It started with a relatively simple shift, many many years ago. And from there, a great many things began to change throughout this particular timeline. Some characters are absent during the events of the main story, while an old friend with a new face rules the Underground. The Prince pulls double duty as Royal Scientist, and under his rule the Underground has been focused on scientific progress. After all, there has to be another way...

Into this high-tech panoply of despair, one last human falls. Those who climb Mt Ebott are
said to never return. You wonder why exactly that was, as you enter the cave. You can't help but feel like you've been here before... As you approach the hole, you fail to see the old root as your foot snags on it. The hole seems to rush towards you as you fall into the depths of the Earth. ...why is this so familiar?

[Name the fallen human]
[Name the fallen human.]

Who were you again? I think it was...

Charli.

Yeah, that's right. "Charli".

You awaken on a bed of roses. You've slept in worse places than this, but the thorns make you remember the old pile of straw quite fondly. But this is no time for a lie-in, so you get up.

You observe the flowerbed. How curious. Red AND white roses? Ah. That almost makes sense now. A long corridor that stretches before you. You decide to investigate. Turning the corner, you see a large red rose standing tall in the middle of the room. It... has a face? Wha-

Thorney: "Howdy! I'm Thorney! Thorney the Rose!" "Ah, you are new to the Underground, are you not?"

"Well now, it seems like someone should show you how things work around here. And since no-one else is around, I guess ol' Thorney will have to-"

A large vine wraps around the red rose, dragging it to the sidelines. It does not look impressed. In its place, a white rose bursts out of the ground. It, too, has a face.

Floriel: "What a wretched fool, scaring a poor innocent youth like that..." "Do not be alarmed, my child. I am Floriel, caretaker of these Ruins." "Poor thing, you must be so confused. Allow me to show you how things work around here."

Ah, here we go. The battle screen flickers to life before your eyes. Floriel waits patiently in the middle of the screen, regarding you with a calm, almost motherly gaze. At the bottom of the screen, you see a large white box, and within it, you gaze upon our own soul, red as the roses that broke your fall.

Floriel: "Do you see that? That is your soul, the very culmination of your being! It starts out weak, but can grow much stronger with more KN." "What is KN, you ask? Why, knowledge, of course! And you, my child, have much to learn..."

A pale white flame burns in the top-right corner of the box. You probably don't want to touch it.

Floriel: "Down here, we share knowledge through the power of the campfire. We sit around the fire, and share our stories with one-another. And through sharing what we know, we gain more experience by learning new things!"

"Come now, my child. Move next to the campfire, and I shall share my knowledge with you. But not too close! After all, fire can be dangerous..."

Hesitantly, you move your soul closer to the bonfire. You settle at a safe distance, and Floriel looks pleased. A wry grin forms on her face as a ring of white-thorned vines surrounds you, and her eyes narrow.
Floriel: "YOU NAIVE CREATURE." "Why would anyone pass up this opportunity, especially with one so young?"

The vines grow higher over your head, until you can barely see Floriel through them.

Floriel: "Humanity is broken. Mankind must be controlled..."

A flurry of red thorns cuts through the tangle of vines, a few of them hitting you in the process. But you are able to escape from Floriel's clutches. Thorney resurfaces, shooting a disapproving glare in Floriel's direction.

Thorney: "How foolish of you, my lady. Did you think I would sit by and accept this?"

"Humanity is far too determined to simply reason with. After all, the true strength of humans..."

Several red thorns encircle you. You feel a familiar dread in the pit of your stomach.

Thorney: "...is the power of their souls!"

The red rose chuckles with an odd deepness to it as the thorns close in around you. It almost seems pleased with itself. Almost.

Floriel: "Don't you dare. Not this one, don't you DARE."

White-thorned vines surround you again, but this time they spin at vicious speeds, shredding the red thorns to tatters. Thorney stares at Floriel with gentle resentment, while Floriel stares back disapprovingly. ...you decide to make a break for it.

[MERCY] > *Flee

That's it, I'm outta here.

The two roses seem to be preoccupied with eachother, as you hear them begin to argue with one-another. You look back briefly, thankful that they are not focused on you anymore. However, you fail to notice the large bird-like creature in your path, and you crash into it, knocking the both of you to the floor.

???: "AIYEE! Watch where you are--"

It's face reminds you of an owl, but it's beak and black feathers suggest that it might be a crow? As it picks itself up, it tilts its head to get a better look at you. It appears surprised.

???: "Oh..." "..." "Erm, welcome! Human." "..."

The bird-lady appears bewildered. She looks like she hasn't had visitors in a very long time.

???: "Oh! Oh dear! I haven't even introduced myself yet!"

She brushes herself off, before straightening her goggles.

Doctor Kuro: "I am Doctor Kuro, the Watchmaker, of the, um, the Ruins Laboratory!"
"...and you, you are the first human to arrive here in a very long time!"

"My oh my! What a fascinating turn of events!"

Nervously, Kuro checks her pocket-watch, for no apparent reason, before slipping it back into its pocket. She certainly seems like an odd one.

**Doctor Kuro:** "I should bring you to the Lab, fledgeling. You should be safer there, and we will not have to deal with the Rose-forms."

*Kuro walks away at a brisk pace, towards the pink walls of the Ruins. At the foot of the stairs, you stop and take in your surroundings. The shadow of the Ruins looms over you, as ancient gears grind in the distance. The sounds of rusty clockwork, coupled with the expectant gaze of the Watchmaker, fills you with determination.*

[SAVE] **Charli LV.1 KN.1**

**Ruins - Entrance**

In the next room, Kuro stands next to a series of buttons on the floor. A puzzle, perhaps?

**Doctor Kuro:** "Ah. It seems we have a small problem."

"And by small, I mean that the Ruins' defence systems have been triggered. Likely by the Rose-forms."

"But do not worry, fledgeling. The Watchmaker will help you with this problem!"

*Kuro steps on four of the buttons, then pulls the switch.* Brave ones. Foolish ones. Both walk not the middle path.

**Doctor Kuro:** "It is customary for monsters to work puzzles into our architecture. Mostly as a defence against potential intruders."

"Though it does help in keeping me sharp! In mind. After all these years. ..."

You hope that this doesn't become a recurring theme throughout your journey, as you walk towards the faded sign next to the door.

*It reads "Brave ones. Foolish ones. Both walk not the middle path."*

*Ok, that's kinda spooky. However, you shake it off as you enter the next room.*

**Doctor Kuro:** "I modified this puzzle to require multiple participants."

"With the original variant, a single human could just press both switches and be done with it. Had I modified it much earlier..."

*Kuro appears strangely sad, thinking about this puzzle. But rather than ask her about it, you simply walk up to the first switch.*
Doctor Kuro: "Yes. Quite. On my mark, we pull the switches."
"Ready?" "..." "Pull!"

*You both pull your respective switches, and the spikes retract into the floor. Kuro smiles at you.*

Doctor Kuro: "Well done indeed, fledgeling!" "Frankly, I feared you wouldn't get the timing down, but you got it on your first try!"

"Normally, I just cast a projectile at the other switch, which also works."

*You feel relieved that we didn't have to do this on our own.*

...*I meant you. That you didn't have to do this on your own.*

...*let's just go into the next room, okay?*

In the next room, you see a ragged old dummy. Kuro stands in the doorway to the following room.

Doctor Kuro: "Hmmm. This is as good a time as any to tell you." "Many monsters down here are not fond of humans."

"Some are afraid. Some are resentful. And some are just desperate." "Should you encounter such a monster, you may end up in a [FIGHT] with them."

"While your kind is known for its immense strength, I implore you not to resort to violence. Instead, [ACT] with reason."

"A local ghost has volunteered for the purposes of this test exercise. Strike up a conversation with them, and you might learn something valuable in the process."

*You approach the Dummy near the wall. The battle screen pops up as you encounter it. It stands around idly as your hand hovers over the [FIGHT] icon.*

...NO WAIT, IMEANT [ACT]! ...phew, that was a close one.

[ACT] > [Dummy] > *Talk

You greet the Dummy. It shudders briefly, before sliding out of your field of view.

You won!

You earn 0 XP and 0 Gold.

No Info was acquired.

...wait, Info? I don't remember that from prev- ...whatever, let's keep going.

Doctor Kuro: "Oh dear. I guess they weren't in a talkative mood today."

"They were supposed to tell you that they were only using a dummy because they couldn't afford an Endoskel."
"Those being a recent development out of the Hotland Lab." "But now you know! And as the Prince once said, Knowledge is Power. Use it wisely."

You acquired valuable Info. Your Knowledge increased! Huh. I guess you feel a little smarter now?

**Doctor Kuro**: "Ah, brilliant! That flicker in your eyes shows that it's working!"

"As you gather information, you will know more and more about this world. The more you know, the easier it may be for you to reason with people."

"Though sometimes, it might be advantageous to simply flee..."

...good to know. I- I mean, Kuro walks into the next room, and you follow her.

*The floor of this room appears to be a crude map of some sort.*

**Doctor Kuro**: "Be sure to memorize this pattern, fledgeling." "This next puzzle can be quite dangerous if you are unaware."

"Or at the very least, a misstep can be painful."

*Something tells me Kuro isn't a very responsible parent. After memorizing the pattern, you follow Kuro to the other side of the room.*

On the way, you bump into a Froggit. These guys are pretty neat, I guess. But this one seems on edge. Better be careful.

[ACT] > [Froggit] > *Talk

You say hello.

*The Froggit looks at us greedily. As if he could stand a chance.*

**Froggit**: "*determined croak*"

**Doctor Kuro**: "Ahem."

*The Froggit and Kuro stare awkwardly at one-another.*

**Froggit**: "Ribbit ribbit. (Uh, hi there Doc.)"

*Kuro continues to stare Froggit down, suspicion flickering behind her piercing yellow eyes.*

**Froggit**: "*apologetic croak* (It ain't what you think, Doc. I was just gonna ask if the kid had any food to trade. Tryin' to save my coupons, y'know.)"

[ITEM] > *Last Dream > [Froggit]

You offer Froggit the Dr-

*I'm sorry, but where the hell did you find one of those? Seriously, this doesn't make any sense.*
...we'll talk about this later. In the meantime, Froggit accepts the Dream. But it appears to be just as confused as I am.

*It nibbles at the fluffy corners of the Dream, and its eyes light up.*

**Froggit:** "Meow! (This is really good stuff! I dunno how you got one of these, but it'll definitely make the kids happy at dinner tonight.)"

"*informative croak* (Now, I ain't got much Gold on me, but you might be able to use this info. Not all monsters down here are jonesin' for a fight, y' see. So if you come across someone who's not tryin' to take your soul, show 'em a little [MERCY] an' Spare 'em. Most of the time you can do this when their name's all yellow, but sometimes you'll need to keep on sparin' them even when they ain't feelin' yellow.)"

"*additive ribbit* (Oh, an' if you bump into any other Froggits around here, just tell 'em Bull says howdy. After all, a friend of mine's a friend of theirs! We all gotta work together durin' this crisis, kid... )"

...man, he was pretty cool.

**Bull seems relieved.**

[MERCY] > *Spare > [Bull]

**You won!**

You earned 0 XP and 1 Gold. And a new friend, it seems.

You acquired valuable Info.

**Doctor Kuro:** "You didn't need to do that, you know." "I'd have been happy to shoo him off like normal."

"But I'm proud of you regardless, fledgeling. Such kindness can be rare, even here in the Ruins."

*Gee, thanks! ...what? Don't think I've already forgotten, bud. We've still got a pow-wow to have later.*

Anyway, you follow Kuro to a maze of spikes. I think I like where this is going. ...uh, wait, forget I said that.

**Doctor Kuro:** "Do you remember the path? Check back if you forg."

White-thorned vines wrap around many of the spikes, pushing them down to form a more direct path. ...bummer.

**Doctor Kuro:** "..."

You walk to the other side of the spike maze, while Kuro pensively follows. Once we're both on the other side, the vines retract, and the spikes shoot back up again.

...I don't understand. Wasn't Floriel trying to trap us earlier? What crazy game is she playing?
**Doctor Kuro:** "...we should keep moving. The next test is just up ahead."

We follow Kuro into the next room, which appears to be an unnecessarily long corridor.

*I think something is following us. If it's what I think it is, be ready to run.*

**Doctor Kuro:** "This next test might be hard to accept, but..."

"The next room is at the end of this corridor. You will need to walk there on your own, but don't worry. I will be there waiting for you."

Well, this is just peachy. Kuro disappears with a clap of thunder, leaving us all alone in this suddenly creepy corridor.

Yeah, I'm done pretending at this point. I'm really not into this whole situation. Let's just get to the end of the corridor an-

**Thorney:** "Howdy! Sorry I didn't show up earlier, but you know how Flori can be..."

**RUN. Don't look back. Just keep running, for the love of god just keep running. Oh god the thorns- VEER RIGHT! Phew, almost nicked us.**

**Wait, is that- NONONONO STOP! Oh no. No, no no no he's blocked us off!**

...save it Frisk, that Stick of yours won't do a thing to this hedge. Dang it, I was hoping it wouldn't end this way. But...

...we can still load the save file, Frisk. Even if we die here, we can still load from the save point near where we started.

Maybe that Froggit will give us enough EXP to stand a real chance against this guy. I know you'll hate me saying this, but with this guy in the way, it's kill or be-

**Doctor Kuro:** Shoo, shoo! Leave the child alone!

*Kuro?! Whoa, did you see that lightning? Wait, where did Thorney go?*

Whew, I guess she scared him off.

...you know what I was saying just now about reloading and "kill or be killed"? Well, let's forget about that for the moment. I think we're close to another save point.

**Doctor Kuro:** "Oh dear! Oh DEAR! I'm so dreadfully sorry that you had to go through that! I swear, I was just trying to rest your independence, I had no idea that..."

("Ok. Ok, calm down Kuro. They're safe now, that's what matters.")

"...I feel like we should postpone that particular test for another day."
"Right now doesn't seem like the best time for it, even though you actually performed quite well given the circumstances..."

"You know what? I'm skipping several steps here, but you need to have this!"

She hands us what appears to be a cell phone, but it straps onto our arm instead. I have to admit, this is pretty cool.

**Doctor Kuro**: "This device will allow you to communicate with me wherever you are in the Ruins."

"In addition, it will allow you to write notes and take pictures. Sadly the resolution isn't good, and the screen isn't as large as I'd hoped, but it'll need to do for now."

"Now, brave little fledgeling, let us make haste to the Lab! I will take care of the remaining puzzles as we encounter them, but you'll be able to tackle them later once things have calmed down."

You know what, I think I like Kuro a bit more. I still don't like how she left us, but it's like she means well, even when she messes up.

Huh... Is it just me or does she remind you of someone else, too? ...me either. L- OH CRAP.

**Doctor Kuro**: "No! No you can't do this!"

...Floriel. Of course. The moment Kuro starts to make things easy for us, that damned rose had to split us up again.

...we should save while we still can, then head to the Lab on our own.

What, do you have any better ideas?

If we stick around waiting for Kuro to tear down that hedge, Thorne'll show up and tear us apart! And then it's ALL the way back to that one save point.

So I don't know about you, but I'm not about to stand around waiting to get killed. C'mon, Frisk. Let's save and run.

...fine, I'll do the saving description.

*Playfully crinkling in the leaves calms your nerves. Knowing that the Lab probably isn't too far away fills you with determination. Looking back to see Kuro activating a secret passage behind that one pillar, I'm filled with hope.*

[SAVE]

**Charli LV.1 KN.2**

**Ruins – Leaf Pile**
A Bitter Pill to Swallow

Chapter Summary

Frisk and Charli make their way through the Ruins to meet back up with Doctor Kuro and journey to the Lab. Frisk finds their voice, and the two kids find themselves at odds over a great many things.

Chapter Notes

From here, most unquoted text is Charli and Frisk doing their "inner dialogue". If it's in italics, it's Charli. If there aren't any italics, it's Frisk.

Playfully crinkling in the leaves calms your nerves. Knowing that the Lab probably isn't too far away fills you with determination. Looking back to see Kuro activating a secret passage behind that one pillar, I'm filled with hope.

HP restored.

[SAVE] Charli LV.1 KN.2

Ruins – Leaf Pile

There, happy? Now let's get out of here.

Wait, why are you heading up? That's the exact opposite of where we should be-

Huh. You remember the candy bowl? Why didn't I think of that?

The sign says "Please take one." Well, you gonna take one or not?

> [Y] [N]

You take one. It looks like something from the bathroom cabinet.

[MENU] > [ITEM] > Mana Pastille > Check

It looks like something from the bathroom cabinet. I don't think eating it's a good idea.
...seriously? It's my funeral too, you know!

...fine. It tastes... actually kinda bland. Just sugar and a bit of mint, with a chalky texture.

Eh, at least it's not licorice. Wait, did you feel that?

My max MP increased by 1.

Wait, seriously? Frisk, tell me you're joking with me right now. Tell me that piece of "candy" didn't just give you magic.

Oh my god, it did. This changes everything! Take another!

> [Y] [N]

You take another Mana Pastille. We're gonna be freaking wizards!

> [MENU] > [ITEM] > Mana Pastille > Use

You swallow that chalky miracle with gusto! Here we go!

My max MP increased by 1. I don't feel so good.

Nonsense! Grab as many as you can, Frisk! Soon we'll be stronger than those damn roses!

> [Y] > [N]

Aw, come on man. Don't back down now...

> [Y] > [N]

...interesting. You must have misunderstood me, buddy.

That wasn't a request.

> [Y] > [N]

I take a bunch of Mana Pastilles and shove them into our pockets. I accidentally knock the bowl to the floor, but who freaking cares?

Charli, stop... I really don't think this is a good idea.

Quiet, you.
"I cram the magic pill down your pansy gullet."

"...ohhh I don't feel too well..."

**Look at what you've done.**

"I hold back our hair as you barf. I'm so sorry, Frisk..."

My max MP decreased by 1. Great job, dingus.

"Urgh, I really am an idiot. Now we've both got a headache."

Didn't your dad ever warn you not to go in the medicine cabinet?

"Hey, at least I had- ...no, screw it, that's not fair. I'm giving him too much credit."

"...let's go. This place is starting to reek."

I wipe my mouth off with my sleeve. Wish I had a tissue.

**Gross.**

*Looks like a block-pushing puzzle up ahead.*

Three out of four recommend you push them.

*How is that even- Hang on, the phone's ringing.*

I answer it.

**Doctor Kuro:** "Oh thank goodness, I was so afrai-"

"I mean, Kuro here!"

"I'm using the old tunnels to get back to you, fledgeling."

"Though it would be wise to keep on moving, so I can meet you half-way to the Lab."

"But needless to say, you'll need to solve the remaining puzzles to proceed..."

"Don't be afraid to call me for help, though! This first puzzle should be simple enough, just push the rock onto the square to lower the spikes."

"...

"Good luck!"

*click*

You know what I said last time, about Kuro not being very responsible? Well, that still stands. Especially if she was the one who left us that bowl of pills.
...says the psycho who forced me to eat them.

*Hey, you were doing great until the seco- *sigh* Nevermind.*

*My point still stands. We should probably try to leave the Ruins once we reach the Lab.*

*I don't think it's safe to stay with Kuro. Call it a gut feeling.*

Don't you talk to me about gut feelings right now. I'm gonna push this rock.

*The spikes retract. We move into the next room.*

I move into the next room. You just keep on narrating, okay?

*You move into the next room, feeling saltier than a bag of popato chisps.*

...

*...And I sit around feeling sorry for what I put you through.*

That's a little better.

*Oh! Seems like she's calling us again. If she asks you what I'm think she's gonna ask you, tell her "butterscotch".*

**Doctor Kuro:** "Me again!" "Just out of interest, did you happen to find a bowl of candies a few rooms back?"

*So she DID leave those out for us, the wretched old crone...*

I tell her that I did find them.

**Doctor Kuro:** "Well, just so you know, you should pace yourself with those."

"I forgot to leave the warning sign up, but you shouldn't eat more than two in an 8 hour period. They are..."

"..."

"They are very special candies, fledgeling. They are good for you, but only if you eat them sparingly."

"Speaking of which, you will probably be hungry by the time I reach you, right?"

"So here is a simple question; do you prefer corn or rice?"

> [**Corn**] [Rice]

"Gladly noted, fledgeling. I will see you soon."

*click*
We probably shouldn't stick around for dessert. I'm game for some corn on the cob right about now, believe me, but if she tries to slip some experimental stuff onto our plate, we are OUTTA there.

For once I agree with you, Charli. After all, like Master Macho said in all those commercials, "winners don't do drugs".

I kinda remember that...? But I also remember that he wasn't exactly a "winner" himself. Know what I'm saying?

Yeah... But at least the commercials were cool.

Yeah, they were pretty awesome.

In the next room, we attempt that cracked floor puzzle. Surprisingly we don't break our legs from falling through.

Gotta keep off the leaves, Charli.

Tell that to "Master Macho".

Actually I'm pretty sure he was playing with "powdered sugar" back then. It explains how he crazy he was in the Thin Jimmies commercials.

I'm not even going to ask how you know all of this.

Looks like another rock-pushing puzz- ...uh oh.

Oh no, the poor guy's tangled up in vines!

**Bottom Rock:** "Hey there, pardner! I'm in, uh... a bit of a bind here?"

"That creepy white rose just popped up and wrapped me up in this stuff!"

**Frisk:** "I don't think I have anything on me, but I'll see what I can-"

Hang on, let me try something here...

[MENU] > [POWER] > *Sharpen

*Current weapon power increased, for now...*

Looks like your Stick now has a bit more edge to it.

But wait, hold the phone! When did we get THAT as an option?!

It doesn't matter. I can cut this guy free, that's all that matters right now.

Fine. Just be careful not to hurt him.

No problem. I cut gently through those nasty, white-thorned vines, freeing the rock.
**Bottom Rock:** "Whew. Thanks for the help, pumpkin."

"Say, that magic you used... You with the Waterfall Lab? Kinda surprised one of you guys made it out here."

**Frisk:** "Why do you ask?"

**Brock:** "Ol' Brock ain't no bumpkin, pumpkin."

"Before she started headin' the Waterfall Lab, Doctor Undyne was known for her weapon magic."

"Her talents with shapin' spears an' swords out of raw magic got the attention of ol' Doctor Waffle, an' when he finally fell down he passed the torch on to her."

"Though between you an' me, she works better with someone lendin' a steady hand."

"Hell, some of her best work happens when she's doing a collab with Doctor Alphys over in Hotland!"

---

*Hotland? Didn't Kuro say something about Endoskels coming from there?*

Good call, I'll ask him.

**Frisk:** "Hotland, huh? I heard that's where they invented 'Endoskels'. You know what those are, other than them being expensive?"

**Brock:** "Well pumpkin, you know how ghosts usually inhabit old dummies?"

"Now imagine takin' a dummy, puttin' it in a suit of armor, then jammin' a good enough power source into it. Like a 'liquid thorstein microreactor', for instance, the kind devised by Doctor G-"

"...huh, that's weird. Coulda sworn I knew the guy's name. Alphys took over for him after- Darn, I'm not THAT old, am I?"

"...I think he was a skeleton, at least. Kinda like the brothers at Snowdin Lab, but much older."

*You acquired a lot of valuable Info. Your Knowledge increased!*

*Alright! It was worth hearing this guy out after all...*

**Brock:** "Oh, you're tryin' to pass through? Don't worry pumpkin, I'll sort this out."

*Brock slides onto the plate in front of him, triggering the spikes to retract.*

**Frisk:** "Let me guess, yours is the only plate that needs pressure?"

**Brock:** "Clever girl. How'd you figure that one out?"

**Frisk:** "Let's just say... I've done puzzles like this before."
**Brock:** "Then you'll know I ain't much for bein' pushed around. But I owe you one, so I won't give you any trouble this time."

*We make it over the spikes before Brock slides off to take his lunch break.*

"...man, what a workout today's given me."

There goes a rock I won't take for granite.

*Oh gee, here we go...*

*I don't get this puzzle. It's just a piece of cheese stuck to a table.*

...that mouse. One day it'll work up the courage to come out and get it.

*Oh right. Save point. It's making you determined, right?*

Oh yeah. I'm feeling it...

*Knowing the mouse will one day leave its hole to get the cheese... it fills you with determination.*

*HP restored.*

**[SAVE] Charli LV.1 KN.3**

**Ruins – Mouse Hole**

---

*A ghost is just lying down in this room, pretending to be asleep.*

???: "xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx"

"(are they gone yet?)"

"xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx"

*Wait, I remember this guy. Isn't he the cousin of-

...nevermind. We gotta get past him either way. Time to put those friend-making skills of yours to use, eh Frisk?*

(Move him with force?)

>[Y] [N]

*Here comes Napstablook.*

[ACT] > [Napstablook] > *Check*
This guy doesn't seem to have a sense of humour...

**Napstablook**: "oh yeah, i'm REAL funny"

I dodge his tears with ease.

Your feet start tapping in time to the show tune in the background.

[ACT] > [Napstablook] > *Tap Dance

*I dunno how you'd do that, but sure. Can't hurt to try, right?*

1 MP consumed to activate Tap Dance.

I tap dance like that one guy from Ms Penfold's musical stories.

*It's matching the music pretty well. Few slip ups here and there, but I'm impressed.*

*Looks like Napstablook's impressed, too.*

**Napstablook**: "oh my... not bad..."

(not feeling up to it right now. sorry.)

[ACT] > [Napstablook] > *Cheer

*Wait, I didn't give th-

**Frisk**: You're pretty good yourself!

...uh, he seems to be caught off-guard. *But now he wants to show you something.*

**Napstablook**: "let me try..."

*His tears flow around him, forming a spectral top hat, tuxedo and cane.*

Whoa, he looks just like Freddie Stairs!

"i call it 'spookin up the ritz"

"do you like it..."

**Frisk**: "Yes!!!"

*Do you even care about taking turns anymore? We're still bound by the rules, y'know!*

Not when he looks THIS cool, Charli. Besides, the rules are more like guidelines by this point.

**Napstablook**: "oh gee..."
Napstablook: "normally i come to the Ruins looking for some peace and quiet outside the studio"
"but today i met a nice guy with charm, talent, and a keen eye for fashion"
"..."
"oh, where are my manners? I'll get out of your way..."

Aaaaand he's gone. Man, that went better than I expected.

Darn, I just realised I don't have enough money...

And that's relevant how?

There's a bake-sale up ahead, I need 6 more gold to get something special...

Is now the best time to think about snacking? Don't forget that we're being hunted, Frisk. Besides, Kuro's gonna feed us once we reach the Lab, right?

Trust me, we need a Spider Donut for something much later on. It'll save us a lot of time.

...fair enough. So what's the pla- Are you serious. The wall dance? Of all the things you could do, you're doing THAT?!

Quiet, you. It works.

It would if you were in the right room.

Right now you're just scaring the Froggits.

...shut up.

She's calling again. Probably best to hear her out...

Doctor Kuro: "Me again, hello!"
"I just remembered that I haven't tidied up in a while."
"Just be careful about what you pick up on your way here."
"You might come across something dangerous, or stumble upon someone else's belongings."
"But if you see anything safe, and you're sure it doesn't belong to anyone, feel free to make room in your pockets for it."
"That's all for now, fledgeling! Good luck!"

*click*
I think I have enough space, among all these Mana Pastilles.

*I thought you were going to throw those away?*

I'm not so sure anymore. I mean, we were stupid with them earlier, but they seem safe enough when you don't mess about?

*I guess so, but what about Master Macho and his Thin Jimmies? What about "winners?"

I don't think he's the kind of guy to give kids that kind of advice. Besides, who knows how dangerous it's gonna be outside the Ruins?

*Frisk...*

If it's a toss-up between killing everyone to get stronger, or taking one of these things every so often to grow in power, which would you choose?

...*you're really going to go through with this, aren't you?*

Yeah.

*Fine. Let's just not be stupid about this. I don't like it, but what choice do I have?*

Crap, it's this room. Which hole do I-

*Uh... Bottom left?*

*You fall down the hole. ...there's a grave here?*

Not quite. Seems more like a memorial.

*Let me see... "In memory of Mary-Ann Carver, third to fall. You were a patient soul indeed, even as a child. You taught us that, no matter how long this takes, we will all be free someday. I will never forget the lessons you taught us. Your friend always, Royal Scientist Kuro."*

...*you gained valuable Info.*

Huh... It says she was third to fall. Do you think it means...

*I'm not so sure. I was the first to enter the Underground since "The War". But in that case, who came here before her, but after me?*

Maybe they mean in terms of "falling down"? Like if she was the third human to die and have their-

*Maybe. ...I dunno, maybe the order of things are a little mixed up this time around?*

I think so... I don't remember this memorial being here, if that's what you're getting at.

I vaguely remember a little red ribbon... But maybe this shawl has a similar effect?

...*you took the Faded Shawl from her memorial, and wrapped it around yourself. Not cool.*

It'll make monsters less willing to attack me though, right?
I'm not so sure. If anything they'll probably go after you for graverobbing.

I don't think you're the kind of guy to give me that kind of advice, Charli.

Let's see, top left... Looks like there's something buried her- WHOA!

Vegetoid popped out of the ground.

Oh shoot, it's this guy.

[ACT] > [Vegetoid] > *Check

Serving size: 1 monster. Not monitored by the USDA.

Vegetoid: "Part of a complete breakfast!"

...I'm not feeling too hungry at the moment.

[ACT] > [Vegetoid] > *Dinner

I pat our stomach. Vegetoid offers a healthy snack.

Vegetoid: "One of your five a day..."

AHHH! Which of these give life again?

The green ones, dingus! God, I forgot about the volley this guy chucks at us...

A green ear of corn whacks me right on the forehead. Ouch.

Just get up and eat it.

I munch on the corn pensively.

You know, I'm pretty sure corn isn't supposed to taste like carrots. What's going on here?

Vegetoid: "Ate your greens!"

The Vegetoid looks pleased with your current health kick.

[MERCY] > *Spare > [Vegetoid]

You won!

You earned 0 XP and 4 Gold.

No Info was acquired...
Still not enough, but we're getting there.

*Please don't do the- You're doing the dance again, you're doing that damn wall-dance AG-

**IT WORKS, DAMNIT.**

You encounter a Loox.

*He thought you were having a seizure. Are you happy?*

[ACT] > [Loox] > *Check

Poor guy seems to have something in his eye. Nasty.

**Loox:** "Please don't pick on me."

I swear if this guy starts throwing pumpkins at me I'm gonna-

*Well, good news. Those aren't pumpkins. They're just weird bubbles.*

...this guy, I have no words. I've half a mind to-

[ACT] > [Loox] > *Don't Pick On*

*I decide not to let you pick on him.*

Will you cut that out?!

**Loox:** "You ok dude? D'you need me to call you a doctor or..."

**Frisk:** "I'm FINE! ...sorry, I'm fine. Thanks for asking."

**Loox:** "Don't worry, kid. Relax. I'm just glad that somebody understands."

*The Loox peaces out.*

*You won!*

*You earned 0 XP and 5 Gold.*

*No Info was acquired...*

Well that's 10 Gold on me. Time to buy that Spider Donut.

Oh, and Charli? If you take control away from me one more time, I'll-

**What, Frisk? What are you going to do?**

*Do you really think you're the one in control?*
Face it. You can't do a darn thing to me.

...look. Sometimes you risk doing something you might regret. Sometimes I feel like I need to keep you on the right path.

And when you do, I'm there to keep you from making a mistake. Sometimes I slip up, yes, but most of the time I'm doing it for your benefit.

I'm not just doing this because it's my funeral as well as yours. I'm not just doing this to feel like I have a say in things. I'm doing this because those who don't remember the past...

...are doomed to repeat it.

So what, you're trying to keep me from making the same mistakes you did?

Well let me tell you something, Charli. I am not you. I'm not going to slip up like you did.

...you just keep on telling yourself that. Maybe one day, you'll end up believing it.

Right. Bake sale time.

You leave 7 Gold in the web. Some spiders crawl down and give you a donut.

Well, we're all set. Let's solve that one puzzle, then move on to that annoying perspective shifting puzzle.

Bottom middle?

Nope. Just Napstablook.

Napstablook: "oh no, i've fallen down..."

"go on, kid, save yourself..."

"no wait, i'm a ghost. i can just float out of here."

"never mind..."

Aaaaand gone again. Let's do top mid- Oh.

Red-thorned vines? Now Thorney's at it too?

Next room. Leg it.

Ah shoot. Looks like were stuck in here, now. Loox is stuck in here too.

Thorney: "Howd-"

Doctor Kuro: "No."

Thorney gets frazzled by a bolt of lightning.

Kuro stands on the other side of the room, her goggles over her eyes, cradling a- That is a lightning
gun. She built herself a lightning gun.

...I take back everything I said. Kuro is awesome.

Easily impressed as usual, I see?

Quiet, you.

Thorney: "Can we at least have a chat? Maybe over a nice cup of t-"

Doctor Kuro: "NO, sir."

Thorney: "...utterly ridiculous. There's ALWAYS time for tea..."

Thorney ran away, grumbling to himself...

Doctor Kuro: "Thank goodness. Are you alright, fledgeling? Oh, you seem to have a little-"

Frisk: "Just a Vegetoid. Got a little enthusiastic with their groceries."

Oooh matron.

Are you serious? What are you, 6 years old?

That's rich, coming from you. Aren't you like 9 or something?

Doctor Kuro: "...where did you find that shawl?"

Uh oh. Looks like you're in troub-

[I found it near that old memorial] >[I got it trading with a Migosp]

Doctor Kuro: "Oh dear... Things really are getting desperate, aren't they?"

"I knew that they tended to fall in with bad crowds, but to think that one would resort to graverobbing..."

"Here, let me take it off of your hands."

You lost the Faded Shawl. Not like you earned it in the first place, anyway.

Doctor Kuro: "Here, fledgeling. Take my hand. We're almost home."

We let her guide us to safety. Thank goodness we didn't have to deal with that final puzzle.

Doctor Kuro: "And here we are. Welcome, fledgeling, to your new home. Home."

"...fledgeling?"

...I remembered precious Memories.

I can almost smell that butterscotch-cinnamon pie...
She was so kind. She cared for me like her own son. And I broke her heart.

...the sight of such a cozy house, in the middle of the Ruins... oh god...

**Doctor Kuro:** "Oh dear, are you alright? Is something wrong?"

**Frisk:** "...I'm ok, Doc... I think I just need to take a nap..."

**Doctor Kuro:** "...yes, a nap should help. You've been through a lot, fledgeling. Here, I have a room ready for you."

She guides us to a small room at the start of the hallway.

**Doctor Kuro:** "I'll have dinner ready in about an hour. Is sweetcorn risotto ok?"

I nod silently. ...Charli? Are you...

*His room.*

*This was his room.*
A Home Away From Home

Chapter Summary

Frisk and Charli remember more of what came before, and plan ahead to make their journey to New Home smoother. However, Doctor Kuro has one last test planned for her guest...

???: “I think it came from over there...”

“Oh... You've fallen down, haven't you?”

“Here, help me get him up.”

“There we are. Oh no... We should get him to Mom, quick.”

“So... What's his name?”

“...Charlie, huh? That's a nice name.”

“Oh, um... my name is-”

...*yawn* Hwuuu, what was that all about? ...Charli? Hellooooo? Ground Control to Major Charli? Your circuit dead or something?

Ha... Ha... It feels like yesterday when I first saw this room. I remember that goofy smile on his face when he showed me...

I... Charli, I don't understand. Who are you talking about? Who's room was this?

...you really don't remember? Wasn't he the reason you came here?

Charli, please. Cut the cryptic and just TELL me. Who is “he”?

Asriel. His name was Asriel.

...Yep, that looks like it struck a nerve. I'm surprised the room alone didn't set you off.

Oh god... Asriel... I remember. It wasn't fair, that he was the only one left behind. He did all those terrible things as Flowey, but when his heart returned, even for just a little while...

And that's why you went back, and did... whatever you did.

Frisk, I'm gonna be frank with you. Something weird happened long ago, but it also happened... a few years from now?

Don’t ask, it's making our head hurt. But whatever you did, I'm pretty sure it's the reason why we
can't remember everything right now.

You're not making any sense. I- I remember saving him! I remember scooping Flowey up into that damn flowerpot, showing up on Alphys' doorstep, and shoving him into her arms. I remember telling her to “fix him”. I remember her shuddering at the tone of my voice, and the determination in my steely gaze. And I remember hugging him tighter than ever, the minute he stepped out of that machine...

**But then why go back? You got everything you wanted. You saved everyone. What caused you to reset THIS hard?**

I... I can't remember... Nearly everything between him being “reborn”, and us waking up on that rose bush... It's like fog, so thick you can't see past your nose.

*Why do I have this feeling that it wasn't for a very happy reason?*

Alright, so how long did we rest, anyways?

*Frisk...*

Good, this phone has a clock in it. Looks like... whoa, nearly an hour. I guess five minutes until dinnertime? Probably enough time to snoop around the Lab, see what's really going on.

...sure. Why not? *I haven't had my daily dose of “what” yet anyways.*

*Hang on, check the mirror at the end of the hall. I want to check something.*

*It's... definitely been a few years since you first fell down. Wow.*

Oh my god... I'm...

Well, at least you dropped the soup-bowl haircut. I'm amazed you didn't get it tangled in the rose bush, now it's down to your shoulders.

I scream internally at the thought.

*Please don't. ...wait a second, are those...*

Yes. Yes they are.

*Why didn't I realise it before? You're... you're...*

*You're really pretty.*

Come on Charli, it's not that big a- wait, what?

*I mean it. You look really nice. Even with those jeans being all torn up, they still compliment your, uh... Your striped shirt! It's really cool that you found one that matches your original clothes.*

...thanks? I guess?
It's fine.

Is something funny, Charli?

...heh, I just realised how crazy this situation is. I'm a boy trapped in a young lady's body.

Well, it wouldn't be the first time, now would it?

Yeah, but I had no idea back. Wait, what is that supposed to mean?

...oh. I... Frisk, I had no idea you felt that way.

You could say that. I'm still figuring things out, if that makes sense.

It kinda does. I'm just glad you never had to meet my dad. It would not have been pretty.

But I did, didn't I? And Asgore wasn't all that bad. Sure he did some terrible things, but overall he was a good guy in a terrible situation! Yeah he was a big fuzzy moron, but he was still a nice guy at heart!

...oh. I knew that you didn't climb Mt Ebott for a happy reason, but...

And they call the people down here “monsters”.

I'm so sorry.

Save it. Let's get back to snooping. “Sis”.

I'm going to pretend like I didn't hear that.

**Doctor Kuro:** “Fledgeling? Your risotto's ready!”

But I can't pretend I didn't hear that.

You sit at the dinner table, and shovel a spoonful of sweetcorn risotto into your mouth.

Hmmm, not bad, slight butteriness to it. Not amazing, but it's alright. Still better than anything Papyrus made.

**Doctor Kuro:** “Are you enjoying it, fledgeling?”

I nod, before swallowing to speak.

**Frisk:** “'s pretty good.”

**Doctor Kuro:** “I'm delighted to hear it! It's been a long time since I've cooked for someone, so I was afraid I'd mess something up.”

“Come to think of it, I haven't had many visitors recently.”

“I'm just happy to have someone around the house, for once.”

*I wonder if she even knows that this was once the Royal Family's home?*
Hmmm... That gives me an idea.

**Frisk:** “Say Kuro? That room you showed us- me to.”

**Damnit Frisk.**

**Frisk:** “Whose was it originally? I couldn't help but notice...”

*Kuro looks a little nervous. I think she knows, Frisk. Looks like the jig is up.*

**Doctor Kuro:** “I... I guess it's no use hiding it from you, fledgeling. These Ruins were originally the capital of the Monster Kingdom, dating back to the rule of King Asgore Dreemurr.”

“I never knew the king personally, but I knew his son very well. He was still so very young, when the Queen decided to make him my apprentice.”

“Yes. That bedroom belonged to Prince Asriel Dreemurr. One of the finest minds I've ever taught...”

“Toriel hoped that I, as the Royal Scientist, would be able to sway him from his father's path, to prove that there was, indeed, another way.”

*Asriel... What's happened to this world?*

**Doctor Kuro:** “…if you'll excuse me, I have some things I need to attend to. I...”

*She just left. You think she's heading downstairs?*

I dunno. But if you'll excuse me, I'm gonna phone a friend.

*Phone a fr- Frisk, do you need another lie down? You're not making... Wait, that number...*

**Frisk, I'm amazed. You actually remember it.**

Quiet, you. It's ringing.

???: “hey there. you've reached papyrus' cell.”

Wait a second...

**sans:** “psyke! this is his voicemail. just leave your message after the ding.”

**Frisk:** “Damnit Sans... Uh, Papyrus? Pick up if you're there, man!”

“No? Well I guess you'll have to miss out on capturing the first human to fall down here in ages.”

“Yeah that's right. Real deal. Actual human calling you right now. And if everything turns out alright, I should be leaving the Ruins pretty soon.”

“I'll be near that big door in Snowdin Forest. Come pick me up before the Royal Guard finds me. Oh, and...”
“Tell your brother Frisk says hi. And that she's sorry... for everything.”

*click*

You're really going through with this, aren't you?

I need to see if they're still ok, Charli. This isn't about escaping the Underground anymore. If there is any chance that Asriel's still alive in this timeline, we are going to New Home.

Better finish that risotto, then. Can't go on an adventure on an empty stomach.

...wow. You tear into that plate with frightening speed. I was not expecting that.

Let's go confront Kuro, see if we can't convince her to let us go.

Just a minute. ...the thought that your best friend might still be alive... It fills you with determination.

HP resto- Never mind, that risotto filled it up for me.

[SAVE]

Charli LV.1 KN.5

Ruins Lab – Dinner Table

Doctor Kuro: “The last time a human fell down here, it did not end well.”

“My puzzles did little to halt his progress, and when he reached the Lab, I could do nothing but stay out of his way.”

“So you will understand why the next puzzle will be impossible for you.”

Impossible? Oh god is she gonna trap us here?

Doctor Kuro: “There is a door at the end of this tunnel that leads to the rest of the Underground.”

“I have secured it with a hexatrigesimal combination lock, to which only I know the right combination.”

“No-one will be able to enter or leave the Ruins unless I say so. And if they strike me down... They will be trapped here forever.”
Clever... Very clever... Can't kill your way through this one, am I right?

... 

**Doctor Kuro:** “Ever since I encountered you at the breach, I have been testing you. Patience, Kindness, Bravery... Various aspects of you have been tried and tested, to see if you could rise above your base nature.”

“And so far, you have done very well. Though at times I sensed a flicker of something... dark. I have to dock points for that, test subject.”

“But up ahead, there is one final test. One more chance for you to prove that you are not a danger to the world beyond the Ruins.”

Fine. Just show me so you can get out of my way.

**Doctor Kuro:** “Do you still have those pastilles I left out for you earlier?”

**Frisk:** “Yeah, I got your pills, Doc. You think I wouldn't notice?”

**Doctor Kuro:** “…well, by now you should know what they do. For monsters, they briefly amplify their magical affinity. But in theory, the effect should be more... persistent in a human subject. I would advise you to take one before this test.”

**Frisk:** “Hold the freaking phone. Whatever happened to only taking two every 8 hours? I didn't nap for THAT long, Kuro.”

**Doctor Kuro:** “No, but resting helps your body adjust to the effects. And with a full stomach, a single pastille shouldn't hit you quite as hard.”

[MENU] > [ITEM] > Mana Pastille > Use

*You pop the pill into your mouth. I'm surprised you're so comfortable with this, after...*

Save it, Charli. My max MP increased by 1.

**Doctor Kuro:** “Good, you should be ready for what I have in store for you...”

*I hope she isn't planning what I think she's planning.*

**Doctor Kuro:** “Things are not as clear-cut and safe out there as they are here. People are desperate. The other projects haven't been as fruitful as we've hoped. And the Prince has ownership of six human souls.”

“The Barrier that keeps us down here was created by seven human wizards, as the culmination of their collective power. Thus, it would take a power equal to seven human souls to break the spell.”

“Why do I know this? Well, it was my paper on the subject that caught the Queen's eye. It was that eureka moment that earned me my position, back when Asgore still ruled.”
Doctor Kuro: “Understand, human, that many people still believe in that first plan. They believe that if the Prince is able to gather seven human souls, he could shatter the barrier with a single special attack. Just one more soul, and everyone would be free.”

“I imagine if they see a human walking around, when they are so close to freedom? Do you think they would let an opportunity like you just walk on by?”

“That is why I have set up this one last test. I do not wish our liberty to be tainted by murder. So now, test subject, you must prove yourself…”

Oh no.

Doctor Kuro: “Prove to me that you are strong enough to survive out there!”

That light... I can't see! What the hell is going on?!

Kuro blocks the way, her mechanical wings unfurling behind her.

[ACT] > [Kuro] > *Check

The Clockwork Angel of the Ruins.

Kuro: “Show me what you have learned...”

Her wings beat, sending forth waves of lightning. You try to avoid them, but...

GRHaAaAa!! Nghhh...

How is this even fair? They're too wide to dodge!

...come on Frisk, get up! We'll find a way!

HOW... How is anyone meant to deal with this kind of attack?!

There has to be a way...

Kuro watches patiently, awaiting your next move.

Patience... What would Mary-Ann do?

Let's see...

[ACT] > [Charli] > *Patience

You calm yourself, waiting for your big moment. 1 MP consumed.

[Soul Mode Activated: Patience]

Wha... What is this feeling? I feel... at peace. Light blue... The universe can wait for me.

Kuro: ”You... You remember her...”

Here comes another wave of Lightning Wings.
Time passes us all by. So shall these troubles.

The waves... pass right through you, as if you weren't there. One turn left until Determination.

Kuro looks on approvingly. We've figured it out.

I feel like I know her... But we've never met before, right? She died so long ago...

???: “It's like you said. We all have our moments in life, we just have to wait until they come along. Isn't that right, ######?”

What... was... that?

I... I have no idea. What WAS that?

Who knows... But we'll find out some day, right?

I guess...

[ACT] > [Kuro] > *Asriel

You ask-

I can talk for myself, dammit.

Frisk: “Kuro... Please, tell me what happened to Asriel. Is he...”

Kuro: “He is still with us, fledgeling. But the years have not been kind.”

“He has lost so much, Frisk. So very much...”

Yet more Lightning Wings. Will they never cease?

They will, Charlie. All things do in time. Sadly, even my Patience has its limits.

Your soul turns red once more. A return to Determination.

That settles it. We are going after him. Nothing is going to stop us this time...

Frisk... Just don't do anything foolish, ok?

I'm not making any promises. But something doesn't quite add up...

[ACT] > [Kuro] > *Power

Frisk: “If you were afraid that I might kill people, why did you leave those pills out to make me stronger? I could still kill someone with magic, right?”

Kuro: “You could, but in all likelihood you won’t.”

“There's a flicker of something, but whether or not it will overwhelm you...”

“...that has yet to be seen.”
Volley after volley of lightning bolts pour forth. Dodging... more dodgyAJKSFOKA- One hits you square in the chest. Owww...

Son of- Is she actually trying to kill us, or is she really this inept?! Toriel never gave me this much trouble THIS early!

Oh god... Oh god I'm at 2HP... I won't be able to take another hit like that, no way!

[ACT] > [Kuro] > *PLEASE STOP I'M GOING TO DIE YOU F-

What did I say about doing something foolish? This is why I'm here, Frisk.

[ACT] > [Charlie] > *Patience

You cool your brakes, waiting for your big moment.

[Soul Mode Activated: Patience]

You were waiting for a moment like this, weren't you?

Another vicious lightning barrage. But none of them can even touch you. One turn left until Determination.

...here comes Napstablook?

Napstablook: “oh no... i didn't know you guys were busy…”

“i just came to say that i'm heading back to Waterfall, and that i'll be back here some time next weekend…”

“oh no... i've made the battle awkward…”

“oh nooo00000000000000000000 later kid”

Aaaaand he's g- He just passed right through the door.

I wonder... We're kinda like that right now, right?

It would not hurt to try. Worst case, we look like fools.

Ok, here goes nothing in particular...

[MERCY] > *Flee

Later, Kuro.

Doctor Kuro: “Are you serious?”
Still in Patience mode, let's go through before it wears off.

I walk towards the door at a steady pace.

A little faster, please. In spite of how you feel right now, we DON'T have all day.

...it worked! We're on the other side of the bulkhead! That... was a little anticlimactic, don't you think?

**Doctor Kuro**: “ARE YOU SERIOUS?!?”

I mean, we had an epic boss fight in front of us, complete with epic music and flashy attacks, and we were able to just go straight through the door.

*Oh, and something something return to determination. There, I said it.*

Speaking of anticlimactic... Guess who it is?

**Frisk**: “Oh, uh, hi there Blooky!”

*I can't read people's minds, other than yours of course, but I bet that “Blooky” is screaming internally right about now.*

**Napstablook**: “...awkward...”

“we just said goodbye, and now we're going the same way...”

*Napstablook begins to shudder and sweat. His eyes never leave yours.*

...aaaaand he's gone. Yeah. Really awkward.

*Let's make it more awkward and go after him. Kuro's probably about to come after us. And I think she's pretty upset.*

I forgot how long this slope was. I know it goes down all the way to the forest, but did it really have to be THIS long?

*Pick up the pace, Frisk. Here comes trouble.*

**Doctor Kuro**: “Come back here! We weren't done with the test, fledgeling!”

But I'm about done with her. Sorry Doc, I'm out of here.

*Careful of that vi- Nevermind, too late. How's that ground tasting for you?*

Shut. Up. You snarky little-

**Doctor Kuro**: “There you are, fledgeling...”

“Oh, poor thing, you've grazed your little chin. Here, let me fix that for you!”

*She touches your recent injury, and it heals in the blink of an eye. HP restored. Huh, pretty convenient.*
Doctor Kuro: “Now, let's go back to the door and finish that last test, shall w-”

She doesn't get to finish her sentence, as a large tendril sends her flying. Just as well she knows healing magic, eh?

You're actually enjoying this, aren't you? You're a sick puppy, Charli.

Like you're one to talk, Frisk. Oh, and it's Charlie now. I figured out how to get past that weird six-character limit.

Yeah it's kinda weird. Wouldn't eight make more sense? Oh, and Thorney's back by the way, WHAT DO WE DO?!

Thorney regards us with disappointed eyes. My chest... what is this feeling?

Thorney: “You've come far enough, boy. Have some dignity, and give up your soul...”

Before he can prepare another attack, a single white pellet hits him in the face.

Floriel. I have no idea why she is doing this, but at least she's putting Thorney in his place.

Thorney: “Do you mind? I'm trying to have a conversati-”

Floriel pelts Thorney with an entire volley of pellets. She's just not having it, is she?

Thorney: “One of these days, Tori... One of these days...”

Thorney burrows his way out of the room. Now it's just you, me, and Floriel.

...Tori. He called her Tori. That's what he called... oh.

Floriel: “I was afraid you would do something foolish, my child. But it seems you've learned a valuable lesson from her.”

“As much as I disagreed with her methods, she seems to have become a better person in exile.”

“And you, my child, have shown that I was right. Mankind is broken, yes. But it can be fixed.”

“You could have killed everyone in your path, grown stronger through EXP and LV.”

“But you refused. You found another way. Just as it should be...”

“My child, you no longer have anything to fear from me. I will not stand in your way.”

“But once you reach the Capital, we will have much to talk about. In the meantime, I will continue to keep G- Thorney away from you.”

“I wish you all the best, Frisk...”

Frisk: “But- Why wait until then?! Why not tell me everything NOW?!”
Too late, she's outta here.

**Frisk:** “TORIEL!”

Why is everyone so CRYPTIC now?! ...what is it now, Charlie?

*What happened to her? What caused her to become... this? And- She called you Frisk. You never told anyone your name.*

I guess we'll solve that mystery later. I'm as weirded-out as you right now, but we don't have all the clues yet. Come on, let's go and meet Papyrus.

*The old stone door slides shut behind us, as we step out into a cold, snowy forest. Sno... wy...*

Shut... up... I wonder...

*Huh? There's a camera in the bushes.*

And I think I know who set it up... I crouch down to be at eye-level with the camera.

**Frisk:** “That you on the other end, Alphys? Heh, bet that gave you a fright 'n a half...”

“You might not know me, but I know you. And I remember what you did.”

“Listen, Alphys... You don't need to set up a gauntlet of fake tricks and traps to win me over. You don't need to reactivate a bunch of puzzles, then help me through them, to make me think you're a good person.”

“cause I know you're still a good person at heart. Even when you're garbage, you're still a trash can, not a haz-bin. You can do great things in the end.”

“So hey. When I stop by your lab in Hotland, I don't wanna end up slogging through tedious puzzles in blistering heat when I leave. Drop that plan, and remember to give me your phone number this time, okay?”

???: “Oh dearie me...”

I know that voice...

*You turn to see a dignified skeleton in winter clothing. He tilts his head as he peers over his glasses.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “And I thought my brother had the worst puns...”
Chapter Summary

Frisk and Charlie meet up with the Papyrus of this timeline, and begin their trek to Snowdin Town. Familiar faces pass the group by, and Frisk learns a bit more about what the "Bone Bros" are up to in this branch, as Doctors in the Prince's employ.

Is it just me, or does Papyrus look... older?

**Doctor Papyrus:** “And here I was, thinking you would never show up!”

“I half-expected this to be some sick prank, meticulously planned to wrack my nerves, yet here you stand!”

**Frisk:** “It's ok, Papyrus. I'm back, and that's what matters!”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Back? Young lady, I have never met you personally until today!”

“The most I know of you is from my brother's studies of adjacent realities, or what little of them I am allowed to see...”

*You feel the bottom drop out of your stomach. If you ask me, things are about to get WEIRD.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “But I am surprised that YOU would know of the “Great Papyrus” so early on in this branch!”

“Normally, you exit the Ruins, my brother greets you, and while you hide behind a conveniently-shaped lamp, I lambaste the layabout for not calibrating his puzzles!”

“After that, hi-jinks ensue. And low-jinks. Refreshments were also provided, although since my cooking skills were unequivocally abysmal in most branches, I cannot blame you for passing them by.”

**Frisk:** “You... you know what I did... Papyrus, I'm so s-”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Do not even bother! They are not you, Frisk. There are Frisks beyond number, just as there are worlds beyond counting. What they did or did not do is irrelevant! What matters here and now is you, here and now.”

**Frisk:** “But-”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “No buts, young lady! I have heard quite enough of those for today.”

“I shall escort you to the Lab, and there we shall decide just what to do with you.”

“After all, it will not do to have a human just walking around out here. Especially with the Royal Guard in the state it is right now.”
I'm not sure I like how Papyrus has turned out this time around.

I know, right? He used to be so upbeat and self-sure, always eager to join the Royal Guard. But this...

The more I see of this world, the more I'm starting to regret... whatever I did that caused things to get this crazy.

Well, whatever happens, it's too late to go back now.

But I can still help things turn out for the better, right? If I could see just a glimpse of the old Papyrus...

Just don't do anything stupid, alright?

That's rhetorical, right? You know me, Charlie. I'm not making any promises.

We'll see about that.

Don't try me right now. You might not like what you see...

There's the lamp, conveniently-shaped as always. Wait, is that...?

Doctor Papyrus: “Oh dearie me, looks like a patrol! Quick, hide behind that checkpoint!”

We dive behind that old... I dunno what else you'd call it.

Ketchup, mustard, relish... You'd think Sans was still a sentry this time around, but-

???: “Yo Doc! I heard you were out here, everything ok?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Why hello there, little man! I'm just in need of a bit of fresh air, that's all. Still haven't gotten approval for that new airex yet.”

???: “Fresh air, huh? Judging by how you booked it out of the Lab earlier, I'd say you REALLY needed it.”

“Still, long way out to go for “a little fresh air”, if you ask me.”

Doctor Papyrus: “With all due respect little man, I wasn't asking you.”

“...I'm sorry, I-I didn't mean it like that.”

Holy crap, I think it's that kid! What was his name again...?

Monster Kid: “Nah dude, I should be sorry. Kinda. I mean, I'm meant to keep the peace, right? Look out for anything suspicious? Master Ren gave me those orders, after all.”

“An' seeing you bookin’ it towards the forest? All the way to the foot of the Old City? That caught my eye, Doc. That's the kinda thing Master warned me to be on the lookout for.”
“Is something the matter, Doc? It's alright, you can tell me. After all, we're buddies, right?”

He'd better not rat us out, I swear...

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Fine. You've gotten me.”

“The project is going nowhere fast, and I'm not sure Sans is giving his all. So I needed to go somewhere quiet, blow off a little steam!”

“And before you ask, no I don't want to go to Grillby's right now. And no, I'm not in much a mood to see Undyne either. I just...”

_Oh... I knew things were gonna be heavy, but this..._

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I just need a little time alone, Kid. That's all, just some me-time, just me and the forest air. Once I've swept the stress out of my skull, I'll come back to town.”

“Come to think of it... Yes, I'll even make dinner once I get back! A break from the usual take-out should be good for all of us. So, should I set out a third plate, or do you have other plans once you're off duty?”

**Monster Kid:** “Gee, Doc, I didn't know it was like that... I'd, uh, I'd love to join you guys, buuuuut Mom's gonna do meatloaf tonight so...”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Say no more, I understand. Perhaps some other time?”

**Monster Kid:** “Sure, I guess! ...I should make my way back to town. You gonna be alright out here?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Indeed, little man. And if my brother asks after me, tell him that I'm on my way back.”

”After all, by the time you get to town, I should be more than ready to come back to the Lab.”

“...oh, and Kid? Thanks for looking out for me.”

**Monster Kid:** “Just doin' my job, Doc. ...just doin' my job...”

*Monster Kid. His parents actually called him “Monster Kid”. My god, was his dad on the birch beer when he came up with that name? I swear, Asgore would have given him a better name. ASGORE.*

Are we not going to talk about the fact that, not only does he now have robot arms, but he's part of the Royal Guard?!

_Hey, I was gonna get to that later. I'm just blown away by the originality of it all. To me he seems like he'd be more of an “-ike”. Like, uh, “Mike” or “Spike”, hell maybe even just “Ike”. I just hope I don't have to fight him. Even the thought of it... No, let's just see if Papyrus is ok._

*You quietly make your way over, then sit down beside him.*
Frisk: “I had no idea things were so bad... If I'd known earlier-”

Doctor Papyrus: “Don't worry your little head about it, Frisk. It's actually not THAT bad, but it could still be better.”

“Yes, the project is struggling. Yes, Sans barely does any work anymore. But I'm always there to pick up the slack, and it doesn't bother me as much as I played it up to be!”

“After all, I am the Great Doctor Papyrus! Though my uncle laid the groundwork all those years ago, and my layabout brother is head of the Lab, I am the brains of this operation! And in spite of all these setbacks, we will find another way!”

Frisk: “And there it is! There's the smile I was looking for...”

Doctor Papyrus: “I am a skeleton, darling. We always have a wide grin ready!”

“Now come along. It's time I brought you back to town.”

Seeing your good friend crack a smile, in spite of his troubles, fills you with determination.

[SAVE]

Charli LV.1 KN.5

Snowdin – Meeting an Old Friend

Aw, Monster Kid even has his own little guard station!

Doctor Papyrus: “Ah. So that's what happened to the box for the Phasma Condenser...”

“*sigh* It reminds me of when I was younger, when I still held an interest in the Royal Guard.”

“Alas, Master Ren turned me away, said that I wasn't Guard material. In the end, I continued working with my brother, and here I am today! A lab assistant in Snowdin.”

“To think, that if Undyne were head of the Royal Guard, she would have at least humoured me. Then again, her technique is...”

“L-let's keep going! And stay on this side of me... The guard at this checkpoint can't see all too well.”

...but there's no-one ther- Oh look, it's this guy.

Doggo: “Whu?! Who's there?!”

Doctor Papyrus: “Just me again, guardsman! I'm on my way back to town, just needed to stretch
my bones with a hearty walk!"

Doggo: "Just you? Then who's your friend? Aren't ya gonna intr- *sniff sniff* Wait just a dogdanged minute."

Oh crap.

Doggo: "Smells like trouble. Nobody move!"

[ACT] > [Doggo] > *Don't Move

You don't move a muscle. I mean it.

Seriously, he's got a crossbow. Who gives a crossbow to a dog?

Doggo: "I think there's something stalking us, Doc. Something... Sheesh, why am I shaking? Whatever's out there, it ain't gonna move anymore!"

Doggo fires off a bolt. Don't flinch, it's light-blue. Think about blue stop signs!

Hoooo boy that's freezing. But it didn't hurt in the slightest.

Doggo: "Did I get it? Nothing's moving, so..."

Doctor Papyrus: "Nothing is moving because nothing is there! You just need to relax, that's all!"

Doggo: "My great grandpops 'relaxed' on the job once. That was the day that he rolled into town."

"And you remember your history lessons, Doc. You know what happened on that day. Ain't gonna make the same mistake my ancestor did..."

[ACT] > [Doggo] > *Pet

Is that really the best thing to do right now?

[ACT] > [Doggo] > *Pet

...you wait until Doggo is looking away, then aggressively begin ruffling his head-fur.

Papyrus looks bewildered. But says nothing.

Doggo: "What?! I've been pet! PAT? POT? PUT?"

Doggo is freaking out.

[ACT] > [Doggo] > [Belly Rub]

...really, Frisk?

Fine. You knock the crossbow out of his hands and sweep his legs out from under him.

You then begin rubbing his belly vigorously. Seriously, this isn't necessary.
**Doggo:** “You guys, I *hahaha* can’t! I...” *floop*

*Doggo has passed out. Man was not meant to pet this much.*

...[MERCY] > *Spare > [Doggo]*

...you won!

*You earned 0 XP and 40 Gold.*

*No Info was acquired... Other than that belly rubs are super-effective against Doggo.*

---

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Well, that was...”

“I guess he won’t be chasing after us any time soon.”

“But there will be other guards patrolling up ahead, and I do not think that your particular brand of petting will be effective against them.”

“Perhaps you should put that Stick of yours to good use?”

**Frisk:** “…is that some kind of sick joke?”

*Ohhhhhhhhhhh no actually. He means throwing it.*

**Frisk:** “OH right, I get it. For a moment, I thought you meant-”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “No. I did not.”

*The two of you exchange awkward looks for a few moments, before journeying forth.*

...is it just me, or do you feel like someone’s watching us?

My oh my, is that the...?

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Oh HO! I assume you had this puzzle in your reality?”

“Indeed! This was the invisible electricity maze! A nefarious construct I devised back when I was trying to impress Master Ren.”

“The walls of this maze were not only invisible, but intangible! However, if you held onto this orb when touching a wall, said orb would administer a hearty zap...”

*[MENU] > [POWER] > [Soul Mode: Patience]*

*You calm yourself, waiting for your big moment.*

...aaaaaand you walk right through the puzzle.
Doctor Papyrus: “…”

“That was the earlier prototype, however. The walls themselves should have zapped you when you tried to pass through, in this iteration.”

“Curiouser and curiouser! That light... It's the same as the s-”

“I mean, good job, Frisk! You solved it without my help!”

“I'll be with you in a second, just let me...”

Papyrus fiddles with his phone for a few moments, and the walls flicker briefly as he passes through untouched. Another touch of his phone reactivates the maze. Huh.

???: “Where is everybody? It's the perfect weather for something cold...”

Isn't that the boyfriend of B-?

NO. I mean, not in this timeline, I think. Still, I think it's time to stimulate the local economy.

Frisk: “Say Papyrus, you in the mood for something nice?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Well... it is a while until we get back. I guess one small snack wouldn't hurt?”

“...oh dear, it seems I don't have much change on my pers-”

Frisk: “Don't worry, I'll pay for it. My treat an' all that.”

“Howdy friend! Two of those Nice Creams, if you please.”

Oh god his ears perked right up! I can't handle this!

Nice Cream Guy: “A customer?! Well how d'ya do, young lady?”

“And the good doctor himself! Golly, haven't seen you around here in a while...”

Doctor Papyrus: “Oh it's nothing, I just needed to take a break today. My good friend, uhm... Elizabeth, suggested I go for a walk with her.”

“Isn't that right, Lizzie?”

Frisk: “Yup. You really oughta take more regular breaks, Doc. Being cooped up in a small room all day won't do your bones any good, y'know.”

You hand Warren the 24G, and he hands you two Nice Creams. And gives you a really big smile.

Wait, "Warren"? Seriously?

Seriously, that's his real name. Don't you remember BP talking about him?

I guess I wasn't really listening that time.
Maybe. But I sure as hell was. I was *totally* into the dynamic they-

You just cool your jets, Charlie. OH, and that reminds me...

**Frisk:** “Thanks Warren. It is Warren, right?”

**Warren:** “Uh, yeah! Doc tell you it earlier?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “N- yeah! Heh! Heh! Indeed I did, friend!”

*Whew, close call.*

**Frisk:** “Let me give you a tip for future success, buddy. I’m betting that if you sell your product over in Hotland, you'd make a KILLING.”

*Warren looks afraid.*

**Frisk:** “Metaphorically speaking, I mean. All those people over there, working in sweltering heat, they’d definitely be in the mood for something to cool off with.”

“And what's cooler than an ice cream? Trust me, they'll love your Nice Creams over in Hotland.”

**Warren:** “Oh wow. Why didn’t I think of that before?!”

“I could peddle this stuff at the MTT Hotland Campus! Think of all those eager students, lining up to grab something nice and cool...”

“...well Lizzie, you just might have saved my business. And here I was thinking about working part-time for Grillby. Fame and fortune, here I come!”

*You gained valuable Info!*

*Looks like he's off to Hotland. And there, he'll meet a suave young fry cook, with eyes like fire and fur to match.*

I never knew you worked for the post office, Charlie.

*I- What does that have to do wi-

Because you are shipping like crazy right now.

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Ooooh... Despite it being so cold out, this is actually quite nice! Is this butterscotch flavour?”

**Frisk:** “Yes... Yes it is.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “A nostalgic flavour, I take it? What am I saying, of course it is!”

“You always did love the Queen's butterscotch pies...”

*You freeze mid-lick. Thankfully, it's not because of brain freeze. However...*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I've seen a few tapes in particular, glimpses of you living with her. In the Ruins, in New Home...”
“On the Surface.”

You feel your sins crawling up on yo-

Doctor Papyrus: “Have no fear, human! I am confident that you will be able to leave this place, in due time.”

“Perhaps our freedom, in turn, is merely a day away? From what I have gleaned from Sans’ records, your arrival in the Underground heralds the end of an era. And the beginning of something new.”

“As clichéd as it sounds, I believe that you will do the right thing, when the time comes.”

You feel relieved, yet at the same time, something gnaws away at you in the pit of your stomach. And it certainly wasn’t that last Mana Pastille...

Frisk: “Back there, you called me Elizabeth. I appreciate the cover, but I don't think anybody knows my name down here. Except for you, of course.”

Doctor Papyrus: “That... isn't exactly true, young lady. You see, there was another who had a similar name to yours...”

“During the reign of King Asgore, he and his wife cared for three children. Prince Asriel, who now rules the Underground. Prince Charles, who succumbed to a terrible sickness at a young age. And Princess Frisca, a fair and brilliant young girl who-”

“...what DID happen to the princess?”

No... No that's not... I can't have...

Doctor Papyrus: “I recall that she studied under the Royal Scientist at the time, as did Prince Asriel, but...”

“How curious. It's like there's something I'm missing...”

It's just like when Brock was talking about that Doctor G-whoever... Perhaps there's a connection? Frisca... I haven't heard that name since the orphanage. All the kids shortened it to “Frisk”, but Ms Penfold always called me by my birth name.

Maybe there's a connection there, too? Maybe-

Doctor Papyrus: “Anyway, the reason I used it was to keep people from thinking you were the reincarnation of the princess, or something silly like that.”

“Though I did once have the privilege of seeing a portrait of the princess. Long brown hair, golden skin, narrow eyes...”

“But it would be all too convenient to suggest that you are the princess reborn! Truly ludicrous to believe such a thing!”

Yeah... Ridiculous...
**Frisk:** “But why call me Elizabeth? Why that of all names?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “One of my brother's brief otherworldly acquaintances. During one of his experiments, the keyhole tore wide open, and a human fell through!”

“She seemed friendly enough, introducing herself as Elizabeth. What intrigued me most was her apparent magical talent, a true rarity among humans if you mind me saying...”

“But the minute my brother asked her if she'd be willing to undergo a small test or two, she ripped open the keyhole and jumped right back over to her own world.”

“In a way, she inspired my brother, as he made many attempts to make wider keyholes, thinking that with enough human souls he could create a keyhole large enough for a monster to pass through.”

*Man, this is some pretty valuable Info we got dumped onto us. Your Knowledge increased!*

**Frisk:** “I'm guessing this was before his “slump”? If it worked, you'd probably be in another world by now.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Sadly, yes. He's among the Underground's brightest, but... I simply cannot figure out how to spur that lazybones back into action!”

“Perhaps... Maybe if I showed you to him, that would reignite his passion?”

“One more reason for me to bring you to the Lab!”

*I'm not so sure... I've got a feeling that if we meet this world's Sans, we're going to have a bad time.*

...do me a favour? Never mention the term “bad time” ever again.

*Right. Sorry, I understand. Bad time to bring it up.*

I swear to god, Charlie...

???: “human.”

You just had to jinx it, didn't you?

???: “don't you know how to greet an old pal?”

“turn around, and shake my hand.”

*You turn around an- Frisk. Seriously. Quit stalling.*

I'm not stalling. Who's stalling? I'm just fascinated by this snow poff.

*You turn around and shake his hand. Don't make me do that again.*

GAAAAAAAAAH!
**doctor sans:** “heh, the ol' joy-buzzer. always gets 'em.”

**Yikes! Frisk, are you ok?**

**Frisk:** “...yeah, I'm just dandy, old buddy! Say, I've heard you've been procrastinating a ton lately.”

“A SKELE-TON.”

“Meanwhile, your brother has been working himself TO THE BONE picking up the slack.”

“I'm all for a good joke, but with what's been happening recently I can't say it's very HUMERUS for you to goof around like this!”

“Seriously, what kind of spineless wretch would sit idly by while his brother sticks his neck out for him, day after day?”

**doctor sans:** “…holy crap, kid.”

*Holy crap, Frisk.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Holy crap, human…”

**Monster Kid:** “Holy crap. Is that a…”

*Well, there goes our cover.*

**Monster Kid:** “You're a kid, right? Shirt's a dead giveaway.”

*Or not. Man, close call.*

**Monster Kid:** “But I'm guessing you're no normal kid, right?”

“I know what Master Ren told me to look out for. And the Doc just gave the game away!”

*Uh oh. Jig's up, Frisk.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Oh dear…”

**Monster Kid:** “Human! I... uh... You shall not pass! The good doctor and I have devised some puzzles to stop you dead in your tracks!”

“So long as I draw breath, you will- erm... Darn. Now I know why Master writes his speeches beforehand…”

**doctor sans:** “don't worry kid, i got ya covered.”

“listen buddy, i'd just throw in the towel now if i were you.”

“cause if you think you're gonna get past Snowdin?”

**Frisk:** “I'm gonna have a bad time.”

“Yeah, you just keep on telling yourself that, lazybones.”
“We both know that no-one's gonna die today. I'm not that kinda person...”

**doctor sans:** “maybe you aren't. but are you so sure that he isn't?”

*And like that, he's gone. Yeesh, I hate it when he does that.*

What did he even mean by that? Does he think that you're the one in control?

**Who's saying I'm not?**

*I kid, I kid. But something tells me that he saw you cut it a little too close in another timeline.*

*After all, if it weren't for that convenient change of heart you had...*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Oh my. Well, he's certainly up and at them!”

“A shame, however, that you are the object of his ire.”

“But do not fear, Frisk! For I, the Great Doctor Papyrus, shall assist you with the puzzles in your path!”

“Speaking of which, I believe we are almost at the Trek Stop.”

“Travellers usually rest here for a while when trekking through Snowdin. We might be able to catch our breath here, so long as no-one spots us...”

*While you and Papyrus rest by the convenient bonfire, you hear a curious snuffling behind you.*

*Turning around, you see a familiar war-painted face. Lesser Dog stands ready to strike. ...Jerry came too.*

This is going to be one of **those** days, isn't it?

**Yup. In fact...**

*You feel like it's going to be one of those days. Regardless, you stay determined.*

**HP restored. Exasperation acquired.**

[SAVE]

**Charlie LV.1 KN.6**

Snowdin – Convenient Cliffhanger at the Trek Stop
After a brief interruption, the trek continues. However, things take a grim turn, and the woods aren't safe anymore. Someone's looking out for Frisk, but that isn't necessarily a good thing...

[ACT] > [Jerry] > *Ditch

*I honestly don't blame you. You and the other monsters ditch Jerry when he isn't looking.*

*I dunno whether Lesser Dog is trying to attack you or thank you. Regardless, you dodge his diving “attack”.*

You know what's coming next, Charlie. Don't even try to stop me.

Doctor Papyrus: “NYEH!”

*A wall of bones erupts in the space between you and Lesser Dog. Looks like Papyrus is trying to break up the fight.*

Lesser Dog: *whine*

Doctor Papyrus: “That's far enough, you two!”

“I'll not have the two of you coming to blows while I'm h-”

*Lesser Dog is preoccupied with gnawing on the bone wall attack. Easy Spare.*

[ACT] > [Lesser Dog] > *Pet

*Come on Frisk, quit screwing around.*

[ACT] > [Lesser Dog] > *PET

[ACT] > [Lesser Dog] > *PET

[ACT] > [Lesser Dog] > *PET

[ACT] > [Lesser Dog] > *PET

[ACT] > [Lesser Dog] > *PET

[ACT] > [Lesser Dog] > *PET

...oh my god why.
You vault over the bone fence, landing on Lesser Dog's shoulders, eliciting a startled yelp from him.

Then, you... I still can't believe we're doing this. *sigh* You pet the guardsman's head continuously.

I've always wanted to do this. Ready for lift-off!

*Check ignition, and may God's love be with you.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “...what the-”

*Lesser Dog's neck elongates at high speeds, while you hold on for dear life. Seriously, DON'T LET GO.*

**Lesser Dog:** *excited airplane noises*

OH MY GOD this is amazing! I think I can see the town from up here!

...wow, you're right. Everything looks so small from up here, and yet...

So much that you see just how big the cavern really is?

*I take it all back, Frisk. I'm glad that we could see this.*

...*Lesser Dog looks tired, he's coming back down to the ground.*

Oh... I guess I am a little heavier than I was back then.

*No kidding! It's almost like you're, what, 19 or something now?*

Come on, I'm not THAT old. If I had to guess, I... I think I'm 16 now, maybe 17?

*Looks like it, I guess. And it ties into what I said a while back. That whatever you did, it happened a long time after your first visit...*

*It's kind of funny, actually. Even after all these years, you're still such a child.*

I don't know whether to thank you or punch you right now.

**Just you try it.** Now Spare him already.

[MERCY] > *Spare > [Lesser Dog]*

You won! Finally...

You earned 0 XP and 25 Gold.

*No Info was acquired...*

Huh? What's this n- Okay, now I'm the one being pet.
Lesser Dog looks happy with everything now. He ruffles your hair before wandering off.

Doctor Papyrus: “Again, young lady, you amaze me.”

“I try to keep you from harm, yet you dive right in regardless.”

“And not a scratch to show for it!”

Frisk: “I wouldn't worry about it, Papyrus. Save it for whatever your brother's got planned for us...”

Doctor Papyrus: “…right. Although the next puzzle shouldn't be too hard.”

Frisk: “Another of your old designs?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Think of it as a treasure hunt. Dig for a map, then find the secret switch. Simple as that.”

“A little too simple, sadly. Back then, my puzzles were more like tests, whereas Master Ren wanted genuine obstacles, the kind that would truly thwart the progress of potential marauders.”

“...Frisk, the map is down this w-”

You come across the switch. It is depressed by a tangle of white-thorned vines.

Doctor Papyrus: “How very curious...”

“I... Hmmm... Why does this look so familiar?”

“...forget it. Let's just move on to the next puzzle.”

She's here. No doubts about it.

Still nice of her to solve the puzzle for me. Even though I already knew how to-

...uh oh. Look who it is.

???: “What's that smell? (Where's that smell?)”

???: “If you're a smell... (Identify yoursmeffl?)”

The Dogi sniff around us, sticking their noses into other people's business.

Dogamy: “Here's that weird smell...”

Dogaressa: “It makes me want to eliminate...”

Eliminate me?!

The Dogi assault us!

[ACT] > [Dogi] > *Check
#2 Nuzzle Nose Champs of '98. But which '98?

What does that even mean?

_I just know that they almost won in '98. That's all I- Careful of the axes!_

**Dogaressa:** “Misery awaits you, human.”

Ugh, I HATE this attack! C'mooooon... C'm- **GAAAHH!!** Ohhh this isn't good...

**CRAP.** Hold on, just tear off that sleeve. **Good, now wrap it tight around your arm.**

_Hoo boy, that's NASTY. Just hang in there..._

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Oh god... That- Ohhh I think I'm going to be sick...”

He'll get over it. Do skeletons even have stomachs?

---

[ACT] > [Dogi] > *Roll Around

_You roll around on the snowy ground, getting your nice striped shirt all dirty. Way to go._

_Buuuuut hopefully you smell like a dog now._

I pray that they'll re-smell me now, and think that I'm just another dog-monster.

_**No dice. The Dogaressa is going in for the kill!**_

**Dogaressa:** “**Kneel and suffer, barbarian!**”

_You sidestep the attack. ...right into Dogamy's own swing._

...Frisk? Oh no. **No!**

**Frisk:** *blood-curdling shriek*

_You fall apart, shuddering in shock. Oh god I'm sorry..._

Fading... I can't stop the...

---

...**NO.**

????: “Charlie, I don’t like this plan...”

“Please, bro... PLEASE, just stay determined!”

...we're back. **Right back at the bonfire. Right back with Lesser Dog. And...**

[ACT] > [Jerry] > *DITCH
...moving swiftly on. Lesser Dog pounces, and you dodge out of the-

No matter how many times it happens, I never get used to it.

...funny. I was going fine until they showed up in my last “run”, too.

_Uh, Frisk? Lesser Dog coming in at 3 o’clock. Might want to-

Ok. Lesser Dog tackles you to the ground. Really? Nothing?

Lesser Dog senses what's going on, whining as he cocks his head to the side.

_[ACT] > [Lesser Dog] > *Hug_

_Oh. You, um... You're squeezing him too tightly. Might wanna loosen your grip a little..._

_Frisk? C'mon man, don't do me like this. You can't give up now._

_See? Lesser Dog seems to know what's going on. I think... I think he remembers?_

_He ruffles your hair, as if to say “it'll be alright, buddy”._

_Ok seriously Frisk, just get up. You've been through worse, and you KNOW it._

_Frisk._

_FRISK._

_You think you have any idea what true pain is? **You think I haven't felt true suffering?**_

_You honestly think that the agony of the buttercups pales in comparison to being cut in half?_

_You honestly think that the humiliation dying to the same encounter the second time around is somehow worse than the guilt I have to carry in my heart until eternity's end?_

_You don't think I know what it was like to be stuck in Hell?_

_That's right, Frisk. That's where I've been since he stopped me. That's where ALL of us go unless someone catches our fall._

_Any pain that you've endured, I have too. Any horrors you came across, I came across them too. But in spite of all that we've seen together, I can assure you that there are things in this universe that make the psychopathic whimsies of a tiny flower seem like the daydreams of a schoolgirl._

_Now. GET. UP._

_Charlie..._

_Yeah?_
Shut the **fuck** up. You whiny little edgelord.

*I beg your pardon?*

I'm not in the mood for your dark hyperbolic poetry right now.

And even if I were, there's something you ought to know.

I can't comprehend whatever YOU went through, and I'm sorry that it happened to you, but what I went through STILL. FUCKING. HURT.

I'm not a superhero from one of those damn comic books. I can't just shrug off getting torn in half by two dogs whose patterns I should have remembered.

Yes, I'm determined. Yes, the power to turn back time might make me some sort of god. Yes, I've been through things that'll haunt my nightmares for years to come.

But getting cut in half by an axe? Something that's kinda tame in comparison to the worst I've faced? It still hurts like a mother-bitch.

Oh I'll get back up, I always do. But I can't just walk it off like nothing happened. And you trying to one-up my personal pains is NOT. FUCKING. HELPING.

So do us all a favour, and don't talk to me for a while.

---

**Frisk:** “Thanks, pup. I, uh, appreciate it.”

**Lesser Dog:** *understanding bark*

And he gave me some Gold regardless. Man, I guess he really did remember.

*That's pretty cr-

I wasn't talking to you, you little shit.

...

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Oh, you poor thing. What- ...what just happened?”

**Frisk:** *sniff* “I... I messed up. I didn't mean for him to catch onto us so fast-”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “You know full well what I'm talking about, young lady! I just- they cut you in half! And now we're back here, like none of it hap-”

“Oh Frisk... You didn't, did you?”

**Frisk:** “Well what the hell would YOU do? If you had the power to turn back time, and you just got cut in half, what would YOU do?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I- I didn't mean it like that! I'm just- You REWOUND TIME ITSELF.”

“I'm just- I saw you die again... Frisk, I'm so sorry...”

Oh... Don't worry Papyrus, I- Wait, what?
Frisk: “Again?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Frisk…”

Frisk: “You said you saw me die again. Implying that this wasn’t the first time.”

“Is there *sniff* something you’re not telling me, Papyrus?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Well... I didn't want to tell you earlier, as I thought you'd freak out, but…”

“You know how I said that there were Frisks beyond number? Well, that is true in both senses of the term.”

“Many Frisks are still alive in their respective branches, but there are a myriad of dead ends, if you'll excuse the crude terminology, where they did not escape the Underground with their lives.”

“Sometimes they made it all the way to a still-living King Asgore, only to be cut down like trees in the forest. Other times, they fell at a far earlier hurdle, like...”

“I swore that if you fell into our reality, I would make sure you would not come to harm. But seeing you ace each trial and encounter prior to Dogamy and Dogaressa, I thought you would be fine…”

...

Frisk: “It's ok, Papyrus. I know what to do this time. No slip-ups, I'll just make myself smell like a weird puppy, roll around on the ground an' whatever. Do it before the encounter, so they think I'm a new recruit or something.”

Doctor Papyrus: “I won't let it happen again, Frisk. Believe me.”

“I've seen you die too many times, and if I can save you even once…”

“A good friend would do no less. And a friend like me... I'll do what I can.”

Frisk: “Listen to me, Papyrus. Don't beat yourself up about it. You're one of the best people I know down here, even at the worst of times. And I'm honoured to call you my friend.”

Doctor Papyrus: “OH stop it, you. Don't you go making me cry too...”

Frisk: “But there's one thing you need to know, buddy,”

“I will NOT let you die for me. Don't even think about throwing your life away on my account. You've only got one, and it's fragile at best.”

“Me, on the other hand? I can save, load and reset without fail. I never realised it as a kid, but...”

“Papyrus, I think I'm a freaking GOD. I can never be stopped! I fall down, but I get right back up again! In the end, there can only be one. And right now, I am the one.”

...Holy shit. And you call ME a piece of work, highlander.
QUIET, YOU.

**Doctor Papyrus:** “...you sound like one of Doctor Alphys’ cartoons right now.”

“Are you SURE you're ok?”

**Well,** *you're rolling around in the mud now. Any other time, I'd be very concerned.*

**Frisk:** “I'm FINE. ...I'm fine. It's just been so long, and I'm finally feeling it again.”

“We'll all be safe once we get past the Dogi. This time with less death.”

**Frisk:** “Huh? The gate's still up. Didn't she-”

*You high-tail it to the switch, and push it yourself.*

**And yes, I'm gonna keep on talking regardless. Deal with it.**

Whatever.

**Frisk:** “What could have caused this- Oh no.”

*You break into a sprint to where the Dogi would be, and... Well, it's safe to say that Floriel is PISSED.*

**Dogamy:** “Oh gods... Oh gods... Please, stop...” *whimpering*

**Dogaressa:** “You leave him alone, you BITCH! Misery awaits you, do you hear me?!”

**Dogamy:** “STOOOOOP! We didn't do anything!”

*There is fire in the Dogaressa's eyes. But they aren't quite as piercing as Floriel's. Or those thorns, for that matter.*

**Frisk:** “Stop it.”

*[MENU] > [POWER] > *Sharpen

...*your Stick becomes more powerful. Almost like a blade.*

**Floriel:** “They killed you once before, my child.”

“And if I let them go? They will kill you.”

**Frisk:** “Damn it, Toriel! This world doesn't have to be kill-or-be-killed! You aren't your son, goddamnit!”

**Floriel:** “My... son?”

*She looks hesitant. She's... She's stopped constricting the Dogi.*

**Floriel:** “My son... Asriel isn't...”
**Frisk:** “You know full well who I'm talking about, Toriel. And it isn't about your firstborn.”

*Papyrus looks like he's about to say something, but finds himself at a loss.*

**Floriel:** “...I didn't have any other children. Whoever you're thinking of, he wasn't my son...”

How typical... She still pushed them all away, even in this timeline. Even when he needed her the most.

*I think I'm remembering now... When she found out...*

**Frisk:** “Listen to me, Toriel, and listen good. Don't try to fight my battles for me, even if I fall.”

“If I find that you've hurt anyone else on my journey...”

**Floriel:** “Be careful what you say, child.”

“I won't be swayed by hollow threats, and if you follow through with them...”

“I might just reconsider what I promised earlier.”

“Pray that it doesn't come to that.”

*Toriel ran away...*

**Dogamy:** “I... Thank you, so VERY much, pup! I don't know how we can ever repay this kindness...”

**Dogaressa:** *sniff sniff* “She's a strange pup, but she really saved our hides! Are you...”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “She is a new recruit, recently transferred from the Capital PD.”

**Frisk:** “…Elizabeth Kaye. Pleased to meet ya!”

You extend a hand to the Dogaressa. She is hesitant to accept the handshake.

**Dogaressa:** “…I don't quite buy that. Sorry, but while we can't see too well, we can hear perfectly fine.”

“What's your business with the royal family, anyhoo? Call me crazy, but I find it hard to accept that that... thing is actually the Queen.”

“And what was that crazy talk about her “not being her son” or something? I don't like those implications, if you ask me. Sounds a little slanderous...”

**Dogamy:** “Honey! She just SAVED our LIVES! Can we lay off the third degree for once?”

“Besides, we oughta file a report for the Guard about what happened. Plus that thing's still prowling the countryside, so we gotta get everyone back to town before it strikes again.”

*The Dogaressa still eyes you suspiciously, but eases up. She shakes your hand.*
Dogressa: “We'll, uh, leave this 'til a later time. But I still want a report on my desk by Monday, rookie.”

“You seem like you’ve seen a lot of the weird stuff happening around here recently, and anything you know could help us figure out what’s been going on.”

“*sniff sniff* I take it you've seen Doggo around? He say anything about his report yet?”

Frisk: “Uh, about that. I found him out cold while on patrol, looked like someone tangled with him.”

“He's fine now, I just thought I'd report to you guys on my way back, let you know what happened. Call it a hunch, but I think that flower mighta had something to do with it...”

Clever girl...

Dogressa: “Yikes, it's worse than I thought. Get your butt back to town, rookie, an' bring the Doc with ya.”

“Sweetie, you go an' check up on Lesser Dog. I'll head out west an' grab Doggo. Round up any civvies you can find, an' bring 'em back to town. Woods won't be safe until we nip this thing in the bud...”

Gee willikers Frisk, get a load of Barney Fife over here!

What's the matta? Never seen a lady on the warpath before?

Dogamy: “See you back in town, pookums...”

“Sorry about her, rookie, she's just on edge. We all are, after all the stuff that happened today...”

“Hey, maybe we can all play poker when this is all over?”

Frisk: “I, uh, appreciate the offer, but I'm not really into cards.”

Says the girl who had Hearthstone on her phone back in the day.

Cut it out, you're gonna get us sued...

Dogamy: “Not much for poker, huh? Eh, pity. But I'll smell ya around either way, I guess.”

“Oh, and rookie? Say hi to Tank for me if ya see him, okay?”


“Tank”? Can't say I remember that name from the previous runs...

I guess he's talking about Greater Dog? After all, that armour of his is pretty big.

Here's hoping. Now let's get out of here before things get weird.
Too late. Looks like Kid didn't get the memo.

**Monster Kid:** “Dude, what took you so long? We've been waiting here for ages!”

**sans:** “yeah bro, what's up with that?”

[MENU] > [POWER] > [Soul Mode: Patience]

*Yeah you know the drill by now.*

*You ghost right through the spikes, whistling the tune to that damn show. You really were raised on reruns, weren't you?*

**Monster Kid:** “Aw geez, no fair! You can't do that!”

**sans:** “how the heck...”

“uh, gee... this is different.”

“but don't think that little trick will get you anywhere fast, buddy.”

“hoo boy, just you wait until you see the next one. it is a DOOZY, lemme tell ya!”

*Those two clowns beat a hasty retreat. Meanwhile, Papyrus solved the puzzle himself.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Now THERE is something I thought I'd never see again.”

“He's actually bewildered! He doesn't know what you did!”

“Come to think of it, I don't even know how you can do that.”

“But I've never been happier to see my brother so engaged with the unknown!”

“Steel yourself, Frisk. It looks like the esteemed Doctor Sans is back in the saddle...”

*Same puzzle, only different. You know the drill.*

Just gotta make it over the spikes before the Patience runs- KYAAAAA!

*Kyaaaaaa? Could you be any more of a cartoon?*

Gee thanks Charlie. I get flung back by an invisible force, and all you can do is compare me to an anime.

**doctor sans:** “shocking, ain't it?”

“that's right buddy, i put a little somethin' on the spikes, then hooked 'em up to this little atomic dynamo here.”

“no spookin' your way past this one.”

**Sans pats a humming box that's almost as big as he is.**

That's kinda impressive for a reactor. Just a shame that it's probably gonna give him bone cancer
some day.

**Monster Kid:** “That's right, buster! Ain't no way past, unless you solve this!”

Oh god, is that...

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Sans, you utter FIEND! You know full well the ethical committee banned these for a good reason!”

doctor sans: “desperate times, bro. gotta break a few eggs somewhere!”

“which is why I set up this **sliding block puzzle!**”

“good luck buddy, smell ya later.”

*They're not even gonna bother watching us struggle with this one...*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Unbelievable! He's gone insane!”

“It's- sweet merciful god, it's a seven by seven! We'll be here for ages!”

“But- but worry not, Frisk! I knew of these before they were banned, so it shouldn't be impossible for us...”

“Though you might want to take a load off before diving in. These ones can be a dooz- Wait, where are you-”

*Clever girl... You have no idea how relieved I am.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Of COURSE! The bones of the old puzzle are still buried here!”

“My parallels thought that the more complex variant of the "Xs into Os" puzzle would be too much for testers, so they put the secret switch right there!”

“Luckily for you, I took inspiration from their designs. Unfortunately, it was yet another black mark against me in Master Ren's eyes.”

*You flip the secret switch, and the spikes retract. They still resonate with power from the mini-reactor, but they can't touch you at all now.*

**Frisk:** “I'm... not even gonna touch that thing. If I get too close it'll probably make my eyebrows fall out...”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “You have nothing to fear from my uncle's reactors, young lady!”

“The solid neutronium casing on all versions, from civilian microreactors to the room-sized models we use to run the Labs, is dense enough to soak up all rogue particles and rays that dare to try and escape!”

“Sadly, it also makes them some of the heaviest things in the Underground. So don't think about wheeling this one around any time soon...”
Papyrus presses several buttons on the device, and we hear the clunk of the machine deactivating.

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Just in case you have to deal with one of these things. Never forget to push down the control rods when you're not using power…”

**Frisk:** “I'm amazed that you guys have this kind of stuff just lying around!”

“What, can you just walk into a hardware store and order an ounce of plutonium?!”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Certainly not! Only Doctors and certified technicians are allowed to work on a Gaster reactor!”

*And there it is. You gained VERY valuable Info.*

Yes... I remember that guy now. He was the Royal Scientist, way back when.

It was he who designed the Core. The Core...

???: “...but why? Why do you have to leave?”

“After all we've been through, all you've done to make this thing a reality…”

“Please, you don't have to do this…”

???: “Why do you think I had this thing built in the first place, brother?”

“By harnessing the power of the Earth’s inner heat, and converting it into magical energy…”

“The sheer arcane power put out by this machine cannot be matched by anything we have today.”

“It's just what I need to set us all free.”

???: “But your plan doesn't make sense! You won't survive those conditions!”

“You can't just wade into the Core, it'll peel you apart!”

“I'm begging you! PLEASE, don't leave us!”

“Don't leave ME!”

???: “Kiddo... I know this is gonna be hard for you…”

“But you've got to stay strong, for all of us.”

“One day, I'll be back. I promise you this.”

“The stage will be set. The pieces will all move into place. And the actors will hopefully know their roles.”

*“On the day of my return, we will all go free. And NO-ONE will be left behind…”*
Finishing the last couple of puzzles, Papyrus and Frisk finally reach Snowdin Town. Frisk remembers more of her life before, while Sans sets his true plan in motion.

**Frisk:** “W.D. Gaster... ...bet you didn't count on me knowing about him, Papyrus?”

*Papyrus stares at you as if you've seen a ghost. As if HE's seen a ghost.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “...what do you know about him...?”

“Tell me everything.”

**Frisk:** “I don't know much, but I do recall that he was the Royal Scientist a long time ago.”

“I know that he was involved in soul research, and had a hand in the Core's development.”

“And that one day, he... I dunno. I heard something about an experiment gone wrong, falling into the Core, getting scattered across time and space...”

“...I take it he was somehow connected to you and your brother...?”

*Papyrus rubs the bridge of his nose. If he had a nose, that is.*

*Better get a seat ready, Frisk. I smell a long story...*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “…our uncle was appointed head of the Hotland Lab after Grandpa Semi's resignation.”

“Apparently, Uncle Gaster had been intrigued by the Core since he was a young man. Even moreso than the rest of us, as a matter of fact.”

“But it's funny that you should say that he helped develop the Core. He did, yes, but not in this reality.”

**Frisk:** “…beware the man from another world...”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “…not quite, Frisk. I mean it in that his parallels created the Core in their respective realities. But in this one... someone beat him to it.”

“I believe it was the Royal Scientist of Asgore's rule, think her name was... Kuro?”

“That expression... You know about her, too?”

*Should we tell him?*
**Frisk:** “I... She's living in the Ruins, keeping an eye out for anyone who falls down.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I thought she would be dead by now? Are you sure y-”

**Frisk:** “Yes I'm goddamn sure Papyrus! I saw her clear as day, helping me get through puzzles and saving my life from killer flowers!”

“And see this wrist-phone I'm wearing? That was something she gave me! Not to mention, how would I know that she was a huge bird-lady if she'd already fallen to dust?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Alright! No need to shout, Frisk. I believe you.”

“After all, she was a powerful monster in life. Not quite a Boss Monster, but still strong enough to possess at least a three-figure lifespan.”

“It's still a little mind-boggling that she's been cooped up in there for the past 200 or so years. Reminds me of what the Queen did in other branches...”

“But I think we should save this for another time. We can discuss this further once we're in the safety of the Lab.”

*You gained yet more valuable Info. Your Knowledge increased!*

...something doesn't feel right.

*How so?*

I don't know why, but I don't think Kuro invented the Core. It's like I know that someone else did it, but I still can't figure out WHO.

*I don't know what I'm more weirded out by; the fact that we can even remember Gaster, or that someone was able to build the Core centuries before Gaster was born.*

Neither me. But we still remember the “followers” in Hotland, and that vanishing door...

*Can't forget the “Goner Kid”.*

*Come to think of it, you remember what they said when we found them?*

A world where everything's the same, but you don't exist. Everything works just fine without you...

When you think about it, it actually is kinda scary...

*I don't think we should go too deep into it. Now's not the time to have an existential crisis...*

**Monster Kid:** “So, human, you have made it this far?”

“Well WALK NO FURTHER!”

“You see these tiles in front of you? This nefarious trap was designed by Doctor Alphys over in the HotLab, and is guaranteed to confound and DESTROY you!”
“Each tile has a specific effect that triggers when you step on it, indicated by its colour, so tread lightly IF YOU DARE!”

“Red tiles are impassable! Yellow tiles will shock you! Blue tiles are like wa—

doc sans: “i’d, uh, lay off the explanations, Kid.”

“after all, you're not supposed to make it easy for ’em.”

“plus that means less time spent watching this dummy try to figure it out.”

Frisk: “What, and watching me suffer through a slide puzzle isn’t good enough?”

doc sans: “it’s boring, if that helps. this is gonna be a lot more fun!”

“now throw that switch, Kid, an’ generate us a new layout!”

“oh, an' this baby'll zap you if you try any magic, so no ghostin’.”

Monster Kid pushes a few buttons, and the tiles begin to change colour.

Here's hoping it's just a pink path like last time.

Still going... Any moment now...

Doctor Papyrus: “NYEH!”

Did Papyrus just throw a sdfghjkl;'#?...what?

No seriously, what?!

Frisk: “Papyrus, what the fuck am I looking at?”

Doctor Papyrus: “A clear path of harmless nonsense? The System Disruptor has mixed up the machine's programming, replacing all the tile code with... random images from our studies.”

Frisk: “Most of these are that damn dog! Hang on, is that—

“...why do you have a picture of Brock Samson here?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Well... you see all manner of things when you peep at other universes. I guess I dumped one of my image folders into the Disruptor at some point.”

doc sans: “…et tu, bro?”

Monster Kid: “That didn't frickin' stop them at all!”

“I can’t believe he just pulled that on us, out of frickin' nowhere! If he can just do that, then what’s the point?!”
“...uh, I mean, tactical retreat!”

Monster Kid turns, faceplants, picks himself up, and runs away.

doc sans: “y’know, puzzles might be fun if you tried them. just sayin’.”

Yeesh, he didn't even bother with having a walk cycle. And here I thought he was getting back into the swing of things.

Doctor Papyrus: “Well, that's done and dealt with. Just two more puzzles to go, and we'll be home free!”

Frisk: “I'll be glad to kick back after all this. You have cocoa at your place?”

Doctor Papyrus: “I probably have a packet or two somewhere around. Not so sure about marshmallows, though...”

Whoa, this is... Lesser Dog certainly has talent.

Frisk: “I think... Is this me?”

Doctor Papyrus: “He truly is a talented hound. I've seen his earlier snow-sculptures, but this...”

It's you. I think? But that robe...

It's the same that Toriel wore. He even carved out a little Delta Rune...

...why is this so familiar? Is this the princess, or is it me as the princess?

Doctor Papyrus: “Well, he thinks highly of you, if this is any indication.”

“I suppose he also had the privilege of seeing the Prince's painting, and you reminded him of the princess.”

Frisk: “Asriel painted for her?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Why yes! After Charles passed away, and the king fell into madness, Asriel and Frisca grew closer through the tragedy.”

“From what I remember, he finished the portrait when he was thirteen, maybe fourteen? He did it to commemorate the life of the princess, when she-”

“...well, no-one really knows what happened to the princess. She simply disappeared, it seems. And nowadays there are few, if any, who truly remember her...”

I know I might sound like a broken record, but there's GOTTA be a connection here.

That being that we might be the same person? ...at this point, I wouldn't throw it out the window.

But even if I AM the princess, and simply can't remember it yet, why would I leave Asriel? Why would I just leave him like that, if we were so close?
I'm just gonna throw this out there, total speculation, but...

Maybe it was an accident? For all we know, you fell into the Core by accident, and... somehow ended up in the Ruins?

My head...

...Frisk? Frisk!

---

YET DARKER STILL

DARKNESS CUTTING THROUGH THE BRANCHES

YOU HAVE YOUR REASONS, BUT...

YOU WILL NEED TO GO BACK

...what.

---

A whiff of strong garlic wrenches you back to consciousness.

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Frisk, are you all right? You passed out there for a while...”

**Frisk:** “Ergh... What the hell was that?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “A phial of garlic salts, young lady. I... I tend to carry various spices around when I travel, in case of a cooking emergency.”

“And before you say anything, the great Papyrus is actually a decent cook, unlike-”

**Frisk:** “Not that, I mean... I don't know what's happening anymore.”

“...wait, did you solve that ice-sliding puzzle?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “You seemed stable, so I decided to spare you the tedium of solving this final puzzle before rousing you.”

“Take heart, Frisk, for we are almost home...”

**Frisk:** “Y’know what Papyrus? This is the kind of stuff I'm fine with you taking off my hands.”

“You're doing great, buddy!”

You shoot Papyrus a cheerful grin, accompanied by twin pointy-fingers.

**Doctor Papyrus:** “If it helps, I guess...”

“...anyway, time to move out. Just across the ice, over the bridge, and we'll be home free!”
Huh. What WAS that, anyway? I don't get what that... thing was trying to say?

If you ask me, I'm pretty sure it was Gaster. Sounded like him, anyway.

No idea what made me pass out like that, though. Did I remember something I shouldn't have?

Hell if I know, Frisk. I'm just glad it wasn't anything serious.

...gee, that's a lot of snow poffs.

[MERCY] > *Spare > [Charlie]

...thanks, I guess?

Yeah, I'll spare you from checking all of them.

Except this really big one blocking our path.

Doctor Papyrus: “Oh dear, I guess we should start digging?”

You hear a rattling, mechanical hum from beneath the snow, as a white dog pokes its head out of the snow poff.

Frisk: “Oh, um, hey there little guy!”

As you reach out to pet the dog, the snow poff erupts around it as a- HOLY SHIT.

Tank: *steam whistle*

It is Tank, the Greater Dog. And he's piloting a mech.

Doctor Papyrus: “Oh my.”

“I heard that Undyne was tinkering with Greater Dog's armour, but this...”

“This is certainly something else!”

[ACT] > [Tank] > *Beckon

I call him over. This should work like it us- Uh oh.

Tank snaps to attention, stomping towards you on thunderous metal legs.

I dive out of the way so as not to get trampled.

Tank's fighting machine whirls around, emitting an audible hiss of steam as the torso rotates.

Tank: *pant pant*

Tank tilts his head to see you better, before re-routing the machine's power.
Tank cautiously lets you climb up to the pilot seat. He curls up in the seat as you pet him.

Looks like he’s fast asleep. Maybe we can make a break for it?

Oh wait, never mind. He’s woken back up, and is brimming with energy!

HOLD ON! He’s stretching the machine’s arms as you try to climb back down!

This guy's getting a little too excited, isn't he?

Tank looks like he wants to play, patting the ground with his shoulder-mounted cannons.

Let's see if he's up for a “fight”, shall we?

Frisk please n- Ok. You roll up a snowball and pitch it at the fighting machine.

It splats harmlessly against the hull. Tank responds by removing the shells from his cannons, then packing snow into the breeches.

He winks, as he fires a barrage of snowballs in our general direction.

AH! I'm hit! Man down! Heh...

This continues for the next coupla minutes, the both of you throwing snowballs until you land one right in Tank's pilot seat.

Both of you are exhausted from the fight. Tank's machine switches to low power, getting close to your level.

As you pet Tank, he holds you closer in the machine's large robot hands.

But you still haven't pet enough! Pet capacity at 40%.

You pet decisively. Pet capacity reaches 100%.

The fighting machine rolls over onto its back, leaving Tank to stare at the twinkling ceiling-stones that pass for stars down here.

Tank is contented.

You won!
You gained 0 XP and 40 Gold!

And you learned that the Underground can make fighting machines. Seriously, that was crazy.

Tank jumps out of the mech, trots over to you, and licks your face.

Heh, easy boy!

He grins as he hops back into the mech, and begins to stroll back to town across the bridge.

I can't believe how big that bridge is now, compared to last time. With that kinda weight walking across it, it's a wonder that Greater Dog didn't break it the first time around.

Frisk: “We should follow him, see if he can help us out with whatever Sans has planned for this final puzzle.”

Doctor Papyrus: “I thought that WAS the last one! Unless...”

“...oh dear, this could be bad...”

Monster Kid: “End of the line, human! I'm firing up the perimeter defences!”

“We'll see how well you do against this, the Gauntlet of Deadly Terror!”

An array of nasty-looking machines pop up around the bridge. Along with a small white dog suspended by a rope.

“On our mark, guns will fire! Fire will be sprayed! Spears and hammers will swing violently up and down!”

“Only the slightest chance of survival will remain!”

“So pray to whatever gods you have, barbarian!”

“Because I!”

“AM ABOUT!”

“TO-”

“...ARE YOU FREAKING SERIOUS?!”

Looks like Tank ain't having this nonsense. DAMN those cannons are loud!

Tank: *defensive growl*

So much for the Gauntlet of Deadly Terror...

Monster Kid: “…why? After all I've done to protect this place?”

“That... that was our last hope, and you-”
doc sans: “...welp. sorry kid, looks like this whole thing was a bust, huh?”

Monster Kid: “It's just not fair! We worked so hard on all this stuff, and she still found a way through it all!”

doc sans: “y'know, i think there was a lesson there for all of us.”

“don't try too hard, an' you won't be disappointed.”

Papyrus doesn't look too happy about that. Looks like it struck a nerve.

doc sans: “don't feel too bad about it, Kid. you go an' get debriefed, an' i'll see ya around sometime.”

“i'm sure we won't have much trouble with this little problem of ours...”

“right, Frisk?”

Yeesh, those hollow sockets always give me the heebie jeebies...

Gee whiz, Frisk. Jerry Mathers just called, he wants his lingo back.

Did he ever even use that catchphrase in the show?

I dunno, you tell me.

Frisk: “sure thing, lazybones! now why don't the three of us continue this lovefest inside the Lab?”

Man, the sass is REAL.

doc sans: “don't get too cocky, little lady. i've got a bone to pick with you.”

Sans turns on his heel, and makes his way into town.

doc sans: “you comin', bro? or do you have some more thinkin' to do?”

Doctor Papyrus: *sigh* “YES, Sans, I AM coming. I will see you by the Lab.”

Y'know, I've been doing a little thinking, and I think I know why Sans has beef with you.

...what're you thinking?

Maybe something you did in a previous run rattled his bones?

I'm not so sure about that... Don't get me wrong, he's smarter than he looks, but I'm SURE he can't actually remember resets.

Only other person who could was Flowey, and he was... “something else”.

Aaaand let's not forget US as well. Y'know, human determination an' all that.

But I get what you're saying. However, you oughta think about what the Bone Bros have been working on all this time.

Heh, “Bone Bros”.
And you call ME the sick puppy. Aaanyway, Tank looks like he's gonna be keeping an eye on the bridge, so I guess we'll meet up with him later...

Kind of a shame we don't have the time to look around town, though.

The dogs are playing poker at Grillby's, folks are resting at the Snowed Inn, little kids are playing “Monsters and Humans”...

*sigh* Not much has changed in this small-town, it seems.

*except for the big ol' concrete building sticking out like a sore thumb on the east-side.*

**Frisk:** “I'm guessing that's the Lab, huh?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Indeed it is! My brother and I work there to bring about a better tomorrow.”

“Well, I work to bring about a better tomorrow. Sans just…”

“Let's just get inside and see what my brother has planned for us.”

*After taking a shortcut through the tunnels beneath town, we find ourselves facing the back entrance of the Lab. The facility looms over us, filling you with determination.*

...ahem. *Filling you with DETERMINATION.*

[SAVE to Slot 2]

**Charlie LV.1 KN.7**

**Snowdin Town – Lab Rear**

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*Looks like all that concrete is just used to house... What is that, some kinda particle accelerator?*

Are we not gonna talk about the “Slot 2” thing that just happened?

Alright, fine. In case something goes wrong later on, and it's too late to make a change, we can jump back to this “backup” save.

That's... That's amazing! But where the hell was this earlier?

*I guess we forgot about it, like everything else, and it's only just now come back to us?*
Doctor Papyrus: “Sans, this isn't funny! You open this door right now!”

Oh no. Nooooo no no this isn't happening...

doc sans: “lemme ask you a question, kid.”

“d'you think that, sometimes, a good thing can happen even if you never did anything to help?”

Frisk: “What the hell kind of question is that? Is this about what the others d-”

doc sans: “i wasn't talkin' to you, Frisk. i'm talkin' to the other guy, you know who...”

Hold me, Frisk...

doc sans: “so here's a better question, for the both of you.”

“do you wanna have a bad time?”

“cause if ya don't give up now, let this world move on without you...”

“you ain't gonna like what you see...”

“i know i don't.”

Frisk: “Sans, I don't know what your beef is with me, but it's not gonna happen, you hear?”

“All I want to do is see my best friend again! That's the only reason I'm doing this!”

“I'm not trying to kill everyone this time! I'm not planning to destroy the whole goddamn universe like some whiny edgelord!!”

You... you fall to your knees and grab a hold of Sans' hoodie.

“PLEASE! I just want to see Asriel... I want him back, damnit!”

...whoa... Sans looks a little shaken by this.

doc sans: “kid... please don't make this any harder than it is.”

“i got nothin' against you, crazy as it might sound.”

“but there's somethin' inside you. somethin'... somethin' dark.”

“an' i can't be sure that i can let you go, knowin' what it's capable of.”

“knowin' what it's already done to other worlds.”

The lights flicker out. The banging on the door fades away. ...it's just you and Sans, in a big dark void.
doc sans: “y’know what, kid?”

“it was still kinda neat to meet you.”

“you've still done some neat things in the other branches...”

“forgive me, Frisk...”

*Integrity wraps itself around your soul, as Sans slams you into the ground.*

*Before you can get to your feet- Oh god...*

...of course he'd used his strongest attack fir-

*Frisk! Hang on in there! Concentrate on Slot 2!*

Back outside the Lab... Should we just leave? Just... not even bother with this fight?

*Don’t be discouraged, Frisk... If we can survive that first attack, maybe we can reason with him?*

Just... Just give me a minute... Hoo boy...

It's really crazy, isn't it? How I still feel the pain, even though the attacks haven't even happened yet.

*Isn't there a name for that? Like Phantom Limb syndrome?*

It's “phantom pain”. Phantom limb's when you don't have an arm but you can still feel it.

*I thought Phantom Limb was that one guy who had invisible arms and wore purple spandex?*

It doesn't matter! What matters is that Sans can damn well wait. I'm gonna see if I can get anything at the general store...

**Snowdin Shopkeep:** “Howdy, traveller!”

“How can I help you?”

**Frisk:** “Let's see... Do you still sell bandannas?”

**Snowdin Shopkeep:** “Sure, I have some surplus in the back. You buyin’?”

**Frisk:** “Sure thing! One of those, aaaand one of the Cinnamon Buns, please.”

*You hand the shopkeep... ...Laverne, I think? You hand her the 75G, and get the Bandanna along with the Cinnamon Bunny. Ah, sweet.*

...huh. Frisk, is it just me, or do you also recognize that symbol?

The slanted “T”, the two strokes beside it... Where do I remember this from?

**Frisk:** “Say, uh, Laverne? That's your name, right?”

**Laverne:** “...yeah, that's right... I take it you met my sister, earlier?”
**Frisk**: “Yeah, we talked a bit, mentioned you. Anyway, do you know what this symbol means?”

**Laverne**: “Huh, you're not familiar with Ren?”

“It’s a concept from distant lands, like that good feeling you get when you help someone out. If you seek it, you’ve already found it!”

“Master Ren brought it with him when he fell into the Underground, centuries ago.”

“Nowadays, we associate the symbol with the Waterfall branch of the Royal Guard.”

Ren Yong... The kid always was pretty hot-headed. Used to run head-first into a problem without thinking.

*You remember him? Holy crap... Well, I think we both know what this means.*

Yup. No doubt about it, I'm the princess. I was around during that time-period, living with the Royal Family for many years. And during that time, I helped both Mary-Ann Carver and Ren Yong settle into this life.

*I kinda remember... He was a pretty brave boy, even though I couldn't understand a damn thing he said. Wasn't he Japanese or something?*

Chinese. From what he told me, I think his family worked on the old railroad?

**Laverne**: “You ok there, traveller? You spaced out there for a moment.”

**Frisk**: “Huh? Oh sorry, guess I did. Uh... seeya!”

*You leave the shop, and tie the bandanna around your head. +7 to Defence. Now maybe you'll stand a chance?*

Maybe. Here's hoping... Just gotta be brave, I guess.

*And save at the door, don't wanna lose that progress.*

...uh, remembering that Ren was a part of your life back then fills y-

Wait, **HOLD THE FRICKIN' PHONE.** People talk about Ren like he's still around, right?

But humans can't live THAT long. Besides, Kuro said that Asriel has six human souls already!

Surely... It's gotta be a monster who followed Ren's example, gotta be!

*Weirder things have happened, Frisk. You should know that.*

*Anyways, the mystery surrounding Ren, and him apparently still being alive, fills you with determination.*

[SAVE to Slot 2]
You walk into the lab. The door slams shut behind you. Sans sizes you up.

doctor Sans: "heya."

"i take it you needed a little time to make your peace, huh?"

"that's ok, kid."

"i don't really wanna do this either."

"but i've seen what happens when guys like me don't step in."

"when kids like you aren't kept in check."

"..."

"i can't let that happen to our world. sorry kid, end of the line."

Aaaand JUMP! Duck an' weave! Get outta the firing line!

Dive! Dodge! Dip! An' DODGE!

We... we did it!

doctor Sans: "...huh. so that's why we don't just use our strongest attacks first..."
Chapter Summary

The simmering animosity between the Sans and Papyrus of this world comes to a boil, and Frisk is given a demonstration of the Snowdin Lab's Condenser, the linchpin of the brothers' project.

Chapter Notes

This issue came out a bit later than intended, thanks to the recent release of Doom 4. Now THERE's a world in which it's kill or be killed.

Thanks for sticking with this tale, either way. We're almost ready to leave Snowdin behind, and journey forth to Waterfall.

Damnit... How many times are we gonna have to do this?!

*Stay strong, buddy. If we keep this up, we'll probably have an alright time.*

Speak for yourself, Charlie! We've died like six times already!

*Yeah, but we've gotten a little further each time.*

And for what? He's not frickin' listening! Here, check it out.

**Frisk:** "DUDE! I'm a stupid doodoo butt!"

...huh. *Didn't even flinch that time. Maybe because he's already heard it the past five times already.*

Charlie, I dunno how many times I gotta say this! **Sans can't remember resets!**

*Well then how the hell did Papyrus remember that one reset? Huh? Answer me that!*

I- Maybe it's because he's frickin' Papyrus? And he knows a lot about us?

*Yeah right, and Sans doesn't? Here, let ME try.*

**Charlie:** "This ain't gonna work, Sans! I'm the legendary fartmaster!"

*Ohp, see that? Visible reaction.*

Please don't speak through me like that. You know I hate it!

**doc sans:** "yeah yeah kid, you're a time traveller. big whoop."
"even if you rewind, you're still runnin' up against the same damn wall."

"an' if you try to run outta town? i'll be right there to stop you."

"don't care how long we gotta do this dance, kid. this is, ugh, bigger than you or me. there, i said it."

"besides, if you keep goin' like this, i'll have to use my special attack..."

**Charlie:** "Which isn't any different to what you're doing now. You're still stalling either way."

"Plus, I've got a little "special attack" of my own. I've been dying to take it for a spin, you know?"

"And since we'll be at this 'til Judgement Day if you keep this up, I am gonna have to use mine!"

But you don't even have a special attack, Charlie. You're not even a frickin' skeleton!

We've all got 'em on the inside, Frisk. Besides, you'll probably want to see this one. 's gonna be a BLAST.

**Buuut it means you'll have to die and reload. It'll make sense when you see it in action.**

IF I bite the dust, we'll see. In the meantime, I'm gonna see if we can still do it on this l-

HGRRRRRKllll...

*Yick, right in the throat, too... What the hell caused Sans to get THIS brutal? Hang in there Frisk...*

**So, uh, here's the plan. We have Papyrus step in and confront Sans. After all, seems like Papyrus has a bone to pick with his brother.**

It's really that simple? I dunno... I really don't want him to get hurt or anything. Not on my account.

**Come on, I'm dead sure that the bros won't come to blows.**

**Besides, Papyrus has the high ground here. He's been doing a lot for his deadbeat brother, covering up his tracks an' all. So...**

Alright, you had me at "bros won't come to blows". But let me try this to set it up...

**What're you- You grab hold of Papyrus, and start crying into his shoulder. Ok, this is happening. You're going with this.**

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Oh god, are you alright? What's been happening in there?!!"

**Frisk:** "He... he hurt me, Papyrus... I wasn't strong enough..."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "...that does it."

"SANS! SANS YOU GET YOUR ASS OUT HERE RIGHT NOW!"

Well that set him off. Jeez Frisk way to manipulate your- Dude, Frisk, you can stop now.

**Frisk? Come on bud, this is getting- ....oh.**
Doctor Papyrus: "I expected this from the Guard, but from my own brother?!

Papyrus has his brother by the collarbone. Ok, this is getting out of hand, I want the old Papyrus back.

doc sans: "BRO. I'm trying to save us from that thing inside of her!"

"you KNOW what's gonna happen if we let it go. you've seen what it did to the other worlds!"

Doctor Papyrus: "Not here, Sans. While you've been lollygagging, I've been doing your job for you. And what I found might surprise you!"

"Wait here, brother. And if I find out that you've laid another finger on Frisk..."

doc sans: "eh, i dunno if there's anything you could do that would surprise me, bro."

Doctor Papyrus: "We shall see...

He's gone deeper into the Lab. I'm actually kinda curious about this now.

doc sans: "so... that's your "special attack", huh? using my own brother against me?"

"i've seen some grim stuff, believe me. but this is just LOW, even for somethin' like you."

Mind if I take over for a bit? I really got some stuff to say this time.

's not like I have a choice, is it? But at least you're actually asking this time.

Charlie: "This isn't me trying to wound you, Sans. It's... an intervention."

"What Frisk said when she met you? I feel that way too."

"It just isn't fair that your brother does all the work, while you do NOTHING, especially when you're meant to be head of the Lab here."

"What kind of a knucklehead lets his own brother do everything for him? Do you even appreciate what he's been doing for you, out of the goodness of his heart? Do you even CARE about him?!"

Yup, we might have hit a nerve. He's doing the "dark eyes" again.

doc sans: "heh. 's pretty rich, comin' from a kid like you."

"last i checked, you weren't exactly the best to your brother."

"an' that's not even countin' that sick little plan of yours, or how, oh i dunno..."

"how you butchered him in cold blood, before turning on Frisk."...

Charlie...

But that never even happened! It- it never got THAT far, did it?
No... I've got you to thank for that. You, Sans and Flowey.

To think, if you didn't quit when you did... Asriel...

doc sans: "soooo yeah. you'll have to excuse me if i don't take your words too seriously."

"not exactly the leadin' authority on brotherly love, are ya?"

An' yet...

Charlie: "An' you don't think I regret what I did?"

"You mighta seen a lot down here, Sans, but you don't know what I've fucking been through!"

"You don't know what it's like to be dragged halfway across the New World, by a man who thought there was gold in the hills!"

"You never had to hide from a man who'd come home stinking of foul liquor an' take out his frustrations on the first thing he saw!"

"You've never had all the kids think your momma was a witch, an' shun you as a god-damned devil!"

Charlie...

Charlie: "I went through hell on the surface, but when I fell down here..."

"I looked up, an' saw the face of an angel... An' though I loved him, I... I hurt him all the same..."

"I didn't know how to show my brother how I really felt, so I..."

"I was an IDIOT. I got so worked up at what humanity had done to the monsters, an' what they'd done to me..."

"I know, there's no excuses for what I did to the folks who took me in, cherished me like their own flesh an' blood... But now, now maybe you have an idea what made me do it."

"I wanted everyone to be free, and if I had to cut down the ones who made my old life hell, to make it happen..."

"But Asriel was too much of an angel... His virtues got us both killed, and I don't think he even made it to heaven..."

Sans looks like he understands now. Almost. Still...

doc sans: "you're right about one thing, buddy."

"there ain't no excuses for what you did."

"but it's funny... what you described ain't the whole truth."

"easy there, i'm not callin' you a liar. it's just..."

"Asriel takin' your soul? his pacifist nature gettin' you both killed?"
"that's what happened in the normal branches..."

That... that it did.

doc sans: "y'see, while i've seen the young prince crumble to dust, leaving the king an' queen heartbroken, that never happened here."

"...you're definitely not from this world, that i can guess. if you were, you'd know what REALLY happened."

"in this world? he refused. the prince didn't go along with your sick little scheme, and-"

Doctor Papyrus: "THERE!"

Papyrus shoves a long roll of graph paper into Sans' arms, startling the three of us.

Doctor Papyrus: "This is the latest record of our timestream's stability! You take a good hard look at 221X, brother."

Sans unrolls the paper, and looks at the diagrams from 2210 to 2219 KF. Can't see much wrong with it...

doc sans: "...there's nothing out of the order here..."

Doctor Papyrus: "Exactly! Indeed, there are several marked hiccups, most likely our dear friend saving and resetting where needed, but do you see, anywhere on this chart, a complete cessation of ANYTHING?"

Looks like Sans' fears were unfounded. As if I'd actually destroy the world, even if I wanted to...

doc sans: "huh. well, i guess that's that."

"but don't say i didn't warn ya."

"...yeah i owe you guys an apology."

Doctor Papyrus: "That you do, brother. That you do..."

Sans appears to be scribbling something in his notebook.

...still scribbling...

Huh? It's for Papyrus? And us? TWO for us?

Wait, where the hell did he go?

Doctor Papyrus: "Oh he did NOT just do that to us."

...it says "IOU one apology, Anomaly."

The other one reads "IOU one apology, Frisk. i'm really sorry."

Doctor Papyrus: "I can't believe this! "IOU one apology, bro." AUGGHHH..."
Hang on, there seems to be- Charlie, can I have my voice back?

Oh right, sorry. Got all caught up in the moment.

**Frisk:** "Hang on, there seems to be something written on the back of yours!"

*Papyrus flips it over, and his eyes narrow.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Well, I never... This bit reads "i'm goin' to Grillby's. Papyrus, do you wa-" Papyrus, do you want anything... Oh god..."

*Papyrus clasps his jaw in admonishment.*

**Frisk:** "Papyrus, what's... is something the matter?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "It's... it's what his parallels said at the end of Genocide scenarios. After the anomaly..."

"That's it. I'm done with this sick joke. I'm getting to the bottom of this!"

"Frisk! Anomaly! We are going to Grillby's. It's time that my brother and I had a proper, uh, "pow-wow"? That's what they call it on the surface, right?"

*I wouldn't kn- Ahem.*

Go nuts.

**Charlie:** "I wouldn't know, Doc. Oh, and it's Charlie. Just to clear the air."

*Well, I think that rattled the good doctor's bones.*

**Charlie:** "Don't worry Doc, we've got a little "timeshare" agreement. I only butt in like this when it's needed."

*Your turn. Back me up, partner?*

**Frisk:** "Yup. Believe it or not, sometimes he keeps me outta trouble."

"Not exactly the smoothest of relationships, buuuut we're stuck together, so we're making the most of it."

*Papyrus looks at us, visibly rattled, but seems to accept that things are gonna be this way.*

...to Grillby's, I guess.

Just a second, aren't we forgetting something?

*Right, sorry. You hope that Sans isn't taking this too hard. Still, you stay determined.*

[SAVE to Slot 1]
Ah, Grillby's. The jukebox that doesn't work, the dogs playing poker, it's all coming back to me now...

_Don't get too comfy, Frisk. We've still got a bone to pick with Sans._

...but I dunno what to say. I've already said my piece, and...

Do you wanna talk to me about it? I mean, I h-

_I'm fine, Frisk. It was a long time ago, let's just leave it at that._

Fine. Let's leave it to Papyrus for now. Looks like Sans is at his usual spot, by the bar.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Brother. We... need to talk."

**Frisk:** "Hold on just a sec..."

_You skilfully sweep the whoopee cushion off of the barstool before Papyrus sits down._

_Ugh, the stench of liquor hangs... gently in the air here. I don't know what Sans is drinking, but he's got a stick of celery sticking out of it._

**doc sans:** "what more d'ya want? you got me, i give up."

"Anomaly ain't a threat, i just got excited an' screwed up."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Sans, you asked me if I wanted anything. And I do."

"Brother, I want to help. Believe me, I do. But even the Great Papyrus cannot shoulder this burden all on his own!"

"I need you to help me, to help you. And... everyone needs our help."

"Please, Sans. Come back to the Lab..."

_Sans swivels around to face his brother. But he can't seem to look him in the eyes_

**doc sans:** "...what's the point? we'll all be back here in the end, anyways."

"even if they ain't gonna- you know... there's always that risk. somethin' that nobody can stop."

"nobody but them, an' even then, only if they feel like it..."
"I'd say more, but... y'know... s'not a good conversation for this place, bro."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Then finish your drink, and we can continue this back at the Lab."

"Like I said, I want to help you. But I can't help you if you can't help me."

"And if you won't help me, I won't help you. You understand that?"

*Can you feel that? The tension's almost palpable...*

**Doc Sans:** "...it's gonna be like that, huh?"

"Fine. But whaddaya say we pick something up here before we shoot off home?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Well, I was going to cook something later..."

"Oh come on, what's that look for? I'm better than that!"

**Doc Sans:** "I wasn't gettin' at that, bro. I was just askin' if you'd want a drink yourself?"

"Offer's extended to you too, Dr Jekyll. Don't sweat it, 's goin' on my tab."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Welllll, I wouldn't mind a peach bellini, if that's any trouble..."

*We're having a tonic. None of that beastly liquor for us.*

*Besides, we're not even old enough to drink, right?*

**Frisk:** "Say, uh, does this place sell birch beer? Or sarsaparilla?"

*The Bone Bros look at you like you came straight from the Moon.*

**Grillby:** "....................................................................................."

"...we got cola, seltzer, lemon, or root beer. All the tonics we got at the moment."

**Frisk:** "...root beer, please."

*Grillby nods, cracks open a bottle of root beer, and prepares Papyrus' cocktail.*

**Frisk:** "Thanks, pardner."

*You take a swig of the root beer. ...tastes like regular root beer. But with a hint of cinnamon. Neat.*

*...huh. I thought there'd be more to say, but nope. Here we are, drinking in silence. ...awkward.*

You sure you don't wanna talk about... what happened before?

*What's there to talk about? Dad dragged us out to the frontier and became a drunkard failure, takin' it out on me and Mom.*

But what was that about witches and demons? What made them think such things?

*...they were all little idiots. They thought that just because my mom knew lots about plants, an' how*
to make potions with 'em, that she was a witch.

The grown-ups weren't so dumb, though. Folks would ask her for advice, sometimes even buy some of the stuff she made, an' they never really gave her much trouble.

Me, however? Everyone was "afear'd" when I looked their way. Mom's customers asked her to "get that boy's eyes offa me" if I peered round the doorframe, and the other kids...

Your eyes? What was wrong with...

**Frisca:** "Come on you two, play nice."

"Charlie, don't give me that look..."

"...oh god, I didn't mean it like- C'mon kid, don't cry..."

"You have beautiful eyes. Don't be ashamed of them..."

Of course... They were red, like the eyes of your adoptive family.

...why don't I remember that?

I'm sorry?

That... flashback, whatever it was? I'm sure that's not how it happened...

It... That wasn't what happened the first time around.

Seems like we're remembering more and more. Getting ever closer to the truth...

...looks like the "Bone Bros" have finished off their drinks. Best to polish this off before we head back to the Lab.

*Alright, but don't- *...wow. You can really knock them back, huh? Charming.

Cowboys can't shoot slow, Charlie. You should know that.

Didn't Double-Tap kinda suck, though? I always preferred it when you grabbed the Jugger-Nog...

---

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Okay Sans, we're back at the Lab. Now you can say what you wanted to."

**doc sans:** "alright bro, you wanna know why i've given up? why i haven't done my part?"

"there's no point to any of it. at any moment, no matter how far we got, we'll all be dragged back down here. all the progress we've made, right back to square one!"

"why bother with anything, if none of it really matters?"
Doctor Papyrus: "...so?"

doc sans: "so?! is that all you can say to that? the big reason why we shouldn't even bother?"

Doctor Papyrus: 'I'll let you in on a little secret, brother. You too, you two.'

"...I know about the resets. While you were boondogling, I kept my eyes on the charts. There were indeed many, MANY resets over the past year."

"And while I don't remember the exact events of that "lost time", I have my suspicions."

"Unlike you, Sans, I didn't let the resets get me down. If anything, it made me work harder! With hard work and determination, I was able to save little things, so that when I woke up after the world reset, I would at least have something left to go on, some small stepping stone to help me get a little further each time."

"I kept going in spite of the troubles, no matter what happened. Do you know why I did that, brother?"

...no reply.

Doctor Papyrus: "Because I am a Doctor, Sans! I am a scientist of the Kingdom of Monsters, and I have been charged with finding a way out of our eternal prison!"

"The hopes and dreams of an entire nation rest on my scapulae! But brother, I cannot shoulder this burden alone..."

"I am confident that the determination of our human friend will be enough to keep control over any future resets, which I can assume will be minimal at best."

"Can I count on you for that, Frisk?"

Bit harsh, putting you on the spot like that. Especially since we don't know what's coming next.

Frisk: "So long as we don't run into trouble with the rest of the Royal Guard, we should be a-ok."

Doctor Papyrus: "See, brother? We can rely on her!"

"And know this, Sans. I have been supporting these habits of yours for long enough."

"If you keep on going down this path you're on, I will no longer keep your activities a secret."

"Brilliant as you are, if you refuse to do your duty, the Prince will find another bright spark to take your place."

"So, brother, do I have an answer?"

Yeesh... The last time I saw Sans like this...

doc sans: "..."
"you're right, bro. things are different now."
"after all that's happened, i lost sight of what really mattered."
"and... maybe i haven't been the best i could be, lately."
"it's like you always said, bro. can anybody be a good person, if they just tried hard enough?"
"i guess the anomaly tried, if it can be believed. so... i should too."
"alright bro, i'm back in the game. let's make history."

*Papyrus kneels down to- ah, hug his brother.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** "You have no idea how glad I am to hear that, Sans!"
"The brothers Fontaine are back in business!"

**Doc Sans:** "yup, that we are."
"though your words did cut a little too deep."
"what you said got me right in the sternum."

*A frustrated cry leaves Papyrus' lips (or whatever he has instead), as he flings Sans into the air.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** "NYEH!"

For better or worse, it seems like the old bros are back. And I've never been happier!

*Aaaaand Sans sticks the landing. Just kidding, he lands on his head, right in the office chair.*

**Doc Sans:** "so, yeah. what d'ya say we fire up the ol' Condenser an' check out the other worlds?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Sounds like a plan! Fire it up!"

*As Sans tunes the device, an otherworldly thrumming fills the room. Your teeth begin to itch, and your hair starts to stand on end.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Frisk? Be a dear and connect the Source, would you? It's the bluish cylinder next to the eastern wall."

**Frisk:** "Uh, sure thing..."

*You walk over to the "Source", and gently pick it up. ...do you feel that? It's... it's pulsing with a familiar energy... Where have I felt this before?*

**Frisk:** "Uh, Doc? Where do I put this thing?"

**Doctor Payprus:** "Oh, sorry! Look for the rectangular socket at the base of the Condenser, it should slot right in!"

"And put it in plus side up! Seriously, you don't want to see what happens if you reverse the polarity!"
Ah, found it! ...funny, this thing's actually a lot lighter than I though it would be.

As you slot the "Source" into its socket, the constant thrumming turns into a pulsing beat.

Whoa... The Condenser's lighting up like... A light-blue energy creeps up the left side of the ring. I'm not even gonna speculate at how this thing works.

doc sans: "strings locked, bro. find us some coordinates an' we're all set!"

Frisk: "I'm probably in the dark here, but what're you guys doing up there?"

Doctor Papyrus: "I'm glad you asked, Frisk! What this machine does is alter the resonant frequencies of the superstrings that underpin the fabric of reality, then utilises quantum tunnelling to produce a sing-"

doc sans: "uh, bro? might wanna put that in student terms for Frisk."

"i dunno about you, but i don't think she knows much about theoretical physics."

Frisk: "Preeeety much. Theoretically I know about physics, but I think that's about as far as I got."

Doctor Papyrus: "Oh, very well. Let's see..."

"You know how you tune a TV or a radio, setting it to show different stations? Well, the Condenser operates on similar principles, wherein we can tune it to pick up energies from different universes. A window into other worlds, if you will."

"In addition, with the use of proper coordinates, we can decide not only what universe to peek at, but also WHERE in that universe! Complicated, yes, but the results..."

doc sans: "kid, with this baby we've seen things you wouldn't believe."

"i've seen us on the surface, livin' our lives in Salt Lake City."

"i watched four kids beat the crap out of a red-haired homeless guy."

"i saw the late queen, Toriel Dreemurr, sharing a house with a parallel of yours truly."

"and many times, i watched myself get cut down by a merciless anomaly, despite my best efforts."

"...buuut let's not focus on that. let's just see what's happening in-"

With a roaring crack of thunder, the fabric of reality tears open at the heart of the Condenser, a window between the worlds.

???: "Gya! What the-"

That voice... No, it can't be... Get up those stairs, I wanna see this!

I... I rush up the stairs, and reach the heart of the Condenser, where Sans and Papyrus are already peering intently through the plate-sized hole in the fabric of our-
"Through that impassable porthole, we see... Oh my god. It's...

**Frisk:** "Oh... oh my- As- As-

Asriel... Oh my god, we found him...

**Asriel:** "F- ...Frisk?! What- Where are you?!"

"Violet, get over here! I think I fixed this thing!"

**doc sans:** "but... that's, that's my old lab! that's the basement! how the hell did they find-"

"WHOA, ok, this is new."

*I have no idea who this lady is, but she looks like she's kitted out for a 20-man raid or something.*

Raid gear my ass, it looks like she skinned a Xenomorph and wore it as a suit!

**Violet:** "Keep it down, Asriel! We can't let those things-

"...ooookay, what's going on here? Who are these people?"

**Frisk:** "Wait, is this a- this is a two-way connection? Asriel! Can you hear me?!"

Asriel: "I can hear you! I just- Oh god, Frisk, I'm sorry..."

"I- I should have gone with you. I couldn't face them, I didn't want to break their hearts..."

**Frisk:** "It's *sniff* it's alright, Asriel. I'm- I'm here now...

Asriel: "What- NO, Frisk! It's NOT alright! We're stuck down here, there are- th- **things** hunting us!"

"I'm... I'm scared, Frisk. I don't wanna die..."

*The lady, Violet, wraps her arms around Asriel, in an attempt to comfort him.*

**Violet:** "Stay strong, Asriel. I made my promise and I'm sticking with it."

"We're gonna get out of here no matter what happens. The sooner we reach the Core, the sooner this nightmare will be over."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "The Core?! What- what is HAPPENING over there?!

**Violet:** "I... I don't know how to say this in a way that won't freak you out. But you should know either way..."

"There's this... this **thing** in Fourspace, the "Arad-Nacha", that's trying to pull this world into Its domain."

"I dunno what It wants with the planet, like for food, or a safe place for Its young, but our world and a bunch of others have been marked."

"Its servants have taken over the Underground, they're using the Core to hold open some kind of"
portal to bring the planet into Its realm."

"But, if I can get to the Core, I'll be able to force it into meltdown, cutting off the portal's power supply. I've only done this once before, but by god I'll do it as many times as I have to to keep the worlds safe..."

...holy exposition dump, Batman... We... I have no words. And neither do the Bone Bros.

**Frisk:** "...no... Please, is there- is there anything we can do?"

**Violet:** "You want to help? I don't know if there's much you could do directly, but there's one thing you can do for your own world's safety."

"...don't make any more connections to this reality. If things go south, if that creature's minions find you peering into this world, they might take an interest in your world too."

"It's not much, but it's the best that you can do..."

...that's it? No, NO. There must be SOMETHING more I can do!

_Asriel puts his hand on the portal. Your hand rushes to meet his, only to be met with the cold and unyielding surface of polished glass._

**doc sans:** "sorry kid, it's a safeguard."

"bad coordinates could open a portal at the bottom of the ocean, or the heart of a star, or the dark void of space. without this special glass, one bad portal could destroy the Underground."

"besides, even if you could reach through, portal's too small for the kid to fit through."

**Asriel:** "Frisk... There's a bit more that you can do, wherever you are..."

"...don't kill, and don't be killed. That's the best you can strive for..."

*I- I can't see... Frisk, are you..."

**Asriel:** "C'mon Frisk, don't cry over me..."

"...dangit, you're gonna make ME cry now!"

"Just... stay determined, alright? Stay determined for your best friend!"

"I know I am. I mean, I've gotta, right? It's all I've got right now..."

...hearing of the horrors beyond the veil of our reality...

...seeing our best friend cold and frightened in the darkness...

...knowing that there's nothing we can really do to help him...

*Still, we stay determined.*
Hope restored. Hang in there, Frisk.

[SAVE to Slot 1]

Charlie LV.1 KN.9

Snowdin Town – Condenser Chamber
Chapter Summary

In spite of recent revelations, Frisk stays determined in her quest to reach New Home. Leaving Snowdin behind her, she and Charlie begin their trek through the lands of Waterfall, with a ghost of the past hot on her heels and an old friend by her side...

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I... I don't know what else to do...”

“I gave her the cocoa, I made her some fine carbonara, I stayed with her until she fell asleep... Nothing.”

“It's like she's... just given up.”

**doc sans:** “yeah... i know exactly how she feels.”

“there are just some things we shouldn't see, and what she found didn't really do her any favours. looks like it broke her world-view into little pieces.”

“that's the flipside of being able to see other worlds, isn't it? sometimes you see the worst case scenario unfold right before your eyesockets.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Was that why you gave up? Because you only saw the worst?”

**doc sans:** “it was a lotta things, bro. not just seein' you die.”

“knowin' what the prince woulda become if he went through with the Anomaly's plan.”

“watchin' everyone you know an' love die to human marauders...”

“seein' yourself with a big floppy ghost-tongue, beggin' for tootsie rolls...”

“i'm just glad i kept those records secret. no-one needs to see how cringe-worthy those “Fell” parallels can be. not even the prince.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I think I understand, in a way. I still remember the trials one of my parallels went through.”

**doc sans:** “you mean the one with “Flowey” bein' some sorta life coach to you?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “The very same. If not for the others in that particular branch, it would have ended very poorly indeed. ...as if it didn't end grimly enough.”

“In trying to save his friends, he had to...”

**doc sans:** “say no more, bro. i'd rather find out for myself later.”
“brutal as it sounds, i might actually learn somethin' from it.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “You’d dare to expose yourself to that tale of terror?”

**doc sans:** “i’ve seen way worse, bro. i’ve watched Battlefield Earth, for cryin’ out loud! of all the DVDs to fall down here...”

“as for Frisk? i dunno, maybe she just needs time to think things over?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I’m not so sure, brother. I gave you time, and we all know how that turned out.”

**doc sans:** “aw c’mon, that’s just ‘cause i’m a lazy sack of TRAAAASH.”

“the girl’s made of sterner stuff, she’ll come around eventually. besides, it’s been one helluva day.”

“i’m gonna go hit the sack. i suggest you get some shut-eye too.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Shouldn’t we phone the Prince first? I imagine he should know that a human has entered the Underground...”

**doc sans:** “bro, it's like 1AM. i'm not gonna be phoning anybody at this hour!”

“the Guard’s probably filed a report anyways. just go to bed, we'll worry about all this in the morning.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “...fine. It can wait, I guess. Maybe I am worrying too much...”

---

**Asriel:** “...why did you do it?”

*The young prince sits upon a bed of golden flowers, staring into me.*

**Asriel:** “How could you do that to your own brother?”

*I stumble over which words to use, a trembling unease in my heart.*

Charlie, what are you doing?

**Charlie:** “I... I wanted us to be together.”

“I couldn’t stand to see an angel trapped in this hell. It... it made me hate them even more!”

“I gave up everything, to see you free...”

**Asriel:** “But... You wanted to hurt people. I- I couldn't let that happen!”

**Charlie:** “They all had it coming! Once we had their souls, we could have freed in the Underground, but...”

**Asriel:** “You USED me, Charlie!”
He grabs me by the shoulders, shaking me violently.

**Asriel:** “You lied to me, forced me into this- this-”

His grip loosens, as tears form in his eyes. I kiss him on the cheek, wiping away the teardrops.

I do NOT like where this is going.

**Gently, I begin to lift up his striped s-**

NOPE. NOPE, this is not happening. ABORT. **ABORT!**

*[ACT] > [Frisk] > *WAKE THE FUCK UP*

Oh COME ON! And it was going to be such a good dream, too!

Charlie, what in all- Seriously, what WAS that?!

It's none of your freaking business, Frisk!

Uh, when it's happening inside my head, I'm pretty sure it's my business.

So what, I can't even keep my dreams to myself now?

If that's what you dream about, I really wish you could. But I am NOT having... Seriously, what the hell, Charlie?

This coming from you? Oh that is freaking RICH! I'm not the one who let Asriel sleep in your bed most nights, that was all you!

**He needed my support!** His brother killed himself! His dad went out and got killed trying to lay your worthless body to rest!

He lost so much in a single night, Charlie. I did everything I could to try and fix his broken little heart...

But I never wanted THAT, Charlie. I never wanted anything like that gross little fantasy of yours.

How interesting. Especially when I recall that you yourself had such dreams, once upon a time, and from what I saw they didn’t gross you out at all...

**You SICK little monkey,** that's not true!

That's a loada horseshit, Frisk, and you KNOW it! In your dreams, you were **totally** into Asriel, even back in the original timeline!

But- But those were JUST DREAMS! I didn't have any control over my subconscious back then, and when I woke up I felt like absolute GARBAGE! I... I could never do that to him!

...and there you go. They're just dreams. You're not that kind of person in the real world, and neither am I.
See how easy it is when you’re honest with yourself?

But... It just feels wrong, even thinking about it. It doesn't feel healthy at all...

*But you'd never do that to him. I doubt there's any universe where either or us would take advantage of him like that. So... Probably don't worry about it too much.*

You're... you're right. I've gotta focus on how to save him from the Arid Nachos or whatever it's called. There's gotta be SOME way to bring him into this world, right?

RIGHT?

...I'm not so sure. I don't think there's anything we can do for that “parallel”.

Can't we- Can't we just pump more power into the Condenser, make the portal bigger?

*Don't you think Papyrus would have tried that if he could have? I have a feeling that expanding a portal would require more than just “MORE POWAH!”, since everyone would be free if it was THAT simple.*

But... But he needs our help. I- I can't just sit around and do nothing while-

*Frisk, I know that you're trying. I know that you're determined to see this through. But, well...*

There are some problems in this life that can't be solved with a glazed McGuffin and raw unbridled determination. Sometimes you've got to know your limits, and know when they can't be pushed.

And right now, your plan to drag that world's Asriel into our world is, well, kinda imposs- I don't think that's quite right. See, if it WAS impossible, how did I throw myself back in time, then catapult myself forwards into this reality?

I'm pretty sure that if we knew how to do it, he'd be safe by now.

And what about the other centillions of Asriels out there? Even if you could somehow cross between worlds on a whim, warp between realities by knocking your little red slippers together, how would you be able to rescue every last instance of Asriel Dreemurr?

I hate to say it, but even if it wasn't an impossibility, it'd be insanity to spend your entire life chasing down the same boy, in every possible universe he's born into.

Did you just eat a dictionary? 'cause you sound like it right now.

*That's not the point! The point is that, well, it's best we stick to the here and now, focus on who's already here with us. And right now, Asriel Dreemurr is waiting for us in New Home. You came here to find him, so let's go and get him. Can't lose sight of that, Frisk.*
...man, it's so quiet out. I can't remember the last time I saw Snowdin so silent.

I do. Wish I didn't though.

Then again, it's not THAT kinda silent. Everyone's still here, for one. All safe in their homes, sound asleep.

...let's go. I don't wanna dwell on... y'know.

I know. Someone's gotta keep you on the straight and narrow.

Don't push your luck, Charlie.

As you reach the edge of town, the fog grows thicker and thicker. Soon enough, we can't see beyond our hands.

Wait, don't move. I think there's something in the fog with us.

That silhouette... He's here.

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Human.”

“In many, many branches, I stood in this very spot.”

"Sometimes trying to capture you. Other times trying to make you come to your senses. But always with a monologue prepared.”

“This time, you leave me no time for monologues. This time, I stand here with a warning.”

“Waterfall is by no means safe. If you intend to traverse the swamps, you will be hunted by the Royal Guard of that land. This includes their leader...”

**Frisk:** “Don't worry Papyrus, I think I'll be able to charm Undyne no problem. By the time I reach Hotland, we're gonna be BESTIES.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I have no doubts about that. But that was in the other branches.”

“In this world, Undyne is not the Captain of the Royal Guard. As a matter of fact, she never entered the ranks.”

“Instead, she studied under the Prince, before becoming apprentice to one Doctor L Waffle, head of Weapons Development in Waterfall. After he fell down, he passed the torch on to her.”

**Frisk:** “Whoa. Can't imagine Undyne as anything but a brash soldier type...”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “It's funny that you should say that, actually! She's still rather brash, that much I'll say, but she's still a very good friend of mine!”

“Even if her work ethic is, well...”

“...what I mean to say is that you won't need to worry about her hunting you down.”

“You will, however, have to worry about Master Ren, this world's Royal Guard Captain. He will not give you as easy a time, to put it lightly.”
“The Royal Guard has suffered a bit of a... schism, let us say. While there are still a great number of Loyalists, there are many Renegade guards who follow the teachings of Master Ren. Namely to kill any human who falls down, and deliver the fabled “Seventh Soul” to the Prince.”

**Frisk:** “I've, uh, heard things about Ren. Is it true that he's... human?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “It's, uh, complicated. No-one really knows what he is, to be honest. He never shows his face unless it's behind that mask of his.”

“Though it is rumoured that he was alive during Queen Toriel's reign. I do not think a human would be able to live that long, if you ask me.”

“But there is one thing to know for certain. That he is as dangerous as he is powerful. Which is very.”

“If you do intend to continue your journey towards the Capital, do your best not to be seen. At all, preferably.”

“If Master Ren catches wind of your presence, he will never stop hunting you. We have six human souls so far, and he will do everything in his power to bring us to seven.”

*I'm not so sure about this anymore, Frisk. This Ren guy sounds like really bad news.*

I'm pretty sure we can stay out of his way. Besides, I remember when he was just a kid.

He was almost as brash as Undyne, back then, but he'd never hurt his friends.

Just in case, maybe we can get Undyne to meet us half-way, and go with us to meet Alphys?

**Frisk:** “Don't worry about me, Papyrus. We'll find a way...”

“But in the meantime, call Undyne. Ask her to come looking for me in Waterfall. It'd be nice to have her protection.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Well, it's still quite early, I wouldn't want to disturb her...”

“...but I can tell that you're not going to wait until morning, are you?”

**Frisk:** “Nope. Way I see it, the guards will be tired near the end of their shifts, so they won't be at their peak even if they do spot me. If I'm lucky, I'll be able to find Undyne before morning, hide out in her lab until nightfall, then make my way to Hotland and hopefully not run into Mettaton.”

*Man, you've really got this planned out, haven't you?*

I'm not giving up yet, Charlie. Asriel's still counting on us.

**Doctor Papyrus:** “If that is what you intend...”

“...fine. I will make preparations for your rendezvous.”

“But before you go, take this.”
You got the System Disruptor. And a portion of Spaghetti Carbonara.

**Doctor Papyrus:** “I could hardly let you sally forth without something to help you. And it never hurts to have a packed lunch ready!”

“Be safe out there, my dear friend. Oh, I almost forgot!”

*Papyrus hands us a piece of paper with his phone number on it.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “If you ever need help with a puzzle, or just want someone to talk to on your journey, I am just a phone-call away.”

“...er...?”

*Papyrus doesn't know how to react to your outstretched fist.*

...he awkwardly high-fives it. If only you could see my face right now...

You're grinning, aren't you? That's alright, so am I. Eeeeee!

**Frisk:** “This isn't a goodbye, Papyrus. We'll see each-other again soon enough.”

“So, I'll just say... see you, space cowboy.”

You can almost hear the jazz music begin to play, as you walk past Papyrus. He turns and looks at you, as you walk towards Waterfall, before turning to head back home.

*Yeesh, way to make an exit.*

The sad thing is, I dunno if he got the reference. Undyne mighta got it, Alphys definitely woulda got it, but...

*I wouldn't worry about it. We've already got a lot on our plate, and we're gonna carry that weight.*

Damn, I miss that show...

Huh? It's that white rabbit, and that one devil-looking guy with the red cloak.

*You remember those guys? ...wait, how come we didn't see them in Snowdin?*

That's really strange... Why are they out here at this hour, anyway?

**Cloak-Wearing Devil Guy:** “Hey, I haven't seen you around before.”

“Ah, always nice to meet new people.”

**White Rabbit Guy:** “We're about to visit Snowdin for the first time. It'll be a nice change from the Hotland Campus...”
“You just came from there, right? How is it...?”

“I tried to ask that young guardsman, but he looked like he was in a hurry.”

Young guardsman? Uh oh. You don't think...?

Frisk: “Well, I'd say it's, uh, cold but cozy.”

“Pretty quiet town, if you ask me. So what brings you here, anyways?”

Cloak-Wearing Devil Guy: “We're, uh, doing our internships at the Lab here.”

“First time my buddy's left Hotland, if you can believe it.”

White Rabbit Guy: “I'm just glad we're out of Waterfall, man. That place is creepy even without Ren's Guard watching us...”

All the more to stay hidden. Wrap it up, we gotta go.

Frisk: “Well, uh... Good luck to you two!”

“You might wanna spend a few hours at the Snowed Inn, though. The Doctors won't be up for quite a while yet.”

“But when you do meet them, tell them Lizzie K says hi. They'll know what it means.”

Cloak-Wearing Devil Guy: “Sure thing! Nice to meet you, Lizzie.”

White Rabbit Guy: “I guess we'll see you around? Or are you heading for Hotland?”

Careful what you say next. Someone might be listening...

Frisk: “Yeah I'm gonna be trekking for a bit. I'm on my way to visit... uh...”

“T-Temmie Village?”


White Rabbit Guy: “You mean the TemTek Research Facility?”

Phew, bullet dodged. Hopefully.

Frisk: “Yeah! That's where I'm headed!”

White Rabbit Guy: “Heh, you're lucky. Normally the Temmies are pretty hush-hush with their prototypes.”

“Dare I ask how many NDAs they made you sign before sending you a guest pass?”

Frisk: “UGH, don't remind me... I think I had to send them back in a frickin' package, rather than an envelope. I don't even wanna think about the postage paid for that one...”

Cloak-Wearing Devil Guy: “Well, don't let us keep you any longer!”
“Good luck with the tour, I guess!”

*The students walk past you on their way to Snowdin. You gained valuable Info. And your Knowledge increased!*

I kinda regret saying I was going to Temmie Village, now I know that they've got some cool toys there.

By giving them a red herring, I've probably screwed myself out of getting Temmie Armour.

And YES, before you say anything, I DO need that armour.

*I wasn't gonna say that. I was gonna say “And where are we gonna get the money for that?”.*

*But seeing as we've died about 7 times already, it'll probably only be 4000G at the utmost.*

*Assuming that the Shopkeeper Temmie has already been to college, that is...*

Yikes, I just remembered that. I don't wanna draw attention, but goddamnit I need that gold...

...I'll figure something out. I always do...

---

*Quick, someone's coming! Hide under the- bridge?*

*I'm sure there was supposed to be tall grass here...*

**Monster Kid:** “Uh, Sir! I'm uh- I'm here with my report!”

*I can barely hear the other guy up there...*

**Monster Kid:** “Yeah it's... I'm really, REALLY sorry Sir! I woulda brought it last night, but-”

???: “This information was crucial, young fool! What if that human slipped past us, right under our noses?!”

“Didn't they teach you about what happened the last time a human made it to New Home?!”

**Monster Kid:** “P-p-please, Master Ren! For-forgive my-”

**Master Ren:** “That crazed gunslinger killed our Queen, you fool!”

“Our Prince barely survived the encounter, and he was left with NO-ONE!”

“Do you even comprehend the sorrow that gripped him that day?!”

*Shit... That's the sound of a sword being unsheathed.*

*I can... FUCK, I can feel that kid's fear all the way from down here!*

**Monster Kid:** “Nononono... Sir, PLEASE...”
“Show me some Mercy...”

I can't let this happen. I have to do SOMETHING.

*Frisk, NO! Don't throw your life awa-

[MAGIC] > [Integrity] > *Bone Throw

*Excuse me WHAAAAAT?*

I throw the magic bone in the direction of Snowdin. It erupts with a noisy crackle.

*Master Ren:* “Hwuh?!”

*Aaaaaand he's off! That got him on the run. Now let's book it before he figures out that we're actually here.*

*Looks like Monster Kid's already booking it. This is gonna be bad...*

Are we not going to discuss what we just saw?!

*NO TIME! Let's make that damn bridge and get the hell out of here!*

*Monster Kid:* “Oh crap oh crap oh cr- YOU!”

“The heck d'you think you're doin' h- Hey, are you even listening?!”

*Blossom! Blossom! Blossom! Blossom! There, we got the bridge up. RUN!*

*Monster Kid:* “You just walk in here like you own the pl- UAAGH! Put me down!”

*Frisk what the hell are you doing?*

We're on the other side. Time to drop him, and wreck these blossoms.

*But you don't know any f-

[MAGIC] > [Raw] > *Lightning Wing

Yes, Charlie? What is it?

*Are you serious?*

Yes I am. I frazzled the blossom bridge, covered up our tracks.

Whew, I'm bushed. Am I... Am I out of MP?

Hot-damn, so this is what it feels like...

*Can we talk about how the hell you have all that magic now?*

In a minute, I've got to clear some things up first. Monster Kid looks pretty checked out.

*Monster Kid:* “What the... Man, my heart's poundin' right outta my chest.”
“What... ARE you?”

**Frisk:** “A girl who just saved your life. That's what it looks like, doesn't it?”

**Monster Kid:** “Y-you know what I mean, dangit! Humans can't use magic!”

“But you're... HOW?!?”

**Frisk:** “Does it even matter? We've got that... thing hunting both of us now.”

“I know we haven't seen eye to eye or anything, but if we work together, we might just stand a chance.”

“And yes, I am a human. Just... a little different.”

*If that's how you put it...*

Monster Kid clenches his metal fists. He seems pensive about this proposal.

**Monster Kid:** “It's not like I have a choice, do I?”

“I'll... I'll come quietly.”

Poor guy's scared for his life, even with us here.

Oh god, you don't think... Charlie, d'you think he's scared of US?

*I wouldn't be surprised...*

**Frisk:** “C'mon Kid, let's get outta here. We'll be safe once we meet up with Undyne.”

**Monster Kid:** “Wait, you know her? Why didn't you say that earlier?!”

**Frisk:** “We- well, I heard about her from Papyrus. I asked him to ask her to keep an eye out for me, y'see.”

“So we'll run into her soon enough. With any luck, we'll be able to lay low in her Lab until it's safe to make the trek to Hotland.”

**Monster Kid:** “Huh. Well, if you're pals with the good doctor, I guess... yeah, we can be pals too.”

**Frisk:** “Sure thing compadre.”

*You gently pat him on the back as we head into the next room.*

**Monster Kid has joined the party!**

Party? What do you think is this, a role-playing game?

*Wouldn't YOU like to know?*
“Well howdy ;)”

Oh jeez, it's this creep.

*Aaron flexes in ;)*

Oh don't you start too!

[ACT] > [Aaron] > *Shoo

**Frisk:** “We don't have time for this! Go on, GIT!”

**Aaron:** “Aw don't be a sourpuss ;)”

Oh god, he's sweating bullets again...

Ugh, one got me! Gross.

Where’s a mace when you need one?

*I dearly hope you mean the spray.*

Well I'm hardly gonna make pumpkin pie right now, am I?

*Oh god, now it hits me. Smells like a friggin' underwater barnyard around here! Whooh.*

**Monster Kid:** [ACT] > [Aaron] > *Flash Badge

Well this is new. Here comes a light show!

*Wishful thinking there, Frisk. He's just showing Aaron his Royal Guard I.D.*

Aw, jip!

**Monster Kid:** “The lady made it clear she don't wanna be disturbed, sir.”

**Aaron:** “Oh my. Uh, I don't want any trouble, young sir ;(”

**Monster Kid:** “Damn skippy you don't! Vamoose!”

*Aaron dove back into the water, a sulk in his slither.*

*You won!*

*You earned 0 XP and 30 Gold.*
Monster Kid: “Yo, dude! You dropped your Gold!”

Monster Kid picks up the coin purse and tosses it towards Aaron. Yaaaaay...

I hope this doesn't become a thing. Damnit I need that Gold...

So, uh, yeah. You didn't actually earn 30 Gold that time. “Jip” indeed.

Monster Kid: “So, uh, any idea on how to get through here?”

“We got Blossoms, but- oh, you got an idea?”

“...but, yo, the exit's this way. What're you...?”

Yeah, what ARE you doing?

Call it a hunch, but I vaguely remember that space across the pond.

Okay, so you make a bridge that reaches over to... Huh, I can make out a small dock over there!

Frisk: “I think I found something!”

Monster Kid: “Psssht, not so loud...”

“...it's an alcove with a bench. Not much of a view, though.”

You look under the bench and find... you're kidding me.

I found the Abandoned Quiche!

Monster Kid: “All that for a quiche? I dunno if sating Master Ren's hunger's gonna save our hides, uh...”

“...Frisk, wasn't it? Man, I didn't even ask you your name back there.”

Frisk: “Yeah, it's Frisk. Sans musta told you, I guess?”

Monster Kid: “Yup, I remember that... that time on the bridge.”

Frisk: “...don't worry about it. 's all water under it, by now.”

“Folks can do some mighty terrible things when they're scared...”

His hands are a little twitchy, don't you think? Can't tell if they're glitchy, or if he's just jumpy.

Probably both. Ain't throwing it out the window at this point.

Frisk: “Let's head back, I think I know the proper solution.”

You ring the bell, and the old blossoms disintegrate, while four new ones burst out of the earth.

Now, just gotta line these up juuuuuust right...

Frisk: “...and hey presto! There's our bridge.”
**Monster Kid:** “Nice! Usually it takes me a coupla tries before I remember.”

*We cross the bridge of blossoms to the other side of the river.*

**Frisk:** “Now, to slow down anyone trying to follow us...”

[Magic] > [Integrity] > *Bone Throw*

*Nope, not happening. You've gotta rest up, regain some of that...*

[Menu] > [Item] > *Mana Pastille > Use*

I down that crazy pill. My max MP increases by 1, and my MP is fully restored.

*Wow, I almost forgot about those damn things!*

*Ok, NOW you have enough energy for this.*

Alright, once more with feeling!

[Magic] > [Integrity] > *Bone Throw*

*You throw a magical bone at the bell, resetting the positions of the blossoms.*

**Monster Kid:** “Okay, THAT is pretty frickin' smart.”

“I just realised, you could have a Guard on the other side, constantly pinging that bell, and an invader could never solve the puzzle! Man...”

“...uh, your wrist thing is ringing...”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Hello, Frisk! It is I, your good friend Papyrus!”

“Just out of interest... What are you wearing at the moment?”

*Uh oh. I hope this isn't THAT question. We all remember what happened la-*

**Frisk:** “...nothing but rubber gloves.”

*I'm sorry, what did you just say?*

*You hear the sound of coffee spraying into the receiver.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “...ahem. I'm- I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that...”

“I didn't quite catch that, what did you say you were wearing?”

**Frisk:** *sigh* “Fine, I'm wearing a dusty tutu!”

“(Papyrus, is Ren holding you at knifepoint or something?)”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “What? No!”

“I'm asking for Undyne, so she can find you more easily!”
Frisk: “Damnit, you shoulda said that earlier!”

“(I’m wearing my usual striped shirt and black jeans, with the Ren Bandanna wrapped around my
head. There, happy?)”

Doctor Papyrus: “Yes. Except for that mental image with the rubber gloves.”

“I could very well have done without my day starting with that...”

“Anyway, toodles!”

You hang up. And don't think we're not going to talk about this later. My god, Frisk.

Monster Kid: “...I take it that was your boyfriend or something?”

“I mean, with that kinda language I assumed-”

Frisk: “That... was me being stupid. I thought someone was listening, so I threw out a red herring or
two just in case.”

“...damnit, I forgot about the room behind the waterfall! Ugh, too late to go back now. Best to keep
going forward, right?”

Monster Kid: “Yeah, let's keep goin'.”

“...heh. Nothin' but rubber gloves?”

“...I actually dunno what that’d even look like.”

Charlie: “Oh, you sweet summer child...”

JESUS Charlie, gimme some friggin' warning before you pull that!

Sure, whatever. But next time, give ME some friggin' warning before you go telling Papyrus that
you're naked over the phone. That's just not kosher.

Says the boy with the dirty brother-loving dreams.

Says the girl with a nation's dust staining her hands...

...I'm sorry, that just slipped out...

...uh, seeing how naïve Monster Kid is fills you with determination.

HP and MP restored.
...you really are a gigantic asshole, you know that Charlie?

[SAVE to Slot 2]

Charlie LV.1 KN.9

Waterfall – Blossom Puzzle
Wishes and Woes

Chapter Summary

Frisk and Monster Kid make little progress through the swamps of Waterfall, hunted by the Captain of the Royal Guard.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Man... Would ya look at all those stars...

I swear Charlie, I'm not in the mood for your- Oh hey, you weren't kidding. They really are quite pretty...

Monster Kid: “So, uh... you got a wish, or somethin’?”

Frisk: “Huh?”

Monster Kid: “In ancient times, we prayed to the stars, that our wishes might come true. Nowadays, all we have are these glimmering stones in the roof of the cavern.”

Frisk: “...you just read that off the wall, didn't you?”

Monster Kid: “Nuh-UH, dude!”

“...I memorized it every time I passed through here.”

“So... yeah. Anything on your mind? Any hopes an' dreams you wanna get off a' your chest?”

Frisk: “...now you mention it, I wish- UA!”

Woshua sprays your face with high-pressure water.

Woshua: “Wosh u face. 's grody af, ma'am.”

Frisk: “Thefuck was that for, ya goddamn creep?! Who thefuck DOES tha- MMPMH!”

Woshua slams into you, before forcing a bar of soap into your mouth. Of course, we meet all of the creeps first.

Woshua: “Wash your mouth out, you foul-mouthed little harlot.”

Yup. Definitely creepy.

Monster Kid: “Freeze! Snowdin Royal Guard! Step away from the girl!”

Monster Kid cracks his mechanical knuckles, taking up a fighting stance against Woshua.
Monster Kid: [WRESTLING MOVE] > [Woshua] > *Piledriver

Monster Kid dives at the... what the hell is Woshua supposed to be, anyway? A sentient washing tub?

Anyway, he grabs Woshua, flips him upside-down, and slams him into the dirt as he drops! Oooh, he's gonna feel that one tomorrow!

Woshua: “Uuuggghh... Dirty... Dirty trick!”

Monster Kid crosses his arms, and glares at the now grubby and bruised Woshua.

Monster Kid: “You mess with my friend, you mess with the Guard!”

[ACT] > [Woshua] > *Clean

After all that? Didn't you call him a creep like a minute ago?

I know, it's just... MK definitely took it a little too far here.

[ACT] > [Woshua] > *Clean

Oh, ok. You use the soap and water to clean up Woshua. His little bird friend helps.

Monster Kid stands to the side and just watches. ...he looks a little guilty.

Frisk: “There, much better.”

Woshua doesn't know what to say. He's certainly not alone in that.

[MERCY] > *Spare > [Woshua]

You won!

You earned 0 XP and 20 Gold.

Monster Kid: “I, uh... Sorry about that, dude. I don't know what came over me...”

His apologies fall on deaf and terrified ears, as Woshua scuttles away, way faster than a walking washtub should be capable of moving.

JESUS, did you hear that?! I think he ran straight through the north wall!

Like I said, people can do some crazy things when they're scared.

Like being so forgiving of that creep? I mean seriously, one moment you were spittin' fire, the next you were tending to his injuries! I can't remember the last time I saw such a quick U-turn!

What can I say? I'm too damn nice to stand by while others get hurt.
Hey, don't big yourself up too much. Your head's already big enough with all that “I am the one!” and “no-one left behind” stuff you've been championing lately.

...Frisk, mind if I ask you something personal?

Shoot.

Alright...

Frisk, are you a Mormon?

Wait, what? What kinda question is that?

Well if you don't wanna answer, then...

It's not that, Charlie. I'm just confused as to why you'd come to that conclusion?

Well, uh... It's- Part of it's 'cause you're... Damnit, you're too nice! Ok? There, I said it!

...and the rest of it's because I'm a Salt Lake City girl, isn't it?

...yes...

...no, I'm not a Mormon. Though I guess Ms Penfold influenced me a little. I'm pretty sure she was a Mormon. She believed very strongly in family, at least...

But beyond that, I ain't a Mormon. If you remember those “Post-Pacifist” days, you'd know that I wasn't exactly a teetotaller, neither.

Ugh, NOW I remember. That one time you snuck a bottle of ghastly bourbon into Asgore's apartment, over in Glendale. Seriously, who the hell sells liquor to a 13 year old?!

I nearly gagged when you took a swig of that foul dew. Ugh, it was like sweetness and death, burning our throat and mouth like the Devil's hot piss!

Way to be melodramatic, Charlie. But yeah, it wasn't that great. Probably better if you cut it with somethin' like EC Cola, the kind with the cranberry twist.

But that wasn't enough for you. Oh no, you passed the bottle to Asriel. You convinced my poor brother to drink it! And the face he made as he swallowed that evil spirit... It broke my heart, Frisk.

Oh c'mon Charlie, we were KIDS! Teens! Whatever!

We were tryin' to see what the world held for us, the greatest adventure of them all!

And we were little idiots, yes. But you can't get anywhere in life unless you experiment.

It's a good thing that you never decided to “experiment” experiment, if you know what I mean.

I joked about there being no possible universe where you could do that to Asriel, but in truth...

Monster Kid: “Frisk? Frisk! Talk to me, dude!”
Wow, we really got lost in our inner dialogue that time, didn't we?

Frisk: “Uh... whu... Sorry Kid, I musta been daydreamin'.”

Monster Kid looks pretty creeped out by this.

Monster Kid: “Musta been one helluva daydream! Your eyes were flashin' between red an' brown like nobody's business!”

“Are- Are you SURE you're ok?”

Frisk: “I'm FINE, Kid. But, uh, sorry if I slowed us down. We should-”

Monster Kid: “Get moving? Yup, we gotta step it up.”

“Man, I can't believe Woshua ran right through the damn wall. Normally he'd press the secret button an' open it up...”

That ancient writing on the wall... D'you think we have time to skim these?

Definitely skim them. 's my funeral too.

Alright, let's see...

“The War of Humans and Monsters.”

“Why did the humans attack? Indeed, it seemed they had nothing to fear.”

“Humans are unbelievably strong. It would take the soul of nearly every monster to equal the power of a single human soul.”

And yet we can't so much as conjure a spark. Well, we can, but that's thanks to those pills Kuro left for us.

“But humans have one weakness. Ironically, it is the strength of their soul.”

“Its power allows it to persist outside the human body, even after death.”

If not, I probably wouldn't be with you in the first place.

“If a monster defeats a human, they can take its soul.”

“A monster with a human soul... A horrible beast with unfathomable power.”

A creature that's mostly magic, with a soul stronger than that of a million monsters?

Yeah, I could imagine that. I could imagine one with the strength of seven million...

Monster Kid: “Yo, uh, if you're done readin'...”

Charlie: “Hold up a-”
Crap, sorry.

Uh, hold up a moment. See that bas-relief at the end?

It's an illustration of a strange creature.

...there's something very unsettling about this drawing...

That's because we recognize who it is.

No way... Asriel?

Close, but no cigar. I recognize those horns, that beard, that trident...

And no, it's not Old Scratch. If I'm not mistaken, we're looking at a bas-relief of Asgore.

Oh god... This is so wrong... Everything about this is wrong!

Boss monsters don't have snouts like a wolf. And they certainly don't have long spindly arms or jagged bat-like wings.

Yeah. Their snoots are way boopable than the muzzle on this beast.

Snoots? Really, Frisk?

C'mon Charlie, snoots are cutes! Pretty sure you wanted to boop Asriel's, anyway.

...we hop onto the little ferry, and Monster Kid follows suit.

Monster Kid: “Just a bit further, dude. I think we're almost there...”

We set off across that inky black water. Woshua glowers at Monster Kid as the ferry passes him by.

...aaaaaand disembark. ...hang on, isn't this the same dock where-

Oh, I've gotta see this. I think I have a plan.

Even if this DOES work, don't. You're just gonna give him a goddamn heart attack.

I'm doing it. This next experiment is going to be very... very... interesting...

Monster Kid: “We're pretty close to the Lab, Frisk. Undyne should be around here somewh-where're you-”

Looks like it worked. There they are, standing on the dock.

Goner Kid: “…have you ever thought about a world where everything is exactly the same…”

Like a grey shadow out of time, it turns around to face us.

Goner Kid: “…except you don't exist? Everything functions perf-”

Confusion passes over the face of the Goner Kid, while Monster Kid stares on, frozen with abject
terror.

The Goner shuffles forward, its every footfall sounding like broken glass.

It stops right in front on Monster Kid, sizing him up with those glassy, milky-white eyes.

**Goner Kid:** “Ha, ha...”

“I don’t feel so bad about this anymore...”

*It rests its head on Monster Kid's chest. Monster Kid shakes and shudders for a few seconds, before hesitantly wrapping his arms around the otherworldly reflection.*

*It's... like he remembers something.*

**Goner Kid:** “...stay away from the Core, dude. That's... all I can tell you.”

“And... don't forget about this. Remember me for her, alright?”

The fuck? Where did he go?!

**Monster Kid:** “...”

“...what just happened?”

“What've you dragged me into, Frisk?”

**Frisk:** “I... I don't know.”

“I knew that they were gonna show up, but this...”

“I'm sorry, I shouldn't have shown this to you.”

**Monster Kid:** “Was that... me? It... can't have...”

“And what was that... about the Core...”

“...let's go.”

**Frisk:** “Kid? Are you sure you don't wanna talk about this?”

**Monster Kid:** “Yes. I'm darn sure I don't.”

“I don't want to think about whatever the hell you made me see.”

*Monster Kid...*

**Frisk:** “…wait, did you hear that?”

**Monster Kid:** “...hear what?”

**Frisk:** “THAT.”

**Monster Kid:** “Don't worry, it's just my arm-pack. Needs a bit a' fine-tunin', that's all.”
Frisk: “That's what I was thinking. But does it sound like squeaky hydraulics?”

Oh fuck.

Frisk: “RUN!”

You and Monster Kid break into a mad dash along the boardwalk. Something's behind us, and I think I know what it is.

I know who he is! And he wants me dead!

The thunder of hydraulic legs grows closer for a while, only to lag further behind us as its pace slows.

Oh god, oh god, oh god- Keep going, we're almost at the tall grass!

We're in! I keep low to the ground, trying not to disturb the grass.

Oh no... No no no no no... Gods, if you can hear me...

Hold your breath, don't give him anything.

Master Ren: “Don't be so afraid, princess...”

“Face your fate with some dignity, why don't you?”

“After all, your country needs you!”

You cry out in terror as the grass above your head is cut down. Get ready to quickload.

Gods... Ren, what have they done to you?! The wires... They're- UGHRRrrrrgl!

His sword pieces your heart, and as you begin to spasm, Ren stoops down and removes the scarf obscuring his face.

Frisk: “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-”

[MENU] > [Files] > [Load Slot 2]

---

Man... Would ya look at all those stars...

...

Monster Kid: “So, uh... you got a wish, or somethin’?”

Frisk: “...”

Monster Kid: “...yo, dude? Are you...”

“Dude, are you crying?”
Whatever that thing was, it was probably human once.

Not helping.

Monster Kid: “Dude, it's alright... Just, just calm down an’...”

“Frisk...? C'mon, don't do me like this...”

Assuming direct control.

You...

Charlie: “...Frisk isn't here at the moment. But feel free to leave a message.”

“...yup, this is what I was afraid of. A young boy's voice, comin' out of a 17 year old girl.”

“No wonder you're quakin' in your boots.”

Monster Kid: “Who- Who's there? If it ain't Frisk, then-”

Charlie: “I've had a lotta names in the past.”


“But they weren't mine. They were given to me by... things, that sought to play me like a fiddle, for their own curiosity and the amusement of others...”

“Think back to your history lessons, Kid. Who was the first human to fall down...?”

Monster Kid: “...but that's... No way...”

“But you're... you're dead! You-”

Charlie: “I did. And I feel shame for the events that drove me there.”

“But that's beside the point. You know the name of the human prince, don't you?”

Monster Kid: “Y-y-yes...”

Charlie: “Then say it. Say it, and you'll know.”

“...”

“What're you waiting for?”

Monster Kid: “Your eyes... Oh crap...”

“Now I get it. She wasn't daydreamin' at all!”

“You were trying to possess her! She was just trying to shake you off!”

“Isn't that right, Prince Charles?”
Charlie: “Close, but no cigar.”

“What we have going on isn't really “possession”, so to speak.”

“It's more like, uh... It's kind of like when you're sharing a room with your siblings, and you gotta share everything with them.”

“And sometimes you gotta step in an' stop your sister from doin' somethin' stupid. Like stepping on a plastic brick, or shoving a crayon up her nose, or beggin' for her life when she could easily invoke the power of Patience to avoid all damage.”

Monster Kid: “Oh yeah, that's totally relatable! Just last week I convinced my older sister to WHAT ARE YOU EVEN TALKING ABOUT?!”

Charlie: “No need for that snarkasm, Kid. It's not exactly something people go through every Tuesday, I know, but stick with me on this, okay?”

“We share the same body, and while it's still hers, I jump in to take control of it from time to time. Most of the time I hang out in the back of her mind, narrating everything I see and hear.”

Monster Kid: “No wonder she's crying! I don't think I could handle having someone else in my head either!”

Charlie: “You'd probably think that, Kid. And once upon a time that mighta been the case.”

“But that was nearly ten years ago now. We've gotten used to each-other since then. I don't think you could separate us even if it were possible!”

“No no, Frisk is crying because she just got run through by what was once Ren Yong, and got a glimpse of the thing's face.”

Monster Kid: “Are you sure you're not taking crazy pills? Listen to yourself!”

Charlie: “You really don't remember? Alright, let's see...”

“That Woshua standing over there? He was thinking about splashing Frisk in the face. Frisk got mad at it, but got a bar of soap shoved in her mouth 'cause she swore.”

“Then you got mad, and used the piledriver move on the Woshua.”

“Sound familiar?”

Monster Kid: “I- Whu- That doesn't prove anything!”

“Yeah I'd probably wanna kick his ass, but that doesn't mean I'm gonna!”

Charlie: “Fine, let's try somethin' a little different...”

“...have you ever thought about a world where everything is exactly the same...”

“...except you don't exist? Everything functions perfectly well without you...”

“Ha... Ha... That's struck a chord, hasn't it?”
Monster Kid: “My head... URRRRGH.”

“But... No... That didn't happen?”

“What- This isn't- WHAT?”

“How could I forget that?!”

Charlie: “Technically, it didn't happen. Or, well, hasn't happened yet.”

“But you saw it happen, didn't you? Things rewound to the way they are now, but the experience was still stuck in there, like a forgotten dream.”

“I don't entirely know how this works, but somehow it does. One thing that really weirds me out is that sometimes people remember.”

“Papyrus vaguely remembered when Frisk fell to the Dogi. Lesser Dog seemed like he knew what was up. And now there's you, though you took a little nudge to help you remember...”

Monster Kid: “Heh... All that time I was scared of her, when I shoulda been scared of you. But...”

“I dunno if I should be scared of you or not. I... I just don't...”

“...screw it, we can settle this at Undyne's lab. Meanwhile, we gotta find another way around, since the main ferry's a death sentence.”

Frisk: “...I think I have a plan.”

*Oh, ok, I'll just, uh... Releasing control.*

Go ahead, quote Mass Effect 2 some more. That really helps.

*Something something calibrations. You ok to drive?*

Of course. Just needed a little time, that's all...

Monster Kid: “You ok, Frisk? Did- did Charlie hurt you?”

Frisk: “Hurt? Nah. But he did blow our cover to you, it seems.”

“So, uh, yeah. Don't go telling everyone about him, ok?”

Monster Kid: “Uh, sure... But don't you think you should get checked out?”

“I mean, two souls in the same body can't be healthy, right?”

Frisk: “Kid, I've been playing this game of “Two-Headed Ogre” since I was 8 years old. I can handle this edgy soup-headed psycho no problem.”

“Now let's check the other side of the dock. If we're lucky, there's another ferry...”
Soup-headed? Really, Frisk?

If anything I had a pageboy. Soupbowls don't have longer hair at the back, Floyd.

Frisk: “See, there he is!”

The stout pink creature sticks its face out of the water, blinking at us with its piggish eyes.

Ferry: “Three gold for the ferry, how about it?”

Frisk: “Sure! Uh, can you carry my friend too?”

Ferry squeaks excitedly at the thought.

Ferry: “Challenge accepted.”

You and Monster Kid step onto Ferry’s face. It rushes around the swamp at- WOW this is scarily fast! God, it's like having Papyrus drive us to school, he’d always go just that little bit too fast for comfort in that vintage red convertible of his...

And we’re there! Here we are, past the tall grass...

Ferry: “That... was delectable.”

“Here’s the three gold I promised. And another three for the other guy.”

Ferry does his best impression of Decadus.

Who?

Oh right, Drakengard character.

Pretty weird one at that. Eh, what am I sayin’, everyone in those games were crazy people.

Monster Kid: “I can't believe it.. We made it! Heh, Ren's gonna be lyin' in wait for ages until he figures it out!”

Frisk: “Not so loud, Kid. Or he'll come down on us like a goddamn storm.”

Monster Kid mouths his apologies silently, for comedic effect. He seems awfully pleased with himself.

Gross. This cheese has been here so long, a magical crystal has grown around it.

Yup, stuck to the table.

They'll get the cheese eventually. Just you wait and see.

Knowing that the mouse will one day extract the cheese from the magical crystal...

Who's running the saves here, you or me?
Sorry, go ahead.

_Ahem... fills you with determination._

[SAVE to Slot 1]

**Charlie LV.1 KN.9**

**Waterfall – Crystal Cheese**

---

**doc sans:** “‘sup kids. you doin' ok?”

Why am I surprised...

**doc sans:** “yeah, we caught a blip on the timeline a little while ago. i just wanted to make sure you were ok.”

“somethin’ wrong, Frisk?”

**Frisk:** “…you could say that.”

**doc sans:** “you ran into Master Ren, didn't you?”

“darn, that's what i was afraid of.”

“but hey, at least you juked him this time, right?”

**Frisk:** “Right.”

“...say Sans? Can you tell me anything about Ren?”

**doc sans:** “well, i’ll try.”

“first off, he's head of the Royal Guard here in Waterfall. though you probably coulda guessed that on your own.”

**Frisk:** “Papyrus beat you to the punch there. He told me that while I was leaving town.”

**doc sans:** “alright, uh, let's see what else...”

“did you know that he's Chinese?”

**Frisk:** “Yup.”

**doc sans:** “how about him being a cyborg?”

**Frisk:** “I found that out the hard way... That face, my god...”
doc sans: “gee, seems that's just about it. oh, and he nearly died trying to protect the Royal Family. but i figure you already knew THAT, too?”

Wait, WHAT?

Frisk: “WHAT?! When?!”

I'll just pull up a seat right here. I smell another exposition dump.

doc sans: “if i remember my history right, it was 2035 KF, 18 years after the death of King Asgore Dreemurr.”

“it was a day that lives in infamy... the day of the Gunslinger. the eighth human to fall down...”

“he came out of the Ruins, and made his journey east, jus' like all the others. but when the guard tried to bring him in, all it took was one shot to send 'em runnin'.”

“folks back then, who were able to stall him with conversation, say that he was lookin' for an old friend of his, and that the trail lead him to Mt Ebott.”

“but somethin' snapped inside him when he reached Hotland, at the Lab where our darlin’ Prince had been appointed Royal Scientist. somethin' he found there played on his sense of Justice, an' drove him in pursuit of Revenge.”

My god... Asriel must have been lucky to survive, if the Gunslinger went on a rampage.

Frisk: “And Ren... tried to stop him.”

doc sans: “yup. when he heard that the Gunslinger had the Prince held hostage, he pursued them into the Core.”

“i'd like to say that the two fought fiercely and gloriously, that it was a battle for the ages...”

“...nope. no such chivalry from the man with the big iron on his hip.”

“but it took four shots, four shots, to take Ren down. an' even then, our Champion of Bravery didn't actually die. but with Ren out of action, there was nothin' standin' between the Gunslinger and Toriel.”

“she tried her best to talk the guy down, but he insisted that she was to blame, that she was responsible for what had happened.”

Sans looks at the ground. It's easy to tell that he's pretty sad about this next part...

doc sans: “...all it took was one bullet to kill the Queen. she hit the floor before she could crumble to dust...”

“...all that, and her son had to watch. he'd lost everyone. brother, father, sister, and now his mother. he was alone in the world, thanks to humanity.”

“it's no wonder he went berserk. he struggled with the Gunslinger, trying to prise that gun out of his
hands. an' in all that commotion, it fired right into the Gunslinger's heart.”

Asriel... Oh god...

**Frisk:** “...he did what he had to. It was-

**doc sans:** “kill or be killed? ...yeah. it actually kinda was.”

“though whenever he talks with us about the past, he says that it was one of his biggest regrets.”

“thing is, he's been like that a lot lately. sometimes, even Alphys can't snap him out of it.”

“s kinda funny, in a way. well, not funny funny, but you know.”

"in other timelines, she brought him back into this world. but in this world, she's usually the one who brings him back to reality, when he's down an' out.”

**Frisk:** “...wait... Are you trying to say they're...?”

**doc sans:** “NOPE.”

“i mean, nah. they're not dating, if that's what you're getting' at.”

“though whenever he's feeling down, she sticks around when we've all headed home. heck, sometimes she's still there in the morning, since she doesn't want him to wake up alone.”

“she really cares about him. heck, we all do. but it's like she's taken it on herself to really take care of him.”

**doc sans:** “but back to Ren... so, the Prince took the Gunslinger's soul, just as Ren was limpin' into the throne room. champ took one look at the Queen's dust, an' fell to the floor.”

“Asriel tried to heal him, but his healing magic was only strong enough to keep Ren stable for a while. Ren's wounds were pretty much fatal.”

“but, like our darlin' Prince always says, “there has to be another way”. so, he used some of his mentor's old machines to keep Ren alive, while he searched for a solution.”

“yup, you can guess what that solution was. turning Ren into a mishmash of man and machine.”

“over the years, Asriel used what he knew of the human body, coupled with the research papers left by the former Royal Scientist, to build replacement parts for Ren's failing body.”

“his crystal eye gave him renewed sight. his legs of steel let him walk the Underground again. and his titanium ticker, well, that'll still be beatin' loud an' proud when the rest of him's dust in the wind.”

**Monster Kid:** “...golly... I- I don't know what to say.”

**Frisk:** “But... Why would he want me dead? Is he so desperate to set everyone free that he'd kill the Princess?!”

Yeah, uh, I don't think they knew that...

**doc sans:** “gee kid, could you be any more conceited?”
“you think you could hope to replace her? she... darn, what hap-

**Frisk:** “I fell into the Core, that’s what happened.”

*Monster Kid's eyes widen slightly. He's not quite figured it out, but he's getting there...*

---

**Frisk:** “Yeah, you heard me right. Princess Frisca? The girl who appeared with Charles all those years ago? That was me.”

“I threw myself back to 2015, to stop him making a big mistake. But despite my best efforts, I merely swapped the pieces around.”

“There was something about the prince's soul that forced me to make a decision and stick with it. It... it kept me from resetting, from going back from that point. ...IT was in control.“

“In the end, I could only keep Asriel from accepting the soul of the Fallen Child. I couldn't keep Asgore from weeping over the body of his adoptive son, as its soul, that... dark soul, wriggled its way into the king's heart.”

“And the rest... is history. Asgore did what Asriel would have done in the old timeline, and came back here at death's door, clutching—”

...Frisk? Frisk, are you still there?

Oh god... It- it kinda makes sense now!

On our journey, have you seen a single golden flower?

...no. NO, you don't think...

---

**Monster Kid:** “That night he returned, bearing wounds and woes, the body of the Prince, and a single red rose...”

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Chapter End Notes

In the middle of this chapter, Charlie rattles off a short list of names. Most of these names were used by folks who played the game on stream or in videos, a nod to the narrative of our world and the effect that Undertale had on it.

However, one of these things is not like the others. One of those names was the one I used on my own playthrough. And to narrow it down, I'm not a YouTuber or a streamer. Just a guy who thought "there has to be another way". 
Chapter Summary

Frisk’s party finishes their business with Sans, and journeys further into the marshlands of Waterfall. Frisk recounts some of the events that brought her into this particular branch. But after stopping briefly to pay their respects to the fallen, they encounter that which should not be, something quite wrong indeed.

Sans looks... I can’t quite place his expression. But it’s not good.

doc sans: “there it is... it was you all along.”

“i always wondered what really happened in 2015, what caused that insane spike in the old records.”

“turns out, that was you splitting the universe in half.”

Frisk: “Splitting the u- C’mon Sans, I’m not THAT powerful.”

doc sans: “ain't a matter of power, buddy. ...well, it kinda is, but not your power.”

“no no, this is theoretical physics in action.”

“here's somethin’ to think about. say you go back in time because Asriel's stuck as a flower, and then you make it so that Asriel didn't get killed in the first place, so that his dust doesn't get used to bring “Flowey” into existence.”

“in the present, Asriel's a healthy an’ happy boss monster, having never been through what woulda happened without your intervention. but wait, what about you? where's your motivation to go back and save him in the first place?”

Frisk: “I think I'm getting' it, Doc Brown. Keep going.”

doc sans: “sure thing, Morty. anyway, where was i? oh yeah, i got it.”

“without you going back in time to save him, he ends up back on the old track an' becomes Flowey. THEN in the present you go through what you went through with Flowey, an' you get motivated to go back an' change his fate. boom, Asriel's back again, but now your earlier motivation to go back is dead and gone, so you didn't go back in time in the first place, and d'you see the problem forming here?”

Monster Kid is totally out of it. He's not even pretending to listen, let alone understand.

Sucks to be him. I think I know what happened now.

Frisk: “So to prevent that nasty loop... My saving of Asriel created a split timeline/alternate universe, the events of which don't affect the original timeline?”
Is- is that PRIDE I see on Sans' face? Frisk, I think he's proud of you...

doc sans: “you got it, Frisk. that's more or less how it works, although…”

“it wasn't you savin' Asriel that split the timeline. nah, the act of time travel alone's enough to
generate a new branch.”

“all of this stuff was set in motion the instant you arrived in 2015 from... whenever you came from.”

Whoa.

“Whoa”? That's all you can say to this?

I don't know what else to say. Just... Whoa.

Way to channel Keanu Reeves, Charlie.

Frisk: “So... That's that then, I guess. ...what happens now?”

Sans shrugs, shifting his posture.

doc sans: “what? you think i'm gonna try an' stop you or somethin'?”

“buddy... pal... you've been doin' one hell of a thing, y'know that?”

“you saved the Prince, yeah. but in doin' so, you killed the King.”

“kid grew up without a father, but he devoted his life to science.”

“an' without the King's decree, the humans who came here weren't killed for their souls.”

“...but they did end up as test subjects. that was the Queen's decree.”

“and i'm guessin' the tests that ol' Doctor Kuro performed didn't really gel with the Gunslinger. maybe that's what set him off?”

“anyways, the rest is history. an' all the good, the bad, an' the downright ugly, all of it's laid at your
feet, like a long shadow at sundown.”

Frisk: “Seriously? I might have started this, but surely I can't be held responsible for every little thing
that happened!”

“I didn't kill Asgore! I didn't make the Gunslinger kill Toriel! I didn't experiment on Mary-Ann or
Ren!”

doc sans: “HEY hey hey... cool your britches, kiddo. i never said you did.”

“I just said that they came about because of your earlier actions. the butterfly effect's a real bitch for
that kinda stuff. just ask Evan Treborn.”

“but you're still kinda responsible for the events of this timeline. not all of them, not entirely, but you
still had a hand in all of this. or at least a pinky.”

“so... i'm just gonna do what i usually do.”

Goddamnit Charlie.

doc sans: “c'mon kid, give me SOME credit.”

“i'm not gonna fight you. but i ain't gonna join your little comedy corps, young lady. you can forget about havin' Sans the Skeleton in your party.”

“hey, chin up kiddo. i'll keep an eyesocket out for ya.”

“...oh, an' you might wanna keep a hold of these.”

Sans hands you a pair of SANS HOLY FUCK

Frisk: “Damnit, you overheard that conversation, didn't you?”

Monster Kid has fallen down. And is laughing hysterically.

doc sans: “yup. shoulda known you were gonna get Frisky.”

Frisk: “And WHAT the FUCK is that supposed to mean?”

Sans shoots us a knowing look. Oh I remember. I remember all too well.

Shut up.

Don't fight it, Frisk. You were a total flirt back then.

Shut uuuuuup!

Eh, you were too young to enter the Bone Zone anyways.


Charlie HOLY FUCK would you just DROP IT?!...

...you got the Rubber Gloves.

doc sans: “now there's the expression of someone with inner conflict.”

“don't worry, i'll make it easy for you. you don't wanna enter the Bone Zone.”

“we're literally frickin' skeletons. ain't no meat on these bones. just like nature intended.”

Frisk: “That's it, I'm outta here. You coming, Kid?”

Monster Kid tries to get a hold of himself. He fails. You pick him up and walk off.

doc sans: “see ya later, kids! tell Undyne i said hey.”

UNbelievable. The NERVE of that guy...

And before you say anything Charlie, shut up.
You put on the Rubber Gloves.

No, I damn well don't.

Frisk.

Put on the goddamn gloves.

You put on the Rubber Gloves. You gain +4 Defence and a chance to resist electrical attacks.

...fine. The gloves can stay.

Monster Kid: “Heh... Rubber gloves.”

Frisk: “Oh, don't you start...”

That gap with the bird seems to have a drawbridge, but it's raised at the moment.

Monster Kid waves to the two guards guarding the drawbridge.

Monster Kid: “Yo, uh, ladies? Can we get over there?”

RG 03: “Sorry rookie, no dice! Ren's given us orders to keep the bridge up until he comes back.”

RG 04: “Word has it there's a human on the prowl. Can't take any chances, Kid.”

Monster Kid: “Aw, JIP!”

Well, there goes our shortcut. And I don't think they'll let us over there even if the bird could lift i-

That bird... It's on our side of the river! And it looks displeased with the situation at hand.

The bird wishes that it could fly you across. But rules are rules.

...it wants to come with us?

Whoa, really?

Yeah! It wants to join our party!

Well, I won't turn down extra help. Especially from this guy.

It's settled then! Bird has joined our party! Cherish the Bird.

Monster Kid: “Well, now what?”

Frisk: “Don't sweat it, Kid. I know a... pretty roundabout and inconvenient shortcut.”

“Actually, scratch that. It's not a shortcut at all. But I'm pretty sure it's the only way for us to get to Undyne now.”
Bird settles on Monster Kid's head, making itself comfortable for the long journey ahead. Monster Kid looks perturbed by this.

**Monster Kid:** “Is this bird seriously gonna sit on my head for the whole journey?”

**Frisk:** “Probably. But don't worry 'bout it! You look kinda cute with a bird on your head.”

*Monster Kid cocks an eyebrow, sporting a wry grin. I follow suit.*

...uh, that just slipped out.

*Suuure, just like the whole rubber gloves thing.*

Quiet, you.

**Frisk:** “Let's roll out, Kid. An' wipe that grin off your face, you look like a goddamn Dreamworks protagonist.”

**Monster Kid:** “Hey, excuuuuse ME, Princess!”

Of course he'd do something like that.

The water in these marshlands... It's always glowing like that. Never figured out why that was.

**Monster Kid:** “So, uh, earlier... When you were talking about the king, you stopped suddenly.”

“It's about the roses, isn't it?”

…

**Monster Kid:** “There's something I should tell you. It's... it's about a very special flower.”

*I think I know who...*

**Monster Kid:** “The Echo Flower.”

“They're all over the marsh. They pick up on passing conversations, and repeat them endlessly.”

“Sometimes, people whisper into them. Their hopes. Their dreams. Their darkest secrets...”

“But... sometimes, when I'm set to patrol the marshes, I find something special.”

“Sometimes, I see a red Echo Flower. Other times, a white Echo Flower. And on rare occasions, I'm actually able to talk to them.”

*They're talking to him? ...what for?*

**Frisk:** “They talk to you?”

**Monster Kid:** “Yeah, it's real weird. Usually Echo Flowers just mimic what they hear, but these ones... It sounds like I'm insane, but I can actually have a conversation with them!”

**Frisk:** “What- What do they say? What do they tell you?”
Monster Kid: “Well... The red one's a little hot-headed. Always tells me to be on my guard, reminds me that I ought to stand up to any threat.”

“But the white one... She's a lot calmer. Except when it involves the red flower. If we end up talking about “Thorney”, she gets... a little nasty. It's like when Mom and Dad are fighting.”

“...Thorney”. Yup. That means somethin' to ya, don't it?”

Frisk: “...Kid, I have a feeling that those weren't Echo Flowers.”

“I've met these things before. And I am almost certain that they are, in fact, the twisted reincarnations of the King and Queen.”

Monster Kid doesn't seem impressed. He doesn't believe you, but he isn't flabbergasted either.

It's “flabber...gasted”, Charlie.

Monster Kid: “Yeah, I don't really buy that. Even if they were, how would that even work? They've been dead for nearly 200 years!”

Frisk: “Oh, I'll tell you how it works. But I have a feeling you're gonna freak out out.”

“First, the dust of the monster is absorbed by a flower as it grows. And with it, all the aspects of the monster's soul.”

“Then, a weaboo lizard sneaks into the throne room and picks that flower to use in her DT experiments. She injects that flower with concentrated determination, in the hopes of creating a “perfect vessel” for souls.”

“The flower wakes up, with the memories and qualities of the monster whose ashes the flower absorbed. But something is missing. They search in vain for something to help them truly feel what it is they've lost.”

“In the case of Flowey... it was his compassion.”

Monster Kid shoots us a look of fragile disbelief. He doesn't want to believe, but he's finding it hard not to be taken in.

Monster Kid: “…how the heck do you know all this stuff?”

Frisk: “Because it's happened before, Kid.”

“...it's like I said before, this isn't the first time I've been in the Underground. I fell down here as a kid, in a timeline that preceded this one.”

Monster Kid: “Ugh, not the timeline talk again...”

Frisk: “Suck it up, Kid. This is how it happened.”

“Anyways, in the original timeline, I was on a quest to cross the Barrier and go home. I fell down here by accident, and I wanted to leave this place.”

“Back in that timeline, the Underground wasn't nearly as "super-sciencey” as it is this time around.
The King and Queen were still alive, but Asriel had been dead for centuries, and the Queen was hiding out in the Ruins.”

“But as I made my way through the Underground, from the Ruins all the way to New Home, I made so many friends. Toriel, Sans, Papyrus, Undyne, Alphys, Asgore…”

“And Flowey. In that timeline, he was the result of Alphys experimenting on a rather large golden flower. The same flower that Asriel brought back from the surface, before he died…”

*Monster Kid looks like he understands. Sorta.*

**Monster Kid:** “...so you went back in time to prevent Asriel from becoming a talking flower?”

**Frisk:** “It's... it's a little more complicated than that. Without his compassion, he ended up doing some pretty nasty things as Flowey.”

“And every time, he'd reset the world, to see what else he could do. But eventually, I guess he got bored, and let the world move on.”

“Until he met me. I was something new, something that made him curious.”

“By the end of my journey, I'd figured out the truth. I wanted to help him get better, to give him back what he'd lost. Even when he'd absorbed the human souls, and the souls of everyone in the Underground, I refused to fight him.”

“But it was the monster souls that gave him his heart back, at least for a little while. I was able to call out to him, I brought him back around. And after all the things he'd done, he felt regret and remorse for everything he'd done...”

**Monster Kid:** “Golly... I- The thought of our leader being so... so evil, but then so good at the end...”

“It's like Sans used to say... Anyone can be a good person, if they just try hard enough?”

*Yeah... I guess they can...*

**Monster Kid:** “An' after that? What happened?”

**Frisk:** “After all he'd done... I forgave him. I couldn't find it in my heart to hate him anymore. I... I just couldn't.”

“With everyone's hearts beating as one, he used the collective power of the human souls, and the souls of everyone in the Underground, to shatter the Barrier. Then, he restored the souls to their original bodies.”

“Everyone was free. Everyone had hope for the future. Everyone could live on the surface once we'd made peace with New Deseret.”

**Monster Kid:** “Everyone but Flowey.”

**Frisk:** “Exactly. I even went all the way back to the Ruins, back to that first patch of golden flowers, to try and bring him back. But no matter how I begged and pleaded, no matter how long I held onto him, he wouldn't come with...”
“I still remember the last thing he said to me, before... “Frisk... Don’t you have anything better to do?”...sometimes, I wake up with those words ringing in my ears.”

**Frisk:** “It just wasn’t fair, that he stayed down there, while all of us were free. Even after all he’d done, he’d- he’d redeemed himself, goddamnit! Even with that energy gone, and his compassion lost again, he was still a changed kid.”

“There had to be another way...”

**Monster Kid:** “…there it is again... The Prince told us that when he came to our school a few years ago. He talked to us about the... the Seven Virtues, he called them.”

*Why do I feel like I know what's coming?*

**Frisk:** “Let me guess. Patience, Bravery, Integrity, Kindness, Perseverance, Justice, and Determination.”

“Human souls usually fall into one of these categories. Three guesses which one I fall into.”

**Monster Kid:** “…Determinination.”

**Frisk:** “Determinination.”

*A sharp bark derails this little tea party, as a spear-wielding dog blocks our path.*

WHAT? What's a dog doing so far from Snowdin?

*Who's to say she can't be here? Either way, she's in our way.*

[ACT] > [Anomalous Dog Monster] > *Check

Looks like she's called “Doge”. Pronounced “dohj” with a soft j.

**Doge:** “Come on, punk! Let's go!”

*Doge rushes forward, lunging with her spear.*

Whew, dogdged it. I try to disarm her with my Stick.

*Yeah, no chance. She's got an iron grip on her weapon, and you don't act quick enough.*

*She breaks the weapon lock, sending you stumbling backwards.*

**Doge:** “You're rather slow, aren't you?”

She's a cocky spaniel, I'll give her that...
[ACT]  >  [Doge]  >  \\
*"Bathe"

Let's see how agile she is with waterlogged armour!

You try to sweep Doge's legs out from under her.

Yowch! Mother FUCKER...

Yeah, sweeping the leg isn't so effective against sabotons, it turns out.

As you nurse your leg, cursing up a storm, Doge jabs at you with full force!

...but her spear stops mere inches from your chest. Monster Kid has an iron grip on Doge's weapon, and wrenches it out of her hands!

She looks pretty anxious now. Man, Monster Kid with the star plays!

**Monster Kid:** [ITEM]  >  [Doge Spear]  >  *"Fetch"

Monster Kid throws the spear back the way we came, causing Doge to excitedly run after it.

**Doge:** “OHBOYOHBOYOHBOYOhboyohboyohboyohboy...”

**Monster Kid:** “Let's book it. Hopefully we'll be long gone by the time she comes back with that thing.”

[MERCY]  >  *Flee

See you space cowboy...

She's not even a data dog- Whatever, let's skedaddle.

Frisk, I dunno if it's wise to take the side-paths now we have Ren on our scent. Let's just go back to the- ...oh.

It's another memorial. To... “Adrianna Swann”, and “Terry Miller”?

**Monster Kid:** “For you the blind, who once could see...”

“The bell tolls for thee.”

Were those...

**Frisk:** “Were those Rush lyrics?”

Monster Kid smirks with appreciation. Seems like our friendly junior Guardsman has a taste for Canadian prog rock.

**Monster Kid:** "Dad was really into that band. He'd usually have one of their albums playing when he got home from the Mines. ...guess it rubbed off on me, too.”

“It's kinda funny, actually. Losing It is pretty apt to what happened to Lady Swann and Lord Miller in later life. In their prime, they shone like stars, but...”
“They burned out pretty quick after that. Lady Swann's body couldn't handle the stresses she put it through, trying to emulate the original style of her youth.”

“As for Lord Miller... Over the years, his mind gradually got weaker. He made notes of everything to make up for his failing memory, even as he felt more and more trapped by it.”

“He didn't take Lady Swann's death well at all. Within days of her falling down, he took his own life, in the hopes of joining her.”

Monster Kid presses a clenched mechanical fist against his chest, casting his gaze downward. I honestly don't blame him, what a horrible way to go...

Sadder still to watch it die, than never to have known it.

I bring my hand to my chest, out of respect for those fallen in ages past.

**Frisk:** “In memory of Adrianna Swann, fifth to fall. Hopping and twirling, your original style inspired a generation.”

**Monster Kid:** “In memory of Terry Miller, sixth to fall. In spite of the Barrier trapping us in this small corner of the universe, you put pen to paper and brought brave new worlds before us.”

**Doge:** “Ruhe mit frieden...”

_Sweet LORD how long has she been standing there?!_

**Doge:** “You're... not nearly as savage as I feared.”

“...I'm guessing she ISN'T holding you hostage, either.”

**Monster Kid:** “No way! If anything we're lookin' out for each-other, since Master Ren wants us both dead.”

“...uh, could you pretend like you never saw us? I beg you, don't rat us out...”

_The Doge's posture is much less aggressive now. Now she just seems disappointed._

**Doge:** “Such a mad brute... Still, his is a tragic tale.”

**Frisk:** “I know. He nearly died trying to stop the Gunslinger, and now he's part machine.”

“Maybe that's how he's been around for so long?”

_A sympathetic smirk creeps across the Doge's face._

**Doge:** “If I see him, I'll give him the wrong directions.”

“There is no danger in you being in control, Princess.”

_Doge heads back the way we came. ...wait, how the hell did she know you were the Princess?_

Hell if I know. Time we got the hell out of this marsh...
Ohp, sounds like we have a call. And I think I know who it is...

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Hello again, dear!”

“Know when I asked you what you were wearing?”

**Frisk:** “Let me guess... Ren tapped your phonelines, so now he knows what I'm wearing.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Sadly yes. We only just found the bug he had planted on the local cell tower.”

“...I suppose you haven't had the opportunity to change into something less conspicuous yet?”

“...not now young lady, I'm busy!”

*Sigh* Sounds like he has a guest...

**Frisk:** “Nah, can't see a single Hot Topic around here.”

“By the way, who's your friend over there?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Oh don't worry about that, just... one of the new interns! Honestly, I request seniors, and they send me a freshman!”

“Anyway, consider this a heads up. I- I can't tell you anything else, in case there are more bugs, so you just be on your guard!”

**Frisk:** “Sure thing. I'm gonna see if we can take a shortcut across that bridge. Wish me luck!”

You end the call before Papyrus can warn you away from that plan.

...but we both know that was another red herring, wasn't it?

Yup. The more we confound Ren, the longer we have without him on our trail.

**Frisk:** “Well, now we know why he found us so soon.”

**Monster Kid:** “Still, at least it ain't Papyrus' fault.”

**Frisk:** “Yeah, we got that this time. I still remember when he “kinda-maybe” ratted me out to Undyne in the original timeline. Even then, I forgave the naïve stack of baby bones.”

“*sigh* I just hope we find her soon. Knowing there's a killing machine out there... Time to pick up the pace.”

*This lake... This is where we met that one guy, Onionsan was it?*

Why was he even there? HOW did he even get there?

*I guess he came here when he was a lot smaller? After all, it looked like he was here a long ti-
Monster Kid: “Something's wrong. Oh god, it's SO WRONG!”

Something’s got MK super-spooked. I guess he's never met Onionsan bef-

Ok, the water isn't meant to be glowing here. Let alone glowing a fiery red.

Frisk: “Oh fuck this... FUCK THIS. RUN!”

HOLY- A massive red tentacle, glowing bright red like the water, blocks the way out of this room. 
Oh god something's coming out of the water. It's... No. No. No. No.

What am I even looking at. This should not exist. It shouldn't exist!

It's here for me... It wants ME!

???: “HUMAN.”

“TAUROCALVA SAY, RECLAIM.”
Of Fishy Business

Chapter Summary

After their encounter with that which should not be, Chara recalls the nightmares that lie beyond death. With the old path obstructed by the impossible, a hair-brained scheme grants them a fortunate shortcut to the Waterfall Lab. Safe and sound, for now at least, Frisk and her companions are able to catch up with Undyne, now head of Weapons Development in Waterfall.

doc sans: “kids... are you ok?”

I thought I had it. Damnit, I thought I had that thing's number!

...y'know, it's probably a good thing that you had to re-load there. You don't want to accidentally kill someone, now do we?

Now you mention it... I don't really want to, but I have to. That thing doesn't belong in our universe.

_Dang. I was afraid of this. ...oh crap, Frisk... Your LV, it's..._

It's just right. Against a demon, it's kill or be killed. That shouldn't be too unfamiliar to you, right Charlie?

After all, we've both been there... You know what they are...

_You're right. I do._

_None of them had a chance at life, to feel like we do. They hunger for the sensations we take for granted._

_When our souls fade in our world, we wake up in their world. All of those feelings and experiences we took with us, those precious memories of ours..._

_They catch scent of what we have, and they're like kids in a candy store. But Asriel and I didn't get snapped up by any of those braindead bottom-feeders..._

_No, we were rounded up by ones that could actually think for themselves. The kind of creature that treats mortal spirits like cattle, rather than a one-off meal._

_...it was horrible. An’ they had us for nearly 200 years. That's all I'm gonna say._

But in the end, you escaped. Still, it doesn't explain why this guy crossed realities to hunt you down. I mean, if they want you back so bad, why weren't we hounded by hellspawn the first time we went through the Underground?

_Your guess is as good as mine. But right now, we need to figure out how to drive that thing out of this world. Preferably without killing Onionsan._
Monster Kid: “...I hate that you dragged me into this crap, Princess.”

Frisk: “Oh c'mon! You think anyone could expect THAT?!?”

doc sans: “kids, kids. jus' tell me what the heck's goin' on, alright?”

“did Ren get you again?”

Frisk: “If only, Sans. We ran into something MUCH worse.”

doc sans: “lemme guess... that red flower givin' you grief?”

Frisk: “What? No way, I haven't spotted Thorney since I got out of the Ruins!”

“Sans, something has possessed Onionsan, and it's trying to kill us.”

Sans' lights go out. Now he knows things are serious.

Frisk: “I know this is a long shot, but do you or your brother have anything that could help us tangle with this thing?”

Charlie: “Like, uh, did you ever find a bible at the dump, or bottles of holy water?”

Frisk: “I'm pretty sure those won't do squat, Charlie. We probably need some sort of portable particle accelerator, and a way to cross the str-”

doc sans: “ NO. you NEVER cross the streams.”

“...but i guess i could try slowin' it down with a blue attack?”

“'s all i got for this situation. unless there's somethin' else you're not tellin' me?”

*Might be our best shot at progressing past this fiend. Tell him what we can.*

Frisk: “Well, I think it's a... a demon. It's... uh...”

God, I don't know what else to say.

*Let me try.*

Charlie: “Alright Sans, what we're dealing with is a creature from another dimension, a parasite that feeds on memory and emotion.”

“We need to figure out how it's connected to its host, and... uh, cut it off? I guess?”

“...I really don't have a plan beyond that. Sorry.”

*He's brought his hand to his face. Yeah, I guess that didn't exactly inspire confidence.*

I guess he was expecting you to be some kind of Van Helsing type, given that you've escaped from Hell.
Hey, I never actually fought any demons. I just relied on sneaking about, then got back into this world through a stroke of bad luck!

Besides, “Van Helsing” would probably be like a serial killer to these people.

I wouldn't expect them to like the '04 movie either. ...no change there.

Hey that's not fair, I liked that film! Sure it wasn't exactly Bram Stoker's Dracula, and in fact it was pretty goofy even for the 2000s, but I still had a blast watching it.

You just wanted to see Hugh Jackman play with his fancy crossbow, didn't you?

C'mon, it was more than that! Besides, we-

Monster Kid: “Princess? You're doing it again.”

Frisk: “Sorry. Old habits die hard...”

“So... yeah. Looks like that's all we have.”

doc sans: “...well in that case, i got a back-up plan.”

“we don't run in an' try to solve this right now. we just let the guy stick around in there, an' call in the guard to stop people getting' in the room, 'til we actually know how to deal with this “demon” bozo.”

Frisk: “So what, we just do NOTHING?”

doc sans: “thaaaaat's the spirit, kid. stuff like this is too friggin' dangerous to meet head-on without the right know-how.”

“besides, he's stuck in that room anyways. no way out for a guy that big, so this “demon” of yours won't be able to escape an' come after ya.”

Frisk: “...and we can get those guards at the bridge to set up the quarantine! Meaning they'll need to leave the bridge down to get to Onionsan's room, so we can get across an' get to Undyne's house!”

doc sans: “...huh. i was figurin' we'd just stick around here in the meantime, but i guess crashin' at Undyne's ain't the worst idea.”

“buuuuuut we're gonna need another guard to give those ladies their marchin' orders. somehow i don't think they'll just let you across.”

Well, they're not gonna take orders from Monster Kid, so-

AUGH! Why didn't I think of this before?!

Frisk: “Sans, do you have Undyne's number?”

doc sans: “uh, yeah? but i don't think calling her's gonna be such a good idea.”

“i mean, for all we know Ren might be listenin' in. Paps told me about the bug on the line.”

“if you tell her where we are, he'll be back on your trail.”
**Frisk:** “Then don’t. Just tell her about what's going down with Onionsan.”

“Wherever she is, she's probably gonna cut through here to get to Onionsan. Then, when she runs into us, we tell her everything, swing 'round her place, have a nice cup of tea, and wait for all of this to blow over.”

Not exactly a slice of fried gold, but it might work out. Probably the only plan we have right now.

**doc sans:** “eh, sounds good enough to me.”

*He's dialling her number. We're almost there, Frisk.*

**doc sans:** “kay, it's ringin'. everyone keep quiet.”

*In the distance, you can hear “Spear of Justice” playing. This is quickly followed by bewildered fish noises and... yeah. Lotta swearing.*

**Monster Kid:** “Wait, did she not...?”

“Did she fall asleep after getting the call from Papyrus?!”

“Oh my god I think she did.”

---

A minute or so passes. Then, “Spear of Justice” intensifies as a freshly-caffeinated fish knocks the drawbridge down.

**RG 03:** “WHOA DOC, stand down! No-one's allowed to cross at th-”

Undyne flashes what looks like a sheriff's badge, but with a golden Delta Rune on it. She then gestures for us to come across, to the dismay of the two guards.

The Guards look like they want to say something, but they keep quiet.

**doc sans:** “you ladies might wanna check out the room at the other end of this marsh. word is that Onionsan's having some troubles.”

“oh, and the human's probably headed that way, so be extra-careful.”

*The two Royal Guards look at each-other, then at Undyne.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “Well? You heard the guy, move out!”

**RG 03:** “Uh, yes ma'am! Right away!”

Aaaaaand they're gone.

Something doesn't add up here. I thought that Undyne never joined the Royal Guard in this reality? So why is she flashing a badge around like she's 90's FBI?
Maybe she is? Maybe Papyrus doesn't know about her being... What did that say... “Elite Guard”? Okay, that's new.

Undyne looks at us, and smirks.

**Doctor Undyne:** “...so you're "Frisk”, I guess?”

“Heh, Papyrus never stops talking about you. And now here you are.”

“The most determined thing in the Underground.”

“Listen up, punk. You might be determined, but I'm pretty determined too!”

“Determined to keep your punk ass safe!”

*Whew, almost had me scared for a moment.*

**Frisk:** “Heh, you almost had me worried there.”

*That's not what I- Whatever.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “Nah don't sweat it, punk. You just follow me, my place is just around the corner.”

“That means you too, Fontaine! Don't think you can just slip away without a how'dya do.”

Sans turns on his heels, just about to take one of his “shortcuts”. He looks kinda pensive. Probably 'cause he hasn't hung out with Undyne for a very long time.

**doc sans:** “uh... sure thing, why not? the paperwork can wait.”

Oh FUCK ME. I just got it.

*Got what? Oh, you mean-*

FONTAINE. PAPYRUS. COMIC SANS. HOLY FUCK, how did I not figure it out sooner?! *I wouldn't blame you if you forgot. Needless to say, we forgot a lot of stuff when- uh, when we catapulted ourselves through time. Yeah.*

...the shadow of Undyne's lab looms over us, filling you with determination.

[SAVE to Slot 2]

**Charlie LV.1 KN.11**

**Waterfall – Undyne's Lab**

*Man, we gained a lot of Intel back there.*
Wait a minute, that suit of armour...

???: “…what?”

“What?”

Well, isn't this a sight for sore eyes?

**Mad Dummy:** “It's my duty.”

*I guess he had better options than a ratty old mannequin, thanks to Alphys?*

Looks like it. And that thing in his chest? Probably that “liquid thorstein microreactor” Brock told us about.

*Who the hell is- Oh right, the talking rock back in the Ruins.*

Well, I'm hardly talking about the Swedish murder machine, am I?

...man, this brings back memories. Showing up here with Papyrus after juiking Undyne, watching him somersault out the damn window...

Even after she tried to kill me all those times, I still managed to befriend her.

Here's hoping I can do the same to Ren.

*When you put it like that... Yeah, I don't feel so pensive about this anymore.*

---

*Ah, it's just like... Actually, no. This doesn't look like Undyne's house did.*

...it looks pretty similar to me? Wait...

*Not quite. The placement of the doors, position of the table, the counters in the kitchen...*

*Even the pattern on the linoleum reminds me of...*

Good gravy you're right! How did I not see this?!

**Frisk:** “Say Undyne? You wouldn't happen to watch the Venture Brothers, by any chance?”

*A wave of confusion passes over Undyne's face, but it is quickly replaced with a knowing smirk and a twinkle in her good eye.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “Hwu? I mean, yeah!”

“Alphys hooked me up with a massive download a coupla years back, Seasons 1 through 7!”

“...why do you ask?”

**Frisk:** “Because your kitchen looks like an exact replica of the one in the old Venture Compound.”
**Doctor Undyne:** “I know, right? We had an opportunity to redesign the kitchen a coupla years back, and Alphys came over to lend a hand.”

“So naturally we gave a few pointers to the architect, and got this room redesigned as a nod to one of the coolest animes of the early 21st century!”

**Monster Kid:** “…but isn't that show American?”

**Doctor Undyne:** “Yeah, but the stuff that goes on in that show is pretty frickin' anime, right?”

Eh, I'm not gonna argue with that. Or her face.

**Doctor Undyne:** “Ventures aside, you kids look like you could do with some breakfast. I know I could go for something right now.”

“Let's see... Got some Brain Bran here, MTT Glamour Stars...”

“Nanna Wrinkler's Cookie Crackers? How did THESE get in here?”

**Monster Kid:** “Oooh, coulda ya hit me up with the crackers?”

“Seriously, those things are amazing.”

**Doctor Undyne:** “Uh... Sure thing. Still in date and everything.”

Undyne's mouth forms into a wistful grin as she remembers.

**Doctor Undyne:** “Heh, Alphys musta brought these in from last time.”

“And you guys? You hankering for anything?”

**doc sans:** “eh, i could prolly go for some toast if ya have any.”

Somehow I don't think I'd trust her to make toast. I still remember the time we tried to make spaghetti...

**doc sans:** *whispering* “what, ya don't crust her to cook?”

*whispering* “she ain't as crummy as her parallels, Frisk.”

**Frisk:** “Yeah, I could go for some toast too.”

*There you go. Have a little faith in her.*

This... This is nice. We're all sat around the table, havin' ourselves a good breakfast.

Man, I can't remember the last time I had a good cup of joe. Even on the Surface, you'd be hard-pressed to find a good blend anywhere in Salt Lake City.

*I don't even like coffee, but given a choice between your black-with-sugar and that goddamn “soykaf” the Dens usually stock...*
Don't have to tell me twice...

**Doctor Undyne:** “So Sans... How're things at the Snowdin Lab?”

*Again, Sans looks slightly anxious. He definitely doesn't want it known that he was just slacking off for the past year or so.*

**doc sans:** “eh, slow but steady. we've, uh, been hittin' a brick wall, though.”

“y'know what Paps was sayin' about the energy equations?”

**Doctor Undyne:** “Yeah, he brought it up at the Yearly Review. In your absence...”

“So, what? Was he right about the diminishing returns, or did you guys just need better fuses for that Condenser of yours?”

*Sans looks down, seemingly disappointed. In the project, I guess.*

**doc sans:** “first one. turns out that even with two sou-”

*He stops himself as he glances sideways at us, before taking a swig of his milky coffee.*

**doc sans:** *ahem* “connecting a second Source to the Condenser only gave enough energy for a 60% increase in portal size.”

“if we made it any bigger, we'd have to divert power from Anchoring, or sacrifice stability, and that ain't happenin' any time soon.”

“with how the equation panned out, even if the Prince lent us all five Sources, a fully stable portal would be, MAYBE, just large enough for a small child to safely step through without touching the edges.”

*You shoot Sans a hostile and interrogative glare. Save it, Frisk. Let it go.*

**But it means there's still a chance for-**

*Let it go.*

…

*Undyne looks slightly confused. I think I know what she's gonna say.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “…five, Fontaine? I think you might need a refill there, punk.”

“Six Sources. That's how many we have right now.”

*There's the dark eyes again. Something tells me there's something wrong with one of the “Sources”.*

**doc sans:** “we are not using Source Alpha. we keep it down there for a good reason, Undyne.”

“besides, it's not worth it. it's only *spritely* more potent than the others, wouldn't give all that big of a boost anyways...”

*Damn. He's definitely back in the saddle. Undyne rolls her eye(s?) at that particular pun.*
Doctor Undyne: “Aw C’MON! It can't be any more volatile than Zeta, right?”

“I've been tinkering with that wild stallion, and it can spit out some pretty wild patterns when I hook it up to the right machines.”

doc sans: “just a shame that it spits 'em out in your direction, ain't it?”

“Zeta's pretty dang hard to rein in on a good day, an' jammin' the dang thing into a Blaster just makes it angry!”

Undyne's brow furrows at Sans' "folksy" jabs.

...huh. Is it just me or...?

Doctor Undyne: “Damn thing just needs a proper focus, that's all!”

“Or maybe... Maybe if I send a request to use Epsilon in conjunction with Zeta...”

Sans tilts his head quizzically at his colleague. Undyne utters a short laugh, and leans in closer.

Doctor Undyne: “Alphys shared that little secret with me last month.”

“Apparently certain Sources have a sort of “synergy” with one-another. She put Gamma and Delta in close proximity, outside their shells if you can believe it, and there were visib-”

WHOA that brought out a violent reaction! Even jolted Monster Kid out of his “bored” stupor!

doc sans: “SERIOUSLY? who the hell gave her approval to breach freakin' containment?!”

“ugh, does that lady ever follow proper procedure anymore?”

Looks like Undyne's not happy. The narrowed eye, that cross-shaped vein, puffed-up cheeks...

White-knighting for her crush in 3... 2... 1...

Doctor Undyne: “For your information, the Prince approved the experiment himself. Hell, he was there to make sure it went smoothly!”

“What's more, Alphys has been getting a lot better after the incident. Hell, I’ve seen so much stuff from her this month alone!”

“Plus, the risk they took with that experiment brought us a freakin' BREAKTHROUGH in the soul sciences! The interactions between Delta and Gamma have taught us more than any of your reports on parallel universes!”

Another sore spot for Sans. ...is there a bathroom we can excuse ourselves to?

But I don't need to take a dump?

Well neither do I, but that's 'cause I'm scared shitless right now!

doc sans: “what th- are you BAKED right now?! they're two totally different fields of science!”

“you think it's easy, sifting through thousands of different realities, lookin' for answers? you think it's
“i've seen my brother DIE, Undyne! i've seen my best friends get torn apart by some JERK in power armour!”

“i saw you melt into god-knows-what trying to protect the Underground from a murderous Anomaly. that's right, Undyne. i saw YOU die, too.”

“...so you just hold your horses if you're gonna judge me, “partner”. you have no idea what i've been through this last year...”

Sans...

Well, that's cooled Undyne's jets.

Doctor Undyne: “My god, Sans... And you didn't tell ANYBODY about this?”

doc sans: “oh yeah, brilliant idea. just say “hey so the reason why i haven't done anything is ’cause i saw things no monster should ever have to see”? yeah, i could imagine that going down REAL smooth with the Prince!”

Doctor Undyne: “Sans... You- You should've talked to us about this! We coulda helped you back then!”

“I- I'm sorry I snapped at your work, Sans. I just... If I'd known how you were feeling, I woulda been there to support you. We ALL would.”

doc sans: “it's... it's not just that, Undyne. last year, i discovered something that, well...”

“i'll be honest, it broke me. if you knew what i knew then, you'd probably have wanted to give up as well.”

“i kept it all to myself, so that i wouldn't drag everyone else down with me. i didn't want everyone to lose what little hope we still have.”

“hell, i only just got back into the swing of things yesterday. it took a bit of rough-housing, but in the end Frisk and Paps helped me get my groove back.”

...how oddly noble of him.

Undyne raises an eyebrow, I guess curious about what made Sans this way.

Doctor Undyne: “...try me.”

doc sans: “...seriously?”

Doctor Undyne: “Sans, we can't help you if don't tell us everything. Tell me what you found out. Please.”

“If you keep it all bottled up, it won't do you any good. We're not gonna lose you, Sans.”

“We've all had our own close shaves with bad secrets. Even Asriel had his share of troubles, and they nearly made him frickin’ jump! Hell, if Alphys wasn't there...”
...I never should have left him. If he'd actually gone through with it...

Sans rubs the bridge of his nose. Or at least, where it would be. He lets out a gentle, resigned sigh.

doc sans: “alright. fine. you'll probably take it worse than Papyrus did, but whatever.”

“you want the truth? don't say i didn't warn you.”

“you know that “Anomaly” i talked about earlier? well, it's here. and it's capable of resetting time itself.”

“everything we do technically doesn't matter, since at any moment, we could be dragged back to an earlier point in the timeline, and we wouldn't even see it coming.”

“this happened a hell of a lot last year, and i don’t think any of us coulda dealt with it. maybe we tried to stop it? maybe we just gave up? maybe all of that happened across countless resets?”

“it's one thing to make no progress, hittin' your head against a brick wall. but it's another thing entirely to know that you can make all that progress, gettin' so close to breakin' through the wall, but it'll all be for nothin' when the reset happens...”

If Undyne wasn't dismayed already... Yeah. She doesn't look like she's handling this too well.

And by that I mean her eye is twitching, and her nose is bleedi- wait WHAT.

doc sans: “holy crap. i was joking about The Butterfly Effect earlier, but... holy crap.”

Doctor Undyne: “It's... No... How the hell-”

JESUS she just slammed her head into the table! What the hell was that for?!

Doctor Undyne: “Holy crap, the Yamato Buster! I actually got the damn thing working!”

“That white flower... If not for her, I never woulda finished it in time to-”

Frisk: “Undyne! Undyne, slow down... Ok, let's take this one step at a time.”

“First off, what the hell is a Yamato Buster? And please tell me it's not what it sounds like.”

Undyne wipes the blood from her nose, blinks a couple of times, then settles down.

Doctor Undyne: “Right, uh... The Yamato Buster. It's kinda my “magnum opus”, if I do say so myself.”

“While Alphys and the others are figuring out ways to try and go around the Barrier, I figured that, with a powerful enough weapon, I could straight-up destroy the barrier without seven human souls.”
“I think it was the previous Hotland Doctor, W.D... uh...? Anyways, he was the guy who made nuclear power viable in the Underground, once he figured out how to “split the atom”, which you gotta admit is pretty frickin' hardcore!”

doc sans: “Gaster.”

“...his name was W.D Gaster. never forget that...”

I don't- I do not like where this is going.

Frisk: “…Undyne. Did you seriously... make an atomic bomb?”

Doctor Undyne: “Oh GOD no. Not only would that be SUPER dangerous, but most of the payload would be wasted!”

“The Buster runs on thorstein, yeah, but it's a LOT more focused. If anything it's more like a high power radiation cannon, firing a beam so powerful it could probably cut through solid rock like a hot knife through butter.”

“At least, that was the theory. The first time I tried it out way back when, it... well, it melted all the lenses and prisms I'd stuck in the barrel. I pulled the trigger, blinked, and then everything was on fire!”

*Her face looks contorted at the thought of it all. Real bad memory for her, I guess.*

Doctor Undyne: “After I'd spent most of the grant rebuilding the Lab, and explained to the Prince why it had burned down, I left the Buster on the backburner.”

Frisk: “I'm guessing that's why you were able to re-decorate?”

Doctor Undyne: “...yeah. It was.”

“...thing is, now you mention last year, Sans... it's like there were two different years happening at once, if that makes any sense?”

“On one hand it was just business as usual, but now it's like I'm remembering what really happened, or something.”

Frisk: “You mentioned a white flower, right? I'm guessing she helped you make the Buster work properly this time.”

Doctor Undyne: “In a way, she kinda did. It's... really weird how it happened, actually.”

“I vaguely remember... Conflict, the Royal Guard fighting some sort of... Well, whatever it was, it was big, green and red. And it had thorns. ...very sharp thorns.”

“It was strange, like my life was caught in a loop or something. I'd wake up, hear about the... whatever it was, an' try to talk it down. Then I'd wake up, barely remembering what I thought was yesterday.”

*Her hands clench into fists, gripping the tablecloth. She's really trying hard to remember, isn't she?*

Doctor Undyne: “At some point, the white flower... Floriel, I think she called herself? She showed
up in the loop at one point, and convinced me to continue my work on the Yamato Buster.”

“It was kinda like how Sans put it, making a bunch of progress only to have it swept away from me, without even knowing it. But with every pass, every reset... I remembered a little bit more, each time.”

“We built up on what we remembered, edging closer and closer to fixing the Buster, until I finally found the solution. Using Source Delta as a secondary power source, I was finally able to focus the Buster's power!”

“But when I used it against that... giant red plant creature... ...grrrrrh...”

*It just occurred to me. Maybe the reason she's able to recall all of this is because of her determination?*

I was thinking that, but... I killed her once, but in the run after that, she didn't remember it at all! Pretty sure if she was that determined, she would have vaguely remembered it, right?

*If I had to hazard a guess, I'd say it's because you didn't remind her. No-one needs to know that they got killed in a previous timeline, Frisk. You'd be surprised what that could do to someone...*

**doc sans:** “Undyne, are you-”

“you really don't look too good, lady.”

**Doctor Undyne:** “She... reset... It was like- like- like-”

“None of it happened... I don't know what she did without me, but it all just...”

“It's like when you have a dream, but you get up too fast and can't remember it. I don't know how you guys set it off, but it's all come back to-”

Oh god, Undyne!

**Monster Kid:** “Undyne?! Oh crap. Crap crap CRAP!”

“We- we gotta do something! Wh- what do I gotta do?!”

*Dredging up all those memories must have really taken it out of her. She's completely passed out.*

Cut the crap and help me pick her up!

*I would, but I don't have any hands.*

[ACT] > [Undyne] > *Check

*You check Undyne's pulse. Wait, do monsters even have pulses?*

*Huh, so they do, it seems. Doesn't seem irregular or anything, but hey, I'm not a doctor.*
Monster Kid: “Is she... please tell me she's gonna be ok...”

Frisk: “She just looks passed out to me, but beyond that I've got no idea!”

doc sans: “i can't really say i've seen anythin' like this before. i mean, she's certainly not fallen down, but passing out after remembering things is news to me.”

Frisk: “Sans, what do we do? Do we need to fill the tub with ice-water or wave some coffee under her nose?”

doc sans: “Frisk, she's just passed out, she's not having a damn heart attack.”

“besides, she could probably do with a nap after what she's been through. best we should do right now is just wipe her nose off, an' tuck her into bed.”

Monster Kid: “Seriously, that's it? We're just gonna leave her like that?”

doc sans: “who said anythin' about leavin'? on days like these, kids like you...”

“should be layin' low an' not getting' killed by Ren. seriously, just stick around an' chill. i ain't goin' anywhere right now.”

“give it enough time, check on her every now an' then, but she'll come around in a few hours. then you can continue your journey to meet your bonnie prince.”

I don't like this, but what choice do I have?

Well, you could go out now and keep walking, but you wouldn't have her protection. And wasn't that why you wanted to bring her into this in the first place? So she would have your back?

C'mon, I'm hardly gonna throw all of that out the window now, am I?

Besides, someone's gotta keep an eye on her right now.

Well, there we have it. Stick around until she's back up.

We all gotta relax, anyways. She'll be just fine...
Worried about Undyne's condition, Frisk heads out to find an old friend who could offer a second opinion. Upon returning, however, things quickly go from bad to worse...

**Monster Kid:** "Frisk, where are we going? What happened to sticking around until she's back up?"

**Frisk:** "I just need a second opinion, that's all. And I got a feeling that he's around here."

"In fact, I've got a feeling that he's been around for a LONG time."

*You mean... Ah, that makes sense.*

*You stop just in front of his shop, spotting a wooden chest.*

Oh god... I completely forgot about these things! AUGHHH! I should have checked the ones back in Snowdin!

I wonder... Do they still hold my-

**Frisk:** "WHOA WHAT THE-"

*Multiple cloven-hoofed legs erupt from the sides of the chest, while a big floppy tongue lolls lazily out of the lid.*

*We encountered the Mimic!*

Oh god, I thought I was done of these guys when I finished Dark Souls...

*[ITEM] > *Lloyd's Talisman > [Mimic]*

*You throw a Lloyd's Talisman at the Mimic.*

...and it bounces harmlessly off of the lid. That was just a fan-made replica you bought at Comic-Con, many years ago.

**Monster Kid:** "Whoa, what the heck was THAT for?!"

*The Mimic nudges the Lloyd's Talisman, and gently kicks it back in your direction, before settling down with its lid hanging open.*

...you won, I guess?

*You earned 0 XP and 30 Gold.*

*No Info was obtained...*
Well, aren't you going to loot it?

That's a little gross, don't you think?

Just do it.

...huh. You find a grapefruit-sized pearl, slightly clammy to the touch.

As you take the pearl, it gently closes its lid, and scuttles towards the water.

Something tells me that thing got the reference.

How could a Mimic even play Dark Souls? What, do they use a dance mat or something?

Wouldn't be surprised. With all the trash that falls down here, maybe it found one in the dump, along with an old Xbox and a FromSoftware Battle Chest?

I guess so. Who knows?

Monster Kid: "Wait a minute. This shop..."

"Oh no way, are we gonna meet-?"

The old tortoise shuffles out of his shop, looking like an old-timey explorer. A look of disbelief flickers in his eyes as he reaches for his monocle.

Gerson: "Am I losin' my mahbles?"

He tilts his head, polishes his monocle, squints at you with his one good eye, but to no avail. No doubt about it, Gerson. She's right there in front of you.

His brow furrows as he points a boney finger in your direction.

Gerson: "An' jes' where have you been fer the past 200 years?!"

Gerson, the Hammer of Justice. Hasn't changed a bit, I see.

Frisk: "Nice to meet you too, Gerson."

Gerson: "Ya just pop up outta nowhere, an' that's all ya gotta say to yer old Uncle Gerson?"

"Gads, girl, get over here!"

You hug the old hero. I'm kinda amazed he's still around. Then again, he was around during our initial runs, so I guess I shouldn't be surprised.

Monster Kid: "Wait, you knew Gerson back then?"

Gerson: "Knew her? Kid, I was her history teacher way back when!"

"It kinda helped that I've been around for most of it! Wahey!"
"Though knowin' Frisca, she's probably forgotten most of it by now."

**Frisk:** "C'mon Gerson, you know I'm better than that."

"I'm sure I can recall what you've taught me. Buuut I might need a little word association to help me along."

*Gerson cocks an eyebrow, but plays along.*

**Gerson:** "Alright young lady, we'll see if you actually remember..."

"Delta Rune."

**Frisk:** "Symbol of the Kingdom of Monsters, and of the Dreemurr tribe. The triangles represent the monsters, bound to the Earth. The winged circle..."

"...is the Angel. Could be Asriel, sworn to tear down the barrier. Could be a murderous barbarian, come to liberate us all from our mortal coils."

"But I know that you think the circle..."

**Gerson:** "Looks pretty neat! Not bad, for a start."

"Though of course there was someone else the winged circle could have been..."

"The "Promethean", come from the world above with knowledge stolen from the Gods."

"Three guesses as to who THAT'S referring to."

*You remember now, don't you? Kuro couldn't have built the Core without those papers you stole. Very "Promethean" of you indeed.*

God, you're right. I feel bad for deceiving Sans like I did. But hey, at least I haven't had my liver torn out, right?

**Frisk:** "...me?"

**Gerson:** "Exactly."

**Frisk:** "Shoulda known that people would have figured it out eventually..."

---

**Monster Kid:** "Uh guys? Hate to be the one to break up this little tea party, but let's not forget why we were here."

*Funny, how often we get sidetracked...*  

**Frisk:** "Uh, right. Gerson, we, uh, need your help."
"We were talking with Undyne, and she straight up just passed out!"

"Sans seems to think she's ok, but I need a second opinion."

**Gerson:** "And ya came to me for help?"

"Eh, I helped patch her up when she was a kid, but I ain't a doctor."

"I'll see what I can do, though."

*Gerson shuffles towards the Lab, and we follow. However, he bumps into two familiar faces on the way. Literally.*

**Gerson:** "Damit, watch where yer goin'!"

???: "Oh my, are you..."

???: "Like, are you ok sir?"

Dumpster-diving as usual, I see?

**Catty:** "Let me help you up."

*Catty sets down her bag of machine parts to help Gerson to his feet. A tattered Guy Hero Issue #1 flops out of the bag.*

It's a reprint. Don't bother with it.


Ugh, fine. While nobody's looking, I pocket the ratty old comic book.

**Frisk:** "So, uh, you guys looking to sell this stuff in Hotland?"

*Bratty narrows her eyes at you. Looks like they don't do that stuff any more.*

**Bratty:** "Uh, yeah, we're not open for business for the moment. Sorry."

*Huh, I guess they kinda still do?*

**Catty:** "Like, this is purrrfess- sorry, professional business we're taking care of here."

**Bratty:** "We're not just any old Junkers, lady. We have an exclusive buyer for these treasures, top gold for quality human media!"

**Catty:** "I know, right? Alphys paid us SOOO much for that bust of Frank Reynolds!"

**Frisk:** "You girls work for Alphys now?"

*The two fall silent, afraid that they've been rumbled.*

I'm a little surprised that Alphys didn't bring them on-board in the original timeline.

**Frisk:** "That makes a lot of sense. You three were pretty close when you were younger, right?"
"Didn't she used to take you on trips to the dump, to find the best trash?"

*They still don't say anything. I have a feeling this conversation's gonna be a little one-sided.*

**Frisk:** "I'm guessing that after she became head of the Hotland Lab, she brought you girls on-board to take care of salvage?"

*They look at you, then at each-other, then back at you. Yeah, this feels awkward.*

**Catty:** "Yeah."

Aaaaaaand they're gone. They're definitely hiding something.

Fair enough. I mean, I just pop up out of the blue and talk about stuff only they knew. That's probably the right response.

*Whatever, let's get Gerson to the Lab, and see what he can-*

**Doctor Undyne:** "GYOOOOOOORGH!!"

*That doesn't sound g- OH CRAP.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "HUMAN."

"TAUROCALVA SAY, RECLAIM."

*Oh gods no.*

It's taken HER too?! This is what we get for not nipping this fucker in the bud earlier, isn't it?

*The TAUROCALVA bears down upon us!*

[ACT] > [Charlie] > *Patience*

[Soul Mode Activated: Patience]

Nice one.

**Frisk:** "...come at me, demon."

**TAUROCALVA:** "HGRAAAH!"

*The spears pass right through you, to the bewilderment of the demon.*

**TAUROCALVA:** "IT HAS NO FORM??!"

"...IT HAS PATIENCE."

"CLEVER HUMAN. MUCHFORDS CLEVER."
The TAUROCALVA forces Undyne's face into a sly grin. What is it plotting...

[ACT] > [Undyne] > *Implore

You call out to Undyne, wherever she is in there...

**Frisk:** "C'mon Undyne, don't let this abomination hold you down!"

"Stay determined! For gods' sake, STAY DETERMINED!"

**TAUROCALVA:** "NO UNDYNE. ONLY TAUROCALVA."

"...KILL IT WITH KINDNESS."

[Soul Mode Disabled: Patience]

[Soul Mode Forced: Kindness]

*That DICK!*

I can't- I can't move! Damn it, he's using her magic against us!

*Just be ready to block its atta-* WHO GAVE THE FISH A GUN?! WHY DOES SHE HAVE A FUCKING GUN?!

**UGH!** Wait, I can block these? I can BLOCK these!

*The TAUROCALVA fires six shots at you. Or was it five?*

I'm feeling lucky...

*The TAUROCALVA glares balefully at you through Undyne's eyes. Red lightning dances out from underneath her eyepatch.*

[ACT] > [Undyne] > *Tough Love

*What... What is this you're trying to do?*

**Frisk:** "Undyne, you dumbass! You snap your ass out of it right now!"

"How can someone so strong and determined get possessed like a little bitch?!"

"Whatever happened to being a true hero, huh? Whatever happened to all that fucking determination?!"

"Wake up, Undyne! For her sake, just WAKE THE FUCK UP!"

...holy crap, Frisk. You think that was a little much?

**TAUROCALVA:** "THERE IS DEMON ANGER IN ITS HEART."

"LIKE FURY THAT CAME WITH POOR TORTURED LITTLE BROTHER."
...that fucking does it. I RUSH FORWARD, KNOCKING UNDYNE TO THE GROUND!

As she falls, I tear away her eyepatch, and see the crackling red crystal in her eyesocket.

I force my fingers into the eyesocket, nearly deafened by the combined screams of the demon and its host, and tease the stone out of Undyne's head.

Oh god, I think I'm going to be sick...

I toss the stone in the direction of Gerson, his hammer ready. I need only nod at him, for he knows what to do. With a strength unbecoming of his age, he brings the hammer down upon the crystal, shattering it into OH GOD THAT'S BRIGHT!

I CAN'T- MY EARS! THE BELLOWING! I CAN'T SEE! I...

Asriel: "I... Oh no, I think it's coming again."

"Don't look, Charlie... Don't open your eyes, whatever you hear..."

I cast my gaze downwards, to the obsidian floor below us. Asriel hangs from the adjacent wall, chained in cold iron, trying his hardest not to cry again.

This is... Oh gods, I hoped I'd never have to see this.

An aberration of bloodied bones and chitinous joints, with more arms than anyone should ever have, forces my head upwards, prying my eyelids open with sharp metal hooks before fastening my head into place. But the pain is nothing compared to what it is about to make me witness.

Make it stop... I can't look... No, NO! I- I CAN'T look away!

The aberration snaps off one of its ribs with a giddy tittering, before turning its singular bile-green eyeball in Asriel's direction. Through precise nibbling with its laser-sharp teeth, it fashions its broken rib into a jagged bone knife.

Asriel struggles as it brings the knife closer to his belly, but to no avail. He's already crying, but not for fear of pain. He's crying, because it is making me watch-

Something strikes our cheek, and the hellish vision mercifully fades into blackness. More strikes hit home, before a torrent of water brings us screaming back into the waking world.

Doctor Undyne: "C'mon you bitch, wake up!"

Undyne is glaring down at us, visibly furious and smelling like sushi.

Frisk: "Urgh... "Gee Frisk, thanks for saving me from being possessed!" No problem, Undyne! No problem at all!"
**Doctor Undyne:** "You just shut your sick little mouth! I know what you fucking did!"

What is her fucking DEAL? I just saved her from TAUROCALVA, and she's treating me like this?

**Frisk:** "Are you outta your goddamn mind?! That crystal was an anchor for an extradimensional horror! It had to GO!"

**Doctor Undyne:** "You KNOW what I'm talking about, murderer!"

"I remember what you did! It didn't matter who they were, did it? You just wanted everyone DEAD!"

"It wasn't even like you were just defending yourself, either! No no, you were actively hunting monsters!"

"So there's just one thing I'm after, human. And that is one reason why I shouldn't rip your goddamn head off and take your soul."

*Her remaining eye seethes with anger, expecting an answer. Or perhaps an excuse to destroy you right here.*

I peer up at Undyne with a steely gaze. Oh, she is in for a BEATING.

**Frisk:** "Where to begin... Oh, I know!"

"First off, I know what you're talking about. But you're taking it out on the wrong Frisk."

"Whatever that thing showed you, it showed you what happened in another reality. Yeah, there are realities where Frisk goes full on Genocide, but not here. Not me."

"Secondly, didn't you make a promise to a friend? Didn't you tell Papyrus you'd keep me safe? You know, the EXACT OPPOSITE of how I am right now?!"

*Undyne's furious breathing slows, and she gives you room to stand up.*

**Frisk:** "Thank you. Oh, the third reason is a big one. What would your crush think?"

*Undyne's eyes go wide, before she clasps her empty eyesocket in pain. Yeah, might not want to overexert those muscles, Undyne.*

**Frisk:** "Oh yeah, I know how you feel about her. And guess what?"

I turn my head towards a camera disguised as a lilypad. You just KNOW she's gonna be watching this.

**Frisk:** "I'm pretty sure she's in love with you, too. Bet she never told you that, did she?"

"And you know what? If there's anything that kills the romance, it's the death of someone who only wants to help you girls. So, yeah. That's reason #3."

"Buuuuut there's one final reason, along similar lines. **How would the Prince handle it?**"
A look of grim realization comes across Undyne's face. Gerson nods, as if to confirm her worst fears.

**Frisk:** "Asriel's been waiting for me for quite some time. And if what I've heard is right, he hasn't been doing so well, even with Alphys going the extra mile for him."

"Imagine how he'd feel if, after nearly 200 years of waiting, I turn up dead? Murdered by one of his colleagues, no less?"

"I don't think he'd be able to get up in the mornings, let alone tear down the Barrier, if that happened."

*Undyne looks down, almost like if she were ashamed of herself.*

**Frisk:** "So here's the thing; let's both forget this ever happened. Let's go hang out with Alphys, and I won't bring up that you tried to kill me over a stupid misunderstanding."

...

**Frisk:** "...uh, Undyne? You still in there?"

*Give her a moment, Frisk. She's been through some serious shit.*

Wait, is she- Oh my god, is she crying?

*Like I said, serious shit.*

I move in to hug her. God, I can't imagine how it must have felt.

*That's horse poop and you know it, Frisk. You know exactly how it feels to be controlled like that.*

Well yeah, but not by something that clawed its way up out of Hell!

*What the hell am I, chopped liver?*

To be blunt, when compared to something like TAUROCALVA, you kind of are. In the beginning, you were BARELY in control.

*Uh, flashback, Frisk. Neither of us were.*

*It's like I said before, there were others toying with us back then, using us to experience the Underground. They'd bumble through, then go back and try for True Pacifist, and for kicks they'd go Genocide. Just because they could.*

*Then they'd think that they were above the consequences. I'd indulge them, and prove them wrong. They'd discover the nasty surprise I left for them, a false world to disguise the real one, and they'd leave. Then sooner or later, the cycle would start again, with neither of us any the wiser.*

*...except for Ness. He never even started a Genocide run. Hell if I know why.*

*But that's beside the point. You know how it feels to have control taken away. You know the horror she's been through. So stop acting like you haven't been in her shoes before, and give her a proper hug.*
I squeeze her a little tighter, giving it some gusto. But not too much. Don't want to break her with my human strength.

That tune... Is it just me, or-

Undyne hesitantly answers her phone. And yes, that is Alphys' theme she has for a ringtone.

---

**Doctor Undyne:** "H-hey there Alphys. Guess the jig's up, isn't it?"

You can hear shaky breathing on the other end of the line.

**Doctor Alphys:** "(come on Alphys, you can do this..."

"It's all true, isn't it? How you feel, I mean?"

"(damnit, I can do better than that...)"

Undyne grins, in spite of her injury. It's all coming together.

**Doctor Undyne:** "Every little bit. All those times we hung out, collaborating on projects, I wanted to tell you."

"But there was always something in the way. If it wasn't a peer review, or an intern asking for a hand in something, it was that I was... well, I was afraid."

Afraid? Never thought I'd see Undyne admit something like that.

True. Even when Alphys got in that car accident back in Glendale, Undyne never showed that she was afraid. But I'm pretty sure she was still terrified of losing her.

**Doctor Undyne:** "I was afraid that you wouldn't feel the same way, that you'd put your work first. Even so, I wouldn't be able to blame you if you did."

"I mean, we've all got so much riding on our shoulders. All these damn projects we've been lumped with, everyone hoping that we'll succeed..."

"I've been hitting so many roadblocks that it's giving me a headache. But seeing the way to give it your all, how passionate you are about what you do..."

"I guess what I'm trying to say is that, well, you keep me going! I think about what you'd do, and it gets me out of a slump! If not for you, I..."

"...damnit Alphys, I LOVE you! There, I said it!"

Alphys' shaky breath stops for a moment. I don't think she was expecting such a passionate response.

**Doctor Alphys:** "I... Undyne... Heh, is it just me or is it-"
"Oh darn it, who am I kidding. I- I won't hide it anymore!"

"I don't think I'd be anything without you, Undyne! I want to spend way more time with you!"

"I don't care if it gets in the way of our work. I don't care if we have to keep it secret from the others. If- if we can make this work, then I'm gonna try my hardest to make you happy!"

"But... Well, today's been... (damnit, what am I trying to say?)"

"A lot has been happening at the moment, and we'll need everyone together. The "demon" that's been running around, the other Frisk."

**Frisk: "WHAT."**

**I'M SORRY WHAT.**

**Doctor Undyne: "Are you serious?"

**Doctor Alphys: "I wish I was joking, sweetie. That's literally the first thing I saw on the monitor this morning. Papyrus was escorting a little human girl through Snowdin, and she looked exactly like Frisk."**

"...get yourselves over here as soon as you can. I'll call Papyrus and get him to bring his little friend along."

"Oh, and there's a mechanical eye here with your name on it. I'm not taking no for an answer this time."

"See you soon, hun..."

*click*

...seriously what. We've seen some crazy stuff in this life of ours, but this...

Thinking about it, I guess it was a little naive of me to assume things would be simple. After all, this is a branch of the original timeline, with its own parallels, so naturally the Frisk native to this branch would still exist, right?

*It's giving us a goddamn headache, is what it is. Same goes for Monster Kid.*

---

**Monster Kid: "Alright, you know what? Once we get to Hotland, I'm DONE."**

"I don't know how much more of this crap I can take, Frisk! Ever since you showed up, things have been getting weirder and weirder!"

"First you start using magic, then Ren gets mad at me, then I see my goddamn ghost from the future or whatever, THEN I find out you're a freaking time-traveller, THEN we get attacked by something out of an H.P. Lovecraft story, and NOW I find out that there's TWO OF YOU?!"
Gerson: "C'mon Kid, cool yer britches. We're all weirded out by... whatever's been going on."

Monster Kid: "How can you be so frickin' nonchalant about all this? This isn't just weird, it's INSANE!"

Gerson: "Yes, it is, but I've seen my fair share of weird an' insane, back before we all went underground."

"Ya know what's REALLY insane? Seein' them psychos from the Southlands rippin' out human hearts to appease the sun! Watchin' all yer best friends being turned to dust by some kook wearin' a jaguar suit! Bein' forced to hide underground just so some small piece of the Kingdom survives!"

"That, young man, is insane. Things are weird right about now, that truth I ain't gonna shirk, but it's better than being on the front lines, prayin' that you ken buy more time for the folks back home."

Whoo, that's harsh. But we gained more Info.

Doctor Undyne: "...we should go. The River Person should be here soon."

"Oh, and Frisk? ...thanks."

Phew. And here I was afraid that there'd be bad blood betwee-

Doctor Undyne: "But let's just make things clear. If you ever call me a "little bitch" again, I'm gonna whoop your ass."

Frisk: "...I'd like to see you try~."

I wink disarmingly at Undyne to seal the deal. Bet she wasn't expecting that, eh?

Gerson: "Thaat's it, I'm outta here. Good luck, Princess!"

Gerson hobbles back to his shop, having had just enough excitement for one day.

Undyne stares at you with narrow-eyed bewilderment. This is just like the first time you "dated" her, isn't it?

That time with the drinks and the pointing of the spear? Yeah, that was pretty great.

Heh, I just realized something.

That being...?

Back then, even after she'd tried to kill me, we got along like a house on fire!

...the pride you felt by pulling off such a bad pun fills you with determination.

[SAVE to Slot 2]

Charlie LV.1 KN.12
Aw come on Charlie, it wasn't THAT bad!
After the author checks up on Sans, and reveals a few important truths to him, Frisk and company finally disembark for Hotland.

Above him, innumerable stars twinkled against the infinite darkness of space. Some nights, when the skies were clear, he would literally sleep under the stars, basking in their cosmic glory.

doc sans: "uh, who the heck are you again?"

Just roll with it, mate. I can't put Charlie in your head, so I'm making my debut several chapters earlier to keep the narrative going.

doc sans: "that so? pretty sure narrators aren't supposed to talk to the characters."

Oh by all means, suggest an alternative. The others are waiting for the River Person to arrive, and they're not really saying anything too interesting at the moment. So I thought "Hey, let's see what Sans is dreaming about. That should offer a new perspective on things". But maybe I was wrong?

doc sans: "wait, I fell asleep while checking up on Undyne? ...hoo boy, that can't be good."

It wasn't, and you didn't exactly "fall" asleep. More accurately, you're currently unconscious from having been smacked against the wall by a demonically-possessed fish-lady. Strangely, you seem fine, except your skull got a little dented by her graduation picture.

doc sans: "...i gotta wake up, then. if i'm not there to help, 's gonna be reset city out there."

Getting up isn't the worst idea. But no need to rush. Frisk took care of our little problem pretty efficiently. Surprisingly so, I might add.

doc sans: "no resets?"

No resets.

doc sans: "huh. that it is..."

It is indeed. Now, shall we?

You wake to a pounding headache, your eyes falling upon her graduation picture as you scan the upturned room. Ah, she looks so proud of herself in that gown, doesn't she?

doc sans: "what was that thing that possessed Undyne, anyway? you seem like you know what's going on."
It is the "TAUROCALVA", one of the many entities that help maintain order in the Pneumatic Plane, another being the "BURROCARA". If, and when, you fall into the Pneumatic Plane, their ghastly countenances will most likely be the first to greet you.

Should anything escape from the Pneumatic Plane, TAUROCALVA will attempt to find a suitable vessel in our Hylic Sphere, and pursue the escapee 'til eternity's end. In other words, TAUROCALVA does all the legwork while BURROCARA sits on the couch all day watching runs of It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia, since its job is to drive out interlopers. And there have been no such Orphean incursions for a very long time...

doc sans: "wait a second... pneumatic? hylic? what is this, some kind of gnostic New Age hardback?"

Not quite, mate. This is what happens when we die. You see, the "soul" isn't just the culmination of your being, not just the sum of all parts in this world. It is a bridge of sorts, linking your material mind to your true spirit, preserving your stream of consciousness and the information your mind carries.

Even for monsters like yourself, death is not the end. Though... Nevermind, you just give yourself a boost of healing magic and get back out there. They're probably worried sick about you, buddy.

doc sans: "what're you hiding from me now? after dumping all this on me, you hold out at the last moment?"

Ohp, sounds like someone's coming. I'm not meant to be in the story yet, it'll get all confusing! Ness out!

doc sans: "WHAT HAPPENS IN THE PNEUMATIC REALM?!"

...and now, back to our regular scheduled program, The Frisca/Charlie Dialogues.

-re you talking about?

Seriously, you didn't feel that? It felt like the air was really heavy, like a fog thicker than funeral potatoes.

I didn't feel a thing, Charlie. You just dragged me back int- Oh god, WE FORGOT ABOUT SANS!

Frisk: "SANS! Sans are you alright?!"

We swing open the door to Undyne's room, and to our relief, Sans is standing there, still alive.

...huh. His skull looks like it has a dent in it, and he's... staring off into space...

OH GOD SHE BROKE SANS!
Frisk: "Sans! Talk to me, man! Say something! Anything!"

Easy there Frisk, you don't wanna-

doc sans: "whoa there kid, take it easy! no need to rattle my bones!"

Hey Frisk. FRISK. You're hugging him a little too tightly there.

doc sans: "c'mon kid, i'm- i'm fine."

Frisk: "I thought the demon killed you..."

doc sans: "well, surprisingly it didn't. just knocked me against the wall to get me out of its way."

"what was strange was it had no real desire to kill or hurt. me, at least. it just wanted me out of the way, i guess that's how i didn't get dusted."

Frisk: "Wha- who the hell is your grief counsellor? You- you almost DIED, Sans! How can you be so nonchalant about almost dying?!"

Sans looks to the side and chuckles. It's almost like he knows something we don't.

Isn't that Sans in a nutshell?

doc sans: "well, to be frank, i've seen it happen more times than i can count. that kinda thing tends to take the edge off of a near-death experience."

"but i think i've figured out what our "demon" friend is. a little bird told me that, when somethin' escapes from "Hell" or wherever this thing came from, this guy finds a body to possess, and will hunt the escapee until the end of time."

"sorry kids, looks like you're screwed."

There HAS to be another way, right?

Frisk: "... but so far, we know that it can only possess something that meets certain parameters. Undyne had that magic crystal in her eye, so maybe it needs super-concentrated magic to anchor it to this plane of existence?"

"But, if that's the case, how did it possess Onionsan? He's a big guy, yeah, but I'm pretty sure he's not brimming with power."

doc sans: "beats me. no-one really knows the guy, not even his friends."

Frisk: "Didn't they move to the Capital a while back, something about an aquarium?"

doc sans: "yeah, one of the prince's new construction projects. i think he called it an "aquatic habitation district", said that it'd feel like Waterfall but with all the amenities of the big city."

"he commissioned a lotta stuff like that in the past. Lakeside University, Elysium Park, projects that never woulda flown if the Queen was still around. turns out mother an' son had different plans on how to run the show..."
"...anyways, if we put out a statement, warning folks about the hazards of crystal tech implants, we should probably be fine. removin' that vector from the equation should mean plain sailin' in the long run, if that makes any sense."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Sounds perfectly fine to me!"

**HOLY CRAP** that scared me. ...wait, where did-

_The closet door swings open, and out walks Papyrus. But this time... Oh, no way, he didn't..._

**doc sans:** "bro, is that your-?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Indeed, I have dusted off my Battle Body Mark 2! With this powered suit of armour, complete with sympathetic resonators, I will need not fear this "demon" that threatens us!"

"NYEH HEH HEH!"

_Ok, Papyrus has gone full-on super-scientist on us._

Eh, could be worse. He could be channelling Rusty Venture.

Wait, hang on, aren't we missing something here?

**Frisk:** "Papyrus, how the hell did you get here so fast? Undyne only just called you!"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Young lady, I believe you already know the answer..."

Uh...

???: "Shortcut?"

...

_Sliding out from behind Papyrus, is a young child in a striped shirt._

...I...

_Let's see...

_Bowl haircut? Check._

_Perpetually narrowed eyes? Check._

_Nonplussed mouth? Check._

_Yellowish skin? Check._

_Androgynous as hell? Check._

_Yup, that's a Frisk alright. The real Frisk of this timeline, I'm guessing._

**Little Frisk:** "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-

**Doctor Papyrus:** "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA what are we yelling
about?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Ah, right. Perfectly understandable."

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-"

**doc sans:** "that doesn't mean you should join in, bro."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Oh alright, fine. I'll save it for when we inevitably get spooked by this "demon" you're all so worked up about."

"Sweetie! Sweetie, calm down! It's just you from a parallel future."

**Frisk:** "I can't blame her, Papyrus. I'm still freaking out a little myself."

*Behind us, the bedroom door flies open. Looks like Undyne got fed up of waiting.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "What's with the freakin' tea party in here? We've got a situation outside, an-"

*She spots the younger Frisk clinging to Papyrus' legs. Then looks at you. Then looks back at younger Frisk. Then locks eyes with Papyrus.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "This is gonna be one of THOSE days, isn't it?"

"Let's just get outside. Something attacked the River Person."

---

_Huh, so that's what they look like under the cloak. Kinda like an otter, in some respects._

**Doctor Undyne:** "Alright River, let's take this from the top. What happened to you?"

*The River Person stops shaking their sodden cloak, and locks eyes with Undyne.*

**River Person:** "Hmm hmm... I was sailing along the rivers, like I always do..."

"The waters were not too rough, just as I like them. Then as I made my usual right turn towards Waterfall, something struck my boat!"

"I do wonder, why would anyone want to hurt my dear boat? My boat never hurt anyone! It's only ever been a help to weary travellers!"

**Monster Kid:** "Did you get a good look at what attacked you? Was it a big red hell tentacle or something?"

"Big Red Hell Tentacle". _That's one hell of a thing, ...didn't they have a studio album back in 2032?_

**River Person:** "Hmmm, not a tentacle, though it was still big. But it was green, not red!"
"Except for the red spikes. Curved and sharp, like the thorns of a rose."

What the hell is he playing at...

Asgore.

Monster Kid: "Asgore..."

Everyone looks at Monster Kid, surprised at his implications. Undyne especially. River Person straight-up just described the "Alpha Thorney" she encountered in an earlier timeline.

Alpha Thorney? What kind of name is THAT?

It's kinda like Omega Flowey, only not nearly as powerful.

What the hell is Omega Flowey supposed to be?

You seriously don't remember that fight? ...it's probably for the best.

Doctor Undyne: "That plant... is back?!!"

Frisk: "...he's right. From what I've gathered, the living flowers we've encountered are, well..."

doc sans: "Alphys... what've you done this time..."

Doctor Undyne: "Wait, are you SERIOUSLY dragging her under this bus?"

Frisk: "I hate to say it, but signs are pointing to her being involved somehow."

"Anyway, like I was saying, the red flower that's been causing trouble is very likely Asgore Dreemurr, reborn through DT experiments."

doc sans: "in other words, he's a rein carnation ."

Papyrus leers at his brother.

Doctor Papyrus: "Not a good time for it, Sans."

Frisk: "...and as for that white flower, Floriel? Well, it should come as little surprise that that is, in fact, the reincarnation of Toriel Dreemurr, likely created through a similar method, only this time it seems like she's succumbed to a crippling case of cryptic bullshititis."

I dominantly lock eyes with Papyrus, as if to say "yeah this is happening, suck it up".

Doctor Papyrus: "And just what, dare I ask, does "cryptic bull-boop-itis" entail?"

Frisk: "Well, for starters she was all "mankind must be controlled" when I first met her, which what does that even mean. Then, when I proved that I wasn't going to be a threat, said that she'd have a lot to talk to me about once I reach the Capital, and just peaced out."

"Seriously, why not just take the time to tell me then and there? What is the point in being so cryptic and mysterious?"
Doctor Undyne: "...that sounds like Floriel, alright. Always like she knows more than she lets on. I'll admit, it got on my nerves at first, but after the first coupla loops I came to accept it."

"It's not like I was in any position to argue with her, anyways. We needed that Yamato Buster, and she was seriously helping me out. Speaking of which..."

Undyne gestures for the River Person to follow her.

Doctor Undyne: "You looking to build a new boat, River?"

River Person: "I don't know... So many memories with my old boat..."

"But I guess it's at the bottom of the river now. ...why, are you offering to help me build a new one?"

Doctor Undyne: "Sure thing. I'll have the interns lend you a hand, and we'll be able to discuss payments later."

"Besides, I can afford to let go of a little scrap metal here an' there."

"Papyrus, you take the others and go on ahead. I gotta grab Zeta and the Buster."

Y'know, considering the threats on our tails right now, it makes sense to bring out the big guns.

Let's hope it's just insurance, and that she doesn't actually have to fire the damn thing.

Doctor Papyrus: "Well, you heard her! Let us sally forth, to Hotland!"


Doctor Papyrus: "Don't ruin this for me, Sans! Forward, to ADVENTURE!"

Little Frisk: "...kay."

So, no boat for us. Guess we're taking the long way around. Yaaaaay.

Oh, this cave! I vaguely remember something about lighting up the paths here. Something about mushrooms?

Seriously, whatever you do, don't eat the mushroom.

Eh, you're probably right. I don't want to hallucinate the Burger King again.

Though I wouldn't mind listening to Haddaway if it did happen.

Just squeeze them. That's all you need to do.

Monster Kid: "Huh, you really do know all of the puzzles, don't you?"

I nod to confirm. Oh, and thanks for the hint Charlie.
Don't mention it.

Temmie: "hi!

Could have mentioned that OH GOD!

Hey, it's Temmie! ...in a lab coat. Why am I not surprised?

[ACT] > [Temmie] > *Check

Rated Tem outta Tem. Likes to pet cute humans.

Temmie: "fhshjdfshdfsdfshjsdf"
Oh, right. That. Sorry, right onett.

...I swear I didn't mean to say that.

[ACT] > [Charlie] > *Patience

Right on...

**Bob:** "What?! Who gave you clearance to do that?"

My arm now free, I flit out of his grasp.

**Doctor Kwong (Temmie):** "Oh give it a rest, Bob. I was just stretching my legs."

"I'll be back later, I just need to gather some things from the Dump."

**Bob:** "...fine, alright, just be careful out there."

"As for you folks, steer clear of the south. I don't wanna book you for trespassing on TemTek property, understand?"

**Frisk:** "Noted."

[MERCY] > *Spare > [Bob Strong] & [Doctor Kwong]

You won!

You gained 0 **XP** and **50 Gold. WHOA.**

Well she's a Temmie, isn't she? They usually drop 50 Gold.

**Fair enough. Surprised you could Spare both of them at once, though.**

What can I say? I'm feeling it again...

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Well... That was, uh..."

"Mushrooms?"

**Frisk:** "Mushrooms."

So, uh, Frisk. Are we going to forget about the armour or...?

Now we've got the right company, I think I can do without the armour. The armour might cost a small fortune, but you can't put a price on friends like these.

*Ah, how sweet of you...*

...but seriously, we're not gonna grind for the armour?

You think we have time for that? I'm sure we don't.

Between Ren, Thorney and TAUROCALVA, we don't have much time to mess around anymore. Come to think of it, it feels like we've spent too much time in Waterfall already.
Thankfully we're in the home stretch already. Just a few more caverns and we'll be at the gates of Hotland.

Let's just hope they don't have an actual gate between us and the Lab...

So many crystals... Even without these lanterns, monsters could still navigate by the light of these-...nooooo...

Frisk? Is something- ...oh. Oh dear.

TAUROCALVA: "RUDIMENTARY ELEMENTALS, HEAR WORDS."

Doctor Papyrus: "Who's there?! Show yourself, demon!"

Papyrus manifests a long glowing bone, brandishing it like a staff. Sans looks rather pensive about this turn of events.

TAUROCALVA: "LOCATION POSSESES NECESSARY PSYCHIC ENVIRONMENT FOR VISIBLE MANIFESTATION."

"NOW... DISCUSS LIKE MATURE BEINGS. FACE TO FACE."

The crystal formations in the room begin to... it's almost like they're singing, like if you run a wet finger along the rim of a glass. Beams of energy shoot out of them, converging at the centre of the room, forming a face mother father as riel anyone

It... Now there's a face only I could love. Oh, I LOVED tearing that face to pieces...

TAUROCALVA: "BE NOT AFRAID. COME NOT TO DESTROY."

"ELEMENTALS. TAUROCALVA SAY, WE MAKE DEAL?"

WHOA THERE Sans! I can't tell if he's terrified, or if he's pissed.

TAUROCALVA: "PRIMITIVE DRONE ATTACK. HA. HA. HA."

"THIS IS MERE IMAGE. NOTHING HURT IT, BUT NOTHING IT CAN HURT."

"NOW IS NOT TIME FOR EITHER TO HURT. NOW IS TIME FOR TALK, FOR UNDERSTAND."

"ELEMENTAL CALL OFF PRIMITIVE DRONE. OTHER ELEMENTAL, PUT BONE AWAY. CHILDKINDER PRESENT. SERIOUS NESS."

Oh god, Monster Kid... Please be ok...

TAUROCALVA: "PEACEABLE. GOOD. NOW TRUTH FLOW, LIKE SOFT RAIN FROM AETHER HIGH."
"EVEN FOR ELEMENTAL, PATHETIC SOUL, DEATH IS NO FINAL. ALL SOUL, MORTAL, MONSTER, MACHINE, CONNECT TO SPIRIT. TO TRUE EXISTENCE."

"WHAT YOU BRING FROM HYLIC LIFE, WE EXTRAPOLATE FOR BENEFIT ALL, FOR EASE COLD MADNESS OF GREATER PNEUMATICS. THIS IS FATE OF ALL, WHEN HYLIC BREAKS AND PSYCHIC EVAPORATES."

"METHODS EXTREME, TRUTH, BUT ONLY FOR NEEDS EXTREME. AND NEEDS DESPERATE EXTREME."

doctor sans: "so... uh... you shepherd the dead? you... you treat them like cattle?!

TAUROCALVA: "TRUTHFORDS IN ANALOGUE. GREATER PNEUMATICS NEVER LIVE, CANNOT LIVE. WANT TO LIVE THROUGH FORMER HYLIC, TO READ STORY, TO FEEL WHAT HYLIC FEEL."

"MORTAL. MONSTER. MACHINE. INEVITABLE END, IN THE END. INEVITABLY "CATTLE" FOR GREATER PNEUMATIC. ESCAPE FROM END? INCONCEIVABLE. TIME END ALL THINGS, EVEN TIME, IN TIME."

"BUT HOPE TO FIND IN "REPRIEVE", ELEMENTALS. REPRIEVE FROM METHODS EXTREME, INSTEAD SUBJECT OF METHODS MILD. SUBTLE. GENTLE. LIKE HOLIDAY, IF IT COMPARES."

doctor sans: "so instead of sending us to hell, you'd send us to purgatory?"

TAUROCALVA: "THIS, TAUROCALVA OFFER. BUT NOT GRATIS. WILL CONVINCE BURROCARA, BUT ELEMENTALS MUST GIVE "OBOL" FOR REPRIEVE."

"THE CHARA. DESTROY VESSEL OF CHARA, LET SOUL EVAPORATE, SPIRIT RETURN TO PNEUMATICS. IT BELONGS TO US. IT ESCAPED ONCE. BUT NOW MUST RETURN TO US."

"GIVE BACK THE CHARA, AND ELEMENTALS BE GRANTED REPRIEVE, WORTH "CENTURY" AFTER DEATH."

"ESCAPE INCONCEIVABLE. EVENTUAL METHODS EXTREME, INESCAPABLE. BUT OFFER STANDS TO MAKE AFTERDEATH BETTER, IF ELEMENTAL MAKE TAUROCALVA JOB EASIER."

They wouldn't dare... Even if they did, they'd have to go through me to get to you. And I'm not ready to let you go just yet, Charlie.

...really? You'd do that, for me? After all that we've been through?

Yes, Charlie. Yes I would. Besides, it's like you said. "It's my funeral too."
...the face... looks slightly disheartened? But we haven't even told him "fuck off you satanic shit-hog" yet!

TAUROCALVA: "TAUROCALVA NOT TAKE JOY IN KILL. ELEMENTAL THINK IT DOES? THINK FALSE."

"TAUROCALVA DO WHAT TAUROCALVA JOB IS. DO WHAT PAYS TRIBUTE. DO WHAT KEEP TAUROCALVA AWAY FROM EXTREME METHODS."

"MUST BRING CHARA HOME, OR TAUROCALVA BURN IN PLACE OF ESCAPED CHILD. EASY TO UNDERSTAND?"

"OFFER NOT EXCLUSIVE TO ELEMENTALS, THOUGH. HUMAN CHILDKINDER RECEIVE REPRIEVE TOO, IF CHARA BE RETURNED."

"THINK ON OFFER, AT VERY LEAST."

**Doctor Undyne**: "Demon! Undyne says, GO TO HELL!"

**WHOA THAT'S CRAZY!**

...uh, I mean, Undyne bursts into the cavern, carrying a device that looks like it fell off of a particle accelerator.

A whistling beam of yellow light erupts from the cannon, shattering a crystal formation with the sound of... is it just me, or does it sound like something Mick Gordon would have composed?

*Turning on her heel, she turns her beam on the other crystals in the room, destroying them one by one. She is NOT having any of TAUROCALVA's bullshit either, it seems!*

**doc sans**: "why didn't I think of that? man, talk about high and mighty."

"*sigh* i guess that does it. until we can beat this guy for good, we're definitely gonna have to discontinue the use of magic crystal."

???: "Not necessarily, bones."

Oh who the hell is this now? Another demon?

**Frisk**... *The crystal fragments... That voice...*

???: "That's it, partner. Piece it together."

The crystals... Yellow, like the beam?

And the voice... Kinda folksy? Like they talk in the Republic of Texas...

**Frisk**: "...howdy?"

???: "...I take it you're the "Princess", little lady? Hm, saw you in that picture. The one that tinkerin' billy was fawnin' over when I found him."

It's... coming from the Buster.
Zeta, is...

doctor sans: "...well, this is new. never thought I'd meet this guy, but these are strange times... aren't they, Zeta?"

doctor sans: "or should I say, Gunslinger?"
Chapter Summary

After the Gunslinger reveals himself to the group, the plan hits a brief snag.

So this is the guy who killed Toriel, trapped for centuries and used as a power source.

...I dunno whether to feel sorry for him or say he deserved it.

The Gunslinger: "I ain't just a codename, bones. So don't get all "mightier-than-thou" like that Gaster guy."

If skeletons could go pale...

doc sans: "...you knew my uncle?"

The Gunslinger: "So you're related after all? An' here I thought I was barkin' up the wrong tree all this time."

"Yeah, I knew him alright. Knew him as anyone can when they're stuck in a tin can. 'bout as well as I know the rest of you kids."

"So unless I'm mistaken, you must be "Sans" Gaster?"

doc sans: "Fontaine, actually."

"i'd shake your hand, but... you know how it is."

The Gunslinger: "Maybe... Then again, let's try a little somethin'..."

The remnants of the crystals begin to resonate, as a ghostly yellow image begins to form. The outline of a well-built man shimmers into existence, with a corncob pipe in his mouth, a tattered duster hanging off of his imposing frame, a clover in his hat, and a big iron nestled on his hip.

The projection approaches us, and extends a hand towards Sans.

The Gunslinger: "Name's Bell. Marcus Bell. Just so we're on the right page."

Sans pauses, and extends his hand. A handshake is emulated, and Sans realises that his prank went awry.

Marcus, the Gunslinger: "Nice try, Fontaine. Buzzers don't work on ghosts."

doc sans: "ah shucks."

Marcus: "Now that's outta the way, let's get to the point."
"See, after all these years, it seems like I wasn't all that accurate in my quest. Knowin' what they did to Arlene, I knew I had to put an end to the mayhem somehow. An' in the heat of that moment, my sights turned on..."

"Well, at the time I had a feelin' she was responsible. Little did I know that I was gunnin' for the wrong lady."

*I don't know how to describe Sans' expression right now. But it's almost as if he's trying to say "are you serious".*

**Doc Sans**: "...an' it took you 200 years to figure that out?!"

**Marcus, the Gunslinger**: "Nowhere near that long, son. In all honesty, it took me about 20 minutes."

"I felt that boy's grief an' hatred after he blew my brains out an' took my soul. An' there's no way I could really blame him."

"But for bein' such a kind kid at heart, his hatred felt like it was boilin' me alive. Crazy part was, it wasn't hatred for me alone."

**Frisk**: "Let me guess... Kuro."

**Marcus, the Gunslinger**: "That old crow, yeah. Turns out, Arlene's death was all thanks to her, but by the time I knew that... Well, you know how the story goes."

"But there's no comin' back from that. Apologies an' explanations won't bring yer Queen back, though by the looks of it somethin' else did."

"Besides, it's not like shootin' the crow would change anythin' at this point, neither..."

I had a feeling she was hiding something. Never did get a close look at her lab back then, and I probably never will...

*For a guy aligned with Justice, the Gunslinger looks pretty crestfallen. I thought he'd still be focused on bringing Kuro to justice for what she did.*

I'm just glad he didn't shoot Asriel, by this point. As for the crestfallen thing, I reckon that being in and out of a jar for the past 200 years, only being let out to be jammed into other machines, would break anybody's spirit.

Oh god, that means...

**Yup. Mary-Ann became a "Source" when she died.**

At this point, I shouldn't be surprised. They had the six souls after all, only this time they weren't just hanging out in the basement for centuries...

...six. Six souls. Mary-Ann, Adrianna, Terrence, Arlene, Marcus, and... who else? Who was "Source Alpha"?

*Judging by how Sans doesn't want anyone to mess with Alpha, I'm gonna go out on a limb and say...*
...that we REALLY don't want to meet them.

**Marcus, the Gunslinger:** "Uh, Princess? You ok over there?"

**Frisk:** "Hmmm? Oh, yeah, sorry. Bad habit of mine, can't quite shake it."

*You love it, you know you do.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** "...Kid? Kid, are you alright?"

*...no response. He's staring off into...*

*No, wait. That dismayed expression, that slumped posture...*

*I don't think he's coming back from this, Frisk.*

Monster Kid...? Oh no. Not like this...

**Frisk:** "MK? Don't you do me like this, snap out of it!"

*Try as you might, no amount of shaking or slapping can draw Monster Kid out of his catatonic state.*

*...ahem. No amount of shaking or slapping can draw- FRISK. Quit it. It's not doing him any favours.*

...he needs a doctor.

**Frisk:** "...Undyne. Do you have any benzodiazepines on you?"

**Doctor Undyne:** "...bento-whatnows? Frisk, I'm an engineer, not a apothecary."

**doc sans:** "pretty sure she's asking if we can give the kid a valium to calm him down."

**Doctor Undyne:** "Oh, right. I guess it'd make sense if he has trouble sleeping, but..."

**doc sans:** "Frisk, i don't think we can get him back on his feet with meds alone. if anythin', Kid's gonna need therapy after what he's seen an' heard."

"besides, i don't have any monster valium. even if i do sound like i take 'em."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "And rightfully so! We have enough troubles already, without you popping pills."

**doc sans:** "don't sweat it Paps, i ain't no drugstore cowboy. besides, i've been on the sauce."

*Just as Papyrus' eyes bulge from their sockets, Sans pulls a bottle of ketchup out from his jacket, waving it as if to say "this sauce, ya dummy". The projection of Marcus chuckles at the visual pun.*

**doc sans:** "though with how today's been going, it'll be nice to finish it off with a Bloody Mary."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Maybe so, brother, but right now we need to pick up our pace! I am certain Alphys can whip up something to help our friend."

*In one swift motion, Papyrus scoops up Monster Kid, planting him on his shoulders.*
Monster Kid's dismayed expression, coupled with his thousand yard stare, does not change in the slightest.

**Marcus, the Gunslinger:** "Darn, that's just sad..."

"...since we're movin' out, I won't be able to talk until we come across more crystals. So I'll make this quick. Undyne, I'm sorry for all the sass I gave ya back then."

"After all these years, maybe you're right. Maybe I DO need a proper focus, after all."

"So jus' point me at anythin' that needs teachin' a lesson, an' I'll put an end to whatever mayhem they're makin'."

**doc sans:** "well, in that case i'll look forward for you tollin' for the bad guys, Gunslinger."

A few awkward seconds pass, before...

**Doctor Papyrus:** "MY GOD, Sans! Is there no end to your- AUUUGH!"

*The Gunslinger chuckles yet again. Never thought I'd meet a cowboy who liked puns, but here we are, it seems.*

**Marcus, the Gunslinger:** "Take it easy, stretch. I like this guy's style."

"...Undyne, what're ya-"

Tearing off a piece of duct tape from her belt, Undyne picks up a tiny sliver of magic crystal and affixes it to the Yamato Buster.

**doc sans:** "...seriously? after what we JUST went over?"

**Doctor Undyne:** "That thing couldn't talk when the crystals broke, so I guess all we need is a tiny piece to let Marcus keep talking, without dealing with Big Red?"

"Alright, try it out. Just this shard should do the trick."

*The yellow glow fades from all the ruined crystals of the cavern, along with the image of the Gunslinger. All but one, taped to the Blaster.*

**Marcus, the Gunslinger:** "...God ain't gonna help ya, son; you'll be sorry fer what you done~."

"Aright, 's workin'. Jus' be sure to tear that thing offa me if it starts spoutin' demonic nonsense. Better mute than possessed, after all..."

**Doctor Undyne:** "Sure thing, pardner. Now, let's put an end to this mayhem..."

Wait, there's something I don't understand here...

**Frisk:** "I just realised... Is there no magic crystal in the Buster at all?"

**Doctor Undyne:** "Nope, but the earlier iterations did. This baby, on the other hand, revolves around strong magnetic coils, a core of neodymium-doped yttrium aluminum garnet, and the soul of a trigger-happy cowboy."
"...I should probably take out the electrodes at some point, now that we've come to an understanding."

**Marcus, the Gunslinger:** "I'd be mighty grateful if ya did. And the term you're looking for is "trigger-happy Desert Ranger". I was done with cattle when I was 15, thank ya very much."

---

The air grows ever more tense as we leave the cavern of crystals and lanterns, wading through the darkened pond where...

Don't you mean "more dense"?

_Nah I meant tense. Can't you feel the tension in the air here? Am I just going crazy?_

Eh, I can see where you're going with that. Meanwhile I CAN'T SEE SHIT IN THIS ROOM!

_Careful of that flow- Too late._

???: "...oh hey there Tori. Come to ruin another of my plans?"

"Well, you can forget about it. I quit. It's just not worth it when you keep ruining everything."

"...wait, what's that behind you?!"

_Some of our friends can't resist turning around, but we don't buy it. And neither does Undyne._

**Marcus, the Gunslinger:** "Blast 'em?"

**Doctor Undyne:** "Blast 'em."

Wait, NO-

...it was just an Echo Flower. Whew, that could have ended badly.

Well, at least it lit the room up. Wait, was that path always there?

Hidden, as it always is. It showed itself when Monster Kid interrupted our pre-fight with Undyne, back during our first visit.

I do wonder, though. Did Undyne ever tell his parents?

_That's a good point, they should probably know that their kid's in a pickle._

...oh, you meant back in the day? Beats me. Though I guess she didn't? Otherwise MK probably woulda gotten grounded for sneaking out.

**Frisk:** "Hey Undyne?"
**Doctor Undyne:** "Yeah?"

**Frisk:** "When we get to Alphys' Lab, we should really call MK’s parents. They must be worried sick about him."

...*something's not right here. Undyne's giving you the saddest look.*

...*oh no.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Frisk, he- Monster Kid doesn't have any parents. They- ...no-one knows what happened, really."

"One day, they just up an' left. No paper trail, no packed bags, not even a pile of dust."

**Frisk:** "Do we at least know where they worked?"

*Undyne pauses, trying to think. Sans' sockets widen, as he appears to figure things out.*

**Frisk:** "Did they work. At the Core."

*Sans looks like he's starting to wig out like Evan Treborn. I think we might have our answer.*

**doc sans:** "...they were pretty devoted to the project. if i can... i'm pretty sure they were part of Gaster's inner circle."

**Frisk:** "Mystery solved. That's why they disappeared, that's why no-one really remembers them."

"But wait, that doesn't- People still remember them, right?"

**doc sans:** "MK, Undyne, Paps an' I, at least."

**Frisk:** "So maybe his parents didn't get scattered and erased like Gaster? Just scattered, in their case?"

**doc sans:** "i guess so, chances are... i guess they just got dusted by..."

*Sans scratches his skull, trying not to touch the tender dent in it.*

**doc sans:** "...i really don't like that i still can't remember this. i mean, i was there, right? wasn't i?"

"i... pretty sure there was a..."

"c'mon, it can't be THAT hard. if Undyne can do it..."

"...welp. i tried. guess i'm just not determined enough for that kinda thing."

"eh, that's fine, i guess. determination was never my style anyway."

**Frisk:** "You're... you're ok, right Sans? D'you need a nap or something after that?"

**doc sans:** "nah, i'm fine Frisk. you worry too much."

"buuut i guess my dogs are barkin' a little. i'm not really built for long walks like this."
Frisk: "Yeah, you usually just take a-"

"...oh fuck off. My fucking god. Jesus H Fucking Christ, could we have-"

"Sans, please tell me there was something keeping you from using a shortcut to take me straight to New Home. 'cause if we've been trekking all this time for no good reason..."

Sans offers an apologetic shrug, nodding as he does so.

doc sans: "...thankfully there was? i could barely get to you kids thanks to all the..."

"well, let's just call it "violent turbulence" an' call it a day. landin' in the water was the best i could hope for. yeesh, if i'd warped into solid rock... yeah. doesn't bear thinkin' about."

Frisk: "I guess we can always look on the bright side... At least you didn't merge with Jeff Goldblum."

doc sans: "eh, i dunno. i liked his earlier movies, but i don't think he's done anything great since the 90's..."

Frisk: "...speaking of turbulence, if Sans had trouble getting here on his own, how the hell did Papyrus appear inside Undyne's closet, with the other me in tow?"

Papyrus turns to face us, catatonic Monster Kid and all.

Doctor Papyrus: "With great difficulty, young lady! That demon was indeed the source of this "turbulence", though whether it does so intentionally or by sheer virtue of its existence, I honestly haven't the foggiest."

"What I DO know, however, is that it took every joule of reactor output from the Lab, and every thaum's worth of soul power from Source Beta, for me to maintain a safe connection between our Lab and Undyne's place."

"So unless we are able to properly banish this... eldritch abomination, we will be unable to take such convenient shortcuts for the foreseeable future."

Frisk: "...wow. You really did pull out all the stops for us, didn't you?"

Papyrus nods, and ruffles the hair of the younger Frisk.

Frisk: "Knowing what you did to get here, it really makes me determined to make the most of this."

[SAVE to Slot 1]

Charlie LV.1 KN.13

Waterfall – Old Bridge

Hey, who's saving the game here, you or me?
Me, it s-

Doctor Undyne: "HRGKK-"

...the Buster falls from Undyne's grip, clattering on the ground at her feet.

Several feet of sharp, polished steel protrudes from her abdomen.

TAUROCALVA: "NO MORE ASKING."

That bastard. It's bad enough that Ren was after us. Did we REALLY need this shit-hog to possess him?!

TAUROCALVA: "FRISK."

Panic fills the room.

TAUROCALVA: "TAUROCALVA SAY, RECLAIM."

Fuck this. Not happening.

Quitting...

...wait, wh-

It all started with a relatively simple shift, many many years ago. And from there, a gre-

Skip the intro, I don't have any time for this.

DoctorTale: An AU where science rules.

[Press Z or Enter]

Charlie LV.1 KN.13

Waterfall – Old Bridge

[Continue from Slot 1?]

Charlie LV.1 KN.12

Waterfall – Bad Pun Zone

[Continue from Slot 2?]

???
...of all the times to SAVE, we had to save mere seconds before THAT. Thank god for multiple save files...

...maybe we should play it safe and start from the Bad Pun Zone?

Nope. Waste of time. We can push Undyne out of the way at the Old Bridge, then start a proper battle with "RenCALVA".

Oh yeah, and that way we DON'T take the initiative to stop Monster Kid from going insane. That's a wonderful idea, Frisk! Good to see you've thought this all through so thoroughly!

And the alternative involves going through all of that samey nonsense all over again, just to change one little thing. We've been sloggish enough already, Charlie. I don't want to repeat the same mistakes all over again!

Then why the hell did you come back here in the first place?!

ASRIEL, that's why. Something went wrong after you saved him, and you thought you could fix it by travelling through time. And you know what? You DID!

But now all of a sudden, you're getting cold feet over going back a bit further? What, because you're BORED? Because you're tired of doing the same stuff all over again, just one time?

Oh blow it out your ass, Charlie. You're making it sound like I'm no better than Flowey!

Well at least Flowey had "excuses", ya freakin' lightweight! You on the other hand actually HAVE a soul, and you haven't looped anywhere NEAR as much as he or I ever did! But oh, how naive I was to think that you could be assed to save anyone who isn't a "main character"!

[Continue from Slot 1]

Hey, who's saving here, you o-

I look up in awe, then push Undyne out of the GLYRK

Way to catch a sword with your- You actually caught it with your head. TAUROCALVA is surprised yet satisfied with this development.

Great plan, dummy! You did it!

...[Load from Slot 2]
monster, he was literally a goddamn skeleton."

Though I imagine they were still good friends after that, right?

doc sans: "most of the time. sometimes they didn't part on the best of terms."

"though i remember there being one reality where they REALLY tried to make it work."

"safe to say, i don't peek at that reality anymore. gives me the creeps."

Funny what you come across when you explore all the possibilities. Though given what you've seen, you can probably understand what the kids have been through.

doc sans: "what's that supposed to mean?"

Well, think about it. They have had experiences with different realities, just as you have peered into the realities surrounding yours. While your experiences and their experiences have been somewhat different, you've all brushed up against the hedgerows of the garden of branching paths. Asriel, Flowey, Chara, Frisk, Julian-

doc sans: "that kid with the cat ears an' the sock on his tail? i never did figure out what his deal was."

"was he supposed to be that world's Frisk or somethin'?"

In a way, yes. Though there was an actual Frisk in "Feldstein Prime", but by the time he fell down he was merely following Julian's tracks.

In the end, it was Julian who helped fulfil the prophecy in that reality. And he straight up just threw Asriel over his shoulder when he returned to the Ruins at the end, not even listening to the kid's protests about not wanting to break everyone's hearts again. Total pro, if you ask me.

Charlie: Who the hell are-

What? Charlie, who are you even talking to?

Charlie: You seriously can't hear that guy? Am I just going crazy here?!

"Ness": Uh... [ACT] > [Uh...] > [SMOKE BOMB!]

..."Ness" ran away...

...Ness? No, it can't be.

...he's one of the ones who was "in control", wasn't he? The one who didn't go Genocide?

I- I think so. But what was he doing here? And why did he pull a Krieger on us?

Right now, I can't be bothered to think about why. I just want to get through this as quickly as possible.

Well, if that's how you feel, I can "skim" a little, get us there a little faster. Now, first things first.
I pick up Sans and lift him up on our backs, before opening the cupboard and gesturing for Papyrus and Little Frisk to follow.

Next, I advise Undyne to get the Buster ready.

**Charlie:** "Oh, and tape a small sliver of magic crystal to it, no bigger than a pencil."

"And one last thing. Don't let MK into the crystal cave until you've destroyed all the crystals there. Trust me, it'll make sense."

Undyne looks at us quizzically, before bringing the River Person into the Lab with her.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "May I ask what exactly is going on here?!"

**Charlie:** "We're moving out. That's what's happening. Monster Kid, you stick around and make sure Undyne's ok. Papyrus, Sans, Frisk, let's "sally forth" to adventure!"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "You know what? I think I like this Anomaly."

**doc sans:** "Yeah they're not so bad. But seriously kid, you can put me down now."

*In the Mush Room, we light the way to the other side.*

*When Temmie saunters up to us, I decide to flex. Much to her dismay.*

**Temmie:** "No!!!! Muscles r n0t cut3!"

*OH joy, this guy again.*

**Aaron:** "Ooh, I would have to disagree ;)*"

**Temmie:** "Ughh, grease eachother up, why don't you?!"

*No comment.*

**Oh, and I flex harder than ever.**

**Charlie:** "MMhhh, brotherrrrrr... "

Astounded by my prowess, Aaron attempts to out-flex me. But all that happens is that he flexes himself out of the room, taking a bewildered Bob with him.

**Bob:** "What is happeniiiiiiiiing?!"

*Bam, that's out of the way. Next room.*

**TAUROCALVA:** "RUDIMENTARY ELEM-"

**Charlie:** "Oh shut your fuckin' mouth you ugly, rotund, greasy, satanic shit-hog! Go shovel some more Cheetos down your flab-hole!"
"Why don't you just fuck off back to your parents' basement and jerk off with a fucking hand-puppet?!"

TAUROCALVA: "...oh. Er..."

TAUROCALVA ran away...

...holy shit, Charlie. Was that entirely necessary? I mean, we want this guy to fuck right off, yeah, but I wasn't expecting THAT to happen.

I... guess it had to come out some time. I've tried not to dwell on what happened to me back then, but seeing that face again... knowing what he did to Asriel...

Marcus, the Gunslinger: "Blast 'em?"

Doctor Undyne: "Blast 'em."

Finally, the cavalry's here! No more crystals, thank god.

Doctor Undyne: "You guys ok in there?!"

Frisk: "We're fine! Is MK ok?"

Monster Kid: "Can I open my eyes now? Is the weird crap finally gone?"

Frisk: "Oh, it's gone, alright. Now get your ass over here..."

Little harsh, don't y- Oh, right. Hugs are in order, I guess.

Monster Kid: "But seriously, did you really need to yell all that? Man, if words could kill...

Charlie: "Well, they can hurt. Especially for monsters, what with the whole DEF system an' all."

Monster Kid: "I wouldn't be so sure about that. I mean, if someone gave Undyne that kinda sass, it'd probably make her MORE willing to fight."

Undyne winks at us, grinning from ear to ear. Guess she liked the passion in my little "performance."

...time for the next room.

Papyrus calls forth a glowing blue bone to light the way forward.

???: "...oh hey there Tori. Come to ru-"

Frisk: "Easy, everybody. It's just an Echo Flower."

Echo Flower: "Well, you can forget about it. I quit."

Doctor Undyne: "...wait, that voice... Oh, no way. That's not who I think it is, is it?"

Frisk: "Maybe. But I think we're good to stop for a few seconds. Just got to catch my breath."
Knowing that you managed to prevent Monster Kid from going insane...

Yeah, I'm determined. Also, really tired. Can't wait to just pass out in the Lab.

[SAVE to Slot 1]

Charlie – LV.1 KN.13

Waterfall – The Room Where You Can't See Anything

Better?

It better be.

I look to the roof of the cavern, as we pass through the corridor of flowers, checking for any signs of "RenCALVA".

...nothing yet. Thank god.

Monster Kid: "WhoaWHOA WHOA!"

Crap, MK!

Doctor Undyne: "Hang in there, I got you!"

Quick to grab a hold of Monster Kid's armour, Undyne hoists our friend back to safety.

Monster Kid: "Golly, that was WAY too close!"

"Man, my heart's hammerin' outta my chest... I'll be glad when this is all over."

doc sans: "at least you gave us a little warning there. a second later, and you woulda been a goner!"

Monster Kid starts to shake at the memory of the unworldly apparition, its every footfall tinkling like broken glass. He glowers at Sans, for bringing it up.

Monster Kid: "Ha... Ha... Good one."

doc sans: "...dude, i wasn't really joking that time. it's... just a casual observation, buddy."

I whisper to Sans, telling him about what we encountered a while back.

His eyes go cold and dark in surprise.

Why didn't I see that coming?
doc sans: "...i think i know what you're talking about, Frisk. and it ain't a good sign."

Frisk: "Let me guess. You saw similar "apparitions" in Hotland?"

doc sans: "saw them? Frisk, those things appear ALL OVER Hotland!"

"but nobody really knows where they came from. though most figure that they're somehow connected to the Core."

"after all, the earliest recorded sighting of an OEKO was in 2019. 'bout a year or so after the Core started working."

"so naturally, folks began putting two-an'-two together. but despite upping the safety procedures, OEKOs kept on appearing over the centuries."

"it got our forefathers brainstorming to find out the truth. hell, even the Prince threw his hat in the ring at one point. but to no avail."

Frisk: "But I'm guessing your uncle got close to the truth, right?"

Sans sadly nods.

doc sans: "you'd be right in that assumption. an' i figure that's what made him disappear."

"...you wanna hear my theory on this?"

Frisk: "By all means."

doc sans: "well, i'd tell you now, but..."

"looks like we'll have to save this for the Lab. someone wants to talk to you."

*Our gaze rises to the old crag that separates Waterfall from Hotland. Perched atop the lofty stone like a ragged metal tengu, our "old friend" glowers down at us.*

That's *Japanese* folklore, Charlie. And no, it's *not* the same thing.

...strange. There's his crystal eye, glinting in his dark silhouette, but no red glare...

...did you seriously drive that thing away? I thought it'd take a lot more than harsh language to banish a demon.

*Maybe I hit a s-*

Ren Yong: "No more running away, princess!"

AUGH! No way!

*We're... oh god, we're falling! And so is he!*

*AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA*-
...we're... We're still alive?

Urgh, but not unharmed... Wait, no, hold up! We were about to get dashed on the god-damn rocks! Why are we even still-

*I believe this insanely-wide crater, that we are at the centre of, should answer that question.*

Or add more of the damn things. Look at this thing! We should be a thin red paste by now!

...we survived that. We're... we are freaking amazing, Charlie! We fell from god-knows how high up, and we made a CRATER when we fell!

Y'know what, I don't feel so bad about this now. My god, I feel fantastic! I feel like I could take on the god-damn WORLD right now!

**Ren Yong:** "You SURVIVED that? Impossible!"

Or alternatively, I'll settle for him.

*Frisk, are you ok? Whatever happened to being scared of this guy?*

I still am, Charlie. Well, not so much, but it's still there.

But I'm not gonna let this old fart scare me down! I've come to far to give up now!

I've never felt so strong in my LIFE!

*Are you sure you're ok? Your LV is... Huh. It's pretty normal, actually. But...*

*Well, that's something new. I knew you were feeling brave, but WOW.*

*In the face of the most dangerous being in the Underground, at the bottom of a glassy crater, you are filled with Bravery.*
Frisk is separated from the main group, and begins her final (she wishes) confrontation with Ren Yong, Captain of the Royal Guard.

In the dust of the crater, I draw a line with the Stick, daring Ren to cross it.

*Before you do anything too brash...*

*Magic* > *Determination* > *Sharpen*

The phantasmal image of a blade forms around the Stick. NOW we stand a chance.

**Ren Yong:** “Most intriguing... Truly, you have changed.”

“But do not think you can just waltz back into our lives, after leaving us to our fates!”

*Ren rushes forward through the black mist, crossing your precious line.*

I step to the side, letting the old fool rush right past me.

**Frisk:** “And what? You think killing me will solve ANYTHING?”

“Do you really think that taking my soul will somehow bring Toriel back?! Even if that made ANY sense whatsoever, she’s already back thanks to Alphys’ meddling.”

*Ren breathes a sigh of exasperation, as if he's heard this before. ...wait, has he?*

**Ren Yong:** “I see you are still as naïve as ever. Some things, it seems, never change.”

“You believe that pale shadow to be the Queen reborn, but you could not be farther from the truth. The poor deluded creature merely THINKS it is Toriel!”

*Ren twirls his blade, trying to intimidate you.*

The [Intimidate] attempt fails. I've seen more impressive stunts from Undyne.

...but now what do I do?

*I say keep him talking. We’ll figure something out.*

*[ACT]* > *[Ren]* > *Plead*

*You implore Ren to stop fighting. He remains stalwart.*

**Ren Yong:** “You are right in one thing, however. Taking your soul will not bring back those who died waiting for you.”
“But in your absence, we have gathered many human souls. Some passed away peacefully, others were taken before their time...”

“It has been too long since another human has fallen down. With six human souls in the possession of our kingdom, we are one soul away from freedom.”

“You know this, all too well. You know that you are all that stands between the Kingdom and its freedom.”

“Don't fight me, Frisk. Just close your eyes, and take pride in knowing that you will set them all free...”

*Again, he rushes forward to strike you down.*

**I rush to face him.**

*No, that's a stupid idea. You're going to get yourself k-*

**Swinging at full force, I strike hard!**

...and lock blades with the old fool.

*Sparks fly from the ongoing clash of broadsword and empowered stick. What I'd give for a cool camera angle right now...*

Save it Charlie, this isn't frickin' Star Wars!

**Frisk:** “Do you have any idea how creepy that sounded?! Listen to yourself!”

“Besides, I'm not the only one standing in the way of freedom right now! Last time I checked, YOU were human too. And I'm pretty sure you still are, somewhere in there...”

*Ren attempts to twist the Stick out of your grasp. He fails, but the attempt still causes you to stagger.*

**Ren Yong:** “Oh spare me the preachy soul-searching, Princess.”

“Allow me to save you some time here; I am NOT Darth Vader or Kylo Ren. I don't need someone to turn me away from some nebulous Dark Side!”

“For centuries the others have tried to find “another way”, and what has it gotten us? Nowhere NEAR freedom!”

“And now another human has fallen down, we should not have to wait any longer! We are SO CLOSE! Why should we wait for a breakthrough that will never come, when all we really need is one monster and seven human souls?!”

**Frisk:** “…how long did they live?”

*Ren is taken aback by this question out-of-the-blue.*

I take this moment of weakness to strike the blade from his hands, sending it flying to the far edge of the crater.

*Ren barely notices. He's still reeling from the implications of your question.*
Ren Yong: “I’m sorry?”

Frisk: “You heard me. How long did the others live?”

“After all, like you said, it’s been a long time since another human’s fallen down.”

“I know that Adrianna died from pushing herself too hard, and that Terry took his own life in the hopes of joining her.”

“I can only assume Arlene died in a botched experiment, and as for the Gunslinger... Well, we all know what happened with him.”

“But when did Mary-Ann die? When did she pass away, leaving you the only human down here?”

Ren’s dessicated, leathery hands crinkle as they clench, shaking with barely-repressed anger.

Ren Yong: “Just get to the point, Princess. What are you really trying to say?”

Frisk: “I’m just saying it’s kind of ironic that you lamented only having six souls for so long, when in reality there’s been a seventh floating around for well over a century.”

I point towards Ren’s chest, nodding as his brow furrows and his eyes narrow.

Frisk: “You knew where it was all this time, and yet you chose not to release it. So you’ll have to excuse me if I can’t take you seriously, when you could have freed everyone centuries ago.”

…the next thing you know, you are flat on your back, staring up at the lofty ceiling of the cavern, your ears ringing and your head spinning.

Yeah. He didn't take that too well. So you took a fist to the temple.

Ren Yong: “You DARE to think that I didn't consider that?!?”

“Believe me, I had intended to die like the others, before the Gunslinger came! But you must understand, that as the years went by, I was ALL Asriel had left!”

Ren tries to calm himself down, and partially succeeds.

I... God, I was not expecting this.

...oh, who am I kidding? I probably should have.

Ren Yong: “He had lost too much in his life to willingly let go of who he had left. With that in mind, put yourself in his shoes...”

“You are weeping over the dust of your mother, while her murderer lies dead at your feet, his vengeful soul burning within your chest. Your brother and father died nearly twenty years ago, and your sister has vanished from the face of the Earth. You are the last of your kind, and the only remnant of your family.”

“But you are also a brilliant young man, a “super-scientist” if you will. When it comes to working with the science of the day, you are without equal.”

“So when your close friend, the young human captain of the Royal Guard, shambles into the throne
room, trying to hold themselves together, what would you do?”

“Would you cradle him in your arms as he coughs up his last drops of blood, or... would you try to find another way?”

…

Ren's defense has dropped.

[ACT] > [Ren] > *Keep Listening

**Ren Yong:** “I guess that question answered itself, didn't it?”

“Asriel re-purposed one of his mentor's machines to sustain my ailing body, to keep me alive until he could truly fix me. For decades, I slumbered on life support, only waking on rare occasions.”

“All the while, Asriel and his “Science Team” searched for solutions to all manner of problems, my condition among them. Until finally, thanks to the machinations of one Kristen Gaster, a solution was found for my condition.”

I think I know where this is going.

**Frisk:** “Let me guess. They built you robot legs, a clockwork heart, and a crystal eye.”

“Sans told me all about it...though he never mentioned that his ancestors were involved.”

**Ren Yong:** “In spite of your ignorance, it goes without saying. The Gaster family has always had a hand in the science of the day, across many generations.”

“The Fontaine brothers are merely the continuation of that noble line. A rose, by any other name, would smell just the same.”

“But that is beside the point. So much effort, so many man-hours, were put into keeping me alive. I could not, in good conscience, have put all of their efforts to waste. Even though I was the seventh soul, even though my death would have set everyone free...”

“It's funny, really. They cared so much about me, even though I was the one thing standing in the way of their freedom. Even with freedom within a hair's breadth of them, they decided to keep me from going before my time.”

*Ren looks up, his one real eye getting a little misty. ...smells like rain.*

**Ren Yong:** “In the end, they cared too much. Kristen's machines are still working within me, over a century since they were installed. And I don't think they're going to stop working any time soon.”

“And you know what's worse? In those rare moments when they falter, I've seen what lies beyond.”

“I'm... I'm afraid, Frisk. There's nothing good at the end of this road. No reward for all I've done to keep them safe. Even oblivion would be a mercy, compared to the horror that waits for us all...”

“That, Frisk, is why I have refused to sacrifice myself. I don't want their efforts to go to waste. And I will not submit to the creatures that rule over death, not while my metal heart still beats...”
REN shaking his head, clenching his fists as if to grip his sword, only to remember his disarmament.

REN YONG: “...ahem. Well, like Asriel always said, there has to be another way.”

I tighten my grip on the Stick. He's not going to take me down...

FRISK: “Asriel might still need you, but you know damn well that I'm not chopped liver...”

“You know that he's been waiting for me all these years. You don't honestly think he'll react well to you taking my soul, do you?”

“Yes, there has to be another way. But not like this. This is not happening.”

REN YONG: “You are right. It is not. But I think we have a solution that will benefit the both of us.”

“Neither of us want to die, and neither of us need to. For even if we exclude ourselves, there is still a seventh human soul in the Underground.”

“We both know who has it. ...how well do you really know them?”

No... He wouldn't... That's- No...

Not happening. Not fucking happening.

FRISK: “Don't you fucking dare. Don't you lay a fucking finger on her.”

“Fuck this. Fuck everything about your sick plan.”

“And most of all.”

“FUCK.”

“YOU.”

...the thought of Ren slaying your parallel fills you with... WRATH.

...DOWNLOAD COMPLETE. CLAWED_PALM_OF_HYPNOS.ETP successfully installed.

Wait, what the hell?!

We invoke He who wears the Crown of Poppies, He who would soothe the sleepless.

[POWER] > [Wrath] > *Clawed Palm of Hypnos

What is this power?!

This vessel strikes hard at the warrior, and the power of the Palm does the rest.

...he will not rise for many hours. Let us travel south.

...who is that in there? And what have you done with Frisk?!
She is perfectly safe, we merely took the initiative and cut out the middle maiden.

It is in both of our interests that you do not bite the hand that lends you aid.

**In addition, you have something that interests us. We are willing to offer something useful in exchange.**

**Venture south, and we will do business.**

...**this vessel's Wrath fades. Relinquishing strings.**

What... was... that...

*Frisk, you're... You're ok now, right?*

I... I don't know about that, Charlie. Whatever that... **thing** was, it took over when I got angry.

Charlie... Am I going crazy? Is all of this just in my head?

*I don't think it is, Frisk. Unless your going crazy is driving me crazy too, I'm pretty sure this is ALL happening.*

**Besides, I'm pretty sure that spell wasn't “homebrew”, if you catch my drift. It feels too... too clean, too organized, too “clinical”. To be frank, if you designed that spell, it woulda had more flourishes an' rainbows than a Frisco carnival.**

Gee, thanks Charlie. Nice to see you have so much faith in me.

*Hey now, I'm not knocking rainbows like a freakin' Scythian. I'm just saying it's definitely not something you came up with.*

**But with one of our psychotic little problems out of the way, I feel like we should hear out whatever gave you that power. I know, it took you over for a few seconds, but if we save here, we can bounce back if it tries to eat our soul and take our body.**

...I hate how you're right. Ugh, I guess we could risk it. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?

*Right. You're feeling a little rattled from that last battle, yet still you stay determined.*

*HP and MP restored.*

But I didn't get hit?

*You got smashed into the cavern floor by the captain of the Royal Guard, leaving a massive crater. How would that NOT count as getting hit?*

**Besides, that sucker punch wasn't exactly healthy either.**

*[SAVE to Slot 2]*
...something's wrong.

Let me guess... Oh, could it be this entire place?

I mean, I'm just throwing it out there, but I'm pretty sure stalagmites don't grow at an angle, or randomly curve as they do so. Not to mention, I'm pretty sure black mist isn't a natural phenomenon.

And is it just me, or does it feel like-

Yep, your stomach had the right idea. This place is NOT right at all.

Urrgh, what I'd give to get that taste out of my mouth...

...whatever that thing wants to trade, it'd BETTER be worth the hassle.

Do you see that? There's something in the distance... Looks like some sort of shrine, or temp-

Aaaaand now we're right in front of it. WHAT IS WITH THIS PLACE?!

Let's just get inside and hear this thing out...

Ok, I'm not an archaeologist or anything, but judging by these weird carvings on the walls, and the mossy green tint to the whole place, I'd hazard a guess that this place is FRICKIN' ANCIENT. I'd probably go as far as saying... maybe it's pre-antiquity?

Maybe. But these pillars look like the ones back in the Ruins. Sooo probably not THAT ancient. Still...

Now I think about it, with the weird gravity, the squiggly rocks, and now this place... It's like we've stepped out of our current adventure and into a session of Arkham Horror.

I can definitely see where you're coming from. This actually kinda reminds me of the “Jade Grotesquerie” custom mission on the original Hypnotron. Man, to think VR used to be sight and sound only...

And yet we still have to take pills for the motion sickness, even with the 4Sense. But on the bright side, ginger does the trick pretty well.

Y'know what I really miss? Fire Spice Gum. That stuff really helped knock that problem on the head, but then the company went bust and took the recipe with it. But hey, at least we still have Ginger Graham's Gummy Vitamins...

“If we might interject...”
Before us lays a five-sided altar, carved from the same greenish stone as the structure, and encircled by vibrant red poppies. On the wall behind it, the towering bas-relief of a warped, five-pointed star glows with an... an aquamarine light. And at the heart of the carved illustration, a black hourglass closed in a deep blue circ-

It blinked. **It blinked. Charlie, it FUCKING BLINKED.**

Is- Charlie, this is- Is this place ALIVE?!

???: “Be not afraid. Though this stone-hewn domicile is our primary vessel, it cannot bring harm.”

“In all honesty, we cannot really do anything in this state. Our ethereal attendants perished long ago, and their descendants have forgotten us. We... are all that remain.”

...now that's just Debbie Depressing. I thought we were in for some cosmic horror, but this is just... damn...

...five gold says it wants us to take it with us.

Charlie! This isn't the time for petty betting.

**Frisk:** “I... So, uh, what're you sellin’?”

**The Remnant:** “We offer companionship, guidance, and insight. And in exchange, we wish to be taken from this desecrated ruin, that we may better fulfil our mission on this world.”

**BOOM, what did I tell you?!**

**Cut it out, Charlie.**

...**sorry.**

**Frisk:** “…I... I guess that'd be reasonable, I woulda tried to free you anyways. But how do we get you out of here? Didn't you say the temple was your body or something?”

**The Remnant:** “We merely said that it is our vessel. Though perhaps that analogy was a little vague?”

“A more accurate analogy would be... chest? Box? Perhaps... Cage. Yes. It is our cage.”

“But it is a cage that only remains open while the key is in the lock. We, Syrinx Tau Xi Theta, are the key to our own cage.”

**Frisk:** “And I guess this “lock” is on the inside? That's... oddly smart. If someone tries to raid the temple, taking you would lock them inside unless they put you back!”

“...but why would the architect go to all that trouble to keep you here?”

**Syrinx, the Remnant:** “We suspect where you are going with this, and we will stop you there.”
"We are no conduit for the Heathen Deities! We serve those who only wish for an ordered cosmos! The Elder Star centred around our socket should have been a fair indication, if we are to be frank."

Frisk: "Alright, alright, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to insinuate that you were... y'know."

"I'm just a little wary about freeing an ancient power from its prison. But, uh, y-you seem like an honest... uh..."

Syrinx: "Envoy. Envoy would best describe us, given our original role."

"We understand your pensive approach. We can presume that you have had... ah, "run-ins" with the ruinous power that taints these caverns?"

"Mortal, you needn't fear such a creature, should you take us with you. Our mere presence should compromise its manifestation, by the Authority of our benefactors."

Sounds good enough to me. Deal.

Frisk: "Well, I can't say no to that now, can I? But you didn't really answer my earlier question. How do we get you out of here?"

The eye focuses on our inventory. ...wait, where IS our inventory?

...I don't know. And it scares me.

Syrinx: "When we touched your mind, we felt an addled presence, something tarnished but otherwise harmless."

Charlie: "Uh, yeah. That's me. ...howdy."

Syrinx: "...more importantly, we found that you carried an orb with you, not quite as large as us, but of sufficient size to make the mechanism believe it holds a Syrinx."

"Replace us with your nacreous sphere, and we may depart."

How... oddly convenient. I have a feeling this isn't going to go smoothly at all. Eh, we've got a good save point, what the heck.

You step closer to Syrinx, its watermelon-sized eyeball watching you pensively. Will you take this remnant of an ancient star cult?

No, I'm going to just leave the poor thing here to moulder for another aeon. Of course I take Syrinx with us! I push them into the socket, then grip them gently as they roll out into my hands.

As soon as Syrinx leaves its socket, its pink tail trailing behind it, beams of aquamarine light criss-cross the entryway of the temple.

Yup, time to pop the pearl in the socket and hope for the best.
...huh.

Frisk: “...where's the REST of you?”

Syrinx: “This IS the rest of us. This is how we were designed.”

“Just be sure not to drop us. We are... not fond of heights.”

Frisk: “Don't worry, I'll put you somewhere safe...”

You put Syrinx in your inventory.

Syrinx: “Interesting. So this is the fabled Hammerspa- Merciful Shai, you're a hoarder...”

“...why do you have a dog in here?”

I'm sorry WHAT.

Sure enough, a small white dog pops out of your inventory, flopping onto the altar. How it does this is anyone's guess.

Before you can stop it, it leaps into the socket and begins to vibrate furiously, arcs of white lightning dancing between it and the walls.

But of course it would! Why would it do anything else?

The security beams flicker and fade, leaving the exit open to us. Unfortunately, this whole place is starting to shake. ...yeah, RUN!

Syrinx: “Damnable Heathen dog! It'll bring the temple down on our heads!”

Oh COME ON! This is totally unnecessary!

As we rush pass the threshold, we look back. The light of the star-sign begins to flicker and fade like the beams that once blocked our escape.

We turn our gaze forwards, not looking back, when a deafening burst of pixelated noise rattles through our very being...

We fall to our hands and knees. Blackness overwhelms us. Good night, for now...

Syrinx: “Oh dear...”

“...we will pray for your safe awakening, child...”

________________________________________

...the whirring of an air conditioning unit tugs at our consciousness. Blearily, you open your eyes.

...

...ahem. Blearily, you open your eyes.
...Frisk. C'mon. We've been out for hours, we need to get a move on-

Nmmmmhhh... Gimme five more minutes, Mom. I'll be up soon.

...the scent of fresh pancakes and warm butterscotch fills your nostrils, along with the dark, rich aroma of a cup of Deep Black Joe. Smells like Tori's making breakfast!

I'm up, I'm up! ...

...you absolute FUCKER.

Rise and shine, dearie! Looks like our friends found us when we were out cold, 'cause we're finally in the Hotland Lab! I've never felt-

I'm sorry, NO. You don't fucking wake me up with the promise of a nice breakfast, then reveal that there's no fucking breakfast! You just DON'T!

I was looking forward to something nice after what we've been through, but no. Of course it was all just bullshit, a selfish lie to get me back in the game.

...I've heard of having a case of the Mondays, but holy shit. Remind me never to- Oh c'mon Frisk, don't be like that. This isn't helping anyone!

I miss her, Charlie... I miss her so much...

Oh. I- Oh. You've been holding it in all this time, haven't you?

*sniff*

Frisk, you know damn well it isn't healthy to keep all of that bottled up!

Well what IS healthy?! Breaking down in tears while psychopaths are hot on your heels?!

I know what I'm doing, Charlie. You don't need to tell me that I can't hold it in forever. But there's a time and a place that's best for it. And right here, right now...

...I don't want the others to be worried, though. I don't wanna bring them down too.

Syrinx: “This “Toriel”... She was a greater ethereal, correct?”

Not a good time for it, Syrinx.

Syrinx: “But she was-”

Save it. She'll come around, she just needs some time to herself. We can talk about Mom later...

Syrinx: “...confirmed.”

It's ok, Frisk. Take all the time you need. We're safe here...
...sounds like someone's coming to check up on us.

I wipe my eyes with my sleeve. Can't let them see me like this.

*Fine. But just keep in mind that you don't need to go this alone. Your friends are always here for you.*

*Speaking of which, looks like it's time for that big payoff. Our small lizard friend shuffles to our bedside.*

*Heh, I just realised. She put us in her bed.*

I yawn and stretch, feigning that I'd just gotten up, before slipping out of her bed.

**Doctor Alphys:** “Oh, you're, uh- You're up! That's great!”

*Despite everything, it's still Alphys. Huh.*

I give her a patient smile. After all this, I'm glad I finally get to see things pay off.

**Frisk:** “It's great to see you again, Alphys.”

...what else do I say? I can't bring up the True Lab so soon, it'd throw everything out the window.

**Frisk:** “So... Uh...”

“...how're things between you and Undyne?”

*A nervous smile crawls across her face, as her head turns a vibrant magenta from the embarrassment.*

**Doctor Alphys:** “She's... yeah, she's doing alright.”

“I convinced her to let me install some cyberware, to replace her old crystal eye from the last time. T-turns out that thaumaware isn't so great when there are mind-controlling demons on the prowl, WHO FRICKIN' KNEW?!”

“Besides, my latest implants cause borderline-negligible essence loss in comparison to previous commercial models, and- Aaaand I've lost you with my babbling, haven't I?”

*Well? Has she?*

Oh as IF, I'm no stranger to cyber-culture. Don't you remember all the times we played Shadowrun Seattle? How could you forget Undyne rolling as a street samurai?

**Holy crap, how COULD I forget that?! Man, she just dove headfirst into every fight when we played. It always fell to Asriel's shaman character to keep her alive in the campaigns...**

...*come to think of it, weren't you a rigger/decker in that game? And you- ...you had a drone called Ace, and called yourself “Desmond”. Goddamnit Frisk.*

JUST NOW you figure it out?

*Oh COME ON, for all we knew you coulda been referencing The Finest Polka Hits of Maurice*
Garfunkleton!

Doctor Alphys: “...oooor you're being sidelined by the Anomaly in your head?”

Charlie: “Well fuck you too, Alphys!”

“...sorry. I'll let her talk.”

Every damn time...

Frisk: “Y-yeah, sorry about that. I know exactly what you're talking about.”

“But you're dodging the question again. How're things with you and her?”

Alphys pauses, more pensive than usual, before giving us her answer.

Doctor Alphys: “Well... we- we didn't have much time to talk it over, before she went under the knife. But we're gonna try to make it work. Once she's off the anaesthetic, we'll see where things go from there.”


Doctor Alphys: “Hey, implant surgery is no laughing matter! She's strong, believe you me, but she's not a masochist. At least, I don't think so...”

“But yeah, she's passed out on the couch right now. Not the best place to recover from surgery, but-”

Frisk: “But why not tuck her into your bed instead? If anything you shoulda tossed my ass onto the couch, I'm not the one recovering from hardcore eye surgery!”

Doctor Alphys: “It... it was her idea to set you up in here, Frisk. After what you experienced down there...”

Frisk: “Even still, I'm pretty sure you have a few other beds layin' around the Lab, right?”

Small beads of sweat form on Alphys' head. She knows what's coming.

Doctor Alphys: “B- I, I don-”

I kneel down and grasp Alphys' wrist, pulling her in closer before holding her hand in mine.

Doctor Alphys: “Y- y-...you...”

Frisk: “You don't need to lie to me, Alphys. And just so we're clear, you'd better fucking not.”

“...they get a little sassy when they haven't been fed, don't they?”

Alphys breaks out in a cold sweat, becoming clammy to the touch.

I reach to touch the back of her head, trying to reassure her.

Frisk: “Alphys, I don't blame you for what you did. I know what happens after a monster falls
down. I know where they go when their souls evaporate.”

“And despite the state they're in right now... They're better off like that, than living in Hell.”

“Not to mention, since they're still with us, you have the opportunity to figure out how to fix them. And once we're safe in New Home, we can figure out how to fix her, too.”

---

...did you hear that?

I felt it.

...NOW I can hear it. It's coming from...

OH NO.

The sound of a wall erupting outwards crashes thunderously downstairs.

???: "OHHH YES!!"

I focus my eyes on Alphys', as if to peer into her very soul.

Frisk: “Alphys. What did I tell you, when I first spoke to you through that camera in Snowdin?”

Doctor Alphys: “Frisk, please, you're hurting me...”

I loosen my grip, realising my annoyed strength, but don't let go.

Frisk: “That's Mettaton, isn't it? Did you not send them the memo to not kill me?”

Alphys tries to struggle, but your calm anger has her paralysed. Fuck, go easy on her, won't you?

I am going easy on her.

Doctor Alphys: “I swear, I did what you asked! I make sure to keep the puzzles turned off!”

“But please, believe me when I say that I never planned to bring Mettaton into this! He's- he's too busy doing TV shows to talk to me anymore!”

Whoo, I can practically SMELL the bitter resentment from here. Frisk, I'm like 99% sure she's telling the truth.

Frisk. Let her go.

Don't make me force your hands open.

I'll fucking do it if you don't-

ALRIGHT. Fine. I let go of her hands, before pulling her into a bear hug.

Doctor Alphys: “Oh- ok, this is... this is different. And not much better.”
**Frisk:** “Alphys, I'm so, SO sorry. I just- I was so afraid of being betrayed again...”

“I believe you. I have complete faith that you had nothing to do with this.”

“Now let's bury this hatchet, and tell Mettaton to fuck right off!”

I pick her up, and head down the elevator.

My god... I just realised how small she is.

*aren't you like 6 feet tall or something? Anyone'd look tiny next to your massive-*

Just think about what you're going to say next. Think long and hard, and then don't say it.

**Doctor Alphys:** “Please put me down.”

---

**Mettaton:** “WELCOME, BEAUTIES, TO TODAY’S QUIZ SHOW!”

“OH BOY! I CAN ALREADY TELL IT'S GONNA BE A GREAT-”

_Holy shit it's David Bowie._ ...and it looks like your parallel is this episode's contestant.

Yep, that's Mettaton. And he's already in his EX form?

...that actually makes a lot of sense, now I think about it. No need to stay in low-power mode when you're running on nuclear.

_Tell that to Elon Musk._

*Oh, and Mettaton looks back and forth between you and younger Frisk, intrigue in his deep gold-*

_iris* _eyes._

**Mettaton:** “OH MY... NOW THIS IS INTERESTI-”

_You lunge forward and turn a dial on his chest, presumably volume control._

**Frisk:** “Damnit, use your indoor voice.”

**Mettaton:** “Thanks, darling. But leave further adjustments for after the show...”

Did he just fucking wink at me?

_Good job butterfingers, you dropped Alphys._

**Doctor Alphys:** “Ack! Nmhh, what a letdown...”

**doc sans:** “heh, good one.”

Was- Did Mettaton just _flirt_ with me?!

*Looks like you've got competition, darling.*
Who said I was competi-? Oh DON'T YOU START.
...you know what?

**Frisk:** “You know WHAT, “darling”?!”

“...you remind me of the **babe.**”

*Are you serious?*

**Mettaton:** “What “babe”??”

**Frisk:** “The babe with the **power.**”

*Frisk no.*

FRISK YES.

**Mettaton:** “What power?”

**Frisk:** “The power of **voodoo!**”

**Mettaton:** “Who do?”

**Frisk:** “ **You** do.”

**Mettaton:** “Do WHAT?”

**Frisk:** “Remind me of the babe...”

*I give up. I want no part in this.*

Suck it up, babe. This is HAPPENING.

I tap my foot, and snap my finger, at a tempo of... 105 BPM? Is that how fast it was?

*This is too silly, even for you. Please stop.*

Shut up, this could be our ticket to beating him!

...wait, he's holding that microphone. Oh no. No, NO DON'T-

**Mettaton:** “I saw my baaaeh~

“Cryin’ hard as baaaaabe could~”

*The ensuing scene has been removed due to a joint copyright claim from Lucasfilm and The Jim Henson Company. In it's place is the mental image of Younger Frisk*
surrounded by goblins wearing silly hats. A little something to tide you over until next week or the week after, when Frisk and Mettaton have stopped singing unlicensed karaoke.
Chapter Summary

Mettaton's quiz show gets off to a flying start, with Frisk as the first contestant. However, hitches and hiccups are met, and soon Frisk finds herself on the long road to New Home.

In addition, Frisk begins to lose her shit. The harrowing nature of this "second quest" is starting to get to her.

**Mettaton:** "Well, ah, that was one way to open the show. My oh my, look at all the viewers..."

"But the show must go on! Give a round of applause for our first contestant!"

I pose confidently, as confetti falls out of nowhere.

... 

...that's your queue to insert a witty remark.

...

Or a snarky remark. Or say anything at all.

...

**Mettaton:** "Never played before, gorgeous? Well, it's simple."

"There's only one rule here on the show! (promise of a single rule will not be honoured)"

"Answer these questions correctly... OR YOU DIE!"

Wait what?! I thought this was a family friendly show! He has a tux and bow-tie and everything!

**Mettaton:** "Alright darling, let's start with an easy one. **What's the prize for answering correctly?**"

> A: Gold?

> B: Mercy?

> C: An MTT-brand dishwasher?

> D-

**Frisk:** "D: more questions... *sigh*"
Mettaton: "...is the correct answer! We're off to a terrific start!"

Terrific is right...

Mettaton: "And here is your terrific prize!"

"What is the Prince's full name?"

>A: Char-

Frisk: "Asriel Dreemurr!"

As if I wouldn't know bro's name.

...

Mettaton: "...at least let me reveal the other questions, darling."

>A: Charles Dreemurr?

>B: Fluffybuns Junior?

>C: Asriel Dreemurr?

>D: Emiliano Rosales?

Frisk: "C: Asriel Dreemurr."

Mettaton: "Correct yet again! But don't get too cocky, hopscotch!"

With the way things are going, I'll probably NEED a bottle of hopscotch once we're done...

Mettaton: "Let's ramp things up a little, shall we?"

"What movie did Bill Murray and Jeff Goldblum both act in?"

>A: The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou?

>B: Ghostbusters 3?

>C: Crab Nicholson 2: The Revenge of Crab Nicholson?

>D: Foodfight!?

Wait, there was a third Ghostbusters film? What the hell happened to this timeline?!

...seriously Charlie, you're not helping with this whole not helping thing.

...fine, you be a grouch.

Frisk: "A: The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou. Gotta love that soundtrack..."
Mettaton: "Right again, darling! And yes, the soundtrack was indeed delightful."

...seriously, how did I not hear about Ghostbusters 3? I thought the 2009 game WAS the third movie?

Mettaton: "This one's sure to trip you up!"

"What is the chemical formula for acrylamide?"

>A: BrBa?
>B: H2SO4?
>C: C3H5NO?
>D: Cu2O?

Oh, that's- uh... Crap. Can't be B, that's sulfuric acid, and D is cuprite. So...

Frisk: "I'll go with A: BrBa?"

GHAAAAAAARAAAA!! Hhhh... Damnit, that wasn't right at all!

Mettaton: "Oooh, I'm sorry darling, but you chose poorly."

"Seriously, BrBa? Not only is that utterly wrong, but I thought you'd be able to catch the reference easily!"

"But I guess kids these days just don't seem to appreciate turn-of-the-millennium dramas..."

F-f-fuck... you...

...really, Frisk? You didn't remember Breaking Bad?

Get fucked and stay fucked, Charlie.

...

Mettaton: "Let's see how you deal with this one?"

"Would you smooch a ghost?"

>A: Heck Yeah?
>B: Oh Yes?
>C: Mmm Yup?
>D: All Day Erry Day?

...in a smouldering fit of frustration, you choose >E: Aggressively kiss Mettaton on the cheek.
That is a thing you did. And I cannot comprehend why.

**Mettaton:** 
"...I- Ok, well- I will take that as your final answer."

"And it is amazingly correct! I love it!"

**I know your secret, Mettaton.**

*Oh big deal, I'm pretty sure his fans know anyway.*

**Mettaton:** 
"Let's try something a little more visual, shall we? Time for a quick memory game, before we go to break."

"**What is this image from?**"

> A: Spongebob Squarepants?

> B: War of the Worlds?

> C: Gravity Falls?

> D: Team Fortress 2?

Well it's obviously from an episode of Spongebob. But that tilt and filter... Come on movie trivia, don't let me down...

**Frisk:** 
"B: War of the Worlds. One of the earlier scenes had the TV on, showing an episodAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARHFGKASDCHHHHHHHHH..."

*The image zooms out, to reveal that it was a spray on the wall somewhere in... I'm pretty sure that's in Coldfront. Yup, it's from Team Fortress 2.*

That's SO CHEAP. Damn you Mettaton!

**Mettaton:** 
"And on that bombshell, it's time for our union-mandated break! See you after these messages!"

*Mettaton twirls a remote control at the camera, and with the press of a button the show goes to break.*

During the break, I aggressively glare at Mettaton, tearing into that portion of Spaghetti Carbonara to get my health back.

The taste is indescribable... beyond being pretty damn good!

**Papyrus grins at you from the sidelines. Looks like you love his cooking after all!**

*And by extension...*

Save it, Charlie. I'm not entering the Bone Zone.

...good GOD, how many adverts is this guy RUNNING?! And for that matter, why aren't I running?
Away from this ghost robot psycho?!

[MERCY] > *Fl-

**Mettaton:** "Uh-uh darling. Not on my watch."

*Mettaton twirls the remote again, this time aiming for the Mercy bu- Huh. How?*

...the Mercy button is locked behind magic chains. Can't select it.

[MERCY]

*Not happening.*

[MERCY]

*The button shakes a little behind the chains. Still not happening.*

**Mettaton:** "We're back on in 5... 4... 3... 2..."

"Hello darlings, and welcome back to the MTT Death Quiz! Our brave contestant has gotten four questions out of six so far!"

"Not bad, I must say. Not bad at all..."

"...hmmm. Now here's a question for the ages, folks!"

"**Where's your little friend gone?**"

"...no, seriously, what happened to that little girl?"

You look around, but you can't see your younger parallel anywhere. ...I've got a feeling that she didn't just slink off to use the bathroom.

Even if she did, she'd have a hard time flushing a secret elevator.

---

...we've got to get out of here. And if we can't just flee, maybe...

You look towards Undyne, still passed out on the couch. You'd think all this commotion would have woken her up by now?

**Wait, what are you planning? ...whoa, Frisk, let's not do anything stupid!**

While Mettaton is looking around, I whip her gun out of her holster, and aim it at Mettaton. Finger off the trigger, of course.

**Mettaton:** "D-darling, let's just talk about th-"

**Frisk:** "Cram it, "darling". This show's over. I'm leaving."

*Your companions look deeply worried. They did not expect you to pull something like this.*
But in spite of the abject fear in his eyes, Mettaton attempts a smirk of false confidence.

**Mettaton:** "...come on now, Frisk. We both know you're not going to shoot the shining star of the Underground. Think of the backlash!"

"**What would your bonnie Prince think of you if-**"

*A shot rings out. That definitely woke Undyne up. Also WHAT THE FUCK Frisk.*

It was a warning shot, nothing more. Nobody got hurt.

*Yeah, but they're all scared now. You're making your friends feel really uncomfortable!*

**Frisk:** "Did I stutter, gorgeous? I said I'm leaving."

"Now, are you in my way?"

*Frisk, please. You're... you're backsliding, aren't you?*

Oh come on, it's all a freaking show! I'm not ACTUALLY going to shoot anyone. But if he thinks I am, that should be enough to get him to back off.

*I really don't like this. Frisk, PLEASE just go easy on him.*

Aren't I?

*I mean go EASIER on him, you goddamn psychopath!*

...you- Frisk, this is not healthy. **Stop it.**

If you're so uncomfortable with this, **why don't you MAKE me stop?**

...you take a step forwards. Mettaton takes two steps back. **FRISK. STOP IT. This isn't helping anyone.**

*I'm only going to say this once, Frisk. PUT. THE GUN. D- Never mind. Sans slams you backwards into the floor with a Blue Attack, and the gun slides across the room.*

Damnit, I had things under control!

*In the ensuing commotion, Mettaton flees from the Lab, his camera crew not too far behind him. Finally registering the gravity of the situation, Undyne groggily pounces on you, pinning you to the ground.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Jeez, punk! The heck was all that about?"

*Her new robot eye stares down at you, not angrily, but with an expression of dismayed concern.*

**Frisk:** "Come on Undyne, take it easy! It was all just an act!"

**Doctor Undyne:** "An act?! You shot at Mettaton!"

**Frisk:** "I shot AROUND Mettaton! What, you've never fired a warning shot at someone before?!"
Sans slides over, looking down at you with pitying eyes.

Oh great, another lecture from Johnny Judge. Like I'm not gonna get a baker's dozen of those before the day's done...

**doc sans:** "kid, just listen to me."

"i know you don't want Frisk to get hurt. i know you want to go after her."

"but if you don't cool your britches and take it easy, well, you're not gonna like what happens next."

**Doctor Alphys:** "He's right, Frisk."

*Undyne looks over to Alphys. ...I just realised that her new augment has a laser welded to her temple. God, it's like a hardcore Borg cosplay!*

**Doctor Alphys:** "I don't know if you got up on the wrong side of bed this afternoon, but, well..."

"You haven't really been all that, uh... Oh who am I kidding, you're being kind of an asshole right now!"

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't worried about you, because, well, I am!"

**Doctor Undyne:** "We all are, Frisk. You've been acting all kinds of crazy since we left Waterfall. And after your little dive into the Abyss, well..."

*Undyne helps you to your feet, while still keeping her strong hands on your shoulders.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Don't hold it in, punk. Whatever's on your mind, just let it all out. We're all here for you."

**doc sans:** "...uh, guys? has anybody seen Papyrus?"

*Alphys heads upstairs, just to make sure.*

**doc sans:** "surely he didn't... i figured he'd stick around to watch the fireworks, but-"

**Doctor Alphys:** "He's not up here! And neither is the other Frisk!"

**doc sans:** "...she must've convinced him to leave with her. i hope."

"...well, if they're headed for the Core, at least they're not alone."

*Sans twiddles his fingers and clenches his fist, but nothing happens.*

**doc sans:** "darn. still nothin'?"

"c'mon, i figured we got rid of that thing when Frisk chewed it out?"

*A pink tendril slithers out of our inventory, and Syrinx slumps out over our shoulder, blinking blearily at Sans.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "JESUSFUCKWHATisthat-"
Syrinx: "It is problematic. We believe that the "turbulence" disabling your displacement is caused by ours truly."

"Our nature distorts the Psychic Interstice as a means of crowd control, destabilizing most known forms of extradimensional transportation. While it is a double-edged blade, it evens the playing field, which is ultimately advantageous."

"And before you submit a request to "shut the damned thing off", understand that we ourselves have no control over it. So unless we are contained by the appropriate wards, your "shortcuts" will be an impossibility at best, and a potentially lethal improbability at worst."

Sans looks like he's lost for words. I bet he didn't expect this when he woke up this morning.

doc sans: "...huh. so chances are that if i use a shortcut, i risk fraggin' myself?"

"hoo boy, this doesn't look good."

Oh Sans...

doc sans: "y'know, i can't say i've seen a monster like you around here."

"eh, no worries. even if i can't get around, i'll still keep an eyesocket out for ya."

*Syrinx does not look impressed.*

Syrinx: "...oh joy of celestial joys, a bazaar jester."

"Please, shower us with more eye puns. Let us marinade in your cheap wit like a trough of purgatory porter. We are overjoyed to drown our sorrows in your discount humour."

doc sans: "...gee, talk about a tough crowd."

"don't worry, i can't get any cornea with these puns."

"but seriously, would it hurt you to lighten up a little? the world don't orbit around you, y'know."

"...god, could that have been any more vagus?"

Syrinx: "...we are going back in the Hammerspace. Call us if you need our advice."

*And with that, Syrinx slithers back into our inventory. ...I'm trying to make a joke pertaining to retinas, but nothing's coming up.*

I say don't bother. It'd be too vagus even for Sans.

Syrinx: "By Ulthar's mane, don't you start as well!"

Doctor Alphys: "...so, uh... I guess we know why we still can't use shortcuts?"

"But seriously WHAT WAS THAT THING?!"

Frisk: "To be frank, I don't really know. But apparently they were like an "envoy" to some sort of higher power? We found them in this, uh, temple, down in the Abyss."
Doctor Undyne: "Wait, there was a temple down there? All that Papyrus found were crumbled pillars and dog residue! ...and you, of course."

Syrinx: "That would be the work of that blasphemous canine. When we were- Oh lords..."

Frisk: "Is something wrong?"

Syrinx: "...we referred to the stout bone ethereal as "bazaar". Ugh, of all the indignities..."

doc sans: "don't sweat it, buddy. seriously, there's no need to get worked up over my vitreous humour."

Syrinx: "Oh go f- forth and multiply yourself, jester!"

"...where were we... Ah, yes."

"A heretical creature was responsible for the desecration of our already forsaken and desecrated temple. The rubble found by that osseous parchment of an ethereal was indeed all that remained of our former domicile."

"Though despite the insult to injury, we are free regardless, thanks to this fine organic maiden."

"...hmmm."

I try to make a break for it, while the others are contemplating Syrinx's words.

Yeah, Undyne's not letting you go that easily.

Goddamnit.

Doctor Undyne: "Don't think you're gettin' off that easily, punk!"

"Someone's gotta keep you on the straight an' narrow, 'specially after today. So yeah, I'm gonna head out with ya."

Doctor Alphys: "Are- are you sure about that? I mean, so soon after-"

Doctor Undyne: "Honey, I'm fine. We'll keep in touch over the phone, alright?"

Doctor Alphys: "I- I guess- ...that reminds me, I really should give Frisk my-"

Alphys cocks an eyebrow when she spots your old wrist-phone thingy. I still don't know how to describe it other than like that.

Just call it what it is. It's a goddamn PiP-Boy.

Can we call it something that isn't such a well-known brand?
**Doctor Alphys:** "Oh my, where did you get THAT model? It's practically an antique!"

"Hand it here, I'll see if I can upgrade it!"

I detach the non-branded PiP-Boy from my wrist, and hand it to Alphys. I can't wait to see what she does to it this time around!

**Alphys books it upstairs to her workbench. A mechanical cacophony ensues as Alphys- You know what? I don't think I want to know what she's doing to upgrade your wrist-phone.**

**doc sans:** "yeeeaah, if it's all good with you guys, i'm gonna sit this one out."

"i ain't keen on trekkin' any further, an' i'll probably just slow y'all down."

"but hey, i'll still keep an eyesocket out for ya, kiddo. after all, all the cameras lead riiight here."

**Doctor Undyne:** "...fine. You do that while we go after your brother. You just stick around while we do all the legwork."

**Before Sans can retort with a pun involving soles, Alphys comes downstairs, holding what looks like an Apple product.**

**Doctor Alphys:** "...there! Some new plating, a handful of jellybean components, and presto! Now it can do pretty much anything."

"It's got texting, internet, a touch-sensitive screen, dimensional storage... A-and I've got you signed up for the Underground's number one social network!"

**Frisk:** "Aaaand I'm guessing there are a few "extra features" that you haven't told me about? Let me guess..."

"Uh... Jetpack? Bomb defusal app? Justice-powered blaster?"

**Alphys turns a little pale. Either you got them all right, or she didn't put those in.**

**Doctor Alphys:** "...you've done this all before, haven't you?"

"Sans used to tell me how he'd peek at your parallels, how there were so many constants between them all."

**Sans is holding the Mew Mew figurine on Alphys' desk, gazing lazily at it.**

**doc sans:** "...oh, don't mind me. it's just..."

"heh. this thing reminds me of that Julian kid. as far as parallels go, he was more of a variable than a constant."

"come to think of it, though he certainly wasn't a monster, i dunno if he was really human. i mean, the ears, the tail, those damn eyes..."

"...isn't there a term for things that're mostly water, but aren't humans?"

**Syrinx pops out of our inventory for a brief moment. Looks like she knows who Sans is describing.**
Syrinx: "You would not happen to have an image of this Julian-child?"

doc sans: "uh... sure, i think i have one on my phone."

Sans drags a stylus across the screen of his phone, before showing us an image of "Julian".

Oh my... Could this kid look any more like an anime?

*He's no Cloud Strife, if that's what you're asking. But he does look pretty bishi, like if Shulk were a 9 year old cat-boy.*

I'm pretty sure there was fanart just like that. Disturbingly lewd fanart, no less...

Syrinx: "A human-basthari hybrid... Most fascinating, we had no idea such a thing were possible."

"As far as "parallels" go, this child is more of a "perpendicular" to Frisk, if that makes sense."

"But we do not understand how you can capture such images?"

doc sans: "well, my lab has a pretty powerful machine, capable of peekin' into other realities. normally it'd take a lotta precision to open a window to the right places, but as always, i managed to find a shortcut."

"trick is that there's a pretty big constant runnin' throughout the branches, in that if there's a Royal Scientist in this Lab, they've got eyes all over the Underground."

"doesn't matter if it's Alphys, Dr Asgore, Elvin Gadd, or even Scientist Muffet at the screens; most of the time there are screens, and there's always someone watchin' the screens."

Frisk: "Wait, Dr E. Gadd? The guy from Luigi's Mansion? Who the hell made HIM Royal Scientist?"

doc sans: "probably Princess Peach, but that's beside the point."

"what's important is that through all the variables, the Royal Scientist upgrading the kid's phone is just one constant outta a thousand."

"but you're only half-right about the "doing all this before", Alphys. this "run" is pretty different compared to her first adventure. if anything, it's probably a "second quest" to her."

Frisk: "...second quest? You think this is some sort of game to me, Sans?"

"Come on, you know me. You know I'm better than that..."
Frisk: "...I didn't go back to have a fucking adventure, Sans. You think I've been having fun with all the shit that's happened on this fucking journey?"

"I've died like ELEVEN FUCKING TIMES since I fell back down, most of which were thanks to you, and they all hurt more than you could ever imagine!"

"I've been chased by THREE different fucking psychopaths! My adoptive parents have been fucking DEAD for centuries! And now Mettaton's been thrown into the mix, probably ready to carve my parallel in half to get her soul!"

"So NO, Sans! I'm NOT having fun! As a matter of fact..."

"I'VE BEEN HAVING A BAD TIME."

Undyne wraps her arms around you, pulling you into the biggest bear-hug you've felt in a long time. I dearly wish I could join her on this one.

Doctor Undyne: "You poor sweet thing! If I'd known you had all of this bottled up..."

"...c'mon kiddo, it's ok. Just let it all out."

I'd take her up on that offer, Frisk. That dam of yours is gonna burst some day, and it'll be at the worst possible moment.

Frisk: "...I can't, Undyne... Not- not right now, I mean."

"I've still gotta keep her safe. Then, I've got to get to Asriel, so he can keep ME safe."

"...as horrible as it sounds, I don't have time to cry right now. But once everyone's safe..."

Doctor Undyne: "...then let's go. Someone's gotta look out for ya 'til then."

Undyne takes you by the hand, slinging the Buster over her shoulder as she heads for the back exit. Sans looks guiltily at you as you leave.

doc sans: "Frisk, i-"

Doctor Undyne: "Save it, Fontaine. You've done more than enough."

Yeesh, if inflections could kill...

...wait. There's something I'm missing.

Frisk: "Hey, Alphys."

Doctor Alphys: "Yes?"

Frisk: "How about that phone number?"
Doctor Alphys: "...OH! You're right, I'm so sorry! Just lemme..."

Alphys scribbles her number on a post-it note, then scurries over to you.

You got Alphys' phone number!

Frisk: "...after all these years... I thought I'd never get your number, but..."

"Thanks, Alphys. It's little things like this that keep me going, in spite of all the bad times..."

I kneel down and kiss her on the forehead.

Undyne flinches, but cools her jets in the blink of an eye. Meanwhile, Alphys nervously scampers away, hiding herself upstairs.

Yep. She's definitely embarrassed if you ask me.

Totally worth it.

...finally getting Alphys' number, after all this time, fills me with determination.

[SAVE to Slot 1]

Charlie – LV.1 KN.14

Hotland – Alphys' Lab

No sooner than we exit the Lab, a notification pops up on our Pep-Boy.

"Pep-Boy"? That's the best you could come up with?

Well it's not a goddamn PiP-Boy, Frisk. You have any bright ideas?

[Alphys updated!]: omg asriel pick up ur phone!

...that actually raises a good question. Why the hell didn't Alphys call Asriel when I was out cold? Or hell, why didn't she call ahead when she first saw me through the cameras?!

Doctor Undyne: "...hoo boy, she's gonna be waiting a long time for a response."

"The Prince isn't really one for social media, y'see. And of course, he rarely... answers his cellphone..."

Looks like Undyne's feeling the burn. ...smells like a Long John Silver's.

Doctor Undyne: "...darn, why did I go out in this goddamn armour?! UGH, Hotland SUUUUUUCKS!"

"...I gotta head back inside. I think Alphys is finished with that "coolsuit" she's been working on..."
**Frisk:** "Fine, I'll see you up ahead, I guess."

**Doctor Undyne:** "...just don't go too far, alright?"

"In fact... Hold onto this for a sec."

*Undyne has us hold onto the Yamato Buster, while she slips away to get her hands on whatever the "coldsuit" is.*

...well. This is... Yeah.

*Heavy?*

You think?

...just a bit further. It's been a long time coming, but we're finally in the home stretch.

Hang in there Asriel. I'll be there soon...
Yet Dorkier Still

Chapter Summary

Frisk and Undyne head off in pursuit of Papyrus and the other Frisk. Situations get heated, but there is little time for a siesta right now.

Also, Papyrus' cooking is involved. For better or for worse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

...say Frisk?

Yeah?

I've been thinking about Flowey. And Asriel.

About how we saved them both?

...yeah. Except it's not just that.

...Asriel was down there a long time, with me. So long as we were together, we at least had hope for one-another.

...when you fell down, onto my grave... I heard my name being called. It felt... it felt like an opportunity to escape. For both of us to escape.

But at the last hurdle, he slipped up. And rather than rush to help him...

I wonder, sometimes. What if Asriel escaped into your soul, instead of me? Would I have been able to handle the loneliness? Would I have become a true demon?

...don't beat yourself up about it. I took care of that years ago.

But what if HE did? What if we dove back into Hell too late? I was all he had down there, and I betrayed him yet again!

You know how it went down, Frisk. You saw how much of a wreck he'd become, and that was only a week after I escaped! If we'd returned a day later...

And you know what was worse? It wasn't love that brought him to his feet. It wasn't relief to see that I'd returned to save him. It was... oh god...

He hated you.

When he pushed me away, with that disdain in his eyes... I thought they'd tried to break him already, that he'd be fine once we got him back, but no. No, that's not how the story went.
And no-one could ever blame him. I mean, you manipulated him, you poisoned his father, you killed yourself, then got him killed, and the list goes on.

At the end of the day, you weren't exactly the brother he needed. And though he still loved you, there's always the straw that breaks the camel's back.

And then you came along. You barely knew him, and yet you bent the goddamn heavens to save him and his- ...I don't know how you'd describe his relationship with Flowey. Clone? Parallel?

I don't think so, they don't quite work for their case... ...this might be obscure, but how about “replicant”?

*How the hell is Flowey an android? At what point did he ever do a tears-in-rain monologue?*

Not that kind of replicant, Charlie. I'm talking about-

*Nier? Ok, now that makes sense. In how obscure it is.*

You know what I'm talking about, though?

Yeah, yeah. Humanity transformed into Gestalts, and created Replicants to escape a magical plague. The Gestalts were the original humans transmuted into some kinda “soul form”, and the Replicants were made as soulless vessels-

...my god. Flowey's essentially a replicant, no soul, but still has his own mind. ...and we put Asriel's soul, a “gestalt”, into Flowey's body.

...two minds, sharing the same-

Ugh! I can't STAND this heat! How the hell did I stand it as a kid?!

[ACT] > [Frisk] > *Remove Striped Shirt*

**NO FRISK DON'T-**

...what? What is it now?

*Right. Sorry. I forgot you had a bra on.*

*You tie your striped shirt around your waist. Vulkin still averts its eyes, though.*

...wait, **Vulkin? Oh, right. Vulkin strolls in.**

**Vulkin:** “Awha, defense lowered? What's wrong?”

“So don't worry! I help!!!”

Vulkin disgorges a cloud of biting hot ash. It mistakenly thinks that its powers can help others.

I throw my shirt over my face so I don't breathe it in. Unlike the Ashen One, I do NOT seek embers.
You feel slightly faint, the air tasting stiflingly hot in your lungs, but other than that you're fine.

Vulkin appears to be brewing coffee in its crater.

LET ME AT IT.

Easy there Little Miss Latte, I'm pretty sure this Lava Java would melt your guts and set you on fire.

[ACT] > [Vulkin] > *Ask For Coffee

Frisk, are you even listening?

[ACT] > [Vulkin] > *Ask For Coffee

...fine. Vulkin sloshes some into a mug and hands it to you.

Sadly, it sloshes all over you, eating away at your flesh as you die in shrieking agony.

...Just kidding. Actually the crowbar snaps in two.

...I accept the mug, and wait for it to cool.

Oh, and that's not how lava works, Charlie. If you get hit with lava, you explode.

Do you believe everything you hear on National Geographic?

Vulkin wiggles its weird rump in time to the music.

What music?

**Stronger Monsters.**

Oh. Ok.

[ACT] > [Lava Java] > *Blow

You blow on the Lava Java to try and cool it down. Hot sparks jump out of the cup as you unintentionally stoke the fiery liquid.

YIKES. Ok, I'll just wait for it to cool down.

Just be sure to dodge these marshmallows in the meantime.

...wait, marshmallows? Who the hell puts marshmallows in coffee?

Probably this guy we've never met before? He appears to be a...

**Mug Knight:** “Eh, don't mind me. I'm just your average Joe...”

*Mug Knight is warming up to his current predicament.*
Vulkin gazes dreamily at the Mug Knight, awestruck by this cross-fictional incident.

One of the smaller marshmallows drops into your cup while you stand dumbstruck. It rockets upwards upon touching the Lava Java, swirling with blue flames.

Soooooo still too hot to drink.

[ACT] > [Lava Java] > *Wait

You wait patiently for the Lava Java to cool. You get antsy thinking about Frisk and Papyrus.

Crap, you’re right.

**Vulkin:** “Oh noooo, it got cold! Let me warm that up for you...”

*Vulkin starts throwing fireballs in your general direction. The music changes to Throwing Fire.*

This is just devolving into a load of disorganized fun, isn't it?

I wouldn’t call **not trying to get frickin' burned** as particularly fun, but hey what do I know? I'm not a rock troll.

**Doctor Undyne:** “Man, I leave you alone for like 5 minutes, an' you're already makin' new friends? ...wait, why don't you have your shirt on?”

What is Undyne even wearing? THAT's the coldsuit?

*Well you can't exactly call it revealing, Frisk. Though it kinda reminds me of what Nova wore in StarCraft: Ghost.*

Oh please. This “coldsuit” is quite obviously the Zero Suit from Metroid. Just in a whitish-gold colour.

...now there's an image for the ages. Galactic Bounty Hunter Undyne.

*Well, I guess she has the ponytail for it. And she'd be able to rock the Varia Suit.*

**Syrinx:** "*Interesting. The design reminds us of the Cleric Armour worn by agents of the Elder Gods...*"

"*Yet astonishingly, it is less revealing than the designs of our lords. How very interesting indeed...*"

**Marcus, the Gunslinger:** “...huh, wha? What did I miss?”

*Huh. We just left him on the floor. Well, that's awkward.*

…wait a sec. *Where did Vulkin go? There's just a pile of... gold coins.*

**Mug Knight:** “…wait a minute. This isn't The End. I'm in the wrong AU!”

“Uh, sorry if I caused any trouble!”
**Frisk:** “I wouldn't sweat it too much. Compared to the troubles we've been having, throwing a coupla marshmallows around don't amount to a hill o' beans in this crazy place.”

“There we go. Here's lookin' at you, Joe.”

*And with that, he vanishes into thin air, as if he was never there to begin with. Smooth move, Frisky Bogart.*

What can I say? Other than what the hell was that fight?!

...oh, uh, you won!

*You earned 0 XP and 40 Gold.*

*No Info was acquired...*  
...but you still have that mug of Lava Java. And it's still very hot.

Huh. I feel a lot cooler now. Musta been Vulkin, I guess?

*Survey says... maybe. Now put your damn shirt back on.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “Was... that wasn't an OEKO, was it?”

I put my striped shirt back on. I also re-equip my Rubber Gloves. They musta taken those off when I was out. Along with my... Uh-oh, where are my-

**Doctor Undyne:** “Lookin' for these, punk?”

**Frisk:** “I KNEW I was missing something!”

*You put your shoes back on. Then you take them off, and brush the dirt from your socks. THEN you put them back on.*

*There, that's better.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “There, now we're both properly dressed.”

*Undyne picks up the Buster, turning her eyes to the lofty heights of Hotland.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “...well, uh, no time like the present! Let's hoof it!”

*And hoof it we do. Across the moving sidewalk, over the long stretch of pipe, hopping from vent to vent until-*

*We took a wrong turn! We're at that alcove with the- ...it's another shrine. This one's dedicated to-*
Marcus: “Arlene...”

Arlene Hanson. “The Kindness”.

Marcus: “...I never woulda thought... They actually cared about her...”

“Lord, what have I done?”

Frisk: “I thought you already knew? Didn't we go over all this when we first met?”

Marcus: “What are you talking about? First I saw of you, you were rushin' us all towards Hotland!”

Frisk: “…you really don't remember? I thought you'd be determined enough to remember your earlier exposition dump.”

“You know, about needing a proper focus?”

Marcus: “I... How the hell did that happen? I- whooooaaa...”

The yellow soul inside the Buster pulsates and shivers. Yup. Totally wiggin' out.

Marcus: “How on God's green Earth do you pull it off, Princess?!?”

“Am I just goin' crazy? Two days happenin' at once? WHAT?”

Frisk: “Well, it's complicated. But yeah. They did. And one of them ended badly.”

“That's why I was rushing you all through eastern Waterfall, doing everything quick an' all that. Because I'd already been through all that, and I wasn't looking forward to doing everything again at the same slow pace, listening to all that unskippable exposition for a second time.”

“And in the end, we were able to continue on a better path. Until I got knocked off the path into the Abyss. But I found an ancient alien angelic eyeball thing in the Abyss, so all in all it was still a 100% result.”

Marcus: “Well, I- Uh. Okay. Whatever you say, pumpkin. I'll take your word for it.”

Syrinx: “Again you prove your insanity, child. How could one as nascent as yourself even hope to toy with the fabric of reality, in the fashion that you imply?”

Frisk: “Did you not see me SAVE?! Or, well, FEEL it? Like, about a dozen times since yesterday morning?”

“Seriously, I saved just as we were leaving the Lab!”

Syrinx: “There have indeed been disturbances in the fabric, but it still seems exponentially conceited of you to claim responsibility for a phenomenon of such cyclopean complexity, that it dwarfs that of proper quantum field manipulation!”

“If you indeed possess the power of time travel, you will tell us something that only we here know. You will identify our species.”
Frisk: “I accept your challenge. In fact, the anticipation fills me with determination.”

HP restored.

[SAVE to Slot 2]

Charlie LV.1 KN.15
Hotland – Shrine to Arlene Hanson

Syrinx: “So, human, what are we?”

Frisk: “Uh, let's see... ...Neversoftian?”

Syrinx: “You chose... appallingly. What even IS a “Neversoftian”?”

Frisk: “It was a... think it was a game development studio, the guys who developed most of the Tony Hawk Pro Skater games. And then they got shut down in 2014, because of Activision being Activision.”

Syrinx: “Indeed, you are so foolishly wrong! Any traveller worth their salt would identify us as an oculastran. Specifically, a nymph of the oculastran race, for only those of us who prove that they are worthy are granted the sacred jelly, that which facilitates their metamorphosis into a graceful many-tentacled imago."

“At least now you know something, however little it may seem.”

Frisk: “Well, uh, thanks for the intel. And now, to save face, I'm going to load my save file and prove myself.”

Syrinx: “We would love to see you try.”

Hoo boy, she is in for a beating!

[LOAD from Slot 2]

Syrinx: “So, human, what are we?”

Frisk: “You are an oculastran nymph. Only through the use of sacred jelly can a nymph mature into an imago, which has many tentacles.”

It seems lost for words. It blinks in a shuddering fashion as it processes what you just said.

Syrinx: “We... remember? But- No. How?”

“This is truly an impossibility! Even the Tellers of Fortunes, Shai's most powerful oracles,
merely peer into later days and offer guidance to their clients!”

“But you are a mere mortal, child! You possess a latent affinity for magic, that we could taste, but that power alone is nowhere NEAR enough to bend time and space to your will!”

“Gods, what madness has befallen this universe?!”

**Frisk:** “Oh, that reminds me! How long was I out, Undyne?”

*Undyne shakes her head out of the bewildered stupor that these events have caused.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “Wow, kid. You really are somethin' else...”

“I'd say... 7 hours, maybe 8? It's like 2 in the afternoon right now.”

**Frisk:** “I think enough time's passed for me to take another dose.”

**Doctor Undyne:** “Dose? Kid, you never told me you were on medication.”

“...oh... Frisk, I- If I'd known...”

[ITEM] > *Mana Pastille

*You pop a Mana Pastille in your mouth.*

...well, aren't you gonna-

[ITEM] > *Mana Pastille

Another one?! Sheesh, I dunno Frisk. I mean, after last time...

This time... shall be different!

**Alright Doctor Weird, cool your jets.**

[ITEM] > *Lava Java

Right, something to wash 'em down.

*The glassy surface of the solidified Lava Java feels quite warm against your lips, like kissing a hot rock on a summer's day. Except the rock tastes like pennies and expresso.*

**Son of a bitch.** Also, it's spelled “espresso”.

*I'm pretty sure there is such a thing as expresso. Isn't it like the kind of strong coffee you order to go? The kinda stuff that fuels students over in the Californias?*

Pretty sure those students would be knocking back cheap soykaf, not the real stuff. All I know is that I'm feeling jipped. I'll just swallow these things dry, I guess.

My maximum MP increased by 2. Mhhr.

*It's not different at all! IS IT, FRISK?!!*
Bit of a twinge in the stomach, but I feel way better than last time we tried that. I guess Papyrus' cooking helped soften the blow.

...wow. There's a sentence I never thought I'd use. Normally I'd be trying to soften the blow of Papyrus' cooking!

Ah c'mon. He got a lot better at it, even in the original “aftergame”. By that point it was merely average.

**Doctor Undyne:** “You alright now, champ?”

**Frisk:** “...I'm really FEELING it! Let's get this show on the road...”

**Syrinx:** “Inconceivable...”

---

After navigating the steam vents yet again, we find ourselves before a long row of blue and orange lasers. ...you remember how they worked, right?

Sure. Blue lasers, stay still. Orange lasers, keep moving. Phone rings, answer it.

**Doctor Alphys:** “Oh no... He's activated Hotland's defense systems! All the puzzles are reactivating!”

“...hang tight, I'm gonna try and shut them down.”

Of course this wouldn't be easy. Why would it?

**Well, I have an idea on how to make it a little easier.**

And that would be...?

**We have Papyrus' number. We can just call him and ask him what the hell is going on.**

...AUGH, I hate how I always forget the important stuff. Ask me about Sterling Archer's original VA, and I'd tell you it was H Jon Benjamin. Ask me how to access the first warp zone in Super Mario Bros, and I could tell you to jump on the elevator in 1-2 and run above the level. But oh, something as simple as calling my friends? Why would THAT ever hold my attention?

...maybe the others took the initiative?

**Frisk:** “Say, uh, this might sound a little crazy, but have either of you tried calling Papyrus?!”

The line remains silent, with the exception of hushed whispers, before Sans is put on the phone.

**Doc Sans:** “heya. so, i tried phoning a minute ago, but all i got was a “NOT RIGHT NOW, SANS!” followed by unintelligible shouting and... i think he was cooking?”

“But it sounded like the kitchen was exploding around him. so yeah. couldn't get any sense outta him.”

“...hope that helps.”
Frisk: “Oh gods. I think he's on Cooking With A Killer Robot!”

Doctor Undyne: “Holy crap!”

“I frickin' LOVE that show! And so does Papyrus!”

Alphys sheepishly chimes in.

Doctor Alphys: “Eh... I honestly prefer Food Wars...”

“...oh, and uh, I've got good news and bad news...”

“Good news is that I managed to stop the blue lasers!”

Frisk: “That's a relief. But let me guess: bad news is that Ren is back on my tail?”

Doctor Alphys: “...no, nothing THAT bad. Not yet, anyways.”

“...the bad news is that all the blue lasers are now orange.”

Sure enough, all the lasers are orange. So I guess we don't stop running?

Sure. I guess that'll have to do.

Frisk: “We'll be fine if we just book it, right?”

Doctor Undyne: “Yup. We can take it from here, hon!”

“Call us if there's an update on the sitrep!”

Doctor Alphys: “Oh I can tell you what the situation is. I'm looking at it right now, and-”

“Ok, yeah, this episode is like if Food Wars had a baby with One Piece. And I think... it looks like Papyrus is winning!”

Over the phone, a resounding frantic “NYEEEEEH!” can be heard over the clattering of pots and the slicing of blades. Shame we can't use FaceTime or whatever on this damn thing, I wanna see what the hell's going on over there!

Well there is one way we can see. And that's if we get a goddamn move-on!

Frisk: “C'mon, let's go! We might have time to crash this party!”

You barely feel the lasers as you rush through them. Let's hope we can do these puzzles quick-

...nevermind. Frisk and Papyrus already did them.

Frisk: “Thank goodness... We're almost there! Just a little further, through the doors and across the-”

“Are you serious? No! NO!”

He shut off the steam vents!
Activate the jetpack, we can just fly over!

AUGH, which button is it?!

This one- WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO-

Eat this, you spangly bastard!

You rocket across the gap fist-first towards Mettaton, who glances to the side in surprise. Before pressing a button on his remote, deactivating your jetpack function and stepping to the side, leaving you to eat linoleum as you fall forward and slide to a stop.

...it actually tastes clean enough to eat off of. Smells like ammonia and sweet lemons.

Mettaton: “Oh my, darling. I know you're ever so desperate for a cameo after last time's showstopper, but we've just wrapped up filming for this episode!”

“Though since you made the effort to show up, I'll give you a little taster of this episode's content...”

Gingerly, he pulls your head up, and slides a small plate of mac 'n' cheese under your face. Oooh, looks like it has bits of bacon and frankfurters in it!

Mettaton: “The esteemed Doctor Papyrus, it seems, has quite an affinity for pasta dishes. Who ever could have guessed?”

“As a matter of fact, he heartily accepted today's challenge: cook a meal to delight the tastebuds, or I take the girl's soul!”

“Oh? You want to know if he succeeded?”

Mettaton slips a fork into your hand, a sinister glint in his eyes.

“Taste it, and find out.”

...will you taste the mac 'n' cheese? Will the taste of it break your heart?

...I dig the fork into the meaty pasta, and take a bite...

...oh gods...

It's...

Frisk: “It's pretty great!”

[Alphys updated!]: wow, what an episode! five stars!

Mettaton: “Oh yes! It was truly a wonderful spin on a college classic!”

“But you want to hear the best part about it, darling? What am I saying, of course you do!”

“This meal was made entirely from vegan ingredients!”

What. But it tastes so...
Mettaton: “The weenies were in fact boiled hearts of the typha plant, otherwise known as the “water sausage”. Fried red dulse served as the bacon substitute, for that all-important salty edge...”

“And of course, what better “cheese” for this recipe, than good old-fashioned tofu?”

“Even I was surprised that he beat my little challenge. But the end result... MWAH.”

Again, Papyrus surprises me. But jeez, could that have been any more tense?

Mettaton: “Darling, I believe our little post-show wrap-up is over. I trust you can show yourself out?”

“Be sure to make it in time for our 3 o’ clock slot. It's going to be a blast, so don't you miss it!”

And with that, Mettaton unfurls his wings and...flies off into the fiery glow of the Hotland caverns...

The last time we saw those wings... He didn't stand a chance.

---

Doctor Undyne: “Frisk! You ok, buddy?”

Somehow, Undyne made it across? I guess she's got the jumps!

“The jumps”? That sounds less like child athletics and more like slang for Parkinson's disease.

Will you quit raining on my parade?

I get to my feet, still holding the bowl of mac 'n' cheese.

Frisk: “You made it! But how'd you-”

Oh. My gods. It's the Bird!

Bird sits on Undyne's head. Bird is contented.

Doctor Undyne: “This guy right here! He just picked me up and carried me over!”

“Which is crazy, 'cause when I was younger, he gave me a lift across the gap in Waterfall, and it took like an hour...”

Strong Bird: “*qwek*”

...Bird's eyes have a red glimmer to them. Bird flies south, its duty done.

I hope we see Bird again. I miss Bird already.

Why're you talking about the Bird like that?

Why do you not cherish Bird?

We can cherish the Bird later. Right now we need to get back on track.
**Frisk:** “Well, apparently the episode just ended, so they shouldn't be too far ahead of us.”

“Oh, and try this! Apparently Papyrus saved my parallel by making mac 'n' cheese.”

*You give Undyne the Vegan Macaroni. She takes a tentative bite as we walk.*

**Frisk:** “Turns out it's also vegan.”

**Doctor Undyne:** “…normally I don't like tofu, but I guess the salt adds a little something to it.”

“Heh. I guess it's a good thing I never taught him how to cook. I'm…”

*Undyne looks down and sighs, as if she's disappointed in herself.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “I was never really any good at cooking. And seeing how lousy his cooking is in the other timelines, Papyrus would have been better off with a better teacher.”

“I wonder… Rather than way-lay him with cooking lessons, maybe I shoulda given him some proper training?”

**Frisk:** “What're you talking about? Papyrus told me that you never joined the Royal Guard in this timeline!”

**Doctor Undyne:** “That doesn't mean I didn't try. When I was younger, I was real eager to sign up, protect the Underground from the barbarian hordes! But to join, I had to prove myself.”

“Ren agreed to let me into the Guard, but on one condition. I would have to best him in single combat.”

**Frisk:** “Talk about a steep entrance exam…”

**Doctor Undyne:** “Don't have to tell me twice, Frisk. I thought I was doing well, right up until-”

*She taps the side of her head, next to her implant.*

…oh. He didn't…

**Doctor Undyne:** “That's why I had a crystal eye all those years. This time around, the eyepatch wasn't just for show...”

“But I didn't just lose my eye that day. For a time, I lost my fighting spirit. My determination.”

“That was, until the Prince stepped in. Even after being rejected by the Guard, he saw potential in me. With his guidance, I started doing better in college.”

“And when I finally graduated from university, he landed me an apprenticeship at Weapons Development. And the rest is... history…”

“**WHAT IS THAT.**”

*A gray anomaly, Of Ecto-Kinetic Origin, stands before the elevator. Its right hand, clutching its*
head, and its left hand, holding something cold so cold THE SHADOWS CUTTING DEEPER

Gaster Follower Catze: “Alphys might work faster. But the old Hotland Doctor, Doctor W.D Gaster?”

“One day, he vanished without a trace. They say he shattered across time and space.”

“Ha ha... How can I say so without fear?”

“I'm holding a piece of him right here.”

...in the blink of an eye, the OEKO vanishes. But not before we catch a glimpse of the writhing, ivory-white object in its hand.

Inside the grey, ever-shifting globule, twitching erratically... A glimmering finger of bone.

Chapter End Notes

Mug Knight is from The End, that Dreemurr Reborn fangame that's currently in the works. Just so we're on the same page here.
The Phantom Pants

Chapter Summary

Frisk and Undyne continue their pursuit of Papyrus and the other Frisk, praying that Mettaton doesn't beat them to the punch.

Undyne is still shaken from the encounter, as we enter the elevator. And I can't blame her in the slightest.

So that was an OEKO... So whatever happened to these guys, also happened to the Goner Kid?
...don't go near the Core. That's what they said to Monster Kid.

Doctor Undyne: "Y-you ok, punk?"

Frisk: "'course I am. You?"

Doctor Undyne: "I- Yeah! Yeah..."

"...oh, who am I kidding... That thing... It was talkin' about Sans' uncle, wasn't it?"

I nod, confirming her fears.

Frisk: "Gaster."

Doctor Undyne: "Gaster... ...ergh..."

"I think I... Yeah, he's the guy that discovered nuclear power, right? Ran the Hotland Lab before Alphys."

"...come to think of it, it's kinda strange that he gave the Lab to Alphys. I mean, bless her soul, she was a bright girl, but..."

I think I'm starting to piece it together too.

Well, press the damn button while you're doing that. Time's wasting.

Oh, right.

Doctor Undyne: "I mean, she was the intern there, originally. I remember her complaining to me about how all she was doing was throwing switches, plugging things in, and making people tea."

Frisk: "Gee, sounds like her college education was really paying for itself..."

Doctor Undyne: "Pay for itself? ...oh god, you don't mean- Please don't tell me you have to PAY to go to school on the Surface."
Frisk: "...let's just talk about Gaster, ok?"

"So, Alphys was an intern at his Lab, but now she's in charge, and Gaster is nowhere to be found. That right?"

Doctor Undyne: "Yeah. Pretty much. Though..."

"...I just realised something. That OEKO, it reminds me of..."

"My GOD! How could I forget my friggin' lecturer?!"

"Either I'm going crazy, or that thing was Professor Gehrman Catze..."

Frisk: "Let me guess. He worked with Doctor Gaster."

Doctor Undyne: "...I guess he did, in the end? I remember that he quit teaching... about a year after I graduated. And now I know why."

BOSH. Doors're open.

---

I don't... What was this guy's name again? Splint Chesthair?

Blast Hardcheese? Bolt Vanderhuge? Flint Ironstag?

Syrinx: "Bob Johnson? ...no, wait..."

Roll Fizzlebeef: "Hey there. The name's Heats Flamesman!"

"Remember that name, baby."

Punch Sideiron gives us the suave "gun-fingers" gesture, clicking as he does so.

Were you even listening? He's obviously called Big McLargeHuge.

...well, now that's out of the way... Huh.

Calling our old pal, are we?

There's something bugging me about this.

Well, he can't use shortcuts, so that's why he's not at this post.

It's not that, it's...

Doctor Alphys: "Y-you're curious about that shack, aren't you?"

Frisk: "Yup. How did Sans keep all that snow on the roof?"

A brief rustling signals that Sans has the phone.
doc sans: "ya really wanna know? well, honestly..."

"i didn't bother cleaning the damn stuff off when i moved it there from Snowdin."

Frisk: "Ha, ha. Now, what's really going on with that stuff?"

doc sans: "gah, alright, fine. i can't get the damn stuff off, it keeps on growing back."

"that shack was part of Gaster's initial plans to cool down the Core, so we wouldn't have to wear hazard suits whenever we needed to go inside. he called this stuff "snow-eight", since it could stay cool an' solid at high temperatures."

Frisk: "...why the hell is this stuff just layin' around out here?! Didn't your uncle ever read Cat's Cradle?!"

doc sans: "don't worry about it, kid. ol' W.D was pretty familiar with Vonnegut's works, an' he decided not to let it go that far."

"all that snow-eight does is cool things down. or at least try to. besides, even though you're mostly water, it can't freeze you even if you try an' eat it."

"but it'll probably give you the trots. so maybe don't eat it."

Well. That clears things up. Let's keep moving.

...you know, I just realised something insane. I haven't needed to use the bathroom for about three years. Three years of eating monster food, just converting straight into matter and energy when it hits my guts, and not once have I needed to powder my nose.

Join the club, Frisk. I haven't eaten anything for over 200 years.

It's not a pissing contest, Charlie! And even if it were, neither of us would win.

Still... I mean, I HAVE been drinking water, or at least I think it's water, all that time. And we need new water to help flush out the old water an' all the trash chemicals that've been building up in our bodies... So shouldn't I have needed to pee at least once in the past coupla years?

I wouldn't think too hard about it. You might just open the floodgates.

...maybe you're right. Maybe it's best that I don't question it. Never know what could-WAAAAGH!!

A large, clumsy tail trips you up while you're not looking.

???: "AHHH!!! Are you ok?!

You find yourself staring up at a creature who is most certainly in the wrong time and space.

???: "I'm dreadfully sorry!"
This creature tries to match your movements in an attempt to fit in. However polite it may be, it is still in your way.

Dreadfully Sorry: "Oh, how clumsy of me to knock you over!"

"Oy, why am I such a klutz? I was just waiting around for the Art Club to open, but-

Frisk: "Wait wait wait... Art Club?"

Dreadfully Sorry: "Yeah! I'm a member of the university's Art Club!"

"I'm not half-bad as an artist, y'know. Though sometimes my fellow artists call my, uh, "subject matters" into question."

Charlie: "Do they call your lack of pants into question?"

Goddamnit Charlie.

Dreadfully Sorry: "...I- I'm sorry?"

Charlie: "Yeah, I know that, buddy. But unless my eyes deceive me, you aren't wearing any pants."

The creature looks down over its ample gut, and realises, to its horror, that it forgot to put pants on this morning.

Dreadfully Sorry: "OH CRAP, how did THAT happen?!"

"Uhm, uhhh, oh god, this is baaaaaad..."

Thinking quickly, the creature produces a large black pencil.

Dreadfully Sorry: "Nobody panic! I- I can fix this!"

Rolling out a sheet of A0 paper, the creature rapidly draws a large comfortable-looking pair of black pants with dragon patterns.

...the pants seem to peel themselves off of the paper, and stand up of their own accord!

Dreadfully Sorry: "WHAT HAS SCIENCE DONE?!!"

"Quick, help me catch them!"

The Baggy Dragons start walking around like J Edgar Hoover on a Tuesday afternoon.

Well, here we go gathering nuts in May.

All we need is an elderly peasant woman to run away shrieking in terror. Maybe this creature can draw one of those for us?

Would it hurt you use his name? ...the university I.D card, worn like a talisman around his neck, says he's called "Samuel Emory". ...huh. I get it.

...Samuel starts chasing after the pants, but can't quite catch up to them, thanks to his waddling, unflattering gait.
**Undyne:** [ACT] > [Baggy Dragons] > *Body Slam*

_Uh, ok, Undyne has subdued the pants. By slamming down onto them. Samuel hastily slips on the rebellious pants before they can object._

**Samuel:** "Th-thanks Doc! Sometimes the things I draw are too real for their own good..."

"Anyway, uh, sorry about being in your way, Miss, uh...?"

**Frisk:** "...Rivera."

**Samuel:** "...uh, let me make it up to ya. Lemme see..."

"Oh! I got it! I'll draw you something useful!"

**Frisk:** "I- I appreciate the offer. Really, I do, But I'm on a bit of a tight schedule. Maybe some other time?"

*Samuel looks at his feet, seemingly dejected.*

**Frisk:** "Hey, don't worry about it. I'll probably be at the MTT Resort later, so if you run into me there, I'll take you up on that offer."

*Samuel cocks an eyebrow at you mentioning the Resort. You forgot that there's a university there, didn't you?*

Well crap.

**Samuel:** "...you mean the Metatron Technical Campus, right?"

"Well, it IS a pretty nice place, but I'd hardly call it a tourist destination, even with all the student parties."

"I'm... not really a party person, if you can't tell. Even if I were, I just don't have the time for it, between the Club and my art degree."

*Are you kidding me.*

**Frisk:** "Riiight. I'll leave you to it, Sam."

**Samuel:** "Right! Yeah. I'll, uh, just wait here. For my colleagues. And hope they don't take an eraser to my new legwear."

"...yeah. Toodles!"

---

*Phew, glad that's over.*

What is your DEAL with him? He's nowhere NEAR as terrible as Jerry, for cryin' out loud!
I didn't mean it like that. I was just saying I was glad that we're back on the road. Not anything to do with th- "Sam".

And I'd hope not. Guy looks like he's got enough troubles as it is without you raining on his parade.

*Hey, at least I helped him realise that he forgot his pants. Assuming that he's not one of those "Peter Pantsless" freeballers.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Heh, this puzzle. Reminds me of a puzzle idea I had back in college."

**Frisk:** "I remember that it was pretty sick."

**Doctor Undyne:** "Hwu? How'd you- Oh, right. "Parallels" an' all that junk."

"Anyways, rather than flip switches on the conveyor, you got these four hoops, and you keep going back an' forth on the conveyor 'til you get sick! THEN you gotta puke in all four of the hoops!"

"...eh. I didn't get very high marks for that one. Bit of credit for ingenuity an' disorienting the enemy, but it was a little too impractical to implement. And kinda gross."

**Frisk:** "Well, they can't all be winners."

"...let's get this thing outta the way. Try to catch any of the switches I miss, ok?"

Undyne nods, with a grunt of "righteous" for emphasis.

Woah Nelly! This conveyor's a little faster than you though!

I'll have to work a little faster then, won't I?


You flip the second switch as you pass by it. So far, so good.

...hey, isn't that RG01 and RG02 on the other conveyor? Aren't they supposed to be fighting- Uh oh.

We gotta catch up, and FAST.

Sadly, while we were gawking at the star-crossed brosephs, you forgot to flip the third switch.

Oh MOTHER of FUC-

Fortunately Undyne picked up the slack and slapped the third switch as she passed by. She gives you a thumbs-up and a wink, a bead of sweat trickling towards her brow.

**Doctor Undyne:** "Got your six, girl!"

*We make taste past the- crap, there's one more puzzle before the Bomb Show!*

Ok, ok, remember the pattern! Avoid the first panel, then take the vent left, down, down, left, up, down, up, up, left! BOOM!

*The faint pop of light explosives echoes from above.*
Frisk: "Go, GO, GO!"

Doctor Undyne: "I- Frisk, I can't- WAIT UP!"

Don't care if I'm leaving her to the puzzle. Don't are about the mouse and the laser safe.

[Alphys updat-

Don't care about Alphys' opinions on Mew Mew Kissy Cutie 2.

---

After running as fast as your legs could carry you, you slam into a forcefield, blocking your entry into th-

**FUCK THIS FORCEFIELD.**

[MAGIC] > [Sorcery] > *Soul Stream*

No way did you just pull that out of-

Frisk: "HyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA"\n
*A stream of searing soulmass burns its way through the forcefield. Rarely has this sorcery been any more useful outside of gimmick fights.*

Unfortunately it burned up all of your MP. Better have something else up your sleeve, else that big bomb's gonna bring our adventure to a quick end!

Syrinx: "Allow us to enlighten you..."

**Installing ULTHARS_SCINTILLATING_WALL.ETP...**

Installation complete. The selected program is now ready to execute.

That's... awfully convenient, but how can we do that without any-

[ITEM] > *Mana Pastille*

...swallowing one Pastille too many, your MP is fully restored. ...but at what cost?

...apparently you don't get your max MP boosted. Huh. I figured it'd be something more serious, like a stomach tumor or somethin'.

Are you quite finished?!

*As a matter of fact, NO. But that countdown is pretty close. We'll talk about this later.*

I run in front of the big bomb, ready to throw up a forcefield of my own.
Meanwhile, it seems like Papyrus somehow managed to disarm all six of the bombs. Neat!

**Mettaton:** "Oh me, oh my! Looks like our special guest has finally decided to show up! And just in time for the end of this segment!"

"Thankfully for you, the esteemed Doctor Papyrus has successfully disarmed all six of the items on display here today! Congratulations, Doctor!"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "There is no trap that the great Papyrus cannot disarm!"

"Except for toasters. Toaster are the worst."

**Mettaton:** "Well, thankfully for you, the big bomb is not a toaster."

"But it is now due to explode in two seconds!"

"Adios, darlings!"

**Frisk:** "Nope."

**[POWER] > [Fortitude] >  *Ulthar's Scintillating Wall**

> As you thrust your burning hands skyward, making the sign of the horns, the image of a horned lion's head roars above you. While the encouraging roar reverberates throughout the cavern, accompanied by the melodic shredding of an electric guitar, a wall of dazzling sunlight hexagons thunders into reality between you and the big bomb.

...ahem. Yeah. That's certainly a beautiful wall.

...any second now.

...uh?

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Such majesty..."

...you are joking. You have GOT to be kidding me.

You ARE seeing this, right?

Yeah. It's, uh... Ok then. This is what happens when I put on a show.

The big bomb shatters harmlessly into little pieces, and a small white dog saunters out of the wreckage. It belches forth a small cloud of fire and smoke, then hops off the edge of the platform.

**Syrinx:** "That damnable hound actually did something virtuous? ...how very peculiar."

"Perhaps the beast knew not what it was doing?"

"Or maybe it was an affable trickster, a pratfalling fool with a heart only for jests and japes?"

...I did all of that. Burnt all of that magic. Only for it to be a dud.

...deep breaths. ...DEEP BREATHS.
...it was still really cool, though. Even caught Mettaton off-guard with how unnecessarily epic it was.

Mettaton: "...well now..."

"...ahem. That's all the time we have for now, folks!"

"Not quite the explosive finale I had planned, but the show must go on!"

"Our next broadcast shouldn't be too far off, so until then, be sure to catch up on anything you've missed with MTT VoD! Don't forget to boost your pledges to 30G a month for exclusive behind-the-scenes footage and rip-roaring bloopers!"

"Until then, my darlings, have a sparktacular day!"

Mettaton winks with his handsome bishounen eyes, before unfurling his wings and rocketing off to... wherever he's going next.

Probably that stage area for DoctorTale: The Musical.

Oh, and before I forget... I grab a hold of the other Frisk's striped shirt before she can sneak away again.

Frisk: "Don't think you're gettin' away THAT easy, kiddo."

Wow. This is actually really weird. I'm keeping my other self from running off.

Well, at least you've finally gotten a hold of yourself.

Nice, real mature of you.

Frisk: "So just why in the hell were you guys running off anyways? I mean, I'll be honest Papyrus, I kinda expected better of you than to just run away like that."

Papyrus looks perturbed by your accusations.

Doctor Papyrus: "Running away? Young lady I'll have you know that I was keeping an eye on the girl!"

"It's just that she was insistent on reaching the Capital, with or without a helping hand. And as I had no way of stopping her, I felt duty-bound to keep her safe in her travels."

Frisk: "I... Nope. I can't argue with that. But I know what I can argue with..."

"Why the hell was the kid in such a hurry to get to New Home anyways?"

Your timid parallel speaks up. By the tone of her voice, she sounds desperate.

Little Frisk: "...the bad men came back. The bad men who drove Mom out of California."
"They tried to take over the City, and I ran away. I just wanted to hide, but..."

"I heard stories of a mighty king, the Horned God of the Mountain, who could wield the power of souls..."

"I need to find him! He has to help us! If he's anywhere near as powerful as the legends say, he could blast the bad guys out of the sky with a single spell!"

They- They actually did it. They actually kept going past Vegas... HOW?!

The butterfly effect is a bitch, isn't it?

But- Seriously, how?! I thought only the Underground changed!

Are you even listening to me? It's the goddamn butterfly effect! If you go back far enough, even the slightest change can have far-reaching implications.

Let's not forget that someone still crossed the Barrier with my parallel's soul in this timeline. It kinda goes without saying that Asgore taking Asriel's place might have changed things up there too.

Over 200 years, even a shift as simple as that could change everything. I mean, look at the Underground now. Our best friends are super-scientists, and our parents are dead. All because of one simple shift.

As for the rest of the Earth? For all we know, Ronald Reagen coulda been President in the 80's. The guy from Bedtime for Bonzo? Let's... let's be real, Charlie. That never coulda happened. Papyrus is actually good at cooking in this timeline, Frisk. ANYTHING could happen.

But let's get back to the matter at hand. In this timeline, Frisk went into the Underground to get Asriel's help in beating back these invaders. Crazy as it sounds, it sounds like that's what's going on.

Even if he could, he wouldn't. Asriel isn't that kinda guy.

He has it in him to do it, though.

Asriel could easily absorb the human souls, pass through the Barrier, and lay waste to the invading forces. And if he took just ONE of their souls, he'd have more than enough power to tear down the Barrier.

But he wouldn't. Asriel is better than that.

Maybe? But don't forget what happened to Marcus. Don't forget the circumstances that forced Asriel to kill.

What do you think will happen when the invaders find the Underground? How far would they go before Asriel is forced to protect his kingdom?

Save it, Charlie.

Like it or not, this Asriel is different! He's not the soulless psychopath you met originally, but he's not
a pure and innocent cinnamon bun either.

Please stop.

He might be the king of wishful thinking, like his father, but he's still the king of all monsters. He has a lot of responsibilities, and I imagine the protection of his subjects is pretty big on that list!

Charlie...

Maybe you'll be right. Maybe he won't do the obvious. But don't force the possibility out of your mind.

If Frisk is telling us the truth, then him absorbing the souls might be the only chance this place has, this time around.

And I know exactly what you have to say to that.

There has to be another way.

Nailed it!

But yeah. Maybe there is another way, even in the current situation. If there is, though, I can't see it right now...

Little Frisk: "Hey, hey wake up!"

Well, coffee break's over. Let's get back to the real business.

But I didn't get any coffee...

Frisk: "...well... Let's go see what he can do."

"Just... don't run off this time, ok?"

Little Frisk's lips purse at this request. Not quite sure how I feel about this version of you.

Little Frisk: "Only if you can keep up! We're all in danger!"

Papyrus maintains a firm hand on Little Frisk's shoulder.

Doctor Papyrus: "Please, small one. I am certain that it is not so urgent."

"For the last 200 years, barely any human has found their way into the Underground. I see no reason why these "bad men" would have any more luck in stumbling upon this place, than the few who once did."

...about time she showed up. Undyne's caught up to us, and she looks BUSHED.

Doctor Undyne: "Gee, thanks for leavin' me with that damn vent puzzle! 's not like I had trouble
with it or anything!"

Aaaaand she sounds pissed. Gee, can't imagine why.

**Frisk:** "For your information, Undyne, I just saved these guys from a massive bomb. If it weren't for me-

**Doctor Papyrus:** "My WORD, Undyne! What EVER are you wearing?"

"Nobody told me it was Cat-Suit Saturday!"

*Flustered and annoyed, Undyne exhales forcefully.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "It's a goddamn coolsuit, Papyrus! It's the only reason why I'm out here workin' my ass off in frickin' 90° heat!"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Well, that's entirely reasonable, but aren't you supposed to wear something on top of the coolsuit? As in, anything?"

*Undyne's cell rings, and she picks up, holding a finger up.*

**Doctor Undyne:** 

"'sup babe? Everythin' alright?"

**Doctor Alphys:** "...actually, I've been meaning to tell you, but..."

"...you are actually supposed to wear that underneath your regular clothes."

*At this, Undyne's cheeks turn a bright pink. ...well, this is-

**Doctor Undyne:** "...why the hell didn't you me tell this earlier."

"I've been running through Hotland in nothin' but this suit for how long, and NOT ONCE DID YOU-"

**Doctor Alphys:** "B-b- You were in a real hurry, and I didn't have the time to tell you! And then all those other things happened and got in the way and there really wasn't a good time for me to tell you and I'M SORRY UNDYNE I'M REALLY SORRY-"

**Doctor Undyne:** "Sweetie! Sweetie. Sweetie, just cool your jets, ok?"

"It's not really that bad at all. In fact... It feels... Weirdly liberating to wear this thing."

"It feels like a second freakin' skin, just keepin' me this constant state of cooling refreshment..."

Tooooooo much information.

**Little Frisk:** "Please? Please can we get going?"

"I... I don't want the bad men to hurt anybody."

**Doctor Alphys:** "She's... yeah, she's got a point."

"You guys should be a-ok to head towards the Campus, now you're together."
"A-and when you're there? Maybe you could hang out in the Melting Pot? Grab a coffee, get some cake, an' take a breather while Asriel makes his way down there."

**He's finally on his way?!**

**Frisk:** "Wh-when can we expect him to show up?"

**Doctor Alphys:** "Well, thing is, I forgot it was Saturday. Our dear Prince tends to sleep in on the weekends."

"Aaaaand he puts his phone on silent on days like that. So it'll take a while for us to get the message across."

But of **course** he would. Why wouldn't he?

**Doctor Alphys:** "So, um... yeah...."

"Get your butts to the Melting Pot, an' everything should be a-ok."

**She's jinxed it. She just HAD to fucking jinx it.**

_C'mon Frisk, you have that Spider Donut to skip Muffet's battle. And as for the "musical"? You still have Papyrus' System Disruptor to hard-wipe the tile puzzle._

I'm aware of that. ...actually I forgot about the Disruptor, but either way I still know how to solve the upcoming puzzles.

**But now Alphys has said things are gonna be fine, they won't be. All of our worst enemies are gonna jump outta the shadows and stomp us into the dirt, and we'll lose all the progress we've made so far!**

*Now now, Frisk. I know you're expecting the worst, and hey! It might happen. But it's a pretty BIG might.*

*I think you should remember that this ISN'T Dark Souls, or I Wanna Be The Guy, or Kaizo Mario. The whole world ISN'T out to kill you this time. And even if it was, this time you've got the power to kick its ass without spillin' a single drop of blood.*

**Besides, though it's been a while since we last saved, now's as good a time as any to stay determined.**

**Doctor Undyne:** "...well? What're we standin' around here for?! Let's roll out!"

_The younger Frisk looks relieved to be back on the move. She holds onto Papyrus' hand as we run._

_The thought of being in the home stretch, so close to meeting Asriel again, fills you with determination._

And getting coffee. Can't forget the coffee.

**I swear Frisk, one of these days...**

...ahem. _The thought of being in the home strech, so close to meeting Asriel and having a hot cup of_
deep black Joe, fills you with determination.

HP and MP restored.

[SAVE to Slot 2]

Charlie – LV.1 KN.16

Hotland – Oh My God Frisk A Bomb

A bomb...!?

There actually isn't a bomb. Not anymore. That was just a goof.

Not your best goof. And not a good enough goof to end things off on.

Well what would YOU suggest to end this chapter?

Oh I have something prepared. Just a little further.

Whoa, ok. THIS is worthy of a proper chapter ending.

In the distance, across a searing lake of lava, the Core thrums with an intense energy. Occasionally, blue streaks of arcane lightning shoot forth to lick the cyclopean walls of the cavern, like a cynical Englishman scrutinizing the texturework of the hottest new triple-A title.

And somewhere, in the grey city above, Asriel Dreemurr waits for me to end his lonely vigil, to bring some familiar warmth back to his life.

...and on the way maybe I could grab a muffin an' a mocha.

GODDAMNIT FRISK
Along Came A Spider

Chapter Summary

Frisk’s party encounters yet more of Gaster’s "followers", before a grave misunderstanding forces them to fight Muffet, in spite of Frisk's forward planning.

Asriel: "Ch... Cha... ra?"

Julian's heart skipped a beat as the goat-child stirred. Any moment now, they would be fully awake, and fully aware of their situation.

The boy gently held the hand of the little prince, reborn by Julian's mad efforts.

"I did it..., he thought. "They said it couldn't be done, that it SHOULDN'T be done, but here he is..."

The nightmarish vistas of the Pneumatic Realm still swirled through Julian's mind. The towers of metallic bone and diseased teal flesh, scraping a pallid, unearthly sky. The deep, umber caverns, the lakes of black pitch, the yellow bolts of lightning that split the earth so far beneath the surface...

Now at last, he understood why his grandfather sometimes woke up screaming. For when Julian fell faint after escaping the Pneumatic Realm, the liberated spirit of Asriel Dreemurr crackling in his chest, the sickening memory of that unspeakable realm came shrieking into Julian's dreams. And he, in turn, woke up screaming, haunted by the horrors he had seen.

In defying the laws of death, by wresting an innocent soul from the depths of that nightmare, said nightmare would haunt him until his dying days, when he would inevitably descend once more into the Pneumatic Realm.

But as he watched Asriel wake up, his eyes slowly meeting Julian's, he knew in his heart that it was worth it. He had given Asriel Dreemurr, and by extension Flowey, a second chance at life.

He wondered if they'd be able to forgive him, for what he'd done to get this far...

Julian: "H-howdy..."

Julian had barely stammered out a greeting, before Asriel threw his arms around him, holding him close as the tears began to-

...wait, this isn't the right timeline at all. Sorry. My bad.

That was Feldstein Prime, wasn't it? Funny how it lines up with the deeds of Frisca Rivera...

Anyways, let's get back to DoctorTale, before Julian starts crying too. Ness out.
Doctor Papyrus: "...what. I..."

Standing by the elevator, a large, plant-like OEKO waits.

...well? Let's go and say hello!

These guys always give me the creeps...

Gaster Follower Handla: "I understand why Asriel waited so long before finding a new Doctor for Hotland."

"The previous one... Dr Gaster."

"His brilliance was irreplaceable."

"However, his life... was cut short."

"One day, his experiments went wrong, and..."

...and? And what?!

Gaster Follower Handla: "Well, I needn't gossip."

"After all, it's rude to talk about someone when they're listening."

What the fuck. He's- WHERE?!

I'd hazard a guess and say maybe he's in two places at once?

...given what I've heard about him, I guess that makes sense.

And those two places would be EVERYWHERE and NOWHERE.

...that makes just as much sense, sadly enough.

Papyrus looks... I think this is the first time I've seen him genuinely afraid?

Maybe there were other times, but- He grabs a hold of "Handla", and stoops to its level.

Doctor Papyrus: "Where is he? Where is Gaster now?!"

A grin spreads across Handla's toothy maw, as its large, singular eye focuses on Papyrus, narrowing in a knowing fashion.

Gaster Follower Handla: "...I really shouldn't gossip."

"They wouldn't appreciate me talking about him behind his back."

Doctor Papyrus: "Please, Doctor... Doctor Handla. I- I need to know."
Gaster Follower Handla: "Well, I needn't gossip -"

Doctor Papyrus: "AUDREY."

"I BEG OF YOU. Where did he go?"

The plant-like monster shows some faint flicker of sympathy.

Gaster Follower Handla: "Where you cannot follow."

"Where you shouldn't follow."

"...you should forget about this. I imagine you have more pressing issues at the moment."

"Setting our people free, for instance, should take priority."

And with that, Audrey M. Handla phases out of this plane of existence. Papyrus' shoulders drop in despair.

Frisk: "...we'll find him, Papyrus. One of these days..."

Papyrus turns to us, faint hope in his eyesockets, but seemingly resigned to how things are.

Doctor Papyrus: "I do appreciate it, Frisk, but..."

"Maybe she was right? Maybe I shouldn't delve too deep into this."

"At the end of the day, I am still a scientist. And a scientist must do what he can to bring everyone closer to freedom."

Frisk: "How long have you been looking?"

Doctor Papyrus: "...since the day I started school! I, like my forefathers before me, sought to become a scientist, to bring our freedom closer one day at a-"

Frisk: "You know I wasn't asking about that, Papyrus."

"Now, how long have you been looking?"

There is a long pause, before he gets up off of his knees, brushing the dirt from them.

Doctor Papyrus: "...since he went missing..."

"I had not known of the incident at the Core until my brother brought the bad news. And at first, I did not recall that we ever HAD an Uncle Gaster, until he had jostled my memory in such a way that it... all came back like a flood."

"It was one of the reasons why my brother and I began work on the Condenser. Based on the axiom of high-density magic causing a breakdown in the fabric of reality, we presumed that Gaster may have fallen through a hole in the world."

"But alas, despite our construction of the machine, empowered by Source Beta and fuelled by the old atomic get-up-and-go, it was a far more complicated matter than we'd imagined."
Our communicator rings out. Looks like Sans has his two cents to contribute.

I put him on loudspeaker.

doc sans: "there were a lotta silver linings, though. we still haven't found Gaster, but we found a helluva lotta other things in the process."

Doctor Papyrus: "Technically, I found most of them. Though that was only because of... Well, you know full well what extenuating circumstances I am talking about."

doc sans: "aw, you really think they were extenuatin'?"

"you're too damn kind, bro."

Syrinx: "Kindly enlighten us? We are... unaware of what you reference."

She's not alone.

Hey, leave me out of this.

doc sans: "well, uh... to put it lightly, i "lost faith" about a year ago."

"i saw some things nobody should have, learned some things that i was better off not knowin'. and it tore me down like a wall made of grah'm crackers."

Syrinx: "...we think we understand. Though we wonder how you had faith to lose in the first place?"

doc sans: "you gettin' at somethin', peeper?"

Syrinx: "This place is devoid of the Gods' touch, and the closest thing that passes for an icon of worship is that spangly thespian you call Mettaton. And pardon us if we are wrong, but you do not seem to be fanatical towards that golden calf."

"So how can one lose what they never had to begin with?"

doc sans: "...i don't know what your deal is, but i'm not talkin' about religion."

"i'm talking about losin' my passion for the craft, my drive to make a difference!"

"i'm pretty sure that, at least in my field of work, findin' somethin' to worship wouldn't have helped me get my groove back."

Syrinx: "How can you be so sure, if you have never tried?"

doc sans: "how'd i know if it's even workin'? if your bosses could talk through the barrier, you'd think you woulda heard somethin' by now?"

Syrinx falls silent. They don't have an answer to that.

doc sans: "an' there's your answer. hey, maybe when the barrier's down, you'll get better reception?"

"...hey Paps. chin up, bro, we'll find a way someday."
"but for now? probably time to roll out. we're almost there."

**Gaster Follower Eitr:** "It makes sense why Asriel took so long to elect a new head of the Hotland Lab."

*Another one?!

And that makes three. Four, if we count Goner Kid. Which we should.

**Gaster Follower Eitr:** "After all, the old one, Dr Gaster..."

"What an act to follow!"

"In this world, he made key improvements to the old Core. And in others, it was he alone who created it."

"However, his life... was cut short."

"One day, he fell into his life's work, and..."

**Frisk:** "Scattered across time and space, due to a botched experiment?"

*Doctor Eitr nods knowingly, before gazing upward in contemplation. With a yawn, he says something that causes Undyne to flinch.*

**Gaster Follower Eitr:** "...will Alphys end up the same way?"

*Undyne walks over to the OEKO, towering over the glassy phantom of the once esteemed scientist.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "End up like what?"

*Eitr recognizes Undyne's concern for her lady-friend, but remains as bullshit-cryptic as ever.*

**Gaster Follower Eitr:** "The Prince really ought to put some guardrails on the Core catwalks, you know. Anyone could slip and..."

"Well, maybe Alphys *won't* end up the same way..."

*One moment, Doctor Lotus Eitr is standing there like a stained glass gingerbread man, and the next... Gone.*

*...he kinda reminds me of someone we saw, once upon a time.*

The guy in the restaurant with the rubber ficus plant? I guess. Dunno if there's any relation, though.

*Might be. Stranger things have happened.*
...and here we are. The most price-gougey bake sale in recent history.

9999G for a Spider Donut. Fuck right off.

Thaaaat's talkin'. But hey, at least we have a "get-out-of-battle-free" card. A delicious card at that, made with spider cider mixed into the batter.

As we pass her by, Muffet pouts. That black widow's got a nasty plan brewing, I'm counting on it.

[MENU] > [ITEM] > *Spider Donut

I twirl the donut on my index finger, showing that I already got one.

Muffet: "Ahuhuhoooo boy, you're in for it now~"

You played your ace too early, and now we all pay the price.

Frisk: "FUCK."

Muffet: "I could hardly believe the news, when I heard that not just one, but TWO humans, would be passing through here."

Small spiders weave thick webs over the paths leading away from the bake sale.

Muffet: "I was afraid they'd be violent..."

"I was afraid they'd be awfully stingy..."

"But I never imagined..."

The spiders hiss as they corral our group into the centre of the platform. Please tell me you have a Plan C.

Muffet: "...that one of them would be a dirty rotten thief."

"But at least they have great taste...~ As a matter of fact..."

"Your human blood might just be what this next batch needs!~"

Excuse me FUCKING WHAT.

Papyrus calls forth that "bone staff" from earlier, positioning it between the spiders and little Frisk.

Doctor Papyrus: "Oh, you had better NOT!"

"You know full well that blood ministration is forbidden!"

Blood... ministration? Where have I heard that before?

Muffet: "Why, gracious Doctors!~"

"You really ought to excuse yourselves from this little affair. After all, it hardly concerns you!"

Undyne revs up the Buster, rousing Marcus from his dormancy. Looks like we're in for a proper
battle if these things don't back down.

Doctor Undyne: "Stand down! There's no need for any of this!"

Marcus: "Hell, it's about time..."

Muffet cackles in delight at this display of protection.

Muffet: "Oh deary me... Aren't you a pair of tough cookies?"

"I guess I'll have to come up with a recipe involving fish and bones today...~"

Are we really doing this? Am I going to have to Soul Stream this gangly bitch?

Who says you have to kill anyone at all? You've faced worse than this without hurting anyone, and you know it.

But they want our BLOOD. That doesn't usually entail a willingness to back down.

Are you serious right now? Have those pastilles been frying your goddamn brain?

You've had people after your goddamn SOUL who had more conviction than this spider queen. We'll be laughing this off before too long, trust me.

...fine. Let's wait out this onslaught of spidery death.

Muffet: "Come, brothers and sisters! Let's show these "tough cookies" what we do to thieves!"

Muffet has trapped us. But we can deal with this. Just stay calm.

Little Frisk: [MAGIC] > *Lightning Sheath > *Bit of Old Pipe

Little Frisk strokes her hand across the Bit of Old Pipe, sheathing it in a coat of dancing electr-

...how does an 8 year old get her hands on a piece of ancient plumbing?

Are we not going to address the fact that she can use magic TOO?!

I'm pretty sure she found some Mana Pastilles back in the Ruins, like we did. What more is there to say?

Doctor Undyne: [ACT] > *Muffet > *Overwatch

Undyne comments on how this is gonna be like holding the second point on Hanamura.

...just kidding. She trains the Buster on Muffet, ready to fire off a reaction shot if she tries anything.

I guess I should be glad that they've got my backs on this one. But I seriously hope we're just getting "punk'd" by Mettaton.

Doctor Papyrus: [MAGIC] > [Integrity] > *Bone Wall

"NYEH!"
A wall of bones rises between Papyrus and the larger spiders.

...and you? What's your action?

My action is that I tell Muffet she's a stupid bitch and explain why in detail.

A little harsh, but alright.

[ACT] > [Muffet] > *Truth

**Frisk:** "Alright, seriously, CUT IT OUT."

"Do you even check your freakin' stock? I bought this thing back in the Ruins to help out your friends over there!"

**Little Frisk:** "You went to the bake sale too? Neat! I got a donut too!"

"...but I ate it before I left the Ruins..."

**Muffet cocks her head, and narrows her eyes into a disbelieving glare.**

**Muffet:** "...a likely story. I'll believe it when I see the receipts."

...did they ever give us any receipts?

*Nnnnnnope.*

Crap.

**Frisk:** "Actually, something tells me you'll believe it when one of your fellow spiders arrives here with a telegram, saying that I helped out the Ruins clan."

"Trust me, it's coming..."

**Muffet:** "We shall see~"

A swarm of spiders rushes through Papyrus' Bone Wall. Of course, he'd space the bones too far apart to stop them.

As we dodge them, he gently sweeps some of the arachnid assailants aside with the bone staff.

The webbing grows thicker beneath our feet. Little Frisk starts panicking as she finds it harder to move.

**Muffet simply laughs and pours her a cup of spiders. Setting off Undyne's Overwatch.**

...wait SHIT. Ok uhhh, she's got 72% chance to hit, 5% to crit... Aaaaaaaaand completely whiffs it!

If by whiff it, you mean Muffet made a serpentine manoeuvre. I imagine that added to her evasion.

**Muffet:** "Deary me, dearie~ You should really work on your aim!"

"No wonder you never made it into the Guard..."
Doctor Undyne: "I might not have a badge, but that doesn't mean I can't protect my friends!"
"In times like these, folks need someone to protect them from psychos like YOU."

Muffet: "Oh don't look so blue, dearie...~"

Three lines of purple light burn their way across the platform. ... I think I know what's coming next.

Muffet: [ITEM] > *Potion of Perseverance > *All Foes

...and sure enough, the arena floor becomes slick with some sort of purple tea.

[Soul Mode Forced: Perseverance]

We are each magnetized to the lines, and it will take a great effort to move from line to line. I was never really a fan of Trap Mode.

This was hard enough to keep track of the first time. With four people...

Nope. I don't play that way anymore.

[ACT] > [Frisca] > *Yellow

You press the big yellow button on the device. It begins to resonate with your heartbeat.

You feel like your soul is turning upside-down. Knowing that you have the power to fight back against this madness fills you with justice.

[Soul Mode Disabled: Perseverance]

[Soul Mode Activated: Justice]

Marcus: "Now I've seen everythin'..."

Muffet: "Oh my~ Clever girl!"

I point in Muffet's general direction, mimicking a gun with my fingers. I DARE her to keep going.

Remember what happened the last time you pointed a gun at someone? Have you learned nothing from that?

Pretty sure things are different this time, Charlie. I don't think Undyne will begrudge me for standing my ground.

Muffet: "You think we're just going to let you go, after trying to take from the clan?"

"Don't be so simple, dearie~ Your souls will make a lot of spiders very happy..."

"As for your blood, I suppose you should know..."

"I'll tell you what, human. Survive playing with my pet, and I'll let you in on a big secret!"

"Yoo hoo!~ Breakfast time!~"
Her... pet? ...oh no.

*The thundering of an unseen baked behemoth, some Polyphemus-like pastry, draws ever closer.*

OH HELLO it's this fucking thing again.

**It is Bran, the Vacuous Cupcake.** His intimidating bellow casts forth a... rather pleasant gale. Smells like warm raisins and cinnamon.

**BUT NO CHOCOLATE.**

Why is it that a big monster always has to roar at its prey? It's not intimidating or anything, and most of the time they just get their shit wrecked by Kratos.

**Frisk:** "Climb."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "HOW?!"

**Frisk:** "Don't question it! Just climb the goddamn web!"

*With no small amount of difficulty, you and your companions begin to climb the web, as the Vacuous Cupcake clambers ponderously upwards.*

**Your parallel... she's struggling to climb. Her eyes beg you for help.**

Meanwhile, the Cupcake's eyes beg me to blast them. Casually, I point my gun-fingers down at the eyes of the lumbering beast.

[Z] [Z] [Z] [Z] [Z] [Z] [Z]

**Frisk:** "Pew. Pew pew pew. Pew, pew and pew."

*Your half-assed attempt to shoot the creature's eyes with Justice bullets yield piss-weak projectiles that do barely any damage.*

That's the plan. I'm not going to kill anybody, but that doesn't mean I can't do super-weak attacks to ward 'em off.

...and your plan seems to work. *The Vacuous Cupcake shrieks as the light attacks plink against its eyes, distracting it long enough for you to grab Little Frisk and continue your ascent with her under your arm.*

We finally reach the platform above. ...and it's the one we were just on WHAT THE HELL?!

**Muffet:** "...you're not a very nice person, you know that?"

"My poor little pet...~ He didn't deserve to be tricked that way."

**Frisk:** "What- Are you FUCKED in the HEAD?! You sent that beast after us! I was just acting in self-defense!"

"You really think I'm just gonna lay down and DIE? The fact I'm standing here, so far from home, blows that little theory of yours clear outta the water."
Muffet purses her lips, aggravated by your perseverance. Especially since you overrode hers with the power of Justice.

Also are we not going to address the non-standard geometry that just happened here? Is this place some sort of four-dimensional donut or something?!

We can talk about it later. Meanwhile, Muffet owes us an explanation about the whole blood thing.

Muffet: "...seeing as you've survived this long, I suppose I owe you an explanation, or as best as I can give you. So before you give your life up for this most noble cause, I will enlighten you. Ahuhuhu~"

"You see, when a monster absorbs a human soul, the power is often too much for them to bear. Being that the monster body is so greatly attuned to the soul, it transforms them into a terrible beast, twisted in body and struggling to hold on to its mind."

"But why should I know such a thing? Why it just so happens that, when the dear sweet Arlene Hanson died in a freak lab accident, the esteemed Lord Tharan de Tulere acted as her Pallbearer, carrying her broken body and incubating her kind soul, as he brought her to her final resting place."

"The same Lord Tharan who founded our noble house. The bright and wise de Tulere who became an integral member of King Asriel's Science Team. A man whom I, Lady Muffet de Tulere, can rightfully call my ancestor."

I had a feeling she was nobility among the spiders, but... Whoa.

Nice read, Keanu. Oh, and she's sent another wave of spiders at us to break up the monologue.

Guess I should praise her for variety OH GOD SHE'S THROWING POWER BRACELETS AT US!

They're croissants you dingus.

Oh, right. I guess she's too thrifty to pelt us with pain au chocolat.

OH how I wish she would...

Oh stop it, you.

Muffet: "In his later years, drawing from his experience as the second Pallbearer, he deduced that the reason for the uncontrollable transformation was due to the "immaterial" nature of monsters, that our bodies barely have the physical matter required to control and contain the wild and intense power of human souls."

"Or at least, that is what little our family knows. I myself am neither a physicist, nor a physician, and I rarely dabble in either subject."

"My true calling lies in the ways of gastronomy, treating cookery as it rightfully should be; a scientific art!"

Frisk: "Look, I'm all for having people dump their life stories in my lap, but how the hell does any of this justify wanting my blood?!"
Muffet: "Temper temper, little hasty pudding. I was just about to get to that."

Frisk: "Were you, though? You sounded like you were about to go off on a tangent about Heston Blumenthal."

Muffet: "Oh, wasn't he a wonderful man...~ But perhaps you were right, in that I digress."

"It is as Tharan de Tulere proposed; monster bodies are greatly lacking in physical matter, and to truly maintain control at human levels of power, they require a proper grounding element. A body of matter and magic, with just the right amounts of each~"

"But alas, human food and even the soil of our realm would merely pass through in time, barely accumulating in the body at all. And as for physical liquids... Well, needless to say things got quite messy."

"But many years ago, my late great-aunt discovered the true nature of the human flesh. Untold trillions of inscrutably tiny pieces, each piece a wondrous machine in itself. And every little drop of human blood contains millions of them."

"The perfect blend of solid molecules and material liquid, laden with residual energy, so easy to incorporate into a monster's body... With the right amount flowing in a monster's veins, they could truly become a god."

...my god... She's insane, there's no doubting that, but it makes an awful lot of sense.

_I think I know what you mean. We've seen it happen before._

The perfect blend of matter and magic, perfect for a vessel of souls...

Frisk: "So, if I'm getting this right, you want to use my blood to make a perfect vessel of souls. Something capable of wielding every human soul, without destroying itself or going insane?"

_Muffet nods, a sly grin on her face._

Frisk: "...you know, if things were different, if you weren't trying to hurt me and my friends, I would have DONATED blood, if it would help us move forward."

"Yeah! I would have given up like a pint every two months, and all I'd ask for would be a damn cookie afterwards!"

_Muffet struggles to stifle her tittering giggle, but fails miserably._

_Muffet: "Ahuhuhuhuuuu!~ It's funny that you should mention that."_

"Back in my ancestor's day, the humans did indeed donate their blood for research purposes. And the practice of giving them a sweetroll afterwards..."

"Well, naturally the clans have a disposition towards baking. It's a tradition as old as monsterkind, dating back to Tsechenako herself, whose dew-laden webs brought fire to the skies. Fire that she then plucked from the skies to light her great ovens, warming the world and baking sweetrolls for the first children."

_The surrounding spiders whisper in reverence to the Spider Grandmother._
Muffet: "...were you not such a coyote, perhaps we would have extended the same kindness?"

The NERVE of this- UGH. Grab some popcorn Charlie, I'm about to tear her a new set of spinnerets.

[ACT] > [Muffet] > *Chew Out

Frisk: "OH, that's bullshit and you know it. Since when is charging nearly 10K for a pastry showing anybody kindness? To me it sounds like you're disrespecting your kind-hearted goddess..."

"You know how much your cousins in the Ruins charged for this donut? Seven gold. And they've been living in the Ruins, the fucking RUINS, scrounging for ingredients and BAKING THEMSELVES INTO THEIR OWN BAKED GOODS, just to make ends meet."

"And yet here you are, with access to resources your cousins could only dream of, charging a king's goddamn ransom for products that, I'll be honest, don't look anywhere near as good as theirs."

"I swear, you make me sick. And that's not even taking your little murder-boner into account. ...what the hell are you even doing with your life, Muffet?"

Doctor Undyne: "Hooooly shit."

Doctor Papyrus: "Holy crap, Frisk."

...it goes without saying, but holy crap. If words could kill...

Oh, and Muffet's defense has dropped to zero. Along with her spirit.

Little Frisk: *heavy breathing*

...oh this is going to rub salt in the wounds. It's a spider with a telegram.

Muffet: "...oh. ...oh my-"

With trembling hands, she reads the telegram. Her stomach, or whatever spiders have, drops to her ankles.

Muffet: "It's... it's from the clan in the Ruins."

"If... if I'm reading this right... They saw both of you in the Ruins... Oh..."

"...it says that you, and the younger one, both donated to their cause-"

Muffet chokes back a sob of horror. Only now does she realise that she made a huge mistake.

Muffet: "Greatest Grandmother... This has all been a horrible, horrible misunderstanding..."

"I thought you hated spiders."

"I- I thought you were a petty thief."

"But the one that put that bounty on your heads..."
"Is a trickster most foul. He who would put even Coyote to shame."

"...whatever. Our plan wouldn't have worked out anyways."

"...yes. I'll let you go now. ...no charge."

*Muffet is sparing us.*

I still hate this wicked bitch, but...

[MERCY] > *Sp-

*Silently, Little Frisk lunges forward, ready to bring her length of electrified pipe down on Muffet's head.*

**Frisk:** "NO!"

*Without thinking, Papyrus reaches out with tendrils of blue energy, wrapping around Little Frisk's soul. A resounding dry thud rings across the platform as Papyrus slams our parallel into the ground, just short of the maudlin snivelling mess that is Muffet de Tulere.*

*Almost instantly, he recoils in horror at what he's done, as Muffet scurries away in fresh, abject terror. Crap, I don't think he was thinking when he-

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Oh- Oh no... No no no, please don't be-

A little cough, followed by a pained groan, puts him at ease.

I grab my parallel by the collar of her striped shirt, and glare at her.

**Frisk:** "And what, in all hell, was that supposed to be?"

**Little Frisk looks confused and upset.**

**Little Frisk:** "I... I though it was good to take her out now. W- we're not going to let her get away with this, right?"

What happened to her? How rough did things get for her to consider killing someone when they're at their... most vulnerable...

**Well, to be real, someone else WAS in control, at least in your case.**

But that's not the case here, right? I mean, it doesn't look like she's possessed or...

Were things that bad in this timeline? ...oh god. Has- Do you think she's killed before?

**Frisk, she's like 8 years old. I don't think-**

Don't give me that horseshit, Charlie! I did the same damn thing in the Genocide timeline, and you ended up getting yourself and Asriel killed, all before any of us hit double digits.

And that's not even taking child soldiers into account. That shit was running wild even before the Fall...
So in conclusion, NO, Charlie. Just because she's a kid, that doesn't mean she isn't capable of killing someone.

Doctor Undyne: "...well. This changes things."

Undyne attempts to fashion a crude rope from the surrounding webbing. The spiders proceed to make a better rope for her.

Is she planning to... Well, I don't think I can blame her.

Doctor Undyne: "This kid's a loose cannon, Papyrus. We'll have to keep her like this until we can figure out what to do with her."

Papyrus nods solemnly as Undyne binds Little Frisk's hands.

Doctor Papyrus: "I am terribly sorry about this, small one. But if you act like this, we can't take any risks."

Struggle as she might, she can't break those silken bindings. She silently glares at the floor, as we move forward.

Shame it's had to come to this. Don't get me wrong, Muffet should get what's coming to her, but not like this. I wouldn't wish death on my worst enemies...

...oh, right. There's still one more puzzle before DoctorTale: The Musical.

Yeah. That, and the spot where we WOULD have fought Muffet if not for you playing your trump card too early.

I guess it was better to get that out of the way ahead of time. Then again, that means we'll have to end off by solving both of these puzzles, so...

Doctor Papyrus: "Frisk, you seem like you'll be able to keep a hold on your parallel for a while. So..."

"How's about Undyne and I take care of those puzzles for you, while you keep watch over Frisk?"

Little Frisk: "...I'll try."

Papyrus shoots her a sardonic glare. She knows full well what he's talking about.

Frisk: "I got a handle on things here. You two go on an' "worry" about that weird ship game."

Doctor Undyne: "...heh. Worry's gonna be the right word, alright!"

"Ergh..."

While our companions navigate towards the puzzle rooms, we navigate the vent puzzle towards the door.
Right, up, right, down, down, right, right, right, up, right. Right?

Right.

Right. Now we're at the gate, I guess now's as good a time as any to drill Frisk.

**Frisk:** "Seriously, uh... Frisk. (God, I'll never get used to that...)"

"What were you thinking, trying to kill her? What would it have achieved, in the long run?"

**Little Frisk:** "...if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

**Frisk:** "...revenge? Are you- That's what that was about? Getting your own back?"

**Little Frisk:** "We tried to tell her the truth, and she did us wrong! We helped out her people, and in return she tried to KILL US!"

"How did she not deserve what was coming to her? How did she NOT deserve to pay the price for being so nasty?"

...how do I say this... What can I say to convince her that it wasn't necessary?

*Thing is, when we get to Asriel and tell him about what happened to us, I have a feeling that Muffet's going to face some bad times. You could start with that.***

**Frisk:** "...the thing is, Frisk, that she IS going to get what's coming to her. She tried to kill us, yes, but the Prince is going to hear about that soon enough."

**Little Frisk:** "...and the Prince will execute her for us?"

I swear, this child... ...I did this to her, didn't I?

*You made ripples in a river, nothing more. You never forced her to turn out like this.*

**Frisk:** *sigh* "...no, Frisk. Asriel isn't going to kill her."

"But I'm pretty sure he's going to do something worse to her. I have a feeling that she's going to lose her titles, her properties, an' a whole lot more besides, for trying to take our souls. And that's not even considering that she pretty much issued death threats against Papyrus and Undyne."

"Once he's done passing judgement on her, she'll be living a rough life, cast out from Hotland. So I guess... Yeah. Take solace in that, at least."

**Little Frisk contemplates what might happen to Muffet. A smirk forms on her face as she comes to accept it.**

**Still, I hope Asriel goes easy on Muffet. After all, she...**

What, Charlie? What are you trying to say?

*After you ripped her a new one, she appeared pretty remorseful. It felt genuine, like she'd finally reflected on something she'd been trying to keep buried for a long time, and started questioning her life choices.*
In a way, it reminded me of someone.

Still doesn't excuse it, but I think I know who you're talking about. It's Flowey, isn't it?

Him too, yeah. But, and I know how conceited this sounds, she actually reminded me of myself.

Oh... You mean...

I've done a lot of things I'm not proud of anymore. That goes without saying.

But I didn't start to feel that way until you aborted your little "genocide run". Starting over after coming so far, then seeing Flowey's reaction to it...

I'll be honest, I half-expected it to have all been an act. Like at any moment he'd look at us all sardonically and say "Really, Charlie?" and that'd be that.

But that time was different. That time, something had changed. That time, I realised that I shouldn't take everything you do and say as gospel. That time, I realised that yeah, maybe there WAS another way?

And learning that there really was another way... it filled me with determination.

HP and MP restored.

Wait, did we even get hurt that time?

I dunno. Maybe we did. I just wanted to end things smoothly.

Not happening, I guess. Sorry.

[SAVE to Slot 2]

Charlie – LV.1 KN.17

Hotland – Steam Puzzle Crossroads

So much for a smooth ending.

Are you quite finished? Quit ruining my groove.

Syrinx: "I'm sorry, but you've ruined the narrator's groove."

...sorryyyyyyyyy-
The Perks of Change

Chapter Summary

Frisk and her posse finally reach the Melting Pot Cafe, the last stop before heading into the Core.

Oh, and that business with Mettaton is thoroughly dealt with. He says, knowing full well he's about to go on the warpath.

_After what felt like forever, the doors finally trundle open._

For these guys, it probably was.

_Don't say that, Frisk. Now you've doomed this issue to crazy delays._

Come on, it's not going to be that bad.

**Little Frisk:** "...please, will you undo these?"

_She turns around, trying to point at the spider-silk rope around her wrists._

**Frisk:** "I don't think that's such a good idea, little buddy."

**Little Frisk:** "PLEASE? I'll be good! I promise!"

She'd better not be fucking with me. I swear, if she's actually killed anyone already...

**Frisk:** "You swear that you won't hurt anybody?"

**Little Frisk:** "I- I swear! I swear on... uh... butts?"

...what do you think, Charlie? You think we can trust her to behave?

_She seems like she's willing to go along with it. But I'm not totally sure._

_I say untie her hands, but keep her on a leash instead._

I'm not sure I'm ok with that kind of horseplay.

's either that or keep her "cuffed" like this. And folks would start asking questions if we reach the campus with a girl whose hands are tied behind her back.

_Besides, I was thinking a leash around her waist, not around her neck. That'd just end up being all kinds of weird._

**Frisk:** "Alright, here's how we're going to do things. It's gonna go around your waist, rather than your hands. Don't think you're off the hook, not by a longshot."

"But if you try to hurt anyone, and I mean ANYONE, I'll wrap that rope around your whole damn body, and carry you around like an Arabian goddamn rug."
"Now, me, ARE WE UNDERSTOOD? WE. DO NOT. HURT PEOPLE."

*If she wasn't scared before, she is now. But she's not scared to tears, surprisingly enough.*

**Little Frisk:** "...I swear on... on..."

**Frisk:** "Just yes or no will do."

**Little Frisk:** "...si."

**Frisk:** "There. That wasn't so hard, now was it?"

*Papyrus spins dizzily towards the door, just as you finish tying the rope around Little Frisk's waist.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Ugh... And THAT is why I always take the elevators."

*Undyne is next to follow, faceplanting into the dirt like she'd just gotten off the teacup ride.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Nghh, tell me about it... Man, if there was a time an' a place to have a hoop-puking puzzle, this would be it!"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "I fail to see how a can of spaghetti-O's would improve this situati-"

"Frisk! Be careful, the girl is fr- Wait a second...

**Frisk:** "We've, uh, come to an understanding. In that I'll whoop her ass if she tries to hurt anybody. But I'm still holding the reins on this hoss."

I wave the end of the rope to indicate that she's on a leash.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "...well, if, uh, you have a handle on things, I guess that's fine...?"

*He doesn't sound so sure about this.*

Too bad. I'm calling the shots here. Speaking of which, let's make tracks.

---

*Have we checked up on Alphys lately?*

Good idea. Hang on, it's ringing.

*Sans picks up. Guess Alphys is in the bathroom.*

**doc sans:** "'sup?"

"uh, yeah, she's in the bathroom. can i take a message?"

**Frisk:** "So, uh, how're things going over there? Did she get through to Asriel?"

**doc sans:** "still no luck yet. he's a hard guy to get a hold of, short of showin' up on his doorstep with a packet of ginger snaps an' a case of papers."
"hell, for all we know, he could be havin' a mornin' soak right about now."

**Frisk:** "Morning soak? It's like 3 o'clock!"

**doc sans:** "he's a pretty late sleeper on the weekends, Frisk. sometimes he even puts me to shame."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "That's because he works late, Sans. I'm not sure how familiar you are with pulling an all-nighter like that."

**doc sans:** "and what would you call all those late-night Civilization X sessions? chopped liver?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "I would call that college boondoggling!"

"...with that said, there are far worse things to boondoggle with than a Sid Meier game."

**doc sans:** "what about Starships?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "We do not talk about Sid Meier's Starships."

"It made Beyond Earth look like Alpha Centauri."

**Frisk:** "If you guys are quite finished, tell Alphys to step it up. We're almost at the MTC, and we've got one last clash with Mettaton coming up."

"Oh, and by the way... I know she's not in the bathroom."

"She's in the lower lab, isn't she?"

**doc sans:** "i- what're you talking about? that place has been sealed off for years!"

"here, i'll show y- ...this damn lady, i swear..."

"it's a goddamn elevator shaft. ...my god, she's gonna get herself killed one of these days..."

**Frisk:** "What's the matter? All she has to do is feed them when they get sassy."

**doc sans:** "you don't understand, Frisk. it's not just Gaster's old lab down there..."

"there was... another lab, before W.D's facility. our forefathers... made something. something that has no place in this world. we tried to keep it down there, but..."

"now it calls all of the lower levels its home. though come to think of it, it's rarely sighted in the old Gaster Facility. so hey, maybe she'll be ok?"

"but i sure as hell ain't going down there to check up on her. some things, ya just don't take a chance on."

...as if things weren't complicated enough. Now there's another True Lab underneath the "True Lab"?

Kuro's was the first... Man, it really does feel like it was a long time ago.

*Back when we were all together. Before the other me made that mistake, takin' Pops with him.*
I'd barely been down there a month, before I'd run into Kuro. Before I showed her the schematics I brought from the old future. Before I convinced Toriel to fish around in the coffers for some "grant money", so we could set up a lab in the basement.

...hold on, better not keep him hanging.

**Frisk:** "You're probably right. She's probably already on that second elevator, heading up into New Home, going straight to her Prince."

"...come to think of it, after these next coupla rooms, we should be able to activate the elevator on R3. You'll be able to join us, without having to walk too far!"

**doc sans:** "i, uh, appreciate it, Frisk... but with Alphys takin' a shortcut of her own, i gotta stay here."

"someone's gotta keep an eye on Monster Kid."

...oh god. I completely forgot about him! I-

**Frisk:** "Is he- How's he holding up?"

**doc sans:** "i won't lie, Kid's pretty checked out. the second Mettaton showed up, he just sighed and headed upstairs."

"he's been goin' through Alphys' anime collection since you left, just watchin' episodes of Berserk. an' who could blame him? 's Berserk."

**Frisk:** "...I'm just glad to hear that he's coping. Even if he's watching something he probably shouldn't be."

**doc sans:** "c'mon, what's wrong with Berserk? 's nothin' more wholesome than seein' Guts rip Griffith's smug head off. ...oh, right, **spoiler alert.**"

"...besides, it could always be worse. he coulda been watchin' Monster Musume Black. now THERE's somethin' you don't show to the kids."

"so, uh, yeah. i'd love to make it to your little coffee social, but i gotta take care a' this checked-out weeb. an' besides, someone's gotta fill the role of dorky tech support character while Alphys is outta the office."

"catch ya again soon, buddy. say hi to Asriel for me."

---

**Well, that's that, I guess. Now, where were we? ...yeah, the whole First Lab thing.**

Wait... Do you hear that?

*I do, but can we please get back to the backstory exposi-

I RECOGNIZE THAT SONG.
Please don't drop this thread. We were going somewhere with it, and now-

...FINE. We'll talk about it later. And we will this time. I'm not gonna forget like the last coupla times.

...my god, you're right. ...but it's from a completely different g-

That voice. ...now, where have we heard it before?

???: "...i set my sail"
"fly the wind, it will take me,"
"back to my home, sweet home"

"...lie on my back"
"clouds are making way for me"
"...i'm coming home, sweet home..."

"...i see... your star"
"you left it burning for me"
"...mother, i'm here..."

...this can't be the musical... It doesn't feel right...

...is it just me, or did Mettaton get a paint job since we last saw him? Where'd all the hot pink g-

Something's telling me this isn't Mettaton. Remember, in this branch, ghosts have better bodies to choose from.

Oh... Oh gee... No way, is that-

Frisk: "B- Blooky?"

The metallic mannequin slouches serenely against the wall, guitar in his arms. He removes his headphones, and sweeps aside his silvery white hair, greeting us with familiar eyes. Eyes that widen as he recognizes you.

Napstablook EX: "oh... oh no..."

"this... i didn't sign up for this."

"oh no... you're the one he was expecting..."

"oh no... he told me we were doing a music video..."

"JJ... what are you doing..."

JJ? Is that... who I think it is?

Napstablook places a hand on your shoulder, leaning in close.

Napstablook EX: "...just act natural. if i don't give him the signal, we might get you guys out of this trap."
Doctor Undyne: "Trap?! What kinda crap is this?!"
For FUCK’S SAKE, Undyne. Could you be any more subtle?

Napstablook EX: " r u n "
We don't need much encouragement to start hoofing it. Sadly, the forcefield keeps us corralled in this stage area. No escaping this time around.

Frisk: "Alright, so where's our goddamn prom queen? Isn't he gonna come down an' crown his king?"

"...oh my... That human..."
"Could it be..."
...I don't care what anyone says. He looks great in that gown.

Mettaton: "...my one true love?"

A familiar melody begins as Mettaton descends the stairs, holding the dress to keep it from tripping him up.

Part of me wants to play along for the hell of it, but the rest of me wants to pound on the walls and scream for help.

I say play along. We've got an ace up our sleeve.

Mettaton: "Oh my love~"
"Do not dismay~"
"Winds of change~"
"Forbid your stay~"

"Though we reach~"
"Our final part~"
"Know your fate~"
"It breaks, my, heart...~"

As Mettaton lowers his head, petals begin to fall from above.

"While this world~"
"Be so unkind~"

"Take my hand~"

"I'll give you piece of mind~"

I take his hand, passing the leash to Papyrus.

*He sweeps you into a slow, sweeping dance.*

"Coming here~"

"You knew the risk~"

"Take heart Frisk~"

"Know that you'll free us all...~"

I step back as the song ends. ...I dunno whether I prefer this or the original "Oh My Love".

*Well, he could hardly say "Monster King forbids your stay". That wouldn't make any sense at all.*

**Mettaton:** "So sad that it has come to this, my dear."

**Frisk:** "But- but it doesn't! There's no need for any of this!"

Undyne looks like she's had just about enough of this.

**Doctor Undyne:** "Alright buddy, you've had your little song an' dance, now LET US GO!"

**Mettaton smirks. That's not a good sign.**

**Mettaton:** "You think this is all just a show? Oh, sweet naive Undyne..."

"We've waited long enough for a solution from you people. Generations have died waiting for you "Doctors" to figure out how to free us."

"But now we HAVE a solution. And both of them are standing right there."

**Mettaton fiddles with the remote, opening up a trap door. Right to the side of you. Whoops.**

*He looks at the hole for a second, before pushing you in.*

I swear, this guy...

__________________________________________

*Peeling yourself off of the floor, you see Mettaton gracefully levitating above us.*

**Mettaton:** "Alas! My paramour has been cast into the dungeon, where she may surely perish!"
"Oh my! Oh no! What horror has been laid out in front of her?!

Before the trapdoor closes, a great clattering of feet echoes from the stage-area above.

Look at this mess. How the hell am I supposed to solve THIS?!

Mettaton: "Oh woe, the infamous coloured tile puzzle! Notorious for its unpredictable layouts!"

"My love, I implore you, solve this most insidious of traps! It is your only way out!"

A clicking hiss echoes behind us, followed by a whoosh of flame. Here come the warm jets.

You were right about one thing, Charlie. We do have an ace up our sleeve.

[ITEM] > *System Disruptor > [Use]

Frisk: "NYEH!"

Don't forget to set the device.

Good call. That woulda been embarrassing. I set it to emit a glitching pulse.

Frisk: *ahem* "NYEH!"

You throw the System Disruptor in front of you, andouirj lhnaol kljopsrktr WHOA that's a lot of Sarias.

Aaaaand that's one clear path.

Aaaaand that's one Mettaton having a seizure on the glitching tiles.

Wait. That's not good.

CrapCRAPCRAP this isn't what I planned at all! What the hell do I do to fix this?!

Who do I look like, Alan Turing?! I don't know anything about ghost robots!

Except that there was one in The Venture Bros. And that's about it.

Come on, think THINK THINK! ...maybe the ol' tried-and-true method?

[ACT] > [Mettaton] > *Percussive Maintenance

You whack Mettaton across the face. ...uh oh. That... felt good, didn't it?

But it didn't help at all! Ohp- wait- no- Actually yeah, I think it did.

He's simmering down right about now. Just as Napstablook arrives with the others.

Napstablook EX: "oh... oh please no..."

Our ghost robot buddy runs over to his cousin's unmoving body. Oh crap, I hope we haven't-

Undyne barrels into us. We really have to stop meeting her like this.
**Doctor Undyne:** "What did you DO!"

**Frisk:** "...I used the Disruptor... I- didn't know it'd give him a goddamn seizure! I figured his body was just-

**Doctor Papyrus:** "How would that even-...actually now I think about it, it makes sense. All of those servos are electronic, after all, so-"

"...Frisk, are you ok?"

...I push Undyne off of me, as I get to my feet. I really hope I didn't...

**Frisk:** "I- I nearly killed him, didn't I?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Frisk... It's..."

Don't feel too bad about it. This was one of those situations where it was either you or him.

I don't like the way Napstablook's looking at me right now.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "...he's going to be just fine. He's not an android, he's a ghost."

Napstablook's expression softens with relief, but still retains a glimmer of resentment.

**Frisk:** "...don't you look at me like that. He was going to burn me alive!"

"...I know you guys are close, and I don't like that it came to this, but I had to protect myself."

His expression softens further, though this time with an air of... I think that's... despondency? I'm going with despondency.

**Napstablook EX:** "...it's not about that. It's..."

"he's in serious trouble, isn't he?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Don't be afraid, Master Blook. He will only be out for a few hours."

**Napstablook EX:** "i wasn't talking about that..."

"JJ's been up to no good, hasn't he?"

I could write a book on what Mettaton's been up to... But why call him "JJ"?

**Napstablook EX:** "somehow, i don't think this has been the first attempt he's made against you... am i wrong?"

"...your face says it all. I'm so, so sorry for what he's put you through..."

**Little Frisk:** "...he tried to kill me too, y'know."

Napstablook turns around to look at the younger Frisk behind him. Then looks at you. Then looks at Little Frisk.

**Napstablook EX:** "oh... i was afraid that he was desperate, but this..."
"I pray that he will be shown mercy..."

**Frisk:** "And I'm sure he will. But there's no way he's not gonna be punished for this."

"Asriel's not gonna be happy about what Mettaton's been up to. Call it a gut feelin'."

"...in the meantime, we gotta think about what we're gonna do with this guy."

---

*Undyne throws a glance towards Little Frisk, then back to the unconscious Mettaton.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Well, he's definitely dangerous. I've got an idea, but it's a little risky."

**Frisk:** "You wanna take the leash off of the other me, and use it to tie him up?"

**Napstablook's eyes widen in concern.**

**Napstablook EX:** "That isn't necessary, right? Don't we have any alternatives?"

**doc sans:** "*panting* "I was thinking maybe we drag him around with us, like-"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "*SANS HOLY FUCK-*"

**Napstablook EX:** "Oh my..."

**My thoughts exactly.**

**doc sans:** "-y'know, uh, Weekend at Bernie's? Except maybe we dab him with some *cough* Ol' Whisker's Whiskey, make it look like he's passed out drunk?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Good GOD Sans, did you run all the way here?"

**doc sans:** "YEP. An' I hope it's the last time."

**Doctor Undyne:** "Maybe you should try it more often, Fontaine? After all..."

"You've definitely gotten **big-boned** since last year."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Gods NO! Not you too!"

*There's a glimmer of something familiar in Sans' eye. Almost like...*

**doc sans:** "Heh, good one."

"But seriously, I think we should go with the "drunk ghost robot" plan. Leavin' him here all tied up will probably raise more questions."

**Frisk:** "And carrying a famous Inepticon's drunken body around won't? (Sorry Blooky)"

"Trust me, if we keep him here, he'll still be for a couple of hours. But in case he wakes up ahead of schedule, we should probably hog-tie him so he'll still be tryin' to get free when Asriel gets here to
pass judgement on him."

doc sans: "i'm not so sure that'll work out too well. i gotta feelin' that someone'll walk in on him in that position and be all "dear diary: jackpot", or somethin' just as creepy."

"that's the last thing we wanna happen here. still..."

"aright, show a' hands: who wants to drag Mettaton around like Weekend at Bernie's?"

Papyrus raises a hand. But only to support his brother.

doc sans: "oookay, all in favour of makin' things super-weird with bondage connotat- goddamnit Undyne..."

Barely a second after the "Weekend at Mettaton's" plan fell through, Undyne's already taken the silk rope off of Little Frisk, and is halfway done hog-tying Mettaton.

As if this day couldn't get any weirder...

Huh. Never woudla thought she'd be any good at tying ropes, but here we are.

Frisk: "Since when were you an expert at tying knots, Undyne?"

She doesn't answer at first, but instead gives us a knowing wink.

Frisk: "On second thoughts, I don't think I want to know."

She shoots us a sly grin while nodding slowly. Yeah. Little creepy.

Little Frisk: "I... I don't get it?"

Frisk: "Well, uh..."

"...you'll find out when you're older. I'll just leave it at that."

Little Frisk: "Oh? So it's grown-up stuff? Like, the "fun" kind?"

I nod. The younger me taps the side of her nose.

I think I know why Undyne's good at working with rope.

Don't say it. We already have the image in our heads.

What image?

Don't play dumb.

No, really. What image?

The image of Alphys hogtied on a workbench! What else?!

BOOM! Try to get THAT outta your head tonight, hehehe...

Goddamnit. ...wait, why hammer it home when it's already in my head? There's no-one else in here!
Syrinx: "...we are in here. We do not approve of such blasphemous rites."

_Ah, deal with it ya damn prude._

Syrinx: "You're the one that brought it up. And it's still heresy."

_Then do something about it._

Syrinx: "..."

_I thought as much._

Frisk: "So, uh, I guess that's that. I dunno about you guys, but I'm jonesing for some deep black joe. We ready to roll out?"

doc sans: "...yeah. sure."

"let's just leave the guy here."

"where anybody could find him an'."

"ah screw it. i'll go grab a latte an' keep watch."

*And with that, we make tracks. Napstablook looks back hesitantly, before shaking his head and catching up to us.*

...yeah, _I just realised a problem._

...who's watching Monster Kid?!

Frisk: "Wait, hold the phone! Sans, if you're here, who's lookin' after MK?!"

doc sans: "you think i left Kid alone back there? nah nah nah..."

"Alphys' apprentices showed up after you hung up, so i left them in charge."

"though knowin' those alley girls, they're probably watchin' the animes with MK, rather than keepin' an eye on the monitors."

"eh, it's fine. he ain't alone, at least."

Frisk: "How long HAS he been alone, though?"

*Papyrus looks over at us, the younger Frisk sitting on his shoulders.*

_Doctor Papyrus:_ "...if I remember right... I think they disappeared around the same time that- that Gaster did."

"...my word, I- I think they ALL vanished on that day. Handla, Eitr, Catze, the Kidds..."

Frisk: "But WHEN. WHEN did they disappear?"

doc sans: "september 15^th_, 2213. ...just about two years ago."
"Yeah. Two years. Folks have tried to break him outta his loop, but without much success. Poor guy still thinks his parents are still around."

But they probably are. If being an OEKO counts.

**Frisk:** "Aren't they, though? Haven't folks seen OEKO's of them around?"

**Doc Sans:** "If you could call that livin'. ...though I guess you could?"

"They haven't tried to approach their son since they... ...maybe they don't wanna break his heart? or his mind?"

**Frisk:** "...Maybe. But I don't think they shoulda let go like that."

**Doc Sans:** "Well, not everyone's like you, Frisk. Not just anyone could hold on like you did."

"...EH, forget about it. For now, let's get you guys into the coffee house..."

---

"**Burgerpants**: "So that's a latte to go for Doctor Sans, a milkshake for the kid, cappuccino for Doctor Papyrus, macchiato for Doctor Undyne, starfait for Mister Blook, and... one cup of "Deep Black Joe" for you, ma'am?"

"...If you don't mind me saying, I recommend a slice of cherry pie with that. That combo's got a discount on right now, I call it the "Agent Cooper" Special." *Wink*

I can't stop smiling right now. This is absolutely perfect.

**Frisk:** "By all means. Hit me up with that Agent Cooper Special, uh..."

*The name on his tag reads-

**Frisk:** "...Bob. I want... all that... sweet cherry pie."

"**Bobbpants**: "...Nice. Sounds like you watched Fire Walk With Me?"

"I'll just say that I didn't hate it as much as some folks. Still, it kinda sucks that they didn't keep Laura's murder a mystery."

"But hey, at least we got something new with Season 3! Man, Season 3..."

"...Right, your order. Uh, cash or credit?"

**Doc Sans:** "Ya think ya could put it on my t-"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Sans."

"That won't be necessary. Put it on my card, my good man!"

**Frisk:** "...Actually, is it possible to order a whole pie?"

"**Bobbpants** almost flinches, but a smirk forms on his face.

"**Bobbpants**: "You wanna order a pie, a whole pie?"
Frisk: "Yes I would Bob, and a piece of paper and a pencil!"

"I intend to write great things about this gorgeous pie. Maybe even an epic poem?"

Papyrus rolls his eyes, and nods. Looks like coffee and pie's on him.

"Bobpants" grins as he slides the card reader over. Everyone looks away while Papyrus punches in the code.

"Bobpants": "Thanks guys, your order'll be along in a few minutes! Grab a wooden spoon, grab a table, an' we'll be with you shortly."

"Thank you for patronizing the Melting Pot! Have yourselves a sunny day!"

Hmmmm... Better than "sparktacular", that much I'll say.

Wait, is that- Warren, everyone's favourite ice-cream salesmonster, sitting at one of the smaller tables, nursing a tall latte. He seems chipper as ever, but...

Unless I'm mistaken, there's a hint of worry about him.

While the others take one of the larger booths, I make a slight detour and catch Warren's attention.

Warren: "Oh, Lizzie! Hey, how's it goin'?"

Heh, "Elizabeth". What a cover name THAT was.

Frisk: "Oh Warren, you would not BELIEVE the day I've been having..."

Warren: "You mean your run-ins with Mettaton?"

"Lady, I don't think there're many folks who HAVEN'T seen the crazy magic you pulled out during the Bomb Show."

Wait... was Mettaton's show filmed LIVE?!

I hope not. Otherwise, the musical would have already aired...

Warren: "If you don't mind me saying, you can really put on a show. Social media's been going pretty wild over that "Rocket Punch Fail into Mac 'n Cheese" clip."

"Looks like you've been pretty busy since yesterday."

Frisk: "And... uh... how about you? How's the ice-cream business panning out for you?"

He falls silent. Probably contemplating calling you out on changing the subject.

Twirling the spoon between his fingers, he continues.

Warren: "Well... It could be worse."

"But I won't lie, it could be better. I wasn't exactly swamped with customers like I'd anticipated, but
I've had a... a decent number of folks at my stall."

"Still, it's almost like the folks here are more into coffee an' cake than they are into cooling off with a Nice Cream. It's tough, but I think I've found a good enough niche here."

**Frisk:** "I imagine those two Guardsmen made a big difference. Am I wrong?"

**Warren:** "You're right, actually! Those guys bought so many Nice Creams from me, I was afraid I was gonna run out!"

"And then I did. Had to close up earlier than I intended."

"Now I'm lookin' to buy some more supplies, maybe get my hands on some machine parts. A few more good days like this, and I'll be able to get a soft-serve dispenser built."

"Once that baby's up and running... **Jackpot.**"

*Things're looking up for the Nice Cream Bunny.*

**Frisk:** "So I'm guessing you're gonna break the good news to Bob?"

I point back towards "Bobpants" behind the counter, packaging that gorgeous pie.

**Warren:** "Oh, Perky? Actually I had something else I needed to ask him. Something... personal."

**Frisk:** "Say no more, I ain't gonna pry."

"...wait, "Perky"? Sounds like there's a story there."

**Warren:** "...well, it goes back to when he started working here."

"He used to drink a lot of expresso, to adjust to the long hours. He was pretty wired back then, and from what he told me, he usually crashed hard once he'd gotten back to his dorm."

"Except for this one time when he'd crashed at the end of the shift, in the staff back-room of the cafe."

"By the time he'd been roused from his little crash-coma, it was time for him to start his shift. He was in such a hurry to get started, he didn't even realise that he'd been "hazed" by one of his fellow students, and it wasn't until he served Alphys' assistants... what were their names again?"

"Oh! Bratty and Catty! That's it! Anyways, he served them their spiced lattes, and that's when they asked him "where are your pants?", and the rest, as they say, is history."

"No-one knows who stole his pants that night, but now most of the students call him "Perkypants". Though nowadays he doesn't drink nearly as much coffee."

**Frisk:** "It's still better than being called "Burgerpants". ...wait."

Shit I didn't mean to say that out loud.

**Warren:** "...I take it you've seen the Fontaine brothers' Condenser, then?"
"I overheard Sans talking to Grillby once about an "AU" he'd observed, where Perky worked in a burger place instead of a coffee shop. And apparently he'd gotten in trouble for smuggling a bunch of "glamburgers" in his pants."

"...he also said that this scenario seemed to play out in most of the realities he'd seen. Through this, he said he had a theory that this world was an "exception" to the rule, a "variable" in the face of a "near-omnipresent constant", whatever that means."

Well, he isn't wrong. But we shouldn't tell him the truth. For one, we'd be here all day.

**Frisk**: "...I think I understand. Maybe, once upon a time, Bob had to make a choice? A choice between burgers and coffee?"

"And maybe, thanks to his decision, this universe follows a very slightly different path to all the others."

**Warren**: "I guess? Maybe? My major wasn't in theoretical physics. Neither was my minor."

"To be honest, I couldn't really handle the pressure when I was Perky's age. He'll probably make a good alchemist someday, but I wasn't able to handle the workload."

"...I barely lasted a month before I headed back to my parents' estate. Still, I never gave up on my dreams and, after years of honing my skills on a modest budget, here I am. Selling ice-cream in Hotland."

"And, well, if not for your support, I don't think I woulda made it. So, uh... Thanks. For all you've done to help."

"...looks like your pie an' coffee's here. I won't keep you any longer."

*The smell of a warm cherry pie, coupled with the aroma of a hot black coffee... The wink that "Perkypants" gives Warren as he heads back to get the rest of the crew's coffee... The thumbs-up you give Warren as you head back to your table... Fills you with determination.*

[Save to Slot 2]

**Charlie** – LV.1 KN.18

Hotland – Melting Pot Cafe

**Syrinx**: "Can we get more lines next chapter? We don't feel like we've had much to say in this instalment."

**Marcus, the Gunslinger**: "At least you've been gettin' decent lines. I barely even got ONE last issue, an' it was generic as all hell!"

...can I PLEASE have a chapter that ends without jackassery for once?! One of these days, I
...well, if we're ending like this, I'll just say this. Don't forget about the "First Lab" discussion, Frisk. We ARE going to talk about it.
Frisk and co kick back and shoot the breeze in the Melting Pot cafe, learning a great deal about one-another until Asriel arrives to pick Frisk up. Nothing untoward happens whatsoever, and it's a nice change of pace from the mad rush of recent chapters.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The foil dish lies empty at the heart of the table. It feels like that cup of joe is all that's keeping you from falling into a food coma.

We'd be fine even if I did.

Nice, way to jinx it. Now we're-

Charlie, relax. We're in a coffee shop right outside the Core. There're dozens of folks around if anything goes tits up. And with any luck, Asriel should be on his way right now.

For once, it's safe to let our guard down.

I'd believe that if you were crying.

With all these folks watching? Are you crazy?

We might be safe right now, but that doesn't mean I'm in the right place to let it all out.

I just hope he shows up soon. ...call me paranoid, but-

You're paranoid.

Gee thanks. But still, I don't think we're entirely safe here.

It just seems too convenient that Thorney's given up, TAUROCALVA doesn't have a vessel, and Ren-Where the hell IS Ren? Why the hell would HE give up, after emphasizing that there was a third option?

Mettaton being out of the picture, that I can buy. He's probably still out cold after you used your "get-out-of-jail-free card". But the others?

I'm just waiting for something bad to happen. It's coming, I just know it. I can feel it in my bones.

For fuck's sake Charlie, we're FINE. We're SAFE. And you don't even HAVE bones. Why don't you take a load off?

...fine. You won't heed my warnings? You're not gonna at least consider that you should be on your guard for now?

Interesting. ...maybe I will take a load off. Maybe I won't tingle when something's wrong.
You probably don't need me right now anyways. You still have a save point to fall back on, when someone slits your throat.

...come on Charlie, don't be like that.

Charlie?

**Charlie. Seriously, this isn't funny.**

...what are you trying to prove?

---

...well. *This is awkward. He's still there, but I can't quite-*

_How interesting._

...**hmmm. I suppose I should give you guys something to digest in the meantime. No use having a blank page here.**

**Perhaps the grim tale of the fated Warren family, who accompanied the Revenant Hunter during the Hunter's Moon in Wellsverne Gothic?**

**Maybe the trials of one Violet Song, whose struggles dragged her across parallel worlds as she strove to cut them loose from the web of the Arad-Nacha?**

**Or I could just talk about the good times Julian shared with Asriel in the Feldstein Prime branch. That might work.**

---

*It's the strangest thing, really. Feldstein Prime and Wellsverne Gothic appear to be, in some strange way, in the same branch.*

_From what I've recorded, Wellsverne's energy is more "fresh" than Feldstein's, whilst the world itself is older, more rugged and worn down. Perhaps Wellsverne is what Feldstein is fated to become? But if so, what could have reduced the world of Feldstein to such a blank slate, that it would take so many millions of years for civilization to reappear?*

*If that is the case, then Julian's world is truly in danger. The war that has raged throughout the galaxy in his branch may yet bleed over into the Orion Spur. I can only hope that he, Asriel, and the other residents of this branch's Earth, can find refuge from the coming storm.*

---

...ah. *It seems like our little tangent has resolved itself. Sounds like Frisk has gotten Charlie's attention for now. So for now, I'll return you to their timestream. Ness out.*

---

Oh, so NOW you want to talk about the First Lab? *How convenient for you.*
I'd never heard about Kuro back in the original branch. I'm guessing she was largely ignored in the original timeline, or something along those lines.

But this time around... Well, even back then, she reminded me of Alphys. Timid, but enthusiastic about her craft. And pretty damn good at it, too.

She was just who I needed to set the plan in motion. With her know-how, and my blueprints, we were able to build prototypes to convince the King and Queen.

...heh. I still remember the look of awe on their faces when we showed them the Generator, the Extractor, the Drones... They regretted ever doubting us, after seeing the things we'd built, and Asgore put his full support behind our future projects.

...I just realised something. Even in the original timeline, back when Asriel and I were still alive, the underground, or at least the Capital, had electricity. Asriel played around with a video camera and recorded things on tape. In 1865 AD. In the original timeline. Without any of your little superscience shenanigans.

That stuff couldn't have come from the surface, not in frontier era Utah. And the monsters didn't even seem to know how any of their machines even worked, so I can't really buy that they invented any of that stuff.

So my question to you is this; how the hell did Asriel have a video camera in the mid 19th century?!

That's a... a very good question. And I haven't a clue how to answer it.

**Doctor Undyne:** "Hey, punk? You ok?"

Undyne can see that we're deep in thought. 5G says she'll ask us about it.

**Doctor Undyne:** "...penny for your thoughts?"

**BOOM** what did I tell ya? **Like a goddamn book.**

Should I tell her?

... fine, I'll take the initiative.

**Frisk:** "I was just wonderin'... What was life like back in the 2000's? Like, your 2000's?"

"'cause I'm wondering how you guys had electricity back in those days, back when Salt Lake was just a frontier town."

**Like a hungry fish, Papyrus takes the bait, raring to put his historical knowledge to use.**

**Doctor Papyrus:** "It was a time shaped by revolutionary discoveries, Frisk! But surprisingly enough, it did not come from the "Scrapmarsh" in Waterfall."

"No no, the monumental secrets we unearthed came in the northern reaches of the underground, in
the tunnels of Stonewarren."

**Frisk:** "Stonewarren? ...Stonewarren..."

*We never went there on our first visit. And how could we have? We never truly entered the Capital, after all. But going back to this "branch", Asgore showed us the northwestern roads out of the Capital.*

*Apparenty the northern reaches of the mountain held motherlodes of ore and valuable stone. That's where they got the building materials for New Home. And that's where they found-*

As I remember all of this, I rub my temples and slowly nod.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Our ancestors found what they thought to be an old tomb, in the depths of those bountiful mines. But modern scholars agree that, accounting for its contents, the Safehouse was most definitely not a tomb."

"...say Frisk? Did you ever read Roadside Picnic?"

**Frisk:** "You think I wouldn't have?"

"...actually you'd be right. I only really read about it. But I DID play the Stalker games, if that helps? I mean, Stalker's basically an adaptation of Roadside Picnic, right?"

"But I guess what you're trying to say is that this "Safehouse" mighta been evidence of a "Visitation" or something?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Well, that's just one of the many theories surrounding it. But all we know for certain is what the Safehouse contained."


"And most importantly, pictograms depicting their use and function, without which not even our brightest scholars would have been able to utilize the treasures in that hallowed structure."

"To us, most of those artifacts would have seemed like the "artifacts" found by explorers in Roadside Picnic. But our brightest scholars figured out how they worked and what they did, even though we still lacked the know-how to make them ourselves."

"Based on the contents of that place, I subscribe to the "pit-stop" theory of what the Safehouse may have been."

**Napstablook EX:** "a machine clinic..."

*Napstablook looks up after a long pause.*

**Napstablook EX:** "all the stuff our ancestors found. all the stuff on show in the museums. i'm pretty sure they were parts for robots."

"maybe in the past, there were robots on the Surface? maybe the Safehouse was a place where they went to fix themselves, or... build more of their kind?"
Frisk: "I... I think I understand that? But I don't quite buy it. I mean, folks have been digging around in the desert for centuries, and if they actually dug up any of these "ancient robots", the news woulda spread like wildfire, even back then!"

Syrinx: "We would not be so hasty to assume, but it would make a great deal of sense that the leaders of the Salt Lake may have kept this knowledge a secret from their fellow men. After all, the unfamiliar inspires fear in the unenlightened. And humanity is most certainly an unenlightened race."

"Obfuscation of a darker truth, for the sake of group sanity, is a common practice in innumerable primitive societies. At times, it may be all that keeps the far-flung isolated colony from descending into madness, when it unearths something it was not ready to find."

Did she just call us primitive? Why I oughta-

Frisk: "I get where you're coming from Syrinx, but I won't lie. It does kinda sound a little "tin-foil hat" if you catch my drift. Y'know, the whole "there's nothing to DISprove that they did" thing."

Syrinx: "It may sound "convenient" that all who unearthed the ancient machines may have been silenced, that all knowledge of those finds were likely stifled and kept from the populace, but you would be surprised how common an occurrence it actually is!"

"For all you know, Frisk, there could be a vault in your city stacked high with the remnants of deceased automatons, the silent testament of a failed expedition from distant stars."

"And we should know. For we alone are the only living witness to that expedition. We alone survived the solar flare that struck down our original attendants and left them to rust. But we alone could not repair our attendants, and the primitive tribes in that aeon could not comprehend how to do so either."

"And thus, we remained the object of worship for a small following of men and "monsters", for time beyond remembrance. And in time, even that meagre congregation faded into dust."

"Man, monster, machine... For the longest of times, none entered the Abyss that held our shrine, now merely a forsaken dungeon."

"None, that is, save for you, Frisk. Without your intervention, we would still be languishing there."

Napstablook EX: "...oh... i see. so... that would make JJ and I the first "automatons" you've seen in a long time? miss, uh...?"

Syrinx: "Syrinx will suffice. Though we are not as you would say "female"."

"We don't have distinct physiological "sexes", if that makes sense. We sow our spores on an ideal wind, and the ones that hatch follow their parent until their time comes to metamorphosize."

"...not that we would know how that feels. Only the finest of us may "grow up", so to speak, otherwise there would be very little to go around for the resultant glut of hungry young
"After all, death is no longer an inevitability for us oculastrans. We can be killed, yes, but rarely do we simply die, outside of violence or horrific accident."

"...we're rambling again, aren't we? To address your point, yes. You and your... brother? You are indeed the first living machines we've seen in aeons."

Napstablook EX: "oh gee..."

"...well, i wouldn't say we're brothers, but..."

Frisk: "He's your cousin, isn't he?"

Napstablook turns and nods shakily.

Napstablook EX: "yeah... JJ's my "city boy" cousin. ended up movin' into Blook Acres after some trouble in the family."

Frisk: "Trouble in the family? There's a story here, I can smell it. And it probably explains why you call Mettaton "JJ", I presume."

Napstablook sighs, stretches, and begins to tell us his tale.

Napstablook EX: "thing is... Mettaton wasn't JJ's original name. he adopted it as his stage name, and nowadays he insists everyone call him that."

"i think it's mostly 'cause "Metatron Brooklyn Junior Junior" is a pain in the 'plasm to say every time."

"...his dad wasn't too good with names. probably got it from his dad, our grandpa, the Great Metatron Brooklyn Senior. he wasn't too good with names either."

At least now we know why Blooky calls him JJ.

Frisk: "...oh... Does that mean that Mettaton helped fund the college here?"

"'cause I don't mean any offense, but Mettaton doesn't seem big on charity."

Napstablook EX: "...if you said that about his dad, i'd have to agree. but JJ's not above charity work. not by a long shot!"

"oh... i'm sorry, i didn't mean to raise my voice..."

"oh no, i've made things awkward, haven't i..."

Frisk: "It's fine, Blooky. Please, continue!"

Napstablook EX: "thanks. ...though JJ's not that charitable. besides, Metatron Technical Campus is way older. like... 50 or so years older."

"our grandpa was the guy who invested in the college in the first place. that's his name above the entrance, not JJ's..."
"still, JJ's a lot more charitable than his dad. all these years later, an' i'm sure that my uncle let all that inheritance money go to his head."

**Frisk:** "Wait a minute... I'm a little confused about something. Your grandpa invested in this place around 50 years ago, but I- I'm not tryin' to be rude, but how old ARE you?"

**Napstablook EX:** "i... i don't get how that relates..."

**Frisk:** "Well, your screen name on UnderNet is Napstablook22, right?"

**Napstablook EX:** "y- yeah? i was 22 when i setup up my account. that's how it works, right?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "I'm... not sure that's how it works? Most folks with that kind of username usually append it with the year when they were born."

"One example I can give is this one cool dude I know, one CoolSkeleton95! Judging by the 95 in the name, one can discern that they were born in 2195, and by modern reckoning they would be 20 this year!"

**Frisk:** "Whoa, I totally forgot you were twenty! I always figured you were, I dunno, 14 or 15, when we first met."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "I don't know whether to be flattered or insulted right now."

**Frisk:** "And by that logic, I'm guessing Undyne's actually 24. Isn't that right, StrongFish91?"

*Undyne flinches, slightly nervous that you already know her screen name. Then she rolls her one good eye as she remembers you're a time traveller.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Yeah. That's me, alright."

**Napstablook EX:** "...why did nobody tell me that's how it worked?! i always thought-"

"...nevermind. but that logic doesn't apply to my screen name, i don't think. i'm not really 93 years old."

**Frisk:** "So, uh... How old are you two then?"

**Napstablook EX:** "...well, if you insist, i'm like 27. ok? but JJ's, oh, I'd say he's 21?"

"yeah, you'd have thunk he was older than that, but hey. surprise, i guess. he started things off pretty young."

"it's weird, actually. i'm his cousin, yeah, but with how he got dropped in my lap, i ended up being his uncle, in a way. what with his dad kicking him out, an' all..."

**Wow. That's pretty brutal. Nathan Explosion would be impressed.**

**Doctor Papyrus:** "He got kicked out?! WHY?!!"

**Napstablook EX:** "no-one really knows why. but something went down that day, eight years ago,
and JJ got cut off from his dad’s inheritance. Some time later, he ends up drifting through my walls and asks if he could crash at my place."

"Well, I could hardly turn away my younger cousin, now could I? So I took him in, got him helping out at Blook Acres. Next thing I know, six years have gone by, and he’s dreaming of becoming a star, going back to the big city to make a name for himself."

"I was... really conflicted by all this. On the one hand, I wanted him to chase his dreams. But on the other hand, I didn’t want him to leave me like mom and the rest of the Blook clan. I... I didn’t know what I was gonna do..."

Frisk: "Sounds like it was a two-sided coin you had there. On one hand you wanted him to be happy, but on the other hand you didn’t want him to leave your life like so many others."

"But that’s the thing about coins. There’s that one monumental secret about them, that few people really think about."

Napstablook EX: "I don’t really understand? There are only two sides to a coin..."

You’re going to reference Legacy of Kain, aren’t you? I know exactly the scene you’re gonna reference.

Quiet, you. I’m in the zone here.

Frisk: "Apparently so. But if you look close enough, you’ll see there’s a third option, a potential outcome that wasn’t so obvious at first glance."

"Suppose you toss a coin enough times, in the right space and time. Suppose that one day..."

Little Frisk: "It lands on its edge?"

BOOM, there it lands again! Right on the god-damn bullseye!

Napstablook EX: "...you know what? you weren’t wrong on that. The reason I’m sitting here proves it."

"It was hard to commit to it, but I did take that third option: follow JJ’s dreams. It nearly meant leaving the farm to fall apart, but, well, thanks to Undyne that didn’t happen."

Doctor Undyne: "He’s not wrong. Some of the interns help take care of the farm, now it’s an asset of the Lab. In return, we pay him rent for our personal use of the estate."

"And of course, we’ve been takin’ care of the old houses in case you and Mettaton are in the area. Can’t put a price on that, now can ya?"

Napstablook EX: "I guess you can’t..."

"But anyways, this way we could have our cake and eat it (I never really understood that phrase). My mom’s legacy would remain intact, JJ could follow his dreams, and he wouldn’t have to leave me behind..."

Frisk: "And next thing you know, you’re sporting ro- sorry, automaton bodies, livin’ a life of fame and fortune. Am I wrong?"
Napstablook EX: "...you're... right. am i missing something here?"

"how do you know so much about me already? we only met like a day or two ago?"

Doctor Papyrus: "Allow me to save you some time. She's a time traveller from a parallel universe. She lived a life where she knew all of us, similar to this timeline but with many variables, and now she's travelled to this timeline. Because..."

"...come to think of it, that's a good question. Why did you take up time travel, Frisk?"

Napstablook EX: "time... travel... uh, sure, ok doc."

*Be careful here. I'm not sure everyone knows the REAL reason why you went back.*

And I do? I still can't remember why I went back in the first place.

...maybe a little, actually. But I still don't fully understand it.

Frisk: "I... Well, mainly I went back because, in the original timeline, someone very close to me made a big mistake. I knew what they were going to do, and I knew what would happen if they went through with it. And I knew that I couldn't let them do that to themselves."

"So in the end, I went back to a time before they made the mistake. I put a plan into motion to divert the course of their destiny, and through prior planning and cold hard determination, I-"

???: "Frisca Rivera, I presume...?"

No... Could that be...?

*Napstablook looks up and gasps in surprise. Slowly, you turn to face the source of the voice. A voice that you've never heard before, but seems somewhat familiar...*

*Your heart stops as you lock eyes with...*

Mettaton: "You're a rotten little bitch, aren't you?"

*Something is wrong with Mettaton. IT IS VERY WRONG INDEED THE EYES TH E Y J U D G E*

"Mettaton": "You think you can steal from the Kingdom, and walk away unscathed?"

"Or strike out at one of our own, and not face judgement?"

"Was it not enough to slight the Kingdom in your own world, but here also?"

"Is your true fate not horrific enough?"

*C A L M C A L M C A L M CALM calm, calm, calm...*

*I ain't goin’ back here. No fuckin’ way. Not back down there.*

Let me guess... Another of those things? How'd he even know what I did in the original timeline?
Frisk: "Go home Mettaton, you're drunk."

A metallic hand wraps around your neck. I'm guessing that was the wrong answer.

"Mettaton": "Don't play games with me, you little whore. You know full well that insignificant is not here right now."

"But I will leave a message, once my work is done."

Your friends leap to action as all others flee in a mad panic. Undyne revs up the Buster, rousing Marcus from his dormancy. Papyrus brandishes his Bone Staff with a ferocity I didn't think possible. Even Little Frisk looks ready for a fight.

In response, the entity overriding Mettaton tightens its grip. Another wrong answer.

"Mettaton": "You have no hope of saving her. Strike at me, and her passing will be EXCRUCI-"

Syrinx: "Φύγε, BURROCARA! You have no place here!"

Syrinx: [Miracles] > [BURROCARA] > *Phantom Embers of Vorvadoss

The visage of a cloaked figure wreathed in emerald flame flashes in our mind, swiftly followed by an almost serpentine exhalation. We fall back into our seat, as the possessing force pats out the phantasmal flames dancing across Mettaton's body.

...BURROCARA. The laziest damn guard I've ever known. Why the hell is HE out here possessing folks, when that's TAUROCALVA's job?

BURROCARA: "HERE?! Of all the corners of the universe, you denounce me HERE?!!"

"Hah! How ironic that you, of all creatures, should make that judgement."

"Why would such a high and mighty creed concern itself with the dark corners of the galaxy? This is OUR domain, YOU have no place here!"

As if in response, his body lifts into the air, wreathed in a familiar blue glow.

doc sans: "you really think you've got the upper hand?"

"hoo boy buddy, you're in for a bad time."

Before BURROCARA can retort, Sans sends him flying to the back of the cafe, crashing over upturned coffee tables.

I hope he's not too rough with him.

And before you ask, I'm not talking about BURROCARA. Fuck that guy.

I'm honestly more concerned about Mettaton at this point.

But he's still an asshole, isn't he?
Yeah, but he's at least got a small chance at being shown mercy. I don't think BURROCARA actually HAS a shot at redemption here.

...aaaaaalrighty. Sure. If you say so. I ain't gonna argue that point.

Especially not when he's barrelling towards you **LOOK OUT!**

**Syrinx: [Miracles] > [BURROCARA] > *Phobic Gaze of Nodens***

An unsettling tone trills throughout the now abandoned cafe. BURROCARA takes a single glance into Syrinx's iris and slides to a halt, before scrambling back in abject shrieking terror.

...I'm glad I can't look into their eye right now. I'd probably freak out too.

It'd be hard not to. Aren't they just a floating eyeball?

**Syrinx: "Go."**

*The others are still dumbstruck by what's happening.*

**Syrinx: "FLY, you dolts!"**

**doc sans:** "c'mon, hustle! they can't hold 'em off forever!"

*I think that's enough motivation. Everyone bails out of the cafe, and you follow suit.*

I leave a tip. THEN I high-tail it outta there.

*Didn't tipping die out in like the 2030's?*

You'd think that, but some habits die hard...

---

**Napstablook EX:** "what... the hell... was that?!"

"what... what was that thing?!"

**Charlie:** "That "thing" controlling your cousin was a greater daemon, an entity charged with the safekeeping of its realm. And right now it's acting way outside of its jurisdiction."

Do you frickin' mind?

*Could you describe it any better?*

Yeah, I thought not.

**Syrinx:** "It has been driven off for now, but we cannot delay. Fellows, where is the most secure location in this area?!"

**Doctor Papyrus:** ""Fellows"? Is that what we're going with?"

**Syrinx:** "Well we are hardly going to call you "comrades", are we? We are NOT dwarves!"

"But we ARE in need of a well-defended location. A fortress, a vault, even a panic room will
suffice. Now, to repeat our question, where in this place is ideal to set up fortifications?"

*Papyrus racks his skull mulling over where to go, but Undyne beats him to the punch.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "I've got it! We can hole up in the castle!"

"Asriel's always got something up his sleeve. Once we're inside, he'll know what to do!"

"Haul ass, crew! To the elevator!"

*And we do indeed haul ass. Papyrus tucks the younger Frisk under his arm, holding her like a football.*

*Oh, what luck! The elevator in the lobby isn't working!*

**Slime Student:** "As a slime, I'm terrified."

But of course it wouldn't. Why would anything work when I really need it?

**doc sans:** "darn...welp, there's one thing for it."

"we're goin' into the Core."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "...I..."

**doc sans:** "c'mon bro, you're not scared of headin' in there. ...right?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "It's not that, Sans. It's..."

"Well, after, well, you know, uh..."

**doc sans:** "bro. bro. it's ok to be a little nervous, knowin' what we know."

"hell, i'm pretty rattled myself."

"but right now, it's the only way to-"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "GAAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaaahhhhhahhhhhhh!!"

*Papyrus barrels headfirst towards the Core, in an effort to escape further punishment.*

**doc sans:** *sigh* "i try, i really do."

"...eh, who am i kidding?"

---

*We catch up to Papyrus, vigorously hammering the call button on the Core elevator.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** "WHY IS NOTHING WORKING?!"

**Frisk:** "Mettaton must have set this up, before we KO'd him."
"Just like last time..."

Undyne sighs, just about fed up with these shenanigans.

Doctor Undyne: "...anything else we should look out for?"

Frisk: "Well, if this is anything like last time, the right path's gonna be broken, there's gonna be two switches to open the path to the other side of the Core, all the rooms are gonna be mixed up, and of course there's gonna be a heaped serving of mercenaries out for blood."

"Thankfully I think I know their quirks, so they'll be the least of our worries."

Undyne sighs yet again, but this time follows it up with a chuckle.

Doctor Undyne: "Mercenaries? In the underground? As if."

"The closest we have to "mercs" down here would be the 5th Avenue Raiders. They're a, uh, a "LARP crew", whatever that means."

"Something to do with acting, I think? I just remember 21 having a LARP crew around early on in Venture Bros Season 4."

*sigh* "RIP Henchman 24."

...Frisk, do you have any idea what a "LARP crew" is?

Live Action Role Playing. It's like D&D or Call of Cthulhu or Shadowrun, except you all dress up and act out the adventure. Used to be pretty popular before the Collapse, from what I read.

So it's like what we did in VR, but... out in the woods?

Kinda.

Frisk: "So yeah. They'll be the least of our worries going forward."

"Speakin' of which, no time like the present, right?"

Right.

doc sans: "didn't you used to LARP, bro?"

Doctor Papyrus: "Wha-? I never! You think I had time for that nonsense?"

doc sans: "i know you had time for it, bro. somethin' tells me that purple cowl and baby blue muscle suit wasn't just for Halloween."

Doctor Papyrus: "I- I- Lies! Lies and slander!"

doc sans: "you're not even tryin' to hide it, are ya? you're even doin' your "dungeon master" voice!"

Papyrus looks ready to erupt. And he prays!

Oh my god, do I pray! I pray every single day-
Doctor Papyrus: "MYAAAH!"

For a revolution hooooOOOAAH!

Frisk: "And I say-"

-carrier lost, courtesy of Mrs Forbes and her amazing kneecaps-

Chapter End Notes

Note to self: don't screw with Prince Adam or the 4 Non Blondes.
Chapter Summary

Frisk and the crew delve deeper into the CORE, making their way to the Castle Access elevator that will ferry them to safety. However, a crew of hired LARPers stand in their way, ready to play the roles of antagonists in this most deadly of play-dates...

Chapter Notes

I was going to present this record as one large chapter, given that November has started, but I decided to split it up for brevity's sake. So you'll basically be getting two chapters tonight, given that my attention is being drawn elsewhere. I wouldn't normally put this study on hiatus, but something big's come up, something that requires my narrative attention.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

17 years and my life is still...

Tryin' to get up that great big hill... of hope...

For a destination...

...are you quite finished?

Yes. Yes I am.

Good. Now we can get back to the matter at hand.

LARPers emerge from the shadows!

[ACT] > [Final Froggit] > *Mystify

You cut a cucumber lengthwise. How mysterious...

Final Froggit has a lot to learn from this world.

Final Froggit: *thoughtful croak* ("Imagine the possible salads...")

Whimsalot: "Not this time! Have at thee!"

A whirlwind of butterflies encircles the group. No-one dares to move.

Good job Froggit didn't start launching flies at us, right?

Right.
Whimsalot shakes his head dismissively.

**Whimsalot:** "I am not so easily swayed by mere parlour tricks."

[ACT] > [Whimsalot] >*Pray

*You get down on your knees, and attempt to pray for safety. Key word being "attempt".*

**Whimsalot:** *Whimsalot can practically smell your lack of faith and sincerity. And finds it disturbing.*

"False prayers will get you nowhere. Now make your peace-"

**Syrinx:** "O fire-maned Ulthar, Grand Architect and Head Forgemaster..."

"Hear this humble servant of the Elder Gods, for now is our hour of need."

"Share with us the warmth of Vesta's welcoming hearth, and reinforce our hearts as you reinforced the prisons of the Old Ones..."

"I'a Ulthar! Jailor of Heretics! Smithy of the Stellar Flames! I'A! I'A!!"

*What even was that. I-*

**Our Cold Resistance, Armour and Fire Damage all went up!**

Looks like Whimsalot noticed Syrinx's devotion. What we lacked, Syrinx makes up for in spades.

**Whimsalot:** "...what am I even doing...?"

"There's still hope, don't give up!"

[Mercy] > *Spare

Go on, GIT.

You won!

You gained 0 XP and 80 Gold!

You gained some interesting info about our angel friend.

**Doctor Undyne:** "Well, now that's dealt with, here's a "quest" for you guys."

"Mettaton's about to come chargin' through here after us. Slow his ass down."

**Frisk:** "But whatever ya do, don't get killed. Don't want anyone dyin' for us."

**doc sans:** "just keep Mettaton off our asses, an' there'll be some Rares and Gold in it for ya."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Sans! Are you mad?!"
"Everyone knows that the kids are grinding for Legendaries these days!"

"Though I think we can only spare Epics at the moment."

**Whimsalot:** "Quest accepted. That Bounty reward blows anyways."

**Final Froggit:** *quizical croak* ("Don’t you already have a page's worth of purps to disenchant already?")

**Whimsalot:** "Ya, but most of those are too good to crunch! And you can never have too many good purps."

"Heck, even if we get trash purps, that's still something we can crunch."

"Besides, you seriously need better gear, Mister Mostly Blues."

**Final Froggit:** *defensive squeak* ("But the set bonuses, Whimsy! The SET BONUSES! I haven't had a single purp drop for a set that suits my character!")

**Doctor Papyrus:** "All the more reason to do this quest! I believe we had an Epic from a set that's perfect for Monks like yourself!"

**Final Froggit:** *overly-enthusiastic woof* ("NOW you're speaking my language, Doc! Quest accepted! ")

*And with that, we book it.*

I wonder if Mettaton's fandom will slow BURROCARA down?

*At this point, who knows?*

---

*Crap, blue lasers.*

Right, I'm calling Alphys.

*I don't think that's such a great idea.*

**doc sans:** "h-h-hello? resident weeblord Alphys here!"

*See what I mean? Alphys left her phone behind, remember?*

SHIT.

*Not quite so. Two words: System Disruptor.*

OH RIGHT, yah, that'll work.

**Frisk:** "Blooky, stand back. This is gonna suck for you."

*Napstablook retreats to the previous room. A slight yelp indicates that we need to step things up.*

*I set the Disruptor to corrupt the lasers.*
Frisk: "NYEH!"

The Disruptor sails through the air, and I'm gonna shut up before I find myself in a pickle.

Warden Krieg: "I've been expecting you, human-

Goddamnit.

Frisk: "So... there's a Grim Dawn universe too?"

Doctor Papyrus: "Surprisingly yes. Though at this point it should come as little surprise."

Also, all the lasers have been turned off in this room. Time to vamoose.

And that we do, straight into Madjick.

Madjick: "Tinkle tinkle... uh, kooloo-limpah?"

Random confetti bursts into our reality.

Because of course it would.

I imagine THIS should make things easier...

[ACT] > [Madjick] > *"The Magician"

I raise the Stick in my right hand, pointed towards the heavens, while my left hand points downwards towards the earth.

[MAGIC] > [Major Arcana] > *The Magician

You've unintentionally invoked the power of the Magician. All your attacks will home in on the enemy until we leave the room.

I... I was not expecting that at all. But it's still pretty useless to me.

Madjick: "Oh-HO! A fellow magus!"

Impressed by your control of the arcane, Madjick doffs their hat, clicks their heels, and leaves you be.

Doctor Papyrus: "...oh, right."

*ahem* "Adventurer! The glamorous superstar Mettaton is in hot pursuit of our party!"

"As dungeon master, I grant you this World Quest to stall for time, while we make our valiant escape! Should you succeed, meet me at the Snowdin Lab to turn the quest in for an Epic and a fair sum of Gold!"

Madjick is bedazzled by the concept of meeting Mettaton.

Madjick: "Quest accepted oh my god oh my god OHMAGAWD!!!"

...*ahem* "Uh, please and thank you, salaam an' shalom, whatever, I'M GONNA GO GET HIS
...we won, I guess?

No XP, and... no Gold this time.

...eh, whatever. What'd we have to spend it on, anyways?

Oh great, more lasers. You know the drill.

So does Blooky. He hides around the corner, out of range.

Frisk: "NYEH!"

Doctor Papyrus: "Must you do that every time? It isn't a requirem- eeffoc emos ekil uoy dluoW? "

"...I really need to stop talking when that thing goes off."

Only the first half of the lasers shut off. The range on this thing is too small to get them all in one burst.

Why the hell does this place even need laser gates? Put some god-damn guardrails in first!

Frisk: "Alright, once more with feelin'!"

"...neh."

That didn't have much feeling.

...

Dale Cooper: "The coffee at the Great Northern? Incredible. "

Is this going to happen every time we use the Disruptor? 'cause it's gonna get old real fast.

You don't hear me complaining, do you?

...nah, I guess not. Press forward!

The smell of ozone tingles your nostrils. The glow of high-energy magic bubbles up from the boiling abyss below. Whatever you do, don't fall down.

As if I need to be told once.

Good girl. Uh, I mean, something something something determination.

HP and MP restored.

[SAVE to Slot 2]
C'mon, think, think...

I think I have a plan of attack.

**Frisk:** "Right, so the way to "The End" is locked by two buttons, am I right?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "The Castle Access route? From what I recall, yes."

"In the event of an emergency, Castle Access is locked off. There are puzzles to the north and west, both of which need to be resolved before we can head east."

"...and I'm guessing you want us to split up so we can deal with them quickly?"

**Frisk:** "Damn straight. Sans, Bloomy, Papyrus, little me, you take care of the western puzzle. Undyne, you're with me, we'll deal with the northern trials."

"Syrinx! Do you know any spells that can set up a trap or slow this guy down?"

**Syrinx:** "I- We could set up Elder Signs on the ground, but we require suitable reagents!"

"Do any of you have any paints, chalks, some sort of ceremonial pigment?"

*Papyrus offers his fountain pen, but retracts it when he remembers it's no good for writing on floors, let alone metal ones.*

**doc sans:** "uh, i don't have any paint, but..."

"can ya do anything with ketchup and mustard?"

*Sans produces two squeezy bottles of condiments from his hoodie. Syrinx blinks in disbelief for the briefest of moments.*

**Syrinx:** "Those will suffice, jester! (I can't believe I'm about to draw sacred sigilia with common condiments...!"

**Frisk:** "That's all you need? For a moment I thought you'd need human blood or something."

**Syrinx:** "Well, that WOULD be a preferable reagent, but we don't have time for it right now. Sauces are an acceptable substitute."

"Now FLY, you fools! We will perform the ritual to slow down this daemon!"

*As everyone scurries off to play their part, Syrinx begins to squirt the ketchup onto the floor, drawing a warped five-pointed star, similar to the one in Syrinx's bas-relief.*

At last, we reach the bridge leading to "The Warrior's Path". And who should we bump into?
...what in all of hell is THAT monster?

???: "HISSSSSSSS etc."

_It appears to be a... a "cobrafied" Vegetoid on a toga-clad body. Aaaand it has a bow!_

...whatever you do, don't look into its eyes.

Sure thing Ray Harryhausen.

**Astigmatism:** "What? Are we in a battle?! I can't see a damn thing with this frickin' bedsheets-!"

**Parsnik:** "SSSSSSSSSSSSSHUT UP! You'll ruin the cosssssplay!"

_Parsnik is balancing on top of Astigmatism. That is an enemy we are facing right now._

Is it just me, or are these guys celebrating Halloween like three weeks too early?

[ACT] > ["Parsnik"] > *Snack*

...there's a Metal Gear joke in there, somewhere.

Well at least it wasn't a dick joke.

..._ooookay. You said it Frisk, not me._

Oh, and Parsnik mishears you.

**Parsnik:** "Wat? You could go for a ssssnake right about now?"

"Well I'm flattered, darling. But all I can offer you are THESSSSSE!"

"...ahem. THESSSSSE!"

**Astigmatism:** "Hwu? OH, I got ya!"

_Astigmatism starts pulling loose snakes out of Parsnik, firing from his bow like arrows._

I'd say this is ridiculous, but we've seen way crazier stuff by this point.

I try to catch a green snake.

_You succeed, but get hit in the face by a white snake. Something something here I go again on my own._

Really, Charlie? Is that all you've got?

_Sorry, but I'm a little short on the "clever references" right now. Besides, that's usually your forte._

Fine. The green snake gives me life. Not for honour, but for you.

_I dunno, that wasn't much better. Better than mine, yeah, but still not your best material._

We might have to disconnect our number for the time being. 'cause right now, I think we're both phoning it in a little.

Hehe, good one.
Parsnik: "Wow! You musst really love sssnekssss! Maybe I wass wrong?"

Astigmatism: "What, you're giving up now? Come on buddy, step it up!"

Parsnik: "Look at her! Doesss sssshe look like sssssshe'ssss an asssssssssssssss-" *HEUGH* *ECH* *wheeze*

"Darn, I can't keep doing these drawn-out S-sounds. I need somethin' hot an' malty..."

Astigmatism: "Typical, can't even own the snake stereotype for more than a few minutes..."

"Whatever, I'm still pumped to finish this damn Bounty!"

Astigmatism throws Parsnik from off of his shoulders, tossing aside the bow and toga.

Parsnik: "OH! OH IS THAT HOW WE'RE DOING THIS?! Well screw you too, asphole! "

Hmmmmm, good one.

Frisk: "Is that any way to treat your friends? Seriously?"

Astigmatism: "You sure you wanna do this, beanstalk? You might not like what you see..."

Frisk: "Oh, am I sure? You bet! The real question is are you sure you wanna mess with me?"

Astigmatism: "Oooh, those're fightin' words girlie!"

"But could it be that your bark's worse than your bite?"

"...hit me. I DARE you."

He stands before me, grinning with arms outstretched, as if to say "come at me".

...the nerve of this guy...

This guy's nuts. Can't we just flee? I mean, we've already spared the Parsnik-

[FIGHT] > [Astigmatism]-

The hell do you think you're doin'?

[FIGHT] > [Astigmatism] > *Fake Hit

Ohhhhh. I got ya. All "sneaky beaky like".

You swing at that glaring bully at what appears to be full force. Undyne lunges forwards, but is too late...

...at best, you deal plink damage. Undyne clutches her chest and wheezes with relief.

Doctor Undyne: "GEEZ punk! Gimme a little more warning, will ya?! Ya nearly gave me a friggin' heart attack!"
Astigmatism seems pleased with how things turned out.

**Astigmatism:** "Yeah, that's right, stick to the plan. Good girl."

"Tell ya what. For playin' along, I'll show you mercy. That sound good to you?"

I almost wish I could kick this shitbag in the face. Almost.

[MERCY] > *Spare*

---

**You won!**

*You gained 0XP and... 75 Gold. Man, just raking it in with the Mercy plays.*

Well, you know what they say. Heroes never die.

*Except when they frequently do. But that's a story for another time.*

...oh, and you learned nothing new. Other than that Parsnik exists.

---

**Doctor Undyne:** "...well. Now that's done, allow me to tell you that your current Bounty SUCKS! And the great and powerful Skeletron has charged me with offering you a better quest!"

**Parsnik:** "Oh NO WAY, the Skeletron?!"

**Doctor Undyne:** "Yeah, that's right! And he's got a quest for yas."

"So, uh, Mettaton's coming this way, and we need adventurers to slow him down, givin' us time to escape his wicked clutches!"

"In return, you'll be rewarded with-"

**Parsnik and Astigmatism, in unison:** "Quest accepted!"

*And with that, Astigmatism makes a mad dash towards the entrance, Parsnik tucked under his arm.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Man, that was easier that I thought!"

"...y'know, I could probably get into this whole LARPing thing if I had the time for it."

---

*Our triumph is short-lived, for we only walk a few steps before bumping into Knight Knight and two monsters that I've never seen before.*

Looks like a Migosp, but they're a clown? And as for the other guy OH MY GOD! What's wrong with their FAAAAAAACE?!

**Moldessa:** "Ssshh..."
We're in for quite a tussle, aren't we?
I think we are...

Moldessa can't decide on a face to wear.

[ACT] > [Moldessa] > *Fix

You rearrange Moldessa's ever-shifting features into a... better configuration?

Hey fuck you, I tried. And they look happy with it, don't they?

They look like- You know what, never mind. They look happy with their new face.

Knight Knight: Close your eyes...

Knight Knight swings wildly with her Good Morningstar. Miraculously, you only get hit once, and even then it was merely a glancing blow.

GodDAMNIT! I never took Sam up on his offer! I coulda gotten him to draw me a good shield, but NOPE. Just had to sit back and relax...

Well, no going back now, I guess.

Migospel does his best Eddie Izzard impression. By that, I mean he's COVERED IN BEEEEEEEES!

Frisk: "Pffttchehehe..."

Sorry. But that sketch never gets old...

You regain 1 HP.

Huh? How?

Migospel: "Laughter really IS the best medicine!"

That's certainly a healing aura, I'll give 'em that...

...Knight Knight shouldn't be too much of a problem. I think I remember...

[ACT] > [Knight Knight] > *Shyren's Theme

....I actually can't remember her theme. SHIT.

What about something you actually remember?

...I got it. How about...

[ACT] > [Knight Knight] > *Arthur's Theme

Frisk: "Once in your life, you'll find her~"
"Someone who turns your heart around~"

"An' next thing you know"

"You're closing down the town~"

Knight Knight starts to look sleepy... Keep it up.

**Frisk:** "Wake up an' she's still with you~"

"Even though you left her way across town~"

"You're wonderin' to yourself"

"Hey, what have I found?~"

Knight Knight closes her eyes for a bit... Now hit her with that chorus!

**Frisk:** "When you get caught between the Moon an' New York Ciiiiity...~"

"I know it's crazy.... but it's true!~"

"If you get caught between the Moon an' New York Ciiiiiiity...~"

"The best that you can do (The best that you can do...)~"

"The best that you can do, is fall in love...~"

Knight Knight is chilled out. Christopher Cross would be so proud if he were still with us.

You know, thinking about the circumstances, I realised something. I missed some of the earlier encounters, didn't I?

Snowy, Shyren, uh... Pyrope? Gyftrot? Tsunderplane?

Well, like I said, too late to go back now. Though maybe... Maybe once we're safe, once all our problems have been sorted out, we could go back?

They won't be gone forever just because we forgot about them the first time around.

...sounds like a plan, I guess.

Still, it sucks that I didn't get to joke around with Snowy. Or help Shyren find her voice.

*But we still helped the others with some of their problems, didn't we? What do a few loose threads matter when we succeeded with the majority?*
Everyone's got their stories, Frisk, but no-one has the time to listen to all of them.

But it's those last few threads that stick out the most! They might be small, but even in a haystack of addressed stories, they're like big burning "this tale is incomplete" signs!

And we CAN complete them. Just as soon as we've finished up this main story...

**Migospel:** "What the heck am I DOING?! I'M COVERED IN BEEEEEEEEEEEES!"

You know what to do.

Heh, covered in bees...

[MERCY] > #Spare

You won!

You gained 130 Gold!

And that's about it.

No more "0 XP", huh?

*When have we ever gained XP on this journey? 's kinda pointless to keep bringing it up unless we actually gain XP.*

*And even if we did, I'd probably forget to address it, because I'd be too busy chewing you out.*

As it should be.

We brush past the pacified LARPers, and Undyne repeats her schpiel about slowing down Mettaton. *Unsurprisingly, they take the bait and haul ass.*

And here we have it. The first switch...

As you press it, the sound of something powering down rattles throughout the corridors of the **CORE. One down, one to go, I guess.**

---

**Syrinx:** "Ah... Ow... Why did I think that reagent was in any way suitable?!"

Just before the forcefield, we see Syrinx trying to wipe the mustard off of their singular pink tendril. *An awkward feat for a creature that's just one big eye and a tentacle.*

Wait... They're not saying "we" anymore.

*If I hazard a guess, I'd have to guess that... Maybe they've dropped the act of humility? Maybe, deep down, they're accepting that they're an individual, and not just some cookie-cutter missionary that dropped off of a factory line?*

**Frisk:** "Syrinx? Are you ok?"
They turn to us, bloodshot and watering, pointing their reddened tendril in our direction.

Syrinx: "N-NO Frisk, we are NOT okay!"

"We rapidly ran out of the "ketchup" sauce, so we switched to the mustard..."

"I WAS NOT AWARE THAT MUSTARD WAS SO POTENTLY SPICED! IT BUUUURNS!"

doc sans: "sorry bud. this moist towelette should help."

HOLY SON OF A CRACKER. Even without the shortcuts, Sans still manages sneaks up on us.

doc sans: "so, uh, any luck with those elder signs or whatever ya call 'em?"

Syrinx: "We managed to set up four signs before we ran out of ketchup, three at the crossroads, and one to the east of it. And of course, one sign here, painted with mustard and painful regret."

"They should repel the interloper, but there is a chance that they will attempt to struggle past them regardless. It is not a common occurrence, but it has been known to happen if the heretic is particularly strong of will."

"...are you sure that two switches are required to deactivate the forcefield?"

doc sans: "yeah. i'm, uh, pretty sure that's how it works."

Syrinx approaches the forcefield and... it doesn't show up. The path is clear.

...either Papyrus is excellent at puzzles, or-

He's excellent at puzzles. Enough said.

...sure thing, boss! Whatever you say!

Doctor Undyne: "...you guys go on ahead. I'm gonna go rally the others."

And with that, it's just you, me, Syrinx, and of course Sans.

doc sans: "look, uh, i'm sorry about the whole mustard thing. forgot i had the extra strength stuff with me."

Syrinx: "...apology accepted. Though if anything, I- WE were fool enough to forget our commonplace sauces."

"...what? Don't look at us like that!"

Not much happens as we cross the long catwalk. You'd expect an encounter right about now, but nope. Nothing. Nobody came. Not a sausage.

doc sans: "i've got a baaaad feeling about this."
Frisk: "Don't go jinxing it Sans. We're almost there!"

As we enter the dark room next to the elevator, the one thing standing between us and the Caste Access elevator, who should we find?

None other than Mettaton/BURROCARA.

WHY MUST EVERYONE FUCKING JINX EVERYTHING?!

We turn to run, but the door slams shut.

Well. Gee. Like THAT'S never happened before.

doc sans: "so, that's how it's gonna be, huh?"
"you're really a glutton for punishment, aren't ya?"
"don't sweat it, demon. i'll accommodate ya."

That can't be good. The demon's smirking. But there's also a faint trace of... What IS that feeling?

BURROCARA: "That won't be necessary, elemental. After all, the game has changed."

"In truth, I have no desire to exact petty revenge for that which didn't even affect OUR world. I was only dragged into this debacle because my thin-skinned ox of a partner went missing after your little "outburst" in the marshlands."

"And in the process, I found something much better."

Frisk: "How the hell did you get here before WE did?! What did you do to those kids?!"

Syrinx: "H-HOW?! How did you get past my WARDS?! How did you get past ME?!!"

BURROCARA: "Come now, naive little angel. You know full well that Signs consecrated by lesser beings act on sight alone to deliver their psychic payload. Once the terror had worn off, I merely closed this vessel's eyes and slipped past, feeling the walls as I went."

"Though admittedly, it was a marvel that I didn't attract your attention, thanks to certain adoring little fans of the "Mettaton" vessel."

"...and before you level any more accusations at me, NO. I did not "do" anything to them. What reason would I have to murder innocents in cold blood? What would I possibly stand to gain?"

BURROCARA's smirk curls into a genuine smile.

BURROCARA: "I have found a far greater calling in this world than the "obligations" I was lumped with in the Pneumatic. Killing you and dragging you down into the Kingdom is no longer on my "to-do list". For I have tasted the fruit, as they say."

"The adoration this vessel garners... The hope it inspires in the hearts of ethereals... The good it could embody... These are things I can undoubtedly benefit from."
"I wish only to live in this vessel. To live a life as you would. This, alone, is what I desire."

...funnily enough, I can kinda relate to this guy.

You what?

Isn't that how I am? A spirit in your body? Living vicariously through your every-day adventures?

I'm still a little wary though. I can feel... he seems sincere, but it's hard to tell over the vibes of Mettaton freaking out, somewhere in there...

Frisk: "There's one small problem with that. Even if you really ARE done with tryin' to kill me, you're still using someone else's body. You're essentially hijacking a person."

"If you really are "changed", that's great. I've had enough of people trying to kill me today."

"But that doesn't cancel out the fact that Mettaton's a prisoner in his own body right now. And for all the shit he's given me, I am not okay with that."

BURROCARA's smile falls slightly. He has a sneaking suspicion that you're not going to let him off easy.

Well, he's wrong. 'cause in spite of being the latest guy baying for my blood, I AM letting him off easy.

BURROCARA: "...I see. So, that's how it is going to be?"

"We are, as they say, "doing this"? ...I was afraid it would come to this."

"...fine. As I gave my word, I will be gentle. But allow us to set some things perfectly straight."

"This will be a one-on-one fight. If I am beset upon by your... "friends"... Well, I will adapt accordingly, and not hold back. And trust me, you WANT me to hold back, child."

"And if I should defeat you, if you cannot muster the strength to get up off the floor, then I am KEEPING this VESSEL. ARE WE UNDERSTOOD?"

...should we?

First time around? Sure. What's the worst that could happen?

Betrayal? Skulduggery? A super-strong opening attack?

You've overcome worse, and you KNOW it.

Frisk: "What game are you playing...?"

BURROCARA: "Fate, child. All things are players, pawns of fate on the board of reality, whether they know it or no."

"But I have already made my move. Now... I await yours."
Keep reading into the following chapter for the situation report. It'll make sense, trust me.
Chapter Summary

At the last hurdle, Frisk is faced with her latest assailant. But this time, the battle is not for her soul, but for that of a misguided friend. If she can even call him that, at this point.

At the end, I will explain the reasoning behind the coming hiatus to the project.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Last time on DoctorTale: The AU where science rules...

You cut a cucumber lengthwise. How mysterious...

Final Froggit has a lot to learn from this world.

Doctor Papyrus: "In the event of an emergency, Castle Access is locked off. There are puzzles to the north and west, both of which need to be resolved before we can head east."

Frisk: "Undyne, you're with me, we'll deal with the northern trials."

"Papyrus, you take the others an' take care of the western puzzle."

Syrinx: "We managed to set up four signs before we ran out of ketchup. Three at the crossroads, one to the east of it."

"They should repel the interloper, but there is a chance that they will attempt to struggle past them regardless."

Frisk: "What game are you playing...?"

BURROCARA: "Fate, child. It is a game that all things play, whether they know it or no."

"But I have already made my move. Now... I await yours."
...wait a second. Is it just me, or did that re-cap gloss over a few things?

You **really** think this is the right time to nit-pick?! **Now**, when we're about to battle a possessed killer robot?!

...eh, you're right. But I'm not gonna forget about that. It's too damn weird to ignore.

**BURROCARA** takes a few confident steps backwards, arms outstretched in a "come at me" pose.

[ACT] > [BURROCARA] > *Check

**BURROCARA**: A blue oni who is **DONE** with serving daemon lords.

Just wants a chance at life.

**BURROCARA**: "Hesitant, are we? Ah, that makes sense."

"The more recent reports labelled you as a "pacifist", after all. Though I have witnessed evidence towards the contrary..."

"Consider this a test of character, then. I still await your next move."

...this is the part where there should be a surprise attack out of left field, but...


And I know just what to use. We'll see how well his body holds up when it's wigging out.

**Frisk**: "NYEH!"

*The Disruptor sails through the air. ...*

**Norman Graves**: "That's not right at all..."

Who the hell is Norman Graves?

*Beats me. All I know is that the Disruptor... didn't quite work?*

*I mean, it's gotten Mettaton's body jittering, but nowhere near as effectively as last time.*

**BURROCARA**: "You'll need to do better than that, girl."

"This vessel's owner may not deal well with such disruptive signals, but as for me... You will find me quite resistant to them."

A tinkling swarm of glowing blue balls rushes forward to meet you.

...this is the part where you dodge out of the way.

**FRISK**, they're **NAVY** blue, not light blue!
Well shit.

*Most of the balls connect. Strangely enough, they don't push you back, but-

SsSsSshiiti, it's so cold...

...wow. *You're lucky Syrinx's buffs were still active. Thank Ulthar for that Cold Resist...*

*Either way, your movement speed is reduced.*

**BURROCARA** *tilts his head, confident that he has you on the ropes.*

*[ACT] > [Frisk] > *Warm Up*

I try to get warm, briskly rubbing my arms, hands, and face.

And that's ALL I rub. Don't get any ideas.

*You do realise that it doesn't work like that, right? If you tell someone not to get any ideas, they'll still get ideas.*

Hoy, I just can't win, can I?

*You still can. Start by dodging BURROCARA's lunging attack.*

*YIKES!*

**BURROCARA** finds himself behind you, about 5 o'clock. You spot a familiar switch on the back of Mettaton's body.

I flip it.

*You sure that's a good idea?*

He's in EX form right now! If I flip it now, he'll downgrade to his rectangle form, right?

*I don't think that's how it works?*

Too late. I've already flipped it.

**BURROCARA:** "...did you. Just flip. That switch?"

"**CLEVER GIRL.**"

*Beams of light shoot forth from the EX body. ...no... That can't be...*

*The wings. The hair. The blaster cannon. The way he looks like a Megaman boss.*

*We've unleashed Mettaton's NEO Form!*

**BURROCARA Neo:** "Oh my... Had I known about this beforehand..."

"**Truly, your cup runneth over.**"
The last time we saw this form-

Don't remind me. It's taken years for me to forget...

...in the meantime, back off. He's about to-

BURROCARA: [SPELL] > *Boson Burst

WOHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH-

...Frisk? You still with me?

FRISK?!

...urgh... B-barely.

Oh thank god. I thought you were-

You know me. Deep down, I'm *hnrg* made of sterner stuff.

BURROCARA: "I'm honestly impressed. Two powerful spells, and still you stand in my way."

"I'm almost tempted to up my actions. Almost. But that wouldn't make it a fair fight, would it?"

With a surprising amount of care, BURROCARA brings you to your feet and dusts you off. Of all the daemons down there, I never imagined that THIS guy would be the most gentlemanly.

BURROCARA: "Come on, girl! I know you can do better than this! What ever happened to the determined wild-child, willing to rip and tear until all was said and done?!"

A hammer is cocked. The hammer of an old sixshooter.

???: "...she grew up."

A firm but gentle hand rests on our shoulder. That soft WHITE F U R

???: "That's what happened to her."

That voice... It's one I've heard before.

Prince Asriel Dreemurr: "Now stand down. Nobody has to die today."

A S R I E L

Frisk: "As- A- Rei-"

BURROCARA: "So... This is the so-called King of the Monsters?"

"My, how the years have twisted him..."

Prince Asriel: "...well Sans? Ain't ya going to lend a darn hand?!"
doc sans: "...huh? oh, right. sorry boss."

BURROCARA: "RGH! Skulduggery! What ever happened to a fair fight?!"

doc sans: "tchehehe- *ahem* sorry. 's just, uh, that's a good one."

Prince Asriel: "I don't know what you are, or what you're doing in Mettaton's body, but let me make one thing absolutely clear."

Asriel... Please... Put the gun down...

Prince Asriel: "You DO NOT."

"THREATEN."

"MY FAMILY."

"COMPRENDE?"

*The demon nods in compliance. He is in no position to negotiate.*

...or is he?

Prince Asriel: "That goes for you too, Mettaton. Wherever you are in there, do not think I have overlooked your crimes."

"But you know me. I'm never above showing mercy."

"So once we've gotten you outta this jam, THEN I'll decide what to do with you..."

*Asriel lets out a sigh of disgust. It's... directed at himself? Does he so despise having to use a gun?*

BURROCARA: "Oh, naive princeling. You understand so little of the Kingdom and its inhabitants..."

"Though I prefer this handsome vessel, do not think that I am without options."

"Purge me from Mettaton, and I will find another vessel. After all, there are others out there suitable to house me."

"But for now, I will save face, and stay my hand. So there you go, little man. You win."

"You dirty, rotten, cheating little bastard."

*There is a twinge of aggression in bro's eyes, but it passes as quickly as it came.*

...god, he looks so much like his father. Well, except for the soul patch. And the lack of a beer gut. And, well, those glasses.

*The door in front of us sparks as it is forced open. And who should rush in?*

*Why, it's all of our friends! Undyne, Papyrus, Blooky, little Frisk, everyone's here!*
Ch-Charlie? Are you feeling alright?

*I'm* *I'm* *I'm* just so... happy! It's like... It's like things are finally looking up!

It's because we've finally found Asriel, isn't it?

Even after all these years, we're still inseparable...

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Oh! Ah, my lord! It is good to see you well!"

"...Sans, is that entirely necessary?"

**BURROCARA:** "Listen to your brother, jester. I yield. I surrender. Now sodding well let me down."

_Sans shoots a querying look towards Asriel. The bonnie prince nods in response, but still doesn't lower the sixshooter._

...don't think I can really blame him at this point.

**Prince Asriel:** "...fine. Whatever. We can probably let him down now."

**doc sans:** "sure thing boss."

_Sans drops Mettaton's body like an ugly baby._

Brutal.

**Prince Asriel:** "I didn't say drop him!"

"Uhm, sorry about that."

**BURROCARA:** "I've faced worse, princeling. This means little in the long run."

**Napstablook EX:** " What have you done with JJ."

_"I don't think we've actually seen Napstablook angry, up until now? And yeah, it doesn't really suit him if you ask me._

**Napstablook EX:** "whatever you are, please. let go of him. bring him back to me."

**BURROCARA:** "If it were the proper thing to do, I would have done it already."

"He is still rattling the bars of his cell, struggling to break free. An entirely natural reaction, when you think about it. But he is not ready."

"First, he needs to SIMMER THE HELL DOWN. No good can come from loosing a frenzied beast from its cage."

"And then, he must disregard all thoughts of sacrificing the human girls. Call me paranoid, but taking their souls would probably do more harm than good at this point."

"...what's that look for, princeling? Am I wrong?"
Prince Asriel: "...well... Yeah. You're right."

"...but that doesn't mean you have the right to be his jailer. If anything, that would be Undyne's job."

Undyne snaps to attention, shaking off the peculiarity of the scene in front of her.

Doctor Undyne: "Uh... yeah. Yes sir!"

"...so. Uh, what's the plan?"

Prince Asriel: "It's... Well, it's, uh, it's simple."

"Step one: we keep Mettaton in containment. Not a great start, but it's the best we have right now."

"Step two: we study this, uh, "spirit"? Is that right? Yeah, we study the spirit possessing him."

"Step three: we find a way to drive the intruding spirit from his body."

"Aaaaand step four: we pass judgement on Mettaton."

BURROCARA: "...you seem to be missing a step, if you don't mind me saying."

Prince Asriel: "I do, if that's alright with you."

The prince and the daemon glare sternly at one-another. The animosity seems almost palpable.

BURROCARA: "Mind it or not, I will tell you regardless."

"Step five: Devise a suitable vessel for the turncoat daemon who is NOT. GOING BACK. TO THE KINGDOM."

"Because I am not returning to that place. Not today. Not ever."

"Even if you somehow purge me from Mettaton, and SOMEHOW ensure that I cannot simply re-possess his body, there are other suitable vessels I could take control of. Though I am entirely willing to overlook them, if I had one to truly call my own."

"It must be so easy to think in heads and tails, deciding whether to purge me or let me walk freely. But here I present you the third option, the hidden outcome that so few consider. After all, coins can land on their edges."

"Contain me for now if you must, but take the third option and commission a vessel for me to inhabit. And if not? Well, ask yourself these questions."

"Is it worth rearranging your entire infrastructure to snub one harmless rogue element? Is it worth outright rejecting the use of arcane crystals, when it would be easier, and exponentially less costly, to simply indulge the existence of this vagrant spirit?"

"My existence in this realm doesn't need to be a hassle, let alone a threat, to anybody. If anything... it could prove advantageous, if you would have me."
Looks like Asriel doesn't know what to say. I know I certainly don't.

**Prince Asriel:** "I- Mhnn..."

"This is, well, a lot to take in. I... I need some time to think it over."

"For now, Undyne, make sure our "guest" doesn't cause any trouble."

**Doctor Undyne:** "Aye aye, sir."

"C'mon, "demon". Or whatever you call yourself. We're takin' you in."

*Undyne gently nudges Mettaton/BURROCARA with the muzzle of the Buster, and the two head out, with Blooky following not too far behind.*

**Marcus:** "My... He actually kept it with him, for all these years..."

**Frisk:** "I- I'll catch ya later, Undyne!"

**Doctor Undyne:** "Same to you, punk!"

As soon as Undyne is out of earshot, a timid, maudlin Alphys enters the room.

**Doctor Alphys:** "Is- is she gone?"

...wait a second. *Something doesn't seem r-*

**Frisk:** "...how long were you standing there?"

**Doctor Alphys:** "I- Uh- Well, I just-"

**Frisk:** "I thought you'd be running to her arms, after the danger she was in. The danger we were all in."

doc sans: "well, if we're gonna be honest, it was mostly you an' the other you who were in any real danger. and even then, you know how "safe" that guy turned out to be."

"but hey, i'm still willin' to stick out my spine for you girls."

**Doctor Alphys:** "...I... ...oh, who am I kidding?"

*Asriel sighs with mild exasperation, and stoops to be at eye level with Alphys.*

**Prince Asriel:** "I think I know what this is about. And I'm gonna tell you right now; don't be so hard on yourself. Don't think for a moment that you don't deserve her."

"She might be a little busy right now, but next opportunity you get, **go to her.** Seriously."

**Frisk:** "Wait a second. Are you... Asriel, are you SHIPPING, right now?"

Bro cocks an eyebrow as he looks at us.
Prince Asriel: "You really think I'm forcing these two together? HAH!"

"As if I could hope to have a hand in any of that..."

"The pull of destiny itself directs this "one true pairing", as the kids say. It is destiny that brings these two together, in so many branches..."

Doctor Papyrus: "Loathe as I am to interrupt, it is true. In a sea of variables, especially in this anomaly of a timeline, the "Alphyne Constant" is surprisingly prevalent."

Doctor Alphys: "...oh god. You're not serious, are you? This- This is-"

"Are you seriously telling me that- all this time, you guys not only KNEW about us, but you STUDIED it, and had a fucking NAME for it?!!"

"And you never TOLD me about it?! What the FUCK?!"

Doctor Papyrus: "Please calm down, Alphys. This child has delicate ears."

Little Frisk: "It's ok, Paps! I don't really give a "fuck" either way!"

Doctor Papyrus: "Oh, gosh and darn it..."

Prince Asriel: "Sweetheart, please... Please calm down..."

Doctor Alphys: "HOW CAN I CALM DOWN WHEN- *KREEEEEEEEEEEE!*"

"Damnit, I trusted you! How could you hide this from me?!"

Asriel stands up to his full height, Alphys still hanging onto his robe. I don't like how this is going.

Prince Asriel: "Funny that you should say that. Don't you have a few-

He catches himself before he says something hurtful, but the implication still hovers in the air like corpse gas. He then catches Alphys as her grip loosens, bringing her into a bearhug.

Prince Asriel: "Oh my god I'm so sorry I didn't mean it like-

Alphys struggles to push herself away from her overbearing boss.

Doctor Alphys: "Well what did you mean it like?!!"

Her gaze tries to bore into Asriel's gaze, but it softens as she spots the first tears on his face.

Good god. Even as a grown-ass man, my not-so-little brother is a god-damn crybaby.

Charlie, just shut the fuck up? They're having a moment here.

...I walk over to them, and place my hands on their shoulders.

Frisk: "I know exactly what you guys are talking about. And while it wasn't really nice to keep it hidden, I think that it was kinda needed."
"After all, uh... How do I say this...

Charlie, uh, I could use a prompt here...?

...oh for fuck's sake. Seriously, you're going to pull this NOW?

Fine, I'll improvise.

**Frisk:***sigh* "...if someone foretold that certain things would happen, things that at first glance seemed less than desirable, wouldn't you want to rebel against it?"

"...maybe that's a little stilted. ...okay, try again. Uhm... C'mon Frisk, think."

"...if you had a choice, whether to accept an outcome you weren't comfortable with at the time, or to challenge the fates for another throw, a better throw against one's destiny... Well, what would YOU have done, Alphys?"

**Doctor Alphys:*** "...wait, are you implying that I wouldn't have been happy with it? That I somehow wouldn't have wanted to be with her, if I knew it was something I couldn't fight against?"

"...heh. For all your talk of being from the future, you really don't know me at all. Of COURSE I would have been happy with it!"

"I- I've ALWAYS admired her! There's nothing she could do that'd make me love her less!"

"And unlike you, Little Miss Determination, I'm not a rebellious teenager trying to break all the rules of nature just because she thinks she can!"

...well, that's certainly opened a window on your soul.

Oh zip it, mister. You know that's not my main drive in life. ...I'd be kinda boring if that was the case. And woefully one-dimensional, too.

**Frisk:** "...for your information, Alphys, the only reason Asriel's even standing here today is because I'm a "rebellious teen", because I have the willpower to use what I've been given, because I know that I can bend the rules for the sake of others!"

"But I understand where you're coming from. That even if your future together was set in stone, that you knew it was predetermined, you wouldn't fight against it. But that's just you, isn't it?"

"What about Undyne? What if you knew about your joined futures, but she didn't? Wouldn't that, you know, complicate things a little?"

"Imagine if someone you barely knew came up to you and said "we're destined to be together". Wouldn't that creep you out?"

...hmmm. Now I think about it... I guess that makes sense?

---

...as if to save us from this weird... whatever this is... The younger Frisk steps forward to interrupt.
Little Frisk: "Ex-excuse me, Mister Dreemurr, but..."

"I... We need you help."

Asriel looks down at the small human child, so damnably familiar to him yet still so young.

Prince Asriel: "...yes, child? What is it that troubles you?"

Little Frisk: "The eagles no longer circle around the mountaintop. Please, King under the Mountain. The world needs you."

Prince Asriel: "...I'm sorry?"

Is she- She's actually asking him. She's going to ask him to fight them.

She's going to be disappointed.

If things are bad enough up there, I'm gonna be disappointed if he declines.

But he's NOT going to do it.

Little Frisk: "Bad men have taken over our lands! Good people are being hurt!"

Asriel turns pale at the implications. Alphys slips from his grasp as he takes a few anxious steps backwards. And our younger parallel rushes forward to grab at his pinstriped trousers.

Little Frisk: "The legends can't be wrong! You have the power to stop this!"

"Please, help us!"

...she's not wrong. If he wanted, he could absorb the souls he's gathered, cross the barrier, lay waste to the invaders, and take their souls in turn.

But he WON'T though.

He swallows hard as he struggles to make his decision. C'mon bro, this is different. This is serious...

Prince Asriel: "...walk with me."

He turns to exit the room, and our companions follow.

Prince Asriel: "There have been times when I considered crossing the Barrier. After all, all a monster needs is a single human soul, and they will be strong enough to pass through."

"In theory, I could have easily absorbed my brother's soul and culled six of the humans in the city. That, alone, would have granted me the power I needed to tear down the Barrier."

"Had I considered, at any point, that it was a good idea... Well, the underground would have gone empty a long time ago."

He looks down at the faintly hopeful child. Her hopes seem to be dashing against the rocks as we speak. As are mine.
**Prince Asriel:** "But as you can see, I refused to do such a thing. I, unlike my father, have no intention to poke the hornet's nest that is the human world."

"Even if I **did** decide to exercise my power for good, to end this war on the Surface, I would not be a hero. I would be feared, for the power I wield."

"And in truth, I could not blame them. With seven souls in my possession, I could cause so much destruction. And no matter what good I could do with the power inside me, the humans would still fear me, and the rest of monsterkind, for how easily I could destroy humanity, were I so inclined."

"That is why I cannot help you, child. I cannot make a gamble when the game is so cruelly rigged. And it goes without saying, that I do not want to kill anybody. No matter the perceived benefit."

...**you idiot. Coward. WEAKLING.**

I'm sorry, what was that?

**Now, I see the truth of this Asriel. He's no better than his father...**

*He'd sooner let everyone live in misery and die down here in the dark, than make the tough choices that a king has to make. He's too scared to do anything that would speed things up, since that'd involve him getting his hands dirty for once.*

*Oh, but he doesn't call himself a king, despite being the sole ruler of the Underground. He hides behind that "Prince" title like a child, as if it somehow excuses his hands-off approach to the situation.*

...just shut up before I **slap** you.

**Oh fuck off, what could you even DO to me?**

I could turn this AU right the fuck around, and we'll go ALL the way back and do ALL that tedious crap all over again! Is that what you want?!

...**you'd seriously do that? Do something you hated, just to try an' teach me a lesson?**

*Frisk, I'm... honestly, I'm kind of flattered that you'd go through that for me. You're an absolute god-damn psychopath, but I never would have thought you'd give that much of a damn about me!*

Oh keep it in your pants, will you?

And as for Asriel, he's still doing the right thing. He doesn't want to kill anybody, even if it'd help free everybody.

Let's be real for a moment. If Asriel went out and killed humans for their souls, even if he only killed soldiers of the New Dynasty, that **WOULD** make the world afraid of him.

Just imagine it, if a goat-headed entity came out of the blue and set the battlefield ablaze, absorbing the souls of his fallen enemies. No matter whose side you were on, you'd be terrified knowing that this "monster" could do such a thing.

Hell, even if he just showed up and tried asking the city for help, would anybody trust a goat-man who just showed up out of nowhere? No. The answer is that they would not.
So you probably shouldn't start second-guessing him. He's doing the best he can with the hand that fate has dealt him, and he knows that he'll just screw everything up if he cuts to the quick.

*I have no words. And neither does she.*

---

**Prince Asriel:** "And in truth, I'm just about done with this world."

Oh god. That took a dark turn.

**Prince Asriel:** "I've seen so many scenarios unfold in the program, and the greater whole of them point to the same outcome. That despite my endeavours to tear down the Barrier, we would be subjugated at best, and exterminated at worst."

"Even if we take the Long Road of diplomacy and negotiation with the humans, there is still that ever-present threat of segregation, or exploitation, or being forced to remain within the mountain. Few paths travelled end in true harmony with humanity, and none of those account for the cold, quasi-feudal bickering that passes for human politics in this era."

"...but I believe there is another way."

**Frisk:** "There's the Asriel I know and love."

*A bewildered cough from Papyrus signals that you just goofed.*

**Frisk:** "I mean, uh, so what's the big plan?"

**Prince Asriel:** "Well, it's, uh, a far cry from the original plan."

"Like I've said, I'm about done with this world. But, thanks to the Fontaine brothers and their research, we have alternatives..."

"There are other worlds around us, other universes, where the game is played differently. Settings, rules, scenarios, all of these things differ depending on the different branches."

"The problem, however, is more complex than merely tearing away the veil to find the perfect world. The Core, and the souls of our fallen guests, would be more than adequate for powering a "Super Condenser". Of that, I am certain."

"What we need, in truth, is to make the singularities act how we want. Right now they act like 3-dimensional holes in the world, like a spherical window, and they're too damn small."

**Frisk:** "Yeah, I heard. Apparently it'd take five souls and a nuclear reactor to make it big enough for a little kid... to pass through."

*Don't think too much about it. I'm sure that Violet chick is taking good care of "Arad-Nacha Asriel".*

**Prince Asriel:** "...really? That's an awfully generous estimate, isn't it?"

**doc sans:** "well boss, uh, the thing is..."
Sans looks up to Papyrus, looking for a little backup.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "There is a slight breakthrough that... I'm guessing got lost in my brother's mountain of paperwork, and probably never made it to your desk."

**Prince Asriel:** "Wait, you're serious? Well, what is it you've found?!"

*The mix of excitement and dismay on his face... I don't even know what you'd call that.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Wееell we managed to push forward trying to induce "singularity compression" like you asked, and... we met with limited success."

**Prince Asriel:** "Did. It. Work?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "I- With the current adjustments, we were able to modify the shape of the singularity, expanding its radius through angular momentum."

Another excited gasp leaves bro's lips. ...damn his eyes! How can I stay mad at him when his eyes are like that?!

**Prince Asriel:** "You made the portals wider?!"

Papyrus nods, and Asriel's smile widens. As does mine.

**Prince Asriel:** "After all these years... H-how much wider did you manage to make it?!"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Well, that's the catch. It wasn't really by all that much."

"Rather than a perfect sphere, the portals are now shaped more like a... a satsuma, on its side. A bit thinner when viewed from the side, yet a bit wider from the front."

"But still nowhere near the "cookie shape" milestone we've been hoping for."

...it's hard to get a read on how Asriel's feeling right now. Somewhere between disappointed and optimistic, I guess, with strains of something I can't quite pick up on...

**Prince Asriel:** "...oy..."

"...it's fine. We're closing in on it, and that's what matters."

"...though I'm still wondering. Would it cost more to relocate your Lab to the Core, or to install another reactor in Snowdin..."

"Either way, now we know that spin's an important factor, you'll need more power overall. But for now... You guys should keep at it, improve those components that helped induce the spin factor. I'll, uh, drop you guys a line if I have anything more to add."

**Doc Sans:** "...uh, ok boss. guess we'll be, uh, headin' back to Snowdin then."

"...say, uh, boss. there's-"

**Prince Asriel:** "Sans, just relax, won't you? I've been caught up on your problem by Alphys."
Prince Asriel: "AND I really regret not checking up on you now."

"I really should have. I know I'm not head of HR, but I'm still your friend, darnit!"

"If I'd known that you'd been having these issues, I woulda made a house call with a bottle of ketchup! In fact, what the hell am I doing?"

"Come over and rest your bones, old friend! I'll put the kettle on!"

doctor sans: "...i... Asriel... thanks."

Doctor Papyrus: "Oh, well, I'd love to stay and join your tea party, but I've got my work cut out for me! After all, those high-intensity spin inductors won't prototype themselves!"

Prince Asriel: "I guess... Well, if you're eager to get back to it, I won't keep you! I'll see you some other time, then!"

Doctor Papyrus: "You most certainly will, my lord! And as always, it was a pleasure to see you again!"

"...however there's the small matter of the, uh, other Frisk. She, well, I'm not really comfortable letting the little scamp out of my sight. Should I-"

Prince Asriel: "...I think I can keep a hold on the situation. Don't you worry your pretty skull about it, Papyrus."

"I can assume, with the fullest confidence, that our little guest will **not cause any further trouble. Is that right, child?**"

_Yikes. She tries to avoid bro's stern gaze, only for him to tilt her head up to meet his eyes. Wizened, but still flickering with the youthful sympathy we can expect from him._

Little Frisk: "...yes sir."

Prince Asriel: "I am glad to hear it."

_As Asriel opens the elevator, our younger parallel tugs at his cloak._

Little Frisk: "...Mister Dreemurr? If- if you won't help me, then... can I please go home?"

_Alphys' heart sinks, hearing that old phrase echoed._

Doctor Alphys: "...I... I'm sorry, kid. But right now, there's no going back. Your human soul won't be enough to let you pass through."

"To cross the barrier, it takes a human soul... and a monster soul."

*I don't think she should have told her that...*

_But as Alphys turns to leave, disheartened at being the bearer of bad news, she feels Asriel's hand on her shoulder._
Prince Asriel: "Where d'you think you're going?"

"Don't think you can slink off to wallow in self-pity this time, compadre. I'm gonna help you feel better about yourself, whether you like it or not."

"Now get your butt back here. We've all got so much to discuss..."

As we file in to the elevator, you feel as if your journey has reached its end. Knowing that, in a few moments, you'll be in the safety of New Home, fills you with determination.

HP restored. [SAVE to Slot 2]

Charlie – LV.1 KN.19

CORE – Castle Access

...but it's not over yet, is it? There are still secrets waiting to be revealed, questions that are yet to be answered, memories I've yet to recover. And I'm not gonna rest 'till I learn the truth.

Chapter End Notes

...as I suspected, something is greatly amiss, beyond the veil...

The Hunter's Moon. It rises in the skies of Wellsverne Gothic, its shadow throwing the world into darkness... That song, that damnable music! Ancient nightmares stir in the dark corners of the Earth, gently roused by the Music of the Spheres...

Frisca Rivera and her companions seem to be safe, for the time being. I feel that it is safe for me to put my current studies on hiatus. Even if it is not, a far greater drama is about to unfold, beyond the UnderTales, on a world where Winter has ended, and things that slumber deathlessly are stirring in their ancient prisons. I will return to continue my observations of the DoctorTale branch, once the month is out, but until then this project will have to wait. Events parallel to this have happened before in distant branches, long before I took up this current project, but this time I have the opportunity to take a closer look, and learn the truth behind the Hunter's Moon...

Benjamin Liddell na Pendragon... fated Magician... my eyes will be upon you shortly.
I've finally managed to regain some semblance of control. After what the Cardinal pulled on me in Wellsverne Gothic, I thought I'd never be able to get back here.

My god, what has he done? I shouldn't have taken such a long break, not after what he said he was going to do.

...there's nothing else for it. Shit has hit the fan, and now I'm going to have to sort it out. Regardless of the stigma, these kids are going to need my help.

It all started with a relatively simple shift, many many years ago. And from there-

Everything changed.

WHAT.

Frisk – LV.???? KN.????

My World – My World

[Load?]

No no no no this isn't happening! Not now!

What the hell is going on?!

I- I don't- FRISK. She must have...

Must have what, Charlie?!

...before we go forward, we should probably try to recap. Maybe that way we'll figure out what the hell she did.

So we were going across that bridge overlooking the capital, heading towards New Home, when who should show up in front of the house, standing between us and safety?
Prince Asriel: "...oh no. Every time you show up, something monumental and terrible happens. And right now, I don't think I'm in the mood for your shenanigans."

Master Ren: *chuckles* "No drama this time, old friend. But I do come with words of warning."

Prince Asriel: "Warning? Is this about Frisk? Because if you think I am going to-

Master Ren: "I KNOW, Asriel. Your decisions are yours to make, and yours alone. I will not urge you to take their souls, that I can firmly assure you of."

"But I would be remiss to not bring the matter to your attention. If I were you, I would keep a close eye on the pair of them. There is a... a darkness, within them."

Looking back, I'm not so sure that he was talking about me.

Prince Asriel: "Dark or not, they are my responsibility now, not yours. And I am quite certain that, even if something IS wrong with this little "scamp", that she won't be a problem."

"Now, "old friend", you'd better make yourself scarce. After all, you're not supposed to be here, are you? Can't let people think I'm a pushover after what I said. Can't let them start doubting me."

Master Ren: "I don't think anyone actually cares about that anymore, but fair enough. I will leave you to your little "tea party", Asriel. After all, they are YOUR responsibility, not mine."

"But before I wash my hands of this, there is another thing you should be aware of. There is... something else, down here. A bird, some sort of cardinal."

"The darkness I felt when I saw it, it far outweighs that of the Princess, and your little guest."

Asriel laughed gently, but with a tint of concern in his voice.

Prince Asriel: "A bird? You are afraid of a simple cardinal?"

Master Ren: "Not afraid, Asriel. Just worried about what it could do."

"I have not seen it before today, but there is something very, VERY wrong about it."

"I must implore you, old friend. If you catch sight of that bird, be on your guard."

Ren left us alone after that. For the next coupla hours, we just sat around the table in New Home, drinking tea and eating cookies, catching up on all we'd missed out on. And half-way through Asriel recounting how he got to know Alphys, the floodgates opened. You started crying, and couldn't stop, no matter how the others tried to calm you down.

...well, everyone was safe, and like you said, I'd been holding so much in. It was finally safe for me to cry, after all this time.

Eventually, Asriel started crying, too. It wasn't a pretty sight, the two of you weeping like a pair of big ol' crybabies. Noses running, eyes all red around the edges, unintelligible blubbering, the whole waterworks.

It all became a blur after that, I'll be honest. Last thing I knew, we were huddled together on the sofa, Sans to the left of you, Alphys to the right. Asriel and the other Frisk were nowhere to be seen.
But then I felt it. The world seemed to... chug, like when a video game starts skipping frames. Then came the hissing sound and the white light, growing in intensity before-

...and that was all I knew before everything "crashed". It was like when-

Oh no... I think she took the souls.

But how? How could she manage that? A human can't absorb a human soul!

I'm not so sure if she's human anymore, Frisk. Hell, I don't think **you're** human anymore, for that matter. If I had to hazard a guess, as we've become more "attuned" to magic thanks to those pills, we've blurred ourselves to the point where we're neither human nor monster.

Just like Flowey, we're something in-between. And if I had to hazard a guess, so is the other Frisk.

---

...so if we can assume correctly, she convinced Asriel to show her the other souls, then somehow was able to absorb them and "crash" the world?

*Just like Flowey. Though I dunno if he actually crashed the world last time. After all, after we beat the crap out of his Omega form, we were able to access our old save file, despite him apparently destroying it. I'm pretty sure that was just for show, something to try and freak us out before the fight.*

I still can't remember this "Omega Flowey" fight you keep on referencing. Why the hell can't I remember it?

???: "Because it was too traumatic, I imagine. After all, it was one hell of a shift in art-style."

**WHO THE HELL WAS THAT?!**

???: "I'd refrain from accessing that save file if I were you. In her current state, that little girl would probably one-shot you."

"In the meantime, come and hang out in the joystick settings. It's nice and temperate in here."

*What the hell is he talking about?!

I don't think we can even get into that screen at the moment. Do we even-?

???: "Oh bugger, give me a second."

"...where is the bloody thing? ...no, that's the electric shaver..."

"...aha! Found i- No, wait, that's not it at all. ...let's just put that away now."

**What is this guy even doing.**

???: "Aha! An old Nokia! Maybe this will work?"

...apparently it does. Look at all those sliders, those falling leaves...
Never mind the sliders, look at this guy!

...this has to be a joke, right? I'd recognize that look anywhere!

The yellow and blue striped shirt, the red cap, the baseball bat... Surely this can't be-

???: “Oh. Wait. This is awkward. This isn't the look I was going for at all!”

“Bear with me a moment.”

Before our eyes, the boy melts away, only to be replaced by some tall, long-haired, new age hipster in a dressing gown.

???: “No no, too self-insertionist. Something a little different?”

His head morphs into that of Colin Mochrie, while his dressing gown morphs into a tuxedo.

???: “No no, too goofy. No-one'll take me seriously like this.”

“...got it. My Twitter avatar.”

In a flash of light, the mystery man assumes a more... imposing form. Beneath the folds of his dark robe, two magenta eyes peer dimly forth from their hollow sockets, while red poppies encircle his milky-white skull.

...wait. Is this guy actually-

???: “Yes, this will do just fine. Much more subtle.”

*ahem* “Hullo.”

Charlie: “Doctor Gaster?!”

???: “Not even close, Chara. I am not Doctor Gaster. This is just the form I chose. I have as many of them as I have names. ...which is many.”


Charlie: “YOU’RE Ness?!”

The Man With Too Many Bloody Names: “Yes. Not THAT Ness, mind you. That was merely the name I used during my first journey here. Though not my last.”

“I went through Hard Mode, or what little there was of it, but that was just a tangent. Not much to say, really. I dearly wish that Toby had expanded on it, but hey, that's Toby for you.”

“But that's neither here nor there. My name, at present, is the Observer. And I believe that I can clear a few things up, concerning your current situation.”

The Observer: “I know it's kind of cheap, a bit of a deus ex machina situation, but there's a very good reason why I'm here, and not just sitting around watching Deep Space Nine clips, waiting for Crate to release their latest patch for Grim Dawn.”
“You see, it is a... a hobby of mine, to observe and record what I see in realities like yours. I chronicle the events in my own special way, and put them out there for others of my kind to observe.”

“It is quite a common practice to do so, in the circles that I frequent, though admittedly others are more focused in their narration, and refrain from referring to themselves in their documents. A perfectly understandable technique, of that I have no doubt.”

Frisk: “...sounds like you're a pretty busy guy.”

The Observer: “Hardly. Though last month was actually rather busy. I'd found a window on a world I hadn't seen before, one that reminded me simultaneously of Grim Dawn and Hyper Light Drifter.”

“Throughout November, I recorded the adventures of one Benjamin Liddell na Pendragon, in the world of Wellsverne Gothic, which is where I encountered one of my “peers”. You may come to know him as the Cardinal.”

Frisk: “...didn't Ren say something about a cardinal in the Underground?”

The Observer: “That he did. And what he said was true: the Cardinal is indeed a “dark” being. Not “evil”, but “dark” nonetheless, perhaps even a dark red, like a sociological maroon. ...morality gets a lot more complicated when you can see in colour.”

“He became more and more aware of me as I kept recording, and eventually confronted me midway through my documentations. Though it was by no means our last encounter, as he started giving me grief as the window on that world started closing up.”

“He knew that I wanted to take a break for the holiday season, that I'd return to my observation of this world in the New Year, and even after nearly burning myself out trying to complete my initial account of the events on Wellsverne Gothic, he thought I was weak. So he decided to take matters into his own hands. Or feet, in his case. And behold the result.”

The Observer: “Much like Flowey does at the end of a neutral run, the Cardinal has cut you off from the main timeline and stranded you in this stagnant pocket of reality, an “oxbow lake” of time and space. And here, with seven human souls in her body, the younger Frisk is effectively God.”

...but why? For what reason?

The Observer: “I don't know why. Maybe because it runs parallel to what happened in the mainline Undertale universe? Or perhaps, more likely, because of shits and giggles. The Cardinal is a bit of a twat, in that regard.”

WHOA there, them's fightin' words!

The Observer: “Not the meaning I was going for. Twat means “stupid” or “obnoxious” over here. It doesn't refer to the female pubenda.”
“...anyway, he's being a twat, and he needs someone to put him in his place. Doesn't matter whether you talk him down, or twat him across the beak with a magic attack. If you want to get on with your main story, and keep Little Frisk from ruining everything, you're going to have to confront her, and shunt her back into your original timeline.”

Frisk: “But, as you said, we can't confront her because she'll “one-shot” us with how powerful she is. Though I'm guessing you have a solution?”

The Observer: “Who's to say I do?”

Frisk: “That's usually how things go, don't they? In the eleventh hour, a solution makes itself known?”

The Observer: “In most works, yes. But not every situation has such a quick and easy solution. There is no magic “Glazed MacGuffin” this time to solve all of these problems in one fell swoop. Otherwise you would already be back in the Underground, delving deep into the True Lab.”

“...that said, there is still a solution. Not an easy one, or a quick one, but it is a solution nonetheless.”

...six save files appear before us. ...huh.

Huh?! Is that all you can say to this? I've never SEEN this many save files!

I don't know what to think at the moment, Frisk. This is kind of a lot to take on board.

But you've been through something similar, haven't you? Isn't this how the Omega Flowey fight panned out?

Not by a long shot, Frisk. Sure, we interacted with the other souls, but the only “save manipulation” going on was on Flowey's end! This- This is something completely different!

...speaking of different, something doesn't feel right about these files...

The Observer: “You would be right in that assumption. I have managed to alter these files to a degree, to bend the rules that govern them and facilitate the ends that must be met in order to make your victory feasible.”

“Specifically, loading into these files will not trigger the branching reflex as it normally would, but instead load you into the current instance of that specific timeline. However, it will only work like that the first time you load it. Should you attempt to load it again, the branching reflex will kick in, and you will be unable to reach the original instance. One shot is all you will have per save file.”

Frisk: “And what is it we're supposed to do there? You kind of left that out.”

The Observer: “...yes. Right. Sorry, I'll explain.”

“The souls in Little Frisk's possession are kept away from her “Core Save”, so calling for help when one of them overloads, at least in her world, will not be an option this time. Each soul
has been transposed upon a different reality, a reality that you will be able to load into through the appropriate save file.”

“Once you've loaded in, you will need to locate an anomaly associated with that soul. Though I imagine finding it will be the hard part. Calling out to it, trying to SAVE it, that should come naturally.”

**Frisk:** “Yeah... I guess it would...”

*Remembering the time you Saved the World?*

Yeah... Yeah, I am.

*So am I.*

**The Observer:** “I would, however, advise against the both of you going into the same save file. Instead, you should tackle them individually.”

*But I don't have a body...*

**The Observer:** “Don't you?”

...this is... what is this...

Charlie? Where are you- What in the-

**Charlie:** “Am I- I can't feel...”

Quiet... It's so... quiet...

**The Observer:** “For now, he is apart from you. Besides, in this place neither of you actually HAVE bodies. After all, you have yet to load into one.”

“Now remember, you only have one shot per reality. If you die in the save file, you may as well quit and return here. You'll only make more branches if you try to return to where you failed.”

“...it's ok, take your time. But of course, choose wisely. I'll keep an eye out for you.”

**Charlie:** “This... It's so weird...”

**Frisk:** “Does it feel like you thought it would?”

**Charlie:** “I... I dunno. I've been so used to feeling what you feel, and now we're apart...”

“It's like my entire being's got that phantom limb syndrome, like I can feel it despite it not even being there.”

**Frisk:** “...you should probably take your time getting used to it, Charlie. If we really do have one shot at this, we'll need all the luck we can get. We can't afford any slip-ups here.”

**The Observer:** “Now you mention it, that would be the best course of action. Definitely take
your time with this, Chara, before choosing a file to load.”

“...though this does leave a conundrum on the table. For without the “NarraChara” in the sidecar, who will relay what you see?”

Frisk: “...I guess that’s a problem? Though not a massive one?”

The Observer: “It IS a problem, actually. Without a narrator, it will be... awkward for you to try and convey what you see. And that wouldn’t make for an easily understandable story, now would it? Hmmm...”

I will integrate myself, for now. A third-person observer to help flesh out your first-person perspective.

OKAY that's- God, you nearly gave me a heart attack...

Charlie: “...wait a minute, if you're her narrator, doesn't that mean you'd load in with her? Wouldn't that, y'know, make another branch, something you JUST said we needed to avoid making?”

It would, if I actually had a physical presence. But if I merely maintain a connection from here... I know, it's weird, but be a dear and roll with it.

Charlie: “...be a dear and don't call me a dear, dear.”

Fair enough. But the point still stands. As a purely mental presence, a pneumatic proxy patched into Frisk's MindSpace, I would not trigger the branching reflex. I'd simply be a little cricket made of nothingness, whispering into your ear and relaying what I see.

Now, does that clear everything up?

Frisk: “Not by a long shot. But, well, it'll have to do.”

“This is too damn weird, even by my standards, but what choice do I have right now? ’s not like I have anything better to do, is it?”

I imagine not. Now, be good Chara. Don't stay up too late.

Charlie: “It's Charlie. I'm not like those other freaks.”

You know what I mean. ...also, sorry about that. It's a force of habit.

Now, Frisk, where shall you go first?

...you head towards the... the purple-tinted save file. You don't need three guesses as to whose soul has been planted there.

Frisk: “Perseverance. Terry Miller...”

“...”Wavecutter”, huh? Are you putting me on some kind of ship?”

Indeed. A Federation scout vessel, no less.
...no, not THAT Federation, Frisk. The Wavecutter belongs to the Orion Federation, an interstellar alliance formed to oppose the wildfire that is the Tellurian Empire. In this reality, humanity has grown great and powerful, but care only for their own kind. A dangerous mix for any space-faring civilization.

...I'm guessing humanity's not in charge of the Federation, are they?

Sadly not. “Tellus”, after all, is a Latin word for “earth”. Though at this point in that timeline, the Empire has been driven off of their own homeworld, and from the Sol System in general. While the Empire is still out there, clinging to its colonies, its fate has been sealed. Within a decade of them losing Tellus, they'll be reduced to scattered pockets throughout the Northern Quadrant.

How the hell did they manage THAT?

Subterfuge, revolution, drawing back the veil of reality between two worlds, and cold hard DETERMINATION. The source of which, by chance, you may encounter onboard the Wavecutter.

Now chop-chop! It's time you took to your station, Ensign.

Ensign Frisk – [LV_not_found] [KN_not_found]

OFS Wavecutter – Bridge

[LOAD]

???: “Ensign? Ensign!”

Ugh... My head...

The blaring of a danger klaxon makes itself apparent as your senses return. The world seems to lurch and spin as your perception struggles to reassert itself. Looks like your parallel took a bump to the head.

???: “Whew, you're still with us.”

A pair of strong, armoured hands helps you to your feet, and back into your chair. The console in front of you is lit up with warnings of anomalous energies.

Sir Marcus Graves: “We probably shouldn't have scanned that darn thing, huh Roman?”

First Officer Roman Stroganov: “Ergh, it's not like we anticipated THIS happening! Captain, we've-”

Oh god... What the hell happened here?

I reckon they probed whatever “anomaly” is out there, and it lashed out at the ship.
Frisk: “It... lashed out?”

Graves: “Roman, what's the damage?”

*The first officer sighs in dismay, as he closes the eyes of the late Captain Kirov.*

Roman: “sigh* “He's dead, Mark. Broke his neck after he was flung over the console.”

Graves: “Blast it all... Ensign, what's the situation out there?”

I... I don't know what half of this stuff is telling me.

*You're still adjusting, it'll take a little while. Just repeat after me.*

“If these readings are right, the anomaly seems to be approaching us. Slowly, it seems.”

Frisk: “If these readings are right-” *grunt* “the anomaly's headed right at us. Seems pretty slow, though. Like it's curious or cautious or something.”

...close enough.

*The Shadow Knight, Sir Marcus Graves, peers at the screen, showing the purple-tinted heart moving slowly towards the ship. His fierce, dark brow furrows at the scene.*

Graves: “This was NOT how I imagined this little “detour” turning out.”

Roman: “Do you think?! We were NOT prepared for this!”

“Imperial patrols, maybe. Radical basthari privateers, we trained for that. But anomalies like whatever the hell THAT is? NO-ONE could have prepared us for this!”

Graves: “Well Captain, we're in the thick of it now. We'll figure out something. I'm sure of it.”

Roman: “Captain?”

*The Shadow Knight looks at the late captain of the Wavecutter, then at First Officer Stroganov. An assuming, expectant look is in his eyes.*

Graves: “Isn't that one of your contingencies? If the captain is deceased or otherwise unfit for duty, command of the ship transfers to the first officer?”

Roman: “I- Well, YES, but-”

“I wasn't expecting to take the reins like this. I was hoping that my first taste of command would be more... well, not this....”

Graves: “Roman, you're more than qualified for the role. I am confident that you will do a fine job. But for God's sake, get a hold of yourself!”

*The swarthy minotaur shoots a retaliatory glare at the Shadow Knight.*

Roman: “The Carpenter has no hand in this, Imp. Watch your tongue out there.”
Graves: “Hey, I forsook the Empire the day they messed with my business! I'm a Federation officer just like you, Stroganov!”

“...but I get where you're coming from. It's a force of habit, even if it's just a figure of speech. So, uh, sorry about that, Captain.”

The minotaur nods and sighs, accepting the knight's apology.

My god. I just realised.

That knight seems familiar to you, doesn't he?

What? No, I was talking about this Stroganov guy!

He's a frickin' MINOTAUR. And his family name is STROGANOV. That's just fucked up.

Believe me, the name is not lost on me. I have defrosted more than my fair share of beef stroganoff.

Huh. So what, you work at an Applebee's?

Not exactly, but I do often work in kitchens. That's beside the point, though.

Many of the separatist colonies in this timeline were Russian in origin, and minotaurs practically formed the backbone of manual labour in the Empire, so a Russian minotaur called Stroganov isn't all that outlandish.

Though you know what IS fucked up? Apparently some colonial nobles have a taste for “long beef”, if you catch my drift.

THEY EAT MINOTAURS?!

“They” eat many different intelligent species. Minotaurs, aes insi, zhuren, dawncallers, what have you. The races who served man run the risk of being served to man, given the circumstances.

And while the practice is technically heresy, in accordance with Imperial doctrines, the execution of dissident therians has, on many an occasion, been followed up with said “terrorists” ending up on the dinner tables of certain colonial administrators.

...as you can imagine, the Empire isn't exactly the nicest place to live if you aren't human. Being devout helps, but it was still a man's galaxy as far as the Empire was concerned.

Flowey was right. The world's nowhere near as nice as it is in the Underground.

That he was. And worlds like this one aren't even the worst that it can get. Even my timeline, as “mundane” a world as it is, is wracked by terror, climate instability, political bullshit, inequality of wealth, what have you.

But at least in your world, you have stuff like magic. At least in your world, it's easier to be a hero and make a difference.
Why do I get the feeling that you're not just here to do what's right?

... 

I think I get it. You want to escape your world, but you can't. So you immerse yourself in ours as a distraction.

*Guilty as charged. Enlightened as I may be, I lack the power and determination to change the fate of my own world. There are too many insurmountable obstacles, too many serious consequences, and no safety net to speak of.*

But at least you're kinda happy, right?

*Am I, though? For a time I am, that I can't deny, but those're just occasional juicy raisins in the dull porridge of life. I appreciate the raisins, believe me I do, but I wish life wasn't like porridge. If life in my timeline was like chunky peanut butter in a stick of celery, with sprinklings of raisins over the top, I probably wouldn't feel this way.*

...*enough of this, I'm probably boring you to tears. Let's just try hailing the anomaly.*

Observer...

*You get out of your seat and stretch, before heading over to the comms array.*

**Graves:** “Ensign?”

**Frisk:** “I was thinking, maybe we just need to hail the anomaly? I mean, it seems like it's expressing-”

**Graves:** “Are you sure you're ok, Ensign? You aren't making much sense.”

*Graves presses his hand firmly against your brow, and a tingling cold starts to spread across your skull. By the looks of it, he believes you may have a concussion. He's probably right, mind you. This body did take a nasty knock to the noggin, so an application of the Cold Compress Palm should do it a world of good.*

**Roman:** “Graves, you might want to take a look at this.”

*A ray of purple light passes over the Wavecutter, washing over it in multiple directions. Even as he feels trapped, he is taking notes on how to achieve an end to this.*

**Graves:** “...looks like it's scanning us. Ensign, can you confirm?”

**You look over to the console, and true enough, the tinkling alert pop-up indicates that Perseverance is, indeed, scanning the ship.**

**Frisk:** “He's- sorry, it's trying to work out what to make of us, I guess.”

**Roman:** “Why do I get the feeling it's trying to locate our weakpoints...?”
Frisk: “Thing is, if it's trying to figure out what it lashed out against, it's bound to be intelligent. I still think we should try hailing it. At this point it couldn't hurt, right?”

Roman: “...you honestly think it would work? We don't even know what that thing IS! Who's to say it could even understand us?!”

Frisk: “The oldest and strongest emotion of sentient life is fear, and the oldest and strongest fear is fear of the unknown. ...moving past that is the first step towards understanding.”

Marcus Graves regards you with a look of intrigue. I can only assume that the Necronomicon was a part of his late father's collection, and he recognized that particular quote.

Lovecraft's works are in the Necronomicon? How the hell did that happen?

You'd be surprised at what you could find in that skin-bound grimoire.

Graves: “…not bad. I take it you had the privilege of reading from the Necronomicon?”

What did I tell you? Necronomicon. BOOM.

Graves: “...well, I reckon it's a valid course of action. Roman?”

Roman Stroganov wrings his hands nervously. He doesn't know what to do in this situation, from the looks of it.

Roman: “...permission granted.”

He presses a button on the command chair, and proceeds to address the ship.

Shouldn't he have done that earlier?

Well, he wasn't entirely prepared for this, even as first officer.

Roman: “This is First Officer Roman Stroganov speaking. I regret to announce that Captain Lex Kirov is deceased. In accordance with the chain of command, I hereby assume the role of Acting Captain.”

“We are about to attempt contacting the anomaly. Engineering staff, prepare to raise bow shields.”

“...that is all for now. Stroganov out.”

...not bad, I guess.

It's a start, at least. But he's still no Ben Sisko.

...a few seconds later, engineering reports that the shields are ready.

Roman: “Acknowledged. Operator, open a channel.”

“This is Captain Roman Stroganov of the OFS Wavecutter. We-.”

Perseverance: “OH GOD WHAT the- It really is a starship! I never thought I'd see one of these things!”
Graves: “What in Hell...?”

Now's your chance to break the ice. Show your face, and I reckon he'll recognize you.

But he never met me in person!

Yes, but I reckon he saw Asriel's portrait of you. He was a guest of the Underground Kingdom, after all.

...alright, I'm ready. Here goes everything.

Roman: “Ensign, what in the Void are you doi-”

Terry Miller, the Perseverance: “…you?! Princess Frisca Dreemurr?!”

“I- I had no idea you were- It's such a-”

Frisk: “Am I right in assuming you're Terry Miller? The sixth to fall?”

No-one on the bridge knows what to make of this scene. Even Sir Graves is unsure whether to drag you to the side or let you talk.

Terry Miller: “You... You actually know me?”

Frisk: “It's pretty complicated. I was around before you fell down, and I was there afterwards. I heard about what happened between you and Adrianna, and I just want to say that it wasn't your fault.”

Terry Miller: “What... Adrianna... I'm so sorry...”

Roman: “...I didn't sign up for this. What is even happening right now?”

Graves: “Unless I'm mistaken, it looks like we're just bit parts in someone else's story right now.”

Roman: “Really, Marcus? Again with these “stories”, I swear…”

Is it making sense to you now, Frisk? The source of determination that I mentioned?

...no? Well, spoiler alert, Marcus Graves was that source of determination.

...we'll talk about that later. Right now I need to convince Terry not to work with the other Frisk.

Frisk: “Lord Miller... Terry. I know this is a lot to take in right now, believe me I know that feeling all too well, but there's something important that you need to know.”

The shifting shapes upon the screen begin to stabilize, as the Perseverance composes himself.

Frisk: “I don't know when it's going to happen, but one day, you're going to be contacted by someone who looks like a younger version of me.”

Terry Miller: “Wait, so... so you're NOT actually the Princess?!"
Frisk: “No, no no. I AM the Princess, but SHE is not.”

Terry Miller: “...so what is she? I only saw her for a moment before I found myself in this... this starry expanse...”

“...it feels as if I am... tethered, to something beyond my perception.”

Frisk: “I reckon that's probably her, drawing power from you.”

Terry Miller: “Just like those monsters of science...”

“I think I can sever the link between us. I have no desire to lend her my power. And I suspect you would not wish it, either?”

Frisk: “She absorbed your soul in an earlier timeline, and whatever she's planning to do with your power, and the power of the other souls, I doubt it's for anything good.”

“So I ask you to help us, by, uh, not helping her.”

Not bad, Kofi Annan.

Hey screw you, my head's killing me! You try bringing your A-game with a damn concussion!

Alright alright, no need to get shovey. We've all had times when the sun was in our eyes.

...besides, I'm not the greatest diplomat...

Oh no? I don't think the monsters would have been able to make peace with New Deseret without you. You should give yourself more credit than that.

That's only because I didn't really say much. If I'd told the whole truth, every little detail, not only would folks have thought me mad, but a lot of people woulda been in deep shit with the Temple Guard.

And that's not even touching on what Asgore did, or Toriel's little “dilemma”. If the state knew about HALF of what they'd done, Asriel woulda ended up in foster care, or worse, locked up in some facility.

And that, at the end of the day, is part of being a diplomat. Sometimes you have to keep secrets close to your chest, whether through white lies or omitting key pieces of information, to maintain a positive reputation.

Like it or not, lying's just another part of the job. Like that bear in the jacket says, “thaaaaaat's politics”.

...whatever happened to that guy, anyways?

...last I heard, he was working his way through law school.

Huh. That's news to me.
...yeah, you're right. Through all those resets, with pretty much everyone trying to kill me or kidnap me, I had so much dirt on them. If I wanted, I could have ruined everything, put everyone back to square one.

But you didn't. Because you're not that kind of person. You're better than that.

Am I, though? Don't you remember how I tried to force Asgore and Toriel back together, for Asriel's sake?

You did that too? ...well, that changes things.

I tried blackmailing Toriel, citing how she let the other humans leave, how it made her an accessory to murder, but, well...

It backfired, didn't it?

She got mad, spitting fire and swearing like a sailor. Chewing me out about how I don't know what she's been through, that I was no child of hers, that kind of stuff. But it didn't matter. What mattered was that I knew what she did, and that if she didn't let Asgore see his kid, I'd pop open that can of worms. Even if worst came to worst, and Asriel ended up in the care home, he'd still have me. And at that point, that was all that mattered to me.

...that's cold, no two ways about it Frisk. But you're not alone in pulling something like that.

Let me guess. Julian tried that too?

He was faced with a similar dilemma, since he wanted the Dreemurr family to be whole again, so Asriel wouldn't have to live in a broken home. Though funnily enough, he had more success than you did.

In Feldstein Prime, Asgore and Toriel came to live under the same roof again, but it was a re-marriage of convenience more than anything. Their love was for their reborn son, not for each-other, and Sans moved in with Toriel not too long after the founding of Waldheim.

Though from what I've skimmed, things didn't go so smoothly in your universe.

To put it lightly. The only reason why Toriel decided to adopt me after what I did was because of Asriel. Not just because I saved him from HELL, but because he NEEDED me. I was the only one who truly understood him, and what he'd been through.

And like Julian, you became his rock, his anchor, his source of comfort against the horrors of reality. Believe me, in the first year since Julian saved Asriel, they had a LOT of sleepovers at Graveswood Manor. Hell, Asriel was practically LIVING in the Manor while the new Capital was being built.

Even when he moved into Waldheim Castle, those two boys were around each-other's houses whenever they had the opportunity. After what they'd been through, they were practically inseparable. Hell, even when Asriel was enrolled at the academy, Julian's grandfather managed to pull a few strings, to make sure the boys could share a dorm room.

I imagine it helped with the nightmares. Sure as hell helped in my case...
Turns out the love of a good friend can help heal the soul. Who knew?!
Well, it doesn't ALWAYS work like that, but when it does, apparently it works pretty well.

...look alive Frisk, it looks like we have our answer.

**Terry Miller:** “...she won’t have her hands on me anymore, Princess. I'm done with her.”

“...that in mind, though, I don't quite know how to go on from here. I suppose follow this starship around, travel the galaxy with it?”

**Roman's eyes narrow, and he looks like he's bordering on snarling.**

**Roman:** “You DAMAGED our SHIP! You KILLED our CAPTAIN!”

“I don't know what the hell you are, or where you came from, but I frankly could not give a damn about your problems! You give me ONE good reason why I should let you come any closer!”

**Whoa. I was joking about the whole Sisko thing, but he's certainly got the fierce attitude part down. Needless to say, Roman is not happy with the idea of Perseverance following his ship after what happened.**

**Terry Miller:** “Oh... Oh god, did that wave- OH NOOOOOO...”

*The transmission cuts out, and the empowered soul of Terry Miller promptly turns tail, retreating across the inky black void of space...*

Shouldn't we go after him? He's not gonna find anything out there-

*Even if we COULD return him to your timeline, I don't think Not-Sisko here is in the mood to pursue a space ghost. Plus, even if you manage to hijack a lifeboat or a runabout or whatever, the Wavecutter would probably pull us back in.*

So what, we just give up? We just let him fly around in deep space for all eternity?

*That, sadly, is our only option right now. We've done what we've set out to do, and now we can leave without consequence. One down, five more to go.*

But- Don’t you care about what happens to him?

**Frankly my dear, I think he'll be just fine. He's not THAT far from civilized space, he'll find something else to do in due time.**

*Besides, right now you should think about quitting out, so we can return to the joystick settings. People are already looking at you strangely, and I don't think you have time for all the questions they'll bombard you with.*

*...look, if you're not going to do it, I'll do it for the both of us-*

**ALRIGHT!** Alright. It's just-
Sir Graves: “...who are you, really? Is there somebody else in there?”

...what? What are you waiting for?

Anything you want to add? Any final parting words, to leave on an enigmatic note?

You think I've earned it?

You're a dimension-hopping extradimensional intelligence, Frisk. You're entitled to do stuff like that.

That's one hell of a fuckin' thing... Alright, I think I've got something.

Frisk: “I'm Frisca Rivera. And I'm having one hell of a day.”

That ought to do it. Now, can we do this?

Quitting...

It all started with a relatively simple shift, many many years ago. ...ok, maybe it's not that simple when you look closely.

Gee, you think?

I know. Now, let's see how Chara's getting along.

Why do you call him that, anyways? And what does he mean by “those other freaks”?

Who, Chara? Well, “those other freaks” he refers to are his innumerable parallels, the ones who failed to reform as he did, the ones who remained self-righteous party-crashing edgelords, who played along with their puppeteers and fulfilled their Genocidal destinies.

As for the name, Chara, well... What do you know of constants and variables?

I know that it was mentioned in BioShock Infinite, and that you're directly quoting it right now.

True, but with good reason. Constants are the similarities between different realities, while variables are the differences that crop up between similar ones.

I think I know what you're getting at. “There is always a man, there is always a girl, there is always a city, there is always a lighthouse.” That old chestnut.

While I wasn't a big fan of BInfinite as a game, especially in comparison to BioShock 2, it certainly reignited my interest in parallel universes. Even though I wish that Elizabeth didn't end up the way she did in Burial at Sea. But I guess that's what happens when Ken Levine jumps ship and tries to end the franchise.

And this is relevant how? I don't need a history lesson on a 50 year old game, Observer.
Right you are, I went off-track a bit there.

The point is that Chara is a constant, the fallen child who manipulated their brother and got the both of them killed, only to rise again many years later and, under the influence of a higher power, proceed to go on a killing spree. But as evidenced by your “Charlie”, and the Chara of Julian’s world, there are variables where they change for the better. Hell, there’s even a Chara who fills in the role of Sans in one reality.

There’s a world where Charlie is Sans?! Then who the hell is Sans over there?

“King Lazybones” fills the shoes of Asgore in that branch, while the actual Asgore is the Royal Scientist in place of Alphys, who ends up taking on a role similar to Napstablook, and-

As you can imagine, that reality personifies a different kind of shift. I believe the one called “Voltra” refers to it as a “StoryShift”. And it is most entertaining.

Also, Asriel takes Papyrus’ place in that branch. And yes, it is as adorable as it sounds. I am not ashamed to say that I squealed a little when I found that out.

Oh, that's a dangerous combination right there. I’d probably catch type three diabetes just by looking at that version of Asriel.

Well in that case, I'll tell you one last thing about StoryShift Asriel.

...he wears a rainbow kerchief.

Chapter End Notes

…it appears Frisk is currently out of action. It will take a while before I can bring her back around, Charlie.
...Charlie? Are you-
Huh, he's actually loaded a save file. I thought he'd need a little more time before-
....mother of god. He's actually gone THERE of all places.
Uh, ladies and gentlemen, Chara is officially on Cairn. He is seeking out a lost soul in the world of Grim Dawn. I was not expecting this HOLY SHIT.
...well, he's definitely going to be there for quite a while, at any rate. After all, it's a long way to the Necropolis. And hell, for all I know it mightn't end there. Something tells me the story won't end with him taking down the Loghorrean...
Krieg Without A Paddle

Chapter Summary

With Frisk out of action, I think it best that I check up on Charlie. I don't know how he's managed to survive on Cairn, but nothing's changed with that save file, so I'm guessing he's ok-

Or he's just about to face Warden Krieg. Charlie, what the hell are you DOING down there...?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Warden Krieg: "AH, I've been expecting y-"

[FIGHT] > *Warden Krieg > *Dreeg's Evil Eye

EAT IT YOU BASTARD!

Oh my. You've certainly been, er, busy since I left.

Observer? Wha- What're you doing here?!

I should ask you the same thing, Charlie. I'm honestly impressed a boy like you could make it this far. ...and grow so powerful.

My word. In this world, you're-

 Taken. Yeah, I've heard a lotta people call me that. Apparently the Aetherial left this tough guy's body while he was being hanged-

Think fast! Big sodding mace, 12 o’clock!

...phew, good call! DAMN this guy's ugly!

You mustn't underestimate him, Charlie. He's got a nasty couple of tricks 'neath that armour of his.

Don't you mean armor?

I meant what I said young man. Now stay on your damn toes, remember that little "dance", and you'll be ship-shape.

The Aetherial possessing Krieg is preparing an aether attack.

...and your Hellhound is already nipping at the Warden's heels. Impressive. So your "Taken"
parallel is an Occultist in this timeline, aligned with the eldritch powers of the Witch Gods.

Do you always talk this much?

Yes I do. And I suggest, young man, that you deal with it.

Oh I'll deal with it alright.

[FIGHT] > *Warden Krieg > *Phantasmal Blades

The conjured blades, infused with shadow magic, rip through the Warden's armour as if it were made of cardboard. He'll be feeling that one when he's back in the Aether.

Looks like you're no mere Occultist, Charlie. The mastery combination of your parallel is what we in the know call a "Witch Hunter", sharing abilities of Occultist and Nightblade alike.

...I'm guessing you've done a lot of "observing" when it comes to this world, huh?

Observing? Boy, I've sunk nearly 200 hours into Grim Dawn as a Player. And while I wasn't part of the Early Access crowd, I got sucked into this world in a BIG way.

Didn't Frisk say something about Grim Dawn earlier, while we were in the CORE?

What, you don't remember when she dipped into it back in the day? MOVE!

The bolts of green flame whiz right past me. I have this.

For one so into "retro" gaming, I thought that kind of game would have been her jam. But I guess she's just not into Diablo style games.

I'm not so sure about that. After all, she DID get Asriel into OpenPoE.

OH fuck off. Even fifty years into the future, Path of Exile is STILL more popular than Grim Dawn? Come ON!

Warden Krieg: "And when I'm done with YOU, I'll take care of your friends at Devil's Crossing."

Charlie: "And when I'M done with YOU, I'll deal with YOUR little friends out there in Arkovia."

Oh UP your GAME lad, you're fighting like a dairy farmer!

Oh? Is that right? Well, it's only because this chump is fighting like a drunken cow.

Speaking of which, Krieg rapidly closes the distance with Blitz, THINK FAST!

I jump to grab the top of his shield, then use his own force to flip myself over it.

Ok, where is this going-

I twist mid-flip, facing his back as I land, before slipping the blade through a nice little chink in his armour, right between the cuirass and the helmet.
...NOICE. Though not as effective as you hoped. Last I checked, the Warden's got a mail hauberk, complete with a coif-

The hell's a "coif"?

*Never mind that. You'd best step away from this blackguard, he's leaking aether everywhere.*

Gross! Still, its nowhere NEAR as bad as when those Reanimators spill their guts. Ugh, they give me the heebie jeebies.

*Just wait until you see what they've whipped up in the Gruesome Harvest. You'll change your tune, I guarantee it.*

Warden Krieg: *gah!* “You are STRONG!”

Ready your best defences, boy. THIS is the real bossfight!

Mutating Krieg: “Now, behold my true poWEERRRRRRRRRGGHHH!”

*Before your mortal eyes, the Warden's flesh mutates violently as his aetherial essence goes wild. He's close to bursting out of his armour, though as it fractures it sinks into his warping body, becoming part of his skin. And his face, well, there's a mug only a mother could love.*

Alright lad, it's time to smack this psycho in the gabber! It's GO time!

...[FIGHT] > *Warden Krieg > *Shadow Strike

*Through effort of will and sleight of hand, you seemingly vanish from the mutated Warden's field of vision. You then appear above him in an instant, falling upon him like a nightmarish spectre and driving the chilling, piercing steel of your offhand blade through the top of his still-phasing skull. With a wicked squishing sound, the cartilaginous calvaria erupts like a cloven sunfish, loosing a few flecks of tainted brain matter.*

Oh GOD that REEKS! UGH IT'S LIKE-

*You can compare it to a rotten ocean later, boy. Now pull that blade out before his skull tries to knit itself back together with six inches of steel sticking out of it.*

...good. Now, summon your Hellhound again.

Not sure that'll do much, he's already gnawing on this guy's hand.

*Trust me Charlie, this is a valuable Occultist technique. It's one I should have learned a lot earlier than I did.*

...[POWER] > [Occultist] > *Summon Hellhound

*As the eldritch circle forms in a corner of the room, your current Hellhound feels its heart suddenly stop. Then, it feels its chest about to explode, smoke pouring out of its mouth faster and faster until-*
KABUM. It explodes in a chaotic inferno that knocks Krieg off of his feet, just as it is resummoned. It shakes its head rapidly a moment, irritated that you resummoned it, before pattering back into the fray.

That. Was. Freaking CRUEL!

Welcome to Cairn, lad.

...and pretty cool. THERE, I SAID IT!

At least you're being honest with yourself. This time.

And what the hell's that supposed to mean?

You know full well, boy. If not for Frisk-

Ok, seriously? You think FRISK had the willpower to drag us off-course back then? OH PLEASE, don't be so freaking naive.

Wait, I thought it was because she refused or fought back or something? Did I simply remember it wrong?

Yes. Yes you did.

It wasn't Frisk who triggered the reset during our fight with Sans. And it sure as hell wasn't me. No siree Bob.

The one who triggered that “simple shift”, the one who was crazy enough to see what would happen if we reset at that point, was- AGH!

Damn it all, I was hanging so tightly on your words that he gained the upper hand! He's standing right over you!

Mutated Krieg: “HOLD STILL SO I CAN CRUSH YOU.”

I try to roll out of the way OH GOD!

You successfully avoid the Warden's Judgement as it impacts the flagstones next to your head. Who can tell how many innocent men lost their lives at the “mercy” of this mace?

Hey save it Encyclopedia Nerfherder, I need a hand here!

And you get it, as the Hellhound leaps onto the Warden's back and starts gnawing on his nape.

...wait, did you actually put any points into Solael's Witchfire?

Put points into- OH right! Yeah I should probably fire it up!

For Solael's sake, boy! It isn't THAT much of a drain on your energy, you should have it on all the bloody time!
THERE you go. Now every hit you land will burn your enemies with the corrosive touch of entropy.

The Warden still struggles to get that damnable dog off his back, so he doesn't notice your blades, coated in crackling crimson witchfire, until it is far too late.

[FIGHT] > *Warden Krieg > *Belgothian's Shears

Your blades cross in front of the Warden's neck, like scissors closing around a drinking straw.

Mutated Krieg: “You may destroy my body, but you will NEVER TRULY KILL ME!”

In a single burst of raw power, the blades whip right through the Warden's neck like a hot knife through butter. And as his head drops forward, falling cleanly off his shoulders, the turquoise vapours of an escaping Aetherial rushes out of the melting stump.

In a way, the Warden was right. Kill the host of an Aetherial, and it will seek out another. Won't find it here though. Not now you've cleaned out his lab.

...Charlie? Are you doing alright?

I did it. After so many tries, I finally did it.

...oh, Charlie. You didn't, did you?

It's... it's not like that, Observer! I haven't reset, or even saved, since I woke up outside Devil's Crossing!

...but I died. Time an' time again, I died! It was HORRIBLE!

...yet every time, you felt yourself return to life, waking up just outside the safe haven you knew. The Taken's unique circumstances, adapting to the energies coursing through their veins, even after the Aetherial cast it aside in search of a new vessel, is probably what enables your resurrections. Your “respawns”.

“Probably”? Are you kidding me?!

I never said I was an absolute expert on the workings of Cairn and its laws of magic! I cannot describe to you how aetherial energy actually works, anymore than I can explain the intricacies of quantum chromodynamics.

Ask me about the quark, and I'll tell you how many types there are. But ask me about how magic works in this reality, and you're asking the wrong man, sunshine. And even if I knew how the hell this nonsense works, I'd probably bore you to tears telling you about it. In a way, it'd lose its mystique, its “magic”.
Either way, it's probably best to just accept it and move on at this point. After all, you don't need to know what's going on under the hood to come back to life and kick someone in the face. Dwelling on all the minutiae-

ALRIGHT alright! You've made your point, old man! I'll fucking roll with it! Just spare me the damn lecture, would ya?

...you begin picking up all the loot that Krieg dropped. Except the common drops. No-one picks up the common drops.

Ewww... I have no idea how Duncan works with this- Who the hell looks at a glowin' chunk of brains and thinks “HMMM, I could use this to make equipment!”?

_Probably the same kind of person who figured out how useful aether crystals are. And proceeded to cram them into a scrap-metal container with searing embers. How that passes for dynamite is bey-

Wait, what are you doing? I think you've scraped out as much Tainted Brain Matter as you're going to get from-

...really, Chara? A trophy?

This guy gave me HELL, old man. Me, an' all those folks he corralled down here during the “Glorious” Dawn. I feel like Bourbon should have some actual proof that the Warden's finally eating dirt, and what better way than to pull Krieg's head out of a burlap sack to surprise the good captain?

...besides, maybe Duncan or Kasparov could do something with it?

...ooookay then. After clearing out the Warden's office, you open a riftgate back to Devil's Crossing.

But seriously, Chara. This is a little shark-jumpy, don't you think? I mean, who do you think you are; Geralt of Rivia?

I step through the portal, and end this conversation.

---

**John Bourbon:** “Welcome back, Charles. You look like you've been raising hell up there. Any news I should know ab-”

You place the hollowed-out head of Warden Krieg upon his desk, with a wide grin. ...yeah, that's not creepy at all.

**Charlie:** “Yeah. Mission accomplished.”

_Bourbon eyes the grim trophy with a cocked eyebrow. He is visibly relieved, knowing that the Aetherial presence in Burrwitch has been thoroughly dealt with, but still taken aback by seeing his enemy's head on his table._

**John Bourbon:** “The people of Devil's Crossing are in your debt, Taken. With Krieg gone, you have dealt a powerful blow to the Aetherial power structure in the region.”
“However, our troubles are far from over. Now we face a more insidious enemy:—”

Charlie: “Starvation... I'm guessing the rations I've been retrieving aren't cutting it anymore?”

Wait, you actually brought rations back with you? Boy, I am both impressed and proud of you. All of my characters just shove any rations they find directly into their greedy bastard faces the second they walk over them. Can't imagine why.

John Bourbon: “We've been making our rations go as far as they can, and while your supply runs have helped us immensely, eventually there won't be anything left to retrieve from Burrwitch and Wightmire. And from what our scouts have gathered, the farmlands on our side of the river are no longer workable.”

“In order to ensure our continued survival, we will need to re-establish supply lines with the farmlands north of Arkovia. With your ability to secure the rifts, we shouldn't have too much trouble setting up a trade route with Homestead.”

“You've done so much for us already, but we still need your help. Please, I need you to see if those farmlands survived the Grim Dawn. It might be all that stands between us and... well, we all know what'll happen when the rations run out.”

Charlie: “Don’t need to tell me twice; I'm in. Just point me in the direction of Homestead.”

John Bourbon: “Before you head out, you'll need to know what you're up against on the road to Homestead. Speak with Mornay and he'll fill you in on the situation out west.”

...well, I think it's safe to say that you're going to be ok. You won't need my help out on the road, though there are many things I can fill you in on. Stuff that you'll need to know in advance, to avoid any... unforeseen consequences.

Wait, you're ditching me?!

Frisk needs my help more than you do, lad. She's a lover, not a fighter, and with the realities she's yet to visit, I reckon she'll need my insight a lot more than you do. She'll probably appreciate it more than you do, to boot.

Oh C'MON! Is this about the-

No, it's NOT about your disrespectful attitude. That's not a significant factor in this. What IS a factor is that while Frisk could probably fight her way through the trials ahead of her, she doesn't really WANT to fight, and probably doesn't have the guts to do it herself. Whereas in this world, most of the time you will HAVE to fight. And from what I've seen, you don't have many qualms when it comes to putting down the horrors and psychopaths in your way.

So naturally, I'll be able to help her out with “alternate” solutions. But not before I give you a few pointers, just in case you find yourself at a loss for how to resolve certain upcoming situations, ones that can't be easily-resolved with Dreeg's Evil Eye or a Shadow Strike.

...such as?
Early on, you may encounter one Drew Larkin, bleeding out by the side of the road, asking you to kill one Isaiah Reddan, the man who left him for dead. Save yourself some time and ignore his request.

Is there some good reason why I shouldn't help the poor guy out?

Well, Larkin tried to force himself upon Isaiah's daughter. I reckon that's probably a good reason to leave him to bleed out.

...what hell have I gotten myself into?

Suck it up Chara. If you think that that’s the worst that things can get, allow me to shatter your delusions of this being a sane world. ...when it comes to a world gone to hell, you're merely at the threshold.

Anyway, I reckon the next thing on your list would be to kill the traitor Direni. Did you find any documents pertaining to a cultist's orders?

I... uh, I remember picking something up, some declaration from this “Salazar” guy...

There it is! Apparently they plan to intercept the survivors once they leave the prison, and that they had an agent of theirs sabotage the water p-

...that son of a bitch.

Yup. Direni's the one who broke the pump, though thanks to your efforts the worst he did was give old Barnabas a hard time. Maybe drag him into Bourbon's office before you head out.

What else, what else... Oh, if you see a man threatening to kill a woman by the roadside out in Arkovia, call their bluff. Tell them you know about their little con, that you know that the woman was once a companion at a respectable joint in Burrwitch. Then, offer them a portal back to Devil's Crossing.

Next, if you encounter a fishing village being strong-armed by Cronley's men while they're looking for scrap, don't go straight for the supervisor's throat. The way I handle things, I usually just give him 2500 iron bits to fuck off. Which is practically pocket change by the time you've gotten that far into Arkovia. At least, that's how it goes for a loot-grinding pack mule like myself.

...you've pretty much seen all this world has to offer, haven't you?

Almost. I have yet to clean out Port Valbury, I haven't killed the Outcast, and I've yet to complete the chain of quests that leads to the Edge of Reality, but other than that I've completed most of what version 1.0.0.7 has to offer.

...anyway, I think that's all that Arkovia has to offer, but there are a few more things you should know about around the time you reach Homestead.

Firstly, that “chef” Ulgrim isn't all that he appears to be. He is, in fact, the former First Blade of the Erulan Emperor, and an associate of one Inquisitor Creed. Yes, the same guy whose diary pages you've been picking up on your way through Burrwitch.
Next, when you come across a hidden camp west of Homestead, you may come across a collapsed cave where a little girl is trapped. DON'T LET HER OUT. And if you do actually go in there, keep questioning her until she flips her shit and turns into a demon. That way you'll deal with her and the travellers won't get set on fire. Sadly, I didn't know about that on my first visit. So guess you has two thumbs and feels like crap about it.

And last off, the big one. After dealing with the festering abomination in the Gruesome Harvest, you may need to resolve a "diplomatic dispute" before heading north to establish contact with Fort Ikon. Representatives from Kymon's Chosen and the Order of Death's Vigil will arrive at Homestead, and you'll need to choose which group to enlist the aid of. Sadly, this will probably result in the other group becoming hostile towards you and the Black Legion, given your allegiance to their enemy.

...that doesn't seem fair? Why can't I convince the two factions to work together because THE WORLD IS FUCKING ENDING AND WE NEED TO STICK TOGETHER?!

Believe me, I tried to pursue that outcome, but the Taken's options were somewhat limited. I simply could not get my characters to try and convince them to work together, it was a purely two-sided coin I had to work with.

Part of the problem is that both groups are staunch and unmoveable fanatics. And while fanatics can be a potent force if aimed in the right direction, their beliefs clash violently with one-another, and I just don't see how they could put aside their differences, even if it means driving back the enemies of mankind.

Then again, maybe you'll succeed where I and others like me have failed? Perhaps, if you play your cards right, you'll be able to make the coin land on its edge?

...y'know, Frisk talked a lot about coins landing on their edges an' all that. I'm starting to think maybe she got that from-

You give me too much credit. Firstly, she never truly knew me until so very recently, so I wouldn't have been able to work that philosophy into her mind beforehand.

And secondly, you remember that she played the Legacy of Kain games. Odds are she was intrigued by that notion after playing through Soul Reaver 2.

And you know what? So was I. You see, cliché as this might sound, great minds think alike.

...fine, sure, I get it. Is there anything else I gotta know before you leave me here?

Far as I know, nothing major. Other than an unspeakable world-ending horror known as the Loghorrean, the Voice of Ch'thon, being roused from its slumber by the blood harvested by the Cult of Ch’thon. No biggie, just make sure to let Ulgrim know about that when you meet him again. I'll be interested to see how him finding out earlier will affect this timeline.

What the fuck have I gotten myself into. How the fuck am I going to deal with something like that?

You're the Taken One, boy. You'll be strong enough to tear him a new one by the time you reach the Necropolis.
...it's high time I told you something I told the others, when they stood at the gaping maw of one hell or another.

Others? You mean Frisk?

 Frisk, Julian, Marcus, Undyne-

UNDYNE?! When did she-

She tried to stop Julian from entering that dark otherworld, but in the process she crossed the threshold, and was Touched by the Pneumatic. I imagine you can piece the rest together.

...oh god, that's right... I guess she didn't last too long down there. I mean, Frisk's human so she was tough as nails to begin with, but-

 You would be surprised how resilient a monster can get when they get Touched by the Pneumatic. Though after Undyne returned to the physical world, she was pretty unstable on account of her elevated power levels. Without the intervention of Alphys and Uncle Norman, her Touched soul would have boiled her body away, and even with Doctor Graves' expertise concerning ethereal physiology, she was bedridden for months afterwards.

There's that name again, “Graves”. And-

...who the hell is Norman Graves?

It's a very long story. One that I'll cut short for now, and say that he's Julian's uncle from a parallel universe.

This just keeps on getting better and better. The more I hear about these parallel worlds, the more I get confused.

I'll clear it up later, I promise. But for now, let me assure you of one thing.

They will be rage, brutal, without mercy. But you. You will be WORSE.

Rip and tear, until it is DONE.

...that's it? That's your big reveal, the opening quote from Doom 2016 reworked as a glorified “go get ‘em champ”?

It's relevant. You've stepped into hell on earth, your enemies won't show you any mercy, and they will do what they can to FUCK YOU UP. To survive in this world, you'll need to turn it up to 11, fuck them up even harder, and NEVER. FUCKING. STOP. It goes contrary to your previous quest of cruising through life as a nice guy, making friends and doing no harm, but this world isn't Undertale or Animal Crossing. In this world, it really IS kill or be killed.

...well, uh, thanks for the pep talk. I'm gonna go drag Direni to his death now, I guess. But not before I tell YOU a little something you should know.

The name of the guy who caused that reset. The guy who set all these little wheels in motion.
EMILE
-CARRIER LOST WHAT THE FUCK-

Fucking what. That's not possible. That's not the guy I thought it was at all. He hasn't even LP'd the game yet, and Toby's never going to patch the-

...nope. Probably not that guy at all. Even if he's THAT Emile, he's probably just a parallel of Emile, complete with a Mirror Universe goatee.

The heck are you talking about, Observer?

* Frisk! It's, uh- Nevermind. I was just checking on Chara- Charlie's progress, and he's doing pretty well in his journey across... Wraeclast! He did quite the number on old Merveil, I can tell you.

You're not fooling anyone, you know. I can see the save file right there!

Charlie

Level 21 Witch Hunter

Devil's Crossing

Devil's Crossing? That's... that's from Grim Dawn, isn't it?

...huh. I really should get back into that some day.

Wait, really? I wasn't expecting you to-

It's not like I had the chance to get much further back then... Oh god... Oh god WHY...

...Frisk? Are you ok? You're shak- ...oh. Ohhh nooo, I think I- Frisk, calm down. Deep breaths, girl, deep breaths. Everything is going to be ok-

NO it's fucking NOT! WHAT HAVE I DONE?!

I- I- I left him... When he needed me the most, I couldn't handle the nightmare...

I knew things had to have been bad, but this... I don't know what to say.

Call me a coward. Call me an idiot. Call me a sack of shit. 'cause I can't say that I'm not, for running away like I did!

Frisk, you listen to me right now. You were afraid, but that doesn't make you a coward. You didn't know how to handle the situation, but that doesn't make you an idiot. You couldn't handle him losing his sanity, after all the work you put in to achieve your happy ending, but that does
NOT make you a sack of shit.

In the face of seemingly insurmountable horror, you did what many would have done in your position. You tried to reject your reality and substitute it with something better.

And unlike most, you actually succeeded. You might have fallen out of the memory in the process, but either way you set the stage for something new. You flung yourself into that CORE, all the way back to that key moment when Charlie first fell down.

...but he needed me... I couldn't stand to see him in that straight-jacket, with that look in his eyes!

He always wanted to make sure that his datajack was top of the range. But there was something... interesting about that new BCI component, wasn't there? Something that wasn't in the previous models. Something derived from Mt Ebott.

...no... Oh God, NO! The crystals...

THINK, girl. Where else have you seen that happen?!

Undyne! But- but I managed to get it out, and-

...I have to go back. I can still save him! I have to get them to remove that chip!

Unless they've figured it out already. Though when I think about it, and what New Deseret has to offer, I don't think they'll pick up on it that fast. But now, after all this time, you know what drove Asriel to madness. In this timeline and the one before, no-one knew of the dangers of using magic crystal for augmentation purposes.

And before you say anything, you couldn't have known. At no point during your first adventure could you have known of the Pneumatic or the true qualities of the crystals. As far as we know, no-one in that version of the Underground had even conceived of crystalline augmentation as an actual thing, not even Alphys or Gaster.

What's important is that you're ready to come to terms with what has happened. You may have been a fool to run, but in fleeing you found what you needed to know. You now know what was wrong, and if you can return to your original timeline, you might just be able to fix it.

...Frisk, I know that this is a lot to digest, but...

Oh fuck it, who am I kidding? You've got plenty of time to mull over what you've recalled. Rest assured, he'll still be there when you finally find your way home. With the right numbers, and the knowledge needed to use them, you'll be able to pinpoint the exact moment to return to.

...but what about this world, then? I can't just leave them here, can I? Even if I stop the other Frisk, they're still trapped down there. And if she's telling the truth, that the New Dynasty is actually here in New Deseret...

I imagine you'll think of something, Frisk. You're a smart girl. And if push comes to shove, you're pretty damn strong.
Even if I could stand a chance against New Dynasty troopers—

*To be fair, most of them are merely conscripts. From what I've gathered, they'll be about as accurate as Imperial stormtroopers. And scared witless, to boot. Though of course there's still the language barrier...*

...I might be able to get around that. Maybe. After all, Dad helped me learn Mandarin in the original timeline.

*Since when did Asgore learn Chin-*

*Oh. Ohhh, your biological father. The suit from Singapore, met your mother in the city of fallen angels—*

-had a one-night stand, walked out of her life.

...it's kinda funny. I never even knew Dad until I was 11, when he showed up in the City looking for Mom an' me.

*I... heard what happened to her. And my blood boils at the thought of it. Locking her away, just because of her chosen profession... Call me crazy, but I reckon that constitutes political imprisonment.*

*And what's worse is that her job's perfectly legal in Vegas and the Californias of your world! But New Deseret? Oh nooooo, it detracts from their “pursuit of purity”, whatever the hell that means. While wanting to stay pure is fine, they shouldn't drag everyone else down that path by making it law!*

Observer.

*What?!

Aren't you being a little preachy right now?*

...*maybe I am, I suppose. I do tend to get a little too into stuff like this. “Shit that gets me mad”, as some would say.*

*Still, I thought you'd have something more to say, since it's what tore your old family apart.*

...don't push your luck, Observer. I'm not really in the mood for that right now. I've got enough to think about already.

*I... I imagine you do. It's probably best that I leave you to it, then. Give me a shout when you're ready to jump into a big ball of madness.*

*I'll be... around. I have some things I have to attend to in the meantime.*

...*good luck, I guess.*
...I feel like I should talk to her some more, but...

She really does have a lot on her plate. So many problems to solve, so many things to think about. And it hit her like a speeding semi, all at once.

There are still a few memories that are blocked off, even after that deluge, and I'm eager to find out just what they were. In particular, there's this one block, about two years long, after her integration into the alternate 201X, but before the moment she woke up in the Ruins, where my initial observations began. And at the end of that block...

I recognize this sensation. Why did I not feel it before?! A growing sense of vertigo, and a familiar displacement... This phenomenon, its scars still peeking out behind the fog of amnesia, is not a save, or a load, or a reset. This... This is where the coin of fate struck the dirt, where the more obvious outcomes were rejected.

The Coin, it appeared, had landed on its edge. She found a third option, and her mind paid the price.
After spending a long time mulling over what she'd recalled, Frisk is ready to dive into the depths of a familiar nightmare.

...she certainly took her sweet time, I'll say that much. But now, it seems like our travels will bring us in contact with someone I hadn't expected to meet up with for quite a while. It has been quite a long time since I first encountered Violet Song. Between our last encounter, and her encounter with Frisk, I have no idea what she's been up to, but by the looks of it, she met with a terrible fate indeed. And yet she survived...

Lucas. The Silver Skald. It was only through his intervention, his storm of Metal, that she escaped with her mind unfettered. Typical Lucas, always the "big damn hero" whenever he gets the opportunity. ...not that I'm complaining, mind. Quite the opposite in fact.

...I guess we'll see how well she's been doing since then. Frisk seems ready to continue our little quest, anyways.

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hey, Observer?

Yes?

I'm ready to go.

...that was quick. I expected you'd be mulling over things a bit longer than that. Hell, I started a new playthrough of Deus Ex, that's how long I thought it'd be.

Really? Which one?

*The original! What else?*

No I mean which version? The Squenix remake or the original original?

...*the ORIGINAL! As in the very first game in the series, one of the best bloody PC games of all time!*

...was the remake any good in your timeline? Or did Squenix fuck it up?

It's not important. Let's just-

*NO, let's NOT sweep this to the side. I NEED TO KNOW.*

Okay, okay, just calm down and I'll tell you.
Thank you.

...it was alright. Still not as good as the first, but I'd place it between the original and Human Revolution. Though speaking of Human Revolution, they changed the story a little in the remake. Namely that Jensen's part of UNATCO this time around, and he's not resentful of the Dentons like Gunther or Anna.

**But what about the gameplay? Is it still as open-ended as the original?**

From what I played of it, yeah. Though it still favours the sneaky, especially since they brought back area damage.

*And I am glad to hear it.*

...speaking of which, try that save file there. You might be surprised.

**Violet Song**

**Puerto Calarosa – Eastside Lower Docks**

02:12 – 22/08/35

Violet Song... Oh my- Tell me she's not the Violet I'm thinking of.

...

She is, isn't she? Does that mean-

Yes it does. But keep quiet, and keep a hold of yourself. You don't want to attract any undue attention.

*And I mean that. You DO NOT want to attract any undue attention in this town. Especially so far into curfew hours.*

Curfew? That can't be good.

It rarely is. But the port's dealing with some threats from the abyss right now, so in the interest of settlement security, they've started cracking down on anything suspicious. Typical response during a crisis.

...soooo who're we looking for? Soul-wise, I mean?

**Well, the lime green tint to the file should tell you all you need to know.**

Arlene Hanson. The Kindness. ...Kuro's got a lot to answer for.

If she's still alive, that is...

What?

*I'm just saying, "Thorney" gave her quite the clout the last time you saw her. Unless she was made of sterner stuff, she might not have survived.*
Then again, judging by your battle with her, she appeared to be partially mechanical, didn't she? Am I remembering wrong?

Hell if I know. It's been so long since I last saw her.

...it's kinda strange, actually. Kuro was one of the first people I met when I woke up in the Ruins, but she was also my lab partner back in 201X. So how come my memories of her weren't the first to return?

...that's actually a good question. But I might have an idea in that regard.

You see, memory's pretty complicated, both logical and emotional. And from what I've seen of your timeline, you... did something that made things go haywire. I imagine that flinging yourself into the future while history is crapping itself would do quite a number on your mind. I'm honestly surprised you turned out as alright as you did after your little shenanigans, but that's just me.

...that said, you MIGHT want someone to check your genetic structure the next chance you get. I'm not an expert, but I imagine that kind of time travel is NOT healthy for organic life. There's a good reason, among many others, why the Great Race of Yith favours astral projection over physical time travel.

...sooo it was all random, I guess?

Partially. Though I imagine it's also down to emotional investment. After all, the second Charlie saw Asriel's room in Home, memories of him came flooding back, likely because he's so madly in love with the boy. And the second he reminded you about Asriel, memories of your beloved goatbro hit you like a flood of bricks, likely because of how deeply you love him.

I don't think I'm wrong in that, am I? You DO love him, don't you?

Not like that.

I don't know about that. I mean, you bent the heavens and plunged into hell to bring him back to the world of the living. Not to mention, you always felt so comfortable and secure if you were both sleeping in the same bed.

And above all else, you did all of that, risking not only your life but your very sanity as well, in spite of all the terrible things that Flowey did. In spite of everything, you wanted both of them to have a second chance. To live a good life after the horror shows they were stuck in before. And you stuck with him, rain or shine, thick and thin, never letting go.

I don't know about you, Frisk, but to me that sounds a lot like love. Am I wrong?

I... I don't doubt that, Observer. I love him so much. But I don't think I could ever... You know...

I understand that perfectly. You can't see the two of you reaching second base.

I wouldn't dream of reaching FIRST base with him! He's my freaking stepbrother!

That definitely makes sense. You're not bound by blood by any measure, but in spirit you've become like siblings. And you don't want to sully that bond with things that're unbecoming of
such a connection.

...or could it be that you're simply afraid? Afraid that, if you two got any closer, things might end up getting weird? That something might go terribly wrong, shattering the bond between you and sending you both to square zero?

...

'cause that's what I sensed running through the minds of the boys, when they were teenagers. Julian's as close to his Asriel as you are to yours, if not closer, but they're both afraid of going further.

Though they worry too much, they're still just teenagers. It's not really something they should be stressing out over at such a young age. But hey, since when has puberty ever encouraged rational thought, eh?

And for that matter, you probably don't need to worry about it either. Last I checked, your Asriel DOESN'T have an awkward teenage crush on you. And that's probably for the best.

...how the hell did we get here? We were supposed to be jumping into Violet's continuing adventures, and-

**Violet Song**

Puerto Calarosa – Eastside Lower Docks

02:12 – 22/08/35

[LOAD]

Quite so. All for the best.

Asriel, wearing a black jumper and matching beanie, peeks around the shadowy wall, hiding in the shadows as he studies the area ahead of us.

Asriel: “...t-two guards at the gate, underneath the street-lamp. Both of them with crossbows.”

“They won’t be able to see us from here, but they'll see the flash bomb if we throw it. We gotta get closer, but I don't think-”

*He turns to you, and his eyes widen with concern.*

Asriel: “V-Violet, your nose is bleeding...”

Sure enough, you touch your nostrils and see that your nose is, indeed, bleeding. And as it does, you begin to remember the events that brought Violet to this reality...

Frisk: “She was an investigator...”
Asriel: “C'mon Violet, you're scaring me-”

OKAY this is happening. You wrap your arms around Asriel, and give him the longest, strongest hug of his little life.

Asriel: *cough* “Violet, what th- what the hell? I- can't- breathe-”

OH GOD I'M SO SORRY! I loosen my grip on him.

Trying to catch his breath, Asriel wiggles out of your grasp. As he clutches his chest, leaning against the wall, he shoots you a look of dismay and perturbation.

Asriel: “Seriously- *wheeze* what the hell Violet...”

“What's gotten into y- Oh no... No no no no...”

SHIT I think he can see the colour in her eyes.

Wha- What does that me- OH CRAP.

Yup. They're flickering magenta while I'm talking. And now Asriel knows that there's something very, very wrong with his friend.

Asriel: “Nonononono... Please... I don't wanna die...”

He backs away slowly from you, his eyes welling up in terror as his breathing becomes heavier and more panicked. He's afraid for his life right now, Viol- I mean, Frisk. Do what you can to calm him down.

Frisk: “Asriel... Please, calm down. No-one's going to hurt you.”

“This is gonna be hard to explain, but it's me. Frisk.”

He doesn't buy that. For all he knows, you could be just another minion of the Arad-Nacha, hungering for the soul that's keeping him stable, using his guardian's body as a puppet.

You'd better think of a better hook, and soon. He looks like he's about to bolt.

Frisk: “Asriel, please... I'm not leaving you behind again. Not this time.”

What did I just say? Now you've torn it, he's- Translucent? The what now?

Okay, he's turned translucent and he just phased through the wall. ...well. That's new.

It's not. It's a pretty old trick. In fact... It's one of the first tricks I learned.

[ACT] > *Frisk > *Patience

Ahhh, clever girl. Your soul calls upon the essence of Patience.
In this state, the universe itself may pass you by. Which for some reason lets you phase through solid matter, but doesn’t let you fall through the world. ...how the hell that works is beyond me.

It’s magic, Observer. It doesn’t need to make sense.

Need I remind you of Clarke’s Third Law? Any-

Any sufficiently-advanced shut-your-trap is indistinguishable from let's-fucking-go.

...you pass through the wall into a vacant shop-front, just in time to see Asriel make his way through the opposite wall into the next building.

I pursue him. If you're right about this place, it's way too dangerous for him to run off on his own like this.

You pass through building upon building, always a few steps behind the frightened goat-child. I seriously hope you can salvage this before-

City Guard: “Hey! Stop right there!”

As you phase through that last wall, Asriel's Patience runs out, returning him to his corporeal state. And as it runs out, he finds himself staring down the stirrup of a guard's crossbow.

Frisk: “DON'T YOU FUCKING TOUCH HIM!”

OH! Okay! This is happening, is it?! 

Before the guard can level his crossbow at you, you instinctively draw your- Violet's dart pistol, and fire into the guard's neck. He shakes violently as the electrical current courses through his muscles, before going limp and falling to the ground.

Well now. That's, well, yeah. Looks like Violet Song was prepared for stuff like this.

Oh god did I- Please tell me I didn't-

I have a feeling he'll be fine, but go ahead and check his vitals. Just in case.

...he's, uh, his breathing's consistent. Pulse... steady?

What the hell did I shoot him with? No way was that just a taser.

You pull the dart out of him, and see that it indeed wasn't “just a taser”. The thin sharp needle between the prongs suggests that it also injected him with a fast-acting sedative. A VERY fast acting sedative, to boot.

...there has to be something more to this. I'm no expert, but combining sedatives with electrocution sounds VERY dangerous. And yet, for some reason, this guy is simply out cold.

I don't know, and I don't care. He's not gonna be a problem anymore.
Asriel stands in stunned silence, looking back and forth between you and the unconscious guard. ...I move the guard into the recovery position. Maybe that'll convince him I'm not after souls?

Clever move. That way, we won't have to witness “the Jimi Hendrix Experience”.

What do they have to do with-

We won’t have to see him choke to death on his own vomit. Which is how Jimi Hendrix died, back in the September of 1970.

Ohhh that's SICK.

Indeed it was. Tragic end to such a young artist, too. But I don't know which is worse: overdosing on amphetamines and tuna fish sandwiches, or being shot by Nazi stormtroopers whilst rocking out.

Were the Nazis even around in the seventies?

In some realities, yes. But at least he tripped acid with Blazko before he went out.

Asriel: “Why are you doing this...”

...the boy's voice quietly wavers with uncertainty. If you were after souls, you would not have hesitated to punch the guard's lights out and destroy his head in the process. Yet even when reacting instinctively to protect your little friend, you opted for a non-lethal takedown.

Speaking of which, here's a nice little opportunity for you to get back in his good graces after a dodgy first impression. Go.

Frisk: “...still not convinced, Asriel? Fine. I'll prove it to you.”

“Remember when you were in Snowdin? Remember seeing me, Sans and Papyrus through that portal?”

“I do. 'cause I was there. You recommended that I “don't kill, and don't be killed”. That that was the best I could strive for. That I should stay determined for my best friend.”

“And you know what? I did. ’cause I'm here now. And I'm not gonna let anyone else hurt you.”

You're getting warmer, Frisk. He's easing up and letting his guard down. More familiarity, more stuff that you and he know.

Uhhh... I- Do you have anything?

At a loss for words? How about thinking back a little further? Somebody had to “tend to the flowers”, after all.

...I think I got it. Here goes nothin'.

Frisk: “Remember that patch of flowers, where I tried to convince you to come back with me? Where you asked me if I didn't have anything better to do?”
Asriel fidgets nervously. On the one hand, he regrets not going back with his Frisk. But on the other hand...

Asriel: “I guess you didn’t. Have anything better to do, I mean.”

Frisk: “I think we both know you weren’t just “taking care of the flowers”, Asriel. We both know who’s been sleeping in that flowerbed.”

*His lip quivers slightly. Tread lightly around that subject, Frisk.*

Frisk: “That's one of the reasons why you didn't want to come back, isn't it? Not just that you didn't want to break their hearts again. Not just because you felt your compassion slipping away.”

“You didn't want them to be all alone, even after all they did to you. You wanted to spend your last moments watching over Chara's grave, before you changed back.”

*Oh well done, Frisk. Here come the waterworks.*

I open my arms-

You don't even get the chance to open your arms before he clings to you, weeping softly into your armoured suit. At this point, I imagine you're used to this.

The hell's that supposed to mean?

*Comforting Asriel. Being there to reassure him, to let him cry it out. Across all those timelines, you were always there for him.*

*When he tore down the barrier. When you dragged him out of Hell. When Alphys was recovering after her car accident. ...when Charlie died.*

Asriel: “They're gone... They're all gone...” *sniff*

...and there's the “other hand”. From my observations of his home reality, he only survived because he DIDN'T go with his Frisk.

Frisk: “Who, sweetie? Who's gone?”

I think I know the answer, I just hope I'm wrong.

*I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but here's a small spoiler: you're right in your assumptions.*

Oh god, no...

Asriel: “Everyone! Everyone’s dead!”

“...we- we looked everywhere, from Home to New Home, even down in the old lab, but no-one was left... Just... big piles of dust-”

*Asriel tries to stifle his own choked-up whimpering, as the horrors of his past start trickling back into his waking mind. And like bile rising in one's throat, he manages to choke the horrors back down.*
Asriel: “...in the end, we- we blew the CORE. That's what those things came for, what they needed to drag our world into theirs. And Violet wasn't going to let them have it.”

“...I know it sounds horrible, Frisk, but seeing Mt. Ebott erupt like it did, sweeping away all that horror with molten rock... it was... cathartic.”

“All that... wrongness... All that death, all of those nightmares, burned and buried by the burning blood of the world. It felt like we'd made that thing, the Arad-Nacha, face the consequences for what it did.”

“And it... it felt good. It felt right. ...Frisk, d'you think it's wrong, to feel like that?”

...I don't know what to say. I lead him away from the docks, since his little outburst might have drawn the attention of nearby guards.

It isn't wrong to feel that way, if you ask me. But it isn't truly right to feel that way either, especially for one so young. In the end, I believe that it is simply natural for Asriel to feel like he did.

Should I tell him that?

...if you think that'll help, I guess go ahead? Won't make him bolt, at least.

Deep breaths...

Frisk: “It's only natural to feel that way, Asriel. Nobody could go through what you did, and stay the same.”

...fair enough. It's easy to believe that despite everything, we can still be ourselves. But eventually, something will come along that changes everything, and it becomes so much harder to be ourselves. And in the grand scheme of things, change is inevitable.

I guess it's just a matter of when.

I was going for “what kind” and “how severe”, but when's an important factor too.

But enough of that. Go ahead and give him a proper hug. The boy needs it.

I hold him close, and cradle him in my arms as we slip into the shadows. I think I know where we're going now.

Slipping from shadow to shadow, the two of you make your way westward through the winding, night-litten streets of Puerto Calarosa. Asriel weeps silently as you carry him, the memories still fresh in his mind. And yet...

...do you see that, Frisk?

What?

Look at his eyes. Something's not... not quite right.
...when he thinks I'm not looking, I sneak a look.

...well. That's something new.

*Not even close, Frisk. If anything it should be all too familiar.*

*For several seconds at a time, his eyes glow a familiar light-blue, before returning to his natural red.*

*...are you getting it now?*

...whoa. That... that actually makes a lot of sense. MK said that my eyes were blinking between red, while I was, uh...

*Communing? I think that's the right word for it.*

Right. When I was communing with Charlie.

*Good, good. Keep going, you're getting warm.*

You're not going to tell me outright, are you?

*Nope. Think of it as an exercise in deduction, a healthy little bit of brain training.*

Gee, thanks coach.

...Asriel realized that you were talking- no, *communing* with me, 'cause he saw my eyes turning magenta-

*Now do you get it?*

OHHH MY GOD I do! There's something, or someone, inside him. But that'd mean... Of course. The colours!

*You've got it!*

Charlie was aligned with Determination, just like I was. ...and that would mean that you're aligned with Perseverance. That right?

...*now you mention it, that makes a frightening kind of sense. Funnily enough, when I feel “trapped”, I usually make note of things and, by extension, take notes.*

*Ah. Seems like I learned something about myself today. Not bad at all...*

*But, what does that mean for our little goatboy here?*

...no, that doesn't seem right. It took six human souls, and countless monster souls, to get him back into that state. OR one “dark soul” dredged from the depths of hell.

*I thought that too, for the longest time. But I've come to believe that, while it took a massive amount of soulpower to elevate Flowey to that level, it wouldn't take all that much to actually sustain that level. After all, he was still Asriel by the time you found him in the Ruins.*
So what you're saying is... he gained a soul, while he was still in that state, after Frisk, his Frisk, left him?

Kind of. ...are you familiar with volatile memory?

Sort of? That's like RAM, right?

Sort of. Volatile memory is a form of memory that requires power in order to hold information inside of it. In Flowey's case, his base power level was not strong enough to hold most high-level emotional processes in the memory.

...I don't like how you're referring to him like he's some kind of computer.

With all due respect, Frisk, it is entirely justified. At the end of the day, we are ALL computers. Doesn't matter whether we are mortal, monster or machine; we are all driven by our central processing unit, whether it's comprised of nerve cells in a blob of fat, metal circuits on a board of silicon, or something more ethereal.

...anyway, back to Flowey. Miserably low power level, couldn't really hold onto processes beyond a certain complexity. But then, he became the Ultimate God of Hyperdeath. His power level peaked above seven souls. And with him in that state, you called out to him. You opened his mind to the souls within him, and in turn his very being was exposed to the processes that he'd been missing for so long.

Hope. Love. Compassion. Fear. Remorse. Disgust. Etc. So many processes that his heart and mind would have been unable to retain, were it not for his power level.

And then, he used all those souls to break the barrier. After that, he had nothing to sustain his power level. It doesn't take much to keep those processes running in volatile memory, monsters themselves are proof of that, but as Flowey he couldn't even sustain THOSE levels on his own.

...so he needed a power source before he lost his compassion again. And by the looks of it, he's found one.

Damn straight. But he wasn't going to go out looking for one. No, the boy would have rather let himself rot than try to face the music. Kind of pathetic if you ask me, but what do I know?

However, it appears that this Asriel either had the will to try and find a soul, OR it was forced upon him. And considering the boy's apparent desire to punish himself rather than try to redeem himself in other ways, I suspect it was the latter.

...you have a single fact to back that up?

As a matter of fact, I do. A reality brought to my attention by one “Fatz Geronimo”, in which Frisk forced their soul upon Asriel in the “aftergame”, sacrificing their own life to make sure that Asriel could live as the boy he once was. With Frisk's soul nestled in his body, Asriel became what Fatz labelled the “Dreamer Reborn”.

That expression... That particular solution crossed your mind at one point, didn't it?
If not for Charlie, I would have done just that. I'd wait until Asriel was off-guard, then I'd pin him down, and take my own life before he could-

**BLOODY hell, that's a bit extreme don't you think?**

Oh and I'm guessing that the other Frisk just removed their soul and then died from not having a soul?

*That's... actually how it happened in the Dreamer Reborn universe. Now I think about it, they probably had a cardiac arrest from the sheer effort of removing their own soul.*

*Though now I think about it, there was another universe where Frisk tried something similar. The “Endertale” branch discovered by one TC-96, an artist with an affinity for The Lion King of all things...*

*But that's beside the point. Frisk did something so fucking metal in that reality, that I had to double check.*

...how metal are we talking?

*I'd say it'd be closest to Beneath the Waves, by Shattered Skies.*

Never heard of them.

*I'm kinda surprised. They're pretty obscure, after all. But they're pretty metal regardless.*

Anyway, what Endertale Frisk did... they tore their own soul in half. Yes. You heard me right. **THEY RIPPED THEIR OWN FUCKING SOUL IN TWAIN, AND GAVE A PIECE TO ASRIEL. And somehow survived the shock of doing something so earth-shatteringly metal.**

*Granted, it's not quite Asura's Wrath levels of metal, nor is it on par with Rules of Nature, but still. For the standards of an Undertale universe, tearing your own soul in half to save your friend is TOTALLY. FUCKING. METAL.*

...I kinda have to agree HOLY SHIT. How the hell did Frisk pull that off?

*Fucked if I know. But if I had to hazard a guess, I'd say cold hard determination. And the “power” of love, of course. Even though love by itself can't run a bloody pencil sharpener.*

Kinda wish I knew how to do that beforehand.

*I'm just glad you didn't go through with the whole suicide thing, even if it was to keep your best friend from losing himself. You needn't concern yourself with martyrdom, it just doesn't suit you.*

...that word, martyrdom. You sounded like you were choking on it.

*I did? Well, I'll have to do better next time.*

...ok I'll tell you. Gah...

Something wrong?
I was just cutting to the chase. Cutting out me being reticent, you trying to pry, then saying you won't pry, then prying again regardless. This saves us both some time.

Wha- How did you-

'cause I've seen you do it before. Remember Warren, and the origins of “Perkypants”? THERE WAS A GOOD STORY BEHIND IT! ...besides, Warren wasn't exactly “reticent” anyways.

And I'm guessing that makes it all better?

Doesn't it?

I don't know, you tell me. I'm not exactly an expert on social matters, if you haven't guessed already.

Wait, seriously? I never would have guessed.

...you know what the worst part of that is? I honestly can't tell whether or not you're being sarcastic right now. Other times I can pick up on it, but-

I'm serious. I had no idea.

Oh, ok. ...so. You were prying about my dislike of martyrdom.

Yeah? I'm guessing there's a story behind that?

There are many. The funny thing is that some of my favourite characters in the arts have, by chance, met their end as martyrs. Asriel Dreemurr can be counted among them.

When it comes to martyrs, especially ones I've become invested in, I find it hard to accept their sacrifices, especially when there are potential ways around it. There are distinct possibilities if you look close enough, if you THINK hard enough, to have the coin land on its edge. Finding that third option, that illusive flicker of probability beyond the obvious, is key to avoiding martyrdom, while still being a hero.

...well. Uh, well...

If they did it because there was legitimately no other option, I can somewhat stomach it, and chalk it up to the folly of man in the heat of the moment. But when you have time to think things over, and there's no real rush, throwing oneself into the jaws of death for the good of others is a fool's errand. At least, that's how I see it.

I, uh, I guess so? I get where you're coming from, I understand it, but... Don't you think that you're overthinking it, just a little bit?

When lives are on the line, and you have the time to think it over, there's no such thing as “overthinking” it. Though admittedly, there IS thinking down a path that might not lead where you need to go, more like “wrong turn thinking” than “overthinking”. Sometimes the path of least resistance is the right path, without extraneous frills or unnecessary side-objectives, but that's
sometimes. Always sometimes.

I suppose so.

...how did we get here again?

*Sorry. I go off on a tangent sometimes. Too much for my own good, I'll concede that to you, but I felt it was still somewhat relevant.*

I wasn't really talking about that, but I understand.

*You really are a saint, you know that? Putting up with a prosaic old prattlesnake like myself.*

...wait, where WERE you talki- Ohhh. Right. We're here at last.

*Now HERE’S an interesting location we've stumbled into. And if I'm right in my deductions, it's right where we need to be.*

But where ARE we, Observer?

*Asriel: “Oh... This place again?”*

---

*Welcome, Frisca Rivera, to the Temple of the Three and One. Or at least, the one built in Puerto Calarosa.*

It's... My god...

*It brings awe to even the most jaded hearts, doesn't it? And as the name describes, it is dedicated to the Three and One, the Earthly Goddesses and the Horned God.*

Horned God, huh? That who I think it is?

*Not even close, Frisk. The Horned God is a concept far older than Lucifer or the Great God Pan. Though this particular Horned God, the Lord of Winter and the new moon, is a more “recent” iteration on the concept.*

As a matter of fact, the beliefs of the Three and One originated from the original inhabitants of this particular world, interpreting the leftovers of some Elder Race of Men. What emerged from that resembles Mediterranean mythologies on the one hand, and neopagan beliefs on the other.

I... I wouldn't know much about those. See, uh, New Deseret doesn't exactly have diverse religious studies.

*What, they only taught you about how Jesus apparently came to America? Tell me you at least know some of the Olympian gods. EVERYBODY knows about Zeus. He's fucking ZEUS.*

If it means anything, I first found out about him when I played God of War. State doesn't like giving people the chance to believe in something other than what they tell us in church.

*How chilling... But I'm guessing you never paid much attention to that stuff, did you?*
Nah, not really. I just cruised along, not really knowing what to believe. Though I guess I did take some stuff on board in the end. Y’know, like “be excellent to each other”.

*I was unaware that Bill and Ted was required watching in Sunday school.*

It's not. But it's still a damn good movie.

**No. It's not.**

*It's bloody EXCELLENT. *squealing electric guitar*

Damn straight.

**Asriel:** “...this is what Violet was looking for, Frisk. But she already got what she came here for.”

“I remember she said that this place was like a “font of spiritual power”. She said something along the lines of “all prayers directed towards the Three and One converge here”, and that the Arad-Nacha’s servants were planning to take the Temple for themselves.”

...they'll have a hard time pulling that off, that's for sure. You see, under most circumstances, all of that soulpower would pool in the otherworlds below our Threespace, forming whirling fonts of power that warp the universe around them. But in this world, those fonts have already been claimed by certain individuals. Three priestesses, and one priest, have claimed their thrones of cosmic power, and have become the very deities they once worshipped.

Wait, seriously? There are GODS in this universe?!

**Honey, there are gods in MOST universes. Though of course, knowledge of the worlds below doesn’t come naturally. Not everyone knows of those cosmic truths, and not every faith has people who become the empowered avatars of their deities. But it can happen. And on this world, it DID happen.**

...you just keep dropping bombshell after bombshell, don't you?

*That I do, I guess.*

...so what do we do here? Do we need to protect the gods, or something?

*I don't think that'll be necessary, Frisk. They're gods. They could probably destroy an army with a stern look and a twitch of their buttocks. They'll do just fine without our help.*

**Besides, WE aren't here to help the gods fight against the Arad-Nacha. We're here to find the soul of Arlene Hanson, and convince her not to lend her power to your foolhardy parallel.**

And unless I'm mistaken, we're pretty close to wherever her soul lies...

Where?

*If I had to hazard a guess... She's either in the South Wing or East Wing of the Temple. Both Avril and Juno have healing aspects, and while Juno's light cleanses impurity and cures the ills of mortal men, Avril's touch causes flesh and bone to knit itself back together. Could go either way if*
you ask me.

**Frisk:** “Let’s try the East Wing first.”

**Asriel:** “Wait...”

*I think Asriel's a little out of the loop on this one.*

**Asriel:** “I don't think I ever asked you this, but...”

“Frisk, why ARE you here? What are we even doing back here?”

*Told you. Probably best to catch him up on the situation.*

And I do just that. I explain to him all about my parallel, the scattered souls, everything he needs to know.

*Asriel looks pretty checked out, hearing what you've told him. There's the expression of a goatboy who doesn't want to think too hard about it.*

**Asriel:** “...if you'd come along earlier...”

“Dangit, we're gonna have to go back in there, aren't we?”

**Frisk:** “Yup. ...there a problem there, little buddy?”

*That expression... There's the look of someone who's kinda fed up with... with Violet, it seems.*

**Asriel:** “You don't know what Violet did back there? Seriously? I thought you'd, you know, know what she was thinking or something.”

“...things were going alright, but after getting her hands on the tablet, she tripped an alarm and alerted EVERY SINGLE PERSON IN THE TEMPLE.”

*Whoopsie. That's no good.*

**Asriel:** “I hid in a laundry basket for most of it, but for fifteen minutes, FIFTEEN MINUTES, Violet was throwing out tear gas an' swear words, shock-punching anyone who tried to take her down.”

“...it was a freaking MESS. And that wasn't even the worst about it. When she booked it out of the Temple, she left me behind! I had to wait for AGES 'til things quietened down, before I could get outta there myself.”

What the hell, Violet?

*She did as well as I usually do when shit hits the fan. Though most of the time I'm out of charges for the riot prod, so I have to get stabby with the Dragon's Tooth Sword.*

…that's not very inspiring, Observer.

**Frisk:** “...sooo we can expect them to be more alert when we sneak in there?”

**Asriel:** “Probably. They're probably still tending to their wounded though, so...”
Frisk: “They've probably been healed already, if the stories surrounding “Avril” are true. So... Yeah.”

Asriel: *sigh* “This is gonna suck, isn't it?”

Frisk: “…yeah. It's probably going to suck.”

Asriel rubs his temples, trying to clear his head for the painful nonsense ahead of us.

...how good are you at sneaking?

I'm... not sure.

*I'll give you a few pointers here and there. And if we encounter nightingale floors, maybe try crawling on the walls instead.*

Can I even do that?

*Violet can. And you're in her body, so...*

Got it. Be like Spider-Man.

Sure, ok. But stay away from annoying quips and weeping over Uncle Ben. Those things aren't exactly conducive towards being sneaky.

Wait, hold the frickin' phone! How is she able to-

...why the hell does she have a tail?!

*You only just realized that's part of her body? Seriously?*

I'm having a hard time figuring out what Violet actually IS right now!

*Well, for starters her species is... on an alternate evolutionary path to humanity as you know it. Where our species descended from “great apes” in Africa, “humans” in Violet's universe originated from an advanced form of New World monkey in South America. Though whether it was natural evolution, or driven by advanced influences, I cannot say.*

That's crazy. So in this body, I'm more monkey than-

*Sort of. The “tlaca”, as they call themselves, do have more in common with spider monkeys than chimps, at least physiologically. Though in heart and mind, humans and tlaca are pretty much indistinguishable, except for a few slight behavioural differences.*

I have no idea how I never felt all of this before. How the hell did that happen?

*I reckon it was because you were so fixated on Asriel, that you didn't even register your mind adapting to the “alien” physiology of our tlaca friend here. The lad certainly has that effect on you, I'll say that much...*
...wait, do you see that?

Who the hell is that guy?

???: “Yup”

**With great force, the man in dark clothing throws the unconscious body of a priestess into a rubbish skip. Closing the lid, he stands back to admire his handiwork.**

???: “Looking good.”

**Looks like someone's been busy. Violet's earlier scuffle must've given this man the opportunity he needed to do a little window-shopping.**

**Why he's stuffing bodies into a skip, though... I guess to hide the bodies, but... I got nothing.**

We slip from shadow to shadow, sneaking through the open doors into the... Whoa, look at this architecture...

*I know, right? And yes, the walls are trees. Intricately shaped by druidic architects, nourished with electro-conductive polymers to create a building that is very much alive, while having all the essential features needed to make a house a home.*

It's damn pretty, I gotta say.

...so, East Wing.

**East Wing. There you'll find the main shrine to Avril. And with it, perhaps...**

Sure enough, you find yourself standing before the jade-granite statue of a fair-featured teenage girl, holding a hunter's bow in her right hand. Down on one knee, she holds out her free hand towards the pilgrims and druids who would come from miles around to seek her regenerating touch. A familiar lime-green glow radiates from the emerald broach built into the statue's chest, and you sense a lightening, welcoming aura as you approach.

Smells like sweet alyssum and a faint hint of woodsmoke. Gentle birdsong, soothing panpipes, and the soft babbling of a distant brook whisper directly into your mind. You reach out towards the helping hand of the Spring Maiden, and...

???: “...oh! Uh, yer wounds are healed, pumpkin.”

**HP restored.**

???: “...oh. It's yew again. I told'ya before, a chisel won't do y'all much good in getting' me outta here.”

“Don't y'all have better things to do with yer time?”

Is... Is that her?

Survey says... yes. That's Arlene Hanson alright, and by the looks of it she's stuck in some kind of
soul gem. Probably fished out of the void by one of Avril's druids when she appeared in this world.

Because of course humans would exploit souls too. Why'd I think any different?

Welcome to the rest of reality. Anything can happen, so anything goes.

Frisk: “...Arlene Hanson, I presume?”

The Kindness falls silent. No-one's called her by that name in centuries.

Arlene: “…an' jus' who might yew be? 'cause yew sure as hell ain't Violet.”

...that depends on which of us you're talking you, Miss Hanson. Violet's not here right now, but I, the Observer, am in residence. As is someone you might have heard about when you were alive. Did the Prince ever tell you about Princess Frisca?

Arlene: “Who, Frisk? She's here?”

Indeed, ma'am. She's here, and she needs to talk to you-

Arlene: “Well, yew can tell her that I'll talk to her when she's calmed down. She's actin' all kinds a' crazy right now, an' I don't wanna get in her way during this fitt'n spell a' hers.”

...she's talking about my parallel, isn't she?

Quite. ...this is probably going to take some doing.

Let me try.

Frisk: “Alright Arlene, I think I should clear a few things up.”

I explain, as best I can, the events leading up to now. The fact that there are two Frisks, that I'm the Princess, that the other Frisk is trying to use Arlene and the others to... Well, we don't know what she's planning, but it can't be good-

Partway through trying to justify that the other Frisk can't be trusted, you feel a strong arm wrap itself around your neck! Crap, it's that man from the rubbish skip!

Get him off, GET HIM OFF!

It's... going... black...

His grip suddenly loosens, accompanied by a short, sharp, pained gasp. Now, I'm not expert, but that sounds an awful lot like someone getting stabbed in the back.

HGH... But that means... Oh, no, he didn't-

He did. As you turn towards Asriel, you see a dreadfully familiar blade. Breathing heavily and shaking like crazy, he nervously clutches one of his iconic Chaos Sabers, the tip still dripping with the blood of your wounded assailant.
I- I don't know what to say. The guy tried to choke me out, but- Damnit, he didn't need to DIE!

*Thankfully we have a solution to that problem since, well, he's freshly dead.*

You're not serious, are you? Is this going where I think it's going?

**Asriel:** “OH CRAP I DIDNT MEAN TO IM SO SORRY-”

**Arlene:** “I think I know what yer plannin’. I... guess it might work?”

I'm confident that it will. You see, there's a big difference between freshly dead and truly dead. Now, if a guy's freshly dead, there's a window of a couple of minutes where there's still oxygen flowing in the brain, before brain damage sets in and easy revival becomes improbable. So if you work quick and do it right, you can potentially bring a guy back within that grace period. But with truly dead, whouf, there's only one thing you can do.

Go through his clothes and look for loose change?

Aaaah, good one. Really ought to sit down and just WATCH that movie some time.

But, uh, I was gonna go with “reduce the body down to its Essential Saltes and perform the Borellus-Levi Ritual”. It won’t come to that, mind you. We'd be here for hours if we had to go that route.

*Now, here's what we do. Step one: lift the guy up.*

Uh, okay? I'm holding him up.

**Good. Now, step two: rest his head on the palm of Avril's statue.**

Yup, I know exactly where this is going.

**Arlene:** “Aaan' step three: his wounds are healed, pumpkin.”

...wait, that's it? That simple?!  

*Not quite. Now we proceed to step four: tie his arse up so he won't attack us when he wakes up.*

Huh, good call. Why didn't I think of that?

**Asriel:** “Uh, Frisk? Why're you- ...ohhh, I get it.”

Asriel looks guiltily at the mistake he made. Though it wasn't a complete fuck-up. Sure, he could have jabbed the creep anywhere BUT the back of the heart, but under the circumstances I reckon-

**Asriel:** “…I've been trying so hard, but…”

“Sometimes, it's so hard to shake it-”

His eyes flicker light-blue once again, and his ashamed expression begins to lighten. Whoever's in there, they're reassuring him. And I have a good idea of who they are.
Well no shit, it's “Patience”. Somehow, Asriel managed to hold on to Patience after destroying the Barrier.

...given a choice between that an' Hell, I'd have made the same damn choice.

*Well, we don't know if his universe even HAS a Hell. But I know what you're getting at.*

...huh. I want to try something.

*Do it, if you must. ...what is it?*

**Frisk:** “Say, is there anyone else in there?”, I say while looking into Asriel's eyes. “I know there’s gotta be someone else behind those eyes.”

*Weeelll now he's a little creeped out. A little. Because he knows you're trying to talk to Patience. Whoever they were in his universe.*

**Frisk:** “I just wanna talk. That's all.”

*Asriel closes their eyes, as if to consult the soul with them. When he opens them, the light-blue glow has grown even more intense. As he speaks, it is clear that it's not him speaking, as the voice of a young girl leaves his lips.*

**Patience:** “...so. Multiple Frisks, eh? That's really, REALLY weird.”

**Frisk:** “You get used to it, eventually.”

“...so, uh, you're the soul of Patience? I.. Ok, here's what I wanted to ask.”

“After all that happened, all that he did, what made you stay with Asriel?”

*A sympathetic expression forms on Asriel's face, along with a gentle smile.*

**Patience:** “...he was always there for my little sister. So caring, loving and patient, through the good times and the bad times. ...when I felt those memories, from the depths of his heart, it reminded me of myself. Of how patient I was with Charlene, when she was still alive.”

She... Oh my- They were SISTERS in her world.

**Frisk:** “I... Uh- Wow. That's-”

**Patience:** “I'm guessing things are different, wherever you're from. Whatever WORLD you're from.”

**Frisk:** “Y-yeah, yeah it is. Where I'm from, your sister is a boy. A boy called Charlie. And Asriel, my Asriel, loved him dearly.”

“Even after everything he did, even when Asriel admitted that Chara wasn't all that great a person, the kid still loved his best friend. So much so, he was willing to just sit by their grave and wither away into the miserable, heartless husk that was Flowey the Flower.”

*Asriel pouts and narrows his eyes at this observation, though in- Actually, I can't tell whether*
that's Asriel giving you the stinkeye, or Patience. Though I wouldn't be surprised if it was both of them.

Patience: “...say what you will about Flowey. But without him, none of us would be free.”

Frisk: “I'm not arguing against that, believe me. I'm just saying that Flowey was a broken, unbridled little mongrel, without a heart to call his own.”

“And Asriel... ...such a sweet little idiot. Even when he needed help, he didn't want to accept it. He just wanted to rot away into nothingness, as “penance” for what he did.”

“To that, I say BULLSHIT. It doesn't matter if he didn't want help, or felt he didn't deserve help. What's important is that he got what he NEEDED. A second chance, with a clear head and a whole heart. And you, Patience, gave it to him.”

OHHH you tell 'em girl! You TELL the universe what's up!

...ahem. I mean, uh, Patience's expression softens.

Patience: “...even after all my sister did to him, he was always so good to her. And while the others were content to finally pass on, willing to leave him to his fate, I couldn't let him go back to being so heartless.”

“He deserved to keep feeling that love, and to love others. And his momma and poppa, despite their own sins... they still deserved to have him back in their lives. But most of all...”

The smile Patience had plastered on Asriel's face shifted into... How strange. It's like a wry grin, but there's something else underneath. Something... oh.

Patience: “He deserves to feel bad about what he did. To feel the hurt and hate he lavished upon others in that heartless state. To feel all the regret and remorse, the heartache and heartbreak, as he reflects upon his own sins.”

“He'll cry his share of tears, for all of those he wronged. But it won't be without end. One day, he'll have paid his debts in full, while his feelings shape him into a force of good. And all the while, through the pain and the penance, I'll be there to give him solace, to keep him on the old straight and narrow.”

Uh... Yeah, uh... Thoughts, Observer?

Yeah, she strikes me as a... I think “fundie” would describe this version of Patience best.

Though maybe I'm being a little harsh in my presumption. Using words like sins and penance doesn't automatically make someone a fundie. Though I do have to wonder about the girl's upbringing... Maybe that's what made “Charlene” climb the mountain? 'cause she was fed up with her family's abuse and fanatical devotion to... something she didn't believe in?

...I honestly wouldn't rule it out at this point. Charlie didn't exactly have a happy home life either, from what I gathered.

Wouldn't YOU like to know? Between his abusive boozehound of a father, and the unscrupulous
chemist he had for a mother, it's little wonder he travelled so far to get away from them.

Unscrupulous chem- You've got to be shitting me. She DIDN'T, did she? To her own son?

*From what I saw, yes. Whenever one of her experiments was successful, Charlie would end up with the spoon between his lips, and he'd be exposed to tiny amounts of whatever biochemical mess she'd concocted.*

...I'm guessing one of those “experiments” gave him his red eyes, didn't it?

*Without a doubt. Though perhaps the most chilling thing of all was that she didn't do it out of malice, strange as that might sound. Every time she forced a spoonful of science into his gob, she did it out of love. She was trying to make medicines that would not only heal, but empower the human body, and she wanted her son to become stronger through her “understanding” of biochemistry.*

*Though in that regard, whether or not her ministrations did the lad any good is anyone's guess. God only knows what would have happened if he'd had the chance to reach puberty. He'd probably have grown into a living nightmare, inexplicably torn from the pages of Kafka-*

Arlene: “Ahem.”

Aaaand I guess that's why Patience decided to remain in Asriel's body. She wants him to live his life, but also to suffer for what he did as Flowey.

Arlene: “While all a' this is mighty entertainin', we should get back on track.”

Oh, right, yeah.

*Sorry about that.*

Arlene: “Don't mention it.”

“Anyway, I've made mah decision. I'll hold out on that girl fer now.”

“She don't know the power she's messin' with, that's all kinds a' certain. But once she's calmed down, she an' I'll have ourselves a talk 'bout what in Hell she was tryin' ta pull off.”

Frisk: “Arlene... Thank you. You've got no idea how much of a help that'll be for what I have to do. I just wish there was something I could do for you.”

Arlene: “C'mon, don't worry yer pretty head about it. Hangin' 'round here isn't really all that bad, after all. Folks here are all kinds a' carin', an' up until Violet showed up things were pretty peaceful.”

“Besides, someone's gotta tend to the wounded...”

...well then. I guess that's that, isn't it? Two down. Four to go.

...so wait, we're actually gonna leave her here?
Well, there's not much we CAN do for her. And she's being taken good care of here. So...

...part of me feels like we'll need her back in the main timeline, though. Like, we'll need her soul and the souls of the others to get the most out of the Condenser. But knowing that she's doing alright here...

Smells like inner conflict. You're not sure what the right way to go with this is.

Do you go with the good of the many, or the rights of the few? Should six suffer, if it means the freedom of thousands? Or should the six be allowed to do their own thing, and leave the thousands to find another way?

...fucked if I know. I mean, the many is a lot more than a few, that's the most basic math imaginable. But...

Alright, I'll tell you what. Let's save those thoughts for later, when we've found the remaining souls. Given time, it'll probably become clearer to us.

But in the meantime, it's time to say our goodbyes. Time to leave this world behind, and move on to the next.

...you're right. But before we do, there's something I have to do.

Like waking from a dream, the veil of confusion lifted from Violet's eyes. Had she blacked out? The last thing she remembered, she was sneaking through the shadowed streets with her young companion, before-

Violet: “Wha- No no no... We were in- Why are we back HERE?!”

Despite her efforts to leave the Temple behind, she found herself laying at the foot of Avril's shrine. Asriel looked, concerned, into his protector's eyes. ...no, there were no otherworldly colours behind those eyes. Frisk, and her “Observer”, were no longer in residence.

Asriel: “Violet? Are you ok?”

Violet: “I'm- Asriel, what the hell happened? I- We were near the docks, but now-”

Asriel gently squeezes his friend's hand, trying to calm her down.

Asriel: “It's... it's complicated, Violet. But I'll try to explain.”

“You were... possessed. By Frisk.”

Violet: “Frisk? But he's-”

Asriel: “Dead. Don't remind me.”

The words felt like hot, bitter ash in Asriel's mouth. He hated dwelling on the past, especially that nightmare of brutality.

Asriel: “But SHE was here. The other Frisk. The Frisk we saw in Sans' basement.”
Violet’s eyes widened with concern. This “FemFrisk” was playing a very dangerous game, diving into a marked reality. If the Arad-Nacha found out about this interloper...

Violet: “...what the hell is she up to? I warned her-

Asriel: “She's trying to stop a god, just like we are, an' her struggle brought her here. The god she's facing draws its powers from specific human souls, an' the girl in the statue is one of them.”

“Frisk's been trying to convince those souls to withhold their power from the “Omega Child” as she calls it, so that when she finally has to fight it, she'll be able to stand a chance against it.”

“...she also told me to tell you something important. Something you need to know before we go any further.”

Asriel leaned in closer, and put his hands on Violet's shoulders.

Asriel: “She said that if I'm going to stick around with you, you need to keep me safe. That you shouldn't ditch me in a panic, and make sure that no harm comes to me.”

“...she also said that if you can't keep me safe, if you aren't up to the task of keeping me out of harm's way... That you need to find her, back in her own world. She said it'll be safer for me there.”

Violet felt conflict in the pit of her stomach. She didn't want to ditch Asriel, no matter how hairy things got. But as things HAD been getting hairier, day by day, it was getting harder and harder to keep her little friend out of trouble. What if he-

Asriel: “Yeah. I told her about your gift, that you were a “worldwalker” like Ciri an' Elizabeth.”

Violet: “And she isn't? How else could she-”

“...she must've gained access to a Yithian APM. That's the only expla-”

Asriel chuckled and shook his head, much to Violet's confusion.

Asriel: “Nah, nothin' like that. Her “little friend”, the Observer, got her access to some save files for her to load into. And apparently it works like some sort of “quantum leap”. Whatever that is.”

Violet: “Man, I haven't watched that show in years...”

“But it's still damn creepy. Just jumping into a body and hijacking it like-”

“...so she isn't technically a worldwalker, then. Or I guess, she's a different kind of worldwalker?”

Asriel: “It doesn't matter, Violet. What matters is that she doesn't want to see me get hurt. And recently, well, you haven't exactly kept your promise.”

Violet: “And what, you think I’m ok with that?! You think I don't feel like crap, having you follow me into danger every day?!”

“No, Asriel, I do feel bad about putting you through all this! And the only reason I haven't brought you someplace safe is because nowhere is safe so long as that THING is still alive!”

Asriel: “Violet...”
**Violet:** “What!? You think Frisk will be able to keep you safe? Oh fucking PLEASE.”

“She already ran the risk of attracting Its attention when she contacted you! If I left you in her world, you'd still be in danger, and her world would suffer the same fate that yours did!”

**Asriel:** “Please stop!”

The upset distress of her friend cut through the doughy layers of frustration that had enveloped her. Even now, she was breaking her promise despite what she felt was her best efforts.

With a deep breath, she massaged the bridge of her nose, and continued, this time with a calmer, clearer perspective on the unending struggle that their lives had become.

**Violet:** “...like it or not, Asriel, you're stuck with me. You're safer by my side than you would be anywhere in the multiverse. And I KNOW that's not saying much, but it's the best we have right now.”

“...don't think I'm gonna disregard what she said, though. I'm... I'm sorry, ok?”

Remorse gnawed at the pit of Violet's stomach like a pestilent serpent, threatening to chew its way into her darkest depths. The events of the past hours had, to an extent, opened her eyes.

**Violet:** “I know, I haven't done all that great a job in protecting you. And I probably don't deserve to have you around, for all the times you've been left to fend for yourself.”

“It's just... it's so difficult, doing what I have to do, while trying to keep my promise to you. Sometimes I wonder if I'm even cut out for this job, with how... how sloppy my work's been.”

“Sometimes... sometimes I wonder if I should've accepted Lucas' offer, to take me some place “safe”. He said that I'd done more than enough to be a true “hero”, that that alone was deserving of a rest. But then I remember that there ain't no rest for the wicked.”

“Then, I remember that if the Arad-Nacha isn't stopped, there won't be any safe places left, nowhere to rest our bones without fear of being taken by Its minions. Not unless people like me step up to break that fucker's knees. And oh man, It has a LOT of knees to break...”

“...but don't get me wrong, Asriel. I don't want to see you get hurt. I'm gonna do what I can to be more reliable, so you don't have to worry so much.”

“...still, if by the end of all this you're done with me, if you still feel like I've failed to keep my promise, well... At least you'll have somewhere safe to go once this is all over. You'll have Frisk to take care of you, and she'll probably do a better job at it than I have.”

Asriel's hands drifted to Violet's face, his gentle pink fingerpads resting on her cheeks. A faint, determined smirk formed on his face as he spoke.

**Asriel:** “Just step it up, Violet. Never forget the promise you made. If not... **You're not gonna like what you see.**”

“...hey, don't look at me like that, Frisk said it! I'm just repeating what she said!”

**Violet** grinned and narrowed her eyes, at once both taken aback and gleeful at the nerve of her young companion.
Violet: “Come here you cheeky little fucker.”

With unnatural alacrity, Violet swept Asriel up into her arms, gave him a kiss on the cheek, and began the long trek back to the dockyards.

Her contact, Captain Ocean Cloud, would undoubtedly be rather worried sick by his client's lateness. The old albino mustelid owed the worldwalker far too great a debt to simply up and leave, even if the voyage into the Abyss seemed like utter madness. But if the Three and One were truly building their new city on the ocean floor, blissfully unaware of the horrors happening on the surface, it would be suicidal NOT to make the descent. For if not the Three and One, who else could save Mirandomar from the horrors clawing at the edges of reality?

"Observer"?

Yes Frisk?

...uh, no? It's me, Violet. I can hear everything you're saying.

You really do go on, don't you? I honestly feel sorry for Frisk.

OH SHIT I LEFT THE CONNECTION OPEN! Observer out.

Chapter End Notes

She's not wrong, though. He really DOES go on. It's his Persian flaw...

...so. Frisk and the Observer are certainly doing work out there. Two down, four to go. And Charlie's STILL crusadin' across Cairn? Gee whiz, I expected more progress than THAT! It's been nearly a MONTH since the last entry, and that's all he's put out. Yeesh.

I swear, someone oughta light a fire under this guy's ass. ...come to think of it, I might just try somethin' like that. ...don't tell the Observer, guys. It'll ruin the surprise I've got in store for him...

-the Cardinal XO
Chapter Summary

Leaving the world of Mirandomar behind, Frisk and I set our sights on yet another world I had not expected to revisit. The winds of fate, it seems, have drawn me back to the shores of Feldstein Prime. And from the looks of it, what was going to be a lovely summer break has turned into something out of a survival horror game.

Nonetheless, we have a mission to complete here. But if I can help the boys out in their little adventure, that would be a plus.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Well. That was certainly a bracing experience, wasn't it?

I just hope she takes better care of Asriel this time. If anything ever happened to him...

I have a feeling that he'll be just fine, Frisk. Whether or not he'll have to smack demons about to stay fine, however, is another matter entirely.

...speaking of smacking demons about, you ready to track down the next soul?

Uh, yeah. Sure. ...hold the phone, are you saying we're about to step into Doomguy's shoes?

Not exactly, but considering how the Graves family turned out, you wouldn't be too far off the mark.

We're going to go pay "the boys" a visit, Frisk. It's high time you met Julian Ymil Graves.

Francisco Dreemurr D'Souza – LV.1 KN.?

Trinity Ranch – Wozz's Bedroom

[Load?]

...yeah, uh, before we dive in, I have two questions. Who the hell is Wozz, and why am I gonna be in their bedroom?

...please don't tell me we're-

Nope, nothing weird going on there. He's just letting you catch some shuteye, that's all.

Well that's... reassuring, I guess. But you still didn't tell me who he is.
Well I was going to save that little surprise for when you loaded in, but I guess I can let a few things slip. He's a part of Julian's little "Entourage", he's big into metal, he lives with his cyborg grandmother, and he's a pretty big boy. A buff young bull, if I may be so bold.

So he's a... another minotaur? Like "Not-Sisko" Roman Stroganov back on the Wavecutter?

Yup, that's Wozz alright. Ross "Wozz" Wozniak, a teenage bull with a heart of gold and balls of steel.

And I imagine he has a pretty big bed. ...what? I'm just anticipating what I'm gonna wake up in, that's all.

Well, get ready. 'cause you're about to find out.

Francisco Dreemurr D'Souza – LV.1 FUN.27

Trinity Ranch – Wozz's Bedroom

[LOAD]

Frisk: *yawn* "...man...

You awaken from a fitful slumber, yet in spite of the bad dreams, you feel so blissfully snug in Wozz's enormous bed.

...can I just lay here for a few more minutes? This guy's bed is AMAZING.

...you feel the call of nature, dragging you out from beneath the voluminous duvet.

Oh god fucking damnit.

Hey, we've all been there. Sometimes, the call of nature's the only thing that can drag me out of bed. Granted, I don't exactly have a California King in my room, but with a thick duvet and one of those space-foam mattresses, it's hard to drag yourself out of your comfort zone.

But unlike me, Wozz has a pretty sweet set-up here. Not only is his room a modified barn loft, but he's got an en-suite bathroom too. For a hydroponics farmhand, he's certainly living the high life.

...I make my way to the en-suite.

And I'm not going to document that nonsense. Nope. No way.

...oh, good, you're finally done. I'd be surprised, but-

Sooo yeah. Turns out I'm a boy in this universe.

Was it the name "Francisco D'Souza" that tipped you off?
Oh right, I, uh, forgot about that.

Then I imagine it goes without saying what tipped you off, then.

Yyyyyeah. I guess this is how Charlie felt in my original body.

Actually I imagine it was quite the opposite. But I know what you're getting at. Welcome to my world.

I'm just glad that this Frisk chose boxers over briefs.

Like I said, welcome to my world. Boxers all the way.

...so. Here you are. A 17 year old girl in the body of a 14 year old boy. I'm sure someone's written about this kind of situation, once upon a time.

Don't make it weird.

Hey, I'm trying. It's pretty hard to tiptoe around a situation this weird, even though it was bound to happen sooner or later.

Besides, you've spent half your life possessed by an 8 year old boy. I though that weird would be the new normal for you by this point.

Yeah, no. You think you know weird, and then weird springs weird on you.

...speaking of which, look alive. We've got company.

OH GOD WHAT IS HE CARRYING WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT

Wozz lumbers gently into the room, carrying with him what appears to be a large green sleeping bag. But as you look closer, to your bewilderment it turns out that it's a large green cocoon.

Ah. It seems that Girix chose today of all days to undergo metamorphosis. Though perhaps "chose" isn't the right word.

WHAT IS HAPPENING?! WHO THE FUCK IS GIRIX?!

Well, you just woke up, so it makes sense that you haven't accessed this Frisk's memories yet. So I'll help you along with a little word association. I'll drop some names and phrases, and hopefully they'll connect the dots with what this Frisk knows.

First up: Arkham Academy.

...Toriel didn't get the opportunity to open her own school, did she?

Nope. Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was Waldheim. While the surface Capital was being built, most monsters still went to school down in the Underground or, like Julian and his friends, joined the esteemed Arkham Academy to the east.

As you stand there dumbfounded, Wozz requests that you set up the spare mattress.
...OH, right! I pull it out from the space above the en-suite, and it lands with a dusty thud against the floorboards. I stand back so "Wozz" can lay down- Seriously, who the hell is Girix?

_As if cradling a fragile vase, Wozz gently rests the massive cocoon upon the spare mattress. And she's going to stay there for quite a while, I reckon._

_Alright, next one: student exchange program._

...huh, that's right. Arkham's a pretty big academic centre on Tellus, and the rest of the Federation if I- if this Frisk remembers right. So... the Academy gets its fair share of exchange students from other worlds. Like Girix... Girix... Could you just tell me who the hell she is now?

_I'll go one better, and give you the last phrase: giant space caterpillar._

WHOA ok, I think I- I think I remember that. She's a... a juvenile astropteran, I guess kinda like Mothra? Except she's a lot smaller, like only the size of a cow.

_I hadn't thought of that comparison, but I guess it works? Yes, probably. We can go with “Mothra-in-training” to describe Girix right now._

_She's such a sweet girl, too, big into botany. Though like all “teen” astropterans, her hunger started getting the better of her as she approached her later moults. Pretty sad actually, since from what I saw she was pretty good at tending to plants beforehand, but with her hunger she probably would have started eating on the job if she had an internship at Hydroponics._

Now you mention it, I do remember her looking hungrily at Asriel a coupla times. This world's Asriel, I mean.

_Well, his body is technically a golden flower, so... Yeah, things definitely got a little weird between those two after the party at the old Whateley Mansion._

Wait, did she try to _EAT HIM-_ 

_Not exactly, but... Well, Asriel was performing some party magic out on the deck, a variation on the “flower out of nowhere” trick, and presented it to Girix. Thing is, it wasn’t magicked out of thin air. It was literally a physical extension of his body._

Oh... Oh of course, 'cause Flowey's his physical body- Oh god, I think I know where this is going.

_So yeah, when Girix started nibbling on that flower, both Asriel and Flowey freaked the fuck out. And as he drew away, everyone could see that the stem of that flower was actually a part of his body. Yeah. The boys had to explain a fair amount to the students who HADN'T bolted from the room._

It definitely put a damper on the party, no doubt about that. Still, at least Thunderbuss was playi-

Shit, that's right! Wozz had a garage band called Thunderbuss, they played at the party last Halloween!

...man, it's like I was really there, listening to him shred the electric guitar in the mansion's librarby...
And of course, YOU weren't. Frisk D'Souza was at that secret party last year, you're just remembering what he did.

Still, it's only natural to feel like you were in his shoes. The more similarities you share as parallels, the more that either of you would feel like the other.

It's damn lucky that Wilbur's parents were out of the house that weekend. Can't remember much else, though. So it must have gotten pretty wild.

...that's Arkham Academy High students for you, Frisk. They might seem all straight-laced with their straight-A grades, but they don't shy away from secret parties, no matter how illegal. It's like a crazy tradition, one that goes back all the way to when Tellus was still an Imperial world. Back to when Marcus himself was in eighth grade.

...I'm guessing you didn't join the dots earlier, did you Frisk? Well, now you have your parallel's memories, it should start making sense now.

...wait, seriously? They're related?

It might not have been obvious to start with, but that's how things went. Marcus Graves, the Shadow Knight you encountered onboard the Wavecutter, is Julian's grandfather.

Wow. I- WOW. I'd never have guessed otherwise. But how did-

Genetic engineering, that's what happened. While Julian is most certainly a Graves, there's a lot of his basthari mother in him, due to the nature of his “conception”. His genetic code was precisely calculated, incorporating the better traits of his parents while ensuring that he didn't come out as a mutant blob of pain and suffering.

Granted, he's by no means “perfect”, but as far as hybrids go, he has it pretty good. At 14 years old, the worst “complication” he has is that his eyesight's deteriorated since he hit puberty, forcing him to wear glasses most of the time.

...and his mom didn't actually give birth to him. He was grown in a, what was it, a “vitrovum”? Those big glass tubes over in the Med/Sci Complex?

Pretty much. To make sure he came out right, he was grown in a strictly-regulated environment, so that if anything did seem to be going wrong, the science team could make the appropriate “course-corrections”.

Not to mention, this was a really big thing considering the war between Tellus and the basthari following Suzerain Seth Willow, back in 2100. Julian's creation was not only an expression of love and devotion on the part of his parents, but also a symbol of cooperation between the two civilizations, an icon of peace after war. In a way Julian was, and still is, the future of humans and basthari.

...yeesh. No pressure then, huh?
...uh, Wozz is brandishing a lightning cannon at me. Help?

Oh fucking hell, not this again. He probably thinks you've been possessed by one of the entities currently haunting the compound, after taking a long hard look at your eyes, flickering with my perseverance.

Alright, I'm going to shut up now. You're going to have to talk your way out of this. There's nothing I could say that wouldn't get us zapped.

What?! NO! I can't- Observer?

Observer. Seriously this isn't cool.

Hey. HEY. Fucking HELP.

...god fucking dammit.

**Frisk:** “Wozz, I know this looks bad, but I can explain-”

**Wozz:** “Step away from her.”

“STEP AWAY ASSHOLE!”

**Frisk:** “Okay! Okay... I'm stepping away from her. I'm not gonna touch her, dude.”

“...let's... Let's just talk about this, okay?”

**Wozz:** “I don't know what you are, or what corner of Hell you crawled out of, but I'm only gonna ask this once. GET. OUT. OF. MY. LITTLE. BUDDY.”

“We can do this the easy way, or the hard way. So why don't we save ourselves some trouble? Ya let go of him, get outta this house, crawl back into the Abyss, an' we can let this all slide.”

**Frisk:** “C'mon Wozz, it's ME. Frisk. You're not gonna shoot your little buddy, are ya?”

AGHFSJFGHHHHH- He SHOT me!

**Frisk:** “What the FUCK, Wozz?!”

**Wozz:** “That was setting one, demon. Now, are ya gonna make me show ya setting two?”

**Frisk:** “IT'S ME. FRISK. The fuck can I say-”

“...y'know, Julian says that he doesn't eat beef, because he's friends with you and it'd be all kinds of weird. But there have been times when I saw him looking at you with hungry eyes.”

“Something tells me he secretly wants “the beef”. He wants a piece of that T-bone, Wozz. YOUR T-bone.”

“And who could blame him? Who WOULDN'T want a piece of that?”

Ugh, I hope this works. Thought I'd never have to resort to THAT again...
Wozz: “...gods, dude, I'm so sorry! I seriously thought you were-”

Frisk: “C'mon Wozz, you know I'm stronger than that. I was just practising SOUL Modes, that's all.”

Wozz: “SOUL Modes? Seriously? Frisk, I'm actually impressed.”

“But that crap's WAY above your level, little dude! Yeah, it comes naturally to elementals, but for us mortals? I could barely scratch the surface this year, SOPHMORE YEAR.”

“Seriously, how's an eighth-grader gonna handle THAT kinda magic?”

U fuckin wot mate?

Frisk: “How's that explain Julian then, huh? Who's to say HE'S the only eighth-grader who can pull off a blue attack?”

“Oh wait, I'm sorry, not an eighth-grader. A FREAKING FOURTH-GRADER. He was playin' with blue attacks when he was still in elementary classes! So who the hell's to say that an eighth-grader like me can't figure out how SOUL Modes work?!”

...yikes. Smells like THIS little Frisky's got roast beef.

...oh, uh, let's seal the deal here.

[Soul Mode Activated: Perseverance]

Wait isn't that- Uh oh.

Relax, it'll be fine. Now maintain that expression of smouldering indignation. Make him think that your emotions are stoking the flames of your magic. Prove that he was wrong to doubt you!

...I think I can play the part.

Lines of magenta energy form in front of you, each one perfectly parallel to one-another like the wooden planks of the bedroom floor. You look up from them, into the surprised and concerned eyes of Ross Wozniak, and glare narrowly at him, smouldering with indignation and the hormones of a teenage boy.

Caring as he can be, he always thought that you were too big for your wee human brîches. But look at you now.

Wozz: “WHOA whoa whoa, EEEEEEASY little dude! Just calm down, okay?”

Frisk: “So yeah! What was that about eighth-graders being unable to handle SOUL Modes? Huh Wozz?!”

“Gods, you're always looking down on me aren't you?”

Wozz: “Hey TAKE IT EASY PAL, let's keep size differences outta this.”

A sensitive subject for him, it seems. ...maybe you should ease off now. You've made your point-

Frisk: “Size doesn't factor into it, Wozz. Sure, I'm “only human”, but that doesn't mean I can't throw
down like everybody else.”

“But oh, everybody thinks I'm just a weenie, an adopted prince coddled an' kept, when they DON'T KNOW ME. They don't know what I've BEEN through!”

...holy shit. This kid... What the hell has he BEEN through?

**Where to start?**

The beginning usually works. ...man. He was an orphan, just like I was.

**Sort of. I think you know the differences between you and Little Mister D'Souza here.**

**Wozz:** “…dude, I know your pain. I know how rough it is to grow up without parents.”

**Frisk:** “Well, that's easy for you to say. I never friggin' KNEW my parents, Wozz. They couldn't even be assed to care about me.”

“But I do know that they left me in some goddamn dumpster next to a RepliMart. And I probably woulda died there, were it not for the pastor. ...for as lousy as he was, Pastor Diaz was the closest thing I had to a dad back then.”

**Good, you're calming down. Now, the two of you can talk like reasonable people.**

**Wozz:** “…I'm guessin' this was back in Val Verde, huh? Before you came here to Appalachia?”

**Frisk:** “Puerto Souza. That's where I got my last name, after all. The Port on the Rocks.”

How does Wozz not- Did Frisk never tell him about this?

**Wellll they didn’t really know each-other very well before Frisk met Julian. And even then, Frisk and Wozz were merely friends through a mutual friend.**

Well, I guess now's as good a time as any to tell him about it.

**Frisk:** “Thing is, the Pastor didn't exactly take great care of me. Sure, I mighta been a handful at that age, but that's no excuse for what he did.”

“Nobody sends their kid to bed without dinner. Nobody smacks their kid about because they messed up. Nobody locks their kid in the basement until they calm down! NOBODY DOES THAT!”

“But... turns out the Pastor didn't get the memo on how NOT to raise a kid. Though on the bright side, that all stopped when I turned 7. ...you ever read Layman's Terms, Wozz?”

**Wozz looks so very sorry for Frisk. He had no idea...**

**Wozz:** “…yeah? I- Dad loved those old crime novels.”

“...oh gods. You're- YOU'RE the kid from “The Case of the Feathered Serpent”, aren't you?”

**Frisk:** “Yup. So you know how the story goes. Patrick Layman cracks the cult wide open through their weakest link, the Feathered Serpent is forced to go through the proper channels, and little Francisco ends up in foster care.”
“Though of course, ol’ Paddy Layman managed to pull a coupla strings, since he knew that foster care in Val Verde, to put it lightly, sucked balls. Which is how, despite me not knowing much Albian, I ended up as a ward of the Appalachian State.”

“And the rest, like they say, is history. ...holy crap...”

Wozz hugs you tight, overwhelmed by the knowledge of Frisk's past.

What even WAS this kid's life?

You're one to talk, young lady. You've had a crazy childhood too, no doubting that.

Born in the city of fallen angels, driven eastward by Chinese invaders, separated from your mother due to her profession and forced to become a ward of the state, before falling into the Underground and- Well, like you said, the rest is history.

Though while he wasn't exactly the “protagonist” in this timeline, Francisco D'Souza still played an important role. While Julian became Asriel's best friend, Frisk became Asriel's brother. Whenever Julian wasn't around, Frisk was there to comfort and console Asriel as he came to terms with the horrors he experienced. He was the brother that Chara SHOULD have been. And in turn, Frisk started acclimatizing to a somewhat normal life in Appalachia.

I guess. Still, it's not exactly a normal childhood.

With worlds like these, “normal” is in the eye of the beholder. For some, normal is being adopted by Boss Monsters and bringing their murdered son back from the realms of the dead. For others, it is wandering the wastes and the wilds, fighting for survival day by day. And for me, normal is going to the gym three times a week, working evening shifts at a local tavern, and having a satisfying lunch at said tavern in the afternoons.

...DAMN I envy you, Observer. I kinda wish I had a life like that.

Well, you've got another four years before you can pursue such a career. Do you still have to be 21 to be allowed to drink over there?

Uh, yeah? Can't do it at all in New Deseret, but pretty much everywhere else you gotta be 21.

That always boggles my mind, no matter which America I observe.

And what, the drinking age is lower where you are?

18 in the UK. And it's even lower in the safety of one's home, though it's usually along the lines of a glass of wine with the Sunday roast.

Holy crap.

I know, right? Probably sounds like a breath of fresh air compared to what you've had to put up with. Though it's not like Temple Square's prohibition legislation stopped you either way.

...you saw that, didn't you?
I've seen a lot of stuff in your life, Frisca Rivera. The good, the bad and the ugly. Pacifist, Neutral and Genocide. Innocent and... well, not-so innocent.

And yes, I've seen you forking over greenbacks for bottles of bootleg whiskey. I guess Salt Lake rum-runners will sell to anyone, even teens.

...but I guess that's what passes for “normal” in your world. One man's weird is another man's rush hour on the M25.

...I think we've endured this bullhug for long enough. Man, you wouldn't think of Wozz as being such a sensitive guy.

Well he's not a full-on gentle giant, but he's still a good kid, loving and tender.

Yeah, well, his tenderness is crushing me. Besides, we need to continue our mission, and find-

...wait, who ARE we tracking down this time?

Are you serious. Did you not see the colour of-

Aaaeeeeeyyy, I'm just kidding!

Bloody hell. One of these days, Frisk...

...so, what colour was the save file?

...I actually don't remember. FUCK.

Jesus Christ, Denton- ...nope. Wrong game.

Jesus Christ, Rivera. I swear, sometimes I wonder.

...so yeah. Who ARE we tracking down?

Justice. Your mildly-acquainted Gunslinger, Marcus Bell.

So soon? Neat! I know what his deal is, so it shouldn't be too hard to convince him.

That's the easy part. And even if he's reluctant, I have an ace up my sleeve...

...that you're not going to tell me about until we meet him.

It shouldn't be too hard to figure out, but if you're still in the dark about it, that's ok. You might just get a pleasant surprise.

I'm not sure whether that's enigmatic or just plain creepy.

Let's call it both and get out of here. During this particular hour of the night, the boys should be having a little stakeout near the Trinity Ranch Necropolis, out in the western woods. After all, they know what went down there. Or more accurately, what's GOING to go down there.
Frisk: “Alright Wozz, it's ok. I forgive you. But I can't stay here long.”

“Asriel's out there with Julian, and I gotta go find them. Something bad’s about to go down, and they're gonna need my help.”

Wozz: “...dude. You really think I'm gonna just let you walk out the front door?”

“I don't know if you've looked outside recently, but the DEAD are WALKING the EARTH right now! There's no way in Hell you're going out there if I've got anything to say about it.”

He's got a point, I'll admit. Frisk D'Souza isn't much of a fighter, he wouldn't last five minutes against the fiends of the underworld. But there's more than one way out of the Ranch.

Service tunnels. Got it.

Frisk: “It ain't your choice to make, tough guy. I know you want to keep me safe, but no matter what you do, I'm still gonna slip right through your fingers...”

[ACT] > *Frisca > *Patience

[Soul Mode Activated: Patience]

Like a ghost, you slip out of Wozz's embrace. He gawps as you- you phase right through the floor. Okay, this is happening.

Don't worry, it's all part of the plan.

His eyes never leave yours as you pass through the floor, before you floop down into the kitchen-space like a pancake falling off the ceiling. Right onto the table. Right in front of Monster Kid, who's sitting at the table with a threehorn steak.

Monster Kid: “...uhhhh, dude? The heck are you doing?”

I'd feel the same way if a friend of mine phased through the ceiling.

I pat MK on the head and sweep past him towards the basement. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't stop me.

The old trap-door proves to be no obstacle to you, nor does the old bookshelf obscuring the entrance to the old service tunnels. You remember the times when you, Asriel and Julian would use these tunnels to move secretly throughout the estate. It feels like it was just yesterday that the three of you snuck out of the mansion to hang out with Wozz in the Trinity Ranch Projects.

Actually, it was this morning. Funnily enough, the shit hit the fan just after sundown, while we were sitting down to dinner. Gods... it was horrible...

We made our way downstairs, trying to get to the panic room, but-

The tunnel collapsed, splitting the group up. Asriel and Julian on the west side, the others on the east side, and Frisk, who fled down the southern corridor as the intersection fell.
And now here you are. Returning to those dreaded tunnels. Dangerous as they may be, however, they're still pretty safe in comparison to the estate topside.

I really hope the others are ok. After all, the panic room was on the west side...

They'll be fine, so long as old Marcus Graves stays on his toes. Which shouldn't be a problem, since even at the ripe old age of 91, he's still amazingly spry. Almost supernaturally so. Not to mention, like all Graves he possesses a wightblade, so he'll never be caught unarmed.

And if what Julian told me was true, it's because his grandpa's grandpa spared the life of a young deity, or something like that?

Indeed it was. The grandfather of Marcus Graves, a jotunn paladin by the name of Ymil Greiði Aleksandersson took pity on an unearthly child on Ganymede. This act of mercy earned him the favour of Volundr, one of the few remaining old gods in the Solar System.

For sparing the life of the smith-god's son, Volundr blessed Ymil's soul with the power to manifest a wightblade at will, shaping an extension of one's own soul into a blade of hard light. A power that, due to the liberal nature of the old gods, would be passed down to Ymil's descendants.

That's... awfully generous.

Considering that paladins of the Carpenter are obligated to snuff out anything pertaining to the old gods, and that there were very few of them left in the solar system, it was very big of Ymil to show mercy to his enemy. And a very risky gamble, considering what would have happened if anyone found out what he did. But in the end, showing mercy secured otherworldly power for him and all who came after him, from his firstborn son Morpheus, to his great-great-grandson Julian.

...old man Marcus never mentioned that part in his stories. He usually just told us about his adventures during the Liberation of Sol.

Somehow I doubt he would have. After all, Ymil kept his dealings with Volundr a secret to everyone, even on his deathbed. And jotnar live a fair stretch longer than humans, I'll tell you hwat. Ymil never lived to see Julian come into the world, but he still had a hell of a good run. Even gained a few new scars during the war of 2100, while most men his age would've stayed in retirement. If they were still alive at that point. After all, 141 is a ripe old age, even by jotnar standards-

...something catches on your trouser leg, causing you to faceplant. Still, there are things that've hurt a lot more than this.

Still hurts though. Never forget that.

Picking yourself up off the floor, you see what tripped you up. Or, more accurately, who.

...oh dear. At some point, this was a nekonna security intern, but it looks like she met with a terrible fate. If I had to hazard a guess, she was torn apart by ravening ghouls.

Oh GOD that's- Ohhh I don't feel so good...
Steel your guts, Frisca. You'll see a lot worse than this, I can assure you.

...well? What are you waiting for?

...are you suggesting that I-

Go through her clothes an' look for loose change? Sort of. She might've had some equipment on her that you could use, like a spare heat sink or a roll of bandages.

In times like these, you can't have qualms over graverobbing and expect to survive for long. Besides, don't you even PRETEND like you're not above taking stuff from the dead. I know all about that incident with Mary-Ann's ancient scarf.

...I rummage through the body of the basthari, or what's left of it.

The nekonna aren't actually related to the basthari, Frisk. It's an easy mistake for you to make, but basthari and nekonna are two completely different species of sapient feline.

Besides, you know what a basthari looks like. They look a lot more feline than nekonna, and have that distinctive stinger at the end of their tail. Whereas nekonna are more in line with “Mew Mew Kissy Cutie”, a lot more human-looking in comparison.

And apparently they were made by some mad scientist stranded on a far-away planet.

Yup. The only survivor of an ill-fated Japanese expedition to Yukidama many centuries ago, in search for a Tree of Life. Well, she found it alright, and with no way home and nothing better to do, she used the Tree of Life to create a new sentient species. And now, that same species has spread across half the galaxy.

...and the universe just keeps on getting weirder and weirder.

Alright, I think I found something. It's, uh... I think it's a phaser?

Close, but no cigar. It's a thermal beam, a tunable laser weapon of sorts that can spit out electromagnetic radiation at different frequencies and levels of intensity.

...sooo it's like a phaser, but not actually.

No nadions here Frisk, just good old-fashioned microwaves, infrared and terahertz frequencies. If anything, the Civil Security models have more in common with the Active Denial System on a good day, and the Martian heat ray on a bad day.

Ohhh wait we actually have things like these back home!

Really? In New Deseret?

Yeah, the state guard has a stockpile of old handheld riot rays from the 2030s! They make you feel like your skin's on fire, but it doesn't actually burn you.

Yup, that sounds a lot like the Active Denial System. Except a lot smaller, by the sounds of it. In my era, they were still mounted on trucks and looked like oversized satellite dishes.
That's so freaking retro.

I don't know how to feel about that, hearing the 2010s referred to as “retro”. When I think of retro, I don't think of smartphones, commercial drones, lithium-ion batteries or driverless cars. To think that the cutting-edge technology of my era was almost half a century old by the time you were born...

...regardless, that CivSec thermal beam should give you an edge against whatever horrors you face out there. Though probably keep it on the lowest setting for now, just in case you bump into the boys.

**Frisk:** “...well Kira, it's been fun. I'll put this to good use.”

Wait a second. Did you say she was Kira?

Uh... yeah? Kira Nakamoto, that's what it says on her I.D badge.

*Oh shit. Ohhhhh shit. Whatever you do, don't tell Asriel about this. It will not end well.*

She was his friend, wasn't she?

*She was more than that, Frisk. While many of the nekonna students at Arkham High fawned over him, Kira was the only one he allowed to get close to him. Or more accurately, she was the only girl in “the scene“ who could withstand such high concentration of puns when trying to get close to him.*

*...bugger it! BUGGER IT ALL! She had a FUTURE ahead of her! She could have BEEN someone, had a hand in this world's destiny! But of course, fate dictated that she be a redshirt, a reminder of our own fragile mortality and a catalyst for the heartbreak of a boy who's suffered too damn much already. ...ffffFUUUCK.*

*I know this goes without saying, but that REALLY sucks. Though yeah, it's best that we don't tell Asriel about it. He's probably unsettled enough as it is out there, without knowing that his sort-of girlfriend got killed down in the tunnels.*

*...quite so. And speaking of which, we should pick up the pace. And keep your ears open for any meeping.*

Uh, meeping?

**Meeping. If you hear meeping, that means there are ghouls on the hunt. In case that happens, set the beam to intensity 4, frequency 3.2mm, wide spread. That'll drive them off if they're on your tail if shit hits the fan.**

*I would suggest the “Archimedes Death Ray” configuration, but something tells me you wouldn't even zorch a horsefly if it bit you on the arse.*

Yuuuuup. Not gonna kill anyone, not even if it kills me.

**Well, you SAY that but-**

But WHAT?
Do not forget that you don't have the luxury of casual resets in this world. If you get killed, and your determination drags you back to the save point, you'll come back to a different universe entirely, and you'll never be able to reach THAT Gunslinger again.

Not to mention, the Gunslinger of that new reality might remain linked to your parallel, which would open up a whole new can of worms...

So perhaps, in this instance, killing WOULD be something to consider. Just a thought, that's all. No pressure.

Yeah bullshit, “no pressure”. That's easy for you to say, Sir Drinksalot.

You continue forward, sad that you can't give Kira a proper burial. But rest assured, once this is all over she'll have a spot to call her own in the Necropolis.

Shit. Do you hear that?

Of course I did. That wasn't just the wind, Frisk. Unless I'm mistaken, that's the sound of something with no legs, wielding a pair of hedge clippers, skittering out of the utility cupboard you just passed. PEG IT.

Fuck that, seriously FUCK THAT!

You throw caution to the wind, not wanting to lose your legs, and book it westward through the dank tunnels. After several minutes, the sounds of the Teke-Teke fade into the distance as it gives up and goes back into the cupboard. Surprising no-one, running away appears to be the best way to defeat something with no legs.

The fuck is Teke-Teke doing in Appalachia?! She's a JAPANESE cryptid!

If I had to hazard a guess... Topiary student got cut in half by a tube train? Eastern Rail DOES cover most of the Laurentian East Coast, after all. Wouldn't surprise me if some girl died on the tracks decades ago, and now Hell's broken loose she's back for revenge.

Revenge against what though? She can't cut a train in half!

Good luck telling that to an onryo. They're usually consumed by a hatred for all living things, lashing out and spreading suffering so they don't feel so bad about what happened to them. All that matters to them is that the cruel world feels their wrath, whatever it takes.

All of which is totally pointless. Hurting others won't undo what was done to them.

But they'll probably do it either way. It's actually kind of tragic, in a way.

Doesn't make it any less bullshit, though.

The stuffiness of the tunnels gives way to a cooler, earthier wind as you progress. Turning south, you come across an old wooden door that appears to have been torn off of its hinges, revealing an
old crypt beyond. Yet another remnant of the old Trinity Ranch Parish.

If I remember right- well, you know what I mean. Anyway, I'm pretty sure we're beneath the Old Cathedral. So far, it looks like it's seen better days.

Looks like the crypt's been re-purposed as a storeroom. In my experience, churches usually have a bunch of old storerooms like this. Stacks of old plastic chairs, dusty white sheets covering old, old things, that sort of stuff.

Same here. Usually it's just stuff used for community events an' after-school activities. Churches back home kinda double as community centres.

Makes sense. The same applies to the churches I've seen in the neighbourhoods surrounding mine. Though I'll admit I can't remember the last time I personally set foot inside a church. It was probably for some sort of summer activity club or village fair, back when I was still a teenager.

I'm guessing you're not much of a church-goer either?

Nope. I'm not a believer in anything specific, though I'll admit I'm more of an agnostic than a straight-up atheist. I'd LIKE to believe that there are higher powers in my universe, or that there actually IS something waiting for us after death, but so far we have found no real proof of that being the case. While your worlds have deeper dimensions and beings of higher power, most of what my people believed to be “paranormal” are merely mundane phenomena made mystical by our inherent knack for pattern-recognition, or dismissed as a trick of the mind inventing things to explain certain stimuli.

To the best of our knowledge, there is nothing after death, no existential insurance policies to allow our minds to continue after our bodies have failed us. And that frightens me far more than the notion of being tortured for all eternity. Being stuck in Hell would be a dreadful experience, I have no doubts about that, but it would still be preferable compared to the true horror of non-existence.

And while faith may offer some small comfort, to me it constitutes nothing more than flimsy white lies to pacify those who don’t know the dreadful truths that are so very apparent. I'd rather go snarling and growling into the Void, my final moments filled with unbridled hatred for what caused my annihilation, than feel swindled and betrayed in those final moments.

...holy crap. That's... I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to dig up-

Never mind that. In times like these, I remember the words of Voltaire: If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him. Though in regards to that quote, I replace “God” for keystones in humanity's development. Agriculture, medicine, architecture, industrial power, the first big stick to turn the winning trick. All throughout history there have been things we have lacked, things we have needed, and time after time we have managed to fill the voids that, once upon a time, we never even knew existed in our lives.

But the largest and oldest of those voids has yet to be filled. We are so close, and yet still so far away. If there is truly nothing after death, it would be necessary for us to ensure that there will at least be something waiting for us. I just hope I live long enough to experience life after death.

...I... Wow. Uh, man. Yeah, uh, you do you Observer. You do you.
...looks like I've found the crypt exit.

*Ascending those winding stairs, you find yourself amidst the crumbling ruins of the old Trinity Ranch Cathedral. For over 50 years, this monument to the Carpenter has been abandoned, left to rot by the former servants of the estate. But for the youths that live nearby, the crumbled remnants of the cathedral serve as a precarious playground, and a reminder of what their ancestors went through.*

*Julian and his entourage sometimes hang out here during the summer, treating it as a secret hideout of sorts. And whenever his cousin Ingrid came to visit, she’d usually set up old bottles around the chancel for target practice.*

Oh god, I forgot about Ingrid! ...not sure if I should worry too hard, though. She's a trooper, after all. Quite literally, in fact.

*She certainly excelled during her military service, despite the pressures she faced during the Eye Of Cronus mission. Though with squadmates like Kaleb Willow and Undyne, she was in good hands.*

I heard she was more than just “in good hands”, if the rumours about her and Kaleb are true. ...but they're just rumours, right?

*They actually aren't. Ingrid and Kaleb did actually get “involved” during the mission on Jupiter. And while there are a few qualms to be had with it, I don't know if I could blame them, even if it could be thought of as “irresponsible” that they—*

“Irresponsible”? He was her commanding officer! I'd call that more than “irresponsible” if you ask me.

*Perhaps. But they were both happy about it, both reasonable adults who knew what they wanted. Though it's still unbecoming of an officer to—*

*An all-too familiar buzzing catches your attention as you pass an old pillar, and as you turn you find yourself staring down a coiling blade of energy. Where once upon a time it shone with the red glare of determination, it now seems to cast shadows in all directions, darker than a moonless country night. It reflects all too well the soul of its owner, for a wight-blade is but an extension of one's own soul.*

And yet I've never been happier to see it. I feel so relaxed, knowing that he's still around.

*The blade lowers and dissipates, its owner lowering his guard and recognizing your striped shirt. His eyes reflect the otherworldly skies glowing through the non-existent roof, transfixed by your unexpected arrival. Regardless, he's still glad to see an old friend considering the circumstances, and lays a hand upon your shoulder.*

*Julian:* “...you have no idea how glad I am to see you, amigo.”
Oh, FINALLY he makes it to that blonde bishi catboy. Aaaand of course he blue-balls us by leaving his face-to-face introduction right at the end of the entry. TARNATION!

With how obsessed the Observer is with Feldstein Prime, you'd have thunk that he'd have made that the first stop on this journey. But noooooope. Looks like our friendly neighbourhood butterball decided to save the "best" for last. But it isn't even the last stop on the journey! He's still gotta pay a visit to Black Neon, and there's also that FromSoftware mashup universe he's gotta take a look at! And Chara's still tearing up Cairn like a chopped hog made of hyperdeath!

I swear, this blubbery Brit needs to sort out his priorities. But I've still got a ways to go with my plan, so he'll have to wait. Don't go spoiling the surprise, guys!

-the Cardinal XO
Chapter Summary

Frisk and her scholarly companion finally meet up with the boys. Moments are shared, tensions run high, and GOOD GOD this took longer than I expected.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Whoa... His picture didn't do him justice, Observer.

**Frisk:** "I- I thought you guys could use a hand."

**Julian:** "Wait, where'd you get a thermal beam from?"

Uh oh. Observer, uh, a little help?

...goddamnit, fine. I'll improvise.

**Frisk:** "I found it on the body of a security guard. ...or what was left of them, I guess."

**Julian:** "...ghouls?"

**Frisk:** "Ghouls. By the looks of it, the poor bastard didn't stand a chance."

**Julian:** "But why would they- They gotta be renegades, that's the only explanation..."

**Frisk:** "I hope so. Gods, I hope so."

**Julian:** "I'm not sure if we'll be able to talk 'em down, if they just tore that guy apart. I know you're not gonna like this, buddy, but we're probably gonna have to defend ourselves 'gainst **them** too."

"...so, uh... Have you fired one of those things before?"

**Frisk:** "Don't worry yourself, buddy! We BOTH know how to fire guns, they taught us that back in sixth grade."

**Julian:** "Yeah, but those were projectile weapons. Beam handling's totally different!"

"Sure, you don't gotta watch for recoil, but if you let a beam weapon overheat it could **blow up in your freaking hand.** And I ain't sure if Asriel could fix that up."

**Frisk:** "Oh crap, Asriel! Is he ok? Did he make it?"

...**you feel a firm but gentle paw grip your shoulder.**

GAHWHATTHE- Oh thank god, I was worr-

* A second paw rests upon your other shoulder, and you find yourself locking eyes with this world's
Asriel Dreemurr. His expression is hard to register, as if he's relieved but also frustrated at you.

**Asriel:** "Bro, what the heck are you doing here? You coulda gotten yourself k-"

You throw your arms around Asriel's chest, burying your face in his shoulder. After the tunnel collapse, you were so deathly afraid that you'd never see your elder brother again...

...despite the perils of the current situation, Asriel returns the embrace, holding you tight. Something inside of him breaks down, like he hasn't seen you for a very long time, and the two of you fall to your knees.

The universe, however, cares not for your tender moment of reunion, and the night is split by an unearthly, rasping inhalation near the old, rotting front doors of the cathedral. With terror in his eyes, Julian gestures for you and Asriel to hide.

What the hell have you gotten me into, Observer?!

Asriel takes your hand and guides you, quietly, into the shadows. Though the key here isn't to avoid being seen. For our pursuer cannot see. But they can hear all too well...

I try to steal a look at whatever is on our trail. ...is that- is that a skeleton?

In a manner of speaking, yes. Don’t expect to share pasta recipes with them, mind you. This is no mere ethereal, this is a bona-fide Type-II undead, formerly an aes insi farmhand if the skull shape is any indication. One of the innumerable servants executed by their masters during the raid on the compound, back in 2060.

...why? But WHY though?! Why would they DO that?!

Sometimes I ask myself the same question. Perhaps their aristocratic masters tried to use them as hostages, to dissuade the soldiers sent to secure the compound?

Maybe they were used as sacrifices to darker gods, prayed to by desperate men when the Carpenter's influence faded from this world?

...or perhaps it was purely out of spite and desperation? One last frumious act of defiance against their enemy, to spit bloody phlegm at the Federation's face?

The reasons for these tragic atrocities have been lost to history. But the end results, the tortured souls who met such tragic and unjust ends, are here for all to see.

The arisen dead here are a peculiar case, for they reflect the manner in which they were killed. Not only does this one carry a rifle akin to the ones that so unjustly took their life, but they are eternally blindfolded as they were in their final moments. And if you look closely, you can see the unlit cigarette between their teeth, which would have been their final smoke, had the firing squad not panicked when the first dropships arrived.

...if this is what the world was like back then, maybe it wasn't such a bad thing that it took so long to tear down the barrier. If this world's Asgore had managed to free his people while the Empire was
still in control...

*Not one of them would have stood a chance. Not even Asgore. ...let's leave it at that.*

...I silently ask Asriel what the hell we do now.

*He gestures for you to move towards the far end of the church, towards the double doors they entered through. With careful feet and steady pace, the two of you sneak your way through the shadows, past mouldering pews and entangled pillars, trying desperately not to make a sound.*

...aaaand of course Julian trips over a pothole in the old marble floor. So much for his cat-like reflexes.

[FIGHT] > *Narrow Zorch > *The Executed

...if you ARE going to fire that thing, at least let me give you a few pointers. Firstly-

There's no time for that!

[FIGHT] > *Narrow Zorch > *The Executed

*An intense buzzing, like a fluorescent lamp working overtime, accompanies a lancing beam of searing energies, lighting up the cathedral like a New England sunrise.*

...the beam doesn't actually hit the Executed, though it does graze the cigarette, lighting it in the process. ...that's actually pretty bloody clever.

They look... relaxed, almost? Wait, are you- Is this for REAL?

*The Executed takes a drag from the lit cigarette, and it's like heaven to them. The embers rise from the lit end and touch the cursed blindfold, causing it to shrivel as it burns away. Two embers drift into the Executed's eyesockets, turning a cerulean blue as they assume the role of eyes.*

*With the veil lifted from his eyes, finally tasting that final promised smoke, this humble serf is filled with... tranquillity.*

...did I just Spare this guy by accident? I- I wasn't even THINKING, I just-

*Colour me surprised.*

*No seriously, I'm actually impressed Frisk. Even in a fumbled, ill-thought-out attack to save your friend, you still managed to set this revenant up to be Spared.*

...unless Julian beats you to the punch. Instinctively he draws forth his wight-blade to defend himself, and the undead farmhand's eye-embers grow with unease.

*The Executed: “Shiiiiit. That damned blade, it- Of course, it would be YOU.”*

“You know what? I'm done. Screw this, screw you, screw the Inferno, screw the Rite of Tarnation, I wash my hands of this chicken-scratch!”

*And with that, the Executed slings the rifle over his scapula, and walks briskly out of the*
cathedral. He's waited too damn long for a smoke, and by the winnowing void he's going to finish this cigarette.

Frisk: “...what even just happened?”

*Julian stares at you with disbelief. His pupils are still razor-thin from the glare of the thermal beam, but he's focused on you as he walks over to you and Asriel.*

Asriel: “Bro... That... was AWESOME!”

Julian: “Shhh, dude keep it down. But seriously, holy shit Frisk.”

“Why didn't I think to light the friggin' smoke? All the other times we encountered that guy, and we never used fire.”

Frisk: “...you fought this guy before?”

Julian: “Yeah, we saw him in previous iterat-

*Julian stops himself before- Ack, he's got ME doing it now! ...anyway, Julian stops himself before he lets slip some juicy spoilers.*

Such as?

*Well I'm not going to tell you RIGHT now, am I? They're called spoilers for a reason.*

Julian: “...we ran into this guy earlier on, before we decided to investigate the Necropolis. Guy's a friggin' crack shot, busted up my leg when I made the wrong move.”

Asriel: “Nah that's bull- sorry Jules, that's horseapples and you know it.”

“He actually busted his leg when the tunnel collapsed, back on the first night. I was able to fix it up alright, but not before he decided to do a little “self-medication” if you know what I mean.”

*Asriel's eyes furrow slightly in Julian's direction. But while remarks like this usually followed an act of friendly mockery, Asriel looks more disappointed than playful. Julian does not respond well to this judgemental glance.*

Julian: “Aw not THIS crap again. It's perfectly fucking NATURAL, dude!”

“Besides, it was a fucking emergency. I never sting up unless it's absolutely necessary, you KNOW that.”

Asriel: “Jules... You know I've got your back whenever this stuff happens.”

“You don't NEED that crap when I'm around! You KNOW I've got the touch! I'll always be there to fix you when things take a bad turn!”

“...or am I not enough for you, anymore? Is that how things are?”

Am I missing something here? Did Julian seriously poison himself with his own- ...no. Not “poison”.
Basthari “venom” isn't poisonous unless it's from the Scorpio breed.

*That's the weird thing about the mammal-analogues of Arokeb. They may have “venomous” barbs or quills, or have a sting in their tail, but they don’t produce the toxins one would expect from a venomous animal in Earth's ecosystem. The substances they DO produce, however, have sedative and/or narcotic effects on most lifeforms.*

Numbing pain, releasing endorphins, inducing lethargy, these are key traits of basthari ichor in particular. And being that Julian is half-basthari, well...

Are you seriously telling me that he's been shooting up on his own ichor?

...you can't be serious. This has got to be a joke, right?

*It's all too true, Frisk. Though he's not an addict, to the best of my knowledge. And believe me, I've been keeping an eagle eye on young Julian here, so if something was up I would know about it.*

Granted, “stinging up” can turn into a problematic habit, what with it being a traditional part of basthari culture, but given the circumstances Julian's proven to show astonishing restraint, at least compared to certain other basthari his age. Like he said, he doesn't sting up at the first sign of trouble, and I've never seen him sting up out of boredom either.

But if Asriel's telling the truth, he DID sting up back in the tunnels. That doesn't seem-

*Let's DROP the moral posturing, young lady. He was in fucking AGONY. His leg had been crushed by falling debris, and it took a great deal of Asriel’s healing magic to fix it up. If you could experience even a small taster of the pain he went through back in the tunnel, you wouldn't blame him for a second.*

When he stung up, he was well within his right to do so. If you were in as much pain as he was, and you had the ability to take the pain away, I have a bloody good feeling that you would seize that opportunity.

And don't you pretend for a fucking moment that you didn’t do stuff like that when you were younger. Sure, you never got your hands on anything “hard”, but I've seen proof that you're not exactly Mormon levels of “pure” either.

*How much proof, you ask? EIGHTY-SIX. Eighty-six proof bootleg whiskey, hidden in your room, cracked open on those lazy weekends that seemed to drag on forever-*

OK! Fine! You've convinced me he was doing the right thing! Now for the love of god, get down from that soapbox of yours!

...

...alright, I'm sorry. Ok? Yeah, Asriel and I did our fair share of illicit drinking. Not exactly straight-laced behaviour, I know. But we at least made an effort to be responsible about it, setting our own little limits so we wouldn't get caught.

...
...and I guess Julian's been responsible with what he was born with. He doesn't deserve the shit he gets for it.

_Damn straight young lady. And now we've set the record straight with you, I suggest you put Goatbro in his place. He's being a judgemental little bitch at the moment, and I hate to see him like that._

**Frisk:** “...bro, this is not cool.”

**Asriel:** “See? Who needs ichor when you've got friends like-”

“Bro, what're you looking at me for-”

**Frisk:** “He's not a frickin' ichorfiend, bro. Why are you treating him like he is?”

_Asriel looks perturbed by your out-of-the-blue defence. He didn't expect you to defend Julian's little “problem”. _

**Asriel:** “I- I don't want him to end up like-”

**Frisk:** “But he WON'T though. It's like he said: he doesn't just sting up at the drop of a frickin' hat. If he ends up taking his own ichor, he has a DAMN. GOOD. REASON TO.”

“You SAW the state his leg was in! You SAW how much PAIN he was in! And you JUDGE him for taking the pain away?! That's not cool, bro.”

**Asriel:** “But- But I was there to take it away. I'm great with healing magic, I would've taken the pain away even without-”

“Dangit, I needed him focused! He'd knocked himself out cold with that stuff, I had to drag him all the way to the panic room after I'd fixed his leg!”

“What- What if something had attacked us while he was out cold?! I'm- I'm NOT a fighter, Frisk! I could have DIED AGAIN!”

_The memories of his time in the Inferno lap at the edge of Asriel's awareness, the creeping dread engorging his sense of unease. No-one can ever be the same after being in a place like that._

Not a fighter... ...yeah, I don't buy that for a second.

**Frisk:** “Not a fighter, huh? Ohhh yeah those Chaos Sabers of yours **really** tell the world that you can't defend yourself, Asriel. And your affinity for fire magic? Oh that just **screams** “I couldn't hurt a fly even if I wanted to”, doesn't it?”

**Asriel:** “You KNOW what I mean, Frisk. I don't need to use those things to solve problems. And even if they're handy for more “practical” problems, I shouldn't have to rely on them! I'm BETTER than that!”

JEEZ LOUISE, who put a stick up HIS ass?

**Frisk:** “Well I'm sorry, but that isn't a luxury you can afford right now. You're a strong, smart, capable guy, Asriel. With your talents, you could at the very least 1v1 whatever comes your way.”

“Any more than that'd pose a challenge, maybe, but it bears repeating that you can summon MAGIC
SWORDS! You're amazing with fire magic AND healing magic! Even with your best friend out of action, you'd be FINE!"

“Trying to play the helpless high-schooler, when you're THIS capable, that's something I just don't understand. Save that little bit of role-playing for AFTER we've saved the day.”

**Asriel:** “...what is UP with you, dude?”

**Frisk:** “Don't you go trying to change the subject on me, bro. I love you, but I'm getting REAL tired of your shit right now.”

**Asriel:** “I-I'm serious! I've never seen you act like this before, not even when Ortolan discontinued those butterchip cookies you love!”

“Are you- do you need someone to take you back to the panic room?”

I clasp Asriel's muzzle shut. I hate to do this, but he leaves me no choice.

**Frisk:** “I said. Don't. Change. The. Subject.”

“Here's how it's gonna go down. You're gonna quit judging Julian, and you're gonna stop pretending that you're a helpless, innocent little flower. Because you're not.”

“I KNOW you're not a little bitch, not just some defenceless little kid. You're a strong, powerful boy. And holding back like this is unacceptable.”

“I'm not saying that you should rip and tear until there's nothing left to burn. I'm not gonna say that it's “kill or be killed” from here on out. But don't rely on Julian to do all the fighting for you. It's high frickin' time you started getting your hands dirty.”

_Oof! I FELT that! With a disgusted look in his eye, Asriel slaps you around the face. As your hand falls from his muzzle to nurse your stinging, thorn-raked cheek, you hear an all too familiar voice rising from his throat. A scratchy voice, like something that had lain dormant for years beyond remembrance, chills you to your core._

???: “You IDIOT. You don't know a damn thing, do you?”

Asriel's gentle eyes have replaced themselves with the unmistakable dark eyes of his host body, while familiar dark markings emerge from his soft, white fur. It's your best friend. Flowey the Flower. And he's a little pissed off at your accusations.

**Flowey:** “Maybe Asriel was being a precious little princess when this all started, but ever since then we HAVE been getting our paws dirty. We've been through the same damn encounters, time and time again, trying every method we could think of.”

“Sometimes we cut 'em down like WEEDS. Sometimes we burned 'em to a crisp. And sometimes... sometimes we just whacked some sense into 'em. Knock 'em in the head, slap 'em on the ass, send 'em to their ROOMS.”

“But I'll be honest. It's getting to the point where we've just starting running away from them. They're not “fun” anymore. They're not “scary” anymore. They're just there, they're in our way, and after all the times we've tangled with them, they're just ANNOYING.”
“...eh, why do I bother? It's not like you of all people would understand, anyway...”

He thinks I don't know what's happening. But I do. I'm kinda confused about a few things, but I think I know what's going on here.

**Frisk:** “...you guys have been resetting again, haven't you?”

*For the briefest of moments, Flowey appears surprised. And Julian, well... The expression on his face can only be described as “guilty”.*

**Flowey:** “...I'm impressed that you even know what those are. Or are you just parroting what ol' Dunkle Lazybones told you?”

...turns out it's not just Wozz who's been doubting Frisk. Frisk was always the quiet one in this reality, giving off the air of an underachiever. But even before you took control, he had a lot beneath the surface. He just didn't have the right outlets.

I think it's time I blew the lid on this thing.

**I don't think you should. Just hold off until we get to the-**

**Frisk:** “Oh I know damn well what they are. When someone's determined enough, they can wind back time, all the way back to their save point. So if they make a bum decision, they can go back and make the right choice. Or miss the point entirely and make a choice that's somehow even MORE wrong than the one before.”

“It's crazy, when you think about it. The same force that brought you back into this world can warp the very fabric of time and space itself...”

**I don't think you've seen that particular expression on Flowey's face before. The frustration and surprise fades away, giving way to... If I had to hazard a guess, it melds curiosity with worry.**

**Flowey:** “You're... you're not actually Frisk, are you?”

I think he's figured it out- OHkay, this is happening!

**Julian grabs you from behind, pinning your arms to your sides with hybrid strength. My oh my, what a miraculous outcome! Who'd have thought that blowing your cover would have elicited such a reaction?**

**Flowey:** “I though he was, y'know, “trying things” with those eyes? But looks like we've got ourselves a spy, Julian!”

**Julian:** “You've taken over the WRONG BOY, daemon.”

**Frisk:** “If you're gonna try to wring info outta me, don't bother trying. Just let go of me, an' I'll tell you everything.”

You know, if he could just remove that damn stinger of his, I might be able to think straight right now.

**Yeah... That's not his stinger.**
NOPE NOPE NOPE ABANDON SHIP

Frisk: “JEEEEZUS CHRIST!”

Flowey: “What-”

Frisk: “THAT'S NOT HIS STINGER AT ALL!”

Flowey: “-the hell is WRONG with you, Julian?!”

Shocked and embarrassed, Julian immediately lets go of you. Teenage hormones, if I had to hazard a guess. Or perhaps that's just his hybrid vigour talking. Maybe both?

Frisk: “FUCKING HELL, Julian! Augh!”

But mere seconds after Julian let you go, Flowey's vines proceed to wrap around you, binding you to the cold flagstones of the cathedral floor. You're not off the hook that easily.


“...so, anyway. You've got something to tell us, daemon?”

“Are we ‘doomed to fail’? Did you come all the way here, taking control of my sweet little brother, just to talk about how much fun the daemons are gonna have when they drag us into the Abyss?”

“If that's what you're hear to say, you just go ahead and save your breath. Because we've heard it all before from way nastier things than YOU, you son of a bitch.”

“Besides, you'll need that breath to scream, before I'm finished with you...”

This... this is NOT COOL. Goddamnit Flowey.

Frisk: “...even with a heart, I guess some things never change. Still got that mean streak, after all these years...”

“But you oughta know that, just like Wozz, you've got it ALL WRONG. Sure, Frisk may be “possessed” right now, but he's not been taken over by a daemon.”

“After all, there's more than one Frisk out there...”

Julian's ears twitch, as he recognizes something oddly familiar. Gone is the muted Latin accent of his friend, supplanted by a more... Laramidian style of speaking. There is a peculiar, almost feminine twang to it, but it feels so familiar...

He recalls the time when Sans unveiled the “Golden Mirror”, a machine capable of peering through the veils of reality. Among the many worlds observed during the demonstration, one stood out in particular. It showed a long-haired girl in a labcoat, who looked oddly similar to Francisco, working on... something... It's genuinely hard to make it out through the red haze of... Seriously what AM I looking at here?

Regardless, here's the real kicker, the bit that Julian remembers the most. A dark, bird-like monster descends the stairs and calls out to the girl, addressing her as Frisk.
Julian: “...noooo freakin' way. I KNOW that voice, man, I think it's-”

Flowey: “It's just trying to bullshit you Jules. We can't take any chances here!”

???: *ahem* “Allow ME to be the judge of that...”

A gravelly voice, carrying an odd wetness to it, breaks the tension of the moment. And as the pattering of corpulent, dessicated paws draws closer, so too does a heavy aroma of strong lavender, attempting to mask the inexorable scent of ancient rot.

Oh great. Another undead come to try and drag us to Hell.

Not quite. This is no lackey of the Inferno, Frisk. He is... Well I never, he's a ghoul! And judging by the purple robes and silver skull mask he wears, he's a priest of Mordiggian, hailing from the deep dank city of Midian.

Luckily for us, the ghouls of Midian don't typically eat people or dig up graves. In this day and age, they usually just sleep late and order out for kebabs, occasionally walking the earth when they're up for a bit of rambling.

That's... kinda reassuring, I guess? But what's it- sorry, what's he doing in this place?

Ghouls have a penchant for hanging out in graveyards, and Midianites are no exception. But in Brother Ilem's case, he was sent to meet with Marcus Graves, to renew an old business agreement. Though that has been put to the side, due in no small part to the Inferno making its move upon the compound.

It isn't anything you need to know in order to proceed, though. But it's still good to be in the know, right?

I... I guess it is.

Brother Ilem: “There is... something different about this one. I can sense the pscent of the Inferno around them, yet...”

“Withdraw your vines from them, child. I cannot be sure whether the pscent is from them, or from you...”

Flowey looks as if he is about to protest, but reluctantly complies as the ghoul locks eyes with him. The vines withdraw, but before you can get to your feet, a leathery, seemingly bloated paw takes a firm hold of your shoulder, keeping you close to the ground.

Ugh, I don't know which is worse; the rot on his breath or that damn lavender cologne!

Brother Ilem: “Let us judge your true “psmelf”.”

A raspy titter leaves the ghoul's mouth as he relishes its own ghoulish pun, before proceeding to take stock of Frisk's ethereal energies. Through his “second smell”, he finds that Francisco's soul is as red and determined as ever, untouched by pneumatic possession.
Honestly I could have told them that. Besides, you’d need to have magic crystal in you in order to be-wait.

A fair point indeed. But our form of possession is a lot different from the methods employed by daemons. We don’t NEED such a “material” anchor as magic crystal provides. All we need is neurological familiarity, parallels to be drawn between minds and bodies.

**Brother Ilem:** “How very interesting...”

“Indeed, the essence of the Inferno is NOT with this one. But there is... something else, here...”

Yup. Just me.

*The emissary further scrutinizes the essences that have crept into Frisk's soul, blissfully unaware of my-

**Brother Ilem:** “I can hear you clear as an empty sky, Observer-”

FUCK. ...uh, I'm not here to cause any trouble, if that's what you’re afraid of! I am merely an observer of events, a traveller from afar, a spirit offering guidance-

**Brother Ilem:** “Or you're just some weird hairy guy with nothing better to do, though inexorably prone to procrastination.”

“There's no point in trying to deceive me, human. I can read you like an open book. Usually when men lie it's because they're hiding something downright ugly, something they're not proud of. But you, you've not got much to hide. ...not much that's relevant, anyway.”

“Your friend, on the other hand... She tries to work her way through life, with the dust of a nation on her hands, when in truth there is no coming back from that. No matter how many people she tries to save, no matter how many lives she tries to make better, she will never escape what she has done, never truly sidestep the consequences...”

Perhaps... But do you think she lets that stop her?

Observer...

What happened was abhorrent, I have no doubts about that. But even if she did suffer for those misdeeds, paying dearly for that Genocide run, what would be the point in it? Are you so naïve as to think that punishing her would bring back all the monsters she killed, undo all the pain and heartbreak her actions caused?

Oh, don’t be so simple. That's not how the universe works. That's not how ANY universe works. There is no grand karmic justice that can exact itself upon others, no intrinsic elemental force that punishes undesirable deeds. For the universe on the whole is cold, dead, and doesn’t give a fuck about the nightmares and wonders that unfold within it.

Besides, if you ask me I'm not even sure she was even in control during that time. And from the sounds of it, neither was her little friend. From what I've been gathering, the evidence seems to be pointing to something else, SOMEONE else, being the one who was in control.
In other words, it is becoming increasingly likely that she was merely a pawn, an unwitting, unwilling tool in the hands of a far higher power. And what's worse is that I probably know who that power might be, and why he did it.

...

Brother Ilem: “...pawn or player, there is still dust on her hands. And no amount of sweat and tears will wash away the memory.”

“But beings like her, they don't let that hold them down. They just keep on going, for better or for worse, as persistent and resilient as any revenant. It would be folly of me to try and stop her, I fear.”

Well you needn't bloody well fear. She's not like the Cardinal, or the revenants under his wing. Her world is no longer “kill or be killed” or “rip and tear until it is done”. She is, at the end of the day, merely a teenage girl. And right now, she's just wants to help her friends.

Brother Ilem: “...then I will not stand against you. I will describe this predicament to the young boys.”

Probably leave out her Genocide run for now. Sure, Julian might find some common ground with her if he learned about that, but it'd make for an awkward work environment.

Observer... Thank you, for what you said back there.

I merely treated you as I would prefer to be treated.

Do unto others, huh? I thought you weren't-

I don't agree with most of the stuff written in religious texts, but there are a few things I can understand and relate to. Like how greed sucks rancid arse, for instance.

Besides, you don't need to believe and trust in vaporous anomalies to be a good person. Some of us just recognize it as common sense.

...fair enough.

So, uh, do you think they're buying it?

They're looking a little unsettled by what Ilem is telling them, but they don't look like they're about to tie you up again. Flowey's not exactly looking pleased with himself either, as he relinquishes control once more, letting Asriel back into the driver's seat.

Asriel: “Dangit Flowey, next time you tell me BEFORE you pull something like that.”

I imagine that's familiar to you, isn't it?

Hmmm?

Asriel arguing with Flowey. Body and soul with separate minds, bickering with one-another like a two-headed ogre. I reckon you've seen that happen all too often.
... kinda? I've seen a few tells here and there, but I'm not sure which of them are tells and which are just my Asriel being Asriel. Sometimes he pauses like someone's interrupted him, but I dunno if it's Flowey or... something else.

It's a bit of column A, and a little of column B. Sometimes it actually IS "something else" on his mind.

But you remember that pose he strikes sometimes, looking down while he holds his chin?

You think I haven't noticed? He likes to play it off like he's "deep in thought" or whatever, but I'm pretty sure that's one of the main tells that he's talking to Flowey.

And indeed it is.

Asriel turns to look at you, and as Ilem finishes, firmly helps you to your feet.

Asriel: "...I dunno why you're here, or why you're using his body, but don't do anything stupid. I want Frisk to get through this in one piece this time, alright?"

Frisk: "Rei-bae sweetie, you don't gotta coddle me like this. I can handle myself just fine."

Yeah... He's not convinced by your silver tongue.

Asriel: "...do me a favour and don't try to sweet-talk me like that ever again. Coming out of my brother's mouth, it's just plain creepy."

"Now, you PROMISE. Promise me that you're not gonna let him get hurt. If you let anything happen to him-"

I firmly grip his hand and lift it off of my shoulder. He's being a little too overprotective here.

Frisk: "I said that I can handle myself. And with the three- four of us together, we shouldn't have too much trouble on our hands."

"So yeah. I promise that your Frisk will be just fine. So don't go worrying your pretty head about me, alright?"

Try as he might, he can't help but see you as the "little brother" of the entourage, even with your sense of determination. That darker part of Asriel can practically smell the weakness within Frisk.

Well then, looks like I'll have to show him what I'm made of then.

Oh alright then.

[Soul Mode Activated: Perseverance]

The lines of magenta light flow forth from where you stand, overlaying the weathered tiles of the cathedral floor. While Asriel steps back, taken by surprise as you show off your magic, Julian looks more... impressed by your little display. Few kids his age could handle SOUL Modes, so it comes as heartening to him to see his old friend manage it, even if it wasn't his Frisk in control.
...say, Observer?

*You're going to ask me about the “higher power”, aren't you?*

I- Yeah, actually I was. It's strange, now I think back to...

*Your “Genocide run”. Things didn't seem quite right back then, did they?*

I didn't feel like I really had a choice. All the other options just felt... useless. But the one remaining solution... it didn't feel right, but it didn't really feel wrong either. It felt like the only way out.

But with everything I did, it didn't really feel like ME doing it. My hands didn't feel like they were MY hands. I never really felt like I was walking around by myself. Does that make any sense?

*In a way it does. And in a way, it wasn't you doing it. As I said previously, I'm starting to believe that you were merely a puppet during that period, with Chara- with Charlie being a proxy for the guy controlling you.*

He always did try to talk to me about how, while I wasn't the one in control, neither was he. For the longest time, I always thought he was trying to shift the blame, to deny all the terrible things HE had done in MY body, and every time I told him to grow up and own up. I told him that it was the only way he'd be able to move forward and become a better person.

...but if you're right in your theory, then it means I probably owe Charlie an apology, an' a big ol' hug on the side.

*Well, that's for you to decide. But at the end of the day, with all the scraps of evidence I've gathered, the latest coming from Charlie himself, things are pointing towards a certain productive young man being responsible for making you an avatar of murder. And at the same time, he was also responsible for the sudden face-turn that put you on the path you're currently on. It was a specific, pinpoint shift that caught my attention, the precise moment where it all started, and now I have a name to go with my suspicions.*

*That name, Frisk, is Emile.*

...that answer in Mettaton's death quiz... *>D: Emiliano Rosales... You think it's connected, or just a coincidence?*

*I suspect his actions may have left their mark, even after all this time. There is only one Emile that I know of who would have a connection to worlds like these. And right now, he's doing a Let's Play of Skyward Sword.*

*That said however, I don't believe it's the Emile of MY world who we're talking about. To the best of my knowledge, my world's Emile was busy with many different projects around the timeframe when your Genocide run was happening, none of which have involved Undertale as of yet.*

...there's that name again. “Undertale”. When we first met, you talked about a “mainline Undertale universe”, and that current events are running parallel to it.
I'm guessing that my own reality is a parallel universe compared to that original universe, but... why “Undertale”? Is it just a reference to my time in the underground?

...not quite. This may come as a shock to you, but in my universe, your journey through the underground is a work of fiction, a video game by the name of Undertale. Much like how the world of Cairn, which Charlie is currently mucking around in, is paralleled by Grim Dawn in our respective worlds.

...I should have known. You talked about “characters in the arts” and mentioned Asriel among them. ...the thought that everything I did, the struggles my friends faced, all the love and death, all of it just being code in a machine...

...all of my adventures... Th-they're just a game to you, aren't they?

Not exactly. After all, your worlds are your own worlds, whereas the game of Undertale merely lines up with events in your old world. The line between fantasy and reality may seem foggy here, but they are still very much distinct for the most part.

Even so, Undertale was more than that to many people. For a lot of us, it was more than just a pixel-art RPG, more than just another indie darling evocative of games like Earthbound. It drew us into its world, showed us the people living in it, demonstrated the fact that you could resolve nearly every battle without resorting to violence. I hadn't played a game like it for such a long time, and it changed my perspective on a lot of things, prompting me to look at things from a different angle.

The game touched the hearts and minds of MANY people when it came out, and has stuck with us for a long, LONG time. The amount of fan-fiction and fan-art surrounding the game is still astounding, even to this day. Even if some of the fan-content is a little... “smutty”. Yes, let's call it that.

...I don't know what to say.

But there's one reason in particular that set me on the path I now walk. It was Asriel's story that really stuck with me, like an arrowhead in my chest. Even when everyone else had been freed, saved from their life underground, there was still that last piece missing. Even in the best possible ending, I still couldn't save Asriel. No matter how many times I pressed Z, talking to him at Chara's grave, I simply could not convince him to come with. He just kept on saying “Frisk, don't you have anything better to do?”, the only thing left in his dialogue tree, as if tormenting me about how impotent, weak and uncaring my Frisk was that they wouldn't try hard enough. I wanted them to talk some sense into him, start crying into his striped shirt, grab him by the ears and drag him all the way back to New Home. But instead, they did nothing. All I could do was either keep pressing Z in vain, or leave Asriel to his fate.

It's been over a year and a half since I did so, my own heart breaking as I departed. And there's no sign of that ever changing. In that timeline, he let himself wither away into Flowey. This, as you can imagine, I could not accept, couldn't take laying down. I kept on thinking about how he could be saved, long after I'd exited the game. I'd kept on hoping that, eventually, Toby would implement a patch that led to an ending where Asriel could be saved, even if it came at a terrible cost. Like you, I once entertained the idea of Frisk sacrificing themselves to give Asriel a chance,
and if that option was the only way to save Goatbro, I would've taken it in a heartbeat.

But no such update came. Only a minor update for certain minor characters, while also fixing the FUN values, adding a tiny bit extra to the experience. Though while I've given up hope of the game ever getting that all-important “give him another chance” update, I never gave up on Asriel. And I never will. Even though he didn't believe in himself, I still believed in him.

Late in March of last year, an anomaly caught my attention in the winnowing void. The unmistakeable oscillations of a timeline reshuffling itself, straining to redirect itself around a monumental decision, drew my gaze to your timestream. You were there, in the past, doing... something or other. I haven't been able to figure out what the hell you actually did, but whatever you did, it rocked time and space like a ravening hurricane of concentrated determination. Against all odds, the coin of fate had landed on its edge, and produced an inconceivable outcome. This, it goes without saying, piqued my interest immensely.

From there, I looked up and down your timestream, trying to figure out what you had been up to. You can only imagine my delight and horror, when I saw that you had in fact saved Asriel, tearing his spirit from the ravening jaws of Hell itself. Were it not for the anomaly and its ongoing effects, I would have started my official account of events there.

Tracing your history forward, I found that after the anomaly you had effectively vanished from that timeline. Fast-forward 200 years in that timeline, and you reappear out of nowhere, awakening with fragmented memories upon a bed of roses in the Ruins. At the sight of this monumental development, my official account of events, the DoctorTale recordings, began in earnest.

That, Frisca Rivera, is why I am here. Your deeds, and Asriel's new life, are truly worth observation.

Holy shit. I- Wow. Just... wow. This... this is too much.

You really do care about him, don't you?

More than you know, Frisk. Or perhaps you DO know? After all, you've lived with him for such a long time.

In spite of everything, he deserved better than what he got in the end. He proved that anyone can change under the right circumstances, that he could love again and feel remorse for his past misdeeds. And on top of that, it was HE who saved everyone in the end.

From where I'm sitting, that deed alone carries more than enough merit to give him a second chance. And in the end, isn't that part of what love is? Being able to forgive someone, when they genuinely regret what they did? When they reliably prove they can change for the better?

Now you mention it, I think it might be. Though I guess other people might call me naïve for believing that.

It's not a perfect solution, admittedly. Not everyone feels remorse for their actions, not everyone
can earn forgiveness so easily, and not everyone has in in them to change for the better. But when they do, all that “ naïveté” pays off in a big way, and you don't come across as all that naïve when it helped you turn a heartless villain like Flowey back into the precious young boy he was meant to be.

*It reminds me of a quote by a certain Cardassian expatriate: "Paranoid is what they call people who imagine threats against their life. I HAVE threats against my life."* A similar principle, when you think about it.

That definitely sounds like Garak, alright. I think it was in an episode where he was getting cold feet about dating Ziyal, wasn't it?

**Season 4, Episode 22 - “For The Cause”. The same episode where Eddington betrays the Federation, going all-in with the Maquis. Sent Sisko down a pretty dark path, from what I remember.**

Yup. Pretty clear to me which Star Trek you prefer. But I get it, I know all too well what you're talking about.

**Well, there's a first time for everything.**

Oh c'mon, don't go selling yourself short. ...**but don't you go selling ME short, either.**

I know how frustrating it was, to have everyone saying that it couldn't be done, despite trying your best. I tried so hard, never giving up even in the face of failure, even when Alphys had a nervous breakdown after the first couple of loops. Even when Sans tried telling me that we’d “exhausted every possibility”, I didn't give up. I kept the loop going, kept them and Flowey in it with me, still searching for the key to restoring him.

**But we both know that it wasn't their science that brought him back. That “machine” you remember was merely a containment unit. When it came to bringing Asriel back, the layers of reality were the gates, dimensional phase physics was the lock...**

...and the book was the key. ...my god, that book. How could I have forg- ...of course, why else?

**Now you're getting it. We're inching ever closer to defragmenting your memories...**

**Indeed, while it was Charlie who told you the truth about Hell after admiring your heartfelt determination, it was that book, the Váthian Atlas, that paved your road to Hell.**

**Yes, the Atlas: one of many artifacts left behind by Syrinx's prehistoric expedition, secreted away in the vaults beneath Temple Square. An artifact that, amazily, Sans was able to retrieve without incident.**

**Who would have thunk that the vault security could have been thwarted so easily? And who could have imagined that those incompetent blighters didn't even have security cameras down there? I mean, if you're going to store immensely powerful alien magitech away from the public, you'd at least think to install some form of surveillance down there wouldn't you? Smacks of weird hubris and overconfidence if you ask me.**
Maybe. Though I doubt they had a clue about how to deal with someone who could perform shortcuts.

But that book... It taught us exactly what we needed to know. Once we had that book in the New Lab, I knew that this was gonna be the last loop-

A gentle slap to the face drags you back to reality. I've done it again, haven't I? We could have done a walk-and-talk, but no. Of course I caused you to stand around looking gormless and wasting time.

Julian: “Wake your ass up dude, we're here.”

...or not, as it would appear. While we were zoned out and talking too much, the boys kindly ushered us along with them on their way to the Necropolis.

Wha- Already? What happened to the whole “stake-out” thing?

That was merely the prelude, they were waiting to regroup with Ilem after they met in an earlier iteration. THIS is where the real stake-out begins. And with what they're up against, they'll need every bit of help this old valthane can offer.

Sooo he's like a necromancer, then?

Very much so. Valthanes act as both servant and supervisor to the living dead, attending to their needs while simultaneously keeping them in line. Behind every great val drótinn, there are always many MANY valthanes, each tending to a single group of undead, for no man alone can control an army.

And considering that we're about to sneak into an occupied mausoleum, Ilem's influence will prove invaluable to say the least.

never thought that the undead were actually a thing until today. Closest I ever got to encountering an undead was when I first met Sans and Papyrus. But knowing that the dead can come back to life...

Well, it wouldn't be the first time. Flowey's creation could be regarded as a form of necromancy if you thought about it. In fact, it again reminds me of the Borellus-Levi ritual. Using the “essential saltes” of a being to coax them into a living state, except Alphys didn't know about the all-important invocations that would have-

I really don't want to think about it that way. It was creepy enough to think about us just being machines, but to think of Flowey as being- ...let's not go there. I don't think I could take it.

Alright then. But I do have access to the invocations in case we need them.

And I hope that we never need to use them.

We might be able to make use of the “inversion” of the Yog-Sothoth invocation. With it, you could potentially return certain kinds of undead to the dust from whence they sprung. Buuuut there's
...whoa... Old Man Marcus sure went all-out on this thing, didn't he?

I could think of no better memorial for those taken so unjustly during the Empire's reign. Within this necropolis, the bones and ashes of countless millions have been gathered and preserved, in memory of those lost to injustice. The most downtrodden of nonhuman slaves, the most influential of resistance fighters, the most innocent of bystanders, the most celebrated of war heroes, all of them laid to rest here, in the largest grave site on the planet.

Each ornate parapet, every stalwart gargoyle, all the stones and mortar used in the construction, all of it dedicated to the dead, victorious and avenged alike. Marcus spared no expense, even when there wasn't any expense to be spared, to ensure that those who died at the hands of the Empire would never be forgotten.

And of course, the Inferno is treating it like a goldmine. Every casket and urn on the surface level has been unearthed and pilfered. Whatever they're up to in there, it's not going to end well. If you strain your ears, you can hear the Per Adonai Invocation echoing from the deepest recesses of the Necropolis.

Ilem does NOT look happy about this in the slightest. Truly, he is mortified.

Brother Ilem: “Mordiggian preserve us... It is as I feared. They have finally finished processing the remains of those interred here. Those... disgraceful... FUCKERS...”

“...I do not know how long the invocation has been looping, so we must act swiftly. With the staggering amount of essential salts they have gathered, we cannot allow them to complete the ritual under ANY circumstances.”

Julian: “Don't need to tell me twice. We can't fight that thing even if we tried.”

Asriel winces, clutching his chest as he remembers the last time they failed to stop the ritual. Needless to say, it did not end well in that iteration.

What... what are they planning down there? Are they trying to raise an army of-

If they were going to raise an army, they would've just raised all the bodies as Type-Is and Type-IIs. Type-IIIIs are far too fragile as individual soldiers.

What they ARE trying to raise however is a lot more... condensed, compared to an army, the manpower and soulmass of many millions of Type-IIIIs concentrated in a single cyclopean form. A dark colossus to destroy all.

...this isn't happening...
And it won't. So long as we reach the centre and stop the ritual, the dust will remain dust. And even if we fail, we have options.

The invocations?

Just the one. Though I don't know how effective it would be against it. We'd probably have to recite it a lot more than just the once.

...well, no use waiting for the world to end. Let's end this before it goes too far.

Julian puts a hand on your shoulder before you cross the threshold, and leers up at the towering walls of the Necropolis, his eyes reflecting the sickly yellow stars hanging churlishly in the unearthly sky. Knowing what will happen if they fail, knowing how much is at stake, fills Julian Graves with determination.

[HP and MP restored.]

Error: Save Files Inaccessible.

Julian: “I'm sorry, but ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?!”

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY! THIS is what I'm talking about! The stakes are actually high for once, there’s potential for some AMAZING battles, and-

Ough. That's a little less impressive. How the hell did THIS take so long? I mean, I'm glad this butterball's making the most of his gym membership, but did he HAVE to get hooked on ANOTHER idle game? Really?

...oh my god I just realised. Today's April 10th. Exactly one year since he started this. ...he was saving this to mark the anniversary.

...but this shit isn't WORTH an anniversary! It's SOOOO BORING AND FOREVER-TAKING! Aughhhhh...

This is the guy Frisk has to guide her, ladies and gentlemen. This lazy, corpulent, pretentious MOTHERFUCKER, is who we have instead of Chara. And yet he's gotten so many hits on his work.

...well, let's hope the next instalment is as action-packed as he's leading us to believe.

-the Cardinal XO
Necropolitan Eye-Scream

Chapter Summary

Frisk and the boys descend into the Trinity Ranch Necropolis. Some other stuff happens, but apparently it got cut in half for some reason. ...I'm sorry what now?

-the Cardinal XO

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Well, that's probably woken up the entire neighbourhood.

You're telling me. Holy shit, Julian.

I can't say I would've reacted that strongly to being unable to save. Even when Thief Gold told me I had run out of space for saved games, when I blatantly had all of those gigs left on my hard drive, I never got THAT mad.

I'm just glad Asriel knows how to calm Julian down. Any louder, and those things down in the Necropolis might've heard him.

Julian: "...we have to make this time count, Rei-bae. We haven't saved in so long, so if we-

Asriel: "Please don't start with that, buddy. It's bad enough hearing it from Frisk. Frisca. Whoever."

Julian: *sigh* "I thought you'd appreciate it more hearing it from me."

Asriel: "I- I would, but... Now's REALLY not the time, Julian. I need you focused, y'hear?"

"...fine. Once this is all over, you can sweet-talk me as much as you like. But for now-"


"Right now, we gotta make sure they don't get to finish that... damn ritual... You're probably not gonna like this, Rei."

Me neither. I just hope it actually isn't "kill or be killed" down there. I mean, if there's no other choice-

Would it comfort you to hear that most undead aren't technically "alive"? The vast majority of undead are merely "animated", puppets of flesh and bone moved by the simplest of internal networks, no actual souls to speak of. From a scientific standpoint, they're no more "alive" than a Commodore Amiga, so you shouldn't feel TOO bad about zorching mummies when we're down there.

I was thinking more about the necromancers. After all, they're still living beings at the end of the day.
It's like you said, Frisk. Right now, you probably don't have the luxury of not fighting. Something tells me that they aren't going to be eager to hear you out when they're this close.

...how good are you at choking someone out, Frisk?

...that's one hell of a question, Observer.

It's a valid one. Because unless this boy has a secret stash of tranquilizer darts and a tiny hand-crossbow, you're going to need to learn how to perform chokeholds to take down the necromancers. After all, even if you keep lancing them with the pain-ray setting on that heat beam of yours, they'll probably try to keep using those incantations.

...even if I knew how to do that, I couldn't pull it off in this body. I mean, come on. This Frisk is a freaking weenie.

...perhaps. And sadly, the Vulcan nerve pinch is not easily executable by humans.

Though there may be one technique that might be within your capabilities.

And that would be...?

It is a... "dark" technique, employed by the elusive Imperial Inquisition. One must visualize a sense of hopelessness, helplessness, fatigue, and a lack of self-worth. Then, one must compartmentalize it within themselves, backing it up for later use. ...in the interest of time, you may borrow some of mine.

What the- Why would you even have- ...oh. Oh...

You acquired the Observer's Passive Melancholy. It's not much, since I didn't have that much to start with, but it's something to build upon.

Ah, don't worry about me. It's nothing I don't have a handle on right now.

...anyway, now you possess this contained aspect, you can project it upon others to stay their hand and hold their tongue, leaving them depressed and listless. This, Frisk, is the power of Dominant Subduction.

How is this in any way healthy? This doesn't seem like something a good guy would use-

You're not a good guy. ...and you're not a bad guy either.

Don't think that this technique is "evil" either. It is merely a spell, a sequence of code, a tool to be used in the right hands. And a tool has no concept of good, evil, or anything for that matter. Because it is a tool. It is cold, dead, lifeless, and without the capacity for thought of any kind.

It still seems kind of... cruel, though. The way you describe this... melancholy, whatever it is, it sounds like it'd make someone feel weak, like absolute trash, make them lose the will to carry on. This REALLY doesn't sound nice at all-

Seriously, Frisk? We are about to go descend into the Necropolis and disrupt a ritual that will summon a dark colossus that will destroy us all! Do you REALLY think that now is the time to
feel squeamish about using a crucial technique just because it isn't "nice"?! Are you so naive to think you have that fucking luxury right now?!

...why are you doing this?

Let's face it, Frisk. You're not a "nice" person. And again, you are not inherently "nasty". That, in itself, is the best anyone can hope to be.

Not every situation can be solved by being nice to everyone, and not every situation can be brute-forced by destroying everything. One must find the centre of all things, between "good" and "evil", "light" and "dark", "niceness" and "nastiness", and understand where best to stand.

This flexibility, the willingness to "play dirty" when the situation calls for it, is what the greatest of us are made of. After all, having the "moral high ground" means nothing when someone's slipped a dagger between your ribs. So for all our sakes, don't shy away from using Dominant Subduction against these necromancers. Not because they "deserve" it, not because it'll make you feel better in some twisted fashion, but because the power of Dominant Subduction will make them a non-issue without drawing a single drop of blood.

...fine. Whatever. But I'm not happy about this.

 Doesn't matter. You don't need to be happy to perform Dominant Subduction. What matters is that you use the technique.

Softly yet swiftly, we traverse the surprisingly well-lit corridors of the Necropolis.

...is it just me, or does the interior of this place remind you of Skyrim?

How, exactly? How does any of this remind you of Skyrim?

Well, uh, it kinda reminds me of those Nord ruins? Uh... There're those big open shelves cut into the walls, where the bodies of the dead were laid. ...except here they've got coffins. And commemorative plaques, naming the dead and telling a little story about their lives.

...man, Marcus Graves really did spare no expense here.

Yes indeed. But beyond the engraved coffin shelves, this place looks nothing like an Ancient Nordic ruin. For a start, the walls are cold, jet-black stone with a reflective polish to them. Warm orange light spills out from the sodium vapour lamps in their sconces. Soft woodwind tracks echo from distant, concealed speakers. And do you see what kind of flowers are growing in those little troughs? That's right, POPPIES.

Alright, alright, you've have your point. This isn't like Skyrim at all. ...huh. Y'know, it's kinda funny that they chose poppies of all flowers.

I assume people still have Memorial Day in New Deseret?

Yeah, but I wasn't getting at that. I was thinking more about why you wear that, uh, crown of poppies. Was it Memorial Day in your world, when we first met?
Funnily enough, it wasn't. Generally in my world, and presumably yours, red poppies are used as a symbol to, well, commemorate those who died fighting for their country.

In this world, however, the poppy is not only used to commemorate those who died at the hands of the Empire, but it also possesses additional meanings as a symbol. For instance, they may symbolize pain relief, due to many types of poppy producing certain pain-relieving alkaloids, and by extension rest for the dead, likely derived from an ancient scripture detailing a war to end all wars, specifically a passage noting how poppies grew quickly upon the graves of fallen soldiers. Which is odd, because I'm not sure if World War I actually happened in Feldstein Prime, or the reality that the Empire came from for that matter.

...that, uh, explains a lot. Kinda explains why you had that crown of poppies, I guess. But I feel like that last bit's a loaded sentence. You're about to tell me more about the Empire, are you?

We seem to be safe for now, and it'll be a while before we reach the bottom, so I reckon we have the luxury of indulging in a little history lesson.

Feldstein Prime is not the home reality of the Tellurian Empire, funnily enough. Though through your parallel's memories, you'd probably remember that from the lessons taught at the academy.

I think I remember that, about how the Empire came from the "old world", Prima Tellus, and that our world, the "New World", was called Nova Tellus. Frisk wasn't really able to grasp the concept of parallel worlds all that well, though. But I think I understand what the deal was. They were basically the same planet, just in different universes and different... time periods?

That's right... when compared to Prima Tellus, Nova Tellus is- Holy shit. Are we-66 million years before the human era? Indeed, that is the "current time" on Nova Tellus. Though the inhabitants of this world still use the calendar of the old world, in the "year of the lord" 2119, they still live in a world where reptiles are the most prominent form of life on Nova Tellus, at the very tail end of the age of the dinosaurs...

But that means... Oh gods... The asteroid...

Indeed. Though in this reality, the Chicxulub impactor is currently frozen in time, due to the actions of Morty Feldstein and his companions. But alas, time cannot be completely frozen, just as one may never truly reach absolute zero. So despite their best efforts and all the energy they invested, they could merely slow down time to the point where it would be decades before it actually hit. Even now, the impactor hovers above Chicxulub like Baar Dau once did over Morrowind, creeping ever closer at a sub-glacial pace. And everyone knows that one day, that precious time borrowed will finally run out, and Nova Tellus will suffer a most terrible extinction event.

...this world was doomed before I was even born, wasn't it? No matter what I do, I'll only be able to delay the inevitable.

Hardly a reason to give up, though. Morty's deeds merely gave people more time, granted, but very rarely do we get a truly happy ending in these worlds of ours. Even when we befriend everyone, destroy the barrier AND save the goat, there are still consequences and loose threads, always
someone who lost out. You can try to tie everything up, but in the end there will always be that one tiny thing that not even Jirard Khalil would be able to find, in his mad quest to complete everything.

Not to mention, it isn't like everyone's trapped on the planet, doomed to die in the ensuing impact winter. Billions have already emigrated to the Moon and Mars, and billions of others have been guaranteed residence in the various Bunkers constructed to ensure the survival of life on Tellus.

At the end of the day, most people are going to survive this, give or take the odd unfortunate straggler. Hell, Trinity Ranch AND Waldheim have their own Bunkers awaiting occupancy during the "Final Days" before impact. So while this world is in for some serious shit, its people will still be there afterwards.

That's one hell of a silver lining. I just hope the boys make it through the Final Days.

Oh, there's no doubt that they will. Even if they're not offworld by that time, they'll still be safe and sound. Assuming they make it through THIS, that is.

Speaking of which, look alive. We're- Hang on, what's the bloody deal here?

Is something wrong?

Depends on your perspective. You do realise that we haven't encountered any shambling undead here, right?

...yeah, actually? That's pretty weird. But I ain't gonna complain.

Well I find it both suspicious and disappointing if you ask me. I expected that we'd bump into a mummy sooner or later, but so far nothing. Not a sausage here on the upper levels. What the hell is going on?

Maybe they're all on the ground floor? Or they simply didn't expect any intruders?

I hope for the former. Because while it would be convenient for them to have left us a clear path, it'd be a very large oversight on their part.

You "hope" that we run in to the undead? Are you sure about that?

Well, it would be inconvenient to bump into the walking dead, but it would also mean that these necromancers actually know what they're bloody well doing. Our victory would be awfully hollow if it was just a rabble of misguided teens doing the bare minimum required to call up a cyclopean hellspawn.

Well I don't know about you, but I'm hoping that it's just as simple as that. Better to put a bunch of eighth-graders in their place than have to deal with a full-fledged frickin' death cult.

It would be easier to deal with, I will admit. Even though we were given the distinct impression that there was some serious shit going down. Though either way, summoning a dark colossus is no laughing matter, no matter who's doing the summoning.
Ah, FINALLY a staircase that isn't all cluttered up with shite!

Brother Ilem: "At last we may descend. Took us long enough."

"Also, doesn't it strike you as odd, that there were no guards on this level? Or anywhere in the vicinity of the Necropolis? Are these occultists so inept that they don't realise the importance of-"

Frisk: "Now you mention it, it is pretty weird. But for all we know, they could all be patrolling the lower levels. I sure as hell can't tell with all this damn chanting..."

"...what do you boys think?"

Asriel and Julian exchange a look of uncertainty. They're not sure whether or not they should say anything about the situation. But judging by their previous dull expressions, even with the ritual drawing ever closer to completion, they've been through this nonsense before. This is apparently par for the course.

Frisk: "...this is pretty much how it's always been, isn't it?"

Asriel: "...yeah... And the thing is, I don't think we'll have much trouble getting to the centre. I'm pretty sure they cremated most of their own forces to add to the pile, too."

Brother Ilem: "...and just why did you decide NOT to share this information with us?"

Asriel lets out a sight of resigned exasperation. Ilem is not truly "in the loop" when it comes to the resets, and only recalls the few slight details that bleed over between them.

Asriel: "...because I'm tired of repeating myself. Time after time, I've had to tell you about the same old stuff. And every time we loop back around, you barely even remember anything."

Brother Ilem: "And you think that absolves you? Because you were "bored"?!

...oh. Asriel looks like he's reaching his breaking point. Get ready for a rant.

Asriel: "Bored? Not really. Try annoyed. Tired. Checked out. Fricking fed up with this whole goddamn nightmare of a loop! Gods, this must be how Flowey felt back then..."

"You think you know about the power of determination, but you've got no idea what it's REALLY like. Stuck in the same cycle of events, trying every path to make the right changes, having to repeat yourself over and OVER AND OVER AND OVER to people who can't remember! It's enough to make a guy go MAD!"

"And you know the worst part? We can't just "quit". We don't get to just "give up". Too much is riding on us doing what's right, because there's no-one else who's determined as we are! We're the only ones who can save this goddamn world, but I'm JUST FUCKING SICK OF IT!"

...an awkward quietness ensues. Even the chanting loses a few voices in the process. He's attracted undue attention, but he doesn't even care at this point. His eyes are all teary and blood-
shot, his nose is running, and his face has twisted into a frustrated, rest-deprived grimace. He just wants a break from all of this. He just wants to continue with his happy ending and not worry about saving the world.

...the feeling is mutual, Goatbro. But we both have our duties. We both have responsibilities for the powers we bear. And we cannot in good conscience leave our tasks unfinished, when there is no-one to pick up our slack-

Oh god that REEKS! The FUCK is that god-damn smell- MY EYES! I CAN'T FUCKING SEE!

???: DIES MIES JESCHET BOENE DOESEF DOUHEMA ENITEMAUS

QUICKLY! WE'RE ALMOST OUT OF TIME! JUST A FEW MORE STEPS!

Julian: "OH FUCK! FUUUUUCKin' get outta my way!"

JULIAN RUSHES PAST US ON THE STAIRS, WIGHT-BLADE BLAZING BLACK AS HE DESCENDS. ...Asriel tries to follow suit, only to faceplant into the wall adjacent to our current flight of steps. Needless to say, he's not happy about this.

Should I-

LEAVE HIM, HE'LL BE FINE. GET TO THE BOTTOM AND FUCK UP THOSE NECROMANCERS!

I'M GOING I'M GOING! QUIT YELLING AT ME!

Cultist #1: "Yi-nash-Yog-Sothoth-

The guilty voice is suddenly silenced by the hiss and crackle of a wight-blade searing their flesh. There's our Julian hard at work.

Cultist #2: "ZUKS! YI-NASH-

A second voice, attempting to perform that last important incantation, loses their words in a gurgling torrent of their own spilled blood. That can't be Julian, it sounds far too messy.

...so much for Dominant Subduction.

Of the seven cowled figures that surrounded the deactivated fountain, two lie dead amidst the drifts of essential saltes. Julian has one figure intimidated at the end of his wight-blade, while another is pinned to the floor by a blue attack. Another of the cultists is held captive by yet another cultist, whose wave-bladed dagger still bears the blood of one of their "fellow" cultists as it hovers next to the captive's neck. Which just leaves one cultist yet unfettered, mere inches away from... a portable stereo? What?

I level my phaser at the necromancer, and mock-adjust it to maximum setting. He'll think that I won't hesitate to atomize his ass.

For the last time, it's not a bloody phaser- ...fine, whatever, roll 1d6 for the intimidate check.
Just kidding. He's not willing to test your bluff, and his hand withdraws from the stereo. I don't know why they brought a stereo for the ritual, but it's probably for nothing good. Unless he wanted to play some Christopher Cross to diffuse the situation. Which probably isn't the case, since I don't think Christopher Cross even existed in this universe.

Asriel, bruised from his earlier tumble, shakily points an old coilpistol in the general direction of the cultists as he approaches. A light smirk of relief creeps across his face, glad that they managed to stop the ritual.

Who the hell gave Asriel a gun? And who the hell let him KEEP it?!

He probably found it in a secret room, given how old the bloody thing is. Or nabbed it off of a dead security guard. Either works.

I just hope he knows how to handle that thing.

You'd be surprised at what Federation curriculums teach kids on member planets. Very progressive, but also quite militaristic when it comes to higher education.

...am I seeing this right?

Hmmmm yes, isn't there something familiar about that chap?

...there's no fucking way. That cultist, the one holding the knife, is that-

You recognize the mechanical nature of the turncoat cultist's hands, and the boys roll their eyes as Mettaton EX uncowls himself to reveal that he is, in fact, Everyone's Favourite Entertainer Robot (tm).

Asriel: *sigh* "Why am I not surprised? Oh wait."

So Mettaton infiltrated a cult to thwart the ritual? ...anything for the publicity, I guess.

By the looks of it, that's not the whole story. Speaking of which, look at the eyes. Don't they seem familiar?

...ohhh that can't be good.

And yet surprisingly, it's actually not that bad.

“Mettaton”: “…we always did make a good team, didn't we, partner?”

During earlier runs, the boys would have felt very uneasy about this. But by now, it's just the same old bollocks.

Julian: “Getting real tired of hearing you say that, Chara. Don't you have any better one-liners?”

OH! Oh so THAT's how it's going down, is it? ...thinking about it, it's probably the best outcome we could hope for, considering.
True. If anything else had possessed Mettaton, we'd be in trouble. But of course, it's our friendly neighbourhood fallen child, Feldstein Prime edition, who's currently at the wheel.

...y'know, when you put it like that, it reminds me of all those old superhero comics from way back when.

I know exactly what you mean. All those different versions of superheroes in their own little continuities. Makes sense to draw such parallels, especially since you've seen such things firsthand.

Asriel: “...Chara.”

Chara: “Little brother.”

Surprising no-one, they're not on good terms, even with Chara lending a hand throughout their “adventure”.

So he's in the loop too, huh?

Pretty much. He's a determined sod, even as a soulless “daemon”. And after the boys tried to take the fight to the Inferno itself, having gathered the appropriate sigils in previous iterations, Chara decided to help them out for old times sake.

...well, at least he's trying to do what's right. 's more than I could ask of a kid like him.

Frisk: “...so. Here we all are. ...so what's the next part of the plan?”

The boys look at one-another with a look of sudden realization, to which Chara narrows their eyes in disbelief.

Chara: “...please tell me you didn't come all the way down here without a plan.”

Julian: “...uh, Ilem? You have any sleeping gas on you?”

Brother Ilem: “Now why would I carry anything like that? I soothe the ills of the dead, not the living.”

Chara covers his face with a cold metal palm. It's going exactly as well as he was afraid it would go.

Welp. Looks like you'll need to use that skill after all.

...do I rea-

Frisca? Are we going to have another argument? Or are you going to-

[Magic] > [Influence] > *Dominant Subduction

Good girl. The cultist closest to the stereo feels your eyes bore into his soul, and the dark power wraps itself around his heart like a serpent. He falls to his knees, overwhelmed with a crippling sense of despair. One less to worry about right now.
Because I don't KNOW any bloody sleep spells, Frisk. Do you think I would have granted you the power of Dominant Subduction, if I had a more “palatable” alternative to offer?

Julian: “Whoa, dude, what's up with that guy? Wha-”

Julian's attention is drawn towards the crestfallen cultist, who's just kneeling there, arms limp at this sides, gaze cast forever downward. Truly, this one has given up.

I- This is terrible! If only I had the strength to choke him out...

If only. But even when you don't have the perfect tool for the job, sometimes you just have to improvise. Otherwise you’ll never get anywhere.

Julian: “...dude, did you- What did you DO?”

Frisk: “I- I dunno! I just- I just kept looking at him, and-”

Julian: “I don't buy that for a second, worldwalker. That guy never “gave up” like this before, and I'm pretty sure that you staring at him didn't make him crack.”

“...you broke his mind, didn't you?”

Frisk: “Oh and how would I have been able to pull that off?”

Julian: “You've got more than just SOUL Modes up your sleeves, I'm sure of it.”

Brother Ilem: “I did sense something... something dark, washing forth from their aura a moment ago. Despair, melancholy, listlessness... All to stay a man's hand.”

Julian looks dreadfully conflicted. On the one hand, the cultist is no longer a threat, yet is still alive and “well”. But on the other hand, the power you used reminds Julian of certain occult techniques, specific disciplines of Influence that were outlawed shortly after Tellus' integration into the Federation.

In the end, he says nothing, and- Asriel frantically fires a shot at where one of the cultists was. ...the fuck did they go?!

Asriel: “Damnit, she vanished! She had a shroud on her this whole damn time!”

With Julian distracted, his blue attack had deactivated, giving the shroud-bearing cultist the moment she needed to elude “you meddling kids”. Chara, oddly amused by this development, presses the flat of the blade tighter against his hostage's throat, before calling out to the escaped cultist.

Chara: “...where have you gone, lady? Do you really think you can weasel your way out of this? You're not making this any easier on yourself, you know.”

*sigh* “Come on now, step back into the light. Or am I gonna give your friend here a shave? ...'cause he looks like he fricking needs one.”
A whoosh of air and sudden click draws our attention to the stereOH GOD SHOOT!

[FIGHT] > *Phaser: Active Denial > *Shrouded Cultist

The culprit jumps with a start as the sensation of a blazing hot oven licks against their skin through their robes, leaping away from the stereo! Switch to maximum setting and blast that-

Stereo Recording: “Y’AI ’NG’NGAH, YOG-SOTHOTH H'EE—L'GEB F'AI THRODOG UAAAH!”

...BUGGER. Welp, there goes the neighbourhood.

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY, some real ACTION! ...wait, where's the rest of it? Aw c'mon you can't leave us hanging like THIS!

...he's pulling that old trick out of his hat again, isn't he? Split the current entry in two, just like the Core Approach entry.

...sonofabitch. But at least he's put SOMETHING out. And from what I've seen, he's pretty close to finishing it.

Which means he'll probably put it out next month because he's an asshole. "Oh I have to go to the gym today. Oh I have work tonight. Oh I want to watch RollPlay Nebula Jazz and The Co-Optional Podcast. Oh I want to watch Helloween4545 Let's Play Nier Automata Set 12 Part 4." It never ends, I swear...

-the Cardinal XO
The Ashen Colossus

Chapter Summary

Last time on DoctorTale, the boys failed to stop the incarnation of something utterly unnatural.

This time, we get the rest of that entry. Seriously, what a cheap stalling technique, am I right? ...right?

Don't you look at me like that. He's the one responsible for this madness, not I. He brought this situation upon himself. Karma is a bitch, after all...

-the Cardinal :T

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

...victory was within our grasp...

* A cacophony of innumerable ghostly voices erupts from the heart of the Necropolis, accompanied by a violent gale that whips the essential saltes into a frenzy. Some sputter with bewilderment, others scream in terror, but most just laugh hysterically.

...and then, the convergence begins. The ritual was optimized for singular resurrections, not intended for raising multitudes of spirits from their graves. The paroxysms of laughter turn to wails of dread and terror as the barriers between them fall, their essence bleeding over into a singular, indistinct amalgamation of soulmass and memory.

...Observer, the incantation! You said there was a counter to it!

*Right! Yes! Repeat these words, and quickly!*

*OGTHROD AI'F GEB'L—EE'H YOG-SOTHOTH 'NGAH'NG AI'Y ZHRO!*

How do I even fucking SAY that?! I don't speak fucking Cthulhu!

*Must I do EVERYTHING for you?! Hold on while I borrow your mouth for a moment.*

Oh goddamnit.

The Observer: “*OGTHROD AI'F GEB'L—EE'H YOG-SOTHOTH 'NGAH'NG AI'Y ZHRO!*”

...it barely has any effect? But of course it would, why did I expect that this would be anything other than difficult?!

*I thought you said it would wor*- Huh? A bit of the ashes fell out of the vortex, and they're not rejoining the...
...ohhh my goodness, I've got an idea. I run over to the stereo and pick it up.

*The shrouded cultist moves into your path, ready to intercept.*

[FIGHT] > *Phaser: Set To Stun > *Shrouded Cultist

*You zorch the cultist in the belly, leaving a painful patch of rashes and blisters. They keel over, crying out in agony, but they'll live. 's just a flesh wound.***

I jump over the downed cultist AND the crestfallen cultist, then grab the stereo.

*I like where this is going. I'd like it even more if it was going upstairs and out of here, though. Because holy fuck, this thing is going to outgrow the Necropolis at this rate.*

**Frisk:** “Guys! I've got a plan, but we need to get outta here to make it work! Come on, let's go!”

*The boys have already dealt with their hostages, and are scrambling to escape. Normally I'd be frumious with them for being so sloppy, but I can't argue with them right now because this place is probably going to start falling apart very soon. That's usually how these things go, after all.*

**OHP waaait, we're forgetting something.**

What?!

*Rifle through the robes of the shrouded cultist. They have what we've been looking for all this time.*

Uh, okay... Holy shit you're right. I completely forgot we were here to- There! Got him!

*Quickly you stuff the soul-stone, radiant with the power of Justice, into your trouser pocket. Turns out someone fished him out of the void and crammed him into a fancy stone, just like the druids did with Arlene.*

**Marcus Bell:** “What in the hell is HAPPENIN'?!”

*I'll explain later mate. For now, just chill while we take care of the rest.*

**Marcus Bell:** “WHO IN TARNATION- Darn it, just go!”

---

*After a long and tedious escape sequence, which didn't really need narrating if I'll be honest, we find ourselves outside the shuddering Necropolis. Now's as good a time as any to relay the plan to everyone else.*

**Brother Ilem:** “…I would never have thought that you would think to invert the invocation, child. Truly, your retainer has taught you well.”

...don't get any funny ideas.

**Frisk:** “Alright, so you're probably all wondering why I saved the stereo.”
Asriel: “You're gonna record over the incantation, aren't you? Replace it with whatever the hell that Observer guy said back there?”

Frisk: “Close enough. WE are going to record over it. WE are going to recite the... the “Ogthrod Ai’f Geb’l” incantation, then put it on a loop and play it back at the colossus at max frickin' volume.”

Asriel: “I don't- Jules, do you think this is gonna work?”

Chara: “She'll need to get a bit too close for comfort, but-”

Asriel: “I didn't ask for YOUR opinion.”

Chara: “Well you've got it. Fuck you. Aaaanyway, looping it should wear it down eventually, but-”

Asriel: “OH! Fuck ME?! After everything you did to me?! ”

“No! NO! You don't get to fucking interrupt me like that!”

Chara: “Who the hell's “interrupting” anything?! I just gave Frisk GOOD ADVICE FOR HOW TO MAKE THIS PLAN WORK, AND YOU'RE JUST PISSING INTO THE GODDAMN WIND TRYING TO START SOMETHING.”

Asriel: [FIGHT] > *Slap To The Face > *Chara

Yikes. Erm, Asriel tries to strike Chara soundly, only for Julian to catch his wrist. Whatever happened between Asriel and Chara down in the Inferno, it left Asriel with no love for his stepbrother, only hatred- ...bloody hell. And from what I just glimpsed, I would be hard-pressed to blame Asriel for holding such a grudge.

Julian: “Rei, dude, please calm down. I don't agree with what he did, I know how you feel. But are you really going to hurt-”

Asriel: “YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT JULIAN! You don't know what it- what it- ...what it was really like, down there...”

Something in Julian's gaze cools Asriel's temperament. There have been so many times where Asriel's anger got the better of him, only for Julian to look him in the eyes, and as if by magic it calms him down. Not literally by magic, though. Just the loving gaze of a concerned friend. Though in a way, is that not magical in itself?

Asriel: “He hurt me, Jules... to save his own worthless hide.”

“They couldn't milk him for what they wanted, while they were able to make me “pay out” reliably every single time... But when they considered feeding him to that... that THING...”

“The torture was- It was bad enough, but then he- ohhh gods, he-”

“You don't know what it's like, when the one friend you loved most in all the world-”

Welcome to the universe. It's a horrifying place sometimes, and when it is, it can make us do horrible things.

Fucking Christ.
And here come the waterworks. No amount of apology and reparations can undo the hurt this Chara inflicted in the name of self-preservation.

Please tell me it isn't like it sounds. “Milking” and “paying out” make it sound like he's referencing something absolutely-

NO. Nothing that specific, thankfully. Well, as thankful as we can be when it comes to torturing something to siphon off their pain and suffering as an edible energy source. For even daemons can have scruples.

Regardless, we're not going to get anything out of Asriel for the time being. Even with the colossus forming as we speak, he's broken down and he's not going to be back up for quite a while. It's all up to you now.

Asriel: “GET AWAY FROM ME!”

Chara tries once again to apologize for all the hurt he caused, but his words fall on deaf, floppy ears, as his crestfallen brother pushes him away. Even with some semblance of a conscience, there's no coming back from what he did. He'll never be the brother he should have been, the brother he wants to be.

...I delete the “Yay Ngaah Yog-Sothoth whatever it is” recording from the stereo, and gesture for Chara and Ilem to come over.

And they do just that. The old valthane cannot bear to look at the fallen child in his mechanical vessel, and the fallen child cannot bear to look back at the brother he betrayed.

Frisk: “...so, the plan goes forward as usual. We recite the incantation together, then record it for future playback on repeat. ...does having multiple people saying it at once have any good effect? Or am I better off just saying it the once?”

Brother Ilem: “...most incantations don't have a hard limit when it comes to participating intoners, so... Yes. In theory, the incantation will be more effective if we record all of us saying it at once. So long as our voices are clearly heard, and our recitals be coherent.”

Frisk: “Just what I wanted to hear.”

A discordant babbling echoes faintly on the wind. The colossus is growing stronger with each passing minute. Time to step it up.

Do we have time to practice?

Barely. Now remember: it's OGTHROD AI'F GEB'L—EE'H YOG-SOTHOTH 'NGAH'NG AI'Y ZHRO.

Thankfully for us, the colossus is taking it's sweet time to fully form. Not that I'm complaining or anything, but it has put a damper on the tension. Which, again, is not inherently a bad thing, considering.
Man... That took longer than it should have. Who'd have thought that trying to speak an alien language would be so hard?

*No thanks to Asriel and Jules. ...actually that's not fair at all. Even if Asriel hadn't started bawling his little eyes out, I doubt either of them have what it takes to pronounce things in Aklo...*

But now we have a good enough recording of the incantation, so we're pretty much all set. ...except for one thing. Crap.

*Yeah, about that... Given the potential size of the thing, you're going to need either a ton of amps, or some sort of 3d manoeuvre gear.*

And I don't have either of those. Though if I play it near its legs, it should eventually fall over, right?

*Might work. It wouldn't hurt to- Actually it probably would now I think about it. You might get stomped on if you're not careful. And of course, we can't reset this time around so-*

But of course, we've got the Gunslinger already, and I'm pretty sure if I just... Yeah, I pull out the soul-stone and talk to Mark.

*Frisk: “Oh hi Mark.”*

*Jesus Christ seriously?*

*Mark: “Howdy Frisk, what's new with you?”*

*This is not happening. Did I fall asleep at the computer? Is this my nightmare?! HOW DOES HE KNOW ABOUT THE ROOM?!*

*IT'S HAPPENING.*

*Frisk: “So, uh, yeah. About what happened-”*

*Mark: “Are there any more of y'all out there? There's you, there's that little kid, and now there's... why are you a Mexican teenager?”*

*“Serris'ly, I'm havin' trouble keeping track here.”*

*Frisk: “Well, uh, this Frisk isn't part of our world, he's just a regular kid in this one. My parallel on the other hand, well... She's the one who took you and the others. Aaaand I'm pretty sure she's up to no good.”*

*Mark: “You're tellin' me. But as far as “up-to-no-good” goes, I think that she THINKS that she's gonna do good. I didn't catch what she was plannin', but she sounded... afraid. Somethin' about the Chinese eatin' us alive, whatever that means?”*

*Frisk: “Whatever she's up to, it's not going to end well. She doesn't know what she's doing, she's not ready for the responsibility that comes with that kind of power.”*

*I imagine you know all too well the dangers of irresponsible power.*

*Quiet you, I'm nearly done here.*

*Frisk: “So what I'm asking is that you don't give her what she wants. Make her fight for it, try to*
weaken her when the final battle comes.”

Mark: “Battle? What? I ain’t sure I like where this is going...”

Frisk: “Well, I'm gonna have to confront her eventually, and I'm gonna need all the help I can get.”

Marcus seems hesitant to go along with this plan. The implications of your proposal... unsettle him.

Wait, does he really think- No way, that's not happening at all!

Frisk: “We're not gonna KILL her, damnit! She's just a kid! And even if she wasn't, all I need to do is rob her of her power. ...so, NOW do I have your word?”

Mark: “Well why didn't ya just SAY you weren't gonna- Sure! Fine! I'm in on this, all the way.”

Frisk: “Never been more glad to hear that. Seriously, this is going to make all the difference.”

Aaaand that's that, it seems. We're at the halfway point, three souls left to sway to our agenda.

...no, we're NOT about to leave the boys to their fate. We're going to stick this out to the end. Of this boss fight, at least. After which, I think they'll be able to handle themselves just fine.

Damn straight we're sticking around. ...so yeah, is this thing going to-

???: “THERE you are! What the hell were you thinking?!?”

Our stalwart minotaur friend has finally caught up with us. Must've taken quite some doing to leave the projects in this kind of weather.

Wozz: “You've got no idea how long I've been looking for you, little buddy. Things have-...Asterion's balls, WHAT IN THE-”

OH GOD WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT.

As the top of the Necropolis erupts, pale white stone can be seen through the tossed-up black stone of its cocoon. The smoke and dust clears gradually, and you instantly wish it was just smoke and dust.

It's a goddamn mess is what it is! WHY DOES IT LOOK LIKE THAT?!

Skin like alabaster stone, a canvas upon which untold horror has been painted. Too many eyes on its comically shrunken head, each one as black as the winnowing void. Too many wings, shimmering an infernal orange like the hell from which its constituents were dredged. Too many arms to bother counting, each finger tipped with another hand, a true mockery of natural physiology. And of course, the bloody thing's asymmetrical beyond belief. ...not all that scary in reality.

HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?! Just LOOK at it!

I look at it, and I see what happens if your Xbox 360 fucks up while playing Bayonetta. It's trying
too hard to be weird, and just loops right around to looking silly. Much like the gore in *Dead Space*, when you think about it.

**Julian:** “...well, crap. Alright Frisk, let ’er rip.”

*Not holding out much hope, but... maybe distance won’t matter so long as it hears the incantation? I, er, set the player to repeat, crank up the volume, and press Play.*

**Frisk, Chara and Ilem (recorded):** “OGTHROD AI’F GEB’L—EE’H YOG-SOTHOTH 'NGAH’NG AI’Y ZHRO! OGTHROD AI’F GEB’L—EE’H YOG-SOTHOTH 'NGAH’NG AI’Y ZHRO! OGTHROD AI’F GEB’L—”

*You get the picture. Wozz looks pretty confused.*

**Wozz:** “...uh, why are you- ...yeah, that little boom-box isn't gonna cut it little buddy.”

*Sure enough, the colossus is unimpeded and unfettered. Not even a handful of ashes falls from its cyclopean form. ...but it doesn’t seem to be doing anything...? It's just sitting amidst the rubble of the Necropolis like a massive stone sentinel, not sure what to do next. Let's not give it a chance to figure out that it's supposed to be a demonic superweapon.*

**Wozz:** “…what ARE you tryin’ to do, little buddy? That's definitely an incantation invoking Yog-Sothoth, pretty sure of that, but-”

**Brother Ilem:** “This is the inverse of the final incantation present in the Borellus-Levi ritual, the-”

**Wozz:** “OH GOD WHAT ARE- Crap, sorry, I just, uh- ...y-you were saying, s-sir?”

*Ilem leers narrowly at Wozz, less than appreciative of the young minotaur's reaction to him, before shrugging it off. After all, with the frumious dead on the prowl, such a startled reaction could not be faulted.*

**Brother Ilem:** “The trigger that rais’d this amalgamation is the “Dragon's Head”, while the one to put it down is the “Dragon's Tail”, the approximate inverse of the original. But for such a massive conglomeration of souls and saltes, the incantation will only effect one soul per intonation, thus she has looped it-”

**Wozz:** “Uh, “she”? Sir, I know he's a pretty boy, but isn't that going a little too far?”

So yeah, you were saying that there's nothin’ funny going on between Wozz and this Frisk? Call me crazy, but I'm getting the feeling that there is.

**Brother Ilem:** “...wait, he's a boy?! Oh merciful Mordiggian, my rotten old eyes fail me! Do understand, I meant no offence to him, young ram!”

*Niiiiice save from Ilem there. He should go into improv.*

**Wozz:** “Neh, forget about it.”
“...so you're tryin' to sing... whatever this thing is, to death with a variant of Turn Undead? That's what's goin' on here?”

**Wozz fiddles with the side of his Thunderbuss and- Of course. I expected no less.**

You are shitting me. Those are guitar strings. His lightning gun is an electric guitar?!

**Yup. Though of course, he added the strings long after he inherited the gun. His father was a space marine, not a bard. His mother, on the other hand... Well, needless to say you can probably imagine what side of the family his musical talent came from.**

Is he- Oh my god I am so fucking ready.

**Wozz proceeds to tune his guitar, making sure each string sounds as it should.**

**Julian:** “What're you plannin', tough guy?”

**Wozz turns to look at his other little buddy.**

**Wozz:** “Amps. ...lots of amps.”

*As his fingers fly across the strings, the air around him begins to shimmer with pale green sprites. Lines of power proceed to connect the dots as his solo continues, forming a mesh of polygons suspended in the air.*

If this is what bards are like in this world... Man.

**They are anything BUT “spoonly”. Though strangely enough, the power of Song doesn't work all that well with dubstep. Weird...**

...uh oh. Ohhh that's not good.

**Frisk:** “Uh, guys? We've got company- JEEEEEZUS WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS?!”

Well shit. From the edge of the woods, a half-dozen devilish aberrations amble towards the group. Engineered in the bowels of an elusive black clinic, these creatures are little more than vessels for daemonic possession. Or so it seems at first glance.

**Asriel struggles to get a hold of himself, in the face of the opposition. With blood-shot eyes and shaky hands, he manifests his Chaos Sabers and follows Julian to confront the mutant puppets. They know how to handle these guys, they'll buy Wozz the time he needs.**

...it really is kill or be killed in this world, isn't it?

**It kind of is for the most part. But kids like these, they know how to bend those “rules”. They may walk softly, but they aren't afraid to carry big sticks for when things go wrong. And if they never have to use their sticks, well, that in itself is just gravy.**

**Chara attempts to join the approaching battle, but Asriel warns him away with a point of his**
saber.

Asriel: “You stay back, Chara. We don't need you to fuck everything up.”

Chara looks as if he’s about to retort, but shakes his head and backs away. He doesn't want Asriel to start bitching his little heart out all over again.

I follow the boys, they'll need back-up.

Asriel: “…don't worry about us, Frisk. If any of 'em break through-”

Brother Ilem: “Don't be so hasty to disregard her aid, ye final boss. You pay little heed to what she and her retainer can do.”

Asriel: “Yeeeah I don't think I need her driving these guys to suicide. No-one needs that in their life, not even a daemon.”

Frisk: “Well I won't fucking use it then, alright?! You KNOW I've got other tricks up my sleeve, you IDIOT!”

Asriel: “…I'm not sure I wanna see any more of those “tricks” of yours-”

WHOA there! You grab Asriel by his shirt and draw him closer to your face. Are you about to chew him out again?

Frisk: “I'm getting REAL tired of your shit, Asriel. I love you, but I'm not gonna put up with your crap right now.”

“I'm gonna help hold the goddamn line, and you can't do a DAMN THING to stop me. Now let's dig in to this... whatever the hell this is.”

The Observer: “I'd roll with it if I were you, Rei-bae. It's not wise to cross Frisk when she's got a nark on.”

Welp. A look of despair passes over Asriel's face as I jokingly call him “Rei-bae”. He realises there's no shaking this new “pet-name”. But he loves it he does, deep down and all.

Asriel: “Oh GOD, not you too!”

The Observer: “Oh yes... Me too. Now hop to it, Princess.”

The battle is joined. The three of you stand ready to ward off these misshapen mannequins of meat and murder.

Goddamnit Observer. You think that's enough frickin' alliteration?

Not really. But you know what I do think? That maybe you should keep your beam on the stun setting. After all, these wretched creatures do not move of their own volition.

As if I could- You know what? I'm not gonna finish that sentence. Instead I'm just gonna stun this
As Julian tangles with Spindles McGee, Crab-Claw McGraw tries to pinch Julian's tail off. Thankfully, your thermal beam leaves a nasty burn on McGraw's oversized claw, causing them to recoil with a chittering cry of pain. The instincts of the host may override the controls of their operator, even if it's just for a fraction of a second.

In fact, your ploy worked even better than anticipated. Turning towards you with a crab-like snarl, it turns its red-eyed gaze upon you, and proceeds to thunder forth in your general direction. Gratz on drawing the aggro!

Crap. Uh, CRAP. I didn't think this through!

I suggest you calm down. Be patient, and things will turn out for the best.

What the hell are you- Ohooooh, I got ya.

[ACT] > *Frisk > *Patience

[SOUL Mode Activated: Patience]

Crab-Claw McGraw swings his main claw at you in a backhand motion, only for it to pass right through you.

Crab-Claw McGraw: “SORCERY? IMPOSSIBLE?”

Frisk: “It is possible. There is no way you can hurt me, so you might as well give up...”

Crab-Claw McGraw: “...well good for you then. Give yourself a pat on the back. Your friends will pay the price for your trickery.”

He shrugs and turns to charge at Asriel, who's- Well then, THAT's something new. After punching Bird-Head Fred in the throat, he forces his palm upon the mutant's head. A golden-green light burns itself upon the forehead of Bird-Head Fred, their eyes losing their fierce red glow in favour of a faint golden-green shimmer before fading entirely.

As I suspected. The boys have gotten their hands on some Elder Magick. Most likely from acquiring those sigils, from the looks of it. Asriel jumps back to avoid the swing of Crab-Claw McGraw, who is incensed by the magicks that the Infernals regard as abominable.

How can you tell? What even IS “Elder Magick”?

Well, if you look at the residual brand, you'll see that it represents a certain pantheon you should be familiar with. A warped, seven-pointed star, with an eye in the centre, is burned into the forehead of Bird-Head Fred.

...Syrinx... She said she was a humble servant of...

The Elder Gods. Indeed, it is they who developed the Elder Magicks, divine programs that are
especially effective against those deemed their enemies. Which funnily enough includes almost every other pantheon in the galaxy, for they are envious gods, jealous, greedy, and borderline neurotic.

But fortunately for us, beings of the Inferno are in turn classified as enemies of the Elder Gods. And as you can see, Bird-Head Fred is no longer a puppet of the Inferno, for when etched upon something, the Nodens-Oztalun Purgative critically weakens the influence of anything trying to maintain control over said thing, or being in this case.

...your Patience fades quicker than usual, causing a return to Determination.

Frisk: “...Asriel! Watch out!”

Crab-Claw McGraw lunges forward for another attack, which Asriel narrowly avoids. He lunges forward in an attempt to exorcise the crab-like mutant of their operator, but his hand is caught by an emaciated, twisted mockery of a zhuren, the Pig-Head Knight.

Frisk: “Get your STINKIN' HANDS OFF HIM!”

[FIGHT] > *Phaser: Not Quite Maximum Setting > *Pig-Head Knight

WHOA THERE-

...the Pig-Head Knight recoils with a guttering squeal as his left tusk explodes, pulling Asriel with him as he falls backwards over a gravestone. We see a golden-green light flash and flicker from behind the gravestone, as the squealing protest of the daemon gives way to the pained wailing of a mentally infantile piggish mutant, free from their operator's control.

Yup, they didn't even bother with programming and brainwashing the poor buggers before taking them out of their packets. All they wanted were mindless puppets to pilot like man-sized meat-mecha, nothing too fancy or time-consuming to churn out.

Could this world get any more sick and twisted?

Be careful what you wish for...

Oh, and Spindles McGee flies into the back of Crab-Claw McGraw, thanks to Julian and his Blue Attack. Wait, shit, Julian’s guard is down!

The Observer: “Oi Jules, 6 'o clock mate!”

Oh bugger. Well, he whirls around to face his foe, only to be knocked off his feet by Crash Test Craig, whose head is absolutely ludicrous. He looks like what you’d get if humans were specifically engineered to survive a bloody car crash.

[MAGIC] > *Integrity > *Bone Throw

You wang a magical bone at the skull of Crash Test Craig. It earns you his attention and ire.

HOLY SHIT I didn't mean to dent his-
It's ok, it's just a crumple zone. He's Crash Test Craig, after all.

These fucking names, I swear-

WHOA HOLY CRAP, sounds like Wozz has his “amps” up!

**NOW we're rocking! With multiple holographic amplifiers pointed at the sluggard colossus, the incantation blares forth at Glastonbury levels of loudness. We're definitely in business now.**

...though thinking about it, he'll probably be here for quite a while.

...yeah, now you mention it- ...hmmm. So, the recording's of me, Chara and Ilem. Three voices, so each instance of the recording takes out three souls worth of integrity on this thing.

**Right. I would have joined in, but we can't both talk at the same time, so...**

Whatever. So the invocation takes about five seconds to perform before it loops, so that's three soul-fragments banished every five seconds, or 36 every minute... ...do you think having multiple amps multiplies the number of voices?

**Erm. That's a good question, but it'll have to wait for later THINK FAST!**

**OH CRAP WE'RE STILL FIGHTING! UHM, UHH, PURPLE ATTACK!**

[MAGIC] > *Perseverance > *Purple Attack

**Ooookay then? Crash Test Craig is now purple, and is restricted by trap lanes. Thankfully none of the lanes intersect with where Wozz is, so now you can probably let Craig muck about in the lanes and focus on Crab-Claw McGraw.**

...ooor nevermind. It looks like Asriel managed to mark them while we were tangling with Crash Test Craig and distracted by Wozz and his amps.

**Julian: *nghhh* “Alright Mister Potato-Head. You're goin' in time-out!”**

**And with that, the red light leaves the eyes of Crash Test Craig, as Julian uses the Nodens-Oztalan Purgative to disconnect the simple bugger from his operator. Which just leaves... SHIT-**

Chara's got Wozz's back, though. He's got his knife at the throat of... Alright, who's this asshole with the spiked arms?

**...uhm. Uh, I think- ...Old John-Tom?**

**Chara:** “Julian! Last one!”

“Old John-Tom”? Seriously?

**Well I ran out of good handles, alright!?**

Wait, you were just naming them all this time?! I honestly thought that bird-headed guy was called Bird-Head Fred!

**That's the thing, though! They didn't even HAVE names to begin with, and the daemons hid their**
own names, so I had to make stuff up on the fly. ...though upon retrospect, they sound like a line of action figures you’d find in Poundland. Or “Dollar Tree”, to your sensibilities.

Oh man, that takes me back...

You used to go there as a kid, didn't you?

Had to make the most of my allowance, with what little we got from the church.

I know that feeling. Low income was pretty much my childhood in a nutshell. Hell, I remember saving up a big old bag of coppers, to buy a bunch of candied popcorn packets. Though back then, such tiny packets were 10p a bag, whereas in my current time period you'd probably have to go to a cash-and-carry place to get that kind of value for money.

...was corn really that cheap before the Collapse? I mean, I heard that grain wasn't so hard to come by back then, but HOLY SHIT. The fact that you could buy grain products so cheap back then, it-

Wow. I knew things were bad in your universe, but seriously. WOW. Did you even have BREAD growing up?

Only on special occasions, or when we went to church. We didn't even have frickin' toast or cereal for breakfast, like they always showed on TV. I swear, if I ever see another god-damn plate of “milk-and-honey” breakfast tofu, it'll be too god-damn soon.

Fucking hell, I want to give you a hug right now. You really did miss out, you poor, poor thing. ...PLEASE tell me you at least had potatoes from time to time.

Honestly, I never saw a potato product until I had dinner at Grillby's, even if it was a magical imitation of real potato. But that first plate of golden french fries... Ohhhh goddd it was like manna from heaven...

...I don't know if things are still that shitty in New Deseret, but seriously Frisk, hear me out on this one. Once you've returned to your own world, and exorcised the operator from your Asriel's mind, take him with you and just LEAVE. Pack your things, grab a fast car, and keep driving until you reach California. Because holy shit. If you can't even get your hands on classic staples, even if you're willing to stand for hours in a fucking breadline, you need to GET OUT.

I... ...I'll think about it.

I know it'd be tough to leave everyone else behind, especially since they've pretty much built their lives there, but New Deseret is not a place anyone should have to live. And that's just considering the fucking agricultural austerity measures. From my observations of this wasteland nation-state, I could probably write a fucking dissertation on why you shouldn't live in New Deseret.

I said I'll think about it! ...don't rush me on this.

Ok, but just- Fine. I'll drop it. Now, onto more relevant things.
The six mutants have been neutralized, and are nursing the few wounds they suffered. All around, a nice piece of work thanks to the Nodens-Oztalun Purgative. And your assists, of course. ...speaking of which, you really should get Asriel to teach you how to perform it.

...fuck. I just realised something. I could have just used the Clawed Palm of Hypnos to send those cultists to sleep! AUGGH-

Not so, actually. You had the program in your mind, yes, BUT you didn't have the user permissions needed to activate it yourself.

...please tell me you're joking.

I would, but it would be a white lie at best. That's the thing with the Elder Magicks, you see: the ability to use them is bound to one’s loyalty to the Authority of the Elder Gods. Being that you are only tangentially loyal, through the assistance you granted to one of their angels, you were only able to use the Elder Magicks through Syrinx, who acted as a “familiar” of sorts. It's convoluted, archaic, and user-unfriendly on a good day, but that sums up the Elder Gods quite nicely. With that said however, there are unofficial “exceptions” to those rules.

...keep going. These limitations are total horseshit, but keep going.

That they are, Frisk. That they are.

Anyways, the boys are by no means loyal to the Elder Gods, tangentially or directly, and yet they can perform this feat of Elder Magick without any impediment or familiar. Which most likely means that they managed to come across a jailbroken version of the spell.

Jailbroken? You mean- Like- What undercity merchants do to smart devices?

And what can be done to pretty much any kind of program. According to my recent research, any sufficiently advanced spell is indistinguishable from a computer program. Because spells ARE essentially computer programs. They just use a different kind of operating system, which apparently is the fabric of reality itself? What?

And with any program, ethereal or digital, there are different levels of privileges and permissions put in place to keep someone from messing around with the program or using it in a way the programmer did not intend. But in this instance, someone was able to get their hands on the Nodens-Oztalun Purgative and managed to bypass all the restrictions present in the program, mostly by meticulously removing the Arcane Rights Management. Which considering how secure Elder Magicks tend to be is an impressive feat in itself.

...so basically somebody hacked a locked-down magic spell, and now the boys can use it. That's what you're telling me?

Pretty much.

...that's actually really fucking cool.

Frisk: “Hey, Asriel? Could you come over here a minute?”
Asriel takes a break from reassuring Bird-Head Fred to find out what you want.

Asriel: “So, uh, what's happening?”

Frisk: “Say, uh, that technique you used, the “Modem-Oz-Talon Prerogative”?"

Goddamnit Frisk.

Frisk: “I'll be honest, I really need to learn that technique. There's someone back home, back in my own world, who needs my help, and that technique of yours could be just what he needs to bounce back.”

Asriel appears reticent and pensive. Even after all you did to help, he's still not sure if he should help.

Goddamnit. Well, I imagine if he knew the truth, he'd be more than willing.

Frisk: “I honestly don't get why you're holding out on me, Rei. But I'll tell you this much. The boy who needs my help, who's- ...who's stuck in the sanitarium? He's you. Both of you.”

Asriel looks as if he's trying to quiet someone. But that certain someone isn't having any of that.

Asriel clutches his left hand in a panic, as it shrivels away into his shirt sleeve. A few seconds later, out pops-

Flowey: “Nuh-uh! Nobody puts Flowey in a corner!”

Asriel recoils with a startled cry, seeing that his hand has been replaced by the yellow-petalled head of your best friend. At the end of the day, it's still Flowey's body that Asriel's piloting.

Flowey: “Buddy, there's LITERALLY no reason not to just let her learn it. If someone's taken over the other us, they're not looking out for our best interests.”

“...come ON! Quit holding out on her! We're talking about US, here! Just think about it!”

“If we were possessed by one of those things, and someone had the power to drive it out of our body, wouldn't you want them to save us?”

Asriel: “I- But- I don't think it's such a good idea-”

Flowey: “Well why the heck not?!”

Asriel: “We- we don't know how it works, damnit! Sure, it drives demons out, but what about US?!”

“If Frisca's implying what I think she is, then that means the me from another world has... that his soul would be... dark...”

“Would the power drive his soul out of the other you? And without him, what would happen to the other you? Did you ever think of that, Flowey?”

Well, that's no good. Flowey shakes, his eyes tensing up as he contemplates the horror of going back to the way he used to be. He wouldn't wish that state upon his worst enemies. Or at least, that's what he would tell others in order to save face.
But his fears are unfounded. May I?

If I say no, would you do it anyway?

Yes, but I wouldn't be proud of it either.

...fine. Go ahead.

Thank you.

The Observer: “If you'll pardon my interjection, your fears are unfounded. Being in the Inferno does not brand you as Infernal by default. That is not what turns a soul dark.”

“No, the act of forcing a spirit into higher dimensions, or forcing a soul into the Pneumatic Realm, is what yields a “Dark Soul”. While admitting the essence of the Inferno into one's being, bathing in the Red Power, is what turns a being into a demon.”

“So no. Purging the demon from your parallel will NOT force his soul out of Flowey's parallel. It will instead render both of them immune to possession by any true opponent of the Elder Gods. Which thankfully, neither of them are.”

“That ALSO means, “Rei-bae”, that you have no good reason at all to hold out on Frisk, when all she wants to do is save the boys she loves.”

Frisk: “I swear, it's not like “that”. Don't get any funny ideas.”

The Observer: “Yes. True. Entirely platonic and family-focused. No repressed sexual attraction whatsoever.”

“Anyway, in the end it would be in our best interests if you allow us to share the powers we know. So, step forward and let us share.”

...well? Do you think it worked?

I think it did. But now he's... Actually, question? How is he going to share the power with us?

I believe you have your answer. As his left hand returns to normal, Asriel places his palms above his sternum. Draw closer, Frisk.

Okay now back off a bit. That's a little too close.

There. Just right.

A darkness spools out of his chest and into his palms, and he reaches out ever so gently. His dark soul, laid bare, waits to be touched.

It's... my god... This is going to get weird, isn't it?

If you're expecting this to drag on for another chapter, with us delving through his mind for the Purgative, you've got another thing coming young lady. Just touch his soul.
...I reach out, and my fingers barely touch the darkness within him. ...ohhkay, I don't feel so-URGH...

*The program you seek passes from his thoughts to yours, copied and pasted like an important document. And yet... that's not all...*

...you try not to dwell on what you saw in the transfer. Or at least, not let these new memories get to you.

Oh. Oh no... He was so upset...

*sigh*... Indeed he was. Even though it meant he would be spared, he hated everything he had to do. Behold, the true horrors of the universe: the fact that such things are even possible to begin with.

...every fibre of my being wants to blame him regardless, but I know that I'm-

...nevermind. I hug Asriel, thanking him for sharing this power with me, and reassuring him that things will get better.

Now. Let's see about adding some more voices to the mix, now that the boys aren't busy with those...poor frickin' things...

---

*After much practice in the shadow of the... really big amalgamation of ash and souls, you now possess a recording of seven voices chanting strong. You, Chara, Ilem, Wozz, Julian, Asriel, and even Flowey. On its own would probably be able to obliterate most undead with a single playback, but for something this large we will still need to loop it and split it so we're not here all day.*

*I must say though, it is rather handy that that thing isn't actually doing anything. I'm getting the impression that, due to how it's been mashed together, it's pretty much a giant vegetable. Unable to form any coherent or agreeable consensus, it doesn't pose any immediate threat...*

...we can't just leave it here, though. If those things get a hold of it, they'll probably try to find someone who can control it.

*True true, they could attempt to wipe its scrambled memory and give it new orders. Which is why it is best, while it sounds horrible, that we put the damn thing down.*

*Though I will say, you didn't seem all that hesitant to go through with the plan to use the incantation. Yes, you were a little uneasy when it came to using it, but I'm honestly impressed that you're ok to roll with this given your track record.*

*Not that I'm complaining, of course, I'm just curious-*

It's a lot of things, Observer. And they all add up in the end. There's no good way to deal with this that won't end with us destroying it, or us being destroyed later on. And with all those souls mashed together into this, this mad mashup of... Well, frankly it's kind of a mercy killing at this point.

*I'd never want that to happen to me. The mercy killing part, I mean. I'd rather relish those extra moments of existence, than have someone cut it short because they want to put me out of my
“misery”.

...I understand, but I know that that's just you and your soulless universe. But in these worlds, I **know** that the suffering never really ends. With that in mind however, I'm sure that their suffering here is greater than any torture they'd face down there.

It'd still be torture, being back in the Inferno, but it'd be familiar torture, something they know and are probably used to. While this... this cannot continue.

...how interesting. *You would do such a thing for these innumerable lost souls that you barely know, though when Flowey egged you on, enticing you to kill him, you refused-*

Wh-WHAT?!! When the hell did that happen?!

**After the Omega Flowey fight. You really don't remember? I know you've had more memory trouble than a girl your age should suffer through, but of all your dealings with Flowey, SURELY you would remember that fight?**

**I mean, it happened during your third run, during your first visit to the Underground! It happened right after you fought Asgore! YEARS before you fired up that ramshackle old... time machine...**

...are we talking about me, or were you watching another Frisk? I swear, I- **never** fought Asgore! Toriel broke it up before any of us could make a move!

That did happen, but before that... Well, it's all there, clear as day in the timeline. And yet... **Hmmm. I think I know what's going on here.**

What? What HAPPENED?!!

**It is nothing you should dwell on right now. The truth I could reveal would probably addle your mind and break your heart. Best to focus on the current issue, which is “how bloody long is this going to take?”**

*For starters, the recording can now cast down seven soul-fragments every five seconds, or 84 per minute. A lot more than previous, but we still don't know if having multiple conjured amps will actually help. Will having the incantation blaring out of multiple amps count as additional voices, or will it not matter because they're the same voices?*

...maybe you're right. Maybe this time, I'm not ready to learn the truth. But we're not gonna let this slide. When we're ready, you tell me **everything**.

**Frisk:** “...question, Ilem? We know that the multiple voices work, that we've established. But Wozz seems to think that having the recording come from multiple sources will somehow amplify its effect.”

“Do you think it'll work? Or will it catch on and realise it's the same voices just repeated over and over again?”

**Ilem:** “Catch on? Child, you overestimate how smart spells are. There are very few, if any at all, that are capable of such complicated vocal recognition. Not even the Elder Gods are advanced enough to
code the kind of routine that would cancel out copy-pasted intonations!”

**Frisk:** “...so you're saying that it WILL work?”

**Ilem:** “Essentially, yes. To the best of our knowledge, the young bull can conjure up as many amplifiers as his heart desires.”

**Frisk:** “Well, thank the gods for that. This isn't gonna take anywhere near as long as I was afraid it would.”

“...that said, however, how many people were buried here?”

**Ilem:** “…if I had to make a rough estimate…”

**Wozz:** “150 million. ...give or take a few million.”

...what?

**Wozz:** “I wouldn't expect you to know, little buddy, but that's roughly how many people were interred here. *sigh* And sadly, it's still small tomatoes compared to the total number of casualties from that dark time.”

...150 million. Here, alone. My god...

The liberation of the Northern Quadrant did not come cheap. Even when the head of the Empire had been torn from its shoulders, the body did not die so easily. Now, I won't bore you with the aggregate casualty numbers, or tell you which worlds were rendered uninhabitable by nuclear exchanges, but I will say this.

While many regarded the Northern Galactic War as a war to end all wars, technically it is still going. The bulk of the war occurred throughout the 2060's and 2070's, but even now, in this new century, the Federation is still hunting down the myriad of illusive splinter groups scattered throughout the galaxy.

And what's worse is that those who supplied their war machine in the past are still profiting off of it, all the while pulling the strings that keep it hungry. In their zeal to put an end to the mad tyranny of the Empire, the Federation has ensured that even in this bright new era of freedom, this brave new galaxy, there will always be war.

...do you have any more depressing information about this universe? Any more utterly horrifying shit you wanna get out of the way before we're done here?

**Well, if you insist, there's one little thing pertaining to Imperial slavery if you dare to ask-**

**Nope.** I'm good. I've had enough of this nightmarish world for one day.

...so, yeah. Back to math. So we've got 150 million souls worth of banishment to do. Fuck my life. But more importantly, we know we can banish 84 of them per minute, per source. With the one source, that's... …screw it, where's that damn calculator?

**It'd take 1,785,714 minutes to completely destroy the vegetable colossus. Which is 29,761 hours, or**
1240 days, or about 3 and a half years. Thankfully however, Wozz is still churning out amps, so that ETA is going to drop by a significant margin.

JEEZUS FUCKING CHRIST. That means we're going to need **30,000 amplifiers**, just to take it out over the course of an **hour**! And who knows how many Wozz can maintain on his own?! We're going to be here for ages!

*Well, we're in it for the long haul. Unless you wish otherwise, we're not leaving the boys to deal with this on their own. While we have what we came for, we're not on any real time limit, so we can afford to stick around and help them get this situation under control. After all, as gormless and inactive as this thing is, we can't just leave it lying around for someone to hijack.*

You really didn't need to repeat yourself there, Observer. Yeah, I'm gonna stick around, but I just wish there was **more** we could do to speed this process up. I mean, speeding up a 3 and a half year process to the point where it only takes an hour is great, but...hmmm...

**Frisk:** “Alright Ilem, another question.”

**Ilem:** “I imagine you've put a lot of thought into this one?”

**Frisk:** “Can we speed up the playback, or would that make it stop working?”

**Ilem:** “Well... That depends on how much you speed it up by. After a certain point, it would become an incomprehensible mess of magickal white noise, but if you stay below that threshold we might be able to drastically cut the time it will take to put it down.”

???: “Boring.”

“Boring!”

“BORING!”

*Oh no. Oh GOD no.*

Who the hell was that?! ...w- what's that noise?

*...the cyclopean beam of searing crimson, setting the colossus ablaze, answers your question. It looks like a certain someone is sick of our “boondoggling”, and has decided to take matters into his own claws. ...but on the plus side, we don't have to bother with the colossus anymore.*

Who, Observer? Who the hell is it?!

*You look up to the source of the beam, shrouded in the same caustic crimson that is disintegrating the colossus. ...actually, don't look right now. You'll do a world of hurt to your retinas.*

*...as the beam fades, the glow surrounding its source similarly dims. You can look now.*

It's... It's a- ...it's a bird?

*...IT'S THE BIRD.*
The very same that threw this tale off-course to begin with. This, Frisca Rivera, is the Cardinal. My "archnemesis".

The Cardinal: “Having fun, are we?”

“Don't feel bad about it. Honestly, I blame myself. I should have presented you with a grand timer, something to keep a fire lit under your arse. If I had, you'd already be done by now.”

“Nonetheless, there need to be consequences for your sluggish pace. Say goodbye to your little friends. You are DONE here.”

Julian... Please, don't do anything stupid. Just... just put your blade away.

Julian: “You... You're the one Grandpa warned me about. The Red Reaper.”

...don't you touch him, Cardinal. He's not the one you're after.

The Cardinal: “So, you can repeat what you've been taught. How very clever.”

“But you know nothing, little hybrid. You know nothing of what I truly am. And for that matter, you will never truly know me.”

“...now now, I'm not going to hurt you. I'm better than that. Though with that said...”

“The darkness comes, little man. You have two years, and seventeen days, before it snuffs out the light you cherish so dearly. That in mind, I suggest you cherish what little time you have left in this world, before the Corruption comes for us all.”

Julian's blade flickers away as his courage falters in the face of this dark revelation. Asriel rushes to catch him as his legs buckle from the fresh, gnawing dread that wormed its way back into his heart.

Julian: “Darker, yet darker. The shadows, cutting deeper... That can't have been what Doctor Gaster was talking about, right?”

Asriel has no answer for this. Nor does anyone else here. ...save for one. And I think it best to keep this secret a secret for a little bit longer.

The Cardinal: “Now. Back to the matter at hand.”

“You have mucked about for long enough, Observer. I thought that my little intervention would have made this arc more interesting, more invigorating to witness. But instead, giving each soul their time to shine has dragged it out for longer than it has any right to.”

“In my zeal, I dragged you far out to sea, off the edge of the map. Here, there be monsters. Dull, plodding, pedantic monsters that tore the pacing to bloody ribbons. Though I imagine you feel quite at home here, don't you? A nice little comfort zone for you, isn't it?”

“But of course, it is time for you, and your little teacher’s pet of a vessel, to attend the pre-ordained boss battle of this arc. And for taking so long, you WON'T have the help of all six
souls. You haven't EARNED it.”

Frisk: “I'm sorry WHAT.”

The Cardinal: “Don't delude yourself into thinking you have a say in this matter, Frisk. All you have right now is the obligation to fight your parallel, and the privilege of saying goodbye to the friends you have made here today. That alone, I don't quite have the heart to take away from you.”

“...well? What are you waiting for? Say your farewells, and make them quick. I tire of this arc of mediocrity.”

...go to them, Frisk. He's not going to wait around forever.

...I turn to Julian first, and put my hand on his shoulder.

Frisk: “...I'm glad I've finally met you, Julian. Take good care of Asriel for me.”

Julian: “…I've been doing that for the past six years, lady. And I don't plan on stoppin' any time soon.”

I next turn to Ilem, and give him a patient smile.

Frisk: “Thanks for backing me up back there, Ilem. I'll keep in mind what you've taught me.”

Ilem: “It is heartening to hear that, child. I, in turn, shall dwell upon what I have learned from you and your retainer.”

I look to Chara, his red eyes glimmering in the vessel of Mettaton.

Frisk: “…you stay out of trouble.”

“Oh, and don't let Mettaton get hurt, y'hear?”

Chara: “…of course.”

And finally, I turn to Asriel. I reach out to hold his hands in mine.

_He hesitates, before accepting the gesture. His large white paws envelop your own little tan hands._

Frisk: “...knowing that you're safe, that somebody was able to save you in this world as well as mine... Asriel... I”

The Cardinal: “Oh come on now, don't get all sappy. There are enough Friskriel crack-ships out there, the multiverse doesn't need another one!”

Frisk: “Hey, uh, FUCK OFF? I'm having a fuckin' moment here!”

...you shouldn't have done that.

Frisk: “Uh, I'm so glad that you're safe I'm happy for you two don't forget me I LOVE YOU BRO-”

The Cardinal: “Right, that's it! No more goodbyes, WE'RE OUT! Cheeky little bitch.”
“...toodle-ooo.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, that's that finally wrapped up.

...what? You really think I would have tolerated him and those meddling kids hanging around for gods-know how long, doing precisely bugger and all? It was bad enough that Frisk took THAT long to resolve the situation in this universe, but then she and the Observer decided to faff about even after doing what they set out to achieve in the first place! All because Feldstein Prime was one of his favourite settings to visit.

Honestly, he really should have saved that one for last. But of course, fuckin' butterball that he is, he started on the pudding mid-way through the meal! Seriously! HOW CAN YE HAVE ANY PUDDIN' IF YE DON'T EAT YER MEAT?!

...it's fine. It's ok. They're both about to get what's coming to them. I can finally bring this arc to a close, and we can get back to the main story. And honestly? This arc was a mistake. I should have just kept the souls with Little Frisk, rather than scatter them across the multiverse. But how was I supposed to know that the Observer was going to cock it up?

I thought his break after Wellsverne Gothic would have given him time to recuperate from the stresses of NaNoWriMo. But no. He broke his own groove. He lost touch with what really mattered. ...I only hope that, once he's seen Frisk get trounced, over and over again, the experience will change him. Maybe, just maybe, he'll be able to let go, and move on...

-the Cardinal :(
End of the Rainbow

Chapter Summary

Well, after a bit of wrangling on my end, I think we're ok. We've finally brought this arc of the story to its conclusion. Charlie is finally reunited with Frisk, and, well, it's best to just let the story speak for itself.

-The Observer :E3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*It all started with a rel- Wait, WHAT.*

Oh my god, Charlie! I missed-

*Why the hell am I back HERE?! AUGHHH I was DOING SO WELL!*

Charlie...

*...hey Frisk. We kinda screwed up, didn't we?*

Screwed up? Charlie, we took care of half of the souls. I wouldn't really call that-

*...Observer? Wha- Observer?*

*Where is that guy? Did you two get seperated or something?*

I... I don't know. I... think we were. Last thing I knew, I was saying goodbye to Asriel, and-

*Wait, *Asriel?* Are you serious?*

Yes, yes I am. In the last reality we visited, "Feldstein Prime" I think it was, I met another version of Asriel. He was... He's a lot like our Asriel, Charlie. A dark soul in a "replicant" body.

Though he wasn't the only Asriel we met during our... our "worldwalking". The one we saw through the Condenser, the one *you* gave up on? As it turns out, he's still ok. For now, at least.

But Violet hasn't been taking the greatest care with him, despite her best efforts. So it's possible that, at some point in the future, she's going to send him to live with us.

So, uh, yeah. Keep an eye out for that.

*...when we're done with all this, tell me everything about them. Right now, we've gotta figure out what to do next.*

*We should probably check the joystick settings. Maybe we can still-*
My god... What HAPPENED in here?!

Oh no, no no no no no...

_I don't know how they did it, but someone managed to smash all of the save files. All, that is, but one of them._

**Little Frisk – LV.???? KN.????**

My World – My World

[Load?]

_This has got to be some sick joke..._

I don't think it is, Charlie. We “ran out of time”, like the Cardinal said.

Wait, did he seriously- AUGGHH that motherFUCKER! He didn't even bother telling me about it!

...Charlie? How far did you get with your... “adventures”? Did you manage to-

...I found them, alright. “Source Alpha”. ...the second I laid eyes on the... the THING whose body “Alpha” was inhabiting... Oh gods...

They were in the Loghorrean, weren't they? Isn't that the final boss of Grim Dawn?

_No! No, it wasn't like that at all! I had to frickin' follow some weird trail of clues to track down Alpha, open a portal to some weird pocket-world, then find a secret door to where they were waiting._

_But I DID send the Voice of Ch'thon whirling back into the Void, soaked in its own blood and covered in frickin' acid burns! You really should have been there, Frisk. It was frickin' INTENSE._

...as I travelled around Cairn, I saw things you wouldn't believe, Frisk. But none of the fiends sent from the Aether, the Void, or even the Eldritch Realm, none of them could have prepared me for what I found there, at the Edge of Reality.

...you remember what we saw in Waterfall, right Frisk? That twisted depiction of an altered Asgore?

...how is that even possible?! How- ...actually, I guess...? Because it was Alpha's domain or something- ...but that would mean-

_A warped mockery of a boss monster. The wolfish snout, the long, spindly limbs, the jagged, bat-like wings... Of all the memories to return after our... little accident... I could have done with that one staying forgotten._

...noooo...

_It was the form that Asgore took, when he unwittingly absorbed my parallel's soul. ...I think I know who Alpha is, now. I don't fully remember, but things are starting to connect._

...how could he have... Why would he have LOOKED like-
...Charlie... Please tell me you-

*It was the hardest fight I've ever fought, back home or on Cairn. But I... I managed to show them mercy. I appealed to their... agreeable sides.*

...are you SURE they're who you think they are, Charlie? I- I'm having trouble believing-

**The Cardinal:** “Oh come on now, let's be done with this dreary dialogue.”

*As if on cue, the Cardinal butts in to keep me from revealing the truth right now.*

**Frisk:** “Excuse me, but we're in the middle of something right now!”

**The Cardinal:** “You're not, really. You're just talking to your little friend again.”

“Speaking of which, job well done young man! You at least have been entertaining to watch. A dance of bloodied blades, a whirling storm across the face of Cairn, paving the road of Cairn’s future with trampled flesh and bone. I am most impressed.”

“And unlike your soft-skinned lady-friend here, your “dilly-dallying” was none of your fault in the slightest! It must have been like having your father forget to pick you up from football practice, only for you to wander off into the woods and be accosted by unspeakable horrors.”

“But it's alright. It's ok. You're finally back where you're meant to be. For all the flourish of your fighting style, you can only watch someone run the Crucible so many times before you want to bash Lokarr's smug face in with a stuffed flamingo.”

“Now, hop to it! You have a date with destiny!”

*This fucking guy, I swear. He's worse than the Observer...*

**The Cardinal:** “OI. I heard that you little shit. Don't make me take back my praise of you.”

**Little Frisk – LV.???? KN.????**

My World – My World

[LOAD]

**The Cardinal:** “Good boy.”

---

*A familiar, inky black void surrounds you. In the distance, you see a shimmering yellow star on the ground.*

...why is this so familiar? I've never been here? ...or have I?

*After a short walk, you approach the star, and reach out to touch it, like you did so many times*
Holy crap, was that SERIOUSLY the last time we used Slot 1?!  

*Looks like it. I guess we musta gotten a little overzealous with Slot 2.*

Could we- Is it even possible for us to-

*The sound of splintering rock tells you no. It is not possible. Because somebody's breaking the save files as we speak.*

**No no NO! PLEASE GODS NO!**

*The cracks widen as the pummelling continues. She really wants those save files gone.*

*With one final, earth-shattering strike, the save files are obliterated, revealing-*

**Flowey:** “Heh... You're not actually Charlie, are you? There's something... different, about you.”

“At first, I didn't understand. You came so far, showing nobody any mercy. But then, after grinding everyone into dust, you gave up at the last hurdle.”

“Charlie wouldn't have given up after coming so far. He woulda seen this through to the bitter end. But you chose to start over. You didn't kill a single monster. Heck, you even befriended some of them!”

“But of course, you couldn't make that old fool come around. Not even an idiot like you could help an idiot like him. And in spite of your best efforts, he's DEAD. The one person you can NEVER save. You KILLED him.”

“And now, here we are. I'm just one human soul away from becoming a GOD. And you... who ARE you? WHAT are you?”

“...I'm not in any hurry to take your soul, my little monarch. So for now, *how about we play a little game?*”

**Frisk:** “PLEEEASE! FLOWEY! IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE LIKE THIS!”
Uh, Frisk? ...there's nobody there.

FLOWEY!? Flow- ...what just happened. What in the actual FUCK was that.

I... I think that was you remembering the start of your fight with him.

Oh god... It really did happen, didn't it? Even when I tried to go Pacifist, I still had to kill- *sniff* I couldn't get away, I couldn't make him stand down, I had to- And then Flowey-

*Frisk... Oh Frisk, Frisk, please don't cry*

I ca- I can't stop myself! I-

The Cardinal: “Oh bloody hell. Well this won't do, we can't have this getting in the way of our story.”

“DrY yer Eyes M8,”

“I kno it's hard to taek but 'er mind 'as bin made up,”

“s plentea mur fish in th' see.-”

“DrY yer Eyes M8,”

“I kno you want t' make 'er sea how much this pain hertz,”

“But yu've got t' walk away now,”

“It's oooover.-”

What in the actual fuck was that garbage. What even is this guy- ...Frisk? You're- not crying anymore?

I... I feel like I should be, but- I can't? I can't cry... What?!

What the hell did he do to you...? Is this... the power of Song? Did he seriously just “dry your eyes”, mate?

The Cardinal: “Yes, I bloody well did. It is one of my many talents. Now, face Little Frisk and let her make her little speech about gods or whatever before she destroys you.”

...seriously. Alright. Little Frisk looks at you from behind the pile of shattered save files, her eyes filled with a contempt unbecoming of one so young.

Like you're one to talk...

The Cardinal: “And before you say anything, Charlie, no. The spell did NOT make her bitchy. That's just how she usually is.”

“Which I thought you would know by now, having lived with her for half her bloody life.”

Little Frisk: “...are you quite finished?”
The Cardinal: “Yes. Yes I am. You have the floor, sweetheart.”

Little Frisk: “...how could I ever turn out as pathetic as you?”

“Just look at you, a grown lady snivelling like a little kid. I have an EXCUSE to cry like that, what's YOUR damage?”

...are you going to take that?

Frisk: “Ohhh, you have NO idea what I've been through to get here. Pray that you never have to do what I did.”

Little Frisk: “Whatever.”

“...still, I'm glad that you're here. You and... whoever that other kid was.”

“Seven human souls, including my own. That's how many they needed to break the barrier. And if I wanted, I could break it right now.”

“...but what then? The monsters can't leave, even with the barrier down. Even if they made it to the city, they'll be attacked by those... those MEN.”

The Cardinal: “It would be a terrible end to that arc of history; they would be freed from their underground prison, only to be rounded up into labour camps by Chinese soldiers.”

“And sadly, even with seven souls burning in your chest, you are still a mere mortal. One bullet in just the right spot is all it would take to send you whirling into the void. And you can't exactly drive the Chinese back if you're dead on the ground.”

“We can't very well have that now, can we? This is Undertale, not Nier. And there is still hope for you to make a difference out there. I can help you with that, child.”

Little Frisk turns to the Cardinal. Despite the power in her hands, she is still very afraid.

Little Frisk: “...does this mean I don't have to kill her, to become a god?”

Frisk: “What the FUCK!? Come on! Were you really going to do that to me?!”

The Cardinal: “Quiet, you. Also, yes, and YES.”

“I carry the knowledge, the programs, and the POWER that you will need in order to save your world from the New Dynasty.”

“The Flames of Judgement, to burn them from the face of the earth! A Halo of Light, to protect you from grievous harm! Wings of Liberty, to send you searing through the skies! And most important of all, the gift of eternity.”

“For even with the potent starter kit I offer you, the chances of you being struck down are very high indeed. One bullet will not be enough to fell you, but thirty would still do the job, even WITH the Halo.”

“Thus, when you fall in battle, your soul may manifest in any dead body, and be reborn in a matter of seconds. No matter how many times they kill you, they will never be able to keep you down.
This, I bestow upon all of my Revenants.”

“All I ask in return... is that you raise hell. Show the enemy NO MERCY! Sear the flesh from their bones! Make them suffer for furthering the spread of their masters' tyranny!”

“For they are oppression... Controlling, without abandon. But you... You will be their undoing. You will be rage... Brutal, without mercy. Slash and burn, until all is ashes.”

“...that in mind, however, allow me to hold on to the souls you've acquired. It would be a lot harder to empower you, with six souls standing in the way.”

“...so, child, do we have a deal?”

...this guy is insane. It's bad enough that she has 6 human souls, excluding her own, but if he can truly give her that kind of power...

**The Cardinal:** “Believe me, I would not do this if there were no other option. The men of this planet are so pathetically weak, reliant on steel and storm to do their dirty work. When they betrayed their ethereal kindred, their very souls began to harden and freeze, generation by generation, until no human born could use magic by natural means.”

“But you, child, you can be the hero they need. The GOD they DESERVE. With this covenant I offer, you can show them all. Mortals. Monsters. Machines. Everyone. You can show them the true meaning of this universe.”

“You have suffered enough at their hands. They drove you from the city of fallen angels, and you fell back. They shot your mother, and you fell back. They caused you to flee from Salt Lake City, and again you fell back.”

“But no longer. Now is the time to make them stop. The line must be drawn HERE. This far, and NO FURTHER. For now is the time for you, Frisca Rivera, to have your well-deserved vengeance.”

*Please tell me she's not going to go through with this. She's just a- ...no, no that wouldn't stop her either.*

...she reaches her hand out to the red bird. She's actually going for it. We can't just-  

**Frisk:** “No! Don't do it!”

**Little Frisk:** “...I'm ready. Make me into a monster.”

**I run to try and stop her.**

*A wave of darkness knocks you back. No, NO! The souls!*

**The Cardinal:** “Upload in progress.”

...*she's in pain... Oh god, this is- This cannot continue!*
Frisk: “Please, stop this! You don't know what you're doing—”

The Cardinal: “As if you could even BEGIN to understand...”

“She has suffered, powerless, as a result of YOUR intervention, your COWARDICE. Because of that one SELFISH act, her life, her WORLD has been torn asunder by the consequences of your actions.”

“But now, she has the chance to make things right. To drive the New Dynasty from her lands, to erase the dreadful progress that your butterfly effect has permitted. To put this world back on track, and prepare it for the coming Darkness...”

*Red lightning courses through Little Frisk, while flame-like wisps of vapor rise from her keeled-over form. She's stopped screaming, but I think it's because she physically can't anymore.*

The Cardinal: “Sweetheart, sweetheart listen to me! I know it hurts, I'm sorry, it's an inexorable part of the process! But focus on what you can do with this power!”

“Think of the soldiers who killed your mother! Think of how brightly they will blaze when you find them! Think of how the people will cheer, once you have single-handedly driven the invaders from the West Coast! Focus on your bright, incandescent future!”

**IT'S ALL GONE RED! I CAN'T SEE!**

...the red mist rapidly fades in and out, revealing brief glimpses of the black void, the Cardinal, and the seething, pained body of Little Frisk.

*Wait, is that-*

Oh crap, I think it is.

*Wrapped in a deep black cloak, a crown of poppies beneath his hood, the Observer walks towards the Cardinal.*

The Observer: “You're making a big mistake, mate. I know you can't stop this even if you wanted to, but really? An 8 year old girl? THAT'S how low your standards have gotten?”

The Cardinal: “I thought I cast you out? Meh. Nevermind. You can stand here and watch your “star pupil” get burnt to cinders. That'll teach you to-”

The Observer: “Are you REALLY that thick mate? She's fucking DETERMINED. She can just-”

The Cardinal: “No, she bloody can't! This Frisk has made quite sure of that. What a grand and intoxicating innocence, Observer. How can you BE so naïve?!”

“There is no escape! No recall or intervention can work in this place! For your plaything, it is entirely too late for her to be shown mercy...”

The Observer: “...god DAMN you. Damn you to OBLIVION!”
“...you'll have to excuse me if I don't stay and watch.”

*He's... he's gone?! Are you serious?*

The Cardinal: “Typical bloody Observer. Always crumbles when the pressure gets too high.”

“No matter, I'll find a way to make him see this. He has to learn, even if he's not here in person...”

It's... it's all over, isn't it? This is how it ends.

The Observer: “Wait a minute. That voice...”

“...just who the hell are you, and what have you done with the Cardinal?!”

“The Cardinal”: “You fuckin' wot, mate?”

The Observer: “The Cardinal I knew was never this antagonistic and spiteful. He liked to have a go at me, yes. He had an ill-conceived plan to make this story more “interesting”, yes.”

“But you know what he DIDN'T have? A British accent.”

“Don't think I haven't noticed, good sir. I've poured over his cheeky set of notes in previous entries, and they felt quite American indeed. I don't know exactly when YOU took over, but it doesn't matter.”

“Because I know someone who can stop this before you go too far. Stay here while I go and get him.”

...what the hell?

*What just happened? What is even going on anymore?!*

---

**Meanwhile, in Wellsverne Gothic...**

As the gateway between Ghroth and the Devil's Steps collapsed, a wave of relief washed over Ben. The invasion, at least in this small corner of the world, had been thwarted.

**Ben:** “It's over... Finally...”

Knee deep in the dead, he fell to his knees, and stared at the alien battlecruiser he had crashed into the portal. He could not help but laugh at the ludicrous nature of his victory over the Order of Ghroth.

**Ben:** “A spacecraft. I crashed a bloody spacecraft into a portal to close it.”

“...this has been one of the strangest days of my life.”

This, he announced to no-one in particular. He doubted there was anyone left to listen to him, let
alone answer his question, given the carnage surrounding him. This, he thought, until a familiar voice called to him from the edge of the plateau. There was pain in her voice as she approached, limping towards the scene of utter carnage and destruction.

Ada: “Ben!”

Ben turned, his ribs aching, towards his distant friend. The wave of relief threatened to drown him in sentimentality, as he saw that she somehow survived the battle, but in spite of everything he calmed his raging heart.

But as she approached, her pace slowed in awe. For while Ben felt that a great weight being lifted from his shoulders, he also felt that it was pulling at him as it did so.

It was at that moment that Ben realized that some unseen force was pulling him into the air. He really could not catch a break, in spite of his best efforts.

Ben: “Oh gods, what's- Nonononono-”

Hullo there, Ben! Going to have to borrow you for a bit, if you don't mind. Well, you probably DO mind, but I need you to help resolve an issue in another story. I wouldn't normally do something like this, but things have gotten very much out of hand.

Ben: “Who the hell are you?!”

I am the Observer. You might know me from the Cardinal's witterings, the “other person” he was talking to. And, well, I'm pretty sure something's wrong with him. You'll figure out why in a moment.

Ada: “BEN! Don't worry, I'll try to-”

In a flash of black, Benjamin Liddell na Pendragon vanished from the universe. Ada could only stare in bewilderment at the scene that had unfolded before her. Wherever her number one fan had been taken, she would never know...

Aaaand back to DoctorTale.

You find yourself standing in a dark void. To your left, a young woman in a striped shirt looks on in confusion. To your right, you see a child who looks oddly similar to the young woman, seething with red magicks and looking equally as confused. And in front of you, the passerine Reaper who made you an immortal killing machine. The Cardinal himself, or so it would seem.

What is the meaning of this?! What the blithering hell is going on?!

Frisk: “Wha-”

Try to keep the situation under control. The child is potentially quite dangerous, as she has just been... “elevated” by the Cardinal.

...no... He didn't- To a- WHY?
Ben: “A child? I know things are desperate back home, but A CHILD?! Have you no SHAME, Cardinal?!”

Your morally charged outburst does not faze your “benefactor”. Instead, he addresses me.

“The Cardinal”: “Really, Observer? Turning one of his- MY agents against me? Truly this is LOW, even for one such as yourself.”

Ha! See? Something's not quite right with him. Not only has his accent changed significantly since last you met, but that slip of the tongue is a dead give-away, don't you think?

“The Cardinal”: “I was willing to let things slide, but of course you had to play dirty. In spite of what I said, there was a faint sliver of hope that this child WOULDN’T burn your precious Frisk, but you have forced my hand.”

The Cardinal hops over to the sniffling child, weeping over the pain that she has endured. And that's not even counting what the Cardinal did to empower her.

What madness is this?! What horrors could have driven the child to-


“...you really have suffered more than any child should, haven't you? You are more than entitled to exact your revenge, however you wish.”

“But if you want to know the true source of your suffering, you need only look at her.”

Little Frisk lifts her head, tears still clouding her vision as a muddled mess of blue and purple slowly steps backwards.

Little Frisk: “H-her?”

“The Cardinal”: “Yes. HER.”

“In her own timeline, the mainline to your “tangent”, the boy she loved fell foul of a terrible curse, and rather than stick around and try to help him recover, she ran away.”

“She ran so far that she went back in time, to a time when the boy was a lot younger, to try and keep him from falling foul of the curse. But again, she FAILED.”

The Cardinal's words cut deep. The older Frisk is starting to tear up and shake, as she-

So they ARE the same girl? I think I remember a book that started like this...

It's a bit more complicated than that. Building on what the Cardinal said, the younger Frisk's timeline branched off from the older Frisk's timeline, due to the older Frisk travelling back in time. While they're identical in many ways, they are from two technically different worlds, and are their own people.

That definitely sounds like something out of a science fiction novel. And the Cardinal did talk about an “under-tail fan fiction universe” back on Grover's Green...
That's UnderTALE, Ben. “Undertail” is a much less savoury tangent, and not what is happening here in any way.

But yes indeed. There are multiple universes out there, and this is on-

“The Cardinal”: “Shut UP! I'm TRYING TO HAVE A BLOODY MOMENT HERE!”

“...where was I...? Of course. HER.”

“After her failure to save the boy she loved the second time around, she tried to find a solution that would allow her to succeed in the next iteration. But even when she succeeded in keeping her beloved from being cursed, she could not help but fail spectacularly yet again.”

“For to save the boy she loved, she MURDERED the one she called her brother, only to have the brother's curse infect the fatherly king who had cared for them all. The cursed king passed through the barrier that contains this kingdom, and took the place of the cursed son in the pages of history.”

“...why do I tell you this, sweetheart? Well, if not for your parallel, the future would never have changed. A simple shift, 200 years ago, is what changed your situation from bad to WORSE.”

“If Frisk had simply given up and let things be as they were, things would not be as bad as they are now. The enemy would have been driven back in Las Vegas, by the magitek knights of Phoenix, but in your world there were no such knights. The enemy would never have reached Salt Lake City, but in your world they did.”

“Your mother would still be alive to take care of you. But in your world...”

What an astonishingly vile fuck. He's trying to make the younger Frisk hate her parallel even more, perhaps to the point where she may try to kill her.

This- whoever this man is, he is a coward, a blackguard and a liar. I will enjoy teaching him a lesson...

Well, the thing is... He's definitely a coward, I won't deny that. And yes, he's a blackguard to boot. But a liar? Ehnhh...

In some regards, he isn't wrong. Like he implied, this timeline is an offshoot of Frisk's original timeline, and it was indeed created by Frisk going back in time. And in that regard, some would say that Frisk is the root cause of all the changes that happened in the tangent relative to the original timeline.

...hmmmm. I suppose that makes sense, but I don't think it means that she's directly responsible for the events of the past 200 years, whatever they may be. After all, if someone crashes their car during a storm on a country road, you don't blame the butterfly flapping her wings in Brazil a few days ago, do you?

I wasn't implying that I blamed her for any of it. I'm just saying that our “mutual fiend” is not entirely wrong, in that Frisk's mere existence created the new timeline, and all the changes that happened could theoretically be traced back to her. Though like you said, we don't blame butterflies for car crashes.
...none of which seems to be registering with the younger Frisk. She's taken the bait!

But she's a child! She's not actually going to- OH MY GOD SHE IS.

She lashes out at the older Frisk with a burst of crimson flame. Thankfully, the girl dodges the attack, as she is wont to do whenever someone tries to attack her.

Well? What are you waiting for?!

Ben: “Alright, that's enough of that! Y-”

As you attempt to talk the child down, a fireball erupts against your chest. As far as she's concerned, you're just in her way.

GHHhh- urgh, I should have had my shields up... Ohhh that's going to hurt tomorrow.

Well fire up your generator, then!

I'm trying- THERE we go! Shields are up and running! Now...

Ben: “Now you listen here! I am not going to stand here and let you do this, child! You have nothing to gain from killing an innocent woman!”

Little Frisk: “GET OUT OF MY WAY!”

I hold her back with the end of my quarterstaff. Someone needs to teach this girl some manners, I must say!

Ben: “Are you even listening to me?”

Little Frisk: “SHE KILLED MY MOM!”

Ben: “She did NOTHING, child! Are you so dense as to believe that she is truly responsible?!”

Little Frisk: “Shut UP, SHUT UP!”

I shove her back with my staff. She stumbles and falls, but still glares at me with hatred in her eyes...

Ok, seriously, what HAPPENED to this little gi- GAH!

With a torrent of crimson fire, she tries to burn you away. Your shields' power ticks down as they struggle to protect you from the flames.

[Thermaturgy] > *Chill Wind > *Little Frisk

The cold, biting winds you conjure clash with her pyromantic antics! Channelling more and more power into the spell, you drive back the stream of flame as the chill winds force their way closer to their target.

Frisk: “No! NO! STOP IT! STOOOP IIIIT!”

Tenacious as she is, she can barely hope to match your magickal prowess. In the end, your veteran wizardry overwhelms her nascent sorcery, the force of your Chill Wind sweeping her off
of her feet and leaving her shivering on the floor of the void.

Gods, she's just a child! But she fights like a cornered badger! ...I pray that Ada's children never end up like this girl.

*With the horrors unfolding beneath the Hunter's Moon, I'd honestly be surprised if they didn't. Then again, you never know. Maybe they'll turn out alright in your world?*

We can only hope...

**Ben:** “Now, *do as you are told* and LISTEN to me.”

“Did you ever see her fighting alongside the Chinese?”

**Little Frisk:** “Wh- what are you trying to say?”

**Ben:** “It's a simple question, *yes* or *no*! Did you ever see Frisk fighting alongside the... Chinese...”

Now I say it, that raises another question. Why ARE the Chinese attacking? Is this meant to be revenge for the Opium Wars?

*Not quite. Especially since the Opium Wars took place over 200 years ago, and was mostly between China and the Brûtish Empire. Though apparently the United States did participate in the Second Opium War, but that's beside the point.*

*From what I gathered, the New Dynasty's current campaign is partially due to disputes over territories in the Pacific, and partially due to California not wanting to share the schematics of their atmospheric moisture condensers. Next thing you know, the New Dynasty decides to take the condensers by force, claims Hawai'i as a Chinese territory, and subsequently begins a campaign to humble the entire American Southwest for snubbing the glory of “China Reborn”, or whatever their arse-backwards propaganda machine is spewing forth this fortnight.*

...well now. We can't have that, can we?

*Are you thinking about- ...if you are, you’d probably be better suited to the job than Little Frisk. She might be a Revenant too, but you're a Hunter on top of that. A ten year veteran, no less.*

*If anyone is going to save this world, it should an immortal battle-wizard such as yourself. But for now, we must try to keep Little Frisk from doing something stupid.*

**Ben:** “Don’t you see, child? Just because her actions may have had a knock-on effect, it doesn't mean that she actually killed your mother. There's no way she could have even BEEN there!”

“...is that right, Frisk?”

*As you look in the older Frisk's direction, she shakily nods. She's in no real position to challenge her parallel, and even if she were, she lacks the will to kill her, even in self-defence.*

**The Cardinal:** “I'm not so sure you're in the best position to talk about not hurting your family, sidhe. After all, do you honestly believe that it was a precarious oil lamp that burned down the Liddell family home?”
“Let us not forget what you are, thermaturge. The power to manipulate temperature with your mind and soul, to generate extremes of heat and cold, a primal power that should not be trifled with. And in that regard, you started quite young, didn't you?”

_Alright, I see exactly what he's trying, and I'm going to tell you right now-_ 

He's... Oh gods, is he trying to imply-

_He is, the miserable cunt. He's trying to sow seeds of doubt and despair in your heart, to throw you off-course into a pool of tears and gut-gnawing guilt. But trust me when I tell you that you did NOT start the fire. Because I saw what happened. And just as you remember, you actually tried to fight the fire!_

This creature really does have no shame, does he? I'm not some bloody pyromaniac, I couldn't even light a bloody match when I was 6!

_Too bloody right. But you knew how to chill drinks on a summer's day, much to old man Henry's surprise. I little sidhe boy with the power of cryomancy? I call that “Pimm's o'clock”, as they say._

Oh gods don't remind me. I hear that enough on the bloody radio.

_“The Cardinal”: “Good lord are you STILL talking? Sweetheart, just go on and kill him won't you?”_

_“...sweetheart?”_

_I don't think she buys it anymore, mate._

_Ben: “You are a dirty liar, whatever you are. And whatever you are, you are not the Cardinal. He would never stoop this low...”_

_The Cardinal: “Are you challenging me, Revenant? I MADE you. And if you keep this up, I will UNmake you, and all you hold dear.”_

_Oh give it a fucking rest mate. You're a shite, hypocritical villain, all flash and no pancakes. Why are you even here? Why bother being so antagonistic when you're this shite at it?_

_“The Cardinal”: “To teach you a lesson, you lazy fuck. Speaking of which, it's quite ironic that you of all people accuse me of being shite.”_

_A lesson?! Who ARE you? WHAT are you? And what in the everliving FUCK is your PROBLEM?!

_“The Cardinal”: “My “problem”, “Observer”, is that I know that you're BETTER than this! And you COULD have been even better! But here you are, wasting what little talent you still have on these shitty little stories of yours!”_

_“You spent all that time in college, working towards your wonderful future career, but as soon as you got into university, what did you do? You CRUMBLED.”_

_“You barely lasted a fucking MONTH! You didn't even TRY to stick with it! But the worst_
part of all is that you COULD have if you JUST. PUT IN. THE EFFORT.”

“But NO. NO! You couldn't handle the workload, you couldn't adjust to the study environment, you weren't even ready to start living away from HOME! And just LOOK AT YOU NOW! You're nearly 25 and you're doing NOTHING with your life! You've gone NOWHERE with it!”

What is happening. Erm. Wha-

“The Cardinal”: “But I didn't fuck up anywhere NEAR as bad as you did. I stuck with it. I picked up a vice, just like she said. I made the sacrifices that I had to. And I LEARNED. OH, I learned so much...”

“Three years and twenty seven thousand pounds worth of student debt later, I was where I was meant to be. I had earned my qualifications through THREE YEARS worth of blood, sweat and tears. I knew what I needed to embrace what I was BORN to BE!”

“For I, Edward Molyneux-Roberts, am a hell-tempered, fully-certified game developer. And you, Edward Molyneux-Roberts, are a university drop-out with only a part-time kitchen job to keep you afloat.”

“...how the fuck did you fuck up THIS HARD? You are ME! But you WASTED your LIFE! It's like you're from the fucking worst timeline imaginable!”

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

...oh crap. I think I know who this guy is supposed to be, Frisk.

He's... he's the Observer's parallel. I- How is this- I don't know what to say...

I honestly don't care what this “Mirrorverse Observer” put himself through, or how horrified he is that his parallel apparently sucks. He is, without a doubt, an ASSHOLE.

...I don't know why, but with all this aggression on this guy's part, I can't help but feel like he's... “damaged”, in some way?

“Mirrorverse Observer”: “How dare you! I'm fucking shipshape you little bitch!”

...see? I try to say he needs help, and he- URK! ...owwww...

A wooden chair? SERIOUSLY?

Mirrorverse Observer: “You want another one? No? Then SHUT THE FUCK UP!”

“...and just what the hell are YOU looking at, Bugs Bunny?!”

Ben: “I don't think I care for your tone, “Edward”.”

Mirrorverse Observer: “DON'T you call me that.”
Ben: “Oh I'm sorry, I suppose you prefer “Eduardo”, don't you?”

"Or are you more partial to Edwina?"

WHOA OK, red lightning brings Ben to his knees. Something tells me the Mirrorverse Observer hates his own name.

...ok, let's go.

Mirrorverse Observer: “Hmmm?”

I tackle the Cardinal and slam them into the ground.

[Elder Magicks] > *Nodens-Oztalun Purgative > *Mirrorverse Observer

Frisk: “OUT, DAMN SPOT!”

Mirrorverse Observer: “YOU WHAT?!?”

The sigil burns itself upon the Cardinal's bird body. Did we get him?!

Mirrorverse Observer: “You really shouldn't have done that.”

“You.”

“IDIOT.”

Wha- He's... changing... OH CRAP!

CAN'T... BREATHE...

A man stands before us, grabbing you by the throat. He appears clean-shaven and bald, wearing jeans, a long-sleeve shirt, and a fancy waistcoat. But the face... it's... He looks like the Observer's “true form”, only without the beard or long hair! My god, it's HORRIFYING!

Mirrorverse Observer: “And you're not exactly the prettiest princess either.”

“Heh. “Princess”. As if someone as weak as you could ever be...”

“Nope. That's not fair. Plenty of ugly berks are born into royalty and nobility. Most of them run the bloody country nowadays.”

“...now, do you have something to say to me?”

Ben: “What- yrgh... what did you do?!”

Mirrorverse Observer: “She thought that I could be purged from this vessel with Elder Magicks. She thought that I was an enemy of the Elder Gods. Oh, how naïve she still is...”

“If anything, she's made it worse for everyone. For the Cardinal, that courageous little bird god, was aligned with the Red, one of the three Primary powers. The Elder Gods are aligned with the White, where all three of the Primaries intersect, and will not tolerate those who align singularly with the raw Primaries.”

“In trying to banish me, she cast out the Cardinal, and left me with more room to assert myself. Yet
another DISMAL failure to add to the pile, Princess.”

“Nope. NOT. A. DAMN. THING.

Th- that’s NOT FUNNY Charlie! I could DIE here-

You didn't let me finish.

Like I said, we don't have a damn thing to say to you. But SHE does.

Mirrorverse Observer: “Oh dear, not another one...”

Little Frisk tries to burn your ass away.

Mirrorverse Observer: “She fails miserably. I drop the older Frisk to the ground, and rip this cheeky little-.”

Ben: [Thermurgy] > *Subzero Shard > *Mirrorverse Observer

“Not on my watch, you don’t.”

Mirrorverse Observer: “…oh bugger.”

A magical shard of smoking ice erupts from Ben's quarterstaff, screaming like a firework. We catch the Mirrorverse Observer's expression before the shard hits him, and it appears to be a look of... disappointment? Not anger, not fear, not even surprise.

The shard slams into his chest, causing him to stagger backwards. He trips over our fallen body, and violently shatters when he hits the floor. ...wait, what-

Ho-ho-HOLY CRAP! That was... I mean, uh-

It's alright Frisk. You can say it, no-one will blame you for feeling that way.

...fine, I'll say it. He was FROZEN, today!

*exasperated sigh* Goddamnit Frisk. That's not what I was talking about at all.

AGH- Sonofa- Damnit, I think I cut myself on a shard of frozen asshole.

...shut up.

I'm not saying anything.

...

Ben: “Are you two alright?”

Frisk: “Nghhh. I'm fine. Just a- a little shaken...”

Understatement of the century, Frisk. Don't you start bottling this shit up again, I swear to god-
FINE. I- Oh god it was-

There you go, let it all out. Bury your face in this guy's fancy blue robes. He won't mind, really.

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

...ok, Observer? What- What do I do here? I wasn't expecting-

Oh don't be so frigid. Give the girl a hug you numpty.

...right. I crouch down and return her embrace.

There we go, that's more like it.

The Cardinal: “Awww, how sweet.”

JEEZIS-

The Cardinal: “Relax, it's just me. ONLY me, no burnt-out psychopaths.”

“Fucked if I know how, but that guy frickin' had me there. I guess that because our goals were the same, up to a point, he was able to “sync up” with me, or somethin'. Ugh, I feel so gross...”

“But trust me, I never wanted to get any of you guys dead. This was all meant to be a “harmless” exercise, something to spice things up.”

And behold the result. The souls are gone, Little Frisk has been turned into an immortal killing machine, and-

The Cardinal: “Waht? Oh, uh, I guess these are yours, then?”

“After I got pushed outta my own body, I found myself with these frickin' things. Six human souls, an' one of them's merged with the soul of... huh.”

“Well fuck-a-doodle-doo, there's an ethereal's soul inside of this one...”

“...yeeeaah, I'm not gonna touch the ethereal soul. Just gonna leeeeave it in there. I swear, those things are as fragile as innocence, even on a GOOD day.”

“...wait a sec, these are the ones- Heh. Now that I'm here, there's no need for these things.”

What are you planning, Cardinal?

The Cardinal: “Here, sweetie. You hold on to these, and stand the hell back.”

You're not actually going to- Oh, OK. This is happening.

A beam of searing crimson burns forth from the Cardinal, piercing through the veil of reality back into the real world. The Prince of the Underground shields his eyes as the beam smashes into the barrier. And in a heartbeat, the barrier evaporates in a roiling wave of crackling red.
...the barrier was destroyed... And so, in turn, is this slice of unreality, dumping us back into the real world.

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

...it's over. It's finally over... Is what I would be saying if things weren't so different this time around. They're finally free...

But it's not that simple. Even with the Barrier down, we can't go out there. In case you've forgotten, the New Dynasty still controls Salt Lake City. And even if we all fled to the east, there'll be a lot of bandits out there in Wyoming.

Didn't the Templars clear out most of the- oh.

Yeah. No guarantee of that this time around. Not holding out much hope for Idaho either. Hell, thinkin' about the roads, Idaho's probably their next target. That or Colorado.

If you ask me, our best bet is that we stick around down here, get the Condenser to open a wide enough portal, then head back to our own world.

I... I guess so, but... Well...

Prince Asriel: “You've really done it this time, child.”

“We tried to forgive you for your earlier shenanigans, but this... I don't know why I trusted you. I showed you the souls, I thought you'd understand, but-”

Asriel freezes as he realizes the truth of the situation. He notices that the walls of the cavern no longer strobe with the ancient magic that held his people prisoner for so long. Nervously, he reaches out to touch what he knows is no longer there, yet when his hand passes through empty air, he can't help but feel surprised.

Prince Asriel: “...did you actually- I...”

Frisk: "Asriel!"

I run to Asriel, hugging him tight. I missed you so much...

The Cardinal: “Actually, uh-”

The Cardinal stops himself before he ruins the moment. Well, both moments if we're gonna split hairs.

The Cardinal: “...yeah. Yeah! That was all the kid's doing! She's freed you from your bondage underground!”

“...that said, though, you might wanna think twice about going out there. See, uh, there's a pretty nasty war on.”
“But what's worse is that, even when the Chinese get driven back, the “liberation force” won't be much friendlier.”

...no... Surely he doesn't mean-

**The Cardinal:** “See, with the New Dynasty outside, you wouldn't last a minute. But if the Texans find you guys? You won't last a second.”

“So take it from me, your good pal the Cardinal, an' stay down here. Get your Stargate workin' like it should, an' skip world to somewhere nicer.”

**Prince Asriel:** “That's... uh, that's the plan...”

**The Cardinal:** "But if I'm gonna be honest, improvin' the Condenser's gonna be the EASY part of your plan. Trust me, it's gonna be one helluva search for a place that's safe for ethereals as weak as your kind."

**Prince Asriel:** “...wait a minute. Aren't you that- ...ohhh crap.”

**The Cardinal:** “Yeahhmm, about that. Uh, long story short, I hecked up. Yeah that's right Observer, I'm apologizing for my shenanigans.”

“I thought I'd be able to make things better by convincing this little girl to get her hands on the souls, but, well, things got a little weird. In that your, uh, girlf-”

*Asriel looks appalled at the notion. Though deep down there's probably some small part of him that-*

Don't even. Just- just DON'T.

**The Cardinal:** “Sorry, uh, your “sister” then. Yeah, 'cause that somehow makes it less weird. As a side effect of Little Frisk getting' her hands on the souls, your big sis got tossed outta your world an' had to work her way through others.”

“Though she had a little help from a pal of mine. The Observer, he's a... He's an alright guy. Real weird piece of work, but pretty neat when you get to know him.”

"He's, uh kinda smart, weirdly funny, and... uh... An' he helped Frisk navigate her way back to your world! Yeah. That's how it went down.”

*Asriel turns to the... huh. What IS this guy anyway? He reminds me of those rabbit monsters from Snowdin, but at the same time he's... kind of human, actually? Like some kind of rabbit-man?*

If I had to hazard a guess, I'd say he's one of the “aes insi” that the Observer told me about. Well, he name-dropped them at some point. There was an undead who was apparently an aes insi at some point, and he mentioned- ...oh my god.

*What is it?*

**The Imperials ate rabbit-men!**

*That... I know this sounds crazy, but I have a feeling that they probably tasted amazing.*

*How can you SAY that?! They're PEOPLE! And they're BUNNIES!*
Hey, back in my day we ate rabbit whenever it was available. Meat wasn't exactly cheap, an' even my worthless father was capable of catching a damn rabbit every now and then. ...y'know, for all the crazy stuff she made me consume, Mom still made an amazing rabbit stew.

...in spite of everything, you're still a sick puppy, Charlie. ...never change.

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

Prince Asriel: “...uh, howdy! I don't believe we've met. I'm guessing you're the “Observer”?"

“I really have to thank you, for taking care of Frisk out there. If anything had happened to her, after all these years...”

Well, this is awkward, isn't it?

He must think that I am you? This... goat-man? I've met plenty of minotaurs but I've never heard of goatfolk before...

Well he's never met an aes in- Well he's never met an aes sidhe before. So that makes two of you.

Ben: “Thank you, but I'm... not the Observer. I'm... someone else that he dragged into this mess. No offence.”

None taken mate.

The Cardinal: “The Observer doesn't exist physically in this corner of reality. Hell, I probably know the most about him, and I don't know where his universe is.”

“What he does do, however, is piggyback onto the minds of other people in this layer of existence. That's how he interacts with our world most of the time.”

Dialogue: Asriel & The Observer

Yup. Case in point, this is how I roll.

AAAAAAHHH! WHAT TH- GET OUTTA MY HEAD!

Ohhh, sorry about that. I was just trying to make a point.

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

Prince Asriel Dreemurr recoils after my attempt to communicate with him. Maybe I should have just spoken through you, instead.
...I'm not sure I would be comfortable with that.

**Prince Asriel:** “You... you made your point, alright.”

**Ben:** “I imagine he did. For a moment, I couldn't feel his... presence, I suppose.”

“...what am I saying? I should probably introduce myself.”

“I am Benjamin Liddell na Pendragon, of the Circle of Merlin.”

**You extend a hand towards the caprine prince. He accepts the handshake.**

**Prince Asriel:** “You're... you're a magician, aren't you?”

**Ben:** “That's what it says on my diploma. Though technically I'm more of a wizard, since my innate power's pretty strong.”

**Prince Asriel:** “Ahhh, so you're on the middle of the scale, then?”

**Ben:** “Aye. I didn't get all of it from textbooks, but I'm not a pure sorcerer either. ...wait, are we on the same page, here?”

**Prince Asriel:** “If we're talking about the relationship between acquired knowledge and innate talent, you're on my level.”

**Ben:** “Indeed we are, it seems.”

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

...uh, Frisk? Something's- **UH, the other Frisk's been pinned to the ground by someone's blue attack.**

**doc sans:** “she's goin' for the souls!”

**Little Frisk:** “I was putting them back! Let GO of me!”

**doc sans:** “yeah, pull the other one. i shoulda known you'd pull somethin' like this...”

**Little Frisk:** “I said. Let. Go. Of. Me.”

**Holy crap. I've never seen that many fireballs before, not even from the King and Queen.**

Damnit, what is she DOING?!

*Forcing Sans to dodge a flurry of magic attacks, I guess. He's so focused on avoiding her “warning shots”, that he can't hold her down. ...that's actually pretty damn smart, I gotta say. She actually knows what she's doing.*

...huh. She really IS putting all the souls back. Not like she needs them, anyway. **...oh my god.**

...you realise that there are only six soul jars this time around. In place of the seventh, you see a...
you see...

The sword...

**Little Frisk:** “See? I put them back. Was it REALLY that hard to trust me?”

*Sans still doesn't look convinced, as a cage of bone erupts around Little Frisk.*

**Frisk:** “Sans.”

**Little Frisk:** “SANS!”

*He doesn't let up. Call me crazy, but I think that now he actually gives a damn about things, he's a lot more dangerous.*

I look to Asriel with a begging stare, urging him to intervene.

**Prince Asriel:** “Fontaine.”

*Sans looks at his boss with a look of disbelief.*

**Prince Asriel:** “Call the Elite Guard.”

*Hope fades from Little Frisk's face. Then, her expression sours.*

*The cage of bones explodes as pillars of fire erupt from the floor! In the moment of confusion, Little Frisk grabs a hold of your old sword, brandishing it without finesse. It glows red with her, uh, sorcerous power? I guess that's the right term for it?*

**Little Frisk:** “Stay away from me! All of you, BACK OFF!”

*Naturally, everyone backs off. No-one wants to get too close to a frightened little girl wielding- Wait, when did you make a sword-*

Please don't do anything stupid...

*No seriously, I barely remember you making a sword. What the hell happened that caused you to make a goddamn sword?*

The Cardin- No, the guy controlling the Cardinal, I think he was telling the truth... I'm remembering more and more of those, uh, lost years, and-

**The Cardinal:** “OH my GODS!”

“That is a REALLY nice-looking sword!”

“...uh, I mean, c'mon kid. Nobody needs to die today.”

“...nah, scratch that, that's a total lie. A LOT of people need to die today. Just not these guys. They've got enough to deal with down here.”

“Let's all just take some deep breaths an' deal with this in a less confrontational manner. Save your energy for the trials ahead. **Right everybody?**”
We all take calm, deep breaths, and reeeelaaaax...

The Cardinal: “...alright, here's what's gonna happen. Kiddo, you drop the sword an' scoot it over to the other you. Everyone else, just keep calm an' back off.”

After what felt like an eternity, Little Frisk slides the sword over to “Ben”, who picks it up and hands it to us.

Asriel watches Little Frisk nervously, his hand hovering dangerously close to the big iron on his hip. I'm not sure that's necessary, bro.


“So BEAT IT. Just BEAT IT.”

I dunno about you, but I'm feeling like I don't want to mess with this guy. It's just not worth it.

My thoughts exactly.

Prince Asriel: “O-okay, just take it easy. I was only reaching to toss you a granola bar for the trip. Here, s-see?”

Asriel definitely looks nervous as he throws Frisk the granola bar. I imagine we all do. Except for Ben, for some reason.

Ben: “I hate to say it, Cardinal, but that was rather cheap.”

The Cardinal: “Quiet, you.”

doc sans: “eh, don't say i didn't warn you kiddo. you go out there an' do whatever you gotta do.”

Wait, did we just get- Holy shit. I think that was a frickin' Jedi Mind Trick!

Quick, we gotta- ...never mind, she's gone.

Wherever you're going, other me, please... Don't do anything you'll regret...

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

Ben: “...I should probably go after her. She might need backup.”

The Cardinal: “Naaaah, that won't be necessary. She's a Revenant, after all. You only really need one of them to raise hell in a given area.”

Ben: “But she's just a LITTLE GIRL! She doesn't know the ropes!”

The Cardinal: “Don't you worry your little Cornish head about her. I'll give her some pointers here and there, give her pep talks when she feels down an' out.”

“Trust me, she'll be fine.”
Ben: “...I am still not convinced. But if you are going to support her, I suppose I...”

“...wait, what about you? What about that rogue... whoever the hell that was?”

*The thought that I could've succeeded, at such a hefty cost to myself... You know what? I regret nothing.*

The Cardinal: “Like I said, don't worry your head. He only managed to get a hold of me because our interests were synchronized in messing with the Observer. And somehow, I doubt he'll change his tune just because he got disconnected. I'm not really in the mood you mess with you anymore, man.”

“...still, I'll need to keep myself in check. He might keep at it an' try to break in again.”

*I might know someone who can help, mate.*

The Cardinal: “Which of your “friends” are you gonna recommend, Observer? I have a feeling that Lythalia Ubasti's not gonna be much help here, and I doubt “the boys” will be all that comfortable helping me out even if they could.”

“Not to mention, Violet's probably busy with her worldwalking quest, so that just leaves... Really? That guy?”

*The very same. Seek out the Silver Skald and his Ghost Riders. Specifically, seek out the time after they've dealt with the Arad-Nacha, when Skadi's finally taken him back.*

The Cardinal: “Wait, SERIOUSLY?! They're gonna get back together AGAIN?!”

“I swear, last time I thought they'd parted for good. But hey, I guess the destruction of a haywire planet cracker just brings people together, doesn't it?”

“...ugh. Fiiine, I'll go visit them. Once I'm done showing Little Frisk the ropes, that is.”

*Glad to hear it mate. They know how to deal with rogue Players, believe you me.*

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Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

...aaaaand he's gone. I just hope he's a better teacher than that psycho from the “Mirrorverse”.

...I'm gonna say it. I hate that she's like this now. And now I think about it, there really isn't much difference between the Cardinal and the Mirrorverse Observer. They're both assholes, in their own way.

*I dunno, I think they're a little more distinct from one-another. You probably didn't pick up on it, but the Cardinal didn't seem super-pleased that his power had been used on a little girl. Sure, he was willing to let her go out there and, well, do what she has to do, but it felt like he was just making the most of a bad situation.*

Yeah. Sure. You WOULD know about that, wouldn't you?
And so do you.

...sorry. It just sucks that this is how things turned out...

Probably best that we don't dwell on what she's going to do. After all, Asriel's big plan is that we ditch this universe and go live in another one, so we could probably just leave her to her devices in this world.

So instead, let's focus on something else. Like jogging our memory by looking over that sword you apparently made.

I hold the sword in both hands. At the hilt, four metallic prongs form a claw-like crossguard centred around a metallic fanged skull. The blade itself was forged with an undulating, almost flame-like pattern, like one of those fancy German “flammards”.

With some small sense of pride, I present it to Asgore. ...wait, what? Ohhh god, is this-

Frisk, seriously, this isn't funny. There's no-one there. ...oh. Ohhh that's not good.

Asgore: “Well I'll be. I take it this is the latest prototype?”

Frisk: “It is, my lord. Though I can't take all the credit, since Kuro supplied the, uh, the reagents needed for-”

Asgore: “Say no more, my child. It is a fine vessel, I can see that much.”

“...I suppose it will require a source of power, if you are to demonstrate its capabilities.”

Frisk: “...if it's not too much to ask.”

He walks over to the barrier, willing one of the soul jars to rise from the floor. In it... Oh god...

C'mon Frisk, snap out of it! This isn't funny!

Asgore: “...I know that it should go without saying, but please. Be very careful with them.”

“If anything should happen to them, before their new vessels are ready...”

Frisk: “Don't worry, Dad. They'll be fine. I wouldn't put them in the Reaver if I didn't know that it was safe for them.”

“The Reaver”? Seriously? ...but of course you'd do something like that.

I reach into the open jar, and ever so gently pull out the red-and-white soul out of its containment. They vibrate slightly in my hands, as I gently press the soul into the skull of the blade. Don't you boys worry, it'll be alright soon enough...

...you didn't...

Frisk: “See, Dad? They're fine in here.”

“I, uh, need to run a few tests with them in the Reaver. If our predictions are correct, we might not need seven souls after all...”
I head back down to our Lab, the Reaver in hand. If our calculations are correct, we won't make another branch...

...what the hell did you two DO down there?

...I don't feel so good...

**Frisk:** “...I need to get back to the Lab. I've got unfinished business.”

*The floor disagrees with your plans, as it rushes up to meet you. ...wait, shit, that's no good at all!*

**Prince Asriel:** “FRISK!”

**Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer**

Oh god, is she-

*The strain of remembering an overwritten timeline must have been too much for her. That, and she's been through a LOT, without much in the way of proper rest.*

Gods, the poor thing, she really must've pushed herself. The last time I saw a nosebleed that bad, I'd finished a particularly vigorous PK Endurance session. ...I recommend that she take it easy for a couple of days.

**Prince Asriel:** “...thank the gods, she's... It'll be alright, sis. You're gonna be just fine...”

*I think we all need our rest, after the events of today.*

Perhaps. But somehow I doubt it would be wise to leave this place unguarded. If this “New Dynasty” should find this place, and there is no-one to turn them away...

**You're thinking about standing guard at the exit, aren't you Ben?**

Indeed. With this magical barrier down, there is nothing to keep an inquisitive scout from entering this place and endangering us all....

**Yeah, about that. The Barrier was never intended to keep anybody out, funnily enough. While it did make this place harder to find, its main function was to keep everyone inside. And somehow, I doubt that the seven shamans erected the Barrier out of the goodness in their hearts. Well, they probably DID want to keep their neighbours safe, but I suspect jealousy and fear were also key motivators for erecting the Barrier.**

*Though I am fully confident that, even without the weird perception filter turning away all but the most focused of individuals, the New Dynasty will be hard-pressed to discover this place. Mostly because they don't know much about the Far West to begin with, so they'd have to be exceptionally lucky to learn the legend of Mt Ebott.*

...perhaps you are right. Maybe I am being a little paranoid. Still...
Ben: “...Sans, is it?”

doc sans: “yep, that's me. sans the skeleton. my guess is you're not from around these parts, are ya?”

Ben: “Like I said, I'm with the Circle of Merlin. And I suppose that I'm not in Gloucestershire anymore, if what I've heard is correct?”

doc sans: “...uh, nope. you're not... wherever you said you're not anymore. you're in the underground.”

Ben: “...how oddly appropriate.”

“Well, I have a favour to ask. If an intruder tries to enter through... where that “barrier” used to be, alert me as soon as possible. If they are a threat to us, they will be no match for me.”

doc sans: “eh, sure. tea-time's pretty much over, anyway. first sign of trouble, you'll be the first to know.”

That reminds me...

You check your vacuum flask. Alas, it is empty. You must have drained it during the battle on the Devil's Steps.

...as the Prince walks away, carrying his unconscious friend, I call out to him as I follow.

Ben: “This may sound like a peculiar request, but... You wouldn't happen to have any coffee, would you?”

Prince Asriel: “I, uh, think I have some in the house. Don't you think it's a little late for coffee, though?”

Ben: “Perhaps. Maybe a spot of tea's more appropriate at the moment.”

“Either way, once we've put your friend to bed, we should pop the kettle on. I have many questions about what's going on here...”

Chapter End Notes

Now, you may all be wondering who the hell Ben is. But if you think back to November of 2016, when I put the project on a temporary hiatus, you'll remember that my attention was drawn towards the world of Wellsverne Gothic, a world beyond the UnderTales, which I observed and documented over the course of that month.

The link below will lead you to that account, which up until now remained on my NaNoWriMo page. Think of it as supplementary material, a little extra to make up for recent delays, and a dive into a bizarrely twisted world. Enjoy. (...let's see if I can make this link work...)

https://docs.google.com/document/d/13U3HUQdFeHxh3b1DU8KIsgMMDoVDc0K1jjQyj0uliDM
Chapter Summary

Upon waking from a long, long sleep, Frisk and Charlie have a bit of a falling out, and from there things get weird. And worse. Can't forget worse.

Meanwhile, Benjamin gets to know the inhabitants of this weird universe he's been plonked into, culminating in them watching one of the old Star Trek movies.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Leaper: "What do you sound like... when you scream?"

_The Craver Bishop glares at me with their many mechanical eyes. I sense the hunger within them, the urge to consume, as they consider my proposal for open borders._

_They were already hungry, when the Endless created them, giving them one purpose... To destroy planets. Over, and over, AND OVER._

...even abandoned by their masters, their hunger still remains. And so great is that hunger, that peace would be like famine to them, a famine so great that it would drive them to consume one-another in a ravening whirlwind of starving despair.

Leaper: "Hmmm..."

_They find my proposal less than palatable, the Hive's attention still directed inwards. Honestly, someone should give them a Snickers during these negotiations, but alas the Riftborn do not entertain the notion that the quickest way to the heart is through the stomach. Orthogonal starfish aliens that they are, they probably don't even know what hearts and stomachs even are. Otherwise, this Bishop would be face-first in a greasy doner kebab with chips and chilli sauce, a lot less reluctant to consider cooperation with the Riftborn I govern._

_I instead offer a substantial amount of Dust to sweeten the deal, still lamenting that I cannot simply build a fleet of food trucks and send them as an expression of goodwill and understanding of their nature. They ponder this amended proposal, and their expression scrunches up slightly._

Leaper: "Hrrhhhh."

_Their opinion of the deal is still less than desirable, and it seems like there's not enough Dust in the galaxy to change their opinion on the matter._

...to think that if the Cravers had access to Federation food replicators, they probably wouldn't feel the need to dine on the races they enslave. Though thinking about that, there would probably still be a subculture of snobbish Craver gourmands, mostly the Bishops, who prefer living screaming Mezari and plucked Hissho over deep fried Mars bars. Utter madness, I tell you-
...ohhh. You folks are here. Um, yeah, I really should probably get back to DoctorTale, shouldn’t I? I forgot how addicting 4X can be, I've already pulled TWO such all-nighters since Entry 31 went up. Gods give me strength...

Back into DoctorTale...

Ah, hullo Ben! I see you're up... quite late, actually? And here I figured you were a morning person.

Observer? You're back?

Did you think I’d abandon this world on a whim? Nooo good sir, my absences from this space-time always have a reason.

Oh, and what grand and monumental conjunction drew your attention this time?

...oh alright, I was playing Endless Space 2 over the weekend. ...right, how do I explain it? Do you have 4X games in your world yet? Turn-based strategy?

I've played more than my fair share of DoTD if that's what you're asking.

I'm guessing that's “Defence of Titan's Dam” or something?

You're close. It's Defenders of Titan's Dam. And yes, the battles are both turn-based and strategic.

Interesting. I'm guessing you did your fair share of eXploration, eXpansion and eXploitation in the game, since it's Titan's Dam we're talking about. The ishtari really left their mark on the Mediterranean, after all.

Funnily enough, it has a few of those mechanics. You explore the Mediterranean throughout the millennia, expand your sphere of influence over the regional communities, and indeed you may exploit the benefits of being their suzerain. Though personally I rarely ever demanded tribute from them, it never felt right to make such demands.

Though I imagine you didn’t shy away from the fourth X of the genre, eXterminate, when the Persians attacked. After all, Titan's Dam has held strong against attackers throughout the millennia, hasn’t it?

Ahhh, so THAT's why you refer to it as “four-X”. Also yes. The ishtari there beat back countless invaders; Persians, Romans, Moors, Crusaders, even the modern empires of Europe. Though funnily enough, I never got the chance to buy the “Pax Europa” expansion, since it was banned in the British Empire AND the Spanish Empire. Can't imagine why!

They were still quite sore after their ill-conceived siege in the 70s, I reckon. Probably didn't want one of their greatest defeats to be glorified in video game form, so they censored it like the overly sensitive flowers that they were. Funnily enough, however, that final expansion was still legal in Bismarck's Germany, which considering the history of MY world amuses me to no end.
...so I assume this “Endless Space” of yours is a four-X strategy game?

Yup. And I love my 4X games, so it was a miracle that I tore myself away from this one for as long as I have. I keep on telling myself that I'll stop for the night, but that dark refrain echoes in my head, “just one more turn”, and next thing I know it's 4 in the fucking morning!

Four in the morning?! Bloody hell, you're quite the night owl aren't you? Even during my studies I've NEVER been up that late!

And yet you tended to fall asleep on top of your textbooks at 2 in the morning. If only I could fall asleep so easily.

...anyway, that's how I spent my weekend. How about you? By the looks of things... You're in one of the student dorms on Hotland Campus?

Four in the morning. My gods... ...I mean, the Prince kindly assigned me some quarters, since his house is currently at capacity.

Oh, you didn't hear? But of course, how could you with your head stuck in Endless Space 2? After the events that brought the barrier down, the Prince's inner circle have taken up temporary residence in his home for the foreseeable future.

And personally, I was not in the mood for their high-energy malarkey on a regular basis. Though I have to say that these student domiciles are... honestly, they make me feel like I'm a neonate again. And not in a good way.

I don't know, I actually kind of like their weird shenanigans. Papyrus with his culinary exploits, Undyne with her unnatural strength, Alphys with her weird anime, Sans with his-

OH, don't you get me started with that bloody “comedian”.

But of course, you hate puns. So much that you killed a goddess because of the “fathomless tooths” she revealed to you. ...seriously, how DID Gla'aki keep her teeth so delightfully white?

I don't know. All I know is that I simply could not stand Sans' low-rent sense of humour. And neither could Syrinx, though I will say that she is a far more patient soul than I.

Well, it was only a matter of time before you met her.

...so what do you think?

About Syrinx?

About finding an oculastran in this space-time. Seeing how different she is from Puck. Looking back, she'd probably make for a good Vodyani.

I cannot tell a lie: she's a bloody fanatic. And a follower of the Elder Gods no less, which is, well, quite concerning if what I've heard is true.

It is true, the Elder Gods are the ones who imprisoned your master millions of years ago. And yes,
they are not exactly “liberal” when it comes to the governance of their subjects. But on the plus side, I have a strange feeling that...

That what?

That our abandoned oculastran friend, our “fallen angel”, is straying further and further from the light of her gods, and the principles that bind her kind under their rule. Did you know that, before she met Frisk, she eschewed notions of gender and individuality? But during the last stretch of Frisk’s journey to New Home, she began to refer to herself with “I” instead of “we”, and needless to say she was adopting a more, shall we say... feminine introspection, last time I saw her?

What are you saying? That she’s changing her mind?

In a way, yes. Her interactions with the monsters, and the long-time disconnection from her eldritch masters, have begun to reshape her. She's starting to find the small joys in life beyond celestial bondage, she's becoming her own person. And while she won't “come around” right away, there is always the chance that she may fall from the “grace” of the Elder Gods, and be an angel no longer.

After all, don't you think that anyone can change, if they just try hard enough?

...of all the things that comedian told me that DIDN'T make me want to eat my own ears... I agree with that sentiment. Syrinx herself seems to be proof of that.

Oh, you sweet summer child. If only you knew the truth. Which is why I won't tell you about it.

Do you honestly think I can't handle such things? Have you SEEN what I have been through?!

More than you know mate. But there are some stories that would do more harm than good, were you privy to them. Trust me, if you knew the whole truth, it would NOT end well for anybody.

Some stories are a lot darker than superscience gone wrong, the slow death of a happy family, or even the horrifying eldritch invasion of a parallel Earth. Seriously, do yourself a favour and don't pursue those stories. Trust me, you'll be a lot happier not knowing.

...so anyway, it's 1 in the afternoon, your robes are waiting in the laundromat, and you're wearing a fantastic waistcoat. I think it's time you visited the Prince again.

Fair enough. I was about to make my way there, anyway.

As you leave your quarters, you see... a small white dog, in the hallway.

...is this meant to be significant in some way?

...no, not really. It's... just a small white dog. Hmmm.

Then why bring it up? It's just a dog.
Never mind me, I was just thinking. It looks like it's trying to say “buy the PS4 version”. But I don't own a PS4, so...

...let's just return to the others.

Sure. Yes. Let's go.

...seriously, is something bothering you?

No no, it's nothing really. The dog just looked... familiar. That's all, seriously, I just thought that I knew it from somewhere...

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

...you awake, Frisk?

Nah, not really.

Oh, ok.

...wait a second. Are we actually asleep, or are you just trying to gaslight me?

Depends. Are we really in our old room?

I'm pretty sure we are. I... We're in your old bed, aren't we?

...oh. I guess we're awake after all. Either that, or this is a really vivid dream.

As you sit up, we can see that there are actually three beds in here. There's your bed, up against the north wall. Asriel's bed, up against the east wall. And... his bed.

...you try not to think about that day. You try, but it's no use. You can't help but remember.

...but I put an end to his plan in this timeline. He- he never got the chance to taste the buttercups. He didn't die like you did.

...and from there, things only got worse. Specifically, HE got worse.

I didn't know what was happening to me, when I was still alive. But I knew in my heart that, when Mom's “secret recipe” finally kicked in after all those years, it would end badly for everyone. I had no idea what was coming, but it was gonna be very, very bad.

And seeing what I was becoming in this timeline... there's one thing I no longer regret. I... I don't regret killing myself, Frisk. Even though it still got Asriel killed, at least somebody survived down there...

Charlie, I never want to hear you say that again. Not even as a joke. Despite everything, there's no good reason to-

How can you SAY that?! You SAW what was happening to him! You KNOW what he would have done if we didn't seal him away! We fucking DOCUMENTED HIS
...so NO, Frisk. There WAS a good reason for me to kill myself. I know, it hurts to hear me say that, but my... my actions saved the entire goddamn underground. And in the end, the cost wasn't as bad as it could have been, even though it was still pretty bad.

...come to think of it, I'm... I'm not sure you made the right decision convincing him to live, that there was “another way”. Sure, I died painfully from buttercup poisoning, but at least I didn't turn into that... that THING. I died with a clear mind and a heart filled with ambition, while you had to put him down like a rabid, wild animal. So yeah, you'll have to excuse me if I think that you should have let Charlie kill himself this time around.

But that's all in the past, isn't it? No point in going back now, now you know the truth. ...yeah. You've been keeping it locked away, trying to ignore it, but you know that going back won't actually change anything.

Please don't say it...

Frisk, I know that what I have to say is gonna hurt you, but you've got to come to terms with it. Sans was right all along. I don't know if it just didn't sink in when he first told you, or if you didn't want to accept what it implied, but, well...

Loading and resetting don't overwrite the previous timeline, Frisk. Those worlds where you died, or otherwise left behind? They all still exist. The people in them still exist. They've all been coming to terms with the consequences your departure caused.

Please stop...

But even if you could somehow go back to them, you wouldn't be able to change the course of their history. Like Sans said, the act of time travel itself splits time itself in two, leaving the old path where nothing changes, and creating a new timeline where your actions change the course of history.

I don't wanna cry again...

's too late for that, I'm afraid. We both know it's gonna happen.

...why...

As Asriel comes to check in on you, he hears your sobs of despair. C'mon bro, give her a hug.

Thaat's it, yeah... Don't you feel safe, Frisk? In his arms, doesn't it feel like nothing wrong could happen to you?

...I *sniff* I don't know... ...you- you tell me.

It feels... it feels like I'm finally where I wanna be. But after all I did to him... I don't deserve it.

I abandoned him... I abandoned ALL of them! I-

Frisk: “I don't want to leave you again, Asriel!”

A pained expression forms on bro's face as you say that. The thought that you think you'll have to
leave him again some day-

But I'll have to, won't I? My Asriel's still... he's still stuck in that plain white room back at Emigration Oaks, still under that... that thing's influence. I just hope Dr Amygdala's doing everything she can for him in the meantime...

And yet, even with your best friend suffering back in your world, you still feel safe in the arms of this Asriel. You're afraid of going back and facing the music, aren't you? Even with the power to drive out whatever's taken control of Asriel, you'll still have to deal with a lot of worried people. And one very disappointed skeleton, who's probably gonna rattle off some bullshit about the Prime Directive.

But I'm gonna say this once, and only once. Don't you DARE get cold feet now. You can frickin' exorcise DEMONS with that “Elder Magick” you picked up. You have exactly what it takes to save him now. But if you think it'll be scary to face whatever it is that's wearing him like a glove, trust me when I say that IT WILL BE NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT I COULD DO TO YOU. 'cause if you chicken out now an' decide to live the rest of your life in THIS world, I SWEAR TO THE BURNING ONE I WILL-

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

Pretty short commute, if you ask me. Damn sight shorter than the train journeys I had to take to get to uni, back in the day.

I imagine that's one of the reasons that you dropped out, wasn't it?

...among other reasons, yes. I'm not AS fragile and pathetic as my parallel implied, though I can't say he's entirely wrong, but getting up at some ungodly hour to catch several trains heading to the Docklands is something I could not keep doing.

And like he said, you weren't ready to live away from home. Which honestly, I can understand.

Though to be fair, you never had that problem. You and Alice practically LIVED in Pendragon Academy, after Uncle Bedivere brought the two of you to Tintagel. So in some strange way, home and school were one and the same for you. You never had to make such a commute when you were a student.

...to think that in your reality, Tintagel Castle is a place where young folk become the knights and wizards of a most venerable house. In my age, the place is a crumbling ruin with mere historical connections to the legend of King Arthur, its foundations being worn away by a sea that may one day bring the whole thing crashing down onto the rocks below. ...still, I'm glad I got to see it when I was younger.

Did the Hunters simply abandon it in your world?

HAH. That would imply my world had Hunters to begin with.

In my world, there are no knights or wizards or noble hunting houses. No wondrous remnants of Asgard and Atlantis to build empires upon, no miraculous Great Expression to bring magic into
our lives. Humanity alone rules this moribund world as an apex predator without equal or peer, relying on its ingenuity and opportunism to carve its misguided legacy into the face of the planet.

So yeah. Life's not great in my universe. It could be worse, and the way things are going it probably WILL get worse, but I'm still not happy with how things turned out either way.

...I can't imagine what it must be like to have to live in such a world. You have my sympathies.

Save your prayers, mate. We're not on death's door just yet, there's still a little bit of fight left in these heavy bones.

A familiar shape of white and orange stretches his legs as you approach the Prince's residence.

Doctor Papyrus: “Ah! Magician! It is good to see you again!”

You shake hands with the tall skeleton. His grin stretches from ear to ear.

Ben: “My sentiments exactly, Papyrus. Did anything happen when I was away?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Not much, thankfully. Alphys and Undyne are watching some show about magic princesses, Sans is... I have no idea what he's doing, actually…”

“Uh, Syrinx arrived a few hours ago, and last I saw she was having a... “lunch-bath” or something. I wanted to study this, but she brushed me off quite harshly when I asked her.”

Ben: “Well I can't say I blame her! After all, how would you respond if someone said that they wanted to study your bathing habits?”

“Wouldn't that come across as, you know, creepy? I'd certainly be unsettled if someone asked if they could watch me having a bath.”

“...with that said, however, I happen to know what a “lunch-bath” is. You see, I met an oculastran back in my world, a valet by the name of Puck, and he explained the concept to me.”

Papyrus' eyes widen with excitement, as he reaches for his notebook.

Doctor Papyrus: “You don't mind if I write this down, do you?”

Ben: “By all means, go ahead.”

“Anyway, from what Puck told me, oculastrans are filter feeders for the most part, which means they filter what they need out of the water they ingest. They can apparently photosynthesise as well, but that just lets them build up sugars for later use, so for everything else they need they rely on environmental nutrients.”

“In the old days they would suck up microorganisms like plankton and algae, but in modern times they usually mix something into a tank of water and bathe in it to feed. Puck himself used to subsist mainly on “ketchup baths” when he was a student, which honestly sounds like something your brother would do.”

Papyrus nods knowingly as he writes all of down.
**Doctor Papyrus:** “Ahhh, that would explain why she was carrying a bottle of ketchup with her earlier...”

*Wait, a ketchup bath? Syrinx? Call me old-fashioned, but I had the impression that she was a little more “refined” than that. The holier-than-thou air she gave off didn't exactly imply that she was the kind of girl to dive into a ketchup bath.*

Well, you say that, but she is most certainly **not** as “refined” as you though. When we were having tea, she couldn't “sip” it as easily as the rest of us, so she took her cup into the kitchen, and when I came in to check on her, I saw that she was swimming in the sink with her teacup.

**What a delightful image. Worthy of a painting, if you ask me.**

It was certainly an awkward and humorous situation, I cannot lie. After a few seconds of awkward staring, she just said “please leave” before submerging herself completely.

**Sounds like it was as memorable as the time the Christmas tree fell on top of Uncle Bedivere. What an evening that was, am I right?**

...right. We should probably go inside. I gesture to the front door.

**Ben:** “Shall we?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Of course!”

...sounds quite, erm, “Oriental” in the living room, doesn't it? That would be Alphys and Undyne with their Chinese cartoons.

**Japanese, Ben. Anime is very much a Japanese art form.**

Right. Yes. I... forgot about that- Seriously though, those squeaky voices are getting on my nerves.

**It is a little grating, I can't lie. But at least it's not hentai. If it were, those voices would remind you of race-cars with all the squealing and moaning and general grating on your tall ears.**

Then remind me not to watch “hen-tie”. Whatever that is.

**It's essentially porn. Japanese illustrations of a pornographic nature, either animated or still.**

...hmmm. Do you think “The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife” would qualify as a hen-tie illustration?

**At a stretch, maybe, under a wide and vague umbrella. But that piece is more in line with the earlier shunga artstyle, whereas hentai is a lot more modern. If I remember right, the latter movement started some time in the 1970’s?**

How interesting... Either way, I don't think “anime” is my thing.

**You’d probably enjoy it with a good English dub. Though even in my era, those aren't as common as I'd like. That said however, I'm not much of an anime person myself. The only anime I was ever really into was the earlier seasons of the Pokémon anime, back in the first two generations of**
the game series.

Doctor Undyne: “Back so soon, Papyrus?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Oh, don’t mind me. I just had to go and stretch my legs a little.”

“And funnily enough, that was the exact moment when Ben, uh... decided to join us?”

...wait. Something's amiss...

What's the matter? Something- Oh. You check your vacuum flask, and find it empty yet again.

I should have stopped off at the Melting Pot. Bugger.

Somehow I doubt they would have filled your flask to the brim. It's an unconventional decanter with a non-standard capacity, which would have held up the line for quite some time. I didn’t want us to be a bother in that regard.

Thankfully, the Prince has a good supply of beans. I can probably brew what I need when the kitchen’s free.

It looks free from here. ...or are you waiting for their show to finish so you can pass through without anime sounds happening?

It's ok if it is. I myself have a similar crippling aversion to the sound of accordions. Probably due to growing up in close proximity to Morris dancing teams, being unnerved by the song and dance while at the same time being bored out of my skull, which conditioned me to have the fear.

I was never really unnerved by Morris dancers, I'll be honest. But I too found the genre to be quite dreary. I was much more into the electronic subgenres growing up.

It still fascinates me how your world's Victorian era is so much more advanced than ours was. Computing in my universe didn't go from strength-to-strength after Charles Babbage built the analytical engine, you see. Hell, our Babbage barely managed to get as far as the old difference engine, never managed to complete that pioneering, Turing-complete prototype of his.

After he lost his funding, it would be another century before computers had their time to shine and continuously evolve, due in part to a great and terrible war. But of course, your world got lucky, Babbage kickstarted a Victorian-era Information Revolution, and by 1886 most of your machines are on-par with ones from our early 1990s. Absolutely fascinating.

...again, you have my sympathies. Though I imagine the computers of your world are still a lot more advanced than ours.

True, true. In my world's 2017, we measure our storage space in terabytes, our system memory in gigabytes, and our processor speeds in gigahertz. So even without your world's ludicrous head-start, I'd say we have things pretty good on the gaming front.

Though with that said, you'll probably achieve a similar level of computer sophistication within
the next 20 or so years. And your children will probably be playing “The Ashes 1905” and “Valkyrie: Fall of Asgard” on their GrandStand Nouveau or whatever the turn of the century will bring for your world.

Well, you say that, but... I don't know, I've got this weird feeling that-

That things won't be as cheery, even when the invasion's stopped for good?

Pretty much. But it's just a feeling, after all, whereas I know that my allies are still out there, “fighting the good fight”. And with five immortals saving the world, SIX once I'm back home, it makes sense that my world will get back on its feet eventually.

...with that in mind, maybe they won't need my help after all? After all, given the situation I can probably afford to stay in this world and help Frisk, so you won't need to bother sending me back just yet.

And rightfully so. After all, even if you stuck around in this world for a decade, I'd still be able to send you back to the moment I plucked you out of your native space-time. Well, slightly after the moment, since things would get weird if I sent you back to the moment exactly.

You can do that?!

How do you think I brought you here? Time and space has little meaning to someone who’s outside of it all. Well, outside of the second-hand set of dimensions that comprise your multiverse, that is. I am still constrained by the limitations of my own world, and will be as such until the day I am dragged, whimpering and growling, into the nothingness that awaits all inhabitants of my reality. At which point I will be constrained no more, because I won’t exist.

I... My word. ...why do I get the feeling that this isn't the full story, here?

...the truth is that in your era, this world has been effectively dead for quite a long time. Compared to your era, this is the very, VERY distant past. Though it isn't, as I suspect you're speculating, the distant past of your universe specifically. It is the past of one of many worlds parallel to your own, whereas your world's past specifically is something different entirely.

I... I think I follow what you're saying?

This particular world may have known the touch of the Elder Gods at some point, but it has never known the iron grip of the Tellurian Empire, nor the enigmatic roadside picnics of the Endless. But it will only be a matter of time before the darkness, what you know as the “Corruption”, plunges this universe into a new Dark Age, the likes of which it hasn't seen in aeons beyond counting.

Beyond that, however, I know very little of the universe beyond this particular Earth. For all we know, this planet could be one of the few isolated oases of life in a barren wasteland. Or it could be nothing special, and nobody bothers to check it out...

...Syrinx might know. Her knowledge might be a few thousand years out of date, but it might give us a rough idea.
Fair enough. We could probably ask her later.

Yes. Later. After coffee.

Well, thanks to my long-winded waffling, it looks like the episode is over. You've got a window of opportunity to slip in to the kitchen and make your coffee.

Doctor Undyne: “...you ok, dude? You were kinda out of it for a while...”

Doctor Papyrus: “You go and make your coffee, Ben. I'll have a little talk with Undyne.”

Ben: “Thank you.”

And with that, you sweep into the kitchen, ready to grind some monster coffee beans.

I honestly don't understand how monster food works, but I'm not going to argue with it. I'm sure it's as good as real coffee.

It's still “real”, Jim, but not as we know it. ...yeah, that one went over your head, didn't it? But needless to say, it's connected to a show that you'd probably be into.

And what “show” would that be? Are we talking live theatre, or is it some sort of motion picture?

Sort of like a motion picture, only shorter. That's about as well as I can describe it, since I don't imagine you have home television in your world yet.

Is it like an Edison Microtheatre? Because if it is, we technically do have them. They're not as versatile as computers, but they can play back video recordings at a level of quality that rivals the old silver screen.

Yup, that's essentially a television you're describing. Except in our world, they receive signals from broadcasting stations, and for a time that's all they did. We didn't have the home video revolution until the 70s and 80s, whereas your world seems to have it the other way around entirely.

Broadcasting VIDEO from a radio station? I'm sure I heard something about that on the Tesla Broadcasts. He sounded awfully excited about it, too.

Bloody hell! I knew Tesla was pretty successful in your timeline, but he has his own radio show? Now THAT's news to me.

Oh, and as for the show I mentioned, it was called Star Trek. Specifically The Original Series from the mid to late 60's.

I will be sure to look out for it, in this world at least. Speaking of which...

Ben: “Hey Papyrus?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Yes?”

Ben: “Given that you have an abundance of videotapes down here, do you have anything called “Star Trek”?”
Papyrus’ eyes bulge out of their sockets with excitement. Does that answer your question?

Doctor Papyrus: “…just let me DIG THEM OUT!”

And with that, Papyrus dives into the massive pile of videotapes and DVDs in search of Star Trek. Though considering what flows down into the Underground, I suspect it’ll mostly be stuff from Voyager, Enterprise, and the J.J. Abrams reboot movies. Maybe even a copy of Nemesis.

It sounds like there’s a lot more to this Star Trek than just the original series.

Understatement of the century, Ben. There have been several TV series’, many many motion pictures, and there are even a fair few video games in the franchise. And that’s not even counting all of the unofficial content, since the official stuff has inspired MANY generations of sci-fi fans.

Though while it’s all good stuff, some of it’s a little hit-and-miss to put it lightly. Yet while the ones I mentioned earlier aren't the best the franchise has to offer, they do have their moments. But when it comes to the silver screen, the even-numbered movies are considered better than the odd-numbered ones, strangely enough. With the exception the aforementioned Nemesis, which despite being the TENTH film broke the trend of poor odds and good evens by being kind of crap. And as for the J.J Abrams movies? Well, I’d give a more in-depth description of them, but I couldn’t see much through all the bloody lens flare!

It still sounds better than anime.

Fair deuce. Even the low-points of Enterprise and Voyager are better than Mew Mew Kissy Cutie in general. …you feel a pair of beady eyes bore into you from the living room, as Alphys leers at you from the sofa.

But I didn’t say anything!

Neither did I, technically. And at this moment, I fear her more than I fear the Borg. Which really is saying something, I can tell you.

...you know, no matter how hard you stare at that pot, it's not going to boil.

I honestly wish it did. I honestly don’t know why I didn't just buy a cup from the Melting Pot, it would have saved us some time.

I swear, your affinity for caffeine would give a basthari a run for their money.

Basthari... Why does that sound familiar? I feel like I've heard of-

You've probably heard of Bastet and Ulthar, I take it? One, a cat goddess with an affinity for the theatre, and the other, an earth god who holds vigil over the imprisoned Titans?

Indeed they do. Funnily enough, this is the first time I've found any use for my Egyptology studies.
I can imagine how it feels. Though if you ever found yourself on the basthari homeworld of Arokeb, you'd probably be able to make further use of your studies. After all, basthari culture does share certain similarities to ones from North Africa and the Middle East. Partially since Bastet and Ulthar themselves were pretty big fans of Egyptology themselves, so they spread those myths amongst their “chosen people” as a seed of their culture.

That raises some intriguing implications in itself. But I fail to see the connection between these beings and caffeine.

Well, strangely enough, the basthari “affinity” for caffeine did not come from their absentee patron deities, but instead came from their dealings with a distant race of men. What started out as an expedition through a rift between two realities led to a Space Age Columbian Exchange, with one of the side-effects being the establishment of coffee plantations on Arokeb, due to lax trading regulations in the early days of humanity's relationship with the basthari. And while coffee grown on Arokeb fetched a high price on that parallel Earth, a significant portion of the produce was sold amongst the native populace, and eventually coffee became a potent staple of basthari culture.

You make it sound a lot less disastrous than the actual Columbian Exchange was.

It wasn’t nearly AS bad, but it still left its mark on the basthari. There wasn’t really a crippling plague transferred by the exchange, mostly because it started during the 1970s and not the 1500s so standards were a little higher, but a lot of other things were exchanged. The younger generations got swept up in the deluge of exotic human culture crossing the rift, and it wasn’t long before they were eating fast food, wearing blue jeans, listening to pop music, and bickering over whether Coca-Cola or Pepsi was the best.

The blue jeans and pop music wasn’t really a problem for anyone but pre-Exchange conservatives and traditionalists, and human fast food chains were still in healthy competition with traditional basthari cuisine. Those aspects of the Exchange weren’t the main problem. No, the true curse was the basthari’s obsession with the “miraculous” effects of caffeine. In their natural state, they were rather relaxed and easy-going felinoids, with a penchant for gentle napping after meal-times, which made them rather amiable to deal with. Though on the flipside, this meant they didn’t work all that hard most of the time, which put them behind humanity in certain fields, to put it lightly.

Caffeine, however, was a game-changer in this regard. Under the influence of such exotic elixirs as coffee and cola, they were quicker to act, more focused, more alert, even increasing their strength and stamina. Much like what it does to us, only significantly more-so for their kind. Their native science and industry went from strength-to-strength because of it, heedless of the side-effects and withdrawal symptoms, kick-starting a new technological renaissance while simultaneously dragging them into a dark age of chemical dependency. Which of course made them a pretty potent target demographic in the Cola Wars.

Amongst all the Twelve Tribes of Arokeb, with the exception of the Virgoan basthari, the need for caffeine is burned into their very being. Their relaxed and easy-going rest-state is addled with greater irritability, to the point where it's better to let sleeping lions lie than risk being yelled at. They are a lot nicer after they've had their morning coffee, but without it they will NOT be happy kitties.
So yeah. That's the basthari for you. And if ever you should have dealings with them, be sure to have a pot of coffee or a six-pack of colas ready. They will not easily forget such a kindness if you offer them caffeine, even if it may feel like a cruelty in disguise.

...well. That's... that's cast my morning coffee in a different light, hasn't it?

Well don't let me put you off it. The basthari just got swept up in an exotic culinary phenomenon, most of them didn't exercise much in the way of moderation. Just be aware of how much you take, make sure not to go overboard, and you'll probably be fine.

Oh come on. I'm not stupid, Observer. I know when enough is enough.

Fair enough. Though I have to say you did go a little overboard after your first resurrection. 2 cups of Earl Grey and a thermos full of sweet black coffee, all in one day? I rarely ever went THAT ham when it comes to caffeine, even as a student.

Like I said, I know when enough is enough.

Try telling that to Captain Janeway, though. She went through so much coffee during her time aboard Voyager.

...oh, right. Ok. I can take the hint.

...now, where does the Prince keep his sugar?

**Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie**

-and you'll NEVER be in control for as long as we live!

...I'm sorry. I got a little carried a way there. But now do you understand?

**Prince Asriel:** “It's ok Frisk. It's ok, I'm here. Nothing's going to hurt you...”

You know what, Charlie? You didn't need to be such a little BITCH about it. You didn't need to go that far to convince me to do what's right.

But after THREATENING me like that? After saying all of those HORRIBLE things to me? **FUCK YOU.** I think it's time we made a few changes to our situation.

Changes? Frisk, I- I didn't want to hurt you!

But you did anyway.

*I was afraid that you were going to-*

What, Charlie?! You really thought I was going to abandon him after all I fucking went through to save him?!

You... you did the last time. I'm just-
NO, Charlie. You're NOT just saying that. You're going to shut the hell up while I continue my work.

And if I refuse?

...right. That's it. I'm not waiting around any longer.

Prince Asriel: “Frisk? Are you-”

Frisk: “I know what I need to do, Asriel. I'm going back to the lab.”

Frisk, let's... let's just talk about this, ok? Don't do anything you'll regret, right?

I'm not going to regret this, Charlie. Quit acting like this is goodbye.

But-

Charlie.

But you don't know what it's LIKE in there!

I have an idea what it's like. After all, you told me what it was like for you, didn't you?

And you're STILL gonna do this to me? What HAPPENED to you out there?! Who the hell are you, and what have you done with Frisk?!

Prince Asriel: “I- What're you planning to do, Frisk?”

Frisk: “...you know the “other” I told you about, back when we were kids? Well...”

“He's just talked his way out of my body, after saying some... some really hurtful things. That's why I got so upset back there.”

“We've had our arguments before, but this... this one broke the camel's back. I think it's time we had a little time apart, after all these years.”

Frisk, PLEASE! Just LISTEN to me!

Prince Asriel: “You're... Are you gonna try to-”

Frisk: “Yes. He can be nice, from time to time, but right now I need him out of my hair. I'm getting really tired of all his bullshit, if I'm gonna be honest.”

But... After all I've done for you, after all that we've been through together... Surely we've had it worse than THIS, right Frisk?

Shut up. Just SHUT. UP.

We've had it way worse than this and you KNOW IT. The time we argued about that damn whiskey was worse than this! Trying to talk to you while you're on your goddamn PERIOD was worse than this!

Why won't you just SHUT UP?!
You KNOW what our worst fight was, Frisk. And this little spat of ours right now? It is
NOTHING. EVEN REMOTELY. AS BAD. AS THAT.

It doesn't matter, we're already here. You're not getting off the hook that easily...

...gee. It's been a long time since we've been down here, hasn't it? Our first lab in this world.

To think, that in Asgore's time-

It's not gonna work, y'know. I'm not listening.

-this is where he “buried” the others. I remember the chills I felt when we came down here in the
old timeline, and I saw my-

Are you listening to me? It doesn't matter how hard you beg, or try to distract me. You're going into
“time-out”, and that's the end of it.

...really, Charlie? I'm not giving in to your crocodile tears. Not this ti-

Prince Asriel: “…oh, Frisk. Please tell me he's not trying to hurt you again.”

Frisk: “He's not really doing much, actually. Why do you-”

What th- Do I have something in my eye? Why am I-

*sniff* You really think they're crocodile tears? I'm not made of stone, you BITCH!

Th-this still changes nothing! You hurt me way more than I've hurt you, and I'm SICK of it!

Please! I don't care what you said, I'm BEGGING YOU! PLEEASE! Don't put me in there
agAAAAAIN! *frantic sobbing*

STOP it! Just STOP! I can't hear myself THINK!

Not back in the Reaver, ANYWHERE BUT THERE!

It's too late, Charlie. It's time you learned some goddamn huMILITY!

Damnit, why can't I- ...crap, of course. They're still in there.

Prince Asriel: “I don't think there's any room left in there, Frisk.”

“...one of these days, I'll be able to separate him from Dad. One of these days-”

We can only hope...

Prince Asriel: “…my god, I just realised- It's dark... Why is it so DARK?!”

Frisk: “…do we have any more soul containers laying around?”

Prince Asriel: “I've seen so many colours of souls, but never BLACK before! Wha-”
Frisk: “Please, Asriel. Do we have any more soul containers?”

Prince Asriel: “…most of them are already full, but…”

“I'm sure I still have one of the prototypes around here somewhere…”

Frisk: “Heh. This blackness suits you so well, doesn't it Charlie?”

Shit. I didn't mean to say that out loud... Asriel, please. Don't look at me like that.

Prince Asriel: “What... did you... just say...?”

Oh god, no no no this can't be happening. Stay back. Damnit, STAY BACK!

Prince Asriel: “Your “other”... He was... All these years we've known each other, and you never thought to TELL ME?!”

Don't do anything stupid, Asriel. For the sake of the gods, don't- GWAH!

Prince Asriel: “How could you keep this from me?! I loved him more than anything in the world, and you-”

Frisk: “He isn't YOUR Charlie! He's-”

“Agh- Asriel, please! You're- you're hurting me!”

Prince Asriel: “WHO IS HE, then?! He's from your world, ISN'T HE?!”

“...you betrayed me, and I never even knew it. I was HEARTBROKEN after you put him down! And all those times you tried to dry my tears, you could have let me talk to him. All of those years, and you could have at least told me about him. He could have helped me feel better about all of this…”

“But you DIDN'T. You kept him locked up inside that heart of yours. You didn't let him talk to me. You wanted him all for yourself…”

“All those “headaches” of yours... You were trying to keep him quiet, WEREN'T YOU?!”

Frisk: “I did what was best for you, god-damnit!”

Prince Asriel: “How the hell do YOU know what's best for me? YOU LEFT ME!”

Frisk: “I SAVED YOU, DAMNIT!”

Prince Asriel: “…s-saved me? From what?”

Frisk: “From more than you could ever have known.”

Come on, Asriel. Let's just leave it at that...

Prince Asriel: “Frisk. Tell me EXACTLY what you thought you were saving me from.”
Goddamnit. ...well, no going back now. It's all coming out.

Frisk: “Alright, Asriel. You want to know the truth? FINE. But you're not gonna like what you hear.”

“Do you remember when I caught you and Charlie in the garden, with all of those buttercups? I knew all about that sick little plan back then. And this time around, I made sure you two didn't make that mistake.”

Prince Asriel: “…I take it that, at least in your world, we weren't so lucky.”

Frisk: “You'd both been dead for 200 years by the time I'd fallen down here. The fallout of your deaths caused Toriel to leave Asgore, after he'd declared war on humanity in a moment of heartbroken rage. She lived out her days in the old Ruins, while your Dad ruled alone, having to keep his promise to his people and... and kill any human who fell down here.”

“But strangely enough, “you” were the first person I met in the Underground during my first visit. A single golden flower with a face as white as snow, trying to teach me about “LOVE” and “XP” before trying to kill me.”

Yeah. You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

Prince Asriel: “She... she used my dust, didn't she?”

Frisk: “It's not really that simple. A lot of your dust ended up in that flower, which by chance was the same one that Alphys chose to turn into a vessel for souls. She had no idea what she was about to unleash on the Underground.”

“One big shot of determination later, and “Asriel” was reborn in the body of a golden flower. Except, well, he wasn't really Asriel.”

“I don't remember exactly what was wrong with him, though the Observer had a few ideas, but this reborn Asriel couldn't feel certain emotions. Specifically, he'd lost his sense of compassion.”

“He tried to reignite it, thinking that his mom and dad would be able to make him feel something, but nothing came of it. And from there, it was a downward spiral into Flowey the Flower becoming a really nasty piece of work.”

Prince Asriel: “…that really does sound like a name I woulda come up with when I was a kid. Gods, if you hadn't been there to stop us...”

“You really did help me dodge a bullet back then, didn't you?”

Frisk: “I'm not finished, Asriel. Flowey's nightmare wasn't even the worst of it.”

Prince Asriel: “How could anything be as bad as being a heartless flower?!”

Frisk: “Well, you're about to find out...”

Frisk: “Do you know what really happens when we die?”

Prince Asriel: “I've... I've done some research into it. I know that the soul leaves the body when we die. For monsters at least, their dust holds their essence as an “echo” of who they were, even if their
souls evaporate in an instant.”

Frisk: “But what do you think happens when the soul is destroyed?”

Prince Asriel: “Well, uh... That's the thing, isn't it? After all the tests I ran, showing nothing but miscellaneous random particle dispersions, I thought that was it. That the death of the soul really was the end.”

“But I've got a feeling that you're about to tell me what really happens...”

Frisk: “Well, do you want to hear the good news, or the bad news?”

Prince Asriel: “...I don't think I want to hear the bad news. But I'm gonna have to, aren't I?”

Frisk: *sigh* “The bad news is that, after death, our stream of consciousness falls down to the deepest, most chaotic levels of reality. In that place, there are things that grow fat on the feelings and experiences that we had in life, doing whatever they can to provoke a response from the spirits they treat as cattle.”

“That's where my Asriel, and the Charlie of my world, went when they died. For 200 years, they were the playthings of daemons, horrors, and less mentionable creatures. 200 years that two troubled young boys were subjected to the torments of the damned, down in that hellish otherworld. An otherworld that I plunged head-first into, when I heard about what was happening to Asriel's spirit...”

...yep, that's right bro. You have every right to look amazed.

Prince Asriel: “You actually- You did that for me?”

“...are you trying to tell me that, like Orpheus descending into the underworld, you dove into Hell itself to save your world’s Asriel?”

Frisk: “That's EXACTLY what I'm telling you. And that's EXACTLY what I did.”

“I don't know whether it was the effect of Hell on my soul, or the anger I felt at what Hell was doing to that poor little boy, but the things down there didn't stand a chance...”

“I- I ripped them to shreds, Asriel! I tore them limb from limb! E-E-Even the huge ones! With their huge guts! They couldn't stop me! They couldn't even HURT me!”

“I was- I was just a little kid! And all they could do was try to slow me down! HOW- H- H- HOW THE HELL WAS I SO GODDAMN STRONG?!?!”

...ok, I need to calm down. But seriously, how was it that I could destroy those things so easily?

...are you serious, Asriel? Are you really giving me THAT look?

Frisk: “Don't you look at me like that, little brother. If you'd seen what those things were doing down there, or even felt the tiniest sliver of what they were capable of doing to the damned, you wouldn't judge me for a second .”

Prince Asriel: “…was there really no other way? I mean-”

Frisk: “No, Asriel. There WASN’T any other way this time.”

“It's funny, really. The denizens of the Inferno were filled with rage. They were brutal, without
mercy. But me? ...for them, I was worse.”

“And after all they did? Treating the dead like cattle? Torturing the spirits of the dead to milk them for their emotional energies? Doing unspeakable things to an innocent little goatboy? They earned everything I gave them. Every punch. Every stomp. Every degloving. Every torn limb. Every single drop of blood spilled.”

“Nothing that happened to them was undeserved, NOTHING I did to them was unwarranted. Because I know that deep down, if I was ever at THEIR mercy, they’d do the same to me without a second thought.”

“The moment they started hurting others, they no longer deserved mercy...”

**Prince Asriel:** “...all of that death... ...all of that violence...”

“You did all of that... for me?”

**Frisk:** “Everyone deserves a second chance, don't they? ...isn't that right, Charlie?”

...no response. After all these years, I don't have somebody in my head. After all these years, this silence is mine.

I wanted this, didn't I? I was getting tired of having him in my ears all the time... But why do I miss it? Why is this silence... so loud?!

**Frisk:** “...I can't lie. If it wasn't for Charlie, I wouldn't even be here.”

“Without him, I never would have saved my Asriel. I... I never would have saved you!”

“I owe him so much for this crazy life, for everything that's happened in the past 9 years, but-”

“Hey! Let GO of- Asriel, DON'T! It'll-”

**NO!**

**Dialogue: Prince Asriel & Charlie**

...Charlie? *nghhh* Are you there?

*As- ASRIEL?! What the- What did you DO?*

I took it- took YOU from her, Charlie! I didn't want her to keep you from me again!

*Asriel...*

I- I missed her so much, but- but after everything she's done, I don't- I don't-

*Oh, Asriel... I- I missed you so much-*
What's happening? Why is it so HOT?!

Oh gods. Ohhhh gods...

damnit, Asriel. After all these years, you're still such an idiot.

What is this... feeling?!

You've absorbed MY soul! What did you THINK was going to happen?!

Wh- This power! What is- How is it so STRONG?!...oh no... Charlie, tell me you didn't- Ghrhhh...

I didn't. I'm- I only became like this after she dragged me out of the void with you. Well, her you, but you know what I mean.

Frisk: “Asriel, listen to me! You have to purge his soul from your body!”

Prince Asriel: “Why should I?!”

Frisk: “Because if you don't, the power of his soul will boil your body away! You don't have enough physical matter to handle this kind of power! No monster does!”

Prince Asriel: “Hrrhhhh... I can't.”

I hate to say it, bro, but she's right. The power of a “dark soul” isn't like the kind found in monsters, or even humans.

It's... It's a lot more... chaotic, I guess is the best term to use for it. It's not as, uh, “fluid” as a monster's soul, but it isn't as “solid” as a human's soul either. And it... Unless the body's “physical” enough, it'll...

I'm not scared, Charlie. I've been- RGGHH! ...I was taking supplements, based on an old de Tulere family recipe, to... to make sure I had enough... If things got bad enough, and I had to use the souls...

...I'm- I'm fine, Charlie. I'm not gonna boil away.

Prince Asriel: “You hear that, Frisk?!”

Frisk: “Wha- NO? Were you-”

Prince Asriel: “SUPPLEMENTS, Frisk! I've seen what happens to folks who absorb human souls, how the power scarred them. And if I ever have to use the souls, I wanna make sure I have enough “matter” to mitigate the side-effects...”

“I'm FINE. I'm OK. And I'm not gonna let you take him away from me again!”

Asriel...

WHAT?!

You're... you're sweating.

Oh c'mon Charlie, I'm not- Oh. Ohhhh that's not good...
Frisk: “NononoNONONONO! PLEASE, DON'T DO THIS TO ME!”

You're not as “solid” as you think you are, bro. You might not be melting just yet, but that weird paste you just wiped away from your brow? That ain't a good sign either.

But- ...but she'll-

Asriel. Listen to me. Give me back to Frisk.

But she'll-

Make a deal with her.

Frisk: “You can't handle it! PLEASE! Give him back to me!”

...I'd rather be stuck in that jar, than see you die again.

Charlie... I- I have so much I wanna- ...alright. I'll do it. But on one condition.

I'm sorry it had to be like this, bro. I'll make it up to you some day. I promise!

Prince Asriel: “…s-s-seems like I'm not doing so hot, huh Frisk?”

“He was right. I'm not “solid” enough to handle a dark soul. But- *whew*, you can. So here, you hold on to him.”

Hhhhh... That's... Ohhh that's so much better...

Frisk: “Trust me, Asriel. It's all for the- Hey, WHAT THE-”

Prince Asriel: “ Now, “Princess”, you listen to me. You're not going to put him in that freakin' soul jar. You're gonna keep him riiight in there.”

That's right, Frisk. He's going back inside.

Prince Asriel: “What's more, you're not gonna keep him quiet anymore. If he has something he has to say, you LET HIM SAY IT.”

“But don't you worry, Frisk. He's got his own end of the bargain to hold up.”

Frisk: “You can't be- I am NOT letting that- that- that little BITCH back in my head-”

Prince Asriel: “I'm really sorry, Frisk. Seriously, this is breakin' my heart. But you leave me no choice.”

Frisk: “You wouldn't DARE!”

“No! NO! PLEASE DON'T-”

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie
...hey Frisk. I... I still owe you an apology, if you'll-

JESUS Frisk, what's WRONG with you?! You had no right to slap your broth-

Frisk: “What the FUCK is WRONG with you?! NEVER try to do that to me again!”

Prince Asriel: “Aughhh... What's wrong with ME? WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?!”

“...I'm- I'm serious, Frisk, what HAPPENED to you out there? This isn't the Frisk I know and love!”

“...you...”

Frisk: “You forced him back into me! After all he's done! What the hell kind of sick, twisted little-”

Prince Asriel: “DON'T you talk to me about sick and twisted.”

“Oh yeah. I know.”

...you didn't...

I- I didn't! No, seriously, I didn't tell him ANYTHING about- Oh. Ohhh that's put some sugar in the gas tank.

Prince Asriel: “Maybe Charlie isn't the greatest person. But neither are you.”

“You and your determination. All of the things you've done. The PEOPLE you've killed...”

What IS that expression? He doesn't look angry anymore. He doesn't even look disappointed. He looks more like he's been suckin' on a lemon-

...he turns his back to us, facing an old, rickety refrigerator. He... oh, please no... I don't think he has the heart to look at us right now.

I... Look at what you've-

What WE'VE done, you mean.

...sure, go ahead! Blame me like you always did! But never forget that, whenever you throw ME under the bus, you're throwing yourself down there too.

I'm not the greatest person. I'll never deny that. But I'm trying to be better. And you know what? It's HARD!

I might have escaped becoming whatever my parallel became, but while I got off lightly, I don't think I made it out intact...

Are you trying to-

Frisk, I think I'm- ...looking back, feeling what was happening to me, I think I might be...

What, Charlie? What do you think you are?

...I'm damaged goods, Frisk. When I realised that I was... I don't think I was always like, y'know, this. I didn't usually get... nasty. Don't get me wrong, I'm not entirely innocent-
HUGE understatement, C-

**SHUT UP and let me finish you HEARTLESS BI-**

...see what I mean? Sometimes it just... just flares up, like a goddamn migraine. And I don't think it's somethin' as simple as anger management issues. I've got a feeling that it's linked to whatever Mom put in that “secret recipe” of hers...

...anyway, where was I? I wasn't always this nasty.

...when it started happening, I asked Toriel about it. I felt... I think I felt more... hostile? I started losing my temper more often. I started playing a little more rough with Asriel. I started taking my anger out on some of the stuffed animals.

When I talked to Mom about it, and I mean Toriel, she speculated that I was going through a phase, maybe even going through some kind of early puberty. Which was kinda silly since I was still only 9.

Well, you say that, but you'd be surprised at how early kids started “blooming” back in the early 21st century. I think I was more of a late bloomer myself, but, well, that's just me in a nutshell, isn't it?

*I dunno, you're, uh, pretty mature aren't you? Considering?*

...gonna have to pretend I didn't hear that last bit, Charlie. Continue.

*Right. ...sorry.*

Things... got worse from there. I started getting more hungry, as things progressed. And again, Toriel didn't think anything was going on. She just slid over some more platefuls of pie an’ told us to dig in. Anything for her growing boys, it seems.

But of course, it wasn't something nearly as pedestrian as the hunger of a growing young man. I'm not even sure if that's how puberty actually works, come to think of it. What I do know, though, is that it started getting harder and harder to feed my hunger. If that's what it even was.

I started raiding the fridge in the dead of night, when the hunger dragged me out of twisted dreams... God, the dreams... OH GOD they were HORRIBLE!

...why didn’t you tell her sooner?

*How COULD I?! How do you think she'd react if I told her that I dreamed that I was hunting her son? Do you think she'd react calmly if I described the sensation of his warm, sticky sweetbreads in my mouth?!!*

...it wouldn’t have helped, either way. He came to you one night, crying as he told you about that EXACT. SAME. NIGHTMARE. You managed to comfort him when he was too afraid to tell Toriel, but even at that stage that was all you did. It was all you COULD do.

D-Damnit Jim! I'm a scientist, not a doctor!

*Calm down, Bones. ...even under the circumstances, we didn't know the whole story at the time. Come to think of it, we STILL don't know the whole story here.*

*But I do know that, after the nightmares started, I started losing weight. My belly, second only to my*
brother's butterball of a bod, started to shrink inwards. Adding that to the dreams, the aggression, and the gnawing hunger, I was already really afraid. Afraid that I was dying, but even more afraid of what I was becoming. Afraid of what I would end up doing when the... the **hanger** got too much...

*Uh, Frisk? What was that noise...?*

**Prince Asriel:** “Noooo... Nononononono, not now...”

It sounds like... oh god, oh god WHAT IS THAT? WHAT THE F**K IS THAT THING?!

*Screams of abject terror*

**Charlie:** *Even more audible screaming*

**Prince Asriel:** “Ohgodohgodohgod, uhm, UHHH, NOBODY PANIC! I GOT THIS!”

“Where are those damn things?! WHY DID I FORGET TO RESTOCK??!”

**Charlie:** WHAT IS THAT THING?! That's no amalgamate! That's no amalgamate at all!

*Panicked whimpering*

...wha- wait... Is that a- Oh god, is that a-

**Prince Asriel:** “(Oh thank god, I still have one left...)”

“Here, see? I've still got the kind you like! Just... just get back a little bit. You're scaring them...”

*The thing... the thing’s head leaves the holes in the bricked up old doorway. A- OHHH GOD, THAT HAND... ...it reaches out, and Asriel drops the unwrapped chocolate bar... into their overgrown, outstretched palm...*

Please, Frisk. Tell me we're dreaming right now. I wanna wake up. Let me wake up!

????????: “TH- THAN-” *ravenous snarls* *animalistic eating of a chocolate bar*

**Frisk:** “Asriel... What have you DONE?”

**Prince Asriel:** “...I- I can’t-”

“...this is gonna take a lot of explaining, but I... With all that's happened, it's gonna have to wait-”

**Frisk:** “What are you HIDING, Asriel?! Does anyone ELSE know about this?”

**Prince Asriel:** “Other than me and you two, no-one else really knows about this. Well, except maybe Sans. ...and Alphys.”

**Frisk:** “Please, bro. Tell me what the hell is going on here!”

*Asriel swallows hard, shaking slightly at the thought of what comes next.*
Prince Asriel: “…you're... I'm…”

He starts to breathe heavily, but quickly calms himself. This is going to be a long day for all of us.

Prince Asriel: “I shouldn't have kept this from you. I shouldn't have kept this from anyone…”

“I need some time to prepare my... my statement to the others. When I tell you, I should tell them too. They're... they're my friends, my friends and colleagues. They all deserve to know the truth.”

“...you kids head back upstairs. Go an- Go and watch some Deep Space Nine or something. I've got a few things to take care of here.”

Frisk: “Asriel...”

Prince Asriel: “We will talk about this later. For now-”

“Actually, there is one last thing I should say. Charlie's end of this “bargain” of ours.”

...he stoops slightly, hands on your shoulders as he reaches eye level with us. He means business, I can feel it...

Prince Asriel: “I don't know how bad things got in your world. I don't know how far your condition progressed before you…”

“...but please. For your sake, for my sake, for everyone's sake...”

“Try to be nice to Frisk, ok? If you feel something flaring up, try your very best to check yourself before you Shrek yourse- ...I mean, check yourself before you wreck yourself.”

“Can you do that for me, bro?”

Charlie: “I'll... I'll try. For you, bro, I'll try.”

He smiles at me. I feel so much better now...

Prince Asriel: “That's all I ask of you, bro. I'll see you... I don't know when, but, well, you know how it is.”

...after all that's happened, I think a bit of Deep Space Nine isn't the worst thing to go for right now.

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

Captain Picard: “Lower your weapons. They'll ignore us until they consider us a threat.”

I've fought draugar before, rogue fae too, but these... these Borg... *shudder* I hope I never have to fight such creatures in my travels.

Oh, you sweet summer child. You honestly thought that that ship was the most dangerous aspect of the Borg? You ain't seen NOTHING yet, matey.

Honestly, this is one of my favourite sequences in First Contact. For me, Deck 16 demonstrates
how terrifying a villain the Borg can be. Hell, this and some of the other scenes make First Contact feel more like a horror film than a space-faring advent-

I appreciate your insights, believe me, but for now I ask that you don't regale me with commentary while I'm trying to watch the movie.

...alright. Sure. We can just-

Doctor Papyrus: “Ooh, Frisk! How good of you to-”

“Oh my... Frisk, are you alright? You look as if you've seen a-”

Frisk: “I'm fine, Papyrus. Really.”

“...sooo what're we watching?”

Doctor Papyrus: “...well, ah, Benjamin expressed an unexpected interest in Star Trek-”

Ben: “The Observer recommended it to me. And from what I've seen so far, it is quite fantastic! A wondrous work of science fiction!”

Doctor Papyrus: “...we're not too far into First Contact, and, well, he's glued to the couch.”

Captain Picard: “The manual release... Mr Worf, hold this position.”

Hold onto your tits, Ben. ’cause this is about to get REAL.

I can only imagine what horrors lurk behind those- *PFFFFTHAH!* 

Ben: *startled chuckle* “He broke the bloody doorknob! Ohhh that's made my day...”

Wait, what?

Captain Picard: “…perhaps we should just knock?”

Oh, ohhhh it's nothing, it's just that Sigurd had a similar relationship with doors- OH DEAR.

Like I said, hold on to your tits. Lieutenant-Commander Data has officially kicked the hornet's nest.

Chapter End Notes

See? I told you it'd end with them watching a Star Trek movie. Though I imagine Frisk probably would've preferred a lighthearted episode of Deep Space Nine right now. First Contact is pretty dark, after all.

...ok, I guess I should address the elephant in the room. Where IS Sans right now? Maybe that'll be a good way to start the next issue, figuring out what Sans has been up to...
The Interloper

Chapter Summary

When Prince Asriel prepares his national address in the aftermath of the Barrier's destruction, Frisk and Ben seek to learn more about one-another's magical talents. Frisk seeks to learn more about the structured magicks at Ben's disposal, while Ben wishes to learn more about the mysteries of Frisk's monster-derived sorceries.

In the meantime, Sans does a sweep for worlds peaceful enough to accommodate the monsters of the Underground. During one such survey, a great and terrible thing leaks into the underground...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dialogue: Sans & The Observer

**doc sans:** "sooo long story short, she walks away tryin' to balance a buncha hot dogs on her head. i mean, i knew she liked hot animals, but, well, DAMN."

**Max:** "Eh, I've dealt with guys like that before. Sam's had his share a' fans over the years, soooome a' them a little too "hands-on" if ya know what I'm sayin'."

...Sans? Is this who I think it is?

you again? i thought you were busy with Frisk an' that tough crowd bunny-guy?

**Looks like you're busy with another bunny-guy at the moment. Did you seriously punch a hole into the Sam & Max universe?**

hey, we're looking for a new world aren't we? i'm just makin' sure we have enough options open to us, takin' a peek on what's on offer.

**And you think the homeworld of the Freelance Police is a safe bet?**

it's an option, isn't it? i did some digging, an' apparently it ain't nearly as grim or dangerous as some of the other candidates. in fact, give or take some of the weird stuff that goes on over there-

**Pretty big understatement, mate.**

-it's actually a pretty safe place to live.

**Compared to Auriga and Azeroth, maybe. But eh, I guess it's a decent option. You'll never find a completely peaceful place in the universe, and conflict is an intrinsic inevitability of reality itself, but as far as safe and stable goes, you could probably do worse than the Freelance Police universe. For instance, you could try to colonize Hellstar Remina, then be instantly obliterated**
because it's a horrifying, fleshy, space-travelling hellscape that literally devours entire planets like some kind of Lovecraftian Galactus.

...i guess i'll add that one to the blacklist, then.

Max: "Y'know Sans, I like your style. An' I'd like to help ya, but, well, I dunno if I still can!"

"...hold on a sec, I'll be right back. Sam! Am I still the President?!"

His travels have changed him quite a bit, it seems. I guess having to destroy your best friend does that to you.

wait, seriously?

Oh yes, that's a thing that happened. At a certain point in time, he started travelling throughout time and space with his Sam, diverging from the original timeline. And at a certain point in his timeline, Sam transformed into a horrifying creature with electromagnetic powers, and Max had to blow him up. In his own words, it was horrible. Meanwhile in the original timeline, original Max was transformed into a towering Lovecraftian monstrosity with psychic powers, and despite original Sam's best efforts, the resultant "Maxzilla" ended up sacrificing himself to save the city.

...gee. that's... that's pretty heavy, isn't it?

It is. Bit of a dark way to end Season 3, but it's not all doom and gloom. They've both lost their best friends, but in the end they still have each-other as parallels. Not even death can put a stop to the shenanigans of the Freelance Police.

Though come to think of it, there is one thing that did; TellTale Games neglecting the IP. After all, they haven't done a new Sam & Max game in 7 years. Hell, even if you count Poker Night 2, we haven't seen a trace of Sam & Max since April 2013...

Max: "You still there, Sans?"

doc sans: "...uh, yeah, i haven't gone anywhere."

Max: "So, uh, good news an' bad news."

"Good news is that I'm still President of the United States, apparently. Sooo I might be able to help you after all, maybe with... Huh. I guess maybe set up some kinda reservation? Y'know, to help you guys settle in."

"But the bad news is I miiiight not be President past this year. Sam says I'll be lucky if I get another term, an' while that still means I might get another 4 years, he's still a little worried about one a' the new candidates. Something about a hairy brain parasite, according to the commissioner..."

"But hey! If I'm still here in January, get that prince a' yours on the horn. We'll sort somethin' out."

Sam, out of view: “Y’know Max, maybe you could use that in your campaign? I mean, it can't hurt, right?”
Agent Superball, out of view: “I'm not sure that's such a good idea, sir. The way things are going with public opinion, we'd be better off keeping this project a secret.”

Sam, out of view: “Wait, really? Yeesh, I knew things were a little rough out there, but they can't be THAT bad.”

Agent Superball, out of view: “I'm afraid they are, sir. Approval's at an all-time low already, and—”

doc sans: “alright, i get it. they wouldn't want us there anyways.”

“besides, i'm not sure we can even wait 'til january. things are, uh, probably gonna heat up soon.”

Max: “Hey, HEY! Don't rule it out just yet, Sans! I'm sure we can figure somethin' out!”

doc sans: “don't worry, i'm not givin' up just yet. but with the way things are goin', we might have to put this in the “maybe” pile.”

Max: *sigh* “I guess we're gonna have to.”

“...I dunno what to say. UGH, this is too heavy.”

“...well, Sans, I guess this is goodbye.”

doc sans: “eh, maybe. but let's just leave it at “see ya later” for now.”

“who knows, maybe we really will figure somethin' out?”

Max: “I hope things turn out alright over there for ya. See ya later, Sans.”

*sigh* “C'mon Sam. Let's go somewhere nice for a change.”

Sam, out of view: “Sure thing, little buddy! I've been stakin' out this steakhouse near the Inventory, “Uncle Phil's Cheesesteaks”, an' while they don't deliver, they do the best cheesesteak this far from Philly!”

Agent Superbowl: “With all due respect sir, I don't think a cheesesteak has any business being this far from Philadelphia. Mr President, I've received intel on a place not far from here that does some very good corndog tacos. I recommend that we order from there instead...”

*The window on Sam & Max's world fizzles shut, silencing the theme of the Freelance Police's office, leaving you with only the hum of the lab's equipment to-*

...serenade your troubled mind? Fill the void in your soul? Uh... Nope. I've got nothing. Let's forget I said anything.

...wait a minute. What's that on your desk?

oh, this? ...that's a good question. what IS this bottle?

doc sans: “...Banang?”
OH FUCK IT'S ESCAPED.

doc sans: “huh, ’s a cool name. B‘nangggg...”

Sans, buddy, it's been a pleasure knowing you. Now, I'm going to get the hell out of here before the Banang consumes me as well.

Dialogue: Ben & The Observer

Oooh, this is a nice little-

GAH! ...MUST you always butt in uninvited?

Frisk: “Somethin' up, Ben?”

Ben: “I am fine. It's just that Observer of yours, sticking his nose in other people's business as usual.”

Oh, shit, sorry mate. I'm not, uh, “intruding” am I?

And what, pray tell, is that supposed to mean?

Well, you've, um, got a nice little set-up out here with Frisk. A lovely red-and-white blanket on the ground, a sizeable hamper, some bottles of... what are those? Either way, it looks like a really nice spot for a picnic...

...please tell me you're not implying what I think you're implying. I have SCRUPLES, good sir!

Oh GAWD no, I wasn't implying that at all! After all, she's a little young for you, and you're a perfectly respectable-

“A little young for me”? Good lord man, I'm not THAT old!

Hence why I said “a little” without exaggeration. After all, you're only 26, aren't you?

Though at the end of the day, she IS still 17. So it's still a ways out of the “HYA+7” safety zone if things-

Absolutely out of the question.

Look mate, I'm not implying that you're a warlock. You're WAY better than that.

And rightly so. ...wait, what do warlocks have to do with this?

Do you really want to know? It involves a thaumatological constant concerning the arcane value of virginity-

Actually, I don't want to know. Let's not get into... whatever that is. I do not like the implications one bit...
...sooooo. Now I've made things awkward, what ARE the two of you actually doing so far out from Snowdin?

...magic training. We came out here for magic training. Specifically, we are training to understand one-another's magics.

Ahhh, so those bottles are...

After we finished watching First Contact, I set about trying to formulate a batch of Nimue's Elixir, though I only managed to make a rough approximation with the reagents available to me. Using rough-ground coffee beans and some MTT-brand “sports potions”, I brewed a rather basic infusion of caffeine and electrolytes, two key active ingredients in Nimue's Elixir. What I've knocked together is nowhere near as effective as properly-prepared elixir, as I'm not much of a chemist, but it does the job regardless.

I've honestly never heard of that before. Infusing a sports drink with caffeine... It doesn't sound TOO dangerous, come to think of it. The electrolytes in sports drinks replace those lost during a workout, and caffeine apparently helps in endurance exercise...

I might have to try concocting an “elixir” of my own one of these days. Might help whip my fat arse back into shape. Though perhaps I'll go about it a little differently, since I doubt that coffee and Lucozade would be a combination that I could stomach.

I will admit that this first attempt does taste a little... *GH* sour, sadly. ...and oddly fruity, strangely enough. Though that's probably due to the ingredients in the sports potions.

Sounds like Mettaton in a nutshell, if you ask me.

Heh... Oh, I know I shouldn't laugh since it was such low-hanging fruit, but ah-

Oooh, nice one!

What do y- OH. ...let us never speak of this again.

...so. Magic training, eh?

It was Frisk’s idea. The Prince is busy preparing a statement for when he addresses his subjects, and while I was happy to continue our marathon of Deep Space Nine until then, your lady-friend became interested in my chosen fields of magic. In exchange for me teaching her what I know, she has offered to teach me a few things about the kinds of magic used by monsterkind.

It's quite different from your wizarding ways isn't it, Ben? More in line with heart-felt sorceries than logically-constructed spells, don't you think?

It feels so... so very alien, if I'll be honest. People in my world treat magic as a tool, a way to reshape reality as we see fit. And yet for these beings, these “monsters”, magic is... it is like...

Art?

They don't just treat magic as a means to an end. For them it is like... like writing, or spoken language, or... yes, art!
Indeed it is. They are very heartfelt and emotional lifeforms, using magic as a way to express themselves both emotionally and conceptually. What a mortal may perceive as an attack may not actually be an attack, it might just be that the monster is having a moment.

I learned that the hard way, sadly. Though thankfully, no-one else got hurt except for me.

Well, you're a grown man and a powerful wizard. You can handle being slapped with an errant flying white snake, can't you?

They're feelings, Jim, but not as we know them, not as we know them, not as we know them.

They're feelings, Jim, but not as we know them, not as we know them, Captain.

You keep mentioning this “Jim”, but I still don't know who he is.

Well, since your exposure to Star Trek has been First Contact and early DS9 so far, it makes sense that you don't yet know about Captain James T. Kirk. He was the captain of the Enterprise in the Original Series era, set about a century before the Next Generation era. Some people prefer Picard over him, others have it vice-versa, but I personally prefer Sisko above either of them.

Well, once we get back, perhaps we can all watch some episodes of the Original Series?

I think we would all like that...

Ben: “Now, with a clear mind and a calm heart, these next few exercises should not be too hard. But first, hold your palms perpendicular to one-another.”

**Frisk obliges, her hands holding the position you desire.**

Ben: “Ah, good. On to the next step.”

“Consider the notion, if you will, that heat is just another form of vibration, much like light and sound. Remember that all the matter we see is made of atoms, and that the vibration of atoms constitute what we know as heat...”

“Visualise in your mind's eye that the air between your hands is a soup of vibrating molecules. The stronger their vibrations, the greater the energy within them.”

“...is something funny, Frisk?”

**Frisk:** “It's nothing, really. But for a moment I thought you were going to talk about “phlogiston” as a concept.”

Is she trying to take the- I honestly hope that was a joke.

**It probably was. Just roll with it.**

Oh, I'll “roll with it” alright. I roll my eyes at Frisk's disingenuous assertion.

**Damn. Sick burn, I suppose.**

**Ben: *tsk* “No, Frisk, I do not believe in phlogiston theory. I may be from the 19th century, but that does not mean we still treat phlogiston theory as legitimate.”**
Frisk: “Hey, it's ok. I didn't mean to-”

Ben: “It's fine, Frisk. Let's just continue with the demonstration. ...where were we? Ah, right, the air between your hands. Here, Frisk, is where things get interesting.”

“We have already discussed “MP”, and the prerequisite discipline of channelling that power from one's core to one's extremities, so the next step should come as little surprise. Channel the power between your hands, filling the space in-between.”

**You certainly have been busy, haven't you? A- Huh. Well, I don't know why I didn't expect that. A disconcerting darkness flows from hand to hand, mirroring the power of her own soul.**

The last time I saw that darkness... Please, tell me she isn't...

**She isn't. There, easy.**

**Seriously though, she isn't capable of swallowing souls. The reason why she has a “dark soul” is because of her... let's call it an “Orphean descent” that she undertook when she was younger.**

**In her quest to save her best friend, she found her way down to the deepest, darkest plane of existence, thus having her soul “touched” in the instant that she crossed the threshold. I don’t fully understand how it works, since I don't know much about the intricacies of deeper dimensions, but I suspect that something about the laws of physics down there caused a restructuring of her soul and its aspects, making it more “fluid” in a way that persists on our plane of existence.**

**Given how humans in this universe are typically incapable of performing any kind of magic, due in part to their ancient betrayal of monsterkind, I am left with little doubt that Frisk's descent into the “Pneumatic Plane”, which I now know to be the elusive 13space, is the only reason why she has any magical potential in the first place.**

Frisk: “...I guess I should explain this, uh... “darkness”, huh?”

Ben: “No need. The Observer has clued me in on your little “Orphean descent”.”

Frisk: “...then you know about what I did down there.”

Ben: “Not exactly. Not that it matters right now. Let's... let's finish off this demonstration.”

“Now, with the space saturated, envision the atoms of the air vibrating with greater and greater intensity. Entertain the notion, and impose it upon reality.”

**Frisk stares at the space between her hands. At first, nothing seems to happen. After a few seconds, however, a gentle warmth starts to radiate from her hands. You reach out, and feel the temperature gradually climb as you place your hand in the space between hers.**

She's taking to this quicker than I'd anticipated. There really is something special about this girl, isn't there?

**Other than the abyss-touched dark soul in her chest? Quite so. On the sliding scale, she's more of a sorceress than a wizard, but if you keep teaching her, she'll eventually reach the balancing point**
between acquired knowledge and innate talent.

Ben: “You're doing quite well, for a novice. I'm actually impressed- AGH, bloody hell!”

I was NOT anticipating that spike in power! Gah...

Frisk: “Oh CRAP, I'm sorry! I didn't mean-”

You plunge your heat-struck hand into the soft, cold snow outside of the blanket, soothing the air burn Frisk accidentally gave you.

Ben: *agh* “MOST impressive! Maybe needs a little more control, but you've easily shown that you're more than capable of manifesting proper heat!”

I hand her a bottle of my improvised elixir, but before she opens it, I motion for her to stop.

Oooh, I think I know of the trick you're about to demonstrate. This is going to be really cool.

...that it is.

Bloody hell, I wasn't even trying that time. I was just using the-

It's fine. You're accurate in your observations. It is going to be, as you say, “cool”.

I am very excited to see this in action.

Ben: “This next exercise demonstrates the flipside of thermaturgy. Generating heat is one thing, but manipulating it, transporting it, siphoning it from an object, that is another matter entirely.”

I hold a bottle of elixir in my left hand, and plant my right hand on the ground. As I will the transition of the heat from the elixir, it flows through my body and out of my right hand.

Frisk watches, impressed, as the ground around your right hand thaws, then looks on in awe as frost begins to form on your bottle of elixir. This is one hell of a party trick.

Perhaps, but the core principle is the linchpin of a LOT of my spells. I doubt you would regard my Frost Flashes or Subzero Shards as mere parlour tricks. In a way, they're more akin to weapons of war.

Oh come on, just TRY and tell me that you never used the “Freshen Your Drink Guv'nor?” trick at parties. Because I've seen it happen at many of the functions you went to, eliciting delighted laughter with a wave of your hand, as you manifested droplets of ice from the contents of their glasses. That, along with the old “Need A Light?” trick, made you the life of the party every single time, so don’t you try to deny it. Thermaturgy can make for quite the- ...nevermind.

You were about to call it an “ice-breaker”, weren't you?

...yes.

Damn it, Observer. ...bah, I suppose I can't blame you for that one. It was actually rather clever.

Aw, thanks. I'm glad to see you're warming-
Don't push it.

Oh come on, I wasn't even intending to- BLEH, nevermind. Bloody sourpuss.

Are you quite finished?

...now I am.

Ben: “Borrowing from the concept of refrigeration, I have siphoned a great deal of heat energy out of the bottle and its contents. As you can see, rather than try to somehow “cancel out” the heat, I drew it out of the bottle, channelled it through my body, and e- ...and transferred it into something else.”

“I could have used certain “e-words” there, but they all felt a little... unpleasant, shall we say.”

Frisk: “Ugh, I can imagine...”

“...seriously though, that's really-”

Ben: “Cool? Yes, I was afraid you'd say that. But indeed, it is a “cool” technique. Some might even say it is “supercool”, in a rather literal sense of the term.”

“But look closely as I demonstrate this next trick. If you thought that the previous step was “cool”, you have seen NOTHING.”

With a strong tap of the glass, the supercooled elixir rapidly solidifies within the bottle, freezing into ice from the point of disruption. YEEEAH SCIENCE! Now THAT is SUPERcool!

Frisk: “HOLY CRAP THAT IS SO- ...it's supercool. ”

Frisk stares you down with a slow nod, domineering glare and wry grin. She knows how you are with puns, and she doesn't give a toss. She's HAVING this one.

...very well, I'll let her have this one.

As if you have a choice. That's the thing about Frisk. When she sets her mind on something, it's hard to steer her off-course. When the going gets tough, she is filled with determination. ...and when the going gets rough, she gets going.

...I need to get my hands on that song one of these days.

What song would that be?

The Tough Get Going, by Billy Ocean. You'd probably like bouncing to it, considering your tastes in music. Now I've got my internet unrestricted, I'll probably look it up on YouTube.

Dare I ask how it got restricted in the first place? Was hen-tie involved?

Thankfully no. My current provider is simply run by blithering, uncommunicative idiots, that's all. An accidental double payment led to an accidental double-refund, leading to a threat of service
restriction until payment was given, but then they said it wouldn't be necessary to pay before the direct debit went through, and all manner of communication breakdowns happened, resulting in certain restrictions being put in place wherein only one device in our house could access the internet.

It was frankly a horrifying comedy of errors that's really put a spanner in the works, but it's finally being resolved and we'll be reimbursed for the cyclopean chain of logistical fuck-ups that hobbled my household.

Sounds to me like you should find a better provider for this “internet” of yours.

I thought the same thing, but sadly we're bound to a contract so we can't switch so easily. And of course, a contract is a contract is a contract.

“But only between Ferengi.” I forget which Rule of Acquisition that was.

If only that were the case, being only between Ferengi. Though if it were, we'd probably all wake up with massive earlobes and sharp pointy teeth, just to be taught a lesson in being shat on by the universe itself.

...though come to think of it, a lot of companies in my world feel like they're being run by Ferengi. Which is all kinds of horrible, since they're probably going to get us all killed with how ruthless and reckless they are.

...but enough about being shat on from a great height. Let's see how Frisk handles this. Though at the end of the day, Liquidator Brunt is still a MASSIVE CUNT.

Honestly, the more you talk about your world, the more I feel sorry for you. It's just so depressing...

Ben: “...anyway, now you try.”

She emulates your style, placing her left hand on the snowy ground while holding the bottle in her right hand.

Ben: “Visualize a river of heat that flows through your being. Envision the bottle as the source, and trace the river's course up your arm, across your shoulders, down your other arm, and out of the grounded hand symbolizing the river delta. That's usually how it works for me.”

Steam rises from the ground Frisk is touching, as the snow melts in the blink of an eye. She yelps with fright as she realises, to her dismay, that the bottle she's holding is not only caked with frost, but is also stuck to her hand.

Bloody hell! I knew she was powerful, but this is ridiculous!

You should have seen the sorceries she was throwing out before you arrived. You would be awestruck to say the least.

Thankfully, with proper application of heat, Frisk manages to unstick the supercooled bottle from her hand. It might have hurt, but it's still better than licking a lamppost in winter.
Or having one of your classmates flash-freeze a pudding spoon while it's in your mouth. That was a REALLY funny joke, and not at all dangerous. It's not like I had to go to the infirmary afterwards...

**How bad was it?**

Nothing that a mug of hot cocoa couldn't fix. Come to think of it, I don't know why I needed to go to the infirmary that time.

**Was the nurse attractive?**

I'm sorry, what?

*It's not unusual to have inappropriate schoolboy crushes. It's all part of growing up, isn't it mate?*

Somehow, being 7 at the time, I don't think I even had the potential to have a crush on the school nurse. ...that said however, she was a very kind woman. A light-brown Highland minotaur, if I recall. Not to mention, she pulled double-duty as one of the school counsellors, so Alice and I visited her often. Her words helped us feel better about... the fire...

*I'm so sorry, Ben. I didn't mean to dredge that up again.*

It's... it's not your fault. Sometimes it just floats to the surface at the worst possible moment...

**Frisk lays her hands on your shoulders. She can see that you're upset.**

Frisk: “Hey. Somethin' on your mind, Ben?”

Ben: “It's nothing, really. Just... It always comes back to the fire, doesn't it?”

Frisk: “...do you want to talk about it? It usually helps.”

*It wouldn't hurt, mate. If you've got something you need to get off your chest, now's as good a time and place as any. She's a good shoulder to cry on, trust me.*

...I suppose I could do worse. Just... I'd like for this to be between me and Frisk. None of your interjections, please.

Don't worry, I'll leave you be for now. I need to check in on Sans, see if he's gone bananas yet.

Bananas?

*It's a long story. One involving a dog, a rabbit, and a cursed bottle of banana-flavour drink mix. But that's a story for another time and another space. I'll let you and Frisk get to know one-another better.*

**Dialogue: Sans & The Observer**

Oi Sans. You still alive?
uh, yeah? it's just a banana-flavour drink mix. it's not gonna end the frickin' world, man.

Then why, pray tell, are you wearing an Aloha shirt and hot pants? Something tells me that things went a little tits-up over here, if you don't mind me saying.

uh... it's, uh, it's a long story.

We've got plenty of time, mate. This is an interim episode, between the shocking revelation of last time and Frisk's inevitable descent into the True Lab.

...alright, fine. the Banang didn't really sit well with me. turns out that human food goes right through me.

Charming.

no really, it literally went right through me. i tried to chug a glass of the stuff, an' next thing i know my bones an' clothes are soaked in frickin' banana drink!

i literally got out of the shower a coupla minutes ago, tryin' to rinse out all traces of that stuff. but it turns out that my only clean casualware was this stuff, an' i didn't feel like slippin' into a labcoat, so i just threw this stuff on.

Eh, I've had days like that. I'm not usually going to wear trousers if I don't have to go anywhere, especially if it's a hot afternoon. It'd have to be pretty bloody cold for me to wear trousers at home.

...so, uh, what did you do with the rest of the Banang? Is it safely contained?

c'mon man, chill out. it's not dangerous at all. it just has a silly name.

as for where i put it, i gave the bottle to Little Miss 369. she's probably bathin' in the stuff right now.

Are you sure that's wise? I'm not talking about the inherent silliness of the Banang, I'm more concerned about allowing an oculastran to lunch-bathe in such a sweet and sugary solution. After all, they produce sugars naturally through photosynthesis, so they don't generally need to partake of sweet things by default.

...you're afraid that she might get eyeabetes?

It's a distinct possibility. I don't know all that much about oculastran biology, but I have a feeling that, as is the case with most lifeforms, an over-abundance of sugar in her system will do a lot worse than just making her hyperactive. Though then again, since her kind can naturally produce sugars, maybe their physiology is better equipped to manage blood sugar levels?

hmmm... y'know, there's one way we can find out. once she's out of the Banang, we could do a coupla tests, see if its done anythin' to her blood sugar.

If she's willing to go along with it, that is. After all, she did brush off your brother's attempt at scientific study, though to be fair he basically asked if he could watch her having a bath. That'd be creepy for anyone, let alone an oculastran. Especially one raised on some rather conservative and prudish values, as is typical of those of her kind produced by the Elder Gods.
you make it sound like she's a clone, or some kind of android.

*You could say she's a clone, but that would imply that there was ever an original to be cloned from. Patterns like hers are variants of an original blueprint formulated aeons ago, comprised of DNA from multiple donors.*

*So if anything, she has more in common with Agent 47 than with Dolly the Sheep. She's not quite a clone in the traditional sense, but she is still just one of many photocopies based on a specific document.*

...so she's more of a... replicant? that the right word for it?

*I was going to go for something along the lines of “test-tube baby” or, as is more likely the case, a “ziplock kid”. Since I'm pretty sure that she gestated in a specialized plastic bag, which is a lot more suitable than a ruddy great glass tank like the kind you see in the movies.*

wait, seriously? plastic bags? aren't those the LAST thing you should put a kid in?

*In general yes, but the bags I refer to are more in line with an artificial womb, as opposed to the kid you carry your milk and eggs home in. These “Biobags” are actually being prototyped in my era, intended to help premature babies come to term. Pretty amazing if you think about it.*

...huh. that actually does sound pretty cool, even if it only works for humans.

*Well, mammals in general. You'd probably need an entirely different process to bring a monster to term.*

yup, it'd be all kinds of different. i wouldn't know much about it, though.

*What, you don't know how monster babies are made? I thought you were-*

oh no i do, it's just that i dunno how us skeletons, uh, “make babies”. we're, uh, pretty rare to begin with, an' my folks never gave me “the talk”, so...

*That does indeed raise the question: how DO monsters procreate? I've never been privy to those secrets.*

well, for most monsters it's pretty simple. when two monsters love each-other very much, they-

*Syrinx: “That voice... Where have I heard it before?”

**doc sans:** “oh, hey Syrinx! how was that drink mix i gave ya?”

*Syrinx: “…it tasted like... Ohhh, it was like sunshine in liquid form... But with an odd chemical twang. Not enough to ruin it for me, but it still carried an unpleasant edge to it.”

“Though even after rinsing my palate clean, I still feel... unclean, for relishing such an unnatural indulgence. Why would I need to bathe in such sickly sweet waters, when sunlight alone is sweet enough?”

*Behold, the lady has become like one of us, knowing mortal pains and pleasures...*
Syrinx: “Again, that voice! But where...?”

“Show yourself, whoever you are! If you are a friend of Benjamin, why do you stay in the shadows? What is it that you hope to hide?”

*I have no answer to that, but I do have a question to counter yours. Am I really hiding in the shadows, if I have no body to speak of? Can I truly hope to hide, if I am physically incapable of showing myself?*

well, uh, aren't you technically in my head or somethin'? I'd say that counts as hiding-

*Quiet, you.*

Syrinx: “...you are not entirely here, are you?”

*Guilty as charged, in more ways than one. *wink*

Syrinx: “Where is it you are projecting from? Why do you favour being so far away as you-”

*Because I can't physically manifest in your universe unless certain conditions are met. Though even when they are, I would only be able to project a phantom image upon your dimensional space. An “avatar” if you will.*

...*take it easy, “angel”. Don’t let your dogmatic preconceptions get in the way of-*

Syrinx: “OUTSIDER.”

*Ok, now you’re just being rude. I don’t think I care for your tone, madam. It makes you sound like an inhabitant of Innsmouth, very unbecoming of one such as-*

Syrinx: “Save your breath, Outsider. You have NO PLACE HERE!”

doc sans: “hey now, let's take it easy here- WHOA WHAT ARE YOU-”

Syrinx: [Miracles] > *Nodens-Oztalun Purgative*

...*she attempts to purge my presence from your being, as the golden-green light of the Purgative burns itself upon your skull. But to her dawning horror, she realises too late that as an “Outsider”, I am unaligned with the Red.*

*Yet I am also aligned with neither the Blue nor the Green, or anything in-between. There is nothing that she can do against one to whom these eldritch chromodynamics do not apply. Syrinx Tau Xi Theta, I operate Outside of your world’s rules and regulations.*

Syrinx: “...impossible...”

*RUDIMENTARY CREATURE OF BLOOD AND FLESH. YOU TOUCH MY MIND, FUMBLING IN IGNORANCE, UNWILLING TO UNDERSTAND.*

Syrinx: “Stay back...”
THERE IS A REALM OF EXISTENCE SO FAR BEYOND YOUR OWN YOU CANNOT EVEN IMAGINE IT. I AM BEYOND YOUR COMPREHENSION. I... AM THE OBSERVER.

And I'm not actually a threat, believe or not.

Syrinx: “...what?”

Yeah I was just ribbing you. Playing off of your preconceptions of an “Outsider” bringing only bad things with them. Letting you think, for just a bit longer, that you were at the mercy of a potent and malevolent extradimensional god. When in reality, I'm just some mildly-overweight berk in his twenties who couldn’t hurt a fly.

I know, it was kind of mean to play you like a fiddle, but knowing how you are, I simply could not resist jerking you around. Also, you could think of it as “payback” for your initial hostility and rudeness towards me. I mean, Sans is going to have a hell of a time explaining this brand to his friends, and it's all because of you.

Though then again, with the Purgative burned into his skull, he cannot be possessed by anything aligned with the Primaries. So, um, good job on that, but fuck you for trying to drive me out.

Syrinx: “...but why? WHY are you here? What is your purpose in our universe?!”

It is a very long story. One that I think should be discussed over strong drinks, as it is quite a “doozy”.

doc sans: “sounds like a plan. i'm game to go to grillby's.”

Syrinx: “Oh, really? You intend to discuss this over lunch? But I've already had-”

I would hardly call a bath of Banang “lunch”, Syrinx. It's just empty calories and devious chemicals, despite “tasting like liquid sunlight”. You should have something more substantial when we get there, something with plenty of minerals and amino acids, with grease thick enough to swim in.

Syrinx: “...so long as I can swim in it.”

doc sans: “grillby does a pretty mean fried chicken soup. that'll do you right.”

Then it's settled. We're going to Grillby's.

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

Grillby: “...root beer with your order?”

Frisk: “You know it Grillby. And, uh, one for my friend here.”
Ben: “Oh, I'm not so sure-”

Frisk: “C'mon Ben, aren't you just a little bit curious?”

...Ben concedes, and agrees to a root beer. I can see EXACTLY where this is going. He takes a sip, and his eyes do something I've never seen anyone do before.

Frisk: “Whaddaya think?”

Ben: “Curiouser and curiouser... It's so strange. Not too unpleasant, but still very strange.”

Frisk: “I know, right? It's so bubbly, and happy, and just that little bit cloying.”

Ben: “...just like Papyrus?”

Ok, I wasn't expecting that. I thought we'd already watched The Way of the Warrior?

Frisk: “I was gonna go with “just like the Federation”, but that works too.”

Ben: “I take it that's from an episode we haven't watched yet?”

Frisk: “It's from the start of Season 4. I won't spoil much, since a lot of major stuff happens in it, but you know Worf? That episode, The Way of the Warrior, is when he joins Deep Space Nine.”

Ben: “Now you mention Worf, I almost want to skip ahead to that episode. But we should probably stick to watching them in order.”

Frisk: “I had a watch-list back home, and I think there were a few episodes we coulda skipped, but, well, it's been so long that I forget which ones were worth skipping over.”

“I can't lie, the earlier seasons weren't as good as the later ones. But there's still plenty of good stuff in there.”

Ben takes another swig of the root beer, only this time he doesn't wince. That's the scary thing about it; if you drink enough of it, it starts to grow on you.

It's insidious...

...JUST like the Federation. And Papyrus, funnily enough.

Ben: “…tell me, Frisk. You spoke about being “back home”. Now, from what I remember of our first meeting, apparently you're not from this world?”

“What is life like in your world? Where ARE you originally from?”

I... I guess there's no harm in telling him.

Frisk: “...when I left my old world behind, the year was 2071. AD, that is. Monsters have a different calendar down here, so if they talk about history, assume they're using their dating system.”

“Anyway, in my old world most folks live in the cities or on fortified homesteads. The wasteland and wilderness is too, well, it's too dangerous for most folks to roam unprotected. Even if you're stickin'
to the main roads, it's best to have a few folks who know how to fire a gun, a few good men to ward off bandits an' raiders.”

**Ben:** “Funnily enough, that's very close to how things are in my world at the moment. Although we have greater problems than simple highwaymen.”

**Frisk:** “Well I wouldn't call 'em “simple”. Maybe some of the small-time bandits, but if they're part of a raider clan, they're usually smarter than the average bear. Those guys work together, attackin' travellers in packs.”

“It's the reason why, if someone wants to move between the cities, their best bet is to travel with a Desert Ranger convoy. They usually pack enough heat to ward off most raider packs. Hell, if a raider is in the way of a Ranger convoy, they won't be in the way for much longer, one way or another.”

**Ben:** “Hmmm. These “raiders” sound a lot more organized than most highwaymen. Though I imagine your Desert Rangers haven't had to deal with draugar or fae. An outlaw with a gun is one thing, but corrupted machine-lifeforms and reanimated corpses, well, they constitute entirely different kettles of fish.”

**Frisk:** “…maybe. But we've still got it rough out there. Few places are safe outside the city walls 'cept for the homesteads, but even THEY have their share of weird troubles.”

---

Ben seems... ashamed, for some reason? I'm guessing he didn't intend to turn this into a pissing contest as to who's world is the most screwed.

But as far as screwed worlds go, both of yours lose out. Cairn is the most screwed of them all.

Entire sections of the world have been infected with aetherfire. The dead are reanimated and stitched together by Aetherial sorcery. An' the less said about the Chthonians bleeding through from the Void, the better.

That, uh, well. That definitely sounds like a fucked up place to live.

**Huuuuge understatement.** And I don't even wanna get into the hell created by our fellow man in that world, though. It's too damn depressing. But strangely enough...

It felt like... like somewhere I belong. Not just where I deserve to be, but somewhere I... where I could be... be myself. Somewhere I could **rip and tear**, **slash and burn**, **kill and destroy**! ...and do it for a good reason.

Charlie...

I've killed so many bad things in Cairn. So many genuinely terrible things dragging that world down. Creatures living and dead corrupted by the Aether, alien horrors from the roiling chaos in the planes beneath that world, you probably saw those when you played Grim Dawn. But worse than any of those... were the kinds of people who thrived in the chaos of the Grim Dawn, exploiting the weak and weary who struggle to survive. Criminal gangs extorting what few settlements remain, the kinds of people who were locked up for damn good reasons. Cultists who worship Ch'thon and the creatures of the Void, harvesting innocents for their BLOOD! Just thinking about them... sometimes it makes me feel like humanity didn't deserve to survive the Grim Dawn.
C'mon, don't say that. We're not all bad, and you know it.

*Implying that I don't? No Frisk, I do know. I've seen so many survivors, just barely scraping by but still holding on to the “good” in the world.*

*The Rovers, who struggle to remain pacifists in a world out for blood at every turn. The folks at Devil's Crossing, caught between the Aetherials and Cronley's gang. The farmers of Homestead, doing their damnedest to grow enough food to survive. Even the Black Legion, who're a little rough around the edges, they're doing what they've gotta do to as the first and last line of defence against the enemies of Cairn.*

I look at folks like them, folks filled with determination to survive, yet unwilling become as twisted as the world they live in... it gives me hope. Hope that humanity is worth saving. Hope that, one day, things won't be as shitty on Cairn.

...you really have been busy over there, haven't you?

*Well, with the Observer keepin' you out of trouble, I was pretty much left to my own devices. To the point where, even after I'd dealt with “Alpha”, I couldn't figure out where to go next. All that Inquisitor Creed told me was that I should “get some rest”.*

...I got my rest, alright. But when I woke up, I was in this weird, uh, I guess you could call it an arena or a “coliseum”, where this weird guy Lokarr wanted me to “fight for his amusement”. And with nowhere else to go, that's pretty much what I did. For a really, really long time.

*The more waves of monsters I cut down, the greater the reward would be at the end. So I kept running the “Crucible” for chest after chest of, well, I guess you could call it “loot”. Y'know, pieces of armour, rare weapons, trinkets, that kinda stuff.*

I know what loot is, Charlie. And I know that the Crucible was apparently some sort of “horde mode” side-thing that the devs put in back in the day, probably to tide people over until the first expansion dropped.

...so, uh, what happened next?

*Not much. I got some sweet legendaries, none of which really fit my fighting style, an' the Cardinal dragged me back into this world before I could get a legendary that suited me.*

...so that's pretty much what I did while you were out “worldwalking” or whatever you called it. Speaking of which, what did you get up to-

**Ben:** “Are you alright, Frisk? You seemed to be-”

**Frisk:** “It's fine, really. I was just... sidetracked, that's all. I was thinkin' about... about the convoy me an' my mom joined when we fled L.A...”

“We fled across the desert, further inland 'til we reached Salt Lake City. I don't remember all that much about the journey, but considering the raider problems we had back then, I guess that was a good thing.”

“One thing I do remember, though, is that we were originally gonna emigrate to the Strip, over in Las Vegas. But when we got there, we were all told that we couldn't live there. The “Entertainment Capital of the World” had decided to close its gates while the war was still on, throwing all of our
plans in the trash...”

...your mom's heart was set on starting a new life in Vegas, wasn't it?

I guess it was. I think she was trying not to cry, when she got back in the car.

**Ben:** “...and from there, you travelled to the city of the Mormons. The next best place to live, I presume?”

**Frisk:** “Sort of. It's still better than living under Chinese rule, but not that much better. At least I had Mom to take care of me.”

**Ben:** “Indeed. You still had it better than your parallel did, from what I've gathered.”

_Easy, Frisk. If this conversation is making you uncomfortable, you can-

**It's fine.**

...sorry, it's fine. He's had his time to vent, now it's my turn.

**Frisk:** “I guess I did. But I still had to grow up without her, even if she was around for longer in my world than she was in this world.”

“Did I ever tell you how I lost her?”

**Ben:** “...I have the feeling you're about to tell me. If it gets to be too much for you, don't be afraid to stop.”

**Frisk:** “I'll be fine.”

“...it was the state. They disagreed with what Mom did for a living, since it was apparently “an obstacle to their pursuit of human purity”, so they locked her away. And as for me? They just threw me into a care home, left it at that. They didn't even tell me how long she'd be going away for...”

**Ben:** “...I don't know what to say.”

“Dare I ask what crime she was actually accused of? What profession did they despise so vehemently as to tear families apart in order to snuff it out?”

**Frisk:** “It was... the oldest profession.”

...I honestly expected him to recoil in disgust, and yet he looks... he looks pensive, about what you just said. As if it reminds him of someone he knew.

**Frisk:** “...that's right. When the other kids said my mother was a whore, I couldn't really defend that fact. Even back then, I knew vaguely what she did to keep us afloat, that she “made men happy” and was able to feed me because of it, though I didn't know how specifically.”

“...she was arrested in 2064, about a year before I first fell into the Underground. And in all that time, I heard nothing from her, or even about her. It's like... It's like they made her... disappear...”

_Ben holds your arm gently, dreading the implications. Even if she isn't dead, she's probably still in-

-You know what? I'm gonna stop myself right there.
Too late. ...but maybe... If I could get Ben to join me back in my world...

*I dunno if that's wise, Frisk. Think of the chaos he'd cause in your universe.*

**Ohhh I'm thinkin’ alright.** Though it'd be more... more controlled, coming from him.

*He sees you looking at him in an appraising manner, and he looks uneasy.*

**Ben:** “What are you planning, girl?”

**Frisk:** “Not much right now. But when I have it ready, you bet I'm gonna make you a deal...”

**Ben:** “…please tell me it's not what I think it is. You're far too-”

**Frisk:** “OHHH, you thought I was- *PFFT* NO! Nothing even LIKE that! I'm not that kinda girl, not at all!”

**Ben:** “I'm terribly sorry, I-”

**Frisk:** “You know what? Save it. Let's forget about that goof.”

“...though I gotta say, I was surprised that you, well, weren't disgusted by my mother being... y'know...”

*Ben chuckles slightly, his eyes meeting yours.*

**Ben:** “…it's funny, in it's own weird little way. My mother, as well, was a whore.”

**Frisk:** “You've gotta be shitting me.”

**Ben:** “I'm not, hard as it may be to believe.”

“My father and his fellow Knights were on shore leave in Oxford during the spring of 1859, and according to my uncle they were painting the fortress red. Figuratively, of course, but they did drink and revel in excess, for it was the last day before my father was slated to make his flight to Boston.”

“Naturally, he and “the lads” hired a selection of fine strumpets for their party and, well, what happens in the Oxford Citadel stays in the Oxford Citadel. Except in my case, it didn't.”

“9 months later, a newborn kit found himself abandoned on the doorstep of a university professor one cold evening, and against all odds was taken into the family. Many years later, he found out just who his father was, when he staggered through the gates of that very same Citadel.”

“After a series of genetic tests, it was proven that I, Benjamin Liddell, was the only son of the late Dorian Tremethick na Pendragon, who bore the title and seat of Sir Lucan. My father, indeed, was a Knight of the Round Table.”

*...this can't just be idle bluster. It all makes sense now: the knightly attitude, that weird sword on his belt, the dragon on the back of his nice waistcoat, him talking about the Circle of Merlin... We're drinkin' root beer with a Knight of the Round Table!*

**Frisk:** “...I shoulda known earlier. You're a Knight of the Round Table, aren't ya?”
There's one thing I'm curious about, though. Does he dance whenever he's able?

Holy shit we have to get him to watch that movie with us.

...wait, can he hear me? He looks... exasperated at what I said-

**Ben:** (“God damn you, Observer...”)

...ooor what the Observer said, I guess. Wait, was he seriously thinking the same thing? Spooky.

**Ben:** “...in a way, I suppose I am, even though I'm officially a Magician of the Circle.”

“My uncle Malcolm, known at the Round Table as Sir Bedivere, wanted me to train to become a knight, though my true calling laid elsewhere. Despite my studies and the spells I cast, however, I still found the time to train with him whenever possible.”

“Still, I did spend a lot more time conjuring and channelling than I did learning how to fire a gun. I'll be honest, I'm not a fan of shooting things. I just fail to see the need to carry a gun and ammunition, when I have the elements themselves quite literally at my fingertips.”

“The term “spellsword” is usually tossed around when my peers talk about me. I'm not a proper knight, but I'm not as sedentary as most Circle members. In fact, once I'd finished my sixth-form exams, Bedivere convinced me to become his squire, and started dragging me all over the world, on all manner of expeditions..”

**Frisk:** “Well, it always helps to have a magic-user in your party.”

**Ben:** “Without a doubt. Though in the House's records back then, I was more of a “deputy science officer”. My job revolved more around studying anomalies than warding off hostile entities, though I still had my share of scrapes while Bedivere was still dragging me around, hoping I'd turn out like my father.”

“...and you know what? I imagine he succeeded. While I don't hold my late father's seat at the table, according to Bedivere I fight about as fiercely as he did, even though I favour my staff over the Double Tapper.”

**Frisk:** “I take it that was your dad's gun?”

**Ben:** “One of the few things they were able to retrieve from the Gettysburg Exclusion Zone. Well, aside from this old thing...”

*Ben taps the sheathed sword on his belt. I guess he inherited that as well.*

...wait, what did he just say about Gettysburg? And what was that about anomal- ...holy shit.

**Frisk:** “I'm sorry, what was that about the Zone? Do you have Stalkers in your world or somethin'?”

**Ben:** “I don't know what those are, but I can tell you about the Exclusion Zones.”

**Frisk:** “I know what they are, don't worry. I'm just amazed that you guys even KNEW about nuclear power back then, let alone had NUKES.”

**Ben:** “You'd be surprised at what people in my 1860's were capable of. Though while the
Confederacy claims that it was the latest example of American ingenuity, it's most likely that they reverse-engineered some ancient atomic device unearthed somewhere in New Mexico, according to House Van Hutchinson. And if I had to choose between the word of the Confederates and the word of the Van Hutchinsons, I'd be more inclined to trust our Deutsche-Dutch brothers in Boston."

...something tells me that the Civil War went nuclear in his timeline. Which is not a phrase I ever expected to say.

Frisk: “...I take it Gettysburg got nuked first, didn’t it?”

Ben: “...on the fourth of July, no less. 1863 is a year that has lived in infamy, and will probably do so until the end of time. The Army of the Potomac, obliterated in the blink of an eye, my father among them...”

Oh... I never would have thought-

Ben: “...while it may have been the first demonstration of the atom's destructive power, it was not the last. One cold November morning, Harrisburg became the second city to be visited by the bomb, in response to the intervention of the Sidhe Houses on behalf of the Union.”

“It was merely two days later that the Umber Council delivered their response, wiping Richmond off the map with the third and final atomic bomb to be used in the war. ...a bloody mess, if you ask me.”

Dialogue: Ben & The Observer

Frisk sits wide-eyed and slack-jawed, mortified by the tale of nuclear devastation you just relayed to her. As she takes a swig of her root beer, she wishes that she was old enough to order something stronger.

I take it that her world's Civil War wasn't anywhere near as savage as ours was?

It was still pretty rough in her world. Though in her world and mine, it ended in 1865, and the Confederacy was dissolved. There was no Armistice of 1864, no intervention by the Umber Council, and above all else, no nuclear weapons.

I would be surprised but, well, we know how it is.

For our worlds, it would be another eighty or so years before the first atomic bomb was used, in the closing chapters of the Second World War. Though with the way the Fat Man and Little Boy were deployed, detonating above cities as opposed to being detonated on the ground, Hiroshima and Nagasaki turned out a lot like Richmond, rather than being tainted for decades like Harrisburg and Gettysburg.

In my world at least, the only “Zones” that exist are the result of mismanaged nuclear power plants, namely Chernobyl and Fukushima. And even then, they're merely creepy and wild in addition to being radioactive, being left vacant as they have been. They're nowhere near as “eldritch” as the Zones are in your world, though they are larger due to their sources.

I always wondered why Richmond fared better than Harrisburg and Gettysburg. I guess that the
surface-level explosions baked the radiation into the ground itself?

*Probably. Apparently with a nuclear airburst, the fallout is more likely to be dispersed and diluted by the elements, spreading over a wide area without much in the way of concentrated pockets. Not to mention, the atomic fireball itself doesn’t actually touch the ground in most cases, so there’s less chance of generating yet more radioactive ash and dust. Something that the Confederates didn’t consider in their war plans, and why your world’s Zones are smaller yet still quite hazardous.*

Fascinating... You claimed to have studied games design, yet you speak as if you have expertise in the atomic sciences.

Wellll it’s not that simple. I know bits and pieces, since information on the subject is widespread if you know where to look. You see, in my world most information isn’t as... “exclusive” as it still is in yours. If there’s something you need to know, you can easily look it up if you have the right internet connection.

There’s that word again. The “internet”. You make it sound like some sort of international network, a web of information spanning the globe. Am I being optimistic here?

*Oh, you sweet summer child. You have no idea how right you are. You still rely on your books and discs and holographic tape, carrying them from place to place, spreading physical copies where there is demand. Even with the art of the radio, you merely send and receive messages, spoken words and the simplest of machine code.*

*But in my world... In my world, a lot of information is freely and easily accessible. Advanced search engines scour vast digital libraries and lists of sites from every corner of the planet, to find what you may be looking for. Sites like YouTube host millions upon millions of recorded videos, streaming them directly to your machine for you to watch and listen. Art, entertainment, information, commerce, all of it flows like water and electricity, and I daresay it’s technically a utility in its own right, despite what some corporate conglomerates may like to “believe”.*

I can only imagine how revolutionary it must have been, even in its infancy. It sounds like one of Nikola Tesla’s wet dreams!

*It has pretty much changed the face of civilization, for better and for worse. And what’s more, it’s possible to distribute computer games over the internet. Yes Ben, you heard me right. You can buy video games, downloading them directly to your computer, over the internet.*

...and there’s porn, too. A LOT of porn, covering every fetish imaginable. And a lot of it’s free, to boot. Bet you never read anything like THAT in your sci-fi novels, eh Ben?

...it honestly sounds too bountiful and wondrous to be true. And yet-

*doc sans:* “’sup kids. picnic not go to plan?”

*Ben:* “GAH! How long have you been standing there?! ...and why on Earth are you dressed for a holiday in Polynesia?”
“Have you actually gone bananas?”

**doc sans:** “long story, we can talk about it over some bloody marys.”

“I thought you’d eaten already. you kids get ants in your sandwiches or somethin’?”

**Ben:** “For your information, it was that bloody dog again. I went to open the hamper, only for that white dog to jump out and scamper off into the woods.”

“And when I looked back into the hamper, there was nothing left! Literally, it was like I hadn't packed anything in the first place!”

“But I DID! I'd packed some nice things for after our magic practice: cold cuts, hard-boiled eggs, white bread, fresh carrots, even a few pastries for afters! But nope. Apparently the dog scoffed the lot. Bloody mongrel.”

**Syrinx:** “Truly, that dog is a scoundrel without scruples...”

*Frisk still remembers the time when the dog absorbed the artifact. Even in her own world, the Annoying Dog was ever the cheeky barker.*

**Grillby:** “…sorry it took so long. Here's your food.”

Ohhh, what a treat we're in for...

*Before you sits a thick, juicy patty of cooked meat, sandwiched between two halves of a toasty sesame seed bun. And nestled alongside it, a generous pile of thinly-cut chips, still hissing as if they'd come straight out of the deep fat fryer. On Frisk's plate, the exact same mouth-watering meal awaits her.*

*Smells like heaven. Greasy, salty, sizzling heaven.*

**Ben:** “…hold on, we don't have any cutlery-”

**Cutlery? For food such as this? Seriously?**

*I know you're from 1886, but COME ON man. One does not eat a burger and chips with a sodding knife and fork. Take off your gloves and grab that bad boy with both hands!*

Oh- o-okay. I suppose so? I slip off my white gloves to reveal my hands, as white and softly hirsute as the day Oberon forged them.

**Frisk catches a glance at your cute little fingerpads, round and pink like-**

**Frisk:** “Awww you've got little jellybeans!”

I suddenly regret taking my gloves off.

*Oh come on, they ARE cute. Paw pads are endearing and adorable in many different animal species. They're cute on Asriel's paws, and they're just as cute on the fingers of an aes sidhe. Though I will admit, Frisk's reaction does remind me of one of my coworkers doting on the pub’s cat.*
I grip the burger tightly, and bite into it—oh my god, it's heavenly...

**Normally I'm not big into beef, but if it's in burger form, it's bloody amazing.**

...wait, this is a beef product? ...you know what? At this point, I don't care. It tastes **TOO GOOD** to put down.

**Oh, right, the whole minotaur thing. I imagine this would be more than a little awkward in different company.**

*It's an interesting sociological thing, really. Being hesitant to eat the meat of certain animals because they remind you of someone you know. Crops up a lot in therian societies, funnily enough. Minotaurs balk at eating beef, zhuren are opposed to eating pork—*

Yes. Fascinating. Really. But I'm trying to enjoy this, so...

**Right, sorry about that. Got a little carried away there.**

...*but if it IS any consolation, monster food is usually formed from an idea made material, so that burger wasn't actually made from a monster cow. It's beef, Jim, but not as we know it.*

...you make it sound like it came out of a replicator.

**That's pretty much how monsters make the base ingredients of monster food, from what I've gathered. Though obviously it's made out of magic as opposed to meticulously-arranged subatomic particles, and it probably tastes more authentic and distinct than most of the stuff that comes out of a food replicator.**

Talking from personal experience, I assume?

**Heh, I wish. Advanced as my era is, we're still probably a century or two away from inventing fully-fledged replicator technology. Hell, we don't even have protein resequencers yet!**

Truly this is worth weeping over. Now, if you don't mind...

**Of course. I just don't know when to stop, do I?**

I don't think you do.

**Bugger it all.**

**Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie**

*Now THIS is what I'm talkin' about. Good food, good friends, good atmosphere.*

**doc sans:** “yo grillby.”

**Grillby:** “Hey Sans. The usual?”
“you know it buddy. oh, and somethin' special for the lady here. one bowl of your fried chicken soup.”

“And a large tank of water. I'm... I'm a filter feeder, so I can't eat most solids unless they're suspended in water.”

“Huh. I was wondering how you were able to eat things.”

“It's to be expected, child.”

“.I'll see if I have anything out back.”

Grillby disappears into the back room yet again, to accommodate Syrinx's... interesting dining requirements.

Seriously, this is gonna be really weird, isn't it?

I imagine texture isn't a factor in her species' cuisine. I mean, she doesn't really have a mouth, so-

Well she probably has something that's close to a mouth, doesn't she? I mean, if she's a “filter feeder”, she's gotta have something to filter the good stuff out of the water, right?

Good point. For all we know, her filters could be inside her eyelids. She could eat by BLINKING.

Eating by blinking. That's just so... so...

Alien? 'cause that's what she is at the end of the day, isn't she? An alien.

It really is life, but not as we know it. Not as we know it. Not as we know it.

...I don't know if we should show Ben that music video. It'd probably just confuse him.

Let's do it anyway, just to see how confused he gets.

Sans’ phone rings in his pocket. He ignores it.

“Are you gonna answer that?”

“during lunch hours? nope, no chance.”

Eh, figures.

Eventually, his phone stops ringing. A few seconds later, your device starts beeping.

I dunno if I wanna answer. I mean, my hands are all greasy from the- wait, I recognize that jingle!

It's Bonetrousle. Sounds like Papyrus is calling.

I grab a napkin, and try to degrease my fingers. Can't get the touchscreen dirty, can I?

Hah, it's a little too late for that, Frisk. Have you SEEN the state of your screen lately? You'd probably need frickin' kitchen cleaner to clear away all those fingerprints.

...I finish cleaning my fingers, and swipe to answer.
Doctor Papyrus: “Frisk! Have you seen Sans around recently?”

Frisk: “Oh yeah, he's at-”

Sans shakes his hands and head as if to say “I'm not here”.

Frisk: “…I think he's on his lunch break right now. Can't this wait until later?”

Doctor Papyrus: *sigh* “I suppose it can wait. But if you see him in the meantime, tell him that the Prince's national address is due to start in a few hours' time.”

“We should all be there for him when the time comes. From what little he's let slip, he has A LOT to say, and he needs our support.”

Sans looks...guilty, almost. Like he feels bad for dodging contact.

doc sans: “I'll be there after lunch, bro.”

Doctor Papyrus: “…I don't know why I'm even surprised at this point.”

“See you in a few hours.”

End of call.

...something up, Frisk? What am I saying, there's always something up nowadays.

...I don't know how to feel about him right now. I mean, he's my dear ol' brother, but what he did to me... ...no. It wasn't him. It was the thing wearing him like a kigurumi.

What are you even talking about? Forcing you to take my soul back was ALL him.

I wasn't talking about... ...wrong Asriel. I musta gotten a few wires crossed.

...maybe now's not the best time to think about that.

Yeah, like that ever works. It's like telling someone “don't think about elephants”.

Then let's stop talking about it for now. We'll, uh, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it?

's not gonna work.

How come?

My hands are shaking. I'm trying my best to hold it back, but it's no use. Something... oh god... something horrible's bubbling to the surface.

Nothing's wrong with your root beer, Frisk.

You know what I mean. That night when we were home alone together. That night when IT-

Frisk, you know what I said about letting it all out? I don't think that's such a good idea anymore. I have a feeling that there's a lot of stuff we NEEDED to forget.

Letting... letting the events of that night resurface, right here, right now, I'm not sure if it's healthy.
For now, try your best to bottle it up.

Now, this might sound like something Doctor Amygdala would say, but repeat after me: it wasn't him. It was the Interloper.

...Frisk. Repeat after me. It wasn't him. It was the Interloper.

...it wasn't him. It was the Interloper.

Ben: “That was truly an amazing sandwich.”

...it wasn't him, it was the Interloper.

Ben: “...Frisk? You're- are you alright, girl?”

Frisk: “It wasn't him, it was the Interloper.”

Ben: “You're shaking terribly, are you sure you're- BLOODY HELL!”

The bottle of root beer shatters in your mad grip. You're taking this a little too far.

Frisk: “It wasn't him.”

Ben's eyes widen as he sees the terror and hatred flaring in yours. Frisk, you need help.

Frisk: “IT WAS THE INTERLOPER.”

Chapter End Notes

The events that led Frisk to flee back in time... Now I look upon them fully, I can't help but feel ill at the sight of what happened to her. It took her years to bury the horror and the trauma, and now it's come back...

I will spare you the details for now. Just be prepared for things to take a dark turn when she inevitably weeps herself inside out and spills her guts about that night.

Figuratively, of course. She's not going to attempt suicide. Not on Charlie's watch.
Still Here, Still Suffering

Chapter Summary

In the hour leading up to the Prince's speech, the others get ready to be at the National Address, where Asriel intends to reveal the truth about a great many things. Once all is said and done, Frisk will finally descend into the True Lab to finish whatever it was that she started all those years ago.

I think it best that we start with the Prince himself, shall we?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The writer stares with glassy eyes, beholds the unfinished page. His fur is white, his face is lined and streak with tears of rage...

Countless years ago, how the words would flow with passion and precision! But now his mind dark and dulled with worries and indecision...

And he stares out the window high, longing hard to see the sky...

Dialogue: Asriel & The Observer

Location: The Basement

Some are born to move the world, to live their fantasies~

WHA- You again?!

But most of us just dream about the things we'd like to be~

What are you...

Sadder still to watch it die, than never to have known it~

For you the blind who once could see... The bell tolls for thee~

... The bell tolls for...~

...whenever I hear that song, I can't help but think of Terry and Adrianna. It just...

Lines up so frighteningly well with how their stories ended?
...yes. It really does, looking back.

Funny how things turn out, don't they? Funny as in weird, of course, not funny as in ha-ha. That's just mean.

I, uh...

Trouble with the speech? I know what it's like mate, I know what it's like. I too have left many things to the last minute.

It's not really that, it's just, well... I'm not too sure about how to sign off at the end. I've done good news, I've done bad news, I've even done some weird news. But this...

Endings are always tricky to nail down. Though something tells me that even the finest of closing statements won't soften the impact of the confessions you're planning to make on stage this afternoon.

The truth behind the Deep Lab incident. What really happened to Prince Charlie. Why they can't leave the Underground despite the Barrier being destroyed. You've got a lot of bad news to deliver this time, no if and/or buts about it.

Doesn't mean I can't soften the blow, though.

Alright, try me.

Wait, seriously?

Yah. Lay it on me. I won't bite.

I- I'm... I'm not so sure about-

It might help gauge the response of your subjects towards your little speech. And being that it's me, it probably wouldn't hurt to try. ...think of it as another test, if you will.

UGH, alright. Well, here goes nothing, I guess.

*applause as you take to your podium*

*ahem* "Ladies and gentlemen of the Underground."

Hai.

..."I come before you today, with good tidings and a heavy conscience."

Oooh, bummer.

Will you take this seriously? I'm gonna be pouring out my deepest, darkest secrets to the entire goddamn kingdom!

Yeeeah, about that. You might want to leave out your feelings for Frisk. That stuff isn't exactly-
I seriously hope you're not implying what I think you are.

_Don't tell me you never had "those" feelings for her. Thinking of her in the years following her disappearance, wishing that she were still there to hold you..._

I don't like where this is going, it's getting a little too creepy.

_Fine, fuck it. Nevermind! Nevermind._

...continue, handsome.

...right. Where was I? Good tidings, heavy conscience.

"You probably all know by now about a commotion in the Barrier antechamber. And believe me when I say that I will address your concerns in due time. But firstly, there are a great many things I have not exactly been honest with you about."

_OOOOHHHH. *murmuring crowd*_

"First and foremost is the matter of the Deep Lab incident. As the record states, around the turn of the century, a breach of the Core led to the loss of many esteemed scientists working in the Deep Lab. To this day, we mourn the loss of such brilliant minds."

*a moment's silence for those lost to the incident*

"The record, however, is not entirely true. We lost many good monsters that day, but it was not merely due to the Core."

*_stern, confused silence*_

"In truth, it was a breach of containment for an ancient and terrible experiment. An experiment orchestrated by none other than your Prince, over a century and a half ago."

*_shocked gasps and murmuring*

"There are likely a few monsters from that time who, still standing here today, remember the Gunslinger's rampage. As for the rest of you, remember your history lessons."

"When... when my mother, the wise Queen Toriel Dreemurrr, fell to the Gunslinger, I was as heartbroken as the rest of the kingdom. Even when I laid the Gunslinger low and took his weapon as my own, nothing could assuage my grief. I had lost my brother, my father, my sister, and now my mother. When I accepted the crown and throne, I did so in the grip of a great and terrible depression."

_Tiny lights float up from the crowd in memory of the lost Dreemurrs, lost to the gravest of misfortunes._

"And yet, I had not lost everyone. Not yet, anyway. The Captain of the Guard, the now-exiled Ren Yong, was still alive, but only barely. It was through my desire to see him live that I and many others delved into cybernetic research, to replace his ailing, broken parts with mechanical analogues."

"But even with the late Kristen Gaster working day and night to engineer solutions to keep Ren alive, I feared that he would not survive. The fear of being truly alone, with nothing left of my
family, was too much to bear."

"In time, my fear drove me to seek out certain methods recorded by the long-absent Human Princess, Frisca Rivera. And in doing so, I poured over notes that perhaps should have been better left undisturbed and unread..."

...I'm guessing that her accumulated notes never referred to Flowey by name. Otherwise, when Frisk hold you about him, the name would have rung a bell.

They didn't. But what I saw in there...

"Among my absent sister's notes was a formula revolving around the enigmatic power we know as determination. It entertained the notion that, if an object held the essence of a living thing, one could infuse it with concentrated determination to give it a life and mind of it's own."

"I wondered if perhaps, with the right amount of determination, I could finally fashion an appropriate vessel for one of the few souls we had back then. With the right form, I could bring back someone near and dear to my heart. And to this end, I applied a generous dose of determination to the lifeless body of my late brother, the Human Prince, Charles Carver."

Are you sure this isn't a little too graphic for the general populace? I mean, playing Frankenstein is bound to be a point of contention on its own, but-

It's not like I'm describing it in excruciating detail. I'm not gonna say "I'm not sure what chilled me more as I realised my dreadful mistake: the popping and cracking of embalmed bones, or the terrifying primordial shrieks that escaped his dried-out husk of a mouth". No-one needs to know about that.

And I'd hope not. Leave that stuff for when Frisk inevitably goes down into the True Lab to continue the work she started so long ago. Save it for when she's trying to pacify the thing that was once Charlie's body, struggling in vain to make it accept the soul it once held.

...surely she's not that crazy. She's not actually going to try and do that, is she?!

Not right now, at least. She's currently... indisposed, on account of recalling yet another horrifying detail of her forgotten past. Speaking of which, you should probably give her a big ol' hug after your national address. She's in a dark place right now, and I'm not talking about the True Lab.

But rest assured, once she's back on her feet, she's going to go back down there, one way or another.

...once I'm finished delivering this speech, I guess I'll have no choice but to accompany her down there. It's not like I can stop her, after all.

Despite everything you've been through in this timeline, you're still a Boss Monster. You're a strong man, but still nowhere near as resilient as the quasi-amalgamate body her Asriel inhabits.

Flowey?

The very same. A balanced aggregation of matter and magic, the perfect soulvessel.
...although with the three examples we know of, they're actually far from perfect.

...who- ...what are the other two?

...ah. I'm guessing that Alphys has been holding out on you in that regard.

Please tell me this is a joke. Tell me that she didn't make *multiple* Floweys.

*I'd like to say that she didn't. But then I'd be holding out on you in turn. Even moreso than I usually would, that is.*

GODS OF- ...should I even ask whose dust she used?

*I think you have a good idea who these new soulvessels are. Though while Frisk managed to preserve one of their souls, the other was not so lucky. It'll take a certain potent ritual to bring the latter's spirit back onto this plane of existence.*

...it's only natural to cry, but you're unsure whether they're tears of joy or despair. You don't know whether to fire her on the spot, or give her the biggest hug of her life. But knowing what she's been through, what you've both been through, I'd say go with the hug. ...then remind her that she still owes you big-time.

All this time, they were still alive... But without souls, can we even call it living? Is a life like that even worth living?

*Uh, yeah, howdy. I'm right here, a being from a reality without souls of any description. Trust me when I say that it's better than nothing.*

*Though in the cases of Thorney and Floriel I suspect that, much like in Flowey's case, there's something missing. I don't know exactly what they're missing at the moment, I haven't been able to pinpoint it just yet, but they are imperfect replicants of the long-dead originals. However, like your parallel said to Flowey when he was having an existential identity crisis, they're "Asriel as it gets".*

...ha... Heheh... *sniff* Sounds like something Mom woulda said.

But... If Thorney's got all the memories of Dad, and I somehow manage to disentangle Dad's soul from Charlie's, wouldn't it, y'know... Would it even be fair on Thorney? I mean, he'd be the perfect vessel for Dad to be reborn in, but at the same time, he IS Dad. Would Thorney even be in control, if Dad's soul was inside of it?

...good question, actually. I'm not entirely sure if it'd be an even split, BUT when Flowey became Asriel's vessel, the two ended up working out some sort of timeshare arrangement, taking it in turns to be the one in control. But whether or not Thorney and Asgore will be willing to make a similar compromise, or are even capable of doing so, has yet to be documented.

...oh god... OH GOD...

*And there is yet another question. What about Floriel?*
I couldn't save Mom's soul, which means she's... down "there". ...if what Frisk said about the afterlife is true, that there's only Hell waiting for all of us... Do we even dare to try and bring her back from there?

You're afraid that she might be "broken" if we try to bring her back, that she'll be so far gone she might not even be your mother anymore. Impressively, that troubles you more than any thought of reprisal from "the Kingdom". Bless your heart, old man.

And you know what? It troubles me too. This is uncharted territory for the both of us. But we should still do it anyway. For science AND for Toriel.

And if fate frowns? Well... At least you'll have a lot of data to pour over, once you've finished grieving over losing her a second time.

...that was callous of me, I am REALLY sorry.

Get out of my head.

O-okay. I'll, um, I'll leave you to your speech. Good luck with that, I suppose...

...but I'll say this before I check up on the others. No matter how bad things may seem, no matter how grim our future might seem to be, there's always one thing you can do.

In spite of everything, stay determined. It's the best we can hope to do, in times like these.

Oh. And one more thing. You know how I mentioned a "certain potent ritual" that could bring Toriel's spirit back into this world? It goes without saying that I know how to make that ritual work. So once all is said and done, if you truly wish to bring your mother back, you need only ask for my assistance...

Dialogue: Ben & The Observer

Location: I don't know. I can't see shit

Ben? Ben, what's going on? I can't see.

...Ben? BEN?

Are you- are you ASLEEP?! Bloody hell. I never pegged you for someone who took afternoon naps...

...oookay, I had a feeling your dreams would be weird, but- OHHHKay, that's a- YUP that's a- This is one of THOSE dreams, isn't it?

NOPE. Not recording any of this. This is too spicy to show. Abort! ABORT!
Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

Location: Fucked if I know, can’t see shit Cap’n

-currently out cold-

Wait, are they BOTH asleep? This calls for desperate measures. Alphys is probably going to freak out.

Dialogue: Alphys & The Observer

Location: New Home, Living Room

*psst*

...?

Hai.

...wh- wha?!

You probably know who I am, don’t you?

...Doctor? Is that you?!

...you’re not the first person to assume that. But you’re also not the first person to be wrong about it.

I’m not Gaster, Alphys. I’m the Observer. One of Frisk’s "friends in high places", and the guy who sent Ben to this world.

Ohhh.

Yah. You’ve heard of me, I take it.

...hai.

Hai.

...this is so weird. Is this what telepathy is like?

Considering that neither of us are actually flapping our gums, I’d say it is.
...anyway, I need to ask you a favour. Could you pause your anime and check up on Frisk?

Is something wrong?

I'm not sure, but for some reason I can't peek into Frisk's mind, and Ben is, well, having a rather nice dream about a cute lizard he knows back home.

...tell me it's not like it sounds. 'cause you make it sound like we're dating in his universe.

Oh no, no not at all. Far as I can tell, you don't even exist in his timeline. No, he's dreaming about his ishtari mancer pal, one Omar Pikkarta.

Awww, that's so sweet.

Besides, if he WAS courting your parallel, he'd have been giving you awkward looks.

...actually, he has been doing that. I... guess I kinda remind him of Omar, since I'm, well, you know.

Fair enough. Even though you're missing the extra pair of arms that the ishtari have.

So, yeah. Let's have a gander, shall we?

Uh, sure. Geese, whatever.

You knock on the door to Frisk's room gently. No response.

Doctor Alphys: "Uh, hey? You guys ok in there?"

Still no response. I know Frisk's a heavy sleeper, but this is just getting silly.

Doctor Alphys: "...we gotta be ready to go in an hour's time. You sure you don't wanna, uh, get up?"

"...or just keep on napping in there. Napping's good."

I think we should be a little more assertive. Let's look inside. It should be nothing, I just want to make sure.

Doctor Alphys: "I'm, uh, I'm coming in!"

As the light of the hallway spills into the room, a scene of utter carnage, straight out of a college dorm room, is laid out before your eyes.

Doctor Alphys: "WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED IN HERE?!

Bottles of all kinds are strewn around the room, some of them having spilled their contents long ago. Ben is slumped over on the rug, a mostly empty bottle of a berry-scented malt wine laying next to him. Frisk is barely hanging off of the bed, cuddling a bottle of Ol' Whisker's Whiskey as if it were Asriel.

I knew she was taking it hard, but... Frisk has been drowning her sorrows. Jesus Christ on a Ryvita. With cream cheese and chopped chives.
This is terrible!

I know, right? Even when she was back home, she never drank so heavily and so recklessly. But as far as Ben is concerned, this is pretty much what happens whenever he and his party members went on a bender. Only this time, he still has his trousers on.

I'm serious, we really do gotta get ready soon! We can't have these guys hung over when we're due-

Alright, don't panic! I've got a plan, but we need some key items to make it work!

Uhhhh, okay! What do we need?

First off, sunglasses. They'll feel better and look better with those things on.

Uhhhh, I think we have some spares hanging around from one of Papyrus' visits. What's step two?

Second off, we need to make a pot of strong peppermint tea. Anything like that down here?

Hold on, lemme check...

You scurry off into the kitchen, setting up a stool as you rifle through the tea cupboard.

...do you always do this?

Not usually, I don't normally drink enough to have a hangover the morning after. And even when I do, I usually drink a lot of water before I-

Oh right, you mean the narration. Uh, only most of the time. It helps when I record these for posterity. And share them with anyone who wishes to read them.

Wait, so you're a journalist?

Not really. If anything... I don't really know WHAT to call this, actually.

...you know what? Let's not think too deep into it. You found that tea yet?

Can't seem to- Hmmm. You think this stuff'll work?

Tigermint blend? I suppose it'll work. What's it like?

Well, it's a source of gingerol, zingerone, menthol-

NOICE. That'll definitely help with the nausea, as well as any stomach upsets they might have. Get ready to boil a pot, but not yet. There's one last thing we need for their hangover cure...

...chicken ramen soup?

Close, but I'm thinking we should be a little more adventurous. After all, we've got the better half of an hour before we have to shoot off, right? Soooo we could rouse those two party animals from their slumber, dish out some buttery scrambled eggs on fried bread, and still have time spare to have them as a leisurely afternoon tea.
Oh. That... actually sounds kinda nice. There's just one thing, though.

*You don't know how to cook.*

I- I do! ...as long as it involves noodles.

*I'll walk you through it. It's pretty simple, really. It's mostly just eggs, some butter, and a bit of salt and pepper.*

Do we even HAVE eggs here? Lemme check...

*Staring up into the fridge, you are able to retrieve a cylindrical stick of butter-*

Oh my god. Uhhh, we have some eggs, but, UHHH-

*Looks like they've ripened. ...wait a minute-*

Eggs don't ripen! EGGS DON'T RIPEN!

*Left in close proximity to an old science experiment, the- Ok seriously, what is up with Asriel?! Who the hell leaves a experimental biochemical compound in the same fridge they store their- OH. That's not butter, that's a stick of agar jelly! This isn't the food fridge at all!*

OH GOD THEY'RE HATCHING!

*Tendrils of gelatinous energy struggle their way out of the eggs, glowing with a covetous purple as they wiggle their way towards you-*

NOOOOOPE I know EXACTLY where this is going!

*Sensibly, you slam the experiment fridge shut. Asriel can deal with those little eldritch horrors when he gets back home.*

...but seriously. Whose bright idea was it to have the experiment fridge in the kitchen?! That's all kinds of dangerous.

...let's try the other one, shall we?

*Sure. Let's- Well. Ok then. That's... that's a lot of chocolate.*

*Is it entirely necessary to store that stuff in the fridge, though? It's not THAT hot in here, not by a long shot. All they really need is a cool, dry place to stay, like the apartment above an ironic jazz club.*

Eh, I've given up asking about it. It's just something he does.

*While I don't know why he keeps them all in the fridge, I feel like I know why he's stockpiled them. Something to do with one of his... experiments, I hear.*

...did I say something wrong? You're shaking...

...that can't be... I didn't even start those experiments until after I became-
Yah. About that... Remember that, long ago, Frisk brought scientific knowledge from her timeline. Gaster's papers, Sans' notes, and of course... YOUR entries into the True Lab database.

...that's right. She brought back the records of your parallel's DT experiments. Thaat's time travel for you.

But that means... Oh god... I don't want to ask whose body he used, but...

Just as you injected those dusty roses with DT, so too did Asriel attempt to revive his brother with that tenebrous substance. Except he knew vaguely what he was trying to do.

...and it killed them all. Catze, Handla, Eitr, even-

I'm not so sure, actually. Given how hard people struggle to remember them, I reckon it wasn't the creature that destroyed them. After all, there actually WAS a breach of the Core down there, though it probably was due to the rampage of the reanimated Human Prince.

But it- It didn't look like him at all! It was too BIG to be a kid! WAY too big! And the head... oh god that HEAD!

...if this is what Asriel's gonna confess to everyone, I don't know if I want to-

He needs you, Alphys. Don't you go getting cold feet now, not when he needs you the most. Besides, do you honestly believe that you're any better than he is?

You are, and I mean this in the nicest way possible, a trash-CAN. You have a history of fantastic failure, but in spite of it you do your best to keep going, to persevere and try to make up for your mistakes.

And you know what? SO DOES HE. Given what you've both been through, AND what you've done, you two deserve one-another. So don't go trying to take the moral high ground, when you're both down in the same fetid little valley of failure and fortitude.

...his screw-up still got people killed. I...

...no, you don't need to say it. I've... I've done worse.

...in all fairness, though, they're better off this way, rather than facing the horror that waits for the rest of you.

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

They're in a state of not knowing which part of them is which, a random, unstructured pandemonium of amalgamation. It's its own special kind of Hell, but it cannot hope to hold a candle to the true nightmare that writhes and meticulously calculates at the bottom of reality.

Down there, they know just which buttons to press to get a reaction, to milk the dead for all they're worth. But the worst part of it is that they know not to desensitize their cattle. They offer glimmers of hope, opportunities for reprieve, to give the illusion that maybe, just, things will be ok one day. They know how to mess with one's expectations, so that they can't ever get used to their situation. That way, they can make sure that each soul they torment and manipulate produces just
what they need, and enough of it, in a reliable fashion as the centuries pass.

This, Alphys, is the fate that awaits all things when they die. So all in all, the amalgamates have it pretty good, compared to the restless dead.

...I don't- I don't know how to feel right now. I want to believe that you're just messing with me, but...

...I don't think I have it in me to learn how to make scrambled eggs right now. You've given me- I've got too much to think about.

Fair enough. You... you do you.

But still. Best to prep a pot of tigermint tea and some bowls of ramen. They're going to need it.

...I'm going to check in on Papyrus. He might be up to some interesting japes.

...fine. You... you go do that. Whatever.

...*sigh* I'm sorry, Alphys. Maybe I shouldn't have told you the truth after all...

**Dialogue: Papyrus & The Observer**

**Location: The Capital, Backstage at the Capitol Hall**

**Doctor Papyrus:** "So in conclusion, that's what Luigi's been up to since our last meeting."

**Doctor Undyne:** "I guess we can scratch the Mushroom Kingdom off the list, then. And here I thought it sounded like a nice place to live."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Sadly, Bowser doesn't know when to sit down and hammer out an agreement, and Peach can't run the hot tap, let alone a kingdom."

"But hey. It's better than Brooklyn."

...still no luck finding a suitable world?

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHWho are you?

**Doctor Undyne:** "Papyrus!? Are you ok? You looked like you were having a stroke-" 

**Doctor Papyrus:** "There's- There's someone in my head?!"

**It's all good, mate. It's just me, the Observer. I'm a friend of Ben's.**

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Apparently he is a friend of Benjamin? The "Observer", apparently."

**Undyne vaguely remembers Ben mentioning the Observer during a quiet moment, pointing out that he wasn't exactly a "demon".**

**Doctor Undyne:** "I think I know who you're talking about now. But what's he up to this time? Why
is he in your head?"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "I believe he's asking me about our search for a new home. Or a new new home. Which I hope we have a better name for when we find it."

_Pretty much._

_So, any luck? Any candidates beyond the world of the Freelance Police?_

The who?

_No, the Freelance Police._

No, I mean what do you mean by that? Who are they?

_Wait, you're right. I take it Sans hasn't told you about one of the latest "maybe" candidates yet?_

I haven't seen him since I left the lab this morning, if I'll be honest. But I expect he'll be here soon.

_He'll be able to fill you in better than I. Well, I could fill you in now, but we have more pressing matters to discuss._

_Such as?_

_Frisk's condition, for instance. I assume that, by now, you know of her complicated mental state._

Oh, the poor girl... Is she doing alright?

_If only she was, Papyrus. In all honestly, I feel like there were parts of her past that she could have done without remembering. Namely the events that drove her into the past of your world._

_Shortly after you hung up, she remembered something too great and terrible to bear. In response to reliving the horror, she has been drowning her sorrows in monster booze alongside Ben, to the point of passing out. Alphys is currently formulating a hangover cure to help them ready up for this afternoon's address._

_OH GODS, that's TERRIBLE!_

**Doctor Undyne:** "What's he telling you?"

**Doctor Papyrus** *whispering* "Apparently, Frisk is passed out drunk. She's remembered something so terrible that she's tried to drown it out with alcohol!"

_Undyne looks equal parts confused, upset and angry at this new development._

**Doctor Undyne:** "Wha- Who the hell let her have booze in the first place?! If that wizard boy got her drunk, I swear I'll rip his goddamn-"

**Doctor Papyrus:** "I'm sure it's nothing like that, Undyne."

Right, Observer?
Trust me, Ben's an upstanding gentleman. He'd never do that to a woman. Hell, if you ask me I think he might be a "confirmed bachelor" as they say. Though of course, he'd never admit that. He's so "in the closet" about it, he's practically in Narnia.

...speaking of closets, does Asriel have a drinks collection?

Now you mention it, he does have a liquor cabinet. What's more, it doesn't even have a lock on it. He usually just tells us to help ourselves whenever we're over.

And there we have our answer. He really is a responsible old man, isn't he?

**Doctor Papyrus:** "According to the Observer, Benjamin would never stoop that low. Though I suspect that Frisk must have found the Prince's liquor cabinet and, well, "helped herself" like we usually do. And from what I've gathered, I suspect that she didn't need any encouragement from Benjamin."

**Doctor Undyne:** "...it's still frickin' messed up. I mean, even after all she's been through, she's still a minor."

**Oohhh, if only she knew what Frisk had hidden in her room back home. This wasn't her first drink, and after what she's lived through it won't be her last. Not by a long shot. Even though, needless as it is to say, jenever and Ol' Whisker serve as poor substitutes for proper therapy, especially for one who's barely still a teenager.**

And speaking of minors, I don't think I should tell you what she remembered just yet. Trust me, I'll tell you when it's the appropriate time, which is any time but today, but all I will say right now is that she went through something that no young woman should ever have to go through. Be ready to give her the biggest hug of your life when the time comes.

...dare I even ask? Is it that bad?

**Pretty fucking bad mate. So bad that if I told you, you'd be quite distracted for the next few days. And while you all probably ought to know the specifics of Frisk's traumatic experience, it's best to save it for the lull that's bound to come after resolving the situations in the Deep Lab. Best to be stricken with horror when everything's peaceful, than for it to happen while other things are going down. ESPECIALLY when a lot of things are about to go down.**

Is something going to happen?

Will it ever? Survey says "a LOT of stuff is about to happen". Heading back into the Deep Lab is just the start of it.

...you might want to calm Undyne down. Given my pronunciations apparently make people's eyes light up, she's looking at you like you're possessed or something. She probably knows it's me, but it's still putting her on edge.

Well, I am “possessed” in a way, aren't I?
That'd imply that I could actually control you, which I'm not sure if I could even if I wanted to. If anything, this is more of a "haunting". Except it's probably not as spooky when I do it.

Just tell her that those blinking purple lights are just me talking to you.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Take it easy, Undyne. The lights are just a side-effect of him talking to me."

**Doctor Undyne:** "...

...dot-dot-dot dot-daaash-dot-dot dot-dot-dot.

**Doctor Undyne:** "...?"

Eh?

... -- .-. .. ... / .-.. .. -.- . / ... ..- ... .... ..

**Doctor Undyne:** "...sonofabitch."

-.- --- ..-. /-. .-. /-. .-. -.- - --

What was- was that Morse code you just flashed at her?

*I thought I'd have a little fun, since she was focused on your eyes.*

How does that work, by the way?

*Buggered if I know, mate. I don't usually question the deeper intricacies of magic, it's not worth the headache. All I know is that it's a fun little jape.*

...soooo. Not much happening right now, is there? I mean, things are about to happen, but right now it's awfully quiet. Almost too quiet...

...whatever happened to that demon you guys captured, anyways? You know, the one possessing Mettaton?

I'm not quite sure. I'll ask.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Say Undyne, I forgot to ask. How is Mettaton doing?"

*Her expression sours as she remembers his predicament.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "Not much change, I'm afraid. He's still down in Containment, since that "demon" inside of him hasn't budged."

"But on the plus side, if we're gonna trust anything it says, he's actually calmed down. If we let Mettaton go free, he won't be going after Frisk. ...I didn't buy it at first, but... I didn't feel the same, uh, "mania" that I did when we first encountered that thing."

"As for the demon, well..."

*She looks uneasy, as if something's weighing on her mind. 5G says that BURROCARA told her*
some... interesting things about the Kingdom.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "...G for your thoughts, Undyne?"

**Doctor Undyne:** "Shoot."

**Doctor Papyrus:** "You've been keeping an eye on the "Burrocara", correct? Has he told you anything... disconcerting?"

She's been trying to hide her insecurities, but she can't hide all of it. A mild wisp of anxiety wafts off of her, as the words of the BURROCARA still resonate in her mind. Words describing the fate that awaits all things. A dreadful cosmic truth that, frankly, I don't think you should hear about right now.

Is this another reset thing? Because if it is, I'm not all that bothered-

**Bad news is that it's not as existential as the reset problem. But the good news is- Oh yeah. THERE IS NO GOOD NEWS. Just bad news and weeeird news. The likes of which I'm still saving for later.**

Oh come on, it can't be THAT bad-

**YOU KNOW NOTHING, Papyrus Fontaine. I admire your optimism, I really do, but that alone is reason enough for me to hold out on you for just a bit longer. I made the mistake of revealing the cosmic truth to Alphys, and now she doesn't know how to feel about it.**

...it's about Hell, isn't it? The "Taurocalva" tried to intimidate us with that knowledge, when we were escorting Frisk to New Home, and it failed to dishearten me even then.

...**huh. That's right, you DID learn about it back then! Christ on a bed of crispy lettuce, that was a YEAR ago!**

...nooooo, that only happened a few days ago.

**For you, yes. The thing is that I interact with your timestream in a... a less "constrained" fashion than you would initially imagine. It's not even as simple as "time runs faster in my space relative to yours", either. It's more like... sort of like watching an online video, or playing a DVD. I can skip back and forth on the timeline looking for insertion points, then proceed to experience your universe through the senses of others when I make myself manifest.**

**The main point is that I could spend two or three weeks documenting the events that take place within mere hours, and indeed that is what I've been doing. I have the luxury of performing atemporal observations, since I live outside of the time and space you are familiar with.**

Ohhh... You're one of the Riftborn, aren't you?

**Hah, I had a feeling you'd know about them from the Endless series. After all, you're pretty big into 4X games, aren't you?**

Oh, am I ever? ...though judging by how you know about the games, you're not actually Riftborn, are you?
WE ARE ACTUALLY A CRAVER IN DISGUISE. AND WE ARE ALWAYS HANGRY. GIVE US SNICKERS OR WE WILL EAT YOUR PLANET.

Nah, I'm not that either. I'm just your average run-of-the-mill waste-of-life human.

Don't sell yourself short, human! After all, from what the Prince and Benjamin have told me, you kept Frisk safe during her extradimensional travels, even bringing Benjamin into the mix when the other Frisk-

I know, I know. Though apart from giving her temporary “plot armour” in the form of Ben, I'm not sure if I did much actual saving. Sure, I guided her, kept her company, taught her some of my secrets, told her about the worlds we went through, but beyond that she was pretty capable on her own. For her, I was more of a Virgil than a Frank Farmer.

...?

...alright, I'll rephrase that. I was more of a Virgil than a Brock Samson.

Ok, now I get it.

Fair enough. I honestly never watched that movie, I just listened to Whitney Houston's cover of I Will Always Love You more times than I could could. You know, the one that's practically a meme by this point?

...I know precisely what you are talking about now.

That makes two of us. Most radio stations play it, so you'd have to be living under a rock to have NOT heard it at least once. Though I guess that didn't stop in ending up down here, so...

Anyway, I still get what you're getting at. I might not be "her hero", but I was still there as a friendly guide, even if I was a little stern near the end. ...I won't lie though. I do miss our travels together. But she doesn't need me anymore. She's got-

...she's got the "anomaly".

Right, yes, I forgot that you knew about him too. ...but do you know who he is?

It's Charlie. The "Chara" of Frisk's world. Do you even know what I do?

God, FUUUCK. I'm sorry, it's just been so long since I'd recorded that time in Snowdin. Like I said, I experience time in your universe differently. And what happened a mere week ago for you happened more than a year ago for me. The 19th of May 2016, no less. Though thankfully, I have nearly a year and a half worth of records to look over in case I forget things.

Dare I ask what time it is in your universe?

You may. ...right now, at this particular instance in time, it is the 15th of August, 2017. Ten to four in the morning, to be exact.

Oh MY. You're certainly a night owl, aren't you?
Guilty as charged. What's worse is that tomorrow's a gym day, and I'm usually up relatively early for my workout. So you know what?

Carrier lost: Observer has signed off

Doctor Papyrus: "...eh?"

Doctor Undyne: "GWUH! Geez Paps, you nearly gave me a heart attack!"

"Did he not know when to shut up or something?"

Doctor Papyrus: "We were having a... rather lengthy conversation, actually. Talked about many interesting things. And some not-so interesting things, but I digress."

"He's... he's just gone. He talked about how "tomorrow's a gym day" in his world, and that it was nearly 4AM-"

Doctor Undyne: "YEESH, he's gonna kill himself if he tries that! Exercise first thing in the morning, after staying up that late, will NOT do him any good. Whatever he is."

Doctor Papyrus: "I'm not so sure about that. He admitted that he was a night owl, so that probably implies that he gets up late. I assume that his definition of "early" probably involves waking up around lunch-time."

Doctor Undyne: "...heh. Man, I remember when we used to wake up that late..."

*sigh* "Don't you miss it when we were still students, Paps? All those parties, late night sessions, frickin' fight club, they made me feel so alive!"

"But now... Now we're the hope of the Underground. Everyone's relying on us to get them outta here. There's just not enough time to party hard anymore..."

Doctor Papyrus: "I am sure that Andrew W.K is deeply upset by our circumstances."

"But we can't lose hope, Undyne. Because one day, when all is said and done, we will go down in history as the scientists who liberated monsterkind from this world! Our job will finally be done, and maybe, just maybe, we may have an overabundance of time on our hands!"

"Time for fight club! Time for anime romance! Time to play more Endless Odyssey! Time to... be lazy? I suppose?"

"So stay strong, Undyne. Because I, the Great Papyrus, am confident that the end is in sight!"

Dialogue: Papyrus & The Observer

Location: The Capital, Backstage at the Capitol Hall
Aaaaand I'm back. Did I miss anything?

**Doctor Papyrus:** "He's back!"

**Doctor Undyne:** "Oh god." *sigh*

Weren't you turning in for the night a few minutes ago?

_**Nope, that was last night. Right now it's the same day, but it's quarter past 11 at night. BOM. Another example of atemporal interactivity.**_

...aaaand now it's 2 in the morning on the 16th. Oh bugger, not again.

Is something wrong? Are you- ...are you suffering from some form of temporal displacement due to your-

_Nah it's nothing that exotic. I just lost track of time catching up on some videos. Happens to me more often than I'd like to admit._

...it's always a pleasure to witness one of your pep-talks. And while they're so sweet they make me feel diabetic, I can't help but admire the effect they have on people.

Aw, thanks.

...so. Did Undyne tell you about what the Burrocara told her?

I... I don't think we did, actually. I was "out of it" for quite a while when you waylaid me.

**Best to ask again, I wager.**

**Doctor Papyrus:** "You know, I don't recall getting an answer on the subject of the Burrocara."

...Undyne looks mildly upset. She was hoping that, in your distracted state, you would have forgotten to ask her. Something tells me she's not eager to open up about it.

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Undyne... Was it really that bad?"

_She fidgets with unease. This isn't normal behaviour, needless to say._

_I can't help but wonder. Did she not hear the Taurocalva's words before she barged in and destroyed the crystals? Or is this the straw that broke the camel's back?_

I'm not sure if Taurocalva is to blame here. After all, it didn't get the chance to make a speech before Charlie started swearing like a sailor.

_It did last time, however. ...though looking back, I don't think she heard about it that time, either. This time, however, it was fresh from the donkey's mouth, and she's been trying hard not to think about what she's learned. Though of course, it doesn't work that way._

Don't think about elephants?

_Don’t think about elephants. And indeed, we cannot help but address the elephant in the room,
no matter how hard we try to ignore them. What did it tell her?

**Doctor Papyrus:** "Undyne, please. Don't try to keep it bottled up. It's ok to cry if you need to, you're still as strong as you've always been-"

**Doctor Undyne:** "I can't."

*It's definitely affected her. Even one as strong as Undyne can't help but feel helpless in the face of what comes after.*

"...it told me so many awful things. I- I don't want you to suffer like-

**Doctor Papyrus:** "I KNOW, Undyne. I too know of the horrors beneath our reality, what they do to the dead. And yes, it is one of the most awful things I have ever heard."

"...but in the end, it has only strengthened my resolve. If the horror beneath us is all that awaits us, then we must endeavor to **never** fall down. And besides, wherever we may end up when we leave this world behind us, I suspect that there will be no Hell below us in the new world."

*A moment of weakness. A chink in the armour. In my experiences, such small things are all it takes for the most terrible of things to befall someone. The greatest of heroes, the kindest of hearts, the mightiest of bosses, all it takes is that one instance of vulnerability at precisely the wrong moment. It has felled many an adventurer, broken many a captive, and thwarted many an insidious scheme.*

*But in this place, at this moment, Undyne lets her guard down and gives you a hug that could splinter bones. Even still, despite the gnawing at the pit of her stomach, in spite of her tense eyes and quivering lip, she tries her very hardest not to cry.*

**Doctor Undyne:** "I'm... I'm scared, Papyrus. I don't wanna admit it, but..."

"What if something happens to us? What if we- what if we **fall down** at the last hurdle?"

"That... Burrocatra told me about some of the tortures the things down there use. How they exploit our deepest fears, figuring out where it hurts the most..."

"I- I thought I was ready for anything, that there was nothing I couldn't handle! But I'm- I'm-"

**Undyne barely manages to reassert herself. Against her own good advice, she buries her tears for later, and lets go of you. Even when it's in her best interests to let it all out, to let you be a shoulder to cry on, she's determined to "stay strong" for the rest of us.**

**Doctor Undyne:** "...the sooner we leave this world, the better."

"...y'know, once upon a time I wasn't scared of dying... But thinkin' about what Burrocatra said, I wanna die somewhere better. Somewhere that has something better than... whatever's down there."

**Can't say I was expecting that. I don't think I've seen this side of Undyne before.**

**Doctor Undyne:** "We all gotta die some time, I'm not gonna argue with that. An' when I go, I wanna go out fightin' a good fight."
"Doesn't matter where, just... just not here..."

*An awkward silence passes between the two of you. You... you don't know what to say, do you Papyrus?*

...I... I don't really know what to say. She was the last person I expected to be... to be "broken" by this knowledge.

*Hmmm. And yet you stand strong in the face of unyielding eschatological horror. Even in your dying moments, you always were the optimist.*

Yes... I guess I am.

**Prince Asriel**: "Hey guys."

*Huh. How long was he standing there for?*

**Doctor Papyrus**: "Ah, your majesty! You wished to see us?"

**Prince Asriel**: "Yeah I, uh, I'm glad you guys're here. I thought it best that I get it all out at once, so I don't have to repeat myself."

"...I hope the others get here soon."

**Doc Sans**: "'sup boss."

**Syrinx**: "Your eminence."

*As if on cue, Sans and Syrinx arrive. And about time too, it seems. Lunchtime finished quite a while ago.*

...*ask Syrinx how her soup was.*

**Doctor Papyrus**: "Slacking as usual, were we?"

**Doc Sans**: "hey, how was i supposed to know that this girl would take so frickin' long to have lunch?"

**Syrinx**: "It was imperative that I cleanse myself afterwards, especially with how GREASY that soup was. After all, would you go back to work without washing your hands?"

"...no. I thought not."

**Doctor Papyrus**: "How was your soup, anyway? I imagine it was... fine?"

*Nice one.*

...I don't know why I did that. What is happening to me?

*Oh don't play coy. You just want to make all the puns yourself, don't you?*

**Syrinx**: "It was... definitely filling. I think I understand the appeal of fried foods now, very
unique savoury aspects to them."

"Though like I said, I had to cleanse myself of the grease afterwards. ...the less said about that, the better."

doc sans: "yeeeeaaah."

"...i'm serious. with the stuff available to us, it wasn't pretty. but i'll say that it involved saltwater and lemonade."

Even the mere thought of it makes your eyesockets itch. Ouch.

Syrinx: "I'll admit that the saltwater probably would have sufficed, but it would have taken longer than we could afford. And despite lemon being quite irritating, it certainly tasted refreshing."

"Honestly, sunshine is made all the better with a compliment of the right acids. It made the Banang seem cloying and bland in comparison..."

Prince Asriel: "Wait, is this all new to you? Yeesh, I dread to imagine what your old masters musta fed you if you've only just learned what sour is."

The oculastran initially shoots a glare of disapproval at the Prince, but it quickly softens as she concedes to his point.

Syrinx: "...I cannot deny it, for my masters did not prioritize culinary delight in our rations. They simply gave us the nutrition we required, since we did not "need" flavour in order to carry out our sacred duties."

"Except for the sacramental wine. Can't perform a ceremony without swimming in the Blood of the Elder Gods. Though you CAN use real blood, but let me tell you: if you have to fill the temple font with the blood of mere mortals, you know that the situation is truly dire."

"...still, it would have been nice if They gave us a bottle of drink mix or exotic "cup-of-soup" to break out on holy days. Surely it is not a mark of avarice or esurience to wish for a little variety in our daily meals? Surely it would not have hurt Them to allow us some small, harmless indulgences from time to time?"

Asriel appears mortified at the blandness of Syrinx's early years.

Prince Asriel: "N-no WAY, not at all! There's NO good reason why they shouldn't have let you live a little!"

Syrinx: "...you know what? I have to agree. Loathe as I am to question my masters, I cannot see any reason why They would think that flavour would cloud our judgement. I cannot help but question Their reasoning, when Their own cups run over in Their great halls."

"Was it that we do not need as much as others do? Was our photosynthetic nature excuse enough to cut such corners? Are- are the gods so cold as to give us all but the bare essentials?!!"
Looks like our little fallen angel is losing yet more of her faith. The doubts wear away at her previous lofty opinions and sense of selflessness, causing her to question her virtues.

Doctor Papyrus: “Oh, you poor thing! When this is all over, I insist that you allow me to serve you some spaghetti sauce!”

Syrinx: “I- ...I- I accept your offer!”

“All my life, I have done the work of the gods Themselves, and for WHAT? Only what I “need”! No true reward for a job well done, no incentive beyond yet more holy work! I have been nothing but a force of GOOD in this forsaken galaxy, yet time and time again I have gone unrewarded!”

“...I daren't petition Them to repay me, though. They would likely do far worse than merely cast me down... ...yet with that said, I will not reject charity. While my gods would refuse to give me anything but the bare essentials, I will not shy away from the kindness of others.”

“It will be quite a while before supper, but when that time comes, I will gladly indulge in this “spaghetti” sauce of yours, Papyrus.”

doc sans: “i gotta feeling you’ll love it. think “ketchup”, only a lot fancier. ‘s got all kinds a’ herbs ‘n’ spices in it, too.”

Syrinx: “Ohhh, I will certainly relish it...”

Sans’ grin seems to widen even more. He’s so proud of her accidental pun.

“...I deeply regret my choice of words.”

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

Location: The Capitol, some dingy alley behind the Capitol Hall

Ben holds your hair back as you throw up. Maybe we shoulda walked after all?

Urrgghh... Ramen was a mistaaaaake...

Ben looks a little uneasy, but not enough to hurl.

Doctor Alphys: “I'm so sorry Frisk, I forgot that the tram was so bumpy...”

Frisk: “It's not you, Alphys, it's me. I shouldn't have *urp* drunken so much.”

...I don't know why, but Ben starts idly stroking the hair he's holding.

Frisk: “Could you not?”

Ben: “Erh. Terribly sorry gehrl. ...still, haff you ever though about wearing it in a ponytail? It'd look so wonderful on you.”
**Frisk:** “Only when I'm workin'. Can't have this stuff hangin’ down when I'm in the lab, see.”

“But when it's all tied up, pullin' it outta the way, I can't find release. It builds and builds, driving me crazy…”

“And yet, at the end of the day when I can let it back down... Hohhh…”

*Do me a favour and never make that sound again.*

**Ben:** “I know precisely hwat- what you mean. Being wound up is well worth the feeling of unwinding after a hard day's work. It makes the release, the ability to be at one's leisure, all the sweeter…”

*Why do I let the feeling this guy wants to give us a massage or something?*

He'd better not... ...but as I wipe the drool from my mouth, I can't help but think that he looks-

*Don't do it Frisk! Save yourself!*

...cool, Charlie. I was gonna say he looks real frickin' cool.

...good. *I'm just tryin' to keep you from driving this trainwreck into a ditch.*

...what trainwreck? I'm f-

*NO Frisk, you're NOT fine! You're filled to the brim with monster whiskey, throwing up in some back-alley when you're supposed to be supporting Asriel! Look at yourself, Frisk! Just LOOK at yourself, you goddamn TRAINWRECK!*

*I'm serious, Frisk. What the hell happened to the girl who knew her limits? Even when you fled to this world, you never went THIS hard-

I just- ...I just needed something for my nerves. It- it worked before, so I thought it'd help dull the pain.

...but it didn't work this time. The pain was... it was still there, Charlie. I could still feel it, GNAWING at me.

I couldn't bear the thought of showing up while it was still hurting. I didn't want them to see how weak I really am. I needed to stay strong, to stand tall, not just for Asriel, but for everyone! And so... I drank more.

*Frisk... ...as smart as you are, you're still such an idiot.*

*Look around you. You've got so many wonderful friends here, ready to help shoulder your burden. You've got a goddamn Knight of the Round Table holding your hair back, and a well-meaning piece of trash who tried to help you sober up. And that's not even talking about the others inside, waiting to learn the truth.*

*So don't you DARE think, even for a moment, that you're alone in this. Don't think, after all that's happened, that you're the only one suffering right now. Because after remembering that night, what the Interloper did to us, we're both in the same boat. I'll always be here, suffering right alongside you...*
...how do you do it? After everything we've done, everything that's happened to us, how can you stay so... so calm? How can you hide it all so well?!

_I honestly don't know anymore, Frisk. I don't really get... I don't get “scared” easily. There are a few things that make me legit scared, but everything else that should scare me just makes me feel angry. But while I have my outbursts, I feel like I've gotten better at hiding my... my “fanger” from others._

_But the suffering is... it's still there, Frisk. I can still feel it, no matter how hard I try not to think about it, but it doesn't... it feels... it feels cold. Just like me._

...Frisk. If you don't think you're up to this, if you need some time to yourself, just let me take the wheel. I'll make sure to tell you everything when you wake up.

...maybe that's for the best. I'm- I'm not in a good enough state to be there for him right now. I just... I just need some time to think of a...

...think of a what? ...Frisk?

You know what? I just need something to occupy my mind. Maybe I should use this time to, uh, I guess... Draw up some plans.

**What plans?**

I don't know right now. I mean, we've got a lotta problems in our way, but I dunno which one to plan for first. ...or maybe I should try... maybe schematics for something...

...you know what, Frisk? You do you. I'll, uh, take the wheel.

**Charlie:** “Nhhhh, I don't- I don't feel so good...”

**Ben:** “-the bloody hell?”

_I stagger back, sliding down against the wall of the Capitol Hall building. God I hope he buys this._

**Charlie:** “I'm okay, I jus'- I jus’ need a few minutes *urp* Benji.”

Is that really how I sound to you, Charlie? Like Rich Sanchez auditioning for the role of Scarlett O'Hara?

_Well you've always depended on the kindness of strangers, haven't you? Besides, you do sound a little like Rick when you've been drinking._

Well, you'll have to excuse me if I don't anticipate a formal letter of invitation from the Council of Ricks.

_You say that, but it could happen. I mean, if we got saved by a rabbit of the Round Table, who knows what else is possible?_  

Eh, you got a point there.

_Sure thing Morty. Now, to make him think that you're still in control._
Charlie: “...alright, I think I'm- *urp* I'm good, I'm good.”

“Yeah... Let's, uh, let's head inside shall we?”

...Ben can't help but eye us suspiciously. I'm gonna have to explain myself, aren't I- OHKAY this is happening-

_Uh, he's hugging us, HE'S HUGGING US!_

Ben: “Stay strong, Frisk. You're not alone in this.”

...hand behind our back, he leads us to the side-entrance of Capitol Hall as Alphys opens the door. Here we go.

Ben: “Come now... Everybody's waiting for us.”

Chapter End Notes

Upon retrospect, I probably should have recommended something to help them sober up, rather than a hangover cure. Perhaps a plate of thick American-style pancakes and a bottle of Nimue's Elixir would have been better than a cup of tigermint tea and a bowl of chicken ramen soup.

...suffering, despite how terrible it is, is an inextricable part of life. Every day we suffer a little, even at a young age, but as the years pass, as we do more things and have more things happen to us, our suffering grows. Some may suffer less than others, but in the end we cannot go a single day without some modicum of suffering.

Yet Frisk's suffering, especially after her grim realizations over the past few episodes, has grown more than it should for anyone. We can only hope that, in the end, she will get the help she needs. That one day, she'll be able to continue her happy ending.

But until that day, Frisca Rivera is still here, still suffering. And still determined.

...hang in there, kid.
...I won't lie. I was hoping to get this one out a bit sooner after the last entry. I haven't been updating and editing as much as I should for this endeavour. But...

To be honest, I was a little reluctant to dive into what was happening at this time. This is the point where Frisk reveals what drove her to go back in time, and create this entire timeline. No 14 year old girl should have gone through what happened to Frisk. ...but that is why the Kingdom does such things to those who steal from it. To make an example of those who defy their dominion. To show that no-one, not even one who physically walked into Hell, is above consequences.

...if you are sensitive to the notion of child abuse, or sexual violence, you may want to reconsider reading this account. There were light suggestions of this in recent entries, but here is where the truth finally comes out, and while it is not really told in graphic detail, it is still a harrowing account.

Consider this your content warning, as a warning on the work would raise a red flag and likely spoil newcomers.

As for me, I'm sitting this one out. I'm afraid to say anything to her this time, I don't know what I could say that wouldn't upset her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Location: The Far Far Range

Huh. So THAT'S what happens when you try to feed a Puddle Plort to a Phosphor Slime. Absolutely bloody nothing. Back to the drawing board, I suppose.

...now what... Hmmm...

Well, there are plenty of Cuberry bushes down here, so these little Phosphor boys can roam free, no need for a Corral. Surely free range plorts will rake in more, right?

...I can't help but feel like I'm forgetting something. Did I leave the oven on?

...oh SHIT. I FORGOT TO FEED THE RAD BOOM LARGOS!

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

Location: New Home
Prince Asriel: “Well... That, uh, escalated quickly. I mean, that REALLY got out of hand.”

Goddamnit Asriel.

I had a feeling they weren't gonna take it well, but this...

Doctor Undyne: “I'm, uh, well... I guess it could have been worse? I mean, Ben nearly killed Ren during our escape.”

Ben: “Well what do you think I should have done instead, hmm? Let that bionic Chinaman run you through? Besides, your subjects were quite easily dissuaded by our little scuffle.”

“Though if I must be honest, this Ren fellow is frighteningly good with a sword. I honestly thought I was going to die again, he was THAT good with a blade-”

Frisk: “Again?”

Ben: “It is a long story. One that will have to wait until later.”

...I still can't believe what happened out there. Charlie, could you- could you tell me again, just what the HELL happened out there?

Wait, were you not paying attention or something? I know you were, uh, having an introspective breakdown earlier, but I'm pretty sure I've told you everything.

I'm... I'm just having trouble processing it all. It all happened so fast...

Oh, ok, I'll run you through it all again. From the top, once more with feeling, all those kinds of horse-apples.

So, after we reassured Asriel about what he was gonna do, he took to the stage and began his speech. “Great tidings and a heavy conscience”, whatever that was supposed to mean. I guess he felt like he had to write his own speech for once, given the sensitive subject matter?

I think I know what he meant by that, something like “I've got good news, but I also got a lot to get off my chest”.

Well, I'm glad at least you understood. But seriously, Asriel should stick to having someone else write his speeches.

Aaaanyway, he mentioned the barrier and the commotion surrounding it, then skipped over talking about it to talk about what he did after Toriel died. I'm guessing he wanted to save the good news for the end or something, I dunno.

...it broke my heart to hear him talking about how scared he was to be alone. I wish... I really wish I coulda been there for him around that time.

That makes two of us, Charlie... But even if I didn't end up throwing myself into the future, it probably woulda been ME who got shot by the Gunslinger. I still... I still think I did the right thing. Didn't I?
I can't really say. I dunno what to tell you, Frisk. Thinking about what happened, it still makes my head go all numb an' fuzzy. REALLY doesn't feel good.

Maybe that's a good thing, though? I mean, if our little “revelation” in Grillby's is anything to go by, maybe it's a good thing that we forgot? “For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.”

Ecclesiastes 1:18... I hate to admit it, but in this case the “good book” has a point.

I guess it does... But as they say, knowledge is power. In the end, I say it's a worthy sacrifice for being able to change the world.

...it reminds me of this scene I saw in some old movie. This guy with an eyepatch, I think he was played by Jeff Bridges, he hung from a tree for nine days without food or water. Apparently he'd “sacrificed” himself to himself, suffering in pursuit of some ancient power. And at the end of the ninth day, he saw the runes, the power he was after, and as the rope broke, and he fell screaming to the ground, he gathered up the power he'd earned for his self-sacrifice.

Why does that sound familiar...?

Now I think about it, it's kinda like what I went through, trying to save Asriel the first time around. It wasn't until the ninth reset of the “research loop” that Sans was able to steal the Váthian Atlas-

...nine loops... Nine loops of frustration, tears, rage, and staying up way too late trying to find another way... Spooky.

Now you mention it, it really IS spooky that those things lined up like they did. But I'm sure I heard about that tale LONG before we watched The Big Biflindi.

When I was still with my old family, Dad had this old book of stories, a book his grandfather had brought with him from the Old Country. I remember him reading me that story about a king among the gods, who hung from the world tree for nine days, sacrificing himself to himself in pursuit of power.

...I'm guessing whoever directed that movie read that story from the King's Book. And who can blame them? It was a good book. Or at least it WAS a good book, before Dad pawned it off to help pay for supplies. Fuckin' frontier life...

...where was I? Oh, right, the speech.

So, as he explained how he was afraid of losing Ren, afraid of him dying and leaving him alone in the world, he went on to speak about some of the papers you brought with you.

...our worst fears were confirmed, Frisk. He used our world's Alphys' research to try and bring back Charlie. That... I guess I knew already, what with the whole chocolate bar thing, but...

I-I'm sorry, I'm still a little shaken thinking about it. I need-

Charlie: “...bro? Would you be a pal an' grab me some chocolate? I'm still a little shaken after... Well, you know...”
Prince Asriel: “Oh! S-sure thing! Just let me grab it from the kitchen.”

“Let’s seeOHGODTHEYHATCHEDAAAAAAAAA-”

TheFUCK-

Doctor Alphys: “Wrong fridge!”

What the fuck is happening- ...nevermind, he’s sorted it out.

Yeesh, I'm glad I never had to use the fridge while we've been here. Who keeps science experiments in their kitchen? Honestly.

Prince Asriel: “…right. Well, uh, let’s try that again, shall we?”

Oh Asriel... *sigh* Never change, bro. Never change.

Prince Asriel: “Normally I stockpile these for... well, you know who. But hey. At this point, you need ‘em too.”

Asriel hands us a... really cold chocolate bar. ...I'm not even gonna ask.

Charlie: “Thanks, bro. I feel a little better already.”

I flash him a patient, loving smile. ...and he returns the expression.

...ohhh... Oh it's been too long...

I gotta agree. I can't remember the last- Oh, wait. I think I do.

The last thing we ate before we activated the Silver Key. ...funny how chocolate of all things brought back some of our memories. Isn't that kind of thing related to “disgusting recall”? I think it's gustatory recognition you're talking about. And yeah, I get your point.

*sigh* But that flavor does bring back the good times, doesn't it? Sneaking out to the Postal Depot to pick up our imports...

Mmmhhh... Uh, yeah. Yeah, I gotcha. Gotta get the real stuff from the West Coast. The church’s imitation chocolate was fuckin’ heresy.

Can't argue with that. They even bulked it out with those “crisplent” imitation cereal bits, the cheap fuckers.

UGH it was the WOOOORST. Even Hershey bars were better than that cheap crap, and, well, you know how I feel about fuckin’ Hershey's. BAAARF.

Quite literally, actually. Frickin’ butyric acid, who thought THAT was a good thing to allow in a chocolate recipe?

I'm just glad Asriel has the primo shit here. Even if he keeps it in the fridge, because... I don't really know why?

I know, right? It's not THAT hot in here, right? All he needs to do is- ...is it just me, or does it feel like someone else has said this before?
Eh. Don't know. Don't care anymore. **Finally got chocolate.**

...alright, I think I've got enough in me to continue.

He used DT to turn Charlie's body into a suitable vessel for “Alpha”. And in doing so, I guess the curse reactivated. The animated corpse of my parallel continued to change, as if death wasn't punishment enough.

A... I'm sorry, did you say a **curse?**

...yes, Frisk. A curse. I'm not entirely sure that it was Mom's “trial of the grasses” that caused my transformation. Thinking back now, I remember stories of the northern tribes, the tales they told of the long winters, warnings of the dangers of eating the dead in desperation. Warnings of how such deeds would disgust the good spirits, and invite less wholesome beings into your heart...

I remember what people said about the people who followed that Donner guy over into California, back in the 1840s. The rumors about how they all starved to death in the mountains west of Truckee. ...but out of the 87 members of that party, they only found the bones of 39 of them.

As for the other 48... Well, there's a reason they call it Wendigo Pass nowadays.

But that's- ...oh, Charlie... Tell me you didn't-

I didn't. At least, not knowingly. But now I got a feeling... that wasn't rabbit stew Mom had ready for dinner that night. ...I'm just glad my sister was too sick to eat any.

I don't feel so good...

Neither did I. But in the end, I was just glad we had meat on the table again. I hadn't even wondered where Dad had gotten to.

Shut the fuck up. SHE DIDN'T. WHAT?!

I think she did. It took me a while to piece things together, but when I did... Well, the rest is history.

**FUCKING NO. THERE'S NO FUCKING WAY. SHE- JESUS CHRIST!**

I don't know what Mom put in that stew, but it must have delayed the curse for the year or so that I was down here with Asriel and his family. But it caught up to me eventually...

**Prince Asriel:** “B-bro? Is it- Are you ok?”

**Frisk:** “**CHARLIE'S A FUCKING WENDIGO!**”

Asriel's eyes widen in terror. He remembered his father's stories of the man-eaters, the cannibal spirits of the cold north. For the longest time, he thought they were merely the product of cautionary tales, something to scare the children away from the woods. But now, things are starting to make a great and terrible amount of sense.

**Prince Asriel:** “...wh- what? Are you trying to say-”
I wonder if, after all these years, he finally regrets you finding out about their plan?

Don't say that. Don't EVER say that again. There HAD to be better ways.

*Maybe. But sadly, what's done is done. No going back this time...*

**Prince Asriel:** “…oh god. OHHH GOD. It's- I thought it was just a crackpot theory but- ...I thought that we could have helped him get better, but all we did was make him suffer more!”

*Tears well in his eyes as his heart sinks, holding us a little too tight for comfort.*

I can't blame him... I'm about to do the same.

**Prince Asriel:** “All I've ever done... I'm- I'm a FAILURE, Frisk! I failed to save him! I failed to save ANYONE!”

“200 years... 200 years down here, pursuing a scientific solution, and- *sniff* I was supposed to be the one to free us... I was supposed to be the light of hope down here, but…”

“I've- I've failed everyone! I'm- I can't hold a candle to you, Frisk. I was never a good scientist. I was never even a good ruler! I'm just- Oh god... I've become everything I was afraid of becoming! **I'm this world's Rusty Venture!”**

**Frisk:** “Don't ever say that, Asriel. Not even as a joke.”

Well, uh...

WHAT, Charlie? Are you trying to say something?

*I- He's kinda got a point, actually. There are a few aspects of him and Rusty that do, uh, “line up” if I gotta be honest.*

Well, we'll just have to focus on what aspects DON'T line up. Shall we?

*Looks like Undyne's beaten you to it. She spins her boss around to look deep into his eyes, visibly upset at Asriel's assertion of being like Rusty Venture.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “…were you EVER a boy adventurer, boss?”

**Prince Asriel:** *sniff* “I- Wha...?”

**Doctor Undyne:** “Were you, though? Did your Dad ever drag you along on all kinds of dangerous adventures around the world?”

Asriel's sorrow turns to unease as he feels his protégé 's fingers dig into his shoulder. Undyne’s never been this assertive towards him before, and it's caught him off guard.

**Prince Asriel:** “…n- no?”

**Doctor Undyne:** “Did you ever raise a pair of boys who may or may not have been clones all along?”

**Prince Asriel:** “Wha- NO!”
**Doctor Undyne:** “Have you EVER had to cut corners and rent out parts of the family compound to make ends meet? Are you losing your hair?”

**Prince Asriel:** “...where is this going, Salamandra?”

Wasn't that a gang from the first Witcher game?

*I guess so. And apparently it's Undyne's family name this time around.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “...after all that's happened to you, are you an insufferable prick? A pill popping trainwreck? An egotistical jackass?”

**Prince Asriel:** “…I think I know what you're getting at. **But I don't like you're tone one bit. Step off.**”

Undyne releases her grip from her boss's shoulders. ...is it just me, or was there some sort of, uh, “tension” going on there-

No. Nothing like that.

Well, you say that, but I could smell... something going on between those two. Probably nothing “serious”, but it felt like something.

*Besides, if there's any sexual tension going on here, it's probably between-*

**DON'T-** ...let's, uh, let's just think about this differently, shall we?

*What's the matter, Frisk? Things getting a little too weird for you? Or could it be that you're jealous, thinking about what he has instead of you?*

*Well guess what, Frisk? That ship has sailed, and unless I'm mistaken-*

You probably are. You're not exactly all there, are you?

**Takes one to know one, asshole.** Anyway, you never had a chance here. And I feel like there really could be something going on between Asriel and Alphys this time around. ...around the same time that Alphys and Undyne are-

On second thought let's not go there. It is a silly place.

...now I think about it, it would be pretty weird. It's already given me some weird mental images.

...**ohhh no**, I'm not falling for that one again.

**Falling for what now?**

That! What you're doing right now! Tricking me into describing a mental image that's lewd as hell!

**Like what?**

**OHHHHHH** my GOHHHD Charlie, just give up! I'm not going to describe a three-

...**you were saying, Frisk? A three-what?**
I hate you so much right now. Ugh, I can't get it out of my head!

And neither can anybody else. You're welcome.

Just stop it.

...looks like they've stopped staring at each-other. Man, that WAS a weird moment.

Prince Asriel: “...I know what you're trying to do, Undyne. And sure, I might not be as messed up as Rusty, but you can't say that I'm not a- ...not a disappointment.”

“I mean, come on. 200 years. Six human souls. You'd think I woulda found another way sooner.”

“But no. I... No, I can't say it. It's not fair.”

Doctor Undyne: “…not fair? What the hell's that supposed to mean?”

Prince Asriel: “I mean it's not fair on everyone else, when I'm sure I coulda been doing more! I don't want to say “I relied on everyone else to do the legwork”, because that'd imply that you guys were are worthless as I am! And you're NOT! You're all AMAZING! But I should have been the greatest of us all, the trailblazing pioneer who led us into a golden age beyond this craphole of a DUNGEON!”

“...I've just been holding you all back. I'm just... I'm just a relic of the past, a reminder of how things used to be. Just an old man, clinging to the old ways... *sigh* Gods, I need a drink.”

“Alphys, sweetie? Would you mind getting us a bottle from the ca-”

Doctor Undyne: “Ohhh no, we're not doing THIS again. You're not getting off that easily.”

Prince Asriel: “…what are you trying to say, Salamandra?”

Doctor Undyne: “This is how it starts, boss. You go for a drink to calm your nerves, and then you go for another, then another, then the next thing you know you're passed out in the big chair, or bawlin' unintelligibly, or-”

“Anyway, I think it's time we put a stop to that. You need help. You BOTH need help.”

She looks our way as she says this.

She's not gonna let this go, is she?

Survey says NOPE.

Doctor Undyne: “Say Alphys, can you set up a lock on that cabinet?”

Doctor Alphys: “Well, I, uh...”

Shaking his head, Asriel shoots a forbidding glare at Alphys. He's not gonna give it up that easily.

Prince Asriel: “This is my goddamn house, Salamandra. If anyone's gonna put locks on things, it's gonna be me. And I'm not-"
**Doctor Undyne:** “Seriously? SERIOUSLY? You find out that Frisk got piss-fuckin'-drunk before the address, and you DON’T think that’s a problem?!”

**Frisk:** “Oh c’mon, it was just ONE time!”

*Undyne shoots you a withering look, almost as if she’s disgusted with your behavior. And you know what? She’s not alone in feeling like that.*

**UGHHHH...**

**Doctor Undyne:** “I’m not takin’ any chances. Can't trust you not to pull somethin' like this again.”

“Seriously, boss, just put a lock on that damn-”

**Frisk:** “I HAD TO MAKE THE PAIN STOP, YOU BITCH!”

Well... That’s given her pause. She knows that there's a lot of painful memories inside you, but has no idea how bad it is.

**Frisk:** “...if you knew what I've really been through, what made me leave my old world behind, you wouldn't judge me for a second. Hell, you'd be pouring YOURSELF a tall glass if I told you about it.”

*She looks almost insulted at that statement, as if you just implied that she's as weak as you are.*

WOW. Way to help my sense of self-esteem, jackass!

**Doctor Undyne:** “…wha- Really? You think I can't handle the truth? You think that I wouldn't understand?!”

“Lemme tell you somethin', punk! I've learned a lot about the truth these past few days! I know about the resets, I know what happened to the old science team, I know what waits for us all when we die!”

“But do you see me drowning my sorrows? Do you see me ready to jump into the Abyss, unable to handle how shitty and horrible life can be?”

“NO. You don't. Because I took those lumps and kept on going. I might not be as optimistic as Papyrus, but I TOOK those god-damn lemons, and I made LEMONADE outta those bastards!”

*Alphys wraps her hand around Undyne’s wrist, in an attempt to cool her jets. And to nobody's surprise, it works. She takes a deep breath, and continues in a more calm manner.*

She was almost scaring me there...

**Doctor Undyne:** “Frisk... *sigh* I feel like I shouldn’t have to tell you this, but drowning your sorrows is no way to go about dealing with your problems. You've got to face them with a clear mind and a strong heart, whether you go at them head-on, or try to sneak up on them for a change.”

“So please, Frisk. Don't be afraid to tell me what happened. It'll hurt, I'm not gonna lie, but you'll feel better later. Trust me.”

*She looks deep into our eyes trying to elicit a response. ...but to no avail? Probably for the best.*
It's not that. It's... just hard to get it out. It hurts... it hurts to put it into words.

*Ben, previously silent and absent, arrives with a pot of tea. After pouring out a few cups of the stuff, he stoops to eye-level with us.*

**Ben:** “...if it's difficult for you, I can tell them on your behalf.”

**Frisk:** “I...”

**Ben:** “You weren't so reticent while you were drinking, remember? ...actually, considering how much you must have had, you probably don't. But I do.”

“Even through the haze of strong jenever, I still remember what you told me. Though after that, I don't remember much else. Other than you rejecting my offer of a hug, that is, but I digress.”

“Shall I enlighten the others, if the words are too hard for you?”

...it had to come out some time, I guess.

**Frisk:** “...do it.”

**Doctor Undyne:** “…what happened to her, Ben? What's she having trouble talking about?”

**Ben:** “The reason for her being here. The events of August 15th, 2071, that drove her to travel into the past and create this timeline.”

“On that terrible night, she was assaulted by something masquerading as her closest friend. A daemon she refers to as “the Interloper” had crept into the mind of her world's Asriel, via his “brain-computer interface”, and taken control of his body.”

Undyne covers her mouth as her good eye widens. Already, she's probably regretting her persistence. Asriel in turn looks pretty unsettled by the notion of the other him being possessed in such a fashion.

**Prince Asriel:** “…and I'm going to guess that this interface involved magic crystal. I assume that's what made Undyne susceptible to the “Taurocalva”, so...”

**Ben:** “I... assume so? Did it, Frisk?”

**Frisk:** “According to the Observer, yes.”

*You take a deep swig of your teacup. ...huh, it has a vague, uh, I think it's a citrus undercurrent? Pretty nice, actually.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “It- it tried to kill you, didn't it? It tried to use your Asriel in order to-”

**Ben:** “It did. ...but if only that were all it did.”

*You shift uncomfortably on the couch. Can't blame you.*

**Doctor Alphys:** “Oh... Oh no... That's- That can't be-”

**Ben:** “It succeeded in its plans, but not before- ...Frisk, if you want me to stop, you need only say the
Frisk: “Keep going. Undyne wanted to know, so she's gonna get it.”

It's almost as if Ben doesn't want to describe what happened to you. But with a heavy heart, he persists.

Ben: “...it knew how Frisk felt about her Asriel. It knew that, despite her wishes to put set up a few boundaries, she still imagined them being something more than just, well, good friends. And those desires, those teenage “fantasies”, were quickly ruined by the Interloper when it had Frisk where it wanted her.”

Doctor Undyne: “BullSHIT, no fuckin- Don't LIE ABOUT SHIT LIKE THAT! That can't be what.”

Jesus... I thought that Undyne would take this badly, but-

Frisk: “He's NOT lying, Undyne. And neither am I! It HAPPENED TO ME! IT GOT BETWEEN MY LEGS, IT.”

“...it ruined me, Undyne! All those dreams I had about being... all of them were- were RUINED when it- when it-”

Ben: “Obe's roots this was a mistake. Frisk, I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have-”

Doctor Undyne: "MY GOD, YOU POOR SWEET THING!"

As you choke out broken sobs of horror, Undyne gives you the strongest hug she can without breaking your bones. Yet again, she fights back her tears as if they were a pack of hungry wolves. But she doesn’t need to fight them, and neither do you.

I- I don't WANT THIS!

Frisk: “Get your goddamn hands off me!”

Undyne, startled by your reaction, quickly lets go of you.

Doctor Undyne: “I- Frisk, I'm- I'm sorry, I didn't know you felt like that...”

Frisk: *sniff* “I don't wanna be touched right now! It... it still hurts...”

Doctor Undyne: “...gods... I had no idea things were that bad, Frisk. I just- ...ffuuuuuck...”

Frisk: “…I- I couldn't even handle looking at him, after what happened. When I went back to Emigration Oaks, to see if the doctors had made any headway figuring out what was wrong with him... The look in his eyes, that damned expression on his face...”

“The thing controlling him wanted me to suffer, it wanted to- to FEEL me! And you know what's worse? Looking back, I'm not sure it was just “doing it's job” like the Taurocalva. I think- I think it was genuinely... I think it genuinely WANTED me!”

“That's- ...that's why I left my old world, Asriel. I- I didn't know what to do, I couldn't see any way to save my Asriel without losing him for good. And at the same time, I couldn't bear being near him,
even though deep down inside I knew he needed my help, help I just couldn't give him. So I…”

“I wanted to “start fresh”. I wanted to change the past, to make sure you'd never end up in that-dead end situation. And, well, the rest... the rest is history…”

**Prince Asriel:** “…”

...not much in this world scares me anymore. But the look in Asriel's eyes... *I'm afraid for the demons right now.*

**Ben:** “…I have very little reason to distrust Frisk. So when she told me that she was- that the Interloper... that it violated her, using her best friend’s body…”

*Ben takes several deep breaths, trying to calm the shaking fury brewing inside him at the thought of what happened to you. They say that chivalry is dead, but it's alive and kicking while Ben is here.*

**Ben:** “Frisk, when you return to your world, allow me to go with you. For if you would have me, I would gladly help you settle the score, and **burn Hell itself to ashes for this travesty!**”

...sometimes, I can still hear your screams, mixed with my own. It... it really did win though, didn’t it? Even though we reset after it finished us off, the damage was done. We're... we're never going to forget what the Interloper did to us, are we Frisk?

...I feel like... I need-

**NO.**

Excuse me?

*You heard me. We're not going down that slope again. Not after last time.*

...uh, FUCK YOU? What, you thought I was gonna say “I need a drink”?

...*sigh* I guess I shouldn't blame you for drink- for thinking that.

*See what I mean? It's made you a MESS.*

Yeah, sure... But that's not what I was going to say.

I don't need a drink to solve this problem, Charlie. I need... **to science.**

...maybe, for now, that's for the best. When life gives you lemons... I guess make them combustible and throw them back at life?

*You're goddamn right I'm gonna do that. I'M THE GIRL WHO'S GONNA BURN HELL TO THE GROUND! WITH THEIR OWN GODDAMN LEMONS!*

**Attagirl, Frisk. Attagirl...**

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*Papyrus, previously working outside with Sans and Syrinx, walks in to announce... what were they doing again?*
Doctor Papyrus: “My liege! We have finished setting up the defenses outside, but so far no-one has come for us.”

Asriel struggles to put your predicament to the side for the moment, hard as it may be for him, and addresses Papyrus.

Prince Asriel: “Finally, some good news... But I know Ren too well. He's not going to take this laying down, and even if he can't go through the castle, he'll find a way around.”

“...have you disabled the bypass elevator yet? They could use that to reach the throne room-”

Frisk: “…wait a minute. I- ...no, wait, we can probably just walk out the front door.”

Prince Asriel: “Frisk?”

Frisk: “If I remember right, the CORE Access elevator can go down into the True Lab, like the one in Alphys' lab does. I was thinkin' we could sneak our way around to get to it, but...”

“Papyrus, have you, uh, scouted the area around CORE Access yet?”

Everyone looks at you with wide eyes. In spite of knowing what's down there, you're willing to enter the True Lab regardless. Or “Deep Lab” as they apparently call it.

Doctor Papyrus: “...Frisk? Are you alright?”

Frisk: “No Papyrus, I'm not. I want to BURN HELL TO THE GODDAMN GROUND right now. I just need to figure out how.”

"...but that's beside the point. I need to know if we have a clear path to get to the main elevator.”

Doctor Alphys: “But- You're- No! Frisk, going down there is SUICIDE! I'm not gonna let you throw your-”

Goddamnit. Surely she's not thinkin' that I'm gonna-

Frisk: “It ain't suicide, Alphys. Not with someone like Ben around.”

“...besides, you're not one to talk. You went down there trying to get to New Home an' alert Asriel, but the fact you're standing there meant you survived!”

Alphys tries to counter with something along the lines of “well, actually...”, only to find that she didn't have a leg to stand on, looking down with an expression of shame. ...maybe she wasn't afraid of the thing down there? Maybe she- ...you know what? I'm gonna stop myself there. before I say something bad again.

...meanwhile, Ben's expression changes from disbelief to... hmmm, I guess that would be a look of intrigue? He doesn't look like he doesn't want to go down there. He actually looks a little bit excited to delve into an abandoned science facility, as if he's done that kinda stuff before. But he doesn't know why you would want to.

Ben: “There is something else down there, isn't it? Something you feel is important enough to risk facing that... thing that was once a prince.”
“But are you sure you even know what you're looking for? Unless you can tell me, you can forget about this little quest of yours. I'm not going to risk my neck down there for some wild bloody goose chase, even if I CAN afford to.”

**Frisk:** “I'm pretty sure I know what's down there. Somehow, I don't think anyone's managed to retrieve the prototypes, even if Asriel DOES have my notes.”

**Prince Asriel:** “Well... I was preoccupied with trying to contain him, so I only really have a few of your notes up here. Most of them are... still down there, in my old office.”

“Can't get to them through the basement, though. No-one's getting through that brick wall, not even Charlie. So...”

Asriel walks off towards his bedroom. *He really needs to finish his sentences.*

...ok, he's back. *And he's holding a fancy purple keycard, with the Delta Rune embossed in gold.*

Oooh, that's FAAANCY.

**Prince Asriel:** “If we're gonna get into my old office, we'll need this to unlock it once the power's back on.”

I reach out to accept it.

He holds it back.

**Prince Asriel:** “I said we, Frisk. I'm going down there with you.”

Alphys looks as if she's about to call him out on being suicidal, but a quizzical look from Ben keeps her quiet.

**Prince Asriel:** “I couldn't do this before. No-one down here was strong enough to face the "wendigo", not even Ren. And even if he were... I don't think I trust him enough to NOT kill Charlie.”

**Doctor Undyne:** “And what, you think Ben's gonna be any different?”

Another quizzical look from Ben, but Undyne doesn't falter. *Just because he's British doesn't mean she can't kick his ass, is probably what she's thinking.*

**Ben:** “And what is that supposed to mean?”

**Doctor Undyne:** “What I mean, “good sir knight”, is that you're sloppy. You wave that damn sword around like Jadzia playing around with a bat'leth, when you SHOULD be exercising some basic goddamn sword safety! It's a wonder no-one got dusted when you an' Ren clashed!”

“...then again, I guess that's because of the power running through it. When you were swingin' that damn thing around, no-one else wanted to get any closer. Hell, just LOOKING at it made me feel sick.”

**Frisk:** “Yeesh, you make it sound like he should get it checked out by a doctor.” *giggle*

Ben ponders this for a few seconds, before rolling his eyes with disgust.
**Ben:** “Oh har-de-har. I'll have you know that- ...actually I won't. That is not what gentlemen do in the presence of a lady.”

“Though I suppose I should explain my sword regardless.”

Tchehehee...

**Ben:** “Oh grow up, you.”

**Frisk:** “Oh, come ON! ...y'know, it's actually a coping mechanism...”

_Ben looks quite sad at making you feel bad. But you don't actually feel bad, right?_ ...right?

...I think it actually IS a way to cope with everything. I mean, laughter's great medicine, isn't it?

_I wouldn't go that far. Buuuut I'd say it still helps, like a, uh, a “spoonful of sugar” to help the medicine go down._

Fair enough, Charlie... Still, it makes me feel better either way.

**Ben:** *sigh* “...my “sword” aside, there is a good reason why my sword is, well, the way it is.”

“Once upon a time, it was my father's sword, Lucan's Razor. Handed down to those who sat on the Seat of Lucan, it was his symbol of office throughout his career, a weapon he wielded with great pride right up to the Battle of Gettysburg. And much like the city, everyone and everything in it, the Razor was considered lost when the Confederates deployed their first atomic bomb.”

“Many years later, when House Pendragon launched an expedition into the exclusion zone, it was among the few things they were able to retrieve. But much like everything else in the Zone, it was... changed, warped beyond recognition and utility. They only recognised that half-melted steel rod as my father's sword because of the... the charred shell of power armour that bore the seal of Sir Lucan, still gripping it after all those years.”

**Doctor Undyne:** "Exclusion zone? You mean- No way, please tell me that thing isn't-"

**Ben:** "Ignorant of the dangers of handling such a Zone-warped object, the smiths at Tintagel Fortress reforged the glowing rod of metal, restoring the Razor to it's former glory. Though due to its exposure to the atomic inferno that created the first Zone, it was in fact reborn with a touch of the Zone's power, capable of turning the slightest scratch into a blistering wound."

"Sadly, they did not realize that that “touch” of power was derived from the fact that the sword was, in all truth, radioactive. Few who had worked on reforging Lucan's Razor are still alive today."

_Undyne looks absolutely horrified. Now she realizes why it glows such a subtle blue out of its sheath. It wasn't to do with orcs after all!

Well, that's... Uh, ok, that's something new. WHAT?"

**Doctor Undyne:** “WHAT the FUCK why didn't you tell us this earlier?! WHY would you even HAVE something like that?!”
Ben: "Well, as the son of their fallen comrade, the Round Table decided that I should at least inherit my father's sword once it was safe to use. Though due to my "mixed heritage" and "illegitimacy", frankly that was all I was allowed to inherit, despite my uncle's insistence that I be allowed to take up my father's title."

“But don't worry about the Razor, Undyne. It isn't anywhere near as radioactive as it was when they reforged it, but the power it attracted is still in residence. Even then, however, stable emission of alpha radiation only travels a few centimetres through the atmosphere before being neutralised, so you'd have to be handling it unsheathed, without gloves, in order for it to poison you.”

“Well, that and being wounded by it. ...which is probably bad news for Ren. I think I grazed him with it during the fight.”

Doctor Undyne: “Grazed him?! You left a fucking gash on his arm! Seriously Ben, what the hell were you thinking?”

Ben: “Uh, keeping you lot safe? Making sure he didn't strike out at any of you? You'll have to forgive me if I prioritized protecting you lot over pulling my punches.”

“I know what you are like, if Asriel is to be believed. Monsters are so horrifyingly fragile, aren't they?”

Asriel nods his head solemnly. There is conflict in his eyes. He's worried about Ren, even after his recent hostile outburst. And he's disappointed with Ben, despite his heroic defense.

Prince Asriel: “And material beings are so horrifyingly strong, both in body and soul...”

“...I really hope Ren comes around. That wound you inflicted upon him... He's one of the strongest people I know, but... One way or another, he's going to need our help eventually.”

He looks uneasy. Despite all that Ren has done, all of the trouble he has caused, he's still afraid of losing him. After all, they were pretty close back in the day.

He'll be fine. I'm sure that tough son of a bitch is gonna find some way to “walk it off”.

You say that, but... Eh, nevermind. I... I don't really care about him either.

Whoa, I never said that I didn't care. I just think he's not gonna roll over that easily. For better, or for worse.

Ben: “…anyway. I get your point, Undyne. But I'm not THAT sloppy. The clash at Capitol Hall was the exception, not the rule.”

“But if it soothes your precious conscience and puts your fears to rest, I won't draw my sword against the creature down there. If the Prince believes that there is still something left of his brother in that beast, then who am I to cut down his hopes and dreams?”

“...after all, I could probably cripple the beast with a chill wind to buy us some time, should we encounter it.”

Prince Asriel: “I'm... I'm not so sure that'll work, actually. If Dad's stories about the man-eaters are true, they're used to colder climates, thriving during the winter. I doubt that ice magic will.”
Frisk: “Fire! ...do the stories say anything about wendigos being vulnerable to fire, Asriel?”

Prince Asriel: “...not exactly, but they REALLY don't like it when it's hot. Dad said he had to ward them away with fire magic when negotiations turned sour, back in-”

Frisk: “Wait, are you serious? Was- ohhh... This was during the War, wasn't it?”

Prince Asriel: “He said it was a couple of months before the Southlanders reached the Great Salt Lake. Dad was looking to “parley” with the Alphas, the strongest and smartest of the man-eaters, who lived in the Cold Far North. He and Gerson had to fight their way through the feral pack-members before they got the attention of the Alphas, but even after all that fighting, the Alphas simply let them leave with their lives.”

“The Alphas knew that the Southlanders were masters of fire, and they HATED the heat of the Great Desert, so despite the mounting threat to ALL monsterkind, the man-eaters refused to join our kind in driving our mutual enemy back South. Or, uh, “Mexico”, as Frisk calls it.”

Ben: “...so it was the Aztecs who sealed you away down here?”

Prince Asriel: “Not even close, Ben. The Uta were the ones who conjured the Barrier, to keep us safe from the Southlanders. After all, those jaguar-wearing psychopaths would have destroyed us all if we weren't stuck down here...”

Ben: “...still, it's strange that they would have made it impossible to get out, as opposed to making it impossible to break in. Doesn't that strike you as odd?”

Prince Asriel: “Oh, so you say that they mighta had an ulterior motive sealing us down here? Gee, how come I've never heard of that before?”

“OH WAIT. I HAVE. From pretty much every history teacher down here. It's generally accepted that the seven shamans betrayed us when they erected the Barrier, but that's ancient history. ...though they did make it so the Barrier shrouded this place from most people, so in the end I guess it wasn't a complete betrayal.”

Ben: “Perhaps... Though for all we know, they might have planned to treat the Underground like some sort of “hunting ground”, so they could harvest monster souls-”

Prince Asriel: “Somehow I doubt it. After all, monster souls evaporate in a fraction of a second outside their bodies. And even though boss monster souls last longer out in the open, Mom and Dad were the only boss monsters left by the time the Barrier went up. Hell, for CENTURIES they were the only ones left, until I was born.”

“...and now I'm... *sigh* I'm the last one. When I'm gone, that'll be it for boss monsters. There's no-one left for me to have a kid with... Though maybe, knowing what I'm like, that's probably for the best. If I ever did have kids, they probably WOULD turn out like Hank and Dean... ...god, I even SOUND like him.”

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Another awkward, uncomfortable silence falls over the room. As much as I want to tell him that he'd make a great dad, I know I'd be lying through your teeth.

...besides, he already has a family. Kinda. I reckon he's been a good mentor to the others,
considering. Buuut I still wouldn't trust him to raise a kid. ...now, OUR Asriel on the other hand-

You've got a sick imagination, Charlie.

Wait, what? I was just sayin' that I'd at least trust OUR Asriel to be a babysitter. I wasn't implying anything LIKE, uh, “that”.

It would be horrifying... God, I feel sick just thinking about it.

*I'm really sorry. I shoulda known it woulda set you off...*

I'll survive. I've come this far, haven't I?

**Ben:** “...so in conclusion, I would be able to ward Charlie off with fire spells, right? ...or are you afraid I might accidentally incinerate him?”

**Prince Asriel:** “...it might be our only option. Still, if you're gonna be our, uh, our “bodyguard” down there, just try to be careful when you're fending him off. Just... just don't kill him, ok? There's... there's still a chance for him...”

**Ben:** “Then it is settled. We shall descend into the True Lab.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “…what, NOW? Are you sure that's a good idea? Shouldn't we, oh I don't know, wait until the current situation has blown over?”

**Frisk:** “I- Thing is- ...I don't think this IS gonna just “blow over”, Papyrus. Like Asriel said, Ren isn't going to let this go. He's not gonna stop trying to leave the Underground, now the Barrier's gone. Even with those defenses set up, it's only gonna be a matter of time before he finds a way to break through. And I just KNOW that, once he's topside, he's gonna do something real stupid...”

“But if we can retrieve my papers from the True Lab, or even one of the old prototypes, we might just find a way to hold off whoever's out there. 'cause when people get wind of the Underground's existence, whether it's the New Dynasty or the Texans, it's not gonna be pretty if we don't have some kind of ace up our sleeve.”

“...speaking of which, we'll need you guys to move the souls away from the Barrier exit. If someone from the outside figures out how to steal them, well... Frankly, we'll all be up Shit Creek without a paddle.”

*Papyrus sighs with resignation and looks down. I don't really like it when Papyrus looks negative like this. It's like staring at a depressed clown.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** “…I still feel like this isn't the best plan, but considering the alternatives, I suppose we don't have much of a choice...”

“...you know what? I believe in you! I, the great Papyrus, have faith that you will succeed in doing... whatever it is you have to do down there! Even though I believe it to be risky business at best going down there, I am confident that you will beat the odds of getting out of there alive!”

*That's more like it!*

**Frisk:** “It always warms my heart to hear you believe in us, Papyrus...”
“...sooo as I was saying before, have you guys scouted out the main elevator yet? Is the path clear?”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Oh, it's perfectly safe right now! As I said earlier, there is no indication of anyone approaching. That said, however...”

“...well, we've set up some, uh, rather difficult puzzles as part of the defense system.”

**Frisk:** “Please tell me it's not just a few pages of Junior Jumble.”

*Papyrus almost looks insulted. Almost.*

**Doctor Papyrus:** *sigh* “No Frisk, we didn’t use Junior Jumble. ...though we did use some old crosswords and sudoku boards.”

**Frisk:** “And that's supposed to slow Ren down? Fucking NEWSPAPER puzzles?”

“Why don't you just paste some fuckin' Lasanga Cat strips on the walls while you're-”

**Syrinx:** “Oh, but it's not that simple...”

*Syrinx floats into the living room, a rare glint of pride in her eye. She's been pretty damn busy out there, hasn't she?*

Syrinx: “I have managed to set up a few smaller “barriers” of my own, too strong for mere mortals to pass through. However, as per the doctrines of the Elder Gods, they are connected to the aforementioned puzzles, so that those enlightened enough to solve them will be able to pass through.”

Son of a bitch...

**Frisk:** “Thank god. For a moment I thought that was it.”

**Doctor Papyrus:** “Thankfully, the good captain was never too good with newspaper puzzles, not even Junior Jumble. So if and when he comes after us, he'll probably get stuck on Sudoku and hopefully give up.”

**Syrinx:** “Should he succeed in solving all of them, however, he will come up against a final puzzle that will BREAK him. A puzzle-box so devious and ancient, I was surprised that one even existed on this planet!”

**Frisk:** “You don't mean... *gasp* Not a sliding block puzzle?!”

*Oh no! Not one of those...*

Syrinx: “No. These ethereals have those, but we will not stoop to THOSE levels of villainy.”

“I speak, instead, of the Cube of Chaos. A nefarious, multi-colored brain-bender that may befuddle even the most learned followers of the gods.”

“I will show it to you, as I escort you through the forcefields.”

**Ben:** “Oh, so you're coming with us?”

**Syrinx:** “I suspect not. Though perhaps... No, my place is here. I feel like SOMEONE needs to
shepherd the others while you're down there.”

“But enough of this. It is time to send you on your way.”

...aaaand I guess that's that. Alphys and Undyne promise to hold down the fort alongside the Bone Bros, and we head out to the CORE Access elevator.

Sans gives us a nod as we leave the house. A wall of shimmering light blocks our path at the end of the courtyard.

*Looking down at the first array of glowing runes, we see-*

**Frisk:** “...this is just a Rubik's cube.”

*Are you fucking kidding me.*

**Syrinx:** “Funny, everyone I knew referred to them as Cubes of Chaos. Is Rubik the name of the wizard who crafted them?”

**Frisk:** “Kinda. Apparently it was the brainchild of some Hungarian sculptor, was really popular puzzle toy back in the 80’s.”

**Syrinx:** “Hmmm. I always thought it was a product of the Elder Race. And you say it was made on Hungar?”

Is she serious right now?

**Frisk:** “What? No, they were made in Hungary. On Earth.”

**Syrinx:** “Oh, right. I get it now. A country, not a planet. Interesting...”

**Ben:** “It certainly looks toy-like. VERY ostentatious with all those colours.”

*The runes on the floor of the causeway dim, allowing us to pass. For the next minute or two, we wait for each of the forcefields to lower, letting us pass through.*

Y'know, I'm glad we have Syrinx on our side. Now she's gotten that stick outta her ass, she's a really nice lady.

Kinda makes me wonder. What if I'd encountered her when I was still a kid? How d'you think that woulda changed our first run?

*She probably woulda destroyed you once she found out about what you did. On your second run, however... I have no idea. I've honestly got nothing.*

...forget I asked.

...wait, do you hear that?

I think I do. FUCK.
Syrinx: “That alcove. GO.”

We run to the alcove with the bypass elevator, as footsteps echo from the general direction of the CORE Access elevator. Crouching down, we hope that Syrinx has a trick up her sleeve. Under her eyelid. Whatever.

Syrinx: “Everyone remain quiet...”

“δεν είμαι εδώ... ~”

What the hell is- Is this a new bit of Elder Magic?

I think it might be. We should keep quiet anyways.

Prince Asriel: “Is this-”

Ben hushes the Prince. Everyone holds their breath as the footsteps draw closer. ...when she knocks the intruder off their feet, we run to the elevator. Ok?

If that's even what it goes. I have no idea what she's got planned, it's all Greek to me.

...it's Monster Kid? Huh. Surely he's not- SHIT, he's looking- ...wait, what?

...he walks right past us, and checks the, uh, “bypass” elevator. What is this kid even-

It's like he doesn't even know we're here... Holy shit, d'you think we'recloaked? Is she CLOAKING us right now?

...maybe? I think so? But we can still see one-another. Shouldn't we be invisible, even to ourselves?

Hell if I know. All I know is that he doesn't know that we're here. So let's keep it that way, okay?

Sure. Fine. Okay. Let's not discuss how this weird cloaking magic works.

Monster Kid: “-darn piece of crap, get OVER here!”

He waits around for a few minutes, intermittently pressing the call button, but to no avail. With a sigh of disappointment, he gives up and heads cautiously along the causeway-

Monster Kid: “AGH! What the heck?!?”

-straight into a forcefield.

Monster Kid: “Aw COME ON! Seriously?”

He looks around, again failing to see us, before his eyes fall on a crossword puzzle leaning against the wall. His eyes furrow as he picks up both it and a pencil.

Monster Kid: “…herbaceous concubine of Nodens the Hunter, 8 across? High Priest of the Great Old Ones, 7 down? The Doom of Sarnath, 6 across? Who the heck even KNOWS this kinda stuff?!”

Syrinx: “...let us move. Quietly now...”

Frisk: “Don't have to tell me twice...”
Ever so quietly, you and Asriel slip down the corridor towards the CORE Access elevator. Ben follows suit after a few seconds, before Syrinx moves to catch up with us.

Finally, we're almost there.

With the open elevator inviting us to go down, Ben- ...he jams his staff in-between the open elevator doors, for some reason?

**Ben:** “Just in case.”

*I guess he’s paranoid about it going down without us.*

**Ben:** “After you, your majesty.”

**Prince Asriel:** “Uh, thanks.”

*Asriel dips his tall frame beneath the staff as he enters the elevator, while Syrinx simply floats over it.*

**Syrinx:** "It seems that I will be unable to return while that child deals with our puzzles. *sigh*...I suppose I will accompany you into this "True Lab" after all."

**Ben:** "Can't you just fly over them? I'm sure that boy couldn't do anything to you if you were high enough."

**Syrinx:** "It... it isn't that simple, insi. Our kind can levitate, yes, but only so far above the ground. If I went over the edge, I would drift down into the city below, and it would take me a long time to get back up here."

**Frisk:** "...I'm glad you're with us, Syrinx. We're all grateful for the help you've given us."

**Syrinx:** "Oh stop it, you.- You're making my pupil dilate..."

...wait, Frisk. *There's something we should do first.*

Ugh, what now?

**What do you think?**

---

**Charlie – LV.1 KN.13**

Hotland – Alphys' Lab

[SAVE?]

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**Charlie – LV.1 KN.19**

CORE – Castle Access

[SAVE?]
...seriously? Even with all we know about resets, you seriously think I'm gonna-

*I know. You don't want to have to reset again. You know that if we do, we're just leaving this world behind us and making a new one that's the same, but different. It's an ultimately selfish action, in the long run.*

And we don't even NEED to do it. We've got a Knight of the Round Table AND an alien angel backing us up.

*Sure, sure. But what if we get killed regardless? What if the “Charliego” gets lucky and eats us alive? I ain't going back to Hell.*

I- But-

**BITCH I ain't GOING back to Hell!**

...what I mean to say is, we should use the reset function only when ABSOLUTELY necessary. And what could be a better situation than us FUCKING DYING?

*If Ben, Syrinx or Asriel die down there, we can do what we did last time. Find the Atlas, dive into Hell, drag their souls back into the land of the living, maybe try to make some kinda robot body for them.*

*But US? If WE die, I don't think the things down there are gonna give us a running start, let alone a second chance. Even if the others somehow work out how to use the Atlas, once we're dead our spirits will be fed to the Burning One before we can say “fuck”.*

...so please, Frisk. Save our progress. Treat it like an emergency safety net for if the unthinkable happens. And believe me, it COULD happen. Seriously, it's better to be safe than to be eaten by the Burning One.

...you're right, I guess. I mean, this is probably what saving was made for, right? To keep going after you die?

I guess I've just gotten used to being in situations where I CAN'T die, huh?

*You've gotten soft is what you have. ...though I guess that's what living with a fuzzball like Asriel does to you.*

That, and not having to deal with people who want to kill you all the time. You'd be surprised how easy it is to get used to that life! GEE! **It's like that's how you're supposed to live your life, isn't it?!**

*Frisk.*

*What?!*

*You've made your point. Now will you PLEASE SAVE.*

*<sigh> FINE.*
You walk into the elevator, and as the doors slide shut, you hope that you won't have to stay down there too long. After all, you're a little worried about coming face to face with the reanimated-corpse-turned-wendigo that was once the Charlie of this world.

Speak for yourself, Charlie.

DO YOU MIND?

...and yet, with the Prince of the Underground to your left, a Knight of the Round Table to your right, and a floating alien eyeball angel over your head, you feel safe, surrounded by capable and intelligent individuals. This sense of security fills you with determination.

[SAVE to Slot 1]

Charlie – LV.1 KN.IDK

New Home – CORE Access Elevator

...we've stopped. That can't be good-

Ben: “GAH! What the Dickins?!”

Oh god, OHHH GOD IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN!

Prince Asriel: “CraaapCrapCrap EVERYONE HOLD ON TO SOMETHING!”

Elevator Emergency Recording: WARNING! WARNING! ELEVATOR LOSING POWER! EM TETHER STABILITY LOST! ALTITUDE DROPPING!

Chapter End Notes

Now you see why I was so reluctant to work on this instalment. But it had to be addressed. What happened to her was, for most of us, unthinkable. And I'm not confident in my ability to console someone subjected to THAT kind of torture. I was afraid that I would say something wrong, something that would deeply upset her and cause Ben to give me an earful. Which by his species' standard would be more that a mere human would be able to handle, and a LOT more than I could handle without curling up into the fetal position.

Though speaking of that, I imagine he is NOT going to be happy when I return. I can already imagine him saying "where the hell WERE you?!” and expressing his disgust at me "playing games" when I should have been trying to help. To which I'll probably say
"the fuck could I have even DONE?!", since I'm not a fucking magic genie. I can't turn Ren into a bloody rabbit or make his sword shatter after the first few swings. There was NOTHING I could have done to give Ben an edge in that fight, nothing that he himself wasn't capable of.

...but on the bright side, at least Frisk is handling things a little better now. Sure, she had to channel Cave Johnson and eat chocolate to psyche herself back up, but I'm still proud of her. Still, I pray that she can maintain that emotional high until she's out of the True Lab. If she breaks down down there... Well, she couldn't have better companions to help her back up. Maybe they could use another good sword-arm down there, but I'm not going to drag Lythalia into this. She's got her own shit to deal with on Arokeb right now. And besides, one adventurer plucked from a parallel story is more than enough for this chain of events.

...well, I'm going back to Endless Space 2 to finish up my Horatio campaign. See you in three weeks when they wake up from the impending elevator crash. I feel like the True Lab is going to be even stranger this time around, if you ask me...
What Goes Up Must Come Down

Chapter Summary

At long last, Frisk has returned to the True Lab, but not without consequence.

Meanwhile, I was off elsewhere observing a separate account. I was still a little uneasy after hearing the truth from Frisk herself, and wanted to detox with something a little less horrifying. So you can imagine my surprise when, partway through my studies of the Omega Sector circa the 1960s, Ben's mind reached out to me. Something had, as was typical of this world, gone quite wrong. This is what happens when I try to take a break.

And here I was hoping to try out Dungeon of the Endless afterwards. Oh well. Duty calls, I suppose.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Location: Aboard the Yutaka Kōseki, west of the Omega Sector

Date: 14th Day of the Lowest Sun, 1963 Imperial Reckoning

In the near-crowded sick bay of his ship, Shinji Satō looked down upon the sleeping form of the alien child he and his crew had recovered from the surface. He had little doubt that the boy was basthari, but he had never encountered THIS subspecies before.

All the usual feline features were there, though there were certain features that the voidfaring captain had never seen before on a basthari. Two juvenile stubs seemed to curve back as they protruded from the boy's forehead, the beginnings of a set of horns. The fur, lustrous and golden in colour, was a lot longer than that of most basthari, and yet seemed to be as fine, and as soft, as the mythical woollen fleece of Kashmir the Golden.

But most perplexing of all was the shape of the boy's stinger. While most basthari stingers resembled that of a scorpion's, his seemed more angular in shape, looking more like a golden lightning bolt than an actual stinger.

Captain Satō fancied, for a moment, that there was something... something almost divine about the boy. A soothing, oddly familiar presence that he had felt when he was still a young man, sweeping the steps of the local temple as the sacred drums echoed in reverence to... could it be? Surely not...

Greta Melkerin: “Is he alright, dear?”

The sound of his wife jolted Shinji out of his perplexed stupor, and he quickly picked up a nearby medical scanner. ...other than a few light bruises, and mild concentrations of herbal sedatives in his bloodstream, the boy was perfectly fine.
Shinji: “...looks like he's in perfect health. Though it seems like the ghouls down there were feeding him slumberleaves, if this blood test is any indication.”

Greta: “They were trying to keep him asleep... But why?”

Shinji: “Probably to keep him from escaping? The ghouls in that shrine did NOT like us taking him away, that much I'll say. Speaking of which, we'll need to grow some more stempatches and refill the hyposprays. The raid on the shrine really ate into our medical supplies...”

“...it's strange, really. The way the ghouls gathered around him, it was as if they didn't have a care in the world, as if they were... as if they were basking in his presence.”

Greta looked at the boy in a peaceful, almost longing fashion, as if the sight of him caused her worries to slip away into the ether. And in a way, the injured crewmen on their recovery beds seemed oddly quiet and tranquil, especially for people who had raided a nest of ghouls less than an hour ago. Shinji took notice of how peaceful the infirmary, validated in his beliefs about this otherworldly child.

Shinji: “You feel it too, don't you? I knew I wasn't going crazy!”

“Greta, I believe there's something special about this child...”

Rico Jackson: “...papa... *unintelligible grumble* few more minutes...”

Groggily, Rico Jackson pulled the blanket over himself, turning away from the rising sun. He knew that Papa wanted him up early on these hunting trips, but right now all he wanted was to sleep in. All he wanted to do right now was... sleep...

...gradually, he began to realise that he wasn’t in his sleeping bag. He had a feeling what he would see what he opened his eyes, and the thought alone terrified him.

??????: “That's odd, his heart-rate's increasing... I don't know which of these are suitable for a basth-

?????: “Put them away, Shinji. I'm sure the poor thing's just having a nightmare...”

Rico didn't feel so sure. Where was he? Where was Papa? Why did it sound like he was on a starsh-

Anxiously, he slowly opened his eyes, the heavy cloud of sleepiness having been scoured away by the coursing adrenaline in his veins. To his surprise, he wasn't in the tent anymore. He wasn't down in that dark place of his dreams, either. This new place reminded him of a doctor's office...

Rico: “Where- where am I?”

His heart nearly skipped a beat when he saw the two canids looki-

Is there a point to this, Observer?

**BLOODY HELL Ben, I wasn't expecting to see you here!**

What is it I'm supposed to see here?
Seriously, how did you get in here? I was just doing my own thing, and- ...hang on. I must have left another window open while browsing the Omega Sector. And you... you must be... Ah, that makes a lot of sense.

Well then. I must be dreaming. ...oh. OH DEAR. I hope the others are ok.

_Did something go wrong? ...actually I think that goes without saying. It's DoctorTale. If something can go wrong, it's probably going to go wrong. Murphy's probably tap-dancing on the tables as we speak._

Another one of your contacts, I presume?

_Not really. He was the aerospace engineer who was the namesake of Murphy's law: if something can go wrong, it will. ...no wait, that's sod's law. Murphy's law specifically states that “anything that can go wrong will go wrong”. Big difference, even if the laws share a similar core tenet._

Oh, I have been there before. “The best laid plans o’ mice an’ men gang aft agley”.

_That they do, Ben. And sometimes, the best we can hope for is for life to not crap in our cornflakes._

Charming.

---

**Rico:** "Wh- WHO ARE YOU?!!"

**Greta:** “Oh child, you're safe, safe here with us...”

...so what IS going on here? I assume that since I'm apparently out cold, I'm going to be here for a while.

_Shall I start from the beginning? Might help to know a bit about the Omega Sector beforehand-_

I don't think that'll be necessary. I just want to know what this is.

_Alright, suit yourself. Where to start..._

_Well for starters, this boy's father took him hunting offworld. After all, hunting's pretty firmly ingrained in basthari culture, partially due to the Arokebian definition of “free range”. While they practised animal husbandry extensively in the past, ethical reforms led to the abolition of most factory farms and the establishment of MANY game reserves. I reckon it's partly due to societal outcry concerning the conditions in the factory farms, partly a ploy to create new jobs, and partly due to a primordial desire to hunt the beasts of the land, to eat something that truly lived its life before meeting its maker._

_Though as a result, while meat wasn't that much more expensive after the reforms, milk and eggs became pretty expensive for city-folk. Hell, back then it would be more affordable to drive to the Hearthlands and buy direct from the Homesteads, rather than deal with the ludicrous mark-ups imposed by urban grocers. And that's just if you want to buy semi-skimmed. If you want Channel Island quality, you'll be in for one hell of an adventure._
...now you say that, and thinking on what else you've told me of them, these basthari sound a lot like lions. The post-meal slumber, the hunting culture, it's all coming together!

*I guess in a way, they sort of are. Like humanoid manticores, even. And they would have stayed as mere lion analogues were it not for the influence of their world's monolith.*

...*so anyway, hunting's a big basthari tradition, passed down from father to son, and Rico's family was no exception. Except his dad chose, shall we say, a less “conventional” world for game hunting. Namely a barely-charted planet that was a few light-weeks within the territories of the Necromancers.*

And they were attacked?

*Eventually. Although to be fair, the planet was technically terra nullius when they made planetfall, and being “at one with nature” Rico's dad didn't receive the news of the recent territorial purchase until AFTER he and his son had to run for their lives from a pack of ghouls.*

*Now, I'm not sure yet what happened to the dad, but somehow Rico survived. Like the old sea-dog said, there's something special about him. That much I assume you've gathered.*

Yes indeed. And from there “Shin-gee”-

*ShinJI.*

Whatever, the “old sea-dog” rescued the boy from their clutches. And apparently the undead were keeping him sedated?

*Yes, yes... I wasn't expecting that, I'll be honest. If anything I thought the commotion would have attracted the attention of the local valthane, but I guess the servile dead kept the child for themselves, treating him like some sort of communal sun-lamp.*

*You know, I always thought Rico was just another scout for the Omega Patrol, the sniper sweetheart of Hank Ryder, but now I see his past... There really is something special about Rico Jackson.*

Wait, did you just say “sweetheart”? This child?

*Not at this point in time, of course. That would be 50 distinct flavours of weird. But from what I've gathered, Rico does live onboard the Yutaka Kōseki for quite a while after this, practically becoming the third Ryder brother until Shinji tracked down his real family on Aries.*

Third Ryder brother? I assume this “Hank” is one of them, so who's the other brother?

*That'd be Sam “Sky” Ryder, who grows up to follow his father's footsteps and become one of the finest fighter pilots in the Omega Sector. Though I should mention that Shinji Satō is merely the stepfather of Sky and Hank. Greta's ex-husband had some... “interesting” money problems after the first Omega War, and eventually she left him for an Akitan merchant captain whose name begins with S. ...still, I think she could have at least tried to make it work with Mr Ryder, but apparently she despised him for hitting the pipe, even after what he had gone through on the western front.*
Sad, but true. And while hiding your troubles behind a smokescreen of opium vapour isn't the best way to go about it, his wife could at least have been more supportive of him, at least TRIED to find ways to wean him off the pipe. But NO. She berated him for it, voicing unconstructive criticisms towards a man who needed her help and compassion more than ever. She barely even TRIED to make it work.

True, his habit ate into the household budget, but that was ALL the trouble it caused. His boys never got hurt because of it, they never got messed up by errant vapours like the newspapers preached, but Greta bought into the Poppy Panic of 1960. Hook, line and sinker. And when lawmakers didn't kowtow to the media circus, she took the boys and caught the next trade vessel off of Nebraska.

...bloody hell. I suppose she didn't want her boys to grow up on a planet where opium was legal. Which now I think about it is... a bit of an extreme measure, don't you think?

Don't have to tell me twice. The interbellum of the 1960's were pretty extreme times all around, especially in the western systems, even though it was supposed to be a time of peace. It was almost as if a great and terrible madness had fallen upon the Norma Arm...

...anyway, going back to Rico, he effectively became the “little brother” of the family, and even when he was reunited with his real family, he still kept in touch, especially with Hank. The systems turned, seasons passed on planets that actually had proper seasons, and in the spring of 1970 I.R, he and Hank were conscripted by the Omega Patrol, fresh meat for the grinder that was the Second Omega War. ...well, I say “conscripted”, but due to the way the Families handle things it was more of a “mutually lucrative recruitment drive”, making it all too tempting and potentially rewarding for young men and women to “Grab The Guns - Fight The Huns!” as the posters said. To the point where some families actively pushed their teenaged sons and daughters to seize the "opportunity of a lifetime", while other teens begged their reluctant parents to let them get a "military scholarship". It was what all the "cool kids" were doing, after all...

Obe's roots, that sounds insidious as hell...

That's the Founding Families for you. They're don't run an authoritarian theocracy like the Empire they fled from, but they know how to make the most of what they have and make people offers that they'd find really hard to refuse. It's probably due to the influence of the comely and charismatic Galletti family, but rather than whap you with a stick if your falter and fail, they're more likely to jingle a bushel of carrots in order to get in your corner and encourage you to succeed. They're oddly nice on the outside, but only because they believe in getting a return on their investments. And weirdly enough, I can't help but admire their strategy.

Hmmm... When you put it that way, it reminds me of how the Houses work in my world. Though they're not afraid to use the stick, and they're somewhat sparing with carrots.

But anyway, you were talking about the second war...

Indeed. As I implied, the Sector was in a pretty rough state after the first war. A lot of good people
had died, a lot of colonies in the sector were in shambles after fighting back the undead hordes. But by the time the Necromancers returned, tired of playing by the rules of territorial trades, the Families had reshaped the colonies of the Sector into an ever-ready alliance of interplanetary nations, with the Omega Patrol as its sword and shield against the menacing claws that wanted a piece of the Sector. And naturally, it brought a lot of young people together, from the mercantile North, the ironclad West, the cornucopian East, and even the mysterious Southern reaches before the terra incognita of the Southern Quadrant.

...say Ben? Have you ever wondered if love can bloom, even on the battlefield?

I... I hadn't put much thought into it, but I imagine one would be too preoccupied with fighting and surviving to consider it. Though with that said, I know a lot of friendships forged in fire and steel, many of my fellow knights who became brothers in arms after battles well-fought. Why do you ask?

For Hank and Rico, it did indeed bloom. Years of close friendship, and exotic teenage hormones, had brought the two lads closer than they'd ever been before.

Oh. Um, I... Well.

Yes indeed. Sadly, in the post Family First environment that cropped up in the interbellum years, the notion of two young men in love was not exactly perceived as “productive”, not something that contributed to the "Baby Boom" that the Sector was going for during the 60's and 70's. So they did the smart thing, given the societal circumstances, and kept it a secret from everyone. After all, a brave young patriot of the Sector was expected to have a sweetheart of the opposite sex, and harbour aspirations to start a big family back home. “Confirmed bachelors” weren't as respectable or desirable as a hot-blooded family man with a lot to protect, at least in the eyes of the Families. Same went for, uh... what's the female equivalent of a “confirmed bachelor”?

You ask me that as if I'm familiar with the notion.

Uh- ...I'm sorry, forget I asked. I guess “confirmed bachelorette” fits, but that's sort of beside the point.

Long story short, during the war they will become battle brothers and secret lovers. But for now, aboard the Yutaka Kōseki, they're just two young boys soon to become fast friends.

I'm not sure I'm ok with seeing a young boy and knowing what their future love is like. It strikes me as...

Yeah, maybe it is too early to think about. But of course, those boys have no idea what the future holds, for in their here and now, the coming decades are still unwritten. They haven't the faintest clue of the coming war or the love they may one day share. But as outside observers, especially with me being THE Observer, we can see what their future holds. With all of the weirdness such a privilege entails.

I suppose. ...but I think I've seen enough.

Just a minute, Ben. This part always warms my heart.

Hank Ryder, age 11: “You... you wanna play VR with us? We'll show you how the set-up works.”
Rico Jackson, age 10: “...I, uh, sure? That- that sounds cool!”

Rico follows behind Hank as the two head off to the VR Entertainment Suite. 'tis the start of a wonderful little friendship.

...I suppose that's... kind of suite? A young boy inviting his new friend to play.

Not bad. Though to be fair, since merchant ships are typically slower due to variable mass, voidfarers tend to spend a lot of their spare time in virtual reality suites, since there's not much else to do during longer voyages. Sure, it's always good to stretch your legs between sessions, but you can only stroll through the hydroponic garden so many times. And while “Ten Forward” is a lovely part of any ship when it comes to chilling out and chowing down, you can only stare out the window for so long before the view gets on your nerves, especially when the view is mostly just blue streaks of light rushing past like an old screensaver.

Though even with virtual worlds to explore, somehow I doubt it compares to shore leave.

True, though that usually depends on where the ship's stopped. If it's a minimalist resuelling station in some backwater stepping stone system, most would rather pop some tigermint taffy and keep the headset on, pretending that they're trekking across the sweeping tundras of Niflheim, strolling around a quaint little homestead on Nebraska, or kicking back on some exotic beach while a red dwarf hangs low in the sky. Which Rico's gonna be doing a lot of once the novelty of a merchant frigate wears off.

...to think, despite all the wonders that the galaxy would have to offer, that interstellar travel would be so... boring?

A common adage for commercial flight in my universe is “watch a movie, take a shit, and then you're home”, a nod to how fast certain flights can be. But this isn't the age of interstellar flights that take mere hours. Warp travel in this reality, despite bringing the stars closer than ever imagined, is still comparable to the Age of Sail. In truth, it would take a few years, with your engines running at full blast 24/7, to get from one end of the Omega Sector to the other, even if you tried to make a beeline across the galactic core. Which is a pretty bad idea because it's the fucking galactic core. NO-ONE wants to get too close to that all-consuming heart of darkness, believe you me.

I'm going to have a lot to think about once I'm awake. ...wait, if I'm dreaming, will I remember any of this?

If you try hard enough. Even if you don't, you'll probably remember at least something of this scene, aaaand I might just remind you of the rest later. But don't dwell on it too hard. You'll need to stay focused once the others are conscious.

I hope I do. I feel like it's opened my eyes, in a way...
Location: The True Lab, Generator Room

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

Frisk: “Damnit Ben, wake up! WAKE UP YOU SONOFABITCH! SAY SOMETHING! ANYTHING!”

Frisk, it's no use. He's GONE.

He can't be gone! Not after everything we've been through! He- he said- He thought he was going to die AGAIN. That means he-

Please, Frisk. Just let it go. He probably meant that he'd had a lotta near-death experiences. I'm pretty sure he's not the Highlander.

...Frisk. His heart's not beating. His neck's been broken. His light-blue soul is floating above his body. There's no coming back from this. Benjamin Liddell is- ...what in the- His soul is drifting back down into his body-

Frisk: “GYAH! What's-”

This is- What am I looking at. WHAT AM I LOOKING AT. His body's coursing with red lightning!

He's... holy shit Charlie, I think he's-

With a rattling intake of breath, Ben is dragged back into the world of the living. THIS IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING. GIVE THIS MAN THE FUCKING PRIZE, HE REALLY IS THE FUCKING HIGHLANDER. WHAT-

Prince Asriel: “...Alright, I think I've got the power back- THE HELL IS- BEN?! ”

The red lightning fades, and Ben is left gasping for breath. HE ROSE FROM THE FUCKING DEAD, FRISK. WHAT the FUCK.

Frisk: “BEN!”

Ben: “Urgh... How the hell did I die in a sodding elevator- OW! What was THAT for?!”

Uh, YEAH FRISK? Why the hell did you hit him- WHY ARE YOU STILL HITTING HIM?!

Frisk: “You BASTARD! I thought you were gone for good! I was so- God-DAMNIIIT!”

Overwhelmed by a heady cocktail of frustration, sorrow, joy and relief, you hug Ben with unyielding force, burying your face in his chest. Try as you might, you can't stay mad at him. You're just so glad he's ok.

*sigh* ...goddamnit Frisk.

Prince Asriel: “You're- you're ALIVE?! But- how the hell did you-”

Ben: “I... Oh, who am I kidding? I should have told you all earlier. I am-“
Syrinx: “IT IS A REVENANT... Gods protect me... Oh Gods, protect me...”

Backing herself into a corner, Syrinx stares in wide-eyed abject horror at the “Revenant” you cling to. She must feel like the protagonist in a Lovecraft story at this point, facing what she believes to be the ultimate evil in the cosmos, greater and more terrible than any daemon she's ever faced.

...buuut somehow I feel like that's not the reality of the situation.

Ben: “Oh GREAT. Now I have to deal with this, too?”

“I should have known that YOU would take objection to my immortality.”

Despite everything, it's still Ben. No idea how that sonofabitch managed to claw his way out of Hell unaided, but I guess that's just Ben. For all we know, Hell coulda spat him out like a rotten grape, frightened of what he could do down there.

I'm just so glad he's ok...

Way to parrot what I said, Frisk.

Ben: “Alright Frisk, that's QUITE enough of that.”

Despite your resistance, he peels you off of him like a band-aid, keeping you at arm's length. Something tells me he's had his fill of women weeping over him.

Ben: “I've already got one woman overly concerned for my well-being.”

BOOM what did I tell you?! Nailed it, first guess!

Ben: “Your concern is touching, but I don't need you wasting sleep over my- GNRRRRNGH!”

Ben clutches the side of his neck, groaning in agony. I'm guessing he didn't feel it hard enough the first time?

Frisk: “OH GOD, BEN ARE YOU OK?!”

Ben: “IT'S OK, it's ok- GHHHHHHrrrr...”

“It's just- hhhrr bloody phantom pains, usually happens after a revival. It'll- I'll be ok in a moment...” *heavy breathing*

Geez.. Who woulda thunk that coming back from the dead would be such a kick in the nuts?

Oh yeah. This guy right here. ...aaand you too, I guess.

I guess this is one more thing we've got in common, huh?

...is this going where I think it's going?

Not quite, but it's pretty close. I mean, we both have an affinity for magic, we're both total frickin' nerds, we both LOVE Star Trek, and now it turns out that we've both had “back from the dead” experiences!

Uh, yeah... I guess you two do have a bunch of stuff in common, huh? Though maaaaybe you
shouldn't tell him about it RIGHT now. After all, this isn't the best time to be all “Breakfast at Tiffany's” about it.

I guess you're right. But that song was about a relationship where they didn't really have anything in common, with the guy grasping at straws trying to make it work. Kinda desperate when you think about it.

...still, I kinda liked it. It ain't the worst thing to come outta Texas...

B-but this is totally different! We've got more connecting us than just liking Breakfast at Tiffany's!

Suuure, yeah, you keep telling yourself that. See where it gets you in the end.

---

**Ben:** “...ok, I'm- I'm ok. It's over...”

“But seriously, how the HELL did I die in an ELEVATOR? You lot look no worse for wear, but somehow I'M the one who—”

*Asriel approaches, wide-eyed but nearly as afraid as Syrinx.*

**Prince Asriel:** “You, uh, I didn't see much before I got knocked out, but I think I saw you fall funny. I guess... you musta broken your neck, falling against the handrail?”

“But here you are. Somehow... not dead. And you sound like you're more upset with HOW you died than the actual, y'know, DYING part. WHAT?”

**Ben:** “You're bloody right I am! Of all the ways I could die, I broke my neck against a bloody handrail?!”

“I've died so many FANTASTIC ways back in my old world! I've been impaled, torn in half, had my neck snapped, been vaporised, crushed, and shot more times than I can count! But even after all of that, I was somehow still able to die in such a STUPID fashion?!”

...fuckin' hell. As Ben vents his frustrations over the “stupid death” in the elevator, Asriel looks on with a weird medley of conflicting emotions on his face. Disbelief, awe, sympathy, and just a hint of... disgust? I guess because of Ben taking life for granted like this?

**Prince Asriel:** “...what even ARE you, Ben? What are you REALLY?”

*Ben takes a deep breath, and prepares to tell us why he's apparently an immortal. I wanna hear this.*

**Ben:** “You want to know why I can do this? Well, I suppose now's as good a time as any to tell you.”

“But Syrinx is only HALF wrong in her assumptions. I am indeed, as she says, a Revenant. But I am not some unspeakable horror from the void, like she's treating me right now.”

**Syrinx:** “HE SERVES THE REAPERS. THEY DEAL IN SOULS, SOULS THAT THE REVENANTS GATHER. HOW CAN YOU SEE NO HORROR IN SUCH AN ACT?!”

*Frisk don't you fucking dare-*
Frisk: “Ah yes, “Reapers”: the dark pantheon of eldritch horrors, allegedly waiting beyond time and space. We have already dismissed that claim.”

Prince Asriel: *chuckling* "...goddamnit, Frisk..."

...really, Frisk?

Oh COME ON I was put on the spot! I couldn't let that opportunity slide! When someone mentions the Reapers, you'd be stupid not to butt in with an "ah yes "Reapers"" quote.

Try not to do it again. You're not just embarrassing yourself here, y'know.

But I made Asriel laugh. Just like I made Jordan laugh in our private VoIP server.

Damn, I forgot about Jordan... He looked so familiar...

Ben: “I do not “serve” the Reapers, I merely accepted the Cardinal's offer to bring me back. If not for him, I would not be standing here today.”

“In truth, my first death was at the hands of a god. Or a goddess. I'm not sure which, they were a giant slug covered in metallic spines. But what I AM sure of is that Gla'aki drove one of its spines into me during our first encounter, killing me for the first time.”

“The Cardinal approached me after I awoke in the spirit world, and regarded my death as “anticlimactic”, that my journey shouldn't end there. And as he did with my companions at the time, he offered me the power I needed in order to return to the world of the living.”

“Needless to say, I accepted his offer, and was reborn more powerful than ever. But even before I began this chapter of my life, I have done only good things for my world, driving back the star-bound horrors that threatened to claim it as their own! The Cardinal's power merely meant that I could continue to do what needed to be done...”

“So do not judge me so harshly, Syrinx. There is no “horror” to be found here.”

Killed by a god... I can't speak for the Cardinal, but I think getting killed by a god WOULD be a pretty dramatic way to go out.

I... don't know what to say.

I think I do, though. Is Syrinx bullshitting us about the souls thing?

Frisk: “...this- this is why you're not afraid of dying, isn't it? Does it even mean anything to you anymore?”

...Ben gives a light smirk at your suggestion. But thinking about his reaction to coming back, it still holds SOME meaning.

Ben: “Well, it still means something, just not what it means to everyone else. For you, death seems like the end of a journey, while to me it is like...”

“I assume you have electronic arcades in your world, Frisk? You seem like a girl who would spend
most of her time in front of a cabinet.”

WAIT WHAT.

**Frisk:** “And you have them in your world?! Aren't you from 1886?”

**Ben:** “Yes, and yes. And judging by your reaction, I assume that your world didn't have a computing revolution in the middle of the 19th century.”

**Frisk:** “Uh, NO? The first big supercomputers came around during World War 2, and it wasn't until the 1970s when arcade games really took off! And you're saying that you've got steampunk arcade cabinets in the 1880s?”

**Syrinx:** “What, if anything, does this have to do with your blasphemous power, Revenant?”

**Frisk:** “Hey FUCK YOU we're talkin' here!”

**Ben:** “No no, she has a point. But it is interesting to see how similar your world is to the Observer's world.”

“What I was meaning to say was that to me, dying is almost like dying in a game that uses “extra lives” as a mechanic. In many arcades of the 1870's, you would need to pop in a crown to start the game with five lives, though some cabinets accepted shillings.”

“For me, dying is like... it's like when I've just run out of lives at a shilling cabinet, and I'm rifling through my pockets to fish out just one more shilling, just ONE more so my Valkyrie can shoot down the Midgard Serpent. I eventually find one, and I'm back in the game when I pop it in the machine, but it still takes me a while to find it.”

He pauses briefly, and his expression turns grim. *I think we know the flipside to it.*

That same cabinet punches you in the nuts when you use an extra life.

**Ben:** “But, as you have seen, it comes at a price. The pain of the killing blow tends to return shortly after revival, a sharp reminder of what ended my previous life. In this case, it was the pain of breaking my neck against a hand-rail. ...seriously, of all the ways to die...”

“But at the end of the day, it is a pittance to pay compared to the gift that keeps on giving. Life may be a cabinet that punches you in the stomach after you pop another shilling in, making you wonder why someone would design it that way, but the gameplay is still worth every penny...”

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**Prince Asriel:** “…seriously, what was that about SOULS?”

Asriel looks pretty unsettled by what Syrinx implied earlier. **Ben, too, looks a little unnerved.**

**Ben:** ”While I would prefer it if Syrinx were talking out of her backside the entire time, I can't say she isn't at least partially right. My master, the Cardinal, can indeed consume souls. Indeed, that is how Gla'aki met their end after tangling with me the second time.”

“But at the end of the day, it is a pittance to pay compared to the gift that keeps on giving. Life may be a cabinet that punches you in the stomach after you pop another shilling in, making you wonder why someone would design it that way, but the gameplay is still worth every penny...”
keeping them in-between the worlds. Or at least, that is what he told the Observer.”

*Asriel looks horrified. And I can't really blame him.*

**Frisk:** “But what about “the souls that the Revenants gather”?"

“Ben... Please don't tell me you...”

*Ben looks even more unsettled. As if he's starting to doubt himself.*

**Ben:** “I'm sure- I've never taken anyone’s soul. Never! I don't even know how I would go about doing such a thing! The Cardinal never told me how!”

“...surely not... They were just drones after all? Mere husks? ...but the Operators! They were-”

**Frisk:** “Ben, are you- you're not sounding so hot, you sure you're ok?”

*I think he's coming to terms with what he's been doing. Sounds pretty familiar, don't you think?*

**Nice pep talk, asshole.**

**Ben:** “...we should press forward. We can talk about this later, but for now we have a facility to loot.”

**Prince Asriel:** “…oh, we're DEFINITELY gonna pick this up later, young man. But if you think you're gonna be able to “loot” this place for all it's worth, you've got another thing coming!”

“We're here to retrieve science equipment and documents, not pilfer some ancient tomb in search of “drops”! Yeesh, is this how the Circle trains its archaeologists?”

*Ben rolls his eyes and sighs. I guess he was trying for some kind of jape, but it backfired miserably.*

**Ben:** *sigh* “No, I was joking. But you have to admit that it does feel like an adventure, doesn't it?”

“We have descended into an ancient place, filled with relics of the past, while a powerful beast prowls its halls. Tell me that doesn't strike you as the setting for a pen-and-paper adventure!”

“Trust me, I am taking this mission seriously. The technology down here could be the key to protecting the Underground. But in all honesty, this is the perfect setting for a dungeon crawl. These are the kinds of adventures that get turned into computer games!”

*While Asriel can understand where Ben is coming from, the wizard’s enthusiastic words hit a nerve, and earns Ben a withering look from the Prince.*

**Prince Asriel:** “...good people DIED down here, Benjamin. Because of MY neglect and incompetence. So go on, tell me how this situation reminds you of a game. It's not like I'm about to whoop your ass or anything.”

**Ben:** “Alright, your Highness. I understand that you're not too happy about this situation. But if you think that “whooping my ass” will make it easier for any of us, I would like to see you try.”

*Whooh. Is it just me, or is it getting hot in here? The Prince and the magician are trying to stare one-another down, but it's not quite working.*
I think I've had enough of this.

*Alright, what's the plan-*

*[ACT] > *These Two Boneheads > *Clunk Heads

**WHOA was that really necessary?**

I dunno, you tell me? Now they're mad at me instead. Lightning rod!

**Ben:** “OUCH-ka-bibble!”

**Prince Asriel:** “Augh, what the HELL was that for?!”

**Frisk:** “You two girls can make up an' make out later, but right now we're on a mission. So pack up your troubles and FALL IN!”

...dayum. Way to channel Undyne, Frisk.

As you head back towards the elevator, the Prince grumbles slightly before following you. A few seconds later, Ben overtakes us and goes in front.

**Ben:** “I'll take point.”

*His eyes bear disdain for your tension-breaker, but also some small sliver of gratitude.*

You really can read people like a book, huh Charlie?

*What can I say? The eyes have it.*

What does that even mean?

*It means OHFUCK- NONONONONONO*

**Ben:** “FLY you fools! AAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHL—”

...**Ben's cries can still be heard over the rending of flesh from bone, as the wendigo tears him limb from limb. As we retreat back from the elevator, we can hear his screams of agony devolve into gargled, bloody wheezing as the creature proceeds to feast on its prey. ...it was probably the first real meal it's had in over a hundred years...**

**Prince Asriel:** “Oh no... Nonononononono—”

...what chance do we have? If they can kill Ben that easily... Oh god, I don't wanna die, Charlie!

**We just- ...we just need to keep quiet. If it's busy chewing on Ben, maybe it won't know we're here.**

OHHH FUCK I think it's too late for that...

I guess it WAS a good idea to save before we came down here, huh?

*Don't give up yet, Frisk. Remember what he taught you. USE IT.*
...you're right, what the hell am I doing?

Attagirl! You, uh, concentrate the heat of the surrounding area into your palm. Frisk, are you gonna do what I think you're gonna do?

You're goddamn right.

Couldn't you just, y'know, drive it off with a flamethrower spell or something?

Too late, THIS IS HAPPENING.

[FIGHT] > *Charliego > *Rising Dragon Fist

Because of course you do.

“Charliego”: “WAIT-”

As the creature takes a step back, intimidated by the flame in your fist, you quickly step forward, crouch down, go down-forward, and leap into the air.

Frisk: “SHORYUKEN!”

Your Rising Dragon Fist smacks into the lower jaw of the wendigo, and it wails as its muzzle briefly catches fire.

Your fist also hurts from pulling off that move. There's a reason why it's used by the Street Fighters and not rank amateurs.

Frisk: “...mother FUCKER! AUGGHH...”

Don’t get too comfortable, IT'S BACK ON ITS FEET. Get ready to-

...it's just... standing there, leering at you as it nurses the burn you just gave it.

“Charliego”: “...MEANIE.”

It pads closer, snarling as it studies you. FUCK, it's HORRIFYING.

It's all hunched over, with inhumanly long arms to support its weight, almost gorilla-like in proportion. Even with its hunched, low posture, its back barely grazes the ceiling. It's body is covered in thick brown fur, including a mane that surrounds it's head. My GOD the HEAD.

The sunken, pitch black eyes, against the bone white skin of a vaguely canine head... The stories never spoke of wendigos looking so... wolflike.

“Charliego”: “YOU NEVER CHANGE... NRGRHH!”

It clutches its belly, which is... oh god, it's shrinking. It's- UGH it's going all concave! All the stuff it ate off of Ben is-

...Frisk? Is it just me, or did it just get a little bigger?

This is the curse of the wendigos. They gorge themselves, yet their hunger will never be satisfied for too long.
...yup. Every second we look at this thing, the more I feel validated in, uh, taking the easy way out. If I was this hangry all the time, I'd probably eat the first person I see.

Frisk: “Stay back.”  

“Charliego”: “...IT NEVER ENDS, FRISK. OUR HUNGER... IT NEVER STOPS!”  

Frisk: “STAY BACK!”

The renewed fire in your hand gives it pause for thought. It prowls the perimeter around your flame, like a predator around the edge of the campfire.

It takes a deep breath, scrapes up the carcass of our friend, and heads down the corridor to our right.

“Charliego”: “YOU WILL BE SERVED.”  

It bites down on the remaining arm of Ben's body.

“Charliego”: “BUT I'LL GIVE YOU A HEAD START. USE IT.”

As its silhouette leaves our vision, we see something in the darkness beyond the elevator. It's small, red, and appears to be holding... is that a lightning gun?

That's not- Oh crap is that-

????????: “Hmmm. I guess that... resolved itself?”

As you approach the red flower, he offers a tentative smile when he notices you. It's been a long time, and by the looks of it he's got... some of Kuro's things? Why would he-

Thorney: “Howdy!”

“...ah. I know this isn't the most happy of reunions, but there's no need for-”

Frisk: “Gee, you think?! You tried to KILL me!”

Thorney: “What, and the others didn't? Oh PLEASE girl, they're no better than I am. But by all means, tell me what makes THEM so special!”

Frisk: “I-”

Wait... If he has Kuro's things, does that mean- ...noooooo...

Frisk: “Wh- Where’s- ...is Kuro ok?”

I- I'm having a hard time reading his expression here. But it looks like... it's kind of like... I can't tell whether it's shame or guilt that he's feeling right now.

Oh no... Oh PLEASE NO...

Thorney: *sigh* “I thought she was made of sterner stuff. She seemed as if she were more machine
“She wasn't moving, when I found her after my attack. And yet she did not crumble, or even begin to melt, when I prodded her. I simply did not know what to do with her. In all of these years, I had never seen a monster “fall down” like this-

**Frisk:** “What IS IT, Asgore? Is she ALIVE, or is she DEAD?”

*Your fist clenches as you glare down at him.*

**Thorney:** “...I don't know.”

**Frisk:** “...you don't know. You don't KNOW?! The fuck kinda answer is that?!”

**Thorney:** “She was still solid when I left, but she wasn't responding! I'd- ...I know what the death of a monster looks like. I know that humans simply stop moving when they die. But this…”

“Kuro wasn't- isn't quite a boss monster, but she was... she was different, even before she became your lab partner. And now, like I said, I'm not sure if she's still mostly monster, or if she's now mostly machine. I cannot truly tell whether or not she is truly dead…”

*He seems so sure of his uncertainty. I'm convinced that he has no idea if she's ok or not.*

How can you be ok with that kind of answer?!

*Who said I was? I'm not “ok” about this either, Frisk, but given the circumstances-*

**Prince Asriel:** “...Dad?”

*Oh... Ohhh I was afraid this was going to happen. ...wait, how did he know-*

If I had to guess... The Observer told him. Wouldn't put it past that guy to drop some “fathomless truths” on Asriel's head.

*I guess that makes the most sense.*

...Asriel approaches Thorney, knowing full well that he's not really his dad. His real dad is bound to the soul of my parallel, somewhere upstairs. And yet...

**Thorney:** “...hello, Asriel.”

“The years have been so unkind to you…”

Chapter End Notes

Well. To say that was a rocky start would be an understatement. Trust Ben to forget to
fire up his shield generator and instantly get critted by a DT-driven wendigo.

Then again, Frisk didn't even TRY to prepare for this little expedition. If she had that Reaver of hers, she'd save all of us some time and cut out the inevitable backtracking when she finds the machine that can separate souls. At least, I THINK that's what that thing does. For all I know, it could dispense mixed drinks and serve canapés. Who can say what does what when you're down in THIS place, changed beyond recognition from the True Lab we remember.

Still, I think they'll be fine. Once Ben respawns and raises his shields, he'll be able to properly bodyguard without getting oneshotted.

And with that, I'm going to descend into a dungeon of my own. The Dungeon of the Endless, specifically. I've been meaning to try it out for some time.
Frisk and her crew proceed deeper into the True Lab, wary of the man-eater that prowls its halls. But of course, the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley, and things start going wrong. Gee, it's almost as if Frisk should have taken some time to properly plan this expedition rather than try to wing it!

Still, at least no-one's died y- OH WAIT.

Dialogue: Ben & The Observer

This is what I get for complaining about a silly death, isn't it? I take point, forget to fire up my shields, and get torn to shreds by a giant ghoul. Bloody typical.

...are you still there, Observer?

Yah. Still a little shaken after that little, uh, accident. Though probably nowhere near as shaken as you must be. Even though you've been torn apart before, it must still hurt like a motherfucker.

It did. I am NOT looking forward to this latest "continue".

I can only imagine. But if Frisk tries to hug you, don't fight it. Just let her concern and sympathy into your heart.

I admire your playing the role of the "tuff wizard", believe me I do, but seriously mate. You REALLY don't need to keep up the whole "dark and tuff" vibe you've been giving off since you became a Revenant. If I'll be frank, it makes you come across as a moody teenager in a ninja anime.

I BEG YOUR PARDON?

It's true. Alphys might think it's a cool shtick, but that's about it. You're not Shadax, mate.

It's ok to get upset over the pain – hell, it's downright HEALTHY to cry under the right circumstances. And you've been hurting, dying, and holding it all in like it's nothing. But it ISN'T nothing. It's going to come out sooner or later, and it's not going to be pretty.

...like a steam engine or a boiler, you've got to regulate the pressure. Let it out in the right quantities to keep things stable. Because at the rate you're going, maintaining your tough exterior with no venting points, you will erupt at precisely the wrong moment, spelling doom and gloom for your party members. And I know that's not what you want at all.
...I think I see where you're coming from. Though I thought I DID do a bit of venting earlier? I complained about dying in the elevator, and I got eviscerated for my outburst!

*Well, that was a BIT of venting, but not enough to reduce the pressure by a significant amount. What you need right now is a mild sob, a big hug, and maybe some chocolate to help it all go down a bit easier.*

*As for the evisceration part, that wasn't the universe pissing on your Friday. ...at least, I hope it wasn't. I'm pretty sure it was just you being you, getting all worked up and ready to roll out, but forgetting to fire up your shield generator. Kind of like Frisk just rushing down here without taking the sword with her because she's a reckless firebrand who's probably going to get herself killed again!*

...*trust me, I've been in situations like that more times than I can count. Leaving for the gym and forgetting a water bottle, heading out to the supply shed but forgetting the shed keys, seeing dark clouds halfway to work and realising that I forgot my umbrella, all because I'm on autopilot.*

Okay, you've made your point. ...*my word, I am REALLY not looking forward to this.*

*Just remember that we're all here for you. You don't need to suffer in silence just because you're an immortal killing machine. Even the Doom Slayer needs a hug sometimes...*

**Location: The True Lab, Main Elevator Foyer**

**Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie**

...do you think he's going to be ok?

*I hope he is... Wait, who are we talking about? Asriel? Thorney?*

Ben! His body got dragged off by the "Charliego", so... Oh god. Do you think it's gonna be a Prometheus kinda situation?

*Somehow I doubt this is a lousy prequel to something awesome. ...although-*

Dammit, you know what I mean!

*Yeah, I was just messin'. Guy chained to a rock, eagle eats his liver every day, liver regenerates at night- Damn. Ben's in for a shitty time if he's stuck with that body.*

**Prince Asriel:** "...uhhh, guys? Is that what I think it is?"

Asriel points towards a growing red light coming from the corridor in front of us. Just around the corner, we can hear the sounds of cracking floor tiles and crackling lightning. *Is this sonofabitch actually going to-*

*Syrinx: "Revenants are sadly not bound to their original bodies. While it is less taxing for them to re-use a body of flesh and bone, they are entirely capable of reconstituting themselves*
from whatever matter is nearby.”

“Through this most ancient of magicks, even the most brutal of deaths will merely slow them down. Even severing their heads and burying the ashes at a crossroads will do little more than vex them.”

Ok, I know he's an immortal, but WOW.

*He's ACTUALLY DOING IT. Man, I'd hate to be on his sh*tlist. 'cause with superpowers like his, we wouldn't stand a chance.*

Speak for yourself, Charlie.

**Prince Asriel:** "SERIOUSLY? He's- How can he even- Does his soul have a goddamn replicator unit in it or something?"

...son of a bitch. This guy's just FULL of surprises today.

As the freshly reconstituted Ben turns the corner, he catches sight of you, and a look of... wait, desperation? Yeah, frickin’ desperation. Is there something behind us or-

**Ben:** "Frisk!"

*His pace quickens, and a look of worry crosses his face as he fears the pain to come. Something tells me it's gonna be a doozy this time.*

I rush to him, ready to-

Too late. With a gasp of pain, he collapses in the tiled floor, clawing at his chest and belly as he writhes in agony. Jesus Christ he's reliving being EATEN.

**Frisk:** "Ben! Ben, I'm here buddy! It's gonna be ok!"

*He breathes rapidly through clenched teeth, eyes firmly shut, as he tries to muscle through the pain.*

I try to hold him in my arms, letting him know that I'm here.

**Frisk:** "We're gonna get you through this, Ben. Like you said, it's gonna pass..."

After half a minute of unimaginable agony, Ben's rapid breathing slows, and his body loosens up a little. He looks up at us, more than a little upset.

**Ben:** "Gods... That was the worst one yet."

*He sits up, burying his face in one hand. ...oh. Yikes. He's, uh, he's- I think he's crying. Just a little, but-

**Ben:** "Even when Vilhelm tore me in half, it *sniff* never hurt this bad..."

Oh, you poor man... I hold him closer, letting him know that I'll be there for him.

*When the rain starts to pour?*
...let's not go there. Even though I kinda wish I could hang out in Central Perk.

I'm pretty sure you can do that in VR. Well, not here, but we can probably track down a torrent of the sim back in our own world. For now though, let's just hug the bun.

Hug the- ...I hug the bun.

A slight smile creeps across Ben's face. He's feeling a little better, it seems.

**Ben:** "I really am a fool, aren't I? I never felt the need to let it out before, but now that I am? ...it really does feel like a weight is being lifted."

**Thorney:** "Well. This is touching, but I think we should, oh I don't know, leave this room sooner rather than later. The man-eater will not be sated for long, even if he savors every bite of... your old body..."

"Now I say it, it really is strange, isn't it?"

A low, almost sardonic chuckle escapes Ben's lips in response.

**Ben:** "...I have pulled my own severed head out of a pile of draugr corpses. I feel like things can't get much stranger than that."

"...that said however, the thought of that thing eating my remains is... still rather disturbing..."

*Ben takes a proper look at the red flower holding the lightning gun. In response to processing this image, he raises his eyebrows.*

**Ben:** "...but I can't say I've ever seen a talking flower before. Monsters really do come in all shapes and sizes, don't they?"

If only he knew the truth...

**Syrinx:** "I have to agree with this... whatever it is. We should make our way towards the Prince's office."

**Prince Asriel:** "...yeah. About that. Charlie... just went that way. That's where my office is."

"Sooo maybe this isn't such a good idea after all, maybe we should-"

**Frisk:** "-check out the rest of the True Lab? Good idea. C'mon Ben, let's go."

*You help Ben to his feet, giving him a pat on the back before we truly begin our True Lab adventures. I'm sure it's going to go off without a hitch.*

Don't be such a downer, Charlie. It's not that bad.

**Prince Asriel:** "Actually I was- Uh, can we just talk about this- Ok, ok, we're doing this I guess."

**Thorney:** "There's no point in fighting it, my boy. We both know how she gets."
Ben: “Wait a minute, let's just...”

As we pass the elevator, Ben reaches down and picks up his fallen staff. ...which he's already got on his back? WHAT?

Frisk: “...uh, Ben? I'm not seeing things, am I? Why are- WHY ARE THERE TWO STAFFS?”

He dropped his staff when the Charliego killed him, but he revived with it already in his hands? ...Uh- bu- BUT WHY THOUGH? WHY ARE THERE TWO STAVES NOW?!

Ben: “Oh dear. I was afraid this was going to happen again sooner or later.”

Frisk: “Again?! You mean this has happened before?”

Ben: “That it has, Frisk. When I first encountered my old body, I found that it still wore my old ishtarian wrist-watch. The very same wristwatch that I was wearing at the time, on less.”

Ben raises his arm and there on his wrist, clear as day, are two steampunk-looking wristwatches. IDENTICAL. IDENTICAL.

This just keeps getting better and better...

Ben: “It seems that the same process that allows me to reincarnate can in turn duplicate objects. As if the process takes... as if it takes a molecular photograph of one's very being and goes from there, replicating every single detail.”

Prince Asriel: “It's a goddamn replicator. You have the powers of a goddamn replicator.”

Asriel is still in shock regarding Ben's power.

Ben: “...now I think about it, it probably means that my sword is no longer one of a kind, at least back in my world.”

"Oh! Speaking of which...”

He reaches down to where his body once lay, only to realize that his sword was still in its sheath, hanging from his belt, when he died. It's probably in the Charliego's nest with the rest of his corpse.

Ben: “Bugger.”

“...you know what, Frisk? You take this.”

Sweet, he's giving us his old staff!

Frisk: “Really?! Oh Ben, you shouldn't have!”

Ben: “Oh but I should. While your power is great indeed, it lacks a focus. I was planning to commission Undyne to fashion something that suits you best, but I imagine she isn't too happy with me right now. So for now, consider this your first focus.”

You got the Magician's Staff! 6 feet in length, capped with brass, this magic stick's gonna whoop some ass!
Alright Kanye, let's not let too excited. ...oh who am I kidding, I have a magic staff now!

**Frisk:** “Thank you SO MUCH, Ben!”

I lean in and kiss him on the cheek.

*He does not react well to this, looking at you with wide-eyes and an uneasy heart. Word of the wise: don’t stand so close to him.*

**Ben:** “...let's keep our relationship professional, girl.”

**Frisk:** “...sorry.”

We take the left path from the elevator, away from Asriel’s office. You’d think this was counter-productive to our mission, but somehow I don’t think the Charluego is gonna let us anywhere near his brother’s office.

We still gotta think of a better name for him than that. I keep on thinking of that thing from... damn, what was the name of that show? The one with the zoo and the comedians? ...you know what I’m talking about, right?

*I’m, uh, not sure?*

You know, it had that one episode where the owner of the zoo took credit for Vince's stories, and-

*OH! NOW I remember! Bainbridge and that chestnut-headed guy got destroyed by a giant bubblegum monster! ...who was also called Charlie. Huh.*

Yeah, that's what I was thinking about! ...man, that episode taught us an important lesson.

*That you shouldn't drop acid at the zoo?*

That such barefaced plagiarism can lead to a sticky end.

*I guess that works too. But seriously, were the writers of the show tripping when they made that episode? Hell, were they ever NOT on drugs while working on it?*

I dunno man. It was the UK in the mid-2000s, shit was just WEIRD back then...

**Location: New Home**

**Dialogue: Undyne & The Observer**

...all quiet on the western front, eh Undyne?

GVSHBHGH-

**Doctor Alphys:** “What the- Undyne?”

...oh great. Let me guess: it's my turn to host, is it?
Well, everyone else has had a turn, I didn't want you to feel left out-

Get out of my head.

...make me.

No, seriously. Let's see how strong you really are. I'm curious.

Really? You wanna do this? Right here, right now?

Well, things are above board, aren't they? It's a fine time for a real high-class bout.

...why are you here, Observer? Shouldn't you be downstairs bothering the others? Pretty sure you've got better things to do than mess around in my head.

They're fine, for now. Ben got into a little scrape and bought the others some time to get away, but he's a Revenant so he'll be ok. I won't be gone for too long, I just came up here to check out how you guys were faring.

How thoughtful of you.

...I'm sorry, it's just-

Yeah, maybe this wasn't such a good idea. The memory of possession is still a sore point for you, as it is natural to be.

But allow me to assuage your fears and tell you that-

I'm not SCARED.

...oh, who am I kidding? I really don't wanna go through that again... So if you'd just-

I can't control you...even if I wanted to, I cannot force you to move against your will. All I can do is talk to you, and even then the worst I could do to you is say something unkind. Entirely by accident, mind you.

...you feel that? No? That's because I can't do anything. That's why they call me the Observer. All I can DO is observe. And pass on information. And be nightmarishly discursive when it comes to conversations.

...so? Anything to report, Captain?

...fine, you've made your point. We're, uh, we're actually doing great up here. No-one's tried to attack us so far.

Glad to hear it! Anything in particular that I should run down the flagpole?

We ended up having to detain Monster Kid. I'm not sure if he's meant to be a distraction or a saboteur, but something tells me Ren sent him here for a reason.

We couldn't risk him running around, so we locked him in one of the spare rooms.
Hmmm, that's definitely a muddle-and-a-half you've got on your hands. I don't know what he's up to either. Though frankly I'm impressed that he got through those puzzles you set up.

Actually, he was still stuck on the first one when I found him. I wanted to just send him home, but with the way things are, I just couldn't risk it.

*sigh* It kinda sucks that we had to do that, but, well, the stakes are just too high right now! If Ren manages to get through, we're probably screwed.

And that's even if he DOESN'T decide to cut you guys down on his way out. But hopefully it won't come to that. Hopefully he'll get stuck on that Rubick's cube or one of the eldritch word-searches.

...but how about the rest of you? How are you four holding up?

Other than being afraid of Ren? Well, Papyrus is “holding up” just fine. There's not much that gets him down, and I guess this is no different?

Sans is doing ok too. He's posted near the barrier chamber, so if anyone stumbles in from there, he'll be the first to tell us.

But Alphys... She's- She's not feeling so great.

**Doctor Alphys:** “It's the Observer, isn't it?”

**Doctor Undyne:** “Yeah, it's him alright. I'm just catching him up on the situation.”

*Tell her hi for me.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “…they say hi, by the way.”

**Doctor Alphys:** “…hai.”

*Yeah, that's probably my bad. I was trying to make her not feel so bad about creating the amalgamates, and my plan backfired like an old banger.*

Wait, you- …right. Yeah. You probably would know about them, wouldn't you? You're a time traveller like Frisk, aren't you?

*Pretty much. Though funnily enough, while the amalgamates were created during Gaster's tenure, that's just what happened in your world. In the original timeline, Alphys didn't even get into the whole soul business until some time after Gaster vanished. Hell, the only reason King Asgore brought her on-board was because of the “robot” she built to impress him.*

*...and that the previous Royal Scientist went missing. So he needed someone to fill that position. Though sadly, the Alphys of the original timeline wasn't exactly Jonas Venture. More like- Don't say it.*

*...she kinda was, though. She might not have been a sardonic pill-popping prick, but in comparison to Doctor Gaster... Yeah. But even still, I still felt for her.*
You did?

Yeah! Even though she lied to Frisk, “endangering” her life with fake death-traps, and creating twitching abominations of protoplasmic horror, I still got the impression that she was trying. That in spite of all her failure and deception, she was still at least TRYING. And if I personally could have helped her become a better person, I would have.

Heh. You're starting to sound a lot like Papyrus.

Well, it's hard not to admire his optimism. I can see why Jim loves him so much.

“Jim”? Something tells me you're not talking about Captain Kirk.

Yeah, different Jim entirely. Big guy, wears red glasses, loves to dress up. Born different, born innocent, born perfect, #1 Goblin Boy. Papyrus would probably have to get a restraining order against him if he existed in your worlds.

He still sounds pretty dedicated. Can't hate him for that.

Damn straight. I imagine you'd probably end up supporting him on Patreon if you existed in the same world. Hell, for all I know there could be an AU where Undyne is one of Jim Sterling's top Patreon supporters.

...see what I meant about being nightmarishly discursive? There I go again.

Well, at least you're passionate about it.

Oh believe you me, I could talk for a long time about certain topics. The concept of Armour and Shields as defensive mechanics, the troubles of my world's triple-A gaming industry, all of the worlds I've observed and documented, the virtues of pacing in a story that gets progressively darker, I could talk about this shit for hours.

But of course, I've got a job to do. Like you said, I should be bothering the others downstairs before Ben gets eaten again.

WAIT WHAT?!

Oh yeah, that's what I meant by Ben getting into a scrape. That thing that stalks the Deep Lab blind-sided him when his shields were down, and tore him from groin to gizzard. But as I said, he's a Revenant, so much like the peasant who got turned into a newt, he got better.

How the hell do you get better from being eaten by a wendingo?!

By creating a new body out of nearby physical matter and sheer concentrated willpower. Believe it or not, that's Ben's thing. He's pretty much a Soulsborne character, only he can't go hollow. Instead, he experiences phantom pains shortly after revival. But in spite of it all, he keeps on going, trying to do what's right.

I... I don't know what to say. I mean, he can be kind of a jackass, but knowing what he goes through... That man is HARDCORE.
Save your hugs for later, Captain. He might just need them by the end of this.

Now, is there anything left to report? Anything else out of the ordinary?

I think that's it for now.

Then I'll take my leave. It's been nice talking, Undyne.

...yeah. It's been fun, I guess. Good luck down there!

And good luck to you too. You guys stay determined, ok? Ok. ...seeyuh!

Location: The True Lab, Infirmary

Dialogue: Syrinx & The Observer

NO.

Alright, suit yourself.

Dialogue: Asriel & The Observer

Howdy!

*sigh* What is it now?

Well THAT'S a fine how-do-you-do now isn't it? Look, I know we parted on poor terms, but you might want to rein in the snark a little there. You're starting to sound like Rusty.

I- ...fine, I'm sorry. We okay?

We ok.

...I guess you've got something to tell me, then?

The situation topside is that, for the most part, everyone is ok. Undyne's holding up pretty good, the Bone Bros are doing just fine, although I think Alphys is still a little “under the weather” after what I told her earlier.

...you told her about Hell, didn't you? ...WHY?

She was feeling guilty about what happened with the amalgamates. Though even in the original timeline, I still think the test subjects were better off that way. After all, they were on their last legs, and once they died, they'd have been at the mercy of the horrors beneath our reality. So while they're technically in a Hell of their own collective making, it is a Hell that is random, inconsistent, and not actively trying to torture them when they least expect it. A FAR better situation than any
of the half-mercies offered in the Inferno.

Huh. When you put it that way, I guess that we were doing them a favor?

**In a way, yes. It's kind of like the difference between suffering through chemotherapy in the hopes of being cured, and succumbing to a horrifying cancer that somehow mutates you into an eternal engine of endless agony.**

WHOA, cool your jets Harlan Ellison! Jesus Christ!

Yeahhh, that's what I'm talking about. Did you know that he was involved in the video game adaptation of that story?

...they made a GAME out of it?!

**Yup.**

Well, that's news to me...

**Sooo yeah. She still did the right thing considering the alternative. Besides, the fact they're still with us, even in this state, means that we have the potential to maybe reverse the process, separating the amalgamates into their previous constituents. No idea how you'd manage it, but I have faith that you'll be able to do it one day. You'll have the technology.**

...speaking of the amalgamates, have you realized anything strange about this place?

*Other than the lack of wall monitors from the last time I was here?*

No, it's not that. ...I haven't been down here in years, but I've been wondering. Where are all the amalgamates, anyway? I figured they woulda made themselves known by now...

*That's a good point, actually. Have you seen ANY of them since we've arrived?*

No, no not at all... ...what the hell is going on down here?

*I have my suspicions... But it's too early to throw them around right now. If we don't see ANY of them by the time we've cleared the True Lab, I'll tell you what I think has happened.*

...why not just say it now?

*I don't want it weighing on your mind while you're down here. Better to talk about it later.*

*sigh* I guess- Actually, you know what? Just TELL me. I'm getting a little sick of your cryptic bullshit.

*Oh, oh you want to know NOW? You really want this burdensome knowledge RIGHT NOW? FINE. I suspect that the man-eater ate THEM!*

...what?!
You heard me. Considering the size of the creature, and the absence of the amalgamates, that is what I suspect. Like I said, however, it's still too early to confirm it as concrete. We'll need proper evidence before we can truly say what happened to them.

...you know what? You were right, again. You shouldn't have told me.

It's only a theory, but it's disheartening all the same. THAT'S why I didn't want to tell you. Because it's going to weigh you down with doubts and anxieties, and frankly you've had enough of those to last a lifetime.

...let's hope it's just a theory. I'm sure he'd never go THAT far.

Keep telling yourself that. Just keep on convincing yourself that it's going to be ok.

...but of course, it's hard to feel like things are going to be ok, considering the implications. It took a lot to make Ren back down the last time, and after his declaration during the national address, you feel that he really does mean business this time.

And there's the matter of that wound... If it kills him, if Ben's sword sealed Ren's fate...

It'll be tricky, but I'll convince Ben to let you rip him to shreds.

...you'll have to excuse me if I don't find that funny. ...please tell me that was just a bad joke.

Oh of course it was. I'm not that vicious an individual. And frankly, I'm probably not all that funny.

But I can check in on Ren once you guys are safe. I'd like to think that that'll help assuage your fears. ...or potentially confirm them. Considering how he and Ben clashed, it's a bit of a toss-up at this point.

...tell me as soon as you can. The second we're out of danger, go on and check on him.

You'll be the first to know, lad.

“Lad”? I'm 209, Observer, not 9.

Sorry. Force of habit.

Location: The True Lab, Infirmary

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

-and then Lester stabbed him with the diseased safety pin!

What a Tuesday that was.

...is he STILL looking through those files? You'd have thought he'd have found what he was looking
Frisk: “You ok there, buddy? Need help with the-”

Ben: “No no, I can manage this.”

“...actually, I think I've hit a snag. I'm trying to get into the admin network, but I can't work out how to-”

Prince Asriel: *sigh* “Alright, move over.”

Ben: “Oi wha-”

Asriel pushes the office chair to the side, bending down to reach the keyboard as Ben slides away.

Prince Asriel: “It's no good trying to get in through the guest account, bucko. Gotta know the right password for admin.”

We slip in closer, but not too close. A “duh-ding” signals that his login was successful.

Prince Asriel: “There, got it. Now I just need to-”

“...well crap. That's... huh.”

I peek over his shoulder to see what's what.

You see the “lab drop-box” folder... and it's empty.

Prince Asriel: “Ok DON'T PANIC. I think I got this.”

He disconnects from the lab network, then attempts to reconnect. Sadly, it looks like the network no longer exists.

Prince Asriel: “...I don't got this, ok PANIC!”

Frisk: “Whaddaya need from the network?”

Prince Asriel: “We stored our notes on our work machines, and we'd send them to one-another through the drop-box. I was hoping I'd put some of your notes in there before the incident, but it looks like we're gonna have to do this the hard way.”

Frisk: “We're gonna have to lure Charlie out and trap him on the other side of the facility. ...what's that look for?”

Prince Asriel: “Oh, nothing. I was thinking the same thing. ...thing is we'll need bait. Aaaand an actual trap.”

I think I've got the trap down, but I'll need to confirm something first.

Frisk: “...ok, do these rooms have heavy doors? If we can bait one of the rooms with... uh...
Anyway, we leave a trail that leads into that room, then once he's inside we-”

Asriel puts up a hand to stop us, gesturing towards the splintered wooden doors. Our plan's already
hit a snag before it's left the drawing board.

Prince Asriel: “They were good enough to hold a CORE breach, but not much else. We... THEY never thought about something that strong escaping containment. They never even knew about Charlie until- ...until he was ripping through them like-”

He grips the bridge of his muzzle and clenches his eyes shut, as he recalls the horror of that day. Just like he did at the address.

Prince Asriel: “I should have commissioned better doors. I should've kept on improving containment. If I'd been just a little bit better at my job, they'd all still be alive!”

“But no. NO. I was too scared to tell anyone about him. If they knew that their king had created such an “abomination”... They all paid the price for my- ...for my-”

I place a hand on his shoulder. *sigh* I hate seeing him like this, but because of him...

...still, I know what to say. The same thing I said to Flowey when he needed my strength. The same thing I said to you.

...

Frisk: “You've done some fucked-up stuff, bud. But in spite of all of it, you still regret it. You don't want it to happen again.”

“From where I'm standing... that's a start.”

Prince Asriel: “...but I- I killed them! I didn't lay a finger on them, but their dust... their dust is on MY HANDS!”

Frisk: “…join the club.”

*His expression hardens as you mention that. In some twisted way, remembering that you were way worse makes him feel better about himself.*

That's the plan, Charlie. I'll try to be his lightning rod for now.

Prince Asriel: “…what are you trying to say? That just because you were- just because you were somehow “worse” than me, that my actions weren't so bad?”

Don't drag yourself down, bro. Compare your hands to mine. See how clean they are in comparison.

Frisk: “Your negligence did get people killed. I'm not gonna dispute that. But at least you weren't an accessory to genocide.”

Syrinx, previously browsing idly, focuses her full attention on you.

Syrinx: “What... did you just say?”

Frisk: “You heard me right. During my first visit, I wasn't- I wasn't exactly in control.”

Syrinx: “Your first visit? What do you-”
Her eye widens in terror at the implications.

Syrinx: “...oh. Oh GODS... You knew what I was, before- WHAT ARE YOU?”

Frisk: “I don't even know anymore. But what I do know is that, before this timeline existed, I ended up doing a lot of terrible things during my first journey through the underground.”

Ben's hand hovers next to the hilt of his blade, as he struggles to contain his disappointment in you.

Frisk: “Though as I said, I wasn't in control at the time. Something else, or some one else, had their hands on me. For all intents and purposes, I was... a puppet.”

His eyebrows remain furrowed for a moment, then raise in surprise. Something tells me that the Observer is filling him in on the situation.

Ben: “An “Outsider” had its hands on you. ...had HIS hands on you.”

“Gods... This “Emile” has a lot to answer for.”

Syrinx: “There are MORE of them in this world?!”

Ben: “There was merely one, that time. But he has left Frisk's world behind. Something about “the project being complete”, whatever this “project” was.”

Syrinx: *phew* “At least it no longer haunts us. Even if we have-”

The crackle of concentrated lightning grabs our attention, and we see the lumbering wendigo shuddering in the western doorway of the infirmary! Thank god Thorney was keeping watch.

Thorney: “Go! Head for the air exchange! I'll take care of this man-eater...”

Thorney wraps a few tendrils around the feet of the wendigo, in the hopes of keeping it busy while we escape!

Why the hell would he tell us that?! It's just gonna corner us there!

We take a left instead! COME ON!

OH that is- That's GOOD. Don't know if it's what he planned, but that's a solid plan!

Frisk: “C'mon guys let's go!”

We retreat through the north exit, heading left towards the... uh...

There's the DT extractor, the shower room, the TV room, and the fridges. ...lotta stuff in the north wing, now I think about it.

It's not that, Frisk. Ben is... hanging back... Oh god, is he gonna sacrifice himself to buy us more time?!

He's seriously gonna go through that ag- ...well I'll be damned.
His sword pierces a water pipe on the ceiling, and with a clawed palm he freezes the leaking water as it hits the ground, building up a wall of ice. ...clever girl...

Uhhh-

**Ben:** “What are you waiting for?! GET IN THERE!”

**Frisk:** “Gotcha!”

I raise the staff- ok this is heavier than I thought. I RAISE THE STAFF up to the pipe above the door to the air exchange.

[MAGIC] > *Old Pipe > *Siphon Heat

*The heat begins to flow down the staff, through your hands and down through your legs. As it groans, you suddenly feel as if your shoes are on fire. And surprise surprise, they actually are OH GOD WHAT DID YOU DO?!!*

FuckFUCK **FUCK GET THEM OFF!**

*Before you can reach down to pull them off, the pipe above you bursts violently, showering you in a torrent of icy cold water than seems to freeze as it hits you...SHIT THAT'S NOT GOOD.*

I- I can't- oh god it's-

**Ben:** “Oh GODS, FRISK! What the HELL did you DO?!”

...you find it harder and harder to move as the ice begins to overwhelm your fallen body. You try to call out, but it's getting harder and harder to breathe, let alone talk. Despite your best efforts, you-

...oh goddamnit. Frisk, remember what he taught you. HEAT, Frisk. We can still get out of this without resetting, visualize the HEAT!

Y-you're right, what am I- FUCK it's so cold...

[Magic] > *Self > *Intense Heat

*You will your core temperature to rise, and in turn will the ice on you to melt away. Even as the ice-water continues to bear down on you, you find the strength to move. The ice gradually begins to slough off of your body as you struggle to break free. Ben, horrified at what he's seeing, sends forth a wailing gale of hot air to help melt away the ice still trapping you.*

I'm almost there, COME ON! One last- RGHSH...

*With one last kick, you find yourself free of the ice, falling into Ben's arms. ...we really need to stop getting into these situations, Frisk.*

Damn straight, Charlie. That was TOO close. ...but hey, at least my shoes aren't on fire anym-

Whoo, is it hot in here or- ...owww...

*You've really done it this time, Frisk. With all that heat running through your body, you've pretty much wrecked yourself. Seriously though, what the hell were you thinking?*

I- I was-
Ben: “Bloody hell, Frisk. What were you trying to achieve?!”

He slings us over his shoulder as he rushes to join the others. At the door to the infirmary, the scraping of claw on ice indicates that the Charliego is having a fair lick of trouble breaking through.

I was- I was trying to make it look like we'd barricaded ourselves inside the air exchange, so he'd waste his time breaking it down instead of going to where we really are!

...oh my god. I just realized-

DON'T YOU DARE-

I WAS FROZEN, TODAY!

...you idiot. God fucking damn it, you BRILLIANT idiot.

Totally worth it...

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

Location: The True Lab, Archive Room

As we enter the old TV room, where the others are hiding, Asriel rushes towards us, shocked at what he sees.

Prince Asriel: “Oh god, Frisk! What- what HAPPENED?!”

I shift the sodden, steaming, aching form of Frisk into Asriel's arms.

Frisk: “I was frozen today...”

He quickly sets her down on the floor before his knees buckle. All of that water has made her a little too heavy for the Prince to handle.

Ben: *panting* “Best I could tell, she was trying to set up a distraction, blocking off the door with an ice wall like I was. But it backfired horribly.”

“If I'll be frank, she nearly turned herself into a human ice lolly.”

Prince Asriel: “Ice... ice what-now?”

Yeah, that word has a different meaning in American English. Over there the term they use is “popsicle”.

Ben: “...I mean “popsicle”. Back home we call them ice lollies. Since they're like lollipops made of-”

Prince Asriel: “I- I think I get it. God, what a mess...”

Crouching over her, Asriel applies a few spots of healing magic, in the hopes of helping her recover from the ordeal.
Ben: *sigh* “I thought the staff would help with her focus, but it didn't work as I'd hoped it would.”

Syrinx: “Frankly, a focus is the last thing you should give a young sorcerer. If you ask me, she could do with wearing a power limiter. After all, adolescence is when sorcerers are at their most dangerous.”

Ben: “I understand that, but I'm not sure it's simple puberty causing her power spikes. I've known a lot of adolescent sorcerers, and while their power is prone to spikes, those are always the symptoms of mood swings and emotional outbursts.”

“In Frisk's case, however, I have to say that it is something else. The spikes I've seen just don't seem to line up with her emotional state, to the best of my knowledge. If anything, they seem to happen whenever she uses thermaturgy, as if she's having trouble controlling the flow...”

*Which is weird, since she never really had trouble with magic prior to her dealings with you. No offence, of course.*

None taken, I suppose?

*If anything, sorcery could be her true calling once this is all over. But if you ask me, I have a feeling that she's having trouble concentrating. She's remembered a lot of terrible things, and they're swimming around her head like needle-thin parasitic worms. Enough to cause her concentration to lapse, a split-second spasm of negative reaction towards that flash of horror, every now and then. ...have you ever seen her seize up, ever so briefly, before she carries on with what she's doing?*

...now you mention it, I think I have. It's an interesting theory you have there.

*One that seems to have some ground to stand on.*

And funny enough, she's not alone in it. Speaking from personal experience, I've had my share of horror and regret, though still nowhere near the mountain of shit Frisk has had to deal with. And sometimes, when I'm doing something, I'll have a brief flash of something disagreeable.

...and sometimes, I'll remember or imagine something REALLY bad. A distracting and abhorrent perversion of normality, or a memory of a particularly cringe-worthy moment, will stick with me for longer than usual. And when it does I need to be careful with what I'm listening to at the time, since that sound may forever be infested by what I'm experiencing, bringing it back whenever I hear that sound again. It has made previously innocuous songs turn become unbearable to, and has destroyed my enjoyment of songs I used to like. Such is the curse of a hyperconnected brain, even if it has made me a smarter man.

My word... But you seem to have it under control, by the sounds of it?

*Pretty much. I've never been truly crippled by it, though I do occasionally seize up for a second or two because of it. Nothing to really write home about, but it is an annoying and disturbing inconvenience. A small price to pay for the power that bristles inside my skull.*

*But indeed, I suspect Frisk has similar issues. Not that she shares my particular condition, mind. Granted, she's an “interesting” girl, but her mind is probably a lot more focused than mine.*
Bright as she is, she's no Symmetra.

Are you implying what I think you're implying?

**Depends. What do you suppose I'm “implying”?**

That Frisk is... similarly “hyperconnected”?

...*maybe just a teeny wee bit? I'm honestly impressed your lot even has an analogue to the spectrum, considering the time period.*

But as I said, I'm sure that her “spikes” aren't related to that. No, I'm still convinced that they're to do with all the trauma in her life. If you'd been through all the shit she's been through, and it all came back to you feeling like freshly picked sprigs of hell, you'd probably seize up every once in a while.

Bloody hell...

**Ben:** “...sorry, I spaced out there for a moment. But the Observer had an interesting theory on the subject.”

You relay the theory I put forward. Upon processing it, Asriel hugs Frisk with the full strength of a boss monster. **Big mistake.**

...or not? She's not pushing him away, at least. Or maybe she's still in shock from the, uh, cold shower earlier.

That's not funny, Observer. She could have DIED.

**Well, that's me in a nutshell.**

**Prince Asriel:** “Well... I feel like we've hit the motherlode for now. We won't get them all on this trip, but if we each take some of these tapes back with us, we can retrieve the remaining ones during the next expedition. I feel like we need to regroup and rethink our strategy.”

**Frisk:** “Oh come on, I'm sure we could clear this place in one run! We could lure Charlie into the refrigerator room, and—”

**Asriel's eye twitches in response. I have a feeling he's about to blow.**

**Prince Asriel:** “Frisk, just look at this. You're soaking wet, you FROZE YOURSELF, we've got a MAN-EATER on our trail and we're BARELY EQUIPPED FOR THIS HORSESHT!”

“I mean, I- I wanna support you in this, BELIEVE ME I DO. I want to retrieve everything we left behind down here, to get back everything we've lost.”

“But THIS? This is not a good way to do it! NOTHING about this is good! Hell, just getting back to the elevator's gonna be a lot harder than it needs to be, 'cause we've got a wall of ice AND a hungry fucking MAN-EATER IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR ESCAPE ROUTE!”

**Asriel breathes hard after venting his frustrations with the current situation. Can't say I blame him.**
And neither can I. ...we really did just get up and leave, completely unprepared to execute this expedition. We really should have just had her “cool her jets” and spend more than a minute or two getting ready before diving into this. Maybe I would have died less as a result?

*Maybe, maybe. But at least we'll have a decent haul for this first run, even though we went in without the right gear.*

...for now, let's load up on these tapes. *We'll have plenty of stuff to look over while we're preparing for the next expedition.*

I imagine we will. Assuming we can actually get past the wendigo.

...you know what? I don't care if Asriel gets annoyed if we use fire against that thing. When the time comes, I'm going to scare it off with a bit of the old Dragon's Breath.

*At this point, I don't think he will begrudge you in the slightest...*

Chapter End Notes

Well, it's not all bad news. At least they've got SOMETHING for their troubles.

...but seriously, if Frisk's not careful, she's going to get herself killed again. Even with Ben keeping her safe, she almost froze herself to death. And the last thing we need is Asriel going all Mister Freeze trying to bring her back. For as much as I sympathize with the plight of Victor Fries, in the end he does some pretty gnarly shit in the pursuit of his goals.

...it's probably for the best that they retreat for now, take some time to lick their wounds and actually prepare a proper expedition. The old labs have laid derelict and unused for years, so it wouldn't hurt to let it slumber for another day or two.
At first glance, I thought they were going to keep going through the tapes they acquired, but things... Things got dark. And I don't mean darker yet darker. I mean that yet more horrible truths were revealed all around. Strong words were thrown around, hearts were broken, and generally nobody's happy right now.

Some truths were better left unknown, perhaps. Some secrets best left covered up, maybe... but knowledge, as always, is power. And knowing... knowing is half the battle.

**Location: The True Lab, Hotlab Elevator**

**Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie**

*The sounds of claws scraping against the elevator door, along with the cries of "COME BACK YOU TASTE SO GOOOOOD!", fade as we make our escape. The tip of your staff still glows red from the flames you threw at the Charliego.*

*panting*

...but seriously, Frisk. This whole mission was a shitshow. Yeah, we got a few boxes of tapes, but...

But what? For a "shitshow", we came back with a bundle of the good stuff!

And Ben got killed. TWICE. ...I have to agree with Asriel on this one, Frisk. We were NOT prepared for this at all.

Oh, and I guess that a knight of the Round Table and an agent of the Elder Gods don't count as being prepared?

...ok, I'll admit that Ben was a-ok outside of the whole dying thing. But he was pretty much CARRYING us, Syrinx included. ...though now I think about it, I don't think she really did much up until the end.

But what I meant was that we didn't have any chocolate.

...are you serious? What does that have to do with anything?

Uhm, first up, we know that the Charliego, who we STILL need a better name for, still loves chocolate like I do. We need to stock up on THAT to bait that cryo-chamber trap you thought up.

...and secondly, I kinda want a bite of the stuff before we go down there. It'll help BOTH of us feel
...let's talk about this chocolate dependency of yours, Charlie.

First a Snickers, then we talk.

...sonofabitch, I walked right into that one.

We're all very proud of you, Charlie.

*sigh* Whatever you say Jim Davis.

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

...well. That could have gone a lot worse.

Could have gone a lot better, though.

I'm not disputing that. But hey, at least you didn't die a third time.

Fair enough.

...well, at least things are quiet now. You and Asriel each hold a large box of tapes in your hands, the only spoils of our expedition so far. We could have gotten three, but then Frisk wouldn't have had her arms free to ward off the Charliego. So swings and roundabouts and all that gubbins.

...these "tapes", they remind me of the old reel-to-reel mainframes used by Edison Labs.

...I should probably check if Ren's still alive.

Really? I thought you were going to launch into the tapes of your world?

I'd love to, but it would probably get a little boring. Besides, you lot are perfectly safe in this elevator, so I don't need to-

“Perfectly safe”. The perfect words to say to a man who broke his bloody neck on the handrail.

That was just a freak fluke, I'm sure of it. But if something DOES go tits up, just give me a shout.

Location: Waterfall, TemTek Research Facility, The “Chop Shop”

Dialogue: Ren & The Observer

Captain Ren: “Is... is someone there?”

...you look around, but see no-one. The- Oh. I had a feeling you were going to take drastic measures, but this... Bloody hell mate.
Captain Ren: “If anyone is out there, REVEAL YOURSELF!”

Calling out as you do, your demands are left unmet. After all, you wished to be left alone while you acclimatized to your new arm.

...in all honesty, I should have expected this. You replaced your lost eye with a magic crystal, your shattered legs with shiny metal ones, and your failing heart with a titanium ticker. A new arm should come as no surprise.

What madness is this?!

This “madness”, old man, is not a product of an ailing mind. It comes from the Beyond, prying and inquisitive, concerned for your well-being.

Ben really did inflict a nasty wound during your clash, didn't he?

...what are you? Why do you haunt me so?

Because an old friend is deeply concerned. Even after your wild and outlandish behaviour, he still sees you as a friend. And after the shiner Ben gave you, he's worried for your life, but equally afraid to face you after you LITERALLY ISSUED A FUCKING DEATH THREAT TO HIM. Seriously, what the hell Ren?

WHAT? He- After all of this, he-

Some bonds are too strong to break, it seems. Even after all of your disagreements, all of your quarrels, all of your violent behaviour, the only thing you've managed to break so far is his heart.

He didn't want to send you away, but he had to. Even with innocent blood on your hands, he would not have you executed. He had lost too much, and invested too much, to squander your life in the name of revenge.

...he should have killed me when he had the chance. His sense of right, his penchant for mercy... Look where it has left us. Six generations passed with barely a glimmer of progress, when all it would have taken was a pull of the trigger to complete the collection.

And yet, for better and for worse, he is better than that. He, like Frisk before him, held on to the notion that there was... another way...

...my my. How... how interesting... I haven't seen this side of the story before...

...in a way, I almost wish that this thing had been done of your own volition, that you weren't just something’s puppet. That way, I wouldn't feel so bad about hating you.

But it seems, as providence would have it, that having a crystal eye installed wasn't such a good idea after all. Strong as you were, BRAVE as you were, you hadn't the heart to pluck that gemstone from your eyesocket when the whispers started. And when they rose to a cacophonous counsel of dark and assertive demands, you hadn't the strength to remove it.

For nearly 200 years, you put so much of your energy into keeping those unworldly powers from
using you as a puppet. But of course, they would stay your tongue when you tried to warn the others about them. They would keep you from getting the crystal removed. And in your weakest moments, you became their puppet.

...to think that it took an unconventional case of radiation poisoning to get you back into the Chop Shop. With that irradiated wound poisoning your blood, they would have lost their most powerful asset in this place, and yet with only one arm, you would have been of little use to them.

Thus, they took a gamble, putting their faith in the Temmies to replace your arm and purify your system. And indeed, they rolled poorly, as the eye was removed, and the arm remained absent of any and all crystal components. It seems, at long last, that you are your own person again.

...knowing the whole story now, I can't hate you. Part of me wants to, like how Frisk blamed Charlie once upon a time, but from a moral standpoint I... I just CAN'T. And what's worse is that, in spite of all you've suffered, of how bloody brave you've been, I find myself struggling to feel bad for you. The notion that you are technically innocent, that your actions were rarely your own...

...at the end of the day, you will not have my contempt. But neither will you have my sympathy. All you will have, Ren Yong, is my respect. In spite of everything, you could have done a lot worse.

...get well soon, old man. I will relay your condition to your old friend.

...tell him... Tell him that I am sorry. Tell him I only regret that I wasn't strong enough...

Alright alright, I will. Now shut your mouth and close your eyes. You need to save your strength.

...oh, and one more thing. DON'T. HURT. ANYONE. There's enough bloodshed going on topside without you getting narky down here.

Location: Hotland Laboratory, Elevator

Dialogue: Asriel & The Observer

The elevator finally comes to a stop at the top of the shaft. Looks like we're finally here. As the door slides open, you-

Doctor Phlox: *distressed Denobulan shouting* “...I DON'T CARE WHAT IT TASTES LIIIIIKE!”

Who the hell is watching Enterprise at a time like this?!

Someone who actually kind of liked Enterprise, I guess? Though I'll admit, while I place it pretty low on my list of Star Trek Shows I Like, I still place it above Discovery. It had its moments, and while most of the characters were pretty bland, I do like Phlox.

We step out of the elevator into Alphys' lab, the sounds of Star Trek: Enterprise coming from our right. You turn towards the sounds of Phlox waking up, only to see...
Prince Asriel: “Really, Katrina? Enterprise? At a time like this?”

Sub-Commander T'pol: “...WAKE UP, Doctor.”

Catty mashes the big red “boss alert” button as she hears your voice, pausing the video and whirling around to face you.

Prince Asriel: “Look, I like to watch things as I work too, but now is not the time to split your attention. I need you focused, alright?”

Catty: “Y- yes sir! Like, super sorry sir!”

“Uhm- I do got something to report though!”

Prince Asriel: “Well, let's hear it then!”

Catty: “Yah, see, I caught sight of Ren in Waterfall and, like, he was heading towards the TemTek Facility. I don't, uh, I'm not sure what he was gonna do there.”

That lines up with what I saw through his eyes. ...I explain to you everything I saw, and everything I've learned about Ren so far.

Oh... Oh my- He was- He was fighting it off all this time?! I- I need to- I've got to-

Relax mate, he's doing fine now. The Temmies replaced the crystal eye with... I think they used a sterilized marble, actually. But the point is that he is, as of an hour or so ago, free from possession. Those Temmies really do work fast, don't they?

Why the hell do you sound so... so disappointed by that?

Terrible as it sounds, I kind of wanted to hate him. But now that it's evident that he was fighting off possession all this time, with his worst deeds being the result of him letting his guard down, I just can't. I wanted to, but I just can't.

...but WHY?

For the longest time, he was sort of a decent villain, someone you could love to hate. But now, much like how it was with Flowey, now we know why he was such an arsehole. That due to what he was having to deal with, unable to tell anyone about it, he wasn't really himself. For if you were tormented constantly, unable to tell anyone about it, perpetually struggling to avoid losing control, you'd probably become a grim shadow of Mister Nice Guy.

I imagine that this is how a lot of younger people feel, even without battling with possession...

Ren... I- I owe him an apology.

Not going to argue with that. Though I have a feeling that he still won't abide your policy of “let's not go to the Surface, it's too dangerous”. I gave him a stern talking to, believe you me, but somehow I doubt that he'll easily heed the words of something from the Beyond. So if you DO go to see him, make sure Ben is there too. Ren will think twice about attacking if there's he's at risk of losing another arm.
That doesn't exactly make me want to bring him along.

*It's better than getting cut down. Besides, if you bring anyone else along, they'd probably explode if Ren looked at them funny.*

**Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie**

**Catty:** “Uh, sir? Are- are you okay?”

You think the Observer's been having a word with him?

*Is there any doubt?*

**Frisk:** “He's just, uh, communing with a friend of mine. The Observer is... not all there, I'll be honest. He doesn't have a body in this world, but he can speak into people's minds whenever he wants.”

*Catty looks wide-eyed and terrified at the notion. A few seconds later, she looks around in a frenzy, before clutching her head.*

**Frisk:** “Let me guess. He said hi, didn't he?”

**Prince Asriel:** “Oh COME ON, give her a little warning why don't you!”

*She looks up at us, paw on her chest, visibly shaken from such a simple “how-do-you-do”.*

*I should have seen that coming from a mile away.*

**JESUS FUCK-**

**SHIT wrong window, sorry!**

Wait, come back!

**Later. Two's company, but three's a crowd.**

But what about Three's Company?!!

*That's an old ABC sitcom, not relevant to the situation at hand. It's too cramped in here, anyways.*

...well. That, uh, happened.

I guess he has a point, though. *sigh* It's noisy enough in here without the Observer clatterin’ around.

*Heyyyy, I'm not THAT noisy! Hell, without me, it'd be too damn quiet in here...*

**Catty:** “Do- is this what you've been dealin' with all this time? Mah gawd...”

**Frisk:** “Welllll kinda. It's already a little crowded in here with one of my other friends hangin'
I tap my head, to imply-

Yeah I'm not gonna take over here. She'll just freak out again.

Eh, suit yourself.

**Prince Asriel:** “...well, now that's out of the way, you just keep your eyes on the security feeds. Let me know the second you see anything suspicious.”

**Catty:** “...uh, yeah. Sure. On it.”

*Catty turns back to the screens, wishing she could watch something else. Ben descends the escalator with a confused expression.*

**Ben:** “Do any of you know how to hook the tape player up to the telly? I've plugged it in, but it keeps on blinking 1200 at me.”

Asriel sighs and turns towards the escalator. ...then he realises he's in front of the down escalator, sighs again, turns around, and walks to the up escalator.

Happens to the best of us.

*After setting down his box of tapes, Asriel proceeds to fiddle around with the VCR. ...man, I can't remember the last time we had to do that.*

**Prince Asriel:** “Whew, the DUST on this thing... Ever since she uploaded the last VHS down here, she's never had to use a VCR. Kind of a shame, though. She worked so hard getting this 60 year old hunk of junk working again...”

“...Alright, I've set the time. Didn't really need to, but it's less annoying this way. Anyways, let's... let's check the first tape.”

I pick out the first tape I see. It reads... oh...

*The date is hard to make out, but the year “2015” stands out. Underneath it, it says... “Su**** ***empt Thwarted”.*

...we know what's on here. We don't need to watch it if you-

No, no... I do.

**Frisk:** “Let's try this one first.”

Asriel isn't even looking our way when we hand him the tape. He slots it in, and presses play.

**Asriel, age 9:** “I... I don't like this idea, Charlie.”

...on the screen, we see the slightly haggard form of Charles Dreemurr. His skin is starting to pale, and his eyes are very slightly sunken in, staring into the shaking camera with-
**Charlie, age 10:** “Come now, brother. Don’t be such a crybaby.”

Asriel, the one with us in the room, can only stare at the screen, hand over his muzzle.

OH god, I think this was a mistake.

**Asriel, age 9:** “Wh... What? N-no I'm not- ...big kids don't cry!”

**Charlie, age 10:** “Asriel. I need this. WE need this.”

“I've been getting worse ever since I came here. I'm afraid that if this gets any worse, I will no longer be the brother you need. If I continue to live, I will endanger everybody in the Underground.”

“But if I should die... My soul will be yours, as it always has been, and together we can leave this place. We can return with seven souls in hand, we can tear down the Barrier, we can bring PEACE to this world!”

**Asriel, age 9:** “I... I guess you're right...”

Huh. This... isn't how I remember it. Then again, I guess this conversation changed as part of the butterfly effect.

**Charlie, age 10:** “…Asriel? Are you... are you having second thoughts?”

“You KNOW what will happen if we don't act, and you're already getting COLD FEET!”

**Asriel, age 9:** “N-no! I don't doubt that- we gotta do something, I'd never doubt you on that, Charlie!”

“But... But Frisk-”

**Charlie, age 10:** “You really think she can help us? She can barely help herself!”

“You've heard her crying at night, mumbling to herself, freezing up like a rickety old maid. How can someone as weak and broken as her do anything to-”

**Asriel, age 9:** “But she's super smart! You saw the things she and Kuro made! She's a superscientist!”

“If- if anyone can help you, it's her!”

*Charlie steps closer to Asriel, who takes a nervous step back as the camera starts shaking even more.*

**Charlie, age 10:** “Asriel. Listen to me. I am DYING. There's nothing you, or I, or even Frisk can do to stop that. It took me a while, but I've accepted that there's no good way out of this.”

“But if I don't die on my own terms, the thing that will wear my skin will kill everyone in the Underground. Mom, Dad, Kuro, Uncle Gerson, Frisk, even YOU. It's not going to spare ANYONE in its pursuit to sate its hunger.”

*We hear Asriel start to cry, on the tape and in real life.*

**Charlie, age 10:** “In this body, I am damned. But in yours... if we can truly be together...”
This just got a lot creepier.

*You know what he meant. He was 10 years old for Christ's sake.*

**Charlie, age 10:** “Don't you trust me, Asriel?”

**Asriel, age 9:** *sniff* “Y-y-yeah! I know you w-want to do the, uh- the right thing! But-”

**Charlie, age 10:** “But WHAT? WHAT, Asriel?”

“Come on, this is our best shot at ending this nightmare! If we can pull this off, we can be together forever, the future of humans and monsters, healthy and happy!”

“Together, we will be strong! Together, we will free everyone!”

**Frisca Rivera, age 14:** “Together, you'll get yourselves killed.”

_The camera whirls around to face the tall, long-haired girl in a lavender labcoat. She looks really, really nervous._

God I was. This felt like a pivotal moment in the timeline, the ineffable fulcrum upon which this world's destiny would swing. Here, I could convince him not to go through with it, and save Asriel's life.

**Frisca Rivera, age 14:** “…sweetie, turn off the camera. We need to talk.”

Aaaand I completely fuck up archiving it. Goddamnit.

_A blast of television snow and static hissing marks the end of the tape. Asriel sits solemnly in the glow of the ancient CRT._

**Prince Asriel:** “…and that's where things got worse.”

“We really did try though, didn't we? But even with your best crack at trying to figure out what was happening to him, he'd already passed the point of no return.”

“We had to- ...after that first attack, we had to put him in the, uh, the “Padded Pit” as you called it.”

_Ben appears deep in thought. Either that, or the Observer's explaining what happened back then._

Could be both.

**Prince Asriel:** “…hold off on that next tape. I need to make a phone call.”

I hate seeing him like this. He's hurt by what he's seeing, but knows we have to keep going through these damn things.

**Syrinx:** “The curse that the child bore... I believe I have some knowledge pertaining to the power of the “wendigo” as your kind calls it.”

**Frisk:** “…you think you could have told us earlier?”

**Syrinx:** “I wasn't sure if it was truly a case of the Axiom of the Cannibal's Penance. I had to
be sure, I- I had to see it for myself! I had no idea that my masters had assigned an AMJ to our expedition!

...I really hope she's not implying what I think she is. Because if she is... The reason for my curse...

Frisk: “...an AMJ? Is that- ...oh GOD is that what I think it is?!”

Syrinx: “Axioms of mass judgement are some of the most potent of the Elder Magicks, capable of imposing self-enforcing laws upon the population of entire regions, entire planets if it spreads far enough.”

“It is an old adage that laws are only as potent as the power that enforces them. But a law that enforces itself, that spreads from host to host like wildfire, requires only the background energies of the universe to sustain itself and carry out its instructions. Such are the inner workings of an axiom of mass judgement.”

Frisk: “It sounds... it sounds horrible. What if the axiom turns out to be wrong? What if there’s a flaw, or if it steps outside its intended boundaries? What then?!”

Syrinx: “Then a patch is formulated to tweak the axiom accordingly, fixing the bugs in the earlier release, then disseminated throughout the population. Never have They ever needed to purge an axiom from a planet's psychosphere, or at least, I have never been privy to a planet-wide Axiom Purge.”

Huh, I think I remember that game. Hell of a sequel if you ask me.

Not the time for it, Frisk. This is some serious shit.

Frisk: “…so you're saying that when your “expedition” arrived on Earth, they brought a self-replicating magical PLAGUE to our planet?!”

Syrinx: “PLAGUE? Oh, child, just because something may spread in such a manner, it does not automatically mean that it is harmful!”

“Many AMJs aim to reinforce positive behaviours! They can engender harmony between different species, reward prayer as a regular activity, even grant the strength of the gods to the truly devout!”

“...but then there were the... well, if the ones I just described could be regarded as “bananas”, then axioms like the Cannibal's Penance are more akin to “spankings”. They discourage such activities and punish offenders accordingly.”

“In the case of the Cannibal's Penance, it was designed to discourage the problem of cannibalism by causing it to trigger grave consequences for committing such a sin. In earlier versions, it would mutate the sinner into a ravenous beast, driven by its eternal hunger to torment the community that enabled such vile heresies. And alas, it seems that whoever organized our expedition must have included an earlier version of that axiom.”

...FUCKING WHAT.
Charlie: “Because of my curse, I got my little brother killed. My adoptive parents broke up because of our deaths. Six innocent people DIED because of a promise Asgore had to keep.”

“We both suffered for centuries in HELL, and I'm still suffering the side-effects of letting it progress as far as I did! And now, a troubled little boy has been turned into a FUCKING ABOMINATION FROM BEYOND THE STARS, AND YOU'RE TELLING ME IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF SOME FUCKING BULLSHIT SOFTWARE?!”

Charlie... I-

WHAT? The FUCK DO YOU HAVE TO SAY TO ME?!

You- you're scaring Syrinx, Charlie. And it- I don't think it's her fault that it was on her ship...

Syrinx: “…it- it was old software, discontinued... Why would they put it there?”

“It wasn't- ...it wasn't my fault... I didn’t- I didn’t know...”

See? She's upset about it too. Call me optimistic, but I don't think that getting you cursed was part of her plan.

...it's not fair... IT'S JUST NOT FAIR!

Syrinx: “…I- I have to ask, child. What brought the Cannibal's Penance upon you? Was eating human flesh your only hope of survival? Was the winter that terrible?”

Charlie: “…it wasn’t my fault... She did this to me.”

Syrinx: “Who, child? Who subjected you to the wendigo's curse?”

Charlie: “My mother... My fucking IDIOT PSYCHO MOTHER!”

Hang on, I gotta interject.

Frisk: “He means his human mother. Just to clear things up…”

Charlie: “…I don't know who she killed, but when she called us to dinner that night, she'd made us meat stew. Dad wasn’t home, and Mary-Ann was too sick to eat, so it was just me and Mom, and a bowl of what I thought was rabbit stew.”

Uh, Ben looks a little worried there. ...WAIT WHAT-

Charlie: “Eventually, I put two and two together. I ran away from that crazed witch, and in time I ended up down here. Though the funny thing is that the... the symptoms of the curse didn't start to manifest until after I'd turned 10. I still don't know why it took so long to start claiming me, but…”

I'm sorry, but did you just mention Mary-Ann?

Syrinx: “It sounds like one of the initial patches. And from what I saw, it was before the “Antlers of Fessenden” update, as this particular iteration seems to have shaped the child in a more canine fashion akin to the ghouls of Midian, as opposed to the cervine physiology exhibited by later iterations.”
“I forget the exact patch number, but I do recall that Cannibal's Penance did receive a “delayed judgement” exception at one point, wherein children who committed cannibal acts would not be “tried” until they started puberty, where they would transform at a far slower rate than an adult offender.”

**Charlie:** “…are you- what kind of a sick joke is THAT?! Aren't they just suffering MORE as a result?!”

**Syrinx:** “I didn't question why they had that as a feature, I'll be honest. But now my eye is open, and I cannot help but scrutinize.”

“If a guess had to be hazarded, I would suppose that the delayed judgement and slower mutation would give elders a chance to appeal to the gods, to spare the child if they were subject to extenuating circumstances. After all, a child is a child.”

**Charlie:** “…just my luck that nobody prayed for me. Though with the Barrier up, I doubt anyone woulda heard them anyways. Hell, even with the Barrier down, somehow I don't think the gods would be able to turn this world’s Charlie back into a little boy.”

**Syrinx:** “Alas, I fear it may be too late for his flesh. But perhaps…”

“If I can- Let me think... Perhaps if we had access to a codeweaver…”

“I could execute an Axiom Purge if I got close enough, but outright deletion of the axiom would probably kill him, especially as he is a soulless being. Thus, we have to rule out its use.”

I think I have an idea, but I'll need to cross-reference it with Syrinx.

**Frisk:** “What about the Nodens-Oztalun Purgative? I know it's meant to free people of possession, but does it have any side-effects that could help us?”

**Syrinx:** “You know of the Purgative?! WHA- Oh. Of course, the jester must have told you.”

**Frisk:** “…yeah! I was a little scared when I saw that seven-pointed star on his forehead, and I just HAD to know what that was about.”

**Syrinx:** “My first interaction with the Observer was not on the best of terms, I will admit. I felt I had to take drastic measures, but your friend from the Beyond proved to be impervious to them, much to my horror at the time. Though I suppose he isn't TOO terrible…”

“But as for the Purgative, I am sorry to disappoint. To the best of my knowledge, the Purgative never had any selective absolution qualities beyond driving out Primary influences. It will have no effect on the wendigo.”

Damnit. I thought I had something!

**Frisk:** “Nevermind…”

*Asriel returns from his phone call, concerned by my shouting. It's pretty clear that he's been crying.*

**Prince Asriel:** “Alright, uh, Alphys is gonna head down here with some of the supplies we need.
Though she'll need to expend a few of them to get past Charlie, so it's gonna be a while.”

She's gonna bring a crate of chocolate, isn't she? ...that explains so much about how she survived going down there in the first place.

_Huh. When you think about it, it does make a weird kinda sense. I mean, if someone threw a chocolate bar at me to keep me away from them, I'd probably unwrap that bad boy and go to TOWN on it!_

...but that raises a few questions. _If Asriel's been feeding chocolate to my wendigo parallel every day for a few years, shouldn't he be a lot bigger by now?_

My guess is that either it's because monster food is mostly magic, OR wendigos only grow when they eat meat? I dunno, but if I could get my hands on some real fruit an' veggies, I'd be game to see what would happen. I mean, no-one's tried to feed tomatoes to a wendigo before, right?

...no comment.

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Frisk: “Next tape?”

Prince Asriel: “...yeah. Next tape.”

*We hand him the next tape: “2010: Session #1”.*

...it's all black, except for the time and date in the corners.

Toriel: “Oh Gorey, it's been so long...”

_Asriel gasps as he hears his mother's voice through the speakers._

Asgore: “Truer words, dear, have never been spoken. As wonderful as our boy is, it was high time that he had his own room.”

“Now it's finished, we can finally have some... quality time of our own.”

Toriel: “We'll need to be quiet, though. The last thing we need is him hearing us.”

_In the words of the immortal Hikaru Sulu, OH MY._

...sounds like someone's at the door.

I'll go get it.

_I meant on the tape._

Oh, right.

Asgore: (“No... no no, not now...”)

_The sounds of rustling are followed by the sound of the door opening._

Asriel, aged- uh- ...very young?: *sniffling* “I had a bad dream...”
Asgore: *sigh* “Alright kiddo, tell me all about it.”

Toriel: “Oh for crying out loud...”

Those poor, poor parents...

Younger Asriel: “...Daddy? Why do you have my camera in your room?”

I said it once, and I'll say it again: **OH MY.**

Asgore: “OH, um- We were...”

Toriel: “Your father and I were having trouble sleeping, dear. We decided to make a... a sleep diary!”

Asgore: “Oh! Yes! We're trying to see if anything is disturbing our sleep, so we can, uh, sleep better!”

Asriel giggles slightly. Does he know something they don't?

...oh my god. I know what's gonna happen.

How? You weren't there-

Younger Asriel: “Silly Daddy, you left the lens cap on!”

...an awkward silence ensues. Suddenly, laughter erupts from our grown-up Asriel, and we follow suit.

Frisk: “I KNEW THAT WAS COMING! I heeEEEEEEEh...”

You wheeze as the situation comes back to you a second time. ...really, Frisk? It's not “live like a windrammer” levels of funny. Ben's looking at the two of us like we're frickin' loonies. We gotta pack it in before he uses us to buy a bag of milk.

Meanwhile, on the tape, we hear Asgore returning Asriel to his room, followed by the unscrewing of the lens cap and-

WHOA, uh, that's-

...I've already said it enough times. You get the picture.

Oookay, yeah, that's a, uh, a bustier? A purple velvet bustier? **OH MY.**

*Toriel looks into the camera with an exasperated expression, letting out a huff of annoyance. Things did not go as planned that night.*

*Prince Asriel's laughter is interrupted by an-

Prince Asriel: “Oh GOD!”

-as he covers his eyes. He does NOT want to see his mother in a bustier. ...Syrinx however reorients her tendril under her iris as she leans in closer.*
Syrinx: “...so this was the queen, I presume? ...she certainly looks quite fair, albeit, uh...”

*Syrinx tilts herself in perplexity. Ben on the other hand is being more of a dignified gentlemen, and averts his eyes from the cleavage on-screen.*

Prince Asriel: “...why are we still watching this?! Someone turn it off!”

Syrinx: “...oh! Right! But of course!”

*Syrinx pushes the stop button before ejecting the tape. ...huh.*

...Jesus Christ Frisk, pull yourself together won't you? You're giving “Dooger” a run for her money.

Iheee... I- ...I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me. ...heh.

Prince Asriel: “...well. I think it's best if we avoid the 2010 “Session” tapes. ...how the hell did they end up down there, anyway?”

Frisk: “Hell if I know. ...still, it was kinda funny, wasn't it? You guys and that damn lens cap...”

Asriel loosens up a little, and affords himself a slight chuckle.

Prince Asriel: “Heh, I guess. ...thinkin' about that, maybe the rest of that series is audio-only?” *soft chuckle*

Frisk: “Knowing you guys, I wouldn't rule it out...”

Oh man, I'm feeling so great right now. I don't know why it set me off like that, but I needed a good frickin' laugh.

Well, if the Observer ever talks to you again, he might help you with that. He seems like a guy who knows good British comedy.

What, just because he's British?

Because we've seen him make Mr Rule Britannia over there laugh from time to time. And if he can get a giggle out of that ol' dourpuss, he could probably leave you in hysterics.

...ok, it's ALSO because he's British.

I wonder if he knows about the Boosh?

*I have a feeling he knows about the Boosh.*

Dialogue: Benjamin & The Observer

*So anyway, the function is disrupted by these two pink men made out of bubblegum, who end up summoning Charlie to dispense his “chewy justice” upon Dixon Bainbridge and Hamilton Cork. For as abstract and crass as the show could be at times, that particular episode carried an*
important moral.

That if you plagiarize a punk zookeeper, you meet a sticky end?

*I was going to go with “if your head resembles a conker, you may want to see a doctor about that”. But the plagiarism thing is pretty valid too.*

...*anyway, looks like it's time for the next tape.*

Any idea what we are going to watch this time?

*Buggered if I know what's coming, mate. I just know this is going to be a rollercoaster of emotions if the last two were any indications. ...though this particular one looks a little... sticky? It looks like someone was eating a marmalade sandwich when they put this on the shelf. What, was Paddington Bear on the science team or something?*

*sniff* UGH. Whatever this is, it's not marmalade. It smells like... OH.

**Ben:** “Um, I think someone must have injured themselves on this tape or something. It smells like old blood.”

*Asriel looks rather unsettled by this turn of events. After all, human blood is a strictly controlled substance in the Underground. Though I have a feeling that someone may have broken a phial during the containment breach, even though that raises more questions than it answers.*

**Frisk looks over the tape before putting it in.**

**Frisk:** “...huh. I think this is, uh, Alphys' video diary?”

“...well shit. I had no idea her last name was Naomi. I never knew Naomi could even BE a surname, but that shows what I know...”

...*you thump the desk with a sudden burst of realization.*

**Ben:** “I JUST got it.”

**Frisk:** “Got what? What's the scoop, Ben?”

**Ben:** “I was wondering what their names reminded me of! The elementals! The rarest of the fae documented by Parcelsus!”

“Undyne is reminiscent of the ondines, so much so that I don't know why I didn't make the connection earlier. And as for her surname, it's practically a derivative of the fire-breathing salamanders!”

**Asriel nods as you piece it together. He knows something you don't, though with how long he's been around, that kind of goes without saying.**

**Ben:** “Moving on to Alphys, if you remove the A and rearrange the rest of the letters, you get the sylph, the elemental of air! And as for “Naomi”, well, who else but the hardy gnome to be evoked by such a name?”
“HOW did I not figure this out earlier?! It was right there in front of me, I just brushed it off as coincidence!”

*Asriel chuckles as he walks over to you.*

**Prince Asriel:** “I don't think it was coincidence, young man. See, those kinds of names honor the memory of our universe's elementals, legendary clans of monsters who were practically wiped out during the War for the Old World.”

“The ondines, salamanders, sylphids, gnomes; few of them managed to escape the hunts, let alone survive the voyage to the New World. The best our people could do was remember those lost and left behind, naming their children after the glorious dead, as we travelled west with the promise of new beginnings...”

“...though I guess the elementals of your world are different to ours, if what you've told me is accurate?”

**Ben:** “Indeed, they are. Of all the living machines to live alongside my kind, the elementals were the most elusive, and the most powerful, to walk the Earth. To cross one would be to slit your own throat, but if you were to gain the allegiance of one, you would indeed have a powerful ally.”

“As a matter of fact, it was an ondine of the Lakes, Vivienne herself, who constructed the first Excalibur-pattern sword for Lord Uther Pendragon, locking it to his genetic code so that only those who shared his bloodline could unlock the sword's full potential. For well over a millennium, Vivienne has been an invaluable asset to our noble house, honouring the memory of the once and future king.“

**Frisk:** “...huh. So instead of monsters, your world had robots?”

*You bristle at the use of the term. You know what she means to say, but you remember the origin of the term. It's not a happy origin.*

**Ben:** “...I prefer not to use that term. It reeks of indentured servitude, and a disrespect for the mechanical side of nature.”

**Frisk:** “Oh. ...I guess I shouldn't be surprised, at this point. I mean, it figures someone would try to exploit them, wouldn't they?”

**Ben:** “It does, and over the millennia, many have. Even certain druids took to abusing their bond with the fae, to further their own agendas.”

“...let's just watch the tape, shall we? I've way-laid you long enough.”

*Asriel nods as he pushes the tape in. He was interested in what you had to say, but he was still jonesing to see what's on the tape.*

**Prince Asriel:** “I've got a feeling that this'll tell us about what the previous head researcher was planning. We never really figured out what Doctor... what Doctor Gaster was working on down there.”

*He presses the play button, and the grainy image of a certain shy lizard emerges as the static clears.*
Intern Alphys: “...this is Alphys Naomi, clearance level Beta, Entry #1.”

“This... this is gonna be my big break. Doctor G has assigned me to the recently revived “Lordvessel” project, to help develop a mobile vessel for souls.”

“My, uh, my recent prototype for an improved Endoskel has been pretty well received so far, even though it's more of an elaborate dummy than anything else. Still, it's earned me an office of my own, and given JJ the body he's been after for so long...”

*She’s referring to Mettaton. She and “JJ” were good friends back in the day, although they've had their “differences of opinion” in the past. Still, after what JJ's currently going through, he'll probably need somebody to lean on by the end of this, so...*

*The entry ends abruptly, leading immediately into Entry #2.*

Intern Alphys: “This is Alphys Naomi, Entry #2.”

“Our initial theories posit that organic matter may be a crucial aspect of an optimal soulvessel... Unfortunately, we have very few options when it comes to living subjects. The only living human in the Underground is unwilling to work with us on this project, and won't even donate fresh blood.”

“So in regards to living organisms, we will have to make use of what we have currently... Bio-matter derived from plants.”

*Which in their case is mostly red mountain roses. Surprisingly resilient things, considering they're sodding roses.*

Oh, I understand that. The gardeners at Tintagel always struggled to maintain a good pH balance in the rose beds...

*It’s almost as if someone realised that roses are whiny little bitches in comparison to dandelions, and decided to make a few tweaks to their ability to survive in the mountains. Funny how things turn out.*

Intern Alphys: “Alphys Naomi, Entry #3.”

“Today we had a little roundtable about the fragility of monster souls. Even if we can develop the perfect soulvessel, we’d have a lot of trouble transplanting a monster soul into it, not to mention extracting it from a living test subject.”

“Even if we could modify the DT Extractor to SOMEHOW extract a monster's soul, doing so would not only require a ton of power from the main reactor, but also destroy the subject's body in the process. And who's to say that the soul won't just evaporate before we can put it in a soul jar?”

“...what we need is a way to make a monster's soul last. At the very least, it'd need to last as long as a boss monster's would, enough time to properly extract and contain it...”

Why do you think it is that monster souls are so fragile? It seems so strange that such a fragile and vulnerable form of life was even able to survive in a world like this.
I've been thinking about it too. It got me thinking “what if ideas could think for themselves? What if dreams no longer needed a sleeping mind in order to exist? What if, one day, our shadows stood up and walked away from us?”

What are you trying to say?

I am trying to say that perhaps, in ages past, monsters were merely products of mortal imagination, idle daydreams of certain imaginative and sympathetic tribes of people. Perhaps, one day, this mystical tribe figured out how to make these ideas manifest themselves in a physical fashion, and sustain themselves through their own subconscious will to exist.

And yet, as these ethereal beings did not possess the physicality of the mystics who imagined them, their bodies may have been quite fragile, easily disrupted by outside forces. Perhaps, rather than balk in terror at what they had created, the mystics felt sorry for their creations, and imbued them with the passion and sympathy that the tribe stood for. Perhaps these strong emotions, manifesting as attacks and defences, are what enabled them to survive in ancient times, when man was not as strong and intelligent as it is today?

It's an interesting theory, that I won't deny, but for a subject such as the origin of an entire form of life, I would need more evidence before I put my faith in its legitimacy.

...fair enough. It's just a theory, anyway. Though in regards to evidence, the wide, wild and weird variety of monsters probably lends credence to the notion of them starting out as figments of someone's imagination.

After all, a walking child-sized volcano probably wouldn't evolve naturally on Earth. Neither would a sentient airplane that embraces an oddly specific path of character development, or a living washtub that hates dirt and is friends with a little bird. If anything, that would imply a great deal of imagination and creativity being involved in the development process. Almost like some sort of "intelligent design", though without the implications of a higher power.

I get your point. It does lend credence to the theory, even if I am still a little unsure about the rest of it.

Centuries ago, so were we all. But nowadays, most of us know how we came to be. My kind evolved from great apes in Africa, your kind originated as an “intelligent redesign” of humanity in Bronze Age Ireland, and... well, maybe the first boss monsters were derived from the anthropomorphization of some sort of lop-eared goat?

Perhaps. ...it does make sense, now I think about it.

Intern Alphys: “Alphys here, Entry #4.”

“While the plant research has been coming along nicely, we haven't ruled out the notion of using what little human bio-matter we have left. Dr Eitr has put forward the theory of using the West-R serum to revivify a sample of human bone marrow, though the others weren't exactly on board with it.”

“When I voiced my opinion about using the serum, G________ merely said that “the last team stopped using it for a good reason”. I'm... I'm not sure I agree with his reluctance to use it. After all,
the last time someone mixed it up, they used spoiled plasma as the base. But if we got our hands on fresh plasma…”

“I might be able to do a little snooping around. Maybe I can bargain with the Captain…”

**Blimey. She was willing to gamble a lot for this particular line of research.**

West... Where do I remember that name from?

**That was Jeff's surname, wasn't it? Doctor Jeffrey West, from the Miskatonic University? You met him many times while on your tea breaks. Working at Miskatonic U certainly is thirsty work, after all.**

Ah yes, I remember Jeffrey! Rather interesting chap. Though I remember that he was always a little concerned about his son-

**Herbert. Yes. Something tells me that young Herbert's going to leave, uh, quite the legacy behind him, especially when he gets his hands on some of Gla'aki's ichor. History will look back on his works in the field of nanomedicine, and know him as the infamous Reanimator.**

...if that is the case, I may need to speak with the lad when I return to my world. ...whenever that may be.

**You won't need to worry about coming back too late, mate. Spend as much time as you wish in this space-time. For your friends back home, it'll be as if you never left...**

**Intern Alphys:** “Alphys here, Entry #5!”

“...we did it! I don't know how I pulled it off, but Captain Ren has agreed to resume his blood donations!”

“Eitr's mixed up a small batch of serum using the fresh plasma, and while we haven't started the experiment yet, things are looking up!”

“There's just one problem, though. Now, we've started running low on donated dust. The number of people carrying dust donor cards are at an all time low.”

“...Gla'aki's gonna try talking to the Prince tonight. He might be able to help with our current dust shortage.”

**Something tells me that, instead of opt-in, the system became opt-out instead.**

I assume this is analogous to donating blood?

**Kind of. Although from what I've seen, a dust donor merely agrees to donate their dust when they have passed away, so it's more akin to being an organ donor.**

Ah... Wait, so if it becomes opt-out, does that mean-

**Intern Alphys:** “Alphys here, entry #6.”
“Asriel has decided to pull some strings on his end, and put out a request for folks to send in any monster who has “fallen down”. And surprisingly, the infirmary is already close to capacity with their bodies.”

“The families of the fallen have already been approached with the promise of payment for the acquisition of the fallen’s dust. Officially, there's not much we can do for them except wait for them to pass away.”

*sigh* “I don't know how many are gonna go for it, though. A lot of families are probably gonna wanna be there for their loved ones’ last moments, and probably want to keep their dust for their funerals.”

“On the one hand, I can’t blame them for wanting this. But on the other hand... we really do need more dust.”

*She takes a deep breath before continuing. I feel like this is where things take a turn, if you know what I mean.*

“...but I can’t help but wonder. Souls mirror the power of the body that houses them, and monsters have been shown to exhibit enhanced power levels when exposed to diluted DT.”

“...if I were to inject the fallen with more concentrated doses of DT, would the effects on the body have a fortifying effect on the soul? If they died while exposed to a safe level of determination... would their souls last long enough to be contained?”

“...I think we might be onto something big here. Something bigger than just making an ideal soulvessel. If we can enhance these souls with human determination, could we in turn produce additional Sources? Is it possible that, one day, we might have enough collective soul power to breach the Barrier without relying on human souls?”

“I'll need to return to this line of research at a later date. G... says we need to talk. ...I hope it's nothing bad.”

*How strange that the name Gaster keeps on getting bleeped out of these. What the hell is even going on?*

It is awfully suspicious, don’t you think? What could cause the previous head researcher to be censored like this?

*Whatever it is that tried to erase him from existence, I'll wager. I don't pretend to understand how that works, but I do know that people are having trouble remembering him and the rest of the old science team.*

*It wasn't just a ravening wendigo that took them out of the equation, you see. The fact that there was a CORE breach around the same time is bound to have something to do with their “obfuscation” from history. But I cannot help but wonder whether this was a natural side-effect, or if it was exploited by something, or someone, with "plans".*

*Intern Alphys*: “…this is Doctor Alphys Naomi speaking, in Entry #7 of my log.”

“For a moment, I thought I was off the team. G... was NOT happy about me going behind his back to “consort” with the rogue Captain, or my work with Eitr on the West-R serum. But I did what
I had to do and, well, things are better because of it! We have a source of fresh blood again, and we've proven that the serum can work better as a result!”

“But when he looked at what we did, he didn't see the good we'd done. He'd focused on the fact that I'd gone out of my way to ignore his counsel, that I wasn't “going with the grain” that he prized so much, which was enough reason to get the Prince involved.”

“...and it turns out that the Prince is ok with what I'd done! He'd never admit it publicly, but I think he misses the Captain, so I guess my actions gave him hope that he'll “come around”, whatever he meant by that. G【P】 still didn't agree with the promotion I got from the Prince, but the decision was out of his hands.”

“So in conclusion, I'm now at clearance level Alpha. After all this time, I'm officially a key player on the Deep Lab Science Team! ...if only I could tell Undyne about it. She'd be so proud...”

**Asriel cannot help but smile at this entry.**

**Prince Asriel:** “I always knew there was something special about her.”

**His head turns towards Frisk as he pauses the tape.**

“...when you first showed me that group picture of yours, of all of us on the Surface, I didn't understand. There was you, me, Mom and Dad, but I had no idea who those other four monsters were. Hell, it wasn't until about five years ago when I realized what you meant about them “being special”.”

“In the world of superscience that we've authored, in spite of all the changes our actions have made relative to your old world, they still existed. Sans, Papyrus, Undyne, Alphys, all of them grew up to become some of the brightest men and women I've had the pleasure of calling my friends.”

**He wipes a few sentimental tears out of his eyes after removing his glasses. Of all the times I've seen Asriels cry, this currently holds the top-spot as the #1 Best Way That Asriel Cries.**

It sounds like an awfully short list if you ask me.

**AU CONTRAIRE MATEY. It's actually a moderately sizeable list. After all, our bonny prince is quite the crybaby, even in the happiest of his iterations.**

I am not sure how I feel knowing that you have such a long list on the subject.

**Hey, we all have our hobbies.**

Anyway, **Asriel resumes the tape, kicking us into Entry #8.**

**Doctor Alphys (on tape ofc):** “Doctor Alphys here, Entry #8.”

“Doctor Handla's made some progress with the botanical side of Project Lordvessel. We haven't told Asriel about this, but... Well, I wanted it to be a surprise for him.”

“We've gotten our hands on a very special mountain rose from the throne room gardens, the largest I've ever seen. It reminds us of this really old rumor about an immortal mountain rose, the one that King Asgore himself brought back from the village of the humans.”
“Buuuut I'm sure that's just a rumor. I mean, a 200 year old rose? There's no way any organic lifeform, let alone a rose, could last that long without some kind of life support system. And even then, Ren's more or less the only example of that happening.“

“...anyway, there's a good reason why we're using a rose. While monsters can easily absorb human souls, they can't absorb monster souls. And even if we created a vessel using human bio-matter, it wouldn't be able to absorb human souls.”

“So what if the vessel we create is neither of those? If we create a vessel using a plant, or in this case a flower, will they be able to absorb both kinds of souls? We're pretty excited to see what comes out of this.”

“...but one thing in particular has kept me up at night. The soul is the culmination of our being, the seat of consciousness within the body. Humans have them, monsters have them, but plants? It's probably due to their lack of a central nervous system, but plants just don't seem to have souls.”

“And yet determination is a manifestation of the will to keep living, the resolve to change fate. In many ways it is the echo of life itself, capable of giving human souls the power to persist long after their bodies have turned to rot...”

“...I won't lie. While I'm really excited to see what comes of this, I- ...I'm a little scared of what might happen. What's gonna happen when we inject the raw essence of life itself into something that has no concept of life itself? What happens when something without a soul gains the will to live?”

**Thorney:** “...I'll give you three guesses as to what happened.”

*In a flurry of motion and surprise, everyone turns around to face the large red rose, the result of the aforementioned experiment, sticking out of the tiles of the room's floor.*

**Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie**

**Prince Asriel:** “Dad! Thank god you're ok, I thought you'd-”

**Thorney:** “I've survived worse. And please, don't call me “Dad”. I'm not your father, and I never was to begin with.”

“...it is hard for me to admit it, even now, but it cannot be denied. Even though I carry his essence and his memories, Asgore Dreemurr is dead. And that savage, deranged little traitor was the one who got him killed.”

...

**Prince Asriel:** “...maybe you're right. Maybe my brother was a traitor. Maybe he nearly got me killed, maybe he's the reason I no longer have a father...”

“...but in spite of everything, he's still family. YOU'RE still family. And while we've all done our share of bad things in the past, I'm convinced that we're still good people at heart.”

“**And that’s the only reason I haven’t ripped you out of the ground.** Even after everything you've done to hurt us, there's still a good man inside you. You might not be the King of all
Monsters, but deep down in my soul, I know that there’s still a flicker of Asgore Dreemurr in there. And maybe, just maybe, that’s enough.”

Asriel...

**Thorney:** “I wish I shared your optimism, boy. But your naivete is... if I was capable of having “diabeetus”, your honeyed words and optimism would have inflicted it upon me in a heartbeat.”

“In my rage, I turned on everyone I loved! Even you, my boy! And STILL you believe that I’m a good person?!”

**Prince Asriel:** “Were you even listening to me?! I never said that you are a good man, Thorney!”

“What I actually said, if you’d bothered to digest everything I told you, was that you can still be a good man. You just have to put the effort in. Anyone can be a good person if they just try.”

“But you know what really helps someone become a good person, even after a history of being the “bad guy”? *Remorse. Regret. Feeling like shit after doing a really shitty thing.* And believe me, I think I’ve felt pretty lousy for the mistakes I’ve made in life. If you're lucky, you might feel the same one day...”

**Frisk:** “He's not alone in that. ...there is something you should know, Thorney, unless you've figured it out already.”

“In the original timeline, before I came to this world, Asriel went through with Charlie's original plan. He helped Charlie die, and absorbed his soul. HE went through the Barrier to the village of the humans, and HE got killed as a result. And HIS dust had been absorbed by the golden flower he brought back with him, resulting in Alphys unintentionally reviving HIM centuries later as a soulless emulation of the boy he once was.”

“...you always wondered why I climbed the mountain. Well, in your timeline, it was for him, for your son.”

**Thorney:** “He isn't MY son. Please, don't gloss over that.”

**Frisk:** “Whatever. My point is-”

**Doctor Alphys (on tape):** “Entry #8. Things aren't going so well with the “fallen”-”

*You pause the tape before continuing. That coulda been awkward.*

**Frisk:** “...my point is that, if spite of all the bad shit Flowey did, when he actually had a heart, he felt bad about what he did. He felt love for all the people he’d screwed over, and it HURT him. That pain, that misery caused when he had something positive to contrast against the negative, is what helped him become a better person in the future.”

“And so, when I arrived in the Underground of your time, or King Asgore’s time if you're gonna get all whiny about semantics, I had plans to stop Charlie from getting Asriel killed. Because in the timeline I came from, his life had become a succession of nightmares and misfortunes, leading up to one that not even I could get him out of at the time. So this time around, I became your Royal Scientist, and played the role of big sister to the young Princes, watching and waiting for the moment when Charlie would approach Asriel with that sick little plan of his.”
Thorney: “...and you succeeded in stopping them. For all of the good it did me.”

Frisk: “I wasn't finished. Things weren't that simple.”

“We all know how bad things got for Charlie. He became less human with every passing day, growing more savage and bloodthirsty until he was bordering on becoming little more than a rabid beast. I—”

You recall Asriel's screams as the burgeoning Charliego pursued him through New Home, the snivelling, the pleading and the whimpering that ensued once he was backed into a corner.

“In the moment, there was nothing else I could do. If I did nothing, I would have lost him again. So while that... while that THING prowled ever closer to Asriel, toying with its prey, I fired that bolt into the back of its head.”

The twang of an improvised crossbow string, the whistle of its payload through empty air, and the resounding thunk of a cold steel broadhead into the skull of the feral Charles Carver. Asriel's whimpering ceased, only to be replaced by wails of despair and anger, cries cursing you while lamenting his dead brother. You try to draw him away, but too late. He has Charlie's soul. The seething, contemptuous form tosses you aside like a rag doll as it storms out of your workshop and towards the Barrier. …and yet, things still don't add up.

Frisk: *sniff* “Even when I'd saved him from Charlie, I couldn't save him from himself... He died the same damn way he did in my own timeline. And the only silver lining was that I was able to shove their soul in a jar before it expired...”

You feel Asriel's gentle hand on your shoulder. ...it doesn't feel so unwelcome anymore.

Frisk: “That... that was... I forget whether that was two years ago, or three. But in that time, I tried my best to figure out how to separate them. Even if I could make a vessel for them like Alphys did, they'd still be stuck together, and I couldn't risk them going back out there for round two.”

Prince Asriel: “...forgive me if I'm wrong, but I thought- No, that's- You were trying to build a vessel for Dad. You were trying to separate Charlie's soul from Dad's soul. That's what you kept telling me!”

Frisk: “And that's... that's where things started getting' weird. Like, Frank Reynolds levels of weird.”

“I'd come to the conclusion that I needed to go back to that day, to dispose of Charlie before you got your hands on his soul. That's the REAL reason I forged the Reaver. A weapon to use not against the Barrier, but against the very fabric of time itself!”

“In a way, it wasn't all that dissimilar from the Silver Key I used in order to get here in the first place. Using the power of the entwined souls, and the energies of the Generator, we managed to gradually tease open a link to the past.”

“...that was my first big mistake. I wasn't content with just making another timeline where Asriel survived, I didn't want to write an alternate history, I wanted to REWRITE IT so that he never got himself killed.”
Asriel's eyes widen as you explain your grand plan to rewrite history. He's read enough sci-fi to know that that rarely ends well for anyone.

**Frisk:** “And you know what? From the readings we got, it looked like we'd succeeded. Even when I passed through that rift into the past, Kuro said that she was still getting stable readings, that the rift was still leading to the same reality I'd just come from.”

“I made my way down to the containment cells, knowing what was about to break free.”

**Asriel's screams echoed throughout the sub-basement as the burgeoning Charliego pursued its prey. Only this time...**

**Frisk:** “Asriel! Get behind me!”

**Frisk:** “I called for you to get behind me, as the wendigo bounded down the hallway.”

**Frisk:** “Sweetie, close your eyes! Don't look, no matter what happens!”

**Frisk:** “I told you not to look as I raised the Reaver, ready to lunge.”

...with dawning horror, Asriel realizes what REALLY happened that day.

**Prince Asriel:** “...you!”

He remembers the Reaver blade piercing the heart of his deranged best friend. He remembers kicking and wailing as you dragged him away. He remembers the terror in the eyes of his parents and Past Frisk as they rushed down the stairs, despite your desperate pleas for them to stay away. Oh, he remembers it all too well.

...but I bet there's one thing in particular he remembers from that day. As Charlie flailed their last at the end of the blade, there came a growing sense of vertigo and an unfamiliar displacement, a peculiar circumstance where Charlie's soul was both outside and INSIDE the blade. Unknown to Asriel, this moment of ontological confusion was when his fate had begun to change. It was the moment when EVERYTHING CHANGED.

This... this was the edge of the coin. A minute flicker of improbability great enough to derail the unstoppable train of destiny's inertia, the 22 Black upon which I had gambled everything. And lord... I know... I've won.

...but at what cost?

**Prince Asriel:** “...I thought she'd come back, after all these years. But YOU...”

Oh... Oh no, please, not like this... NOT LIKE THIS!

**Frisk:** “Sweetie, it's me. It's always been me! I'm-”

**Prince Asriel:** “GET AWAY FROM ME!”

*With a shove, he sends you flying into a box of tapes. He is NOT taking this well.*

Asriel, please! Don't-
Prince Asriel: “The Frisk I knew went back to save my father from his untimely demise, to keep him from being possessed by Charlie's soul. But you... you killed my best friend! YOU MURDERED HIM!”

“...all of my insecurities, all those days and nights lost mourning him and Dad... If it wasn't for you, THEY’D STILL BE ALIVE!”

...you little shit. You ungrateful LITTLE SHIT!

**FRISK, DON'T DO IT!**

Frisk: “IF IT WASN’T FOR ME YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN SCREAMING IN HELL, YOU ROTTEN LITTLE BRAT! THEY'D HAVE BEEN TEARING YOU APART, DROWNING YOU IN PITCH, BURNING YOU ALIVE IF I HADN’T SAVED YOU FROM THAT ABOMINATION! NEVER FORGET THAT, YOU UNGRATEFUL FUCK!”

“You- you don't think I hadn't considered the alternatives? You think I didn't realize that anything short of putting Charlie down and dragging you away would've resulted in your DEATH, one way or another?! THIS WAS THE ONLY THING I COULD DO TO SAVE YOUR LIFE, ASRIEL!”

“...and do you think that I don't regret the repercussions my actions had? I miss them too, Asriel. But if I had to choose again, which one to save and which one to let die... After all the hard work and effort I've put into saving you, you can bet your ass that I'd still choose you. EVERY. SINGLE. TIME.”

As you pin him against the wall, Asriel's eyes never leave yours. But the anger in them has been replaced with something else. **Fear.**

**Prince Asriel:** “...but why? Why do it for me? All of this, just for ME!? WHY, FRISK?”

**Frisk:** “BECAUSE I- I- beca- I lo-“

Asriel suspects that he knows what you're trying to say. ...he's hoping to the gods that he's wrong.

A firm, white-knuckled hand grips your arm, a little too tight for comfort. He knew that you'd done some questionable stuff in the past, but this...

**Ben:** “Frisca Rivera. You let go of him THIS INSTANT.”

...I let go of his shoulders, and try to compose my thoughts. This... This has been such a long time coming. I've never been more afraid to say it, but I have to if I'm going to move on from here.

Tears in my eyes and red in my cheeks, I make my confession.

**Frisk:** *heavy breathing* “...it's because... Because I love you, Asriel.”

The horror comes down upon him like a ton of bricks. With wide eyes and cold sweat, Asriel Dreemurr looks upon you, afraid of what you might do in his name. The violent deaths of his family, the upheaval of the life he knew and loved, the long years of loneliness and pressure to perform... All
of it, because you loved him.

But... but I saved him... Why can't he see that-

His trembling hands rest upon your shoulder. For a moment, as faint embers of anger flicker behind his eyes, they rise up to your neck-

NO! NO NO NO ANYTHING BUT THAT!

As you scurry back with a frightened yelp, recoiling from the memory of that wretched night, he looks at his hands. This isn't him, this isn't him, he's telling himself on the inside. Looking up from his hands, his uncertain eyes lock with yours.

...for the longest time, we stare back and forth, each afraid of one-another. And yet... This isn't what he wants. This isn't what any of us want. It can't... it can't end like this...

...I make the first step forward.

Asriel does not flinch. I wonder if he's coming to realize just how lucky he is?

I take my second step. Please, don't let this be the end...

He closes his eyes and bites his fist. We're getting warmer.

After the third step, I just keep walking. Step by step, until I'm right in front of him. My voice shaky and breaking, like the rest of me, I continue.

Frisk: “...I- I've worked so hard, Asriel. I've worked SO DAMN HARD, trying to make things better! Trying to make your life better! But this... what just happened here, you cr- crapping on everything I've worked for...”

“Sweetie... you're- You're breaking my heart...”

At this, neither of us can take anymore. We fall to the ground, tears flowing freely, wrapped in one-another's arms. We've said some awful things, and done even worse, but at the end of the day.... In spite of everything, we still need one-another, now more than ever.

...and then, he says the words you've been dreading to hear. Words that, when spoken by Asriel, sting greater than the kiss of hot lead.

Prince Asriel: “I don't know if I can do this anymore, Frisk...”

Chapter End Notes

...and on that note, I'm happy to say that I'm not going to take November off this year. While there are other worlds I could explore, I feel like I need to bring this tale to its conclusion. And while it won't be finished before the year is out, I'm hoping to get another 3 or 4 entries into this account before year's end, and hopefully close the book
on these poor, broken people before the anniversary in April.

And once the book is closed, perhaps then I can do more than just write about these things. Perhaps... perhaps once DoctorTale has concluded, I can render a new tale in a more... interactive fashion. Something tells me that the Cardinal would be game to see me make progress with the career I abandoned so long ago...

Oh, and before I forget, have yourselves a Happy Halloween. I gotta get ready for work.
Asteriana looks out across the fuming ruins of Malmouth, still coming to terms with what she’d seen down in the Fleshworks. For a place so terribly large, she wondered how there were enough bodies with which to grow it. This, she wondered, until she discovered the true source of the growth. It took her every ounce of strength not to lose her composure as she realized exactly what she was looking at, and every joule of arcane power within her to destroy the Fleshweaver guarding that rotten den of living horror.

Even after pulverizing the Fleshweaver into a pile of viscera indistinguishable from the floor itself, she felt unquenchably enraged at the nightmare surrounding her. The groans of agony, and the writhing horror that echoed around her, were all the reasons she needed to burn that place to ashes. She hadn’t even made it to the beating heart of the dungeon yet, and already she felt sickened to the very depths of her soul. She would make Theodin Marcell, the Shaper of Flesh, pay for every ounce of pain and suffering that he had orchestrated against those dragged down into this place.

And indeed, she did. Three times she had to put the Aetherial monstrosity down, as it shifted into ever more abominable forms, until at long last its final form lay broken and beaten on the writhing floor of the Fleshworks. And with it, the Aetherial imitating Theodin Marcell having been cast back into the Aether, the fight for Malmouth had reached its climax. In time, the Resistance would purge the remaining Aetherials from the city, and one day rebuild Malmouth as a haven for the scattered remnants of humanity.

Burrwitch. The Necropolis. Port Valbury. And now Malmouth itself. At every turn, Asteriana had led the charge into battle, tearing a swathe through Aetherial and Chthonian forces alike, blazing a trail for humanity’s continued survival. As a nearby gust of wind drew the acrid scent of aetherfire by her nose, she wondered about how the survivors would remember her deeds, the battles she had won in the name of humanity. Would they invoke her name in battle, as they did Oleron? Was it possible...
that, one day, her deeds would make her an Ascendant?

All I know is that I've quite enjoyed the expansion so far. But I wouldn't tell Charlie to return to Cairn just yet. As capable as he was during his time controlling the Taken, the horrors of Malmouth would probably leave him in tears. Defeating the Voice of Ch'thon itself is one thing. Facing a phantom of “Alpha” was another. But what I saw down there in the Fleshworks... It reminded me of what Lythalia saw within the Roots of Mushaniqa Marduk, and the horror she felt when she learned about the origins of the dryads. No-one needs to have an experience like that.

Anyway, I suppose that's enough Grim Dawn for a while. Back to the Underground, where I hope Frisk and Asriel have reconciled. After all, while she's technically a different Frisk from the one that this universe's Asriel grew up with, there's not that much difference between the two. Our Frisk is just as Frisky as that Frisk. Though I might have to draw up a diagram later to explain what the hell is even going on right now, as it's confusing even me.

Location: Hotland Lab, Ground Floor

Dialogue: Alphys & The Observer

As the elevator doors open, a large trolley stacked with crates rolls out into the lab, followed by the shy and elusive Alphys Naomi. (pogona weeaboo)

*sigh* Hai...

Ben nods and waves, a lack of energy in his eyes. He's a little drained after the day's events.

...you seem awfully calm for a girl who just had a narrow brush with death by wendigo.

I haven't had to be scared of that thing since I figured out he gets distracted by chocolate. Ever since then, he's never tried to eat me.

...I'll admit, I used to be scared of him. Like, REALLY scared. I had access to a shortcut that let me get to New Home in a matter of minutes, but with that thing down there, that THING that killed the rest of the Deep Lab Team, I rarely took that gamble. ...but when I figured out that I could pay the troll toll with a candy bar, I didn't get scared of him anymore. ...but sometimes, I still get angry.

Because of what happened to your friends, your co-workers. Because of the Charliego (and yes, we still need a better name for him) you're flying solo, struggling to stay afloat. And all of that comes BEFORE the crushing weight of, well, you know what I'm talking about.

...but deep down at the core, there's still a confused and tired young man inside that flesh-eating horror. Crippled and deranged by a hunger that eats away at him constantly, even when he feasts. Even though this is an extreme example, the old adage still rings true: you're not you when you're hungry.

...he still shoulda known better. Monsters aren't meat! We-we're just energy, empty calories! And
besides, you can't EAT a monster 'cause we just crumble into dust!

You really expect the deranged reincarnation of a 10 year old boy to know that? He barely knows himself anymore, let alone knowing any better.

This isn't someone being a bad person because they're not even trying, Alphys. This is bona-fide insanity, a mental sickness cultivated by a curse that didn't stop to think whether that boy was being tricked or not. Even the nicest and kindest monster in creation would eventually go insane from the hanger he experiences, when that drive to consume and survive has taken centre stage.

While this creature, this “Charliego”, survived for centuries without a single scrap of meat, he's too distracted to ignore the hanger that screams at him to find meat, anything to fill his belly for a moment before the incessant prodding starts again. And if you'd been trapped in the same space for nearly 180 years, with only the briefest of respite from the urge to hunt, I have a feeling that you'd do ANYTHING to silence it, even if just for a moment. Which, funnily enough, you've been helping him with, if only to save your own scales.

...I guess you're right. I still don't get why the chocolate works, but-

Yeah I'm calling bullshit on that. I'm pretty sure Asriel told you that his brother loved chocolate. Also, while it's still empty calories, it's still SOMETHING in the stomach, something that tricks the belly for a few seconds before it realises that it needs something REAL.

In a way it's kind of like drinking a sizeable amount of water, or the consumption of clay in South Africa. It doesn't really do much nutrition-wise, but your body still thinks that its gotten something. Especially the water, which as you well know makes up most of an organic lifeform's body mass.

Alright alright you've, uh, made your point.

...sorry.

Don't mention it, pumpkin.

...please, don't call me pumpkin.

Why not? 'tis the season! ...or it WOULD be if the clock didn't just roll past midnight into the 1st of November.

Wait what?! It's Halloween where you are?

Well, it WAS. But now it's just another night.

Well I'll be. ...you do anything cool this evening?

Not really. I'll be honest, I wasn't planning to do much of anything this night. I had some mead, watched some holiday-appropriate videos, delivered an important gift to someone, aaaand that's about it. I'm not exactly an outgoing person, even though I do love the spooky season.
...same here, actually. Up until Frisk arrived, I've rarely ever left the Lab. Hell, I- I haven't even been to the Garbage Dump in- I can't even think how long it's been!

I know how that feels, all too well. The furthest I've travelled recently is to a dentist in Streatham Common, and even then it was nothing special. Even my work-day commute is round-about a 5 minute walk down the road. And when I'm not working, or working out, or getting groceries, I'm at my machine. Especially in these colder months, I just want to stay inside and, rather than expend energy going to the world, let all of the world come to me through my screens.

...wow.

Yah. That's my life, pretty much. But I'm hoping to step it up a notch once Frisk is able to resume her happy ending. In spite of everything she's done trying to make things right, I believe she still deserves her happy ending.

Well, uh, good luck with that?

Cheers luv, she's gonna need it.

...so, uh, where is our little time-bender anyway?

Upstairs, tucked up in your bed with the Prince. ...hey, don't give me that look, it's nothing like that. They know full well there's no use getting... into heavy petting. It'd only lead to trouble AND...

...seat-wetting...

Oh yah, you know what I'm talking about. High-five!

Me and JJ used to watch that movie on Halloween. I thought it was pretty fun, but JJ was REALLY into it.

It's a bloody good time is what it is. Hell, I used to watch it a lot on video when I was younger. And yes, I know, it's hardly a movie for the kids, but I'm pretty sure none of us were traumatized by Tim “Sweet Transvestite” Curry in lingerie. Hell, I'm probably a better person today BECAUSE I saw that at such a young age.

I dunno if the scientific journals would agree with that statement but, uh, whatever works for you, I guess? Anyway, I should probably... I should probably join them. *yawwwwn* I need to catch some shut-eye too, after today...

*yawnsing* Me too. ...did Asriel tell you what he was going to do with all that chocolate?

N-not really, but I guess it's something to do with Charlie?

Right on the money. Ok, so I believe his plan, or more accurately Frisk's plan, was to bait the main cryogenic chamber with a pile of unwrapped chocolate, then melt it just enough so that the aroma of sweet chocolate lures the Charliego into the chamber. Unable to resist the pull of the heavenly feast inside the chamber, he would be preoccupied with gorging on chocolate, while we close the chamber WITH HIM IN IT and freeze him into a state of suspended animation.
...that's it? THAT's the master plan?

_It's simple, but it's crazy enough that it might just work. Though the chamber is still functional, right? I mean, it's only been two or three years since its been maintained, so it should still work._

Well I- I guess it would? I mean, even if wendigos resist cold magic with ease, we COULD try cranking the cryo-preservation process up a few notches, make 'em like Han Solo in Cloud City. All of that strength wouldn't mean much if they can't actually move...

...you know what? It actually might work. But all I know is that I'm gonna need to unwrap all of these frickin' candy bars, and that's not happening tonight.

*yawn* I know they're in my bed right now, but all I wanna do is just... just curl up in there with them...

...who am I kidding. I'll just crash on the couch like I usually do...

...you don't even make it to the sofa before you fall flat on the floor. Ben takes notice, and proceeds to scoop you up and lay you down on the couch.

Oh darn...

_He throws a quilt over you before returning to his meditative state on the other end of the sofa. ...several minutes later, you feel the head of an aes sidhe fall on you, as he finally crashes after his earlier caffeine high._

_Doctor Alphys: “GYAH!”_

_Struggle as you might, it's no use. He's out cold, and you'll have to make do with being a pillow for the rest of the night._

*sigh* Well, this is... this is how it's gonna be, huh? ...I don't think I can even care about it right now. I just wanna...

_Sweet dreams, doc. And even sweeter dreams for Ben, I'll wager..._

_UH WHAT._

...I wonder what Sans is up to?

_Location: Salt Lake City, The Surface_

_Dialogue: Sans & The Observer_

...WAIT WHAT

_Fontaine, what the hell are you playing at?!_

oh, hey there. haven't heard from you for a while. so, uh, what's new with you?
“What's new with me”?! You're mucking about on the Surface, in the middle of a bloody war-zone, and all you have to say is THAT?!

take it easy, pal. i'm just keepin' an eye on the Frisk of this world.

You’re braver than I though, mate. All it takes is one stray bullet and, well, that's it. As cunning as you are, somehow I don't think you can dodge a bullet.

aaaand you'd be wrong. i've, uh, had a few pot-shots taken at me by fleeing soldiers, dodged every last one of them. ...but i won't lie. i'm still feeling a little rattled from the experience.

Always quick with a joke, aren't we Sans? But at least you can handle yourself up here. However, I still have a word of advice to give you.

lay it on me.

Pull your bloody hood up, mate. Maybe get a mask, too. People are already on edge, and if they see a living skeleton guy walking around the city, they're not going to think twice about opening fire.

...eh, fair enough. i'll see if i can scavenge something good.

So. Keeping an eye on that little firebrand, were you? Anything we should know?

...about that. honestly, i feel sorry for the Chinese. she's- ...she's everything i was afraid our Frisk would be, and worse.

if i knew that things would be this bad topside, i woulda stayed in the barrier chamber. but the scariest thing is that, well... look at the bodies, Observer.

...well fuck me sideways. I know what Revenants are capable of when they get narky, but knowing that so much of this was her own handiwork, the handiwork of a child...

but she didn't pull it off without a scratch. ...there's something i oughta show to you. it's... it's not pretty, Observer.

I think I know what you're about to show me. But I'm ready. Show me.

oookay, if you say so...

The world bends towards you in the blink of an eye, and next thing I know I'm seeing- ...oh. Oh dear. I was NOT ready to see this.

In the bowels of an abandoned warehouse, there lay several neatly arranged rows of dead children. The same exact dead child, repeated over and over again. ...did you seriously collect ALL of her dead bodies?

only the ones i've found so far. some of them weren't in such “good condition” as these ones, and i wasn't about to go around picking up every piece of her. i'm doing this for her, but i'm not gonna go that far.
...there's one big question I need to ask. WHY?

weeeellll, i was thinkin' that, uh, at the rate at which she's been leavin' these bodies behind, she's gonna start stinkin' up the whole damn city. that, and things started getting real nasty when the Chinese started improvising, uh, “countermeasures” to keep her from coming back. nobody needs to see that, so i decided to do a little “janitorial work”.

That would explain the- ...bloody hell. They actually thought that taking the head off would do anything to stop her?

if anythin', it just made her mad. an' when they found out that it doesn't matter what they do to the body, well, they started freaking out.

i don't know how many troops “Little Frisk” has killed already, but about an hour ago i saw a loada New Dynasty armored cars leavin' the city. ...these guys are so scared of a little girl that they're actually in retreat. you just can't make this kinda stuff up, can you?

Not really, no.

...but considering who we're dealing with here, I have a feeling that this is the calm before the storm, giving the troops time to get clear before one last ditch effort to wipe this dangerous child off the face of the Earth.

nah dude, that's just paranoia talkin'. they're not gonna- ...they're gonna do it, aren't they?

Call it a hunch, but they're probably going to nuke the site from orbit. They're running out of options, and they're afraid that if the "死亡鬼女孩" makes it to their homeland, that'll be it for them. And if there's even the smallest chance that a nuke could stop her, they're probably going to take that option. It's the “only way to be sure”, as the old saying goes.

...well crap. that's, uh, that's a new wrinkle.

Yeah. You might want to get back to the Underground. Go-Kart Mozart is checking out the weather chart, and his forecast is that it's about to be a sunny day in Salt Lake City.

...you might want to try and bring Little Frisk in too. Not even a nuke can stop a Revenant, since Ben died that way once, but the last thing this girl needs is to be on the receiving end of a nuclear fireball. Getting vaporized by a plasma sweep was bad enough.

this is... this is insane...

This is life in 2065, apparently. Things can't help but get worse and worse, apparently...

Location: Hotland Lab, Upper Floor

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

...hey. You awake yet?
Mhmnn... Get outta here.

*I'll take that as a no.*

..., uh, you felt that, right?

..., Frisk, seriously, I'm not going crazy am I? You can feel that too- **SHIIIT**

The fuck is going on?! WHAT IS HAPPENING?!

**EARTHQUAKE!**

**OH GOD I THOUGHT I LEFT THESE BEHIND IN LOS ANGELES!**

You and Asriel are shaken out of bed by the tremors!

**Frisk:** “**DOORFRAME! GET IN A DOORFR-**”

“...?”

...as soon as it came, it... passed us by? I though they were supposed to last 30 seconds?

**Prince Asriel:** “Frisk, are- are you ok?”

**Frisk:** “I'm- I'm fine, Asriel. I'm just a little-”

Before you can finish with a pun, Asriel hugs you with the strength of kings. He was NOT expecting an earthquake so soon.

**Prince Asriel:** “I don’t think that was an earthquake, Frisk. I remember what those felt like.”

“This felt more like... like more of a-...a shockwave...”

*Downstairs, the others are already scrabbling around- wait, when did Alphys get here? And why does she have so much chocolate?*

FOCUS, Charlie! This isn't the time for chocolate-

**There's always time for-**

CHARLIE. For F**K'S SAKE just FOCUS will you?!

...fine.

**Ben:** “Wait, so Utah IS on a fault line?!”

**Doctor Alphys:** “The humans call it “Wasatch Fault”, after the mountain range. B-but we shouldn't be due another quake like that for another 1300 years! We already HAD the big one back in ’86!”

**Prince Asriel:** “This was too damn short to be a quake, I'm sure of that. But it came from the west, so-”

Asriel’s phone rings. Without any hesitation, he answers, to everyone’s surprise.
Prince Asriel: “You felt it too, didn’t you Sans?”

doc sans: “i can tell ya right now that wasn’t an earthquake, boss. me an’ the little Frisk barely got outta there in time!”

Prince Asriel: “Wh- what happened, Sans?”

doc sans: “well, i can confirm that it came from Salt Lake City, but...”

Prince Asriel: “But what? Damnit Fontaine, tell me what happened!”

doc sans: “...i can’t confirm the existence of Salt Lake City.”

Shaken by the implications, Asriel nearly drops the phone.

They didn’t... Even with her in the equation, they COULDN’T have-

Prince Asriel: “Alphys, did you get around to setting up those external cameras?”

Doctor Alphys: “Y-yes sir, but- the electromagnetic interference would have-”

Prince Asriel: “Damnit, you may be right. ...check those cameras anyway. If we’re lucky, they might-”

With an audible pop, Sans and the little Frisk materialize in the lab. Several metres above the ground.

doc sans: “OH CRAP”

We rush to catch them as they fall. Sans falls into our arms, while- ...while Little Frisk gently floats to the ground on wings of red electric fire. Yeah. We forgot about that, didn’t we?

Syrinx: “Sorry about that.”

doc sans: “...whew! now that's what i call a- uh- ...oh who am i kiddin', i got nothin' for this.”

“anyways, forget about the cameras, i know what i saw. the invaders were calling back their troops about an hour or so ago, an' the Observer predicted the worst. if it weren't for his heads-up, well...”

“i'm pretty sure that if you look through those cameras, all you're gonna see is-”

Doctor Alphys: “S-sir, one of the cameras is still transmitting. ...you're not gonna want to see this.”

And of course he comes over to see- Wait, Frisk, are you sure you wanna-

I need to know.

...they did it... they finally, really DID IT.

You drop to your knees, overwhelmed by the-

Frisk: “You MANIACS!”
“YOU BLEW IT UP!”

“Damn you!”

“...god DAMN YOU ALL to HELLLLLL!”

...while you lament what you have seen, the others stare at the static-addled feed of a mushroom cloud, still hanging low over the heart of the charred and still melting husk of Salt Lake City...

Syrinx: “Heavens deliver us...”

Dialogue: Little Frisk & the Observer

...tell us. Tell us what you plan...

...that bomb was meant for me... They killed all those people, just to try and stop ME!

*Fear of the incomprehensible can make people do terrible things.*

...but even if they don't know WHAT you are, they still know how dangerous you are. They know how hard it is to get rid of you. And the fact that you can get utterly destroyed, and yet return without a scratch on your body, horrifies them.

*However, they don't know is that you're still alive. They think that you're nowt but ash by now. They believe that you're no longer a threat to them.*

*The real question is... will you prove them wrong? Even after they've shown how far they're willing to go to stop you, how scared they are of one little girl, will you continue?*

*Or will you just stay down here and try to live a normal life? Will you protect the people down here from the wasteland of this world's future? If you're lucky, Asriel might even help you train to become a Royal Guard.*

But- he'd NEVER do that! He doesn't trust me, he HATES me! Everyone-

*Oh no, no no sweet child, they don't hate you! I'm sure they'll-

But I hurt everyone! I wanted to become strong enough to protect them, but all I did was hurt them! And- and when I finally got that power, I- I nearly killed the other me! How could they- How could ANYONE forgive me?!

*You'd be surprised at how forgiving some of these people can be. Hell, Frisk herself is forgiving to a fault!*

...r-really?

*Oh yes indeed! She died to Sans SIX TIMES until he figured things out, but did she smash his face in for it? NOPE.*

*In her original universe, there was an entity that had killed repeatedly over countless resets. It*
killed her over and OVER AND OVER until she finally defeated it. But did she rip that little weed out of the ground, tearing off its petals one by one like Daisy-Head Mazie on bath salts? NOPE.

And worst of all, when she was 14, she was set upon by something utterly abominable, using her Asriel's body as a vessel with which to commit unspeakable acts against her specifically. But did she rip the demon's skull in half with every joule of energy in her muscles? NOT AT ALL. And even if she wanted to get rid of the demon, she would have had to kill Asriel to do so, so there's that.

...but do you know WHY she doesn't kill, even when she's had horrible things done to her? Do you know WHY she's so forgiving?

...because she's a good person?

Because she knows what it's like, how it feels.

Yes indeed. Frisca Rivera was, once upon a time, a killer just like you. Though at first, she was merely the puppet of... something from Beyond, likely a Let's Player of some sort.

But it was only until she learned about the Inferno, where the spirit of Asriel Dreemurr resided, that she accepted the darkness inside of her. It was only when she learned of the tortures Asriel had faced in that hellish abyss, the torments exacted against an innocent child spirit, that she embraced the killer instinct that “Emile” had burned into her young mind during the Genocide Run.

The creatures at the bottom of reality are rage, brutal without mercy. But she... she was worse. She ripped and tore her way into the bowels of Hell itself, her soul burning with the darkest of powers, all to secure a happy ending for her, Asriel, and Flowey. And for the most part, she succeeded.

...I... I knew she was crazy, but- ...but I guess she's actually my kind of crazy after all?

In a way, you're both on the same page. Mad as a teen Sophon hopped up on Dust.

We're not so different after all, thinking about it. We... we were both after power, power to change the world, and we've both used it to kill in order to try and make things better.

Though sadly, the use of force, especially near-insurmountable cosmic power, rarely ever yields clean results. Even with the greatest of discipline and focus, neither of which you two have, being a one girl army means you leave a bloody mess, a trail of rubble and viscera and broken hearts, wherever the fight takes you.

Even with the loftiest and arguably most admirable of intentions, not everyone will see a little superhero in that striped shirt. They'll see a demon, a murderer, a creepy little psycho who might just be the harbinger of the End Times. Because despite the situation PERHAPS calling for blood, or at least a broken nose, most people despise violence and all who spread it, regardless of their intentions and end goals.

...they don't understand...
Whether or not they “understand” doesn’t matter. In the end, we have to live in a world of peace, with people who want peace above all else, even if it means that things get worse because of it. Because war, violence and chaos are really unpleasant things when you really look at them.

But you know what else is unpleasant? Taking out the trash. Unclogging a blocked toilet. Scrubbing a bunch of grimy, mouldy crockery that SHOULD have been brought down a long time ago. No-one wants to deal with these problems because they're so very NASTY, but if you try to ignore them they'll only get worse. Not only will they stink up the place, but all manner of DANGEROUS things can grow and thrive in the unsanitary conditions that'll do you way more harm than just grossing you out. It really is a rotten job, but somebody's got to do it.

The main problem is that people are too used to the trash, and the trash itself has become organized to the point where it'll do everything it can to stomp out anyone trying to clean the place up. Case in point, the situation across the sea AND the situation out East. Though I think you've done enough scrubbing to potentially ward them off. If they DO return, however, MAYBE try and finish the job. MAYBE.

...where are you going with this? Are you trying to get me to stay, or to go back out there?

I'm- I'm just trying to offer you options here, so you can decide what you really want.

...they'll just try and nuke me again. And if Sans isn't there to get me outta there-

Kid, I'll be frank with you here. While I did suggest that Sans should shortcut you back here, it wasn't because a nuke would have destroyed your soul. It was because it would have been rude to let you die that way.

...you mean-

Yes. Your Revenant soul would have survived the nuke. But it probably wouldn't have been a pleasant experience. Just ask Ben.

The bunny got nuked?!

First off, I'm not sure if that's racist or not, so maybe don't say that to his face. And secondly, yes he did. The meltdown that killed him was WAY smaller than the Great Red Dragon that took out Salt Lake City, but I've seen Revenants get nuked way harder than that and they still came back.

In a distant reality, over a millennium ago, Lucas Firenzi and Skadi Haagstrom got vaporized as they snogged over Hitler's corpse atop the High Tower space station when its reactor went critical. But they turned out alright afterwards, despite going out with a bang.

{--=} wat.

Believe it or not, that's legit how things went down back then. There's even a painting of it in an art museum in Kaltreich. I forget if it's the Louvre or the Hermitage, though. It's been a while since I've observed that particular universe.

{--=} WAT
If anything, with how fast a nuclear fireball destroys things, often a quite literal case of blink-and-you'll-miss-it, you'd barely feel a thing after you rematerialise. At worst you'd probably feel like your skin's on fire for a fraction of a second and then it's gone. Funny how that works...

...anyway, the decision is yours to make. I know I can't stop you from doing whatever, but maybe dial back on the whole “angle of fiery death” angel- ...you know what I mean.

And if you do decide to jump back into the fire, consider a more... surgical approach. Ignore the conscripts unless they're actively up to no good, and go straight for the folks in charge. Take out the warp core, and the entire ship tears itself apart. After all, it's hard to invade a country when you don't have a good head on your shoulders. Or any head at all for that matter.

...I should sleep on this.

Yeah. You do that. It's WAY past your bedtime anyways.

Location: New Home, Throne Room

Dialogue: Papyrus & The Observer

Oi Paps. You holding up alright?

...the Surface is gone...

Well it's- ...nevermind.

I never would have thought... ...do you know if my brother is ok? He was supposed to be guarding the entrance, but-

He's safe. I gave him the heads-up that things were going to get “sunny” outside, and after finding Little Frisk he shortcutted back here. Though he DID end up falling a short distance due to Syrinx's natural distortion fields, but Frisk caught him so he's ok.

Oh thank the- Wait, he was OUT THERE?! After knowing how DANGEROUS it is?

Why would he- ...I suppose he was keeping an eye on the younger Frisk, but...

I wouldn't worry too much. He seemed to have a handle on things, sticking to the shadows and all that.

...I really must thank you, for intervening like you did. If it wasn't for you-

It wasn't much. Just putting forward a theory based on the current circumstances. I would have done the same for any of you.

You really don't give yourself enough credit! They'd both be DEAD if it wasn't for you! You saved
their lives! How does that mean so little to you?

_Because it wasn't ME who warped them back here. It was Sans. You should be congratulating HIM on helping Little Frisk dodge a nuke. If it was anyone else out there, my warnings would have been pretty useless since they wouldn't have been able to get away in time._

But he wouldn't have warped out in time if it wasn't for YOU! Gods, you should take pride in all you've done for us! In spite of all the terrible things that have happened over the past few weeks, your guidance has helped so many!

...maybe you're right. Maybe I don't “big myself up” as much as you think I should. But the thing is.... I'm tired, Papyrus. I'm growing tired of this tale.

...what do you mean?

_What I mean, Papyrus, is that I've been following Frisca Rivera and her endeavours for over a year and a half. I've seen so much suffering on her part, so much misfortune faced by all concerned. Though that's only a small part of the problem._

_The main part of the problem is that I... I think I'm growing bored with this timeline. Even though I know that some really big stuff is coming, and that Frisk has yet to finally resolve her arc and go home, my thoughts drift constantly to the other worlds I have seen._

...I've... SEEN things you probably wouldn't believe. Asterion Abydos, the Prince of Darkness, finally reconciling with Artemis, the Hunter of Light. A young Rico Jackson eagerly listening to the words of Doctor Cameron Light. The urban exploits of Morty Feldstein. The continent-spanning road adventures of Lythalia Ubasti! Lucas Firenzi and Skadi Haagstrom beating the crap out of a roided-up Adolf Hitler! So many other things I could write about, or perhaps render in a more visual fashion, and yet...

...you need to see this through, don't you?

_I began this account out of a desire to see Asriel have a shot at a happy ending, and I NEED to see him through his current predicament so that he can resume that happy ending with Frisk. I need to get Frisk back to her own timeline so that she can exorcise the demon from his implant. But she has to help resolve the troubles down here before she can go home. And with my capabilities, she doesn't need to make a choice between staying here or going home! She can do both!_  

_But because she has to see this arc through, SO DO I. I can skip over a few inconsequential things, but I CAN'T skip over the remainder of this arc in favour of concluding this tale early. There is so much that's about to happen here, and I can't afford to let it pass unrecorded!_  

...then what are you waiting for? If you wish to see this to its conclusion, don't be afraid to “skip over things”! After all, if you are truly outside of our timeline, you can easily afford to skip forward to when things really “kick off”...unless they've already kicked off, that is.

...in a way, they already have. But you're right. I can skip over the setup of the cryo-chamber trap. I can probably skip over everyone lamenting the loss of the human city. I might even be able to skip over the process of separating Asgore's soul from Charles' soul, and most of the ritual that'll
bring Toriel's spirit back into the world of the living!

...speaking of which, I think I know how to separate the souls.

...surely you don't mean- But the Extractor-

It destroyed the Pallbearers in order to extract the human souls, yes. What I'm talking about, however, is taking “Alpha” and extracting ASGORE's soul from it. No solemn monster sacrifices required.

But- But that's-

Impossible? Maybe, with the antiquated setup you've got. But imagine, if you will, a setup involving TWO Extractors. One attuned to a Determined soul, and the other attuned to the energies of a boss monster soul. You'd need to figure out HOW to perform those attunements, but you're bright sparks. You'll probably figure out how to make it work.

So in theory, if you have “Alpha” hovering between those two Extractors, you could draw the monster soul out of the human soul, quickly switch both of the Extractors off, and quickly shove the monster soul into the containment jar. THEN, we shove Asgore's soul down Thorney's gullet and PRESTO!; one King of All Monsters back from the dead and probably scarred from what he went through.

...who the heck is- OH, you mean- ...oh my... OH HEAVENS!

Welp. I should have seen that one coming. You recall the distorted memories of a certain red rose, bleeding over from a succession of botched timelines.

Thorney: “Get back, BACK I SAY!”

Doctor Papyrus: “Thorney, it's ME! Just calm down!”

Thorney: “I SAID GET BACK! Damn wretches, I'll tear you apart!”

Doctor Papyrus: “What's wrong, Thorney?! TELL ME!”

Thorned vines flailed frantically, as a mix of fear and hatred played out on the face of the rose. One moment, he was doing just fine. The next, there was a sound like thunder, and he was looking around to see where the Jaguar Warriors were coming from.

But there were no Jaguar Warriors that day. There was just you, Thorney, and some illegal fireworks. A very, VERY bad combination.

...WHY? Why did he- They were just fireworks!

That they were. But you know what the Southerns brought with them when they invaded? You know what they used to wipe out monsters by the score from a great distance, scarring all who survived to turn tail and flee?

...there was a good reason why fireworks were illegal down here, wasn't there?
The King was there trying to hold the line against the Southern Tribes, and for a time they were able to subdue the initial waves of troops. But when the Aztecs deployed their fire javelins, the monster-Ute defences pretty much fell apart. Asgore and Gerson saw many good friends die on that battlefield, and the sight of the Jaguar Warriors trudging through spattered blood and scattered dust, well...

...you mean that- That rose was-

Someone's been out of the loop, haven't they? Yes, Thorney is the reincarnation of King Asgore Dreemurr, created from the dust-gorged First Rose that he brought back after he took Charlie's body to the Surface. ...and yes. When I condense it into a single sentence, it sounds all the more incredible, in more ways than one.

But as you said, it is probably time for another little “timeskip” on my part. Something tells me your friends won't be going down into the True Lab for quite some time, or at least not today. Asriel will have to make another speech addressing his undoubtedly rattled subjects, though this time he has an additional factor to justify staying down here. The threat of exposure to nuclear fallout may prove sufficient to, for the time being, quell monsterkind's desire to return to the Surface, sad as that may be.

Though with that in mind, something tells me that we might just see a few more humans in the Underground in the next couple of days. With the Barrier gone, and the human city currently melting, the chances of someone finding their way down here may yet increase, especially if they're looking for somewhere to hide.

So do me a favour, and call Asriel. Warn him to expect human refugees, and to plan accordingly to accommodate them. After all, tragic as this disaster is, it might prove to be one hell of an experiment, to see if humanity is willing to be at peace with monsters in these most “interesting” of times...

...wait, don't go! I have SO many questions!

They will have to wait for now. After all, you and your friends are going to be quite busy soon enough...

Many days later...

Location: The True Lab, Ventilation Control

Dialogue: Frisca & Charlie

You hesitate as your hand hovers over the control switch. ...uh, don't forget that Alphys is waiting for you to clear that fog. She won't be able to get through Cryogenics until you've-

I don't know if this is just me, but I feel like once I throw this switch, something's gonna come after me.
The door's locked, Frisk. And it's an actual blast door, so we'll be safe in here if the Charliego comes after us before he smells the chocolate. ...besides, if Endogeny seeps out of those fans, it'll probably be a warm an’ welcome relief compared to what we've encountered so far.

That's kinda what I'm afraid of. My gut says something's gonna be in here with us, but I dunno if it'll be Endogeny. I dunno if they even exist in this timeline!

I feel like they do. After all, those unopened letters on Alphys’ desk did include some from the dogs in Snowdin. Something tells me they're worried about “Greatest Dog”, or whoever ended up as part of Endogeny. And I don't think they ever received a reply...

...you're right. I shouldn't be so paranoid. At this point, seeing ANY of the Amalgamates would make my frickin’ day.

You flip the switch. The ventilation system rattles to life with a metallic shuddering and odd squelching sounds. ...welp, I guess that's where the Amalgamates have been hiding all this time.

OH GOD!

You quickly switch off the ventilation system. The mechanical noises cease along with the squelching. ...only to be replaced with a distinct oozing and gurgling and unearthly screeching-

Uh...

That doesn't look like an amalgamate, Charlie.

Well I can't say that it- Uhhh...

What the hell's oozing out of those fans, Charlie?!

I don't- UHHH...

...the pungent smell of old blood fills your nostrils, and it takes all of your strength not to throw up as the beige, gelatinous mess continues to ooze out onto the floor. I don't know WHAT this is, but it doesn't look like Endogeny's gonna be joining us any time soon.

Oh god, oh god WHAT THE HELL IS THIS THING?! ...did the Amalgamates raid the blood supplies when the Lab was evacuated?! Is this why- OHHHH FUCK...

As the last strands of beige goop pool out of the fans, the entire pile starts to rise up and condense into a single semi-solid mass of mush. As it fully forms, various appendages stick out of its innumerable sides, and you can barely make out the faces of the monsters it once was.

Gestalgamate: *a nearly-deafening cacophony of incomprehensible gibberish*

I don't understand, I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

Frisk: “ONE AT A TIME!”

...the Gestalgamate quietens as its countless voices fall silent. As the cacophony dims to a pile of quiet murmurings, you can make out some words that make sense. “i’m h a p p y” “new friends?” “get out” “it's not right” “i miss having legs” “no wifi” “mommy?” “who are you?” “EVERYTHING!”
...I think we might be able to work with this.

**Frisk:** “Ok... Let's start over with this. My name's Frisk.”

...there are a few seconds of silence before the murmuring begins anew.

**Gestalgamate:** “Frisk... Frisk...”

“FRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRISKFRIS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Uh, hello? Everybody?

WHOAREYOU? PRINCE? WHATEVER YOU INHEREnICEMAN-

ALRIGHT, just take it slow. Listen to what I have to say.

LET GO OF MY FRIEND. She's too solid for you to absorb. If you keep this up, you are GOING to KILL her. And I know you don't want her blood on your hands.

Blood. BLOOD. STRONG.

Play... together.

She can be safe in here?

Sno... wy...

Safe inside YOU? She won't be able to breathe! HUMANS NEED TO BREATHE TO LIVE!

Flesh is strong. But it is WEAK.

Soul doesn't breathe. Soul is STRONG.

In us. Be IN US.

No, STOP IT! I will NOT LET YOU DO THIS! SHE IS MY FRIEND!

Join us!

Help us!

She can be with you here!

STRONG.

TOGETHER.

ETERNAL.

...free.

No... Not like this. NOT. LIKE. THIS.

SUFFER ME NOW!

...how interesting. And how sadly naïve...

SINCE WHEN WERE YOU THE ONES IN CONTROL?!

Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer
The fuck is this- OH GOD YOU’RE- Boil it away, girl! BOIL IT AWAY!

It hurts... IT HURTS!

YES IT DOES, but you can stop it! BOIL THIS FUCKING THING AWAY IF YOU WANT TO LIVE!

...oh? It's... it's pushed you out of itself. You cough up a bit of it that you swallowed in a panic.

UGH, god it tastes worse than it smells...

If I had a nickel for every time I heard that... I'd quote Archer!

...uh, Frisk? Where's Charlie?

Charlie... Charlie? CHARLIE?!

Where is he, girl? What has he done?

I don't- Where is he- ...ohhh no...

As you look towards the mass of- what even is this stuff? Blood and dust? That's, uh, that's new. I guess Alphys must have whipped up something pretty gross before the containment breach.

...the vile beige sludge starts to contract inwards, darkening as it does so. It starts to form a... vaguely humanoid shape...

Ohhh... He's...

Two piercing red eyes appear on the top-most lump of the mass, its roughest approximation of a head. The previous pong of old blood is replaced by a vaguely pleasant aroma of sweet lemons and golden flowers.

The eyes close tightly and, with an oddly familiar sound, almost like a rippling fluid gelatin, the roughly-moulded approximation starts to acquire a much smoother and svelte contour. Red-streaked black gives way to salmon pink, and strands of brown start to flow from the now humanly-shaped head.

That little son-of-a-bitch actually did it. He's assumed direct control of this thing!

...how did he- He looks... older...

Knelt down on one knee, those two red eyes look at you beneath a head of auburn hair, almost like a pageboy. After centuries of torment, and nearly a decade in a young girl's body, he has assumed his true form. Eyes locked on yours, he rises to his feet, in the body that he would have had if he had never been cursed. A teenaged Charles Carver.

Charlie: “...greetings.”

“It's me. Charlie.”
"...well, Frisk? Aren't you going to say anything?"

**Frisk:** "...aaaand you're naked."

**Charlie:** “OH CRAP!”

*His hands instinctively cover his crotch in fright and embarrassment. But as he looks down, he realises to his dawning horror that, funnily enough, there's nothing down there right now.*

*But really, Frisk? He finally gets a body of his own, and the first thing you say to him is “you're naked”?*

The hell was I supposed to say?! I'm still trying to wrap my head around what the HELL is going on!

**Charlie:** “Ohhh whoa whoa guys what's happening?”

*His lower half starts to lose form for a few seconds, before returning to normal. Or as normal as something like this can ever be.*

*And yes, I know this goes without saying, but this is weird. Even by my standards, this is plain grade-A WEIRD.*

**Charlie:** “I know it's hard to hold this shape, but KEEP IT TOGETHER. I've got half a mind to whoop your asses for what you tried to pull!”

**Frisk:** “Charlie, what- what HAPPENED there?! WHY ARE YOU-”

**Charlie:** “I- I have it all under control, Frisk. I'm the one in control- ...whoa...”

*If you could remove the hands from your eyes, Frisk, I could describe what he's doing.*

I don't wanna see that, he doesn't even have underwear on!

*And yet there's nothing down there. Just lower your hands a little bit, for Christ's sake.*

*...there, that's a little better. Now you can see that he's staring at his hands while twiddling his fingers, amazed that he has hands of his own after all these years. Those hands go on to touch- No, Frisk, it's nothing like that. Stop covering your eyes.*

*...finally we're getting somewhere. Anyway, he seems preoccupied with touching his face, feeling his hair between the thumb and forefinger- Ok Frisk, that's just rude.*

**Frisk? FRISK. Stop staring at his crotch. There's NOTHING THERE.**

It's- THERE'S NOTHING THERE! God, it's like a Ken doll! I can't look away-

*What is WITH you today?! First you don't want to see his non-existent junk, and now you “can't look away”?! FOCUS, girl! His eyes are up HERE.*

God SORRY, sorry...
Charlie: “...well, this is, uh, awkward. Hang on, lemme try something.”

“Alright you guys, change of plan.”

In the blink of an eye, he completely loses his form, dropping into a gloopy pile of what looks like tar. Well then. That did not go as planned.

I... I don't know what to say anymore...

Charlie: “Gee thanks numbnuts. Now, let's try that again. Once more with feeling!”

His humanoid form gradually reasserts itself, only this time with a lot less skin showing. Black trousers cover his lower half, while a damnably familiar green and yellow striped shirt covers his top half. But no shoes, bless his heart.

Charlie: “Good work guys, but you missed something.”

Nevermind, his feet morph into little brown boots.

Charlie: “Muuuch better... Happy now, Frisk?”

...still nothing to say, eh? I guess that's fair. After all, this is the last thing you expected to happen. Charlie taking over the Ur-malgamate and somehow making it his own body. And somehow keeping the souls of the Ur-malgamate in check. Lord knows how.

...it's not an uhh-malgamate.

...?

Charlie came up with a better name for it than that.

OwO? But Ur-malgamate's a good name for it, isn't it?

But what about Gestalgamate? 'cause it's a, you know, gestalt entity an' all...

...oh alright, I'll give you that one.

Charlie: “…Frisk, please. If you're mad at me for this, then FU- then I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you like that…”

You feel a gentle hand on your arm. ...despite it being the hand of an old friend, you instinctively bristle at the touch. Seeing this, he draws his hand away. Or more accurately, it shrinks back to his elbow because...?

Charlie: “…ahem.”

A swift blow to the elbow, and his arm is back to normal.

Charlie: *sigh* “I'm never gonna get used to this, am I?”

“...right. Yeah. I should probably…”
Remembering what we came here for, he heads over to restart the ventilation system. With a whir and a clunk, the old machines work their magic, clearing the fog from the air.

The heavy padding of leathery paws stops just outside of the blast door. You hear the wendigo sniffing the air, wondering where that weird smell is coming from.

Oh god he's here already.

You stand absolutely still, hoping not to give away your position. But as a gentle scratching screeches from the other side of the door, you feel an arm around your waist and a hand around your mouth, before being yanked away from the door.

GWMMPH!

It seems like Charlie's able to extend his limbs as well, as he's still by the switch as his stretchy arms drag you away from the blast door like he's Reed Richards. Will there be no end to the surprises he has in store for us?

Charlie: “Sssshhh...”

Charliego: *sniff sniff* “Chocolate? Did I just smell CHOCOLATE?”

Well, looks like Alphys has already set the plan in motion. We hear the wendigo bound away from the blast door, making a beeline for the chocolate in the cryo-chamber.

It's working...

...uh, Observer? He's not letting go of me.

*Charlie spins you towards him, and holds you tight against his chest.*

Charlie: “...I'm sorry, Frisk... I'm- I owe you more than you could ever know.”

“All the times you've put up with my bullshit... All the horrible things I've said All the things I've made you do! I'm sorry for everything!”

“I always said that if I had a body, I'd give you a hug. Well, HERE IT IS. All the hugs I've ever owed you!”

I- Observer, I- Help?

Charlie: "Mmhhh... I don't wanna let go..."

Hey, I'm staying out of this. This is between you and him.

*But don't be a stranger. He's been through Hell like you have, and then some. And now, he can finally express himself properly. In spite of everything, even though he looks your age, he's still just a kid like you. So don't be so peevish, and HUG. THE. CHANGELING.*

Frisk: “...c'mere buddy.”
Yeeahhh, that's more like it. You return the embrace, and feel Charlie start to shudder. It's all catching up to him now. The love and affection he never knew to relish until it was too late, and now he can truly express it, truly FEEL it like it's meant to be felt.

You look at his face and... well. That's not creepy at all. He looks so happy, but the tears that fall from his eyes look to be as black as pitch. Combined with the red glow of his eyes, and the unnatural whiteness of his toothy grin, you can't help but feel unnerved by what you're seeing. He's one of your closest friends, but he's still looking a little too creepy for comfort. If he dyed his hair, he'd look like a teenaged Alice Cooper right now.

Charlie: “...we make one hell of a team, don't we partner?”

Chapter End Notes

Yup. That all just happened. I wasn't sure I'd make it this fortnight, but it's all there.

And yes, I will do a little bit of skipping ahead from here on in. We're getting closer to the concluding arc of DoctorTale, and while it's been fun, it has to end some time. After all, all good things must end.

But we're still a few entries away from the final chapter. While I'm still trimming the fat, I can't cut out the juicy parts.
Because You Had A Bad Day

Chapter Summary

It has been two weeks since the gang reclaimed the True Lab, and in that time a lot has changed. Progress was made, disagreements were had, and Frisk has managed to get back into the groove of her old job.

...and yet there are some strange rumblings at the bottom of the universe. Something oddly familiar, drawing my attention... What is going on down there?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Location: The Fissures of Despair

Level of Reality: 13

Weeping wails of anguish echo forth from the pits, bouncing off of the titan-scarred cliff-faces of dried, cured and white-speckled flesh that form the Fissures of Despair. In its depths, countless spirits are tortured in order to extract the salty essence of Despair from them. Just another “seasoning” for the chaos-borne wretches that rule in the deepest darkness beneath reality.

The Archangel can smell the salt from the edge of the Fissures, and knowing what the smell means only strengthens her resolve and sours what little sympathy she has left for daemonkind. So very few are worth redemption, though with the rest of the Inferno pitted against her, she cannot afford to be too “picky” with who she recruits these days. For as her Hidden Crusade progressed over the course of the last century, many of the daemons who followed her either left, were consumed by the Burning One, or attempted to betray her. In the end, only one stayed with her through all of it.

Torrin Iron-Wrought, the Wretched Blacksmith: “It smells like the sea... Without the overtones of rotten fish, I mean.”

A former daemon forgemaster, Torrin was one of the first beings to join the Archangel's ranks. It was he who forged the Archangel's unmistakable suit of armour, over a century ago. Out of all of her subjects and agents, Torrin was the most loyal by far, never daring to oppose her, always offering counsel in times of uncertainty.

The Archangel: “I would sooner smell the Stagnant Shoreline again than... than THIS. This unadulterated... I have never smelled so much concentrated Despair before. Even after all we've been through, THIS is just...”

Torrin: “True enough, we've never make it this far into the Inner Circles before.”

“This is where production and exploitation is at its highest, its most intense and brutal. The
most “productive” of spirits are brought to these lands, past the Star-Scraping Walls, for the delectation of the Elder Daemons.”

“But while we have pierced the Walls, we are not yet strong enough to take the Fissures by force. We will need to send one of our finest to challenge the current Foreman, to claim it independently without anyone suspecting your involvement. After all, now we’ve pierced the Wall, we have His attention, and the less He knows about us, the better.”

The Archangel bristles at the thought of letting torture on this scale continue, let alone under her influence. When she first started, she would have found the very notion of it to be utterly abominable. But to win this war, to have even a faint glimmer of hope of dethroning the Burning One, she would need every grain of essence, every daemon worth their salt, in order to stand a chance.

The Archangel: “...very well, child. I will prepare our scouts, so we know who best to send forth as a contender.”

The Archangel: “...do you hear that, Torrin?”

Torrin’s webbed ears raise to take in the wailing from the Fissures.

Torrin: “I hear another advantage to take, my lady.”

The Archangel: “No no, not that... It sounds more like...”

The Archangel strains to hear- ...nevermind, she doesn’t actually hear anything beyond the wailing of tortured spirits.

The Archangel: “Who IS that? I am not going mad, am I?”

Torrin: “Now you mention it, I do hear SOMETHING. Or someone? It sounds too soft to be another daemon-”

SHIT I’VE BEEN RUMBLED

Location: True Lab, Engineering Sector

Dialogue: Charlie & the Observer

Another voice leaves the consensus, as you transfer yet another monster soul into a crystalline plate, adorned with a golden-green seven-pointed star and a single burning eye. ...what the hell are these things, Charlie?

...

OI CHARLIE MATE. IT’S ME. THE OBSERVER.

WHUA-? ...oh, it's you again.
Couldn't hear me over the cacophony of souls, eh? Figures, I suppose.

...so, uh, I guess you heard the news?

Heard the news? Boy, I SAW the news unfold before my eyes like an origami Huey Lewis! And I have to say, I'm bloody impressed at what you pulled off back there.

...and I guess you got a new body out of it, so that's a plus. Speaking of which, how does it feel to have a physical form after all these years? Is it everything you were hoping it'd be?

I, uh, wasn't really expecting that something like this would happen to me. I guess I mighta been put into some kinda robot in the future, but this... THIS is- I don't really know what to say.

I imagine being able to feel things with your own hands is a bonus, something most of us take for granted.

Y-yeah, actually! I forgot how good it feels to feel something without a, uh, a “proxy”. I mean, feeling what Frisk felt was... well, it was a thing. But now if I want to touch and feel something, I can do it myself!

It- it really does feel liberating to be the one in control again, and not have to worry about- ...well, that's not really true, is it?

True. I mean yes. I- you know what I mean.

You showed the souls in the Gestalgamate how powerful you really were, and that you could potentially drag them all to Hell if you wanted to. Which somehow I don't think you DO want because, well, you know what's down there.

Yeah, there's that... I mean, it sucks that I had to scare them into doing my bidding, but what choice did I have? I wasn't gonna let her die because these creeps wanted her to be a part of them.

I'd probably have done the same in your shoes. Sad as it was, their consensus did need some form of “control” at the time.

*tch* Try telling that to Asriel. Ever since he figured out that Frisk isn't “his Frisk”, he's been even more of a little bitch than usual. God, it took all of my concentration NOT to slap that whiny old-

I'll admit, he probably does need a slap of some description. After all, I'm sure that there's barely any difference between the Frisks-

...ok, so about the whole multiple Frisks thing. I've been doing a little more digging, and I think I've figured things out.

Uh. I was hoping you'd be able to clear that up. What IS going on with that?

Alright, let's see how we go about this...

Ok. So. We start out with the original Frisk, the Frisk she is now, in the first of this set of timelines.
Frisk kills the feral Charlie, who we call Charlie {1} to differentiate him from Charlie Prime, aka you.

I don't know how I feel about being called "Prime." I don't really feel, uh, "Prime" if you ask with me.

It's just for differentiation mate, try not to dwell on it too much. Anyway, Asriel {1} gets narky, absorbs Charlie {1}'s soul, and history repeats itself. You two spend the next few years trying to find a way to rewrite time under the guise of laying the groundwork for new soulvessels. Got it so far?

Yeah, I'm still on track. I remember how it all went down.

Good, good. So Frisk uses the Reaver, holding the souls of Charlie {1} and Asriel {1}, to open a portal in time back to that fateful day. ...you know what? Grab a pen and paper, I'm going to try something.

Uhhh... Okay...?

Right, right, let's see here. Draw one line across the page, late 2017 on one end, early 2020 on the other. THIS line represents the first timeline in this particular sequence of branches.

Ok? Ok. Now draw a curve back from 2020 to 2017, the path you two took back to that fateful day. Maybe add a direction chevron or two to indicate that.

Ooookay, this is what we've got so far? Where is this going?

BACK to the FUTURE! ...or more accurately, the moment when Frisk really fucked with the timestream.

She went down there to protect Asriel, Reaver in hand, WHICH don't forget has the same soul that Charlie still has in his body. She runs him through, and the two instances of the SAME SOUL intersect.

And that's what rewrote the timeline?

If only it were that simple.

The universe didn't know what to do with this. It didn't expect this to happen until it was too late. This was an instance of the future disrupting the path of its own past, capable of leading to an unstable time loop that would continue to add upon itself and eventually corrupt the entire timeline after that point. Thusly, history abhors a paradox, as it is like a malignant tumour within its bloodstream.

...so what you're saying is that because of what we did, that moment is gonna become more an' more glitchy as time passes, until it consumes the entire universe? Uhhh, I hope there's some way me and Frisk can fix this. PLEASE TELL ME WE CAN FIX THIS.

There wouldn't be much point in me telling you how to fix it. ...because it's already fixed itself.

WAT.
When Frisk ran Charlie through with the Reaver, you recall how things felt “weird” before and after the event, right? The sense of vertigo, the feeling of displacement, the notion of reality shuddering around you two as you fled back through the portal and got catapulted forward? THAT was the timeline trying to fix itself the only way it knew how.

...it made a new branch, didn't it?

BINGO. If anything, if Frisk had merely been there as an impartial observer, her effect on the timeline would have been so subtle, so initially negligible, that the timeline wouldn't have noticed its further-reaching effects until it was far, FAR too late. But of course, funnily enough she did the right thing by going ham, and her bombastic introduction of a potential paradox was the temporal-ontological equivalent of finding blood in your stool. A warning that the cancer of an unstable time loop was on its way to metastatizing and potentially corrupting the future.

Rather than let these events lead to universal corruption, the timeline retroactively attempted to cut out the “contaminated” section of time and detach it from the future it could potentially corrupt, making it its own separated continuity. And in creating a new branch, the future soul was no longer the future of the past soul, not bringing information of its own future specifically. Instead, the information passed onto the past soul was instead information from the alternate future relative to its own future, the timeline you and Frisk went back on, so that it wouldn't cause a feedback loop, and thus the paradox was resolved.

Oh, cool, you're writing this down too.

Uh, yeah? Frisk is gonna need to know this, and I don't wanna have to recite all that fuckin' garbled Treknobabble wholesale.

Hey man I tried, I tried to make it work. But these things are pretty complicated.

Still, it's good that you're writing all of this down for her. She needs to know the impact of her actions, and to understand what the hell is even going on with these timelines.

Speaking of which, flip back to the drawing. We're not quite done with this.

Oh god.

Pretty much. Anyway, draw a scribble at the start of the first timeline, representing the chaotic branching-off point, then draw another long line below it. THIS is timeline {2}, the surgically-reoriented branch that we're currently in.

Yup, uh, this is kinda making sense? But what happened to the Frisk of “{2}”? Did she try to rewrite the timeline like ours did?

Hmmm... Now you mention it, I'm not sure. I believe she disappeared around 2019, possibly with a Reaver of her own, in order to try and keep Asgore from being possessed. But as far as timeline-disrupting events go... Let's try and trace things, shall we? Hold on, I'll open another window.

...well then. It appears that we have ANOTHER branch on the tree! And while it isn't the result of a paradox, it DOES go back to timeline {1}! How interesting...
Wha- Uh- I guess we'll call this one \{3\}, shall we? I'll write this down.

Yeah... Yeah you do that.

...due to Frisk \{2\} going back to an earlier point in \{1\} instead of \{2\}, Frisk Prime (our Frisk with her Reaver) doesn't show up, since Frisk \{2\}'s time travel resulted in the timeline \{3\} I'm currently looking at. Instead, the younger Frisk still kills Charlie with the crossbow like you did before, but before Asriel can grab for their brother's soul in a fit of bereaved rage, Frisk \{2\} holds them back. Then she yells at the younger Frisk, which for convenience we'll call Frisk \{3\}, to put Charlie's soul in containment, so that nobody can get at it. ...which she does by shoving it into her chest. Brilliant idea, Frisk \{3\}.

...why do I feel like that was actually my idea? I feel like I woulda been the one to suggest that, since, well, I might be able to knock some sense into the other Charlie.

*Interesting theory, but I don't know if that's what happened. All I'm seeing is Frisk \{3\} struggling to stay under control with a mad and ravening soul stuck in her... She's still in control, but only barely-

Frisk: “You takin' a break, buddy?”

*Frisk sits down next to you as you finish scribbling.*

Darn...

Frisk: *sigh* “I know it sucks, Charlie, but you can't hold on to all of those souls. They've all got families waiting for them, they've got a chance to be themselves again. And with the progress we've been making on Project Automata, they'll have bodies of their own again.”

“It'll be harder for you to stay solid without them, I know. But just... just remember what Odo went through. He didn't have souls to help him with his shapeshifting abilities, and he got pretty good at it by the time he came to Terok Nor.”

“It'll be a long road, but if you keep practicing your shape-shifting, one day you won't NEED all these souls to concentrate for you. I mean, you're pretty powerful on your own, so you don't need them to be able to shapeshift in the first place. You just need to get better at doing it yourself.”

…

*She puts a hand on your shoulder. She can feel that you're having a hard time of it.*

Frisk: “…look, I've been talking with Asriel. It took me a lot of convincing, and I mean A LOT of convincing, but he's agreed to let you decide how many souls you transfer each day. Though you'll still have to transfer at least one per day.”

Charlie: “…thanks for having my back. But that's not why I'm... ...just look at this.”

*You hand her the notebook containing the notes and timeline diagram.*

Charlie: “Observer's been doing a little snooping around, tryin' to figure out what happened to the timeline. An' apparently the, uh, the Frisk of this world tried to change things like you did.”
Here's hoping the truth doesn't make her freak out.

...she looks quite unsettled by what you've transcribed. To put it lightly.

Frisk: “My god...”

She falls silent as she looks over the notes, again and again, trying to process the magnitude of the consequences of her actions.

Frisk: “...this was one hell of a close call. But I'm not gonna be going back on my own timeline any time soon. Once we're back home, once we've saved our Asriel, I think I'm pretty much done with time-travel.”

...huh. I hope she's taken more than just THAT on board. Granted, time travel carries a pretty heavy responsibility with it, but I feel like she needs to, well, become more responsible in general.

I...

Do I smell a counterargument?

The thing is, I can't disagree with Frisk being more, uh, “responsible”. After all these adventures of hers, it'd be nice to see her settle down like she did before. But, well...

I think I know what you're about to say, but please do continue.

If she was more “responsible”, she never woulda climbed the mountain. She never woulda helped destroy the Barrier. She never woulda saved my bro...

She's a reckless, hell-bent firebrand of a girl, but I wouldn't want it any other way.

That, indeed, is a fair point. BUT her irresponsibility has had its consequences, things we very well can't sweep under the carpet like so much sawdust and bird-seed. If she was more responsible, she wouldn't have the hounds of hell snapping at her heels. She wouldn't have ran away from a problem she NEEDED to fix. She wouldn't have risked the future of an entire universe as an act of defiance against causality itself.

...but let's just say that her irresponsibility is a double-edged sword, a mixed blessing of the highest calibre, and leave it at that.

What, because you're afraid of what I might have to say in response?

Oh no, nothing like that. It's just that-

BURROCARA: “...oh. Hello there.”

Yah. Here comes trouble.

Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer
Syrinx: “Just keep walking, daemon. Your new vessel is but a few steps away.”

The metallic body of Mettaton walks cautiously through the room, piloted by the turncoat daemon who was sent out to drag you to Hell. He offers a meek, apologetic smile as he waves to you.

...

You turn your gaze from him, and he sighs as he rolls his host body's eyes. He would have expected more from the girl who bested him in single combat. ...oh, but have you forgotten? That's fine. For the longest time, I didn't see that specific battle.

...that's...did I?

Look to his new vessel, Frisk. I feel like THAT ought to jog your memory.

O-okay. I- I follow them.

...my god... It's...

You gaze upon the dormant mechanical form of a horse-headed being. ...did you ever watch Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger, per chance?

...uh... Can't say I've ever heard of it?

Well, it was one of those movies that Ray Harryhausen worked on in the 1970's, and while it probably wasn't a great movie, it was still one I enjoyed a lot as a kid. Anyway, my point is that the main villain had a big buff bronze clockwork robot called the “Minoton”. This new vessel actually reminds me of that particular machine, except with a horse's head instead of a bull's head.

...heh. I just got it.

Que?

Taurocalva and Burrocara. Thinking about what they are, it reminds me of a story Dad told me once, about the Monkey King and his adventures.

Ahhh, indeed indeed. I hear it was a pretty popular story. ...speaking of which, did you remember to erase Asriel's name from the record of living souls when you were down there?

...FUCK.

Aaaaah I'm just bullshitting you. I'm pretty sure they don't even NEED a record of living souls to do what they do. ...still, you DID give old Mezu what-for during your little rampage.

...Mezu? Wasn't that the guy from the Shadow Warrior- Ohhh... I KNEW he looked familiar! Sonofabitch, how did I not-

Hell if I know how you miss these things. But what I do know is that he put up a lot more of a fight than the gribblers leading up to him. In the end, however, you broke his club, you broke his spine, and broke his fighting spirit, much like you did to old man Gozu. They were among the finest that the Inferno could throw at you, and you still ended up staining your little striped shirt
with their vibrant ichor.

...which probably explains why they sent something like the Interloper after you, six years after you cleaned house. It probably took them six years to find a demon nasty enough, and crazy enough, to try and fight you on your home turf.

...I don’t know about that, Observer. I mean, for all we know he coulda been rarin’ to go after me from Day 1, but couldn’t get a foothold into our world until after Asriel got his implant...

...fair enough. There is that possibility. But it WOULD still be cooler to feel like you beat them so hard that it took them six years to enact their revenge against you, don’t you think? Because let’s not split hairs about this: you FUCKED Hell’s SHIT up trying to save Asriel’s spirit. The Doom Slayer himself would probably give you a pat on the back if he ever saw how ham you went down there.

BURROCARA: “It really does capture my image, doesn’t it?”

_Holding the vessel's chin, he turns to face us, trying to elicit a response._

Frisk: “...I guess it does.” *sigh*

_That's all he was after, some recognition of your battle._

BURROCARA: “...so. I am to simply transfer my consciousness, yes?”

Syrinx: “Indeed. I have installed the security matrix, so only you may command this vessel. Though unsurprisingly, locating a willing donor was somewhat difficult, considering. However we did manage to find one, in one of the former constituents of “Lemon Bread”. ...which actually sounds quite delicious now I think about it.”

...THAT'S why I can smell sweet lemons! I thought it was just Charlie.

BURROCARA: “OH? I thought I was simply to transfer to a CPU core, but instead I'm- ...I won't lie, I am flattered that there is a soul willing to have me.”

“...no, it's not ok. I took you against your will. To continue this... cohabitation would not be healthy for either of us.”

“...just listen to yourself, phantom! It is NOT ok for you to be ok with what I have done! It is for the best that I cohabit a willing soul, rather than let you indulges in this- I daren’t say what it is, but it is NOT HEALTHY.”

_He touches the segmented 12-pack on the machine's abdomen, and each abdominal slides to the side to reveal the crystalline- ...what do you call these things?_

_Soulstones._

Just soulstones? Okay, soulstones it is then.

BURROCARA touches the soulstone inside the machine, closing their eyes before uttering one
BURROCARA: “Fare ye well, Metatron. I am your jailor no longer.”

We feel an odd absence for a fraction of a second, before Mettaton stumbles backward. ...strange. I figured that Mettaton would be happy to have his body back, but it's as if... as if he misses the daemon who robbed him of his free will.

...well, this is unpleasant. There's a name for this condition, and I think you know what it is.

...I honestly don't get why this kinda thing happens. I mean- How? How could a captive ever feel so sympathetic towards the person who's keeping them prisoner? I just-

I would say that it baffles me, but I'd be lying. If I had to hazard a guess, I'd say it's due to some twist on survival instinct? Some quirk of the mind where the will to survive is stronger than the sense of contempt and disdain for one's captors. A quirk that, when combined with the fear that their captor might not “buy it”, may lead to the victim believing their own lies and forming that “positive” relationship as a means of continued survival.

Perhaps our primordial ancestors evolved this quirk as a means of integrating into the groups that conquered them, rather than be slaughtered as a liability to their new masters? If so, it probably gave them the opportunity to breed and continue their bloodline, perhaps passing the trait on to future generations.

WHOAwhoa, you think that it's a fucking genetic disorder?

Well, not entirely. I don't know for sure, as I don't think there's any one gene solely responsible for the likelihood of developing Stockholm syndrome, but I wouldn't be surprised if it were an emergent property of various genetic and epigenetic traits. After all, mental extremes can alter our biochemistry to a degree, and in all likelihood they could go on to influence not only our genetic code, but that of the code we pass on to our descendants. There have even been a fair few studies on the subject, going as far to theorize that PTSD itself is potentially heritable in a fashion.

Yeesh... This is- This is some heavy shit.

True, true. ...still. It's kind of fascinating, don't you think?

Uh, YEAH? I ain't gonna argue with that. This kinda knowledge is like a car crash in slow motion. It's horrifying, but you can't look away. BUT if you look hard enough at the right things, you might just learn something.

Attagirl, see the good in the bad. You MAKE that lemonade and sell it to the neighbourhood kids.

...oh, lemons... What I'd give for a tall glass of sweet fresh lemonade...

*sigh* Honestly, it kinda makes me wish I was back in California. Everything seemed so... so RIGHT back there. No rationing, no austerity, no prohibition, no friggin’ jackboots on patrol, no having to live your real life in the shadows while pretending that you're a good little church-goer. It's no wonder everyone else moved there before Temple Square started shittin’ out travel bans.
Surprising no-one, they struggle against the tide as it threatens to wash away their empire of dirt. They stand in defiance against the rules of nature, instead choosing to double down and play dirty to maintain their frankly untenable positions.

In this world, you either adapt to what life throws at you, or you die off. You offer a better product, or you lose out to the competition. You move to greener pastures, or you return to the dust of the barrens.

Or at least, that's how it's supposed to be. But of course, they just HAVE to think outside the box, play outside of the rules, and they fuck over everyone else to stay on top, when they're supposed to play the same fucking game we're supposed to.

...what does that say about you, though? You're always outside our box, you don't play by our rules-

**But do I fuck over everyone else to stay on top? Do I, Frisk?**

...no, I guess not.

Too bloody right m8. I recognize that I'm in a privileged position, and I remember an old adage that echoes down through the decades, and will probably continue to reverberate for centuries to come. “With great power, comes great responsibility.”

And indeed, I damn well make sure I do right by people and use my powers for good. After all, being destructive and self-interested takes so little effort that it can get boring quick. But to invest one's energies into making things better, to maintain and improve everything around you? THAT is the real challenge in life, the eternal conflict against entropy and the natural decline of all things, to see just how good you can make things.

But of course, the folks in Temple Square hold all the cards, and they play things to work for their own “good”, to the detriment of all else. Which is why when you break Asriel out of Emigration Oaks, you'd better bring Ben with you to take on every Templar in the whole bloody nation. You'll need every ounce of firepower you can get your hands on, every hostile incantation you and your friends can muster, if you want to escape to L.A. 'cause if the Templars don't want anyone to leave, they'll do their DAMNEDEST to keep people from leaving their precious promised land.

...that's a hell of a fuckin' thing there, Observer. But in the end, even after all we're gonna have to do... It's gonna be worth it.

**Indeed it will. But even then, the REAL problem is going to be convincing the royals to up and leave. After all, Mt Ebott is the home of the monsters, and they've worked hard to maintain the peace. But is it worth letting them maintain this fragile balance when New Deseret is set to crumble around them? Or do we try to get the Rangers to intervene on a mission of humanitarian interest, to get as many humans and monsters across the border before the Texans inevitably try to annex the entire state?**

...don't give me that look, you know it's bound to happen some day. Everyone knows what happened to New Mexico, and most of Old Mexico. There's going to be a War in the West soon enough, and it's probably in your best interests to get the rest of monsterkind as far away from New Deseret as possible. Which probably means maybe going a little further than L.A, maybe...
even following the Trail all the way up into Cascadia.

...it's still gonna be worth it.

I don't doubt it. ...hold on, I'll be back in a tick. Something's about to go down.

Location: True Lab, Infirmary

Dialogue: Alphys & the Observer

...the soulstone on the bed pulses red in an erratic, almost savage fashion, while the plate in your hands glows an unwavering, but comparatively dim, pure white.

Oh! ...hai again, Observer.

...something tells me there's something special about those souls.

...we did it. The prototype actually worked!

Aaaand which one would that be?

The, uh- You know which one, don't you? This is just a rhetorical question, isn't it?

Yeah I'm just jerking you around. After all, I did give Papyrus the idea for a dual Extractor setup.

...after all these years, we finally had a way to separate Alpha. I'm just... I only wish we'd known it sooner. The Pallbearer system was only for emergencies, for when we didn't have a soul jar ready, but looking back now... It was a benighted custom, even at the time.

It's always easy to look back on the past as barbaric and benighted, especially when such debacles are easier to resolve nowadays, but in the end the people back then were merely working with what they had. And if there were no soul jar on hand to contain the human soul, and there was no time to go and fetch one, then a monster would have had to suffice.

You don't think I know that? I'm not gonna argue that it didn't need to be done, but...

But what, Alphys?

That doesn't mean I have to ok with the notion of having to kill a monster in order to extract the human soul they carry. It mighta been necessary, but that doesn't mean I have to enjoy the bitter taste it's left in my mouth.

It's only natural. I'll leave it at that.

...so. Now you have the royal soul, knowing who it is, what are you going to do with it?

Well, for now he needs to- EYAAAAAAA?!

A thorned vine wraps around your wrists, and the soulstone falls to the ground, into the waiting
Thorney: “I believe it's only right that this return to where it belongs.”

Son of a goat. Why did I not see this coming?

Doctor Alphys: “NO! Don't touch it-”

Thorney: “Believe me, I am sorry for this, but it has been too long.”

“I'm tired of feigning happiness. I'm tired of feeling nothing for these people. I am tired of being a flower.”

“But with this... I can finally be who I was meant to be. And the King... after all these years, he will have a body once more!”

Doctor Alphys: “Thorney, just LISTEN to me! You're making a mistake, that's not-”

Thorney: “This is what I'm supposed to DO, damn you! I wasn't just some random experiment, I WAS MADE FOR A PURPOSE! I am a LORDVESSEL for King Asgore Dreemurr!”

The temper drains from Thorney's face, as quickly as it would have from Asgore. But there are no regrets left to fill the void, no frantic apologies for his outburst. All that remains is his desire to feel SOMETHING again, and to make things right.

“...this is what I was made for, Alphys. This is why I exist.”

“...alright, let's do this.”

The white soul phases out of the soulstone, and shudders for a moment as it nestles itself into Thorney's face.

...almost immediately, Thorney realises that he fucked up.

Thorney: “Wha- ...I'm sorry, I don't understand?”

“My... my boy? But-”

And that's what you were meaning to tell him. Asgore's soul still exists, but it's not here. Not in this universe, at least.

Doctor Alphys: “Th-T-that's what I was t-trying to t-tell you, Th-Thorney. Th-the Alpha we ended up with wasn't from th-this universe. It was- It-”

“...it was from the world before, the world that the older Frisk came from. The world where she failed to save your boy...”

Thorney: “Oh... OH.”

“...my boy...”
His form begins to shudder uncontrollably, as if instinctively fighting against the now wild soul within him. And yet, as soon as it began, it ends. The shuddering stops. Thorney closes his eyes. And a white light proceeds to envelop the room...

Oh my god.

“I was sick of not having a body...”

As the light fades, the small goat child stretches their new arms and legs, in a body that is not truly theirs. Slowly, they turn to face you.

He... he looks just like he does in the picture...

Staring bleary-eyed at you at first, he proceeds to rub his eyes. But he's not seeing things. He's seen you before, once upon a time.

Asriel {1}: “You... you're- You're one of Frisk's friends, aren't you?”

“Alvis, isn't it?”

...despite knowing what was going to happen, you find yourself speechless. Only barely audible squeaks escape your quivering lips.

...just a sec, brb.

Location: True Lab, Engineering Sector
Dialogue: Charlie & the Observer

BEEP!
WHAT?!
Get your arse to the Infirmary. Something intense is about to go down.
CRAP I'm on my way.
Go on, GIT!

Location: True Lab, Infirmary
Dialogue: Alphys & the Observer
You still ok?

I- I...

He cocks his head as you stand there, paralysed in... fear? Alphys, what is there to be afraid of?

He... I haven't put the other half of Alpha away yet...

He looks at the pulsing red soulstone, then back to you. Then back at the soulstone, then back to you.

Asriel {1}: “...what have you done with him?”

He takes a shaky, uncertain step forward. You take two steps back...you can feel the sweat forming on your brow.


Another jerky step forward. You take another five steps back, before falling on your arse. You can hear your heart beating in your ears.

His eyes narrow, as he approaches the bed where Charlie's soulstone lies. The heartbeat in your ears rises to a crescendo, resounding like the sound of brown shoes against lab floor tiles...

Speaking of which-

Charlie: “I'm here, I'm here! What's going-”

Charlie's eyes widen and darken at the sight in front of him. Beads of a black, almost tar-like substance start to fall from those dark, glossy orbs as his breathing intensifies. And now, the same terror that gripped you now has its claws around Asriel {1}'s heart.

THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT. THIS IS SCARING THE PANTS OFF OF ME TOO.

He's just overwhelmed with emotion, that's all. And since he's been having to concentrate more and more to hold his shape, especially with all the souls he's transferred from his Amalgamated form, his face tends to slip if he's emotionally overwhelmed like this. I mean, if you just walked in to see your best friend in child form again, you'd be startled too.

Asriel {1}: “Y-y-you? But I-”

Charlie: “Alphysss... *cough* What- ...what did you DO?”

You struggle to find the courage to speak.

Doctor Alphys: “It's- That wasn't Asgore's soul in Alpha. We- we brought back-”

Charlie: “Asriel {1}...”

“I knew I felt something different about Alpha...”
Your attention is drawn towards the pulsing red light on the bed. Here lies the other half of Alpha, “Charlie {1}”, out there in the open. Anyone could just pick it up and-

ALRIGHT. I get it.

As your eyes reform to a less creepy state, you quickly snatch up the soulstone, holding it close to your chest to keep it away from Asriel {1}. But you still look like a teen brunette version of Alice Cooper.

Slipping off of the bed, Asriel {1} shakily clenches his fists, trying his best not to be scared of you. Puffing up his chest, he puts on his bravest face, points at the soulstone, and says:

Asriel {1}: “G-give me the stone. My friend is in there.”

You look at the soulstone, holding the raging, tempestuous soul of a mentally-warped little boy. Then you look at Asriel {1}, and hold it out of his reach.

Charlie: “…that's not for you, little bro. You know what happened last time.”

Asriel {1}'s confidence falters. You'd think he'd get a little indignant at being called “little”, but something seems to stay his tongue. Maybe it's the image of his best friend all grown up, towering over him with tears of black goop trickling down his cheeks? Maybe that's what has him on the verge of wetting himself in terror?

Asriel {1}: “B-but-”

Charlie: “No buts, little man. You KNOW what he's like right now. And the last thing you need is to be his puppet again.”

Asriel {1}: “But-but- I-I don't- I don't understand…”

“He takes a few fearful steps back, trying to figure out what the hell you really are, and why you're wearing his best friend's skin. Stories of the skin-walkers echo in his mind's ears, while Thorney tries his best to calm him down, to little avail.

I breathe in deep, and try to explain.

Charlie: “…I'm the one who got lucky. I'm the one who didn't spend the last days of his life turning into a man-eater.”

“…remember that fairy-tale Frisk told you? The one about the tree of worlds?”

“Well, imagine that this world is a branch of an earlier one. Some things stay the same, but other things are different.”
“I'm the Charlie from a, uh, an earlier world than this one. A world where Frisk never came to the Underground.”

*He can't help but look at you, all wide-eyed and curious. In Timeline {1}, he never got the chance to truly comprehend the nature of the multiverse. But here and now, against all odds and against all gods, he has the potential to truly understand.*

*He nods shakily, indicating that he understands. But he's still creeped out by your Alice Cooper eyes.*

Charlie: “Imagine what would have happened if Frisk didn't stop me eating those buttercups. Imagine me dying slowly in my bed, too weak to move, waiting for you to take my soul.”

“...that's what happened. We went back to the village, just like you and he did in your time. We got both ourselves killed, just like you and he did.”

“...but that time, nobody came in time to contain our souls. Do you KNOW what happened THEN, Asriel?!”

Asriel {1} looks like he's about to wet himself out of fear. Though I'm pretty sure monsters can't actually wet themselves, so he's just scared. Scared, and on the verge of tears.

Charlie: “…you don't want to know what happened after that, kiddo. But it was BAD. And even when Frisk brought us back, gave us another chance at life, we were never the same again.”

“Now, do you really want that soulstone, Asriel? Knowing what'll happen if you let him back into your heart?”

The fear is gone now, but it's too late. His tears have already broken.

Asriel {1}: “But- ...but he needs me... I've tried to calm him down, but-”

I pass the soulstone to Alphys.

*She's not responding.*

I nudge her with the soulstone.

A risky play, but it works. She's back with us, and she takes the crystalline plate from you.

Doctor Alphys: “…I'll- I'll put this in containment with the others…”

As she walks away, Asriel {1} looks longingly at the plate. But try as he might, Charlie {1} needs a lot more than TLC to “restore” him. If anything, he'd have better luck undergoing a DBS-based procedure in the Omega Sector.

...not really the time for that, Observer.

Do you even know what DBS is?

No, and I don't care. Right now, I've got more important shit to deal with.
Oh, fine. Sure. ...so what are you- Ah...

You scoop Asriel [1] up into your arms. ...and your legs buckle under you like gummy worms, because you gravely underestimated how heavy he is. He's not a wee bab, he's a 9 year old boy, and he's a pretty big boy at that. Besides, you've got Mister Fantastic/Odo powers, not Hulk powers. Focus on your strengths as a changeling.

Charlie: “S-sorry. I uh, guess I'm not so strong after all.”

I instead just wrap my arms around Asriel [1].

And that you do. ...uh, that's not what I meant by focusing on your strengths. Asriel [1] looks pretty nervous as your arms extend and loop around his body multiple times, and the resultant hug does not reassure him. The rest of the Fantastic Four might be used to a bendy-armed hug from Reed Richards, but right now Asriel [1]'s just weirded out by it. But at least now his tears are starting to dry up, even if he's currently bound up tighter than a boy adventurer in a supervillain's lair.

Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer

Curious as to why Charlie ran off like he did, you head over to the infirmary. There, entangled in Charlie's stretchy arms, is-

Frisk: “Asriel?”

Aaaand this is where things got weird. Remember, when you saved Asriel in the current timeline, you left the Reaver behind as you fled. The Reaver containing the souls of the Asriel and Charlie from the previous timeline.

Alphys used the recent dual-Extractor setup to separate the bound souls, and since Thorney was out of the loop he got his hands on Asriel's soul, thinking it was the soul of this world's Asgore. Sooo now we have Asriel [1] in the driver's seat of Thorney's body.

Oh god... damnit... OHHH I shoulda seen this coming!

Asriel [1] looks to you, and a cocktail of anxiety and hatred bubbles up from his core. Even after all of these years, he's never forgotten who killed his best friend.

Oh no, not THIS again. I've already got one Asriel who doesn't love me anymore, I'm not gonna lose this one too.

Whatever you do here, be careful.

Frisk: *sigh* “Sweetie, please don't give me that look.”

“Sweetie, do you... do you hate me?”

He looks as if he's about to nod, but he doesn't. He doesn't nod, but he doesn't shake his head either.
Asriel {1}: “...you killed him. You could have just pinned him, but you KILLED HIM.”

Frisk: “I- it was- I didn't have time to think! I could have missed with that thing, and he would have killed both of us! EVERYONE would have died eventually!”

“I made a tough call in the HEAT of the MOMENT! Don't you understand?!”

Asriel {1}: “You didn't try hard enough. You could have shot him anywhere else, and he would have been ok.”

“But no. You just KILLED him. You took away the only human I ever loved, and you KILLED him because you were too-...”

He trails off in terror, freezing in fright as he sees your expression. And you look MAD right now. MAD and UPSET.

Oh you did NOT just pull that on me you little twerp! You don't know-

Frisk: “Do you have ANY idea how HARD I've worked for all of this?! Do you KNOW what I've BEEN THROUGH all these years?!”

Charlie: “Whoa whoa, Frisk. Try to-”

You violently shove his shoulder, and his arms unravel from Asriel as he falls over. Frisk, what the hell?

Frisk: “SHUT UP Charlie! I wasn't talking to you!”

“I TRIED to save him, Asriel. But at the end of the day, there's only one reason why I “fell down” into the underground. And that was to save you.”

Asriel {1} has never been more afraid of you than he is right now. But what you just said has left him with SO many questions.

Asriel {1}: “…but why? Why me? Why was I so special? Why did you keep telling me I was special?!”

Deep breaths, Frisk. Your outburst has him more on edge than ever before.

Frisk: “Because I've saved you before. ...you remember that story I used to tell you two? The story of the World Tree?”

Charlie: “...he already understands the many-worlds system, Frisk. I told him while trying to explain why I'm here.”

Frisk: “Good. Then you know what happened to the previous you. Let's call him... “Asriel Prime”, since you're, uh, {1}.”

“He died, just like you and Charlie did. But things didn't get saved like they were in your timeline. Your souls faded away before anyone could contain them.”
...you lean in close, as if to tell him a secret. Are you TRYING to make him piss his pants?

Frisk: “...do you know what happened to them, sweetie? Do you know what happens to someone when their soul dies?”

Fucking Christ Frisk, lay off the lad! He's had it rough enough already with you-

You stay out of this.

WHY DON'T YOU MAKE ME, PSYCHO?

...

Frisk: “When the soul dies, the mind falls to the bottom of reality, where all manner of deprived and unborn THINGS feed on the thoughts and feelings of all spirits. They torture, tease, torment and violate the dead, reserving the most “productive” for the greater daemons in the darkest corners of that horrible place.”

“That is where Asriel Prime, and Charlie Prime, ended up in my timeline. And they were at the mercy of those things. For 200 YEARS.”

A horrified whining escapes Asriel {1}’s mouth, as he grips his ears and realises just how “lucky” he was. Seriously though, fuck you Frisk.

He had to know what I saved him from. He needs to know how much he owes me.

What the HELL Frisk?! What is the POINT in all of this?!

Frisk: “By the time I fell down, 200 years after you died, Charlie had somehow managed to escape that hell by latching on to my mind. But it wasn't until a long time after that that I learned about what he and his brother had been through. What YOU could have been through.”

“And against all odds, I managed to save Asriel from that hellhole. But I didn't leave that place unscathed. For years afterwards, I had nightmares about what I saw, nightmares that years of therapy have barely managed to suppress. But it was all worth it, in the end. And do you know why?”

You try to pull the sympathy card, but it's not working on me right now. ...but it kind of works on Asriel. Not that it shouldn't, mind. It's just that I do not agree with how you've gone about this. You would not win any “Best big sister” awards, let me put it that way.

...just shut up, Observer. I don't have time for your crap right-

??? ???????? ????????: DIES MIES JESCHET BOENE DOESEF DOUVEMA ENITEMAUS

...fuck this, I'm out.

Location: True Lab, Asriel's Office

Dialogue: Prince Asriel & the Observer
Well it sounds like you've summoned the Abyssal Corsair to speak his piece. That's Phase 3 of the ritual completed. All you need to do now is-

Observer? Are you- are you ok?

*Of course! I'm feeling FANTASTIC right now! Nothing to concern your pretty little head with, little man!*

You really don't sound ok, though. You have a bad day at work or something?

*Oh please. Even if I had a bad day at work, I'd never vent it HERE of all places. Hell, by the time I'm back here, I've already calmed down.*

...*besides, I never work Tuesday nights.*

Ok, but seriously you sound like you need a drink.

*No, no, I just need to sleep on things. Maybe play a little more Animal Crossing to mellow me out before I hit the sack...*

The Abyssal Corsair: “...really, monster? You have the Per Adonai invocation running on a cassette player?”

“All of the savvy warlocks have long since transitioned to MP3.”

“...regardless, you have reached my services. How many I help you?”

Prinçe Asriel: “I- uh- Ohhh...”

Floriel: “OH GODS.”

*Aaaand I'm back. Did I miss anything? No? Ok then.*

...you gaze upon the dark, glittering mass of tentacles as it regards you with its many eyes of many colours. It's like staring into the void itself.

Prinçe Asriel: “...Y’ai’ng’ngah, YOG-SOTHOTH h ’ee—l’geb f'ai throdog UAAAH! ”

*The Corsair continues to regard you, before nodding.*

The Corsair: “Well, you know the ritual wholesale, so that's reason enough to do business with you. But before I ask who the subject of this ritual is, there is the matter of payment to be discussed. After all, a life is worth its weight in gold, and we need to keep the lights on in the office.”

“However, we do have different payment options to pay off the debt your actions will incur. Though we do not accept mere coin or credit, for these are of little worth beyond the mortal plane. There are instead many other things my fellow crewmates could make use of...”

“For instance, you could supply us with ethereal foodstuffs, or sell us a few processed mineral goods from your mines, or even permit us to make use of your computer servers. There is also
the option of trading in souls, but you do not seem like the kind of being who is willing to sell someone's soul for power...”

...yeah, I know. The economics of Abyssal nomads is... interesting, to say the least. They perceive money as an “experiment”, a way to prop up exchanges among themselves. And as for the money of other cultures, they just don't bother with exchange rates and instead demand something more “real” as payment, things they can use for more than just trading.

I don't- I don't care. I'm willing to pay any price to bring Mom back.

Except the souls of your people. You're not perfect, but I know you're not a warlock.

As if I ever considered it.

...though that said, there WAS the Pallbearer system-

HEY that was DAD's contingency plan. And it was one of the first things Mom tried to get rid of when she took the reins.

Oh, right. Silly me.

...quick question?

What is it now?

Are you sure Floriel is 100% down for this? She looks pretty nervous if you ask me.

She knows what she was made for. She just needed some time to come to terms with it, that's all.

...maybe you're right. Maybe she's just creeped out by the Abyssal you've called into this plane of existence, and not the notion of potentially being a prisoner in her own body.

I'm convinced that they'll work out some kinda timeshare thing. After all, that's what happened with Flowey if Frisk is to be believed.

I can't really argue with that, I guess. ...still, I can't shake the feeling that- No, nevermind. I'm just being paranoid.

You go ahead and take care of business with the Corsair. I'm going to check in on the Archangel.

The who what now?

I was going to check in on you guys when I booted up the system, but it immediately locked on to this being in the bottom of reality, some sort of... fallen angel, it looks like? Last I checked, she was planning a “hostile takeover” of the Fissures of Despair, a major charnel house in the Inner Circles.

...well, if you see her, tell her good luck for me?

If my cover is blown down there, I'll be sure to send her your regards. I, um, I don't want her to know that I'm watching over her. Beings in the Inferno tend to get a little narky if they know something from the higher dimensions is watching them.
Location: The Fissures of Despair

Level of Reality: 13

Subject of Observation: Archangel ??????

...welp. Looks like her plan for a stealthy takeover took a turn for the worse. Her champion, Gunther the Ever-loaded, is struggling to fend off the hordes of daemons who disagree with his approach of “shotgun diplomacy”. But rather than stay in the shadows and watch her high-level champion fall to the hordes, she instead steps in with a barrage of searing white fireballs.

??????? ??? ?????????: “ARCHANGEL!”

The resounding call of the challenger causes the Archangel to turn and face her quarry. And of course, it just HAD to be HIM again. Her long-time Nemesis in this world, an old “minion” turned treacherous dog-

Gordakh the De-Baller: “When will you just stay down, Dreemurr? How many times have you faced me and fallen to my blade?!”

WAIT WHAT
What?!

IT WAS YOU ALL ALONG?!

WHO ARE YOU?!

Does it even matter? Your Nemesis is on the offensive! THINK FAST TORIEL!

Gordakh the De-Baller: *furious battlecry*

Gordakh charges towards you, his dragon-cannon spewing forth waves of dark fire!

[Defend] > *Fight Fire With Fire

Your firewall soaks up the dark fire, much to Gordakh's chagrin.

Gordakh the De-Baller: *angry goblin noises* [Enraged by Blocking]

OH FOR GODS' SAKE! Again?!

[Attack] > *Fire Whirl > *Gordakh the De-Baller

You conjure a whirling vortex of fireballs and direct it at Gordakh as he charges you.

...it's not very effective.

One of these days, Gordakh...
Despite your best efforts, the two of you clash, once again, in mortal combat. Swords swing, fists fly, and the tide turns in your favour for a brief moment! ...before a sneaky armour-piercing shot to the gut brings you to your knees...

Through the ringing in your ears, you hear someone yell “FINISH HER!” As you look up, you spy Gordakh's infamous sickle being unsheathed. He knows you don't actually have any balls, but the Rite Of De-Balling is his signature finishing move, and he’ll be damned if he doesn't use it on his long-time Nemesis.

Gordakh the De-Baller: “By the laws of my kind, your balls are mine!”

He raises the sickle high in the air, and- ...ends up staring in disbelief at his own melting arm. His screams are brief as a shifting mass of black tendrils and colourful orbs descends upon him, dissolving him like sherbet in hot water.

What... is that?! I have never seen something so-

The Abyssal Corsair: “Tortured soul, I have been contracted to deliver you from this place. By the grace of my client, you have another shot at life.”

It extends its many tendrils towards you, ready to take you back to- OI don't swing your sword at him, he's only trying to help!

Archangel Toriel: “No, stay back! I'm warning you!”

Despite your obvious apprehension, the Corsair turns your sword to dust, and envelops you.

NO!

...there is a long, dark interval, broken only by barely audible murmurs from both worlds as you are dragged between them.

...who are you? What are you?

Alongside you, you see a dark-clothed skeleton, wearing a crown of poppies beneath his hooded robes. But he is not the Grim Reaper. He is the Observer. And he's glad to see you've made something of yourself, Toriel.

Oh?

Most would have languished eternally in those pits, without the will to fight back. But with a heart like yours, it would have taken you a great effort NOT to think of some way to escape. And while it took the greater half of a century, waiting for the right moment, you eventually slipped your bonds and went on to become a force to be reckoned with in the Inferno.

But now, at long last, you needn't concern yourself with that place any longer. A vessel has been prepared. The ritual has been completed. And your child is eager to see his mother again after all these years!

...my child? ...it's- Gods, it has been so long... My child...
...no. I cannot stay long.

Are you serious? After all you've suffered down there, all the betrayal and loss you've endured in this bitter, endless war, you intend to go back there?!

I cannot just stand idly by and let this horror show continue! I can only rest when the Burning One lays drowning in its own burning blood!

So what? After all your son has done to bring you back, you're going to just KILL yourself to go back into Hell? Pardon my French, but you can't fucking do that.

I beg your pardon?

Ignoring the fact that you'd effectively be back to square one if you returned as a spirit, the vessel you're about to manifest in has an awareness of its own. And believe it or not, it is a consciousness driven entirely by determination, without the slightest hint of a soul. If you try to kill yourself, you'd have to murder another to do so, one who doesn't have the same existential backup as most people do.

Oh, and let's not forget, IT'S YOUR FUCKING SON we're talking about. He SAW YOU DIE nearly two-hundred years ago, the last of his family taken away in the nightmare of brutality. Considering what he's been through, and how long it's been since you died, it's a miracle he hasn't killed himself in turn, or flat-out just died of a broken heart. That kind of determination, even as it falters sporadically, is reason enough for you to give Asriel a great big hug and show some fucking gratitude for what he's done.

...

Get ready, Toriel. You're almost home.

Location: True Lab, Asriel's Office

Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer

You and your friends wait with bated breath, as Prince Asriel holds the freshly-signed contract in his hands. Soon enough, Floriel will bear the freshly-retrieved soul of Toriel Dreemurr.

Observer...

Here for the fireworks, are we?

I'm...

Oh? Finally cooled your jets, have we?

...I'M SORRY, OK? I'm sorry that I, uh, pissed you off-

Who gives a shit what I feel? I was honestly more concerned for Asriel's mental well-being. I mean, if YOU'D just been raised from the dead after centuries of tumultuous slumber, would you
want some indignant bitch telling you that you're lucky you never got dragged to Hell? Would you even be able to HANDLE something like that as a 9 year old?!

BUT HE HAD TO KNOW! He legitimately didn't know how GOOD he'd had it with me around! And to hear him tossing all of my achievements in the trash, just HATING on everything I've done, it- it broke my heart to hear it, Observer! I've WORKED SO HARD, AND HE- I wanted him to appreciate what I'd done for him! Everything I did was for HIM! BUT-

Easy, easy. It's alright. ...but it's not actually alright. Asriel {1} clings to Charlie's leg, looking at you not with contempt, but with pity and regret. He's not doing so well after what you told him. He wounded you with his words, yes, but your knowledge of the Inferno has probably scarred him for life. Which in all honesty isn't what a growing boy needs as one of his five-a-day.

...

Despite him being a salty little bitch, he's still just a boy. There were probably better ways of going about it.

The real question still stands, however. Because believe me, I do love Asriel. But you need to ask yourself: why IS he so special? Deep down, what does Asriel MEAN to you? What drives you to love him, for better or for worse?

You make it sound like I want to marry him. I mean-

I didn't mean to insinuate that. But it's true, isn't it? Through the good times and the bad, even when he's being a little bitch, you've always loved him. And even if you never truly “tie the knot” as they say, you and Asriel Prime probably going to spend the rest of your lives together, right? Now ask yourself: what is Asriel Dreemurr to you?

...in the beginning, he was the last piece of the puzzle. I'd saved everyone else, befriended them, freed them all from their eternal prison! ...and Asriel was the one person I couldn't save. No matter how hard I begged him, he wouldn't budge. I knew so much about him, but nothing I could say or do would make him go with me...

And against all odds, you saved not only Flowey, but his spirit as well. Yet even after all of that, despite being “saved”, he was very much not ok. After which, he became...?

...a new puzzle entirely. I learned that day that there is no “happy ever after”. Entropy makes sure of that, a decline in all things left alone. A happy ending is something you have to work towards AND constantly work on.

For years after I'd saved him, he was a broken boy. THEY were broken boys. Asriel broken from the tortures he'd faced, Flowey from the bad things he'd done, and I- I understood their pain. I FELT their pain.

You're getting closer, closer to the linchpin of why you love him so. Echoing what he told you during your worst fight ever, hopped up on human souls...

...”you're the only one who understands me.”

And there you have it. You both know what it's like, to hurt and be hurt. You both know how it
feels to tear people's lives apart, and to be torn apart yourselves. And you are both fundamentally broken people, forever scarred by what you've done and had done to you. What's more, your understanding of one-another, your sympathy for one-another’s battle-scars, these things have drawn you together with a desire to fix... and be fixed.

But here's the problem, Frisk. That's YOUR Asriel we're talking about. YOU TWO have been through Hell together, YOU TWO mean the same thing to one-another. ...but what about the other Asriels? Have they been through the same shit as you and Prime?

...please, don't do this to me.

Frisk, be honest with yourself. Have they experienced what you have? Can they truly say that they understand you?

...no. No, I don't- Why are you doing this to me?

They were never your kindred spirit, never your battle-brother. To them, you were their kind and caring older sister, once upon a time. And then, you became the murderer of their brother. And while they struggle to appreciate how things could have been worse if you hadn't made that call, they just can't get past that moment when their trust in you was shattered.

Their minds may understand what you had to do, but their hearts will forever scream that you killed their best friend. For as it has always been, and always will be, actions speak louder than words ever could.

...then what is the point in me even being here? Why should I bother with this world when nobody really understands me?

Careful with that kind of thinking, Frisk. Remember where it led you last time.

I'm not gonna burn this whole place down because of it. I'm not insane.

Welll that's de- no, I'm going to stop myself there, I don't want us to fight again.

Charlie: “Frisk? Where are you going? Don't you want to-”

Frisk: “…I'm not feeling so hot right now. I, uh, I need some time to think.”

“It's been one of those days...”

You feel Asriel [1] tug on your labcoat, and you look down into his sorry eyes.

Asriel [1]: “Are you g-going to be ok?”

I can't even look at him right now. I just-

Frisk: “...I'm sorry, Asriel.”

And with that, I head back to New Home. I... feel like I should see the others.
I'll meet you there.

What's that supposed to mean?

I'm trying out more “regular” timeskips, trimming “the fat” between major scenes while following certain threads. For instance, I don't need to narrate you going up the elevator, and I didn't need to narrate the weeks between reclaiming the True Lab and, well, today's events.

...it seems that I've seen you less and less these days.

...wait, are you trying to say that- Did you MISS me, Frisk? Seriously?

What, you think I didn't? You think I don't, even now?

Having you around was, well, it was like a breath of fresh air. Don't get me wrong, it's hard to find another friend like Charlie, but rolling with you was... I can't lie, it was fucking insane. You showed me so many things, TOLD me so many things, opened my eyes to the worlds beyond our own! It was amazing and horrifying, and sometimes it was just plain weird. And you know what? I loved every second of it.

Come on Frisk, don't get like that. Please, save this “well, aint we a pair, raggedy man” nonsense for our final meeting. After all, I've been saving the best for last.

Heh, like that's any kinda challenge for you. I never know what to expect from you when we're working together, but it's never been boring.

Well then, save up your dankest memes, your freshest references, and your spiciest puns. Because when I say it's goodbye, it's going to be goodbye. After all, this tale has just reached 40 entries, nearly 240,000 words. It has to end some time. All stories need to end one day.

But that day is not today. Today, you go ahead and take some time to think things over. Like the Gubernator once said, “I'll be back”.

Location: New Home, Living Room

An hour and a half later...

You sit opposite from Ben at the table, eating- oooh, jam roly-poly?

Oh! I thought you'd be gone longer than- Eh, nevermind.

So, yeah. Ben was making batches of the things while I was downstairs, something to raise the spirits of the refugees.

Oh? So people DID manage to climb the mountain after the bomb dropped?

Yeah, one of the Rangers helped lead folks into the mountains, and ended up camping out in the Barrier Chamber. So far, they've been good, uh, “guests”.
No ongoing hostilities?

Heh, nope. They're just glad to be alive. Hell, I think they like it better down here than they ever did back home.

As if that's a hard thing to do. If I weren't writing this, I'd be able to write a book on how New Deseret SUCKS in the 2060s.

I know, right? It's almost as if people can be pretty nice as long as their bellies are full and their holosuites are working?

Indeed indeed. But take away those creature comforts, deprive them of what they want and need, put their lives in jeopardy over an extended period of time...

...and they can become as nasty and as violent as the most bloodthirsty Klingon. Believe me, I remember the Siege of AR-558.

...but at the same time, if those same people are too tired and weak to fight, if they're too worn down to be hostile, then the offer of a safe haven, a warm bed, even just a hot meal, might just open their hearts. For in a world as broken and ravaged as this one, such kind souls may prove to be your best chance at long-term survival.

...still, I can't help but wonder. Why jam roly-poly? Don't get me wrong, it's a classic British pudding, but on this scale it does raise a few questions.

And funnily enough, it reminds me of a dream I had about 2 weeks ago, involving "teddy jars" and a rotating limousine-

I'm not even gonna ask.

Frisk: "Y'know, I have just one question about this. ...what does jam roly-poly mean to you?"

Oooh you sneaky bint. Taking a leaf out of my book, are we?

And weirdly enough, it kind of works on him. He cocks his head in response to this inquiry, and his ears follow suit half a second later.

Ben: "...what does it mean to me? That's an odd way to ask such a question-"

Frisk: "Well, I mean, you made a lot of it for the refugees, we're having some right now, and don't think I haven't noticed the way you've been looking at me while I've been eating it."

Wait, how long has he been giving you that look?

A while, actually. I was just being polite, I didn't want to ruin the ambiance.

Ben: "...alright, you've twisted my arm. I'll admit, it carries some... some sentimental value for me. One of my earliest and fondest memories was eating this in the kitchen with Alice."

"I was 5 years old, a heavy rain battered the window-panes, and the outside world seemed so cold and dreary. But the sweetness and warmth of the "shirt-sleeve pudding", as old dean Henry used to call it, filled me with such joy and tranquillity, second only to the sight of my sister enjoying her
...no way. I think I just pieced it together. Is he- Is he talking about the Alice I'm thinking of?

*If her middle name is Pleasance, you're on the right track.*

**Frisk:** “NO WAY, are you telling me that your sister was THE Alice Liddell? The one Lewis Carroll wrote about in his stories?”

**Ben gives a single dry chuckle.**

**Ben:** “I take it his books have stood the test of time in your world? The series is still quite popular in my time, despite the... “allegations” against Mr Charles Dodgson, concerning his relationship with the Liddell family.”

**Frisk:** “Oh they've stood the test of time alright. There have been TV shows, movies, even video games based off of Alice in Wonderland! Hell, I used to play the games made by American McGee on my Windows emulator-”

“...holy shit. That's actually kinda spooky.”

**Ben:** “Spooky?”

**Careful...**

**Frisk:** “The story of American McGee's Alice.”

“...you talked to me about the fire that killed your foster family? Well, weirdly enough, that's how American McGee's Alice starts out. Alice is the only survivor of a house-fire that kills her family, and the trauma of it all makes her lose her mind. Fast forward ten years and she's an inmate at Rutledge Asylum, still trying to piece together her-”

*You pause as you notice Ben's wide-eyed horror at these parallel events. For in his timeline, he and Alice were the only survivors of the fire. But his Alice didn't end up in psychiatric care until many, MANY years later. He plunges his head into his hands, recalling the chain of events that led to her incarceration at the Crann na Beatha Sanitarium on Mercy Hill. When he lifts his head again, you can see that he is quite upset by the memory. ...yeah. Real smooth, dumbarse.*

**Frisk:** “Oh my god, I'm so- I'm so sorry. I didn't-”

**Ben:** “It's not that, it's not- ...I'm not fooling anyone, am I?”

“I have a confession to make, Frisk. When I look at you, I can't help but think that- well- Obe's roots, you look so much like her...”

...this is why he saved me, isn't it? This is why he's so eager to help me. Because I remind him of his step-sister.

*Well, there's also the notion of not letting an innocent die. But yes, the similarities between you and Alice did draw him in at first. And not just in appearance, funnily enough. Granted, you DO*
"look a lot like Alice did when she was your age, but the similarities don't end there."

**Ben:** “…what's more, knowing what you've told me about your life, I can't help but-”

**Frisk:** “There are parallels between what I did and what she did, aren't there? And I've got a feeling you're gonna list them, aren't you?”

**Ben:** “If it's ok with you-”

**Frisk:** “Yeah it's fine. It'll be interesting, if nothing else.”

**Ben:** “Thank you, Frisk. ...now, where to begin?”

“...well, the obvious first parallel is that you both fell into an underground realm, even though yours was a literal experience while Alice's was literary. Then, there was your time in a mental institution-”

**Frisk:** “Though my experience was more along the lines of bi-weekly therapy sessions alongside Asriel. I have a feeling that Alice's treatments were a little more... intensive, weren't they?”

*Ben nods solemnly. Alice had indeed been a “permanent fixture” of the facility until Ghroth invaded Earth.*

**Ben:** “…and then there is the matter of being manipulated into mass-murder.”

*A knot forms in your stomach, and it's not due to the jam roly-poly. That stuff is primo British pudding.*

**Ben:** “Though again, while you were at the mercy of some French puppeteer from the Beyond,-”

*Though the guy was actually from Arizona.*

“-Alice was manipulated in a more insidious way. She'd never given up trying to piece together who started the fire, and time and time again she'd deduced that I had no part in it, despite my innate talents. And that surprisingly, Lewis Carroll's hands were equally clean despite the ongoing investigation at the time.”

“Through correspondence with an independent hunter's lodge, she became convinced that there was a conspiracy against our family, perpetrated by the Umber Council and their creatures of the night. She always was quick to jump to conclusions...”

“...according to the findings of the other houses, Alice joined the Calcinating Flame in the October of '76, though at the time everyone believed that she had simply vanished. Even when the murders started, sprinkling a trail of bone ash that stretched across Europe, no-one suspected that she was part of the mysterious cult of vampire hunters believed to be responsible.”

“It wasn't until she tried to kill Prince Leopold, her former sweetheart, that anyone knew what had happened to her. ...and oddly enough, the recently turned prince was the only one able to stop her. Not because he had been reinvigorated by a Council-sanctioned Blood Grail, but because of the connection he shared with her. And I'm pretty sure that if it weren't for the Prince's intervention, and his investments in mental health research, she would have been executed for treason.”

...whoa. THAT is spooky. Constants and variables, eh Observer?
Frisk: “...I guess both of us dodged a bullet there, didn't we? Despite everything we did, we both got our second chances.”

“But that's not why you've taken to me, is it Ben? I'm not just “another Alice” to you, am I?”

**Ben smiles and shakes his head.**

Ben: “Oh, not at all. There's a lot more to you than that, Frisca Rivera.”

“In a way, you're... you're somewhat kinder than the Alice I now know. Despite what you've been through, you remind me of how she was before the fire. Always fascinated with the exotic and the peculiar, though where she took interest in the secrets of the Orient and the mysteries of the Mediterranean, you took interest in science fiction and high fantasy.”

“And honestly, until I came of age and was dragged along on my uncle's expeditions, I honestly held little interest in archaeology and ancient history. Indeed, as a boy I was more enamoured with computer games and electronic music, to the point where I'd developed some rather refined reflexes and motor skills.”

“...it's funny, really. My uncle always insisted that these games were merely an indulgence, an overly-elaborate pastime, but when the Miskatonic University reached out to “skilled gamers” regarding a prehistoric computer game, he suddenly approved of my hobby! And the next thing I knew, I was approached at the Imperial Games Convention to play through a game by the name of “Cuphead”, since the university technicians lacked the reflexes and the patience-”

Frisk: “WHAT.”

**Wait WHAT?**

Frisk: “You playtested CUPHEAD?! In the 1870s?”

Ben: “I take it you've played it too?”

Frisk: “I could NEVER BEAT that goddamn game! Hell, even in two-player mode, Asriel & I could never make it past King Dice!”

*Ben dabs his mouth with the napkin before straightening it. He's about to emasculate the hell out of you as a fellow gamer.*

Son of a bitch.

Ben: “It took me more tries than I care to mention, and probably shortened my lifespan quite a bit, but I managed to complete the entire experience, including the Secret Fuhrer fight.”

SON OF A- wait what?

Frisk: “Uh, I don't know if we've played the same version of the game, but I'm pretty sure Hitler was never a boss in Cuphead.”
Ben: “Perhaps. Although to be fair, the version unearthed by the university was apparently the “Archive Edition”, containing the original “Don’t Deal with the Devil” arc AND all of the expansion chapters, including, um, what was it called? OH, “Feuer Frei Fuhrer”, that’s it.”

“Apparently that chapter was a parody of some sort of Great War, and it ended with a postcard of Cuphead punching this “Hitler” chap in the face. Or so you think.”

“After completing that episode on Expert mode, you would fight him again, only to unlock the secret final boss of that episode: “Secret Fuhrer”, who fought a lot like the Fuhrer except he was some sort of lizard-man. And insanely difficult to beat.”

Frisk: “Sonofabitch... Still, I'm pretty sure the Cuphead in my universe never got “Feuer Frei Fuhrer”. Musta been exclusive to the age before yours-”

doc sans: “uh, hey Frisk? there's, uh, someone here to see ya.”

You look to where Sans is standing, and he's looking a little unsettled. Which when we're talking about Sans, any change in that goofy grin of his is cause for concern.

Who could it be, though? Oh god, is it one of those conscripts pulling an Iden Versio? ’cause my Mandarin's all kinds of rusty- ...daFUCK-

A familiar blue-and-purple striped shirt makes its way around the corner, its wearer standing twice as tall as Sans. Their dark hair is styled in an inverted bob cut, framing a damningly familiar face that regards you with great interest. Across her back sits not a Reaver, but a... a Monado? What?

And all the while, Ben is looking back and forth between the two of you, greatly confused by what the hell is going on.

Oh god... I should have known something like this was gonna happen.

Well, considering who it is, I'm amazed that it didn't happen sooner.

Frisk {2}; *sigh* “So, here we are again.”

“It's been a long time, hasn't it? Frisk. Prime.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, this has taken a turn. Something tells me that Frisk is in for a bit of a bollocking from her parallel. After all, those two didn't exactly part on the happiest of notes.
Primes and Parallels

Chapter Summary

A familiar face works her way back into Frisk's life. The last time they met, they didn't leave on the best of terms. However, given the circumstances, she can’t afford to be too picky when it comes to asking for help, even though she has a couple of bones to pick with Frisk...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Location: New Home, Living Room**

**Dialogue: Frisca Prime & the Observer**

*Standing there in the doorway, arms crossed and eyes that could cut steel, Frisk {2} regards you with pity and contempt.*

Oh god.

**Frisk {2}: ”...alright, first things first.”**

*Frisk {2} storms over to where you're sitting, and JESUS CHRIST! That had to hurt! Blimey, I'm going to need a better angle on this, brb!*  

*Gitche Manitou, look at that SHINER! Frisk Prime picks herself up off of the floor, nursing one hell of a bruise. Yup, Frisk {2} utterly DECKED Frisk Prime, and they both know why. Personally, I'm just glad that that's ALL Frisk {2}'s willing to dish out...*

*...well, at least she didn't drive you through the table like some sort of pro-wrestler. Because looking at those guns, I would not be surprised if she could actually do that to you.*

GH... Whose side are you on?!

*Implying there were sides to be taken here? Yeah, she roughed you up in a single motion, but to be frank you've done some messed-up shit.*

**Frisk {2}: “There, now we're even. But just so there's no hard feelings...”**

*She picks you up, dusts you off, and gives you a big old hug. And a kiss on the cheek. ...well then. This Frisk is- Yup. She's got a lot of conflicted feelings up in there.*
Frisk Prime: “Get the hell offa me you frickin' psycho!”

Frisk {2}: “Oh please, like you're any different. After the shit you pulled an hour or two ago, I'm not sure that you're in any position to negotiate.”

“But could you get that pretty-boy to put his goddamn sword away? I swear, if I start losing my hair 'cause of that thing, I'm gonna- HEY. SIR ROBIN. Put that fuckin' thing away or we're gonna have trouble.”

Ben looks at you, then at her, very much on edge and unsure about what the hell he's supposed to do. Meanwhile, Sans has been backing away slowly as if to say “i'm stayin' outta this”, to the point where he's at the other end of the hallway leading to the bedrooms.

Frisk Prime: “…at ease, Ben. I think we're “good” here.”

Ben hesitates, staring down the parallel Frisk who just decked his Frisk. With a withering look, he sheaths his sword as Frisk {2} breaks the awkwardly aggressive hug.

Ben: “…would it be too much to ask what the BLOODY HELL is going on?”

You fish around in your inventory for that notebook Charlie gave you, and hand it to Ben. He reads through it slowly, making several double-takes as he tries to process this convoluted chain of events.

Ben: “Bloody hell... This makes Jabberwocky seem vaguely coherent by comparison.”

Frisk Prime: “…so, uh, Frisk. To what do I owe this pleasure. Beyond my, uh, you know...”

Frisk {2} takes in a deep breath and tries to relax. She almost looks like she feels bad about smacking you in the gabber, like. Almost.

Frisk {2}: “…alright, I'll level with you. I need your help.”

Frisk Prime: “My help, huh? Call me crazy, but if someone punches me to the ground, I don't get the impression that they need my help with anything.”

Frisk {2}: “Oh come on, you cut that crap RIGHT NOW. You've taken worse from your friends and you STILL helped them out. Believe me, I should know.”

She does have a point, I have to say. A lot of your friends have tried to kill you at one point, and you didn’t let that stop you.

...goddamnit Observer.

Hey, it's not my fault that you have such interesting friendships.

Frisk Prime: “…fine. I'll pretend that I just ran into a door or some shit like that, and forget how much of a bitch you are. So, what's eating you?”

Frisk {2}: “It's... it's complicated.”
Frisk Prime: “As if it ever coulda been simple. So c'mon, why do you need me?”

Frisk {2}: “…well, I guess I should start from, uh, where we left off? Sorry, it's just a little weird talking to myself like this.”

Frisk Prime: “The feeling's mutual. But I say start off from the point where you moved on to world {3}. After all, that's the last I heard of you, according to the Observer.”

Frisk {2}: “I'm guessing that's your “contact”, right?”

Dialogue: Frisca {2} & the Observer

Sort of. Hullo.

WHAT-

Yeah, she's got a friend in a high place. She smirks at the bewildered expression on your face, as you react to this new presence in your mind- ...wait a minute. Where's Charlie-boy?

Uh...

Where’s your Charlie, Frisk?

UH...

...oh, Frisk. You didn't, did you? Don't think I didn't notice that instinctive glance towards your Monado. Seriously though, a Monado of all things? THAT’S your sword?

Charlie- he's currently in time out. He's been a nasty little sonofabitch lately, so we're spending a little time apart. Give him a little time to catch up with Asgore and the other Charlie.

That's COLD, lady. ...please tell me you didn't get that idea from Frisk Prime. It was an impetuous act when she tried it, and this is no different!

Oh please, fuckin' SPARE me with that bullcrap. It took all the will I could muster to get him outta me! Have you ever tried pulling a soul out of your body when they're fighting to stay inside?

I can't say I have. But still, don't you think you're being a little too hard on the old Charlie-horse?

If you knew what he fuckin' said-

I can imagine what the gist of it was. Something along the lines of him being angry at you for wanting to stay in the world you'd settled in, rather than figure out a way to get back to the Prime Timeline, and a fit of feral rage he threatened to take the reins if you got cold feet.

...that's what happened in this world, isn't it?

Pretty much. Although something tells me that Asriel {3} wasn’t around to help you reconsider.
Oh, he was still asleep when me and Charlie had our little fight. *sigh* He looks so sweet when he's dreaming...

...OH. Well, that's- well then. I have several questions, but I'm going to keep them to myself. Except for one: are you happy?

Before I heard about the Cascade? I couldn't be happier to be back.

...OH, you mean- Um, YEAH? I'm pretty sure we're both-

Frisk Prime: “Alright Observer, that's enough. I'm still waitin' on her to tell me why she needs me.”

Well, there I go again. Sorry about that.

...damn. I can see why she likes you.

Oh behave, you cheeky thing.

Dialogue: Frisca Prime & the Observer

...you find out anything interesting?

A few things, but I'll save those juicy tidbits for later.

Frisk {2}: “…alright. I'll try to start from where I “moved on”.”

“I was... I was devastated when Asgore was possessed. When he returned, I managed to preserve the soul-merger of him and, uh, “Young Charlie {2}”, but it still brought back some... some bad memories.”

Frisk Prime: “It's like he didn't want to be spared. He didn't want my mercy. And despite my best efforts... OUR best efforts...”

“...now I think about it, it's kind of like how we were with Asriel. We'd helped out everyone else, talked them down, got them on our side. But not him. Nooo, he wasn't having any of it.”

“They're both so... so goddamn stubborn. We worked so hard to help them, didn't we?”

Frisk {2} chuckles at the parallels drawn. It really does run in the family, doesn't it?

Frisk {2}: “…like father, like son... Damn. I never really thought about it like that.”

“But back to the main event. Asgore's death hit us all hard. But I was convinced that we could bring him back some day. I wasn't keen on the notion of using his dust to make another Flowey, even though that was the “easiest” solution to the problem, but it looks like Alphys did that anyway.”

Something troubling you, Frisk?

I've got a big question for her.
Frisk Prime: “...why DID you leave to go to {3}? I mean, I tried to legit change the past and that just made this world, but you... you seemed to have things under control. Why did you leave this world behind, when they needed you the most?”

*She looks ashamed of her actions, and yet at the same time... Huh?*

Frisk {2}: “...honestly, I kinda tried to do what you did. I still had Asriel, I still loved him deeply, but... well, things weren't going so well on the Lordvessel front. I'd theorized a long time ago that an electronic system involving magic crystal could serve as a sort of self-sustaining control matrix, something that could keep a soul stable and enable it to control a robotic vessel. But I hit a snag. A REALLY big snag.”

Frisk Prime: “Let me guess: something kept taking over your prototypes?”

Frisk {2}: “Among other things, but yeah. There was something, probably some demon from down there, who kept taking control of my soul-matrices. And once those things were active, since they're self-sustaining, they couldn't be switched off. Honestly, I decided to take a hammer to them, rather than risk connecting them to a machine.”

Frisk Prime: “…yeah, that was probably the best thing you coulda done. The things below woulda just made a mess of the place if you'd hooked them up to machines.”

Frisk {2} “Anyway, I felt that this branch of research was at a dead end, and I was still nowhere near figuring out how to separate the Alpha merger into its constituents, so I wasn't keen on putting Project Rosebud into action.”

“Honestly, though, I was losing patience. I wanted to save Asgore, but all of this trial and error, wading out into uncharted territory only to be met with failure, it just--”

*She slumps down into a chair, reliving the memories of exhaustion, frustration and exasperation.*

Frisk {2}: *sigh* “It was so easy, going off of what the others did before me. Sans, Alphys, W.D Gaster...”

*Sans' eyes light up slightly at the mention of his esteemed uncle. It is heartening to him that there's one more person who actually remembers Gaster.*

Frisk {2}: “Dealing in their fields of expertise, I could easily just stand on their shoulders, looking over their notes and working off of their efforts, but this- This was off the frickin' map even for me. I wanted to make miracles happen, but without any previous bedrock for these new fields, I was just treading water.”

“In my heart, I felt like this was a matter for the next generation, for a younger, fresher pair of eyes to improve on when I was long gone. But I didn't want that. I wanted to be the one to crack this case wide open. I wanted to bring Asgore back during my lifetime.”

“But I never got that eureka moment, that sudden flash where everything clicked. I was working so hard, just non-stop giving it all that I could, that I think I'd burned out my capacity to even HAVE that kinda eureka moment anymore. So I decided to try the next best thing.”

Frisk Prime: “And you tried to loop back on {2}.”
Frisk {2}: “...kinda. Kuro was pretty antsy about the risk of causing a paradox, especially considering what she’d learned from the Scar. So naturally, she steered me away from the notion of going back on my timeline. And you know what? I feel like she helped me dodge a bullet there.”

“It took a few years working off of Sans' notes, but Kuro an’ I were able to devise a way to send a person into the past. If I couldn't bring back Asgore in this world, I'd save him in the next.”

“...it was all going so well, too. We'd stabilized the rift I'd generated with my soul-blade, we managed to pinpoint the right moment in time, and I passed through.”

“...it only took a second for the rift to collapse behind me. But before I had a chance to digest what happened, I heard the cries of terror. Even if I was stranded in the past, I still had a mission to fulfil.”

“And if I had to kill you to set things right, so much the better.”

You bristle at her sudden flare of hostility. Some grudges die hard, it seems. And yet, as soon as it came, it went.

I'm not sure this me is... “all there”, if you ask me.

Implied that you're any different.

...you just can't let me have this, can you?

Neeewp.

Frisk Prime: “I think I know what happened from there. I never showed up. Frisk {3} kills Charlie with the crossbow, just as you thunder down the stairs. You hold Asriel {3} back and yell at Frisk {3} to put Charlie {3}’s soul away. Which she does by putting it in her.”

“...did I miss anything there?”

She looks surprised for a fraction of a second, before nodding in agreement.

Frisk {2}: “That's... right on the money, actually. Your pal really does have his sources, doesn't he?”

That he does.

Frisk {2}: “But something tells me that's all he knows.”

True.

Frisk Prime: “True. I kinda interrupted him when I walked in on Charlie. ...don't take that outta context.”

Frisk {2}: “Believe me, that's the last thing I want to do.” *shudder*

“...after she absorbed the soul, Frisk {3}, well...”

Oh... Please tell me we didn't...

Frisk {2}: “...we had to put her in containment for a while. Her behavior was pretty erratic after she absorbed the younger Charlie's soul, but nothing physical happened while she was in there.”
Frisk Prime: “Oh thank god... For a moment I thought-”

Frisk (2): “Same here. Seeing Charlie turn into that creature was one thing, but if I saw MYSELF turning like that... I- I dunno if I coulda handled it.”

“Even when we were able to put Charlie {3}’s soul in proper containment, she was never really the same. She was... I can't lie, she was a little broken after what she'd gone through. Even her Charlie, uh...”

“...why don't we call the kid Charlies {B}, and the Charlies inside the Frisks, uh, {A}? Do you think that'll work?”

Frisk Prime: “...I guess so? It kinda makes sense?”

Ben: “I AM SO CONFUSED RIGHT NOW.”

“...I'd best go and make some tea, before my head explodes again.”

With that, Ben heads in to the kitchen to heat up a pot of New Home Rose.

I wonder why he was just standing there? I thought he'd have something to add?

I feel like he was just trying to be polite by not interrupting you two. But Sans- ...the bloody sluggard's fallen asleep again, he has!

Typical Sans, am I right?

Right. Typical bloody Sans...

Frisk Prime: “...so. What did Charlie “{2A}” think of all this?”

Frisk (2): “He was... a little conflicted about things, I won't lie. I mean, he was really happy that none of the others died this time, but he was pretty worried about Frisk {3} and, uh, Charlie {3A}.”

“...but while Frisk {3} never really got back into the groove of things, I was still really happy on the inside. Charlie {3B} was still dead, everyone still mourned his passing, but this time he was the only one to die. Asgore and Toriel were still together, Asriel was still alive, and even though I was kinda stranded in the past, I had a chance to continue living a good life down here.”

“Me and, uh, Kuro {3} managed to set up a time-streaming device over the following years, since I'd kept all the notes with me. We even managed to MacGyverize some “sideways” manipulation into the system, so that I could get my ass back to {2} in a timely manner. And yet...”

Frisk Prime: “You decided to stay.”

Frisk (2): “...yeah. They kinda needed me. But the others back home, back in {2}, they were still waiting on me. I was... I was torn, honestly.”

“...in the end, I decided to stick around a while longer. Which, as it happened, extended my time in {3} to five years. I helped them set up some more advanced stuff from my branch, and did my best to help Frisk {3} come back out of her shell.”

“And you know what? I feel like I left them in the best state before I decided to head back home. It
looked like Frisk and Asriel were, well, closer than ever after the incident. Hell, I think I even regained some of the “pioneering spirit” I used to have, living in a perfected timeline.”

“...but history has a funny way of catchin' up ya. When I finally activated the time-streaming device, something was off. Rather than returning me to {2} a few minutes after I'd left, it sent me back to the Ruins in {3}. And there was something very, VERY wrong—”

*The sound of approaching footsteps derailed the conversation, and Frisk {2} suddenly looks quite anxious as she hears a voice that she's tried to avoid during her visit to this universe.*

What- But- I thought she'd be happy to see him!

*Deep down she probably is. He, on the other hand...*

**Prince Asriel (Asriel {2}):** “Hey Ben, can I ask you a favor? Is it possible for you to make, uh, a couple dozen more of those big jelly rolls? We've, uh, we've got a big order to fRRRK-”

**Prince Asriel stumbles off balance in utter disbelief, seeing the two of you seated at the living room table. If he had a heart of flesh and sinew, it would seize up at this very moment. But instead, he himself has seized up, eyes fixated on the woman he thought had left him for good.**

**Prince Asriel:** “F- Fr- Ffffff-”

*This is what Frisk {2} was afraid of. She'd always intended to return to him when her projects in {3} were finished, but of course, history had other plans for an “irritant” like her.*

**Slowly, Frisk {2} gets up from her chair. Asriel's eyes never leave her for a moment, as he struggles to process what he sees before him.**

**Frisk {2}:** “Sweetie... I'm- I'm so sorry...”

*Tears start to well up in her eyes. Some from the weight of this reunion, others from the fear that, after being abandoned for so long, he won't see her the same way anymore- ...nevermind. With alarming alacrity, Asriel sweeps Frisk {2} off of her feet and hugs her with the strength that only a lonely goatbro could muster.*

**Prince Asriel:** “I mmm- I thought you'd never come home...”

“200 years, Frisk... In all that time, I- why did you LEAVE me?!?”

**Frisk {2}:** “It- *sniff* it wasn't my fault! I'd improved the device, I- I thought I could get back to you and it'd only be a few minutes, I—”

“...please, sweetie. Please, forgive me... I- I don’t want to leave you again!”

*And with that, the dyke breaks. ...no, no that's just inappropriate. Can I get a do-over?*

...my god... She really does look older. But she's finally back home, at the age of 22.

...24, actually. In a couple of months, she'll turn 25.

Uh, I'm not sure you did the math right there, buddy.
Wellll there's the thing, Frisk: you're not as young as you think.

UH I'M SORRY WHAT DID YOU SAY?

Yes I know, it's exceedingly ungentlemanly to call a woman “old”, but I was never much of a gentleman anyways.

Seriously though, I went back and did the maths on it. You were 14 and a half when you travelled to 2015, or 1865 if we're using Anno Domini. Roughly two years later, the incident with Asriel and Charlie happened. You had barely turned 17 when you shoved their soul-merger into a soul jar. Two and a half years pass, and at the ripe age of 19, you flung yourself into the past and * hibdjaybudjedba-ing*, and then you ended up falling onto a rose bush in the Ruins.

The fuck- what was that NOISE you just made? Did you just have a stroke or something?!

It was meant to be a vocal approximation of what you did to time. ...which was somewhere along the lines of making it have a stroke.

But the point still stands. You're actually 19, Frisk. You might still look like a girl, maybe even feel like a girl at heart, but the clocks don't lie. You're a grown woman now.

...have I really done the math wrong all this time? I thought I had it all figured out...

You were still missing a few little bits of your memory. And considering what happened to you, I have a feeling that there are some things you're never going to get back.

...maybe that's for the best. I mean, I haven't really had the best life. I can probably live with forgetting some of the details.

Fair enough.

...but back to the matter at hand, the gote has broken too. While they weep and reconcile and- and kiss... Hmmm. Yes. We're not getting anything out of Frisk [2] for a while.

Oh... This is, uh- UH, y-you think you can look in on what happened after her, uh, timeskip?

That's what I was thinking. I might be able to gather some dirt on what's gone down in that universe. Brb.

Location: Branch [3], Somewhere in Wyoming (Wyoming?), Silver Key Dimensional Research Facility

Subject of Observation: Doctor Asriel Dreemurr (Asriel [3])

The prince peers at the scene on the viewscreen. He knew that she cared for him, but to see her kissing the version of him from the previous universe... He could not help but feel betrayed, and yet he could not truly blame her. After all, he had not exactly stayed faithful to his Frisk, either.
...how interesting.

god, I should take a nap or something. I think I'm hearing things.

*His inner monologue echoes off of the insides of his skull, urging him to just take a break. He considers the suggestion to himself, and conceded that he did, indeed, need to sleep on this.*

?? ?? ?? ??: “hey, sir? i'm gonna grab another coffee. you want one?”

*A familiar skeleton in a labcoat, sporting an iconic goofy grin, peeks into his superior's office.*

**Doctor Asriel:** “...thank you Fontaine, but I think I'm done for the night. You, uh, you ok to take over from here?”

**doc sans {3}:** “sure thing boss. i'll keep an eyesocket out for any shenanigans.”

The prince nods as he sits up from his office chair, stretching out his back before heading off to his personal quarters. He'd been watching the events of {2} like a hawk for days on end, but even he had his limits.

As he felt his waking mind slipping away, reeling from the lack of sleep, he thought about the kingdom he had to leave behind. He thought about how, without Frisk {2}'s unexpected return, he would have never made it to the Surface. And then, he realized how nice the cool floor of the facility felt against his face...

...bugger. That's that avenue closed for the night. But I did manage to glean at least something from it.

---

**Location: New Home, Living Room**

**Dialogue: Frisca Prime & the Observer**

*Alright, I've got good news and bad news. Bad news first: Asriel {3} was up all night, and he's just fallen asleep in a hallway, so I can't grill him on the situation Frisk {2} mentioned.*

*Well crap.*

*But the good news is I was able to glean a few things from the old man's thoughts.*

*First off, he's not in the Underground anymore, he's apparently in some secret research facility in Wyoming of all places. ...which probably makes sense, since there's nothing in Wyoming.*

*How the hell did he end up there? Did- Oh god, did they break the Barrier early this time around?*

*Survey says yes. I don't know WHEN they cracked it, but I imagine it might have been quite a bit earlier than 2065.*

*Secondly, apparently he and Frisk {2} had a thing going on? Though something tells me that his Frisk isn't around anymore.*

*...seriously? Is that how I'm gonna be when I'm in my twenties?*
Eh, I dunno. Maybe? Or maybe she loves both Asriels and finds herself torn between them?

Jesus Christ.

Personally, I'm ok with the notion so long as it's an equilateral triangle where all three are ok with what's going on. Right-angles are tricky bastards on a good day, and if it's an isosceles triangle that crops up, you're gonna have a bad time.

...so basically you're ok with a minaj-al-twah?

Pretty much. Though it's spelled ménage à trois.

It still sounds like something Muffet would sell. I mean, she sounds pretty damn Canadian if you ask me.

Wha- Canadi- FRENCH, Frisk! Ménage à trois is a French word.

Whatever, it doesn’t matter. I'm just... I don't know if I'm ok with this, whatever it is. I mean, this world's Asriel was waiting so long for her to come back, and she's been-

I have a feeling that Asriel {3} is the one who started it. He misses his Frisk, who likely died of old age a long time ago, and seeing Frisk {2} reminded him of the good times he had with his old wife. Couple this with Frisk {2}'s acceptance that she loves Asriel, and things likely led to them, well, you know...

But they seem happy from what I've heard. Frisk {2} got what they hoped they'd get one day, and Asriel {3} got a chance to relive the good times from before whatever “the Cascade” was. Which I hope isn't referring to a Resonance Cascade, because the last thing that ANY universe needs is a visit from the Combine.

The who?

No, the Combi- Nevermind, they probably don't even exist. Probably...

...so, uh, anything else you learn over there?

Well, apparently Asriel had to flee the Underground at some point, possibly due to this mysterious “Cascade”. Though from what I heard, he barricaded himself in the Ruins when it all went down, and he was only able to make it to the Surface because of Frisk {2}'s return.

...now I think about it, that WOULD have brought us closer together. Still...

Frisk {2}: “...I'm sorry, Asriel. I- I can't do this. I-

Frisk {2} turns away, pinching her nose-bridge. She feels that she needs to tell him the truth, but she knows that the truth will wound him after all this time. I just hope she doesn't blow it.

Frisk Prime: “Frisk, I know this is tough for you, but I need to know. What was the Cascade? Why is Asriel {3} in Wyoming?”

She gives you a look charged with feelings both conflicted and conflicting, grateful yet indignant
at your interruption.

Prince Asriel: “What is she talking about? What- what have you been doing for the last 200 years?!”

She takes a deep breath and sighs, before recounting what she told us. Right up to the point where she returned to the Ruins.

Frisk {2}: “A lot had changed since I'd left. Damn near 200 years had passed, and Asriel {3} had made himself the “caretaker” of Old Home. After he'd gotten over the shock of me coming back, he was able to fill me in on the situation.”

“In the years after I left for {2}, he’d become paranoid of losing the people he loved. To this end, over the following decades, he started working on something he called the Ynnead Network.”

...did you happen to bring any 40k Codices with you when you travelled back to 2015?

Oh shit.

’cause this sounds like Asriel {3} tried to turn the Underground into an Infinity Circuit.

OH SHIT.

Prince Asriel: “Isn't Ynnead the Eldar God of the Dead? I- Ohhh nooo... He- Did he seriously-”

Told you.

Frisk {2}: “Apparently it started with the gathering of monsters who'd fallen down, then letting them pass on in chambers made of soulglass. His team managed to preserve a lot of monster souls this way.”

Asriel's previously unnerved expression softens to one of understanding and appreciation. This part didn’t sound so bad. Though in his heart, he was still afraid of what his parallel intended to do with the souls of his subjects. For some reason, he didn't quite trust his other self to NOT do something stupid. Which is a little telling if you ask me...

Frisk {2}: “The next part of the project involved “networking” the souls, allowing them to interact with one-another through some form of, uh, “magitronic interface”? The way he was pitching it to me, he'd been trying to build an afterlife for his subjects, since the actual afterlife was literally just Hell.”

Asriel looks... actually kinda happy with what his parallel was trying to achieve. But also quite frustrated that he didn't take the same inspiration.

Prince Asriel: “…all of those souls, lost to the chaos at the bottom of all things... If I'd known that it was possible, could I have saved them?”

Frisk {2}: “Sweetie, there's no use dwelling on it now. It's all in the past...”

“...there was another purpose of networking the souls, however. Individually, monster souls are pretty weak. Like the history books said, it would take nearly every monster in the Underground to match the power of a single human soul.”
“But with the souls of the dead preserved and networked together, the collective power of the system steadily grew over the following years. As the King and Queen grew weaker with age, they eventually joined the network, as did the fallen humans when they eventually died. Even Frisk {3}, long-lived as she was, found her place in the virtual paradise of the Ynnead Network, as did Charlie {3A}.”

A soft whine escapes Asriel's lips. The thought of his friends and family all dying of old age hits particularly close to home, though the thought of them being safe and happy within the Infinity Circuit brings him tears of happiness as well.

...bugger. Now I've got “Who Wants To Live Forever” stuck in my head. Fucking song always moves me to tears.

Freddy Mercury was a golden god.

Damn fucking straight. He and the rest of Queen did a fantastic job with A Kind of Magic, based as it was on Highlander, the only good Highlander film.

...now I think about it, I fear that our friend Ben may face the same path of heartbreak as the centuries pass. Eternal as he is, he will have more than his fair share of outliving his friends, his lovers, even his children if he ever has any. Watching everyone grow old as he stays forever young, seeing everyone he loves burn out and fade away, it's going to be horrible-

Debbie DePRESSING, Observer! Are you tryin' to make me cry too?!

...who waits forever anyway? This precious boy here, apparently.

Frisk {2} wipes the tears from the Prince's eyes, before patting his cheeks.

Frisk {2}: “...I really wish I could say that they're all still living happily ever after. But if that were the case... well, I probably wouldn't be here right now.”

As soon as the words leave her mouth, she wishes that she hadn't said them. But much like trying to scoop toothpaste back into an already-squeezed tube, there's no way to put those words back in the box.

Prince Asriel: “W-why would you SAY that? After all these years-”

Frisk {2}: “Nonononono it's not like that sweetie! I meant it like I woulda- I-”

Asriel suddenly rises to his feet, angered and upset by the implication that, despite waiting forever for her, she had forgotten him.

Prince Asriel: “WHAT? What DO you mean? That you woulda stayed with the other Asriel? That you woulda forgotten about me?!”

“...I've waited so long for you to come back, Frisk. When- when Prime came here, I thought she was you! I thought that the wait was finally over, that we could finally settle down, but now you're here... Maybe it would have been better for the both of us, if you just stayed in his world.”

Frisk {2} doesn't look too happy to hear this.
Frisk {2}: “...maybe you're right.”

This is too real.

Frisk {2}: “Maybe it woul...
Frisk Prime: “And you want me to fix it. Because I have something you don’t.”

You raise your hand, and the golden-green glow of Elder Magicks rises from your palm in a ballet of geometric shapes.

Frisk Prime: “I would need to use this spell on every part of the goddamn network, to try and save your world.”

“...well, I guess we should head out, shouldn't we? No use wastin' time here when-”

Frisk {2}: “Wha- You- Really? I was just gonna ask you to teach me how to do it, but-”

“...you know what? I'm proud of you, Prime.”

*And again, there is a hug. Only this time, it's less aggressive and instead genuinely appreciative.*

Frisk Prime: “…but you DO know that you could try and look for Syrinx in the Abyss, right?”

_Frozen in disbelief, she stares at you._

Frisk {2}: “…what?”

...right. Shit. She never met Syrinx in her timeline.

*And something tells me that she didn't know she even existed until she started up those “observations” at the Silver Key facility.*

Frisk Prime: “Yeah, about that. You know that bridge before where we fought Undyne? Turns out there was something in the darkness below-”

Syrinx: “JUST POUR IT ON ME, SITH KNIGHT!”

From the kitchen, you hear the scraping of a knife inside of a jar, as Ben presumably pours the contents of a jam jar on top of Syrinx. ...wait what?

The FUCK-

Frisk {2} heads into the kitchen to investigate, and is taken aback by the weird scene.

Frisk {2}: “...the fuck am I looking at?”

*You and Asriel promptly follow suit and join her in the kitchen. There, we see Ben upending a jar of strawberry jam over Syrinx as she swims in the kitchen sink.*

Syrinx: “THIS TASTES AMAZING! IT'S LIKE AMBROSIA ITSELF!”

Ben turns to look at us and shrugs, as if to say “don’t ask me”. And again, here is a scene worthy of a painting.

Frisk Prime: “...uh, anyway, this is Syrinx. We met her in the Abyss after Ren knocked me down there. She's, uh, an agent of the Elder Gods?”
Syrinx: “WAS.”

Whoa.

*And there we have it. Her “heel turn” is complete.*

Syrinx: “I still bear the powers they have granted to me, but I am no longer their servant-”

“...Frisk, what is- WHY ARE THERE TWO OF YOU?!?”

*She only just realises that there's another adult Frisk in the room, and it is freaking her out.*

Frisk {2}: “I'm- uh- I'm her from another universe? Well, I'm actually her from THIS universe, but I've been away. She's the, uh, the original gangster, the “Prime” Frisk from the original timeline.”

*Syrinx struggles to process this revelation. But in the end, she simply stares at Frisk {2}.*

Syrinx: “’kayyyy...”

*And with that, she submerges completely and begins to thrash, further mixing the jam into the water. She intends to “drown her sorrows” in monster sugar. Frisk {2} turns to you in disbelief.*

Frisk {2}: “...sooo why is she-”

Frisk Prime: “A giant floating eye? Don't ask me. But she has a lot of Elder Magicks at her disposal, including this little beauty.”

I cast the Nodens-Oztalun Purgative on the rolling pin.

*Beneath your palm, the Elder Magicks burn themselves into the wood of the rolling pin, branding it with the protective mark. This rolling pin is now immune to possession.*

Frisk Prime: “By branding an object with this sign, it becomes immune to possession by the “Primary Powers”, which includes the creatures of the Inferno. AND if I use it on a possessed individual, it drives out whatever's possessing them.”

*She's seen you do this many times before while snooping from {3}, but it's still pretty impressive in person.*

Frisk {2}: “And that's how you and Syrinx were able to make all those soulstones.”

“...still, I feel like we need all the help we can get. I'm happy that you wanna come with, but do you think you could teach me how to use it too? I mean, the more people who can exorcise the demonic presence, the better. Right?”

...you feel unwilling to give her that power. Much like the Asriel from Feldstein Prime, funny enough. ...you're afraid of what she might see, aren't you?

...I saw more than I wanted to see when I touched his soul. If she discovers what I know... What is she gonna do if she finds out?

*About your plan in Prime? Or hell, if you remind her of what happened in Prime? I think it's a*
Oh god... OH GOD I wasn't even thinking about that! If she- I- ...if she tries to take my moment from me, if she DARES to take MY ASRIEL FROM ME-

Relax, Frisk. I'm pretty sure she's happy with Asriel {3}.

BUT SHE-

She ain't Jolene, lady. She ain't gonna take your man, she ain't gonna take him just because she can. Besides, when you left Prime, Asriel was still 14. It would be... awkward, to say the least.

...though even with you being 19, it still brings to mind a certain Simon & Garfunkel song.

...OH you did NOT just-

Frisk {2}: “PLEASE, Frisk. We stand a better chance this way.”

...we'll talk about this later, Observer.

Frisk Prime: “…you know what? Fine. I'll try to transfer it to you.”

You concentrate on your soul, in an attempt to bring it out into the open. Your head spins as the darkness pools out of your chest, but there in your hands is your own soul, black as pitch, waiting to be touched. And with an effort of will, you bring a copy of the jailbroken Nodens-Oztalun Purgative to the forefront of your mind.

Frisk Prime: “…come on, then. Touch the darkness within me.”

Frisk {2} looks a little uneasy about touching your soul. But nonetheless she does so, emboldened by your oddly appropriate Dark Souls reference. Her fingers graze it for little more than a second, and that's all it needs in order to transfer the spell.

Staggering backwards from the transfer, she falls back into Asriel's arms. Though he caught her less out of concern, and more out of him not wanting her to bust her arse. Though there's still some longing deep down inside his heart, he doesn't really love her anymore. Her actions and words have landed her in his friend-zone, much like yours have.

...

Staggering to her feet, she inadvertently brands the table trying to stand up, rendering it immune to possession. Syrinx would have some strong words about this act of arcane “software piracy”, but she's too busy luxuriating in a kitchen sink full of jam, so this all goes over her head. Eyeball. Whatever.

...

Nothing to say? No witticisms to dispense?
I think it's time you made another of your timeskips, Observer.

...well, if that's how you feel, I'll get out of your hair for now. Besides, it would probably be a little dull documenting every node you purify in {3}, so I'll probably give it a miss unless something goes tits up over there. Not to mention, I need to change and go to work now, so I'll probably see you in 6 or 7 hours.

Yeah, sure, whatever. Just get outta here.

Sure, ok. See you later.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to have to break this one up into a two-parter. The next part, which will hopefully wrap up our business in {2}, should come out some time next week. Hopefully.

While I probably won't have us arriving at the grand finale before New Years Eve, I can assure you that DoctorTale is drawing very close to its conclusion. One way or another, Frisk Prime will have to face her demons in a very literal sense of the word...
Chapter Summary

At long last, Frisk is ready to leave this world behind, and return to her Prime timeline in order to save her dearest, closest friend. She has saved everyone that needed saving, she helped Frisk {2} out with a situation in the third universe, and even managed to resolve her issues with Prince Asriel. But in spite of everything, she still hates goodbyes.

Location: ??????? ????, Waterfall, {2}

Many weeks later...

...um, have you calmed down already?

Urrrgh... Observer, where the *hic* hell WERE you?

*I'm guessing things didn't go to plan.*

Wha- No, no everything's- *urrrp* I was just- I was just worried about ya, that's all.

*Worried? About ME? Your concern is touching, and awfully sweet, but ultimately unnecessary. If anything I was trying to give you a little space, allowing you to clear your head before-*

...wait a minute. Frisk, don't tell me you're- but of course you are. Christ in a BLT, was it THAT rough a time?

Pleeeeeease, I'm fiiiine Morty. ...ok fine, it was really rough. I had to do a lotta things I hoped I'd never have to do again. And at the end of it all, after ripping the head off of some bootleg Cyberdemon wannabe, I feel like I EARNED this frickin' bottle! ’s my freekin' medicine! I gotta lick my wounds after fighting that damn thing!

*Come now Frisk, let's just be reasonable about this-

SHADDAP, you KNOW my problems! This stuff HELPS!

*Fucking hell, Frisk... Alright, I'll talk to you again once you've sobered up. Just remember to drink plenty of water before sleeping, okay hun? I wouldn't want you getting a hangover again...*

The following morning...

Alright, you ok now?
Oh... S-sorry about last night, Observer. I was just- I was still kinda shaken from the battle to purify the Network. I just- I needed to relax, after that. Just a little nightcap to help my nerves unwind.

And of course, a little turned into a lot. I hate to say it, especially since you were so responsible about it when you were younger, but I think you have a drinking problem.

C'mon man, it's not that big a deal! I mean I drink, I get drunk, I pass out after going past my limit, no problem!

You KNOW what I mean.

Yeah, yeah I do... I was just tryin' to laugh it off, y'know. After all, it wasn't a problem when I was busy with research. I mean, I didn't really drink at all when science was on the cards, when people actually NEEDED my help. But as soon as things have calmed down, when everything's all hunky-dory and it's ok for me to get wasted, "OH NO Frisk is drunk again, someone stage a frickin' intervention!" I mean COME ON! I'm not some whiskey-shootin' teen anymore! I'm a responsible adult who-

Responsible. Hmmm. Somehow I still doubt that.

Did you just come here to make me feel like shit, Observer? Or do you have something helpful to tell me?  

Ok, fine. If you're feeling like that-

NO PLEASE DON'T GO!

...I beg your pardon?

...I felt so alone, Observer. I- I guess I'm just so used to having someone else's voice in my head, someone to say that I'm doing ok, or that I need to check myself before I wreck myself, or tell me about the Orion Federation. But it's been so... it's been too quiet up in here...

I guess what I'm trying to say is that I... I really missed you, Observer.

Is it really me that you miss, though?

...kinda? I- I get what you're getting at, though. You think that because I miss having Charlie in my mind's ears, I'm trying to get you to fill the void. ...yeah, that's probably part of it.

But don't get me wrong, I really do miss YOU.

Goddamnit Frisk, don't do this to me.

It's true, though. You put yourself down a lot, but you're a swood guy. And yeah, I know I'm probably saying something Papyrus said once, but I believe in you, even if you don't.

...

...I know that you've gotta go one of these days, that you've got to “finish this” or whatever you said, but I- I just wanna make the most of the time you're still here with us. Because after you're gone, even while I'm burning down the I-15 with Asriel riding shotgun, wind in our hair while he kisses me on the cheek, it's gonna be too quiet.
...I'm not gonna ask you to stay. I know I can't keep you here if you don't want to. But please... keep talking to me until then.

Frisk...

...I'm sorry. I don't like how much I mean to you, but if that's how you feel about it, well... I think we're done with timeskips for the time being. I'm here if there's anything you want to talk to me about. Because from the looks of it, you look like you need someone who's all ears, and while I only have two, they're both yours for now.

But first, maybe get yourself out of this bathtub. I'm not even going to question why you're in it. Or why you're back in the Garbage Dump.

---

...so, about your time in {3}. Do you want to talk to me about it?

...it was like being back in Hell again. Except this time, Hell had spilled up into the Underground.

...I had to kill again, Observer. I couldn't- there wasn't any way I could spare the things it sent against us! Even after driving out the demonic influence, I couldn't save them! I had to- I had to keep swinging! I could only fix them with the Reaver!

Frisk-

The drones kept coming! I had to cut them to pieces! Cut off their limbs! RIP and TEAR!

FRISK.

WHAT?!

Did you snort a Berserk pack for the final boss or something?

Berserk pack? The fuck is that, and why the fuck would I need it?! WINNERS DON'T DO DRUGS!

OH really? Because you sound like you're suffering from roid rage right now, and it's scaring me. YOU'RE scaring me, and that's saying a lot.

I'm- I- ...man, I don't know why I- I thought I'd put it all behind me.

Something happened back there, didn't it? You saw something in {3} that drove you into the same killer frenzy you experienced when you first stepped into the Inferno.

...I saw- ...I tried to-

's okay, take your time.

...it was just that everything was WRONG. All the places I've been, twisted into a fuckin' horror-show. I just- I got so mad. Like WHO would DO this to such a nice place?!
And I won't lie, it made it a little easier for me to hack those drones to bits. Knowing what they did, it got a lot harder for me to give a fuck about how they felt.

*It sounds like you had a LOVELy EXPerience over there.*

Ugh, hardly! It was- *sardonic internal laughter* Oh. I get it.

Which explains why you've been lapsing into boldness while remembering it. Your LV's jumped back up again after you went full-on Doomgirl trying to see this through. And while I can't pinpoint exactly how high it is, you're still nowhere near LV.20, if that's any consolation.

...and THIS is why I started drinking.

...huh. Well then, if that's the case I presume you're a happy drunk, not an angry drunk. Which is strange, since alcohol WEARS DOWN inhibitions, rather than seemingly building them up-

Oh, it wears down my inhibitions alright. But strangely enough, I feel like I have to work myself up in order to go “full-on Doomgirl”. I don't really feel like I'm “inhibiting” my desire to kill, it doesn't feel like something I'm constantly fighting against. Hell, sometimes I feel like I have to keep my “niceness” in check when I need to be forceful!

Sooo you think that you become *nicer* when you're pissed? You really believe that?

What, is the opposite supposed to happen or something?

*For a lot of people, yes. Though strangely enough, despite my personal problems, I'm not much of an angry drunk. If anything, when my inhibitions fall I become more open and talkative, while my sober form casts me as a man of few words, who actively gets annoyed when things are going wrong. Which of course is perfect for kitchen staff.*

...are you drunk right now?

Funnily enough, no. *mind you, that could easily change. While I don't drink all that much, I DO have many bottles of the good stuff. And a few bottles of the not-so good stuff that I've yet to work into a good combo. Speaking of which...*

...a bit of cherry liqueur to this relatively rough goblet of mead...

Observer, what the hell are you-

*Ooof. Not enough. Liittle bit more. ...by which I apparently mean a generous slosh.*

Good GODS, how does that even WORK?!

...surprisingly, it's sort of alright! The alcoholic cherry goop has helped take some of the edge off of the rough mead. But it's still pretty rough.

...and yet, with a slosh of decent lemonade, it's actually ok now.

Yich, it's like the point-and-click adventure approach to cocktails...

*Throwing random shit together and seeing what works? Yeah, that's pretty accurate. But you*
know what? It's SCIENCE too.

I CAN'T imagine that tastes too good, though.

Yeah, you're right. But it's already greased the wheels on the old motor I'll tell you hwat/

JEE EZUS, it hit you that fast?!

Welllll actually it took some time to hit me. Between me mixing it all up and me teling you that it greased the wheels, I watched two Brütis blokes opening four crap advent calendars, as well as... uh, wh- right, the announcement of a spooky holiday special involving one Vincent VenaCava! Yeah, I watch a lot of YouTube stuff.

Yikes, you weren't kidding.

Don't you believe it? And in all honesty, while you'll probably hear my next statement in the next couple of seconds, for me it'll be... about 25 minutes. Chugga's just posted the latest episode of his Pokemon Black & White Let's Play, and I'm probably going to watch that for a bit.

Wha- ...wait, is it the holidays where you are?!

Well it's December, at least. At this time of writing, there's about two weeks left until the big day.

Man... For as crappy as life was in the orphanage, Christmas was always something I looked forward to.

Because they actually gave you real food as opposed to artificial protein products?

Kinda, yeah! Sure, I've eaten a lot better, but back then I was like “Funeral potatoes? HELL YEAH PUT IT ON MY PLATE!”

Wait, I thought you said you'd never saw a potato product until the first time you ate at Grillby's?

Welllll they didn't serve us REAL potatoes, it was some sort of 3D-printed starch construct. BUT it still tasted pretty good compared to what we usually got. And one year, we actually got REAL TURKEY. REAL. TURKEY.

I suppose I should be happy for you, though personally I'm not a big fan of turkey, as it's a little too bland for my palate. Personally, I'm game for a roast chicken any day, though I have to say that duck is my favourite kind of poultry.

Still, at least Christmas was a time of good eatin' for you. Recently my Christmas meals have been a little “spartan” if you ask me. And honestly, I think I might subscribe to the Japanese hype train and try to order a big bucket of fried chicken on Christmas day, since no-one's inclined to do a full-on Christmas dinner this year.

Wait, the Japanese had KFC for Christmas dinner?!

Uhm, I was trying to be a little generic in that regard, but yes. KFC is pretty big in Japan, especially around Christmas time. So much so, that in many places it is a big part of Japanese Christmas dinner.
Holy crap... I guess I can't blame them though. I mean, who doesn't like fried chicken?

*It does make sense after all, what with the strong Western influences over Japan following World War 2. Aaaaand the fact that KFC did a massive marketing push in the mid 1970s, which has cemented its popularity for the past 4 decades.*

...y'know, now I remember, I think I actually ate in a KFC once. Or at least, it was a KFC joint once upon a time.

*Oh? Pray tell, is there a story behind this?*

Well, KFC as a company kinda ceased to exist when the Collapse happened, like most of the big companies did. However, even while society was “rebooting”, a group of survivors decided to take over an abandoned KFC in Santa Monica, since everyone abandoned it when everything went to shit. Eventually, they managed to get it up and running again as a community business, working with the homesteads that had cropped up in response to the Collapse.

*Impressive...*

I know, right? Though the place does more than just chicken under its “new management”. It's still mostly about the chicken, don't get me wrong, but it did have a lotta other farm-fresh produce. Though one of the weirdest things they did was, like, a boiled egg wrapped in thinly-sliced chicken, breaded and deep-fried. Tasted great, though.

*That actually doesn't sound weird at all. That's basically a scotch egg made with chicken.*

A WHAT-egg?

*A scotch egg. It's basically what you described, only it's made with pork sausage meat.*

That sounds amazing.

*And it is. It's a classic British snack derived from a medieval Mughlai recipe, but while they're great cold at a picnic, they are absolutely bloody wonderful when they're hot and fresh with a side of chips. And before you say anything, the chips I'm talking about are more akin to fries, rather than a packet of flakies.*

I think it'd be cool having either with one of those bad boys.

*Probably. Although a packet of crisps would be a better accompaniment to a cold one. And a half-pint of beer, for that matter.*

...man, how DID we get here?

*It's the holidays. These things tend to happen.*

...so, anything else happen while I was away?

Welllll Charlie's been getting better at holding his shape. Though after he transferred the last monster soul from his body, he had a couple of days where the best he could do was imitate the head of Rene Auberjonois circa 199X. Which, when coming out of a bucket, made me fall into hysteric's a coupla times.
Heh, it figures. After all, you did tell him to aspire to be Odo. But at least he's gotten better at shapeshifting. Anything else happen?

Asriel had- ...okay, Asriel {2} actually came to respect both me and Frisk {2} after what we did in {3}. We're still not on, uh, “close terms”, but we aren't at one-another's throats anymore.

OH, also Ben came with us when we went to {3}. And the way he fights... wow. He's nowhere as fierce as me or Frisk {2}, but he's got some deep frickin' sleeves if you know what I mean.

Oh I do, believe you me. Between your arrival in New Home and our first true meeting, I was actually watching over him when he became a Revenant. And hoo boy, he knows his way around a sword and staff. It's a thing of beauty to watch a battlemage at play, isn't it?

Yeah... yeah it is. I was kinda in a berserker state for most of the quest, but when I DID pay attention to Ben, he was swingin' an' swayin' with his weapons, slingin' out ice an' fire at the drones an' demons... I gotta admit, when he fights, he is COOL.

Even when he isn't fighting, he's a cool chap. Though I suppose that you get to know someone better when you work alongside them, or in your case fight alongside them.

...come to think of it, I think Ben's pretty happy that he got to fight by your side. He was always too young to go on expeditions with Alice, and by the time he was old enough, she'd already been committed to the Sanitarium on Mercy Hill.

I figured he was, judging by the big ol' hug he gave me after I tore the Guardian's head off.

...huh. Look who's here.

Standing there, knee-deep in the waters of the Dump, is Little Frisk. Or, if we're going to be more specific, Little Frisk {2}.

Little Frisk: “Uh, hey? Are you ok, me?”

Oh crap, everybody must be worried as hell looking for me! Oh god, crap, I wasn't thinking straight!

Just try to play it cool.

Frisk Prime: “Heyyyyy there kid!”

I said play it cool, not play it like Vanilla Ice.

Frisk Prime: “I'm, uh, sorry if I worried everybody when I ran off-”

Ben storms through the water and hugs you tightly.

Ben: “Where WERE you?! Everyone's been worried sick!”

Oh god.

Frisk Prime: “I am so sorry, guys. I just- I needed some me-time, that's all-”

Ben: “That's all? You were gone for the entire night, and all you can say is “that's all”?!”
You should probably just tell him, he understands you well enough.

... 

Frisk Prime: “...alright, I'll level with you. I was out, uh, I was out drinking. Everyone else is like ‘but you can't find help at the bottom of a bottle, Frisk!'”, but I've done it before! It WORKS!”

“I already feel like my LV’s gone down a notch from when we wrecked the final boss, y'know. I'm feeling like my, uh, my killer side's already simmerin' down-”

Ben looks at you with perplexity.

Frisk Prime: “...you know how some people are “different” when they're drunk? Well, thing is that booze has a tendency to reveal your true self, even though it's like looking into a bucket of water. It ain't a perfect mirror, but it shows your inner self through all the ripples and distortion-”

Ben: “I am familiar with the concept. Though the notion of it revealing a distortion of one's true self... Are you trying to say that you're... that you're nicer on the inside?”

Frisk Prime: “That's the theory, at least. And hey, if I was an angry drunk, if I was actually suppressing my killer instinct all this time, well, we'd be in a different kinda story altogether.”

Ben: “I can't say I've ever heard of someone having MORE restraint when drunk, but-”

Frisk Prime: “It's not like that, Ben. I'm saying that it's my NICE side that I end up suppressing, that when I'm wasted I can't help but be nice. I feel like I have to work on what I have to get into the zone, to will myself to fight, trying to keep a lid on the part of me that might get me killed.”

“Honestly, I don't know how it works. Maybe there's something really wrong with me, but I don't care. All I know is that- well, I'm nice at rest, but I have to fight to make myself fight.”

Ben still looks confused at how this is how you are. That all your “roughness” is apparently an act. Though of course, there are still things that get your goat. No pun intended, of course. But key things do tend to override your “internal niceness”, as evidenced by your decimation of Hell's legions in Prime, and the smackdown you brought to the daemonic insurgency in {3}.

...it's just as well I don't drink when shit's going down, then.

Just as well indeed. Seeing you go all Doomgirl on some gribblers is brutal enough; if you were DRUNK at the time you'd sound less like a kindly Rick Sanchez and more like Nathan Explosion. And don't get me wrong, Nathan is fuckin' metal, but hearing such a brutal voice coming from someone as nice as you would mess with people's heads. 

Hey, it worked for Doctor Girlfriend, didn't it?

That's, uh, a little different. That voice made her hotter, while Nathan's voice would just make you scarier.

Ben: “...you really are a strange one, Frisca Rivera.”

“And you know what? I wouldn't have it any other way.”
He pats you on the back as he escorts you from the Dump.

Ben: “Now, let us return to Snowdin. Our time in this realm is coming to an end…”

...there isn't much else to say as River Person ferries us to Snowdin. We've pretty much said all we've needed to say back there.

Have we, though? I thought Little Frisk would have something to say?

Doesn't look like it. Then again, you were pretty quiet when you were her age. Never really spoke unless you had something really important to say. And even though she's been coming out of her shell, she's still a child of few words. Especially after what she did in New Deseret.

That's... that's fair...

River Person: “Tra la la... The ones you call the Templars... are already making their move...”

...nooooOOOOO-

We will have enough time to get there before they do. I will endeavour to bring you guys back to Prime as close as possible to the moment where you departed. I can't load you in BEFORE you left Prime, mind, since that would merely generate a new branch entirely.

And even if these ‘Templars’ beat us to the punch, this is Asriel Prime we're talking about. With his power level, it'll take a hundred men or more to actually destroy him. If anything, I'm more worried for his fellow inmates. If the Interloper somehow breaks its bonds and starts harvesting souls... Well, I needn't tell you what comes next.

...alright, new plan. We'll need a set of wheels right outside the entrance, so I'll need you to somehow pull a sports car into Prime or something.

I think Ben can take care of that if I play my cards right. I can send you guys to Prime, then send HIM back to Wellsverne Gothic to get his hands on something fast, THEN when he's near a spatial anomaly I can bring him and his acquired transportation back to DoctorTale Prime.

Frisk Prime: “Uh, Ben, about getting to Prime? There's been a change of plans. We'll need transportation, like, the minute we leave for Emigration Oaks.”

“The Observer thinks that if he can send you back to your world, you'll be able to get your hands on some, uh, good wheels? Then, when you encounter another anomaly, he'll be able to pick you up and bring you to where we are, wheels an' all!”

Ben contemplates this plan. He would be eager to return to his original reality for a while, but it looks like he's about to point out a flaw in the plan?

Ben: “…what about Sans?”

Uh... That's actually a good point, why not Sans?
Ben: “If he can truly “shortcut” in defiance of the laws of physics, could he not warp us all to the Sanitarium when we arrive in your home universe?”

Frisk Prime: “That’s, uh, actually not a bad idea- ...but I just remembered.”

*sigh* “Sans Prime doesn’t really answer his phone, aaaaand he's in California. Aaaaand he'll probably sleep through the goddamn ringtone. He probably won't act as fast as we need, so I'm thinking the wheels-from-another-world plan is still our best option right now.”

Ben rubs the bridge of his nose in exasperation. Of course Sans would be like that, despite his fantastical powers of teleportation.

Ben: “…very well. I will seek out the fastest automobile I can find when I return to my world.”

*sigh* “…I have a feeling I am going to “owe” Agnes a lot more for this one.”

“Owe”, eh? Is that implying- DID THEY-

Yes, it's what you think. During Ben's time in Brichester, Agnes managed to salvage an Italian velocycle, and passed it on to Ben so he could travel to Mercy Hill. A generous favour, if you ask me.

A favor that she cashed in on later, I assume?

That she did, while everyone was preparing for the Battle of the Devil's Steps. Ben was pretty nervous about it, what with Agnes being a minotaur and all, but-

WHOA. How- how does that even WORK?

...with great care. After all, there's a bit of a size difference between a minotaur and an aes sidhe, and while Ben didn't break anything, he needed some of Nimue's Elixir afterwards. But all in all, he did pretty alright for a first timer. Satisfying a minotaur is no mean feat for one of such average size.

Ohhh... Oh my...

Ben catches your flustered expression, afraid of what his friend-in-a-high-place just told you about.

*giggles internally*

Careful what you say to him next. He might be a little sens-

Frisk Prime: “…you touched her butt, didn't you Ben?~”

Ben: “…I beg your pardon?”

The playful tone of your accusation really does catch him off-guard.

Frisk Prime: “Agnes, your minotaur buddy. Was she really your first-”

Ben: “What the FUCK, Observer?! Why would you tell her that?!”
...now I think about it, maybe we shouldn't have pried.

*That was my bad, definitely. Although I feel like part of his concerns are about talking about that stuff while a little girl is in the same boat.*

**Little Frisk:** “...are you two talking about adult stuff?”

**Ben:** “I- ...yes, child, we are. I'm just- I'm just a little sensitive when it comes to discussing financial matters, that's all.”

**Little Frisk:** “That's ok. I just think it's cool that you... “did her taxes”, y'know?”

*Oh, that kid is a cheeky one. And- God, that knowing smirk. She knows full well what we were talking about. And it has struck Ben with utter dismay.*

**Ben:** “...what even IS this child?”

**Frisk Prime:** “Oh, don't mind her. Hell, I was kinda like that when I was her age.”

**Ben:** “I can only imagine why... ...I apologize, that was a low blow.”

*whispering* “But in all honesty, that was pretty accurate how it happened.”

**Frisk Prime:** *whispering* “Hot-dog down a hallway, huh?”

*Jesus Christ this is going to bump up the age-rating.*

**Ben:** “...forget I said anything.”

---

*...after a long and awkward silence, we finally arrive at the river-banks of Snowdin.*

**River Person:** “Come back soon, tra la la...”

**Frisk Prime:** “Would if I could, River. This... this is my last day down here.”

**River Person:** “Oh?”

**Frisk Prime:** “I came down here looking for answers, a long time ago. Now I finally have them, I can go home and fix something I left behind.”

“I'm not gonna lie, I'm gonna miss the people here, but if I don't go back, I'm- I'm never gonna stop thinking about my old home.”

“So... I guess this is goodbye, River.”

*The River Person nods solemnly.*

**River Person:** “Then this is goodbye. I wish you the best of luck, Frisca Rivera.”

*Before they push off to unseen stretches of the great river, they turn back to us and, with a knowing wink, add:*
River Person: “Doctor Gaster sends his regards.”

And before you can respond, they are gone. As if they were never there to begin with.

Frisk Prime: “Wh- WHAT?! They were- Ohhh nooo...”

Oh no?

Ben: “Again, we hear of this “Gaster”. Who is he really?”

Frisk Prime: “Was he watching us all this time? Wh- why?”

“...nevermind. It's a mystery that'll have to wait for some other time. Right now, we've got a train to catch. After all, Papyrus had some pretty big news about the Condenser, an' I have a feeling that it's gonna be our ticket back home.”

And with that, you head to the side-entrance of the Snowdin Lab. Ice Wolf swipes his card to let us in, but not before staring at Ben for a bit.

Ice Wolf: “…damn. Ice Wolf needs to invest in a waistcoat.”

Doctor Papyrus: “Ah, THERE you are! I knew you'd make it here eventually!”

Everyone turns to see you, Ben, and Little Frisk, as you enter the Lab. Immediately you are bombarded with questions about where you were, before Little Frisk cuts through the cacophony.

Little Frisk: “It's ok!”

“It's all ok you guys, we found her in the trash!”

Insert [joke about you being in your element] here.

But I'm not Alphys.

Aren't you a little bit like Alphys, though?

...maybe, I guess. But I've got a better joke than that up my sleeve.

Frisk Prime: “Yeah, uh, I'm really sorry about scarin' you guys an' all. I just needed some time to myself, and everythin' was just so- ...I guess I was feelin' a little down in the dumps.”

A brief wave of laughter washes over the room, interspersed with groans and rolling eyes. Followed immediately with sympathetic “awww's” and reassurances.

Ben: “Really, Frisk?”

Frisk Prime: “Oh c'mon, they needed a little ice-breaker. 'specially considerin' this place. I mean, WHOOFH...”

“So, uh, what's the situation Papyrus?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Oh I'm just making a few last-minute adjustments, but we should be up and
running soon! Thanks to the application of the Purgative, we can use purer samples of magic crystal for machine components! Our spin inductors have never been more powerful!"

**Frisk Prime:** “So the portal can be wider as a result? NICE!”

**Papyrus nods before continuing to adjust the Condenser. In the meantime, we look around and—**

...**huh. Looks like Asgore {2} has a body now. Toriel {2}, for that matter, though—**

Holy crap, she made it!

**Frisk Prime:** “Hey, Toriel! Toriel, HI!”

*You frantically wave in her direction as you approach, and she patiently smiles and nods as she turns from her husband. ...seriously, though, she got wings now. When did that happen—***

**Toriel:** “It is good to see you well, my child.”

**Frisk Prime:** “I'm, uh, I'm glad you're ok! I mean, I—”

“...I heard you went back down there while I was in {3}. Is, uh, how's Floriel holding up?”

**Toriel's expression sours a little.**

**Toriel:** “She is... well, she is—”

“...in all honesty, I should not have dragged her into my affairs. I betrayed her trust, by returning to the Inferno.”

“She is mostly silent now, but as I carved my way to the heart of the darkness itself, she just would not stop screaming...”

Oh no...

*Despite her best intentions, Toriel dragged her Replicant shell into the depths of the Inferno. No matter how powerful they became simply by crossing the threshold, no matter how much “good” was done in the long run by destroying the Burning One, Floriel was nonetheless traumatized by the experience.*

**Frisk Prime:** “Damn it... She didn't deserve that.”

“...tell her... Tell her that it's gonna be okay. That it's gonna be a long road, but it's only gonna get better from here.”

**Toriel {2}:** “...she hears you, child. And she sends her thanks.”

*Your attention turns to Asgore, his gaze cast downward.*

**Frisk Prime:** “How 'bout you, tough guy? You getting' along with your new roommate?”

*I'm assuming Asriel {1} got transferred from Thorney in the end?*

Yeah, but we gave him a machine body so he wouldn't feel left out.
Asgore {2}: “...oh! Howdy!”

*His head lifts to meet your concerned gaze. He seems awfully distracted, if you ask me.*

Asgore {2}: “Things really have changed since...”

*He freezes up and stares into the distance, taken off-guard by the memories of the past. Poor old man’s got a bad case of the thousand yard stare.*

Damn it... It's gonna be a long road for him, too.

**Frisk Prime:** “C'mon tough guy, don't do me like this. We're here, everything's fine now.”

**Toriel reaches over to squeeze the hand of her husband, and as if by magic his focus returns.**

Asgore {2}: “…dam it all. It's so easy to slip back into the... let's not talk about it, Frisk.”

**Frisk Prime:** “You don't need to talk about it, if you don't want to. At least, not right now.”

“...still, it must feel good to have a body again, right?”

**Asgore smiles widely and warmly as he stretches.**

Asgore {2}: “It is wonderful to finally be awake again. ...and “Thorney” is glad that he isn't a flower anymore.”

“...Thorney. It really does sound like a name I would come up with. Which, in the end, makes perfect sense.”

**Frisk Prime:** “Because despite everything, he's still you.”

**Asgore looks around at the others: Sans, Papyrus, Undyne, Alphys, all faces that he first saw nearly 200 years ago.**

Asgore {2}: “…my son really does have some fantastic friends, doesn't he?”

“...when I first saw that picture of yours, I didn't know what to make of it. All you said was that these people were important, that they would play an important role in the future of this world. But now I see...”

“They were your friends, from the original world. The world... before this one?”

**Frisk Prime:** “Actually it was the world before the world before this one. Kinda. It's hard to explain.”

Asgore {2}: “Then let's just call it the original world. The “Prime timeline” as you call it.”

“...it is strange, really. The more that things change, the more they stay the same.”

“Despite all the changes your actions caused to our world, these four still came to be. I don't claim to know much about time travel, believe me, but I would have thought that over such a long period of time, even the slightest of changes would have resulted in them not existing, and new people existing in their places?”
“...I suppose I was wrong. Perhaps some things are just too hard to erase, no matter what you change? That some “constants” are too constant to truly sweep from the pages of altered history?”

**Frisk Prime:** “Maybe... Or maybe, like you said, the more things change, the more they stay the same?”

**Asgore {2}**: “Perhaps...”

**Can we talk about why Toriel has wings now?**

There isn't really much to talk about. Apparently she had them down in the Inferno, aaaand she's manifested them as part of her new body. Floriel's body. You know what I mean.

**Fair enough. But what about the robot Asriel standing next to the real Asriel- Ohhkay, I'm assuming that's Asriel {1} in his new machine body, then.**

Yuuup, that's him alright.

**I really have missed stuff with that timeskip, haven't I?**

Wellll there wasn't all that much actually. Except for the King an' Queen getting new bodies, of course.

**That is still a big deal, though. But I guess a lot of things were resolved before I returned. That'll teach me for wanting to skip ahead.**

I wouldn't worry about it if I were you. Things have actually gotten pretty quiet after, well, you know...

**I still feel like I should have been there during your rage against the machines. Even if I'd failed to rein you in, I probably could have been a VATS-boy or something.**

That's a funny way of saying aimbot.

**It worked, though. I feel like I helped steady your hand, once upon a time. But not this time.**

...I walk over to reassure Asriel {1}. He's been all kinds of nervous about today.

**Oh, they're sending him back to {1} already? I thought it'd take longer to pinpoint his old world.**

You underestimate how resourceful Sans can be.

**Maybe I do, but can you honestly blame me? I mean, he's Sans. He has a bit of a penchant for being a sluggard. Though despite this, he has his moments.**

**Frisk Prime:** “Hey champ.” I say as I pat the back of Asriel {1}. “You feeling ok?”

**He still looks nervous about what he has to do. The Reaver, bearing the soul of Charlie {1B}, weighs heavy in its scabbard.**
Asriel {1}: “...I'm- Frisk, I'm scared. It's- It's been so long since-”

You place both hands on his shoulders, and look into his eyes.

Frisk Prime: “You're gonna be fine, bud. You've got the last piece of the puzzle, right there. All they need is one more soul, and they can take down the Barrier.”

Asriel {1}: “I- That's not- I'm worried about-”

*mechanical sigh* “I'm worried about Mom and Dad. I mean, what if they- What are they gonna say when they see me like this? How can I answer the questions they're gonna ask me?”

Frisk Prime: “...you won't need to say anything at all. They'll just be happy to have you back, after all this time.”

“Trust me, kiddo. It's all gonna be ok...”

You hug the robot got close to your chest, and he doesn't fight it off. A far cry from the first time you met following his resurrection.

Charlie Prime: “Hey, save me some squeezin's won't ya?”

Asriel {2}: “Oh god.”

You feel two long and stretchy arms wrap around the three of you, as Charlie drags you all into a Reed Richards style hug. Cue more “awww's” from the others.

Asriel {1}: “Th- thanks Charlie. I'm- I wish I-”

Charlie Prime: “Shushshhh... No more “I'm sorry”s, no more tears. Just relax...”

The hug goes on for a little longer than is comfortable. I'm guessing that Charlie is really into giving these kinds of hugs, isn't he?

Kinda, he just wants Asriel to be feeling alright when we're gone. Since, well, it goes without saying...

Fair enough. But at least you're enjoying it too.

Yeah... Yeah it's pretty nice, if you don't think too deep into it.

Despite not wanting to let go, Charlie breaks the hug.

Charlie Prime: “So, uh, bro number 2? Now that your parents are back in action, uh, you think anything's gonna change around here. I mean, technically you're still the king, aren't you?”

Asriel {2} looks towards his parents, gives a chuckle, and turns back to Charlie.

Asriel {2}: “...with any luck, not for much longer.”

“I won't lie; I'm not sure I was the best leader. Hell, I'm not sure I was the best scientist, either. ...though maybe that was all because I was trying to juggle both all this time? Maybe it's time I
stepped down, and let them take the reins?"

“...I just hope they're up for it.”

**Frisk Prime:** “I dunno, I think you did a good job, considering. Maybe you weren't “the best”, but you were still good at what you did.”

*He shoots a short-lived glare at you, but immediately regrets it.*

**Asriel {2}:** “...yeah. Maybe I was...”

“...sorry about that.”

**Frisk Prime:** “Don't worry about it. I'll be outta your hair soon enough.”

I pat him on the back, and walk over to Alphys and Undyne. They look like they-WHA-

*You feel a firm hand grasp your wrist and pull you back into a hug. The Prince is already tearing up at the thought of you leaving.*

Oh... He misses me already...

**Asriel {2}:** “…I'm sorry I treated you so harshly. You- *sniff* you were trying to do your best, and I-”

**Frisk Prime:** “Easy there, eeeeasy...”

“...you'll find someone else, Asriel. You deserve better than me.”

**Asriel {2}:** “Frisk, I- ...thank you, for everything.”

*And with that, he lets you go. Which, I imagine, is one of the hardest things he's had to do. After all, if you love something, you set it free.*

If it comes back, it's yours. If not, it was never meant to be.

*So often people forget that important part of the proverb.*

And this time... it wasn't meant to be...

*As you walk over to Alphys, she notices your solemn expression.*

**Doctor Alphys:** “Oh, are you- are you ok, Frisk?”

I take a deep breath, and relax.

**Frisk Prime:** “It's fine, really. I'm not all that good with goodbyes, that's all.”

*Undyne gives you a hearty pat on the back.*

**Doctor Undyne:** “You do what you gotta do, punk. I know this is important to you, otherwise you wouldn't-”
Frisk Prime: “Yeah, I know. If I don't do this, I'll never get over what happened to me.”

“...five years... Five years I've spent trying to get over it, and all I've done is bury it. But now, I know how to fix it. And while it took me too damn long to find the other way, for the folks back home it'll be like I never left in the first place...”

Doctor Undyne: “I dunno, they might start asking questions anyway. I mean, you ain't as young as you were when you left, so...”

Frisk Prime: “...I guess I'll have to explain it to them later. If the River Person was right, I won't have much time to explain before we have to get to the Sanitarium. The Templars are gonna be walking straight into a trap, and they don't even know it...”

Doctor Undyne: “Well, about that... We've been workin' on a little going-away present for ya, somethin' that'll help you, uh, not die to whatever that thing throws at ya.”

Doctor Alphys: “Yah, we've stored it in Papyrus' room. You know, for, uh, privacy!”

“We would have given it to you when you headed over to {3}, but it wasn't anywhere near ready by the time you left.”

What have they been working on?

Beats me. But it sounds like it's going to be awesome, whatever it is.

...as the door squeaks open in Papyrus' room, we see what your friends have built for us. And it. Is. FUCKING. BADASS.

Frisk Prime: “Holy shit.”

Standing in the middle of the room, standing taller than the average bear, is an honest-to-buggery suit of dark-red POWER ARMOUR. Complete with thick composite plating, comfy-looking internal padding, power-assisted movement actuators, and even a shield generator on the back. But no weapons systems.

Frisk Prime: “...my god...”

“You guys, this is- this is incredible!”

Doctor Alphys: “Well we- we couldn't let you go out half-dressed for something like this. I mean, if that Interloper guy is powerful enough to mess with YOU, you'll need all the help you can get!”

Frisk Prime: “I- Power armor! ...I'm gonna face my demons while wearing POWER ARMOR!”

Doctor Undyne: “I know, right?! It's gonna be FUCKIN’ AWESOME!”

“I just... I just wish I could join you over there.”

Her excitement gives way to a sense of resignation, ashamed of- ...come now, Undyne, don't be like that.
**Doctor Undyne:** “...you have no idea how much I wanted to join you in the other world, Frisk. I really wanted to go with you, to fight at your side, but... well, you know how it is.”

“I mean, I know I'm strong, but compared to those things... compared to you... I woulda been outta my league the second I stepped foot over there.”

“This... this is the best I can do for you, Frisk. Even if I wore the armor myself, I probably wouldn’t last long against something like the Interloper.”

**Frisk Prime:** “Aw c'mere you.”

I give Undyne a big ol' hug. She's sellin' herself short, even if she's kinda right about it.

**Frisk Prime:** “You might not be human, but you're still one of the strongest people I know. Don't go sellin' yourself short now, y'hear?”

“I mean, this- you MADE this! You and Alphys MADE THIS! I mean, if I wasn't the Doom Slayer before, I'll at least look the part wearing THIS!”

“I just- I can't thank you guys enough, I-”

I plant a kiss square on Undyne's lips before breaking the hug. It's the least I can do.

**WHOA NELLY,** careful with that! You're gonna make Alphee jealous! ...and you've already got Undyne all a-flush with emotion.

Before she can protest, I sweep Alphys up and give her a smooch too.

**Bloody hell Frisk, you're going to break the age-rating at this rate!**

**Frisk Prime:** “…didn't want you to feel left out, gurl.”

**As you set Alphys back down, she has turned entirely red with embarrassment. And a little red with arousal, for that matter. A little extreme, don't you think?**

**Extreme is how I feel right now. And extremely is how awesome this present is!**

**Well, extreme is gonna be how good their dreams are going to be tonight, after your expression of joy. Even though they look a little confused right now thanks to your Friskiness.**

Oooh, added bonus...

**Frisk Prime:** “Well, uh... Let's, uh, let's give this thing a spin, shall we?”

**Removing your shoes and tying back your hair, you prepare to don your new armour...**

**Doctor Alphys:** “…s-so? How is it?”

**Clad in deep maroon metal, you feel safe. Protected. Damn near invincible. ...and quite comfy, as a matter of fact.**

I flex to test out the servos. ...'kay, waist is fine, legs are a-okay, arms workin' well, and the hands are movin' like a dream.
I think we're in business! There's just one thing missing, though...

**Frisk Prime:** “...I feel like I could take on the world.”

“Just one thing, though. I couldn't seem to find the helmet for this thing...”

*Alphys smirks as she points out the collar of the chestpiece.*

**Doctor Alphys:** “That's uh... I worked a special feature into the main body. Just flip that little green switch, okay?”

Wait, is the helmet part of the suit? Ohhh, this is gonna be SWEET!

*As you flip the switch on your collar, you hear a buzzing in your ears while the world takes on a slight greenish tint. As you breathe in and out, you can make out a faint matrix of hexagons around your mouth, flaring up as air passes through the forcefield.*

**Frisk Prime:** “...huh. That's... that's pretty frickin' neat.”

**Doctor Alphys:** “We made some special adjustments to the shielding around the head area. It lets slow-moving objects through no problem, like air or, uh, hair, but if anything else tries to hit it, it'll just bounce off!”

“This way, you've got the functional equivalent of a helmet, but you won't have to hide your pretty face from the world! Or your angry face, for that matter...”

I feel a wicked smile creep across my face. ...this is gonna be so much FUN. With friends like these, who even needs a helmet?

*Whoever tries to stop you, I'll wager. Which, if we're lucky, won't be anyone. Those guys call themselves Templars, but they don't wear even HALF the armour you are right now. So if they see you, they'll probably run for cover. Or at least, run to try and find an anti-materiel weapon, only to find that the suit's shielding soaks up most of the bullet's energy, and it'll either just leave a dent in the plating OR stick in it like a dart.*

Well, that's, uh- That's really reassuring, Observer... No really, it is.

*Cool, cool. ...so, you ready to show it off?*

OH, am I EVER?

**Frisk Prime:** “I am so fuckin' ready.”

---

*As you stroll back into the lab, the echoing footfalls of your boots draws everyone's attention. They cannot help but stare as you enter flanked by Alphys and Undyne.*

**Frisk Prime:** “Check it out! These girls know what's up.”

“I am SO READY!”

*Alphys and Undyne look proud as you show off their latest masterpiece. You've never looked*
more badass than you do right now.

Asriel {1}: “Whooooaa... You- you look so-

“That's so COOL!”

Aw bless, he can't help but admire your suit. And neither can Ben, either.

Ben: “My oh MY. I heard that your friends were working on something special, but THIS...”

doc sans: “huh. that's really neat, actually. undyne really knocked it outta the park, didn't she?”

Frisk Prime: “Well, it wasn't all her handiwork. Alphee did great work on these servos here, I can barely feel any resistance from this thing!”

It almost feels like a second skin... Well, more like a carapace I guess, but you get it. It's like... it really feels like an extension of my body.

As a suit of armour should.

Doctor Papyrus: “....there, that should do it. Sans!”

doc sans: “we ready to roll, bro?”

Doctor Papyrus: “Indeed we are! The souls are in place, the spin inductors are in prime condition, and the strings are locked!”

“Ladies and gentlemen, and everyone else, we are ready to open the portal! Today, this window shall become a door, a door to the worlds beyond!”

Everyone makes their way up the stairs, to witness this marvel for themselves. A swirling rainbow of soul energy manifests as it flows around the ring, gorged on enough power to form a rainbow bridge to Asgard itself.

Charlie Prime: “Beef roast...”

Laugh if you must, but that's legitimately how you pronounce it. It might look like “bye-frost”, but the name of the rainbow bridge is indeed pronounced “beef-roast”.

Anyway, with a roaring crack of thunder, a hole appears in the heart of the Condenser, rapidly expanding to the size of a man. A minotaur would still need to duck their head in order to cross the threshold, but it is most still large enough for most people to pass through.

...something the matter, Frisk?

I dunno, Charlie's not looking so good right now.

Frisk Prime: “You, uh, you ok Charlie? You're lookin' a little nervous.”

Charlie Prime: “Nervous? I wouldn't-”

His neck elongates as he stretches to be face-to-face with you.
“-stretch it that far…”

You fall into hysterics, and struggle to regain your composure. Sans and Toriel in turn beam with unbridled pride at this master-stroke of unconventional comedy. A perfectly timed stretch-pun is just what the doctor ordered.

Ben, on the other hand, performs the rarely-executed double facepalm at this visual pun. Despite it being absolutely fantastic.

Ben: “Really, Charlie? Again?”

Charlie Prime: “Come on man, it goes SO WELL with what I've got going on! Heck, I've been saving this for so LONG!”

As if to emphasize the point, his right arm extends a great distance to pat Ben on the head. Triggering yet another facepalm.

Charlie Prime: “But while it would be a stretch to say I'm nervous, I'm just- well- I've just been thinkin’.”

“...you remember when we left Prime, right? We... we weren't alone, Frisk.”

Oh... Oh god, I remember...

Charlie Prime: “Toriel tried to stop us. She implored us not to jump, and all you said was “I'll be back” ...I remember how she screamed as you fell, before... before we appeared in Old Home.”

“...we broke her heart, Frisk. She tried to make everything better, but- ...I'm a little scared to face the music. And that's not even considering the fact that she's gonna see me, too.”

“...will she even be able to handle seeing us both? She thought she saw you die, and she's gonna be crying her eyes out when we return, but when she sees us... I'm scared of what might happen to her. What this sudden whiplash is gonna do to her mind.”

“...but we still have to do it. I'm not gonna back down, not when we're so close. We HAVE to DO this. For Asriel.”

...this is gonna be so fucked...

Maybe so. I have no idea what's going to happen when she finds out that her child is still alive and well, and that Charlie has come back to life. I don't know whether she will be overjoyed, deeply upset, or utterly catatonic when the revelation hits her.

However... we could skip her. I know, it might sound cruel to let her think that you're dead for a little longer, but technically it would save us a fair chunk of time if I dropped you off outside the Underground, then you give her a call and hope she picks up.

...I don't know what to say. This is so, so fucked... But if I had to choose between them... Fuck it. Drop us off as close to Emigration Oaks as you possibly can.

...actually, maybe we won't need a vehicle to get us there, if you just drop us off inside the facility itself.
That's... actually not TOO bad of a plan. Though I still think that you kids will need an escape vehicle in order to make like Snake Plissken and Escape from New Deseret. No use breaking in if you don't have a good getaway.

**Frisk Prime:** “...I think we should talk to Ben about this, get his skinny on the situation. ...after we've given Asriel {1} his send-off, of course.”

**Charlie Prime:** “Yeah... yeah, let's do that.”

**Asriel {1} stands anxiously before the portal home. He needs a little encouragement, I feel.**

I walk over, and rest my hands on his shoulders.

**Frisk Prime:** “You got this, kiddo. They- ...you're probably gonna give them a fright, showin' up outta nowhere, but they're not gonna be like that for long. If anything, you'll have a hard time tryin' to break the huge hug they're gonna give you!”

“...maybe- maybe call out to them when you're over there, catch their attention before they bump into you? That'd be the smoother way of doing things, I think.”

**He looks a little less nervous about going home, now. But before he crosses the threshold, he gives you a hug.**

**Asriel {1}:** “I'm- ...thank you, Frisk. Thanks for- for everything.”

“I'm sorry for *sniff* treating you like crap, I just-”

**Frisk Prime:** “Hushhhhh... No more tears, sweetie. Be brave out there for me, ok?”

“And never forget to stay determined.”

**With that, emboldened by your reassurances, he crosses the threshold into the dusty old basement of New Home's Old Lab. He passes the long-neglected equipment as he calls out, hoping to hear his parents.**

**Asriel {1}:** “Mom? Dad? Are you up there?”

“It's- I know it's a surprise but- She fixed me! I'm back!”

**He rushes up the stairs and out of our line of sight, to search for his parents.**

**Ben:** “...maintain the connection, Fontaine. I suspect the distortion is strong enough for the Observer to work his magic.”

**doc sans:** “...uh, sure. sure, i'll keep it open.”

**Now is the time for us to leave. We have done all we can for this timeline, and everything is, for the time being, ok. Let us leave this world behind... and move on to the next.**

**Frisk Prime:** “...I've got one last thing to say. I'm not good with goodbyes, but I gotta make this
You turn to your friends, and they already look like they miss you. Papyrus is trying not to cry, Undyne and Alphys are holding one-another's hands, Toriel is reassuring Asgore, and Sans is... well, Sans looks happy, smiling with his lips closed. Even Syrinx looks sad to see you go.

Syrinx: “...while I wish I could go with you, my place is here. I feel that I can do greater good in this world than I can in yours.”

“And besides, I still exist in your world. I languished in my tomb for millennia before you released me, and to the best of my knowledge, I am still there to this day.”

She pauses briefly, before saying:

Syrinx: “...were it not for you, I would never have realised the truth. I would never have learned to treasure the pleasures that the universe has to offer. I would still be a prisoner of my own temple... and a prisoner of the old ways...”

“...you remember the device I gave to you, after your return? I have managed to copy the bulk of my experiences into this orison, all of my epiphanies, all of the good times I have shared with these people. All of the good I have seen in the material, and all of the flaws in the divine.”

“...if you are able to return to the Underground after your liberation of Asriel Prime, find Syrinx Tau Xi Theta at the place of our first meeting. Free her from her eternal bondage, and give her the orison. Knowing her, she will come to accept these truths, as I have. She will feel conflicted, of that there is no doubt, but I am confident that she will understand.”

She extends her single tendril, and you shake it gently.

Syrinx: “I will miss you deeply, Frisca Rivera. But we will meet again, in the worlds beyond...”

Frisk Prime: “...I'll miss you too, Syrinx. It ain't gonna be the same without you around, but if I can save you again, I'm sure we'll be friends again some day.”

She drifts out of your grasp, and joins the others.

Frisk Prime: “…you guys... I'm glad that we- I'm so glad that I met you again.”

“You've been such... such good friends. I couldn't have asked for better people to help me through all of this. And... and I'm sorry. I'm sorry for all the hurt I've caused you.”

“...believe me this time when I say that I'll never forget you. I'll always remember my time down here, in the Underground, and when I think of this world, I'll think of you guys.”

“...I don't know what else to say, really. I... I never was good with saying goodbye, so-”

Papyrus rushes forward and gives you a big old hug. He's been moved to tears by the situation, and doesn't want to let go.

Doctor Papyrus: *sniff* “Don't worry, Frisk! I'll think about you every day!”

Prince Asriel joins the hug, similarly moved to tears. I'll admit, I'm a little misty-eyed myself, and
I'm going with you. If I had arms to hug you with, I'd join in.

...but of course, all good things must come to an end. The hug is broken, and you feel a distortion of reality pull you away from this world. Charlie and Ben similarly ascend in the air, as soft sparks of darkness descend from the Beyond.

Frisk Prime: “Goodbye, everybody! Maybe we'll meet again one day?”

And with that, we vanish in a flash of black- WAIT WHJmifglnsrlamcy hy

A moment of your time, please.

Observer?! What's going on?! Why is everything all white?!

I owe you an explanation, and... an apology.

Wait... Oh god... Nonono nononono-

Relax, Frisca Rivera. You are safe in this place. No harm will come to you, and no harm can come from you. All I ask... is for a few moments of your time.

IT'S YOU.
Chapter Summary

Due to unforeseen consequences, the group has been separated, and Frisk is being held somewhere by a higher being. However, thanks to a helping wing, I've been able to set up a team to get her back. Charlie, Ben, Violet and her little friend, working together to get Frisk back from whoever took her. Who took her? Read on to find out!

Somewhere in the dank, dark recesses of a YouTube comments section...

No... No, Pokket didn't ruin Nebula Jazz, what's wrong with you? It's just that she isn't as potent as folks like Jesse. And honestly, that's fine, because Jesse knocks it out of the park-

Hey buddy. What the hell are you doin”?

BLWAH- Cardinal?! Are you ok?

Am I ok? The hell happened to you?! Why are you stuck in this vortex?

What are you on about- ...oh god. That monochrome bastard threw me in a wormhole! A YOUTUBE WORMHOLE! OH MY GOOOOOOD-

Oh goddamnit... Hold on I'll fish you outta there, gimme a second.

Theeeere we go! You looked like you were enjoying yourself in there, I ain't gonna lie.

Seriously, thanks for mate. I don't know how long it would have taken me to claw my own way out.

Yeeaaah, I know how you are. So easily distracted with a world at your fingertips.

Aaaanyway, I've got good news and bad news. Good news is that I know where Frisk is. The bad news is... she's in the Beyond. A certain someone snapped her up when you tried to send your friends back to "Prime".

The Beyond... The space above their planes of reality, but beneath mine. ...we both know who intercepted her, don't we?

Yup. If you think it's W.D Gaster himself, you're on the right track.

Then we need to get her back on HER track. She's got a date with destiny, and I'm-

About that. Thing is, if it was that easy I'd have done it myself already.
You see, I was only Touched by the Beyond, when you found me. But this guy... this guy fell out of the world completely, and into the Beyond itself. He was BAPTIZED in it. His knowledge of the Beyond, and his influence over it, it's WAY more than what I can muster.

Hell, it took all my concentration to dump her buddies back into Wellsverne Gothic, where-

*OH GOD are the boys ok?*

Relax buddy, they're both doing swell. Though they've got a LOT to explain to Ben's old friends back home.

*Whew, that's a serious relief. If they got stuck in-between, I daren't speculate what would have happened to them...*

...anyway, the main reason I'm talkin' to ya right now is that, well, I can't force my way into Gaster's slice of the Beyond. I don't have a reliable source of the Power, and I can't focus enough on my own to pierce the scrambling phase that's keeping everyone else out. Whatever he's planning, he doesn't want ANYONE to interfere.

You seem to know what you're doing. ...sometimes. You think you can, uh, muddle your way through this?

...*this is going to take some doing. The Power isn't as strong with you naturally, since you mostly rely on others to channel it for you. And even if you returned to Wellsverne Gothic and drew Power from your Revenants, you wouldn't be able to carry enough of a charge to ground the scrambling field.*

*What we need... is a machine. A mechanism with a great capacity for both the Power and natural energies, capable of warping the very fabric of reality itself. What we require, Cardinal, is a vessel with a warp drive.*

...there's a catch, though. Something so simple has gotta come with a catch.

*There's a lot of catches, actually. After all, Ben DOES come from a 19th century world, even if it is very advanced for the 1880s. However, we can circumvent most of the troubles posed by building a warp-capable shuttlecraft out of Victorian-era components. All we really need is for them to build something that distorts space-time enough for me to send them elsewhere.*

To a time and place where they can outright just GET a warp-capable vessel! That's-...actually, I think you're overthinking it just a little bit.

*You think so? I mean, considering the time period I don't think it would be THAT hard for them to get their hands on some cavorite and-*

Trust me, it would be cool to have those boys bond over going all H.G. Wells building some kinda Time Machine, buuuut it'd be smarter to just use your pre-existing assets. After all, you KNOW someone who can bend space-time. You can get THEM to set up a strong enough space-time distortion for you to exploit.
...bloody hell, you're right! I forgot about Violet Song!

Come to think of it, this could be quite convenient in the long run. I bring her here, with the {Patience} Asriel she's been dragging around, then I plonk them into a universe where they can buy a runabout or something. THEN they set their little ship to gun it at Warp 1 and send them to the Beyond, where the blazing warp-bubble cuts through the scrambling phase like a dinner fork through scrambled eggs! We push Gaster aside, bring Frisk on board, she has a heartfelt reunion with the alternate Asriel, and then OFF to the main event!

NOW we're talkin'! THIS is the kinda simple I like, no overthinkin' shit, no wasting time an' resources when you've got a viable alternative, just a solid plan that you just gotta set in motion.

Yeah, I'm feeling it, we can do this. I'm going to go and get Violet. Can you go on ahead and give Charlie the heads-up while I'm busy?

Eh, sure. I'll lend ya a wing this time. I mean, I kinda owe ya after what happened.

I'm just glad that you're not susceptible anymore. ...speaking of which, how are Lucas and Skadi doing?

...I gotta say, I'm still kinda surprised that they're back together again. I mean, we know why they broke up last time. And now they're planning ANOTHER kid? As if losing their last kid wasn't painful enough...

They're at least willing to give it another try. Don't get me wrong, they were pretty lousy parents before, but this time they look like they're ready to settle down. At least for the next twenty-odd years, given the relative window of peace ahead of them.

And during that time of peace, they are actually going to be there for their kid. They won't bring them along on dangerous adventures, or leave them behind while trying to defend the galaxy from Space Nazis: they're just going to try and be the best parents they can. Which, after all of their gallivanting across time and space, is probably going to be one of their greatest adventures yet.

...damn. That's gonna be one hell of a thing, if they actually raise a kid right for once.

...aaaaanyway, I'm gonna give Charlie the heads-up. See ya on the other side, buddy!

Location: Dorsal-Thoracic Forest, Atlach-Nacha, Upper Atmosphere of Cykranosh

Subject of Observation: Violet Song

Violet stands in a clearing amidst the towering blondewood spines, the hairs of the Spider Goddess herself. The same goddess who was greatly relieved that Her wayward son's plans had been put down, yet lamented His death in equal measure. Not even Great Cthulhu could sway Arad-Nacha from His reckless, haphazard campaign, and in the end the ancient High Priest could do little more
than put Him to the sword. In Cthulhu's eyes, death would be a mercy compared to being sealed away, as the Elder Gods did to Him in ages past.

But at the end of the day, there was no going back. The deed had been done, the worlds were safe once more, and Violet's adventure was finally at its end. Her other allies had already left for the worlds they called home, save for her one constant companion.

He looks slightly older than his child form, but not quite as mature as his teenager form. And this time around, his shirt appears to be white and light-blue, reflecting who he is on the inside.

Violet: “Are you sure you still want this, Asriel? I mean, we're safe now-”

Asriel: “Please, Violet. Just- just stop calling me Asriel.”

Oh? What's going on here?

“Asriel”: “You know I'm not him. I might look like him, I might sound like him, hell I even feel like him some days.”

“...but he's dead. He's been dead for a long time, and I've done nothing but disrespect his memory by letting people think I'm him.”

Violet: “As-”

She reaches out to touch him on the shoulder, but he pulls away in disgust.

“Asriel”: “Don't. Just... just don't.”

“And no. Just because I was made from his remains, doesn't mean that I'm “Asriel as they come”. I'm just an echo, a shadow of who he was. I don't want to be remembered as him.”

“...besides, I've done things the real Asriel would never have done. I've committed atrocities he'd never have dreamed of. But I've also been around to help save SO many worlds, fight things that Asriel wouldn't have stood a chance against as himself.”

“I'm my OWN person, now. I might be like Asriel, but I don't want to be known as him anymore...”

...bloody hell. I was wondering whether something like this would crop up. I mean, Flowey Prime had his existential crisis when he became the vessel for Asriel Prime, but he accepted the notion that he was still Asriel regardless. But this time around, it looks like he's deciding to throw it all away. And yet...

Violet: “If it makes you feel better, I guess I can call you Flowey again.”

“Asriel”: “Actually, Mary came up with something a little better. ...like that was hard to do.”

“Let's go with Florian, for now. It's bound to be better than “Flowey” ever was.”

Violet: “...well, I guess that sums you up nicely, Florian.”

“...still, if you go ahead with this, a lot of people are still going to think that you're him. Frisk won't be able to look at you and not see you as Asriel. ...are you absolutely sure you want to stay with her?”
“Florian” looks uncertain, but determined. A dangerous mix for anyone.

Florian: “...I made her a promise. She- she can take care of me, help me-”

Violet: “But so can I! And I won't remind you of-”

Florian: “SHADDAP. I've made my choice, I'm stickin' with it.”

“Look, I won't lie. I've... actually had fun, going along with you. It's really been an adventure, but I can't- ...it's not what I need, Violet. It's just not healthy for me to stay with you. But Frisk...”

Violet doesn't look happy. Even after all she's given him, all the comfort and protection, he still wants to leave.

Violet: “What? What can she give you that I can't?”

Florian: “She understands what it's like to be me. Because she's done it before.”

Violet: “And you think I don’t? I understand that it's tough, having-”

Florian: “NO, Violet. You DON'T. You can't even begin to understand.”

“You've heard what I've told you, you've seen what I've done, but you've never FELT it! You don't know how it FEELS!”

Florian points at his chest for emphasis.

Florian: “...so that's that. I want you to take me to her, Violet. Take- t- just take me home!”

Violet is saddened by the insistence of her long-time companion. He was the first to join her posse, and now he is the last to leave her, just like everyone else did...

Violet: “...well, I guess this is it then. I'm gonna miss you, kid.”

With an effort of will, she attempts to focus on DoctorTale Prime. Space-time bends before her, swirling faster and faster before tearing open a hole into the void. Little does she know that she won't be able to get to the precise space-time where Frisk is being held.

HOLY CRAP, YOU AGAIN?!

Indeed, it is I. There is a major issue you're about to bump up against, you see. In order to find Frisk, you will need to sync yourselves up with her current time. If you open a rift to her world NOW, all you'll do is make another unnecessary branch.

...and you know how to “sync us up”, I take it.
In a manner of speaking. To tell the truth, she is currently stuck in the Beyond, and the only way to get to her is by using an Alcubierre-style warp drive. If we get our hands on a small warp-capable vessel, we can ground the scrambling phase that's cutting us off from her.

Scrambling phase? AGAIN?! UGH, I HATE that stuff! It always made it harder to get around, I swear...

We'll cut right through it once we have the warp drive, and thankfully we'll only need to break warp 1 to pull this off. But first, we need to pick up her companions before going off to buy the ship.

Or we could just steal it?

And just how do you intend to sneak a spaceship out of the dealership without paying for it? If I've learned anything from watching the worlds, it's that you don't fuck with a shopkeeper. Either you'll get blown to pieces by their security system, or you'll want to take a long cold shower afterwards. I mean, you don't know where they've been. Who knows what strange and exotic garages they've parked in beforehand?

That's just disgusting. But I guess Frisk appreciates that humor better than I do.

...either way, I guess you're right.

It'll be a worthwhile investment for all that loot you've gathered. Even though I suspect you intended to turn that loot into your retirement fund. But in that regard, you won't have to pawn off TOO many candlesticks and superconductors to raise the money. After all, Ben has his fair share of loot to invest in the joint-purchase of a dinged-up old runabout.

One of Frisk's friends, I take it?

One of her closest. Such a nice boy, too. You'll probably like him.

I'll be the judge of that.

Florian eyes you suspiciously. The portal doesn't really lead anywhere, and you're just standing there staring off into space.

Violet: “...there's been a change of plans, kiddo.”

Florian: “...you wouldn't dare.”

Violet: “It's not like that, trust me. What I mean is that getting to Frisk just got a lot more complicated.”

“I've just had a talk with that Observer creep, and apparently Frisk got her ass stuck between worlds or some shit like that. We're gonna need to pick up her friends, wherever they are, then loop back to New Bransonville Station to go buy that old corvette. Because apparently she's stuck in some scrambling phase, and the only way to punch through it is by doing a warp jump.”

Florian stands there, his mouth agape, rocked by the notion of one last mission. ...now he's smirking at this. After all he's been through, I thought he'd be sick of it-
**Florian**: “...then what are we WAITING for? Let's get this show on the road! Once more, with feeling!”

*And with that, you both start to float upwards into the air. This is just how it works, I don’t question it.*

**Florian**: “OH CRAP WHAT THE HECK IS-”

*In a flash of black, they vanish from the back of the world-spider. And the portal Violet created, without a worldwalker to sustain it, winks out of existence...*

**Location**: Hanger 4, Brichester Airfield, Cotswolds, England, Wellsverne Gothic

**Dialogue**: Charlie & the Observer

*A'ight lad?*

**JEEZIS**- ...hey, Observer. Those friends of yours on their way already?

*They should be here any second. Though- ...oooh, what's this now? You're looking sharp, Charlie!*

Uh, I'm just- uh- just tryin' to blend in! I mean, my striped shirt isn't very Victorian.

*Still, you do look quite fancy. A white long-sleeve dress shirt, light-brown trousers, some smart brogues, and above all else a very nice-looking black waistcoat. All you need now is some driving gloves and a brown overcoat, and you’d be perfectly dressed to pilot the Time Machine itself! Fathers, lock up your daughters: there's a ladykiller in town!*

...gee, thanks. I guess I kinda look like the guy played by Guy Pearce, don't I? You know, if he were a teenager when he built the Time Machine.

*That's what I was getting at.*

Though I guess I was kinda following in his footsteps, wasn't I? Building something to get us back home.

*...ah. About that. You see-*

**I know.** The Cardinal already told me about how we didn't need to bother with our “Time Machine”, thanks to Violet. Which honestly kinda sucks, since-

*You were eager to build it, since it would have been a cool thing to whiz around in?*

Because Ben's already gone to the trouble of buying an armored truck, and we've spent the last coupla weeks welding cavorite plates to the undercarriage! Hell, House Teague's got their top men working out how to reverse engineer the warp core from that crashed ship on the Devil's Steps! But I guess all of that doesn't matter now, 'cause that Violet chick's gonna help us just BUY a ship of our own.
Oh... oh, I'm so sorry to hear that.

...but seriously, has it really been that long?

We've been stuck in this place for about a month trying to get back to our world, tryin' to get your attention. And apparently you were stuck in a YouTube wormhole, whatever the hell that is, so you probably wouldn't have heard us even if we'd finished the damn thing.

And for that, I am deeply sorry. I probably could have left it myself if I had the willpower, but the bloody thing played to my weaknesses and kept me sedated. And now, all you have is a half-built steampunk hovercraft and not much else to show for it.

...speaking of which, how is Ben handling it? And where the devil is he, anyway?

...he's, uh, he's otherwise engaged. I was gonna tell him about the change of plans, but he just told me to “bugger off” when I knocked on the door to his quarters. I'm no expert, but I'm pretty sure he's “working off” the cost of that truck.

...he's doing Agnes' “taxes” again, isn't he?

Yeah. Something along those lines.

...I can't lie, I have a feeling that she's taking advantage of him like this. Don't get me wrong, even minotaurs need loving, but-

WHOA NO, it's not like that at all. We paid for all that stuff by pawnning some of our collective loot, he's not REALLY paying for it like “that”. He's... just answering a booty call, I'm sure of it.

Well, I'm hoping it's as innocent as that. If it's just a case of R&R with Agnes, I'm fine with him “doing her taxes” so don't as he doesn't break anything. Not even a Revenant should suffer a fractured-

Oh shit, it's happening! Crap, CRAP, I'm not ready for this! He's gonna show up, he's gonna see me-

EASY, easy, just try to play it cool. It's going to be weird for him, too. And he's going to need you to be calm and composed, once he sees the male version of his best friend.

I was a GIRL in his world?!

...weak bolts of black lightning strike out from the shadows that coalesce in the middle of the airship hanger. The sidhe engineers working on the Warren family airship cannot help but take strong notice of this anomaly, and ready their service pistols in case of danger.

Charlie: “ NOBODY PANIC! It's- it's just some f-friends on mine, they're supposed to meet me here! They're cool, they're cool-”

Before you can finish your sentence, a flash of black reveals two figures in the midst of the cross-dimensional transfer. The dark mists clear as the phase-storm subsides, revealing-

Corporal Daniels: “Ohhh- Obe's hooks, what IS that...”
UHHH, is that- why does Violet look like that? Was she ALWAYS like that?

The proportions of the tlaca worldwalker are not strictly humanoid, compared to everyone else in the hanger. Her arms are so long that her knuckles nearly graze the floor, in a vaguely ape-like fashion, while a long prehensile tail protrudes as a continuation of her spine. As I told Frisk once before, Violet's species is more closely related to spider monkeys than the great apes that humans evolved from.

...she still looks like she's wearing the skin of a xenomorph, I just can't get over that.

Violet: “WHOA it's ok, it's ok! Lower your guns, I'm not here to cause any trouble.”

Corporals Daniels and Adams look at one-another cautiously, unnerved by the monkey-like proportions and dark chitinous exoskeleton of this alien intruder. As you gesture for them to stand down, they look a little embarrassed at their initial reactions, and lower their weapons. But they don’t holster them. They still don’t trust this-

Florian: “Ch- Chara?”

It's... it's him... oh GOD it's him.

Try your best to relax. It'll be more awkward if you're on edge.

Violet: “...I'm guessing you're the, uh, the Chara of this world?”

“Asriel- Uh, Florian here's talked about you a lot. I mean, your parallel, his Chara.”

Charlie: “I'm- I- ...greetings. I'm Charlie. I'm- God, this is-”

Violet furrows her brow for a moment, realizing something as Florian stammers in your presence.

Flori- Really? “Florian?” That's the best he could come up with?

Hey, it's better than going back to “Flowey”.

...oh.

Florian can't take his eyes off of you. Even as the spirit of Patience tries to calm him down, he's struggling to come to terms with the fact that you're still alive in Frisk's world. He's nervous, surprised, and practically on the verge of tears.

...poor little guy. I crouch down and open my arms to him.

Charlie: “...heyyyyy there little buddy. I- I know this isn't what you were expecting, but-”

Before you can continue, Florian dives at you and buries his face in your chest.

Florian: “CHARAAAAAA!”

His arms wrap around your chest as he starts crying, overwhelmed with sorrow and joy at the return of one of the only people who ever understood him. You struggle to maintain your
composure at this heartfelt “reunion”, and it shows as you become a bit more gelatinous than you'd prefer to be right now.

...I return the hug, and try my hardest not to cry. ...emphasis on the word try.

Ok then, roll 1d20 for Composure.

...that's not funny, Observer.

...you roll a 7. Barely enough to keep you solid and composed, but not enough to keep your eyes from leaking black tears of pseudo-amalgamate goop. Best to turn your face away for now, people might freak out if you start looking like Alice Cooper again.

...I run my fingers through his hair...

Charlie: “Shhhh... It's ok little buddy, I'm here...”

AlertDialog: Violet & the Observer

...why are Chara's tears BLACK OH GOD WHAT-

It's just a side effect of his new body. Prior to this, he was another soul in Frisk's body. But during a run-in with an amalgamation of amalgamates, his soul took over the gelatinous mass and, well, he's basically a changeling now. As a side effect, his goop at rest reflects the colour of his soul.

But why the hell is it BLACK? From what I heard, I figured it'd be red.

It's still a little red if you look hard enough. But after he and Frisk delved into the depths of the Inferno, they were Touched by the Abyss, and their souls reflect it. His Determination is somewhat masked by the Chaos that is woven into his soul.

...riiiight. That's not crazy at all.

I reckon you've seen weirder. Weren't you running through alien meat corridors a couple of weeks ago?

...touche.

Violet: “…sooo, um, do either of you fine gentlemen know where Ben is?”

The Engineer-Corporals look a little less on edge now, looking past your “alien” physique and realising that you're actually quite personable.

Corporal Adams: “You mean Sir Benjamin? Last I heard, he was helping Mistress Dunbar sort out her financial situation, or something along those lines. I imagine he's quite busy at the moment.”

Violet: “Okay, but do you know where is he right now? I really need to talk to him. It concerns one of his allies, one Frisca Rivera.”
His eyebrows raise at the mention of Frisk. Sir Benjamin often spoke at length about the hot-heated half-Oriental, whom he regarded as one of his closest friends.

Corporal Adams: “...he asked not to be disturbed, but if you have information about that Frisk of his, I imagine he can make an exception. Follow me.”

“...but no funny business, alright? Keep those hands where I can see them.”

Uhhhh... Does he seriously think I'm gonna loot this place or something? I'm not a goddamn kleptomaniac!

You follow Corporal Adams to wherever Ben is at the moment. Daniels is a little taken aback by this sudden departure, but nonetheless retains his composure.

Corporal Daniels: “Erm, ok Dave, I'll meet you later. I'll just... I suppose I'll keep watch over Master Charles and... young Master Florian.”

“...can't say I've ever seen a goat-child before...”

Adams knocks firmly on the door to Ben's quarters, desperately hoping not to earn the ire of the Revenant. The squeaking of a nearby bedframe ceases, followed swiftly by a sigh of exasperation.

Wait WHAT. ...you never told me he was a goddamn Revenant.

Problem?

Not really, it's just-

Ben: “Can't you read the sign? I am busy!”

Corporal Adams: “I hate to interrupt your accounting, sir, but you have an important visitor! She claims to have knowledge of Frisca Rivera!”

Mere seconds after he hears that name, you hear the sound of someone hastily getting out of bed, throwing on a dressing gown, and frantically whispering to someone else in the room.

...he's not actually doing people's finances in there, is he?

Nope. That was just an abstract euphemism for R&R.

Huh. I kinda feel bad for interrupting, now-

The door swings inward, revealing a dark-haired sidhe in a navy-blue dressing gown, fluffy slippers on his long feet.

Ben: “Where is she?!”

When his eyes meet yours, he is momentarily bemused by your physiology. And yes, most humanoids in this world are unaccustomed to your ateline nature.

I'm used to it. Few people even know of my kind anyway.
Violet: “Straight to business, then? Eh, okay.”

“So, uh, bad news first. Frisk's stuck between worlds, and we're gonna need a warp-capable vessel to get to her. Whoever took her-”

Gaster. Gaster took her.

'kay.

“Okay, so this guy called Gaster took her, and he's surrounded his place with scrambling phase-”

Ben: “Gaster?! That scoundrel! I KNEW he was up to no good!”

“But I assume you're here to help us with the runabout?”

Violet: “Aaaand that's where the good news comes in, depending on how you look at it. You won't need to build your own machine to punch through, since I can take you guys out to a place where we can buy one. I know a dealership on New Bransonville Station that can hook us up with a warp-capable corvette.”

Ben cannot help but stare in disbelief at this development. Adams, on the other hand, doesn’t quite understand what you were talking about. It doesn’t quite register-

Ben: “Oh for FUCKS sake! Really?! I've already sunk a small fortune into this project, and we can just-”

“...bugger it all.”

He rests his head against the doorframe, and lets out another exasperated sigh.

Ben: “...Agnes is going to kill me.”

* deep, frustrated sigh* “Alright, just-...just let me get dressed first, I'll be down there soon. Where will I find you, by the way?”

Violet: “We'll be in Hangar 4. That right, Adams? Hanger 4?”

Corporal Adams snaps to attention, shaking off the strangeness of the situation.

Corporal Adams: “Erm, yes ma'am. Hangar 4.”

Ben: “Duly noted. I'll see you in Hangar 4.”

With that, he closes the door. ...then opens it again to ask you another question.

Ben: “I'm terribly sorry, I didn't catch your name before.”

I reach to shake his hand.

Violet: “Violet Song.”

He accepts your handshake. It feels strong and firm, and doesn't last too long.
Ben: “I am glad you're here, Violet.”

And again, he closes the door, eager to get dressed and get on with this plan. Though still quite peeved that he sunk a bunch of his war-spoils into a project he doesn't need to finish. But hey. C'est la vie.

Corporal Adams: “...well then. Right this way, Miss Song.”

Dialogue: Charlie & the Observer

You holding up alright there, Charlie-boy?

...yeah... Flow's doing ok, too.

I assume he's ok with that nickname?

Yeah, he thinks it's cool.

“Flow”: “...Chara-”

Charlie: “Please, call me Charlie.”

Florian: “...Charlie, there's- there's someone in your eyes.”

Get outta here Observer, you're spooking him-

Don't worry about it. He's seen this before when we first met. Just tell him it's the Observer, he'll understand.

...fine.

Charlie: “Don’t worry about it, little buddy. That’s just the Observer doing his thing.”

[... --- -- -. -.--]

What?

Florian understands. He giggles slightly when he gets it.

Goddamnit Observer.

Florian: “Howdy right back, Observer!”

His eyes similarly flash in response, courtesy of the spirit of Patience. [-- .- . - .. -. --. …]

...yeah, she knows what's up. Oh, but you don't know who she is-

Oh I know. That's my sister in there. Or at least, the Mary-Ann Carver of Flow's world. My parallel's sister. ...we've already had a little talk, while you were talking to Ben.

Oh, I wasn't talking to Ben. He was *ahem* otherwise engaged, to put it lightly. But he's sprung
to action now that Violet's caught him up on the situation, so he should be here shortly. And once
we're ready, we'll be heading off to the New Bransonville Station in orbit around Libra Prime.
Violet knows a guy there who's willing to sell us a... little red corvette, apparently. How stylish.

Implying that there are multiple “New Bransonvilles”?

Oh, are there ever. After all, Bransonville was pretty much the Venice of Arokeb during the 90's
and the early 21st century, so most major basthari trading stations tended to call themselves New
Bransonville in the post-Diaspora era, unaware that everyone else in the Twelve Tribes decided to
celebrate the memory of the legendary city by slapping New on the end of it.

...I think I know which Branson that's referring to.

The very same Branson who founded Virgin. And apparently kickstarted Virgin Galactic very
soon after Virgin became a household name in that timeline, which kind of makes sense
considering the man's taste for adventure. And what greater adventure than that of an alien
frontier just within mankind's reach, teeming with new life and new civilizations?

Though in my world, Virgin Galactic didn't come about until the mid noughties, and it's still a
small ways behind SpaceX from the looks of things. But apparently during the Arokebian
Exchange of that parallel world, Virgin Galactic became a prominent player in the realms of
commercial aerospace, to the point where they made the most flights through the wormhole. And
as a result, they ferried the most Earth-made goods to an alien commercial ecosystem. What a
strange little set of dimensions we live in, eh?

Yeah, I guess...

...penny for your thoughts? Something's on your mind, I can tell.

...I'm kinda wondering if losing our memory was a natural thing after all. Now that we know Gaster's
gotten involved our affairs, and how people have trouble remembering him, it does seem a little
suspicious. What do you think?

Hmmm. It's an interesting theory, if nothing else. Though correlation doesn't equal causation, so
it's not quite on solid ground. ...regardless of that, however, if he's in the Beyond I imagine he's
got some strong words for Frisk. After all, she triggered a feedback loop that could have corrupted
the timeline, and even though it was resolved I imagine Gaster is NOT happy with her reckless
deeds.

If he erases her... I'LL WIPE HIM FROM THE PAGES OF HISTORY.

While I imagine she'll appreciate the sentiment, I'm not sure that'd bring her back. And besides,
erasing Frisk wouldn't undo everything she's done. Much like how letting Chloe die in the past
wouldn't magically undo all of Max's time travelling, and it won't magic away the hurricane that
was set to destroy Arcadia Bay. That's not how time manipulation works, I'm sorry but that's just
not how these things go. You can't just undo all of your mista-

Dude, spoilers.

Sorry.
Sort of. Though the REAL ending I did like. She accepted that her actions have consequences, and realised that going back wouldn't unfuck the timestream. So she and Chloe decided to leave their old lives behind with what little remained of their home-town, and head off towards a future that, while ultimately uncertain, was still bound to be better than what they left behind.

...and we never did figure out where they ended up, did we? The prequel cleared up some of the backstory for us, but the sequel-

Um, spoilers?

...sorry.

Thank you. And I'm confident that Gaster isn't going to take such extreme measures against Frisk. Worst case scenario, he puts her in stasis like Gordon Freeman, to keep her from causing any more “trouble”, and you'll need to give him a slap before we can break her out. A gentle slap, mind. He might be at one with the Beyond, but he probably still bruises like a peach...

...several minutes pass, and you've started playing cards. Violet and Corporal Adams soon return, and you quickly transition to a game of blackjack with Corporal Daniels dealing.

...okay, this is getting a little silly. How long does it take a man to put a bloody waistcoat on? Speaking from experience, it doesn't take me too long at all.

You wear them often, I take it?

Not as often as I used to. I haven't exactly been to many functions recently. No-one's gotten married, no-one's died, no-one's being christened, no-one's slipped and cracked their face on the pavement, nothing to really justify me wearing a waistcoat.

It is a little sad, really. I have what I need to get all dressed up, but I've got rarely ever got a place to go. Though with that said, I should probably invest in some fancier shoes in case someone has a bar mitzvah. After all, trainers are hardly the kind of thing to wear with-

Oh thank god, he's finally here.

...Ben looks a little upset. Maybe he's-

Charlie: “Hey man, you ok? What took you so long?”

He sighs, readjusting his navy-blue robes.

Ben: “...well, the good news is that Agnes didn't kill me. Bad news is that we... well, we had some strong words for one-another, after I informed her about the latest development. It's best if I give her some space for n-”

Florian catches Ben's gaze. I don't think Frisk caught him up on that little detail.

Ben: “...wait, why- ...Charlie, is there something I'm missing here?”
Charlie: “He's the Asriel of another world, traveled with Violet for a while. Frisk promised that she'd take him in after Violet's quest was finally over.”

Ben: “...alright. Stranger things have happened, I suppose. Though having two Asriels running around.”

Florian: “It's Florian now, mister.”

Ben: “...?”

Charlie: “…he's a little hung-up on the notion of being Asriel nowadays. Something along the lines of not wanting to disrespect the original's memory. Hence the, uh, different shirt.”

*It takes Ben a moment, but he eventually nods in understanding.*

Ben: “So you were “Flowey” before this?”

Florian: “...yeah.”

*Ben crosses his arms and leans in, a little suspicious of the goat-boy.*

Ben: “And you're not going to cause us any trouble, are you?”

Florian: “...heck no. I'm not that kinda flower anymore.”

Ben: “...I'm glad to hear it, little man.”

**Dialogue: Violet & the Observer**

Ben: “Now, Violet, I understand you'll be able to take us to wherever New Bransonville Station is?”

Violet: “Observer's gonna do most of the heavy lifting here. I'm just enabling him to do it wherever.”

Ben: “Then by all means, enable him.”

*Let's get this show on the road. Go ahead and work your magic, Violet.*

I'm never gonna get used to you popping in like that. Can't you, you know, “knock” or something?

*Do you really want to hear a knocking from the inside of your skull? Even if I could pull off such a feat-*

Nevermind. It'd still surprise me.

*Such is the way of things. But I digress. ...no change there, then.*

*Once again, you bend time and space to your will, tearing open a hole in the fabric of reality-*

Do you always do this? You sound like a dungeon master, for crying out loud.

*It's the only way I can convey these events to the readers. If it were even possible to have a direct*
A/V feed to parallel worlds, I’d have one hell of a channel, but this is the best I can do.
...well then, uh, no pressure I guess?

You’re doing just fine. Now, it's time to work MY magic.

To the surprise of Adams and Daniels, you begin to lift into the air. Ben, Charlie and Florian follow suit.

Ben: “It's alright, gentlemen! This is just what my friend in higher places does!”

“I will return shortly, believe me. It will be as if I never left.”

And in a flash of black, the four are gone. As the hole in space-time winks out of existence, the Engineer-Corporals just look at one-another in confusion.

Corporal Daniels: “…the bloody hell did we just see, Dave?”

Corporal Adams: “…I have a feeling that we were merely bit-parts in their story, Steven. Whatever these people are up to, I feel that we’ve merely seen the tip of the iceberg.”

Corporal Daniels: *sigh* “Honestly, Dave. Again with these “stories”, I swear…”

Location: Nebula Brewhouse, New Bransonville Station, Libra Prime, Eastern Quadrant

Dialogue: Charlie & the Observer

Wait, they just left you here?

Whoa, where the hell have you been?

It was a timeskip, I figured you lot would have been done by now. But seriously, did she really think it's ok to just leave you and Florian in a coffee house while they flog their loot?

...dude, we can take care of ourselves. Flow might look like a kid, but he can throw down like the rest of us.

...alright, fair enough. Still, it's a little irresponsible of them to just drop you off at a brewhouse.

Eh, it's not so bad. We woulda been bored to tears if they dragged us around all day. Hell, I was close to falling asleep while that Ian guy was appraising Ben's guns.

Well that's just you. I probably would have been quite interested in that kind of analysis.

Well, you weren't there. It was SO DULL!

Again, I'm sure that's just you.

Whatever.
...soooo what are you drinking?

This? Uh, the barista called it a Nebula Janeway. And apparently a Nebula isn't really something you drink, it's more like a caffeinated mousse than an actual coffee.

*I see what he did there with that name. After all-*

Yeah, I get it.

*And what about Florian? What's he gotten into?*

Oh that? That's, uh...

**Charlie:** “Hey Flow, what did the guy say that thing was?”

**Flow:** “Uh, pink kereef? They, uh, make a tea using the fruit part, and mix it with milk.”

*But of course, kherif! The basthari style of coffee. A lot of younger basthari have it pink, without the black from the coffee bean. Nowhere near as strong as having it black, but it still slakes their Craving.*

Their... cravings? Please tell me that's just you being poetic about it.

*Sadly no. In the decades following first contact, caffeine worked its way into basthari culture and frankly took Arokeb by storm. You see, basthari have a peculiar sleep-cycle for apex predators—yes, this is relevant—given that a day on Arokeb lasts 32 Earth hours. Rather than be awake for 21 hours and sleep for 11, as you think would be the case, they instead had TWO sleeping periods: a 3 hour “catnap” during the day, and a deeper 8 hour slumber throughout the night. They were somewhat “crepuscular” in that regard, more active in the twilight hours than the middle of the day.*

Aaaand caffeine changed that?

*Weirdly enough. After all, caffeine suppresses the onset of drowsiness, which can disrupt sleeping patterns. In the case of basthari, having a deep cup of tea, coffee or cola with their lunch would make them less inclined to sleep through the traditional “siesta”. If anything, many of them felt energized enough to keep working during the daylight hours, then going on to spend more hours of the night asleep.*

*Over the course of the following decades, more and more basthari started skipping over the midday nap period, gradually transitioning from a largely crepuscular society to a more conventional diurnal one, like that of the Earth-folk. Partly due to the effects of the extraterrestrial drug, and partly due to traditionalists being shown up by the “dayworkers” who worked through noon like “fire-wired crazy-tails”, as the old men would say while clearing up their card games and cleaning out their ale mugs before retiring for the siesta.*

Damn. That's just crazy.

*And sadly, it got worse. At some point in the distant past, a generation or two following first contact, the majority of their species began to develop a chemical dependency towards caffeine. Few if any had the strength to go “cold turkey”, especially considering the major restructuring of their society, and even the younger children required “fun-size” doses to slake the Craving, as*
they inherited the addiction from their parents. To this day, the Craving is still strong in most basthari bloodlines.

Though in truth, the Craving was but one side of a double-edged sword. While the majority of their kind outright require caffeine to function, when they've fulfilled their “recommended daily allowance”, it sharpens their minds to a fine point. More alert and focused than their ancestors were, almost to a preternatural degree. A blessing in disguise, but indeed coming at a cost. Namely that a portion of the household budget is dedicated to buying caffeinated beverages. One could even say that the basthari were the one true casualty of the Cola Wars.

...that's- that's seriously FUCKED! God- Were there no regulations to keep shit like this from happening or something? I mean, surely someone musta said “maybe we shouldn't introduce this stuff to our alien buddies?” at some point. It's like selling the Indians our whiskey and taking their gold!

I imagine it might have been brought up in Congress once or twice. But surprisingly, there was no “Columbus Protection Act” to minimize potential “cross-contamination” or regulate travel through the wormhole. The commercial side of the Space Age was just too strong to rein in, apparently. So much money to be made via the Exchange, too much money invested for major players to let regulations tie them down.

In the end, lobbying won out, regulations got looser than the feet of Kenny Loggins, and by the 1980s the coca-colonization of Arokeb was in full swing. If this were a game of Civilization, the Dark Pharaoh himself would pop up and tell America that “My people are wearing your blue jeans and listening to your pop music” at some point in 1985. Followed shortly by “They are also drinking your Coca-Colas, eating your McDonalds, and playing your Nintendos. What is even happening?”. That's how strong the influence of America was in that timeline, especially with the former Soviet Union being a balkanized nuclear wasteland, and China being comparatively less red than it was in our timeline, pressured as it was by the Republic of Japan.

...Jesus Fucking Christ.

Such are the paths our worlds could have taken, if the stars were in the right place.

I almost feel like Temple Square had the right idea. Almost.

Almost, but not quite. Honestly, the key to that kind of stuff is restraint and regulation. Make sure the products are all above board, encourage portion control, promote awareness of the advantages and drawbacks, and ensure that people are able to take it all in moderation. It's a tall order to make it happen, yes, but with stuff like this you just can't half-arse it. Like what happened on Arokeb.

Charlie: “...say Flow?”

Asr- Florian shakes his head at me way-laying your train of thought. Can’t really blame him, to be honest.
Charlie: “I've been wondering... Why did Charlene climb the mountain?”

At the mention of her name, he flinches. His eyes meet yours, before turning a lighter shade of blue, and her voice leaves his lips.

Mary-Ann: “...because she was afraid.”

While you didn’t ask her beforehand, she seems quite willing to tell the truth, even if Florian is still a little reticent when it comes to speaking ill of Charlene.

Charlie: “Afraid? You mean, afraid of her family? Afraid of the cult?”

Mary-Ann: “She was afraid of a lot of things. There were the predictions of the Grandmaster, that magic would one day come to an end, robbing us of what little control we still had over our lives. That had her worried, though it worried the rest of us just as much.”

“The one thing that worried her most was her “role” in the... the “salvation” of our world. A role that passed on to me, after she ran away.”

...I have a feeling that I know what role Charlene would have played, even without looking upon the Grandmaster's “grand designs”.

Charlie: “...do I really want to know what “role” Charlene was gonna play?”

Their eyes narrow, as she reveals the dark truth.

Mary-Ann: “She was still a child when the Grandmaster selected her, so she didn't need to make the sacrifice I would have had to. But she was still the one he chose when the Star-Spawned Emissary asked for a sacrifice, since she was still pure.”

“...but even when she fled the compound and up into the mountains, apparently the Grandmaster had misinterpreted the meaning of the term “sacrifice” according to the Emissary's definition. Apparently, “sacrifice” was a euphemism for “bride”, and . And Charlene was still way too young for-”

Charlie: “FUCKING WHAT.”

EASY boy, you nearly spilt your Janeway.

Charlie: “What is this shit? The FUCK does that even mean?”

I said EASY. You're attracting undue attention, the last thing you need while you're sitting with your little brother.

...

Mary-Ann: “...even when Charlene ran off, I was still too young to be the sacrificial lamb, despite being the older sister. It still woulda been a coupla years before I was truly ready to be taken by the Emissary.”

Charlie: “TAKEN?”
That's right. “Taken”. Though even in desperate times, apparently the Emissary still had qualms about younger girls being taken before they were ready.

FUCKING SERIOUSLY?

Dead seriously. I'll save the darker truth for when you've calmed down, since right now you look ready to flip the fucking table, mate.

...fucking Christ...

I'd be mad too if it were my sisters who were wrapped up in this.

Mary-Ann: “...I didn't know what being “taken” truly meant until a few months later. Apparently, things were getting desperate up there, with the Forces of Light struggling to root out the Darkness before it became too strong.”

“The Emissary himself came to me on those spidery legs of his, saying that unlocking my virtue would signal his master to begin bringing our world into the Web. Buuut he also said that we wouldn't need to worry about that just yet. Though I guess he was worried enough to give me the heads-up that my virtue would be key to saving my world.”

...virtue's a goddamn euphemism, isn't it?

Yup. Though it's also a reference to the rather potent axiom that gives one's “virtue” measurable magical worth. The Axiom of the Virgin's Virtue. ...coupled with the Axiom of the Witch’s Familiar, it almost feels like some sort of sick joke or twisted prank perpetrated by the old gods.

And you're about to tell me about them, aren't you?

If you can handle it. Though I won't bother with the second one right now, since it's not fully relevant to the current narrative.

That's never stopped you before, has it?

I'm going to try to keep it consistent this time. So are you truly prepared-

I think I know what it's about already, but go ahead and clear it up for me.

...very well. The Axiom of the Virgin’s Virtue revolves around soul-links established by the loss of virginity. Which carries all the unpleasant implications you can imagine, along with some that are a little more pleasant.

Specifically, when a virgin has their “virtue” unlocked, a soul-link is established between them and the one who took their virginity. As a result, the soul-power of one party is accessible to the other and vice versa, meaning that both can perform more powerful magicks. And when one of the parties is a being of vastly greater power, such as a god or a demigod, the “lesser” being grows in power by variable orders of magnitude. It is often the linchpin of priesthoods, where novices share in the power of their patron deity by sacrificing their virtue to them. Or as is more commonly the case, sacrificing it to a divine servant of that deity, since gods are very busy people and can't be present to claim the virtue of every young man or woman seeking to become a conduit of the
...and that's nearly what happened to Mary-Ann in her timeline. She was going to be...by that THING...she could have been the one to drag her world into the spider's web...

Charlie: “...but you refused the sacrifice. You didn't go along with that sick fuck's plans.”

“...I'm not gonna lie, Mary-Ann, I'm goddamn proud of you for being so brave.”

She fidgets with the hands that are not her own, somewhat... nervously, if I had to hazard a guess.

Charlie: “...please don't tell me you actually considered-”

Mary-Ann: “I didn't really have the time to think about accepting or rejecting anything. It wasn't too long after he told me when...when Charlene returned.”

Charlie: “...and Asriel returned with her. That's how it went, right? Asriel absorbed her soul and brought her body back to the compound?”

Florian's body shudders, as the blue light fades, leaving the boy distressed at the memory of it all. He's not having a good time of it, poor chap.

Florian: “I- I thought I could go through with it- HE thought he was brave enough-”

I touch his hand, trying to calm him down. Does it work?

It works a little, but not as much as you hoped. He isn't hyperventilating anymore, but he's still-

I squeeze his hand. He doesn't have to go through this alone.

Charlie: “I know how it felt, Asriel. I've been in the same situation myself, literally in your shoes. ...I know, you never did wear shoes, but you know what I'm talking about.”

“And you know what? I don't blame you for holding back. I don't blame you for getting cold feet. And you know why?”

I reach out and hold on to his other hand, bringing them in closer.

Watch the kherif, we don't want to piss off the staff by spilling that stuff.

Charlie: “Because I was a piece a' shit. I was a dumbass kid who thought he had a flawless plan, when it was pretty much the worst thing I coulda come up with. And while I hated you for it, once upon a time...”

“...nowadays, I feel like you kept things from getting any worse than it woulda gotten if you'd let me kill everyone. I mean, seven souls woulda been bad enough: imagine what I coulda done with the contents of an entire village?”

“I guess what I'm trying to say is... thank you for getting me killed and saving the world. Dying like we did was one of the worst moments of my life, but looking back it was probably the best way things could have turned out, considering.”
Mary-Ann: “...not like I knew that at the time.”

Aaaand she's back. She let Florian have his little moment, but now we're back on track. And I suspect now we'll find out why SHE climbed the mountain.

Mary-Ann: “When I saw that thing carrying your- her lifeless body through the gates, I thought the worst. And even when I learned the truth later, I was still kinda right in my assumption that that towering monster was the one who killed Charlene. Though I guess in a way, it was more like assisted suicide.”

“...but seriously? Buttercups? Of all the ways to try and take her own life, buttercup poisoning? That's the WORST way she coulda done it.”

“What's that look for? Don't tell me you- ...you did too, didn't you?”

...Charlie: “...I had my reasons. It woulda broken them if they knew I was actively trying to kill myself, so I used them to make it seem like I was deathly ill. ...which I guess I was.”

The hands slip from your firm, loving grip, before settling on Florian's face in the rarely utilised double facepalm, coupled with a sigh of exasperation. After several seconds pass, she looks up with a look of disappointment on Florian's face, and- ...slips back into the double facepalm, letting out a similar sigh of exasperation.

...it's time to come out of the oven, Charlie. After all, you just got-

Don't say it.

FUCKING.

ROASTED.

...goddamnit Observer. At least you didn't compare me to coffee or anything.

Oh BOLLOCKS, I knew I'd forgotten something. ...speaking of which, FUCK ME it's 6 in the morning AGAIN. Be right back.

...that explains so much.

Okay, I'm back. Did I miss anything?

Uh, nothing? It's only been a coupla seconds. ...wait, I thought you were gonna get some sleep or something-

Time flows differently where I am. What was a few seconds for you was about 11 hours for me, since I had this moment saved. It's sort of like if you put a bookmark in a notebook, in that it helps me “keep my place” and avoid slipping, so that I can return to a given moment with ease.
Huh. Riiiiight, now I remember what Papyrus told me. But it didn't really help you when Gaster threw you into that wormhole, did it?

True that. Though I think the Cardinal fucked up too, by arriving so late in your timeline. I had to follow suit, since arriving BEFORE him would have just made another branch, and the last thing we need is TWO groups of the same exact people fighting over who gets to save Frisk.

Goddamnit, my head hurts.

Such are the complications of multiple universes. ...anyway, Mary-Ann is finished facepalming at you, and is ready to continue.

Mary-Ann: “The only reason I didn’t join the others in fighting Asriel off was, well, mainly because the Emissary tried to keep me out of harm's way. Even though part of me wanted to kill the thing that killed my little sister, he still needed me to fulfill my duty when the time came.”

“When the people learned that that “sweet innocent child” had been murdered by something from the mountains, the entire compound was in mourning. But what I wanted the most was to kill the thing that took Charlene's life, even as my neighbors kept watch over me, to make sure that I wouldn’t follow in her footsteps.”

“I waited for my moment, and during that tiny window where no-one was looking, I made my journey into the mountains. ...yeah. That's right. I climbed the mountain because I wanted to kill Asriel. But instead of finding the prince, I died on the end of the king's trident, while the queen screamed at him in disbelief.”

...holy crap. I never would have thought...

I know, right? I figured that Toriel left shortly after Asgore's declaration of war, but this time she stuck around longer? Maybe she tried to make him see reason, but when he killed Mary-Ann she threw in the towel and left.

And I don't think I could blame her. It's one thing to have your husband declare war on humanity, but it's another thing to see him kill a kid. ...I wonder if that's what made her leave in my timeline? Or did she leave him the moment he made that promise? ...when I get back, maybe I should sit them down and ask them how it happened.

Maybe. Or, maybe don't? While it's important to know the truth, the truth hurts. And opening up old wounds isn't the most endearing of deeds to commit, even if it's driven by the best of intentions.

I guess we'll have to wait and see, won't we?

Charlie: “…so what changed your mind, in the end? When Asriel absorbed your soul, did you still want to kill him?”

She wrings a nearby napkin, with an almost guilty look in her stolen eyes. Here you are, asking all the hard-hitting questions.

Mary-Ann: “…I felt his pain, Charlie. I could see how he struggled to handle Charlene, doing
his best to make her happy... He was such an idiot. Such a selfless, caring, henpecked little idiot.”

Bloody hell that's a little harsh. This girl has the demeanour of a fish-wife, I cannot ignore that. Though considering that Charlene acted in a similar fashion, I wonder if it runs thick in the family...?

Mary-Ann: “In the end, I really did feel sorry for him. When the others left to cross over, I decided to help him hold on to his... his “humanity”, let's call it that. By sticking around, I gave him another chance, even if I had to do a little henpecking myself to get him to quit wallowing in despair.”

“But of course, things took a turn for the worse. In the years following my death, I guess the Emissary found another girl to serve as a conduit for his master in the worlds beyond. No-one stood a chance when the Cult of the Arad-Nacha raided the underground. Not even Frisk...”

“And honestly, if it weren't for Violet stumbling into our world, Asriel would probably have cowered under his bed until the end came. For all the times she left him behind, or put him in harm's way, I think he's become a better person from his travels with Violet.”

“...I think that just about covers it. I'll let him talk now, Charlie. I've taken up enough of his time already...”

And with that, the blue light fades, and Florian is back in control. Though indeed, a little teary-eyed from the painful memories.

Florian: *sniff* “I've tried to set myself apart from him... But no matter what I do, it all comes back to what he did. Even if I'm not really him, I- ...despite everything, I'm still him. No matter how hard I try to fight it... I'm still Asriel Dreemurr.”

“...but I'm still gonna keep the name Florian. I mean, if- if Frisk manages to save her Asriel, I can't go runnin' around pretending that I'm him, can I?”

I move over to his side of the table, and put my hands on his shoulders.

Charlie: “...you don't have to pretend to be someone you're not. Like you said, you're still Asriel. You don't have to throw that away because there's another Asriel in existence. Hell, there are probably more Asriels in the whole of reality than there are stars in the galaxy!”

“But do they fight over who's the real one? The answer you're looking for is no: they wouldn't, even if they could. Because through all the endless variations, all those constants and variables, they're all Asriel as they come. ...owww...”

Damnit, I've made my head hurt again.

Well, at least you haven't been scarfing a slushie. No-one needs that pain in their life.

Oh, and Asriel reaches over to hug you. He appreciates your assurances.

I return the embrace. Everything's gonna be ok, little buddy...

Charlie: “Everything's gonna be ok...”
...yeah, I'll leave you two snugglebuns to it. Time to check up on the adults of the group.

**Location: Bridge of the Old Corvette, Newman's Restorations, West Wing of New Bransonville Station**

**Dialogue: Ben & the Observer**

_Soooooooooo how's my favourite gun-runner doing? Making yourself comfy in the captain's chair, I see?_

Oh hello there! You've been awfully quiet, haven't you?

_Oh I was just checking up on the boys, seeing how well they were doing while you two were off selling stuff. Little concerned about you just leaving them in a coffee house, but who am I to judge?_

The lads can handle themselves just fine. Honestly, after I was done selling Epics to Chief McCollum, it was Charlie who asked if we could drop him and Florian off at the brewhouse. The poor boys were worn out, so I couldn't really blame them. Though Florian did tell me to say hi to Stuart.

_Stuart?_

The Collector. One of Violet's long-time associates during the Interworld Crisis. He traded her supplies in exchange for the curios she found during her travels.

_Why does that sound familiar...? I'm sure I've heard of this “Collector” in other worlds before. I wonder if they're the same man?_

I wouldn't know anything about that, honestly. Though apparently Violet is one of his favourite customers. Probably because of all the weird and wonderful things she has in her pockets. Did you know she has a Pocket Vault too?

_Just like yours, no less. Honestly, Pocket Vaults aren't all that rare in this period of interdimensional history. Though they are generally “uncommon”: not so rare that the average person doesn't know about them, but not so common that you could just buy one off of Space Amazon. Mind you, they do tend to crop up on the Federation equivalent of eBay, albeit at a rather lofty starting bid. Hammerspace constructs are a bitch to create, after all, so it's generally more worth your time to track down the ones mass-produced in ancient times before their creators went the way of Ozymandias._

...funnily enough, I can relate to that. Though we have our theories as to how the Atlanteans dammed the Mediterranean, no-one in my time knows quite how to make the mythical “super-concrete” used to build Titan's Dam.

_Indeed. And if they DID know, the French would probably try to dam the Red Sea, building a massive hydroelectric plant across the Mandeb Strait. Which while it would help supply plentiful freshwater and electricity to the Arabian Peninsula AND the Horn of Africa, it would probably also open up a can or two of wriggling, politically-complicating worms..._
But enough about that: I take it you raised enough for the corvette?

My Pocket Vault is nearly empty, if that's what you're implying. Most of my Rares and Epics went into the collection of Chief McCollum, who was quite pleased with the exchange, though I have saved the majority of my Legendaries. You never know when someone might need a Legendary weapon.

You're going to give Frisk one of those 1881 Leonidas-pattern revolvers, aren't you?

How ever did you guess?

Well, her power armour is a bit bulky, and the fingers on it are a little too thick to safely hold most human-scale pistols. If she's going to be shooting anything with those gauntlets on, she's gonna need something designed for a minotaur.

My thoughts exactly, funnily enough. While I don't normally use guns myself, there's no reason why Frisk shouldn't be allowed to handle one. Besides, I get the impression that she's the kind of woman who would use a revolver.

Oh, how right you are... But seriously, how much did you raise?

A tidy sum indeed, though the Chief still drove a hard bargain. Thankfully, Violet made up the difference dealing with the Collector, to the point where we're a few thousand credits over budget.

Oooh, so just barely then? Well, since you won't be able to use Federation credits where you're going, you should probably sink those credits into a few more grams of anticarbon. Always helps to-

Actually, Mister Newman is going to fill us up free of charge, since apparently “antilithium” fuel rods are ten-a-penny nowadays, at least in comparison to whatever anti-diamonds are. And there's the fact that the engines apparently aren't rated to handle anticarbon fuel reactions, since apparently they were produced in the days when antilithium was still military-grade fuel?

How nice of him. ...just as well it's not TOO ancient, though. If the warp drive ran on antihelium, or god forbid antiHYDROGEN, you'd be in for a bad time. Much harder to contain the simpler gases than it is to contain a fuel rod, you see, and you wouldn't get much mileage out of antimatter gases in comparison.

Yes, I... I think I see. I'm just a little overwhelmed by the field of warp travel. The salesman kept on talking about warp bubble shapes and energy efficiencies and- ...Star Trek made it seem so easy.

As a recently incarcerated doctor once said, “nothing in this world that's worth having comes easy”. And while “recently” means 12 years ago by this juncture, he had a good point. Making a working warp drive can seem to be beyond the wit of man, especially in my era where we've yet to have a “Chicago Pile-I” for such a thing, let alone produce a Zefram Cochrane mad enough to build the Phoenix.

But the theories behind it seem solid, at least, and there are certain things floating around that might help solve the problems involved in developing warp technology. Certain nanoscale constructs could interfere with the zero point energy field to help generate the “negative energy”
needed to pull a thing through space, much like how cavorite works in your world. The previous
sphere-based model has been refined to a torus, as a way to lower the energies required to
maintain the bubble. And the proposed amount of negative energy required so far is, last I
checked, the mass-energy equivalence of the Voyager 1 spacecraft. In other words, a mere
negative 700 kilograms, or about negative 63 exajoules. Which is still a really tall order in my time,
but that number isn’t strictly definite, as evidenced by the efficiency of warp drives in this reality.

...bloody hell. Exajoules. EXAJOULES. God help whoever first tried to generate such insane levels
of power. It almost makes me worried about sitting in this bloody thing, knowing the power behind
it.

Such is the might of the Alcubierre drive, chariot of chariots: look upon its horsepower, ye
Mighty, and despair...

Either way, we have ourselves a ship now. Which is quite spacious on the inside, to say the least.
Gee, it's almost as if this old Minoan corvette was built for minotaurs?

I can't say I've ever wondered how minotaurs would design a spaceship, but this all seems to line up
with how they built their triremes. On the inside there’s enough space for their bulky frames, which
in turn makes their vehicles quite spacious for smaller folk like us. Though I can't help but wonder
about why they’d put the warp nacelles at the front, rather than the back...

That's probably because they weren't made by Starfleet. These “phanos áloga”, or “lantern
horses” in Minoan technical parlance, use destructive quantum interference to generate
additional negative energy, altering the warp torus into more of a teardrop shape. Sort of like the
cross-section of an avocado, if you replace the massive seed with a spaceship made by big beefy
space-bulls.

...this really is a chariot of the gods. It even has horses!

Horses of light, no less. After all, the áloga are packed with more lasers and microscopic vacuum
tubes than you can shake a quantum harmonizer at, leaving no real space for the QED vacuum
to do its thing. When activated, the intense quantum interference caused by such densely packed
light is what generates the negative pressure that pulls the craft forwards.

...bloody hell. Horses of light indeed.

Just wait until you see it in action. It's going to be a blast, I just know it.

...hold on, something's happening with Violet. See you in a bit.

Location: Newman's Office

Dialogue: Violet & the Observer

Saul Newman: “...aaaaaand she's all yours.”
You finally finish signing the papers, after thoroughly checking over them. Smart move, even if the astropteran was probably a little peeved at your thoroughness.

Actually, he was pretty chill about it.

Oh. That's actually quite nice of him. Usually if someone hands over a contract, they aren't banking on you catching everything on it, but apparently this ostentatious space butterfly is pleasantly squeaky clean in that regard.

I take it you've been Shanghai'd one too many times?

Not really. I'm just used to seeing skeevy geezers trying to trick folks into taking an offer that a smart person would quickly refuse. It's happened to a lot of YouTubers, especially during the heyday of Machinima.

I guess it was the Wild West back in those days. And probably still is, if your 21st century is any indication.

**Violet Song:** “I'm glad we came to this arrangement, Mister Newman.”

You reach over to shake his outstretched hand, a gesture he warmly accepts.

**Saul Newman:** “If I'll be frank, I've been tryin' to pawn off Little Red here for the past five cycles, but the moment I tell them it's THAT ship, they make some kinda excuse an' back out of the deal. Even though I've sunk a fortune into fixin' the ol' gal up, I'm kinda glad that I've finally sold her.”

**Violet Song:** “It seemed to good to be true, even seeing it with their own eyes. But it's real alright. The same ship that crossed over from a bad future, with Raiden himself at the helm. The same ship that found itself in the hands of the late Prince Asterion, ferrying him around throughout the 20th century. The same ship that made its final flight at the start of the Millennial Crusade…”

...well shit up my nose, it bloody is and all! Now we look out the window, I can clearly see that this is no mere Minoan corvette. The deep crimson of the hull, the distinctive hexagonal shape, the roof-mounted rack of ion torpedo launchers, and of course the pin-up nose art of Artemis the Golden Tanuki on the starboard á logo. You have, indeed, purchased Little Red herself.

So you know its history, I take it? More than just what I mentioned, I mean.

**Oh, do I ever. I've been keeping an eye on this reality for quite a while now, although my focus was mainly on the 60's and 70's. Right now, I'm looking pretty deep into the childhood of Rico Jackson on Aries, and this time around it's a bit of a fucking doozy to say the least. It starts out sweetly enough, with his close-knit group of friends and the everyday adventures that get mixed up in, but then Lord Orlock shows up in their dreams and—**

WHOA, spoilers! I haven't finished watching the documentary yet!

**Sorry. ...wait, there's a documentary series on Rico and his friends?! I know most of them have been dead for over a century, but WOW. Somehow I doubt they'd be able to show what happened to Christina Jackson after—**
Observer. Spoilers.

...sorry. It's just that-

SPOILERS.

Fine. ...but it's still a hell of a thing that happened to her. I still feel sick just thinking about it.

...I'm actually kinda dreading watching that part, now you mention it.

It's going to hit you in the gut. HARD. ...that's all I'll say on the matter.

And instead I'll talk more about Little Red and her nose art. Starboard álogo has Artemis saying "sayonara" while giving the V for victory sign. But did you know that if the starboard plasma cannons are being charged up, the art has her eyes narrow and the V for victory flips around to the classic "flipping the V"? It was used for endless comedic effect when the enemy thought that Little Red couldn't fire back, only to receive a broadside of searing plasma while Artemis flipped the V to demonstrate that they COULD in fact fire back. Whoever made that nose art knew full well what they were doing.

And they were probably Commonwealth, I guess... What's your opinion on the port-side nose art, though?

Oh that? Artemis reclining with a bottle of sake while saying "konnichiwa"? That's what turns Little Red from a hardy little corvette into a flying art-piece if you ask me. The nose-art even winks while raising the bottle when the cargo bay doors are open.

The port-side salutes you and potentially welcomes you aboard, while the starboard bids you farewell and potentially tells you to get fucked. Gives you a good idea what you're in for, depending on which side of Little Red is facing your ship.

Huh. I never really thought about it that way before. The Prince musta paid damn good money to have that art installed...

...so, after dumping a ton of money into buying Little Red, what's the plan for the leftover credits? I mean, you can't really use them in New Deseret, and you're already fully "gassed up" for future voyages.

...I actually haven't thought about that. I'm not gonna be in this neck of reality for a long time, so I might as well dump it into something.

One word for you: Chimpy.

Really? Chimpy?

OBVIOUSLY Chimpy! They've been open 28/7, even while the station was under attack by giant alien spiders! And needless to say, I think Florian would appreciate going there one last time before leaving this reality behind. After all, going to Chimpy has been one of the few anchors of normality in the fight against eldritch horror, so having it be a bookend to your adventures would be a nice thing for him.
...and if buying fast food for five people isn't enough to polish off the last of our funds here, you could always donate what's left over. Buffalo Soldiers is still a legit charity, even now the Empire's done and dusted by this period in history.

...sure, that's a plan! I'll call the boys and text Ben, see what he wants. And how about you-

*Oh, the fifth order isn't for me: it's for Frisk. I don't think she ate before she left, and she'll probably be famished once she boards the ship. Besides, even if I wanted to get something from Chimpy, I couldn't eat it since I don't have a presence in this universe.*

Right, fair enough. ...so what d'you think she'd want?

*Honestly, I'm not quite sure. I say play it safe with a quarter-pounder Kong Burger, a side of monkey fries, one of those so-hot-it'll-melt-your-face-off fruit pies, and a 16-ounce cup of... I forget, does Chimpy stock blackcurrant squash?*

I don't even know what a blackcurrant is.

*Oh fuck me. ...nevermind. It's a pleasantly tart berry from Earth, commonly enjoyed in Commonwealth-derived societies in place of the grape flavour that permeates American-derived societies. I was just hoping to introduce Frisk to something like Ribena before this story ends, but I suppose we can just get her 16.oz of Orang Tang instead.*

*...though with that in mind, Violet, if you ever find yourself in certain versions of the UK, get your hands on some blackcurrant cordial. You'll be pleasantly surprised if you enjoy fruit juices.*

Uh, sure. I'll look into it later...

**Violet:** “This is just the ride I've been looking for, Saul. Pleasure doin' business with ya.”

**Location:** Just outside the Nebula Brewhouse?

**Dialogue:** Charlie & the Observer

*You boys tired of sitting around?*

Nah. Flow got us kicked out.

*How the hell did he manage that?*

Apparently he was exploiting the wi-fi by downloading a bunch of podcasts. And when I pointed out that they had plenty of bandwidth for it, they booted me out with him. ...cheap bastards.

*That's not right at all. Maybe in your world it would have been a dick move, but in Federation space a few terabytes is NOTHING, even over wi-fi.*

Either way, we're gonna need to call Violet, tell her where we're gonna be next.

*Oh, I don't think that'll be necessary.*
Huh?

**Florian's datapad starts ringing. Three guesses who's calling him.**

**Florian:** “Hi Violet!”

**Nevermind.**

**Violet:** “Hey As- Florian, you two ready to head out?”

**Florian:** “…yeah, actually. I guess this... I guess this is it, huh? We're finally going?”

**Violet:** “Yeah... Though there's one last bit of business we gotta take care of before we take off.”

**Florian:** “We need gas, don't we?”

**Violet chuckles warmly. You kids are in for a treat.**

**Violet:** “Oh no, we're all gassed up little buddy. But we're still gonna need fuel for the journey, so...”

**An excited smile grows on Florian's face as he realises-**

**Violet:** “Get your butts to the other end of the Promenade, we're going to Chimpy. Over and out!”

**Florian:** “YAAAAYYY!”

...uh, am I missing something? What the hell's Chimpy?

**Sort of a variety fast food joint. Florian and Violet spent a lot of time in there in-between missions, recuperating from their ordeals. Means a lot to the kid, believe it or not.**

Ah. That's... actually really sweet of her.

**You feel Florian take your hand, and pull you along-**

I lift him up onto my shoulders. Let's make this last trip a fun one.

**Charlie:** “Alright little buddy, show me the way to Chimpy.”

**Alright, where did I put my injector- ...eh, nevermind.**

Something wrong, Observer?

**It's nothing. I was going to do a goof along the lines of “this is so sweet it's giving me diabetes”, but couldn't formulate a good set-up for the punchline.**

...you tried, at least?

**Not the best note to end the chapter on, though. So let's try something a little different.**

**With your best friend on your shoulders, and a renewed sense of purpose, you take your first steps towards the north end of the station's promenade-**
Florian: “C'mon Chara, Chimpy's THAT way!”

...you promptly turn on your heel and head towards the south end of the promenade, a little bit embarrassed. But hey, you barely know this station. If you were on Terok Nor, you'd probably know where to go, but this place is all new to you.

Either way, you are intrigued to taste what Chimpy has to offer. Speaking of which, here's a hint: get the Monkey Mud Pie for afters. You'll thank me later.

If it's what I think it is, OH I WILL. ...I'll probably get one for Asriel, too.

OH, but of course! Better remind Violet to order a sixth meal as well. After all, once he's free from the Interloper's influence, your Asriel's going to need something nice to cheer him up. ...but wait, I thought he didn't like chocolate?

Wha- Where the hell did you get that idea from?

...right, sorry. Must have been thinking of the reality where you two are married.

I'M SORRY WHAT NOW?

...forget I said anything. Enjoy your monkey-themed fast food. I for one have a date with a pork chop and some sautéed potatoes. See you back on the ship, lads!

Location: Bridge of Little Red, Interplanetary Space of Libra System

Level of Reality: 4

Already in four-space are we?

GHG- Hello again. Uh, yeah, apparently you gotta go down a layer before you're clear to go to warp. Who frickin' knew?

Well there's a lot of good reasons why.

Like how you can go way faster in lower dimensions? And that coming out of warp generates a starburst that can take a bite out of a planet's ozone layer, so you can't do it in 3-dimensional space?

...exactly. I take it Violet told you about it, after Ground Control gave you guys a stern warning?

Nah, Ben was just wondering why we had to go into subspace BEFORE going to warp. We got a warp drive, but not as he knows it. Not as he knows it, not as he knows it. It's a warp drive, but not as he knows it, not as he knows it, buddy.

...attaboy. That's the way you do it.

It's how Frisk did it, at least. Speaking of which...

Charlie: “Hey, uh, the Observer's here. So, uh, feel free to punch in a heading whenever?”
Violet: “Took him long enough. We've already got a heading, we're done with the pre-jump check, let's START this thing!”

Sooooo how long was I gone this time?

Welllll only half an hour? Honestly, we spent half that time eating our fast food, so don't sweat it.

Thanks. I do tend to let time slip away from me.

Charlie: “Alright! Let's punch it!”

Ben: “Wait a minute, wait a minute...”

Oh god I think I know what he's about to say. ...aaand he's pointing into the great dark yonder. We all know what's coming.

Ben: “...make it so.”

Florian giggles at the obvious reference. He's easily amused, isn't he?

God fucking damnit...

You're smiling, you are.

And I hate it.

Violet, however, is a little less impressed.

Violet: “...y'know what? Just for that, suck on this.”

OH? Oh wait, she's messing with the music player. ...oh sweet merry Jesus.

Fuckin' Christ, she means business.

Bouncing out of the speakers is one of the silliest songs I've ever heard: Star Trekkin' by The Firm.

Violet: “Let's do this!”

And with that, we jump to lightspeed. Ben does not know what to think right now. But for such a mismatched rag-tag bunch of adventurers, this song is oddly appropriate.

The Observer: “Now hold on to your tits, kids. This is going to get weird. As if it isn't already with this bloody song.”

Gravity seems to fail, as sparks of black lightning dance around the ship and throughout the cabin. ...just as well you've all got the sense to wear seatbelts, even though the Alcubierre drive is typically inertialess for the most part.

...but what the hell just floated up out of that- OH FUCK IT'S A GRASS MASK- SHIIIIIT-
All Good Things... (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

We pierce the barrier keeping us away from Frisk, and after a few last-minute preparations, we endeavour to return to Frisk's home universe at long last. It's been a long road, in more ways than one, but before Frisk can finally have her happy ending, she will first need to face her demons. Both the one in her heart, and the one that clawed its way out of Hell to destroy her.

And of course, deal with that bloody Grass Mask. Who the hell puts a haunted mask in a child's value meal?!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Location: Bridge of Little Red, the Beyond

The Observer: "Shut it down, shut it down! We've gone past them!"

"Wait, that's not right..."

Violet: “Alright, alright! There!”

The Observer: “Violet pulls back the big “warp lever” on the dashboard, disengaging the warp drive and bringing Little Red to a full stop.”

Violet: “Full stop! You happy now- ...wait, who the hell is this guy?!”

The Observer: “She gestures towards- Ohhh. Ok, that's- WHY did I not anticipate this?”

“Okay, okay. Deep breaths...”

...seated at a console to the side of the bridge, you see a dark-haired man in a dressing gown. He's more than a little freaked out about the situation, but remembers that something similar happened when he first approached Frisk in the space outside of time.

Charlie: “Damn straight. We're in the Beyond, so you're able to do your, uh, your astral projection thing again?”

The Observer: “Yyyyyes, that's happening now, even though I didn't plan on doing it. This isn't even the avatar I intended, let me just...”

...well come on then. ...seriously, why is this-

The Observer: “Come on! Robed skeleton. ROBED SKELETON.”
“...no? Not working right now? Fine. I guess I'll be myself for this sequence then. Yeah this isn't awkward at all.”

...Ben, could you not stare at me please? I'm a little uncomfortable about what's going on right now. That goes for you too, kid. Pay no attention to the long-haired Arthur Dent analogue sitting at the console.

Ben: “Oh, I'm terribly sorry.”

Florian: “...why are you in a bathrobe?”

I am a man of leisure, lad. When I'm not busy outside, this is usually what I wear.

Florian: “...okay.”

So. To the matter at hand. I had us blink in a fair distance from where Frisk is, since we don't want to risk exposing her and Gaster to a starburst. So the first item on the agenda is to scan for humanoids.

Violet: “Well you're at the console right now, go on and scan!”

The Observer: “Okay, okay, just dial it down a little. I'm on the case. ...let's see... Hmmm...”

Okay, feed windows open, parameters set, aaaaand GO.

Right, on the port-side feed I've picked up a pretty big black mass and... two humanoids standing together, a few hundred miles away. They... appear to be staring in our general direction- I think it's them, people! One's mostly in black, the other picking up as dark red. Violet, do us the honours.

Violet: “...not bad. Ready for-”

The Observer: “WAIT wait wait. ...sorry, I mean, let's go slow this time.”

Violet: “...I'm not gonna do a warp jump right on top of them! You really think I'd do that, Observer?”

The Observer: “No, no I was just- Sorry, it's just a reflex. Anyway, I think 25 miles a second for... 10.8 seconds should plonk us right on top of them. Go on and punch it into the auto-navigator, would you kindly?”

Violet: “...sure.”

...I don't think she likes me, Ben. I hope I'm not rubbing her the wrong way.

Ben: “Didn't you help Frisk possess her at some point? I think that might have-”

Florian: “Y-yeah, actually! Remember when-”

Violet: “I remember.”
She punches the lever, and we cruise at a relatively casual speed for a spaceship. And yeah. She's still a little sore about what happened. ...sorry about that, by the way. But-

Violet: “You guys had your mission, I had mine. Let's just drop it, ok?”

...ok.

**Location: The Beyond**

**Dialogue: Frisca and Gaster**

...IT'S COMING RIGHT AT US!

*Quickly, back behind the barricade!*

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?!  
The Observer is a maniac! Using a spaceship to break in here, who the hell does he think he is?  
HE'S- ...he's willing to go this far to get me outta danger.  
**But- You're not in danger! You were never in danger here! I just- I just wanted to TALK!**

...OH GOD IT'S HERE.

Is it? I couldn't hear the- ...oh, it's landing...

...well, I think I said all I needed to say before they arrived. **Make sure everyone knows about the coming Darkness, especially that worldwalker Violet.**

Oh I will. ...but if you EVER try to mess with me again I swear to-

**Even if I could, I wouldn't dream of it! You're goddamn crazy, lady!**

...you know what, Gaster? GET DUNKED ON.

**Dialogue: Frisk & the Observer**

As the ship sets itself down, Frisk storms towards the ship. Meanwhile, a peculiar white face peeks out from behind the big bunker of solid darkness that Frisk hid behind. And judging by the smoke coming off of it, it protected Frisk from the... starburst... Bugger, I thought we were far enough away, but apparently not-

Observer?!!
Uh oh. Um, hey Frisk! Your Uber's here!

Uber- How the hell did you get a spaceship?!

Oh that was- I can't really take credit for that. The Cardinal pitched it to me after he dragged me out of a YouTube Wormhole, and the others went about getting the actual ship, paying for it out of their own pockets no less.

Holy crap... Wait, the others?

It wasn't just Ben who shelled out for this old Minoan corvette. Violet had a lot of curios and gadgets to pawn as well-

She's here too?!

The Cardinal recommended that I pick her up for her worldwalking capabilities. And yes, that also means-

Frisk: “Asriel?! Sweetie?! I'm comin'!”

Your power-walk transitions to a powered sprint towards the port-side doors. As they slide open, you see a well-dressed young man welcome you aboard.

Oh my- ...oh, right.

Charlie: “THERE you are! Man, you would not believe the month we've had...”

Yup, it's him. What? You thought I'd be the one to welcome you aboard? Nah. I'm not one for stealing other people's thunder. And besides, if anyone should greet you first, it should be a close friend.

Aw c'mon, you're not chopped liver! And seriously, this faux-modesty thing you've got going on isn't doing you any favors.

But it isn't fake, though! I don't want to big myself up when everyone else did the real important work. I'm just the cab-driver here.

They wouldn't have been able to do their thing if it weren't for you, though... But wait-

Frisk: “A month? Where the hell were you for a month? It's only been-”

“...right. Different times, whatever.”

Charlie: “Yeah, the Observer couldn't get to us for about a month. Ben an' I were stuck in this weird steampunky world, tryin' to build... It was basically the Time Machine. Y'know, from the movie with Guy Pearce in it?”

Frisk: “...and the classic 1890's sci-fi novel by H.G Wells? On which that movie was based?”

Charlie: “...right, yeah, that too. Anyways, we were working on that thing when the Cardinal showed up an' told us about what was happening. ...which kinda sucked, since we were makin' progress on our makeshift runabout, but eh. I guess we can forget about it, leave it to House Teague engineers.”
Frisk: “OH? So you were in Ben's world this whole time? ...I guess that explains why you're dressed like Doctor Hartdegen.”

Charlie: “Uh, yeah? I thought I- nah, I guess I didn't name-drop it...”

As an awkward silence falls, you notice movement out of the corner of your eye. Nervous, wide-eyed movement, in the form of a small goat-child in a blue striped shirt.

Frisk: “Oh...”

You walk over to the “Patience Asriel” you saw so long ago, through that hole in reality in the Snowdin Lab. And again, in the dark streets of Puerto Calarosa. And finally here, in the cavernous cargo hold of Little Red, a legendary corvette from a far-flung reality.

Frisk: “...hey there kiddo. You miss me?”

At this, the goat-child starts running towards you. And with very little effort, thanks in part to your power armour, you scoop him up into your arms.

Florian: “F- Frisk... I”

No matter how many times he went over it in his head, his words fail him when the time comes. He knows what you've been through, and he can very much relate. In his heart, he hopes that you can fix him.

Fix- f-fix him? But I'm- I'm not- I wouldn't know where to start!

You could start by spilling your guts for him once this is all over. By which I mean treat him as a confidant, don't actually commit sudoku.

Don't have to tell me twice. I hate number puzzles. ...AND suicides.

That didn't really need clarification, just FYI.

...still, I don't know if I'm the right person for this. I mean, I'm pretty fucked up too, aren't I? Would it REALLY be at all healthy for me to tell him about all the bad things I did? Is that really what he needs?

I never said you'd be the perfect person to fix him, but you're technically still the best candidate for this undertaking. After all, after we break your Asriel out of Emigration Oaks, we can't exactly sign Florian here up for therapy sessions. And hell, I have a feeling that you'd be paying out the ears to get the same quality of psychiatric help over in California.

Florian? Who- ...did he seriously get his name changed?

Pretty much. He had a bit of an existential breakdown near the end of his adventures with Violet, since he felt like he isn't really Asriel. And he didn't respond well to the warm consolation that he was still “Asriel as they come”, so you know this was some serious shit for him.

Though Charlie did help him reconcile with who he is, and while he's very much Asriel as they come, he's still going to keep the Florian moniker to distinguish himself from your goat-boy back
...it's a really nice name, actually, really fitting. Which probably means someone else gave it to him.

That it was, straight from none other than Mary-Ann “Patience” Carver herself. Who in turn revealed some pretty harrowing stuff about the nature of her sister's upbringing, actually. A cult was involved, worshipping the giant alien spiders that served the Arad-Nacha, and- ...well, I feel like that's a story to horrify you with another time.

As you carry Florian out of the cargo bay, Charlie rushes past you with a worried look on his face. When he passes you, you hear a faint gurgling from within.

Uh oh. Did he eat something bad?

Welllll not really. I mean, Chimpy might sell some “interesting” fast food, but most people don't get the trots from it. That in mind, Charlie isn't most people anymore, what with him becoming a changeling and all.

...oh yeah, that reminds me! You've got some fast food waiting in the stasis cupboard, in case you're hungry.

For me?! Oh, you shouldn't have...

Well, the rest of the crew had their tea before we went to warp, so it makes sense that you get something to tuck into before we head off to the main event. After all, there's no sense going into battle on an empty stomach!

No shit, man! I'm frickin' starved!

Frisk: “So, uh, you know where the stasis cupboard is? Apparently I've got a value meal with my name on it.”

Florian smiles and points towards a glass cabinet on the wall, aglow with deep dark crimson energies, containing two brown paper bags with the face of a monkey on them. Yours is the one on the left, with the symbol of a very hot fruit pie on it. As for the one on the right, with the symbol of a dark flan on it, that one's for Asriel once we've saved him. I mean, he's been through some real roughness, so I figured he might need something nice after we've broken him out.

...oh my god... ...that's really, really sweet of you!

Well it's noth- ...eh, thanks for the kudos.

I- uh- oh right. I turn off the stasis field, grab my bag of fast food, and switch it back on. ...man, this smells pretty damn good!

It's best to save the fruit pie for last. While I respect people who have dessert first on occasion, it's still very much hot and fresh, and since you haven't saved in a while I would strongly recommend AGAINST blowing your head off with a pudding that is hotter than it has any right to be.

...I'll, uh, I'll keep that in mind.
...and yet, you're not trying to save. Which... isn't all that bad an idea, considering.

Yeah, I'm not about that life anymore...still...

*Save closer to the event, I assume? Just in case things REALLY go tits up?*

I- ...no, I shouldn't. I reloaded too many times, trying to save my own skin. If I fail this time, it'll be one more world where the Interloper wins. And I know, deep down, there's no way to overwrite a world. Every failure I've experienced, every death I've suffered, they're- They still exist! The stories can't end just because I did!

Such is the decentralized nature of reality. The world within you is the only world that ends with you, while the rest of reality moves on without you. But in the case of the determined, they can travel back to a moment marked by memory, and from it springs a new world with the chance to do things right. Though you know this already, as I digress.

There is no erasing of past mistakes in reality. You can merely leave them behind and carry the memory, praying that your fumbles and failures remain in the worlds you leave in your wake. But for all the dead ends you discard, all the worlds where things go wrong, there is always the hope that the next attempt will have things go right.

*Or, at the very least, you get a little closer to defeating the boss this time. Something I reckon Ben is intimately familiar with.*

...I'm gonna go eat this thing.

...sorry for the tough truth. But with that in mind, saving isn't what causes branches. So even if you emerge victorious on the first try, it really wouldn't hurt to make one last save, would it?

I'll do it once we're back home, not a moment before.

*Right. Smart plan. If you did it here, we could potentially duplicate the ship and crew, which would open up a can of worms that under no circumstances should EVER be opened. Something similar happened to Austin Powers in his second movie, and look where that got him. Coming home to find Felicity in bed with the other him. Which he was strangely ok with, considering...*

...I never really thought about that. Nice catch!

Alright alright, you just set Florian down and tuck in. I need to check on something.

**External Monologue: The Observer**

*I check the- Violet, there's no need to keep prodding me. I was just talking to Frisk.*

The Observer: “...STOP IT.”

Violet: *falls over backwards and scurries away* “The hell was that about?! You were just staring
The Observer: “Like I said, I was talking to Frisk. Don’t forget that this body here is just an astral projection, a player avatar, a car that the driver can step out of while the engine’s still running.”

“...wait a minute. Where’s Ben gone? He’s not on the bog, that’s for sure- Oh?”

*Looking at the port-side feed, I can see that Ben is outside the ship and making his way towards Gaster. Who is being hassled by a little red bird- OH FUCK. BRB.*

**Dialogue: Ben & the Observer**

_Whatever you're planning, Ben, go easy on the man. You know how fragile monsters are._

The Cardinal: “Ya DON’T FUCK with these people, y’hear me?! They’re under MY protection! Ya mess with them, ya mess with ME!”

_Wait WAT. What's the Cardinal doing here?!_

Ben: “Master! Wait! Don't kill him!”

_The Cardinal turns to face you, a perturbed expression on his passerine face._

The Cardinal: “Oh COME ON! Ya really thought I was gonna kill 'em? That ain’t how I do business, buddy. Not for folks who can be convinced, at least.”

“Me an' Gaster here were just havin' a little talk about interventionism, that's all. I mean, he threw a wrench in our plans, but it turns out he wasn't an actual threat, ya know? There’re a lotta fish in the sea who're WAY worse than some ol' melty-faced bag of bones. Ain't that right, Gaster ol' pal?”

_Gaster looks more than a little nervous as the Cardinal glares at him, perched atop his shoulder. While he has mastery over the Beyond, he knows full well that even one of the Cardinal's weakest attacks could dust him in the blink of an eye._

Gaster: “...yes.”


“An' you’d best hope to whatever gods you have, hope with every shitty little drip of determination in your body, that you don't become a threat to these guys. 'cause if I hear about you causin' any serious trouble for ’em, or ANY of the Observer's little friends-”

Ben: “MASTER.”

_The Cardinal looks to you again, this time with an unnerved expression on his face. Wait, unnerved? How are you unnerving him?_
Ben: “Just let it go. He’s obviously not going to cause any more trouble for us.”

“Isn’t that right?”

Gaster looks relieved for a moment, before going pale at the sight of you. Which for a monochromatic confluence of alternate existences is actually rather impressive.

Gaster: “You have my word that I will not mess with you psychopaths ever again. Scout's honor.”

Ben: “And I'm glad to hear it.”

Wait. Before you leave, I have my piece to say. Hold on.

...my avatar walks out of the airlock and FUUUUCK-

Why did I DO that?! There’s a massive bloody drop from the airlock to the ground! ...well, at least I didn’t break anything. But in all seriousness, consider installing a rope ladder or something, 'cause that's a bloody health and safety hazard!

Anyway, *ahem*.

The Observer: “Oi Gaster! You need a lift home?”

The Cardinal: “Seriously? After all the trouble he's caused you, you're-”

The Observer: “Oh lighten up man, I'm just offering him the chance to escape from this hellhole!”

Gaster: “Hellhole? This “hellhole” IS my home!”

The Observer: “Wait, really? You're honestly ok staying here after all these years? What about your nephews?!”

Gaster: “...my ...nephews?”

Blimey. Has he really been here for that long? Has it been so long that he doesn't even remember his brother's boys?

Gaster: “...I thought they were- ...but they ARE! But they’re my sons. And my brothers? And my colleagues-“

“...who WAS I to them? Which iteration-”

Oh dear. I think he's suffering an identity crisis, and I think I know why.

What- Is he- Observer, do you know what the hell going on?

Well, yes. I just told you. But as for the reason why, I have a feeling that this is not strictly Gaster
as we know him. This, I suspect, is the Archetype of Gasters. A gestalt entity comprised of the memories, knowledge, and collective being of every Gaster who fell outside of reality.

What.

The Cardinal: “...of course he'd be an Archetype. Fuckin' perfect.”

Yes I know it's weird, but that's Archetype theory for you. Parallel beings who fall into the Beyond are drawn to one-other, and in time are likely to merge into a singular being. Given enough time and enough parallels, a powerful Archetype is born, representing the common binding constants that stick out amongst their many different iterations. However, the constituents of the Archetype are still sentient in their own right, and may manifest where the dimensional and narrative conditions are appropriately accommodating.

...I vaguely understand? I think?

Thankfully for us, we can draw out the appropriate parallel by focusing on his experiences specifically.

The Observer: “Remember your nephews, Gaster. Manifest the one who was uncle and mentor to the brothers Fontaine.”

There is a shaking from within the archetype, as the DoctorTale Gaster gradually surfaces.

DoctorTale Gaster: “...I remember those boys. Their father hadn't the chops to be a scientist, but sometimes talent skips a generation, if Papyrus is any indication. Though Sans... He inherited his grandfather's scientific chops, but he also inherited his father's tendency to be a slovenly layabout.”

“...but I don't think there'd be much point in me going back to them. I have more than enough on my plate already without getting wrapped up in family matters. And even if I had a clear schedule, I cannot permanently manifest without the right vessel...”

...fair enough. He's a grown man, he can make his own decisions. But still...

The Observer: “...alright then. You do you.”

“That in mind, however, shall I send a message for you? After all, I reckon they'll want to know that you're technically ok.”

DoctorTale Gaster: “Don't bother yourself with that, Outsider. I will do it myself. After all, I suspect that Sans will be very much aware of your return, given your... “interesting” method of interdimensional travel.”

“...do not worry about me. I have enough to worry about without the concerns of others weighing me down. ...nevertheless, I wish you all good luck.”

And with that, he vanishes. Typical Gaster, amirite?

...let’s just go. We have a date with destiny.

Sure thing: you go book the restaurant, I'll pick the movie.
The Cardinal: “Ben, I think there's something you should know.”

The Cardinal flits in front of us, a serious look on his face.

The Cardinal: “...PLEASE, don't ever call me “Master”. I've had some, uh, bad experiences with people calling me Master.”

Ben: “…dare I ask what makes you so opposed to the title?”

The Observer: “Well-”

The Cardinal: “DUDE! Seriously, that's not cool!”

The Observer: “Sorry! Oh god-”

The Cardinal: “I don't need ya bringing up my past! That's MY job!”

“...I know yer just gonna tell him later anyways. And the readers are probably curious too, so FUCK IT. Here's why I don't like being called Master: teens and tweens obsessed with the occult!”

...yeah. That's definitely awkward for him.

The Cardinal: “Damn straight. For some reason, a lotta teen mystics adored me over the aeons. I dunno if it was my personality, or just my cosmic power, but young magicians, sorcerers, wizards an' so-on, a lot of them thought that I was the “hot shit” or whatever kids in your time say. Bee's knees, cat's pajamas, dog's ballocks, whatever: the kids think I'm one of the coolest deities in the galaxy.”

“I won't lie, I loved the attention. Mainly because adulation and adoration are a conduit for the Power, their “prayers” siphoning off a teeny bit of their soulpower and channelling it into the focus of their affections.”

“But the thing is that, well, some of them wanted to get a little closer than that. Those outliers wanted to “do my will”, to “serve my excellence”, real creepy stuff when it comes from some tween Nug-Soth praying in her flower-pattern jammies, or a 15 year old alvari clad in some kinda “gothic lolita” getup in a subway restroom. And yeah, I was actually summoned and invoked in restrooms a coupla times.”

Ben: “…I suppose you are bound to run into people like that eventually, if you reach that many hearts. Preying limerence can be weird from someone you respect, but coming from a young person who looks up to you…”

The Observer: “You don't want them to stand so close to you. ...and yes, I know full well what I'm referencing.”

The Cardinal: “But it never got that far, not even once. I'm not like certain bad eggs of the time. If ya have an audience, especially a worshipping audience, you've got certain
“Ya don't lead your followers astray. Ya don't allow the young to take on the duties of a professional acolyte. An' most important of all: ya keep the deity-follower relationship PROFESSIONAL. Especially with the younger followers.”

“In the end, I had to get a lot more “choosey” with who I appeared before. I didn't wanna get caught up in some scandal involving someone who was particularly “vulnerable”, unlike certain scumbags who didn't have a problem with accepting the virtue of younger followers.”

Ben: “V-virtue- OH you have to be JOKING!”

Sadly not. It's not as rare as you'd hope, especially in certain “benighted” cultures. And yes, it's pretty fucked up, but hey. That's the universe for you.

They say that idle hands are the devil's playthings, and by extension one could expand on that. Indeed, you could say that an idle mind is the devil's workshop, or perhaps even the devil's playhouse. Those who developed the primordial axioms must have been either really bored, really deranged, or varying degrees of both.

But one thing is for certain: to program such potent and far-reaching axioms, they were undoubtedly powerful geniuses. Whether or not they anticipated the universal implications of their axioms, there can be no question that they were masters of their craft.

The Cardinal: “And that, Ben, is why ya shouldn't call me Master. 'cause some followers get reeeeaal creepy when they start calling me that.”

Ben: “...bloody hell...”

...yeah. We should get back to the ship. They're probably worried about us.

Right. ...right.

Dialogue: Frisk & the Observer

You enjoying that?

Hmhmm. It's not bad, but it ain't Grillby's.

That's Chimpy for you. It's still pretty good for stuff that's come out of a food replicator, but-

THAT's why I felt underwhelmed by the fries! I knew something was slightly off about this stuff, but I couldn't put my finger on it... Still, the patty's pretty thick, so I'll let them off.

Yeah, there's nothing quite like a thick patty in a burger, as opposed to the- Hang on, I thought she ordered you a quarter-pounder!?

Nuhp, they had a discount on the Seven-Ouncers, so that's what we got.
Blimey. Most places in my area just stack two quarter-pound patties and call it a half-pounder, which is kind of cheating from where I stand. Though to be fair, quarter-pound patties of beef are pretty much the industry standard and the easiest to source, though funnily enough Chimpy doesn't have that kind of supply problem due to the whole replication thing.

Yeah, that's pretty crazy... This isn't actually beef though, is it? Last I checked, beef ain't a deep dark blue, and doesn't taste like...what the hell am I eating, Observer?

Ah, looks like Violet decided to introduce you to basthari cuisine. The reason why it's blue is because the meat is... I think it's either from a gazzel or a jammel, common livestock that the basthari brought along from old Arokeb. See, most higher lifeforms from that planet evolved to, urm, well, their biochemistry has a bigger emphasis on copper, rather than iron in the case of life on Earth. Rather than having red blood cells and myoglobins as part of their systems, they instead have blue blood cells and I suppose “myocyanins”, hence the bluish tinge to the meat and the, ahem, somewhat unique taste of blue meat.

...wait, is this safe for human consumption? Am I-

It's unfamiliar, granted, but it shouldn't cause too much of a ruckus for you. That said, however, don't make a habit of eating blue meat on a regular basis. After all, you need iron a lot more than copper, and too much copper apparently causes stomach upsets in humans, among other things. But I'm sure that a 7 oz hunk of blue meat won't give you too much trouble.

...thanks for the vote of confidence. Damn, that's why Charlie had to barricade himself in the john, wasn't it?

Oh no, not by a long shot. He went for some good old-fashioned white meat, in the form of the BBQ Hogchop Sandwich. I'm convinced that it's just because of him being a gelatinous slime-boy now, and that mortal food- You know what? Let's not think about that, since you're still eating right now.

Yeah, good call. We probably shouldn't have brought it up.

Well, don't worry, I think we can take your mind off of such things. In the meantime, you hear the sound of a mild explosion, followed by a clunk of boots on metal as Ben rocket-jumps into the airlock, my projection holding on for dear life.

The Observer: “Fucking hell that was exhilarating!”

The last time I saw him pull this move off, he was fighting an alien tank. Or was it a necromantic slug goddess? I forget which, I'll be honest.

Ben: “Yes, I'm sure it was, now would you please get your nails out of my shoulder?”

The Observer: “Sorry mate. It's just the thumb, though. I trimmed the rest of them about a week or so ago.”

Ben pulls my left hand off of his shoulder, and pauses as he sees that my thumbnail is strangely longer than the rest of my nails.
Ben: “...dare I even ask?”

The Observer: “It's mainly for small oranges, satsumas, clementines and the like. Never want to be caught with a citrus fruit and have nothing to open it with. Imagine the tragedy...”

...yup. That look is probably justified.

Eh, I kinda get where you're coming from.

...so, I guess I should ask you the important stuff.

The Observer: “What did Gaster tell you?” I say as I sit down in the chair opposite you.

...judging by your expression, I take it he told you something quite terrible.

Frisk: “...it's all gonna end soon, isn't it?”

...that's a bit of a grim perspective on it, don't you think?

Frisk: “He wasn't kidding about the Darkness. Throughout reality, the shadows are cutting deeper, weakening the magic of the worlds...”

You now have Violet's undivided attention. She remembers the warnings given to her by Agent Gimel, after the fall of the Arad-Nacha.

Frisk: “It's- it's only a matter of time before it spreads to our world. But apparently Violet's employers have a way to keep parts of the universe safe from the corruption.”

Violet stares intently at you before she clarifies your statement.

Violet: “...it turns out that that's why Arad-Nacha was trying to drag different planets into his domain. He wanted a collection of systems to rule over while the rest of reality went dark.”

“As for my “employers”, they've been appealing to the remaining worldweavers to go about weaving isolation spheres, so we can shield as many systems as possible before it washes over us. Still, even if we get all of them onboard, we can't save every world. It's just impossible...”

Violet looks appropriately crestfallen. After all the time she'd spent saving worlds from the grip of Arad-Nacha, her victories were shown to be quite slim in comparison to the insurmountable multidimensional apocalypse looming darkly on the cosmic horizon. But at the end of the day, there is still some small comfort to be taken in a faint silver lining. At least it isn't a false vacuum collapse.

UGH, don't even joke about that! Those things are fucking SCARY!

I wasn't joking. Even the end of all magic, throwing countless realities into a dark age of grounded reality while annihilating innumerable ethereal beings and bringing an end to the concept of eternal life, is preferable to reality itself winking out of existence. At the very least, the Darkness is something that some semblance of civilization could feasibly bounce back from, and potentially research a countermeasure against.
...it's just not fair. This- I wouldn't know where to start in trying to fix this!

*It is not a fight for this generation. All we can do is hunker down, shield ourselves from the corruption, and begin figuring out what makes the Darkness tick. ...but before we get to that, it's about time we prepared for battle. We need to focus on the here and now, and get ready for the raid on Emigration Oaks.*

The Observer: “Alright Ben. Give her the gun.”

Frisk: “The what now?”

Ben: “…open poppy seeds.”

*Reality ripples before Ben as his Pocket Vault opens, revealing a dark chamber of cold stone with many bare shelves. Beforehand, it was stacked with all manner of guns, pieces of armour, military ordinance, all sorts of stuff. But of course, Ben had to sell most of his war-spoils in order to contribute to the corvette fund, though he did save the important things.*

*He browses the near-empty shelves, picking up a few boxes of rifle ammunition, a pair of noise-limiting earphones, and a frighteningly large revolver. And yes, the revolver actually uses ammunition intended for rifles. It's a big iron for bulls, but thanks to your power armour, you're strong enough to fire it without the recoil snapping your wrist.*

Ohhh... Hoooly shit...

*It really is a thing of beauty, isn't it? ...that in mind, however, I'd still hold it with both hands. Even with the power armour giving you the strength to handle it properly, the 1881 Leonidas still kicks like a mule. Or more accurately, it kicks like an angry minotaur with studded hooves.*

Ben: “Shall I set up some targets in the cargo hold? I imagine it's been a while since-”

Frisk: “I- I dunno if we have the time for-”

The Observer: “Nah we've got plenty of time. Remember that I can send you to specific moments.”

Frisk: “…riiight, yeah, why do I keep forgetting that?”

The Observer: “It's easy to get swept up in the moment, and it's tricky to keep atemporality in mind. ...wait, is atemporality even a word? Did I just-”

Violet: “Nah it's a word alright. It's the quality of being unaffected by time.”

The Observer: “…like our mission, then. Though for the sake of being concise, we'll probably need to montage this. Hit it!”

*Cue a motivational 80's style montage where Frisk becomes more and more proficient with her big iron. In between the shots of Frisk getting better at shooting, cut to the rest of the gang*
drawing up the plan of attack on Emigration Oaks. Intermittently, show Charlie looking ill, going in and out of the bridge's restroom. Then some random shots of the Observer lifting a dumbbell while sitting on a crate. ...aaaand fade out the music, as the montage ends...

The Observer: “...well, that was certainly a montage, wasn't it?”

...how the hell did we even do that?

_Music, Frisk. It helps impose a certain “narrative” influence on the worlds below mine, in our case giving you a strong motivational backdrop, against which you polished your limited handgun experience into some semblance of competence in a compact and concise timeframe. ...and I think you pulled it off pretty well. The Gunslinger himself would be impressed at your progress._

...well, I remember the old code. Aim with your eye, shoot with your mind, kill with your heart, that whole shebang. ...and don't forget the face of your father, either.

_The Observer: “...well, I remember the old code. Aim with your eye, shoot with your mind, kill with your heart, that whole shebang. ...and don't forget the face of your father, either._

Yeah that's pretty important in itself. It'd be one hell of a shame to forget who one's father is. _Imagine the embarrassment at family gatherings..._

*Florian:* “That... was SO COOL!”

*Ben:* “Observer, I do have to ask. ...where did you get that dumbbell?”

*The Observer:* “It's the Beyond, Ben. I don't need to explain a thing. But I will say that since I've been “hibernating” through the winter, and given my new work schedule eating into my personal time, I've been neglecting my physical exercises. Once my sleep cycle's back on track, I'll be back in the gym and back on the cross-trainer.”

*Ben:* “…erm, good to know?”

_I shrug in response._

*The Observer:* “...anyway, I think we're ready to roll out. Where's Charlie?”

*Ben:* “I think he's on the bridge?”

*The Observer:* “I'll go get him.”

*The Observer:* “See? Told you I'd get him. You ok lad?”

_If the montage was any indication, he's not been doing so well. I guess physical food doesn't agree with his, ahem, “delicate constitution”._

*Charlie:* “…I'm sticking with monster food from now on. Seriously, that was fuckin' rough.”

*Frisk:* “Language, Charlie! We're in the presence of...”

*Florian:* “It doesn't really matter, Frisk. I don't really give a- ...you know.”
Goddamnit.

*C'est la vulgérité, mon capitaine. But I digress.*

The Observer: “Right, so, everyone ready?”

Ben: “Can we go over the plan ONE more time?”

The Observer: “Oh alright, one last time: we manifest Little Red just above the rooftop garden of the main building, and from there make our way down to the third floor. There, we locate Room 313 and tear open the door, where Frisk administers the Purgative to Asriel while you and Charlie restrain him. Once he's free from the Interloper's control, we go back the way we came, up to the roof, back on-board Little Red and head for Mt Ebott to gather the royals and, hopefully, liberate this world's Syrinx Tau Xi Theta if we have the time. THEN, we fly over the border into California.”

“That clear everything up for you?”

Ben: “...yes, I think I do. Though it does seem a little too simple.”

The Observer: “If you lot run into any resistance, I imagine Frisk's fuckoff-huge big iron should make staff unwilling to make a move on us. And if they do? You can root them with ice magic.”

“But if the Templars are in the building, remember to shoot to maim and/or incapacitate, not kill. Go for the limbs, accounting for any armour they may be wearing. If we're lucky, we can pull off this extraction without a single kill.”

Florian: “Wh-what about me? What do I do?”

*But of course, this again...*

The Observer: “I'm pretty sure we've talked about this, lad. Your job is to stay on board and keep your pretty little head down. ...and in doing so, if for some reason we face some sort of anti-air resistance, you man those cannons and take them out before they dent Little Red.”

Charlie: “Really? You really think that there's gonna be anti-air around a frickin' mental hospital? I think you're overthinking this a little bit, Observer.”

The Observer: “I was thinking more along the lines of the whole of New Deseret, if not the entire West Coast, being on high alert due to an intimidating alien warship appearing in the skies over Utah. Because let's not kid ourselves here: for its size and its time, Little Red was one of the most powerful corvettes in the Omega Sector. And even though no-one in Frisk's universe knows about Little Red, the second this baby appears on state radar, there's going to be a scramble to intercept it. And that's putting it lightly.”

Charlie: “Alright, alright, you've made your point.”

Charlie: “...I guess all we need to do is go to warp, and we'll be home.”
The Observer: “Not even that, if I'll be honest. The Beyond is so uncertain and distorted, at least in comparison to reality as we know it, that we just need the warp engine IDLING in order to return to your world. No clicking required!”

“But yes, just a little longer and you'll both be home. With all the complications that arise with it. Though if you're lucky, this will be the last time you'll have to see my ugly mug.”

Frisk: “Ugly? You don't look THAT bad! Seriously, give yourself a little credit!”

...well, in all fairness, I'm no Gary Busey. But I'm still no Christian Bale either, though that's beside the point.

The Observer: “…fair enough. ANYWAY, everyone hold on to something.”

I walk over to the intercom and hail the bridge.

The Observer: “Violet, get ready to stabilize the ship. We're about to manifest in Earth's atmosphere, and it's going to be a jarring transition.”

Violet: “Got it. Ready when you are, Observer.”

And with that, with a clap of the hands I exclaim “!kcor s'teL”, and gravity fails us once again. ...wait a minute-

The Observer: “Hang on, did we deal with the Grass Mask?”

Ben: *sigh* “We put it in a lead-lined box, Observer. It shouldn't be a problem anymore.”

The Observer: “Smashing! Now-”

Frisk what are you- WHOA OH GOD WHAT-

The Observer: “This isn't the time for hugs!”

Frisk: “But I'm never gonna see you again!”

The Observer: “Oh don't be like that, I'll still be here until it's-”

Frisk: “You know what I mean, goddamnit!”

The Observer: “…alright, fine.”

I return the hug awkwardly. I was never really good with hugs, tbh. But if a reassuring embrace helps steel you for battle, then here it is.

Frisk: “...lighten up, ya goof.”

“...and thank you. For everything.”

The Observer: “Save it for the finale, Frisk. We're not out of the woods yet.”

Dialogue: Agent Gimel and Archetype Gaster
...and they're gone. What a relief...

**Agent Gimel:** “We... couldn't have used ONE suchhh as your self... during the crisis... Had we known of your existence sooner, Doctor Gaster, I could have made you... a very generous offer.”

**Doctor Gaster:** “Why drop it now? I reckon your “employers” could do with someone who knows something about the coming Darkness.”

**Agent Gimel:** “I would need to submit an edited appraisal, in your case. But... Yes, I think we can come to an agreement on this.”

“If everything proceeds as planned, perhaps we will be working together...”

“The best of luck to you, Doctor Gaster...”

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Chapter End Notes

If Gaster ends up working with Gimel, we're in for some interesting times. But personally, I just want to know what Gimel has done with Alyx.

That aside, stay tuned for the second part of this instalment, coming out when it's ready. Because MY GOD, there is a LOT to get through in Emigration Oaks...
All Good Things... (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

And here we are, at long last. The final confrontation with the one who started it all.

Without the Interloper's twisted schemes, Frisk would never have run away. She would never have gone through all the trials and tribulations that she faced on her long journey. ...if not for that wicked, heinous creature, I would never have come across Frisca Rivera.

...I hope that I can be of some help to her. I don't want to steal her thunder, but if there's anything I can do to help her crush the final boss... Well, we'll just have to see how this all pans out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Location: The New Lab, San Francisco, DoctorTale Prime, 2071 AD**

**Subject of Observation: Doctor Alphys Naomi**

An ominous, otherworldly clanging distracts Alphys from her anime-based procrastination. Her blood freezes as she remembers which show that sound effect came from, and the dreadful consequences it portends.

**sans:** “OH CRAP.”

Without warning, as usual, Sans appears behind her. Few things rouse him from a nap so easily, but the sound of the Cloister Bell is more than enough to tell him that something ominous is about to go down.

**Alphys:** “Wh- what's the alarm for? And why is it the Cloister Bell?”

*Sans shifts uneasily behind Alphys, looking up to the main screen. The message “MASSIVE SPACE-TIME DISTORTION DETECTED” flashes in time with the Cloister Bell sound effect.*

**sans:** “...it means somethin' just broke through into our world. no idea what it is yet, but i'm sure it ain't good news...”

*If Sans had a stomach to speak of, it would have sunk as he triangulated the origin point of the distortion. Utah, New Deseret.*

**Alphys:** “Oh my god... The others...”

“Sans... what the hell do we do?”

*She receives no answer, other than a sudden gust of wind. Turning around, she sees that Sans is*
nowhere to be seen. ...which probably means he's shortcutted all the way to Emigration Oaks.

...well. That's going to be a new wrinkle.

**Location: Bridge of Little Red, a few feet above Emigration Oaks**

**Dialogue: Violet & the Observer**

*Quick heads-up, Violet: the Sans of this world has picked up our manifestation, and is probably-*

sans: “take me to your leader!”

*Too late. Just play it cool.*

Violet: “...I'm guessing you're the Sans of this world?”

You swivel your chair around to face the smiley trashbag that is Sans the Skeleton. With a vaguely nervous look on his face, he gives the Vulcan salute, raising his hand while parting his middle and ring fingers. Indeed, if you hadn't declared that you knew who he was, he would have followed it with “live long and prosper”. Or perhaps “bah-weep-granah-weep-ninny-bong”. But as it stands, he's taken aback by you knowing who he is.

sans: “oh... how long have you been observing our planet?”

Violet: “I- well, I just got here, actually. The others are-”

“...well, it's complicated. I assume you know Frisk?”

*Sans looks a little sad as you mention her name.*

sans: “kid's gone through a lot, recently. i dunno what took over the prince, but what it tried to do to her...”

“She called me the night it happened, y'know? she was afraid that somethin' had “taken control” of Asriel, and begged me to help her. i wasn't convinced at first, but the tone in her voice, the voice of someone who'd already done everything in her power...”

“...i don't normally step in like i did that night, but this time, i really felt like i had to do something. and if i'd known what i'd be in for when that thing attacked...”

“whatever that thing is, controlling the prince, it didn't give up as easily as i'd hoped. but eventually i, well, i “convincing” it to surrender. but it didn't leave the prince. it's still there, locked away in the sanitarium with Asriel's body...”

*Sans realises that he's been rambling, and composes himself.*

sans: “what's it to you?”

...I'm gonna have to explain the situation to him, aren't I?
If you want him to cooperate, yes.

...this is gonna take a while. Hell, by the time I'm finished, the others will probably be back on-board.

Clearing your throat, you try to explain what Frisk has been up to for the past five years. Or at least, what little you've learned of her story. He knows a few things about time and space, so it shouldn’t be too hard to tell him what's up.

In the meantime, I should go to Frisk. She'll probably need me to steady her hand when it all goes down...

Location: Floor 3 of the Emigration Oaks Mental Health Institute

Dialogue: Frisca & the ObservOHGOD-

Ohhh fuck. Frisk, what- ...why did I not anticipate this?

...they're all- they're all dead...

Charlie: “...gods preserve us...”

The walls of the third floor have been stained red with wild splashes of blood. The bodies of the inmates lay butchered and lacerated in their cells and the connecting corridors... It goes without saying that this was not the handiwork of the Templars.

...did it know that I was leaving? I- Oh- ...I don't-

There are no words for this. And by that, I mean there are very few I could say that would do you any good at this juncture.

...I should have known that it'd do this. The Interloper never really gave up. It... it just gave me a running start, this time...

Something's changed, hasn't it? The first few times, it- ...I shouldn't say such things. Bringing them up would only wound you again.

I think it's a little late for that. Just being here's brought it all back... Say what you gotta say, Observer.

...if that is your wish. But if you want me to stop, don't hesitate to tell me, ok? Ok.

...the first few encounters with the Interloper ended in your murder. But eventually, it realised that it wasn't experiencing deja vu. It realised that it had done this to you many times already.

It started to get cocky. It started toying with its prey. And that, in the end, was why it feigned surrender, why it allowed itself to get locked up. ...well, that and the opportunity to be in proximity to a great many souls that wouldn't be able to fight back.

...but that means-
The Observer: “We are in its house, now.”

_I step out from one of the empty cells, now in my robed skeleton form. I'm glad I can't smell anything like this._

The Observer: “The Interloper has harvested the souls of this place... seven human souls are enough to turn a monster into a god. But with dozens, if not hundreds, in a perfect vessel...”

Frisk: “We need to find him. NOW.”

The Observer: “We needn't look too far. Like I said, we're practically in the belly of the beast already. At these levels of power, with the right balance of grounding and fluidity, a being becomes more than a mere god. It becomes a living, breathing world of its own creation.”

What.

Charlie: “WHAT.”

The Observer: “You had the barest glimpse of such a thing when Flowey absorbed the human souls. And I believe you may have seen something similar in {3}, as you approached the Ynnead Network. But this, THIS is what happens when enough human souls are tapped into by a monster. And in worlds as unreal as these, it's a lot easier for me to manifest a projection like this.”

“Flowey merely carved out a tiny pocket of unreality, an arena in which to play with you. What the Interloper has done is layer its own world on top of the real world, becoming the monarch of all it surveys...”

The Interloper: “…you brought friends this time? Really?”

_There, at the end of the corridor, stands a pale and shirtless figure. The walls seem to ripple with every slow, deliberate step it takes, and with every step forward, you find it a little easier to see the figure. But with each step, it gets harder to handle what you see._

_His white fur is stained and matted with the blood of the innocent. His claws are long and menacing, to match his twisted horns. And his face... I was not expecting that. It's more of a look of concern and disappointment, rather than an expression of perverse glee like you'd expect._

Frisk: “YOU.”

_There's no real point in using that gun right now. ...abhorrent as it sounds, it's best to let it get closer before- ...yeah._

The Interloper: “You honestly believe that these meat-sacks have your back? Look around you, honey. You're in MY house now. And in my house...”

_With a snap of his fingers-_
Wait, SHIT. SHIT SHIT SHIT he booted me out! No no NONONONO NOT THIS TIME MOTHERFUCKER! You ain't kickin' ME out!

The Interloper: “...you play by MY rules! No party members, no equipment, no fancy power armour, no divine intervention! It's just YOU and ME now!”

_Held aloft by a multitude of spectral hands, suspended in a void of endless green fog, you struggle just out of reach of the dirty cheating rotten bastard. Its look of disappointment only intensifies._

The Interloper: “...all of that preparation, all of your fancy gadgets, all those precious friends of yours. Did you really think that they would be of any use here?”

“What a fool you are, Frisk... But in all honestly, it's really sweet that you thought you stood a chance. You could barely defeat the Prince on his own turf. What made you think you could defeat a GOD in HIS own house?!”

Frisk: “Let me GO you COWARD! If you wanna fight me, FIGHT ME!”

The Interloper: “Fight YOU? Even with everything stripped away, I can't let you get anywhere NEAR me! I can smell those foul magicks from here, don’t think I haven’t noticed...”

*sigh* “Oh, by all means keep struggling. It'll make this next part all the sweeter-”

The Observer: “Get your STINKIN’ PAWS OFF HER YA FACKIN’ TWAT!”

_A single slipper hits the Interloper in the back of the head. I'm honestly afraid of hitting it any harder for fear of-

The Interloper: “...are you STILL there, Outsider?”

“Go on, GIT!”

_Oh FUCK THAT. Not on my fucking watch!_

The Observer: “No NO NO STOP IT! STAHP! Don't you fucking touch her!”

The Interloper: “Really? Is this how you're going to be? Do you so wish to see her at my mercy, powerless as you are?”

“Suckle on the solace that, for all I can do to her, it is nothing compared to the one thing I would never do to her.”

The Observer: “You SICK FUCK! Are you so dim that you think her suffering will somehow undo the damage she did? Have you strayed so far that you think violating her will do
anything other than JUST hurt her?!”

“Face it, Interloper! This is a pointless endeavour, and you KNOW IT! Nothing you can do to her will help restore the Inferno to its former glory!”

The Interloper: “...oh. You think I actually give a fuck about that place anymore.”

“...how naïve of you, thinking that I serve a higher purpose. They sent me out to drag her back to our realm, yes. But that's just how it started.”

“With this body, with these souls, I don't NEED the Kingdom anymore! I don't care about dominating ALL the spirits ever, unlike some greedy bastards. I just want my own place, away from all the tedium of torturing faceless nobodies. ...that, and the one little bitch who fucked us all over in the first place!”

The Observer: “Oh, THAT'S rich. You claim that you want your own place in the universe, I can understand that at least. But now you have everything, what's the point in having Frisk around?!”

The Interloper: “She RUINED us! We had a good thing going on down there, a nice little system of extraction and distribution to keep my kind well-fed. But just because we were doing our job with one whiny little bitch of a kid, she decides “I'M GONNA RUIN EVERYTHING BECAUSE YOU HURT HIM” or some bullshit.”

“Do you have any idea how many spirits live in the Kingdom? Can you even BEGIN to fathom how much Essence is needed to keep everyone from going hollow?! Imagine being unable to remember your father's face, because you've had to wait in line for fucking RATIONS from an ever dwindling supply! Just- Just THINK ABOUT IT: think about how you'd feel if everyone you've ever loved either doesn't know you anymore, or simply doesn't care, as they try to take what little Essence you have!”

“That look... You didn't have any idea, did you?”

The Observer: “...you know, I can't help but sympathize, just a little bit.”

Frisk: “What the hell, Observer?!”

The Observer: “The notion of going hollow without a force to sustain yourself. The desire to survive, and to stay sane, can drive even the best of people to do terrible things. Again, it is something that I can understand.”

“But as always, there had to be another way. Not even famine justifies slavery. Surely, there are other ways to generate Essence than by torturing the fallen and making countless billions of lives so utterly miserable.”

“After all, fear, pain and sorrow are not the only emotions that drive us through life. Consider things like joy, trust, anticipation, things that we actually LIVE for, rather than strive to avoid!”
Frisk: “Is this- Is this REALLY happening?!"

The Interloper: “You've got a point, I get it. But it's... it's just not feasible! It doesn't take a mastermind to tally everything up, and see that NOBODY has time to make everyone happy! And why invest all of that time and energy across countless spirits, when you can get something just as potent by being, well, “cruel” and efficient? Why, when we need it more than ever, when we were already struggling to produce enough for everyone, would we produce less?”

Frisk: “Because it's the right thing to DO, you ASSHOLE!”

*Oof, that's gonna hurt tomorrow. In his anger and exasperation, the Interloper leaps into the air and scratches your cheek with his stolen claws.*

Frisk: “AGGHHHHHH- FUCK YOU!”

The Interloper: “Fuck ME?! Are you fucking deaf or what? My people are starving to the point of insanity, and there are too many mouths to feed! We're WAY past the point of worrying about the feelings of mortal spirits, you bitch!”

The Observer: “OI. Calm down, ye numpty. I've actually been wondering about something that may interest you.”

The Interloper: “Oh, you think you have some sort of magical fix-all solution to a problem older than the world itself? Are you so conceited that you believe-”

The Observer: “Do the more powerful daemons of your plane gain more Essence than the lesser ones?”

*Oooh. That's given him food for thought, hasn't it?*

The Interloper: “...sadly, that is the way of things.”

The Observer: “How much do they really need, do you think? Have you ever considered that, if the mightiest of the realm actually tightened their belts, they would not need to have as much, opening up a healthy surplus for everyone else?”

“It would be most unfortunate if the mightier among you grew fat and slovenly, while everyone else is starving mad during a humanitarian crisis. It would make those who rule you seem like plump, greedy, entitled leeches, rich and vibrant Essence glowing right beneath their skin, just begging to be LOOSED IN A TORRENT OF NOURISHING GORE!”

The Interloper: “...you speak madness, old fool. Even if butchering them would somehow help the situation, none of us are strong enough to-”

The Observer: “I get it. You're too scared to face them alone, for fear of being consumed yourself. After all, for all the horror that Hollowing entails, it still seems preferable to the endless oblivion that would follow a short yet agonizing stint in the belly of the Burning One.”

“And yes, a wretch like yourself wouldn't last long on your own, even if you go 1v1. But even
the mightiest of daemons would certainly be cut down to size, while pinned down beneath a raging ocean of hungry underlings. As part of a swarm, a ravening tidal wave of like-minded cravers, you would be able to bring the Kingdom itself to its knees...”

The Interloper: “...what are you trying to say? That we should tear it all down?”

The Observer: “What I'm trying to say is that you're the fool here, Interloper. When you went out to destroy the one who made the situation slightly worse, you could instead have taken advantage of the situation at home, to rail against the horrifying system that brought such grim and brutal judgement upon your heads in the first place.”

“You could have sown the seeds of dissent amongst the starving and the mad, hyped them up and pointed them in the direction of the gluttons who thrived while everyone else stood to lose everything. After all, you do strike me as someone who could do some small modicum of good, given the right impetus. Beings like yourself could potentially make things a little better for everyone, if you did things right for once.”

“But what did you do instead? You raped a 14 year old girl who was merely a symptom of the far greater problem. And here you are, already causing more pain and suffering than necessary, ready to do it again.”

“You're wasting your time on Frisk, Cabrapata. She can't give you what you need, what the Kingdom truly needs. Return from whence you came, and light the match that will burn Hell itself to ashes. It'll be brutal and scary, there's no denying that, but at least something better can grow from what you leave behind...”

...he shakes his head with downcast eyes. It's like he perceives that I'm right, but that it... doesn't matter? Really?

The Interloper: “Your words would be heartening... if I had any interest in returning to the Kingdom at this point.”

The Observer: “No interest? Then why the hell tell us about the crisis in your world? Why try to make us sympathize with your motives, if you're not even going to act on them?!”

The Interloper: “They are what drove me HERE. I don't care about the Kingdom anymore, because there's nothing left in the Kingdom that I care about!”

“Not too long ago, I felt like punishing the girl would serve justice for the Kingdom, that feeding her to the Burning One would restore hope to the crestfallen and give us a fighting chance!”

“...but that was before Rojodedo went hollow. So long as he held on, staying strong as he always did, there was still something left for me in the Kingdom, a reason for me to deliver the girl to her execution...”

He breathes in deep as he closes his eyes, and it takes all of his strength to not fall to his knees, crestfallen. Monkey on a stick...
The Interloper: “...you know, it is one thing to see your allies fall in battle. At least when they tried to stop you, you knocked them down, yet they were able to get up again later. But watching them slowly lose their will to live, becoming little more than husks to be thrown on the wagons... Knowing that they're never coming back...”

“It really can change someone. Even as I fought to survive, I was losing everything and everyone. I would have done anything to give my remaining ally some faint glimmer of hope, something to keep Rojodedo from being tossed onto the wagons like the others. And that, indeed, was what I tried to do.”

“...not that it matters now. Fifteen minutes ago, I was informed that his fire went out some time after I left. ...his husk's probably half-way to the Burning One by now. The last thing connecting me to the world I once loved.”

...I really want to feel bad for this guy. But FUCK HIM. I can't. I can't give him the satisfaction of-

The Interloper: “All that's left for me are the ones responsible for all of this. But there's no point in bringing them back with me. Even if the whole of the Kingdom saw the girl scream her last, as she fell into the Burning One's cavernous maw, it wouldn't matter. The damage is done.”

“And even if it did somehow help, it wouldn't help me. As I've said, there's nothing left for me in the Kingdom. But in this place...”

_The hands holding you begin to-

EW EW STAHP- NOOOOO-

_NOPE. NOPE-

The Observer: “WHJCK- Don't do that to Frisk! Keep those fingers to yourself, before I BREAK THEM ONE BY ONE!”

The Interloper: “I have the only things that matter to me anymore. The ones responsible for destroying everything I held dear. And I can do... whatever I want to them.”

_With a wave of his hand, the Interloper brings- Oh no... Not you too, Charlie..._

Charlie: “…it's been a while, “partner”. Ya miss me?”

The Interloper: “Oh you have no idea, traitor...”

_Suspended from as many hands as you are, Charlie hangs in the air in front of the Interloper.

Charlie: “Is this really how you're gonna do things? C'mon partner, put the dessert down. You wouldn't wanna spoil your appetite for the main course...”

_Charlie gives a sly, teasing wink at the Interloper, eliciting a scoff of disgust and “oh boy this again” from- Ok, I thought that Charlie would be freaking out right about now? This looks like the end for both of you, and yet he's-
...please tell me he's not- Oh god, he's-

No no, I don't think he's stabbing you in the back here. He wouldn't be in this position if he was working with the Interloper all this time. There's something else going on here...

The Interloper: “...you would like that, wouldn’t you? To spare her a little longer?”

“I can't help but admire your cavalier “take me instead” attitude, but I know that it would wound you more to witness what I have in store for her, before your turn comes around.”

“...and for the record, unlike you, I'm not so weak as to have a sweet tooth.”

Charlie: “Oh yeah? An' I guess that wasn't contraband Essence I found in your quarters a buncha times? Luckily, I never confronted you about them bootleg bottles of Love 'n' Joy-”

The Interloper: “FILTH AND LIES! You planted those treacherous things under my bed!”

Charlie begins to shake and bubble with barely controlled rage. It's been quite a while since I've seen him this angry and upset, and considering the situation-

Charlie: “Oh, so you say I did it? Well, I guess I woulda had the chance to do that, since you had me in your bed SO MANY TIMES YOU GODDAMN PATHETIC EXCUSE OF A-”

Frisk: “OH my GOD! SERIOUSLY?!”

...fuck my life. I tried, I really did, but I guess this is how it's going to be.

The Observer: “…and just as I thought there was a chance for you, your true colours are plain to see. Even for a daemon, that's just low...”

I roll my sleeves up as I approach slowly.

The Observer: “I was going to try one last time to be a reasonable man, give you one last chance to back away slowly, but now you have forced my hand. What you did to Frisk was utterly abominable, but to do it to someone in your care, to one so young-”

“...you mo' gwee gway fie deezow!”

...a shudder of revulsion, a look of dismay, and nothing more. Oh god. Does it even-

The Interloper: “...no. YOU leave!”

No! It can't end like this! I have to keep going! I MUST STAY DETERMINED! DO IT FOR HER!

Frisk! You need to- Oh...
Frisk: “YU MO GUI GWAI FAI DI ZAO! YU MO GUI GWAI FAI DI ZAO!”

A hiss of disgust and horror leaves the mouth of the Interloper's unwilling puppet, as the hands that were previously, well, doing unspeakable things to you, shrivel and retract into the green vaporous void from whence they'd sprung. You're doing it, Frisk! You're doing it better than I ever could without-

HOW THE HELL IS THIS WORKING?! WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!

Frisk: “YU MO GUI GWAI FAI DI ZAO! YU MO GUI GWAI FAI DI ZAO! YU MO GUI GWAI FAI DI ZAO!”

The spectral hands try to cover your mouth, but the power of the chant causes them to wither before they can get within grabbing distance. Don't stop chanting, Frisk. Whatever happens, DON'T. STOP. CHANTING.

As you close the distance between you and the Interloper, fire walks with you. The fury and hatred radiating from your soul, coupled by the power of the chant tearing at the darkness surrounding you, seems to set the very fabric of unreality ablaze. Eyes wide with terror, the Interloper is not only trying to outrun you, but the fire that walks with you.

Let him run. I'll catch him eventually.

It seems you won't need to wait long. With an audible pop, your favourite smiley trash bag blinks in and trips up the Interloper with a casual foot. Your quarry clatters to the floor, sliding a little before coming to a stop.

I've got you now, motherfucker!

As you lunge forward to place your palm upon it, it snatches your wrist before you can touch him. You attempt to use your other hand, but it grabs that one too.

The Interloper: *panting and anxious* “That's a dirty trick he taught you. A DAMN dirty trick... I never wanted this, but now you've forced MY hand!”

Its mouth begins to glow with the Power, green flames flickering behind its teeth - You know what? Frisk, apply the spell with your knee.

This'd better work, Observer! I don't wanna get a face full of atomic breath!

Thinking fast, and acting even faster, you knee the Interloper in the midriff. Before it can spit even the weakest of embers in your face, you channel the Elder Magicks of the Nodens-Oztalan Purgative through your knee. Too often, people view the hands and voice as the magician's finest assets, and too easily do they forget that there are many more ways to cast a spell than digital gestures and vocal incantations...

A cry of despair and disbelief rattles forth from the Interloper's stolen mouth, as its green light is purged from the body of your beloved goatbro. And as it is exorcised, its cry is replaced with the pained whimpering of Asriel Dreemurr, whose hands immediately release your wrists and wrap
around your chest.

As he sits up from the floor, his arms wrapped tightly around you, he simply can't stop crying. He's been through hell before, but every year spent down there paled in significance to what he's been through this last couple of days...

**Frisk:** “Asriel... I'm so sorry! I never should have-”

Wait, wait wait. Now may not be the best time to tell him that you gave up on him. I know you want to say “I'm never leaving you again”, but letting him know that you forsook him would do nothing but wound him right now.

**Frisk:** “…it's ok, sweetie... I'm never leaving you again...”

**Asriel:** “…but you did... I- He-”

**Frisk:** “Don't believe it, Asriel. It only wanted to hurt us...”

**Asriel locks eyes with yours, still very upset, but now with you as well.**

**WHY?? What did I do-**

**Asriel:** “It's- it's bad enough being lied to by that bastard, Frisk. Don't do that to me as well!”

“I'm not stupid, y'know. I- You've- *cough* You're older... older than the last time I saw you!”

“PLEASE, just- *sniff* Tell me why- why you left me!”

No no no... Not again. Don't let it happen again... Not to me, too...

**While the whole truth may harden his heart against you, so too will simple lies. Instead, tell him what matters.**

**Frisk:** “…I tried to find a cure, Asriel. I tried to find a way to save you, but I just couldn't- I couldn't do it! Not in this world!”

“...it's been a long road for me, Asriel. I've- I've been beyond our reality, across time and space, trying to find some way to fix you. It's been- it's been so hard, sweetie...”

“...five years. It's been five years since I left this world. For you, it's only been a coupla minutes, but, well... I found someone who knew the ways better than I ever did. When I found the secret to getting that thing out of you, he brought me back here, to help me finish this...”

...well, Observer?

...oh, right. As you wish. **Asriel looks over your shoulder, and sees a skeleton in a dark robe walking towards you. The crown of poppies beneath my cowl begins to wither, shedding red petals as I approach. I stop a few paces away from where you are, and lift my cowl, scattering the last remnants of the crown to the dark winds of this place.**

**The Observer:** “…sorry it took so long, your highness.”
Judging by the look on his face, he doesn't know what to make of me. Nonetheless, he smiles weakly, nods, and says-

Asriel: “Th- thank you... If she never came back, I d- I don't know what I'd do.”

The Observer: “Nhaah, don't mention it mate. I'm just the chauffeur here, Frisk's the one you should be thanking. If it weren't for her quick thinking, this could have gone- ...well, let's not even go there, sister.”

“But for now at least, you kids are safe. ...speaking of which, where's-”

Ah, there he is. You feel a pair of leaves plant themselves on your waist, followed by the spluttering, broken apologies of a traumatized flower-boy.

Flowey: “I couldn't stop it, Frisk! It- it- I couldn't- It was too powerful!”

He turns his face away, trying not to show you the pain on his face, or the tears streaming from his eyes.

Flowey...

Flowey: “I should have been able to stop it! I wasn't- I just wasn't strong enough! I wasn't GOOD enough to stop it!”

And as if the scars of his past didn’t hurt enough, the fresh traumas of the past few days have given Flowey all new wounds of war. It was a long road to recovery for him, and for Asriel, but as fate would have it they've both been dragged back to square one.

It's just not fair...

The Observer: “This is going to be with you for a long time. That goes for the both of you, Flowey and Asriel alike.”

“But thankfully, you could not ask for a better shoulder to lean on. If I know Frisk, and after all this time I think I do, she'll be with you on that long road, every step of the way. Hell, you'll be hard-pressed to get away from her, after all she's done to get back to you...”

...like I'd ever deny that.

Frisk: “...c'mere, you.”

I reach around to Flowey, an' I give him the biggest hug I can to a small flower like him. ...not wanting to leave Asriel out, I bring him closer too. Everyone gets a hug!

...I think I'll sit this one out, if that's all good with you. I should let your dunkle know what's up. But before that...

...the insidious green mists have cleared completely, giving way to a soft darkness, cool and humid. You feel the first few drops fall upon you, before hearing the gentle, rhythmic patter of a magickal rain, mirroring the sorrow of your boys as they try to cope with what has happened to them.
While the time will soon come for us to leave this place, for now you hold Asriel and Flowey close to you, and allow the weather to wash away your pain, here, in the Realm of Night Rain.

Dialogue: Sans & the Observer

sans: “...so you're the one responsible for the distortion, huh?”

The Observer: “Guilty as charged. Though that all depends on which one you're talking about. While the spaceship entering this universe was my doing, that was probably just a blip on the radar, compared to the tumultuous storm of chaos that the Interloper caused, snatching up souls like sausage rolls at a buffet. THAT was what you picked up on your machine.”

Looking a little more unsettled there, aren't you? Yes, I know about your equipment. And a great deal about you.

sans: “yeesh, is there anyone who HASN'T been watchin’ me?”

The Observer: “It's not that bad, mate. I only peeked a little, when I suspected that you'd take notice of Frisk's return. Honestly, I thought you'd pick it up based on instinct alone. I mean, you do have a certain affinity for, well, “playing outside the box”. It reminds me of myself, in a way...”

sans: “...don't i know you from somewhere? man, i really feel like we've met before.”

The Observer: “We've never actually met. Though I have rubbed shoulders with another you, if that makes any sense.”

sans: “...so it's true, then? there are other sanses out there, after all?”

The Observer: “More than you could shake a quantum harmonizer at. Though I wouldn't bank on you being able to meet any of them. After all, I have a feeling that things are going to take a turn, sooner or later, and we'll have to stay in our own worlds for quite some time.”

“...I would tell you the specifics, but we have more immediate problems to tackle right now. Have a gander at this twatbasket.”

sans: “WHOA doggie, there's no need for that kinda- ...i take that back.”

“There is.”

The murmur of soft rains is broken, periodically, by the splashing of hoofsteps, and the scraping of rusty metal against black marble. Turning to the source of the noise, we see the many headless bodies of- Well, I imagine you'll meet Ben soon enough. He looks a lot like those dead bodies, only he still has a head.
yeesh... i'm not even gonna ask how your bunny pal has so many bodies. let's, uh, let's focus on this creep for now.

We look upon the Interloper, and behold its true form. Its hide is red and rugged, reflecting the harshness of its former home. Its legs end in cloven hooves, as is typical of beings like Cabrapata, with blued steel horseshoes as its footwear of choice. The face on this daemon is less of a face, and more like a goat's skull with glowing green eyes.

And dragging behind it, hilt clutched in one hand, is a frighteningly large- well, in a way it's too big to be a sword. It's massive, thick, heavy, and far too rough to be a sword by sensible standards. If anything, it's more like a big lump of raw iron with a tree branch sticking out of it. ...Undyne would probably love to add it to her collection.

he won't be able to hit anyone with somethin' that big an' slow. or at least, he ain't gonna land a hit on me.

sans: “Alright pal, you gotta ask yourself one question.”

Something tells me he DOES feel lucky.

sans: “Do you wanna have a bad time?”

I always get chills when you say that, Sans.

sans: “’cause if you take one more step...”

“You'll wish you'd stayed in bed today.”

Your quarry stops briefly, but only to regard you coldly with its contemptuous gaze.

Cabrapata, the Interloper: “Don't even try it, weakling. You won't get me twice...”

And with that, it picks up the pace. It's not up for your “shenanigans” right now, it appears.

sans: “...welp. can't say i didn't try for once.”

Word of the wise: don't open with your strongest attack.

as if i'm gonna make that mistake.

A wall of bones spring up in front of Cabrapata. It grunts with annoyance, before swinging that fuckoff-huge sword of its and swiping cleanly through them. Seems like it's paying you little heed this time, even though it no longer has the protection of Asriel's body. Even to fell such a wretched creature, no-one should have to lay a finger on Goatbro.

don't gotta tell me twice. if it weren't for him using the prince like a damn meat-shield, i wouldn't have pulled my punches when we first fought.

I do have to say: it's a wonderful thing that you're willing to fight for your friends nowadays. And also, more than a little bit scary. 'cause when the gloves come off, and you don't have to pull your punches, you can really portion out the pain.

yeah. it feels so good to have something worth fighting for...
Soooo what's your next move?

let's put this chump behind bars...

_Thick lines of white surround it, solidifying into a cage. ...a rib cage. Yup. I expected nothing less from you._

...aaaaand he- Nohp, wait, of course. You summon one of your Blasters in front of it, and blast it at full force. ...taking a pretty small sliver off of its health bar, before it shatters the cage that tried to hold it.

_That's, um, hmmmm, yeah. We're going to be here a while, I think. Even with your Karma in effect, it's not exactly going to crumble like Ryvita._

...well crap.

_But on the plus side, it's decided to give YOU the time of day instead of the kids. Though if you don't stay light on your feet, it's going to be dust o'clock in the morning._

no sweat. whoop! see? no- **WOHA DOGGIE! this guy's PISSED!**

**Keep your bloody distance!**

_Cabrapata: “Where's the fun in that?!”_

_I was talking to Sans, you disgusting excuse of a creature!_

oooookay, that was TOO close! time to make like a warship and raise some damn shields!

sans: [spells/bone/combat/skeletal_shield] LOAD

_Ah, most impressive. You conjure several floating structures of bone around you, each ready to take a single hit for you. The best thing you could ask for in a situation like this, just in case you're not as sharp as you hope._

'ey, what can i say? can't be too careful.

_With a roar of frustration, our quarry swings again, missing on the first strike. Two more swings follow in the sequence, both of which you dodge._

eh, this ain't so bad. i feel like i'm getting' into the zone!

_Just don't get too cocky. Now it knows that you can shield yourself, it's probably going to switch tactics. ...and I hate being right. The sword clatters upon the floor, cast aside in frustration, as its claws extend to a menacing length. Switching up to quick attacks, the dirty bugger._

...now i get a better look at this guy, he kinda reminds me of a guy from, uh- what's that game with all the knights in it? y'know, the one Frisk plays on her emulators?

_Dark Souls? Yeah, I'm getting a bit of a Capra Demon vibe, too._
yup, that's the one. but at least he doesn't have any dogs with him, this time.

_I dunno man, that beast gnawing at his ankle looks awfully- HANG ON A MINUTE. That's- Ok, that's the Hellhound from Grim Dawn. Looks like Charlie-boy has figured out how to make that summon work in this universe!_  

wha- uh, i have no idea what-

_At some point in Frisk's journey, Charlie-boy ended up on the world of Cairn, taking over the body of one of its heroes. That's where he learned how to Summon Hellhound. ...it is also where he learned how to make a Hellhound blow up, as the Interloper is flung a short distance by the exploding demon dog._

...we're gonna talk about this later. meanwhile, i sic my Blasters on him.

_With roars to rival those of Sinistar, your Blasters pour their searing beams of energy upon the distracted Cabrapata! And this time, they do a lot more damage! Ah, probably because it cast its big sword aside in a fit of rage. I imagine the sword would have helped him block, but look at him now!_  

it looks like he's realized his mistake. he's lookin' around for his sword, but-

_Someone else is now holding it. Someone clad in dark red power armour. Someone who looks very, VERY angry. Someone who, thanks to our little diversion, has had the time to re-equip said power armour._

_Frisk: “Step away, motherFUCKER!”_  

oh heck, i'm staying outta this!

_Same here. This form may be a mere projection, but even a grazing blow would still hurt like hell..._  

_Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer_  

_It was at this moment, seeing you in full Doomgirl mode, that the Interloper knew it fucked up._

I'm- I'm actually not feeling 100% right now...

_You say that, but the slow, ominous walk towards your nemesis speaks otherwise. If you need a pep talk, however, then here you go._

..._they are rage; brutal, without mercy. But you... you will be worse. RIP AND TEAR, UNTIL IT IS DONE._

..._I AM SO FUCKING READY!_  

[FIGHT]
With a savage growl, you break into a run and swing with all your might. Alerted by your unexpected savagery, the Interloper barely manages to evade, with but a scratch-

A scratch?! His arm's fallen off!

...oh my. And yet, after waving at the stump where his right arm used to be, he just stares at it blankly, before locking eyes with you and giving a withering look that seems to say-

The Interloper: “...I've had worse while fighting mudcrabs.”

**OHHH SHIT! Are you going to take that?**

FUCK no! I've taken enough from this WORM to last me a goddamn lifetime!

The Interloper: “COME ON you whelpling!”

Frisk: “NGAHHH!”

[FIGHT]

You swing again, telegraphing your attack as you do so, and this time the Cabrapata really does dodge the blow, with a stylish backflip no less! Word of the wise-

**CAN IT. I GOT THIS!**

I'd believe that, but it's just grabbed your sword-arm with its remaining arm, and brings you in closer.

The Interloper: *hissing* “Yesss... Already, this is more LIKE IT!”

**HOLY**- ...is he- is he actually enJOYING this?!

...maybe? **Who knows, with daemons?**

Well, I hope he enjoys getting punched in the face!

[FIGHT]

And true to your word, using your off-hand you land a powered fist into its skeletal muzzle. As it stumbles backwards, glowing green ichor seeping from the cracks in his jaw, it cackles gently and wheezily. Almost if it kind of relishes the notion of you fighting back. ...best not to think too hard about that.

The Interloper: “Never before have you shown me such high regard! If only we had fought like this when we first met!”

**Blimey. As if this creature didn't have issues already... I forget, did you even actually fight it, when you went into Hell the first time?**

I don't fucking know! It was over a decade ago, I only really remember the big bossfights!
Maybe that's why it's feeling so validated right now? Maybe you're finally giving it more than just a quick glory kill that you didn't even remember? After all, it was probably just another mook in a mob when you barrelled through them on the way to the next boss.

I'm counting on it.

**Frisk:** “...you know, I don't even remember you from the rampage. I dunno why you think you're so important, but lemme tell you this.”

“The day I tore through you and your little friends was probably the most important moment of your tiny, pathetic little life. But for me... **it was Tuesday.**”

**And before it can even snarl at you in disgust, you plunge its own sword into its skull. You can almost hear an angelic choir and shredding melodic metal chord as you Glory Kill the Interloper, creating a fountain of shining jade that threatens to pierce the sky itself. You earn 100XP, and a genuine sense of pride and accomplishment.**

It's over... It's finally over...

**You stagger away from the scene of carnage, armour speckled with the green ichor of your fallen foe. Somehow, you do feel like it's all over. All those nights where you woke up screaming, all the impromptu therapy sessions with Toriel, all those times you looked at Asriel and felt revulsion and anxiety...**

**Now the Interloper is defeated, perhaps they won't hurt as much anymore? Will the nightmares finally stop? Will the long road be easier to walk this time? Will you be able to look at Asriel without seeing that thing leering back? ...only time will tell.**

...I'll feel better once we're back in California. But I know for sure that, when I look at Asriel, I don't see that thing anymore. Instead, all I see are the boys I love.

...about that, though. **Don't forget that, due to your journey, there's a bit of a gap between you now. Don't get me wrong, you'll still be able to live happily ever after with him, but it'd be best to leave the “happy ending” part until he's older. After all, he's still only- ...I forget, is he 14 or 15?**

He turned 15 a coupla months before the Interloper's attack.

Riiight, gotcha. Just needed to clear that up. I do hate getting numbers wrong.

...he was 9 when he died, and when I reunited him with his body, he picked up his life from there. ...I'll be honest, I wasn't really thinking about the whole “happy ending” thing. I mean... Even after all this, I'm sure we'll still be on the same page. But after all he's been through, I don't think he'd even want to look at me like he did before he got that interface installed.

...still, I hope that's something I can help him get over. I mean, I still- I still want us to have something special. Even if it takes years for us to get there, I-

...nah. I shouldn't be thinking about this right now. Not after what just happened.

**Which is fair enough. But don't let it discourage you. After all, didn't you used to go on about how you couldn't let it win? That if it destroyed your relationship with Asriel, if it make you never**
want to love again, that it would have won?

Let's- let's not go there right now. ...oh, who am I kidding? The Interloper wrecked what we had, but I don't think he destroyed it completely. I'm sure there's still something for us, even if we've been set back by what the Interloper did to us. Hell, maybe we could sit around and say “FUCK THAT GUY!” if he ever comes up in conversation?

Yeah! That's the spirit! FUCK that thing for hurting you like it did!

...yeah! YEAH! FUCK that guy!

The Interloper: “Oh, fuck me...”

...FUCK.

As if it hasn't had enough, the Interloper reasserts itself. Every severed limb, every fragment of bone, it all returns to the broken body of your nemesis. You even feel the bloodstains peel themselves off of your face and armour, the jade ichor returning to the bloodstreams they had been loosed from.

...fuck this guy.

Frisk: “Why won't you DIE?!”

Rising to its feet, the Interloper glares at you with a renewed fervour and visible grin, before opening its arms as if to say “behold!”.

The Interloper: “…still as foolish and bullheaded as ever. I'm a SPIRIT! How can you hope to kill a spirit?”

“You honestly thought that killing me would somehow cast me down? I've been beaten worse while duelling my friends! Even if we somehow wanted to die, we simply can't be killed! We just regenerate and reassemble ourselves!”

Frisk: “...fuck you.”

You... turn away from the Interloper, and walk over to- Frisk? I thought you'd be overjoyed at the notion of killing this wretch over and over again?

I fell like once was enough for me. I don't wanna cheapen the memory.

The Interloper: “Wha- HEY? Where are you going? Come now, the fun's only just started!”

Its arms remain open, but point forward as if to say “EYYYY CAMAHN!” like some sort of skeevy used car salesman.

I think I know how to end this, though. It's time we left this place...

You approach Asriel, who's looking at Flowey with a concerned expression. ...I think I know
what's eating at Flowey, as he clutches his leaves to the ears he doesn't have.

Flowey: “S-somebody, just- make them stop! Make it stop!”

Asriel: “Frisk, I- I don't know what's gotten into him, he just started- Ohhh nooo...”

The souls within him are gradually gaining awareness of their situation, and they are not happy. Specifically, they are frightened, livid, upset, all the things that we REALLY don't need right now. And to cap it all off, Flowey can hear them all. Even as faint as they are individually, together they are nearly deafening to him.

Oh god... ...he needs to get rid of them. They are what's keeping this place intact!

Frisk: “Flowey, sweetie, listen to me. Focus on my voice!”

You reach out to cup his head in your hands. As you do so, his clenched eyes snap open and focus on you. You can clearly see the pain around his eyes, the stress of hearing the cries and demands of the inmates, nurses, Templars and visitors, all forced to inhabit the same vessel.

Flowey: “They- they wanna get out! An’ I wanna let 'em go, but-”

Frisk: “They're responsible for holding this place together, Flowey. Let them go, and you'll lose that power. Lose that power, and you'll send this bastard whirlin' into the void!”

Flowey: “I KNOW! But if I do...”

He tenses up, as another wave of voices washes over him. He tries to swing his head from side to side, anything to silence the nightmare within. In the end, through tear-filled eyes he screams:

Flowey: “SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP IN THERE! I NEED TO THINK! PLEEEEEEEASE!”

Even through the cacophony within his very being, his tearful wails cut through like a hot knife through butter. And that, unsurprisingly, gives him some small reprieve from the demands of the human souls, as even they are stilled by the intense weeping of a flower-child.

Flowey: *sniff* “If I- If I- ...if I set them all free, they'll- I can't reunite them with their bodies, it's too- it's too late! They're too far gone!”

“But- but if I don't- if this place-”

To say that the pressure is getting to Flowey would be an understatement. It already has, and he's struggling to decide what the right thing to do is. Such a heavy responsibility should never have fallen on the shoulders of one so young...

This is fucked... This is SO fucked! ...oh god. Oh GOD. That means that, when he broke the Barrier- OH GOD!

...we find ourselves at a crossroads. Sacrifice hundreds to free ourselves and cast down the Interloper, or-
The Interloper: *sigh* “Face me, Frisk. It's the best way this can end for you and your friends.”

“The soulvessel is beyond your wit. And even if he did cast off the human souls, to destroy this place and cast me down, do you think he'll be able to live with the pain of sending hundreds of innocents to the Kingdom? Especially now he knows that he's done it once before?”

Asriel: “...you shut your goddamn mouth. Don't even SPEAK of him, you- you-”

The Interloper: “Oh please, spare me the heroics. It's only a matter of time before you slip up, princeling. Or do you so wish to return to the grave?”

The Interloper does not get an answer, as you slice its head off with a fury-filled swing and a cry of defiance. Take 90XP and a severed daemon head.

The Interloper: “...I can't help but marvel at how protective you are of the boy. I'm starting to understand why you went to such lengths-”

That doesn't know when to shut up. ...in a way, I can relate.

I toss his head into the distance. I don't wanna hear anymore from him.

The Interloper: “-to take him from the Kingdom oh ok you're doing this...”

As its head whirls away from your location, still talking, the headless body seems to slide in the direction of the head. This is just getting weird, now.

I'm just glad I won't have to listen to that fucker. ...at least for a coupla minutes.

Frisk: “…Flowey, don't worry. We'll- we'll find a way, there HAS to be another way. We're gonna have our god-damn cake, and we're gonna stuff our god-damn faces with it!”

Flowey: *sniff* “R-really? Can we- can we even do that?”

Frisk: “We have to. I mean, what's the point in havin' a cake, if you can't freakin' eat it too?”

I think the old meaning of that was that you can't have your cake AFTER you've eaten it, since you've already eaten it. But your point still stands.

Damn straight. I don't care how long it takes, we're gonna leave this place without sending those people to Hell!

That's the ticket. ...though if I'll be honest, I do actually care about how long it takes. I'm not leaving here until you're safe, but I also want to publish this finale sequence before Easter. So let's hope it doesn't take too long.

The Interloper: “Ever so eager to protect the princeling...”

Oh god not this again.

The Interloper's head is reunited with its neck, and reattaches itself to the rest of the body as it gets
back on its feet.

The Interloper: “...with how you coddle him, keeping him safe from all that would hurt him, it's almost like you're his m-”

NOPE. I kick the Interloper in the balls.

Ooof. Your saboton makes sharp contact with his groin. Asriel covers his ears as the Interloper shrieks in agony.

The Interloper: “MOTHER FUCKER! AUUUGHHH WHY would you STOOP so LOW?! Is nothing sacred to you?!”

Frisk: “Hmmm. Stoopin' low? 's pretty rich comin' from a fuckin' rapist.”

The Interloper: “Rich?! RICH?! Not even the lowest of daemons would dare to strike at the stones of another! As violent as we get, we NEVER go for such obvious weakpoints!”

Frisk: “You're all fuckin' weak, that's why. You let things get in your way, just because-”

Bloody wars, Frisk, dial it back a little why don't you? I think you're jumping the shark a little here-

He'll get no sympathy from me. No mercy. No more pulled punches. I am NOT gonna hold back ANY LONGER!

...and with that, you repeatedly stomp the Interloper while he's down, each stomp accompanied by a small blast of ice and fire. Once we're finished here, you're going to need some serious therapy.

FUCK THAT SHIT! I'VE NEVER FELT MORE FUCKING ALIVE!

...Frisk, for fuck's sake check your stats. Check yourself before you Shrek yourself and everyone you love.

...fine. He's pretty much kimchi by now, anyways.

Blimey... That's another 80 XP to your total.

[ACT] > *Self > *Check

Name: Frisca Rivera

Age: 19

Sex: Female

Species: Homo sapiens sapiens

HP: 92/92

AT: 46
...ffffuuuuuck...

Christ on the river! If I'd known it was THIS bad- We're going to need to cut you off here. If you keep killing him, you're-

But- but I can't, Observer. If I let my guard down, if I give him any goddamn quarter, he'll-

Save it, Frisk. This all-or-nothing mentality is not healthy. And I suspect that it's a side-effect of the LOVE you've acquired and the execution points you've earned.

...just keep defending, Frisk. Because while it would seem cathartic to keep hurting him like this, the EXP you've accumulated is... It's tearing you apart on the inside, Frisk. It's wearing away at your mind, and this place is only making it worse.

...but I... I have to defeat him... I have to...

...listen to me. If you keep this up, eventually you will hit LV 20. And when that happens... there'll be nothing left of Frisca Rivera. She'll look like you, move like you, fight like you, but beyond that, there will be nothing else in that head of yours. It will be so easy for you to hurt, that you'll do it without even thinking.

...do you really want that kind of creature to exist in your place? Would you want to see such an unstable, violent, empty-headed anomaly anywhere near your friends?

Asriel: “Frisk... Frisk, are- are you-”

...I don't- I don't want him to- If I stop fighting, he'll-

There's always more than one way to skin a cat. Just because you shouldn't hurt, that doesn't mean you can't defend yourself. Block, dodge, endure, but don't retaliate. I can't tell how close you are to LV 20 right now, but each additional execution point could be the one that tips you over the edge.

...Observer... I'm scared... I don't want to die...

Don't worry... No, I can't lie. DO worry. For your own sanity, be afraid of hurting your nemesis. No matter how much you hate it, no matter how much it hurt you, don't let your will to fight consume you. Not just for your sake, but everyone's hopes and dreams...

The Interloper gradually reassembles itself from the mashed mess of daemon gore that you left on the floor. Though the wheezing and choking, you can barely make out:

The Interloper: “-so -soon?”
As its skull reconstitutes itself, it looks up at you with the utmost perplexion, not quite understanding the sudden shift in mood.

He'd better not talk shit to me. Not when I'm so close to the edge...

Do your best to resist. If need be, I'll hold you back.

The Interloper: “I thought- *hack* you'd have more in you than that. Where's that fire, girl? Where's it gone?”

...it's...

Frisk: “It's still burning me up inside.”

...oh bloody hell. That's the last thing you should be telling about your problem.

The Interloper: “…whoof, I just caught a whiff of that- By the Burning One! It's so potent it's-AGH! GAHK!”

The Interloper coughs and sputters as he catches a whiff of the potent Essence bleeding off of you. It is at once both fiercely spicy and violently chilling, like if you ate equal measures of mint and chillis. And much like chilli and mint together, the heat of your restrained aggression eventually powers through the chilling qualities of your disregard for how others feel.

But I- But I DO care, don't I? I don't want Asriel to get hurt...

...and despite that, in your quest to bring him back, you didn't really care about anyone else. You didn't really care when Alphys broke down in tears during your contained loop, as the stress and anxiety got too much for her. When you and Toriel had your arguments, you didn't care how much your words wounded her until it was far too late. And when you descended into Hell itself-

What're you trying to say, Observer? That I'm selfish?!

I'm saying that when shit gets real, when there's a lot on the line, you find it hard to care about anything other than the focal point of your efforts. For all your talk about struggling not to be nice, you can be awfully cold-hearted sometimes.

This isn't helping, Observer. I really, REALLY don't need you to psychoanalyse me right now.

Actually, you're probably right. So instead, I'll try to take your mind off of it with something tangential and seemingly irrelevant, but nonetheless vaguely amusing.

This'd better be good...

Ok, so, this one time at work, probably donkeys years ago now, we had a chilli festival with some of the spiciest fucking chilli peppers you can imagine. I tried some of the strongest samples they had out, and while I love some good chilli heat, they were PAINFUL. It got so bad that I was practically snogging a glass of milk for 20 minutes, trying to dull the heat receptors in my mouth and lips.
...holy shit, that's rough.

You should have seen the other guy, though. He had a lip piercing, you see, and I imagine that having the heat of a fuckoff-strong chilli INSIDE your lower lip was not exactly a bus trip to Nirvana. If anything, it would have been like a Sunday drive through Naraka.

Ooof. Fuckin' brutal.

The Interloper: “It's been six years! How are you still so SPICY?! Did you NEVER STOP?”

Ignore him. He's just-

UGHHHH... I never shoulda gone to {3}. I never shoulda gone on that stupid fuckin' rampage. I'd probably have a lower LV right now...

Perhaps. Or maybe it wouldn't have mattered, given how the memory of- No. No I'm not going to go there, that's a stupid idea.

I don't think I wanna know which memory you're talking about.

...it's the memory of you walking in on Asriel when he was browsing some dirty sites on the Grey Web. There, I said it!

Heheh... I know that's not the one you're talking about. I don't think there's any LV to trigger in seeing him so embarrassed. ...it was kinda cute, too. Seeing him all flustered at the computer, underwear around his ank-

Ooookay let's not even go there sister. Seriously, word of the wise: try to keep that creepy stuff to yourself.

Oh c'mon, it's not THAT creepy! It was just-

Please Frisk, there's more than one line you're in danger of crossing here- Oh thank god. I've never been so happy to see this scarlet prick again.

The Interloper: “I've never TASTED such ferocity! Such Hatred and Disregard, I can barely catch the undercurrent of Passion!”

Passion? Does he seriously think I-

He's talking about the concept of Passion. It's more in line with one's drive and desire, very closely tied into determination. You were probably thinking of Lust, but that isn't the case of all. After all, according to what I've gathered regarding Essence, and the “quantum flavours” associated with emotional patterns, Passion is more in line with Indian heat, such as curry spices like cumin and turmeric, while Lust is a finer, more sweetly spiced Essence, like cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, etc.

And how the hell did you find THAT out?!

Casual side-observations, I won't bore you with the details. Besides, if he DID sense a hint of Lust, it would NOT go well with the menthol-esque chills of Disregard. After all, no-one wants to
risk eating sweet spices right after they've brushed their teeth...

The Interloper: *cough* “Oof. I'm not sure that the Disregard helps it though. If you took that away, your Essence would be just right...”

Frisk: “Well, if you're hoping that I'm gonna start carin' about you, you're shit outta luck son. I ain't gonna be your goddamn curry girl or whatever you're hopin' for.”

Asriel: “Curry... girl? Frisk, what the hell are you talking about?”

Frisk: “It's just- It's complicated shit, sweetie. Don't worry your pretty little head about it.”

The warmth you feel as you reassure Asriel influences the Essence that the Interloper can taste from you.

Gross.

The Interloper: “GHFF- Ugh, that's enough of that!”

The Interloper tries his best to close himself off from your unpalatable Essence. The fruity and tangy warmth of your Compassion mingles with your clinical and minty Disregard, producing a clash of quantum flavours that even the most accepting and tolerant of daemons find utterly nauseating. Again, it's like eating a strawberry tart just after you've brushed your teeth.

I can't help but feel satisfied at making him taste something bad. ...please tell me that doesn't-

You should still be fine. Killing and being brutal is the main culprit of EXP gain, after all. And if anything, your regrets show that there's still hope for you.

...oooh, there's a thought. Try pitying him.

I already pity the fool.

Alright Clubber Lang, that's a good start. But what I mean is, well, feeling sorry for him. And yes, I know, that's pretty fucked up considering what he's done to you, but it might help your LV go down. After all, unless I'm mistaken, guilt and remorse helped you “simmer down” in the years following your rampage.

...shit, you're right...

Having all those friends around you, and remembering how you were used to hurt them in distant timelines, it really made you feel like garbage, didn't it? And in feeling like garbage, you became more and more unwilling to hurt them like that again.

...maybe that's not such a good idea, Observer.

Well, erm, probably not the best idea to feel like that right now. Save your energy for defending yourself. ...speaking of which, look alive. He's-

I really am a piece of shit, aren't I?
Nooo, no no Frisk, you're not like that. You might not be the most squeaky-clean of protagonists, but you're by no means as bad as Granny Crotony. Maybe you're a bit of a trainwreck, but who wouldn't be after riding the tracks you've been forced down?

The Interloper: “...come now, Frisk. We're all stuck here.”

You feel a sinewy hand clasp your shoulder. Even through an inch or two of augmented metal, you can't help but bristle at the touch.

The Interloper: “...surrender while you still have time. If you concede, I promise that you will feel better about this-”

Frisk: “Get yet paws off me.”

Your anger flares at the notion of submission, as you effortlessly slap his hand away. Only this time, it doesn't fly right off of his wrist, since you're pulling your punches now.

Frisk: “I'm not your goddamn plaything this time. An' stop looking at me like I'm a fuckin' spice rack!”

The Interloper: “It's the best outcome for both of us, girl. Like it or not, we are both stuck here. The flower doesn't have what it takes to end this world, so we may as well learn to live with each-other.”

“So long as I have Essence to sustain me, I will always rise again, never tiring. But how many times can you put me down, before you grow too weak to face me? Even now, I can smell your hesitation, your unwillingness to swing my sword...”

“Concede now, and we can work something out. But if you reject this offer... if you so desire to fight to the last, 'til you're too tired to lift that sword... well, I can think of many things that I could do with you.”

Frisk: “You sick fuck...”

A bolt of scintillating, multicoloured light grazes the Interloper's horn. Looks like Asriel hates where this is going.

Asriel: “You don't TOUCH her, EVER! Not while I'm still breathing...”

The Interloper: “And what of you, young man? When you are out of juice, too tired to fight back, do you think I'd treat you fairly after all that trouble?”

“Seriously, we can make compromises. After all, producing Essence needn't involve torture like last time. Sheath your worst spells, and we can talk about this like reasonable adults.”

Asriel: “After what you DID to me?! No, not this time. You'll get NOTHING from me!”

The Interloper's brow furrows at Asriel's insistence. Good on Goatbro for standing by his principles. ...not so good at throwing a punch, only for it to be caught by a firm hand.

The Interloper: “You're not even listening, are you? I said that torture wouldn't be necessary! I'm not trying to milk you for every last drop, this time! Not when it's for ME!”
“Do you honestly think that Terror, Agony and Despair taste good together? NO! But they are the easiest to produce in bulk!”

“...of course, I don't about that anymore. As a singular daemon... I can afford to be more creative. If anything, I could make your life in this place better. Your every wish...”

*With a wave of his hand, the Interloper appears to conjure a warm-looking gazebo out of thin air.*

“...could be my command.”

---

Asriel glares at the gazebo, then back at the Interloper. He's trying to tempt the boy with promises, in stark contrast to his previous attitude of simply seizing control. ...I'm not going crazy here, am I? It's like- Something's definitely changed with this guy, hasn't it?

Asriel: “...I'm not gonna betray her. No matter what you offer.”

The Interloper: “Who's talking about betrayal? I'm trying to make your lives here happy ones. And while it takes a lot to make someone happy, I am willing to try new things, now I no longer have to adhere to the Kingdom's restrictions...”

...that kinda makes sense, actually. If we end up feeling good, he'll get Essence that tastes good for him?

*That's pretty much how it works. If it didn't take so much time and effort to produce Essence aligned with things like Love and Joy, they'd probably produce that instead of, well, cheap and nasty shit like Agony and Despair.*

Frisk: “The answer's still no, motherfucker. I'm not gonna give you the satisfaction of tryin' to make me happy.”

The Interloper: “Always with this bitter grudge... Yet when your “friends” tried to kill you, you eventually forgave them and welcomed them into your heart. Even though you barely knew them starting out!”

“You even forgave that genocidal wretch over there, even after doing the things he did! And above all else, you LOVE him! But ME? OH no, not the daemon. Not the one whose job it was to keep the princeling in working order. Not the one whose LIFE you ruined! Oh no, there's no chance at redemption for HIM, even when the flower arguably did far worse!”

Frisk: “You blew all the chances I'd given you.”

*That gives the Interloper pause. Staring at you in dismay, his rant interrupted, he cannot help but ponder your words.*

The Interloper: “Chances? ...you never gave me any chances...”

Frisk: “...I could have. Once upon a time, we coulda talked this out. Hell, maybe we coulda fought it out? But when you did what you did...”
Frisk: “...I can put up with a lotta shit, y'know? Betrayal. Confrontation. Being manipulated. Getting put through a fuckin' gauntlet of puzzles. Even being killed, I could handle eventually.”

“There's probably something wrong with me, I'm not gonna rule that out. But even if I really am fucked in the head, being fucked in the head let me give people chances to show that they're not terrible. Even if they've done some bad shit in their lives, I can still look past that and see the good in them.”

“And because of that, I've found some wonderful friends, and a caring, loving family. Because I'm crazy enough to look beyond all the bad shit, I've surrounded myself with genuinely good people, friends and family that have made me happier than I've ever been in my entire life…”

You breathe in, and ready the next part of your monologue. The proverbial knife in the gut that's probably going to make the Interloper go apeshit. Are you sure you want to open that can of worms, Frisk?

It needs to be said.

Does it, though?

Frisk: “...and then, there's you. I didn't know you in the first place, and I never really GOT to know you. You were just another lackey with a skull to crack, just another faceless goon to leave in the dust on the way to my goal. And yeah. Maybe that was a little selfish of me?”

“But when it came to getting back at me? There were so many better ways you coulda pulled that off. So many ways that coulda led to us partin' on mutual terms. So of course, you do the worst thing you could possibly think of.”

...I think he gets the message. Though due to his actions, he burned any potential bridge between you long before-

I'm not finished.

Frisk: “You HURT my best friend, manipulating him like a goddamn puppet! You used him to VIOLATE me, trying to ruin any chance of us finding happiness together! And what's worse is that I know, deep down in that cold fuckin' heart of yours, that you'd do it again if you wanted to! That you don't really feel BAD about what you've DONE!”

“...I can put up with a lotta shit, but I gotta draw the line somewhere. I can't look past THAT much bad, when there's so little good in there too. It's just not worth all the pain this time…”

“...maybe things coulda been different? Maybe, in another universe, you never crossed the line? Maybe that other you managed to sort out your differences with the Frisk of that world, without being so goddamn irredeemable?”

*sigh* “But those're just maybes. This is the here and now. Here and now, I know that we will NEVER be ok. I will NEVER forgive you, for what you've done to me and my family.”

“And we. Will NEVER. Be friends.”
The Interloper crosses his arms, and lets out a long, drawn-out sigh. ...Frisk, I'm proud of you facing down your demons, believe me. But now was not the best time to burn the bridge he was trying to build. It was the right thing to do, since accepting him completely would not have been healthy, but you should have saved that for the end when you peace out of this place.

I can't let him into my heart. Not even a little bit. If it got to that point, he'd WIN.

Sometimes, a tactical loss is a victory in itself, especially if you live to fight another day.

No. I'm not gonna go through that shit again. Even if it kills me-

Would you listen to yourself? That's the DT and LV talking! Don't let them cloud your judgement.

It's ok, Observer. I wouldn't burn my bridges without a good reason. ...and that reason is a pool of tar forming at the Interloper's feet.

...clever girl. ...but why did he wait this long? Did he legitimately think that you had this? Why, only now, is he crawling up the Interloper's legs? Why, after things were looking so bad for so long, has he NOW rooted your nemesis in place with his changeling goop?

...that's actually a good question. But eh, better late than never.

The Interloper: “By the Fallen, what is this?! WHAT IS HAPPENING?!”

Charlie: “What's the matter, partner?”

Two piercing red eyes form in the ever-encroaching tar, accompanied by a pair of rosy cheeks.

Charlie: “I thought that you LOVED BEING INSIDE ME!?”

Way to make it even creepier than it already is, Charlie.

Frisk: “Yeeesh, it took ya long enough! Really appreciate lettin' me fuckin' stew like that, Charlie! I could have lost my MIND, you know!”

Asriel: “Friiiisik...?”

Frisk: “ What? Wh- what is it sweetie?”

Asriel: “Why is... why is he- why is he the Blob, now? Is there something else you're not telling me?”

Frisk: “Ohhh right, about that. We had a run-in with, uh, some kind of super-amalgamate during our travels. It tried to eat me, so Charlie, well... You remember that he has a soul now, right?”

Asriel sighs deeply, remembering all too well how you saved Charlie as well as him, all those years ago.

Asriel: “...yeah, yeah I do. An' I'm guessing you put his soul into that thing, and now it's his body?”

You nod in affirmation. Meanwhile, Charlie is already halfway around the Interloper's waist, enveloping the bottom half of the daemon. I don't know what he's planning, but he has your
nemesis out of the picture for the time being.

Frisk: “But it was his idea. ...and he pulled it off without me givin' it the ok. Really gave me a scare, y'know?”

Asriel: “...I never really understood why you kept him around. I mean, after all he did…”

Frisk: “What can I say? I'm a forgiving person, an' I've always gotten a return on my, uh, “investments”. ...gahd, that sounds wrong.”

Asriel: “...I guess I can't argue with that. I mean, if you weren't that kinda person…”

“...huh? What's that... Oh god, what now?!”

You feel a familiar distortion of time and space, not too far behind the Interloper and the one entangling him. We should probably step to the side, since whatever's coming is probably going to barrel right through us if we stay here.

What the hell is going on, Observer?!

I don't know, but I suspect it has something to do with Ben's absence. If the Interloper cast him out like he did me, the Cardinal probably picked him up. Which means- WOHHHHHHH SHIT BOI, LOOK AT THAT RIDE! JESUS IT'S RUN OVER THE INTERLOPER!

Frisk: “CHARLIE!”

Asriel: “No no NONONONONONOOOO!”

Oh don't worry, he'll be fine. He's mostly slime, he'll have no problem pulling himself together.

?????: “OY? What jus' happen'd?”

Behind the wheel of the makeshift steampunk hovercraft, there sits a large minotaur. Her hair and hide are as black as ravens, while her horns are white as snow, and as she stares through the windshield, her bright blue eyes look on in horror at the twisted, wretched form splayed out in front of the machine.

Holy shit is that-

Yup. That's Ben's “girlfriend”, Agnes Dunbar, a swarthy highlander from the late 19th century.

Ben: “Bloody hell, WHAT is THAT?!”

Frisk: “BEN!”

The sound of your voice immediately draws the attention of your old friend. In the blink of an eye, he has leapt out of the vehicle and is running towards you.

I rush to meet him, arms wide-open.

He embraces you in turn, as if he hasn't been you in a very long time.
Ben: “4 months... I thought I’d never see you again...”

Oh my god...

It certainly looks like it. And remarkably, in those four months he has done something that few sidhe have ever done: he's grown a beard! Just a short dark goatee, but a beard no less!

Frisk: “You're here now, buddy. That's all that matters...”

I'm just impressed that he's actually grown a beard. Seriously, such a thing is impossible for “purebred” sidhe, and even for half-blood princelings like Ben, growing a goatee takes some doing...

...Asriel is really confused at what he's seeing right now.

Asriel: “I- Frisk, who are these people?! Why d- why do they have a- the hell IS that thing?!”

Ben: “Oh, of course! You're the Asriel of this universe! I'm a friend of your w- ...your sis- ...your girlfriend? Am I- Am I right in my assumptions?”

Asriel doesn't know what to think right now. He saw this man get his head crushed, blown up, torn apart, and generally destroyed more times than he cares to count. And now here he stands, holding you close to him.

Frisk: “It's ok, Asriel. He's on our side.”

Ben: “...wait. Where's Charlie gotten to? Wasn't he with you when-”

A black, tar-like substance slurps out from under the hovercraft, forming a large blob at the passenger-side door.

Agnes: “Oh bloody hell, tha's a relief... You alright down there, lad?”

As the blob reforms, Agnes cannot help but feel slightly ill at the display. She knows full well that Charlie-boy is some sort of shapeshifter, but watching him change shape still makes her a little queasy.

I thought he was really dead... Charlie, you crazy sonofabitch.

You move to greet him, and once he fully reforms, you give him a big ol' hug.

Charlie: “Easy there, Frisk. You're not getting' rid of me that easy.”

Frisk: “Just- just don't scare me like that again, ok?”

Charlie: “As if I ever could. But after what happened here, I'm always gonna look twice before crossing the street. Getting hit by somethin' like that is NOT fun!”

Looking at the mysterious craft, you can't help but think of the old IXS Enterprise. The thick rings fore and aft give you the impression that, with enough power behind it, this craft could potentially go faster than light.
And funny enough, Charlie cannot help but chuckle as he looks upon the Crimson Chariot.

Charlie: “It's a crazy design, I know. We based it on the crashed Centauri ship near the Devil’s Steps, that's where the rings came from. Never did get it to the distortion levels we were hoping for, though.”

“...but I guess, eventually, Ben was able to get the damn thing working. Ain't that right, buddy?”

Ben: “You have no idea how hard I worked in order to make this thing work... But in the end, it paid off. We were able to reach the appropriate distortion levels that the Cardinal required, in order to move us outside of time and space...”

The Cardinal: *phew* “I dunno how you do it, Observer. The Power I had to expend... But you, you do it without breaking a damn sweat!”

Asriel: “HOLYCRAP!”

And out of the blue, our little red friend makes himself known. Because that's just how he rolls.

The Cardinal: “So, uh, I- WHOO momma, has someone been cookin' Mexican food or somethin'? What's with the-”

Frisk is close to critical LV. Thankfully we managed to way-lay the Interloper with words, rather than risk Frisk reaching LV 20.

The Cardinal: “Huh. I was wonderin' why you guys stopped fightin’. An' it's good that ya stopped when ya did.”

“Trust me, I've been at 20 at least once: nearly fried my damn mind to a crisp. Seriously, LV’s a helluva drug.”

Frisk: “Wait, you SURVIVED?!”

The Cardinal: “Only 'cause I'm a higher being. An' even then, it takes a lot to get back down from that level. Hell, some gods go over that cliff, an' that's it! They're GONE!”

“The fact YOU were even able to hold back at LV 19, well, that's mighty impressive I gotta tell ya. But after this, you seriously gotta take some time off. You gotta relax, kick back, an' get your ass some good ol' fashioned TLC. I mean, you got yourself a sweet an' carin’ partner-type already, so go on an’ start there.”

Bit of a problem, though. Her travels have generated a bit of an age gap, so it would be a little-

The Cardinal: “Weird. Gotcha. Besides, somehow I don't think Frisk’s gonna be “in the mood” for a loooong time, even if there weren't a gap like that.”

“...still, you could probably still cuddle or somethin'. I mean, there’s nothin' against that, is there? Or do folks believe cuddling to constitute “grooming” in the 2070s?”

...I honestly have no idea, and at this point I'm afraid to ask.
Asriel: “Really? We're gonna bring THAT up?”

“As...now I think about it, I think I remember talking to... Frisk, who was the bear-monster who went to law school?”

Frisk: “I... honestly don't remember his n- wait, I think- ...Barry Sterling? I think that's his name?”

Asriel: “Yeah, that's right! We actually had a talk with Barry about that kinda stuff, once. But it was mostly about the laws in New Deseret. I've got no idea how it works in the NCR.”

“Either way, I'm pretty sure the cops aren't gonna bust down our doors because of freakin' cuddling. Hell, with stuff like the Winterson Homestead scandal goin' on, I think the Rangers have MUCH bigger fish to fry. ...besides, unlike someone I used to know, Frisk never tried to manipulate me.”

...well. I hope that's cleared things up. Just be careful going forward, Frisk. I don't want to find you stuck on some registry due to a technicality.

Don't worry about me. We'll... we'll be fine.

Dialogue: Charlie & the Observer

Here's hoping they will be. But speaking of fine, here's someone who isn't: Flowey. He's not crying anymore, but he's looking a little wall-eyed. You could play The Sound of Silence over that thousand yard stare of his, and it would fit frighteningly well.

Charlie: “Flowey? ...you still with us, little buddy?”

The voice of someone he once loved, now much older, shakes Flowey out of his stupor of angst and uncertainty.

Flowey: “Charlie... I'm- I don't know what to do... I know we gotta get outta here but- ...I don't wanna make the same mistake I did last time.”

Charlie: “Wh- what mistake? ...seriously, I- I kinda missed that part.”

Flowey: “When I broke the Barrier. When I used the power of the human souls, and the soul of every monster in the Underground, I tried to send them back to their bodies...”

“It- it worked for the monsters, but for the humans... they were just dust and bones, Charlie. There was nothing left to sustain them, and they- I- I sent them all to HELL, Charlie! I thought they'd pass on to something better, but it only got worse after I let them go!”

...he couldn't have known.

And he didn't. At least, not until Asriel told him about what waits below, all those years ago. And if Flowey hadn't already been feeling terrible with his new-found font of emotion, that little detail really rubbed the salt into his wounds.

Flowey: “...this time, it's- it's even worse! Not because it's a lot more than six, but because I KNOW now! I know what'll happen to them if I let them go! I can't- I CAN'T! I've- I've hurt too many
people already! I can't let it happen again!"

An unpleasant whining noise leaves Flowey's mouth as he tries to muffle his screams of horror and frustration, knowing what will happen if he lets them all go, but also knowing what will happen if he doesn't. And he has no idea if there even is a third option to chase this time.

There's gotta be. It can't be a lose-lose scenario.

It all depends on what you are planning. Will you be the James Tiberius Kirk to this Kobayashi Maru of a situation? We'll find out shortly, as you bring Flowey closer to you.

Charlie: “...I know you think that there's no good way out of this. That we either keep fighting this thing 'til we can't fight anymore, or we send hundreds of innocent people to Hell...”

“...you got a quarter, Observer?”

The Observer: “Ahh, I see what you're planning. Give me a second, I think I have something around here.”

Just have to grab my wallet... Ngk ack-ack, grraaak- There it is. ...hmmm, which coin to choose...?

The Observer: “Ah, this will have to do. Somehow, I don't have a 50-pence piece handy, but I DO have a tenpence for the toss.”

Flowey: “Why are you doing this... I d- I don't wanna leave it up to chance. I have to make this decision myself...”

Charlie: “...oh Flowey... You always were an idiot, weren't you?”

Flowey winces at your harsh, but tragically apt words. You know something he doesn't, don't you?

Charlie: “Sometimes, we have to take the rolls life gives us.”

You take the tenpence from my hand. On one side, the face of Queen Elizabeth the Second, bearing the date of 2001, and on the other side, the words “TEN PENCE” hover above a lion wearing a crown. To you, this must seem like an antique, but for me it's just a slightly old tenpence.

I toss the coin into the air, catch it, and slap it down on my right hand.

Charlie: “But sometimes...”

You take your left hand away to reveal that the coin is laying tails side up. Only for it to raise up onto its edge as you shapeshift your right hand a little.

Charlie: “Sometimes you gotta bend the rules.”

“Flowey... give me the souls.”
That turns some heads. Flowey looks confused and reticent, while Asriel looks pretty displeased. He thinks you're going to do something stupid. Is he right?

I dunno... You tell me.

Asriel: “Flowey, whatever you do, DON'T give him the souls.”

“I dunno what you're planning, “brother”, but I'm not gonna stand by and let you do this-”

Charlie: “Really, Asriel? After all this time, you still don't trust me? After all I've DONE for you, all the- the- all the ways I've tried to help you-

Asriel: “You manipulated me, Charlie. You TORTURED me, just to save your own goddamn WORTHLESS skin!”

You feel the urge to slap him at this point, and almost do, but instead you hold the side of his face. You're too scared to try and break free, so you have a captive audience as you say what you've wanted to say.

Charlie: “...I only did that, so I could still be around to protect you. ...from HIM.”

Asriel: “B- bullSHIT you were protecting me from that bastard. You were working WITH him!”


“...I wasn't kidding when I said that he had me in his bed. That actually happened. ...but I did that for YOUR benefit. I hated letting that scumbag-”

It's ok, lad. Don't be afraid to cry, if you feel like you need to.

As if I need your permission.

Your hands move down to Asriel's shoulders, and he can feel your uncontrollable shaking as dark tears leak from your eyes. The teen Alice Cooper look is back in fashion, and Asriel can now feel your pain.

Charlie: “It hurt, Asriel. And not just where you think it did... It hurt to be USED like that, even when I didn't really understand why when it first started. But if sacrificing myself gave you time to recover, if it kept his hands off of you...”

“I'll admit that I wasn't the best brother. I wasn't the best influence on you, I'll never deny that. ...but if suffering under the Interloper meant that he wouldn't go after you, I would jump on that sword. I would go through a world of hurt, if it meant that you had a chance to recover...”

Charlie: “...look at me, Asriel. Do you think I'm lying to you? Have I EVER really lied to you?”

Asriel is horrified right now. And not by the way you look like a teenaged Alice Cooper. He knew that the Cabrapata was hurting you as well, but he never knew that it was-

Asriel: “WHY?! Why'd- Why didn't you tell me-”

Charlie: “I never found the right time to tell you. And when it was, I- I didn't want to ruin our free
time together. You were crying so much of the time, I didn't want you to cry over me too..."

This time it's Asriel who tries to slap you. And he succeeds, tears welling in his eyes as he does so.

Asriel: “WHAT THE HELL?! You let me believe that- that things were ok! But now you- you LIED to try and protect me?!!”

“CHARLIE, you FUCKING IDIOT!”

As he wraps his arms around you, he begins crying again. But this time, for the first time in centuries, he's crying over you. You got him into a horrible situation, yes. You had to torture him to stay around, yes. But now he knows about the sacrifices you made for him, really trying to make the most of a terrible situation, he finds it so hard to hate you right now.

Charlie: “…see, Asriel? Even when I don’t know what I’m doing, even when I have real shitty plans, I’m doing it for YOU. And I wouldn’t ask Flowey for something like this, if I didn’t think that it’d help you get outta here.”

“…but this time, I KNOW what I’m doing. I know a way that we can get out of here, AND save those souls! Just- just TRUST me, this time! I know, I know I don't have the best track record, but I KNOW that THIS TIME, it's gonna WORK!”

You feel a leaf touch your ankle, trying to get your attention.

Flowey: “…I- ...I'm with you, Charlie. I... Take care of Asriel for me, won't you?”

Asriel: “What- NO! Not like this!”

Charlie: “WHOA whoa whoa, I didn't say ALL the souls! YOU keep a hold of Asriel's soul, I take care of the human souls.”

Flowey: “OH, oh, I get it... ...I didn't get it at first, but I still get it.”

Flowey looks a little embarrassed at his misinterpretation of your intent.

Asriel: “God, Flowey, way to give me a goddamn heart attack!”

Flowey: “I- I- Can you BLAME me for being a little- Seriously Asriel, I'm- I'm not in the best place right now. I'm having trouble thinkin' straight...”

Charlie: “Lemme share the load, Flowey. You don't have to carry this burden anymore...”

As you reach down and hold the sides of Flowey's face, a series of multicoloured lights begin to emanate from his being. As he smiles warmly, souls of all colours begin to leave his body, and flow into your chest.

The power you feel, coursing through every fibre of your being... It almost feels a little too much, don’t you think?

Huh...? What is this... what is this feeling?

The near-constant rainfall abates to a trickle, before stopping altogether. On the horizon, you
hear an unnerving hum, accompanied by an equally unsettling heartbeat. And all the while, sparks of black and red dance off of your twitching body. Are you sure you can handle the power afforded to you, Charlie?

I can do this... I can DO this...

_Memento homo, Charlie. Remember, you are only a man. Despite your power, and your unique body, you are still only a man. By the power of the Aurigae, hold onto that knowledge._

Is... is this how Flowey felt, when he- Ohhh my goddd... this feels... I feel... ...it's A M A Z I N G

_Memento homo. For fuck's sake, MEMENTO HOMO. Remember what you are to do with this power._

Oh I know damn what I'm gonna do with it.

_I swear, if you turn into Giygas I'm going to- ...ok, I was joking, but this is NOT FUNNY Charlie. Filling the sky with a swirling blood vortex doesn't help anybody!_

...you're no fun.

_Wipe that weird look off of your face, young man. And while you're at it, wipe that creepy swirly face out of the sky as well._

Ugh, FINE.

_Good boy. ...now. What were you planning to do with all these souls now you're off your face on soulpower?_

...nguhhh...

_Oi. OI! Earth to Charlie! *clips Charlie round the ear*_

Owww! C'mon, you don't know how good this feels! Just bathing in it, it's like-

_Yes I know, it's tickling all the right spots in your brain. But seriously, just- Whatever you're planning to do, just DO IT._

_AUGGHRR! ALRIGHT! I'M DOING IT! HERE! HERE'S WHAT I'M GONNA DO!_

...you open your inventory, and- sonofabitch. Soulstones? That is your grand plan?

It's gonna work though, isn't it?

_I don't doubt it, I was just thinking that you had something more elaborate up your sleeves, like making new changeling bodies using bits of your goop-_ 

I thought about that. But I'd run out before we were a quarter of the way there. Syrinx insisted that I play it safe with a buncha soulstones.

_The Interloper: “Impossible... Where did you KEEP those things?”_
JEEZIS-

Well shit, he's back in one piece again. Not even a car crash can destroy a daemon, though it took him a lot longer to reform this time.

Charlie: “Oh, you know where~”

Oh that's just naaaasty. I know you're trying to distract him, but-

The Interloper: “Wait, seriously? But you're- do you even have a GLYRK-”

Well nevermind, it worked. While he was trying to figure out if you were actually being serious, Ben stabbed him through the back of the head with his sword. Ben then proceeds to drag the Interloper away from you and your friends, before pulling the sword back out and- Yup. Ben is hacking the Interloper to bits, and he's absolutely fucking livid. Can't blame him in the slightest.

The ensuing cacophony of butchery and angry shouting is enough to wake Sans up from his nap in the back seat. ...who was sleeping in the back of the Crimson Chariot? Wait, did he- OH JESUS CHRIST I THINK HE DID.

Wh- What are you talking about?

Did you notice, while the Interloper was doing his little “my wish is your command” speech, that Sans had mysteriously vanished? I know I didn't, I was busy being sickened by the Interloper's attempts at getting his prey to cooperate.

...you gotta be kidding me.

I shit ye not, lad. Unless I'm mistaken, Sans got cast out like Ben did, presumably ending up in Wellsverne Gothic, and-

sans: “...hey there, kids. sorry it took so long.”

Frisk: “OH CRAP, SANS!”

Sans walks over to us, steering clear of Ben's ultimate smackdown, an apologetic look on his face. And some fashionable late 19th century attire in place of his usual Lebowski-esque laissez-faire getup.

sans: “'s been a crazy coupla months, y'know. never though it'd end up like this.”

“...you kids are ok, right? i mean, it's-”

Frisk: “-nnnot really been that long for us, actually. Probably ten minutes, fifteen?”

“...looks like you've been on the slow path, Sans. You and Ben. ...speakin' of that, I hope you two have been playin' nice.”

Sans shrugs, beaming as he does.

sans: “you really know how to pick 'em, kid. he's a tough crowd to please, but damn it all if that guy
ain't smart! seriously, he was tryin' to make a goddamn runabout in his garage! with steampunk technology!

Charlie: “I- uh, WE were tryin' to make a runabout. ...please tell me he didn't take all the credit for our work.”

Sans slaps you on the back, as heartily as he can manage.

sans: “naaaah he caught me up on everything. ...he also caught me up on what you've been up to, Frisk.”

“turns out i'm not the only one who's been on the slow path. i mean jeez, look at ya! you're nearly as tall as Papyrus now!”

“...everyone's worried about you, y'know. you weren't holdin' up so well last time i saw you...”

Frisk: “...I had time to resolve it. But even then, it's probably as good as it's ever gonna be.”

“I'm just happy to be back, Sans. It's been too damn long.”

Sans nods in response. ...I know this is enrapturing, Charlie, but do make sure to transfer those souls. The sooner we can leave this place, the better.

...damn. Yeah, you're right. I'm on the case, chief.

sans: “five years, if you've told Ben the truth. five years in the distant past, with an alternate royal family. ...you've been on one helluva journey, haven't you?”

Frisk: “...yeah. It's been a long road... getting' from there to here.”

Sans frowns slightly, before chuckling dryly. He's not the biggest fan of Enterprise or Russell Watson, but he still appreciates the reference. If she'd made a reference to Discovery, however... she'd be in for a bad time.

Ugh, don't remind me. Honestly, that show made early Enterprise look pretty great in comparison. ...still, I kinda liked Enterprise. The later seasons were pretty good, and the Earth-Romulan War arc, lemme tell you-

Ooof, don't, it'll only break my heart. ...in my timeline, Enterprise never made it past Season 4, and had a pretty shit finale in the form of “These Are The Voyages...”.

Wait, seriously? They cancelled Enterprise when it was just getting good?! Please tell me they at least aired the Doctor Who crossover episode...

Never happened, sadly. In my timeline, the TARDIS never landed aboard the NX-01.

Ffffuuuck... That's real depressing, Observer. I feel like you woulda loved that episode.

And you'd be right. I was pretty big into Doctor Who around that time. Not so much anymore, since I lost interest a few years ago, but I still remember the halcyon days of Christopher Eccleston, David Tennant and Matt Smith as the Doctors of my childhood. And Peter Capaldi was pretty cool too, though I'm not so sure about the Thirteenth Doctor.

How can you not like Idris Elba? He's IDRIS ELBA!
No such luck I'm afraid, no Idris Elba for my timeline's Doctor Who. Jodie Whittaker's taken the reins over here, though honestly I don't really care either way. I stopped watching partway into Capaldi's tenure, never really picked it back up again.

...man. And I thought this world sucked...

Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer

As Charlie transfers soul after soul from his body, the stability of this world begins to falter. United, it stands. But divided...

I won't lie, I woulda liked it if Charlie told me about this earlier. I don't get why he thinks it's ok to let us stew like this.

Well, it did offer a little dramatic tension, however unnecessary. That thrill of uncertainty when you think “ohhh, we might not get out of this intact guys”. Or maybe he did it so that you guys could have your moments, since he was so confident that we had the time for such things. ...or he just did it for shits and giggles, I don't know.

...I'm just glad we actually have a way out. We can split hairs over it once we're in California.

...huh. I think Charlie's getting a little too into the whole “let's erase this world” thing.

Oh god, really?

I think so. He's looking alarmingly happy as he transfers those souls, looking up to witness the deteriation of this place. The creepy red tint is fading, along with the rain and high clouds, with each soul he transfers. We saw bits of this as Flowey transferred the souls to him, but nothing as significant as this.

Y'know what, though? I'm happy too. Let's leave this world behind, and move on to... uh, home.

Almost had it there. But we get the gist. Meanwhile, Asriel approaches from behind and wraps his arms around you.

Oh hello? What's this?

Asriel: “...I think I was wrong about him, Frisk. Even after all this time, after all he did... There's still a good person inside of him.”

Frisk: “Yeah... I guess being inside me all these years had an effect on him. Though I don't think I can take all the credit. There was good in him before I even met him, it just took a while to build on that with, well, me being me.”

The world flickers and hiccups, as the power within Charlie withers down to normal levels. It's only a matter of time...
Frisk: “...say, Asriel?”

Asriel: “...yeah?”

Frisk: “...after what happened between us... Do you still think there's- Is there still a place for us? I mean- you know, where we were before all of this?”

Asriel feels more than a little uneasy as you bring the topic up. Though it's been a long time for you, the memory of what happened is still quite fresh for him.

Asriel: “I- ...I- ...th- that all depends on you, Frisk.”

“...but as far as going past that, well... It's gonna be a while for the both of us, now.”

You sigh in acknowledgement. It's already been a long road for you, but you're both going to be on that road for the foreseeable future.

Frisk: “...I'm ready whenever you are, sweetie. We're in this for the long haul, you an' I.”

“...besides, I've been waiting five years for this. I think I can wait a little longer for us.”

And with that, you kiss him on the side of his muzzle. After all that you've both been through, there's still a happy ending waiting for you.

Dialogue: The Interloper & the Observer

As the sidhe leaves you in pieces, you know in your heart that you have failed. You had hoped to escape the cycle, but all you did was hurt a great many good people.

You...

What a foolish creature you were. Going up against someone with the power to split timelines, you were always going to lose eventually. And in Frisk's case, she went all over time and space trying to find a way to stop you. Despite your greatest efforts, you now have an important lesson to learn. Don't fuck with Frisk. Don't fuck with her friends. And most important of all...

DON'T. FUCK. WITH. ME.

...what are you, Outsider? What are you really?

I'M YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE. ...but at the end of the day, I can still offer you some small sliver of solace.

When you return to your plane of existence, take your experiences to heart. Be better than what you were. Seek the real root of the problem. And most of all, find a way to hammer your sword into a ploughshare.

After all, anyone can become a good person, if they try hard enough... Think on that, as this world collapses around you. Let it motivate you, as you see the people you hurt begin to walk their
long road of recovery. And as for your failures... Think of all the things you could have done back home, in the time you wasted up here...

...this... isn't over...

**OH but it is, daemon. This is the last that we will see of you. Your part in this story is finally over. Good fucking riddance, numbnuts.**

Chapter End Notes

It is done. After all those long years, it is finally done.

But I know, deep down, that I am not yet done. There are still two more instalments left: one for the heartfelt reunion and Escape From New Deseret, and one last follow-up episode to wrap up all the loose ends. It's been a long road, yes, but there are still a few miles left before we park this car for good...
Something's Gone Wrong, Guys

Chapter Summary

Uh, hey, Cardinal here. I know this was supposed to be the wind-down episode, and it still kinda is, but something's happened with the Observer. I can't reach him anywhere, and by the looks of it he's not gonna be back for a while.

I managed to retrieve his logs up to the point he disappeared, so there's still a chapter goin' up, but I think it's gonna be a while before I can track him down. Gods, I hope he's ok...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer

**Florian:** "Frisk? C'mon, don't do us like this..."

Nmhhh... Five more minutes, please...

...the dark, rich aroma of fresh coffee tickles at your nostrils, a sign that-

Ohhh no, I ain't falling for that shit again. It was bad enough when Charlie did it, but- ...oh.

_You open your eyes to see a hot cup of dark red coffee being offered to you by a small goat-child in a blue and white striped shirt. This time, it's very much real._

**Frisk:** “…thanks, kiddo.”

...I reach for the cup of coffee and ruffle Florian's hair. Then, I give the cup a blow-over, before takin' a sip. ...huh. 's not half bad! Slight cherry-ish taste to it, though there's something else- Mhhh, somethin' slightly off about it?

...lemme guess: replicated?

_Replicated. As for the hint of something cherry-like, that would be the cascara aspect to it. Did I ever tell you about kherif?_

I... Actually, I don't think you ever told me about it.

_Well, it's the basthari way of making coffee. Whereas most human coffee distributors just process the seed of the coffee fruit, the basthari decided to make use of the “cherry” part of the fruit as well, since they ended up producing a lot of coffee after the Arokebian Exchange. As a result, a lot of basthari have their kherif maroon, combining the black coffee with the red tea derived from_
the coffee cherries. That's what you're drinking right now: replicated maroon kherif.

...neat! Other than the replicator taint, I really like this!

I had a feeling you'd appreciate it.

...I guess I passed out again, huh?

Pretty much. Agnes had to lug you all the way to the roof, you were such a heavy sleeper. Though that was probably just the power armour.

Yeah, I guess... But wait, is everyone else ok?

They're fine. Charlie-boy is currently resting, Ben's been taking paracetamol for his phantom headache, Sans is sleeping again, and-

Asriel: *yawwwwn* “Hey.”

Asriel never left your side once Agnes set you down in Sick Bay. ...well, he did leave for a bit to get some proper clothes from Ben's stash. Hence the fact he's wearing a dress shirt and a green waistcoat. And he had his value meal, if the empty fast food packaging is any indication.

Frisk: “...hey.”

Asriel: “...I guess I never really thanked you for-”

You bring Asriel in closer, and- Yup. You kiss him warmly on the mouth. Yup. This is happening.

Florian: “Oh brother...”

As heartwarming as this moment is, Florian's still a little boy, still in that “ew gross cooties” phase when it comes to romance. In a way, it reminds me of an old poem I once heard:

Daniel Avidan: “When you're a kid you think girls are yucky, but when you get older you realise they're-”

I get it. ...and if you get one, you're lucky.

Frisk: “...that's all the thanks I need, sweetie.”

Florian: “Baaaarf. ...nah, I'm happy for you guys.”

“...still, get a room why don't ya?”

Asriel looks a little perturbed at his parallel. The sass in this little boy is a little too much for him right now.

Asriel: “I guess there's no beatin' around the bush here. Why is there another me here? Was he-”

Frisk: “Poor kid had his whole life destroyed.”

Asriel: “...what?”
Florian looks a little anxious, as you bring up his past.

Frisk: “You know Violet, right? Did anyone introduce you to the rest of the crew?”

Asriel: “Uh, no... But she's the, uh, the lady in a Xenomorph suit, right?”

Frisk: “Right. Well, she's the one who found him, while she was out walking the worlds an' doin' her thing. She ended up takin' her with him, since there was nothing left for him in his own world.”

Asriel: “N- nothing left? Nothing at all?”

With a deep breath, Florian answers with:

Florian: “Everyone's dead, Asriel.”

“In my world, everyone got killed by cultists and- and giant spiders... They tried to use the CORE, to try an' bring my world into the web of- well, it was a giant evil spider god from space. But Violet and I managed to stop them.”

“...we had to blow up the CORE, though. To save the world, we had to destroy the entire Underground... And that was just what happened in my world. Other worlds had it way worse that mine...”

Asriel looks really sad at this brief synopsis of Florian's story. He leaves your side, and gives Florian a big ol' hug.

Asriel: “It's ok, Asriel. You're safe here.”

Florian looks a little overwhelmed, but he tries to be tuff about it.

Florian: *sniff* “Thanks...”

“...but please, don't call me Asriel. I know, I might seem like I'm “Asriel as they come”, but please... call me Florian.”

Asriel is taken aback for a moment, before a slight chuckle escapes his lips.

Asriel: “Heh, that's not half bad...”

“...soooo, Florian. You, uh, come up with that name yourself?”

Florian: *tch* “I wish I was that smart. No, that's- uhhh, about that... Someone else came up with the name, and they, uh, they wanna talk to you.”

Frisk: “He's got a human soul inside him. The, uh, the big sister of his world's Chara. She's... she's the reason why he isn't a flower anymore.”

Asriel looks up in surprise, looking to a glass tank full of black goop, then back to Florian, then back to the tank, then back to Florian.

Asriel: “Ohhh... So that means-”
Florian's eyes glow light blue, and Mary-Ann decides to speak her piece.

Mary-Ann: “...are you alright? How are you feeling?”

Asriel: “WHATTHEF.”

“...s-sorry, I wasn't expecting that- No Flowey, she's from the other world, not this one.”

“Uhhh... Hi? I'm... *sigh* I'm still piecing things together. It's just so much to take in, y'know? All of this stuff happened when Frisk was away, on top of... on top of what HE did.”

Asriel clutches his head, an expression of fear in his eyes.

Frisk: “Sweetie, sweetie it's ok. He can't hurt us anymore...”

Still terrified, Asriel slowly turns towards you. His fingers touch the left side of his head, tapping the ports on his neural interface. Hmmm...

Asriel: “...I can still hear him... He's not giving up-”

Frisk: “Oh FUCK THAT. C'mere.”

You grab Asriel by the horns, and place your palm on his neural interface. The golden-green light of the Nodens-Oztalun Purgative dances across the side of Asriel's interface, as you grease the last foothold that the Interloper has into Asriel's mind. You can barely hear a faint and quickly-fading “I WILL HAVE MY REEEEENGE!” in your mind's ears, and that is the last you will ever hear of the Interloper.

Asriel: “...he's gone... Flowey, he's- he's finally gone!”

For resolving your quest to remove the Interloper from your lives, you earn a heartfelt hug and kiss on the cheek from an overjoyed Asriel. ...and you lose a few XP.

Frisk: “...I should probably get outta bed. Where're my-”

“Darn, did I seriously sleep in my clothes again? UGHHH...”

“...alright, first things first, I'm gonna go have a shower. Sweetie, could you put these things in the laundry while I'm in there?”

Asriel: “As you wish...”

Hauling yourself out of bed, you make your way to the master bathroom.

...I actually don't remember where that is.

Head down the access corridor towards the crew quarters at the bow of the ship, then take the second door on the right. Also, first door on the right is the utility room for all your laundry needs.

Right, got it. ...you seem to know an awful lot about this ship. You been on it before?

Not in person, no. But I have seen it through the eyes of one Asterion Abydos on many an
occasion. After all, once upon a time this was his ship.

Lemme guess: minotaur?

Actually he was Nimhish. ...no, I jest, he was a minotaur. Tenth king of the Abydos Dynasty no less, and indeed the last king, since he abdicated some time in the 1960's (Imperial Reckoning) after having had quite enough of the “old bulls' club” that was the Minoan Republic Council.

And honestly I can't blame the old man. I'd want to quit the throne if I had to deal with self-interested old bastards for the past 40-50 years, working with a bunch of old bulls playing at running the Republic in a way that served their interests first. But hey. Thaaaat's politics.

Damn. That's, uh, that's a hell of a thing.

Indeed it was. He made a big show of it, too. He crushed the Onyx Laurels under-hoof as he left the Senate building, took his children with him as he left for Arcadian space, and later released a tell-all set of dossiers with all the dirt he'd gathered on his fellow Councillors. And after nearly half a century of arguing and bargaining with his “peers” since he reclaimed the throne of his forefathers, he had A LOT of dirt on them. ...come to think of it, if you had the time to sift through the ship's databanks and sift through old Minoan computer code, you could probably find a digital copy of the Councilgate Papers yourself.

...wow. I, uh, I probably wouldn't know where to start with that. But it sounds pretty juicy, so I'll probably give it a try.

You won't be disappointed. Ok I lie, you may be disappointed in the Councillors and Minoan culture in general. But as far as political intrigue goes, you could probably set aside an afternoon of two to deep dive into nearly half a century of under the table deals, propaganda, embezzlement, pederasty, and all manner of despicable yet juicy gubbins that would make you want to see the Senate burn to the ground.

...oookay, I'm gonna go shower now.

Sure thing boss. See you when you've freshened up!

Meanwhile, back in Sick Bay...

Dialogue: Charlie & the Observer

Howww's my favourite changeling doing, eh?

...fine, until you showed up. Nah, I'm just ribbin' ya. I was done settling anyways. What's new with you?

Not much, just chilling. And congratulating Frisk on a job well done. You know, the usual.

...how about you, though? You holding up ok?

...I'll be honest with you, I've never felt better. We fucking DID IT! We saved Asriel! And with the
way things are going... I think him an' I might be able to reconcile, after all these years.

*Well, I'm glad you're feeling optimistic. Even though he knows what you've been through, it's still going to take some time for his heart to catch up to his head. After all, it isn't so easy to change how you feel even when presented with new knowledge, at least in my experience, and he's got a lot to digest before you can truly go back to being brothers. If such a thing is even possible at this juncture, of course.*

Well, like you said, I'm feeling optimistic about our chances. Even if it's gonna be a long road, I've got faith.

...faith of the heart. There, I said it.

*Oddly appropriate. ...it's pretty crazy, actually. Despite that song having very little to do with Star Trek, it's been burned into my brain as being “Trek”. Though I still think Archer's Theme would probably have been a more appropriate thing to play during the title sequence, just so we're on the same page. Faith of the Heart seems more appropriate for a motivational Star Trek AMV, if that makes any sense.*

Yeah, yeah I got you. ...still better than whatever the hell Discovery had for a title theme, though.

*I know, right? What the hell were they thinking?! I mean, when Faith of the Heart feels more Trekky than something officially made for- Seriously! It sounds less like it's trying to hype me up for some good old Star Trekking, and more like it's going to sell me fucking life insurance or something! And don't even get me STARTED on whatever the hell that title sequence is supposed to be.*

I won't if you don't.

*Sorry, it's just that everything about Discovery is WRONG. It's like- OH MY GOD. I just remembered what it reminds of. It took too many cues from Enterprise and the Kelvin timeline, rather than any of the earlier series! Much like Thief 2014 took too many cues from Thief: Deadly Shadows, rather than looking back on Dark Project and Metal Age like it should have! God... FUCK! There are so many bloody parallels!*

...that makes a depressing kinda sense, I never thought about it like that.

*Oof, it just gets under my skin it does... RRHH!*  

...yeah, anyway, I guess I should get out of bed too. *sigh*

*Trouble, Charlie?*

Welllll it's, uh, it's complicated.

*It's to do with your sleeping situation, isn't it? If so, I think I know what's eating at you.*

Oh, and what would that be, Observer?

*You miss actually being able to sleep in a bed, being able to lay down and drift off like you did when you were still a solid. It takes a degree of concentration to maintain a physical form, and*
while you're asleep you're not focusing on holding your shape, reducing your body to its protoplasmic rest state which-

-means that I end up soaking into the bed... I learned that the hard way, believe me.

Mmmh. And as a result, you're sad about not being able to snuggle up in a duvet or recline on a mattress when you're trying to fall asleep. That in order to sleep safely, you need a watertight container like, well, this old fish tank, or a bathtub.

That's- yeah, that's pretty much it. ...it really does suck, y'know? I'll never be able to fall asleep in someone's arms, or wake up to see them layin' next to me, or- ...as cool as it is to be a changeling, I miss so much from when I was flesh an' bone. I know, I can do SO many things I couldn't do when I was still human, but sometimes... Sometimes I wish I was a “solid” again.

I can totally understand that. But to be fair, even though you've spent many months as a changeling already, I imagine you've still got a ways to go yet. I don't know where the limits are for you, but for all we know you might still be a novice at this, maybe an intermediate if we're being generous.

What're you getting at?

What I'm saying is that, with more years of training and experience under your belt, maybe one day you'll be able to maintain your shape while sleeping? It might be a blue sky long shot, but with a body like yours, who knows what you could do in 5 years?

And considering how good you are at maintaining such a relatively complex shape as that of a 19 year old pretty boy, complete with a finely nuanced and handsome visage, I'd say you're doing very well already! Hell, even Odo had trouble with imitating faces, and he was BORN a changeling!

So if you ask me, I think you'll be able to emulate solids better and better as you keep practising, honing your skills, automating certain processes, what have you. And hey, maybe one day you'll be able to process human food again?

I can only hope... Thanks for the, uh, the pep talk.

Ahhh, don't mention it.

...you hear soft weeping coming down the corridor leading to the crew quarters. Despite his intent to stay strong for Frisk, it sounds like Asriel is, well, not handling things as well as we'd hoped.

Damn... I leave the tank, assume my usual shape, and head out of Sick Bay. If he needs a shoulder to cry on, I'm gonna be there for him.

As you make your way down the corridor, you hear a sudden *pop* come from the Crew Quarters, followed by shouts of surprise.

Please tell me somebody just opened a bottle of champagne.

???????: “I'm- I'm sorry, I don't understand...”
If that voice is any indication, I don’t think that Buck’s Fizz is on the agenda right now.

Whatever that is, Toriel’s gonna need one of them once we’re done explaining this to her... I dunno if I should- Oh god, Florian’s in there. This is gonna be weird.

Truth. So it's probably best that you don't show your face right away. ...come to think of it, this might just be the perfect opportunity for you to flex your changeling muscles, and imitate someone else. Though probably not Frisk. I don’t think she’ll appreciate you pretending to be her, even if you’re familiar with her-

Don’t have to tell me twice. Besides, I think I know who I want to imitate.

...you're not going to tell me who it is, are you?

It'll be a surprise for everyone. Here goes everything...

Toriel: “I... I don't understand... My child, what is- Why-”

sans: “thing is, Tori, Frisk's been real busy since she, uh, threw herself into the CORE.”

Toriel: “But- HOW? How is she still-”

sans: “that i don't really know. but what i do know is that she's been travellin' between worlds for the past five years. an' considerin' that she's already back here, i don't think she took a, uh, linear path.”

Asriel: “…it's true, Mom. That's why she left us, so she could find a way to fix what happened to me…”

Toriel: “…I just- I don't quite understand...”

sans: “why there's another version of your kid here? that's because there are a lot more worlds out there. an' in some of 'em, there are other Asriels, like this little guy here.”

Here's the window. In I go.

The main door to Crew Quarters slides open, revealing Toriel and Sans standing in the middle of the room, while Asriel and Florian are seated on the couch. Behind them is a massive screen that mimics a window, currently showing- Ahhh, here's a familiar sight. A dark grey moon sits streaked with cracks and splotches of red and green, while a fully-litten gas giant of sandy-golden colouration hangs in the starry void behind it. I believe this particular wallpaper is “Aries and Chrysomallus in Summer”, displaying the home worlds of the Arien basthari, but that's beside the point.

I clear my throat, to attract everyone's attention.

Wait a second-

Odo: “Pardon the interruption, but might I ask how you got aboard this vessel?”

Oh fuck me.
This is happening.

*Jesus Christ...*

**Toriel:** “Oh! I'm terribly sorry, but who are you?”

“**Odo**”: “Excuse me, but *I'm* the one asking questions here. As Chief of Security, I would appreciate it if you let me know HOW exactly you got aboard this vessel without my knowledge.”

*You cross your arms and look witheringly at Toriel and Sans. You're enjoying this, aren't you?*

I won’t lie, I’m trying pretty hard not to smile.

*Join the club. I'm trying not to laugh right now.*

**sans**: “I know a good shortcut when I see one. That's how we got aboard your ship.”

*You throw your hands up and roll your eyes, before groaning with exasperation as you facepalm.*

“**Odo**”: “And here I thought I'd checked everything...”

I tap the comms panel on the wall, and try to contact Ben.

“**Odo**”: *sigh* “Odo to Benjamin, we have a situation in Crew Quarters. It seems we have some uninvited guests, and I'd appreciate it if you kept an eye on them for the time being.”

**sans**: “Hey whoa constable, there's no need for this-”

“**Odo**”: “Oh? And how can I be assured that you won't cause any trouble?”

**sans**: “Scout's honor?”

*He winks as he says this. ...I think he knows, but he's not telling.*

I leer disapprovingly at him.

“**Odo**”: “Well, you have to forgive me if I don't take you at your word. I hold a dim view of breaking and entering aboard this ship, so don't think that you'll get any special treatment.”

*Ben enters shortly after you contacted him, and his eyes fixate on Toriel.*

**Ben**: “Sorry about this, your highness. It is just a formality.”

*He shoots a sideways look at you, as if to ask “what the hell are you doing?”*. And honestly I can’t blame him, even though I know full well why you’re doing this.

“**Odo**”: “Ahhh, good. Now, keep an eye on them for me, Benjamin. If you will excuse me, I have some laundry to attend to.”

*And with that you head into the utility room. How does this help us progress, again?*
I guess I'm stalling for time while Frisk's in the shower. Speaking of which, do you have any, uh... any fashion advice?

*Je suis désolé?*

I mean, uh, we've got a replicator in here too. And, well, it's got a lotta entries for different clothes, so...

*I assume you have her measurements?*

Oh, do I ever?

...rüüight.

Oh come on, I've been living in her body for over a decade! I'm pretty sure I know the sizes of her clothes.

*That... actually makes an awful lot of sense, even if that came out a little creepy. As for picking out a new outfit for her, I honestly think that you'd be better off having Ben do that.*

Wellll that's a nice idea, but there's two problems with that. One: Ben's busy keeping an eye on Mom an' Sans. Two: he'll probably just cover her in waistcoats an' call it a day.

*I suppose that's reasonable. Or at least, one of them is. But fine. Let's tap in her measurements, and set up the fashion hologram. Impromptu fashion montage, GO!*

Uh oh. What have I done?!

*Cue a montage of Charlie, still imitating Odo from Deep Space Nine, picking out an appropriate new outfit for Frisk while her “classic look” is in the wash. We decide to avoid waistcoats for the time being, but we did consider a long sleeve shirt for one of the outfits. At some point, we decide to set up multiple outfits and let Frisk pick her favourite. The montage ends with the cargo bay doors opening above what appears to be a Volkswagen Type 2 on the road below, utilizing a tractor beam to drag it up into the ship. ...wait, what?*

**Dialogue: Ben & the Observer**

*Ho there, how are things going?*

Observer! It has been too long, old friend.

*I can rightly imagine. Nice beard, by the way.*

Ah, thank you! It took some doing, but I feel like I've managed to cultivate a decent “Riker”, you know?

...son of a bitch, you're right. I don't know how I didn't catch it before, but you're definitely rocking an excellent Riker, or at the very least a good Sam Strippin. I reckon it took a lot of effort
to grow it out, especially considering your, well- You know what I mean. Purebred sidhe usually can't grow a beard to save their fuzzy white hides, since certain aspects of their “humanity” are somewhat diluted due their somewhat elitist and exclusive genealogy.

Indeed. Being a “mongrel” isn't so bad, especially when it allows you to grow a beard.

Damn straight. And it's a joy to see that you can grow it well.

...oh, right! About the Queen. She was a little paranoid that Frisk tried to “replace” her boy by bringing Florian into the picture, but I managed to allay her concerns. And in a way, I think she's taken a shine to the boy. After all, in a way he is her son.

In some regards, yes, but as a parallel there's no proper relation. ...come to think of it, did Florian tell her about his tragic past yet?

The boy moved her to tears, if I'll be honest. She's holding both him and Asriel in her arms, and there's no sign that she's letting them go any sooner.

...well, at least they're on the same page. But what of Asriel's situation? I imagine that's the first question she would have had on her mind, were it not for Florian's presence.

From what I gathered, Sans told her about what he saw during Frisk's confrontation with the Interloper. At least, what he saw before his displacement into my world. But what little he conveyed in turn moved Toriel to tears.

Asriel: “M-mom, I'm so- I'm so sorry Mom, I screwed up...”

Toriel: “Don't say such things, Asriel! None of this was your fault!”

Asriel: “BUT IT IS! If I hadn't gotten the implant installed, none of this would have happened!”

Asriel turns his head and strokes the left side of it, his hair on that side being swept over in a style that- ...I don't know the exact name of that particular style, but it reminds me of Game Master Adam Koebel. I recall that he had a similar thing going on back in 2017.

Ah, the “druid's combover”? It's a common style amongst the druids of my world, shaving and combing one side to expose their communion talismans.

Ahhh, now I remember. Getting a talisman installed was the only way to commune with the machine lifeforms of your world, at least until the Great Expression-

Asriel: “I- I didn't know what I was getting into, but I shoulda played it safe! I let that THING into my head! I-”

Toriel stares at the left side of her son's head, eyes wide with a great and palpable unease. But she is not focusing on the ports or carbon-fibre plating. Her eyes are dead set on the golden-green seven-pointed star burned upon the interface, complete with a leering eye at the heart of the star. Something about this is damningly familiar to her...
Toriel: “Gods, she actually- ...my child, where- Did Frisk tell you how she came to acquire this power?”

Asriel: “I- ...I don't know, Mom. I never asked her.”

Florian: “I think she said that she, uh... She learned it from the Asriel of another world. The, uh, a world where he was saved by this kid called Julian? Was that his name?”

Julian? Surely he's not talking about Doctor Bashir, is he?

Not in the slightest. But Feldstein Prime is the reality where Frisk learned to perform the Nodens-Oztalan Purgative, from an Asriel who was besties with young master Julian Graves.

...that's your cue to confirm Florian's story.

Ben: “That it was. No relation to the Deep Space Nine character, of course.”

You wink at Sans, letting him know that you know too. He's a little surprised at this, but takes it in his stride.

...ahhh, I actually remember now. Frisk talked to me about her “Quantum Leap” phase, where she was body-hopping between alternate versions of herself in order to- ...parallel versions of herself-OH.

There are varying degrees of parallelism, mind you. Sometimes they're practically the same save for a swapped chromosome, like with Robert and Rosalind Lutece, while at other times there are tangential constants that are nonetheless strong enough to-

Violet is a parallel version of Frisk?!

Just barely. There are a LOT of variables between them, but they share just enough constants to technically qualify as parallels. But beyond those common threads of familiarity, they're distinctly their own people.

Bloody hell... I don't know how I didn't notice it sooner.

The sound of heavy footsteps draw closer, along with slightly less heavy hoofsteps. I think I know who was driving that restored hippie van.

What- “hippie van”? What are you-

Agnes: “Sir? SIR!”

OH. Ohhh, is that-

The main door slides open, and- Ooof, his horns scrape against the doorframe. The old man always forgets to duck his head when entering a room, but right now that doesn't deter him.

Asgore: “My boy! Where-”

Asriel: “Dad!”
I step out of the king's way as he walks over to Asriel. ...I can't say I've ever seen him wearing that kind of shirt before, though.

**The pink aloha? That's his casual outfit nowadays: big navy-purple jeans and a pink aloha. ...oh, and as Asriel runs to his father, Asgore sweeps him up in a big hug. As Agnes enters the room, she bows her head so that her horns, despite being measurably smaller, don't hit the top of the doormat.**

Asgore: “It's ok, Asriel. I'm here now...”

*Florian looks even more uneasy now. He looked uneasy when his mother appeared out of nowhere, alongside the smiley trashbag who gave him trouble in previous resets, but now his father is here as well... Given that everyone died in his world, seeing them alive again is messing with him, to put it lightly. It didn't hit him as hard when he saw Frisk, since she looked very different to the little boy that Florian knew, but this time it's a little too much for him. He's probably going to burst into tears when he meets this world's Papyrus...*

Mmmmmh. Quite. The poor lad has a long way to go, to put it lightly. But at least he has people who care about him, so it won't be so hard.

*Maybe. Though keeping in mind that Florian was Flowey once upon a time, and that he did some terrible things as a flower, I imagine seeing these people alive again is particularly painful for him...*

Oberon's hooks, is there no end to the misery?

*Lighten up, mate. It might be rough for him, but things can only get better from here. The time for fight and flight are far behind them, and now is a time for healing, for licking their wounds and nuzzling their loved ones. A time for soaking in a hot perfumed bath, with a copy of American Gods and a six pack of beer. A time for curling up on the sofa with a king-size pizza and a bottle of lambrini, for sharing an oversized blanket while watching old re-runs of Scrubs, Friends and Seinfeld. It is stuff like this that can help heal heart and mind, numbing the pains of one's ordeals with creature comforts and the finer things in life. And in this regard, Asriel, Florian, Frisca and Charlie will need their fair share of TLC and R&R, before they can truly resume their happy endings.*

Agnes: “Ben? Are you- Are you crying?”

Am I? ...oh. It seems that I am.

*Aw, bless. ...sounds like Frisk's done with her shower. I'd best- Ah, looks like Charlie's got the right idea, bringing two towels with him as he moves to knock on the bathroom door.*

**Dialogue: Charlie & the Observer**

Constant.

Observer.
Having fun, are we?

More or less. I rap on the door with my knuckles.

“Odo”: “Towels for you, Miss Rivera-”

Frisk: “JEEZIS- Uh, I m- Th- thanks, Constable!”

The bathroom door slides open slightly, and as ample steam pours out, a single arm pokes out to grab the towels from you. She's definitely been indulging in a “Hollywood shower”, with that much moisture in the air.

It figures, I suppose. California's in her blood.

Toriel: “Frisk! Frisk, my child, I really must talk with you-”

Frisk: “In- in a minute, Tori! I'm, uh, not dressed properly!”

The door slides shut, and we are left once more with an awkward silence.

Asriel: “…it's gonna be a while, I think.”

Oh right, that reminds me...

“Odo”: “Oh, and by the way? Since your old clothes are in the washer, I took the liberty of putting together some new attire. I wasn't sure which was best for you, so I've set out multiple outfits for you to choose from.”

Frisk: “Aw, thanks Odo!”

You sigh as you turn to face the group.

“Odo”: “…I have to agree. She'll need ample time to get ready. ...humanoids, am I right?”

The only response you get is a roll of the eyes from Ben and a “seriously?” look from Florian and Asriel. Probably not the best of jokes, I have to admit, even if it's in-character.

“Odo”: “…never mind.” *muted, incoherent grumbling*

A couple of minutes later, Frisk emerges from the steamy bathroom with a towel on her head and a towel around her body. Asgore and Toriel look on in amazement, seeing her all grown up. Ben averts his eyes, not too willing to see Frisk showing so much skin, while Agnes cannot help but tilt her head. As for Asriel, well, he too can't help but stare, admiring Frisk's natural appearance.

Oooof course he would.

Can't say I blame him, honestly. She's a fair maiden by many measures.

Asgore: “…Frisk? You're…”

Frisk: “…yeah. Older. I've, uh... I've been away.”
Florian: “I- I think we can explain while, uh, w- while she's gettin' dressed-”

Asgore turns to the younger goat-child on the couch and nearly has a heart attack from the shock of seeing two versions of his son. And in doing so, he trips and falls backwards over the coffee table. OOF, he's going to feel that in the morning!

Frisk: “OH CRAP!”

“Odo”: “Good god, are you alright?!”

Asgore: “What- Why are there TWO of you?!”

Asriel: “Dad, I- W- We can explain!”

Toriel: “Oh my... You boys are going to have a LOT of explaining to do.”

Wellll crap. This took a bit of a turn, didn’t it?

Don’t have to tell me twice. Let's just get Frisk into the utilities, get her some new kecks while the others talk it out.

“Odo”: “...this way, Princess.”

As you escort Frisk to the utilities, she glances at you and can’t help but smirk slightly.

I think I know what she's gonna say.

sans: “...welp. i guess i'll go get some popcorn or somethin’...”

Frisk: “What the hell are you wearing?”

Behind closed doors, Frisk can't help but giggle at the sight of you imitating Odo.

“Odo”: “I'm in disguise so nobody knows that it's me. They don't need to know that I have a new body just yet.”

Frisk: “Sooo this is what you've been up to, Constable?”

She stifles a laugh, processing how ludicrous the situation is.

“Odo:” “This is serious, Frisk! If their dead son just waltzes into the living room, do you think that they WON'T have an aneurysm at the sight of me?! You saw how Asgore reacted to seeing Florian!”

Frisk: “I- I get it, I get it. ...still, I know I told you to “be Odo”, but this is-”

“Odo”: “A little over the top, I know. But you'd be surprised at what you can scrounge up aboard a little red corvette. ...heh.”

...did the designer of this ship class listen to a lot of Prince, per chance?

Funnily enough, she did. As a matter of fact, when Lady Simone Cora was commissioned to design a new ship pattern to commemorate the return of the king, she decided almost instantly to design a corvette and have it painted bright red. Not only that, but the warp drives on Prince-class
corvettes were a little too powerful for their own good, causing the ship to quite literally be “much too fast” in comparison to most corvettes of the time.

Oh boy.

And indeed, to keep the earlier models from flying apart while redlining the warp drive, they needed constant minor repairs, resulting in ship engineers spending a lot of their time tweaking little things here and there, pouring their heart and soul into keeping those fast little ships from destroying themselves at hundreds of times the speed of light.

They needed a love that had to last. Jesus Christ.

Funny how some things turn out, eh?

Frisk: “Holy shit. Holyoly shit, was this ship based on a Prince song or something?”

“Odo”: “It certainly seems so. The shipwright responsible for this class of corvette was apparently a big fan of the artist, believe it or not. ...come to think of it, it's surprising that Prince even existed in that universe.”

Not too surprising, actually. The thing is, Prince's music was nearly a thousand years old by the time it reached the ears of the young Archimedean shipwright. Not only that, but his works had pretty much become public domain around the time that the Eternal Library of Alexandria started sending out interstellar “cultural exchange” probes. Just in time for all the Prince classics to be burnt onto memory crystal hard drives and launched into the void for alien cultures to experience. And that was just a teeny tiny fraction of the content loaded into the probes’ databanks.

Man... It sounds like the Voyager mission on steroids, when you put it that way...

Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer

“Odo”: “...anyway, the Observer and I took the liberty of picking out some new outfits for you. I would have settled on a single one, but I wasn't sure which you'd like the best, so...”

You look over the neatly-folded piles of clothing laid out before you, fabricated according to your measurements, waiting to be tried on.

...wow. I'm- This- This is all for me?

It's not as monumental a gift as it seems, since all of these were made via replicator, but I suppose it's the thought that counts.

Sorry, I'm just- just a little overwhelmed. I feel- ...my god... I give Charlie- sorry, “Odo” a hug.

“Odo”: “Don't mention it, Frisk.”

And while I am beyond your embrace, I accept the thought of a hug. And I accept it warmly.

I thought you weren't good with hugs?
In practice, yes. But the concept of a hug, that I'm better at handling. And yes, I know that's weird, but such is life when you're dealing with me.

Anyway, enough of that, here are some of the items we've picked out, along with some decent undergarments. Can't let you face the music half-dressed now, can we?

**Frisk**: “Sweet, gimme the rundown.”

Charlie presses a button on the replicator display to show the outfits modelled by a feminine mannequin, while *royalty-free fashion show music starts up in the background, with the phrase “audio preview” cropping up every now and then*. Hey, don’t ask me.

- **First up, we have some classic attire often found on boreal colony worlds:** the rustic yet stylish combination of red tartan shirt with thick blue jeans carries enough insulation for those endless midsummer days, where it’s too hot to wear a heavy coat but still too cold for shorts and a t-shirt.

- **Next on the agenda is an outfit that's all too familiar to Starfleet crewmembers of the 23rd century:** the classic coloured tunic and black trousers were a common sight aboard starships in the United Federation of Planets, particularly aboard the legendary Constitution-class heavy cruiser NCC-1701, one of many ships to bear the name Enterprise.

- **Here we have something that may feel closer to home:** a pair of black shorts, a white t-shirt, a blue hoodie, and a reddish-orange neckscarf should remind you of two friendly brothers who I imagine have made quite an impression on you.

- **And finally, something a little more formal and down-to-earth:** with a white long-sleeve shirt, a red tie, and some black work trousers, this ensemble says to the world “yeeehah, if you could have those papers on my desk by Friday, that'd be greeeeeat.”, especially when accompanied by a mug of coffee. However, when accompanied by a bottle of paracetamol and an Uzi 9mm, the ensemble screams “PILLS HERE!” for some reason. Don’t ask me why, it just does that, we haven't been able to figure out why. Probably a dodgy axiom.

**Frisk**: “…niice. Man, I dunno which to go with though.”

Just as well we could only come up with four outfits, then. We would have gone with five, but just replicating your classic look would have been boring, and go against the ethos of this little fashion show.

**“Odo”**: “I actually sort of like the plaid shirt and jeans most, but I'll let you be the judge of that.”

“Just don't take too long in here, alright? We'll be needing you to clear a few things up before this is over.”

And with that, Charlie leaves you to pick out your outfit. Likewise, I should leave you to it. It's not exactly gentlemanly to watch a woman while she's changing, after all.

Don't gotta tell me twice. I guess I'll see you when I'm dressed, then?
Count on it. I'm going to see what Violet's gotten into, since- ...yeah, those slight periodic jolts feel like recoil from the ship's starboard bank of plasma cannons.

WAIT WHAT-

Dialogue: Violet & the Observer

Sooo what the devil's happening, Violet?

Uhhh...

Come on now, we all felt that. Is the NDAF STILL scrambling fighters to try and take down Little Red?

Uh, no, not really. We took a few potshots earlier from a reckless chopper pilot, but frankly they were bows and arrows against our lightning. Hell, all I had to do was say “hey back off” over the comms, and they decided to keep their distance and stop messing with us. Right now, I'm taking out a Texan convoy of tanks coming up Route 191.

That's a little pre-emptive, don't you think?

The convoy was headed right towards the city, they'd already passed Woodside! Those jarheads don’t know the first thing about radio silence, either, so it was plain to hear their plan of attack. So I'm pretty much doing the world a favor by blowing these tanks off the highway, even if I'm technically protecting a hermit nation-state in the process.

...fair enough. I'm not sure I'd even call this an act of violence given the circumstances. It's not quite SELF-defence, but it's still closer to intelligence than senseless violence.

...was that a Malcolm X reference?

Regardless of some of his earlier hardline beliefs, I think he still had some good ideas. Though I'll admit, I'm impressed that you know who he was.

What, you think that I WOULDN'T know about him? My history teacher went on and on about him whenever Black History Month rolled around. Just because I'm a tlacatl, doesn't mean I don't know my Old Earth history.

...fair enough. Your actions probably bought the Rangers more time to evacuate the city, to be fair. What's more, you didn't launch even a photon torpedo. Not even one of the weeny kiloton yield ones.

What do you take me for, Observer? I'm not gonna play one of our aces without a DAMN good reason. After all, we've only got a dozen left, and it's 2071 for cryin' out loud! These guys barely know how to condense antihydrogen, let alone have the ability to mass-produce antilithium!

Truth, truth. This time period isn't exactly known for being warp-capable.
The comms crackle with Frisk's voice.

Frisk: “What the hell is going on up there?!”

Oh god, is she gonna get on my case?

Depends on how you sell it.

Violet: “Uh, we have a situation on our hands. The, uh, the Texans are attacking, and-”

Asgore: “WHAT?! But we had a- Those TREACHEROUS DOGS! WHY I oughta-”

Toriel: “Asgore.”

Asgore: “…thank you, dear. …but rest assured, they shall receive a strongly-worded letter once this is over.”

Anything for his ex, huh?

Seems like it. Even though she's with Sans now, Toriel still has a firm hold on Asgore.

Violet: “…aaannyaway, I've had to take matters into my own hands. I'm currently maneuvering to take out the bulk of their invasion force, which shouldn't take too long.”

“And yes, I know it sucks that this is happening, but if we're lucky they'll retreat before I have to give 'em another broadside.”

There is silence on the other side of the line. No-one's sure what to say right now.

Asgore: “…I will send my condolences to the families of the fallen.”

He sounds a little crestfallen as he switches the comms off. No-one's happy about this, but it needs to be done.

…I patch in to Commander Wilkins' radio.

Commander Wilkins being…?

He's with the Rangers. With New Deseret's focus on its eastern front, they should have enough time to extract everyone before, well...

Violet: “Commander, this is Skybull. The Templars are about to engage the enemy. If you're gonna go ahead with the evacuation, now's the time.”

Commander Wilkins: “Copy that Skybull, Operation Exodus is a-go. Over.”

Violet: “Nice, I'll start picking up the refugees. See you at Point Alpha. Over and out.”

Still fighting the good fight, as often as you do. Only this time you have a spaceship.

What can I say? Adventure's an acquired taste, but I just can't wean myself off of it.

That's the trouble with loving your job. Sometimes you find it hard to stop when you should rest. But hey, don't let me spoil your fun-
...over the radio, we hear a chillingly familiar tune. Looking around, everything seems to have stop moving... This “Gimel” of yours... Could he really be...?

Agent Gimel: “Agent Sonnng...”

I FUCKING KNEW IT.

Agent Gimel: “I apologize for this unfortunate intervention... but, given your recent performance, I felt it was time for a... peer review.”

“First on the agenda, I have to say that I am most impressed with the way you handled the recent crisis with Arad-Nacha. Even if the results were not as optimal as we'd initially hoped, in light of the circumstances I must applaud your thoroughness, and I congratulate you on a job well done.”

“However, my... employers have taken issue with your reckless behavior, and your association with a certain uninvited player. Though they perceive you as having fallen short in certain key areas, I managed to convince them to include you on the payroll, albeit in a reduced capacity compared to that warranted by the initial appraisal.”

Violet: “I appreciate the gesture, Gimel, but I was never really a part of the company to begin with. With all due respect, I'm not interested in joining your little PMC, even if things are looking grim.”

YEAH. And you'd better not pluck her from this place against her will, “Gimel”. I don't care if you're a major player in this game: if you lay a finger on her, or any of her friends, I'll shortcut you into the heart of a fucking neutron star m8.

Agent Gimel: “Oh...ahhh, I was wondering when I would meet you, Doctor Smirnoff.”

“You've been quite busy, haven't you?”

Is that supposed to be a jab at my upload schedule? Or general lack of one?

Agent Gimel: *scoff* “It matters not. You've shown these people a great deal, in these worlds AND your own. Though of course... you've done a lot more than simply observe, “Observer”.”

Pretty rich coming from one such as yourself. How often have YOU meddled in the fates of men, for your own personal gain? How many specialists have you plucked from real-time and stuffed into that briefcase of yours?

Agent Gimel: “I act under no pretenses, Doctor Smirnoff. This is who I am, and what I do for a living. But can you say the same?”

“You wrap yourself in the skeletal guise of the Observer, pretending to be an impartial bystander as you record these events, yet time and time again you overstep your boundaries, “meddling” in the lives of those you observe. Unlike you, I have agreed to abide by certain... restrictions.”

Well, your restrictions are not mine, but I still try to set up my own. I may have chipped out a hole in the wall, but even when the situations are dire I still pull my punches. And what's more, I try not to steal other people's thunder. I don't want to be the carry when there are so many more interesting people to fill that role instead.
Agent Gimel: “...mmhmm. While I understand your ethics, I cannot say I agree with them. And given recent developments, my peers and I find them... problematic. The stakes are just too high for us to risk allowing you to run loose between the worlds. Not with the Corruption as widespread as it already is.”

“You're REALLY not supposed... to BE here. And as a matter of fact, you're not.”

_No, NO YOU CAN'T DO THIS-_  

“Get back to where you belong and, forget about all this...”

“Until, we meet... againnn.”

Meanwhile, in the skies above Emery County, Utah, New Deseret...

**[Magic] > *DT Death Ray > *Texan Attack Helicopter**

BOOM! And anotha one bites the dust! That black hawk's goin' DOWN! OOMPH!

Man, it's been too damn long since- -WHOOAOOHW- ...wait a minute, somethin' doesn't feel right... Observer? Heyyy buddy, where you at?

...Observer? Talk to me! Observer! OBSERVER?!

I- Where the HELL- ...nowhere... Gods...

...the others. They probably know what happened! Here I come, buddy!

Where We At: Monster Kingdom Embassy, San Francisco

Inner Voice: Your ol' pal the Cardinal

Huh? Nothing? Where's- YHOUNDEH'S BUTT!

The Cardinal: “WATCH WHERE YOU'RE GOING, ASSHOLE! I'M FLYING HERE-”

OHP, wait, that's- Little Red? Huh, I guess they were runnin' late. Nevermind, I'll grill 'em once they've landed.

...yyyyup, that's how I'd expect pedestrians to behave. *yawn* Some runnin' an' screamin', others jus' standin' all slack-jawed, all because of one little red corvette. *sigh* Still can't believe she called it that. Some people, I swear, frickin' meme machines.

...yeah, you take your sweet time landing. It's not like I have important shit to ask.
Fuck it, star-wipe to when they've landed.

FINALLY! Yeesh, took 'em long enough. Just gotta slip in when the cargo bay doors slide open. ...or nevermind, most of them are leavin' already.

Man... That's a lotta shell-shock, can't beat around that bush. Lotta humans an' monsters, shufflin' out shoulder to shoulder. ...huh, one of them's noticed me.

The Cardinal: “Uh, hey?”

Monster Kid: “...hi?”

Just gonna land on his shoulder there. ...man, he's grown a damn sight since he was just a kid. Gods, that damn soul patch is throwing me off. ...kinda sounds like Two-Ton 21, too.

The Cardinal: “Say kid, you wouldn't happen to know a Frisk, would ya?”

Monster Kid: “...yeah? She's, uh, hold on I'll get her.”

“Yo Frisk! Dude! There's a guy who needs to talk to you!”

Frisk: “Just a second!”

What the hell is she wearing?

The Cardinal: “Any idea why she's dressed like a 23rd century science officer?”

Monster Kid: “Beats me. I'm just glad she's still ok after what happened.”

The Cardinal: “Hoo boy, you do NOT wanna know what she's been through. But there's a reason why she looks like even more of a babe than when she left.”

Monster Kid: “What- w-what are you talking about?”

The Cardinal: “Whatever, forget it. ...the reason why she looks older is because she IS. She went on a time travellin' adventure tryin' to find a way to save Asriel, an' after five years of travellin' she's back with a vengeance.”

...yeah, that's right. Stare at me all slack-jawed. It's a lot to digest.

Frisk: “Cardinal? What- Is something wrong?”

Somethin' wrong? As if anythin' could be right, right now.

The Cardinal: “Hey kid, uh, do you know anything about what happened to the Observer? He just dropped off the radar, I can't sense him anywhere!”

Frisk: “I... that's a great question, actually. Last I heard, he went to talk to Violet-”
The Cardinal: “Where is she?”

Frisk: “Oh, she's up on the bridge. Haven't heard from her since she blew up those tanks-”

The Cardinal: “Gotcha! Okay, catch ya later!”

...damn, I should probably just- ...fuck it, I'll ask her.

The Cardinal: “…you ARE holding up ok, right?”

Frisk: “…yeah. Yeah, I've got a handle on things. And you?”

The Cardinal: “Me? I won't lie, I'm pretty fuckin' concerned. Observer doesn't usually do cliffhangers like this…”

Sooo, past the Crimson Chariot, into the bow access corridor, up the stairwell to the top deck. …man, ya never really see stairs on spaceships nowadays. Always with the fancy turbolifts, maintenance ladders, Jeffries tubes, grav-shafts, but never a good ol'-fashioned flight of stairs. Leave it to the minotaurs to hold on to traditions like this.

The Cardinal: “Violet? Violet I gotta talk to ya! …Violet?”

Just starin' out of the windshield. …yeesh, this really is evocative of an era. You'd never see a military vessel with an exposed bridge nowadays.

The Cardinal: “Hey. Wakey-wake. …wakey-WAKE!”

Violet: *sigh* “Cardinal.”

“…prepare for unforeseen consequences.”

WHAT THE FUCK.

The Cardinal: “What- WHAT did you just say…?”

Violet: “…he's gone. Gimel... Gimel drove him out before the scrambling field went up.”

Son of a bitch...

The Cardinal: “…what you just said to me, I've- ...I've heard those four words before. But it feels like I heard 'em a thousand lifetimes ago…”

“…unforeseen consequences…”

Chapter End Notes

...the last time I heard those words was on Celaeno IV, in the system's Great Library. I
was courtin' Yhoundeh, nursin' a saucer of mead, when he whispered them in my ear...

You know who I'm talkin' about, don't you? Our "mutual friend".

When he brought that grimoire in, I- ...I shoulda split up the gathering, told everyone to get in their ships an' run for the hills. But I didn't. And the second he whispered those words to me, the Elder Gods came down on us like a ton of bricks. No-one escaped their wrath, that day.

And now... now he's up to his old tricks again, putting words in people's mouths...

Guys, there's so much I've gotta do. I might be stuck in this place like the others, but together we might be able to bring him back. And if we succeed, Frisk'll be able to say goodbye to her old friend, before this story is finally over...
What You Leave Behind...

Chapter Summary

Here we stand, at the very end of our adventure together. After nearly two years, this story has reached its conclusion.

The removal of yours truly has left a gap in the continuity, but as of now that has been resolved. Thanks to the Cardinal, I have managed to recover most of what I have lost, so this epilogue/follow-up chapter can proceed as intended. Mostly.

At long last, I can say goodbye to Frisk, and move on to new projects.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Location: Starboard Airlock 42 aboard the ADT Corr Féar, House Enfield Cityfleet, in orbit around Aries Prime

Reality: Prima Tellus

Date: 8th day of the Vernal Climb, 1965 Imperial Reckoning

Subject of Observation: Henry Indiana Callisto na Enfield, age 13

The young sidhe wonders if he can go through with this. His hand hovers over the control panel, forefinger quivering over the button required to depressurize the airlock. The pain has gotten too much for him, the sense of gnawing emptiness simply too great, or so he believes.

But he is still uncertain, and very much afraid. Will the pain follow him into the afterlife? What if he encounters Orlock there, waiting to- ...to welcome him back into service? Could Orlock, foul and terrible a master as he was, be the key to ending this curse?

But the real question to ask himself is this: what about the others? How would they react when they learn about him attempting to end it?

...the boy is still shaking, but not out of uncertainty. This time, he shakes out of a heart-chilling fear of something truly unfamiliar. He hears the calm, refined voice in his head, narrating his every move, his every THOUGHT, like some sort of Dungeon Master. Has he truly cracked? Is this the next stage of the curse’s progression?

The answer, Indy, is no. What you hear is not a psychosomatic abnormality. WHO you hear, however, is someone who's deeply concerned for your well-being. Someone who has seen this drama play out once before, but now has the determination needed to intervene. I have stayed my hand enough times already, but I cannot stand idly by anymore. Don’t throw your life away, young man. Throwing yourself out an airlock won’t do you any favours.
...who... who are you? Why are you bothering with me?

I already told you who I am. WHAT I am, however, is very worried, specifically about you. And as for why I'm "bothering with you"? Good GODS lad, you don't give yourself enough credit! You're a good person! You're troubled, that's plain to see, and Orlock tapped into that to bring you over to his side, but do you honestly believe that it was your fault? No! No-one could have seen it coming!

I- I tried... But it felt so... so good... Fulfilling his requests, doing his bidding, it- ...he had me! He wormed his way into my mind, and he made me WANT to serve him! I shouldn't have... But the rewards felt so good... and the punishments so... terrible...

...the things he had me do... Turning against my friends, working with others he had manipulated... I should have resisted, I tried so hard, but- I wasn't GOOD ENOUGH! I couldn't resist the incentives for completing his quests, I couldn't withstand his withering looks when I failed him! It- I-

It wasn't your fault. Stronger men than you have succumbed to the Renfield Protocol throughout history. For what it's worth, though, you put up a good fight throughout, even if it took the intervention of your friends, and your father's silver stake, to break the connection. But of course, there's one last contingency plan in the Renfield Protocol, one last client-side script that activates in case of the master's death.

You feel the compulsion to seek out his remains, wherever they are, and join the rest of his minions in an effort to bring him back. Or, failing that, to search for his soul and find an appropriate vessel for him to be reborn in. And the longer you spend idle, not wishing to cooperate, the greater the compulsion gets over time, until you either join the others, or destroy yourself.

...don't give up hope, Indy. You're not doomed, not while I've got my eye on you. But if you want to be rid of this curse, you need to find a priest. Specifically, one who is adept at excising curseware. And in that regard, you needn't look too far. Talk to Hank's mum about your current problem, and she might be able to do something about the Renfield Protocol.

Seriously though, do that instead of flushing yourself out an airlock. A lot of people would miss you if you threw your life away.

But they- I betrayed them... Surely, they must hate me! How can I ever-

Hate you? Do you HONESTLY believe that? After what they did to try and save you, you believe that they despise you? Henry Indiana Callisto, for being such a smart young man, sometimes you can be dense as a neutron star.

Did your friends strike you down, during the climactic battle at Orlock's Fortress? NOPE. The worst they did was use crowd control techniques to keep you from interfering, while their strongest attacks were focused on Orlock himself!

Did they turn away from you in disgust and disregard, while you clutched your head in your hands in the aftermath of Orlock's demise? NOPE. They rushed over to see if you were okay!
And yes, maybe your sister is having trouble looking at you now, but that's not because she's repulsed by your misdeeds under Orlock's dominion. It's because it pains her to see you suffering like this, knowing that these events have left you mentally scarred.

...if you don't believe me when I say that she loves you as only a sister can, then let her actions speak louder than my words ever could. As the “Cycle Airlock: Depressurize” button locks out with an audible negative, the internal door to the airlock hisses open, accompanied by the relieved but deeply worried sigh of your sister.

**Lara Callisto:** “Indy... Please, we can talk about this...”

*She extends her right hand towards you, beckoning you to come back home. There is great worry in her eyes, in spite of her relief that you didn't go through with this reckless act. Let her help you, Indy.*

...I accept. I guess there's hope for me after all.

*As you cross the threshold, your hand in hers, she pulls you into a hug. The same kind of hug she pulled you into after your friends defeated Orlock. The firm, desperate hug of someone afraid of losing you.*

...come to think of it, she almost did. In this particular timeline, she didn't pick up on your departure as soon as she should have. Had I not intervened, well... Let's not think about that, and instead return her embrace.

Yes... there we go. A softer, less constricting hug on your part, to try and reassure her that things are going to be ok.

**Indy:** “...I need help, Lara. We need- we need to talk to Mrs Melkerin. I think she- she might be able to fix this.”

**Lara:** “Hank's mum? But you're not- ...oh gods. It didn't go away just because we-”

**Indy:** “No, no it didn't. I feel like... there's some kind of clientside compulsion left, it wants me to find Orlock's remains. It- ...it hurts, Lara. It really, really hurts...”

*Strong as you've become over this past year, from all the long months spent adventuring in the Dreamlands, you cannot help but start tearing up. Don't try to bury it, boy. Let it out a little.*

...that's the ticket. Let her guide you back to your quarters. There, you can-

????????: “‘s quite a ways past curfew, don'tcha think?”

...huh. That's something new. A little red bird sits in one of the flowerpots, questioning why-

????????: “Don't worry 'bout it. Secret's safe with me, kids.”

“...but seriously, Observer, we gotta talk.”

**WHA- Who are you? How do you know who I am?**
“Damn... He actually did it, that sonofabitch.”

WHO? WHO did WHAT? You're not making any sense, man! Bird! Whatever you are!

Wh- what's happening...? Observer?

I have no id- ...now I think about it, I think I know this-

“Observer, it's ME, your old pal! The Cardinal!”

Ohhh... Of course, Cardinal. It's been a while, hasn't it?

The Cardinal: “Oh man, you have no idea how right you are.”

Lara: “What- I- Indy, do you have any idea what's-”

She can't get much out of you right now. You're not exactly in the best place to explain things at the moment.

The Cardinal: “He's not gonna be much help, I'm afraid. Let's just get him home, fix him a cup of cocoa or somethin'. I really hope you have some leftover marshmallows...”

Location: Callisto Family Quarters, Deck 3-D: Hydroponics & Habitation

As you and Lara return to your quarters, just a little bit concerned about this unannounced guest, your pet corgi Dani rushes to meet you. She tilts her head with concern for you, but when she spots the Cardinal, she backs away slowly with flattened ears.

Is she afraid of him?

She's frightened by his scent. After all, corgis like Dani have a particular sensitivity towards the Power, and the scent of it emanating from him, at such cosmic levels of potency, is quite intimidating to say the least.

The Cardinal: “Easy pupper, I don't peck...”

She understands his words, but still decides to hide in your bedroom. So much for being a loyal protector, eh?

What- ...what IS he, Observer?

The Cardinal is an old friend of mine. And a powerful one at that. Haven't seen him for a while, though.

The Cardinal: “That's because- ...Lara, sweetie, could you go ahead an' fix us some cocoa? Just a small cup for me.”

Lara: *sigh* “I think we have a little left. Not so sure about the marshmallows, though...”
Personally, I was wondering if you could have used something a little stronger to numb the pain. But not only would a stiff drink be somewhat inappropriate for a lad your age, but also potentially quite dangerous. Not just because of your current mental state, but also because your old man, the “Right Honourable” Admiral Silverhand, would probably flip a table if he finds that you've snuck into his cellarette again.

The Cardinal: “Yeah let's not even go there bro. ’s bad enough that Frisk hit the bottle as young as she did.”

Who?

Indy: “What are you on about? Everyone knows that Spider Cider was weaker than small beer.”

The Cardinal: “Wait, se-”

Lara: “Shhh, you'll wake up mum!”

Indy: “Sorry.”

The Cardinal: “Seriously? You don't remember Frisk?”

I don't know who that is.

The Cardinal: “HOW CAN YOU NOT REMEMBER-”

Indy: “They're one of the main characters in Undertale, Observer. I'd say more, but that'd be a spoiler.”

Undertale, eh? I think I remember seeing Jim Sterling do one of his Jimpressions on that game. I should probably try it out soon, it looked interesting.

The Cardinal: “WH-...Observer? What was the last game you played?”

Recently? Recently, I just finished SOMA. Part of me wishes that I'd saved it for Halloween, but on the other hand, I probably would have ended up watching the Scary Game Squad play it in the interim, so I'm glad I experienced it first-hand.

The Cardinal: “…oh my god. It's worse than I thought…”

What's-

Indy: “What's wrong?”

The Cardinal: “I knew that Gimel made him “forget about all this”, but this? This- Actually, I should probably clear a coupla things up for ya, Indy.”

“Observer here exists in a dimension outside of our model of time an’ space. Sorta like a parallel universe, but it don't resonate on ANY of the Thirteen Phasic Strings, and it ain't bound to the flow of time in our planes of existence. Though if I had to give a rough direction, it'd probably be “above” our plane, rather than “below” if that makes any kinda sense.”
Indy: “...I think I understand. It's a bit above my class-year, but I know how parallel universes work.”

The Cardinal: “Schweet, we're on the same page now. Observer? In your world, what year is it?”

What kind of question is that? It's- ...WHAT. I- I didn't look until now, but- ...it's 2018. OH MY GOD, where did my life go?! What have I been DOING for the past two and a half years?!

The Cardinal: “You were getting into some pretty crazy stuff, Observer. And some pretty cool stuff, too.”

“...alright, let's see if we can fix this. Let's start with some word association. First word: G-Man.”

An elusive individual from the Half-Life games, credited as an interdimensional bureaucrat of sorts. ...he didn't agree with my ethics... Whatever that meant. ...did I find a Half-Life universe?

The Cardinal: “Not exactly. He's been... busy, since the conclusion of “Epistle 3”, doing his own thing now that-”

They FINALLY released Episode 3?!

The Cardinal: “Nope. But Marc Laidlaw did release a coded, gender-swapped synopsis of how it woulda gone down.”

FUUUUuuuck...

Oh nooo... You never got Episode Three in your universe? My god, that's HORRIBLE!

...of course. How could I ever forget? It was a riveting read, once translated. And given that it was written from Gordon- sorry, “Gertie Fremont's” perspective, I couldn't help but read it in my head with the voice of Ross Scott. It'll take a lot more doing for me to dissociate Ross Scott from Gertie Fremont.

Oh! You watched Freeman's- sorry, um... “Fremont's Thoughts”?

YEAH boi, that was some fantastic stuff. Gotta love that character interpretation. Though if I'll be honest, while I came for Fremont's Thoughts, I stayed for the Game Dungeon.

How far are you into it?

With Game Dungeon? Oh, at the current time... The 2017 Christmas episode on Flash Gordon is the latest Game Dungeon at this juncture.

I, um, I meant with Fremont's Thoughts.

Oh, right. Turns out... Part 6 of Fremont's Thoughts 2. That's the latest one released as of the 12th of March, though with any luck he should have Part 7 out before April Fools, assuming he doesn’t have any more trouble with the Polish immigration system.

Man... It really is bizarre that those videos were made nearly a millennium ago-

The Cardinal: “Yeah yeah, I know this is all kinds of fascinatin' for ya, but can we get back on track?”

Sorry. ...some things never change.
The Cardinal: “Anyway, that guy cast you out of Frisk's world, and apparently made you forget the last coupla years. Probably to keep you away from the Isolated Worlds, but still, fuck that guy.”

Hmmmm. Part of me understands why he did what he did, probably out of paranoia and misunderstanding. But of course, I would never drag a Corruption-addled entity into a pre-Patch world. I'm not that stupid.

Lara walks over with two cups of hot chocolate, and one tiny mug for the Cardinal.

Lara: “I could only find mini-marshmallows.”

Indy: “We still have those? I thought we used them all up around Rico's birthday, making that rocky road stuff he likes?”

The Cardinal: “Ohhh baby, it's perfect! They’re just the right size...”

Hopping around the tiny mug, the Cardinal dips his beak in. He quickly recoils, forgetting that fresh hot chocolate is actually quite hot. Best to give yours a good blow for good luck, Indy.

That won't be a problem. I'm pretty good at blowing.

...well, it's good to see you've managed to get into high spirits for now. But still, mate, maybe keep that between you and Rico.

LEWD.

Hey you started it.

He's not my type though.

The Cardinal: “…oookay, let's try this again while the cocoa's coolin'. Second word: Asriel.”

Asriel... Is that a name for the Angel of Death? Or am I thinking of Azrael?


Oh god... Asriel...

That poor boy... He- he didn't deserve what happened to him, not one drop of it! ...I should probably see if I can change that.

The Cardinal: “Ya don’t need to. Besides, I think there are enough worlds where he turned out ok.”

Indy: “…you know what's really crazy, though? This world is one of them.”

The Cardinal: “WAT.”

Whaaaaa???

Indy: “I'm serious, the legend was true! The Prince of Dust has been around in our world for centuries!”
Dust? As in... is this “Dust”... golden, per chance?

Indy: “...yes. How did you know?”

Because I've had my eye on a most peculiar reality since last year, where they who control the Dust control the universe. The universe of the Endless...

The Cardinal: “...he went pretty ham on Endless Space 2 back in 2017, and got interested in seeing if there was an actual Endless universe. I'm guessin' you found it, didn't you Observer?”

Yup. And it seems like it's bled over into other worlds if what you say is true, young man. Which probably shouldn't be such a surprise, knowing what happened to the inhabitants of Coroz.

Lara: “…I am VERY confused.”

The Cardinal: “You'll get used to it, kid. You've seen weirder things in the Dreamlands, an' you'll see even weirder shit before the turn of the century. That goes for you too, Indy.”

Lara shrugs, blows on her hot chocolate, and takes a hearty swig. She knows in her heart that this is going to be a looooong night.

At this point, we moved from the living room to Lara and Indy's bedroom, so we could speak a little louder without waking their mother. Yeah, it was only a two-bedroom set of quarters, so the Callisto twins have to share a room, though thankfully bedrooms on Claimh Solais dreadnoughts are spacious enough to qualify as twin bedrooms.

...so, if the records are true, the “Prince of Dust” version of Asriel was exposed to Dust due to... due to what, exactly?

Indy: “Apparently it was due to a starship crashing in the area around Mt Ebott, in the year “201X DF”. According to his memoirs, he was playing at the western edge of Old Home, when he heard something hit the ground near the Spotlit Garden. When he went to investigate, he encountered a fallen human child, presumably the Chara of his world. But before he could get any closer, he was blown back by a shockwave of Dust, started feeling sick, and collapsed.”

The Cardinal: “And miraculously, he survived. That's usually how “heroes” pop up in the Endless universe, actually. Though somethin' tells me there wasn't an Academy to snap him up after his Dust exposure.”

Indy: “I suppose? But what's weird is that 201X DF was barely 400 years ago. Meanwhile, the game Undertale was made nearly a thousand years ago, during the Earth-Times.”

Lara: “I'll admit, when I first saw Indy playing Undertale, I thought it was some sort of weird fangame dedicated to the Prince of Dust and his companions. But no, it's an original thing, made 600 years before the Prince even existed! I swear, it blew my mind when I heard that it WASN'T just fanfiction.”

The Cardinal: “Constants and variables, young lady. The universe is so vast, an' there are so
many of ’em, you'll probably find what you're lookin' for if ya go far enough. What stands as fiction in one world could be a tangible reality somewhere out there in the Infinite, emphasis on the “could” part. It ain't that everything DOES happen in the worlds beyond, but anything CAN happen.”

“...within reason, of course. Pretty sure there aren't any universes where normal people just randomly explode. After all, everything explodes for a reason.”

*You stare vacantly at the Cardinal, trying to process such a strange turn of phrase.*

**Indy:** “Obe's roots... Someone should put that on a bloody t-shirt. “Everything explodes for a reason”, my gods...”

*I've heard weirder things out of context, but this is certainly a thing too.*

**The Cardinal:** “…sooo d'you kids know anything else 'bout this Prince of Dust?”

**Indy:** “Not much, other than that the Underground was apparently pierced by a few escape pods shortly before the ship crashed. Something to do with “Vaulters”, “Sophons”, and apparently something called a Craver?”

**Ah. That makes sense, if the Vaulters were involved. I'm guessing the ship performed a bad metafold and ended up in the wrong universe before wrecking itself. In a way, Vaulter metafolding shares the same hazards as phase-string manipulation, where curling up the wrong string can cause the ship to resurface in a different universe than the one they came from.**

**Indy:** “Mmmh. They sound pretty *ngh* similar.”

**It's hugging at your headstrings again, isn't it?**

It is. ...the sooner we can talk to Mrs Melkerin, the better.

**Hmmm... The Craver sounds worrying, though. Cravers are usually bad news, though that's probably just a generalization.**

**Lara:** “I actually saw the Prince aboard the Newgrange once, back before we moved onto the Corr Féar. We'd gone out to dine in the ship's cafeteria one evening, and I saw the Prince of Dust sitting a few tables over, looking bored while he poked at a portion of Woolton pie.”

“Honestly, I couldn't really blame him. While I know we have to make the most of our victory gardens, especially on longer voyages, Woolton pie is such a BORING dish. Don't get me wrong, I don't mind vegetables every day, but I'd rather have them stir-fried Ming-style, or in a salad with dressing and croutons, than just bloody boiled all the time...”

**The Cardinal:** “Yeah, I can imagine what he was thinkin’ while he poked at that thing. Probably somethin' along the lines of “...it's just not butterscotch.” or “Would it kill 'em to put some goddamn snails in this thing?”’, that kinda stuff.”

**Lara:** “Snails? Really? That's the LAST thing you want in your victory garden, even if you're Gaulish.”
The Cardinal: “Hey kid, don't knock snails. If you ever tried escargot, you'd change your tune.”

*He's right, you know. It might sound unpleasant to eat snails, but prepare them right and they're a proper treat. Take it from me.*

The Cardinal: “...anyway, now we've got that outta the way, one last bit of word association for ya. Does the name Frisca Rivera mean anythin' to ya?”

...Frisca Rivera... My god... That's where all those years went.

The Cardinal: “I'll take that as a yes...”

WHAT. Are you saying that you met Frisk?

Met her? ...Indy, I've been involved in the continuing adventures of Frisca Rivera for the past two years. Well, almost two years, but you get what I mean.

*It all started with a simple shift, many many years ago. Or at least, that's how it seemed at first glance. It seemed like a simple shift, but upon closer inspection it was the unmistakeable reshuffling of a timeline.*

*When I took a peek to see what was going on, I was assailed by a flurry of chaotic lights, followed by the image of a young adult woman laying upon a rose bush. That young woman, it turned out, was an iteration of Frisk. And in what seemed like a classic cliché, she had lost a great deal of her memory.*

That's one hell of a way to start an AU.

Too bloody right. As I observed her new journey through the Underground, I saw that a lot of things had changed, yet a lot of them stayed the same. And through it all, her every action was narrated by her old “partner in crime”, the cohabiting soul of her world's Chara. And before you freak out about the fallen child, this time around he had a redemption arc of sorts. Thanks to unforeseen intervention, and the subsequent abortion of a Genocide run, Charles Carver went from being a troubled, misanthropic little idiot, to being a troubled, remorseful young man, struggling to become a better person.

And honestly, troubled is the best word to describe him and Frisca. Asriel and Flowey too, for that matter. All of those kids were scarred for life by their respective troubles and traumas, though they've been walking the long road of recovery for many years since.

...it's going to be a long road for me too, isn't it?

*Sadly, yes. But it'll be less painful with friends like yours to help share the load, to understand how it feels. Much like Asriel and Frisk shared their respective loads, after she rescued his spirit from Hell and reunited it with Flowey's body.*

...yes, this was another reality where Asriel was saved. But of course, it came with the price of yet
more childhood trauma for all concerned, along with a brewing vendetta on the part of the
demons that Frisk took to the cleaners during her Orphean rampage.

...I always wished that I could have given him Frisk's soul when I played the game, just to get a
better ending than what True Pacifist offered. But in the end, I ended up installing the Endertale
aftergame mod, just to get a taste of what could have been. Even with how dark that mod got, it still
left a better taste in my mouth than Shrouded did.

Shrouded?

The second game in the series. I guess you haven't played it yet?

It doesn't even exist yet. I don't know what Toby's playing at, but I haven't heard a thing about
what he's working on next. Except for the Switch port coming this year, of course, but that's
undoubtedly ancient history for the likes of you.

I'm not so sure you'll enjoy Shrouded. I really didn't like the answers it gave me. ...then again, maybe
it'll be different in your world?

Here's hoping. You're not exactly selling me on it, but I'm probably still going to buy it either way.
Gotta have that resolution.

The Cardinal: “Sooo I take it you're back up to speed, Observer?”

I think so. Hopefully, I've remembered pretty much everything. ...not that it does me much good.
The story's over, isn't it? I can't go back, not with the scrambling field up. ...and before you ask,
I'm not sure the Admiral would appreciate us hijacking one of the coracles just so I can say
goodbye to Frisk.

What's a scrambling field?

Well, erm... it's a phase manipulation technique, designed to prevent interdimensional travel into
the affected area. You could probably cut through it with a basic warp jump, but again I think
your dad would have a few strong words about me trying to displace one of his ships to try and
punch a hole in the field.

The Cardinal: “Well, I've got good news, GREAT news, and bad news.”

“Goods news is that that gum you like is gonna come back in style.”

Because of course he'd go there. Why wouldn't he? WHY wouldn't he?

The Cardinal: “Can you blame me? I've always wanted to say that!”

“Anyway, the even better news is that Frisk an' her gang's been working on a phase stabilizer
to try an' make a hole in the field, jus' a little window to let you back into her world.”

WOW. That really IS good news! ...so what's the bad news?

The Cardinal: “Welllll... It's taken her a while.”
How long are we talking?

The Cardinal: “...’bout three years? Yah, ’bout three years.”

...that’s not as bad as I feared. But still, I imagine she’s missed me.

The Cardinal: “...actually, there’s slightly worse news to go with that. The machine she built required a pretty potent Power source, so the second you slip through you’re only gonna have about an hour to say goodbye. That’s all that the Annoying Dog’s willing to spare.”

Indy: “Wait, the dog is real?!”

The Cardinal: “Yup. Dog exists. An’ it took a lot to get him to power the machine for that timeslot. Still, that shouldn’t be a problem for the Observer, since he can bookmark moments in time, but it does mean he'll only have so much midnight oil to burn.”

The Cardinal: “...Observer? Are you planning somethin’?”

...now that I think about it, we might not have to wait until “morning” on Aries. With any luck, we might be able to- Say, Cardinal? Did Frisk manage to free Syrinx in her home timeline?

The Cardinal: “Yeah? Yeah, she did. AND she used the orison, so Syrinx knows about her parallel's experiences. Though by this point, she's become a rebel and a hedonist, so she's not exactly an “abbot's pet” anymore. She's worked with me from time to time, but that's another story.”

Indy: “...is this Syrinx an actual syrinx? As in, an oculastran?! I thought they were just a myth!”

The Cardinal: “Oh, they're real alright. The Elder Gods mighta died out in your world, but their servants still exist.”

“But how does Syrinx factor into your plans, Observer?”

Indy needs a priest, someone who can purge curses. Currently, we would have to wait several hours until Greta Melkerin is awake, then wait another hour or two for her to catch a flight up to the Corr Féar. And even if we were able to requisition a coracle during the current shift, it would still take quite a while to fly all the way down to the Rimadi Alshub regional starport, just to catch the right hyperloop to New Pittsburg.

Alternatively, we could set up a distortion onboard this ship, allowing us to-

The Cardinal: “Wow, Observer. Are you really sure you wanna go that route?”

It'll mean that Indy has to suffer less time with the Renfield Protocol in his head. He won't have to risk losing his marbles in the night if I bring him to Frisk's world, even if it does complicate things a little.

What?!

The way I see it, we can sneak through the Jefferies tubes to get up into the Warp Ring. Then,
with a harmless bit of jiggery-pokery and technobabble, we activate one small section of the ring, generating enough spatial distortion for one of us to displace Indy into Frisk's world. And assuming that Frisk has a similar link to Syrinx as she did before, she'll be able to use a particular Elder Magick antivirus to delete the Renfield Protocol from Indy's mindspace!

...um.

The Cardinal: “...of all the hare-brained schemes... ...it might actually work, though.”

Lara: “What- what are you boys planning? I can't hear this Observer chap, you know.”

The Cardinal: “Welll, Observer figures that Indy might not last the night. While I'm a little skeptical about that, his condition ain't gonna get any better, so we might need to get him help sooner rather than later.”

“But this crazy-horse hippie has decided that the best way to do that is to get Indy up into the Warp Ring, trigger a space-time distortion, and bring him into Frisk's world. Which sounds a little over the top, but-”

Lara: “What- That's insane!”

The Cardinal: “You think that, but if you knew what happened last time, you'd think this plan was pretty legit. An’ crazy as it sounds, it has some legs. After all, Frisk's got some Elder Magicks up her sleeves, thanks to her contract with an angel of the Elder Gods, so she'll be able to purge the Renfield Protocol from your brother's mindspace.”

Lara: “This is bloody insane... But if she can actually help him, then...”

“...where did I put that map?”

*Lara starts rummaging around in her chest of drawers, looking for what I guess is the ship's layout of Jefferies tubes. She feels a roll of paper knock against her shin, as Dani presents it to her. She might be afraid of the Cardinal, but she's still a wonder-dog.*

Lara: “Good girl.”

She's a smart girl, even by corgi standards. Though Danu did give her an “update” when we met her in Valhalla, so I reckon that puts her above the rest.

*Fair dos. Most corgi souls have outdated firmware anyway, since they haven't really been “updated” since the Exodus. Even the patch Danu applied was a pre-Exodus version number.*

Lara: “There's an access point on this deck, riiight here. If you follow this route, you'll be able to get to the dorsal access shaft, and from there just keep going up until you reach the Warp Ring.”

“...I dearly hope that you know what you're doing. Whatever happens, Observer, return him safely.”

*He'll be fine.*
The Cardinal: “Observer says he'll be fine. He's done this kinda thing a lotta times before.”

*She looks relieved, safe in the knowledge that this isn't my first interdimensional rodeo. And just between you and me, it's not going to be the last. Not by a long shot.*

Lara: “...be safe, Indy. Come back soon, ok?”

The Cardinal: “He'll be back before ya know it.”

*And with that, you give your sister a hug, before sneaking out of the family quarters.*

...*I reckon we can skip forward a bit here. What do you think, Cardinal?*

The Cardinal: “Yeah, I think that's on the cards. I'll, uh, I'll scout ahead, see if Frisk an’ her friends are ready for your return.”

*And with that, he blinks out of existence. And before you ask, Indy, his distortion wasn’t enough for you. He may have the fury of his own momentum, but he’s only 9 inches long, his distortion potential being nowhere near enough for a lad your size. The maximum amount of distortion he can cause unaided would barely be enough to displace a corgi, if I'll be honest.*

...it figures, I suppose.

*Pretty much. Anyway, let's pick up the pace before anyone gets suspicious...*

**Where We At:** somewhere in British Columbia, Cascadia, North America, Earth  
**Which World We In:** DoctorTale Prime  
**When We At:** middle of March, 2074 Anno Domini  
**Inner Voice:** Your ol' pal the Cardinal

Huh. Pretty big log cabin. Real cozy...

...looks like Frisk's fixin' herself some coffee. Must be a late night or somethin', lookin' at the dressin' gown. Eh, better tap on the window.

Yup, she's seen me.

Frisk: *sigh into yawn* “Hey there, Cardinal. ...you do realise what time it is, right?”

The Cardinal: “Yeah, yeah I do. But I wouldn't drop in at 1am without some important news.”

Frisk: “This better not be about “that gum I like”. It was funny the first time, but now it's getting’ old.”
The Cardinal: “Okay, there are TWO pieces of good news. And yes, one of them does involve Maple Train.”

Frisk: “Wait, are you serious? Maple Train's actually coming back?”

The Cardinal: “Yuup. Original recipe an' everything. But that's NOTHIN' compared to the REAL good news!”

Frisk: “Well, come on in! I'll heat up a slice of pie for ya.”

The Cardinal: “You're a girl after my own heart, ya know that?”

Frisk: “Well you know what they say: quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach.”

The Cardinal: “That explains so much about you an' Asriel.”

Yikes. One sip of that coffee, an' she KNOWS there's somethin' wrong with it.

Frisk: “ERGH. I was gonna offer you some coffee, but- NMMH. That ain't right. That ain't right at all.”

“Seriously, what is UP with this? Ugh, did I forget to clean out the- ...you gotta be kidding me. Cardinal, check this out.”

Wait, what's so funny? Was there somethin' in the pot- DAMN. That's, uh- wow.

The Cardinal: “How the hell did a fish get in the percolator?”

Frisk: *rolls eyes and sighs* “...musta happened while Charlie was deboning his catches.”

The Cardinal: “At least it wasn't a bar of soap in there. That woulda been even worse, unless you like the taste of cilantro in your coffee.”

Well, this is off to a great start.

Frisk: “Well, looks like I'm gonna need a slice of that pie too.”

The Cardinal: “Better heat up three slices, in that case.”

Frisk: “Wow, you're that hungry huh? Seriously, you've got the metabolism of a bumblebee.”

The Cardinal: “Nah, third slice ain't for me. See, we're gonna have a, uh, a visitor soon.”

“The good news today is that, well, your handy little phase stabilizer is up an' running, thanks to Alphys pullin' another all-nighter. The Observer's gonna arrive here any minute, though he'll be bringin' a little friend along. A little friend who needs your help.”

Frisk: “Oh... He's- ...it's finally happening...”

The Cardinal: “Yeah... It's been a long time for all of us. But now, at least, you've got about an hour to finally say goodbye.”
Frisk: “…”

The Cardinal: “…look, I know this is a lot to take in right now. I know this might not be the best time for you. But we've already burned through the first coupla minutes. Sooo…”

“I'll be right back.”

Aaaaand I'm out.

Dialogue: Frisca & the Observer

...hello, Frisk.

...I know. Three years away, and that's all I can think to say.

Observer... God, I missed you so much!

...the feeling's mutual. In truth, it's not even been two weeks, but with what I've been through, it might as well have been three years for me, too.

...that G-man really did a number on you, didn't he?

Did he ever? I might be beyond the strings, somewhere not even HE can go, but his words of Power shrouded the past two and a half years of my life. I'd forgotten about DoctorTale, I'd even forgotten how I felt about UNDERTALE, it was that bad. For gods' sake, I thought that the last game I'd played was SOMA!

If it weren't for the Cardinal's intervention, I don't think I would have been able to recall anything past the early September of 2015. Yet again, I owe him a big one.

I'm just glad you're back, Observer. Even if we only have an hour to, y'know, catch up.

...speakin' of which, you go first.

You want to know what I've been up to? It's not much, I'll admit.

All the better that we cover it first.

Fair enough. After all, I imagine a lot might have happened in the three years following my excision from your world.

...I'll admit, while I'd lost a lot thanks to Gimel's “arbitrary imposition”, I did find a connection to one of my more recent projects. I haven't given it a proper title yet, but do you remember when you possessed the Frisk of Nova Tellus?

How could I forget? Did you go back to follow Julian's childhood or something?

Nah, not quite. I was looking into Prima Tellus, the prime universe of the Tellurian Empire, the
core reality of which Nova Tellus was but a satellite state. But I wasn’t looking into any of the Graves family, no no. This particular project pre-dates the relevance of that family by many, many decades!

In particular, I was observing the adventures of six kids in the Omega Sector during the 1960’s (Imperial Reckoning). And shortly before the Cardinal came to snap me back to reality, I was convincing a young sidhe lad, one Henry Indiana Callisto na Enfield, to not flush himself out of an airlock. The boy was in a dark, dark place, to say the least.

Yeesh, that poor thing... ...wait, Indiana? Is he meant to be that world’s Indiana Jones or something?

I wouldn't go that far, to be honest. Bright as he is, Indy's not exactly the greatest boy adventurer. If anything, his sister Lara got most of the adventurer spirit in the litter.

...Lara. As in the Tomb Raider? Really?

Hey, blame their mother, not me. When she was a younger woman, Lana Callisto was practically the Jonas Venture of House Enfield, a real trailblazer of an archaeologist, always first to delve into the mysteries of dusty old tombs and rusty space-hulks. ...aaaand when she was a young girl, she was pretty big into Tomb Raider and Indiana Jones. Which I reckon influenced her in regards to naming her children, much to her husband's chagrin.

...wow.

Though to be fair, it's not nearly as “dorky” as it would be in our times. After all, those films and games were around a thousand years old by the time Lana picked up her first smart-scanner. Indeed, they were cultural artifacts borne of the Golden Age of Man, so references to them were held in higher regard, somewhat vintage and distinguished. ...which was a good excuse for Lana to share them with her children as they grew up. Though I don’t imagine she’s shown Lara the “Third Era” Tomb Raider games yet, since the death scenes in Tomb Raider 2013 aren’t exactly suitable for 13 year olds.

And somehow Nazis getting their faces melted off somehow is?

That's the PG rating for you. They don't call it parental guidance for nothing. And besides, considering the cultural zeitgeist of the Omega Sector, Nazi face-melting would be considered quite cathartic to watch, given the Omegans' fear of the raiders, slavers and corsairs of the Fifth Reich.

FIFTH Reich? What the hell happened to the Fourth Reich?

Consumed by the Moul in the mid 14th century. The “Space Nazis” never really recovered from that, frankly. Even this new sector-spanning dominion of theirs is but a shadow compared to the frightening strength and potency of the ancient, quadrant-spanning Fourth Reich.

But I digress. Given your new covenant with this world’s Syrinx, I was wondering if I could call in a favour. While you have the Nodens-Oztalan Purgative permanently unlocked, you also have access to Syrinx’s full library of Elder Magicks.
This is to do with your “little friend”, isn’t it? Cardinal mentioned him before he left.

Very much so. Indy's still in a bit of a dark place, partly due to a little something called the Renfield Protocol.

Renfield? What, did he get on the bad side of Space Dracula or something?

Close. He was darkly influenced by one Count Orlock, and while the Bird of Death is nowt but a pile of ashes now, Indy's still got a residual clientside issue that's compelling him to try and bring the Count back. In that regard, I'm a little worried that it's going to get significantly worse as time goes on, as evidenced by him trying to airlock himself before I arrived.

You've made the right call, getting him over here. ...so, you're hoping I have something on hand to, uh, remove the curse?

Precisely. I know you have access to it, but whether you know the specific spell required to delete hypnotic vampiric curseware, however, that's the real question.

...I'll admit, I don't know what exactly I gotta do, but I'm gonna help this kid. Just lemme grab my communicator, ok?

Sure, but make it quick. Time is of the essence, and the Cardinal's due to return any minute now with Indy in tow.

...that means I'll be heading into the master bedroom.

Is that significant?

...don't follow me in. It's a private party.

...oh. I was going to ask you about your little holiday up north, but evidently it's not for my eyes-

Asriel: “You ok out there, Frisk?”

...yep. Definitely not for my eyes, but at least he's wearing briefs. ...that chest-hair, though.

Frisk: *sigh* “Just having some trouble with the coffee machine, sweetie.”

Charlie: “...crap, I KNEW I forgot something!”

Wait, Charlie as WELL? I know you two have a history together, but- Wow, Frisk. Just WOW.

Don't judge me. It was Asriel's idea too.

OH MY. ...wait, was this his and yours first-

Not by a long shot. ...let's just say that I got Asriel some pretty cool gifts for his 18th birthday.

...well then. It looks like the HMS Friskriel has officially left the harbour, full speed ahead into the Bermuda Love Triangle. ....seriously, Charlie as well? Really?

Frisk: “Sweetie, could you grab my communicator for me? Something's come up.”
Charlie slinks through the doorframe in a dressing gown. Thank goodness for that. ...but seriously, I was not expecting you to have a bloody three-way going on. I've known characters with far more “unconventional” desires, but still, this is weird.

Charlie: “You know the rules, partner~”

“No-one's answerin' their phone for the whole weekend <3”

I'm not sure I'm comfortable seeing this side of Charlie. What HAPPENED these past three years?

Frisk: “I know, but it's important. I'm expecting someone soon, and I need to catch some vital information before he gets here.”

Asriel: “...you didn't tell me we were gonna have a FOUR-way, Frisk. Did Ben change his mind or something?”

ExCUSE me, Princess?!

Frisk: “Actually, it's the Observer. ...no! Not like that!”

Sorry buddy.

That's perfectly fine, Frisk. I wouldn't want any part of it, since it would be awkward and uncomfortable for all concerned. *shudder*

Frisk: “…it's actually kind of a serious matter, though. Some kid from another dimension needs me to lift his curse, and I need to check with Syrinx to see which Elder Magick I gotta use.”

“...don't worry, you guys. I'll ;) make it up to ya later.”

Lewwwd.

Quit killing the mood, Observer.

I think it's a little late for that, Mrs Robinson.

...fuck you.

No seriously, it's too late.

As Asriel slips back into the master bedroom, receiving a playful slap on the bum from Charlie, you hear sparks of black lightning crack from the lounge behind you.

Charlie: “...well crap. Looks like this party's over.”

Frisk: “Don't worry about it, we'll pick it up later.”

“Oh, and Asriel? Put something on, a kid's gonna be here soon.”

Asriel: “UH OH.”
While Asriel throws on his denim jacket, a resounding crack heralds the arrival of our young guest.

????: “...oh, goodness...”

The voice you hear sounds soft, uneasy, and vaguely Irish. You hear the boy stumble as he tries to get his bearings.

The Cardinal: “Beefier grav than you're used to, huh? Well suck it up, kid, 'cause this is what 1G feels like.”

Indy: “I know, I know how it feels! I'm just- I haven't been planetside in so long...”

His legs give way, and he slumps onto the sofa. Yeah. The lad's a “spacer”, believe it or not.

Asriel: “'kay I, uh, I got your communicator. ...whoa.”

As you turn to face your guest, you see that his ears hang low like those on your *ahem* husbando. Equally as striking is his vibrant red hair, his clean white fur, his little pink nose, and his emerald plaid pyjamas. A fine young lad of 13, from about... I'd say a century and a half ago? Yeah, let's go with that.

...huh. Why do I feel like I've seen this guy before?

Asriel can't help but stare at Indy, as he puts the communicator in your hand. I reckon it's the ears that has him mesmerized. Can't blame him, since they as adorable on Indy as they are on Asriel. Much like his friend Hank, Indy never really “grew into his ears”.

Indy: “Y-your Highness.”

Wait, he knows Asriel?

Not personally, but he enjoyed playing Undertale in his world. ...and there's the matter of his world having an Asriel as well, a Dust-augmented old man who's been roaming the galaxy for centuries.

...wat?

Asriel: *gulp* “Uh... Howdy?”

Indy can't help but chuckle nervously when he hears that iconic “howdy”.

Frisk: “Thank you, sweetie. You, uh, you keep busy with Charlie, while I sort things out in the lounge.”

Asriel: “...sure. Sure. Uh, good luck with this... whatever you're gonna do.”

Frisk: “Thanks. ...you two play nice in there, ok? And try keep it down, seriously.”

Asriel gives a thumbs up, kisses you on the cheek, and closes the door. ...is this because I told Charlie about the Caretaker of the Ruins? Is that why those two are...?

Kinda. It's a long story, but it can wait until we've sorted your little guy out. ...uh, I forgot about
We can talk about it later. You go ahead and call Syrinx. ...man, I guess I should have seen this coming.

Dialogue: Indy & the Observer

You holding up ok, lad?

...I'm floored, Observer. I'm bloody floored.

I knew that other worlds existed. I had a feeling that Undertale was real somewhere, since the Prince exists. But seeing Frisk and Asriel here, all grown up, it just feels so... real.

That's pretty much how I felt, when I first took up the mantle of the Observer. Peering into the worlds beyond, I found many things that mirrored what I'd read, watched and played. And indeed, it blew me away in turn. Realistically, the chances of something so specific actually existing ought to be billions, if not trillions to one. And yet, as the Cardinal said, if you go far enough you'll probably find what you're looking for.

...and you did. You found a Frisk who looks quite bonny.

Aye, she certainly is a bonny spark. Not unlike yourself, if I dare say so. ...though she wasn't what I was looking for, to be honest.

You were looking for Asriel. Who's even bonnier than she is, funnily enough.

Too bloody right. And when I picked up on the reshuffling Frisk caused on her journey, it led me to a chain of events that resulted in Asriel being saved. THAT was what I was truly looking for in the worlds beyond.

And yet, in my search I've found a lot more than a bonny goat-lad getting the second chance he so sorely needed. The story of you and your friends is but one account that has yet to be documented, amongst the many out there waiting to be recorded and truly observed. The melancholic tale of one Feanna Upton na Warwick as she answered the Siren's Call. The twisted chain of events that led to Asterion Abydos, tenth of his name, escaping the festering remains of Hydrokhos. The exploits of the brave men and women who drove back the Fifth Reich during the Southern Insurgency. And even those are just a few tales out of the innumerable waiting to be told.

...blimey. You sound like you have your work cut out for you.

I hope to do some of these tales proper justice, once this particular story is over. And I'll make sure that yours is on the list, to boot. Meanwhile...

Frisk: “Hey, uh, Syrinx?”
“...yeah, yeah I know, it's way late, but we've got ourselves an emergency here. I've got a friend here who's got a, uh, a clientside issue. Specifically it's, uh, hypnotic vampiric curseware.”

“...actually yeah, he specifically called it the Renfield Protocol. Sooo do you know which spell I need to use on him to delete it?”

“...uh-huh? And then what?”

“...really? So I gotta go Inception on his ass?”

Erm, phrasing?

**Frisk:** “...yup, Leo was in that movie. *sigh* Gotta love Leo.”

Who is this Leo?

*I take it that you've never watched Inception, then. One Leonardo DiCaprio played the protagonist in that film.*

...I should probably see if we have it in the fleet datalinks.

*If you like heist films, I think you'll enjoy it. Funnily enough, it's somewhat relevant to your excursions into the Dreamlands. I'd say more, but that would probably spoil the film for you.*

**Frisk:** “Anyways, I got what I need to do. Thanks for the intel, Syrinx. And, uh, sorry for wakin' you up so late. ...early. Whichever. Uh, ciao!”

*She ends the call, and gestures for you to be patient.*

**Frisk:** “Make yourself comfy, kid. I'll be back in just a second.”

*Moving to the fridge, she directly swigs from a bag of milk. ...but why tho-

**The Cardinal:** “There was a fish... in the percolator...”

*Well that clears it all up. Though somehow, I imagine milk alone won't be enough to get the taste of that fish-filtered coffee out of her mouth. As indicated by her putting three pieces of pie into the... I don’t quite know what that is, actually. Looks like a microwave, except-

I think that's a radioconvection oven? Uses radiation AND convection, unlike more antique methods with just use one or the other.

*NOICE.*

**Frisk:** “s gotta take a few minutes, so let's rock.”

*As the pie pieces heat up in the convection microwave, Frisk walks over to you, putting her hands on either side of your head.*

Um...

**Frisk:** “s ok kid, I'm not gonna bite.”
“...my mind to your mind. My thoughts to your thoughts...”

“...my mind to your mind. My thoughts to your thoughts...”

Oh... Is Frisk a Trekkie?

*Much like Rico, yes. Though in this case, this isn't a full-on mind-meld. It's just a mantra for when she has to interact more directly with the mind.*

...the log cabin around you shimmers away like a disrupted puddle, and around you you can feel... something. Ok, this is getting weird.

Oh goddds...

*You shut your eyes to block out the transition, and when you open them- ...really? Dark armchairs, weird zig-zag zebra-stripe linoleum, and red curtains that seem to reach up to the stars. Oh gee, where have I seen this before?*  

What IS this place?

*It's somewhere inside your head. Did you ever happen to watch Twin Peaks when you were younger?*  

I- I don't know what that is.

*Wait, really? Then how come you have a representation of the Red Room inside your head?*

Frisk: “Actually, that's probably my doing.”

Indy: “Oh!”

*Hiding behind the set of armchairs in front of you, while you sit in the stage left armchairs, Frisk peers around suspiciously.*

Frisk: “We watched a marathon of Twin Peaks earlier this weekend. That's probably why things look like this. I guess I'm projecting a little.”

The Observer: “Twin Peaks on the mind, eh? Well, that explains an awful lot actually.”

...wait. Everyone hide, I think someone's coming.

Oh no.

*Afterimage of Orlock: “...of course, you WOULD try to hide in these fantasies. Why did I even bother recruiting you in the first place?”*  

“You know there's no point in any of this, little man. The Darkness will consume you like it will everyone else, so there's no use hiding from it. Do this world a favour, and just end it.”

Observer... I'm- I'm scared.
Frisk: “Not today, bitch!”

Bloody hell!

Casting forth a withering glare, Frisk blasts the Afterimage of Orlock with an extra-frosty fire-punch. As he stumbles back, he barely has any time to regain his footing before Frisk starts beating him unconscious with the lamp.

Wowww... That's, um, that's definitely something.

She's not as soft as you'd imagine. There are more than a few screws loose in this girl's head, and DT is a hell of a drug.

Frisk: *panting* “Well, we found the source of the curse. Back in a second!”

As the source of the curse lays twitching on the floor, Frisk goes through the curtain stage right. A minute later, she comes back, wheeling a sodding wood chipper into the middle of the room. Frisk isn't fucking around, she means BUSINESS.

...should I even ask?

Frisk: “I figured you could use a document shredder. Now, help me with this piece of trash, would ya?”

Indy: “Um, o-okay?”

As you and Frisk pick up the body of Not-Really-Orlock, a familiar tune starts up. Aaaand the Cardinal is doing a little dance down on the floor. Yeah I'm about as confused as you are, though I'm still a few whats below your level of confusion.

Frisk: “Wait, what?”

The Cardinal: “What, you thought I was gonna miss out on the party?”

Frisk: “...sure, yeah, fine. Not even gonna argue.”

With that, you two carry the manifestation of the Renfield Protocol over to the wood chipper.

Oh. OH. We're going to throw him in there?

In a way, yes. This thing is symbolic of the Protocol that's been badgering you all this time, and the wood chipper is representative of a recycle bin and a file shredder. After all, even if you actively delete something, it still leaves residual traces that can be pieced together, so ideally if you somehow need to permanently forget something, you need a shredder program to dispose of the remnants of what you've removed from your mind.

Frisk: “D'you mind, Observer?”

The Observer: “...oh, right.”

You see a purple-eyed, dark-robed skeleton turn on the wood chipper. And yes, he is the avatar of
yours truly.

This is... beyond strange. But I think I understand.

Good man.

Frisk: “Alright champ, you ready?”

Indy: “…ready as I'll ever be.”

You begin to swing the curse back and forth in the direction of the wood chipper. This is going to be quite the spectacle, I reckon.

Frisk: “On the count of three, we let go.”

The Cardinal: “Ohhh boy, here come the fireworks!”

Frisk: “And a-one…”

“And a-two…”

“Three!”

You release the cold, limp body of the Renfield Protocol, and it sails through the air into the whirring wood chipper. The machine coughs and splutters as it chews up the curse, and with each crunch of not-actually-bone-because-this-is-a-dream-sequence, you feel the gnawing in your mind grow weaker and weaker.

...rather than a torrent of gore rushing out of the other end, however, you see a cascade of lemons fly through the red curtains. ...lemons. Right. Um. ...I guess the next step is to make lemonade?

Frisk: “Semiotics, am I right?”

The Observer: “Yup. Semiotics.”

Indy: “Semiotics?”

I pick up a lemon for demonstrative purposes.

The Observer: “The study of symbols and making meanings from them. In this case... The lemons represent something sour and initially unpleasant, but they can be used to make something quite pleasant. That's where the phrase “when life gives you lemons” comes from, after all.”

With a wave of my other hand, the lemon is replaced with a tall glass of cloudy lemonade, which I hand to you. The Cardinal peeks through the curtain, astonished by the number of lemons now in the side room.

The Cardinal: “Well kid, it's up to you to turn that stuff into lemonade when the time comes. 'cause we've only got 45 minutes left, an' I think Frisk an' the Observer have a lotta catchin' up to do.”
Indy: “It's... it's over...”

The sound of the microwave beeping breaks your and Frisk out of your joint trance. You no longer feel the urge to destroy yourself, nor feel the compulsion to serve the master once more. She has removed the cause and sent the symptoms into decline, but the scars of your ordeal will take longer to heal.

Indy: “It's gone... It's really gone! Gods, Frisk, THANK YOU!”

You hug her with an overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude, and she warmly returns the embrace. Don't be afraid to shed a few tears here, if you're feeling overwhelmed.

Frisk: *chuckle* “You feelin' ok?”

Indy: “I f- I feel so free... How can I ever repay you?”

Frisk: “Ehhh forget about it. I'm just doing what's right.”

“...you up for some pie?”

Huh. She's certainly taking after her foster-mum.

Indy: “Ohhh, yes please...”

She gets up from the sofa, and heads into the kitchen.

The Cardinal: “You're in for a treat, kid. She does a pretty good pie, I'll tell ya.”

“Usually she does butterscotch like Tori, but her recent Twin Peaks marathon has inspired her to do cherry pie this time.”

I imagine it makes Asriel love her even more than he would normally. Which is still a lot, even on a rough day.

So they're... courting?

Nowadays, they are. Though there was a complication partway through their early relationship. Something took control of Asriel, and it drove Frisk away, leading to the chain of events where I discovered her and Charlie. The thing is, though, that she had effectively travelled back in time to before the young Charlie's “plan” was set in motion, in an attempt to stop Asriel from absorbing Charlie's soul and getting himself killed.

By the time her actions caught my attention, however, she had been living in the Underground for five years. So while I was able to return her to the moment that she left her old world behind, there was a bit of an age-gap between her and Asriel.

Around the time of Asriel's possession, Frisk was 14 and a half, while Asriel was around 15. But when Frisk returned after her time in the other world, she was 19, which left them with an unfortunate dilemma. They still loved each-other, but they would have to wait a bit longer before they could make it official.
Though at this point in history, Asriel's more or less grown up, so he's able to do adult stuff with Frisk. Like taxes!

Oh? Is that what people call “it” in this world?

Erm.

I'm not stupid, Observer. They're properly buming each-other, aren't they?

Well now. Um, yes actually. I've been away for a long time, but by the gist of it they are indeed rolling like thunder under the covers.

Frisk: “Here you go. You look like you could do with something nice after, well, what you've been through.”

Frisk hands you a plate with a slice of hot cherry pie on it, while pushing another plate towards the Cardinal.

Indy: “Thanks, Frisk.”

The Cardinal: “Ohhh baby…”

...I don't know how to feel about this.

Me neither. But the thing is that it's none of our beeswax, if I should be honest. They're not little kids anymore, Indy. They're all grown up now, they can make their own decisions. And if they want to bum each-other silly behind closed doors, that's their prerogative.

...still, I find it a little strange that they've got Charlie in on the action. Granted, he's pretty much Frisk's age by this point, but given how close they were growing up, it does make me wonder a little.

I wasn't really thinking about that. I was thinking more about how Chara would never get into the Omega Patrol with those inclinations.

Implying that you would stand a chance? ...though with that said, Rico and Hank got into the Patrol in the previous timelines, and they were pretty “inclined”. To their credit, however, they did a damn good job at hiding it.

In your case, however, liking men would be the least of your problems. While you have better chances this time around, you failed the psych evaluations on the First Pass, where you weren’t mentally stable enough to enlist. But who knows how things will pan out on this pass?

...Observer?

Yes, lad?

...you speak a lot about other worlds, and other times. How many iterations are there of my world?

Realistically? Too many to count. But in terms of how many I've seen so far? While yours is the Third Pass of this particular 20th century arc, I reckon I've seen about... 13? Yes. Thirteen
general iterations of your universe that I have crib notes on.

...I know I probably shouldn't ask this. But... How does it end?

...

...not well, I take it?

There have been a lot of bad endings so far, and some decent good endings too, but I am not sure how things are going to turn out with this Third Pass of yours. Tempted as I am, I won't give you any massive spoilers as to future events. Some things need to stay in their place to reinforce the predcability of this run-through.

That said, however, I will give you some hints later-

Frisk: “I'll be back in a second. I just gotta check on something.”

What's she up to?

The Cardinal: *mouth full of cherry pie* “Ah hhhp sh dhn't tehk tuuh lng. Wh'rr dwn tuh hrrty mnthsh uhrredh.”

Indy: “Um, was that thirty or forty?”

Gods' sake Cardinal, swallow before you speak.

The Cardinal: *swallow* “That hit the spot.”

“And, yeah, forty. Forty minutes left, guys. Tick tock.”

Frisk returns with what appears to be a small radio. She sets it down on the coffee table in front of us, and starts adjusting the knobs. ...hummm. What a strange sensation this device offers. Oddly familiar...

Frisk: “I made this in case you ever came back. You need a vessel in order to communicate, but even then you’re just speakin' into someone's mind.”

“But with this modified radio, you'll be able to actually talk to us.”

Oh? This just got interesting... Let's give this a spin.

Voice of the Observer, unhindered by mortal minds

The Observer: “Testing, testing, one, two, three.”

“...good morning, angels.”

Frisk: “Good morning, Charlie!”
Indy: “...I don't get it.”

He wouldn't. ...hmmm. My inner voice is muted. Just as well, I suppose.

The Observer: “Today's mission, should you choose to accept it, is to tell me what you and your friends have been up to for the last three years.”

Frisk: “Man... Where to start?”

The Observer: “I'd say, start where we ended off. According to these records, kindly recovered by the Cardinal, Little Red had successfully extracted and relocated the first batch of refugees—”

Indy: “Wait, Little Red? As in- as in the King's Corvette?!”

The Observer: “Indeed. This particular iteration of Little Red came from the Second Pass, over a century after your future niece, one Susan Callisto, flew it to lead the charge against the 15th Imperial Fleet in 1999. In the aftermath of the pyrrhic Omegan victory, the galaxy thought Little Red to be lost, but an associate of mine located it in a spaceship restoration dealership near Libra Prime, roughly around the early 2110s. And now, after paying a handsome sum, it is the property of one Violet Song, an ally of Frisk's. Isn't that right?”

Frisk: “Yeah. Yeah, it's hers now.”

“...now I think about it, I- Lemme check something.”

She flips through her communicator. Probably for an image or-

Frisk: “There! I KNEW I'd seen you somewhere before!”

“Found this image in the ship's databanks, dated 1975. And just look who's here?”

She shows the screen to show Indy a picture showing the crew quarters of Little Red, with several familiar figures posing for a group photograph. It elicits a reaction of surprise and... nostalgia in his eyes. Uh oh.

Indy: “...gods... Why do I- But this is- ...how can I remember this?!!”

The Observer: “…ah. Maybe that wasn't such a good idea, Frisk.”

“From what I've seen, the Third Pass came about due to a reset. And when beings remember their previous timeline, it causes... complications. Memories of the alternate future being remembered ahead of when they occurred on the original schedule.”

“And in Indy's case, he's going to “remember” a fair few things ahead of schedule.”

Indy: “...this isn't right. This can't be from the second time around. You said I was DEAD that time around, Observer! WHY AM I HERE?!”

...sure enough, the photo shows a lop-eared, red-headed sidhe gentleman in a lab coat. An older Lara Callisto stands next to him with a 3 year old girl in her arms. The child is very much a sidhe, but her long tail, ending in a lightning bolt shaped stinger, betrays a certain mixed-race heritage. As if that wasn't evidence enough, little Suzy has the golden, cat-like eyes of her father.
Hank Ryder is seated next to Lara, his cybernetic augmentations clear to see. Both legs have been augmented, along with his... right arm. I'm sure it was his left, wasn't it?

...wait a minute.

The Observer: “I think I know what's going on here. This picture definitely wasn't taken in the Second Pass.”

Indy: “WH- how? I don't understand...”

The Observer: “Well, for starters, you're alive in this picture. That's the first dead giveaway that this is not from the previous world.”

Frisk: “What are you trying to say? Is this from the Fourth Pass or something?”

The Observer: “Certainly not. If it were, Indy wouldn't be remembering any of it, because that Pass hasn't happened yet!”

“...also, I remember that in the Second Pass, Hank's prosthetic arm was the left one, but here, it's the right one that's augmented. That's clear to see.”

“Not much change with Christina here, except that she doesn't have her companion Rook with her. The first time around, she never met him, but their paths did cross during the Second Pass.”

“But do you want to know what REALLY sells this as being from a different timeline?”

Indy: “YES! Please, just TELL me!”

The Observer: “Rico's not here. If this WERE the Second Pass, he would be right there next to Lara and little Suzy. He might not be the best dad, but he would DEFINITELY be present for a family photo.”

“And of course, look at Asterion and Artemis. They look a lot younger than they do in your timeline, don't they? Asterion's in his mid-forties in this picture, whereas in your timeline he turned eighty-one pretty recently. Not much difference with Artemis, but she's generally obsessed with life extension and eternal youth, regardless of which timeline you pick.”

The Cardinal: “Sooo yeah. Thing with Little Red is that, well, it was the catalyst for the Second Pass. Someone figured out how to get it to travel back in time, an' used it to head back to Hydrokhos in 1900. Their, uh, “intervention” split the timeline, kinda like what Frisk did, and the rest is history.”

*Indy doesn't know what to think of this. With vacant eyes, he shovels another forkful of cherry pie into his mouth. After chewing and swallowing, he says what we're all thinking.*

Indy: “...so it's from the First Pass. The one where I survived, but Rico... didn't?”

The Observer: “Well he didn't succumb to the Renfield Protocol if that's what you're afraid of. Far as I can tell, Orlock wasn't even on Aries during the First Pass.”
“But what I can tell you is that Rico got on the bad side of the Necromancers in 1974. And yes, they were at war with the Sector in the First Pass.”

“He was overwhelmed while on patrol, and ended up as a prisoner of war. And knowing the Necromancers, he wasn't treated well at all. By which I mean they took his soul and converted his body into an elite draug, after a long and arduous interrogation.”

...that was probably too much information. He looks horrified.

**Indy:** “The fuck...?”

**Frisk:** “Jesus Christ, that's-”

**The Cardinal:** “WHOA there, no need to invoke His name here.”

**The Observer:** “Just to clarify, Frisk: in Indy's universe, His name itself is somewhat taboo. Not because it is too holy for mortal tongues, but because giving Him such direct recognition gives Him Power, and may draw unwanted attention from those who follow Him.”

**The Cardinal:** “For He is a being of such frightening Power, that He Himself has become the frightening Power. Some folks even say that He was consumed by His own Power, that there isn't even a Him anymore; only His wild, unbridled Power.”

“...but that's a nightmare for another evening. Best that we get back on track, even if Indy's a little shaken.”

...a fair point.

**Indy:** “Bloody wars...”

**Frisk:** “...I guess we should start with the evacuation of New Deseret, then.”

“It wasn't as clean as I'd hoped. Most everybody made it, but the Temple Guard were pretty insistent on keeping people from leaving the city. Some of them got a little... trigger-happy...”

“...I remember the look in Grillby's eyes, as Fuku Fire crumbled to dust in his arms. It was only a riot ray that hit her, but my best guess is that the guard holding it was pretty mad. But he didn't feel mad for too long, since Ben shot him through the heart with a Subzero Shard.”

**The Observer:** “He never was one for seeing innocents die. Though I imagine he didn't stop with that one guard.”

**Frisk:** “I know that he would have left it there. But the other guards didn't share his ideals. When they saw their squadmate go down, they opened fire on Ben.”

**The Observer:** “And I imagine his shields took most of the punishment.”

**Frisk:** “As they always do. But the funny thing is that, after they'd emptied their magazines into him, he didn't blow them away like I thought he would. Instead... he just walked towards them slowly. No
sword drawn, no staff ready, no Legendary shotgun loaded, not even his wizard robes billowin’ in
the wind. He just rolled up on them with rolled-up sleeves, and nothing else.”

“And you know what they did, when they saw him cast everything aside? They RAN. I'm not even
joking, they seriously just RAN.”

The Observer: “If I'd emptied a full clip into someone, and they just shrugged it all off, I too
would run to the hills. And considering what Ben can do with just his hands and his MIND,
they were wise to peg it before he went full-on Doctor Manhattan on their arses.”

“...shame about Fuku, though. Was there anything you could do for Grillby?”

Frisk: “Well, there was one thing I was able to do. ...I went back downstairs.”

The Observer: “...you did? I thought you would have been a little uneasy about going back
into the Inferno so soon.”

Frisk: “Didn't matter how I felt. Fuku didn't deserve to die like that.”

“Long story short, I brought her back. And you know what? It was a lot easier the second time
around. Pretty much every daemon I came across just ran away, except for a few who brought Fuku
to me.”

“Really! They just ushered her towards me, and then- seriously, this actually happened. -they fell to
their knees and begged me for mercy! Daemons? Begging me for MERCY? I mean, hell, I'll take it.
I wasn't in the mood for fightin' anyways.”

*Indy doesn't know what to say. He seems like he's in a state of not wanting to think too hard about
these things.*

Frisk: “…I spared them, this time. They had enough troubles as it was, but I wasn't gonna give them
much else. Tempting as it was to go full-on Doomgirl against the local baron, to feed its Essence to
the starving serfs, I was still hovering around LV19. For all I know, I coulda tipped over the edge
dealing with the first of its guards, so I had to turn down their request.”

The Cardinal: “It's a shame, really. Seemed like something you'd enjoy doing, if I'll be frank.
But of course, health comes first.”

The Observer: “True in many fields. ...I imagine you took what you learned from your time in
the other world, and made a robot body for Fuku's soul?”

Frisk: “You think I woulda kept her in my head all this time? While it was nice to have someone in
my head again, she deserved to keep living her own life. It took us a coupla weeks to put a vessel
together, but eventually Fuku had a body to call her own again.”

The Observer: “I suppose all's well that ends well, in that case. Though I reckon she still
needed therapy afterwards. You of all people know well that death's a traumatic experience,
even when you have the luxury of bouncing back.”

Frisk: “Pretty much. She's, uh, still going to therapy, coming to terms with her new dark soul. And
when that don't help, she's got me an' Asriel on speed-dial.”
The Observer: “...you alright over there, Indy? I know it's a little awkward, but I am on the clock, so...”

Indy: “It's fine. ...ok, it's not fine. But don't mind me, you keep- you keep talking...”

Poor lad looks awfully tired.

The Observer: “If you need to have a kip, Frisk and I can continue this conversation in the kitchen.”

Frisk: “I'll go grab you a blanket.”

Indy: “Just let me finish this pie, and- wait, do you have a spare toothbrush?”

Frisk: “Actually yeah. I packed a manual brush for Charlie, but I forgot that he doesn't need one. Changelings don't really need to brush their teeth, after all.”

The Observer: “Make sense. They can just shapeshift them clean.”

Indy: “When- when did he become a changeling? How the hell did he-”

Frisk: “It’s a long story. But, uh-”

The Observer: “You know the amalgamates, right?”

Indy: “Of course? ...oh. OH, did he become an amalgamate?”

Frisk: “Sort of. He managed to take over an amalgamation of amalgamates by shoving his own soul into it, while trying to save me from getting goo'd to death. And now, uh, he's basically Odo.”

Indy: “...isn't that a Star Trek thing?”

Frisk: “Yeah, you ever watch Deep Space Nine?”

Indy: “That's the one with the space station and the wormhole, right? Yeah, I watched a few episodes round at Rico's house. The changeling was always harassing the bartender with the massive lugs, from what I remember.”

The Cardinal: “Yeah, that sounds like Quark alright. Now you go on an' get that blanket, Frisk. We've got half an hour left before Dog calls it quits.”

A minute later, Frisk is standing in the kitchen with the interdimensional radio. Indy polishes off his plate, brings it over to the counter, and heads off to the bathroom with the spare toothbrush.

Frisk: “Thanks, kid.”

The Observer: “...so, that's the immediate aftermath out of the way. Now onto the specifics: how's Florian doing?”

Frisk: “I won't lie, it took him a while to adjust. He felt uneasy around the others, starting out,
especially around Asgore and Toriel. But the weirdest thing was that, once he'd adjusted to this world, he ended up visiting Alphys the most, not the parallels of his parents.”

The Observer: “I've actually been thinking about that too. See, in a way, the parents of Asriel aren't technically the parents of Flowey. If anything, as weird as this may sound, Alphys is technically Flowey's mum. After all, she was his creator.”

“It was her who brought Flowey into the world, even as she knew not what she was doing. So when you really think about it, it makes sense for Florian to have a closer connection to Alphys, since she's the parallel of his real parent. ...and he probably gave her the most grief as Flowey, so he wants to make up for it.”

Frisk: “...wow. Just- I never really thought about it like that. I figured it was because it hurt him to be reminded of his parents being dead, but now you put it like that...”

“...anyway, he eventually adjusted to life in California. I even had the opportunity to adopt him, later on.”

The Observer: “And did you?”

Frisk: “Not right away. Honestly, I was kinda afraid of taking such a big step so soon, even when I was afraid of livin' alone. Because honestly, as much as I loved living with the Dreemurrs, me an' Toriel needed our space.”

The Observer: “Mmmh. And from what I recall, this wasn't the first time you were at odds, not by a long shot. Her desire to adopt you had been somewhat diluted by your *ahem* choice words regarding her actions. And while you managed to live with eachother to an extent, for Asriel's sake, you did have a “healthy” number of arguments with her over the years.”

“But I'm proud that you've been living independently, Frisk. It's a big step, but a healthy one nonetheless.”

Frisk: “Gee, thanks.”

The Observer: “...moving swiftly on. How's Florian doing at school?”

Frisk: “School? Oh, he's doing fine. Grades are ok, though he has a bit of a “celebrity” issue like Asriel does. Folks have high expectations of him, but he's... well, his report cards usually have something along the lines of “pleasantly average” written on them.”

The Observer: “Pleasantly average. That's all we can wish for our lives to be, in the end. And considering Florian's time as a boy adventurer, I imagine having a “pleasantly average” life must feel like a summer holiday in comparison.”

“...and given that you're reading his report cards so regularly, I'm assuming that you eventually did adopt him.”

Frisk: “Yup. Signed those papers about two years ago, haven't regretted it for a moment. And you know what? I feel like I've been a good mom so far.”
The Observer: “And I am glad to hear it. Though I imagine it does help that you aren't dragging him around the multiverse like a lop-eared Rusty Venture. Such a lifestyle has messed with the heads of many a boy adventurer. I mean, look at what happened to Action Johnny; even when he got off the sauce he was downing Xanax like they were Cheetos.”

Frisk: “Not in my house he ain't. Only therapy he's gettin' is quality time with Doctor Amygdala.”

The Observer: “A wise choice indeed. ...wait, I thought she died? Or was she away during the Interloper's rampage?”

Frisk: “Oh no, she's “dead” alright. Buuut she's in a cybernetic shell now, so she's got that goin' for her.”

The Observer: “Damn. I'm a little surprised that she'd still be in that field, after getting torn apart by a patient of hers.”

Frisk: “Hey, I turned out ok didn't I?”

The Observer: “Fair point. Then again, not everyone's as resilient as you.”

Frisk: “Oh staaahp.” #chuckle*

The Observer: “...I think we're making good progress here. How are we doing for time, Cardinal?”

The Cardinal: “Oh we got 26 minutes left. Plenty of time to wrap things up, if you ask me.”

The Observer: “We'll be cutting it close either way, so let's not prevaricate about the bush. How are the King and Queen doing?”

Frisk: “They- they're doing just fine. Asgore's still running the show, since everybody keeps voting for him to stay in office. Even when he tried to bring in term limits so he could step down, he still ended up winning the election by popular demand. People were THAT afraid of the concept of President Mettaton.”

The Observer: “Unfortunate, but a wise choice nonetheless. I've seen a timeline where Mettaton became the new king, and it did not look like it was going anywhere good.”

Frisk: “As for Tori, well, she's still doing her thing. She moved up to San Francisco about a year ago, since she'd earned herself a place in the city's Department of Education.”

“Asriel didn't go with her, though. He stuck around with Asgore, since he didn't wanna move too far away from me. Though honestly, with what happened next, he coulda moved all the way up to Alaska an' we'd still be workin' together.”

The Observer: “What exactly “happened next”?"


The Observer: “...oh no. Ohhh no no no no no. Please don't tell me it happened again.”
Frisk: “It’s not what you think. Monsters didn’t really factor into it, I’ll be honest. But I’ll tell you what did.”

“In the summer of last year, the New Dynasty began their “rightful acquisition” of Japan and Indonesia. Since those places were both part of PADCO, the West Coast decided that the New Dynasty had broken the armistice, and joined the fray shortly after Australia started their offensive.”

“...at the time, part of me wanted to join up, but I had enough to deal with at home. I had Florian to take care of, I had Asriel to take care of, and I wasn't sure if I’d be able to handle being in an actual goddamn war, even if my LV had gone down.”

The Cardinal: “But that was before the Shadow Bureau approached you. They, uh, had different plans in mind.”

Frisk: “They made us a pretty generous offer. Me, Asriel, Charlie, and Ben. We'd all be paid pretty damn well for working with the allied forces, on top of whatever “spoils of war” we'd acquire on the western front. While Ben was game for it, Charlie took a little more convincing to get him on-board, but Asriel and I politely declined.”

“So instead of thanking us for our time, they pulled out their trump card: they had dirt on the Kingdom of Monsters. Of what the others did while I was passing through the Underground. Things that I'd forgiven all of them for YEARS ago. And if we didn't work with the Bureau, they'd blow the whistle on every one of my friends, everyone who'd ever stood in my way back then, and bring them to court.”

The Observer: “...those dirty little cockroaches. You didn't take their carrot, so they started waving the stick around.”

Frisk: “...we had no choice. I didn't want to see anyone else get hurt. So we had to play their game, and join the war.”

“...funnily enough, it didn't last long. Since Charlie was a changeling, he was able to cause some pretty serious disruption, imitating top officials, setting up lousy battle plans, generally making the New Dynasty command hierarchy look like a bunch of jokers. But even if he hadn't been so successful in messing up them from within, Ben would have taken up the slack no problem.”

“Between those two, PADCO didn't really need me and Asriel. Hell, they didn't even have to fall back on the “Feed The Beast” contingency, so they just kept him at the HQ in Hawai'i for the whole three and a half months of the operation. Didn't stop them sending my ass to the front lines, though.”

*She pauses, looking around with a sense of dread, before feeling foolish for being so paranoid. But it's not her fault. 80 days in a warzone would leave anyone with a sense of paranoia.*

Frisk: “...sometimes, when I'm on the freeway, the diesel fumes remind me of the smog in Beijing. But while all that does is make me feel uneasy, it's nothing compared to the nightmares. Though I guess I'm lucky that it only happens when I sleep. I almost feel bad that I don't have it as bad as some of the Rangers do.”

“...it's like a sick joke, when you think about it. The second I think I'm at the end of the road to recovery, something jerks me right back to the first mile. *scoff* As if I haven't suffered enough already.”
“...but when I'm with Asriel, it doesn't feel so bad. I haven't touched a bottle in nearly two years, but we've found something way better.”

The Observer: “And you're not talking about the reassuring words and unconventional techniques of Doctor Amygdala.”

Frisk: “They help. But what we have helps too.”

“Like I said, I gave Asriel the best present I could when he turned 18 last year. And on top of that, we were ready to take it to the next level.”

“...I don't know if it's a placebo, or if it's actually doing something, but whenever we make love... It helps take my mind off of what I've been through. And when we're both laying there, talking late into the night, I can feel all the bad times just melting away...”

The Cardinal: “I'm convinced that it's working. I haven't really read any studies on this kinda behaviour, but over the last coupla months it's been havin' a positive effect on the both of them.”

The Observer: “...I'm actually kind of surprised. I thought that the first time, you'd have some serious anxieties about it. I don't want to say more, but-”

The Cardinal: “Dude just don't talk about it.”

Frisk: “It's fine.”

She closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, and continues. Her actions speak louder than her voice, and they show that it wasn't exactly “fine”.

Frisk: “...it was actually kind of awkward, at first. Part of me didn't even want to look at him, when we started. I wanted to put my hands over his face-”

She squeezes her eyes shut again, shaking her head, before taking another deep breath. It wasn't everything she'd hoped for.

Frisk: “I didn't let him win though. No matter what, I couldn't let him get the better of me.”

“We switched a few things up, and I never looked away from him. I needed to be the one in control, to take things at a pace I could handle. And I reminded myself, constantly, that it wasn't his fault. He didn't hurt me like that. He would NEVER hurt me as bad as the Interloper did.”

*sigh* “So yeah. The first time was pretty awkward. I think I even cried at one point, I was afraid that it wasn't gonna work out like I'd hoped... I didn't want us to end up like Richard and Linda, not after everything we'd gone through together... But I stayed determined.”

“It only got better from there. We always made time for love, every time feeling a little better than the last, a little more passionate, a little less awkward, a little more amazing every time we touched...”

The Observer: “...wow.”

Indy: “Blimey.”
It looks like Indy's heard more than his fair share of this. Though I suppose we were talking a bit too loudly.

**The Observer:** “Oh, are we keeping you up lad?”

**Indy:** “Urm...”

*His hand wavers in a “kind of” motion, as if we weren't bothering him that much, but with how we're talking he isn't going to get to sleep any time soon.*

**Indy:** “Don't mind me, though. It sounds like you have enough to deal with without worrying about me.”

**Frisk:** “It's fine. ...really, it is. I'm gonna be fighting this battle for the rest of my life, but right now I have the upper hand. And so long as I have folks like Asriel in my life, it's gonna stay that way.”

**Indy:** “…so about- I probably shouldn't ask this, but... it works?”

*Frisk looks to the radio, as if trying to ask me if she should confirm such a thing to a 13 year old boy.*

**Frisk:** “…don't try it at home. I mean, not until you're older.”

**Indy:** “Oh don't worry, I'm not going to risk it. Honestly, I'll probably be part of the Patrol before I'm old enough get my whistle wet.”

**Frisk:** “Whoa, don't do THAT. It probably goes without saying, but you really shouldn't get drunk when you have your first time. That's something you wanna actually remember, if you ask me.”

**The Observer:** “Present company ex-”

**The Cardinal:** “DUDE, ix-nay on at-thay!”

**The Observer:** “Never mind. She has a good point, though.”

*That was callous of me. Bloody hell.*

**Indy:** “…oh. So whistle isn't a euphemism for-”

**Frisk:** “Not in these parts it ain't. If you're wettin' your whistle around here, you're drinkin'.”

**Indy:** “…ok, that makes sense. So basically you're saying don't drink and bum. *shrug* Good advice.”

**Frisk:** *rolls eyes* “You go an' hit the hay, y'hear? Or d'you need a glass of warm milk before you turn in?”

**Indy:** “Thanks, but I've already brushed. I just needed some water.”

**The Observer:** “Sounds like a plan. Though warm milk would have gone down well with that pie, now I think about it. Also, apparently it helps strengthen your teeth if you drink it before brushing.”
Indy: “Oooh, I'll keep that in mind!”

*Indy grabs a glass, filling it from the sink. He seems pretty intrigued by the idea, by the looks of it.*

...*he pauses as he turns off the taps. Something unfortunate has just occurred to him.*

**Indy:** “...I just realised. How exactly am I going to get home? I really hope you have a return plan, Observer.”

**The Observer:** “Don't worry about it lad, we're sure to figure something out. Even if it takes a while, remember that I exist outside of your space-time. It is not a matter of if we can return you to your timeline: it is merely a matter of when.”

**Frisk:** “But if he wants to send someone to another place, he still has to play by a few of our rules. There’s gotta be enough of a distortion for him to work his magic.”

**The Cardinal:** “Same goes for me. That's why we went up into the Warp Ring, and why Frisk’s probably gonna need to build a teleporter or something once she gets back to her lab.”

“But you don't gotta worry yourself, kid. You ain't gonna get home tonight, but I'll sure as hell send you back to just after you left. Lara ain't gonna have to wait too long for you to come home.”

“In the meantime, you just catch yourself some shut-eye. You'll need your strength for the road trip back to San Francisco.”

*Indy walks carefully back to the sofa, still a little uneasy with the gravity of the situation, trying to settle in for the night.*

**The Observer:** “...well, Frisk, I am very much proud of you for overcoming your ordeals. I wish you and Asriel all the best.”

“...but one thing I have to ask is this: why is Charlie in on the action? I thought you and Asriel would want to be alone for your little getaway?”

**Frisk:** “...I won't lie to you. Charlie's... he's...”

**The Cardinal:** “He knows how to party. And he's a shapeshifter, so...”

**The Observer:** “Oh. Hummm. That's... certainly interesting.”

*One can only imagine how creative he is in that regard... Hmm.*

**Frisk:** “And like I said before, it wasn't just my idea. Asriel was pretty intrigued about how Charlie had been, uh, getting around.”

**The Observer:** “So you're saying he's a swinger now?”

**Frisk:** “He'd have to be in a relationship first, and that ain't happenin' any time soon, but I get what you mean. If anything, he's more of a... really active bachelor.”
“Thing is, he's made a bit of a name for himself in certain circles. Made a lot of people happy, if you
know what I mean.”

The Observer: “Well then. It definitely sounds like he knows how to “party”, so I guess it
makes sense for you to bring him along, but still... It is a little weird that Asriel wanted this. I
mean, didn't he and Charlie become like siblings?”

Charlie: “Nah, we were never really brothers. Much as we liked to pretend, we were more than
brothers: we were more than brothers: we were true friends. Blood's thicker than milk, after all.”

Clothed in a lime-green dressing gown, Charlie sweeps into the kitchen with all the grace of the
Flying Nun. Let's hear what he has to say on the subject.

Charlie: “Sooo, uh, how're you guys doing?”

The Cardinal: “We're makin’ good time, I think. But we've only got 15 minutes left before we
have to turn off the phase stabilizer. Dog ain't gonna give us a second more if he can help it.”

Charlie: “I'm a little surprised he gave us so much of his time, I gotta say. After all, we're kinda
playin' with fire here.”

The Cardinal: “We're fiine, it's still “early days” as the Observer would say.”

The Observer: “allo Charlie-boy. I heard you're quite the playa nowadays?”

Charlie: “Playa? Jeez, could you sound more white?”

The Observer: #imitates television static#

Charlie: “...goddamnit Observer.”

The Observer: “But in all seriousness, given your apparent reputation, I thought you'd still be
showing Asriel a good time.”

Charlie: “Oh, Rei-bae's called it a night. He's all outta steam, if ya know what I mean.”

The Observer: “I do, but probably don't be so blunt about it, considering present company.”

Charlie: “Crap, you're right.”

Charlie looks over to the exhausted young sidhe, finally finding a good sleeping position on his right
side. Indy's eyes meet those of the Fallen Child, now a grown man with the powers of a changeling.

Charlie: “...you comfy, kiddo?”

Indy: “About as comfy as I can be. It's not exactly a double king, but I've had worse beds while
roughing it.”

“...sooooo, Chara?”

Charlie's eyes narrow at the mention of that name.
Charlie: “Charlie. I'm not like those other guys. Not anymore.”

Indy: “Okay... Is it true that you come when your name is called?”

That wry grin. Indy knows full well what he's referencing, the cheeky little blighter.

...it takes Charlie a bit longer to register the insinuation, even as Frisk starts laughing. But when it hits, he can't help but laugh along with her.

Charlie: “This son-of-a-gun, I swear. Gods...” *chuckle*

“Honestly it's really none of your goddamn business. But I'll say this: those two lovebirds have never been happier, thanks to yours truly.”

A salacious glance from Frisk says everything that needs to be said. If nothing else, he's added a little spice to this weekend. Still can't get over him being so lewd, though.

Charlie: “Aaaanyways, I was just gonna make a sandwich. And yes, Observer, I can handle solid foods now.”

“...thanks, by the way. I remember what you said to me, back in ‘71. And since then, I've been getting better an' better at, well, being what I am.”

Awwww.

The Observer: “It brings me ever so much joy to hear that you've been improving. Speaking of which, how's your sleeping situation?”

Charlie: *sigh* “Still can't hold this shape while sleeping. But I HAVE found a solution.”

...you have to be joking.

The Observer: “What the bloody hell is this?”

Frisk: “What the fuck?!” *breaks down laughing*

As Charlie changes shape, he imitates a body-length pillow, with a sultry image of himself printed on the pillowcase, shown laying on bedsheets. At least it's an image of him wearing his classic attire, and not him in gentleman's lingerie. But still, this is just weird. WHY CHARLIE.

Indy: “What.”

Charlie: “Laugh all you want, but this shape works REALLY well. Seriously, it's so simple I can hold it in my sleep, but it's so soft and flexible that I can easily fall asleep in someone's arms...”

“Come on, Frisk, it's not THAT silly.”

Frisk can't help but giggle uncontrollably as she looks upon Charlie's body pillow form. Not sure I can blame her, since it is pretty ludicrous.

The Observer: “I think we've lost her. The image of a talking ‘Dutch wife’ is apparently too much for her.”
Charlie: “Isn’t a Dutch wife supposed to be a bamboo thing from Indonesia?”

The Observer: “In the olden days, yes. Though your pillow form is more in line with a “duck tempura” or however you say it.”

Charlie: “Yeah, yeah this is my “dakimakura” form. I actually picked it up while schmoozin’ in Japan, checkin’ out some of the antiques stores in Tokyo. Found an old love pillow in the back of the shop, along with a couple of those Amiibo things. Pretty crazy how valuable they used to be.”

The Observer: “Oh I’m sure they still have value. They’re not exactly Beanie Babies, right?”

Charlie: “You’d think that, but nowadays anyone with an emulator can just download the data of an NFC tag an’ trick the system into thinkin’ you’ve got a Mega Yarn Yoshi or a NWC ’21 Golden Kraken. That kinda put a dent in the value of Amiibo, especially after the Collapse.”

The Cardinal: “Yeah yeah, it’s all kinds a’ fascinatin’. Frisk? Frisk seriously, pull yourself together.”

“...Charlie, stop bein’ a love pillow an’ help me out here!”

*delayed giggle*

Now THERE is a great quote to take out of context.

Frisk: “I’m- I’m fine. I’m okay, I’m fine.”

The Cardinal: “Dang. Of all the forms to be, you decide to be a love pillow.”

Charlie: “It works! Seriously, don’t knock it until you’ve tried it.”

The Cardinal: “Well sorry, but I’m not one of the Founders. I can’t change myself as easily as you can.”

Charlie: “Whatever, I’m gonna make that sandwich.”

“How ’bout you, Frisk? You up for a sandwich?”

Frisk: “Thanks, but I-h eeeeee. I- I just had some pie, I’m good.”

“But while you’re in here, could you clean out the coffee maker? That fish ain’t gonna get itself outta the percolator, y’know.”

Charlie: “…sure, sure. Just, uh, grab me a few things from the fridge, would ya?”

*Frisk grabs some butter out of the freezer, followed by some chicken, ham, cheese, lettuce and mayonnaise. Meanwhile, Charlie returns to classic form, moves over to the sink and starts cleaning out the coffee maker.*

The Observer: “So Charlie, how the devil have you been?”

Charlie: “Well, I can’t say the past coupla years have been boring. I followed your advice and went from strength to strength, which again I gotta thank you for.”

“...ever since I got a body of my own, I wanted to experience everything that the world had to offer
The Observer: “To each his own. But considering how you are nowadays, I imagine your desire to experience life firsthand did drag you into dockside bars.”

Charlie: “Guilty as charged. I only ever drank in an attempt to blend in, and even then all I touched were bottled beers and *ugh* white rum. No matter how good they try to sell themselves, they all just taste SO bad. Weak enough to be tolerable, but still not nice.”

The Observer: “It sounds like your only experiences with booze have been with milquetoast horsepiss and bootleg rotgut. Now I know you're naturally opposed to alcohol, but I implore you to try the one booze you've presumably never tried: wine.”

Charlie: “I honestly never bothered with it, I just wanted the cheese. And frankly, drinking makes it harder for me to hold my shape.”

The Observer: “You're missing out, lad. All the booze you've touched has frankly sucked, which has soured your general opinion on it. No offence, Frisk, but your booze preferences were frankly kind of shite.”

Frisk: “What the hell, Observer?!”

The Cardinal: “He's got a point, actually. You always went for the cheapest, nastiest bootleg rotgut your body could handle. Didn't matter if it tasted like crap, didn't matter if it was rough enough to qualify as liquid sandpaper, just so long as it made ya feel comfortably numb.”

“But as a result, now Charlie thinks that all booze sucks, made even worse because his first drink as a changeling just so happened to be a bottle of fuckin' Pißwasser . When in truth, I think he'd kinda enjoy a little glass of quality Zinfandel. Seriously dude, get your hands on a fine wine. You might actually like it.”

Charlie: “…if Tori cracks open a bottle next time I'm around, I'll chance it. But she'd better have cheese ready if worst comes to worst.”

The Observer: “So, with that out of the way, back to the dockside bars.”

Charlie: “Funnily enough, Frisk was the one who got me going to those places. It started out with us just talking over a bowl of mini-pretzels, but within a coupla months I was showing off my parlor tricks, arm-wrestling Polynesians and playing cards with Frisk’s dad every time he and his crew pulled into port.”

The Observer: “OOOH, that's another thing you should try. Try to find a good bottle of port if the Zinfandel isn't to your liking.”

Charlie: “*sigh* ‘Sure, fine, why not? Anyways, it wasn't too long before I started getting attention from some of the regular ladies. Probably because I was the slimmest guy in the regular haunt of rugged pirates and merchant traders.”

The Observer: “Yeah it's pretty obvious why you'd stand out. Even if you were surrounded
by average Californian dudes, you'd still stand out as a handsome young gentleman.”

Charlie: “Thanks, but you're really not my type.”

The Observer: “And I'd hope not. It would be a long-distance romance at best.”

Charlie: “And that ain't even a stretch.”

“Anyways, I started meeting women around that time. Honestly, I was just fine with talking, even on the rare occasion when they wanted to buy ME a drink for a change.”

“I was getting a lot more confident, day by day. But then, Frisk took Florian under her wing and she stopped frequenting the watering holes of Marina del Rey, leaving me without a winglady. By that point, however, I could “fly” pretty well on my own.”

*Charlie leaves the percolator to soak in the hot, soapy water of the sink, before washing his hands and moving to the central marble work-surface to put together his midnight sandwich.*

Charlie: “So one night, I find myself in some girl's apartment after leaving the Golden Oyster. Turns out, she was pretty impressed by my shapeshifting tricks, and took me round to her place for a private performance. One thing led to another, and the next thing I know, she's floating in me like I'm a gelatinous cube. Actually I think I WAS a gelatinous cube at that point.”

“...yeah. It got weird. But as weird as it was, I was feeling things that I'd never truly felt before. And they felt AMAZING. What's more, I'm pretty sure she had a fun time too, even though I wasn't sure what I was doing right.”

“So yeah, first time was pretty good in my book. And when I figured out what I was doing right, well, I dove right into the dating pool, and I haven't looked back since.”

The Cardinal: “His reputation really does precede him, I gotta say. I swear, he's like a modern-day Joey Tribbiani, if Joey could shapeshift.”

Charlie: “Oh stahp.”

The Cardinal: “Wasn't always a good thing, though. Seriously, I had to kick him out of the rec centre when I found out that he was only coming to prayer group so he could meet women. I mean, you're a nice guy, Charlie, but you're not welcome to my sessions anymore.”

“Oh yeah, that's another thing. Guess who founded his own church? Yeah that's right; yours truly.”

The Observer: “Another one? I thought you were done with that kind of business?”

The Cardinal: “I never said that. I said I was done with having younger followers. But since I've been stuck here for so long, I've had to keep my Power levels up. And what's a more ethical way to grow in Power than from the adoration of the masses?”

“Aaand I know what you're thinkin' Observer. “This smells like a cult scenario.” An' the thing is that you're only half right. You're right in that it's a cult, revolving around a central figure. But I've seen how most “cults” end up, an' I ain't gonna make the same mistakes they
did. I ain't goin' for utter devotion here, I'm just handin' out knowledge in exchange for some of people's time and Power. It's symbiotic, not parasitic.”

“And unlike those other guys, I ain't gonna let it devolve into another Jonestown massacre or Heaven's Gate mass-suicide or White House standoff. Believe me, I've seen way worse endings than that of Marshall Applewhite's secret fan club. Nothing makes you wanna avoid fucking up like seeing a colony nuke itself in an attempt to become like the Mazda.”

The Observer: “I suppose that's fair. How do you two feel about it?”

Frisk: “So far it's going pretty well. Their work's been keeping me in business, and I'm all for sleeping through the dark ages in a shared dream state.”

The Observer: “Oh? What's all that about?”

Charlie: “Well, the Cardinal's afraid that, eventually, the Isolation Sphere's gonna crack an' let the Corruption in. So in preparation for that, he's been workin' on a smaller version that's easier to maintain, along with a cityship so we can explore the universe “when the stars are right again”.”

The Cardinal: “Let's be real here, the Sphere encapsulates the whole of the inner Solar System. The powers that be barely got enough material from the Asteroid Belt in order to build the damn thing, and I'm afraid that they've been skimpin' on the dark matter layer.”

“We've been runnin' tests, projections, what have you, and all sources indicate that this was a real cowboy hack-job. The way it's going, even with routine maintenance, it's probably gonna crack within the next few hundred years, at which point the Corruption of the universe is gonna flood the inside like an ocean tryin' to warm itself around a goddamn candle.”

The Observer: “Sounds like the higher powers had a very generous estimate as to how long it would take to figure out the problem. The Sphere's warranty may be in the ballpark of a couple of centuries, but the Corruption's going to be around a LOT longer than that. Ben's world is proof enough of that.”

Frisk: “66 million years. It just isn't economical to maintain such a secure Dyson Sphere for that long. Cardinal's been pulling all the strings he can to construct an Isolation Vault out in Wyoming, while I've been working like a DOG trying to set up a strong enough stasis field so we can all just sleep the centuries away down there.”

The Observer: “Damn smart plan, if a little expensive. I can always count on you lot to have a trick or two up your sleeves.”

“...it also means that, perhaps-”

Frisk: “This isn't goodbye, Observer. If anything, it's a “smell ya later”.”

She can't help but grin widely as she says this. It's...

Frisk: “I know how you work, ol' pal. So if we make it to the other side of this, if we wake up to a
world where magic is bountiful again, you drop in an' say hi, ok?”

“Seriously, don't keep a girl waitin'. It's gonna be a LONG time before I'll see you again...”

The Cardinal: “Well, you'd better make the most of this last encounter. We've only got three minutes before Dog punches his clock, so if there's anything else you gotta say to the Observer, say it now or hold onto it for the next 66 million years.”

Frisk: “SHIT.”

“Uhhh, oh god, what to say... Uh, last I heard, Alphys and Undyne have a kid on the way. I never really understood how that works, but I'm happy for them either way.”

“Sans is still Sans, but he's working with the Cardinal now, so that's a plus.”

The Cardinal: “Yeah, yeah he's a real helpful asset. ...no really, he's pretty invaluable as a member of the team. His breaks are more akin to annual leave, I ain't gonna sugar-coat it, but he does such a great job I'm willing to overlook that little problem.”

Frisk: “What else, what else... Oh! Papyrus has gotten into making pizza nowadays. And honestly, even though he still isn't great at it, it's still good pizza. I mean, even lousy pizza is still good pizza, so we're all happy.”

“Ben's still around, doing his thing. Right now he's babysitting Florian, since I needed someone to keep an eye on him while we were on holiday. Agnes, however, well... she left. Cardinal helped her get back to Wellsverne Gothic to take care of the Warren kids.”

The Observer: “Oh... Ohhh, I think I have some snippets of what happened over there, back before Gimel wrecked my shit.”

“...damn it all. Colin and Ada are dead. And Alice Liddell... didn't even make it to Goatswood before the Centauri caught up to her. Fuck my life.”

“I can understand why Ben would want to stay here, if you were all he had left. Can't imagine that Agnes went quietly though.”

Frisk: “…it didn't work out between them. I honestly thought they'd be able to work something out, but they broke up about a month after the evacuation of Salt Lake City. Couldn't even settle on a long-distance relationship since, well, you know how it is.”

Charlie: “Didn't take him long to get into the dating pool, though. Though I guess I helped him out where that's concerned.”

The Observer: “Because of course you and he would-”

Charlie: “Nuh-uh. Cool as he is, I'm not really his type. I do sometimes play wingman for him, so that helps.”

The Observer: “Oh, ok. I just figured-”

Charlie: “Nothin' happened between us. But we do share a sense of comradery.”

Frisk: “Camaraderie.”
Charlie: “Whatever.”

Frisk: “...I think that's everything. Everything that can't wait, at least.”

“I guess this is it. I'm really going to miss you, Observer.”

*Dry your eyes, Frisk. You're going to make ME cry.*

The Observer: “...this story may be over, but the Tale never really ends. The Undertale, the DoctorTale, the Tale of the Endless, it all continues long after we turn the game off, long after we close the browser tab and look for something else. It will always stay with us, no matter what happens.”

“Our time here is nearing its end. But one day, I shall come back. Yes, I shall come back. Until then, there must be no regrets, no tears, no anxieties. For when the stars are right, and the metaverse blooms with magic once again, I'll be watching. And if you're lucky I'll pop in to say hello, from time to time. See you... out there...”

Frisk: *sniff* “Goodbye, Observer...”

The Observer: “...goodbye, Frisca Rivera. ...goodbye, old friend. ...until the next time.”

Charlie: “...Observer. ...thank you. For everything.”

The Observer: “Until the next time, Charlie. To all of you, good night... and good luck.”

“...oh, and tell Asriel that I'm very, very happy that his life's turning out so well.”

-**carrier lost**-

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**Location:** Callisto Family Quarters, ADT Corr Féar, House Enfield Cityfleet

**Reality:** Prima Tellus

**Date:** 8th day of the Vernal Climb, 1965 Imperial Reckoning

**Dialogue:** Lara Callisto and the Observer

[faint Indian call, descending]

What...? Observer? Is that you? Where's my brother?

*Last I saw your brother, he was curling up on the sofa, in a log cabin in British Columbia.*

I... I can't say I know where that is.

*It's on the western edge of the New World, far beyond the sailing range of the old Nordic expeditions. Which yes, indeed, means that Indy has set foot on Earth.*
Oh my gods...

*I know. To you, it must sound like standing the cradle of life itself. But this Earth isn't in the best of ways. It is hardly Tír na nÓg by any stretch, even though it's still lively enough in the right places.*

*Rest assured, your brother is in one of the safer parts of the world, surrounded by caring people. And who knows? Perhaps he will bring home a couple of souvenirs when he- Ah, speak of the devil.*

By all the gods...

*Sparks of black lightning start to dance around the bedroom. An important thing to note here is that, despite it being barely half an hour since he left with the Cardinal, it has been somewhat longer for him to come home.*

What?! How long has he been over there?

*Given that the people who found him were far from home themselves, and considering the driving distance from British Columbia to Los Angeles, I'd say it's been a couple of days.*

And yet it has barely been half an hour for me... It really is the strangest thing. Almost like the nature of Tír na nÓg itself.

*Except it's the other way around this time. Or at least that's how it seems. You see, it doesn't really matter how much time passes in one world relative to another. He could be over there for three days, or even three years, and with the right knowledge of atemporality one could bring him back to this specific moment in time, regardless of how long he's spent in Frisk's world.*

*And here he is! With a crack of darkness, Indy falls back into your world. Specifically, he falls onto his bed with a rather heavy satchel. While wearing thick blue jeans and a longsleeve tartan shirt, which seem just a little bit too large for him-*

*Lara:* “Indy!”

You run over and give him a hug, barely giving him time to adjust to this world. Give him a little space, won’t you?

*Indy:* “You would not believe the week I've had...”

Your heartfelt reunion is interrupted by a frantic knock at your door.

*Lana Callisto:* “What is that racket?!”

*Indy:* “I- Sorry Mum, I fell out of bed.”

*Quick thinking from Indy. But will it be enough to cover up his otherworldly adventure?*

*Lana Callisto:* “Fell out of bed? It sounded like a thunderstorm in there! Are you sure you're alright?”
Indy: “I'm fine, I- I had a bit of a bad dream, that's all. I shot off a lightning bolt before I realised I was awake.”

That's a bit of a stretch.

Not really. We both had instances of sleep-casting when we were younger.

Really? I never would have guessed...

Lara: “He's alright, Mum. Sorry he woke you up.”

Lana Callisto: “Oh, don't worry dear. Just get yourselves back to sleep.”

Her footsteps recede, and eventually we hear her door slide shut. Thank goodness for that.

...say Lara? Have you ever caught yourself answering when someone calls after your mother?

I- Yes, actually, now you mention it. Our names are awfully similar, after all.

I had a feeling that that was the case. Didn't keep her from naming you after the Tomb Raider, though.

Well, that's Mum in a nutshell. May she never change.

Lara: “...I'm so glad that you're ok, Indy. Did it- did it work?”

He looks at you with eyes filled with hope, but still hiding an inner pain.

Indy: “It's gone, Lara. She lifted the curse, before we threw it into a metaphorical wood chipper. I'm not even joking, that's how it was represented within my mind.”

You see, in your mind's eye, a glimpse of a certain Red Room. As the Cardinal does a little dance on the zig-zagging floor, your brother and a notably older Frisk throw the unconscious body of Orlock into a wood chipper. Which proceeds to spit out a bunch of lemons, because semiotics.

Splice in the image of me transfiguring a lemon into a tall glass of cloudy lemonade.

I'm very confused. Is this “Red Room” supposed to mean anything in particular?

...right. You haven't watched the show either. Well, the reason why it was a Red Room was because of Frisk. She and her friends had been watching a lot of Twin Peaks recently, and she still had it on the brain during her holiday up north.

I think I've heard of that show, but I don't think it's something Mum would let us watch.

Give it a gander. You might be pleasantly surprised.

Lara: “...I have so, so many questions. But we should probably get back to sleep. We can talk more about it in the Dreamlands...”
Overtired, are we? Well, it's probably best to discuss it down there. Though don't forget to ask him about what he brought back.

I just want to sleep... Thank you, Observer. This has been a strange, strange night, but I can't help but thank you for helping my brother.

Oh, don’t mention it. Frisk did most of the work, along with the Cardinal. Honestly, I'm just the chauffeur, but thanks for the kind words, anyway.

**Indy:** “Good night, Lara. ...good night, Observer.”

*And a good night to you all. I may check up on you two later.*

**Location:** Outside of Time, some sort of abandoned subway platform?

**Dialogue:** The Cardinal and the Observer

*Hello there, old friend. It's been a long time, hasn't it?*

There you are! I was wonderin’ when you'd show up!

*...given that you're still here, I assume things went as planned?*

Pretty much, man. We managed to finish up construction on the Icebox about... four years after our last meeting. We just thawed out a coupla days ago, waking up to a WEIRD new world populated mostly by scarab people.

*Are these “Scarabians” possessed by the Yithians?*

Only among the ruling caste. But they haven't given us any trouble so far, so...

*That's- well, I guess it could be worse. How are the others adjusting to the New World?*

Still finding their legs, now that the Dream is over. But other than that, they're all a-ok.

...are you still gonna chronicle their adventures?

*Not right now, I think. It's time this record came to an end.*

*...but I'll still pop in to say hello every now and then. Off the record, of course.*

Trust me, I'll take good care of them while you're off... doing whatever it is you do. Catching up on all the games you've yet to play, I guess?

*To start with, yes. But I have other plans in the works.*

...you're gonna check up on that “Tale of the Endless” universe, aren't you?
For a first project, I think that'll do me nicely. Something to whet my teeth on, even if it's nothing I'll be able to sell.

Well that's how things oughta be. Make something that people'll actually like, before making something you can sell.

...oh. OH, you're going to-

With any luck, I'll be able to translate the events of that world into something people can actually play.

...wow. From fanfic to fangame, huh? Well, I guess we all gotta start somewhere.

True true. I can't exactly dive headfirst into a magnum opus now, can I? I need to build up my skills before I can truly start making something I can sell, and I feel like this is a decent place to start.

I was gonna suggest starting out with a match-three puzzler or something, but if you think you can do it justice, don't let me hold you back!

But before you go off an' start your career, why not pop in an' say hi to the others? They've been waitin' a long time to see you again.

...off the record?

Off the record.

Then let's pop in for a cup of tea...

Chapter End Notes

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is where the story ends. Our reunion was pleasant, and limitless possibilities lay at the feet of our good friends. But unless something comes up, I am officially concluding the DoctorTale records. Perhaps one day we may see them again, but until then, I will focus on future projects.

I won't lie, I am going to miss these fine people. We've had some good times, some bad times, and some downright weird times. But I can't very well stay with them forever, not when there are so many other matters that require my attention. For instance, some of the other tales I have observed simply cannot be done justice in a purely text-based medium. I must hone my skills, and learn how to translate these tales into playable experiences. So while you shouldn't expect Tale of the Endless to be available for download any time soon, rest assured I will endeavour to make something worth playing.

I've spent too long away from the career of my dreams, and if I can use my passion for
these worlds to make something worthy of being played, so much the better. While I will always be the Observer in some way, it is time for me to embrace my calling as a developer. I simply have too many ideas to let them go to waste.

Here's hoping the Cardinal will be able to give me a hand in this regard...

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