buttons.

The smallest Crimson Keeper raised their hand. “Mister Jonah, I’d like to ask Miss Linda some
questions.”

“Oh? Sure. Go ahead.”

After everyone settled down proper, Frisk kept their focus square on Linda.

“Ma’am, are you worried that I’m too young to be an ambassador?”

“Of course,” the other replied. “Any adult would be concerned. If you’re not old enough to vote, you shouldn’t be meddling with politics.”

“I agree.”

The response caught Linda off-guard.

Cenna smirked; the kid had grown since they entered the Crimson Hall.

She then asked: “Then, why did you go through with this big Magus scheme?”

Frisk answered: “Passing the Trial opens many doors for negotiation. I’m not sure what else a Crimson Keeper can do, but at least it’s a start.”

“Did they force you to their side?”

“Hmm… More like they’re making sure I’m taking my claims seriously. I did free the monsters. So, they’re my responsibility.”

Linda remained skeptical.

“Is that true? Your community didn’t even know you’re a boy or a girl!”

“Why is that a problem?” said Frisk.

“If you can’t even be honest about your own body, how can anyone trust you with the lives of others? Not just monsters mind you. We’re talking about humans too.”

The kid smiled. “Oh, that? Well. It’s a two-part reason. First, there are lots of scammers out there. Those who guess wrong would filter themselves out of the pool. Less paperwork is always good, right?”

“That…!” Linda paused for a moment. “That’s actually very smart. Did you come up with the idea by yourself?”

Frisk nodded twice. “As for the second reason, it’s for fun.”

“For… fun?”

“Yup. The Ebott Monsters love puzzles, jokes, and surprises. I’m keeping my real gender under wraps as a ‘once in a lifetime’ long-running gag. For their enjoyment, of course.”

“Once my body starts changing, I can’t hide it anymore. That’s when I’ll make the official reveal.”

“What if you remain as androgynous as you are now?” asked Linda.

Frisk replied, “That won’t change my decision. It’d be great for Halloween, though. Imagine all the costumes I could try.”
“So… it has nothing to do with inner uncertainty?”

“Nope.”

Cenna could see the sheer sense of contemplation on her brows. That woman thought long and hard.

_Huh. So that’s her main concern?_

_I can’t say it was totally unreasonable either…_

The human mother proceeded to ask a few more questions. Mostly mundane and down to earth.

“The monsters. They fed you well? Reminded you to drink plenty of water?”

Frisk nodded.

“Do you have friends?”

“Lots,” they smiled. “Both kids and adults.”

“What about exercise? Playtime? Did you finish your homework?”

“Um.” Frisk scratched their cheek. “I haven’t been able to think about school or anything else with all the back-to-back crises. But don’t worry, I’ll try to catch up.”

“Your new mother… does she love you?”

“Like her own child. Oh, and don’t forget about my new dad too. I admit the family situation is a bit complicated, but he will do whatever it takes to protect me.”

Linda struggled. Brows, furrowed. Muscles, tensed. Her lips moved a few times, but there were no words.

In the end she gave up. She pushed back the chair and stood up.

“I admit defeat. Frisk is in good hands. Better than most parents in the world, to be honest.”

Cenna pinched herself. “Wait. …Is this for real?”

“Yes. I’m surrendering custody to you. Case closed. Apologies for the inconvenience.”

The human mother left in a hurry. Left her cup of water untouched.

“H-hey! Hold up!” said Cenna.

_Something’s going on. I gotta talk to her._

After taking a quick swig of own drink, she chased after the other woman.

Linda didn’t stop walking.

“That was abrupt as heck!” the Magus pointed out, yelling. “’Mon lady, I know there’s something else going behind the scenes.”

Still not slowing down. Cenna continued her pursuit.

“Is this Gungnir related? My intel ain’t complete, but I know about the worldwide factions.”
Linda remained quiet.

Cenna took a deep breath. “You gotta leave the group now, Linda! Whatever happened at the Magus HQ today is the work of organized militants. You can’t afford to get caught up in that. Not as a mom.”

‘Not as a mom’.

Linda stopped dead in her tracks.

“‘He’ told me to let Frisk go.”

“He?”

“…The new boss. A foreigner.”

_Oh crap, don’t tell me it’s too late?_

“Which branch?” Cenna asked.

“I… I’m too far down the ranks to know much.” Linda admitted. “But, he took over the network after the monsters emerged from the mountains. Or rather, he tried to. Not everyone wants him.”

“Ever seen his face? Even a photo is fine.”

She shook her head. “I have not. But, I received a voice clip. It… it didn’t feel right to delete it.”

Linda gave the Vanquisher her phone. “Don’t rat me out.”

“No probs.”

Cenna activated the recording and listened it for herself.

_This accent…!_

“That man is an Aratet, Linda.”

_He’s a true Gungnir._

_A direct descendant of the Legendary Hero!_

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Congar for the red giant segment. His initial proposal was a lot more coherent. But, it didn't fit Anise's state of distress so I had to spaz it.

Here's the original text of inspiration:
"Do I have to entertain them, or do they just have to be alive when you get back?"
"Because one is gonna cost a lot more than the other."
"If you'd imagine a football as the cost of keeping them alive. The Sun would then be a good estimate of entertaining them. Wait! Wait! I wasn't finished. The Sun after it's gone into Red Giant status."
Monday Visitations

Chapter Notes

Early post! Or late. That, I'll leave it up to you to decide :P

Just to note that there will not be a new chapter this weekend because it's... Chinese New Year! I won't be posting any new content this Sunday.

In the meantime, please enjoy. See you guys the next round.

Phew. You managed to handle that pretty well. Resolving the custody case was a huge relief on your shoulders.

…You feel sorry for anyone who had to battle these in a span of years. If not decades.

Jonah looked at you with a smile. You asked if there’s something on your face.

“Oh, no. It’s… how do I put this? The way you carry yourself is different compared to the last time we met.”

A lot happened in the past weeks.

“I can imagine,” he said. “Actually, no. I can’t.”

Huh?

“I’ve heard about Crimson Keepers before. I know they exist, but I don’t know much else about them. They seem to keep their pre-elected jobs.”

“But stories say they always come out of the exam as a different person. For better, or for worse.”

Lowering his voice, he asked: “Is it true that you can die in the Trial?”


“H-hey, I’m not looking for tabloid material.”

Can you tell him about your mad adventure in the Crimson Hall? Nah. Not a good idea. You now understand why the Magi were so secretive.

So you told him that it’s a ridiculously tough exam that makes you question your life choices.

Jonah nodded slowly.

You also added that death is only an issue if the applicant screws up super, super bad. Like crashing your car into the wall at full speed. Without seatbelts. That will kill anyone.

Jonah chuckled at your example. “I see. Well, I guess he’s not as merciless as I thought.”

Who?
“Judge Thyme.”

Ah. You tell him that Papyrus coined the best nickname: Tsunderjudge.

“Soon-der wha?”

‘Tsundere’. It’s a term for a person who’s cold on the outside, warm in the inside. So, add ‘Judge’ and you get ‘Tsunderjudge’.

Insert awkward staring moment here.

“S-sorry,” he said. “I find the Dreemurr’s fire display more believable than him being, uh, whatever term you used.”

That’s fine. You bet that he won’t show the soft side to anyone but those closest to him.

Jonah’s phone rang. He answered it.

“Yes Miss Wan-- Caraway? …Oh. Alright. See you soon.” The call ended there.

What happened?

“Oh, nothing bad. Just that your sister was caught breaking some hospital rules. Did the doctor say you could leave your ward?”

You showed Jonah the ‘OK’ sign. You’re free to take a walk as long there’s a trusted adult.

“I better escort you to your sister’s then.”

Cenna’s ward was situated far away from the monster crew. Hmm, it’s going to be a long way back.

When you reached her bed, you walked into a scene right out of an anime: and angry nurse and an apologetic patient.

“Miss Caraway! You can’t just get up and run without permission! What if you rip open your wound?”

“Sorry, Loris. But, ol’ Mez was the one who arranged the meeting.”

“My word…” The nurse groaned. “He can be hardcore for all he wants, but he can’t force his bad habits onto you.”

“Now you understand why I get soooo mad at him sometimes.”

You waved and said ‘hi?’. Yes, with a question mark at the end. It’s a necessary interruption.

Cenna beamed at your presence. “Yo, Frisky! Thanks for bringing them here, Mister Mackenzie. At least I won’t be bored out of my mind.”

“No problem,” he said. “I’ll let you two catch up. Tomorrow, I’ll come back to finalize the papers.”

And there he went.

With a warm smile, the nurse greeted you. “Hello there! Stretching your legs?”

Yup!
“My, my, you’re so much cuter in person.”

The command ‘FLIRT’ flashed by your mental faculties, but you dunked it in the trash.

You have a position to maintain now. No random hits on middle-aged nurses please. And definitely not the doctors too!

* * *

It’s after a second examination. This time, you managed to convince the doctor to take Cenna out for a walk. Or a ride rather, since she’s on a wheelchair.

“Dayum, Frisky. Did you roll a nat 20 on your Charisma check or something?”

Maybe. Besides, the staff trust you to call for help if anything happens.

“I bet the perks of being a Crimson Keeper helped ya back there.”

Is it really such a big deal?

“Ahuh. You can say thanks to the Judge before Mez for that. After the Great Ebott Razing, he made the Magus Association public. Official. Government sanctioned.”

Oh? What was his name?

“James Aran Pashowar. A real good guy. I heard from Lucy that he first unlocked his Mark from a freak workplace accident.”

Workplace accident…?

Wait, he had a REAL JOB before becoming a Supreme Judge?!

“Ahuh. He was an architect. The Spire? His handiwork.”

Whoa. That’s quite a career leap.

Hey, what about your bio Mom and Dad? Cenna said only people who inherit the family magic can keep the special name. But, you remembered that Dad got all the wrong skills.

Cenna corrected you with a cool fingergun pose. “Bzzt! Wrong skills for combat only, to be specific. Papa was a support Vanquisher: the dude behind the DEMON busting tools.”

So how did he pass the combat-side down?

“With the help of books and battle-savvy friends. Then I had the rest of the skills drilled into me at school. It’s not that he knew zilch. He had all the theories. Just sucked at physical combat.”

“Mind you, I don’t plan on taking it to the grave. Lucy helped me compile everything. If you didn’t wanna continue the tradition, I’d pass it to the Magus Association. Let ‘em decide who to teach.”

What if you do?

“Then, you decide. Keep it to yourself, or make it open source. Up to ya.”
Tough choice…

“Hey, you could always pick up Mama’s side.” Cenna wrote a bunch of strokes in the air. “Crunch them numbers and draw those blueprints. The world can never have enough science.”

With your terribad math?! No way!

“Oi oi oi, where did all that ‘determination’ go?” she teased. “If you’re serious, you could always ask Lucy or Goopdoc to drill that stuff into your brain.”

Yeah, but you’d like to keep your options open. At the moment, everything seemed to point towards the path of law and diplomacy.

Speaking of past careers, what about the Tsunderjudge? He’s quite a mystery. Not much data about him online either. What was his normal job before he became a badass?

“Wrong question there, Frisky.” She waved her finger. “You should have asked: ‘Did the badass ever get a normal job?’ The answer is both yes and no.”

How so?

“Would you believe me if I told you that he was once a part-time bartender? Not only that. He was an eSports champ! He participated in international competitions for some ultra-hard VR shooter game. But under a different identity. Good luck trying to get him to confess.”

Challenge accepted! He’s gonna be the benchmark for your Charisma dice rolls.

“Hah! That’s the spirit. I gotta warn ya though: he’s got mad resist against speech skills.”

You expected nothing less.

Still, it made you curious. Maybe Cenna can tell you more? You thus asked if he aspired to be a pro-gamer.

“Nawh. Unsustainable, he said. Like all sports, you can’t really keep up past your mid-twenties. That’s how he ended up in an accountancy course. The War of the Red Victory happened in the middle of his studies, so he never finished his cert.”

…The thought of Tsunderjudge as an accountant sent chills down your spine. No fraud or unbalanced numbers will ever escape his prying eyes.

Along the way you wheelchaired past a corridor lined with a host of extra beds. There were many patients on them, both young and old.

“Huh, that’s the burn department.” Cenna commented. “We’re not going there?”

Nope. The monsters were placed in a separate ward, reserved for their kind.

“Mez is being tight on security, as usual.”

No kidding. The skelly lady also confiscated everyone’s belongings, phones included. For safety, she said. Don’t want funny characters to steal anything during treatment after all.

“Heh. No wonder the chatroom’s so dead.”

“Speaking of security…” your sister groaned out loud. “I can’t believe I shared Linda my phone
number! What was I thinking?"

She did?!

“Yeaaaaah don’t ask me how, Frisky. Just. Don’t. It’s like, some weird phenomenon from the other end of the multiverse.”

You chuckled. Maybe it wasn’t such a bad idea. It’s always better to make new friends than to keep old enemies.

Hmm… there’s the matter with your ex-schoolmates. You didn’t make any contact with them since you left the Underground. A reunion is going to be awkward.

“When in doubt, tell them you hit your cute lil’ head too hard. That ain’t a lie there!”

Heh. You thought of the same.

* * *

After a long walk, the two of you arrived at Undyne’s ward.

Cenna couldn’t stop laughing. “Ahaa my goodness! S-sorry Captain, but. Hahahahaha! You’re as red as a lobster!”

That said it all. Undyne, the most epic suplexing badass of Mount Ebott, had become a half-baked fish wearing an oxygen mask.

Your lips curled weird.

“Aw c’mon! Cut me a break,” Undyne grumbled. She’s not happy about her predicament either.

Okay, okay. How did the redness happen? Is it serious?

“Nah, punk. I’m fine. The doc said that I’m just having the fish-scale version of a delayed sunburn. Give it a few days and it’ll flake off on its own.”

“I did expose myself to some pretty intense heat. They counted me lucky that I didn’t get the second or third degree stuff.”

And the mask?

“They’re worried that the hot smoke might damage my lungs. So, I gotta breathe in these special gasses for 24 hours.”

Cenna said: “Geez, Monster get the healing part easy. Humans have a much, much harder time with all the infections and whatnot. Real painful. Real slow.”

You agree.

“Huh, really?” Undyne mused out loud. “Alphys would love this info. We do need to build a hospital back in town.”
The fish sighed, wistful. “I wish she’s by my side now. Didn’t hear anything from her since yesterday.”

And then there was that flare of intense irritation. The bed is vibrating together with her.

“Not to mention it’s so goshdam BORING without my phone! I can’t even tell what time it is!!! What kind of stupid precaution is that???”

“Eh? You didn’t call your girlfriend?” exclaimed Cenna. “You should have had the time right after you stepped out of that place.”

Undyne shook her head. “NO!!! That lady skelly took all of our stuff right away! We had a chopper lift us straight to the hospital! Gaaaah!”

“Where’s everyone else?” asked Cenna. You could hear the alarm in her voice.

The Captain turned somber. “It’s more or less the monster version of an ICU. I know I flipped out, but I appreciated the urgency. The only non-critical patients were me, the punk, Gerson, and that Garamond guy. Everyone else got floored.”

You told your sister that the Magi brought in a number space-tech looking metal pods. Lady Lucidia did the levitation transport.

“Shit…” she muttered. “That ain’t stellar news. No wonder the glambot told me to take it easy.”

You’re glad that Mettaton had stayed back in the real world. Otherwise, he might end up with more than just a busted mecha.

“I’m sure they’re all fine,” Undyne noted, “We’re a strong bunch!”

* * *

Alphys, Doctor Gaster, and Napstablook arrived at the hospital lobby.

She ran straight to you and tried to talk, but she’s out of breath.

Breathe, Alphys. Breathe.

Cenna tilted her head. “Should we call for some assistance?”

“I’m fine.” Alphys wheezed. “I just… you know…”

You noticed the security staff checking the contents of a cardboard box.

The scaly scientist ran back. “Oh! Please be careful with Mettaton’s body!”

So that’s where it went. That also explains why he was a pink ghost this morning. Not that he’d let anyone in public see him in that state, oh no. He’s actually quite shy about it.

You messaged Mettaton to let him know what happened.

That was probably a bad idea. He zoomed straight to his mecha and popped out of the box.
One moment of quelling frightened security guards later…

…and Mettaton returned to the public eye in classic box form.

“My beeeeeeautiful body~~~~!” he said. “Spic and span, in tip-top shape!”

Blookie began to cry. “…Oooh… You’re okay!…… Everything was so scary……. I thought……. I thought…….”

“I’m so, so sorry to worry you, my dearest cousin.” His bendy arms hugged the ghost.

“…Thanks Mettaton… I’m glad…”

Yep. Those are tears of relief and joy.

“Daww,” said Cenna. “That’s sweet.”

Doctor Gaster approached you. “Child of Mercy--”

‘Frisk’ will do.

“Alright. Frisk. Do you know where the King and Queen are located? Grillby? Papyrus? Sans? Are they alright?”

You frowned. They’re still undergoing intensive treatment.

“Egads!”

The hands of the skeleparents began to examine you.

“Ah… parents will always be parents,” said Gaster. “They wonder if you’re injured.”

Physically fine. But tired. It’s almost lunch and you had yet to feel hungry.

Cenna poked you. “Well Frisky, you did have some fries just two hours ago.”

Good point.

You led the visitors to Undyne’s ward.

Alphys almost cried when she saw the lobster-red. “Ohmygosh, what happened to you? D-does it hurt???”

Her strong girlfriend soothed her. “It’s just a bad sunburn. I’m fine, Al. What about you?”

“I’m. I’m just. Well. A ball of anxiety and happiness.”

“What about the town?”

“W-we dispelled the fog! And closed a weird gate of spacetime nature, I think? H-here! I think this will explain everything.”

Everyone huddled around Alphys’ tablet. In it, was a live recording of what transpired in town.

So THAT is where those huge hands came from! Can Goopdoc use any more of that ‘handy’ magic?”
“It’s not as useful as it looks,” he explained. “They’re not autonomous. With every extra hand summoned, I must juggle my conscious attention between them. I can only multitask so much.”

But, he has Roman and Helvetica now. They could ‘handle’ the rest.

For that next-level punnage, the left arm raised for a high-five. You answered it with glee.

The right arm meanwhile planted her own palm to Doctor Gaster’s face.

“Bad puns aside… you’re right. I should cooperate with the friends in me. Not overpower them as I had done for so long.”

* * *

You had to go back to Cenna’s ward for both your lunches and more examinations. The doctors checked up on you too. Might as well.

Health status: all green!

Alphys, Mettaton, and Napstablook stayed with Undyne while Doctor Gaster followed you. That man didn’t want to be an awkward lamppost.

…And also, Cenna’s SOUL became an interesting study of his. He’s been examining it for a long time, both in bird and non-bird form.

He wanted to do some experiments, but you had received another alert from Mettaton.

Mom, Dad, and Grillby arrived in Undyne’s ward!

Once Cenna was back on her wheelchair, it’s time to hurry. Dang. You’re getting quite a workout today. And you’re supposed to be resting.

At least now you had Doctor Gaster’s help: his floating hands did the pushing work for you.

Upon arrival, you noticed Lady Lucidia’s presence. She’s beautiful and stately, though she hid her skeleton identity behind a human-like porcelain mask.

Now that she’s up close, you noticed that her long, luxurious hair outright defies gravity. The ends of the massive curls point upwards. Combined with her elegant fashion choice, it gave the impression that she’s always floating.

Undyne was out of bed too.

“Oh, you’re here.” said Lady Lucidia. “Right on time.”

That’s good. Is everyone okay?

“They’re stable. The worst had passed.”

You heard Mom groan from her bed. You rushed to her side.

“Frisk…?” she muttered.
Yes, Mom. You’re here. How does she feel?

Mom squeezed her eyes. “…Like a terrible hangover… Oh, the nausea. It’s sickening.”

Dad begin to stir. Everyone shifted their attention to him.

“Asgore?” asked Alphys.

“Oh dear…” he replied. “Golly. That. Was quite a ‘blast’ from the past.”

Mom chuckled. “Haha… we made a ‘big bang’ alright. Real explosive ‘fire works’.”

Puns?! Now?!?

Alphys tapped her claws together. “I think it’s good news? They’re well enough to crack jokes.”

Guess so…

Lady Lucidia commented: “A lively sense of humour is indeed a good sign. King Asgore and Queen Toriel had experienced great trauma on their Psychia.”

She then asked, “Do you know why monsters are weak to killing intent?”

You don’t actually. You hoped to find a more concrete answer from your older friends. They shrugged back.

“Dunno,” said Undyne. “I never thought much about it.”

“I had read about this weakness in our records,” Alphys added. “But none explained the details in a scientific manner.”

Everyone turned their heads towards Doctor Gaster: the man who should know all the details.

Except, he too shook and shrugged. “I’m afraid the knowledge I have pales compared to the Surface. Lady Lucidia, would you kindly enlighten us?”

Uh. Are you supposed to believe that? The man got shattered across space and time, for goodness sake!

Nevertheless… you kept your opinions to yourself. The conversation resumed.

Lucidia explained: “A monster is made up of magic-based substrate: Dust. Our very lifeforce is what holds our bodies together. In other words, we are the physical manifestations of our Psychia.”

Le gasp. If that’s the case, monsters are practically walking SOULS. That’s why you had 20 HP while some monsters had… tens of thousands?

“Accurate.” Lady Lucidia seemed flustered for a second. “I-I mean, yes. You’re right. Humans have miniscule lifeforce in comparison. However, they’re insulated by organic matter. Their Psychia too has much better defenses because of their Determination. Among the magic-kind, only Boss Monsters have similar levels. Enough to make a Psychia linger after death.”

“And that is also the root of the issue: Determination has the unique property of disrupting a monster’s structural integrity. When projected as an ‘aura’, it easily overpowers the afflicted monster’s will. This is what makes humans ‘strong’ in your lorebooks.”
Showing Mom and Dad, she continued onward to the next part of her report.

“While King Asgore and Queen Toriel’s true bodies suffered no physical damage, their Psychia still reeled from the experience of ‘death’. My treatment thus concentrated on stabilizing the resulting physiological shock.”

“This concludes my explanation.” She ended the whole thing with a graceful curtsey.

Everyone uttered a long ‘oooh’ in unison, complete with a slow nod… all at the same time.

“W-what about Grillby?” Alphys motioned her hand to his bed.

“Oh, that poor knight. Has he ever experienced true combat before?”

Doctor Gaster replied: “No. Yes. Not quite. I…”

Then he went silent. He’s not confused. More… guilty? Remorseful?

Undyne shrugged. “Other than training and some cheeky swindling monsters, I don’t think so? Frisk was our first real threat in ages, and that says something.”

Was that ‘threat’ supposed to be ‘wimpy overblown panic’ or ‘walking dust-generating machine’? Both happened, Undyne.

“Hey, I dunno anything about YOU going crazy!” she exclaimed. “Of course I mean this timeline. The ‘wimpy overblown panic’ one.”

Okay, noted.

You noticed that Lady Lucidia squeezed her gloved hands together.

“I see…” she said, “Sir Grillenn defended me against the Gungnir force. Admirable, more so for his first true battle.”

Mettaton got excited. “Oh YES! I caught the tail end of that skirmish! A spectacle of a lifetime, I’d say! …And hope. Such exciting battles are too gruelling for repeat rehearsals.”

Lucidia nodded to him. “He joined your rescue efforts soon after, with nary a moment to rest. Then, there was the Limit Break without the assistance of a power armour.”

“In a nutshell: Sir Grillen had overextended himself in both realms. He was at the brink of a total exhaustion. I’m thankful that the Intensive Recovery Pod restored his vitals to a hundred percent.”

…but, Grillby burned himself out. Pun not intended. It doesn’t look like he’ll wake up soon.

Your ears then picked an abrupt door entry. You turned around expecting to see Papyrus.

…Except, it was the Tsunderjudge.

You and Cenna tilted your heads. He looks vivid yet exhausted at the same time. His hair is pretty damp too.

Fresh from the shower?

“Ahhh, Frisky,” Cenna agreed. “Fresh from the shower. That means he just woke up. What time did you sleep, old man?”
In all his tsuntsun, Mezil huffed at the question. “Not important.”

“That means 11 in the morning.”

“Judge Caraway, this is not the time for guessing games.”

“Har? You’re not here for a visitation?”

“No.”

That’s right. There’s always this sense of purpose in the old man’s actions. You thus ran up to him and asked what he’s up to now.

“To settle unfinished business,” he said.

A squad from the armed forces marched into the room upon that declaration. They lined up behind the Tsunderjudge, guns at the ready.

A cold sweat rolled off the side of your forehead. The severity made you realize that the demeanor of the man you fought in the Crimson Hall still existed.

His ‘intensity’ never changed or wavered. It had just been deflected toward different matters.

“Monsters of Ebott. The coroner in the case of the missing Six Children has discovered new information. The following suspects will therefore be arrested and detained for further investigation:”


Everyone was shocked over the last two names. If he stopped at Goopdoc, you wouldn’t even get half the reaction.

Oh no. With that statement, the first person who would flip out is--

“What?!! We risked our LIVES and this is how you repay us?!”

Yes. As you thought, the most outraged would be Undyne.

Mezil responded: “Worry not, everyone will continue to receive the best medical care us Magi can offer. However, none may leave this ward.”

That almost exploded into a magic battle. You had to jump in to calm down your fish friend.

“Whoa whoa whoa Captain!” said Cenna. “It’s all SOP. Standard operating procedure. It ain’t a personal insult or betrayal or antagonizing or whatever. Mez just blows at his delivery. As usual.”

Besides, having soldiers around will protect the monsters from reckless humans too.

Dad pushed himself up to sit in his bed. Undyne ignored the sting of her burns and helped him.

“Captain…” he said with a weak smile. “…Let the good man do his job. This was bound to happen sooner or later anyway. It’s long overdue.”

After some deep, extremely audible breaths… she cooled herself. “Fine. I trust you guys. But if they try to do anything funny, I’m gonna rain them a new one!”

Another small crisis averted. But it’s not over yet. In fact, it’s only now beginning.
With the sternest of stern glares, the Tsunderjudge ordered: “Crimson Keeper Frisk, follow me. Bring Judge Caraway along with you.”

Gulp. Monday is not even done and you’re already in hot water.
Where is the Tsunderjudge taking us?

Cenna sighed. “I bet he’s gonna use one of his tricks again.”

Tricks? You wondered if he’s someone like Sans. What are his colours anyway?

“Red, Yellow, Cyan. But, don’t let the similarities fool ya. Expect zero jokes from the old man. I think I can count the number of times he made me laugh with my ten fingers.”

Mezil waved his cane once without looking back. “I’m not so morbid that I’m devoid of humour. Not my fault my jokes are not to your taste.”

“It’s to nobody’s taste!”

“False. My wife appreciates them.”

“I thought she facepalms half the time or something.”

Maybe he’s right, Cenna. Papyrus screams about Sans’ routines all the time. But, he’s popular enough to have his own timeslot with MTT.

Cenna sighed harder. “You have to see it to get it, Frisky.”

The Tsunderjudge stopped in front of a janitor’s closet.

…We’re really going to have a meeting in a room of dirty mops and cleaning agent?

“Watch,” he so said.

First, he showed you the contents. It’s about as janitorial as you’d expect: brooms, mops, and assorted other trash-collecting dirt-busting tools.

Then he planted his fancy butterfly Mark on the door.

Opened again and it became… a fancy gothic-themed living room.

Oh my god he has the taste of a real vampire.

“Tell me about it, Frisky.”

Mister Tsundervamp, what’s with choosing a janitor’s closet for a Spirit Gate?

In his no nonsense tone and the straightest of faces, he replied: “We have a cleanup to do. Starting with you.”

……………………………

Your sister is right.
This wasn’t funny at all!

It’s scary as fuck!!! How is this considered humour?!?!

“Told ya,” said Cenna.
Why is his mark not a bat?? Why a butterfly????

There are so many levels of wrong with this!

Mezil huffed. “There IS such a thing as a vampire butterfly.”

That’s not the point!

He tapped his cane on the ground, irritated by your outbursts. “Why are you a star and not a sun? In scientific terms they’re the exact same thing. Yet their symbolism is different.”

“I’m a butterfly and not a bat for a reason. Go ask Mettaton if you want to know more. That is, if he still remembers.”

You hoped that he does.

Mezil stepped into the otherworldly mansion and beckoned you to follow. “Come in. I’ve set it so that time will freeze once the door shuts.”

Okay…

His initial presentation added a humongous heaping of wariness to your decision-making. But, your sister assured you that she’ll be there for you if anything happens.

You thus pushed the wheelchair into the strange room.

The door vanished behind your back. There goes your exit out into the living world.

“What welcome to my Hub,” said Mezil. “This is where I rest, strategize, and LOAD my checkpoints.”

Cool. This is a ton more decorative than your ‘Main Menu’.

“That’s what you call it?”

Yup.

You walked about, awed by the sheer detail of this ‘vampire’s estate’ outside of time.

The floor tiles looked like real marble. You jumped a few times to test their hardness, and also the kind of sound they produce. Each detail screamed legit ‘metamorphic stone’ to you. The support pillars were the same way, plus carved reliefs to add further elegance to the design.

Then there were the rooms. Lots and lots of rooms.

There’s a ballroom.
A kitchen and a dining area.
A bath, with both a pool and a shower.
A garden.
An entire arcade?! Computers?!
All the latest consoles and their games?!

You sparkled from anticipation. Could you try them? Yes? Pretty please?

Cenna grabbed your hand. She squeezed it tight, warning: “Frisky, pay attention. Mez won’t invite you here for a simple hangout.”
“That’s correct, Judge Caraway.” He said, “It appears you’ve also noticed that I kept you in your injured state. With your hot-blooded attitude, I must take precautions whenever I can.”

A gun materialized in his left hand. He turned around and pointed it straight towards your face.

W-wha…
What’s going on?

The room’s temperature dropped a few degrees. You’re not sure if that’s literal or figurative anymore.

Mezil Thyme glared at you, hard. “Answer the truth. Did you use an HVM?”

Your jaw dropped. What in the blazes is an HVM?!

That reaction was enough to make him shift his attention. “Tsk. Judge Caraway, you didn’t tell them anything about the Levels of Volition?”

Cenna crossed her arms. “Oi, that happens AFTER the Trial. Did you forget or what?”

“Hmph. Fine. I’ll make it simpler. What exactly did Frisk command to ‘destroy’? The machine, or their opponent’s will to live?”

Huh what wha?

You told Mezil that you planted your Mark on the Trap Harvester itself. The electronics. The object. Nothing to do with other people’s DT.

Once that went kaboom, the rest of the Seraph System poofed along with it. Also Persona wouldn’t have anything to left to steal!

“Are you absolutely certain you didn’t think of damning the source?”

You have no clue what he’s trying to say. Is there anything wrong with smashing the battery?

Cenna pointed to your confused face. “See Mez? Look at this. This is the face of innocence. That Mark was absolutely NOT an HVM at all! I’m the one with Demontology IV here and that’s my expert verdict.”

A few tensed seconds later, Mezil dispelled the gun. You could see his body language relax.

“Looks like I can still call you a Crimson Keeper,” he said. “I thought I had to execute you as a Fallen right here.”

B-but this is not the Crimson Hall!

“That is but a fancy stage. Living Victories can unleash their full potential anywhere in The Void. That’s how Hubs exist in the first place.”

“Come back to the lounge with me.”

As you wheeled Cenna along, she continued her coarse objection. “Seriously Mez, what the fuck was that for? You already announced Frisky’s election to the world and you pull that gun shit?”

“It’s more of a test. Also, a confirmation. Yesterday, I couldn’t finish the ceremony proper due Sans Serif’s interference.”
Cenna tried to look at you from her seat. “How did Mez Claim ya anyway? Was it by force? Or you volunteered?”

Um, he didn’t do anything? Everyone rushed out for the hospital.

Mezil stopped midway. “Allow me to rectify that.”

He reached a hand over your head and… patted you. It’s much gentler than you expected.

Your chest flashed red. A crimson butterfly emerged, fluttering around in a circle before flying upwards towards Void’s black sky.

Hey… There’s no ceiling at all!

Here you thought that the raw blackness was another choice of interior design.

“Hmm, you can’t see anything either?” Mezil remarked.

Yup. But you know there’s more than it meets the eye.

Sans said that he saw an entire map of rainbow pathways. What about Papyrus and Lady Lucidia?

“Papyrus described them as fireflies. On the other hand, my wife sees them floating crystal lanterns.”

Wow, it’s different for each Seer?

“Only if they can perceive it to begin with. For example, Doctor Gaster saw nothing but darkness. His colours were unfit for the job.”

Mezil sure knows a lot about the skelepeople.

“Of course. Only those with the Fire of Humanity have the potential to become Chronographers. Each Supreme Judge had at least one Chronographer as a partner. Otherwise the sheer amount of logistics becomes overwhelming.”

“Crimson Keepers exist for a similar reason.” he said. “The Claimed are sorted into three main categories to declare their helpfulness. I presume you’re not familiar with the terminology?”

Not really…

You heard some of it here and there. But, you don’t know what they mean.

“I’ll start from the lowest. Category 3: The Fallen. DEMONS. The scum of the earth. The verdict for any Living Victory that succumbs to corruption is death: too powerful to be kept alive. Not even Supreme Judges are exempt from this.”

“Category 2: The Suppressed. You were once at this level. They’re those drained to the point where they can no longer cast a Mark unless I allow it. It sounds ghastly, but under normal circumstances this limit doesn’t affect their daily lives.”

“Then there’s the Crimson Keepers, Category 1: Living Victories who retain their Marks, but share their power with the Supreme Judge. They will have all their magic except for the Keys of Fate.”

“In the days of old, the Crimson Keepers ran Trials in the Supreme Judge’s stead. The reasons are many: minor illnesses, missions abroad, and so forth.”
Hmm… you understand. Before the modern era, it took days, weeks, months, or even years to travel from one place to another. Then there was that annoying language barrier. There’s no way one person can manage it all.

“You were at a precarious edge,” Mezil commented. “Zig-zagging between each of the three categories. It wasn’t until minutes ago that I knew where you stand.”

S-sorry about that. Um. You’re a growing kid after all.

Your attempt at being cheeky didn’t work out.

“Just watch your heart from now on.”

Okay. Uh, so… what is he going to be using your DT for anyway?

“Keeping The World and Persona in check. The incident had drained my reserves. It’ll take a while for the other butterflies to recover.”

“Once they have, we can discuss about the ownership of the Keys. That will take place in a later date.”

You went back to where you started. In your excitement, you didn’t notice that it had sofas and tea tables.

The Tsunderva-- Tsunderjudge settled down on the nearest seat. Even that casual action still retained a certain level of dignity.

You and Cenna sat on the opposite side. A holographic menu spawned before you, showing all the possible drinks and food the system could generate.

You flicked through the options.
And flicked.
And flicked.
And flicked some more.

Is it endless?!

“My wife and I appreciate good cuisine. Try the search function to narrow down your specifics.”

You immediately keyed in ‘Butterscotch Cinnamon Pie’.

Not found?!?!?!

“Odd. She did taste Queen Toriel’s famous pie. I suppose Lucidia didn’t have time to update her database.”

Disappointed, you pushed the screen aside.

“Not having anything?” Mezil asked.

Nope. All you really want is your mom’s star dish… and he doesn't have it.

“Very well. You can call it back anytime. How about you, Cenna?”

First name basis? Whoa. Now that’s ‘relaxed’.
She smirked. “Heh, you know my fav.”

Lo and behold, she ordered three cans of milk coffee. Not just any old cans either: they're of the most famous top-tier brand in the Far East!

“C’mon Frisky, try one.” She shifted it to you. “Back in the real world, you gotta pay quite a pretty penny for that.”

Thanks. Her positivity livened you up a tad.

You opened the can and took a sip.

…Dang, that’s good. It’s aromatic, not too sweet, and super duper refreshing. The perfect balance!

She tossed the second can to the old man. “YOU need to chillax big time.”

You watched it fly. Judging from that angle, there’s a 99% chance that it’s going to overshoot the grip of Mezil’s hand and hit his head.

And, Cenna already had the ‘oh crap’ look written all over her face. She KNEW she had messed up.

But the offending object just froze in mid air.

“Goodness,” said Mezil. “Can’t you just hand over the drink?”

Your sister clapped her hands together and bowed her head in apology. “S-sorry! I forgot I’m in the crap version of myself.”

“Lucky for me, this is my Hub. Therefore everything here is subjected to my will.”

Mezil plucked it out of suspension. You heard the pop of the seal, and the drinking ceremony continued as if nothing ever happened.

You wonder…

This Hub is his territory. In addition to that, non-living objects have no will to resist his time-bending powers.

…Can you still focus on Mezil and bring up the shop interface? Your view narrowed, and your most pressing questions appeared in your mind’s eye.

It worked!

He noticed your attempts right away. You can’t tell if he’s amused or not.

“Go on,” he said. “This is why we’re here after all.”

Man, he really has an attitude.

> HVM
> The Ocean Abomination
> Sans
> eSports League
> Tsundere

Okay Frisk. Choose carefully. Starting with the ‘eSports League’ topic might net you a smack on the
wrist and no real answer.

You’re not in the mood to jump straight into the big talks yet, so you picked the last option.

> Tsundere

You tell him that he wears the tsundereness on his sleeve. Is he like this 100% of the time?

Cenna laughed so hard, she strained her stitches. Oops.

As for the man named Mezil Thyme, he bit his lower lip. Huh. Interesting. He DOES have more emotions than the stone-cold serious-business mode!

“What’s wrong with you people? Even Papyrus…” he grumbled. “Am I that amusing to you?”

Yes.

“Nice to know that you’ve kept your childlike honesty. Here I wondered if it’s forever lost from Sans Serif’s bad influence. You’re both charmers. Not my favourite kind to deal with.”

“As for your question…” he continued. “This is not an act. I’ve always been the serious sort. Furthermore, I’m aware that it intimidates the majority.”

> Why won’t he lighten up?

“And pretend? I’m not an assassin. I’m a judge. The Supreme Judge even. Nothing detests me more than malicious fakers who put up pleasant fronts to hide their evil.”

He did mention that in the Trial. It’s the key to his Ascension.

How… did he not shoot himself in the foot over diplomacy missions? You’re sure that there are some incidents where he had to lie to survive.

Mezil Thyme didn’t reply. Or rather, he couldn’t.

You sensed there’s a big lock on his heart.

It doesn’t look like you’re making progress with this line of questioning.

So…

> HVM
> The Ocean Abomination
> Sans
> eSports League

Your options hovered over the eSports topic for a while…

Nah. It doesn’t seem appropriate.

> HVM

What exactly is an HVM? And why would that warrant a kill post-Trial?

“HVM stands for ‘High Volition Mark’,” he replied. “Marks come in three different levels of volitions depending on the following factors: the amount of Determination, the nature of the
command, and the intended target.”

“Would you agree that the more you force your will on a person, the more violent the nature of that imposition would be?”

Like, a pat versus a play-push versus an all-out-fighting-push?

“Yes. Simple, but effective imagery.”

“A Low Volition Mark is the least invasive and safest to use. The bulk of its effects concentrate on the Psychia. Or, SOUL as you are more familiar with.”

“The easiest and most useful example: memory-retention. It links the target’s consciousness to the caster’s linear sense of time. That’s how Papyrus became my proxy.”

Wow. That’s… a crazy simple answer! This is so cool!

“On the other hand, a Medium Volition Mark tempers with bodily functions. Blindness. Vertigo. Immobility. A host of other plays of the nerves and senses. They require more force than a mere preservation of states.”

So the stunt he pulled on Mom was an MVM.

“Correct. Now… a High Volition Mark, as the name states, is the most violating of them all.”

“The examples include the following: mind-alterations, mind control, body takeovers, forcing out secrets, imposition of identity, disabling of vital instinctive functions–”

Whoa whoa whoa! Hold it right there! He can’t just go spouting off a giant list out of the blue!

“Well then, Frisk. If you think the explanation alone is enough to solve your puzzle: Tell me, what do all those actions have in common?”

…Eh?
Another test--

For some reason, the image of Sans’ back popped up in your head.

That’s strange.

After your first release from the Underground, you were fixated on Asriel: to give him a happy ending.

Over the repeated timelines, you had grown tired, cynical. And you wanted to end it all. When you became bitter, Chara replaced him.

So what’s with Sans? What is he supposed to reflect?

You slapped your cheeks together. He’s right. You’ve come this far. Just because you passed a crisis, doesn’t mean you’ll stop learning.

There will always be more lessons for you. Slack off and another Sans might catch you off guard.

You know that Mezil is watching your every move. He’s trying to see if you have grown, or regressed to your pre-Trial state.
Hmm... each the actions Mezil listed had one thing in common.

You answered: they overpower another person’s well-being.

“You could say so,” he answered.

Bingo!

The Tsunderjudge’s tsun levels magnified. “To be more accurate, they’re the ultimate violation of life.”

Life? Is it any life...? Like, even using it on a plant will be counted as a HVM?

“No. That’s the sole reason why you escaped with the skin between your teeth. Although your Mark was filled to the brim with destructive intent, your aim was on an object without a mind. Therefore, it would be counted as an MVM at most.”

“But if you had applied that to The World, you would have bloodied your hands with the irreversible deaths of many.”

D-d-d-death...?! What?! Why?!

“Determination is Willpower. Imagine what would have happened if you had destroyed their will to live. That’s not counting the possibility of physical trauma, direct or otherwise. If an HVM is inflicted on the body, internal functions will fail. Inflicted on the mind, insanity follows soon after.”

“I have seen the effects first-hand. At best, the victims become vegetables on life support. At worst, their organs liquefy from the inside. Mind you, they’re still conscious in their last seconds.”

“...There’s simply no clean death from an HVM. At that point, a swift end is mercy in itself.”

You shivered. If you had done what Mezil feared... It’d make headlines in a bad, bad way.

Cenna patted you on the shoulder. “But you didn’t! Celebrate that, Frisky.”

Y-yeah...

You wonder, if a human Marked by an HVM is doomed to die, will the same happen to a monster?

Mezil said, “That depends.”

Depends?

> HVM on a Monster.

You’re afraid to select that option. Because, you had already seen one effect of Determination overdose.

They’re the Amalgamates. And those were the results of a direct injection without any specified commands.

You selected it anyway.

“Well, considering some of your residents... you’re aware of the liquefaction of monster matter, though merger will only happens if more than one monster is present. Otherwise they too will expire.”
You remember the ‘fallen down’ patients. And there’s the matter with Goopdoc and his friends.

Is that why Mezil arrested Doctor Alphys? You told him that it was an accident. She was trying to salvage monster SOULS.

W-what? Hang on a moment. What’s with the ominous glare?

“I knew the Amalgamation itself was an accident. The townsfolk were not secretive about it. But… none of them mentioned anything about the ‘salvaging’ of SOULS. They expected medical treatment, and that alone.”

You covered your mouth. Dammit! You mentioned too much!

Your first instinct was to turn to Cenna for help. But… she’s staring back at you with shocked horror.

“Doctor Alphys tried WHAT?!?” she asked. “Frisky, please tell me that you just misunderstood the whole deal! I thought flower boy was bad enough!”

You muttered a soft ‘Sorry’.

Your sister planted her face into both palms. “Aw maaaan… Now I can’t ignore her either. This is totally under Vanquisher jurisdiction.”

M-may you know why?

“Ever heard of ‘The Philosopher’s Stone’?”

You nodded. Of course! It captured the imagination of many fantasy based media since forever. It’s the stuff that transmutes lead to gold, right?

“What if I told ya the creation of such is banned on the Surface?”

Do you dare ask why?

Is… is it because of economics…?

Cenna grabbed your head and turned it towards Mezil. Nevermind the room temperature dropping any further now. It’s already at absolute zero. He’s that serious.

She then said: “All yours, old man. You’re the one who know this the most.”

Mezil planted his cane before him, mimicking the pose of a stalwart knight.

So he began:

“It takes a human and monster Psychia to ascend to godhood. That means access to at least two lives. But what if you’re in a situation where one side is impossible to obtain?”

“Boss Monsters are difficult to kill. Their Psychia, fragile. And in modern days, only few remain. Meanwhile humans have multiplied to the billions. It’s far easier for a monster to obtain a human’s than the reverse. A conundrum with only one answer: the creation of a tool to replace a Boss Monster’s power… As for the how?”

Mezil summoned a diagram of a complex yet familiar Arcanagram. It had… lots of points. Maybe over 40.
You began your count.

49 points.
The Soul Stealer.

“Correct. The heretics’ answer was to condense mass multitudes of lesser monsters into a united entity. The more, the better.”

So the Ocean Amalgamate is an enormous Philosopher’s Stone…

You… You felt sick.

This was a concept that should have stayed in anime. Why must it be real? The implications are horrific.

“Imagine how powerful an HVM is required to subdue a product made from the lives of millions. The bigger the Philosopher’s Stone, the more Determination must be overcome to plant the Mark. A Living Victory that strong might as well bear the Keys of Fate… and the Supreme Judge title.”

“That is the Magi’s darkest secret.”
A tensed atmosphere lingered over the monster’s ward. It’s been ten minutes since Mezil had requested Frisk in person.

Lucidia was sure he’s going to use the Hub. They don’t have much time to waste. The Magus Association estimated that they have about four to six weeks to prepare for the Ocean Battle. Beyond that and the risk of a containment breach increased exponentially.

She could tell Doctor Gaster had grown restless. He ignored the watchful eyes of the stationed soldiers, sliding around to check up on everyone’s health, be it mental or otherwise.

*His concerns seem to be split in equal parts, although I’m observing more proactivity surrounding Alphys.*

*He doesn’t have many students. But he’s very favourable to those on his good side.*

“Lady Lucidia?” asked Undyne, “Where’s Gerson? Haven’t seen him all day.”

She replied: “He’s guarding the Recovery Pods for the time being.”

“Protecting them from outside goons, or making sure that a certain dangerous skelly stays inside?”

“Both.”

“Oooooooooh.”

After making his round, the male Seer approached Lucidia directly. He doesn’t look happy. She sensed a spike of wariness from the soldiers.

*Such intensity.*

*I must stay calm…*

The man asked: “Why are you also detaining Doctor Alphys? If this has anything to do with the Six, I can assure you that she’s innocent!”

“She’s the most recent Royal Scientist, privy to the nation’s secrets.” Lucidia replied. “If there are no issues, we will release her after questioning.”

“Who will handle this… ‘interview’?”

“I will,” said Lucidia.

He narrowed his gaze, not shy to show his distrust. “I shall wait for Frisk.”
Off he went to comfort Alphys.

*That poor woman… Lucidia thought. She’s working herself up.*

Frisk then returned with Mezil and Cenna. All the monsters’ attention shifted to them.

With a serious yet peaceful tone, the new Crimson Keeper told everyone the following:

“The Magi want to confirm some details about the Dreemurr Nation’s tech. They will ask you a series of questions in a private location. Please answer them the best you can. No violence will happen. And I will escort you all to the interviewing chamber one by one.”

It’s clear to Lucidia that they’re trying to soften the blow. Flowey was already proof positive that dark undercurrents exist; it all comes down to intent.

Accidents, or by design?

The nature of their discoveries will tell much about their mindset.

* * *

“A-a-a-am I in trouble?” Alphys took a deep breath. “Nevermind. I know what I did was wrong. I just hoped that it stayed behind in the Underground.”

Lucidia averted her gaze for a moment. Her heart rocked between sympathy for the woman’s plight, and the irritation of not holding herself together.

*It’s like I’m looking at a mirror.*

A private voice message appeared on screen, written in Magi script. It read: ‘Do you need my help, Lucida?’

It’s from her husband.

She replied, ‘No, thank you. She’s not suited for your methods.’

Lucidia thus began: “…Discovery itself is not the problem, Doctor Alphys. It’s all about the procedure. From what I could gather with the help of Flowey and Chara, these are the details of your research.”

It would be the best if Frisk was never mentioned. Lucidia didn’t know how much lay behind an unspoken promise of mutual secrecy. She didn’t want to ruin any of their hard-earned friendship.

Perhaps beginning with Doctor Alphys was a poor choice. She may be the Royal Scientist… but this poor soul lacked the coldness for her monumental task.

The presentation of evidence had only just begun, and Alphys was already reduced to a crying mess of tears.

“I-I’m so sorry,” she sobbed. “All I really wanted was the lab! I-I-I didn’t want any of this to happen. I--”
Lucidia summoned the Hub’s interface. She tapped on a box of tissues and a bottle of fresh water.

She presented the items to Alphys. “Doctor, please.”

“T-thank you.” The lizard pulled out some tissues to blow her nose.

“You didn’t become the Royal Scientist to succeed Doctor Gaster?” asked Lucidia.

Alphys replied, “No. I… um… love tinkering with machines. I wanted to make those cool anime inventions come true. A-a-nd nobody but the Royal Scientist would have the funding or equipment for my dreams. So I teamed up with Mettaton to… to trick King Asgore.”

“How so?”

“I told him that I had created a brand new SOUL for my ‘robot’. It’s really just a ghost piloting a mecha.”

“I see,” said the lady. “That is a serious fraud. On the Surface, you would have been excommunicated. Perhaps jailed.”

“I-I know…” Doctor Alphys shrank harder. “I was really stupid. And desperate.”

“How was your case handled by the committee?”

“The committee’…?”

“Yes,” said Lucidia, “The scientific and medical community.”

Alphys scrunched her half-soaked tissue. “We don’t have them? Uh. I-I don’t think we even have a hospital?”

That statement shocked the Seer. “Where do you treat your sick and injured?”

“The Lab,” explained Alphys. “That’s why I have so many patients. Before that, we took the injured to King Asgore’s castle. He’s awesome with healing!”

“What about the sharing of knowledge?”

“School, I guess? I dunno. I-I’m sure Gaster had many assistants, but we didn’t have a committee.”

“To tell you the truth…” Alphys fidgeted. “Queen Toriel fired me. But, later on King Asgore reinstated my position so we could wire the Core’s power supply to town.”

With this level of haphazardness, it’s an amazement that their civilization progressed beyond the Middle Ages.

“Thank you for your time, Doctor Alphys. Please let Frisk know that I will speak to King Asgore one hour from now. I need some time to prepare.”

* * *

King Asgore had recovered much since he left the ICU. Still, fatigue weighed heavy on his head.
“Your Majesty, we can send you back to bed if you’re not ready.”

“No, it’s alright.” He said, “A King must perform his duties be it rain or shine.”

“Very well. But if your condition deteriorates, I will suspend the meeting.”

“Thank you for the kind consideration.”

Lucidia arranged the printed reports of her findings before him. “I’m alerted that you had issued various SOUL experiments.”

“Oh, yes.” He picked up one sheets for a read. He squeezed his eyes, trying hard to focus. “Golly. I think the print is too small for my current state.”

“Apologies. Please wait for a moment.”

She summoned a holographic screen with a bigger font-size. “Is this better?”

“Thank you.” Asgore nodded along as he scrolled through the text. “Hm… Yes. These are all of Doctor Alphys’ experiments.”

“I noticed that you had requested specific outcomes from her. Such as ‘Unleash the power of the SOUL’.”

Lucidia summoned another screen, this time with notes about Doctor Gaster. “On the other hand, you let Doctor Gaster drive his own research. This is the testimony I had obtained from Queen Toriel.”

“Gaster… oh dear. He’s a true visionary. All sorts of ideas poured out from his mind long before I had even considered them. I could never keep up.”

“His unwavering spirit single-handedly transformed the entire Underground. The Core wouldn’t have been possible without his study of the washed down technology.”

“On the other hand, Alphys needed some direction. She’s lost without a little nudge. But her resourcefulness makes up for the slow start.”

Interesting facts. Gaster did have an Orange Eye, which would contribute to his forward energy. Alphys seem to be more of a Yellow-Purple type.

“Could you explain the inspirations behind this experiment?” Lucidia pointed to the gathering plan. It was the one that spawned the Amalgamates.

“Certainly.”

The King readjusted his body in preparation for the long talk. He leaned forward. Head, lowered.

“We had Six SOULS by then,” he said. “Since we didn’t know when the last human would drop into The Underground, I thought it was best that we make do with what we have.”

“The populace had grown impatient. It’s been decades since my foolish announcement. Overpopulation added to the stress.”

“Overpopulation?” Lucidia noted the oddity. When she delved into Papyrus’ mind, New Home was devoid of people. It didn’t match King Asgore’s claim.
Asgore nodded. “A baby boom began about 200 years ago. It slowed down soon after, but we still had a crowding problem.”

The woman compared the statements to the Surface’s history. “That’s the Industrial Age. I believe Gaster later discovered that the pollution of water sources contributed to a reduced life expectancy. Was there an improvement in agriculture to counteract the problem?”

“Let me think…”

Asgore went silent as he recalled the centuries past. “Our farms started to fail. My wife quickly ordered the building of more watermills to produce magical energy. Meanwhile, I led many monsters on an expedition for new land.”

With a sheepish smile, he admitted: “We almost ran into a famine. But, we were blessed to avoid such a catastrophe.”

“I see…” Lucidia made a note. She will investigate the circumstances later. For now, the question about the Philosopher’s Stone took priority.

“King Asgore, you figured that it would be best to take advantage of the high birth-and-death rate to fill in a missing slot?”

“That’s correct,” he nodded. “I knew the rough ratio. So, I wondered if it’s possible to gather the remains passively.”

“Please clarify if I make a mistake. But, your plan depended only on the dead and dying?”

“Yes.”

“Live subjects were not considered?”

The king gasped. “Oh golly, no! Absolutely not!”

Lucidia was thankful that such a scheme had never crossed the good King’s mind.

On the other hand, there was that ‘other Seer’…

She continued, “I wished to enquire more about Flowey’s creation from Doctor Alphys. However, she was in great distress. Are you knowledgeable enough to explain it in her stead?”

“Please give me a moment for a refresher.”

After reading through one of the notes, Asgore’s ears perked up.

“There it is,” he pointed at the right paragraph. “We needed a vessel that’s neither human nor monster. Monsters cannot retain other monster SOULS.”

“That is true,” the woman confirmed. “Humans cannot contain other humans either.”

“A plant is neither human nor a monster. That… that is why she chose the lonely Ebott Goldenflower…”

Asgore frowned for a moment, then gathered his composure to resume his testimony.

“We Ebbot-folk believe that the spirits of the departed linger in their dust. That’s why we scatter them on their favourite things as their last rites. My son… was on that flower.”
He contemplated. “…I wonder if Doctor Alphys learned anything from Gaster’s research? Leftovers.”

“Leftovers?”

Asgore stroked his beard. “After the Core Incident, there were many mysterious gaps in the records. I had half-written books without a name and a vacant lab without an owner. Just as the skeleton brothers had no records of their parents.”

“It was strange,” he said. “Stranger still that I didn’t think it was an issue.”

The King brought up an interesting point. “I see. Thank you, Your Majesty. I’m sorry, but could I request for Doctor Alphys again?”

* * *

Alphys sat down at the other side of the table. She’s trying hard not to shrink. ‘Trying’ was the word. One could see the real struggle within.

“Is there… something else?”

Lucidia asked: “I wondered, where did you learn about Willpower?”

“Willpower?”

“Apologies. I meant ‘Determination’.”

“Well, um… most of it was through observation and referencing what we already knew about monster SOULS.”

“Did you coin the term on your own?”

“Y-yes.”

Two different minds, two different backgrounds, but the same conclusion. Independant discoveries were not all unusual in history. People often persevere until something works.

I hope I’m wrong here.

“Have you considered experimenting on live subjects?” asked the Seer.

Alphys froze for a moment. “I did consider the idea. But, it’s impossible. The amount of energy required to extract a monster SOUL is enormous. And even then, the procedure is fatal.”

“It would have been nice if they’re more like humans,” she admitted. “Just, take the SOUL out for a while, finish the job, then put them back. No harm done.”

“What about a sacrifice?” Lucidia stated. “Your nation has willing volunteers.”

“It would be a pointless suicide.”

“I see.”
It’s quite a relief to hear that they didn’t have the technology or methodology. However they did have a machine that was leaps and bounds ahead of the Surface.

“Did you build the ‘Determination Extraction Machine’?”

“Yes! But, not from scratch,” Alphys glanced left and right. “I received the blueprints from Sans. So, um. The current machine is more like a Version 1.5? Yeah.”

“Was it written in Seer script?” Seers tend to write down their secrets in glyphs to limit prying eyes. Narrows down the list of culprits should a compromise occur.

“You mean the hands? Yes. Sans gave me the alphabet, and then I could read it without any problems.”

The confirmation astonished Lucidia; Doctor Alphys had more gifts than she realised. Though she wouldn’t understand the audio aspects of their tongue, all writing was open to her.

“Did you retain the original copy?” asked Lucidia.

Alphys nodded. “It’s all the way back in town though.”

“I’ll make a note for retrieval.” She said. “A soldier reported the extraction as a painless procedure. Gentle, I daresay. Fatigue was his only notable side effect. The Surface lacks any such method. Ours are known to be rather agonizing.”

“Oh? Why?” Alphys exclaimed. “Y-you guys have space level stuff!”

“Perhaps we were too dependant on the existence of Marks and Blood Crystals. The thought of distilling Determination as a substance was comparatively… a novel idea. That is why our extraction technology is primitive compared to yours.”

“I see… M-may I ask why it’s painful?”

“It triggers surreal nightmares,” said Lucidia. “They can ripple out into phantom pains. That’s all I can share.”

“Okay. That’s fine.”

“Do you remember the author’s names for the books you studied?”

“I think so.” Alphys scratched her cheek. “But, uh, a lot of them were anonymous. Or reprints.”

“That’s fine. Titles or reference numbers will do.”

Though Lucidia would have preferred a direct input into the Chronograph, it’s offline for maintenance. At current time, a simple pen and foolscap papers served as sufficient replacement.

* * *

Doctor Wendell Dominic Gaster.
Otherwise known as the man scattered across space and time.
Unlike the remorseful King Asgore and the skittish Alphys, he exuded bitter defiance.

Lucidia could still feel the pressure despite her accumulated experience over countless timelines. The eloquent and the forward tend to overpower her.

While she hesitated, Gaster began his attempts to control the conversation. “I suppose this is our first official business, Tactician.”

“Indeed,” Lucidia replied.

“As the Royal Scientist and the last surviving member of the Council, you had the responsibility to deter all declarations of war against humanity. Yet, not only did you ignore it, you encouraged genocide.”

“Why does it matter?” Gaster questioned back.

“It’s proof that you not only breached countless laws, but you had also betrayed the expectations of your nation.”

“Hah. Hilarious.” The man scoffed. “Such empty words. Is this what the Surface Seers have been reduced to? Mere parrots to their human masters?”

*Why did Doctor Gaster have a change of heart? He’s been cooperative ever since Papyrus won him over. So, what’s going on?*

*Is he trying to defend someone…?*

“Doctor Gaster,” Lucidia questioned, “What is your game? I recognize the pattern.”

“Well, well. Since you caught the memo, allow me to be honest.”

Gaster rested his hands as a steeple. Peering at the woman, he insisted: “I refuse to cooperate unless you drop all charges against King Asgore, Doctor Alphys, and Sir Grillenn.”

“Impossible,” Lucidia replied.

“Why not?”

“King Asgore declared war. He also directed Doctor Alphys in a number of forbidden experiments while she herself committed fraud, in addition to plans to create a Philosopher’s Stone.”

“As for Sir Grillenn… he confessed to me that he had killed someone. The coroner’s reports confirmed that the cause of death for the Yellow Child was through asphyxiation and severe burn trauma.”

Doctor Gaster slammed the table with his right. The sudden loud sound startled Lucidia, though she tried her best to not show a hint of weakness.

“Funny that you mention murder,” he said. “Lady Lucidia. With your thread of logic, The Magus Association must answer to us Dreemurrs the following crimes: unjust imprisonment for a thousand years, civilian lives lost in the war, and the violent murder of our beloved prince!”

“Yet, you have the gall to insist that only WE pay the price? Preposterous!”

“We shouldn’t be demanding mercy. We should be demanding justice! Reparations for the grief you had inflicted on us as a nation! How does that compare to woes of a few families… if those impish
children had anyone in the first place?”

“Furthermore,” Gaster added, “Our nations have zero diplomatic agreements as the result of our isolation. The Six were not innocents. They were intruders. Invaders. Their very presence posed a threat. Was it really so wrong for us to eliminate them?”

“Surely your coroner noted the signs of impalement on the Blue Child’s bones. Well, let me tell you now: it was I who ended her terror! She ran around trampling the smaller citizens of Waterfall!”

“Children are nowhere as innocent as you think.”

Lucidia tried to present her counterpoints. But then, Gaster gave no opportunity. He doled out the next accusation before she had the chance to recollect her thoughts.

The man continued without mercy. “As I had thought, you lack the social flair to be an orator. You work best as an analyst: the mind behind the data. When it comes to the fires of a face-to-face debate, you fail to push back against your adversary.”

“If you cannot handle me, I’m afraid you’re disqualified from passing judgement. No wonder Sans Serif managed to weasel so far.”

_Do something. Don’t let him win!

Gravity twisted around the woman. He had stirred the hornet’s nest, and her patience reached her limit, threatening to break.

Then, a message from her husband interrupted her wrath.

‘Halt the interrogation. He’s a bad match for you.’

‘I know you’re upset. But if you lash out now, you won’t be the victorious party.’

Lucidia got up from the chair without an extra word. She hurried out of the chamber through a sliding door.

Once out of Gaster’s sight, she took off her mask. It cracked in her grip.

“Lucidia.” It’s Mezil.

She lifted her head to gaze at him. Her vision had started to go watery from tears.

“I’m nothing but a weakling…” Lucidia replied. “Always so frail against the Will of others.”

…Curse me and my monsterness...

* * *

Lucidia bowed down before Gerson, the Hammer of Justice. “Thank you for the day’s hard work,” she said, “Please, have a good rest.”

“No probs, ma’am. Wahaha!” Gerson’s laughter didn’t last long. “Ya got someone taking over my shift?”
“Judge Thyme. At least for now.”

Whether she realised it or not, Lucidia let out a sigh. It was enough to catch the attention of the old hero.

“Chin up,” he smiled. “There’s always tomorrow.”

“Thank you…”

Lucidia didn’t tell Gerson that the cause for her poor mood was due to Doctor Gaster. Let him reason that it was because of a long day.

When the turtle left, she pulled a seat over to Pod 02 and sat down. Quiet. Concerned.

Should I wake Papaya up?

She touched the surface of the cover. The data retrieved from her powers matched the life-analysis machine: Condition Green.

In terms of vital healing, the Intensive Recovery Pod had completed its job. However…

…The Princess of the Sky still hesitated.

What if he tries to burn his Eye now?

What if it burns outside of his control?

Perhaps it’s better to have him rest a while longer. After all, he’s not known to sleep often.

Her attention shifted to Pod 01.

Lucidia put Sans Serif back into stasis this morning. Karma demanded a forced fragility on his Psychia, limiting the output of his lifeforce. It impeded the healing process.

She heard someone knocking on the door. It’s either the next Healer on duty, or her husband.

It turned out to be Mezil plus… Cenna? In a wheelchair?

“Dear?” she asked, “Why is she here?”

Cenna pointed her fingers at Mezil’s face. “Blame a certain grey-haired black-coat tsundere.”

The senior clicked his tongue. “Do you really have to chide me in such a roundabout way?”

“Yeah! Of course! I’ll never give up a chance. You’re the idiot who thought Frisky used an HVM, even though nobody died.”

“You’re insufferable. You think that I can receive news of unexplained causes of demise in less than a full day? Besides, it's the kid’s intent that matters most!”

“Bah. Excuses!”

Ah, those two. Some things just don’t change.

They had been this way since their first meeting all those years ago.

“Hmph,” the man huffed, “Weren’t you the one with the big news and a killer boredom. Cut to the

“Report.”

“An Aratet assimilated the Central Gungnir group. He’s the new boss now. We gotta inform the Investigators to dig up his ID.”

“Oh… I know who he is.”

“Eh? You do?”

“Yes. In fact, I also know he was the mastermind behind the Spire’s fire. Sir Grillenn and I had faced him in combat.”

Cenna clenched her hands into a fist. “Dammit. And I wasn’t there to kick his butt. So, any names?”

‘’Aiden’. He claims to be Persona’s son.”

“Whaaaaa?! Is he a Red? I thought Mez got rid of all the next-gen DEMON wannabes by now. Anyone still alive either broke off from Gungnir or turned out to be puny scrubs.”

Mezil huffed. “He could be a fake: a masquerader taking advantage of a leaderless rabble.”

“I cannot confirm his lineage yet,” said Lucidia. “However, Aiden did not utilize any Marks. It’s possible that he is, at most, a Red Minor.”

“I’m afraid we must pursue this new information at a later date. The Chronograph is still decrypting. It will take about twelve more hours of processing before it completes. Apologies.”

Mezil pushed the wheelchair closer to Pod 02.

_That look…_

“Mezil?” she asked. “You wish to wake Papyrus?”

The question made him cough. Sometimes Mezil had his plans obscured. Sometimes, he’s more obvious than he would like to admit.

“…You got it right. Spot on, even. Yes. He has the best relationship with Doctor Gaster for persuasion. And, if that fool insists on his rebellion we can use the young man’s Eye to pry into his history—”

Lucidia shook her head. “No.”

“Why not?” asked Mezil. “Papyrus did just fine as my proxy.”

“The circumstances have changed. I don’t know how much more he can take. Both mind and body. He already suffered so much so soon.”

“We can guide him in the least damaging manner.”

“Is Gaelic not enough for you?” Tone, bitter. Angry.
Mezil asked back: “What do you mean? He’s our best friend.”

“No. You don’t get it.” Grief choked her words. “Is damning Gaelic not enough for you? For us? If we continue to depend on Papyrus, we’ll lose him to madness as well. Is that what you want?”

Mezil added, “Lucidia, I don’t understand. They’re both Orange Seers, but they’re not the same type of character.”

“No means ‘no’!” The Seer snapped back. “I refuse to let you request Papyrus’ help ever again! Denied!”

The two humans were taken aback by her reactions.

“Okay,” said Cenna. “I don’t wanna be ‘that annoying gal’, but Lucy you’re getting top-level cranky here.”

What nerve. Have they forgotten?

“He tried to claw his face off!!!”

They stared at her with slack jaws. Shocked. Cenna mouthed the words ‘He did what?’ in silence.

Realising what she had done, Lucidia retreated. “I—I’m sorry. I… didn’t tell you. Did I? Yes, Papyrus has the propensity to inflict self-harm. It’s not as overt as Gaelic’s habits. But, I would consider them more insidious due to their relative invisibility.”

“Cuts, carvings, and clawing… They draw little attention. Easy to hide. Easy to dismiss as little ‘kitchen accidents’. Papyrus loves to cook after all.”

“Sans Serif did think of every possibility. I never blamed him for his quest. In fact, I sympathized with his predicament. To an extent. I’m sorry for the outburst.”

Her husband shook his head. “No, you’re right. Papyrus is not immune to pitfalls. I had almost forgotten about them in the light of his brilliance.”

Cenna added, “Guess it’s real easy to take him for granted, living up to his nick and all.”

“If that’s the case,” said Mezil. “Leave Gaster to me. I will ensure that we achieve victory without burdening Papyrus. Or you.”

“Honey,” said Lucidia. “I’m sorry about what happened. I…”

Then she clammed up. Apologizing for something so personal always made her heart bubble from anxiety and embarrassment. There were doubts if she was even honest about it. Pride often gets in the way.

Mezil reached out to her for a good, firm hug.

“No offense taken. You had a rough day. Despite so, you did a great job. And I’m sorry that I overestimated the health of others.”

“Mezzy to the rescue huh?” The Vanquisher laughed. “Maybe now tell him to stop working me to the bone. Please?”

“Shush. You’re ruining the mood.”
Lucidia rested her face against her husband’s chest and closed her eyes.

*Ah... what did I do to deserve such a good man?*

**Chapter End Notes**

Gaster shows his fangs.
It’s Tuesday.

The clouds were dark and grey: a sign that it’s going to rain.

Your first order of business was to travel back to Ebott Town to collect some personal items.

Mezil had arranged a bodyguard to accompany you. To be exact, an invisible skeletal bodyguard. He’s none other than Mister Garamond Blanc, Snakeface’s cousin.

So off you go in your officially designated car. The media is still tracking your movements, so you can’t just shortcut your way there.

At least the hospital was a little nearer to your town than the Spire. Burning three whole hours was just plain tedious.

You know Sir Garamond sat beside you, but you can’t see him. The seatbelt is invisible too. You wonder…

…If you stretch out your hand, will you touch him?

You gave it a shot and managed to grab his arm. You could feel the fabric of his sleeves too! It’s weird that you’re holding something so solid yet invisible.

“Hm? Do you need something, Crimson Keeper?”

AAAH!! That frightened you. You didn’t expect that he could talk in this mode.

“Apologies,” said Garamond. “I tend to keep the nature of my abilities a secret. It looks impressive, but it’s rather easy to counter once you know the trick.”

Really?

“Yes. Judge Thyme sensed me on our first meeting.”

That badass is the last standard to compare to. He’s inhuman.

You noticed a strong scent stuck on your hand. You sniffed it.

…Tobacco? Garamond is a smoker?

“You have a good nose,” he commented.

How do skeletons even smoke?! Does he puff from his ribs?

“No. You know that we descended from humans, I presume?”

You nodded. Goopdoc told you about the history of his kind.

“The conversion deals with more than just bones. Key functions are also imported. Digestion, for example.”
But they have no stomach…

“Not a visible one. But, a proxy for the storage and breakdown of edible matter exists in our bodies.”

What about breathing? You know that they are immune to hypothermia. That’s about it.

“Oxygen levels are more important than the medium. We can survive fine in water, but air is preferred.”

Huh. So where does all the waste material go? Humans poop for a reason.

“Shedded dust. Much like dead skin cells. It’s the same for all monsters.”

Wow. An unvacuumed, unswept room is basically a monster’s version of a dirty toilet. That brings ‘living in filth’ to a whole new level.

Papyrus was right in keeping the house clean. Yes.

You stared out of the window, letting out an audible sigh.

“Is something the matter?”

Um, you didn’t get to ask the Tsunderjudge everything. He jumped right to business after you disclosed Alphys’ experiments by accident.

“It’s fine. You will have time to get to know him better. As for Doctor Alphys, please don’t feel guilty. Lady Lucidia and myself already had suspicions. We’ll take the blame for you, if we must.”

Oh?

Garamond explained: “I visited your town during Halloween.”

That means he had seen the Amalgamates in person.

“Indeed. It didn’t take much to understand that Determination experiments had occurred. It was all a matter of the ‘how’, ‘who’ and ‘when’.”

………………

Time to change subject.

What does he think of Ebott Town?

Garamond paused for a moment, then replied: “It reminds me of happier times. Though, I’m not so rose-tinted that I’m ignorant of childish heckling.”

“…I just hope that your society can resist corruption better than mine did.”

Your car soon arrived at the town border, stopping for the Royal Guard’s inspection. It’s Doggo’s turn today.

You rolled down your window.

“Hey Frisk! I saw you in the moving car!” he exclaimed. “But, I can’t see you anymore. Only the fancy ride. I guess it’s because the running engine keeps it vibrating.”

You giggled. For his sake, you shook your body a bit.
“There you are. Finally coming home, eh?”

You explained to Doggo that you’re here for official business. So, not quite.

“Oh. Wow. That’s tough. Uh, mind hearing me out a bit?”

Sure. You have a moment.

“The past two days were pure crazy. Huge weird fog. A door in the sky. A Sans lookalike. Then the humans started hauling a whole lot of stuff out of Asgore and Alphys’ place. Upon the King’s own orders!”

It appears that their arrest was not announced. Understandable. It would have been a riot.

“There’s a whole bunch of humans at the skelebros’ backyard too. They’re in special suits. ‘Hazmats’, I think they’re called? Either way, they’ve been using robots to try pick the backdoor lock.”

That’s excessive, but you guess the Magi’s paranoia is justified.

“The worst of all? Curfew got tighter! Everyone holed up in their houses! Even MORE humans ran around. Constant high alert!”

“It’s getting on my nerves,” he said, “I ended up smoking four whole sticks.”

You ask Doggo to lean closer to the car. He started to get super excited.

“I’m getting a pet?”

Yup, for all the hard work he had done!

He’s beyond happy. Started spouting ‘pet pot pat’ over and over too.

You then let the driver know that it’s time to continue the journey.

En route, it started to rain. You feel the damp coldness on your skin.

The Temmie Vault lay up ahead. That’s where you stored your equipables once you got to the Surface.

It also serves as the Temmies’ new residence. Huge house is huge. During sunny days, the occupants hang around their porch. At night and on rainy days, they loiter around indoors.

“Tempties…” Garamond pondered. “Never heard of them before. It’s possible that they’re extinct outside of the Dreemurr Nation.”

Maybe it’s better that he stays invisible. The rest of Ebott Town doesn’t know of the Surface survivors yet.

Also, they might mistake him for a human. They love to pet humans. Even though the action gives them hives.

“I concur.” Garamond handed you an umbrella. It looked like its floating in midair.

“Crimson Keeper Frisk, please exit the car as you usually would. Don’t worry about the door.”
Okay… That sounds like he’s a pro at this. You trust in his ability to avoid getting face-smashed.

The car stopped near the entrance. Alright. Time to get out, open your umbrella, prepare your wallet, and ask Bob to open the lockboxes for you. Simple enough.

Then, before you even had the chance, you heard a cacophony of high-pitched screaming. Temmies fled their homes in terror. Some grew their legs ten feet tall just to cover more ground.

What would terrify them so much? Gungnir?! Jerry?!

The slower Temmies spotted you. They began crowding around your car, begging you to let them in.

This is bad. Driving now will only run them under the wheels!

You couldn’t see the effects, but you could feel a change in the air. It’s likely that Garamond was burning his Eyes to assess the situation.

You heard a slight gasp. “Gaelic?”… he muttered.

Mister Snakeface?

You pressed the button to roll the window down ever so slightly. Otherwise, the Temmies would try to climb in from sheer panic.

Whoa whoa whoa calm down! What’s going on?

“UWAAAAAAA! Tem! Sked!!!”
“Fud thief broke in!!!!!”
“Tem is not Tem Flakes!”
“BONES R NOT CUTE!!!!!!!!!!!”

Anyone trapped inside?

“BOB!!”
“And! Shop Tem!!”
“Let us in plz!!!”

There’s only one thing left to do… you need to rescue the two Temmies before they become accidental lunch.

You told the driver to stay put. And not to freak out if the monsters start getting rashes.

Then, your mission began. The moment you and Garamond got out of the car, the Temmies poured inside.

Once it’s full, they shut the door. Those squeezing against the human driver immediately contracted ‘hoives’, popping red spots all over their faces.

You hope that they have enough money for antihistamines.

Garamond’s invisible body blocked the rain droplets. You understood his weaknesses now: he’s solid no matter what. If you’re his opponent, you would try to fight him in a pool of shallow water.

He then dispelled his invisibility. Huh? He’s not going to keep it?
“...There’s no point in this rain. Besides. Gaelic can smell me from a mile away.”

Unlike Lady Lucidia’s porcelain mask, the now visible Investigator Garamond wore a tinted face shield. Reminds you of riot-control gear. Practical.

He rang his phone.

“Lady Lucidia,” he said, “Gaelic has escaped his confines. He’s just invaded one of the Ebott Monster’s homes. Is the Grandmaster unhurt? …Oh, I see. The Flower Children are not suitable watchers for him anyway.”

Pause. “You wish to speak with them? Alright. Ending call now.”

The moment he finished his side, your phone rang. It’s a private, encrypted number.

You answered it. Hello?

Lucidia said: “Crimson Keeper Frisk, I have a favour to ask… but I’m not sure if it’s an appropriate task for you.”

Does it involve wrangling a crazy skeleton?

“Something similar. I just hope it doesn’t come to any actual ‘wrangling’. Gaelic can be a danger to himself and others. If… if possible, could you lure him to someplace safe?”

Lure? Why lure when one can befriend? That’s the best outcome.

At the very least it sure beats sending a team of magical dog-catchers after him later. That’d be a sad sight you’d rather avoid.

“Are you certain?” Lady Lucidia replied, “A word of warning, getting past the initial barrier of aggression is risky at best, suicidal at worst. Please don’t hesitate to call upon Investigator Garamond’s assistance should the need arise.”

You have your ways. Don’t worry about it. If Gaelic is really too much to handle, you will run away and resort to Plan B. That good?

“I’m relieved. Thank you again. Remember. Safety first.”

End call. You had the thought that you should contact her again once you’ve succeeded in your sidequest.

It’s time to enter the Tem House.

Man, what a mess. From the living room doorway, you spotted upturned furniture, opened cupboards, scattered Tem Flakes, fallen drink cups...

But no sign of Snakeface.

You approached a smashed window.

“Gaelic must have entered through there.”

Uh... you’d understand if the floor had muddy prints. But why in the world is there mud on the CEILING???
“He can climb on any surface.”

That’s not a snake, that’s a gecko! What animal is he anyway? Nothing is consistent.

Papyrus did call him a wyrm once. But wyrmss don’t climb walls either!!!

You then heard some angry yelling from the east wing. That’s where the Vault’s front counter is situated.

“NO!!!! Moi FLAKES!!!! LEV STASH ALONE!!!!”

Hurrying to the scene of the crime, you found the culprit. He’s on all fours, gathering a handful, before pouring them straight into his mouth.

Heh. He’s wearing only a torn pair of pants, unlike the other well-dressed skeletons. Where did the rest of his clothes go…?

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOoooooooooooooooo (dies).” Shop Tem screamed. In full Tem Armour, she flipped herself over.

Oh, right. You didn’t need that set anymore, so you didn’t buy it even though you had sent Tem to cooleg.

Bob meanwhile kept pushing out more food from behind the safety of the counter. “Our lives are more valuable than the flakes, Temmie!” He exclaimed.

“But!! Tem haz DEFENSE!!!”

“He almost smashed his way in. I’m not taking any chances!” Bob pointed at the myriad of radial cracks and scratches on the bullet-proof barrier.

Temmie then spotted you and flipped right back up.

“UwaaaaaaaaAAAAA! D-don’t come! Dangerous for hooman! TOL hooman too!”

It’s alright. We’re pros.

“Oi-kay…” she whimpered.

Bob said: “Be careful, everyone.”

Thanks.

Focus. Bring up your battle interface.

**MARK - ACT - ITEM - MERCY**

In light of Lady Lucidia’s warning, let’s replace ‘MARK’ with ‘HELP’.

**HELP - ACT - ITEM - MERCY**

* ACT
* Check * Talk

Always Check first.
* A wild skeletal snakedog. Maybe.
* You need to communicate. But how?

Gaelic stopped eating.

“Mondie…” he muttered. “Mondie. Why you be here?”

Garamond replied: “I’m here to escort the Crimson Keeper. Why are you here?”

“Why. Why?”

Thinking so hard about the question stressed him out. He began to growl. Drool seeped between his teeth.

There’s a certain glaze in his look, telling you that he’s not quite ‘there’.


Was it possible that he doesn’t remember anything about Sans’ capture?

* ACT
* Check * Talk

You told Gaelic that Sans Serif had long been arrested. Lady Lucidia and Tsunderjudge have him trapped in a healing pod.

He began to sway back and forth, muttering in a series of distorted tones…

Isn’t that the Seer’s language?

* HELP

Can Garamond translate?

“‘Sound Symbols’. He’s frustrated that he can’t understand your words.”

Please pass on your message in their tongue.

“I’ll try. Though, it won’t work if he’s too deep in the abyss.”

Garamond attempted to sign to Gaelic. Slowly.

Anger turned into joy. Snakeface started to clap his hands and yelped upwards to the sky.

Looks like your message had been delivered. Problem solved, right?

* MERCY
* Spare

You wanted to invite him for a nice lunch at your house. You know how to cook a simple pasta, and that’s perfect for a rainy day.

But…

When you got close, Snakeface freaked out and tried to bite you. The Temmies screamed.

You can’t dodge this! Are you going to get bit?!
But Garamond nabbed you out of danger in the nick of time. Phew. T-that was a close shave.

Gaelic crouched on the ground, ready to attack again. His Eye ignited in a flare of orange and purple. It’s so unstable. Violent. Wild.

“DEMON!” He howled, “M’LORD SAY, KILL!!!!”

“You used Determination,” Garamond commented.

Uh, yes? That’s how you spare monsters.

“Wrong move. Gaelic’s primary targets are Living Victories and criminal Magi. They would try the same trick for malicious motives.”

In other words: a ‘Betrayal Kill’. Dang. You made him ultra-paranoid instead. Any ideas?

“Befriend him truly. Or retreat. You make the final call, Crimson Keeper.”

……………………

You won’t retreat yet. There’s still something you can do.

Round 2, start~

HELP - ACT - ITEM - MERCY

* ACT
* Check * Talk

You tested the waters by initiating another Check.

* Snakeface is watching your every move.
* You’re staying as still as possible to avoid any further provocation.

He’s not fighting back. That’s a relief.

* HELP

You asked Garamond why fighting Gaelic in direct combat is a horrible idea. You’ve seen the massive snake blaster, but nothing else. You need more information.

“He’s much stronger than any human,” Garamond explained, “Think Captain Undyne. But my greatest concern is his poison creation abilities. He can generate perfect replicas of any toxin he has consumed or experienced.”

Upon saying such, Garamond’s Eyes burned for a moment. He had Yellow. In other words, Truesight.

“He’s currently secreting a powerful venom. But… I can’t identify which animal. Your country may not have the antivenin. Nevermind your town’s lack of a hospital.”

Huh? He can’t find out any more details?

“No. I lack Perseverance for the job. My Eye is most useful in revealing ‘presence’. Specific stats require a separate investigation.”
Ah. Alright then.

Talk about a survival situation. If you get bit even once… you’re deader than dead.

* Talk

Gaelic backed himself against the wall.

“Who are you?” he asked. “Ah dunno ya. Ye wish ill fer M’lord?”

No. Of course not. You’re the newly elected Crimson Keeper. Mezil’s ally.


That’s a roundabout way to describe ‘ketchup’. Well, he’s not wrong about your relationship with Sans there. But it’s different now. Sorta.

Gaelic was there for your Trial, including the approval. He was part of the rescue team too!

Garamond joined you. “That’s right. I was Juror 1, and you were Juror 2. This human child speaks the truth. You witnessed the whole thing.”

“…I did?” The man glanced left. Right. Shook his head. “Don’t remember.”

* ACT
* Check
* Talk
* Remind

You shared some of the more memorable bits of the Crimson Hall. Like the big butterfly cloud. And the Trap Harvester incident--

Gaelic hyperventilated, hissing harder than before.

Nonononono! Wait that gut-kick was an accident!

Oh goodness gracious… You feel your heart pounding against your chest. This is scarier than Hyperdeath because of the sheer unpredictability. Your mistakes threatened to bite you in the butt.

* HELP

There has to be a way to calm Gaelic without leaving the Temmies behind!

“Words won’t reach him anymore. I suggest a full retreat to call for backup. The rest will have to hide until help arrives.”

Give up? Now? Running away is a valid tactic, but…

Wait a moment. Bob managed to keep him at bay. And it worked!

‘The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.’

You pointed towards the kitchen. If he’s not going to understand words, then he shall understand taste!

“You plan to cook a proper lunch for Gaelic?”

Yup. For that, you need to check the fridge and pantry.
“To be honest with you, Crimson Keeper, Gaelic is not very particular about cuisine. You could give him raw produce and he’ll appreciate it nonetheless.”

It’s all about showing him your efforts. That means Snakeface has to follow us to watch. You’re letting Garamond decide on the handling.

“Very well. Please proceed.”

Off to the kitchen you go.

The stove appears functional. Is that a full set of pots and pans?

Now what’s inside the fridge?

It’s… well-stocked?!? That’s the LAST thing you expect from Temmies!

The drawers are full of dry goods as well. You can make anything: from pasta to bread to rice to a host of other stuff. What is this grain?

Millet? They’re smaller than you thought.
Quinoa? Never heard of it. Smells kinda bitter. Soapy?
Barley? Oh, so that’s how barley grains look like in real life.
Buckwheat? This the main ingredient for soba noodles.

Wow. The Temmies have gotten rather adventurous. Nevertheless, experiments can wait. You need to make an easy meal that involves zero knifework. Thanks to your ‘reputation’, holding a blade right now is totally gonna send the wrong idea.

You obtained a packet of macaroni from the drawers.

And from the fridge, you grabbed some cherry tomatoes and three eggs. You wished that they didn’t chill the eggs though. Those are best at room temperature.

Where are the plates and bowls? Salt? Pepper? Oil?

You groaned when you realised that Tem had placed them on the very top shelves of the cabinet. They could stretch their legs. You can’t.

“Need some help?”

It’s Garamond.

Sure! But uh, if he’s in the kitchen… who’s keeping watch on the hungry one?

He pointed at the corner. Snakeface had claimed that place as his safe zone.

“As long you don’t go near there, you’ll be fine.”

Thanks a ton. Okay, you’ll need the cheap salt for the pasta, the nicer looking one for seasoning, that black pepper mill, some dried oregano, and olive oil.

For utensils, two big bowls, one smaller bowl, paper towels, two dining spoons, a sieve, and that chef-y wooden spoon. You could get the pot and pan without further assistance.

The kitchen had become your new ‘combat’ focus.
There are three targets to choose from: the sink, stove 1, and stove 2.

HELP - ACT - ITEM - MERCY

* ITEM
* Pot

Use it on the sink.

* ACT
* Fill * Take

Fill it up with water.

* Take

Obtained a pot of water.

* ITEM
* Pot

On Stove 1

* ACT
* Fire

Start the boiling process. ITEM: salt into water.

* ITEM
* S. Bowl
* C. Tomato

* ACT
* Wash
* Dry with P. Towel

You’re not going to elaborate which is ITEM or ACT anymore. This is getting way too tedious.

* Measure Macaroni in Bowl 1.
* Add Macaroni to boiling water.
* Stir Pot once with W. Spoon. Leave it to boil.
* Crack all 3 eggs into Bowl.
* Season with a bit of salt. Not too much.
* Add dried oregano.
* Beat eggs with Spoon 1. Set aside.
* C. Tomato into Pan on Stove 2.
* Add Oil.
* Set low heat. Let it cook on its own.
* Wait.

You’re hearing a commotion coming from the front porch. Oh no, the Royal Guard must have received the call for backup! If they charge in now, your friendship plan will be ruined.

* HELP
Damage control time, Garamond!

He took out his phone. “The driver is still outside. I’ll have him pass the message.”

Phew. Okay, please inform the others that you’re busy with the suspect. For now quietly let them lead Bob and Shop Tem to safety. Emphasis on the ‘quietly’ part! Then, stand their ground.

“Understood.”

Time to resume cooking.

* Check Macaroni. Too soon.
* Check Macaroni. Nope.
* Check Macaroni. Just right.
* Drain Macaroni with sieve.
* Place Macaroni in Bowl 2.
* Add Oil to Bowl 2.
* Mix with Spoon 2 so the pasta doesn’t clump.
* Remove C. Tomato Pan from Stove 2.
* Pour egg mixture.
* Use wooden spoon to scramble.
* Put Pan back on Stove 2.
* Repeat pan on, pan off until creamy.
* Pour scrambled tomato eggs into Bowl 2.
* Grind black pepper mill into Bowl 2
* Sprinkle a bit more salt to finish.
* Scrambled tomato eggs on macaroni, complete!

You handed the result to Garamond. He delivered it to Gaelic and… you watched him eat from far away. Face, straight into the bowl for the chowdown. Spoon, ignored.

Careful with the tomatoes. They’re quite hot.

Now you’re the one who’s getting hungry. Oh well, you don’t want to sponge on Temmie’s supplies more than you need to.

Once he’s done… Gaelic stared at you in amazement.

“‘Tis be true?” so he asked. “Yer a Crimson Keeper, elected by M’lord?”

Finally. You could use the Talk option in ACT again.

ACT
* Talk

You nodded. That’s why you’re here. Gotta help ol’ Mez gather some stuff.

Gaelic fiddled his fingers. “Ah thought he dinnae want any more Keepers. He be done with them. None to trust.”

Including your parents?

“Yer parents…?” He tilted his head.

The Wanderstars? Cenna’s?
“Oooh. Nay. They died. Different.” He swayed left and right, showing signs of distress. “Ah was broken at that time. Injured. Scythe o’ death almost claimed me. When ah returned to duty, Crimson Keepers be gone. Disbanded.”

S-seriously…?


Unfortunately, that didn’t work. You pointed at yourself: the lone kid who disrupted the whole deal.

“But ye be Wanderstar. Suppose he had no choice.”

You remembered that Mezil had a big lock on the ‘Tsundere’ topic. Perhaps this unexpected event will give you a vital clue.

So… what happened to the rest of the Crimson Keepers?

“Mmm…” Gaelic tried to recall. “M’lady said many parted ways in peace. But Reds, they not be those who yield. They gathered the unhappy. Sought revenge. Placed a bounty on M’lord’s head.”


“But Cenna say… not good to eat foe. Grandmaster too. Images o’ Almighty make, they say. Difficult, difficult. The scent o’ their lifeforce whets me gut. The more they hate, the hungrier ah get.”

Question: could this ‘tasty lifeforce’ have something to do with Determination? If that’s the case, is Mezil Thyme very delicious?

He blushed. He freaking blushed.

Gaelic answered, “Aaah, M’lord and M’lady! Me heart longs fer their waters! Love be ambrosia, better than any blood or dust!”

What are you supposed to take from this?!!
Can you order one mind-bleach???

Investigator Garamond facepalmed.

“Please don’t continue that line of discussion.” he remarked, “Just know that he senses the world in a… unique manner.”

“Aye aye,” Gaelic nodded. “Yer meal. Simple ‘tis be, but warms me being. Taste o’ friendship. Like Cenna’s treats.”

Another question: is the friendship official now? Cenna IS your sister. A friend’s sibling is also his friend, right?

Gaelic frowned. “Yer pullin’ a fast one? Who are ye, the false angel? His brother be me friend. But he still remains me foe.”

Good point. Sorry for trying to be convoluted.

You sincerely want to be his friend on your own merit. Is that better?
He brightened up again. “Aye, aye. Yer heart shines through. There be any way ah can repay yer deed?”

By keeping himself safe.

You promised Lady Lucidia that you will take care of him while he’s in Ebott Town.

Does he know the way to Mom’s house? You live there too. There’s nothing important inside, so it’s perfect for a refuge.

“Aye! I know.”

Thumbs-up. You’ll catch up the moment you retrieve the important items from the Vault.

…Does he need extra clothes? It seems like he lost a whole lot of them somewhere.

“Nay? Nay nay. This be sleepwear.”

Aha. You get it now. Worn down, yet comfy right?

He nodded.

“Ah be going now. Thank ya.”

Gaelic left the Tem House the same method he broke in: through a window.

* YOU WON!
* You gained 0 EXP and 0 GOLD.

Oh. That counted as a ‘escape’ on Gaelic’s end, formally finishing your skirmish.

Garamond phoned right away; “Lady Lucidia, Frisk’s mission is a success. He’s safe now. …Yes ma’am. I’ll keep you updated.”

“Good job, Crimson Keeper.” He praised you. “It’s not easy to befriend my cousin.”

No kidding. You had to improvise a whole kitchen. At least you didn’t have to dodge flying bullets and skull lazers too.

Phew. Guess you can FINALLY ask Bob to help you unlock the lockboxes.

Geez. It’s only Tuesday, and this week is already off to a ‘great’ start…

Chapter End Notes

Imagine that suddenly, Cooking Mama happened.

Free internet cookie to anyone who got the Axiom Verge reference. That is one surreal game. Definitely recommended for Metroidvania fans.

Lady Lucidia would like to remind everyone that there's no three-way ship going on, as disclosed in Chapter 116.
Old Wounds

Chapter Notes

Although I already have 'Graphic Violence' as a warning tag, I would like to give a heads up that things might get a bit uncomfortable here.

What a ‘perfect’ weather for today.

Doctor Gaster gazed at the gloomy rain. He’s due for another round of interrogation, but Mezil hadn’t given a definite time. A tactic to increase the sense of unease, most likely.

His ever-temperamental right hand smacked Gaster on the cheek. It wasn’t painful, but she kept pushing.

You still won’t let up, Helvetica?

I know, I know. Lady Lucidia was just trying to do her job. But I had to play the antagonist for everyone’s sake.

The left hand joined his wife, sticking his palm on the other cheek. A wimpy strike at best, but it refused to slide off.

Roman. You must be in a terrible mood. Yes you’re right, my ploy has the potential to blow up in all our faces. What else is new?

But if we don’t try to defend ourselves, those humans will just get their way. I can’t let any of the others pay for my sins. Especially not Doctor Alphys. Good lord, her life hasn’t even started yet!

…Would you mind putting your arms down? We don’t want to be caught looking silly before our captors.

After a moment of reluctance, the friends conceded.

Thank you. Now, kindly listen. It’s vital.

As you know first hand, our next opponent is nowhere near soft. In the best case scenario, we could negotiate some form of agreement. But if things take a turn for the worst…

Doctor Gaster readjusted his collar.

Please give me full control of our magic.

The soldiers opened the door for the Magus Judge. The battle of words loomed ahead.

Doctor Gaster was taken to the same room as the day before. The hospital-installed door only served as a convenient concealment to the Living Victory’s personal world.

How strange. Considering the existence of Papyrus’ altered scarf, they have every means to restrain us. Yet they did not take that precaution.
Judge Mezil Thyme of House Berendin sat on the opposite side of the table, with that ever-piercing glare of his locked square in view.

“Hmph,” the human huffed. “You tormented my wife for your own selfish gain. Why should I bow to your wishes?”

Here we go. There’s no turning back.

Doctor Gaster began: “I question your legitimacy of arresting us monster folk.”

“As I had mentioned to Lady Lucidia, we have yet to establish a proper diplomatic agreement between the Dreemurr Nation and the human world. It’s unfair that you hold us accountable to laws we are unfamiliar with. Laws that didn’t exist in the past.”

“Furthermore, though you claim to be a judge, I see only a vigilante. You sir, have no true legal standing. Am I right?”

“Why do you say so?” Mezil questioned. “The Vanquishers are part of the police force. In addition, The Magus Association has their own land, facilities, and headquarters. It requires government acknowledgement to be in the public eye.”

Gaster furrowed his brow. “That will fool only the ignorant. And I am anything but. Do not forget: I was the man scattered across space and time!”

He continued: “In my bouts of consciousness, I wandered through countless libraries. I read. I absorbed. I studied everything about the Surface. That includes the legal system.”

“But The Trial of the Crimson Hall takes place in a realm outside of the human sphere. Since you have no humans in your Jury, your ceremony is unverifiable. I daresay it’s outright illegal!”

“Illegal?”

Mezil’s body language concerned Gaster. He remained still. Unfazed. As though he had heard these arguments to death.

Did Determination make up for his lack of Bravery, or was he standing ground on the base of Patience?

Ugh. Such a stoic. If only I could better read the subtle hints.

“That’s right,” Gaster continued. “You Magi claim to have a deep history with the monarchy, thereby affirming your position. But my parents told me of how the Royal Court sought advice from the Red Sage, only for them to storm out of the door when the truth is not to their pleasing.”

“Still, I digress. Let us suppose those bonds are as tight as you say. Nowadays there is one major difference. Namely: democracy.”

“The monarchies of the modern world have become mere figureheads. True power lies in the hands of the publicly elected. The unknown commoners. They don’t trust you, and you don’t trust them.”

“Yet, despite scandal after scandal, you never once exploited the Keys of Fate to set things right. Why? Same reason they let you continue this harsh, bloody nonsense of a mock trial. It’s all about the status quo!”
Gaster expected a rebuttal. Refutation. Even the slightest withdrawal would be enough to further push his opponent into a dead end.

Instead, Mezil affirmed everything:

“You are correct.” It was a calm, cold, and frank statement.

*Why am I the one feeling pressured?*

*Should I continue my attack as I had done to Lucidia?*
*Or should I prepare for a counter as Judge Thyme defends himself?*

*I can’t be too direct. He would shoot down an accusation without mercy.*

*Could we do a bit of both…?*

Doctor Gaster said: “Then, by what authority do you wield judgement of my nation?”

To which Mezil responded…

*“By what authority do you wield judgement of me?”*

…This chilling aura. That must be what poor Frisk had felt. The two friends within huddled together in his mental space, cowering under the shadow of Judge Thyme.

*Curses! A trick question. No matter what I answer, it will just fall back on my skull.*

*“Your frustration shows, Doctor Gaster,” added Mezil. “You may be used to the needlessly circular plays of semantics your protégé is so fond of, but perish the thought. I mean what I say, and I shall ask you again.”*

*“What authority do YOU have? Morality? Ethics? History? Pain? All of those?”*

The Amalgamate steeled his resolve. If silence was synonymous to defeat, why not march forward instead?

*“Why yes indeed!” Gaster lifted his finger. “Each and every one of them!”*

Mezil stood up. *“Then by that very same authority, I heap my judgement unto you!”*

*“Tell me, W. D. Gaster. Before your freedom, have you ever disclosed the truth of the ‘Legendary Hero’ to anyone other than Sans Serif?”*

Gaster clenched his hands into a fist. *“I… did not.”*

This time, the judge slammed his hands down on the table. *“Then why do you expect me to reveal such to humanity?”*

*“What do you think would happen if the world knows of the power to turn back the clock? Let alone it being the birthright of a single individual? I’ll tell you right here and now!”*

*“Nations will throw everything they have to possess that one poor soul. Indiscriminate infighting will flourish at unprecedented scale: a never-ending War of the Red Victory!”*

*“Yes, we maintain the status quo. That’s because nobody wants to live in fear of magic-imbued assassins prowling at every corner.”*
“Do not talk as though you know better.”

The scientist had questioned: Mezil Thyme was known as the ‘Keeper of Peace’.

Peace? In a world full of wretched humans? What does that entail? Impossible without some Level of Violence.

“By your logic…” said Doctor Gaster, “Had we waged war, without Frisk’s timely intervention, elimination would have been your answer?”

“Depends.” Mezil replied, “However, there is one certain detail.”

The Judge’s brown eyes switched to a glaring crimson hue. A digital pistol spawned in his left hand, loaded and ready to fire.

“I will not hold back.”

It pains me to say this, my friends… but I had suspected this a long time ago.

We are here solely upon the mercy of mankind.

“Well,” said the Amalgamate. “You may commit genocide on us without a single repercussion. Perhaps that is what the Gungnir did in the previous timeline. DEMON or not… it doesn’t matter, does it?”

Gaster summoned his Blaster. What hope did he have against a seasoned Determinator? None. But he refused to back down without a fair fight.

That was the way of the Dreemurr Nation since the kingdom’s founding.

“Very well then. If that’s the case, I shall defy you lot till the very end. You will NOT pin my sins onto the people I love!”

How would the Supreme Judge react to this bold, futile, and pathetic front of desperate bravado? The same stern manner as with everything else: stoic with a hint of annoyance.

Mezil Thyme dispelled his gun, and the colour of his irises returned to their original shade.

He sighed. “The scenario you propose would only happen as the absolute last resort. Unlike that boastful bowel ache, I still have someone to answer to.”

“Who?” Gaster raised a brow.

“The Grandmaster. Even if you don’t believe in the divine, at least acknowledge my elder’s existence.”

The Supreme Judge pushed himself off the chair. He proceeded to leave the chamber without looking back.

“It’s all up to you now, Father,” so he said.

Father?

What kind of ‘Father’? Are we speaking of direct relations? No, wait. Judge Thyme came from an ordinary background.
A… priest? A Bishop? Organized religion still exists on the Surface. It wouldn’t surprise me if this ‘Grandmaster’ also served as a spiritual leader.

The flurry of pondering intensified when Gaster gazed upon the new, mysterious figure.

Minus the red gemmed staff, every other detail fit the historical illustrations of the ancient founding Sages: from the tailorwork to the mask.

*Could it be a uniform?*

*Not surprising if they dress the part. It’s a sense of hereditary immortality, I suppose. That way, there will always be a ‘Grandmaster’.*

The mystery man sat down. For a good ten seconds, no one said anything.

Gaster snapped himself out of the shock. He straightened his back and said: “Why, we meet at last. Mayhaps we monsterkind can finally get proper justice. Your Supreme Judge is quite a character!”

“My, oh my,” The Grandmaster chuckled. “I can see why poor Lucidia had so much trouble. Your inner fire burns more than both of your parents combined, young one.”

And so, he removed his mask.

Underneath the coverings was none other than true solid bone.

Above all…

…He had red, glowing eyes.

It was a figure that Gaster found controversial. Yet, his parents insisted that they pay this man utmost respect. It would be unbecoming for a son of the Seven Sages to protest.

*No.*

*It has to be a different Red Lich. The chances of survival on the turbulent Surface for a thousand years are so low… it’s impossible.*

Except, he announced the undeniable: “I am Lord Mezil of Berendin, Grandmaster and Founder of the Magus Association. You should know me by an older moniker: The Red Sage.”

That statement smashed all theories Gaster had crafted in his head. His liquid being quivered. Rippled.

“You…” he muttered. “You’re still alive? You. Outlived all your students?”

“That is indeed the case,” so replied the Lich. “Are you surprised?”

“Surprised? Of course! You’re a walking target! And… and what is with--”

Gaster shut his mouth before he said too much. He could rant to King Asgore, only because they weren’t strangers… But at the teacher of his father and mother? The legend himself?

Thus the man suppressed his heart. “Apologies. Where are my manners? I’m Wendell Dominic Gaster. Son of Shirai and Visigoth. The Orange and Cyan Sages respectively.”

*Egads, why is this so difficult?*
The Grandmaster nodded. “Ah… those are all names I haven’t heard in a long, long while. Did your parents explain the origin of what you bear?”

*Look at him. Acting in such a gentle, familiar manner.*

“T-they did. It’s to honour the memory of their first students. My father taught Wendell, and my mother taught Dominic. Both of them, human.”

“Did that displease you?”

“No. Why should it? Such a trivial detail. They were good to their teachers. I-I am fully capable of separating their species from their personhood!”

The Grandmaster commented otherwise: “Your Armament certainly doesn’t seem to think so.”

“Excuse me?” Gaster blurted.

“The Skull. It’s been there since you threatened Judge Thyme.”

Gaster turned around. The summon had started to change colour. Its cool cyan threatened to turn orange. And when that happens, it’s going to rampage.

He jumped out of his seat and proceeded to restrain the Blaster. “Stop! Yield! Go away!” He commanded, but it refused to listen and struggled under his grip.

“Egads, I can’t have you cause trouble now.”

The Lich had slipped up close for a personal inspection. How silent and near-invisible he was, despite his lofty position. With a tap of the tip of his staff, the elder tested the Blaster’s wild disposition.

The skull reacted. Nervous, It snapped open its jaws with the threat to fire.

“Just as I thought,” said the Grandmaster. “You have the magical mastery, but you never quite accepted your Orange side. Human descent or not, those of dust express their emotions through magic.”

Looking at Gaster, the ancient one thus asked: “Does your heart inflame with anger? Hatred?”

“I…”

*Oh goodness gracious. Roman. Helvi. Help me. What should I do?*

*Be honest? Have I not dishonoured my parents enough?!!* 

*What do you mean The Grandmaster saw through me already??* 

Yet, his friends within were right. The Red one knew that the moment he showed his presence, old wounds would be opened.

“Oh Son of the Sages,” said Lord Berendin. “Tell me. Which path will you embrace? Of humanity, of monsterkind, or neither? The choice is in your hands. Don’t bottle up your feelings.”

“…Very well.” Said Gaster. “Very, very well then. I choose my OWN way!”

All pretense of a negotiation ended there. He let his heart free, and it demanded blood. Or whatever
the Liches spill when their bodies break.

Gaster grabbed his Gasterblaster by the mandible. With all the liquidy might he could muster, he swung the weapon towards the Grandmaster whole.

The ancient one raised his staff in a defensive position. Good. All according to plan.

With his holed hands, Gaster signed the command:

[SELF-DESTRUCT]

The gigantic skull construct thus charged itself up into a devastating bomb.

The blast destroyed the interrogation chamber. Tables, chairs, walls, floors, gone. Virtual reality frayed at its seams. Glitched squares of corrupted data lay about in the aftermath of the explosion.

As for Gaster, his splashed remains just crept back together. Only disruption of Determination could pose any danger to Amalgamates. The makeshift bomb was made of magic and therefore did nothing to his being.

I’m going too far?

Close your eyes then. Roman. This is between me and the Red Sage. Nothing to do with either of you.

The glitches subsided. The Red Lich leaned against his staff, winded from the impact. Empty sockets now replaced its once gemmed tip.

I knew it! Those crystals are no mere decoration. They’re filled with Determination: amplifiers for his magic. I see he’s come prepared for battle after all.

I must part him from his weapon at this instant!

Gaster rushed forward. His body coiled, stretched and squeezed towards the Lich, repositioning himself to capitalize on that small window of weakness.

There, he summoned three floating pairs of hands. Sent one to grab the elder by the neck.


The other extra pairs of arms locked down his arms and legs. Marks work best with an active touch, and Gaster won’t let any last minute limb-flailing get the better of him.

Body reformed -- chest forward -- back straight -- Gaster proclaimed the following with all his pride: “I am an Amalgamate, cursed with immortality: I will get up again and again until you kneel before ME!”

The Grandmaster asked back: “Will surrender satisfy your anger?”

Gaster held his breath. After a while, his lips turned up in a bitter snicker.

“Of course not. Surrender is far too easy.”

Gaster tightened his grip. What a shame that a Lich was stripped of flesh, otherwise he would have the satisfaction of strangulation.
However, there were other ways to inflict pain. He commanded the two other floating hands to twist and pull the skeletal joints. Even better if he could tear them off.

After all that effort, all he was awarded was some meagre grunting.

*These joints... they’re putting up more resistance than I thought. Well beyond human limits. It’s like they’re... refusing to break.*

*So this is what it means to be a Red Lich.*

All anger, all resentment, all hatred, burst the dams of his civil front.

“You...” Gaster wheezed. “You’re the reason why my father went insane. You’re the reason why he committed suicide. He took my mother’s dust and threw himself into YOUR BARRIER!”

“He should NEVER have revived you!”

“Show me! Show me how you betrayed my people, the ones who rescued you from the grips of death!”

“Fight!”

Yet despite everything, the provocation for mutual violence was denied. The Grandmaster stayed determined to remain meek.

The language of peace only added more fuel to the fire. His attempts, intensified.

Gaster sensed a shift in The Void. Crimson butterflies fluttered overhead. Squares of data appeared on the spot, and concrete formed in place.

*That’s right. We have company. To be exact, he never did leave us.*

*Mezil Thyme.*

A high-walled colosseum emerged: the ancient human’s arena of bloody battle. Proof of their cruel history.

Standing on the podium was none other than the Supreme Judge. Or rather, the Supreme Judge of bygone days. Gone were the wrinkles on his skin and the grey in his hair.

This was the Vampire of Time in his prime. Armed with a rifle.

“Father, cease the operation. He’s beyond reason.”

“Not yet, Winston.” The elder said, “This. Is just the beginning.”

“If it’s the beginning of pointless torture, I shall put an end to that.”

Red lines coursed through the arena. They revealed a tridecagram: Lady Lucidia’s ultimate weapon against all things Determination.

Mezil declared: “This is my final warning, W. D. Gaster. Stand down.”

“Here I thought I’m the insane one.” Gaster scoffed. “You do know that your beloved ‘father’ is a Red, yes? And yet you choose the WESS? It will never kill on its own, but it’s the aftermath that should have you worry.”
“A Red Lich’s primary binding force is Determination. If you drain them, I’d wager that his bones will become weak and brittle. I daresay just the weight of his own body would snap his neck!”

“Lay a single scratch on him, and you will pay dearly.” The Magus’s aim remained steady.

“Winston,” said the Lich. His tone was firmer than before. “We agreed that this is the time for reconciliation. Not judgement.”

The hesitation was clear, but Mezil relented. Gaster found that the most amusing sight.

“Son of the Sages. What do you think I should have done?” A question for Gaster.

In an ideal world, what should the Red Sage have done to save the Dreemurr Nation?

So he answered: “You should have helped us monsters win the war. Continued your council with the King and Queen. Remained loyal to us. Anything but that fancy terrarium of a tomb!”

He expected some kind of a defense. An explanation of the circumstances. A struggle.

Instead… the Red Sage confessed the following:

“Indeed, I could have done so. And yet I didn’t. I apologize, son of Shirai and Visigoth. I had failed you from the very beginning.”


*I’m supposed to be elated. Happy. Satisfied.*

*But… but why am I so frustrated?*

Words, shaking. Tempers, rising.

“I wish you’re dead, Red Sage.” Gaster blurted, tears streaming down his face. “If you were a mere name in history, I could distance you as a relic of your era. Reason that my parents upheld an ignorant fool based on personal biases.”

“If you were dead, I could deny my disgusting, boiling hatred against humanity. I could continue playing teacher, telling interesting tales for the next generation. As I had already done for Frisk and Papyrus.”

“If you live, I must accept you as a real person. With real feelings. With real remorses. Not a caricature.”

Gaster tightened his grip, ready to snap the Grandmaster’s neck.

“So please. Die for me.”

The Supreme Judge fired his rifle. The bullet didn’t strike Gaster. Rather, it struck the Grandmaster. The light of the red butterfly glowed so bright that it was blinding.

Then, the flames of the WESS were set alight.

The man once scattered across space and time had experienced many agonies. He thought he had survived them all, but they don’t compare to this private slice of hell.
In the end, Gaster was ‘baked’ into a piece of solid stone. Still conscious. Face frozen from the screaming pain. 

*This is what I had inflicted upon you, Papyrus?* The statue wondered.

*What a terrible, terrible scar. And now, I’ve dragged your parents through the same horrors.*

*Maybe it’s truly better if you hadn’t saved me.*

The aftermath unfolded. Mezil teleported to his elder’s side and smashed the prisoner free with the butt of his rifle.

“Are you hurt?” asked The Supreme Judge.

With a slight grunt the Grandmaster replied, “Somewhat. Your trump card stings more than his assault.”

“Apologies. He… forced my hand.”

“I understand. Shame we couldn’t resolve this without some roughhousing.”

Mezil huffed. “Everyone talks about peace, but they themselves are not peaceful. I wouldn’t need to be a ‘Keeper of Peace’ if everyone walked the talk.”

“Is that a jab at yourself?” asked the elder.

“Call it… self-acknowledgement.”

“Your sense of humour is as grim as usual, dear Winston. Now, let us revert. We can’t leave this man in torment.”

“Are you serious?”

“Please.”

The following sigh was one fit to be in a family.

“Affirmative, Father.”

Mezil snapped his fingers before Gaster’s face. The world went grey, and all movement stopped. Then, it’s back to the interrogation room. Alone with the Grandmaster.

The sudden shift from stone to liquid caused Gaster to splatter on the table. Too drastic to hold form.

The Grandmaster helped remould the goop. It’s like piecing together lumps of wet, sloppy clay, one careful handful after another.

“…How…?!” Gaster muttered. “I thought Frisk had the Keys of Fate…”

“So it is true. Your memories remain. Just like us Living Victories.”

“As for the Keys,” said the one of bone, “The Crimson Keeper gave it back to my son-in-law for the time being.”

*I… I can’t muster any more determination to defy.*

Barging back into the room was none other than the human Magus. His intense glare showed the
thinness of his patience. He... had stepped on a goopy bit. With a growl of agitation, the Supreme Judge plucked the mess off his sole.

“What was that childish prattling for?!” Mezil fumed. “Your proposal will only prolong conflict! Do you even know the definition of war? Or are you so sheltered in your mental ‘Underground’ that you glorify genocide?”

“There, there, Winston.” The Grandmaster coaxed. “I’m sure he studied plenty about the conflicts of the Surface. We wouldn’t have Sans Serif otherwise.”

“Yet he became so blinded by idealism that he tried to murder you, Father. Out of everyone, HE should know that there was no ‘good’ option!”

Mezil shoved the piece in his hand at the half-formed mass. The action telegraphed his irritation well enough.

“Listen here, W. D. Gaster. War. Is. Hell. It’s a realm of damned if you do, damned if you don’t. Need I remind you about your people’s condition a thousand years ago?”

“The Dreemurr Nation was surrounded and outnumbered. The humans had a DEMON with the Keys of Fate. And not a single soul with flesh and blood had ANY interest for a diplomatic solution. They wanted you GONE. Exterminated.”


“And if your kind stole a human, what would that prove to the world? That monsters live up to their name?”

“How do I know this? Because for the past thousand years, many of the Surface survivors volunteered themselves to become war machines. They had their beings twisted beyond saving so that their children could see the light of dawn.”

“Do you want your citizens to suffer the same fate?!”

Gaster remained silent.

So in the end... they too had made many of their own ‘Sans Serifs’.

War is an ugly thing after all.

Lowering his head, the Seer admitted his defeat. “You’ve made your point. Fine. Do what you must.”

Except, The Grandmaster shook his skull. “Son of Shirai and Visigoth, I hold no personal grievances against you.”

“The Grandmaster wishes to parley,” said Mezil.

“Yes. The offer of negotiation still stands regardless of your actions here today. We merely ask for your cooperation going forward.”

“And in exchange?” Gaster didn’t know if he should be relieved or insulted. Perhaps both. “No. Wrong question. I can see that I’m on the losing side. I’ve already done so much to make myself the
enemy. What’s there left to negotiate?”

“The terms of our survival,” replied the Grandmaster, “For humans, monsters, and the whole of Planet Earth. Ebott Town included.”

“Until then, a proper atonement of our past mistakes will have to wait.”
I know I missed the whole of last week. Big, difficult scene is big. For a refresher of ‘what in the world is going on’, check chapters 121 to 125.

There’s a bonus content this week: Gerson and the Purple Child. Thanks to Ma_Kir for this request.

Also, bonus points if you could understand any of the Steins;Gate references.

Happy Easter! And have a good weekend.

‘When the Hero’s quest ended, he fell on his knees. The strain of the journey had at last caught up to him.’

‘While his tired bones rest in a healing cradle, he dreamed of a different story…’

In a world that did not come to pass, there was once a ceremony conducted by The Underground.

King Asgore announced the cancellation of the war. He explained to his citizens that they had discovered a way to bypass the Barrier. However, the human world outside still required more investigation.

He opened the containers of the Six Souls in public. Apologized for the children’s untimely death… and let them free.

At least, that how the story was supposed go.

In the midst of the partying, The Great Scientist Papyrus couldn’t find his three-in-one elders. That won’t do. Uncle Gaster was an important figure; he shouldn’t miss out on the best part.

“UNCLE GASTER? UNCLE GASTER!!” He called out. “MY GELGETTHI ISN’T GOING TO LAST FOREVER!”

“WHERE COULD HE HAVE GONE?”

The Dreamer wondered the same.

“MAYBE HE HAS UNFINISHED BUSINESS WITH THE KING?”

“HMM. HMM. CHANNELING MY INNER GENIUS TELLS ME I SHOULD HEAD TO THE ROYAL CASTLE, PRONTO! YES. THAT’S RIGHT. IT IS THE CHOICE OF SKULLS;GOAT!”

It appears that no matter which world he came from, the general thread of Papyrus’ logic remained intact. The other world’s version of him ran all the way there.

Except, the place was empty.
But when he left the castle gardens, Papyrus spotted Gaster. He’s sliding across the trails that led away from New Home, carrying a potted golden flower. He recognized it as the source of King Asgore’s favourite tea.

The youngster called for him, but the uncle carried on. The goopy skeleton headed towards a small cave. Papyrus followed not too far behind.

At the end of the journey lay a secret garden powered by science: artificial sunlight, a water source, and a host of other machines tailored for optimum plant life.

Five other flowers had already been planted. There was a hole left for the sixth.

“UNCLE GASTER?” asked Papyrus.

“Shh…” The man rested a finger on his lips. “Keep your voice down, son. This is a very delicate experiment.”

The youngster covered his mouth.

“Wait for me outside. There’s something I must explain.”

Wait, he did. He didn’t seem to mind having to call on a bit of patience. Papyrus, however, did sense something off about this situation. It’s enough to make him fidget and jitter.

Once Gaster finished his gardening work, he beckoned Papyrus to follow. They moved farther and farther away from the cave.

The uncle’s face lit up with excitement. He asked: “Did you know that these special flowers have the ability to retain great power? Think of them as self-sustaining batteries.”

“WOWIE!”

“Wowie, indeed. I don’t have any more materials for replacements. That’s why I need all the help I can get to maintain what we have.”

The smile faded to deep concern.

“Papyrus,” said Gaster. “Could you check on those flowers every day for me? I have a bad tendency to get absent-minded when the schedule gets hectic. Disastrous for plant care. This… this is one garden that cannot fail.”

“I THOUGHT WE ALREADY FIGURED OUT HOW TO GROW HUMAN VEGETABLES UNDERGROUND?”

“Different plants have different needs. I’m trying to find the ideal habitat for our little golden ones. Replicate King Asgore’s throne room, you might say. Will you aid me?”

“OF COURSE, UNCLE GASTER! YOU KNOW I’LL HELP YOU IN ANY WAY I CAN! NYEH!”

“Good, good. One more thing, Papyrus.”

“YES?”
“Please... leave your brother out of this. That poor chap is already leaden with so much responsibility. If we heap one more experiment on his skull, I’m afraid his spine might snap.”

“OH MY GOD, YOU MEAN THIS COULD BE MY SECOND SOLO PROJECT?!”

“Second?”

“What is a mad scientist without a personal ultra secret pet project? Of course I have one, uncle Gaster!”

“When it’s done, it will bedonggle your minds! My mind! And my future self’s mind! Nyeh heh heh heh heh heh!”

The dream then zoomed forward to the very day that pet project failed spectacularly; the youngster had tried to break the taboo placed upon him and suffered the ultimate punishment for doing so.

When he next woke up, he found himself in a strange, empty space. It’s dark. And fireflies floated overhead.


“WHERE AM I?...” Papyrus asked.

“Also where are you? I don’t see you anywhere uncle Gaster?”

“That is because you’re now a part of me. Living in my inner world. Don’t worry, you are not alone.”

He met a man there who was almost a mirror image of his magnificent self, and a beautiful woman that he doesn’t recognize. They claimed to be his parents.

He was happy at first. Elated. But then, a big fatigue washed over him. Bedtime had arrived, and his favourite car-bed spawned in this strange space.

They exchanged goodnights.

For the first time in his life... his parents tucked him into bed.

The ebb between lucidity and sleep rolled by. Many a times he tossed and turned, wishing to be awake, only for a breeze to lull him back to slumber once again.

Such was the pattern, until one day he had a rude awakening.

“UNCLE GASTER? WHAT’S HAPPENING?!”

“The worst case scenario, my boy. See for yourself.”

Outside the mindscape, Uncle Gaster hurried into action. Hordes of malformed melting monsters crawled at his tail. They groaned, attempting to latch on to the edges of his clothes.

“A REAL ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE?!? JUST LIKE THE MOVIES???”

“Close enough. Accurate, I daresay.”

“WHERE ARE WE GOING?”
“To our backup plan. The fruits of our labour will shine today. First thing’s first, though. We must shake off this creature!”

Gaster summoned his Blaster, firing into the goopy mass. Each pulse of that beam deterred their approach ever so slightly.

“NO! DON’T HURT THEM!”

“No, worry not, they’re Amalgamates. My beams are nothing more than inconvenient brooms of hindrance.”

More dripped down from the ceiling.
Even more climbed upwards from the sides of the cliff walls.

They added themselves to the shambling horde.

Papyrus could hear their mumblings.
‘You’re like us.’
‘Come.’
‘Join.’
‘Why do you resist?’
‘Why?’
‘I hate you I hate you I hate you.’

“Argh, you pesky pests.” Gaster grumbled. “Strangers shall not encroach my sanctuary! My body is for the Font family, and the Font family alone!”

The struggle continued until a great crimson lightning flashed from the distance. Thunder boomed through the caverns.

Upon receiving the command, the whole Abomination shifted their focus to a single point.

There, ‘The Last Persona’ emerged from his protection.

Then. Then…

Papyrus’ parents obscured his vision. Though their loving arms covered his sights to save him from witnessing the cruel execution, the loss of life still lingered in the air.

His brother Sans was no more. The shock left the younger sibling muted.

“I’m sorry,” muttered Gaster. “We must make haste.”

They escaped to an offshoot trail. Papyrus recognized this as his daily path to the secret garden.

He wondered. Was there a hidden treasure hidden underneath the bloom? Could that be the experiment?

Gaster pried a piece of fake rock off the wall, exposing a hidden button. He slammed it with the side of his fist.

Light bathed the golden flowers. To Papyrus’ shock, human SOULS floated out of them.

“W-WHAT IS THIS?! I THOUGHT WE SET THEM FREE!”
“Papyrus. These are ‘Ebott Goldenflowers’: otherwise known as ‘Cheaters of Death’. They’re vessels that preserve the life of the departed.”

“On the day of the ceremony, I used these flowers to re-capture the fallen human SOULS. Away from the rest of the populace.”

“…WHY DID YOU LIE?”

The elder took a deep breath, followed with a heavy sigh. “The numerous reports about the Surface pointed in a dire direction. Your brother believed that something could be done without the Six. I did not.”

“I… I was his partner in crime for this doomed timeline. The responsibility is mine to bear. Therefore, I made this garden behind the backs of the nation.”

Gaster stretched his arms out towards the floating SOULS.

“Children of humanity, I present myself to you as a vessel! Please aid us in subduing that tyrant!”

Except, the SOULS refused to cooperate. They hovered there, stubbornly idle.

“…Well, I understand your hesitation. Still, this is not the time for grudges. Right outside is an evil man controlling a true abomination. If we don’t cooperate, he will devour you!”

The SOULS pulsed. They transmitted their thoughts via magic.

Purple asked for Gerson.

Yellow asked for Grillby.

“I’m afraid they're not here with us. I’d wager that they’re on top of that floating island. No! I’m not talking nonsense! The world has gone haywire over the past year.”

They then asked for their most diligent caretaker.

He watered them.

Checked the lighting.

Pampered their soil.

Every day, without fail.

‘Papyrus’.

“Well. He is right here. Up you go, young man.”

The next thing he knew, his head was perched on Doctor Gaster’s body. He didn't even get a chance to say goodbye to his parents.

“UM… HELLO?” he said.

The SOULS responded positive, at least. They surrounded him, greeting back.

“Yes, it is I, the great magnificent scientist Papyrus! Nyeh heh heh! Apologies for the lack of anything other than my handsome visage. An unfortunate accident happened.”
“BUT, WHAT UNCLE GASTER SAID IS TRUE. THE BAD HUMAN... HE...”

Tears dampened his eyes. Fresh was the wound in his heart.

“HE ALREADY KILLED MY BROTHER.”

The Six granted him a moment of silence, mourning the loss together.

“THANK YOU, MY FLOATY FRIENDS. I'M GRATEFUL. BUT WE SHOULDN’T DALLY ANYMORE.”

Acknowledging the urgency, The Six set aside their differences and merged with Papyrus. Unimaginable power blessed his being.

His liquid goop body shifted around, remodeling itself to a form more suitable for the task at hand.

...It was none other than his original, pre-dusted shape, battle body and all.

His right Eye -- now restored to its former glory -- burst into a torch. It showed him a vision of what’s happening in present time.

“OH NO! SOMEONE’S IN TROUBLE!” he exclaimed. “WE MUST HURRY BEFORE THEY FALL!”

Papyrus dashed out of the cave.

He will not lose another life under his watch. Not today.

He thus leapt against the walls, ran upside down on the ceilings, and rushed through the Underground’s inverted terrain without a single missed step. He did it in such a natural, great manner, he forgot that he’s now a Six SOUL GOD.

The Abomination noticed his presence. It began to move towards Papyrus, acting on its instinct to assimilate.

In turn, his clairvoyance showed him how to use his Blasters to halt their advances. So Papyrus did exactly that.

The Six cheered on.

When he arrived at the scene, the long-lost striped human friend duelled against a Seer Amalgamate. It had a peculiar mechanical device strapped on its arm.

The inner Uncle Gaster recognized it as Sans’ ultimate weapon: The Seraph System. He raised an immediate red flag, warning Papyrus to confiscate it posthaste.

The Persona meanwhile watched from afar. He must have realised that The System cannot be used by those of flesh and blood. Therefore, he commanded a slave to do his bidding.

Papyrus conjured a femur. Raised it high.

“NYEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEHHHHHH!!!”

Down from the ceiling he dropped. Upon that mighty swing, the liquid skeleton splattered all around.

The Seraph System spun in the air. Papyrus caught it.
When he did so, a surge of images flooded his mind; he struggled to stand as his Eye intensified.

“WHAT IS THIS?” he muttered. “WHO IS THIS OTHER ME?”

The Dreamer knew exactly what the young man saw.

The Fire of Humanity told him tales of a world so foreign yet so familiar.

In that world...

He, Papyrus, didn’t pursue science. Instead, he aspired to be a knight.

He didn’t have a proper job. Instead, he was stuck as a constant trainee.

He didn’t help the family run a water plant. Instead, he befriended a human in a striped shirt.

His social status was so much lower. Yet, the Great Scientist surely must have felt the grief of losing that life.

After all, feelings are memories that transcend time.

When the vision ended, he saw a pair of disembodied hands strapping the Seraph System on his arm.

“W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING, UNCLE GASTER?”

One last tug secured the belt.

‘Leave the controls to me.’ Gaster signed back. The hands then vanished.

“Papyrus?” said the human. “You’re… you’re alive?”

He turned around. It’s a voice that he had heard for the first time in this timeline. It nonetheless invoked nostalgia.

“ANIMATED AND LIVELY, I’D SAY! BUT FORGIVE ME. I DON’T REMEMBER YOUR NAME.”

“Frisk! The name is Frisk. I’m so happy to see you.”

“I’M… I’M HAPPY TO SEE YOU TOO.”

The Last Persona then stepped onto the battlefield to greet his new opponent, cutting their reunion short.

“Another Oracle, huh?”

After a brief scrutiny of Papyrus, he clapped his hands. Slow. Deliberate.

“I see. You monsters did gather those human SOULS after all. My ancestors warned everyone about the dangers all those years ago. Nobody believed it until the Great Ebott Razing.”

“Hmph. Not that I blame you. Power is a wonderful thing, is it not?”

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN.”

“It’s all about enacting your will. Sealing you feeble creatures under the mountain stripped
what little autonomy you had.”

“Imagine the festering resentment! Only a matter of time before the pot boils over.”

“Why don’t you show me your true heart’s desire? Your god commands you!”

An oppressive aura of Determination descended upon his skull. It attempted to stir a sense of bloodlust that he never knew it existed.

His mother, insulted.
Uncle Gaster, taunted.
Papyrus, challenged.

The Six scrambled to rein them in. Yet, his temper continued to roil.

“I… I DON’T WANT TO FIGHT. BUT YOU…”

Head, hot and light. A creeping madness muddled his senses. He tried to shake himself out of it.

“YOU… YOU KILLED MY BROTHER. AND YOU’RE TRYING TO KILL MY NEW FRIEND.”

But it refused. Every bone on his being rattled.

“I HATE YOU…!”

Persona’s command set alight that inner Hell.

“I’LL… K I L L Y O U--”

A tight slap on the back of his pelvis snapped him out of it. Executed by none other than Frisk, his pint-sized human buddy.

They said: “Don’t. He’s not worth staining your hand. Hating on others won’t solve anything.”

They stepped forward. Intense white flames surrounded the child in a ring of fire, ready to retaliate upon a moment’s notice.

That magic… he realized, belongs to Asgore’s clone: Queen Toriel.

What happened to her?

“Papyrus, take the Six and flee to the Bastion. Don’t worry about me. I have Mom.”

He didn’t understand a lot of things. Why does Frisk possess Queen Toriel’s fire magic? What was Persona’s ultimate mission? Why the Underground, of all places?

However… he had priorities. Frisk’s safety came first.

Papyrus used some of his Blue magic to pull the kid to his side.

With a heroic pose, he declared: “IT’S RUDE TO HOG THE SPOTLIGHT, FRISK! YOU HAVE ONE SOUL AND I HAVE SIX, SO I SHOULD BE THE MAIN CHARACTER OF THIS PLAY.”

“BESIDES, OUR OPPONENT AND MY MAGNIFICENT SELF ARE GROWNUPS. GREAT
Amused by this declaration, Persona laughed. Something went right at least.

“It appears that you’re not as moronic as you look. Indeed, let’s deal with this as true men! Tiny brats shouldn’t get involved.”

“AGREED! LET’S HAVE OUR BATTLE ON THE COUNT OF THREE.”

“Fine by me.”

Frisk tried to object, but Papyrus showed a reassuring hand.

The skeleton conjured a new bone. Persona prepared his battle stance.

“THREE.”

“TWO.”

“ONE!”

“START!”

Papyrus threw his weapon and…

…Scooped Frisk into his arms. He sped towards the nearest shortcut with the kid held above his head.

In truth, that bone was none other than his ‘Special Attack Version Kai’: a flash grenade.

“FLEEING IS A VALID FIGHTING TACTIC TOO!!! NYEH HEH HEEEEEEEEEEEEEHH!”

When the bomb set off, the dream of this timeline began to warp. Twist. The record of their journey, lost in the ripples of possibilities.

It was a grey day.
The skies were crying.
The winds were howling.

Wherever they went, the Abomination continued to spill from the cracks and caves of Mount Ebott. Neverending.

There was something warm in his hands. Papyrus looked down.

It was a SOUL. Frisk’s SOUL.

The kid didn’t make it. The Queen, lost forever. Despite all his efforts, a terrible misfortune happened in the midst of their escape.

Tears mixed with the rain, soaking into his gloves.

‘Take them, Papyrus.’
‘It’s too late for the child. But, we still have a chance.’

Uncle Gaster, Father, Mother, and the Six waited for his final decision.
Papyrus absorbed the SOUL in his embrace. With that, he ascended into the mythical figure of a Seven SOUL GOD.

The Dream was then cut short. And The Dreamer awakened.

The next thing he knew, the present day Papyrus struggled amidst warm, bubbling water.

His Eye burned bright. Too bright. The tricolour shades of his being reflected against the smooth glass covers of his healing pod.

He heard Lady Lucidia on the outside. She yelled something, but the keen noise of his people’s magic drowned out the details.

‘Extinguish’? He thought he heard.

WAIT!

A Seer’s Seal attempted to control the flame. Curb it.

NOT YET.

THERE ARE STILL SO MANY IMPORTANT CLUES TO SEARCH FOR!

Papyrus fought back. The Seal broke within seconds as the young Seer set his skull ablaze.

I WANT TO SEE THE END!

At the peak of his power, the cradle that had kept him safe could take no more. The pod exploded. Liquid spilled. Glass shattered. Metal splintered.

Papyrus fell into the mess of brokenness. The bits nicked his bones, his skull throbbed, and his sockets stung from the unceasing burn.

Yet their pain paled compared to his heart.

“I CAN’T SEE IT…” he said.

Papyrus cried and cried.

“WHY CAN’T I SEE IT? WHY???”

The sudden presence of a familiar red scarf snagged his face. All of its magic suppressive features kicked in. At last, the fire in his Eye stopped burning.

With a protesting muffle, Papyrus said: “WHAT IS THIS RUDENESS??! CAN’T YOU SEE I’M IN THE MIDDLE OF THE VITALLEST OF BUSINESSES???”

He tried to pull the scarf down, but a small vine slapped him on his wrist and stopped him without mercy.

The flower chided: “No. Bad. We’re not risking another apocalypse until we figure out what’s wrong with you.”

“FLOWEY…?”

“Yep. Your very best friend. And if we’re friends you’ll listen to me. It’s for your own good.”
In the background, Papyrus heard Chara.

“You okay?” asked the ex-human.

“I-I’m fine,” Lucidia replied. “Please excuse me. I need to run some checks on Sans.”

“I’m gonna call the janitor then.”

“Not yet. Sorry. I… don’t want to scare the staff.”

“Oh, right,” Chara sighed. “Of course. Ignorant humans. This is why I hate them. How about we borrow a mop and a bucket?”

“A better option. Thank you.”

After some clattering on the keyboard, she breathed a sigh of relief. “No errors detected. Integrity, a hundred percent.”

“Even after all of that?” Flowey asked. “Lady, you’re scary strong. I mean. There’s actual metal shrapnel! Piercing the wall!”

“I couldn’t risk damaging the computer. And… I wouldn’t want you or Chara to get hurt either. You’re organic. And shieldless.”

A humm of magic floated towards him. Gently, a woman’s slim fingers pulled down on the fabric. She rewound the scarf. Freed up his left socket so Papyrus wouldn’t be blindfolded.

Lady Lucidia’s Dichromatic Eyes then shifted their colours between her mismatched green and blue to a united purple. The last time she did that, she analyzed him from head to toe.

Her face was filled with worry.

“Unable to complete analysis...” she said.

Papyrus gripped her arm, worried. Almost frantic. “MY BROTHER. SANS. IS HE ALRIGHT? D-DID I HURT HIM???”

Although shocked at first, the woman patted his hand and reassured: “He’s safe. I did not detect any anomalies. Excuse me, I have other priorities to tackle.”

“OH. RIGHT.” He let her go.

“Flowey, please take him to the bathroom and tend to his needs.”

“Okay. C’mon Paps, follow where I point.”

As they walked on, the youngster waded through the result of his accidental destruction. The floor was wet. Slippery. And at times very, very sharp.

The pod? In shambles: broken beyond repair.

They’re alone in the bathroom now. They had folded up towels and hospital gowns, waiting for use.

Papyrus ignored them all.

“Uh, hello?” Flowey waved a leaf before him.
The skeleton insisted on standing before the sink, bones bared.

“Ugh, you-- I know you can’t catch a cold but I got a job to do!”

Flowey tossed a towel over Papyrus. “Dry yourself up already. Sheesh.”

The skeleton draped the fabric over himself, huddling under it.

“MAY I COMPLAIN?” he asked.

Flowey rolled his eyes. Pouted. Then, he begrudgingly surrendered. “Sure. Go ahead. I complain a lot too.”

“OKAY.” Papyrus smiled. “THAT BIG FIERY SUNDAY WAS TERRIBLE.”


“SANS NEVER DID PICK UP THAT SOCK. IT’S STILL IN THE EXACT SAME SPOT ON OUR NEAR-IDENTICAL SURFACE HOUSE.”

“Wow, seriously? That’s trying too hard.”

“ISN’T THAT RIGHT? AND! HIS ROOM IS ALWAYS A MESS. IT’S SO IRRITATING! JUST LIKE HIS BAD PUNS!”

Moments of silence went by.

The Seer whimpered. “I WANT MY OLD LIFE BACK.”

“I knew it!” The flower groaned. “That’s Frisk-level nonsense right there. C’mon, your old life was STUPID! Nobody took you seriously. Like ever!”

“…Then again, you could afford to waste your time on dumb stuff. Not the case anymore, huh?”

Flowey rested on top of his skull. “I know how that feels. Chara and I… We can’t go back to the good ol’ days either. Our fallout proved that.”

“DID YOU MAKE UP?” he asked.

“Call it a work in progress,” the boy admitted. “We’re trying to find common ground. Not getting on each other’s nerves. You know. The logical approach. Whatever.”

“Anyway, give yourself a break. You deserve it more than anyone else. Let us deal with the bullcrap for the rest of today.”

Even though Prince Asriel had much bitterness to deal with, he still chose to be good. Papyrus patted him on his petalled head.

“THANK YOU, FLOWERY.”

“...Now you’re just misnaming me on purpose.”

“OH NO. NOT AT ALL! IT’S A SPECIAL NICKNAME JUST FOR YOU.”

“Aww gee, thanks.”

The two snickered together: sharing a moment of brevity at the end of an otherwise turmoiled
Tuesday.
Winding Wednesdays

You checked your phone first thing in the morning. And you told yourself the following:

‘Good Morning, Frisk. It’s Wednesday, 7 AM.’

You tried to remember what happened in the later half of yesterday.

You arrived home at long last.
You met up with Snakeface outside.
You unlocked the door with the thought of making lunch for yourself while you wait.

Hmm. After your meal, you tried to loan Mom’s robes to Gaelic. He can’t keep running around half-naked.

Except, her clothes ended up being too wide and too long. Then you thought of loaning your wardrobe. You ditched the idea immediately.

Garamond’s spare clothes were more to his size. At least the robes served as a nice blanket of sorts.

In the meantime, you also unloaded all the lockboxes from the boot and hauled them to your room. Boy, those were heavy.

You hit the bed not long after 8 pm, right after dinner. You had been deprived of a good rest and the hospital bed didn’t cut it either.

Eleven hours of sleep, huh? Geez, that’s too much. No wonder you felt so groggy.

You dragged yourself out of bed for your morning routine.

Does this mean you have to make breakfast for everyone? Ugh, more cooking was not on your agenda. Perhaps you should go with some toasted bread instead?

You walked down the stairs. Cold winds rotated in your living room, making themselves right at home.

How odd.

Upon closer inspection, the culprit was… another broken window!

FIRST TEM’S KITCHEN, NOW YOURS?

WHY MUST SNAKEFACE KEEP BREAKING WINDOWS???

WHO THE HECK DOES HE THINK HE IS????? PAPYRUS?????

Then again, they’re both skeletons. Is this a skeleton habit?

That’s it! You must teach him how to use doors. It’s now the first point on your agenda.

You pulled the curtains to prevent people from peeping inside.

Off to the kitchen you went. You noticed something sitting on the chopping board.

There’re two pieces of raw, whole poultry. Tiny things. Could they be ‘spring chickens’?
No. The meat looks way too dark. Reminds you of raw liver.

…You’re not confident enough to cook meat yet. Where did this come from? What are you going to do? Fridge them? Should you turn on your PC and look up for tips?

You heard the rustling of paper bags behind you. Oh, it’s Mister Garamond with groceries.

He seems surprised to see you.

“Good morning.” he said, “You’re up early.”

To be honest, you were up way late for the time you went to bed. That’s not normal. Did he manage to buy the goods from the local market?

“Yes,” he replied. “You weren’t around to hear the news, but the curfew lightened up last night.”

Oh?

“Upon King Asgore’s advice. Businesses opened, supply trucks flowed in, and people got to work. I saw some children heading to school as well.”

So, life returned to a semi-normal state?

“Yes. Though all facilities will close earlier than usual. Do you wish to attend class?”

Garamond’s gotta be kidding. There’s no way you can do your Crimson Keeper job and attend school at the same time.

At this rate, school may have to wait for next year. Keeping the world intact comes first.

“Hmm,” he pondered. “You’re right. But missing your education will be detrimental in the long run.”

Yeah… You would have to try catch up over the summer. Or in the Hub. Doctor Gaster is a great teacher! He’ll definitely help.

“That’s a relief.” Garamond took off his trenchcoat and gloves. Rolling up his sleeves, he said, “Excuse me. I’ll try to prepare breakfast.”

Pointing to the mystery poultry, you had to ask…

‘What are those?’

“Pigeons.”

…Pigeons? The same birds people feed for fun in city squares and parks?

“Yes.”

You’re shocked. Are they safe to eat? Never know what they’ve consumed beforehand.

“Gaelic said these two are safe for human consumption. I trust him: he hunts for House Berendin.”

Huh… interesting.

Does Garamond know how to cook them?
He scratched the back of his skull. “I, uh, only have Lady Lucidia’s written instructions to go by. Why not have a look?”

Heh. It’s a simple bird-on-chopped vegetable roast, with some bacon on the breast to prevent it from drying out.

Isn’t this more of a lunch or dinner thing…?

“It’s the only recipe that doesn’t require knowledge of butchering. The bird can be cooked whole. And, I won’t burn the vegetables.”

Hmm. Well, okay. We could strip the leftovers into a sandwich filling. But, with a bird so small between three people… that’s not likely to happen.

“Oh. Don’t worry about Gaelic. He already had his breakfast. The remaining pigeons are for us.”

That’s sweet of him. In his own wild way.

Where’s he anyway? Home?

“Oh the mountain,” Garamond replied. “Something about mushrooms and herbs. It did rain yesterday.”

* * *

Phew. What a hearty breakfast. The taste of pigeon was a hybrid between chicken and beef. It’s stronger than conventional meats, but nothing compared to snails and badghetti.

You checked your phone. You had a personal direct message from Cenna.

**HotAndSpicy**

Frisky. Message me the moment you finish your breakfast.

You typed back:

**Shining Star**

I’m here.

**HotAndSpicy**

Can you get yourself in position for a live vid in about 10 mins?

Official business.

Accept the first private number that beams through.
You informed Garamond that your sister needs to contact you.

“Acknowledged.” He said, proceeding to stack the plates and clean the kitchen.

Hmm. Snakeface still hadn’t come back yet. You wondered if he got lost, or tangled up in some trouble.

You hoped nothing happened.

For now, you went to your room, turned on the PC, booted the client for your broadcast, and waited for a private number to contact you…

Accept.

To your surprise, Chara was the one on the other side of the line.

“Greetings, Frisk.” They said, “I’m playing a stand-in for Lady Lucidia today. She’s busy and blah blah blah. Anyways I’m supposed to give you a status update.”

Go on. Shoot.

“Good news: mister fiery bartender is awake. Other than a huge, splitting headache associated with exhaustion, he’s fine. According to Lady Lucy’s timetable, Grillby’s family is set to visit him today.”

That’s a huge relief! Wait. He has family?

“Ahuh. Pretty sizable by monster standards too. Four cousins. Parents still around. Grillby is the only bachelor.”

“Remember Fuku Fire and Warm Torchguy? They’re his youngest niece and nephew.”

Ooooh!

…You’re a bit creeped out of how much information Lady Lucidia has on her fingertips.

“Get used to it. Intel is her game.”

“Okay. Up next…” Chara took a moment to read the notes in a different window.

“Undyne is no longer a bright red lobster. Still got some splotches here and there, but otherwise the docs gave her the okay for a discharge. She’s not leaving without Dad though. So she’s still gonna remain at the hospital.”

Expected development on the last bit. What’s next?

“Goopdoc actually changed his tune. He was super uncooperative before. Now he’s giving it his all. I dunno what happened in the interrogation chamber.”

Um. No torture involved, right?

“Har har. Nice one. We always were on the same wavelength. But, nah. That won’t work on the
Chara looked left and right, then leaned forward to the microphone.

“I saw this guy in a hooded cloak yesterday. All black-and-red. Spotted him in the hallway while I was packing extra junk food before departure. I think that’s the legendary ‘Grandmaster’.”

W-wait! Isn’t that the man who helped you out in the Sans fiasco?!

“Oh, you met him before? I hear he’s the REAL top dog of the Magus Association. Not Tsunderjudge.”

“So. With goopdoc no longer being a pain in the butt, the adults got together for a meeting.”

You guessed that Mom and Dad flexed their diplomatic muscles.

“Bingo, smart cookie. We had some hot negotiation action.”

“…Actually it’s Mom and Undyne who were dishing out the most heat. You know Dad: with enough self-pity points, he’ll just sacrifice himself without a second thought.”

You nodded twice.

Did they finalize their terms and conditions yet?

“Not yet, they still need your input. Think of it as drafting a proposal. I’m sure they’ll contact you tomorrow.”

“Meanwhile, you have better things to do. Your bodyguard informed Lady Lucy that you picked up Snakeface. Stopped his invasion at Tem House too. Yay.”

Chara doesn’t sound happy at all…

“Because I would rather have him locked up in a dungeon. As for the key? Flushed down the toilet!”

How cruel.

“I don’t care. My time in Gungnir was pretty shitty. But, there’s some stuff that I agree with. Such as: ‘don’t tempt fate by taming wild animals’.”

“You know, in the days of yore, rulers employed my people to kill any beasts that stalked their settlements. Those creatures were deadly pests. Vermin. Be very, very wary of them. It’s kill or be killed, y’know.”

The flower rubbed their forehead, sighing.

“Look. Frisk. That guy. He’s way, waaaay too much for Azzie and I to handle. Wanna know how our first meeting went? He tried to eat our petals! I’m not kidding.”

Even though they’re plants?! Here you thought only creatures look tasty.

“YES. That guy eats everything! And I mean EVERYTHING! Even nasty veggies like us aren’t safe!!! The only reason we’re okay is thanks to the Tsunderjudge.”

“If it’s up to me, I’d rather you help us get Papyrus better. Let Snakeface rot by the wayside.”
P-Papyrus? What happened to him?!

“Classified,” huffed Chara. “He’s awake. Eating. And Azzie is taking care of him. That’s all I can say.”

“Heh. That Azzie. Surprising change from his Underground psychobrat self, huh? This fussy, caring Asriel is more like how I remembered him.”

Le gasp. Does that mean there are improvements on feeling love and compassion?

“Nah. Not at all. Both of us still feel jack squat in that department. But he remembers what’s it like. Thanks to you.”

“Anyways, for your assignment. You need to get Gaelic sane enough to hold a proper conversation.”

That’s… not what you expected. Why so?

“Because he must be able to follow your instructions. And have fine motor control. And also, not eat everything he comes across.”

Hmm. That sounds like a lot of work.

“Bingo again. Now you understand why I would rather have Papyrus? A loud silly glory hog he may be, he’s way more predictable.”

“Alas! What can we do? The Trashbag fucked everyone over.”

It’s fine, Chara. You don’t find it a bother. You want to befriend him anyway.

“Good for you. Now go and ask your sis for tips”

Can do. Anything else?

“Nope. I’ll call again another day. Keep your phone charged. See ya.”

Bye Chara. Well, Cenna is next…

Three rings later, she picked up. “Yo Frisky! You’re up to date I take?”

Ahuh. Heard about the assignment too. Gotta get Gaelic back on track.

“Aw yis, time for me to shine! Okay Frisky, how is he at the moment?”

Kinda hard to tell. Snakeface’s not home. Out hunting and foraging. He got you some pigeon meat!

“Oh really? Great news there, Frisky. It means he still recalls you’re his friend.”

But, he broke out this morning. Through your house window!

“Crap. That means he forgot how to use a door again…”

How is that even possible?

“Long story. Anyways, you wanna lead him toward human-specific activities. Like, listen to some songs. Hymns. Folk tunes. Simple stuff. Then wait wait wait Mez what the heck are you tryin--”
Cenna’s voice faded into the background. She protested something about ‘stealing my phone’ and ‘giving it back’.

Ever severe, Mezil Thyme asked: “What do you think of Gaelic?”

Knew it. Bad Tsunderjudge! You puffed your cheeks and demanded that he return the device to its rightful owner. This instant!

“I will do so after we clarify some details.”

You sighed. Okay, fine. You asked if he wants to specify his question further. It’s too vague.

“Do you consider him a man, a beast, or a cute pet? Be honest about it.”

Uh… You don’t mean to be offensive, but your impressions lean between ‘cute pet’ and ‘beast’ territory.

“Has anyone told you to lock him up in a cage and throw away the key?”

What the heck?!?! Is he psychic?? Did time rewind while you were sleeping???

Mezil huffed. “I’ve lived long enough to hear every objection under the sun.”

More so with the Keys of Fate?

“Yes.”

Good point. If that’s the case… yeah. ‘Someone’ did tell you to do that.

“An impatient folly.” the Tsunderjudge replied. “Perish that thought from your mind. Remember your Underground adventures. Offer your grace to him and you will be blessed a hundredfold.”

You can do that.

“Are you certain?”

Yes, sir. Super certain.

“Very well then. I will be giving the phone back to Cenna now. You may continue your inquiries.”

Just like that, the Tsunderjudge’s gone.

You had a feeling that your difficulty meter just keeps on ramping up since your pinkie-swear with Sans in early winter.

You asked Cenna why the Tsunderjudge was being extra tsun.


“Y’know Frisky. If this is too much, I’ll help ya out. Get discharged early and roll over to Ebott. I got ten years of experience in handling the loony bin.”

…Only if the doctors give the all clear. Last thing you want now is some random infection tossing more spanners in the works.

“No problemo! I’ll try to weasel out under ol’ Mez’s nose while he’s sleeping. Can only stand being
cooped up around him for so long."

You giggled. Yep. You totally absolutely certainly see why.

“The earliest I can ‘discharge’ will be… noon tomorrow?”

That’s late! Can’t she do it noon today?

“Nope. No can do. Already got myself busted once. Gotta lay low for a little while longer. In the meantime follow my phone tips. So hold out until then, okay?”

* * *

You checked your phone first thing in the morning. And you told yourself the following:

‘Good Morning, Frisk. It’s Wednesday, 7 AM.’

You tried to remember what happened in the later half of yesterday.

First, you tried to teach Gaelic how to use the door. It was a colossal failure as he kept taking the same old path of least resistance. Oh well.

Then you opened a box of children’s board games. Tried to play Snakes and Ladders with him. Pun intended. Rolling dice and counting steps are what sentient beings do.

Surprisingly, Gaelic understood numbers better than proper entrances. You don’t get it. But, you’ll take any victory… even if you did lose the game.

Dinner was more pasta, topped with butter-sauteed canned snails and wild mushrooms, accompanied with a bowl of fresh wild herbs: aromatic, bitter stuff.

Garamond loved the greens. After tasting a few bits, you had enough and passed the remainders to him.

Oh man. The ingredients alone would have racked up a three-digit price tag in the city. Yet you’re having it for almost free. Was it okay to have that kind of decadence?

You went to bed. Woke up to a brand new Thursday morning--

HOLD ON A BLOODY MOMENT!!!!

WHY IN THE HECK IS IT WEDNESDAY AGAIN???

You scrolled through your contact list posthaste. Crap! You didn’t have Tsunderjudge’s number! Going full Undyne mode, you slammed the side of your fist on the bed.

You dashed into the toilet. A full bladder feels awkward no matter the circumstance.

Once that business was done, you ran out of your room. Still in your jammies to boot.

There’s that cold blast of air. That broken window…
And there are STILL two dressed pigeons on the chopping board.
It’s Wednesday alright.

Ready to look for Garamond, you slipped on your jacket, reached for your keys--

Only to realize they’re not on the keyholder.

…Of course. In hindsight, that made a ton of sense. There’s no way Garamond could safely lock your house without borrowing your keys.

He should be back soon. In the last RESET, he came home while you were pondering over the poultry. That’s after you took your sweet time on your morning routine.

You paced around in the living room. C’mon, what’s taking him so long?

Then you heard the clatterings of keys. You darted to him the moment he entered.

“Is something wrong, Frisk?” asked Garamond.

A RESET happened!

“Reset…? Wait, you meant the cosmos rewound? We’re in the past?”

Yes! Exactly!

Garamond dropped the bag of groceries. You caught it before the contents spilled everywhere.

Without an extra word, the cool detective skeleton sped out of your home…

Your phone rang. You answered it.

It’s Tsunderjudge.

Explanation, please???

“The moment they’re within your reach, mark both Blanc cousins as your proxy. Align their memories to yours in linear time.”

“Gaelic’s combination inflicts invasive deja vu, leading to confusion and accidental injuries. Prevention is better than cure in this case. Lest you want him to suffer on every SAVE and LOAD.”

You shuddered for a moment. W-what about Sans? Lady Lucidia?

“Worry not. Their Aspects are more data-oriented. They don’t share Gaelic’s bane.”

Thanks for the tip. But you still wanna know what is up with the timey-wimey shenanigans. You’re his only Crimson Keeper, and you deserve the insider info.

“Tsk. Demanding. Don’t expect me to indulge your every whim. Nonetheless, this is related to the folk of Ebott Town. I’ll brief you based on that connection.”

“The Gungnir’s new leader has at least a Minor Red. As such, I need to know if he has a system to record timelines. And how.”

Oh.

Oooooooh.

That’s some true serious business.
Man, trouble already? The Crimson Hall fallout was just three days ago. You still haven’t adjusted to the post-Sans fiasco.

“Hmph. Work waits for no man.” said Mezil, “If you seek rest, the repeating days can be a boon for you. Be a kid. Continue the bonding moments. Do whatever you want as long it’s disposable.”

“Your proxies will remember along with you.”

A vacation sounds great. Even though it’s kinda a forced one…

Hey! If that’s the case, why didn’t Mezil warn you earlier? You were happily playing with Gaelic before the RESET. You could have plastered a proxythingy on him back then and saved a lot of trouble.

Seconds of silence passed by…

“An Investigator was found dead in the previous timeline. Early Thursday, past midnight.”

That… that doesn’t sound good. At all.

“Yes. And if the HQ’s fire is of any indication, we might have traitors in our midst.”

“I cannot allow them to plan a counterattack. The longer I delay, the more advantage they will gain.”

It would have been nicer if Mezil said that he just forgot to give you instructions. Like a normal human being would.

“You and your silly wishes. What do you think this is, a slice of life?”

Yeah. Stacked up as a good, tasty pigeon sandwich.

“Hmph. You can have your slices of pigeon sandwich with the Blancs. Under normal circumstances, I would have summoned Gaelic for a hunt. But the current arrangement is to our mutual benefit. As accidental as it may be.”

“If the Gungnir switches their primary target to you, they will serve as your sword and shield.”

Garamond’s obvious. Reliable fellow. Gaelic on the other hand…

If the Temmie Incident was of any indication, you have serious doubts. Though he does appear to be an anti-Living Victory unit of sorts.

Either way, you promise Mezil that you’ll take care of them.

“Thank you. Please enjoy the rest of the day. I mean it.”

Will do!

Hope Garamond and Gaelic will come back soon, safe and sound. There’s too much pigeon meat for you alone. Also there’s a Snakes and Ladders game to beat. You need to live up to your title as a Living Victory, after all!

Heh. Seems like you’ve grown rather fond of your new friends.

If only Snakeface could stop breaking windows…
Wednesday Woes

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes.

Wednesday Number 2.

You had Garamond and Gaelic Marked. For this scenario, they won’t be affected by timey-wimey shenanigans anymore.

Time to start with the basics.

This is a door.
This is a knob.

You demonstrated the art of door opening. Turn the knob, then pull. Or push, if you’re from the other side.

Tada! It’s a brand new world!

Gaelic mimicked your steps. You clapped and smiled for a job well done.

He chirped, glad that he got it right.

You went outside. Closed the entrance. Then knocked on the wood, signalling him to put his new skills to use.

You expected something to go wrong. But, it didn’t. Gaelic did not bust out of the window to get you. Instead, he answered it like a normal human being!

Good job again! See, not so hard is it?

In the next RESET -- Wednesday Number 3 -- you were woken up by loud banging. W-what was that? An invasion?!

Then you heard the distinctive awfulness of shattering glass.

You found a broken window again. Why? Where did it go wrong?

Checking the door revealed a whole bunch of scratch marks. And dents. The knob was almost pulled out of its socket.

Oh. You planted yourself an epic facepalm. You forgot to teach him how to use a key. And how locks work.

Next lesson!

* * *

RESET Cycle 5. Wednesday: 1600 Hours.
Mezil made a note for himself to never walk near Undyne. She’s a death trap in the form of a fish.

Inevitably, he found himself backed into a corner. The woman pressed both arms and legs against the walls. She dug in deep, attempting to turn herself into a living barricade.

“A ‘cicada block’?” he questioned.

“Captain, if you’re serious, you shouldn’t waste your endurance on such a flippant pose.”

Undyne barred her teeth. “Endurance is not the problem, punk! I can benchpress with 17 kids on my back! ALL. DAY. LONG.”

Unamused, Mezil crossed his arms. “What do you want?”

“You’re a time-travelling superpower, right? Then, fix Papyrus! Prevent his injuries, or whatever the hell he’s suffering from!”

“Impossible,” Mezil answered.

“Why? You can’t? Or you WON’T?”

“I can’t and I won’t.” The Judge narrowed his glare. “Do you want to gamble Frisk’s life? Perhaps trade theirs for Papyrus? Damn the world for his sake?”

He could see Undyne’s muscles tense from the sheer consequential dilemma.

How expected. The Judge huffed.

“Just let me do my job.”

With a snap of his fingers, the Living Victory teleported away. He teleported into the meeting room he had reserved for the day.

“Greetings again, warlock.”

It’s Chara, the former Gungnir. They put up a fake smile, further accentuated by their rosy little cheeks.

“So what’s up? Needed to start over again?”

Adjusting his cravat, Mezil said: “Captain Undyne is in clear distress. If that incident repeats, I should ask Doctor Gaster to keep her at bay.”

The flower piloted their hovering pot disc towards the Magus. “And how are you gonna do that?”

“He’s an Amalgamate. He’ll remember the memo. Or would you rather have more work?”

Chara chuckled. “Nah. I’m too busy helping Azzie and Lady Lucy anyway.”

“Good.”

“So… you’re gonna head back outside?”

The answer lay in the heavy stomping footsteps of an enraged Champion-level monster. Undyne had dashed all the way to the entrance of the ward, threatening to fight the guards stationed there.

Chara and Mezil exchanged looks.
“Change of plans,” said the human. “Going outside is too much of a hassle. I’ll set up a new base of operations here. Seal the front door with a Mark. And get Doctor Gaster’s assistance within the first five minutes of the next loop.”

“Sure. You do you.”

* * *

Wednesday Number 7.

Songs… Cenna’s ‘Snakeface Survival Tips’ involved folk songs.

Hmm. Considering his name, you know the perfect place to start!

Let’s see. ‘Dulaman.’

You broadcasted the video stream on your TV.

“A ‘níon mhín ó, sin anall na fir shúirí,”
“A mháithair mhín ó, cuir na roithléan go dtí mé,”
“Dúlamán na binne buí, dúlamán Gaelach,”
“Dúlamán na farraige, ‘s é b’fhearr a bhí in Éirinn,”

The Blanc cousins stared wide-eyed at the music video. Garamond in particular.

“You…” Garamond muttered. “You’re telling me the language still lives?”

Why not? You tilted your head in confusion. Just board a ferry and sail west. They’ll encounter a big island where it’s taught in schools.

“When did this revival happen? When I was last stationed here, the humans told me that the ruling empire forced the tongue to extinction.”

There was a revival. But, by then it was renamed into two cousin languages. In a way the ‘original’ Gaelic was dead. Except not. Language is complicated.

You watched Snakeface trying to sing to the tune. He looks extra cute doing so. Watching that puts a smile on your face.

Does he understand it?

Garamond shook his head. “Despite his name, he speaks primarily English. Or rather, a dialect of it.”

Then, a miracle happened. Gaelic spoke for the first time since the looping began.

“Scott!” he exclaimed. “Scott Wiley!”

Who?

“Scott Wiley!”

Could you find this person on the internet?
You keyed the mystery name into the search bar…

Oh! It’s the ‘Snakeman’!

“Know?” Gaelic asked back.

You nodded many times. He appeared in a bunch of old nature documentaries. They called him the ‘Snakeman’ because he’s an expert in everything scaly and slithering. Oh, and because he always wears his trademark diamondback-patterned hoodie.

Wanna watch one of his videos?

Gaelic squealed in utter delight. This person must be important to him.

You clicked on an archived video.

The host and his camera crew walked along a road trail. They talked with a local who said there had been a snake attack recently.

After a few tensed moments and a short chase, the Snakeman caught a sleek snake.

There was a small celebration. Curious locals gathered around the successful hunt, trying to have closer look at a feared creature. Especially the children.

“Ya see here?” Scott began, “‘Tis be a Black Mamba. One o’ the most venomous snakes in the sahara. They be named that way not because o’ their scales. Ya can see here, she’s pretty grey. ‘Tis because o’ their mouths.”

Whoa! He’s not kidding: the interior of the mouth was pitch-black! Not the usual pale colours.

“See? E’en their tongue be black. Look at that. Quite a beaut, I’d say.”

“These be primarily terrestrial, preferrin’ to live in scrub, termite mounds, abandoned burrows, and rock crevices. But they can climb trees if they wanna.”

“If their venom don’t scare ya, their speed might. Aye! On the right surface, they can scurry up to 11 kilometres per hour. Aggressive lil’ buggers!”

“Despite that, these things are shy, secretive, and skittish. Rather flee than fight. Spot ‘em in the wild? Keep yer distance and walk off. No need to get anyone hurt.”

You watched his assistant press a spot near the end of its tail.

“We got a girl?”

“Yup, Scott. It’s a female.”

“Aye, we’ll need to check the surroundings fer eggs then. Hatchin’ near humans ain’t good for either side.”

“Stay away, everyone! She might slip.”

You then watched them carefully put the snake in a secure but ventilated box.

Question: do the Surface monsters have internet access?
“To some extent,” Garamond replied. “But that’s not how Gaelic knows about Scott. Though he never disclosed it in public, that man was a Magus. A Tracker, to be exact. The same one who rescued Gaelic as a child.”

Ooooooh! So Snakeman was Snakeface’s childhood hero.

The puzzle pieces clicked together. Gaelic was copying the legendary Snakeman all the while! Imitation is the best form of flattery?

“It was more than that. See, Scott was also his first teacher. Taught Gaelic language. Outdoorsman skills. How to live as a man even when he’s in the wild.”

Cool beans. But… it doesn’t look like the lessons stuck.

Whoa! Gaelic started growling at you, half insulted and half challenged.

“Fire!” he said. “Ah make fire. Need no flint, no match, no gas!”

Vocabulary count, increasing. He knows when you’re talking behind his back too. That’s a great improvement!

Alright Snakeface, you challenge him to start a campfire with nothing more than some newspaper and wood. The backyard has all the space.

“Now?” he asked.

Yep! Right now and outside. We have all day. As long as he doesn’t burn the house down, Snakeface can do as he pleases.

He grinned wide with glee.

* * *

Wednesday, evening?

Undyne stood before an old, sturdy oak tree. It’s right across the road from the hospital. Close enough for the building to remain in sight, far enough for her to not be bothered by security.

She wanted to have a good word with Judge Mezil Thyme. Try as she might, she was banned entry by that Mark plastered on the door.

Venting her frustration, she punched the trunk with her bare fist.

“Dammit.”

Once was not enough. She continued punching the trunk, each blow corresponding with her cursing.

“Dammit dammit dammit dammit DAMMIT!!!”

Undyne then felt an arm wrap around her waist. Looking down, it belonged to Alphys.

“Stop,” Alphys sobbed. “Y-you’ll only hurt yourself.”
“So what?!?!” the other yelled back. “The most I’d get is a bunch of scratches. That’s NOTHING! Nothing compared to Papyrus!”

Burying her face into her lover’s back, Alphys replied: “It’s something to me.”

The flow of emotions swirled from outward anger to inner grief. Undyne’s tears dripped down toward the tree’s roots.

“You don’t understand! I promised to myself that I’ll take care of Paps. But what am I doing now? Watching him suffer!”

She pounded the tree so hard, the bark crunched under her knuckles. Loosened leaves fluttered down on her hair.

“He’s… he’s too good for this. It’s unfair.”

The two women remained silent as traffic rolled past. Life continued undisturbed, despite their existence, so busy yet so lonely at the same time.

“Honey,” said Alphys. “What does Papyrus think about this?”

“I dunno.” She admitted, “He looks crushed. But those dumb flowers keep chasing me out. Doctor Gaster too. How can I ask?”

A row of cars stopped by the hospital’s entrance. Their interiors glowed bright in various colours. Humanoid flame monsters stepped out. All of them had a similar shape to Grillby, though some were shorter than the others.

Alphys mentioned: “I-I think I saw them in my lab once. Watching the Spire’s broadcast together.”

“They must be Grillby's family,” said Undyne. “Man. He must feel weird seeing them come by every day.”

“Every day?”

“Dejavu, Alph. Been having lots of them lately. Strong ones.”

“T-that means we’ve been reliving the same day? Just like the Underground? I guess you two are getting a taste of what Sans lived through…”

“Guess so. And it sucks.”

Alphys shuffled her feet. “…C-can I say something?”

“Sure,” Undyne replied.

“T-the end of the world might be around the corner. But. Um. If it’s with you, I’d gladly spend this Wednesday together. Treasure it over and over again. T-that would make the dejavus less sucky, yes?”

“Al…”

Undyne’s fins drooped. Oh, how could she insist that Alphys didn’t understand? Flowey. Amalgamates. They’re all things that went wrong without a solution in sight.
Alphys too could do nothing but watch.

The captain turned away from the tree to give her girlfriend a big hug.

“I’m sorry for being such a loudmouth.”

“It’s fine, Undyne. We all have bad days.”

* * *

Wednesday Number 10.

BAD DAY ALERT! BAD DAY ALERT!

You now have more than a broken window to deal with. There’s upturned furniture, scratched wallpaper, and a lost Snakeface.

How could this happen?!! Everything went completely fine for the past loops! He was recovering! He was talking complete sentences! He used the door for FIVE DAYS STRAIGHT!

You’ve asked the Dog Clan to help in your search. It had since become nightfall, and you still couldn't find him.

You returned home. Dejected. Disappointed. Despaired. How are you going to explain your failure to the Tsunderjudge?

And what about the house?! Mom will flip!

Garamond sat next to you on the sofa, contemplating.

“Hmm. When Judge Thyme rewinds again, Gaelic should be back in your home.”

Oh right. He would be inside. And today’s damages would also vanish as if nothing ever happened.

“Correct. There are two possible outcomes after that. He’ll either remain in the house, puzzled. Or he’ll attempt to flee again from shame. It would be wise for us to plan for the next cycle.”

You spawned a Mark over your hand. As you flipped through the colours of the rainbow, you wonder which of them would help you deal with Snakeface.

Hmm. Do they even have the same intensity as before? You know that The Void is the only place where your Living Victory powers could be at their fullest. In your case, that meant anime-level mass destruction.

It should still be serviceable in the physical world… even if it’s just a fraction.

You pasted a Blue Mark on yourself. It made you float at a slow pace, reminiscent of bobbing in a swimming pool.

Mobility check. You tried to move left. Right.

Okay, you’re not covering as much ground as you did in The Void. If you could make a comparison,
you used to pilot a plane. Now you’re just paddling along.

It took an extra Orange Mark for you to reach a more fairy-like speed. Also a far cry from your previous experience.

The skeleton asked: “Do you feel tired, using that magic?”

Nope. Just nerfed.

“Not surprising. Without training, the human body is a poor conduit. The only exception is ‘Determination’.”

If that’s the case, why not pump through more DT?

Power Up!

The Marks switched from their coloured state to Red. All your floaty-floaty magic? GONE IN AN INSTANT!

You yelped as you crash-landed on the floor. Ouch!

Garamond hurried to check on you. “Are you alright?”

Just a painful bum. Easily erased in a time loop.

So, pumping in Red alone won’t work? Your Determination overpowered the other Aspects, turning it into an ordinary Mark…

Drats. It’s back to square one. You were hoping that you could turn yourself invisible. Or fly in the sky. Anything to tail Gaelic if he tries to escape.

“Sorry, but he’ll outrun you in every way.”

Pondering intensified.

So, either we keep him inside by making every exit Snakeface-proof. Or…

You asked Garamond if it’s possible to mix your power with technology. To track him.

“Intriguing,” he said, “Let’s contact Lady Lucidia. She’d be interested in hearing your suggestion.”

* * *

[INITIATING DIAGNOSTICS.]

[EYE STATUS:]

[CYAN, ALL CLEAR]
[YELLOW, ALL CLEAR]
[PURPLE, ALL CLEAR]

[PSYCHIA STATUS: RED.]
Sans blinked a few times.

*Man, how long have I been asleep? I bet it’s artificially induced; I don’t recall any dreaming.*

[DISCHARGING PATIENT 01.]

The pod leaned back and began its draining procedure. Slowly it lowered him unto a flat surface.

Once complete, the protective glass slid open.

“Can you move?” someone asked.

It was Lucidia. She held a folded hospital gown in her hands.

Sans tried to sit up. Despite being all bones, he felt heavy. Then there was his arm: a dead weight hanging by the side.

He replied: “About as much as a skeleton can, heh.”

Lucidia responded with a displeased glare. “Please behave yourself as I dress you.”

“Uh, can’t you let me do that? In private?”

No further response. Lucidia appeared to be in a hurry. The biggest hurdle was none other than his paralyzed arm.

“Welp. Guess you’re a real pro,” said Sans, “Thanks.”

“Gratitude acknowledged,” Lucidia replied. “Let’s review our previous entry: Persona wished to eradicate all magickind by assimilating them into the Philosopher Stone. Doing so will earn him the favour of the populace, bolstering Gungnir support.”

“Depending on the circumstances, he will likely choose to dispose of the Stone, or keep it as a personal weapon.”

Sans started sweating.

*What in the world are you talking about, Lady?*

Lucidia continued without missing a beat. Though he’s patient to the point of laziness, Sans can’t let this one slide.

“I-hold on a moment.” he raised his left hand. “I have no clue and no context. Since when do we work together? I mean, my last memory involves a liquid-filled glass prison. And one heck of an angry Supreme Judge.”

The woman flustered for a moment. “Oh. Apologies. I had skipped a key procedure.”

Lucidia summoned a compact, skeletal flower bud. Each of its closed petals consisted of a set of ribs, tailored to mimic the original plant. They concealed a glowing core that pulsated slowly in the three colours of its owner.
It's hovering towards... me?

Sans took a step back. “Wait. I don’t remember your Blaster being, uh, that.”

“The crane’s functionality is limited,” she explained. “Perseverance only. As demonstrated by Papyrus, it’s possible to own multiple forms of the Skull Cannon depending on one’s Aspects.”

“Huh. Multiple settings aside, I only have one shape. Besides your plant-thingy doesn’t look anything remotely like a skull.”

“It doesn’t have to,” Lucidia replied. She paused for a moment before adding: “Or rather, I refuse to. I prefer the modern term ‘Armament’; it allows for more customization.”

Sans wondered about her response. The words were laden with an unknown past.

“So...” he tilted his head towards the strange bone bud. “What does it do?”

“It serves as a portable extension of the Spire’s Chronograph.”

“Huh. Interesting,” said Sans. “But how does that relate to me?”

Lucidia reached her hand out toward the bud. It bloomed into a ‘Lotus’: a flower associated with transcendent purity.

A wisp floated in the centre, gently changing colours.

She said: [Initiate temporary deactivation of the Seer’s Seal.]

The core quickened into a lamp. Square embers sparked out from the flames.

Sans felt his Eye reawaken. As he thought, she had him on lockdown all the while. Otherwise she wouldn’t have the confidence to let him walk close to her.

[Initiate Perseverance Linking.]

There it was, the dreaded deja vu. The cyan fire flared with an intensity Sans found uncomfortable, dumping all sorts of information into his skull.

Countless images flashed by. The unknown became known. It packed a punch that almost knocked him out.

Seconds passed before flame subsided into a glow. Sans panted, wiping the sweat off his forehead.

WHAT THE HELL?!

Persona timeline? Gaster’s fake vision world of absolute hell? It’s real?

“That... That is NOT my usual deja vu,” he said. “Did you alter it?”

“Yes,” Lucidia nodded. “I had prepared the information in advance. Your colours don’t see far enough. Therefore I needed to deliver your recollection as a single, compiled package.”

“There’s no way your husband agreed to this plan.”

Lucidia remained quiet about the accusation. For Sans, that answered everything.

That look on her face... is someone who had woken me up at least ten times.
He fixed his Eye on the woman. She had a counter. It read: 10.

*Right on the money.*

*She needs my help with Chronographing. In other words, she’s not relying on Papyrus. For all his willingness and superior traits… she’d rather dabble with me: Mister Danger.*

*Sigh. I feel lazy already. But what choice do I have?*

“Give me a moment to sort it out.”

He made himself comfortable and focused. Taking his sweet time, he flipped the pages of the package in the back of his mind.

“Alright, done. So, what do you need?”

Lucidia explained: “Continue the vision dive while I consult Doctor Alphys on the Crimson Keeper’s request. Your left arm’s Blue should be a sufficient stabilizer. This time, we will try again to go beyond the moment of Papyrus’ deification.”

“Hmm,” Sans mused. “That sounds like a tall order. Even with the Fake, my colours can’t make leaps like Paps.”

“True. However, much like mine, they function best on clues. Further exploration will depend your ability to extract and identify evidence.”

“So, that’s where I come in. Heh, it all makes ‘Sans’ now.” Topped that off with wink. The jingle and drumbeats went off in his mind, though it was mere silence to Lucidia.

She responded with a scowl that matched her husband.

They’re a couple alright.


Sans burst into a cheeky chuckle. He hadn’t had a good laugh for what seemed to be an eternity.

“Yup, lady. I sure do.”

Chapter End Notes

I found Dulaman the seaweed song via *Song of the Sea*. Indirectly. I watched it and got interested in more Irish folk songs. Great movie by the way.

Next week may or may not have a new chapter. It’s a pretty big scene and I want to make sure it does justice.
Chapter Notes

Thanks to an anon for telling me what Sans’ drum sounds are. It’s a rimshot. Turns out it had nothing to do with a gunman shooting at a glass rim.

I’ve been trying to work several chapters at once to figure out which would be the best arrangement of scenes.

Thank you for your patience!

It’s the night of the 10th Wednesday.

You set your alarm clock it to 5 A.M. so you could try prevent Gaelic’s escape. It’s dangerous out there, and you have a promise to keep.

…………………………

Shuffling noises woke you up next Wednesday morning. The eleventh one.

A thief?!

You laid low. Jumping right now might startle the intruder, or intruders. You want to at least get a good look on their faces before kicking them out of the house.

With the aid of your blanket, you slowly shifted your head…

The thief was a… skeleton? Gaelic?

He had arranged your lockboxes in a straight row. Whenever he opened a box, he would stick his head inside to sniff them.

A spy assignment from Tsunderjudge? Or, his instincts compelled him to investigate?

The glow of his Eye lit in one of the boxes. He’s picking up a scent, and you had a good idea what that was.

Bingo! Snakeface pulled up the tutu. He rumbled a soft growl of disgust. After putting it down, he moved on to the content of the final item.

Chara’s Heart Locket.

Your phone’s alarm went off. Dang, talk having the WORST possible timing!

The sudden noise spooked Snakeface. He dropped everything and scurried out of your room, kicking over the lockboxes in the process.

You leapt out of bed posthaste. When you rushed downstairs, you found your living room tinted in a violent mixture of Orange and Purple.
Snakeface had his back against the wall. His loud hissing made your hairs stand on end. Hostility exuded from every part of his being.

What’s more, that Eye burned so bright… it’s a torch.

“PER-SONA…” he muttered.

“DEMON… DEMON! KILL!”

…You retreated up the staircase. What just happened?

Meanwhile Garamond tried to no avail to calm his cousin down. Snakeface bolted around him and leapt straight out into the dark.

His cousin sighed and pulled the curtain. Though patient, he lacked perseverance: he had the look of a man at his wit’s end.

You asked Garamond if he knew what’s happening to Gaelic.

“He… He’s not well.” Garamond replied. “Excuse me, I need to settle my nerves.”

You heard a slight tremble in his voice.

Garamond ran to his bag and took out a flat case. It contained all the necessary tools to light a fancy cigar.

He had second thoughts.

“Ah, I’m sorry. I’m supposed to be watching over you.”

It’s alright. But… P-please don’t light it in the living room. You’ve got smoke detectors.

“Thank you,” he said. “It’s still early. Perhaps you should return to bed.”

You frowned as he left for the backyard.

…”This’ Wednesday is going to be an awkward one.

* * *

No pigeon meat for you today. Garamond still shopped for groceries, however, so at least you had some decent food.

After breakfast, you had a video meeting with Lady Lucidia. She came up with an idea to help you, though it may take the whole day for Doctor Alphys to develop a working proof of concept.

Garamond asked: “Could you tell me what happened earlier today?”

Maybe it’s easier to show than to tell.

You led him to your bedroom. Everything other than your clothes cabinet was left untouched since.

After explaining the event, Garamond launched his investigation. You watched him scan each and
“Frisk,” he asked, “Have you borrowed their power?”

Borrow? Like, EQUIP?

“Yes. Reds of both Majors and Minors can enhance their personal artifacts with their Psychia. The closer the connection, the stronger their power.”

Oh. If that’s the case… Yes. You had EQUIPPED all those items in at least one timeline before.

“I see. They’re all contaminated with your Determination. Useless for detailed time investigation.”

Whaaaaaat?!

“Nevertheless, it’s not a total loss. Lady Lucidia has identified a number of living links to some of the children. There’s also forensics to consider. You will need to return these items to their families anyway. Isn’t that what you wanted to do from the very beginning?”

You apologized. You hoped that the Six’s original possessions could become more than mere tokens.

Then… there’s the locket.

You need to get that back to its original owner no matter what.

You closed the boxes and set them by the side. Sure, they will reset tomorrow. But you don’t want to stub your toe. Pain is still pain, no matter the timeline.

Say, that was Truesight, right? Why not scan you for traces of Chara? You thought that the Tsunderjudge had purged you clean, but there might be traces left behind.

His dual Aspects lit up again. Shaking his head, he said: “My Eyes do not detect any signs of demonic possession.”

Huh?! Why would Snakeface call you ‘Persona’ otherwise?

“I think there’s a misunderstanding. The ‘Persona’ he knew was the ultimate Gungnir warrior. Not a living vessel.”

You’re confused.

“The troublemaker that harassed Judge Thyme had set himself up to begin a new line of possession. He used his title to conceal his True Name. On the other hand, you became a ‘Persona’ to Chara. It’s different.”

You still don’t understand how Gaelic got so spooked…

Maybe Snakeface freaked out because he smelled your DT on all those incriminating items? Blue’s set in particular. It’s stained with death.

“A logical assumption,” said Garamond, “But…” He crossed his arms to contemplate.

After a while, he asked: “Could you perform the Gungnir knife dance for me?”

Is… is that a good idea, given the circumstances? Isn’t that like a spiritual ritual of sort?
He stifled a cough. Almost laughed at your silliness. Almost.

“Ehern. No. It’s nothing spiritual. Besides, Gaelic won’t be seeing it. You’ll understand once we complete the exercise.”

Okay? Whatever floats his boat.

You brandished a chopstick as a knife-replacement. Chara had a set 92-step regiment. Think of it as musical scales to practice for the real concerto.

The training happened at your backyard. You danced under the morning sun, slashing imaginary leaves in the air. The fluid movements swirled against the wind of your own making.

And–

“Stop.”

You froze. In martial arts, this is the time when the master corrected the student.

He repositioned your foot. Straightened the angle of your arm. Tapped your lower back.

“What’s the number of this step?”

Uh. You don’t know.

“Hmm. As I suspected. You lack proper form. Repeat that move, please.”

Okay! …Did you do it right this time?


“That’s all I need. Please, rest for a while.”

The both of you sat down at the porch. He’s smoking his second stick for the day.

“…Frisk,” said Garamond, “I have good and bad news for you.”

Shoot. That’s why we’re here.

“The good: you’re neither possessed, nor the ultimate Gungnir warrior.”

Yay!

“The bad: you’ve yet to make Chara’s fighting skills your own. You’re relying too much on your possessor’s inheritance.”

You groaned out loud. He’s saying that it wasn’t a perfect download like what you see in the movies?!

“No. In addition to that, Chara was far from a master. What skills they had pale compared to an adult’s. The possession may have imparted you all of their skills, but also all of their mistakes. It’s pure rote memory, lacking in personal history.”

How does he know so much?

“Studying the Gungnir is part of my job. Sometimes, their members leave the cult in fear. They’re willing to share their arts in exchange for refuge.”
Dang. Learning that your awesome moves are actually lackluster… dampened your spirits.

“Don’t despair,” said Garamond. “You’re young and talented. With study, you’ll go far beyond Chara in the future.”

He blew out a puff of smoke. Made doubly sure that it didn’t fly into your face. Even a kid like you knew that breathing in direct tobacco smoke was outright unhealthy!

“The effectiveness of a Martial Arts school depends on the body.” he continued, “It’s no different for the Gungnir.”

“For example, your knife art is divided between two styles: the Sun and the Moon. Male and female, respectively. The routines vary.”

Why does it matter?

“Biological differences. For example, a man tends to be larger and taller than a woman. The Moon Style would put him too close to his opponent. A woman with the Sun Style might always fall short.”

Hmmm… if size matters, wouldn’t that mean a small-sized man should keep to the Moon Style? Or a tall woman would do better with a Sun Style?

“In terms of reach, perhaps. But there’s more to it than that. Men develop greater upper-body strength. On the other hand, it’s more advantageous for a woman to focus on her legs.”

Whoa. You wouldn’t have believed that looking at Undyne. But then again, Undyne is special.

“I usually caution against mismatched styles. But in your case, don’t waste what you have. Masters are expected to know both anyway.”

Hmm. How then did Chara end up with only one side?

“Age. It’s best to start training one of the styles as a foundation before branching out to the other.”

And since they died young… their training was incomplete.

Your mind swirled with excitement. Say, does Garamond have a speciality? Snakeface was totally Snake-style!

“No, not quite,” he replied. “My moves are rather generic. I try to not engage in close-quarter combat. Too much physical contact may expose my skeleton identity.”

True, true.

Garamond seemed a ton more relaxed than this morning. Though there might still be some stress, it's no longer to the level where it’d crush him.

Heh. If Garamond smokes as a limited treat for his break, what about the Tsunderjudge? He doesn’t look like the smoker type.

“Judge Thyme doesn’t dabble with the usual vices. No smoking. Moderate drinking. No tomfoolery with anyone that’s not his wife.”

“He does have one unusual taste, though: Jungle Curry. There’s a place where they maintained an authentic recipe. Untailored for local tastes.”
Nothing unusual about a favourite food. You have Mom’s pie!

“Do you spend an agonizing hour in the toilet after having your dessert?”

That much suffering?! That long?! No wonder Doctor Gaster wanted to cook up a non-lethal version of that curry.

After drawing in one last puff, Garamond extinguished the cigar in a small tube-like device. You tilted your head in interest.

What’s that?

“A cigar snuffer. It cuts off oxygen with minimal wastage. Removes the fire hazard as well.”

That’s so cool. Science wins again.

“Thank you,” he said. “For letting me be myself for a while.”

…You understand. He’s been on the job with zero breaks. Sleeping on the couch doesn’t make for the best rest either.

Consider today a holiday. Or at least a weekend. Doctor Alphys will definitely make an AWESOME tool!

Garamond smiled a bit. “I hope so.”

* * *

About 8.30 PM, Doctor Alphys rang your phone.


Yeah. You’re alright. You wish the bad turn didn’t happen though.

“D-don’t worry! I’m sure you’ll get to the bottom of the matter in the next RESET. Stay determined!”

Thanks. You will.

“I’m going to send an app to your phone now. It’s still super untested, so there might be bugs.”

Will it break your phone?

“N-nothing that major! You Marked the device, right?”

Yes. You had it Marked.

“Good. But, um, I don’t know how your OS will maintain the date without glitching out. Lady Lucy assured that it won’t be a problem, though.”

“O-oh, one more thing! I won’t remember anything about today, let alone my own app. So. You’ll have to remind me if there’s any issues. I-I’m sure I’ll catch up once I read the logs.”
Can’t the Tsunderjudge just preserve Alphys’ state--

Nevermind. Scratch that. You’re not prepared to face him yet.

You heard a nervous chuckle from Alphys. She understands.

“The instructions are included. If you have any questions, just call back. I-I don’t think I’ll be sleeping anyway…”

You asked Alphys about the others.

How’s Mom? Dad?

From your perspective, you’ve not seen them for ages.

The forced timeline vacation was fun at first, but you’re starting to miss everyone.

“Aw Frisk…”

“Asgore and Toriel are fine. Grillby too. Mettaton returned to his studio yesterday. So, he’s not stuck at the hospital with us. Undyne… she… she’s very upset. None of us know what’s going on with Papyrus. Or Sans for the matter.”

Maybe in the next timeline, you’ll call everyone for a chat.

“That’s a great idea, Frisk! I’m sure they're worried about you too.”

You nodded. Sorry for cutting the convo short, but you gotta beat Mezil to the punch.

“Okay! Good luck.”

Thanks. You ended the call there. Hmm, what could this special program be?

You ran the installer and…

The graphics were taken straight from Mew Mew Kissy Cute. It earned a skeptical brow-raising from Garamond.

You had to reassure him that this wasn’t a joke.

Oh, it’s an Arcanagram drawing pad.

There’s a first-timer’s tutorial. You played it.

Mew Mew herself read the instructions for you.

“Welcome to Mew Mew’s Arcanyagram class, nyan!”

…Yup. It’s Alphys’ handiwork alright. All her skills writing fanfiction were put to good use.

“Pens and crayons are great for purrtending, but they're not going to make myagic! They need a fuel source, a machine, and some nyanstructions. It’s basically a compyooter.”

“But don’t fret, even an utter nyewbie like you could build one of those fancy-shmancy stars, nyan!”

“First, you need to write your code. Tell the compyooter what you want to do. Most of the nyanstructions will be inserted at the points. If you need more data, just add those to the intersections
of your star.”

“The simplest Arcanyagram’s the Pentyagram, nyan! Five points. The bigger and more complex the spell, the more points it requires!”

“What happens if you use less? You get squares, triangles, and circles. Basic geometry, nyandanyan!”

‘4’, ‘3’, ‘0’… where’s ‘2’ and ‘1’?

Garamond explained, “Those would be a line and a dot. They’re only useful in advanced Arcanagrams and are not detailed in introductory courses.”

Ahuh. You don’t quite get it yet, but you nodded along anyway.

“Mreow~~ Triangles represent the myagic of monsters. Anything placed inside a triangle will affect only monsters, nyan! Ain’t that mysterious?”

“Squares represent hyoomans. They require an extra point to bypass the physical body. If you need a spell to work only on hyoomans, you must have squares in mind! Otherwise, the spell will bounce off into nythingness!”

“Circles contain other Arcanagrams in their boundaries. Without them, you get lots of cross-wiring. That’s BAD! They’re also used to transfer external components such as reagents and catalysts.”

“Remember your BODMAS? Circles functyoon just like your brackets, and they must be solved first!”

“This App will only go up to nine-points. Anything beyond uses too much memory. So, do your best to keep it clean and simple, nyan!”

“That’s all. Good luck! Mew Mew believes in you~~~!”

And that’s it.

You rubbed your fingers through your hair.

This is pure programming!

Math!

THE WORST!!!

You have zero comprehension in that stuff. Sans, Lady Lucy, and Goopdoc made it all look so easy!!!

“I have some knowledge of Arcanagraphy,” said Garamond. “If you let me know what you want, I can try to help.”

Thank goodness for saving your poor noggin!

Okay, here’s the plan…
Wednesday Number 12. You were stirred awake by your bodyguard.

The plan worked! Your night’s worth of hard work paid off.

Alphys and her genius amazed you. The concept was so simple, yet you had never thought about it.

She already had an interdimensional storage device installed in your phone. All she needed to do was to link it with the Gram-writing app.

Based on your phone input, the app would draw a Gram in the storage space. That same system would then digitize your Aspect input and combine it together in that common room, parsing the result before returning the data to your ultra-handy device.

Red for permanence, Purple for data tracking, Cyan for focus… and some more that you can’t quite remember. You might have used a combination of eight or so Marks.

With that, you made a Gram that tracks your Determination. Snakeface still has your Mark. It’s going to stay no matter where he is in the world!

Then, set it over your satellite maps and… bingo! You have a signal!

Let’s see. Saturated red dot. That’s you.

Much smaller faint dots nearby. Probably the lockboxes.

Gotta zoom out first. Ah. There we go! Heh, he’s still within the region.

You suited yourself up for the morning cold. Also, you bagged up some cookies from the cookie jar. According to Cenna’s ‘Snakeface Survival Tips’, packing treats whenever possible is your best bet.

With the invisible Garamond by your side, you began your chase.

Wow. Gaelic’s zipping all over. Does he have any teleportation powers?

“No,” Garamond replied. “He’s not Sans Serif. Your area IS filled with portals, though.”

Oh. The ‘shortcuts’. That made sense.

The trail led you down a suspicious line of felled trees. Midway, the town’s construction workers stopped whatever they were doing to look around.

“Whoa! Did you feel that sudden gust of wind?”

“I think I saw something ran past us!”

“A purple and orange light, I think?”

Snakeface had been here alright. You approached them to ask some questions.

“Frisk! A-are you supposed to be out here?”

You explained to them that you’re trying to chase a friend.
“So it WAS a person after all! That’s dangerous. We’re hard at work here, salvaging.”

What prompted them to check this place?

“It got really noisy one night. Next morning, my team peeked over and we found a lot of broken trees.”

“Not to mention that there was an INSANE amount of sawdust. More dust than wood!”

One of them tapped at a log. “Check this end here. It’s like they got buzz-sawed at weird angles.”

You took a closer look. You can’t quite put your finger on it, but there’s something off about the texture. It seemed too clean? Like a… disintegrating laser?

Your mind raced back to the night you had fried chicken. A strange earthy-smelling motorcycle helmet fell in Dad’s garden. Not long after that, Sans teleported off into the night.

Your breath stopped for a moment. This trail of damage was inflicted by SANS.

“Frisk?” One of the workers asked: “Is something the matter?”

Uhh. Now's not the time for controversial reveals.

You coughed a bit and said that the ‘weirdness’ made you feel uneasy.

“Don’t worry your noggin too much. We’re the experts here. If this log is contaminated, we’ll throw it straight into the furnace.”

“Yay for free heating!”

O-okay. You tell everyone that you got to go.

Keep up the good work in the meantime!

“Bye Frisk. Watch your step! It’s slippery from yesterday’s rain.”

Thanks for the warning.

You checked your phone again. The blip made had made its way up the mountain…

Following the dot, you soon found yourself standing before a familiar cave.

Long, long ago, you stood before this very same opening.

Your naive self believed that caves were the beginner’s dungeon. ‘An adventurer is you’ was the thought on your mind. So, in you went, carrying aspirations of fun.

It was an adventure alright; more than you ever bargained for.

When you peered at the seemingly bottomless depths in wonder, that was when the edge crumbled beneath your feet and your undertale began.

Your life would never be the same again.

In the present time, someone had tried to block the entrance of the cave with some planks. A smashed signboard lay flat by the entrance. Reading it, you recognized King Asgore’s handwriting.
‘DANGEROUS CAVE’ it read. With a smaller ‘do not enter’ underneath it. That’s about as Dad as it gets.

“The damages are fresh.” Garamond noted when he decloaked, “I hope he’s not hungry. Please let me enter first.”

Yuuuuup. A hungry Gaelic is a deadly one. That’s why you came armed with cookies.

You stayed close behind Garamond, inching deeper and deeper into the cave.

You arrived at the big hole. There, you found the person you’re looking for. Snakeface huddled in the shadows on the other side.

Right now, he’s a ball of tearful whimpers and troubled mumbling. A pitiful sight to behold.

As much as you wanted to go over there and hug him, Cenna’s Snakeface Survival Tips included the words ‘no surprise touches’ in red, underline, italics, all caps, and in bold.

“Gaelic?” Garamond called.

Snakeface glanced at you. He shuffled away.

“Don’t,” he said. “I hurt you.”

A negative response was better than none. At least it showed that he could be communicated with.

“Did you have a nightmare?” asked Garamond.

You noticed how Snakeface tensed up. He tried to hide behind his arms.


The rest of the speech was drowned by incoherent mumbling.

…More brain bleach? Maybe. Though at this rate, Gaelic might need it more than you.

You rustled the bag. You told him that it’s moist, chocolate chip cookies. Mmmm~~~ sound delicious, right?

He’s resisting the irresistible. Peek. Hide. Two steps forward, one step backwards. In the end, he retreated even deeper.

This isn’t going to be easy, huh?

You recalled that one time when Mom drank wine with Sans. She started tossing pizzas as frisbees. The cookies had roughly the same shape, so…

With your best aim, you tried tossing your cookie like a frisbee.

…It veered off course and plunged into the Ruins below. Dang! Even aerodynamics are working against you!

Maybe you need to get nearer and throw the whole bag. Let him eat whenever he wants. Yeah. That sounds like a plan.

The previous collapse had narrowed the path, though. Falling down right now will definitely trigger
a RESET. Still, if an adult can get there, so can you.

“Frisk, stop!” yelled Garamond.

You heard a snap under your foot. The path had started to crack from your… weight?

WTF! You’re heavier than an adult skelly monster?!?!

Fear prompted you to hurry back to Garamond. He’s reaching out an arm.

Gotta. Grab. That!

Then -- just when you thought your luck can’t get any worse -- you tripped over a stray tree root.

You landed chin first onto the earth. It hurt. A lot.

In your daze, you remembered how Chara fell into the Underground.

Foot, to root.
Root, to hole.

Such was history, ever repeating.

“Frisk!!!”

The ground gave way right beneath your body. Before you could react, darkness encroached your body.

You passed out.

Soon, you’ll hit rock bottom.

GAME OVER.

“Stay dee-toor-min, Aye? Cannae give up.”

Wait a minute. You’re not dead!

Blink, blink. It’s… Snakeface? He’s covered with dirt. Does that mean… he saved your life?

You tried to sit up, but Gaelic stopped you.

“Wait,” he said. “Test.”

He took off your shoe and poked you at the sole. “Can feel?”

Aha! You got it now. You told him that you can. Also, you wiggled your toes to show that you have full motor control.

“No pain?”

Just sore as heck. Nothing serious.

“Good, good. More tests?”

You let him check as much as needed. To be honest, you’re amazed that he acted as a medic even in his half-feral, head-messed state. It’s as though he had those skills drilled into his subconscious.
Once satisfied, he helped you sit up. “Nothing broken. Just scrapes and bruises.”

Thanks a bunch.

Gaelic had brought you to the corridor beyond the Ruin’s entrance.

Wow. There’s a lot of dirt. And rocks. Your drop had triggered a collapse. A genuine cave-in! If Snakeface hadn’t protected you… you’d be buried alive. Shudder.

You stuck your hand into your pocket. Maybe you might still have reception. Maybe not. Either way, you have to try.

…There’s nothing there. You held your breath.

Oh no. No no no no no! Anything but your PHONE!!!

Gaelic, has he seen your phone?!?! Wait, does he remember? I-i-i-it’s a rectangle with a glass screen!

Tilting his head, he asked: “Small machine that smells like ya? Star?”

Yes! That’s right!

“Ah go.” Off he went to dig in the giant pile of loose rock and dirt.

Meanwhile, your mind chanted a desperate prayer.

Phone. Please be intact please be intact please be intact--

After much digging, he found your most ‘precious’.

And… the screen was a shattered, spiderweb mess. Great. Just great.

You tried to boot it, but it refused to awaken. Your phone had slipped out of your pocket and died.

Noooooooooooooooooooooo!!!

Your twelfth Wednesday had just gone from bad to worse.
Wednesday Survival

Chapter Notes

Guess who injured her right arm?

Me :( 

Nerve/connective tissue related. It's bad enough to use painkillers. And I'm typing this mostly with one hand. I'm a one arm bandit at the moment. As such, next release will be delayed.

In the meantime if you're hankering for anime, I highly recommend Houseki no Kuni/Land of the Lustrous. Their anime is a phenomenal adaptation of the manga. It's a very solemn yet beautiful show.

For even more worldbuilding and play on RPG tropes, Dungeon Mushi's manga. Dungeoneering and cooking combined.

If you want a movie, No Game No Life Zero I hear is really good. I've not watched it, but Editor-sama did.

For historicals, try Showa Genroku Rakugo Shinju. Now this one is a complete 26 ep show of a storyteller's life. Not ongoing.

Onwards to 155

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Frisk, the tiniest Crimson Keeper in history, walked through the Ruins with great confidence.

On the other hand… Gaelic would rather be in any other place than here.

Feeling skittish, he kept his head low and his shoulders hunched. His sight peered through the floor for any signs of hidden traps.


The child looked back a few times. Their pace slowed to a halt, and they furrowed their brows in deep concern.

“Snakeface, are you cold?” they asked.

Gaelic inspected himself. It’s not surprising why the child had come to that conclusion. He had only a threadbare, muddy pair of long pants to call clothing; one article shy of total nudity.

He however knew that he won’t succumb to such human limitations. The sensation was a nuisance at most.

“Don’t worry,” the child replied. “Mom made everything safe. She even has the solutions pointed out. See?”

Frisk walked over to a lever with many yellow arrows. “This one will lower the spike trap over there.”

Metal spikes blocked the path of progress.

_Cenna… Cenna had tour…_

_No traps mentioned. Careless? Nay. If have traps, Cenna would mention. Cenna didn’t mention._

_If nobody here, then why spikes now?_

Senses on high alert, Gaelic burned his Eye to see beyond the walls.

Rust and roots had already encroached the gears. He couldn’t tell why it was wrong, only that system had already failed.

When Frisk pulled the lever, the clockwork of doom began to tick. The innards screeched in a strained metallic groan.

“H-huh? What’s happening?”

The spring mechanisms snapped, causing the spikes to shoot straight into the ceiling.

Gaelic’s protective instincts propelled him into action. He swooped the little one straight off the floor and fled to the opposite end of the corridor.

A cascade of breaking metal and rocks collapsed. That one mishap triggered a chain of trouble.

Once the dust cloud cleared, the damage was done. Purple bricks lay scattered about, and a mound of rubble prevented any further advancement. Road, blocked.

Frisk dropped their jaw. “Whaaaaat?!?!? It’s not even been a full year!”

Strange logic. It stirred Gaelic’s curiosity. “Why year?”

“This place existed for over millenia,” said Frisk. “If it can last that long, why would it crumble now? It’s a cave! There’s no wind or rock to wear it down either.”

A cute, naive way of thinking befitting their physical age. “Wrong,” Gaelic grunted. “Very wrong, aye.”


“Gear may not be a thousand years old. Nay. Nay. M’lady say inside can change while outside stay the same.”

Frisk rubbed their chin. “In other words, there’s no guarantee the traps are as sturdy as the rest of the structure. And also, we may be looking at the end of their lifespan?”

The child slipped their hands into their pockets and pondered harder, squinting.

When they make that face, it reminded Gaelic of his Lord. Already his heart pined for his master’s presence…

The nostalgia can wait. Right now, it’s his duty to protect those under his care.

Frisk had come to a conclusion. “We’ll have to avoid any path that contains lots of puzzles. Especially if they require constant maintenance. Um. My entire journey was full of them. And I don’t know if an alternative exit exists…”

They smell of worry with a twinge of fear. Perhaps a warm lick on the cheek would calm them down? They’re also in a serious need of cleaning.

So Gaelic summoned a flat, fleshy ‘ecto’ tongue: a skeleton’s magical mimic of non-bone parts. With that, he licked the dirt off the child’s cheek.

Frisk giggled from the sensation. “Haha, that’s tickles! Are you sure you’re not a dog?”


But to this child, dogs were cute, friendly critters. ‘Man’s best friend’ as the saying goes.

Flustered from the praise, the skeleton felt his cheekbones grow warm.

“We must go,” he said. “No food. Water not safe fer drinking.”

“Can’t you use your awesome wyrm blaster to tunnel our way out?”

*Should?*

*Don’t. Not steady. Memories hazy. Will still remember friend?*


The frustration turned inward. He started hitting himself on the head.

“S-stop!” the child cried.

And stop, he did.

“Sorry. I guess you haven’t recovered enough yet.” Frisk put on an encouraging smile. “That’s okay. We’ll take the slow way then. One foot at a time.”

Gaelic pointed at his chest. “Ah take lead from here?”

“Okay.”

His nose caught a scent: reminiscent of ionized air, yet not quite.

“Portal nearby,” he reported. “Wait.”
He kept his face close to the wall. There were little gaps between each brick, just enough for wind to flow in.

Left and right, he went. Searched for the weakest section, he did.

Many laughed at his apparent miswiring of senses. Most Seers depend almost entirely on sight. Those who diversified concentrated on hearing or touch. Like Mondie, or his fair lady.

Smell? Humans weren’t good with it. Less so for Lichborn. It’s a skill reserved for beast types, such as dog monsters. And yet it’s one of his greatest strengths.

Just thinking about it made him feel out of place. Others don’t understand. House Berendin does.

“There.” With his sharp fingers, he scratched an ‘X’ between two hanging vines.

Frisk asked, “Are you going to bust down that wall?”


Gaelic summoned a set of fangs. Sharp, strong, and conical. His masters showed him how industrial drills worked. They’re so simple, just slow with the limitations of manual labour. With his Orange, though, speed was not an issue.

He arranged the fangs according to the weakness of the structure. Then, he charged them up.

The fangs drilled into the wall. Hard, soft, doesn’t matter. Energy was all he needed.

In a matter of seconds, he made multiple small holes.

Frisk said, “Um, shouldn’t you summon one big drill? It’s easier to make a tunnel.”

Gaelic shook his head. “Nay,” he said. “Watch.”

For the big finale, he brought out a heavy femur: weighted at the end. Then, with one large swing of his makeshift hammer, he smashed a clean hole through the wall.

The kid dropped their jaws.

“Whoaaa…” they said. “Did I just see the awesomeness of science? From you?”


The human child looked like they wanted to say something. But then, they relented. “Nevermind. Let’s move on.”

Beyond their newly opened path lay the deep-maintenance chambers. The Ruin’s traps were sorted in there by layers. Gears, levers, springs, and other connecting contraptions all linked back to this same space.

Deeper in, there was a board detailing the maintenance schedule. The next inspection never happened, because by then the residents had already migrated to the Surface.

“You could read that?” Frisk asked.

“Some, aye.”
“That’s great! You’re getting a lot better than the first day.”

Their youthful cheer reminded him of Cenna. How strange it was, to share traits even though they’re not be related by blood.

Around a bend they then found the portal. It was kept away in a small room on its own. A janitor’s closet? A tool storage? It had long been emptied. The door, unlocked.

Beyond the portal lay…


Gaelic almost bolted back from where they came from. What’s before them was a frigid climate with even less chance of finding nourishment.

He worried not about his own self, but the child. Small size. Ill-suited clothes. Without shelter, it’s a recipe for impending doom--

“Wait, wait, wait!” Frisk pointed out. “There’s a house right behind us!”

Behind?

Gaelic turned around. There was indeed an intact cabin right before his face. It appeared that they had exited from a backdoor of sorts.

“Let’s check it out,” said the child. “Maybe there’s leftover food inside?”

“Aye,” he said. Low temperatures should slow decay.

They soon arrived at the front of the house. The snow had buried a fifth of the entrance.

Pointing towards a tall cliff, Frisk hopped up and down. “I recognize that place! It connects to the main Snowdin road!”

“Up there?” he asked back.

“Yup! There’s a cave overlooking this valley. I think it’s the Annoying Dog’s home. I managed to get in there once.”

“Which means…” They pointed to their left. “Straight in that direction is Waterfall. We’re not totally lost, yay~”

Knowing a direction was half the battle won. Spirits lifted between the two.

For now, they should get something to drink. Start a fire. Melt some snow. Humans need water the most.

Doors have knobs. They should be turned. Gaelic tried, and it refused to budge.

“Locked,” he growled.

Frisk was surprised. And perplexed. “ Weird. Why would you lock an abandoned structure? Maybe this is someone’s summer home?”

The house had an unused fireplace, thus a chimney. To Gaelic, anywhere he could squeeze through was a valid entrance.
“Wait here,” he said.

Up, up, up he climbed: onto the roof. Once confirmed that he won’t get stuck midway the chute, he went in feet first.

His flexibility made the job easy. In but a moment, he’s inside. The soot didn’t bother him.

First thing’s first, unlock the door. A brief search in the drawers turned up a spare key. Frisk’s lessons paid off.

The child stepped into the space, chuckling. “Do you do this often?”

Gaelic replied, “In me home, always.”

“Is it Lemurian architecture?”

The innocent question choked his throat. He lowered his head, anxious of their possible response. “Nay. Y’see. Ah… I… live in a cave. Many tunnels. Many exits.”

Frisk’s eyes sparkled with excitement. “Whoa! That’s sooooo hardcore! No wonder you’ve got them skillz. Do you still need to pay taxes?”

All of that worry, puffed into nothingness. The whiplash made Gaelic burst into a guffaw.

“Did I say something wrong?” the kid pouted. They closed the door behind them to cut off the cold air.

“Nay, nay, nay!” He waved his hand across the face. “Ya cute. Adorable. Like a button. Mm… dunno if pay taxes. M’lord takes care o’ that.”

“I expected the tax stuff to be handled by Lady Lucidia.”

“With money, M’lord better. He has uh…” Gaelic stared into the air, trying to remember that complex word. “Ak-koun-ting the-gree…?”

“Accounting degree?” Frisk fixed it.


“I see.” Frisk responded with a slow nod. They then looked around to inspect their new surroundings.

“Oh wowie. This place is great! There’s a fireplace. A comfy sofa. Functional kitchen. And a master bedroom! We could stay here all day.”

That caught Gaelic off guard. He had assumed Frisk intended to loot the house for travelling supplies. Maybe find a packet of biscuits, or an abandoned can of beans.

Neither had eaten anything since they woke up. Weakness comes with hunger. Death waits for those who cannot trek: survival was always a race against time.

Gaelic warned with a low grunt. “Stay be bad. Must eat. Then move.”

“How so?” Frisk asked back. “By now, the Tsunderjudge should know we’re stuck Underground. Even if he doesn’t, he would still RESET by night for his investigation.”
“No no. Cannae stay.”

“Aww. Come on. Let’s just start a fire and see from there. It shouldn’t take long before we’re back in Ebott, safe and sound.”

“Eeeeh…” Gaelic wasn’t sure about that logic.

Half of his job as a Tracker involved trying to prevent others from getting killed by their own poor choices.

He’d insist more, but there was a sinking suspicion that the human would disregard his warnings.

After all, they had that glint of determination in their eyes.

* * *


Frisk also found a forgotten ‘tangram’; the Ebott people sure love their little toys of the mind.

Over a meal of boiled crackers, the child and the snake read to pass the time. Frisk played the role of a teacher whenever they reached a difficult word.

One syllable at a time. String those together. Form a necklace of meaning.

When books overstayed their welcome, they resorted to puzzles. They made shapes from other shapes, searched for words in a mess of letters, and filled in blanks based on descriptions. Fun, in a quaint way.

Frisk kept staring at their broken phone. Perhaps they wished that they could play some electronic games. Perhaps they had bigger worries. Gaelic could only guess.

After being ‘Determined’ to the point of exhaustion, the child excused themselves to bed. They’re confident that they would be woken in the comforts of their home.

Gaelic stayed up to watch the fire. The logs won’t burn without input. It also gave him light to read some more.

He lived his life surrounded by books of all kinds. The neighbours thought he would grow up studious. Fly high in school, then at his job.

But… he had always read books for a different reason. It wasn’t the knowledge. It was the words. The shapes. The letters. Of how they string together into something meaningful.

So foreign. So mysterious. Like the stars overhead and the oceans beneath.

Before he knew it, he too drifted into slumber. The open book of puzzles became an accidental pillow.

He dreamed of a lady in sapphire. Dressed prim and proper. She stood on a rocky pillar against the violent ocean, crying alone.
A dark red shambling mess of faces approached her. Closer and closer, it inched to the maiden.

What is it? Why did it make her cry?

He cannot allow it!

Upon his command, the Earth trembled, the waves crashed. A massive bone snake -- his trusty wyrm-- rose from the depths. And they merged into one.

Hunt, he shall. End the lady’s grief.

Rip. Tear. Constrict and devour. The foe refused to waver.

Frustrated, the serpentine one dragged it down into the depths. Though the wyrm soon dissipated along with the last of his might, the mass of faces were unable to swim back up against the currents.


Gaelic then woke up. He gasped when he noticed that the fireplace had died down to mere embers. Hurried to rekindle the flames, otherwise he had to start the laborious process again.

Warmth once again filled the room. Gaelic breathed a sigh of relief.

He closed the book he slept on and put it away on the shelves. Already he had a bad track record of damaging property in Lemuria. Didn’t want to start another list in the Dreemurr Nation.

After that, he dropped himself on his pelvis and went back to sleep.

Again he dreamed. Always he dreamed.

Unavoidable they are, containing constant reminders of a painful past: such was the curse of his Eye’s colours.

This time, a foreboding thunderstorm loomed over his head. Their hot claps of lightning caused him to jump in fear.

Once again, the maiden from the cliff rocks shed her tears. She came to him pleading for help.

“Please, save my husband!” she said, pointing towards the gloomy horizon, deep in the cloud’s dark domain.

A common heartache was shared between the wife and the man beast. He too cannot bear to see them apart.

Another hunt commenced. This time, it took him to a faraway land.

He made his way inside a putrid den, filled with an unmistakable foulness. It reminded him of the hive where he once sought mates in desperate futility.

Therein lay the maiden’s own mate… sank in the mud of depravity, addled in a poison that the demons had inflicted upon him, and forced to endure torture to his heart.

The hunter hauled the man on his back. Upon that instant, the surroundings turned bright red. Demons chased hot behind their tail.

In the midst of their flight, they encountered a long stretch of foul water.

So the rescuer returned to the way of the beast. He united himself with his steed, and fled through the city’s waterways, toward the ocean. All for the sake of their survival. Until at last, they escaped.

Shedding the shell of a beast, he brought the human to rest at the shore. There, on the sands, he built a campfire. His clouded mind almost made him forget the art of ignition. Before long, the scent of burning coals filled the his nostrils.

“Thank you for saving me.”

He asked why the Keys of Fate refused to turn.

“…And wipe out all evidence of their crimes? Hmph. They’re counting on that.”

“If I turn back time now, I would have no proof of my scars. Be deemed a lunatic haunted by some malaise imagination.”

“No. I will be their downfall. Mark my words.”

The scene shifted toward an elegant office. Grand. Stately. Refined. As far removed from the wild at it could be.

Wife on the left. Husband to the right. The same two that he had helped, they stood before him.

“You now belong to House Berendin.” Said the woman. “From this day forward until dust, you shall be our knight: Sir Gaelic Blanc.”

The man reached out his hand. An invitation.

“Come.” he said “Join me in my next hunt.”

“Our prey is Persona and all those dear to him. DEMONS: every single one of them.”

“Leave none alive.”

With that, the sleeper woke up yet again. The rush of bloodlust ran into his skull.

“PERSONA! DEMON! KILL!”

Gaelic growled, ready to pounce into action.


How annoying. He always had a hard time telling apart reality and illusion. At least the outburst didn’t wake the little human.

He lay back down on the floor, curled up, watching the flames dance in their hearth.

Fire. Proof o’ me humanity. Ah can live without fire, ’cause ah not be human.

But. Beasts do not build fire. Do not craft tools. Do not pray.

What am I?
Frisk began to stir in their bed.

Gaelic kept watch. The long-awaited show of the day was about to begin. What oh what would this child’s bedtime habits be?

So far, they did not share Cenna’s overexcited rolling. Occupying the same space as her guaranteed disaster. Punches, kicks, blanket theft, body roll. She’s the worst sleepover mate.

Maybe they’d have issues like his Lord? Difficult to sleep and worse to wake. Trying to get him up early was an effort that required ‘perseverance’. Too often he would fall right back to bed, with hazy memories of his brief awakening.

Or, they had the impeccable timing of his Lady? She’d sleep and wake on the clock, not a minute too soon or too late. No trashing or rolling. Almost unmoving. Less a monster, more of a machine.

A minute later, the child suddenly sat straight up. “Good morning, Frisk! It’s Wednesday!” they exclaimed.

They then fell back onto the soft mattress. “It's. Not. Wednesday…” Their sheer disappointment exuded from every tired word.

Gaelic chuckled his heart out. “Dinnae ah say? Bad to stay. M’lord may not rewind.”

“Whyyyyyyyy,” they whined.

“Today could be last day. Or be key break. If he cannot rewind, he cannot.”

Gaelic didn’t mention one more reason… It was also the likeliest scenario; times like these, he wished that his Lord wouldn’t put so much faith on his abilities.

The human’s belly growled out loud. That’s the price they paid for being stubborn. If they had listened to the Tracker's advice, they would have been long home.

Frisk pulled the blanket over their head. “That’s it. I’m taking back the Keys. The Tsunderjudge can get dunked!”

They made all sorts of strenuous squeaks, trying to push their Determination past the limit of the Crimson Keeper’s Claim.

“Be Determined. You can do it. Dunk! The! Tsunderjudge! Ngaaaaaaaaaaaah!!”

Gaelic had heard plenty about their maturity. They acted well enough in the Crimson Hall, but now? It’s a whiny tantrum befitting their age. Though, many an adult would behave the exact same way.

He knew he shouldn’t laugh… but their reactions. Oh, how hilarious they were.

Peeking under the sheets, he asked: “Why so fiesty? ‘Tis because o’ the hunger? That just be appetite, aye. Yer haven’t felt true hunger yet.”

“No,” Frisk pouted. “It’s my phone. It had all my account keys… Everything is tied to a unique ID.
There are some services that would lock me out for two whole weeks for getting a new phone!
That’s not counting the fact that Mom would need to contact the bank for even more account
shenanigans. Security features are a pain.”

“And, at this rate I’m gonna lose Alphys’ super duper Gram writing app to my own stupidity. She
worked so hard on it.”

The human planted their face straight into the pillow, uttering a long-drawn out groan.

With that perspective, Gaelic understood why the phone was so important to them. Lady Lucidia
depended much on high-technology too. If she lost all her data in the same way… her mood would
be foul for days.

“M’lady can fix it,” he said.

The statement caught Frisk’s full attention. “Really?!”

Gaelic nodded. “Past data, the Chronograph has. Repair, her speciality. She could try to sew yer
phone back to one piece.”

“Sew…?” Frisk wondered out loud. “I don’t think that’s the right verb?”

He snickered. “When ya see it, ya understand.”

“Oh. So it’s not wrong Gaelic speech. Speaking of which, you’re a lot more fluent today!”

Gaelic touched the top of his skull. The child had a point: his words flowed and his thoughts were
clear.

“Cor Blimey, yer right!” he exclaimed.

The child laughed. “What’s the weather report today, Snakeface?”

“Clear skies with some sparse clouds.” He smiled back. “May ah see yer wounds?”

Frisk sat up in the bed. Gaelic checked their chin first. He recalled how they tripped and landed hard
there.

It developed a bruise. Otherwise, nothing serious.

The other stray scratches had dried out. His observations discovered no sources of new blood.
Infection was minimal as well.

“Ya be fine as long ya don’t touch any water,” said Gaelic.

“Aww,” the human frowned. “How are we gonna get past Waterfall then?”

“If needed, I’ll lick ya clean again.”

“That sounds… unsanitary. Yet it’s the right answer, isn’t it?”

“Aye. Some poisons thinned are medicine. M’lady made sure ah can make any concoction fer
M’lord.”

He opened his maws wide and showed off his long, purple tongue.
The child said: “Shh, stay still.”

They peered deep in his mouth. Almost stuck their head inside.

“Whoa. You really have two sets of teeth! One here…” Frisk poked the outer fangs. “And another one within.”

Their fingers ran on the edge of his true, straight-lined teeth. It was part of the human skull he was born with. Added the outer layer of fierceness later.

“Are you a moray eel?” they asked, snickering.

“Ah wonder if yer cheeky wee mouth could still snark once ye drink some earthworm soup.”

Frisk stopped laughing in an instant. Their face froze in their default stoicism.

“…Seriously? My teacher used to scream at kids who ate earthworms in the playground. I can’t believe I’m gonna do this for real.”

“That, and whatever ah could scrounge in the Ruins before our journey. Maybe some roots. Or bugs. Aye, if we be lucky we might even get a snake!”

“Hey, leave some space for the REAL feast in Waterfall. It’s a buffet in there. We’re talking all of that plus catfishes, eels, breams, trouts, carps, fireflies, AND water sausages galore!”

Hearing about the good hunt made him drool a bucket. “Aaaaah, ye whetting me appetite! Do ya not fear I’d get impatient and start with ye instead?”

Grinning, Frisk said: “You won’t eat friends. Riiight?”

“Cannae refute that,” Gaelic hollered. “Ye determined lil’ bean, yer one o’ a kind.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Congar of One Falls for the spike-ceiling suggestion
Thursday Tension

Chapter Notes

My arm is okay now :)

This chapter is a lot more complicated than expected. My eyes are getting crossed over from the amount of detail that we had to check multiple times.

I hope I didn't miss anything. Either way, enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Thursday, 0600 hours.

Ongoing repairs prevented Mezil from using the Spire’s briefing hall, much to his annoyance. He’s not comfortable talking about top-secret material in civilian space. Nonetheless, the hospital’s boardroom will have to do for now.

It’s fortunate that the hospital’s chairman was once a Magus Healer; it’s thanks to him that the non-magical staff members don’t ask too many questions.

Cenna struggled to sit up straight. Hair, not properly combed. Hat, falling forward.

Mezil sighed, fixing the hat so that it doesn’t drop onto the floor. “…And you complain about me.” he said.

A long, angry groan expressed her dissatisfaction.

“Old man…” she muttered, “I gotta wake up at ungodly hours just because you’re a damn vampire. Will it hurt you to sleep early for once?”

“And give you the chance to boot me off my bed?” he replied. “I thought you’re the lark. Isn’t six your usual waking time?”

“You’re starting the meeting AT six. It means I gotta wake up at five!”

Mezil sat down on his chair. “Any later and I’ll be too tired.”

The young woman glared back. “Yeah, yeah, because you take fucking forever to sleep AND wake up. BOTH! You have stupid max resist stats versus alarm clocks too!”

“At least I don’t need to fence my sleeping space. Goodness, you roll more than a ball.”

Their silly spat ended when his wife, Lucidia, entered the boardroom. She stared at the two humans for a moment, unimpressed by their current sleep-deprived condition.

“Do you two need an ice-cold towel?” she asked. “I refuse to start the meeting if nobody can pay attention.”

Cenna sat straight up. “No ma’am! I’m fine ma’am!”
“Good. How about you, ‘Judge Thyme’?”

Straightening his coat, Mezil responded: “Please begin, ‘Lady Lucidia’.”

Lucidia turned off the lights and connected her tablet to the hospital’s projector. It listed all the related suspects of this time loop.

Two men occupied the center. Aiden of Aratet, supposedly the eldest son of The Last Persona.

And…

The nemesis himself. Even after all these years, he’s still relevant to history. What a scourge.

Lucidia focused on the younger of the two; “Aiden of Aratet,” she began “The current true leader of Gungnir. Claims to be Persona’s son.”

“In my search for his identity, I started with the public records: medical, police, immigration and so on. However, I could not find an individual named ‘Aiden’ who matches his features.”

“Knowing their tradition, this mismatch is intentional. Aiden would have listed a different name. Therefore, I next ran a search for all mixed-race Aratet children without a known father. Here is my closest consistent match.”

The screen displayed a photograph of a young boy. It’s a humanitarian record for child soldiers.

Peering at the photos, Mezil noted the similarities around his eyes. They tend to change the least. Even so, it was difficult to match the face of the man with his prepubescent self.

Lucidia continued: “According to this documentation, ‘Asachulra Bhuntiri’ enlisted in a student program after the war. Eligible children could gain sponsors for re-education, promoting a future free of conflict.”

“His grades were good enough to secure him a spot at an agricultural school. After graduation, he worked as an apprentice in the same place for two years. He vanished from the public eye soon after. Presumably that’s when he returned to his old ways.”

Mezil asked, “What about their passports? They would’ve had to get into the country somehow.”

“The police already received my request yesterday, though no progress can be made until time continues to flow on as normal.”

“That’s exactly why I had decided to end the cycle.” said Mezil. “Behavioral patterns suggests that the Gungnir lack sufficient ways to record spacetime. The alterations were just enough to evade capture; there’s no indication of a counterattack.”

Cenna leaned against the chair. “Yeah. Real slim chance for them to have a proper Persona. They wouldn’t have been so desperate to grab Frisky if they already had one. This Aiden fellow is probably a Red Minor, nothing more.”

Mezil pointed out. “Still, I don’t know the exact nature of his Psychia either. He could be a special case.”

“Like a Double Red Minor?” asked Cenna. “With a 50-50 Major-Minor split?”

“Yes,” Mezil nodded. “Judge Pashowar had a student with a similar composition. Shame she died so young.”
“Anyway,” Cenna twirled her finger at the screen. “About that stuff from before. Here’s the thing I don’t get. Sure, the Aratet region went to hell at one point. But. Once they stopped fighting, they would have rebuilt to modern standards, including records for everything and anything. What gives?”

“Aiden must have settled in a rural area. Those catch up the last. I won’t be surprised if he changed identities then and there.”

Mezil crossed his arms. “I can think of an easy loophole. Use a relative’s name. Preferably a wife’s.”

Lucidia nodded. “Their tradition dictates that the non-warrior member of the family hold the majority of their property. It’s a practical arrangement: those who fight or work abroad are unable to manage the assets. A civilian spouse would make the best choice.”

“Aiden’s missus holds the cash and pays the bills, huh?” Cenna rubbed her neck. “Any signs of kids?”

“Captain Undyne mentioned that Papyrus singled out a male teenager.”

The next photograph was a snapshot reconstructed by the Chronograph. Papyrus talked to a brown-skinned boy with a gold earring.

Without doubt, that was another Aratet. The traditionalists mark their adulthood with earrings emblazoned in a symbol matching their deeds. His was diamond-shaped, themed in a sun motif.

“Known name, ‘Dayton’. Age, estimated 15 to 17 years old. Based on context, Aiden is his father.”

*Persona has grandchildren now?* Mezil thought. *Another day, another headache… What else is new?*

Mezil’s phone disrupted the meeting. It came from an approved emergency number: Investigator Garamond.

“Excuse me.” Mezil then answered the call.

“Judge Thyme, Frisk has yet to emerge from the Underground. Should I call a rescue team?”

The Judge hurried out of the boardroom with such urgency, he knocked over his own cane.

Both his ears and legs were aware of this mistake. Yet he can’t turn back.

…I can’t let Cenna know.

Where could he go? The balcony was the worst place with all that wind. The cafeteria was too public. And the solitude of the parking lot just begged for an attack.

In the end, Mezil retreated into the men’s bathroom. She won’t follow him there. At least, that’s what he hoped.

He holed himself up in one of the cubicles, locked it, and resumed the call.

“Sorry for taking so long,” he said. “I was in the middle of a debriefing.”

Garamond replied: “Understood, sir.”
“Thank you. Back to Frisk. They’re still in there? I thought it’s possible to walk out of the Underground within a day? Back then it was almost clockwork. I can’t imagine they died.”

“Correct, sir. I do retain their Mark. Plus, if they sustained serious injuries, Gaelic would have brought them out posthaste.”

“Agreed,” said Mezil, “But why then the delay?”

“I don’t know, sir. Will you rewind time?”

Mezil primed his SAVE. The world desaturated into monochrome grey, ready to switch back to yesterday.

Should I?

After much contemplation, the Living Victory put away his powers.

“No, I won’t. Continue your observation and keep me posted.”

“Yes sir.” Garamond ended the call.

Alone in the toilet, Mezil let himself relax. The constant need to be strong before others could wear down even the steeliest of men.

Then, he heard the hinges of the main entrance. Someone else had entered the restroom.

A guard on duty? Hospital staff? A Gungnir infiltrant? Or…

Mezil prepared to react. Any moment now, as long they remained in the vicinity, an ambush may be sprung.

Except, the person walked past his stall and got down to business.

Toilet seat, lowered.
Streams of water, checked.
Groans of bowel movement, checked.

And finally, relief. “Aaaah… Can’t wait to go home and tucker out.”

Mezil recognized the voice as belonging to one of the guards. It appears that he was just discharged from his shift.

Everyone is tired, huh? Might as well get mine done too. Pass the time. Make an alibi.

The wait continued until the neighbour washed up and left.

…I wonder if I’m getting too paranoid.

Mezil dragged himself to the sink. As he washed his hands and his face, the flowing water reminded him of his own fatigue.

Against caution for the fluctuating quality of urban water systems, he also drank straight from the tap.

Maybe his oversensitive digestive system would protest. Maybe not.

Other than meeting the right amount nutrients, Mezil didn’t care much about the source. It made no
difference whether or not his meat was grown in a lab or butchered from an animal. Protein is protein. Can it be digested? That’s all he wanted to know.

He never had the luxury of being picky. Let that sense of judgement focus on other more important things: such as his battle with time-travelling DEMONs.

When he stepped out of the bathroom, Mezil sensed a spike of aggression charging towards him. His left hand darted to his gun holster. Dangerous or not, it’s an ingrained habit.

“MEZIL THYYYYME!!!!”

Alas, he was too late. Cenna managed to grab his arm and twisted it behind his back. The price of his failure was a strong slam against the wall.

“What happened to Frisky???” She yelled.

Mezil grunted. “Why now?”

“Because YOU ran off like a shady bastard! Tell me, goddamit! Or else I’ll make you!”

Down the hall, Mezil heard the hurried footsteps of the guards on duty. And the situation spiralled out of control.

Cenna stole his gun from the holster. Without doubt, she would use that to keep the guards at bay.

They soon arrived. Prompt and on point. One of them ordered, “Judge Caraway, please stand down!”

“Stay out of this!” she yelled back, recklessly waving the gun around.

“You’re attacking a superior. Please. Stand. Down.”

“That’s why I’m telling you to get the fuck away! This is PERSONAL!”

“Ma’am, calm down,” said the guard. “Being irrational won’t help.”

“Then make him TALK!!!” she yelled back, “Or else I’m gonna punch the bloody secrets outta him!”

From the corner of his eyes, Mezil saw Cenna raise her fist. He braced himself for the inevitable impact.

Or so he thought. In the nick of time, a familiar buzz of Blue magic saved his face from a firm bruising.

There was a startled yelp, and then Mezil got freed from her grip. Lucidia had tossed her husband’s assailant towards the ceiling.

Ever meticulous, Lucidia used her magic to slip his weapon back into its holster.

“Thank you,” he said.

“You’re welcome.” Turning towards the dangling human, Lucidia questioned: “What were you thinking, young lady? A fight? In public? Are you a child? I expect the Magus Association’s top Judges to behave better!”
Cenna grit her teeth. “Yeah, I’m a bloody delinquent. What are you gonna do about it, Little Miss Perfect?!”

“I will do what any ‘Little Miss Perfect’ would do: restrain and discipline!”

Lucidia proceeded to rope Cenna with a long spine. No matter how the young woman struggled, she couldn’t break free.

The assailant was then handed over to the guards. While they did their handcuffing for good measure, Lucidia helped her husband.

“Are you fine, dear?” she asked.

“Sort of,” he replied. “A sore arm and some light bruising at most.”

Still, there was that seething anger radiating from the transgressor. She continued to yell and struggle among the guards. What a chaotic scene.

Mezil thought that he should settle the mayhem before she wakes up the whole hospital.

Too late. The Grandmaster himself already walked onto the scene. He must have caught word of the ruckus. The proverbial cat had escaped the bag, ran all the way to the elder, and led him here.

“Do we have trouble?” he asked.

A guard reported: “Judge Caraway assaulted Judge Thyme, sir! We don’t know the reason yet.”

“That’s fine,” said the elder. “Please escort Judge Caraway to my chambers. I’ll take it from there.”

All of them responded with a salute. “Yes, sir!”

Mezil sighed, relieved that his father-in-law wrapped up this incident posthaste.

Lucidia, however, glanced at her husband. Mood, soured. As if her days weren’t bad enough.

At least, he would just need to deal with his wife. Nobody else. He counted that as a silver lining.

* * *

Cenna lowered her head. A mix of guilt, anger, and anxiety stirred in her heart.

Sitting across her was the Grandmaster himself.

‘The Ancient One’.
‘The True Headmaster’.
‘The Judger of Judges’.
‘The Red Sage’
And the cheekier yet accurate, ‘The Holy Bone’.

The lady expected nothing but a stern berating from now onward. She might as well be a little girl with a dunce cone on her head.
“Well then,” so said the ancient one. “You’ve caused quite a ruckus.”

“Yes, sir…” Cenna muttered.

“And you also derided my daughter as ‘Little Miss Perfect’.”

Regret. Utter regret. Just thinking about it made her cringe. She knew Lucidia resented that title, and it was precisely the reason why she used it.

Growing redder, she admitted: “Yes… Sir…”

The Grandmaster rested his staff against his shoulder. “Recite to me the most basic common prayer: Our Father.”

Cenna hesitated. She knew exactly where he’ll focus. This wasn’t the first time Lucidia’s adoptive father disciplined her.

In the relationship chain, if Mezil was the ‘son’ then Cenna would be the ‘granddaughter’. It’s not official on paper, but the old Lich saw no difference. After all, the Wanderstars did give her over to the custody of House Berendin.

“Recite,” he said. Stern.

“R-right! Um.”

“Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.”

Lord Berendin nodded. “Right there, ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us’.”

“You’re commanded to forgive. Otherwise the roots of bitterness will continue to spring up… as it had happened on this very morning.”

Cenna tried to avoid his direct gaze. “It’s hard.”

“I know it is,” said the old man.

“I’m angry.”

“I know you are.”

Her vision started to blur from the tears. “If my parents were really that important to Mez, why did he let them die?”

In turn, the Grandmaster replied: “Have you asked Winston for the truth?”

“He’ll just deflect the whole issue!”

“But you have never tried. Not once in these ten years. Do you fear his answer, or do you fear being
She clenched her hands. “Both, to be honest.”

What a shame for someone with Justice. Cenna knew she should have confessed sooner… Her inability to resolve their complicated relationship prevented her from taking certain Vanquisher tasks. She’s already grateful that it didn’t mess with her Ascension.

If nothing happened to Frisky, she could have hidden her thoughts. Forever maybe. But something did happen: on the same demonic mountain that had claimed her parents.

“If…” she began. “If Mez tells me he had a choice, I wouldn’t be able to face him again. If he didn’t, then, I dunno. I’d get mad anyway. Probably rile myself up about his solo battle with Persona cause, y’know, he had a whole damn army at his disposal!”

“Heck, a group of snipers would have guaranteed a much safer outcome! So why… why did he insist on his bloody gambit?!”

Before Berendin could say any more, he questioned her heart. “Cenna, are you willing to listen without prejudice?”

Does she want to listen? Or does she not?

“I… know half of it at least. Mez didn’t want to put anyone at risk of HVMs. Persona had no qualms resorting to those. It makes sense, I guess. But.”

In the end, she couldn’t proceed. Cenna shook her head. “Sorry, Grandmaster. I just can’t.”

The Lich tapped his chin, pondering at this current predicament.

That moment seemed like forever. Patience, she lacked. On the other hand, the old bone had plenty.

“Uh, Sir. I got something to ask,” The lady fidgeted with the tip of her hat. “I… Uhm…”

After a few false starts, Cenna mustered enough coherence to speak: “I wanna know what sort of a guy Mez was before meeting Papa and Mama. They seem to go way back. At the dinner table, they’d sometimes joke about Mez not turning into a real vampire. With a spooky castle and all.”

“I was too young to understand. Now that I know more, I wonder what sort of truths those words were based on.”

The Grandmaster chuckled. “Oh, did they? Always the comical ones. Let’s see, how do I answer your question without divulging too much…”

Whatever lightheartedness lasted only for a while; he resumed a serious tone fit for explaining the past.

So the Red Sage said: “Many doubted Winston’s eligibility to be the Supreme Judge. His election was done out of necessity and steeped in violence. Such often happens when the previous generation fails to secure a peaceful succession.”

“As his conflict with Persona grew, so did his darkness. It reached a point where I was pressured to seek a replacement. That’s where your parents came in.”

Cenna widened her eyes. This was the first time she had heard of this story. The Wanderstars died
too soon, and Mezil would never confess without a direct prompt.

“M-mama and Papa were supposed to replace Mez?!?”

“Not quite,” the Grandmaster replied. “Contrary to the demands for his disposal, I sought those who could guide Winston back to the right path.”

“They entered the Crimson Hall as a pair. My personal request. The son of Wanderstar was determined to remain faithful to the truth, while the woman he’d one day marry was determined to be kind, no matter the circumstances.”

The sweet memories made Cenna smile. “Yeah. Sounds like them alright. They took in a random kid like me. So, did they confuse the heck out of Mez?”

“Why, yes.” he nodded. “They had left him quite befuddled. That was the first and only time I had ever seen Winston call for a recess in the trial.”

Snort. Chortle. She tried her best to control her laughter, but it kept spilling over.

“Oh my god even Mez in all his tsundereness had a nubcake moment! Hahahahahaha I can’t believe it! Ack I think I pulled my stitches.”

The old one tapped her on the shoulder with his staff. “Now, now, Cenna. Everyone has to go through the learning ropes. Winston was no different.”

“Okay, okay, okay.”

It might have taken a good minute for her to truly calm back down. Maybe less, maybe more. It’s hard to tell.

“Well then.” The Grandmaster’s staff tapped the floor, “Now that your spirits have been lifted, I shall send you back. But only under one condition.”

“Which would be?”

“That you apologize to your colleagues for your outbursts. Keep it simple. And most of all, honest.”

“Ugh….” Back to square one.

“Apolo...” (sniffle) “Apologize. Or else.”

“Ok! Ok!” Sooner or later, she had to do it anyway. “…I dunno if Lucy can accept it though.”

“As long you give her time. Come, the Cosmos turns ever onward.”

* * *

Back here again…

While Lucidia handled the fine details, Mezil rested in his seat. He grumbled about the soreness of his twisted arm. The hospital had provided him an ice pack for the joints and some simple instructions.
Then, he yawned. So he got up to walk around. Started browsing the internet on his phone to get an idea about the public opinion in the meantime. The media still held persuasive power over the masses… one that Gungnir had managed to exploit for their own agenda.

So far, nothing different. Just more ‘advocates’ yelling about the perceived lack of safety of the Magi students. There’s a high chance that they would converge into a public protest this coming Saturday.

The sheer taste of disdain made him reminisce. Memories of the old, yet unforgettable past echoed. He might not recall the exact details, but the intent… it was as bright as day.

Long in the past, The Grandmaster called him to office. Severity weighted the air.

“I know what you did, Winston. I’m no fool. Your actions have put your integrity under question.”

“You have two options. Repent and use the Keys of Fate to undo your deeds, or live with the consequences.”

“………………………………………”

“I see. You do not believe in the path of Mercy either.”

“Surprised? No, not at all. The majority of Supreme Judges thought the same as you. Mercy was given to individuals, but few make it their lifelong calling. My days of youth are not exempted.”

“Dear Winston, an empire built on force will not change people’s hearts. The Redeemer Himself said that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Many of your predecessors lost their lives to this vicious cycle. Directly or otherwise.”

“I pray that one day you will see the light. In the meantime, I shall continue to be a living example: as I have been for generations.”

At this moment, Mezil felt old beyond his age. “Mercy, huh?”

His musings were interrupted when Lucidia returned with a clipboard in tow.

That stare of disappointment… it stung more than any physical injury. The heavier the responsibility, the greater the scrutiny.

“Why didn’t you rewind?” questioned Lucidia. Her voice had a slight snap. “You knew Cenna would react like this. And what if Frisk was injured? What if something worse had happened to them?”

He replied: “I’ll cross that road when I come to it.”

His reasoning only made Lucidia angrier. The edges of her luscious hair started to curl upwards: a bad sign. “Look, anything can happen in the next twenty-four hours to prevent you from using the Keys. We’ve talked about this, Mezil!”

The pressure rose. For both of their sakes, Mezil needed to calm her down.

“I’m aware.” He kept his voice level. “I’ve also taken that into account. Since nothing serious has happened in the last few resets, I let time flow.”

Continuing, he said: “This is also for Frisk’s benefit. Before the Crimson Hall, they had free reign on their power. Nothing had permanent consequence. The fact that they’re still down there means that they’re expecting time-travel to undo their mishap. A dangerous and complacent thought.”
Lucidia pondered. A slight relief, yet Mezil can’t relax just yet. It all depends on her next response.

“That is quite true. But isn’t that a bit harsh of a lesson? I know Gaelic is with them. Still, I’m worried.”

Raising a brow, the husband asked back: “You doubt his abilities?”

“Not him.” She clutched her clipboard. “It’s Frisk. Prodigy or not, a child is still a child. Can they handle Gaelic at his worst? Alone? Even if we rewind… I can’t imagine the traumatic memories that might remain.”

“They befriended the entirety of Ebott. That includes an extremist fish, a nihilist Lichborn assassin, and two sociopathic DEMON flowers. Gaelic shouldn’t be a problem.”

His wife glared back. “You’re aware that they almost got bit, right?”

“Well aware. Everyone has to get past that initial aggression. Minus your good fortune. He’s always gentle with you.”

The disbelief intensified. Dealing with his wife’s mood swings was the price of keeping her as a living person. Allowing her to embrace the ways of a rational ‘machine’ may make his life easier, but that meant losing her precious heart. A pointless endeavour.

Mezil let out a deep sigh. “Frisk thought that Gaelic was between a ‘cute pet’ and a ‘beast’. Typical ignorance. We know he’s more than that. Only those lost in the wilderness will truly appreciate him and his virtues.”

Her temper cooled. After a long thought, she responded with the following statement: “As long you admit that this may not be the wisest of decisions. I’m sorry. There are just too many unknown variables for my liking.”

He could accept that. She had a point. Also, the determination to preserve respect trumped winning some fleeting argument.

“Yes, dear,” he replied, “…Maybe it’s not for the best. I’ll bear full responsibility should anything happen.”

“Thank you.” Handing over the clipboard, she said: “Please sign.”

“What’s this?”

“A form to suspend Judge Caraway for one week for attacking a superior. Insubordination, Judge Thyme.”

Mezil read the details. Everything was already filled out. All he needed to do was verify and approve.

…His decision-making process must have taken longer than expected. Lucidia grew impatient. “Did you fall asleep with your eyes open?”

“No,” Mezil shook his head. “I just wonder if it’s necessary. The Spring Mission is right around the corner. There’s not much time left to prepare.”

Frowning, Lucidia reminded him of the reality of this situation. “I wish we could ignore it. However, she snapped in public. It would set a bad example to the rest of the Magi if we sweep this incident
under the rug."

"You have a point," he added. "So, another forced vacation."

"Another?"

"I had said the same for Frisk."

Thus, The Judge sealed the verdict with his pen. He knew that Cenna had stopped caring about her track record a long time ago. Why bother? Credentials were useless for someone who’s about to ‘retire’ from the mortal plane itself.

"And done." He slipped the pen back on the board. "Lucidia, I want to ask you something."

"Yes?" she replied.

"Have I become a sentimental old fool?"

One blink. Two blinks. Lucidia asked back: "Is that a bad thing, dear?"

The puzzled reaction confused Mezil. "Yes. I’m supposed to be stern and impartial."

"Oh dear husband, you can be so silly at times. The Supreme Judge is a human with a heart too. That warmth should be treasured."

"That… doesn’t answer my question. My job isn’t quite fit for mere humans."

Mezil took a seat. He then rested his head on the table, drawing out weary sigh.

"There’s just no end to this," he muttered. "First it was Kisei, then Persona, and now his children. Grandchildren even."

"I’ve turned grey in the past decade, Lucidia. I can no longer walk long distances without a cane. And yet, my enemies are youths in their prime, springing up everywhere. How can I take on Aiden, the Son of Persona?"

Lucidia settled by his side. "My determined husband, whining? I’ll have you know fifty is not that old! The official senior citizen classification begins at sixty. You’re a decade too young to label yourself so."

He grunted. "On the assumption that the average human doesn’t deal with a lifetime of death matches."

Countering in a playful tone, she asked: "What about soldiers? Police? Would fifty be considered old for them?"

"Athletes," Mezil added. "Don’t forget athletes. And yes, I would consider fifty to be ‘old’ for those groups."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk. Feeling creaky already? It’s not even a century. I’ll have you know that I expect you to live for much, much longer. Together with me… as my handsome red-eyed Lich."

"Hmph. I’ll only live as long as you do."

"Such morbid romanticism. A melodramatic Mezzy is a tired Mezzy. Rest, dear. We’ll resume businesses when you’re better."
Someone knocked on the door. Mezil groaned in response. Meddlesome interruptions… he had to force himself back up to his professional stance.

“Does my hair look right?” he asked.

Lucidia help smooth down the stray strands. “Now it does. I’ll answer the door.”

The father-in-law had returned with the delinquent in tow. By way of discreet nudges of his staff, The Grandmaster urged the semi-reluctant Cenna to do what’s right.

He waited in silence. That expectant stare was all Mezil needed to understand his intent. The young lady took off her hat as she slowly walked closer towards her superiors. That’s good manners there: a proof of sincerity.

“Um,” she began. “Sorry. For the dumb outbursts. And, u-um…”

The Grandmaster cleared his throat. Non-existent breathing organs for a Lich, but the sound got his point across. If Cenna had a lighter skin tone, she would’ve been as red as a tomato.

“Sorry, Lucy, for calling you ‘Little Miss Perfect’. I know you hate it. And. I realised that I was being horrible.”

“And Mez, sorry for flipping out over Frisky. That proves your point, huh? Me. Not being able to handle it.”

Mezil huffed. “Glad you acknowledged that part. Does it hurt to have a little faith in me? If something serious does happen to Frisk, I’ll use the Keys of Fate. That’s guaranteed.”

“Mmm,” Lucidia nodded. “Apology accepted.” Those were her words. But, her heart wouldn’t be able to let it go so soon.

The Supreme Judge pushed the clipboard towards Cenna. Reaching out his arm, he said: “Turn in your badge and gun. You’re suspended for a week starting from now.”

These was an immediate look of dejection on the young woman’s face, as if he’d just served an extra blow to whatever sense of shame was already burning on her head.

“Go look for Frisk.” he then added.

Shock replaced the gloom, followed by an eventual brightening into joy. There was never a person so glad to surrender their gear… until today.

The gun and her badge, placed before Mezil in under half a minute. Quite an amusing sight to behold. This girl could be so dense yet sharp at the same time.

“You’re dismissed,” he said. “Scoot off already. Bring along a certain fish if possible.”

Cenna saluted. “Thank you very much! Have a good sleep, sir!!!”

Off she went. So hard to believe that she almost died last Sunday. At least she’s still robust.

Back alone, Mezil slumped into his chair. “Guh. I’m feeling nauseous.”

Dear wife sprang into action. Her delicate fingers massaged his scalp, analyzing every function on his body.

“You think that’s the cause?”

“Negative,” she replied. “But risky. Bathrooms are a prime source of contamination from infected users. It appears that your current issues are caused from skipped meals.”

“Suggestion: a light snack before retiring to bed.”

Lucidia had a point. Coupled with the ill-feelings, he heard his stomach growl. Rather embarrassing. In a half-joking manner, he asked: “Jungle Curry then?”

Her response? “Request, denied!”

Chapter End Notes

The Purple Kid's story from the Chronographer Record is referenced here! This line to be specific:

“Yes,” Mezil nodded. “Judge Pashowar had a student with a similar composition. Shame she died so young.”

If you're wondering what he's talking about, head over to this Url: https://archiveofourown.org/works/9538106/chapters/32534289
Mettaton, in all his shrewd glam, cashed in on his sudden spike of publicity.

If life gives you lemons, make lemonade! As long there weren’t any casualties, he didn’t see his opportunism as a problem.

At least he hoped so. One may never know how the Surface rolls.

He set up an impromptu signing event at his studio. Fans lined up before his table, each with a copy of his album.

The line was short by his estimates. He didn’t expect a massive crowd on Thursday. It’s not the weekend; most of his fans would only be free during those precious two days.

Next in line was a girl about Frisk’s age. He greeted: “Hello there, sweetheart. What’s your name?”

“Bianca!” she said. “I met you at hospital, Mister Mettaton.”

His face lit up. “Oh my~~ If you’re here, it means you’re all healthy!”

She nodded many times. “Yup yup.”

Mettaton posed a dramatic gasp. “Splendidly wonderful news! Will you be going back to school soon?”

“Next week.”

“Even better!” he praised. “I’m going to draw you some FABULOUS stars as a lucky charm. How’s that?”

“Great! May I have a Blooky Stamp too?” It was always an extra delight when his cousin received proper acknowledgement.

“Of course, darling! One Blooky Stamp coming right up.”

After patting the stamp on the ink pad, Mettaton placed the logo down next to his starred autograph. It’s Napstablook in all their adorable glory.

Since Blooky isn’t the most public of persons, the ghost preferred to use a personal stamp instead of a pen. He’d let Mettaton carry it everywhere so the more public glambot could thank the fans in his stead.

Bianca lifted her autographed album in delight. “Thank you!”

“Stay healthy for me, alright? Bye, bye sugar~~~”

The little girl waved goodbye and ran off to her mother. Looking at her now, nobody would believe that she was sick enough to be warded.

Mettaton had one more customer left. A young teenager judging from his stature, somewhat on the
tanned side of the human-colour scale.

“You seem good with kids,” the boy said.

“Absolutely~ I always make sure my fun can be shared with the whole family--”

When he had a proper look, Mettaton froze. He was taken back to that Sunday madness.

Fire.
Water.
Darkness.

Papyrus, with a knife to his neck…

The name escaped his mind, but Mettaton won’t forget that face. This boy was none other than a member of the Gungnir.

“You…” said Mettaton. “What are YOU doing here?!"

The boy tensed up. He ducked his head low, glancing back and forth.

How peculiar. Mettaton had observed this very same behaviour many times from Alphys: it’s a sign of a person who doesn’t want to be seen…

“T-this is a public signing, right? I mean. I’m. I’m here for this.” The human slid Mettaton’s album on the table.

“Hmmm,” Mettaton pondered out loud for the theatrics. “What an interesting turn of events! Say baby, what’s your name again?”

“Dayton. Actually, that’s not my real name.”

“A nick?” He raised his brow. “A stage name, perhaps? My, my, my, I didn’t think you’re a musician my darling fan.”

Dayton tensed up, shocked. Then he shook his head back and forth. “No, no, no! I’m not your fan! And I’m not a musician either! That’s my younger brother. He’s super good. Super, super good. S-so good that he performs on stages, just like you!”

He dug into his pockets, pulling out a data stick. It’s secured in a ziplock plastic bag. A bit overkill on the water-protection, but you won’t see him complain.

“Here!” the human pointed. “The full performance. If you call yourself a musician you better listen to it. Otherwise you… you have no taste!”

The boy’s arms quivered from fear. Not so surprising since he had the recent misfortune of tangling with the strongest of the strong.

“Oh dear me,” The robot posed a dramatic swoon. “I can’t leave my possibly-future-fan stay an absolute wreck! Let’s retreat to a less public place. Do you want to try my MTT-brand Soda?”

“I hate sodas,” said the boy.

“Maybe MTT-brand Milk Tea then?”

“Yeah. T-that’s better. Hot. If possible.”
Mettaton thus closed shop and led Dayton to the guest lounge. Going too deep into the studio might send out the wrong signals.

A human secretary served the mug. “Just as you requested, Mister Mettaton.”

“Thank you, darling.”

Dayton was astonished by the presence of his own kind. “You employ humans too?”

“My fanclub is open to all,” said Mettaton. “That includes anyone who wishes to work with me. Humans? Monsters? Sweetheart, that don’t matter.”

“I myself am a huge fan of humans! I find your kind fascinating beyond words.”

Pose. “The culture!”
Pose. “The pizzaz!”
Pose. “The life!”

…The young Gungnir had become uncomfortable from the spontaneity. He seemed to lean on the conservative side. Could it be a part of his background?

The celebrity settled back down to his seat.


“If you insist, darling.”

Inserting the data straight into his mechanical being would be a terrible idea. Alphys warned against ‘viruses’ and ‘trojans’: nasties that could mess with his systems.

So Mettaton called for a secure company laptop. He played the file on it.

There were no malicious programs. Instead, it showed a stage.

“I recognize that place,” said Mettaton. “It’s the auditorium for young, upcoming performers! Even students can rent it.”

Dayton pointed to a boy wearing a colourful cloak. “That’s my younger brother.” he said, “We’re one year apart.”

He carried a strange stringed instrument that Mettaton had never seen before. The construction appeared simple: it involved a sound box, two strings, and a long fingerboard. The complexity of the modern cellist’s bow was a complete contrast against the seemingly rustic design.

After the performers and audience welcomed each other, the musicians seated on their respective chairs.

Mettaton stared in amazement when he heard the sounds. A whole new world opened to his ears: so harmonious yet so foreign at the same time.

For the most of Mettaton’s life, the main source of music came from electronics. Electric instruments, synths, or other pre-recorded sound bites which would be adjusted by a computer. His exposure to the acoustics was quite limited. Embarrassing to admit, he had only attended an orchestra once so far.

Just when Mettaton thought he got used to the new textures, Dayton’s brother opened his mouth.
…Could it really be possible for a human to whistle from his throat? Apparently so. The weird hybrid of song and noise sounded beautiful in a haunting way.

“Doesn’t his throat hurt?” Mettaton had to ask.

“It did, at first,” Dayton answered. “Then he got used to it. What about you?”

“Don’t tell this to anyone, darling. But. I ate ghost drops for a week after my first performance.”

The human tried to keep a straight face. Still, his lips curled a little bit.

Mettaton continued to watch in silence. Whatever caution he had about Dayton faded into the background. There was not a single understandable word, yet he couldn’t help but to be enchanted by the music’s soul…

Meanwhile, the human sipped his tea.

Near the end, Dayton’s brother announced the highlight of the show: a solo performance. In heavily-accented English, the boy explained it as a tribute to the family who raised him.

It’s his own composition, sung in his mother tongue. Called it proof to the world that it’s possible to compose something new while staying true to one’s roots. Every ancient song was novel once upon a time. Tradition doesn’t equate to obsolescence.

Though he fought back the tears, the brother’s voice never cracked under pressure. For a singer to deliver such emotions while maintaining composure revealed the true depth of his showmanship.

Dayton wasn’t kidding. This kid was a professional despite his age.

When the song ended, the audience clapped. Mettaton joined in too. He wished he was there to mingle with the performers. Shake their hands, shower compliments, and learn more about their origins.

The robot praised, “That was splendid! Wonderful! A heartfelt performance of flying colours, I’d say!”

“Heh,” the human smirked. “You do have good taste after all. Not like most of the kids in this country. They complain that my brother’s singing is weird.”

After yet another flamboyant series of poses, Mettaton replied: “I know a true artist when I see one, sweetheart. Even if it’s outside of my comfort zone. Oh yes~~ Your talented brother will have a bright future in the arts! A superstar in the making!”

With a nervous chuckle, Dayton said: “Maybe a ‘superstar’ is a bit too much.”

Dayton rotated his mug, fidgeting to stave off his nerves. “H-he wants to become a Loremaster. Think of it as becoming a living library. Most of the other boys dream about guns, glory, and livestock. Not him. He wants to gather the scattered knowledge of the Aratet. Make us a real people again. Maybe then the other tribes would see us as more than dangerous weapons.”

What an aspiration. Enemy or not, a dream of recording culture was something Mettaton could cheer on.

The icebreaking session now out of the way, the celebrity asked him a serious question: “So, ‘Dayton’. I’m sure you have more on your mind than showing off your brother’s talent audition.”
The kid gulped. Maybe he got a bit too comfortable there, being his brother’s biggest fan. Quite a familiar sight, Mettaton thought.

“Y-yes, actually.” he said, “I… I want to talk to you. Because you seem to be close to the Magi; The Vampire showed up at your studio in person.”

Mettaton remembered now. On that day, Mezil helped clean up the place and keep the nosier media at bay.

Huffing, the robot crossed his arms. “Oh. That nasty vandalism! Were you a part of it, mister?”

“Yes,” Dayton admitted. “It was bait.”

“Bait?” Mettaton asked back.

“We wanted to trap you with your own words. Dad said the common mob only wants to hear sensationalist stories. Rile them up and they’ll do half the work for us. It’s an ugly attitude, but a useful one.”

How brave it was for young Dayton to come alone, Mettaton thought. Almost foolish. He had Mezil’s number. There’s nothing to stop him from detaining the boy right here in the studio. But, the glambot decided not to further frighten his guest.

He posed. “The past is the past, darling. I’m sure you have many, many hot questions. Baby, ask away! I’ll answer the best I can.”

Dayton got up from his seat. It would be impossible for him to bring a knife, so he prepared his bare fists instead.

“The Magi kept following us… Dad’s been trying to make contact for days, but there’s no answer. Did the Oracle betray us?!”

The Gungnir, trying to contact an oracle?

Mettaton blurted: “Who’s this ‘Oracle’ again?”

The human rubbed his forehead, trying hard to remember the key information. “Something about paper… Papyrus! That’s it! His name is Papyrus!”

“Dayton dear, Papyrus isn’t even awake. Grievous injuries! Coma included! That poor cinnamon roll had been hospitalized ever since the big fire.”

“So… he didn’t use his Eye to help the Vampire of Time?!”

“Not at all,” Mettaton furrowed his brows. “Dear me, just thinking about his condition drives me sick with worry.”

Relieved, Dayton plopped himself back on the seat again. He wiped the sweat off his face with his sleeve. That’s genuine fear.

The glambot said: “I noticed you Gungnir were utterly terrified of Papyrus. Why? He’s the cinnamonest of cinnamon rolls.”

“…Dad warned us about the Coloured Ones.” Dayton replied, clutching his mug. “They’re the deadliest.”
“Why so?”

“Because they descend from us humans. My people’s legends tell that humanity inherited the will of the gods. Coloured Ones have remnants of that power. It allows them to become DEMONs on the battlefield. With enough numbers, they’re a force far deadlier than the ‘Ageless’.”

The new terminology threw Mettaton off. “Come again? Who are they?”

Dayton explained, “The Ageless are special monsters that don’t grow old. More like spirits of nature, commanding the elements of their domain. Your nation has two of them. The fire goats who took care of your Chosen.”

Almost accurate descriptions there. Mettaton tapped his chin, pondering about the new names he had learned.

‘The Coloured Ones’ are ‘Seers’. It made sense because they’re the ones with coloured flaming eyes. Alphys explained in her notes that they were ‘proof of their humanity’.

‘The Ageless’ are ‘Boss Monsters’. Self-explanatory. It’s doubtful that the Gungnir knew anything about their life cycle. Even the Underground monsters had never seen King Asgore age until he had his son. And, the process stopped the moment the Prince met his unfortunate demise.

Then there were ‘The Chosen’. He didn’t need to be a supercomputer to realise that’s the Gungnir’s term for Red SOUL humans.

If that’s the case…

He asked, “Papyrus is this ‘Oracle’ because he can see the past, present, and future?”

Dayton tried drinking more tea to calm his nerve, but his mug was empty. “Y-yes. Only true masters can fight an Oracle toe-to-toe. Otherwise it’s certain death.”

“Yet you’re here today,” the bot pointed out. “Darling dearest, count your lucky stars! You met the right person. If it was his brother… My, my, my, I dare not imagine your fate.”

The human winced. “H-he has a brother?”

“An elder one. Now he’s the true ‘anti-human’ unit!”

Dayton responded with a suspicious glare. “I thought that’s you.”

“Classic misunderstanding, baby!” Mettaton showed off his gorgeous hot-pink boots. “That was just the original sales pitch to get all my sweet, sweet electronics~~~”

Clarifying: “I never wanted to become a weapon. My life’s dream had always been to bring smiles to people’s faces. It’s just, well, circumstances got in the way.”

The human stared at Mettaton for a moment, then let out a chuckle. It was not a happy one. Bitter, perhaps?

“Brother thinks the same. Almost. He… he’s the artsy kind.”

Mettaton watched the human struggle with his emotions. On one hand, he wanted to stay strong before the supposed enemy. On the other hand, he’s burdened by a weight that could only be guessed.
“My little brother… his first original solo -- the one you saw -- was in the style of a warrior’s farewell. He sang it for my dad and me. We… didn’t expect to survive the mission.”

Mettaton gasped. “Excuse me?! A suicide plot?! Baby, that’s foolishness!”

“Hey! It’s not like we wanted to!” The kid retorted. “It’s just, the odds of survival were so low it might as well have been.”

“Can’t you do your heroic deeds without finding trouble, sweetie?”

“No. As long The Vampire is in charge, Gungnir has no hope of reaching that ‘thing’ under the ocean.”

What a predicament. An unspeakable abomination waiting to burst out of its can? It sounded like a recipe for world-wide calamity.

No wonder Dayton was so willing to gamble his life. It’s all or nothing.

“So, darling.” Mettaton crossed his legs. “If I’m an illegal freedom fighter trying to slither my way into Magi heartland… I would find an innocent excuse. Maybe, apply for a trip with a legit group of civilians? Surely family members would be most welcomed to witness a rising star’s debut performance~! Family support goes a long, long way.”

Perturbed, Dayton distanced himself from Mettaton.

“No way! Fuck!” he exclaimed, “Argh, I’m so STUPID! You’re a super celebrity, of COURSE you’re gonna figure me out!”

The reaction left Mettaton speechless. He didn’t expect to get a 100% accuracy rating. Maybe 50%. Or 10%. Even a big fat zero.

Poor Dayton. The kid curled over himself in utter dismay. The stress could crush him right there.

“The elders were right.” He muttered. “I’m waaaay too young and inexperienced to follow Dad after all. I’m gonna ruin my brother’s future too. I’m dead. I’m so dead. Deader than dead.”

Mettaton clapped his hands to get the kid’s attention. It took a few tries, but he eventually succeeded.

The robot then said: “I… just threw the most dramatic movie-like scheme on the table. Oh goodness me! Isn’t it too soon to jump to conclusions?”

Pose. “You could have sailed here on a boat!”
Pose. “Or hitched on a truck!”
Pose. “Hopped the border on foot!”

“Pure speculation, baby! A super celebrity I am, but I’m no detective. My words are no better than juicy gossip.”

Dayton stared back in a daze.

“I-I’m not dead yet…?”

“No, darling.” Mettaton winked.

The monster who he tried to kill, covering for him? Mind-blowing.
Alas, the wonder didn’t last long. The human soon dropped the ugly truth: “The Sky Witch will dig up our records, we’re screwed either way.”

Mettaton wondered what happens to human children who get caught for a serious crime? Community service? Juvie? If he could believe crime-dramas, a far worse fate awaits those tried as an adult. Dayton would come out of prison many years later as a true hardened criminal.

Can Mister Glam in his good conscience send his future-fan to such a place? What if there’s a way to give the kid a second chance? That’s something to keep in mind.

How surreal to think that everything converged on that day. The high stakes. The complicated history. Not a single person on Ebott Town was the wiser.

Mettaton asked: “Was your brother happy to see you two again?”

“Yeah… But, he’s worried too. We failed. And the Oracle has seen our home. Dad expected a counterattack. Or at least, the Magi chasing our tracks.”

Dayton ruffled his own hair, frustration bubbling over the pot.

“I’m sick of that life!” he yelled. “Dad had fought enough as a child soldier. I want him to stay at home with Mom. Run the farm together without worrying about stupid fighting!”

“I want my brother to hone his craft in peace. And my sister to grow up in a normal school. I want my new sibling to be born in an intact family…”

The boy still tried to hold back his tears. “But you magical beings keep pushing that dream away! Dad can’t quit as long you’re around! The whole of Gungnir is counting on him!”

Mettaton called for a box of tissues. They were promptly delivered to the table. He passed them to the human.


Could there be others in Gungnir who felt the same as this boy? Everyone thinks they are the heroes of their own tale. Monsters. Humans. It doesn’t matter. They’re all the main character.

“Honey,” said Mettaton. “I understand how you feel. Believe me! But darling, I think you’re barking up the wrong tree. And I’m saying this as a star to his future-fan.”

“Forget about our differences for a second. Like it or not, Mister Thyme is the only one with enough bountiful resources to settle that ocean hoo-hah. Who’s going to organize the army if he’s gone?”

Dayton replied with the fullest confidence: “Dad. And the elders. T-they’re nothing like the guys you see in your country! They have real experience.”

“Darling dearest, I’m happy to hear that you’re so confident in your father. However that still doesn’t address the biggest elephant in the room.”

“What?” the boy asked.

“Connections, baby! Nevermind lots and lots of money. Ships, weapons, fuel, and other logistics don’t come cheap.”

Unimpressed, Dayton scoffed at the thought. “The Vampire only looks strong. If his network was sufficient, he wouldn’t have failed so many times.”
“Then, why not help him succeed?” Mettaton asked, neglecting to question how the kid knew about the timey-wimey.

The human was taken aback by the suggestion. “I’m not helping a heretic!”

“Oh no, no. Play your cards right, baby. Can there be anything better than saving the world AND your family at the same time?”

His shrewd business sense began ticking away. Indeed, if the Gungnir think they’re the heroes… why not capitalize on that desire?

His secretary then barged into the room, all harried and quite in panic.

“Dear, what’s wrong?” he asked.

In between the huffs and puffs, she said: “Mister Mettaton! The lobby. Someone stormed into the lobby!”

Faint angry yelling sounded in the background. Listen hard enough, and one could hear Dayton’s very name.

“Dad.” The kid shook his head. His groan was so full of the fed-up factor, any teenager in the world would be proud. “It has to be Dad. Argh, this is so annoying! I can’t do anything without everyone watching me. It’s the same in the village, the same in this country!”

Mettaton activated his built-in security feed. Down the halls, guards tried to stop a man in a regular ol’ jacket, jeans, and a cap… which conveniently obscured the top half of his face. Curse headwear.

When the intruder refused to back off, they took out their batons and tasers.

An immediate smackdown happened. One lone man fought against many. Every punch landed at the most painful spot. Then, he turned victim after victim into person-sized bowling-balls and pins.

Not even technology could stop him. One of the guards almost struck a blow. But no, the taser got wrung out of his grip. In the next shocking turn of events, the poor fellow bit the dust instead. Ouch.

The last remaining guard managed to at least knock off the cap before succumbing to a wall-slam.

Mettaton gasped; he had seen this person before.

The assailant was none other than the man who fought Grillby and Lady Lucidia.

‘Aiden of Aratet’, he was told. The current true leader of The Gungnir.

“Dayton darling,” the robot asked, “Are you THE boss’ son?”

The boy replied, “Yep. The biggest big boss of big bosses.”

“Could have told me that sooner, baby!”

In any good drama, there would be a spike of escalation that brings excitement to a scene, all leading to one final twist. Great theory on the big screen. Quite a heart attack in real life.

Mettaton started to have deep regrets about hiring cheap. The ‘security’ he had were meant to watch out for thieves, not fight against a seasoned war veteran.

Still, he had duties to fulfil. Turning to his secretary, he said: “Quick. Head to the emergency exit. I’ll
take care of matters here.”

“But Mister Mettaton--”

“As your employer, your safety is my number one responsibility. Hurry, darling! Lest you get caught in the crossfire!”

After thanking him, his secretary fled the scene. There’s one less possible hostage now.

Now, to calm himself down. Think of it as a prep for a big concert. Go steady on the magic. This scenario will put his improvisation skills to the test.

Playing the card of an ‘innocent entertainment robot’ won’t work anymore. The warrior had seen the might of Mettaton’s NEO form, thus knowing full well about the offensive capabilities of his systems.

Plan A, chucked into the trash. Now for Plan B: to remain courteous at all times.

Aiden barged into the guest lounge. Silent. Seething. As the boss approached closer, Mettaton tried to speak. “Sir, your son here shared your younger boy’s wonderful perfor--”

His attempts: ignored.

The father grabbed his son by the arm and tried to pull him out the door.

Dayton struggled. He insisted in staying put.

Aiden began scolding his son in a foreign language. Nonetheless, the tone of his voice translated the scene into understandable emotions. Monsters are more in tune with those after all.

His anger was not misplaced: any father would be worried sick if his son ran off to meet up with a stranger. Worse if it was a racial enemy.

Dayton -- being his reckless teenage self -- started yelling back at his dad. He was quite the animated individual, pointing his fingers everywhere. Something about ‘police’.

Well, it wasn’t an unreasonable counter. Aiden’s public storming put them right under the spotlight: the worst possible outcome among the non-fatal options.

The argument escalated along with the volume. At the height of it, Dayton pointed an accusative finger towards his own father.

‘Oh no’, thought Mettaton. It’s family quarrelling at its worst.

Foolish Dayton must have crossed the line. His father raised his hand, threatening to slap the kid across the cheek.

“Stop!” Mettaton yelled, summoning a horde Minis to split them apart.

Aiden must have misunderstood the robot’s intentions. He reacted with a retaliatory punch. A great golden light flashed at the end of the human’s fist.

For a split second, Mettaton caught the glimpse of a familiar jagged symbol: one associated with danger and high-voltage.

The bolt of lightning… exploded. It really did. All the Minis dropped dead on the floor, twitching for
a while before they vanished in a puff of smoke.

On the other hand, Mettaton survived the blast somewhat unscathed. It appears that Alphys had installed a new anti-shock insulation. That girl works fast, he thought.

What about Aiden?

Aiden reeled from the recoil. He struggled to stand, bearing the pain. Stray sparks jumped around his singed arm.

It wasn’t an illusion. The human DID shoot out lightning! Somehow.

Police sirens approached from a distance. Backup had arrived.

But Mettaton didn’t want any rescuing. Not yet, at least.

So he posed. “Darlings, I have a proposal that you might like. But, it’s limited edition. Only valid if you trust me to deal with the police.”

With a hoarse voice, Aiden replied: “Nonsense. I’ll escape with my son.”

“And discard the surest road to the ‘Oracle’?” Mettaton winked. “I’ll have you know that he’s my Number One Fan. Papyrus darling will never miss a call from yours truly.”

The bot continued: “Of course, this could all be an elaborate ploy to trap you. Perhaps it’s prudent that you make a break for it while you still can. Either way you sparkling bolts, the final choice is in your hands.”

Mettaton then excused himself so they could make their decision.

After a brief assurance, the police helped him transport the unfortunate victims of violence to the hospital. Mettaton hoped that they suffered nothing more than a nasty bruise. The insurance would get antsy otherwise.

The next hour was spent further clarifying the incident to law enforcement. He played the tune of a family misunderstanding: a silly son sneaked out of the house for the signing event. Didn’t inform anyone. Then his father thought the kid was about to get swindled. Nothing that Mettaton couldn’t sort out with his wonderful PR skills.

The story worked. Since it was ‘resolved’ in a peaceful manner, the cops left.

All was well. Mettaton strutted his way back to the guest lounge. Did his visitors flee like a sensible person, or did they take the risk? That question would be answered with a push of a door.

There they were, sitting on the sofa. Aiden and Dayton of the Gungnir had trusted the monster just enough to stay.

Add one more accolade to Mettaton’s celebrity charm!

Chapter End Notes

Now remember Mezil speculating that Aiden could be like the Purple Kid? ;)
For two weeks in June I will be on vacation, starting from the 3rd to the 15th. There's no guarantee that I could squeeze out one more chapter before it begins. If yes, great! If not, the next entry would be in the latter half of June.

Stay well until then!
Connections

Chapter Notes

Somehow, we manage to crank out a chapter at the border of vacation. I wrote it over the week, Editor-sama edited it at the airport and hotel. The end result is a bonus!

No more surprise goodies until vacation is over unfortunately :P

Have a good June.

Papyrus stared at the ceiling for the whole day, blank and in deep contemplation. Being stuck to a hospital bed was one of the most boring moments in his life.

His best flower friend took care of all his needs. Making sure he drank. Making sure he ate. And making sure that Papyrus never, ever, ever takes off the red scarf around his skull.

To pass the time in between tasks, Flowey played on his portable video game console. “Maybe you should just try to sleep, Papyrus.” he said.

Papyrus replied, “I’VE SLEPT FOR DAYS, FLOWERY. I REFUSE TO BECOME LIKE SANS!”

“Point taken. Feel like solving some puzzles instead?”

“I GUESS. BUT I DON’T SEE ANY BOOKS LYING AROUND.”

“Heh. Be prepared to get your mind blown away then!”

After a few taps on the gaming pad, Flowey passed his console to Papyrus. “Go nuts. Solve as many as you’d like.”

Flowey showed him everything under the ‘puzzle’ category. With all those titles, there would be hundreds, maybe thousands of options.

Oh how he sparkled at the sight. “WOWIE!!! THIS IS A TREASURE TROVE! THANK YOU VERY MUCH.”

He got right to it. Flowey watched over his shoulder, just like the old days.

One set of puzzles.
Two.
Ten.
Thirty.

A whole day must have passed by now, right? Papyrus remembered how it would take him forever to solve this many. But, when he looked at the wall clock, it was only two hours. He spent an average of four minutes per puzzle.

“How STRANGE. WHAT IS THIS BABYBONES DIFFICULTY?!?” he asked the flower.
Flowey looked over the puzzles again. “Do you wanna call your old self a babybone? Because nothing changed. These puzzles are about the same level as the stuff you had in the Underground. You’re not cheating with your all-seeing-eye… right?”

“NOPE,” Papyrus frowned.

“Well then, I think you finally gained some experience! Or. Maybe Lady Lucidia did something to your brain, skull, whatever, while you were asleep.”

“NOW THAT’S JUST SILLY. SHE’S A FAIRY GODMOTHER, NOT A MAD SCIENTIST! THAT TITLE BELONGS TO UNCLE GASTER AND ALTER PAPYRUS.”

The ex-prince lifted his leaves in protest. “A person who can transform a pumpkin into a carriage is totally capable of tweaking people’s heads!”

“HMMMM…” Papyrus rubbed his chin. “YOU DO HAVE A POINT. BOTH REQUIRE SACRILEGIOUS LEVELS OF ATOMIC MAGICAL MANIPULATION THAT MAY OR MAY NOT CROSS THE BOUNDARIES OF NATURE!”

The moment Papyrus finished his speech, the one and only Mezil Thyme entered the room.

“I heard that,” he said, ever grumpy.

Flowey tried to play innocent. “Nope. You didn’t. You weren’t even in the room. You shouldn’t be hearing anything in the first place.”

Mezil’s squinted at Flowey. Showing his earpiece, he said: “You think that Lucidia wouldn’t install monitoring devices? Papyrus is under observation, for goodness sake.”

The flower stared back at the Magus with disgust. “And you wonder why people think she’s a witch?”

Ignoring Flowey, Mezil pulled a chair over to Papyrus and sat there. “My wife aside, you are half-right. Papyrus did gain experience. His observational and cognitive skills have improved over the trial of fire. Count on his good fortune that he came out remotely fine.”

Thinking over it again, Papyrus had to admit that his old self was too distracted by thoughts of fame and popularity. Maybe that’s why he found Junior Jumbles so difficult? Those require some level of focus.

The old man leaned on his chair, resting his head against the wall. He had the face of someone who had just woken up and was still trying to get his engine started.

He said: “It would have been nice if she could really ‘fix’ someone’s brain, though. Might have cured someone who dearly needs it.”

Papyrus frowned. “IS IT MISTER GAELIC?”

“Yes,” the Magus replied.

The skeleton gave the console back to Flowey. Any mood for fun and games was all but gone now.

“What’s wrong with him?” asked Papyrus. “He became worse than a real dog. He reminds me of the scary creatures inside storybooks.”

The flower interjected, “I wanna know too.”
“I’m not the expert,” said Mezil. “But from what I understood, it’s some kind of a backlash from activating The Eye too soon in his developmental cycle. You will have to ask Lucidia for further details.”

Flowey complained. “Aw c’mon, man, I’m sure YOU know enough. You married the most computer skelly lady in the world!”

“IT’S FINE,” Puffing his chest, Papyrus announced the following: “THERE’S NO BETTER WAY FOR THE GREAT PAPYRUS TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE THAN TO SEEK IT STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE.”

“Hmm.” The flower pondered. “Skips any stupid misinformation too. Not a bad plan. If that’s the case, we can also ask what the heck is going on with you.”

The skeleton placed his hand over his right eye. Could his own power turn into an enemy? Sans did mention that the Seer’s Eye is both a blessing and a curse.

“WILL I… BE ALRIGHT?” asked Papyrus.

Mezil turned the question around. “What is your definition of being ‘alright’? To return to your old life unscathed, as though it was all a dream? Or do you expect to escape with the skin between your teeth?”

“I SUPPOSE IT MEANS ‘TO FUNCTION WELL ENOUGH FOR A NORMAL LIFE’.”

“Then you will have to ask yourself what is your new ‘normal’.”

Papyrus started sweating a bit. Still, he forced a smile. “AS LONG AS I DON’T NEED TO CHANGE MY HOUSE ADDRESS TO A HOSPITAL WARD.”

The old man huffed. “Then you’re fine. At worst, you’ll live with me in the Berendin Manor.”

“I HOPE IT DOESN’T COME TO THAT!” he exclaimed. “NOTHING AGAINST YOU, BUT EBOTT TOWN IS MY HOME.”

“Understandable.”

That made the young skeleton think. Mezil -- the old man with a lifetime of experience -- mentioned that he was born in the same city as The Magus Association. Then, he described a rather unhappy family life.

Was it really that terrible?

So Papyrus asked: “MISTER MAGUS, WHAT WAS YOUR CHILDHOOD LIKE?”

Mezil glanced at the former prince. “I would rather not want to continue this conversation with Flowey around. It’s a private matter.”

“Fine, Fine. I’ll eavesdrop like usual.” Flowey hopped on his levitating plate. Quite a technological wonder there. It’s controlled by magic. A soulless DEMON Flowey may be, he still had his monster touch.

Once he left, Mezil relaxed his shoulders. Papyrus figured that it was less about the facts and more about the presence. Maybe he didn’t want to be on guard for sassy, snarky commentary. Too much of a distraction.
“I suppose both of us had irregular childhoods,” he began. “You, raised by your older brother. Me, who raised himself. You turned out much better. What a difference love makes.”

“YOU RAISED YOURSELF?” The skeleton scratched his head. “I THOUGHT YOU HAD PARENTS.”

The other huffed. “Not much parenting can be done when one is drunk half the time. They’re forever addled. Mind asleep in a different land. I might as well have been an orphan.”

“BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR SIBLINGS? THEY SOUND NAUGHTY BUT, I’M SURE YOU CARE ABOUT EACH OTHER.”

“No. My sister resented my parents for their failures. And me, for my success. Part of the reason why she turned to drugs.”

“As for my younger brother… he cares only about himself. A worse sociopath than your flower friend: the rest of us were mere sources of money to feed his risky games.”

Papyrus shivered for a moment. That was Mezil’s ‘family’? Home should conjure images of a safe place where people love and annoy each other. Not… whatever he just described.

The man continued: “I kept the house in order so Child Protection Services won’t take me away. Some may call it ‘enabling behaviour’, but I just didn’t want to leave. My own siblings were already a headache. Dealing with complete strangers who may or may not come from worse conditions? An absolute nightmare.”

“But, you could also have met someone like Frisk.” Papyrus smiled.

“I could,” said Mezil. “But I didn’t believe it was possible. If you think I’m a pessimist now, you’ve not met my younger self.”

“I’M GLAD YOU GOT BETTER. EVEN IF IT’S A BIT.”

“Did I truly? …Or is it just your presuppositions?”

He seemed… doubtful? Troubled? Mezil’s perpetual frown made it difficult to tell the difference. Frisk’s youthful and simple face telegraphed the nuances better.

“Say, Papyrus… When you were a child, what did you do when you’re bored?”

Talking about himself always gets Papyrus animated. “PUZZLES! LOTS OF THEM! AND IF I FELT MORE RAMBUNCTIOUS, I WOULD RUN AROUND PRETENDING TO BE A HEROIC ROYAL KNIGHT! THAT’S SOME GOOD TRAINING, I MUST ADMIT.”

“And what would you do when you’re angry?”

“HMMMM…” The skeleton mused. “DEPENDS. IF IT WAS WITH UNDYNE, I WOULD WRESTLE HER ON THE SPOT!”

“If it’s not with Undyne, I would just scream, spin around, and stomp my foot. That would spend most of my anger points! Anything left would be used up in jogging and puzzlecrafting.”

Mezil raised a brow. “Isn’t that just irritation?”

“IRRITATION IS A FORM OF ANGER TOO.”
“I suppose. As for me: in my times of boredom, I would go to the arcade. And there...” His voice darkened. “In my growing anger, I would ‘kill’ anything that stood in my way. The more difficult the enemy, the better.”

Silence hung in the air. Papyrus didn’t know how to react yet. There’s a nagging sense of familiarity in this scenario.

But what?

Think, Papyrus. Think.

Grillby once said something about solving puzzles in steps. His mental gears thus tried to connect the dots.

Which troubled individual did this story remind him off...?

Chara? No. Mezil had no such grandiose fantasies about genocide. He never once smiled in his battles.

Flowery then? No. Though boredom was a shared motif, it wasn’t the source of his apathy or killing intent.

What about Sans? No. Sans had more focus. He always built his plans around a specific goal or target. That would be Mezil later in life, not the fledgling youth.

Maybe... Frisk?

Papyrus exclaimed, “SO YOUNG AND BURDENED... YOU MUST HAVE BEEN STRESSED BEYOND YOUR HAIR, WISHING TO ‘KILL’ YOUR PROBLEMS JUST SO YOU COULD BREATHE. YOU WERE JUST LIKE FRISK!”

The positive tone didn’t go unnotice. Mezil asked, “Why be so happy about that?”

“MISTER MAGUS, IT MEANS THAT YOU CAN HELP THEM! AND THEY CAN HELP YOU! I WAS WORRIED THAT YOU WOULD HAVE NO COMMON GROUND, SEPARATED BY DECADES OF OLDNESS.”

Mezil... resisted the urge to bite his lip? Was he embarrassed by the connection? Flustered?! Who would have thought.

After regaining his composure the old Magus asked: “Is it that obvious?”

Papyrus nodded. “FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, TSUNDERES ARE HARDEST WITH THOSE WHO’RE MOST LIKE THEM.”

“I don’t think that’s exclusively a tsundere idea. Nor I would say that Frisk shared the same issues as I did either. But, you’re right to some extent.”

Looking away, the Magus said: “You believe people can choose to be good. I did not. And, I still don’t.”

“ARE YOU SURE?” Papyrus asked back. “YOU GAVE ME A CHANCE!”

“Thank the Grandmaster for that. I honestly didn’t have high opinions about you. I was at wit’s end. My deck, empty. Desperate for a game-changer. Any game-changer. That’s how ‘low’ you were on my radar.”
Papyrus glanced left and right. “I EXPECTED IT AS MUCH. HAVE WE HAD THIS CONVERSATION BEFORE?”

“Did we? Maybe. I can’t remember. A day for one man could be a month for me. Sometimes, my personal thoughts get mixed up with events. Thank God for Lucidia.”

“I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL.” Papyrus nodded. Yes, that Chara incident. He had a first-hand taste of a Living Victory’s life. “THAT’S OKAY. WE’LL JUST REMIND EACH OTHER.”

He then asked: “WHY DON’T YOU BELIEVE OTHERS CAN BE GOOD?”

“What is ‘good’?” Mezil replied. “That everyone is happy? Or winning a prize you want? Or getting others to concede to your wishes? Fortune and misfortune are two sides of the same coin. One man’s cruelty can be another man’s heroism. Without knowing that person’s standard for ‘goodness’, I would rather err on the side of caution.”

Papyrus clutched the end of his blanket. “THAT… SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING SANS WOULD SAY.”

“Without doubt, he would. Application is where we diverge. ‘In the End, I persevere’, that was his Ascension. His SOUL’s vow. It didn’t matter how hopeless or nonsensical or questionable the circumstances were, anything to stop the universe from collapsing into a premature end. As for myself…”

Mezil uncapped the top of his cane and drew his sword. He used its polished surface as a mirror, reflecting his visage.

“You heard it before: ‘As long I walk on this Earth, I shall preserve peace. No schemer nor manipulator shall tarnish the hearts of the pure for their sick and twisted amusement. My loved ones must be protected, no matter what’.”

“Similar, sure, but different in intent. There’s a reason why I detest conniving wordplays: they hide malice behind innocent ideas. Detestable.”

The Magus offered the blade by the hilt. “Do you want to hold it?”

“SURE!”

The young skeleton lifted it one-handed. Contrary to expectations, it was light. Maybe between 400 to 600 grams? Less than a kilogram for sure.

“I THOUGHT YOU ALREADY HAVE A GUN. ISN’T THIS FANCY BLADE REDUNDANT?”

This time, Papyrus could hear the sheer dismissal in Mezil’s huff. “Come back to me when you’re stranded in battle with no bullets. There’s weight and bulk to consider too. Magic? That could attract unwanted attention. Swords are silent. Stealthy.”

“I SEE… BUT I’M NOT EVEN SURE IT’S LEGAL. THE HUMAN COPS GOT CONCERNED WHEN I SHOWED THEM MY CALCIOUS BATONS.”

“A swordcane is indeed illegal under normal circumstances. They’re considered ‘concealed weapons’. Though, as Supreme Judge, I have the necessary clearance while on duty.”

Papyrus tilted the blade, the reflection shifted against the silver gleam. It’s a beautiful piece of art.
Except, it was meant to take the lives of others.

“WERE YOU ALSO ARMED AT FRISK’S WAKE?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Mezil, “The situation was more dangerous than you realise.”

“…WHAT’S IT LIKE TO KILL A PERSON? DO YOU FEEL ANYTHING? I IMAGINE THAT IT MUST BE PAINFUL.”

“I want to say that it depends on the victim. But, that would be a lie.”

The Magus remained silent for a while. His constant-stoic expression made it difficult for Papyrus to guess his exact emotions.

“I felt nothing,” at last he admitted. “Nothing died on the inside, as others have attested. I did not choke from disgust, by sight or by scent. Blood didn’t trigger any negative reactions. Neither was I haunted by remorse over the lives I had ended.”

“In other words, I’m abnormal. A ‘monster’ in human terms. Though it’s closer to a DEMON, if you ask me.”

Is that how Mezil thinks of himself? At this rate, a truly normal well-adjusted person would be the most special of them all.

But…

Papyrus knew better than to accept surface facts. Mezil is the kind of guy that requires one to read between the lines.

“MISTER MAGUS, IT’S OKAY TO BE ABNORMAL AS LONG YOU KEEP TRYING TO BE BETTER. BESIDES, YOU’RE JUST MAKING YOURSELF SOUND WORSE THAN REALITY! AN UTTER TSUNDERE TO YOURSELF!”

“I KNOW DEEP INSIDE YOU ARE KIND. IF YOU WERE TRULY AS COLD AS YOUR WEAPONS, YOU WOULDN’T HAVE Poured SO MUCH INTO HELPING OTHERS. EVEN... EVEN IF THEY END UP HATING YOU FOR IT.”

“TRULY, BEHIND THAT MURDEROUS FRONT IS SOMEONE WITH A SOFT HEART.”

That must have hit an emotional bullseye. The stoicism broke: try as he might to hide, Mezil’s cheeks turned pink.

How he flustered. “T-that’s nonsense! I-- you-- Did Lucidia tell you to say that?!?”

Papyrus chuckled. “I KNEW IT! THE FAIRY GODMOTHER HAS HIGH STANDARDS AND EXCELLENT TASTES. GREAT MINDS THINK ALIKE, AS THEY SAY. AND THERE’S NONE GREATER THAN THE GREAT PAPYRUS! NYEH HEH HEH!!!”

“Tsk, now you’re just rubbing it in with your sarcastic glory hogging.”

He wriggled his brows. Yes, he was being cheeky. It’s a trait often obscured by his zany logic. It takes a sharp person to tell the difference.

Just when he was about to show the old man the true joys of wordplay… his phone rang. Mezil reached into his pocket.
“Mettaton, hm?” he muttered, then walked away. “Please excuse me.”

“UM, BUT YOUR CANE…” The sharp half of it was still in Papyrus’ possession.

Too late. Mezil had already left to attend to the call.

How does it feel to wield a real non-magical weapon? Papyrus wondered… Would it warp and wobble against the wind? Would it be bouncy?

Papyrus got out of bed, trying out a few moves with Mezil’s blade. It’s balanced. Surprisingly sturdy.

Nonetheless, something felt ‘off’. Uncomfortable. Was his technique wrong? Or, his conscience couldn’t bear the thought of holding a true instrument of killing? It’s different from a misappropriated kitchen knife.

Mezil cleared his throat to catch Papyrus’ attention.

“Playtime is over,” he said. “I would like to have the rest of my cane back, thank you very much.”

“Oh! No problem.”

The young skeleton passed the weapon back. Hilt first and blade pointing downward of course. Safety first.

After reassembly, Mezil reached for the opposite pocket… What’s inside there?

He pulled out a familiar looking device and handed it to Papyrus; “Fully charged. Ready for you to use anytime.”

When Papyrus inspected it further, he realised that it was his very own phone. He accepted it in absolute delight. “Thank you so so very much!”

“Mettaton just called,” said Mezil. “He informed me that you had some ‘new friends’ desperate to contact you. So much so that they sought out the celebrity in his own studio. You need to contact them the moment you’re awake.”

New friends?
Desperate?
Mettaton’s Studio?

Papyrus turned on his phone. Turns out, he had a lot of missed calls registered to ‘a new friend’.

It all made sense now. He gulped in his heart. Did Mezil try to pry? “I suppose there’s a downside to being popular. No breaks allowed.”

“Don’t beat yourself up over it,” Mezil replied. “Injuries can’t always be avoided. Your ‘new friends’ should understand this best.”

The way Mezil emphasised his words clued to Papyrus that the old man knew the truth. Not surprising, since Mezil was sharper than a tack. Papyrus was more disappointed with himself for not being able to maintain secrecy.

“Do… you have any advice for me?” he asked. This would be his first true diplomatic ‘mission’. Any teachings from a senior would help.

Bad. All easily twisted to mere subjectivity. A successful diplomat must know when to open their arms, when to stand their ground, and when to shut the door.”

The Judge pointed the top of his cane at Papyrus. In all his characteristic grimness, he warned: “Weigh every demand carefully. And never, ever make rash promises.”

More heavy things to contemplate about.

“THANK YOU,” said the skeleton. “I’LL KEEP THAT IN MIND. NYEH.”

The elder nodded. “You’re a hero now, Papyrus. I entrust this connection to you.”

And so, The Supreme Judge left the young, budding hero with his first true assignment in the real world.

It’s going to be a tough job, but Papyrus wasn’t afraid. He’s about to try something that could only be dreamt of for centuries. The idea filled him with both fear and excitement.

No point lollygagging anymore. He dialled the number and waited for the other end to pick up.

It was almost instant.

“Oracle,” said Aiden. “Your kind’s celebrity insisted that you were out of commission. Is that true?”

Papyrus replied. “YES. I TRIED TO STOP MY BROTHER’S NEFARIOUS PLANS. IT… DIDN’T TURN OUT AS WELL AS I HAD HOPED.”

“‘Brother’? I presume he’s a Coloured One too. There’s a reason why I don’t trust those of bone.”

“IT’S NOT UNFOUNDED. BUT, I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- AM HONEST. PLEASE WAIT FOR A MOMENT.”

With his selfie camera, Papyrus snapped a picture of himself: hospital gown and enchanted red scarf included. He then send it straight to Aiden’s number.

Over at the other end, he heard Mettaton’s dramatic distress. He heard the young teenager Dayton as well.

Whoops. Mezil did say they were Mettaton’s guests. That bot would never leave his visitors unattended. Basic hospitality after all.

Aiden returned to the line. “Wounds held together by The Sky Witch’s potent magic… they must be serious injuries. Scars are the proof of survival. Wear them with pride.”

“I-I WILL.” It’s not surprising that the Gungnir value toughness.

“I’M SORRY FOR NOT BEING AVAILABLE AT YOUR MOST ANXIOUS MOMENTS. SINCE I’M HERE NOW, LET’S GET RIGHT TO BUSINESS! WHAT DO YOU WISH TO ASK ME?”

“I want to meet your new Crimson Keeper.”

“FRISK?”

“Yes. We Gungnir have tried to secure them many times. It’s unprecedented to have a Chosen
strong enough to overpower the Vampire. If Frisk ascends as a new god, we’ll finally take back our ancestor’s Keys of Fate. That will end the infighting.”

Listening to Aiden only brought more questions. Infighting? The Gungnir weren’t united? Papyrus thought that was a Magus problem.

“WHO WAS YOUR ANCESTOR?” he had to ask.

So Aiden explained, “You know our ancestor as ‘The Legendary Hero’. Though the True Name was lost, we still venerate the memory of ‘Asas Asal Ara’. It roughly translates to ‘Ara, the original origin’.”

“OOOOOH.” Papyrus nodded slowly. How fascinating.

“Asas Asal Ara is the founder of us Aratet. Before that, we were fleeing nomads. Our land was ruled by demonic courts: twisted abominations in the shape of humans. Taking pity of us, the Asas Asal used the power of the divine gods -- the Keys of Fate -- to purge the corruption.”

“Yet his heroic deeds were defiled. First by the kings of the West, then by the Magi. Those of magic killed our founder to steal the power of the gods. We’ve been fighting to regain it ever since.”

That didn’t align to what Papyrus had witnessed. Mezil wasn’t kidding about mismatched perceptions.

If that’s the case…

“JUST TO CONFIRM,” said Papyrus. “WE ONLY WANT TO TALK, RIGHT? NO VIOLENCE? NO FIGHTING?”

“Indeed. I hope it will remain a peaceful dialogue.”

“THEN JUST LEAVE IT TO ME! THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL ENSURE A SMOOTH MONUMENTAL GREETING BETWEEN TWO MISUNDERSTOOD SIDES! NYEH HEH HEH!”

“I don’t have a say in it?” asked the other.

“OH! I APOLOGIZE. HOW RUDE OF ME TO NOT ASK FOR YOUR OPINIONS. DO YOU HAVE ANY SPECIFIC REQUESTS?”

“I’ve heard rumours that you’re an aspiring chef. Cook us an Aratet welcoming feast. That will prove if you’re worthy of diplomatic discussions. Should you fail, Frisk will meet us alone. Do we agree?”

All he needed was to cook? What an easy job! Papyrus accepted it without thinking twice.

With utmost confidence, he answered the call. “I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL COOK YOU A FEAST THAT YOU WILL NEVER FORGET! NYEH HEH HEH!”

“Good. Your task begins the moment you’ve healed enough to leave hospital. From there, you will have three days. Do not cheat. I have eyes on you.”

“Rest well, Oracle.”

The call ended.
“YES!” Papyrus pumped his fist. “MISSION ACCOMPLISHED! NOW ALL I HAVE TO DO IS TO WRITE DOWN A SHOPPING LIST.”

Three seconds later, streams of sweat saturated his scarf. That’s when he realised that he had forgotten Mezil’s key advice.

‘Never make rash promises.’

“…I… HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO COOK AN ARATET WELCOMING FEAST!!!”
Vacation time is over and it's back to regular weekly releases. Hopefully the rust didn't pile up too much.

Gaelic pronounces ‘I’ as both ‘ah’ and ‘ai’, depending on the flow of the sentences. Any normal ‘I’ is read as the standard ‘ai’ version.

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You feel a breeze of humid air blow on your face. It’s warm compared to Snowdin.

Which means… Waterfall is up ahead! It’s the end to a long, cold, trek in the snow!

You let out a triumphant cry. Food, here you come!

Snakeface chuckled. Smiling, he placed a finger on his teeth. “Shh, wee bean. Yer yells might scare our prey.”

Hey there, plants can’t run.

You led him by the hand to a beautiful row of fruiting water sausages. You plucked one and waved it in front of Snakeface.

Behold, a catkin reed that tastes just like a real juicy sausage! After some ketchup at least. Either way, they’re miles better than to the ones that grow wild on the Surface.

He sniffed the morsel a few times. Then, he chomped half of it down in one bite.

You giggled. It’s scary yet cute.

“‘Tis good!” he exclaimed.

Right? Right? Let’s pluck a few and settle down.

“Mmm but fish be better. Ye gather. Ah hunt.”

Fishes? Right here?

“Aye. Gonna show ya. There be one right over there…”

He slipped past the water sausage shrubs and into one of the many slow-moving rivers, barely causing a ripple on the water surface.

You were amazed by the silence of his movements. Back in civilization, he’s quite a loud one. The laughing. Yelping. Occasional crashing. You could feel the energy coming from his voice. It’s a whole different story when he’s on the hunt.

You clutched the pot you ‘borrowed’ from the cabin. Because you’re a human, Snakeface insisted on disinfecting every drop of water you’d drink.
It’s a shame that he’s so troubled in the head. Shouldn’t the lady and the Tsunderjudge have access to the best of the best treatment? Did they try and fail?

While you pondered, Gaelic resurfaced. He lifted a fresh catfish for you to see.

You gasped. That was fast! It’s a big one too. Alongside the sausages, it can feed two people.

After gathering some more fruit and filling the pot, you made camp at the driest spot you could find.

Snakeface’s fire starting skills still amazed you. He required only a few random pieces of wood. That’s about as caveman as it gets!

Gutted fish, roasting over the embers.
Water sausages, boiling in the water.

All you need now is a lot of salt. Except, you don’t have much. Oh well. The handful you salvaged from the cabin will do.

While the morsels cooked, Snakeface apologized to you. “Sorry. Fer the trouble.”

You tell him it’s alright. BUT! He gotta explain some stuff to you.

“I… may not be able.”

That’s fine. We’ll try to work it out.

First. Did the nightmare involve… the ‘bad touch’?

He cringed so, so hard. “No. No! Not gonna talk about it! Save yer ears.”

Gaelic, you told him, you come from a foster home. There were many kids from messed up backgrounds there. Even if the adults refuse to say a single word, everyone would gather around the older residents to get the latest scoop.

You don’t know the exact details, but you did understood that the bad touch could become a lifelong trauma.

So…?

“Mnggh… ‘Twas good at first. The touch. Then it turned bad. Worse than poison. One ah cannae stop drinking. A wasteful fool ah was.”

Uh, you don’t get it. Your brows scrunched hard.

“Have ye ever been naughty behind the backs o’ others?” He asked, “Like playing games past yer bedtime? Or stealing from the cookie jar?”

Aha! You understood that! Then consequences come around and the regret sinks in. Did you get that right?

He nodded many times.


Snakeface blushed so hard, his skull might as well become a lightbulb.

“Argh, ya cheeky lil’ pup!” He complained. “Stop! Cease yer prattling this instant! Cor Blimey, this be the death o’ me.”

You snickered.

Lunch had finished cooking. Snakeface split the piping hot fish in half while you picked out the hot sausages with makeshift chopsticks.

Sprinkle a little bit of salt on the fish halves and… done! It’s time to eat.

Huff puff. You blew on the flesh to cool it down. Then, it’s straight into your mouth.

Your face turned weird. It’s… it’s somewhat muddy, yet so sweet and moist. Nice firm flesh too. If only it wasn’t this earthy.

You alternated the fish and water sausages to keep your taste balanced.

Gaelic couldn’t stop smiling at you. Hey, what’s so funny?

“M’lord struggled the same on his first camp,” he replied.

Only Tsunderjudge? What about the Fairy Godmother?

“Her father hunt and fish fer sport. She be more accustomed to the flavours o’ the wild. Still, she can be quite picky. Anything too intense may make her gag.”

Heh. A fussy eater and man with bowel issues. Snakeface had his work cut out for him alright.

He bowed down to you, saying: “Ah live to serve.”

Many people joked about this. But this guy? You bet he took it seriously. Word for word.

Once dinner passed, sobriety replaced leviety. The atmosphere dimmed just like the faint embers of burnt out coals.

Gaelic laid down on his side. With his sharp fingerbones, he doodled a pattern on the rocky ground.

“Lil’ bean,” he said. “Ya know that it be wrong being a third wheel to a married partner, aye?”

Whoa. Those were the most lucid words you’ve heard from Gaelic since the Sans fiasco!

Serious mode, on.

You nodded. Yes. Always the root of much drama on TV. But that’s because of jealousy, right? It’s always one partner loving someone else, dumping the one they married.

He shook his head. “Even if both have the heart, the bond is only fer two. Ah got no place in there. And… yet I only love them even more. So, so, much more.”

Why? This is getting confusing. Shouldn’t he get angry instead? Dejected or something? That’s how people responded in those dramas.

“Ya don’t understand, eh? Ah was a twisted snake. Slithery, slippery. Once upon a time me stalkings instilled fear in M’lady’s heart. The more she tried to hide, the more ah tried to chase.”
“Then the Grandmaster himself stopped me… with a chat and a bowl o’ potage. He be determined, refusing to let me leave until ah confessed me evil heart.”

Did the Grandmaster flip table? Maybe take out a shotgun?

“Haha! Nay, nay. He just told me that M’lady would detest me, and her husband would become me enemy forever.”

“O’ heavens, that struck fear in me more than anything in the world. It not even be their mettle in battle. ’Twas the idea that I’d be hated. By the two who mattered most.”

He continued, “The Grandmaster, father o’ M’lady, told me that there are many other ways to love someone. It dinnae have to be the flames o’ shameful lust and passion.”

“Well meaning, he was. But this twisted fool still schemed to be at their side. Pondered and wrestled, ah did. Then out hatched a terrible idea.”

Gaelic ran a gentle touch down the curves of his modified face. From the forehead down to his cheekbone, to his chin, to his clavicles, to his ribs, to his pelvis.

…I think he’s just trying to show off with a Mettaton-level display there.

“Me body be the only thing ah have. So ah sold meself as a slave. M’lord and M’lady. They bought me. Symbolic, mind ya! They not be degenerates. Since then, I served House Berendin as their personal knight.”

Wow. You didn’t expect to hear that kind of a tale in this era. Is this the 21st Century? You checked the invisible ‘watch’ on your arm to act out your perplexment.

Jokes aside, you don’t quite get why it’s so ‘terrible’.

Snakeface smiled at your innocence. “’Twas a binding contract, carving meself into their lives without breaking their union. M’lady be too kind. Questions lingered, yet she still took me in.”

“How good they all were. They fixed me relationship with Mondie. They taught me real love that I once forgot. The Grandmaster read me Scripture: holy words that live and give life.”

If Gaelic mentioned any of these to you before the Crimson Hall, you would have doubted. Now you could believe it. The couple does seem to be the thoughtful type.

…Though the Tsunderjudge ought to turn down the heat. His glare is burning hot 24/7!

A forked tongue flicked at you a few times, licking the air.

“Sweet, sweet child. So pure, yet so dark.”

You uttered a nervous chuckle. His last statement caught you off guard. Then again, once upon a timeline you did murder everyone as a Persona.

Could it be he tried to taste your Determination?

You’re lucky that Snakeface didn’t hold it against you. He resumed scratching the pattern on the ground. It’s growing into an elaborate sprawl of vines.

“What a wretch am I,” he said. “E’en when they showed me Heaven, ah still descended to that pit o’ villainy. Why? Why did I do that? A spit in their faces! That alone should have me bones ripped joint
“In the end, after fifteen stretched years, M’lord’s patience reached its limit. Wished it happen sooner. Never seen his anger so great.”

Uh. You thought Cenna won the award for ‘pushing all the berserk buttons on Tsunderjudge’.

Snakeface shook his head. “Nay, nay. She just stirred annoyance. Fer me, it be different. Blackest o’ black. He asked: ‘Are we not good enough for you?’.”

“‘Twas then I was exposed a traitor. Let them down, ah did. M’lord and M’lady couldn’t bear with me anymore. They sent me back to the Grandmaster, where I was held for penance.”

They had a jail? A dungeon?


…Demoted to a maid. That’s rough, Snakeface. Rough.

“Aye, aye. It ain’t the work that made me flinch. ‘Twas the disapproval. The loneliness. The shame.”

Yeah. You feel him. Getting punished with chores always sucks.

“Yet, this fool be none the wiser. One day ah received a letter from one o’ the ‘shameless’. Wished to discuss they did. To negotiate. Called me childish. Prodded me to grow up and settle the business alone.”

The mere mention stirred distress. He couldn’t maintain eye contact with you. His focus darted around, vigilant and almost paranoid.

“How horrible it was, this pitiful pride! Rallied by that letter, ah ran away from the safety o’ the manor. At that time, ah was determined to fix it once and fer all. Cut ties to the old foul ways. Devote meself to me masters till the end o’ days.”

Snakeface’s bones rattled. He dug his grip into the ground. Without warning, he clawed through his little doodle.

The abrupt destruction startled you.

“‘Twas then… it all went wrong.” He said, “She was with child. My child. Born to be their bargaining chip. They tried to make me choose: House Berendin, or them.”

“What did I choose? To take this unloved babe to House Berendin and never return! Me refusal destroyed fantasies. More broken hearts to me name.”

“A fight broke out. With me Eye sealed and a fragile life to protect, I was overpowered. Down, ah was. Drugged beyond measure. They tried to make me look like ah had fallen.”

T-the perpetrator had to be a human. Or many humans! Right? You can’t imagine monsters ever stooping this low.

Gaelic remained silent. It’s a grim sign. Darkness can claim anyone: human or monster.

How did he escape? Did the baby survive? Did they take it back?
“Heh. Me strength against poisons turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Though addled, ah made it back to the Berendin Manor. As for the babe. She…”

The man shook his head. “Ye ears. Best to spare them.”

You asked if the criminals were ever apprehended…

“Nay, they were not.”

WHAT?!? Why not??? The Tsunderjudge is the big boss, and his wife is a Chronographer. They could have easily identified all the culprits with that machine!

“‘Twas me just desserts.”

You don’t care about that. If they didn’t get caught, they could have ended up hurting others! Besides, they deserve to be punished!

He… kept glancing between you and the scratches on the floor.

“A Pure Red ya might be, yet yer heart leans to Justice. Colours M’lord shares with ye.”

You watched him push himself up to a seated position. Comments might need to wait. Gotta give him time to recompose himself. It’s… a painful subject.

“Ah served M’lord from his youth to his greying days. His light and darkness, ah had witnessed plenty. Have ya heard? ‘Justice twisted becomes vindication’.”

Yes, you have. Cenna explained such to you before.

“Aye, aye. Ye had a taste, but that cur Persona bear the brunt in full. M’lord strikes be swift, brutal, and true. No mercy for his enemies.”

“M’lady, kind she may be, she also be a mortal like ye and I. That cur’s cruelty broke her heart. Their shards turned to knives, fashioned into tools o’ death.”

“Together, no criminal could hide. The swift shot, the strong cut down. Terror clutched to those who heard their deeds.”

“Ah denied me case so they tread not this bloody path again.”

Ah… It was all to protect his beloved.

You can’t imagine Mezil and Lucidia took the news well. It must be frustrating to know a horrible truth, yet have your hands tied down over the fine details.

Talk about a difficult situation…

What about Snakeface? What does he think?

The thought alone made tears flow down his face.

“Why do they still love me?” he asked, “Is it selfish to wonder? They should have left me in the dust. Trapped, I was. Between life and death. Unable to help. Left them alone in their greatest need… their darkest hour.”

“M’lord’s damaged arm. That cur and his Hex. The splitting o’ alliances. The loss o’ yer parents, his
most trusted Crimson Keepers. ‘Tis fault be mine! All of it!’

…Poor guy.

You opened your arms wide and asked if he wanted a hug.

Snakeface hesitated. But your Charisma points weren’t maxed out for nothing! You maintained your pose, while a confident spark gleamed in your eyes.

In the end, he crawled to you. You wrapped your arms around his shoulders to the best of your ability. Soothing pats worked wonders for you, so it should do the same for him.

There, there. It’s all in the past. You didn’t blame Sans for The Core Incident. Likewise, you won’t blame Gaelic for the big mess either.

Time-travellers unable to undo their personal tragedies… that’s some top tier irony right there.

By the time the emotions settled, the coals had gone cold. The water was shared between the two of you. Then, you washed the pot and resumed your journey.

Along the way…

“Sorry,” Snakeface said. “Fer the tears. Dinnae know what came over me.”

Heh, don’t worry about that. You have a knack for getting people to open up to you.

“A dangerous talent.” Gaelic replied, “Knowing one’s past carries a burden. ‘Tis the proof o’ trust. Even then, others may not disclose their life in full. I know ah didn’t.”

You scratched your cheek. Well, you didn’t share your foster-home days with anyone either. Or heck, you didn’t even tell Snakeface about your Underground adventure! Point being, it’s up to him to divulge or not.

It’s nice to hear him chuckle, even if it’s a soft one.

“Wee bean,” he said. “When the day arrives, M’lord must share ye a dark secret. Wrath might stir, but I beg ye to grant mercy. ‘Twas a hard decision to make. Harder still to do.”

…Does it have something to do with the giant swarm of butterflies? Because, that was quite the ominous sign of statistical hacking.

Snakeface looked back at you with a sad smile. “As the saying goes: the road to hell be paved with good intentions.”

You grimaced.

That’s going to be ‘interesting’…

Oh well. For now, you just want to get back to the comforts of civilization.

You should be out of the Underground by evening. Just in time for dinner!

Chapter End Notes
Freshwater fish is not my favourite, but I can see why it would be a delicacy for some folks. I prefer saltwater fishes by a mile though.

Salmon doesn't count as 'freshwater' as they only swim inland to breed. I never had trout before though. I hear they're like the freshwater versions of salmons.

I think I might have catfish before. Except, I wouldn't know it because of non-English names.
This chapter is way longer than I thought, hence the delay. Apologies. The next chapter is expected to be difficult too.

Maybe getting suspended wasn’t such a good idea after all.

Negotiating for transport ended up trickier than expected. The Magus Association had a car stationed for Mezil, ready to roll out upon that man’s request. Cenna would have all the clearance needed under normal circumstances. But now…

…It’s ‘vacation’. And off-duty personnel had no business with work facilities.

The driver shook his head. “Sorry, Judge Caraway. I received Judge Thyme’s notice.”

Cenna groaned. “Aw c’mon. We’ve been friends for years. Can’t you give me a free lift, just this once? It’s not like you’re doing anything at the hospital anyway.”

“And who’s going to take responsibility if any of our on-duty superiors need to rush somewhere for an emergency?”

“Errrr…” She couldn’t argue against that. Well, she could. But that would mean divulging top secret skelly magic. Cenna didn’t need or want to incur the wrath of Lady Lucy a second time.

The driver sighed and took out his phone. At first, Cenna thought he’s going to call Ol’ Mez…

Nope, it was a transport app: the one where anyone could book a ride on the go.

“Make sure you set the destination at the foot of the mountain, kay? They don’t have public transport.”

“Sure.”

It searched for a while. Then, they found an available driver. Her friend showed her the number plate and the estimated time of arrival.

“Heh, he’s gonna drop off someone else at this very hospital first.” her colleague said.

Better than being left high and dry, or paying extra. Over-the-counter booking services can charge exorbitant prices, after all.

Cenna saluted back. “Thanks a ton! I’ll pay you back soon.”

“Take care of yourself, okay? You worry everyone sometimes.”

“I’ll… do my best.”

Undyne walked up to her. The Captain of the Royal Guard had just finished the communication business on her end.
The monster asked: “We got a ride?”

“Yeah,” Cenna nodded. “My friend here helped book a civilian transport. 10 minutes. How goes your end?”

Undyne replied: “I delegated the rescue organization to the Royal Guard. My guys may act like total goofs sometimes, but they’re the best when it comes to a search!”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah. Kids always get themselves lost in the Underground.”

“If it’s that much of a maze, how did Frisky get out so quick the first time around?”

“They kept to the main road. That’s the shortest route we have to New Home. There’s a small problem though: Hotland.”

Cenna raised a brow. “Eh? What’s the issue?”

With a sigh, Undyne explained: “Hotland’s old design depended almost entirely on some form of electrical component. They’re all defunct now. Either salvaged, or unpowered. King’s orders. Good luck trying to cross lava as a puny human!”

“Wait, didn’t we once carry out an injured Papyrus? By foot?” She didn’t remember any trouble.

“That’s the new road,” the fish explained. “Which I’m not sure if the punk remembers. They only walked there once, as opposed to fifty plus times.”

Cenna crossed her arms. Frisk had special magic. If the Void adventure was of any indication, they had the potential to beat every Magus flat on the ground in a couple of years.

But, direct flight could still be an issue. If the kid lost consciousness from the heat or the fumes mid-flight, it’s a straight plunge to their death…

She shook off that grim, apocalyptic thought.

*Nope. Nu-uh. That better not happen.*

*Okay time to change the subject to something more cheerful.*

“Sooo…” Cenna glanced left and right. “What’s Frisky’s new Dad like? I mean, I talked to him and all. He’s nice. But I heard you have a history with him.”

Undyne was more than happy to answer. “Oh yeah! He’s THE BEST KING! I mean it from the bottom of my heart.”

“Better than my boss?”

“HELL YEAH!!!” The fish pumped her fist. “If I was there with you this morning, I would have joined the SMACKDOWN! Ker-pow!”

Cenna shot a quick glance back to Mister Colleague. Looks like the male Magus pretended that he didn’t hear anything. The ability to stay nonchalant in the face of any indirect information -- incriminating or otherwise -- was the hallmark of a good driver.

*Oookay Cap you’re getting way too fired up there. Mind my colleague, friend.*
Grinning, she said: “Hey, hey, hey forget about that stuffy ol’ man. I regret bringing him up. I wanna hear about YOUR boss.”

“You’re right.”

Undyne continued, “Let’s see… He’s strong. He’s kind. He’s like a warm fire in a hearth: the heart of the nation. I was a rambunctious little urchin back when we first met. One day I thought it would be a ‘great’ idea to challenge the man himself! I grew up hearing all about King Asgore’s might in the War, and I wanted to see that with my own two eyes.”

“Two’ eyes?”

“Yes,” Undyne cleared her throat. “A training accident happened in my teens. This was before that.”

“Ah. How did the challenge with the King go?”

Undyne whistled. “I couldn’t land a single finger on him. For YEARS! He’s got moves, I tell ya. The only reason the punk got anywhere was because he held back. BIG TIME! Combine that with his low spirits, and he’s just a shadow of his full power.”

Cenna expected an excited retelling about Undyne’s days with the King of Monsters. However, the fish’s face became overcast. Somewhat… clouded.

“What’s wrong, Cap?”

She glanced between Cenna and the floor.

“...Seeing the Surface treat him as if he’s some soft fluffy fool, I got a bit angry. Annoyed. Okay, maybe insulted. Like. I know he deserves way more respect.”

_Huh. Wasn’t expecting that._

Cenna asked: “I take that you ain’t fond of how the Queen brushed him off either?”

Undyne breathed out a long, tired sigh.

“If I’m honest with myself… yeah. But what can I do? They’re equals. Asgore always wanted to deal with Toriel on his own. If he says ‘stand down’, I stand down.”

“I knew he wanted a ‘peaceful normal life’.” She used her fingers to make those ‘air quotes’ for emphasis. “And I really wanted that for him. He had suffered enough. But, is that for the best? Am I just letting him run away?…”

“…I can’t believe I’m saying this, but the Dreemurr Nation needs to come back. We need a proper governing head. I know a bear who’s big into politics, but he’s nowhere prepared to go anywhere beyond a mayor’s post…”

“I think I’ll quit my teaching job and return full time as the Captain of the Royal Guard. Criminals could walk into our town at any moment, and we can’t just dump all the responsibility on human cops. I will need to train new recruits. Plan better patrol routes. Keep a lookout. Be prepared for the worst.”

_Poor kids. From what I observed, she had some fans._

_I kinda wish the conversation didn’t tangent off to something so serious. But, she needs an ear._
“I agree,” Cenna replied. “You need to get the legal stuff ironed out first, though. Otherwise you’ll be branded as an illegal armed gathering.”

The fins perked up. “How do we do that?” asked Undyne.

“There’s only one way… you gotta ask Mez.”

Instant groanfest. Oh, how Cenna understood the sheer amount of cringe over that prospect.

“Oh my god, HIM???” Undyne exclaimed.

“Yuuuuuup totally,” Cenna replied.

“I rather eat a handful of chillies than to talk to that man!”

“Shit, don’t give him any ideas. He might just force you to choose between a negotiation and a bowl of red hot peppers.”

“NGAAAH!!!”

Tapping on Cenna’s shoulder, her colleague notified: “Your ride is arriving soon. You guys better head to the front.”

“Oh, thanks pal.”

By the time they got there, the car had already dropped off its previous passenger. Cenna hoped that it wasn’t someone with an infectious disease. Colds, however minor, could ruin someone’s week.

One hop inside and it’s onwards to Mount Ebott. Estimated time of arrival: about an hour depending on the traffic.

Should I take a nap? Cenna wondered. I really didn’t get enough sleep this morning. Or… maybe we could talk some more?

“So—” Her sentence was interrupted by a huge yawn. Cars have the magical ability to become moving lullaby machines.

Undyne grunted. “Jeez, get some rest already. You look like you need it. Don’t worry. I’ll make sure we make it to our destination!”

“Thanks lots, Cap.”

Cenna tried to make herself comfortable. Sleeping upright was never the most refreshing position. Irregular access to proper comfy, flat places to rest was one of the suckier parts of her line of work.

I heard Sans could sleep soundly anywhere and anytime. Damn, I wish I had that talent.

Perhaps her wish was heard. Because at one point, Cenna fell asleep…

A hazy nightmare paid a visit. There was a certain dark-skinned schoolgoing teenager. When she came back home, she went to the nanny’s and picked up her sibling.

Dinner prep involved a microwave and prepacked food. Such was fine once in a while. Minimal mess, minimal cleaning, minimal waste of time. That way, she could concentrate on babysitting.

As dreams always go, out of nowhere a Grim Reaper appeared. He’s small in size, making his scythe tower over him more than it should.
Also, he brought hotdogs.

"‘Sup? Mind if I join ya for dinner?"

The girl laughed. "Damn Sans, did you get demoted from the Seraph post or something?"

"Oops. Cat’s out of the bag, huh? Nah. No demotion. This is just part-time work. I still do the singing gig as my main."

They had dinner together. The baby sibling lay close by, snoozing.

"Cute kid you got there," said the Grim Reaper.

"Hey, hey, you better stay away from the crib. You haven’t even washed your hands! Always wash your hands before touching a young baby."

"Protective, eh? That’s good. Humans are fragile. From the day they’re born to the day they meet the Almighty."

A bell rang over the reaper’s head. It’s a message from the heavens, informing him of a mortal’s imminent departure.

"Welp. Thanks for keeping company. Job calls."

A spike of dread prompted the girl to look into the crib.

The baby was gone.

She turned back to the short Grim Reaper. He held them in his arms.

"Stop! That’s kidnapping!"

"Nah," the other replied. "This tike’s my latest job. Poor kiddo… Turned into dinner by one crazy beast. That’s quite the bloody way to go."

The elder sibling chased after the avatar of death, but alas, he remained forever out of reach.

"Please! Take my life instead!"

"No can do. Your time ain’t up yet. We’ll meet again after that big battle, ‘kay?"

Cenna woke up with a slight yelp. Her heart thumped so hard, she could hear the beats between her ears.

"Whoa there, you alright?" asked Undyne.

"Y-yeah," she replied. "I’m. I’m fine. Just a little nightmare."

Undyne patted her arm to show her concern. Indeed, the Suplex Queen had her soft side too.

The borders of Ebott Town soon loomed up ahead. Cenna recalled the day she first arrived here as a fresh Magus graduate. The full breadth of the giant mountain stood tall.

Unmoving.
Uncaring.

Cenna shook the thought out of her head. It’s no fault of the mountain itself that the accident
happened. She shouldn’t be blaming it for the mistakes of others.

They then entered town. Though peaceful on the outside, there was a marked sense of worry in the air. Those left behind were those who couldn’t volunteer. Their only solace was to keep checking their mobile devices for any news on their beloved ambassador.

Since Ebott Town’s map had yet to be completed, Undyne had to guide the driver to the start of the mountain trail.

There, a strong looking male dog waved from afar. ‘Dogamy’ was his name. It appears that Captain Undyne had already relayed the car’s number plate.

“This is the right place?” the human civilian asked.

‘Yup’, said both girls. Cenna took note of the bill so she knew how much to repay her colleague later.

*Wow. That’s more than I expected. Still cheaper than over the counter, though.*

After thanking each other, the taximan turned around and headed back toward the human city; he didn’t have any customers from Ebott Town.

Guard and Captain exchanged salutes. It’s the fish’s territory now.

Undyne said, “Report, Dogamy.”

Dogamy barked once. “Organization is going well, Ma’am! Team New Home has searched for the past hour and a half. The Riverman brought his many boats and we were able to ferry all of Team Waterfall.”

“Muffet and her swarm of spiders are Team Ruins on their own. She’s scouring every nook and cranny as we speak. Team Hotland is currently preparing to enter the inner zones. Further manpower problems were solved thanks to the help of volunteers.”

Cenna was impressed. Before her first encounter with the Dreemurr Nation, she had doubts about their ability to handle a crisis. Got proven dead wrong.

“Do we have enough gear?” Undyne asked.

“No,” replied Dogamy. “But the Magi helped supply some.”

Undyne got a little worried. “Did they join any of the teams? I don’t think it’s a good idea to bring even more humans inside. It’s alien territory for them.”

Shaking his head, the dog clarified: “They’re only assisting in communications, ma’am. They have some sweet, sweet toys. Bark!”

“Oh. Phew, that’s a relief.”

*I guess Ol’ Mez sent the memo here too…*

Cenna asked, “Have you seen a guy who dresses like me? With, uh, a face-plate?”

The dog’s ears perked upright. “Oh! The one who smells like tobacco smoke and bones? He’s the one who provided the equipment. A friend of yours?”
“Yep! That’s my senior. Where is he now?”

Dogamy pointed towards the mountain. “He’s at the Underground exit, keeping watch. We’ve set up camp nearby there.”

Peer hard enough into the distance, and her hawk-like eyes could spot the large dark-green tents used for outdoors operations.

“Oooh, I see. We're going there now?”

Dogamy nodded.

*I probably shouldn’t tell them about my suspension…*

He thus led them up the path, none the wiser about her status.

Unfortunately… the secret was out of the bag the moment she met Garamond.

Right away, the senior called out: “Even if you’re not suspended, I can’t let you join the rescue team.”

All eyes locked on her in a snap. She could feel the puzzled pressure. Every monster wondered what happened to the hot-shot Magus who once strode into their town.

“Aw c’mon,” said Cenna. “Why did you have to make THAT part public?”

“So that you don’t sneak off with the rest of the Ebott folk while I’m not watching.”

A female dog who looks just like Dogamy spoke up. “(I don’t see any problems if she wants to help, suspended or not. She went into the Underground before.)”

*This is my chance—!*

“Apologies Miss Dogaressa, but Cenna is still recovering from a serious injury. She shouldn’t be straining herself with a search. You should be able to smell blood, gauze, bandages, and antiseptic on her.”

The dog lady sniffed close to Cenna. “(Oh dear. You’re right, Mister Blanc. She smells like a wounded human. I’m so sorry lady, but you can’t join us.)”

Gah…

*Don’t tell me I came all the way here just to be useless?*

Just when Cenna thought she hit a dead end, the heroic Captain came to the rescue. “She can still help with support, right?” Undyne said, “Managing the comms shouldn’t bust her stitches.”

Garamond pondered harder than he should have. Cenna kept giving him little hints with her facial gestures, trying to convince him to accept the Captain’s proposal.

After a resigned sigh, he agreed. “Alright, I’ll take her under my wing.”

Undyne had a mischievous, catty smile on her face. It had ‘I helped you out’ written all over it.

*Thanks lots, Cap! Now I understand why you have Kindness attributed to ya.*

They suited up. Team Hotland consisted mostly of flying and fire type monsters. Not all who float
were Hotland natives: the moth-types for example. But they were the best in traversing the segmented terrain.

One of the volunteers was a teenaged monster girl in the shape of a plane, complete with ribbon on her head.

The monster fumed. “B-baka! I agreed to do this not because I care about Frisk or anything!”

*S-she’s a tsundere?!
A kawaii Type-A tsundere?!?

“Uh, okay,” Undyne nodded. “Whatever you say.”

The girl exclaimed, “What was that?! Y-you think that I’m joking? I’m here because they can’t seem to stay out of crumbling caves!”

“Auh. I’m agreeing with you. If you see them down there, give them a big headbutt in my stead.”

The plane blushed bright pink. “Fix my gear already!”

Cenna put all her willpower to use NOT to burst into complete laughter. …Though it didn’t stop her head from streaming her true thoughts.

*Omg ahaahahahahahahahahahha if Mez is Tsunderjudge this girl must be Tsunderplane and she’s a totally cute plane shaped Mezil omg ahaahahahahahahahahahahahah!

In the meantime, they fixed the surveying gear on the young lady. Cameras. Digital goggles. Headphones with a microphone. A first aid kit. And some water. Never know if the kid might need rehydration.

The girl tried to fly around, but she kept wobbling in the air. All that weight might be too much for an untrained teenager. Rescuers had to be fit and strong for a reason.


The team cut the load by removing the medicine kit. They also reduced the water quantity to a half of its original volume.

Tsunderplane’s grunted in her next test flight, but it was smooth and steady. That’s good enough.

Garamond reminded: “Watch your surroundings. Do not proceed if danger is detected. Otherwise we would need to rescue you too.”

“I-I get it…” she replied. “Okay. I’m going now.”

The plane girl joined the rest the Hotland crew. What’s left… was Team Snowdin.

One of the Dog Clan members walked up to Undyne’s feet. It was the Pomeranian-lookalike who piloted a mecha armour.

The fellow communicated only in barks. Nonetheless, Captain Undyne understood the report in full.

She squat down to pet the dog. “Good boy. I’ll join you.”

“Aren’t ya a Waterfall native or something?” Cenna asked.
With the biggest toothy grin, the fish laughed. “Heh heh, I hung out with Papyrus long enough to have Snowdin as my second home. Okay. I gotta go catch the boat. We’ll get back to you soon.”

Once they too put on their search gear, Team Snowdin marched forth into Mount Ebott.

Cenna waited around, anxious.

An hour passed. Then another. And many more. Soon the sun trailed down the horizon, bathing the sky red.

The worries got the better of her. She walked away from the camp to catch fresh air.

*Environmental updates. More environmental updates.*

*Still no sign of kiddo.*

*I really did come all the way here to be useless. Damn.*

Her good senior passed her a bottle of water. “You must be thirsty.”

“Thanks.”

Glug, glug, down the liquid went. That made her feel a little better.

“I’m real worried about Gael and Frisky,” said Cenna. “More like, both of them being together. I mean. You know how he can be. Did I tell you about the first time I met Gael?”

“No. But I heard the stories from Lady Lucidia.”

“How much did she tell you?”

“Well…” Garamond leaned to one side of his leg. “You were in charge of feeding duty. Did your usual tasks, but forgot to lock the door. Gaelic escaped. You chased him all over The Spire… And somewhere down the line you had to rescue a student’s pet cat before it became a snack.”

*Note to self, Lucy doesn’t leave out details.*

She tried to hide her embarrassment by playing it cool. “Yeah… That had to be one of the most intense workouts of my life.”

The senior took out his cigar, but he put it away after a brief glance. Sometimes, he fights the urge.

“Frisk will be fine,” he reassured. “They’re extraordinary. Both as a young adult and as a child.”

“Being a Living Victory makes one older than they look, huh?”

A Magus called for them: “Judge Caraway. Investigator Blanc. We have news from Team Ruins.”

The two rushed to the comm device. Team Ruins was Muffet and her many spiders. Maybe Frisk stayed there all the while?

The spider baker sounded worried. “Dearies? I hope you’re seated because I have good news and bad news.”

“Start with the ‘bad’,” said Cenna. If given a choice, it’s better to get the stress out of the way first.

“The back end of the Ruins had a structural collapse. I think it’s from a broken trap. My little spiders
noted that someone tried to pull a lever… which resulted in quite a spectacular mechanical failure.”

“A-any signs of blood…?” She asked back.

“Nope!” Muffet cheered up. “And that’s the good news. It appears that dear Frisk escaped the mishap! Ahuhuhuhuhu~”

“There’s a big hole in the deep maintenance chamber. Maybe the collapse opened a new path? I’m going to look for the human in the inner city now~”

“Good luck, Miss Baker! I’ll buy lots of your bread tomorrow.”

“Keep your word, Miss Magus~~ Ahuhuhuhu~~~”

The Waterfall scouts phoned in.

“We found a campsite! It’s fresh too! This is way outside the town area…”

That’s awesome news. Did Gaelic manage to gather enough sense to start a fire? Could he recognize Frisk as a friend?

“There’s a weird scratch on the floor. Seems that someone carved a pattern and then destroyed it. I can feel the sheer distress…”

Not so good news. Gaelic doesn’t seem stable. Not one bit. He could be teetering between a man and a beast. The unpredictability worsens in the ‘twilight’ between sanities.

New input from Snowdin.

“Undyne reporting,” said the Captain. “I think the punk was here! I found a note from Frisk in a lonely cabin off the beaten path. It says ‘borrowed pot, will return later’. The kid’s walking around with… a cooking pot?”

Cenna’s thoughts had to backtrack for a moment. “Excuse me? A pot?”

“Yup. Said that they need it to boil water.”

Key information was gathered and broadcasted to all search teams. In summary, Frisk and Gaelic’s last known location was at Waterfall. They had spent a night in Snowdin. Borrowed a pot and packed some firewood for their journey.

“Also, I’m seeing some weeeeeeird footsteps in the snow. They start and stop outta nowhere!”

The illogical footsteps meant that Gaelic had been taking them through a series of static portals. Seers used to live there in past generations, so they would have their own convenient pathways. ‘Shortcuts’ indeed.

If only Sans was around. He would know every connecting point like the back of his hand.

Garamond straightened his coat. “I should go. Otherwise, the traces won’t make sense to them.”

Just when he was about to leave, they received another transmission. It’s from Tsunderplane.

“I found them!!!” she yelled.

The girl turned on her camera feed. It showed Frisk sitting by a second campfire at the mouth of a
cave. They were boiling water in preparation for the trek into Hotland.

Frisk waved at the camera. Other than being covered in dirt from their misadventure, they looked healthy.

But… there was a certain wild skeleton missing from the picture…

“Where’s Gael?” asked Cenna, “Er. I mean have you seen a skeleton monster with fancy markings on his face?”

Tsunderplane replied, “Nope. Frisk is alone.”

Gaelic possibly left to scout ahead. It’s part of his job as a Tracker, after all.

The plane monster then flew closer to the human. “By the way, I got a message from Undyne for you!”

“What is it?” the kid asked back.

“THIS!”

She executed a headbutt square on Frisk’s forehead.

Upon that instant, everything went wrong. Something -- or someone -- knocked off the camera.

“EEEEEEEEEEEK!!!!”

A loud crunch cut off the screams. Whatever just attacked her had also destroyed the microphone. Her gear had sustained enough damage to send a red alert signal to the rest of the teams.

“W-what’s happening?!”

“It’s from Team Hotland!”

“Did something attack her?!”

Garamond hurried to broadcast an order. “All teams, stand ground. I repeat, all teams stand ground. We’re assessing the situation.”

A sick, sinking sensation churned in Cenna’s gut. She remembered the weird nightmare she had in the car.

Did the worst happen? Caught right on camera?

No… That nightmare can’t be real! Please, don’t let anything happen to those two!

Please.

Tensed seconds of nothingness passed by. Five more may be all they could afford before Undyne rallied her forces. If Gaelic had become Frisk’s enemy, they’d have no time to lose.

But, right before she issued the order to mobilize… the camera went back online.

The one who activated the device was none other than Frisk themselves. Realising that they only had a visual feed, they made an ‘O.K.’ sign for homebase to see.

As for Tsunderplane, she peeked over the human’s shoulder.
The whole camp breathed a huge sigh of relief. Nothing went wrong after all.

Garamond reported the good news. “Targets secured. Rescuer is unharmed. Begin escort phase.”

Cheers of celebration filled the communication channels. The overt joy expressed by the Ebott monsters lifted everyone’s spirits.

Cenna slipped away from camp toward the cave. Her senior didn’t try to call her back.

_I guess he’s letting me go._

Her hurried steps were stopped dead at the mouth of King Asgore’s old throne room.

_What. The. Fuck._

Ebott Goldenflowers -- Cheaters of Death -- had continued to flourish long after their original residents had vacated the premise.

To Cenna, the word ‘flourish’ may be an understatement. In just two weeks, they had grown taller. Denser. Even the burnt patch -- their supposed anathema -- was covered in a carpet of tiny sprouts. They had taken so much root, no weed could invade.

_How the heck did they go extinct in the first place?! They’re like bacteria!!_

Anise once told her that certain plants function more like colonies. She speculated that the golden flowers were one such a species. Though, much about these ‘SOUL containers’ still remained a mystery as they had been extinct on the Surface for a long while.

_Okay. I gotta pump myself up. These DEMON flowers are nothing without a possessor… Right?_

Cenna inched forward. She tested the potentially cursed grounds by touching the tip of her boot at the overgrowth’s edge.

Her Psychia felt a tug. Vines? Magnets? Whatever it was, the magical flowers tried to latch onto her spirit.

She backed off in an instant.

_No… no way! They’re trying to eat ME?!_

_I can’t go through that! There’s just too many._

_Great. I can’t even get past a mini killer jungle anymore? Stupid disease._

In the midst of her thoughts, Cenna heard some distant footsteps.

“Frisky???” she yelled.

“Sis!” They waved back.

Indeed, it was frisky Frisk. Tsunderplane was by their side too.

_Argh, screw the flowers! If they wanna grab me, I’ll just outrun them!_

So she did. Dashed through the foliage as fast as she could. The invisible vines tried to snare her feet, but they broke upon the forward momentum.
A little bit more… then it’s the final stretch. The last of the sticky flowers fell behind her.

And the home run was completed with a huge tackling hug. The joy overshadowed the pain of her wounds.

In the end, the nightmare remained only just a nightmare.

Cenna blinked a tear of joy. “Dammit, Frisky. I thought you were done for.”

“Sorry,” the Frisk replied. “For making you worry.”

“Aw that’s the past. I’m just glad you’re okay.”

Tsunderplane fumed something about ‘this is why you shouldn't climb mountains alone’ in the background. But, the tsundere ranting could wait.

Frisk let go of the hug first. Worried, they kept staring behind them.

Cenna asked: “What’s wrong, Frisky?”

“Snakeface… He got sulky over the whole Tsunderplane thing. Almost didn’t want to follow us. I cleared up the misunderstanding, but… well. They’re still suspicious of each other.”

Tsunderplane huffed. “I-i-it’s not like I’m weirded out by s-someone who tried to bite me in half for headbutting Frisk or anything…”

It made all sense now: Tsunderplane’s sudden headbutt was mistaken as a sign of aggression. He had leapt on the aviatory monster to protect Frisk, not knowing she’s a friend.

Frisk tried to look further.

“He should be somewhere in the back. But… I don’t see him. I hope he didn’t get lost.”

Frowning, Cenna said: “He’s more likely to ‘get lost’ in a different sense, Frisky, if you know what I mean. Was he stable around you?”

The kid scratched their cheek, unsure. “Snakeface told me a tale of great woe. I didn’t understand all the details, but I realize he had a terrible time.”

*What am I supposed to conclude? Sure, he’s clear enough to explain some of his personal history. But he’s also snapping at the slightest trigger. Is he sinking or floating? I’m worried he’ll relapse.*

Flowers rustled. Cenna’s first instinct was to pull Frisk close. Could it be a DEMON? If it was, she should have sensed it.

It turned out to be Gaelic instead. The top half of his skull poked above the petals, reminding Cenna of a crocodile in a river. Instead of greeting her presence, he sank back into the yellow depths.

*Heh. He seems to be on search mode. Could it be a rare bug? Or he’s hungry enough to eat anything that moves?*

More teams arrived, curious about the rustling. One dog in armour extended his neck to ceiling level to get a better look.

Then, his search stopped. Gaelic stood straight up in the field of flowers.
“Cor Blimey, Cenna!” He called out, “Yer a sight fer sore eyes! Get o’er here and put yer Truesight to good use. Ah smell people all over this big patch o’ goldies. Call Mondie too if he be around.”

First reaction: immediate relief. He’s more of a man now and not a beast, putting to rest many safety concerns.

She tipped her hat to him. “Ey there buckeroo, you can talk again! Pretty eloquent to boot. Haven’t heard your poetic flair since that dumpster fire of a Sunday. I’m happy for ya.”

Second reaction: confusion. People? Patch of goldies?


“Cheaters o’ Death, aye? Empty flowers be pure fragrance. Possessed ones be mixed with blood or dust. Very faint, it is. Easy to miss in ignorance.”

Gaelic crouched over and took another whiff. “This smell be familiar. Lockboxes. Aye. Tutu right before me. Next to that be a cowboy hat just like yours. Ribbon cluster behind. Gloves to the left. Apron, far end at the entrance in a tight cluster. Notebook, more scattered than the rest. But the presence be clear.”

Every ear that had heard his words gasped in utter shock.

“The Six?!”
Did a little drawing practice on Saturday:

And yay we released on time on Sunday! Enjoy.

0930 Hours.

After making sure dear husband Mezil slept soundly, Lucidia had the Magi escort Sir Grillbz Grillenn to her temporary hospital ‘lab’. That’s where she performs all the necessary treatment.

She had him lie in the Intensive Recovery Pod, without the liquids.

Tests were run, and the results read…

“Sir Grillenn,” She said, “There’s a notable increase in your stats.”

The fire champion sat up. “…I’ve become stronger?…”

“Yes.”

He frowned. “…At my age?…”

“It surprised me too.” The woman referred back to the numbers. “But you have the aptitude. Perhaps a fragment of your monarch’s power now flows through your dust?”

Grillby sighed. “…Such a waste…”

“Query: why do you conclude so?”

“…I intend to return to my bar… There’s no need for such power there…”

In other words, he wishes to return to a normal life. It’s the dream for most warriors who tire of their adventures. Living life on the edge was unstable, dangerous, and lonely after all.

Furthermore, Lucidia’s faith taught her that people were meant for peace. The glorification of war and their trade was an evil illusion that hid much grieving bloodshed. It would be wonderful if everyone could just lay down their weapons in the name of harmony.

Yet there’s another harsh reality before her… Countless souls did value might above all else. As long they exist, so would the need to defend oneself.

It’s possible that her husband may never retire.

“Warning: news of your prowess at The Spire has reached far and wide. I know of several individuals who would do anything to duel one such as you. And not all of them are honourable.”
Lucidia continued, “Suggestion: Register as a part-time trainer. This will encourage potential duellists to set a formal appointment with a referee. We would then supply monetary compensation for your time, counting it as a paid service.”

A clear sense of reluctance hung on Sir Grilenn’s face. It wasn’t out of laziness or apathy. Rather, it’s the face of someone who was denied the chance to turn over a new leaf.

“…Thank you…” The man bowed his head. “…I’ll consider it…”

_I’m not sure if you should be thanking me._

_Again, I’m the bearer of bad news._

Lucidia pretended to analyze more test results. Her real focus was on the knight of fire, trying to discern his body language.

_Sir Grilenn is more of a victim than a criminal._ she thought, _He followed his orders to the letter, ignorant of the outcome._

After proving his valiance in many ways, Lucidia’s heart had softened towards this bartender. She was rather ashamed that she had deemed his bar unfit for patronage.

Sure, the bar’s menu may be irritating to her husband’s bowels. But on second thought, it wouldn’t hurt as much as that dreaded Jungle Curry. Perhaps the good drinks may even offset the unhealthy meals. At least, that’s what she hoped.

…………………………

_It’s for the better that he doesn’t participate in the Ocean Battle. The water isn’t kind to his species anyway._

“Query,” said Lucidia. “Will you agree to some short physiotherapy? I want to analyze your movements.”

The mention of exercise snapped him out of his dourness. Grillby stretched his neck, arms, and hands.

“…Hmm. That would be a good idea… Something to distract myself…”

Looking at her, he then asked: “…What about Papyrus?… Sans?… Are they alright?…”

_Should I tell him the truth? Or should I hide behind confidentiality? I’m not sure which would be worse on his heart._

_I think I’d better strike a middle ground._

Lucidia answered, “I have a treatment plan prepared for Papyrus. If all goes well, he will return to a normal life without problems. As for Sans… there’s a chance that we cannot salvage his losses.”

“…What did he lose?…”

“All function and sensation in his right arm, which suffered the brunt of the explosion. My attempts to fix the issue showed no positive results as of yet. His chances of recovery grow slimmer with every failed attempt.”

Grillby huffed. “…Only an arm?… Lucky him…”
1400 Hours.

King Asgore and Queen Toriel, they were the last surviving Boss Monsters from the pre-Sealing days.

Lucidia tried her best to remain calm, but she couldn’t shake the tension. The ancients always had a different view. They had the life experience that most of the short-lived could only dream of.

The Grandmaster rested his hand on her shoulder.

“Relax, daughter,” he said. “I’m here with you for this session.”

“I know, Grandpa. But…”

The memories of being judged and scrutinized haunted her.

“Lucidia,” said the Grandmaster. “If the heat burns too hot, there’s no shame in retreat. The Dreemurrs will understand that not every detail is under your control.”

“Open your ears and hear their hearts, and things will go smooth. I know it’s easier said than done. Nevertheless I know you’re a capable one.”

She had no confidence, but she complied nonetheless.

They arrived at the ward at last. Lucidia steeled her resolve before she passed through the door.

The Dreemurrs expected their arrival. Queen Toriel sat in her hospital bed with a regal poise, ready to attend what political battle may come her way. It’s clear from her expression that she had set aside her motherly ways.

As for King Asgore… He still had a smile. It’s possible that he’s trying to blunt some of the tension coming from his wife.

The King’s eyes brightened. “Howdy, Red Sage, it’s so good to see you again after a thousand years. Or, would you prefer the title ‘Grandmaster’?”

Lucidia was taken aback by the extreme contrast. So was Toriel, it seemed.

“Asgore,” she said, “We’re about to begin a serious negotiation…”

Asgore replied, “All the more why each participant must feel welcome. We don’t want to start off on the wrong foot.”

The queen squinted at first, but then relented with a sigh. “I suppose. The population loves you for a reason.”

* * *

Did I observe a slight softening towards King Asgore? Interesting.

Lucidia performed a curtsy of introduction. “I am Lucidia of House Berendin, Chronographer and Tactician of the Magus Association.”
The Grandmaster placed a hand over his chest. “And I am Lord Mezil of House Berendin, Grandmaster of the Magus Association. It’s a pleasure, King Asgore and Queen Toriel.

Asgore smiled. “Relax. I may have been King in the past, but I did technically abdicate my post awhile back.”

Toriel shook her head. “It’s a bit too late for that. Remember, we took up our mantles again for Frisk’s trial.”

“W-well, there’s that. Nevertheless…” The great goat beckoned the two to come closer. “I want to take a proper look at the lady who helped us out so much.”

Lucidia’s first reaction was to hide behind her father’s robes. When she realised what she had done, she stepped right back out.

Both elders couldn’t contain their chuckling.

“Oh dear me,” said the Queen. “I’m happy to see that you two have such a close bond.”

Asgore asked: “Has she always been such a shy flower? I wouldn’t have known from her sheer professionalism in the Crimson Hall.”

The Grandmaster patted her on the back, saying: “Ah, I apologize. Old habits die hard, as the saying goes. Lucidia used to do this all the time.”

“That’s so adorable! From a cute child to a fine woman. You’re very blessed. Oh, did you know my son used to tend the garden with me?”

“That explains why Prince Asriel has such a green thumb! Your affinity with plants is quite a marvel.”

The two fathers continued to exchange stories about their children. Meanwhile, Lucidia wished that she could die right there and then; the embarrassment was almost unbearable.

Queen Toriel cleared her throat. “Excuse me, gentlemen. I think we should save the reminiscing for another day.”

“I concur,” Lucidia added. “I’ll get the chairs and distribute the papers.”

*A job is a job. We have to get it done.*

Once Lucidia and The Grandmaster sat down, the negotiations officially began. The Dreemurr had already read the documents this morning. What they held right now mostly served as reference.

Lucidia began: “The War of the Red Victory sprang forth from the murder of Supreme Judge James Pashowar. Kisei Yuzukitsui -- one of our best -- had betrayed us in an effort to usurp the Keys of Fate.”

Toriel pushed up her reading glasses. “And that’s how Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme came to be.”

“Yes, indeed.” Lucidia nodded.

Asgore frowned. “What did this ‘Kisei’ want the Keys of Fate for anyway? Was it to control the world?”

The Chronographer clarified. “That is just one of the possible applications.”
“As you are aware, the union of power requires two: a human and a monster. Though human SOULS are plentiful, the eligible monster candidates has dwindled over time.”

“Because of this, many humans feel that the Surface’s monsters have unjustified supremacy. This brews both fear and envy. Therefore… they began to experiment with Determination to find a way to circumvent the union.”

“Humanity then discovered that it’s possible to compound groups of regular monsters by injecting them with Determination. The unfortunate individuals lose their integrity, melting into an uncontrollable mass of consciousness. …Strength without control.”

“The next step was stabilization. Again, Determination became a key component. Please allow us to demonstrate with a mockup.”

Lucidia conjured a magical bone and passed it over to her father.

The Grandmaster planted his Mark on the bone. The injection of Determination liquefied the bone into an osseous lump of clay.

He said: “Take shape according to my ‘Will’.” Upon that command, the lump solidified into a polished white orb.

“If this were to be done on an Amalgamate, it would transform into a Philosopher’s Stone. It now has the direction, control, and portability for anything the bearer wishes for. I’m sure you had heard of legends of turning lead to gold. Let’s say… it wasn’t unfounded.”

Both King and Queen stared at the orb, disturbed.

First to ask was the King: “What…? I’m not sure if I grasp the science.”

Lucidia answered, “In a union, both sides magnify each other to overcome their weaknesses. A human SOUL is powerful, but has miniscule output… whereas a monster SOUL utilizes energy with great efficiency, but lacks the reserves to make full use of its ability. The Philosopher Stone replicates this dynamic.”

Toriel asked, “Can this be done with any Mark?”

“Negative. A Mark must first overpower the collective. In turn, a Philosopher’s Stone is limited by the number of victims it can claim. The stronger the stone, the stronger the ‘will’ required to create it.”

“How…” The King cleared his throat, struggling to continue the difficult enquiries. “How many civilians does it take to match my power?”

She answered: “About a tenth of Ebott Town. However, trafficking that many monsters to exceed the bare minimum would raise the alarm of law enforcement. The most discreet method would be to build a mechanism that engulfs whole cities. And that’s what Kisei Yuzukitsui did.”

“There’s only one means by which to finish a Philosopher Stone of that scale: The Keys of Fate.”

“And…” said Toriel, “Despite Judge Thyme besting Kisei in direct combat, you were unable to prevent the worst-case scenario.”

My biggest regret…
Lucidia did her best to not give into the pain.

“Affirmative,” she said. “The Ocean Amalgamate now poses a risk to us all. Your nation included. We thereby seek your assistance in putting the souls of the many to rest. The terms and conditions were already given to you earlier.”

“As outlined therein, The Magus Association… no. I -- Lucidia of House Berendin -- will select a handful of champions to end the Ocean Abomination.”

“First, Frisk Nokluirvanoic Wanderstar shall be Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme’s aid. They will oversee the operation together, and support the forces with their powers as necessary.”

“Second, Doctor Alphys and Doctor W. D. Gaster are required for the reconstruction of the Seraph System. Though destroyed, my analysis concludes that your Tactician’s device is key in turning the tides of battle.”

“Third, Captain Undyne, as our spearhead. Her new mastery of Determination shows great potential. In conjunction with her innate water-type advantage, it would be foolish to exclude her from the battle.”

“And the last piece… a union of souls. King Asgore -- the sole remaining combat-ready Boss Monster -- is to become the living vessel for Cenna Caraway. She will give her life for the cause.”

“In return for your participation, we shall grant The Dreemurr Nation full autonomy, equal to Lemuria.”

Toriel took off her reading glasses. She folded them on the table by her bedside and… pushed the papers away.

“We’re sorry Lady Lucidia,” said the monarch. “We reject your proposal.”

…I had a feeling that it would come to this.

But Grandpa isn’t acting yet… Perhaps it’s still too soon to turn the tables?

Lucidia asked: “Care to explain the reasons behind your objection?”

The Queen of Monsters thus began. Her spirit rose and her stance grounded.

She said, “An autonomous self-governing nation sounds splendid. But, The Magus Association will not be able to fulfil any of their promises. Most of your resources would be spent in the upcoming battle. And, judging from the recent ‘terrorist’ attack… you may not have as many allies are you’d like.”

“From what I had learned from the Red Sage himself, human alliances tend to dissolve the moment their larger goal ceases to exist. In the end, you will be vulnerable to any foe: Gungnir or otherwise.”

Lucidia chose not to respond. She had a good idea of how Toriel thinks: arguing for the sake of pride would only lose her respect. This women values a level head.

It didn’t take long for the Queen to continue: “Judging from your silence, I take it that you acknowledge your flaws. Nevertheless with so much at stake, I do not wish to end our negotiations so soon. Here are my counter-proposals. Fulfil these, and The Dreemurr Nation will reconsider their participation.”
The Chronographer nodded. “Please do so.”

“To start: The Magus Association may not control or coerce Frisk in any way. I noticed that you’ve planned their life since a baby. As much as I understand the need to nurture such talent… I have learned from experience that being too strict does more harm than good.”

“Experience?” the Seer asked back.

“Yes.” There was a flash of grief on Queen Toriel’s face. “Every child that I had let go… died. So, I thought the best thing for Frisk would be to keep them under my watch, in the Ruins, for the rest of their lives. It is not much different from a prison.”

*She does have a point…*

“Your Majesty, I agree that Frisk should have a personal preference in their future studies. They may continue in their current monster syllabus if they wish. All we ask is that they maintain their duties as Crimson Keeper.”

Despite the leeway, Queen Toriel wasn’t happy. Lucidia wondered what she did wrong.

“Lady Lucidia,” she said. “You seem to be under the impression that I’m speaking about their education alone. I’m afraid that’s not the case. My second objection will make this clear.”

“The document states that ‘The Dreemurr Nation will support the Spring Mission efforts via supplying and approving all necessary personnel’. If we agree to this clause, it means that you will be handling all logistics. Am I correct?”

“Correct, Your Majesty,” Lucidia replied.

Toriel said, “Doing so will not command the love and loyalty you need. Perhaps Surface monsterkind had hardened enough to accept indirect command or mere policies. But, not us. We still follow the old ways, where the citizens elect and serve by their hearts.”

“Thereby, I say: let King Asgore become the fire of their furnace, and the whole of the Dreemurr Nation will fight for your cause. In return for our entire population, we request that you give pardon to our foolish mistakes of old. Sans Serif’s included.”

*Can I really trust the population to handle a crisis this severe? They’ve been living under a literal rock for a thousand years.*

*But… more manpower isn’t a negative point. We might require other expertise…*

Lucidia thus replied: “I shall consider the reinforcement proposal. As for the pardon, however, I’m afraid I cannot guarantee it at this moment. Even if we manage to secure such a clause, it will never extend to Sans Serif.”

Queen Toriel slammed her hand on the mattress.

“Preposterous!” the matriarch exclaimed. “You ask that much of us, and you still cannot give a full pardon?!”

Lucidia responded as calmly as she could. “The plea of ignorance extends only to the Underground times. Therefore, it applies to King Asgore Dreemurr, Doctor W. D. Gaster, Doctor Alphys, and Sir Grillbz Grillenn.”
“On the other hand, Sans Serif committed high treason on the Surface with full knowledge of the consequences. He will be trialled accordingly.”

Huffing, the Queen said: “Is this how you treat a messenger of truth? Frisk, my very own child, said that Sans had warned us all. Inevitable doom waits beyond the horizon, Tactician.”

“I do not believe that’s the only outcome,” Lucidia replied.

The other was unimpressed. “Hmph. I expected more than willful ignorance from you, Lady Lucidia. I certainly do not agree with Sans’ methods. But, I would never doubt his findings! This is a matter that drove the most laid-back man in my entire Kingdom to execute the most desperate of plans.”

“To make matters worse,” Toriel continued, “You demand Asgore to be on the front lines? With Frisk? And sacrifice Cenna? I will not let you send my whole family to their graves!”

Patience worn thin, Lucidia dropped the polite pretense. They want cruel logic? Then they will get it.

“Your Majesty,” the Seer said. Colder in tone. “You do not understand the scale of this impending apocalypse. It’s not something that could be avoided without sacrifices. Failure will end the world. Even if you barricade yourselves under the mountain again, your nation will not escape.”

“Escape? Sacrifices?” Toriel scoffed. “Irony is a bitter comedy, Lady Lucidia. You are trying to raise leverage on us, yet you yourself are helpless against the political machinations of public opinion and Gungnir threat.”

“Is this the limit to the Keys of Fate? Will Frisk be plunged into the same despair? As mother and Queen, I will do everything in my power to prevent Judge Thyme from dragging my child down into his personal abyss.”

Lucidia stood up from her seat. “Enough with the veiled insults against my husband!”

Now, after a long period of watchful silence, King Asgore sprung to action. He got out of bed and stood in between the two parties.

“Ladies, ladies. We’re getting too heated here. Please, let’s not hurt each other out of frustration. I know what you two are thinking. ‘It’s easy for you to say’. But, I am asking for peace because it’s anything but ‘easy’. This… could be our toughest decision yet.”

Though the silent tension remained, the flames diffused. Both Lucidia and Toriel took a step back. The Grandmaster’s staff tapped against the ground. He stood up and approached the King.

“Your Majesty, I’m afraid we’re at an impasse. Though Queen Toriel brought up many valid points, my daughter’s words ring true as well. Neither proposals are satisfactory.”

King Asgore smiled. Although it’s slight, it’s sincere. “I’m sorry for putting you and your daughter through such a grilling. Red Sage, would you be so kind as to give us another night to ponder?”

“Certainly, old friend. These are weighted decisions, ones that cannot be made in haste. We shall make our leave now, Your Majesty.”

The King’s reputation for his gracious warmness lived up to the hearsay. He escorted them to the door in person, sending them off with the same hospitality as he would have given on his own grounds.
As for the Queen… she remained in her bed, conflicted.

In the hospital halls, and far away from the Dreemurrs, Lucidia sighed. “I have failed you again, Grandpa.”

“Daughter, you’re being too hard on yourself.” Said the Grandmaster. “Negotiations of this sort rarely succeed on the first try. Even someone like Queen Toriel got swept up in emotions.”

“The Council wouldn’t think so.” She lowered her head, staring at the ground in defeat. “Mother wouldn’t think so.”

And Toriel reminded Lucidia too much of her own past…

The father took her hand, holding it secure in his gloved grip. “We understand, dear. Your husband. Myself. Gaelic. And Cenna. We are all on your side. Plus I’m sure at least one of your new friends will support you too.”

Lucidia tilted her head. “Which new friends?”

“You have not realised that yet? Well, you’ll soon see. Come, the day wanes. We still have work to do.”

* * *

1940 Hours, evening.

Papyrus had somehow managed to secure a pen and some printing paper. The flower children were the first suspects.

Whatever it was, he had his brows scrunched hard.

*It appears that Papyrus is working on something. I wonder what?

When he saw her, Papyrus perked up with his usual cheer. “FAIRY GODMOTHER, DO YOU KNOW HOW TO COOK AN ARATET WELCOMING FEAST?”

One blink. Two blinks. Then, Lucidia drew out the longest sigh of the day.

He started to look worried. “YOU… DON’T KNOW EITHER?”

“Please explain from the beginning as I apply your suppressors.”

Lucidia had him sit on a chair. The bed would be more comfortable, but she needed 360-degree access to his skull.

For now, she would just apply a normal Arcanagram. Any advanced implants will have to wait until she had access to her own ‘True Lab’.

*First, the top…*

Needle-thin osseous matter formed at her command, each of them packed to the brim with Lichborn programming. Since the current Arcanagram was meant to be temporary, a surface-level insertion
should suffice. Papyrus won’t feel anything more than a slight tickle.

While she worked, Papyrus explained that he attempted to initiate diplomatic relations with Aiden of Aratet alone. It resulted in a cooking challenge that’s way out of his league.

Lucidia said, “You know that Aiden had set you up to fail, right?”

Papyrus whimpered. “I’M AWARE OF THAT NOW. I’M SO SORRY FOR MAKING THINGS WORSE.”

“Then, why do you still try?”

“OH, THAT’S SIMPLE. SO I CAN WIN HIM OVER FOR REAL! SURELY, HE WILL NOT THINK OF ME AS A SIMPLE SKELETON IF I CAN JAPE HIS JAPES. ALSO THERE’S NO WAY I COULD LEAVE FRISK ALONE!”

Lucidia chuckled. “Quite determined, aren’t you? That’s… not a bad thing.”

“DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING?” he asked. “EVEN A SMALL CLUE IS AWESOME.”

“Hmmm…” The woman mused out loud. “The Aratet welcoming feast is reserved only to those they trust. It’s not easy to earn that kind of respect if you’re an outsider.”

“HAS ANYONE TRIED TO RECORD IT?”

“They refuse to let anyone film the feast. Whatever information I have comes from written journals at least two hundred years old.”

“WHY ARE THEY SO SECRETIVE?”

Lucidia paused for a moment. Her heart was conflicted: would it be right for Papyrus to hear more about the Surface’s dark history?

*His shine. It’s so bright. I don’t want him to lose it either. Sans Serif, your desire to shield your brother is a temptation in itself.*

*Yet, it’s wrong to keep him ignorant.*

She resumed her work. “Other than agriculture, the Aratets worked as mercenaries. Bodyguards. Assassins. Their allegiance was not based solely on money. Rather, it’s based on one condition: the employee must never pry into the source of their power.”

“Nations rise and fall. Yet, the employment clause remained constant. The outside world rarely mattered to them.”

“POWER?” Papyrus asked back. “YOU SPEAK AS THOUGH THEY USE MAGIC.”

“…They do. You can say that they’re the most magical of all Gungnir. It’s often DEMON-based, but that doesn’t change the fact.”

He gasped. “T-T-THEN WHY DO THEY HATE MAGIC-KIND???”

“They treat their power as a sacred blessing of their gods, used only when the situation calls for it. There’s no fun and games with those abilities.”

“On the other hand, the Magi see magic as a science. Tools. Forces. A neutral part of nature, no
different than the laws of physics. They see our lack of reverence as heresy. Monsters take it one step further as means to express their emotions. It can be for work. It can also be for pleasure. Games. Sport.”

Lucidia frowned. “Perhaps the Aratet had a grain of truth.”

“SUPERFLUOUS NONSENSE!” Papyrus protested. “MONSTERS ARE MADE OF MAGIC. HOW ELSE CAN WE SHOW OUR EMOTIONS? IT’S LIKE COMPLAINING ABOUT HUMANS PUNCHING!”

“Well… unregulated punching is indeed illegal in most places. You can kill a human in one strike if it hits the heart. Or the head.”

Papyrus raised his finger for a moment. Then, he lowered it. “…I HAVE UNDERESTIMATED THE BRUTALITY OF HUMAN MUSCLE ONCE MORE. PLEASE CONTINUE THE STORY, MISS LUCIDIA.”

Though reluctant at first, her Kindness swayed to his wishes. “Decades ago, their land fell into civil war. Their old government collapsed from corruption. Anarchy ruled the land, from there famine rose.”

“The Aratet became scapegoats due to their secretive ways. It didn’t help that many were once hired by the fallen government. Filled with hatred, the many tribes rallied the support of the powerful and ambushed the villages, causing the first in a wave of genocides.”

“ONCE WASN’T ENOUGH?” Papyrus’ voice wavered.

“No,” Lucidia replied in a straightforward manner. “Once the Aratet were scattered, the people turned against each other for other reasons: both simple and complex. It further devolved into a multi-part war. If my husband didn’t end it with the Keys of Fate, they might still be fighting today.”

The sweet soul tried to hold back his tears. Yet, she heard the sniffling of sorrow. “NO WONDER DAYTON WAS AFRAID OF EVERYONE…”

“His paranoia has its reasons. It’s… the same for us Surface monsters.”

Part one, done. Lucidia moved to the front. “Stay as still as you can, Papyrus.”

The second part involved the area around the eye sockets. The Lichborn had inherited a human’s sensitive eyes too; getting an accidental poking won’t be fun.

“What are you doing, actually?” It’s a question that would appear sooner or later.

“Seeking a replacement for your scarf,” she said, “You have experienced my secret weapon twice, and in both times you were administered magic-imbued accelerated healing. Despite our best efforts, you still sustained scars. Determination leaks out from places where it shouldn’t.”

“But… but…! I want to be a badass ninja with my mom’s scarf!!!”

The unexpected comical tangent tickled Lucidia’s funny bone, making her burst into a chortle. It’s even funnier now that she had watched enough ‘anime’ to understand his logic.

Once recomposed, Lucidia said: “Hmm, it would take a while for you to completely heal. You might have a chance to be a ‘badass ninja’, after all.”
“YES!!” He’s so excited, he almost bounced off his chair.

“Please hold still. Otherwise you might get poked.” A different topic should keep him occupied. What could she ask…?

“Mind if I ask you a question? How much do you know about your Awakening? When did it first activate?”

“UM…” Fidgeting with his fingers, Papyrus explained: “WEIRD THINGS STARTED HAPPENING AFTER I ZAPPED MYSELF WITH AN ELECTRIC TRAP. THEN I FOUND OUT LATER THAT MY EYE WENT CRAZY WHEN I WAS A BABY. SANS HAD TO SEAL IT, AND THAT CAUSED SOME WEIRD BACKFIRE TO MY NOGINN. UNCLE GASTER WAS SO SORE ABOUT THAT INCIDENT.”

“You poor thing, suffering so many accidents. Please be more careful.”

*It’s a wonder that his Eye didn’t shatter.*

> Let’s see… the Awakening lasts for exactly 168 hours. But, my intel states that his instability lasted only for ‘six days’. I always wondered why his particular period was so short. It turns out that he had spent one day Awakened as a child.

Lucidia kept silent until she set the last of the foundation. If all works well, she would improve on this draft as the cornerstone for a more permanent implant.

Now, to detail the refinements.

“This confirms my suspicion. Otherwise you wouldn’t have achieved Ascension with such ease.”

“It’S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE EASY?” he asked back. “MISS AUNT HAS ONE. MISTER MAGUS TOO. AND UNDYNE. AND GRILLBY. SANS HAD TO CHEAT, BUT HE REACHED THAT LEVEL TOO.”

“In a room full of geniuses, brilliance becomes mundane.” she noted, “Besides, Captain Undyne and Sir Grillenn didn’t achieve Ascension. Those power-ups were of a different nature.”

“OH.”

“To explain it in plain English, you were born without natural limits. Your Eye’s power outgrew your body unchecked. That’s why you had such an early Awakening.”

“If no action was taken, you would have died. Or become a vegetable: your mind lost in spacetime long before you could develop a grounded reference.”

“SANS… DID THE RIGHT THING AFTER ALL?”

Lucidia scrunched her brow. “‘Half’, I would say. He was a novice and he used a textbook template. If anything went wrong, he could have killed you instantly. On the other hand… Doctor Gaster might be tempted to use different, more experimental methods.”

“ONE PERSON HAD PRO SKILLS, AND ANOTHER HAD PRO DECISIONS.”

“And you needed both. Not one or the other.”

“What about you?” asked Papyrus. “WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?”
“That’s a bit unfair since I have advanced equipment at my disposal. But, if I had a patient like you at current time… I would first redirect the excess Determination and magic to a burning device. It can be a machine or an Arcanagram. Then I would apply a slow-forming Seer’s Seal. By making the process more gradual, it would minimize the chances of a recoil.”

Papyrus’s face glowed in awe. “WOWIE! THAT SOUNDS BRILLIANT! YOU MUST HAVE HELPED MANY, MANY PEOPLE. I’M SURE YOU HAVE PLENTY OF FRIENDS!”

…Friends?

………………

Tears obscured Lucidia’s vision, forcing her to stop her work.

“OR YOU’RE LIKE THE OLD ME, UNKNOWN AND MISUNDERSTOOD?”

“No,” she muttered. “No… I am feared. Resented. Hated by my own people. You would too, if you know what I have done and how I had failed.”

The younger skeleton, as great as his name, held his fairy godmother’s hands with warm reassurance.

“IN A ROOM FULL OF CONTROVERSIAL CRIMINALS, DUBIOUS DIFFICULT CHOICES ARE MUNDANE. THE GREAT PAPYRUS WON’T HOLD ANYTHING AGAINST YOU.”

He tried to wriggle his brows, then remembered the unfinished treatment and didn’t want to ruin it.

“I’M SURE THIS ‘ALMIGHTY’ PERSON WON’T EITHER! I MEAN, SANS WAS AWFULLY RUDE. YET HE DIDN’T GET ZAPPED TO DUST!”

“So, please don’t be so hard on yourself. When this chaos blows over, I will serve you my ultimate speciality: the Reunionghetti, beef-maybe-edition! Nyeh heh heh!”

What sweet simplicity you have. Have we made the matter of sin too complicated?

Could you change even the Gungnir’s heart, I wonder?

“You know…” he said, “about the ocean battle… I’ve always seen everyone fighting together as one. Me. You. Sans. Frisk. The whole town. For the sake of the world!”

It raised an alarm. Did the scarf fail? If that was the case, it’s doubtful that her new handiwork would last long.

With worry in her tone, Lucidia asked, “Was it a vision?”

“Nah. Just my imagination. But wouldn’t it be nice if it comes true?”

That was a relief. Lucidia forced herself to smile. Though her spirits weren’t fully lifted, she appreciated his efforts.

“As it stands, I’m not sure if that unity can ever come to fruition. It might be just a dream…”

“Well,” Papyrus grinned. “If I could be a scientist in a parallel dimension, anything is possible!”
Papyrus oh Papyrus…

Ah, I shouldn’t be so pessimistic.

She then finished the last of her weavings. “There. You can take off your scarf now.”

The fabric was cold and damp from all that head sweat. What a clammy, icky texture.

“I… think I’ll have this laundered.”

Her personal phone started to ring.

Is it Mezzy? Perhaps it’s poor Anise getting overworked in a sub-functioning lab?

The number… was from Cenna. If that’s the case, it had something to do with Frisk. She excused herself from Papyrus and went to the corner to answer the call.

“Hello?”

On the other end of the line, Cenna chimed in: “Lucy. I recommend putting aside any mess-causing containers in your hand right now. Sure, you got your Blue but better safe than sorry.”

“I’m fine. What’s the problem? Has Frisk suffered critical injuries?”

“Nawh man Frisky is all frisky! They’re A.O.K. Eating just fine too. Just in need of a shower, really.”

“That’s excellent news. Then, why do you sound so alarmed?”

“Because Gael discovered The Six.”

More puzzlement. “Their corpses are in the morgue. What are you talking about?”

“Yeah but you see, their SOULS a.k.a Psychia are trapped in the Soul Eaters a.k.a Cheaters of Death a.k.a Ebott Goldenflowers soooooo… help, please? Like ASAP a.k.a right now???”

There might be no sleep for Lucidia tonight.
I apologize for taking so long on this scene. I fell ill, and then the fuse box in my house blew. GG me, no electricity for hours.

With such a backlog I’m not sure if I could release the next scene within 7 days too. I hope to get back on track as soon as possible.

In the meantime, if you’re a Megaman fan (X series to be specific) you might want to keep an eye on my side story: https://archiveofourown.org/works/15482040
It will have an irregular update schedule since GQ takes priority.

Enjoy!

In the middle of the night, Doctor Gaster and Alphys were summoned to the boardroom. The poor lizard had barely enough time to wash her face. But, it was urgent.

The inner skeleparents refused to let go of her hand. Either they had grown fond of her, or they expected a rough time.

Doctor Gaster cleared his throat. “I-I’ll be there for you, dear. I mean. ‘We’ will be. The three of us.”

“Thank you, Sensei.” Alphys muttered.

Still too soon, they arrived at the meeting point. Maybe it was better to get things over with.

They were led inside and…

Alphys gasped. “Papyrus?!”

The cheerful skeleton puffed his chest and pumped his arms. “WHY YES, IT’S ME! THE GREAT PAPYRUS!”

The surprise reunion brought the lizard to tears. Forgetting her predicament, she rushed forward to give him a hug.

“Ohmygoshohmygoshyouareokay! I was worried sick about you. E-everyone was!”

Patting her back, Papyrus said: “I APOLOGIZE FOR THE UNNECESSARY STRENUIOUS WAIT. BUT ALL IS FINE NOW. LADY LUCIDIA HAS GIVEN ME THE REQUIRED TREATMENT! EVEN THOUGH IT’S JUST PART ONE OF MANY.”

“Part one… of many?”

Alphys turned towards her new mentor. Doctor Gaster had his Eyes active. Whatever he saw, it pierced him with grief.

“Heavens, no…” he mumbled. Gaster held Papyrus’ skull. “No, no, no! Egads, I’ve sinned through
“Is there something wrong with Papyrus?” Alphys asked. To her normal, spectacled sight, the tall skeleton appeared to be the picture of good health.

“…So you understood, Doctor W.D. Gaster.” Lady Lucidia’s sudden voice jolted the poor anxious lizard.

She sat at the head of the table, focused on her data. Papyrus’ loud presence had completely overshadowed hers.

“Please sit down. All three of you.”

Questions and celebrations will have to wait. Alphys let Gaster sit next to Papyrus. Family first.

Lucidia asked: “You two are the best scientists in the Dreemurr Nation, am I right?”

“Yes,” Gaster answered.

Alphys couldn’t muster the confidence to confirm the question. “I. Uh. That’s… that’s what others say.”

“But,” then said the sapphire maiden. “None of you had any real scientific training.”

The first victim of her scrutiny… was none other than Gaster-sensei.

Lucidia frowned. “I’m both baffled and terrified to think that you’re a teacher. Let alone the mind who built The Core. Do you even care about your own life, or the lives of others?”

“Excuse me?” Gaster raised a brow.

Lucidia put up a blueprint of the Hotland Laboratory on the boardroom’s projector. “Look here. You have a single interconnecting airflow. No auxiliary ventilation. No emergency shutter system. No partitioning. No barricade doors. No mass fire-extinguishing. And so on. In other words, your Lab has failed every safety regulation. The construction is so faulty, it might as well be a death trap.”

“If this is the setup that’s replicated by Doctor Alphys on the Surface, it’s unfit for any scientific or engineering task. It requires immediate renovation.”

“In fact,” Lucidia glared. “If The Core suffers from the same shortsightedness, it must be shut down until that facility complies with existing standards.”


“Countless deaths have happened in workplaces around the world due to ignorance and negligence. Do you wish to repeat history?”

“NO…”

Alphys quickly raised her hand. “W-wait! I-I did update the infrastructure when I became the Royal Scientist! I’m a big klutz, you know, so I made quite a number changes for my own benefit. The plans you have must be outdated. P-please let me show you the modifications before we consider any further action.”
That’s the least I can do to save Sensei.

The Chronographer pondered for a moment. Then, she said: “Very well, I will inspect the current facilities with your assistance.”

Oh my god I actually did it.

“However, there are other issues surrounding your laboratory practices.”

She switched the projector to a different display. It’s every note she had collected from Alphys’ Surface Lab. Her main focus: the Determination experiments.

Lady Lucidia -- the one who remained the most calm throughout the whole Sans fiasco -- then raised her voice.

“Doctor Alphys. Am I to understand that you had a sample size of one? ONE?!!? There were at least a hundred other possible samples available to you, yet you put all your efforts into a single flower with sentimental value? It’s through sheer luck that your attempt succeeded at all!”

I’m.
I’m so dead.

Lady Lucy is gonna kill me for my terrible handiwork.

The next screen showed Lucidia’s corrected notes, written in red to demand everyone’s full attention.

“This is what you should have done. One control sample, grown from a fresh seed and free of monster dust. No Determination. No dust. A second control sample where you inject pure Determination, without any dust. And a third control sample where dust is applied without Determination.”

“As for your hundred other flowers, use the dust of your other fallen citizens. One person per one flower, sorted by species and name. Make a size of around thirty minimum. More if you can. Then, create another batch of samples from dust of the same species, but increase the levels of Determination. Grow and scale as needed.”

Alphys covered her mouth. The ‘proper’ sentimental-free attempt was almost heartless.

“Does this shock you?” Lucidia asked.

Oh. Oh no. She’s asking a possibly-personal question. Okay I-I gotta be honest without being offensive. What am I supposed to say?

No. That won’t work. It would sound like I’m excusing myself.

Um, no. That might insult her.

Uh. Uh. Uhhhh.... I-I can’t stay silent either. Can I?

I think I should be like Undyne and throw everything into the pot!

That’s what she did. She threw all her ideas into her mental ‘pot’, cooked a reason, and presented it with the best coherence she could muster. In hindsight, it resulted in a bold-faced lie. She hoped that Lucidia wouldn’t notice.

“Yes?” said Alphys, “It’s nothing like how I imagined. I thought that Asriel would be the only
feasible candidate. That’s why I put everything into him.”

Lucidia shook her head. “He may be a Boss Monster, but there’s no guarantee that his dust will have the required qualities. A different species might be the key. Or, the origins didn’t matter. Only the quantity of Determination.”

“It’s true that with my proposed method, most of your attempts may end in failure. But, organized failure gives you more data than pure success. You can succeed without understanding. Failures will force you to think. Isn’t that right… Doctor Gaster?”

The sudden shift of spotlight made Gaster ripple. She’s one scary skelly.

“I… I can’t refute that.” he said. “But! I do have one issue.” Her mentor refused to back down without at least some sort of fight. Must be his Bravery talking.

“Which is?”

“Economics. It doesn’t seem that Alphys would have the resources to generate that many failures. After all, there can only be one ‘Prince Asriel’.”

“Agreed.” Lucidia replied.

Both Alphys and her Sensei were surprised. They expected more justifications, especially after the woman ripped their flaws apart.

“In a situation where resources are lacking, the next best course of action would be to run as many simulations as you can. This will depend more on past observations. Papyrus, please pass the Personal Digital Assistant.”

Right on cue, Papyrus pushed a tablet in front of Alphys. When she swiped away the lock screen, she started sweating buckets.

It’s everything about Flowey and Chara: their physiology, their magical properties, and other daily observations.

Alphys realised there was something very wrong about the situation. If it was just a mere peer review, Lucidia wouldn’t have handed over new material.

The lizard gulped. “Did… did something happen back in Ebott?”

“Yes,” confirmed Lucidia. “I had called you in today with the intention to assemble a science crew. The mission would be to salvage the remains of the Six Children from the Ebott Goldenflowers before they perish for good.”

A billion and one questions exploded in Alphys’ head, yet not one of them had anything to do with ‘How did they survive?’.

She already knew what the flowers could do. Somewhere at some point, they must have absorbed the SOULS after the Barrier was shattered.

Rather, she had everything to ask about the aftermath: “Lady Lucidia…? What do we plan to do with The Six?”

“Unconfirmed at this point,” the maiden admitted. “Whatever it is, we should first prevent them from turning into DEMONS. I had assigned Alchemist Anise Anise to help me. But… the task is too
overwhelming for so few of us.”

“Furthermore, The Six’s existence is still classified. There are no other Artificers or Alchemists in the Magus Association with the required clearance.”

Papyrus then said, “THAT’S WHEN I SUGGESTED THE BRILLIANT MINDS OF OUR ROYAL SCIENTISTS!”

His shining enthusiasm was dampened by the subsequent reality presented by Lucidia.

“It’s still not enough... If only we have more time. The public grows more and more anxious for a press statement.”

A person then knocked on the door. Without waiting for an answer, the outsider let himself in. Alphys’ overactive anime-inspired imagination filtered the man’s entry with a dramatic 5 o’clock shadow. His fancy clothes didn’t help one bit either.

Judge Mezil Thyme? W-what is he doing here?

Oh, right. He runs on ‘vampire hours’.

“What’s the verdict?” He asked.

With a clear sense of disappointment, Lucidia said: “The Royal Scientists have brilliant minds, but they’re beset by a lifetime of bad laboratory practices.”

Gaster grunted, salty about the statement. “To be fair, the Underground was in its infancy compared to the Surface. Surely you don’t expect a mere chick to fly without feathers!”

Mezil crossed his arms. “So, add ‘primitive’ to the list.”

Alphys gasped. That was a brutal shot straight into Gaster-sensei’s heart. Mezil Thyme had killer marksmanship in more ways than one.

“Well then, Lucidia,” said the Judge. “If we need more help, why not conscript ‘him’ again? Have that man be more than a useless waste of energy as much as possible.”

Lucidia flustered, “H-how did you know...? You weren’t supposed to notice.”

He smiled. “Dear. I know you more than you know yourself sometimes.”

Alphys’ personal anime filter suddenly switched into a whole new genre. The shadow got replaced by bright, prismatic sparkles. Gone was the image of a dark, intimidating old man. The new light transformed Mezil into a dashing romantic.

That understanding subtext.
That subtle gentleness.
That mutual understanding.

T-this... this must be how Lady Lucidia sees him!

He’s a biseinen~~~ The standard of matured beauty!

The Lady and the Gentleman, forever in love. Kyaaaaaaaaa they’re so wonderful together!!!

“Have you finished swooning yet?”
Alphys squeaked, surprised by the interruption. She was so caught up in her imagination that she
didn’t realise that Mezil loomed over her seat.

Her scales blushed all over. ‘Alphys the yellow lizard’ had transformed into ‘Alphys the red lizard’.

Fortunately, Mezil didn’t take her fangirling personally. He just sighed and resumed business as
usual. “Pay attention. The second part of the briefing will begin now.”

“…Huh?” Alphys questioned. “I-I thought Sensei and I didn’t qualify…?”

“Well, I’m sure the both of you are capable of adhering to instructions. Having two supercomputers
on team should resolve any matters of haphazard planning.”

“Two? Lady Lucidia and…?”

The man tapped his cane down. “Come in, Sans Serif.”

Sans Serif?

Alphys thought she misheard the name at first.

But then, there he was. The skeleton of infamy.

Sans stood before everyone else. Waving back, he said: “‘Sup. Heard you need some help.”

Papyrus dropped his jaw.

Gaster melted into a puddle of goo.

And Alphys covered her mouth. Otherwise, she might scream too loud.

How was she supposed to feel about this second surprise reunion? On one hand, she was glad to see
her friend again. On the other hand, she was mad! Furious! Ready to slap him across the face for his
crazy world-risking gambit.

But then, Papyrus leapt over the table. He tackled his brother with a huge hug, crying much tears of
joy.

“BROTHERRRRRR!!!” he said, “YOU’RE ALIVE AFTER ALL! I’M SO SO SO SO ULTRA
SO HAPPY! I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU AND WHY AND AND AND--”

It ended with a long whimper.

Sans patted his brother on the back. “There, there. S’okay now. I’m fine. Sorry for putting you
through all of that.”

All the while, Alphys couldn’t avert her eyes from Sans’ right arm.

_Huh? There’s something odd. It… it didn’t move at all._

_It reminds me of that time when I haven’t figured out how to route power into Mettaton’s arm. It was
just hanging there. Like. Dead weight._

_Dead…?_

The details clicked together. Alphys got up and rushed to Sans as fast as her stumpy legs could carry.

She said, “Papyrus, let go of Sans for a while.”
The tall younger brother did so. The moment there was an opening, Alphys grabbed Sans’ forearm and lifted it up.

*Oh no. That’s not relaxed. That’s absolutely limp!*

There’s one final test. Alphys pushed her fingers between the skeletal ones. She gripped it firmly, and ordered: “Sans, squeeze my hand. Now!”

“Nah,” he replied.

“Do it!” she yelled.

“I can’t. That’s not about being lazy, y’know. I really can’t.”

Those words confirmed the worst case scenario. Whatever anger Alphys had was replaced by sorrow and pity.


Mezil thumped his cane and cleared his throat. Loud. Alphys could feel the growing Determination, making her weak in the knees.

“Back to your seats,” the Judge reminded. “You can have all the reunion time on the road. Right now, we have important matters to discuss.”

“About?”

“The Six.”

“I thought we haven’t decided yet?”

“That’s why we’re laying out the options now."

Mezil sat beside Lucidia as an example for the rest. Meanwhile, Sans settled at the opposite side of the table… far away from Gaster-sensei.

Though conflicted at first, Papyrus chose to accompany his brother.

Alphys instead joined Gaster’s side. She decided sensei needed the emotional support, though he might not admit so.

“So,” said Sans. “Heard you found some dead kids. Welp. Preventing them from becoming DEMONs is the least of our concerns. We still have those SOUL containers, y’know. We can stuff them right back in there.”

Gaster tried his best to solidify himself. There were some goopy bits here and there, but he managed to shove them back in the right place.

The mentor said, “I see… It’s theoretically possible. All we’d need is a fragment of a donor SOUL to serve as a basis, and some Determination to facilitate the restoration. A Living Victory would be able to supply both.”

Sans then asked, “But the main question is what do we do after we’ve fixed them up?”

“Well, the only permanent solution I can think of would be to convert them into Liches.”
“I-is that even possible?” Questioned Alphys. “All the examples I had seen involved adult humans.”

“Doctor Alphys makes a good observation,” said Lucidia. “The standard reanimation spell works only on adults. Children do not have enough substrate to sustain themselves.”

Papyrus pondered. “BUT, WE KNOW WHAT BONES ARE MADE OF. CAN’T WE ADD EXTRA CALCIUM SO THEY’D GET THEIR PROPER BULK?”

“There are also ethical reasons why the reanimation of children is not further researched. Liches will not age unless they reproduce. The theoretical Lich child cannot grow, and they can never reproduce. They would also be legally dependent for the rest of their existence, vulnerable to exploitation.”

Gaster knitted his brows. “Is that truly the case? Minimum ages can get rather arbitrary in the past, to put it lightly.”

“I acknowledge that technical ‘children’ have been reanimated in history. The youngest recorded was thirteen years old upon time of death. That’s the age of adulthood in many societies of old. Therefore, they were not recorded as ‘children’, and also old enough to reproduce. Hence they were able to go through the expected life cycle.”

“The Six, however, are about Frisk’s age. No matter where we take this, the ethics remain questionable.”

Then, a bright idea lit up in Alphys’ mind. She raised her hand and exclaimed: “Let’s turn them into robots!”

“JUST LIKE METTATON?” Papyrus said, “THAT’S A BRILLIANT IDEA! THEY CAN START YOUNG, THEN AS THE YEARS GO BY WE REPLACE THEIR PARTS FOR A MORE GROWNUP LOOK!”

This time, Mezil was the one who brought up a counter. “Is it even possible to sustain a human Psychia in a mechanical body? If so, how long can they survive? Are we opening the door to cybernetic transhumanism? Do we even want to go that far?”

Already, Alphys imagined the fabled robot apocalypse. She dabbed some sweat off her forehead with her sleeve. Maybe that’s not a good idea after all.

Sans shrugged. “Eh, why not just leave them as flowers?”

His suggestion caused an immediate outrage from almost every party involved.

“Egads, Sans! Have you learned nothing?!”

“That might as well turn them into DEMONS.”

“I refuse to deal with more bratty plant kids.”

“BROTHER, THERE’S SUCH A THING AS BEING TOO LAZY.”

For Alphys, it struck an extra personal chord: enough for her to stand up. “T-that’s TORTURE, Sans! Prince Asriel suffered enough as is!”

“But all your suggestions are fundamentally the same, right?” he replied. “They’re all about keeping someone alive longer than they should.”

“No, it’s not!” the lizard exclaimed. “It’s about giving them another chance! With good quality of life. Turning them into flowers is the lowest of the low!”
“Not really. They could be easily be accepted as magical citizens. Monsters don’t see any distinctions when it comes to shapes. As for living environments? Piece of cake. They can get around fine too, as you’ve observed with the two other kids. They’d even have friends and family of sorts.”

Mezil glared at Sans. “That’s just one step closer to that massive abomination of a flower farm.”

“Welp. You guys asked for the ‘keep kids alive’ options, not the ‘disaster free’ one”

“Ugh, fine. What’s your real suggestion? I’m sure you proposed that flower plan just to push our buttons.”

“Well… Why not use them as backups for the Ocean Battle? Maybe they’ll spend the last of their power. Maybe they won’t. Point being, we have nothing to lose. Easier than asking someone else to cut their life short, right?”

Sans… Sans has a point.

But, is it really right to call on their power again? We’re already wronged them so much over the Barrier.

Gaster asked: “Wouldn’t that render the Seraph System moot? The goal of your machine was to be a sacrifice-free alternative…”

“If we can build a new one in time to begin with.” Sans lifted his arm, shaking it as though he’s a Halloween prop. “I’m crippled now, you see.”

“Hmph. You underestimate us. I’m sure if you give the blueprints to Doctor Alphys, she’ll match your mettle in no time.”

The lizard’s sweating intensified.

Muri muri muri muri. That’s impossible! I-I-I’m not Sans!

I’m happy that Sensei vouches for me, but maybe his expectations are getting a bit too high.

How do I even???

Papyrus raised his hand.

Help. Please say something zany yet logical. You’re our only hope.

“WE SHOULD GET FRISK’S HELP. KIDS CONFIDE BEST WITH OTHER KIDS! IT’S UNFAIR THAT WE MAKE SUCH A HUGE DECISION WITHOUT ASKING THE SIX THEMSELVES.”

“IN THE MEANTIME, MY BROTHER WILL TEACH THE REST ON HOW TO BUILD HIS FANCY STABBY BRACER. THERE’S NO POINT FIDDLING WITH THE NOODLES WHEN YOU DON’T HAVE THE PASTA SAUCE READY.”

That was simpler than expected. “Papyrus is right!” said Alphys. “W-we’re jumping straight to the garnish without even chopping the ingredients! Or shopping for them! W-we should concentrate on saving their SOULS first. Then, we’ll decide what to do.”


Papyrus was delighted. “WHY THANK YOU VERY MUCH, SANS. I’M GLAD WE’RE
FINALLY ON THE SAME LEVEL.”

At last, they had come to a unanimous decision.

Mezil issued the order to leave the hospital for Alphys’ Lab at once. It may not meet their standards, but they don’t have anywhere else nearby the mountain. Transporting the flowers to the city might endanger them.

Outside, at the patio, Alphys looked back at the hospital building. This could be the last time she would have an extended stay there.

On one hand, she’s relieved that she gets to go back to Ebott.
On the other hand, she’s worried about the goats. Asgore and Toriel still needed their treatment.

Rest well, Your Majesty.

I-I… I’ll do my best. Don’t worry about me. Because, this time I’m not alone!

Chapter End Notes

https://polarissketches.tumblr.com/post/156455525456/commission-for-karbonkevin-thank-you-so-much-a

Relevant picture.
Friday Frolicks

Chapter Notes

Finally an Undyne POV chapter. Her side is pretty overdue.

Also I made art for the first time in a while.

This chapter took much longer than expected due to the previous week's backlog. But, it's finally out yay!

May or may not have sneaky typos. Feel free to let me know if you spot any.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Undyne had her fair share of fun sleepovers before. But, they only involved people that she had known for a while.

The Skelebros.
Alphys.
That squirt.
King Asgore.

And yet -- despite all her experience -- this was the first time she became the victim of a surprise kick to the face.

“OW!!!” Undyne yelped. “What the heck?!!”

One reaction led to another. Then it became a wrestling match.

“NGAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!”

Frisk drew the curtains to let in the morning light. The sudden brightness stung Undyne’s single working eye.

With a grumpy frown, the human child pointed at a specific direction.

Following it led her straight to… Cenna.

“Morning Captain,” she said. “We done roughhousing yet?”

Undyne realised only then that she was grabbing a whole leg. If she remembered Alphys’ trivia right, it’s what the wrestlers would call a ‘kneebar’.

She released her grip pronto. Last thing she wanted to do was to further injure a wounded human. They already had enough trouble finding fresh gauze and bandages to change the dressing.

“Golly, sorry about that.” The fish apologized. “I thought someone ambushed us.”

Cenna waved her hand across her face. “No sweat, Cap. It ain’t your fault anyway. I’m just…
‘special’ when it comes to sleeping habits. Keep that wrestling skill! It’s SUPER useful. Trust me.”

While massaging her leg, the Magus whined. “Damn. I hoped that I could go through one night without making a mess. This is why I can’t do sleepovers.”

Frisk sat down by their sister’s side. “Is this normal for you?”

“Unfortunately, yeah.” Cenna yawned out loud and rubbed her eyes, still sleepy from the sudden waking. “Mama and Papa tried all sorts of ways to keep me from rolling off the bed. In the end, they got me a queen-sized low-lying type.”

Undyne snorted. “Lots of space, eh? And even if you DID roll off the mattress, you wouldn’t hit your head so hard.”

Everyone had their quirky habits. Some were more annoying than others. Back in the Underground, fights sometimes broke out over small issues. How Undyne was glad that the citizens now have space to breathe.

Frisk asked: “How did you survive the academy, sis?”

“Uuuuh…” Cenna cleared her throat. “They tried to make me fit the standard gear. But, in the end they gave up and moved my old bed into the dorm.”

Much snickering happened.

The fish stretched her back. “Alright, I gotta get ready for my run. Hey squirt, you coming with me?!”

Frisk strode towards their bed and tucked themselves right in.

“Don’t turn into an Alphys so soon, punk!” Undyne yanked the blankets off. “You’re not even a teenager yet!”

The kid groaned, putting their pillow over their head. Their muffled protest said: “Nope. I’m done with physical activity for today. I wanna relax before the Tsunderjudge appears.”

Cenna yawned again. “Well, Frisky did just come back from a crazy wild cave survival trek. Also, they’re SO right about Mez. That guy is a freaking adventure magnet. No breaks when he’s around.”

Hmm… they have a point. Sooner or later, the big boss will get himself involved. We’re gonna be busy then.

So, Undyne draped the blanket back on the kid. “Fine, squirt. You get a break today. Make sure you work hard on relaxing, you hear?”

They returned a thumbs-up gesture. The two grownups then left the bedroom so the little one could rest in peace and quiet.

As the two walked down the stairs, Cenna asked: “Well, what’s for breakfast?”

“Any one of you can cook?” Undyne asked back, “Toriel, uh, banned me from her kitchen.”

“Maybe Gaelic, if he’s home. Don’t bother asking Garamond. The cool guy can’t cook.”

Hearing the name ‘Gaelic’ and ‘Cooking’ in the same sentence shocked Undyne. “Excuse me? That ‘Snakeface’ can cook?”
“Only if he’s stable. Somebody’s gotta make sure Ol’ Mez doesn’t get food poisoning in the rural zones.”

A savoury aroma floated from the kitchen. Convenient enough. The less time spent on breakfast, the sooner Undyne could get into her routine workout. Gotta keep that body in shape.

A properly-dressed Gaelic watched the stove, while Garamond washed up. How early did they wake up?

The wall clock pointed at a little past seven. Toriel oh Toriel, with her sense of old-fashioned analog clocks. Everything was digital in Alphys’ place.

Then, the details clicked in Undyne’s head.

*Wait, what? It’s already this bright?*

_Huh. So it’s like what Frisk told us. The days start earlier in Spring and Summer. By the time we emerged from the Underground, it was almost the beginning of Fall._

_Dang… it’s already Friday._

Garamond wiped the knife dry with a cloth and set it on the rack. After turning around, he said: “Good morning. Is everything alright? We heard quite a ruckus upstairs.”

Cenna chuckled. ‘‘Me’ happened. No big deal.’’

“Your animated sleeping habits still puzzle me to this day.”

Garamond proceeded to prepare the table. He first placed down a rope mat for the pot, then he distributed the bowls and cutlery. There’s a salad of wild greens. Fancy.

“Any updates from Lucy?” said Cenna, settling down in a seat.

“She’s been with the science crew since last night. Right here in Mount Ebott, at Doctor Alphys’ Lab.”

Three seconds of silence happened before both sides made a huge exclamation: “WHAT?!”

“Why didn’t anyone inform me?!” Cenna questioned, but then she hid her face behind her hat. “Nevermind. Suspension.”

Undyne was the one who’s rightfully upset. “They should have informed ME! I’m the Captain!”

“She might have,” he said, “Have you checked your phone yet, Captain Undyne?”

“Phone. Right.”

That’s when she realized that she had left the device upstairs in Frisk’s room. A quick trip later…

_Jeez. Did I really sleep through all of that? There’s a whole briefing sent at what, 3 in the morning? Damn. Alphys must have it rough. I’m gonna try calling her first._

Undyne stopped by the stairs to dial Alphys’ number. Maybe she’ll answer. Maybe not.

To the fish’s surprise, there was an answer.
“H-hi?” It really was Alphys.

Undyne’s eye lit up. “Alphys! Babe, you okay?” For a moment she sounded very Mettaton-y, but she couldn’t care less.

“I. Uh. Haven’t slept yet. But I’m surprisingly energetic? Must be the energy potion. I think I might doze off if I stay still for too long though.”

Someone called for Alphys in the background. It didn’t sound like Gaster. More high pitched. Screechy? Not an adult’s voice, that’s for sure.

“S-sorry. I gotta go.”

“I understand,” Undyne replied. “Give it your best shot!!! Show everyone what you’re made of!”

“Thanks. S-see you soon. I hope.”

The call ended. It’s time to head back to the kitchen.

It appears that she had walked into the middle of a conversation between Cenna and Garamond.

“Flowerboy and Rosypal are there too?! But, why?”

“They may be the only ones capable of communication. If it’s possible in the first place. Oh, Anise joined the team.”

“Was she overjoyed?”

“Over the moon,” Garamond said, “As for the rest of us… we’re to care for Crimson Keeper Frisk. That’s something even a suspended family member can do.”

Cenna pouted. “You gonna keep rubbing that in or what?”

“If you didn’t get suspended, you could help me watch over Gaelic too. Right now… I guess you can just focus on the preschooler.”

“Wait. If all we have is babysitting duty… it might as well be a day off!” The Magus pushed her bowl aside, just enough for her to rest her head on the table. “Aaaah sweet glorious break day. I didn’t have any for goodness how many timelines now.”

_I guess after working for that long, you’d wanna become a Sans too._

_I wonder what’s for breakfast?_

Undyne scooted over to the stove. Toriel may have banned her from using the kitchen, she never decreed against peeking.

There’s no mistaking the aroma of sauteed mushrooms, salt, butter, and…

“Potatoes?” she asked.

“Aye,” Gaelic replied. “Wild mushroom potage. The birds dinnae show up this morning. Squirrels be good eating, but ye all be pressed fer breakfast time.”

Gaelic continued to glare at the pot. Hard. It reminded Undyne of her own cooking attempts.
Undyne asked, “Is there a problem?”

He grunted at an empty box of dehydrated potato flakes. “‘Tis starch be o’ magic. Not good fer the wee bean and Cenna. Mighty fine for ye though.”

Cenna laughed as she approached with a bowl. “Aw c’mon, Gael. Magic food is awesome for a Magus like me! The innkeeper’s cinnamon bunnies? They gave me a bigger energy boost than any caffeine in the world.”

“Ya know that ye get more from true physical food, aye? Magickind spend much energy to digest physical food. Makes ‘em sluggish and heavy.”

He continued, “On the other hand, humans cannae get their full nutrition dependin’ on magic alone. Organic life be more than energy. Sooner or later they’ll need the little essential traces. Fall prey to diseases otherwise.”

Undyne recalled all the pizza-nights with the gang, and how TIRED she became afterwards. All the while she thought the slump was due to their heavy fattiness.

*If that’s true… then so are the human-specific drawbacks!*

She zoomed straight to the fridge, hoping that there would be something for the squirt and Cenna. Alas, it had gone bare from the lack of Toriel’s upkeep.

Closing the fridge, she sighed: “Out of stock. Dang.”

Gaelic said, “The fridge usually be well-managed?”

“Yeah. Fresh produce from the human farmers too.”

“Her Majesty be wise, makin’ the effort to obtain the fruits o’ the earth.”

The man was about to lift the pot. But, he suddenly froze: sockets widened, and colour filled his special Eye.

Gaelic backed away from the stove.

“Captain? Could ya ladle the portions? Bring the pot to the table too. Ah… ah need to sit.”

“No problem,” Undyne replied. “Get some rest. You’ve done good.”

*It seems that the snake skelly didn’t completely recover from the hell Sans put him through.*

*Or. Hmm. I dunno. He had some quirks before that too. Thought I was sashimi.*

...*Poor guy.*

* * *

What better way to brighten up the day than a casual tour? The citizens get to greet Frisk, and Undyne gets to survey the town’s condition.
At least, that was the plan.

Now… if only she could convince the Blancs to show their face to the world.

Garamond strapped his face-plate tight. Gaelic? He went hiding under the living room’s table, burying his face into one of the sofa cushions.

“Look, Trenchcoat Man.” Undyne tried to reason. “You saved the Temmies. Why don’t you make yourselves official?”

Garamond replied, “We technically don’t exist. The Temmies thought I was a tall human.”

“Temmies are the last monsters you should use as a gauge. There’s one who tried to hatch a hard-boiled egg. I’m sure the rest of the citizens will figure out that you’re not human.”

Still, he stood his ground. “I will not expose my face more than required. Not without explicit permission.”

“Okay,” said Undyne. “I can accept that. But the volunteers have already seen your cousin. I think the whole ‘secret Surface monsters’ deal is out of the bag.”

The human siblings tried their best to coax Gaelic out from his hiding place. Cenna kept to words, while Frisk made a trail of candy.


Muffled in the pillow, Gaelic replied: “No.”


The kid nodded with determined confidence.

Gaelic responded with a loud growl. “Me. Dangerous. Go away.”

Cenna huffed. “Buddy, I know you’re doing that primal speech on purpose.”

Undyne had seen her fair share of social anxiety. It came with the part and parcel of living with Alphys. But, she didn’t expect this issue to be on a person with Bravery as his main trait.

Then again, there was Papyrus. Maybe he realised it. Maybe he was oblivious to the real problem. Undyne didn’t want to ask too much…

Nevertheless, she had a situation to settle. She asked, “What’s his problem?”

Garamond was reluctant to answer at first. But, then he said, “Gaelic hasn’t walked openly in a town for years. The last time he did that was on Halloween eight years ago, with Cenna, near the Institute’s grounds.”

“I understand if it’s a human city—”

“Sorry. Lemuria included. It’s… it’s complicated.”

Undyne needed a moment for the facts to sink in.
Years? YEARS!

Gaelic is a shut in?!!? Wait. He lives outdoors. Wouldn’t that make him a shut-out? Yeah. Shut out of town, that’s what he is!!!

Frisk looked at Cenna. “Sis, my ‘ACT’ needs more options.”

“Heard ya, Frisky. Any ideas?”

“Is it possible to contact the Tsumerjudge or Lady Lucy? I would do it myself, but my phone is busted…”

Interesting. Undyne asked: “Why them?”

Looking at her, Frisk explained: “They are Snakeface’s two most important people in the world. He will brave anything and everything upon their command.”

C’mon Undyne, think.

There has to be something you can do.

You can’t just be all dumb muscle.

A giant lightbulb flashed then in her skull.

Fu. Fufufufufufu! BRILLIANT!

Undyne lifted the whole table high over her head. Magazines and assorted table decorations poured on the floor. The move was sudden enough to stun everyone in the room. Except Frisk. The kid’s used to it.

Time for a CHALLENGE!

Undyne yelled: “Complete MY tour, and I’ll take YOU to Alphys’ Lab!!!”

Oh, Gaelic knew who’s there. He heard all about it during breakfast. That unsteady glancing was a sign of intense thinking.

It’s working. He’s seriously contemplating the challenge. Just a little more…!

Hint hint, wink wink at Frisk. The kid had a good head on their shoulders.

They showed their smashed phone to the reluctant skeleton. “You promised me that Lady Lucy will fix this, right? If you don’t accept Undyne’s suggestion we might miss her.”

Ooooooh the borderline-guilt-tripping promise move! Nice one, punk. Super nice.

“Phones are veeeeery important for a Crimson Keeper like myself. Gotta be able to keep in touch with the Tsumerjudge.”

OOF! Going straight to the call of duty, I see! Don’t let up!

“Above all, I’m sure they’ll be super proud of you. Praise? Hugs? At least a smile? You wanna see them smile, right…?”
Wohoo! THAT’s the final blow!!!

Final blow, indeed. Gaelic cried out: “Ah give, ah give!!! Argh, ye cheeky meddlesome spunky whippersnapping lot! Pitting e’rything under the sun. Guess I should loan more clothes from Mondie.”

Success! Undyne and Frisk fist-bumped each other for a job well done.

But Cenna said: “Hold it, folks. There’s still one more guy who needs to come out of his shell. Captain. Frisky. Help a gal out, will ya?”

Hint hint, wink wink at Garamond. Yup. Talk about being on the same wavelength. Grinning earfin to earfin, the Champion Fish stretched her arms.

“Sure thing, Cen. Sure thing.”

Just as the two girls wanted to pounce on Garamond, he vanished. Frisk didn’t call him ‘Mister Invisibone’ for nothing.

“I refuse to break protocol.” he said.

Frisk’s first reaction was to throw a handful of candy at the direction of the voice. The bits missed and scattered on the floor, so they kept throwing more at any other direction.

“Nani?” Undyne blinked.

“He’s still solid.” The kid explained, “Throw candy until it bounces off his body!”

Too late. While they were trying to plan their strategy, the main exit opened and closed. All three groaned ‘Aww man’ at the exact same time.

Gaelic laughed hard at their failure.

“Mondie be two centuries older than you lot. Ya think he dinnae try to cover his weakness?”

* * *

Things went better than expected. Undyne was prepared to fend off crowds and crowds of monsters who had no sense of boundaries, but that didn’t happen.

Everyone treated Frisk as they would on any other day: a greeting, a question about their well being, some chit-chat, then they let the kid go where they wanted to go.

No swooning, no excessive curiosity: just the right balance of acknowledgement and distance. At least, so far…

They walked through the new morning marketplace. Produce of both magic and matter mingled in this spot.

Remembering what happened earlier this morning, Undyne bought two apples from a human farmer. One for Frisk, and one for Cenna.
“Eat up,” she said. “You gotta get some REAL vitamins!”

“Thanks.”
“Thoughtful of ya, Cap!”

Gaelic then picked up a box of cherry tomatoes. “Apples dinnae have that much. At least, not compared to these--”

Upon the sound of deep-fried batter, he froze. Then his attention snapped to the right.

A few stalls down the road, the neighbourhood’s worth of Froggits waited eagerly for a fresh batch of food.

*Hey, I recognize that sign. They sell deep fried insect fritters. A super popular hit with the Froggits.*

The incident hypnotized Gaelic so much, he walked off without paying for the cherry tomatoes.

Cenna called him back. “Gael! GAEL! You forgot to pay!”

“Pay?” When he looked down at the item in his hands, he realised his mistake. “Oh, right. S-sorry there, mate.”

Apologies given, money exchanged, then it’s time to check out the fritter stall.

The Froggits were delighted to meet Frisk.

“Ribbit! (How are you?)”
“Ribbit. (Did you sleep well?)”

“I’m fine, thank you,” said Frisk. “What’s good here?”

“Ribbit ribbit. (You should try the worm fritters. I don’t know what kind of worms they were, but definitely not the earthy ones. These taste like clams.)”

And, sold! Frisk bought a bunch of worm fritters to share with everyone.

Other than Gaelic’s occasional focus issue, the rest of the market trip went fine.

*That’s not too bad. I can handle hyperactive-kid levels of attention span. He comes back when you call him anyway.*

Down the road, Aaron showed up. Talks with this guy tend to get… interesting.

Flex. “Hi Frisk.” Wink. “You should hang out with more muscles.” Flex. “Your group is getting too skinny.”

Undyne eye twitched. “Aaron, you wanna wrestle with me?”

The horse started winking nervously. “Maybe next time. I wanna know which neighbourhood that tall Sans-type came from.” Wink.

Conflicted feelings, intensify.

…*Well that explains the normality. The citizens have yet to put two and two together.*

Gaelic had to suppress a growl. Must be the comparison with Sans. But, he managed to regain
enough composure to point westward. “Somewhere there. Very, very far. Don’t come here often.”

I… I can’t poke any holes with that. Lemuria could be at the west. He just didn’t tell Aaron HOW far ‘west’!

“Oh, cool.” Aaron replied, going through his wink-and-flex routine. “That’s some crazy makeup you have there. Friends would call it ‘Radical’. Awesome. You do that every day?”

Blushing, Gaelic answered. “N-nay. ‘Tis be part o’ me.”

“Extra radical. I like that. Wanna compare flexes?”

Somehow, the invitation turned into an arm wrestling match. Nobody ‘won’ so to speak: their arms stayed in the same position, but whole persons circulated around the sidewalk in the meantime. Frisk had to end the match before the scene got weirder.

“You’re strong!” said Aaron. “Like, a ton of invisible muscles. Thanks for the fun. I gotta go.”

Then off he went, flexing away.

Cenna bust out her finger guns. “Eeeey, Gael! You did it! That’s a hundred-percent peaceful interaction with a stranger~”

Chuckling, Frisk added. “One of the more eccentric ones to boot.”

“Ah… ah did it?” Gaelic was happy, but he’s still unsure.

Time for more positive reinforcement. Undyne joined the cheering party. “See? You can do it! Ready for the next challenge?”

“Aye. Aye!” If he had a tail, it would be wagging right now.

So the fish said: “Why don’t you decide where to go next? Anywhere you want.”

Zoom! Gaelic climbed on the tallest object in the vicinity, which was the lamp post. He perched on it like a bird and scanned the town with his Seer’s Eye.

Crossing her arms, Undyne nodded with approval. “This guy has great taste for the high view. I like that.”

“Mom doesn’t.” said Frisk. “She was so mad when you did that in front of our school.”

“Eh. Toriel doesn’t know how to appreciate the art. Getting to unconventional high places is a true test of strength, finesse, and balance! YEAH!!!”

Gaelic slid down from the pole, jumping off midway for an aerial headstart back to the group.

“Ah wanna go there!” He pointed southeast. “To a bakery run by a spider!”

“Oh yeah.” Cenna rested her hands on her hips. “I promised to buy her stuff. Send a truck of free bread to all the guys working hard repairing the Institute.”

“Muffet’s, huh?” Undyne commented. “Still feeling peckish?”

“Food always be good. But this be more than that! This town, since ah arrived. M’lord’s scent linger in the air. Puzzling, puzzling. I think ah found the source.”
Cenna dropped her jaw. “Did you just say Mez’s scent… is at a bakery? The fuck?”

Undyne shared her sentiment. She couldn’t help but be a little bit concerned.

***

At Muffet’s bakery cafe…

What was supposed to be a fun trip became a serious affair after all. Muffet had some suspiciously realistic doughnuts on display.

Those racks would normally be filled with plastic or resin imitations. But in this bakery? They were all actual doughnuts, immortalized via dubious application of Determination.

Gaelic squealed like a total fanboy. “Determinination! Determinination belonging to M’lord! Many, many doughnuts filled with them! Ah dinnae know why, but the spider baker has them displayed as pretty samples o’ her wares. Curiouser, curioser. Ah wonder, do they taste well? Are they edible? Can ah finally drink M’lord’s waters without sin??”

They called the establishment’s owner, plated some of the questionable evidence, and had a private chat with Muffet at a quiet corner.

Garamond dispelled his invisibility for business. Kept on his face plate though.

Muffet began explaining how she accidentally caught Sans in her web. Undyne did remember that Alphys paid the spider lady to protect her lab. The only flaw lay in the fact that Sans had incredible PR skills.

He needed to use the DT-extraction machine. Muffet let him do so at a cost, and…

“It was a superb deal!” Muffet explained. “A whole bottle of Determinination for just the price of a mid-range phone? That’s a complete steal! A businesswoman like myself can’t give that up, ahuhuhuhuhuhuhu~~~”

So THAT is how Sans got the materials to make his bracer! Judging from everyone’s looks, they’re probably thinking of the same thing.

Cenna breathed in deep. “Ma’am. I super appreciate all your help searching for Frisky. And, yeah I am still buying lots of your bread as thanks. But. But. You gotta understand that unauthorized tampering with Determination is illegal.”

Investigator Garamond agreed with his colleague. “We may need to confiscate your display doughnuts. Please understand that Determination is a more dangerous substance than you realise. It’s not safe for your establishment.”

“How so?” Muffet asked back, completely innocent.

Frisk answered, “They can melt monsters.”

“Well, I know that much dearie. I handled them with the same care as I handle deep-frying! Maximum safety, ahuhuhuhuhu~~~”
“They can poison humans too.”

The spider lady started to grow perturbed. “T-they’re not supposed to be eaten anyway.”

Gaelic… cooed over the baked goods. Determination does weird things to him. More than the normal monster folk.

“Aww,” said Muffet. “Somebody’s in love with my pastries, ahuhu~! Which one is your favourite?”

Cenna facepalmed. “No, ma’am. He’s loving the owner of your pastry’s DT.”

“Sansypants?”

Again, the mere mention of Sans set off a low growl from Gaelic. That instant reaction was both amazing and worrying.


Popping out their glowing Red Psychia, Frisk added: “He has the same Aspect as me.”

The unfamiliar segments shocked the spider woman. “Eek, what happened to your SOUL?!?! It looks like floating jigsaw pieces!”

Everyone’s focus shifted to calming Muffet down. Then, while they’re distracted, an unfortunate accident happened; Gaelic had chomped down on the DT goods. Maybe Undyne had overestimated his ability to restrain himself after all.

“Mmmmmgh???? MMMMMMMMGMGH!!!!”

The Determination Doughnut outright refused to be eaten. Its magic glued Gaelic’s teeth into the dough. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t escape the grip of a very determined piece of pastry.

Defeated. Frightened. The ferocious one was reduced to a sobbing pile of bones.

Undyne and Garamond phoned their respective science experts postpaste. The rest did their best to comfort the poor victim.

They were given three choices:

One, have Frisk try to overpower the target with their Mark.
Two, break the offending Determination with Undyne’s spear.
Three, take Gaelic to Alphys’ Lab to use the DT-Extraction machine.

Frisk summoned their star. They had it in their hand, but they had trouble applying it to the doughnut.

“…I think my Mark is standard-size,” said Frisk. “I can’t make it smaller than what I have now. What about you, Undyne?”

Undyne tried her best to balance the spear. Maybe a tiny prick was all she needed to settle the crisis.

But, that’s easier said than done. The object had a repelling force similar to a Mark. Then… there was the aftermath to consider.

Even if she could make a toothpick-sized spear, the NGAAAAAAAAAAAAAH would be too
dangerous.

…For safety’s sake, she gave up.

“I rather not,” Undyne said, “I mean, I could try. But most of my break attempts have resulted in a flaming explosion. Would Gaelic still have a skull after that???”

“Point taken.” Frisk dispelled their Mark. “So… I guess that leaves us with Option 3.”

In other words, the Lab.

Though, they were going to go there anyway -- and Undyne did want to see Alphys again -- she just wished that it was under nicer circumstances.

Chapter End Notes

Made some corrections on 16 August.

Cenna's old bed is now Queen sized. Yeah. That's a lot of space for one person.

Froggits now speak in (brackets just like Dogaressa)
Muffet offered to transport everyone to Alphys’ Lab in her van. That’s the least she could do after the mishap.

“Ahuhuhu…” she said. Clearly guilty. “I’m so, so very sorry. You’re right, Frisk. They’re too dangerous. I-I’ll have the spiders pack up the rest of the display.”

That’s good. Send them all over to Alphys. She should know how to dispose of them.

“Dispose? That’s a waste, dearie. Without that Determination, they’ll become edible again. Ahuhuhuhuhuhu~”

Hmm. True. You tell Muffet that it will require further examination.

You continue patting Snakeface to soothe him. It’ll be okay, sir. Everything will be okay.

It didn’t take long to reach the Lab. The power of automobile technology does wonders.

You hurried to press the bell. Rung it multiple times for good measure.

Alphys answered the door. She looked… tired. Exhausted. Wiped out. Broke her own personal record for the baggiest of baggy eyes.

“Oh. Hi.” Yawn. “E-everything’s ready. You should take…uh… what’s his name again? Um…”

Your worrying intensified by a metric ton.

Undyne rushed over to her girlfriend. “Al? Al you okay? When was the last time you slept?!?!”

Alas. The poor lizard fell asleep in her embrace.

Tempers flared. Undyne scooped Alphys princess style and stormed through the doors.

You tugged her shirt. Wait!

Undyne fumed. “How DARE they work Alphys to the point of exhaustion! Emergency or not, she doesn’t deserve this! I demand to speak to the boss!!!”

Shhhhh! You pointed out just how silent the Lab was. If everyone was working, there should be a lot more activity.

To your fortune, she stopped her rampage. She looked left. Right. Then left again.

“You’re right.”
Phew crisis averte--

Undyne boiled again: “Does that mean they left her alone?!?!?!”

No! That’s absolutely not it!

You heard the steady taps of a cane. Foot, foot, cane. Yes. That’s the Tsunderjudge for sure. They’re coming from the inner lab.

Then, he appeared. As impeccably dressed as ever. Does he have a cabinet full of the same clothing?

Mezil grumbled. “Pipe down, will you? Everyone is trying to sleep.”

Then, Tsunderjudge saw Snakeface: the man held hostage by a pastry filled with Doughnutination.

If speechless dots could be materialized, you imagined them piling up around the Tsunderjudge.

As for poor, poor Snakeface… his level of embarrassment gave Napstablook a run for his money.

Mezil narrowed his gaze. “Remember the last time you tried to eat my Mark?”

Gaelic shook his head.

“I see. Well, it refused to be digested. So you only ended up having a bad bout of vomiting. It was a fortunate outcome. Would have poisoned you otherwise.”

This… this wasn’t his first time?!??

You heard a voice from the upper levels of the lab. It’s one that’s too familiar, and you’re not sure if you’re ready to face yet.

It’s ‘him’. The most notorious skeleton of Monsterkind. No, not Gaster.

“Oh hey, nice timing. We could use a test subject right about now.”

Sans teleported down to ground level. There’s… there’s something off about him. Nevermind the odd manner of how he’s holding his right arm in place.

He seemed more… energetic? Lithe? Efficient?

You mentally slapped yourself. No, this is NOT the time to get impressed by the illusion of coolness! Get serious. Get mad!

Snakeface’s growl-o-meter just rocketed into critical mass. Though muzzled by a determined doughnut, he still attempted to charge at Sans.

But the Tsunderjudge would not have chaos rule the day. He snapped his fingers and spawned a butterfly filled with peaceful Determination.

Snakeface ceased all his attacks and returned to his master’s side.

So Mezil could generate the light side of DT after all. Until today, you saw little more than his battle mode.

The grump crossed his arms. “Pray tell, what do you intend to test?”

Sans replied: “The Seraph System 2.0, of course. The beastly skeleton got us Muffet’s Determination
Doughnut. 99.99% match to my previous sample. Therefore, we can compare the data to a known attempt.”

“Yes, Speaking of whom, hi!” he winked past you. “That was a good batch. Thanks a ton.”

Muffet just stood there, silent and unsure.

Oh. She doesn’t know anything, does she?

Leaning close to you, Muffet asked: “Did Sansypants lose some marbles?”

Yes. Yes he did. A lot happened last weekend. It’s…

Tsunderjudge finished the sentence for you. “It’s top secret, not to the privy of civilians. Please refrain from asking further questions.”

Muffet giggled. “My, oh my. You are quite a dashing authority figure. No wonder you have such devoted admirers.”

Grumpy Herb was not amused. “I’ll pretend that I didn’t hear that.”

“Ooooooooh, spicy!”

A spice-lover with a spicy attitude. Guess his obsession with Jungle Curry wasn’t unfounded…

Sans snorted. “That’s fun and all. But, the patient needs treating. Come, snakedog.”

Just the idea was enough to tick Snakeface off. He’s hyperventilating.

Undyne stepped forward. “No damn way, Sans! We WILL use the DT-Extraction Machine. Just as Alphys planned!”

“Oh? Guess he’s making friends faster than expected.” Shrugging, Sans surrendered his plans. “Welp. There’s that. Muffet brought more, right? Flavours shouldn’t affect the test. And a bigger sample size is always better. So… let’s get to business.”

Looking at Garamond, Mezil issued an order. “Observer, ensure a clean transaction between Sans Serif and Miss Muffet. I’ll take care of Gaelic.”

“Yes sir.” Garamond saluted. “Thank you for the continuous care of my cousin.”

“No problem. He’s my responsibility after all.”

With the sternest of glares from the grumpiest Living Victory, he then warned Sans: “Don’t do anything funny.”

“Oh,” Sans replied in his usual jokester manner. “Chillax. I won’t get ‘webbed up’ in any trouble.”

Good lord, the bad puns are back too. Ouch. If Tsunderjudge didn’t try to maintain a stoic face, he would have facepalmed.

Without retort, Mezil prepared to make his leave. He’s being extra serious.

Hmm, you wondered out loud if the Tsunderjudge thinks you’re needed anywhere.

He replied, “After we get that blasted doughnut out. In the meantime, you’re free to decide.”
Hmmm…

Stay around so you can talk with Sans, or accompany Snakeface to the DT Extraction Machine?

Choices, choices.

You’ve made your decision. You told Mezil that you’ll help Garamond watch over Sans.

“Mature,” he commended. “Very well, I’ll leave him to you.”

Thanks. You’ll catch up with him later.

“Hey squirt,” said Undyne. “I’m gonna take Alphys to her room.”

Great idea. You watched the fish rush up the stairs to the second storey, where all the bedrooms are. In the meantime, your big sister followed the tsundere into the inner lab.

Come to think of it, Alphys slept through the whole drama. Wow. She must be dead tired.

You joined Garamond to observe the transaction. Nothing fishy. Just Sans ‘compensating the victim of his nefarious plans’ by buying Muffet’s entire stock of Determination Doughnuts.

Garamond asked: “Who are you billing this to?”

“The Magus Association, of course.” Sans replied, “It’s their commission.”

“But you’re the one who conned Miss Muffet into your schemes. Use your own money.”

You crossed your arms and nodded many times.

“Fair point. OK. I’ll just ask Lady Lucy for research funds later.”

Ugh, that loophole exploitation.

The order was signed, and Muffet scurried away as fast as she could. This must be a super weird day for her.

“How are ya, kid?” Sans then asked.

Fine. What about Sans himself? You’re both concerned about his well being, and suspicious about his current state.

“Impending Abomination apocalypse aside, I’m feeling better than ever. Certainly in a less-compromised position than the snakedog on the operating table.”

Serious?

“Yup.”

Why? You can’t wrap your head around this lack of stress.

“That pod is pretty close to a miracle device. Got more rest in there than I had in a decade. Too bad humans can’t use it.”

Okay, but what about his mental state? Or, emotional. If he’s still capable of that.

You noted the relief on his face.
“Papyrus grew up for real. Walking the right path too. I don’t need to worry about him anymore. For the longest time, I feared that the world would corrupt him… like how it did for us.”

‘Thanks’ for the reminder, Sans.

“Just being frank.”

Right. Right. You remind Sans that he still needs to serve his sentence. Somehow.

“About that,” he said, “Unless circumstances change, all that awaits me is an execution. I guess nobody updated you about the ‘big scoop’?”

You showed Sans your smashed phone.

“Yikes. Had a bad time, eh?”

Yeah. You can say that again.

Say… If he could teleport around, that means his Eye is active. Why would Tsunderjudge let a death-row prisoner run free? Unless something happen to it? Surely, Sans didn’t escape from his mad attempts unscathed?

You heard Undyne returning from the bedroom. Sans glanced at that direction too.


Wait!

Too late. He teleported away. It’s darn obvious that he’s avoiding the wrath of the fishy Captain.

Undyne noticed that you and Garamond were alone. “Drats. Sans fled, didn’t he? I was ready to GRILL him!”

He said he went back to work. Yeah, you know it sounds impossible, but you also think it’s true. If he really wanted to escape, he would have done so already.

“Gah…” she grumbled.

Well, since there’s nothing left to do in the hallway, time to look for the Tsunderjudge.

“Excuse me,” said Garamond. “May I ask you two a question?”

Sure. No problem. What’s up?

“What… what do you think of Gaelic?”

Undyne rested her arms on her hips, pondering. “He… really reminds me of some of the Dog Clan’s kids: hyperactive and eager. He oughta brush up on those social skills though.”

Grinning wide, she added: “I’m sure he’ll be just fine after a few more trips around town!”

Sorry to rain on the parade, Undyne, but it’s not as simple as that. Snakeface had shared a slice of his past with you. It’s not good. In other words, he fits the ‘Cute but Troubled’ trope and needs to see a therapist. Fast.

“I see,” Garamond replied. “Thank you for your honesty.”
Right before he disappeared from sight, you saw his hand reach under his coat. He’s going for a smoke.

You wondered if you had mentioned something wrong. Could Garamond be the type who can’t accept hard truths? That doesn’t make sense with his Justice trait.

…Maybe it’s a response that he had heard too many times.

Anyway, it’s time to check on the Tsunderjudge. Huh. Wait a moment… when you had your exorcism, the DT-Extraction Machine wasn’t in the depths of the True Lab. Guess they moved it back.

“Yup,” Undyne confirmed. “We had to lug everything out for you. Thank goodness I’m strong!”

Hmm, do you remember how to walk to the old DT-Extraction chamber? If it was the same as in the Underground, then you would. But… your mental map would be outdated if Alphys didn’t remake the lab one to one.

“Heh squirt, feeling lost?” Undyne reached her hand out to you. “I know the place like the back of my hand! I’ll guide you.”

Ah, the plus perks of home turf. You thanked her for helping out.

When you entered the True Lab, you noticed that it was a lot cleaner than you remembered. Brighter too. Some of the rooms had shifted around. Did Alphys make the whole complex modifiable?

Undyne said, “Yup. It’s not tied down like the old Lab. Core Tech, all the way!”

Cooooool.

You passed by a new room labelled ‘Resting Chamber’. Okay, that doesn’t sound something Alphys would write. Lady Lucy’s demands?

“Wouldn’t surprise me if she took over the place. Her husband is Judge Thyme after all.”

Wanna take a peek?

“Sure.”

You gently opened the door. It’s dark. And quiet. Perfect for sleeping.

Oh! You could see the head of a human woman you don’t recognize. If she’s here, she must be a Magus. You don’t know her expertise though.

Then there’s a red scarf hanging over the other bed--

Wait wait wait wait wait wait.

Hold on.

Do you see that, Undyne?!

She whispered. “Yeah. I see it. Papyrus is here…!”

“Actually,” Undyne corrected herself. “I’m not even surprised that he’s around. I mean, we saw Sans. And that guy was totally critical. What shocks me is that Paps is asleep while the sun is up.”
Yeah. She’s right. Papyrus would normally skip the snooze in times like these.

But, you don’t want to disturb either of them. It’s been a long night, after all. You closed the door and resumed your journey.

Around the corner, you smelled the fragrance of Ebott Goldenflowers in the air. Huh? The place ahead was much brighter than usual. Almost like sunlight.

Curiosity compelled you to investigate.

Whoa! Someone turned this whole section of the lab into an indoor greenhouse. Garden lights hung low over rows and rows of potted Goldenflowers. They seem to be arranged by the colour of their pots?

You spotted Flowey and Chara jotting notes about the Ebott Goldenflowers.


Flowey shouted from the other end.

“Stop! Stay where you are!”

He put everything aside and leapt on over.

Pointing square at the floor with his leaf, Flowey said: “Not. One. Step. Further.”

Why so strict? You asked him.

It’s rather strange to see the ex-prince take charge on the Surface. In the Underground, Chara was always the boss.

“Because I have no idea where your shoes went! You could be carrying all sorts of nasties from goodness knows where. The last thing we need now is some infection killing all the flowers.”

“Notice how the pots are colour-coded? That’s because the Six were shattered all over those patches. Each flower is holding a small fragment. And we need to piece all of them together.”

I-is that even possible?

“Maybe,” he said. “But our first order of business is getting them healthy enough so we can transfer them to THAT contraption.”

He now pointed to a familiar row of SOUL containers. They’re hooked up to a computer… and a big mad science tube filled with a mysterious sky-blue liquid. You don’t know how to describe the apparatus otherwise.

What’s with that setup?

“You will need it to talk to The Six, Frisk.”

Pardon?!

Flowey nodded. “Yup. See, The Trashbag wants to use them for the Ocean Battle thingy. But Doctor Alphys wants to give them a second chance in life. In the end we took Papyrus’ third option. Asking them themselves.”
Ah. Yes, you understand now. Any problems so far?

“I wish there’s none,” he said, “We have a MASSIVE aphid situation. They’re THE WORST! See? This is what happens when people walk in without making sure they’re clean!”

Chara crept into the conversation. Typical of them. “Or those bugs have always been there, just kept in control by Dad’s green thumb. Either way, Judge Thyme was supposed to accompany us to look for the right insecticide. Then, well. Doughnuts happened.”

“You better get going,” said the rosy-cheeked one. “Azzie and I gotta concentrate.”

“Just shoo!” Flowey said, trying to wave you away. “And take your dirty shoes elsewhere! Like, around the bend to the right where you’ll find the big boss at the end of the hallway.”

Alright. Thanks. Keep it up, guys!

You walked, and walked, and walked… until you reached the DT-Extraction Machine at last. Doctor W.D. Gaster stood at the helm, hard at work. He’s been trying to adjust the trajectory of the machine to point at the doughnut, and not the victim.

It was once his machine. So, it made sense that he’d replace Alphys as the main technician.

Lady Lucidia stood by the side of the table, keeping Snakeface calm by holding his hand. She looked so sweet in her pearly-white sleeping gown.

“IT’s okay, Gaelic,” she said. “Just one zap and you’ll be free.”

Snakeface was in clear distress. Gosh, that’s one of the saddest whines you had ever heard.

You thought you’re gonna stay for the grand conclusion, watching the doughnut get devoured. But… the Tsunderjudge thought otherwise.

“This doughnut business is as good as done.” he said, “Follow me.”

Aww, really? What about revenge on the hostage-taking pastry?!

He shot an icy glare at you and Undyne. “Gaelic’s not for your amusement.”

…Fine. Annoyed, you let the Tsunderjudge lead you away.

Wait. Undyne is joining too?

She nodded. “Sounds like he’s got important info.”

The two of your were brought to the viewing room behind the machine. Oh, no wonder Alphys had so much space in her house! The majority of her anime collection got moved to the True Lab!

There’s a state-of-the-art home-theater set, some snacks, and a mini-fridge. You don’t know if it’s stocked, but you know the room is perfect for binging. The only thing missing would be a nice big sofa.

“Beanbags, hm?” The old man commented as he made himself right at home by plopping on the red one. “Sit down, both of you.”

Okay. Sounds like you’re in for a long talk.
You and Undyne shared the green bag. There’s a third blue one, but what’s the fun in sitting alone?

So, what's up?

“Garamond relayed his concerns to me about your answers to his question.”

The one about Snakeface?

“Yes,” Mezil replied. “…Snakeface, huh? What a label. Well. I can’t say I’m surprised. Let’s see if you would still call him that once you look at this.”

He handed you a photograph.

You and Undyne peered at an unfamiliar skeleton. In the picture, he was lounging by the beachside in a simple shirt-shortpants combo.

He reminded you of Garamond. Golem-like. Just a lot more energetic. If Garamond’s a rock, this person is the wind.

There’s something oddly familiar about him. Like, you should recognize this bloke.

“That guy’s handsome,” Undyne commented. “I bet Alphys would go gaga.”

Who’s that?

The Tsunderjudge thus answered. “Gaelic.”

You were shocked.

Undyne first pointed to the photo, then to the general direction of the DT-Extraction Machine. “This is THAT guy?!?”

-200% Ferocity, +30% Cute, +70% Hunk!

Then… what happened…?

“He listened to the voice of fools,” said the elder, “They encouraged him to get a face that befits his ‘odd behaviour’.”

…………………………

You tell Mezil that you have questions.

Investigation mode, activated.

> Odd Behaviour.

Gaelic’s behaviour doesn’t seem natural. At times he acts more like a hungering beast of the wild than a civilized person.

“You’re right,” said Mezil. “It is abnormal. As for your suggestion to find a therapist, I’m afraid to say that none were effective. Their mere qualifications as professionals was enough to cause wariness in Gaelic.”
That’s oxymoronic. Professionals are professionals for a reason!

“Perhaps he sensed that they’re likely to treat him as merely their job? Gaelic will not open his heart unless you prove to be more than a business partner. I’m surprised he confessed to you so soon.”

That maxed out Charisma stat has gotta do something.

“As you say. Well then, why don’t we move on to the source of his odd behaviour? I’ll give you a clue.”

Mezil pointed to his eyes.

Oh. You get it now.

> Seer’s Eye.

It has something to do with their special Eye, doesn’t it?

“How much do you know about the ‘Awakening’?”

Hmm… you know Sans scarred his mom’s arm for life. Even post-Amalgamation!

Then there’s Papyrus, who couldn’t control his powers for a week or so. Lotsa physical pain, and a ton of creepy visions!

Undyne grimaced. “It was horrible watching Paps go through that crap.”

“More ignorance.” Mezil shook his head. “I suppose that can’t be helped.”

“The Awakening is described as follows: the moment a Seer’s Eye rouses from its slumber, Determination levels rise, along with the mental alterations required to comprehend this new sight. The average age for an Awakening is between seven to ten years old. The ideal age range is past six and before thirteen. Do you know why?”

Undyne raised her hand. “I know! It’s because of the brain! I read that humans develop 90% of their brain by six. I bet it’s the same for skeletons.”

“Not bad. You know that much at least. You’re correct: the majority of a human’s brain completes by six. The rest involves fine-tuning and puberty. So, what do you think happens if a Seer’s Eye awakens before the brain has acquired a steady foundation?”

They get… burned?

“Correct.”

You hoped that you had guessed wrong. Does that mean… Papyrus… he…

Scrunching her brows, Undyne said: “What are you thinking, Frisk? He’s okay! Unusual, but functioning better than Sans.”

Mezil then asked, “Have you ever known Papyrus before his Awakening?”
“Of course! I watched him grow up in the Underground.”

“False. By the time you first met him, the process had already happened. My wife noticed a discrepancy with Papyrus’ duration. An Awakening lasts for exactly 7 days, or 168 hours. No more, no less. Papyrus appeared to finish the process early. In truth it was just a continuation of the past.”

Hmm… you wondered: how many Seers have you met so far?

There’s Papyrus, Sans, Doctor Gaster, Lady Lucy, Garamond, Gaelic. If you recall correctly, Sans awakened when he was 7. That’s within the ideal age range. Papyrus is the unusual case. What about the rest?


And…

“Gaelic Blanc: age five.”

Oh. Oh no.

A new option popped up before you.

> Odd Behaviour (Continued)

> Other cases?

You could choose to dig more into Snakeface’s past, or get a glimpse of a wider world.

……………………...

Maybe you’d understand everyone better if you knew the risks.

> Other cases?

You’re sure that Gaelic isn’t the only victim. Were there other bad Awakenings?

Mezil raised a brow. Seems like he didn’t expect you to take this route.

He said, “Yes. There were. It’s the prime reason why the Seer’s Seal was invented in the first place.”

“My own wife too almost succumbed to her powers, but she had access to the best facilities to minimize the damage. Even then, you’ve experienced her quirks.”

Undyne commented, “Yeah… Her speech tends to get ultra robotic.”

“If the power is too great for the bearer, it consumes their very minds: their ‘humanity’. The ultimate cost. Victims could end up wild and insane. Or they become a shell of their former selves, lost in a coma of visions. That’s just two of the most extreme outcomes.”
“Remember that adults are not immune to this ‘overburn’ phenomenon. Suicide is one of the leading cause of deaths among their kind. Desperate, they take their own lives before they lose their remaining shred of consciousness.”

…So that’s what Sans meant about The Eye being both ‘a blessing and a curse’.

> Odd Behaviour (Continued)

Mezil and his glare… it’s always the same levels of ‘stern’. That’s why it’s hard to tell what he’s truly feeling.

“Gaelic’s initial readings weren’t good from the beginning,” he said. “Purple. Orange. Persevering in reckless bravery. It lacks a stabilizing colour, and his inborn magic further exacerbated the problem. Doctors suggested his parents to give him up.”

They didn’t, right?

“No. They raised him the best they could. Even so, Garamond told me that Gaelic already showed troubling traits as a toddler. He was slow to speak, loved to chew, and didn’t get along well with the other children. His parents tried positive reinforcement to encourage more socially acceptable behaviours. Alas, they were too late.”

“…Perhaps their efforts might have been more fruitful if they had him Sealed in time.”

Mezil clicked his tongue. A strange, childish habit for a man like him. You wondered if he picked it up as a kid somewhere?

“Twenty-five years ago… When my wife and I took Gaelic in, my father-in-law warned us about the weight of our decisions. Like a sacred oath, keeping him meant that we are responsible for his entire life: from that moment to the day he returns to dust.”

He rested his head against the shelf, spacing out at the ceiling. It’s a rare moment of vulnerability.

“…I wondered what would have happened if we kept him ‘free’. Yet, that’s the least we could have done to secure his future. Nothing on this earth could ever repay the debt we owe to him.”

“Such ungratefulness,” Mezil said with a bitter tone, “Gaelic -- the saviour of Lemuria -- shunned forever by the people he protected.”

The fish gasped. “HANG ON A MOMENT!” said Undyne, “Did you just say, ‘SAVIOUR’?!?!?!”

> Saviour of Lemuria

You slammed that button fast and hard. What the heck is this revelation???

How, Tsunderjudge?! How?!?

Mezil squeezed his cane. You sensed the memories stirring up a spike of dark Determination.
“After we lost Mu, my wife and I tackled two separate calamities. I hunted down the human enemy, while Lucidia teamed up with the armies of Atlantis to stop the Ocean Abomination. However, by consuming those very same forces, the now unstoppable Abomination bulldozed over the last line of defense. And only one island remained…”

Lemuria.

“Indeed. The human Magi required to cast the Seven Soul Barrier struggled to arrive at the site of calamity. Lucidia was prepared to sacrifice her life to buy them precious seconds. But I had a feeling that she had all but given up hope for survival…”

“Then a great wyrm emerged from the depths of the ocean.”

That must be Gaelic! His full-sized Blaster is freaking MASSIVE!

“It coiled around the Abomination, halting its rampage. The goo wrestled. Flowed. Yet, the wyrm persisted. That action became the ultimate game-changer, stalling the charge just enough for backup to arrive at the scene.”

Shouldn’t they have seen that huge behemoth?

Mezil sighed. “He ran out of strength right before their arrival. The Magi only saw my wife reinforcing a massive spinal coil. The skull, where Gaelic was, had already disintegrated.”

So Lady Lucy’s the sole witness to his heroic deeds. No wonder they’re so close.

“They were childhood friends first. But I digress.”

D-does Gaelic even remember that event?

Mezil frowned. “Maybe only as a fragment of a dream. I’m sure you noticed he has memory issues.”

If he’s a true hero, then why was his life a total crapsack? He should have been celebrated by everyone! Then maybe that would have negated his bad reputation.

“Lucidia chose to keep it a secret.”

But, why???

“A ‘hero’ is expected to behave in a certain way. Fail that standard and disappointment follows. If Gaelic was hailed as a hero… his downfall would only be greater.”

Undyne rubbed her arm. “Believe it or not, I understand what he means. There are a lot of expectations when you fill in the big shoes. Man, my Underground days were quite a stressful lot.”

No kidding. You remembered Dad and Alphys as well. They all carried the weight of a great burden on their shoulders.

Then, what about Lady Lucidia herself? She should be of high status, no?

“Frisk,” said Mezil. “My wife lost much of her standing because of Gaelic and I. We were seen as bad company. Omens. Many view her as the witch who married a DEMON, and the keeper of a violent beast.”

T-that’s so unfair!
“Such is life.”

You’re getting frustrated. Super frustrated.

“Therein lies the sad truth of Gaelic Blanc.” Mezil added. “With each intensive activation of The Eye, his mind further deteriorates. Those heroic deeds serve only to worsen his condition, and his social status among his kin.”

“It’s for that very reason that my wife hesitates in bringing another powerful Seer to the frontlines of the Ocean Battle. What if victory demands unmentionable sacrifices? For example: Gaelic’s last remaining shred of sanity? Or Papyrus’ well being?”

Your heart sank. You understand the dilemma now. So did Undyne.

“No!” your friend yelled. “I-I won’t let Papyrus lose his mind. I won’t let Gaelic lose his either. Those two barely started life!!!”

You agree. Snakeface was sooooo happy that he handled muscle-freak Aaron without issues! You don’t want to see him tossed back into the looney-bin.

And, the last thing you want is Papyrus to fall into a permacoma: a vegetable -- a fruit -- an actual papaya!

Mezil closed his eyes, solemn.

“I wouldn’t want to condemn them either. But unless everyone else gives it their all, there’s a chance that circumstances may not grant them the luxury.”

True…

“Think long and hard -- Crimson Keeper Frisk -- whether you would be determined enough to seek an impossible dream, or be forced to give it up for the illusion of certainty.”

“The choice is up to you.”

Chapter End Notes

I still need to poke the Megaman X story from time to time, so next chapter is on the schedule of: 'released when it's done'.
‘One quest done, a new one rises. The Hero’s trials and temptations continue.’

‘If only it was a story book that ended with ‘happily ever after’.’

Hours had passed since Papyrus woke up from his long nap. He refused to call it ‘sleep’.

He resumed his internet research on the Aratet welcoming feast. Whatever information he could find matched Lady Lucidia’s statements: there was nothing new.

On her advice, he then tried checking the neighbouring tribes. He learned much about the other cultures of that region. Except, they’re not what he’s looking for.

Papyrus zoned out before the screen. When his focus blurred, the monitor shone in a bright, white light.

White, just like the Gates of Heaven.

**WHAT EVEN WAS THAT?**

**IT’S GOOD, RIGHT? IF IT WAS GOOD... WHY DID IT HURT?**

Not the kind to sit still, Papyrus got up from the computer chair and sought for someone who could explain.

**MISTER MAGUS WOULD KNOW THE MOST!**

But try as he might, he couldn’t find the elder anywhere. Neither could he find the flower children.

**HMMM... IT APPEARS THAT THEY HAVE LEFT FOR THEIR ERRANDS. THEY DID SAY THEY NEED TO FIND SOME DELECTABLE POISONS FOR THOSE TINY SAP-DRAINING PESTS.**

**MAYBE FRISK WOULD KNOW? LET’S GIVE THEM A RING FROM THE GREAT PAPYRUS!**

He took out his phone and dialled the number. At the same time, he heard a ringtone going off in the distance. He brushed it off as a coincidence.

Frisk answered the call: “*Hi Papyrus. Could you come over to the workshop?*”

A rather puzzling response. Nonetheless he replied: “*OKAY. I’LL BE RIGHT THERE IN A JIFFY!*”

So he made his way to the workshop. The moment he opened the door he saw Frisk and… Alphys!

It appeared that Alphys just finished a mechanical doohickey, evident with the soft cloth she used to clean her hands.

Smashed remains lay on the table, taken apart to make way for a replacement.
“Wow Frisk.” she said, “You’re lucky that the memory components survived. All I needed to do was to transfer them to a new phone.”

Frisk lifted their phone high up in the air. The pose reminded him of those old-fashioned action adventure games he used to play.

Excited and overjoyed. They cried out: “It’s repaired!”

Papyrus furrowed his brows and placed his arms on his hips. “YOU CALLED ME HERE JUST TO SHOW OFF?”

The feigned disapproval soon turned into praise. “EXCELLENT! I SEE THAT YOU’RE A CONNOISSEUR OF IMPROMPTU ACTING!”

“…BUT, WHAT RAMBUNCTIOUS ROUGHHOUSING DID YOU TANGLE YOURSELF WITH TO ACCOMPLISH SUCH A MESS? NOT EVEN UNDYNE AT HER BEST DESTROYED YOUR PHONE!”

Frisk responded with an awkward chuckle. “Well, that… I… uh… fell into a really deep hole up on Mount Ebott.”

A second later, Papyrus bugged his eyes out. “GREAT GOOGLY MOOGLY!!! ARE WE SECRETLY IN THE UNDERGROUND NOW?!?!?”

“No.” Frisk reassured. “Totally not. Don’t worry, Papyrus. We’re never going back to those times again.”

Huge. Relief. “PHEW. WELL THEN, YOU NEED NOT WORRY ABOUT ME EITHER! I AM FINE AND DANDY AND HALFWAY FABULOUS.”

Both squinted at Papyrus, suspicious.

“Halfway?” asked Alphys.

“Why not full-way?” added Frisk.

Before he could answer, Papyrus was tackled by a familiar muscular hug.

“Papyrus,” said Undyne, her voice cracking. “You’re fine. I’m so, so happy.”

“UNDYNE?” Papyrus felt a bit disconcerted. The big-sister figure he knew wasn’t this sappy. He was worried that something broke her spirit.

But, not long after, Undyne let go of her hug and slapped her hands between his skull.

“Don’t. Ever. Risk your life for no reason again!”

Add a point-blank yell for good measure. “EVER!!!”

What a huge relief to see his friend act her usual self.

“OKAY, I’LL DO MY BEST TO NOT BECOME A PILE OF MAGICAL CALCIUM DUST.”

“You said it, okay?” Undyne then said: “Now what the heck is up with you being ‘halfway fabulous’? Why not ‘full-way’?”
Papyrus started sweating. The last thing he wanted to do was to upset everyone further.

*OH NO.*

*WHAT SHOULD I SAY? FRISK DESERVES A LITTLE BREAK. ESPECIALLY IF I DON'T COOK UP THAT WELCOMING FEAST.*

Then, he recalled the other issue that bugged his mind.

“**WELL…**” he tapped the edge of his fingers. “**THE BIG EVENT DID LEAVE ME RATHER RATTLED. FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT'S WITH THE WHITE LIGHT? THE GATES OF HEAVEN? DID SANS FINALLY HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART?**”

More suspicious squinting. The addition of the fish added much intensity to the atmosphere, like a spoonful too heavy on the chili flakes.


Frisk lifted up a finger. “How did you know?”

“Call me skeptical.” Undyne crossed her arms. “But he behaved just as I’d expect.”

Papyrus puffed his chest. “**HE’S MY BROTHER! I KNOW WHEN HE’S SANS AND WHEN HE’S A DIFFERENT SANS. EVEN IF MY TRACK RECORD ON OBSERVATION ISN’T ALWAYS STRAIGHT.**”

“…On a normal day, I would have made a fuss. But. Y’know. I rather focus on something else right now.”

Glancing to the side, an awkward Undyne rubbed her arm.

“Papyrus,” she continued, “Queen Toriel and myself were in the hot seats of negotiations. The situation with the Ocean Battle isn’t looking good. To make matters worse, nobody proposed a better idea yet. Anyway, what about that light again?”

Frisk and Alphys blinked at each other.

“Did you see it, Alphys?” the kid asked.

“No?” The lizard squeezed her hands. “I was outside with the rest of the town, helping Gaster-sensei close a giant door in the sky. W-was that what Papyrus talked about?”

Frisk shook their head. “No. It’s not. That’s just Sans. What we experienced was super different.”

“Yeah,” said Undyne. “It’s CRAZY BRIGHT! And also CRAZY HEAVY! I thought I was going to get squashed by that mysterious weight. Good thing Frisk used that Legendary Artifact.”

“Yup,” They agreed. “The Grandmaster said it’s some kind of a substitute. I don’t understand the full picture though.”

“T-that’s scary…”

Turning to Papyrus, Alphys asked: “Why do you want to know?”

“**IF THE GATES OF HEAVEN COULD CHANGE SANS, MAYBE IT COULD CHANGE THE OCEAN AMALGAMATE TOO. MAKE THEM SURRENDER PEACEFULLY.**”
The lizard fiddled with her claws. “I-if what you said is true, then that light would save us a lot of trouble. And danger. T-that could resolve our current deadlock!”

Pouting, Frisk asked, “But how are we even going to do that?”

“Well, S-Sans supercharged himself with DT and said a prayer. If we could replicate that scenario, maybe we can summon the same structure?”

Undyne rolled her eye and groaned. “Does that mean we have to ask ‘that’ guy?”

Papyrus asked, “THE ALMIGHTY?”

“No,” said the human. Who’s about as reluctant as Undyne. “Sans.”

“OH. LET’S GO AND LOOK FOR HIM THEN.”

They found ‘him’, hard at work, mulling over a list of data on the computer screen. No jokes. No pranks. Quite OOC.

Alphys beckoned Frisk and Undyne to a corner. Although Papyrus didn’t listen to the actual conversation itself, he knew what she’s going to say:

‘Sans has become a cripple.’

Never in Papyrus’ life had he imagined his brother would end up like this. A twinge of grief pricked his heart. But, at the same time, he counted his blessings; the fact that his brother survived was a miracle in itself.

“SANS, DO YOU HAVE A MOMENT?”

The short disabled scientist stopped whatever he was doing posthaste. He turned around in his swivel chair, using his telekinesis to stop it at the right direction.

“Ey, there’s the four of ya,” said Sans. “‘Sup?”

They explained their idea. But… the elder brother just shook his head.

“Jeez.” said Sans. “You guys realise that The Almighty could have just ignored me, right? Kept the gates to his exclusive dimension sealed, no matter what. See, if this fellow is truly ‘All Mighty’, he has no obligation to bow down to anyone’s wishes. Limitless Determination and such.”

Undyne fumed. “What?! But our world is at stake!”

“I didn’t say he’ll do nothing. I’m saying that he might not do things your way. Big difference. He ain’t a genie in a magic bottle. So, forget about trying to science together a result.”

“THEN… THEN WHAT SHOULD WE DO?” asked Papyrus. “SURELY, THERE MUST BE A WAY TO DISCUSS!”

“You gotta ask the expert,” said Sans. “It ain’t Cenna. Ain’t snakedog either. Maybe not even Lady Lucy or Judge Thyme. Remember what Persona said? That DEMON dissed a certain ‘old master’. Said his own kids didn’t listen to him very well.”

Frisk tilted their head. “You mean, The Grandmaster? The guy who taught me how to use The Legendary Artifact?”
"Bingo," Sans turned back to the screen. "Welp, I think Lady Lucy can help you connect the comm lines. The Grandmaster is probably still at the hospital, having tea with Gerson at this very moment."

Pumped and motivated, Undyne exclaimed: "What are we waiting for then?! Let’s get a video call going!"

The entourage left, going forward with hope and excitement. Papyrus was filled with similar positivity, yet... he lagged in his steps.

He stopped and let the group go ahead without him.

Looking back, he said to Sans: "I KNOW YOU HAVE MORE TO TELL ME."

The elder brother nodded. "I do. But, not right now. I’d rather wait till I can get everyone is in the same room together. And with everyone, I mean everyone."

"AN APOLOGY IS WAY OVERDUE!!! …EXCEPT, THAT’S NOT WHAT I’M ASKING FOR."

"SANS, YOU WOULDN’T HAVE MADE THAT PRAYER OUT OF NOWHERE. YOU MUST HAVE READ ABOUT IT BEFORE! THE BROTHER I KNOW WON’T BANK HIS FINAL GAMBIT ON MERE POP-CULTURE HEARSAY."

"Heh. You’re right. Like I said, I did do my research to know where my namesake really came from."

"THEN YOU ALWAYS KNEW THAT LIGHT WOULD KILL US?"

"Yeah... Heaven is only for the pure. Impure folk tends to die in The Almighty’s direct presence. Well, according to the book at least. Not like anyone’s ever seen His face."

"BUT YOU WERE TALKING TO SOMEBODY!"

"Yup. How do I explain this? I was looking at more than one person, but at the same time they’re united. It’s complicated. Don’t wreck your brain about it."

Sans continued, “Either way, this other person at the Gate was the one who told me that nobody was ready. Not even me. Being the ‘best world’ does come with a hefty entrance fee. One we haven’t claimed yet. If you wanna know more, you gotta read the manual.”

"WHERE CAN I READ THIS BOOK?"

"Eh, you can find it on the net. Quite easily too."

“But Papyrus…” He pointed at his Eye. “You’re a Seer. Why not ascertain the writings for yourself? That is, if you’re prepared to give up everything that you thought you knew.”

The tall one lifted a confused brow. “WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I THOUGHT I ALREADY DID? THE CORE INCIDENT AND WHATNOT."

“Well,” said Sans. “Are you willing do go even deeper?”

“OF COURSE! THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL NOT LET GO OF AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH, NYEH HEH HEH!”

The elder brother smiled back. “Great. Lookin’ forward to the results.”
“OKAY. THANK YOU. AND, SANS, DON'T FORGET TO TAKE YOUR MANDATORY BREAKS!”

* * *

Uncle Gaster’s voice rang in the air, in all his usual exasperated gentlemanliness.

“Sir! For the love of all things good, PLEASE stop trying to bite me! ‘Tis me, remember, Gaster the Doughnut-slayer!”

When Papyrus arrived at the scene of Alphys’ living room, he found the goopy Uncle Gaster squashing, stretching, and flowing to escape from Gaelic’s fierce defensiveness.

Despite his genius uncle having saved his wise but troubled mentor from some indescribable unfortunate accident involving a doughnut, the two now found themselves at odds.

For Papyrus it was easy to see why.

Behind the guardian, on the sofa, lay none other than Lady Lucidia. The fire of the Seers continued to leak out from under her eyelids.

Undyne grunted. “What now?!”

Gaster explained, “W-well we were just discussing something, and midway through our chat she fainted!”

Papyrus’ dear mother shook her fist in the air. Meanwhile dear father wagged his finger in sheer disapproval.

“Fine, fine! I admit I skimped on the details,” said Uncle Gaster. “I made Lady Lucidia beyond livid before she fainted. Is that better?”

Double thumbs up from the skeleparents.

“Either way, Captain. I NEED to examine Lady Lucidia. I am a qualified doctor for Seers! Even if my scientific safety standards need some polishing.”

Frisk and their friends tried to convince Gaelic to let Uncle Gaster do his job. But, their efforts were repelled with a lot of snappy snarling.

The sight aggravated Papyrus. How RUDE could they get? Don't they know the basics of giving people space?

“LET MISTER GAELIC WORK! HE CAN'T DO THAT IF YOU KEEP SETTING HIM OFF.”

“Hey, Paps has a point.”
“Maybe we were too pushy.”
“Let’s move.”

So, the whole group took a few steps back.

The aggression stopped in an instant. Gaelic proceeded to examine the fainted Lucidia. He cupped
his hands over her face and breathed deep.

What a peculiar method of analyzing someone. Papyrus understood that if Gaster were to be in charge, he would observe with sight. Zoom in with his microscopic vision. But Gaelic’s ways were different: he breathed in the fumes and fire of her magic.

A few seconds of processing later, her guardian growled. Hard. A rattling ball of rage. The quantity of anger shot off the charts sky high.

“What did ya do to her?!?” accused Gaelic.

“Nothing!” Gaster tried to defend himself. “We just talked!”

The other hissed back. “Then what talk ye about to make her inflict this on herself?!”

All attention landed square on Uncle Gaster. Goodness gracious, he continued to perpetuate a controversial reputation.

“It’s…” The scientist cleared his throat. “It’s about ‘humanity’. Rather, what we count as humanity.”

“Young ones. You know how the Underground differentiated humans from monsters? It’s by the capacity to ignore the goodness of the soul and inflict killing intent. Lady Lucidia swore by different nuances. We clashed over the subject matter and… this unfortunate incident happened.”

“What evil did ya accuse?” Gaelic seethed. “That she be a mad witch, cold and callous??? Are those the words ye uttered?!”

Gaster exclaimed, “What?! No! None of the sort! I’m the mad scientist here, not her. It’s just an argument that got too heated.”

“…Is she really gonna be okay?” Alphys commented: “She seemed like an overloaded computer crashing from a glitch, speaking in a gibberish mixture of Code and Binary before fainting.”

“I hope so, dear. I really do.” Gaster’s being rippled.

* * *

Hours continue to pass with no substantial progress. The sun -- in all its bright glory -- started to sink across the sky.

Papyrus doesn’t know how Aiden counted his hours. Would he consider it ‘times up’ by midnight? Or by the cycle of dawn and dusk? Maybe other means?

I WASTED MY FIRST DAY…

He thought of filling his time with assorted household chores. Mess had a tendency to pile up in the midst of busywork after all.

But could he clean knowing that he had a looming deadline over his skull? Worse still, a trap that he had so foolishly walked into?

Not at all.
WHY AM I RACKING MY SKULL SO HARD FOR?

I COULD JUST PEEK INTO A TIMELINE WHERE I HAVE MADE A SUCCESSFUL FEAST. AND THEN, COPY THE ACTIONS ONE TO ONE. LIKE READING THE ANSWERS AT THE BACK OF A WORKBOOK! AB-SO-LUTE-LY BRILLIANT!

IF THAT DOESN’T WORK, I COULD ALWAYS LOOK INTO THE ARATET’S PAST FEASTS AND FIGURE OUT THE NUANCES OF THEIR DISHES. LIKE STUDYING OLD EXAM QUESTIONS! NYEH HEH HEH! SUCCESS IS GUARANTEED!

BUT, THE FAIRY GODMOTHER TOLD ME NOT TO USE MY EYE YET. IT NEEDS TIME TO HEAL.

IF I USE IT NOW, I MIGHT.

I… MIGHT...

I MIGHT END UP WITH A DEAD LIMB OF MY OWN...

Papyrus clutched his scarf.

IS THAT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FAIRY GODMOTHER? SHE OVERUSED HER TIRED EYES?...

...AM I PREPARED TO DIVE DEEPER THAN I THOUGHT POSSIBLE? TO GO SO FAR THAT I MAY NOT COME BACK?

With his slow and shaking hands, Papyrus unwound the scarf. He folded it into a nice rectangle. Rested it on his lap.

Lady Lucidia’s implants activated. The intricate patterns of dots and vines lit up in red, burning away what Determination the body couldn’t handle.

So delicate. They look like they’d break apart upon a touch…

WHAT IF I’M TEMPTING SOME KIND OF DARK FATE?...

WILL MY LUCK FINALLY RUN OUT?

STILL, I CAN’T LET OTHERS SUFFER ANY MORE.

I MUST DO MY PART!

Just when he gathered the courage, he heard the soft rumbles of a car coming from a nearby window.

He looked outside. There he was: Judge Thyme had returned.

Without thinking twice, he wrapped his scarf around his neck and rushed out of the room to greet them.

Papyrus, however, walked into a rather peculiar sight: Flower Chara sat in their pot, balancing on top of Mezil Thyme’s grey head. Meanwhile, the man carried Flowey in his non-cane hand.

Everyone else witnessed the same deal. So… on one side stood a whole group of puzzled people. The other, flower pot man.
Lady Lucidia grumbled. “You’re late.”

“Sorry,” Mezil replied. “It’s quite difficult to walk at any reasonable speed with Chara on my head, but they insisted.”

Chara grinned. “Well, he may be late but I’m on Thyme!”

Instant silence. Papyrus’s bones rattled, resisting the urge to scream at that lame and lazy pun.

On the other hand… Sans. Sans had the biggest, happiest grin.

“Eeeeyyyy!” he cheered.

Dear father Roman wasn’t any better. The moment when the silence broke, that left arm sprung out a huge thumbs-up to Chara.

Gaster facepalmed together with dear mother Helvetica. “Roman, no.”

“Heh, looks like somebody’s gonna have a ‘bad Thyme’.”

“Sans.”

“Courtesy of a true ‘Thyme Lord’.”

“Sans, stop.”

“You mean it’s ‘Thyme’ to stop?”

Papyrus couldn’t keep it in anymore. His days worth of stress combusted into the loudest scream he had in ages.

“NYEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

* * *

Embarrassing nuclear meltdown on bad puns aside… it’s dinner now.

The star of today’s meal was none other than the fabled Jungle Curry. And some plain ol’ fish and chips for those who cannot tolerate the spice.

The sheer intensity of spice smacked Papyrus square in the face. He knew there was chili. He had dabbled with chili flakes in his pasta adventures before. But…

Everything else?
What were they?

It reminded him of the times where he walked into the spice isle, except STRONGER. And what’s with the lemon-yet-not-lemon aroma?

Even the rice seemed different. The grains he was familiar with weren’t so opaque white. These smell of coconuts. Plus some other sweetness that he doesn’t recognize.

Frisk kept staring at the curry itself. Squinting their eyes, they said: “I can’t tell the difference between the meat and the sauce.”

“You’re not supposed to,” said Mezil.
Flowey and Chara were ill-impressed. They glared at the mounts of meaty spiciness with clear suspicion on their faces.

“It looks like doo-doo,” said the ex-prince.

“Eyup,” Chara nodded. “I’ll stick to my sugary diet of sunlight and chocolate, thank you very much.”

Papyrus said, “BUT YOU’RE PLANTS! DOO-DOOS ARE PLANT FOOD, RIGHT?”

“Bzzt, WRONG!” Flowey huffed. “Just because we’re plants doesn’t mean we eat doo-doo! Those ‘microbe’ thingies break the doo-doo down into usable nutrients first. It’s only AFTER the process that we can suck the goods up through our roots.”

Miss hot-shot Vanquisher already grabbed a paper plate. “I ain’t the one with a bowel tantrum, so I’m totally fine with this as dinner!”

Clapping her hands in glee, Cenna’s friend ‘Anise Anise’ was just as enthusiastic. “I finally get to try Judge Thyme’s guilty favourite of legend!”

Meanwhile, Uncle Gaster rubbed his chin at the cartons of full-cream milk. “Why not water?”

“Capsaicin is oil-soluble, sir.” Anise explained, “Water won’t do much to quench the burn. Low-fat or skimmed milk won’t help either. Yoghurt is great too!”

“I see, I see. Interesting… You seem to know your ingredients. I thought of asking Lady Lucidia but, hmm.” Gaster then started to mutter to himself. “Maybe this Anise girl could help me make a substitute.”

Once everything was set up, it’s time to begin the buffet. Those who’re familiar with the dish scooped up a proper portion, while those unfamiliar started with a smaller taste test.

Lady Lucidia didn’t even touch the stuff; she went straight for the fish and chips. Someone here doesn’t like curry.

Papyrus also noticed that she’s been broody since the quarrel with Uncle Gaster. Her mood, foul. Her tempers, simmering.

“FAIRY GODMOTHER…?”

“Please don’t worry about me.” Then, she excused herself to eat in private.

MAYBE I SHOULD LET HER COOL DOWN FIRST.

I WONDER HOW ARE THE REST?

While Papyrus surveyed to make sure everyone had their share, he noticed that Gaelic, Garamond, and Cenna didn’t use any cutlery. They opted to use their right hand. He’s not surprised if the wild one chose the tool-free method. But the rest? How peculiar.

So he asked: “WE DON’T HAVE ENOUGH SPOONS? I COULD GET MORE IF YOU NEED.”

To his surprise, they declined.

Gaelic grinned as he mixed the spice with the rice. “‘Tis be the way rice was eaten in days o’ old.”
“Ahuh,” Cenna nodded. “Takes practice, but it’s dang satisfying once you get the hang of it. Also, protip: it makes eating chicken on the bone easy.”

Garamond had a more practical reason: “I don’t like soft plastic spoons. They bend or break easily.”

Curiosity tempted Papyrus to try. He would have to remove his gloves, wash his hands, and make a mess. But he’s more than open to learn of foreign cultures! Now more than ever.

Then everyone got distracted by the intense coughing and wheezing coming from Sans. He choked so hard that he didn’t even have the opportunity to make any more atrocious spice puns. He glugged down his cup of milk in one go.

“I taste nothing but bitterness and pain,” said Sans, panting away. “How could anyone eat this?! It’s worse than badghetti!”

Undyne chuckled. “Jeez, do you have to be so dramatic? I think there’s something wrong with YOUR tastebuds. This thing is AWESOME!!!!”

Alphys agreed, “I-it’s spicy, but it’s so floral. Like I’m eating straight from King Asgore’s dream garden! This is waaaaaaaay better than generic hot sauce.”

“Agreed,” said Frisk. They continued to eat their curry with a straight face. Sweating, but otherwise fine. “Papyrus, why don’t you try it?”

“I SUPPOSE I SHOULD…”

Step one, mix the rice with the curry.
Step two, scoop a bite. Try to get some meat.
Step three, eat.

Chew, chew, chew, chew. Swallow.

“I FELT LIKE MY SKULL WAS ON FIRE,” said Papyrus. “BUT IT WAS MORE THAN JUST HEAT. IT HAD AN AROMATIC MEDLEY OF SEASONED SPICES THAT I CAN’T RECOGNIZE, COMBINED WITH THE RICHNESS OF FRAGRANT COCONUT AND SAVOURY BEEF…”

“QUITE A DELIGHT, ACTUALLY! VERY U-MA-MI!”

Undyne grinned. “See? You’re the only one who thinks it’s bitterness and pain.”

There it was: that mischievous, catty, ‘kawaii’ smile. The fish had a nefarious scheme brewing in her noggin. How strange the tables turned. Usually the short trickster did all the plotting.

“Ooooh don’t tell me you’re one of those who can’t take the HEAT!”

Sans backed away. “I don’t like that look on your face.”

The fish managed to grab Sans by his dead arm, preventing him from teleporting. She then proceeded to force a whole plate of Jungle Curry into his mouth.

“JUSTICE!” So yelled Undyne, “JUSTICE!!! This is for all the UTTER BULLSHIT you put us through during the previous arc! FUFUFUFUFUFUFUFU!!!!!”

Sans gurgled through his stuffed mouth, burning at a chemical level from the insides of his skull.
“Oh? What’s that? You want ANOTHER??? Sure thing! I can’t wait to cram a year’s worth of vengeance down your throat!”

Papyrus to the rescue. “BAD UNDYNE! NO ONE SHOULD BE PLAYING WITH FOOD. UNLESS IT’S A FOOD FIGHT, OF COURSE.”

With the two separated, Papyrus could concentrate on taking care of his brother.

One cup of milk wasn’t enough to quench the heat this time. Sans ended up claiming an entire carton for himself.

“WILL YOU BE ALRIGHT?” asked Papyrus.

“Uh. Yeah…” Hack, wheeze, cough. “Eventually…. Say, when are you gonna eat?”

What Sans said was true. Other than the initial test munch, Papyrus had yet to have any of his dinner.

“OH, THAT’S RIGHT. UM… I DON’T HAVE THAT BIG OF AN APPETITE. TO COMPENSATE, I THINK I’LL HAVE A BIT OF EVERYTHING.”

That’s what he did: Papyrus took some Jungle Curry, some rice, some fish fried in batter, some chips, and a dollop of tartar sauce. Can’t have fish and chips without tartar sauce.

*OH RIGHT, NEVER FORGET MILK! ESSENTIAL FOR STRONG BONES.*

One cup, for himself.

His pickings ended up being too heavy for him to carry on the paper plate, so he sat down at the table proper…

…Which by sheer coincidence, ended up right next to Judge Thyme. He’s almost done with his meal by now.

“HELLO THERE MISTER MAGUS! DID YOU ENJOY YOUR DINNER?”

“Yes,” the man replied. “I see you took the path of variety. That’s fine. Jungle Curry can be an acquired taste. I don’t expect you to make it your full meal on the first round.”

“IT BECAME A HIT THOUGH. THE ONLY ONES WHO DIDN’T LIKE IT WERE SANS AND LADY LUCY.”

“My wife has company at long last, it seems. She’s not fond of intense pungent flavours. Or anything that’s too much for her senses. Though, despite her aversion to intensity, she does like certain cured and fermented produces.”

“I SEE. BY THE WAY, HAVE YOU SEEN UNCLE GASTER AND ANISE ANYWHERE?”

“They went to the kitchen to talk about culinary science. Let them be. You have other priorities.”

Papyrus pointed to himself. “ME?”

The tsundere squinted at the young skeleton. “I used today’s SAVE because a certain hero made yet another rookie mistake: ignoring the doctor’s orders.”

Gulp. That sure killed any remaining appetite he had. “W-WAS IT SERIOUS?”
“Moderate, I’d say. Not enough to cripple you for life, but enough to prevent you from tapping into your potential for the rest of our campaign. Thus, your Eye foretold nothing but the inevitable dead end.”

“Something else needs to change, no matter how small. That’s why we’re having this spicy feast.”

Now that’s a head-scratching proposition…

The last time Jungle Curry appeared in a time loop, it was the source of great turmoil.

“DON’T THEY GIVE YOU MUCH BAD TOILET TIMES?”

“Exactly,” answered Mezil. “With my current condition, that ‘bad toilet time’ will weaken me just enough for a certain boisterous pest to peek out of his prison.”

Jaw, drop. “PERSONA?! BUT, WHY?”

“If Aiden is indeed his legitimate son, then Persona would have had an Aratet wife at some point. He might be the only person in this building to know the details behind their elusive feast.”

“Tonight, make Persona spit out the truth. Only then you’ll have a chance to overturn the Gungnir’s schemes.”

Chapter End Notes

Pokerel once wrote to me: "LET MEZIL HAVE HIS JUNGLE CURRY 2K17"

It's 2K18 now, but the wish is fulfilled at last XD.

Also some notes:
The dish of legend here is officially 'Rendang' from Malaysia/Indonesia/Brunei, not to be confused with the other Jungle Curry named 'Kaeng Pa' from Thailand. I didn't realise that there was a literal jungle curry until today. Oops. I wanted to keep the names generic RPG, since this is technically RPGland.

Original Thyme skit was by Danielxcutter: (https://danielxcutter.tumblr.com/post/176865106085/lucidia-why-are-you-late-mezil-mezil-is-holding).

The subsequent Thyme jokes were added by Discord readers who jumped on the opportunity. Thank you guys for letting me implement the joke in script. I didn't have nearly enough bad Undertale puns in GQ, since the focus is more on the grand scheme of things.

Also, Daniel and his friend Somnium writes Magicae est Potestas. For those who're fans of Artemis Fowl, it's worth checking out this crossover. I heard many good things about it. Chapter link here: https://archiveofourown.org/works/9310319/chapters/21100844

Silly fact: The Crimson Hall arc took over a year to complete. Indeed, Undyne leaned very much on the fourth wall. It's Undertale after all :P
The Jungle Curry was great. Not as burning hot as you expected. Certain chili ramen actually have a bigger kick than this. But, what it lacked in heat it made it up in flavour.

Then reality slapped you right in the rear. Ideally, a human passes motion at least once a day, or every other day.

You… haven’t had the big one in a while. The curry was the final straw that broke the camel’s back. You ran straight to the toilet -- the one that Alphys installed just for you.

HNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNGGGHHHH!!!

That groan echoed your deep regrets for not taking care of your bowels better.

Papyrus knocked on the door and asked: “ARE YOU ALRIGHT, FRISK?”

You tell him that constipation sucks.

“ON THE SCALE OF LIQUID TO ROCKS, WHAT IS THIS?”

An entire mountain! That's the price you pay for not drinking enough water and not eating enough fiber.

“OH… WORRY NOT! FROM NOW ON, I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- WILL MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A HEALTHY DIET.”

“THOUGH I SUGGEST THAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO HURRY UP BECAUSE I THINK MISTER MAGUS IS ALREADY STARTING TO GET THE CRAMPS.”

How does he know?!

“BELIEVE IT OR NOT, HE GOT PALER.”

Gaaaah! This is going to take some ‘THYME’!

“FRISK!!! NOW’S NOT THE ‘THYME’ FOR SANSYPUNS!”
“DARN, EVEN I GOT INFECTED BY THAT LAME TOMFOOLERY! THIS IS WHY I SAY WE’RE WASTING PRECIOUS SECONDS!”

Okay, okay. If it’s that urgent, why not take him to Mom’s house first? Seer shortcuts and all.

“That’s a fantastic idea! Where’s your house key?”

It’s in your pocket, but maybe Papyrus doesn’t need a key if he can use the window. There should be one that’s already broken.

“Excuse me? Why, I certainly wasn’t there to bust a hole through your viewing vista.”

Heh. You tell that Papyrus has a new contender: it’s none other than Snakeface.

“I see, I see! We must compare notes. Either way, I shall go prepare your new ambassadorial task for the night.”

Ahuh. Tsunderjudge’s new job for you… You know about it.

Off he went. You wonder if you’d need to get any other help other than Papyrus. Chara, maybe? They’re Gungnir after all.

…but they didn’t have a good reputation, if you remember right. Maybe it’s better to let them concentrate on their gardening mission.

You decided to review the details a bit…

The current leader of Gungnir is Persona’s son. He issued Papyrus an challenge. And it’s your job to make Mister DEMON cough up his secret info. Okay. Got it!

You expected to turn the toilet into a spice potpourri, but that somehow didn’t happen. Guess your meal was still being digested. Nonetheless you dumped the consequences of your past decisions down the bowl.

Once that’s done, you washed up and staggered out. You wondered how much time had passed. Hoped that you weren’t too late.

Alphys’ living room had since turned silent. You presume that some had adjourned to your house, while the rest retreated to their respective workshops.

Garamond escorted you to your home via shortcuts. One turn here. Another portal there. And you’ve arrived at home sweet ho--

What the heck?! What’s with that ominous thundercloud vortex circulating over your roof???

You spotted Cenna standing at the front porch, looking up at the phenomenon. You called for her.

“Yo, Frisky,” she said. It lacked her usual sunny style. “Bah. Look at that jerk. Trying to claim your house already.”

Ahuh. Talk about arrogance.
“Either way, Garamond and myself are on standby in case anything goes wrong.”

Heh. Still working even though she’s on ‘forced vacation’?

“Of course. Ain’t gonna let some ol’ ghost prevent me from protecting my baby sibling!”

While stretching her hands, she added: “If that bugger tries to escape, I’ll shoot him down. Meanwhile we’ll try to keep the curious onlookers at bay.”

Yeah. It’s not every day that a house gets a localized storm.

You thanked your sister for the backup and entered your home.

Oh. Wow. Papyrus had taken the time to clean the place up. The only ‘messy’ thing left was the broken window. That’s great because you thought that Mom was going to come back home to a heart-attack of a wreck.

You headed upstairs where the washroom would be. As you climbed up the steps, you heard(grunts of agony rumbling from the bathroom door.

There’s also an odd scent in the air. No, not from Tsunderjudge. It reminded you of… ionizers? Well, you’re dealing with an ‘electrifying’ personality after all. And it ain’t Mettaton.

Persona was in your room, with Papyrus and a tea set. His red-dyed shadow sat cross-legged inside a pentagram made out of bones.

In this form, Persona looked more demonic than he should. His eyes and mouth were condensed into a pure red light.

Papyrus waved. “YOU’RE FINALLY HERE! I THOUGHT I NEEDED TO BREW A SECOND BATCH OF GOLDENFLOWER TEA TO PASS THE TIME. OUR GUEST OF HONOUR WAS GROWING IMPATIENT.”

Has it really been that long?

“WELL, NOT REALLY. MISTER MAGUS HAD BEEN IN HIS WATER CLOSET FOR ONLY FIFTEEN MINUTES OR SO.”

“PLEASE DON’T MIND THE SPOOKY PENTAGRAM BY THE WAY. IT’S PURELY FOR AESTHETICS! I REMEMBERED BEING THOROUGHLY EXCITED WHEN UNCLE GASTER TAUGHT ME TO BUILD A FUNCTIONAL ONE.”

Deep down, you had hoped that the Gram wasn’t decorative. What if Persona stepped out of his bounds and try to hurt you?

Persona chuckled at your fears. “Relax, little child. Winston locked away all but an image. Have you seen that man’s SOUL and body, rigged with witchcraft through and through? He’s the best cage, you could say.”

You tell Persona that you’re rather doubtful. If Mezil -- a weaker Living Victory -- served as such an effective container, then everyone wouldn’t have needed to go through so much trouble to deal with your DEMON possession problem.

“So young, yet so prudent.” He said, “Sit down. Let me take a closer look at the squirt who almost killed me.”
Persona patted the ground outside the bone star. Yup. That’s proof that it’s pure decoration.

Okay Frisk. Bring your ‘A’ Game. No more hesitations.

You sat down next to Papyrus, which was not the spot Persona offered. Without words, you let him know that this is your home turf. You’re the one setting the rules. Not him.

Your actions didn’t go unnoticed. Persona smirked in amusement.

“How cute. Well, I suppose there’s a reason why you’re here. Not only did you steal the Keys of Fate from the Vampire, but you also withstood Chara’s influence.”

Hm? Persona knows about Chara?

“Yes. And I venerate them as a true ancestor. A rightful warrior of my people. They had captured a monster and ascended to godhood: what more can a Gungnir ask for? Yet the narrow-minded cowards of the day resorted to false condemnation.”

“What use is tradition if weakness is all it produces? Those superstitious lot deserved to burn for their ignorance!”

Heh. How ironic. You told him that Chara still consider themselves scrap.

“A terrible shame. They deserve more respect than that.”

Hmm. You need to understand more about what makes this man tick.

“PERSONA,” said Papyrus, “SURELY A GREAT MAN LIKE YOURSELF HAD MANY HONOURS AND TRIBUTES. HAVE YOU HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT THE ARATET WELCOMING FEAST?”

Isn’t that too direct, Papyrus?!

“What bold flattery. I do know everything about the Aratet’s customs. But, why should I bother telling you?”

“IT’S SO THAT I COULD COOK THE MOST SCRUMPTIOUS OF MEALS FOR YOUR SON, AIDEN!”

“…Aiden requested it?”

And the DEMON started ‘fufufufu-’ing to himself. Alright, he didn’t actually go ‘fu’, but the sinister snicker had a similar feel.

“All the more why I don’t want to help you. Aiden is one of my best sons. A personal favourite, I might add.”

“Oracle. You seem to be the naive sort. So let me spell it out for you: friendship was never on his mind. The feast was a trap to guarantee his victory.”

Papyrus frowned. “I STILL WANT TO GIVE IT MY BEST.”

“So, it’s about pride in the end? Pitiful.”
You tried to not show it, but in your heart you clenched your fist. Dammit. This guy is an utter piece of shit who’s trying to escalate the situation into a bigger shitstorm.

Nobody takes a shit on Papyrus and gets away with it! Nobody!

Activate intensive diplomatic focus!

> Persona
> Aiden
> Mezil

All names?! Not a great bunch of options. But you can only ask what you know. You have to reveal new paths before you can press any further.

> Persona

Let’s have a bit of icebreaking session.

So Persona, what’s the deal with him? He has the same Mark as the Gungnir founder… but he sure as heck doesn’t act the same. You thought people of the same Mark would behave similarly.

Persona seemed pleased that you’re willing to listen to his story.

“That depends.” he said. “A Mark has multiple facets. Though I share some similarities to my ancestor, that doesn’t mean we’re the exact same.”

“A bolt of lightning can mean swift justice. It can also mean the power of heavens. I wouldn’t know where my ancestor leaned. However, I know where I stand: as a new god who transcends above the ashes of the old.”

Wouldn’t that be a phoenix?

“Hah! Good point. Yes, that could have been my Mark if only I had a more gentle spirit.”

A new option appeared.

> Colours.

It’s been a while since you had to guess the colours of a person.

You tell Persona that you’re going to guess his colours.

Let’s see…
Red is a definite.

Green is out of the picture. He admitted it to himself that he doesn’t have a gentle spirit. Not Tsundere for sure.

He’s really good with close combat. Very bold and brave. But he also has a strong personal standard. Quite a sense of integrity.

Red - Blue - Orange? Or Red - Orange - Blue?

“Amusing. What do you think you’ll gain by knowing my colours? How futile.”

You smirked. If it’s really so pointless, Persona wouldn’t even acknowledge it. Knowing his colours will give you a better understanding of what he values most. Therefore, get a better deck of cards for this diplomatic skit.

Persona crossed his arms. “I hear that you’re a Triple Red. The ultimate wild card. I’m sure you’ve heard enough lauding at this point, so let me hit that nail down a peg.”

“Your traits are fleeting. Transient. They shift and change to meagre whims. Winston with his judgeful eye couldn’t make any sense of you. A person like that… is dust under my feet!”

Argh! He’s resisting all your Charisma rolls!

You have two more options:

> Aiden
> Mezil

…but Persona isn’t in the mood to answer any of those yet.

Papyrus spoke up. “DUST? THE MORE YOU TRY TO STEP ON THEM, THE MORE THEY FLY. AND THEY’RE EXTREMELY ANNOYING TO CLEAN! ALSO, IF FRISK IS SO FLAPPY IN YOUR EYES… WOULDN’T IT BENEFIT YOU TO BE NICER? MAKE YOUR POINT AND HAVE THEM CHANGE IN YOUR FAVOUR. A DEITY LIKE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO THAT.”

Ooooh, it’s the Papyrus reverse psychology at work.

Persona in turn lowered his arms and shifted to a more casual stance.

“Oracle,” he said, “Are you trying to manipulate me?”

“MANIPULATE?” Papyrus replied. “FAR FROM IT! AT LEAST, NOT IN THE SAME SWINDLING MANNER AS YOU THINK. INSTEAD, I’M POINTING OUT THAT THERE’S A MORE BENEFICIAL PATH, EVEN IF THINGS DON’T LOOK LIKE SO AT FIRST.”

“…Are you a salesperson in your day job?”

“NOT AT ALL, SIR! I HAVE MY STANDARDS. IF I AM TO BE A SALESPERSON, I WOULD ONLY DO SO WITH AN HONEST PRODUCT. IT WON’T REST ON MY
Persona laughed. The light of lightning flashed into your room, but the thunder was only a distant roll...

At least you know that he’s not angry.

He said: “Unbelievable. An oracle with a child’s honesty. Almost a fool. And one that amuses me so.”

“Very well. I’ll indulge. Our young Living Victory may ask whatever they wish.”

Thanks a ton, Papyrus.

> Aiden

Could Persona tell you more about his favourite son? Are they close? What were his hobbies?

…There was silence. Did you touch on a sensitive topic too soon? Nevertheless you mustered your determination to be patient.

In the end, Persona replied: “I wouldn’t know. I was with him for only a while before we parted. Since then, we had never met face to face. I would receive a mail about his progress once a year, if I’m lucky.”

Oh. What kept them separated?

“Politics. Not long after I married my first wife, the land descended into civil war. I was right in the hotspot.”

Then… what stopped Persona from getting help?

“This nation’s government couldn’t provide refuge to her clan. If she applied as an individual, perhaps it would be successful. But, family was important to her. That’s all she had. Meanwhile, I blended together with the rest of the unfortunate tourists stranded at the embassy.

Why not take Aiden with him? Why leave his infant son behind in a warzone?

“Hmph. For my wife, giving the child to me was no less dangerous. There’s no guarantee that a nurse or a stepmother would love Aiden; they could see him as a competitor and do ill toward him. Furthermore, I too would soon engage in a campaign of my own. That’s no condition to raise a child in.”

Wait, pardon? Competitor?

“A king has to have as many offspring as possible,” said Persona. “And one cannot expect a single poor woman to do all the work. Besides, anyone who marries me has the chance for divine blessing. If she produces a Chosen heir, she’d share in her child’s honour.”
No wonder Cenna calls him a cult leader! He even has a harem, just like the Eastern emperors of old!

Just how many kids did he have? Does he even remember them all?

Wait, you’re more interested about why an Aratet would put so much effort into marrying Persona?

Your questions seemed to have tickled Persona’s funny bone.

“That’s prying too much. Child, you may only choose one question. The rest will be considered void.”

> Mezil
> Kids
> Marriage

Multiple choices, but only one path. Sheesh, the pressure.

First and foremost, let’s not bring up the Tsunderjudge yet. They’re a mutual sore point.

Second, you’re sure that Lady Lucy knows the exact number of his offspring. Any personal feelings about them would not be useful to you at all. It’s yet another trap.

Considering Papyrus’ ultimate mission, you should ask more about the marriage.

> Marriage.

YIKES! The rest of the options got zapped out of existence! He really meant ‘just one’.

“Not fooled by sentimentality? You’re already more level-headed than most children of your age.”

“Have you heard about the Asas Asal Ara?”

No…

Papyrus raised his hand. “I HAVE! THAT’S GENOCIDER, THE LEGENDARY HERO, THE ORIGINAL ORIGIN!”

“The Oracle did his homework, I see. You’re right: the Aratet are direct descendants of the Legendary Hero. But, they have one major problem. Although they once had divine blood, they now lack the density required to spawn a strong Chosen.”

> Divine blood.
You tell Persona that you’re missing some key information. What is this ‘divine blood’ anyway?

Pointing straight at your chest, he said: “Willpower. That which dyes your spirit red. ‘Chosen’ is their word for precursors of Living Victories. Immature Reds.”

“Think about it. Who else could lay a claim to the Keys of Fate other than those born of Red? Did you think that any less than divinity could ever turn time’s wheel?”

Well… it IS special. You can’t deny that.

So, the Aratet were not producing Red Majors of their own. Is that right?

“Correct. The number and quality of their Living Victories had declined with each successive generation. They saw it as a sign that they had displeased the gods. And then, I appeared: bearing the Mark of their ancestor.”

“By wedding the lost halves of The Legendary Hero, the Aratet hoped to elevate themselves to worthiness once more. My wife, the blood. Me, the spirit.”

Something poked your curiosity. It may be an inconsequential one, but dang you can’t hold back the urge.

> Marriage details.

When did they get married, and how?

Persona reminisced with nostalgia on his shadowy face. “My matchmaking happened during my secondary years. Sixteen years old. I was in the middle of my studies when an envoy knocked on my door. They came with a photo album of the Aratet’s finest maidens, with a shortlist of recommendations.”

…Wait. Isn’t teenage marriage illegal?

“There’s a leeway for those just two years apart. Romeo and Juliet Laws. Nonetheless, I wasn’t prepared to marry. Not yet. I explained to the envoy that I was studying for my final papers. Securing a good tertiary education would benefit Gungnir as a whole.”

“At the same time I wanted to get to know the maidens better. I can’t make my selection on mere hobbies or family ties. So I wrote a long list of questions for the girls to ponder.”

What kind of questions?

“For example, ‘Do you prefer a man to yourself, or are you willing to share with sisters that you don’t know?’. Or, ‘Who makes the decisions: you or your guardians?’.”

“Some girls are more exclusive than others. They won’t be happy with me. Scheming in-laws are the worst: I need faithful followers and not puppet masters. I won’t let them use their daughter as a tool.”
You didn’t say it out loud, but Persona was strangely considerate to potential mates.

“The year-long exchange reduced the pool of candidates to one maiden. A fine one, she was! The perfect balance of a gentle stream and a burning fire. Meeting her in person was enough for me to marry her on the spot.”

“We had a private acknowledgement in front of our elders. Afterwards, we prepared for the grandest celebration: the Aratet welcoming feast and our wedding ceremony combined.”

“It was an endeavour that would take months. Rather convenient that it was past my birthday and exams. I would be eighteen -- a legal adult -- when I boarded the plane for Aratet lands.”

“There, I was blessed with another surprise: a newborn son. We hit the jackpot of luck. Ah… it was the happiest, most colourful, and grandest day of my life. Nothing compared to that splendour since.”

When Persona shared his story, you almost forgot that he’s a jerk of a DEMON. He was once a man who fell in love. Got hitched. Had a baby.

Then, the unhappy things happened. Would his life be different if he wasn’t a Gungnir god?

> Aiden is a Red?

Persona shook his head. “Alas, he was not born a Chosen. Yet, I was far from disappointed; his colours are rarer than any mere Red. In my personal opinion, the marriage plan was a great success. Why? Nothing important.”

That is absolutely totally certainly important info!

“NO,” Papyrus interjected. “HE’S RIGHT. AIDEN’S COLOURS AREN’T IMPORTANT. WE’RE STRAYING FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY FROM THE FEAST!”

Gasp. Another trap?! That’s about as bad as Sans! Maybe worse!

Look at that smug face. No wonder Mezil hates his guts. Literally.

> Aratet Welcoming Feast

No diversions anymore, mister.

“Hmph.” Persona huffed. “Here I hoped that you two would get caught up in the lore. What benefit do I gain for ruining my son’s plans? I want the Magus Association to burn together with the Witch and the Vampire.”

The fate of the world? Giant abomination? Hello?
“If Aiden cannot save the world without the meddlings of wizards, so be it. That monstrosity was created by Magi anyway.”

…Indignation rushed to your head. It took all your determination to remain stoic. No wonder Tsunderjudge had to summon him on the ceramic throne! There is no better place for the doodoobutt he is!

“I know what you’re thinking. It’s written all over your face. Why don’t you ask me why I hate the Vampire so much?

> Bad blood

Yeah. You wanna know. What’s up with the bad blood?

“What if I tell you that The Vampire of Time murdered my family?”

You were taken aback.

“Skeptical, I see. Your disbelief won’t change the truth: Mezil Thyme had killed many of my wives and children. Their deaths were delightfully covered up under the guise of ‘mission casualties’. Ask him yourself, if you dare.”

…You will. Later.

“I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- HAVE A PROPOSAL.”

“Oh?” The DEMON leaned forward, curious.

“What does the naive Oracle have to offer?”

Papyrus straightened his back and put on the face of a confident hero. “IF YOU HELP ME IMPRESS YOUR SON WITH THE MOST ACCURATE OF ALL ACCURATE WELCOMING FEASTS, YOU GET TO GO HOME WITH HIM!”

Wait. What? Release Persona out of his prison?!

“PERSONA ISN’T THE ONLY PRISONER, FRISK. MISTER MAGUS IS THE SAME. THEY’VE BEEN CHAINING EACH OTHER ALL THESE YEARS. A SAD, TRAGIC TALE!”

Hmmm if Papyrus puts it that way, it’s true. Both sides spend all their energy in a dumb tug-o-war.

But… Persona would need to possess something. Or someone. Is it really okay to let a guy like him live with his son?

“OF COURSE!” Papyrus replied. “IN THE PAST, PERSONA DIDN’T HAVE THE LUCK TO BE A PROPER FATHER. BUT NOW HE’S GOING TO HAVE A SECOND CHANCE: AS A GRANDFATHER TO FOUR LOVELY GRANDCHILDREN!”

“I’M POSITIVELY CERTAIN THAT HE CAN FIND THE GOODNESS IN HIS STANDARDS SO THAT HE WON’T PLUNGE THE NEXT GENERATION INTO A BLOODY BATTLE WITH MISTER MAGUS.”
Why and how exactly? Vengeance is a great motivator

“FIRST, THEY’RE BOTH GETTING OLD. SECOND, WHAT BETTER VENGEANCE THAN HAVING A FAMILY HAPPIER THAN YOUR ENEMIES!!!”

Persona burst into a complete guffaw. Lightning jumped and jolted to every clap of his hands. You had to cover your ears to dampen some of that awfulness.

Maybe he’s mocking, maybe he’s impressed. Probably both.

“What zany logic you have,” said Persona “Yet I agree, Oracle. The Vampire will never have a child to call his own, be it as a human or a Lich. That’s his greatest curse.”

“Fine then. In return for my freedom, I’ll tell you the answer to your riddle. After that… it all depends on you.”

“THANK YOU VERY MUCH!”

Papyrus pulled out his pen and notebook, ready to jot down notes.

So Persona began: “The Aratet welcoming feast consists of seven dishes: one centerpiece, three of the host region’s best cuisines, and three of the guest’s favourites.”

Hang on, three of the GUEST’S favourites?

“The kid caught on, I see. Yes. What better way to prove your care, concern, and acceptance than by knowing your guest at this personal a level?”

That means… the feast won’t work if Papyrus doesn’t know Aiden’s favourite foods!

“Exactly. Mind you, my son has all the right to not tell you anything. In the end, he still has the final say.”

Hmph. If that’s the case, the deal is off. You won’t let Persona out of jail.

“Are you certain? Our terms only stated that I was to divulge you the details about the welcoming feast. You didn’t specify that it had to succeed. Is the future Ambassador of Monsters so keen to break their promises?”

Honour, mister. Honour. You’ve dealt with enough Sans-semantics to realise that this too was a trap. The circumstances are far more complex than he makes them out to be. Besides, Mezil himself needs to agree too. And you know he won’t unless there’s a way to guarantee long-lasting peace between both sides.

So yeah. Aiden’s favourite stuff DOES matter! The feast itself is the first chance in centuries at a ceasefire between the Magi and the Gungnir! If Persona already blabbed so much, why stop now?

Papyrus patted you on the back. “FRISK, DON’T GET ANGRY. PERSONA KEPT TO HIS WORD! HE CAN ONLY TELL US WHAT HE KNOWS. IT’S THOROUGHLY UNFAIR OF US TO KEEP HIM LOCKED INSIDE MISTER MAGUS JUST BECAUSE WE WEREN’T SATISFIED.”

Heh, all the more reasons for him to play along. You’re sure that the old ghost wanted to leave Mezil anyway.
Thus you asked him. What will Persona do to Mezil if you refuse to comply with the agreement?

“I’ll just torment him until I either claim his being, or he ends his own life.”

Figures. It’s the same deal when Chara possessed you.

Still ready with his note-jotting tools, Papyrus interjected: “EXCUSE ME, BUT I HAVEN’T ASKED HIM ABOUT THE CENTERPIECE YET.”

The DEMON’s cooperation surprised you. The centerpiece turned out to be deep-fried dumplings.

It does make sense in a historical perspective. Grain is synonymous to life, with wheat being one of the valuable flours. Make a dough out of it, wrap that around a mince of meat from livestock and veggies from the land, and then fry them in animal fat.

What you’d get is the symbol of a land’s bounty: jam packed with valuable calories for the physically active. Not recommended for the sedentary.

You were stuck with the three regional specialities. What would the Dreemurr Nation’s best be anyway? Mom’s pies? You’d need more than that…

The rushing waters of a toilet flush interrupted your thoughts. Looks like someone’s finally done with his business.

“That’s the cue to return to my cell,” said Persona.

“Struggle with all your strength, younglings. Succeed or fail, it makes no difference. I’ll savor every moment!”

The DEMON’s form dissolved into a stream of electrical sparks, running under the door gaps. What followed after was Tsunderjudge going ‘Argh!’ at the other end.

Ouch… Zapping on the way back? That’s one way to spite a prison warden.

Papyrus, ever dutiful and considerate, pushed a luggage bag to the washroom. Wow. Talk about being prepared. Even if Tsunderjudge didn’t rewind time for the curry, he still expected an extended stay away from home.

It’s back to waiting.

Alright Papyrus. Time for some serious talk. You put your best stern principal impression and asked if he’s going to use his Eye again.

“No,” he replied. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS HAS THE ANSWER TO THIS RIDICULOUS RIDDLE! I DON’T NEED TO USE ANY EXTRA POWER.”

Good. Because he shouldn’t! Concentrate on the healing business. Don’t make the same mistake as the previous timeline.

Speaking of injuries… you lightly touched under your chin. Ugh, that bruise from last Thursday still hurts. It’s reflecting your ego right now.

Is this why Tsunderjudge doesn’t like to do diplomacy? In a way, it’s easier to brand someone a criminal and take out the guns.
“BUT FRISK,” Papyrus frowned, “WE WOULDN’T HAVE ESCAPED FROM THE UNDERGROUND IF YOU HAD RESORTED TO SUCH VIOLENCE.”

Yeah. Been there, done that.

Argh. You ruffled your hair in frustration. That’s why the Surface is all messed up in the first place: lots of humans who demand their own ways.

“CHIN UP, FRISK! AT LEAST WE HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW MISTER MAGUS.”

If he could accept the outcome in the first place…

You plopped on the ground, waiting anxiously for the Tsunderjudge to finish his shower.

Chapter End Notes

No ETA on next chapter because it's another history-heavy stuff.
Finally, an update.

Many have requested me to write a list of glossaries of the unique terms of GQ. I agree it's good reference, so I'll be making that my next Magus Compendium entry.

If there's anything you are unclear, or don't remember, please tell me in the comments box. It's ok if you don't remember the term. Just write down the idea/concept and I'll match it with the unique term (if they're named at all.) If there's no name... I guess it's time to make a new terminology!

Remember readers, take care of your health. Eat, drink, and sleep properly when you read GQ :)

Oh, and have some mooncake: http://sophtoart.tumblr.com/post/178771265290/i-am-so-late-for-both-the-anniversary-and-the

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Done with his shower, the Tsunderjudge staggered into your room in his black pajamas. He carried the cloth of his cravat in hand: brooch pinned on it.

The ever dutiful and compassionate Papyrus rolled out a futon for him.

Tsunderjudge then plopped on the mattress, turned to his side, and curled up.

He’s still feeling the aftermath of his bad toilet times, huh? The majority of the world’s population would never see him in this state.

You tell Tsunderjudge that he looks absolutely pooped.

Glaring at you, he replied: “Of course. This is quite a draining procedure. No pun intended.”

A short pause later, it’s back to business: “So, how did your negotiations go?”

Rather bittersweet, you said: on one hand, you dug up intel on the feast. Including the main star: deep-fried dumplings!

But, everything still hinged on Aiden. If the feast succeeds, you’d have to keep your word and give Persona back to his family. If not... Mezil will continue to be haunted and it’s back to square one.

You wished that the results were better.

“As expected. Don’t blame yourself: that man wasn’t a dreaded cult leader for nothing.”

Huh? The Tsunderjudge isn’t mad? It wasn’t a clear victory for peace.

“In some scenarios, a lackluster result may be the best you can get.”
Tsunderjudge sat up on the futon and beckoned to Papyrus for some Goldenflower tea. It had gone cold now, but he doesn’t care. Bad toilet times tend to make one thirsty after all.

How was it? Isn't it weird to drink something made out of DEMON flowers? Feeling possessed yet?

He replied, “It tastes good. Harmless.”

That’s uncharacteristically… mild? He’s not putting much of a resistance against your cheeky tongue. Did he just lose all his inner spice down the toilet bowl?

He stared at his butterfly brooch for quite a while. Silent. Did he miss his wife already? Or was he worried about her?

“Frisk, you’re aware of how Determination manipulates monsters, right?”

Nod, nod. Friendship is magic!

“It would be nice if everyone used that power for good, but there will always be scum who’d use it for evil. Without protection, a monster would be swayed by every whim of a Living Victory.”

Like, a bad version of ACT?

“That’s what you call it? I suppose you could say that.”

“WAIT A MOMENT,” said your tall skelly friend. “DOES THAT MEAN HUMANS HAVE MIND CONTROL AFTER ALL?”

No, Papyrus, that’s way too cartoonish. It’s more about suggestion and intimidation. Exploiting a person’s thoughts and traits for your own gain.

“That’s right. Since you understand the mechanics, I’ll get to the point: I had warned Papyrus to not start the negotiations until you’re around. Without you, Papyrus would have fallen prey to Persona at every turn, playing on his pure goodwill.”

“That didn’t happen, however; your own aura of Determination protected your friend.”

Mezil’s eyes narrowed on the glimmer of his personal jewelry. He then put the butterfly brooch in your hand, letting you examine it up close.

“This brooch is part of a pair. My wife has the other half: the symbol of our marriage vows. Mine is imbued with a magic battery to supplement my human Psychia. Her version, on the other hand, is filled with protective Determination, similar to your own.”

“She utilized it recently to fend off Aiden.” Mezil added. “…I dare not imagine what might have happened without it. That Red Minor’s Will would’ve been unbearable.”

So he’s saying that things could have gone much, much worse without your protection? Got it.

Heh. Turns out this wasn’t just a fancy piece of bling after all. Sounds useful going forward.

You carefully gave the brooch back to Mezil. Don’t wanna break their precious wedding gift.

Papyrus played the ends of his scarf, concerned. “I SURE HOPE THAT PERSONA KEEPS TO MY WHOLESOME LIFE ADVICE.”

But, what if it's the opposite? Like teaching his grandkids to be utter pests!
“Simple,” said the Tsunderjudge, “His descendants will make themselves wanted criminals. Consequences will follow his poor choices.”

Geez. All those innocents, at risk because of one guy… that’s a sobering thought.

You remembered Persona’s accusations. They didn’t sound like something a Supreme Judge should do. Could it be related to the ‘dark secret’ Snakeface warned you of?

………………

Looking at the Tsunderjudge’s drenched and pallid state, you realize now’s not the right time to ask. Rather, you better take a shower yourself. It's getting late.

Papyrus nodded at you. “A HOT SHOWER TO WASH OFF ANY REGRETS. A GREAT IDEA, IF SAY SO MYSELF! LET ME HELP YOU WITH YOUR LAUNDRY!”

Laundry? Oh. Right. Mom isn’t home, and you had a crazy busy week. It piled up quite a bit.

Thanks, that’ll help a ton. Be careful with last Thursday’s batch, though. Those went through a messy mountain misadventure.

“OKAY! MISTER MAGUS, DO YOU WANT YOURS WASHED TOO?”

“Hmm,” Tsunderjudge mused out loud. “Sure. Everything except the coat. A home washing machine isn’t suited to clean that.”

Your skelly friend paused for a moment. “WAS THAT A PUN?”

“A pun? Where?”

Uhm. Coat? Suited?

The Tsunderjudge sighed. “Again, pun not intended.”

“In all seriousness, don’t touch it! My wife spent hours rigging it with magic and making sure it’s fit for combat. The last thing I want was some wrong wash setting ruining her work.”

Ah. So it's like that brooch.

Such Perseverance! Lady Lucidia’s dedication goes above and beyond the normal duties of a married woman! Very admirable, though also a bit scary.

* * *

While Tsunderjudge rested, you grabbed some fresh jammies and went to enjoy your relaxing shower.

Aaaah… the modern era is good living indeed. Can’t imagine life without showers. They’re refreshing for the mind and body.

Afterward, it’s back to business.
Cenna and Garamond sat downstairs in the living room, watching TV. They appear to be monitoring the evening news.

Cenna greeted you. “Yo, Frisky! Freshened up, I see. Wanna stick around for the possible cringe?”

Heh, heh. Not a fan of the news, huh?

“They can get real stupid.”

All the more why you gotta be aware. So, you sat down with the other two guys.

Oh, hey. There’s a bowl of cherry tomatoes on the table next to you. The regular, non-magical kind. Snakeface bought them for his wounded human friends. You ought to eat some to help your body heal. Good ones taste awesome anyway.

While you snacked away, the news started a new story.

The studio news anchor reported: “With the collaboration of local municipalities, The Magus Association has completed key repairs in their electrical and water supply. However, there’s still much work to be done. They’re still tallying up the total amount of damage, including the belongings left behind in the student dorms.”

“Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme remains unavailable for commentary, citing that he has ‘other vital business to attend to’, quote end quote. He was last seen at Elderburgh Hospital with select Ebottian monster residents.”

The clip showed a short video of the Tsunderjudge, Alphys, Doctor Gaster, and a masked Lady Lucidia entering the car. It’s filmed from quite a distance.

“This development brings up some rather puzzling questions. Why was he hanging around with monsters at the hospital instead of taking care of urgent repairs? Think of all the staff and their unpaid leave! Think of the children and their interrupted courses! With the end of the semester so close, would they lag behind their unaffected peers? The Spire is their main school. It would be a shame if the core faculty loses to the branches.”

“Blah,” Cenna exclaimed, “Their usual propaganda. And isn’t that camwork breaching stalking laws?!”

Garamond replied: “Judging from the image, it’s within the minimum distance. We can’t do anything about it.”

Minimum distance?

Further questions would have to wait. Newscasters wait for no man.

“Local educator Vice Principal Henry Halesworth, however, assures us that The Magus Association will work with insurance to ensure that every student receives proper compensation for their losses. Meanwhile, those affected will be relocated to the nearest branch schools for the rest of the semester.”

“We’ve asked the public about their opinions on the matter.”

This must be the ‘cringe’ Cenna talked about.

An elder man shook his head. “I miss the days of Judge Pashowar. He was a warm guy who’d
“Doesn’t Judge Thyme care about the students?!” A dramatic mother fumed. “Why is he letting the Vice Principal handle everything? Or is he a Principal by name only???”

Ah, another Linda airing her frustrations on mass media. There’s nothing like it.

“Nobody died.” A cool goth-punk commented. “That’s great in my book. Could have been worse without the monsters.”

But, her classy friend said: “I wish the media was more ‘free’, if you get what I mean. Ages ago, reporters could gather around anyone anywhere to get their story. But now? Limited to only the sanctioned sites. I wanna know what’s going on in monster town! The new Crimson Keeper lives there, right?”

Errrrr… Come to think of it, you weren’t swarmed by a bajillion story-thirsty reporters and journalists yet! Straaaange.

“Thank Ol’ Mez for pulling some timey-wimey strings back in the day,” said Cenna. “He tightened reporting protocols nationwide. Wanna ask questions? Only if the other party permits it. No badgering allowed. Doesn’t stop certain people from trying though.”

“We interviewed this resident of Ebott Town for his impressions about the current situation.”

They interviewed Aaron. THEY ACTUALLY INTERVIEWED AARON!

Your excitement is growing. As you watched, you started munching more and more.

Basking in the attention, the horse flexed his muscles before the camera.

“What’s your name, sir?”

“Aaron.” And he winked. Yep. He did exactly that.

“Are you friends with Crimson Keeper Frisk?”

“Of course.” Flex wink. “Everyone is their friend. Saved us from the Underground, y’know.”

“What about the fellow you wrestled earlier?”

“The super strong skeleton? He’s new to me. I heard he comes from the west side of Ebott Town. Bet he’s Frisk’s friend, and their friend is my friend. C’mon human reporter, let’s flex together.”

Garamond said, “…This is why I refuse to decloak.”

You’re grateful that the horse didn’t know much about the Lemurians. Things could have gotten ugly otherwise.

“Indeed.”
“Next update: Captain Undyne and Doctor Alphys shared a moment of comfort before Elderburgh Hospital. The Captain punched a tree in frustration, then the Doctor rushed over to hug her.”

Wait. What?!

You nearly choked on your cherry tomatoes! It’s them alright! Below a tree across the road from the hospital!

“This scaly romance had garnered a whirlwind of fanart on the internet. LGBTQ+ communities in particular consider this pair to be a good example that love transcends all borders, including species.”

How is Alphys going to take this news?! She is going to die from embarrassment. You know it!

“Frisk,” said Garamond. “You need to warn them. There will be people who want to use their relationship to push all sorts of agendas. It will only ruin their lives.”

Yeeehah, understood. You had gone through your own share of sharks trying to turn you into their poster child of whatever.

“That’s all for Magus-Monster related news. Next up…”

But then, another person walked onto the set to whisper the latest update.

“This just in: The Dreemurr Royal Couple agreed to talk to us live, right from the hospital ward itself!”

Cenna turned towards the laundry room and yelled: “Yo Mez!!! Did you authorize a press conference with the Dreemurrs???”

Both Papyrus and the Tsunderjudge hurried over. Your skelefriend dropped his jaw, and almost had the whole laundry basket hit the floor. Thank goodness he’s good with Blue Magic.

“No,” said the old man. “I didn’t give any permission.”

Is he gonna RESET?

“…Not yet. I want to hear what they the have to say first.”

Good idea.

Reporters on location crowded around the beds where your parents sat. It must be cramped with all that extra camera equipment. Security forces stood by the sidelines, ensuring that nothing physical breaks out. Jonah the lawyer was there too, serving as their human representative.

At the beginning of the interview, they exchanged introductions. The pleasantries went back and forth for a while. Then, they started asking about you.

A lady reporter questioned: “King Asgore, Queen Toriel, what do you think of Frisk becoming the youngest Crimson Keeper in history?”

Dad answered with his distinctive warmness. “Unexpected. I didn’t know such a position existed until the previous weeks!”

“Oh dear,” Mom raised her brows. “I knew they would grow into greatness, but I didn’t think they would be elected so soon. I hear that Judge Thyme intends to mentor them in person. All I had to do
was to adjust their schedules.”

The woman commented: “You two seem to take this in stride!”

Dad replied, “Starting young isn’t unusual for us. I just wish that they will remain healthy for the rest of their lives.”

“Your Majesty,” A different reporter interjected, “You appear to be quite concerned about their health. Does this have anything to do with the six children who went missing in your kingdom?”

Gulp. It’s the time-bomb question, right out of the gate.

Mom, Dad, don’t screw this up!

King Asgore, in all his solemn sadness, nodded at the press. “Yes. It has everything to with them, I dare say. The majority of children who fell into the Underground died not from conflict… but from accidents and illnesses.”

“Are you saying that your nation was unsafe for children?”

“In terms of sanitation and medical knowledge,” Dad replied, “I admit that we were embarrassingly inadequate. We were also unable to handle complex infections and conditions that our magic couldn’t cure.”

Mom stressed, “Only in the Underground, mind you. Frisk and Doctor Alphys worked together to ensure that Ebott Town meets modern safety standards.”

“But,” the lady pointed out, “I heard that you don’t have a clinic yet?”

“One shall be built soon.”

Next question from the humans: “Will your nation be returning the bodies to their families?”

Mom replied, “We will do so once The Magus Association releases them over to The Dreemurr Nation.”

“Have you read the autopsy report, though?”

“No, dear. We didn’t have the clearance to read them yet.”

“Then, Your Majesty, how would either of you know if the children died from accidents or illnesses? What if there’s more to it? You said ‘majority’, did you not? Doesn’t that mean that there were children who didn’t die from accidents or illnesses?”

“Indeed. There were some cases where many of my own citizens were killed in direct conflict with a human. Tragic it may be, their death was an unfortunate case of self-defense.” Dad replied.

In disbelief, someone else exclaimed: “How? You expect us to believe mere children are capable of such? Besides, your guards should know enough to restrain an unarmed youth!”

Uh, would the reporters sit through the whole explanation about a monster’s inherent weakness to human Will…?

Seems there was a simpler solution after all. Dad gestured with his hands; “The victims were about the size of cats at most. Many even smaller. Quite easy to get stomped on.”
Of course! If you wanted to grind LOVE, it does make sense to start with the easy pickings. The smaller and slower they were, the easier to kill.

“Not to mention,” he added, “Those kids also concealed weapons like firearms and knives. It’s a King’s duty to protect his citizens. My Guards and I could not sit still and let such violence continue on my nation’s soil.”

Mom too remained collected. “Rest assured, everyone. If we do discover any explicit wrongdoings, we will bring the perpetrator to justice. That too is our duty to see through.”

You peeked at the Tsunderjudge. He seemed to be rather interested in the outcome so far. It’s easy to see why. As long the humans accept the self-defense story, then Ebott Town would be safe.

“We trust Frisk, our child.” she said.

“Except, they are not legally yours until you’ve gone through the adoption process. Have you?”

All attention snapped towards poor Mister Lawyer.

“The adoption process cannot conclude until the monsters are given full citizenship.” Jonah noted. “But for all parties concerned, there’s no breach of law. Frisk’s legal guardian -- Cenna Caraway -- has accepted the Dreemurrs as trusted caretakers.”

“Cenna Caraway? As in, Judge Cenna Caraway? The Magus Association’s top Vanquisher?”

“Correct. The one and only.”

“Isn’t she terminally ill? She might be desperate. After all, why else leave the child in the hands of illegal immigrants who just emerged from under a mountain less than a year ago?”

Jonah responded with a slight tone of irritation. “Please refrain from making baseless accusations about my client. Keep things on-topic. The Dreemurrs wanted to clarify their stance in public. That has nothing to do with Judge Caraway’s reasons.”

“Except, it has everything to do with Frisk! Their well-being is of the utmost importance. Besides Judge Caraway doesn’t exactly have the best reputation either. People are calling her Judge Thyme’s contract killer. That’s the word on the street!”

“Sounds like the Dreemurrs and their Judge Caraway are both negligent!” A frustrated professional yelled from off-screen. “They admitted it themselves.”

“I agree.” Another chimed. “We can’t let Frisk live with a bunch of ignorant murderers! That child would be the one to end Judge Thyme’s reign of terror!”

Then, the meeting devolved into people throwing further insults at your parents. Mister Jonah had to call for security to force them out of the ward before things got worse.

You were baffled by the apparent lack of professionalism. That’s not how you imagined reporters to behave.

On one hand, you don’t blame them for doing their job.

On the other hand, you wanted to punch them in the face for putting an accusatory spin on
Cenna raised a brow at you. “What else did ya expect?”

Someone calm and collected? Logical? Factual? No accusations towards the people they’re interviewing?

“Eeeh, you’re way outdated, kiddo. Most of the good fellows either go private, or they’re elsewhere.”

What does Tsunderjudge think? Is NOW a good time to LOAD a SAVE?

“No,” he replied. “I cannot determine yet if this broadcast is a boon or bane. We’re in uncharted territory after all. I lack the data to divert to a specific outcome.”

Point. So, right now it’s all about observation and analysis.

* * *

Tsunderjudge decided to stay in your house a little while longer to recover. Guess he was really that pooped from his ceramic-throne-DEMON-summoning ordeal.

Awesome! Why not have a bedtime story session together then?

Papyrus’ eyes went googly. Oh you know how much he loves that. “A BEDTIME STORY?! I HAVEN’T HAD ONE SINCE… FOREVER!!!!!!”

Sir Tsundere blinked a few times. It’s a sign that he thought your suggestion was high on the ‘silly’ meter.

His response? “You should be winding down for sleep, not keeping yourself active with wild imagination.”

“What are you talking about, Mister Magus?” Papyrus spoke up. “They’re the perfect lullaby! I always sleep sounder after a good night’s read.”

Utter skepticism exuded from Tsun Tsun’s suspicious squinting.

You asked if nobody ever read to him a bedtime story before.

“No,” he replied. “And I would rather not. By the time I need to sleep, I would be too tired to enjoy anything anyway.”

That sounds boringly practical.

“That’s fine!” said Papyrus, “What works for me may not work for you. I’ll go read something from Frisk’s shelf then.”

“…I could tell you a story based on my life.”

Say no more! Papyrus and yourself gathered around Mezil, eager to hear some juicy tales.
The sudden attention made him feel awkward for a while. “Why don’t you choose your… bedtime tale?”

What choices do you have?

> Judge Pashowar’s role
> Romantic escapades with Lady Lucy
> Snakeface hunting shenanigans.
> School and eSports

THE ESPORTS OPTION IS BACK!!!

Papyrus grabbed the opportunity for his own personal input. “I WANTED TO ASK HIM ABOUT HIS SCHOOL LIFE TOO!”

Alright, it’s decided!

> School and eSports

He tensed up, nipping on his lower lip as if he’s embarrassed. What a priceless reaction.

“Who told you—” Mezil muttered, “Cenna! It’s her, isn’t it? Ugh, you Wanderstars will never let me go.”

Heh heh heh. Looks like you’ve got a family secret that’s passed down from generation to generation!

Mezil planted his face into his hand and let out a big groan.

“Well,” he said, “I suppose it is somewhat relevant to your current situation, what with the media frenzy and all.”

Yeah! Cough it up. What’s the scoop?

“Eherm. Hm. Once upon a time…” so he began, “There was a cynical child with an extraordinary name. His parents were museum curators, well versed in the lore of the land. They thought that their son should share in Lord Mezil of Berendin’s glory. Even if only the tiniest of pieces.”

“Alas, the boy didn't share much in common to the hero they idealised. When the family declined, he sought escape at the arcade. Spent too much time there. Became such a regular, that the clerk by the counter knew him by name.”

“This child experimented game after game. But none satisfied him. Too easy. Too shallow. Then, the clerk suggested this newfangled online world that's known to make grown men cry.”

Wow, so dramatic.

“Anyone would cry if they lost a thousand on a bet.”
“The suggestion was a perfect fit. Tough as nails, yet not unfair. Anything and everything could be exploited to turn the tides. It kicked up his creative juices. Before long, he spent his days strategizing in his workbook. He researched military and police tactics, both old and new. And did his best to apply them to his game.”

“Thus, as the child grew so did his skill. By his early teens, he won duels and went from local competitions to the world championship: winning prize after prize, earning money to further support his new obsession.”

“That child was you!!” Papyrus exclaimed, beaming with pride.

“Indeed he was.” Mezil replied.

“I heard about it before, a certain wallflower, alone in the classroom, scribbling notes in his notebook. So it was all strategies and not schoolwork?!”

“Yes. After all, I was determined to become the very best. Though I failed realize the consequences of my neglected schooling until I had almost flunked my final exams. …Almost.”

That’s the shock of the century! Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme, the former school delinquent!

“Excuse me!” The old man retorted. “I was NEVER a delinquent. I kept to the rules and didn’t do anything illegal. It might be more accurate to say that I was an underperforming student.”

“Passing is always easier than excellence. Alas, I didn’t study nearly as much as I should have. Most of my time was spent on my part-time job at the bar, and refining my marksmanship.”

Papyrus’ bony eyebrows alternated between each other. “Come to think of it, Frisk… what is this e-sports thing anyway?”

It’s sports, except with electronics. Like video games.

Papyrus seemed unimpressed. “But sports should test the limits of body and mind! Video games lack the ‘body’ aspect.”

Sports doesn’t always have to be physical, you explained. There’s chess.

“Hmph. It certainly tested my limits,” said Mezil, “I wore a full-body sensor, and thus had to have a reasonable amount of endurance.”

Hang on a moment. That sounds familiar.

You took out your phone and did a quick search for any old VR eSport that used a full-body sensor. Such technology didn’t become ubiquitous until the recent decade or so.

Found it! Time to play some past recordings.

Man… Papyrus may want to take his words back. This title was INTENSE! In addition to headset and hand-controllers, the players moved around on an omni-directional treadmill. Players have to have good cardio for this.

Your skelly friend had trouble wrapping his head over its scale. “Was it so fun that Mister Magus traded his education for entertainment? I didn’t think
HE’S THE METTATON TYPE.”

The prize money for the top three spots numbered in the millions.

“WHAT?!?! I DIDN’T KNOW VIDEOGAMES COULD COMMAND SO MUCH MONEY!”

Mezil added: “Only if you win the paying brackets. Besides, a million isn’t much if you need to split the spoils between your guildmates. Not to mention cover the business expenses. As such, sponsorships and other perks are much more valued than cold hard cash.”

He sure knows a lot. You tried to look for his name on the list of champions. But, as usual, you couldn’t find anything with ‘Mezil Thyme’.

“NYEH, YOU GOT THE NAME WRONG. IT’S MEZIL WINSTON.”

Oh. Oh right. You forgot about that. Let’s see… still nope.

“‘The Harbinger’. Look for that.”

The Harbinger, huh? Figures that he’ll keep his real identity under wraps. There we go, let’s see what you’d get.

The young Mezil had concealed his face under an electronic helmet. The only visible part was his mouth. A man’s gotta eat and drink. And of course, he dressed with class: wearing a black 19th century military uniform. Cravat included.

He… he was his own guild. Every other position was manned by NPCs.

One man, against many. And he was one of the top five?! The positions changed every year, but he ALWAYS stood among the cream of the crop!

“In my final year of school, I received a sponsorship offer. The only criteria was this: to be ranked among the top three, worldwide. I would be going against whole teams by myself. It was considered be an impossible task, but if I succeeded they would have a great story to sell.”

And he did exactly that.

“YOU’RE SOOOOOO COOL!!!” Papyrus yelled. It seemed that he changed his stance a full 180 degrees.

But… what made him quit? It’s quite lucrative.

Mezil glanced to the side. “I tire of the media romp associated with being a top ranker. Certain parties don’t respect my wish for privacy. I had drinks spilled on me by ‘accident’ in hopes that I would show my face while cleaning up.”

“Gossip. Expectations. Rabid fans. They followed my shadow whenever I became The Harbringer. I didn’t want that kind of fame, but my sponsors depended on such attention.”

Did he behave any differently? Maybe more charming?

“Absolutely not,” Mezil replied. “I behaved the same as both Mezil Winston and as The Harbinger. Yet somehow, I had fans.”

Papyrus puffed his chest. “OH MY, YOU’RE UNDERESTIMATING THE ALLURE OF THE DARK AND MYSTERIOUS. KEEPS PEOPLE WONDERING.”
That’s 100% right! You high-fived Papyrus.

“I suppose,” he cleared his throat. “Anyways… a young upstart appeared out of nowhere. He lead a team of five and initiated blitz through my territory. I couldn’t beat them back despite my best efforts. In the end, I fell off the rankings: a first in my career.”

You huddled your knees, eager to listen to the next part of the tale. It reminded you of your camping days.

“The fans talked about how they had vanquished The Harbinger, bringing new winds of change to the status quo. Good for them. It was an excellent fight and they deserved it. When I requested a rematch, it was more about curiosity than wounded pride. Were they the real deal, or were they mere flukes?”

“A strange event then happened. One of the members, a long-range specialist, was defamed over scandalous allegations. The accused then punched a persistent accuser on camera. Just like that, he was cast out of the guild. The public remembered him as either a fool or an assaulter: a ruinous reputation.”

“By fate, the poor bloke drifted into the bar where I worked part time. He insisted that he was innocent. I believed him. There were just too many coincidences and inconsistencies. Pity how suspicions of guilt oft fan hotter flames than innocence.”

Man, that sounds like a soap opera mixed with a shounen fantasy RPGMMO isekai.

Papyrus proudly nodded, “I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU JUST SAID, BUT I AGREE!!! EVEN BEFORE HIS BIG JOB, HE HELPED THE HELPLESS. THAT’S THE HALLMARK OF A HEROIC HEART!”

The praise made Mezil blush. “Eherm. Reality can be stranger than fiction. Under an oath of secrecy, I gave the lad a second chance. Trained him to be my successor: The Second Harbinger.”

Did junior live up to expectations?

“Very much so. As it turns out, he was one of the major reasons why his old guild beat me in the first place. He had sharp eyes and an even sharper mind to analyze the situation. He was just naive when it comes to politics.”

“I gave him some rules to follow. One: to never show his name or face. Two: to never give or take any bribes, as they’re a tangled web of trouble. Three: to not take any new members that’s not a successor. More members increases one’s chances of getting unmasked.”

“With my successor on my side, I soon regained everything that I had lost. Then I passed the torch to him, citing my college education as the main reason for retirement. Got to get my accounting degree before age catches up to me.”

And then… The War of the Red Victory turned his life around.

“Indeed. That disaster happened just a few months after I started the introductory courses. Becoming a Supreme Judge made those accounting skills all the more vital.”

Did he cheat by cramming the books in his Hub?

“How else could I juggle deathmatches, law enforcement, and an accounting exam all at the same time? My wife helped me in academics. I wouldn’t be here today without her, and I don’t mean just
in the romantic sense.”

“Which brings me to the ‘morals of the story’, so to speak.” Mezil concluded. “One, the media is more often a pest than not. It takes a Determined soul to fend them off. Two, no one can do everything alone. Focus too much on one thing and you’ll lose sight of other opportunities.”

“Frisk,” he said, “I have to admit, your parents did well in handling the media. Since their return to the Surface, they’ve truly come to embrace their roles as a proper King and Queen. The bumbling ignorance they displayed in the beginning has become a thing of the past. They’ve earned my respect.”

Thanks Tsunderjudge!

From now on, though, please help inform your awesome royal parents about the world’s politics. It's still quite new to them.

“Noted.”

Mezil started rubbing his throat. All that talking must have made them dry.

“Well… I’m off to drink some water. The story’s done anyway. Go to bed you two. It’s late.”

Okey-dokey. You put your phone away and tucked yourself to bed. Before you settled in though, the old man had one more message for you.

“By the way. The Dreemurs and Sir Griffen were cleared for discharge tomorrow. Along with Sir Gerson, they will arrive in Ebott about noon.”

You burst into a small celebration with Papyrus.

“THEY’RE COMING HOME!!!” He cried.

Yes! That’s the BEST news! It’s been so long since you had seen them, time loops included!

Oh man, you’re getting too excited to sleep.

“SO AM I!!!!”

Just as Mezil left your bedroom, you caught a glimpse of a genuine smile.

You were stunned. It wasn’t slight or snarky or ironic or weak: it was a REAL one! The tsundere was actually capable of that?!

“OF COURSE,” said Papyrus. “I HAD SEEN IT BEFORE! HE WAS SUPER PROUD OF ME WHEN I ACHIEVED MY ASCENSION.”

Aww man. While you weren’t looking, Papyrus had become an exclusive friend to the scariest misunderstood vampire.

C’mon, let’s hit the hay. Don’t wanna be all groggy for the big day.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks to WolvenOne, author of Long Road for advice on how to make the most annoying newscasters based on real life. He follows the news and boy, sometimes you wonder why they're so sensationalist.
Chapter Notes

Some long awaited revelations in this chapter. Enjoy!

Man, I really can't guarantee my update schedule anymore. Things getting more and more complicated in story.

Welp. This is definitely straight out of science fiction.

Six containers. Six pipes connected to a central machine. And six human SOULS to fix.

First, the fragments were flooded with liquid ‘Patience’ to slow down further decay.

Once they had stabilized in their individual bottles, the fellow scientists added a new input to the machine. Liquid ‘Justice’ and ‘Integrity’ were injected straight into the system. The solution mixed as a swirling concoction of sunflower yellow and cobalt blue.

The multi-coloured mixture served a dual purpose: one to identify the correct parts, two to draw the pieces together. The computer does the fine tuning: not fun to have your arms connected to the hipbone so to speak.

Next, a jade liquid filled the canisters. ‘Kindness’ mended the fragments, promoting a cohesive whole. However, leaving them as they are would just slow an inevitable dissipation.

They’re out of energy. No strength. Running on empty stomachs. That won’t do.

A bright, candy-like mixture of orange ‘Bravery’ and purple ‘Perseverance’ replaced the peaceful green shades. Half a minute later, the bright crimson of ‘Determination’ was added in: a triple swirl of life.

The final result: the SOULS of the Six, fully formed. Sans couldn’t say that they’re in mint condition, though. They no longer shone as bright as he remembered. Almost translucent: about 80% opacity.

Still for all intents and purposes, the procedure went well.

Chara asked, “Is it done?”

Alphys rubbed her eyes. “I can’t believe it… but… but it finally is!”

Flowey heaved a groan of relief. “Good riddance. That was the longest day of the week. What time is it anyway?”

Sans replied, “Two in the morning. Wanna wake the kid up?”

Project Leader Lucidia frowned at the prospect. “Not yet. As they are, the Six won’t have the strength to communicate.”

“Fair enough. Guess it’s time to catch some zees.”
“Affirmative.” She nodded in approval.

Flowey, Chara, and Anise exclaimed a united cheer. And so, the people shuffled around in preparation to retire for the day.

Sans waited. Watched. Observed. It’s the same as he had done for so many years.

Doctor Gaster, trying to act like a responsible adult, ushered the ‘youthlings’ out. Off to bed for them, before anyone changes their minds. No last-minute video games, no internet surfing, and no movie binging.

Lady Lucidia stayed behind. She would always be the last to leave. Sometimes she doesn’t leave at all.

The woman turned towards Sans, questioning: “What do you wish to discuss that requires such privacy?”

He replied, “What made you jump to that conclusion? I could just be too lazy to leave.”

“Fact: I am unable to relax around you.”

He couldn’t blame her for feeling that way. Lady Lucidia’s prim mannerisms served as a front to hide her flaws. In truth, she becomes emotionally unsteady in the heat of confrontations.

No surprise that Gaelic, her trusted bodyguard, always kept watch his mistress. Maybe he stalked the air vents. Maybe he bunkered down by the doorway. The locations shifted often, but his dedication did not.

_Doubt he’d understand the details. Still, it doesn’t change the fact that he could chew me out over tone and body language._

_Gotta play it safe._

“That’s some improper proper paranoia right there,” he said, “Nonetheless, I do wanna confirm something.”

He thus made himself comfortable. Teleported to the edge of the nearest table. Rather difficult to hoist himself up with one hand, after all.


“I happened to confirm a bunch of stuff there. Like, how the Barrier forms a sphere. And how it ignores non-sentient lifeforms. Then there’s the fact that it requires a constant tiny stream of Determination to function. Although, at that size ‘tiny’ becomes relative, no?”

The response? A miniscule, yet noticeable tense on Lucidia’s shoulders.

“Please get to the point.” There was a snap in her voice.

It’s quite clear why Lucidia didn’t have Patience as her strong trait. She’s the no nonsense type, not sparing any time for games or mysteries. He, on the other hand, had all the patience in the world.

“Don’t be like that.” Sans teased, “I mean, a story’s gotta have buildup. Right? Okay, now, we know that The Barrier is not a perpetual machine: it needs a source of DT that outlives the Seven Magi for any unknown amount of time. So what’s actually providing that power?”
Sans paused. He spared her a moment for a chance to answer.

And yet, she said nothing.

“Aw c’mon. Not even a guess? Fine then. Like or not, I’m gonna start presenting some hypotheses.”

“Let’s see. Hypothesis Number One. Give The Barrier a routine feeding of Determination. Like, leave a Legendary Artifact or something somewhere and replenish it at set intervals of time. Although… that’s not really a valid option. The Surface never did have any good DT-Extraction technology. Plus the logistics are a nightmare. Too much upkeep. Too easy to sabotage.”

“Hypothesis Number Two. Replace the aforementioned fuel source with your hubby’s ‘vampire’ system. This turns the Supreme Judge into a permanent battery. Sounds great on paper… until said battery gets assassinated for control of the Keys of Fate, starting the War of the Red Victory. Safe to say we can rule out this option too.”

“Next,” said Sans, “Hypothesis Number Three. Humans. To be exact, humans within the proximity of the Barrier. Their Aura of Determination is the perfect candidate. I bet Genocider realized this, so he planted his jolly band of Reds right at the foot of the mountain, growing a population of local DEMONs to further strengthen the stronghold.”

“But therein lies the conundrum… One day the Gungnir all left, and your Vanquishers exterminated their DEMON brethren. Nothing much would be fed to The Barrier henceforth. I bet the Magi thought that it’s gonna collapse. Except, it didn’t. Weird, huh?”

Quietly, Lady Lucidia’s persevered in her resistance. Judging from her intensifying glare, she caught on to those facts a long time ago. Yet, because of that she refused to grace a single word.

_Yup. As expected, with her smarts, there’s no way she could have missed those details._

“So, I’ve been thinking. The Sealing was way long ago. The Barrier was getting old. Outdated. You can’t really install a new system without taking it apart and recasting it whole. That’s a no-go for the Mount Ebott situation.”

“…But what if the Barrier turned to a different source? Hey, a person is a person. Doesn’t matter whether or not they’re weak or strong. As long there’s someone creating the Determination, it’s all valid pickings.”

“Y’know,” he added: “Back in the day when I manned Gaster’s Chronograph, one of those nasty Dead Ends had monsters falling down en masse. Monsters, however, are immune to bacterial and viral infections. A ‘plague’ in the normal sense would be impossible.”

“That is… unless the Barrier, having turned toward us instead, started sucking out more than we could bear? Crazy thought, huh?”

_Alright. This is gonna be the final nail in the coffin. It's now or never._

“Welp.” he shrugged, “Who knew ‘neglect’ was just another word for ‘genocide’.”

The prediction was spot on. True Blue magic lifted Sans off the table and clamped his jaws shut. That was the reaction he had sought for.

_Bingo._
[Silence.] Lucidia signed her threat. [Lest I slip my touch. A coin made from your bones is worth less than dust. This is your final warning.]

The pressure around his throat increased. Lucidia’s eyes burned in an intense fire. Her hair and clothes floated on their ends, bent by the force of her magic.

*Do I even want to know what she does to coins??!!! If my neck is anything to go by, it’s nothing good.*

At the same time, Sans noticed the shadows from under the door had begun prowling back and forth. It’s Gaelic. The spike of Lucidia’s magic must have raised an alarm. But, he didn’t charge in. Could be due to the lack of commotion.

*Man. I always thought she’s the scariest of the four. Cenna and Mezil have an obvious gradient. Snakedog, well, you expect him to be nutty. But the Lady? She’s a pressure cooker. Extra dangerous.*

Lucidia began: [Insistence: we did NOT abandon you! Since its founding, The Magus Association’s primary goal has been to protect the monster nations from any and all threats. Yours included.]

[I know what you’re thinking, Sans Serif. You accuse us that we had lost sight of our duty. That the Supreme Judges of the past began to think of you as mere distant myth. That we killed your kin through inaction.]

[Perish that thought! I refuse to let you heap the sins of the long dead upon me!]

Sans Serif was more intrigued than nervous. In a way, she was right: he could dish out those accusations and more if he wanted to pick a bone. The act of ‘flaming’ didn’t need to be factual, only sensational.

However, she was also wrong: Sans intended to subvert the accusation. Alas, the Lady had presumed the worst outright.

He tried to sign back to her, but even that attempt to communicate was shut down. Her Blue grabbed his hand and lifted it up.

Lucidia narrowed her eyes. [Request to speak denied. I refuse to let you walk all over me.]

He started sweating.

*Mental note: I may have gone a bit too far. Not my best decisions in hindsight.*

[Listen here and read well,] she said. [The Barrier was meant to be broken from the outside. To do so, one of the two major clauses must be fulfilled: either the world becomes safe for Magickind, or your nation fails to thrive.]

[We were ready to mobilize after the Great Ebott Razing, fearing the worst case scenario. Yet, instead of confirming a decline, your nation’s lifesigns grew stronger. Denser. More robust. What should we conclude from this paradox? Break? Or don’t break? Factor: inconclusive.]

[Sans Serif, the quality and quantity of your Champions astounds me. You yourself have observed the effects. Experienced them. The moment the Barrier’s oppression ended, your Determination flourished to the point where you competed head-to-head with humans. And compete you did.]

[Cease your false casual friendliness, ‘Seraphim’. It’s a tasteless joke. Your reputation for being laid-back was nothing more than the side-effect of a taxing drain.]
Lady Lucidia gently lowered Sans back on the ground, marking the end of her long rant.

Freedom, at last. Sans rubbed his sore neck. The release hurt more than he expected.

“Um,” he said, “Wow. Bad mood much?”

Ignoring his commentary, the woman turned her head aside. “You win again, Sans Serif. You crafted your words to provoke a reaction, did you not?”

He asked back, “How so?”

“If I ignore and leave, it implies secrecy. If I deny, you’d counter me by exposing my lies. If I lashed out, you’ll confirm your suspicions. All of my possible actions will benefit your beloved Queen in the long run. She will have more power with her negotiations now.”

“Unless I play the cards in a way that favours both parties.” He retorted.

“Why should I trust you?” Lucidia replied, skeptical.

“You’re thinking that I always hide my real face under the fakes. Nah, Lady. That’s being too straight. Sure, I can goof around to make someone lower their guard. Yet, I like the friendly casual attitude too. Good for my SOUL. I don’t blame ya for getting the wrong idea though: we were on opposite sides for a long while.”

“That said, let’s clear up some misunderstandings here. Like, that key detail you gave me. It’s impossible for you to know the real condition of the Underground without breaking the Barrier. Good point. It’s Schrödinger’s Mountain, after all.”

“Tori’s a mom, and moms have a certain perspective. Make it known to her that you’re honest about your kind intentions. Revealing these troubling truths might make her relax her stance. No guarantees, but it’s better than nothing.”

“You…” Lucidia glanced at the floor. “We could have been allies had you bothered reading my letter.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. I could still decline the offer.”

There and then, she shot an intense glare that rivalled her husband. If she had a gun, the bullet would have struck him square between the eyes.

“Who are you to presume the contents? Is it because I behave according to a certain archetype? What arrogance… I shall paraphrase the words you discarded.”

*Here we go.*

*Wonder how will it line up with my predictions?*

“This is right. You are the **worst** kind of trash!”

The punchline hit so hard, Sans burst into laughter with the ‘hahs’ and the ‘hehs’ mixed together.

“T-that was your opening statement?” he snorted. “Oh God. Nice to know that you got your facts straight. I was under the impression that you didn’t think of me as trash.”

His commentary was not met with pleasure. “That is addressed in the letter too. Please, let me continue without any further interruption.”
“Cool. ‘K. Carry on.”

So, she did. “In the previous timeline, you had stripped my husband to his undergarments. In public. Before your fellow citizens of Mount Ebott. All for the sake of your twisted sense of humour!”

“Without a doubt your character belongs in a burning heap of refuse. And yet, I will disregard your flaws, for your mind is sharper than any blade.”

“By the time you read this letter, Judge Mezil Thyme had undone certain doom with the Keys of Fate. Your nation had sought independence. In doing so, your people fell prey to Gungnir and the media. Ebott was reduced to cinder, dust, and ashes.”

“At first, I wanted to mentor Papyrus as a Chronographer. However, not everyone with his potential has the strength to carry his duty.”

“I therefore asked myself: is it right to expose him to unspeakable horrors in search of a golden path that may not even exist? It’s an ethical dilemma that I do not have a clear answer. The truth of the world can change a person for better or for worse. I know how it changed me, and I couldn’t wholeheartedly say it was ‘good’.”

“Then, you interceded. You bargained. You volunteered to bear the burden of his mission to convince The Dreemurr Nation to trust the Magus Association and cooperate. In exchange, Papyrus would be freed from the memories of genocide.”

“Judge Thyme questioned: ‘Why should I trust a man who trusts no one?’. You answered: ‘My actions will thus ‘butterfly’ out into the great unknown’. Though I cannot divulge my personal thoughts on the matter, I can say that I found the implications quite intriguing.”

“As part of our deal, I taught you everything I know about Determination: from its influence to its practical uses. We hoped that it would give you new inspiration to avert the grim tidings that await.”

“I shall now write down three main questions of our subsequent thought experiment, and their respective conclusions.”

“Question One. Can the law protect you? Conclusion: negative. A law is only as good as enforcement, and enforcement as good as detection. History shows this all too clear. Anyone can be corrupted. Twenty-five years ago, betrayal of the highest degree engulfed two of the three remaining monster nations on the Surface. The ramifications still linger today, threatening to destroy the world as we know it.”

“Question Two. Can the Supreme Judge protect you? Conclusion: conditional. The desire exists. I vouch for his upright and loyal character. But he too is mortal. Once his flesh wanes, there is no guarantee that he could keep a hold on the Keys of Fate.”

“Question Three. Can Frisk be trusted as a successor? Conclusion: uncertain. I acknowledge your concerns over their qualifications. They had once become a Seven SOUL-DEMON GOD, with many crimes that I had analyzed and categorized. Their potential so wide, yet so narrow. To you, they’re both a friend and an enemy. A student and a traitor. A dangerous entity. They must therefore, before further consideration, undergo the Trial of the Crimson Hall. It is the place where the body, mind, and heart of all candidates are tested.”

“As for Papyrus, if he’s injured we’ll heal him. If he’s in danger, we’ll protect him. We will not force him to become a Chronographer. However, if he insists on that path on informed consent, we will not deny it either. The training regiment will be tailored to his current ability, not future stakes. That’s
the most I can assure you.”

“Perhaps you might suspect our altruism. Why should the Magi help you deal with the Gungnir? What hidden benefit is there to gain? Resources of your land? Manpower and talent? Credibility for a propaganda machine? And more?”

“Indeed: this is not mere altruism. We do need your help. As I alluded to earlier, there exists a grave threat of our own making. One beyond politics, beyond Gungnir, and beyond the powers of this world. Our allies are insufficient. Many of them cowered, while even more laughed: either at the impossibility of our prospects, or to allay their fears.”

“Suggestion: will you accept cooperation beyond our initial agreement? Our interests align, and multiple brilliant minds are better than one. Remember, it is sinners who need mercy. Not the spotless. Show mercy to us, and we shall do the same for you.”

“Signed, Lucidia of House Berendin.”

Sans drew a deep breath and held it for a while. The revealed contents of the letter sent shivers up his spine.

The hell? It’s almost point by point. Yet I’m a slob and she’s a maiden. How in the world did we end up being so different?

“Sorry to break it to ya, Lady. The only thing that I didn’t expect was the opening statement. I know it’s cliche to say ‘great minds think alike’, but yeah, ‘great minds think alike’…”

“Even the allusions to the Ocean Abomination?” she questioned. “You wouldn’t have known about that until after your gambit began. Your opinions really wouldn’t have changed had you known of our plight beforehand?”

Sans pondered for a moment. “Considering scope, I would have done what I had done anyway. With or without your hints. A Dead End is a Dead End.”

Lucidia, the Sky Witch, used every bit of kindness, integrity, and perseverance to resist slapping the sense out of Sans. It’s already commendible that she tolerated his presence for so long.

For my own safety, I better calm her down. Don’t wanna get strangled again. Or dropped from the stratosphere. Nope, nope, nope.

“Speaking of hypotheticals,” he switched subjects, “Remember that Persona timeline? It’s the culmination of my Megalovania findings. Quite the eye opener that one.”

“Still… There IS something I didn’t realise until much later. Not until you had me catalogue everything from other perspectives. You, uh, made quite a sacrifice there. Integrated yourself into a machine… damn. Levitating an entire island 24/7 ain’t a joke. Not even gonna grace it with my usual puns; you’re something else alright.”

Sans sensed the tell-tale signs of floating hairs. She’s not keen about it. But it’s a point he has to make.

“What surprised me most was how Robo Lucy still tried to negotiate a cooperation with me. I would have expected her to rain hell the moment she had the opportunity. But… she gave Frisk the order to capture me alive instead. Contrast that with Grillby, who was more than ready to skim the pond scum out of the Waterworks and roast it into cinders.”
“Of course she wouldn’t,” grumbled Lucidia. “A machine is only concerned about the best logical outcome. She would have no room for petty feelings. Your skills were of paramount importance. That is all.”

“That’s where you misunderstand, Lady. You never did need my skills or my smarts. By all logic, I’m a liability. Unpredictable, with an abysmal track record to boot. The real best-but-amoral answer would be to kill me on sight and steal the Seraph System from my dusted bones.”

He concluded, “Even as a machine, you never did lose your Kindness. Just got better at pretending. Always caring so much about the wellbeing of others, to the point where you killed your SOUL for the sake of the world…”

“…If I knew the real depth of your heart, then yeah, we would have been allies.”

Lucidia bitterly replied, “Are you pinning the blame on me for lackluster communication?”

“Nope,” he winked. “Not at all. I’m just a poor judge of character. That’s why I’m not the one running the Crimson Hall. I would spend way too much time trolling the fuck out of everyone.”

“Would?” The woman huffed. “‘Did’ is the word. Also, mind your manners.”

“Eh, fair point. Sorry.”

“Anyway,” said Sans, “Be kinder to yourself, ‘kay? I know, I know. Least qualified guy to give you that advice and all. But hey, that’s my objective observation.”

“I see…” Lucidia faced the SOUL devices once more. Her gravity-defying aura faded.

*Good to see her back to normal. Wouldn’t want to leave her high-strung.*

“Welp. I’m gonna put the lab work down for the night. See ya.”

He teleported to the door to help himself out.

Gaelic blocked the way. What a pointless endeavor: as long the beast doesn’t catch his clothes or his dead arm, Sans could teleport to safety.

*Should I get sassy? Or should I save my strength? Hmm. Decisions, decisions.*

However, another person made it for him.


Though initially hesitant, the lanky skeleton soon bowed to the orders of his mistress. He fixed his watchful gaze on Sans as he slipped between the gaps.

“Thanks, Lady.”
King's Homecoming

Chapter Notes

Play Deltarune if you haven't already. It's Toby's secret darker yet darker project.

Also yes I have already contributed to the fandom:

See the end of the chapter for more notes

King Asgore checked the date on his phone. Saturday, it read: six days since the Trial of the Crimson Hall.

Which also meant six days since Sans broke Toriel’s heart. That whole ordeal was not a pleasant way to discover such secret, one-sided feelings.

From the early morning onward, he concentrated on getting the formalities done: packing up their stuff, signing the discharge documents, meeting up with the two remaining monsters in the hospital, all while watching out for any angry humans.

A limousine arrived, along with an armed escort of Magi. Asgore found the arrangements needlessly fancy, but he had heard from Mettaton that this was a kind of transport reserved for VIPs. It would reflect bad on the host if they failed to provide the proper ride for one’s status.

“…It's quite spacious inside…” Grillby remarked.

“The seats face each other too, wa ha ha.”

Except, fitting the Goats side by side STILL proved a little too tight for comfort. So, instead they each paired up with the smaller person.

Asgore and Gerson on the forward facing side. Toriel and Grillby on the back facing side.

King and Queen sat diagonally across to balance the weight.

The long trip back to Mount Ebott thus began.

Toriel gazed out of the car window. Quiet. Lost in thought. The conclusion of Frisk’s trial had brought only a new plethora of complicated concerns for the royal couple.

Should he strike up a conversation now? Asgore wondered. Or should he give her some space? How strange it was for the “PR-Expert” to get clammed up before his own wife.

In his hesitation, he felt a sudden nudge. It’s coming from Gerson, urging him to take the initiative.

Gulp. Do or die, as Undyne might say.

“Toriel?” asked Asgore. “Do you… want to talk?”

“If you wish.” She replied, yet her gaze continued to stare into the far yonder.
He pondered out loud: “I wonder if we did the right thing? After all, our surprise press conference must have seemed like open defiance against Judge Thyme…”

“We needed to prove ourselves,” she answered. “Consider it leverage. Both sides wish to get this issue done as soon as possible. Besides, if our actions were that disastrous, time would have unwound. We would have received a warning from Frisk, or the Supreme Judge himself.”

Everyone checked their inboxes, pronto. They then breathed a collected sigh of relief when they found no signs of bad omens.

“That’s sharp of you, Toriel,” Asgore noted. “Reminds me of the old days.”

All he got was a soft ‘mhmm’ from her.

The awkward silence returned.

If Toriel couldn’t muster the spirit, then Asgore considered it his duty to stoke the flames. Therefore, he mustered every ounce of his ‘determination’ to snap her out of her slump.

“Please talk to me,” said Asgore. “I want to help you.”

“I am not sure if you can. I worry about our nation, our child, and… him.”

“Sans, right?”

Toriel nodded.

Grillby raised his hand to the surprise of everyone. “…I request permission to speak my mind…”

What did he want to say, Asgore wondered. “Sure. Fear not. We’re all ears.”

“…Do not worry about Sans Serif…” said the fiery one. “…He’s alive… He can take care of himself…”

Toriel immediately turned away from the window. “He is?!”

“…Yes, Your Majesty…”

“How is he?” She asked, worried. “Did we. I. Did I go too far?”

Bowing his head, he answered: “…No… I’d say not enough…”

Gerson laughed. “Wa ha ha! I see why your grandpa was so concerned about ya. Once you’re determined, there’s no stopping.”

“…I am?…”

The old turtle paused for a while. “I’m not sure. Maybe I got the wrong kiddo. Asgore?”

Poor friend. He had aged so much over the millennia.

Asgore cleared his throat and smiled at his citizen. “You passed the qualifications to become a Captain roughly the same age as Undyne did. Then -- despite Gaster’s pleas -- you retired early to open a bar. I think that’s quite headstrong.”

The fire elemental clutched his shirt, digging into the fabric. Troubled.
“…King Asgore…” said Grillby, “…May I confess?…”

“Certainly,” so nodded the monarch.

“…I think I’ve changed…”

“Since when?”

“…Since I got to the Surface…”

That surprised Asgore. He expected Grillby to say that he had changed since the big fire at The Magus Association, not before.

“Could you explain it in more detail? Take your time."

Grillby answered, “…At first, I could work longer hours… Then I helped the town… The next thing I knew… I fought battle after battle… And then Sans Serif betrayed us…”

“…A violent fire burns in my chest… It refuses to die down… If I was there during the press conference too…”

The fire elemental squeezed his eyes shut. “…I’m afraid I would have lost my composure…”

It’s a story that Asgore heard aplenty, more so during the war days. “It sounds like you’re grieving, Grillbz. Your hopes were high. And then, someone who should know better broke your trust.”

“…Perhaps…” The knight bowed his head again. “…Thank you for your wisdom… …Allow me a moment of reflection.”

Now, Asgore had two individuals spacing out at the windows.

* * *

When the transport arrived at Mount Ebott, the entourage found the town’s citizens waiting to welcome their ruler.

Such a scene was nothing strange for King Asgore. He’s been before crowds for as long as he could remember. Mettaton’s TV crew? That raised some eyebrows.

Mettaton in his box form gave some last minute instructions to anyone willing to listen. He called for monster children to come to the very front. For the adult monsters, Mettaton’s crew provided handfuls of pink sparkling confetti.

“Even more media?” Toriel sighed.

Squinting through the glass, Gerson asked: “King Fluffybuns, did ya set this up?”

“No,” Asgore replied. “I believe Mettaton is acting on his own again.”

The Magus driver asked: “Your Majesty, should we meet the crowd?”

“Ah, yes. Please give us a moment to tidy up.”
Tidy up, they did. Made sure their clothes fit right, no stray strand of fur sticking out, and free from other messes built up over the long trip.

Once Asgore gave the signal, the driver stepped out first. He walked over to the King’s side, and opened the door for him to exit. A formal sign of respect.

The moment the King and Queen walked on camera, the Mettaton’s TV crew lifted a signboard with a big ‘GO’ printed on it. The citizens happily obliged by throwing the supplied confetti.

Mettaton exclaimed to the TV crew. “Beauties and Gentlebeauties, King Asgore and Queen Toriel are home at last! Look at the joys on the people’s faces. Especially the children, who cannot wait to give our beloved Boss Monsters a big hug. What jubilee!”

A child asked, “Can we go now, Mister Mettaton?”

“If our royal subjects are ready, why not?”

Asgore chuckled and spread his arms wide. “Come here little ones.”

So the children ran towards King Asgore for a big great hug. They exploded into all sorts of chatter: questions mixed with excitement about their own adventures.

“I’m so glad you’re back!” said a little cat girl.

Asgore replied, “I’m glad too.”

“Are you okay?” A slime child asked. “You didn’t get hurt too bad, right?”

There’s no way he could disclose anything that went down in the Crimson Hall, whatmore the fact that he almost died. So, he kept to a more general reply: “Nothing crippling, dear child.”

An excited bird boy hopped up and down: “Asgore, Asgore, Asgore, there was a weird fog and we couldn’t get out but we stood together and and and--”

He laughed at that response. “Did you help the adults?”

“Yeah!”

“That’s brave. Good job!”

Some of the older children -- Toriel’s students -- approached her instead. Asgore noticed Kid was among them: he’s one of the Papyrus-fans along with Frisk.

Kid asked, “Yo! Are you alright, Teacher?”

“I’m fine. Thank you, dear.” She replied, “Have you been good?”

“Yup! We stuck with each other in times of crisis!”

“I’m very proud of you.”

It was great to see Toriel’s nurturing side again, Asgore thought. She didn’t have any opportunity since she became caught up with global politics.

Mettaton showed his hand towards the scene. “Behold, darlings~ A regular sight of our nation! Every child in Ebott had sat on the King’s fluffy lap at least once, asking for a Gyftmas present.
Same for me when I was a kid.”

“As for our Queen? A beloved teacher! She appears to be made of sterner stuff, but rest assured it is for the good of the future generation. Her mothering nature ensures no ill should ever befall a child under her watch.”

Toriel tried her best to not glare at Mettaton for his ‘description’. She hadn’t gotten used to runaway news yet, as it’s been many decades since she was in Monsterkind’s limelight.

“Oh!” The superstar switched his attention to the insides of the car. “Do I spot Gerson Boom, the Hammer of Justice? He’s been travelling the world as a historian, giving eyewitness testimonies of the ancient past. Quite a feat for a thousand-year-old turtle!”

“Wa ha ha, ya didn’t need to call me out like that.”

Asgore himself encouraged the children to greet his old friend. He kept a close eye nonetheless, just in case a child tripped into his shell. They can get quite clumsy in their jostling.

Grillby waited behind the car. He had exited the vehicle on his own, keeping a lookout for any trouble.

“I spy with my fantastic eye a hero returning from duty!” Mettaton exclaimed, “Grillbz Grillenn, former Captain of the Royal Guard. Putting down his title doesn’t stop him from protecting the populous. He was none other than my comrade in arms during the great Spire fire!”

The grownups went wild with flirting hearts. Bachelors of male, female, and other categories -- defined and undefined -- squealed for the fiery one. Some swooned over.

“He’s sooo handsome!”
“Dashing!”
“Glasses are injustice!”
“I knew he had a bar, but I didn’t know he was the Captain!”
“Marry me, hero!”

“Oh my,” Mettaton gasped. With some extra dramatization sprinkled on top. “Looks like he’s becoming the next hot topic! My, my, my, my. Will he steal my spotlight?”

Poor Grillby. Asgore sensed that he’s getting intimidated by the attention: he never showed his face to the public for a reason.

The King stepped forward to calm his citizens down. “People, please don’t distract him. Sir Grillenn has taken on the duty of my bodyguard despite recovering just yesterday. I ask that you give our good man some space to do his job.”

There was a big ‘oooh’ from the crowd.

“Of course, Your Majesty!”
“Protecting you is very important.”
“Do your best, Sir Fire!”

I’m always grateful that they’re so cooperative.

“Who did I see over there?…” Mettaton pointed to the back of the crowd, feigning ignorance.

“Oh dear, I can’t get a clear view. Darlings, would you be so kind to step aside?”
The citizens giggled and laughed as they shuffled around, cutting a path towards the intended direction. They’ve been clued in from the start: Mettaton is meticulous when it comes to showbiz after all.

Judge Mezil Thyme in his best suit waited at the far end, his cane resting before him like a sword of human yore. He always looked serious. Quite hard to tell if he’s angered or otherwise.

Asgore spotted someone hiding behind the stern human. It’s tiny and blue, with a bit of purple, topped off by dark brown.

“Frisk?” he muttered.

Frisk indeed. The child hopped out of their hiding spot, waving to their parents in great joy.

Mettaton announced to the camera loud and clear: “It’s Frisk, our beloved human Ambassador! Look at how healthy and hale they are. Not to mention utterly elated! After almost a whole week on their own, they’re finally reuniting with their dearest family~~”

Asgore couldn’t contain himself. Neither could Toriel. Both hurried on their feet to meet dear Frisky Frisk again.

The child couldn’t wait either. Their steps got faster and faster, until they sped to an all-out run.

“Mom!” Frisk cried out. “Dad!”

“Frisk!”

“My child!”

They jumped into each other’s embrace. King Asgore and Queen Toriel hugged them together: not as two estranged persons, but as a single couple. A return to the days before the tragedy.

The populace cheered. They threw away whatever remaining confetti they had in their hands and shot magic into the air. Young and old, humanoid and otherwise: their hearts celebrated as one.

Mettaton posed in front of the camera. “The most splendous sight! Love crosses all borders indeed~ Brings a tear to my mechanical eye.”

A rhythmic tapping sound then caught the attention of Asgore’s ears. It belonged to a certain man’s cane.

“Ooooh!” Mettaton narrated the events: “It’s the Supreme Judge of the Magus Association. I heard some naysayers insisting that he was just twiddling his thumbs, but this couldn’t be further from the truth! Diplomacy, baby~”

Asgore’s fur stood a little. He had once suffered the brunt of this human’s combat capabilities in a terrifying test of wills. His merciless might reminded him of Genocider: unyielding and unwavering.

Mezil, however, reached out for a handshake. “Your people are kind to me. I’m grateful for the hospitality. Thank you.”

Asgore returned the gesture with a smile. “And thank you too for looking after us.”

On that day, for the first time in a thousand years, the ‘Kings’ of Magi and Monsters shook hands before the world.
With all the welcoming business done and over, the entourage adjourned to Alphys’ Lab. Her spacious estate and the vitality of her equipment turned the place into the unofficial headquarters of the kingdom.

Not everyone attended the meeting. Cenna wasn’t there. Neither were Garamond and Gaelic.

Lady Lucidia and Captain Undyne updated the others on the situation.

First, Mettaton -- self-proclaimed to be a vital member of the diplomacy team -- had caught wind of the news fallout. So, he took it upon himself to provide the necessary ‘counterbalance’.

Second, Papyrus was tasked to cook a near-impossible feast. He asked for Toriel’s help on her signature pie. Somehow, it’s part of his key victory plan.

After getting a list of ingredients, he bolted right out of the door. Asgore supposed that Papyrus already knew all the remaining details. Therefore, he didn’t need to sit through the whole meeting.

Next on the itenary: the Six SOULS had been recovered, and soon they’ll be ready to speak with everyone. Frisk wanted to respect their wishes… whatever those may be.

Then, Lady Lucidia disclosed the Barrier’s true nature. That was the most startling news so far. By the time she was done, it left every monster dumbfounded.

“I… I see,” Toriel muttered.

Gerson shrugged. “Knew there was a catch. To think an envoy from the Surface should have come to set us free, but never did…”

Mettaton leaned forward on the sofa, amazingly whimsical despite the news: “That’s the twistiest of twists! Life is more exciting than fiction on rare occasions.”

Alphys wiped the sweat off her face with a handkerchief. “The Barrier sapping our spirits due to the lack of humans… Is that the real cause of the persistent sadness in the Underground? I… I don’t know. We were still grieved over the Prince’s loss.”

“B-but,” asked Undyne, “What the heck was up with the Prophecy then??? Asgore, wasn’t that divine message confirmed by the ancient Seers?”

The King nodded. “Yes, it was.”

Doctor Gaster hung his head low, as Asgore had expected. The matters of his family history had always been complicated on his emotions.

“This means…” he said. “The Surface would never become truly safe for us Monsters no matter how long we waited. The prophecy would lead us to ruin in all eventual realities. Except for maybe the original plan—”

Sans walked right into the meeting area. In his usual casual manner, he said: “Nah. Forget about that Adult-Asriel business. Total disaster.”

Peace vanished in a blink. Grillby dashed towards Sans at top speeds, his fist charged with mighty fire.
Good thing the sly skeleton zipped out of harm’s way. That action bought Asgore enough time to regain control of the situation.

“Grillbz Grillenn,” He ordered. “Stand your ground!”

The former Captain knew when to yield. But, the elemental magic continued to course around his body unrestrained.

“Whoa there,” said Sans. “I thought the whole attack-on-sight deal ain’t your thing.”

Grillby questioned: “…Did you escape imprisonment?…”

Those words put the alarm in context. This faithful knight thought that the criminal had broken out of his confines. Maybe set to do more crime.

“Nope,” Sans replied, “I’m also part of the emergency science team hammered together by Lil’ Miss Lucy here.”

“…Address Lady Lucidia with more respect…”

The skeleton raised his brow. “You got the hots for her too? She’s a married woman y’know. Geez.”

“…Rich nonsense coming from you…”

What mood whiplash. The day started out so fine, and now the dignity of the wives was at stake.

Asgore sought to calm the situation. “I’m sure nobody here believes that silly allegation. Please, Sans, don’t make things worse again.”

The short skeleton snickered. “Don’t ya think it’s a bit weird that the ex-Captain of the Royal Guard is being so antsy over a princess from a different nation? One might even call it defensive.”

“Excuse me?”

“Yup. Grillby protected her from Gungnir. And I got some other scoop that hints to a specific direction, if you get my drift.”

The King started to sweat. All that news, dropped right on his feet with no time to mull over.

Toriel stepped forward. Her back straight and head high. “Is that a problem, Sans? I don’t think so. If Sir Grillenn is so careful with Lady Lucidia, it means that Judge Thyme could entrust her security to us.”

“Like how they entrust her security to Gaelic the Snakedog? He said some reeeeal saucy stuff.”

Before further damage control could be done, Grillby stormed off without saying a word. He took the stairs.

The scene left everyone extra awkward. Faces of disbelief. Faces of aggravation. Faces of shock.

“What in the blue blazes were you thinking?!?!” Gaster freaked out. His Amalgamated friends burst into a flurry of hand-signs, reprimanding their son.

Even Mettaton cannot stand to see the outcome. “Was that a joke, darling? Because it’s not even funny.”
“Welp,” Sans replied, “I had other things on my mind, but I got too distracted by Sir Hothead The Traitor Knight to remember what.”

Undyne blew her top. She slammed her fist on the table so hard, it tilted to one side. “You haven’t answered the question!!!”

“Sorry, not now. Catch ya later.”

Just like that, the provoker slipped back to his workshop.

* * *

When the couple excused themselves for a drink in the kitchen, Toriel approached Asgore for a request.

He knew that it would be business related. Nonetheless, it’s a welcome change from getting completely snubbed. The recent developments still felt unreal. So many things happened in the span of a week.

“Asgore, you should speak with Grillby. I don’t know him enough.”

“Well, I…”

Toriel glared with a pout. “Don’t tell me you were holed up in that castle for so long, you don’t know anything about Sir Grillenn either?”

“No,” Asgore explained: “He’s the stoic sort. Never said much about his personal life, or feelings for that matter. You know how difficult it is to discern Frisk or Judge Thyme when they don’t speak?”

“So that moment in the car…”

Asgore nodded. “Was the very first time he asked for advice.”

Toriel squeezed her hands together, anxious. “I think we’ve done something… irreversible. What if, by giving him a piece of our life force, we somehow changed him? I-it was my plan to begin with. I-”

She cut herself short with a long, deep breath. “I’m sorry. I think I’m getting ahead of myself.”

“Toriel,” Said Asgore. “If you need anything, call me. I’ll go talk to Grillby first.”

“Thank you.”

The King looked all over. Whatever jovial atmosphere that welcomed him in the beginning was gone, replaced with uncertainty.

The fire elemental was nowhere to be found…

He wasn’t on the first floor.
Or the second.
Or the third.
Or the fourth.
Or the fifth. Or was it the sixth…?

Asgore thought that he should have taken the elevator. It’s a little disorientating without big giant numbers labelling every floor.

Finally, he found him on the rooftop. It’s a beautiful day outside. The flowers of early Spring had begun blooming around town, and the sun shone in bright white: a sign of approaching noonday.

Grillby was with Garamond. He’s inspecting a brown plump stick with curiosity. It appeared to be made from tightly rolled leaves.

Asgore thought he shouldn’t interrupt the men just yet.

“…So this is a cigar…” commented Grillby. “…It’s quite different compared to a cigarette…”

The skeleton behind the face plate said, “Sir Grillenn, I warn against starting the habit. Your fighting style demands top physical condition. Tobacco will do more harm than good.”

“…What about you, then?…”

“I came from an era where it was mistakenly considered medication. By the time their true effects were exposed, I’ve become too addicted to stop.”

“…Addiction, hm?…”

Grillby bit off a small tip of the cigar despite the warnings. Fire elementals could consume anything their flames can burn, traditionally edible or not.

“…It tastes better than I expected… But I feel a little ill…”

“The nicotine content of a cigar is higher than a cigarette. Plus, it has no fillers to water it down.”

“…I see…” The man of fire returned the remainder of the roll. “…Thank you…”

The King smiled. It’s always great to see new friends bonding.

Walking forward, he greeted: “Howdy, Grill--”

The knight however bowed and… stepped backwards.

Asgore thought that it was because of surprise at first. But, whenever he tried to approach him, the man of fire responded by maintaining distance.

“What’s wrong?” The King wondered out loud, blinking.

“…Your Majesty, forgive me…” he replied, “…I shouldn’t be in your presence…”

The stiff formality combined with a guilty expression confused Asgore.

“I don’t understand?”

Investigator Garamond too bowed before the King. “Please allow me to explain, Your Majesty. Sans Serif had studied an alternate timeline where Persona defeated Judge Thyme. That Sir Grillenn joined House Berendin of his own accord to secure citizenship for your nation.”

“…That would make me a traitor, just like Sans…” Grillby winced at the thought. “…Perhaps his
accusations had grounds after all…”

Asgore reasoned: “This is not that timeline. The circumstances differ.”

“…But I may already have feelings for Lady Lucidia… I just don’t know if this is love… Or something else…”

Things just got more complicated right under his nose. Asgore paused to think. The ex-Captain may be an experienced law officer, but his personal life seemed bare.

Gardening takes patience and care. Dealing with the heart of others was no different. If only he could transfer those skills between areas of expertise.

Asgore asked: “Maybe I can help narrow it down? Please tell me why Lady Lucidia became special to you. Be it with many words or few.”

The spring breeze drifted by, bending the orange flames to its path.

“…When I swore a bloodless battle… I saw how her face lit up in reserved hope… That her prayer for a miracle would come true… It’s as though she expected failure… the death of others being the only possible outcome…

“…Would it hurt to show her the light Frisk brought to us?…”

Asgore pondered harder. He tried to recall the days when he first dated Toriel. What made him pursue her as his wife? It certainly wasn’t mere diplomatic ties.

What were the days of his courtship like?
How did he feel when he prepared the flowers for young Toriel?

The memories of his first impressions had yellowed with time, but they certainly never faded.

“Do you feel your heart beating faster?” asked the King. “Fluttering? Awkward warm reactions? Flames changing colour? Water boiling in the cups you hold?”

“……No, Your Majesty……”

What a huge relief. “Then rest assured, it’s not romantic love. I believe your strong emotions came from empathy on her plight. She is in a difficult situation. One that I don’t envy.”

Instead of being glad, the knight grew more sullen. “…Is that so?… Would her plight alone be enough for me to defect?… If yes, what kind of a person am I?… Am I even fit to serve anyone?…”

Tap, tap, tap. It’s that cane again. Mezil must have noticed the long absence.

“Your Majesty,” so he said, “If Sir Grillenn so wills it, would you allow me to pass him under the forge of judgement?”

“The Crimson Hall?” asked the King. “I thought it’s only for Reds?”

“You’re right, the Crimson Hall is typically reserved for Living Victories. But that doesn’t mean I can’t host miscellaneous trials when I see fit.”

Mezil continued, “Besides, the Hall itself is already booked for one such an unusual trial. I’d like to begin proceedings right now. You and Sir Grillenn must attend.”
“Now? As in, this very moment?”

“Apologies for the sudden haste, but we truly don’t have much time left. The Ocean Battle is three weeks from now.”

Asgore’s chest thumped.

Three weeks.
Twenty one days.
That’s not even a month anymore, and they haven’t even signed an official agreement yet…

The King of Monsters asked: “We can’t postpone the battle.?”

Mezil scrunched his brows. “There are ways. But, I suggest that we settle the important matters first.”

Asgore tried to remember what other Red SOUL individuals needed examining. Frisk was already a done deal. So… who else?

“Excuse me, may I ask who will be trialled?”

Turning back to the stairwell, the stern Judge replied:

“Sans Serif.”

Chapter End Notes

Grillby is waking up.

I think you guys should know by now that Sans is up to something. Also I cannot believe it's almost 3 years since I started Golden Quiche.
This chapter was supposed to be released on the 18th of November. But... we didn't get to finish it on time. Why 18th? Because that's the last day before a two-week vacation in Malaysia.

So, both the editor and myself are super tired for the past few days from the vacationing. We tried our best to polish this chapter and catch any inconsistencies. Crossing fingers that nothing went wrong. Thank you Editor-sama for this dedication.

There's a section that I wanted to originally include in this chapter, but it got postponed in the later phases. Multiple rewrites also contributed to this chapter's delay.

Also, on the 27th of November marks the 3rd year of Golden Quiche.

It's going to be THREE YEARS?!?!

I thought I would be done in just months. I feel like a Game Dev now. Did you know Toby had been working on Delta Rune since 2012? Or the guy who made Iconoclast spent 11 years on his project? I understand them so much when it comes to work eating up more years than expected.

EDIT: Image should be fixed now

Mezil never brought so many people into his Hub before. There’s always a first time for everything, one could say. They’re the core Ebott crew, with the exception of Flowey, Chara, and Sans Serif.

It was certainly a cheerful atmosphere. Papyrus uttered a joyful squeal, while the rest of the monsters were in various levels of wonder and awe.

Undyne grinned. “So THIS is Mezil Thyme’s magical time-desync training space???”

“Yes!” said Papyrus. “I’M SO HAPPY TO SEE IT AGAIN. I THOUGHT… I THOUGHT I WOULD NEVER COME BACK HERE.”

“Aww, did you have good memories? Like, LOTS OF TRAINING???”

The mention of ‘good memories’ made Mezil cough. Papyrus went through hell and back to deal with that Chara menace. The old veteran wouldn’t count it as a pleasant time.

But Papyrus had a different mindset. “OF COURSE! HE EVEN HAS A KITCHEN! WITH THE ABILITY TO SPAWN ANY INGREDIENT I WANT! A GREAT PLACE TO PRACTICE COOKING -- SHOULD THE GRACIOUS VAMPIRE OF TIME GRANT ME HIS PERMISSION -- BECAUSE IT WOULD BE BENEATH THE GREAT PAPYRUS TO MESS UP THE GRAND FEAST!”

“Worry not, Papyrus. You may practice in this Hub after your brother’s Trial. Please bear with us for
a while longer.”

Wistful, the youngster expressed: “THOUGH I WISH FLOWEY AND CHARA COULD HELP ME OUT.”

“Sorry,” said Mezil. “Certified Soulless DEMONS are not allowed in my sanctuary. It’s a rule.”

“I UNDERSTAND. IN THE MEANIME… CAN I SHOW MY FRIENDS ALL YOUR COOL SNAZZY ROOMS???”

“Go ahead,” he said.

So, Papyrus kicked off his mini tour. Frisk stayed behind, however, squinting at Mezil with crossed arms.

“Does this mean I could have saved all that travelling time for my trial?”

Mezil wondered what would be the most difficult part of this odd session: keeping Sans Serif’s mouth in check, or handling Frisk’s genre savvy snark?

The adult replied: “You think I’d reveal the secret before you pass your test? What if you had turned out to be a Fallen? Besides, many believe the Crimson Hall is an actual location. It’s important to maintain public perception.”

Though still displeased, the kid agreed to his sound reasoning. “Good point.”

Their expression then changed to glimmering hope. “Can I do the same in the future? Access my cool space anywhere I want?”

Mezil answered, “With some refinement on your magic, yes.”

All that irritation vanished in an instant. Frisk’s eyes twinkled with anticipation.

Well, the Hub access is one of the best perks. I had used it in more than one occasion to circumvent inconvenient situations.

…Convenience, huh. What a dangerous lullaby.

Lucidia commented straight into his mind: “It was indeed very convenient when you stole yourself away for Jungle Curry.”

Hrk! The commlinks are open?

“Yes, honey. Now. About that Jungle Curry. Is it really worth punishing your bowels for that taste? I tried it before and I would rather have a cheese platter.”

I… I apologize for my mistake during the Chara incident.

“And?”

The Persona talk was for the greater good.

Lucidia remained bitter. “You rewound time for Papyrus, and yet you neglected to warn me about my own folly? Is he more important than me now?”

Not exactly what he expected. Close enough, nonetheless.
Lucy dear, you could have walked away from Doctor Gaster anytime. I had reminded you before: sometimes you just have to let someone be wrong. Also, I don’t think it’s fair that you push that responsibility on me, considering that you were also made aware of the consequences of your choices through your Perseverance.

“I know. That’s why I didn’t want to confront you about it.”

But you kept it in your heart anyway. Isn’t being passive-aggressive worse on yourself? There’s no need to hide from me, Lucidia. I can handle you.

“I’m more frustrated about myself. I can’t stand seeing that Gaster so WRONG about his definitions.”

“It’s not just Sans Serif who’s affected here…”

“Um, Tsunderjudge?” asked Frisk, “You okay? You’re spacing out.”

Mezil replied, “I’m fine. Sorry about that. Was thinking about something.”

“Can I ask you another question then?”

“Yes?”

“Gaelic said you have some… dark complicated history. It’s related to me and the Crimson Hall.”

Mezil replied, “Did he? I suppose sooner or later I’ll have to disclose it to you. But not right now.”

“Why not?” they asked back.

“I don’t want my past to influence you just yet.” Mezil replied. He then asked: “Do you know how the Dreemurr Nation handles court cases?”

Frisk narrowed their eyes with an audible ‘hmm’. “Monsters tend to duke it out. I don’t know if they ever settled anything without a magic rumble.”

Internal palm to the face. Mezil still wondered how their society could run with so many outdated areas in administration. Their scientific department was a ‘delightful’ mess.

Hmm. In that case, I would need to secure the safety of both parties. Sans Serif included. If I can’t do that, he might retaliate. That will just worsen the situation for everyone involved.

Lucidia mused over the line. “Sir Gerson, Hammer of Justice… his Champion magic might be useful here. I had seen how The Law stopped all of Gaelic’s direct hits.”

Interesting. How is Gaelic anyway? Has he recovered?

“I’m… trying to get him back on some proper routine. Dress right, eat at the table, practice his Snake Arts, the usual. Grandpa is praying with him too. The more he builds discipline, the sooner he might recover…”

A lack of confidence resonated in her words. It didn’t sound like his recovery was quite on track. The clouded news made Mezil’s determined heart sink a little.

Why don’t we make your introduction official to Frisk?

“Yes, very well.”
Mezil summoned a holographic voice panel. He set it to broadcast her words for the child to hear. “Lucidia, my dear, is the Crimson Hall ready?”

“Preparations are complete. Do you wish to connect it to the physical realm now?”

“Not yet. Papyrus had initiated a tour around the Hub. It’ll take a while.”

Frisk meanwhile stared at them with great astonishment. “Lady Lucidia is here?!” exclaimed Frisk.

Tapping his cane on the ground, he explained: “She’s currently in a hidden basement of this Hub, managing its systems.”

Faint ‘ngaaaah’ and ‘nyeh heh heh’s’ then echoed from the gaming room. From the sounds, Mezil concluded that Team Ebott had discovered the pinball machine. He was never a fan of the game, but no respectable arcade would be complete without that oversized vintage toy. At least Papyrus was enjoying himself.

Lucidia giggled. It pleased him to hear that her mood lightened a tad. “What a sweetheart. I will be on standby then.”

“Thank you.”

He then dispelled the panel.

When the Ebott Gang finally finished their tour, they gathered back at the living room’s table. They were given key necessities for making their rough drafts, such as pens and papers.

Mezil remained standing, resting some of his weight on the cane before him. “Today, you’re preparing for another Trial of the Crimson Hall,” he began, stern.

“The subject’s name is Sans Serif, the biggest thorn of our diplomatic efforts. Negotiations will resume once we settle his case. Ideally, this covers matters surrounding the Six as well.”

“MORE FIGHTING?” Papyrus frowned. “I THOUGHT WE’RE DONE WITH THOSE SHENANIGANS.”

“He was an invader back then. Now, we’re testing him as a legitimate candidate. Furthermore. I will not be the one to handle his case.”

“Frisk Wanderstar,” commanded Mezil. “In the name of cooperation and coexistence, step forth to receive your duty.”

It’s rather heartwarming to see their friends and family give them little signs of encouragement. Mezil had stopped envying this closeness a long time ago. He didn’t remember when. Maybe he never had that feeling to begin with?

The kid then looked up at him, waiting for their next instruction.

So, Mezil conjured a fully loaded pistol and placed them in Frisk’s hands. “This gun is a sign of your authority. Use it wisely.”

Frisk’s brow twitched. “…Are you serious?”
“Yes,” replied the Judge.

They looked at Mezil, then back at the pistol, and then back at him again. “I don’t even know how to use a real gun! The one I used in the Underground was empty!”

Undyne blinked. “What do you mean, punk? Don’t you just aim and pull the trigger?”

Papyrus then mused out loud: “I NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHY IT’S CALLED ‘PULL’ WHEN YOU CLEARLY ‘PUSH’ YOUR FINGER INTO THE LITTLE TINY HOOK.”

Doctor Alphys, master of trivia, started spouting random facts: “T-t-that’s because you actually pull your finger back into the firing mechanism! Modern guns like Mezil’s rely on a Double-Action trigger, where the hammer strikes and releases in one action which is REVOLUTIONARY compared to their earlier incarnations—”

“That’s… interesting.” Said Queen Toriel, skeptical. “But how does that help my child?”

“W-well, good practices go a long way. For example, a gun won’t fire unless the safety is removed.”

Frisk showed the gun to Alphys. “But I don’t know if this is or isn’t locked either…”

Before they caused a catastrophic accident, Mezil dispelled the gun. He already imagined Lucidia being speechless over his bizarre choice.

“Eherr,” he cleared his throat. “Let’s try something else.”

*What other symbols of judicial authority do we have? Hmm…*

So, Mezil spawned a judge’s gavel for Frisk.

The kid shook their head, refusing to accept it. “We already have a ‘Hammer of Justice’ right here. We don’t need any more.” Their thumb pointed to Sir Gerson.

“True that! Wa ha ha!”

Such fuss… Good thing he had Patience as one of his Minor traits. “What do you suggest then?”

Reaching their palm out, Frisk answered: “The Wanderstar. My SAVE. There’s no better symbol of authority.”

“Very well. Focus your power on your palm. The Keys are yours the moment your Mark forms.”

The elder drew in a long, deep breath. Slowing down his heart rate helped shut his inner crimson valves sector by sector. He closed off the flow belonging to Frisk in particular, allowing them to fill their personal reservoir again.

It didn’t take long for Frisk’s star to shine bright on their palm.

“…Why is it gold?”

Frisk replied, “Why not? This works just fine.”

A plain black and white window popped up beside them. It had a single SAVE slot with their name on it.

“No,” Mezil instructed. “Make it red. You’ll see the difference.”
“Okay?”

When Frisk pumped in more Determination, their symbol shifted hues to crimson. Five new empty SAVE slots opened beneath their measly single file.

They dropped their jaws, blown away by the revelation. As with their friends.

“Ohmigoshohmigosh it quintupled in capacity!”
“I CAN’T BELIEVE IT! WAIT, I CAN. MISTER MAGUS HAD ONE HUNDRED.”
“One hundred?!?! Jeez! Kid, we’re ramping up your training! Let’s make it TWO HUNDRED!”
“…What kind of situation would require anyone to keep that many?…”

Lucidia privately whispered: “Little did they know, you had once used 93% of your max capacity before.”

Resolving that damn Aratet War was indeed a huge pain in the rear. Not to mention pyrrhic and unsatisfying.

The world became peaceful. But, it didn’t get better. Back to square one.

“Everyone, don’t get too excited.” Mezil reminded. “Let’s continue the briefing.”

“Sans Serif, Lichborn Tactician of the Dreemurr Nation, had dyed his SOUL Red. He had enough expertise to manifest a Mark and cheated death at least once. This makes him a full-fledged Living Victory by technical definition.”

“He is however also a citizen of the Dreemurr Nation. It would widen the diplomatic rift between our nations if I drag him by the chains as a DEMON. Therefore, I’m handing custody of him over to Frisk Wanderstar: Crimson Keeper and Ambassador of Monsters.”

“The Dreemurr Nation shall thus trial him based on their own laws, and in the method they believe is the most fair. That’s the gist of our current predicament.”

Queen Toriel asked: “Can we resolve this without violence?”

“Yes,” Mezil replied, “I don’t conduct all my Trials by battle either. Many of my candidates are unable to fight.”

There was a wave of relief over the monsters, each of different reasons. Some were happy for Sans’ sake. Others were grateful that they didn’t need to engage in another hair-splitting deathmatch.

“Today’s proceedings will be closer to a standard courtroom. However, there is one key exception: there will be no jury, as we do not have enough time to secure a neutral third party. The Ebottians will act as prosecution, levying out their charges against Sans Serif.”

“Who’s defending Sans?” Frisk questioned.

“Himself,” Replied Mezil. “Which is ideal. Unlike standard courtrooms, the Crimson Hall depends on personal accountability. A man or woman who’s unable to speak for themselves wouldn’t become a Living Victory.”

“I suggest that you take advantage of the disconnect in the flow of time to prepare your case. Once the Trial of the Crimson Hall begins, the clock will resume as usual.”

“THAT’S STRANGE,” Papyrus pointed out. “WOULDN’T IT BE BETTER IF WE FINISH
“I wish we could. But, the Trial of the Crimson Hall demands the presence of the Grandmaster. He monitors the proceedings from his office in the physical realm. It’s too much of a security risk otherwise.”

Mezil bowed his head in respect to the ancient turtle. “Sir Gerson, if you have nothing to bring against Sans Serif, could you help us?”

“Wa ha ha! Of course!” The ancient turtle nodded. “Let the young’uns sort it out.”

“I would like to request you to lay down a boundary field. Deny anything that will cause harm or death.”

“No problema! Leave that to me. Waha!”

“Thank you.”

The Dreemurr Nation began putting their plans on paper. They shared their ideas between themselves… and laughed. A lot.

Seems that they’re planning less of a sentence and more of a revenge prank.

“I think it’s many an Ebottian’s dream to ‘dunk on the dunker’.”

Hmm. What should I do in the meantime? Maybe boot a challenging game? Take a nap? Or, read some Scripture. Lord knows I’m behind on that.

Just when he thought he’d have a moment’s rest, Team Ebott had already finished their assignments. It’s either they worked fast, or their demands were ‘simple’, to say the least. He would have to find that out for himself in due time: it’s onward to the Crimson Hall now.

Mezil thus escorted everyone out of the main entrance. Except for Papyrus. That young man stayed behind in The Hub, alone.

Mettaton noticed the oddity: “Papyrus darling, you’re not joining us?”

The young skeleton responded: “NO. I REFUSE TO PROSECUTE MY OWN BROTHER. BESIDES, I’VE ALREADY SETTLED ALL MY ISSUES WITH HIM. THERE’S NOTHING LEFT FOR ME TO SAY. I’LL BE WATCHING THE TRIAL FROM HERE.”

“I see~! All the best, sweetheart.”

To Mezil’s surprise, Gaster slid back to the youngster. He reasoned: “Being no better than Sans, my judgement is moot. I too shall remain here should anyone need me.”

Did he just… attempt to weasel out of an uncomfortable situation?

“Tch, the nerve,” Lucidia grumbled. “Do you understand now why I couldn’t disengage?”

He’s certainly quite a temptation for fury. It says something if not even Sans Serif can stand him.

“No,” said Mezil. “You will attend court as a key witness, Doctor Gaster. And who knows if we might need to bring you to the stand for… other reasons.”

And how he doth protest: “Y-you can’t pronounce such! Have you forgotten, you gave the authority
away to--"

The junior Crimson Keeper nabbed Gaster by the hand, trapping him in his own wits.

“Please?” they begged.

The Amalgamated doctor rippled a bit. In the end, he gave in to their wishes. “Oh… fine… I can’t decline The Child of Mercy’s personal invitation.”

With that out of the way, Mezil resumed playing the guide, leading the group past the gentle streams of a digital garden. It’s not full of colour: when it comes to plantlife, he enjoyed cohesiveness and function more than splendour. Instead, small, fragrant white flowers dotted the greenery, glowing a tinge of blue from the backlit cyan streams.

“Jasmine?” asked King Asgore. “Isn’t it a tropical plant?”

Gaster grumbled. “Don’t get too excited, Your Majesty. I apologize for dampening the mood, but those are mere digital recreations. Fakes. Unaffected by climate and other complicated biology. They’re not worthy of so much as a shred of your attention.”

“I see…”

A tram station waited at the end path. From there, a single-car vehicle would take them to a different part of the Void: far away from the mansion grounds.

When all related passengers had boarded, Mezil used his Mark to activate the locomotive’s gears, chugging along on an invisible rail.

It didn’t take long for the young at heart to marvel at the foreign space. They asked questions among themselves, filled with comments, speculation, and wonder about the what-ifs of alternate universes…

Frisk then held up a rough drawing of a man sitting on an ornate throne, slumping on one side with a half-filled wine glass in hand, legs crossed. The person appeared thoroughly disinterested at whatever’s happening before him.

“What’s this?” Mezil asked.

Frisk pointed a finger-gun at him. “This is how I imagine the Fantasy AU of Mezil Thyme.”

“A stereotypical vampire lord? You really think I’d sit this way?”

They nodded.

“Why?”

“Because it suits you.”

He huffed. “Kindly take your silly imagination elsewhere.”

Elsewhere, indeed. They started cooking their imagination together with the more fiction-savvy friends, making up alternate personas of themselves in different settings.

“*Honey*?”

*Yes, my dearest?*
“Do you think -- somewhere out there -- there’s a Mezil Winston who became a normal accountant?”

Hmm. It wouldn’t surprise me. Maybe a seamstress version of you exists as well. The possibilities are infinite.

The tram soon stopped at the designated destination. The monsters seemed confused by the blank space. They expected a pre-prepared place.

Sometimes, Mezil just wants to show off the ‘cool tech’.

“Courtroom Mode, please.” He instructed Lucidia over the line.

“Affirmative.”

White tiles spread outward from the platform, building over an invisible frame. Unlike the Crimson Hall’s usual arena format, this new chamber was a standard room by all means. Once the ceiling was in place, the bench and bar were first to form.

Next, the side desks. The court clerk and court reporter would sit there in a normal courtroom. But in this case, The Hammer of Justice replaced both those roles. He must stay within the boundary field for it to function.

Then, two veto panels appeared up high. The Grandmaster’s, and one more beside it: a secret extra that the Ebottians don’t know about yet.

Last to be installed was the gallery. Or what SHOULD have been the gallery: the usual rows of seats were replaced by a single ornate gothic throne, complete with a black frame and crimson cushions.

Mezil took a step back in disbelief.

“Lucidia!!!”

Worse still, a holographic screen displaying her face appeared. She intended to make this a public affair.

With a mischievous smile, Lucidia explained: “I thought Crimson Keeper Frisk had a fine suggestion. You always did have spectacular showmanship as testament to your pre-Judge jobs. Not to mention I like it when you sit with style.”

The mere mention of ‘showmanship’ caught Mettaton’s attention. “Oh my~~ did you just say he was a fellow performer, Lady Darling?”

“Why yes. A skillful bartender and a professional gamer, living the same life with separate names.”

“How very fabulous! And with time spinning around so much, I bet he needs to maintain an act at all times. Splendid, splendid! This explains how your wonderful husband could handle the media so well.”

“Thank you for your gracious praise, Mister Mettaton.”

Mezil sighed out loud. “…Is this what I reap for that curry gambit?”

“Yes.” she answered. Brutal and straight to the heart: a price to pay for teaching Lucidia to be more assertive. He’ll have to take both the good with the bad.
Frisk had to rub it in further: “Can we give him a glass of red wine too?”

“Alcohol clouds the mind, therefore it’s banned from court. On the other hand… I think some sparkling grape juice would make a fine replacement.”

In truth, nothing edible was allowed during a court session. But, they’re in the Crimson Hall. So in the end… Mezil had to eat his own bent laws.

The Vampire of Time thus sat down on the Dark Lord’s throne with a half-filled wineglass of sparkling grape juice. This moment would be forever recorded in the Chronograph.

“Snapshots made.” said Lucidia.

“Send them to my phone!” Frisk exclaimed.

Doctor Alphys joined. “M-mine too!”

“Oh, it’s not ready yet. I first have to filter and edit for the best shot.”

...They’re enjoying this a bit too much. Mezil thought.

Thereby, the wife whispered the following words into his mind: “Your objections are as empty as your stomach. Monsterkind ill needs a curry fanatic such as you.”

Tsk. What is a mon? A miserable pile of dank memes.

With the embarrassment out of the way, it’s time for the Hammer of Justice to go down.

“Hup!” Gerson lifted the digital clone of his hammer. “Here we go. Wa ha! No one’s croakin’ under my watch!”

One slam later, and The Law spread underneath their feet. The edges of the field passed just behind Mezil’s fancy chair, ensuring the Vampire’s safety as well.

Lucidia began her work; “Connecting the Crimson Hall to designated real world entrance. Time will resume.”

Within seconds, a Spirit Gate spawned, the door swung wide open, and…

…Sans Serif was unceremoniously tossed into court by a tangle of vines. But, right before he hit the floor, he flipped himself in the air for a secure landing.

The DEMON flowers were unimpressed, grumbling at Sans from the doorway.

“Gosh darnit!” Flowey crossed his leaves, “Why do you have to compete with Papyrus for cool points???”

“Yeah,” Chara nodded, “Fall flat on your chin like the lousy comedian you are. Stop stealing the limelight!”

Sans responded to their mockery in his usual nonchalant manner. “What can I say? I’m a natural.”

With that, order was returned. The flower siblings shut the door behind them, leaving the suspect in his spot.

“Everyone ready?” asked Frisk.
There was a unanimous ‘yes’. That marked the beginning of court.

Frisk was given a transcript to read out loud. Standard procedure in the courtroom. “We gather here today for Sans Serif’s Trial of the Crimson Hall, a potential candidate with the following criminal charges to his name: disruption of Frisk N-noklu-u-uawaah… Wanderstar’s Trial, the theft of Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme’s Keys of Fate, kidnapping a minor, multiple accounts of harassment and attempted murder, including but not limited to the near eradication of innocent alternate universe residents and the use of High Volition Marks.”

The first-timer rubbed their cheeks, sore from reading the complexity. “That’s a real mouthful…”

Still, they recollected themselves and got back to business; “Sans Serif, how do you plead?”

He replied: “Guilty as charged. I’m a real trashbag. Did all of that and more. So. We done with this already? I gotta get back to the lab.”

Frisk set their paper down, hopped off the Judge’s seat, walked all the way down to the witness stand, and dragged Sans to the clearing in the center of court.

“Kid?” the skeleton asked.

There was a moment of silence. Then, Frisk executed the most satisfying of all flying kicks. What a glorious boot to that trickster’s chin!

They then walked over to Sans and picked him up by the collar of his hoodie.

“Defend yourself,” they said. “We want to know why you did all that shit, so TALK! I swore to you that you WILL taste the consequential boot, and that includes owning up to your fucking actions!”

Shocked by the kick, no one moved. No one objected. Not even Queen Toriel, who would normally correct others for their crass language.

“…Heh,” said Sans. “You’re growing up. That’s good. So, you mean to say anything goes for my defense?”

The kid nodded. “Yeah. Give it your worst. Anything but just standing there and taking the guilty verdict.”
“‘Kay. No regrets then.”

An ominous subtext brewed beneath those final words.

“Mezzy,” Apprehension gripped Lucidia. “Why do I have a terrible feeling about this?”

That’s because the both of us are bound to get involved. One way or another.

Chapter End Notes

As you can see, a private conversation between the couple is quite different from their public behaviour.

Oh right. I almost forgot. I had a picture saved for years for this moment. Years.

https://www.deviantart.com/karbonkevin/art/Keep-your-chin-up-Sans-650448748

"Collaboration between BlackRazorBill (blackrazorbill.tumblr.com/) and I. The birb did the original sketch and lines, I went and redrew a few, upgraded the heck out of the boot, colored the image, and added some effects.

Funny story about this one: I was talking with another creator, Sophtopus (sophtopus.tumblr.com/) about Sans, and I expressed my immense dislike for his attitude and that he deserves a kick in the shin. I then requested that someone sketch this event for me so that I may color it. Razor jumped right on it, but due to Razor's first language not being English, the message was taken as a misspelling of "chin" and this was born instead. I was not disappointed by this series of events.

Check out these two awesome peoples' stuffs; they're both writing pretty awesome fanfics, and Razor's has pictures! Ooooh!

I think I may have spent too much time on the boot, but it's an awesome boot."
Prosecution

Chapter Notes

It's finally here. Sorry for the long wait! This is quite a meaty chapter. Made my head hurt literally at some points.

Also, bonus art! Linking to my deviant art because tumblr is apparently on the verge of major upheaval. http://fav.me/dcui2wc

I also have a twitter if you want to follow me there: https://twitter.com/sophtopus

Meanwhile, enjoy!

How does this go again?

Maybe, just maybe, you should have told Tsunderjudge that you don’t recall enough of your custody-battle timeline to run a real court. Memories of that dam nutty lawyer game series were a bajillion times clearer.

But then, your friends only had fiction as a reference point. This court will get up-ended no matter what. It’s all a matter of how and when.

You requested the prosecution to make their opening statement.

Sans -- the defense -- then asked: “Who’s the prosecutor anyway?”

Before you could reply, Undyne slammed her hands on the table and yelled: “ALL OF US!”

Ah. Yes. Classic move. You steeled your heart for the inevitable turnabout-fest.

“…Wow,” Nonchalant with a hint of smug. Sans was clearly not impressed by your ragtag crew. “I’m surprised that old grump on the vampire throne even allowed that.”

Undyne refused to let the statement get to her. “Hah! Don’t laugh just yet. We’ll take you down before you can crack another dumb joke!”

“Tall order. But, there’s a tiny problem: only one person can go at a time. So, Judge Frisk… got any preferences?”

It’s clear to see how Sans already attempted to grab onto the steering wheel. But, he did have a point: the prosecution DOES need to take turns. It will be a complete mess otherwise.

You nominate Undyne to lead her team.

She’s more than happy to oblige. “YEAH! Great choice, Your Honour! I won’t let you down. Mwahaha! Justice!”

Back, straightened. Arms, crossed. Chin, lifted. Undyne in all her Undynity then made her opening statement, radiating confidence with a vengeance…
“Your Honour, I ask the court: ‘who’ is Sans Serif? In the Prosecution’s opinion, he’s the most annoying, insufferable, snarky, antisocial genius we’ve ever met! As such, we have established a giant laundry list of BEEF with this guy!”

Undyne whipped out a sheet of printing paper: the same one that you had compiled together with the rest of the gang. While tapping it with the back of her hand, she read the contents out loud.

“Unrelenting Laziness. Aggravated Wordplay, Dereliction of Duty, Breach of Verbal Contract, Threatening a Minor, Selling Unlicensed Food, Littering, Failure to disclose critical facts as Tactician, Hazardous Environmental Neglect, Illegal Spacetime Experiments, Overdue Payment, Fraud--”

Sans raised his brow. “Hold it! That doesn’t match Their Honour’s initial list. I thought we’re talking about my Void misadventures? That sounds more like our Underground days.”

“That’s the whole point!” Undyne pointed an accusatory finger at him. “These are trends that extend way, way back, and we’re in absolute hot trouble because of them. Because YOU never tell the truth! YOU always try to do everything alone! And YOU have zero integrity! The only place fit for YOU is PRISON!!!”

Sans… took it cool. He shrugged. “Not like your qualifications are any better, Undyne. I mean, let’s be frank. Who was the one who went on about becoming a villain if that serves it’s justification? ‘You’.”

Undyne slammed the table with both hands. “OBJECTION!!! Your Honour, that’s totally an assault against my character. It has no place in the court of law!”

Objection sustained. You frowned at Sans. C’mon, what’s with the antagonism today? First Grillby, and now Undyne?

“Young Honour, I ain’t dissing for insult’s sake. I genuinely don't consider her capable. But I guess it’s fine if this becomes a kangaroo court. After all, in many points of history spectacle mattered more than truth. Appeasing the masses and whatnot. ‘Justice’ hinges on popular agreement, right?”

A water spear stabbed the corner of Sans’ stand. Undyne fumed so hard, there’s magical steam coming out of her ear fins.

Oh no. It has already begun.

Her singular eye narrowed at Sans. “Don’t. You. Dare. Your cynical tripe has no place here! Stay on topic!!!”

“Heh. As far as I can tell, you’re the one who’s going off-topic with violence. I guess it fits you, huh? Overpowering others when things don’t go your way. And if that doesn’t work, you chicken out.”

“If we want to bring up the Underground, why don’t we talk about your treatment of Their Honour? Once upon a time Prosecutor Undyne -- then Captain of the Royal Guard -- justified the extermination of a child by blaming the long-dead humans of the Sealing War. Meanwhile she lied to Papyrus about--”

Here comes the rain of rage. You instinctively ducked behind your desk to escape the torrent. See, if your kick could land a hit, so could Undyne’s spears. And they WILL hurt.

“Heh,” you heard Sans say. “Lost all that character development already? What a waste. Guess
you’re nothing without that fancy armour and that cybernetic eye.”

Enough is enough. You summoned your shining Mark and lifted it high above your head.

**LOAD SAVE**

The court was de-wrecked thanks to the power of time travel. Hmm, how far back did you go?

Sans -- the defense -- asked: “Who’s the prosecutor anyway?”

Cue Undyne slamming the table. “ALL OF US!”

It appears that you had subconsciously made a SAVE after the boot to the chin, and before the proceedings began. How odd…

Could it be an autosave function? The complexity of your SAVE system has apparently scaled with your magical proficiency. Convenient.

“…Wow. I’m surprised that old grump on the vampire throne even allowed that.”

“Hah! Don’t laugh just yet. We’ll take you down before you can crack another dumb joke!”

“Tall order. But, there’s a tiny problem: only one person can go at a time. So, Judge Frisk… got any preferences?”

All eyes locked on you. The pressure increased. Who else could you choose that’s NOT Undyne?

…Your silent pondering must have gotten noticeable, because she just raised her hand to volunteer.

“I’ll do it!”

You shook your head. Not for the opening. We’ve been down that road before.

Despite the initial struggle, the mighty fish swallowed her pride. “Okay. I get it. We’re dealing with Sans after all.”

Thanks for understanding. And, sorry.

A particular limelight-loving glambot soon started waving at you with all his pink, glittery enthusiasm. How opportunistic. You were hoping to ask for Mom’s help, but…

…Hmm. Why not? If Sans wants a spectacle, you’ll give him a spectacle. Besides, showbiz is quite the cutthroat field to begin with. Maybe that savy cunning could fish out something useful? No pun intended.

If anything does go wrong you could just LOAD your SAVE again.

Alright. You nominate Mettaton.

“She’s a splendid choice, Your Honour! Alphys-darling, please flip the switch~~ Oh yes!”

Just like that, Mettaton puffed into his glamorous android form. He came prepared with a nice pink coat: one of the suits he had worn for a talk-show interview.

When did he manage to prepare that outfit? Not important. It’s showtime!

Mettaton rested his hand on his hip. “Sansy darling, what a mess you’ve gotten yourself into.”
“Yup,” said Sans. “Biggest ever. Don’t think anything could top this in the future.”

With a teasing tone, Mettaton wagged his finger at Sans: “Oh no no. Don’t declare safety too soon, you sly criminal. That’s a jinx on its own.”

He continued, “You see Sansy darling, you’ve gathered quite a list of grievances. Shocking really.”

“Yeah!” Undyne lifted up her sheet of paper. “Here’s your list of BEEF!”

She tried tapping it with the back of her hand again… but Mettaton snatched the paper out of her grip.

“Hey!!!” she protested.

Ignoring her, the bot read out the contents: “‘Unrelenting Laziness’, ‘Aggravated Wordplay’, ‘Dereliction of Duty’… oh my, you even have ‘Threatening a Minor’ in there! Tsk, tsk, tsk. What terrible terribleness.”

“Heh,” said Sans. “Old news for me.”

Undyne yanked the paper back with a slight grumble.

Mettaton carried on without an apology to his teammate. “Something doesn’t make sense, though. If you’re such an unentertaining piece of lazy refuse… you wouldn’t be here at all. Indeed, baby. Your very presence in court is a walking contradiction!”

So far, so good. Mettaton’s competence was a pleasant surprise. It’s hard to believe that he’s the same guy who -- by some manner of questionable monster resource management skills -- once installed a faulty fountain in his hotel.

You watched the bot twirl towards the Tsunderjudge.

“Judge Thyme darling. According to your briefing, we’re not here to confirm any wrongdoings. Am I right?”

Mezil Thyme on his vampire throne answered: “Correct. We’re not here in the Crimson Hall to question the existence of a crime. Rather, it’s to ascertain the heart of the accused.”

Huh. So Undyne was right? Imagine that.

“Indeed~~~” said Mettaton. “The deed has been done! The truth recorded! Caught on videotape and analyzed to the core! And yet, we’re still missing a vital piece of the puzzle.”

“Why oh why did Sans Serif -- our bonafide lazy comedian -- decide to play the role of the antagonist. What makes him tick? Is he a villain… or perhaps… an anti-hero?”

“Fair point.” Sans shifted his body to one side. “So. What do ya need?”

Mettaton leaned forward against the table, legs outstretched. “A promise from you, darling. Call it a judicial vow. You shall tell the truth and nothing but the truth.”

The skeleton shook his head. “Sorry Mettaton. I hate making promises. ‘Fraid your pizzaz ain’t enough to convince this cold pile o’ bones.”

“Oh dearest dear, did I say that you’d make that promise to me?”
Showing his hand to you, Mettaton added: “I’m speaking about Their Honour, Judge Frisk! How could they do their fabulous job if you continue to conceal your intents in the shadows?”

You held your breath. What a way to put you in the spotlight.

“…Funny you should mention it that way, Prosecutor Mettaton.” Sans said, laughing. It’s not the usual chuckle and chortles either; he’s dead serious. Chilling almost.

“Okay. I’ll tell the truth, and nothing but the truth. Promise.”

Sans continued: “Say, Lil’ Miss Lucy, why not spice things up and supply us with some visual aid? Link it to my Eye if you must.”

A pause lingered in the air. Lady Lucidia hesitated, but… you’re sure she’s going to go along with it.

“…Very well.”

With your prediction spot on, we now have a giant floating screen behind Sans.

“Initiating Link with subject: Sans Serif.”

Sans’ Eye burned in his three colours. Cyan, yellow, and purple flames flowed towards the monitor. You noticed that this time, the purple was dense enough to be seen from your chair. It’s usually so faint.

Mettaton clapped his hands. “What an excellent idea! Nothing communicates better than the big screen. Open your eyes and ears, beauties and gentlebeauties! It’s time to witness the defendant’s tale!”


The display started to play a slice of time: that moment when Mom traded knock-knock jokes with Sans from behind the Ruins’ door.

Mom said: "If a human ever comes through this door… could you please, please promise something? Watch over them, and protect them, will you not?"

“Now, I hate making promises,” Sans elaborated: “But… someone who sincerely likes bad jokes has an integrity you can’t say ‘no’ to. That’s how kiddo survived to this day.”

Narrowing her eye, Undyne accused: “Bah! You broke your word with your stupid crazy plan.”

“Nope. Not at all. My goal was always to find a safe world, not exterminating the kid. As much as it’s convenient to go back on my word, I can’t. A promise is a promise. It ain’t one otherwise.”

Mettaton crossed his arms. “If that’s your claim, then merely watching over Frisk would have sufficed. What compelled you to go beyond a simple bodyguard?”

“That’s due to a different promise. Go ahead, Lil’ Miss Lucy. Show them.”

There it was, your pinkie promise with Sans. It was made in his lab. Mid-winter. A few months ago by now.

“I promised the kid to help them out. Boy, they sure needed it. Who would have thought that they’re smack dab in the middle of a historical whirlwind?”
The prosecution pressed: “What was Frisk’s plea exactly, word for word?”

“Well, the kid didn’t say much. They were in their shell, weighed down by desperate despair. But, let’s review what I said instead.”

The video resumed.

“The Surface isn’t kind to you, huh? That’s some… heavy research material you got there. In Alphys’ Lab, I mean.

You watched your younger self cry, immature and helpless in the world. Those were dark times.

It’s strange that you feel more empowered now despite the heavier responsibility.

“Hey, kid.” he said to you back then. “You’re not alone, y’know. You got Toriel. Asgore. Papyrus. Undyne. Alphys. Every monster in Ebott. We’re all willing to help.”

“Even lazy ol’ me.”

That fond innocence. You really, really trusted him. Simpler times: where did they go? Did you change so much in the course of a few months?

“You know I hate making promises, kid. But when I do, I follow it through.”

He then offered his pinky finger: the sign of an oath. You remember it well.

“Will you do the same? If we overcome this, promise me that you’ll never RESET again. Keep that power under lock and key. Forever.”

Gasp. It’s been so long, you had forgotten the exact words.

Lock and key.

Forever.

…Wait…

Your heart pounded. The sharper ones at the prosecution’s desk started sweating. It appears that they realised the predicament as well.

“Oh… oh my…” Mettaton muttered.

Undyne said. “I don’t like the vibe, but I can’t put it to words. I KNOW something’s wrong. I just can’t brain what!”

“My dear rambunctious darling,” Mettaton coughed. “Their Honour Frisk never could uphold their end of the deal… If they rise to replace Judge Thyme’s position, it’s as good as being a life-long time traveller. If they quit being a Crimson Keeper, that power will only end up in the hands of others. It’s impossible for them to lock it away forever!”

“Crap…” But after a few seconds, Undyne slammed the table. “HOLD IT! That means Sans got no bloody reason to pin any blame on the kid!!!”

Sans however shrugged. With one shoulder too, since the other side was dead. “Hey, I didn’t know that either. Yet despite the issue, I still kept to my word. Tried to ‘save’ everyone the best I could.”

“I thought you only cared about Papyrus and Toriel?”
“Well, let’s just say a happy Frisk is in everyone’s best interest. Don’t you know what happens when Their Honour is unhappy?”

Sans looked straight at you. The moment he did so, his Eye burned bright. The screen tore and frizzled.

“I’m sorry, kid.” he said, “Can’t say I’ve forgiven you for killing Papyrus yet.”

Then, The most incriminating moment happened. How Mezil Thyme grilled you for this: a punishment of burning hot coals and demon spice.

The court watched the scenario in silence. They listened to Papyrus’ speech, of how you were a puzzle-hating weirdo going down a dangerous path. And how someone needs to keep you on the straight and narrow.

You did not listen. Your husk of a person inched closer and closer to the jolly skeleton, ignoring his pleas.

“I, PAPYRUS… WILL GLADLY BE YOUR FRIEND AND TUTOR! I WILL TURN YOUR LIFE RIGHT AROUND!!!”

With your toy knife, you sliced his skull clean off the spine.

The decapitation of the Great Papyrus horrified your friends and family. It’s one thing to hear secondhand testimony. It’s another thing altogether to watch the crime happen on screen.

“Ugly sight, huh? Of course, Judge Thyme grilled the kid about this. Why kill Papyrus, the shining light? Why kill Toriel, their mother figure?”

Sans, stop!

Too late. When he mentioned Toriel’s name, the screen switched to another terrible time. You slashed her across her body to gain access outside of the Ruins.

Mom…! Dad…!

Dad turned his back towards the screen. His head hung low, trying hide his grieving tears. He cannot bear to watch.

On the other hand, Mom had this cold, stoic silence of sheer disappointment. You had seen this too many times, directed at your goatfather. Now it’s on you.

“That’s just the first of many,” added Sans. “Next up, Undyne the True Hero. Who died with a huge grin on her face. Believed that good will prevail. That someone would come and stop the menace.”

Undyne was left speechless. Motionless. Alphys hugged her as the screen played out her inevitable demise. The poor lizard sobbed and refused to let her girlfriend go.

“Then there was Mettaton. With his non-functional NEO. Still as confident as ever.”

To your surprise, the bot remained neutral. What went through his mind as his personal philosophy fell apart? Disturbed, or mildly amused? You cannot tell.

“And then, The End that never happened. You can thank yours truly for preventing it.”

Sans’ battle played over and over before your eyes…
You wanted to object to Sans. Say that’s not you, but Chara.

Except… your throat tightened. You remembered the Crimson Hall. You already admitted the responsibility of your actions before this very court.

You glanced at Mezil. He’s resting his head against his hand with his distinctive intense glare, scrutinizing your every move. That was enough to make you dunk your immature thoughts into the trash.


“And yet, Their Honour is elected as a Crimson Keeper. Successor too. On a flimsy little excuse.”

You could hear the sheer salt exuding from Sans’ tiny bones. “‘Be determined’? Really? That’s your ‘oath’? Fishy is an understatement. Many other Living Victories had way stronger convictions, yet they failed anyway.”

“Which brings up a major question: why did Frisk Wanderstar pass despite everything? Is it because they’re a Pure Red? Or, did Judge Thyme swear to their deceased biological parents’ graves? Heh. We’re pretty similar if that’s the case.”

Undyne slammed the table, yelling away. “What’s your point???”

“Simple, really.” said Sans. “A judge’s gotta meet a certain standard. Fail that bar, and they’re not qualified to sentence anyone. Can you sincerely say that Judge Frisk is right person for the job?”

“YEAH!”

“No.”

Undyne and Mettaton answered at the same time, but with opposite conclusions. It didn’t take long for the fish to redirect her frustrations on the bot.

“What the hell, Mettaton?!?! I thought you’re on our side!!!”

“Darling. Please listen. It’s not about sides anymore.”

“Frisk passed that Crimson Hall shit! That’s not good enough?!?”

“I know, dear. But it doesn’t change the fact that they’re unprepared for this controversy. Imagine the scandal if they make any rash judgements! Worse for poor Judge Thyme!”

“…I’m afraid I agree with Mettaton…”

That’s the biggest twist of twists. Grillby -- the guy who used to serve you fries -- now stood against you.

“…In this situation… Frisk has a potential conflict of interest… Therefore they may not be suited to evaluate this Trial…”

The next thing you know, the prosecution bickered among themselves. It’s no longer directed at Sans. Rather, it was about you.

Nope. Bad. Terrible result. Abort, abort!
A hidden panel audibly flipped above your head. Looking upwards, it glowed red with an Ace of Spades.

It’s… The Grandmaster’s Mark?

Mezil Thyme stood up from his throne. “A word with you in private, Crimson Keeper.”

But, what about the Trial? What about Sans?

“Call a recess,” he replied. “Sans Serif will wait in his own room.”

Undyne blinked in confusion. “We haven’t even started.”

“No,” said the old man. “This court has already looped through two sessions. That’s plenty enough for the time being.”

“Aww man, I was so hyped about the smackdown too.”

You had no choice but to do what the Tsunderjudge said. You called for recess, and let the court split up into their respective chambers.

The prosecution had their own space. Gerson joined them too, as an old friend of the Royal Couple.

The defense, well, he had a whole room to himself. You bet Sans would gladly take the opportunity for a quick nap.

Meanwhile, you faced the music. Alone.

Mezil asked: “Do you know why I called you here?”

You muttered a sheepish ‘not really’.

“That panel above your head was the Grandmaster’s veto card. You had witnessed it before. His duty is to maintain order, and his words are absolute.”

Yeah… back then Mezil missed his shot, and the Jury didn’t understand that there was a time loop. The Grandmaster had to step in to give Tsunderjudge a chance.

“Correct. However, there’s no Jury in the current setup to object to the Supreme Judge. Therefore that Mark can only mean that he’s calling you out on your error.”

But nothing happened when you rewound Undyne’s flipout. So, why are you in the wrong now?

“Your first LOAD was to salvage a simple derailment. Your second LOAD was an attempt to salvage your own reputation. Hide your flaws. Keep secrets. An unacceptable action as a judge.”

“Since you’re new to the ropes, the Grandmaster is giving you leniency. Two panels instead of one. Think of them as ‘extra lives’.”

…What happens if you blow through all of your ‘lives’?

Mezil answered, “It will be considered a mistrial. All proceedings will stop immediately. The failed Judge will then await judgement from The Grandmaster himself. Continued defiance can demote even the Supreme Judge into a Fallen.”
Hearing that, you lowered your head in shame. Gosh. That courtroom was a mess.

You wondered out loud. What about Judge Thyme himself? Why can’t he tell the truth to you?

“I keep secrets not because I fear for myself. Rather, it’s because the truth may be too much for the seeker to bear. First, prove to me that you can handle it. Only then I will confess. Otherwise, you’re better off not knowing. Such is the Magi’s highest decree.”

You summoned your Mark in your palm. Frowning. Being a real Judge was tougher than you expected. How does one even begin?

“Well,” said the elder. “The first step is to acknowledge that authority is complex. It has nothing to do with mere might, position, or riches. Depending on those alone produces a puerile corruption of the genuine article.”

“Next, learn from those who had once tread that same path. Study their successes and failures.”

That’s a given…

“The last and most important step: you must acknowledge is that you will never be perfect. A ‘good’ decision today may prove to be a bad one down the road. Nonetheless, you must commit. Hesitation breeds anxiety, and anxiety breeds paralysis.”

Okay. Noted…

So. Is it possible to get a crash course on the art of judging? Because, you might need it right about now.

“Hmph. There’s no replacement for experience. But… I could give you some more advice.”

Heh. That’s better than nothing.
Hi, I'm alive. It's late due to the Holiday season.

With that said, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! They're so close together, the might as well be the time.

I've been really under the weather for the past month. So, next entry is also 'when it's done'.

‘Find a way to read the true intents of others’.

That was your advice. A good place to start. You know how Sans and subtexts go too well together.

Upon the recommendation of your new teacher, you requested Lady Lucidia’s aid.

At first, you thought that you’re going to sit the tram all the way back to the Hub… but Lady Lucidia thought it’s better to visit you in person: right in the Judge’s resting chamber.

Not going to show you her awesome high-tech basement, eh?

Lady Lucidia replied: “Redundant action. Records state I had requested assistance from Doctor Alphys in a previous timeline. May I have your phone?”

Aha, the Mew Mew Kissy Cute Arcanagram writing tool! Thank goodness the data wasn’t damaged from your untimely drop.

So… uhm… What does she intend to do?

“I shall make the necessary adjustments via Code Injection.”

Injection…?

Lady Lucidia nodded. “Manual input can be tedious, slower, with a high chance of error. I prefer to use magic whenever possible.”

Seers can do that?

“Negative. I’m more attuned to machines than others. Sans Serif may be able to match me… but I wouldn’t recommend Gaelic to perform the same, despite sharing the Perseverance trait.”

Yeah… He might end up destroying said object, knowing him.

She chuckled along with you. It’s nice to see that she’s not a cold, calculating robot, contrary to her speech patterns.

 Alright. You passed the device to Lady Lucidia, confident it’s in good hands.

“Initiating input,” she said.
A fan of thin, delicate bones appeared over her head, so fine that you could mistake them for needles. With them, Lady Lucidia pierced your phone with a thousand strikes.

Okay, that was an exaggeration. It’s not really a thousand. More like a hundred or so. They fly by too fast to count.

Also, they didn’t leave any holes. The procedure was to inject Code into your device: nothing to do with turning it into a pincushion. After all, Lady Lucidia would never ever intentionally do something like damage one of your possessions.

Hang on. Needles? Snakeface once mentioned that Lady Lucidia ‘weaves’ her repairs! Are those claims true? Was the needle magic part of it?

“Oh?” replied Lady Lucidia. “No. The needles have nothing to do with the weavings. Do you… want to see it?”

Your face brightened up in an instant. Of course!

The lady suspended your phone between the palms of her hands. And then… then… cleaved it to bits. Yes. Cleaved. Split. Chopped by an invisible cleaver.

Your jaw dropped on the floor.

YOUR PHONE! YOUR PRECIOUS PHONE!

PANIC MODE ON!!

Wait, it’s a digital recreation.

NO!!! YOU STILL NEED IT FOR YOUR JOB!!!

YOU REPEAT: PANIC MODE ON!!!

You’re not sure whether or not to be horrified or bewildered. S-she… she just destroyed your phone with nothing but Blue Magic!

How strong is she anyway?! Even if Papyrus had super-strength from his Orange, he still needed some kind of a tool to wreck an object! Lady Lucidia just did it with PURE CONCENTRATED FORCE!

Seriously. How is she weak? Is anyone actually sure that she can’t fight?!!

She giggled at your flabbergasted reaction. “Watch now, Crimson Keeper.”

A simple pentagram formed under the pieces. She then burned her colours bright. Two Mixed Eyes, huh? What a combo.

Look close enough, and you could definitely see fine threads drawing the cleaved parts together. Bit by bit, matter began to meld at the seams, making the gaps thinner and thinner until your device reformed into a single solid piece.

“Please hold down the power button.”

Per her instruction, you booted the device as soon as possible. Lo and behold, it works!
“Now give the update a test run.”

Running the newly installed Gram activated your phone’s camera. It made an overlay that allowed you to read the most prominent colours of someone's SOUL, and their general emotion.

You tried it on Lady Lucidia first. At the moment, she radiated a glow of emerald green.

Her Determination meter was bright and glowing. She looks happy, proud of her weaving skill.

H-how does she do that?!

“Blue, to gather. Green, to restore. Purple, to understand. I mend things at a molecular level. As such, my ability to repair is proportional to my understanding of the material.”

Awesooooooome!

“However,” she cautioned. “I have certain limitations. Example: if the destroyed object has missing components, I cannot repair it. Had Sans Serif’s Karma consumed your phone, a certain percentage of material would have been lost to the wind, requiring additional substrate for reconstruction.”

“I am also unable to mend living organisms created from physical matter. My magic would be recognized as a foreign intrusion, and therefore rejected.”

Odd. Wasn’t it a form of Green Magic? Kindness has healed you no problem in the past. It worked just fine! So what gives? How are monsters any different?

“Throughout your adventure, only your Psychia sustained damage. Magic restores it without issues. It’s a different matter had you suffered bodily harm. As for your other question… what do you know about monster constitution?”

Hmm. They’re weak to physical damage, but they heal much easier. Almost instant! Just a bunch of good food and bam, it’s back to normal.

Lucidia frowned. “I’m afraid your information is outdated. The bodies of monsters are in truth projections of their Psychia. Think of them as a magical substrate that mimics physical materials based on an individual’s unique blueprint. In layman terms, while their composition is ‘looser’ than organic matter, it’s erroneous to say that they’re weak to physical force. Rather, monsters are vulnerable to factors that disrupt this bond.”

Like, Determination?

“Accurate. The physical resistance of a monster is identical to the matter they replicate. In a world of firearms, there’s no difference between a human-like monster and human. All will be obliterated by the force of physics.”

Grim mentions there, Lady.

You rubbed your chin. Does that mean that Undyne would be made up of imitation-fish material?

“Keratinous matter, yes.”

Then a rock monster would be… silicon?

“Accurate. Therefore, a skeleton such as myself would also be made up mostly of osseous components. This relative adaptability is the same reason why monsters mend better than humans. As long as a body part isn’t lost completely, and the integrity of the Psychia remains intact, restoration
will be close to perfect. Humans instead… endure scar tissue even with the best medical care.”

Cool! Is that why the robot eye works for Undyne?

“Affirmative. Undyne accepts prosthetics without issues due to the fact that her Psychia still remembers her lost eye. It will accept any suitable replacement of magical nature. How unfortunate that a functioning ocular implant requires some cybernetics. The Dreemurr’s medical standards are a bit…”

“…Lacking.” Her expression chilled to one of bitter ice.

You crossed your arm and pondered. Then what about Sans dead arm?

“Sans Serif’s Psychia no longer registers the existence of a right arm. The Determination explosion destroyed the connection between body and SOUL.”

“…Lacking.”

……………………………………

“Your expression tells me you are quite shocked by the news. Query: do you still care about Sans Serif?”

You nodded.

“Even now that he’s your enemy?”

You scrunched your brow, puzzled. Your relationship has become complicated, but calling him your ‘enemy’ was too much of a stretch. Besides, you wouldn’t have befriended the monsters if you treated everyone with enmity over their past transgressions.

“He just destroyed your reputation in court. Do you not resent that?”

You… you don’t know if you have the right to do so.

“Perhaps things would have turned out differently if we approached you sooner. In your first loop, for example. Sans Serif’s ‘Links’ wouldn’t have been so strong, and suspicions alleviated. Alas, we missed the opportunity…”

Your phone registered a huge dip in Determination. Her sadness was as plain as light anyway. You didn’t need a fancy gadget for something that obvious.

You asked her if she needed a chat.

“No.” Lady Lucidia looked away. “I think you should return to your friends.”

Your phone’s interface changed accordingly. Her glow turned purple, and your phone informed you that she’s being avoidant. It matched your hunch.

What to do, what to do… Maybe she needs a change of pace?

You invited her to join the meeting.

“Declined,” she said, “I let Sans Serif use my interface. I expect much ire against my thoughtless actions.”

It’s not going to be as bad as she thinks. Court is all about the truth, right? You’re sure that the rest will understand.
An unstable mixture of blue and purple soon filled your screen. Her DT levels: brooding dark. Lady Lucidia tried her best not to show it, but she’s aggravated by your insistence.

Hmm. She’s the reverse of Tsunderjudge apparently. He tends to start with ‘no’, but relent once you convince him. Lucidia instead further backs into her shell.

You promise her you won’t press the issue. And reminded her she has your number, just in case she changes her mind.

Relieved that her space was respected, she said: “Thank you.”

You exited the Judge’s chamber, looking at a fork in the road. Going left would take you to the Prosecution, while the right path would take you to the Barrister.

Decisions, decisions. You wondered if you should peek on Sans.

Curiosity got the better of you. So, went right towards the Barrister.

It’s quiet there. You mustered all your wannabe-ninja skills to open the door ever so slightly.

He’s sleeping, as expected. Well… it may be for the best, since you won’t be tempted to pry deeper.

You let him get his snooze and went back to the Prosecution.

Oh? Doctor Gaster was outside. He’s facing a floating screen, speaking to someone.

Distress must be the mood of the hour. The goopdoc exclaimed: “W-what do you mean that the feast is destined to fail?!”

On the other line, Papyrus replied: “MY ESTEEMED GUEST REFUSES TO TRUST THE GREAT PAPYRUS. WITHOUT IT, THE ARATET WELCOMING FEAST IS A BUST.”

“But fear not!!! That doesn’t mean that I cannot cook a feast to welcome them! Watch me, Uncle Gaster: I shall turn the tables with my impressive culinary arts!”

“If only we could be there to help you, Papyrus.” Gaster then grumbled, “Sans just had to-- argh! It drives me mad just thinking about it.”

“IT’S FINE. I HAVE ALL THE RESEARCH MATERIALS I NEED, NYEH HEH HEH! I’LL GO NOW, UNCLE GASTER.”

“Good luck, my boy.”

Transmission, end. He let out a huge sigh.

You walked up to Doctor Gaster. Looks like another plan is crumbling apart. Then again, it was a trap to begin with.

“You knew about this, Child of Mercy?”

You nodded. Persona explained it to you. It’s something that needs two parties to work. Missing a key ingredient, so to speak. We’ll just have to try against all odds.

“More diplomatic problems,” Gaster grumbled. “Why does Judge Thyme have to make everything so difficult?! Can’t we resolve Sans’ drama after ridding the world of that gigantic briny pest first?
Hmph. The world of science is a much simpler world. How I prefer it.”

…Hmm. He does have a point. Why now? We’d have all the time after the mayhem. Provided reality itself survives the conflict in the first place.

With great concern on his face, Doctor Gaster said: “I suggest that we keep mum about the bad news first. The Prosecution is suffering from some… ethically emotional dilemmas at this very moment. Judge Thyme went ahead of you to restore the memories of those doomed court sessions.”

Oh. Right. That.

Goopdoc wasn’t kidding when he mentioned ‘dilemmas’. It’s worse than Megalovania. When you peeked into the room you noticed how your crew separated into clusters.

You lifted your phone to get a general read.

Mettaton, being his fabulous self. He seems to be chilling alone. And thinking, maybe? He’s… hot pink? Uhh… That isn’t even a SOUL colour. You dismissed it as ‘Mettaton’ for now.

Undyne sat on the couch, curling forward while clutching her head: stressed beyond belief. Alphys sat by her side, trying her best to support her despite the awkward silence.

Shit. Undyne’s glowing purple. You were expecting yellow. Not purple. Never purple.

Mom meanwhile occupied a single armchair, painting a picture as morose as the rich blue aura around her.

Dad huddled at a corner. He’s keeping himself occupied by boiling a kettle of water for tea… with himself as the stove. He’s glowing in faint white: zero stats in every colour of the spectrum. Zoned out. Zombie mode.

As for Gerson? Gerson remained Gerson, ever patient, as evident by the cyan glow. Also, too busy watching over Dad to show much of anything else.

Grillby on the other hand had the face of a soldier who came back from a losing battle, betrayed by luck and inefficiency of command. He’s dark… red?

Red?! FFFFFFFfffffffu--

You can’t believe that you’re in a situation worse than Megalovania. Back then a smidgen of hope existed because hearts united to a single goal. Here? It’s burdened with confusion. Divided. Almost everyone is in the wrong colour.

When they noticed your presence, all heads turned towards you.

Gulp.

You pocketed your phone posthaste. It’s rude to have that out. As much as you want to continue testing your newfangled app, you don’t want to cause further misunderstandings.

Besides, you’re long overdue for a sincere public apology. How could you express one, though? Bow anime style 90 degrees? Get on your knees with your forehead on the ground? No, you’re not in the right country for all that.

You thus walked into the prosecution’s chamber with your head lowered. Butterflies fluttered in your twisting stomach and cold sweat dampened your neck.
In deep regret, you told everyone that you’re sorry from the bottom of your heart.

No response. You expected that. It’ll take a while for the facts to sink in.

Then, Mettaton said: “Apology accepted, darling. At least from yours truly. Honey, you know how much I love humans. Including their ability to deny flattery! Horrendous or not, I respect that trait.”

Thanks…?

“Not so fast, dear.” he motioned his hands to the others. “You have their thoughts to address too.”

You resisted a nervous chuckle, although you’re sure he spotted the signs.

Undyne was the first to speak her mind. She had a few false starts, then sank back into her darkness. “…I’m so weak,” she muttered, “I couldn’t stop you… Dammit! What kind of a best friend am I?!!”

In other words… Undyne was more frustrated about herself than you.

You’re afraid to face Mom. But you must. So that’s what you did.

“My child,” said Mom. “I share a similar sentiment to Undyne. It appears that I have failed as a mother yet again.”

You asked if she’s disappointed in you.

“Well… you did learn from your mistakes, and you handled yourself well in the Crimson Hall. But I would be lying if I said I’m without doubt. As Ambassador and Crimson Keeper, you could face worse situations. What desperate decisions would you make then? Will you return to those dark thoughts? With these questions unanswered, it seems that even Judge Thyme is pressured by circumstance to accept you. That’s not a good thing.”

You agreed with Mom. You told her that you expected to fail back then. At the least become suppressed as a student until you’re an adult. Time-travel years or not, you have no experience.

“I’m glad you’re mature enough to admit so.”

You asked if Dad is alright. He seems. Um. Out of it?

Mom shook her head. “Leave him be. He… needs time.”

Gerson nodded at you in silence. Yep. You agree to let Dad be.


He stood up and confronted you.

Sweating intensified. You never realised how intimidating he looks without his glasses. They did a great job softening his face.

So he asked: “…Do you believe your own philosophy of mercy?…”

You answered yes. Grillby was not convinced. You expected as much.

“…Lady Lucidia was ready to massacre the Gungnir… She softened her heart… because of my faith in you…”
That’s good. Right?

The ends of his flames flickered. “…I question if it’s misplaced…”

You reassure Grillby that the past is the past. You won’t do it again. Never ever--

He raised his palm, stopping your words. “…No rash promises… There may come a day where rehabilitation is impossible…”

Killing someone isn’t a joke! You believe in mercy cause you’ve seen the alternative. Lived it! You don’t want anyone else to be haunted by that kind of burden.

“…Too late… I had already killed someone a long time ago… A human about your age… Done in the name of freedom…”

You had heard stories, but this was the first time you had a direct confession. It does explain his current bitterness.

“…The ideal remains an ideal in the end…”

Someone slammed the table. Looking back, you spotted an Undyne that’s back to her passionate self. You bet she’s burning in bright Orange or Yellow.

The fish yelled. “Goddamit, Grillby, you sound just like that bonehead! Yeah, they were bad in an old timeline. SO WHAT??! They’re not bad anymore!!!”

“Consider this!” she said, slapping her chest. “If life went differently for ME, I would’ve become a crappy dictator and ruined the whole nation with my stupid ideals of revenge!”

“The same goes for everyone in this room. We’ve all made mistakes. So YEAH, Frisk has plenty of reasons to shun us too, yet they didn’t. So why the hell are we so harsh on them???”

Undyne…

You couldn’t quite believe your ears. You expected such a speech from Papyrus, not from her. Her passion has touched you.

Alphys mustered her courage to back her girlfriend. “S-she’s right! Frisk had enough reasons to not befriend us. Yet, they did so again and again. T-that should be a testament of their character!”

“Darling dearest,” said Mettaton. “You’re aware that Sansy will use the same argument against us, right? The line of argument would be something like, ‘If we can forgive Frisk based on circumstance, why not the defendant?”

“That’s different!” Undyne retorted. “His past actions weren’t erased. Heck, they’re not even rectified! He’s still pulling the same crap on us right now, in the same damn timeline!”

“My dear rambunctious fish, there’s a reason why I plea my case as I did! He’ll just spin the case with the excuse that we’re not sparing him the opportunity.”

Huffing out loud, she chided: “Which is exactly why that went super horrible. We’re in this pickle because of you!”

Mettaton furrowed his brows and flipped his bang. “Ugh darling, I have enough of your noise.”

“Says the guy who wanted to STEAL King Asgore’s target on live TV!”
This is getting out of hand. You thought maybe it’s time to step in. However, Mom was faster than you.

Queen Toriel in all her Queerness called for order. “Enough. You’re being played like a trombone and you don’t even realise it.”

The two stopped arguing, but you can still see the fumes between them. They’re not the most compatible bunch.

Grillby returned to you. “…Frisk… Please respect your own ideal… If you don’t, no one will…”

You nodded back to him. That’s the plan.

Wow. This day has no breaks for you. First, Tsunderjudge. Now, Sir Bartender. Visiting Grillby’s would never be the same again.

Attention returned to the mission at hand. Dad had recovered enough to serve everyone his ‘self’-brewed tea, although you doubt it would be consumed. No one had the appetite for anything.

You asked the big question in a quiet tone: who’s going to be the prosecutor anyway?

Undyne groaned. “I dunno. I’m a bad pick. And Mettaton led to another dead end.”

The glambot posed with confidence. “I could change my line of argument, darling. I’m as flexible as my arms.”

“But you’re still gonna be Mettaton. You wanna risk Sans throwing another wrench at you?”

“Hmmm.” Then, his face lit up with an idea. “If we’re going to be throwing wrenches at each other, might as well do it in style! How about it, darling Alphys? The most unexpected twist!”

You watched your lizard friend seize up. She’s so frozen, she might as well be a block of ice.

Alphys exclaimed. “N-n-n-o! Muri! Muri-desu! S-S-S-Sans will never let me go over the wh-whole Lab disaster. O-or anything about my life!”

You hate to say this but, Alphys would just become a sitting duck at Sans’ wiles.

Dad… Nevermind. It’s the same deal, different skin. Sans already roasted him multiple times.

What about Mom? She has a good head on her shoulders. Her experience as a Queen helps too.

Shaking her head, Mom said: “I’m sorry, my child. I’m not sure how to respond to him yet. He… did keep his promises by technicality.”

Darn. You considered begging her to stand. Maybe pitch favours: be a good kid, do certain tasks, or whatever. Anything to get Mom’s help. It’s rather manipulative, but what choice do you have?

“…I will be the Prosecutor…”

The resulting silence was so intense, you could hear a pin drop.

NANI?!!?!!?

Grillby?!?!? The guy who needed Mister Red Bird to speak in his stead is going to prosecute Sans, your rival for the smoothest talker in the Dreemurr Nation?!??!
“…My silence towards you was a precaution… The less I speak, the safer…”

Jaw, drop. He… he actually thought that through? Then why did he evacuate with the other monsters when, um, ‘incidents’ happened?!

“…Evacuees need guardians… Captain Undyne was more than enough for the front lines…”

An excuse, or strategic thinking? Hmmmmmmmm.

Doctor Gaster huffed. “Quit that snide nonsense. His early retirement from the Royal Guard was such a tremendous loss for a reason. You youngsters have no idea.”

“However!” he continued. “There is one minor problem, friend. Your voice. It never quite healed. Are you sure you can take the strain? I imagine the defense will jump on your weakness without hesitation.”

The fire elemental rubbed his throat. “…I’ll deal with it…”

…Why not ask Lady Lucidia? You had seen what she could do! You explained to Grillby how she cleaved your phone into quarters, and put it back together without a single scratch.

Grillby expressed interest in your proposal. “…She had treated me before, but never so extensively… Maybe there’s something she could do…”

With eyes wide open, Alphys commented: “I’m sooooooooo glad she didn’t vent her anger at me.”

Mom pushed herself off the seat. Her action caught everyone’s attention, stopping the chatter in an instant.

She said: “If that is the case, I shall defend Sans.”

You gasped. The outrage levels of the room spiked. Most of it came from Undyne.

“What the hell,” yelled the fish. “You can’t do this, Toriel!!!”

“I can and I will.” Mom said. “You wanted a change, do you not? Making sure that Sans doesn’t do the talking should give you an edge, and keep the peace.”

Good point there. But… but… Mom is a super tough cookie. You’re not sure who’s worse.

With a soft chuckle, she replied: “Be more confident, Frisk. You’re not our Ambassador for nothing.”

Mom hugged you with her warm, soft arms. You returned it with a snuggle.

“I’ll be going now, my child. Do your best.”

Yes, Mom.

And so, Queen Toriel went over to the Barrister’s side. Dang. At least the prosecution will have the advantage of knowing their next opponent.

Sorta.

You asked Grillby if he’s anxious, maybe even afraid of what’s to come?
His reply? “…I have no fear against a ‘sober’ Toriel…”

That. That was the coolest and funniest declaration rolled together in one.
This chapter. Man. It's meaty. So meaty that it took us about 17 days to finish it.
Lots and lots of details here. Read it slow and deliberate.

It was a dream of a hazy memory.
The soft comforts of a bed did little to allay the pain and suffering.
It hurts to move.
It hurts to breathe.
It hurts to exist.
Yet, the dreamer had no voice to cry.
In the background, a mother wept beyond the door. A few floors down, two men -- a father and an uncle -- duelled magic. One could feel the anger all the way to the upper apartments.
A doctor, tall and lanky, opened the window and yelled to the men below.
“Egads you two, fight elsewhere! The boy needs rest! Or do I need to get down there to beat some sense into you???”
The noise moved away.
“Ugh, those hotheads.”
The doctor walked over to the bedside. He inspected a hanging bag filled with a glowing white liquid. A long thin tube led towards the bed.
“Oh dear. The ruckus woke you up. I hope you’re feeling at least a little better. Though, I know you can’t answer. Just relax.”
There’s a cordialness in his manner of speech. It was the polar opposite of the fierce exasperated threats he made to the noisemakers below.
“Curious about this bag? It’s an ‘intravenous drip’. Something I adapted from studying human medical practices. Directly feeds magic and medicine straight into your body.”
“Science is wonderful, isn’t it? Wait. N-nevermind. Don’t force yourself to reply just yet.”
“Hmm… what a strong will you have. All this and yet you didn’t cry. That’s a very, very good thing. You don’t want to injure those vocal chords any further.”
The doctor read the report. His skeletal hands squeezed on the sheet. Frustration threatened to crumple through the sheet.
“…I’ll call your mother now.”
The deed was done.
Grillby doesn’t know how long Lady Lucidia took to complete his request. It could be an hour. It
could be more. At least the clock won’t tick in the physical world.
By the time he returned to the Prosecution’s chambers, it was empty.
Grillby looked around. “Where did they go?”
Lady Lucidia answered: “They had gone ahead, waiting for us.”
“I see.”
The fire elemental rubbed his throat. It’s strange to hear himself with a functional voicebox: it was as
though he had become a totally different person.
The woman squeezed her hands, anxious. “Sir Grillenn, may I have a word with you?”
“Yes?”
“Your organ was scarred from a lack of proper treatment. It’s a miracle that you didn’t sound feeble.
Or were rendered mute.”
“I have removed the damaged tissue and weaved a new implant based on your Psychia’s data.
However… there was always a risk that the procedure might fail. It’s better to have a quiet voice
than to have none at all. That is why I never attempted this surgery in the physical world.”
“Hmm,” Grillby mused. “If that’s the case, I won’t know if I could keep this result in the first place.”
Lady Lucidia nodded. “Accurate. Therefore, do not overstrain. Please exercise caution.”
“Understood. Thank you for your concern.” Grillby bowed down, alleviating her concerns, before
walking his way toward the court.
A plan had already sprung in mind. Queen Toriel might have thought of the same, albeit for a
different purpose.
He stopped before the final door. A sudden wave of doubt gripped his heart, making him hesitate for
a moment as the demons of ‘what if’ played their mocking tune.
…Get a grip… Grillby thought to himself.
Grip, he did. Right on the door’s handle. Then, it’s onwards to the Crimson Hall.
His patrons waved for his attention from the gallery. They dispensed words of support. Something
along the lines of ‘kick his butt’ and ‘do your best’. The warm sentiment was much appreciated.
The two Kings of Magi and Monsters sat on their respective thrones: Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme
and His Majesty Asgore Dreemurr. The contrast between them was akin to light and dark.
Though his days as a Captain had long passed, Grillby saluted the King as a sign of honour.

Asgore smiled and returned the gesture. But, the moment he lowered his hand… his expression turned sombre once more.

Frisk, this court’s current judge, seemed to be configuring something on their phone. Were they taking pictures? Scanning? They had exhibited the same behaviour in the resting lobbies as well. It won’t surprise Grillby if they installed a new tool for this case.

…I shouldn’t keep anyone waiting…

Grillby went over to his bench. From here, he observed Sans standing beside Toriel: the Queen of his own nation.

He admitted that didn’t hold her to the same level of reverence as King Asgore. After she returned to the community, Toriel likened herself more of a mother than a ruler. Quite a terror with alcohol too. Still, she’s been stepping back to her former role in the light of the recent crises. Not an opponent to be underestimated.

Frisk put the phone down and asked: “Is everyone ready?”

Queen Toriel straightened her back. “The defense is ready, Your Honour.”

Grillby responded in like. “The prosecution is ready, Your Honour.”

The whole court uttered a soft gasp. Though puzzled at first, Grillby then remembered that he had his voice fixed.

Somewhere in the background, Mettaton fancied about a ‘dashing dasher’. Doctor Alphys couldn’t stop squealing either. The man of fire did his best to ignore those reactions.

“Eh erm,” Frisk faked clearing their throat. “Court is in session. Sir Grilenn, please make your opening statement.”

“Your Honour,” said Grillby, “The plaintiff observes that Tactician Sans Serif has yet to explain himself for his seeming acts of treason. His bouts of personal attacks against the prosecution and the judicial body served as mere distractions from the truth. We demand that he testify about his movements: from the creation of the Seraph System, to the conclusion of incident. That is all.”

Frisk lifted their phone towards his direction. After a brief check, they nodded. “Okay. Queen Toriel, please make your opening statement.”

And so she said: “Can this court handle the truth they seek? My client has plenty of reasons to doubt, considering the lack of experience of those involved. As Tactician, he’s also obligated to keep secrets. The defence proposes that we postpone this hearing to a later date. Preferably after the imminent Ocean Battle. This is a waste of precious time.”

Both sides were frank about their thoughts. This may not ever happen in a human courtroom. But, this is the court of magical monsters. They do things differently.

“Objection,” said Grillby, keeping his tone level so that he doesn’t overstrain. “The prosecution insists otherwise. We’re missing vital information that could turn the tides of battle. Who could we enlist? What is the true nature of the technology that Sans Serif created? What was that strange light that almost killed us?”
There are many questions in need of answers. The prosecution therefore requests the culprit to testify.

The defense did not reply. It’s up to the judge now.

Frisk checked Toriel with their phone. The more Grillby watched, the more he’s convinced that they had installed a type of scanner.

Objection sustained. Sans Serif will testify.

The man in question walked over to the witness stand. “Finally, kid. Got the right guys for the job. Thanks to Tori and Grillby, I can finally get into the marrow of the matter.”

... So he antagonized everyone else to force me into this position...

Sans continued: “Welp if you really wanna start from the beginning, let’s go back to the time when my Eye got sealed. How about that?”

“Sealed?” Grillby asked.

“Yup. Lil’ Miss Lucy and I struck a deal in one of the past timelines. See, back then things didn’t go so hot. The Dreemurr Nation rejected the Magus Association’s help. Gungnir found the Six, and then the media frenzy exploded into an all out riot. Dead End.”

“Why did you make this deal?”

“Because the alternative would be Papyrus getting a crash course into becoming a proper Chronographer with no guarantee that he’ll ever remain sane. Not gonna put my little brother through that kind of hell.”

...Ironic coming from you...

“Please elaborate to court about the nature of this deal.”

Sans replied, “Lil’ Miss Lucy would plant a Seer’s Seal on my Eye, preventing me from using my usual tricks. Half-blind, I’d be forced to travel deep into her territory: the Spire’s Library.”

The story continued: “Up there, I met the lady. She completed her end of the deal: to teach me everything related to Determination. It was her best bet of finding a solution. A new, unexpected path. Too bad she was wrong in thinking that her efforts would change anything.”

“Why wouldn’t it?” Grillby questioned.

“Us double Tacticians once brainstormed a bit. It all boils down to three questions.”

Sans then lifted his hand to show his index finger: the sign of ‘one’. “Will legal rights protect us? Nope. Ain’t anything in the universe could prevent anyone from changing their mind. There’s always a risk of corruption and fanaticism.”

Two fingers. “Can the Magus Association do their job? Depends on who’s in charge. Mezil’s going grey, so I estimate that he’d hold out maybe a decade or two at most. That’s not taking into account any threats that may cause premature existential failure. Which brings us to...”

Three. “Can Their Honour Frisk succeed him? Big question there. Tell me, Sir Prosecutor, what’s your answer?”
Grillby remained silent. He knew full well it was a trap: a rebuttal waits at every path.

“That look on your face…” Sans said, “Tells me that you’re not confident either. Which proves my point: Their Honour is in hot water if any scandal gets out. Like say, a dusty history swept under the rug.”

“This world is too set in their own traps to get anywhere.” Sans added, “That’s why I gambled it all into my final gambit. To make sure I wouldn’t get tempted to turn back, I burned my entire wardrobe and a few other belongings. Ask Their Honour. They can confirm it.”

Toriel was horrified by the revelation. “Your Honour, is that true?!”

Frisk nodded solemnly. “Yes, Mom. It’s true. I was there to witness it.”

Shooting a mother’s glare of massive disapproval at the witness, she said: “Well Sans, looks like I will have to drag you to the clothes store once we’re done with this trial.”

“Appreciate it, Tori. But that’s gotta wait until after I finish the Seraph System. Really working overtime on that.”

…This deadlock… I should take note of this…

It’s fortunate that the court supplied a pen and paper. He made a quick reminder.

‘Eye sealed - deadlock - circumstances won’t change.’

“Sans Serif,” Grillby said, “Please resume your testimony. What happened after you met Lady Lucidia?”

“I built the Seraph System,” the skeleton replied. “Version 1.0 that is. To be honest it's a little on the shoddy side. I hammered it together with whatever spare parts I could get my hands on.”

“What is it made of?”

“A bunch of complicated electronics, lots of skeleton code, and Determination-imbued steel. The casing was the only thing useful from the old Chronograph. Rest of it, perma-junk.”

…Should I question where he obtained that?…

…No… The source is not important…

Grillby asked: “What’s the purpose of the Determination-imbued steel?”

“Protection and preservation. I know folks would think that it prevents the device from unravelling, but nah. Once I go back ten years, it’s gone. But the setup ensures that I retain my memory.”

So, this involved time-travel after all. “That was your plan all along?”

“Yup,” Sans nodded. “Well. Plan A anyway. The idea was to prevent The Core Incident from ever happening. No bad science, no murder attempts, no collateral deaths, and Their Honour gets to live happily ever after with their biological parents.”

“On my end? I would have perfected my wormhole theorem: bypassing the Barrier without any need for human SOULS. You saw it happen, Grillbz. Again, that is all thanks to Lady Lucy’s study, and some live tests.”
...I don’t quite grasp the scientific details... but...

Another note, jotted down.

‘Eye sealed - deadlock - circumstances won't change.’
‘Core Incident - undone - memory preserved.’

“What did you do after you completed the device?”

“Tested it on Muffet’s DT Doughnuts,” said Sans. “Worked perfect. Then, I moved on to my next target: Doctor Gaster himself. Why him, you ask? Because that man is a conscious Amalgamate. He’ll remember every incident of time travel. There’s no guarantee that he won’t try to stop my plans, so I made sure to silence him first.”

Gaster was an ‘old friend’ by technicality. Even though the relationship had soured over a particular incident, Grillby wouldn’t want any misfortune to befall on his skull. “Did you try to kill him?”

Sans shook his head. “Nope, because I know it won’t. It takes more than a drain to finish an Amalgamate. The only way to kill them is complete obliteration: SOUL and all. I’d need to use Karma for that to happen, giving him ample opportunity to run away.”

“Interesting.” Grillby crossed his arms. “And would he still remember in that case?”

“Eh, maybe? Nothing past the point of his own death at least.”

...Should I ask further?... Is there anything useful?... Or am I getting distracted?...

..................

...Toriel is being too silent... If there’s anything incriminating to be found here, she would have stopped me long ago...

...Something doesn’t add up... Lady Lucidia prevented him from using his usual tricks... But his Eye was burning in his gambit...

...Then...

Grillby asked: “ Sans Serif, who removed your Seal? And when?”

Sans responded in his usual nonchalant manner. “I did. With Muffet’s boatloads of DT. As for when? Right before I started the construction of the Seraph System. After all, I needed the Eye to trigger the secret truth first. And that’s when I realised that the full extent of our crapshootery.”

“Why didn’t you explain this earlier?”

At last, Toriel stepped in. “Objection! Your Honour, explaining every detail will bog down the testimony. My client deems that the exact methods of removing his bindings to be unnecessary. What’s important is that he sees a hopeless future. Besides, he's meanwhile clued us in on another vital detail: the poor baker Muffet was an unwitting collaborator.”

Frisk furrowed their brows, thinking hard. In the end they decided: “Objection sustained.”

...Perhaps she’s right... It’s not when or how... But who... Muffet is nothing more than a distraction...

...When did exactly did Sans Serif notice that the seal on his Eye?... Who would he turn to?...
...It’s difficult for me to continue because I wasn’t deeply involved in the pre-Spire incidents...

...What do I know so far?...

Grillby remembered a time when he found Sans in his bar, drenched in seawater and beach sand. He took him to Alphys’ Lab… that was when he met Doctor Gaster for the first time in years.

Then, the ‘exorcism’ happened. At first he didn’t quite understand the full scope of the task, but he had a better idea after witnessing Frisk’s past actions. That child was a DEMON possessed by another DEMON. No wonder they had to purge the parasite out of their being.

After that event was over, he went straight back to his bar. Perhaps he should have congratulated Frisk on their newfound cleansing?

The next day, the Magi and their police colleagues appeared in town. All premises that dealt with lodging, food, and drink saw an increase in customers and revenue. Grillby’s establishment included.

The situation soon soured. Sunday. It coincided with his fire arts practice. The regular red-feathered patron ordered the strongest booze first thing in the afternoon. Not a good sign. Told him that an anti-magic cult had terrorized Mettaton’s studio. It was exactly one week before the Crimson Hall, Grillby remembered.

From then onwards… it’s bad to worse. The Royal Guard found themselves shorthanded. It spurred the call for volunteers to help maintain the watch. Grillby now recalled Papyrus’ enthusiastic yelling across town. Quite the living police siren. Helped deter many possible troublemakers.

The bar closed down during the curfew. He became way too busy with security. Furthermore, no one should be out more than they needed to.

...The next time I saw Sans… He carried an unconscious Papyrus on his back… I was looking for Captain Undyne and the King to report about Gungnir...

...He didn’t teleport at all… Which means his Eye was already sealed back then...

...I think I have a new line of questioning...

“Sans Serif,” he began. “I remembered that you and Queen Toriel went to Mount Ebott for something technical. Papyrus got injured in that event. Could you elaborate?”

Toriel blinked. “Objection. How does this relate to our current case? It’s going off-topic.”

“It’s related,” Grillby retorted. “Your Honour, we need to establish a clear timeframe of Sans’ Eye unsealing. This will clue us to the people he had met.”

Frisk nodded. “Objection overruled. Sans, please answer the question.”

Sans remained calm as he explained: “I worked with Gaster to set up a Chronoviewer. See, we needed a device to project Paps’ visions on a screen. Otherwise whatever he sees will be his exclusive knowledge. Kinda troublesome, right?”

Grillby wasn’t happy to hear that. What’s the use of prison if it only served as a second home? “I thought Doctor Gaster was under arrest for the mishap of The Core Incident?”

“Yep. But, he had a bright idea and he roped in a willing participant. Papyrus went and got Gaster all the material he needed.”
Even harder to believe. “No one had any objections that a prisoner started a science experiment. Unsupervised?”

“About that…” Sans glanced at his defense. “Tori, you wanna explain? Or I should?”

At first, she was puzzled. But then the details clicked in her head. “Dear me! You’re right, Sans. Sir Grillenn, I was the one who endorsed Doctor Gaster’s project. He proposed the idea to King Asgore, Frisk, Papyrus, and myself. We thought that this ‘Chronoviewer’ would become a vital tool for our Kingdom’s survival.”

Grillby questioned: “Do they function just like Lady Lucidia’s screens?”

“Yes, that’s a fair comparison.”

...Aha... That explains why the Magus Association allowed Doctor Gaster to build it... They too would be interested in Papyrus’ visions...

The list of notes:

‘Eye sealed - deadlock - circumstances won’t change.’
‘Core Incident - undone - memory preserved.’
‘Chronoviewer - Papyrus - ended in injury.’

...I think I’m ready build the bridge...

“Sans Serif,” said Grillby, “Of all the people present in the experiment, how many of them knew about your Eye being Sealed?”

Sans’ lips curled upwards. “Probably better if you give me a list of names, Grillbz. Maybe you saw something I didn’t.”

...Doesn’t look like he’s willing to give me a straight answer. Instead, he’s testing my memory...

Annoying. Nonetheless, Grillby agreed. “Very well. Does Frisk know about this?”

Sans replied: “Yup. One of the first. I was working for the kid back then.”

“Papyrus?”
“ Nope. Didn’t want to put him on Mezil’s radar more than he already was.”

“Undyne?”
“ Nope. But she was already suspecting it. Almost got busted.”

“Cenna Caraway?”
“I sure hope so. Otherwise she would be putting herself in danger. Lil’ Miss Lucy sent her there to watch me after all.”

“Queen Toriel?”
“Nope. Sorry Tori.”

“Doctor Alphys?”
“Nope. She wouldn’t be able to help.”

“Doctor Gaster?”
“Oh come on. Now you’re just guessing.”
“No. Your avoidance is telling the truth. It’s a ‘yes’. You hoped that I would forget about Doctor Gaster, did you not? If you had truly broken the Seal alone, as you have claimed, Gaster wouldn’t be a problem to your plans.”

Grillby pointed his finger at Sans to raise the heat. “The only reason he’s in the loop is because YOU needed his assistance!”

The gallery gasped. Undyne yelled a ‘YEAH’ somewhere. Then the people began chatting among themselves over this new revelation.

The defendant meanwhile wiped off a bead of sweat on his brow. “Hey, ever thought of signing up for law school?”

“No distractions, please.” Grillby would have none of that. “Tell me, Sans Serif, how much DID Doctor Gaster know about your predicament?”

“A lot I’d say. But I’m not exactly the right person to answer that question. If you know what I mean.”

...Heh... He didn’t even try to lie or deny... This is what he wanted after all...

Grillby raised his head high to make his declaration: “The plaintiff requests Doctor Gaster to stand as a witness.”

“The defense would like to request the same.” Toriel added posthaste.

Frisk granted permission, Sans returned to Toriel’s side, and Undyne -- as Captain -- escorted Doctor Gaster to the witness stand.

Round Two of questioning.

Doctor Gaster put up his best appearance for the proceeds. With the witness stand covering his lower half of the body, he appeared as solid as his former self.

Reading from the same instruction note, Frisk said: “Witness, please state your name and profession.”

Doctor Gaster bowed.

“I am Doctor Wendell Dominic Gaster, former Royal Scientist of the Dreemurr Nation.”

Raising his arms, he continued: “On the left is Roman. On the right is Helvetica. They are the parents of Sans Serif and Papyrus.”

“Thank you.” The judge nodded. “Skeleparents? Sorry for dragging the both of you into this.”

They signed back. Though Grillby doesn’t understand, he knew that they didn’t blame the court for any inconvenience.

It’s back to prosecution. “Doctor Gaster, did Sans Serif ask for your assistance?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“When and under what circumstances?”

Right off the bat, Gaster presented his words with charismatic eloquence. “It happened two weeks
ago, soon after Frisk’s exorcism. Sans had enlisted Papyrus as a glorified taxi to my prison. When he didn’t teleport past the bars, that’s when I realised something was off. How right I was: his Eye had been sealed tighter than an airtight lock!”

Not quite what Grillby expected. “I thought you two hated each other to the bone?”

“Well, yes we still do. But that doesn’t mean I could turn him away! Aside from Papyrus, I also have his parents to oblige to.”

“…The two citizens you hold in hostage as Amalgamates.”

Flustered, Gaster exclaimed: “Grillby! It’s complicated! I thought you would understand my position from our, ehm, strained friendship.”

…Strained is an understatement… I sometimes wonder it’s one-sided after all…

A flash of memory slipped by right after that thought. He recalled a lanky, encouraging doctor with similar a flair for words, though that person's face or name eluded him.

…Why am I thinking about that now?…

Toriel scoffed out loud. Someone had stoked her ire.

“Complicated?” she questioned. “Dangerous I’d say. Unsafe experiments? Hostages and blackmail? Not to mention how you almost turned us all into a massive Amalgamate!”

“It’s regrettable that Sans chose the most violent path. One has to wonder, however, what would have happened to the rest of us if he had stood by and done nothing.”

The witness liquefied from the Queen’s sheer glare.

…I guess Gaster is an expert in digging his own grave…

…A part of me wished that he had stood on trial like this years ago… That would have been true ‘justice’…

“Queen Toriel,” Grillby proposed, “Would you like to cross-examine the witness in my stead?”

Delight was written all over her face. “Why, of course. Thank you.”

…This would be a good time to rest my throat too…

…Hm?… A mild discomfort already?… We’re nowhere near done…

Grillby frowned as he touched his throat. The action didn’t go unnoticed, as a bottle filled with green magic soon spawned on his table.

The contents smelled of coconuts: one of the first new oils he sampled on the Surface. Sweet, rich, and smooth. Great for drinking.

Toriel thus resumed: “Doctor Gaster, would you kindly inform the court about your ulterior motives in assisting Sans Serif?”

Gaster refused to let the accusation get the better of his image. “I assure you the only ‘ulterior’ motive I had was ‘reconciliation’! My boy Papyrus has shown me a path unimaginable: Mercy! I expected him to cast me back into the Void, and yet he did not do so. Don’t you think it’s only fair that I try to
make amends?"

Both the defense and prosecution pondered over this fact.

...I can tell Gaster is honest about this... Although it may not convince Toriel...

She asked, “In what ways have you tried to reconcile?”

Gaster answered, “For one, I willingly surrendered myself to the law. I came forth with my ill deeds and let myself be incarcerated in Snowdin. Then, I tried to help those who’re dear to Papyrus’ heart.”

“For example, Judge Mezil Thyme -- friend and mentor to our young man -- his love of spice can get him into tremendous trouble. So we three tried to find a factor that maximizes taste and minimizes poisoning. Alas, it wasn’t successful.”

Gaster’s friends both signed their thoughts. Even the man connected to them had trouble translating their flurry of wavings.

“S-slow down, Helvi. Roman, you too. Right. Yes I understand you’re both frustrated that we couldn’t solve the curry problem. But sometimes the path you choose doesn’t lead to an answer. Roman? I’m not sure if we can ask Sans directly. Might as well, I suppose.”

“Sans!” he said, “Your father wonders if Determination would have ever worked?”

Their elder son replied, “Sorry, Dad. Extensive testing proved that the ‘DT taste improvement theory’ is a bust. Might be a good preservative if you could drain the red stuff before consumption, though.”

Roman snapped his fingers in frustration: it was a futile quest in the end.

“Anyway,” Gaster continued, “In return for his assistance I helped Sans about the matter of his locked powers. I have the ability for both telescopic and microscopic sight. Therefore, that’s what I used to find the root of the problem.”

“Analyzing the Seer’s Seal, I noticed two major points of interest. First, the Code utilizes a constructed language that served as a cipher. Second, it’s filled with refined intricacy. Weavings and threadwork, reminiscent of my departed mother’s tailoring skills. It was then I concluded that the person who applied it had to be a woman of great knowledge and talent: a Seer working with the Magi.”

The defense listened with great interest. “That’s quite the analysis. So, did you or did you not play any part in breaking this Seal?”

“I did. Sans and I worked backwards. Though we could not read the synthetic language, I knew some ancient procedures. However… that’s also when we discovered that the Magi refused to let us have an easy victory. Thyme’s trademark butterfly rewound every effort. Such an annoying little insect.”

...Interesting... Sans would indeed be forced to research Determination... and meet Lady Lucidia...

...It matches his testimony...

“So,” said Toriel, “After this, Sans roped poor Muffet into his schemes, broke the Mark in secret, and then began construction of the Seraph System. I presume that’s also when he took action against you?”
The scientist answered: “Yes indeed! He waited until I ate Muffet’s doughnut to confirm that the Seraph System worked as intended. Then, he closed in for the kill. Stabbed a Mark on my chest and turned the three of us into stone!”

One more piece of the truth was revealed to all. Noise levels increased in court. Still, the full picture remained hidden.

“How odd.” Toriel mused. “I do recall several ‘unexplained phenomena’ accredited to your name. Care to explain why that may be?”

Gaster responded, “Well… I thought that I would entrust our future to Papyrus alone. But! Sans Serif’s diabolical plans failed to take a particular ‘quirk’ into account.”

“As you know, The Magus Association defines Determination as the ‘Will’ of a person. Therefore! When Sans drained me, he inadvertently absorbed my very consciousness! An unexpected, golden opportunity! Alas, the inner workings of this lifeless machine were still safeguarded by Sans himself. I found myself helpless. Trapped. A mere tagalong! At least, I could badger him with words to no end.”

“And badger him I did!” The doctor hollered. “It’s all due to my shrewd genius! In the end, I managed to sweet-talk Sans into a trap.”

Grillby squinted in disbelief. It’s correct that Gaster is prone to honeyed lips. But to have that work on Sans of all people? That idea casted a dark shade of doubt.

So the fire elemental interjected: “Doctor Gaster, please explain the nature of this trap.”

“Believe it or not, Papyrus would have won the battle fair and square. Never underestimate a clairvoyant fighter! Alas, time ran out too soon. Sans was mere seconds from activating Judge Thyme’s pre-Core SAVE… The situation became one that was ‘cheat or be cheated’. I thus offered Sans my help, requesting ‘explicit permission to control the Seraph System’. Quote for quote.”

“The moment he handed me the steering wheel, I primed the Trap Harvester to freeze his sense of time, and rigged the Seraph System to feed him visions of the hypothetical path he tried to take.”

“A hefty serving of humble pie.” Toriel’s lips pouted with skepticism. “Is that the absolute truth, Doctor Gaster?”

“Why would I lie? There’s nothing to gain.”

“Hold it!”

All attention turned square on Sans.

He rubbed the back of his neck. “Jeez, why are you guys so surprised? I’m still my own defense. Nobody removed my barrister status. Anyways, Gaster said he trusted in Papyrus to beat me. Welp. I call that a lie.”

“On what grounds?!?” Gaster exclaimed.

“If you really trusted in him, you wouldn’t have buttered me up for your fancy trap. You could have done nothing. Let Papyrus win, ‘fair and square’.”

Gaster widened his eyes in shock. The alternative didn’t even cross his mind. “You--!!!”
Sans cut in before the witness had a chance. “But you did. You helped me plant the WESS: Lil’ Miss Lucy’s ultimate anti-DT weapon. Why don’t you tell the court what happens if the victim is a Seer?”

“You put him through that hell!”

“Yep. A hell that I intended to revert. But for your plan to work, whatever damage inflicted had to stay. In other words…”

With a chilling tone, Sans accused Gaster; “You sacrificed Papyrus to defeat me.”

Grillby shook his head. Gaster made Sans appear to be a hero. He would pass the Crimson Hall at this rate.

...Gaster, you really are an expert in digging your own grave...

...Sans, are you trying to sacrifice your mentor to escape?...

...Hmm… No... That is far too small a goal... This is but a stepping stone, although I don’t know where it leads...

The Amalgamate dripped. Roiled. His face changed to one of shock to indignance. He slammed the side of his fist on the table.

“SANS SERIF!!!” He yelled. “You DARE turn me into a scapegoat?! Again?!?”

The short skeleton laughed. “Nah, Ol’ G. It’s the other way round. I’m the one on trial here. Wouldn’t it be convenient if all your wrongs were pushed on me instead? Sans Serif, mastermind extraordinaire. Yep. That’s a nice narrative.”

Grillby switched his attention on Frisk. They began to lose their cool. Soon, their control too. Would they be tempted to rewind time?

Crimson Keeper or not, they’re still a child that’s new to the job. They need help, and help Grillby will give.

The prosecutor thus yelled: “Objection!”

They couldn’t hear him. Gaster was so riled up, he continued arguing with Sans and Toriel without cease.

...Ngh… This is bad…

“Objection!!” He repeated his stance with greater volume. Still drowned out.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. Grillby raised his hand above the table. Inhaled deep. He will yell louder than he ever had in his entire life.

He slammed down. Hard. And right after that, his voice rang into the Void and beyond.

“OBJECTION!!!”

A sharp pain stabbed his throat. The implant could never replace the original, just as Lady Lucidia had warned.
He heard the worried calls of his name. Not important. He must follow up on his objection.

“Defense. You may not.”

Cough. Hack.

“Disrupt court. With slander.”

Wheeze. Cough.

“Evidence. Needed.”

In his coughing magic got pushed upwards, filling his mouth. Disconnected from their host, the escaping substance destabilized and crumbled into dust.

Due to sudden injury, the judge declared an emergency recess.

* * *

It’s the bed again.

The soft comforts complemented with the strange haze. It’s difficult to focus, and he was feeling more content than he should.

The pain was more bearable than he expected: a little on the ‘annoying’ side of the meter. It reminded Grillby of getting a moderate bruise. Or an intense workout after missing too many days.

In the background, he heard many arguments. They’re too jumbled to make sense. Nonetheless, one could feel the conflicted emotions all the way from his location.

Lady Lucidia opened the door. Air and gravity bent around her, floating the tips of her great curled hair.

“Silence,” she warned. “Or else.”

Intimidated, the commotion moved away.

The lady then shut the door with telekinesis, leaned her back against the nearest wall, and sobbed into her hands.

Mezil Thyme soon slipped into the ward. He took care of his wife, giving her water and consoling her. The way he acted was one of experience… as though this wasn’t a first.

While Lady Lucidia is recovering, Mezil became the spokesperson. He gave Grillby a digital screen to type out his thoughts.

“I apologize,” said the husband. “My wife is not a doctor. She’s more of a scientist.”

Though half-addled, Grillby had enough clarity to use the device.

‘What do you mean?’ he wrote.

“Lucidia can discard failed constructs without a second thought. But, that is not an option when it
comes to an individual’s fate. Life after all weighs much heavier than materials and data. As such, good doctors require a balance of care and coldness. They need the heart to treat a patient, yet yield themselves to the harsh realities of mortality. Failure has to be swallowed one way or another.”

Grillby responded: ‘Maybe that’s why Gaster could become one.’

Mezil huffed. “That man is dangerously oblivious. I have no words about the poor reasoning behind his choices.”

‘Please let your wife know that she’s not to blame. It has nothing to do with her lack of skill. I overexerted despite her advice. It was my fault.’

“Your kind consideration will be appreciated.”

Three rapid knocks called for their attention. The door opened just enough for a certain small child in striped blue and purple to peek through the gaps.

“May I come in?” asked Frisk.

Their request came on quite a short notice. Still, Grillby wanted to meet the kid anyway. He sat up on the bed and beckoned them to walk on over.

So they did. With an apologetic face, they muttered: “I’m sorry, Grillby. I should have called for order sooner.”

“Good that you knew,” noted Mezil. “I take that it’s different compared to what you had practiced in the Underground?”

Frisk nodded. “Way different.”

“Not surprising. You had led, battled, dodged, and convinced… but never judged over a heated dispute of this magnitude.”

With how well they did in the field of combat, it’s easy to forget their inexperience in other areas. Even adults could fall into the trap of being too narrow. He should know it best.

So, Grillby wrote back: ‘Thank you for the apology. What do you plan to do now?’

Frisk replied, “I wonder if you want to start over. Tsunderjudge said I could preserve your memories. I can preserve everyone’s memories too! Sans included. Then, only your injury would be undone.”

A tempting proposition. But…

‘What’s the catch?’

Was that hesitation in Judge Thyme’s body language? He held his breath longer than usual.

“…There’s none,” he replied. “If it’s Frisk, they’re more than capable of supporting a handful of proxies. Otherwise, Lucidia has each session recorded. We can implant the memory back into you at any time.”

“I won’t get penalized?” the kid asked.

“No. You’re not reversing time to cover up your own flaws.”

Frisk bounced back with a positive pep. “Let’s do it then!”
“But you may need to take Sir Grillenn off the stand.”

Instant defeat. Frisk exclaimed, “Why?!”

“It won’t solve the issue of his fragile voicebox. The same problem may repeat. Do you want to put him through the pain and suffering again? Besides, Sans Serif now knows of his weakness.”

“Then we exclude Sans.”

“Now that’s grounds for a mistrial. You would be putting him under a deliberate and unfair disadvantage. He’ll figure it out sooner or later anyway.”

Grillby squinted. He therefore typed:

‘Apologies for my frankness, but you’re both overcomplicating the situation. I want to remain as prosecutor despite the risks. If anything happens to me, it won’t carry over to the real world anyway. Am I right?’

Frisk replied, “As long as Determination is not involved, you’re safe.”

‘Then so be it. I’d like to continue without further delay.’

The kid glanced between the writer and his statement. “Grillby, is this you speaking? Or the concoction of painkillers? Those things can mess with your head.”

‘Painkillers’. That explained the reduced pain and the weird fuzz in the head. Regardless, Grillby knew that he’s sound of mind.

‘Do I appear to be a passive person?’

Behind their stoic face was the intense awkward pressure to say the ‘correct’ words. In the end they said: “You were super different as a bartender. But, I guess you’re not a shopkeeper right now. You look… ‘Determined’."

...Huh… This is strange...

...I gave up on lesser circumstances in the past...

...What drives me forward now?...
We made it! Last post before Chinese New Year! Those who have been following me since the beginning would notice that it's been three Chinese New Years since the story started. Wow, what a trip.

And also last piece of art right before the holidays.

http://sophtoart.tumblr.com/post/182406859950/yes-i-know-the-singular-for-seraphim-is-seraph

I'll be travelling to visit relatives during the season. As such, there won't be any writing done.

Have a happy new year of the lunar kind!

In the defense’s lobby…

Queen Toriel pinched the bridge between her eyes.

“Sans,” she said, “You have to stop throwing the court into an uproar. Did you really need to bring up the Gaster matter? Frisk had to rewind time yet again…”

Sans, lounging on the sofa, replied with a simple: “Yep.”

“Why?” Toriel asked back. “I’m trying to make everyone like you!”

“You don’t need to.”

“But they are your friends!”

“Were.”

More headaches. “You’re making this difficult, Sans. If only you were nicer to everyone, they would have listened to you.”

“That’s what I tried to do with the big maze. Nope. Didn’t work.”

Toriel narrowed her gaze, exasperated. “That nonsense was anything but nice.”

The conversation stopped. It doesn’t look like he had anything else to say.

Sans leaned back against the sofa and gazed into the Void above. “Tori. Do you believe me?”

She froze on the spot. Some silent seconds ticked by before she confessed her thoughts. “I… I don’t even know what you’re thinking anymore.”

His fingertips clawed into the sofa’s fabric.

“Thought so.” Sans closed his eyes. “Y’know Tori, my objective was never to clear my name. Only
to get everyone on the same page. And, if they can’t understand where I’m coming from… well, we’d be getting nowhere fast. It’s as simple as that.”

The Queen sat behind her best friend. “Please tell me about your goals then. I can’t help you unless you tell me where you’re leading us.”

“You sure?” He asked back. “Helping me would be going against your husband.”

Stern mother mode, activated; “Sans! It’s not like I’m letting you completely off the hook! I’m asking for time to make a proper judgement, not one done under pressure. It’s for everyone’s sake.”

Sans closed his eyes. Was he contemplating? Or did he decline without words?

“Welp,” he said. “If you really wanna help me, you gotta let me say what I need to say. It will definitely cause an uproar in court. They might even try to dismiss me. But, I must.”

Is this what the sayings call ‘a self-fulfilling prophecy’?

No one could understand him because he’s alone, yet Sans was alone because no one could understand him…

A light bulb lit in her mind. “Sans, could it be… that you don’t understand them either?”

He hummed out loud, musing. “Maybe. My estimates have been both right and wrong as of late. Hmm, take Lil’ Miss Lucy for example. I got it right that she had secrets and what it takes to force them out of her. But, she’s more unstable than I thought.”

It was so obvious. Toriel felt stupid for not realising the handicap sooner.

She cupped her hands on Sans’ cheeks and turned his head to face her. The action surprised him.

“I’m so sorry,” she said. “I… was so caught up by the outrage, I forgot what you lacked. Please Sans, let me read the situation for you.”

“Tori? Explain?”

“You’re lost without Papyrus. Let me take his place as your compass. I have an intact heart. I understand the emotions of others. I can see when the fuse is going to blow, and what would set them off.”

Sans raised his brows. “Huh. Fair point.”

After a moment of contemplation, he replied: “Then, I’ll entrust myself to you. Keep me on the right path, ‘k?”

* * *

When court resumed from where it left off, Grillby and Toriel took turns enquiring about the happenings at Megalovania: from the purpose of the maze, to persuading Frisk, and the subsequent battle with Papyrus…

“And that’s the gist of it,” said Sans, marking the end of the recap.
“So,” said Toriel, “in your own words, you put us through that ordeal to promote ‘character development’, ‘inner strength’ and ‘mutual cooperation’ in the unlikelihood of Frisk declining your offer to RESET?”

Grillby crossed his arms. “Queen Toriel, I wouldn’t believe so. His actions were nothing but a stall, designed to break our spirits. I’d say any positive outcome was an unexpected side-effect.”

Sans shook his head. “Jeez, Grillbz. Never pegged you for a pessimist. Look around you. Look at yourself. Everyone has come so far since the Underground days. That’s a good thing, right?”

The fire elemental huffed. “Papyrus is scarred forever because of you. Do you dare make light of that?”

“You’re the one making ‘light’ if you ask me.”

Keeping to her promise, Queen Toriel stepped in to deflate the situation. “Sans, not everyone had the same experience as I had. Sir Grillenn isn’t wrong either. Didn’t you shelter Papyrus from Gaster because you feared that he might resort to questionable teaching methods? For us, the Megalovania ordeal bordered on similar cruelty.”

Somewhere in the background, the scientist doth protest. Toriel ignored him.

Sans thought about it. “Hmm. You got a point there, Tori.”

The gallery muttered in confusion. Frisk tilted their head too, puzzled by the exchange.

“Your Honour,” she said. “The defendant would like to remind everyone that he was born with an incomplete heart, worsened by his upbringing. Unlike all of us, Sans doesn’t understand empathy in an instinctual manner. He learns his kindness from observation of what we approve and disapprove on.”

“Recent events have made most of his knowledge outdated. That, combined with the additional pressure of the looming conflict, may cause Sans to choose an unnaturally forced dialogue. I implore you not to take his words too personally.”

To her relief, Frisk understood. “Ahuh. He told me about it.”

However… there was another side to the coin. Grillby -- Sans’ former trainer -- refused to budge. “I know, Queen Toriel. That’s why I shall not relent. I will make it clear to Sans Serif that I do not accept his ways.”

That staunchness. What a world of difference compared to his quiet bartender persona. Toriel sensed the weight in her opponent’s words. “Your stance is noted, Sir Grillenn.”

I must say, those rectangle glasses did a good job softening his face. I wonder if they’re just cosmetic?

Looking at Sans, Grillby added, “Should you try to throw this court into disarray again, I motion to penalize you for your breach of conduct.”

“Fair,” Sans replied. “But it’s not like I am a full-time lawyer with a reputation at stake. What would be my punishment?”

Toriel reached out her hand, trying to tell Sans to cease further provocation. Alas, the warning came too late.

She gasped. “One month?! That’s well after the Ocean Battle!”

“That’s right, Queen Toriel,” said Grillby. “Sans will not entrust the Seraph System to anyone without his direct supervision. Therefore, he has a vested interest to remain on board. It’s a position he won’t gamble… unless the payoff is worth the risk.”

A dangerous aura caused Toriel’s fur to puff up. She thought it came from Sir Grillenn, at first. But then, her sight trailed towards the side…

…And towards the witness stand.

Sans’ face didn’t change at all. Not even a single flicker from his Seer’s Eye. And yet, an intense force flowed out from his being. Could it be due to his Red-dyed SOUL?

“A ‘1 HP’ scenario, eh?” said Sans. “Just like old times.”

“Indeed,” Sir Grillenn replied. “Make it count.”

The child judge’s stoic expression shifted to curious intrigue. “Okay Sans. If you rile up this court again, we’re gonna give you a looooong time out.”

It’s official. The stakes raised a few notches.

Sans, what are you trying to do? I thought you trusted me?

Just when she thought that she would be left behind, Sans asked: “Tori, wanna start the next line of questioning? Ask away. I’ll answer.”

You’re returning the steering wheel, I see.

What should I ask…?

“Could you tell us about the happenings in the alternate timeline, after Gaster tricked you?”

Sans’ face lit up. “Oh! That’s a fun one. Let’s see…”

An intriguing testimony followed. 10 years ago, the Core Incident never happened. And Sans’ wormhole plan worked just as intended. Monsters who could pass off as costumed humans were sent out as scouts. They returned a report that made Asgore cancel the war effort.

Meanwhile, Gaster and Sans had built the Font Family Waterworks. Ensured that the nation had clean water no matter what happened on the Surface. As a result, Sans had become quite the boss. Papyrus received training to become a scientist: the opposite of Undyne’s guardian path.

For the everyone else, the social dynamics remained more or less the same.

The Queen did not reunite with her King.
Undyne led the Royal Guard.
Alphys helped her seniors with all things technology.
Mettaton bloomed into a star.

So many things changed, yet so much remained the same…

Interesting details. Judging from Grillby’s furious note-taking, he thought so as well.
“Witness,” said the queen. “Where did your vision end?”

Sans glanced upwards. “When Persona invaded the Underground with his own personal goop army in pursuit of ‘Supreme Judge Wanderstar’. He buried himself inside the Amalgamate to shield himself from the Barrier’s effects. Then, he drove me into a corner and…” Sans imitated a stab right over his left eye. “Marked the end of my life.”

“Hold it!” Grillby slammed down on the table. “There are notable gaps in your testimony. For example, you did not disclose the identity of ‘Supreme Judge Wanderstar’, and why Persona targeted them.”

“Ehhh… Not sure if I should. I mean, it’s super scandalous. Worse than the reveal about your switched allegiance. I’m not gonna say anything else if I’m not guaranteed that I won’t be penalized.”

Hmm, if that is the case… it’s time to pull some strings.

Toriel announced: “Your Honour, the defense insists that any information about Supreme Judge Wanderstar should not incur a penalty. It would be best to clarify this situation. The information may be vital for our future campaign against the Abomination.”

Frisk seemed worried. Nonetheless, they agreed to Toriel’s terms. “The court agrees with the defense. Witness, please amend your testimony.”

“Sure thing,” Sans replied, pausing a moment to catch a breath. “Well… as far as I understand it now, the Magus Association took the skies after the Spire fell. The land and sea ain’t safe anymore. Abomination and all that, y’know.”

“So, in order to reach the floating city, The Persona decided that the beast needed more mass. Too bad the only other surviving monster nation… was none other ours.”

“And the big plan for survival? Forced evacuation. They can’t have the goop army grow any further. Especially not with a couple of Boss Monsters from the Sealing War still alive and kicking down there. Prime fuel source those two.”

“But… What could they do to those who refuse to leave? Therein lies the scandal.”

Toriel said, “Do tell.”

“You send down the angel of death, that’s what. No two ways about it. Thing is, if Sir Grillenn was the herald of flight, then the angel of death was none other than Frisk Wanderstar. Your Honour themselves. Caught up another dusty affair.”

“Now, we’ve seen their skills. The ‘cleanup’ of remaining monsters would be no problema. But they’ll never stand toe-to-toe against Persona and the Abomination on their own. Not without all the extra ‘firepower’ they could get. They thus sought the Six… and needed a stabilizer…”

“Sorry Tori,” said Sans. “I couldn’t save you in that timeline either.”

Even Toriel didn’t know how to respond. What a dark scenario. Doom was all that’s written on it.

Should I say something? Or should I keep quiet? Which is the wiser choice?

Maybe there’s still one more question. Besides, if anything does happen… it won’t be Sans’ fault. I will take that responsibility.
Toriel therefore asked: “Sir Grillenn, would you have objected against this plan?”

The Prosecutor lowered his head. “No. I wouldn’t. In fact, I would be grateful that evacuation was considered at all. There’s no certainty that our citizens would integrate well, and the sudden spike in population would tighten supplies. It would be easier for them to enact genocide on the first opportunity.”

“I see… the defense acknowledges this logic.”

That line of questioning ended with a sense of morbid mutual acceptance. No one could argue against the dire bleakness of ‘Persona’s Timeline’.

After a few moments, Grillby asked: “What happened after the vision reached its conclusion?”

Sans let out a groan of hesitation. He glanced aside. Wiped off the sweat on his skull.

“The thought alone makes my bones shiver,” he said, “Gaster trapped me in his mindspace: The Core recreated. If that’s not enough, he also entombed my bonely self into a pillar… with a WESS to make up for the loss of my Seer’s Eye. Low intensity, but still a world of pain.”

“Excuse me?” Toriel blinked.

Sans dangled his paralyzed arm before the court. “Remember I said that Persona used a Mark? Determination used in a vision inflicts real damage to a Seer. It’s part of the reason why we never saw Mezil’s attempted final blow on Persona.”

“Now, I bet you guys are wondering how I escaped. So, I’ll cut to the chase. I went and baited Gaster into attacking me point blank with a Gasterblaster. Mom and Dad would never let him do me in like that. So, they yanked the cannon away and aimed it at my prison instead.

“Ka-Boom! Except… Karma’s a bitch. With my Eye gone and the WESS destroyed, my DT levels started to rise rapidly. Mom and Dad offered to Amalgamate me… But, uhh, I’d rather not. Let’s leave it at that.”

“Then, just when I was about to turn to dust…”

Sans snapped his fingers. The click rang out into the great black nothingness above their heads.

“I casted an actual Mark. Without mechanical aid. Commanded it to eject Doctor Gaster from the Seraph System.”

“That’s a lie!” Grillby exclaimed. “As a monster, it should be impossible for you.”

Sans shrugged. “Who says so? I have human roots. That puts me closer to a Determinator than anything else. This power doesn’t come free though. Embrace it and your SOUL turns red forever.”

The prosecution crossed his arms. “A Red SOUL… ‘Determination Monster’. In other words, a DEMON.”

“Technically, yup.”

Grillby said, “From what I understand, DEMONS are immediate targets for vanquishing. Why shouldn’t we sentence you to death this very instant?”

The other replied, “For starters, I’m dependant on a DT-stabilizer to live. Be it the Seraph System or a Claim Mark. Without either of those, I would succumb to an immediate overload and die by
Amalgamation. My life is not my own anymore.”

Alarm, raised. Toriel hurried to put her cards on the table. Her conscience wondered if she was exploiting a misfortune. In a way, it was for her personal gain.

“Your Honour!” she pleaded. “You can’t let anyone else use the Seraph System! Ever! We are talking about lives here.”

“Your Honour,” Grillby counter. “That matter has no bearing on our case and should only be discussed at a later date, outside of court. Please do not let the upcoming conflict distract you from the task at hand. The prosecution would like to remind everyone of the underlying question this Trial seeks to answer: is Sans Serif still worthy of our trust?”

Toriel gulped. An uncomfortable warmth built up under her fur. She discreetly tried to draw puffs of cool air from her mouth.

*I can’t believe I’m saying this, but Grillby is grilling us without mercy.*

*Is this how others feel when they deal with me? Oh dear.*

*My child… How do you rule?*

Frisk contemplated. In the end, they announced: “I agree with Grillby. “Let us postpone the subject. Witness, please resume.”

“Allright. Welp. My escape from Gaster’s mindspace just so happened to coincide with the spunky spice lady shooting me dead for good measure. As Prosecutor Grillby said, I had become a DEMON: an immediate target for vanquishing. Too bad I also acquired my Ascension then and there. Determined to Persevere, the System unwound the destruction of my very SOUL. How about that? Came back stronger than before too.”

“And that’s when you also acquired a new Eye, did you not?” Toriel enquired.

“Yeah. The White Eye. It’s the result of burning all seven colours in unison. Like humans, Seers are limited to three Aspects by default. The main difference lies with Determination being incompatible with normal monster physiology.”

“What’s the result? The power to peer into space and time, unrestrained. Crazy, right? Front, back, up, down, sideways, everywhere really. Whatever I wanted to know, I knew. That’s when I discarded Plan A in favour of Plan B.”

“If you don’t mind,” said Toriel, “May I ask why you discarded Plan A? Your Plan B, exchanging dimensions… It is not something I would call feasible.”

“Because our world is headed to a dead end, no matter what. Even if I had made a proxy in The Void, that’s not gonna fly. We’d still be linked to our very physical and very comatosed bodies at the entrance to the Crimson Hall.”

“Enlighten us. Why are we heading toward the unavoidable? Who even caused such a predicament?”

To her surprise, Sans pointed an accusatory finger straight towards the gallery.

*It’s not Frisk?*
Was it because of Asgore, the one who promised war? 
Was it because of Gaster, the man of terrible ideas? 
Or was it because of any one of his other former friends, who each paved their own path?

No.

It was because of the Supreme Judge of the Magus Association, Mezil Thyme of Berendin.

And the court went into yet another uproar.

“What now?!”
“Oooh what a plot twist, darling!”
“Y-you can’t just accuse THE BOSS HIMSELF! Are you insane?!!”

Toriel noticed that Gaster shrank into his chair. He did not cry indignation in all his eloquence… as though he agreed with Sans.

“…Sans Serif.” Grillby warned with the most intense of glares: “You’d dare blame the man you willfully killed through a failed timeline of your own creation? Is this the hill you want to die on?”

“Ayup,” He replied. “This is my pitch.”

“Fine. Lay down your accusations. We shall see if they have any merit.”

…What should I do? Queen Toriel -- the toughest nut of the Kingdom for a millennium -- struggled to make a decision.

*Oh, curse my slowness. Think, Toriel. Think!* 

*There’s still something you can do!*

Sans, however, did not wait for an answer. So, he began:

“Ten years ago--”

“Wait!”

All attention focused on Toriel. What pressure… Nonetheless, she stood her ground.

“Sans. This is… sensitive. If you want to get anyone to listen, you need to be at your most courteous. No jokes. No insults. Nothing controversial. I beg of you.”

For the first time in this whole session, Sans had worry written on his face.

“Sure thing, Tori. Sure thing…”

The skeleton started to think. Ponder. He muttered quiet rehearsals to himself, only to shake his head in the end. Every sentence he envisioned was discarded for failing to meet the standards she imposed.

Sweat started rolling down his skull.

“…Sans?” Toriel asked back.

“I can’t do it, Tori.” He replied. “I ran a hundred simulations. My usual mannerisms bleed into everything. It’s gonna tick off everyone. I… I can’t be like you.”
Yet another weakness exposed. Judging from his response, Sans himself didn’t know this. He got around life with cheeky smarts and casual jokes. It always worked to his advantage. Until now.

“Your Honour,” said Toriel, “The defense requests for the testimony of Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme! Sans’ case rests on his statements!”

Frisk frowned, troubled. They looked towards the gallery and asked: “Judge Thyme? Will you not come forward to testify?”

Mezil Thyme merely replied a firm: “I refuse.”

The unimpressed Sans scoffed. “Heh, afraid of getting your dirty little secrets exposed?”

Answer, the vampire did not.

Grillby spoke up. “Your Honour. Judge Thyme always put others ahead of himself. A man of his character is rarer than treasure. The prosecution believes that dragging him through the mud is a pointless endeavour. The past is the past. This reveal serves little more than to sow deeper mistrust between our nations. Had it truly made a difference, then we would have heard of it sooner. Instead, Sans Serif used his newfound power to try and force our SOULs into bodies that are not our own.”

“Ehh.” The skeleton shrugged, “Not like anybody would believe me anyway. It’s a tough pill to swallow.”

The flaming prosecutor shook his head. “Pointless circular logic. In truth, you don’t believe your own analysis. Your Honour, I believe we’ve heard enough. I say we postpone the hearing, as Queen Toriel desired, by exactly one month.”

Toriel now slammed the table and cried out: “O-objection! Prosecutor Grillby, I’m disappointed at your cowardice! Too many times has human nobility escaped justice due to their power and authority!”

Grillby raised his chin. “And how many times has Sans Serif run around free of consequences due to his connections to Their Honour and Your Majesty?”

That was a critical-hit straight through the heart.

Lightheaded, Toriel staggered. Her hands dug into the counter for support.

This is my limit?

I want to help Sans but... is this really the end for us?

Toriel resisted her emotions. Showing them now would be a bad example for Frisk and the nation.

“It’s okay, Tori.”

She looked up. Despite everything, Sans appeared content.

“We tried our best,” he said. “That’s good enough. I said what I had to say. I’m... pretty relieved I got this far, to be honest.”

He drew out a long sigh. “Your Honour. Kid. It’s all up to you now.”

In the moment of truth, Judge Frisk had the final say.
Tension built up in the air as everyone waited for their final decision. They’ve been scanning the courtroom with their phone for quite a while.

Toriel guessed that they engaged in an internal wrestle of facts versus feelings.

After long deliberation, Frisk said: “I’m sorry, Sans. I haven’t decided on your final verdict yet, but I gotta give you a timeout. May the silence help you sleep better.”

“True that.”

Thus, the curtains closed with the defeat of the defence.

“OBJECTION!!!!!!”

A second panel flipped over Frisk’s head. It’s a video screen of Papyrus himself, complete with a kitchen in the background.

“I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- VETO AGAINST THE PENALTY! NYEH HEH HEH!!!!”

His boisterous presence was like a ray of light breaking through the thunderclouds. Toriel began to understand why Sans held his brother to such high esteem.

From the gallery, Undyne yelled: “Papyruuuuuuuuuus!!! You can’t let Sans escape again!”

“UNDYNE! I DIDN’T VETO OUR PERSONALIZED LIST OF PUNISHMENTS! I’M JUST OBJECTING AGAINST THE DISBELIEF!”


Sans muttered, “Bro... I...”

Cyan flowed down his cheeks.

At first, it was just a drop. Then, it became a steady stream.

“I’m... crying?” Sans tried to wipe the tears off with his sleeve, yet they refused to stop. “Why?... I thought... I thought I’m not capable of crying anymore...”

Papyrus touched the screen, smiling. “IT'S BECAUSE AT LONG LAST, SOMEONE'S ON YOUR SIDE.”

The faith of the Great Papyrus broke the final bastion of Sans’ chilled heart. A surge of magic triggered a whirlwind of Aspects, shredding the witness stand to sawdust.

Sans then dropped on his knees... and wept.

The scene astonished Toriel. Never before had she witnessed such a manifestation of emotions from the little guy. He was always so controlled. Cool. Professional in his own way. Not the kind who’d throw magic around at the drop of a hat.

I still have much to learn about you, my joke buddy. She thought. How pretentious of me to think I had figured you out.

Papyrus soon focused his attention on the man of a different kind of heart: one not of icy bone, but rather it’s of stern steel. It’s none other than Judge Mezil Thyme.
“MISTER MAGUS,” he said. “I KNOW WHY YOU DIDN’T WANT TO TESTIFY.”

“YOU COME FROM A GREY, SOUR, AND JADED WORLD WHERE THE WORST IS PRESUMED. IT… IT MUST BE VERY LONELY.”

“But worry not!” Papyrus rested his hand on his chest. “I -- THE GREAT PAPYRUS -- ALSO BELIEVE IN YOU. ALWAYS. SO PLEASE, SHARE US YOUR STORY.”

Toriel wanted to chip in, but she relented. Mezil Thyme doesn’t trust her. Therefore, her words won’t carry any weight.

“Very well,” he said, “I’ve anticipated that it would come to this. A story is requested, therefore a story is given. But be prepared: do NOT expect a cheerful outcome.”

The Vampire of Time thus thumped his cane on the ground, leaned forward, and stood up with the aid of his fancy stick.

“You may have heard that everyone is born good. Hmph. A naive presumption at best and self-deceivement at worst. Here is the truth from my years of judgement: everyone is tainted with evil. All fall short before true goodness. All fall short before their own standards. All succumb to their own selfish desires.”

“I am but evidence of mankind’s tragedy.”

Chapter End Notes

Someone asked me why Grillby wears glasses. Toriel mentioned it. But, just in case her thoughts weren’t clear, Grillby wears them mostly for cosmetic purposes. He looks a lot less fierce with the glasses on which helps keep customers at ease.
February wasn’t kind to me this year it seems. There was Chinese New Year, which was very tiring, and then I fell sick for quite some time. It also took quite a few drafts before reaching this direction too.

I hope to release sooner in the later chapters. I want to see this story complete as well.

If you don’t understand what’s going on, I suggest going back a few chapters at least.

WHERE AM I?

…………………………

WHO AM I?

The dreamer lay on his back, half submerged in a quagmire of clotted blood. From above, bleak clouds rained down warm drops of crimson, akin to liquid rubies: each soft pelt determined to sink him deeper into this bog of corruption.

Then came the black wind.

“Papyrus”, they whispered. Over and over.

“Could this dramatic fiddle answer our riddle?"
“Could this dramatic fiddle answer our riddle?”
“We exist because of humans like him? Or rather, don’t exist?”
“We exist because of humans like him? Or rather, don’t exist?”
“Goner Kid is the only one who fits this temporal axis.”
“Goner Kid is the only one who fits this temporal axis.”

“Papyrus, Doctor Gaster praised your powers. Perhaps… you could help confirm?”

“N-no. I don’t think he’s healed yet. I’m okay. It can wait.”

It stirred him awake. The howling winds had blown the rain clouds away.

PAPYRUS? ISN’T THAT A PIECE OF PAPER? ARE THEY ASKING ME TO FETCH SOME SO THEY COULD FINISH THEIR HOMEWORK?

IT MUST BE A QUEST! THERE’S NO TIME TO DALLY!

So he sat up. His unusually thin self cut through the clotting much easier than expected. Puzzled, he examined his body.

I’M… A SKELETON? IN A BLACK UNDERSUIT?

Examining his own hand confirmed his suspicions. It’s made of bones, metacarpus and all.

A slight glow of carnelian, sapphire, and emerald reflected against his white being. As he brought his hand closer to his face, the glow grew brighter.
MY EYE IS ON FIRE…?

HOW STRANGE AND FASCINATING.

Lightning flashed in the distance and thunder rolled. The rain clouds threatened to march forth again in indignation, seeking retribution.

Disturbed, the dreamer decided to refocus his attention to his little quest. Far away from this place.

I. UH. SHOULD FIND SOME PAPYRUS REEDS. INDEED. THAT’S THE BASIS FOR MAKING PAPER!

So he wandered. Roamed. Waded through this vast dark land devoid of sun, keeping a lookout for the reeds in question.

He wished that he had more clothing. An oppressive seeping chill had settled in. Skeletons shouldn’t feel cold, yet the dreamer found himself huddling tight as he pressed onward.

WILL I EVEN FIND ANYTHING? I’M… I’M GETTING QUITE SCARED.

NO, NO! THAT’S PUIERILE DEFEATISM. I HAVE TO BE BRAVE. KEEP MOVING.

At that time, a crimson butterfly fluttered by. As if drawn to his resolve, it circled around him twice before resting on his shoulder.

“OH HELLO, LITTLE ONE. ARE YOU LOST JUST LIKE ME?”

Without a word, the creature took off.

HMM… I THINK I READ THAT BUTTERFLIES DRINK NECTAR FROM FLOWERS.

OH! THAT’S IT! MAYBE IT KNOWS WHERE THE PAPYRUS REEDS ARE!

He followed it with renewed hope.

An island soon loomed ahead. Tall reeds topped by a cluster of thin leaves lined the shore. They looked like rows of miniature coconut trees.

The closer he approached, the surer he was of his discovery. They were undoubtedly papyrus reeds: the material he sought for.

“HMMM, HOW DO I HARVEST THESE? I DON’T WANT TO UPROOT THE WHOLE THING…” He thus tried to break one of the reeds with his bare skeletal hands.

The crimson butterfly returned. Whenever the dreamer ignored it -- busy with his quest -- the creature would slap its wings against his face.

He shooed it away once.
It came back.

Second time, now. Again, it came back, this time bumping itself on his skull.

“SHOO! SHOO!”

Third time’s the charm. The butterfly perched right between his eyes, blocking his view with its wings.
“NYEEEEEEEEEEEEEHHHH!!! YOU FLAPPY PEST-- CAN’T YOU SEE I’M TRYING TO WORK? YOU REMIND ME OF A CERTAIN ANNOYING CANINE WHOSE NAME I FORGOT!”

But this butterfly was as determined as the boisterous rain clouds. It continued to bother the dreamer until he was all but fed up.

Finally, he yelled: “WHAT DO YOU WANT???”

The creature flew deeper into the island. It appears that the insect wanted the dreamer to abandon the papyrus reeds and follow its flight. Perhaps it was on to something?

“I SUPPOSE…” Curiosity compelled him anyway.

In the middle of that island stood a cave, its mouth leading to a flight of stairs. The butterfly fluttered into the darkness below.

Thus he too descended that path. The dreamer expected a long corridor toward the dankest depths, filled with funk and creepy crawlies. Unpleasant, yet not unfamiliar.

That was not the case. He instead emerged in a lush, mossy grotto.

In the center of it all stood a great mound of stone and beastly bones. A tiny ceramic urn nestled in the peak’s indent, protected from weather and wear by a quaint sloping roof. One could call it a shrine.

If only this place had sunshine… it would have been beautiful.

“ Took you long enough to reach here.”

The sudden presence of a person’s voice startled the dreamer. He jumped and yelped as he turned towards the source.

There stood the shadow of a man, outlined in red, facial features omitted. Whoever this person was, he was defined by a taste quite refined: black tailcoat, white cravat, even a cane to complete the image of a bygone era. Classics endure for many reasons.

The most eye-catching detail, however, was his exquisite gold and ruby butterfly brooch. It looked just like the little creature that had led him to this place.

Despite this person’s grim appearance, the dreamer didn’t sense malice.

“HELLO MYSTERIOUS PERSON,” the dreamer greeted. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE BY YOUR LONESOME? AND, DID YOU SEE A PESKY FLAPPY BUTTERFLY FLAP BY?”

The other replied: “…I was that ‘pest’.”

“OH. YOU REALLY DIDN’T HAVE TO FLAP AT MY FACE LIKE THAT. YOU COULD HAVE TRANSFORMED BACK TO YOUR DASHING SELF AND SPEAK WITH ME… WHO ARE YOU ANYWAY?”

“Hmm,” the figure leaned forward on his cane. “You may call me by my title: the Vampire of Time. I’m not sharing my True Name yet. Not unless you tell me yours.”

“I WISH I COULD, MISTER VAMPIRE. I DON’T KNOW MY OWN NAME. I SUPPOSE
YOU’LL HAVE TO CALL ME MISTER SKELETON FOR NOW.”

The vampire huffed. “Despite everything, you still retain your usual mannerisms. What a difference the Blue Aspect makes.”

“PARDON?”

“You are The Great Papyrus. That is, should you choose to claim that identity for yourself.”

The dreamer alternated between his left and right brow, thoroughly puzzled. “WHY AM I NAMED AFTER A TYPE OF PAPER?”

“It’s not paper. Rather, it’s the name of a font. Your kind’s fashionable naming trend in recent years.”

What a strange trend. Still, any name was better than none at all.

THE GREAT PAPYRUS, HUH?

IT DOES HAVE A NICE RING TO IT.

The shadowed man walked up to the urn sitting on top of the altar. He spoke: “Little girl, you have a new visitor. Perhaps you’d find his presence warm and radiant.”

The man stepped aside for the dreamer to make his formal introduction.

He posed confidently: head high and chest puffed. “NYEH HEH HEH! I’M THE GREAT PAPYRUS, MASTER OF JAPES AND PUZZLES! LITTLE GIRL, IT’S GREAT TO MEET YOU.”

Silence replied his best efforts. “ARE YOU SHY? THAT’S OKAY. THE GREAT PAPYRUS WON’T HURT YOU. NOPE! NOT AT ALL!”

Perhaps this child needed a bargain. “WOULD MY BOMBASTIC PERFORMANCE OF A BONETROUSLE COAX YOU OUT OF THAT TINY URN? SAY THE WORD AND I’LL WHIP OUT SOME TRADEMARKED DANCE MOVES!”

The vampire faked a cough to get his attention. “It appears that there’s a misunderstanding. The urn contains dust. She passed away a long time ago.”

Talk about awkward. Sweating, Papyrus slowly un-posed himself. “I, UH, APOLOGIZE FOR DISTURBING HER SLEEP.”

“No, it’s fine. I should have been clearer. It didn’t help that I spoke as though she still lives.”

“…I wish she did.” The vampire said, lowering his head.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a toy snake. It’s handcrafted from pieces of polished oxbone, strung along a hemp spine so that it could coil with all the flexibility of the real thing.

The toy was then carefully wrapped around the circumference of the urn. “Auntie made this for you.” The man said, “May it protect you from many mischievous rodents in the future.”

The sadness of the scene touched upon Papyrus. Pretending that she still existed -- even for the briefest of moments -- had to be one of the most private ways to cope with loss.
He wanted to give condolences, but couldn’t think of anything without sounding shallow.

In the end, he asked: “WHAT HAPPENED TO HER?”

“She was a victim of murder,” so said the vampire. “The culprit was her own mother.”

The statement sent a shock through the skeleton’s bones. “H-HOW…?”

“As the illegitimate child of my best friend, she was born to be a bargaining chip for his devotion. The mother gave the father a cruel choice: to abandon me and raise this child in their twisted commune, or to return to my domain without the baby.”

“My friend, however, chose the third option. To grab his daughter and flee. A traitorous act. And thus that woman’s ilk tried to silence their evil with more evil: inflicting grievous injuries and using poisons beyond measure.”

“He survived. His daughter didn’t. Despite our best efforts, she lasted only for a while. The nameless baby turned to dust in my very arms. Her poor father didn’t even have the chance to say goodbye.”

“The worst of all… the criminals had connections who were willing to bury the crime should it prove convenient. And, in the eyes of the influential and the powerful, an innocent child’s life holds zero value. Especially when it is born of one whom they deemed unclean.”

“…I -- the Vampire of Time, Supreme Judge of the Magus Association and Keeper of The Peace -- could not give justice to the most helpless… The sheer hopelessness of that thought alone pushed my dear wife to a resentful isolation.”

When he finished that sentence, the man of shadow began to twist and flare. He’s engulfed in grief, topped with bitter fury.

“What good are the Keys of Fate if I can’t protect those who need it most?” He asked, and the heavens responded.

Thunder rolled across the dark clouds. Mocking. Jeering. Papyrus sensed a deep enmity from the roars above.

The vampire was more than aware of the implications. Looking up, he huffed.

“Hmph. As if you’d do any better, Persona.”

The ‘Keys of Fate’. The dreamer knew what that meant: the power to rewind the clock.

“WHY COULDN’T YOU SAVE HER WITH YOUR AWESOME TIMEY WIMEY POWERS, MISTER VAMPIRE? WHY… DIDN’T YOU RESET?”

The vampire turned away from the urn and headed back to the stairs. “You need to understand the stakes first. Come, Papyrus. Follow me.”

“OF COURSE.” He answered. Though, he still doesn’t fully get why he was named after paper.

The vampire started to climb up the stairs. Papyrus looked back at the girl’s urn for one last time before joining his host.

They emerged not on the small reed-edged island, but a graveyard where tombstones stretched far and wide.
Here too, the evil rain poured unceasing.

The man led the skeleton to a particular pair of tombstones, sitting side by side. Though their names had weathered from the constant shower, they shared the same bas-relief of a heavenly four-point star.

The scene sounded ironic in the dreamer’s head. Skeletons, like him, should be the ones sleeping under this dirt.

After all… humans turn to dust at a slow, slow rate.

First, they become cold.
Then, they stiffen.

What comes after that was better left unsaid.

Curious, the dreamer asked: “WERE YOU CLOSE?”

“Indeed we were,” the vampire replied. “They’re the Wanderstars: the light that wanders wherever it is needed most. My trusted colleagues. Always with their radiant faith. Always shining. Always…”

The dreamer chuckled. He’d recognize that fond-yet-annoyed huff from anywhere, though he didn’t recall why.

The man sat down on the pavement with a grunt. All that standing must have been tiring. Papyrus did the same: it’s a more personable position.

Pointing to the stone before him, the Vampire then said: “Husband.”

And then to the stone that Papyrus faced: “Wife.”

“I SEE…” The skeleton touched the grave’s star. “DID THEY HAVE ANY CHILDREN?”

“Two. The eldest, a spunky adoptive daughter. The youngest, a mere baby when they were buried.”

“I WISH I COULD HAVE MET THEIR CHILDREN. THEY MUST BE WONDERFUL PEOPLE!”

“You already did.”

Perplexed, Papyrus said, “I… DID? BUT I CAN’T REMEMBER.”

“You will, in time. Those of Integrity are not prone to lose their footing.”

“I, on the other hand, spiralled down a dark path early in my career.” The man explained, “My inexperienced self had yet to develop the integrity to apply his own standards of righteousness.”

“People called for my early retirement, if not execution. Perhaps that’s the road the Grandmaster would have taken if I wasn’t married to his daughter. Instead, he sent these two newlyweds to my first proper Trial.”

“I went in there with the prejudice that they’re wide-eyed fools waiting to be crushed. Try as I might… I couldn’t find any error in their ways. They were determined to be kind in spite of brokenness. Determined to uphold justice.”

“At first I found their attitudes insulting. I thought their smiles must be a farce. A mask. An oblivious
saccharine coping mechanism against a ruthless world. But my ignorance was proven wrong many, many times over. Seems I was the naive fool.”

“In the years to come, they thus kept me on the narrow path. Accountable. Balanced. They provided sound counsel. Acted as proxies whenever needed. Helped me judge candidates when I’m busy or tired. The ideal Crimson Keepers.”

“I thought folk like these only existed in religious fiction. I’m not saying that they were perfect saints. Far from it. Just, not the expected twisted mess of misanthropy.”

“Yet, a part of me always stayed on guard. What if they change for the worse, like my parents did? Do I have to catch them when they fall?”

Sir Vampire sighed deep as he looked up toward the eternal rain.

“Fall they did. Not from grace, but from a mountain. And, I could not catch them. They died together. Gone in a mere blink. Not even a goodbye.”

“I’M… SORRY TO HEAR THAT.”

His words paused there.

Papyrus spared a moment to mourn together with the Vampire of Time. He sensed the longing pain that still stung this man's heart.

“Again I ask, what good are the Keys of Fate?”

“Useless against nature. Useless against nurture. Useless against schemes.”

The chorus of lightning and thunder clapped again.

“Did you hear that?” the vampire said. “Even if there’s just a handful of such scum, they make existence miserable for everyone else. And yet… the world has far too many.”

At this rate, Papyrus just had to ask: “WHO’S UP THERE? IS HE WHAT HUMANS CALL ‘GOD’?”

His question was answered with a different question: “Who is God to you?”

“UM… SOMEONE POWERFUL? MIGHTY? WITH AWESOMENESS?”

“Delightfully vague. Let me tell you first, the mocker above our heads is nothing more than a DEMON of a man. He may call himself God… but he doesn’t live up to that title. Not at all.”

“I SEE…”

There was an unanswered question still nagging him. “MISTER VAMPIRE, IT’S BECAUSE OF THAT MAN, IS IT NOT?”

The vampire replied: “Yes. Our battles were steeped in time and blood. He, Persona, remembers everything no matter where the cosmos turns. Day in day out, I had to stay one step ahead of him to survive. Many tactics only worked in a single pass. One timeline, one chance. That’s it.”

“I couldn’t save my friends, or the little girl, because turning back time would have sacrificed whatever victories I had against that DEMON. Furthermore, the child was born around the same time as the youngest Wanderstar…”
“...If I went back far enough to start over with a fresh slate, the Wanderstars will lose their child: erased from time. As Crimson Keepers, they will remember this forever. It’s no different from murder.”

“Living Victory… Ultimate Weapon… Ignorant titles for the wishful! None but me know the reality of this eternal arms-race of Determination.”

With the help of his cane, the man pushed himself off the pavement. He then asked: “Will you follow me to witness the conclusion of my tale, or will you resume your prior quest?”

The dreamer pondered. Sure, he started with that idea in mind… but what would he accomplish by making papyrus on his lonesome? Does he even know how to do so?

On the other hand, this mysterious shadow needed company. Someone willing to listen even if it hurts.

The dreamer therefore said: “I’LL FOLLOW YOU.”

“Very well.”

The vampire thumped his cane on the ground. A ripple spread throughout the land, flipping the tiles over like pieces of playing cards. The tombstones flattened and folded over, reminding Papyrus of a popup book closing page by page.

A new environment greeted them. Golden gears, great and small, ticked away under a glass platform. Look past the gaps and one could see fluttering swarms of crimson butterflies.

Yet even here… the rain refused to cease. The droplets passed through on contact with the glass, seeping into the innermost mechanisms.

The vampire asked: “What is ‘justice’ to you?”

“TO LIVE WITHOUT HURTING ANYONE, I GUESS?” Papyrus realised later that his response was rickety at best.

“Hmph,” the shadow huffed. “Did your enlightenment sail away together with your memories? I don’t blame you. Most never understand it either.”

“Justice fulfilled is truth. Justice corrupted is vindication. But, to the ignorant ‘justice’ equates to ‘convenience’. They sing lofty praises if it benefits their desires, cry foul if it hinders their plans. They do not care about anyone outside of their scope.”

“Every day, the public cry for justice. But when justice is meted in full, they feel the sting of their own darkness. They don the masks of ‘good people’ and claim to fight for the ‘oppressed’, when in reality they themselves have failed to meet the standards they so demand. I am just their latest punching bag.”

Papyrus frowned. He didn’t like that statement. “BUT THERE ARE MANY WHO DO CARE! I WOULD CARE IF I KNOW.”

“You said it yourself: you only care about what you know. And yet, injustice still rears its ugly head in the lives of those you miss.”

The vampire resumed his walk above the gears. The taps of his canes ticked in sync to their clockwork rhythm.
“Imagine for a moment, Papyrus. What if by rewinding time to save one person, you condemn a hundred elsewhere? What if by saving one nation, you perpetuate the subjugation of another?”

“THERE’S NO THIRD OPTION?”

“What you think as a ‘third option’ may just be an illusion. Those with the Keys of Fate inevitably shift the scales towards their personal convictions. They too have their own friends, family, and homes. A bias of the heart.”

They approached a throne. A majestic crown sat on the cushion, made up of crimson-gemmed keys of gold. Splendour befitting the ruler of time.

“Behold,” said the vampire. “A pale imitation of the True Living Victory’s seat in Heaven. Whoever wears that crown controls the Keys of Fate. However, only the most Determined of the Determined can do so. On its own, a competitor may steal this fragile symbol of authority at any point.”

“So, to prevent further blood from being spilled, The Magus Association researched tirelessly to uncover the science behind this magical power. They developed a system to secure the crown’s bearer to their organization: the Claim of Conquest.”

“In other words, every one of my predecessors was also a ‘Vampire of Time’. We feed on the Determination of others to add to our own pool, further pushing our levels to greater heights.”

Papyrus felt uneasy. He understood the pain only to a certain extent. Imagining himself in the vampire’s shoes was not the same as wearing them.

“MISTER VAMPIRE,” he said, “IT’S NOT LIKE WE COULD DESTROY THIS THRONE. IF YOU DON’T WEAR THE CROWN, SOMEONE ELSE WILL. IT’S HARD BUT… ALL WE CAN DO IS TRY OUR BEST.”

And the reply was: “Destruction may be impossible. But what if there’s a way to keep the seat empty?”

The dreamer gasped. “THIS IS REVOLUTIONARY! WHAT IS IT, MISTER VAMPIRE? PLEASE TELL ME.”

“The solution is to leave the crown contested. Forever in flux. However, to do so, I must first become the undisputed Living Victory on the planet, for as long as it takes. Every name, every power, every Red… must be put under my name.”

“BRILLIANT! WAIT, WHAT?’

The dreamer started sweating. Shivering. The cold rain had truly gotten into his marrow. “HOW… MANY IS ‘EVERY RED’?… TEN?”

“More,” the vampire replied.

“A HUNDRED?”

“No.”

“A THOUSAND?”

“Not even close.”

“TEN THOUSAND? THAT’S A LOT.”
“We’re not in the Middle Ages.”

“What about a hundred thousand?”

“One more zero, please.”

“A million?!”

The Vampire nodded. “About there.”

“Can you even do that?”

“Can?” The vampire huffed. “I did. It took me more repeats than I could remember… but I did. Decade after decade passed in the span of a single unwound year.”

“First, I had every seer with the Purple Aspect sealed. I’m not so heartless as to let them suffer on the sidelines. It’s best that they don’t remember.”

“Next, I dismissed the remaining Crimson Keepers. With this plan, their services were obsolete.”

“After that, I went after those who already knew about the Keys of Fate. The remaining Gungnir and the Magus families. The latter had long been caught up in petty struggles within their pathetic bubble, unfit to bear any responsibility.”

“With those three categories out of the way… I moved on to the civilians. Started peaceful. Sent out letters. Explained that they should get themselves tested at the nearest post. Those with the Red Aspect -- known prior or discovered later -- were to limit their powers for ‘security reasons’.”

The more Papyrus listened, the more uneasy he felt. “What if they think it’s just a japect?”

“I’d send people. Or show up in person if I have to. Should they still insist on their disbelief… well, a gift is useless if one does not acknowledge its existence.”

“What if… what if they fight back?”

“Depends on ‘how’,” said the vampire. “The most dangerous would be singled out as DEMONS and Marked for death. However, as much as I’d like to have them killed when time resets, I couldn’t. Not without resorting to forbidden methods or endangering innocent bystanders.”

“Bystanders?”

“Imagine if a person driving a car suddenly died. Their vehicle would go out of control and crash into anyone on the path. It’s an outcome I wanted to avoid.”

“So,” he continued, “I opted for suppression, while keeping the individuals on record. Reserved their final punishment for the very end. At that time, I gathered a dedicated taskforce to help me eliminate every single last one of those rascals.”

Papyrus stammered, “E-every one? B-but what if they suddenly choose to be good?”

“If they wanted to be good, they would have done so a long time ago. Remember Papyrus, these criminals hide behind a veneer of civility. Parents. Important people. Service workers. All layers of society. They had fooled their social circles by burying their evil with more evil. But they will not fool me. I -- As Supreme Judge -- thus spent the last year hunting down every DEMON I have
branded.”

In that final proclamation, the Vampire of Time twisted the top of his cane. Out came a blade of sharpened steel. As he lifted the sword to the heavens, it reflected the ghosted faces of The Claimed.

Men and women, young and old: none were spared from the vampire.

Their will, suppressed.

Their freedom, stolen.

Their personality, stifled.

Their hearts, scorning.

“O Great Papyrus, do you now understand the cost? There must be zero competition for the crown. It’s only then I can do what needs to be done to void the Keys of Fate.”

“Of course, there will be many who detest me for my actions: Magi and Gungnir alike. Let them, I say! Let them scheme together to take my head! Let them burn my Spire! Let them forever covet a power held by no one! In this game where everyone loses, it’s better not to play at all!”

The golden gears woke up from their second-bound march. They churned. Whirred. Spun. Angular flashes of crimson shot through the glass surface, gathering at the feet of their vampiric master.

It was then revealed to the dreamer that they stood on a massive cage, filled with a million victims trapped right beneath their feet.

Papyrus lunged forward, grabbing the vampire’s arm. “NO! YOU’LL ONLY HURT YOURSELF!”

He didn’t understand why he said so. But he had a feeling that someone dear and close had once tried something similarly drastic. It ended in futility, doomed by his own consequences.

Alas, the pleas fell on deaf ears. The vampire struck the crown with the edge of his blade.

The impact released a great light, blinding the dreamer. He staggered backwards.

The floor began to crumble. His foot pushed down a weakened spot. Papyrus tried to jump away before it caved in, but there was no safety left.

So he fell into a deep, dark hole.

Where was the vampire?
Where were the butterflies?

He couldn’t see anything past the raining fragments of golden gears. Until he landed on a flat, white plane.

“OWIE.”

He pushed himself up. The floor chimed whenever something touched it. Firefly-like particles floated off the ground, never going above his knee.

It would have been a nice and mystical sight… if a giant golden gear didn’t crash land a stone’s throw away.
He looked up. Broken brass and steel cascaded from above, and it’s getting closer. Fast.

Papyrus gulped. He scrambled to his feet and ran for his life.

Crystals, dust, and shards were thrown up in the air from the chaotic impact. One piece whizzed past his head. Another smashed next to his feet. He ducked out of the way to avoid half of a cog, followed up by sprays of shards.

In the midst of chaos, he heard a baby’s cry.

“A BABY…?” Fear thumped against the dreamer’s ribcage. What was a baby doing in the middle of this empty field of looming meteor showers? “DID I HEAR A BABY?!!?”

Up ahead, he spotted a cradle. Papyrus sprinted with all his might. Within seconds, he closed the distance. Inside was indeed a human baby in a white onesie.

White. Not blue, nor pink. Is this child a boy or a girl? He can’t tell. They’re crying from the sudden chaos that befell their surroundings.

The dreamer scooped the child into his arms and protected it with his own body. But, when he did so, the baby’s chest began to shine in a bright light.

Out floated an unstable golden star.

The baby let out another cry. It sent out a massive shockwave that caused the debris to freeze in place.

How could they do that? What was this power? Who was this baby?

WAIT A MINUTE. I HAVE SEEN THIS STAR BEFORE…

IT’S THE SAME AS THE ONE ON THOSE TOMBSTONES!

The second cry shattered the debris. Dust of gold now floated in clumps and clouds. The horrific terror had transformed into a beautiful sight.

Then, upon the third cry… the star spun like a turbine. It began to draw in every remnant of the vampire’s broken mayhem.

Truly, a wondrous sight to behold. ‘Wanderous’, if Papyrus wanted to pun.

When the baby absorbed the last speck, the star shone in the most brilliant of reds. Bloody rains and pesky butterflies can’t compare.

For a moment, Papyrus saw this baby’s future self. They had dark brown hair, yellowish skin, and a striped shirt: blue and purple. He still couldn’t tell if they’re a boy or a girl.

“…FRISK?”

There was then a great slam against his back. Knocked to the ground, he winced with his eyes shut. Groaned. Struggled.

Struggled?

When he opened them again, he was confronted by a skeletal beast. It’s a dog? A snake? A man? A snake dog man?
The beast yelled: “This is how ye repay M’lord?!?”

Whoever it was, the ferocious being grabbed Papyrus by the shoulder and smashed him down.

“He bared his heart!”

Slam!

“He risked his life!”

Slam!

“And ye interrogate him as a criminal?!?”

Slam!

“This be TREASON!”

The final slam hit stronger than the rest. The dreamer’s bones hurt. His head hurt. And his heart too.

“Explain, Papyrus! Why should ah not devour ye???”


The assault stopped. Anger got replaced with concern. Worry.

“Ye forgot ye own name?” it asked back.

“I… I DON’T KNOW… I DON’T KNOW ANYTHING… PLEASE, STOP HURTING ME.”

The beast backed off. It left as quickly as it came for reasons the dreamer didn’t understand.

There’s no more rain. He’s in a kitchen of sorts. He’s also not in his undersuit anymore. What was this white armour? Blue pants? Red gloves? His hands touched a scarf. It’s so soft and comforting. He pulled it up and sank into the fabric for comfort.

More strangers checked up on him: grey monsters whose voices seemed familiar. They crowded around… which further pushed Papyrus into the embrace of his scarf.

A woman with dark skin and a cool hat then walked up to the grey ones. “Give him some space, will ya? I’ll, uh, deal with you guys later.”

The crowd uttered their apologies and stood by the sidelines. They’re afraid of the woman for some reason.

She got down on her knees. Up close, he could see her bright yellow eyes.

“You okay?” she asked.

“NO,” he said. “I’M NOT OKAY.”

“That’s fine,” she patted him on the shoulder. “Name’s Cenna Caraway. I’m a Vanquisher, and here to help. Let’s get you somewhere quiet first.”

“T-THANK YOU.”
He still doesn’t know what’s going on, but at least it seems that he’s going to be safe.

Chapter End Notes

Oh. Wow. At the posting of this chapter, these were the story stats.

Published:2015-11-27
Updated:2019-02-27
Words:599995
Chapters:175/?
Comments:5153
Kudos:2340
Bookmarks:229
Hits:77985

The word count is 599995. I can’t even make up this number even if I wanted to. It's. It's the same backwards and forwards.
Verdict

Chapter Notes

Update: It appears that something broke in the subscription system. Some people are receiving updates, some people didn’t. If you're not receiving update mails from AO3, try resubbing. Sorry for the inconvenience.

Sans, the defence, dished out his attack. Ironic but true.

“So,” he said, “You insist to have repeated more years than you can count. And for what? Justice? Revenge? To make enemies of the whole world?”

Mezil Thyme returned the sternest of glares. “It was for the greater good that I Claimed every Red.”

“Every Red? That so? ’Cause the way I see it, there’s a contradiction sitting right on the judge’s seat. Sure, children below the age of accountability are exempted. But considering Their Honour is a Pure Red, I’d say that’s outright irresponsible.”

Prosecutor Grillby countered: “Judge Thyme completed Their Honour’s Trial. Long before adulthood, if I may add.”

“Too little too late. By then Your Honour already reached the peak of their power, massacred the underground in its entirety, and nearly ended existence itself.”

Turning to Mezil, Sans added: “If only you had Claimed them from the start then--”

You heard a loud thud over your head. What’s going on?

Looking up, all you could see was Papyrus’ cranium. Did he just fall forwards into the camera?

He pushed himself away from the screen. And, that’s when you held your breath; his Eye had lit up, shining bright in his trio of colours.

No! Why did he use it?!?!

“I... I DIDN’...”

The Eye activated on its own?

Use the scarf! Extinguish the fire!

“I DON’T... WANT TO...”

Why not?!?

“DU... TY...”

He staggered backwards in pain. The weird red marks around his eyes came back. It’s overpowering the treatment meant to control his power!
Oh no. This is bad. Bad, bad, bad, bad!

You prepared to jump off your seat… then you heard someone screaming bloody murder on the kitchen side.

It’s Snakeface, pissed off, and tackling Papyrus in full force. You couldn’t see it on camera, but you were sure he’s smashing Papyrus against the floor.

This is utter mayhem! Court’s adjourned! This instant!

And Sans was gone. He’s well on his way to give someone an extra bad time.

Huh… Snakeface just left? Afterwards, Sans appeared on screen, ready to chase him down. But he’s late. Must have taken the long route somewhere.

Your big sister had to step in to stabilize the situation with the power of persuasion. Papyrus comes first, you heard.

Phew. At least they didn’t get into another fight.

Cenna hailed you from the camera. “Hey Frisky. I’m taking Papyrus to Lucy. Wait there, okay? Call ya later.”

You approve of her decision. The transmission then went offline.

With no other option but to wait, you all camped together in the courtroom. Everyone’s anxious for Papyrus.

Alphys muttered: “I-is he going to be okay?”

You hoped so.

Papyrus’ grey friends ebbed into existence before your very eyes. Other than Doctor Gaster and yourself, the rest of your team reacted with a slight nervousness.

You let everyone know that they’re also your friends.

Doctor Gaster added: “And they’re my assistants. Rest assured, they’re not dangerous.”

You beckoned them to come over. But, they didn’t want to. Reasons can wait. Instead you went and met up with them.

The group bowed their heads, with Goner Kid leading. “We’re sorry.” she said.

What was there to be sorry about? You asked.

The shortie ficus-guy replied: “We… we asked Papyrus to confirm a truth.”

Odd. You don’t remember that he used his Eye before this incident.

“I told him not to,” said Goner. “But, Papyrus is the kind of guy who won’t forget about a personal request. It’s in his subconscious. And, it might have reacted to Judge Thyme’s testimony…”

Hmm. You understand her point. What did they ask for anyway?

The talking head said: “We suspected Goner Kid was affected by Judge Thyme’s actions. If she was
erased from time, when did it happen? Under what circumstances?"

That… stirred your curiosity as well.

Well, it seemed like they’ve found their answer. Unless Tsunderjudge committed perjury.

When the screen came back online, the Greys vanished posthaste. You noticed that they’re quite apprehensive around the Magi. Afraid, even.

Hmm… The background in the video was no longer that of the kitchen. It doesn't look familiar.

“Yo,” Cenna said, “You guys can go see Papyrus now. Lucy’s gonna spawn a door to the medical bay. Listen to her instructions, yeah?”

A direct connection? If she could do that, then what was with the long, roundabout tram ride? Safety reasons?

You didn’t get an answer. Instead, a simple frame spawned at a side wall.

You hurried on through the portal. In the need for speed, Undyne and Alphys bumped into you.

“Oof!”
“Watch it!”

Sorry!

* * *

A sterile hospital-like setting awaited you on the other side, designed with function over form. How strange. You had explored the whole of Mezil’s Hub and you had never encountered such a room. There’s also a ceiling above your head…? That's new.

“We’re at basement level, kid.” Sans said.

Sans? Yep. It's Sans alright, leaning back against the smooth white wall.

You asked him if he knew anything about his brother.

“Nope. I’ve just been waiting here. Didn’t want to disturb the lady while she worked.” Pointing towards the door, he said: “Go ahead. Give it a knock.”

You did just that.

Lady Lucidia greeted you. The skelelady seemed tense. “Request: should Papyrus ask you to leave, please do so.”

You’re not sure what to make of that. But, alright. You agreed.

Cenna stood at the corner. She’s giving the talking space to you and your monster friends, Sans included. You nodded at her in silent acknowledgement.

Meanwhile, Papyrus had seen better days. He seemed so exhausted. And also a little terrified.
Anyone would feel that way after getting assaulted by Snakeface. His mannerisms add extra skelly scariness.

You asked Papyrus if he’s okay.

“OH HELLO, HUMAN…” he replied. “YOU BROUGHT A LOT OF FRIENDS.”

Huh? What is he talking about? Everyone who came here are also his friends.

“THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I’VE SEEN THEM. WELCOME, OTHER FRIENDS!”

You thought the world went silent for a moment. In movies, it’s always unnerving when all music and sound effects cut out. It meant something went super wrong. Or super intense. Or both.

You pointed at Undyne. He doesn’t remember her either?

“NO,” he replied. Straightforward and dry.

You grabbed Sans by the sleeve and dragged him to the bedside. Pointing at him, you asked Papyrus if he recognized this person.

“OH, HE’S THE SKELETON WHO HELPED THE NICE HAT LADY.” He brightened up for a moment. Then, it's back to the usual. “I APPRECIATE IT, BUT… I DON’T KNOW HIM EITHER.”

Sans had the face of a man who just witnessed an apocalypse. You heard his breath tremble.

You told Papyrus that Sans is his brother. THE brother who raised him since a baby! He doesn’t recognize him?!

Papyrus just stared back with a blank, fatigued gaze.

He truly absolutely definitely totally didn’t remember Sans???

“…I… WOULD LIKE TO BEFRIEND ALL OF YOU. JUST. MAYBE. AFTER SOME REST? PLEASE… PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE FOR A WHILE. IT'S. IT’S TOO OVERWHELMING.”

That’s the cue. As you promised Lady Lucidia, everyone ushered themselves out of the ward, pronto. Best to avoid skelelady’s wrath. Tsunderjudge taught you as much.

Huh. Where DID the Tsunderjudge go anyway? He left your group without saying a word. Knowing him, he probably felt responsible for the incident.

Alphys drew in a huge deep breath, held it for a few seconds and went: “What. In the world. Happened. To. Papyrus. Like. NANI?!???”

“…Papyrus burned his brains out,” Undyne remarked. “I’m sure of it. Remember what Mezil told us about Snakes?”

You nodded. Seers who go too far beyond their limit lose their ‘humanity’, he said. And in Papyrus’ case, that must have meant amnesia.

Sans paced back and forth. You have not seen him this stressed out for a long while. Your phone scanner showed his colours flipping around like crazy. Bet his mind raced a hundred miles per second trying to figure out a way to fix Papyrus.
Fix Papyrus…

That’s it! You’re sick of this injury drama trope. First it’s Grillby, now it’s Papyrus. AGAIN. He’d been hospitalized for serious injuries for like four times now???

It’s time for a RESET. To erase this day from ever happening.

But then, Alphys latched on your hands in an attempt to prevent you from using the Keys of Fate.

“Don’t do it, Frisk!” she exclaimed.

Why not?!

“I-if you do, everything will be in vain! Y-you would have wasted your latest chapters!”


Sans spoke up, “Y’know. I’m agreeing with the kid. Told ya court was a waste of time without wasting Thyme.”

“No!!” Alphys yelled back. “It may be easier for us, but not for Judge Thyme! And I-I-I’m not saying this because he’s a-a-a hot biseinen husbando at fifty years old!”

That was out of a left field. But okay. If not for his good looks, then why?

“I know what it’s like to keep HORRIBLE SECRETS for AGES and have NOBODY to talk to and even if I had someone I’d still feel guilty because it’s just so BIG and grimdark and THE SPIRE caught fire and OH EM GEE he had enemies all around him and that’s my situation times a MILLION!”

Wow. That was a lot to say in one breath. No wonder she panted and wheezed by the time she was done.

She lifted a shaky finger at Sans. “And you. YOU. You are the LAST person who should encourage secrets in this room. We’re here today in this freaking mess because YOU couldn’t be honest about ANYTHING!”

You privately wondered if Alphys grew a massive backbone or something. You understand that her personal experiences triggered an immense inner strength, but accusing Sans? Now that’s bold as heck!

“Heh, touché. So, what’s your proposal, Alphys?”

“W-w-we should listen to Papyrus first. H-his Eye is special, right? He might discover more than what we heard in court.”

“You sayin’ that our witness ain’t completely honest? Shocking.”

Alphys’ scales turn red with anger. “Y-you think a biseinen tsundere would air his deepest regrets in front of a whole bunch of strangers like us?! I thought you’re the genre savvy one!”

You tell the two to chill out.

How about this? You’ll take a vote. Listen to everyone’s opinions whether to rewind now, later, or not at all. Good?
At least for now, the two short scientists agreed with you.

It may be time to seek some advice. You clapped your hands together and breathed deep. Then, you started the survey with Dad. He’s the King. Therefore, he should have the first say.

He stroked his beard, pondering with great consideration.

“We shouldn’t be hasty.” said Dad. “I know it sounds more like your mother’s wisdom, but what if Papyrus wishes to share his knowledge first? You can’t make changes out of ignorance, my child. Educate yourself before all else.”

Great point. Does Mom have anything to add?

“Not at this moment,” Mom shook her head. “We shouldn’t alter time more than we need to. However, I worry about your future. What if you end up in the same trappings as Judge Thyme?”

You told Mom that you don’t have an answer yet. ‘Determination’ won’t always cut it. You had tasted that futility before. Despite everything, you couldn’t save Asriel and Chara from their flowery fate.

Next, Sans. Yes, he’s counted. Despite his criminal status.

“Sooner the better, kid. I know. I know. Hypocritical of me after making you do that no-RESET pinky swear. Still… if I gotta make a choice, who cares about the big reveals! Intel can always be repeated, and memories preserved. Papyrus? He won’t recover as easily.”

What about the Seraph System? Maybe it can help?

“No guarantees on that front, kid. It’s still experimental territory.”

Noted. Grillby?

He crossed his arms. “We won’t be able to connect with our potential allies if we ignore their side of the story. Yet, I do not want to see Papyrus live with a deliberating handicap either. Preservation is preferred, if possible.”

You were quite shocked of Grillby’s response. How does someone so hot stay so cool?

“No offense, ‘Your Honour’, but I’m being objective for everyone’s sake.”

You shivered a bit. Apologies. You’re still adjusting to his not-bartender side. His thoughts will be considered.

Next is… Mettaton. Well?

“Dearest darling. Even my tolerance for drama has its limits, and poor Papyrus flew far over that threshold. And jumped a few sharks. I agree with Sans, honey. We have bigger fish to fry. Like that feast.”

Curious, do we have a backup plan just in case Papyrus cannot cook?

“O-of course, darling!” He fanned himself, “I-I’m sure the skeleparents would be happy to fill in their son’s shoes. If that’s not enough, I’ll showcase some of my finest MTT-brand foods too. Our nation’s very best!”

You squint. Did you just see a hint of uncertainty on the glambot’s face?
Moving on. Undyne?

She shot a nervous glance to the side. “I’m good as long Papyrus comes out alright. I just don’t want him to lose any more pieces of himself.”

Agreed. You asked Alphys if she has any additional concerns to convey?

“Maybe we can preserve this timeline’s data… But…” Alphys gripped her claws together. “H-How can we be sure that the incident doesn’t happen again? W-what if Papyrus gets the same vision no matter what? Like a compulsory event flag in a visual novel?”

You didn’t think of that. Now when Alphys mentioned it, you gulped in the same fear.

Turning to the Goopdoc Extraordinaire, you asked him if what she said was true.

He’s rippling. Not a good sign.

“Frisk,” he said, “Do you remember that dreaded Chara exorcism loop?”

Not everything. Your recollection depended on how much DT you could muster at a given moment. Some parts were hazier than others.

“Well… Papyrus suffered much throughout his attempts to rescue you. Most attempts ended in failure. The same might apply here. Without a significant change in the proceedings, nothing would change. A temporary seal on his Eye may do the trick, but when are we certain that the window has passed? The danger remains.”

You see. Going back in time alone won’t necessarily keep Papyrus safe…

OK! Gerson had been waaaaay too quiet. You hadn’t heard a single peep from him since this whole debacle started. Almost forgot he’s there too.

“Wanna know what I think, huh?”

Yup.

“Suppose I could give ya some wise old turtle council and stuff but… right now I ain’t got any! When you’re as old as I am, you know when to kick back and listen. Everyone here already said what ya need to hear. Wahaha!”

That’s such a typical Gerson answer. You could tell that he’s trying to cheer you up in what little ways he can.

Hmmm… you pondered about it. Everyone had their own fair share of valid points. It’s tempting to undo everything outright, but a ton of unanswered questions still remain.

Alright, you’ve decided. You’ll need to hear Papyrus out first.

* * *

While Papyrus rested, you and the group returned to ground level and played Tsunderjudge’s grand collection of arcade games. It’s something to keep everyone occupied, Sans included: to pass time.
Unable to control her strength, Undyne had broken the same pinball machine three times by now. Good thing the Hub is digital and self-repairing.

In the end, everyone decided to play the legendary table-flip game. It encapsulated the current mood. What a cool device to vent frustration.

Yeah! You managed to beat the high score!

Whoa, someone grabbed you by the waist and lifted you up high. That came out of nowhere. Was it Dad?

“Eeeey, Frisky, great job beating the old man’s record! Man, you guys are literally flipping up a storm here.”

It’s Cenna!

In one second, everyone flooded her with questions about Papyrus’ well being. She had to retreat with you still in her hands.

“Whoa whoa whoa fellas. Too many is tooooo many.” She said, putting you down. “Let the Crimson Keeper to their job, yeah? Go ahead, Frisky.”

Right. You asked Cenna if Papyrus got any better. Did he get his memory back? You hoped that the amnesia was short-term.

Shaking her head, she answered, “Nope. Sorry.”

Bummer. What now?

“Well. Speaking of games… what if we play cops? Folks like me are often the first to talk to witnesses whenever they’re hospitalized. They’re more willing to open up if we’re trusted authority figures.”

Looking at Undyne, she added, “You guys already got the monster version of Chief Police. If Papyrus is more comfortable around her, she can take the lead.”

Undyne was more than enthusiastic. “Of course! I wanna be there for Papyrus! I’ll pass the info to the rest too.”

You and Undyne thus joined Cenna and talked to Papyrus. Lo and behold, the plan worked a hundred percent. He’s the believing type after all.

Papyrus began telling you about his vision. He wandered through a bleak quagmire of mud filled with grief and anger. It sounded like a reflection of Tsunderjudge’s heart, confirmed by the presence of Persona constantly haunting him over his head.

He told you about Snakeface’s kid. You confirmed the story. The girl’s tragic father spoke about it before… including the part where the criminals got away scott free.

Then, Papyrus talked about the graves of your biological parents. Cenna tried her best not to cry, but a tear or two escaped.

She told you about how Tsunderjudge would visit the family home time to time. At first, she was scared of his eternal grouchesiness. But he would never hurt her. As her heart and body healed, she
began to see him as a curious old uncle. Sometimes, he brought gifts handcrafted by a wife that never appeared. Cenna admitted that sometimes she thought Mezil was lying about his marriage.

Tsunderjudge never talked about business in front of her. He wouldn’t even share much about himself. Cenna only ever heard his adventures from your biological parents.

Then, that terrible, terrible year happened. If you wanted to give it a name, it was ‘The Year of Judgement’. Maybe ‘The Void Year’? It’s a year that became ‘void’, over and over again.

The final vision was all about you. Your trademark symbol -- the star -- absorbed the aftermath of Tsunderjudge’s doomed plan. It turned you into a supercharged, superpowered baby: the strongest Living Victory of this age.

You stood there for a long while, pondering in silence.

“HUMAN? ARE YOU ALRIGHT?”

You said that you’re going to talk to ‘Mister Vampire’ in person.

Be right back!

Then, you bolted out of the room.

Onward to the mansion’s jasmine garden. If you remembered right, this flower had associations with love and purity. Though plain white, it had a fragrance many times stronger than roses. Super sweet.

The Vampire of Time sat there, alone on a metal leisure swing, facing the vast darkness of the Void.

Let’s see… how to start this conversation. Keep it natural, Frisk. Put that Charisma stat to good use. Remember Alphys’ advice and try to not pry too much. The biseinen is quite a private person after all.

Except, Tsunderjudge beat you to the punch. He noticed your presence and huffed. “Hmph. Come and sit beside me.”

That’s what you did. You plopped your butt on the curved seat. Resisted the urge to make it go faster.

You asked if the swing had any special meaning for him.

“My current home has one installed,” the Tsunderjudge replied. “It’s relaxing.”

Agreed.

He asked back: “How much have you heard from Papyrus?”

You relayed the information to Tsunderjudge. Told him that, unlike the professional cold-cut statements he testified in court, Papyrus revealed deep, personal wounds. They’re words that he would otherwise never proclaim…

You can see why Gaelic got upset. He expected a private talk between determinators. Instead, his master got embroiled in court shenanigans.

Afterwards, you focused on the Claimed Reds and the baby.

“So… that’s the power of a Pure Red. A living Trap Harvester.”
He knew about the makeup of your SOUL?

“Yes, of course. Your parents discovered it a few weeks after your birth. None of us knew how it would develop. Triple Aspects are the rarest of the rare. There’s not much documentation about such individuals. More so for a Red.”

“To think my actions caused such a drastic change in your latent potential. I had no idea. That is, until I saw you achieve Ascension overnight. A prepubescent child… challenging me at the peak of my power. Who could have guessed?”

You drew a long, tired sigh. Dammit, so Sans was right all along? You spent so much time and emotion trying to prove him wrong…

There’s something you don’t understand, though. What did Papyrus mean about ‘splitting the Keys of Fate’?

Mezil asked: “You know what happens when two Living Victories have conflicting levels of Determination?”

Yup. You nodded twice. Neither parties get to use their SAVES.

“Correct. And if this cancellation happens between two consenting parties, with both tied to the same massive supply, no schemer will ever gain the power to travel back in time.”

Yet the tsundere can still use the Keys of Fate. What happened?

“It takes two or more to split the Keys of Fate. The Grandmaster refused to become my partner in crime. I remember it as though it happened yesterday. Determined, he declared that he would hand me over to The Almighty. To let The Creator be the judge of my actions.”

You don’t quite understand. Did… he just ditch his responsibility?

Tsunderjudge narrowed his gaze. “Even fools appear wise when they keep their mouths shut. Except in your case, you exposed your folly outright. It’s indeed clear that you don’t understand.”

Well. You did say so.

“Then don’t accuse. Do you think that The Keys of Fate are humanity’s tool to tweak the world to its whim? No. The Grandmaster defines it as a divine duty to work for the best despite living in a broken world.”

“My suggestion was no different than abdication. In his eyes, I attempted to impose an illusion of security. Unacceptable. Even if no other Living Victory surpasses us, the Ocean Abomination continues to be a constant threat. One that requires the power to RESET.”

“I was ready to take the responsibility of whatever impending chaos would ensue. I thought that if the Abomination wins, so be it. A single pass for all eternity. That should have been the new natural order.”

“However, The Grandmaster in his wisdom refused to let my short-sighted nihilism gain any foothold. He insisted that I keep my duty, and therefore here we are.”

It’s not mere inaction after all, huh.

You noticed that his expression softened a tiny bit. “When I was young, I thought those who prayed
were weaklings who don’t improve themselves. ‘Ditching’ their responsibility, as you said. What a wormy caterpillar I was. Blind to the truth.”

“To pray for hope. To pray for wisdom. To pray for good. All these takes courage, and courage is what I lack.”

Somehow, everything clicked into place. The Tsunderjudge acts the way he does because he’s not brave enough to connect his heart with others.

You got off the swing, walked before him, and reached your hand. You tell him that he doesn’t need to unpack everything right now. But, please allow you to help him speak to your friends and family. Papyrus would have wanted that.

“What do you ask of me?”

His trust.

…That intense tsundere glare. You must have presented the most difficult request. Still, you’re determined to persist. He’s hardboiled to the core, unlike the more fragile Lady Lucidia.

In the end, he accepted your hand, albeit in a rather heavy and semi-reluctant fashion.

With his classic tsundereness, he said: “Very well. I’m at your mercy.”

Success! With a spring in your step, you led the Tsunderjudge back inside.

* * *

While waiting for you in the living room, the crew savoured a spot of Dad’s freshly brewed tea. Except for the hydrophobic Grillby: he munched on tea leaves instead.

Cenna stormed right up to the Tsunderjudge. She lifted her leg and swung it towards his shin, stopping right before it made contact.

She yelled: “DODGE ALREADY, OLD MAN! I know you could have just teleported out of the way and whatnot, but you always surrender to the bloody hits like its penitence or something. You know how fucking painful it is to watch you take all this shit from me?! Just talk. I’m not that immature!”

Annoyed, he asked back. “Then talk.”

“Okay, you wanna talk? Why the fuck did you put a KNOWN SUPERPOWERED KID in fucking FOSTER CARE?!? It’s a place for shithead damaged kids! I was that shithead damaged kid!!!”

Uh oh. This smells of unresolved family conflict. You immediately interjected and suggested to Cenna to resolve the matter in a calm and collected manner.

“Calm?! Right now?! He didn’t go send the bloody calvary when you went missing either! ‘I got caught up in work’, he says. ‘The news came late’, he says! All I ever hear are half-assed answers! He’s a time traveler for God’s sake!”

Cenna, calm. Collected. Patience. You get why she’s angry but Mezil should be allowed to start
from the beginning: to tell the truth about your foster home placement and the unfortunate mountain accident, without anyone in this room judging him for anything.

Some of your friends resisted the urge to object. After much consideration, they thought of the greater good and agreed.

You patted Mezil on the arm, encouraging him to speak.

You sensed gratefulness. In a way, it’s a silent ‘thank you’.

Facing the rest of the crew, he explained:

“Frisk’s parents always thought that it’s best for their child to live a normal life for their first twelve years. No seals or training. It’s imperative to develop their character and mind before introducing magic. Many things could go wrong with a Pure Red otherwise.”

“After their deaths, I made a decision. Call it rash. Call it foolish. I was determined to give their youngest a normal life. However, living with me at House Berendin would’ve been anything but ‘normal’. After what I had done, I became a target for the world. That includes anyone close to me. It’s no condition to raise a child in. I had already lost one, and I won’t lose another.”

“For their protection, I thus had all traces of Frisk’s Magus heritage hidden. Even from themselves and the foster home. In exchange for funding for the child’s needs, I imposed only two conditions. They must never be adopted out, and they will receive education at The Spire after finishing their primary school.”

“That plan… backfired. Frisk’s mundane identity did not allow me to gather the resources needed for a swift rescue. Troubled by the recent RESETS, Lemuria worried more about the possibility of the Gungnir or the Abomination gaining access to the Keys of Fate. A seemingly ‘random’ child at the eleventh hour was not worth the sacrifice needed to cross Ebott’s Barrier. Or so they told me.”

“By the time they realised that it was a Red Major who fell, Frisk had already set the Dreemurr Nation free.”

Hang on a moment. What about that nasty family court timeline?

Mezil sighed. “You had exposed yourself to public in the worst way. Complete with flauntings of solid gold. People kill for those. And so pressure mounted on me from all sides. I couldn’t let you fall into the hands of a Magus or a Gungnir family, lest they train you to become their puppet. The next best action would be to put you in a neutral party, chosen by me.”

Was he happy with the outcome?

“No,” he grumbled. “The couple I selected showed their true colours after they won the case. They were more interested in status and fame. Probably wanted to use you as a proof of pride for their ‘parenting techniques’. I was ready to whisk you out of there at a moment’s notice.”

…Too bad you’re weren’t the most patient. You chuckled uncomfortably.

The Tsunderjudge then did something that you never thought would happen. He bowed to you, English style, with sincere apology.

He said, “I’m sorry for not being able to give you the life you needed.”

Aware of the full picture at long last, you tell him that you’re grateful that he put in his all to keep
you safe. What happened on the mountain was either fate or an accident. Either way, it was out of his hands.

Mezil set his cane down before him and cleared his throat. “Well then,” he asked, “Do you wish to postpone court for the time being? I’ll remind you that we cannot continue without a neutral voice.”

Papyrus, right? Yep. You’ve thought of that. The Grandmaster would consider his absence grounds for immediate mistrial. And that is why you’re going to give a verdict right now.


 Nope. And your verdict was this:

You quit.

“Excuse me?!”

“What?!”

“Punk, you can’t do that!”

Hold on. You’ll explain.

The biggest reason being that you’re personally tangled up in this crazy web. No way in heck you could remain unbiased after hearing all of that!

Furthermore, this court drama had riled up emotions and dumped too much information for you to process. Not even your fancy phone scanner helped make the right decision.

All for what end? To call for capital punishment? Hearing testimonies and sorting between truth and lies? That ain’t YOUR style! You had much better progress with a heart to heart talk at the garden swing than the courtroom mess.

Besides, with the Abomination looming, you can’t afford to lose anyone! This is not the time to pin any blames. Nobody is going to die. Nobody will get demoted.

But, that doesn’t mean there will be no ‘judgement’. Sans did commit a crime, after all.

With your right palm facing up at shoulder level, you asked Undyne to give you ‘THE LIST’!

Undyne placed the list into your hands as though she’s giving an official decree. Well, it might as well be at this point.

You offered it to Tsunderjudge. Asked him to read it and let you know what he thinks.

With slight skepticism, Mezil unfolded the contents.

Cenna couldn’t resist peeking. Her face contorted. Soon enough, she walked off while trying to stifle her guffaw. You expected that reaction from her though. There’s a MUCH bigger prize awaiting your attempt.

First, it was a smirk.

Then a grin.

And at last, Mister Tsunderjudge broke through his usual range of emotions and 100% legit laughed out loud!

W-wha he hid his face behind your paper?! That’s not fair! Pouting, you thought of yanking it out of
his hand. Then again… maybe just hearing his laughter is enough.

Once he’s done, he returned the list to you. At least his face still glowed with a smile. You gotta appreciate these rare moments.

“So that’s what you were working on. A fine ‘execution’, I’d say.”

Heh, heh. Great isn’t it? Fits Tsunderjudge’s morbid sense of humour too. You still remember about the whole janitor closet deal.

“As you requested, you have my trust. Do as you wish.”
There’s a chance that last entry’s notifications did not send out properly. Ao3 bugged out somewhere.

If the scene seemed to skip a beat, you might have missed 176.

Edit: If you're still having notification mail issues, try to whitelist AO3. Apparently some services think AO3 is a dubious site and so filters those mail out as junk.

So, it was decided. With the approval of both Magi and Monsters, Sans shall be punished according to ‘The List’.

The courtroom hall got replaced with an impromptu basketball courtyard. Ha ha. That vampire sure had a distinct sense of humour.

You liked the atmosphere. It’s tempting to dunk Sans straight into one of the hoops.

Ol’ Gerson shuffled himself to the viewing stands. He had worked hard maintaining his magical field, so he deserved a well earned rest. Dad joined his ancient friend as company.

Huh? The Tsunderjudge also went the way of elderly men? Why? He's dang fit for his age. Leg injuries starting to bother him? Or did he prefer to watch from a distance?

Whatever it was, it’s his story. You need to do your part.

With THE LIST in your hand, you declared that it will be read out on the level of severity: from the lightest to the heaviest.

For example, insisting that Sans finally pick up that sock in the living room. That’s a joke gone too far. Seriously. You can’t believe that it needed to be written in.


Next, ‘stop being such a trashbag and clean your damn room’!

“Ok, ok. I’m feeling more energetic nowadays.”

No more lazy naps for nap’s sake. Prioritize proper sleep. Limit naps for when he’s ACTUALLY tired. And yes you have taken into account the possibility of shift work.

“Hmm. Sure. Can do too.”

Get proper footwear dammit! How did he even manage to not slip with those slippers?! Slippers shall only be limited to his home.

“I’m starting to like sneakers anyway, so that’s fine.”

Mom dictated that he shall take care of her flower children. Once a week, or more often if required.
And take care of them well. Top quality. Further arrangements are to be decided.

“I’m really not sure if that’s a good idea,” said Sans. “I know the weedy kids will try to mess me up, but… I don’t think Tori and the kids share the same idea of ‘top quality care’. Get what I mean?”

You clutched the paper, slightly apprehensive. Yeah. You get what he means. But, The List is The List. It’s to help both sides, capiche?

“As long you understand, kid.”

Sans is also to get therapy. Exactly what kind of therapy, it’s not decided yet. Anything to cut that nihilism out of his life.

“What are you gonna do if the therapy ain’t working out?”

You rubbed your chin. Let’s try making it attendance based first. You understand that this process is not something that could be forced. The important point is to keep trying until something fits. Don’t give up.

“Thanks for thinking this through. Really appreciate it.”

No problem. You're not that heartless.

Next. Go on a ketchup detox. His quantity of consumption will be limited to ‘normal people portions’. That’s usually about one packet a meal. No more chugging bottles of them like he’s addicted or something.

“Uh… starting to get difficult there.”

Does he rather get curbed on puns? Because that’s next.

“Wait,” Sans held his breath. “That’s not even the worst? It’s too soon. How are you even going to enforce these rules?”

You shrugged. At least it gives everyone the right to complain.

No puns. No jokes. No japes. No schadenfreude or sarcastic snark. No mocking music or badabing!

Perturbed, Sans exclaimed: “I-isn’t that excessive?! Without wordplays, I won’t be me anymore… I might as well become a bland faceless character.”

You stuck out your tongue. Just kidding, Sans. The actual entry covers only the corniest of Sans’ puns. How does it feel to be played?

“Unsettling. But, that’s part of the fun. Good one, kid!”

Sans sure has weird tastes…

You continued reading out his sentence. Most of the next dozen were standard civic stuff like ‘don’t swindle for profit’ and ‘don’t threaten death at random children’. They’re just breadcrumbs to the punch waiting at the bottom of the paper.

At last, you reached the first of the heavy hitters. ‘Upon request, Sans is to teach Alphys everything he knows about science and Seer magic’.

Doctor Gaster raised a brow. “So… simple? Practical? I thought you’d have more diabolical
assignments, Doctor Alphys?”

“W-well,” she said, “It’s better t-to think long term. I mean, now Sans is obliged to be my lesson
dispenser.”

With the most demonic smug grin, she added: “Forever.”

“My, my, dear Alphys. I’m so pleased of you.”

…She’s making Sans sweat with mild discomfort. What a powerful dark side.

Next up, Mettaton. Oh. This is rich.

Tapping your shoulder, the glambot posed. “Frisk darling, will you let me have the honour?”

You grant your approval.

Mettaton strutted around Sans. “Sans, Sans, Sans, my top comedian on MTT-TV. Guest star of my
upcoming science show. Oh dear me, I’m afraid to say this but…”

The courtyard darkened.
One spotlight shone on Mettaton, and the other on Sans.
Drums rolled in the background.

How is he coordinating all of this?

Mettaton struck a magnificent, accusatory pose!

“YOU’RE FIRED, BABY!!!”

The spotlight on Sans turned red. Incidental trombone music played its sad, sad tune. It’s the exact
melody that annoyed Papyrus all this time.

“Ok.” Typical Sans answer.

The bot breathed a satisfied sigh. “Always a good stress relief.”

Wow. Talk about getting dunked on by all of his poor life decisions. But, that got you curious. A
science show…? What science show?

“Something to educate our impressionable young about human health, since our biologies can be
quite different. So, Sansy and I struck a deal, honey. He was supposed to be at least a guest star.
Well, after this incident, his involvement shall be nullified. Bye bye. Adios.”

Who’s gonna fill in the empty slot then?

“Don’t worry about me, superstar. There’s always another audition process to select a fresh face.”

Cool. Now, let’s move on to the star attraction. Literally.

Sans blurted, “Literally?”

Yep. Undyne -- Captain of the Royal Guard -- shall execute ‘the mother of all suplexes across space
and time’. Quote for quote.

She’s already breaking out into a chain of ‘fufufu’. You beckoned her over with a big cheeky smile.
Is Undyne ready for some fun?

Showing both palms at you, Undyne answered: “Totally!”

You spawned two Marks: one star per hand. Orange for propulsion. Blue to float. Maximum output, because we're in The Void.

Heh, she must be feeling just like an anime superhero right now.

“Yes… YES!!” She cackled in mid-air. “I recognize this POWER!”

Similar to her battle armour, huh? You’re not surprised; Determination and all.

Whoops! She almost flipped upside-down despite your Blue Star’s help. Lucky for her, Cenna was there to coach the basics.

Sans said, “Uh, Frisk. You know that a rocket suplex is gonna be fatal for anyone. Right?”

Well. If anything goes wrong you can LOAD a quicksave. But, that’s just a backup plan.

You waved at Gerson. Dad helped his friend up from his seat as they began walking towards you.

“…Serious, kid?”

Serious.

The old turtle stretched his neck and shoulders. “Finally reached there, huh? Well kiddo, where do I need to stand?”

You pointed at the basketball hoop.

“Wa ha ha! That’s a nice pick. Looking forward to it.” Thus Gerson moved into position.

You noticed Sans analyzed the old turtle with his Eye. Hey!

“Sorry.” He said, “Just checking.”

Meanwhile, Undyne had gotten the hang on her temporary anime power, grinning earfin to earfin. “NOW I’m ready!”

Alright, everyone to the stands. Stay clear of ground zero!

Once the spectators settled down, you told Undyne to get ready.

Three!
Two!
One!

BLAST OFF!!!

The strongest fish grabbed Sans and rocketed straight into the dark yonder. Listen hard enough and one could hear him scream.

Whoa! A streak of blue and orange whizzed over your head! Apparently The Crimson Hall loops around itself. It does make sense. Otherwise, it’s a straight plunge into nothingness.

Here she goes! The second and third loop. Then it’s just a series of zips over your head. They’re
going so fast, you can’t count anymore. It’s quite a spectacular sight.

Smackdown! From a perfect 45 degree angle, Undyne plunged straight into the confines of Gerson’s boundary field.

It was a majestic KA-BOOM!, you dare say. The ground caved in as chunks of concrete flew into the air. Not even the steel basketball pole escaped the carnage.

W-what the?! Gerson stood on a lone island of unbroken ground???

You dropped your jaw. Holy fried bananas in batter. Is the Hammer of Justice nigh invincible?!

Dad scratched his cheek. “Well… that’s why we say he’s named ‘Boom’. Gerson leaves behind a blast everywhere. I don’t understand how it works, but his powers can redirect any attack.”

…!!!

Geez. You now understood why Gerson caught Sans’ interest. The ability to redirect anything and everything could have amazing applications. What if one could create a legendary shield?!

The excitement can wait. You wanna know if Undyne and Sans survived.

As you walked over to check, Sans got tossed out of the pit. He rolled once before stopping right beside your foot. Undyne then jumped out without any problems.

You asked if she’s okay. That sure took a while.

“So sorry Frisk,” she said, “It was a smashing ride. Thrilling, but dang. I need a breather.”

You’re glad to hear that she’s fine. But, maybe she should swing by Lady Lucy’s clinic later? Just to make sure nothing broke. It pays to be paranoid when it comes to massive force.

You heard some shuffling. It’s Sans, who’s finally able to move again. He proceeded to hug the floor while rattling from skull to toebone. “Sweet, sweet earth, please don’t let me go.”

You pouted at Sans. What’s with the melodrama? He was totally fine with those same speeds when he went six-winged-angel mode.

“That’s different, kid. If I’m the one flying, I know where I’m going y’know. Getting dunked removes all sense of control…”

Hmm. That’s true. Now you feel rather sorry for him.

He asked, “That had to be the last, right? It can’t get any worse than this.”

You tell Sans that there’s ‘one’ more.

He flipped on his back. Looking at you, he blurted: “Seriously?”

100% serious.

You read out the final punishment: Sans Serif will be banned from Grillby’s, the finest establishment of grease in all the land! And, only the owner can decide when to let him back.

A moment of silence…
Then, Sans let out the longest, smallest ‘noooo’ in the world: a lost despairing whimper engulfed in its own patheticness. It’s beyond sad.

You sat down by his side to ask if it truly was the worst.

“Kid. You don’t understand. Burn Grillbz enough and he holds a mean grudge. I might never, ever, ever, ever be able visit his bar again. Nevermind eating anything.”

Maybe Sans would get a lighter sentence if he paid his tab?

Which then Grillby himself replied: “I won’t accept a single cent.”

W-whoa?! When did he get so close???

He didn’t give you an answer. Instead, he distanced himself.

…Yep. Sans is screwed. Permabanned.

Here’s the bigger question: how on earth are you gonna enforce all those rules? You can’t watch Sans 24/7. Maybe you need one of those tracking leg-bands used for prisoners?

Cenna tapped you on the shoulder. She then pointed you straight to the one and only Tsunderjudge. “The old man will help ya there.”

Oh, will he loan out manpower?

“Something even better.”

Okay. A solution is a solution. So, you hopped over to the tsun.

Aha! Since Sans depended on your Claim to keep his Determination at safe levels, Mezil suggested that you add a number of clauses into the Mark. Make it so that his DT-levels increase upon every transgression.

Small offenses will cause small increases. Bigger ones will cause bigger increases. Go back to his criminal ways, and Sans self-destructs into a pile of dusty goo. Morbid. But, there’s no other way to enforce the sentence.

Besides, it’s not like it’s permanent. The levels will go back down over time.

You informed everyone about what you’re going to do. They approved, though Mom had her concerns. Could this mean the end of their knock-knock jokes?

You let Mom know that if Sans stays good, it’s possible to adjust his sentencing. Maybe relax the jokes as a reward. Gotta give some motivation, right?

In one flash, you imbued your will into the Claim. Go ahead, Sans, crack a pun. Gotta test it.

He pondered for a while. “So… this is the price for being bad to the ‘bone’?”

Pause. Nothing happened?

“Hm? Sure this is working? I didn’t notice any changes.”

You rubbed your chin. Standard expressions might not trigger the clause: otherwise all idioms and metaphors would be banned alongside puns.
You tell Sans to try emphasise on the ‘bone’ bit. Make it super corny.

“’Kay,” Sans cleared his throat. “So… this is the price for being bad to the bone!”

Cue the mental rimshot. It’s upon that moment, Sans winced and clutched his chest. That’s the reaction you were looking for. There’s a slight reddish glow beneath his shirt.

“Oh,” he commented. “Feels like someone backhanded my chest. It’s quite warm, too. Man, I bet it’ll burn if I try to infiltrate Grillby’s.”

WHAT?! He just triggered another penalty. Is he doing this on purpose?

“No. Of course I’m not trying to get myself punished-- Hurk!”

Sans, stop!

“I’m trying, I’m trying! But I’m afraid I can’t kick the habit in Thyme.”

The shine on his chest was getting brighter. Why did he need to drag the Tsunderjudge into this?!?!

“No. Of course I’m not trying to get myself punished-- Hurk!”

Did he just ripple? He rippled! Isn’t that a sign of impending overload???

You slapped a ‘Mark of Silence’ on Sans’ grinning mouth. Emergency measures, yo.

Sans wheezed a few times. The pain of being unable to pun seeped into his bones.

Slowly, you could feel the Claim returning back to its normal cap. The crisis had passed.

How disturbing. Just four puns? You protested to Tsunderjudge. Isn’t this too strict?! He almost died from stupid wordplay! They weren’t even the worst of Sans’ puns!

“No.” He replied, “It’s working as intended. If Sans Serif wants to live, he better channel that extra Determination into respecting the rules.”

You’re not sure if you’re imagining it, but there’s a hint of deviousness in Mezil’s eyes. Is this what they call justice? Or vindication?

You dispelled your latest Mark, allowing Sans to speak again.

His first response? “…That was one of the most terrifying moments of my life…”

Hmm… Won’t Sans exploit this system as extra sources of DT?

“ heck no.”

On cue, he suffered another strike. Hah! He fell for it.

“’Do Not Lie to Owner’ clause?” Sans mentioned. “That’s pretty cheating.”

You crossed your arms and nodded, smug. You’re not so naive to think that he could gather intel without trickery. But he will have to tell you the truth, and nothing but the truth! How does that sound?

Sans nodded, nonchalant and factual. “Great. I like it. You select the ears, I give the news. That’s.
how classified work should be."

All right. Sentencing complete. It’s a wrap. Here concludes today’s Trial of the Crimson Hall.

Good grief, you’re done. Absolutely done.

Maybe you should visit Papyrus one more time before heading back to the real world?

Your group thus swung by the Hub’s medical bay. Lady Lucy didn’t allow you to visit Papyrus himself, but she scanned Undyne and Sans for any injuries. Fortunately, Gerson’s magical field did the job just fine: they’re both ‘Condition Green’.

It piqued her interest enough to request for the old turtle’s stay. With the explanation that he had nothing better to do, Gerson accepted the lady’s request.

You asked Lady Lucy what she’s trying to do. You thought she finished treating Papyrus. You’re anxious to rewind his injuries.

“Status: more analysis required.” she replied, “LOADING without sufficient data will only result in repeating consequences. Preventive measures, compulsory. Please resume business as usual until I complete my research.”

And old Gerson?

“The Law may be required to confirm certain hypotheses. In the meantime, please pay attention to new events in this current timeline as they unfold.”

Huh… okay. You promise Lady Lucy to remain vigilant.

The rest of you returned to the real world. How much time had passed? You’re not sure, but you’re confident it’s no longer noon. Not by a long a long shot.

Your stomach growled. Oops. Come to think of it, you haven’t had lunch either. Funny enough, you didn’t feel hungry in The Void.

Alphys suggested, “I-I have lots of instant noodles.”

There was an immediate frown from Mom and Gaster.

“W-w-w-we can add our own vegetables! Leeks, carrots, mushrooms, cabbages anything! I-I swear it’s possible to make a proper meal out of instant noodles. People in the Far East do that all the time.”

You asked Alphys if she even had groceries in stock. Nobody had time to shop. Your pantry had gotten pretty bare too. Whatever Garamond bought won’t be enough to feed everyone.

She answered sheepishly. “I have… a dozen eggs. Maybe?”

Does she still have that thick soy sauce that she bought on a whim at an Eastern food fair?

“Of course! Though, I haven’t even opened it yet.”

You made a suggestion. It’s a meal you used to have back in your foster home. Easy to cook for large amounts of people, and doesn’t require much of the salty soup stock either.

Cenna laughed so hard.
“Mez, did you really give them Mama’s recipe?! She used to cook that!”

In which he replied, “Well, they wanted something that ‘even a child could make in bulk’.”

That explains kitchen duty. Your foster home needed all the help they could get to cook for so many people.

Undyne blinked a few times. “Wait, Frisk. If you knew how to cook… then why did you follow my instructions during our dinner date?”

Did she think you were in any position to teach? She broke the table in half with her spear. Besides, it was more fun to follow along.

Mom’s glare focused on Undyne like a ray of magnified sunlight.

The fish tried to save her scales. “T-the past is the past, Toriel. We don’t do that anymore.”

Mom leaned forward. School principal mode on.

“Undyne. How did you lose your Underground home again?”

“In a fire,” answered Undyne.

“And how exactly did that fire happen?”

“We turned up the stove up way too high. Yeah! T-totally not intentional.”

Mom’s new glare balanced the scorch of the sun’s plasma surface and the absolute chill of outer space. All in perfect intimidating harmony.

Uhhh… Maybe it’s best to start cooking. An empty belly doesn’t wait.

With your instructions, the packets of instant noodles thus transformed into a big plate of fried soy-sauce noodles topped with strips of thin crepe-like omelette.

Time for the taste test. Passed! Though it would be a lot better garnished with crispy shallots.

Still, you smiled at your plate of noodles. It’s nice to know that a piece of your biological family stayed with you for all these years, even though you never realised it.

Meanwhile your monster friends looked at the results with great curiosity. Understandable. They won’t find it anywhere in their country.

You urged everyone to take a share. So, they did. Dinner is served!

Alphys loved it, as expected. It’s simple and comforting. Plus, it features instant noodles. It’s fills her happiness checklist.

Sans, of course, started squeezing a packet of ketchup over his meal. You remind him that he’s limited to ‘normal people portions’.

Doctor Gaster couldn’t stand it. He refused the meal outright. His friend Grillby had to coax him; Goopdoc was supporting two other people in his body, after all. In the end, the fussy scientist caved in.

Awww. You’re sad that the fire elemental no longer had his awesome fixed voice. Why can’t THAT
be permanent? It’s nice to have a positive buff for once.

You heard Cenna and Mezil talking the background.

“Do we have enough for Gael?” she asked, “Maybe I can use this to lure him back?”

The Tsunderjudge said: “There’s no need. Gaelic is with Garamond. They’re on the lookout together.”

As he said so, his phone went. Ring. Ring. Looks like Mister Invisibone needed to deliver a report.

“…How many?”

Mezil listened. You stared, waiting for a reaction. You can’t discern anything else other than ‘serious’.

You took out your phone and scanned him. Dark red. Hm?

“Do not engage,” he said. “Let them come.”

Mezil then ended the call.

You asked him what that was about.

“Hurry and eat your fill. Work is heading our way.”

So soon? Although you wondered exactly what ‘work’ entailed, you’re not going to doubt his warnings.

You scarfed down the noodles and rinsed your mouth. Can’t greet others with smelly breath.

Dad helped out by giving you a piece of mint. Ah mint, the ultimate breath freshener. Thanks!

You waited at the lobby of the lab, expecting the rumble of media vans and the badgering voices of reporters. Except… things were silent.

Too silent.

Finally, the doorbell rang. You wanted to answer, but Mezil stopped you in your tracks.

Again, the doorbell rang.

Mezil asked: “Doctor Alphys, can you open the door remotely?”

“U-uh. Yeah. S-sure.” She dug into her pockets and pressed a button.

You heard a beep. The door slid open.

There were no reporters. No media. No cameras. No microphones. No vans.

Instead, you saw an adult man with two teenage boys wearing colour cloaks of fanciful foreign designs. Their skintones reminded you of autumn acorns.

Grillby immediately stepped forward, cautious. While Undyne summoned her spear to defend Mom and Dad. They’re both on high alert.

The bartender’s actions threw you off. He acted so cold to you after the courtroom drama, yet he’s
jumping straight to your defense. Why? Does he know this person?

He said: “…Yes… That is Aiden of Aratet… The current boss of Gungnir…”

Oh.
Em.
Gee.

You started freaking out internally.

You’re not prepared for this!!!
King’s Duty

Chapter Notes

Did the subscription fix work? I'm really hoping it works.

As a reminder, if you have Discord you can come chat in Fanfic Paradise. You'll get live updates, sneak peaks, and assorted other possible story shenanigans. Also, we host a bunch of other curated fanfiction that may fit your fancy. Link is on the story cover, but here's the URL for ease of access: https://discordapp.com/invite/wtthb26

Asgore’s father once warned of human politics. He taught his son that he should never cross its paths, let alone follow its ways. Nothing good can come out of the bloodthirsty determined, he’d say; it’s better to hide than to get involved.

Fast-forward a thousand years and King Asgore found himself in the middle of the worst-case scenario. Hiding could only last so long, it seemed.

High tension lingered in the air. Standing outside was none other than Gungnir’s current leader: the one they call Aiden of Aratet.

Mezil Thyme drew out his gun, loaded and ready to fire.

“Why so hostile, Vampire?” The foreign human said: “You’ve won this war. Your Witch yet lives and the Spire still stands tall. You even claimed that kid as your own. The power of time is at your fingertips. We’re at your mercy.”

“I’m no fool, Gungnir. You wouldn’t have brought along your sons unless you’re in a position of strength.”

Asgore observed the guests. This Aiden fellow was not a human to be trifled with. His posture was that of a true warrior: steady and grounded, prepared to retaliate against any attack.

The brothers, on the other hand, contrasted each other. The fairer, taller, gruffer one tried hard to maintain the same warrior’s stance as his father. Asgore could tell he was outright uncomfortable to be in this position. More so when he looked at Mettaton. Still, he tried to be brave, keeping his guard up for his family’s sake.

The other son didn’t bother carrying that same staunch aura. He appeared gentle, holding an amicable yet stoic demeanour. If he didn’t have such a sun-tanned face, he could be passed off as a normal teen with some sports background.

Aiden continued: “Did you not hear that our mission failed? What can a scattered, demoralized people do?”

Mezil huffed. “Regroup, of course. I’m not being hypothetical either. I’ve seen it time and time again.”

“Then why not take the shot? Your attack dog must also be out there. Let him loose and end this farce.”
“Hmph. That last thing I want is to start a war on King Asgore’s soil.”

“Have you grown so soft as to care about these monsters?”

“It’s none of your business.”

The stalemate resumed. Much bad blood lingered between Mezil and Aiden. If nothing changes, the pressure cooker is going to blow. Dear departed father was not kidding when he said human politics reek of danger.

Frisk looked to Asgore. It’s their ‘desperate-begging-face’, usually reserved for pleas to venture to a specific place of interest. It could be the theme park. It could be the museum. It could be a fair.

This time, however, it was Frisk’s silent cry for help. It’s not likely that the boss of Gungnir would listen to a child who had yet to prove themselves in his eyes.

What about Toriel? Her character leaned closer to Mezil’s toughness. Not good for this scenario either.

Only one option remained.

King Asgore thus walked to the entrance, slow and gentle, until his foot touched the evening sun’s warm rays.

“Howdy,” said the King. “Would you like to come in and have some tea?”

Aiden and his lighter-skinned son were taken aback by the invitation, filled with caution and doubt. Nonetheless, Asgore offered again. “It’s impolite for us to leave you outside for so long. Please, we can discuss matters at the table.”

After much consideration, the Aratet family entered Alphys’ Lab.

Asgore turned to his subjects and said, “Please give our guest some privacy.”

“I’ll protect you,” Undyne volunteered.

“Thank you, but you’re needed elsewhere. Watch over my wife and child to the best of your ability.”

Although she was reluctant at first, Undyne could not decline the call of duty. “Yes, sir!”

The King led his guests to the kitchen and settled them to their seats at the dining table.

As he turned towards the pantry, Asgore sensed a wave of magic pulsing through his fur. The strands resisted the air, making him feel like he’s under water.

It's been a long, long while since he stood in the field of a Seer's timefreeze, but he'll never forget the sensation.

“Sans?” he asked. “Is that you?”

“Yup,” he answered, leaning against the kitchen’s doorpost. “Sans Serif reporting in, Your Majesty.”

It was serious business after all. “Report, please.”

“We’re in the worst case scenario. Mezil is right. If Aiden here ain’t in control, he wouldn't have
shown up with his sons.”

“How bad is this ‘bad’, Sans?”

“Bad enough for Mezil to not shoot Aiden on sight. If anything happens to the bossman or his kids, the Gungnir will force us to RESET. If I had to guess, they will probably kill one of our kind in turn. It doesn’t matter who. Could be Alphys. Could be you.”

“Then, please fetch Gerson. Anyone who stands in his field is safe.”

“No can do, Your Majesty. Take that route and the Gungnir will kill any citizen minding their own business in town. It’s not just the Lab being held hostage here. It’s the whole town. Probably got several snipers scattered about for instantaneous retaliation.”

Asgore felt the nerves rise to his throat. “I see… Is there any way to defend ourselves?”

“Sounded like Aiden was expecting Snakedog at least. Dude’s fast, I kid you not. But, there’s only so much distance he can cover at once. By the time he runs to one sniper, a whole bunch of bullets would have already done their deed elsewhere. Same goes for The Royal Guard. It’s a Dead End.”

“In that case, should we use the Keys of Fate now?”

“Nope.” Sans replied.

“Why not?”

“Cause someone’s keeping track of the changes in time. After all those RESETs, don’t you think that Aiden showing up now is a bit fishy? We made sure court happened in a closed innocuous space, courtesy of the Old Thymer.”

Sans grunted from the penalty. His Eye lit up to convert that extra burst of pun Determination into magic.

“Sorry,” he said, “Needed a boost. Let’s see, where were we? Right, I’ll cut to the chase. I suspect that the Gungnir have an unclaimed Red Major of their own.”

The goat gasped. “I-impossible! I thought Frisk was the only Red that escaped the culling!”

“I hoped so too. Would save us a lot of headache. Unfortunately, Frisk is just one example of how little kids can fall through the cracks.”

Sans stared at the Aratet boys. Analyzing them, without doubt. “Heh. They came prepared. That colourful cloak ain’t for show. It deflects magic, scrambling my sight.”

Asgore noted, “You can’t read their stats then.”

“Yup. No dice on Aiden’s LV either. I’m only getting gibberish. Anyways, the boys are teenagers, right? Deduct ten years, and they’re way below the minimum age. I won’t be surprised if either of them is our mysterious recorder.”

“Oh and one more thing,” Sans continued, “Aiden might have figured out that I sabotaged their Spire plan. He’s gonna have a bone to pick with me.”

Asgore frowned. “Seriously, Sans? You tangled with the Gungnir too?”

“Yup. See, they planned to eliminate you and Tori before the onset of the trial. Then a squad would
swipe Frisk back to their base, while the main force dealt with Mezil, Lucidia, and The Grandmaster. The whole fire thing? To destroy evidence.”

“For my own scheme to work, the Trial of the Crimson Hall had to start without a hitch. So, I forced them to take the second option. The fire became the starter instead of the finisher.”

Despite what went down with Megalovania, Asgore would be forever grateful to Sans for foiling Gungnir’s true plan. The thought of bloody chaos made his kind soul shudder.

“So yeah, this Aiden fellow is cause for concern. Despite knowing about the Keys of Fate, he got the guts to confront Sir Vampire. And I’m not chalk it up to desperation or arrogance. He’s way too meticulous for that. In other words, he has a trump card up his sleeve.”

Asgore asked, “Do you know what it could be?”

“Nope. I thought I could get a hint with my Truesight. But, that’s a bust. So, King Asgore. I gave you all this info. What do you wanna do with it?”

The king pondered for a moment. With a meek smile, he responded: “Maintain diplomacy, of course. I’ll handle the PR.”

“Heh. Good call.”

The red glow on Sans’ chest began to fade. “Welp. Running out of juice. It’s all up to you now, Your Majesty.”

“In the meantime, Sans,” said Asgore. “Please get everyone to safety into the Void. And, keep the Spirit Gate a secret.”

“Can do. Want anyone in particular to stay behind for security?”

“I’ll leave that to your discretion.”

“No probs. Okay, really gotta ciao now.”

Asgore nodded to Sans. “Thank you, Tactician.”

When time returned to its normal pace, Sans had already teleported away to execute his mission.

Alright, now to make some tea.

Asgore went through the selection present in Alphys’ kitchen. Most of them were in bags, though she also had a jar of loose Goldenflower petals and a tin of Breakfast. He checked the contents to make sure they’re fresh. So far, so good.

He brought them out to the table and set them before his guests.

“Do you have a preference? We have Earl Grey, Breakfast, Goldenflower, and…” Asgore squinted at a packet with Eastern script. “I think it’s green tea.”


“Yes, sir.”

“Ebott Goldenflower, the sacred Soul Vessels of the gods?”
Asgore nodded.

“‘You lot have the nerve to turn this land’s holy flower into a drink. That’s sacrilege!’

Gulp. Did he just commit a massive faux pas? Was Aiden genuinely insulted by the idea, or did the provocation serve as a test of character?

Asgore did what he had to do. He bowed his head to the Gungnir and said: “My deepest apologies, sir. The Ebott Goldenflower appeared to my nation as an unknown plant of great beauty mere decades ago. I had no idea others revered it. In that case, I will not brew it for you.”

The sons whispered to their father in their native tongue. After a brief discussion, they agreed on something.

Aiden said, “My sons forgive you for your ignorance. Therefore, I too will pardon you. They want to try this ‘Earl Grey’ you offered. Also, they want milk and sugar.”

What a relief, thought Asgore. “Very well. What about you, sir Aiden?”

“…Breakfast. No milk or sugar.”

The choice was neither on a whim or by mistake. Asgore understood that this was yet another test. This human wanted to see if the King of Monsters could serve a spot of tea without subterfuge or betrayal.

While the water boiled, Asgore searched for the requested items. To say that there was no pressure would be a lie. Did Alphys even have milk? Was it still fresh? He wouldn’t want to give the guests a stomach ache, accidental or otherwise.

The fridge did have milk in stock, but it was half consumed and therefore unsuitable to serve. Frisk was right: the pantry management had been in disarray due to the recent chaos. There wasn’t any time to shop either.

To his fortune he found some packeted sugar and creamers. They will have to do for now.

Asgore brewed the three orders of teas to the best of his ability. Mugs for the boys, and a teapot for the father and himself. He will show his goodwill by sharing their drink from the same source.

He first served the boys, bags removed. They were also given metal teaspoons to stir.

Laying down the sugar and creamer, Asgore explained, “Young men, I’m sorry. We don’t have fresh milk in stock. Would you be fine with these instead?”

The smaller boy stared at the creamer packet with great curiosity. Poked it a few times to feel the texture. It appears that he had never seen such an item before.

“Oh. If I may ask, which of you is the older brother?”

The boys looked to their father. It appears that he enforced a code of silence. Understandable, since they’re in enemy territory.

“…The taller one is my elder son, Dayton. The other is Niton.”

“Ah, I see.”

Dayton took one stick of creamer and two sticks of sugar. He showed Niton how it was done. Then,
he scooped a bit of the mixture for his brother to taste.

Happy with the result, Niton repeated his brother’s steps. One creamer, two sugar, and stir.

By now, Aiden’s brew should also be ready. Asgore brought the teapot to the table and poured a cup for himself and his guest.

“Here you go, sir.”

Aiden nodded and said, “Thank you.”

“How was it?” asked Asgore.

 “…It’s well done,” Aiden replied. “Please drink before it grows cold.”

“Ah, that’s right. I should.”

Asgore settled at the opposite side of the table, alone. He savoured his own spot of tea.

The leader of Gungnir asked: “Are you truly a king? Your demeanour is more of a servant. I heard that you worked as a gardener for the local school.”

“Well,” Asgore smiled, “I once abdicated my position. This earth had long fallen into human hands. Instead of resisting with our old national identity, I thought it’s best that we integrate ourselves.”

But Aiden said, “Except, integration is impossible. A pipe dream. People need identity, community, and security. Otherwise, they will be exploited by the powers that be.”

“I acknowledge the difficulties. Therefore, I took up the crown again.”

The human warrior crossed his arms, not quite impressed. “Monster, prove to me that you have what it takes to walk the talk. Only then we will be on equal terms.”

It’s not over yet. A blessing in disguise, thought Asgore. At least he wasn’t snubbed outright. “What is your test?”

“Answer a few questions. First, The Vampire was slow to notice our presence. Where had he been for the past few hours?”

Asgore realised that it will be up to his discernment to comply or to refuse. A king must know when to speak, and when to keep quiet.

In a respectful tone, he chose to tell the truth. “The Supreme Judge was overseeing a trial involving one of my citizens. We conducted judgement our way, and he wished to witness it in person.”

“How serious was this crime? I don’t imagine a petty dispute would garner The Vampire’s full attention.”

“Indeed, you are right. The list was long and severe, with possible treason as one of the accusations.”

“How serious was this crime? I don’t imagine a petty dispute would garner The Vampire’s full attention.”

“Bringing that criminal to us.”

Asgore remembered what Sans had warned. He responded: “I’m afraid I’ll have respectfully to decline. A guest should not trouble himself with the internal affairs of my kingdom.”

“But it is our business. Your Oracle, Papyrus, promised to cook us a feast. Yet your kingdom
continues to hinder his efforts with matters of lesser importance.”

So this is what Sans warned me about. I admit, Aiden is pushing against my nature. Putting the foot down is more of my wife’s expertise.

The King of Monsters shook his head. “I disagree with the notion that it is ‘lesser’. Without the necessary verdict, negotiations with the Magus Association could not proceed. And in return, your eventual safety at the feast would end up jeopardized.”

“Please explain.”

“Trust, Sir Aiden. In return for our assistance in the future battle, they are to trust the Dreemurr Nation to host a feast in your honour.”

It appears that Aiden has finished his first cup. Offering the pot, the King asked: “Would you like to have more tea?”

The human pushed his cup forward. No words needed to be exchanged. His body language spoke for itself.

The attempted rapport resumed over the freshened servings. Aiden again made the first move. “Then let us speak with the Oracle. We wish to know if the feast will go as planned, or if extra information is required.”

“I’m afraid I can’t allow that either. Papyrus is unavailable at the moment.”

“Unable to greet his guest?” Aiden asked, “That doesn’t sound like the Oracle at all. He risked his life to return Dayton in the name of friendship. A man who values bonds will make time to maintain them, no matter how preoccupied. Or… do the warlocks have unspoken motives toward sabotage?”

The accusation threw Asgore off balance. “Pardon me? Why would they? If Papyrus keeps his promise to you, a new path opens for the betterment of all.”

“Is that what you truly desire, ‘king’? Or are you only going to abide by the whims of your citizens like some lowly servant?”

Somehow, that triggered an epiphany. What if Aiden’s idea of a king was something completely different?

It’s best to clarify matters. “Sir Aiden, it appears that you misunderstand. According to the standards of the my nation, a king is to serve his citizens. It doesn’t matter whether it’s walking the political tightrope or soothing a crying child, a service is a service. I am not to demand any special treatment. Whatever respect and gifts the citizens lavish on me should be of their own free will.”

“With that said, it is also my duty to protect everyone. I’m doing so by not treading the path of war. If peace can be achieved, peace I shall choose. As King.”

“Even if your adversary is a people who’d rather see you decimated?”

“Yes,” Asgore answered, bold. “I do not want to sound pretentious, but I understand the grief of your people. I remember the Sealing. I remember how my son died to human hands. And, I once announced the war to end all wars, to seek vengeance for the humiliation we endured. That is not the case anymore. I have renounced war, because I have opened my eyes to the truth.”

“And what truth would that be?”
“My enemies have families too.” He briefly smiled at the teenaged boys, acknowledging their presence.

“Should I wage war, there will be many more ‘Asgores’ losing their children to monster hands. And in turn, monster families would lose their loved ones to human retaliation. The cycle of violence thus continues unending. Is that the scenario you prefer, King of Gungnir?”

Aiden lifted the cup to his lips and took a sip.

But after that, he didn’t set the cup back down. Instead, his arm trembled. Ripples rocked on the still-hot liquid, threatening to spill over their ceramic container.

An electrical current coursed through Aiden’s body, inflicting what appeared to be a great pain as his breath bellowed with the dark foreboding of a thunderstorm. The more the human’s blood boiled, the stronger the currents coursed.

“…Sir Aiden?”

Asgore’s fur began to stand, fluffing up his entire being. A mix of snaps and cracks buzzed in the air of the kitchen while wrath unquenched threatened to let loose.

Such irony that this man despises monsters, because he was not very far from one himself.

Then, the call of his sons snapped the father out of the rage. Aiden seized his arm in an attempt to subdue this power.

In the end, he smashed the teacup on the table. It triggered a small bolt of lightning that shot straight towards the ceiling, leaving behind a blackened patch.

Asgore’s fur flattened as the remaining static faded. What a close call. But the relief turned into a different sense of alarm when he noticed what happened to his guest.

The human just had hot tea splashed on him. To make matters worse, small bits of broken ceramic had lodged themselves into his skin.

“Sir!” Asgore exclaimed, “Your hand--”

The King’s concern was met with bitter seething. “Stay away, monster.”

Still bleeding over the table, Aiden declared: “I need no pity from such a weak creature.”

“But…”

“Your proclamations of peace come from safety and comfort. True imprisonment is not being left alone under a mountain with your ways intact: it’s having to watch your people get torn apart for who they are!”

“I’ve cremated the corpses of broken girls and maimed boys. I’ve cut down orphans hung on trees. I’ve freed slaves who later died of disease. The survivors live either in poverty or fear, even to this day.”

“Your declaration of pacifism spits on the dignities of the living and the dead!”

Sorrow filled King Asgore’s heart. The human world truly was as cruel as his father warned.

“…King of Gungnir,” said Asgore. “I apologize if I have crossed the line. However, my point still
stands: I do not want those horrors to repeat on anyone. Therefore, I’m determined to not become that instigator.”

“Enough. It’s clear to me that you’re ignorant. This ‘peaceful world’ of yours is nothing but a ruse. Congratulations, King of Monsters, you’ve made another enemy.”

Aiden got up from his seat. “Sons, it’s time to leave.”

Enemy.
The worst possible outcome.

Despite all his efforts, King Asgore had failed. He failed his child, his family, and his people.

He reached out, wanting to call for the human's return. Their talk cannot end on such a negative note. Otherwise, all hopes for a proper resolution may vanish forever.

Yet, he couldn't think of a plea that wouldn’t sound trite. Even if he got his attention, what then? This man was of the Aratet, the true heirs of the Gungnir way. Asgore had nothing to keep the other party interested.

The moment that man leaves The Lab, he will give the order to eliminate Monster and Magi for good. It will be a decimation his kind have not endured for a millennium.

The slim chances faded right before the king's very eyes. What should he do?

What CAN he do?

Asgore reached for the shortened haft of his unformed weapon, ready to extend it to its full size as a trident. He pondered in great fear for what he might have to do with it.

Should he throw a warning shot against the wall?
Should he stab the human threat before it passes the point of no return?
Should he hold the sons hostage and use them as a bargaining chip?

Ugly, ugly thoughts flashed through Asgore’s mind. It sickened him to even consider them.

Asgore thus chose not to draw out his weapon. Rather, he summoned a wall of fire at the exit.

Dayton shielded his brother Niton with his body. Aiden merely lifted his hand to his eyes to shield them from the light.

Aiden grunted. “You intend to incinerate us?”

“No,” thus said the King of Monsters. “I just intend to make you stay and listen.”

*How ironic. Maybe my wife rubbed on me more than I’d like to admit.*

The human lifted his chin, defiant. “Will you then admit your hypocrisy? Here you are, initiating violence in the name of protecting your people. When you’re at a gunpoint, battle is inevitable.”

“…Why yes indeed.” Asgore kept his head straight while mustering a gentle smile. “I think I see now. We are quite similar.”

“It must be difficult knowing that your people wither away constantly under the mountain of political and societal pressure. You’re barred from seeing the sunlight of freedom. Always watched. Always suspected. Forced to hide in the shadows.”
“You longed. You groan. You blamed. You wished. Sacrificed others in the name of many. We used to live that way too, King of Gungnir.”

“Will I ever understand your horrors? Perhaps not. But I understand the suffocation of oppression. Such was my life for the past thousand years.”

“I am here to offer an alternative path for your people. My goodwill remains: the less bloodshed, the better. My children -- both living and deceased -- had shown me that a less violent path is more than a dream.”

King Asgore showed his hand to the table. “I apologize for starting on the wrong foot. But, will you not let us help you break your own ‘Barrier’?”

The goat monster did not know if he did the right thing or said the right words. The hearts of humans were as unpredictable as the violent oceans.

Silence continued to hang in the air until at long last, there were footsteps. Aiden and his sons headed, not out of the dining area, but towards the sink.

Turning on the faucet, Aiden replied: “King of Monsters, I suppose you’re not all bark. Our talk shall resume once my wounds are tended to.”

A huge wave of relief washed through King Asgore.

The worst was over… for now.

While Dayton applied first aid, Asgore took on the task of cleaning up the mess made on the table. Can’t have shards of ceramic linger around, royal or not.

Well, I suppose I’ll have to get ready for round two.

“Would you like to have another cup?”
Observation

You have no idea what happened. Somehow, you ended up at the definitely-ultra-tense negotiation table.

The first order of business was helping Dad serve the cups of tea, starting with the guests of honour: Aiden and his sons. The boys sat close to each other as a pair, right next to their father.

Then you served the other senior: Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme. He’s by his lonesome, with a huge empty gap between him and the nearest Gungnir boy. What a sad stretch of nothing.

Last, the hosts. One for Cenna, one for yourself, and one for Dad.

Wait, Cenna?! Why is she sitting on Dad’s side of the table? She should be next to the Tsunderjudge as his bodyguard! Also, the Wanderstars are sorta the Berendin extended family by now.

Cenna responded with a big confused shrug.

Mezil Thyme explained: “I heard Queen Toriel had already assimilated Miss Caraway into her brood. Besides, I believe that you siblings should never be separated again. Please embrace your new title, ‘Princess’ Cenna.”

“Oi Mez,” Your sister protested with a hushed voice. “You can’t shove me off to the Dreemurrs at the last minute!”

Aww Cenna, don’t wanna be real royalty?

“It’s not that,” she sighed. “I mean, the dude’s like raised me for the past ten years! Then again, he’s probably trying to save me from his burning dumpster heap of a reputation.”

…True. You’ve heard some hot controversy.

The Aratet brothers whispered something between themselves, trying to not chuckle. They stopped the moment their father scolded them. You don’t understand a word, but you’re dang sure he said something about their manners. It’s a universal parent-child thing.

Uh oh. Today’s tea isn’t the usual Goldenflower brew. Red teas have… an annoying side effect. And, you didn’t go to the loo before the meeting started.

You asked Dad why you’re summoned here. Isn’t this a grown-up’s table?

Dad explained: “In Aratet tradition, it’s an heir’s duty to prepare for the future. This includes an observing role in important negotiations.”

“Frisk,” he said, “Though I know you’re sharp and inquisitive, may I ask for your silence? The adults will be the primary debaters here. It’s proper etiquette for the young to remain quiet unless requested.”

But what if you need to go to the toilet?

“Just let us know and you may leave at anytime. The same offer extends to any other human in this room. The call of nature can not be ignored.”

That was a HUGE relief. Thanks Dad.
Hmm. Four adults, plus you, and the two teenagers… That’s seven people total. An uncanny coincidence, considering the whole Seven Soul Barrier deal.

“Alright. Shall we get straight to the matter, then?” Dad took a sip. “Sir Aiden, do you know anything about the impending calamity?”

“Yes. I know about the creature beneath the ocean. But I don’t trust the Magus Association to handle the problem.”

“Why so, if I may ask?”

“Because they’ve yet to vanquish the monstrosity. Despite supposed ‘noble’ goals and all the resources the world has to offer, no progress has been made after several attempts. It’s clear to me that ‘The Living Victory’ lacks the strength to take it down.”

You’re hit with a twinge of guilt. Even if Mezil had won, you would have undone everything with your personal Undertale angst. You kept that fact to yourself, though. No need to give Aiden any more ammunition.

Mezil replied: “I admit to having failed to quell the threat. Infuriating, but true. However, what makes you think ‘you’ stand a chance instead?”

“Because I have something you don’t.” Aiden placed his fist over his own heart. “Loyalty.”

He continued, “My people will follow me to the ends of the earth. Unlike yours, Vampire. Your actions have caused many to turn away from your cause. They cooperate only to plot from the shadows, seeking any opportunity to sink you under the waters.”

Tsunderjudge, the Lord of Unimpressed, replied with a big huff. “Your recognition extends only to the Aratet Branch. Local Gungnir didn’t even know you existed until recently. Besides, the majority of those members don’t even fit your needs. They’re physically untrained urbanites: mere adult children tangled in their own pettiness.”

“That matter is to be resolved in the near future.” Aiden retorted. “I will not disclose what we’ve amassed, but I can say this: we can win with just a fraction of your setup.”

“Rich talk. That doesn’t tell me anything. How exactly are you going to defeat an invincible world-ending calamity? With pointy sticks and peashooters? Another lame terrorist bonfire?”

“No.”

Aiden touched the surface of the table using his uninjured hand.

“With this!”

Bright, yellow light then flashed under his palm. Lifting his hand, the glowing symbol of a lightning bolt had seared its existence into the wood.

Your eyes grew wide. By now you’d recognize this power anywhere.

It is none other than a Mark.

But, it didn’t last long. The image rippled twice before dissipating, leaving behind a smoking charred imprint.

Looking at the tsun, you notice how pale he had become. You don’t blame him one bit.
You remembered what Persona once said:

“Alas, he was not born a Chosen. Yet, I was far from disappointed; his colours are rarer than any mere Red. In my personal opinion, the marriage plan was a great success. Why? Nothing important.”

‘NOTHING IMPORTANT’ YOUR DAMN FOOT! THIS IS DEFINITELY SUPER IMPORTANT!!!!

That. Mark. It’s Persona’s own Mark. Heck, it’s Genocider’s Mark! That’s the Magi’s timeless nemesis! For Persona’s Aratet son to inherit this rare symbol… it’s the legend reborn!

No wonder he has Gungnir’s full devotion.

“A Split Aspect…” said Mezil.

Dad asked, “Pardon? May I know what it means?”

The tsun took a moment to recollect himself. “King Asgore… it means that Aiden’s Psychia has a near even distribution of colours. He is a Yellow Major with a Double Red Minor of equivalent proficiency. This enables him to conjure a ‘False Mark’: a type of hybrid Aspect magic.”

“How are you so certain?”

“The Magus Association once had a student with similar powers, but of a different colour. She was a Purple Major with a Double Red Minor. Her Mark was a pen. Anything she wrote or drew in her notebook persisted beyond time-travel.”

You… sensed a disturbance coming from Dad. Dad?

Muttering, he whispered: “A Purple Mark…? Can… can it be…?”

Dad? Is Dad okay? He’s looking rather shaken.

He shook himself out of the funk. “I- I am fine. It is a matter for a different time.”

Dad patted you on the shoulder. But, you’re worried about the squeeze at the end. It’s too tight.

You wondered if… it had anything to do with The Six.

“Sir Aiden,” said Dad, recollected. “I assume that it’s more than a symbolic crown. How exactly can your power defeat the Abomination?”

“Unfortunately, it cannot yet. Since I’m not born a Chosen, I must first receive the final blessings of the gods: the Keys of Fate. Without it, I cannot ascend into a god of lightning and smite that monstrosity.”

Mezil planted his face into his hands. Cenna also had a ‘WHAT?!’ written all over her face. You’re just as dumbfounded, to be honest.

“Gungnir’s ignorance knows no bounds,” so the old Magus said. “Some things never change.”

Aiden started to fume, his patience growing thin. “The ignorant one is you, Vampire. You think you’re invincible.”

Dad cleared his throat. “Excuse me gentlemen. You seem to be withholding vital information from
“Indeed. Everyone will cease to be. The Gungnir’s suggestion appears to require the powers of a Living Victory. Except, the Abomination’s very nature prohibits such. It’s a sudden death scenario. Immediate doom.”

“Thank you, Judge Thyme.” Turning towards Aiden, Dad asked, “Sir Aiden, does your plan take those factors into account?”

Aiden nodded. “Of course. The power of the gods is not a plaything. Too bad it's currently in the hands of heretical Magi who treat it devoid of reverence. That’s why we're in this situation to begin with. The method I propose, however, should prevent the Abomination from accessing its willpower. Unable to strike back, the heart of the beast becomes vulnerable and I can destroy it from within.”

A method to stop the Abomination in its tracks…?

It appears that Dad shared the same wavelength as you. “You mean draining it of Determination? Is your Mark capable of such a feat?”

“I’m no vampire, King of Monsters.” Aiden shot a mistrustful glance at Mezil. “I have more direct, honourable ways.”

Mezil Thyme slapped the idea down without mercy.

“There’s nothing honourable about a Curse of Death!” he yelled.

Irate, Aiden responded: “You impose a universal ban on the divine, damming any mortal who crosses the boundary. Such senseless fear-mongering.”

Mezil countered. “How can we even be sure that you’ve attained the mastery you’ve professed? Do you know how to use your father’s Mark? Experience makes a huge difference. Anything less than a perfect execution is tantamount to torture.”

You tell Dad that you’re lost.

“So am I, Frisk,” Dad replied.

Cenna came to your rescue as the resident Vanquisher. She explained: “They’re talking about High Volition Marks. The Magus Association decrees that any Red caught using one will be judged as a Fallen. But the Gungnir consider it as proof that of their leader’s divinity.”

Oh, right. Those. You tell Dad this ‘HVM’ is baaaad news. It’s like an always-fatal curse. With nasty side-effects.

“More brainwashing,” grumbled the Gungnir boss. “Life and death are two sides of the same coin. If
suffering is a certain outcome of divinity’s touch, how can the Persona tradition exist at all?”

Mezil’s patience started to wear thin. “Your roots are showing, Aratet, and it’s giving me a headache. You don’t even know what you truly believe.”

This discourse spiralled further and further into ‘massive nope’ territory. The Tsundere was acting extra snappy too. What’s with all that snide snark? What happened to his sense of ‘Patience’? Is he really that fed up?

“Gentlemen,” so said the mighty King Asgore. “I think we’re starting to lose focus. The world may end tomorrow. Our common goal is to defeat the Ocean Abomination. We need mutual cooperation, not argue about personal philosophy.”

You’d think an impending calamity will bring people together. Not quite, it seems. Both sides believe they’ll succeed, and therefore have their minds set to the future. Politics in a nutshell there: trying to future-proof one’s own butt at the expense of the greater good.

Dad then asked, “Perhaps you could answer some of my questions? Like for example… Judge Thyme, is it possible to loan the Keys of Fate to someone? You don’t need to agree to the idea. I just cannot help but wonder.”

Judge Thyme took a deep breath and contemplated. His intense thought process made you sit on the edge of your seat.


At last, he answered: “Not directly. If I just lower my levels, the next strongest will become the new bearer, and it won’t be Aiden. As for the other possible method… the Gungnir will never accept it.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s a proposal of utmost heresy to their religion.”

Aiden grimaced at the mere mention. “At least you know that much, Vampire. I refuse to become yet another trophy in your collection.”

Turning to Dad, the Gungnir Boss said: “King of Monsters. If you want to keep your word, then please consider this suggestion. I want the Royal Child to depart from the Vampire’s fold and be the one to lend us the Keys of Fate. If they are able to stand against the Vampire on their own volition, taking back the Keys should be an easy task.”

That meant breaking Mezil’s Claim of Conquest on your SOUL, right? It also meant breaking his trust in you. Your Trial of the Crimson Hall would be for naught.

Or, maybe not? You could ask the Tsunderjudge nicely. He can always put it back later. Maybe your involvement is the key to settle this deadlock.

What would happen if Aiden takes the lead?

But Mezil Thyme glared at you. “Frisk, do not even consider it. I am your mentor now. And, I will not let you be conned by this cultist’s suggestion. I refuse to return the status quo to the days of Genocider. That will deal an immense blow to the Magus Association, and by extension all of Magickind.”

“Think about it this way: will he even let you take it back at all? If he could vanquish the
Abomination, he could do the same to you.”

You asked if that still applies to the moments where you’re at the peak of your power.

Mezil replied, “Yes. Despite everything, you’re still human. You’re not invincible. None of us are.”

“I see.” King Asgore shook his head. “In that case, I am afraid it is also too soon for me to agree. My child’s safety is not guaranteed.”

“But—”

Mezil Thyme cut Aiden of Aratet short. “Leave them alone. They have no power to decide. Again, I demand: become my Crimson Keeper.”

As you had predicted, the Gungnir boss flat out declined. “Over my cold, dead body.”

“Even if it means that you’ll abandon your father?”

“What are you talking about? You finished him off with a Vanquisher by your side! Every report I received confirmed that my father’s spirit has left this world.”

“Those reports are wrong.”

Then, the Tsunderjudge stood up. Oh no. He’s extra ultra serious.

“Perhaps this will change your mind, Aiden of Aratet.”

There he goes. Mezil exposed his abdomen, revealing Persona’s cursed Hex.

In that instant, Aiden and his sons gasped: filled with a fearful reverence at that crimson symbol.

That fear soon turned into indignance. “You are indeed a vampire.” Aiden seethed. “Draining souls to imprison a god! So THIS is why you insist on converting that Abomination into a cursed stone!”

Mezil scoffed at the idea. “Hogwash! I will never use a Philosopher’s Stone. My goal is to destroy the Ocean Abomination, ending the threat to our world!”

The elder son, Dayton, couldn’t contain his anger anymore. He drew out blade, threatening Mezil at knife point.

“Liar!” He yelled. “Give Grandfather back!!!”

Cenna stood up and ejected her bird-like SOUL. It perched on her lower arm, falconer style: ready to swoop at Dayton in a moment’s notice.

Welp. This is why the kids had to keep quiet. Lack of experience and a low Wisdom check translates into rash actions. Just one wrong move was enough to create a standoff between Gungnir and Magi.

“Dayton!!” The father commanded. “Stand down. Walk backwards, slowly.”

“But…” the boy responded: his words, shaky.

“Do as I say!”

And that’s what he did. Dayton retreated, putting his hooked knife back into its sheath. The adults kept their own weapons at bay.
Okay! You gotta go! Reeeeeeally gotta go! Like NOW!!! Your heart and your bladder can't keep up with these high stakes anymore.

“Oh dear! Hurry on, Frisk.”

You ran all the way to the toilet. Was there anyone standing around? Sans? Maybe Grillby? Don’t know, don’t care. Onward to the ceramic throne!

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah.

That was a big relief. Note to self: always prepare for long conversations. And limit consumption of caffeine.

Exiting the toilet at last, you noticed that a pretty long queue had amassed in your wake. It’s all the other humans: Mezil and Aiden included.

The younger boy, Niton, was up next. He said something that sounded like ‘Eks-koos mi.’ Your brain needed a second to translate it to the proper English phrase ‘excuse me’. Now that’s what you call a heavy accent. Almost unintelligible.

You stepped aside and let him enter. He also went in quite a hurry. Must have been holding it in.

Tsunderjudge doesn’t look too good. Is he okay? Did his gut protest again?

“I’ll live,” he replied.

Please do.

…You probably shouldn’t linger. Better leave before things get any more awkward.

On the way back, you heard a soft ‘psst’ from under the couch.

“Hey, Frisk. Come closer and sit on the sofa. Act normal.”

“Yeah, but don’t make a sound. You’ll only get us into trouble if you do.”

It’s Flowey and Chara. You wonder what they’re up to. Oh well, only one way to find out. You did as they said.

Flowey began: “Question time. Did you tell those lightning-heads that you became this ‘Persona’ before? Tap one for yes, tap two for no.”

You tapped the cushion twice.

“Why not!!” he exclaimed. “That’s your trump card! Even I can see this! Oh wait, nevermind. You can’t answer back.”

Chara then asked, “Are you afraid that they’re gonna flip out because of me?”

You tapped once.

They groaned. “Well figures, I was the kid who almost set off the apocalypse after all. But… here’s the funny thing. The guy haunting Mezil recognized me as his equal. A worthy god in his eyes. Somehow.”

You tapped your finger frantically, trying tell them that you don’t understand.
Flowey explained: “See, the lightning-heads were supposed to wreak havoc at Mettaton’s Spring Concert.”

“Ahuh,” Chara added. “But I told Mister ‘Last’ Persona this: if he puts you -- my very own Persona -- in any danger, I will disown him! And you know what? He bowed to my demands!”

“Crazy, right?”
“I still can’t believe that happened, Azzie.”

“Point being,” Flowey said, “If at any point those two stupid adults insist on being utter morons, call Chara. As for me? I better remain hidden. Revealing that a monster became one of their precious Goldenflowers is just gonna open a nasty can of worms.”

“Tap once for Red Kid approval.”
…You tapped twice.

Flowey responded first. “Huh?!? No??? What in the blazes are you thinking? Oh whatever, you still can’t reply. I really hate yes-or-no sessions.”

“Are you sure?” Chara asked back, somewhat skeptical. Maybe even disappointed.
You tapped once. Yes. You’re sure.
They sighed. “Alright. Have it your way then. Good luck. You better explain to us later.”
You hopped to your feet and rushed back to the kitchen, hoping to find Dad by his lonesome. There’s something you need to ask him first.
He’s staring at his cup with great solemnness. Many things seemed to weigh on his mind.

“Oh, howdy… You are back--”
You asked Dad if twenty-four hours would be enough.

“And me?”
Would twenty-four hours be enough to turn the tables?

“Well. I… I think any amount of time would be helpful.”
Then, let you do your Ambassadorial thing. You have an idea, but it requires Dad’s explicit permission.

Though puzzled at first, he eventually nodded with understanding. “Yes Frisk. You may do what you must. I will support you.”

Thanks Dad.

Uhm… Could he clear out some space in the meantime? You need to borrow something from the kitchen.

As you rummaged the drawers, you can’t help but groan. Ugh. Undyne and Alphys seriously need to take better care of their tools. Knives should either have sleeves, or be stored on the knife rack!

Let’s see…
Dining knife? Bzzt. Not the right weight distribution.
Cleaver? No. Way too heavy.
Bread knife? Nah. Too long.

Steak knife? That’ll do.

You gave yourself a quick stretch. Can’t have your muscles cramp up at the worst possible time.

Satisfied with your impromptu warm up session, you equipped ‘S. KNIFE’.

Dad has finished using his superior strength to stack the furniture into a corner. Nice. The stage is set for your next plan.

Now… to wait.

The humans returned from their toilet break. You nodded at Dad as a signal that you’re ready.

After clearing his throat, he announced: “Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. The Royal Child wishes to perform for our guests. I believe it will interest all parties at the table.”

He then smiled at you for fatherly motivation. Heh. Cenna couldn’t stop grinning either. Of course she knew what you’re gonna do.

You took in one final deep breath to get into the mood.

Three. Two. One.

You brandished the kitchen knife. You spun it between your fingers, finishing up with a swift slash.

The glint of steel flashed a pattern in the air, dancing to the rhythm of your feet. Your body became one with the blade. Deadly style points, off the charts.

You paused at the end of the first stanza to observe the Gungnir’s reactions. Aiden didn’t show much, though the boys were shocked by your abilities.

“Where did you learn that?” asked Aiden, “It’s not something the warlocks can teach you.”

You tell Aiden that if he wants to know more, he must uphold his end of the bargain: attend the Aratet Welcoming Feast in peace. He will learn everything he wants there. Perhaps he could even meet his father’s spirit. And taste a ton of good food.

The Gungnir Boss contemplated hard. You’re not sure what stressed you out more: freezing in mid-pose, or the uncertainty of men.

“I will return on Monday, ‘Royal Child’. Where does the Oracle intend to host the feast?”

At our local school. It’s the only place in Ebott Town with a kitchen big enough to cook for a large group.

For reasons unknown to you, Niton’s face lit up in the mention of ‘school’.

Interesting. Maybe this tidbit could help ease the tension. Here’s hoping that you’re right on the money.
Morning Lull

Chapter Notes

I'm late but Hollow Knight is an amazing game, 10/10 will recommend even after I become an old prune. Can't wait for Silksong!

As a result, the GQ discord chat had become a HK chat too. A very welcome turn of events. With my longer updates, things can get a bit quiet. Chatting a variety of stuff is always nice.

As for the chapter itself... one of the reasons why it took so long was the number of discarded and reworked bits. The final draft looked quite different compared to my first. Happens quite often in the creative process. The second reason was due to some nasty, nasty health hiccups. Really hate those.

Enjoy! Hopefully the next update won't take too long.

It’s another Monday. And, for the first time in ages… you attended class.

Delighted, your classmates crowded around you during homeroom. They have lots to tales share.

“First, a weird fog flooded the town. We tried to evacuate.”
“But none of us could get out! It’s like, we were trapped in a giant glass bubble, yo.”
“Then a HUUUUUGE gate in the sky opened up!”
“Doctor Alphys gathered everyone to some weird star diagram.”
“A goopy monster summoned many GIANT hands!”
“Yeah, and we pooled ALL of our magic together to save the town from that bad man!”
“Heave! Ho! Heave! Ho!”

Wow. That sounds super duper awesome. You wished that you could have joined them in their effort.

Monster Kid, whose real name is also Kid, then asked: “Yo Frisk, where were you that time?”

Believe it or not, Kid, you were on the other side of the gate. Long, crazy story. Had to foil that hooded criminal’s plans and stuff.

“Wow. Like. We saved you???”

Yup yup. Big time. You gave everyone with limbs a high five, and pats for those who don’t have any.

Snowdrake a.k.a Snowy wondered: “Was that really Dunkle Sans? Or a lookalike?”

Huh? A Sans lookalike? Why did Snowy think so?

“Oh, I heard the red bird screaming to the big bad in the sky. Something along the lines of…” He cleared his throat for his dramatic reenactment. “Where is the real Sans? What have you done to him???”
“Hey, that’s pretty good.”
“Those drama classes are finally paying off, huh?”

While your other classmates congratulated Snowdrake on his acting prowess, you’re filled with deep concern. On one hand, they all saw Sans. On the other hand, they don’t believe it’s him in the bones.

Team Magus warned you to not disclose the true extent of his involvement. You understand why. Sans was not just ‘one can of worms’: he’s an entire worm farm!

You told your classmates that the true identity of the ‘big bad’ was top secret. Rest assured, he has been dealt with and will never again cause anyone trouble.

Your classmates stared in wonder for a few seconds. Then, they all breathed a huge sigh of relief.

“Cooooool!”
“So it wasn’t Sans after all.”
“Skeletons are so hard to distinguish, seriously.”
“It would have been silly if the number one lazy slob in town grew epic wings.”
“Pfft. Sounds like a dumb movie.”

Phew. Crisis averted.

In your mind, you tell yourself that you’ll accept the headcanons. Yes. Let the people make their own cover story.

…Better direct them away from any more Sans talk.

You asked your classmates about your missed lessons. How far behind were you?

There was an instant change in the atmosphere. The kids started looking at each other, their eyes filled with awkwardness.

The inn bunny boy finally broke the silence: “I think you might have to say goodbye to summer holidays.”

Oh. Crap.

Summer holidays?
The biggest chunk of free time in your life?
Lost to schoolwork like the dreaded MATH?

Pressure mounted on your shoulders. Your chest cringed at the loss of anime binge nights.

You clutched your head and let out a big ‘Noooooooooooooo!’

Kid place his notebook on your table with his mouth. “But you can borrow my notes!” he said.

“And mine!”
“And mine too!”

Awww, thanks a ton!

“No probs. We’re just doing our part in helping you out. You protect us as our Ambassador, and in return we’ll protect your homework.”

Around that moment, Mom entered the room. “Good morning, children.”
“Good morning, Miss Toriel!” Everyone greeted back.

Smiling, she said. “Please return to your seats, my dears. I have an important announcement to make.”

Everyone shuffled back to their desks. It’s great to see Mom smiling again, considering how she broke down into tears over the smashed window. It was the last straw after a long, stressful day. At least the new window should arrive tomorrow.

Mom stood before the class. “We’re going to have a very important guest visiting our school this evening. He and his sons will have a private tour of the whole building. So, before the day ends we will dedicate some time to clean the classroom.”

“Are they humans?” a classmate asked.

“Yes, they are dear. Not just any local human either. They come from a land far away.”

Some of the kids started to get excited.

“From far, far away?”
“How far is this far?”
“Ooooh. Will we get to see them?”
“Are they friendly??”
“Would like some friendlies after that big mess.”

“Well…” Mom glanced to the side. “They won’t meet you, I’m afraid. It’s after class hours, and the Royal Guard wants every child back home safe and sound.”

Then the class groaned in disappointment. Though some were relieved. Not everyone liked meeting new folks.

Kid bobbed up and down from his seat. “Miss Toriel, what if we make them some cool art?”

“An arts and crafts display? What an excellent idea! We shall do that for our guests.”

* * *

The local celebrity named Mettaton had suggested to Papyrus that he should keep a journal. That way, he won’t forget anything important.

“DEAR JOURNAL,” Papyrus read it out loud. “TODAY I AM OFFERED TO COOK A VERY IMPORTANT DELECTABLE FEAST! IT INVOLVES DEEP FRIED DUMPLINGS, AMONG OTHER THINGS. IT MAY NOT BE THE HEALTHIEST OF CHOICES, BUT THE GREAT PAPYRUS WON’T TURN DOWN A REQUEST SO SPECIFIC.”

“I WILL FOLLOW THE GUIDANCE OF UNCLE GASTER, WHO CLAIMS TO HAVE MY MOTHER AND FATHER, HELVETICA AND TIMES ROMAN, ASSIMILATED INTO HIS GOOPY BEING.”

Satisfied, he closed the journal for the time being.

Papyrus got up from his car shaped bed and pulled the curtains. What a bright, wonderful morning:
perfect to go hunting for groceries.

He was told that this was his room, filled with his favourite things. Papyrus sensed an endearing connection… but he couldn’t remember why it’s there.

The clatter of cutlery alerted him that breakfast would soon be ready. So, down the stairs he went to join the family table.

Sans Serif, the man who should be his elder brother, was setting the table with his cool telekinetic powers.

Noticing him, the short one greeted: “Hey, morning bro.”

“GOOD MORNING, MY APPARENT ELDER BROTHER.”

“Take a seat, Paps. Ol’ G should be done with the pancakes any moment now.”

The two sat down. Then… an awkward silence hung in the air for a while.

“UM,” said Papyrus. “HOW’S YOUR ARM? THE DANGLING ONE. I HEARD YOU HAD IT INJURED FROM A NASTY FIGHT.”

Sans touched the right side. “Being ‘dead weight’, as usual.”

The ‘punishment’ followed right upon that instant. Sans groaned as he reeled against the back of his chair.

“ARE YOU A MASOCHIST?” Papyrus exclaimed, irritated. “FIRST, YOUR PUN WAS TERRIBLE. SECOND, YOU KEEP TRIPPING YOURSELF WITH THAT AWFUL RED LIGHT!”

Sans chuckled. “Heh, maybe I am. Say, how much did Lil’ Miss Lucy update ya?”

“QUITE A PLENTY. I HAVE A ROUGH IDEA OF WHAT MY PAST LIFE IS LIKE, COMPLETE WITH FAMILIES, FRIENDS, AND MY NOW-FORMER JOB AT THE CAFETERIA.”

“Wait. Letting you off without notice is illegal.”

“NO… I…” Papyrus lowered his head and gripped his hands together. “I’M RESIGNING. WELL, I HAVEN’T DELIVERED THE LETTER YET. BUT I WILL TODAY.”

“I WANT TO WORK WITH THE FAIRY GODMOTHER AS HER ASSISTANT. I APPARENTLY MADE A PROMISE TO FRISK TO HELP THEM IN THEIR DIPLOMATIC JOB. STAYING IN THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA DOESN’T SEEM RIGHT ANYMORE.”

“Oh.” Sans looked relieved. “True. A direct connection with the Chronographer will help our kiddo in the long run. Did she mention anything about training you?”

“NO. WHAT ABOUT TRAINING ME?”

“Well… The Association offered you an apprenticeship. But that was before the big incident.”

“I SEE…”

Papyrus blinked his moistened eyes. “AM I GONNA BE CRIPPLED FOREVER?”
“Nope,” said Sans. “There’s still hope for you. Come over to Alphys’ Lab about noon. I’ve got a thing brewing that may give you your memories back. Well. Some of them at least.”

“REALLY?!?!?”

“Yup.”

Papyrus sparkled with delight. All his initial sorrows vanished like mist under sunlight.

“Oh, hey, the pancakes are coming. Let’s dig in.”

* * *

Undyne stood vigilant at the borders of Ebott Town. She’s not on duty this shift, but she didn’t care. She thought that maybe if she glared hard enough into the yonder, the baddies won’t dare to step foot into town.

At least, that’s what she wanted to believe. If they so desired, the enemy could snipe her down on the spot. It’s sobering to think that she’s at the mercy of political agreements.

“Yo Cap!”

Cenna walked on over, carrying a tote bag.

“Morning Cen,” Undyne grinned. “How are you healing up?”

The other replied, “Fine, thanks! It no longer hurts. You had breakfast yet? I brought sandwiches.”

“Yeah, I did. But my breakfast was so early, THE FREAKING SUN looked lazy! I’m up for a snack.” Undyne’s stomach then growled right on cue. She let her fellow guards know that she’s going to take an early lunch break.

The two ladies had a hearty sandwich. The filling consisted of slices of cured beef with cheese and ham, laced with honey mustard sauce. The only vegetables in there were sliced dill pickles.

It’s unusual for sure but Undyne ain’t complaining.

“Damn, this stuff is GOOD! A big kick of salt, vinegar, meat, and mustard. IN THE FACE! YEAH!!!”

“Right? Great wake up call for the day.” Cenna chuckled, passing a bottle of water. “Gotta stay hydrated though.”

Undyne forgot how thirsty she had become by standing on guard for hours. The plain, refreshing water really hit the spot. “Thanks a ton for the refuel.”

“No probs,” said Cenna. “Hey, mind if I hang out for a while?”

“Well, sure. Though things are gonna get real busy in the next hour or so. Morning market closing shop. Lotsa human vendors and such leaving town all at once.”

“That’s fine. It won’t be for too long. I gotta pick up Anise either way. Did ya know we went to the
Tem Shop this morning?”

“Oh my god. Your colleague? She’s like a human Temmie herself!”

Waving the phone before Undyne, Cenna grinned. “I have the recording right here.”

Undyne’s mouth curled into cat mode. “Show me. Don’t forget to send a copy to the chatroom.”

The Magus cackled in delight. “Aye, aye, Cap!”

They watched the video together. It’s Anise Anise, the Alchemist, in the Temmie’s natural habitat.

“hO! i’M tEM!!!”

“HOI I’M ANISE!!! Kyaaaaa oh my god they’re so cute! Are they cats? Dogs? Cat dogs? With hair? They look sooooooo fluffy!”

“can tem pet human?????”

“Pet? Me? Of course you can! Give me all your pets!!! I WILL PET YOU TOO!!!”

Masses of Temmies crowded around Anise to give her pets. Meanwhile, Anise scooped them up like puppies: complete with a constant excited squeal. In the midst of the cuddling, red puffy spots sprouted all over the monsters.

“W-w-w-what’s happening?”

“tem is allergic to hoomans! i hear hoomans are allergic to tem too!”

“You’re telling me that now?!?!?!??! I’m feeling itchy oh no oh no am I showing allergic reactions?? Oh wait it’s just psychological-- DID I SEE A SPOT???”

“it! hOIVES!!! It’s ok tem is allergic to tem too.”

“KYAAAAAAAAA!!! Cenny, help meeeeeeee!!!”

“Ya’l! ain’t touching me! I ain’t getting no ‘hoives’ now, ya hear???”

“Ceeeennmnyyyyyyyy!”

Recording, end. “And we took her to the mobile clinic for a shot. I’m just waiting out here for the meds to take effect.”

Undyne burst into a guffaw. “Your Anise friend is HILARIOUS! I thought girls like her only exist in anime. Is she always like this?”

“Yup. I guess it’s one of the reasons why Lady Lucy hasn’t dismissed her yet. Smart, cute, and funny. Livens up the place.”

“Hmmm… I think you got a point. That Lady cares about Papyrus too, and he’s a real sunshine.”

Thinking back, Undyne always saw this Lucidia as a rather gloomy person. It’s not like Alphys’ ‘glitter-coated trashcan’ imagery. That’s but a poor attempt of covering stinky issues with a peppy front.

Lucidia was more akin to a crystal sculpture in an empty vault. Lacking in forced pretense, yet still
isolated. It’s too easy to romanticize the untouchable gleam.

Undyne didn’t feel like gossiping at the moment, though. Better talk about the REAL news!

“Hey,” she poked the human with her elbow. “I heard you’re gonna attend tonight's big feast as ‘Princess Cenna’. To think we used to be enemies, and believed you’re Frisk’s Magus Aunt!”

How the human got flustered. “Oh man, don’t tell me the title is official…”

“If the King says he’s gonna adopt you, that’s official enough for me! Welcome to the Dreemurr family.”

“Aw shucks that’s sweet of ya’ll.” She looked in the general direction of The Spire, nostalgic. “Guess I had it easy. Real adoptions have a ton of red tape. Ol’ Mez must have used his clout to get me a home.”

“Speaking of which,” said Cenna. “Mind sharing more about your past? It’s pretty obvious that you and the King have a strong father-daughter relationship.”

Undyne replied, “As long you share more of yours too.”

That’s what they did. The two tough ladies exchanged the bobs and bits of their yesteryears. Fun stories. Cute moments. Silly tales…

But as the sun grew higher and hotter, the conversation turned to more serious matters. Like the Royal Guard. Gun laws. Protocol. Vanquishers and the police force.

Then Undyne asked…

“Can’t you just stay alive?”

Undyne wasn’t sure how she ended up with that question. To some extent, she regretted it immediately… but words spoken could never be taken back.

Cenna stared back with a sense of betrayed shock. At least, that’s how Undyne understood her expression.

“I-I mean, there has to be some old geezer out there with lots of experience! They would have lived their full life, right? Why not choose them for the Merger? You have lots to catch up with Frisk!”

“Y’know, Cap,” said the Vanquisher. “I had thought of that too. But, erm. Last thing I want is for Frisky to resent me.”

That was not the reply the Captain expected. Taken aback, she exclaimed: “Why would they?!? Getting to spend more time with their long-lost sister has gotta be the BEST outcome, no matter what! Right?”

Cenna frowned. “Well. Yeah. I get what you mean. But I had visited enough hospitals to know that caring for an invalid ain’t all hunky dory.”

“Cap.” She looked away, trying to hide her tears. “According to Lucy, I survived past spring before. And, uh, I would be in a wheelchair by Summer. I don’t think I’d live past the year.”

Undyne should have known better. Perhaps let the issue slide. Or acknowledge it with a sad “oh” and move on. Yet…
“What if you piggyback in Asgore’s body?” exclaimed Undyne. “Continue living as a SOUL?” One second later, she wished that she could suplex herself. Hard. Of all the things she could say… it had to be the worst.

The air became uncomfortable. Awkward.

At long last, Cenna answered. “Y’know. I’ll think about that. Thanks.” And then the Vanquisher scooted off into the yonder.

The words indicated hope, but her body language said anything but. It’s possible that Cenna had already considered the option a long time ago.

Undyne used the bottle to splash some fresh cold water on her face. It’s the sensation of regret over rash words.

Off in the distance, an increased density of vans and trucks began their daily commute toward the border.

“Argh dammit. I gotta focus. The post-market crowd is coming…”

* * *

If Sans had two functional hands, he would have snapped together the final components thirty minutes ago.

Those thirty minutes had become a full hour, and he still struggled to get it right.

The theory was sound: use his False Blue to make the parts stand vertical, tune the alignment with his functioning left hand, and then let gravity help push the slots into the right place.

Except… he’s no Lady Lucy. Without the guidance of his right hand, his False Blue came out far too ‘floaty’. It’s like working without friction. Things kept bobbing up and down and sliding out of place, hampering progress on the Seraph System.

Right now, functionality was incomplete. It can load but one additional colour, and only had a basic DT battery. Not to mention that he hadn’t even started on the casing. It’s just the bare-bones skeletal components.

“Steady. Steady.” he muttered to himself.

After the umpteenth try, he finally heard a satisfying ‘click’. The Seraph System’s interiors are at last one and whole.

He laid everything back down on his workspace. There’s a long way to go, but Sans was content with his current progress.

“That’ll do. Alright. Time to take a break.”

After covering the machine with a piece of loose cloth, he headed out towards the kitchen for a drink. Too bad he’s banned from ketchup with the threat of death. Would be nice to have some.

He took a mug from the drawers and filled it halfway with water. He then walked towards the table
to observe the damages from yesterday, sitting down next to the charred lightning print.

Touching the pattern, he muttered: “Lightning, electricity… not immune to backfire. Persona didn’t have that problem. Curious.”

“Hmmm… Frisk, the star. Cosmic power, light, hope. Dreams personified.”

“Mezil, the butterfly. Chaos, life, death and rebirth. Vampire of Time.”

“Mine, the seraph. Divine messenger. ‘Holy, holy, holy, LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory’.”

“Then what of Aiden, the lightning bolt? Gungnir, Odin’s spear. Symbol of power? No. Symbol of control.”

At the end of his musings, the mug’s contents were finished clean. It’s already almost noon. The market should have closed. Once Papyrus delivers the ingredients to the school, he would be on his way back to the lab.

“I wonder what’s up with the others.”

So Sans teleported straight into the heart of the True Lab.

Lady Lucy was nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile, the Royal Scientists had their heads down in distressed fatigue.

Judging from the spread out pile of papers, they were trying to consolidate their research about Determination. Results, forever pending.

Lifting a brow, Sans commented, “Looks like you two are having a bad time.”

Alphys lifted her finger at Sans. “Do not.”

Sans being Sans, played it cool. “Hey, hey, don’t be so prickly. I’ve been holed up in my workshop the whole morning. Cut off from the rest of the world. An update would be nice.”

Gaster sprung up from his seat. From the looks of things, he’s going to explode into a giant rant.

“CURSE THOSE LIGHTNING MEATHEEEAAAADDSSSS!!!” the doctor yelled. “We are behind schedule for an ENTIRE WEEK! That’s one third of our precious, precious time! GONE! Yet we’re faffing around hosting a feast instead of preventing a calamity. I daresay we should be building WAR MACHINES!!!”

The doctor’s extreme outburst raised an internal red flag. Sans never liked those. “Ok doc, calm down. Breathe. Take a soothe drop before you rip your throat in half.”

There was no smart retort coming from the goopy doctor. He instead slunk back into a puddle of despair.

“I-I’m trying hard to not cry, Sans.” Alphys added. “Please take your japes elsewhere.”

“Ooookay. I’ll move along then.”

Stability wouldn’t be found in this room. So, he teleported to the lobby. Papyrus had yet to arrive.

It’s a prime opportunity for a quick nap. He thus laid down on the nearest sofa and napped away. No
matter the outcome of the feast, he’ll need all the rest he could get for the next round of the midnight oil.

A troubled dream plagued his sleep. Beads of sweat rolled down his bald head, stirring in incoherent mumbling.

Attempts to wake up failed. The mind wanted to flee, yet the bones were unwilling to stir from their stupor.

Until…

“SANS!”

The booming voice of his younger brother jolted him out of the mental hellscape. It’s fortunate that he didn’t misfire a bone or a teleport.

Sans wheezed a few times from the shock. After he settled, he said, “Uh, hi.”

Papyrus asked with a worried frown: “ARE YOU ALRIGHT? YOU COULDN’T STOP TURNING IN YOUR SLEEP.”

“Oh.” Wiping his forehead, Sans realised he was drenched with sweat too. “I had a weird dream. A nightmare. Couldn’t wake up… until you rolled in. Thanks for saving my pelvis, heh.”

“WITH GREAT PLEASURE, MY APPARENT ELDER BROTHER!” Papyrus shone with genuine joy.

There was a great comfort knowing that despite the amnesia, Papyrus’ core personality hadn’t changed a single bit.

“Come, follow me to my workshop. Let’s put the memory fixing tech to the test.”

“OH BOY, I’M EXCITED!”

Sans let Papyrus nerd out in the science workshop for a while. His little brother always liked the cool and the complex, despite lacking the right mind to grasp their innerworkings.

The book on advanced puzzle construction actually once belonged to Sans himself. But Papyrus appreciated it more than he ever would, so the elder gifted it to the younger. A scientist Papyrus AU was not such a crazy stretch after all.

Pointing to the sheet-covered mechanism on the table, Papyrus asked: “WHAT’S THAT?”


He unveiled the construct. Instant sparkles from Papyrus.

“IT’S SO COOOOOOOOOOL! …BUT I HAVE ZERO IDEA WHAT IT DOES. HOW DOES ONE USE THIS CONTRAPTION?”

“You wear it like a bracer. Here, I’ll help.”

After some’ guidance, Papyrus strapped the Seraph System on his left arm without issues. Detecting a flow of magic, the display turned on.

Papyrus’ face lit up in delight. “WOWIE! IT’S WORKING!!! HMMM… ‘ACTIVE: O / B / G’?”
“INACTIVE: C / Y / P”? ‘DT: 0%’?? WHY IS IT ZERO?!”

“Interesting, ain’t it? Maybe it’s better if we jump straight into it. Learning by doing, y’know. Right now, you have the following three colour-coded Seer powers: Orange, Blue, and Green. Our objective is to add Purple on top of your current set.”

Sans pointed at the ‘DT’ meter. “In order to do that, you need to pay the cost. The cleanest and most concentrated source of Determination comes from a SOUL.”

“ Monsters have a tiny quantity of it, while humans have much more. So, don’t use it on a monster. That’s a recipe for disaster. On the other hand, getting a permission from a human can be a mite tricky. They’re not bottomless wells either.”

“WHAT ABOUT FRISK?”

“Ah, they’re the exception. Kid’s got more DT than they know what to do with. They’re in school though. Busy, busy.”

“WHAT ABOUT…” Papyrus hesitated. “NEVERMIND. I DON’T THINK HE’S AROUND. IT’S NOON AND VAMPIRES DON’T COME OUT INTO THE SUN.”

Interesting little tidbit. It seemed that the amnesiac Papyrus had an encounter with Mezil Thyme in the vision dive. In addition, he knew that man had plenty of Determination.

“I know who you’re talking about, Paps. And you’re right. Don’t wanna wake him up for something like this. He’s got a big day ahead of him.”

“So,” Sans continued, “Troubling, eh? You need DT-currency but you ain’t got none. Lucky for you, I can foot the bill. Just say yes and I’ll dig into my reserves.”

“Oh you know somebody? Wait.” Papyrus rubbed his chin. “You… said ‘you’ CAN FOOT THE BILL? BUT, MY APPARENT BROTHER, YOU JUST TOLD ME TO NEVER USE THIS DEVICE ON A MONSTER!”

“Ah. Well… about that. I’m not exactly a monster anymore.”

Before Papyrus could react, Sans grabbed the youngster’s arm and pulled it close towards his chest. A bit of telekinesis was enough to eject the hidden blade from its sheath.

“SANS?!?” he asked. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING???”

“Papyrus, I want you to understand something. No matter what happens, I will always, always love you.”

Sans then smashed the ‘needle’ straight into his red-dyed SOUL. The procedure began immediately, draining from an ever-replenishing supply of Determination.

“NO!!!” Papyrus freaked out, trying to pull himself free. “STOP THIS INSTANT! I DON’T WANT TO HURT YOU!”

“Bro. Don’t worry. It doesn’t hurt.”

Though it was true that he felt no pain, his body didn’t like the procedure a single bit. His Determination levels plummeted. At the same time his ‘Redness’ refilled it almost instantly. His head spun from the dizziness caused by the rapid cycle of all or nothing.
When the device had gained enough, Sans let go. He couldn’t stop panting.

Concerned, Papyrus reached out. “A-ARE YOU ALRIGHT?”

“Papyrus,” Sans winced. “There’s… a ‘curse’ on Seers like us. The stronger the Eye, the worse our weakness wanes. To reconnect with your past self, you need to add what you lack.”

“Purple should be enough for now. Don’t try adding any more: the machine doesn’t have that function yet.”

Whimpering, Papyrus clutched the bracer: “I… I… I’M SCARED.”

“I know you are. That’s normal. It is a scary powerful tool after all. Welp. Do you believe in me, a stranger to your current self?”

The hard questions caused a bout of confusion. Papyrus hesitated. Mulled. Pondered. Squeezed both his eyes shut in the struggle to make a decision.

But in the end, Papyrus drew in a deep breath and said: “I BELIEVE, BECAUSE DEEP DOWN I KNOW YOU’RE NOT A STRANGER.”

The Seraph System hummed to life, spawning a pentagram over the Eye. Three points for Orange, Blue, Green. One more to open up a slot. And one final point to add in Purple. With it, Papyrus’ Eye gained a fourth colour, burning with the intensity of a furnace.

“NYEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEHHHHHHHHH!!!”

Mere seconds later, the fire extinguished. Papyrus swayed and wobbled. Sans quickly propped him up with his False Blue magic.

“Bro?” Sans asked. He was prepared for the worst, yet facing the possibility of a botched attempt still filled him with dread.

Then…

…Papyrus gave Sans a great big hug.

“I’M SORRY,” he whimpered, “I’M SO, SO, SORRY FOR FORGETTING YOU.”

It worked. The procedure worked! Sans hugged back tight.

“I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN CARE OF MYSELF BETTER! OH MY GOD, WHAT HAVE I BEEN DOING???”

“Hey bro, don’t beat yourself up too much. Take it as a lesson. First-hand experience is the best teacher after all.”

Before Sans could send Papyrus off, he needed to confirm one more thing.

“Say, how much of your memory have you recovered? Try to think back as far as you can.”

Papyrus put both fingers on his temple. “HMMMMMMM… I DON’T THINK I CAN RECALL ANYTHING BEFORE MEETING FLOWEY.”

“Hm. Thought so. It appears you only recovered about two years. But that’s enough for you to tackle the feast, at least.”

“YES, THAT’S HIS NAME ISN’T IT? OR SHOULD I CALL HIM PRINCE ASRIEL?”

Another failure to the failure pile. It’s an expected disappointment. Recovery is always a long, uncertain road.

“…Damn. That’s a bust, huh? You remember what you did, but it’s not personal for you.”

“I SUPPOSE…” Papyrus sighed.

“If that’s the case, be careful. If Aiden finds out you had amnesia, he may void the whole event.”

“WHY?”

“Many possible reasons. Imagine, for example, that he’d accuse the Magus Association or the Dreemurr’s of exploiting your condition. Crazy? Maybe. But belief doesn’t run on common sense.”

Papyrus nodded with enthusiasm. “IN OTHER WORDS, I HAVE TO KEEP MY WITS ABOUT ME. I SHALL DO JUST THAT, MY GENUINE BROTHER! THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING.”

Not even a fraction of self-doubt, as usual. At least Papyrus had enough discernment to ask questions. Though, with the ‘curse’ of the Seers… one can’t take anything for granted.

“Whatsoever you do, don’t burn your Eye. It’ll eat whatever Purple is left in your body.”

“UNDERSTOOD!” Papyrus returned the Seraph System and left for the school, fired up for his new mission.

Though incomplete, the Seraph System still managed to help. Perhaps Sans had underestimated the potential applications of his creation. He wondered about the potential of this technology.

Could his weapon one day become medicine?
As a gesture of goodwill from the Dreemurr Nation, King Asgore assigned the best compatible guard to House Berendin: none other than Sir Grillbz Grillenn.

Two vans stocked with clothing and accessories stopped before Alphys’ Lab. They’re carrying imports from the Berendin’s home, including a full-body mirror. The third floor rooms thus became a dressing chamber in a snap.

Since then… Lady Lucidia fussed over fashion and kept cycling through her wardrobe. She's trying to figure out what fits her the best for the occasion.

So far, Grillby counted at least five different mask patterns, six pairs of gloves, four pairs of boots, alongside over a dozen dresses. And somehow she still had more luggage yet unpacked.

“Does this look good?” she asked.

‘Good’? It was better than ‘good’. She was outright beautiful. The rich blue ballroom dress brought out the best of her delicate frame. Everything else was also on point, from the intricate white laces to the pleats of her dress. Put on some jewelry and she would be set for any event.

Grillby replied, “…Yes…”

Lucidia examined herself before the mirror one more time. Again, she changed her mind and returned to browsing her choices.

The poor fire elemental grew confused. “…May I ask why?…”

“Oh,” the skeleton lady hesitated. “I thought it might be too extravagant. Don’t want to outdress the Dreemurr Royalty. This is more appropriate elsewhere.”

How thoughtful of her. Understandable, she had to be extra cautious for this event. It would be her first public appearance to the world. She had only one chance to leave a proper impression.
Grillby then heard someone knocking on the door. It was Gaelic Blanc, no longer in his cousin’s
t attire, but dressed once more in his own clothes. He remembered them from the Megalovania
incident.

“…Good afternoon…”

“Afternoon,” the other greeted. “Oh? M’Lady picking out her clothes? What a treat! ‘Tis been a
while since she had this bother.”

“…Excuse me?…” Grillby blinked.

“She’s been wearing her own brand o’ work uniform, aye.”

“…Ah…” It all made sense in hindsight. Working clothes help put one in the right mindset for the
day.

Lucidia showed the men a simpler white dress. “How about this?”

In which Gaelic responded, “M’lady, ye know me thoughts. Ye look the best with nothing at all.”

Grillby was flabbergasted by what he had heard. That statement was equal portions lewd AND rude!

The flower children meanwhile giggled from the air vents. They’re constantly watching from the
sidelines for the latest, juiciest gossip. What a terrible habit they had fostered.

Lucidia, however, responded to that statement with only mild annoyance. “Gaelic Blanc! You and I
know that isn’t an option. We Lichborn are to maintain a humanesque appearance to the outside
world.”

“But M’Lady, we be in monster territory. The local brothers dinnae hide their form. Why should ye
struggle so?”

Now that’s fuel for thought. Maybe there’s logic behind his stark statement after all? “…Lady
Lucidia… Sir Gaelic is right… You can relax with us… why not at least reveal your actual visage?
…”

“I…” The woman hid her face behind the fabric. “I’m not ready to show my true self to the human
media.”

Lucidia then grabbed a few more clothes and retreated into the dressing partition.

“Sir Grillenn, was it?” asked Gaelic.

The fire elemental nodded.

“Are ye a fan o M’lady? Aye, that ketchup heretic accused ye so.”

Grillby cringed.

…Curse Sans for spreading baseless accusations…
…How do I answer this without digging my own grave?…”

So he answered: “…I honour her… as the Chronographer, and as Judge Thyme’s wife… That is
all…”

The beast-like skeleton pushed his face close. His forked snake tongue flicked a few times, licking
the elemental’s cheeks.


When Gaelic distanced himself, Grillby resisted the urge to scream, internally or otherwise.

The other monster’s expression turned to one of childlike curiosity, bright-eyed and eager. “How does a knight like ye end up running a bar? With whom does yer flower o’ love bloom? They be a woman? Man? A transitional mimic like yer local celeb?”

Already with the personal prying. But, Gaelic didn’t seem to think such questions were a big deal.

“…Let’s start with the shorter story…” Grillby replied, “…I don’t have a romantic partner…”

Gaelic was shocked by the reveal. “Yer a literal hot bachelor?! How can this be?”

The beast proceeded to circle around the man, scrutinizing him from top to bottom.

“Look at ye, Strong. Sturdy. Handsome. With courteous manners matching yer fine form! Aye, with ye prowess in combat, ‘tis safe to say ye be younger than yer numbers. How can it be that ye caught no heart? Do they have no taste?!”

What was he supposed to do with all these lofty praises, so sudden from a strange acquaintance?

“…I… uh… spent my time between the bar and maintaining my training… I don’t flirt with my customers either…”

Gaelic planted his face into his hands, letting out a disappointed groan. “They can still seek ya outside normal hours. Even if ya be dense and oblivious, it be no excuse fer the others to not try! Me heart breaks for the fools who failed to see ye…”

Awkward levels, rising.

…Would I make a good husband?… I never once considered that… I may be too much of a workaholic if I’m honest about myself… Not a good prospect…

Grillby cleared his throat. “…About the bar…”

Another round of fashion examination interrupted the chat. This time, though, what he saw left him in shock. The princess’ gravity-defying locks had somehow shrunk to shoulder-length!

“…Your hair!… Where did it go??…”

Both skeletons chuckled at his reaction.

Lucidia explained, “No member of skeletonkind has natural hair. I used to wear wigs as a child. In my late-teens, I installed a hair-generating Code into my skull for convenience. This allows me to generate any hair type I’ve previously analyzed on the fly.”

Now Grillby felt quite silly. “…Oh… I see… I thought it was a gender difference… Please pardon my ignorance…”

“All is well, good sir.”

What followed was a return to the usual routine: another design, another rejection, and another retreat into the dressing chamber.
He thought it best to start from the beginning. “…About the bar… It was a suggestion from an acquaintance…”

“Do ya like it?” asked Gaelic. “‘Tis hard work, keeping everything running day in day out.”

“…It’s a nice atmosphere… I’m not shy about the workload… Maintaining the Royal Guard takes more…”

The skeleton frowned. “A question so simple, yet no answer? Could it be ye in truth be bored? Like a hobby that dragged on far too long?”

“…Huh?… W-what makes you conclude so?…”

“There be no passion in yer words,” said Gaelic. “Only fleeing. Like a man runnin’ away. Run, run, run.”

The skeleton’s odd and unpredictable mannerism threatened to trigger Grillby’s recently-used fighting instincts. Though his breath quickened for only a moment, it didn't go unnoticed.

“Oh?” Gaelic tilted his head. “So there be a fire that burns inside despite ye discipline! Very nice. No wonder ye earned M’Lady’s trust to bear the Berendin heraldry in that other timeline.”

...He seems to be hoping for something from me...

....................

The fire elemental turned aside. “…Sir Gaelic… I’m not the same person as that timeline…”

“Yer base character can’t be too different, aye?”

“…You’re correct… But first and foremost… I belong to the Dreemurr Nation… I’m sorry if that dashes any hopes…”

Grillby wondered if he was too harsh. But he can’t take it back. A fact is a fact.

Nothing transpired between the two for a while. Then, Gaelic lowered his head. “M’sorry, Sir Grillenn. Perhaps ah overstepped ye boundaries. Ye bar be a cozy place. Tis fine if ya wanna stay. In days o’ peace, a defender be unneeded. Aye?”

“Fer many loops, ah watched this town upon M’lord’s orders. Sans Serif haunts yer bar, so there ah stalk too. Yer daily routine ah observed. I thought ye a quiet husk o’ a man. That all changed when ye helped us deal with the false angel.”

“That sword o’ magic in that alternate world… ah sure it be Lemuria’s last true relic. It must have chosen ye.”

...Is he sound of mind?… Grillby wondered. ....A magic sword? ...Chosen?...

Nothing he said made sense… And he thought he’s getting used to Papyrus’ zany logic.

As though he came upon the brightest ideas, Gaelic’s face lit up with joy. “What if ye replace me?”

“…Pardon?!…”

“Aye, aye! Take me post. Be Knight o’ Berendin! Me days o’ service be numbered. A successor, they need. And ye impressed me enough to consider a peer!”
“...I...I can't do that!...”

“But ye must! 'Tis your destiny!”

Discomfort levels, rising to the stratosphere. Grillby excused himself upon that very instant. “...Apologies... but I should go...”

Despite pleas to stay, the fire elemental rushed towards the exit.

There he bumped straight into a certain butterfly Magus.

“Oof!”
“...Ack!...”

Mezil steadied himself with his cane. He appeared to have just gotten out of bed no less than ten minutes ago. His hair was a mess and he still wore his black sleepwear.

“That’s some way to start the day,” he muttered. “Is everything alright, Sir Grillenn?”

“...I’m sorry... It’s just...”

Grillby looked back at the beast-like skeleton, unsure what to say.

“I understand,” said the Magus. “I’ll take it from here.”

All attention shifted towards the human. Gaelic wasted no time to greet his master.

“Slept well, M'lord?”
“Kind of. Hmm, you’re wearing your own clothes again. That’s good. Keep it up.”
“May ah have a hug?”

A hug was given without any further questions.

...That is quite a stark change of behaviour... But it's genuine...

...This must be their usual dynamic...

Alerted to her husband’s arrival, Lucidia hurried out of her partition half-dressed. Grillby’s first response was to turn his face towards the wall so he doesn’t accidentally see things that he shouldn’t.

“Mezzy! Your hair is in a complete mess!”
“ Well, I just woke up.”
“Have you selected your clothes yet?”
“I’m going to wear the same as always. Have you decided on yours?”
“No. This is driving me nuts! Maybe I should just keep to my uniform too?”

“I was thinking... do you still have that coat? The one that’s inspired by the early half of the previous century.”

“I think I do. But, are you sure? It’s what I wore during the War of the Red Victory.”

In which Mezil replied with gentle determination. “That was where our love began. Fitting for a first appearance, is it not?”

Lady Lucidia giggled in delight. Predicament, solved in a few sentences. Judge Thyme’s sense of precise aim was certainly not limited to his gun.
“What about my mask?”
“You can use the updated face, if you prefer.”

Mezil then said: “Excuse me for a moment, I’d like to speak with Sir Grillenn.”

And so, Judge Thyme whisked him away from the uncomfortable situation. In the hallway, the fire elemental leaned against the walls to catch his breath.

“Did they give you trouble?” Mezil asked.

Grillby shook his head. “…I’m just not used to their quirks…”

“I understand what you mean. You are not the first, Sir Grillen. Either way, you should take a break while you can. We need you in peak condition for when the Grandmaster arrives.”

“…When will The Grandmaster arrive…”

“Perhaps around 3PM. He’s preparing a gift for the occasion. Whatever it may be, he’s confident that our guests will appreciate the sentiment.”

As Mezil headed back into the room, he said: “I’ll see you then.”

“…Thank you…”

Grillby let out a sigh of sweet, sweet relief.

…What just happened back there?…

…That Gaelic… making weird, unreasonable demands…

…I don’t know what his circumstances are… But he sounds desperate…

There was a slight discomfort in his belly.

…Hmm… I’m starting to feel hungry…

Off he went to have lunch. Nothing great: just some sandwiches from the fridge, prepared by Gaster in advance.

…An alternate reality, huh?… How did that happen in the first place?… This whole deal sure sounds like science fiction…

Sitting around doing nothing made the head-numbing sensation worse, however. So, he thought to visit the two Royal Scientists. Never a dull moment when they’re together.

On the way there, he happened to pass the SOUL treatment lab. It reminded him that it’s been three days since they pieced the remains back together.

…To think they used Gaster’s old tech again…

Once upon a time around his niece’s birth, Grillby would pay daily visits to a particular disembodied Yellow child. They’d chat over a decent meal, letting him escape the twisted reality of his Royal Guard post within the guise of ‘gathering intel’.

Now, whenever his niece gains a year, he’s reminded of what that youth had lost.
She’s already a teenager…

I wonder if he’s awake yet…

When he tried to enter, he stopped upon hearing a voice.

“Sorry, kiddo. We never did find your mommy down in the Underground.”

Sir Gerson?…

Grillby peered between the gaps of the door. There stood Sir Gerson indeed, speaking to the Purple SOUL. Monsters could process the magic-based wavelengths emitted by the disembodied, allowing communication without the aid of external devices.

“What about ‘King Fluffybuns’ and ‘Goatmomma’?” said Gerson. “Wahaha! They’re right as rain! Adopted a new whippersnapper too. It’s Frisk: the one who broke us all free.”

“Auhuh. Yep, that’s them. Short brown hair with a striped blue-and-purple shirt. They asked for your help, huh? They’re crowned Ambassador nowadays. I’d have to say… they got their work cut out for them. The Surface has gone loop-de-loop.”

The Purple SOUL’s light pulsated at a gentle pace.

“Hmm… if ya wanna know about your surviving family members, ya gotta ask Lady Lucy. Y’know, the pretty skelegal in blue? Eh? You’re afraid of her? Wahaha! I guess she can be pretty intimidating, but she means the best for ya.”

Gerson showed a file to Purple. “See this? All her hard work in here. She’s tracking them down to give you a proper burial. Auhuh. It’s still on the agenda. Heard the media won’t let us go unless we resolve this right. Wahah!”

Sounds like Lady Lucidia has been researching the lives of these children…

I don’t think I should eavesdrop any further…

The fire elemental tried to leave only to cancel the plan… The flames on his being stirred. Flickered. An eerie shiver of intuition crept from his head down to his shoulders.

He then heard a scurry of light clatter from the ceiling. Faint. Almost silent.

There’s something… Rushing straight at me… I know the flower children are always lurking… but this is not them…

Whatever it is, it’s closing in fast…

He braced to counter. But looking around, he found no one. Not even a shadow in sight.

Tense seconds passed. The air returned to still silence.

An intruder?… Maybe a spy drone?…

I can’t leave until I know what I’m dealing with…

Grillby remained vigilant. Eyes open, ears sharp, body ready for action for what may come.
Until…

“Um, ‘tis me.” A familiar voice came from the air vents, timid.

Looking up, Grillby spotted a pair of glowing eyes peeking out from the darkness.

All that stress for nothing. Grillby’s tension dissipated together with a long, loud sigh. “…Please don’t do that again…”

“Sorry,” Gaelic replied. “Ye had the aura o’ a man who’d punch me if ah get close on land.”

“…You could greet from a distance first…”

“That be true.”

The skeleton pushed himself out of the tight spot. His clothes had gathered considerable dirt and cobwebs from snaking around in the vents.

While dusting himself off, he commented: “Mighty impressive that ye kept yer guard up fer so long. Yer a better martial artist than a bartender, that be sure.”

“…That’s nothing special?…”

“Nay, nay. In all me years o’ hunting targets, most shrug away me presence as either pests or tricks o’ mind. Lax. Oblivious. Yer different, aye. Must be why that false angel ya trained had the same sharpness.”

Then, Gerson exited the Lab. He had heard the ruckus from start to end, much to their embarrassment. After a brief laughter, the old hero invited them both to have a chat with the SOULS.

“Anyone ya know in here, Grillbz Grillenn?” asked the ancient one.

Gazing at the Yellow SOUL floating in the tank, he replied: “…Yes…”

He walked up to the tank and placed a hand on the glass. A warm greeting coursed from the SOUL through his arm.

“…Hello… It’s been thirteen years…”

To the child, their last meeting was a recent memory. Yellow had spent most of the time asleep.

“…I built a bar… It’s Western themed… Fits your style…”

Yellow was delighted. He couldn’t wait to see it for himself. The child asked if Grillby liked owning one. Funny to think that today he received that same question twice.

“…It’s nice… Though I haven’t opened it in a while… The town is in danger…”

...I wonder what would Papyrus do if he knows they’re awake... He would team up with Frisk... Then what?...

...I promised that I’d help him… Yet here I am wondering what to do…

Then, he had an epiphany. Papyrus being Papyrus would take the path of a fresh start.

“…If… you could have a second chance…” he asked: “…Would you like to become a Lich or a
robot?…”

At the corner of his eye, he spotted a flash of gold and green scurrying under the desk.

…Huh… That’s right… There’s those flowers…

“…Or you could choose to become a talking flower… I don’t know why it would be preferable… but the option exists…”

Yellow didn’t understand what a Lich is, but he knew about a robot and a flower. The kid remained hesitant.

“…You don’t want any?… Your past wasn’t happy… but that doesn’t mean the future will be the same…”

He simply didn’t know what to do. He had accepted the fact that he’d just vanish once the Barrier was broken. Rather fatalistic for a Red Minor.

Maybe Grillby should ask the other kids first. Let Yellow think this through.

“…Alright… take your time…”

Since the SOULS remained silent around Lady Lucidia, Grillby thought he should write the requests down for her.

One he retrieved the tools, the note-taking began. Grillby spoke with the children while Gerson read their autopsy report. In the meantime Gaelic just watched. He had his shoulders high and hunched, wary of the SOULS.

…Yellow, boy, an old friend. Cause of death: me. Dreams to be a treasure hunter, but decidedly decided to be indecisive…

…Green, boy, never fought a monster. Cause of death: heatstroke due to getting lost in Hotland. Wouldn’t mind becoming a Lich or a robot. Flower, refused. Keen on a second chance…

…Cyan, girl, occult enthusiast. Sister to Orange. Cause of death: the icy cold lands of Snowdin. Becoming a Lich would be her dream come true…

…Orange, boy, the responsible one. Brother to Cyan. Cause of death: monster-built traps. Becoming a robot is the coolest, he said. No one wants to be a flower, it seems…

…Purple, girl, a former Magus. Cause of death: bacterial infection. Euthanized by Doctor Gaster. Second life, declined. Wants to meet her mother again…”

Grillby had to read that line again. “…F-former Magus?!… Do you know about this, Sir Gaelic?…”

The beastly skeleton bared his teeth with a low growl. “Aye. Purple once be a student in the Magus Association. The lass, ah bear no grudge. But the mother she loves so much, she be me master’s foe of the red-dyed war. A Red.”

“In her youth, she gave up the path o’ the Keeper. Settled down and had the lass. Ah dinnae know what folly crossed her mind when that woman signed up fer that skirmish. Put the lass in danger unimaginable.”

“The mother helped the heretics kidnap Lady Lucidia, aye. Promised her a cursed rock needed to cross the Barrier. Payment in exchange fer me Master’s life.”
The Philosopher’s Stone. Queen Toriel had made sure every person involved in the Megalovania incident understood its significance as a substitute for Boss Monsters.

“…What happened to her?… I hope Judge Thyme didn’t…”

“M’lord dinnae land the final blow,” the other answered. “But ah be sure that where lives be concerned, he would do whatever he must.”

“…That means she’s alive?…”

“Nay, nay. Ye misunderstand. M’lord and M’lady said ‘twas the Aratet Chosen who did the deed. Went by the name o’ Vers. His Mark be this reticle o’ death. His aim merciless and absolute.”

Upon hearing the harsh truth, grief ebbed from Purple’s heart. Old Gerson, ever the hero, comforted her for the loss of innocence.

It can’t be helped. The sting hits hardest on the first day. Grillby knew this first-hand.

When the child’s emotions stabilized, they moved on to the final child.

…Blue, girl, ballerina in training. Cause of death, exsanguination. Her wish is to…

…Ascend as a goddess?…

The proclamation seemed childish at first; it’s not uncommon for children to get carried away with fantastical grandeur. However, the details regarding the dusty ‘Waterfall Incident’ flashed through Grillby’s mind.

The pen slipped from his grip and fell on the ground. His flames flickered wild, warping the shadows around his feet.

“…You are a Gungnir…”

An eerie giggle echoed between his ears. She was amused that a monster knew anything about them. The existence of the cult spawned after the Sealing, thus leaving even the Royal Guard ignorant of their dangers.

“…I fought them before…” noted Grillby, “…In a recent terrorist attack…”

She thought it was an expected outcome, since the monsters were set free.

“…I believe you’re mistaken… They targeted the Magus Association, not us…”

It didn’t change the fact that the Underground’s people had gotten involved. It’s fate. Destiny.

“…Enough… It’s time for me to ask the questions here…” Grillby narrowed his gaze, “…Why did you invade the Underground?…”

She was born a Blue, not a Red, the girl explained. By theory, that served as an immediate disqualification for the title of Persona.

Yet, it conflicted with the Gungnir’s warrior ideology of strength. If she could prove herself stronger than a Red, what’s stopping her from being crowned Persona?

Legends tell that those humans who hunted monsters gained power unimaginable. With each victory they absorb more and more magic from the pure dust released by death’s embrace.
Mount Ebott was the perfect target: a whole oblivious nation trapped in a giant cave. The opportunity of a lifetime.

“…Why Waterfall?…”

Waterfall had the smallest citizens, and also the quietest hunting grounds.

Indignance rushed to Grillby’s head. The flames and shadows reflected his SOUL roaring fierce, consumed with anger.

“…You…” he seethed “…It’s because of you, the other children suffered!… If you didn’t murder anyone… all the children after you wouldn’t be hunted!…”

“…Purple could have seen a doctor sooner… Green wouldn’t need to hide from the Royal Guard… I wouldn’t have needed to take Yellow’s life!…”

Blue responded that she didn’t care. It’s their problem. Not hers.

He imagined himself smashing through the SOUL’s container, shattering that cruel human in one strike of glorious vindication.

However, he resisted. Killing her now would only bring trouble to both Monster and Magi.

...Calm down... Breathe... An adult shouldn’t succumb to a child...

Calm, he did. Although it was just enough to not burn the place to cinders. The shadows stabilized and the glow subsided.

............... ...

...This makes Frisk appear to be a saint... I’m glad Papyrus isn’t here to hear this...

Blue asked who’s the current leader of Gungnir. Trying to take control of the conversation again, it seemed.

“…A man who calls himself Aiden of Aratet… Son of the Last Persona…”

The SOUL shone with intrigue. Two generations had passed since her failure. Such a long time.

“…Is he still alive?… Of course… We’re meeting him this evening for official business…”

The eerie giggle again echoed. How foolish, she said, for an ex-captain to not finish a death battle with Gungnir’s leader.

She warned that he will want to settle the score. His honour as a leader is at stake. And this time, Grillby won't be so lucky.

‘You will die.’

Gaelic hissed. “Balderdash blather! Hogwash! Poppycock! Ye sorry snivelling gobshite! Sir Grillenn be one o’ the nation’s best, and ye damn him to a curse o’ death?!”

‘Being the ‘best’ is no guarantee for survival’.

Harsh as it sounds, Grillby knew that to be true. Aiden had been so close in dealing the final blow. If Mettaton didn't intervene, who knows what would have happened?
Gaelic grabbed Grillby on the shoulder: uncomfortable, direct physical contact. The strength of that grip was no laughing matter either.

“Don’t listen to her! Grrr she be killing ye spirit before the fight even begin! Combat be deadly, aye, but ye need to go in with the mindset o’ a victor. That’s how M’lord survived the hell o’ his foes!”

“Fire. Ye need fire,” he growled, “This not the time fer ye to hide in yer inner bar! Quit running away! Ye be a GENUINE Knight o’ Berendin!”

“…Dreemurr… Knight of Dreemurr…” The elemental corrected. Poor guy got so confused.

Blue told Gaelic to shut up. He’s being noisy, annoying, and creepy. No sense of personal space. She also told him to go die in a ditch somewhere.

Those statements further provoked the skeleton. He growled, snapped, and tried to claw the surface of the glass container. The action frightened the less courageous SOULS, causing them to back away from ground zero.

“Ye Gungnir cur! Ye should have rotted with yer corpse!!!”

Blue continued to goad the hornet’s nest. She accused Grillby for being a cowardly limping husk in the wind. Where is his integrity, she asked? Where are his pride and honour? Why does he need this bony manmutt to defend him?

Yellow then burst into a huge guffaw. If he still had his body, he would be rolling on the floor laughing.

Her indignance redirected towards Yellow. Why did he mock her? How dare he?

The boy of Justice then pointed out that Blue tried act more grown-up than she ought to. Her own integrity was hollow and shallow, easy to resist. When things don’t go her way, she throws a tantrum of lame insults: the pinnacle of immaturity.

It’s naive of her to think that she could intimidate The Former Captain of the Royal Guard. Stupid, even.

...Wow… He is quite the cowboy at heart too… shooting her down with a quickdraw…

Gerson had enough. “Pipe down ya whippersnappers, this is a no-fight zone! Don’t make me put down my banhammer!”

Still trying to act like the better child, Blue turned her nose up at Yellow. Her focus returned to Grillby, this time she offered a proposal: help her ascend into a goddess, and she will guarantee his safety.

“…I refuse…” Grillby replied, “…I see no reason to entertain you… Your scenario won’t happen anyway…

“…How do I know?… It’s because Aiden of Aratet is married man with his own children… Not to mention a tribe and a nation… There are no stakes to risk his life for in this tiny town… Certainly not for one's sense of honour…”

Blue tried to bargain, but her efforts were denied as the man of fire turned his back against the SOULS.
“…Be a good girl now… And, thanks for the warning…”

He still had a long day ahead, and he can’t let this incident become a distraction. Any further doubt should be reserved for after the feast.
MTT Livestream

Chapter Notes

This chapter is brought to you by Mettaton: the glammest glam robot in the world!

The non-serious fluffy silly paid questions were contributed by my regular readers in The Fanfic Paradise’s Discord channel. No real money was transacted and all the numbers here are in-story only.

Bonus: A little scene from Chapter 165 http://fav.me/ddbqwfs

What a beautiful sunny weather, filled with the warm rays of Spring.

Mettaton couldn’t contain his gleeful grin before the mirror. He’s moments away from reaching a new level in his career: the biggest livestream yet.

All the promotion,
All those long practice routines,
All that careful diplomatic maneuvering,
Everything will finally bear fruit!

…Or will it? Should things go wrong, that fruit may turn out rotten and spell disaster for the entire monster race.

Still, who could give up this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity?

‘What’s entertainment without danger?’ Such is the philosophy of Mettaton.

Therefore, the risk was worth it.

He put extra effort into preparing himself. Only perfection allowed. His suit must be free of wrinkles and stray thread. His hair must be in the right shape. His face, spotless and dazzling!

Last but not least, spare batteries. He already charged himself to max a few minutes ago, but it never hurts to be prepared.

“Time for a warmup, baby~”

Mettaton switched back into his box form. He stretched his wheels, spun himself around, and finished it off with a pose.

“So far, so good. Let’s give this a grand finale!”

With a spark of magic, he flipped the switch to transform back into his humanoid form.

He was SUPPOSED to return to his fantabulous two-legged self without a hitch… except he ended up having legs for arms and arms for legs!

Mettaton let out a high-pitched shriek.
“What in tarnation?!? No! T-this must be a nightmare!”

He tried to pinch his cheeks, but instead he received a boot to the face.

“Ow! Gosh darn, my systems still think I’m plugging in hands.”

Alphys rushed into the room without knocking on the door. She must have heard the ruckus and thought a terrible accident had befallen him. How right she was.

She screamed: “METTATON! Oh em gee! W-what happened to you?!”

“I wanted to ask the same, sweetie,” he said. “I was just testing my transformation and this… this… MISHAP MISHAPPENED!”

“O-okay. D-don’t panic. Transform back into your box form first.”

One puff of magical smoke later, Mettaton was back into the box… upside-down with his wheels in the air.

Mettaton cried out: “This is a disaster! Help me, Doctor Alphys!!!”

“Let me check the debug. Hold still.”

Alphys opened a diagnostic panel and plugged in her phone. She then scrolled through the data for the root of the problem.

“Wow…” She pushed up her glasses. “Your transformation program looks like scrambled eggs. Are you, like, super panicking inside?”

“Me? Panic?” Mettaton laughed. “I’m a veteran, baby. Taming the nerves is half the trade! I’ve rescued people from a burning building, so you know. That proves that I’m sturdier than I look! M-maybe I got a bit too excited…”

Unconvinced, Alphys narrowed her gaze, Toriel style.

Clearing his throat he added: “Well, I am maybe an incy wincy tiny bitty anxious that the internet backlash might set up a murderous mob intent on razing all remaining monsterkind to the ground. No big deal~”

Once second of silence later… Mettaton let out a huge, dramatic groan. “Blasted custard me, Alphys-darling. You are totally right. Nothing is more vicious than the world wide web after all.”

With a cynical smirk, she acknowledged the statement. “Yeah. I know that first-hand. From both sides.”

Catching the opportunity, Mettaton faked a gasp. “My oh my, are you finally admitting your bad habits? That all those shipping wars bring more heartache than satisfaction? That Mew Mew Kissy Cute 2 should be evaluated on its own merits instead of being bogged down by its predecessor?”

“H-hey!” She protested. “That was uncalled for! Since when are you the jokester?”

“I’m second to Sans, darling.”

“Laaaaaaaaaaaaaame.”

The two exchanged a moment of chortling, then went back to troubleshooting.
Four o’ clock. The Magus Association gave Mettaton the approval to begin his broadcast.

However, the weather forecast predicted that it would rain after seven and thus bring a cold night. Best take the fairness while one still can.

Turning to the cameras, Mettaton got to work posthaste. He had a Mini carry around a tablet so he could read the livestream’s chatter.

Ever since he had that transformation mishap, Mettaton kept to his box form. His confidence suffered and he was not ready the music just yet. Perhaps a little passage of time might do the trick.

Onwards with the show!

“Beauties and Gentlebeauties,” he announced. “The MTT Behind The Scenes Feast of Fantasy Livestream is ON AIR, baby! How’s your Monday, my wonderful viewers?”

“Going well?” Pose!
“Not too shabby?” Pose!
“In the dumps?” Pose!

“Whichever it may be, your fantabulous host is here to spice it up! Make a bad day great, and a great day better!”

“The chatroom will be opening soon. Standard rules apply. Remember folks, this is a family-friendly channel. There shall be no trollish spam!”

The first time he went live, his moderation team had to squash many an indecent picture. One can never trust the collective internet to behave.

“Let’s go in three, two, one~~”

A flurry of excited fans cheered in the form of text and emoticons.

“OOOOOOOH YES!!”

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**MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE**
> Yay it’s mettaton!
> MTT MTT!!!
> WOHOOOOOOO!
> The Tontonman!
> [#]-o [#]-o [#]-o [#]-o [#]-o [#]-o [#]-o
> :D:D:D:D:D:D
> woot! o-[#] o-[#] o-[#]
> [#]-o o-[#] [#]-o o-[#] [#]-o o-[#]
> Text emoticons. Such nostalgia!
“Thank you for the warm welcome beauties and gentlebeauties! Oh boy, am I delighted to see you! I can already tell today is going to go down into the history books.”

“As the title of the livestream says, you’re going to watch some EXCLUSIVE behind the scenes content brought to you by yours truly.”

“That’s right! No fancy makeup, no scripts! While the rest of the media can only wait at the front yard, we’re going to have private one-to-one chats with the big names backstage. All on King Asgore’s gracious graces!”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> What’s the event anyway?
> I know you said it’s some exclusive footage, but i don’t even know what we're even exclusiveing
> Something about a feast?
> Feast of Fantasy?

“You’re right, sweetheart. For the first time in FOREVER, Monster, Magi, and Gungnir are going to sit at the same table together! Imagine that! A momentous event for the world to witness, hosted right here in my hometown to boot~”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> So it’s like a summit?
> Pretty low profile for something so big
> is it really THAT big?
> The Magus Association and the Gungnir have been at odds since their inception.
> And the monsters, well, they got sealed under the mountain 1k years ago.
> Definitely a huge deal.
> Who are the Magi and Gungnir anyway? I see lots of magic promotion but… I don’t even know what they do.

“Well, well, The Magus Association deals with the regulation, protection, and proper education of all things magic! Did you know that humans are capable of magic too? I sure didn’t! My people always thought otherwise. Turns out that their magic is just a different brand.”

“As for the Gungnir… From what I understand, theirs is an ideological movement based on the teachings of the Legendary Hero of the Sealing Wars. They value a human’s innate strength to overcome and conquer, but dislike magic. To what extent? That is still up to debate.”

“Bonus info, darlings! The folk who will visit us today come from the mountain plateaus, far, far away from our Mount Ebott. I hear they’re among the most traditional of the Gungnir: the Aratet!”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> As if the Magi are much better.
> them and their spiritual new age nonsense
> It’s a religion
> all religions are cults
> …why are the Magi and Gungnir at odds for ages?
> Because the Gungnirs think magecraft is dangerous. Humans shouldn’t be dabbling in it nilly willy
> or making bombs out of it
> Only the Chosen Ones are privileged to use that kind of divine power.
> And The Vampire is absolutely NOT a Chosen One
> Magic is a form of science. If you’re anti magic, you’re anti science.
> What’s this? The Sealing Wars?
> Anti WEAPON SCIENCE more like it! Look at what abuse of science is capable off!
> Nukes, crazy ballistic weapons, mustard gas.
> DID I MENTION NUKEs!
> I don’t think anyone is happy about guns that can shred you into pink dust in a second.
> Those things can push PLANES.
> The world doesn’t need magic.
> We don’t NEED magic persay. But it can be useful in productive ways.
> Like quantum physics
> No way man quantum physics are important! Where do you think your tiny electronics
components come from?
> I… I don’t think it’s quantum physics?

“There’s a little bit of a complicated caveat here,” said Mettaton. “See, us monsters are literally made
of magic. Therefore, The Gungnir see us as walking timebombs. The Magus Association -- being the
primary protectors of this power -- never took kindly to the whole anti-magic deal.”

“Which is why this feast is the most important event to happen this century, baby! We’re gonna hash
everything out tonight!”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> All the best MTT!
> You can do it!

Mettaton clapped his hands. “Thank you, thank you. Aaaallright darlings! Enough backstory. Let’s
get ROLLING, shall we? Starting right here!”

The camera team panned the lens at Mettaton’s surroundings. It’s Alphys’ backyard, where Mettaton
had the permission to park his studio’s trailer van.

“Every journey has a beginning, darlings!”

He led the crew inside. For a slight detour, he stopped by Napstablook’s desk. The ghost was
managing a number of computers and sound equipment.

“Blookie-darling, say hi to the fans!”

The shy white ghost looked up to the cameras. “……Oh…… ooooh… hi… thanks for tuning in…
uh sorry… I don’t mean to be rude… But I am very busy…”

“Sweetie, don’t worry. They understand your tireless effort to make sure everyone hears my wonderful voice. Isn’t that right, dearies?”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Ganbatte kudasai blookie-chan!
> Yayaya!
> Give it your best you cute ghost you
> Don’t stress out too hard okay?
> aaaaaa he’s so cute <3
> [(8|)

> The chatroom exploded with hearts and encouragement. Sweet Blookie had more fans than they would ever admit. The ghost’s mere existence exuded an irresistible adorableness.

“…Thank you… I hope everyone has a good time…”

Mettaton then walked over to the lobby of the Lab. He asked the viewers, “Do you guys still remember the wonderful Doctor Alphys? She appeared on my very first livestream.”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> yup seen her before
> Uh… no
> This is my first time on your channel
> if she is who I think she is, something’s very fishy about her ;)
> Show us, M!

“You’re in luck! Today, she’s tagging along as my friend and personal technician. Actors will always have a first aid crew on standby. But, since I am a robot, the standard fare won’t do. It has to be someone who knows the inner workings, and there’s no better person for that than the one who built my fabulous MTT-brand body! My creator so to say.”

Alphys emerged from the workshop with a backpack of tools. “A-are we live?” she stammered.

“Mhmm, yes darling. Say hello to the fans.”

“U-um, hi!” said Alphys, forcing herself to be peppy. “D-don’t worry. I’m not gonna steal the show.”

“Fret not my brilliant friend. If anything, you’re going to enhance it.”

“Aww Mettaton, that’s sweet.” After adjusting the straps one last time, Alphys asked: “Where are we going first?”

“To our shining Ambassador’s school, of course~"
“Oooh.” Alphys nodded. “I-I heard that The Magus Association is going to send some extra help there. A-after all, one can’t cook a feast by their lonesome! That’s crazy! In which case… maybe Papyrus could make a bit of time for us…?”

“Yup. That’s right Doctor Alphys! We might be able to catch our Master Chef in action!”

* * *

Alas, they were too late. When Mettaton’s crew arrived at the school’s cafeteria, they were greeted by the sounds of chopping and cleaning, and no Papyrus in sight.

From the kitchen, they then heard Papyrus yelling for more onions. It prompted one of the aides to haul a whole box of them into the cooking fray.

He seemed… frantic. Distressed.

“Wow,” Alphys commented. “It’s like, Papyrus is yelling in All Caps. Sure, he was already doing that, but it’s way louder now.”

“Oh no! If it’s already that much of a HELL’S KITCHEN, I’m afraid we might not be able to meet our dear chef extraordinaire after all. I’m so sorry my darlings.”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Bummer
> Nooooooooooooooooooooo
> I really wanna see Master Chef Papyrus!
> Maybe we can ask him to come out for a little while?

Mettaton mused out loud. “I suppose that is something my charm COULD pull off~”

From the back, there came a stern: “No.”

The camera swerved to the source. It’s the man himself: Supreme Judge Mezil Thyme. He’s as sharp-dressed as ever.

Putting his cane down, Mezil Thyme explained: “I’m certain Papyrus will drop everything to meet his favourite celebrity… which is why we can’t let Mister Mettaton interview him just yet.”

Trouble brewed in the chat. The fans were angered that they’re denied of their wishes.

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Booooooooo
> eff off dictator!
> Party pooper!
> Go back to your castle vampire >:(

> Who you gonna call? GHOSTBUSTERS!
> But The Vanqs are the ghostbusters :/
> He’s their boss!
> I HAVE A SILVER WHIP

For better or for worse, Mezil checked his phone. Narrowing his gaze square at the camera, he warned: “I am not oblivious to your misgivings. Behave, lest you bring shame to your celebrity.”

Mettaton wasn’t sure if this man had poor social skills, or if he’s intentionally painting himself as a ‘heel’ a.k.a ‘the bad guy’. Showbiz or not, there are lemons to turn into lemonade.

“Ehern! Beauties and Gentlebeauties! Hold on to your ghostbusting equipment and garlic-flavoured stakes! No misappropriation of silver jewelry either! Remember how my splendid studio got vandalized? Judge Thyme, bless his SOUL, paid for the cleaning services! I assure you, behind that sour face lies a generous heart.”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Maybe he’s the one who dumped the trash on you

“Oh don’t be silly,” The celebrity huffed. “We all know that it’s the fault of--”

Mettaton had to catch his thoughts for a moment. He knew that the Gungnir are keeping a close watch on every word he says. Lambasting them now would disfavour Aiden and his young princes: a terrible idea to entertain.

“--Kids! That’s right! Angsty kids who didn’t get enough love or direction in their life. Maybe both. But, Uncle Tonton has a helpline for those precious folk who need an ear!”

Cue the display for the MTT-Brand Health Helpline on the bottom of his screen. It’s actually a redirect to the Surface’s mental health helpline. As much as he wanted to make his own true MTT counselling for the troubled, he didn’t have the qualifications to pass the legal red tape.

Judge Thyme doesn’t seem amused by the advertisement. Why? Not something Mettaton wanted to know on-camera.

Before the old Magus could shoot out any more fiery judgement, Mettaton switched topics: “Say, where’s your LOVELY wife?”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Huh. He’s married?????
> I thought it was a rumour
> Naaaah there’s no way a sourpuss like him can get a wife
> Maybe she’s a witch
> Or a [censored]
> I say he’s faking it.
Mezil hinted towards the right. When the camera panned in that direction, it captured the living presence of a STUNNING woman.

Behold, that retro chic dress coat!
That fine crafted porcelain mask!
Those soft white gloves!
And those slender black leather boots! Who needs heels with style like these?

Everything about her exuded CLASS to the world!

The chat went wild.

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> OMG
> WHO’S THAT???
> It’s the wife!!!
> IT’S REALLY HER???

Presenting the lady, Mettaton hammed it up. “Remove your skeptical spectacles, my special specials. You’re not seeing any smokes and mirrors. This sweetheart in purple is none other than Lady Lucidia of House Berendin: Judge Thyme’s beloved wife~~~”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> No waaaaaaaaaaaaaay
> Omgomgomgogmogm
> [censored] he’s actually married?!
> If he’s married, I’m a wizard!
> Her hair, it defies gravity! :O
> What’s behind the mask?
> Creepy
> I thought it was cool. Like a masquerade.
> With that getup anyone can act as the wife. What gives?
> Is she wearing for winter? I think those are fur-lined.
> That coat looks warm.
> Looking at it is making me sweat yo
> Not that warm, unless it’s summer.
> Prepping for the cold night I guess?
> Is it me, or she looks kinda thin? Maybe she’s all bones?
> I say she's a fake. Magi parlour tricks again.

By now, Mettaton wanted to give the negative anon a boot. He didn’t need naysayers to bring down his show. Alas, he didn't employ an actual moderator to watch the chat. There's a tinge of regret for his overreliance on automation.
Puzzled, he asked: “Hm? What do you mean? She’s clearly wearing a very rich royal purple. Almost red to match her husband’s tastes.”

Alphys and the camera crew started to show all sorts of hand signals: ‘stop’, ‘halt’, ‘abort’.

“Excuuuuuuuse me for a moment.”

Mettaton wheeled away from the screen, and took a peek with his ghost form. Although he had fused with his body, the taser incident in The Spire broke that connection. It’ll take a while for him to heal.

Lucidia was indeed dressed in rich, royal, sapphire blue. Just like what others had said.

“Oh. Oh my. It is blue.”

Alphys whispered: “I-I think I need to update your optics. Unlike the cam-crew, you’re still using the old Underground salvage tech. I never thought it would have trouble rendering that colour.”

“Dear me, that’s quite a technical difficulty. On the bright side, at least we know what needs improvement!”

Mettaton wheeled back on-screen. “You were right, my perceptive fans! Lady Lucidia is indeed wearing blue instead of purple. I apologize for my colour-blindness. Good thing I’m a robot with swappable parts!”

Back to business. Showing the microphone to the Lady, he asked: “Anyhow Lady Lucidia darling, this is your grand debut! What do you want to say to YOUR future fans?”

In a somewhat stilted manner, Lucidia replied. “Hello, world.”

“Well, that’s quite simple yet effective.”

“Wait!” Doctor Alphys gasped. “Chotte matte yo! I-I think she’s making a reference. It’s the most basic programming lesson for newbies!”
Hello
Hello :)
Hi :D
doctor alphys is right!
Hello, world.
Ask lady lucy if she’s referring to that.

“Oooh my~ is that true?” asked Mettaton. “Are you making a programming reference?”
Lady Lucidia responded with a cheerful and natural tone: “Affirmative! It is indeed a nod to introductory syntaxes.”

What a blessed turn of events! The mood had swung a full 180, from dissent to genuine interest.

“My oh my~ If you want to ask questions, we first need to garner their permission. Will our classy couple grace us with their answers?”

Husband and wife met on screen to discuss the issue. The man wasn’t keen on opening himself to the whims of the anonymous. On the other hand, the woman wanted to give the questionnaire a try.

In the end, the duo agreed. They sat down together on a cafeteria bench.

Mettaton got straight to work. “This is the moment you’re all waiting for, my lovely honeys: The Q and A! Questions are free. But! If you really, really, REALLY want your query to stand in the limelight, you gotta dress it up with some PREMIUM pricing. After all, time is money, baby~”
And just like that, the very first question had a glittering price tag. There’s no limit of viewers willing to throw money for priority treatment.

So Mettaton read that out, “Thank you for the contribution, darling! Your patronage is much appreciated. Now, for a grand total of 100 dollars… To ‘Mezyl’: Do you ever take any of your wife’s advice?”

Mezil’s stoic front shattered into embarrassed flustering. Meanwhile, Lady Lucidia just couldn’t stop chuckling: her polite front nary containing the relatable headache of any married couple.

What a priceless reaction. Definitely worth the money spent.
“What was that for?! The old man exclaimed, “First, why was my name bastardised into a mock pharmaceutical product? Second, do I look like a clueless stubborn fool to you?”

To which Lucidia jabbed: “Then explain to me why do you sometimes sneak out of the house to feast on toxic curry.”

“There is nothing toxic about Jungle Curry.”

“Your digestive systems disagree, dear.”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Lolololololololololololoo
> Omg ahahah
> Mezyl
> XD
> Wow
> Amaze
> I can’t believe the vampire is a curry addict
> Clearly he’s cursed to love spice even though he can’t digest it
> Mezil Thyme and fiery diarrhea. Bad Toilet Thymes, indeed.
> Mezil Thyme and the chronic fire-rrhea
> he can never live it down
> Now he has to deal with everyone’s bullshiet on top of his own crap
> that makes sense both as a metaphor and not
> Literal and metaphorical meanings
> My favorite
> I’ve known your pain since before the turn of the millennium.
> I can’t understand why my spouse loves chili either! They eat bird’s eye chili RAW!
> And then complain about all the burn in the toilet!
> SUFFER FOR SPICE
> It’s because chili releases the happy hormones
> That’s it we have a new meme
> The spice must flow
> nonono I meant the whole curry vampire deal. yours is a really really old one
> He totally needs to take a mezyl after downing the curry ;)
> Aww give him a break. Curries are THE BEST!
> Yeah it’s my country’s national dish!
> Bwahaha i think i know which restaurant he’s talking about
> this is an overly long gag

Mettaton chimed in his own opinions. “I must say, they do make some scrumptious curry. The coconut milk adds an exquisite tropical richness to the blend. I’m inspired to make a new brand of MTT products based on those flavours!”

In a last attempt to salvage his reputation, Mezil remarked: “That aside, of course I listen to my wife. She’s my trusted partner, both on the job and in our private life. We may not always agree, but that doesn’t mean I don’t pay attention to her wishes and well-being.”
Mettaton fanned himself. “My, my, my, my, my! Look at that, the world wide web is curious about your SPICY LOVE STORY!”

“Pardon?” she replied.

“Well, take a looksie darling.”

Due to the sheer amount of romance requests, Mettaton had the Mini show Lucidia the livestream chat. Her husband shook his head and muttered a complaint about ‘nosy people’.

“U-uh…” She fidgeted in shyness, blushing behind the mask for sure. “We’re married for 25 years. I first met him while I was on the run from danger. The situation is too complicated to give a simple and straight answer. Let’s just say I was involved in an internal conflict within the Magus Association, whereas my husband was an unarmed civilian with the right talents. Despite the odds, we ended up saving each other’s lives on more than one occasion.”

“As for how long we dated before we married…” Lady Lucidia replied in a polite, factual manner: “Several weeks. It may be surprising, but we got to know each other quite well in a short span of time.”

“SO FAST??!!?!”

“I guess the vamp really is a shounen protagonist

Gotta powerlevel those rep points when you’re in danger

nonono you got it wrong. he has to get the right flags for the Good End of Lucidia's visual novel route

I guess that means we’re living in the Lucy Timeline?"
Metton wondered if there was any time-travelling at work here. In their memories, they would have dated much longer. He had a taste of that in the recent courtroom drama.

Of course, he did not disclose that to the public. Such a power should remain top-secret forever…

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> [99$] lady lucy, would you smooch a Thyme Vampire? Last buck only when we see the smooch!

Mettaton switched on his ‘drumroll’ sound effect from his boxy self. “For 99 sparkling dollars, would our masked sweetheart smooch a Thyme Vampire???”

Mezil protested a bit; perhaps the ol’ boss of the Magi felt his fearsome reputation chip away. But, Lucidia pecked a kiss on her husband’s cheek. Her mask remained on, but Mettaton considered it as good as done!

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHHHH!!!
> THAT’S SO KAWAII
> TOTTEMO KAWAII
> aaaa my heart I cannot
> ROMANCE BABY
> ok i’m now convinced they’re a real couple
> I guess that makes me a real ‘wizard’.
> Which is accurate anyway because I’m 30+ without a girlfriend
> [1$] for the smooch
> I’m so jealous

“Romance, baby indeed! Next question,” said Mettaton. “For the contribution of 200 dollars, we have the following request. Ehm. To Mezil: Have you ever actually gone to outer space? Your exploits make it hard to distinguish between reality and the tall tales that get made up. Something about you fighting angry Moon ghosts or whatever version of it’s being told these days?”

Lady Lucidia giggled. “Who comes up with these?”

“I have no clue, honey,” the celebrity shrugged. “I keep my chatroom anonymous for maximum freedom of expression.”

The grumpy Magus glared at the camera. “That is the oldest trick in the book. If I say ‘yes’, my answer would be taken as the absolute truth. If I say ‘no’, it would be deemed as a denial of a larger conspiracy. Neither confirming nor denying will also yield the same result.”

Alphys said, “D-did you really go to the moon? Are there really DEMONS on the dark side? M-maybe leftover experiments from decades ago???”

Mezil let out a long sigh. “You and your ludicrous expectations just proved my point.”
“Oh darlings, the moon is at least good for one thing.” Mettaton struck a dramatic pose. “As a romantic backdrop for my greatest hits! Order today, and get a free MTT-Brand Extra Spark-tacular Lunar Poster for all your starstruck needs!”

“Speaking of romance, I think this next question fits the bill. To Lady Lucidia: what’s your secret to a happy marriage?”

Perceptive Alphys asked: “Why is she getting all the serious questions?”

Lucidia replied: “Closest match to query: shared experiences. We do things together, be it at work or at leisure. That includes housework. Since Mezil has lived on his own before, he has sufficient mindfulness in certain aspects of housekeeping.”

Doctor Alphys glowed with interest. “D-do you watch anime together?”

“Sometimes,” she replied, “But more often we play digital games. Not against each other, mind you. Sometimes I’d watch Mezil’s gameplay. Sometimes he watches mine. Two different people playing the same title can yield very different results.”

“That’s delightfully adorable!” Mettaton squealed. “Do you see now my darlings? Beneath all that grim front is the fluffiest couple~”

The ‘image improvement’ master plan worked just as intended! The less the public sees anyone as enemies, the better. Watching perceptions shift to a lighter spectrum filled Mettaton with satisfaction.

“Oh? What is this?” He commented, “We have a new contributor! My oh my, this fan is quite generous. For 350 dollars we have another question addressed to Judge Thyme.”
After clearing his mechanical throat, Mettaton read it out loud: “Mezil: Are you sure you’re not an actual amnesiac vampire? I found several pictures of you from the 1940s! And, there’s also this one 15th-century painting that looks like you grew an impressive mustache.”

The old man exclaimed from sheer disbelief. “Excuse me?!?!?”

Lady Lucidia laughed even harder. She must be having a field day with this session.

After regaining her composure, she commented, “Query: was the name of this man from the 1940s ‘William Winston’?”

Ding, ding! Correct. The participant posted a picture of a sharp looking man in a previous-century military uniform. Although the photograph was of someone in his twenties, Mettaton spotted enough similarities to understand the curiosity.

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> I-is this for real?
> holy smokes
> It’s that era alright
> I see the similarities in the wavy hair.
> How am i supposed to compare an old dude with this hot youngster?
> He’s not THAT old! He’s only 50 years old despite his super white hair.
> and he's still hot

Mezil grumbled, “I am not sure if I should be impressed or disturbed. William Winston was my great-grandfather. He earned many medals for defending the border. If you paid attention in history class, you should know that this soil was almost lost to a dictator’s invasion. It’s thanks to men like him that we remained sovereign.”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Wow! A descendant of a war hero!
> that’s like, everyone during that time though
> yeah i heard my great gramps signed up for war at 16 years old
> what about the ancient painting? i wanna see the painting!

Though reluctant, the man replied: “My wife is more versed in topics surrounding events of centuries past. Let her see it.”

Request, granted. It was an oil painting of what appears to be a high-ranking soldier in his forties. The contributor was not kidding about the plush moustache: well groomed and sculpted for maximum fashion points. Although the man did not wear armour, he tucked a helmet under his arm with great pride.

Lucidia’s tone of voice turned cold and factual. “Identity confirmed. However, this man does not match my husband’s genetic data. The similarities are pure coincidence. Furthermore, facial details register a lower matching percentage compared to William Winston.”
“What about his name?” Mettaton scratched the top of his boxy head.

“What, classified, confidential. He was a Vanquisher sent by the Magus Association to execute a DEMON on a throne. His target's cruelty was one of the key inspirations for classical vampire lore.”

“Oh my, he was a vampire hunter?”

“Acceptable approximate. Apologies. I can not disclose any further details. Query denied.”

An uncomfortable silence hovered over the chat…

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Uhhhhhhhhh
> what happened?
> is she offended?
> Did we make her angry?
> It’s like a switch.
> why does she sometimes start talking like a robot?
> Maybe she IS a robot???
> It’s the witch switch
> Hey, she’s known as The Sky Witch for a reason…
> Were you traumatized as a child?
> it’s gotta be something big
> don’t be afraid. we’re nice people

Mettaton resisted the urge to scream. And, judging from Alphys’ face, she had the same thought. The internet was as fickle and as intrusive as the legends say.

“D-darlings! Your concern is appreciated, but I think we’re going too fast too soon! I suggest a focused interview for such confessions. Maybe in a future livestream?”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> Ooooooooh
> An Interview With a Vampire (and His Wife)?
> nonono no it’s An Interview With a Vampire and a Witch.
> I’m totes up for that session

What a big relief. “Thank you for your kind considerations, my darlings. In the meantime, I want to hear the conclusion to this doppelganger tale. Lady Lucidia, how does your classy husband look like in his prime?”

Like that, the warmth in her voice returned. “Mezzy dear, you have the best copy saved in your cloud, right? Upload that straight to the livestream.”

“Yes dear…”

And so, a reluctant, grumpy Mezil Thyme uploaded a picture of his youthful days. His fancy getup
didn’t change much over the years.

Looking at it, Mettaton gasped.
Alphys gasped.
The whole camera crew gasped.

If the wild reactions of the livestream were anything to go by, even the viewers gasped at the reveal.

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> omg
> [censored]
> oh my god
> Are you kidding me???
> Mezil looks EXACTLY like his great-grandfather?!!??
> Oh no he’s hot
> He’s hot as an old dude too
> I TOLD YOU HE’S STILL HOT!!!
> wtf even is this
> impossibru

Alphys noted: “T-they could pass off as twins!”

“Or clones!” Mettaton added, “Maybe our contributor is right after all: what if the Supreme Judge secretly a benevolent vampire?! A war hero of legendary skills~”

In which Mezil doth protest: “Absolutely not!”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> There’s no such thing as a benevolent vampire.
> Like there’s no such thing as a war hero.
> you can’t ever call anyone a hero if they’re in war. There are only war criminals
> whether or not they’re on the winning or losing side doesn’t matter
> Let me tell you. I know what he did.
> I know the people he killed.
> sod off edgelord
> 2edgy4me
> Have you considered earning the title of an edgemarquis? If you ask me, you sound more like a killer than Judge Thyme. Bet you’re a psychopath.
> ad honenheim fallacy!
> Ad hominem you idiot
> this isn’t some alchemist cartoon
> Uuuuuuh family friendly channel here
> Yeah, guys. I don’t think this is allowed in MTT’s livestream

“Uuuhh…” Alphys started sweating. “M-Metta? I think you gotta close the chat.”

“No, dearie. I-it’s normal for chat get a little heated. I-lm sure it'll moderate itself eventually. Look, my viewers are defending Judge Thyme! Thank you sweeties, for keeping the peace~”
And with that, everything returned to normal. The whole chat breathed a collective sigh of relief.

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> ok ok
> no more fighting ok? :(  
> fine

"Huh. What’s this? Another donation? It’s a whole grand! It reads…”

[MTT ☆ GOSSIP ☆ LIVE]
> [1000$] Your propaganda machine is laughable. We will not be silenced. You keep the corpses of dead children. Monster. Magi. Human. Any and all heretic sympathizers will die by our cleansing blade tonight!
> We will purge the world of your influence!
> Mark our words!

That’s the last straw. Mettaton cried out, “Reject that payment! I WILL NOT have anyone spew hate on MY channel. Time for a commercial break!”

“The MTT Behind The Scenes Feast of Fantasy Livestream is brought to you by the MTT Soda Line: Sparkle up your life with every sip of MTT!”

And so, the stream was cut short.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: I forgot to post a picture of Lucidia in said dress.

http://fav.me/dd34xct

This is what she wore for the event.

Also the term "Hello, world!" will forever make me think of the opening of Kekkai Sensen from Bump of Chicken. It's a really catchy.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOU4YiuaxAM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=He6ZkZMS8VM
Border Burden

Chapter Notes

An update has arrived! Enjoy!

You, Frisk, put your hands into a steeple and breathed deep.

What in the bloody blazes just happened? Somebody just paid a whole dang grand to deliver a death threat on MTT’s Feast of Fantasy livestream.

Big sister Cenna looked at you, then at the folded evening gown in her hand, and then back at you again.

“...Guess I ain’t gonna wear this.” She said. “I can’t be ballroom dancing while I'm going toe-to-toe with the lightningheads.”

Mom disagreed! “No. You are royalty now! A princess must look her best: especially in trials such as these. Besides, you are the sole candidate for the merger with Frisk’s father. A premature life-threatening skirmish should be the last thing on your mind. In the meantime, the Royal Guard is sworn to protect you at all cost.”

“Er, right. Sorry.” She squeezed her hands, feeling super awkward. “I’m not used to that kind of first-class treatment.”

Heh. Hard to switch out from her usual front-line responder mentality, huh? Too used to the role of protector instead of the protected.

Nonetheless, you asked your sister to prepare her gun. Even if it won’t be used, it will at least deter some troublemakers.

“Eeeeeerrrr about that…” She chuckled with guilty discomfort. “I, uh, got suspended for getting physical with Mez.”

Riiiiiiiiiiight. Because the idiot Tsunderjudge couldn’t be honest about you falling into the mountain again! So, no gun either. Oh well, who needs a gun when you have EPIC Vanquisher magic!

Mom cleared her throat. Loud. Her matron glare reminded you that Cenna shouldn’t be anywhere near danger for all the reasons that she had just outlined earlier.

Point taken. Say, have Aiden and the Grandmaster arrived in town yet?

Cenna checked her phone. “Nope. Mez hasn’t pinged me about the GM just yet. But... your chatroom went wiiiiiiild.”

It did?

You checked your group chat. It seems that Mettaton had already flipped out to everyone about the whole incident. Which means... Undyne will definitely have the border on a lockdown.
Right on cue, the official notification arrived in your inbox. It’s from the recently-reinstated Captain of the Royal Guard. Both Magi and Gungnir happened to arrive at the edge of town at the exact same place at the same time, she wrote. And neither side was willing to give way for the other.

That’s a deadlock alright: just as you thought. It’s time to go before things worsen.

Dad, the King, just finished potting a poisonous yet rare flower that he found at the school playground. He had to move it for the children’s sake. At first, he wanted to introduce it to Mettaton’s viewers… but it appears that plan will have to be postponed too.

As he walked towards the kitchen, he said: “Frisk, we can move the moment I’m done washing up.”

Okay Dad.

To be safe, you made a SAVE. A glowing red star appeared at your feet.

………………

WAIT, WHAT?!?!?!?!

You had the Keys of Fate all the while?!? You didn’t give them back to the Tsunderjudge?!?!

Or… rather… he never asked for them. What happened??? Why didn’t he??? You went through his ‘Trial of Crimson Nightmares’ for a reason!!!

Think Frisk, think. He won’t just simply forget about something so major.

That’s right, you were holding onto the SAVES to undo Papyrus’ injuries. While waiting for the test results, Aiden showed up. Time resumed due to his meddling. You placated the Gungnir with your knife dancing and bought the monster citizens their precious time.

And here you are: caught in the middle of yet another sensitive diplomatic situation.

Welp. You are the ‘Golden Quiche’, Monsterkind’s Ambassador extraordinaire. This is your moment to shine. The Tsunderjudge is judging your judgement.

“Yo Frisky,” said Cenna. “Running into a problem?”

SAVE management, you said. There’s one autosave, one Papyrus save, and now one pre-border shenanigans save. You have… two more empty slots.

“Can ya clone your SAVES yet? Mez does that a lot. Especially if it’s an older one.”

Huh. You can. Also, the autosave was a few minutes before your most recent SAVE… roughly the moment when Mom finished her princess lecture. Knowing a few minutes could spell a huge difference, you cloned the older autosave.

Thanks a ton, sis!

“No probs.”

However, Cenna still looked troubled.

What’s up? You asked.

“Just getting a real bad feeling about this. Wish I still had our family heirloom.”
Mhmm, yes. The Trap Harvester. Which got blown up by yours truly. Sorry, sis.

“Eh, it’s fine. You did what you had to do.”

Meanwhile Dad finished washing up.

“Frisk, I am ready.” he announced.

You thus waved goodbye to Mom and Cenna. Work calls.

* * *

You, Frisk, put your hands into a steeple and breathed deep.

What in the bloody blazes just happened? There was chaos, the feast got cancelled, and you’re in your EMPTY Hub. It was still undergoing renovations after the disaster named Megalovania.

Walking past the Ruin’s Gates, you emerged into Mezil’s jasmine gardens. Up ahead stood his big, fancy mansion.

At least your Hubs are connected…

Inside there the Tsunderjudge waited, having tea in the living room.

“Welcome, Crimson Keeper.”

You tell the old man that you have some serious questions.

“Does it involve the Keys of Fate remaining in your possession?”

…Yes.

“Then I think you already know the answer; you are the main character of this scenario. The people involved are directly connected to you, not me. I have neither the power nor the influence to make the required changes.”

So he didn’t just forget about the Keys.

“No,” Mezil replied. “I won’t be so absentminded over something so vital.”

What about the exorcism curry incident?

“That mistake was due to the overestimation of my health.”

…Surprisingly, that was a truthful answer.

“I advise you not to go alone, Frisk. Cast a Mark of Proxy on the Psychia of your chosen assistant. You must be within physical range to apply it. That’s what I did for Papyrus in order to have him rescue you.”

Papyrus did say something like that happened. Mezil attended your funeral to meet your skelefriend in person.
So, you need someone with knowledge of how both the Magus Association and Gungnir operate. Fortunately, there’s one such a person near you.

You told the Tsunderjudge that you’re gonna make your big sister, Judge Vanquisher Cenna Caraway, your proxy.

“A wise choice.” He nodded, “Now go forth, Crimson Keeper. Today, Frisk, you are the future of humans and monsters.”

* * *

You, Frisk, put your hands into a steeple and breathed deep.

How in the bloody blazes does one make a proxy?

Cenna explained: “Command your Mark to link my mind to your sense of time. Then, plant it on my SOUL.”

She ejected her jigsaw-esque SOUL and presented it before you. It shone in a bright marigold yellow.

After pumping yourself up, you touched the floating heart.

You’re Determined to link Cenna’s mind to your sense of time!

Unlike your usual Marks, the proxy spell took some time to materialize. It’s like watching a printer apply layer upon layer of ink.

Once complete, you sensed a pulse resonating in your chest. That must be proof that Cenna had become your time-travelling partner.

Mom watched with great wonder. You told her that this is the same power as the Tsunderjudge's.

“My human child, using magic like a natural monster, I never thought I would see the day.”

There she goes, radiating with Mom Pride.

Business first, though. You informed them about what happened in the old timeline.

You and Dad went out to settle the border dispute. By the time you arrived, Mettaton and Undyne were already butting their heads against each other.

Pretending to be Undyne, you yelled: ‘METTATOOOOON I’M TRYING TO WORK HERE!!!!’

Then, you switched into one of Mettaton’s fabulous poses. ‘Darling, I’m trying to work too! My reputation as a celebrity hinges on this moment!”

Cenna facepalmed. “Yeeeeah I see how that went so very wrong. Two professionals at the opposite end of the spectrum… and it’s unfair to ditch either side.”

“Did you do anything, Frisk?” asked Mom.
You tried, but no one listened. The commotion attracted a ton of other media attention which further sullied the situation.

“What about Asgore?”

…Nobody listened to him either. Which meant that Aiden lost respect for the King of Monsters as well. He said: ‘What good is a leader who can’t control his citizens? Pathetic.’

HOWEVER! That was STILL not the dealbreaker!

Cenna said, “Wow, it got worse?”

Totally absolutely certainly got worse. Gungnir’s statements insulted Undyne to the highest degree. She snapped and accused them of starting the fire.

“Truest fact with the crappiest timing. Bet the lightningheads cried foul.”

Yep. They in turn got mad about being treated like criminals, leaving with the whole entourage. What’s more, all of this happened on multiple live media channels.

That’s when you realised that you reached a massive GAME OVER. And here we are, one RESET later.

“I see…” Mom pondered.

The present time King Asgore once again finished potting a poisonous yet rare flower that he found at the school playground. He still hadn’t told you why he thought it was such a danger to the children.

He said, “Frisk, we can move the moment I’m done washing up.”

Okay, Dad.

You told Mom that you need to bring Cenna along for this round. She can help Undyne to calm down while you sort things out with Mettaton. Besides, the Magi would be happy to see her. Should time run short, she’ll change into her dress at school.

Mom nodded. “If that is the situation, then I shall allow it. Hurry you two. The sooner you get there, the better.”

At the border, everything went according to plan. Cenna’s additional presence helped Undyne feel supported, and in turn reduced the chance of a metaphorical underwater volcanic eruption.

Meanwhile, you managed to convince Mettaton to adopt a new premise: ‘keep it natural’. Let events unfold while staying at a distance like a nature documentary. That way he can comment all he wants without interfering with official business.

Though skeptical at first, he eventually accepted your proposal. “I suppose THAT is a valid genre too. Very well my shining star, I shall do as you say!”

Thanks a ton, Mettaton.

You watched him wheel away to about one metre from you. There, he stopped. It’s kinda close… but it’s better than nothing.

That’s one problem solved. You went back to the border’s roads to see if new issues cropped up.
Two security guards approached Dad. One wore a bodyguard’s uniform, the other wore a tribal cloak and a cloth mask.

“Your Majesty, the Magus Association should enter first. The Grandmaster is here with delicate cargo for the feast. We must make haste before it perishes!”

“Denied! Gungnir enter first. If Warlock go ahead, they double back to capture our chief!”

“What? Had we wanted to arrest you, we would have already done so! Besides, how can you guarantee that you won’t try to attack us instead?”

Looking at the bottleneck, Dad asked out loud: “Is it not possible for both to enter at once?”

“NO.” both answered in unison, followed by exchanging awkward glances.

Well, there’s a simple solution to this. You proposed the following: why not ask the big bosses themselves for what they think?

Cenna then walked up to you, keeping cool despite the situation. “Frisky, let the Gungnir in first.”

Huh? What about the Grandmaster? What about his cargo???

“I know he won’t mind. It’d be worse if we continue to argue here.”

She does have a point…

Okay, it’s decided: Gungnir will proceed first, followed by the Magus Association. The Royal Guard shall travel in between the two groups so neither side gets any funny ideas.

“What?!” the Magus representative exclaimed. “I implore you to rethink this decision!”

On the other hand, the Gungnir representative bowed in gratitude. “Thank you, Royal Child. We prepare right away.”

The Magus representative was left in shock. Cenna tapped her colleague on the shoulder for a quick chat.

“If you have any objections, bring them up with me. Meanwhile I’ll help you escort the GM.”

“…Yes, Judge Vanquisher…”

“Heh, for now it’s better to call me Princess Cenna.”

“No offence, but I thought that was a joke?”

“Looooong story. I’m as baffled as you are, really.”

You watched her get into one of the three shiny black cars. Cenna chose to sit in the frontmost one. Maybe the Grandmaster is in there?

While both sides prepared to mobilize, you noticed that Undyne herself looked unhappy. You asked if she’s okay.

“…I hate this,” she said. “It’s like, we’re letting those jerks walk all over us. We know what REALLY happened at The Spire. Without us, tons of people would have died a horrible death.”

She’s right. Unfortunately, this is not the right time to bring up that subject. It sucks but The Dreemurr Nation has to bear with this pretense for the time being.

“I understand. I had a feeling that I’d cause a disaster if you didn’t intervene. Thanks for saving my
You decided that you won’t tell her about the previous failed timeline. Undyne’s judgement was accurate, and you don’t want to kick her down any further.

Undyne left to perform her duties. What’s up with Mettaton? He’s still filming from afar. You appreciate his obedience.

Did you manage to solve this scenario? You sure hope so! Because, if you’re honest, you’re excited to try Papyrus’ ascended cooking.

But to your utter dismay, you heard glass shatter from the Magus Association’s entourage. It’s from Cenna’s car. That can never be good.

You dashed straight there, ignoring the warning yells from Undyne or Dad. You must know what happened.

The bodyguards then whisked you away. They told you not to look. They told you to hide.

You screamed for your sister’s name…

…But she could no longer reply.

* * *

You, Frisk, put your hands into a steeple and breathed deep.

Why in the bloody blazes does this keep on happening???

That’s it! You’re done! You need a break! You thus went over to Tsunderjudge’s Hub discouraged. The moment you saw a couch, you plopped face first into the cushions.

A calloused hand rubbed the top of your noggin. “Hey Frisky, cheer up. I’m not double dead yet.”

Yeah, that’s good. But it still gave you a heart attack. It hurts to see her die.

The Tsunderjudge huffed at you. “Where is your determination? This is just the second round.”

“Oy, Ol’ Mez! You forgot the trouble YOU caused last week? Frisky’s been feeling the job since you grilled them in the Crimson Hall! Give them a break.”

Thumbs up. Nice one sis.

“No probs, Frisky. High five.”

You lifted your hand and she returned a gentle high-five.

“Hmm, but why now?” Mezil asked. “You handled Gaelic quite well. Not to mention you had more fire in the past.”

You sighed out loud. The last time you felt this frustrated… it was when you were trying to revive Asriel. When that failed, you went down a dark, dark path.
Afterwards you were told many times that your Determination was the problem. Sans did. Tsunderjudge did. That’s why you don’t dare to get yourself too hyped now.

“Which means you’re intentionally limiting your options?”

It’s definitely not a wonderful idea to betray Aiden at this point. The old you might have tried that out of curiosity, but… let’s just say that you have grown wiser.

…You’re worried that you’re just going to make things worse. Again.

“In my eyes, it will only get worse if you don’t get involved. They need you. And I understand that’s frightening.”

You asked what the Tsunderjudge would have done.

“Me? I wouldn’t even host the feast at all. I do not trust men like Aiden to understand the values of the Dreemurr Nation or the Magus Association. Hence why I think you’re a much better fit for this mission. I’m not known for being pleasant.”

Wow. Why so cynical?

“Perhaps this is not the right moment to explain. It’s not like you’re in the mood for any more serious business. So, go ahead, catch a break.”

What? Nani?

“When you’re in the Hub, the physical world remains in stasis. You can take your time to rest and recover.”

You sprang up from the cushion, unable to believe your ears. Is he serious????

“Do I look like I’m joking?”

It’s hard to tell when he’s serious 24/7!

“To prove my point, I shall leave. Use any facility as you please.”

The Tsunderjudge actually went up and left!

A miracle happened!!!!!!!

Cenna tapped you on the shoulder, starting to get giggly and excited herself: “You know what this means? We get to do the fluffy!”

Yeah! Like, a pillow fort? Blanket fort? Pillow fight??? Wait, those need more people for maximum fun. Let’s try an activity that’s just right for two people.

“Pray tell, what is it?”

Video Games. To be specific, SHMUPS! You asked if she knew anything about them. You had a feeling she does, judging from how she maneuvered in that Sans Serif fight.

Cenna slapped her forehead and laughed.“Oh man, that’s Papa’s FAVOURITE genre! Can’t believe you inherited his taste too! Sometimes he would get sooooooo deep into ‘the zone’ Mama had to nag him to bed. Otherwise, he might not sleep.”
You can imagine it now. Tsunderjudge the eternal nocturnal, and your biological dad the shmupper running on minimal sleep. Quadruple the nerd power. Utterly hilarious!

“Don’t forget the wives complaining to each other.”

Ooooooooh yes indeed. You can totally imagine sighing at their husbands’ quirkiness in the background.

You really wanna draw that someday. But first! You and Cenna shall have a jolly good time in the games room!
August 31st is Malaysia’s Independence Day. Quite a coincidence to have it happen on a chapter about border woes. Happy Independence Day to Malaysians out there, although this was posted very late.

In the deepest basement of the Hub, the Chronographer’s Laboratory lay hidden. Other than a select few, guests were not privy to its existence. Not even Papyrus had clearance during Chara’s exorcism.

Before she put on her visor, Lucidia heard the sounds of cheerful laughter echo from above. She recognized the voices as belonging to Cenna and Frisk.

Curious, she summoned a screen to investigate.

Oh… they’re having quite some fun together.

Hmm. I never understood the appeal of this genre. There are way too many things to keep track of on screen.

Despite her initial protest, Lucidia ended up watching their play session.

She watched…

And watched…

And watched some more. The spectacular fireworks of multi-coloured bullets hypnotized her into a daze.

“You could join them if you want, dear.”

Startled, Lucidia yelped a high-pitched squeak. She turned around to see her husband Mezil.

She asked: “…Do I want to know how long you’ve been standing there?”

Mezil replied, “Do you?”

“No. Knowing you, it’s at least ten minutes.”

“I’m serious, though. You could take a break. I’m not a slave driver.”

“Thank you, but… shmups are more your kind of material,” said Lucidia. “Besides, I’m not in the mood for fun. We have a case to solve.”

Mezil straightened his coat. “Likewise, I too would rather work. Let us begin.”

The real work started here. Lucidia put on her visor and ignited the fire in her Eye.
Miniscule cubes of mimicry emerged from thin air, filling the blank space of the Void. They radiated outward until the system had created a life-sized diorama of the crime scene: the Ebott Town Border. Despite its seeming realism, both husband and wife were not quite satisfied with the results.

Mezil tapped his cane. “Hmmm… it’s limited. Too limited.”

Lucidia further commented: “Frisk has yet to reach full adult height. Their lower eye level in addition to their diverted focus has reduced the base rendering distance.”

“Hmm,” he pondered. “Gaelic should have scoured every nook and cranny of Ebott Town. Try to patch in his scouting results.”

“Affirmative. Attempting to verify the age of data.”

Lucidia relayed the details to her husband. “Gaelic’s memory is over three months old. And, it’s from the second timeline since the Dreemurr Nation left the Underground.”

“So, we’re stuck with a white winter…” Mezil muttered. “Plot that terrain on a separate layer. It may still have some use.”
"Acknowledged. Generating terrain on Layer 2."

The diorama expanded into the thick of winter. Only Frisk’s immediate data had the green foliage of spring.

“This will do for now,” said Mezil. “First, let’s examine ground zero.”

Looking out from Ebott Town, the forest stood on the right and meadows on the left. Frisk’s frozen copy was being whisked away by two bodyguards. The rest of the personnel had their guns drawn and on the lookout, defending the entourage.

Mezil took the time to check the faces of the staff on scene. “I recognize the bodyguards. Draw their profiles from the database and do a cross check.”

[MATCHING MEMORY WITH THE MAGUS ASSOCIATION REGISTRY]

“I did not find anything suspicious about their profiles,” Lucidia reported. “Would you like a copy?”

“Yes please. I’ll check them later.”

Lucidia spawned a tablet with the requested profiles and set that aside.

Mezil moved away from Frisk’s model and proceeded to check the cars. “Where was the Grandmaster?”

“Unknown,” Lucidia replied. “I was unable to confirm his location before Frisk quit the scenario. However, I am certain that he’s not in the frontmost vehicle: ‘Car 1’. Cenna knows the safety procedures: she will not disclose his location to possible enemies.”

“So he’s either in Car 2 or Car 3…”

There was a half-rendered image of a truck behind Car 3. “What’s this vehicle for?” Mezil asked.

“Number plate confirmed,” said Lucidia, “Source: Magus Logistics. That truck is carrying the Grandmaster’s gift for the feast. He arranged for one earlier today.”

“So it’s a part of his entourage, huh.”

That concluded the initial examination of the border’s immediate surroundings. The investigation resumed on Car 1, the victim of the crime. It suffered one large bullet hole at the backseat window.

Mezil requested Lucidia to render the interiors of Car 1. But the Chronographer ran into yet another problem.

“Error: Frisk is unable to see beyond the vehicle’s tinted glass.”

He said, “Then we extract the data from Cenna’s Proxy Mark instead.”

The sentiment brought up the unmistakable disgust. “Do we have to do that? She’s the victim…”

“Even better,” Mezil replied in a deadpan manner.
Peppered with crankiness, Lucidia complained: “Are you forgetting that the carnage will go straight through my mind? It’s more invasive than merely looking at the results.”

Blinking twice, her puzzled husband said, “But you’ve handled autopsies for almost three decades?”


And so, she loaded the data before she made a further embarrassment of herself.

Then, she took off the visors and rubbed her eyes.

“It’s done…? Except, I am not bothered? Does the Chronograph require maintenance? I must examine this without any peripheral equipment.”

Lucidia hurried over to open car’s damaged door. When she did so, she did not encounter a grisly mess of what used to be a human being. Rather… white glitch-squares censored Cenna’s remains. Blood was absent as well.

Exasperated, Mezil yelled at the false sky: “FRISK!!! You showered in the dust of countless monsters, yet you can’t render ONE human being?!!?”

The technical difficulty was an amusing welcome to an otherwise grim investigation. Chuckling, she commented: “Dust is sterile by comparison. Even I, as a monster, admit to such. Nonetheless… your suggestion was not a total loss.”

She pointed to the condition of the back seat. “The window is riddled with small radial cracks. The cushions are torn apart in a similar manner. Furthermore, I see holes in the ceiling as well. They appear to be particles launched in a high velocity from a single point. I suspect that we’re dealing with a shrapnel shell. Every shot is guaranteed lethal.”

“Illegal war-grade equipment…” said Mezil. “Is it Gungnir gear?”

“Unable to confirm query. I must first analyze the fragments to determine the bullet’s make. Furthermore, the black market does not care about affiliation.”

“Which means we could be dealing with a mercenary as well. I won’t be surprised if some rich sod paid this person to sow chaos. Still, it’s still too soon to speculate motives. The ‘how’ matters more at the moment.”

Mezil faced the forest. “At least we know the attack came from that direction.”

“Is it an ideal place to hide, is it not?” asked Lucidia. “The forest provides plenty of cover.”

“Hmm… depends. It also blocks line of sight. Mobility may be an issue, as well. Could you generate a sniper rifle, a laser pointer, and a tripod for me?”

The tools were generated as requested. Mezil slung them over his shoulders and began trekking into the false forest.

“Do you need to change into hunting gear? Your coat might get caught in the shrubs.”

“No. It’s fine. Snow aside, it’s easier to walk than I thought.”

Test one, sniper gun only. No tripod. Mezil tried to adjust his aim with the guide of the red laser. He tried standing. Kneeling. Lying down on his front.
Frowning, he said, “To get this aim, you’d have to peer between the narrow gaps of the underbrush. There’s nothing to see beyond a tiny opening. And I expect worse visibility in springtime’s foliage. It’s an utter crapshoot.”

Test two, sniper gun with tripod. He adjusted it to match different height levels… and he still ended up dissatisfied.

“Still the same problem.” Mezil frowned his brows. “Also, going back any further would put me in the trees. And beyond that, it’s Ebott Town… but, firing from a building doesn’t match either. The angle is wrong. Too low. The shooter must have been at ground level.”

“Between visibility and distance, it appears that this clearing is the best site. The shot must have rung from here.”

“Come to think of it…” Lucidia crossed her arms. “No one mentioned anything about gunfire sounds. Not even the most silent guns are completely inaudible. Someone should have heard something from your current position.”

“Perhaps it was masked by the engines of Gungnir’s entourage. However… if I’m that sniper, I would have preferred the meadows. More space, better view, and I could have fired from a much greater distance. Escape could be easier too. One just needs a sturdy off-road bike.”

Mezil dispelled the test guns. “Nonetheless, we have enough to work out a plan. Frisk will handle the border, while Cenna will attempt to ambush the sniper from the woods. Have Garamond investigate the alleys in that part of Ebott Town, but leave Gaelic on standby. The sniper could retaliate and I want him to be able to assist at either point.”

“Orders acknowledged. Relaying tactics to Crimson Keeper Frisk…”

Lucidia, however, didn’t want to interrupt the Wanderstars. They just started and didn’t have much opportunity to spend time together.

“…After their gaming session,” she added. “I shall summon the Blancs instead. They should be in Room 6.”

A door materialized. Opening it revealed that the cousins were keeping themselves occupied playing a game of cards.

Gaelic’s face lit up in delight. “Work be calling?”

Lucidia nodded. “Yes. Or, do you want to complete your game with Garamond first?”

“Nay, nay!” He tossed the cards aside without a second thought. “’Twas but a trifling timewaster. Starting to grow mighty bored, aye.”

“Likewise,” said Garamond. “This was the tenth round.”

Looks like she will have to tell them about the Wanderstars’ jolly sidetrackings later. “I shall then explain to you about the mission details. It will require your cooperation.”

* * *
The next loop ended worse than the last.

Frisk writhed on a bed in the Hub’s Medical Bay, determined not to scream. A phantom pain lingered despite their survival. Their body may be fine, but their Psychia had yet to catch up.

Their elder sister did her best to console them. “Frisky! I’m here, Frisky! Everything will be okay!”

“Incoming injection,” said Lucidia.

She held the child down with Blue Magic and inserted a needle into their arm. The relief was almost immediate.

Panting, Frisk asked: “What in the world just happened? Time was RESET! Why did it STILL hurt like heck???”

Cenna patted their head. “Your SOUL hasn’t caught up with the fact you ain’t bleeding to death yet. I hate it when that happens too.”

Sitting up, the kid’s attention diverted to the Supreme Judge.

“Tsunderjudge,” they pouted, “I really could have used a warning.”

“Well,” he shrugged. “I wouldn’t know that you’re so unlucky. The chances are slim, and when it does happen I just tough it out. The pain never lasts too long.”

Frisk glared back in disbelief. “When you lose an arm, a leg, an eye, and half of a face, even one second is too long.”

“Then you now understand the dangers. Illegal weapons are illegal for a reason.”

The child slumped forward and breathed a huge sigh. “I’m so glad I have time travelling powers.”

Lucidia tucked them in. “Frisk, you should rest for the time being. Cenna will take care of you. Meanwhile, Mezil and I will investigate the crime scene.”

“You sure?” they asked, “I feel fine.”

“The medication might cause some drowsiness. It’ll hamper your judgement.”

“Can’t you dispel the meds with magic?”

Smiling, the Chronographer shook her head. “Negative. I do not want to edit your body at such an invasive level. It is better to let biology run its course.”

“Yay, more hangout breaks!”

Oh, what an adorable child they are.

Husband and wife then left the Wanderstars to their rest. The siblings began chatting, and anything was loud in this silent Hub.

Cenna asked, “So Frisky, colour me curious. Which is worse: Sans’ Karma or getting blown up?”

“HMMMMMMM!” Frisk pondered. “Neither! Drowning takes the cake. It’s pure terror incarnate. That happened during the ‘Chara Exorcism Arc’ and it was the WORST!”
“Huh. I expected Karma. Gael described it as ‘soul fire’, but to me it looked more like some acid from hell. Remember his angel mode? That stuff ate through everything!”

“Normal Karma is not Super Karma. I could still fight with Normal Karma coursing through my veins, so not so bad I guess? Have you drowned before, sis?”

“Nope! Records state that I never got killed by an environmental hazard. I only remember certain stabs and shots. Hate to admit it, but Ol’ Mez really took care of me.”

Ah… Lucidia sighed. *Living Victories and their morbid sense of humour. It’s part of their coping strategies, I suppose. I’m not immune to them either.*

Mezil leaned close to his wife. “Are you trying to spare Frisk?”

In response, Lucidia tapped her husband on the tip of his nose. “Let the child keep whatever innocence they have left. Not everyone is as hardboiled as you are.”

“It appears that my wife is growing sassier since that silly livestream session. I wonder why…”

“Do you have a problem, Judge Thyme?” There was a slight hint of mischief to her tone.

“No. Not at all,” he faked a cough. “In fact, I think I prefer it that way.”

“You better keep that to yourself, Mezzy. Otherwise the cheeky children will tease you to no end.”

“A fair assessment.”

Mezil tapped his cane three times at the end of the hallway. The floor descended in segments, forming a flight of stairs down to the Chronographer’s Laboratory. It’s designed to recognize only his cane or Lucidia’s heels so no rambunctious visitor stumble into the sanctioned zone by accident.

At the base of the steps, he tapped his cane another three times to reverse the process. It’s back to work for the two veterans. Lucidia put on her visor again and they reconstructed the most recent failed border attempt.

In this turn of events, the following changes happened:

Car 1 was not shot. Instead, King Asgore suffered a direct strike to the chest, causing him to explode into a cloud of dust and shrapnel.

Captain Undyne, Frisk, and every other person who were near Asgore suffered collateral damage. Humans or Monsters, adult or child… the laws of physics made no such distinction.

Again, the white squares censored any death and gore.

Mezil’s cane brushed against a scarlet ponytail lying on the road. “Captain Undyne is not dust yet, but she wouldn’t have survived for long. The shrapnel ripped through her vitals.”

“As for Frisk, if the injuries were as severe as their description, they were doomed as well. A child has less blood and therefore will exsanguinate sooner.”

Lucidia muttered, “They were closest to King Asgore…”

He asked: “What happened at Cenna in the meantime?”

“I will update the forest with Judge Caraway as the anchor.”
She shifted their positions to the forest zone.

Cenna entered the woods as they had planned. Everything within her line of sight transformed from white snow to spring foliage. So far, so good. Her path was unhampered and she was not reacting to any danger.

When she arrived at the presumed shooting grounds… she found nobody. Left, right, up, down, she searched, yet she could not find her target anywhere.

Then, the chaos at the border happened. That concludes her scenario.

What a troubling development. Lucidia frowned with worry. “Error: like Judge Caraway, I am unable to detect evidence indicating the presence of our assailant.”

“Which means…” said Mezil. “This time, the attack came from the meadows instead. Tsk, what a pain!”

“Judge Thyme. After we analyze the ballistics, we should discuss our findings with the Wanderstars. They may know something we don’t.”

The findings were explained over butterscotch pie and tea. It’s Frisk’s favourite dessert in lieu of their memories of Queen Toriel.

“According to my analysis,” she said, “The shots from Loop 2 and 3 came from the same gun. I could not find evidence of magical enhancement or trace it to any known source. We also noted that it only fired once. It’s possible that the perpetrator is trying to leave behind minimal evidence while staying mobile. The use of shrapnel shells suggests that the goal is to inflict maximum damage per attempt.”

Mezil added, “Note that we’re dealing with a single gunman. Had it been a squad, Lucidia would have found two different samples. However, given how quickly they moved from the forest to the meadows, I’m inclined to think the enemy has a Living Victory on their side. Whoever they are, they can’t be older than a teenager.”

It saddened Lucidia to think about it. As far as she could tell, only young children like Frisk escaped the Year of Judgement. Add ten years and these Reds still wouldn’t be full-fledged adults.

After listening to the explanation, Frisk raised their tiny fork in epiphany: “Aaaaaaaaah!”

“What is it, Frisky?” Cenna asked.

“I forgot to tell you something super important,” said the child. “I heard from Dad that one of Aiden’s sons is a Red.”

“Serious?!”

“Yeah, serious. But Sans is the one who told him, and he couldn’t see which.” Frisk pretended to tug an invisible cloak over their shoulders. “They’re wearing special clothes that block magic.”

“Strong enough to deter SANS?!” Cenna rubbed her temples. “Damn. I guess some of our material ended up in their hands too.”

Frisk cut another slice of their pie. “I still find it a bit ironic that Aiden is using magic to fight magic.”

Lucidia explained: “Without magitek, the materials that interfere with Seers are few and
cumbersome. Aiden appears to be more pragmatic than he lets on. Judge Thyme, which of the two sons do you think fits Sans’ analysis?"

The man finished his cup of tea. “The elder prince Dayton is too skittish and reckless, unbefitting a Red Major. He would be a Red Minor at best. Which leaves us with the younger prince, Niton. An amicable stoic, seemingly innocent…”

Frisk pouted. “Was Sans being vague again? He really should stop that.”

Lucidia responded, “Negative. Sans Serif protected King Asgore’s interests. He didn't have a concrete answer to risk the peace talks.”

“Hmmm… I can see the point,” said the child. “Aiden would freak out if the King of Monsters knew which of his sons was a Red.”

“Correct.” It’s quite a relief to see Frisk catching on the fine nuances. It will help in their future job.

Mezil contemplated out loud. “Then, if Niton -- the second prince -- is their Living Victory, what purpose do they gain from disrupting the feast?”

The Vanquisher crossed her legs over. “Maybe they’re trying to trap us. Make us look bad and incompetent.”

Nodding rapidly, Frisk added: “I agree with sis. He tricked Papyrus into cooking the impossible. Without Aiden’s favourite dish, it’s just a normal dinner. Doomed to fail.”

The old judge set his cup on the table. “That might have been the case if both of us didn’t reveal our respective secrets. But now, he should have a vested interest to obtain his father’s spirit and to determine your true nature as a possible Persona.”

“I have another counter,” said Lucidia. “A sniper attack is suboptimal for Aiden in every scenario. It’s difficult to coordinate with so many eyes watching him and his people. Plus, it fails to do any permanent damage as Judge Thyme still retains the Keys of Fate.”

“Honestly, if I wanted to use the feast as a means to set up a trap, I would have Niton enchant a potent poison. Then, I would have sent a spy as Papyrus’ kitchen aide to add the solution into his cooking. I would let the Magi and monsters eat first. When the poison takes effect, I could even accuse them of attempting to kill me.”

“Even if the sniper is of Gungnir origin, we cannot rule out infighting. This Aratet Welcoming Feast is controversial on all fronts: both of magic and of blood.”

“Wow,” Frisk commented. “You might be right. W-wait. What’s stopping them from doing that anyway? What if this sniper hoo-hah is just a distraction from the poison plan?”

Which the Tactician responded: “Your hypothesis is a definitive possibility. I see no reason why they would not attempt it regardless.”

The child stared at the remains of their pie. After a while, they put the dish on the table. “I think I lost my appetite…”

“Suggestion: we should replicate Loop 1 in full. If our enemies actually have a Living Victory, they will recognize this as a trap. If not, then a repeat will happen. There is a third option that they will repeat themselves despite knowing it’s a trap… but doing so only puts themselves in range of Gaelic’s fangs.”
Mildly annoyed, Frisk asked: “Does that mean Cenna has to die again?”

“Depends,” Lucidia answered. “Stick to the plan and Gaelic may be able to ambush the attacker. Cenna would survive in that scenario, allowing you to complete your mission on the third loop.”

That morsel of hope was enough to fire up their determination.

“Okay then. Let’s do this!”

* * *

The fourth loop ended prematurely. Gaelic’s life was snuffed out while he travelled around town. There were no witnesses to explain what happened, other than the victim.

…If only they could catch him first.

For the past fifteen minutes or so, the Wanderstar siblings had tried to coax Gaelic out from the garden’s jasmine bushes. Yet, he continued to dart around for cover.

When they went left, he fled right.
When they went right, he fled left.

Frisk tried throwing some hot dogs on the grass. That just chased him further away.

“How is he running away from food???” Cenna exclaimed.

An equally perplexed Frisk said: “I don’t know either! I thought you’re the Snakedog expert, Cen!”

“This is new for me too, Frisky! Just don’t use any DT okay???”

“Yeeeeeeeeeep. Been there done that.”

Mezil sighed. “Calm down, you two. Your antics are only adding fuel to the fire. Why don’t we try putting down some blankets?”

“Try these instead,” Lucidia conjured a bowl of tiny boiled quail eggs and handed it over to her husband. “His favourite of favourites.”

“Come to think of it… we haven’t had these in a long while.”

The three humans thus started a quail egg picnic to prove to Gaelic that they were not enemies. He had yet to accept their offer.

“Won’t you join us?” Frisk asked Lucidia.

“Negative,” said Lucidia, “I need to cross reference something in the Chronograph. Besides, my presence might create a group too large for Gaelic to be comfortable.”

“Okay…” Though dejected, the child accepted her excuse. “It’s just… he seems to like you the most.”

They had a point. Her staying might have helped Gaelic recover. After all, she was his oldest friend.
However, she had a hunch that his testimony would be too traumatizing for him to recall. And it probably wouldn’t be coherent either. It was better for her to gather the cold, hard data straight from the Mark of Proxy’s recollection of events.

Then there was the other thing that she wanted to confirm. It’s a hunch that gnawed on her bones since The Megalovania Incident…

On the way back into the mansion, she met Garamond. He had an unlit cigar in one hand and a screen in the other. The device displayed a map of Ebott Town.

With a hand over his chest, he saluted to the Chronographer. “Lady Lucidia, how is Gaelic?”

“My husband and the Wanderstars are still attempting to coax him. Do you have anything to report?”

“Yes Ma’am. The streets of that section of Ebott Town are all clear. However, a word of caution: the Mark of Proxy on us Blancs was not properly maintained. While it’s strong enough to bring us into the Hub, you may encounter complications in the extraction process.”

The child’s lack of experience had shown their cracks. “I see. The warning is much appreciated. Also, I shall add your findings to the database.”

After a small bow of gratitude, she continued on her way.

However, she couldn’t stop thinking about the unlit cigar. The scent of tobacco always makes her cough. Over the years, he knew not to smoke around her. Void or no Void.

Turning back to Garamond, Lucidia then said: “You may smoke to your heart’s content. I will be in the basement and not within your immediate vicinity.”

“Oh. Thank you.”

She heard the lighter’s click right before entering the mansion proper.

[WELCOME, SEER LUCIDIA]
[ESTABLISHING CONNECTION]
[BLUE: READY]
[GREEN: READY]
[PURPLE: READY]
[VITAL SIGNS: ALL CLEAR]
[EXTERNAL VISUAL OVERLAY: DISABLED]
[DISPLAYING DATA ON PATIENT 01: GAELIC BLANC]
[COMPILING RESULTS]
[GENERATING LINE GRAPH]

The results confirmed her worst suspicions. Gaelic’s recovery was slow and unstable, with a clear
decline.

…Unleashing his Armament worsened his condition more anticipated. Sans Serif’s ruthless assault further added to the mental strain.

I shouldn’t have given him that energy potion. Why did I authorize that?

I… I should have known better.

Regret, regret, regret. Lucidia took off her visor to shed a tear. As much as she wanted to break down and cry her heart out, she could not allow herself to fall.

What good is there for me to mope? I should make the most out of this situation.

Putting the medical data aside, she moved on to official business.

[CALIBRATING TO SUBJECT: GAELIC BLANC. MIX, RIGHT (PURPLE, ORANGE)]

[INTEGRATING PROXY MARK]

[PROCESSING CLAUSES…]

[PARSING…]

[PARSING…]

[PARSING…]

[EXTERNAL VISUAL OVERLAY: ENABLED]

[GENERATING PLAYBACK]

The scene began with Gaelic traversing the forest. He hopped, ran, and climbed in the shadows, making sure that no one followed him.

The journey continued until he reached the clearing: the site of the first shooting. As expected, there was no one to be seen.

Gaelic discarded his helmet. He burned his Eye to scout his surroundings far and wide. Lucidia tried to sync with his sight, but the Chronograph failed to connect. It likely was due to the weakened Proxy Mark as Garamond had warned.

From the way he scanned, it seemed that he found no one at the meadows either. He looked back to town. No one there either.

Then he flicked his tongue to taste the air. His stance snapped into one of alarm. He turned towards a tree… and dashed straight into it at maximum velocity.

There’s a portal there? This confirms Mezil’s test trajectory.

A series of hops took him far away from the Ebott region. It’s one of the defunct train tunnels that came to be a crossroad of portals.
A downwind breeze blew through the tunnel. Gaelic immediately ducked low on all fours to maintain his dash.

Gunfire rumbled across the tunnel.

*That sounds like… a bullet?*

Lucidia paused the playback. Bit by bit she rewound… until she had a crystal clear frame of the bullet floating in midair. It was almost right in front of Gaelic’s face.

*Model and type confirmed with ballistics. It’s a match!*

Gaelic dodged last minute and continued to run on all fours, using his Seer’s powers to leave inaccurate afterimages of his location.

This forced the sniper to fire a second time. Again, Gaelic avoided both the primary fire and the secondary shrapnel blast. The tunnel’s cacophony further masked Gaelic’s true position. This attacker won’t have the same advantage as Sans Serif had.

There, at the end of his run, was none other than the elusive enemy. The answer to the mystery:

A Seer Sniper.


The Fire of Humanity burned bright.

Then their Eye went dark. Instead of firing for a third time, the opponent took something out of their pocket.

That was the last coherent memory. What came after was a rippled mess of twisted colours.

A sharp pain buzzed through Lucidia’s skull. She felt her body tumble backwards. Her arms reached forward to grab something. Anything. Yet she sank deeper and deeper into a realistic nightmare.

UNKNOWN ERROR!

[ATTEMPTING TO ABORT SESSION]

[WARNING! UNABLE TO ABORT!]

[ERROR]

[ERROR]

[ERROR]

[SYSTEM FAILURE DETECTED! ERROR CODE 666: INITIATING EMERGENCY PROTOCOL]
Sans never thought that he would welcome these time loops. Each reset taught him better ways of building the Seraph System as a whole.

His fourth build finished sooner than the third. If the trend keeps going upwards, he might finish all the electronics by next morning.

But, the phone rang just when he was about to start his fifth attempt. The number belonged to ‘HotAndSpicy’.

Sans switched on the speakers and answered: “The number you have called is unavailable. Please leave a message after the beep. Beeeeeeep.”

One brief pause later. “Hot damn, I'm glad Lucy ain’t doing the dialing. She would have dropped a tree on ya or something.”

That earned a laugh. “Welp, it looks like she made a sensible choice then.”

The Mark’s pun-ishment struck swift and merciless.

“Okay, okay. I’ll bite. What’s up? I noticed that you guys went through a bunch of loops. And not just as mere numbers on a counter.”
“Huh, you remembered? I thought the Claim should have prevented memory retention. Even after punning.”

“Nah. I don’t think that will work on me. I haven’t checked myself in the mirror yet, but I think I might have some traces of residual Red mixed into my other Aspects.”

“That makes things easy then. Okay, Assassino. Here’s the lowdown: we’re being hounded by a Seer sniper.”

Sans dropped the grin. “A Seer? Really?”

“Ahuh! They’ve been firing shrapnel shots through the portals around Mount Ebott. Since you’re the guy who knows every shortcut like the back of his hand, we need your help. Think you could take down the shooter ASAP?”

“Whatever happened to Snakedog? He’s so fast, he’d put a blue hedgehog to shame. That’s not even counting his sheer strength.”

Over the line, Sans could hear Cenna breathing through her teeth. “The enemy has an anti-Seer weapon too. I don’t know what it is, but it eff-ing injured Gael and Lucy.”

The more he listened, the worse it sounded. “Lil’ Miss Lucy too?”

“Yup. Must be some kind of a DT-imbued tool. A frontal attack won’t work on this fellow.”

Sans flipped through his memories for all the similar incidents that he had encountered thus far.

The weird Arcanagrams that lined the Spire’s elevator shaft.  
The Crimson Hall’s stone door.    
The WESS.  
The hypothetical Persona Timeline.

All had something in common: they mess with a Seer’s sight.

“Are those two alright?” asked Sans.

Cenna sighed over the line. “They claim to be fine, but I can’t help but worry. Especially Gael. He might get too aggressive against our target.”

“Isn’t that his default stance?”

“Nononono you don’t get it, man. Gael freaked out HARD after that last loop! He won’t eat, drink, or let his guard down at all. We’re talking Mega Bad News here. Whoever’s behind this is crazy smart. I don’t wanna underestimate them.”

“I see. Why are you asking me then? I’m a Seer too y’know. That’s already a detriment.”

“As far as I know, you’re the resident anti-human guy. That makes you the anti-Seer guy by proxy.”

“I doubt it works that way, but let me see what I got.”

He glanced at the half-finished Seraph System and promptly decided that it won’t be enough.

“Sorry to disappoint. I have a dead arm and an unfinished weapon. I’m at a total disadvantage.”

“The Seraph System is still not done?”
“Nope. It partially works, but I can’t risk any stray bullets blasting it to pieces. Really don’t wanna start over from scratch.”

“Damn. Any other bright ideas? Fancy assassin tricks? We can’t let the sniper act.”

“Do you have a backup plan?”

“Plan B would be to send Gael back out there to flush them out of their hidey hole, regardless of his condition. But honestly? I really, really don’t wanna do that. The success rate is way too low. Even if we did manage to nab our target, we’re gonna have a high coffin count.”

“In other words,” said Sans. “A complete PR disaster for Papyrus. The feast might as well fail.”

“Glad you’re sharp as ever, Assassino.”

“…Give me a moment to think.”

Sans pushed his chair close, sat down, and pondered.

“Y’know,” he said. “You’re not so dumb after all. Yep, I’m an assassin alright. A good assassin knows more than one way to make a ‘killing’. I’ll take the job, but you gotta provide me the tools.”

“What would they be? As long it’s not crazy reckless or expensive, Lucy can arrange something.”

“I need a way to talk to this fellow. Droids, radio hacks, tapped calls, anything. All’s fine if I can establish contact. I’d prefer to do it through a computer with a microphone, though. Phones won’t give me the liberty of controlling my voice input.”

“Going the way of Charisma dice rolls, huh? How can I know it ain’t gonna backfire to high heavens?”

“Eh, you don’t. But Papyrus’ wishes are mine. The criterium for his scenario is straightforward: zero casualties on either side. Let’s call it a redemption arc.”

“If you put it that way…” said Cenna. “I think the Observers over at Mount Ebott should still have some enchanted surveillance drones in their equipment stash.”

“Enchanted, huh? How many do you have?”

“They carry a minimum of three, maximum of twelve. Those things get destroyed pretty often, as you can imagine.”

“I want ‘em all.”

“Sure, Mister Serif. Order taken! So, what about the hardware on your end?”

“I have a particular PC in mind. I’ll ring you from my end.”

“Good! I’ll be waiting for ya. By the way, this Seer’s colours are Cyan, Orange, and Yellow. Contemplate on that while I handle the other stuff.”

“Thanks.”

When the call ended, Sans groaned out loud. It’s one problem after another.

“Damn,” he muttered. “Asgore still hasn’t settled the Six yet. Guess peace is always an uphill battle.
Let’s see… those colours are… Ascertain, Reach, Appraise. Stamina to maintain silent focus. Judgement to fire at the best moment from afar. They’ll also have great natural vision. Damn. It’s the ideal sniper. All those traits synergize with each other.”

“What would be their weakness? Hmm. No means of shielding or healing themselves. They can’t fly. No ninja balance either. Most importantly, they won’t have dejavu. But can I really call that a ‘weakness’? Recording methods do exist. Anything they lack can be compensated for with the right equipment.”

“This person’s colours are the complete opposite of Lil’ Miss Lucy. Orange concerns me the most. What if they have future sight?”

The train of thought was interrupted by a weird crunching sound from Sans’ right sleeve.

Sans placed his paralyzed arm on the table. When he pulled the sleeve back… dust sloughed off his bones.

The inevitable had come much sooner than expected. He knew his SOUL no longer recognized the existence of his arm, therefore it was no longer immune to the effects of Karma. It would rot despite his best efforts to preserve it.

Arrangements for surgery can wait for later; the job came first.

Sans left his workshop, taking his phone along. In the living room, Napstablook was still preparing to resume Mettaton’s livestream.

He teleported straight to the ghost, startling the poor fellow.

“…Ah!…” They faded in and out. “…O-oh… It’s you… Please don’t do that…”

“Sorry for the spook Blook,” said Sans. “But do you have a spare wired headset with a microphone lying around? I need it to make an urgent call.”

“…I do… Hang on…”

Napstablook took out the request from the sound equipment box. “…Uh… I heard you’re a one-armed bandit now… Let me help you plug this into the PC…”

“That’ll help a ton. Thanks.”

The nearest computer with an internet connection was… the same machine that Frisk had used last winter. Whatever Sans found in their search history started this whole mad quest.

How things had come to a full circle.

Napstablook was thorough in their aid. They did everything for the disabled skeleton, from the setup to the fitting, to the details on the communications app. Sans made extra sure that the ghost had set the microphone to push-to-talk.

“Can you load a window for your cousin’s livestream?”

“…Sure…”

A few ghosty clicks later, Napstablook loaded the page.

“A-ok,” said Sans. “Thanks again. Maybe I can hire you as my ‘hand’ in the future?”
The ghost smiled. “…No, thank you… I’m booked to the brim… Besides… I’m not a great maid…”

“Heh, it’s ok. I’m just joking anyway. You’re a good ghost.”

Napstablook started to blush. “…Oh… ooooooooh… I’m not feeling up to praise yet… I’ll go back to my sound station…”

Off they went. Then, Sans called Cenna from the computer.

She picked up on the second ring. “Yo, Assassino.”

Sans pushed the assigned button. “‘Sup. You can start linking to this computer now.”

“Right on it. I’m gonna pass the message to the tech guys. Stay there in the meantime, yeah?”

“Wait for a moment. Can you guys do me a favour? Make sure Mettaton doesn’t reach the border. If our Cyan - Orange - Yellow sniper is shooting through the shortcuts, I’m positive that they’re using the livestream as an extra scope.”

“Hate to burst your bubble, but Frisky beat ya to that idea. Something about ‘calm plant time with Goatdad’. They also told Captain Undyne to sort the entourage by alphabetical order. ‘G’ goes before ‘M’, so Gungnir will get their preferred spot anyway.”

“Huh. They’re pretty smart. That’s gonna save you guys a lot of time.”

“Yup. Definitely. We’ll head straight to the school after we deal with the sniper. Hang on, going radio silence for a bit.”

While the Magi did their work, Sans released the button and leaned back against his chair. He took the time to chill. Old habits die hard.

The break was brief. Cenna soon returned and said the following:

“Everything’s ready. We’re diverting the feed to you right now. Go knock yourself out.”

“Okay,” he said.

Sans accepted the video feed. The Magi had just released the drones within the forest. They scuttled low on the ground, light and quiet. Their spider-based shape reminded Sans of Muffet’s underlings.

The drones entered a clearing. After a slight hum of magic, they walked through a water-like veil. It’s none other than a shortcut.

The camera switched to a low-light mode almost immediately. It appears that the enemy hid in some subterranean tunnel.

Cenna then said: “At the end of this tunnel is Gael’s last known encounter with the enemy. Do you copy? Over.”

“Copy that, over,” Sans replied. If that’s the case, they had to hurry. The enemy might change locations soon.

While they traversed, Mettaton’s livestream went back online.

King Asgore, Queen Toriel, and Frisk waved at the camera.
“Welcome back, beauties and gentlebeauties~! I deeply apologize for the previous mayhem. Well, that’s why livestreams are full of dangers. One may never know if we stumble onto something UNSAVERY! LIVE!”

“Enough of the gloom. Today, our wonderful King Asgore had discovered a rare but poisonous magical plant. It’s none other than the beau-ti-ful Silvermane!”

“Howdy. I’m Asgore, the King of Monsters. Why yes indeed, as Mettaton mentioned this is a rare but poisonous magical plant. It’s covered in insect-detering glassy hairs, giving it a mane-like silverish sheen.”

“Oooh what wonderful purple-- I mean blue flowers! Your Majesty, how does a magical plant differ from the normal non-magical kind?”

“Non-magical plants such as your garden variety tomatoes do not react upon a magical charge. Look what happens when I give it a slight pulse.”

Frisk gasped. “It’s glowing! Does the same happen if you do this to an Echo Flower?”

“Yes, my child. You’re correct. Now, I have quite a personal history with this Silvermane. When I was but a new king, I had harvested the wrong flower from the woods by mistake. My knowledge of botany was not as well-versed as my current self, so I thought this candy-like scent meant that an edible treat awaited me.”

“Oh, I became lightheaded almost immediately and turned immobile for one day and one night! It’s a miracle that I survived at all. The herbalist later told me that I had consumed Silvermane: a key ingredient in a potent painkilling solution that doubles as a sedative.”

Toriel added: “Your father always had issues with such substances. He considers dental visits to be quite a terror for a reason.”

Asgore scratched his cheek in embarrassment. “Quite. Ehem. As you can imagine, the Silvermane was in high demand during the Sealing War. My nation’s healers dug up every plant they could find. Their roots are especially effective, although the whole plant is just as valuable. Sadly, efforts to farm more from seed failed, and we didn’t have time to study their ecological needs.”

“I thought they had gone extinct all this while… until I smelled their scent in the school playground! Remembering my own foolish presumptions, I immediately potted the plant before any child was tempted by its intense nectar.”

“What an intriguing tale!” Mettaton exclaimed, “I wonder how they bounced back from their near-extinction. I’d say we have a medically important mystery in our midst: a breakthrough in the making!”

As the drones veered into the shadows, Cenna notified: “We found the target. I repeat, we found the target. Routing your output to the drones and going on radio silence. Look lively, mister. Out.”

Illuminated by the light of a phone’s screen, their target stood near the end of the tunnel. They appeared to be in standard military gear, including a gas mask. Their clothing seemed somewhat loose, however; not something tailored to fit their size. Perhaps it was meant to be disposable.

Sans saw them hit the wall in anger with the side of their gloved hand. It turns out they were exploiting Mettaton’s livestream after all.

Then… a recording began to play.
It belonged to a young girl’s voice. A teenager perhaps? Couldn’t be any older than twenty. The recording played out the speech at a clear, deliberate pace. The Code is difficult to understand without the aid of hand signals, but prioritizing the clarity of tones above speed may solve that issue.

Does this recording belong to the sniper? For now, Sans would presume so. Although it did not translate back to English, he heard two familiar words: ‘misi’ and ‘kompromi’.


“I should test her language skills…”

Sans pressed the talk button. “Hey, seems like you’re in quite a pickle.”

The camera got immediately destroyed. It was not a problem as the Magi just switched to a different drone. When the feed came back online, she had already stashed her weapon.

Press button. “Wait. I’m here to negotiate.”

It got destroyed again. Was she reacting to being discovered? It didn’t look like it. If that was the case, she should have ran already.

But… she remained in the same spot. On guard, but not fleeing.

Sans thought to try a different approach. [Hold your fire. I’m not here to hurt you. I’m not even here.]

[Mana engkau?]

At least he had one positive match: it was the same voice from the recording.

[Curious, instead of shooting again, you asked a question. I’m guessing you do brain The Code’s original language. Not surprising. You’re a Seer like me. We’re born with that understanding.]

[Here’s the scoop. You’re exposed, kiddo. Mettaton’s Livestream is proof of that.]

The sniper didn’t budge.

[Hmm. Interesting. Old news to ya, huh? Maybe it’s because of your fancy recording device?]

Still no response. Talk about being a hard nut to crack.

[Keeping quiet? You’re either super confident… or darn spooked. Not gonna lie, I would be concerned too if I were in your shoes. You’re a Cyan-Orange-Yellow mix, and yet you failed to realize that you’re surrounded.]

[It’s okay. I know a human intruder would have caused a bigger ripple. Might even radiate a clear killing intent too. Drones are small and emotionless. Pretty hard to spot something like that in the dark. Slap a shortcut-crossing Gram on them and they’re good to go.]

[Sudah! Diam!]

Talk about stirred agitation. This girl was all brains and no social skills. Reminded Sans of two other
brainy ladies he had met in recent times…

[Judging from the tone of your voice, you’re getting tired of me. Heh. Too bad. I’m a patient guy.]

[Back to the start. I’d like to negotiate. Break a deal. Parley. Cause you’re in a serious pickle otherwise. I’m talking ‘extra sour with a ton of hot spice’ kind of pickle. And, I’m offering you a way out of that mess.]

[All you have to do is give up the gun and come with. If you do, I’ll take good care of you. Nice food, friends, all that jazz. My brother would be so happy to meet ya. But if you insist on on your ‘misi kompromi’, missy. Welp, it’ll definitely be a bad time.]

[So, how do you wanna play this game? The easy, or the hard way?]

The dice rolls… failed. The girl became furious. Insulted, even.


[I’m pretty sure that was a challenge.]

In her haste, the sniper made her first mistake. She took out her phone right in Sans Serif’s and the Magi’s view. On the back, it had a glowing music note.

[Lima. Amaran: JANGAN endahkan mulut manis Sang Rangka Angkuh dalam mana-mana senario! Dia mempunyai suara yang mendalam. Terus tembak!]

Upon completing her record, the sniper destroyed the drone.

Cenna called not long after the development. “Damn, did you see that?!”

“Yes. That’s a Mark alright. Things are getting miuighty fishy. If she had the support of a Living Victory, why is she depending on a Marked device? Turning her into one of those ‘proxies’ would have made both our lives much easier.”

“I mean, ‘Both our lives’, you say? Won’t proxies make crap unpredictable?”

“Predictably unpredictable. We’re in a timeline where that tool guides the action. If anything happens and she loses that power, not even I can predict what she’s gonna do. Right now I at least know how she’s planning to attack. And that’s a good thing.”

“I still don’t see how that’s a good thing-- Oh, hold on. Frisky’s trying to tell me something.”

Sans heard the kid say something in the background. Cenna then sounded a long ‘ffffffffffff’ as she resisted the urge to swear out loud.

“We gotta go. Right now. Aiden is on his way and I’ll be damned if the Dreemurrs don’t show up on time.”

“Already? That’s okay. Go do your Princess Cenna thing.”

“Thanks! Wait, how do you know about that?”

“I just figured it’s a Tori thing to do. Either way, I’m going offline now too. Got a sniper to chase down. Bye.”
Sans yanked off the headset and plunked it on the table. At first he thought of teleporting back into the workshop to grab some cables… but why waste precious seconds when they’re right here? He was lucky that the ghost chose a wired headset.

“Sorry Blookie. It’s an emergency.”

He unplugged the device, conjured a bone, and cut the cord from the headset.

With the aid of telekinesis, and his own dexterity, Sans bound his dead arm to his torso. It’s too dangerous to have it flail around on the whims of momentum.

Then, last but not least, he pulled his hood up. When it comes to a ranged fighter, it’s best to obscure his skull. A clear view could spell instant death.

“Time to head out.”

Sans hopped straight to the school’s rooftops. Preliminary scouting confirmed Cenna’s words. The Gungnir entourage had already crossed the border and were well on their way toward school grounds.

Focus.

His Seer’s Eye set alight. At a low intensity burn, Sans used his Cyan to dampen other environmental distractions.

Ten tense seconds passed. On the eleventh tick, he sensed a faint rippling murmur above his head.

He dodged sideways upon instinct, narrowly avoiding a thin beam of magic.

Next came the counter, as he teleported straight through the shortcut with his own Blasters at the ready.

There she was: the enemy.

The conflict soon transformed into a chase of portals. They traded magic blow after magic blow, but none ever coming into contact.

The battle dragged them everywhere: forest, mountain, town, Muffet’s bakery, an unfortunate monster’s bathroom, the Town Hall’s porch, and the grassy meadow hills. The list of locations went on and on.

Along the way, Sans observed a number of things.

First, the Seer was a clairvoyant-type without a doubt. He’s piling up the pressure, yet she dodged every single attack with fluid ease. The flow of her movements reminded him of a mix of Snakedog and Papyrus.

Second, her Blasters had a canine motif, either dog or wolf. He found it odd for her to choose a social animal as her emblem when she had very little sociability.

Third, she’s had the sniper’s rifle strapped on her back all the while. She refuses to use it to defend herself. By the virtue of the weapon’s nature, the recoil would put her in quite a bit of trouble. She therefore kept to bone magic and her Blasters.

I’m being lured away from the school, dragged along like a bone strung on a kite. She’s probably trying to find the right portal with the ideal trajectory.
I think I know where she aims to go. I must stop her before then.

Sans commanded his Blasters to engulf his foe from all directions. Yet, she leapt out of the beams with little more than some frayed clothing, escaping into yet another shortcut.

He knew where that one would end up at. In fact, he knew every shortcut around this region, including alternate pathways. As Tactician it was his job to remember every nook and cranny. Besides, he enjoyed making that map. Enjoyed it so, so much.

With that in mind, he chose to intercept her through a different set of portals and eventually found her on Mount Ebott, sliding down a hill. He arrived ahead her, cutting her off at the bottom of the slope.

‘Rockfall’, that’s what the townsfolk dubbed this place. It was where Frisk’s parents met their untimely demise. It was also here -- at this most cursed of cursed spots -- where one could find a direct shortcut back to the school.

[This is as far as you go.] He signed.

Unable to proceed any further to her goal, the enemy Seer reached for her pocket, ready to pull out her trump card. Clearly she had enough of Sans and his shenanigans.

Sans thus had to make the hard choice. He could either shut his Eye off to prevent the weapon from taking effect, or keep it active to understand the truth.

He chose to take it whole. Sans burned his Eye to gather as much data as he could.

Out came the weapon in question. Embedded in the center of an octagonal metal board lay a small, white stone. It radiated Determination, monster magic, and the cries of the damned.

Identity confirmed. This ‘secret weapon’ was none other than a Philosopher’s Stone.

By means of a magical charge, the Arcanagrams on the board activated. The Stone projected an overbearing blast of raw colour magic: a mess of noise designed to disorientate a Seer.

Sans’ sight distorted in response. Sheared. Squares of intense rainbow overlapped. His head and his chest grew hotter and hotter. It was as though someone poured gasoline on a flame. Explosive. Out of control.

...That stone… I see… Seers sacrificed… her pack of wolves… packed into one...

While he’s disabled, the enemy ran up to him and slammed the butt of her gun into his skull, sending him face first into the ground. Despite the hit, his skull didn’t crack. It didn’t nick off his 1HP either. He thought it was weird that he survived at all.

He can’t give up now. He must be DETERMINED.

Get up… Get! Up!

He feverishly pushed himself up from the earth. Alas, he was too late. The enemy’s own Eye burned bright. She aimed straight towards the cliffside, at the exact location of the shortcut.

The enemy then pulled the trigger. That bullet cleaved the air connecting Rockfall and the school.

The sound of the gunshot boomed into the forest, causing the resident woodland creatures to scatter. Cawing crows circled overhead. Ominous. Alarming.
Alarming who?
About what?

With her mission complete, the enemy spoke to herself.

[Sasaran dihapuskan. Misi tercapai.]

She packed up and prepared to leave. Vacate. Hide.

*She shot towards the school. Everyone’s there.*


*I don’t know where they are. She might have killed them…*

*I failed you all. Again.*

*No. Never again!*

The air went silent, still. Crows froze in mid flight. Time had stopped ticking.

Caught in the boundary, the enemy bumped into frozen air. She tried to smash her way out to no avail.

Did his time-freeze always do that? Sans couldn’t recall. He had a feeling that something had changed, but he couldn’t put his finger on the difference.

All he knew was that he couldn’t let her go.

A strange thirst bubbled from his SOUL. Maddening. Infuriating. With each heavy step forward… the sensation grew more and more unbearable within his heart.

*[EXP,]* he said. *[It’s an acronym. It stands for “execution points.” A way of quantifying the pain you have inflicted on others.]*

*[When you have enough EXP, your LOVE increases. LOVE, too, is an acronym. It stands for “Level of Violence.” A way of measuring someone’s capacity to hurt.]*

*[The warmth of LOVE… I crave. Crave for EXP to increase LOVE. I need more strength to kill the human. I need more strength to avenge Papyrus. I need more strength to… to…]*

The enemy Seer pressed her back against the edge. She spoke The Code in desperation, but it was too foreign for Sans to understand.

That rattling of terror… made Sans burst into a mad, bitter laugh. Oh how **exhilarating**. If the Seer didn’t want such fear, she shouldn’t have crossed HIS path. She should have taken his offer. To become good friends, eat nice food, and all that jazz.

*But she refused. Serves her right, he thought. Serves her right.*

Sans teleported close to her. He charged Karma into his left arm and plunged it straight through her chest. It didn’t matter what manner of protective gear she wore; his power will render them as permeable as floating dust.

*Was his Karma always this strong? If so, why didn’t he exploit it sooner? Did he just choose not to?*

Using the last of her strength, the enemy Seer took out her phone and attempted to make one last, desperate recording.

[Amaran… jauhi diri… Sang Angkuh… mata… merah… bahaya… Terus… bunuh…]

The phone slipped out of her grip, landing face down. After that, she disintegrated into dust. Her clothes fell into a messy pile, body armour and all.

“Oh. Right. She had her phone Marked. That will lead me to my next target.”

Sans Serif shifted the sniper’s leftover fabrics aside to get a closer look. However… the Mark had vanished. Not a single trace of it was left behind.

“Huh,” he muttered. “Whoever it was, looks like they’re already dead.”

What am I supposed to do now?

I’m getting a feeling that something went wrong. Horribly wrong. But hmm, I can’t put my finger why.

Come to think of it. Why is my right arm tied up? I can’t feel it. When did that happen? When was I injured?

He flipped the device to its glassy front face. Then and there… he saw his own reflection.

Sans’ Seer’s Eye had become more Red than Cyan. He was so steeped in Corruptive Determination, even his other normal eye had taken on a crimson hue.

He stared at it for a good few seconds. Out loud, he then wondered…

“What… am I?”

Chapter End Notes

Translation notes! The language here is Malay, the official language of Malaysia. Not very common in the world as we’re only about 32 million. And even then, it’s not absolutely widely spoken. Many people use their mother tongue (Chinese dialects, Indian dialects, Malay dialects) and English is the world-wide lingua franca. Malay had become a 'Schrodinger's Main Language' in a way. It's the national language of Malaysia, yet in many cities English is used in tandem or more.

I admit, I am very rusty with my Malay. The only time I use it was to read subtitles and handle certain official business. Or speaking with store clerks.

Here are the translations by order of appearance.

1. Four. Warning: mission has been compromised. The Beast has found you. The Judge may act soon. Pay attention.
2. Where are you? (Malay has politeness levels like the Japanese. Kau is the short for 'Engkau' which is quite casual/rude. This reddit link explains it all: https://www.reddit.com/r/malaysia/comments/2jriq3/difference_between_awak_kamu_and_kauengka)

3. Enough! Shut up!

4. You think I'm stupid? Naive? I don't care about anything you offer! Such an actor. We'll see who's smarter.

5. Five. Warning: do NOT pay heed to Mister Arrogant Skeleton’s sweet tongue in any scenario! He has a deep voice. Shoot immediately!


Overburn

Chapter Notes

Oh man it's been a crazy busy few weeks. That never goes well with a super complex chapter.

Some time ago I finally completed my part of the commission with PolarisSketches. If anyone asks what's GQ is about, show them this pic! It's a great intro. Even if no one asks, reblog anyway because Polly is a great artist.

https://sophtoart.tumblr.com/post/188094108565/lineart-by-polarissketches-colours-by-me-this-is

I had also written one side-story in Chronographer's record. I highly recommend you to check this out to understand more about this chapter. You can do this before or after reading this update.

https://archiveofourown.org/works/9538106/chapters/49746482

And that's it for the announcements, I think? I'm trying to not overpromise my schedule since the next scene is also going to have a lot of thinking to do.

Meanwhile, enjoy!

Papyrus didn’t tell anyone, but he made enough spaghetti sauce to feed an army. He can’t let the mooks go hungry while the VIPs have their dinner. There will be plenty of humans and monsters to serve come nightfall.

However…

Leading a full kitchen turned out to be way more intense than cooking a meal at home. His experiences as a part-time employee at the school cafeteria didn’t prepare him for THIS.

His parents used to do this for a living? Every day of the week? Truly, he had gained a newfound respect for all kitchen staff.

As he was frying the first batch of meatballs, Papyrus shouted for status updates.

“How’s the cinnamon buns, pastry human?” he asked.

“Going into the oven, sir!”

“Is the queen’s pie safe in the fridge?”

“Yes sir!”

“Thank you! Aide human, have the meta steaks been prepared for the grill yet?”

“They’re ready to go on the grill.”
“AND THE VEGETABLES?”

“Ready too!”

“SPLENDID JOB! OTHER CHEF HUMAN, HOW’S THE KETCHUP COMING ALONG?”

“It’s a bloody banger!”

“I’M NOT SURE WHAT YOU MEAN, BUT I SENSE POSITIVE ENERGIES FROM IT.”

“UNCLE GASTER, IS MOM READY YET TO SHOW OFF HER DUMPLING PLEATING SKILLS?”

Said Uncle Gaster had just unwrapped the first batch of dough. They were chilled beforehand for easier rolling. “Absolutely, my boy. Do you want to join?”

“I DON’T THINK I CAN, SORRY. I STILL HAVE MEATBALLS TO FRY AND STEAKS TO GRILL.”

“Alright then,” Gaster said. “I hope they’re doing fine out there. We’ve reached this stage at last…”

The way he answered worried Papyrus. The Keys of Fate might be turning again… and that’s never a good sign.

Someone knocked on the kitchen door. Quite loud to boot. Mister Other Chef Human went over to check. Moments later, he returned with more concerning news.

“Your little boss said they need you outside of the kitchen. They’re looking mighty worried. And quite peckish.”

A ‘little boss’ with an appetite. It couldn’t be anyone other than Frisk.

“I SEE…” Papyrus, with a serious gaze, slapped his hand on the man's shoulder “CAN I LEAVE THE KITCHEN TO A PRO LIKE YOU, OTHER CHEF HUMAN?”

Though slightly confused at first, other chef human soon replied: “O-of course!”

“THANK YOU VERY MUCH.”

Papyrus compiled a quick hotdog with the still-simmering ketchup. After setting it down on some paper napkins on a plate, he took off his apron and rushed out with it to greet the hungry young boss.

It was Frisk alright. Their expression brightened a little when they saw the hotdog.

“Oh man, I’m so tired of being semi-hungry. Thanks for the snack, Papyrus.”

“NO PROBLEM, MY BEST HUMAN. BE CAREFUL, IT’S HOT.”

“Wow. You’re right. The ketchup is STEAMING.”

After a few huffs and puffs, Frisk munched their first bite. “Huh? It’s not goopy like the usual ketchup. It’s fuller somehow. Smells a little different too.”

“MY DAD’S SPECIAL RECIPE! HOW IS IT?”

“Awesome!” Frisk munched on another bite while giving a thumbs-up. “This is way better than the
Frisk replied with clear disappointment. “Nope. Follow me, Papyrus.”

While holding onto the warm dog, the bite-sized Crimson Keeper led Papyrus out of the cafeteria zone. They approached the gym area. There, Papyrus noticed many smears of liquid on the floor. They’re dark red and slightly yellowish. Ominous colors.

“Careful. Don’t step on them. They’re slippery.”

Gripping the door handle, Frisk said: “We’re just gonna look from outside, ok? Monsters are not really welcomed in there.”

The human kid opened the door just enough to take a peek.

The gym had transformed into an emergency hospital. The injured humans lay down on sheets of cloth. People ran back and forth with medical kits, clean water, bandages, and other tools to treat their patients.

“…ARE THEY ALL GUNGNIR?” Papyrus asked.

“Yep,” Frisk replied. “It happened when they arrived at our school. A sniper fired a shrapnel bullet right on our doorstep. Both Aiden and Dayton were badly injured. The ambulance is on the way.”

“WHAT ABOUT DAYTON’S YOUNGER BROTHER? I KNOW HE HAS ONE.”

“Niton…” The kid shook their head. “He took a direct hit. Didn’t even have much of a corpse left behind. Mom tried to save his SOUL, but it shattered too.”

Papyrus crouched down on one knee, matching Frisk’s eye level. Concerned, he asked: “WHAT ABOUT YOU? ARE YOU ALRIGHT?”

Frisk glanced to the side as they nibbled on the last of their hot dog. “I wasn’t in the line of fire. It’s just… I think I saw some stuff that I shouldn’t have seen.”

“I’M SORRY TO HEAR THAT.”

“Let me bring you to the rest of the guys.”

Frisk proceeded to guide Papyrus to Toriel’s classroom: an impromptu camp for monsters and the magically-inclined. The unused tables, chairs, and crafts were moved to each of the four corners.

The scene here was not much better compared to Gungnir’s side. Sure, they didn’t suffer any physical wounds, but their morale had hit rock bottom.

Mettaton in his pink ghost form floated beside his broken body, huddling together with his other stranded TV crew. Alphys had opened up the box for repairs.

“Papyrus!” the ghost exclaimed, floating toward the skeleton. “How’s the kitchen-side, darling?”

Papyrus answered, “GOING GREAT. THE HELPERS ARE A MASSIVE HELP. WE WERE ON TRACK TOO.”

“Wait, if Frisk brought you here, hot stuff… Who’s taking care of the other hot stuff?!”
“I ASKED OTHER CHEF HUMAN TO WATCH. MOST OF THE GREAT PAPYRUS SIGNATURES -- ERGO THE SEASONINGS -- WERE ALREADY DONE BY THE GREAT ME, NYEH! ALSO, UNCLE GASTER AND MY PARENTS STAYED BEHIND TO SUPERVISE!”

The pink celebrity threw his head back and yelled ‘OH YES!’ Dramatic and dynamic as always. “Thank the stars! At least there’s a spark of hope in this mad mayhem.”

When the elation faded, Mettaton sighed in surrender. “I’m busted, my darlings. I’ll go return to my corner now and get some beauty sleep. Keep your wits about you, baby…”

Papyrus nodded. “I WILL.”

Next to inspect were King Asgore and Queen Toriel. The King sat still on the chair, staring at his red-stained hands. He seemed too traumatized to wash up, evident by the splatter of dried blood on his snow-white fur. The Queen didn’t fare much better. She sobbed to herself while muttering her grief.

Papyrus made out a faint sentence:

‘I could not save that child either…”

Ambassador and skeleton both thought it’s best to leave them alone. For now.

Cenna sat at the teacher’s desk to use Toriel’s computer. She had plugged in a portable internet hotspot and a microphone so she could use the machine to communicate with the rest of her peers.

She flashed a weak smile. “Hey Frisky. Thanks for bringing Papyrus. We’ve yet to find Sans though.”

“Oh,” said Frisk. “You know, I thought being suspended means you don’t get to work at all.”

“Hahaha! You’re right there. But the old man is short on manpower. It’s gotten even worse after that latest scuffle between Gael and our resident Assassino.”

“HOLD IT!” Papyrus exclaimed, “DID YOU SAY ‘SCUFFLE’? DID MY GENUINE BROTHER GET INTO ANOTHER FIGHT WITH MISTER GAELIC?!?! ARE YOU SURE IT’S NOT A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY????”

“Cinnamon Roll, a mistaken identity may be our best case scenario. Though, we won’t know for sure until the Observers and Miss Muffet find our funny fugitive.”

“HOW DID THAT HAPPEN? AND WHY?”

“…Let me start from the beginning.” The Vanquisher turned the swivel chair to face Papyrus. “As the newly appointed ‘Princess’ of the Dreemurr Nation, I hired Sans to eliminate an enemy: a certain Seer sniper that's been hounding us since the Magi and Gungnir first arrived at Ebott's border.”

“When he failed to stop the gal from completing her objective, we presumed that our one-armed friend was injured or worse. Mezil ordered the Observers for a search and rescue. Thaaaaaaaat’s when crap hit the fan. Gaelic went nuts! Not just regular nuts, but anti-DEMON nuts!”

Frisk nodded at Papyrus. “Sis is right. I have seen Snakeface go anti-DEMON mode before, and his behaviour matches 1-to-1.”
The situation sounded worse by the second. “WHERE IS GAELIC THE SNAKEFACE THEN? I WANT TO CHECK UP ON HIM.”

They pointed their thumb over their shoulder. “The teen’s classroom.”

Thus it was decided. The heroic skeleton and his human friend shall pay a visit.

Upon arrival there, Grillby had just exited the room. The fire elemental frowned the moment he saw them.

With his hand stretched forward, he warned: “…Do not come any closer… Especially you, Papyrus…”

“WHY?” He couldn’t remember being Gaelic’s enemy. That was Sans!

A bone-rattling screech howled from the classroom. ‘Traitor!’ Papyrus heard. ‘Traitor! Traitor! I can smell ye, traitorous cur!’ The same accusation went repeated a few more times before it became incomprehensible Code.

Grillby escorted them a few more doors away from Gaelic’s haunt.

“…I DON’T UNDERSTAND,” said Papyrus. “DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG?”

“Errrr…” Frisk lifted their finger. “You kinda put Tsunderjudge under a hot giant spotlight during Sans’ trial. That’s how you got yourself hurt in the first place.”

“EXCUSE ME?”

The fire elemental added: “…You forced Judge Thyme to confess about his past… in front of everyone involved… Gaelic sees that as betrayal…”

Details clicked together. Papyrus remembered the event and guilt stabbed him in the chest. He began to question if he might have felt better if he hadn’t regained those two years’ worth of memories.

Fiddling with the end of his scarf, the skeleton muttered, “I-I THOUGHT… BEING HONEST AND OPEN WOULD HELP MISTER MAGUS. HE KEPT TOO MANY SECRETS.”

Grillby shook his head. “…Judge Thyme is not the main point here… It’s Sir Gaelic… You see, he has a troubled history with mob justice… False accusations still ruin his life to this day… Witnessing his master get tossed into court by your urgings… painted a bleak impression on you, Papyrus…”

Unhappy, Frisk protested: “But Papyrus did nothing wrong. In fact, that tsun really needed to be called out. He admitted so himself!”

 “…It’s not about right or wrong… It’s about breaking personal trust…”

 “…Like between us?”

 “…Similar… But in your case, you were in the deepest wrong… I should never have put my faith in you from the start…”

And therefore, Frisk and Papyrus joined the ‘Sad People’s Club’ together.

The kid’s phone started to ring. They picked up, replied ‘okay’ a couple of times, then ended the call.

The little Ambassador looked up and said with renewed spirit:
“They found Sans. Let’s go, Papyrus!”

“ALRIGHT!”

But, before he could find the heart to leave, there was one more thing The Great Papyrus had to do. On the top of his loud ribs, he vowed:

“MISTER GAELIC! I WILL MAKE UP WITH YOU SOON! THROUGH THE TASTIEST APOLOGY!! MARK MY WORDS!!! NYEH HEH HEH!!!!”

Satisfied with the announcement, Papyrus followed Frisk back to Toriel’s classroom.

The discovery of Sans’ whereabouts led to the monsters crowding around Cenna’s computer. The news seemed big enough to snap them out of their personal funks… which could be a good or a bad thing.

Cenna -- blocked by the massive bodies of both the King and Queen -- tried to wave her hand above their fluffy mass. “Hey! In here! Can you see me???”

The monsters made way for Frisk and Papyrus. It’s a tight fit in the crowd, but luckily Papyrus had always been a thin skeleton, and the human remained tiny.

Displayed on the monitor was the video feed of one of the Magi’s spy drones. It showed Captain Undyne trying to pry the lab door open with her spears. Failing that, Muffet’s spider underlings attempted to scuttle under the gaps. That path was blocked too.

Cenna explained: “The search team tracked Sans back to his backyard lab. I’m gonna attempt to negotiate. Don’t talk into the mic unless I give it to ya. High chance that he’s unstable at the moment. ‘Kay?”

It was a unanimous agreement.

Once she gave the signal to the search team, Undyne and the spiders retreated.

The Vanquisher spoke into the mic. “Hey Assassino, I know you’re in there. I’m not here to arrest ya. Just checking up on your status.”

Silence so far.

“You went MIA and got me real worried. Are you hurt?”

More silence. Cenna passed the microphone to Papyrus. It’s his time to shine.

Papyrus cleared his throat. “SANS? ARE YOU IN THERE???”

The video drone picked up a loud thud against the wall. There was a voice, but it sounded too muffled to understand.

Cenna’s phone rang. She redirected the call to the communications system.

“Papyrus? You… you’re alive?”

That was none other than Sans alright. It wasn’t a mistaken identity at all. The nerves sunk down the young man’s chest.

“YES I AM! WHY WOULDN’T I BE? I WAS BUSY CRAFTING MY EXTRAORDINARY
EXQUISITE CUISINE IN THE KITCHEN, NYEH HEH HEH!”

“…What about Tori? Is Tori fine?”

Papyrus passed the microphone to the Queen. She took it with shaky hands.

Toriel said, “I-I am here, Sans. Please, do not frighten me.”

“I thought the human… no… the sniper. I thought the sniper shot you.”

“No. I was fortunate. No monster perished in that incident as the bullet hit Aiden and his people. His younger son… is the only deceased victim so far. Who is this human you speak of, Sans? Were you ambushed?”

Sans replied: “No. It was a solo sniper. That Seer… It’s… complicated. Not something I wanna say out loud in public. Can I talk to Paps again?”

The microphone went back to Papyrus. “YES?”

“Can you tell me what happened on page 6 of Fluffy Bunny?”

Why did he ask? What was Fluffy Bunny to begin with? Wasn’t it that nightly story book? Sans would read it every night but… Papyrus did not remember its contents.

He started sweating.

“Was that question too specific? Ok. No probs. What’s the colour of the sock in the living room?”

“UM…”

“How many action figures do you own?”

“UMMMM…”

“Where did you get your Pet Rock from?”

“UMMMMMMMM!!!”

“What car model is your bed based on?”

Unable to take the pressure anymore, Papyrus exploded into a big yell. “SAAAAANS, STOP! I… I CAN’T ANSWER ANY OF THESE QUESTIONS BECAUSE I BURNED MY SPECIAL EYE TOO HARD! I… I DIDN’T TAKE CARE OF MYSELF… I MESSED UP! BIG TIME!!!”

A moment of awkward silence lingered. Frisk patted their friend on the arm.

“Whoa. Not the answer I expected. But, that’s the most accurate verification of your identity. Sorry, Paps. I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

“Truth is, I’ve been hearing your voice down here… in my head… telling me to… stop slacking. Pick up the sock. Get a real job. Feed the pet. Eat better. Y’know. The usual music.”

“I, uh, really needed to hear the real you.”

Toriel covered her mouth. Alphys whispered to Frisk, commenting on how bad it is for Sans to be having hallucinations.
"MY GENUINE BROTHER, LET US HELP YOU."


"SPEAK IN HUMAN, SANS, PLEASE!"

His brother obliged. “Well… If you wanna help, then you gotta follow my instructions. First, I need a fellow expert. Doctor? Scientist? Both? Someone who knows all about ‘The Seer’s Curse’. The Surface has someone like that, right?”

“Second, stuff for forensics. I have the sniper’s remains with me: dust, clothes, tools, and her weapons. I will also need more paper. I think… I think… the walls and whiteboards aren’t providing me with enough space. Don’t want to erase the older notes yet. Apparently, I was building something amazing?”

“Third. Uh. Medicine? Sweet drinks? Something to keep me going. I’m losing my arm to Karma, fast. Heh, fitting. There’s no pain, but the rapid loss of magical matter is draining my stamina. I can’t be losing stamina… Got work to do… Must continue writing…”

A baffled, angry Alphys vented her frustration with a whole bunch of hand movements. Mettaton tried to keep her mouth shut with his stubby ghost arms, but he failed as he’s intangible.

Cenna signalled Papyrus to tilt the microphone towards Alphys. There’s no stopping her anyway.

“You should be in MY Lab! I-it’s pretty much a hospital. WHICH IS WHERE YOU NEED TO GO! RIGHT NOW! Oh Em Gee Sans I can’t believe you’re still doing mad science when you’re literally DYING!!!”

“Uh… Alphys, right? Don’t worry. I’m not dying. I already prepared a spell to seal off my wounds for when my arm falls apart.”

“That’s not convincing at all!!!”

“Okay, okay. Whatever you say. And fourth… this is for Papyrus… I’m sorry, but you have to let the kitchen go. Other than some vital mental support, someone has to translate my sloppy handwriting. The ol’ noggin is working faster than my pen.”

"ANYTHING FOR YOU, MY GENUINE BROTHER."

“Thanks. Much appreciated, bro.”

Cenna scrunched her brows, pondering hard. She beckoned for the microphone back from Papyrus, saying: “You’re asking for some pretty specific stuff there, Assassino. I can’t guarantee a total pass, but I’ll see what I can arrange.”


“Understood. Going offline for a bit. You take care of yourself in the meantime, yeah?”

“Sure.”

When the transmission ended, everyone released their tension in their own way. Sighs. Groans. Annoyance. Mild panic. Maybe a bit of all four emotions.
“Gwah,” the Magus slapped down her hat. “Lucy is the only person who fits the bill.”

King Asgore then said, “If she goes, Sir Grillenn must follow. He is her assigned bodyguard.”

“Ahuh, I’m fine with that. What about you, Papyrus? Sans did request for your presence, and I know you agreed already, but don’t you think you should let the kitchen know?”

“Yes! I should tell the chef humans the truth. Dinner will still be served, but it will be in a humble not-celebratory fashion. So, don’t worry about going hungry.”

Frisk hugged the skeleton. “Pity I can’t come with you. We’ll undo this bad timeline later, okay?”

Would that be possible? From the short time Papyrus tangled with the Keys of Fate, he realised that things may not always go their way.

Worries can wait. While Cenna prepared Lady Lucidia, Papyrus went back to the kitchen.

There, he announced the shocking news. Morale hit rock bottom. The mood lifted a tad when he told them that there are still people expecting dinner and that no food will be wasted. The Royal Guard, The Magi, the townsfolk, and remaining Gungnir should be able to finish the stock.

Papyrus relinquished his leadership to the seniors. Then, he left to meet up with Lady Lucidia.

The woman in blue waited at the playground, illuminated from mask to toe by the orange glow of the fire elemental’s flames. Their demeanour matched the dark, cloudy sky.

The trio travelled to the skeleton brother’s house and detoured to the back yard. Muffet’s spiders had long since been sent home. Those who remained behind were the peacekeeping forces of both humans and monsters.

Lesser Dog -- whose real name Papyrus could not recall -- delivered the requested medicines into Papyrus’ hands.

“Thank you, my fluffy friend!”

He petted the dog monster. Doing so caused the canine’s neck to extend a bit.

“Hey Papyrus,” Captain Undyne slapped a firm grip down on Papyrus’ shoulder. “All the best.”

“Thank you.”

Despite her encouraging words, Undyne too looked as serious as the dark weather looming overhead.

Papyrus knocked on the door. “My genuine brother, we’re here.”

An Arcanagram lit up to their presence, unlocking the entrance. The three approved ones entered. Once they cleared past the boundary, the door shut behind them. Papyrus heard the lock click into place. It appears that Sans truly did not want to step back out into the Surface’s light.

His voice hollered from below: “You guys need extra lights? Sorry. The glare of my usual fluorescents started to bother me.”

“Offer declined.” The fairy godmother replied. “Increased photosensitivity is a common complication of your condition. I too would prefer low lighting. Sir Grillenn, could you go ahead and illuminate
the stairway, keeping your fire as faintly lit as possible?"

“…Consider it done, Lady Lucidia…”

Upon command, small kindles of flame lined the edges of the steps. It was just enough to make out their shape.

When they entered Sans’ Secret Lab proper, they found the skeleton writing notes on the wall with the aid of a glow lantern. He was serious when he said he needed more paper. Almost every square inch -- including the floor -- was covered in writing.

Stopping mid-sentence, Sans turned his head. “Yo.”

Papyrus felt his SOUL skip a pulse. What happened to his eyes? Why were they… Red?

Angered, Lady Lucidia wasted no time to chide: “You most foolish of fools. You should have fled. You’re the only person who can build the Seraph System, and you let the enemy damage you. And for what? Data? What use is data that you cannot apply?”

Sans chuckled. “My memory is messy, but I’m sure it’s the vampire who uses the word ‘fool’ unironically. Not you.”

“Requesting the patient to cease his inane prattling and submit himself for analysis.”

“Ah. That’s more like it. Y’know come to think of it… you two are pretty similar, huh? I don’t mean only in character, either. I’m reminded of our first meeting. You… you seem to know what you’re doing. Yup. You may not be used to a gun but… your conscience ain’t exactly guilt-free, am I right?”

Sans stared hard at Lady Lucidia. “If you had any real juice, I would have risked a limb to throw a bone. But. Nah. You don’t have any. Your flaming bodyguard doesn’t have any either. Which is weird. Weird. Too weird. A pity really. Grillby, didn’t… didn’t you kill a human before? Why am I reading LV 1? You should have more EXP. Much, much more.”

Confusion, confusion everywhere. Papyrus didn’t understand what Sans was trying to say.

Yet, the Fairy Godmother knew. She asked: “‘Execution Points’, am I correct?”

“The one and only.”

“I find it interesting that your method of calculation implies that all murders are enacted at a close distance. When monsters die, their Psychia releases a burst of magic. The absorption of which is what you call ‘EXP’. However, this process is in no way guaranteed.”

Lady Lucidia clenched her hands for a moment. “Query to Sir Grillenn and Papyrus: do you see sense any ‘EXP’ on me?”

The Fairy Godmother, a candidate for LV and EXP? Papyrus couldn’t imagine it. No one deserves to be sullied with that kind of stain, least of all this prim and proper lady.

He narrowed his eyes. “I’M NOT SANS, BUT I DON’T FEEL ANYTHING STRANGE ABOUT YOUR SOUL.”

"…Neither do I…” Grillby added

“Such is the proof this method’s shortcomings. In Sir Grillenn’s case, he had collected a human
SOUL whole without consuming its power. Destruction of the physical body does not incur any penalties. Though a death indeed occurred, he is clean in terms of science.”

“Really?” Sans replied, “Huh. Interesting. Then, am I also reading you wrong, Lady? I thought you had killed plenty of people. Lots of LV and EXP. But, nope. Did you apply a mask to hide your true value? Like the one on your pretty face?”

“Again, it is because I did not personally harvest the lifeforce of my targets. They perished apart from me. In addition, I did not consume their flesh or blood. Therefore, I too am clean in terms of science.”

“The same won’t work for your pup. Scary fellow that one. I remember him taunting me. Tried to play tricks. Ain’t his style. Could tell. He’s a predator. Hunter. Violence incarnate. Why was he LV 1 too? Should be more. Why wasn’t it more???”

“Gaelic Blanc has undergone multiple rituals to purge his ‘LV’ and ‘EXP’. Without those, he suffers from severe withdrawal symptoms, making him susceptible to DEMONs. To his fortune, he has not killed anyone since his last session and remains clean in terms of science.”

“Talk about loopholes. Ludonarrative Discobiscuits. Say, are you gonna do the same for me?”

“If applicable. First query: did you kill anyone else other than the sniper?”

“Nope. I thought I killed Papyrus. But he’s here, alive. That sniper girl. She… she was delicious. Weird for me to say it. Like…. Like a thick bowl of soup… With tomatoes… Dust flavoured tomatoes!”

Papyrus felt his nonexistent stomach churn from the imagery. He kept reminding himself that it was metaphorical. It had to be so.

“Second query: was your previous victim unusually high in ‘EXP’?”

“Yes,” Sans replied. “Colour me surprised. And delighted.”

“Third query: what was this person’s LV?”

That question made Sans think for a long while. “Sorry… was too busy suffering. Definitely greater than 1, though. 18 maybe? Mmhmm. Yep. Sounds about right.”

“Data accepted. Final query: Sans Serif, what is all this hard-to-read text?”

“Well. About that. See, that last incident re-awakened my Eye of Dreams. I used it to take a good hard look at that Philosopher’s Stone thingy, and had a flash of inspiration. Since then, I’ve been writing until my remaining good arm practically popped off. Don’t worry, it’s a figure of speech.”

“Anyway. Problem is, The Eye works but it’s weak. Too weak. Missing data. Can’t risk using the stone itself, and more DT will amalgamate me. There’s this Claim too. The human’s ‘star’… Young kid. Not mature yet. Talent without refinement. No, no, bad idea. There’s another layer of protection. Not messing with that.”

“Ah… punning… punning is great, but it hurts. Same goes for ketchup. Abusing The Claim for fuel is a chore. That’s fine, EXP gives more base power for DT to multiply. If I can’t safely increase the multiplier, I’ll increase the base. Heh. Yep. A better and tastier alternative. I just need to look for someone with a lot of LV. Close quarter killers… didn’t you guys invite a whole group of those people? I’m very sure these Gungnir don’t collect SOULs whole.”
Papyrus gasped. He stomped his foot down and insisted: “NO SANS, YOU’RE NOT MEDDLING WITH MY GUESTS!”

“Are they still your guests? After that disaster, I don’t think so. Sorry to say Paps, they might turn against you. Heh heh heh… I’m gonna have a field day. Say, is the Magus Association open for kill contracts? I solve your problem, you solve mine.”

“…I won’t let you…” Grillby countered. “…You’re going down that human’s path… the one you condemn so much…”

“Ehh,” he shrugged. “Been there. Done that. The Ol’ Vampire Judge said so. I’m really no better than that human.”

“WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, SANS? YOU HAVEN’T--”

Except he did. It’s only one victim but… Sans had already killed someone. Papyrus couldn’t deny that anymore.

Lucidia clutched her hands, nervous. Still she persevered to say the important truths. “Warning, Sans Serif: judging from your medical history, you have a high predisposition to substance addiction. Determination and lifeforce trigger similar dependencies. This affects the severity of your symptoms as well. Therefore, I believe it’s best to sedate you before withdrawal kicks in. If it all goes well, you should sleep through the worst of it. Meanwhile, I will read your notes.”

The response? He just resumed his mad science scribbles on the wall.

“Sorry Lady. Got too much work to do. I’ll just have to go kill some people later. When nobody’s looking.”

Since when had Sans listened to others after setting his mind on something anyway? Undyne’s historical yelling about him dodging his sentry work never stuck either. There was also that sock, still due for removal.

“Overruled!” Lucidia yelled, trying to mimic her husband. “I repeat, CEASE your inane prattling and submit yourself for analysis! This instant!”

Again, Sans refused. “Not yet. Listen, listen. Just a bit more and… I think we can help… Mom… and… Dad…?”

Noticing his preoccupation, Lady Lucidia took the immediate opportunity to cast a large, elaborate Gram under Sans’ feet. It sent out a soothing hum.

Sans’s breaths became heavy. Shaky. His writings turned into a scrawly squiggle. He then leaned sideways with the pen still in his grip, creating a long downwards trailing line until he hit the floor.

Grillby then laid Sans down on the couch. They couldn’t leave him on the cold, hard floor, no matter what.

What a peaceful face, thought Papyrus. Never could he have imagined a moment where someone had to forcibly put the laziest bone to sleep. When Sans snoozed, he looked no different than the Underground days.

The younger brother knelt down by the sofa and rested his cranium on Sans’ forehead. Papyrus shed mournful tears, knowing that yet another promise of peace had caused everyone so much pain.
Lady Lucidia proceeded to scan Sans. That’s why she came here to begin with.

She finished sooner than expected. Perhaps too soon, as though she was merely confirming her suspicions.

“FAIRY GODMOTHER, WHAT’S WRONG WITH SANS?” asked Papyrus. “PLEASE… DON’T SOFTEN THE BLOW FOR ME.”

She hesitated. He could tell by the look on her face that she did not want to disclose the full story. However, Grillby interceded. The fire elemental told her that she should trust the new Papyrus.

And therefore, the lady explained: “He is suffering the same affliction as you and Gaelic. His Seer’s Eye is overflowing with Determination to the point where his primaries have consumed the weaker Aspects, forever altering his mental faculties. I have called this phenomenon: ‘Overburn’.”

“Sans Serif, however, is affected in much greater severity than a typical patient due to his Red Aspect. His altered being causes an unusual imbalance. With Red overpowering all the others, his Determination is attempting to convert everything under its influence: starting with the ashes, then moving on to the flames themselves.”

Grillby commented: “…So this is why… Sans had this weird combo Eye…”

“Affirmative. It appears that Sans Serif suffers from an additional side effect. His Red has overtaken his Purple and started drawing upon residual memories from his subconscious. They appear to belong to an odd alternate universe version of himself. Perhaps we might find a clue in his writings. If they’re sensible to begin with.”

Papyrus decided to put his grief aside for the time being. It may be unnatural for monsters, or even for humans, but he had a job to do.

He still trusted Sans despite everything that happened. If his brother called him here to decipher his handwriting, then the information on the wall had to be important.

Grillby conjured two glowing orbs of warm flame and handed them over to the Seers for additional illumination. The lantern alone may not be enough as the elemental himself had chosen to stay behind to watch over Sans.

The entrance to the second chamber of the Lab was left wide open for Papyrus and Lucidia to enter. There, the writings on the wall further extended to their original starting point.

Sans’ secret workshop was a workstation of dreams. He had a forge, mechanical saws, electronics station, mould makers and casts, tool racks, an anvil, a workshop bench, and a power hammer of all things. It’s only missing a loom and a sewing machine to make a complete collection.

Papyrus had a vague memory of Sans submitting a very specific floor plan to the builders. The older brother insisted it to be an exact clone of their Snowdin home. All the while, the young one thought it was for familiarity’s sake.

“Suggestion: I shall make a typographical sample of your brother’s handwriting.”

“So… YOU’RE MAKING A SANS SERIF FONT. I CAN’T BELIEVE MY GENUINE BROTHER’S TERRIBLE PUNMANSHIP TRANSCENDS HIS LUCIDITY.”

Lady Lucidia paused for a moment before drawing a long, tired sigh. “I thought you’re the one who hates puns. If my internal thesaurus is correct, you just made three in one comment.”
“I ONLY HATE CHEAP PUNS. GOOD ONES LIKE CARDBOARDHYDRATE ARE PAPYRUS APPROVED.”

“Please stop. I detest puns because they confuse my understanding of vocabulary.”

“IT’S NOT EMBARRASSMENT?”

“Negative. Now, let us not distract ourselves any further.”

And so, The Great Semi-Amnesiac Papyrus helped the Fairy Godmother to read the barely legible ramblings of a mad scientist.

It appeared that sections had been erased to make way for new content. Following the text, he reached a whiteboard containing a picture of a very familiar device.

The large letters to the side read: 'V1.0’. That one whiteboard contained none other than the original schematics of the Seraph System.

Papyrus thus helped decipher Sans’ horrible handwriting for Lady Lucidia, reading the words and symbols out loud to the best of his ability. Some of it even involved high-level math.

Lucidia nodded in understanding and summarized, “The first iteration of the Seraph System -- the one you had encountered in The Void -- contains the following functions: a computer-generated Arcanagram lens, a blade designed to drain Determination, two battery sources to store said Determination, and the ability to amplify monster magic by using what’s been stored. This allows for the creation of a Mark that matches the bearer’s Psychia.”

“IT DOESN’T GENERATE MATTER? SANS MADE A WHOLE MOON OUT OF NOWHERE!”

“Negative. The generation of digital matter from Determination in The Void belongs to my Chronograph. That criminal brother of yours managed to gain illegal access to the ability by hijacking my husband’s power.”

“WHAT ABOUT ALL THOSE WEIRD ALTERNATE REALITIES?”

“They’re virtual recreations of his White Eye’s observations. Query: How much memory did you restore? And what was the exact method?”

“ABOUT… TWO YEARS? I THINK? BUT IT’S NOT COMPLETE. CERTAIN BITS OF DETAILS ELUDE ME LIKE THE CONTENTS OF FLUFFY BUNNY. AND THE COLOUR OF THAT TERRIBLE SOCK. SANS HAD ME USE HIS INVENTION TO ADD A PURPLE LENS. BUT HE WARNED ME THAT IF I USE MY SPECIAL EYE, I’LL LOSE MY MEMORIES AGAIN.”

“I see. Data acknowledged and recorded.”

Moving on, they arrived at the darkest corner. What remained of the attacker lay placed there in a haphazard pile. How typical of Sans. At least her dust had been tied up in her own clothes.

Lady Lucidia used her Blue to lift the gas mask. “She came prepared for Gaelic. This would have rendered most of his aerosol-class toxins useless in battle.”

Next to the remains -- on the floor -- were the crude drawings of a phone and a musical note. Sans had used red ink for the latter.
“I THINK SANS IS TRYING TO SAY THAT THE GIRL’S PHONE HAD A MARK. IT’S THE MUSICAL NOTE WITH ONE LONG TAIL.”

“That is a ‘quiver’. Am I reading the word ‘vanished’ here? Your brother seriously has poor penmanship. The writing is getting sloppier and sloppier.”


“Hmmmm… Other than a single-use spell, a Mark dissipates either from a loss of concentration, or the complete demise of the caster. A music note for a musician… The likelihood of Niton having been the owner of this Mark rises. Though, he seemed rather weak for a Determinator.”

“WHY DO YOU THINK SO?”

“His Psychia shattered almost immediately despite being a Red. What about this line, Papyrus?”

Lucidia pointed to two rows of stick figures on the wall.


“WHAT’S THIS? IT READS: ‘A PACK OF WOLVES, PACKED INTO ONE.’ BUT THESE DRAWINGS LOOK NOTHING LIKE A WOLF! I SHOULD KNOW. I STILL REMEMBER THIS WOLF CHUCKING ICE TO COOL THE CORE.”

“Sans Serif wrote ‘nameless girl’ instead of ‘name unknown’… that means she’s not given a name at all; True Name magic won’t work on her. She was created to be a weapon. To live as a weapon. And to die as a weapon. Just like her brethren, I presume. The failures were most likely culled into ‘The Philosopher's Stone’.”

Papyrus’ bones rattled. He was not the kind to feel angry. Annoyed, yes. Irritated, yes. But so furious that he wanted to slap someone across the face? It was a rather foreign emotion, until today.

“WHO COULD HAVE DONE THIS?! he yelled. “NOT EVEN UNCLE GASTER AT HIS WORST TREATED SANS THIS BAD!!!”

“It is too soon to tell. Please remain focused.” Despite her aloof words, she too carried a grim expression on her face. That’s how professionals are: they put aside their immediate emotions for when they're more appropriate.

“HUH?” He squinted. “WHAT’S THIS? FUN? SEER 1. 84…573…772? HOW IS ANY OF THIS FUN???”

“Correction: FUN is an acronym for ‘Functional Universe Number’. What did you find?”

“SANS WROTE… THAT EVERY PERSON HAS A UNIQUE FUN VALUE. IT DOESN’T CHANGE. LIKE DNA? BUT… THE SANS FROM WORLD 1 APPARENTLY HAS A DIFFERENT NUMBER FROM THE SANS OF WORLD 2? ARGH, WHY DOES MY GENUINE BROTHER HAVE TO BE SO CRYPTIC???”

“Comparing content with your education level… Papyrus, I’m afraid from this point onward it is out of your scope. However, to our boon I have obtained sufficient data to reconstruct the ‘Sans Serif Font’. I thank you for your services. Please take this opportunity for a moment of respite.”
She then burned her Eyes in Blue and Green to read the rest of the script.

Meanwhile, Papyrus went back to the dusty remains. He picked up the cursed stone, gazed at it for a good while, and pondered...

What were their lives like?
Did they know love?
Were they aware of what they were denied?

He tried to communicate heart-to-heart with the people in the stone, but he was greeted by nothing but silence.

If only they could hear his voice…
If only he could hear their voices…

Then maybe they could still be saved.

Looking up, it appears that Lady Lucidia had left to read the writings in the other room. Anxious and impatient, he hollered to her, asking: “ARE YOU DONE YET?”

“Status: pending.” She responded from afar.

The tone of her voice had changed. More mechanical, robotic even. He recalled hearing this before when she used her Eyes to scan his vitals.

It bothered Papyrus. Was this also caused by what Lucidia called ‘Overburn’? He could only speculate.

When she returned, her Eyes has switched to double Purple. Wisps of their fire trailed past her hair.

She strode straight to the wall that talked about FUN. Her light burned even brighter there.

Then… she extinguished her Eyes. When she did so, Papyrus sensed his unease dissipate.

“Processing complete.” She said, “I can’t believe this. He… he might have cracked the code. Despite his madness, your brother still managed to crank out a plausible theory. If this is legitimate, we’ll have the biggest breakthrough of the century.”

“MORE THAN HIS WORMHOLE TELEPORTATION?”

“In terms of urgency, yes. If this is applicable, then…”

“THEN WHAT?”

“It could bring us certain victory. A method to defeat The Abomination.”

Finally, a spark of hope in this mad mayhem. As Mettaton had said: thank the stars!

“WOWIE! THAT’S AWESOME NEWS!!! LET’S GO TELL EVERYONE ABOUT IT!!!!!!”

Except, she looked rather… apprehensive? Why would she respond this way to a solution?

“…Papyrus,” she said, “I must issue a warning. Again, you stand at the crossroads. You may have to make a cruel choice.”

“WHETHER OR NOT… WE KEEP THIS TIMELINE?”
“Accurate.”

As expected. There was a catch after all. When time-travel is involved, things may not always go their way. In that moment, he recalled that surreal dream with the vampiric butterfly.

The butterfly had asked:

“What is ‘justice’ to you?”

“What if by rewinding time to save one person, you condemn a hundred elsewhere? What if by saving one nation, you perpetuate the subjugation of another?”

If he was the wielder of The Keys of Fate… what would his final decision be?

Would others even come to agree with him?

Could he find the golden path without checking the answer-book of time?
Dad thought that he needed to return to his humble home for a quick bath. He said that it’s improper for a King to handle official matters while soiled by biological hazards. The political battlefield is not the same as the Sealing War, or so he said.

Thus Mom left to escort Dad back to his home. Knowing the amount of fur he has, his bath would be anything but a quick splash. It’ll take a while. A looong while.

Mettaton and his TV crew meanwhile had gone back to the Lab, alongside Doctor Alphys. It’s for the best, especially when they needed to prepare an emergency announcement over what befell their tragic livestream.

As for Princess Cenna, she replaced Grillby’s duty to watch over Snakeface. He’s… having a mighty bad time at the moment.

You’re now the only one with the appetite to have a proper dinner. You thus went to the kitchen to acquire a nice, warm bowl of spaghetti meatballs. After a quick intermission to the toilet, of course.

On the way back, you wondered if Papyrus made any headway with his mission. It’s been a while.

The ambulance sirens could already be heard moving further and further away. Good. They had done their job. Terrorists or not, doctors were bound by oath to treat anyone, even The Gungnir.

A ‘surprise’ awaited you at your classroom. By now, you’re kinda used to situations like these. What does one call the expected unexpected?

Two battle-hardened men sat face-to-face, separated by the length of two student tables. If they got any closer, it might become a fist fight.

On the left, it’s Tsunderjudge.
On the right, it’s Aiden.

You skirted around the room to sit in your chair and slurp on your spaghetti. Ah. Nothing beats a good portable bowl of warm noodles and meatballs on a cold, rainy night. The aroma of the sauce overpowered the otherwise unpleasant scents of blood and antiseptic. At least, that’s what you told yourself.

Darn, Aiden's one tough cookie. Here he was, sitting in your class wrapped in bloodied bandages. You bet he insisted to stay behind, delaying his leave at the risk of his own life. He sure cares about his people.

…C’mon Papyrus, come back already. This is getting awkward.

You made a SAVE in your 5th and last slot. Just in case.

The tsundere huffed in all his old man tsundereness. “Don’t blame me if you drop dead on the spot. Go to the hospital already, you fool!”

“So you can run away, Vampire?” Aiden retorted. “I’m not letting you.”

“Tsk. Don’t you care about your wife and your surviving children?”

“None of your concern. I’m here for Niton. That innocent child had nothing to do with our conflict,
yet things turned out as they did…”

Mezil countered, “‘Nothing’, you say? You used his musical performance to gain entry into this country. That’s as good as being complicit.”

“Baseless accusations! I could have entered your country in many other ways. The performance was just a coincidence!”

“And you’re going to claim it’s also a ‘mere coincidence’ that he knows how to dress your wounds? Sit for the talks? Attend this feast despite its dangers? Sang a lament for you and your elder son?”

“That’s his tribute of filial piety. A concept I find sorely missing in your decadent society.”

“Except your son is a ‘Chosen One’. I witnessed his very Psychia shatter in Queen Toriel’s hands. And you’re telling me that he didn’t help you in any of your operations at any time?”

Mezil leaned forward, menacing. “I was not born yesterday, Aiden of Aratet.”

You nodded as you munched on a meatball. Yep. Aiden may not be able to escape with any Diplomacy dice rolls here. Niton may not have hurt anyone personally, but you can’t see him being fully innocent either.

Mezil’s phone rang. By that alone, you knew the bad news was going to get worse. It’s just a matter of ‘how’.

He listened quietly. Intently. You stared at his face to try and read his emotions. For someone who wears his heart on his sleeve, he’s quite stone-faced.

After he ended the call, he placed his phone on the table. The tsun treated the device like an incriminating photograph of a crime scene.

You sensed a dark menacing aura from Tsunderjudge. Oh boy, he’s triple serious.

“A music note,” he began. “The Mark of sound. Enchanted on a device capable of recording messages. That explains every mystery surrounding you and your ilk. You’ve been using your second son’s power to elude me. Do you dare insist on his supposed non-involvement?”

Come to think of it, Mezil had issues tracking down the Gungnir last Wednesday. If they didn’t have methods to record a RESET, they should’ve been arrested by the second or third loop. But… they kept eluding.

Mezil Thyme then pointed the top of his cane towards Aiden and proclaimed: “You’re the cause behind this mess.”

Aiden slammed his fist down. “Absurd! I call this is a Magus scheme! Why would I issue such an order against my own flesh and blood!?”

“Two observations, Aratet. First, you didn’t deny that musical Mark. Second, you immediately presume that this attack was intended to target The Gungnir. For you to make that conclusion, it means you know the true story.”

Ooooh. A trap! Talk about getting busted! You could see Aiden tensing up under Mezil’s ever-stronger pressure.

Since you finished your meal, you wiped your mouth clean and moved to the table. There, you put
down an extra chair at Mezil’s side.

You tell him that you’ll handle this one, as Monsterkind’s Ambassador.

“Fine by me.” The Tsunderjudge huffed.

Okay. The first thing you did was to present Tsunderjudge in all his entirety. You admit to Aiden that he’s hard-boiled, hard-headed, and an absolute pain to deal with. Plus, the 24/7 dark 5 o’clock shadow doesn’t make things any easier. C’mon, the dude looks like an actual vampire! It’s understandable that Aiden mistrusts this image. But! You know from experience that he’s actually a pretty fair guy.

Tell the truth, and maybe everyone can work something out. Or go to the hospital first, because you don’t want Aiden to bleed to death in your classroom. That’s all you ask.

Aiden groaned from his physical wounds and his heart’s inner conflict. You’re determined to be patient.

At last… he gave in. “Fine. I will disclose one secret, and only one. You have yet to gain my trust for anything more.”

That’s a good start. So, what’s the story?

“Niton’s blessing is given only to two devices. One of those is mine.”

And the other…?

Aiden remained silent. Drats.

The Tsunderjudge then said: “The other device would be in the hands of his second-in-command, or a direct relative. Either way, there’s a reason Aiden wanted to control this information. Niton’s Mark embodies absolute authority. Every message recorded under that symbol must be obeyed without question. For that to end up in the hands of an assassin that Aiden did not employ…”

…It means a traitor exists within the Gungnir ranks. Isn’t that right?

“Yes. And it also means that Aiden and his sons were indeed the Sniper’s true targets.”

What?!! Not the Grandmaster? Not Mezil either? Not even you and your dad?!?!

“We were nothing but pawns for the ideal outcome.”

You clearly remember Aiden mentioning that the loyalty of his people was his strength. What happened to that?

“Universal loyalty is impossible.” Mezil explained, “I presume having this feast in the open -- with me as a main guest -- goes against the interests of the wider Gungnir community.”

Let’s get something straight. The Gungnir traitors teamed up with the traitors of the Magus Association to hire an assassin to kill AIDEN, of all people???

“You’ve summarized it well, Frisk,” said the Tsunderjudge. “Except in their eyes, Aiden and his Aratet are the true traitors. Every accusation he had heaped on my head is now his current reality. Such massive irony.”

Aiden tried his darndest to hide. You’re sure he’s dying from shame, anger, and betrayal.
Figuratively, you hope. You REALLY don’t want him to drop dead in your classroom.

Anyway, if that’s the case, the answer is straightforward: make sure nothing happens to Aiden next loop. Let’s turn the tables! Besides, the both of them now have a common enemy.

“Don’t you think it would be prudent to question why Aiden wants this feast to proceed, despite the risks? He’s playing with fire to sit at the same table as the ‘heretics’ he demonizes.”

That can wait until after the crisis. Though, it would be nice to know right now too.

Aiden sighed. “Royal Child, I still doubt the King of Monster’s ability to rule. But, he told me a story that I won’t forget: it was about life under that cursed mountain. We Aratet live close to the sky, yet the results are the same. We are prisoners in our own land. Confined. Suffocating. My goal is to make my people free again. No matter the cost!”

In which the Tsunderjudge was far from impressed. “Free? Free to do what? The main tribe chooses to live on the plateaus either way, secluded from larger society. Self-exile is as good as imprisonment.”

Woah there! You objected to those statements! You bet that there will be folk who choose to migrate out. They shouldn’t fear genocide just because they’re genetically related!

The old Magus clicked his tongue. He’s reaching the level where he couldn’t contain his irritation.

“We don’t need a rickety tower of ironies stacked on top of each other! In case you had forgotten, HIS entire organization is dedicated to the obliteration of monsterkind! Your pity will be wasted.”

It doesn’t have to be that way! Maybe Mister Lord Vampire could stand to be less antagonistic for once!

Next thing you know, two intense gazes locked at you. They’re filled with doubt and suspicion.

Mezil remarked, “Is your immaturity catching up with your physical age? …It’s almost as if you’re trying to bite the hand that feeds you.”

And Aiden questioned: “Whose side are you on? You claim to be a Crimson Keeper, yet you know the Gungnir Knife dance. You are like a reed in the wind.”

No and no.

You have your own stance, and it’s this: both the Magi and Gungnirs are being big fat doodooheads! In case they forgot, there’s an apocalypse happening in less than three weeks! This is not the time for digging down heels and headbutting each other.

You want both sides to establish at least a short-term truce. You know Ebott’s Monsterkind will be happy with any decision as long as there’s no immediate danger at their doorstep.

Mezil said, “Your mother, the Queen, still refuses to provide the necessary aid.”

All the more why the truce needs to happen. You know Mom. She won’t budge unless she feels safe. Maybe this is the peace of mind she needs.

“It is more than that,” Mezil said. Showing the numbers on his fingers, he explained: “She gave us three conditions. One, that you decide your fate in life. Two, that your father -- King Asgore -- will lead his people in the Ocean Battle. Three, a universal pardon for all his citizens.”
…You’re guessing that the third clause is the most difficult request.

“That goes without saying.”

Aiden grunted, trying to clear his throat. Despite being bandaged, he’s still losing some quantities of blood. It’s starting to make him thirsty.

You asked him if he wanted some water.

“No,” he declined. “I’m not that weak.”

Okay, if he insists.

“Look, Royal Child,” he glared at you. “Convince the Vampire to save my son, and you don’t need to concern yourselves over the missing children. We won’t interfere any longer. You handle your own mistakes.”

W-wait, he’s talking about The Six, right? Those who got lost on the mountain?

“Yes. Six children in exchange for one. Perhaps two, since I don’t know if Dayton will survive the night.”

You started to think. It would be a lie to say you were not enticed. The matter of The Six had been a metaphorical skeleton in the closet for ages! Considering how The Gungnir had a grip on the media, having Aiden off your back may--

Your thoughts were interrupted by Mezil Thyme’s angry tap of the cane.

He stood up. Why did he stand up? You didn’t think anyone said anything wrong.

“Son of Persona,” Mezil said. “What a blatant con. I can’t believe you’re making us waste our time on a mere puppet!”

A puppet?

“Yes, a mere puppet. Aiden can’t keep any of his promises either. He and his people have history and lineage, but they have no real power. No territory. No riches. He’s in the same position as us, if not worse. His command is enforced only per the agreement of the larger Gungnir community, which has betrayed him. In other words, he’s a puppet king.”

N-no way…! He was a fake? But the attack on the Spire was real. You AND your friends ended up in the hospital because of the whole ordeal!

If all of that was done by a fake leader, then what will a real attack look like?

“Don’t fret about that, Frisk. As far as I’m concerned, we’ve already won. We didn’t lose any personnel. Meanwhile, Aiden’s organization fell into further disarray. There’s no need to rewind.”

This time, Aiden was the one who stood up. From your angle, both adults seem to tower over you.

The younger adult demanded: “Return my father! Once I ascend as a true heir, you can have whatever you want. Name your price!”

Mezil huffed, “I doubt that. Bargain as much as you see fit, but I know you will not offer anything worthwhile.”
“Fine! Since you’re such a monster lover, let’s start with their ancient artifacts. Did you really think the relics of the lost ages vanished along with the dust of their original masters?”

You spotted a slight twitch of disgust on Mezil’s face. “Of course you and your ilk glorify the looting of the dead. What else should I expect?”

“Like it or not Vampire, you know your collection is not complete.”

“Unfortunately, yes. The relics we have recovered did not tally to what was lost in the Sealing War. We have long suspected that the ‘Legendary Hero’ had a hidden vault in your people’s land.”

Aiden reached his hand out and gripped it into a fist. “Correct. The most precious treasures were locked away, sealed by the symbol of Asas Asal Ara. Since its inception, we have guarded this vault for the arrival of the Chosen One of prophecy.”

Mezil shook his head. “Aratet. The Artificer’s works have long since exceeded the relics of old in quality. These ‘treasures’ will more likely end up as mementos for surviving descendants. It’s a low priority matter.”

“True. But they are still useful to me. I can mount an effective attack with their aid. What about land? Territory? I’ll give you the strongholds of our common enemy.”

“What good is land that cannot be defended? Declined.”

“Then what of riches? Your funding will be spent after your war in the ocean.”

“Ridiculous,” said Mezil. “I swore to never accept tainted or laundered money. Begone with that notion.”

“What about manpower? My people are strong and skillful. They’ve infiltrated even your ranks! If their expertise is desirable, you may employ them free of charge.”

“And worsen my security issues? Use your head for once.”

Frustrated, Aiden slammed the table. “Then what do you want, Vampire???”

“You.”

Both you and Aiden stared back in speechless silence. Did you hear that right? You sensed Determination radiating from that statement too.

“What…” Aiden muttered, “What did you just say?”

“I have mentioned this before. Son of Persona. There is only one thing I want from you.”

Mezil uncapped the top of the cane, unsheathing his hidden sword.

You protested. Why did he draw his weapon?! What in the world is he thinking???

The old man ignored your outbursts. He pointed the tip of the blade towards Aiden’s shoulder. “Your freedom for your son’s life. Bend your knee to me.”

You held your physical body tight to the seat. There’s only one thought flashing through your mind right now:

‘YOU OLD IDIOT!!!!’ Full on Flowey mode. Maybe this was how Flowey felt about you!
Gosh. This is not the time for that! What the heck is Mezil thinking?! What are you supposed to do? What could you say????

Your heart pounded as fast as your mind. Think, Frisk! Think! You’re so stressed out, your hair is standing on end.

…Wait. That was supposed to be a metaphor.

‘Supposed’ was the word, but you noticed that your hair actually DID start to stand on end.

You were reminded of Halloween. There was a curiosity vendor with a plasma ball. Touching it caused Mom and Dad's fur to defy gravity, fluffing them into a huge puff.

You were the puff now.
And there were no plasma balls here.

Aiden’s brown irises had turned a golden yellow. What’s more, that same shade shone through his clothes in the shape of his SOUL.

The air grew thick with magic. Streaks of magical electricity -- powered by Aiden’s raw emotions -- coursed through the walls and the ceiling into every lamp, every switch and every outlet. Including the school computer on the teacher’s desk.

Each flashed with Aiden’s Mark: the Gungnir’s Legendary Lightning Bolt.

Oh CRAP!!!!

Mezil pushed you down. Even though your mind had yet to catch up, your body acted. You dove straight under the table and covered your head.

The next thing you knew, Aiden unleashed his will in all its fury. It was utter chaos. Mayhem! A blinding light struck your eyes and a loud crack smashed your eardrums.

Before you could even think to RESET, the sheer thundering force knocked you out cold.
Dark Thoughts

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hunger.
The driving force of life.

It is the reason plant-eaters graze.
It is the reason meat-eaters hunt.
As with all other living things, the hunger drives the beast to feed.

These dark confines -- what they call a classroom -- were too barren. There was nary a scent of a living creature, save for a small stench coming from the underside of the teacher’s desk.

It attempted to scuttle, but the beast was faster. He snatched the critter: a humble cockroach.

Large or small, the beast did not care. The prey still tastes of life, and any life will satisfy his hunger.

So the beast swallowed his prey whole.

A flash of light then came from the side. It stung. The unpleasantness made the beast wince and hide under the furniture, safe in the shadows.

Who there? Why here? The beast wondered. He sniffed and whiffed to make sure.

His nose picked up the scent of a friend!

A voice said: “Oookay Gael, what are ya doing under there?”

She looked into his hiding spot with a soft orange lantern in hand. Yellow eyes. Dark skin. It was indeed a friend. Not just any friend. She’s the fun friend!

“You don’t get it, huh?” She sighed. “I’m not sure which is worse. This bug, or the moss incident.”

He did not understand what was bad about the moss either. Nonetheless, he licked his hands clean to rid himself of the creature’s smell. Friend didn’t like.

Pointing to herself, the friend asked a question. “Hey, do you remember my name?”

The beast blinked. He could feel the answer deep in the jungle of his mind. He just needed to dig it out.

After a few false starts, he uttered, “Sen… Cen… Cenna!”

“Good job!” ‘Cenna’ praised. “Now what’s your name? You already heard half the answer from me.”

Gael. That’s what she said. He recognized the sound.
But… unlike the friend’s name, he couldn't find the rest of the pieces.

The inability to recall made him frustrated. Angry. He clutched his head and growled.


He tried to mimic her, but it was hard. “Ka…keh…ga… Gael… lic…”

“Eh, close enough. Keep practising, dude. You’ll get better soon.”

She reached out her hand to pet him on the head. He liked it very, very much. It satisfied one of his many hungers, as fleeting as the moment may be.

“Do you want to go to the kitchen? Grab some grub? They should have lots of delicious treats by now. Tons better than that icky roach.”

Grub meant food. Did he still crave food? He touched his tummy, checking for the hunger pangs. They’re there, but not strong. Not strong at all.

Where then did the intense pain come from?

The tips of his fingers trailed upwards. To the chest.

“Here. Here hungers? H-Hurts?”

“Oh,” said the friend. “I get ya. You had a bad dream again? Wanna talk about it?”

He nodded, happy that Cenna knew.

“Take your time, Gaelic. Don’t force it. Stop whenever you want to stop. Okay?”

‘Okay’. Words… words… How do they string together? What gives them meaning? Why do they exist? To the beast, they function like magic.


Water moistened his eyes. ‘Tears’, they were called. They intensified the pain in his chest. His claws wanted to dig in, tearing out the invisible bindings choking him.

Cenna looked sad. “Isn’t that when you ran away into the human lands? I heard about that. Pretty much your worst days, no?”

Worst? ‘Most bad’? Could that be the worst?


“Well okay, ONE of the worst. Is that better?”

“Aye. Aye better.”

A sudden fear gripped him: dark, confused thoughts that crawled in the underbrush, armed with stinging venom. Gaelic darted into a corner, curling his knees close to his chest. His eyes darted around, seeking out for signs of danger.
Many found this behaviour abhorrent. Told him to grow a spine. To be more assertive. They were happier when he played the role of the romantic trickster. Tease and tickle. Poke and riddle. Speak in poetry and song.

Yet others lavished him more for his docility. Praised. Fawned. Their fantasy fulfilled. Stay that way. Be a good boy. Let them toy and play and bruise.

Still some provoked his wild side. They wanted to gamble at the mysterious, dangerous, and deadly. Dabble in forbidden pleasures. The taboo that most feared.

The beast did not know what should be his identity.
He did not know what ‘identity’ meant either.

He just wanted this hunger satisfied. To be accepted. To be loved. For that he’d become anything he must.

Worried, Cenna asked: “You alright there, buddy?”

“…Bad…bad touch…” he muttered. “…No. Do not want. But hungry. So hungry. If don’t give, stay hungry.”

“Oh, Gael. I think you’re trying to say ‘lonely’."

“Lon…Lonely?”

“Your heart was ‘hungry’. Right?” Cenna tapped her chest. “That’s loneliness.”

‘Loneliness’. A hungry heart. Was that what it means? He had a feeling that Cenna was right. Cenna always knows best. Most good.

She patted him again. ‘That’s in the past, buddy. You’re not in that bad place with bad people anymore. You have me. Lucy. Mez. Not to mention you made a whole bunch of new friends!’

New friends?

The thought made him happy at first. But then, who were these new friends? His mind couldn’t make the connection.


He also recalled another member of his kind. Tall. Smelled of Orange, Green, and Blue.

Good guy. Or so he once thought.

It was the traitor to his Lord.

The beast hissed and snapped. “Traitor! Traitorrrrrr! Not friend! Crush his bones! Eat! Eat!”

“Hey, hey. No eat tall skeleton.” Cenna said, “It was all a misunderstanding. Mis-un-der-stand-ing. Get it? He wants to say sorry, so you should let him try. Remember the Scripture? Forgive seventy times seven, as the Almighty forgives you.”

Scripture. Holy words that give life. Even if he didn’t understand anything of what was said, it gave him peace: another hunger fulfilled.
“Forgive… seventy times seven. Seventy times seven.” Gaelic repeated.

Except, this time, the expected peace did not happen. Instead, the pain in his heart remained. Loneliness? No. Not loneliness. It was a different kind of hurt. He remembered the prison bars. The docks. The ocean. A boat leaving across the horizon. His beloved, taken away.

No. She ran away. Ran from him. Fled to let the beast take all the blame.

“Not me!” he yelled, “Dinnae do! Lies! Come back! Come back and tell them it not me! No, no, no! Sorry for stupid! Stupid, stupid! Sorry! For-give me! Sorry!!!”

Too many eyes had stared down their curses. Too many hands had climbed on his bones. Too many wills had chased him away.

The surge of fear pushed him to run. Run, run home. But where is home? What does home look like? Is home safe? What is safe?


Anywhere no hands will reach and no eyes will judge. Anywhere others won’t hurt him. Anywhere he won’t hurt others.

Anywhere will do.

The beast darted out of its hiding spot. This place was no longer deemed safe.

Portal. He wanted to find a portal. A way out of danger. To run far, far, far away. The deeper into the wild, the better.

No one goes into the wild.

No one will find him there.

Dealing with beasts like himself was easier. He could fight. He could bite. He could kill and eat without fearing hundreds of eyes, hunting him down for revenge.

He rammed into a wall. No portal there. So he tried running the other direction, plowing through the ‘tables’ and the ‘chairs’.

Another wall. Again nothing. No escape. Prison? Box? The thought of being trapped plunged him further into panic.

So he ran into more walls. And more walls, and more walls, and more walls. He’d smash himself out if he must.

“Gael! Stop!!!”

Someone, or something, grabbed him. He struggled to break free at first, but then… the familiarity in scent made him stop.

A tight, warm embrace soothed his flight. It took a while for him to realise that he had his face pressed against Cenna’s belly.

“I’m sorry.” She whispered, “Maybe that was too soon. Let’s forget about Papyrus for a while, ‘kay? We’ll handle that later. Later.”
Comfort. Soft comfort. Every breath the beast took was filled with the odors of the woman he trusts.

When he hugged back, his hands squeezed her buttocks. Cenna was not wearing her usual thick clothes. This borrowed dress was much thinner. Finer. He could feel where the underwear ended and the skin began, and the texture of fat above those well-toned muscles…

The grip wasn’t intentional. Accidental. Yet, it stirred the appetite of his hungering heart. No matter how toxic, the heated high fed him, desperate to satisfy that unending desire.

“Please,” he whined. “Mate. Be one.”

Cenna replied with the usual answer. “No, hun. No can do. I promised ya, Gael. I’ll never be your girlfriend. I’ll only be your good friend.”


“That’s exactly why I made that promise. Selling your body ain’t gonna make you less lonely. It just makes it worse. Get it?”

“No…” More tears trickled down his cheekbones. “So hungry. Lonely.”

“…Poor thing,” she said. “You need to learn how to make friends without benefits, man. Real pals won’t take advantage of ya. No matter how many times you beg, plead, or cry. And, I’m gonna show you by example.”

Cenna reached over to his hands. Finger by finger, she lifted them off her bottom.

Despite his drive and instincts, the beast did not retaliate. Her ‘will’ was warm. Peaceful. Lacking in malice. Though it did not shine anywhere as bright as his Lord’s, he understood her heart.

The human friend patted him on the shoulder. “C’mon buddy, let’s get you to the infirmary first. Then we’ll have dinner. Class cleanup can wait for last.”

Cenna held Gaelic’s hand, lifted him up, and led him down the school halls.

He squinted from the brightness outside. Did not like. So he stayed in her shadow.

Midway, Cenna stopped walking. A new scent filled the air: one of soft wood embers and spiced wine. Similar to his Lord, but not the same.

“Oh, hey. Sir Grillenn. Back from helping Lucy already?”

“…Yes… Um… Your dress…”

What about friend Cenna’s dress? He tried to glance up against the glare to see why the question was asked…

The lower half of the dress had a long tear. Going up.

Such a nice thing, ruined. Ruined because of him.

“Eh,” she said, “These fancy dresses ain’t good for rough work. Gael freaked out and he was knocking into the walls and furniture, so I had to throw myself in to restrain him. Afraid to say the classroom is a total mess. Hope Queen Toriel won’t hold me against that.”

“…I’m sure she won’t…” replied the fire elemental.
“Any updates on Sans?”

“…Not good… He has gone completely insane… The mad scientist kind…”

“Yikes. Talk about going from bad to worse. I’ll catch up with ya later. Gotta take my buddy here to the infirmary for a quick check up.”

“…You better not… You know who is there… arranging details for his big brother…”

“Bloody really?! Then it’s a detour to the canteen, I suppose. It’s dinnertime after all. You wanna join?”

Before the fire could respond, the beast detected a sharp spike of strange air. It tingled. Singed. His nasal cavity stung from the irritation.

This sensation… reminded him of a brewing thunderstorm.

Before he could warn his friend, lightning struck the hallways. The ceiling lights burst. Chunks of the wall clattered on the ground. The world seemed to crash around him.

The beast’s first reaction was one of fear.

How? Why?

Lost and disoriented, he cowered low to the ground.

Cenna held him close. Reassured him that there was no need to be scared and everything was okay.

Then a thought reached him.
What about his Lord? His Master?

Master should be somewhere in this building.

The beast’s Eye lit wild.
No obstacle could stop the hunter’s sight. Not wall. Not floor.

Below, in a different classroom, a small human lay face-down on the floor and under the table. It was the little bean. Good child with long shadow. Out cold.

Violence broke out. An enemy cloaked in white squares slammed the Master against the floor. Punched him. Tossed him against the wall.

The Master could barely fight back. Injured. The lightning must have struck true.

Fear snapped right into rage. The beast hissed, growled, and shrieked. He got on his limbs, preparing himself to dash to his Master’s rescue.

But he couldn’t. Friend Cenna kept holding him down. She cried. Begged. Pleading to not go.

And so the beast wondered:

Why?
Why friend won’t let?
Master in trouble!

He wanted to tell Cenna to stop hugging. He’s the best choice. The strongest. So why? Why not let
He tried to talk.
No words came out.

They were all arranged wrong. Gibberish.

The rage turned inwards into the beast’s own heart.

Why was it so hard to make words?

Friend Cenna said, “Don’t burn… Eye. Please… don’t…”

Why did Cenna mumble? Why was her voice so weak?

The elemental waved his hand to catch his attention. He kept looking at Cenna, concerned.

From his lips breathed her name and a whole lot of gibberish. They’re words whose meaning the beast could not perceive. ‘Sound symbols’, he called them. But soon after, the man used simpler terms, and the beast could finally understand.

“…Stop…” he said. “…Look… She is hurt… Doctor… Hurry…”

A metallic odor was close. Too close. The beast sniffed to pinpoint the source. It came from friend’s hair. Blood. Sweat. Fear. Burnt skin. Rock dust.

Bad, bad signs. Friend was hurt. In trouble. But how much? Can she be moved?

He laid her on the ground. The hallway was poorly lit. Shiny sources not shining anymore.

“…Need light?…”

The helper conjured a ball of flame, like a campfire in the air. Now the beast could see. Examine.

His Lady had spent much time and effort to teach him what to watch for. Methods. Steps. When someone gets injured, he must find the problem as fast as possible.

The beast thus used his Eye to peer under Cenna’s clothes.

What were these strange burns? He wondered. They look like trees. Roots sprawling from her shoulder down her arm. Did lightning strike her there? It must have.

He moved on to the next layer, the organs, muscles, and bones. Spied how the blood flowed, and if there were any leaks anywhere.

Her scalp had a cut that looked like it came from a fallen piece of rock. Heart beating too fast. Muscles tensed in small spasms. Other organs seem stressed too.

At least her brain was safe.

Friend was half-conscious. She muttered sound symbols and her eyes couldn’t focus.

“Help… it hurts…” Those were the only words that made any sense.

Cenna would not behave like this from a small flesh wound. She survived stabs and shots before. Held herself together. But this? From this, she whimpered. The pain must be unbearable.
The fire elemental placed his hand on the beast’s spine. The touch was firm yet gentle.

“…I’ll carry…” he offered.

Though the beast knew his own strength would be more than enough, the fire elemental was the warmer of the two. Plus, his back was smooth. Not like a skeleton’s. Good for carrying humans. Very good.

So the beast helped load friend Cenna on the man’s back. Then, together they travelled down the dark hallways.

The storm had destroyed the shining rods in the ceiling. Sparks jumped and popped from their broken outlets. Whenever they did so, the beast’s instincts told him to shirk away. They’re loud. Dangerous.

The fire elemental thought so too. He looked back to say: “…Stay close…”

A moment later, the good helper’s shoe touched a piece of concrete. Almost tripped into it. The obstacle caused him to stop. He breathed an annoyed sigh.

Why? What happened? The beast investigated. It turned out that the path to the stairs had suffered a massive collapse. Ceiling panels and chunks of the wall littered the once smooth floor.

The beast recalled the rock that had hurt Cenna. The thought made him angry. Angry at rock. Rock, bad. Must be cleared.

And that’s what he did. He tossed and pushed aside debris after debris. Anger fuelled his great strength. No awkward shapes and heavy weights could stop him. If an object could be tossed, it would be tossed. Obstacles, begone!

“…Thank you…” said the elemental.

Hearing that gratitude made the beast happy. He’s being helpful, and helpful is good. It further motivated him to keep the pathways clean.

All was fine until they arrived at the stairwell.

The beast coughed and covered his face. It was the wretched stench of burning plastic. From beneath the black smoke came a strong, suspicious orange glow. A school notice board had caught fire on the in-between floor along with some posters.

The elemental beckoned for the beast. He put friend Cenna down and instructed: “…Wait here… Watch…”


The beast did as he was told. He stayed, and he watched. Meanwhile, the helper took a moment to stretch his arms and neck.

Then he reached a hand out to the flames and drew them into himself.

The beast had a feeling that he had seen this monster in action before. It was on the cursed moon with that tomato-scented heretic.
But this time, there was something new. Something different. Something Red. A commanding presence. How similar it was to the fish, the bean, and Master.

No. Wrong, wrong. Something else had been mixed in: a light unique to the large goat with a golden beard… the greatest of monsters…

The beast realised what it meant. A seed was planted. Sprouting. Still small. But will grow quick and strong. Fire Eater will be a simple bartender no more. Though, it doesn’t seem that the wielder had realised this yet.

With the flames quenched, the elemental returned to pick up friend Cenna. Their journey resumed.

At last, they arrived at the infirmary. The place of beds and medicine. It too was damaged by the lightning. Medics running to and fro tried to treat and transport other human victims. No shinies overhead here either. Smelled of burnt bits and trouble.

But biggest trouble wasn’t that. Among the humans stood the tall, scarfed skeleton that smelled of Orange, Green, and Blue.


The beast growled. Crouched. Ready to pounce. If he tossed Master into the heat of judgement, would he do the same for Cenna?

“…No!…” The fire elemental commanded. “…Down… Down…”

Why? Why not attack?

While the beast stood there confused, the fire elemental gave Cenna to the human medics. He also said some sound symbols to ‘Papyrus’, too difficult to follow.

Meanwhile, the traitor skeleton kept nodding along. He smelled of caution and enthusiasm.

When they’re done, the fire elemental returned and said: “…You… Gaelic… take care of Cenna…”

Words. Need words. Need to warn good helper that Master was in trouble.

“M-Master?” said the beast, “Master!”

“…What happened?…”

Growl. Snap. “Enemy! Enemy attack!”

“…Where is Master?…”

The beast pointed in the direction where he last saw him. “There. Class-room.”

Fire Elemental nodded. “…I’ll save Master… Good?…”

Strong fire go against the enemy? Happy, very happy to hear. Master will be safe!

How to express? The beast remembered that one word. ‘Good’. That’s the word of praise and approval. Good is good.

“Good,” the beast replied. “Good! Good!”
“…Thank you, Gaelic…”


The trusted man left for the rescue, taking the questionable skeleton ‘Papyrus’ along.

Gaelic did not mind. The strong Fire Eater can handle any trouble. Right?

But, the skeleton came back. At the door, he signed the following symbols:

[I AM SORRY…]

Sorry? Sorry don’t believe. Gaelic could not read his will. Will not strong. Not clear. Don’t know if honest. So, he growled back.

Papyrus must have realised that. He rubbed the sides of his skull to wake himself up.

On the second try, he signed: [I AM SORRY! AND I WILL COOK A DELICIOUS MEAL AS AN APOLOGY!]

Food? For Gaelic? It was the same promise as before. The beast did not want. Not genuine. Distant. But now, he could feel that sincere will up close.

Tall traitor was not traitor after all? Was Cenna right again? Cenna always knows best. Most good.

Satisfied or not, Papyrus soon hurried off to catch up with the fire monster.

After the skeleton had left, pangs of true hunger gripped Gaelic’s abdomen. Belly unseen, yet could feel. Jittery, yet tired. So very tired. Needed to feed. Delicious meal apology sounded very appetizing now. But that had to wait. Wait until he sees his Master safe by his side. Safe.

In the meantime, he continued to watch over his injured friend.

Chapter End Notes

Cenna has ‘F’ level Luck it seems

Works inspired by this one

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