| Rating: | Teen And Up Audiences |
| Archive Warning: | Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death |
| Category: | Other, F/F, F/M, M/M |
| Fandom: | Undertale |
| Relationship: | Undyne/Alphys, Chara/Asriel, Chara/reader, sans/chara |
| Character: | Sans, Papyrus, Undyne, Alphys, Asgore, Asriel, Gaster, chara - Character, Frisk, Toriel, Mettaton, Gaster Followers, Monster Kid, Gerson |
| Series: | Part 1 of The Unified Theory Papers |
| Stats: | Published: 2016-12-07 Updated: 2018-11-18 Chapters: 49/? Words: 264893 |

**Visiontale**

by **SansRene_KantGaster**

Summary

A fanfic about a blind Undertale protagonist, written by a real blind person.

Currently undergoing major revisions. Most likely won't update until those revisions are completed, but we'll see.

When in doubt, read the preface of the story, and the summaries and endnotes for each chapter as you go along. They're important... especially later on.

Copious swearing and pop cultural references.

Also if anyone has read far enough in the story to know what the "Soulology," "Psychophysiology," "Magity," "Ethermetry," and "Translationism" tags are, congrats.

As of 11/28/2017, Visiontale has a TV Tropes and Idioms page! Update it, and link to it on other pages on TV Tropes at your leisure.

http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Fanfic/Visiontale
I'll be blunt.

Leave now if any of the text below, between the asterisks 1. is too far out of your comfort zone, or 2. Whether any of the following seems like too much effort to invest in a fanfic. I know this seems like overkill, but they still need to be said. Otherwise, skip the text between the asterisks.

******

Constant vagueness

Using information besides sight to construct scenes, like positions of characters' voices or haptic feedback

If you prefer visual language to describe situations

Figuring out which characters speak via their dialogue and no other context clues

Extensive exposition derived from real-life technical knowledge

Fictional exposition, with accompanying jargon, describing fictional fields of study with equal rigor to the exposition based on real-life fields of study

Reading endnotes to fully understand the story

The Chara as narrator theory

******

This work was directly inspired by several other fanfics: Time Forgot, by ClockworkFlames, and "The Scientist," both posted on this site, and Inseparable, posted on Fanfiction.net.

This AU is... different... to say the least.

This is partially because I've created a system connecting modern physiology, neuroscience, psychology, and magical traditions to how magic and determination work: gaps in knowledge, external research, and all. Meaning there are aspects that are under-studied or misunderstood, like real science.

Most of it is because I'm blind. I can only see light, so I can't use it to figure out what objects or locations look like. Therefore, I used descriptions of puzzles/environments on the Undertale Wiki. That, descriptions from Let's Plays, and liberal artistic license.

My descriptions will reflect both this reality, and the fact that in this timeline, I don't know about Undertale's existence, which is what happened to me in real life. Undertale came out six days before I started my freshman year of college, but I didn't even know about it until October. I have to use Chara's descriptions and my own knowledge of RPGs to figure out what to do. I'm reinterpreting my current Undertale knowledge through this lens.

My experiences as a blind person also heavily inform the fic. This entails applying the methodologies I have been taught to navigate places and perform tasks independently to the
story. Because these routines inform the fanfic, descriptions of the environment won't stray beyond what is necessary for me at the current time, and I will act according to these routines. The only Daredevil-esque shenanagans you're going to get are only possible because of Chara, and sometimes, not even then. I'm fed up with people representing blind people as being either deadweight or Daredevil. The Undertale community has tried to be inclusive of many types of people. Accurately portraying disabled people falls under that umbrella.

The Xenoblade spoilers/copious pop culture references warning is because I namedrop characters/events from that game, and many other games/books/TV shows frequently, and not just because I like them. It's because some of these references and spoilers are plot-relevant. The characters also use these references as analogies to help me understand the Underground. Expect almost, if not every, chapter to have spoilers and or references, in one way or another. In this timeline, Chara has access to my memories, so I'm writing the fanfic accordingly. When the entire story is finished, I will go back and edit everything, but even then, don't expect all the jokes to make sense without looking them up.

I also include cues in the text to play music and notes indicating this timeline's canon voices, which adds to the immersion and replicates my Undertale experience. I've been heavily influenced by the voices I've heard people use, both while playing it and dubbing content. The same goes for the music, in-game and fanmade. Therefore, I will put the URLs to relevant songs or voice acting samples in the chapters and edit them as my preferences change. Voice-acted fanwork has been a valuable resource for me since it's allowed me to enjoy web comics, which are otherwise presented in a format my screen reader can't read. When done well, they make the game seem more alive, for someone who can only experience it via characters' text-scrolling noises, descriptions from the Undertale Wiki, and good fanfiction. I also plan to voice-act certain parts of Visiontale, and I will link to them in the endnotes of the relevant chapters when I've finished them.

As of April 6th 2017, this AU has a Twitter! My username is VisiontaleSans. I'll post updates there, as well as on my primary Twitter account, @XenobladerTouko.

Comment, kudos, enjoy, and stay determined.

You'll need it...

- Inspired by **Time Forgot** by ClockworkFlames
- Inspired by **Inseparable** by UnderAnon
- Inspired by **The Scientist** by talkingsoup
- Inspired by **It's Time for Judgement** by ibeta
- Inspired by **Two Worlds** by eney, Spazzin
The thought of you reading how a blind person uses a cane... and how much I swear... 
fills you with determination.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1

{Why can’t class be over already? It’s almost Friday—so I can finally watch YouTube!
I haven’t gotten the homework problems yet—I probably should take out my earphones so I can 
hear my professor…
I take them out and put them in my pocket, but even then, I don’t hear my professor lecturing.
Somehow, it takes me several more moments to realize I’m not sitting at a desk.
I’m lying down.
{Where am I?}
Now, instead of sitting at my desk, I sit up on the grass.
I put my hands on the ground, and I roll a blade between my fingers, only to feel petals on the top.
I’m sitting on some flowers, not on grass, apparently. I’m not at my desk in my precalculus class 
either.

{How did I get here? How do I get home so I can watch YouTube—or how do I get back to class—
but mostly home so I can watch YouTube? {How am I gonna get there without my cane?}

After groping around on the ground for several moments, I find my cane not too far away. My 
backpack is also close by. I check to make sure nothing important is missing: my phone, water 
bottle, wallet, BrailleNote, MP3 player, and flash drive are still there. Good. I take a quick sip of 
water, then check the time on my phone. It says, “12:00 PM.”

"But my class started at 1:00 and ends at 2:05…”
{Well I’m not going to figure out where the fuck I am without walking around a bit…}

I stand up, extending my cane out to its full length, arcing it along the ground in front of me to 
detect obstacles. After only a few steps, the tip of my cane hits a wall. I follow it, and after several 
seconds of walking, I find another.

"Why’s this room have flowers for a floor?"

I follow the second wall, reaching my free hand over every few steps to touch it. Nothing changes
for a while, until eventually, I find a groove there, and the texture of the wall changes, becoming more smooth. Just before the texture change, a tall, thin, cylindrical bump protrudes from the wall. It’s the edge of a door, but not the side with the handle. It’s the edge of the door with the hinge.

I walk a couple feet further and reach over expectantly, finding the handle.

Well at least I know where this door is. I’ll figure out what the rest of the room looks like and see if there are more doors. If not I’ll come back over here and open it.

After circumventing the room, I don’t find any other doors, so I return to the door I did find, switching my cane to my left hand momentarily to open it. Air wooshes past my back as the door swings open behind me. I switch my cane back to my right hand and take a couple steps forward.

Listen to this song!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oB_IKI1o754

“Howdy! It’s me, Flowey! Flowey the Flower!”

“What the fuck—!?” I start to ask.

“You heard me!” He…? Flowey… says, pausing for a moment.

“Hmmm. You’re new to the Underground, aren’t you—?”

“Hold up—you mean underground like the black market? Or underground like literally underground?”

“The second one.”

Flowey’s… completely baffled. “You know we’re actually underground right—?”

“No—I can’t see so no—“

“So that’s why you have the stick—“

“Cane—“

“Right. But golly! You must be sooo confused!”

“Yeah—that’s an understatement—”

{Is he high? Is he one of those guys who lures kids away to…

{He’s hella weird…}

“Since you have no idea where you are or what to do, someone ought to teach you how things work around here!” he continues. “I guess little old me will have to do.”

I laugh a little. “Oh come on you can’t be that old… or little…” I reply.

“Wait…” Flowey contemplates for a moment. “What do you mean ‘You can’t be that little? I’m just a little flower’”

“Well I wouldn’t know that without you telling me,” I start to explain. “I literally can’t see you so I don’t know what you look like.”
“Well that doesn’t matter, doesn’t it?” Flowey says enthusiastically. “I’ll still teach you how things work around here!”

“Wait what do you mean ‘around here’? Where am I?”

“The underground! Didn’t you hear me say that?”

{On the other hand I don’t know how the hell to get out of here… so…}

“Okay. You’ll have to describe everything you’re doing though.”

“Sure!” Flowey asks, “Ready?”

“Yeah…?”

“Here we go!”

My cane flies out of my hand. My feet leave the floor.

“What the--?” I ask again. “How far up am I?”

“Don’t worry! It’s not that far.” Flowey explains. “What does matter is that around you right now, there is a heart. That is your soul, the very culmination of your being. Your soul starts out weak, but it can grow strong if you gain a lot of LV!”

“You mean levels?” I ask.

“No silly! LV means love!”

“And Love is…”

“Having a lot of LV makes you strong, but you only have 1 LV right now. You want some LV, don’t you?”

“Yeah, but how do you know how much LV I have, and if I gain LV, how will I know how much LV I have? Do I have a name tag, but for my… Love, on me?”

Wait…

He knows it on sight.

I should know it too… somehow…

I stop and think for a moment. In my head, I, imagine? No… sense… the number 1. Like imagining what an object feels like, I can sense the number 1 in my mind. It’s like knowing where my body is in space at all times without actually touching it.

“Flowey, do you know me?” I ask.

“No! But that isn’t the point!” Flowey sounds a little hurried. “I’m going to share some LV with you.”

“I can’t earn LV by myself? You can tell me how to earn it, then I can be on--”

“Don’t worry, it will be much easier if I share some LV with you.” Flowey seems even more hurried now. “Down here, LV is shared through little white… friendliness pellets!”
“Are you ready? Move around! Get as many as you can.”

“How will I find them? I can’t see them…” I trail off awkwardly.

“I’ll bring them to you!”

“Okay.”

I reach out my hands, only to feel pain. “Fuck you can’t be serious…”

“YOU IIIIDIOT! IN THIS WOOOOORLΔ, IIIIT’S KIIIIIIL OR BEEEEEE KIIIIIILED!”

Flowey’s voice, but, angry. Harsh. Distorted. Screaming as the sound of friendliness pellets fills the air.

“Why would anyone pass up an opportunity like this!?”

The sound of the friendliness pellets all around me… coming closer…

They’re here.

Pain, all around me. I scrunch up, forgetting I’m hovering in midair. Wherever I ended up, I’ll die here… wherever the fuck here is… Alone. Afraid…

“DIE!!!”

Not like this. Dear Alvis, not like this!!!

Evil laughter…

Well maybe a little more than evil…

Then, a sudden flash of heat, and a startled gasp from Flowey. His voice goes back to normal again.

I drop to the ground on my back. I sit up heavily, feeling the pain coarse through me.

Watch the following video until 1:21, or as close as possible, then close it.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3ohHXIVk5Q&index=5&t=81s&list=PL7lC3f2GdYDlqgPC--ZEtUh_tfLByVDFi#t=01m02s

“What a terrible creature, torturing such a poor, innocent youth.”

A female voice, coming closer. I sense and hear her kneel in front of me, her voice coming from just above my head. “Ah, do not be afraid, my child. I am Toriel, caretaker of the ruins. I pass through this place every day to see if anyone has fallen down.”

“Jesus fucking hell… ……” I mumble.

I owe her… Fuck I didn’t say that out loud…

“What is Jesus, my child?”

I know there are people who don’t have a religious affiliation, but this takes the cake...
Utter confusion, on her part and mine. “He’s… it’s… nothing. never mind. I’m sorry…”

“If you say so. Come. I will guide you through the catacombs. This way.”

A hand brushes against mine, and I grab it, standing, whincing as the pain racks my body. I lean against her. Her arm brushes against mine as she says softly near my ear, “I will heal you as we walk along. Walk as normal, if you can, my child.

As she helps support me, I feel… hair?

No.

Fur…

There’s fur on her arms, not hair.

She’s… not human… not completely…

I can’t care about that now. As long as she doesn’t imitate another horror film like Flowey did, we’ll be good… And besides as long as I have my cane, I’ll be able to get away from her…

But where the hell is it?

“Toriel, where’s my cane? It’s a red and white stick lying on the ground. It should be close by.”

She places it in my hand gently. “Here it is, my child. But may I ask, why do you need this particular stick? There are plenty of other sticks around here, and much thicker and longer ones at that.”

{I’ve done this before. Not like this, but it’s not new to me.}

“I… it’s just the right size for me. Blind people use them, all the time, to get around. I arc it on the ground while I walk so I don’t bump into things.”

As we start walking, I move my hand up her arm to her elbow, switching arms so my cane is on our right side.

After a few steps, Toriel suddenly lets go of me, and I feel a tug on my cane. “You have no need to use that when you are with me, my child. I will make sure you are safe from harm.”

I try to explain: “No I understand… and I’m soooo grateful you’re helping me… it’s just… after Flowey, I’d feel safer with it. That, and I always use it if I have it. Even before I came here I did that. And besides I have to learn how to walk around this place.”

As we continue to walk, I feel something warm pass by my face. I let go of Toriel and try finding its source. I touch a hard, round object suspended in midair.

*Listen to the song!*  

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K276nkB293A

[The shadow of the ruins looms above, filling you with determination.]

“What the—?” I mutter, only for Toriel to edge closer to me. “Are you all right, my child?” she asks concernedly.
“I’m fine… just… this place is weird… Just, worn out…”

“We can rest here for now while I inform you of the nature of the ruins, if you wish.”

After reorienting so she faces me and helping me sit on the ground in front of her, Toriel begins to speak. “Welcome to your new home, innocent one. Allow me to educate you in the operation of the ruins.”

Toriel starts to walk, several clicking sounds accompanying her footsteps. Some distance away, she stops, and I hear a louder clicking sound. She hurriedly walks back to me, placing my hand between hers.

“The ruins are full of puzzles, ancient fusions between diversions and doorkeys. One must solve them to move from room to room. Please adjust yourself to the sight of them.” She tells me, leaning down to my height.

“uh…”

Toriel inhales sharply. “I am sorry, little one. I have never met anyone who cannot see before. I will be more considerate in the future.”

“Ehh, It’s okay. At least I know there are a lot of puzzles now. The thing is is that I don’t know what you did to solve that puzzle. Can you show me what it feels like?”

Toriel gasps a little. “Oh I could not, my child. It is much too dangerous for you to be interacting with the puzzles right now. But I will tell you what it is. There are six switches on the floor, and a lever on the wall. Near by, there is writing on the wall. It says, ‘Only the fearless may proceed. Brave one, foolish ones. Both not walk the middle road.’ There are markings around some of the switches, which I did not flip, because the writing says not to. The marked switches are on the middle path.”

“I guessed as much from the riddle…”

“You are very observant, my child.”

“When you have to learn how to walk around new places without being able to see, you have to be.”

“Should I continue?”

“Yeah.”

Toriel continues, “After flipping the appropriate switches, I flipped the lever on the wall. Then, the door in front of us opened. Do you understand what I did in order to solve this puzzle, little one?”

“I mean, it didn’t seem that hard. The only thing was that if I tried solving this by myself, I wouldn’t have known about the writing on the wall, so I would have just pressed all the switches until the door opened.”

“This is precisely why I must guide you through the ruins, my child. You cannot navigate them alone, since all of them require sight to solve. Come. There is a second puzzle in the next room.”

She helps me to my feet, and we walk down the hallway and through the door. She stops again.

“To make progress here, you must trigger several switches. Do not worry. I have labeled the ones
that you need to flip.”

“How will I know which ones you labeled?”

“I’ve taped a piece of paper to each of the switches you need to flip, innocent one. They are on the wall. Should I walk you over to them?”

I try not to sound too annoyed. Like, she saved my life, for Monado’s sake… and if people… no… if monsters… like Flowey live down here, I’ll need to go slow. Even so, I can find the switches if they’re on the wall. I can’t walk over them by accident.

“I’ll walk along the wall until I find them. You can watch me so I do okay.”

“I will do that, my child. If you ever have trouble finding the switches, do not hesitate to let me know.”

I start to trail the nearby wall, hitting my cane against it every couple feet. I put my other hand on it, feeling for any switches. When I find the first one, I confirm there is a piece of paper on it, and then I pull it. I do so with the second switch and hear a grinding sound. “What was…?”

“There were some spikes in front of the door in front of us, little one. When you pressed the two switches, the spikes retracted into the floor. It is also important to note that there was writing on the wall which said ‘Stay on the path.’ There are two paths across this room, and the second switch you flipped was on the path we were supposed to walk.”

“Okay. So if there’s a puzzle, any switches I flip will solve it?”

Toriel takes my hand and leads me into the next room as she replies, “Precisely, my child. This is the next puzzle. Should I describe it to you?”

I laugh. “Well I won’t know how we’re going to solve it if you don’t…”

“Very well. We are standing in the eastern part of the room. In the middle of the room, there is a plaque reading ‘The western room is the eastern room’s blueprint.’ There are spikes in the eastern part of this room, so we must follow the path drawn out in the western room.”

“What path do we have to take?”

“I will help you walk through the spikes, so you need not worry. But, since you must know how the ruins operate…”

She pauses for a moment. “May I have your hand? I will hold your…” she pauses uncertainly, “cane, in the meantime.”

I hold out a hand, and Toriel places a fingertip on it. I use my other hand to feel what she draws on my palm. When she finishes, she hands my cane back to me and asks, “Do you understand what we have to do to traverse this room, insightful one?”

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

As we walk across and out of the room, I inwardly thank Alvis that Toriel is accommodating for me. With no way of gaining my bearings, no protection, no familiarity with the nature of this location at all, I have no one to turn to for advice. She has no incentive to help me, and yet, here she is, taking the time to describe hazardous puzzles in inhospitable environments to a blind person.
After a little more walking, we stop, and I hear Toriel turn a little toward me. “As a human living in the underground, monsters may attack you. You will need to be prepared for this situation. However, worry not. When you encounter a monster, you will enter a fight. While you are in a fight, strike up a friendly conversation. Stall for time. I will come and resolve the conflict. Practice talking to the dummy.”

I walk forward until my cane bumps the dummy. When it does, my feet leave the ground. “Uh… what do I say to it?” I call out, twisting my body around a little so I can ask Toriel.

Toriel doesn’t respond.

Why talk to the dummy if it’s not alive? That’s stupid…}

Instead of talking to the dummy, I contemplate what she has told me.

“When you encounter a monster, you will enter a fight.”

I encountered Flowey when I first arrived here.

Flowey is a monster, so I entered a fight with him when I saw him. Met him…

“Toriel,” I call out again, “do I have to talk to every monster I meet?”

“Why would you ask such a thing, insightful one? Although monsters may attack you, you should not hurt them. This is why I am having you practice talking to the dummy.”

“What if I don’t know what to say?”

“You do not have to talk to every monster you meet. However as long as I am here, you have no need to fear.”

“So I can run away?” I ask. “If I get into a fight, and you’re not there to end it before I can get hurt, I can just run away?”

“Yes, my child. In your case, this may be the only way you can stand a chance against most of the monsters down here, since you…”

She stops uncertainly, saying the next few words as if they are in a foreign language. “Since you cannot see, and do not know what appeases each monster. This is why I must accompany you for the time being.”

I nod. “Okay.”

I turn back around and face the dummy. “Hi? How’s life?”

I wait a few seconds and then keep talking. This was… weird… to say the least. It was like some weird RPG…

Wait.

Like some weird RPG…

Like some… weird RPG…

“Have a nice day.” I try to contain my excitement as my feet touch the floor again. “Where are we going next?” I ask Toriel as she takes my arm and leads me out of the room.
After a few more steps, we stop. “You have done excellently thus far, my child. However, I have a
difficult request to ask of you. I want you to walk to the other end of the room by yourself.”

I laugh a little. “Okay… I swear if this room has a lot of puzzles in it…” I start before beginning to
walk. I automatically veer off to one side, trailing one wall. Leaves and vines crunch and squish
under my feet. I hear Toriel walking along behind me. After a couple minutes, I reach the other
wall. I walk along it, only to find a pillar a little off to one side, preventing me from trailing it any
longer.

“Greetings my child. Do not worry. I did not leave you. I was merely behind this pillar the whole
time. Thank you for trusting me.”

Toriel’s voice, from right next to me. “Well I heard you stop walking, so I knew you were near by.
You didn’t have to follow me all the way here. I’ve had people tell me to walk places on my own
before to see if I’d learned the route right, but… this is different right?”

She walks a little closer to me and sits down. I sit down next to her, and she places her hand on my
knee, patting it affectionately. “there was in important reason for this exercise: to test your
independence.”

“I had to learn to be independent a long time ago. I didn’t have someone like you around all the
time to help me.”

“All the more important I learn how well you can cope on your own, curious one. However I must
tell you something. I must attend to some business, and you must stay alone for a while. Please
remain here. It’s dangerous to explore by yourself.”

Toriel’s hand brushes mine, and she places a rectangular object in my hand. “I will give you a cell
phone. If you have a need for anything, just call.”

“What’s your number?” I ask. “If this phone doesn’t have a voiceover, I won’t be able to use it.”

“What is a ‘voice over, my child?”

Utter confusion.

{How the hell does she not know about voiceover on phones?}

[She didn’t know you were blind until a couple minutes ago. Cut her some slack.]

I suppose he’s… she’s… they’re… right.

Wait.

He? She? They?

Who is…?

Why am I asking “who is” if Toriel and I am the only ones here?

Am I crazy?

Why am I questioning me asking if I’m crazy?

I feel the cell phone over. Dear Alvis it’s a flip phone…
The underground must not have the same level of technology as Cupertino… the United States…

[Your world…]

[My world…]

I try to explain as simply as I can. “The phone I use can talk, so when I dial the numbers, it says them aloud. Also when someone calls me, it says their phone number or name aloud so I know who it is.”

Toriel makes a distraught sound. “Oh I am so sorry my child. Even though this cell phone does not have a,” she hesitates again, “voice over, you have no reason to feel lost. I will be the only one calling you. So if it rings, you will know it is me.”

I take my backpack off and take out my phone. “Can you tell me your number? I can enter it in here.”

“What is… what is that, innocent one?”

Astonishment. Complete, and utter stonishment.

{She’s never seen a smartphone before?}

[Yeah.]

The voice again.

I reply to it… them… inwardly: {I suppose… what is this? The ‘90s?}

“It’s a different kind of cell phone. I can enter your number so when you call, it says your name aloud.”

“But how will you dial my number if your cell phone has no buttons, resourceful one?”

Okay. Toriel’s nice. Like, she saved my life nice. Nice probably isn’t even the right word--

Fuck it it’s true.

I can’t help it.

{wow… she doesn’t know about touchscreens?}

I unlock my phone and start adding a new contact. “If you touch the phone’s screen, it will type a letter or number. And when the voiceover is on, if I touch that same spot, it will say the letter or number aloud. Toriel, how do I spell your name? And what’s your number?”

When Toriel next speaks, she sounds much less surprised. “I am… happy you can do this by yourself, insightful one. I will help you.”

After entering Toriel’s contact information into my phone, she stands up. At least I can rest assured you will be safe with your own cell phone. I am leaving now. I will call you periodically to ensure you are safe. Be good, all right?”

She walks away, a door opening, then closing behind her.

[Come on. You’re seriously going to stay here? Don’t you wanna know what the ruins are like?]
The voice again.

I say aloud, “I do but Toriel said to stay here.”

[You’ll be fine. You have a phone. And me.]

“Okay… but who are you? Am I crazy?”

[Yeah you’re crazy. You’re staying in this boring room. And I’m your… sighted guide… At least that’s what you call people like me. Come on!]

“Okay…”

After taking a couple more sips of water, I pack my bag and stand up. Before I can move on, however, the voice pipes up again.

[Good thing you drank that. Your HP is a little low, even after using that save point so soon. Being with Toriel must have drained it, even though it healed you fully not long ago and she was also healing you.]

“HP? Save point? What is... what are…?” I begin to ask.

A light chuckle. [I know you know what HP is! And save points! I know what you know, you know... What does HP usually stand for?]

“Health Points?” I say aloud.

Leaving the floor when encountering monsters.

Encountering monsters being called fights.

Love.

I have 1 LV.

LV also stands for levels, where I’m from...

Like a weird RPG...

Like… a… weird… RPG...

“This world… it’s an RPG! It’s Pokémon but I can talk to enemies if I don’t want to fight! I don’t have to either fight or run away. Oh my Goooood!”

[You seem excited.]

“Of course I’m excited! I’m in a fucking RPG, for crying out loud! The only video games I can play are RPGs! And I’ve done challenge runs for Pokémon games! This place has save points, like ChronoTrigger! I know how this world works! And assuming Flowey wasn’t lying… you can sense my HP?”

[Yeah. You can too.]

I stand still a moment. At first the number 1 stands out clearly in my mind’s eye. However, after a couple moments, the number… no… the fraction… 12/20 manifests itself.
That is my HP.
My HP is… kinda bad...

[Are you done freaking out now? We have puzzles to solve!]

“But what if monsters attack me? I—“

[You mean us…]

“What if… monsters attack us? I don’t know what to say…”

[I do. I’ll help you.]

“You know this place?”

[Yeah. Why?]

“Nothing…”

Soon, I find the door and walk into the next room.

[There’s a save point a few feet in front of you. That and a Froggit. Try talking to him to see what he’s like. He’s to your right.]

I turn to the right and walk forward a couple steps. “Hi…” I say slowly.

“Ribbit Hello human. How are you? Ribbit.”

“I’m doing okay… I’m alone because Toriel left me here…” I explain. “I was supposed to stay in the room behind us until she comes back… but… ehh…”

“Ribbit. But you are here instead. Why? Ribbit?”

“I want to know what else is around here. I can’t see, so I need all the information I can get about this place.”

“Ribbit. In that case, I have some advice for you about battling monsters. If you act a certain way, or fight until you almost defeat them, they might not want to battle you anymore. If a monster does not want to fight you, please, use some mercy, human. Ribbit.”

[Is that like the weird RPG you were yelling about?]

Yeah.

“How will I know it’s time to use some mercy?”

“Ribbit. Monsters will glow yellow when they no longer feel threatened. Ribbit.”

The Froggit stops suddenly. “Ribbit w-wait you can’t see. I’m s-sorry, human. They w-will also ask f-for mercy, too. That is our custom. S-sorry. Ribbit.”

“Ehh, it’s all good. I’ll probably have to tell this to everyone I meet down here anyway. Thank you.”

“Ribbit. You’re welcome. Ribbit.”
I turn away and start walking again. To the save point?

[To the save point!]

I walk forward until I feel the warmth of the save point on my cheek. I reach out a hand and touch it.

[Crinkling through the leaves fills you with determination. HP fully restored.]

{Nice.}

[Yeah. And by the way I’ll tell you if you can use mercy on a monster. That’s called sparing them. I got you!]

{Okay. Where to next?}

[Up north, there’s a room with some free food. And I know you like that. And you need it too.]

“Fooooood!”

“Who knew binge-playing all those Pokémon games and Xenoblade would come in handy someday?”

Chapter End Notes

If the link in the text of the chapter to Toriel's canon voice doesn't work, here it is again.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3obHXIVk5Q&index=5&t=81s&list=PL7Ic3f2gdYDiggqPC-ZEtUh_tfLBvVDuF#t=01m02s

Listen from when the video is set to start until 1:21.

As of 10/13/2017, I finally decided on this timeline's canon voice for Flowey!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oB_lKI1o754

Yaaaaas!

Finally!

After sixteen months of writing, I’ve finally found this timeline's canon voice for Chara! Thank Tesla for Undertale: the Narrator's Musical!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K276nkB293A

More links will be added to this chapter, and other chapters with voice-acting and music annotations, as I find good voices and songs, so keep checking the endnotes, because I'll be linking them there for reference.
Chapter 02

Chapter Summary

This warning? reminder? will apply to every chapter. I've used Marriland's Let's Play of Undertale, and the Undertale Wiki, for puzzle and enemy descriptions, so take those parts with a grain of salt...

Also, there will be references to braille in nearly every chapter for a while. If you don't know about it at all, look it up online, because what I say here, though true, is only experientially true. I'm no historian. I'll explain the history of braille to Toriel at some point, but still...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

2

*Four pieces of Monster Candy later…*

[Dude you already picked it all up there’s nothing left…]

“Fine… Where to next.”

[Get out of here then I’ll tell you.]

“What’s this Monster Candy anyway?”

[They’re little and white. Why?]

“Crap!!!! Like… friendliness pellets!! Nooooo—“

[They’re not related. They’re just hard candies that don’t taste like licorice.]

After leaving the Monster Candy bowl behind and walking through the other opening in the previous room, I suddenly stop before I can go farther. I try taking another step, but my legs don’t move. [Nooooooo stoooooop!]

“Whyyyy?”

[There’s cracks in the floor! I stopped you from falling! Well I guess I could have let you keep walking…]

“Whyyyy?”

[It’s the only way to progress.]

“But wouldn’t I have gotten hurt?”

[1 You have the monster candy you’re good. And 2 you have save points., You could have just respawned a couple rooms ago.]
“Okay… let’s go then…”

[Walk forward a few more steps.]

*A few steps later…*

My cane swings out over empty space. I stick it vertically down into the hole, but it doesn’t touch the floor below.

“I hope you know what you’re doing…”

[You know I do… Just bend your legs. From what I… from what you know, that supposedly dampens the fall…]

I jump… and land on my feet. “How far was…?”

[More than you are tall. Not too bad. Just walk over to the right a little and you’ll find the way out.]

“Okay…”

*A few more steps later…*

“I climb this?…”

[Yeah. It’s not too bad. After you get out just keep walking until I tell you to stop. Or till I stop you from walking… Put away your cane though ‘cause it’s narrow…]

“The claustrophobia is real…”

[Meh. You’ll know when it’s over…]

After crawling up a few? A few dozen more? Feet, I feel a flat surface. I stand up again, unfold my cane, and keep walking. After several more feet, my feet route to the floor. [A wild puzzle appears!]

“Oh great this place will be full of Zubat…”

[Yeah pretty much. But this isn’t so bad. Just remember that three out of four grey rocks recommend you push them.]

“Like how nine out of ten dentists recommend Crest toothpaste?”

[Just trust me. Walk a little more and you’ll run into a rock. Then I’ll help you push it.]

“How heavy is the rock?”

[It’ll slide along the floor when you push it.]

I find the rock, fold my cane up again, and grasp the rock with both hands. After about a minute of instruction, I hear a grinding sound. “What was…?”

[There were some spikes. The rock activated a switch underneath that tile. Now there are more cracks in the floor, but--]

“Oh dear Alvis no….”

[Well you’ll only fall if you don’t walk in the way I tell you to walk… which you aren’t stupid
enough to do…

This inner voice has a lot of faith in me…

{You don’t know anything about me…}

[Oh yeah? I can hear you… in your own head]

{Okay…}

[If you were so stupid, you wouldn’t have figured out how this world works so fast…]

“Truuuue…? Well binje-playing RPGs and abusing saving in my challenge runs also helps…”

[So come on… cut yourself some slack… You could say that my amazing encouraging presence fills you with… determination!]

“True…”

[Seriously man you can do better than that… I’ve found a lot of hype memes in your head. And from what I hear… well from what you remember, if you do hype things you’ll actually feel that way, even if you didn’t… I can sense you thinking about what to say… Just… dooooo iiiiiit!]

“I’m really feeling it!”

[There… now to the puzzle. In a few more feet there are more cracks in the floor. But if you walk over them a certain way you’ll get across. So take it slow. And I’ll be controlling your body again.]

“What if I fall?”

[It’s not that far down. A little deeper than where you jumped. And if you’re really that freaked out that’s what save points are for…]

“Can you help me get back?”

[Sure.]

After using the most recent save point, I return back to the new puzzle. [Okay let’s go. You’ll be… unresponsive… until you get across. But it’s for a good reason. You got this!]

“If we don’t try it we’ll never know!”

Loop until the next note.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJ6ppbOfEfQ

After a couple minutes of slowly walking across the room, we stop on fully flat ground. I sigh. “Oh thank Alvis we’re--“

I hear a rustling sound not too far away.

“Oh no…”

[It’s just a Moldsmal. Nothing to worry about.]

“Oh of course I don’t have to worry! It’s juuuuuust a fucking Pokémon encounter in real life! Nothing to see here—“
“Shut up!”

My feet leave the floor.

“What do I do? I’m not armed so I have to talk…”

[Flirt with it.]

“Whaaaaaat what the fuck?”

[Come on you heard me—I know you’re not deaf yet…]

“Flirt…?” I repeat. “What does the… Moldsmal… look like?”

[Little and jiggly… Like, knee-high little and jiggly…]

“Like Ditto?”

[From what I know you know about Ditto, then… yes but it’s green…? Wait do you know what--]

{Yeah I do. I could see when I was young so…}

“So I just say something nice about jello?”

[Yeah. And oh yeah and wiggle your hips too.]

“Oh heeeeeeell nooooo!!”

[They’ll be more likely to spare you.]


“Where is it?”

[Walk forward about five feet. Then you’ll be above them, but a few feet in front of them.]

After doing so, I call out, “Animators designing female characters can learn a lot from you…”

[That’s a nice thing to say to anime characters--not jellow…]

*Cue dying a little inside from stupid because… wiggling my hips…*

“You owe me…”

Another rustling sound… but it’s… rhythmic. [It’s wiggling back and forth in response--]

“Ugh!”

[--and glowing yellow.]

A relieved sigh. “Okay how do I spare it?”

[Just say it.]

I clear my throat, and, holding back the awkwardness, I call out, “I spare you.”
More rustling sounds. [It's gone.]

More relieved sighing.

[Oh and before you withdraw into yourself ‘cause you made a reference no one down here’ll understand, check your pockets...]

In one pocket of my shorts, there are my earphones, and in the other, I reach my fingers in and feel…

“What is...?”

[Gold. You got one from sparing the Moldsmal.]

“If it takes this much grinding to get gold around here I’ll never be able to buy anything…”

[You’ll be fine. There’s plenty of free stuff. Like in the next room… Well more like in one of the next rooms.]

[Below us there are six rooms. There’s writing on the wall saying ‘There is only one switch.’]

“Where is it?”

[The openings to the six rooms below us are in a three-by-two pattern. The middle room in the top row has the switch. The upper left and lower right rooms have enemies. The Lower left room has free stuff.]

“Ooooh what is it?”

[You’ll see.]

“Let’s get the free stuff, then…”

[To fight the enemies or nah? I don’t know how powerful they are, so I can’t risk it... And besides, if the friendliness pellets are as painful as Flowey’s…]

“Take me to the room with the free stuff, then we’ll talk to the other monsters.”

My legs begin moving me forward. They bend under me and stiffen, and I jump down. [The Faded Ribbon is on the ground to your right.]

“What’ll a Faded Ribbon do for me?”

[Make it so any damage you take is reduced by 3, in addition to your defense stat... Come on you’re the one who said this world is an RPG! You know how armor works!]

“Truuuuue…” I bend over and feel for the ribbon and pick it up. “How will this protect me?”

[Tie it onto you, or wind it around you somewhere. Maybe your lanyard?]  

“But what if it falls off?”

[It should be long enough to tie your hair up with.]

“Okay…”

As I climb back up onto the first floor, the voice asks, [To the Vegetoids?]
“More monsters?”

[Yeah. Jump down here and I’ll help you.]

I jump, but as soon as my feet touch the floor, they leave it again. “What do I do?”

[Pat your stomach! Now!]

“Why? Because this monster likes fat people? We already have an obesity problem wait fuuuuuuuck!!!! You don’t know about America…”

[I’m just gonna ignore that… and no! Exactly the opposite! It’s a carrot with a face…]

“Okay…”

[And you’ll be happy I helped you get and equip that Faded Ribbon… Just get the Monster Candy out of your bag just in case.]

I pat my stomach awkwardly. Soon after, I hear some whooshing noises coming down from above. [I got you! And if you feel something hit you it’s okay. Some of these carrots are green. They’ll heal you for one HP.]

“Okay ahhhh!”

My body jerks around in midair. I feel some pointy objects prick my legs a few times, but just as many times, I sense my HP increase. The green carrots, I guess…

[Pat your stomach again…]

I do so. More carrots fly around me. I do this several more times before I’m told to stop. [They’re glowing yellow.]

“I spare you,” I call out. My feet hit the ground, and I hear a jingling sound from inside my pocket. “Gold just… shows up out of nowhere here?”

[Yeah.]

“Okay… that’s… nice… To the other monster!”

After fighting the second monster, a second Vegetoid, I jump down to the switch room and move on. As I walk into this room, my cane hits something. I reach out and realize it’s a pillar. “Another puzzle?”

[Yeah but this one’s weird. You actually walked through an empty room, which is part of the puzzle. That room had a plaque on the wall, which said ‘The far door is not an exit. It simply marks a rotation in perspective.’ Basically I’ll be walking you through these rooms to find three switches. The thing is that this room rotates, so we can access the other rooms. You ready?]

“Yeah.”

[The first switch is near the entrance.]

After pressing that switch, I’m guided through the room a couple more times, pressing switches. When I press the last one, the grinding sound of spikes lowering echoes through the ruins. “What path did that unlock?”
“Okay…”

As we walk forward again, I sigh. “It’s so tedious… just… when can we get… I don’t know… home? Somewhere with Wifi and good food? Maybe I’ll find a way home soon…”

After another minute of walking, my legs stop moving. [There’s three more rocks here. I’ll tell you which one to push… well more like I’ll tell you which rock to ask to move for you…]

“I can’t even… I can’t even say anything about that anymore…”

I walk until I’m guided to the first rock. I reach out to touch it, only for it to push away a little.

“Hey. You want me to move?”

“Hehhhh?”

“I said do you want me to move?”

“You’re a… talking rock?”

“Yes, actually.”

“But where are you… scooting… off to?”

“To unblock this bridge.”

“Okay… if you say so…”

I hear some grinding sounds. [He needs to move a little more.]

{A little more where?}

[He’ll know.]

“Uh… hey… can you please move a little more?”

“Okay. Like this?”

“Like how?”

“What do you mean, ‘Like how?’”

“I… can’t see you… like… at all… I’m trusting your judgment on this one…”

“Sure thing.”

After a little more grinding, the rock replies, “I’ve moved out of your way. Do you know there’s two more rocks in here?”

“Yeah… why?”

“Good thing you came to me. They didn’t have to be moved. You’re good now.”

“Thanks… I owe you…”

“Uh… talking rocks? I mean, he was nice but… only in the Underground…” I say under my breath
after walking across the bridge. “Where to next?”

[Another save point!]

“Thank Alvis…!”

[You’ll know it when you see it.]

“Whauw, whauw, whaaaauw…”

[Sorry not sorry.]

I walk forward and eventually feel the comforting glow of a save point by my cheek. [Knowing the mouse might one day leave its hole and get the cheese... It fills you with determination.]

“Wait whaaaaat?”

[There’s a mousehole in one wall. There’s also a table with some cheese on it--]

“Free food?”

[It’s stuck to the table…]

“Ewwwwwww!”

[This is why I’m here: so you don’t get food poisoning. And yes I know you can just spawn back at the save point you just used but come on…]

[Anyway after you save here we’re almost home. Just… one last surprise…]

[A surprise being what?]

[Someone cool.]

After I touch the save point and walk out of the room, I’m about to ask who the surprise is when I feel a chill on my skin and hear… buzzing noises? “Why’s it cold? And what are…?”

“Are they gone yet?”

“Whoa…”

[Oh that’s Napstablook don’t worry. Just cheer him up and he’ll go away.]

[He’s a bit… emo… though…”]

My feet leave the floor, and I call out softly, “Uh… Napstablook… it’s okay… you’re much better off than me…”

“Heh.” Is the monotone reply. My body jerks around in midair for a few seconds.

“Seriously. At least you know how to get around I can’t even see it…”

“Heh heh… you don’t have to worry about phasing through walls by accident when you’re not paying attention…”

A wet splat on my skin… and my HP lowering down to seventeen… lowering to fourteen… [Oh yeah his attacks are tears--]
Of course--

Cheer him up one more time…

I think for a moment. Must… not… sound… cheesy…

“Don’t cry… save that for when it matters…”

My feet suddenly hit the floor again.

“Okay…

“Let me try…”

Some… squelching noises…

“I call it ‘dapper blook…’ do you like it…?”

A… whispery voice… next to my ear. That’s what ghosts sound like down here…? Wait whaaaat?

[Whaaaaat what?]

[The ‘Dapper Blook…]

[It’s a top hat made of tears…]

I laugh aloud. “Okay that hat’s cool. But if you’re a ghost, how does it stay on your head???”

[He can be spared.]

I add quickly, “Can I feel it after I spare you? Like I can’t see it so…”

“Oh gee… Okay… if you say so…”

Some more gold falls into my pocket.

“I usually come to the RUINS because there’s nobody around… but today I met somebody nice…”

“Thanks man. You’re pretty cool.”

“I'll get out of your way.”

“See you around.”

“I wish I could say that but—”

The cold feeling disappears, but a… wet… substance… drips down my face. [That’s the hat…]

“Oh… but how does anyone even…

“Let’s keep walking.”

[Up ahead there’s free stuff again!]

“Where!?”
[Just a little farther. I’ll let you know when we get there.]

After a couple minutes of walking and several more encounters, I stop. [The Toy Knife is at your feet.]

“How the hell will a Toy Knife help me? Even a butter knife is more useful…”

[It’s stronger than a stick… it has three attack…]

“I guess… but how will I wield it?”

[Put away your cane. Or at least get good at putting it away when you encounter a monster.]

“But I need—“

[Look man: your cane helps you not bump into things. I do that better, since your hands are free. And you’ll avoid hitting some monster by accident…]

“I guess…” With some… actually very much hesitation, I put away my cane and hold the Toy Knife in my left hand.

[I can tell that was hard on you. Well now that I’m in your body I understand now. Hold out a little longer. We’re almost home. We’ll backtrack a little to get there.]

After walking back the way we came a little and sparing a few more monsters, I’m directed to walk forward again, in a direction we hadn’t gone yet. Footsteps approach me. “Oh dear. That took me longer than I thought it would. How did you get here, my child? Are you hurt? There there; I will heal you—“

{Won’t she caaaaaaaalm dooooon??}

[Trust me she rarely does. When she’s worried, she gets worked up…]

“Toriel I’m fine. The monsters were nice, like you. And I found some stuff to heal me and protect me.”

[And you saved…]

{Does she know about that?}

[No…]

[Just… don’t… … mention… … it…]

{Okay…?}

“I should not have left you alone for so long. It was irresponsible to try to surprise you like this… Well I suppose I cannot hide it any longer. Come, small one.”

“Like, where did you go…?”

As I follow Toriel, I feel the familiar glow of a save point near my cheek, and I touch it. [Seeing such a cute, tidy house in the RUINS gives you determination.]

I am about to inwardly respond when the voice chuckles and teases, [Yeah I know… *cue ‘You made a mistake.’ Sound…*]
Stop the music.

I walk a couple more steps, but Toriel lays a hand on my arm before I can continue. “Do you smell that?” she asks.

I sniff the air, and my mouth starts watering. “What is…?”

“It is a butterscotch cinnamon pie. I thought we might celebrate your arrival. I thought you wanted to have a nice time living here, so I will hold off snail pie for tonight. But it is too hot to eat right now. Here. In the meantime, I have another surprise for you.”

She takes my arm and we walk to the right a little. “Here we are, a room of your own. Make yourself at home. There are some shoes beside the bed, if you wish to replace what you are currently wearing. Do you wish me to bring the pie to your room when it is finished?”

“Where’s the kitchen? If I’m gonna be staying here for a while, I have to know how to get around your house… And I might want to go out there to get the pie.”

“It is to the left of your room.”

“Okay. You can bring the pie to my room and then I’ll figure out where I want to eat it. Thank you Toriel. I can’t even begin…”

A soft, kind laugh. “You are very kind my child, but it is not necessary that you thank me. I am merely… doing what any monster would do, if they knew you, and who you were.”

I nod. “I hope so… I hope there aren’t any more monsters like Flowey around…”

Toriel closes the door, and I take my shoes off. I drop my backpack at the foot of the bed, removing the BrailleNote and my phone from it. I place them, alongside my folded cane, on a nearby table. [I’ll help you select the right size of shoes…]

“Okay… I’ll damn well need that since my right foot is flat…”

I sit down on the bed and reach over to check the time on my phone. The voiceover says, “2:00 PM.”

“Only?”

[Yeah I guess. Why? Did it feel like longer?]

“I suppose. What I want to know is how much battery I have left on my phone and the BrailleNote. I… I don’t know if they have Wifi here. And I’ll have to turn off everything on my phone that’s not the voiceover to save battery.”

I touch my finger to the upper-right corner of the lock screen, and my phone says, “80% battery power.”

“Time to turn off Wifi and Bluetooth and all the lights and to delete all the apps I never use…”

I go to Settings and hover my finger over the Wifi option. I’m about to enter the Wifi menu and turn the Wifi off, but my finger won’t move. [Check the signal thing.]

“Why?”

“Two of five bars,” the voiceover says.
“Wait whaaaaat?”

[We both heard that… Seriously…]

“No not that! There’s Wifi heeeeeeere!!!!”

[It kinda sucks here but it’s--]

“Trust me I’m just glad it works… Well I’ll only know that when I try connecting to Google… If Google works, then you know the Wifi suuuuucks…”

[Google… Wait ooooh that was your world’s home page… We don’t have that here… What you doing?]

“I’m seeing how advanced their… your? The, technology is…”

I open Safari and wait for the first web page to load. My phone says “Undernet home.” I find a list of links on the screen and choose one. They’re news stories about… different areas of the Underground, apparently… The voiceover reads off some headlines:

“Mettaton’s Next Show Airing Tomorrow Night at 8:00 Pm.”

“Mew Mew Kissy Cutey Marathon Tonight, Starting at 7:00 Pm.”

“Insightful one?”

Toriel rests her hand on my arm and pats it. “The pie is ready. What are you doing?”

As she asks this, she bends down to read my phone.

“There’s Wiiiiifiiiiii!!! Thank Gooood! I know what the Underground is like! They’re… you all are… like home… but without politics…”

“But you are home now,” Toriel, tries to explain.

“I mean… home home…” I trail off.

Toriel grasps my arm. “I have brought the pie here with a tray in case you wanted to eat it here. Have you made your mind up yet?”

[From what I know about you you think knowledge is power. Toriel is right here. DO IT! JUST, DOOOOO iiiiiit!!!--]

{Please stoooop… I know I got this.}

“I’ll eat the pie in the kitchen.”

“I will help you to the kitchen so you can eat the pie. You can also learn the way there so you can walk around by yourself.”

I reach over to unfold my cane, but my hand stops in midair. [No no noooo… I’m helping you out now… remember?]

{Yeah… Sorry… just… habit…}

I walk out with Toriel to the kitchen, sitting down and reaching out with both hands as she scoots a plate of hot pie toward me. As I pick it up and start smearing cinamin and butterscotch filling all
over my face, Toriel quietly starts to speak. “I want you to know how glad I am to have someone here. There’s so many old books I want to share. I want to show you my favorite bug-hunting spot.”

“Well you can catch the bugs and I can feel them, more like…”

“I am fully aware of that, my child. I’ve also prepared a curriculum for your education.”

“Oh… I’m already in college… I’m a freshman…”

A surprised gasp from Toriel. “Child—I mean… I did not know… I am sorry… You are not a child, then…”

“Ehh. Not for humans… maybe not for monsters either…”

“How old are you, my—insightful one?”

“Eighteen. I’ll be nineteen in… what month is it?”

“September, my child.”

“My name is Pauline. And my birthday is in January.”

“Then you would have been born in January of 183X, Pauline.”

The first bout of genuine confusion in a couple hours.

“Whaaaat? What do you mean 183X?”

“That is the year, my child.”

“What year is it?”

“It is 201X right now.”

An amused chuckle. "This may come as a surprise to you, but I have always wanted to be a teacher."

A laugh of my own, but much louder. “Well you’re pretty damn good at it… if it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t have figured out how the puzzles work.”

[Hey!]

{I’m trying to be nice… and it’s true… before I knew about you.}

“But the thing is… is that since I can’t see, I won’t be able to read the books you have since they’re not in braille.”

“What is braille, Pauline?”

[Finally, you’re the one giving the answers to stuff…]

{I know right?}

“Well,” I begin, “it’s like letters and numbers, but for blind people. It’s made of six dots, three rows by two columns. Different combinations of dots make letters and numbers.”
I pause, contemplating for a second. “Normally, there would be a machine around that I could use to write out some braille, but…”

Toriel stands from the table, walking away. “Do you need objects to substitute for dots, my child?”

“Yeah. The problem is that you don’t have a brailler, so you can’t write the braille out on paper…”

“What is a… brailler… made of, Pauline?”

“The thing is is that I’ve used a brailler, but I don’t know what it looks like. We couldn’t make one, even if you had the materials. We can use a slate and stylus for now.”

“What does it look like? I can make it for us, resourceful one.”

I laugh again. “Well, the one I have has four rows of cells and enough cells per row to go across a normal sheet of paper, whatever size that is for you. We’re going to be writing a lot. Make one as large as your regular size sheet of paper for now…”

Chapter End Notes

Yaaaaaas! FIIIIINALLLY!!!

As of December 6, 2017, I've finally found Visiontale's version of Enemy Approaching! Here's the URL!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJ6ppbOfEfQ

Until now, I could never find a cover which was lively and energetic, and yet, not heavy musically. Essentially, I couldn't find a version that captured the same emotions as the original, except using not 8-bit and not-as-synthesized instruments. The orchestral versions I found didn't have enough drums, and what drums they did use weren't as loud and sharp as in the original. The instruments performing each part never matched up with how each part sounded in the original regarding timbre.

In this cover, the drums are prominent, but not so loud or sharp that they detract from the melody and all the harmonies. The mix of the piano and the 8-bit synthesizers performing the melody captures Visiontale well, considering that my RPG experiences involve games that use both real and synthesized instruments.

The organ and excerpt of Stronger Monsters were the icing on the cake.

Thank you Note Block!
Chapter 03

Chapter Summary

There is a description of what writing braille is like here. Again, if it's confusing, it's easier to look it up.

Also, here are the beginnings of my theory of how determination works. It's based on some current neuroscience research right now. I'll have it explained in more detail when I eventually meet Alphys.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

3

[WAAAAAKE UUUUUUUP!!!!!]

More tired than curious: “The fuuuuck?”

I fooooorgooooooot soooooomethiiiiiing yeeeeeesteeeeeerdeaaaaay!!!!]

“Wait what yesterdaaaay...?” I mumble into my... I mean, the pillow…

[There was something in the ruins I forgot to show you!]

“What.”

[Fooooooood!]

“Free food?”

[No... but it's good food...]

“Too lazy… What time is it?”

[Reyn time!]

“Oh heell noooo!”

[But for real it's like nighttime, but like, really early morning but you pretend it's nighttime still so you can be lazy nighttime... Check your phone.]

I reach over, unlock my phone, and check the time. “6:30 P.M.”

“So it's not late afternoon, evening-ish... then?”

[Let's just say it's 6:30 P.M your world's time, where you live, but it's literally a little after sunrise...]

“Underground???”
[Light shines through the barrier. And they use that to tell the time.]

“How do I figure out what time it is then? I have to change it on my phone to match the time here.”

[Ask Toriel.]

“She's awaaaaake???? It soooo earrrrly...!”

[She doesn't sleep all in one sitting, like, eight hours at a time. If you don't believe me go to the living room...]

“Okay. But first... where the hell's the bathroom?”

[The door right outside here. I bet Toriel'll notice you're awake... well, up out of bed for some reason... and bring your phone and the BrailleNote with you.]

In a couple minutes, I... we walk into the living room. After a little more walking I stop. Reaching out, I feel the arm of a chair… and then someone's hand lying on the arm. “Good morning, my... I mean, Pauline.”

"Morning."

“Did you sleep well?”

“Yeah. I’m used to napping at weird times of the day… and going to sleep late at night…”

“Do you need anything?”

“I... uh... I just wanted to know what time it is right now... I need to change the time on my phone ’cause if I'm going to be here a while, I'll need to get used to it...”

“I understand my child. There is a clock above the fireplace. It says 10:15 in the morning. There is a second chair next to mine. You can sit down there while you fix your time. Here.”

She takes my arm and walks me a couple feet to one side and I sit down. “After you fix your cell phone and... BrailleNote, I have a surprise for you.”

“Okay.”

A couple minutes later, Toriel walks over to my chair and asks, “I will lead you over to the dining table. I have been thinking about what you have told me. I hope I have… done well...”

After sitting me down in a chair, she guides my hand across the table. My fingertips touch... something... “There are two objects in front of you. Please pick them up, my child.”

[Daaaaamn sooooooon.]

{I can't even...}

{If you were talking to literally anyone else you'd say it too...}

{Truuuuue... The cells are a little... not the same size... but for the most part it's fine.}

{And the stylus is metal, so that's good... so it will last.}

{Truuuuue...}
“Pauline? Is the... slate and stylus... satisfactory?” Toriel asks in an expectant voice.

“You, made this???,“ Much of the tone I would have used if I had said “Daaaaamn sooooon” is evident regardless.

A brief, soft laugh. “Of course my child. I worked on it outside while you were asleep. And—“ She holds out her hand, placing some flat metal discs in my hand, “I have created some, braille dot, substitutes, so we do not waste paper. I have also made some frames to put them in.”

“Hooooly shit you worked with metal? For me?”

[And you said “Daaaaamn sooooon” wasn’t appropriate…]

{I know I know…}

“If that is what it takes for you to be happy here, I will gladly do it again, my child. Is there anything I need to fix? I followed your description as best I could.”

“Some of the cells are larger than others and the round insides of some of the cells aren't the same size or evenly spaced out either.”

“I will keep this in mind. Before you came, I decided on the ingredients and did most of the preparation for our next meal. I will begin the cooking, and while that happens, we may talk.”

{How the hell do I even start?}

[You got this! You just... start small...]

“Toriel?” I call out.

“Yes? I am lighting the fire for the toast.”

[Lighting the fire?]

[She's using magic. She has a stove but she doesn't use it.]

{Okay...?}

[Yeah, like, she used a fireball to scare away Flowey... And how do you think she did the metallurgy for the slate and stylus?]

{Coooool!}

[I know right?]

“You might wanna get a pencil and a piece of paper so you can write this stuff down...”

The swooshing and crackling of a newly-lit fire. Footsteps. A chair scraping across the floor... and Toriel's hand on my shoulder. “May I sit here my child? It will be easier for you to give feedback on my... braille that way.”

“Oh yeah... ’cause if you sit over there—“ I point in front of me, to where Toriel had been sitting before, “your braille would be upside down for me...”

She piles the metal discs in my hand. “I am ready.”
“Well, like, this is the braille cell. This one's dot 1, this one's dot 2...”

... “The letter ‘a’ is dot 1 only. ‘b’ is dots 1-2.”

“Is ‘c’ dots 1-2-3?”

“No... that's ‘l’.”

... “Is this the letter ‘h’?”

“That's 'j'. ‘J’ is 2-4-5. "H" is 1-2-5. ‘D’ and ‘t’ are flipped. And ‘r’ and ‘w’ are too”. ‘E’ and ‘l’ are too...”

... “Pauline, how do these feel?”

“Uh... a through l are fine. But the bottom dot on the ‘m’ should be in the lower left, not the lower right. M is 1-3-4, not 1-4-6.”

... [Whaaaaat???? So quickly…?]

{What do you mean?}

“Is this what my name would look... feel... like, in braille?”

“Yeah! But you put a dot 6 before the ‘t’. You put a dot 6 before a capital letter.”

“What if all letters in a word are capitalized? Do you put a dot 6 before each letter?”

“You put two dot 6s before the first letter of the word.”

“How will I braille any of these old books if I cannot write sentences?”

“The thing is is that most braille books aren't written like this. They're written in grade 2 braille. This is grade 1 braille.”

“How is grade 2 braille different from grade 1 braille?”

“It has contractions... like the two letters ‘en’ are the dots 2-6. but it's complicated... Mormally there'd be reference materials for them I could use but...”

“Just name them… as many as you can... and I can write them down...”

{That patience though…}

“It'd take a while... and you’d have to know the grade 1 braille first... And if you have any math books or anything with numbers, that’s also different… And even now I don’t know all of that kind of braille…”

“Is that how you learned braille? You learned grade 1 first?”

“Yeah. But I learned contractions when I was young. It took... uh.. a long time... to learn them all.”

“We have time my child. But first... I will make lunch. It is 12:45. Then I will fix the slate and stylus. Then you can figure out what you want to do.”

[Ask her about the food... to go outside to find it...]
“Oh yeah after lunch can I please go back into the ruins? I haven’t seen everything yet!”

“Oh of course my child Just bring your phone. If you ever get lost, just call me.”

“The problem is that I don’t have a charger for my phone. So eventually it will run out and I won’t be able to use it anymore. So I’ll have to use yours…”

“I will give you my spare phone after we eat. Do you have—“

Toriel’s voice suddenly changes. A little more… sad… “You have my number already, so you have no need for me to tell you it again, resourceful one.”

“Yeah. As long as your phone has a redial button, then as long as I call you once, then I’ll never have to dial your number again…”

*A lunch time later…*

“I will be doing some work inside for a while my child. I will have my cell phone close at hand in case you call.”

“Okay. See you later.”

As soon as I’m out of earshot of Toriel, I abruptly break into a jog. [The bake sale isn’t far. Come on!]

{Why you making me run?}

[Because it’s free food…?]

{What do they sell?}

[Doughnuts and cider… a cider for eighteen gold. A doughnut for seven gold.]

{How much do I have?}

[Count it…]

{Forty… this better be good… Also on a note about counting gold, do they have five G coins or ten G coins?}

[No… it was never a problem--]

The voice cuts itself off. [Never mind…]

*A couple minutes later…*

[Hold up seven G. They’ll exchange it for the doughnut.]

[Okay.]

I hold up my hand with seven G in it, and it leaves my palm, one coin at a time. In its place, a doughnut wrapped in a napkin drops down. “Thank you,” I call out, but no one answers.

“Where’s the cider?”

[Walk over a couple feet. Hold up eighteen gold this time.”]
After holding up the gold, a jug of cider as large as a Costco jug of milk drops onto my hand. Fortunately they’re… whoever’s running this thing… is nice to give me the jug handle first. “Thank you,” I call out again. {Daaaaamn it’s huuuuuge!}

[Yeah… you comparing it to a Cosco milk jug isn’t wrong. Uh, you’ll want to hoard the Spider Cider. It’s… not sold very often… and it has healing properties…”]

{Spider Cider?}

[It’s made of real spiders, not just the juice.]

{Euwwww…}

[Hey from what I know about you and food, you care about organic stuff. This cider is as organic as it gets! Like seriously it seems like you know a lot of people who care where their food came from… shouldn’t they just be happy it’s… well… food… and that they have any?]

{Truuuuue…? Like, all truuuuuuue…? Yeah… a lot of people care if their food is organic. It’s expensive but… people still do it… but I’m no expert… If I can I’ll eat organic food but I don’t go out looking for it.}

[Just hold onto that thing. Even if it’s empty. You’ll help promote their brand that way.]

{Easy enough… Now all I have to do is make up for all the gold I lost… Is it possible for us to walk around and encounter monsters for that?}

[RPG hoarding tendencies?]

{Yeah…}

[I’ll walk you around and help you dodge monsters’ attacks[]]

I walk around for about an hour and a half, talking, or gesturing, or… flirting… with the monsters. Just as I am about to earn my 150th gold, my phone rings. I put it on speaker: “Hello? Toriel?”

“My child, I wanted to let you know that I will be doing some errands for a couple hours, so I will not be home. Where are you as of this moment?”

“The ruins. Should I come home?”

A short laugh. “Of course not. I merely wanted to notify you so when you come home, you do not come looking for me, only to realize that I am no longer present. Was there anything you wanted me to buy?”

“Hmmm…”

{Yolo!}

[or Naaaah…]

{What do you mean or naaah?}

Uncharacteristic hesitation. […] … Uh… tell you later…]

{Okay…?}
[You were saying?]
{Since they have Internet here, like, would they have phone chargers?}

[Why do you ask?]

{"Cause I want to know what the Underground is like. I can’t read Toriel’s books as they are now. We can’t scan them since I don’t have a computer to hook the scanner up to. My phone’s all I have.}  

[Ask her then.]

“Toriel, do you think you could find a charger for my phone?”

(Of course my child. But I foresee a problem. Since you do not know what your charger looks like, how will you describe it to me? How will I know what to look for?”

“I’ll come home and see if I can find a picture of it online. Or I can describe it.”

“I will await your arrival home then. Bye Pauline. See you soon.”

“See ya Toriel. Bye.”

On the way back home, I ask, {Uh… can I ask… you… something?}

[Yeah. ]

{What should I call you? Like… at least online I can call people by their usernames…}

[My name’s Chara.]

{Chara… spelled how?}

[Like “character” Chara, but pronounced “Car-uh.”]

{Sounds mysterious…}

[First come on I know you were gonna say shady… And second only as much as you want it to be.]

{Okay… Uh… Chara… I… I also wanted to ask… you said that YOLO isn’t true… Why?}

[Because you are filled with determination.] is… Chara’s… unhelpful and untrue response…

{Oh yeah… You said Toriel’s house and those leaves and the gross cheese filled me with determination…}

[Yeah… so…? Your point is…]

{Is that a… custom… in the Underground? To say that… random objects… or important objects… fill you with determination…?}

[No.] Chara says harshly. [I said it because it’s the truth.]

{But I don’t feel very determined…}

[No. You don’t feel determined. You are determined.]
Around here, because you are human, you are determined. Being determined is basically a nearly universal state of being for humans. It’s almost synonymous with being alive…

What’s…?

To put simply, determination… gives humans the power to reach their maximum potential, even in the most dire circumstances. You know what saving is, right?]

Saving what? Money?]

A grunt of frustration: [Come on I know you’re smarter than this. You understand more than anyone else I’ve known down here. I mean like saving in games.]

Yeah. I spawn where I saved.}

And what else happens?]

Everything is how it was when I saved.}

And in games why would you do this?]]

Because I did something wrong… or got lost…]

Yeah, but why do you save, more generally??]

If I mess up, I can go back and try again.}

So YOLO is wrong because…?

“Ooooooh… myyyyyyy… Gooooooood…”

So what does saving do?]

It sets stuff back to how it was when I saved.]

But whyyyyy would you save down here?]]

Because I want to fix something I did wrong.]

And if saving sets everything to how it was like when you saved, then what does this mean for you?]]

I can try again.]

I know that right now, you’re drawing on your memories of playing the Pokémon games. In Pokémon White 2, when you were fighting gym leaders without anyone to help you, what would you do before fighting each gym leader?]}

Save?]

Why?]

So if I died I could just soft reset and try again…}

So… here…?]
“Ooooooh… myyyyy… Gooooood…”

{I’d come back to life… … … …}

[You said that you would save so you could correct any mistakes you made. Why would you want to save here? Why would you want to come back to life?]

I reply aloud, in a hushed voice. “Because… because I don’t want to die here…”

My voice cracks. “I’m too young to die… I haven’t done everything I want to do.”

[Not just here. You don’t want to die ever. That will to live… that is the triggering… emotion… or event… for determination.]

{But how is it that the cheese and Toriel’s house are places that I could reappear at?}

[Because they’re significant. They stand out. And because… I used them too…]

{You, used them?}

[Yeah… just know that I’ve seen all this before… a lot, actually…]

{So… you already know what determination is?}

[Yeah.]

I slowly wonder aloud, “Why do save points appear? Based on what you’re saying, it seems like save points appear when you die…”

[Not exactly… Everyone wants to correct their mistakes. Everyone has a time in their lives when they fuck up, and want to set right what once went wrong. And everyone wants to live. With the save points you can do both these things, if you want it hard enough…]

“But if determination… minmaxes people’s potential, then… what can you do with that?”

Another pause from Chara. [I, don’t know… I only know you can use it to reset… that’s actually the thing determination is known for. Why do you ask?]

“What if I’m determined to do something that’s not… … cheating death?”

[You think you could use determination for other stuff?]

“Yeah. I just have to want it enough… right?”

[I know what you’re about to say and no; if you’re right about determination, it doesn’t work how you think: you can’t use determination to get your sight back. You can’t physically imagine yourself seeing again, not how a normal person sees. You only had a couple years worth of experiences to draw on. That was your maximum you’d end up minmaxing. And as of right now you can’t see anything like what you saw back then, so… yeah… it couldn’t happen anyway.]

{But how does it work? Do I just imagine myself at the save point, and I spawn there? Or if I can use determination for other stuff, how would determination affect my body? Would it increase adrenaline output? Would it make it so all my energy was focused on… running away or enduring attacks, or what?}

[Well… here’s the thing. Frankly it’d be better you know this now and not later. But there’s
someone who knows a lot more about determination because they studied it scientifically. It’s good you’re trying to research this, and this place. I wish I did it more when I was here, actually. If you spend a little more time on the Undernet, you’ll find her.]

{Okay…}

I walk back into Toriel’s living room and I hear her stand from a chair. “Hello Pauline. I was waiting for you. Do you have a photograph of the phone charger prepared?”

“I’ll try looking for it. If I can’t find it, I’ll describe it to you.”

*A couple minutes later…*

I can’t help but shout “They have it! It’s… somewhere called Snowdin Town.”

“Oh I know where that is my child. It will not take me long to arrive there and determine whether the charger is available. And if it is not I can always place an order.” Toriel perks up.

“An order? Who makes them? Where do u get them from?”

Toriel suddenly sighs heavily. “I have not seen her in a long time… I do not know how she will respond to your presence in the Underground…”

“Who is she?”

Another sigh. “It is too painful to explain, my child. I am terribly sorry. But I promise I will try my best to find this phone charger.”

She stops for a moment, her tone turning apologetic. “Oh I should have asked this sooner. I am sorry for being caught up in my own thoughts. Why do you need this charger?”

I laugh. “Let’s just say it’s hard… okay, like… almost impossible… for me to go without the Internet for more than a couple hours at a time. Maybe not even then. The Internet’s the only reason I was able to do my work at school. And besides: since we don’t have the technology to scan your books, it’s better I read stuff online. Maybe I’ll find digital copies there.”

I say the rest wistfully: “And since I’m not in school and not doing homework, I have… a lot… of free time now…”

[Reyn time!]?

{Oh heeeell nooooo!}

“Very well. Toriel walks forward and hugs me. I hug her tightly back. “I will be off then insightful one. I have left hot dogs and pie on the dining table. I have put them in a thermos, so they should remain relatively warm until you wish to eat them. Unfortunately I do not have a microwave, and it is much too dangerous for you to use the stove by yourself.”

“Yeah…” I agree.

Toriel begins to walk away, down some stairs. “Oh my child: if you ever hear someone knock on this door downstairs, feel free to ask who it is and open it for them. Sadly I do not have a spare key for you to leave the house, but I will make that my first priority when I leave here.”

“So you have someone to make spare keys too?”
A, reprimand? No…. it’s teasing. “My child, I may not have a smartphone, but I am aware of key-copying.

[YOOOOOUUUUU IIIIDIIIIIOOOOOOOT!!!]

“Fair enough…” I call after her, just a little embarrassed…

“Be good my child. And stay safe.”

“Bye.”

The door downstairs loudly shuts.

[Wait whaaaaaat she’s giving you a spare key???]

{What? Is this weird?}

{Yeaaaah!!! She didn’t let anyone leave like that before…}

{Before???}

Chara sighs. [Okay… I should have told you this earlier… Toriel would have told you eventually but that’s not the point. You know how Toriel said that every day she walks through the ruins to see if anyone has fallen down?]

{That’s a normal thing?}

{Yeah… it’s happened several times…}

{Whyyyyyy?}

{I’ll tell it to you like how Toriel told me.}

Long ago, two races ruled over earth: humans and monsters.

One day war broke out between the two races. After a long battle, the humans were victorious.

The monsters were sealed underground with a magic spell, underneath Mount Ebot.

They say that those who climb the mountain never return.]

“Whaaaat???” is my rhetorical, whispered response. “Why’d humans declare war?”

[It’s not for me to say… I actually don’t know why. Just… well… they need human souls to break the barrier that traps them down here, seven of them.]

{oh nooooooooo… no no no no no…}

“How many do they have?”

A long pause. Then Chara says quietly, [Six.]

“Fuuuuuuuuuuuck!!!!!!”

[Yeah… this is why when Toriel sees a human child, well, a human, she doesn’t let them leave. She doesn’t want them getting killed.]
“By…?”

“Fighting them.”

“A-a-and… t-t-they’re a-a-a-all d-d-d-dead n-n-n-now?”

Chara sighs. [Yeah…]

{But I have to get home! I have school! How will I--}

Another pause, but much longer. [It’s… complicated… just… I’ll help you figure out how this world works, and maybe even how to get home. It’s just… I’ve never seen this happen before…]

{Why?}

Chara laughs. [Well for one a blind person’s never fallen down… let alone a college age blind person…]

{Really?}

[Toriel asked how old you were since… well… everyone who’s fallen down before you has been younger than you… significantly so… like, preteen younger than you…]

“Oh… my…”

[yeah…]

Chara changes the subject. Honestly I don’t dwell on the condition of the past six humans who were here… except for the fact that I didn’t think about how Toriel had the shoes already… [How about you prepare for if Toriel doesn’t find a phone charger ready to buy? Also prepare for when the BrailleNote dies…”

{Oh yeah… there’s some stuff I’ll write down now so I still have it when the BrailleNote and my phone die…}

When I walk back to my room, I feel something on the table, next to my cane. “The slate and stylus is fixed!”

[Yeah. And just in time too. How much battery does the BrailleNote have?]

After turning it on, I check the braille display and read aloud, “It has sixty percent left. I’ll turn off the Wifi and the other stuff I don’t use. The problem is that even if the BrailleNote is off, the battery drains. And… well… since you guys don’t seem to know much about blind people to begin with, I don’t think you’d have a charger for the BrailleNote either…”

[Truuuuue…]

“But how will I stop the battery from draining?”

[Take it out but put it in again when you need to use it?]
“Maybe… I’ll do that after I write down some stuff. I don’t know how useful it will be here, but who knows? I’ll at least copy down my passwords, since I know there’s Internet—“

[Undernet you mean?]

“Yes? And no…?”

[Okay. I’ll just get the essential stuff. Then when Toriel comes back I’ll have her write it out in print and—“

A banging sound in the distance.

“What was…?”

A… devious…? Chuckle from Chara. [Come on we got this. I think… no: I know who that is.]

“Whoooo?”

[You remember what Toriel said right? If someone knocks on the door, you can basically violate any common sense from parents talking to their kids they’re leaving alone and ask who it is and open the door and not feel creeped out! And without getting killed like every stupid horror film victim ever!]

“Okay…?”

[Leave your stuff here. You should take out the battery from the BrailleNote now though.]

With Chara’s help, I walk out of the room, and instead of walking straight out my bedroom door, I walk out a ways, then turn right, so I am walking down the stairs. They tell me these stairs are directly across from Toriel’s front door.

After opening the door to the basement, Chara explains, [This place is pretty empty. You could walk around down here without me and you’d still be fine. There’s no furniture or anything down here. The door is—]

Another knock, almost deafening now, now that the door’s not too far away.

[We’ll walk forward a few dozen feet to get to the door.]

{But what do I do when I get there?}

Chara’s voice softens, for the first time not sounding sarcastic or informative. [Just, ask who it is. And I’ll help you open the door. I think, no: I know you’ll enjoy this.]

A third set of knocks, but after them, I hear… a somewhat faint voice… “Knock knock.”

"Nope!"

[You’re supposed to ask "Who’s there?"]

{"Fuck that!"}

[Seriously ask "Who’s there?"]

"Nope nope nope nope nope!"
That’s not creepy at all…!

[I know it sounds like the title of a cheesy horror film… a comedy horror film or otherwise… but trust me it’s fine.]

Chara seems… excited. “And besides I think you’ll like this. JUST! DOOOOOO IIIIIIT!!!!]

“Fine. but if Toriel’s house ends up getting robbed—“

[Well you can’t blame me because no one else knows I’m here… so…]

*Cue face palm*

{Oh yeah… … … shit.}

[Come on!]

I suddenly begin walking forward briskly. [The handle’s on the right side.]

“But I’m not gonna open—“

I abruptly stop, one of my hands reaching out in front of me. I feel a cold, stone surface. “Ooooh heeewlll nooooo!” I protest…

The door swings outward and open, with surprisingly little creaking…

I’m impressed.

With the door. Not Chara…

“Hello?” I call out.

No one answers. I call out again, but there is still no response. I walk forward a couple feet, find the door handle, then close the door again.

Listen until 2:34, then close.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqhirHCWBc4&t=328s#t=01m42s

Make sure you finish what’s left of this chapter by the time the song reaches 0:26.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emU2aoj8CIQ&index=11&list=FLmHGufMolDktodLm1kSXITA

“Human… don’t you know how to greet a new pal???”

“Fuuuuuck!!!” I spin around, but don’t know exactly what to do next since… someone’s already inside the house…

{But no one answered how!?!?}

[They could have walked through…”

{But that door's—}

[It’s actually pretty big. And it did prop itself open. And you were standing in only part of the doorway…]
But what do I do!?!? They’re already insiiiide!!

Well you’ve already turned around… just… shake his hand…

But I don’t even know who he is!

Look man Toriel said that it was okay for you to ask who it was and let them in. She trusts everyone around here. So she trusts him. And you trust her… so…

I guess… but if anything happens—wait shit I can’t blame you can’t I…?

Yeah… just… reach your hand out…

I extend my left hand outward but don’t feel anything. I take a step forward, and I also hear… the other person—monster--moving closer. After a couple seconds someone’s hand grips mine.

Daaaamn his hands are coooold… and dry…

Not dry… not really.

What do you--?

As our hands move upward in the midst of beginning the handshake,

… … a balloon deflates… or worse… {Uh… … …}

Chara begins to giggle… very out of place like…

“Heh heh heh. The old whoopee cushion in the hand trick. It’s always funny…”

{You can’t be serious…}

I withdraw my hand and take a step back, only for a hand to touch my arm. I keep trying to back away. His hand’s sooooo dry… and… bony…

“Oh yeah. Sorry. I should’ve told you where I was first. Tori told me to come by. Guess she didn’t tell you who I was yet.”

“What!?”

A short, deep chuckle. “Ehh. It’s okay. I’m new at this. I’m Sans. Sans the skeleton. I’m actually supposed to be on watch for humans right now but,” he? pauses a moment, “you know, I don’t really care about capturing anybody.”

Chapter End Notes

Here is the link to the Sans voice.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqhirHCWBc4&t=328s#t=01m42s

Watch until 2:34, or as close as possible. I included the question, and not just Sans’ answer, for context.
Here is the link to Sans' theme for Visiontale, if it's not easily-accessible in the chapter text itself!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emU2aoj8CIQ&index=11&list=FLmHGufMoIDktodLm1kSXIT

Make sure you reach 0:26 by the time the chapter ends, and start listening to it when the note says so, no sooner, no later. This chapter and the next one are meant to be read one after the other, so the song picks up where the next chapter starts. That's also why only such a small and specific part of the song is mentioned here.
Chapter 04

Chapter Summary

Let's just say there is a reason I had Sans watch all those Xenoblade videos... trust me...

My process for figuring out the date in the Underground is based on the research I performed for this chapter. I'll post a full list of URLs I visited in the endnotes, if anyone wants them. Just say so in the comments.

The things I do for you, Undertale...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

4

[Time to say something that sounds completely stupid but means well!]

{Uh, more like something that tries to mean well... Let's see how he'll react. “Sans Reacts to Nerdy Blind Kid...”}

[Hey! That should be copyrighted shouldn’t it? Based on your memories--]

{Oh heeeeeell noooo! Moving on! Nothing to see here!}

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emU2aoj8CIQ&index=11&list=FLmHGufMoIDktodLm1kSXITA#t=00m26s

Loop until the chapter ends.

“Hello. I'm soooo soooorryyyyy for freaking out like this... I should've known you'd—“

Stumbling over my words like an idiot...

Sans cut me off. “Oh come on kid. You can't apologize for somethin' you never would have known about. I do that to everyone.”

“You mean you give everyone heart attacks?”

[And there goes any attempt at actually being nice...]

{He scared the living--}

Chara suddenly turns serious. [Trust me: Sans hasn’t scared the living shit out of you yet...]

{But he--}

Somehow Chara becomes even more serious. [Trust me. You’ll know it when it happens...]
“Well, when you put it like that, you could say every time you see me you'll be heartbroken.”

“Ugh...”

*Then cue cringe-induced snickering*

“If you keep doing this you’ll give me a heart time…” I warn? Him.

Another chuckle. He seems encouraged. “Bad puns: the best ice breaker. But I have to ask: Pauline, have I scared you enough that you won’t let me in?”

“You know my name.”

[YOOOOOU IDIIIIIIOOOOOT! Crashing the mobile artillery into a house?!?]

{Wow… But how is that weird! Why are you doing that!? How does he--}

“Of course. Tori thought it’d be a good idea if I knew a bit about you before coming here.”

[See? I DON’T WANT ANY EXCUSES! CHAMPIONS DON’T WHINE; THEY WIN!]

{*Sigh…* I guess…}

“What else did she tell you?”

“That I should make it obvious that I’m a skeleton so you don’t feel awkward about holding my arm when we go places…”

Somewhat embarrassed, I admit, “Truuuuue…”

“Well then. Are you gonna let me in then? You’re unnecessarily pulling my heartstrings…”

“But… if you’re a skeleton, you wouldn’t have a heart…”

*Cue singing a Kanye West song, and Chara giggling some more…*

“I was working on something when you knocked, so… I’ll finish that. Then we can talk… or whatever…”

“Whatever you want kid.”

Sans holds his arm out to the side a little, and I grab his elbow. We walk upstairs to my room. “Heyuh. Can I take off my slippers and jacket here?”

“Sure. This is only an Asian house ‘cause I’m here, so go ahead.”

“And uh, can I sit on your bed?”

“Sure. Why do you ask?”

“Tori wanted me to, ease you in, to the rest of the underground. We didn’t know how much you’ve seen—“

Sans stops mid-sentence. “Man . I’m sorry. Just, force of habit…”

“Ehh. It’s okay… I do it too…”
“I mean, we didn’t know how much you’ve been exposed to till now. So she told me to be careful.”

“Fair enough.”

“Also: I don’t know how much you can do or how much you care about your room being different from normal on your own, so, yeah.”

[You’re annoyed at him aren’t you?]

{*Sigh*… I just… I don’t know. It’s nice Toriel told him about me but…}

[But what?]

{I don’t want to be treated different here too.}

I sit on the bed next to Sans and spread my hands out over the bed’s surface, searching for the BrailleNote, the BrailleNote’s battery, and the slate and stylus. “I mean, that makes sense but… did Toriel tell you I’m in college?”

“Yeah. It was the first thing she told me after sayin’ you were… blind. Seriously. I’m impressed. I couldn’t walk around like that.”

“Everyone takes their sight for granted. I just hope that doesn’t happen down here…”

“Heya. Us monsters, we’re not perfect. But yeah; we haven’t met someone like you before. Just do what you’ve always been doing.”

I go into my document with all my important information, insert a clean sheet of paper, and start poking some phone numbers into it.

“How’d you realize that you had to write the braille in backward so it would turn out right on the flip side?” Sans asks.

{Whoaaaaaaaa…}

[Come ooooon. Why are you surprised?]

“Trial and error. I started using this thing in second grade. And when I tried writing my name and took the paper out, I was sooo mad it came out wrong…”

“Hey. When you’re done with that can I give it a shot? I mean, if you’re gonna be writing stuff to everyone like this, I need to raise awareness of it.”

[Ooooooh… myyyyyyy… Gooooooood…]

{Are you fucking kidding me!??}

[Nope!] Chara breaks down laughing incoherently… and I do the same…

“I’m impressed. Like, I’ve made blind people jokes, and some braille jokes, but…” I trail off.

[What’s the braille joke?]

{If Sans doesn’t play Super Smash Bros for Wii U he won’t get it…}

[Truuuuue…? You mean if Smash for Wii U doesn’t exist down here in a recognizable form Sans
I don’t know how much of this stuff I need, but I’ll get all of it… or at least enough of it. I know that I could find email addresses and most phone numbers on my phone if I need them, but if Toriel doesn’t find a charger, I’ll have to do this anyway…"

Sans chuckles yet again. “Oh man. Tori told me ‘bout your phone. She kinda wants one, but she’s still confused about how to type if there aren’t any buttons…”

“Yeah… she freaked out when I showed it to her… Like, are there no smartphones down here?”

“Nope. There are. But they’re just prototypes. Us monsters, we get our technology from the dump in Waterfall. It’s pretty cool, ‘cause we sometimes get current stuff. Well, current to our knowledge, from what we’ve read online…”

“Sans?”

Yeh?”

“What’s technology like here? Like, you know about smartphones, but Toriel doesn’t, so do only some people know? And you have Internet and social networking, so you can’t be too far behind us…”

“Hmmm…” San’s voice sounds less… lazy? Less, drawling. “Kid, I have a question for you.”

“Yeah?”

“You know what year it is right?”

“Yeah. It’s 201X. Toriel told me the first day I was here.”

“What year do you think it is down here?”

“If you have access to the regular Internet, then the time should be the same down here as it is up there.”

“So you’re correlating the year down here to the year on the surface, eh?” He sounds… interested.

“Not exactly. I’m correlating the year down here to the year where I come from. That’s why I was happy to know you had Wifi down here, because assuming…”

{This is gonna sound crazy…}

[Why not do it? But hey! That’s just a theory! A--]

{Oh heeeeeeell noooooo!}

{Fine…}

Quiet patience. “Assuming what?”

“Assuming… that technology has progressed mostly similarly in this world as it has in mine, I can narrow down what year or range of years it should be based on the technology you have.”
“So you want to know what we have down here?”

“Yeah.”

“So: you said you were happy to find out we had Internet, well, the Undernet, and Wifi. When were they made in your world?”

[This isn’t like Sans… He already can tell you’re not from om on the surface… well this world’s surface…]

{Whaaaat? He’s pretty chill.}

Palpably awkward silence from Chara. [Uh… yeah. Let’s just say you’re in the minority when it comes to that opinion…]

{Whyyyyyy?}

[You’ll see, when you eventually leave this place.]

{Okay…}

“Um… The Internet was developed in the 1970s where I come from. I think it became available to consumers in the 1990s. Facebook has been around for… a long time… It was one of the first, or maybe the first, social networking site. It’s been around since the mid 2000s. I’d say around 2005.”

“Well can’t you check online so you know for sure?”

“Yeah.”

*A couple minutes on Google and a bad pun about MySpace later…*

“Okay Facebook was founded in early 2004, not 2005. And Myspace came first. And if you’re making fun of MySpace, your world has technology exceeding 2005.”

“How about Wifi then, kid?”

“I started hearing about it in… the late-ish 2000s… by the time I started sixth grade I knew what it was. Or what it did anyway.”

“When’d you start sixth grade?”

“2009.”

“So it’s older…”

“Yeah.”

“But how much older?”

After a couple more minutes on Google, I summarize, “I found a page on Wikipedia about the history of Wifi.”

After a few more minutes, I continue: “I can’t find the date for the first time Wifi was made commercially available for use to go online.”

After a few more minutes, I say, “I found the name of the first computer that had Wifi networking
on it. Let’s just hope it’s Internet Wifi, and not microwave oven Wifi…”

“Nice. If I can do a Google search about food and make my microwave warm that same food for me all at once, I’ll take that…”

“Truuuuue…”

*A few more minutes of wondering why Wikipedia is so labyrinthine later…*

“Okay!” I gasp, out of breath after reading a couple more pages. “Most likely, Wifi became commercially available for Internet use in 1999. And assuming that you haven’t gotten access to our TV radio bands for Wifi yet, then conservatively, it is 2005 or later here.”

“Okay…”

I turn the voiceover off and hand it to Sans. After a few seconds of silence, I hear a… familiar voice…

*A few notes of electronic keyboards and Korean vocals later…*

“Ooooooh… myyyyyy… Goooooood… You gotta be kidding me…”

“Nope. See for yourself.”

When he hands the phone back to me, the voiceover is already reactivated. I read the title and publication date of the video.

“I never thought I’d be so happy to hear ‘Gangnam Style’ in my life…”

“So: now you know that all things being equal, the year here is at least after July 2012.”

[Come ooooon… Why are you so happy? And don’t try lying ‘cause I’ll know…]

{Fine… I… I just hope it’s here…}

[Xenoblade?]}

{Yeah… I’ll look for some music. If it’s here, then I’m good…}

[And the Xenoblade Chronicles 3D trailers?]

{Yeah…}

I set the cursor in the YouTube search box. When I’m done typing I scroll my finger down the page, listening to the search results.

“Yeeeeees! IIIIIIT’S HEEEEERE!”

“Whoa hold up. What’s here? Something from your world?”

“Yeeeees! Just… listen!”

*A few minutes of badass guitar solos later…*

{Do you think he liked it?{
I don’t know… Maybe… I never did this with Sans, so… I wouldn’t know…]

“Wow. Never thought you’d like rock music…”

“I started listening to it in middle school. ‘You will Know Our Names’ isn’t actually rock. It’s metal, but… yeah… ‘cause of this song, I started playing piano again. I started listening to more metal and rock music.”

“But what’s Xenoblade Chronicles? Sounds edgy…”

“Kinda… it depends on how you look at it…”

[Finally! You laughed! And not at one of Sans’ jokes!]

[Shut! Up!]

[Fine… that was a cheap shot…]

“Sans? How much do you know about technology?”

“Well I know what YouTube is. And smartphones.”

“Do you know about video games?”

“Oh man…” Sans starts to explain. “You have nooooo idea… Papyrus saw an ad for a racing game in a magazine. But I had to tell him we couldn’t play it.”

“Papyrus…?”

[Sans’ brother.]

“My bro. He’s really cool. I think you’ll like ‘im.”

“So Papyrus is a gamer?”

“Well he tries… He looooves Portal. But ‘e wants to replace the cake with spaghetti…”

“I mean, I’d watch someone LP that game…”

“Yeah. As for me,” Sans sighs, “it’s not exactly my thing. I mean, we don’t have the technology to play most of them.”

“Most of them?”

“We can play older handheld games but that’s it.”

“Oh…” I feel just a bit disappointed…

“What’s wrong kid? Is it about Xenoblade? It’s not a handheld game?”

“No… it’s for the Wii. It came out… how do I put this? It came out in June 2010 in Japan, August 2011 in Europe, April 2012 in the United States, and April 2015 on the New Nintendo 3DS, so it’s technically also a handheld game. This video was uploaded August 2013, according to this world’s time. I just… have to…”

I start typing again.
[Wow… I never thought I’d hear Sans actually laugh so much… That’s saying something…]

“Auhw! Kid. This—is—great!” Sans can’t stop laughing. “So this is what Super Smash Brothers is like?”

“Only the newest one. Shulk is my main, actually.”

Sans composes himself a little. “So, you’re telling me you play as a guy who can see the future?”

“Yeah.”

[Oh my God yeeees!] *More incoherent laughter from Chara…*

{What!?!}

“So…” Sans says slowly, “when you’re reading stuff in braille, you could say, ‘I’m really feeling it?’ Eh?”

“Oh… myyyyyy… Goooood…”

I follow Chara’s lead… “Why didn’t I think of this before???”

“But Pauline: this can’t be all, right? Shulk had to come from somewhere. Was it Xenoblade? And you were sayin’ lots of release dates. And since this was uploaded in 2013, then all the versions of Xenoblade you said exist except the last one. Shouldn’t ya look for that one, to narrow down the date a bit more?”

“Yeah that’s true. Okay I’ll go search again.”

After a bit more typing, my voiceover reads aloud “Xenoblade Chronicles 3D Launch Trailer.”

“Yeeees! It’s after April 2015 here!”

“High five.”

I give Sans what he wants, trying ot to feel too… weirded out? Disturbed? By his hand literally being bony…

“Why’d you show me these trailers and not Xenoblade itself?”

I sigh. “The thing is… is that I watched someone play through Xenoblade before I did it myself. I just don’t know if he exists here…”

“Well no use in not trying right? And even if you can’t find the videos, you can still tell me ‘bout it. The story. The music. Ya know?”

“Yeah…”

{Dear Alvis I hope he exists here…}

[Yeah… I do too… from your memories, he seems like a cool dude…]

{Truuue…}

As I am about to begin the fourth YouTube search, my phone rings. “Hello? My child?”

“Yeah?”
“Are you all right? Is Sans there?”

“Yeah!” I put it on speaker. “Hey.” He says.

“I have fortunate news, my child! I have found you the correct iPhone charger. Although I do not know why its creator has tried deceiving me into believing I am a phone…”

“It’s a long story. It’s actually, very iOpening.”

“Wow…”

“Come on. You should have seen that coming…”

[‘I see it!’]

“I see it!”

“Exactly…”

Sans turns back to the phone call at hand. “How much longer will you be out? Papyrus is probably looking for me.”

“You haven’t told him about me yet?”

“Heh heh. You’ll just have to meet him for yourself. Tori, how long will you be away?”

“Approximately another half hour. Forty-five minutes, if I encounter any mishaps. Have either of you eaten?”

“Oh shiiiiit…”

“Not yet,” Sans says over my cursing. “don’t worry. At least if you’re gonna turn into a skeleton, it won’t be on my watch.”

“Oh thank goodness. You are in good hands.” Toriel sighs a bit, relieved. “If you are in need of anything else, do not hesitate to call.”

“Okay. Bye.”

“What are ya lookin’ for?”

“Please… dear Alvis please be here…”


“Yeeees! Yeeees!”

“Hey hey. Calm down. Why so excited?”

“Chuggaaconroy exists heeeere!”

“Is he the Let’s Player you were talkin’ about?”

“yeah! He’s sooo awesome! He makes reaaaally baaaaad puns!”

“Only I can be the judge of that. And, uh, Pauline?”
“Yeah?”

“Three things. One let’s eat—“

“But how can you eat? You don’t have insides and stuff…”

“Do you wanna find out?”

{Euwwwww… Hey! What’s sooo funny?}

[Nothing… *Suppressed giggling*]

“We’ll bring the phone to the table. Second put it to full screen… my eyesight is pretty bad…”

“But… if you’re a full skeleton, you have no eyes…”

“Well I’m still better off than you…”

“Whauw whauw whaaaaauw…”

“And third: you said you’d let me use the slate and stylus. I’ll work on writing somethin’ while we eat.”

“Sure. To the kitchen!”

{Emile… since you’re here, it won’t be sooo bad down here… I think…}

[Does the thought of squeeing over Alvis’ accent in front of Sans fill you with determination?] A moment’s hesitation. Nervousness about being so, open, in front of a complete stranger. Still.

{Yeah. It does.}

[Congratulations: you have just knowingly saved for the first time.]

Chapter End Notes

Here is the link to Sans' theme, set to start at the appropriate timestamp:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emU2aoj8CIQ&index=11&list=FLmHGufMoIDktodLm1kSXITA&t=00m26s
This chapter has an obscure Xenoblade joke in it about the inventory... I'm sorry...

Also philosophy and feels... Hopefully, I can reach a point in this story where I can fully explain all the philosophy alluded to in here...

5

[Dear Alvis do you aaaaaalwaaaaays sleep so late?]

{Yeah...}

[Even on school days?]

{Espeeeecially on school days.}

[Whyyyyy?]

{'Cause I never have time to do everything I want during the day...}

[You mean you never had enough time to do what you wanted during the day.]

{Oh yeah...}

[Well... why don't you get up then? You don't seem tired.]

{Ugh...}

*Incoherent groaning*

[Duuuuuude...!]

{Whaaat?}

*Exasperation that doesn't need to be said... thought...*

[Like... duuuuuude... You have sooo much you can do right now. Help Toriel with braille? Buy more doughnuts? Binge watch Metaton's show? But you're like, you're like, staying in bed!]

{Sooo?}

I've never heard Chara so`\. indignant? Affronted? [Duuuuude! You're missing out on sooooo much! How can you be sooo apathetic? There soooo much you could be doing but you're lying in bed, for Monado's sake!]

{I never get to do this back home. I'm always busy. I always have soooo much work. Like, you might think this is me being lazy, but this is how I'd want to spend some of my free time. If I had enough of it...}
[Hmmm,] Chara concedes. [I mean, you are... no; were... pretty stressed back then. At school, I mean. AP classes. College aps. Trying to learn to main Shulk without having a Wii U and having to use the shitty 3DS controls instead...]

{Oh Goood you have noooo idea what I'd do for a Wii U...}

[But you know, it's weird, thinking that everyone who's fallen down before you... they never made it to college. Hell; they never made it to high school. I could help them defend themselves against Toriel's attacks and not get lost in Waterfall. But I can't do a damn thing about college aps or SAT scores or anything like that.]

{Oh my God that's right isn't it? I'm the oldest human to fall down!}

Sadness between us that needs no words.

[Hey. Can we change the subject?]

{Uh, I guess...? To what?}

[You squeed soooo hard in front of Sans yesterday when you talked about Xenoblade...? Like, you only ate 'cause he told you. You--]

{I knooooow. I... I was... I'm just so happy I met someone... modern. Like, someone who knew about Internet and Wifi and stuff...}

[Not everyone down here is so clueless you know.]

{I didn't mean it like that. I meant, like, Sans reminds me of the Youtubers I watch... watched...}

[Can still watch...]

{True...}

[So...?]

{I... I'm just so happy I met someone who I don't have to explain everything to.}

{Uh huh.}

Chara pauses. I sense them, thinking. [It's interesting... he usually isn't this cautious. And invested in stuff. He's lazy... mostly... but not cautious... not like this.] If Chara could speak aloud, they'd sound like someone muttering to themselves under their breath.

{What do you mean? He just seems hella chill. Maybe you could call him lazy...?}

[Him asking to take off his shoes and jacket and set them down in your room. He's never done that before. Not just 'cause he's never been here. He doesn't... didn't... act like that before around anyone else.]

{Well you keep saying blind people... monsters... don't exist here. And Toriel told Sans to be careful around me. Maybe that's what he thinks being careful is.}

[Yeah. It's just, disconcerting, to see him act like that.]

{Makes sense.}
[And yet you're still annoyed at him?]

{Yeah...}

[Just be glad Toriel's been open-minded about you. You don't know how lucky you are.]

{Are all the other monsters really afraid of outsiders?}

Chara doesn't reply. {Were the other children mean to them?}

Chara still doesn't reply. {But yeah you're right. I'm happy I met her, and you...}

A, surprisingly, cheerful, laugh from Chara. [Yeah! You wouldn't have anyone to meme with!]

{Ugh...} This time it's not a cringy groan.

[But one thing though.?

{Yeah?}

[At least if you're gonna sleep in all day say hi to mom--]

{Whaaaaat?}

A hurried response. [Nothing. Just, let's say hi to Toriel at least before you go back to sleep... meaning going back to lying down and trying to fall asleep again but failing at it but not really feeling like getting up...]

{It feels soooo good to be able to sleep in all day.}

{Yeah I know. You're, like, seriously enjoying this.}

{I had to wake up at 6:30 in the morning for three of out of four years of high school. Hell; even in elementary school I woke up kinda early. I never got much time to myself. To do what I wanted to do. Here,}

As I lie in bed some more, wrapped in a monster's, blanket, I choke up. {This is my chance. To do what I want. Yeah. It's selfish but...}

I trail off. What can I say? {I want this. Weirdly enough I don't mind this. No Zanzadamned essays every week. No stress from hearing about other people's stress. No one treating me like I'm... less of a person...}

Sudden shock from Chara. [Wait really? That can't be a thing!??]

A mental guffaw. {Ooooh you have noooooo ideeeeeaaaaa... Just watch the news in Amurica--}

[Oh heeeeeell noooo!]

{Exactly.}

As I'm about to leave the bathroom, Chara suddenly suggests: [Bruh?]

{Yeah?}

[Take a fucking shower.]
{But I don't have spare clothes!}

[Go back to your room there's spare clothes in the closet.]

*A few seconds later...*

{Wow... Toriel's been putting in work!}

[Duh. Why wouldn't she? She trusts you. So much she went out and didn't wake you up!]

{Exactly like back home.}

[Nice. But yeah. Duuuude. Take a fucking shower!]

[I aaaaaam...!]

After a couple minutes of groping around in the shower, I call out, even though no one is around to hear. "Where's the shaaaaampoooo!?"

[Toriel doesn't have any of that stuff. Monsters don't need it.]

"But she's had people over why doesn't she have aaaany!?"

[How would she even make shampoo and soap? You need, like, lots of chemicals for that!]

"But there's someone who can make iPhone chargers! If you can make those--"

[No it doesn't work like that. You're gonna have to deal with it.]

"Wait... could I make my own soap?"

[Maybe. But if you're gonna do that pлеееееase take a shower first. You fuckin' need it.]

{Okay...}

After my shower, I am about to go back to my room, only to suddenly change direction so I end up walking toward the kitchen table instead.

Okay... it's Chara...

[Oh heeeell nooo!]

[Just see for yourself. Uh... wait...]

I stop, and my hand reaches out under Chara's control, my fingertips brushing a piece of paper on the edge. "Braille," I breathe.

[Read it then.]

My child. I apologize for leaving you alone. I wanted to notify you of my absence so as not to worry you. I will be performing some more errands and will not be back until evening. Sans will be stopping by once more around 1:00. He alerted me to the alarm he caused when he first arrived, so I have told him to call you before he reaches the basement door. I have left pie and hot dogs which Sans can warm on the stove for the two of you. As always, do not hesitate to call me if you are in need of anything. Be good resourceful one. Toriel.

"Hoooooly shiiiiit sheeeeee wroooote braaaaile!?"
[Yeah! Told ya she's good!]
"But... she's only"

[She's only been using braille for, like a day? Yeah. You're right. But she probably stayed up late getting it right.]
"For me...?"

[Damn right!]
"Oh my... Gooood..."

Sudden wistfulness from Chara. [Told ya: she's dedicated. She's really something. She's the only reason I...]

Chara trails off. "Toriel's the only reason you what?"

[Nothing.] I never thought Chara could sound so hurried...

[Well, don't just stand there. Let's see if we can make soap for you 'cause #FirstWorldProblems!]
... "Whoa... Are you for real?"

[You mean is Wikipedia for real? Yeah. It is. They don't have any of this stuff down here. So yeah... you'll have to go without soap.]
"Shit!"

[Be glad there are human showers here at all 'cause monsters only clean themselves for other monsters' sake. They can just magic off most dirt.]
"And what about a comb?"

[Toriel could order one--]
"Nah. It's okay. She already ordered me a phone charger. It must be hard to get all the stuff for that together."

[You sure? It wouldn't take too much effort to make.]
"I guess... but it'll have to be sturdy."

[Suit yourself. Maybe Toriel could cut your hair so you wouldn't have as much of a need for one.]
"Maybe. What time is it? And don't say Shulk or Reyn time!"

[Like, 12-ish. Sans'll be here soon. If you wanna binge-watch Youtube, at least stay in the kitchen to do that.]
"Okay."

... "Uh... literally what the fuck just happened?"

[Metaton's weird. Not exactly my thing but, quite a few monsters like him. And he has merch!]
"I'd buy that."

[I got you! I can hook you up later.]

... "I never thought I'd be so happy to hear Markiplier in my life!"

[Yeah. The monsters who have computers really like him. A lot wanna meet him if they get on the surface.]

"Why? 'Cause they wanna hear him freak out?"

[You mean freak out for real?]

"Oh yeah... Can they comment on his videos?"

[Uh... it's complicated?]

"How?"

[Posting comments uses different systems. They've tried, but... yeah, it doesn't work like that. They've tried sending comments in but everyone thinks the servers never get our stuff.]

"Heh... interesting. Uh, Chara?"

[Yeah?]

"How are you here? Like, you're in my head, but..."

[Are you asking if I have a physical body somewhere?]

"... I don’t know... maybe? Yes?"

A heavy weight fills my chest. It's... overwhelming melancholy. I'm a bit sad about what I left behind--okay maybe a bit more than that--but not like this. [It's a long story.]

"Oh."

It's Chara.

That's their overwhelming melancholy.

They're sad that... they don't have a body...

[Look. I can't really explain right now. It's for the best. You'd wanna hear it from... the ones affected most.]

Quiet sniffing, but not my own. [Can we watch something funny?]

"What do you have in mind?"

... ... "Oh heeeeeeell noooo!"

[Oh come on seriously!! I know you're thinking this subconsciously. Okay maybe not in Rick Astley's voice, but...]

"But like, this meme is sooooo old!!!
"Soooo!?!?"

[I've only heard of this from other people... meaning I've seen it in your memories...]

"But out of all--"

The Youtube video stops, my phone beginning to ring. "Hello?"

"Hey kid. I'm downstairs. You should find a key item outside the door. You can't lose it in your bag. And it's pretty big."

"Okay. I'm--"

[Wow...]

{What?}

[Oh heeeell nooooo!]

{Oh yeah...}

"Really??"

Another one of Sans' frequent laughs. "Oh come on. You laughed at it."

"I did and I can't believe I did..."

"Just like my bro. But yeah. Get down here. I have some things to tell you."

"Sure."

Chara has no need to direct me toward the basement. When I open the basement door Sans places my hand on his elbow. "Thought I'd do this whenever I saw you. Seems like it'd be easier on you."

"Thanks."

[Just thanks?]

[Like, I'm happy he's helping out. Toriel's nice but,]

[But what?]

[I didn't mean it like that. I mean, Sans is like, actually fun. And not just like my mom back home and stuff.]

[Then why don't you tell him? He'd really appreciate it!]

As we enter the kitchen, I decide, why not?

"Sans?"

"Yeh?"

"I, I'm really grateful you're coming here. I know you're supposed to be looking for humans... you must be putting yourself in a lot of danger."
"Neh, not really. I told you: I don't really care for capturing humans."

"Oh yeah."

"You seem down kid. Why's that?"

"Just... I'm the only college age human who's fallen down."

{Don't cry... don't cry... shit...}

Sans steers me over to my bed and wraps an arm around my shoulders. "It's--no. I can't say it's okay. 'Cause it's not. And no one down here can even begin relating to you, but, hey: you've already done a lot more than the other humans who've been down here. No one ever researched the Underground. Well, not like you have."

"I guess. But it seems no one else has had access to the Internet in their pocket when they fell."

"That's true. But still. One of the questions I have for you. Well had for you. I was gonna ask how much you know about the barrier, but,"

"Humans created it. Seven human souls are necessary to break it."

"You're right. There are six human souls. And you could be the seventh."

"Okay. What else?"

"What do you know about Asgore?"

"Asgore?"

"He's the king of the Underground. He lives close to the barrier. If you want to go home, you'll have to take his soul. And even if you're going to break the barrier, you'll have to take his soul so you could get away with breaking it yourself."

"Why? So I can combine my soul with the others to break the barrier?"

"Yeah. Kinda."

{No no no no no no no no no no...!}

"So how would I take his soul?"

"You know how. I know you're smart enough for that. Just think 'bout all that philosophy you've been exposed to about how humans have a physical self and a consciousness. AKA a soul. Or The Matrix…"

"I... I... I have to kill Asgore?!

"Yeah."

[If only you could see Sans' face right now.]

{He seems... so sad...}

[Yeah. Well a little more than sad but yeah. You're right.]

"Why are you telling me this now?"
"'Cause you need to know. 'Cause you have the right to know. Monsters will try to take it from you. And well, Tori told me to accompany you as far as I could. That at least if you have to fight Asgore someday, you might learn some things along the way. And who knows? I might be able to see something new."

"New. What do you mean? I know none of the humans who have fallen down have ever broken the barrier but--"

"Buddy."

Sans suddenly becomes stern. "I have to tell you some things. I've never told anyone them before. I've never felt the need to. I never thought anyone would understand."

"Not even Papyrus?"

"Especially Papyrus. You'll see when you meet him why this is."

"What is it?"

"Well. It's complicated. But I think you'll be able to understand it. But first: I wanna get back to Xenoblade. It's not quite my thing, but I can understand why you like it. Let's get in a couple episodes and eat lunch. I think gaming has helped me get my act together in this sense. It's... confirmed some things. I,"

He hesitates. "Well. One thing I noticed? You can save in the game after a fight but before a chest has been opened. It seems like a lot of games have that. Since it seems like quests can sometimes take a while to complete."

"Oh you have noooooo idea..."

[Ice cabbage flashbacks?]

{Yeah...}

*Shudder*

"And you could save in front of the chest and open it. And if it wasn't what you want you'd exit the game and come back. Then you'd open it again and keep trying."

{Oooooh, myyyyy?}

[Weird RPG tendencies?]

{Yeah!}

"So...?"

"This may seem weird but... from what Toriel has told me you're pretty smart. Your college education might help you understand this. That and you've gamed. And you've stayed in Tori's house a pretty long time. Believe it or not all the other kids stayed only a couple days, maybe a little more. They never had the chance to think about this."

“About what?”

“I think the same thing, with saving and stuff, has happened here before. Is happening here. And, since you're here, will happen here some more.”
Chapter 06

Chapter Summary

There are some... interesting... conversations in here, between Toriel and I and Chara and I. Also more feels...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

06

"So... I'm gonna stay until Toriel can do braille better?"

"Yeh. Then I'll introduce you to Papyrus. It'll be a moment worthy of getting down on papyrus that's for sure."

"Oh man. He seems cool. He actually reminds me of Chuggaconutroy a little."

A short laugh from Sans. "Ya mean how he talks?"

"Yeah dude. But I don't know. Could Papyrus get a million subs?"

"If humans really like puns, then yeah. Well they seem to, so yeh. He probly could."

"Oh duuude... Like... if Papyrus were a Youtuber, he'd be like all the hammy Youtubers combined into one. Jacksepticeye, Chuggaconutroy, Marriland, all of them."

"They all like puns?"

"Yeah like, they seriously looooove puns. Their reactions are sooooo fun, and like, they're all hyper like Papyrus seems to be, so..."

"Yeah. And, from what I've seen, Emile still seems real good at what he does. My bro, he's real smart. He could be real dangerous, if he wanted. I think he could handle knowing' 'bout resetting."

"Yeah. If you frame it like some huge puzzle he'll remember."

"Makes sense. But one thing though: how would we make sure he remembers?"

"Trust me: he'll remember. Resets affect memory somehow. As for how? Even now I don't know."

"Do you think we have access to research on memory? From, like, on the surface? I know we can't create content, but we should be able to access information."

"What do ya have in mind? I've looked at some databases over the years, but you're the college kid. You've done this with a different frame of find from me."

"There are studies out there about gaming improving memory. Maybe we can find more memory stuff. 'Cause, like, I don't know how memory works, but... there are humans who do."
[Cool. I guess it didn't matter I learned some of this before you came. Damn I wish I knew more college kids before I met you...]

[I never thought I'd use this database searching stuff I learned like this...]

[Fair enough. So what are you guys gonna do?]

"Sans?"

"Kid?"

"Do you have a computer at home?"

"Course. It's a little older than what's current on the surface, but... yeah."

"How good is your Internet?"

"It's good enough. Why?"

"Do you know about, like databases and stuff? Human scholars, like, post their articles there. There's, like, databases for lots of subjects. You'd have to look for psychology stuff."

"Sounds about right. I've used 'em a ton. I've looked through 'em lots of times, but it's worth doin' it again. What do ya think I should look for?"

"They have research guides online. As for accessing material, sometimes you have to pay for that stuff. Which sucks but..."

"I've used free stuff all this time. But ya think I have to get to that info no matter what?"

"Uh..."

[For the greater good?]

{If it means I can get out of the Underground then yes.}

"I guess. If your Internet's that bad, if you have to hack some things then do it. If you know how. But only take what you need. And if nothing else you should be able to find stuff on YouTube and other non-scholarly web sites. Google Scholar should help a lot."

"Sounds about right. But it's good you've confirmed all this stuff for me." Sans stands from the kitchen table, taking my arm. "I've gotta go. Paps is probably worried about me. And it seems like I'll have a lot to do."

"Damn right."

"How much should I take?"

"I don't know however much you think you need. If you can get something good for free, take it."

"I've tried learnin' 'bout this stuff without hacking but... I realized that wouldn't cut it. So it looks like I'll be busy for a while. Don't be surprised if I don't come by for the next couple days. Maybe more. Just tell Tori I'm busy if she asks."

"But... when will we tell her about the resets?"
"We'll figure it out when we get there. Don't worry about it. Just treat it like another research assignment for school. That should keep stress down. And the best part is this has no deadline. This should be no problem."

We walk downstairs to the basement, stopping at the door. He pats me on the shoulder. "I'm routin' for ya kid.

"Kid: you have no idea how happy I am I can talk to someone 'bout this. A couple of the kids who fell, they died before I even got to 'em. And well: I can see in how you speak, how your education's done good for you. You can say things well. You're good at workin' through stuff. You're using what you're learning. Monsters could learn from that."

"I guess. On the other hand you guys don't deserve the bullshit which is the United States education system. You guys need to learn stuff that people on the surface take for granted. And I can only help so much since I only have my phone to go look for stuff."

"We can talk about all that another time. Just... binge-watch all the stuff I showed ya, all right? It'll pass the time."

"Okay."

"See ya around Pauline."

"You too--"

Sans and Chara laugh, long and genuinely, before Sans closes the door.

[Something I noticed: Sans never asked how you managed to get here without getting hurt.]
{True...?}

[Do you think he suspects me?]
{I don't know. Why?}

['Cause...]

Chara's voice... cracks.

[He'll ask eventually. Or he'll figure it out. Or both.]

"And he'll... he won't..."

{Whaaaat?}

A hand on my arm.

Fingers intertwining with mine as I take a seat at the kitchen table.

Someone's arm brushing my sleeve.

My phone being wrenched out of my grasp, the voiceover turning off.

"What--who?"

Clicking sounds of typing, and the soft piano notes of a familiar song.
"Look: I... I just think he'll find out eventually. And... I'm afraid..."

"... Chara?"

"Yeah."

"You're a Xenoblade fan! I knew Emile would pull through!!"

A light laugh. "Yeah. If nothing else I'm soooo happy you showed it to me. I'm sooooo happy you're here. To show me everything." They shudder and talk faster. ["I... I won't physically be here for long. Maybe a few more seconds."]

Their hand leaves mine. ["Just know this: you knowing how determination works is more valuable than you could ever know. Right now anyway."]

Their voice fades. ["Who knows? Maybe you'll figure it out. Just..."]

[Stay determined!]

[For both of us!]

**Stop reading, keep listening to the song until it ends if it's still playing, then keep reading.**

*Later that day...*

... "You appreciated my note, my child?"

"Yeah that was hella cool!"

"I am glad I have satisfied you." Toriel's soft laugh. "Is there anything else I must learn?"

"Yeaaaah... but we have time."

"Of course. But my child? It is late. You should go to sleep now. Or at least prepare for bed now."

"Yeah okay."

I stand from the kitchen table and turn around. "Oh yeah Sans said he'd be busy for the next couple days. He'll let me know he's free."

"Of course. I will be working outside over the next couple days, so you will be alone all day, starting early in the morning. Do not be afraid if you wake up and discover I am not home."

A moment's hesitation. "Good night, Pauline."

"Night."

... {Question? How did you...}

[Come out earlier today? Don't know. The only thing I can think of is that you wanna know about me. And you wanna have someone to talk to. Maybe...}
[It can't be..."

{ What are you...? Can't be what? }

"Just, I think I can help you a lot more if I'm in a physical form."

A quiet voice on the floor by my bed. Someone climbing up onto the bed, tugging on the blanket. "I think... if I can show up like this more, it'd help both of us. You'll be less lonely. And it'd help me."

"Okay...?"

"I know you're confused right now but... we can practice it while Sans is gone, starting tomorrow."

"I... guess?"

"Night."

"Night Chara. And get your own damn blanket. Seriously..."

*The next day.*

... "Why must quotation marks share a braille sign with the question mark and was?"

"I don't know... but they, like, open and close, nicely..."

Shifting of metal discs on the table. "I suppose that is true. However I would think whoever invented braille would have taken this into consideration."

"Maybe he did... I don't know. That would have been the least of his problems."

"His problems?"

"Yeah. Louis Braille invented... braille..."

{ Yeah I know it's redundant deal with it. }

[Dude I wasn't gonna snark about it... probly...]

"Who is Louis Braille, my child?"

"He was, like a blind French dude who got his eye poked out when he was four? Five? Young...?"

"Oh my."

[First? Wow. Second Toriel's covered her mouth in shock.]

{ I can hear that...}

[Just making sure.]

"So he became blind?"

"Yeah. He, like, made braille so he could read stuff on his own."
"What inspired him to create braille?"

"There was a version of braille-ish writing with twelve dots first. It was a version of Morse Code."

"Morse Code?"

{Shit.}

[Come on. Explain it. Or at least try to...]

"It's, like... you make letters with sound, usually. Some dude apparently made a tactile Morse Code. And Louis adapted it."

"I, I never realized how little I knew about the surface until you came."

{Whoa...}

[Yep.]

"After talking to you over these past few days, it's like I..."

Toriel takes a long, deep breath, like she's collecting herself. "It's like I never spent time on the surface at all... it is as if I never saw anything. It is as if all the books I have read over all these years... it is as if I never read them."

"I mean, you lived in only one part of the surface. I don't know how long ago you lived up there, so... maybe you're right."

"My child... how am I supposed to protect you if you know more about the world than I do?"

"I... it's okay. I mean, I know it's not okay but... at least you know some things now. If I had stayed, this would have been my... second... or third... week of school."

A furry arm wraps around my shoulders. Then another. "Pauline, I am sorry, for acting so ignorant. I should not have expected you to--"

"It's okay. I mean, I know it's not okay but... at least you treat me like an equal. Mostly. And, well, it's okay if you call me 'my child'. Whatever you want. It's probably hard to call me anything else since you've... seen six children already..."

[Let's be real here you wouldn't have said it if I hadn't done it for you.]

{Dude not cool!}

"Yes... that is true. Just, know that..."

Another long breath. "I believe in you, resourceful one. I know I must not get my hopes up but... I believe in you. I can see the differences between you and the others. Your education has conditioned you to cope with stress, for better or worse. It has kept you sane. It has stopped you from leaving."

"Like, I'll have to leave eventually."

"I know. But, at least Sans will be accompanying you."

Toriel stands, taking me with her. "It is late my child. You must prepare yourself for bed."
"Okay. Night."

"This may seem sudden but...

"I Love you, my child."

{But I haven't been here that long... How do I... Should I...? Is it appropriate to say... I still have a family...}

"... Thanks for everything."

After dropping off my stuff and finding another set of clean clothes in my room, I step into the bathroom. When I walk into the shower, remembering I have no soap, and don't feel uncomfortable with it, I finally feel like I've found my place in the Underground... or at least, I'm well on my way there. I plan on sorting all the data Chara and I collected earlier that day when I'm finished. {I might be the only human down here but I'm not alone.}

No snarky response...

“Chara?”

Wait...

“Chara?” I ask aloud again.

Where's Chara?

I change clothes as quickly as I can. I enter my room and grab my phone and my new comb off the table where I left them when I went to take a shower. Inwardly I thank Toriel for going out shopping again today. I begin squeezing the water out of my hair, but as I flick the water away from me to one side...

"JESUS!"

{... Whaaat?}

"That's what towels are for!"

"Who the fuck--"

"You know who I am!"

"Hold up... Chara?"

"Yeah! I've been here since you got your clothes!"

"But but but but but... how? I never asked for this!"

"Neither did Adam Jensen but that doesn't matter. I'm here... and I've been here about as long as last time. Earlier today, the last time you, summoned me here."

"You mean when we watched Mettaton try to--"

"Yeah yeah. Ugh... just... ugh..."

"Yeah..."
"Mutual shuddering sounds"

"You just had to tell mo--Toriel--about Louis stabbing himself in the eye...?"

"Yeah..."

"Dude...! Like, seriously? Whyyyy?"

"'Cause it's true. And she, like, told me about the six human souls, so... like, it's only fair."

"Yeah truuuuue...

"But yeah like, I checked the BrailleNote's battery, and, it's like, almost dead."

"How almost dead?"

"Like, under thirty percent almost dead."

"Shit."

"Well, like, if you wanna use it at some point you'll have to have Toriel take a picture of it so Alph-...someone--can make a charger for it."

"Okay. I'll ask Toriel--"

My hand jerks toward the table mid-sentence, first grabbing the slate-and-stylus, then a sheet of paper off of it. "Whaaat? Oh..."

*A couple minutes of poking holes into the paper and putting the note outside later*

"How long do you think you'll stick around this time?"

"Hmmm." Chara sounds much older than... they usually sound... all of a sudden. "I Don't know. Maybe all night. Maybe another few minutes. But I'll still be here, no matter what happens. Like, it's good I'm here, like this though. 'Cause I wanted to ask you a favor."

"... Sure."

"Toriel... she was right. She, like, doesn't know much... okay basically anything... about the surface in modern times. And..."

Chara gulps. "Neither do I. I... didn't get too far in school."

"How old are you?"

"It's... hard to explain but... I never learned American history. Not in middle school. Okay not at all."

"Hoooooly--!"

"Yeah. From your memories I know you learned American history in fifth grade. When you were ten? Eleven?"

"And in eighth grade."

I laugh. "And holy shiiitt high school..."
"That too. But... point is: Toriel and I don't know shit about the surface. So... could you... show us?"

[I... how do I...? how much...? What do I...?]

Chara touches my cheek. "I know you must be... really confused... okay maybe more than confused. Overwhelmed, maybe? I don't know I never learned about how to talk to people right! Just... look: you may not know everything about the surface but that doesn't matter. What matters is that you know about the surface more than any of us, just 'cause you've been up there more recently than any of us. Hell, I bet you know more about it than everyone down here!"

"Even Asgore?"

Slight hesitation from Chara. "Even Asgore."

"Well if you say so..."

"Trust me," Chara guffaws. "Once you load up Khan Academy and Crash Course for us, you'll know."

Chara hands me my phone. "What do you wanna show me first?"

"I guess... Crash Course U.S. History?"

"The U.S. is America right?"

{"Hooooly shiiit..."}

["Told you."]

"Yeah they're the same."

Chara takes my hand and pulls the blanket onto our laps. "Can you start from the beginning?"

"As much as I love Obama for being a gamer I wouldn't start off with him first...?"

Chapter End Notes

The Xenoblade main theme is sooooo pretty! Here it is again!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGkPEDFRgng

The information about Louis Braille is true, to my knowledge. I read a biography of him in late elementary school but haven't read about him since. To be fair, considering his history, it'd be hard for me to forget about him...

Also Crash Course is amazing. Their videos saved me in high school, so they're probably good enough for Chara. If you need U.S. history/psychology/physics/philosophy/literature/economics/statistics/astronomy/mythology/computer science/film help, or help for several other subjects, go there. They're amazing. Can't say that enough.
Chapter 07

Chapter Summary

Prepare for more feels, politics, and Papyrus! Papyrus-related feels!

Also, finally! I'll be out of Toriel's house!

No offense to Toriel but still...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

07

*The next day…*

“Wait: so someone stole your cane? In first grade?”

“Yeah… I still can’t believe someone would do that. You have nooooo idea of how badly I’d want to find them and… yell at them…”

“Seems like you wanna do a lot more than that…” Chara’s voice sounds closer to me. They’ve probably leaned in closer to me as we sit on my bed.

“I… yeah…” I admit.

“No shame in hiding it. Everyone has the capacity for bad in them. It just depends on how much you embrace it.”

“Yeah… I’ve thought of that.”

“It’s not just a thought for you, isn’t it?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean: you always have these, urges, to do or say, immoral things, but you know you could never get away with it. So you don’t do them.”

I sigh. “Yeah…”

“Keep in mind: down here, that mindset… probably isn’t the best thing. But it’s not the worst either. Watching out for yourself and getting what you want: that’s not bad.”

“People always say it is.”

“That’s ’cause those people don’t have the guts to do what needs to get done, when there's no other way. That’s ’cause they don’t want it enough.”

Chara lays their hands on mine. “But you do. You and I are… the same that way. We’re both determined to do what we must. Or what we want.”
“People always tell me that I need to learn to advocate for myself. Frankly I’m tired of it. It’s harder than just asking. It’s like… ‘I couldn’t do this thing myself so I’m asking you to help me.’ You know?”

“Depends. If you ask everyone to do everything for you you might as well have your arms and legs cut off so you can’t go anywhere or do anything without someone helping you.”

I laugh nervously. “I don’t know whether to cringe or laugh at that. But yeah I get you.”

“You’re asking for things down here, but they’re things you could never get without help. That’s fine. Don’t worry about it.”

“I guess.”

“You’re gonna worry about it anyway?”

“Yeah…”

“I know. Just think: you’ve already survived longer than two of the children who fell down here. Just by not doing anything stupid! By realizing that the monsters have resources you can use to survive longer. Well some of them do. If you keep doing that, You’ll get out of here.”

“But… I have to kill Asgore.”

“Shhh. Think about that when the time comes. Now, can you… like… explain about why the colonists were sooooo pissed at the British again?”

“Uh… sure…? But I’m American, so… bias much?”

*The next day…*

… “So, why is it three-fifths, and not half…?”

“So the slaves could have some vote ‘cause the South wanted it, I don’t know…?”

“I mean why three-fifths, not one?”

{Oh shit…}

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing…”

[And yes I heard what you were thinking.]

“Doesn’t seem like it. You wouldn’t know this but you don’t, look that eager to tell me…”

“Yeah…”

“Why?”

I sigh. “It’s a long story…”

“Come on. We have time.”

“When I mean it’s along story I mean you literally would have had to have lived in the U.S. to get it so it’ll take too much time to just say it long story…”
“Oh…”

“Let’s just say the monsters down here would get it. Pretty quickly…”

*The next day…*

… “Is this how you write the number 201 my child?”

“Yeah! I don’t think you’ll need to learn to do it in Nemeth braille, so, yeah! You’re good.”

“And—“ Toriel pokes some more braille into the paper, handing me the sheet after a couple seconds, “is this how you write 201X?”

“Yeah nice!”

I can hear Toriel’s smile. “I am glad I have improved so massively my child. Just one more thing, before I prepare the house for Sans’s arrival. I will not be going out today, as Sans wanted me to stay. He had something to tell me.”

{Oh Gooood…}

[It’ll be fine. Sans can do it. Remember how he said--]

[Yeah yeah I do.]

[Good. Now, let’s see what he found online about mitigating the resets.]

… “Sans… this seems… rather improbable—“

“I know. But trust me: I've had plenty of time to work out the kinks. Each reset would be like a past life. My theory's that your mind has suppressed them 'cause... it'd be too much to handle, to put lightly. Humans forget traumatic memories on purpose. So why not monsters?”

“This is only applicable to human memory. Because their research only accounts for humans' brains.”

“If we were really all that different we wouldn't remember things the same way humans do. Or to put it another way: how do you think we forget things? If there are any differences in how our memories work relative to humans, I haven’t found any yet.”

“I... you’re…”

Toriel takes a breath. “As much as I wish to say this does not match my experiences, it makes sense. I... very rarely I have nightmares... or déjà vu. When I say certain phrases or do certain tasks. Or when another monster does the same. It is especially jarring whenever a new occurrence arises in my life. I have braced myself over the past several days, assuming that Pauline's arrival would trigger them but... they have yet to occur.”

“That’s 'cause no one like Pauline has fallen down before. She's so new there’s nothin' for ya to remember. And she hasn’t reset anything yet. By staying with you she hasn’t had to yet. But when she leaves, she will. Even if she’s with me she may have to do it.”

“So you want me to… use these memory exercises, to combat the resets?”

“Yeah. I found more info 'bout how humans and monsters remember stuff and create memories.
Just to confirm what I already know. Resetting impairs your ability to store memories, seems like. So when someone resets in the middle of you doing something, you may have encoded the information of doing that thing, but it wasn’t stored. So it’s just… floating around in your head. That’s also why you have déjà vu after doing something.”

“So when déjà vu occurs, I have remembered something that… already happened, that I do not properly remember, because I could not have properly remembered it?”

“Yeh. That is, if my theory’s right. But it looks like it is. Just in case Pauline has this, ability, I wanted to let you know.”

“But how did you realize she has it, if she has not reset yet?”

Sans doesn’t answer immediately. “That's the thing: I don't know. But I can just tell, there's somethin' different 'bout her, compared to all the other humans who fell down. I can't know without formally lookin' at her soul. But she also didn’t seem too shocked when I first told all this to her, which has to mean something.”

“So, you two will be safe then?”

“Yeah. In theory, she can just save somewhere safe, and if anything happens, she spawn appear back there. No biggie. I mean, she managed to get here safe. Even through all the puzzles. She’ll be fine. And I’ll be watching her.”

“Well,” Toriel stands up, hugging me to her, “I trust you and your judgment. It seems like you have thought long and hard about this. I will pack your bag, resourceful one. There is little point in keeping you here any longer. I have already become proficient in braille enough to give you notes. And I can always call you, and you can always call me.”

“Yeah I guess.”

“Do not be sad resourceful one. I, I have hope for you. Sans is right: I realized you were different as soon as I lay eyes on you. I know now how… vulnerable… the others were who fell down. You… may be like them in some ways, but not all of them. I am happy that this, reset,” Toriel speaks the word slowly, “has brought you to me. To all of us in the Underground.”

“I don’t know what to say…”

“You have no need to say anything. The knowledge you have bestowed upon us is thanks enough. You may think it is far too soon to say this, but I cannot thank you enough for helping me see how close-minded I was. How ignorant I was. But I digress. I will return in a couple minutes with your bag.”

As Toriel walks over to my room, Sans lays a hand on mine. “You ready for this kid?”

“I mean you’ll be there so… My main problem is Papyrus.”

“He can be a little, insensitive… well I think you might see him like that at first, but who knows? I think you two will get along. Especially ever since I showed him Xenoblade—“

“wait whaaaat!?”

“Yeah. He reaaaaaally likes Emile.”

“Even with all the puns?”
“Oh yeah. He’s really feeling them.”

[“Eh!”]

“I have brought you your bag resourceful one,” Toriel calls out as she walks back over into the kitchen. “Well, it is a bag, not exactly yours. Because your backpack is much too small. But I have packed your old bag anyway.”

I hear something being placed in front of me. “I have placed it in front of you.”

“Okay…?”

*A couple minutes of poking around later…*

“How would I wear this?”

“You drape it over your back and chest. It distributes the weight more evenly. It is also more, practical… than a backpack or a bag slung across your body by themselves. The bag is actually two separate bags, so in time of need, you can detach one, so the other half will remain attached to you. And the bag prioritizes what you retrieve from its pockets depending on your circumstances, so you will not lose what you place inside it.”

She laughs. “At least, at first. You will have to condition the bag to give you what you want when you want. However I had it prioritize healing items, your cell phone, and money in the pocket your hands are on right now. I have placed a key to my house, as well as some food, in the pocket next to it, already.”

“Sweet!”

[Cue RPG hoarding tendencies!]

{Yep!}

“But how can it fit all this stuff?”

“Magic, resourceful one.”

“Oh yeah… I forgot that’s a thing…”

[You idiiiiiot!]

{Shut up!}

“I am surprised you have forgotten. Fire magic was how I forged the slate and stylus. And magic altering physical properties of objects is, rather commonplace.”

“Fair enough…”

“Actually, space-altering magic is how I have managed to fit all my books in my house. And all of your clothes in the back portion of the bag. Your old clothes are there, as well as some new ones. They require minimal effort to be washed, so you should be capable of managing them on your own.”

{Shit I have to wash my own clothes!}

[Come on I can help with that…]
“I have also modified your phone case and the phone itself. It will automatically return to the front-most pocket if it is ever in danger of being damaged. The case will take any damage in its stead. Considering where you will be going, you will need this. Also, if absolutely necessary, the bag can act as body armor. Most pockets are actually pouches secured onto a fabric frame. When hit, they will detach. It can also keep you dry or shield you from high heat long enough for you to either escape, or… reset.”

“Hooooly shiiiiit This is awesome!”

Toriel laughs in delight. “I had an inkling you would enjoy it my child. I have also taken similar precautions for your cane. It will automatically return to the sheath on the right side if dropped.”

Toriel hesitates. “And if you ever need to arm yourself, there is another sheath on the front. I hope you will never have to use it but…”

Sans takes my arm. “Come on. We’re burning daylight.”

As I stand outside Toriel’s basement, Toriel hugs me one more time. “I know this may sound strange but, I am not as sad to know you are leaving as I was with the others. I was never presented with a situation where I felt confident enough to let them leave.”

“I know…”

“Just, know that if you need to, you can always come back. I did not allow the other children to do so but… I know you can handle it. That is why I gave you a copy of my key.” As I grip Sans’ arm and start walking, I call Toriel goodbye over my shoulder.

“Just know: you will be the hope of the Underground. I am sure of it!

"I have not been so sure of anything in a long, long time.”

After a couple minutes of walking, Sans says in my ear, “Wow. Tori seems real proud of you.”

“Yeah. I can’t believe she did all this for me. And I… I still barely even know her.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“I mean, I’ve only known her a little more than a week. How much can I learn from someone in a week? Especially a total stranger—“

“Kid.” Sans stops, letting go of me. “I don’t know how much of this you can pick up with just sound but, Tori’s never hidden anything from you. She’s helped you with all her strength. She’s taken care of several other children before you, so she knows what to do.

"She…”

Sans pauses for a second from his position across from me. “She treats you like her own kid.”

“That’s true…”

“Come on. Lighten up. Now you can carry as much stuff in your inventory as you like! For all the collection quests…”

“I swear if I have to collect Ice Cabbages to gain people’s favor around here…”
Sans laughs. “Nah ya won't have to do that. But heads up. You might wanna put on the thickest jacket and pants Tori got for you. I stopped here since there’s a bush you can change behind.”

“Why?”

“Just do it. If you wanna get hypothermia, fine by me, but…”

“Son of a bitch you’re a skeleton. No wonder you don't give a shit!”

“And that’s why I live in Snowdin…”

*A new pair of pants and jacket later…*

I walk a few dozen steps forward, holding onto Sans’ arm once more.

“Fuuuuuuuck!”

“Yeh. It's not called Snowdin for nothin'. Good thing Tori also modded your shoes so they don’t get wet…”

“Yeah…”

[Not a fan of the cold?]

[Dude I lived in California! It never snows there! People were--are--weather wimps!]

[Oh…]

Sans grabs me and holds me closer to him. “What why—“

“Shhh. My brother's coming. I’d say to stay calm but… we’ll see what he says to ya.”

**Listen until the monologue ends, which is when the music starts.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt0Gc3Uc8So&t=179s

“SANS! I’ve been looking for you everywhere! What if a human passes through?”

Sans lets go of me and pushes me forward a little bit. “Ya mean like this one?”

[He’s, like, pointing at you.]

{I guessed as much…}

We stand in the snow silently for a couple seconds.

“OH MYYYYYYY GOOOOOOOD!

"That’s a human right?”

“You can talk to her you know.”

“You’re a human right?” Papyrus asks, taking a few steps.

“Uh duh…?”

A few more seconds of silence.
[He’s, like, two feet in front of you…]

{Good to know…}

“YEEEEES! Excellent!”

{Jesus is he alwaaays this loud?}

[Yeah. He’s like Emile that way. You’ll get used to it. You got used to Emile…]

{Truuue…}

Papyrus clears his throat and takes a deep breath. “Huuuumaan! You shall not pass this area! I, the Great Papyrus, will stop you—“

“But I got here just fine—“

“NONSENSE!!! I have completely halted you in your tracks without even activating any of my puzzles!”

"{Puzzles?}"

[Normal people might call them traps…?]

{Oh shiiiit.}

“Now, I will get all the things I deserve! RESPECT! RECOGNITION! I will finally be able to join the Royal Guard! People will ask to be my… friend?”

{Why he have no friends?}

[It’s… complicated… You’ll have to see for yourself.]

{…}

“I will bathe in a shower of kisses every morning!”

Sans interrupts: “Like every rapper ever. Or like every rapper wants.”

"{[Eh!]}

“SAAAANNS! You haven’t even done anything! I have finally done the unthinkable! You would have just let the human pass right on through, even if they walked right in front of you! That’s how lazy you’ve become!”

“Hey! Sans isn’t lazy! He saved my ass and made sure I didn’t get lost and bored!”

“Yeah. She’s right. I met her a while ago. I’ve, introduced, her to how the Underground works a little—“

“You mean the human’s been here this whole time and you haven’t even bothered capturing her!?”

“Capturing…?”

"{Fuuuuuck!}"

“Yes! Capturing! I will capture you! You will then be delivered to the capital. Undyne will… I’m
gonna… I’ll be so popular! Then! Then, I don’t know what’s next!”

{Oh my…?} 

[Yeah… he’s like Emile on steroids…]

“Well I have to get out of here somehow so…”

“Come on Paps let her through. You can prepare your puzzles, like you always say. How else will she know how amazing they look?”

“Sans! The human can’t be so lazy she would not take the effort to look at my puzzles! Easy! She can just gaze upon them in wonder—“

“Uh…”

Someone’s hand grabbing my wrist… hard…

“JESUS!”

“Whaaaat!? You doubt the glory which is my, the Great Papyrus’s puzzles?”

{Oh dear Alvis what do I say?}

[Just tell the truth…]

“No! I can’t see!”

“What do you mean you can’t see? You have eyes—“

“Bro?” Sans sounds… a little stern… now. “She literally can’t see. The only reason she knows who you are is ‘cause I told her you’re my brother.”

“Is this—“ Papyrus begins to ask, before stopping for a moment. He takes my hand again, and…

{Jesus he’s strong…!}

[Yep!]

“Human? What happened to your eyes!?!”

“Uh… I don’t use them…?”

“Do you even know what your eyes look like?” Sans asks.

“Uh… I know they’re all… milky and stuff…?”

“Yeh. You’re right.”

“But how can this be true!? Humans always look at things! Look at me human. Please!”

“Papyrus…”

{Why do I suddenly feel so sad?}

[’Cause this is the first time someone’s taken it so hard that you can’t see?]
“I can’t. I know where you are ‘cause you’re talking and, well ‘cause you’re holding me. And I can turn my head in your direction when you’re talking to me but I can’t literally look at you.”

Papyrus puts me down. “so,” he says with, much less ham, now, “you cannot gaze upon the glory which is my puzzles?”

“No. You could tell me what they look like though. But it’ll be hard.”

A few more seconds of silence in the snow.

[Wow. I never thought I’d see Papyrus this, thoughtful.]

“OKAY!” Papyrus shouts in my face. “I, the Great Papyrus, have come up with a solution! I will describe all my puzzles to you so you will not miss a single detail! It will be just like if you could see!”

“Thanks man.”

[Oh come on you like him already. Don’t lie to yourself.]

{I’m just glad he’s adapted so fast.}

“So you’re gonna let her through?” Sans asks.

“Yes! Continue, but only if you dare! Gneh heh heh!”

Papyrus runs away laughing.

“I’ll make sure Paps doesn’t get too crazy. He hasn’t realized ya can’t do any of his puzzles, even if ya know what they look like…”

“True…”

“Even so I think you’ll be fine. You’ve made it this far. Just, keep doing what you’re doing. It wouldn’t be surprise me if he’s gone and changed the puzzles, just for you. See ya soon.”

“You too.”

A short laugh. “Well, not really. But instead I'll just say let’s press on and on and on. How’s that?”

“You’re quoting Xenoblade!”

“Course. The puns are great. Anyway I better get going.”

After Sans walks away, Chara says, [Oh yeah: I’ll walk you over to somewhere you can use as a save point. Then maybe you can witness the gloriousness which is Papyrus’s puzzles.]

Chara leads me over a few feet, and my hands touch an object. {What am I…?}

[This is a conveniently-shaped lamp!]

“What’s that sposed to mean?”

[it’s… hard to explain…]

[“But does it fill you with determination?”]

“I guess…?”
[Good. You’ve saved.

[Now back to our regularly scheduled shenanagans.]

Chapter End Notes

Here is the link to the Papyrus voice!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt0Gc3Uc8So&t=179s

Listen to the monologue until the music starts.

What I tell Chara about my school and personal life is basically all true... this is a younger version of me, after all.

If anyone wants any references regarding the information Sans and I discuss about human memory, I can provide it in these notes if they want.
Chapter 08

Chapter Summary

There are literature references in here that anyone below high school age may not understand... Good times...

Also determination theory allusions, symbolism, hip hop, and horror film references! At least!

Also I should have mentioned this earlier in the story's overall notes that any techniques I mention for Orientation and Mobility, AKA walking around without looking like an idiot, and accessibility technology, like the voiceover on my iPhone and the BrailleNote, are all real and are portrayed how I, or other people, would use them.

08

[Heh. Sans left us alone?]

“Yeah…? I’m confused too but… he didn’t ask if I needed him to come with me so… we take those.”

As we walk along, Chara asks about my, old life? Ongoing life? No longer my own but most familiar life? How would I tell them that teachers for blind people are rare? That I struggled doing math because it relied too much on visuals, and brailling math homework by hand was annoying? That I hated the Commonap? They weren’t even in middle school yet!

[Look man I can tell I’m just… flustering you… right now--]

“It’s fine.”

[You don’t sound like it is.]

“*Sigh…*”

[Just saying it’s hard not to notice when I’m literally in your head 99% of the time. You, like, can’t have privacy in here.]

Sudden curiosity: “Chara?”

[Yeah?]

“What’s it like, to know what I think? Is it like hearing me talk? Telepathy?”

“Hmm. I, can’t describe it, not really. I’d say it’s like having a Bluetooth earpiece in your ear all the time but, you could remove that. It could break. I’d say it’s like walking or standing behind you all the time when you talked to peo—monsters, but… that’s creepy.”

“Truuue…?” I laugh a little.
[And I can’t say you’d know it when you saw it ‘cause…]

They trail off, expectantly…

“Whauw whauw whaaaauw…”

[Yeah… it’s impossible to describe… But there is something coming up that I can describe. It’s a box by the side of the road!]

“Heh?”

[Like, literally! I never had a reason to use one but…]

I turn sharply off to one side, Chara presumably leading me over to it. I bend down, lifting the metal lid and reaching my hand inside. “A glove?”

[A Tough Glove.]

“So you’re expecting me to wear one glove?”

[Yeah…]

“Is there a pair—“

[Nope. Never saw one. She didn’t use a second one—]

“She?”

[Yeah. This glove, it belonged to the second kid who fell down and got their soul taken by Asgore. I don’t know why it’s here in this box, ‘cause she made it a little farther down the road, but…]

“So you’re asking me to wear a dead kid’s glove?”

I hear a slapping sound inside my head. [Zanzadammn it! You’re right…]

I close the box and turn back toward the road under my own power. “All that’s left is to make this a baseball glove with poems written on it which belonged to my beloved dead younger brother named Ally. And then you’d call me Holden Caufield.”

[Who the—]

I sigh. “Oh yeah… you never read Catcher in the Rye…”

[What’s that?]

“It’s a book about an angsty kid who loved reading but kept getting kicked out of school ‘cause he kept skipping class and getting in fights and ‘cause he thought everyone was phony…”

[…?]

“Yeah it’s weird… but I liked it. That was in junior year of high school. It’s really popular… on the surface… where I came from… maybe both.”

[Why?]

“Cause it’s about an angsty teenager who’s smart but doesn’t like school…”
Chara abruptly laughs harshly. [I think I could have been one of those kinds of kids…]

“I don’t think it’d be that bad. You’re snarky sometimes but—“

“—you’re so lazy! You were napping all night!”

“I think that’s called sleeping…”

[“Eh!”]

“Excuses excuses!”

“No Johns,” I mutter under my breath, and subsequently, a wave of confusion sweeps over me, even though I know what no Johns means…

Oh…

{It’s a Smash thing… like, no stupid excuses…}

“Oh!” Papyrus stomps over to me and starts yelling.

[He yells all the time for him it’s just talking…]

“The human arrives! In order to stop you, my brother and I have created some puzzles. I think you will find this one, quite shocking!”

{{Shit!}}

“You can’t be serious!”

“Oh yes I am! You see, this is the invisible electricity maze! When you touch the walls of this maze, this—“ a ball of… something… plonks down onto my arm, only to fall to the floor. I bend down, scrabbling my hands across the ground, trying to find it.

I eventually pick it up, and Papyrus continues ranting. “When you touch the walls of this maze, that orb will deliver a hearty zap!”

{Wait…}

[You’re on the right track… just… hang in there…]

“Sound like fun?” Papyrus asks, a little too enthusiastically…

“Uh…” I begin to respond.

“How dare you interrupt me! I have not even finished!”

“Sorry…”

“Well, let’s just say the amount of fun you will have is actually very small! I think!”

“Oh Jesus…”

[Come on I know you got this. If you’re holding the orb when you touch the walls it’ll shock you. So, you…]

I unfold my cane and place the orb on the ground. I start to walk forward, and it doesn’t take long
for me to hit a wall, which is presumably invisible. I walk along it for a while, making sure not to divert away from it. After a few more seconds of walking, my cane stops coming in contact with the wall…

Heavy footsteps crunch in the snow behind me. “Incredible! You slippery snail, you solved it so easily! Too easily!”

“Wel, the orb was gonna shock me so I ditched it…”

“How dare you not respect my puzzles! That is not how this puzzle is supposed to be solved!”

“You mean I wasn’t supposed to put down the orb! Like, you made it! Why’d you even put it in? Why not just make the walls electrified AND invisible?”

Papyrus huffs. “Fine: you do not respect this puzzle. But no matter! The next puzzle will not be so easy! It was designed by my brother Sans! You will surely be confounded! I know I am. Gneh heh heh!”

I stand there awkwardly for a few seconds, expecting Papyrus to continue talking or him to lead? Drag? Me to the next puzzle, but he just storms away. “Heya.”

“Holy shit!”

Sans ignores my outburst. “Thanks for that. Seems like my brother’s having fun. Isn’t he cool?”

“Uh… if you mean a substitute for Jigsaw from the Saw films, then… yes…? He’s pretty cool…?”

Sans chuckles shortly. “I don’t know who that is, but, they don’t sound pleasant…”

“Oh you have nooooooo idea…”

“Why? Am I right?”

Sans shuffles forward a couple steps. “Come on. You can tell me who they are…”

I take a breath. “Well… he’d make traps representing people’s flaws and force people to try escaping from them.”

“Well, that’s not exactly what Papyrus does but, yeah. I get it. But why not just say it?”

“He’s… not very nice. Well he, may be…? Nice…? But… he’s, not Papyrus nice.”

“A nice person who does mean things?”

I hesitate. “I’ve never watched the Saw movies myself. I just read about them. They’re… pretty violent… and controversial…”

“Not like that’d matter for me. I’ve seen worse.”

{Whoa Sans though…?}

[Take his word for it. It’s a… long story…]

{Chara? You’re all, like, serious, again. Is there anything wrong? Is my comparison offensive?}

[Nope… just…]
A mental sigh. [Just, I’ll tell you. Okay? Just, not now… It’s not the time.]

{Okay…}

“Will you be okay kid?” Sans asks. “There are some ice puzzles ahead, and I’d hate to see you slide away like Shulk on Valak Mountain.”

{Whaaaat?}

“Hooooly shiiiit you gooot theeeeeeere!?”

[Well that changed quickly…]

“Yeah. I binged on Xenoblade the past few days.”

Another laugh. “For once Papss is right. I slept in and binged on it the past few days. And I would’ve done it again today if he hadn’t dragged me out of bed.”

“Oh dear Alvi—Jesus the ice puzzles physics…”

“Yeah. I realized, the ice around here’s pretty similar, so… you gonna be okay?”

“I mean, if I really need to, I can save before the puzzle and reset if I get hurt or fuck up.”

“The puzzles have reset mechanics built in. But if you feel safer saving before each one, go ahead.”

[Well this got serious quickly… again… Well I’m not surprised.]

{What do you mean?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

“I’ll be on my way then. Good luck.”

[Dude, put your cane away.]

“Why?”

[’Cause there’s a puzzle ahead I think you’ll… appreciate…]

“Appreciate being…?”

[It’s a game of snowball miniature golf…?]

“It’s not miniature golf! It’s golf in miniature!”

[Let me guess: another reference I won’t get?]

“Well… maybe you could have gotten it… the show it came from was meant for preteens. Even though teenagers and grown-ups would be able to appreciate it the most…”

[But you wanna try?]

“Sure…?”

[If you play you get gold--]
“You could have just told me that…”
[Okay. Just… walk forward. The ball is about chest height right now. I’ll tell you where to push it.]
“So it’s clubless golf in miniature…”
*One attempt later…*
[Damn your legs are short!]
“Well excuuuuuse mee for being Asian—wait shit you wouldn’t know about the—“
[Well, think about it like this. Even when we felt trapped by the limits of your body, we figured it out and got it in. And we got 2 gold, so… not bad. Not bad at all. You wanna try again? We can keep playing to get more free stuff…]
“Okay… But we should save here first…”
[But why?]
“In case we screw up…?”
[Well yes but, how badly do you wanna get the free stuff?]
“Reaaaaally badly. We, like, only have 150 gold…”
[Does this desire to get the free stuff fill you with determination?]
“Yes.”
[No hesitation. I like that. Then, let’s do this.]
*The second unique attempt later.*
[The ball is small now. But standing still, we waited for this opportunity. Then we dethroned the ball with a sharp attack.]
“That’s… a bit weird…”
[But it’s true.]
“I guess…?”
I hear the tinkle of gold falling into my front bag’s most easily accessible pocket. [Reach inside and see how much there is now.]
“There’s… twenty gold… This’ll take forever!”
[Well we have forever…]
“Truuue…?”
*The third unique attempt later…*
“How’d we do?”
[Well, I realized something,. You’ve figured out the course by muscle memory now. The first time,
you just kept pushing it, whether the ball was going the right way or not."

“So?”

[This time, it worked. I realized you are the kind of person who rushes fists-first through all obstacles. And for it, you got five gold."

I confirm this is the case, then we move on, counting out what we’ve earned. “We have, like, seventy-two more gold now. Why do you want me to keep going?”

Chara sounds, excited. [Let’s just say it’s an easter egg. I was the only one who could get it to work but… maybe you can, since I’m here…]

*Fourth unique attempt later…*

“How’d we do?”

[Really good.] Chara can’t suppress their glee. [Patience. Bravery. Integrity. Kindness. Perseverance. Justice. Using these, you were able to win the game. And check your pocket.]

I reach inside, a heavy stack of coins touching my hand. “Whoaaa!”

[Yeah! That’s fifty gold, just from winning that one time. That was our fastest time yet. It was fast. And the ball didn’t even shrink that much.]

“So if I keep playing like that I’ll keep getting fifty gold?”

[Uh no…? Every time I’d play it I could only get it in like that once. Afterward I’d only get ten gold.]

“Well… I want this. Like, really bad. Like, if I don’t get this I won’t have any other easy way of getting money and I don’t know how job applications work down here really bad…”

[Okay…]

I walk back to the start of the course, stand quietly for a second, take a breath, and then push the ball with both hands as fast as I can, leaning my body to match the curves and sharp turns on the course. I make sure my hands and feet, not the ball, touch the boundaries, since Chara told me several attempts ago that the ice surrounding the course would melt the ball a little on contact. As the ball falls into the hole, the same size as it started, I can’t help but feel hyped.

“Yeees!”

Most importantly, I hear a loud clink from in my front pocket. I reach inside and feel the same equally tall stack of gold appear there. “Yeees! I gooot it biiiitchees!”

[Wow.] Chara sounds… a little more than surprised. [I never thought of that. I never thought you could use determination to, wish? Conjuri? Stuff out of mid air like that…]

*Several more attempts later…*

[You good? We have, like, 500 gold in all now! I think we’re good…]

“But when the hell will I come back here?”

[Good point, but still. Seriously I don’t even know how long we’ve been standing here doing
“Fine let’s go… but where?”

[We’re turning off the road again soon. Then—shhh!]

I stop walking for a moment, and hear two? Three? sounds.

Two of them are Sans and Papyrus from somewhat far away. Papyrus is laughing, and Sans
sounds… bored…

The third is…

[Don’t panic you got this.]

“Why?”

I fly off the ground, the third sound coming closer. {What’s—}

[That. He’s? They’re? a Snowdrake. He likes puns.]

{Sweet!}

[Just… pun at him. You’ll be fine.]

I clear my throat and call out, “Hey I heard you’re pretty cool …”

{Ugh… that was baaaad…}

{True but snow bullets!}

I jerk backward in midair, but not quickly enough, as a bullet hits me in the arm. I somehow
manage to grab it out of the air, and awkwardly float there a second as it melts in my hand.

“It’s okay. Chill out man!” the Snowdrake calls back.

“Oh you didn’t just…” I mutter under my breath…

[Oh he did. And you’ll have to come up with a couple more if you wanna get out of here. And if
you wanna console him laugh at his jokes like a normal person…]

I oblige. “Duuude… you should take a chill pill and stop attacking me!”

“Hey! For me, ice puns are snow problem to make!”

He continues to hurl ice bullets at me, my health slowly widdling away down to fourteen from
twenty. [Healing item time?]

{But how will I know it’ll come out of my bag right?}

[Trust me!]

I place my hand on the front pocket of my bag, and fortunately, a piece of the Monster Candy
appears in my palm. [Eat it!]

{Okay—Jesus! I’m at twelve!}
[Eat it whole! Trust me I did it and I was fine!]

{But you’re crazy—people can’t—!}

[Just! Doooooo! Iiiiiit!]

{Fine…}

Apparently, Chara is right, since when the candy touches my tongue, it dissolves, wrapper and all. [You can just chuck it in your mouth. Monster food’s mostly magic so you can’t choke on it…]

{Okay…?}

[Also, bad pun time?]

{I knoooow…}

“Hey Snowdrake?” I ask.

“Yes. You have a bit of adv-ice?”

“Well I have some for you. You shoulda been the third rapper on “Straight Outa Kompton” ‘cause you’re a real Ice Cube!”

Snowdrake hovers for a moment, but he starts laughing soon enough. “Nice one! I’ll make sure to live up to him. He’s pretty cold-blooded!”

“Well, most rappers are like that in public, so… I spare you—“

Snowdrake flies away, and I drop to the ground. [And more gold!]

{Yep!}

[Let’s go! We’re close to Snowdin Town! Just a little more! Keep at it!]

We walk toward the skeletons’ voices, and soon, we hear them arguing? I don’t even know anymore… about a puzzle.

“Human! I hope you’re ready for the next puzzle!”

“I swear… what’s next: a pit of toxic waste that burns my skin off if I move my legs?”

“No! Sans made it! Now, behold!”

A few awkward moments later…

“Saaaans! Where’s the puzzle!?!?”

“it’s right there. On the ground. Trust me. There’s no way she can get past this one…“

“Oh shit…“

“Don’t worry. Just walk forward and you’ll find it. It’s on the ground.”

I drop to my knees and crawl forward cautiously, feeling for any unusual markings on the ground. I eventually find some raised, compacted snow, and follow it, trying to discern its shape. I eventually reach some snow that… feels different… from the rest.
Hey! Can you help me solve this puzzle? Find all the words below:

- Backslash
- Slit Edge
- Sword Drive
- Battle Soul
- Summon Bolt
- Gale Slash
- Butterfly Step
- Ice Cabbage
- Dance Apple
- Ether Cylinder
- Cylinder Gauge
- Blossom Dance!
- Mind Blast
- Jump! Speed! Shield! Buster! Smash! Purge! Streeeeeem Edge! MALLC

{Wait--the fuuuuuuck??}

{It’s the key to a word search… or it seems like it, based on your memories…]

{If we read the rest of the ice maybe we’ll find it…}

{Yeah… let’s do that…}

{Chara? You don’t sound so sure…}

{It’ll be fine. Be glad Papyrus didn’t make the toxic waste pit puzzle…}

I crawl back to the beginning of the puzzle and begin feeling for more snow braille… only to find none.

After a few more minutes, I stand up and ask to no one in particular, “What the fuck is this puzzle!? It’s a word search but there’s no words!”

“Saaaaans! That didn’t do anything!”

“You call me crawling on the ground to solve a snow braille word search nothing!?”

“I knew I shoulda used today’s crossword instead.”

“Oh heeeell noooo! Crosswords are a pain in the—“

“Crossword? I can’t believe you! In my opinion, Junior Jumble is easily the hardest!”

“That doesn’t sound hard…”

“What? Really? Duuuude… that’s easy peezy word scramble. That’s for baby bones…”

“[Whauw whauw whaaaauw…]”

“Huuuuman! Solve this dispute!”

“{Uh…}”

“I mean… if you’re unscrambling short but obscure words I gueeeees? it could be hard…?”

“Yes! Humans must be very intelligent, if they also find Junior Jumble so difficult. Gneh heh heh!”
“Duuuude… like for real though, crosswords are a pain in the ass… because Spanish homework…”

*Shudder…*

Again, Papyrus storms away. Sans crunches toward me this time stead of appearing near me like Alvis being a stalker…

“Hey. Thanks for saying Junior Jumble just to appease my brother. Yesterday he got stumped ‘solving’ the horoscope—“

“Well if he couldn’t figure out which sign he was, I suppose he could solve it…?”

“Not like those things tell you anything valuable about you anyways.”

“Yeah true they, like, say something general enough you can accept it, ‘cause people look for things that already match them.”

“Like I’d ever find anything relatable in there. No humans have gone through anything monsters have…”

[Whoa…]

“FYI Snowdin Town’s to the east of here. It’s not far. You want me to help you get there? ‘Cause Xenoblade ice physics…”

“Yes pleecease!”

… … … “You can use magic to ski without skis?” I shout as we skid along the ice.

“Yeh. Pretty much. We’re not that heavy combined, so…”

“Fair enough.”

[Waaaaaait! Stooooop!]

{Whyyyy?}

[Saaaave pooooint!]

“Saaaans stooop!”

“Where?”

[Tell him to stop at the tables!]

“The tables!”

Sans laughs all of a sudden. “Sure kid.”

We slide a little more, then eventually stop. I reach a hand out and feel a, table?

[Knowing the mouse might one day find a way to heat up the spaghetti… It fills you with determination.]

{Heh?}
[It’s like the cheese and the mousehole… but your hand’s next to a frozen plate of spaghetti and a microwave and all the buttons say spaghetti and there’s a mousehole near here, and a note!]

[Heh?]

“Heya. There’s a note here for you. Want me to read it?”

“Sure…?”

Human! Enjoy the spaghetti. Little do you know, the spaghetti is a trap, meant to entice you! You’ll be so busy eating it, that you will realize you are not progressing! Thoroughly japed again by the Great Papyrus! Gneh Heh heh!

“Wow… just… I can’t even… why would he believe the spaghetti would…?”

“Spaghetti’s his thing. It’s like… most humans on the Internet and bacon——“

‘Baaaaacoooon!”

“Exactly. He always cooks spaghetti at our place. So get used to it.”

“Not like I’m complaining at home the spaghetti was gooood.”

“You should give Paps some tips. He’s been taking cooking lessons from Undyne——“

[Dear Alvis…]

“Undyne?”

“Yeh. The head of the Royal Guard. Why?”

“Oh nooooo…”

“Don’t worry. Paps sees her every day. I’ll make sure he doesn’t spill the beans about you till you’re ready.”

“Sure…?”

“Oh yeah also: we’ll be sliding over some rougher snow ‘cause it’s covering up the solution to the next puzzle. I’ll slow down——“

“Jesus what the——“

Loud noises…

[I was wondering when we’d encounter them…]

{“Who…?”}

“Oh. Them? That’s Dogamy and Dogaressa. Two Royal Guard members.”

“Two dogs?”

“Yeh. So?”

“So Asgore trained attack dogs to hunt humans?”
“Basically?”

As the dogs’ barking becomes progressively louder, Chara warns [Hey I know you wanna nope the hell out of here but to dodge their attacks you can’t move. You can’t—]

{Don’t care!}

“Sans?”

“You wanna slide outa here?”

“Yeeees pleaseease!”
Chapter 09

Chapter Summary

Yaye capitalism and Papyrus giving good directions! Also hooray for introducing essentially-original characters!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

09

As Sans increases our speed, the barking follows us. I hear grinding sounds in front of us after moving several dozen more feet. [You guys slid on top of a switch to retract some spikes. And you’ll have to do that again soon except you’ll have to slide? Step? On some tiles while doing it. You should have Sans stop so you can do that.]

“Kid? There’s an Xoxo puzzle coming up. I’ll stop a couple feet from it. You just have to walk on the tiles. Then we can keep going.”

“But what about the—“

“Dogamy and Dogaressa? They’re far away enough, it’s fine. Just walk straight.”

I’m happy to oblige. As I step off the last tile, my heel presses a switch down, and the familiar grinding sound of retracting occurs. Sans touches my hand to his elbow again, and we continue skiing? Sliding? Away from the two dogs…

Who are still following me…

“Fuuuuck why are they still following me!?”

“They smell you. But don’t worry they’ll probably give up soon. You’ll know when.”

“Probably?”

“Saaans!? What are you and the human doing!? Saaaans!?” Papyrus demands as we slide past him.

“Papyrus fuck off dogs are chasing me!” I yell at him.

Papyrus replies, now sliding alongside us, “But I have been waiting here for you! I wanted to know whether I japed you with my spaghetti!”

“No time for that! Later!”

“But I have modified the next puzzle for you! While you solve it, you can tell me about your reaction to my clever jape!”

“Laaaaater!!”
“But this puzzle looks—“

Papyrus stops, then continues, “I mean feels like—my face! As you attempt to solve it, you will grow to appreciate how highbrow I am!”

{Oh heeeell nooo he didn’t!}

“Dude not funny!”

“You will not know until you try solving it!”

“Calling things ‘highbrow’ is racist! And fine I’ll try it. But if the dogs come over here it’s all your fault!”

“Very well. Saaaans! Make sure the dogs do not come over here! I will instruct the human!”

“Okay.”

Papyrus walks away a few feet and proceeds to yell instructions at me. “Human! Walk to the left!”

I do as he says but feel no tiles under my feet. “But I don’t feel any tiles! You mean the right! You’re facing me so it’s to the right not the left!”

“Just walk on it while holding onto her.” Sans calls out. “That’s what I did for the Snow puzzle.”

“Papyrus crunches back toward me. After a couple seconds, he loudly asks while facing me, “Human! How did other humans give you directions!??”

“Depends…?”

“Would they do what I did!?” he presses.

“No… they’d… use cardinal directions or the positions on a clock—“

“Okay! Human, I will stand at the end of the puzzle and give you directions! Is this suitable?!?”

Sans advises, “Yeh. It should be. As long as you don’t confuse three and nine o’clock.”

“Also as long as you’re not too far away for me to hear you over these fucking dogs!…!”

“Saaaans! You were not the one to find this brilliant solution! Now watch and learn!”

Papyrus walks away again and begins yelling. “The first tile is at seven o’clock, in… two Sanses!”

“You mean feet?”

“No! I mean two of Sans lying down! Because he does this more often than standing on his own two feet!”

“{[Whauw whauw whaaaaauw…]}”

“I’m four feet ten, or 1.27 meters, if you’re into that.”

[Why are you sooo embarrassed all of a sudden?]

{*Sigh…* ’cause Sans is short but still taller than me…}
“Okay.”

“You will soon feel the edge of the tile with your foot!”

… “The seventh tile out of fifteen is at two o’clock in one-and-a-half Sanses—“

“You mean… uh…”

“Basically seven and a half feet…” Sans supplies.

“Precisely!”

… “Alrighty! Are you ready to step on the final tile!?”

“Yeah.”

“I am standing behind it! Human, follow my voice!”

“I can hear you just fine—“

*Cue Papyrus quoting Xenoblade characters obnoxiously loudly…*

As I step on the last tile, Papyrus grabs me by the back of my bag, hoists me into the air, and wraps his arms around me. “Huuuman! I, the Great Papyrus, am proud of your accomplishments! Now we may proceed—“

“About that bro? The dogs are almost to that Xoxo puzzle behind us. If we wanna get home ASAP, we better split. And Pauline was holding onto—“

“Nonsense! I can guide her much better than you can! I saw you slide over here! How dare you not let her try my spaghetti!” Papyrus begins sliding along, still holding onto me.

“Dude it was frozen to the table!”

“That is no excuse! I prepared that spaghetti especially—“

“Fuuuuuck what’s happening?!”

“You’re sliding around another puzzle. Paps is really proud he came up with it but he’s skipping it for the sake of time.”

“Mark my words human, we will return to this puzzle in the future! You must be japed by—“

“Uh, bro? You may wanna pick up the pace.”

More barking, but much closer this time…

“Oh no…”

[Yep. That’s Lesser Dog…]

{Now there’s three dogs chasing me!?}

[Yeah…]

“Why are you so afraid human? I, the Great Papyrus, will protect you! And besides: they are fellow Royal Guard members! They are admirable—“
“But you’re not in it yet…” I point out.

“Well I might as well be!” Papyrus retorts as we slide ever faster on the snow. The snow soon turns to ice as Sans calls out, “Paps is helping you get through the last Xoxo puzzle. He’s pressing the tiles down as you pass by them.”

“Thanks!” I try my best to turn around to thank him, but I fall out of his grip in the process, skidding along the ice for several feet on my side.

In the midst of my slide, I am suddenly wrenched into the air by the back of my bag and my ankles so I am on my back instead. “Oh myyyyy Gooooood!” Papyrus’s voice sounds from near my head. “Human! Are you okay! I did not intend to let go of you!”

“I-i-i-it’s f-f-f-fine. J-j-j-just… c-c-c-c-cold… t-t-t-that’s a-a-a-all…”

“You’re not hurt. That’s all that matters.” Sans reassures me from near my feet. “Come on. We’ll both hold onto you as we slide into town. I bet the shopkeeper and Nice Cream guy will think our entrance is real slick—“

“Sans!” Papyrus, reprimands, Sans. “This is no time for puns! The human is hurt! And you make fun of how she fell!? How dare you! You are tarnishing the reputation of us skeletons! I, for one, am a skeleton with standards!”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

The two skeletons prop me up between them with magic, Papyrus grripping my right arm tightly to his side. Sans presses his right hand to my shoulder. “We’re crossing the bridge into town. We’ll get you all warmed up in the Snowdin shop. Then we’ll figure out what to do next.”

“Sure!” I shout over the ever-louder barks of the three dogs. As the rock beneath my feet turns back into snow, the back half of my bag rips off, aggressive barking accompanying it.

“Yooooou!” Papyrus screams. “Why you little—“

He quickly lets go of me and sprints back the way we came. “How dare you attack the human like this! At least I will announce when I am attacking them! And she is also blind! She did not even know how far behind her u were!”

“Whoa he’s pissed…?”

“Yeah.” Sans seems, surprised. “I didn’t expect that. But he’ll get your pack back. Just give it time. We’re only a few dozen feet away from the shop anyway. Can you walk it?”

“Yeah. Thanks for all that—“

Sans repositions our arms so I am holding onto his right elbow. “No problem kid. I’ve never had to do that on that puzzle before, but,”

He does not finish his sentence.

{Seriously why does he keep doing that?}

[You know.]

{No i—}
[Yes, you do. You’re just not admitting it yet.]

[What do you--?]

Chara mentally huffs. [Fine. Keep deluding yourself into thinking you don’t understand anything about this world. ‘Cause believe it or not, you know a lot. Hell knowing a lot has helped you not die so far. If you embraced that--]

[It’s not like that! I was just wondering why Sans keeps saying he’s never had to do stuff before, or how he’s doing new things! Is his normal life boring?]

Silence between Chara and I. [Yes. You’re right. But I won’t say anything more. I’ll let Sans tell you eventually. It’s better that way…]

“Kid? We’re here. I’m opening the door.”

“Okay.”

I step into the store.

“Oh wait… everyone’s used to it being cold here so there’s no heat…” Sans says aloud what I just realized physically. “Hey! Light up that stove in the back! It’s cold in here.” He calls.

“Why—oh! A human? Oh I’m so sorry I didn’t warm this place up sooner! It may take a while to light the fire, even with magic. It may be better if you take her to Grillby’s.”

“Oh yeah. Thanks for the suggestion. But first: you want anything here? It’s been a while since we ate. There’s some other stuff here too. I can tell you ‘bout them if you want.”

“What do they have?”

“Well let’s just ignore the cold stuff—“

“Why the hell—“

“Everyone here doesn’t have to care about how cold food is. Including me. The only non-cold food in here is the Cinnamon Bunny, at twenty-five gold a piece. How much cash do you have?”

“Five hundred…?”

Sans whistles.

[How the hell can Sans whistle if he has no tongue?]?

[Don’t know…] is Chara’s… uncomfortable… response…

“They’re about the size of your palm, if that helps.”

“How much can I afford to buy without wasting my money…?” I think aloud.

[Come on man! You have an easy source of income! You can buy as much as you want! Go crazy!]?

{But I don’t know when I’ll be able to go back to play with the ball!}

[Doesn’t matter! You have plenty! Besides: Toriel gave you that Butterscotch Cinnamon Pie slice
that heals all your HP! So you can buy a little less…]

{Fine…}

“Can I buy four—“

[Only?]

{Seriously?}

[Who knows when you’ll come back here?]

{Fine…}

“Six, Cinnamon Bunnies, please?”

“Sure! That will be 150 gold.”

I walk forward until my hands touch the counter, and I lay the front part of my bag on it. I reach inside and pull out some gold. I begin counting it out, but the owner just scoots it to her side of the counter. “This is twenty-five gold already. As you take gold out I can count it up for you.”

“Thanks.”

{Shit how will I pay her this will take foreeeeever!}

[Well the bag gave you the right amount the first time…]

{Why don’t you guys have paper money!?}

[We never needed it…]

{Ugh Asgore I swear…}

[Just keep taking out handfuls.]

*Five handfuls of gold and six Cinnamon Bunnies later…*

[Hey there’s a Manly Bandana here for fifty--]

[Where did it come from?]

[Ally—]

{Oh heeeell noooo!}

{Fine…}

“This should be it for now.” I turn around, trying to face Sans.

“No problem. Just wanted to tell you, you can also place orders for items here if you want,. You can probably order a charger for the BrailleNote.”

“Oh yeah!”

“You want to order a printed item?” the shopkeeper asks.
“Whoa you have 3D printers!?”

“Yes we do, in Hotland. If you tell me what item you want I can notify Alphys. She will then go online and look for a suitable image of it. Then she’ll print it out and send it back here for you to look at to make sure it’s the right thing.”

“The thing is,” Sans explains, “is that she’s blind. I’ll have to help her with that.”

She gasps softly. “Oh I—I didn’t mean—“

“It’s okay. You couldn’t have known without us telling you.”

“I, I am sorry. It is just…” the owner sounds much more troubled than I ever would have imagined. “At least I know now. The problem is that sometimes it takes time for Alphys to even find good images. Sometimes she even has to settle for a substitute item. It can take between a few hours to a few days to complete the process.”

“It’s fine. I can wait.”

“Give her the BrailleNote then so she can deliver it to Alphys so she knows what to look for,” Sans suggests. “I’ll get it out of your bag.”

“but it’s… it’s expensive,” I say weakly.

“How much?”

“Eight? Thousand dollars. U.S. dollars. I don’t know how much this is in gold but…”

“And it has all your important stuff on it too.”

{He remembers!}

[Why wouldn’t he?]

“Yeah…”

“Tell you what: I’ll bring it with me the next time I go see her. That will be tomorrow afternoon. I’ll make sure nothing happens to it.”

“Okay,” I breathe out a sigh of relief.

“Okay then,” the shopkeep affirms. “Why do you need to bring this alongside the order?”

“I need a charger for it but I don’t know how easily, Alphys, can find images for it.”

“What kind is it? I can at least tell her that. And also, whatever this is…” She trails off. “May I see it?”

“It’s a kind of AC adapter. And sure.”

I flip the leather case open, revealing the keys. “May I touch the… bumps?” she asks.

“Yeah. It’s off. And probably dead. Right now anyway…”

“She writes using that,” Sans explains as she runs her fingers over the braille display. “The dots are programmed to raise up or go down. And that’s how they make the dots for the letters and
numbers.”

{I never told him how--}

[Come on! Why are you even surprised at this point? Sans is smart okay?]

{Yeah… truuuuue…}

“I… I can’t imagine how you would read and write using this,” she almost whispers. “If you don’t mind, if you’re not busy, can you come by and show me how it works? Once the charger is done?”

“We can both show you braille before then,” Sans answers.

“Yeah,” I agree.

“Thank you. That will make my time here much more interesting. Sometimes business can be slow.”

“No problem,” Sans turns around, hands me my bag, and takes my arm. “I’ll take us to Grillby’s now, if you’re ready. I know a shortcut.”

Sans grasps my arm again, but the shopkeeper stops us before we can walk out the door. “Wait! At least introduce her to the Nice Cream guy down the street. Or take him to Grillby’s with you so she doesn’t get cold out there…”

“You want some Nice Cream?” Sans asks as we walk out the door.

“You mean ice cream right?”

“No Nice Cream. ‘Cause it’s actually nice. This is on the way to Grillby’s so don’t worry it won’t —“

“Hello?” someone calls out to us.

Sans turns off the street and stops. “The Nice Cream guy’s cart is in front of you.”

“Hi.”

“Oh! A customer? Finally! I can’t tell you how long monsters have been passing by without buying anything!”

“Why do they keep ignoring you?”

“I don’t know!” the Nice Cream cart owner seems… distressed… “They just keep complaining about how when they want to buy one, it takes forever for me to make some for them! By the time I’m finished, they’re too impatient and they leave again!”

“Wait hold up you make the nice cream on the spot?”

“Yes! I make them from scratch myself!”

“By yourself?”

“Yes!”

“So no one helps you?”
“No. Why do you ask?”

“Capitalism?”

[I never thought I’d ever have to do this…]

“You should find some people—I mean monsters—“

[Shit I feel bad…]

“—to help you so it’s faster.”

“But this is my business! Why should I let other people do the work for me? I don’t want anyone interfering with my product! I want it to be as high quality as possible!”

“Well,” I start to explain, “if you find someone to package the Nice Cream, and someone to find the ingredients, and someone to mix it—“

“Yes?”

“You can spend less time making and more time selling. And make customers happy.”

The Nice Cream guy considers. “I’ve thought about it. And I’ve even asked some monsters around here. But no one wants to! They think it will be boring!”

[Cue the nine-to-five work jokes…]

[Come on that’s not even relevant!]

“If you give them something they want in exchange, they might do it.”

“You mean like gold?”

“Yeah! You just have to make sure you don’t give them it all, or else you won’t have enough left to buy your stuff.”

[Revenue and profit margins?]

[Yeah!]

“Hey guys,” Sans interrupts, “let’s talk about this at Grillby’s. ‘Cause kid? You seem chilled down to the bone right now…”

“Whauw whauw whaaaaauw…”

“Okay!” the Nice Cream guy agrees. “I’ll put up a ‘Closed’ sign right now.”

After a couple seconds and some clanking noises, I hear the Nice Cream guy say from next to me, “Let’s go then. And, if you don’t mind me asking, how did you know that finding monsters to help me make my Nice Cream would make them easier to sell?”

“School stuff.”

“But how can I learn this?”

[A wild Adam Smith appears!]
“Well… it would be easiest if you had some books about business or economics in the library. Or if you have a computer you can look some stuff up. That’s better than me just telling it to you from memory.”

“My laptop is back at my cart. I’ll go get it.”

“Sure!”

As he runs away, the Nice Cream guy calls out, “What’s this book called? I can load it up so it’s open by the time I meet up with you again at Grillby’s.”


“Oh yeah I’ve heard of him! I even read his stuff a long time ago! But he talked about wine, not ice cream, so I never finished it and I didn’t think it was relevant…”

Chapter End Notes

Adapting this section of the game helped me realize how… unconventional… Visiontale is compared to other fanfics… because seriously try imagining a blind person doing these puzzles on their own…

{{[Nope!]}}
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

A break from most of the action and more world-building... meaning descriptions of how I imagine Snowdin to look like... Next chapter marks a return to normalcy for both this story and my college life: AKA researching stuff at the library! I wanted to continue the chapter with the next day's research, but it didn't feel right.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

10

**Loop until the next note.

“I mean, if you want to help me I’ll be happy to find a way you can do it,” the Nice Cream guy agrees after reading through The Wealth of Nations… or least enough of it that he understands how specialization works…

“Like, normally I’d have to have a job interview and get permits and stuff before I can even work, but… I guess not around here.”

“So you really wanna work?” Sans can’t believe it. “Man. I thought you wanted to lie in bed all day.”

“I do! But… like… I don’t know how I’ll get money to buy all my stuff… and it seems like I’ll be staying down here for a while, so…”

“I’m just trying to think,” Nice Cream guy ponders, “of a job you could do by yourself. I… I want to have control over the creation of the Nice Cream. Even if someone else has to measure out the ingredients I want to still be the one mixing it. I’d think that’d be… hard… for you…”

“I mean I could do it… whether it’d be practical’ the thing. I did cooking a few years ago but besides that I don’t cook at home. I microwave and toast stuff but that’s it.”

“And keep in mind, you may be used to working out in the cold, but her? Humans aren’t built to withstand that for long. You may wanna move your stuff near the shop. Somewhere warmer, but close enough you can keep an eye on her.”

“Yeah,” he muses. “I keep forgetting humans can only tolerate cold by wearing layers and layers of clothing. I should have thought of that first.”

“Ehh, it’s okay. It’s not the worst thing in the world. At least you thought of it before I got to work and sat out there for eight hours and froze to death.”

Nice Cream guy laughs lightly. “Well I’m not that negligent. I’ll have you put on the outermost wrapping on the Nice Cream. The Nice Cream is actually wrapped in a second piece of material as well, but I can have someone else do that. Sealing the Nice Creams in their individual outermost bags will be less messy and faster. Although I seal them shut with magic, so I don’t know how
“Maybe we could place an order for a machine which seals them. I could put the wrappers and Nice Creams in and the machine could, dispense, magic, to seal them shut. And I could seal lots of them at once. Because mechanization and specialization are bestest manufacturing tools…”

[If handled right…?]

{Yeah but you get it… at least I think you do…}

[Come on I’m getting flashbacks from your econ classes… of course I get it…]

{True. Uh. Chara?}

{Yeah?}

{What the hell do I call the Nice Cream guy? Do you know his real name?}

[Like, people just referred to him as the Nice Cream guy around me. You can ask…?]

“Uh,” I lean across the table, hoping I’m talking to the right monster, “do people call you something besides Nice Cream guy? ‘Cause, like, if I’m gonna be working for you it’s only fair I __“

**Stop the music.**

The door to Grillby’s crashes open. The dozen or so monsters around us continue talking like nothing happened. Chara and I, on the other hand, react exactly like you would expect.

“[Fuuuuuck!]”

“I, the Great Papyrus, have returned from my run-in with the other members of the Royal Guard!” he shouts, running toward our table. “I have brought your bag back, safe and sound!”

He pulls up the chair next to me and plonks the back half of my bag onto the table.

“Oh thank God,” I begin to say. “Did they, like, attack you?”

“Not at all! And even if they did, they would be no match for me!”

Papyrus gnheh heh hehs. “You will witness this soon enough! After all, I have yet to properly attempt capturing you!”

“Oh no…”

{{Fuuuuuuuck!}}

“You can’t be serius.” Sans breathes.

[Whoa Sans being serious again though…?]

{Yeah… and I agree!}

“Of course I am being serius brother,” Papyrus rolls his rs on the word “brother,” and I try… and fail… suppressing a laugh.

“It’s like Spanish all over again…”
“She managed to survive my puzzles only because you altered them! I must attempt to capture her, without any interference! If I succeed, Undyne will—"

“But she can’t see,” Sans emphasizes. “The only reason she got through your puzzle was ‘cause you described it. How could she stand a chance fighting you?”

“nonsense Sans! She solves puzzles every day! She can at least prove a worthy opponent for me before she is inevitably captured!”

“Solves puzzles every day…?” I repeat.

“Of cooooourse!” he shouts in my face proper. “While searching for you I read the notes you had placed in your bag—"

“[Wait whaaaaat?!]”

“Yeh. I’m confused too,” Sans slowly agrees. “You already know how to read braille?”

“How could I not? I, the Great Papyrus, saw the pieces of paper you failed to throw away at our house over the past several days and wondered what they were. I learned that dot writing is called braille and memorized its components. It proved, rather challenging, actually,” he admits.

“Whoa…” I’m still in shock. “So, you like, learned braille by memorization alone…?”

[Yeah I’m surprised too… but not too much.]

“It is rather different from what I, the Great Papyrus, am used to,” Papyrus continues, “but nothing I could not handle! If you could learn to write in a completely different system from our own and walk around by yourself, my puzzles would be a breeze by comparison!”

[Uh, nope!]

{Yep…}

“It doesn’t exactly work like that…” I try explaining. “Like yeah, braille and O&M are hard but they don’t involve spikes and invisible electric fences!”

“Well they do now!” Papyrus seems to have completely missed my point… “You will have no trouble fighting me!”

“I… I guess there’s no convincing you otherwise,” I sigh and confirm with him.

Sans answers, “Yeah. There’s not.”

“At least, if we’re gonna do this, let me get used to Snowdin first. ‘Cause I had to learn how to walk around, the rest of the Underground up to this point—"

[You’re not telling him about the Ruins?]

{Does he know about them?}

[I… don’t know…? Maybe?]

“—around Home. And Snowdin has a lot more peop-monsters and buildings int it. And they’re out in the open, so, yeah. You guys will have to orient me to this place.”
Everyone at our table falls silent for a few moments.

“Of course I will help you!” Papyrus offers in his usual, Emile-ish, way. “I am up to the task of leading you around Snowdin.”

“Oh you can put braille plaques or signs next to each door on the outside of each building,” Sans offers. “We can sculpt them out of ice if we need something short term.”

Papyrus jumps up from the table, knocking over… knocking his chair several feet across the room… in the process. “I shall begin doing so right away! Until we meet again human. And hopefully, that will be in battle! Gnheh heh heh!”

He proceeds to run out the door, banging it open and shut like he did when he arrived.

After a few more moments of awkward silence, I tentatively comment, “Uh… like, I didn’t know Papyrus would do all that stuff to learn braille. And he did it without any help from anyone!”

Sans chuckles. “Why are you so surprised? I told you: if Paps ever genuinely tried capturing humans, he’d be pretty damn good at it. He has amazing capacities for auditory and visual learning.”

“I should tell him to make some landmarks for helping you find my Nice Cream stand,” Nice Cream guy points out. “It would make it much easier for you to get to work every day.”

“Truuue…?”

“And also: I never had time to tell you my name. The other shopkeepers around here call me Robin.”

I clarify, “Like Smash Robin or human ice cream brand Robin?”

“The ice cream brand.”

“Nice!”

“I took that name after finding out about the brand online, from human food reviewers.”

“Sweet!”

Sans starts laughing again. “Nice. Just like Robin’s Nice Cream…”

* Cue stifled laughing from Chara*

{Shut up!}

“Whauw whauw whaaauw…”

“So you didn’t mean it to be a pun?”

“No I just, thought Robin naming himself after an ice cream brand was… pretty sweet…”

I trail off, realizing I’m just continuing to make the unintentional pun…

“You know,” Robin stands up from his seat, “we’ve been sitting here for a while and you never got to meet Grillby yet. Or order any food. You want me to ask him over here?”
Before I can respond, Sans says “Sure thing.”

Robin pads across the room as Sans takes the chair Papyrus used. He leans in close to my ear and whispers, “You better be careful around Grillby. He’s quite the hothead.”

“Okay… long as he’s less hyper than Papyrus we’re good…”

“Grillby’s here,” Robin calls out as he walks toward our side of the table. “Grillby this is Pauline.”

“Uh Robin, the thing is, Grillby can’t talk. Or at least he doesn’t choose to. So, how will this work? And sign language won’t work ‘cause someone’s gonna have to translate for him all the time.”

“Can we, like, have him type on my phone?”

“Maybe… but he might melt it—“

“Wait hold up. Melt it?”

“Well he’s made of fire, after all. Don’t you sense it? He’s standing about four feet away from you, on your left side.”

After a couple seconds, I confirm that I sense some heat emanating from… somewhere… a couple feet away.

“Uh, Grillbs,” Sans turns to the left, speaking nervously, “she only has one phone. So if something happens to it—“

[Save?]

{Save!}

[Then we can reset if anything happens…]

“He wants you to unlock it,” Sans tells me.

I stand up and walk a couple feet so I’m standing next to Sans’ chair. My phone is placed in my hand, and I unlock it using my fingerprint. I turn off the voiceover and hold it out in front of me. Soon after I hear the clicking sounds of typing.

“Wait if he’s—you’re,” I correct, “made of fire how the hell are you even—?”

Grillby finishes typing and turns the voiceover on. I discover he’s created a new note, and I read it.

Hello nice to meet you, human. I am the most precise magic user in the Underground. Well I think so anyway. I’m not made of fire. I’m just warm most of the time.

“Oh… that, makes sense…”

[Whauw whauw whaaaaauw…]

“That’s good!” Robin exclaims. “You two can communicate at least. All we have to do is braille the menu—“

*A burger, fries, and several bottles of ketchup later…*

“Thanks for everything, Grillby.”

When we finish eating, I undo the fingerprint restriction on my phone and make my password easy to type, even with the voiceover on. ‘No problem,’ Grillby types. ‘That’ll be 280 gold for your meal.’

“Ehh, put it on my tab kid. It’s no problem—“

“I can pay for my own food I have cash.”

[So harsh with Sans though…?]

[I didn’t mean it--]

[Of course you didn’t…]

[*Sigh…*]

“And besides I wanna give him a ginormous tip for reading… typing out… the menu… for me.”

“You got a point. Do what you want kid. I’ll help count up your money.”

“Sans? Why the hell doesn’t the Underground have paper money? Or larger amounts for gold?”

“We haven’t needed it, I already told you. People use magic on their bags so they can hold all their gold.”

“But seriously this is getting annoying… someone oughta tell Asgore…. And also if you have five gold or ten gold coins it’ll be easier to count your money.”

“I’d like that.” another one of Sans’ laughs.

Grillby taps me on the shoulder. ‘Where will you be going now? Do you have anywhere to stay? There should be a room at the Snowed Inn you can stay in.’

“Yeah. Good point Grillbs. I’ll have to have Paps clean the house in the meantime anyway. And the Snowed Inn isn’t too big so you should be able to figure it out on your own.”

“Sure. But, it’s literally called the Snowed Inn?”

Grillby types, ‘Yes. Why do you ask?’

“Dear Alvis it’s a pun?” I half ask, half groan.

“Alvis? He’s the High Entian royal seer from Xenoblade, isn’t he?”

[[Shit.]]

“Yeah. I just say that most of the time ‘cause ‘dear God’ triggers people…”

“Well why would you use his name in that way?”

“It just… sounds cool…”

[Why would you say it Sans hasn’t even finished watching the Let’s Play yet—“]
“I’ll help you over to the Snowed Inn,” Robin offers, “and Sans? You can help Grillby with the
braille menu. Then I’ll start researching the Nice Cream-wrapping machine. Engineering’s not my
thing, but I’m sure there must be some human analogue out there I can send over.”

“Yeah thanks a lot man.” I stand up, Robin laying a hand… paw… on my hand, prompting me to
hold onto his arm. “Bye Sans bye Grillby. See you later.”

“More like see you tomorrow kid,” Sans calls out as we walk out the door. “it’s late. Like, past
nine o’clock late.”

“Holy shit…”

Robin explains, “Most of the businesses besides the library are all on the same street. Grillby’s is
in the middle. The main shop is on one end and the Snowed Inn is on the other. When you walk out
the door, if you turn right you’ll find it. If the snow gets all rough under your feet you’ve walked
too far.”

“So the street is on my left?”

“Exactly. The path up to the door is cleared of snow and a bell rings when the door opens. So you
might find it if you follow the sound of someone walking in or out.”

After following his directions, Robin holds the door open as we walk in the entrance. “The desk is
to your right.”

Chara guides me to the desk and I ask, “Hello. I want a room please.”

“Okay,” the innkeeper says. “That will be eighty gold.”

I reach in the front pocket of my bag and begin counting out my gold. I’ve only counted out ten
before Robin and the innkeeper begin helping me. “I’m sorry, but you only have seventy gold,” she
tells me.

“Fuuuck!”

[Calm down man she’s cool with it--]

[But I can’t pay her! I shoulda bought less at Grillby’s…]

“Don’t worry,” she coos. “I can let you stay here for free, if you want, until you find another place
to stay. Here’s your room key.”

She touches my hand as she slides a plastic card across the desk. “Your room is the last door on the
right, at the end of the hall you first get to on the second floor after climbing the stairs. The stairs
are in the back of this room, on the right.”

“Thank you soooo much—“

“It is no problem,” she cuts me off as politely as she can. “Just by staying in my inn you’re
attracting business. People will want to see the human after all.”

{Oh yeah…}

“Oh yeah…”
“Actually my sister who runs the shop told me about you. She said you might be coming. And,” she laughs a little, “Papyrus stopped by to notify me of him putting a braille sign in front, so you can find this building.”

“Nice.”

“I’m grateful he’s doing that actually. This town is, confusing sometimes, with the sidewalk getting covered in snow.”

She steps out from behind the desk. “I’ll help you to your room. If you need anything, just dial 000 on the room phone.”

I flop down on my bed as Robin finishes describing the layout of my room. “We can push the bed up against the wall if you want so you don’t fall over. Or we can find a room that has a bed like that.”

“This is fine—“

“It won’t be too much trouble. We only have to move it a few feet. And we’ll be using magic.”

Before I can refuse the offer again, I blurt “Okay.” The bed slides along the carpeted floor, while I’m still sitting on it. It bumps against the wall before coming to a stop. “There. The bed is also closer to the bathroom now.”

“Thank you guys.”

“Your welcome,” the innkeeper replies. “The desk is across from the foot of your bed. I’ll move it so it’s right next to the head of your bed.”

“Sure.”

Robin begins walking toward the door. “Is there anything else you need? I don’t start work until ten o’clock tomorrow morning, so if you need help with anything tonight I have plenty of time.”

“Nah. Just, where’s the power outlet?”

“One of them is in the wall at the head of your bed, near the floor. It’s between the bed and the table. Your bed is also across from the TV. The remote is on that table too. It’s pretty easy to use. There are, like, several channels, but they’re all static except one.”

“You guys don’t use the TV?”

“We do,” the innkeeper laughs. “Just for Mettaton’s show though. You can’t miss it flipping through channels. It’s channel one.”

“Thanks for everything. I’m gonna prepare for bed.”

“Okay. Neither of us live too far from here, so if you need anything just call.”

“Okay.”

“Good night,” the two monsters call as they close the hotel room door.

[Let me guess: you’re just gonna floss and mouthwash but not brush your teeth and then binge-watch videos with me in bed?]
“Yeah…”

Chara appears, sitting on the bed beside me. “But first? I have a suggestion.”

“What?”

“Tomorrow we’ll go to the library. Even if the books aren’t in braille there’s probably someone who can read you the important parts. Or I can do it. If you’re gonna, fight, Papyrus, you have to know how magic works.”

“Truuue…”

“Meaning you’ll have to learn how magic works and relearn some laws of physics ‘cause I know how much you struggled in Physics Honors last year.”

“Yeah… but Chara? I never needed Robin and her to move my bed and that table. I coulda managed with this stuff where it was.”

“I knew that. I… I just thought it’d make your stay here easier. Like, I don’t know how long we’ll be staying here, so—“

“So you made those two help me by making me ask?”

“I knew it wouldn’t be too much trouble for them to do this. So I made you say it ‘cause you wouldn’t have said it otherwise. It seemed like you didn’t trust Robin. Just ‘cause the first thing he did when he saw you was solicit you for his Nice Cream—either that or ‘cause all you wanted was to be alone and didn’t want them here.”

“I—it’s not—why the hell would you—“

Chara continues like I never spoke. “I may not have trusted everyone completely down here but even I knew Robin was a good person—monster. Everyone’s just trying to help out. Whether they do it in the way you want is the thing… but they still try the best they can.”

“But Asgore trained fucking attack dogs to hunt down humans! And they didn’t even stop until Papyrus went after them. How do I know that there aren’t more of them?”

“There are more Royal Guard members. And it’s good you’re freaking out about meeting them. Her. Even I did, a little. Which is why you need to lab?Research? Magic. Tomorrow. So you’ll stand a chance against Undyne.”

“Oh no…”

“Yeah… Undyne’s… confrontational,” Chara slowly says the word.

{Holy shit Chara wouldn’t have heard that word before meeting me wouldn’t they how old are they?}

“Look: I promise when you defeat Papyrus you’ll be home free for a while. ‘Cause if you impress Papyrus you’ll impress Undyne.”

“I guess…“

Chara hands me my phone and my phone charger from my bag. “Dude come on! You, like, worry too much. Even if some of it’s justified not all of it is. Like, we haven’t gotten to learning about the Civil War on Crash Course yet! And, that’s, like, exciting!”
“Exciting? It’s actually horrible. There were worse things that happened after but, like, in America this is one of the most horrible. And you think it’s… exciting.”

“Well it is! They, like, have better technology now so it doesn’t take a thousand years for someone to get shot.”

“And healthcare was shit. A soldier might as well have been shot rather than sent to a doctor if he got hurt…”

“But they finally figured out how to fire multiple rounds before reloading. How the hell—“

“Chara! Seriously not cool!”

“But—“

“I went through a military history phase but I never did this.”

“Well it doesn’t matter anyway ‘cause the Civil War ended 150 or more years ago so why do you care?”

{Oh yeah… they don’t even know about slavery… not really. They don’t even know about black people being treated like… animals… well at least with real animals slave owners cared if they died…}

“Well what if I told you slaves’ treatment is similar to monsters’ treatment by humans? They segregated them here in the Underground and put up the barrier ‘cause they thought they were a threat. And hell humans attacked first!”

Chara retorts, “Well I’m still annoyed it took them so damn long to make better guns… And besides: I’ll learn about that soon enough will I? By watching this?”

“Yeah. You’re right. Even so don’t be surprised if we stop a lot… ‘cause… more complicated stuff you wouldn’t have known without living in the U.S. for a long time…”

Chapter End Notes

As of 10/16/17, I finally found suitable Snowdin music! The uRL is:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_fA6Pptogw

Horray for GameChops! Too bad Paps barges in sooooo soon... *sigh...*
This is probably one of the most important chapters, since there is some, exposition, regarding how determination works in this timeline, which is a theory I created, and am still revising, based on both real, cutting edge science, and the in-game lore. This chapter, and ones like it, are the ones most likely to be revised drastically since if my facts are incorrect, I have to change the chapters to reflect the correct or most current science.

The exposition from this chapter comes from the library books in Snowdin, and the Wikipedia page on the Autonomic Nervous System, which I first accessed on December 20, 2016 Pacific time.

Later on, I will start citing genuine scientific articles in these chapters, since the science I will be drawing on is, relatively current, AKA from the last five years, or even more recent than that. My citations will be placed here when applicable. If anyone wants me to put footnotes in the actual chapter text, or as close as can be managed, comment saying so.

Also, here's the link to the video with the voice for Dewey!

Between March and June 2017, I took a college class at school relating technology and communication. Let's just say when the quarter was almost over, I realized that my professor sounded like how I imagined Dewey to sound. It may seem weird that I'm using a real person's voice to inspire an Undertale character but... it worked out!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POe4Iz6fUI&t=171s#t=02m43s

If it weren't for Professor Raphael, I wouldn't know the language necessary to articulate the... sociotechnological and cultural developments I'll be elaborating on later on. It will be a while before I can put that course's material to good use, however. Suffice it to say, Visiontale motivated me to pay attention in that class.

Yeah: he's cool.

11

“Waaake uuuuuup! It’s, like, 1:00 P.M already!”

“Soo? I turn over so I face the wall, trying to block out Chara.

“But, like, we actually have stuff to do today!”

“Yeah so?”

The blanket unravels from around me and falls onto the floor. “Seriously man you actually have something important to do and you just wanna fuckin’ sleep?!”
“You know I consciously choose to do this can you please stop annoying me about it?”

“The sooner you get up the sooner you can get the research done so the sooner you can fuck around…”

“Since when did you start swearing?”

“When did you start swearing?”

“That’s not even—“

{Holy shit Chara just--} 

Several objects hit me in the face from my new position sitting up on the edge of the bed, and I soon figure out they’re clothes. “How much clothes did Toriel give me?”

“Enough so you only have to wash them every two weeks but can still wear something new every day. Outside and here.”

“Nice! Where should we put my old clothes?”

“You can still use them later. There’s lots of empty pockets on the back half of your bag. I’ll put them in the one to the right of the clean clothes pouch.”

“Thanks. But shouldn’t I eat first before changing?”

“Like, Grillby’s, Robin’s Nice Cream, and the Snowdin shop are the only food places. And you could have the food delivered here if you really wanted—“

“But that costs money—“

“That you don’t have to pay out ‘cause the innkeeper is basically letting you live here till you get things figured out. It’s like bringing snacks to your room from the kitchen if you were at home—“

“No it’s not I’m asking her to bring it here. I’d get the food myself if I was at home.”

“Suit yourself. We’ll be sitting around in the librarby all day later anyway so—“

“Did you just say ‘librarby’?”

“Yeah why?”

“You know it’s supposed to be ‘library’—“

“I know. Everyone knows. The sign is misspelled. Sheesh. Just change so we can go to Grillby’s…”

*A few minutes later…*

“You really like bacon?”

“Yeah…”

“Don’t worry. Many monsters do. Because it tastes good. Because they don’t have to worry about its, negative health effects. And because the human Internet loves it…”

“Truuue…”
‘And besides: this costs forty gold. You still have some left. Robin said you can start working in two days. I can track what you eat and charge you then.’

“I have a way to earn gold. I can pay you. Just… later today or tomorrow, not now…”

{Whoaaa!}

[What you thought Grillby couldn’t laugh?]

{No I just--}

[Thought since he can’t? Doesn’t? speak, he wouldn’t laugh?]

{Yeah…}

‘Of course. And what would you like to drink?’

“What do you have?”

‘Most human drinks.’

Before I can refuse, I answer “Cherry coke.”

[Gneh heh heh!]

{Seriously…?}

[Come on even you can appreciate this. You rarely have soda in your house…]

‘And would you like me to pack some for you for when you are in your room or outside? Thermoses are easy to come by. They’re free actually.’

“Sure. But how will it stay cold? Besides it being cold here?”

‘Insulation. And magic.’

“Okay…”

‘Where will you be going after this?’

“The library. ‘Cause I need to learn about how magic works.”

Grillby laughs again. ‘I heard Papyrus yesterday. It’s good you’re being cautious since his fights are, wild. People come by this place for refreshments though, so I can’t complain. Should I split your order so you can have some while you’re there?”

“Sure.”

‘If I don’t bring the food in five minutes or less it’s free.’

“Okay.”

“Oh my Goood this is sooo good!”

[Yeah Grillby’s awesome… him and Toriel should team up.]

“Truuue… bacon on butterscotch cinnamon pie—“
After eating and packing my dinner, I ask Grillby, “Where’s the library?”

‘Walk toward the shop, but turn left at the first path you find. It’s the only branching path that way. The library is on the left.’

“Thanks.”

‘If you get lost, walk until you find a building. I’m sure any monster there can help you find it.’

“I owe you guys soooo much…”

‘Not at all. It is unfortunate Asgore must take your soul. Because us townspeople could modify this place for you if we had the time.’

“Oh yeah…”

Grillby pats my shoulder. ‘I’ll watch you from the front door to make sure you’re headed the right way. Good luck.’

“Thanks.” I stand from my seat and walk the couple feet to the door. I open it and orient myself so the street is on my right, unfolding my cane as I do so. “See you later Grillby,” I call behind me.

Start the video at 2:43, and end after about thirty seconds, or until you get the idea of what he sounds like.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-POe4Iz6fUI&t=171s#t=02m43s

After a few minutes of walking, I find the library, but before I can open the door, a monster does so for me. “Come in,” they say. “You must be the human Papyrus was talking… ranting… about… last night!”

“Yeah…”

“I’m the librarian, the name’s Dewey.”

“Like Dewey Decimal system Dewey?”

“Of course! He was the reason I could organize the books in here at all! Before I found out about him they were all stacked on one table. Now we have them all laid out nicelike.”

I enter the library, my cane bumping against… something… “That’s a shelf. Our newest books are there. What are you looking for?”

“I need to know how magic works.”
“Well you can’t know that without knowing monster anthropology and history.”

Dewey laughs. “Well it’s not anthropology down here isn’t it? Because that’s the study of humans. No one’s found a suitable substitute so it can refer to monsters.”

“Oh yeah… I keep forgetting…”

“It’s okay. You’re from another culture. You’re just seeing this how you were taught to see it. And who knows? You’re an outsider, so you could probably find some things we take for granted.”

Dewey takes my shoulder. “I got a few reports written by our oldest class of monster children. I can read them to you after we find a seat.”

“Wait the kids write the library books?”

“Monsters don’t have publishing companies. Just… mechanical publishing equipment. We don’t have much formal scholarship either,” Dewey explains as he pushes out a chair for me. “I have a monster history book, cultural anthropology book, and psychophysiology book—“

“Wait whaaaat?!”

“Psychophysiology. It’s the relationship between psychological states and their impact on a monster’s, or even human’s, physiological state. You feel certain things when you experience certain emotions don’t you? When you’re angry your heart rate increases. And when you’re excited you feel the same way, but it’s your experiences which differentiate the two. It’s like that.”

“Yeah… truuuue…”

“Well I’m gonna read you part of the book which explains this. I know these books by heart, so I’m just reading the most important parts aloud. This section is a comparison of monster and human biology, and how they each shape daily life differently.

“While monsters are mostly made of magic, human beings are mostly made of water. Humans, with their physical forms, are far stronger than us. Sure, they process food to make energy much less efficiently than we do, but that doesn’t matter. What does matter is that no matter how they feel, if they have the physical strength to do something, they can. And if they want to do it, if they have to do it, they will find a way to. The next chapter goes into greater detail about the impact monsters’ emotions have on their magical strength, and, in the process, their way of interacting with the physical world.

“Despite these advantages, they will never know the joy of expressing themselves through magic. Their cells, and their muscles, and their bones, restrict them. They can’t light fire with just a gesture. They need a lighter and matches, at least. They can’t heal wounds instantaneously. If it takes months to fix a broken leg then why use them at all? Wait; they can’t fly without assistance either so they can’t even get away with not using their legs.

“Humans are really missing out. I say it doesn’t matter they can run marathons. They’ll never get a bullet-pattern birthday card… or create snow sculptures of their loved ones in seconds… Can I just say that monsters’ lives are better than humans or do I have to cite my sources again?”

“Well,” Dewey finishes reading the chapter… section… I’m not even sure… “what do you think?”

“This is how the library books are like? I thought adult monsters would write these up.”

“Well, the adult monsters look at them. They let the kids say almost anything they want. And
besides: these books are for the younger ones. The older students read to them. So writing like this gets to them better.”

“I… oh yeah… you don’t really have college professors riting about this stuff don’t you…?”

“And to be honest,” Dewey flips through the book, “I prefer it that way. Why have some old monsters write these books when by the time they’ve finished learning everything more stuff has been discovered? They’d spend years and years of their lives in school, just to write as a footnote in a book, ‘Since this book’s publication it has been discovered that humans can, in fact, heal themselves at a comparable rate to magic; read my next book to find out how, even though it’ll take ten years for it to come out…”

“I mean like, it’s not thaaat bad… I think… but still… yeah… truuue…”

[College life stuff I won’t understand?]

[Even I don’t fully get it. I was only in school for a week? Two? I don’t know how it works either.]

“I opened the book to the section on emotions’ effects on the monster soul, the chapter is called ‘Monsters’ Comprehensive Physiological Response to Emotional Stimuli.’ Should I start reading it?”

“Wait this was written by kids?”

“Of course!” Dewey laughs. “Kids with a dictionary next to them, but still kids. We fact-checked these books with Alphys and Sans, so what you’re hearing is pretty accurate, if not a little… not as professional as it first sounds. Ready?”

“yeah.”

“This part is a little technical. It discusses human physiology. And I don’t know if you ever studied it.”

“I did. Up until a few months ago actually.”

“In high school?”

“yeah.”

“Okay. But if you need me to explain anything, I can. I have a printed copy of a recent human college physiology book here so, don’t hesitate to ask.

Because they are made of magic, monsters’ bodies are attuned to their SOUL. Akin to the amigdala’s role in human emotional stimulus and processing, monster souls are the origin of their emotions. Magic ebbs and flows according to the user’s state of mind. Strong, positive emotions, like love or passion, generate the most powerful and controlled outbursts of magic.

“However, in monster-human confrontations, monsters’ fear or panic may interfere with their ability to focus their magic. If they manage to reign in their emotions, they have a chance of surviving or running away.

“But most monsters lack this kind of self-control. Negative emotions create similar effects as they do in humans. When humans feel stress or fear, their endocrine systems release hormones which reallocate their bodies’ use of energy, and flow of blood through them. They enter a state called
‘fight or flight’, although ‘flight’ is inaccurate, seeing as they can’t actually fly…

“In any event, monsters enter a similar state of fight or flight when threatened. But unlike humans they lack subconscious systems to help calm them down. If put in human terms, monsters have a sympathetic nervous system… well… sympathetic magical system. But they don’t have a parasympathetic magical system to decrease magical output, when a threat has passed or on command. A monster must consciously suppress their emotions to begin redirecting their magic so it can be used effectively.

“If a monster doesn’t want to fight, its defenses will weaken. Its magic will become diffuse. The magic composing their being, surrounding their soul, will become less substantial, more susceptible to wearing away. If enough of it has worn away, the monster’s soul is exposed, and only immediate escape from the confrontation can aide in their magic regenerating.

“What is worse is the overwhelmingly magical nature of monsters makes them inherently empathetic. Their beings do not end where their physical forms end. Their consciousness, originating from their soul, and their sensory capabilities, also exist in a cloud or bubble around them. Their consciousness does not completely fade until several feet away from their bodies, but their sensory capabilities, initiated by magic, can extend much farther. Anything in their line of sight, or field of knowing, can be influenced by their magic. Even if a monster can’t see something, if they know it’s there, they can affect it.

“This empathy inevitably makes it immensely difficult for monsters to exist near humans. They are guaranteed to come in contact with humans’ emotions, and become weaker because of it, with the only way to remedy any negative impacts on their magic is to minimize, if not completely cut off, any contact.

“So the crueler the intentions of our enemies, the more their attacks will hurt us, because the crueler their intentions, the more negative emotions we feel. And the more negative emotions we feel, the weaker we become. And the weaker our magic becomes, the less able we are to fight back and protect our souls. Any human is capable of exhibiting such cruelty. Their survival instincts are naturally selected for. Us monsters never had that kind of… weeding out.

“Therefore, if a being with a powerful SOUL struck with the desire to kill…

“Um, let’s end the chapter here…”

I hear a clunking sound as Dewey puts down the book and lets out a breath. “Well, now you know why we monsters were unable to fight the humans. Their emotions alone lowered our morale so much we couldn’t fight if we tried. It wouldn’t matter if they couldn’t heal their wounds in a second. As long as they were conscious they could feel a desire to defeat us. And that would be enough.”

[…]

{What’s wrong Chara?}

[Nothing.]

{It doesn’t sound like nothing…}

[Just… there’s more to this story. Ask him about what monster souls are made of.]

{Whyyyyy?}
[Because it matters. A lot. Because it has to do with determination. And why humans have it.]

{Okay… but why can’t I just ask about--}

[No.]

Chara sounds… stern. [Don’t ask about determination. Just don’t.]

{… Why? Is it taboo?}

[No. It’s… worse…]

“Dewey? You keep talking about monster souls. But what are they made of? Is that even a fair
question?”

“Of course I should cover that. But it’s only speculation. The scientific evidence supporting it is…
tentative… at most. It’s in a different book. Should I read the most important bits?”

“Including the part about wanting to end a chapter if what’s in it is too dark?”

“Yeah,” Dewey chuckles. “That was literally in the book. Let me just find the right chapter… this
is a relatively new book so I don’t know it by heart yet…

“Love, hope, compassion… this is what people say monster SOULs are made of. After all if they
weren’t their magic would manifest like things out of horror films all the time and no one could
stop them, even if they tried…

{Nice…}

[Yeah. Some of the kids here reeeeally like human horror films… I still don’t know why…]

“But the truth is is that the absolute nature of monster souls is unknown. They cannot be studied as
they disapate soon after death in all except the rarest of cases. All we can go on are testimonials of
monsters in poor health or close to death.

“In light of our lack of evidence, we cannot even begin speculating on the absolute nature of the
human soul. Although it has been theorized that humans’ souls don’t need these things to exist, we
cannot investigate the details as the only six human souls we have are currently being held by
King Asgore, and he forbids them being available to the public for study.

“One rumor circulating around the Underground over the past several years, however, may offer a
glimpse into how the human soul operates. Unlike monsters, humans’ actions are mediated by the
brain. Monsters don’t have one, only a soul. It is often stated by human scientists how the brain
regulates humans’ bodily functions and directs their actions. Maybe… humans’ brains are the
reason they are stronger than us. After all, the brain sure seems similar to a monster’s soul. They
do the same things, after all.”

“You guys doing okay? Dewey loooooves talking to people about soulology. He thinks that every
monster who walks in here could have the answers he’s, well, we’re, all looking for. You could
say he’s looking for, chicken soup for the soul…”

“Holy shiiit!”

Sans lays an arm… his humorous, ulna, and radius? Across my shoulders. “Come on don’t act like
you’re not confused… You may not feel like it, or think you look like it, but you look, like, really
zoned out right now. Come on DD, give her a break. You’ve read, what? One?"

“Three,” the librarian corrects.

“Three,” Sans corrects himself, “about how magic works. I think Pauline should talk this over with us. Over lunch—“

“I already ate lunch. I ate at Grillby’s just before I came here.”

“Over dinner.”

“It’s half past three,” Dewey points out. “My watch says so.”

“Well think of it like a snack. After all, you need some brain food.”

“Ugh…”

“Heya I didn’t mean it to be a pun this time… I’m not thaat similar to Emile yet…”

“Truuuuue… Papyrus is getting there though…”

My bag appears on my lap. “Get out some food. We can talk about all this, and your fight with Paps, at the same time. That, and well... have you ever been around anyone using magic before?”

“Yeah when Toriel would use fire magic to light a fire in her house. And forge the slate and stylus.”

“Good. But that’s not the only kind of magic around here. Or rather, that’s not the only manifestation of magic around here. It’s good you stopped reading where you did DD,” Sans turns away a little, presumably speaking to Dewey, “’cause it’s about time I help by leading her through some, hands-on, learning.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

First off, the first version of this chapter was posted on Christmas Day, so, consider this a Christmas gift.

Second, I never realized how hyped I was to write this chapter until I looked up all the information I needed to know on the Undertale Wiki and read the glorious encounter and flavor text. FYI, I retrieved the relevant dialogue from there on December 24, 2016.

Lastly...

Gneh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

12

“So, like, what you know affects your attacks?” I ask Sans as he eats the other half of my bacon sandwich. Dewey’s left for the moment. “To tell everyone you appreciate the books!” he sounds like he’s beaming. “That and I want some of that bacon. So I’m off to Grillby’s.”

“Yeh. A monster’s, ‘field of knowing,’ is the area their consciousness covers. The stronger the monster, the larger the area. And the more passionate the monster, same thing.”

I reiterate slowly, “So Papyrus will be really strong then since he reeeeeeally waaaants to capture me…”

“Yeh. The only thing you can do is survive until he sees you really don’t wanna fight. Or get hurt.”

[Man I wish you knew how happy Sans is right now.]

{Why?}

Sans laughs. “Oh man,” he’s, excited. “If only you knew what he’s been doing since you last talked. He’s cleaned the house! And made extra spaghetti. And modified the decorations. And moved all my stuff so you don’t trip over it. Even the stuff on shelves!”

“Modified?”

“You’ll have to see for yourself.” He sounds, sly, all of a sudden. “But yuh get it right? What he’s gonna be like?”

“Think so.”

“Just one more thing: a monster’s consciousness is in a slightly rounded field around them and above them. But if they wanted they could change that. No point on focusing on what’s behind you
when what you’re doing is in front."

“Like how humans don’t actually multitask they just switch between things really fast.”

“Kinda. More like it confirms that multitasking doesn’t exist.”

“So whatever Papyrus looks at, he’ll be focusing on.”

“Exactly. Most of the time a monster’s field of knowing isn’t much larger than their field of vision. So you should be fine.”

Sans pats my shoulder. “You’ll do great. You came here to look for information. That’ll pay off in spades.”

He stands from the table. “Later tonight I’ll be seeing Alphys. She wants me to consult her about the BrailleNote.”

“Where does she live?”

“Hotland. It’s… a little far from here but… distance doesn’t mean much around here. Dewey didn’t tell you about the rest of the Underground?”

“No… I just told him to read the psychophysiology book…”

“Ehh. You have time. I’ll tell him to find something short to read you tomorrow.”

“So you dropped the BrailleNote off already?”

“Yes. Woke up before noon to do it too.”

“Dude I, like, woke up at 1:00, so… you woke up before me.”

[Someone lazier than Sans? It’s a miracle!]

{Shut! Up!}

“Anyway: Alphys took a look at the BrailleNote and is reeeeally interested in how it works. So she’s researching the components right now. She thinks she can make a battery compatible with our current technology so she can just use what we already have.”

“But you guys have electricity don’t you? Alphys made me that iPhone charger.”

“We consume magical energy, generated using geothermal power. The Core, deep below Hotland, is how we get our power. So when you plug your phone into the wall you’re technically charging it using magic. Magic has, amorphous properties, so for small stuff magic and be substituted for electricity, if sent through the correct medium.

“Sweet!”

“Anyway, I’m goin’ to Grillby’s. Wanna come with? It’s like, dinner time.”

“Wait hold up you go from sounding like a science textbook to… that?”

“Well I didn’t wanna give you a shortened answer. ‘Cause you have a right to know. We all know it.” Rather than sounding casual, Sans now seems… blunt. Genuinely open and honest.
“And,” he slows down a bit, “since you’re gonna be down here a while you oughta know what we know.”

“Truuuuue… But it’s only 4:30—“

“More like five.”

He laughs. “Who’s suffering from mood whiplash now?”

“Wait…”

“Let’s just say learning about the resets led me to some… interesting human web sites. TV Tropes was my main source of info about humans for a good long while. So yeh. I’m genre savvy.”

“Yeeees!”

[Just one yeeees?]

“And even if you’re not hungry yet you’ll wanna meet the editors of Undermail.”

“Undermail?”

“The Underground’s newspaper. I bet they’ll post past issues online so you can read them if Dewey yelled at them about it enough.”

I laugh. “Yeah… he’s hella smart!”

Sans brushes my arm with his, signaling for me to hold onto his elbow. “I can walk there myself Grillby gave good directions.”

“You sure? There’s more snow out. You might get lost and turn into a, cold case, if you don’t use sighted guide.”

{{Whauw whauw whaaaaauw…}}

“I can hear you walking I’ll be fine,” I reassure him as we walk out the door and down the sidewalk. “And really man?! You make a murder joke before I fight Papyrus!? Too soon!”

“But it hasn’t happened yet.” Sans’ voice comes from a foot or so to the right of me.

“Like it’s still, too soon.” I trail off, unable to phrase it differently. I turn right, following the smell of…

“Baaaaacoooooon!”

[Wow I never thought I’d hear Sans laugh so hard… and I’ve heard him laugh hard a looooot.]

{What!? I’m hungry!}

{Yeah I can tell. Sans, like, mooched off you… even though he could’ve gotten his own bacon from Grillby. RIP.}

“Thanks Reed. You too Wrighte.”

“Whoooo…?”

“The Undermail journalist and editor,” Sans explains as he guides me first through the door, then
my hand to his elbow and extends his arm out behind him so I am walking behind him. “It’s narrow. Thought it’d be better if I went in front.”

“That’s actually what you’re supposed to do,” I observe as I sit down at the chair Sans pulls out for me. “The person giving sighted guide, puts… extends… their arm behind them so the person using it can walk behind them to avoid obstacles. And if anything happens,”

[Just say it…]

“Yeah… the sighted guide will get hit by a car first.”

“Whauw whauw whaaaauw.”

[Saaaans diiiid the thiiing!]

{Yep!}

“Hey Reed. Wrighte. Get over here,” Sans calls out, pulling out two more chairs. “Pauline they’re sitting across from you.”

“Hi.”

“Hey!” one of them greets me, “I’m Wrighte! The best word search creator in the Underground!”

I groan, “Oh God… Sans did you have them help you with the damn word search outside yesterday?”

“Yeh…”

“Too lazy to make it yourself?” Reed? asks.

“Yeh…”

“Ehh.”

“Dewey told us about you while you were talking to Sans,” Reed explains. “He wants us to read the best issues of Undermail to you before we figure out how to, digitize,” they say this slowly… like what Toriel did when I told her about the voiceover on my phone, “them for you. We’ll need Alphys to print something but it should be easy. We just need something to turn the print paper into brailled paper.”

“Like, you can either have Alphys make or use a scanner you already have to turn the newspaper into a file I can read digitally. But I’ll need something to read that file on. A scanner could be compatible with my phone.”

“Or the BrailleNote. Well the file from the scanner anyway,” Sans adds.

“Yeah. Or you can just type them up and give that file to me. Or Alphys could make an embosser, which is like a printer, but it brailles files. I’d have you email the files to me, but…”

“But what?” Reed and Wrighte ask in unison.

“I don’t know if my email works here…”

“We can always post them as text on the Undernet. We know you have a smartphone, so that should work for now,” Wrighte cheerfully reassures me, “at least until we ask Alphys to make the
The door crashes open… and shut… “It is I! The Grrrrreeeeeat Papyrrrrrus!”

{must… not… laugh…}

{{[Shit…]}}

“What’s so funny?” Reed whispers. They sound closer, so they’ve likely leaned toward me across the table.

“He sounds like…”

[They know about Spanish you know. Some monsters are bilingual…]

{I didn’t assume--}

[Oh yeah? You just did…]

{*Sigh…* Fine.}

“He sounds like he has a… Spanish? Mexican? Accent… a little.” I whisper back.

[What you don’t wanna compare him to the most interesting man in the world?]

{How the fuck--}

[Your memories…?]

The Undermail staff and Sans start giggling as well… at least until Papyrus stomps over to our table, slams a chair down on the side of the table closest to me, and begins, “Human! I cannot believe you would rather spend your time here with my brother instead of me! All he’s done over the past several days is watch YouTube videos!”

“Hey! If I had my laptop here I’d do that every day too!” I retort.

[That’s not helping…]

{Well it’s true!}

Papyrus roars, “You have somehow made my brother even lazier! You and Fiora! You, Fiora and ___”

“Hey,” Sans brushes my arm as he leans across the table and in front of me. “No spoilers in public remember? We went over this. We don’t wanna make everyone send hate mail to Undermail if anyone else decides to watch Emile’s LP. Like what happened to Markiplier’s Let’s Play for—“

“Fine then.” Papyrus agrees, loudly and grudgingly.

{What happened? What did he spoil?}

[…]

{Chara? What did he spoil?}

[… It’s a… long story…]
That you’ll end up telling me when we have the time?

They hesitate for a moment, uncertainty and… anxiousness… washing off of them. […] Nah…

“Anyway,” Papyrus continues, unusually quiet. “I, the Grrrreeeat Papyrrrrrus, could not help but observe that you were cooped up inside all day today.”

Yeah… why’d you ask?”

[What? You don’t wanna tell him you were labbing magic?]

{… Yeah... I think…}

[Papyrus already knows this stuff. It’s not like you were digging around for secret stuff.]

{… We’ll see.}

Papyrus takes a breath—

{Wait how did he breathe he doesn’t have to—}

“I asked, because… well…”

{He never stutters like that.}

[Yeah true.]

“Allow me to tell you about some complex feelings.”

“Suuuuure…?”

{Why is Papyrus all… seriouslike?}

He begins slowly, “I’ve begun feeling… feelings like, the joy of finding another pasta-lover. The admiration for another’s puzzle-solving skills and gaming expertise—“

“Like, I know only stuff about RPGs and that’s it,” I hurry to amend. “Like I know about other genres… mostly horror games… but I can’t play them.”

“I have also begun feeling feelings like The desire for a cool, smart person to think you are cool.”

“Duuuude… that happened to me aaall the tiiiime in school…” I affirm.

“These feelings…” Papyrus continues.

“Yeah?” I prompt him.

“Must be what you are feeling right now!”

{What the fuck!?!}

“What the f—“

“I can hardly imagine what it must be like to feel that way!” Papyrus returns to his… shouting…? Self, and barrels over my attempt to speak. “After all, I am very great! I don’t ever wonder what having lots of friends is like!”
“Well you’re talking about it so you probably do wonder about it…” I try pointing out.

{Insecure much?}

[Oh not at aaall!!]

“Nonsense! I pity you… lonely human…” Papyrus interrupts me. “But worry no longer! I, the Grrrrreeeat Papyrrrrrus, will be your…”

He uncharacteristically trails off.

{Friend? Is it--?}

“No.” Papyrus suddenly says decisively.

“No what?”

“No!” he shouts again. “This is all wrong! I can’t be your friend!”

“What?”

“You are a human!” he… seems… to justify. “I must—“

“Oh heeeell noooo you aren’t capturing me!” I argue back, but to no avail.

“Now, I can fulfill my lifelong dream!”

{Oh God why is Papyrus… happy?}

[‘Cause capturing a human is like, his lifelong dream…]

{Okay…? That’s not obvious--}

[And scary.]

{And scary!}

{{At all!}}

“POWERFUL! POPULAR! PRESTIGIOUS! I, THE GRRRRRREEEEEAT PAPYRRRRRUS, WILL SOON BECOME AAAAAALL OF THEEEEESE THIIIIINGS!”

He stops abruptly. “That,” he says more quietly and firmly, “and the newest member of the Royal Guard.”

I reply, “Fuck you! You’re fucking crazy! How the hell am I supposed to fight back? I’m not even armed! You’re attacking a fucking blind person you fucking asshole! For your own benefit! If this is what you wanna do, and if you’re who Asgore wants in the Royal Guard, then fuck him too!”

[Wow…]

{He hasn’t censored himself in front of me so why should I?}


{Well it’s true! If he’s training fucking attack dogs to attack me and wants… crazy people--}
[And narcissists--]

{Them too!}

“Everyone knows now you’re a huuuuuge dick!”

[But Papyrus--]

{Shut up!}

“OH?!” Papyrus challenges.

I feel someone’s hand on my wrist… and my feet leave the floor… and my knees bang the side of
the table…

Someone grabbed me… and is holding me in the air…

Wait.

“Heeeeeeey!”

“If you wish to prove your worth to me, fight me then!” he shouts in my face.

“Now!?” Sans gasps. “Paps! She hasn’t eaten! We were gonna—“

“Silence Sans! You will never know the pleasure of capturing a human! You are too lazy to
eeeever achieved what I will achieve!”

“But she’s right: she’s unarmed. So how can she even defend herself?” Sans tries to confront
Papyrus… or at least it sounds like it because his voice is coming from right below me.

Papyrus begins walking… and I hear the sounds of scraping chairs… lots of them…

{Seriously they’re gonna watch me get bodied!?}

[Bodied?]}

{Beat up!? Badly!}

[Yeah, they are… to be honest I would too…]

{CHAAAAAAARAAAAA!}

[What it’s true!]

“The door to Grillby’s bangs open and then shut, Papyrus still holding onto me. “We will settle this
outside!”

“What the fuck—“ I begin to ask.

“It’s not far from Grillby’s.” Sans’ voice sounds… pretty quiet from where I am. “There’s a space
cleared off for the monsters to use for stuff in the middle of town.”

{At least Sans will be watching.}

[Yeah. You have noooo idea of how relieved I am about that. He can stop Paps if he gets out of
hand.]
{But Papyrus just ignored him! Sans got walked over--!}

[When push comes to shove… well when push comes to getting fucking recked, Sans’ll cover you. Trust me. He can handle himself.]

As Sans finishes speaking, Papyrus drops me, where I fall to my knees. I carefully stand back up again, thankful Toriel modified my shoes to be multi-weather. I hear Papyrus walking away. After another second of walking, is footfalls stop, and I am launched in the air, but higher than normal.

Another fight.

{Where the fuck--}

[Like, twenty? Okay more like thirty? Feet off the ground. Papyrus is… about fifteen feet away from you. Well fifteen feet away from your spot on the ground if you had stayed—]

Chara stops, the sound of… bullets? Something? Filling the air below me. “What the—“

[Bones.]

{Boooones??}

[Yeah… well bullets shaped like bones. They’re about ten feet below your feet. They’re flying around below you. You might wanna move higher. Give yourself some space.]

{How?}

[Like… jumping, but not really by moving your legs like you’re gonna jump? Shrugging your shoulders upward? Lifting your arms up? Moving your body like… you’re trying to move up.]

{That’s helpful--}

[Look I never had to think about it I just did it!]

I imagine myself lifting into the air, and the cold wind rushes by my skin. “Holy shit that was fast!”

[Yeah. You’re, like, sixty feet in the air now… but the bones are still ten feet below your feet. Papyrus is directing them with his hands.]

I motion my body as if to back away, but the clacking of bones follow me, still below my feet. “Crap.”

“YOOOOOUUU THINK YOU CAN EVADE ME!?!??” PAPYRUS YELLS.

[He’s walked so he’s… less then ten feet from where you would have been if you stayed on the ground.]

{But how can I still hear him?}

[Magic does that remember?]

{Noooo…?}

[His voice covers his field of knowing. Monsters don’t really speak their consciousness just projects manifestations of their soul. And he’s strong magically. So yeah… he shouts all the time}
for a reason…]

“Well the bones haven’t moved—“ I begin to shout back.

[Nooooo!]

{What do you mean no!?}

[Don’t say it!]

{Say what!?! It’s true the bones haven’t really moved at all!}

“—any closer!”

Chara groans. [Oh nooooo you went and did it now… please Papyrus by Alvis don’t do it…!]

{Do what!?!}

“Oooooh yeeeh?! Let’s see if you can handle my fabled blue attack!”

The sound of bones crashing together… doesn’t move any closer, but it is louder now… and coming from above me too… from what sounds like a larger vertical distance… above my head.

There are now two sets of bones, one above me, the other below me.

Loop until the end of the chapter.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64cvrwzrmhU

[Oh thank Alvis they’re just blue bones—]

{Bluuuuue?}

[Blue-colored bullets are avoided by not moving.] Chara explains. [Normally you would have first seen… felt… them if you fought Doggo but… he didn’t notice us. That and we walked far away from him. I knew you didn’t like dogs so I directed you to take a different route.]

{So I just don’t move and I’ll be fine?}

[Yeah!] Chara… doesn’t sound like themselves. [Papyrus is just testing you!]

They sound like they’re… reassuring themselves…

That… never happens.

[He’s seeing if you panic and move or not. He’s fighting you, but not in the most--]

Chara stops dead.

[Dangerous way possible.] they feebly finish, after a couple seconds of silence except for the moving bones.

{Chaaaaaararrra…? What happened?}

Before Chara can answer, Papyrus yells louder, deafening even over the sounds of the two groups of bones.
“{That doesn’t sound evil…}” I can’t help but notice… and snark.

“Blue?” I repeat. “So I can’t move?” I try moving my arms and legs, but find that I can’t lift either of them. After trying to lift up my arms a little from my sides, my shoulders slump back down, forcefully and painfully.

I then try curling into a ball, tucking my head against the front of my bag and my knees close to my torso, but my legs force themselves back to an unbent, vertical position. My entire body feels…

Heavy.

{Chaaaaaaaarrrr?! Why do I feel--}

“{[AAAAAAHH FUUUUUUCH!]}

Chapter End Notes

RichaadEB’s glorious cover of Bonetrousle was only added to the chapter as of 10/14/2017... I don't know how it took me soooooo looooong to get around to adding it but... it's here now! The original URL is:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64cvrwzrmhU
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

To anyone who wanted a hard Papyrus fight not related to the genocide route, here you go! To anyone who wanted a serious and genuinely angry Papyrus for reasons not related to the genocide route, here you go! This fight is... frankly the least of my problems relative to the other boss fights I'll be... bodied in...

Also horray for the most serious arguing Chara and I have done yet.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

13

Loop until the next note.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64cvrwzrmhU

“\{AAAAAAH FUUUUUUCK!\}”

{Why are we--}

[Blue magic simulates manipulating gravity!]

{Only simulate?}

[What you think monsters can bend reality and make—screw it later!]

{But the hell? What—how--}

[Come on I know you know how real gravity works! It’s literally rocket science!]

{You… move faster in the opposite direction…?]

[You achieve escape velocity? Yeah. Juuuump!]

I jump, trying to distract myself from the fact that I’m jumping off of air… through air… instead of a flat, solid surface. My arms and legs pull upwards, as if I was jumping on the ground,and the group of bones below my feet become a little quieter—

[Fuck the other group of—there goes our health… it’s at fifteen. And no it’s not at three-fourths it’s half because sleeping in the inn made it go up to thirty.]

{I should sleep in—}

[Later! Eat something!]

I touch the front of my bag, chewing and swallowing the second monster candy as Papyrus pulls me downward toward the bones again. “I can almost taste my future popularity!” he shouts at me.
“Not by attacking a civilian you’re not!”

Duuuude…?

What it’s true!

Jump agaaaaain!

I oblige, Papyrus shouting after me, “Papyrus: head of the Royal Guard!”

Noooo!

Whaaa—fuuuuck! Oooour heeeeealth! Why is it thirteen! I thought—

Papyrus moved the second set of bones so we can’t jump up as far. And he moved the bones below us also. There’s about twenty-one, twenty, nineteen? Feet between them now. Not twenty-five or six.]

Oh noooo… you don’t mean he’s just gonna…

Maybe… I hope not.

”[Aaaaaaaah!]” Chara and I scream again as Papyrus sends us toward the ground. “Papyrus: unparalleled spagettore!” he proclaims.

That isn’t even a—“

Shut up! Do you really think that’ll help?!?]

What it’s--

Spagettore is really a—nooo! Not… not again! Not like this! Anything but this!

You’re scared? Haven’t you seen Papyrus fight before?!}

Yeah but--

Chara stops. Just… heal okay? You have all the Cinnamon Bunnies, two Monster Candy, and the pie. That should be…

Chara stops again as Papyrus jerks on my body using magic another time. “Undyne will be very proud of me! King Dreemurr will trim a hedge in the shape of my smile!”

“You’re fucking crazy! You’re making someone proud by hurting me! If you want to make someone proud who thinks that the only thing you can do about me is to hurt me, then fuck Undyne too!”

Oh nooo… you did it now…

What now!?!?

“And Asgore hired Undyne so he can go fuck himself too!”

Oh dear God if you could see Papyrus right now…]
“What!?"

“He has no right to be a king!”

Stop the Bonetrousle.

Loop until the next note.

https://materiacollective.bandcamp.com/track/cave-of-monsters

Suddenly, the sounds of the bones vanish as I drop like a stone. [We’re… seven? Eight? Feet aboveground now. Like, Papyrus could reach up and grab you himself if he really wanted. And before you ask yes he’s that tall. You’re just facing in the opposite direction from before. And papyrus is walking so he can face you.]

I hear crunching noises below me. Papyrus walking toward the spot directly below me… most likely. “Human,” he says in a… normal human volume range… “I can withstand my brother’s horrible puns. I can even tolerate his constant laziness, and his excuses to take naps at all times of the day—“

“Actually,” Sans calls out, “those naps at nighttime? That’s called sleeping—“

“Silence Sans!” Papyrus’ voice returns to its usual volume as he reprimands him and turns his head a little to one side, most likely toward Sans.

“What I propose,” he turns back to me, his voice lowering in pitch and losing any semblance of humor, “is this: you require assistance to help you get to the barrier. And I aim to become the head of the Royal Guard by capturing you.”

“So?”

“If you come willingly, then you will be under my protection. Undyne would not, no! Could not, Hurt you then!” he seems a little optimistic and more like his normal self again.

He turns his head a little to the side again. “I will even allow Sans to supervise, as he knows much more about visual repairmen than—“

“It’s visual impairment not visual repairmen!” I can’t help but correct. “If you don’t even know what my disability is how will I know you’ll even listen to what Sans—“

“I was about to explain that. I, the Great Papyrus, had the foresight to expect you would disagree. Because you are not nearly as intelligent as I. Because I have come up with an offer you can’t refuse!”

“Which is…??”

{This better be good…}

[Yeah…] If Chara could speak aloud, their voice would squeak and crack all at once in fright.

“If you apologize for defiling our king’s name and admit I have japed you, Sans and I will escort you to Undyne, where you can apologize to her yourself, with us there for protection! And where you can personally tell her I made this offer to you, so I will have control over your custody rather than her.”

“And who knows,” he begins to sound optimistic again, “if she entrusts me with the responsibility,
I may also have an influence over what Asgore does with you. I can ensure that he takes your soul in a humane way."

[I didn’t expect this. And frankly: Paps may be scaring the living crap out of me, but, I like this. He’s, serious and stuff now.]

{I wanna take it… I really do.}

{I mean, I might too… if I wasn’t armed. If I was… not so much.}

{Papyrus at least is letting Sans accompany me to make me feel better.}

{He acknowledges that Sans is your lifeline down here. Papyrus might not like Sans’ puns, but him taking care of you is making him less lazy. Mostly. Getting Sans to be less lazy is, like, his thing.]

{And he was doing that by telling Sans to help him capture humans… so me…}

{True…}

{He’s even… protecting me… from Undyne… and in the process, Asgore.}

{Paps has been training under Undyne for several years now. She’s known the Canine Unit for longer but she knows him best. She’d trust his judgment. I think.]

{He’s… stopped to talk to me…}

{Well he’s, not quite so hot-blooded as to challenge you--}

{But that’s what he’s doing right now!}

{Oh yeah… But He’s just doing what he’s been told to do: to fight and capture any humans who come down here. He’s just following orders.}

{And he’s come to his senses and realized how fucking horrible he—}

{Wait he’s basically making me say he beat me! He’s making me surrender!}

{Yeah.}

{And he’s making me apologize to him! And undyne! And Asgore!}

{Truuuue…}

{Fuck no! Asgore hired Undyne and Papyrus wants to impress Undyne. So he’s under the king’s orders.}

{Oh yeah… I mean not exactly he’s still in training but… he’s basically a Royal Guardsman in everything but name…?}

{How do I know that Sans can actually do anything to help me if Papyrus brings me to Asgore?}

[…] You don’t. We don’t. Normally I’d say that Sans could help you but… I’ve never seen someone insult Papyrus’ honor like this. And I wouldn’t be surprised if…]

Chara gulps… somehow. [I wouldn’t be surprised if Sans backs up his brother.]

{What if he just kills me? I can load but… if he takes my soul then… can I even come back from
“If you wanna fuck with me then why the fuck should I take your word!? Why the fuck should I care about what Undyne thinks? She probably wants to kill me the first chance she gets! If I was armed I’d kill you myself! And anyone watching couldn’t say it was murder because you forced me to fight. And—"

“Oh?!!” Papyrus’ voice becomes slightly louder… and somehow more… devious.

[Screw that he didn’t sound evil before. Now he does…]

[Yep!] Chara squeaks.

“Now,” Papyrus’ voice rises in volume… and becomes angrier with every word, “I have no choice but to use my special attack! Behold!”

A grinding sound behind me… and my body flying backward…

Toward the grinding sound…

{Why are we…?}

[Flying backward? …] Chara observes.

{[Oh no…]}

{Whaaa--}

[I never knew Papyrus could…]

{Could what!?!}

[I never knew he could use magic to simulate gravity… besides up and down… also braaaaaace yourself!]

{Why?}

I gasp as my back slams into… something…

[Hooooly crap that’s a big bone…]

I can’t tell whether Chara seems impressed or terrified.

[What--]

[Your back is up against a reeeaaally tall bone… like it’s as tall as Papyrus and then a couple feet more--]

{Which is—}

[Like… nine… no ten… nine and a half feet? Of magic bone?]
Oh I’m being held in the air—fuck! And pelted with bones while being magically bound to a fake bone! Thaaaat’s sooo much better than if it was a reeeeal bone!

[I… I didn’t know he’d… I’m sorry!]

[What??? Chara…? Are you…?]

They sniff. [Don’t worry about me. Just… say sorry to Papyrus! I’m sure he’ll--]

[No! Why should I apologize to him when all he’s done is--]

Chara sniffs some more. [Our health is at twelve. We should… eat things… but not whole things. That’s a waste…]

I eat a third Monster Candy and half a Cinnamon Bunny, so I reach twenty-eight health out of thirty, but Papyrus’ attacks soon reduce it back down to twenty again. [You should bought the Manly Bandana… it had seven defense instead of three! But noooo! You just had to—]

[Chaaaaarrrrra! Why the hell should I wear dead kids’ stuff! It’s—]

[Then why do you still have the Faded Ribbon on? Why didn’t you just leave it behind when I told you that the Tough Glove belonged to Ally?]

I take a sharp breath, temporarily… blocking out… the pain of Papyrus launching bones at me. {I… I… forgot…}

A laugh worse than Papyrus’. Even worse than Flowey’s.

[Oh you think you can tell me whaaat’s right and wrong can you? At least if you’re gonna act like a total do-gooder then do it all the damn time.]

Chara laughs again. [Well go on! Take it off! It belongs to a dead kid. So it should be respected. It doesn’t matter you’re going through your items faster! You’re preserving something that belonged to one of the idiots who came down here and didn’t take the time to look around and observe everything! And that’s what matters.]

I slowly raise a hand to my hair, brushing the Faded Ribbon with my index and middle fingers, about to pinch it between them and my thumb so I can pull it off and toss it away. Without it, every time Papyrus attacks me, I will take three more damage than before.

I have seven-and-a-half healing items left… technically more if I divide them up.

Energy drains from my body as I sense my HP dropping to nine out of thirty. Touching a hand to the front of my bag, I eat a Monster Candy and a Cinnamon Bunny, gaining twenty-one HP in one sitting.

My bag…

“My bag! It has defense stats! At least I think so since Toriel said I can use it as armor. But how much?”

[Oh yeah. I don’t know how much though. She never said…]

{So… why have I been worrying about the Faded Ribbon! I don’t need it! I can just remove the back half of my bag and put it on in front of the first half.}
I unbuckle the back half of my bag from the main frame, readjusting it so it overlaps the front half. I move my phone so it is in the larger, primary compartment of the front half of my bag, so it is closest to my body and farthest from Papyrus’ bones.

{Why didn’t you think about the bag’s defense stats?}

[I… forgot…] Chara answers sheepishly. [I… didn’t have the right to yell at you like that… I’m…]

{Apologize later.}

[Okay.]

I take off the Faded Ribbon and toss it in front of me, toward the clacking sounds of the bones, quick ripping noises following suit.

As I retract my arm back, I notice that my HP has fallen back down to ten. I reach for my last piece of Monster Candy and the other half of the Cinamon Bunny I started eating earlier…

[Whoa… he went and did it now…]

{Did what…?}

[You know what.]

{Where’s my bag?}

[The bones… they just cut through it. Both parts of it. I saw your phone and phone charger fall on the ground but they’re out of the way of the bones so--]

{But my money! My clothes! My school stuff that I brought down with me. Everything! That bag was--}

**Just make sure you hear enough of her voice to get a good idea of what Undyne sounds like.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAhBWXp-sFc

“NGAHHH! Hey Papyrus! Hold up! I’ll finish the human off myself!”

Stop the music.

I crash to the ground into a heap. I slowly sit up, eventually managing to stand up again. {[Oh nooooo…]}

“Papyrus! I commend you for detaining the human for this long. I was just about to come see you, about what you have been posting on the Undernet about a new training method, but,” Undyne’s voice becomes louder as she turns toward me. She was probably facing Papyrus before.

“It’s you.”

{Wow I never thought I’d ever hear someone hate me soooo much…}

[Same… and I’ve heard this before…]

{Before?}

[Nothing…]
Seven. Seven human souls, and King ASGORE will become a god. We have collected six thus far. Understand? Through your seventh and final soul, this world will be transformed.”

“I know. It was one of the first things I was told when I fell.” I reply flatly.

{Just kill me already…}

[You can’t be serious!]

{At least I can take this time to save. Then, if I do die, I can reload and run away. And get the Manly Bandana and the Tough Glove.}

[So you’d steal to keep yourself alive? Even after how you reacted to the Faded Ribbon?]

{If she’s gonna kill me right now then it’s only fair I do what I can to stay alive after.}

[Double standards much…?]  

{No it’s not! I can’t defend myself! And at least against Papyrus I had healing items. So now…}

[So you’d use that stuff even though they belonged to Ally?]

{I… … Yes.}

“No. "You know what?" She pauses. *Loop until the end of the chapter.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kR54declpAA "NGAAAAAHHHHBBBBBBBBBBB! SCREW IT! "YOU! "You're standing in the way of everybody's hopes and dreams! Alphys's history books made me think humans were cool... ...with their giant robots and flowery swordswomen. BUT YOU? You're just a coward!”

{Whaat the fuck?}

[I’m… still confused… and this isn’t even the first time I’ve heard her say this…]

{What is she…? We don’t have giant robots or… flowery swordswomen… yet.}

[Sounds like anime--]

{I think it is too.}

[And I think you’re right…]

{Okay: so Papyrus’ boss has deluded herself into thinking anime is--}

[No! Not at all! I, if we weren’t here I could explain--]

{Like usual…}

[*Sigh…*]

I take a deep breath. “Look I… I’ve talked to some monsters. And I know how badly you all wanna go back to the surface. But… you think killing someone who can’t even defend themselves is right? I’m not standing in the way of your hopes and dreams!”

“I won’t have any of your wimpy goody-two-shoes-shtick! Oooh! I'm making such a difference by hugging random—“ she interrupts.
“I haven’t hugged anyone! I got chased by three dogs on the way here!” I can’t help to shoot back.

[That’s not helping… the dogs are under her command after all…]

{Fuck that.}

“It would be more valuable to everyone if YOU WERE DEAD!!! Human, your continued existence is a crime! Your life is all that stands between us and our freedom!” Undyne rants.

“So I was right you do think killing me is more important than helping me get home!? Ends justify the means my fucking ass! Fuck you Kant!”

[Whoooo?]

[A… dead guy who said ends justify the means…?]

[A dead guy who would think killing one defenseless human is okay if it means saving lots of monsters?]

[I guess.]

[Oh… no wonder you’re pissed…]

“Enough!” Undyne roars, and in that moment, I am unsure of who I am more afraid of: Papyrus, who at least let me talk, or Undyne… who sounds like a stubborn anime protagonist… but with the power to back it up. Asgore hired her for a reason, after all.

“Everyone’s been waiting their whole lives for this moment! I will channel everyone’s desires into every attack! ”I can’t lose! ”Now, human! Let’s end this, right here, right now. On behalf of my people, I’ll show you how determined monsters can be! En Guarde!”

[Uh I don’t feel like I’m in an anime at all…!?]

[Same!]

[And I’m not even gonna complain about the English dub sucking really hard!]

[Same!]

[[Oh noooo…]]

[I saved earlier right?] 

[Yeah when you sat down.]

[Run?]

[Ruuuuun!]

**Stop the music.**

Chapter End Notes
These endnotes were only added as of 10/14/2017.

I've been meaning to add the two Bonetrousle remixes I linked here for... several months... but I was too lazy to do it, for some reason.

Here's RichaadEB's Bonetrousle again for reference!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64cvrwrzmhU

Here's the link to the other Bonetrousle remix, from "Fallen: An Undertale Tribute" by Materia Collective.

https://materiacollective.bandcamp.com/track/cave-of-monsters

Regarding both remixes: who knew that changing the pitch/tempo of bonetrousle could make it feel so different compared to the original?

As for adding NGAHHHH!!!?

I couldn't find a version I liked, because apparently, people think that NGAHHH! and Spear of Justice are the same song... so I just used the original instead! It's already pretty daaaaaamn goood...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kR54declpAA

Now, as of 02/24/2018, I've decided on Visiontale's canon voice for Undyne! It's here!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAhBWXp-sFc

I'm referring to Cellochicita's normal speaking voice, and none of her singing/voice-acting voices.
14

I lift my foot off the ground and try turning around, but my legs don’t move. {Is my soul--}

[No it’s not blue she’ll explain. She always does.]

My feet fly out from under me.

I’m… we’re… in another fight.

Against Undyne.

While I’m all out of healing items, wearing no armor, and at… ten health.

“As long as you’re GREEN you CAN’T ESCAPE! Unless you learn to face danger head-on... You won't last a SECOND against ME!”

[I got this! I just have to help you visualize the shield then you can aaaaah! Noooo! Wait noooo you—-we--can’t visualize the shield. Can’t we?]

{What?}

[I can’t make you visualize the shield since you don’t have functioning eyes for me to take control of…]

Chara and I are at five health…

{Oh yeah… since I can’t see, and I don’t know what my own body looks like, even if you know where the… bullets--}

[Spears--]

{Spears are, I can’t use the shield because I never had enough experience seeing…}

{[[No no no no no nooo!]}}

I tumble through the air, crashing to the ground, face-first. [Uh… Pauline?]

{Yeah?}

[Don’t sit up.]

{Why?}

“NGAAAAAAAAHHHHH!”

“GNEEEEEEEH!”

{Whaaaat?}
“Look. Undyne. I can’t say I condone what you did. The kid’s right: you attacked her when she couldn’t protect herself. I still would’ve disagreed with this if she had armor on. But at least if she did she could’ve proven herself by dodging.”

Sans…? pauses. “And your green soul state’s useless to her. She can’t see so she can’t shield herself. You failed to let her face danger head on. You led her to face death.”

{He ain’t wrong…}

{Shhh!}

{Whaaaat!?!}

Crunching noises near my head. “And Paps? I… expected better of you.”

[I’ve… never, heard him so, disappointed.]

{Chara? Are you… crying?}

[Yeah. *Sniffle* This is… so unlike Sans to feel like this. Especially towards Paps. And it’s not like Paps to completely ignore what Sans says.]

They nervously laugh. [I mean don’t get me wrong he does sometimes: but not for stuff like this.]

“In the past you’d fight the humans till they were exhausted. But even then you wouldn’t really hurt them.” Sans sounds closer to me now.

As he pauses, Chara whispers, even though no one else can hear, [Oh my… his eyes…]

{But he’s a skeleton! He—}

[I mean, his eye sockets…]

Chara sounds… both awed and on the verge of… making me shit my pants. [They’d only glow like that when--]

[Glow like that…?] I repeat mentally.

[Yeah. When he decides to… show off his true power… his eyes—wait right? Left? If you’re facing him it’s his right eye…? glows a bright blue. So bright it’s almost too bright to look at. I bet if you were sitting up you’d be able to see it—wait!] Chara interrupts themselves. [It’s usually his left eye. But now…?]

{You said eyes before. So it’s both now and not just one?}

[Yeah…?]

“But now?” Sans continues, his voice still sounds like he’s about to tell a joke… a joke about
murdering someone painfully, that is… “You’re actually trying to kill her. “And why? ”Just ’cause she’s not a ‘kid’? ”She may be a human adult, but that doesn’t make her, invulnerable. I thought you’d know that better than anyone. She was scared of the Canine Unit of the Royal Guard, for Zan—for God’s sake! ”And you helped her get away from them too. How could you forget about that?”

[He remembered to not spoil Xenoblade things for Paps, even now.] Chara points out, in the smallest voice I’ve ever heard from them.

“Sans! I—“ Papyrus tries to interject.

“No Paps.”

I cover my ears as a harsh, static-like noise appears… somewhere… near me.

[OH God—]

{Whaaat!?}

{Not one of thoooose…! Anything but oooone oooof thoooose!}

{What are thoooose!?!}

[I’ve only seen him use them in New Home. Not--]

It sounds like Papyrus and Undyne are talking at the same time, but I’m not sure. The… thing… is too loud.

“Look: I know you two can take a few of these to the dome. They only do fifty damage a piece right now. And your defenses are higher than anything down here human or monster-made could provide so it won’t really hurt you if you do.” Sans somehow makes himself heard over the sound of… the… thing…

The noise increases in pitch until I am forced to cover my ears a second time, only for it to decrease in pitch again. However, this lasts for only a few fractions of a second, because the noise goes up in pitch and volume a second time, rising to its first peak.

Then, the ground under me shakes a little, as the beginnings of Papyrus’-, Undyne’s… and Chara’s… screams are drowned out by a completely different sound-- Sounds. Two completely different sounds at once. A roaring or crashing sound, harsher than all the previous sounds combined, and a somewhat higher-pitched humming layered on top.

No one speaks or moves for a few, tense seconds… or minutes…

I eventually assume Papyrus and Undyne have left. I turn over onto my back and sit up, only for my hands to slam into… something, a little above my current eye level, Chara screaming again as I do.

It’s smooth and somewhat round where I touch it…

It’s also at least as wide as I am. Okay maybe one-and-a-half times as wide as I am…

[Oh. He shot the laser through the ground in front of them. Good. Well except there’s a hole large enough you could crawl into it with room to spare but other than that you’re fine!] Chara sounds… a little more than just relieved.
"That was a laser?"

"Yeah… well a magical, laser-ish thingy?"

"Where’s--"

"Him and Undyne ran the fuuuuck away… to only Monado knows where… well he damn well should have run the fuck away! Actually he should have run away sooner but…"

"Whyyyyyyyyyyyy?"

"It was Sans…"

In disbelief:

"No!"

"Told ya you wouldn’t believe me…"

"What did he--"

"He used one here in front of all these people? [Daaaaamn! [This better go viral on the Undernet or else--]"

Now Chara sounds, excited… and not just scared…

"Chaaaaraaa! What did Sans do!"

"You, uh, might feel like shitting your pants right now—"

"Ah fuuuuuuck!"

[Aaaaaah!]

Chara pauses as if taking a breath. [Aaaaaah!]

They do so again. [Oh God oh God oh God oh Gooood!]

When they pause again, I interject: {Shut up!}

"—and I don’t blame you. Just… as scary as the Gaster Blaster sounds, it’s the least of your problems. I mean, if you shit your pants, you’re gonna have to wash them… and I’d think washing your clothes isn’t the easiest… or one of your happier memories from back home.”

"{[Ugh…]}"

"{[Welk you went there...]}"

[I don’t know whether to make you run the fuck away or not ’cause it’s truuue…]

{Yeah…}

Someone’s… Sans’… hand on my shoulder. “I… I had to do that. Nothin’ else would scare them away. Paps… he’s never met an adult human before so… I guess what he did was justified from his perspective.”

Sans takes a breath… pauses… “And as for Undyne… same. Same, but worse. And more
complicated. "'Cause yeah: it’s horrible she’s only fought kids. The things is she’s actually received tons of training to deal with human weapons. That’s why she’s the head of the Royal Guard."

I stand there, running my hands along the… Gaster Blaster… as Sans continues talking. “I mean: I guess she thought that since those kids could dodge, a larger human could actually fight back.”

He laughs… and I’m not sure about whether it’s appropriate, let alone whether to laugh along or not. {It’s not funny… but not quite not funny either.}

[Yeah true… it’s, like one of those jokes that’s funny but horrible so you don’t know whether to laugh…]

“And to be honest: it makes sense. With her training that kind of mindset would apply. Except if you’re talkin’ ‘bout a human with a disability. I mean; I’d think it’d be obvious you couldn’t see when you didn’t look her in the face when she went all anime on you.”

“I guesses…?”

“Look: if you wanna be left alone for a while to deal with this that’s fine.” I don’t reply. "I’ll have Grillby deliver food to your room. Your phone is safe so you can at least binge-watch something to get your mind off all that.”

[I think Sans grabbed your phone earlier so that’s how it’s safe.]

"{Thank Alvis!}"

[Amen!]

“And I have Tori’s number so I’ll call her so she can bring you spare clothes.”

[Thank Alvis!]

"{Amen!}"

[Oh thank God Sans’ eyes aren’t creepy as hell anymore…]

“And,” Sans begins to sound, less, angry and more, typically serious. Brushing his elbow against my arm, I grab onto it as we walk a couple steps, “at least if you’re gonna be scared shitless, you might as well know what you were scared shitless by.”

“Okay…?”

[Nope nope nope nope Nope nope nope nope!]

{Chaaaaarrraa? Why?}

“Ehh, be careful though. They’re, not used to being touched…”

[Nope nope nope nope nope nope nope nope!]

{What are we touching?}

After a couple minutes of touching the Gaster Blaster… and jumping at every noise it makes, I ask, “Uh… this thing is a skull?”
“A skull that shoots lasers.”

“ooooonly lasers!?”

“What? You want a Gaster Blaster to be capable of shooting miniature Gaster Blasters which shoot lasers?”

[Nope nope nope Nope nope nope nope!]

“Uh… no…”

{[*Shudder…*]}

“Are they always this big?”

“Most of the time, the smallest one,”

Sans pauses. “Hmmm. The smallest one I’ve ever made was about… three-fourths, maybe half, the volume of this one. But I know their proportions so I could make one as small as I wanted.”

“How small?”

[For science!]

{Yep!}

“Hold your hands out.”

Sans places… something… in the palm of one of my hands. “That’s a Gaster Blaster about the size of… the two of your fists, thumbs enclosed, knuckles touching, like this—“

He quickly demonstrates with his own hands. “It’s somewhat more elongated than the one I used earlier but it has the same purpose.”

“How do you make the lasers come out?”

“It’s empathetic.”

“heh?”

“I can control them mentally if I visualize the lasers’ flight path well enough. But This one homes in on enemies. It’s not perfect. But it’s accurate down to a… three or four meter radius wherever you point it. It’s enough that you can aim it by ear and so its range covers the movement patterns of most monsters.”

“Whoa… but if a monster gets closer than that to me…?”

“If you can back away toward the nearest open space. And if you can’t it can alter its firing patterns.”

“But how do I make sure I… don’t kill someone?”

“Gaster Blasters’ sizes are usually proportional to their damage. This one adjusts to accommodate the enemy so it results in enough damage to force mercy, but no more. This HP threshold is reached when fired three times. And it conforms to this number automatically.”
“Whaaaat!?"

Sans laughs. “Yeah, I’m, real proud I came up with this so quickly.”

[He diiiid this just now though!]

{What!? You said Sans is smart…}

[True but--]

But why only ‘nearly all monsters?’ Are some… really tanky?”

Sans sighs. “Well let’s just say if you need to fire the Gaster Blaster more than three times at a monster you’re screwed anyway. And, the only one I can think of who could place you in that situation now is Asgore.”

“Oh yeah…”

“If you really want to deal more damage it can. It will, hesitate first though. They’re used to me—“

“They’re?”

“Gaster Blasters are, kinda like… those voice-activated AIs on smartphones… except for creating lasers. Not ordering pizza.”

[Duuuude…] Chara bursts out laughing.

{I know right?}

“And since it’s a magical construct bound to you you can’t lose it or have it stolen from you. And it won’t get damaged like your phone can. And if something does end up happening to it somehow my consciousness is bound to it too, so I can also use it.”

“But… why are you giving me this?”

[That’s all you’re asking?]

{Where do I start? Like ‘Sans, you know the United States military would kill everyone down here for just one of these…?’}

[Yeah!]

“’cause if push comes to shove, you need a weapon. One that doesn’t involve getting in close. ‘cause many of the monsters in upcoming areas are… insensitive about humans’ biological limits or dangerous to humans just ‘cause of their physiology. But I… I want to make sure I have control of it too, so it’s not… misused…”

“Fair enough.”

“If you have anywhere you keep valuables at home, find a place like that in your room at the Snowed Inn,” Sans cautions as we begin to walk back into town. “But make it somewhere close to you. So you both don’t lose it and so it doesn’t… wander over to you by accident while you sleep.”

{Why is he laughing? That’s… really creepy.}
“IT might do that ’cause, well, the Gaster Blaster is a semi-conscious weapon bound to its user. If it’s not near you it’ll try finding a way to you.”

We walk through the door of the Snowdin Inn, monsters calling out to us as we pass. When we reach my room, I sit on my bed. “What you want for dinner? Grillby won’t keep track of your gold today.”

{he knows?}

[Well he knows your password… and him and Grillby are good friends.]

{Fair enough…?}

“We know this?”

“That’s the spirit. Just… hold onto it until I get back okay? It’ll float at your waist when you walk, sit, or lie down, by default, until you ask it to move or move it yourself.”

Sans… clacks… across the room as he leaves. “You two get acquainted okay?”

“Uh… okay?”

“Just keep cool, okay kid?”

“Okay.”

When Sans closes the door behind him, my bed sags a little on one side as Chara appears. “Well: this happened!”

“Yep…”

“Can I hold it pleasease?! It’s… strangely not scary at all when it’s this small…”

“Seriously!?”

“Yes!”

Heeeell nooo!”

Chapter End Notes

Horray for exposition and being scared all at once!

Here is the URL of a link to a Steam post which provides a possible explanation for the Gaster Blasters' appearance.

https://steamcommunity.com/app/391540/discussions/0/492379439682039763/

Though I've read the post, I didn't specify the Gaster Blasters to look like how this
user describes since I've never felt a dog skull, let alone the skull of the species they discuss, so I don't know how I would translate that experience into writing. I've only felt a human skull... so... Honestly, I assumed the Gaster Blasters were human skulls but...

I accessed this post on December 28, 2016.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of the Papyrus fight... I've changed a bit... but Chara hasn't changed at all. I find out how I can work without leaving my room, so laziness!

That, and everyone acts all... sad and culturally relativistic...

If you don't know about statistics, read the endnotes. Otherwise, ignore them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

15

"So… you're saying that John wrote lots of teenagers' books and his nerdy brother talked about sex a lot because science!"

"Not talked: talks... 'cause SciShow..."

"He has his own channel? Why doesn't he, like, just do everything there?"

"First off he shares it with two? Three? Other dudes... and second I don't know okay?"

As Chara and I scroll through Crash Course's playlists, searching for a new topic for them to learn, I try explaining to them why John might have become a YouTuber… even though I first learned about him through boredom in high school and I don't actually know much about him. "But Hank is sooooo cool!" Chara seems… pretty damn happy as we start Crash Course Psychology over a plate of bacon. "Why isn't he doing everything?"

"Uh… 'cause John does literature stuff… 'cause he writes books and stuff… so Hank wouldn't be able to do the literature stuff."

"But why?"

I am about to answer when someone... knocks on my door… then knocks on my door a second time… and a third time… and a fourth time… then a fifth time… then says: "Knock knock. Who's there?"

"Sans come on!"

[Who's…?]..."Who is it?" I call out. "And Sans why the hell'd you knock so many times?"

"Because all the people profiting off your being bodied also knocked. To be completely honest."

"Robin?"

"Yeah it's me."
"Ugh…"

[Oh God… it's sooo bad... but still funny though…]

{Chaaaarrraaaaa!}

"Oh! Robin! Why would you say that to her?"

It's the Snowdin Inn innkeeper… and she sounds… offended…

"The sooner you open the door," Robin calls, "the faster you can get back to infodumping us!"

"What…?"

[I think they mean us retweeting every video we watch… every last one…]

{Truuuuue…}

I stand from the bed, turning right and walking along the right wall until I feel the front-most wall of the room. As I sidestep to open the door, the Gaster Blaster presses against my waist. I wrap my right hand around it, the sensation I know now as magic flowing through my fingers.

After I open the door and let everyone in, they start talking at once.

"Oh I hope I haven't disturbed you!"

"My sister told me about you and your experience at the shop. I had some suggestions I wanted to put by you before dumping them all on her--"

"Grillby and I came up with a plan for how you can pay for your meals and work for me without leaving your room!"

"Hey hey whoaaa." Sans cuts off everyone else. "Amy? Laura? Guys? Hold up. This wasn't what I had in mind when I said we were gonna come over. And see her. You're not letting her take everything slow. She at least deserves that."

"Whaaa…?"

"We," the Snowdin shopkeeper says slowly, "were worried about you. We were all there, watching the… the fight." She hesitates before saying it.

She laughs nervously. "Well it didn't turn out to be much of one didn't it? Oh I feel awful I shouldn't have--"

"Ehh." I dismiss. "It's okay. You're right though…"

"I'm Laura." The Snowed Inn owner touches my shoulder, then my elbow, then my hand, prompting me to shake hers. "I never felt the need to tell you my name since… well… Snowdin Town's small. Everyone sounds different. Even we know that. And we don't have to learn people's voices just to get to know them."

"Laura? Thanks for everything though. I have no idea of how long I'll be staying here."

"I know. Just… I'm considering taking part in Robin's plan so you can pay me back how you wanted to when we first met. You seemed pretty distraught when you found out how broke you were."
"Yeah… but Robin what's the plan?"

"It's simple. Just, sit on the floor please. It's easier this way." He advises.

I oblige, and I hear the rustling noises of everyone sitting near me, followed by a… metallic noise. "I propose that I send you Nice Creams through this Dimensional Box. And that you wrap them--"

Another metallic noise. "--using this machine Alphys finished just this afternoon."

"Dimensional Box?" I repeat.

"They're like the PC in the Pokémon games. You put stuff in in one box, you can access it in another."

I notice at this moment that Sans sounds like he's sitting directly next to me, on the opposite side to the Gaster Blaster…

"How does it know it's me? And that I'm getting out my own stuff and not someone else's stuff?"

Sans doesn't answer. "It's… complicated. The technology is pretty cutting edge, even now. But I... have some books on it. I can go looking for them if you really want."

"Sure. Robin? What's the machine like?"

"It uses magic to fuse the openings of the wrappers shut. I'll show it to you later."

"So I'll package them here and not outside where your cart is?"

"Hell no!" Robin's.. offended too. "You'll stay here, wrap however much I send you, then put the wrapped Nice Creams back in the box. You just tell me when you received them and when you finished, so I can pay you based on how long you worked, and how many you packaged. This way you can work mostly at your own pace, in a setting you're comfortable with."

{Whoaaa Robin thooooough!}

[Yeah!] Chara sounds, pleasantly surprised. [I never thought he'd do this. This is good though! We can watch YouTube while doing it!]

{Truuuue…?}

"I put this by everyone else," Robin continues. "Grillby and Laura will get your meals to you. But Grillbs wanted to experiment with sending your food to you via the same Dimensional Box, so we'll do that first."

[Don't deny it you're happy you don't have to cook or buy groceries."

{Yeah...}

[But we'll take those.]

{Yep.}

"And if it doesn't work Laura can just bring them here. You can just text Grillbs your order."

"But how will--"
A... thing... heavy thing... rough thing... fat thing... falls into my lap. "I finally finished it."

{Uh... how can Sans sound out of breath if he doesn't have to breathe?}

[I... don't... know...]

"What is it?"

"Why don't you find out?"

Grillby's Menu as of October 201X

Drinks (alcoholic drinks will not be served to non-cemented monsters)

{Whaat does...?}

[So no underage drinking?]

{Chaaaraaa!}

[What!? That happens in college doesn't it? At least that's what you're remembering...]

{Duuude!}

"Well?"

"It's a braille menu! And it's freaking huuuuge!"

"Yeah... formatting everything right... did that."

Sans laughs. "Unless you wanted me to abbreviate each item and put those abbreviations on a
flowchart, and then put the full descriptions on a completely separate page. 'Cause double-sided
braille isn't a thing right?"

"Ugh..."

[Whaaaat?]

{That'd happen whenever I looked at braille diagrams. They'd put the abbreviations on a separate,
not facing page. So it'd be annoying to read.}

[Oh... I see...]

Chara pauses. [Ugh...]

"And before you ask no I didn't hack the American Printing House for the Blind's web site. I
looked at the formatting for some braille diagram catalogs."

"Oh thank God..."

"What are you two talking about?"

[Amy's... like, really lost...]

{I know...}

[Just making sure.]
"It's braille stuff. 'Cause what they'd do is--" Sans takes the braille menu from me "is that there wouldn't be braille here. There'd be braille here. So she'd have to flip the page every time she'd want to know what an item was."

"Hmmm. Interesting. But how is it that the dots here don't cancel out the dots here?"

"You… format it right… and prey."

Sans and I laugh. "Truuuuu! I tried doing my own two-sided braille by hand when I was younger… it didn't end well… and I had no idea of why it didn't work. I just put the braille in any blank space on the back side of the page. And when it didn't work right I'd rebraille it… and it'd get even more fucked up…"

"I came here because I wanted to take you up on your offer to show me braille." Amy explains. "I'll be coming after work of course, but, I don't work eight hours. I rarely do. It's more nine-to-two not nine-to-five."

"Huh. I… never thought that was a thing…"

"It's okay. Most monsters don't work forty hours a week. Actually they work more day-to-day, not by week. We have… little need for breaking down time into weeks. But I'm not really the right monster to talk about that."

"I wanted to check up on you every day after we work so I can pay you. And verify your meals' costs so I can deduct that from your pay beforehand." Robin adds. "And besides: we can talk about the… videos you've been posting on the Undernet over the past… day… also. 'Cause I really like them."

"Which ones?"

"The economics ones. I never imagined I'd like this stuff." Robin's excited. "But I read all of The Wealth of Nations, not just the specialization stuff. I wish I'd thought of this sooner."

"It's okay. Well it's not okay but you know what I mean… Like, the only reason you didn't know is 'cause your guys' Inter-Undernet is… kinda slow…"

"As for me," Sans moves the Gaster Blaster to my knee, placing my hand on his own as he holds it, "I had some… news… about Paps."

"Oh."

Everyone sits there for a few awkward… okay maybe a little more than awkward seconds.

"I'll keep it short, okay?"

"Okay."

"Paps hasn't been home since last night. He's been at Undyne's house. I know since he's been posting confused emojis on the Undernet all day."

"All day?"
"And all night."

"How do you know?"

"I," Sans chuckles, "stayed up binge-watching YouTube."

"{[Duuuude…]}

"I'm actually planning on calling him on the phone when I get home. I'd talk to him face-to-face but…"

[The shrug though…?]

"I think Paps needs some time to process what he saw-"

"Only sooome time!" Laura interrupts. "That was amazing! Terrifying and not really like you, but that was why it was amazing!"

"Truuuue." Everyone else, including me, agrees.

"Grillby gasped last night." Robin seems either on the verge of panic... or hype. "I've only heard him laugh until now. And he gasped, plenty of times, last night."

"Wait Robin you went to watch?" I ask.

"Yeah. Why?"

"So you didn't try to stop him?"

"I-"

"All of you know him! And you didn't even try stopping him! It's like the fucking Coliseum all over again!"

[Whaat?]

{Fighting to the death. One dude's a prisoner or untrained. The other is a lion. Or bear…}

[Well that's not really what happened between you guys but this... Coliseum thing... still sounds interesting--]

{Chaaaaarrrrraaa!}

[What!?!]

"I--"

Amy's voice shakes. She takes a breath and starts over. "It's one of those things where it's sooo horrible. But you can't help but want to see it. You can't help but want to know what happens. Even if it's…"

"Even if it's horrible." Sans finishes. "Or even 'cause it's horrible."

"Yeah." Laura sighs. "I'm with Amy on this one. I was cleaning up and saw everyone walking to the center of town. I only saw it was you when the fight started."

"Even though I'm the only human so I would've been the only one he could've fought."
"Believe it or not no: he mock fights with the Royal Guard. I'm used to hearing him yell at everyone so..."

Her breath catches. "I... I couldn't Believe Papyrus was actually doing it. And you didn't seem to either. I wanted to look away, but..."

She sighs again. "I couldn't. I honestly wanted him to take your soul. And do it quickly. So... at least if you were to die here, it'd be with dignity. Better than being killed by Asgore after having traveled all that way just to die--"

Muffled sobs.

{Whaaaat? I... I didn't mean to...}
[Yeah. But that was... deep...]

"You wanted me to die?"

I'm unsure of whether to feel shocked or angry.

{But she's so nice! How could she--}
[Then ask.]

"It's not like that. Dewey's talked 'about the six humans before you a lot."

Sans sounds... tired... and not the kind involving sleep. "He said we were... conditioned... to favor monsters in everything. No matter what--"

Sans abruptly stops. "No matter what Asgore..."

He trails off, but restarts again. "No matter what Asgore did to try to... treat humans with respect, it never sank in."

[The other four's faces though...?]

{Why? What happened?}

[It's... difficult to explain.]

{You can try.}

Chara doesn't answer.

"So Asgore's tried to make all of you respect humans? If he did then why the hell is there the Royal Guard?"

Sans doesn't answer. No one answers.

"My point is," Sans continues, "is that I was saying how Paps has been at Undyne's house. I'm gonna call him... and tell him what you think of all of this. You can say whatever you want to me. And I'll tell Paps what you told me. But at the end of it you have to tell me whether you wanna talk to him in person about this. It doesn't matter when. Just whether you wanna do it."

"Why are you doing this? I... I insulted him. And your king. And Undyne. Why the hell would you back me up? He's your brother, for Monado's sake! Why the fuck would you put me before him?"
"Cause that wasn't like Paps at all. I've never seen him that angry. Not like that."
'I dunno… he seems angry all the time to me.'
"Grillby! Wow! I mean it's true but still… wow! And you have… a… voice thingy now!"
'Yes. I'm grateful Alphys worked on this text-to-speech device at such short notice. Now I can properly interact with my customers and… maybe even follow Robin's lead and hire some employees.'
"Sweet!"

[He's right though…]

{Yeah…}

Everyone else agrees. "Thing is," Sans sounds a little louder, probably because he turned toward me, "I'm not gonna try to tell you you have to give in to what he says. All I want is that you don't feel threatened around him. You can disagree with him all you want. I just don't want you and Paps to... be like this."

I sigh.
"I know. It's… still a lot, what I'm askin', isn't it?"
"Yeah… I just can't fucking believe he'd do that!"
"I can't either. Just… what I said earlier: about Papyrus' reasons and how Undyne basically said taking your soul is justified, from a monsters' point of view?"
"Yeah…?"
"And that this implies that capturing a human sucks but that it sucks less 'cause it'll free all monsters?"
"It didn't seem like you all think it'd suck…"

'Yes. Frankly I don't think anyone could apologize for wanting Papyrus to take your soul. It's that conditioning Dewey's told us about.'

Grillby sighs, under his own power.
"I guess…"

"Just… do you think you could see yourself talking to my bro about this in a civil setting? Even if what you say isn't completely civil?"

{I… I can't.}

[No, you can.]

{You don't know that.}
Yeah I do. I know you can do this. You have me.

{But you said you'd kill--}

If I was armed. You weren't. Even if we were we couldn't get close to him if we tried. And just 'cause I'm into weapons doesn't mean I'd always wanna use them. Gloves or… bad words…

{I… I guess…}

You can pour it all out. And you'll be safe 'cause he'll have to listen to you.

{Yeah…}

If you're really this uncomfortable with it at least ask Sans if you can do it in public in front of as many monsters as possible.

{So Papyrus can be held accountable for what he says?}

{Yeah!}

"Sans?"

"Yeh?"

"Can we do this in public?"

"I woudna been surprised if you didn't suggest that. Sure. Wherever you want."

"Where do you want to meet him?" Amy asks. "Unfortunately you aren't familiar with the Underground yet, so there aren't any places you could go where you're on an equal footing with him."

'How about at my restaurant?' Grillby suggests. 'I can keep an eye on him and any spectators. And if it comes down to it I can ban him from it for a while.'

"Sure."

"And we can stream it on the Undernet!" Laura suddenly interjects.

"Stream it?"

"Other monsters could comment in the chat." Amy adds. "Everyone deserves to see this. It'll be…"

She gulps. "It'll be the first cooperative thing between humans and monsters we've seen in… in ever."

"You guys got Twitch to work? Sans I thought you guys couldn't make new content on the surface Internet."

"Well it'll be more like a TV special…” Amy trails off. "Well not really. TV and Undernet video streaming are the same thing…”

"Huh…?"

"Yeah it's… always been like that."

"Well," Sans amends, "at one point we did use separate televisions, but when we figured out how to
get Internet and recreate it, they became obsolete."

{Greeeat. They wanna see me yell at Paps and him body me again in public. Everyone down here's part of a war-based culture…}

[Come on I know that's not what you're thinking…]

{Everyone down here's a Proud Warrior Race G-Monster?}

[Like you're not part of a culture full of them…?]

{No… *sigh…*}

"This could be big." Robin reaches over and touches my hand. "Well. We all know you wanna talk to him. But we should leave what you say up to you. We'll make sure your time here is smooth surfing--"

"Isn't it smooth sailing?"

"Smooth Undernet surfing," Amy clarifies. "Cause yeah: on days Mettaton streams the Undernet literally breaks..."

. "We'll get this to Reed and Wrighte and Mettaton so they can prepare everyone. In the meantime, here's a Nice Cream you can eat while I explain how to use this machine…"

... "So it's like you're vacuum-sealing them?"

"Yeah. Tomorrow, text me when you wake up so I can send you thirty of these. This machine times how long it takes you to package each one and texts me the numbers. I'd much rather do thirty hours worth of samples but... I didn't know whether we'd have that kind of time."

{How does Robin know... stats stuff?}

[You can ask...?]

{But how?}

[Why should it matter?]

"Robin? Why are you saying I should wrap thirty Nice Creams? Or work for thirty hours?"

"I... did a lot of reading. And that was something I learned. 'Cause..."

His voice drops to a whisper, and he seems to forget he's talking to someone. "Apparently it's true: statistics can be used anywhere."

"But what are you gonna do with the data??"

"I'll figure out your average time." He sounds somewhat normal again. "Over the course of... an hour? Two? Three? I can pay you based on how many you wrapped. And on a little extra based on how long you worked. 'Cause if you make a lot in a short period but keep going, it's basically overtime."

"Okay...?"

"Trust me," Laura's voice sounds slightly louder, like she's leaned in close to me, "he was all
worried about how much to pay you. And how. 'Cause, like, American minimum wage isn't set..."

"Yeah... I heard it's ten bucks... while some places are paying eleven."

"Well in gold it'd be different... I've figured it all out."

"How 'bout I call Paps now while you do this Robin?" Sans stands up, removing his hand from the Gaster Blaster, which presses itself against my palm more closely. "It shouldn't take long."

"That," he seems on the verge of telling a joke, "and arranging you to meet Mettaton. 'Cause, yeah. You'll need it."

He walks out the door, chuckling to himself, Chara laughing a little along with him. {Chara? Why is Sans all... sneakylike?}

[Nothing...] They snicker again.

"Okay. I'll let you feel my hands while I wrap one, so you know what to do. In the meantime, you can try explaining braille to Amy."

"Uh... sure."

"I already know about the braille cell," Amy reassures me. "Sans debriefed us--"

"{[Whaaaaat?]}"

"The night you came here. Sans showed up just before Papyrus did with some cheat sheets."

"{[Nice.]}"

She hesitates. "That," she says unsurely, "and I was wondering why there's a huge block of ice shaped like Papyrus' head in front of his house with dots on his forehead... I assumed it was braille, and I wanted to know what it said."

"Okay...?"

"That," Laura adds, "and we were wondering how my sister and I could make useful and artsy signs like that for ourselves..."

Chapter End Notes

About the statistics reference from Robin: a minimum of thirty samples is recommended for data sets with a normal distribution, (AKA those bell-curve things they use for IQ tests and grades) like manufacturing processes, so this number isn't just a random one.

Mettaton is coming soon. That is all.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Toriel's back, and she's behaving, strangely...

Mettaton is coming, relatively soon, I promise.

The day after Robin proposes his plan, Toriel visits me to bring me more clothes and new supplies. She seems inspired by the Dimensional Box, and muses about using one for the interior of my new bag, so if it was ever destroyed, my possessions could be moved elsewhere in an instant. "I am glad everyone here has taken your safety and well-being into account."

"Me too. Everyone's been pretty chill about everything."

Toriel laughs softly. "Oh, you've already taken to Sans' puns?"

"I took to them as soon as he made a braille joke--"

"He did?"

Surprise and... delight... from Toriel. [Her face though...?]

{She sounds happy.}

[Just a little more than that...]

She sighs, shifting on my bed. "I cannot necessarily say I am surprised. Sans seems to have worked very hard to accustom yourself to living around here. I am more overjoyed than you could ever know, resourceful one."

"Yeah... everyone's pretty cool."

[Whauw whauw whaaauw...]

{Shut up!}

"I am especially impressed by Robin. He seems very, open-minded, about you working for him. And accommodating for your… circumstances… by finding a way you can work in familiar surroundings is especially reassuring. I am confident you will be able to learn the way, even after..."

She trails off, reaching an arm across me. She presses the Gaster Blaster into my palm. "After your, experience, obtaining this. I would apologize for us monsters putting you through such an ordeal but… that is far from sufficient. Sans, warned me, that his brother could be... difficult to reign in but..."

She sighs. "I never imagined he would... push Sans to do what he did. As for Undyne..."
"Unfortunately I am not surprised by her behavior. From what I have heard she is... hot-blooded."

"Yeah... I just can't believe Paps attacked me! I've told Sans this but... we figured something out."

"Sans told me of your acceptance of his offer to talk. I am more than pleased that you did so. Considering your history with people... misunderstanding you... I was surprised you did so at all."

"Yeah... I meanlike, I really didn't want to. It's, hard for me to let go of grudges."

"Then why did you do it? It would have taken so much effort to overcome any fear and anger you were feeling."

"Yeah... but it's not like I'm not angry. I still am. And I want Papyrus to know it too. I’m just, not as afraid anymore."

I cradle the Gaster Blaster in both hands, placing each thumb on each side of the ridge on its head... on top... "At least I can defend myself. And I won't... fuck up while doing it since Sans is also controlling it."

"Yes!"

Wonder and... awe... in Toriel's voice. "I am not surprised Sans entrusted a Gaster Blaster to you. You have carried thousands of... U.S. dollars... of equipment with you for years now, after all. This is essentially free. Sans has explained its... their... operation to me."

She pauses. "I never imagined so much thought could be placed into a... a miniature cannon... but... I suppose their magical nature leaves room for flexibility."

"It's kinda like I... like I own a gun now."

"Yes indeed."

Toriel begins to whisper, and her voice echos off the far wall, like she's turned her head to the side. "I... I wish I had studied how they worked. I wish I had... I should have taken up... if I was not woefully ignorant before, I am now."

"What's wrong?"

Toriel keeps talking. "If only I had asked for... for a computer... then I could... I could talk with you on an equal footing..."

"You can ask Alphys to make you one." I suggest.

When Toriel next speaks, her voice echos less, so I know she's turned toward me again. "Yes. I... I will. I will speak to Amy when I leave here. Hearing of your interactions with the monsters... I believe it is about time I go about purchasing a computer. Because the... the Undernet in your pocket... I must be able to keep up with that." That is..."

She pauses. "That is what... that is what he would have wanted."

"Who? Sans?"

An... awkward... pause.
The pause continues for several more seconds.

Someone's phone rings. After a couple vibrations, I pick it up. "Hello?"

"Hi it's Robin!"

{{Robin thooouugh!}}

"Hi!"

"Are you busy?"

"Like, I was just talking to Toriel."

"I know. I saw her walking to the Snowed Inn. It's good I called you when I did. Because I'm gonna send the first hour's worth of Nice Creams. Well according to the numbers you should be able to finish at least three fourths of them in the first hour. Of course this is the very low end, while employing a ten percent margin of error but..."

I laugh. "Duuuuude..."

"Yeah I know you'd appreciate how I figured this out. You had a right to know even if you didn't know about... statistics stuff. I'll send it after I hang up and time you, okay?"

"Okay."

"Oh Robin! I am so glad you have made these arrangements for her," Toriel touches her hand to my wrist, removing the phone from my hand so she can also talk to and hear him. "I never would have known what to do in your position."

"Really it wasn't so hard to think of this. It's just a matter of convenience. This is what I would have wanted... if I couldn't see."

“I agree,” Toriel fervently seconds. “Are you ready, my child?”

"Yeah."

Robin asks, "You have the machine with you?"

"It's on the floor."

"Then we should sit on the floor while we talk resourceful one."

Toriel touches my arm as we sit on the floor at the foot of my bed, where Robin placed the machine and the Dimensional Box yesterday. "Good. I'll get a text when you've finished this so don't worry. You can still talk guys. I'll call if anything happens. Bye Pauline."

"Bye Robin. Thanks."

"Yes, thank you very much." Toriel adds on, and I hang up. As I put the phone down, I hear some... plonking noises... from the Dimensional Box. I open it and feel two containers: a cooler with the Nice Creams and one with the wrappers. "I will be quiet for a little bit, so you may take your time and accustom yourself to the task at hand."

"Okay."
I place a couple Nice Creams into their wrappers and insert them into the machine in the orientation Robin specified, closing the lid and pressing the button. After a few seconds of quiet whirring, and some heat emitting off it, there is a soft clicking noise as the lid opens. I touch the newly-sealed ends of the Nice Cream wrappers gingerly, the plastic still warm. I remove them, replace them into the cooler, and continue with the next couple pairs. As I work, Toriel describes the rest of the Underground to me.

“Waterfall is rather… maze-like. The waterfalls themselves will make navigation using auditory cues rather… tedious. Although Sans or myself could accompany you.”

“Yeah… I was gonna ask you guys to come with me anyway…” I admit, removing two new Nice Creams from the cooler. “What’s it like?”

“It is rather humid and muddy, so I packed you shorts and T-shirts. You will be requiring those kinds of clothing for most of the rest of your stay in the Underground, actually, seeing as Snowdin is the coldest area.”

Toriel reaches across my lap, and I hear a rustling sound. “One of the Nice Creams was not oriented like the previous ones. I knew you could have ascertained its position eventually, but… I do not want you to suffer any delays.”

“It’s okay Robin knows I might take a while.”

“Yes I remember, my child. It is just that, Sans wanted to talk to us after you had completed your work for the day.”

“Why?”

“About your talk with Papyrus. But he wanted to tell you the details himself. He notified me first so you could… mentally prepare yourself.”

“Okay.”

I check the Nice Creams’ cooler and count that I have finished about a third of them already.

“What did he say?”

“Well,” Toriel begins slowly, “in essence he said that your talk would be visible to everyone, but that the only ones present would be you, Papyrus, and Grillby. The cameras would be configured ahead of time and controlled remotely.”

She laughs a little. “Apparently he asked mettaton to facilitate your talk, but he… was rather indignant about it.”

“Why?”

Toriel can’t stop herself from laughing as she says it: “In Sans’ own words, ‘I’d say it but I’d sound weird. Safe to say it was dramatic.’ Essentially Mettaton wanted you two to have some semblance of privacy—“

“But this is gonna be filmed…”

“Yes, Mettaton was completely aware of that, according to Sans. He said something to the effect that he assumed you would feel uncomfortable if he facilitated the discussion since you have never met him. After all, he wanted you to learn what he sounded like, and he needs time to, adjust, his broadcasting practices.”
“I’ve heard his voice before. Online… on the Undernet… underline? And like, Laura said he’s on TV.”

“Yes, he is a… TV show host. And news reporter. And actor.”

[I never thought Toriel could be so happy about Mettaton…]

{Why?}

“He’s very expressive. I think you will, find him, very open-minded, if nothing else, when you two at last have the chance to talk under more positive circumstances.”

“Nice. Sounds good.”

As I reply, I close the Dimensional Box, laying my hands on its lid like Robin taught me. I lift my hands from its surface as it begins to vibrate slightly. When the vibration stops, I lay my hands on the lid again, speaking Robin’s name loudly and clearly. After more vibrations, the box finally falls silent. It only takes a few seconds for a clang to sound from the inside, and for the lid to pop open a second time.

“Toriel? How does the Dimensional Box know where Robin is?”

“To be honest,” Toriel muses, “I do not know. I… never had a opportunity to study it. I, merely applied variants of the magic operating it to storage within my own home. Why do you ask?”

“’Cause it’s a machine using magic. And Dewey made it sound like only monsters could use magic…”

“Oh. Sans told me of your, quality time—“

She chuckles a bit, “—with Dewey. He has not changed at all…”

She suddenly sounds wistful. “Of course his occupation as librarian would place him in a very favorable position for informing you of how the Underground operates. He was rather persistent regarding this matter, when I last spoke to him. Although his task was to inform the rest of monsterkind instead… although those two tasks are, essentially identical.”

“When was that?”

“It was… oh I do not know how to explain… not too long ago. Maybe… 199X…”

“Two years ago?”

“Yes… more or less…”

She takes it back. “Well… not human years. More… Underyears…”

“Whaa?”

“Underyears. They are… an alternative form of timekeeping around here, primarily used by…”

[Daaaammn she does nooooot look happy at all…?]

{Why?}

[You’ll see… hear…]
“—by Asgore’s closest followers.”

{Yeah. I hear it…}

“it is based on the fact that it takes seven souls to break the barrier. It is… seven periods of seven weeks of seven days to an Underyear. 343 surface days.”

“But you told me I fell down in September of 201X…”

“Well… most monsters use the human year since it is much more… compatible… with the human media we are given via the waterfall flowing into the dumpster. September of this year… 2015… is still apart of 201X.”

“When did 201X start?”

Toriel does not answer.

“Toriel?”

She still does not answer.

[*Sigh…*]

{Chara…?}

[*Sigh…*]

Toriel takes a Nice Cream from my hand, and I hear the machine opening soon after. “You are around halfway done now. I can apply the heat to these three Nice Creams, while you ask Robin how many more shipments you will wrap, and when he will pay you. Because afterward, Sans will be coming.”

“Okay.”

I reach over, bumping the Gaster Blaster’s side as I feel along the floor for my phone, only for my phone to… push against my fingertips…

Toriel laughs in delight, ‘Oh yes!” she exclaims softly. “The Gaster Blaster is semi-conscious. It is like Sans’ second pair of eyes. So he could see your phone.”

After a short, confused pause, I laugh as well, but much harder. “Whaaaat?”

“how else would the Gaster Blaster know the location of your phone?”

“Yeah… truuue… I’ll text Robin now then.”

… “Pauline, this is the last shipment. I will call Sans—“

“I can just text him.”

“But I do not wish to disturb you. You can do this last batch independently. I have helped too much already.”

“Ehh it’s okay… I… I’m happy you came over…”

“You are most welcome resourceful one. I will go out and call Sans then.”
Toriel stands and pads toward the door, which soon shuts behind her. I hear her voice a little faintly in the hall.

[So if Sans can see stuff through that…]

{Yeah…?}

[Shit Sans can see me!]

{So…?}

Chara doesn’t answer. [Just… I don’t know how he’d react to seeing me appearing out of nowhere all the time when you’re supposed to be alone…]

I find Robin’s name in my contacts and text him, asking about my pay. After only a couple seconds of silence, the phone vibrates, alerting me to a notification. I touch my finger to the upper half of the lock screen, where the voiceover says: “Messages: Robin. I’ll send you twenty gold per Nice Cream. So 400 gold in total today. 5:45 P.M.”

I reply with a thank you before answering Chara. {But… he… sleeps… a lot…}

[Yeah, truuue… so we should be fine. And if he does… let’s just say this isn’t as bad as when he found out about the resets…]

After a few more seconds, Toriel knocks on the door a couple times before entering. “I have notified Sans of your progress. He says he will arrive shortly.”

“Okay. I just texted Robin. He’ll pay me 400 gold today. He’ll probably send it—“

A knock on the door. “Knock knock. Who’s there?”

“{[Fuuuck!]}”

“I… did not expect this…” Toriel… sounds like she’s reacted the exact same way… just without the swearing…

“It’s open… I think…” I call out.

The door swinging open… and the smell of bacon wafting into the room. “Yeh. It was. Hey kid. Hey Tori.”

“Oh hello Sans!” Toriel stands up, walking toward his voice. “Pauline was just about finished—“

“Yeh I know. On the way outa Grillby’s Robin stopped me to give me updates about you. That and to lighten your load by tellin’ me to bring some Nice Creams over.”

“Yeees!”

“Yeh I knew you’d be happy.”

The slap of slippers against the floor as Sans sits next to Toriel, farthest away from me. “I’ll keep this short, ’cause after this I was thinkin’ we could invite the others over here.”

“Sure!”

“’Kay. So. I’m sure Tori told ya about Mettaton wanting to respect your privacy and not freak you
out…”

“Yeah…”

“So, he was wondering when you wanted to do this. He’s in no hurry. And neither is Paps. He… actually wanted to take a few days to… sort things out… for real this thime. And not just the stuff in our house.”

“Okay.”

“He’s, taking this pretty seriously.”

Sans’ voice becomes firm… but not… Gaster Blasters incoming… firm. “And trust me: I’ve seen him serious. And this is different. He’s… been looking all over the Undernet for… for things.”

“For what?”

“I’m lettin’ him take care of that himself. I won’t know what he has planned until you do.”

“Huh.”

“How much longer will Papyrus need to prepare himself?” Toriel asks.”

“Ehh… maybe until… the end of this week… so… four? Five? Days? From today. I, we, wanted to know when in the day you wanted to do this.”

“The… morning… morning-ish…? I could get myself to wake up early for this…”

“How early? Paps is… an early bird.”

“Uh… maybe noon?”

“I can get you there quick so you can get it over with.”

“But it is merely…” Toriel calculates. “Maybe a few hundred feet… at most? From the entrance of the Snowed Inn to Grillby’s? Pauline has walked that route before—“

Sans laughs. “Yeah… she has. But not with half the Underground tryin’ to catch a glimpse of ‘er. And or Mettaton. Let alone on the same day…”

[Truuuuue…]

“Oh yes… I see. I suppose it is necessary then for you accompany her—“

“Wait.” I interrupt. “Toriel, you’re right. That I know this route I mean. I… I can clear a path for myself, if need be.”

The Gaster Blaster Suddenly grazes my leg so it rests in my lap, between my hands. I cup it, the edges of my hands above the spikes jutting out of its temples. “Like, Sans can shadow me while I hold this. He can follow at a distance… or wait on me or something…”

“Yeh.” Sans sounds confident. “I like that idea. ‘Cause, lots of monsters are reaaaally confused about how you can get around by yourself. I can just have Mettaton tell everyone to not talk so you won’t get overwhelmed.”

“Yeah…”
Good thing he thought of that… ‘cause if you get freaked out I get freaked out…

{Yeah…}

“Thanks Sans.”

“No problem. Mettaton may be the most—“

He abruptly stops, only to restart again. “The most well-known monster in the entire Underground, even more than Asgore. ‘Cause yeah… he’s our YouTube star…”

“Nice.”

“Yeah. So… you want me to tell Paps you two’ll meet five days from today?”

“Sure.”

“Okay. Thanks for that. Now I’ll text the others. ‘Cause… I found something we could all do together tonight.”

He laughs… and continues laughing… “Oh man.”

He can’t stop laughing. “I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of it, but it’s pretty damn popular on YouTube. We could learn about human culture. And you can learn why Laura was so horrified by Robin saying him and her and Amy were profiting off your being bodied!”

“Whyyyyy???”

“Why what?”

“Why was she offended?”

“Well… ‘cause Robin was talkin’ to her right before we came over. And… he saw I watched Cards Against Humanity on my computer at my place--”

“[[Oooooh noooo…]]”

“And he made the card combination ‘Step 1: going around punching people. Step 2: a murder most foul. Step 3: profit!’ go together.”

“[[Oooooh noooo…]]”

“Oh noo…” Toriel gasps. “However… Robin did create a… logical response… so…”

She laughs, somewhat aghast. “I am unsure of whether to laugh or reprimand him for his behavior…”

“Yeah… it’s pretty good…”
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

FYI, the Cards Against Humanity scenario at the beginning is practically the same as my real life experiences playing the game, choosing random cards each round included...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

17

… “Damn it Robin how the hell do you keep getting all the good cards?!”

“How is this card good? We don’t even have cancer down here…”

“[[Ugh…]]”

“I threw it away. I was saving the ‘cheating in the special Olympics’ card for you, but I didn’t want to waste it since this card was asking about why you couldn’t complete your homework.”

“But still! We’ve gone over twenty rounds and I’ve only won… like… one point! And seriously that’s, like, too real…”

“What!? You and Sans said this is supposed to be offensive!”

“That’s not my point!”

“I,” Amy hesitantly replies, “have to agree with Robin on this one. After all, the ‘cancer’ card is only good when played against you…”

“Son of a bitch!”

“Unfortunately most of these are… close to useless… if played against us.” Laura half laughs, half sighs, as she brushes my hand while refilling her hand back up to seven cards. “And come on Robin knew you’d pick it. And this game’s about offending everyone and inevitably playing to the czar so why are you even mad?”

Now, it’s my turn to sigh. “Fine. I suppose. It’s just that… it’s really bad but really good… but really unfair now…”

“I guess.” Robin concedes.

‘I’m the czar now,’ Grillby speaks up, pausing for a fraction of a second before reading his card: ‘How am I maintaining my relationship status? And Pauline, FYI I am single.’

“Uh… okay.” I choose a random card from my hand, hoping it’s relevant this time…

“Hey hey as much I like hearing you guys rage at the cards,” Sans’ voice sounds a little louder than earlier, like he’s turned his head toward me, “but we should probably finish up, like, when
someone reaches six points. ‘Cause yeah… the meeting with Paps is tomorrow…”

“Okay…”

“And if you really wanna continue the game longer we can keep track of everyone’s hands and put everything on your table. ‘Cause you, like, never use it…”

“[{Truuuue…}]”

“And besides: I have to make sure paps doesn’t, overdo it.”

“Overdo what?”

“Hey Laura that’s what I was gonna ask…”

“We’re all worried about him. Snowdin’s a lot less, exciting nd interesting, without him around. I’m just curious about what’s been going on with him. Is he at least back at home?”

“No… he’s been askin’ me to send him stuff through the Dimensional Box. Clothes. Books. Dry noodles—“

“Druy noodles?” I repeat.

“For spaghetti.” Sans clarifies.

“Oh yeah… ‘cause like, that’s his thing…”

[YOOOOU IDIIIIIOT!]

[I forgot--]

[How could you have forgotten the fucking frozen spaghetti!? And you not eating it triggering him?]

{Fine, fine…}

‘The cards are in,’ Grillby announces. ‘I’ve already shuffled them Pauline.’

“Okay.”

He begins, ‘How am I maintaining my relationship status? Getting married, having a few kids, buying some stuff–’


The pause continues for a little while longer before he finishes, his voice much quieter than before, ‘--retiring to Florida, and dying.’

Everyone laughs… and cringes… simultaneously… “Wow…” I manage to say before breaking down incoherently.

“Whaat?” Laura and Amy’s voices are… muffled…

[They’ve, like, both covered their mouthes in shock… and they’re trying to suppress laughing.’

{I guessed as much… and they’re not doing a very good job.}
“Oh man. I feel so bad for you.” Sans pats my leg as he speaks. “Just... wow... wow...”

“Yeah... this is pretty true...” I can’t help but admit.

‘The second response is,’ Grillby continues, ‘a...

He trails off. ‘A constant need for validation. Oh...’

Cue groaning from everyone, including Chara...

‘The third response is, guys who don’t call.’

Someone clapping.

[That’s a thing...]

{What is...?}

[Grillby clapping.]

{Oh...}

‘I’m, impressed, and very, very sad that this is even here.’

“Same.” Robin agrees.

‘The fourth response is, being a motherfucking sorcerer.’

“Eh!” Sans and I affirm.

‘I, can’t say I agree with this. But, I can’t say I disagree either. This one... no... the first one wins.’

“Which one?” I ask.

‘Marrying? Retiring to Florida?’ he partially repeats. ‘Who’s was it?’

An awkward silence.

Collective groaning from everyone.

‘Pauline?’

Tangible disbelief from Amy. “I... I can’t believe...”

“Damn it the sorcerer lost?” Robin also sounds disbelieving. “But... this is what we are as a people —I mean as a group Grillby! How could you! You didn’t even read the last card! How could the all you can eat shrimp for $499 lose! You own--”

‘Because,’ Grillby attempts to calmly justify Robin’s loss, ‘I am a monster, who technically only has to worry about a couple of these things. Or even if I have to worry about all of them, it’s not the same. You should at least understand that.’

“Yeah... true.” I agree.

“Yeh. Same.” Sans copies me. “But Grillbs? One more and we’re done for the night okay?”
“But you said—“ I begin to protest.

“Yeh I know. But I just realized it’s almost eleven. At least if you’re gonna get to Grillby’s on time, you have to be ready by 11:40 tomorrow morning. And I’m accounting for all the YouTube videos you’ll watch after we all leave in your… sleeping time.”

“[(Truuue…)]”

Everyone else agrees…

“Okay I’m the czar. What’s my card?”

“It’s,” Amy reads aloud, “blank: that is how I want to die… wow… morbidly relevant much?”

“Yeah…”

More collective groaning.

… “Chara get your own blanket!”

“I did! I just can’t sleep!”

“Stop moving!”

“I can’t! I’m… I’m scared.”

“Yeah… me too…”

“But you know what?”

“What?”

“Before we leave the Snowed Inn, save.”

“No.”

“Do it, in case Papyrus reacts violently. I… I don’t know if we can trust his reaction to be… peaceful… or not… manhandling.”

“Truuue…”

“And besides: you have to stay determined. I told you that back at Home.”

“The Ruins?”

“Yeah. The Ruins used to be called Home. ‘Cause that’s where the monsters lived before moving to New Home.”

“Wait you can’t be serious. It really—“

“Yes it is. Asgore’s reaaaally bad at names.” Chara answers, before scooting to the edge of the bed.

… “Come on I know you’re dressed but just too lazy to get off the bed.”

“Saaaans…” I groan.

“Looks like we don’t have a choice!”
[That Shulk impression tho--ahhhh!]

Someone’s hands on my shoulders… and the Gaster Blaster jumping into my hand before falling back down to my side soon after. “[[Fuuuck!!]]”

“Hey I wanted to tell ya about my shortcuts in a more tasteful and controlled environment but…”

“Really? So you can…?” I begin to ask.

“Yeh.”

“So you technically never have to walk?”

“Yeh. But I’m… too lazy to do this most of the time.”

“But you did it just now…”

“Yeh but this is different. Come on, stop stalling. The sooner you leave, the sooner you can get this over with… and the more time we have to think of a new plan if things go to shit.”

“Fine…”

I exit my room, walk across the lobby, and out into the cold, thankful Toriel replaced my snow clothes. After a couple steps, Sans lets go of my arm, and I hold the Gaster Blaster in front of me in both hands as Chara controls my body. It pulses with magical energy, squirming while I squeeze it between my palms, as if trying to… find a comfortable position to sit in…

[…]

{Chara?}

[Nothing… just… is it weird to mention that the Gaster Blaster doesn’t look so scary when it’s this small now?]

{It still is…}

After about a minute more of walking, I turn left and reach out my hand, about to open the door to Grillby’s, only for someone to open it for me. ‘Hello,’ Grillby whispers to me.

“Hey. Thanks for this.”

“No problem. Mettaton is, pretty far away. At the library actually, watching the livestream. Sans will be right outside if you need him.’

A pressure on the Gaster Blaster’s top, and warmth brushing my fingers. ‘Assuming that this is, insufficient.’

“Okay.”

‘I set up a table closest to the door. But sit wherever you like.’

“Okay.”

I follow Grillby’s instructions, taking the first chair I come across. After only a few seconds of waiting, the door opens a second time, and I hear the thud of heavy boots on the floor.
Papyrus.

The chair across from me scrapes outward, Papyrus presumably sitting down.

We sit there for a few tense seconds.

I don’t know what to say. I don’t’ want to mess up. I’m afraid… I’m afraid if I have the first word, I’ll just keep talking, and won’t stop, and Monadodamn it if I’m civil and Sans asking me to be civil…

“Human?”

[Papyrus being so quiet though…?]

{Yeah…}

“Yeah?” I reply.

[Just ‘yeah?’ Even I know you could have at least said ‘yes…’]

“May I?” is his tentative reply.

“May I… what?”

“May I say something?”

[… Whoa.]

{Yeah… this is… different.}

“Uh, sure.”

Papyrus… clears his throat… somehow… and I try not to become distracted by it. He begins to speak, so softly I have to lean forward by placing my elbows on the table.

“I… I know humans customarily greet one another with a handshake… or a hug, but… we both know that is not, appropriate.”

I softly sigh. “Mmm-hmmm.”

“And I, I am aware that my mere presence here is…”

Papyrus hesitates. “Uncomfortable. Unbearable, even.”

[He never stumbles over his words like this. Last time didn’t count. This is real.]

I sit silently, waiting for him to continue.

“I… I cannot begin to express my… my regret… at how I have acted. My regret, however, is not for all the reasons you may assume. I, of course, have come to my senses about my failure… my failure to truly take your disability into account.”

More patient silence. I readjust my position in the chair but continue to lean toward him.

“I failed to listen to you, and Sans.”

He laughs nervously, and I can’t even begin to describe it, because it’s not his typical gneh heh
“To think: I continually blamed Sans laziness for everything, when, in fact, I had failed to pay attention to what he did and said, on the way over here, everything he did to try to make your journey here… accessible.”

Papyrus says “accessible” as if he has just said it for the first time.

[That’s good. Paps knows the buzzwords…]

I put my puzzles and my own pride above all else. Even… even his approval, in the end. All I wanted was… was to be popular. To be prodigious. To be a member of the Royal Guard.”

I don’t know what to say, but I manage to respond instead of continuing to sit there: “I… I remember that. You said that here, before the fight.”

I continue listening.

[He’s right though.]

{Yeah. But why did he say he regrets what he did but not for the reasons I might think?}

“As much as these failings have hurt you, however,” Papyrus’ voice raises slightly in volume, so I lean away from him slightly, “I cannot necessarily say all of it was my fault.”

He pauses for a fraction of a second, then elaborates, “I saw you leave the library that day. I… I knew you must have learned about us. And about…”

He takes a breath. “And about… what most monsters think of humans.”

“You mean the monster kids’ school reports?”

“Yes. Specifically… that about the advantages monsters possess when compared to humans.”

“Oh…”

“I have gone back there, and read those books for myself, in the time since we last… met. And I… I think I… I have come to understand something…”

“What?”

“That… that I have been raised to act the way I do.”

“Yeah. Dewey told me…”

He stops, a bony hand pressing against one of mine from across the table. “You were right, in a way: Asgore wanted to recruit loyal monsters for the Royal Guard, those who would not hesitate to… to kill humans with no hesitation.”

“Yeh I knew that…”

“But that’s not all. He also wanted to hire monsters who… saw humans as… less than human.”

“Whaaat?” I ask in a hushed voice.

[I’m intrigued…]
“Me too… and I’m not sure what to think about that...”

“I know you know what I mean.”

Papyrus’ voice cracks.

[Whoa.]

{Yeah. What does he…?}

“I treated you like an object.”

[Wait. Papyrus--]

{Oh my God…}

As Papyrus begins to sob, both his hands press on top of mine, while I still hold the Gaster Blaster. “I treated you like a… a thing… to be bought and sold. To be used however I pleased. Not a… not a conscious being. That was wrong of me. That was very wrong of me!”

A few seconds of crying. I am unsure of what to do, so I continue letting him cup my hands in his.

“If there was anything…”

Hiccupping which should be impossible…

[Whoa… his face though…]

{What!?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

Papyrus sniffs… somehow… “If there was one thing I was taught growing up, it was that humans and monsters must be treated with respect, here or on the surface. That their… dignity… as conscious, independent beings, must be upheld. At all costs.”

{Whoa…! This sounds like something they’d say at my school though…!}

[Huh. Interesting. What was it like?]

{It’s… difficult to explain. But… let’s just say this stuff is… was… their thing.}

[Oh!]

“I… I failed you. I’m… I’m sorry. I, I know you probably can’t forgive me but… if there is anything you wish to say to me, now is the time. I said such terrible things to you. It is only fair you do the same. I said my then-honest opinion of you. If you wish to do so to me, do it now.”

I compose my thoughts for a few seconds.

{Don’t swear. Don’t swear… just don’t do it… Sans said to be civil… I have to…}

[Stay determined. Everything is going to be all right.]

The most soothing voice Chara has ever used.

I slowly reply: “Papyrus?”
“Yes?”

I sigh. “I… I can’t say I’m not angry at you. I… I still am. I still can’t believe you’d treat me like that, just for your own personal gain. Or for the sake of someone so… terrible… as Asgore… which seemed, still seems, the same to me…”

I pause for a moment, then continue, “And to be honest, if it weren’t for Sans controlling it, I would have found you and fought you with the Gaster Blaster, and not given a shit whether you lived or died. As long as I could… prove I could do things on my own. As long as I could prove that being blind didn’t make me weak. I’d do it.”

I collect my thoughts again. “But what you’re saying about individual dignity, I get that. If there was one thing I learned from my time in college, it was that they respected individuals. The president said professors taught students by, by ‘educating the whole person.’ They call it the three Cs: competence, compassion, and conscience. All their classes helped with one of those. Hell even their engineering program talked about taking compassion into account when designing things.”

“Oh.” Some energy returns to Papyrus’ voice. “That, makes sense.”

“Like… I can’t say I’m much better than you. If it weren’t for Sans I wouldn’t have thought of coming to talk to you. It took everything I had to even listen to Sans when he said you wanted to talk instead of driving him away and cussing him out and calling you really really horrible things…”

Papyrus asks, more of his usual passion returning to his voice, “why did you take it then!? If Sans had not… stepped in… I do not think I would have done this either.”

I respond with no hesitation. “‘Cause, I thought you realized how fucking horrible you were for treating me like that and I wanted to hear you say you were wrong and I was right and that your king was stupid for hiring you for the Royal Guard—“

[You swore…?]

[Shut up!]

“I know.”

Papyrus’ voice softens again, calm, but somewhat louder. He’s leaned in closer to me. “I realized this, after reflecting on how we talked to one another, up until, I hurt you.”

I wait some more.

“And, I suppose, we are not so different after all, in some ways. We are not so different in ways that matter. But not all of them.”

“Ohay.”

“I am unsure of how aware you are of this, but you seem… tired… right now. It pains me to see how much pain and suffering I have caused you, on top of what you must feel constantly, considering you have fallen into a wholely new place.”

“Yeah…”

[He’s not completely right, isn’t he?]
“I will keep this brief then: we can both agree that we disapprove of Asgore’s policies. Yet I cannot help but acknowledge that my family upbringing has failed to completely trump the influence society has had on me, regarding humans.”

“Yeah.”

“You also see the effects monsterkind has had on me. And you are justifiably angered by them.”

“Yeah. Definitely.”

A short pause.

Uncertainty in Papyrus’ next few words. “I kno we cannot change monsterkind overnight, but…”

Papyrus pauses, his voice having regained most of its usual volume when he next speaks. “But there is something we can do. I propose that you, as well as our finest experts in as many disciplines as possible, human or monster-made, gather to try to find a nonviolent method to break the barrier. Surely, you must know something! You have been to college!”

“Uh… not for that long… and you guys have the Undernet, so why ask me?”

“Because you are the only human reference we have.” He decisively states, his chair scraping against the floor as he stands. “As intelligent as us monsters are, we are still, severely lacking, in many areas regarding humans. And, seeing as you are amongst the minority of humans, you must have extensive knowledge of how humans think society should function. Maybe that knowledge is the key to undoing the magic sealing us underground. After all, humans did it. They had their motives. And motives and emotions power magic. You know this!”

“Yeah that’s true!” I’m a little more than surprised by Papyrus’ sudden outburst and his idea. “I don’t know if I could go that far, but…”

“Nonsense!”

I gasp in surprise. “Oh—“

“I am sorry.” Papyrus stops shouting… proceeding to talk at slightly less than his usual volume for the moment. “I am just… excited. We have never met a live human to examine the effects of monster magic on who was able to help us. That had been the one thing that had stopped Dr. Alphys and—“

Papyrus stops again. [What is it this time?]

[…] I’d say you know but… you don’t.]

{But what is it!? Why has everyone been, like, stopping what they’re saying in the middle of it all of a sudden?]

[I’ll help you find out. I promise. You’ll be seeing Dr. Alphys soon. She can tell you everything. Sans and Papyrus will make sure she does.]

{Okay…??}

[I mean it.]
“Uh… sounds good,” I respond, trying to bridge the awkward silence.

“Okay then!” Papyrus lets go of my hands, his boots thudding against the floor as he walks to my side of the table. I stand to face him.

He touches one of my hands with one of his, which breaks contact with the Gaster Blaster. He does the same to my other hand, and then I hear the clunk of the Gaster Blaster being set on the table. I am unafraid of its absence.

“Human—oh! I am sorry! I should not, I cannot, call you that anymore. Pauline?”

“Yeah?”

Some scuffling of boots on the floor.

Papyrus manipulating our hands so our palms press together. I notice that his hands are truly level with mine now, seeing as our wrists also press together, at my shoulder height, so our hands partially cover my—

Our, faces.

Papyrus has knelt down--

No.

He’s not kneeling.

He’s sat down on the floor.

Papyrus has sat down on the floor in public, live in front of everyone, just to be eye to eye with me.

When he next speaks, his voice resonates through my body, not just because of his closeness, but because I sense magic flowing into me from his palms, from his entire being. His voice sounds deeper than normal, to the point that He sounds completely different: intelligent, dignified, and yet, somehow… eager. All at once.

“I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster, second-in-command of the Royal Guard, humbly ask you to accept my offer, on behalf of the Dreemmur royal family, the Inertia Society of Royal Scientists, and all monsterkind.”

{…}

[How the fuck can we top that?]

{… I know! Just… what the fuck!?!}

Chara seems… just a little more than confused now. [No way. He didn’t just--]

Before I can verbalize my confused mental reaction, I reply “Okay.”

As I finish speaking, Papyrus presses his palms against mine, and in the process, my palms press against his as well. After a few moments, he readjusts one of my hands so I am holding onto his wrist. I feel his weight shift as he rises to his full height, and he places the Gaster Blaster in my free hand. “We mustn’t delay! We must rush to see Dr. Alphys as soon as possible!” he shouts, his voice still… deep… and smart… and dignified-like…
As we walk out the door, I hear two sounds.

First, I hear Grillby’s unrestrained laugh of pure joy.

The second is… someone’s voice calling out over dozens of shouts, if you could call all of the noises the monsters were making shouts.

“Don’t any of you know the meaning of decency!? Let them through! I specifically forbade cameras here for God’s sake! I am the reporter here. Oh Pauline darling, I am soooo sorry for all this. This way to the River Person please. I’m right here, don’t you worry. If you and Papy ever get separated, follow my voice. And don’t be afraid to break out that Gaster Blaster to clear yourself a path through these oh so rude spectators…”

Chapter End Notes

You officially have an out to determining which college I attend now...

No shame. It's a good school. Same goes for my high school, although I've yet to give you all an out to figuring out which one I attended yet...

The professors are awesome, so awesome that they've supported me whenever I've found a reason to write about video games in their classes. I've done so every quarter so far since my freshman year started. Even now, in October 2017, it's still true.

Actually, it started in my senior year of high school, but still...

This fanfic has allowed me to apply the communications, psychology, sociology, philosophy, statistics, and physiology concepts I've learned to a... somewhat realistic and definitely relevant... subject in my life. I'm not even sure of how to begin articulating how grateful I am for that.

Actions speak louder than words, I suppose.

What's even better is that what you've read is only the beginning.

Making my high school and college experiences plot-relevant is only fair.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

A somewhat filler chapter... meaning a chapter that's not nearly as immediately lore or emotionally-heavy as the chapters before it.

It's about time we had one of these...

Also, let the memes, references, and Xenoblade spoilers formally begin!

18

"Papyrus!"

It only takes a few seconds for Papyrus and I to become separated. I can't even begin describing how overwhelmingly loud, and confining it feels. I already hate regular, human crowds, where basically everyone is taller than me, their bodies restricting my auditory range so I must walk much closer to an object to avoid it.

Monster crowds are... much worse...

{Nope nope nope nope nope nope!}

"Actually," the voice calls out again, "let's go to your house Papy. It's much closer. It's near where you two fought--"

A sudden swell in noise, so I can't hear the rest. I shout "Sure!" back at them anyway.

[Thank Alvis we can still hear him...]

{Him?}

[Yeah he's a he.]

{Okay.}

"Oh for God's sake Aaron she can't see you flexing knock it off!"

{Heh?}

[Don't ask...]

"Human! Please! Use the Gaster Blaster to clear a way toward us! Do not worry. I am confident my brother found a way to adjust its firing patterns to account for you navigating through crowds."

I grasp the Gaster Blaster in one hand as if balancing a tray, its rounded shape obviously changing it slightly. My right palm presses against the magne ovale in place of the usual tray's flat surface, fingers curved against their mandible. My thumb supports the occipital bone, the bone at the back of the head. I hold my other arm up in front of my face, the edge of my palm facing outward to protect myself from eye level obstacles. Despite Chara’s control over my body making walking
independently faster and less hazardous, I remember this technique saving me from hitting poles in high school. Unlike stopping using my cane, this habit will not be given up so easily.

I sweep my arm in front of me, in a similar arc to the arc created when using my cane, except I am clearing an approximately shoulder width space, from my shoulders down. When I used my cane, my hand and wrist would be at waist height and therefore, would be scanning that area.

The whine of the Gaster Blaster has just begun ringing out before I sense monsters moving around me. The space in front of me feels properly cold, rather than stiflingly hot from bodies pressing up against me. I walk faster, knowing I can follow Papyrus and... the other guy—the other monster, more freely.

[Uh... it's good we're wearing snow shoes 'cause the snow's all... melty and gross now...]

{Why?}

[The Gaster Blaster. It’s not as bad as Sans’ Gaster Blaster but still it did a number on the ground. We really need to come up with a name for them--]

{Chaaaraaa!}

[I’m serious the Gaster Blaster is basically Sans with only a head it’s only fair--]

{Chaaaraaa!}

[We’ll talk about this later. Just aim it again. A few more rounds of this and you'll catch up with Paps!]

{Okay.}

After another cycle of whining and rumbling from the Gaster Blaster, I now recognize that we're on the sidewalk again. After a few more feet, the... other monster... with Papyrus calls out, "When you reach the end of the sidewalk keep walking toward us. You will walk across the space in the center of town where you and Papy had your fight. Then you will feel more compacted snow and stone. That is a residential sidewalk."

"Okay."

After one more use of the Gaster Blaster, I reach the new sidewalk, Papyrus shouting, "This way! We are both standing in front of our house, Sans' and mine."

"Okay!" I confirm.

It only takes a few dozen more feet to reach Papyrus... or rather it takes a few dozen more feet for me to turn off the main sidewalk and walk straight into Papyrus...

[That's, not normal...]

{Nope. People usually get the fuck out of the way but I don't have the stick of doom anymore so--}

[... Whaaat?]

{A girl in sixth grade named my cane the stick of doom... and it stuck...}

[Oh... I like it.]
"Take my hand human." Papyrus gentely removes the Gaster Blaster from my hand, positioning my fingers on his wrist as we walk toward his house. "The mailboxes are to our right. And the path leading behind our house is to our left. You must walk up two steps to reach the front door."

"Papy? I am very glad you are describing all this, I really am, but we may need to save the tour of the outside for another time. The crowd's catching up with--oh Sunderplane! Ooooh heeeeeeell nooo!"

{Whaaat?!}

[It's a long story...]

[As always...]

[Seriously what Sunderplane did was... weird.]

[...]

Papyrus leads me up the stairs, and I hear the click of the front door being opened. We walk inside just as some voices... grunts... clicks... begin sounding behind us, louder and louder.

"Sans?" my newest monster sighted guide calls out. "A little help here?"

"Sure."

Only when I hear the quiet slapping of slippers on carpet and feel a bony hand uncurling my fingers from around Papyrus' wrist do I realize Sans is near by. He walks past me and out the door onto the porch.

The voices and noises quiet down all at once. It only takes a second for the footsteps... beating of wings... other sounds... to recede away from us.

The thunk of the door as it finally shuts, and the four of us stand... somewhere... in the house.

"Well kid? You're here now. Glad to have you."

"Uh, should I take my shoes off? 'Cause like, at a lot of my friends' houses... and my cousins' houses... we do that..."

"Ehh."

A verbal shrug from Sans. "Take 'em off. Just put 'em somewhere--"

"Nonsense!" Papyrus interrupts. "You ask her to take her shoes off while the living room is still--"

"I just teleported to her room. I brought her stuff here and like, just set it down. I woulda cleaned up but I was watching you guys come over here through the front window. And besides: I wanted more direct control over the Gaster Blaster from here."

A heavy pause. "I... I am sorry for yelling at you like this Sans. Just... I am used to..."

Papyrus doesn't finish his sentence.

[Whoa Paps looking hella sad though...?]

[Yeah... he sounds really sorry.]
"Ehh. Bro, you're not wrong. I still haven't cleaned up upstairs. We can go do that, while Pauline gets to know Mettaton."

"Yes. I agree. Pauline, the sofa's up against the right wall, about... ten feet, from you, diagonally. Mettaton will be sitting to the right of you. I will accompany Sans to make sure he actually puts effort into cleaning up."

"Okay that works."

When I sit down, it only takes me a moment to realize that the sofa feels, very sunken, under me.

"It's a pleasure to meet you darling."

{Heh?}

[Why you confused?]

"Hi."

[Seriously, like, why you confused?]

A cold... thing on my folded hands. I flinch back, only for... the thing... to envelop them.

Someone... Mettaton... is touching my hands.

Mettaton reorienting my palms so they press against... his metal palms... like what Papyrus and I did earlier. Afterward, we engage in a traditional handshake. I can't help but be fixated on his hands. His... metal... hands...

A long, dramatic sigh. "It has been a long time since I have performed that handshake."

"That palm thing?"

"Yes, precisely. It has been... oh, twenty years? Since I've performed the Inertia Society handshake, and the first time I have performed it in this new body."

"New body?" I repeat.

Metal clanging on metal. "[[Fuuuck!]]"

"Oh how could I forget? I, I should have made time to meet you before today. Well, in retrospect, no one is nonplused by me being a robot so--"

"Wait whaat!?"

"Oh dear."

More than a little concern from Mettaton. "Well to be fair I used to be a super fighting robot; that was my intended purpose, but--come on darling I know you know what I just namedropped."

{I was laughing?}

[You weren't but... your face, kinda, gave it away... and the only reason I know this is a reference is because of your memories...]

{...}
"Uh… okay. I mean, people... humans... in my world, have been kiiiinda, joking? About what would happen once we had AI but--"

"Don't get me started on your conceptions of robotics." Mettaton huffs. "I've read plenty on the subject. At least, what little I can download without hacking. Hard AI, soft AI, tests for consciousness, programming morality? Bah! Better that any, artificial," he scoffs at the word, "intelligence, learn for itself what is right and wrong. And if humans really can't stand the thought of AIs making mistakes, they should not have made advancements in this field of study to begin with. If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen, as they say."

"Yeah, truuue. So, you're a robot?" I ask.

{I know it's a stupid question but--}

[Actually it's not.]

{He's, like, hella passionate about AI though...?}

[Yeah. I mean it's only fair since humans will perceive him as a robot--]

{Perceive?}

Mettaton calms down a little. "I am a ghost, possessing a robot body. Employing technomancy, as you humans call it. Although this body is powered by magic, rather than the methods you're used to. Mostly because it is an empty shell. After all, I would not be able to interact with my fans or even make videos if I had no physical body to interface with my cameras computer or editing software but--"

"Editing software?"

Mettaton squeezes my hands in his. "I know you must be, very confused, right now but, come now I know you know what I do for a living. I've seen your repostings of my earlier content. Everyone has. I bet, everyone's gone to look for your Undernet profile as we speak."

"So, you post videos--"

"Darling," his hands press harder against mine, and he sounds louder, so he's likely leaned in close to me, "I know what a YouTuber is. You may as well call me one."

"Wait whaaat you're a YouTuber!"

"Though that is not the job I am most well-known for, yes, I am."

Unbridled pride. "Actually, you could say I introduced the Underground to the concept of a YouTuber. Monsters have been watching it ever since its popularization, but, let's just say the younger generations have latched on to several human personalities in particular."

"Wow! Who do they watch?"

"As of late? Emile, or Chuggaaconroy, as he is known. Since Sans has reposted nearly every video he has made in the past, oh, year or so?"

"What?"

[Same. That'd be, like, several dozen hours of footage. And, like, it's been only... a couple weeks?]
"Of course! Sans hasn't told you has he? He's been reposting every video Emile has posted over the past year or so. Ever since... June of last year, in human years. I was actually in the process of uploading a video explaining what they were this morning. I left my computer on at home to let it work on uploading while I came here but..."

Another dramatic sigh. "I would not be surprised in the slightest to discover that you and Papyrus broke the Undernet. And before you ask: yes this is physically possible. The Undernet, as active as it is, is quite small on human standards."

"I wasn't gonna doubt that but like, what other YouTubers do you guys watch?"

"Well," Mettaton seems contemplative, "does the name Mark Fishbock ring a bell?"

"Uh..."

I rack my brain. "Maybe...? Uh..."

Chara begins to snicker uncontrollably. {What!?!}

[Nothing...]

More snickering.

{Chaaaraaa!}

"His YouTube handle is Markiplier."

"Oh..."

[Oh my God he did it!]

Chara's snickering transforms into uncontrolled laughter in an instant. [Come on I know you're thinking he sounds like Mark... don't lie to yourself. He did it on purpose!]

"I very much admire his style. So much, I adopted his voice since, well, most monsters born within the past fifteen human years have heard him at least once. And really, his voice is perfectly suited for what he does, don't you think? You'd be a much better judge of that than me."

I am unsure of how to react. "I guess...? His voice is like, really deep and loud and stuff...? So, like, people can hear him... even if he’s ranting or rambling a lot...?"

"Yes, exactly. As much as I've come to enjoy Emile, I am afraid Mark is much more recognizable. His voice is actually quite close to the voice I originally adopted, so it was only a matter of employing slight pitch adjustments for me to get it down. Monsters only sound the way they do due to magic. Every monster has a unique magical signature. And this signature gives them their voice. In general, the deeper-voiced and louder the monster, the stronger they are magically. Dewey actually did an extensive study on the matter, a while back."

"Huh."

"And in any case, most monsters born after WiFi was built into home computers recognize Mark, especially after Papyrus spoiled some of his Let's Play of—"

"Heya." Sans calls from... somewhere to our left. "Come upstairs you two. We've cleaned up."
"Okay." I call back.

We stand from the sofa... and only then do I realize how tall the sofa is supposed to feel...

"If you walk straight from where you are you will reach the stairs. There are railings--"

Mettaton stops dead. "Oh my. You two? Why is there a giant robot painting up there?" he asks.

"Oh that's not just any robot." Sans calls down. "That's the Mechonis."

"Wait whaaat!?"

I rush up the stairs, someone grabbing my shoulder as I begin walking across the second story landing. "Slow down. Yeah. I replaced the normal painting up here with one of the Mechonis. 'Cause all the others I wanted to make would be spoilers. And well, I also got some help from Alphys to 3D print it, so it's tactile--"

"Whaat!?"

Sans' and Papyrus' simultaneous laughs of delight. "Even I was surprised human. I never knew you could use CAD&CAD like that until now."

"CAD&CAD?" I repeat.

"Hey bro, remember what we agreed on? Wait till she gets to Hotland to use the old lingo. I... I'm happy I still remember it too but..."

Sans trails off, and Papyrus says "Of course. I, I am sorry Sans. I am, impatient, that is all."

"I don't blame you. Pauline, wanna check out Paps' room? I think you'll like it."

"Sure!"

"Mettaton, I, wanted to talk to you about her... future living arrangements, in my room."

"Of course Sans."

A pat on my head that's slightly too hard for comfort. "If you need anything, give us a shout darling."

"Okay."

Their footsteps walking down the hall to our left.

"Follow me then." Papyrus positions my hand on his wrist as we turn right at the top of the stairs and walk to the end of the hall. I hear the click of the door as Papyrus holds it open for me. "My bed is directly across from the door. Although, I am afraid you must settle with sitting on the floor, since it is not very comfortable for sitting on."

"Huh?"

I walk inside, walk forward a few feet, then stop, touching a... plastic surface. "Papyrus? Where's your bed?"

"That is my bed. It is shaped like the exterior of a race car. So the bed part is on the inside."
"{[Duuuuude!]"

"Gneh heh heh! Sans and I have actually discussed altering it but... if you find it cool, we can keep it the way it is. Instead of sitting there, you shall sit on the floor, and I will, bring you, objects of interest!"

"That works." I turn around so my back is against the side frame of Paps' awesome race car bed and sit down. Paps closes the door and immediately starts walking around the room, and I hear... stuff... being moved around. “How did you wanna mod the bed?” I call out to the room at large.

“Well,” Papyrus’ voice comes from somewhere to my right, “there are few truly awesome beds in gaming. And unfortunately very few human car designs have ever appealed to me. Therefore, I have decided that if I ever had the resources to alter it, I would want to sleep in an Animus—“

“Wait whaaat!?”

“Yes! I find Assassin’s Creed rather interesting. I do not object to the existence of the Assassins or the Templars. No; what I object to is how the protagonists’ ancestors are not skeletons!”

“Whaaat?”

“You humans and us skeletons look the same, do we not?”

“but but but but but... you like, you don’t have guts and stuff...” I weakly object, utterly lost.

“Nonsense. We digest food. And even sweat and cry. What has always confounded me is why humans have developed, organs and flesh... when we are proof these mechanisms are unnecessary.”

{Like, isn’t Paps, like, related to the scientists around here?}

[He is.]

{Then why the hell--}

[It never sank in. Besides that I have no idea.]

After a few seconds, I sense him kneeling in front of me. "I have some action figures here human. You may recognize some of these."

"Uh... I can't guarantee--WAIT WHAAAT THAAAAT'S SHUUUULK!"

[Huh. So thaaat's what Shulk looks like. Daaaamn the Monado is as tall as him!]

{Yep!}

"How... h-h-h-how... how did you...? I... I c-c-can't e-e-e-even..." I stutter.

"I am glad you like it. I had Alphys assist me in creating the magical blueprint. However rather than use one of her computers, I formed it with magic myself--"

"Wait whaaat!?"

"Yes! Exactly! I used magic to shape the materials conventionally used by Alphys' 3D printers because it would take less time."
"Nice!"

"But wait! There's more!"

Papyrus gently removes the Shulk amiibo--action figure from my fingers and places another in my palm. "Sans suggested this one. Undyne suggested the armor. Unfortunately it is not very practical but... in a game where the player's equipment choices show on their party members, it is only fair she would aim for aesthetics."

"okay..."

{It's--}

[He's--]

{He's... tall though...? But like, how do you know he's a he?}

[Uh... just by looking at him...? It's hard to explain. I have no idea of who this is. Like, I'd say we could just look it up on Google but... yeah...]

"Do you recognize him?" Paps asks.

"So it is a dude." I clarify.

"Yes. If I may,"

Paps sets the action figure in my left palm and holds my right hand in his own right hand. He bends my fingers back so my thumb, index, and middle fingers form a two-pronged, claw-like shape, the latter two fingers together. He places the latter two fingers on the front, right side of the action figure, and my thumb on the rear, right side, closing them to form the aforementioned claw shape. "Move your fingers downward, and tell me if you notice anything."

After a few seconds, I slowly answer: "His right arm is... uh..."

I'm lost for words.

"Is it like Shulk's left arm?"

"No...? This guy's right arm is, like, not wearing a shirt--"

,yes!"

[Whooa he's hyped though...]

"Go on."

"It's, like, all covered up. There's not even any space between the side of his arm closest to his body, and, like, the rest of his shirt."

"So you think his shirt only has one sleeve?" Papyrus presses.

"Yes...?"

"Technically he is wearing a normal shirt, and his right arm is covered up with another cloth but yes, I understand how you came to that conclusion. Well then. Do you know any one-armed video game characters? Ones whose right arm is non-functioning?"
{No way no way no way no way no way.}

[Whaaaaat why you so hyped?]

[It can't be.]

"I know, one. His name's Dunban, from Xenoblade."

"Gneh heh heh!"

"Wait whaaat this is hiiim!?!?"

"Yes! I am surprised it took you so long to figure it out but... I suppose you could not gather any context from his armor, not only because you have no reference point, but because Dunbun is more inclined to forgo it."

"NAAAAAKED DUNBAAAAAN YEEES!"

[...? Literally what the fuck!?!]

{Dunban gets agility bonuses if he wears no armor...}

{But then, he's, like, naked!}

{Uh... not really... he's presumably still wearing clothes... just... no armor...}

[... ...]

"{[aaah!]}" The door bangs open. "I heard naked done ban yes?"

"Roooooobin?"

"Yeah! We made it through the hellhole which is the center of town."

"We...?"

"Laura and Amy. They're, like, downstairs. Our businesses will be running on, shorter hours, until further notice. 'Cause, well, let's just say as soon as I got back to my cart lots of monsters asked me where you were... and I... replied by pointing in the general direction of this house... and said if they wanted to know, to ask Sans..."

Cue us making mutual shuddering noises.

"Like, why the hell are you even here?"

"'Cause, we wanted to see you off. At least that's what we planned to do till the rioting started. Laura and Amy were trying to look up advice for what humans do when there's, a pocket lips? Things? On the surface."

{Wait what the--}

[I think he said a thing wrong.]

"You mean apocalypse, things on the surface?"

"I, think so." Robin still sounds shaky. "Anyway, they've horded food and brought lots of stuff you can bring with you to Hotland. 'Cause that's where Mettaton said it'd be best for you to stay. You'll
have access to the best technology the Inertia Society has to offer. And you'll have comparable WiFi to the surface--"

"Wait whaat!?"

"Well, it'll be, like... two bars of WiFi at least on good days... but still... it won't suck. You can actually stream video there not from YouTube, if you're lucky. So you can finally watch dubbed anime!"

"Sweet!"

"Come on let's go to Sans' room. The three of us checked it out already when we first came and debriefed with Mettaton but..."

A pretty damn good whistle from Robin. "It's cool. Just, you think Paps' room is cool? Like, duuude! It's awesome. I bet if Sans' room was yours, you'd, like, never wanna leave the house again."

"And I can bring the rest of my... amiibo!" Papyrus chimes as we stand up and begin walking down the hall.

"What's next: you have a replica Monado in your kitchen?"

"Human? You mean Monado replica, do you not? Even you should know the Replica Monado is... underwhelming. After all, it is inferior to the original in every way!"

"Oh yeah... I misspoke..."

[Dude?]

{Yeh?}

[First off? I'm confused...]

{It's a late game spoiler reference...}

[Oh...]

{Yeah...}

[And second come on I knew you were gonna ask if they had a model of the mobile artillery. Crashed into a house or otherwise...]

{Did not!}

{Did too!}

{Did not!}
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Horray for memes and references which won't make sense for a while! Again!

Well, more like "as usual..."

Stupid ideas, everyone being a nerd, extrapolations based on this timeline's history, and imagining what and how Sans would sound/feel like to someone with no context for what powerful magic felt like combined to make this.

I'm proud of it damn it!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

19

… "This calendar is huuuge!" Laura shouts. "? "Just… why? It's like, half the wall!"

"In case the Undernet goes down and I can't check the surface date. All the important gaming and not gaming stuff is here."

Sans takes my wrist and traces my finger down the, apparently ginormous, piece of paper. "The release date for Xenoblade Chronicles X is over here. And the last Smash Bros Nintendo Direct date is over here. And—"

"Sans."

[Whoa Robin's all serious though…?]

{Yeah.}

"You know this isn't what we're asking about. Yeah, the calendar's pretty sweet. But how can you gloss over, I don't know, the rack of swords and guns and whatever the hell these sword-shield-gun things are—"

"Gunlances."

"Swords and guns and gunlances taking up half the goddamn room and squishing your dresser into the corner!" Robin finishes at a shout.

"Literally what the fuck!"

"Pauline? I agree!" Robin shouts back. "Literally what the fuck!"

"They're tests from our 3d printer, Paps, Undyne, and mine. Our 3D printer's downstairs, in the shed."

A plasticy, metallic, scraping sound, and Sans' familiar chuckle. "Oh man makin' the Masamune
was tough. And this is just the small one. The full scale one’s at Undyne's house.

"The Masamune?" I repeat.

"You’ve never heard of it? It's famous. It's from ChronoTrigger. It’s Frog’s sword." he prompts.

"Uh… I thiiiink so…?"

"Aren’t your cousins gamers?"

"Yeah but for Pokémon games, Smash Bros, and that's mostly it."

Sans whistles. “Maaaan you’ve been missin’ out.

“ChronoTrigger’s gotten lots of praise. Three guys, all from different companies and industries, worked on it. And a port for the Nintendo DS came out 8 years ago. That’s probly how ya know it.”

{Whoa…}

"Yeah I think my friend played it in high school but I don’t remember that much."

"The Masamune’s like the Monado—ya know, the OP fantasy RPG sword the hero’s supposed to use? But for Frog. And he’s not even the protagonist. It was the first thing we made."

Another scraping sound. "I made the Monado… and all the other versions of it… over the past few days. I also have Marth's sword. And Robin's sword. And—"

"Holy shit how the hell do you have all this stuff in one place!" I blurt out.

"Magic."

"He's not lying," Amy quickly adds on. "I can just tell by looking around, Sans used Dimensional Box magic to fit everything in here."

"You wanna check it all out? It's right next to my bed so you can sit on it while we hand you stuff."

{"Uh… should I be freaked out or impressed?}

No one answers.

[Come on don't deny it you're excited.]

{Yeah… I am.}

[I am too. This is sooo cool!]

{Yep!}

"Sans," Mettaton tentatively asks, "as much as I think all this is a lovely show of craftsmonstership, could we get something to eat for Pauline? Because you look starving. And exhausted. And well, your talk with Papy was during your normal lunchtime…"

"Gneh heh heh! No problem Mettaton. I will warm some food, and check up on Grillby and Dewey. Because—"

"SHIT!"

"Dewey. He showed Pauline all that magic stuff. There might be some monsters looking for him. And he's, not much of a fighter."

"Oh no..." Amy, Laura and I groan in unison.

"If you really need someone to go looking for him," mettaton offers, "I can. In the meantime: Papy, get lunch—a snack—a very early dinner—prepared."

"Of course! I have prepared for this exact situation! I will make a lunch, snack, and early dinner all at once!"

Papyrus runs out of the room.

[What would you even call that?]

{Uh... I don't know... and since lunch/dinner portmanteaus are already stupid... yeah no}

"And Sans?"

"Yeh?"

"This might be asking a lot, but if you have any working gun prototypes, get them loaded. If monsters swarm over here, you all will damn well need them. Conservatively, fifteen percent of the underground came here today. And some of them seem... violent."

As Mettaton walks away, Sans says to him, "My pleasure."

{{That's not creepy.}}

“Anyway,"

Sans’ hands brushing against my wrists as he sets something… long and heavy… in my lap. “This is the Masamune. The larger one is, hmmm… twenty-five percent larger than this.”

… “So,” Amy summarizes, “we’d have to hit them in the head to kill them?”

“Yeah... that’s kinda how zombies work—”

{ I didn’t think it’d take an hour to explain that... but it did...}

“And humans—“

“Saaaans!?”

{Woooow Robin can’t even right now thooough...?}

[Well someone’s gotta do it—Paps isn’t here...]

“Come on it’s true. But in all seriousness,” Amy continues where she left off, “does this mean we can’t be zombified?”

“Uh... I think so... Like, you guys don’t have brains to zombify... like I don’t know.”

[…]
“I don’t know either…”

“But I have thought about what to do, if it happens, I mean.”

“Really?”

“Laura? How do you think I haven’t completely freaked out down here by now?”

[‘Cause of me?]

[Yeah but…]

“There’s lots of zombie prep stuff online.”

[Ehh fine…]

“‘Cause as the Internet says: if you’re prepared for zombies you’re prepared for anything… and This is… pretty damn close…”

“Really? I never would have known…” Laura muses. “Like, how would you even deal with that? ‘Cause like, don’t zombies make a lot of sound so that’d get in the way?”

“Yeah…”

“As long as they’re George Remero zombies you’ll be fine. If they move any faster than that you’d be boned—”

“Saaaans!”

“What it’s true. And Robin calm down dude.”

“Dude like, how the hell do you know so much about zombies?”

“‘Cause the Internet loves zombies. Even we’ve seen Night of the Living Dead. And well, Paps asked about them once. ‘Cause like, he asked if the two of us could be zombified, ‘cause we’re the humans’ ancestors—”

“But you guys aren’t—“ I begin to correct him.

“I know but paps still isn’t convinced.”

“Yeah I know… he told me earlier…”

“Huh. Interesting. Well it’s good you and him had some alone time. All we have to do is hope he actually makes something good for—“

The door bangs open. “I have prepared our lunch or snack and or early dinner!” Papyrus announces. “And there is enough for Dewey as well, when Mettaton brings him here.”

“Sweet. Come on. We can keep a lookout for him from up here,” Amy takes my arm. “Let’s eat out on the balcony, assuming it won’t be too cold.”

“Ehh. We have magic for that.”

… “What do you think human?” Papyrus asks from his position beside me at the table.

“It’s weird… but I like it…”
“Same.” Laura… I think it’s her but I’m not sure because whoever it is still has food in their mouth. “But dude… we should come over and have lunch more often.”

“I would very much appreciate that. If everyone has finished, I will clear the plates. And all of you should get inside, because it’s getting dark—“

“[Whaaat?]”

“Yes. This side of the house is getting rather dark for some reason.”

Papyrus sounds like he’s stacking the plates. “Let us go inside, while we determine whether the Undernet is still functioning. Because if it is, human, I had something to show you!”

“That,” Robin takes my arm, “and you can pack a few Nice Creams. I only have about a third the usual shipments; that’s all I could carry, but, it should suffice. And I’ll turn the TV on in the meantime.”

I’ve barely finished climbing down the stairs before Papyrus calls from the kitchen: “It’s even darker over here! And why is it so loud outside?”

“Loud?” Amy repeats.

“Yes! It sounds like shouting, like right after we left Grillby’s.”

A short pause. “And it’s getting closer.”

“Getting’ closer?” Sans confirms. “Paps? Can you see anyone out there?”

“Yes actually. Quite a few monsters and…”

Papyrus trails off. “And Mettaton!”

“What!? I thought Dewey is supposed to be with him!” Laura runs into the house. “Why is he alone?”

“Come here and see!”

We rush into the kitchen, cramming around the sink to look out the window above it. ‘Yeah… I hear monsters out there… and they don’t sound happy…” I observe.

“Sans?” Amy asks. “You may wanna get the stuff from your room. Mettaton is strong, but he’s meant to fight humans. He might hurt someone in the process of trying to get over here. We should clear the way for him.”

“Sure. A few ether rifles then?”

“Sure.”

As Amy replies, she steps in beside me, placing her paw on my hand. “Let’s see… Mettaton is a few hundred yards from here. But he’s… he’s stuck… I think. He’s not moving. But… but why?”

“I hope Dewey is unhurt.” Paps’ voice cracks a little. “His library is awfully exposed. Why would he not come with Mettaton? And…”

Paps trails off, but soon starts speaking again. “Human, do you smell something… smoky?”
"Yeah… why?"

"Paps?"

Amy… and she sounds… urgent. "That thing that’s making it all dark out? That’s smoke. And it’s coming from… from the library."

A single moment of silence.

"Oh Dewey why would you do this!” is Paps’ sudden cry. “I… I never understood why you said you’d protect your books with your life but…”

"Books?"

"Pauline.” Is Laura’s stern way of attracting my attention toward her voice. “Dewey was the one in charge of storing documents about humans. Gaster entrusted him with their restoration so monsters could learn from them. Among other things. And well… Dewey was one of Gaster’s strongest supporters. And some monsters… didn’t… don’t… like that he helped you."

“So you guys are saying he’s protecting his books?” I infer.

A… surprisingly resigned sigh from Papyrus. “Yes. Although I have no idea of how he would do so since… well… he is not very strong magically. In fact,I believe I have never seen him use magic at all.”

“So,” I summarize, “he’s protecting all this stuff but he can’t use magic?”

Another silence.

{I’ll take that as a yes.}

Sans’ now-familiar walking toward the kitchen. “I just got a text from dewey. He said to clear the way for Mettaton. He told Mettaton to create a diversion so he could get here.”

A chuckle out of the blue. “He said he’d tell us when he’d get here but… come on we’ve all watched sci-fi films and the not really sciency thingy breaks and a guy volunteers to fix it and says it’ll take ten minutes but after ten minutes he doesn’t come back…”

“Yeah.” We agree in unison.

“So yeah. He’ll be going to the basement. I just unlocked it for him. He’s transporting books via the Dimensional Boxes so they’ll arrive before him.”

A few more slippered footsteps toward us… and some… plastic, metallic sounds. “I brought some ether rifles. Well magically-powered rifles… same thing. You guys fire some warning shots. Strap them to your arms and cast magic like normal. And Pauline?”

“Yeah?”

“Dewey said he’d need you and me out on the balcony. Sorry if this is a stereotype but… I’d think you have the best hearing out of all of us. If he tells us something with sound, you’d hear it best. Dewey’ll be coming round back.”

“But I don’t know Morse Code! I only know SOS and that’s it!”

“He said you’d know what he—“
An explosion which rocks the house and the crashing of metal.

“Guys get the ether rifles powered up. We’re heading to the balcony. And,” Sans whispers in my ear, “if there was ever a time to save, now would be that time.”

“But—“

“Dewey’s the closest thing to a college professor you’re gonna get down here. If anyone was gonna help you make up the education you’re missing it’d be him.”

Only an instant of hesitation, before I reply, “Okay.”

[Does the prospect of all that zombie talk coming true somehow fill you with determination?]

[I… I know I should be scared shitless right now but…]

[But what?]

[But… I’m not.]

[So are you filled with determination?]

[Yes.]

… *Several minutes of standing on the balcony, straining to hear over the crowd slowly making its way over to the house later…*

“Anything yet?”

“Nah. No texts, no nothing. And it sounds like everyone downstairs is doing okay.”

“What are we waiting for, exactly?”

“Dewey’ll run over here. There’s a second entrance to the basement in my room so we’ll just follow him down there. But it’s takin’ him a long time…”

“Yeah… I hope the… the not really sciency thingy… thing… didn’t happen to him…”

“S—wait. What’s that?”

“What’s what?”

“There’s a… a light… over… it’s a little far… maybe… a quarter mile from here.”

“Then how the hell can you still see it if it’s so far away?”

“It’s ‘cause it’s a… an orange light. It’s small but… you know how humans use orange cloth if they wanna be spotted in survival situations?”

“Yeah…?”

“That’s orange magic. I… I don’t know what—“

Vibrations from Sans’ pocket. “It’s Dewey. He texted all shortlike but… it seems like it says ‘Change of plans. Being followed. Turn on TV. Pauline listen close.’”

“Okay…?”
Sans grabs my arm, and we walk back into the upstairs hall.

“AMY!”

[Whoa I never thought I’d hear Sans shout though…?]

{Same.}

“Whaaat!”

“Turn on the TV!”

“Okay…”

Some garbled shouting and other noises. Crackling. “Hello this is Mettaton reporting on behalf of Undermail. And do I have a story for you. Listen carefully, because this is—“

Banging. Screaming. “Where is he anyway?” I ask.

“Uh… he dug himself a trench and he’s sitting in it…”

Total disbelief from Laura. “It sounds like a—“

“Shhh.” Sans shushes.

“Listen carefully,” Mettaton restarts, “Because all you viewers out there? This will be a test of your patience. And all of you are my test subjects, whether you like it or not.”

“That’s,” Papyrus slowly comments, “not like him at all.”

“Well. Here goes nothing.”

The shortest of pauses before Mettaton starts… angrily grunting… and muttering to himself, so quietly I start leaning over the railing to hear.

“This camera’s aperture isn’t opening. Well, human science is rather unreliable. Such marvelous, handheld technology? Please. A better portal onto this astounding scene would be direct magical stimulation of the souls of any monster watching. This, mediating device, only interferes—“

“Hey! There he is!”

“Sorry I had to go about it like this darlings. We had so little time,” Mettaton’s words rush out as the crunching of snow begins to drown out his words. “But Pauline: if you’re watching, I know you’ll pass this test.”

The grinding of metal. Monsters’ shouts growing louder. Static, as the TV’s signal is cut off… and… laughter?

Sans laughter.

“What the fuck happened to Mettaton!” I ask.

“No time.” Sans grabs my arm again. “Let’s get back out there. I… I have an idea of what just happened. It’s stupid but… no one would think—“

“What are you doing?” Amy calls after us.
“Human?” Papyrus’ voice sounds from the bottom of the stairs, “I know you can pass this test.”

A… excited… gneh heh heh. “I promise to provide cake and grief counseling after this is all over.”

Back on the balcony, I can’t help but feel utterly confused. “What the fuck—“

“You know what it is. Me and Paps do too. But Dewey addressed you for a reason.”

“But why!? Mettaton just did a news report—“

“That was no news report. That was a broadcast for us. And on behalf of Undermail? Reed and Wrighte transmitted that. For us.”

A second of my mind being blown…

“Remember what he said. This… test… doesn’t mean shit if you don’t get it. Why else would Dewey ask you to listen?”

“He said the… aperture… on his camera wasn’t opening. If it wasn’t opening, then he wouldn’t be able to film in the first place… I think.”

“It’s not that kind of aperture. What else do you think of when you hear the word aperture?”

“Aperture Science.” I blurt out.

“And what did Mettaton say in the next sentence?”

{whoa why is Sans so close to me this is weird and creepy…}

“He said human science was unreliable…” I recall.

“Specifically: ‘Well, human science is unreliable. Before that he said ‘My camera’s aperture isn’t opening. Notice something?’”

“He said science?”

“Yeah. But he said it as the third word. And aperture was the third word.”

“And he said portal later. So he wants us to do something related to Portal?”

“Yes.”

[Oh man if only you could see Sans’ smile right now. Well Sans smiles all the time but--]

“Think of the third word of those sentences.”

“I can’t remember exactly what he said. He said something…” I strain my brain, even though Mettaton just spoke barely a couple minutes ago. “He said how technology—“

“Handheld technology.” Sans corrects.

“Handheld technology wasn’t the best way for everyone… us… to see what was going on.”

“And ‘handheld’ was the third word in that sentence. Now, what phrase do you know that uses—“

“In case anyone else got the reference. No one would have known it was out of character unless they knew him really well. No one would’ve known his dramaticness here wasn’t normal. And trust me he’s dramatic aaaall the time.”

“And he said ‘test’ and ‘test subject.’ So he wants me to do something?”

Sans pushes past me and walks forward a few steps. “That orange light… could it be… it has to be… Grillby’s casting orange magic over there. He came with Dewey.”

“Nooo…”

“Yes. And you know how portals work. You need an orange one and a blue one.”

“So…?”

“I was gonna tell you this in safer circumstances, but you saw—felt—heard me—teleport into your room this morning.”

“But in Portal you step in the portal and come out the other one.”

“Yeah. He wants me to teleport him over here.”

“But that would mean you going over there—“

“Not if my field of knowing is large enough. Or rather, enlarged so I know he’s there, even if I can’t see him.”

“So you’re gonna bring him here?”

“No. YOU are.”

“Heh?”

“Let’s just say… Dewey knows my limits magically. He was there while dad… Gaster… trained me. He knows I can’t teleport him here myself.”

“But…”

{[Whoa…]}

“He knows YOU can.”

“But I can’t use magic—“

“But you’re filled with determination.”

{[Whaat??]}

“How do you—“I begin to ask.

A completely out of place… but somehow proud… laugh. “Cause Gaster first hypothesized it. Alphys isolated it. And I named it. Why do ya think I brought up the resets? I’ve been talkin’ to Alphys ‘bout you ever since we met. And have you ever wondered why I didn’t ask about where you got your cash? You… were determined… it was necessary you have that to create it from nothing and stay that way. Haven’t you noticed how bullets dissolve on contact with you?”
“No… and yes…??”

“Let’s put it this way. You know how portals work. I know where Dewey is. And you wanna help him however you can.

“And I give you permission to access my field of knowing.”

Sans steps around me so he is on my left side. He bends my arm so my elbow is resting on the balcony railing, hand up, palm facing outward. He presses one of his palms against mine and interlocks our fingers, and I realize that since our thumbs are on the same side, his left palm is pressing against my left palm.

“It doesn’t matter you can’t use magic yet. You know my field of knowing’s mostly spherical. And you’re in the center of it. Use that image and our physical contact to imagine my soul and the resulting field of knowing. Draw on the knowledge and magic in it like how you’re pulling on my hand.

“And think about how you want Dewey to live.”

“Okay…?”

{This doesn’t sound like hippy shit at all…}

{It’s not.}

Firm conviction from Chara. {I didn’t study magic; no one talked about it like this but… magic is science here. You trust Sans. And Sans trusts it. So…]

{Okay.}”

A tense moment of concentration. Even though the last time I could see was years ago, Sans’s explanation still makes sense.

A flash of light around us.

The thunk of… something… someone… someones… on the balcony floor.

Frustrated screaming from far away.

Sans leading me away from the balcony and back inside as the shouts from the front of the house become louder still.

“What was that!” Robin asks what I could ask if it weren’t for the numbness flowing through my body. “How the hell did they—“

“Determination.” Sans replies simply.

“Well,” Laura’s voice rises in pitch in fright, “whatever it was is getting everyone to come over here even faster!”

“I will carry Dewey out of here.” Papyrus climbs the stairs toward us. “But I am afraid we will be unable to reach the—“

The front door crashes open, accompanied by a resounding “Good job you two! And Sans? Please get them out of here within the next minute I can’t hold them off forever. I can’t use my full strength here.”
“Sure Neo. Guys? Open the bottom drawers of my dresser. Drop everything and everyone down there. Pauline and—“

“There she is!”

{Wow… that doesn’t sound like an angry mob at all…}

[Truuue…]

“GO!”

Sans pushes me down the hall to the left, toward his room. “Don’t worry about us. We’ll catch up with you. I’ll teleport me and Neo in there.”

We all shout an okay as we pile into Sans’ room. Two sets of arms push and pull me toward the corner, forcing me onto my hands and knees, protecting my head as I crawl toward the bottom drawer. I pull it open, not even stopping to think how Sans managed to hide this from Papyrus.

The drawer comes away from the dresser, but not like a drawer. More like a door, the sides of the dresser acting like a frame. “Go!”

That’s Dewey’s voice.

Hands reorienting me from behind until I am in a sitting position, so my legs dangle down into the hole.

Someone pushes me, and I almost immediately land on a hard surface. I reach out and feel wood. I begin touching it, trying to figure out what I am sitting on… in… before it pushes outward, like the above door.

I turn around and climb down from the… thing with the hidden door… onto the floor. Several thudding and clanging noises follow suit.

As I stand there, unsure of what to do or where to go, I feel a draft hit me. “[Fuuck!]”

[The door’s open! Close it!]

{Okay!}

I walk forward under my own power, hands in front of me. After a few steps, I stop where the draft seems strongest and begin feeling for the door. I reach out and soon feel a doorknob.

“I guess Sans didn’t have to leave that unlocked after all.”

Robin’s voice, right behind me.

He lays a paw on my shoulder. In a kind voice, he says in my ear, “Everyone’s here. Just close the door and—“

I am about to oblige when my feet, still bare from removing my shoes earlier, shake against—

No.

That’s the floor shaking.

Not me.
My hand falls from the doorknob.

My whole body shivers, and not just from the cold.

[No no no no no no no no!]

My bones rattle, my ears ring, and, while still standing, my arms suddenly straighten and fall down to my sides, my legs locking together.

{What—}

The floor shakes harder, and I hear items rattling around the room. My legs give weigh, and I sink farther and farther to the floor.

Then, a voice begins to sound.

As my body slowly falls, I eventually end up lying on my back, knees drawn up, arms seemingly glued to my sides. Vibrations resonate through me… and not just those from the floor. The air—

No.

My soul is shaking. Not just the air.

{That’s magic. Isn’t it?}

[Yeh.]

Chara hadn’t sounded scared when Sans first summoned Gaster Blasters.

They do now.

Compared to what I hear… feel… what happens… the Gaster Blasters seem… trivial.

By comparison, Chara’s prior fear seems… utterly misplaced.

“Do you wanna have a bad time?”

Chapter End Notes

I have a strong suspicion that most likely, the chapters will be long like this one from now on… because the Gaster backstory is coming!
Chapter Summary

Another filler chapter, comparatively speaking.

Trust me: things will get genuinely real, very soon...

20

"Hu—I mean, Pauline. Please... wake up--"

"Ahhh!"

"Papy, you could have waited for her to wake up naturally, you know. Her vital signs were stable. And besides: she seemed to be having a lovely dream."

[UGH... *phlegm...* tired... wait Mettaton laughed at what?]

{Ugh... dunno... why are you asking me?}

"Yeah..."

'How do you dream? Do you see light in your dreams?'

I squirm around on the floor.

{Where's Grillby?}

A warm spot appears on my arm. 'I'm on your right side. Sorry for not saying so before.'

"Uh... I see light... and maybe even color sometimes...? There's also music sometimes."

"Human? Have you played Smash in your dreams?"

"Yeah. Like, a few times. I even played against Chuggaaconroy once."

"But how did you know it was him? The only distinguishing characteristic I can think of is his loud commanding voice. Like mine!"

"Yeah truuue..."

"How about Xenoblade?"

A quiet, slightly raspy voice. "Dewey?"

"Yeah I'm sitting next to Grillby."

"Okay. Yeah I have... but more like I was actually in Xenoblade. I've dreamed about fighting some monsters before."

"Have you dreamed about Shulk?"
"Yeah... I've dreamed about wielding the Monado a couple times. Why do you ask?"

"Cause I started watching Chugga's LP. It's... pretty weird... but cool."

Amy's voice grows louder as she continues to speak, so she's probably leaned in closer to me. "I started watching it while I waited for you to wake up. I was gonna ask you some stuff but... you were glowing blue in your sleep--"

"Heh?"

"Yeah. We tried to move you closer to the computer but like..."

A short, completely out of place laugh. "We couldn't move you. Even all of us together couldn't do it. So Grillby cast fire magic in here to keep you warm. We forgot: Sans doesn't need that stuff so... yeah... there's no heating system in here."

"Yeah... Dewey had to remind us your body temperature could fall too low, even with the snow clothes on..."

A paw on my other arm, and Laura's apologetic voice.

"Wait Amy you said I was asleep..." I begin.

"Yeah Laura and I both did."

Mettaton's metal footsteps toward me, and his voice a couple feet above my head. "Hmmm... actually, I'd say you were more knocked out rather than asleep. In fact, when I first came here most of you were lying down, asleep or passed out. Grillby was the only one awake when I came over here the first time."

"How long was I out?"

"It is... 10:00 now."

Papyrus sounding slightly muffled, as if he is looking down. "At least according to my phone. And the fighting ended... oh... two hours ago?"

I sit up rapidly. "Wait hold up I've been knocked out for, like, seven hours?"

"Yeah." everyone confirms.

"But Papyrus you said the fighting ended two hours ago."

"Yes it did. At least..."

A... shudder... from Papyrus. "At least, the most obvious martial uses of magic stopped two hours ago. But even when it did your soul was still blue."

A nervous gneh heh heh. "You did not even move until the minute before I woke you up."

{How do I even ask...?}

[Uh... ... fuck if I know--]

{Chara!}
[Tell them what you dreamed about. Well it wasn't a dream. It was... what happened to you.]

{But I don't—}

[I do.]

A blinding flash of light.

Blue light.

I squeeze my eyes shut. I begin to shake.

"What the hell...?"

{{Paps?}}

"Sans... by Tesla... what did you do?"

{Paaaaps?}

"Do you wanna have a bad time?" I repeat without even thinking, my body shuddering with each word. As I speak, some of the vibrations I experienced before return.

Well, not just that.

The last voice I heard before... falling unconscious... I recognize it now.

[I had to have you say it. You wouldn't have said it if I didn't make you. Uh... also... to prepare you.]

{Prepare me for what?}

"That was Sans. Wasn't it?"

Silence.

[Everyone's faces though...?]

{I'm guessing that's a yes?}

A knock at the door.

"Ahhhhh!"

{Woooow... everyone was surprised by that not just you.}

A click. Cold air blowing past me.

The door is open.

Another click, and the cold air stops.

Someone closed the door.

Someone walks across the room toward me in clunky shoes... not as clunky as Papyrus', but still.

Some very quiet... moaning... from everyone around me.
A heavy... thing... falling to the floor somewhere across the room.

Some gasps and more moaning.

Clacking sounds nearby.

"Hey kid."

"Fuck!"

I gasp again... and Robin freaks out at the same time from somewhere in a corner.

Some... very confused... incomprehensible... noises...

Chara and I giving up on figuring out what we just heard. "How... you just... like... walk in here and..."

{Is that Robin?}

"Literally how can you go from shooting giant fucking lasers and throwing monsters around and... a-a-a-and you just come here and say 'hey kid'?!"

Heavy breathing.

A tense laugh from Sans. "Turns out? I took my time getting down here. 'Cause I was tryin' to figure out how to... explain what happened up there."

Awkward silence. "Wait I heard giant fucking lasers and throwing monsters around...?" I squeak.

"Yeh. That's about right."

"You can't be serious."

"Oh. I am."

{Ehwehwehwehwehw...}

{What?}

[Some left—both—eyes glowing of dooom...]

"Put simply? Some monsters had a bad time."

"{[Ehwehwehwehwehw...]}"

"How many of them were there?" Amy whispers.

"For all intents and purposes? The entire town came to watch you talk to Papy. So the entire town was there when I retrieved..."

Mettaton stops himself to laugh. "Well, not exactly retrieve Dewey. More like watched Dewey..."
"cement himself."

"As what?"

"His use of magic."

"Yeah Mettaton's right but... let's at least explain what happened up there after you got knocked out. 'Cause Paps and I were awake most of the time. We went out there to take turns watching the shit hit the fan." Dewey points out.

"Gneh heh heh heh..."

"Oh yeah true... but yeah. We saw quite a bit of the fight. There were like, fifty monsters who banded together to attack the house. Or you, I guess. I... on the way here I heard them talk about bringing you to Asgore and stuff.

"It was just... it was incredible."

Dewey, in awe: "These two didn't fight all of them alone. The residents of Snowdin helped out. They deflected magic away from them. Healed them continuously. Redirected bullets away from any buildings."

"I saw some trying to film us with their phones but..."

Mettaton pauses in thought. "It didn't work. We only found this out later. But yes: I am eternally grateful to everyone here. They had no incentive to help us and yet... they did so, with all their strength."

In a harsher tone, Mettaton says: "But let's be honest here all of you: you're just trying to divert attention away from asking how Sans could have all this."

"Yeah."

"To be frank: I have no idea... he ... seemed like a different monster entirely out there... I expected the Gaster Blasters but... such a wide field of knowing, and such precise control it..."

He sighs. "It made me feel utterly incompetent by comparison."

"Hey. MTT. Calm down man. I'm with you on this one."

A second nervous laugh. "When I walked out that door, I... all I could think of was what would happen if they got to you. To all of you."

A tingling sensation on my hands. I jerk away... well at least I try, but my body begins leaning forward on its own. The tingling returns. I can't move my hands.

"Look: I'm not sure where all that power came from. I just knew... none of you deserved this."

The tingling: that's Sans' hands on top of mine.

"They knew you guys couldn't defend yourselves.

"But they came anyway.

"They had to pay.
“An eye for an eye, as they say.”

"I thought the expression was an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind?” Dewey tentatively asks.

My head sinks down. My skin burns. "What goes around, comes around, Dewey."

"So you went out there and beat the ever-loving shit out of everyone?” I have to ask.

"Yeh."

Sans' hands vibrate on top of mine.

"Sans."

A weak whisper… plea… from Papyrus. "I... you... what the hell...?"

A shaky gasp. Then words begin spewing out. "You lazy bones I can't believe you'd do something so reckless! Out of all—how dare you not follow the scientific method—I—!"

"Heh heh heh heh heh. Come on Paps you know that wasn't an option. Even when I first used it I didn't use this much magic. And you remember Michael Faraday: he did science experientially and turned out fine."

The tingling vanishes. Sans orients my hands in the Inertia Society handshake, and we perform it. "But you already know what I can do."

"No I—"

"Yes. You. Do."

I fall onto my back and go rigid. I begin... lifting off the floor...

Rising to my feet.

Walking... somewhere.

[I'm not doing this.]

[I know.]

I abruptly sit on the floor, my hands stretched out, palms down, in front of me. I touch a... box... thing...

More gasping.

'But. Taking complete control. How?'

"I know how muscles and joints work. Grillbs? Out of all people I'd think you'd know this. If you know it well enough you can do it. Or, put another way? Magic is a matter of degrees."

'Yes. I remember.'

"Where am I?"

"You're next to the drawers you fell down into. You're touchin', basically a dimensional box for magic."
"Whyyyy?"

"'Cause if there was someone I'd want ya to see use magic it'd be Dewey."

But I only did it once!" the librarian stammers. "And I was in danger. That's—"

"You still are."

The box vibrates under my hands. It's the... tingling sensation.

"Okay. But guys be prepared to dissipate it okay?"

A deep breath, a short, sharp bang, and a whizzing sound. "Reach inside."

I find a hole in the top of the box, reaching one hand inside. It doesn't take long for me to touch... something...

"Take it out."

"Okay...?"

I hold a... somewhat round object... in my palms.

"This might sound strange but..." Dewey walks over slowly while he talks, "I expected them to look different. Like, really round and not like a real bullet."

"Huh. Go on." I ask for an explanation.

"Well... it's like a... like a pill, but with a pointed tip. I guess. I'm not an expert on these things. Undyne is..."

"Oh."

Awkward silence.

"Um... everyone?"

"Yeh bro?"

"I... have a request of all of you. Before the—I mean Pauline, goes to Hotland, may we stop by Undyne's house?"

"Assuming," he rushes, "if you feel comfortable doing so. I... I've noticed she's been... rather on edge lately. It's not like her at all."

"Like," I turn toward Papyrus, "when though?"

"As soon as possible. The less time we spend here, the better. And Sans has already brought down our most important belongings from upstairs--"

"Wait whaaaat?"

"I dropped 'em off near the door."

"Oh..."

"So," Laura whispers, "you'll be leaving us huh? And we've only, like, hung out a couple times."
"I guess." is all I can say.

"We'll come with you."

"Amy? We need you and Laura in Snowdin."

"But—"

"I... agree with Sans on this one."

Laura sighs. "As much as I hate to say it. As much as I wanna go and help Pauline... I just... there'll be too many of us. We're already putting ourselves in danger by staying here together."

"Wait so," Robin sounds much less freaked out now, "I have to stay too?"

"Unless you learn to use yellow magic in the next hour? Yeh."

Robin sighs. "Yeah. You're right. Now that I think about it... I can tell you guys what's happening around here. Listening to customers in line and stuff."

"You'd do that?"

{I'm with Sans on this one.}

[Yep!]

A short pause, then: "Yes. I would. I... I have to know what my customers think. That way I can serve them better."

A sudden laugh. "And Pauline? I owe you. A lot. You're the most important customer I’ve had in a long time. If I have to eavesdrop to keep you safe I will."

'I agree. We can share information Curie. You can work with me after your cart closes.'

"Of course!"

"Curie?" I repeat.

"It's my last name. My full name is Dewey Durkheim Curie but... I don't think you'd know who Durkheim is..."

He trails off sheepishly.

"Well you have plenty of time to explain."

Sans standing from his place across the room. "'Cause I'll be helping everyone pack a bugout bag."

"A whaaat?"

"Paps. It's a 'if zombies come I grab this and get the fuck out' bag."

"Oh! Like the bag I packed and hid under my bed which you brought down here!"

In a much less upbeat tone, Papyrus says, "Yes. They will definitely need them."

"I'll be gone for... I don't know how long. But... Pauline?"
"Yeah?"

"Save."

"Save what?" Robin repeats.

"Save."

"Okay."

"Dude? What are you talking about?" Amy asks.

"It's..."

Dewey sighs. "It's related to how Pauline got me over here today. It has to do with Gaster's research. I'd explain it here but... I want Pauline to know it first. And I'd want Alphys to do it. I may have known Gaster for... a long time but... I was the psychologist between the two of us. I don't have any business messing with that kind of science."

"Amy? Grillbs? Come on. I may not have been to your houses but I still know some shortcuts."

"But brother!" Papyrus calls out, as I hear some rustling sounds. Presumably the others standing up. "The human is no longer armed! What happens if... if those damned Dreemmurr fanatics come back?"

An intense humming in the air. "Here. It's meant for you. And I know you can handle using it properly. This one will kill."

"But it doesn't look normal. It looks like... like a regular skull--"

"Heh heh heh. I guess yeh it does. 'Damned Dreemmurr fanatics' musta brought me back."

"Gneh heh. Yes. At least... I won't forget what dad looks like now."

"Yeah. Wish us luck bro."

"I will. And Sans?"

"Yeah bro?"

An edge creeps into Papyrus' voice. "If anyone tries to hurt them, do not hesitate to use karmic retribution on them. For what they've put the human through."

"But Paps—"

{Woooow Sans is confused—}

[More like... taken aback... I think I said that right right?]

{Yeah you did.}

[Yeah!]

"Sans. You said yourself: an eye for an eye. And... as much as I hate to say it, if those damned Dreemmurr fanatics came here today, then... I would think that that warrants using that power."

"But you know it's not—"
"I know you’re nervous about it. But it’s powerful. And it’ll... deter them... from going any further."

"You... really sure ’bout this?"

"I am. I know you only used it on me and in lab tests but..."

"What is it?" I ask, intrigued and... creeped out.

"It's a form of magic I saw Sans use once. It's... niche and difficult to use but... powerful. Second only to blue magic. At least I think so."

Sans, firmly: "All you have to know is this: remember the phrase what goes around comes around. This kind of yellow magic is based on that."

A glow fills the room. "Guys let's go. And Pauline?"

"Yeah?"

"I'd apologize for usin' all this magic around you but... everyone does it. I'll tell you when I'm gonna use it if I can. Dad... he put proper use of magic above almost all else."

"Sure."

"See ya soon."

"Yeah."

The glow disappears.

"So," Dewey sits down beside me, "want me to tell you where I got my name from?"

"Dewey? She may want to sleep. She seems like she damn well needs it."

"Yeah true Mettaton..."

"There's a blanket a few feet to the side of us. You should be able to find it."

"Sweet."

"I'll text Sans and tell him you'll be sleeping. We'll catch the River Person at dawn. It is safest."

"Yeah MTT I'm with you on that one. I'll need to adjust to living in Hotland again."

"Good night Pauline."

{Dewey sounds happy.}

[He is.]

Chara seems... wistful. [I wish I could be there. Like, really there with you.]

{I'd like that.}

A bony hand on my head. "I shall prepare some food for the journey then. It is somewhat long. And, if we truly are returning to Hotland, I have some more packing to do. Like the painting upstairs. I want to hang it somewhere nice."
"Okay. Thanks Paps." I mumble.

"You are welcome. Sleep well human."

[Awww.]
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Discrimination, feels, hacking, and more memes!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

21

… … … "Ya sure it's not wet bro?"

"I am completely sure! I placed it with Dewey's things. He hates things getting wet. Especially paper. So—"

"{[Heh?]}

"Oh! Human! You're awake!"

Paps' hand on my arm. "We took Dewey and MTT's advice and let you sleep. But we're on the River Person's boat now. So if you stand up, you must take care to walk slowly and keep your balance."

"I don't think that will pose a prominent problem tra la la."

{Heh?}

[That's the River Person.]

"After all, Sans has cast his cyan spell to stop your soul's unsanctioned slippage. You were out like a light when they carried you aboard. And as of right now, you may as well still be."

{Whoa they're freestyling though! That's awesome!}

[Whaaat?]

{You don't know about rap—}

[Not really…?]  

{Like... they made all those things rhyme and shit.}

[I know what rap is. But dude "Sans" and "cyan" don't rhyme. They both start with S but—]

{Cyan starts with C!}

[How would I know that!]

"Uh, technically, "cyan isn't blue. It's blue-green."
Mettaton's voice from somewhere to my right. "But I can admire that rhyme Shakur."

"It's one of the few things I genuinely enjoy in life trala. It's one of the few things technology has yet to completely overtake."

A firm pressure and some slight pricks on my shoulder. "It's me Dewey."

"Hi.

"What time is it?"

"It's like," Dewey sounds like he's looking down at his phone, "five-thirty A.M. We were gonna let you sleep but… two things. One was that Sans said you seemed close to consciousness. And two: Reed and Wrighte graciously gifted us the latest issue of Undermail when we left."

A… weirdly echoing laugh. "Dewey. You haven't lost your knack for poetry either."

"Yeah I haven't. I might've learned about document-preserving techniques, but I still have to keep my literary skills sharp via practice."

"Sharp as a tack." Paps pipes up.

"As sharp as a knife through butter." Mettaton adds. "But look: as much as I'm having fun doing this, we should catch Pauline up, darlings. I'll be sitting on your other side, opposite Dewey."

"But let me hold the paper. It's the only copy we have. They had trouble even giving us this one."

"Very well."

"Mettaton's clanging footsteps across the boat's planked floor. "Okay. Here we go."

"Riots Over Inertia Society Induce Dreemmurrite Bad Time"

"Last night, the initially peaceful demonstrations surrounding the human and Papyrus Gaster's negotiations, regarding a collaborative effort to break the barrier, soon deteriorated into chaos. Emotions ran high through the spectators.

"I couldn't believe my ears," one Snowdrake said. "Like, it was weird. To see them just, talk. But like, dude, it was like, really cool. The human, wait her name is Pauline. Sorry. Like, Pauline was… still pretty pissed. Like, everyone knew that. But like, she managed to keep her cool—"

"{{Ugh...}}"

"—under pressure. We could all feel the anger coming off her. But she… she calmed down. She like, respected Papyrus. She, like, treated him good. Like, she wasn't scary at all."

"She's polite and smart ribbit." a Frogget agreed. "I saw her in the ruins. She seemed a bit confused when we first met ribbit. So it didn't surprise me she was scared by Papyrus. I was just glad to see her safe at Grillby's. I'm so happy for her and hope she'll have a good time down here ribbit."

"However some monsters are much more weary of Pauline's presence."

"I don't know what to think of this," one Whimson said. "She was afraid of Papyrus, so she at least respected his power. She saw he was in charge. So she was rightfully afraid. But for once it's not the human I'm afraid of. It's that short skeleton, Sans. He thinks protecting her is so damned
important? Doesn't he know that if he killed her then he could gain eternal fame and glory among our people? We could have been on the surface by now! But he decides to support his brother."

"I'm disappointed in Papyrus." a Washua agreed. “Honestly. He had so much potential. To be in the Royal Guard. But he threw it all away! How could he!? His nepotism! His human-loving roots! They've truly corrupted him. And as for his brother? He clings to the past. There is no future where humans and monsters can cooperate. That dream died long ago. And how dare he not respect our long-held martial traditions! This is not what the Underground needs. He should remember, as King Asgore Dreemurr said: in this world, it's kill or be killed!"

"We have yet to collect photographic or video evidence of the riots. All cameras within Snowdin Town suffered catastrophic failures in the wake of the fighting and have yet to be repaired. We will release written testimonies from the Snowdin residents as often as we can on our site, uww.undermail.drmr."

Only a moment of silence before Mettaton scoffs. "Really, I do not object to most of this. I actually find it surprising that Whimson even acknowledged how you felt about the incident. As a species they tend to… keep to themselves."

"But what about that… Washua?" I ask. "Like, they were hella mad."

[You don't like them at all don't you?]

[No. Not at all. But mostly I'm just confused.]

"Gneh heh heh. Of course."

{{Whoo Paps though…??}}

"They don't understand. They never did. The majority of them never saw the merit in adapting human technology."

The spaghettor sighs. "Monsters like them are the reason we came with you. They're some of Asgore's most… loyal… supporters."

"Fanatical's more like it."

Chara squeaks. [Not again! No more eye glow of doooom for you!]

"I know Sans. I just… I just think that no matter what they say about us, we must still treat them with some semblance of respect."

"I know that. And normally I’d agree with ya.

“But if we get off and even just one attack gets cast they’ll get what they deserve. Dignity be damned."

The floor under me vibrates slightly, and not just from our movement across the water.

"But to answer your question," Dewey softly explains in my ear, "it's because Sans and Paps, being skeletons, suffer some, issues, interacting with other monsters. The older ones… don't get along with them very well. Even some of the younger ones are scared of them. You never saw that since everyone in Snowdin's used to them."

"Oh yeah…"
"Exactly."

Dewey sighs. "Skeletons have always been discriminated against, just by virtue of being the most human-looking of monsters. There weren't many of them on the surface, during the war. Gaster was the only one who made it down here."

"Holy shit…" I breathe.

"Well that doesn't change a damn thing."

Sans, speaking from Mettaton's old position, and coming closer. "We're all outcasts in one way or another. It's fair we're together."

"Yeah true."

I sit up, Chara and I thanking Alvis inwardly that the blue magic has faded away. "Heya. Could me you and Shakur talk for a minute?"

"Sure. Why?"

"Because I had some observations to make. And some inventory to take tralala."

"Sure."

When I stand, my legs lock under me. One hand resting on Sans' elbow, I slowly walk to the right toward the River Person's voice, who giggles. "I could have come to her you know. No need to leave her knock-kneed, from your blue soul magic mastery."

"This is for some semblance of privacy. And well, as long as we're on board I'd think any use of magic like this is a given."

"Yeah truuue." I concede.

"Well I will waxe on the water's hostile ways no more tralala. I will get straight to it. May I make some observations?"

"Sure."

"You made some awfully specific mentions of your college's philosophy. I was not the first to do so. Some monsters from Hotland filled me in. But suffice to say that I am aware of where you would have went to college."

"I mean, I wasn't trying to hide it…?"

"Then may I continue?"

"Yeah."

"I confirmed earlier with Papyrus that you own, high-end human technology."

"Like, an iPhone is expensive since it's good but… I don't know there might be phones better than it out there."

"But this is not my point tralala. Far from it. I have several more observations to make."

"Okay go on."
"To sate my curiosity I employed some aid from Dewey. He mentioned how you seemed to have taken…"

The River Person pauses uncertainly. "Some Advanced Placement school courses."

"Yeah AP courses."

"And is it correct that these courses are college-level?"

"Yeah. Like, people at school would take them in high school so they wouldn't have to take as much stuff in college. And 'cause it'd make them look good."

"Not if ya fail you don't."

"True."

"But how do these colleges know the caliber of a recruit's work? They must assess their skills somehow."

"Yeah. They like, have AP tests for each class. So if a student gets good AP test scores, it makes them look smart on college applications."

"And, as Dewey inferred earlier while you were asleep, you have taken, conservatively, one AP course: statistics. You wrote off Robin's bell curve knowledge and statistical processes as we write off the existence of the soul."


"And how well did you fair on those tests tralala?"

"I got 5s on all of them I think. Except Econ. I think I got a 3 or 4… I think… it’s been a long time… all I know is that my school gave me credit for it so…"

"Just to confirm: this is on a 5-point scale right kid?"

"Yeah."

"Dewey seemed, encouraged by your success. So may I ask: why is it so important that you took these classes? Because shouldn't anyone be able to take them tralala?"

"Like, in theory…? I think…? But like… not really. 'Cause like… if your grades aren’t good then you won't get recommended for them and like… only people who could afford to take the AP test —"

"Wait."

"{[Saaaaans?]}

"Afford to take it?" he repeats.

"Yeah. Like, you'd have to pay like, 100 U.S. dollars per test."

"And you took four of these?"

"Yeah…?"
"So you got into college just ‘cause ya could pay to take good classes?"

"I still had to work my ass off!"

"Sans doesn't mean it like that trala." Shakur reassures. "But yes. I must agree with him. It seems rather… counterintuitive… for you to attend a school which values diversity when most of the students with the best odds of admission can afford to take the AP tests and hire private tutors for the…"

The River Person pauses again. "The SAT--"

"{Ugh.}"

"Bad memories kid?"

"Oh you have no fucking idea!"

" trala, did you ever utilize one of these private tutoring services?"

"No! I had someone from school help me for free! Well basically for free we paid her per hour but still it wasn't a fucking tutor or something! I studied using really fucking long vocab lists online and braille books I got for free."

"And yet, somehow," Shakur’s voice oozes intrigue, "despite these, setbacks, you received over a 2000 on your SATs—"

"{Hoooly shiiiit how do you—}"

"Dewey trala. Apparently he took the time to search for your records. I do not precisely know how he did it but… he did, trala."

"Huh. So that's how he found my SAT scores. And he probly even found the classes I took in high school and what I would’ve taken in college, if I stayed past the first week…"

"Yes. He said he saw how smart you were, and next this question's what I heard: he asked how you, so rich and smart, some-how, did not fall apart. For when you fell, you left behind so much, and yet, you do not mind.

“I know this, for you haven't broken; really you've been rather open. I'd think, if you missed your life, you'd want it back; if I am right. But you help us, knowing in full, your free reign’s lost on your return.

“How do I know? You barely mention family friends or where you're from. And thus, I rest my case with you, save one last point, then I'll conclude. Although there's things you're sad you left, what you don't miss, outnumbers them.

“Therefore, you join Papyrus' plan."

A haunting whisper in my ear. "I warn: if what you'll do still stands…"

“Beware the Man Who Speaks in Hands."

{[… … …]}

{[Whoaaaa…]}
"Anything you may have on your mind I would be glad to hear trala," Shakur says more gently. "I just wanted to tell you what I observed. And see how accurate it turned."

"Like… but… that was like… all in verse!"

"I am rather proud of that myself. I pride myself on my poetry prowess."

"Whoa…"

[And it's still goiiiing!]

{Yeh!}

"Let me guess: the sigh means they're right?"

"Yeah…"

I turn toward Sans. "Like, I miss my cousins. Like, over the summer we started hanging out together without our parents being there and like, that was fun. And like, my college professors are… were… like, really cool and like… they didn't care that I was blind. Or a nerd. They gave—a shit about what I had to say. Like, even if they didn't understand it all, like, they listened."

"Like your parents and friends didn't?"

Another sigh. "No but like, my friends play—played—games together but like, I couldn't—can't—play with them 'cause they're online games that you can't play with just sound."

"And your parents trala?"

I sigh again. "They just didn’t—don’t—get video games. Or anything I did for fun. Sometimes me and my dad would listen to music together but otherwise that’s it. And I… really wanted to live on campus but… it would have been too expensive. My thought was we’re already paying $50,000+ in tuition every school year. Why not live there?"

“I always imagined myself living by myself after high school, ‘cause like, that’s what happened on TV but… it didn’t happen. It’s, it was embarrassing, that I have to be dropped off and picked up by my mom from school, when everyone else can go everywhere however they want. Even if they don’t drive they can take the bus and shit.

“And the people at school said that people who lived off campus had… have…? a harder time making friends in the first place… and my friends don’t go to the same school as me so…”

“But why do ya hang out with 'em if ya don’t play the same games?”

The obligatory sigh. "It’s complicated… we’ve known each other since middle school, basically. In eighth grade a few of us hung out near my math class during brunch and lunch every day. I also got back into Pokémon that school year since a Japanese kid moved to our school and he hung out with us so…"

"Human?"

"Papyrus?"
"What were your other friends like?"

He lifts my left arm from my side, holding my hand between his, speaking in the gentlest voice I have heard him use thus far.

[Feels!]

{Chara?}

"Where do I even start?"

"Anywhere human."

"Who showed Xenoblade to ya?"

"I met him in sixth grade--"

"This “he” hgot a name?"

"Yeah. Eben. He like, put orange peels in my rabioli—"

[Whaaaat?]

"WHAAAAAT!??"

"Did I," Mettaton slowly walks over to us, "hear that right?"

"Yeah…?"

"You don't sound so sure," Dewey comments uncertainly.

"Like, I don't know either but like…"

"Just…” Papyrus stammers, "w-w-w-why!??"

"I don't know—we were in sixth grade!"

"At least," Shakur sounds amused, "if Eben meant to catch your attention, he should have asked for rabioli. That constitutes my social stimulus standard…"

I’m… not quite sure of how to reply: "I mean, like, I guess that makes sense…? but like—"

"He decided to intervene in your lunch while you were eating rabioli and not spaghetti?!"

"Uh…”

{[…]}  

"Let's go where you were before to talk about this, all of you."

"Sure Mettaton."

Papyrus helps me back over to my spot, where everyone sits down.

"So did you hang out with Eben in eighth grade too darling?"

"No. I hung out with Ian in eighth grade."
“What'd he do: put banana peels in your spaghetti—”

“SAAANS!”

“No! He like, introduced me to Portal and Okami and Mother… Earthbound… I still don't know the difference… Also Warhammer 40,000—”

“So he introduced you to the glory which is the cake!?”

“Yeah--”

“Nope.”

“No…? He actually did...? He like, motivated me to look up Portal—”

“We don't talk about the cake.”

“Duuuude!”

“Saaaaans? What are you talking about?”

“The cake is a lie.”

“{Oh heeell nooo!}”

“Human? I agree!”

“Ugh.. that meme is like, sooo old!”

More groaning.

“But hey: anyone who likes Earthbound's my kinda guy. Haven’t gotten to play it, but I watched Chugga play it a little.”

“Yeah… he was the least weird out of the four of us. He'd like, make sure Eben and Chen didn't do anything stupid… too stupid…”

“Chen?” everyone repeats.

“His real name's Michael but we call… called… him Chen since it's shorter—”

“By one syllable…” Dewey trails off.

“Yeah I know. But it sounds cooler and there were like, sooooo many Michaels at my school so…”

“So did he put banana peels in—”

“SAAAAAANS!”

[Wow Paps is soooo triggered…?]

“No… He like, was hella trolly and stuff. 'Cause like, he played really weird decks in the Pokémon TCG and Magic: The Gathering—”

“YOU LIKE pokémon!?”

{{[Whoaaa Paaaaps thooough...!]}
"Yeah. I've liked it ever since I was in... third grade...? I think...?"

"Undyne looves Pokémon!"

"No way."

A... mischievous... gneh heh heh. "I shall take the necessary steps so you can properly meet her so we can show you her Pokémon card collection."

"Duuude!"

"Anythin' else we have to know 'bout Chen?"

"He'd try to stop Eben from stealing my food during lunch in high school and he worships the Holy Cheese Muffin and made April Fools day Holy Cheese Muffin Day instead—"

"What the fuck?"

[I'm with Sans on this one.]

"This Eben guy--"

[Oh maaaan... Sans does not approve...?]  

"—I'm just thinkin'... why the hell did ya hang out with 'im?"

"He's nice though! He just... likes—liked—food... a lot... and I just so happened to have a lot of food every day 'cause my mom would pack food for my friends and for me so..."

"Did he play Pokémon too kid?"

"Yeah like, he started hanging out with me and Ian and Chen 'cause he saw me and Chen playing Pokémon and decided to move three feet over from the dudes he played chess with to play with us. And he made a deck with the cards he had at home and got recked since I tried hella hard to make a good deck—"

"Good. Long as he didn't mooch cards or strats off ya—"

"No. We like, traded stuff though... and he got hella jealous one time when I got awesome pulls from booster packs he bought for me for my birthday... and the thing is is that he gave me half the packs and kept the other half..."

Clapping. "Eh. Get dunked on."

"Gneh heh heh! As you ought! You have amazing luck! Because you had the fortune to befriend me and the rest of the Gaster family! And the Inertia Society!"

"Well you’ve still gotta put in a shit load of work," I bluntly point out to Papyrus.

"I know that."

He becomes much quieter, and much more serious, in an instant. "I... I just want to honor our father as best I can. He was... very kind. And also very smart! He was the smartest monster I knew."

"Yeah."
Sans and Paps sound... nostalgic... and in awe. "I... I hope that when we reach Hotland, we will have the honor of showing you his life's work. After all, he told us that presenting our achievements for a human would determine the true extent of our accomplishments as a civilization. Our values. Our reasoning. Our mastery of the world around us."

"And," any semblance of laziness disappears from Sans' voice, "in any case: you'll be stayin' down here for a while. Monster children for fifty-plus years have grown up surrounded by the magic from the CORE. Some even get how it works before they're even literate. It's only fair you learn about it as well."

Sans laughs, filled with pride. "And I'm damned proud of what Dadster did, makin' the CORE. Whatever happens, we have to show it to ya. Even though we have to teach ya how magic works from the ground up just so you can appreciate it. 'Cause frankly: humans haven't done anythin' like it yet."

Vibrations of blue magic run through my body—and soul. "And even if ya do, we did it first. And we'll lord it over ya as long as we live."

I sit in shock for a moment.

When I fell, I never thought about how I was able to charge my phone. How Sans and Paps heated their house. How their TVs worked. Only that I could.

How could I want Undernet access so badly, knowing how hard it was to obtain, and yet, not realize how miraculous it was that the monsters even had electric lights and plumbing?

Would monsters even need electricity and plumbing?

{{Whoa...}}

{{Thaaat waaas deep...}}

"Yeah. He... he said showin' the CORE to other monsters was his pride and joy. But doing so for a human?"

An eager laugh, and not just from Sans. "Thinkin' of that drove him. If he knew 'bout you... just damn. He would've been bouncin' off the walls."

"Sans?"

"Yeah bro?"

"May we stop at Undyne's house? I wanted to accompany Pauline to meet Undyne. If anyone were to escort her when they formally meet, it should be me."

"I'm with ya completely on that. The rest of us can go ahead to Hotland. To tell Alphys to prep everything."

"Well, you and Dewey can go." Mettaton says. "As for me, I have YouTube content to catch up on."

"We are almost there trala," Shakur calls out. "Gather your things and prepare to disembark. It was a pleasure to have you aboard Pauline."

"Thanks... uh... Shakur... You mean like Tu Pac Shakur?"
"Yes."

More amusement. "I actually find his addressing of social issues rather candid."

"But he was like, explicit and stuff."

"I find his approach direct and appropriate. If it were not for his untimely death, I would have invested my time and effort to paying tribute to him."

"Duuuude… I never would've thought you were into that."

"Don't judge a book by its cover trala. Or in your case don't judge a monster by their worldview."

"I… I guess…"

Dewey's hand… on my arm.

He slides it down my arm until he touches my hand.

Those are Dewey’s claws interlocked with my fingers.

"I have your bag. We should be getting off in like, two minutes. I'll call you when I get to Hotland. And I'll tell Alphys all about you."

He sounds like he’s beaming. "She'll be sooo excited to meet you."

"What's she like?"

A light laugh. "You'll have to see for yourself."

"Oh. All of you?" Shakur calls out, "it seems your monster of interest has deduced our coordinates. She is running this way."

"HEY PAPYRUS!"

"Yes! Undyne!"

Papyrus walks past me, yelling as he goes.

"Where are you going?"

"Your house of course!"

"Perfect! I was on my way back from my morning run so just bring her here."

"Very well. Put on your bag human."

"Okay…"

I have just finished doing what Papyrus asked when someone lifts me off the deck by the back of my bag… and I fly through the air… and hit… a hard surface…

Thank Alvis it's not the ground.

"Gotcha!"

A clattering of metal near me. "Gneh heh heh! I, the Grrrreat Papyrrrus, have stuck the landing
once again!"
Undyne… yelling near me… and I'm still off the floor.
"Just hold still okay? I'll carry you."
"{[Heh?]}
"I'll walk slow. Just tell me if you want to stop. You hear me?"
"{[Okay—?]}
“YOU HEAR ME!?”
“Yes!”
We begin walking. "Great! See you guys! And good luck." She calls out.
"Heya: do that again and you'll get splattered against the ground. I know you’ve heard the eyewitness reports about last night…"
"Sure sure I'll give you greater warning next time, I promise.
“And Dewey? Say hi to Alphys for me, will you?"
"Will do. Good luck you three."
"See you soon!" I try turning around to call back to Dewey, but A… rough hand… holds me in place as I crane my neck back.
"I wish I had carried the human like this Undyne. They… I would have avoided… the Canine Unit Fiasco."
Paps… on the verge of tears. "I wish I was as careful as you——"
A smacking sound, and a "gneh!" from Paps. "Me? Careful? Don't be silly. Just wait and see."
Undyne's voice, close to my ear. "We'll be home in fifteen minutes, if we keep going like this. I've… never done this before."
"Ehh. It's okay."
"In the meantime," Papyrus seems closer to his usual energetic self, "I can tell you about the human's Pokémon Trading Card Game escapades with her questionable-save-one human guy friends!"
I jerk in Undyne's grasp. "Wait whaaaaat! That's awesome! You must tell me how you vanquished your enemies!"
"{[Uh…]}"

Chapter End Notes
Ian, Chen, and Eben are all my real friends. The weird stories I tell about them are also
real...

As for what Shakur infers about my life before I fell, what Dewey tells Shakur about it
after hacking into... places... and what I tell them?

It's essentially true.

Also, for anyone curious about Gaster's role in Visontale: now you know a little bit
more.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The true divergence from canon and or cultural relativism begins!

Assuming it hasn't begun already...

That, and a more... thoughtful... characterization of Undyne... because after reflecting on it, I realized that the fandom is severely lacking in that regard...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

22

"Here we are human."

Bony hands on my shoulders... and... a tingly, tugging sensation on my legs... as Undyne stops walking.

[Paps is making us float...]

"I have the—" Papyrus begins to say.

"Wait! I've got it!" Undyne interrupts him.

I eventually end up on my feet again, as a door near by creaks open. "I've already cleaned up. So nothing's left on the floor for you to trip on."

Undyne takes my arm... very tightly... and leads me inside, closing the door behind us. "Don't worry while you're here. I'll take care of whatever you need."

"Wait... Papyrus?"

"Yes human?"

{How do I even ask...?}

"How am I wearing shoes?"

[I'm confused...]

{Same.}

"We put them on you before we left. Thankfully Toriel gave you a couple pairs. I remembered you never had time to put them back on before the..."

"The bad time..."

"Oh yeah... 'cause like... I fell unconscious yesterday without shoes on..."
I try turning to Undyne. "Hey speaking of which should I take my shoes off—"

"No! Just… sit down. I'll take care of it." She rushes over me.

{{[Uh…]}}

Undyne walks me forward a little. "There's a chair in front of you. I'll put your shoes somewhere where you won't trip on them."

"Sure…?"

I haven't even finished taking them off when slightly scaly hands brush my feet. "OH GOOOOOD —!

Then… some stuff hitting… something…

{Huh?}

[She… threw your shoes on a shelf… a really tall shelf.]

{Oh.}

I stand up, hands out, about to try to walk around a bit, when the same pair of slightly scaly hands presses down on my shoulders. Hard. "Hey! What did I just say!? I told you: I'd take care of everything!"

"I know."

I'm trying to get over the fact that Undyne sounds like she's angry, when… she… shouldn't, feel angry…

"I know but Paps said we'd come here and I don't know how long we'll be here so I need to know how to—"

"But at least LET ME HELP YOU!!!!!"

"Uh… sure…?" I hurriedly agree. "Can you like, show me around so I know where everything is?" I ask her.

"But you're my guest. I don't want to—"

"Undyne? Pauline's right. If she's going to be in your company, she should at least be able to walk around without bumping into too many things. She did this at my house."

"Ngahhhh."

A… somehow aggressive sigh. "Fine. But if you stub your toe on just one table leg—"

A whoooshing noise and rush of air past my face.

"--I'll make sure it pays for its insolence!"

[Come on… what's so funny?]

{She referenced Xenoblade!}

Chara takes control of my body, and I begin walking around, two sets of clanking footsteps
following close behind. I brush my hands against the edge of a table as I walk past it. "The Royal Guard and I strategize while sitting around that table!"

"Hmm."

"Her collection of Pokémon cards is also under that table!" Papyrus pipes up. "They’re in a box half as tall as you! Which I guess, when you put it that way, isn’t saying much—"

[That’s right—]

{I know I know!}

"Whaaat!?"

"Exactly! I hope that I can test my skill against you! Because you have been a trainer for years, according to Papyrus."

"I mean like… I’ve played the Pokémon TCG since… fifth grade…? but started I doing it seriously in eighth grade…"

Undyne’s hands on my shoulders again: "Wait stop walking! My piano's there--"

"You have a piano?"

"Yes."

[You want me to get you over there?] 

{Yeees!}

[okay. The piano's in the corner, next to the…]

Chara trails off. [Big Masamune replica—]

{Whaaaat!?}

[Remember? Sans said he gave the larger Masamune to her.]

{I still can't believe Sans made all that stuff… it's like, kinda creepy…}

[He packed it with him--]

{Whaaaat!?}

[Yeah. He carried it down to his basement behind him with blue magic yesterday. So… I guess he wanted to bring it with him.]

{[Lovely.]}

"Human?" the two Royal Guards ask in unison.

"You play piano punk?"

"Yeah."

I eventually find the piano bench… and proceed to struggle sitting on it since it's too tall… "And I used to play flute. And I sing. And write rap. And produce music. Well more like mashing songs
together since I haven't found a thingy that'll let me make rap beats—"

"Oh! You should have told us sooner! Because Napstablook also does—"

"Wait THAT guy?"

"Ghost is more like it."

Papyrus walks a little closer. "He's well-known around the Underground for making remixes of human music, and composing quite a bit of our original music."

"Duuuuude nice! But like, Undyne you play piano?"

"Yes. I took it up as a less… aggressive… hobby, several years ago."

"What music do you play?" I ask Undyne.

"Human war songs. They’re interesting. Songs from the, Civil War and the… Civil Rights Movement."

"Huh. You're in to that?"

"YES!"

Sudden passion from Undyne. "I have a picture of Malcom X on my wall, right next to you. He… he's who I want to be like."

"But he was like… extremist--"

"I KNOW THAT!"

“But he… he wanted to help his people make a life for themselves. Without help from anyone else! “That's… that's what monsters should do! When we get free, we have to make our own way. That's what I've trained all my life for."

"Uh…"

I lift off the piano bench. "So you're saying I shouldn't follow Malcom X's example?" she growls in a much quieter… but much more threatening… voice, in my ear.

{Whoa sheeee's piiiiissed…?}

[Not really… she doesn't look like it… I think…]

"Like uh… humans don't really like him—well some of them do but—" I stammer.

More loud passion and insistence from Undyne: "But why? He's awesome!"

"Gneh heh heh… oh no…"

Apprehension from Papyrus. [That's not normal…]

"Do you know what Malcom X did?" he asks.

"Uh… it's been forever since I thought about him… 'cause like, I only learned about him in junior year of high school…"
"He like… wanted African American people to live separately from other people and crowdfund a shit ton of money so they could do that. But he like… was militant and stuff--"

"You think I don't know that?!"

Undyne, slightly hurt, but still passionate. "I know this! That's EXACTLY what I think monsters should do! When we go free, we have to stick together!

“We… we can't rely on humans for everything again. We already use so much of their technology and ideas.

“We… we have to prove we're good enough.

“Our values. Our reasoning. Our mastery of the world around us.”

{Whoa Paps said that earlier!}

"Undyne…

“I… I didn’t think you’d tell Pauline all this so soon…

“And you haven’t talked about this with me in a long time.” Papyrus stammers.

Another "Gneh!” like earlier. "Come on. I may not like puzzles, but that… that doesn't mean I don't think. Even about this kind of stuff. Gerson told me all this."

"Well, he is an honorary Inertia Society member," the skeleton muses. "He is one of the few older monsters who supports us."

"Exactly!"

A heavy arm across my shoulders. "Look I know you're thinking I'm gonna apologize for all this, but I won't. I can't. I've devoted my whole life to war. And it's gotten me really damned far. I have no reason to ditch it now."

"I mean like… people stay in stuff since it'd take too much effort to change everything, and like, sunk costs… sooo…"

{I know I’m probably fucked by saying this but it’s true…}

"I know."

A much quieter, heavy sigh from Undyne. "I've learned a lot about human politics, from Asgore. From your… Internet. I just… I just can't see us monsters doing things peacefully up there. Is it wrong that I want to defend our people from attack? Is it wrong I don't want our people getting run over like during the war?"

I don't answer.

"IS IT!?!"

"I don't know! Like, I get you but you want to kill me!"

"Well what else can I do? We have six human souls. You're the seventh."

“Not yet—“
"No. You are."

"I'm too young to die.

"I don't want to die.

"I haven't done everything I want to do. I'm... I'm only eighteen. I haven't started college. I still live at home with my parents—"

"Human?"

Papyrus, much quieter than normal. "Can you... do me a favor?"

"Yeah what is it?"

"Can you...

"You've been sitting here so long but..."

"You got up on the piano bench but you still haven't gotten to—"

"PAPYRUS! WE'RE—"

"I KNOW UNDYNE!" he snaps. "I've just...

"I've heard this so much before."

He takes a shaky breath, and his voice cracks. "I... I have nothing good to say about this. This w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w... one th-th-th-th-th-thing our family c-c-c-c-couldn't a-g-g-g-g-gree on. Ever. And this was one thing Gaster couldn't convince everyone else to agree on either."

He takes a breath. "And besides: the human doesn't even know about any of this yet. That is why I wanted to take her to Hotland.

"Because..."

His voice slowly becomes more impassioned. "If anyone can explain this to Pauline, it's Alphys!

"She was... is... the closest thing I have to Gaster now.

"E-e-e-even closer than S-s-s-sans."

A moment of silence.

"At least take me with you," Undyne slowly replies. "To prepare for peace, you must prepare for war, as you humans say. Alphys can do all that soft sciency stuff."

Another whooshing sound by my face. "You can't gloss over everything with science and CAD&CAD. We all grew up hearing war stories And playing war games, Papyrus.

"Even you.

"She can't know about one without knowing about the other.

"And besides: war and... extremism... is all I'm good at. Might as well put that to use."

"Human?"
"I want you to play something… nice on piano. We—
“I… I need it.”

[Oooh!]

[This is… unexpected…]

[What should we play?]

[Like… what do you play after…]

“What do you wanna hear?”

"Maybe something from Xenoblade." he suggests.

"Uh…"

"Can you play Engage the Enemy?" Undyne asks. "It's my favorite song from the whole soundtrack."

"Or,” she contemplates, "SOMETHING BADASS!!"

"Okay."

{Almost all the music I know is badass battle themes!}

[That’s not bad.]

[I guess.]

I reach my hands over to the piano keys, slightly confused about the stickers on them. I press some keys, surprised how the piano sounds… in tune and clean. It even has the same wood… or plastic… smooth wood feel on the keys. I scoot closer to the edge of the piano bench, searching for the pedals. After a couple seconds, I take a breath and bang out the first chord, Papyrus "Gneh!"-ing when I do.

*A couple minutes of trying to replicate badass guitar chords on piano later…*

"YEEEEAAAH!"

"I… didn't expect that."

Papyrus… sheepishly. "Okay."

"Your execution was sloppy but it sounded pretty good."

[Wooow Undyne critiquing us though…?]

"Yeah I know I only took piano in elementary school. I quit in sixth grade ‘cause school… honestly I don't think I learned much either."

"How long did you take lessons?"
"From… first grade… maybe before… until sixth grade…"

"I can retrain you if you want. I’ve taught plenty of monsters to play piano."

[Whoaaa…]

"Like… I really wanted to take piano lessons at school, just so I could play You will Know Our Names right. 'Cause it's like… hella badass."

"I KNOOOOW RIIIIGHT!" Undyne fervently agrees.

Someone lifting me off the piano bench and setting me down in another chair. "But not as badass as TIIIIII!"

*Some attempts at trying not to sing along which utterly fail because Chara later…*

**Play the first English opening for the Pokémon anime here, if you want.**

"Duuuude hell yeaaaaah!"

"Gneh! I wish I could play guitar, just so I could accompany you and Undyne. And we all know the Pokémon theme isn’t nearly as awesome without that guitar solo! Or the violin, because it is even more technically difficult than piano!"

"Come on you can get Alphys to print you one. I mean, she made me my piano."

"{{Whoaaa!}}"

"Yeah! She's really smart. She suggested I take up piano so I could play our favorite anime music together--"

"Duuuude you watch anime!?"

"Yeah. And I play the Pokémon TCG with Alphys--"

"Wait duuuuude! Like, what cards do you even have?"

Some clanking footsteps and a loud crashing noise. "I have lots of them. But… they're mostly just copies. I… I don't know how to preserve any that go down the waterfall but…"

[Oh maaaan she's happy right now…?]

{I mean I guessed as much…}

[Yeah true…]

"How old are your cards?"

"When did you play?" Undyne asks, much quieter now.

"Like… 2011 through 2013…? and a little bit of 2010. But I know about cards starting from Diamond and Pearl… so… 2007…?"

"I have copies from then!"

"Sweeet!"
"You can have some if you want."

"But Undyne, she can't read them. She would need them brailled—"

"Oh that! You mean stabbing holes in the paper?"

"Uh… yes and no…?"

[Hey I'd call it that too…]

"Um… how about we sort out what cards you want and then go see Alphys--" 

"Wait wait wait! Maybe… Toriel gave me…"

I touch the front pocket of my bag, and the slate-and-stylus appears in my hands. "We can use this to braille them."

"But that will take forever! And it would be exhausting, because you have to stab the paper hard enough so the stylus makes a legible hole!"

"I'll come with you to Alphys so I can help you braille them!" Undyne enthusiastically suggests.

"That works."

"How about we all sit at the battle table and sort through the cards? I can write down your decklist."

Some rummaging-around-in-a-bag noises. "And while Undyne reads you those cards, I can look into this, Magic, game you spoke of earlier."

"But like… I didn’t play it that much. I had a deck but like… I didn’t really learn how to play. I used Pokémon cards as proxies And we all know the Pokémon theme isn’t nearly as awesome without that guitar solo!"

"I will find a way for you to play with the least amount of inconvenience!" Papyrus matches Undyne's enthusiasm as he walks over and leads me to the table. "Are either of you hungry? Because I packed spaghetti!"

"[Duuude!]"

"Ngahhhh! YES PLEASE!"

;*:A couple hours of nerding out over Pokémon and Magic and Papyrus downloading a copy of the Magic: The Gathering rules to my phone later…*

"Have everything Undyne?" Paps calls out.

"Yes! I… I just have one more change of clothes to pack, then we can leave." Undyne shouts back from upstairs. "Is Pauline ready?"

"I'm ready. Just have to use the bathroom."

"Okay. Then we'll be off."

*A couple minutes of complaining that Undyne’s sink is too high later…*
I walk over to the bottom of the stairs and ask: "Where are we going?"

Some clanking sounds down the stairs, and Undyne's hand on my right arm. She slips it downward so her… scaly… fingers intertwine with mine. "We're going somewhere special.

"I… I know we could just take Shakur’s boat to get there but…"

After a couple minutes, we walk out the door, Papyrus in toe. "This is something you have to see— hear—smell—touch—"

"And maybe even taste!" Papyrus pipes up as we begin walking away from Undyne's house. "Because there are plenty of edible plants around there. Monsters use them in their cooking."

"Yeah you're right.

"But more importantly?"

A… firmness… enters Undyne's voice. "I wanted to do my part in educating you about our people. Waterfall is a living, breathing museum for monsters. The ones who remember living on the surface live there. And Waterfall is where we…"

She takes a… shaky breath, which hitches in her throat. "Where we first recorded our history. Before we had computers. Radio. The printing press. There are carvings on the walls of the caves in Waterfall which tell our story. I run through there every day.

"To remind me of… of what I'm fighting for.

"Every monster walks through there early in their lives. If you're really serious about helping us, you have to…"

A strange combination of bitterness and zeal. "You're gonna have to do more than just enjoy Mettaton's TV show. You're gonna have to do more than just make a few friends. The only way you'll be able to help us is… is…"

"You HAVE to become one of us.

"After all: just by adopting your culture most of us have become human. Even I have, and I don’t even like much about you guys.

"We will only accept you once you give up your human ways, just as my kind have given up theirs."

Undyne lets go of my right arm.

A whooshing sound.

Undyne shoves a long, thin object between my outstretched hands.

Then, she pushes my hands upward until my fingertips brush a… sharp point.

I'm holding a… magic spear, which jerks as she grabs hold of it.

Undyne adjusts the spear in our collective grip so the point presses against my left arm, just below the elbow.

Papyrus and Chara gasp.
I tense up, expecting great pain.

Instead, I only sense a momentary, sharp prick, and the slightest breaking of skin.

Somehow, I let her hurt me.

Undyne wraps the fingers of my right hand around her left wrist, and arranges the fingers of my left hand on and around the spear, as if I was holding my cane.

At my eye level, decisively: “I know everyone’s gonna think I’m crazy for saying this.

“I don’t care if I am.

“I stand by what I said: you HAVE to become like us, as we have become like you.

“I will accept nothing less.”

Chapter End Notes

I accessed the Wikipedia page on Malcolm X on February 13, 2017. What everyone says about him is based on what is written there.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

The elaboration on Dreemurrite politics and the appearances of Monster Kid finally begin!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

23

It doesn’t take long for us to arrive in Waterfall. We’ve been there only a few seconds before… something cold… drips on my head. "Is it raining?" I ask no one in particular.

[No… it's just wet… we're underground there's no rain—come on I'd think you'd know this!]

{Okay fine Jesus—}

"No human. Water is just continually dripping from the ceiling."

As I walk between Undyne and Papyrus, holding one of their hands in each of mine, he continues, voice slightly muffled, "I texted Sans and told him we'd be taking the long way to Hotland. He said he'd check up on us soon."

A short, uncertain gneh heh heh. "In the meantime I sent him the rules for Pokémon and Magic: The Gathering. He said it'd be fun for all of us to learn to play and make decks while the Undernet is being repaired."

"The Undernet's still down?" I'm surprised.

"No. Alphys just thought it may go down soon. When monsters find out you've decided to live in Hotland well… Mettaton will be very conflicted."

"Why?"

"Because he will have to choose between covering you in the credible journalist way or the tabloid journalist way…"

"{[Oh…]})"

"Good to know Alph is keeping out for you.

"Tell Sans we'll be AFK for a while. It's… it's only fair we have our phones off for this. 'cause we're basically in a museum. And even I know it's rude to use your phone in a museum."

"Of course!"

iPhone-ish tapping noises from near by, and Papyrus speaking as he types. "Sans! It is I, Papyrus W. D! Gaster. We have just arrived in Waterfall. We are—"
"No need for that."
"{[SHIT!]}"

[Wooow even Undyne freaked out!]
An… impossible whistle from Chara. [I didn’t even think that was possible.]
"BY TESLA!"

[Heh?]

[Uh… Paps is like, freaking out too some more.]
"Oh come on: I said I’d be checkin’ up on you guys soon didn’t I?"
"SAAAAANS!" we all retort in unison.

[Awww you’re even freaking out together!]

[Like you're not?!]

"Of course."

Undyne… hurriedly apologizes. "We’re… just on our way through Waterfall. Tell Alphys it might take a few hours."

"She already knows. Me and Dewey were gonna ask ya to bring Pauline here anyway," is Sans' casual reply.

"But it’s good you’re doin’ it now. I'm goin' to Grillby's to Update the rest of the Crew—"

"Ugh."

"What?"

"Don’t say that!"

"Why?"

"You're too old for that!"

"Heh heh heh heh heh. Really? Ya think so?"

He’s… more amused than offended.

"Yes!" I can't help but say. “No one says that! It’s like when old people try to sound cool: It’s just soooo wrong!"

"Huh."

[Oh no Sans what are you deeply thinking about?]

“Based on how I sound, how old do ya think I am?"

[Uh—serious question all of a sudden whaaat?]
"I don't know! And I don’t care! Just… too old!"

Another chuckle. "If ya say so…"

“But seriously: anyone got anythin' ya wanna tell the others?"

Papyrus answers first: "That Pauline has… talked… to Undyne. And that Undyne has taken it upon herself to exhibit the more… historical and warlike… aspects of our culture."

Papyrus sighs. "Oh I hope everyone else isn’t too worried. Robin must be worried sick! Or hell—just sick!"

"Nah. Reed and Wright asked me to ask you. They wanna get some material for their next article. And…"

A humming in the air and the ground shaking under me slightly. [Nope nope nope nope nope!]

"They don't trust anyone else to relay info between us so… yeh: I'm doin' that now. I'll be goin' to Snowdin every day when everyone's on break."

The tingling sensation of Sans' hand on my shoulder. "Anythin' you wanna tell ‘em?"

"Uh…"

I compose myself for a moment. "Tell Robin," I say slowly, "to print out some blank Cards Against Humanity cards. 'Cause I have some… ideas…"

"And," Papyrus adds on, "tell Grillby he has my permission to serve my spaghetti in his restaurant. It will be a powerful symbol, to have our foods served side-by-side. It will ease the residents’ minds. Promote unity. And open up their culinary horizons!"

"Of course bro. See ya later. Good luck."

"Thank you." everyone replies in unison.

A brief instance of intense light shining in front of me. Then Sans disappears.

"There’s no time to waste." Undyne tugs me along. "We have to solve some puzzles to get through here. Paps, can you—"

"OF COURSE! I… I assumed you and the human would want some private time to yourselves anyway."

Undyne slows down. "Hear that? There's a waterfall up ahead. Rocks fall down it, so we have to walk under it at the right time."

Undyne laughs. "Me and Alph worked on the puzzles together. But I… don't like puzzles at all so I just plonked some rocks upstream instead. We’ll run under it in a couple seconds."

Papyrus, firmly from behind us: "On my mark…"

“Okay go you two!” Papyrus eggs us on.

Undyne pulls me closer to her side, and we run under the water. It only lasts a second, and not that much water even drips onto my body. Papyrus splashes behind us. "Very good human."
“Now, after we go through the next room, there will be a Bridge Seed puzzle. This room we're walking through now has nothing in it.

But before I begin solving it, I'd think you'd want to know what I will be doing when we get there.”

"Yeah sure."

Papyrus walks up beside me. "Well, the Bridge seeds are very large aquatic plants that thrive in magic-rich environments.”

He’s leaned down to talk in my ear. “When four of them line up in a specific manner, they sprout, and their roots attach to one another to form a single organism.”

Squelching and splashing sounds as we walk across the room… and the rustling of grass nearby. "YO!"

{"What?"}

Footsteps rushing toward us. "Wow! By Tesla I c-c-can't b-b-b-believe I c-c-c-came at the r-r-r-right time!"

"Heh?"

"Hey I've never seen you around here before. What's up?"

"U-U-Undyne," they stammer. "I th-th-think you're so cool yo!"

A, delighted laugh, from Undyne and Paps. "Gneh! Of course she is! But, not as awesome as the human!"

Papyrus nudges me forward a little. "He's in front of you. I suppose you two can shake hands--"

"Or we can do this yo!"

Metal—no—plastic—both—fingers grab my wrists and turn my palms outward. I press them up against the monster’s own palms, noting how they feel similar to Mettaton. "I'm Will yo. And you're Pauline right?"

"Yeah—but how the hell do you know me?"

"My parents won't stop talking about you yo! They're hella excited about you."

"Really?"

"Yeah!"

[He's like, holding a finger to his lips.]

"But also they're like," Will says more quietly, "not very happy. They're really mad at the Dreemurrites."

He laughs. "My dad called them some BAAAAAAD things."

"{{Tell me more.}}"

"he said what happens in the house stays in the house. So I can’t tell anyone. He said I..."
“I might have a, “bad time”—"

We all shudder a little.

[Nope. We don’t have to bring that up again so soon.]

“And not ‘cause what he said is logically wrong.”

"I, almost want to know what your father said," Papyrus nervously fills the silence, "just so I can
tell Sans later. And affirm whether it warrants a bad time but…

“Gneh heh. That wouldn't be very nice."

Undyne repositions my hand on her wrist again. "Hey Will you wanna come with?"

"Hell yeah! I mean, yes please yo!"

"Duuude!"

Water splashing against my shoes as the four of us walk along. "So your parents are hyped about
me helping Paps?" I ask.

"I'm on the right side yo! I’m holding Undyne’s free hand!"

"Oh…"

"Sorry I didn’t tell you before. My mom said it makes us look bad if I don't describe stuff like that
yo."

"And I would know." Papyrus agrees.

“Like this happens—happened—a lot at school. I’d like, talk to someone even after they walked
away—“

“That sucks yo! They should do what I do! Tell you where they are! So you don’t talk to yourself
like a crazy person!”

“{{True.}}"

“That’s an easy fix,” Undyne remarks as we step out of the water on to… less muddy ground.
“Even I’d do that.”

"But anyway yeah: they’re really excited. When they're not talking about you, they won't shut up
about this… “Gaster” guy!"

"Really!?" It's Paps' turn to be intrigued.

Papyrus stops walking. "We are at the beginning of the first Bridge Seed puzzle. I will hand you
one Bridge Seed so you know what you will be walking on. They are, rather big actually, but light.
Hold out your hands please."

A fat, rough, wrinkly, and slightly waterlogged bundle falls into my arms. "Hoooly shiiiiit it's
huuuuge!"

"They can get pretty long." Undyne sounds amused. "Papyrus will put them in the water so we can
cross over."
A chuckle. "Well personally I'd jump it—I’ve done it before, but…"

[She's, like, looking at Paps's Gaster Blaster—]

[I forgot that's a thing.]

[Oh: it is… it's like, hovering at his shoulder and staring at her all creepylike.]

Chara and I make shared, internalized shuddering sounds.

Papyrus takes the Bridge Seed back and begins walking away, boots squelching as they sink and lift out of the mud. "I will drop four of them in at a time and create a bridge, four Bridge Seeds wide and…"

He pauses, calculating. “Ten Bridge Seeds long. When submerged in water, the Bridge Seeds expand and lengthen. They’ll also become firmer. They easily support Undyne's weight, so you have no need to worry."

"Thanks Paps."

While Papyrus constructs the bridge, I ask Will, "So like, your parents were talking about Gaster?"

"Yeah! They, really like him. At least I think so. They…"

Will pauses for a second. "They're really happy you're working with Papyrus. 'Cause they think Papyrus is really smart yo! They actually wish Gaster had been king, not Asgore yo!"

Undyne, indignantly: "What?"

"Way yo!"

Will seems… completely oblivious to Undyne's anger.

"They keep telling me Gaster was the smartest monster ever! And they think you and Sans are smart too. They want the Inertia Society to rule the Underground, because they know about humans yo."

"The puzzle is finished!" Papyrus announces. "Come along. The next room has an even larger Bridge Seed puzzle."

As Papyrus positions my right hand on his right wrist, he extends his arm out behind him to accommodate the narrow bridge seed bridge. Undyne stands behind me and wraps a… very buff… arm around my shoulders.

"So you're saying," Undyne asks Will, "that your parents want a Gasterocracy? A government ruled by the Gaster family, and not the Dreemurrs?"

"Yeah! 'Cause they think that Asgore isn't that…"

He trails off. “Human-smart yo.” He eventually settles on.

A yelp. "Please Undyne don't hurt him he's only a kid!" Papyrus’ words rush out as we step off the Bridge Seeds onto solid ground.

Deep breaths and… angsty sighs.
“Paps I wasn’t gonna hurt him—by Tesla calm down.”

Undyne places my right hand on her arm again. "I… I want to agree with you Will. I have no reason not to.

“You’re right: Asgore… never fully understood why I wanted to know about human weapons. He knows it’s for self-protection but… he’s never wrapped his head around the whole “Black Power but for monsters” thing.”

Undyne extending her arm behind her as we file through a narrower passageway. “But even so, if it weren’t for him I wouldn't be here. I wouldn’t have this job.”

Her voice drips with nostalgia. “He trained me, you know.

"Years and years ago, I tried fighting him."

A fond laugh. "But he kept dodging my attacks! Even though he was strong enough to take them on the chin.

“But he… he said I was strong. So he started training me in magical combat. Alph had to help me learn about human military tactics though."

"We have reached the second Bridge Seed Puzzle! This one will take somewhat longer, but no worries! I, the Grrrreat—"

Papyrus stops in the middle of his… title…? "No.

“I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster, shall ensure you safe passage!"

I thank him again. "You were saying Undyne?"

"I knocked him down for the very first time a few months ago. And I've been training with him for… hmmm… several years now.

"And it's not like I haven't tried talking about science with him. Science is awesome! Just look at the Mythbusters! They're my kind of guys!"

{"Duuuude I loooove theeeeem!"}

"Oh man!" Will pipes up. "They're so cool! My parents have every episode on DVD yo! They wanna meet all of them, when we get on the surface yo!"

"REALLY!? I wanna talk to Jamie! ‘Cause I wanna learn to grow a beard as awesome as his!"

"Undyne…?"

Papyrus… uncertainly. "I don't think that's how human facial hair works—"

"At least I CAN grow facial hair!"

"[Ooooh!]" Will, Chara, and I respond to Undyne's burn.

[Paps better have burn heal!]

{Yep!}
"But that's not my point." Undyne continues. "I LOVE human science. But I also want to protect monsters from attack.

“And since human science can do that… why SHOULDN’T I use it!?”

Undyne, suddenly grabbing my hands, and positioning them in front of me… so they grasp one of her spears, planted in the muddy ground. "And if it means I have to take up a more modern weapon so I can protect everyone, so be it! I've already learned some magical combat techniques from Alphys's research. But I know that won't be enough."

"Human! The second puzzle is finished! Take my hand. We can walk side-by-side this time."

Undyne's spear… disappears from between my hands, even though I don’t feel anyone take it away. “Where’d it go?”

"It's magic. I mean, I'd think that was obvious but…” Undyne tries to explain what happened as she falls into place behind me. Paps and I begin walking on the Bridge Seeds.

When Papyrus next speaks, his voice seems… much closer, and comes directly in my ear. "The next room we call the Wishing Room. I will let Undyne describe this room to you because she passes through it every day.

"I n-n-never had a reason to c-c-c-come h-h-here m-c-much be-f-f-fore I met h-h-her so…”

{What's with Paps?}

[Feels.]

{Oh.}

When we step off the Bridge Seeds, I immediately notice a… faint sweet odor. Undyne walks up beside me and nudges my right arm slightly with her elbow, signaling me to hold onto her instead. We walk forward a few steps, then stop.

Undyne draws me closer to her and drops her voice. Her armor clinks as she leans in close to my ear. "This is the Wishing Room. There are colored stones and crystals in the ceiling. Monster children come here all the time to wish upon them. And when they say their wishes, the Echo Flowers repeat them back."

I gasp. "{Ooooh my Goooood… that’s like… soooo sad… and sooo deeeeeeep…}"

[Yeah.

[I… I still can’t believe all this is real.]

"The Echo Flowers," Papyrus huddles up to us, "are little flowers of many colors. They're all around us. They can't grow outside Waterfall because they need high concentrations of magic to grow and thrive. They are also very sensitive to magic, from monsters and machines. That sensitivity is how they can repeat what is said to them.

This is also one of the few places in the Underground where our technology is strictly forbidden. The rest of Waterfall is under similar regulations. There are residents living here, but they cannot live within a certain radius of the Wishing Room. This is our attempt at environmental preservation."
"The Echo Flowers also smell pretty nice. They—"

Undyne pauses, then continues, "Well here—"

"Undyyyyne!"

"It's fine Paps. It's just one. And I'll replant it later."

A… tickling on my nose… and Chara giggling. "Smell that?"

I take a deep sniff. "Yeah it's… sweet. But not too sweet."

"Echo Flowers are a delicacy, you know. Only the most important monsters can season their food with them, the supply is so highly-sought after," Papyrus whispers. "Even Asgore has limited access to them."

"I would know."

"Dadster, Sans, and I, we would cook with them, if we were lucky. According to most estimates they are more valuable than caviar."

"Wow…"

I continue sniffing the Echo Flower… then jerk it away from my face as I hear someone say "Wow…” faintly close to my ear.

An uncharacteristically light laugh from Undyne. "Come on don't be such a crybaby. We told you the Echo Flowers repeat back the last thing said to them."

"Oh yeah…” I sheepishly bring the Echo Flower back toward my face… and avoid making any unnecessary comments.

"I remember this place really well yo." Will says. "I come here all the time. I wished here just a few days ago."

In the same quiet voice, but slightly muffled, Undyne asks, "What'd you wish for?"

[She’s leaning down to talk to him.]

{Awww.}

"I wished for a good grade on my next science test."

"Eh! I did that in school too!"

Undyne nudges my arm, signaling me to hold onto her again, and she walks forward slowly. "When's your test?"

"In a week yo. It's on… basic magitry."

{"Heh?"}

A curious "Gneh.," and a short pause.

“I suppose your confusion is entirely justified: the Inertia Society has yet to formally educate you regarding magitry, have they human?”
Papyrus sounding… different. Less loud, more composed, and… similar to how he sounded when he formally proposed our peaceful cooperation at Grillby’s.

"Yeah." I bluntly reply.

"Will? How about I make you a deal? You come with us to Hotland, and I'll get Alphys to help you study for your test!" Undyne somewhat returns to her usual self.

[Duuuude Will’s face though!]

"You mean it!?"

Will yelps. [Dude stop hugging him so hard!]

"You bet I do! When we're finished with you, you'll kick that test's—"

"Undyyyyyyne!"

"{(Damn it Paps!}"

"We're coming up to another room."

Undyne lets go of me momentarily to take the echo flower from me. As I hear the scraping of dirt near my feet: “There's some writing on the walls in there. I'll read it to you when I'm done planting the Echo Flower.

“It’s… the reason why we brought you here."

Undyne stands, places my hand on her arm, and walks forward more quickly, the scent of the Echo Flowers soon fading away as we step into a...

{Why’s it smell like stone? And why does it like… smell clean?}

['Cause it is. The floor's all clean. There’s stone carvings on the walls. There’s light-up crystals everywhere so everyone can see.]

To themselves: [I guess they still maintain it.]

"We're standing in front of the first panel. We're gonna walk to the edge of the dock. Just… hold on to me.

“You ready?” Undyne asks.

"Mm-hmm."

Undyne and I walk forward a couple more steps, but she suddenly stops. Chara and I each try moving my body, only to fail miserably.

A faint pressure on my spine. [Uh… why are we blue?]

{Why are you asking me?}

After a few seconds, Undyne begins to read.

"The War of Humans and Monsters…"
"Though we have written countless tomes chronicling our suffering during the War, one mystery remains.

Why did the humans attack?"

I’m drawn in by Undyne’s uncharacteristically-soft, rhythmic voice. We walk a few steps over to the next panel. [Oh thank Tesla we're not—or nah we're blue again.]

"For it seemed as if they had nothing to fear."

We walk a few more steps, and Undyne continues.

"Humans are unbelievably strong.

“The power of nearly every monster soul combined… that would equal only One human soul.”

The weight of blue magic lifting from my soul momentarily as we walk a little farther down the dock, only for it to return again when we stop.

"But humans have one weakness.

“Ironically, it is the strength of their souls.

“Its power allows it to persist outside their bodies, even after death.”

Another cycle of the blue magic fading away as our group walks along the dock, only for it to reappear again.

Undyne solemnly speaks once more.

"If a monster defeats a human, they can take its soul.

“A monster with a human soul…

“That would be a horrible beast… with unfathomable power."

Walking to the next panel. "Conversely, a human cannot take a monster’s soul.

“For when a monster dies, its soul disappears.

“To take the soul of a living monster…

“That would take an unimaginable amount of power.”

We walk to the next panel.

"The power to take their souls… THIS is the power the humans feared."

We walk to the next panel.

"There is only one way a human could absorb a monster soul.

“They would have to absorb the soul of a Boss Monster.

“A monster whose soul is both significantly stronger than a normal monster…

“And NOT significantly weaker than a human."
“Such monsters are exceedingly rare.”

We walk to the next panel.

“A Boss Monster’s soul is strong enough to persist after death… If only for a few moments.”

Undyne raises her voice slightly as we arrive at the next panel.

“A human could absorb this soul.

“But this has never happened.

“And now it never will.”

In an instant, the softness in Undyne's voice fades away.

Bitterness.

Resentment.

Emotions and sensations I can’t even begin to describe fill my chest… and touch my soul.

She’s blaming me.

”The humans, afraid of our power, declared war on us.”

We move to the next panel.

“They attacked suddenly, and without mercy.”

We move to the next panel.

“In the end, it could hardly be called a “war”.”

By now, I assume that each statement is on a separate panel.

”The humans were too powerful, and us monsters too weak.

“We failed to take even a single human soul…

“And the humans turned countless monsters to dust.

”Hurt, beaten, and fearful for our lives, we surrendered to the humans.

“Seven of their greatest magicians sealed us underground.

“Anything can enter the Underground, but only beings with a powerful soul can leave.

”There is only one way to break the Barrier.

“By amassing enough power equal to SEVEN human souls.

”But this cursed place has no entrances or exits.

“There is no way a human could come here.

”We will remain trapped down here forever.”
As we walk past this progression of panels, Undyne seizes my arm tightly. When she next speaks, I sense her breath in my ear and passion and… determination… flowing off of her. She sounds like how Papyrus sounded, when he told me he would enter the Royal Guard, even if it cost me my life.

"However… There is a prophecy.

"The Angel…

"The One Who Has Seen The Surface…

"They will return.

"And when They return…

"The Underground will go empty."

I gasp softly. {Whoaaaa…}

We shift over to the next panel as Undyne—and Papyrus—and Will—recite in unison: “Only THEY can be the catalyst for change we desire.

“Only THEY can initialize the equal and opposite reaction we require.

“Only THEY can force open our prison and drive our kind’s mass acceleration toward progress.”

My body seizes up in Undyne's grip as I fall to my knees. [Oh God why are we blue now!?]

They are no longer the same monsters as they were a few minutes ago.

They have all intoned these… PRAYERS… countless times before.

A harsh, strident chorus rings out as one: “ONLY THEY CAN BREAK OUR INERTIA.”

Chapter End Notes

Kudos to Sir Isaac Newton for providing inspiration for those last few lines.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Finally!

I can say this about multiple aspects of this chapter but... spoilers...

If you want to know about how I chose the background music for this chapter, read the endnotes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

24

I don’t know how long we continue walking after everyone denounces me.

In a strange way, I’m not surprised that everyone wants me dead. After all, Laura and Amy said so themselves back in Snowdin.

Just…

Hearing it from Papyrus is… disconcerting, to say the least, even after our conversation before our fight, where he essentially told me outright.

Hearing him call for my death in the same sophisticated voice he used when he proposed my cooperation with the Inertia Society only makes it worse.

{What the hell…?}

[... Why you confused?]

{*Sigh…* Everything.}

Just… Paps wants me dead!}

[How does this surprise you? He wanted to capture you before so—]

{*Sigh…*

[Like, he told me everyone told him he was supposed to capture humans when he was growing up but I didn’t really believe it.

[’Cause if he really wanted to capture me he could have just done it.

{Or he could’ve just killed me…}

[I…]

Composure slowly emanates from them. [Look—you probly think Paps saying that and him being
nice can’t happen at the same time but they are. And you said you’d kill him if you could.]

{I know but—}

[You really hate him THAT much, just ‘cause he wants to help the monsters live on the surface?]

{No! And you said at Toriel’s place doing what I have to to get what I want’s okay!}

[I said it isn’t bad—that’s not the same—you should know that!]

{So you want me to ignore what everyone—}

[No.] Chara interrupts firmly. [No I’m not.]

You think you guys are much better?

[John said in Crash Course U.S. History that America fought a lot to keep everyone safe. They were fighting communism and not monsters but still… communists were monsters to them.]

[The monsters wanna be free. And you’re from America and you like to be free.]

[So why’s it so bad they think this?]

{You have no fucking—!}

[Yes. I. Do.]

A chill runs down my spine. Chara suddenly seems… cold. Sharp. If everyone around me could hear how Chara sounded, they would have no idea we were friends.

They would have thought Chara wanted me dead.

[World War II. Korea. Vietnam. All those wars in the Middle East I get confused about and don’t wanna try properly identifying ‘cause you’ll get triggered ‘cause political correctness even though you dn’t know about them too—]

{I never—!}

[You’re remembering how everyone said it. And you try acting like it. But really…]

Chara’s creepy laugh. [You’re not.]

[If you were, you wouldn’t have been mean to Toriel when she didn’t know about smartphones. And you wouldn’t have been surprised when Sans told you he goes underline a lot.]

[You thought he was like her.]

{That’s not what being political correct means!}

Determination injected into every word: [I. DON’T. CARE.]

[Political correctness is for humans. NOT monsters.

I agree with Undyne: you have to learn what monsters are REALLY like. ‘Cause they know what you guys are really like. It’s only fair.

[THEN you’ll learn about them the right way.]
A note of sadness in Chara’s mental voice. [And… I do… I did… so you need to too.]

I sigh, mentally and aloud.

“Human?”

Papyrus shifting in my grip so he is speaking in my ear. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“I know it’s not nothing.

“I… I can feel there’s something wrong.”

Quiet concern. “You… you seem sad. Why?”

Another sigh. {I have to tell him don’t I?}

[If you’re gonna help them you should tell them what’s wrong. ‘Cause it’ll bother everyone if you don’t.

[If you don’t I’ll make you.]

{Fine.}

I take a short breath. “It’s just… I didn’t think you’d say that. That thing on the walls. I thought you were taught to be nice to humans.”

“Not NICE. RESPECTFUL. But otherwise yes: you are right.

“Dadster taught me to respect humans as individuals.

“Just like how some monsters… only respect fellow monsters as individuals.”

“Oh.”

Papyrus’ wrist shakes between my fingers as we walk. “I… I always knew there was something, different, about what Sans, Dadster, and I said about humans, compared to everyone around us.

“Some monsters don’t want to learn about human science to… to win favor among humans. They want to use it to find ways to kill them, like Undyne wanted—wants—to do.

“And my father was frustrated by that. I could feel it—me and Sans both could.”

A strangely-placed laugh. “Gneh heh heh: and believe me: these monsters frustrated him all the time. And he was very clear what he thought of them.”

More subdued: “But even then… even before he…

“FELL DOWN…

“Even then… I listened to Asgore.

“I HATED IT!”

The first time I’ve ever heard Papyrus shout about… not me…
“But I… he was… I didn’t want to make him mad. Or worse, sad. He’s… he really is—“


“That it was wrong—logically and morally—that I believed both at once…

“But…”

The shortest of pauses. In spite of myself, I can’t help but feel curious about what he will say next.

“I STILL DID—DO—BOTH! I STILL WANT HUMANS DEAD! I still THINK killing them will lead me to popularity and prestige.

“Even after Dadster told me to respect them…”

Papyrus stops walking and wrenches free of my hand. “I… I know you’re angry at me. Don’t hide it. If you want—

“NO!

“You have to tell me exactly how you feel.”

I stop walking as well. I didn’t expect him to react so… strongly. I hadn’t even said that much… and THIS is what came from it?

[Monsters are really empathetic. Remember? He’s just letting it all out.]

“You… you know what I’m doing is wrong. THAT’s why you’re angry. And sad.

“Isn’t it?”

With only a little force from Chara: “Yes.” I admit. “But that’s not all.

“I told you if it weren’t for Sans I wouldn’t have talked to you. I wouldn’t even have cared about you.

“I would have killed you. Somehow.

“You get why I think this.

“And I can’t tell you what you’re doing is wrong, ‘cause it’s not.

“’Cause humans do the same thing.”

“Gneh heh. I suppose.”

Resigned.

That is how Papyrus sounds.

[I never thought I’d see Paps like this. I’d say it’s not like him but… I guess it is now.]

A resigned {Yeah…}

“I don’t have the right to be around you. Not… not after—GNEH!”
“Papyrus.”

Undyne sounding… soothing… and slightly muffled, like talking into cloth. “You’re a good monster. You really are. If you weren’t, I wouldn’t have made you second-in-command of the Royal Guard!”

“But…” Papyrus sniffles a couple times before composing himself. “But… I’m not—”

“YOU ARE NOW!”

A clang. Unbearable scratching against Metal, and a couple startled “gnehs!” from Papyrus. {What just happened?}

“THERE! You’ve gotten one of your requests. I’m officially making you my second-in-command. So if I’m not there, you’ll represent the Royal Guard in matters of civil unrest and Dreemurrite business. If I’m not there, MONSTERS MUST ANSWER TO YOU!”

The air around us crackling and smelling of ozone. “And as a show of my support for your position, from now on, I will wear the Inertia Rune on my armor, in place of the Delta Rune. For contrary to its name, it doesn’t represent the change we all need.”

Several gasps, and not just from Papyrus. “Yo! But you—“ Will stammers.

“Do you REALLY think I’d leave Papyrus behind for the sake of politics?

“NO!

“HE’S MY FRIEND! He’s been my friend almost as long as I can remember! Hell—Gaster called me his second daughter he never had.

“If it weren’t for his and Alphys’s families growing up, I wouldn’t have given a damn about humans, AND their science. I would’ve ended up like those Woshua losers.

“MONSTERS SHOULDN’T BE LIKE THEM!”

Undyne wrapping me… and Papyrus… at least I think so because I hear some cracking sounds and smell… the faint scent of tomato sauce… close by… in a tight hug.

“Paps? Science made you who you are. You, Sans, and your whole family.

“And Pauline?

“The only reason you could go to school was because of science. Some nerds decided that adopting braille would help their fellow man. And someone else poured all that cash into developing JAWS and prototyping the white cane.

“Hell—there are humans trying to help humans like you see again!

“Just because I wield a spear doesn’t mean I’m just a soldier. I’m not just an expert in human and Dreemurrite military science.

“I’M A SOLDIER BECAUSE I FIGHT FOR WHAT I BELIEVE IN!”

{[Whoaa that was deeeep…]}

“Undyne?”
I’m not even sure how to describe Papyrus’ voice. It’s like he’s out of breath but… he’s a skeleton so…

{Uh… Chaaaraaa?}

{Yeah?}

{Do skeletons need to breathe?}

[… Uh…]

Confusion between us that can’t be conveyed in words.

“You’re… squishing us…”

“And where’s my hug yo!” Will pipes up.

Undyne lets go of us.

“EDISON DAMN IT UNDYNE WHERE’S MY HUG!?”

“WILL! HOW DARE YOU MENTION HIM!”

Will squeals in delight… and pain…? “Oh man. That’s not even the biggest hug I could give you.”

Undyne’s excitement is infectious. “I’ll save that hug for after you kick that basic magitry test’s ass!”

More scraping of metal: she must be using her spear to carve the… the Inertia Rune… into her armor.

The scraping has barely stopped before Undyne shouts at us again: “COME ON! We’re almost to Hotland!”

She grabs my right arm and practically drags me along. My feet lift off the ground.

“[[AAAAAAh!]]”

“Just a little more! Keep at it! Just down this wood ramp—and some more walking and—“

“Undyne! There she is! Wa ha ha.”

“[[Heh??]]”

We stop abruptly, Undyne setting me down firmly on my feet. “GERSON!

“I didn’t think you’d be working today old man.”

“Gneh! Gerson! It’s a… very pleasant surprise to run into you like this!”

[Oh maaaaan if only you knew how hyped Paps was right noooow…?]

{Whyyyyy?}

“I couldn’t agree more Papyrus.

“And as for you Undyne? I’m not working! I was just about to head to MTT Resort for a party! But I just so happened to catch a snippet of you youngsters’ conversation and—”
A stereotypical old man laugh. “I couldn’t help but be intrigued. And I was wondering why the air around here was hummin’ so hot with magic!”

“And why you heard nails on a chalkboard.” I can’t help but snark.

“Mwa hah hah! Very true Pauline—very true.”

“Considering the sudden changes to Papyrus’s and Undyne’s armor, how could I pass up the chance to share my infinite wisdom with you!?”

{"Eh!}'"

On my own: What?”

“Oh how could I forget? I guess this is what happens when you get as old as me! Wa ha ha! I’m sorry I didn’t tell you who I was first.

“I’m Gerson. I used to be the Inertia Society’s Head Archeologist. But I retired long ago. I’ve decided to teach youngsters how to spot criminals! And when I’m not doing that—which is most of the time—I’m contemplating whether higher powers exist or not instead!”

{"Whoaaaaaa duuuude!}"

“I know you wouldn’t know this but, yes! You’re right! You have the right to look so shocked. Undyne didn’t believe I spent my time like that either, when she was a little urchin.”

A nostalgic sigh. “But I digress.”

A sudden, sharp decrease in Gerson’s shady old manliness: “Papyrus and Undyne used to have the Delta Rune on their armor. It is a winged circle, above three triangles forming a…

“Oh—Papyrus what is—“

“A trapezoid sir!” Papyrus eagerly supplies.

“Wa ha ha! I can’t math, as you young people call it—”

{"Duuude saaaaame—“

“But yes, it is a trapezoid.

“When asked to explain its significance, most monsters usually say it represents the Dreemurr royal family. Or our kind as a whole, trapped underground. And that the circle represents the surface.”

“Huh. Why do they call it the Delta Rune?”

Gerson’s voice sounding closer than before. “Well, according to the Inertia Society, the delta symbol represents change in human—well, I suppose—math and science. Yours and ours.”

Melancholy that hits me like a punch to the gut. “And well, when the king and queen’s son was born, monsters were filled with hope. They thought his existence would change things.”

Gerson becomes scholarly again as quickly as his melancholy appeared. “But no one knows exactly when the Delta Rune came into common use. Let alone what it originally meant.”

[What the hell am I supposed to say to that!?
“Like yeah—it’s interesting—but it’s not just that.”

[Think about it then. He’s not going anywhere—he WANTS to talk to you! He looooves talking about this stuff!]

“Like duh—!”

[I know but still—just wanted to make sure…]

{He’s basically telling all this deep shit to a stranger—}

I finally say aloud: “I haven’t heard all this stuff before. This is kinda like all the symbols on American money—”

“Mwa hah hah! I would know! I learned symbology using your money!

“And if you think THAT’S complicated? It doesn’t hold fire magic to the new symbol on Papyrus’s and Undyne’s armor! I’ve seen it hundreds of times and I still forget what everything means!”

“Oh I know what it is yo!” Will’s excited. “My teacher just told us about it last week! It’s a free body diagram!”

He hesitates. “Well, it’s stylized, but still—”

{Ugh—}

“So you know what they are yo!”

“Yeah…

“Just, physics flashbacks… ugh…”

I shudder, internally and externally.

“Don’t worry yo! This one’s easy to understand!

“It’s a square with an arrow coming out of the bottom side. That arrow’s pointing down. And there are two arrows pointing out of the top, with horizontal lines going through them.

“The forces pulling the box upward are greater than the force pulling it down! And the two top forces are reactions to the force pulling the box down. That’s what the… hashmarks… mean.”

He stops to catch his breath. “Hey Papyrus did I say that right?”

“Yes! Exactly! Good job Will.”

“But like… aren’t the arrows labeled with the force magnitude too?” I uncertainly respond.

“Yeah! That’s why it’s a stylized free body diagram yo! ‘Cause the magnitude of the forces aren’t labeled!

“My teacher told me the two arrows on the top represent two forces: the Inertia Society and the rest of the Underground. The box is our civilization! And our hard work is generating the net force necessary to get us back to the surface.”
“But what are the hashmarks—I never learned about that.”

“That means the Inertia Society and the rest of the Underground are forces reacting to the force of humanity holding us down!”

It takes me only a moment to appreciate the symbolism… and the nerdiness. “[Whoa thaaaaat’s deeeeeeep…!]”

“And the arrow pointing down is the force holding you guys down.” I clarify. “Usually, arrows pointing down like that are gravity but…”

“Exactly yo! You're smart yo! And you keep saying you don’t like science yo!”

“No I like it—it’s just that Physics Honors was hell…”

“In a way the magnitude’s labeled yo. The force acting downward’s a really short arrow. The other two arrows are longer yo!”

“I guess that works…?”

“But yeah! It’s not that complicated. Gerson learned it! And he grew up before Newton was even born yo!”

“{Duuuuude!}”

“Wa ha ha! Will’s right. And thank you for making me more STEM-smart than I really am!”

“I got you yo!”

“But now that you know all that, I won’t keep you any longer. You deserve to learn all this the right way.

“Now you have lots to talk about with Alphys. For such a young whippersnapper she’s one smart cookie. She spouted facts all the time back in the day. You'll make her happy.”

Thick nostalgia, like Undyne, on the way to the Wishing Room. “Telling Alphys you learned all this will help her remember everything. Talking about the Inertia Rune has damn well helped me do that.”

Gerson… seems to be talking to the sky—

Well… not the sky…

“Monsters being so knowledgeable like this sure made Gaster proud. I think it’d be best if I tell you what the Inertia Rune meant to him, in his own words.”

Gerson, in a reverent, practiced voice: “The Inertia Rune succinctly captures the Inertia Society’s purpose: to prove that our members, alongside the entirety of the Underground, have the capacity to generate the net force necessary to overcome the humans’ intentions to imprison us.

“And to generate this net force we will utilize which methods?

“Our values. Our reasoning. Our mastery of the world around us.

“Via rigorous application of these methods, we shall prove to humanity that we are not only their intellectual equal, but their absolute equal.”
Gerson sighs. “I wish you could see how happy I am.”

He’s stopped talking to the nonexistent sky. “I’m surprised I still remember that speech.

“And I’m simply giddy that I had the honor of telling it to a human!”

“{Nice!}”

{That’s… that’s what Gaster sounded like?}

[Yeah.

[He sounded EXACTLY like that.]

“I… I am too.”

A faint whisper that I barely manage to make out.

It’s Papyrus.

He sounds on the verge of tears… but not sad ones this time.

“My parents showed me that speech. They have copies posted all over the place in our house yo.”

“You guys really like Gaster huh?”

“Oh I wouldn’t say that. Admire is more like it.

“As long as I may have known him, Alphys, Sans, Papyrus, and Dewey are the only ones left who have the authority to talk about him at all. I’ll leave the details to them.”

Some rustling sounds from near my feet. “Well I should get going. The rest of the Freudians will get really damned mad if I don’t show up again.”

“Freudians?” I repeat.

{Oh God oh God oh God oh God!}

[Whyyyy?]  

{Remember? Crash Course Psychology…?}

{Freud was…}

{Weeeeeeird…}

[Oh.]

Chara suddenly talks faster. [Wait wait wait wait ewww by Oedepus oooooh noooo!]  

{Dude how could you forget Freud—!}

[I know I know I heard his name before I watched that but I didn’t know… THAT!]

“They’re the psychologists of the Inertia Society, loosely speaking. They’re having a… group free association session… to deal with their repressed memories of their time working under Gaster.”
A wicked-sounding laugh. “But I just think they’re doing it to get drunk! Wa ha ha!”

“Duuuuude—“

“Undyne? Papyrus? Take care of Pauline, will you?”

It sounds like Gerson’s turned away from me. “She’s the intended recipient for our research now. You need her in one piece when you introduce her to Alphys!”

Two pairs of hands seizing mine. “COME ON!”

{Whoa hooooly shiiit that was loooud!}

[Yeh!]

“Ngahhhh! We’ll carry you there it’ll be faster just hold on help me Papyrus!”

“OF COURSE! GNEH HEH HEH!!!”

As the two Royal Guard members position me lying down between them and begin running, Chara asks, [Does the thought of finding out what’s the fucking deal with Gaster fill you with determination? And don’t say you aren’t thinking that ‘cause I know it’s true.]

{Yeh!}

“[[AAAAAAH SLOOOOOOW DOOOOWN!!]]”

*Several minutes of bumping along, praying we don’t fall down, and Will, Papyrus, and Undyne loudly and eagerly talking over me as we go later…*

“HUMAN! WE HAVE ARRIVED!”

An unexpectedly gentle process of letting me down on my own two feet… and Papyrus talking much louder than usual somehow.

{“JESUS!”}

“I knew you would find Hotland uncomfortable at first, and not just from the heat. Hotland contains the highest concentrations of magic in the entire Underground! To help you acclimate to this new environment, I stopped along the way to grab you several cups of water—well more like water induced with magic but…”

Papyrus nudges one of my hands with a cup, which I drain quickly. “Thanks Paps.” I gasp when I’m done.

“I’ll make sure Will gets inside safe,” Undyne explains, “and then I’ll help Paps debrief everyone.”

Undyne’s seriousness fades somewhat. “And besides: I want you to meet Alphys alone. I think you two nerds will get along reeeeally well.”

“I agree Undyne.

“Human! I’ve set the cups of water between your feet. COME ALONG WILL! My brother will be thrilled about your physics knowledge! And your parents’ support of the Inertia Society!”

“Hell yeah yo!”
“And your father’s uncensored and explicit opinions of those damned Dreemurrite fanatics!”

“I don’t think he’ll be happy about that—even if he agrees with them—but I’ll tell you guys about it—but only for science yo!”

Clunky footsteps rushing away from me, and an enthusiastic “GNEH HEH HEH!!!” fading into the distance.

When they’re out of earshot, I mutter, “Fucking hell it’s hot!”

[Dude: Asgore might be BAAAAD at naming stuff, but he’s not THAAAAT BAAAD at naming stuff…]

{Uh… what?}

I bend down and grope between my feet for the water.

Now that the Royal Guards are gone, I notice a faint hum all around me. It reminds me of walking somewhere quiet, and hearing the power lines over my head. Either that, or the whirr of my fridge or the rush of air from my heater at home, but all these sounds happen all at once.

It’s the hum of machinery.

The taste and smell of ozone also fills the air. Not as strongly as when Undyne used her magic earlier, but it’s still there.

There’s also a… more familiar sensation: a pressure on my body and soul, like when Sans used his magic—

More than that.

As I shift my feet to pick up a full cup of water, they feel… lighter. Like… I’m walking on air. Like… if I walked too hard, I’d start floating. Like how astronauts say how jumping on the moon feels like you’re flying.

It also seems like the air itself is agitated, and not just because of the slight breeze flowing past me. This… agitation… it makes my skin crawl, and I can’t help but continually run my fingers over my arms to make sure nothing is crawling on me. When I’m not doing that, I can’t help but pace back and forth, just to keep myself moving because…

Well, the air is moving too.

It’s moving with me.

Somehow, for some strange reason, these… habits… reactions… seem perfectly reasonable.

[Dude?]

{Yeah?}

[Don’t worry about Alphys—she’s pretty chill.

[Does the prospect of handling some awesome technology fill you with determination?]

“{Yeah duh.”]
Much slower footsteps, but toward me this time… and distant muttering?

**If the link doesn't work, skip to 3.5 minutes into the video, then listen to her until you can imagine her voice well enough.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrPZpVGLoC0#t=03m30s

“Oh. My. God. I d-d-didn’t expect her to s-s-show up s-s-so s-s-soon!”

Faster footsteps, and more urgent and slightly louder muttering. “I haven’t showered! I’m barely dressed! Literally the whole Lab’s all messy and—”

Several more seconds of footsteps, which soon stop a couple feet in front of me, followed by some… mutually-awkward silence.

**Loop until the end of the chapter.**

https://soundcloud.com/fredrikhathen/alphys-from-fallen-an-undertale-tribute

“H-hiya Pauline! I’m Dr. Alphys, King Asgore’s Royal Scientist.”

“Hi.”

“You m-may be wo-wo-wondering how I kn-kn-know your n-n-name.”

“Ehh… a little…”

“That’s because… well… I’ve known it f-f-for a l-l-long t-t-time.

“Ever s-s-since you left the Ruins, I’ve b-b-been observing your journey on my security consoles. Your f-f-fights. Your f-f-friendships. Everything.”

“{Uh Whaaat—?}”

Alphys rushes through her words. “I’m s-s-s-sorry ab-b-b-bout th-th-th-th-that. I d-d-did it because S-S-Sans wanted me to. He int-t-t- tended to help you g-g-get here as soon as p-p-p- possible. Th-th-th-there was n-n-no other w-w-w-way.”

Her voice breaks. “I h-h-hope you can forgive m-m-m-me.”

“Oh my God—Alphys it’s…

“It’s okay…” I try comforting her. “I—”

I stop as small hands and short fingers—

No—not fingers—claws—touch my hands at my sides. I touch them back. curious about what’s happening.

Alphys lifts up my hands and uses her claws to arrange my fingers so our palms press together.

“Like, I gave Sans my phone password and Google already knew everything about me back home sooo… ehh.

“I’d be mad but… what’s the point? At least you told me that to start off with…”

“I know. We guessed that’d b-b-be the only r-r-reason you wouldn’t b-b-stay mad at m-m-me for
keeping t-t-tabs on you like that.

“Besides: watching someone on a screen really makes you route for them.”

Alphys has… stopped stuttering and sounds louder. “I know you know this. I’ve seen how much
YouTube content you’ve been retweeting… well—”

A high-pitched, nervous laugh. “—reposting underline. And I realized this a long time ago, from
watching anime and Let’s Plays—”

{“DUUUUDE YOUUUUU WAAAAATCH LEEEET’S PLAAAAYS?”}

“Y-y-yes.”

Alphys, taken aback. “I s-s-started watching LPs a few y-y-years ago. And I’ve also finished Ch-
Ch-Ch-Chugga’s LP of Xenoblade so—”

“Duuuude!”

“Sorry. I know you wanna talk about this now but… I’m… um… I’m g-g-getting ahead of myself.

“Just… take m-m-my arm, ok-k-kay? We’ll be walking on some conveyor belts to get to the Lab
and they move p-p-pretty fast. But don’t worry! It won’t take long to get there. I’ll t-t-take the
empty c-c-cups.”

“Sure.”

[Oh man dude I just realized—you and Alphys are basically the same hight—you’re not so short
after all!]

{Yaaaaa!}

[She’s, like, Sans’ height—]

{But Sans is taller than me!}

[Yeah—that’s why I said basically!]

{CHAAARAAA!}

“Anyway,” Alphys says in my ear, “watch your step. And let me w-w-welcome you to Hotland.”

She pauses a moment before launching into her explanaition. “W-w-we use raised conveyor belts
to get around here. Below us are the real streets. Well I g-g-guess you can’t c-c-c-call them
streets because the conveyor b-b-belts are where the r-r-roads would be, and th-th-th-there are
sidewalks or w-w-w-walkways on either side but… you g-g-g-get it right--?”

“Yeah I get it.”

“Good.

“And almost all the buildings have e-e-elevators in them. We’ve built everything u-u-upward, to s-
s-s-save space.”

“I know people wanna do that in cities—”
“On the surface.” I add.

Alphys laughs a little. “Yeah. And that’s just the half of it.”

We stop. “Well more like that’s just the infinitesimal but—Wait! I have to do something be-be-be-
before we can…

“I n-n-need to scan…

“There!

“That’s good—you didn’t diffuse my field of knowing and my ethergraph.”

“{Heh?”}

“We use the patterns of magic emitting off of monsters to identify them. Like f-f-fingerprints or t-t-
tongue prints for humans. We call them ethergraphs. That’s how I op-p-pened the door.”

A clicking sound, and I walk inside, only to stop after a couple steps. “Oooooooh my Good
there’s air conditioning!”

Alphys giggles, amused. “Yeah! We do this for the Snowdin Inertia Society members. We just
cranked it up for you.”

We walk down a hallway, Chara giggling every time I feel the cool air brush my skin, and I make a
relieved and hyped sound. “There’s a little ways more to walk in here. And we’ll have to t-t-take a
longivator but—“

{“Hehh?”}

“It’s an elevator that moves longitudinally. It’s pronounced like the… first two syllables of
longitude…

“That is, a-ss-ss-ssuming you s-s-say it like that…

“But anyway,”

A pause as we turn a corner.

“While we’re here, I had some, questions for you. Before you came, I researched human
accessibility technology for the visually impaired and… I wanted to consult with you to make sure
I’ve replicated it right.”

Alphys is… completely different now.

She’s businesslike and composed. She sounds like the smartest person on an anime or other
cartoon: the one who uses their intelligence to solve problems and communicates with everyone
else using… probably made-up sciency stuff…

“Like here: on the wall next to the elevator I just installed some 3D-printed signs.”

Alphys stops walking and takes my hands in hers, guiding them until I touch a… familiar, plastic
surface.
"HOOOOLY SHIIIT IIIT'S BRAIIIIILLED!"

Exactly. Over the course of my research I learned that it’s the law in the United States that elevators have these. And that there are braille signs next to doors. Well there SHOULD be but… I saw some pictures of your college. I couldn’t find them next to every door—“

“Oh maaaaan my O&M instructor was sooooo pissed about that…?”

“I still haven’t finished labeling all the doors in here. That’s what Sans has been doing all day.”

“[[Duuuuuude!]]”

The elevator—longivator—dings, and the doors slide open, Alphys positioning my hand on her left arm again. “And, while watching you, and preparing for your arrival, it got me thinking.

“As quickly as Sans and Robin made accommodations for you, neither of them seriously applied science to your problems. And well… doing that… that’d be a priceless opportunity for me. For all of us in the Inertia Society.”

Stopping for a moment, the clicking of another door, and Alphys’ voice filling with undisguised eagerness. “I’ve been waiting my entire career for this! It’s… this is… this is what Gaster prepared us for.

“Not to help solve the Underground’s problems.

“No.

“He… he told us… demonstrating the extent of our accomplishments as a civilization would constitute the true test of our advancement as a civilization.”

As she speaks, I speak alongside her, and I’m only mildly surprised that I know what to say: “Our values. Our reasoning. Our mastery of the world around us.”

Alphys squeals in delight.

[[Jesus!]]

“You remember! You really remember! Oh man S-S-S-Sans and P-P-Papyrus and D-D-D-Dewey are gonna be sooo happy! You’re a-a-a-alr-r-r-rr-rr-rr-rr-ready getting it!”

“Yeah I guess I am. Everyone’s been saying it today so… ehh: it’s not like I’d forget…”

Alphys stops, and we turn to face the wall. “We’re at the main dining area. Well—the main dining area I use anyway. Everyone else is here. I have some food warmed up. After we eat, it’d be my and the Inertia Society’s honor to give you the grand tour.”

“Yeah sure. Thanks Alphys.”

A quick burst of ozone in my nostrils and on my tongue. A pressure down my spine and on my soul. The rapping of metal on wood?

A whoosh, a click, and a slab of metal gently bumping against my left arm as the door in front of us slides and swings open.

“Ya didn’t have to do that Alph. I undid the lock from the inside when I heard ya fangirl scream.”
Bony hands on my shoulders and the pressure of blue magic on my body. “Hey kid. I’d ask ya how Waterfall went but… I heard what happened from Paps.

“All that can wait.

“How much did Alph tell ya?”

“You’re braaaailing the siiiigns!”

Laughter… and not just from Sans. “Yeh. It’s… actually not as bad as you might think. Not once we programmed the 3D printer to label the plaques.

“But ehh. Ya don’t have to care ‘bout how I made ‘em. Only that ya won’t confuse a radioactive isotope storage room for a non-radioactive isotope storage room.”

“{[Uh…]}”

Chara and I aren’t the only ones making cringy noises.

“SAAAAANS! Don’t joke about that yet! Only after the human’s toured the entire facility!” Papyrus shouts from inside.

“Cme on. I’ll find you a seat. I… we… have a lot to talk about. Papyrus told me you learned about the Delta and Inertia Runes?”

“Yeah we stopped on the way here.”

“If you can handle that I KNOW you’ll understand what I have lined up for you right now.”

Sudden confidence: “All the material I’ll be telling you has been designed so a human could ease into it as easily as possible.

“After all, the Inertia Society has prepared for this moment for…

“Hmmmm…

“A century.

“At least, that’s my most conservative guess.”

Chapter End Notes

I accessed the Wikipedia pages on the Greek letter delta and free-body diagrams on February 18, 2017 pacific time.

Here is the link to Visiontale’s Alphys canon voice! If the link doesn't work, skip to 3.5 minutes in to the video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrPZpVGLoC0&t=03m30s

Here's the song I linked to at the end of the chapter!
This is literally the only cover of Alphys I've found which does justice to the nuances in the original. It's nervous, lively, and, later on, erudite and dignified. It reflects her personality, as well as that of Dewey. Dewey is what Alphys would have been if she genuinely tried to solve a problem, and didn't break down completely if she failed. Visiontale Alphys is what Undertale Alphys would be like if she had a place to channel her energy, one that she genuinely cared about, a purpose larger than herself, even larger than helping monsterkind free.

The song also reflects how the Inertia Society headquarters is the first real showcase of monsterkind's achievements as a civilization, cause seriously: Alphys couldn't have done everything by herself. Even just considering the CORE/the architecture of Hotland, that's genuinely impressive. In-story, this is the first time I've seen a concrete example of how different monsterkind is, in terms of technological development, when compared to humanity.

In short: Alphys and the Inertia Society have every right to be proud/hyped... and that will only become more apparent as time goes on...

This is officially the first chapter to exceed 5000 words! I don't even want to guess about how long the chapters will be from now on...

If anyone wants a clarification of what the Inertia Rune looks like, someone can draw art of it, and link it in the comments... Then, the artist and I can make sure our interpretations of the Inertia Rune match.

I'm not completely sure of when physicists first started using free-body diagrams, but it seems like they've been using them for a long time. They're not the official way of representing force anymore but... that will come up later... maybe... I don't even know. I've researched many soft sciences and hard sciences at this point for this story so... who knows?

The link to the Wikipedia page on free-body diagrams is posted below, to make sure we're on the same page.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_body_diagram
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

This is a filler chapter for the first... half or so...

Trust me: after this chapter... let's just say that all those allusions I've been making to using scholarly articles while researching Visiontale since the beginning will apply.

Also more made-up newspaper articles and politics!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

25

Alphys extends her arm out behind her as we walk. "The g-g-ground floor is what I'm most w-w-worried a-b-b-bout. At least on the other floors, everyone keeps things clean as for regulation but... here, not so much. And the h-h-h-a-a-a-llways are mostly identical, so if you m-m-miss the signs you'll get lost really easily. E-e-e-v-v-v-en I d-d-d sometimes, when I'm not looking where I'm going."

"And you've yet to use a cane down here," Dewey's muffled response from behind us as Alphys stops, the click of a door following soon afterward. It swings open and... "{[Food!]}"

"Yeah. This is m-m-my room. Sometimes I have food Boxed to me when I d-d-don't feel like leaving."

"Alphys made the fridge a Dimensional Box so we wouldn't have to leave the room when we watch anime!" Undyne enthusiastically explains as Alphys guides me toward one of the walls.

"My b-b-bed is folded up right now, to maximize work space. B-b-but I won't do that to the bed in your room bec-c-cause you have to orient yours-s-s-self to it. Well, this—"

"Hey Alph. There's a crap load of fine magitry on your desk. Unless you wanna tell Pauline 'bout the clean room I'd think you'd wanna clear that off..."

"I kn-kn-kn-know Sans. It's j-j-j-just th-th-th-that, that's all scrap so it doesn't matter if she touches it and... I'm just showing her the desk 'cause I p-p-p-put the same kind in her room, in the same place.

"Speaking of which..."

Alphys takes my hand and begins tracing the perimeter of the desk, stopping every so often to describe drawer and cabinet placements. I am about to begin feeling the desktop itself, but Papyrus tentatively speaks up from behind us, from in the doorway.

"Alphys? I know you have been preparing for the—Pauline's arrival for several days but... I have a suggestion to make. If you have not already connected her room to the Boxnet, at least make the receiver a tray, not just blank desk space. If she ever adopts your eating habits, this will contain any
spills and…"

He pauses. {Paps sounding really nervous though…?}

[Yeah it's weird. He's, frowning, somehow. Which is weird 'cause this is a good idea. Why would he —]

{I don’t know. He’s been… less crazy lately…}

"That's t-t-true. Good idea Paps!

“Pauline? While I g-g-go find a tray to put on your desk, Will, I'll show you to your room too.”

"What! I have a room too yo?!

"{{Jesus Will calm dooown!}}"

"Y-y-yeah. I c-called your parents. I asked if you c-could stay here so we could help you study. Actually—"

"SWEEEET YO!"

“When I called th-th-them and said you came with Pauline, they s-suggested it themselves.”

“This is like, the least suckish thing that’s happened to me before a test ever yo!”

"And Undyne? I've set up a room for you too. I c-c-can show you that as well."

"Let’s go then! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR!?

" Sans? Paps? Dewey? You guys can show Pauline where her room is. And where all your rooms are in relation. 'Cause I'm…"

Eagerness pouring off Alphys in waves. "I'm proud we found a way to make it work. And also, Sans and Paps—you guys ar gonna have to remember—I mean re-remember—how to find your rooms. 'Cause,"

She laughs a little. "It's been a long time since you’ve been in them."

"Maybe you could work on collecting the materials necessary for CAD&CADing a cane for her in the meantime," Dewey suggests as he walks over to stand beside me at the desk.

'I've c-c-considered that though! But I c-c-c-couldn't find a good-enough design. They're too flimsy and—!"

"Alphys." Dewey says more gently. "It's okay. If one breaks we can always make more. It’s not the end of the world if Pauline breaks a cane—"

“True—it’s happened lots of times at school.”

“And furthermore, making her a cane won’t be like publishing an academic paper, where she could reject it without any chance for us to remedy our mistakes. This is philanthropy."

"But d-d-d-dad—!"

{"Wait wait what!? DAD!?"}
"That’s true—I haven’t told you yet. Alphys is my daughter."

"Duuuude!" Will and I respond… in the exact same tone of voice… which amuses Chara, for some reason…

Dewey laughs. "I could’ve told you earlier, but it wasn’t relevant. What is relevant right now is that I teach you how to find your room. From here you just have to trail a couple hallways and you’ll be fine."

Dewey's… claws… on my right hand, prompting me to take his left arm. "See you later Alphys."

"We'll m-m-meet back at the main dining area l-l-later. I'll t-t-text you any changes. And bef-f-f-fore you ask Sans gave me your number."

"Ehh —that doesn't surprise me."

The door clicking shut, and Sans, Papyrus, Dewey and I walk one way down the hall, while Alphys, Undyne, and Will go the opposite direction."

*a while of inwardly being scared of running into stuff in my new room later…*

… … "So kid. To summarize: if you're standin' here on the long side of the bed, the door's where?"

"Uh… two-ish o'clock?"

"And if you were standin' in front of the short side instead?"

"Uh… ugh."

Mentally struggling to rotate my perspective.

"It's uh… ten-ish, eleven-ish, o'clock…?"

"So, if I'm interpreting this right," Dewey walks around the perimeter of my room, closing cabinets, it sounds like, "walking in L-shaped paths is best for Orientation and Mobility?"

"Yeah. Straight lines and walking along the wall is just good overall. Open spaces are really hard. And also crowded places —well at least I think they’re hard."

"Can you come over here then so we can talk about that? The Dimensional Box is right next to the door—we haven’t put it on the desk yet. But we can put it where it belongs if you want. The desk is where Alphys put hers, in her room."

From the bed's position in the lower right hand corner of the room, I walk diagonally to the top left corner, toward Dewey's voice, where he puts a hand out to stop me. "Thing is, the Inertia Society's looking for information on your accommodations. So we're trying to train ourselves and everyone else in O&M, braille, and accessibility technology more generally."

“Wait —so you’re teaching everyone braille?”

“We originally intended that me, Alphys, and Sans and Paps would be the only ones to learn it. This was when you first got to Snowdin. But once word got out that you were headed here monsters wouldn’t stop asking us for recommendations about research materials."

“Yeh: ya could say everyone was… really feeling it?”
Sans sighs happily, from… his place on my bed…

"It's strange. I've seen ya walk around without your cane a lot. Which is weird, 'cause visually-impaired people need 'em almost all the time."

"I have dipped my head in the think tank regarding this dilemma as well—"

"Jesus!"

"Oh sorry human. I’ve been standing here by the Dimensional Box this entire time."

"But like if I’m holding on to someone I don’t reaaaally need my cane —I use it still ‘cause I feel safer with it. And like also in high school, if I was walking down a hallway with no poles in the middle and there were no people I’d just run down it and use the cane when I got close to where I was going."

"It is good you have brought up the subject of how you construct routes through locations. Ever since we arrived here, I have been contemplating how you solved the invisible electricity maze. It took me much longer than it should have to realize this: you used the same trailing technique as you did, back in Snowdin Town!"

"Did I refer to the correct orientation and mobility technique? Because that is what my brother and I have learned, from the resources we’ve cobbled together from—"

"Yeah Paps you're right."

"Excellent! Then, having learned this terminology, I realized: if your room was located such that you would only have to trail the side of the hallway where your room's door is located to reach where you wished to go, that would improve your experience navigating the Lab immensely!"

I don’t have to think over his suggestion for long. "{[Yeah that’s true!]}

"GNEH HEH HEH! I knew you would approve of it! I knew this only solves half of your orientation and mobility problems, because not every facility we intend to take you two on a regular basis can be reached by trailing the same wall. But we’ll deal with that when we get there."

"After Paps told me this we looked for a room on the same side of the hall as both of ours. So this one. To get to Paps' room, make sure when ya trail the wall, it’s on your right. And that it’s on your left if ya wannna go to mine."

"It's good we found it."

Sans, much more serious and quiet than he sounded a second ago.

"We really wanted to stay in our old rooms."

"Yes." Papyrus agrees equally softly. "Staying in our old rooms…"

"It will help us remember.

"We did all we could to make sure your living arrangements accommodated the placements of our rooms: Sans Dewey and mine."

"Wait Dewey where are you staying?"
"I'm right across from you."

"[[Eh duuuude!]]"

Dewey prompts me to take his arm. "Let's show you our rooms. Then we'll tour the ground floor for you as best we can. Then we'll let you get settled.

“It's been a… long day… so I wanna give you time to think over this."

"Yeah that makes sense."

*Around a half hour later…*

… "[Hey we can't kick each other in this bed!]"

{"Truuuuue—it’s wider than the one in Snowdin. And the one in Toriel’s house.”}

“Dude Chara like, what time is it?”

The blanket shuffling around on top of me for a couple moments. ["Too lazy to look at clock…”]

"There's a clock in here??"

["Yeah--”]

"But I—"

"I know you can't see it—it's for everyone else―"

“I know that—”

"But yeah I can tell you're tired. I'm not as tired but… I'll stay here 'cause you're sleeping."

I switch positions so instead of facing the right wall, I'm facing toward Chara. "Will you stay the whole time though?"

They scoot closer so our feet touch. ["Depends. It’ll be hard but… I'll try."]

A… lock of hair—brushes my ear, and I grunt in surprise.

["I'm so happy we're here,"] Chara whispers in my ear. ["There's soooo much everyone wants to show you. I don’t know if you know this but… all the monsters who saw you and the Skelebros, they were SOOOOOO happy.”]

"I guess they would be."

“No —they didn’t just LOOK happy. They WERE happy… I could feel it in their magic. You probly didn’t feel it but…

"Look: by the time Alphys has showed you everything you'd think you were stupid for bitching about the Wifi.

"I don't know what to say other than…

“Are you determined to learn this stuff?"

{"Well when you put it like that yeah."}
Chara takes my hand under the blanket. "I think? Alphys told everyone not to use knock knock jokes to get you to open the door—'cause that's Sans' thing—that'd probly confuse you."

I laugh. "True."

Chara squeezes my hand. I squeeze their hand back. ["Good night —Afternoon —whatever… you get it."]

"Night Chara."

*An indeterminate amount of time later…*

…… … "HEEEEEELL YEEEEAAAAAH!!!"

We jerk awake. "[AAAAAALAAAAAH!]

"What the hell what—"

["I don’t know—I don't have eyes in the back of my head!"

"That sounded close by—"

["Yeah…"]

Chara and I mutually groaning, scooting closer to each other because the air conditioning is too cold, and trying to fall back asleep again.

*another indeterminate amount of time later…*

…… … "Ring ring ring ring ring ring; banana phone—"

"[Aaah *incoherent grunting noises* JESUS NOT AGAIN!]]"

{[What’s with all the loud noises?!]}

"Chara get my phone!"

Grumbling and the blanket falling off me. ["Must… reach… phone… without leaving bed…"]

"Duuuuude I know right?"

Chara pressing my phone case right up against my nose. ["Here."]

I touch my finger to the screen to a spot below where the date and time are displayed, and my phone reads out: "Phone. Call from: Sans Wingdings Gaster. One minute ago."

"[[SAAAAANS!]]"

[[He made his own ringtone for when he calls me!? When —?]"

[“Hell if I know—“]

As I double tap on the notification, Chara pokes my arm. [“I gotta go…”]

"Hello?"

"Heya. You have a nice nap? Or should I call it a half sleep? 'Cause Dewey's worried he scared
"ya."
"Oh! I heard someone shout hella loud earlier—"
"Yeh that was him."
"{{Woowooow...}}"
"What happened!?"
"Magic practice. And the newest edition of Undermail."
"[Huh.]
"He wanted ya to be there when it gets read aloud with the rest of the Inertia Society tonight."
[Every time Sans laughs, quote Xenoblade.]
{But that'd be all the time—}
[I don’t care—JUUUUUST DOOOO IIIT!]
{Uh… looks like we don’t have a choice!}
"Well more like in a few minutes. ’Cause it's already nighttime—"
"[Whaaat]?
"Yeh you've been sleepin’ for a while—we’ve been waitin’ for ya—"
"Oh my God…?"
{They're waiting on me.
{Everyone in this fucking place is waiting on me like I’m a fucking celebrity oh my God…?}
“Ehh it’s all good. Ya wanna come to my room? Or should I come over there? Then we can walk over.”
"Sure you can come."
"Be there in five."
"Yeah sure bye Sans."
"See ya soon kid."
The end-of-call dial tone plays.
[Let's go wash your face so we don't feel like complete crap…]
{Truuue—should I take off the pajama pants?}
[Nah—everyone'll be wearing casual clothes. Hell —some of them might be in pajama pants.]
{Thanks dude.}
*several minutes of walking with Sans and nearly running into supply carts later…*

… "So after walkin' down this hallway ya turn right. It's this first door."

"Sweet."

As we stop walking: "WHOAYOUWHACKPEOPLEINTHELEGSTOGETTHEMTOMOOOVE!?"

{ "[HOLY CRAP!]"

“If that’s true that’s sweet yo! Oh and it’s me Will yo!”

"You didn't answer my question!"

"Undyne Jesus!"

I try calming her down as I walk through the now-open door behind her. "But yeah why do you ask?"

"THAT'S AWESOME!"

"And painful."

Sans… seems both intrigued and disconcerted. “I mean, I read about it underline but… still. Wow. You must’ve been a real ankle-biter…."

A collective groan… and acknowledgment that he’s right…

"Only if you don't move out of the way like lots of people did back in high school…"

"Come on! You're sitting with me and Alphy and Will tonight!"

"Alphys said the whole Inertia Society was gonna be here."

"They're here yo. Just in rooms all the way down the hall yo. There's dining areas for all the different groups. And they're sooo cool! The psychology one has a huuuuuuge portrait thingy of this guy with an awesome mustache—"

{[“Oh God no not the Freudians!”]}

“What!? What’s wrong with them yo? They’re hella nice—"

“No—not that! Just—"

“I wanted to eat with them but Alphys told me to eat here instead yo—"

“Uh Will?"

Sans… very uncertainly from beside me. “I’ll make this quick, ‘cause I’m not the one who should tell ya this but…”

Sans takes my hand off his elbow and leans forward. “The kid’s not sayin’ the Freudians are mean. I’ve spent lots of time with ‘em—they’re real nice.

It’s just… the kid must’ve learned this at some point. So ya have to know it too…
“That guy with the awesome mustache?

“That’s Freud.

“And Freud was a dick.

“If ya wanna know the details, ask Dewey. Or Gerson. But mostly Gerson.”

Cue Chara and I making shuddering noises. Undyne soon joins us.

A few seconds of awkward silence before Undyne clears her throat and grabs my left arm. “Ngahhhh—this psychology stuff’s weirding me out. Let’s get to our seats.”

She nearly tears my arm off my shoulder as she begins pulling me farther into the room—at least until she yells out in surprise, and we begin moving in a completely different direction.

{Whaat's happening?}

[Nope nope nope—]

“This feels weird yo!"

Will… sounding like he’s trying to talk while being bumped up and down… He must have been dragged along too.

"Oh! I was just about to get you. Thank you for bringing Pauline over here brrrrother!!"

{"Paaaaaps?"}

We stop abruptly, Undyne nearly falling on top of me. Will grabs onto my shoulder for support. "You are correct!"

A chair being pushed against my outstretched hands. I pull it out and sit down. "No problem bro."

{Wait whaat?}

“My brother took you over here with his blue magic—I’m guessing because Undyne was planning on having you sit over there—“

{He’s pointing--}

{I know—}

{—at the table near the kitchen crammed up against the wall. He must have disapproved of it immensely for him not to give you prior warning that he’d take you here! Let alone that he’d use his blue magic to do it!"

“{{Yeeeeeaaah…}}”

Cue more mutual shuddering noises from Chara, Will, myself… and Undyne.

"And you even gave Pauline a seat close to the end of the table so she could get up more easily! Normally high-ranking Dreemmurrite officials would sit there but…”

A quick gneh heh heh. "But there aren’t any here today." he says more slyly.

Tomato sauce held close to my face?
"I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster, am sitting on your right side!"

{Oh… so thaaaat’s where the tomato sauce is coming from…}

[Yeah.]

{…}

“And I’m across from Sans, so I’m sitting across from you, but one seat diagonally to the left yo! Us and Alphys are at the very left side of the table, in the last, five seats.”

"Uh… Pap-p-p-pyrus?"

Alphys, sitting directly across from me. "I th-think we should get d-d-down to reading the article now before we eat. Before we get too c-c-carried away."

"Of course Alphys! After all, we mustn't be careless."

"{[Oh my God you quoted Dunban! And you like, said it in a normal conversation!]}

“Gneh heh heh! Of course! As of this current moment, forty-eight episodes into Chuggaaconroy’s Let’s Play, Dunban is my favorite character!”

Alphys rummaging around under her seat. "Pauline? I h-h-have a copy of Undermail here. I know I c-c-c-could’ve just sent you the l-l-link to it but… everyone e-e-else was doing th-th-this at dinner so… you r-r-ready?"

"Yeah."

"Okay."

"Welcome the Waterworks: el-Shabaz Exhibits Our Prized Precinct—"

"{[Whoaaaa!]}"

A short "Wow." from Sans.

A whistle from farther down the table to my right, next to Alphys. "Did Shakur help make this headline? The alliteration isn’t like Reed at all. It’s amazing."

"Dad? I d-d-don't kn-kn-know…"

Alphys turns a little to one side to reply. "But it w-w-wouldn't surprise me. But here’s the rest of the a-a-article.

"This afternoon, reports began trickling into our newsroom that Undyne el-Shabaz, Captain of the Royal Guard, had read the Plaque in Waterfall aloud to her to teach her about our history."

"The Plaque?" I repeat.

"It’s th-th-the wall with all the engravings on it, with the dock next to it."

"Oh…"

{For once the name isn’t lame.}

"Anyway," Alphys continues, "l-l-let's s-s-see what Wrighte said…"
"Pauline respected Undyne and her position as Captain of the Royal Guard, at least," one Woshua said. "She had the sense not to talk back to her, like she did Papyrus. She seemed very attentive."

An Aaron agreed. "I mean, I didn't really see much 'cause I was doing my daily flexing—"

"Heh?" I interrupt.

An awkward silence.

"It’s… complicated."

Sans trails off. "It's a species-specific thing."

"What is he—is he like, hella buff or something?"

"Yeh. Most of them are."

Alphys continues reading.

"--but yeah. She was much quieter this time around. If she'd been like that around Papyrus the first time she would've avoided lots of trouble."

"{Yeah he's, probly right.}"

"Anyway Undyne must have thought she was strong enough to handle it," He continued. "To take her through Waterfall personally. She read the Plaque aloud to her. It looked like that was the first time Pauline saw us flexing our collective cultural muscles--"

"{[Eh!]}"

"Heh heh heh heh—"

"SAAANS!"

"What bro? That was pretty great."

"True." Dewey affirms.

"What I don't understand is why Undyne didn’t have her kneel down at each panel and not just the last one," one Moldsmall said. "That's what you're supposed to do. It would have helped her become more intimate with our culture than just, walking by them, if you know what I mean."

"{Uh… that doesn’t sound right…}"

"It's not supposed to be like that," one Moldbyg said. "Separation of church and state, you know? And Pauline still seemed pretty scared of Undyne. But as long as Sans approves of it, I guess it could be worse."

"When the Undermail staff began receiving word of Undyne’s meeting with Pauline, we attempted to contact her, Papyrus, or Alphys for an interview. Instead, Sans responded to our request for information by inviting us to the Inertia Society headquarters. He issued the following statement on the matter.

"I respect the kid for doin' this," Sans said. "I mean, relative to the post-industrial nation she comes from, our history probly seems real barbaric. (laughs)It didn't surprise me Pauline got it so quickly. And it shouldn’t surprise you guys either. This is living history we're talkin' 'bout, not like what she
Sans continued by discussing Papyrus’s promotion to second-in-command of the Royal Guard.

"As for Undyne bestowing that title on my bro? I say good for her. But she better realize that in the Lab, Paps, Alphys and I outrank her. The Inertia Society’s purpose is to conduct independent research for the good of monsterkind. And she damn well believe I’m gonna enforce that."

Sans concluded his statement with a note to the press. "If ya want any info on the kid, ask me. Long as she’s here, she’s under our protection. And this ordinance isn’t gonna change any time soon. It was one of the last things Dadster wrote in the United Theory Papers. We’re gonna respect that."

"And to emph-ph-ph-phasize this p-p-p-p-point," Alphys begins stuttering again, “he pushed our chairs halfway across the r-r-r-room and up a-g-g-g-a-ainst one wall with us s-s-s--still in them. He apologized afterward. “And ya better remember this, you two.”

Wrighte and I left the p-p-p-premises soon after."

Sans guffaws. "Oh: they didn't just leave. Reed nearly tripped on his own feet runnin’ out the door."

Papyrus, in awe. His concern is palpable. "You scared them that badly!? Reed has nerves of steel! Even during the Fishbock Fiasco he wasn’t that scared!"

"THAT little thing?" Undyne scoffs from the head of the table to my left. "That was nothing! That wasn’t even a riot!"

"But y-y-y-yeah."

The woody and bitter smell of a newspaper being shut. "Th-th-this was what we w-w-wanted to sh-sh-show you. While y-y-you're here, you'll be safe. We'll all be."

"But that one Woshua was like, not as, intolerant, as the last one."

[Come on I know you wanted to say worse.]

{I know—but that dude surprised me.}

[Same.]

An affirming "Mm-hmm." from Sans. "They're polarized as a species. ‘Bout politics, I mean. They're either tree-huggers or reactionaries, if ya ask me."

Will begins giggling uncontrollably. “Hee hee hee hee… my parents call them worse. They think Woshuas are like the worst parts of environmentalists and the worst parts of conservatives.”

“Oh?”

Dewey and Sans… sound interested… and Chara and I aren’t sure of what to think of that…

“I… almost wanna know what he thinks of ‘em but… heh heh heh. That wouldn’t be very nice.”

“Oh man!” Will doesn’t seemed perturbed at all. “When they find out about this they’ll toooottally want you to wreck that Aaron…?”
"Oh God oh God nope nope nope!"

{What?}

[Slight eye glow of doooom in both eyes!]

{Nope!}

“Trust me: if I could, I would. You’re just lucky he wasn’t any creepier. Sometimes they’re… misogynistic…“

The sound of a wine bottle being uncorked, the very slow, thick dripping of it being poured, and… "Uh… guys?"

"Yes human?"

Papyrus seems… a little more than thankful that I found a way to divert the conversation…

"Why's it smell like ketchup in here?"

"Oh that? That's me."

"PAPYRUS!"

"{[Dewey?]}

[And Undyne.]

{He sounds… indignant… and Undyne’s… never mind she’s the same.}

[Oooooh yeeeeeah he is. I never thought Dewey’d freak out like that over Sans drinking ketchup but—]  

{Waaaait whaaat!}

[Yeah…]

"Sans?"

Dewey leaning across the table, and adopting a… serious tone which I’m not even sure of whether to call fitting or not. "You never told her you drink ketchup?"

"She never asked—"

"Never asked!"

{[Woooow heee's piiised…?]}

"Never asked!? She wouldn’t have had a reason to ask!"

"Wait wait wait hold up Dewey you can't be serious—"

"Oh. I AM!" he basically yells at me—Sans—both of us… "BY EDISON—"

"HOW DARE YOU MENTION—"

"Dewey. Paps. Hold on ya don’t have to swear —or mention Edison anymore. I got this."
My chair rotating counterclockwise so instead of facing Alphys, my knees bump the side of Sans's chair.

Sans takes my right hand, moving it toward his place at the table until I touch a… slightly sticky glass bottle… and the fingers—phalanges—of his left hand wrapped around the neck.

"{No way.}"

With my hand still on the bottle, Sans lifts it, tilting it toward him. {There’s NO WAY he’s actually gonna do it—}

With his right hand, he shifts my right hand so my fingers are… touching the lip of the ketchup bottle, a little of it trickling past my fingers, my palm pressed against his mandible by his metacarpals.

Only when Sans’ teeth press against my fingers and the neck of the ketchup bottle do I believe it.

{"OH GOD NO WHY!??}"

{"FINE I BELIEVE YOU!!!!}"

[BY TESLA PLEEEAAAASE STOOOOOP!]

I remove my finger's from Sans' mouth… unsure of whether to wipe them off or suck off the extra ketchup, because… {Chaaararaa?}

[No you can’t lick it off—!]

{But why—he doesn’t have saliva—}

[I don’t care it’s wroooong!]

Alphys somehow breaks the silence. "Uh S-S-Sans? I d-d-don't think you had t-t-to—"

Plonking the bottle back on the table. "That's the point.

“What I just did? That's how ya DON’T elaborate on things ya say aloud."

I'm trying not to cringe… and laugh… because he’s right…

"{{We never speak of this again.}}"

"Oh: I’m gonna speak of this again."

Sans being as out-of-place serious as Dewey. “The neurology guys wanted to know how ya process stimuli. So—"

"Son of a bitch—you weirded me out for science!?"

"As GLaDOS said: we do what we must, 'cause we can."

"What's next—are you gonna tell me Dewey's gotten Grillby to get him the bacon-flavored toothpaste and—"

"NO!" It's Dewey's turn to be indignant. "I mean I'm getting in to bacon but—"
"OH BY FARADAY'S LISP CAN WE NOT DIVERT AWAY FROM THE ISSUE AT HAND MORE THAN WE ALREADY HAVE!!??"

[Whoa Paps sounding all fancy again thooooough…?]  
[No that was Dewey—]  
[Heh?]  
[I… don’t get how he sounds like fancy important Paps either…]  

In an instant, I feel shame flooding off everyone in the room.  

Dewey seems muffled, as if he’s looking down, as he timidly says: "S-S-Sorry. I’ve just b-b-been so tense about e-e-e-everyth-th-th-thing ever since Pauline g-g-g-got here I… c-c-c-couldn’t help it."

A woosh of air past my face, and a yelp from Dewey. "Come on it’s okay you big nerd. That fancy voice thing was awesome! It sounded just like Papyrus did, when he was almost done telling Pauline about you guys back at Grillby’s. And besides: from what I hear, Alphy has big plans. Better get all that silliness out of your system now."

“Oh man! How’d you do that yo?” Will sounding… genuinely interested.

“I…” Dewey sitting in thought. “I… don’t know what you’re talking about I was just—“  
“But you sounded all dignified and fancy and pissed off all at the same time yo!” Will insists.  

[Dewey’s like, shaking his head really really really hard…]  
“I… don’t get what you’re saying but…”  

[Sans and Paps glanced at each other. I think they’re… worried…? Or scared? Or… excited?]  

"Big plans?” I ask Alphys.  

"Y-y-yeah.  

“Here’s the th-th-thing. What Dewey and the Gasters showed you to-d-d-day is only part of the Lab. They showed you the m-m-m-most frequently-used areas that everyone sh-sh-sh-shares.”  

Alphys’ sounds… shaken. Breathing quickly and shallowly, she continues, "Tomorrow, I’m going to tell you a-b-b-b-out my research. OUR research, actually. Me, and my dad, and Sans and Papyrus.  

“What we’ve been d-d-d-doing over the past t-t-t-twenty years.”  

"But Alphys?” Dewey looking up suddenly and seeming apprehensive. "You don't mean—"  

"I DO mean it." Alphys replies firmly. "I have to. I know Gaster would… he told me… this kind of research is one of—the most important—things of all to tell the human or humans we’d educate here. I—"  

"But Alph."

Sans losing all traces of his joking self. "It's awfully technical stuff. The kid hasn't taken a college-level biology or chemistry or psychology or sociology or neurology or neuroscience or physics course—"
"I took a dual anatomy and physiology class in senior year of high school. I thiiiiink…? it used a college-level textbook…?"

Sans turns to me… I only know this because he stacks his hands on top of mine, and when he next speaks, he’s louder. "That’s not the same. And it’s not nearly enough.

“Alph: at least let one of the Sperrites tell her how—"

"No Sans."

{[She didn't just—]}

Sans removes his hands from on top of mine.

"I need to do this. Me, and you, and Dewey, and Paps… we HAVE to be the ones to do it. We… we were the ones who researched it. I’d agree with you but…

“Pauline trusts us."

An uncertain, halting giggle from Alphys. "At least, she knows us the best. And I think as of right now, that's the most we could ask of her."

[Sans nodded his skull. So did Paps. And Dewey just… nodded.]

{Good to know.}

"I’ll trust your judgment on this. Ya lead our research team, after all."

Alphys takes a deep breath. Her claws brush the backs of my hands, manipulating them until our palms press together to perform the Inertia Society handshake.

Residual ketchup and all.

"Pauline?"

“Alphys?"

“Tomorrow, it would be an honor to give you a tour of the most sensitive facility in the Underground.

“I call it the True Lab.

“In the True Lab, the Gasters, my father, and I devoted our lives to researching the nature of magic.

“Through that research, we stumbled into world-shattering findings, in a subject that monsters have more impirical experience than in any human.”

The Curies and the Gasters speak in unison, with so much weight placed on every word that I’m afraid I’ll sink into the floor.

“THE NATURE OF THE SOUL.”
Just to clarify: the orientation of the furniture thus far in my room is (clockwise). 12:00 corresponds to an object being directly in front of me, 3:00 directly to the right, etc.

12:00: Dimensional Box  
12:30/1:00: desk  
4:30-5:00: the bed, short side where Chara and I slept against the back wall.  
The door (Relative to the front short side): where described  
The door (relative to the long side of the bed not up against the wall): where described

The orientation of everyone sitting at the dinner table (bottom-right to top-right):

Papyrus, me, Sans  
Undyne (at the head of the table)  
Will (sitting across from Sans)  
Alphys (sitting across from me)  
Dewey (sitting on Alphys' left, across from Papyrus)

I know the position cues were vague, but that's because when I sit with people, I only know where they're sitting once I hear them talk.

We're heading to the True Lab next, boys.

The prospect of finally explaining my crazy DT/magic theory... it fills me with determination.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Let's just say the initial editing process for this chapter was... horrible.

On one hand, I learned how to merge two documents together in Microsoft Word.

On the other hand, I learned how annoying it was to go through and edit every instance of quotation marks being replicated or words being stuck together and or replicated...

{[Never again.]} 

This is why I create separate documents for each day I edit a chapter...

All I can say is... after a week and a half of writing, and around five months of contemplation...

Here we are.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

26

The next morning—day—when we wake up… Chara and I scoot around in bed, a pillow between us, trying to find a pair of positions which would allow both of us to fall asleep, stay close to each other… AND not kick each other. As I move my arm, my fingers brush Chara's hair, splayed across the pillow.

They shift so they face me, their breath blowing against my face as they giggle. ["Why you playing with it?"]

They suddenly sound… strangely younger than usual.

I make an unsure sound. "It's short."

"It's not that short—shoulder-long at most."

Chara's arm emerges from the blanket, their hand touching my right shoulder. "Stop looping it around your fingers—do that with your own hair."

They push my hand, but not enough to motivate me to move it.

"Sorry."I mean, I just… I've been doing it since… I don't know when. Forever. It's a habit."

"How are you?"

"okay. Tired still but—"
"We went to bed before midnight for once!"

"I know but—"

"And it's like—"

Chara presumably glancing at the clock. "—seven o'clock. Or something. I was confused when I saw you awake."

"I told you I woke up at 6:30 in three out of four years of high school."

"But you aren't a morning person—"

"Oh." I grunt. "You have nooooo ideeeeeeaa. And it turns out teenagers don't function properly until the afternoon to begin with so…"

"Oh: I think I do. I share your body. So I'm like… really tired."

Chara readjusting the pillow separating us. "I'm scared."

Barely above a whisper, they lean in close to me.

"I…" I take a breath. "I just don't know what to think. On one hand, I wanna know how determination works but…"

"Alphys—she… she was nervous. Even more than she usually is… at least I think, from the little time I've known her…"

"Yeah." Chara says shortly. "Just a bit."

"I mean this research is secret so… it makes sense."

Chara doesn't reply for a moment. "How about this? You seem awake enough. You wanna go tell Alphys you're ready?"

I groan. "But it's soooo early—"

"But you're awake—"

"Ugh… fine. I'll go wash my face and stuff and we'll see her after…"

Chara patting me on the shoulder as they disappear.

I slowly walk across the room, out the door, and down to the bathroom, the last door on my section of the hallway.

After washing my face, and contemplating how my life has changed so much that someone has successfully convinced me to wake up early with minimal fuss, I leave the bathroom, and someone calls out: "Hi it's Dewey."

"Hey."

He walks closer. "Sleep well?"

The verbal equivalent of a shrug.

"Yeah… the four of us stayed up late Me and Alphys and the Gasters."
He laughs a little. “Everyone's in the dining room. I know it's early and you're not a morning person but… the sooner we get done the longer you have to process it all.”

"Uh… yeah."

“Good. You'll need all the time you can get. Just… Alphys said to change into… sturdier clothes. And bring your bag and phone and phone charger. Oh: and pillow."

"Okay…?"

"'Cause she doesn’t know how long we’ll be down there.”

“Okay…?”

“I'll wait in front of my room okay?"

"Yeah sure."

*A few minutes later*

Alphys' chair scraping against the floor, and her presumably standing from her seat. "Okay. L-l-let's go. The elevator to the True Lab isn't t-t-too f-f-far from h-h-h-here. Just… take my arm, ok-k-kay?"

"Sure."

"I told my parents what you told me, that I'm coming with you yo."

Will, sounding serious for the first time. "They're, kinda scared. But happy too yo."

"You're coming?" I'm, more than surprised.

"There's a reeeeal damn good reason for that."

Sans… speaking from the corner? "Yeh: might seem kinda weird 'cause we told ya me Paps Alph and Dewey would be the only ones comin' but…"

[He shrugged.]

"—trust me: it'll make sense."

I stand from my seat, slinging my bag across my body. Alphys' claws press lightly on my right shoulder, and I slide my hand down her arm until it rests on her left elbow. As we exit the room and start walking through the hallways, I ask Alphys, "Where's Undyne?"

"Well, the th-th-thing is, she kn-kn-kn-knows this stuff already. Kinda. She, actual-ll-ll-y suggested she not go. 'Cause… this isn't her expertise. She told you about our… our inclination t-t-t-toward war. We're going to t-t-t-tell you about our aspirations t-t-t-toward science.

Our group turning right, walking a few dozen feet, then stopping. "Uh… g-g-guys? I d-d-don't th-th-think the elevator will accept my c-c-cr-cr-credentials if I'm with Pauline. One of you has to —" she sounds like she's turned around to address the group behind us.-"

"I can do it Alphys."

Papyrus walking forward a couple steps, bumping me slightly as he strides forward. [He's pressing
his… hands… metacarpals…? to a panel, it’s metal and—whoa are those creepy animated hands???

{I don't know! why—}

The creaking of elevator doors, and Alphys leading me inside until we stand against one wall.

[Does the prospect of finally learning about determination fill you with determination?]

{That's redundant.}

[I know that's why I said it that way—I thought you'd think it was funny.]

{Eh!}

[But does it?] Chara insists.

{Hell yeah.}

Probably—

No.

Cue the most solemn and agonizing elevator ride I've ever taken.

After a minute, I start as our descent jolts to a stop, the doors dinging open. Alphys walks me forward out the elevator doors and forward a couple steps.

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jb8E8NQCErg

I immediately notice that the room seems… quiet.

Too quiet.

It smells like… like a library… or very very old classroom which has been in use for decades.

The stuffiness of stacks of papers and books, a tinge of metal, like my chemistry classrooms, and…

The numbness after portaling Dewey to the balcony of the Skelebros' house.

Enveloping my whole body and soul.

Something alien is here.

Several somethings… which are alien… are here.

Whatever research Alphys led down here… it involved everyone working with something powerful.

{Now I get why this place is secret…} If I had said this aloud, it would have been in a squeak.

[This is like the setup for a horror movie waiting to happen…]

{No duh!}
A few more moments of... of heavy silence.

"Well," Alphys' voice seems to melt into the walls, making her seem so much quieter than she should. "Here we are."

A short walk through the True Lab, strange smells, more numbness, tingling, and... even stranger noises accompanying it all. Eventually, Alphys stops walking, removing my hand from my arm and placing my palm on the back of a chair, indicating for me to sit. Everyone else follows suit.

"Okay." Alphys seems to be, reassuring herself. "I... I have a lot to tell you, all right? I'm going to start talking. I want you to tell me if you get it or not.

"And I want you to summarize what I've told you as best you can."

She says more gently, "And don't be afraid to be confused. This... this stuff is... I don't even know what to call it. It's more than different to you. It's completely outside your ordinary experience.

"And you guys?"

Her voice echoes slightly, as if she's turned away from me.

Everyone else replies with a chorus of "Yes?"

"Don't be afraid to add anything. I had you guys come down here for a reason, after all."

I sense Alphys' breath—

No.

A current of magic blows across my face. "Just... try to follow along. Okay?"

From her seat across from me, Alphys presses her hands on top of mine.

"Yes." I tell her.

**Stop the music.**

She takes a breath, and in the same voice she used when asking me about the Lab's accessibility technology, she begins to speak. It only takes me a few seconds to realize why despite her quirks, Asgore hired her as the Royal Scientist.

"First: I need some clarification regarding your knowledge of the Barrier. You know by now that it requires seven human souls to break it." she asks without actually doing so.

"Yeah."

[Yeah!?] Chara repeats. [Alphys is like, giving you the lecture of a lifetime, and you just say "Yeah!?!??]

{What else am I supposed to say!?}

[At least...]

A mental huff. [I don't know she's being all formal! Be that way. She's telling you about her life's work! She's showing secret stuff to a human she basically doesn't even know. You...]
A frustrated sigh. [I don't know treat her Like a… I don't know. Like how she should be treated. With respect. She's basically part of the government.]

Chara's right.

{I'll try.}

"And that one human soul is essentially as powerful as every monster soul combined."

I'm about to say "Yeah," when instead, I say, "Undyne told me when she read the Plaque to me."

{Chara?}

[I had to do it.]

{Fine.}

"When King Asgore appointed me to be the Royal Scientist, I devoted the first several weeks—or I guess first couple months—of my tenure to thinking about our problem. At the end of that period, I reasoned that we had to find out why human souls were so powerful. Then maybe, just maybe, we could grant monsters that power.

"So I issued a directive to everyone in the Inertia Society: to gather and catalogue every scientific, or sufficiently-detailed publication, about humans they could find. Books about biology, anatomy, physiology, psychology, everything.

"Some members even brought me… religious and mystical texts…” She adds on uncertainly.

"My thought process was that, if we could learn how humans perceived themselves, what they thought made them so strong, then maybe, we could induce that behavior in monsters."

She seems… nostalgic.

"Then my opportunity came.

"Well, it’d be more accurate to say that some monsters had told me my opportunity had come.

"One day, some Inertia Society members interrupted me in the middle of reading some psychology texts. They were urgent. They told me, ‘Come upstairs! Now!’ When I asked why, they rushed me to the elevator to the ground floor, to one of our multipurpose laboratories.

"When I got there, I saw there was a stretcher in the middle of the room.

“And on that stretcher was a human.”

She sighs. "They were—

“No.

“He was a lot smaller than I thought he'd be. Until that point I had mostly studied human adults.

"Over the next hour or so, I was debriefed by residents of the Ruins.

"He had fallen down and had been trying to find the way out. He was only armed with a plastic knife, and had a light blue, woven ribbon around his left wrist.”
I’m about to interject, but Chara holds my mouth shut. {That ribbon—the one I put on my lanyard—what did it look like?}

[Like the one Alphys just talked about--]

{But how--!?

Chara doesn’t answer for a while.

[I guess it was our determination making stuff for us. Like with the gold.]

"What intrigued me was what the residents told me about his fighting style. He never actually used the knife. Instead he tried talking down anyone he encountered. He dodged some bullets, but, most of the time, he'd just move around a little or stand there, and…

"Light blue light would appear around him as he talked. And monsters would get hurt if they tried to move around in it. So it's not like he didn't try defending himself at all."

"Like Papyrus' bones?" I recall.

"Yes." Alphys seems relieved. "Exactly."

"His abilities were sufficient to deal with single monsters but... they weren't enough.

"He was accosted by several of them at once and…"

Her voice breaks, and she stops for a moment. "He... he couldn't stop them. The risk of taking damage didn't scare them. And he didn't even try using his knife."

She doesn’t have to tell me the rest.

"After showing me the body, I wheeled it down here and used my newly-acquired knowledge to…"

She gulps. [She... looks like she's about to throw up. Or cry. Or both.]

"--to perform an autopsy. To, to dissect him. Magic had been used to preserve him so even soft tissues like the brain were completely in tact. Using our medical equipment and magic, I extracted the nervous and glandular tissues and other materials associated with sensory organs, as well as the spine and the brain. Essentially, I separated out these structures from the integumentary system, and nearly all muscle mass. Only the heart remained.

"I stored the components I chose to preserve in a magic-enhanced container. I hooked up, several dozen? Maybe more… electrodes and sensors of all kinds. Some instruments were mundane, like EEGs and heart rate monitors, but others? Not so much. Since I knew he had used magic, I placed some ethergraph equipment around him as well."

Dewey's claws brushing my wrists. He leans in close to me from his position on the left side of the table, and in a quiet, flat voice, he says, "You... don't seem all that shocked by this. I would've thought you'd be sick to your stomach."

"Ehh." I reply in the same flat voice. "I mean, I dissected a cat in senior year of high school. One group in our class had a pregnant cat so I got to feel the fetuses so—"

[Everyone's... kinda grossed out now...]

I continue talking: "I mean this stuff isn't new to me. I read about horror films a lot in high school
and I got to touch a skeleton once 'cause there was one hanging in the corner of my physiology classroom so—"

A collective "WAAAAAIT WHAAAAAT!?!?" from everyone.

"That," Sans contemplates from the right side of the table, "explains why you aren't thaaaat weirded out by me and Paps."

"Yeah…" I shift to the right slightly to face Sans, replying awkwardly.

I turn back to Alphys and ask, "But he was dead. Why were you collecting that data?"

"You’re right: he WAS dead. But only in the clinical sense. He wasn’t SOULOLOGICALLY dead, because we managed to prevent his soul from deteriorating.

“Using a specific combination of magical stimuli, I mimicked electromagnetic impulses in the human body. So I…

“I essentially hooked him up to life support.”

{Chara?

{You were right—NOOOOW this is freaking me out.}

“I watched his readouts the rest of the day, and had someone move a bed and Dimensional Box down here so I could study him more closely."

[Alphys like, put her hand on her chin like the stereotypical smart person pose.]

"At the end of that first day, I was about to leave for the night, excited about what I’d done, eager to tell everyone but…

"But the ethergraphy equipment went wild. The EEG did too. The center of the brain associated with fear… it lit up. If he had been corporial, he would have been generating stress hormones.

“When I walked back to check on the monitors, the measurements went down again. I made sure the readings were genuine, and that my instruments were recording these occurrences, then I began to leave again.

"But the heart rate monitor went crazy. Even though he couldn't breathe anymore, he was displaying all the physiological signs associated with stress he could make.

"I asked myself why this was happening… and at the sound of my voice, the EEG and other instruments calmed down. I asked the other scientists present for their input."

Alphys laughs lightly. "I didn't believe what they said. Not until I noticed that the human's soulological signs began reacting to what we were saying. When we laughed… when we were worried… when we yelled at each other… he seemed to react to our conversation.

“Everyone told me it was because he could hear me. Not with his ears, but with his soul.

“He knew I was leaving.

“And he… didn't think me rushing out of the room like that was a good idea.

"I was about to ask him if this was true, then I realized: I hadn't extracted his vocal cords so he
couldn't speak.

"Then, Sans suggested something. And even to this day, I still can't believe it.

"You wanna tel her?"

"'Course.

"I said this.

"I'm gonna ask ya three yes-or-no questions.

"After I ask one, I'm gonna walk toward Alphys.

"If ya wanna answer yes to a question, turn the space around her blue. I’m gonna mark this space, a two-meter radius around her, with clear tape on the floor.’

"After ya answer each question I’m gonna exit that radius and wait three seconds. Then, I’ll ask ya the next question and approach Alphys again.”

Sans pauses a moment before continuing.

"'Course, I put down the clear tape b’fore we started.

"First, I asked: can ya really understand us as well as if ya could still hear with your ears?

"I got halfway toward ‘er before that kid lit up the circle I marked out. Then I walked away and wwaited the three seconds.

"Next, I asked: Are ya truly concerned about Alphys’s current emotional state?

"I walked one foot inside the circle before he lit it up.”

Chara and I wait eagerly for Sans’s last question.

"The last question I asked was this.

"Are ya truly afraid of bein’ left alone tonight?”


"That’s how far I got before he turned that circle blue.

“So that answered Alphys’s question.”

"Me, Sans, Paps, Dewey, and some other Inertia Society members moved our most essential belongings down here. I put my bed in the room next door. And we ran some lights from his room to mine. I told him to make them blink if he needed anything.”

"You keep calling him he,” Will points out what I was about to say. "What was his name yo?”

In a soft voice, Alphys whispers, "Simon.

"His name was Simon.”

We all sit in silence for a few moments. "Simon." Will and I repeat in hushed tones.
"He had been ten, almost eleven years old, when he had been killed in the Ruins.

“He had been interested in handiwork and crafts.

“The ribbon had been part of something he wanted to make. He'd been out on a walk, trying to think through his plan for the project the ribbon belonged to when… when he fell into the Underground…”

Dewey, in an equally-soft voice. "From then on the rest of Alphys’s team—which included me—ate breakfast in Simon's room. We put sensors on ourselves and light strips everywhere and told him to activate them if he wanted to talk to us or ask us things.

"We created a program which sent the magitronic impulses he created to certain sensors which would translate them into responses which could be shown on a monitor.

"We asked him questions about his life, before he appeared in the Underground.

“He answered.

“And when he asked us where he was, we showed him pictures and videos of the entire Underground.

“And when he finally got around to asking about the technology keeping him alive, we told him everything. It took several days, but he sat through it, frankly, better than I would have.

"After a few weeks, when we surmised that Simon was comfortable around us, I asked him a very important question:

“Why did you use those light blue attacks, when you had the plastic knife with you?

"Simon's answer chills me to this day."

Dewey speaks each word slowly. “He said… wrote… answered, I didn’t think hurting any of you on sight would help me find the way out of the Ruins. I knew I had to wait for the perfect opportunity to escape each encounter. And I decided I'd wait as long as I had to. And I'd do anything I could to stall for time.

"But I wouldn't attack first. That'd be… wrong.

“I had to be… patient.”

"So he showed you guys mercy, even though he could’ve hurt you?” I summarize.

"Yes. Kind of…” Dewey answers. “Kind of like what you've been trying to do. Don't get me wrong—he still hurt some monsters but—”

I laugh harshly. "Emphasis on try. And at least he didn’t go so far as to tell Asgore to fuck himself…”

Papyrus picks up where Dewey left off. "We got to know Simon really well! We talked with him every day for… hmm…

“Two-and-a-half years?”

“{Jesus!}”
“We got to know everything about him. How the other students his age didn't understand why he liked sewing and working with cloth. How they teased him for being too quiet. He told us… he thought if he waited, it'd stop.”

“But it didn’t.”

No one confirms or denies this for me.

“He thought if he took his time, if he made something cool, they'd be impressed. That they'd understand—“

I cut off Papyrus mid-sentence: “But they never did.”

Again, no one answers.

We appended a sewing machine to his ethergraphy equipment so he could make us things. He had been in the middle of making Dewey an Inertia Rune vest when the second human fell into the Underground. This was approximately two-and-a-half-years after Simon appeared."

[Oh maaan Paps is hyyyped…?!]

{Whyyyy?}

"She was the complete opposite of Simon,” Alphys says. “Tailor went down fighting. And she managed to get to Snowdin. Not far, but she did.

“By this time, I had installed cameras outside so I could observe the humans myself.”

"Heya Alph?"

"{Ahhh Jesus!}"

"Forget I was here kid?"

[Sans is… amused…]

{How can you tell?}

[He's like, smiling differentlike…]

{Okay…?}

[Trust me there's a difference. It's small but… there IS one.

[Oh and quote Xenoblade.]

{Whyyy?}

[Sans laughed—]

{Wait we’re seriously—}

[What do you think?]

{Uh… "I'm really feeling it!"}!

"You're gonna skip right to the nitty-gritty science stuff and totally ignore that awesome abs
Alphys doesn't answer…

"I'm guessin' that's a yes.

"Tailor was a feisty one. Tried punchin' me in the face when she first saw me. She turned her fists and the space around her orange too. If I stood still near her it'd hurt me so… yeah: I had to keep my distance to talk her down."

Sans sighs. "Her recklessness cost her.

"She killed a couple monsters in self-defense but couldn't get through Doggo. It didn't help that he used Simon's light blue magic in his attacks, so she hurt herself whenever she tried movin' toward him."

"Whoa…" "Will and I respond in shocked tones.

Alphys' turn to talk. "This time we were prepared. Soon after Simon was killed, I had Asgore issue an order to everyone in the Underground, that anyone who found a human dead would use magic to preserve them. And if they didn't have the expertise for that, they'd call up Royal Guard and Inertia Society members to do it, and that they'd accompany them here. We knew that unlike the physiological effects of death, the deterioration of a human soul takes several hours. So the preservation process wasn't nearly as time-sensitive as you might think.

"So when she was brought in from Snowdin, I already had the surgical equipment, container, and sensors ready."

Alphys laughs. "Ooooh maaaaaan she was reeeeeeally angry when the partial revival process was done. She kept firing orange bullets at us. And it took Simon basically breaking down into tears —"

She backtracks, "—well we only knew this because the parts of the brain associated with sadness were activated so… yeah. It it didn't literally happen but…

"It took THAT, and Sans and Papyrus saying her bandana was awesome for her to calm down."

"I mean you guys are right yo." Will says matter-of-factly. "It's a bandana with abs on it! That's like, awesome yo! Just thinking about it's making me feel buff!"

{"Duuuuude."} I interject. "{This is making me feel like a fucking whimp…}"  

"But yeah: we had them stay together, and we set up more screens in front of their eyes—well their eyes and the related optical organs—hooked up to some magitronics. So they could communicate. And we had to get extra sensors for Tailor 'cause she kept overstimulating them, 'cause her and Simon argued aaaaall the time."

"Actually," Papyrus muses, "they resembled Sans and my interactions, when we argue. Except with no awful puns."

"At least,"; even I know Dewey's smiling, "not at first. Simon made his first brain pun a month after Tailor arrived."

Dewey guffaws. "And ooooh maaaaan she was basically screaming for hours after that."
"What was she like?" I ask. "Was she like, a boxing fan or something?"

"Kind of. She said she liked martial arts. She had belts in several of them. But she never lasted very long in any of her classes 'cause she'd pick fights. And her teachers... really didn't like her talking back."

Alphys hurriedly adds, "Don't get me wrong—she was no jock and she wasn't stupid but... yeah: she was in to the don't think, feel thing."

[Quote please?]

{Uh... "Yeah Shulk! Get stuck in!"}

[Heh?]

{It's Reyn...}

[Oh.]

"She mellowed out though, when Paps started comin' down here as much as Alph did. They'd yell at each other aaaaall day."

"And she even kept it up when the third human fell down. And Steven didn't even mind. He yelled quite a bit as well!" Papyrus moves on to the next topic in the only way he knows how: by making a little more of my hearing go away.

The Inertia Society members chuckle.

"What was he like yo?" Will steals my question out of my mouth.

"He could use dark blue magic. Well we call it blue magic. And everyone differentiates between it and Simon's magic via context, but... yeh. He looooved to dance. I saw 'im dance a bit to dodge Papyrus's attacks. Even if he wasn't really dancin', he definitely had a sense of rhythm which helped 'im a ton."

[A skele-ton?]

I can't help but laugh aloud.

“‘You missed the opportunity for a pun,’ dewey points out in loo of Chara.

“‘Oh: I didn’t. Pauline’s already laughin’.”

"Frankly," Sans stacks his hands on top of Alphys’s and mine as he continues talking, "it was pretty damn stylish. And it worked. He dodged my bro's attacks, and even knocked him over with it once. Even redirected some bones."

In a more sober tone, Sans admits, "But it didn't last long.

“‘He didn't make it far into Waterfall at all. A couple Woshuas killed 'im and got Undyne to bring 'im here.’”

We take a moment of silence before Sans continues.

"When he got revived the three of 'em started arguin' a lot. But it wasn't all bad. They couldn't agree on how to act like around us. Steven said he'd stick by the life lessons his dance and
gymnastic coaches taught 'im, no matter what. 'Cause even if everyone around 'im changed, he’d stand firm. He’d stay the same.

“And as for what Tailor thought of ‘im?”

Sans laughs. {"Feel the flow of battle!"}

"She said she get in there and do what her heart told her was right. So in a way, her and Steven could agree on what mattered."

"That," Papyrus' voice seems on the verge of a gneh heh heh, "and that his magic was the coolest! He could move things around the room for us. And fill out paper forms with a real pen."

"And he'd ask us to have the TV or radio on in here," Alphys recalls fondly. "He'd move stuff to the beat."

The Inertia Society members continue this way, everyone telling stories about each of the remaining humans.

David,: the human who used healing magic and Undyne’s shields, was the chef, and Papyrus’s protégé. Dewey recalls, “He tried to get Simon and Tailor to cooperate, to help him cook in their room. He saw the good in every monster he met, and he tried to demonstrate to them that he wouldn’t stop being kind to them, no matter what.”

Sans, with profound respect: “He even healed monsters who got hurt. And shielded everyone who went through Waterfall with ‘im. ‘Specially the monsters who defended ‘im till he reached Undyne.

“And before ya ask why they didn’t help ‘im fight Undyne? David wanted to abide by her rules. To show he cared about her.”

"Undyne respected him a lot." Alphys muses. "I think he had the biggest influence on her, out of all of them. She saw a strength of character in him which she could relate to, even if he didn’t fight in the same way she did. She even asked him to teach her his shielding techniques. Actually, he inspired her to use green magic in the way she does."

Next comes Adam, who everyone agrees is the smartest of the six overall. The Skelebros and Dewey talk over each other in the process of telling stories about his intellect. How he took notes on the monsters he met. How he stayed with the Skelebros to practice his magic. How he copied down passages from the Snowdin Library to take with him. How he thought Undyne’s spears exploding against the rocks in Waterfall was awesome. How he'd always say "I reject your reality, and substitute my own”, when talking to the scientists.

How he said he did what he did because he knew he had to persevere, no matter the circumstances. That he had to be open to thinking of some MacGyver-style plan at any moment to escape danger. How he had fallen into the Underground while talking with his friends about what they'd do if a zombie apocalypse happened…

"Duuude Sans like, is Adam why you're into zombies?"

"Yeh. And why Paps is into Portal. And he got the rest of us into horror movies. Those of us who weren’t too chicken, anyway."

"Sweeeet!" I can't help but feel hyped.
"Funny story about what he was doing when he appeared here…” Alphys says, “He WAS with his friends, but he left the group to do something—and he told them he’d be right back—“

“Let me guess: he never came back ‘cause he ended up here—“

Sans and Papyrus, in unison: “Never, ever, ever, under any circumstances say I’ll be right back. ‘Cause you won’t be back.”

"Then there's kari." Alphys remembers fondly after waiting for the Skelebros to make their reference.

All the Inertia Society members burst out laughing. "She was fun!" Papyrus shouts. "She showed us how to fire guns and stuff!"

"Wait whaaat the fuck!?"

"YES! She had some… airsoft guns with her when she fell down here. She was out with some cousins at a makeshift shooting range they made. They used boards with pictures of people they hated pinned on them for targets!"

"Duuuude sounds pretty sweet." I blurt out.

"But," Will interjects, "how would you even shoot a gun without shooting the wrong person yo?"

"There are places in the U.S. where blind people can own guns under the Second Amendment."

"Huh."

Sans… doesn’t seem surprised, somehow. "Makes sense. I mean, if someone insists blind people can't own guns they’re denying ya your right to bear arms."

"And to short-sleeved shirts." Dewey pipes up… and we all cringe-laugh.

"She was always saying she wished she had the power to get us free," Papyrus praises. "For great justice! As she’d always say it.

“That, and when in doubt? C4.”

"Yeh." Sans and I acknowledge the reference.

"Wow but like, all the Mythbusters fans fell down though!"

"Yeah. That made things… pretty fun around here," Alphys sighs happily.

"and it got even better when Kari's one-year anniversary of falling down—like, not into the Underground, but being killed for her soul—came around.”

Before I can snark: “And yeah I know it sounds morbid but I’m getting there.

“That day—and for lots of days after—every single member of the Inertia Society cleared their schedules to come down here and meet them. By this time I managed to build software that could recreate their voices, mediated via their brains and magitry, of course.

“And they talked with everyone over some cake Simon, Adam, and David made.”
Before anyone can interrupt: “And yes you could argue that since the cake was finished every time it was made, that whoever showed up after it was gone could say the cake was a lie and it’d be right.”

“I wasn’t gonna—“

“She knows you know Pauline.” Dewey clarifies. “She’s doing it for Sans—“

“I wasn’t gonna—“

Paps, sarcastically: “of Course not…"

[Alphys is like, really thoughtful right now.]

"On one of those days, something really important happened."

“That day, some Inertia Society members were asking about their motives. Their plans of action. Praising how even though they had different ways of solving their problems and interacting with monsters, each of them found a way through, for as long as they could, with what they had.”

[She's looking at Sans.]

{Whyyy?}

"While that talk was goin’ on I was thinkin’ over their responses."

“What drove ‘em to do what they did.

“How they had the strength to stick to their guns till the end.

How Tailor kept fighting, even with a nearly-severed hand.

“How Adam used his magic to stay standing, even as he bled out. They found ‘im standin’ up: none of the other humans were found like that. Not even Tailor.

“No matter what any of ‘em did, they acted that way ‘cause they wanted to survive.”

{Wow—these guys must’ve been really damn cool and good and smart for everyone to like them and respect them thaaaat much. And only Kari finished middle school—she was only a couple weeks away from starting high school when she showed up here.}

Sans’ voice sounding muffled, as if he’s looking down.

"I… didn’t think it through.

“What I said, I mean.

“It just came to me.

“A flash of inspiration. Like Archimedes runnin’ through Syracuse naked—“

“Waaaaaaaait whaaat!? No no no no no!” Will interrupts.

Dewey and Sans snicker all… immaturelike… “Will,” Dewey joking with him, rather than just sounding like a college professor… “It’s true. At least, everyone thinks it is.”

“Yeah.” I verify.
“Uh… Sans?” Alphys asks in a small voice. “Can you just… get to the point?”

“Sure thing.”

[Sans is looking up again.]

“I asked the six of ‘em this question.

“You guys must have been pretty damn determined to do all that, huh?”

Chapter End Notes

The gloriousness is coming.

Slowly, we're getting there.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

See the end notes for citations to the web sites I used... and an explanation for its... finer points. Read them only if you're sufficiently confused. If not, ignore them.

Also horray for medical ethics, me being unapologetic, and double standards!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

27

"WHAAAAAT!!"

[That's it!? Just whaaaat?]

{I mean what else do you think I should say? It's sooo deeeep!}

[Yeah…] Chara haltingly admits. [Truuuuue.] But seriously you don’t even stop to think “waaaaaaait Saaans named the thiiing?” and then say “Whaaaaat!?!”]

"On one hand,” Dewey’s, college professor tendencies, seem to be the only habit keeping him calm, "I'm not surprised by this reaction.”

"Kinda reminds me of a crappy Vine montage. Just cut together some screenshots that don’t even begin to describe what you're reactin' to and—"

"{"SAAAAAANS!!}"

"HUMAN!!! You are finally interjecting in conversation in the same manner and toward the same subjects as I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster! I am proud of you!"

"{"Yeah!!}” I affirm.

"On the other hand," Dewey… somehow manages to continue, "I'd think you would have taken the time to…"

[He's ringing his hands.]

"—and I don't know, mull over it…?

“Or is everything so uniformly weird around here you’ve just stopped questioning it?”

A verbal shrug. "Yeah… Kinda…

“Well like Sans told me he named the thing just before we saved you so… yeah: I knew already. But I didn’t know how he did it or like, about the stuff before."

"Hmmm."
"Well, I guess this makes my job a lot easier. It’s probably best I ask this now, just so we’re on the same page."

In a clear voice: “What else do you know about determination?”

I say with no hesitation… and not just because Chara is compelling me to do it: "That humans can come back to life with it."

"Exactly."

[She’s really surprised.]

“Well technically it allows humans to continue functioning longer than their physiological signs would suggest, and much better than their physiological signs would suggest, but…

“Yes.

“If a human was determined enough, I guess they could survive, even at the edge of death, and maybe even heal themselves, but that’s purely speculative.”

{She doesn’t know about the save points. Or saving.}

[Yeah.]

{But how? If she researched it then--}

{It’s… complicated. Just trust me I don’t think she has to know about that right now. You’re here to learn from her… and the sides: I don’t even know how we’d explain it to her.}

{I guess that’s true.}

“Do you know why determination allows its user to do this?”

I recall Chara and I discussing determination in the Ruins, and Sans directing me on how to use his knowledge to teleport Dewey to his house.

I compose myself. "It's 'cause…

“It’s 'cause no one wants to die." I say in a small voice.

“If someone wants to use determination, they have to think about wanting to live.”

"Exactly. That’s one way to think of determination. It was the first one we came up with, actually.

“I saw… you used determination to get yourself more gold than you should’ve been able to get, so… you figured out that it can do things besides stop humans from dying." After a moment of confusion… and paranoia, I remember Alphys’ cameras. "Oh yeah: you did didn't you?"

[I forgot about them too… so…] ‘At the ball in Snowdin." I continue to recall.

"Yes."
“Since we’re talking about the ball game, it actually brings up an important point.

“There are six other forms of magic besides determination. When a player plays the ball game in a specific way, a colored flag pops out. And each flag represents one of those forms. Actually, thanks to our research, there’s a seventh flag now, to represent determination.

“Besides determination, the other six forms of magic are as follows.

“Patience.
“Bravery.
“Integrity.
“Kindness.
“Perseverance.
“And justice.”

“Like each of the dudes you were talking about—“

[Don’t just call them dudes—!]

{You know what I mean—and they do too!}

“As you might have gathered from the conversation we had with the six souls, which led to Sans calling them determined, each of these colors of magic is driven by a specific…”

Alphys searches for the right word. “Motivation? A certain way of life? Guiding principle?

“Even now we haven’t settled on what to call it.

You must have noticed, Simon, Tailor and the rest of them had differing reasons for interacting with monsters the way they did, but overall, they all wanted to carry through that plan of action, no matter the circumstances.

“Until their final breaths.”

“And they all did yo.”

[Will you’re freaking us out—I didn’t think you’d be the serious one—]

{True!}

“So you’re right: determination is magic driven by the will to live. It’s the most,”

Alphys stops, probably unsure of what term to use again. “primal.” She eventually settles on.

“Though humans have portrayed magic in innumerable manners throughout their cultures, they all possess an integral attribute in common.

“One that monsters’ conception of magic wholeheartedly shares.

“Undeniably, determination stands as an exemplar of this attribute.”

The room has fallen silent.
Alphys’s voice sounds more… FIRM.

More… COMPOSED.

Like she has thought of what to say for a very long time.

Even longer than just one night.

More like her entire life.

{Why the fuck does Alphys sound like Dewey last night when he got pissed at Sans!??}

[Hell if I know!]

{Like what’s the deal—it’s freaking me out!}

[Same!]

[Like, what the hell is she talking about?]

Rushing to think of a way to… condense… Alphys’s description into fewer words before she starts talking again. {She thinks that humans made up lots of kinds of magic that have one thing in common. Even with the one that monsters use.}

“After countless hours of analysis, I have isolated the commonality between these systems, inclusive of Dreemurrite soulology, and of determination.

“Even more than humans already characterize magic, determination is defined as the resolve to change fate.”

Chara and I can’t help but gasp and make other mind blown noises.

“[OOOOOOOHHH!]”

“Heya… Alph?”

Sans… as surprised as us.

“It’s not like you to be so…”

[Okay—you know it’s bad when Sans doesn’t know what to say--]

{Dude like… why’s everyone all weird all of a sudden?}

[I don’t know.

[To be fair this stuff’s important. And I’d bet that they stayed up all night trying to figure out how to tell you all this without confusing you.]


“I know.”

Everyone sighs as Alphys’s voice reverts to its slightly high-pitched, squeaky form. “I just… that was…

“I’ve been thinking about that stuff for a long time. But I never had the chance to talk about it with
“Of finding the right words to say.”

Everyone’s tension fades away. “Alphys?”

“Yeah Dewey?”

“I think I should take it from here. Saying that it… I can feel it. It took quite a bit of effort.”

Alphys giggles.

“I’ll explain the testing on the six souls. And if you want to correct me, go for it.”

“Y-y-yeah. S-s-sure thing.”

As Alphys talks, she scoots her chair closer to the table and… puts her head down on it.

“Observing the six humans use magic confused us. They hadn't had a day of formal training in their lives! And yet… they were doing things that would have required extensive education: human and monster.

“So me and Alphys and the others wrote up some formal interview questions to ask them. Then we coded them for—“

“[[Coded?]]”

“Yes, coded. But not in the computer science sense. We wrote down their answers and noted when they mentioned certain subjects. Highlighted each of their answers under a certain topic in a different color. Broke their answers up into smaller chunks that we could analyze, and such.

“In particular, we asked them about their lives on the surface. About what you call, paranormal or psychic, experiences.

“None of them had any.”

“Well,” Papyrus hesitantly says, “Adam believed in ghosts even more than he already did that one time after he watched The Exorcist—but that was while he was in the Underground already. So, gneh: that didn’t count.”

“So nothing?” I ask.

“Nothing. They were only able to levitate objects, or heal wounds, or shoot magical bullets once they fell into the Underground.

"So Alphys and I—but mostly Alphys—hypothesized that determination catalyzed their magic. And that their exposure to the latent magic in the Underground activated their determination."

"So like, you guys thought that determination was what made humans so strong.”

Everyone in unison: “Yes.”

“And if you gave the determination to monsters it’d be the same.”

“Yo! That one week of college coming in handy thooooough!”
“[Eh!]"

“Obviously we use magic naturally, but yes.

Determination would increase the effectiveness of monsters’ magic, relative to what they are normally able to do.

“Alphys?"

Dewey… turning to one side and essentially talking to the tabletop. “I think you should explain this. For one: you designed this series of experiments. And you lead them too.”

The table shaking slightly as Alphys lifts her head. “Sure. I… I think I feel less… weird… than I was before.”

“What I did,” Alphys explains as Dewey leans away from me, “was that I took measurements while the six of them used magic and saw something… interesting.

“When hooked up to ethergraphy equipment, we noticed their production of a certain hormone increased. These increases did not occur in their resting states. We even correlated the increase in that hormone to the amount of magic each of them generated within a certain amount of time.”

“But like…” I’m not sure how to phrase my question, “what does this hormone have to do with determination?”

“We didn’t think the increase in the hormone was relevant. We only looked at it more when we saw that the concentrations increased when they used magic. It LOOKED like they were correlated, but we needed to know for sure.

"If humans’ ability to cast magic derived from the latent magic they were exposed to, we needed to remove as much magic from their rooms as possible. And control how much magic they were exposed to so we’d know if something had happened.”

A short chuckle. "We started powering the measuring equipment using conventional electricity—"

“Wait what do you mean conventional electricity?” I repeat. “Do you guys have superconductors or something?”

“I don’t think so yo.

“I don’t actually know whether this is true but…”

[Will’s like, talking to Alphys—]

“Controlling for the density differences in the walls isn’t really a thing humans have to worry about with their electricity right?”

[Dewey’s… I don’t even know how to describe what he’s doing…]

Chara… awkwardly trailing off… has to mean whatever’s happening is… weird…

“Calm dooooown Pauline hasn’t learned the thiiiings yeeeeeet!”

Will laughing in delight. “Sorry Alphys sorry Dewey. It’s just, my parents were soooo happy when they found out I was learning Magitry at school yo!”
“GNEH HEH HEH! THAT’S THE SPIRIT!”

Will yelps as… Papyrus… {What happened?}

[He like, thumped Will on the back a liiiiiittle tooooo hard…]

“In any case,” Alphys continues, “anyone who interacted with the humans in that room was told to restrict their fields of knowing to their corporial bodies, so their souls wouldn’t set off the detectors by accident. For all intents and purposes, these monsters would be invisible to those particular instruments, and to any monsters who tried using their fields of knowing to examine the testing spaces without their corporial bodies being present.”

“I’d make a blind person joke here but…”

A short, deep chuckle from Sans. “That’s your thing. And I don’t think I’ve earned that. Haven’t known ya long enough.”

A verbal shrug. “Ehh. As long as it’s not shitty it’s fine.”

“Good to know for later…”

“We had them sit at rest, and then perform various tasks, magic-related and not.” Alphys continues. “In both cases, we analyzed their physiological parameters and the composition of their ethergraphs.

“Then, we compared those ethergraphs to those of monsters with the same cemented forms of magic.

“while performing tasks not requiring magic, the six humans’ ethergraphs were not significantly different from the ethergraphs of monsters who were both cemented in the same forms of magic, and who were also performing tasks not requiring magic.”

Chara groans. [Too much math…]

“So like, what happened when they used magic?”

“A couple things.

“In order for monsters with the same cemented forms of magic as Steven and Adam to manipulate the objects they did, they would’ve needed extensive knowledge of physics.

“Which neither of them had.

“If a monster cemented in green magic wanted to affect biological tissue in the ways David did, it would require extensive biological and medical knowledge.

“David didn’t have that knowledge.

“That, and during testing or not, sometimes, the humans’ fields of knowing didn’t seem to be restricted to their room. Steven would move things, and Kari would shoot things, in rooms they had never actually been in at all.

“When we were experimenting on them, they knew we were in another room—obviously—but they didn’t know what the monitoring room looked like, so under the Dual Awareness Principle, they—"
“{[Wait heh?]}” is our… unprofessional but completely justified response.

“The “Dual” in the name,” Dewey jumps in without skipping a beat, “refers to being knowledgeable of the object, system, or being that is being manipulated, knowing that object, system, or being is even in their field of knowing in the first place, and—“

“{[Uh…]}”

A bony hand on my wrist. I jerk away, but a pressure appears on my body—

No.

On my soul.

“Curie?”

Sans, in a firm, stern voice.

“How ‘bout I explain this?”

HE grabbed my wrist.

HE’S casting blue magic on me.

“Does the phrase “knowledge is power” ring a bell?”

“Uh… yeah…?”

“THAT'S what the Dual Awareness Principle is.

“But WE don’t call it that.

“Instead, we say “Magic is a matter of degrees”.”

I repeat: “Magic is a matter of degrees.”

“Yes.

“Dadster thought of it.

“The “Dual” in Dual Awareness Principle refers to these two questions.

“To what degree do you know about what you’re casting magic on?”

“{[Yeeeeeaaaaaaah…?]}

“And to what degree can you affect the environment with your magic?”

He loosens his hold on my wrist and lifts the pressure of his blue magic from my soul, for the most part. Simultaneously, Chara and I frantically work through the information.

We don’t want to keep him waiting.

“So like,” I say slowly, mind racing, “Simon Tailor and everyone doing all the stuff you said was weird ‘cause they were doing things with a degree of precision that they shouldn’t have…?

“And they were doing it as if they knew stuff that they like… didn’t actually know…?”
A deafening silence.

At least, before Sans lets go of my wrist… and my soul… and starts clapping.

Not sarcastically clapping.

Not slow-clapping.

GENUINELY clapping.

Chara and I exhale a little… anticipating someone to respond.

“Ya might’ve hated gettin’ down all your reasonin’ in AP U.S. History in so much detail… but it sure as hell helped ya now.

“Ya might’ve bitched ‘bout school sappin’ ya of your creativity, but this kinda deduction… you’ve damn well learned how to use it.”

Chara and I exhale a little more.

“How many times do I gotta tell ya?

“Ya got it.

“And ya did it in less time than all the others. Only Adam thought it all through anywhere near as fast.

“We’ve officially taught ya the most important thing any monster learns in school.”

It takes Chara and I a few more seconds to exhale completely. We basque in our smartness for a little while.

“Okay.”

Sans has leaned away from me. “Dewey? You can talk now.”

Dewey, stumbling over his words: “I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t h-h-h-have ass-ss-ssumed you—“

“It’s all good—it’s like when my friends talk about the games they play and I don’t get it—they have to explain everything again. It’s fine.”

Dewey takes a deep breath. “Well, in that case, now that you know what the Dual Awareness Principle is, I can explain how the six humans’ uses of magic violated it.

“Monsters improve their precision in using their magic both by learning to cast it on smaller and smaller objects, projecting their soul over larger and larger distances without tiring, and thus, affecting a larger sphere of influence—“

“Heh heh heh—“

“SAAAAANS!”

“Thank you Papyrus.”

Dewey huffs. “Just ‘cause fields of knowing are traditionally drawn as spheres doesn’t mean they’re puns!”
“Course not…”

[Wooow Dewey’s annoyed…?]

“Anyway…

“They also learn more about the objects they’ll be manipulating, so they can apply that knowledge to these two exercises.”

Will startles me by pointing out, “So that’s why sneaking up on my friends doesn’t work yo! ’Cause they know what they walked past. So when I try sneaking up on them, they notice the change. Even when I’m trying to be stealthy…”

[“And—”] I turn to Sans while Chara says what I say to him, ["that's how your shortcuts work.”]

Clapping from everyone, and not just Sans this time. "Yeh. Exactly.

“I helped Alph design those experiments. We kept makin’ the testing area larger, and movin’ the monitoring equipment farther away, thinkin’ their fields of knowing couldn’t reach us—”

I interject, [“But they did.”]

"To test how large their fields of knowing were,” Alphys picks up where Sans left off, “we did a double-blind test—”

[Quote Xenoblade]

{Uh… “This is the Monado’s power!”}

I can’t help but cringe… because as bad as the pun—accidental pun—is… it’s the correct terminology…

“Actually, it was more than just double-blind. If that’s possible.

“In a normal double-blind test, both the participants and the scientists don’t know who will receive which treatment—“

I affirm “Yeah—“

“I say it’s more than just double-blind because the participant, and who among us would talk to them, were randomly assigned simultaneously. And we communicated with our assigned participant through text, so no one knew who they were talking to.

“We were sent off throughout the Underground in enclosed, windowless, soundproofed trailers, so we didn’t even know where we were when we communicated with our assigned participants. Even if a trailer was just outside the Lab, we moved each one an equal amount of time to make sure we couldn’t deduce our location.”

“And none of you guys projected out your fields of knowing—“

Alphys and Paps… with surprising sass: “DUH!”

"After crunchin' the numbers, we saw: we were right.” Sans explains. “To a point.

“Determination gives a human a much larger field of knowing and ignores the Dual Awareness Principle entirely.
"But it did so much more.

"The hormone they made when castin’ magic in our earlier experiments, its presence set off the magic detection equipment. And THIS time, we knew it wasn’t ‘cause there was somethin’ wrong with our equipment."

Alphys repositions her hands so they are underneath mine. "After they cast magic, we asked them about the, triggering event or desire they drew on.

"Each of them said they remembered how casting magic felt when they first encountered a monster… and right before they were killed…"

I whisper, "The will to live…"

"Exactly.

"That desire manifested as one of the other six forms of magic we were familiar with."

"But," I ask, "what about that hormone? Is that… is that where the determination came from?"

"Yes. It's called DMT. I'd give you the real name but—"

"I mean, I learned some chem in high school—"

"Its formula is C12H16N2. I don't think I need to tell you what it looks like—"

"Ugh…"

"Yeah…"

Alphys laughs. "I can see how learning chemical structures would have been… painful… for you.

"What you need to know is that DMT, when administered, causes rises in blood pressure and heart rate. It causes the production of several other hormones to increase too. Like endorphins, which inhibit pain. It's also thought that DMT helps with anti-inflammatory responses and tissue regeneration.

"So basically, magic exposure amplified DMT’s preexisting effects.

"And the six humans drawing on the will to live gave them control over their bodies they wouldn’t have had otherwise, so they could increase their own DMT production on command.

"When combined with DMT's new, magic-induced properties, they cast magic without training and exhibited the… powers… we associated with bringing humans back from death and functioning when it otherwise would have been impossible.

"Like increased healing capabilities, pain inhibition, reallocating their bodies’ resources to muscle activity and away from then nonessential functions like digestion on command—"

I blurt out in the middle of Alphys’s thought: {“[Heh?]”}

{Wait wait the fuck I wasn’t confused—}

[Well too bad I am!]

[When DMT was exposed to magic, it did all the things they thought would have to happen for a
human to cheat death. This includes making them cast magic I guess. Then, they call magic-
exposed DMT determination, I think… I mean, DMT's a pretty convenient abbreviation…

[Well she could have just said that!]

Chara huffs. [Ugh… well I guess I should’ve known she’d do this. You’re the first human who
could understand this stuff on their own after all… and that’s a pretty damn good reason for her to
be hyped so…]

"And," Dewey continues where Alphys left off and leans in closer to me, "this may not be all that
relevant right now but, DMT has been associated with altered states of consciousness too. It's used
in religious ceremonies, mixed with compounds which allow humans to process it. They—you—
need that. Humans have chemicals in their digestive systems which break it down so you guys
don't get high on the stuff."

"But yo: if you gave the DMT to monsters, how would we even take it yo?"

"Dude Will I was gonna ask that!"

"Cause like, we don't have guts and stuff. Not really. Not even Sans and Papyrus do and they’re
skeletons so you’d think—" Will continues.

"Waaaaait whaaat!"

"You must remember!" Papyrus’s hand clamps down on my head, "We lack all your squishy
insides! So that is why we can't be zombified, because we have no brains! So we cannot adopt
zombie habits!"

"[{Uh… yeah…? I guess…?]}

"But but but but wait!" I suddenly realize. "How…

“How… do you guys like… eat then…?"

"If any of you suggests doing a repeat of the ketchup…” Papyrus begins to allude.

"[Nope.]” everyone else follows my example.

Meaning everyone except Sans…

“[{SAAAAAANS WHYYYY DIDN'T YOOOOUUU SAAAAAY NOOOO!?]}

"Exactly human!"

“I will clear up your confusion.

“Monster food is almost entirely magic, and digestion is an automatic process where we envelop
that food into our field of knowing."

{Whoa Paps sounding sciency thooeough!}

Alphys can't hold back her joy. "I mean it is a legitimate question. Because not all conventional
medication administration techniques work on monsters. We did eventually figure out that injection
was most reliable though. Because if we used topical administration we couldn't be sure of exactly
how much medication had been absorbed.”
"That," Sans… is trying to suppress a laugh, “and not all monsters have skin to topically-apply things to—"

Alphys rushes over him, “But that came later.

“What mattered was that We finally figured out how they could perform magic so well without training!

“We exposed all six of them to green magic to increase their natural DMT production. And we siphoned it from them. But mostly from David, Adam and Kari. It seemed like the longer humans are exposed to magic, the more DMT they produce. And the more readily they produce it when they need to cast magic."

“So… what did you do with this stuff?”

"My team and I, we realized that we couldn't perform the usual trials associated with human medicines. We had no animal test subjects. Actually, animal life as it is on the surface is exceedingly rare here.

“So instead we…”

Alphys gulps, her voice beginning to shake. "We recruited monster volunteers to be administered determination.

“Using hospital registrars, we randomly selected subjects who had… fallen down.

“At a certain time each day during the recruitment process, we brought them here. In addition to monitoring the state of their physical bodies and souls, we injected determination into them based on their mass, using our preexisting protocols for prescribing medication to monsters. Several times a day, we'd measure their HP, attack, defense—"

"Wait whaaaaat!?”

"Come now human! You're not deaf yet!” Papyrus interjects. "You heard her loud and clear! We use RPG mechanics to evaluate monsters' psychophysiological states!"

I stammer, “But but but whyyy!”

{What’s next!? Do they use Pokémon battles to settle disputes?}

[ Pokémon don’t exist down here—]

{That’s not my point!}

“You know by now! Mental and physical health is one in the same for us!”

More sheepishly, he adds, “And well, because we lack your squishy insides, and everyone besides Sans and I lack your bones, your metrics for determining health are utterly useless!”

"Oh yeah…

“Using HP and stuff would make more sense then… I guess…”

{I don’t feel like an idiot at all…}

The… sensation of someone’s—
Chara’s—

It feels like Chara’s hand is on my cheek.

I know that it’s not real—tangible—but… Chara being… affectionate like this… isn’t normal.

Gently: [It’s okay.]

[I thought it was weird too. It still is, actually.]

[To reduce all these things, how healthy or strong you are, down to a couple numbers…]

“cause like, your guys' stats go down when you're scared and go up when you're happy." I remember from my first meeting with Dewey.

"EXACTLY!"

"{[Jesus!]}"

"Paps. Ya made your point. By Tesla caaaaaalm doooooown."

[Woooow even Sans didn’t expect that!]

He explains slightly more quietly, "It's not perfect, but HP’s the most readily-measurable indicator of a monster's overall health. Like a human's heart rate, blood pressure, concentrations of certain elements in their body, and level of mental acuteness, all in one."

Alphys continues, “Among other theories, we expected that if determination really did catalyze magic, then monsters could perform the magic necessary to heal themselves more easily, and in the process, regenerate the magic surrounding their souls. Even if they weren’t cemented in green magic, or lacked the necessary knowledge to do so.

“We couldn't perform the same separation as we did on the six humans because removing the soul would destroy the physical shell containing it. So we had to contend with the safety of the subjects' souls from the beginning.

"And… while we were at it, we tried to find a vessel to store all the six, well, hopefully soon, seven, human souls. Monsters can't absorb monster souls, and humans can't absorb human souls. At least, that's what our current theories suggest.

"So, we listed out objects we could inject with determination. We had several candidates in mind but…

“We chose one with sentimental value."

the Inertia Society members abruptly whisper in unison: "That first golden flower.

“The flower that grew before all the others."

Dewey picks up where his daughter left off. "We, wanted to surprise Asgore with the vessel, at the same time as the results of this stage of the determination Study."

Chara barely manages to prevent me from shouting aloud: {Oh God oh God oh God you can't be serious fuuuuuuck!}

[Uh… they are…]
Tense silence.

"So… did it work yo?"

"Did any of the subjects come back to life?"

"Oh no."

"Chaaaraaa?

[Alphys', dewey's, everyone's faces… and their souls—]

[What is it!?]"  

Chara freaking out… is bad. Very bad.

"It didn't work, didn't it?"

I hope I'm wrong.

"No. Not at all."

Alphys seems on the verge of tears. "I mean, the subjects did wake up. I remember it clear as day.

"I was talking to Adam about our study.

"How it was failing.

"How the monsters' families kept asking us what was going on.

"So they could… so they could prepare for their loved ones’ funerals.

"Then Dewey screamed so loud I thought he'd shatter all the monitors. I ran inside and saw…

"One Snowdrake was awake! She was sitting on the edge of her bed. She was responding to questions.

"She even, got up and walked around.

"And over the next day or so, the rest of the monsters did the same!

"They just… woke up! Like nothing ever happened.

"Even our experiments on the flowers were a success. We eventually succeeded in giving one the will to live.

"I followed through with Asgore's request to give him the six souls, and sent him the vessel too.

"I told the families everyone was alive. And that I'd have them home within the next couple days."

She breaks down into tears in earnest. Ugly sobs, tears falling onto my hands, my HP draining a little with every drop that falls.

She’s… crying magic.
"But it went wrong. ALL WRONG!

"The monsters were fine for a little while but…

"All you need to know was that about a day after the last monster opened their eyes and exhibited seemingly normal behavior, we heard screaming.

"And when we came in… we…"

[Alphys looks like she's gonna faint. Or puke.

[Or both.]

"Even though we had administered determination in the doses clinically accurate to each participant, it had been too much.

"We can be exposed to as much DMT as we want. As long as it hasn’t been induced with amgic.

"As for post-magicDMT? Which we call determination?

"Our bodies can't handle determination in any appreciable amount because virtually all of us lack the physical matter needed to contain it, let alone harness it.

"If monsters are exposed to too much determination they…

"They…

"Melt."

Disgusted noises… from Chara and I…

[I feel like I'm gonna puke.]

[Same.]

"All the weird noises I heard on the way over here…” I put out there, hoping I'm wrong.

"Yes." Alphys squeaks. "You heard the amalgamates.

“They're on the cusp of death, but can't die because the determination is preventing them from dying."

I gasp—then nearly gag.

[She, put her head down on the table.]

"I c-c-couldn't—can't, believe I s-s-s-s-screwed up like that." she sobs into the tabletop. "I… I'm a horrible p-p-p-person. I know it already—you d-d-don't have to say anything.

“I… I kn-kn-kn-know you hate me. So many m-m-m-monsters already do. Lots of Inertia S-S-S-S-Society members left after t-t-t-they found out. I do the 3D-printing because I d-d-d-don't need to work with anyone.

“In f-f-f-fact, I don't really interact with the rest of th-th-th-them anymore.

“I h-h-hadn't talked in person to D-D-D-Dewey until you came here. And I… I hadn't t-t-t-talked to Sans and Papyrus until now either.”
“So you did monster experimentation and didn't tell the families what happened?”

A tear-streaked sound of agreement.

“And you couldn’t find a way to fix them?”

Another squeak: “Yes.”

“And you can’t even put them out of their misery—"

{I hate that I suggested—}

Again, I have to remind myself Chara is… ten-ish? Years old. [You shouldn’t. It’s… it’s fucked up, what they have to live through. If they can’t be fixed, killing them quickly is all we can do.]

In a more contemplative tone, Chara muses, [Actually, doing that would be good. ‘Cause the, amalgamates, probably want that. Well they probably want to come back to their families but if that can’t happen then…]

Alphys’s ashamed reply into the table: “I… I didn't want everyone to hate me. I thought if I hid it… everyone would just…

“FORGET.

“It’s not like everyone hasn’t tried to forget traumatic memories on purpose before…

“Every single monster’s done it…”

A weighty silence, where Alphys’s tears dry on the backs of my hands, draining my HP ever so slowly all the while.

“Have you… ever avoided telling the truth about something, just so you don’t have to be punished… even while it eats you up inside?”

Alphys, her head still down on the table, but slightly more composed.

“Even while you know that telling the truth will make the pain from that lie end?

“That… you deserve what you get, even while you hate that fact?”

A few seconds of Alphys sniffling. She eventually quiets down.

{Wait.

{I can’t fucking believe this.

{She’s trying to say that I’ve done things as fucked up as her! Fuck no! I’ve never done anything that fucked up!}

[Even if you haven’t you BETTER say SOMETHING—]

{But Alphys—Dewey—they’re—}

[So NICE?] Chara finishes.

A… not-as-scary laugh… but a harsh one.
Chara shouldn’t sound like this.

[It’s like what Paps said right? They’re nice. But they still wanna get free.

[And come on: it doesn’t matter you haven’t done the same kind of fucked-up things. You did
fucked-up things too.]

[I fucking hate this…]

[Uh… I think that’s the point.]

{You think I don’t fucking know that!??}

[I know! Just, if you didn’t I think everyone’d be really… worried? Concerned? I don’t know you
know what I mean! If you don’t say something!]

"I…"

An exasperated sigh.

A… defeated sigh.

Chara forces the words out of me: “Yeah—well it’s not nearly as bad as what you guys did but…

“For me it feels like it.

“I’d play Pokémon or Smash in the middle of the night. And when I’d get caught I’d say I was
sorry but not really ‘cause all I wanted to do was play it without anyone telling me what to do.
’Cause they didn’t understand. They never did.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if they think all video games are GTA clones… I know it’s not the same
but…

“And in eighth grade I bombed my science class, the fall trimester. And I was in the Junior
National Honor Society, so I couldn’t have any more than one B for all my classes… so…

“I didn’t tell my mom until the spring trimester and she got really mad. But she said some really
shitty things during it so even though I knew I shouldn’t have lied I was still mad at her and wanted
her to stop…”

I trail off, Chara lifting their control over me.

"Human?"

"Papyrus?"

[Oh God Paps looks like he’s about to cry nooooo not agaaaaain!]

"May I point something out to you?"

I don’t answer.

"We both know that what you did cannot be compared to what we did.

“Alphys never asked you to do that.

“She just wanted to know if you’ve ever felt like you deserved punishment for something you’ve
done.

"It does not surprise me that you said these things.

"After all, you jumped at the chance to show my brother the games you love. Some humans might say that you forced Xenoblade on him.

"And you mentioned how even among your friends, you felt isolated.

"And now I know that this is because you did not have any opportunities to discuss the games you loved at home.

"I completely understand why you would seize any opportunity you saw to play video games… and damn the consequences."

Only a split second of thinking through his response: {He gets it.

{He really gets it.

{And he means it.}

I had a feeling you’d know that.

[Monsters can’t fake how they feel. Paps couldn’t have done it if he tried.]

"You are in shock, and disgusted, and angry, and wondering why we even wanted to tell you about our research.

"It’s just that…"

Papyrus sighs. "I know this will sound like a… like a cop out but…”

An on-edge gneh heh heh. "You humans have done much worse.

"MK Ultra.

"Unit 731: the Japanese soldiers, who, ‘experimented,’ on war prisoners.

"The Tuskegee experiment.

"All of them involved varying degrees of unwilling human experimentation. And when not that, unethical behaviors besides.

"We did all we could to treat the subjects well while they were here. We did not harm them on purpose or give them drugs which we knew were harmful."

Just as Papyrus stops speaking, Alphys stops crying, only for Papyrus to break into sobs. Chara starts screaming. [No no no no no nooooo!]

"I actually requested that Alphys tell the amalgamates about you.

"Your reason for staying with us.

"That she would tell you about their… condition.

"That they should… stay away from you.
“Because, I anticipated that you would be angry. And would be unable to respond rationally.

“You would… hurt them unnecessarily.”

“They’d feel how angry I was so that’d hurt them,” I clarify.

[He nodded.]

“Yes. Exactly.

“If it weren't for that they'd be wandering around more freely right now.”

I sigh. "Yeah—we've done some really shitty things.

“And like, you guys did the best with what you had. It's not like you were trying to be assholes like the guys who did the Tuskegee experiment. They infected those black dudes with syphilis and intentionally didn't cure them and just stood there and watched them get infected and die.

“And yeah… MK Ultra wasn’t much better."

Dewey's sigh, barely audible over Papyrus' crying. "I just knew that this study would garner ire and hatred and disgust from any human who found out about it.

“We knew that anyone who found out would be appalled.

“That they wouldn't understand how desperate we were.

“That comparing our efforts to breaking the barrier to MK Ultra and the United States' attempts to best the USSR via research into psychic powers, by giving, ‘volunteers’, LSD to see what would happen, would go completely over everyone's heads.

“We knew you'd be angry.”

[He shrugged.]

“Well… a little more than that,” He corrects himself.

“But we thought you had the right to know.

“You're the oldest human who's fallen down. We guessed you'd have enough experience with human history to grasp the implications of what we've done.

“How any human who found out would brand us as war criminals.

“As… MONSTERS.

“COMPLETE monsters."

I sigh again. "I guess.

“But why would you tell me all this if you knew I'd hate you after it?"

"'Cause we had an idea."

"[Sans?]" I ask uncertainly.

He doesn’t answer. "'Cause when I told Alph about you, she remembered a crazy idea we had, a
long time ago.

“It was the reason Gaster hired her.

“He’d been speculating about determination's existence when he… died.

“I helped Alphys with her study and did my own research alone at the same time. I talked to the kids a lot. To… gather evidence. To… bounce ideas off ‘em.”

“So you want me to help you with this crazy idea, even though I basically have no incentive to?”

“No.” Sans says bluntly.

“You DO have an incentive.

“This idea’d let us break the Barrier without takin’ your soul. It’d be the peaceful solution my brother proposed to ya, back at Grillby’s.

“But to make it happen we need YOUR determination.

“That, and only now is there sufficient human research. We knew what we wanted to do, but you guys hadn’t researched the right fields of study yet. So we couldn’t conduct the experiments involved with enough precision.”

“And, if nothing else,” Alphys’s voice doesn’t sound muffled anymore, “if you MUST fight Asgore, if you help us, we’ll have the expertise necessary to… help you get through that alive.”

She seems a little more composed. “And if we do this, you'll be able to learn everything you ever wanted to know about us.

“From the source.”

I'm intrigued. "What is it?"

Alphys sighs.

Though what she says next is, unbearably sad, her voice remains firm enough. If I hadn't been there to hear it, I wouldn't have known she had been crying only a couple minutes earlier. The… professionalism… I glimpsed when I first arrived shines through.

“You know, what's been happening over the past few weeks?

“It's gotten me to think about things I haven't had a chance to think about for a long time.

“If it weren't for you and Papyrus I…”

It sounds like she's turned her head to the side, so she's talking to herself more than to me.

"Only recently did I realize how lucky we were, that Papyrus did what he did.

“Because… I realized…”

Her voice becomes even softer.

"Lately, there have been days where I can't remember what he looked like.

“What he sounded like.
“What his magic felt like against my body and soul.

"It wouldn't have surprised me if…

“If Papyrus had taken any longer, I would have forgotten all those years I knew him, even before he hired me.

“I would have forgotten how he and my father were close, close friends.

“Brothers, even.

"Given a few more months—

“NO.”

[She shook her head.]

“WEEKS—I KNOW I would have forgotten EVERYTHING about him.

“In spite of all he did for us. In spite of him giving us electricity! Computers! CAD-and-CAD!

“And a standard of living which rivals many postindustrial nations on the surface.

“And even after all that I… I…

“I still would have forgotten about him.”

Dewey, Papyrus, and Sans quietly reply with "Yeahs." of their own. Their sadness rolls off of them in waves.

Even Chara.

I don't know what else to ask except "It's Gaster, isn't it?"

A long, tense silence.

I assume Alphys has given up, that she will not tell me, because it's too painful.

"Aristotle.

“Archimedes.

“Thomas Aquinas.”

Her voice no longer echoes against one wall, so she has likely decided to turn toward me again.

In place of her sadness is… awe. Admiration. Respect…

[[Why’s she listing all these dead people?]]


“Sir Isaac Newton.

“Nicola Tesla.

“Albert Einstein.
“Stephen Hawking.

“Neil deGrasse Tyson.

“Adam Savage.

"Do you know what all of them have in common?"

I don’t hesitate to answer: "They were all like… science dudes? Well except Aristotle he did a little of everything. Same for Leonardo. And Thomas Aquinas was a… a… religion…? dude…?"

"Yes. Exactly."

Excitement pours off Alphys. "Monsters have compared him to ALL these people!"

She’s talking faster now: “There are probably even more humans he could be compared to, if we had the time.

"You've actually heard a lot about him from… well everyone.”

Her voice returns to its previous, hushed tone. “But no one's really bothered explaining it all. He only, created, a full name for himself… oh, when was it? The human 1990s?

“He named himself after a then-new human font he enjoyed."

"Wingdings?" I repeat uncertainly.

She laughs, a light, delighted laugh. "Yeah! He started using it on everything! Even his scientific papers—"

“Uh…"

“{What?}"

Alphys suddenly seizes my hands in hers. Her breath—if monsters are made of magic, do they need to breathe?

A whisp of her magic brushes my face…

"I just want to make this clear."

She states with pride: “All this time, we have been referring to Dr. Wingdings Gaster.

“Or as some of us call him, the true Royal Scientist.

“Or as, basically everyone, calls him, the most brilliant mind of all monsterkind.

“And I know this seems like an exaggeration but, I KNOW it's true. I've never been so sure of something in my entire life!

“Even the Dreemurrrites can agree on this."

“{Daaaaaamn!}"

"So I'm gonna help you with Gaster's research?"

"More than that."
Sans pries Alphys' hands off of mine, sandwiching his between ours. "At the very least, we're gonna help you get home."

"And if we're lucky, we'll break the Barrier!" Papyrus... adds his hands to the stack... at least I think, 'cause Chara grumbles [Jesus Paps your hands are heavy—at least squish your hands between ours and Sans's so we know you're there!]

"But to do that, you have to help us.

"We explained our research so you'd know what you'd be gettin' in to."

"which is...?"

"You'll act as our source of determination."

Dewey, with conviction, as he adds his hands to the stack... Chara complaining a little more.

"You'll help us acquire the knowledge we need.

"Or rather, you'll help us regain what we lost."

A... nudging... at my side. "I'm with you guys all the way yo! I'd put my hands up there but... Pauline seriously you look uncomfortable dude..."

Will walks behind me and grasps my shoulders instead.

Tingling runs through my hands—arms—my entire body—MY SOUL.

"Our most advanced CAD-and-CAD machines shall shape Gaster's body."

It's the voice thing: from Papyrus back at Grillby's, Dewey, last night, and Alphys, just today—NO.

Sans is... channeling power, but his voice isn't exactly the same as when Papyrus did it.

He still sounds... dignified... but his voice is different.

PUT TOGETHER.

DECISIVE.

... DETERMINED.

"Our memories shall shape Gaster's soul.

"And YOUR will to live shall grant him life once more."

Chapter End Notes

This won't be the first time I'll be putting chapter explanations in the endnotes.

DMT's a real hormone, and its physiological effects are real, if not insufficiently studied...
When the six humans fell, and were exposed to magic, it changed. Only then did it acquire logic-defying properties. From now on, DMT will be called determination.

Humans' determination production is effected by the duration of their survival in the Underground and the strength of the monsters they encounter.

It is produced when humans cast magic, and when they focus it around the desire to live. The other forms of magic require focus around similar concepts, like bravery or patience.

Therefore, the six humans cast the other six forms of magic without training.

Determination is logic-defying because a determined being's field of knowing is essentially infinitely large, and they require no prior knowledge of an object or phenomenon to manipulate it, only the desire to do so.

An example:

Sans is standing in the center of a room. Its dimensions don't matter. Until he's seen the entire room, he can only manipulate objects in whatever space he can see without lifting his feet off the floor to change positions.

Object A is placed in this space. Let's say it's... one of Grillby's ketchup bottles. He's seen/used one many many times, so he can bring it to him, and even open it, without touching it because he's familiar with it.

Once Sans examines the rest of the room, it's incorporated into his field of knowing, so if that same ketchup bottle was placed behind him, he could still move it, because he could detect the change to his field of knowing and knows enough about the bottle to do so.

Next, we place Object B, like my BrailleNote, at Sans' original position, and ask him to remove its keys without damaging any of its components. Sans wouldn't be able to do it because he wouldn't know how it was constructed by just looking at it, even though it's within his then-current field of knowing.

However, after seeing the whole room and removing the keys by hand, he could do it, even if it was placed out of his immediate field of vision, just like with the ketchup bottle.

If a determined being wanted to take out my BrailleNote's keys, they could do it without having seen the mechanisms operating them. "Magic is a matter of degrees" only applies to the other six forms of magic.

Let me know if I need to explain more...

Here's the link to the Wikipedia page on DMT.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N,N-Dimethyltryptamine

The link to the page on endorphins:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endorphins

Here's the YouTube video where I first learned about the Tuskegee experiment:
Unit 731 is also... alluded to... in that video before that timestamp... look them up online at your own risk.

Subjects like this, especially the DMT headcanons, are why I talked about citing sources in the notes proceeding this entire story...

As of November 22, 2017, I've found a documentary which explains how DMT works! It's called DMT: The Spirit Molecule. I watched it on November 22, 2017, and it can be found on Netflix. Turns out my halfass research on Wikipedia isn't nearly as far off from the real scholarly thing as I thought! Let's just say the last big DMT study was in the '90s... the surface calendar '90s, so... yeah: DMT's still not well-researched at all. It's very trippy, and I'd recommend it, if you want to hear about DMT's weirdness from the source.

Also,

Yep!

It's happening!

The Man Who Speaks in Hands will be back!
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

It's official.

Visiontale is over 100,000 words.

I don't even want to guess how long it will be by the end... but place your bets in the comments if you dare! Gneh heh heh!

Basically: the first third of this chapter is... more decisions I shouldn't be making... and the rest is more worldbuilding through medical procedures.

Also horray for more music! I put the link to the song I used in the endnotes, as well as in the chapter text itself.

If you're curious about my thought process in choosing the music for this chapter, skip the part of the endnotes contained in asterisks.

If you're confused about me describing the layout of the room with just audio cues, read the part in asterisks.

Otherwise, ignore the endnotes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

28

Chara and I sit in silence for only a second before we shout variants on "[Oooooh myyyyy Gooooood!!!]" and other astonished noises.

[Dewey's like. Actually relieved right now.]

"So at least THIS," he emphasizes, "is so crazy you have to sit and process it first."

He sighs in relief. "That's good."

"When Alphys and Sans brought up this idea to me again last night," Papyrus says to no one in particular, "I reacted in very much the same way."

I can't help but relax when he lets out his usual gneh heh heh. "I am very much surprised you react more similarly to me rather than Sans's, especially because you've known him longer."

"But why are you so shocked yo!? This like, totally makes sense yo! I was thinking, determination and green magic share properties so... I don't know. Using them at the same time could be effective, if determination was injected into a monster cemented in green magic yo."

"That's true," I agree with Will. "They'd like, know what to do 'cause of their training. And if they didn't they could do it anyway, 'cause determination."
"Uh… Sans?
“Undo the hand sandwich—"
"You mean the handwich?"
“[[Ugh…]]” and more cringy noises aside.
“SAAAAANS!”

Cue Will giggling over Papyrus’s and Dewey’s reactions… but not too loudly.

“I have to get some stuff,” Alphys hurries to explain, moving the conversation along away from the pun…

The tingling vanishes, and I lift my hands from the tabletop, flexing my fingers.

The scraping of a chair across from me. "I'll be right back. I just need to know a couple things first.”

Her professionalism has returned, just when I wanted it most. “First, how much do you weigh?”

“Alphys?”

Papyrus, insistently.

{Oh God—Biggest Loser flashbacks…}

"Uh… I don't know…? Like… 95-ish pounds…? Maybe…?"

“Alphys?”

Papyrus, more loudly.

Alphys walks around the table and nudges my right arm with her elbow. "I need your exact weight. It's so I… I know how concentrated everything needs to be.”

I take her left arm, and we start walking. “We, we can't be too cautious. Come with me. There's a scale over here—"

“ALPHYS!
“BY TESLA STOP!”

Alphys nearly falls on top of me, she’s so startled.

“HOW COULD YOU FORGET TO ASK FOR THE HUMAN’S CONSENT!?

“You’ve JUST finished telling her about how our research violated the Bellmont Report, and then you go and DO IT AGAIN!?"

I let go of Alphys and turn to face Papyrus.

"Pauline."

Papyrus speaks much quieter, but his seriousness remains. "I have an important question to ask you, one that Alphys has neglected to acknowledge."
“Do you even want to volunteer your determination to us at all?

**Loop the music until the next note.**

https://soundcloud.com/fredrikhathen/true-determination-from-fallen-an-under-tale-tribute

"I'd think you would have asked that first and foremost. Especially after our… review… of medical ethics last night," Papyrus rebukes, turning toward Alphys.

Alphys gasps. "I… I know."

She sounds on the verge of tears again. "I… w-w-was just s-s-so exc-c-c-cited I—"

"At least I know why you did all those experiments," I tell her. "Even if I hate what you did when they went wrong.

“Hell—you're right—I do think it's fucking horrible. But at least I can get something out of this."

"You're volunteering for a, frankly unprecedented study." Dewey says gently. “For monsters AND humans.

“And," he laughs, "you’re using prototype equipment no less! It's the ultimate scifi cliché! Like—“


“The machine we’ll all be hooked in to, when we remake Dadster’s body and soul—that is, if the kid says yes—I’ve used stuff like that before.

“A lot, actually."

“You have?"

Dewey’s… a little more than surprised.

“That CAD-and-CAD machine—it’s based on a design I made as a thought experiment a long time ago.

“Since then I’ve made one just like it. It doesn’t tap as deeply into a monster’s soul, and it doesn’t draw as much power from the environment either, but…”

He trails off. He seems to be talking to himself rather than to us.

“The last time I used it was a few days ago. So what we’ll be doing isn’t completely untested.

Chara and I relax. {If Sans used it then it can't be so bad.}

[Sounds about right.]

"Do you… want us to leave you alone to think about this yo?" Will asks… adopting the Chara-not-sounding-their-age tone.

“Sure."

Several "okays" From everyone.

“But first,” Alphys rummages around in her bag, “I have to give you the consent form. I have a braille copy—“
“Wait you guys have an embosser—!”

“No—we just put paper in the CAD-and-CAD machine instead of plastic. It wasn’t THAT complicated—” she begins to explain.

“YEAH BUT STILL!”

Alphys leads me back to my seat, placing the form in front of me. “Just shout if you need us okay? We’ll be just outside. And none of our fields of knowing will be projected beyond our corporial bodies, so we won’t be able to see or hear or sense what you say or do or think while you read it.”

Everyone starts to stand from their seats, file past me, and leave the room. “Oh yeah that’s a thing.” I realize.

“No matter who ya ask,” Sans presses a hand against one of mine as he walks past me, “soulological privacy matters. It matters even more for you, since you’re not trained yet. Ya wouldn’t know if someone was watchin’ you, or if someone found out what you’re thinkin’.”

The door opens directly behind me. “Take our word for it—we won’t know what’s goin’ on in here,” he reassures.

“Okay.” I call out to him as everyone walks outside. The door closes behind them.

Just as I thought, Chara appears beside me, taking Dewey’s seat to my left. “[Do it!]”

“Dude I haven’t even started reading the—“

[“Yeah but still! They’re not gonna hurt you like they did those monsters—they CAN’T hurt you like that!”]

“Yeah but I still HAVE to know what they’re gonna do,” I start reading the form to myself, fingers lightly brushing the braille.

[“I guess.
[“But at least read the form out loud for me—“]

“But you know braille—“

[“NO I don’t.”]

More than confused: “Wait what? We’ve been together for like—“

[“I know when you’re READING or WRITING braille but I can’t do it. And the sides—no one else’ll hear you talking to me.”]

“That’s true,” I scoot my chair closer to Chara and start reading aloud.

Strangely, it takes much less time for us to work through the form than I initially assumed. Chara isn’t confused about the explanations about the rights we have as study participants, or of the study procedures. When we reach the section affirming that I’ve read the form, and that I understand what I’m being asked to do, I remark, “This is like… the biggest thing I’ve ever done. Like, after…? sophomore year of high school I did a study thing but it like… wasn’t like this… it wasn’t like… invasive…?”

[“But why do they have to say that you read it and understand it? You get it—“]
“Like, in case anything happens…”

I trail off and sigh. “It's just… I don't know I shouldn't even be thinking about this! I’m like… basically one of those people that volunteers to try drugs to see if they work or not. I'm… I'm barely an adult—”

[But adults are eighteen. YOU’RE eighteen--]

“I know but it's not like that.” I rush over Chara. “I can't do shit! I can't drive—I can't take the bus to school. I can't use money from my own bank account to buy whatever I want. I—”

[“You’re wrong.”]

Their blunt tone surprises me.

Before I can answer: [“You COULDN’T do adult things.

“You COULDN’T drive.

“You COULDN’T spend your money.

[“But you’re HERE now.”]

Exasperated grunting. [“Look: they don’t matter anymore.

[“Your parents aren’t here so they don’t matter anymore.

[“Fuck it—they probly think you're dead—or missing—but mostly dead—by now.”]

“That’s true isn’t it?” I realize with a pang. “Cause when I got here I was like, in the middle of my precalculus class. They would’ve assumed I was like… still at school.”

[“You have no way of contacting them,”] Chara continues.

[“They don’t know where you are.

[“Or who you're rooming with.

[“Or what you've done.

[“Or all the shitty stuff you've said—“]

“Especially all the shitty stuff I’ve said.” I slowly admit.

[“Yeah: you said shitty stuff, but everyone’s okay with it— well not okay with it but they’re not mad—like they’re not so mad they don’t wanna talk to you—“]

“Yeah I get it.”

[“So if you wanna do it, do it! Since we met you managed your own money. We went to lots of new places and met lots of cool dudes!

[“Cool dudes who think you’re important.

[“SO important they wanna tell you everything about them…”

[“Cool dudes who care about you so much… even though you’ve just met. In ways your friends on
the surface didn’t do enough. I think.”]

Chara laughs… and it’s not creepy for once. [“And you said it yourself: if nothing else, you’ll learn how the Underground works before Asgore takes your soul…

[“And…”]

A wave of overwhelming melancholy hits me… and this time, I know it’s from Chara.

[“I… I’ll be able to see Gaster again.

[“Maybe even in person.

[“Well not exactly in person but you know what I mean. With your—our—determination I—we—could…”]

They don’t have to complete their sentence.

“Yeah.

“If I’m gonna die,” I struggle to admit it, “I might as well do it in style.”

[“Exactly.”] is Chara's… taken aback response. [“I mean, isn't that what YOLO is?”]

“YOLO means you only live once—not die in style.”

[“Yeah I know—it’s just weird that we're making a bucket list when determination technically stops us from dying—“]

I laugh a little. “Yeah true.”

[“So are you gonna tell everyone to come back inside now?”]

“I think so.”

I contemplate the form one last time. “Like… this isn’t bad at all—Alphys is gonna extract determination from me and she’s gonna replace it with a little bit of each of the other six colors of magic—so I know what they feel like.

“I’ll just replace the determination that they use naturally.

“so it really IS low risk.”

“Also, Gaster's like, Sans's and Paps's dad,” I think aloud, “so… if he comes back… they’d be together again.”

[“Yeah.”]

“And I fucking owe Sans—“

[“You think?”]

“Yeah.

“I hate that Asgore’s gonna take my soul… but at least I can do this for them before…”

The enormity of what will eventually happen to me hits me. Chara leans over and takes my
shoulders.

[“And you're completely forgetting how even the damned Dreemurrites admire him.”]

“That’s true,” I recall. “And like, they hate human culture so… if THEY like him then…”

{[“Daaaamn.”]}

[“Tell everyone to come back then.”]

“Okay.

I stand up and start walking to the door. Chara follows me for a couple steps before patting my arm. Their voice and presence fade from the room and enter my head: [Good luck.]

As I reach the door and crack it open, I call out: “Guys?”

I’ve barely finished speaking before Sans’s slippers click against the floor a couple feet away. I try… and fail… to suppress a flinch as I realized that he’s teleported in front of me. "You okay kid?"

Sans asks. He turns me around, positions my hand on his left elbow, and walks me back inside. He takes me to my seat before he sits down.

[Come on what are you waiting for!? Go for it!]

{What—no memes?}

[Well…]

Chara, didn't expect me to ask them for memes. [I guess… if you want…]

They take a completely-unnecessary breath. [JUUUUUUST… DOOOOOO IIIIIIT!]

**Stop the music.**

Chara’s soul tenses up as I tell everyone, "Yeah I’m fine—"

“Ya got through the form real fast—“ Sans observes.

“Ehh. It wasn’t that bad.”

“Ya get it all down?” he asks again, more insistently.

“Yeah—”

“And ya know all your rights as a participant—“

{Dude fuck off!}

Chara and I barely give Sans time to finish: [“Yeah I know what’s sposed to—“]

“AND the details in the procedures—“ Sans won’t let up.

[“YEAH DUDE I GOT—!”]
“AND how we’ll protect your privacy—“ he asks, especially sternly.

I shout over him: [“YES I DID!

[“What—you think I skipped over everything!?”]

“No.” Sans enunciates.

“You must know how we shall protect your data.”

My body shudders with every syllable.

“Because you’ve yet to learn to detect a breach in your field of knowing.

“Because unlike a monster, the only way to protect your soulological privacy is to restrict your access to those outside the Determination Study.”

{He’s right.}

[I hadn’t thought of that…]

“Like…” I speak to no one in particular, “that stuff on the paper—it wasn’t all that bad. There was a lot but…

“I can't fucking believe you guys can just… live with all this--”

A sad laugh from Alphys. "Trust me: that used to not be the case.

“It's… still really hard for me to get out of bed and work sometimes. For all of us."

"So," Dewey asks, "what are you trying to tell us?"

"Look man," I shift in my seat, locating Dewey's voice, "I'm fucking scared.

“Like, I don't know what to expect 'cause the last time I was in a study thing was after sophomore year of high school. I think. And even then they didn't do any scary stuff—they just got data from me.

“Like, if anything happens to me it's all my fault for saying yes…

"But like, I haven’t been down here that long and even I know how important Gaster was to you guys.

“And like, if the DREEMURRITES think he's important then like…

“Yeah."

["More than you could ever know."] the Skelebros… and the Curies… and Will… and Chara… all say in unison.

"So," Alphys asks, trying and failing to suppress her excitement, "will you do it!?"

As I’m about to reply, I stand from my seat with my palms facing outward.

I don’t even mentally object over Chara taking control of my body.

Alphys performs the Inertia Society handshake with me. "That's great!" she squeals.
"And this is just in time for my magitry test yo! This is like, gonna be the ultimate example of how soulology is different from human science yo! I'd high-five you but I don’t think Alphys is gonna get out of the way…"

"I… I can't thank you enough."

Dewey follows Alphys’s example by performing the handshake with me… by pushing his daughter out of the way first.

Forcefully.

He already sounds… a little teary-eyed.

“I know you’re gonna hear this a lot from us but… I’ll say it anyway.

“I’m grateful you’re doing this. That you think this is a worthy cause. That your hatred of our mistakes hasn’t impeded you so much that you don’t want to help us.”

“This is what determination does, dad!” Alphys insists, beyond eagerly. “IT DOES THE IMPOSSIBLE!

“Pauline had no reason to do it but… she is!”

I yelp as I stumble backward… someone… wrapping their arms around me from behind. "I agree with the Curies completely!" Papyrus cries from far above my head. "I can't believe I—we—might—gneh!"

Papyrus yanks away from me roughly. “Hey Paps—let up so Alphys can get started will you?”

As Dewey talks, a… nervous energy… prickles on my skin. [He just cast purple magic on him--]

{So like… he grabbed him--?}

[Kinda…? It’s like… blue magic but nerfed…? And he did it when he pushed Alphys out of the way so he could shake your hand—]

{["Wait Dewey you can use yellow and purple magic now!"]}

“I… I guess so,” he slowly confirms.

“But I’m serious Paps: we shouldn’t keep Pauline waiting.

“Alphys? You can start preparing the equipment.”

“Of course. I’m gonna take Pauline over to the scale now. I’ll have her weigh herself while I get dressed.”

Alphys walks around the table, places my hand on her left elbow, and guides me forward and to the left side of the room. "We’re walking along the left wall. The scale's in the upper-left hand corner of this room,” she seems to pause, “right in front of you.

“Remove your shoes and bag and jacket.”

As she finishes that sentence, I begin doing what I’m told. “We’ll have you take several measurements and use the value at the tenth percentile.

"
"We're not using the mean because…"

"Well…"

She gulps as I hand off my bag to her. "we used the mean for our test subjects during the Determination Study and…"

[Does she mean that they used too much?]

{Yeah.}

She's said more than enough, so all I need to say is "Oh…” in agreement.

“Even though you're not a monster, we’re using these measures, just to be cautious. Because you haven’t been exposed to magic that long.

From behind us and to my right, Sans asks, "Heya Will?"

"Yo?"

"Can you go—"

[He's pointing to a panel on the wall near the door where we came in—]

"—and press the top button on that panel? It'll put up a clear barrier for you to stand behind."

"Why—" Will begins to ask, only to stop himself. "Oh yeah: 'cause only you guys know how—"

[Sans like, waved his hand to cut him off--]

"Oh I'm not qualified to handle determination. Paps isn’t either. Only Dewey's allowed on the other side with Alph and the kid. And even then he needs to stay out of the ten-foot—"

"Um, actually it’s the three meter radius around her," Alphys corrects as she nudges me forward and to the left, presumably closer to the scale.

"The three-meter radius around her." He corrects quickly.

He chuckles. "Always the stickler for details."

"I mean," she replies, brushing my side as she bends down. I hear some beeping sounds near my feet. "You are to. Why do you think I wanted you to help me with my research?"

She stands to her full height again, lightly touching my right elbow. I turn my body to face her. "Okay. I just zeroed the scale.

“To collect a data point for your weight, walk forward, stand on it for a count of five, step off, count to five again, then repeat. Do that ten times in total. Dewey and the Gasters can tell you if you need to repeat anything again.

“And Will?"

“Yo Alphys??”

“Put the barrier up now. When Pauline's done taking measurements I'll prepare the DT extractor. We can’t have you getting exposed to determination. I’ll be mixing some chemicals before we
hook her up to it so…”

"Right away yo!"

A short humming noise, and the click of plastic on metal from behind me. "It's up!" he calls out. His voice is muffled slightly.

"I’ll watch Pauline while you get changed, Alphys."

Apparently, the table is within the confines of the plastic barrier, so Dewey’s inside our half of the room. "You need to change into a proper lab gown. And take all the additional precautions, because you’ll be handling determination."

"I know."

"Just making sure,” Dewey says gently as Alphys pats me on the arm clumsily and hurries past me, another door opening and shutting across the room from us after a few seconds. As it shuts, I hear some light footsteps approaching me from behind. "I can come a little closer to you but not much more,” Dewey says. "I'm standing at the edge of the restricted area. But I can still give you instructions from here."

“Where’d she go?”

“She went to go change. There’s a room full of supplies through a door across from you., in the right wall." "Sure.” I acknowledge as I step off the scale for the first time independently. "But why is Alphys exposing me to the other colors of magic now?"

Dewey explains, “As Alphys stated in the consent form, she wants you to become acclimated to all the colors of magic. You’ll be down here for a while, so we want your body and soul to become accustomed to how each one feels. It’ll be another source of sensory information for you.”

I step off the scale, mentally count to five, step on, count to five again, then step off, collecting the second data point. [Like—when Alphys was talking about injecting those monsters with determination—you were freaking out ‘cause of the needles. You can't see them so—]

{I know but like… just the thought of something sharp and pointy inside me is…

{Ugh.}

We shudder simultaneously as I collect the third data point. "While I’m here, I have to ask you a couple questions. To make sure Alphys can do both of these things properly. And so she can take additional safety measures if needed.

“Do you have any allergies?” Dewey begins firmly.

"Besides pollen, cats, dogs, soy…?–based things…? and penicillin, no.”

He laughs a little. "That’s a lot of things… but that’s okay.

“I have to ask because… well… we've never performed these procedures on a living human. The documents that came with the blueprints for the DT Extractor, they state that anyone using it has to ask whoever is being strapped in to it that question.”

Six measurements to go. "Fair enough."
"That and," Sans comments from across the barrier, "she's usin' an unconventional extraction method. On human standards anyway. She needs to prepare the extraction sites with some chemicals. If we realized you were allergic to somethin’ in those chemicals, Alph would’ve had to prepare somethin’ different instead."

[Halfway there though!]

{Yep!}

[thank Tesla they're not using a needle to extract the stuff from you! I think!]

{Amen!}

As I'm about to step on the scale a sixth time, the door Alphys left through bursts open. "Okay," she seems out of breath. "I'm back! I'll prepare the DT Extractor soon.

But first…”

She takes a few deep breaths. “Is there anything I need to know before proceeding?"

"No," Dewey answers as he walks away, toward where I heard the others earlier. "Hold on I'll get out of your way. Will lift that up will you? Because—"

"Heh heh—"

"[[SAAAANS!]]"

"Really? I didn't even intend to pun! Again!"

"How are you not used to this Dewey?"

Papyrus sighs dramatically all Mettaton-like. "You’ve shared in my pain for years now!"

“Because I’m sharing in your pain around someone new.” Dewey makes it sound obvious.

"You guys? I'm on it yo!"

"How many measurements have you finished?" Alphys asks from near the other door as she opens a… a fridge? I breathe in sharply as the bitter smell of chemicals wafts toward me, and the room becomes slightly colder.

"Seven now."

"Good. I'm just unpacking some sterile equipment and disinfectant and some other stuff so, take your time."

A muted thud as the fridge closes.

{I'm nervous man.}

[Me too.\]

Chara collecting their thoughts. [I didn’t even think this stuff could exist.]

{Mm-hmmm.}

[One weight to go.]
Alphys walks over to me. "When I’m done, I’ll lead you over to the DT extractor and calibrate it so the contacts fit you—"

{"Wait whaaat!?"}

“Alph’s gonna extract the DT from you with pads on your skin.”

[Thank Tesla Sans is all chill right now!]

{Truuuue!}

"We can’t use IVs most of the time like humans do ‘cause we use green and blue magic to locate and extract the right stuff.” Sans explains as Alphys walks away.

“I’ll be over by the fridge. There’s another table next to it, against the back wall. I’ll let you know when I’m done.”

“Okay,” I call out to her.

“Anyway,” Sans continues talking as Alphys stops at the right side of the back wall, “that, and Alph's gonna be hooked in so she can operate it.”

I step off the scale for the last time. "Wait so she's using the thing with her mind?"

"Yeh." Sans confirms.

[Saaaans! Just "Yeh?"]

{Finally you get it! How does he not give a shit!?}

[He gives a shit—he just knows how it works already.]

{I guesse…}

"Dude Paps calm down—we have time to tell her the details. It’s gonna take a few minutes to let all the right ethermetrical reactions happen anyway—and Alph has to watch over ’em in the meantime.”

Paps sighs a little. “I suppose.

“But if you are going to explain what I think you are going to explain, at least treat it with the respect it deserves.

“So no puns.” He concludes, with emphasis.

“Sure thing.”

Sans pauses a moment before continuing, as I hear Alphys opening some metal containers and the clink of glass being set down. I could’ve brought this up earlier, before we left ya alone to read the consent form but… I might as well do it now.

“As she said in the form, she’ll be usin’ a CAD-and-CAD interface. On the surface, sayin’ CAD once stands for computer-aided design. Like how the Lego factory’s run by robots.”

"Yeah I know I saw that on TV at some point."
"The second CAD stands for consciousness-aided design. Monsters use their fields of knowing to influence the process. ‘Cause ya can’t imbue magic into somethin’ with just a machine. Ya need a… living being… to guide the flow of magic.”

"CAD-and-CAD was one of Gaster and the Inertia Society’s biggest breakthroughs.”

Papyrus, in a faint, wistful tone. “We’ve used it to make—"

[Paps is pointing at stuff around the room—]

"—almost everything here. It’s how Alphys made our smartphones. Your iPhone charger. The DT extractor. Everything."

"Whoaaaa," I breathe as Alphys walks toward me again. “Okay. I’ve prepared the conductive fluids, adhesive, and antiseptics. I’m gonna take you over to the DT Extractor now.”

“Sounds good.” I find Alphys’s left elbow as we walk forward and to the right slightly. As we stop, my legs bump gently against a piece of furniture in front of me.

“There’s a bed in front of you. You’re standing at the foot of it. Lie down while I prepare you for the extraction process,” Alphys instructs in a clear voice.

Chara and I are startled by her tone.

She sounds… practiced.

It’s not just that her stuttering has disappeared, and that she sounds intelligent and composed, but that she’s… PRECISE, in her language.

After I do what I’m told, she walks over to my left side and begins swabbing my forehead with a sharp-smelling liquid. She edges closer to me, her lab coat rustling as she leans down to speak in my left ear. “If I had to describe the contacts to you, they’re like electrodes, but for magic. This liquid contains antiseptic chemicals and blue and green magic. They’ll catalyze and speed up the extraction process.”

“No wonder it smells like a hospital,” I comment as I hear the sharp snip of scissors next to me. Then, Alphys lays a… piece of slightly-stiff fabric? on my forehead. She positions my hands on it. “There’s really thin metal on the inside, and—“

She guides my hands to several cables attached to and leading out of the pad, “—these cables lead to the DT Extractor. Your DT will be drawn from the cable you’re touching. We’re also collecting data on your brain activity, using the thinner cable next to that one.

“I just trimmed the fabric of the contact so it fits you better. It’s almost as large as your forehead. Press down on the contact until the adhesive doesn’t feel wet, and the contact doesn’t move.”

“Okay.”

Using both of my hands, I press the… contact… against my forehead, some glue squishing against my skin each time I apply pressure. After several presses, the adhesive feels more viscous. After a few more, it stops moving altogether.

As soon as I’m finished, Alphys walks a few steps toward the foot of the bed. "Lift up the top of your shirt a bit please."
"Sure."

Her gloved hands brush my neck and chest lightly as she applies the same conductive liquid as before. She hands me the contact and helps me press it down firmly on my chest until the adhesive thickens and solidifies. “Lie down on your left side so you can feel the DT Extractor.”

I obey, lifting my hands off the second contact. Alphys positions them face-down, moving them along the cables, until I touch the metal sockets they originate from. “The DT Extractor is to your left. It’s against the back wall, to the left of the fridge. I’ll be standing on the opposite side of it, with similar mechanisms attached to my head, hands, and chest. Instead of exclusively collecting data, they’ll also draw power from my soul and my field of knowing. Sans, Papyrus, and Dewey will be looking at most of the data we’ll be putting out.”

[How could she forget to mention how the DT Extractor looks like a creepy skull--?]  
[Wait what--!?]  
[Yeah!]  
[Uh…]  

We inwardly shudder. [It’s like… kinda round…? And like, the sockets come out of the temples…?]  

“What are you gonna do over there?” I ask, attempting to divert our attention away from the metal skull sitting only a couple feet away…

“I’ll be facilitating the extraction. I need these three here, to look at everything and make sure we’re both okay, because I’ll be… really involved. Mentally and soulologically.”

I am about to reply: “Yeah—that—”

Mid-sentence, she seizes my shoulders, the wisp of magic which is her breath blowing against my face. "If you feel even the tiniest bit uncomfortable, tell us.

“I SHOULD be able to tell if you are but… I don't actually know how sensitive I'll be toward your pain.

“I could tolerate the pain from the six other humans, when I extracted determination from them but… their pain receptors weren't genuinely attached to their bodies so… that most likely made a difference.

“The others will be watching your physiological and soulological activity, so they'll also know if you're in pain. Just in case I misjudge how you feel.”

{I know the form said there might be pain but…}

I don’t have to finish my sentence: Chara can feel my uneasiness for themselves.

Alphys lets go of my shoulders and walks so she stands at the foot of the bed. “And I'll be restraining your ankles and wrists and head, just in case—"

I jerk upright: "Hoooly shiiit!"

"I have to do it, so you won't hurt yourself. I'm strapping your wrists and ankles to some metal bars on the bed."
Loosening her grip on my shoulders, she says more gently, "You don't have to do this, you know. Now, or at all.

"Remember—you can withdraw—"

"Well if I'm gonna be scared shitless I might as well know what I'm gonna be scared shitless by."

Everyone laughs… even Chara… and I’m reassured more than I care to admit. "So Gaster's not the only one who can make pithy quotes," Sans remarks from behind the protective barrier.

See bro?"

More serious now. “I didn’t forget everything."

"Well I suppose that’s a good start," Papyrus says as Alphys straps my wrists and ankles to the metal bars she described.

"Just to reiterate,” Dewey walks over to the foot of the bed as he talks, “you understand the risks.

“You… you could get hurt.

“Your soul might experience some… side effects."

"I mean I have to.” I hold my head still as Alphys fastens a strap on my forehead, on top of the contact. “’Cause you guys need the determination to bring Gaster back.”

I conclude, "Yes. I do."

With that, Dewey retreats to the center of the room, near the barrier. Alphys steps away from me, quickly squeezing my bicep as she does so. From the left side of the DT Extractor, she explains the process for attaching her set of contacts to her body. As she talks through the process of applying the first contact, the one on her head, I can’t help but ask Chara, {How the hell can she be so—}

[You seriously think she didn’t practice how to use this thing before she took you down here? That’d be stupid.]

She finishes applying the contact on her hands. [I guess that’s true.]

[And the sides: I think Alphys being calm makes sense. We both know she’s done more complicated stuff before.]

It's not long before Alphys applies the contact on her chest. She has barely finished telling me that the adhesive has hardened before I hear the clicking sound of typing, Alphys muttering as she does so.

After a few more seconds, she announces in a clear tone, “Initializing…”

My contacts vibrate ever so slightly against my skin. “Initialization confirmed,” Dewey and the Skelebros respond sharply in unison.

“Soulological and magitronic integration… commencing.” She pauses before “commencing”, as if reading off a screen.


“Target soul… located.” After several more seconds, Alphys speaks and pauses before “located”,
as if she’s reading off a screen again.

My scalp and forehead tingle, like I’m sitting on pins and needles, but involving significantly less pain. “Target ethergraph stable.”

Chara and I start when we hear Papyrus’s voice: he sounds formal again.

“Determination extraction… proceed.”

I sense a faint… tugging sensation… on my head and chest as Dewey calmly says, “Pineal gland access successful.”

The tugging sensation slowly intensifies over the next minute—or two. I don’t want to interrupt anyone. Eventually, I tentatively ask, "Guys?"

A chorus of "Yeahs?"

"Like… I know I should’ve asked this earlier but… where’s my soul?"

"That's easy yo."

I'm taken aback by Will's immediate, confident response. "It's the brain yo.

“It helps humans make decisions. Stores their personalities. And controls what their bodies make and do. Like how emotions control the magic in monster souls, yo.

“So whatever's telling your body to make the DT, it's in your brain."

"It’s the pineal gland, in the anterior part of the brain, slightly inferior to the frontal cortex.” Sans explains shortly.

“Your liver and kidneys make the DMT. Your pineal gland has all the parts for makin’ it. But Alph didn’t put the second contact over your liver ‘cause ya can’t extract determination from there.

“She put one contact on your head for all the reasons Will just said.

“And she put another over your heart ‘cause…

“Humans don’t say the phrase “heart and soul” of somethin’ for nothin’.”

It makes perfect sense—not from a physiological standpoint, but from a metaphorical one.” Papyrus says evenly from behind the barrier.

“Humans think consciousness derives from the brain.

“And they also think the heart is the soul. Even if it's not true.

“That’s why we draw human souls as hearts, and monster souls as upside down hearts.”

“Our science derives meaning from concepts just as much as testable models: if not more so.”

"So," I slowly realize, "Asgore wants to use human brains exposed to magic to break the Barrier."

"Exactly.” Papyrus answers, without hesitation.

"Uh…"
I shudder, as the tugging sensation slows, then stops completely. I hear Alphys peeling her contacts off her body before she rushes over to me, leaning in close. “You feeling okay?”

“Yeah.”

“Any pain?” she insists. “What you felt… was it too forceful?”

“I mean, it could have been worse. It wasn’t painful—just weird.”

She sighs deeply. “Thank Tesla.

“That’s good. That’s really good.

“So this extraction method is as painless—and foreign—as Gaster speculated it would be…”

I wait for her to finish reminiscing as Alphys hands me a wet cloth. “Peeling off the contacts should be as easy as peeling off a sticker. If it’s not, then let us know. We have some warm water prepared, just in case we have to soften the adhesive.”

“Okay.”

Alphys continues talking as I work a fingernail underneath the contact on my chest, gripping the edge with my hand as it comes away. “You’ll feel some residual hardened adhesive and conductive fluid, but it’ll easily come off with the wet wipes.

“In the meantime I’ll prepare the solution that contains the other six forms of magic. It was created during the determination extraction process.”

Alphys removes the restraint from around my head so I can peel off the first contact. “The table's on this side of the protective barrier so… I’ll take you over there when you’re done.”

Before I can object, Chara takes control of my body, so I peel the first contact off much faster than I expected. I stand from the bed, wet wipes in one hand. I begin walking forward. [The table’s on your left. So the chair’s there too.]

As I sit down and begin unfolding the wet wipes, Alphys bustles back over to the DT Extractor, and some whirring noises, and the pouring-out of liquid, fill the room. I can just barely make out her muttering.

“—so light for her age—

“—prematurely born—

“—ninety-two pounds—

“—1.09 grams per cubic centimeter so I need to make 318 mL—

“—dilute it so it won’t overwhelm her—“

I eventually set down the wet wipes on the table when I’ve finished using them, as Alphys walks back over. She stops to my left, a clunking sound following close behind. With her hands still gloved, she holds my hands in place on the table where they are. "Okay. I've set a 500 mL beaker in front of you. It's filled about…"

"I'd say," Dewey helps out his daughter, “that’s a little more than half-full—“
The Skelebros agree.

"What they said.

“This solution contains the other six forms of magic, mixed with sterile water. I weighted the concentrations to favor colors of magic you haven’t felt before.

“I want you to touch it with two fingers on one hand, then two fingers on the other. Let it soak in. Only then, after you've felt, no ill effects, do I want you to put both your hands in it.”

I reach forward and feel the warm glass of the beaker. “Yeah sure—“

"Just remember: if ANYTHING makes you feel uncomfortable, tell us. Take your hands out and wipe them off on—“

She lets go of my hands long enough to set a cloth on the table next to where she held my hands down. She guides one hand over to it so I know where she put it. "—on these."

I oblige.

“Are you ready?”

“Yeah.”

Alphys lifts her hands off of mine, and I hear her walk away a couple steps. After confirming where Alphys set down the emergency wipes, I make a scissors gesture with my left hand and inch it forward. When I've made contact with the rim of the beaker, I dip my fingers downward, coming in contact with…

{I kinda expected it to like, hurt or something.}

[Same.] Chara's equally, let down…

Footsteps directly behind me, and several sharp knocks on the plastic barrier. "Talk to us kid."

Sans, standing a couple feet behind me. “What's it like?"

"It's… like water." I haltingly describe as I dip my first two fingers on my right hand in the solution, rubbing it between them and my right thumb. I perform the same rubbing gesture with my left.

"Any pain? Numbness?" Sans intones.

"No.

“It's like…”

I stutter, trying to describe how it feels. "It’s warm—and not just 'cause the water’s warm—the magic feels warm.

“But it’s also kinda cold. I don’t get how something can be hot and cold at the same time but… ehh.”

I wiggle my fingers around in the solution as I dip both my hands in it. “And I feel like moving my hands a lot. But I know I can’t ‘cause I have to do this."
“And I’m tingling… like when you guys were using the DT Extractor.

“But there’s no pain.” I emphasize, trying to reassure everyone.

"Any changes to your stats?" Alphys questions… urgently. “You might not have done it before but—just sit still and breathe deeply. You should see—feel—sense—them, as easily as you feel your feet pressing down on the floor."

"Uh…"

[When you arrived in the Underground, you had twenty HP, 10 AT, and 10 DF. What is it now?]

"{Uh…{  

{Thirty-two.}

"It's thirty-two." I turn my head slightly toward Alphys's voice.

"What is?" she presses.

"My HP."

"When you arrived in the True Lab, I saw you had thirty-one HP. And Sans told me that in Snowdin you had twenty right before you went to the Snowed Inn. And when you guys left to come here, you had thirty.

“How about your AT? when we stepped off the elevator, I saw it was eleven."

"It's…” I pause for a second, visualizing the braille numbers. "Twelve?"

"And your DF? It was 10 at its baseline in Snowdin. And 11 when you first arrived here in the True Lab," she continues.

"Uh… still eleven…?"

"Okay."

The clicking of keys from where Alphys is standing, and… more muttering.

"—her ethergraph—

"—statistically significantly more perseverance—

"—determination that’s statistically and practically greater than anyone else—

"—almost like two humans but—“

It takes several more minutes for the beaker to drain. When it does, I remove my hands, which still feel warm, cold, and tingly, all at once. “Wipe them off,” Alphys instructs.

I've barely finished following Alphys’s instructions when the barrier behind me lifts up… and Papyrus gently lifts me out of my seat, with his hands and his blue magic.

"That was actually very interesting to watch human," he says in my ear, thankfully at a normal volume. "It was much more relaxing than the DT extraction. The determination is in a transparent container in the base of the machine. Its red coloration made it a little, unnerving, to look at, as it
filled that receptacle…"

He shakes a little as he sets me down again. "It was like watching Nightmare on Elm Street all over again. All those buckets of blood—"

[Whoa Sans does not approve…?]

[Why?]

"Bro? No spoilers. She might wanna watch it at some point."

"Of course.” Papyrus quickly apologizes. “I suppose we don’t need a repeat of the Fishbock Fiasco —“

A clatter… and a sharp and surprised “Gneh!” as Papyrus disappears from behind me. In front of me, the pressure of Sans's blue magic on my body and soul take his place. I lift a couple inches off the floor. I squirm, unsure of why Sans is casting magic on me. [Wow Papyrus getting flung out of the way like that thooooough…?]

{True.}

[And it’s not like Sans to do this. But hey! Now we're eye-to-eye socket with him for once—]

{Chaaaarrraaa!}

Alphys squeaks. "Wh-wh-why are y-y-you d-d-doing th-th-that—HEY PUT ME DOWN!"

“We all shared in your fear”

The hint of formality in his voice unnerves Chara and I to no end.

“Only Alphys’s calm way of giving orders stopped you from breaking down.”

I “Mm-hmm” in agreement, unwilling to interrupt him.

“Th-that’s a b-bit of—” she tries to object, but Sans won’t let her finish: “I mean it.

You earned her trust faster than any of us, Alphys.

“She obeyed you without question.

“I have yet to instill the same trust in her,” he says, his tone softening somewhat.

Alphys gasps softly. “Th-that’s not true—“ she starts to say, but again, Sans cuts her off: “You gave directions so clear Pauline never asked you to repeat them,”

Undeniable admiration. “And she never faltered when carrying them out.

“You never changed them to account for her blindness.”

A gentle thunk as… presumably… Alphys drops back onto the floor.

I stay in the same place.

"I… I guess that's true.” She replies, choosing her words carefully.

“As much as I want to brush all that off, I know I can’t."
“You wouldn’t be telling me this if you didn’t mean it.

“If you think I’ve really earned Pauline’s trust faster than you then… I might as well make the most of it.”

Sans takes one of my hands in each of his, lifting them from my sides. We perform the Inertia Society handshake, his blue magic channeling into me, alongside static—

No.

Chara… seems to withdraw deeper into me as they explain in a small voice, [That’s Sans’s yellow magic you’re feeling.

[I’ve never felt this before.]

In a mental voice so quiet I can barely make it out: [It doesn’t hurt.

[I didn’t think he could use his yellow magic without it hurting…]

{What do you mean?}

I wait for them to answer…

They don’t.

“Dad?”

Alphys?”

Dewey is still caught off guard by Sans’s formality.

"Get Pauline and Will back upstairs. 'Cause let's face it. We've been here for a while. You guys may not know this, but you look really tired."

"Sounds good." We agree in unison.

“At least I feel tired tired and not bored tired yo.”

"Papyrus and I are gonna look at our old video recordings to make sure we—"

"I understand your caution. But it is surely erroneous to assume that I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster, would ever forget our father! So viewing his speeches and our old home movies and his coded video footage from his joint research with Dewey is completely unnecessary!"

Alphys laughs. "That’s the spirit.

“And Sans?

"How about you bring that machine from your basement down here? You DID say that if Pauline said yes to our idea, it’d be relevant. I know it's been a long time since you've done magitry around here but… I'm sure we can configure it properly by the end of the day.

“And you should probably get a refresher on magitry anyway—"

"Heh heh heh heh heh."

[Uh I’d ask you to quote Xenoblade but fucking hell that laugh isn't creepy at all—!]
[TRUE!]
[Well Sans isn’t like, technically creepy—] Chara stumbles over their words as they clarify, [he’s excited! But he’s like… quiet excited…? And not like, hyped excited…? And like, I thought he’d be hyped excited…? So THAT’S why he’s creepy as fuck!]

{Yep!}

“Of course.”

[And just when I thought it couldn’t get any worse…!]

{Yep!}

[Does the thought of doing the important thing fill you with determination?]

{Duh!}

{[WHY HASN’T HE PUT US DOOOWN YET!?]}

Chapter End Notes

******

Here’s the layout of the room, from top left to bottom right.

Top left corner: scale

Against the center of the back wall: bed

To the right of the bed, also against the back wall: DT extractor

Against the right side of the back wall: fridge storing perishable lab supplies

Top right corner, set in right wall: supply room

Center of room: table

The protective barrier divides the room in half horizontally. The door is at the center of the wall behind it.

******

Here’s the link to True Determination! It's from Fallen: An Undertale Tribute.

https://soundcloud.com/fredrikhathen/true-determination-from-fallen-an-undertale-tribute

When I first heard this song, I knew I wanted it in the soundtrack for Visiontale. This moment: Alphys telling me about her idea for bringing back Gaster, as well as the... ethical dilemma... of me helping them, is what I imagined when I heard this song. The fact that it was recorded with real instruments doesn't hurt either.
I couldn't wait.

I had to post this, even if there may be some... minor errors. I want Gaster back sooo badly it's not even funny.

I created my theories for soulology and determination so they could account both for how humans can save, and bringing back Gaster.

Seriously: I've been spoiled by Man Who Speaks in Hands and their sympathetic portrayal of Gaster...

Soon, we can have Dadster feels... and exposition regarding very hard fictional science... all in one!
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

When I first wrote this chapter, I did it in one take.

Cue notes regarding music in the endnotes for anyone who's interested!

**THIS IS IMPORTANT!!!**

starting with this chapter, make sure you're up to date, and continuing onward with the chapters that come out from now on. There will be spoilers from the previous chapters in the chapter notes of succeeding chapters. They're essential to giving context.

If you want to ask questions in the comments, just mention the latest chapter you've read all the way through.

Before you begin the content of your comment, write the number of the chapter you've read, followed by SPOILERS!, to indicate to people not to read it if they haven't reached it, like so:

29SPOILERS! or 17SPOILERS!

I'll put SPOILERS! before any of my comments with spoilers in them. If your comment isn't in this format, I won't approve it until you resubmit your comment with the ChapterNumberSPOILERS! qualifier before it. It's only fair...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

29

Over the next five days, I hardly spend time with the monsters who accompanied me down to the True Lab at all. With few exceptions, we don’t share meals together, their food being sent to their work spaces via dimensional box instead.

I lie awake, talking to Chara, when I have trouble falling asleep. Often, we hear footsteps and doors opening and shutting in the hallways around us.

Voices whispering in hushed tones.

Raw sobs.

Impassioned and frustrated screaming.

Heated arguments.

Stern warnings.

Bones clattering.
Gaster blasters firing.

Bodies slamming into every available surface.

Mock angry noises which only Papyrus can make.

During the day, I read Will’s school books and listen to Undyne try to explain the finer points of soulology… emphasis on try. Thankfully, Will is… patient… enough to scan his books in the proper format, so I can transfer the files to my BrailleNote. Primarily, I read soulology texts, because most of Will’s books are about it. “I was checking some out ‘cause I wanted to figure out what colors of magic I’d be cemented in yo,” he says one day, after I read an explanation of orange magic.

“I mean, I don’t know what you’d use. Maybe… actually bravery sounds about right…? Or purple?”

“As long as you throw yourself into it with a pure heart, it doesn’t matter what kind of magic you end up cemented in!” Undyne points out from on my left, as enthusiastically as ever. “No point in forcing yourself to use a color of magic that doesn’t represent who you really are.

“I mean look at me! No one expected me to use green magic!”

She gives a hearty laugh. “Even David! He thought I’d share magic with Tailor or something!”

“[Truuuuue.]” Will, Chara and I agree.

I begin to comment: “Like, what you said about helping monsters… it’s not what we—“

“Humans yo.” Will interjects.

“Well, some humans—most humans yo…”

“What most humans,” I admit, “think kindness is but… monsters decide what each color of magic does so… ehh.”

“But determination’s amazing!” Undyne thumps my back… Chara squeaking with each blow. “Just think: that’s how you’re able to walk around without a cane! Or play Super Smash Brothers with only sound! THAT’S AMAZING!”

“It’s not that amazing yo.”

[Wait Will being serious though…?]

His chair scrapes along the floor to my right until it bumps mine. “She HAD to learn to do that yo. And besides: she just had to think a lot. It’s not like she got superpowers or—“

“NOT TRUE!” Undyne objects. “How does she know how to walk around in this room without even being here before! I haven’t even punished my furniture for hurting her even once!”

{"Uh…"}

“I mean,” I explain as I reach over across Undyne’s desk to grab my water bottle, “you were like, yelling at me and saying where the bed was so—“

A pair of knocks at the door… then a second pair of knocks at the door… then a third pair of knocks at the door… and then an indignant “NO SANS! I’M NOT DOING IT!”
“Come on Paps: Pauline probly figured out how many of us are knockin’ at the door by now. If ya haven’t helped her do that already…”

SAAAAAAAANS!!”

{{Paaaaps?}}

The crashing of metal as Undyne stands from her seat… clanging footsteps… another crashing sound as the door bangs open… and a… squeal? “NGAHHHH! PUT ME DOWN!”

“Duuuuuude!” Will runs over to a spot behind me to my right, toward the… noises. “Like, how are you doing that yo!? Undyne’s like… twice your height Sans!”

“Practice.”

Some shuffling footfalls behind me, and two pairs of claws on my shoulders. “Hi.” Dewey quietly greets in my ear.

I reply “Hi…?” As Undyne and Sans proceed to argue? In the doorway.

“Guys?” Alphys tries to stop them. “We didn’t come to… debate this. Please Undyne. Just… you two can settle this later. In Smash or otherwise.”

Everyone proceeds to walk into the room proper, their footsteps stopping at Undyne’s desk at various places around my chair. Dewey lifts his claws from my shoulders, moving them to my lower arm on my right side. “I’m right here,” he softly clarifies.

“Human?”

“Papyrus?” I turn my head slightly to the left toward his voice.

“We would like to, apologize, for neglecting to give you company over the past five or so days. As you must have guessed, we are awfully busy now!”

“Yeah I know.”

“It is just,” Papyrus sighs… and I’m not at all surprised by it, “we have had to, convince, some Inertia Society members to lend us their expertise. Because as you may have guessed, a significant number of them are hesitant to help us after the tragedy a couple years ago.”

“That, and I’ve had to reject lots of requests for interviews. Of you. Me. Everyone.” Sans continues from behind me and slightly to my right, behind Dewey.

“And most of ‘em haven’t been…

“Civil.”

[Oh God all the spare chairs are floating near the ceiling.]

“I have too…” Alphys seconds from directly behind me. “Some… blogs—well it would probably be more accurate to call them underline tabloids—have been asking us for interviews. When our requests over email don’t keep them away, their authors come here and…”

[Wow I never thought I’d see Alphys trying to sound nice… or civil I guess is the word now…]

{Whyyyy?}
“She’s like… frowning really hard—or pouting… she’s not happy.”

“And… speak… to us in person.

“In the hallways between work spaces.

“In the elevators and longivators.

“A few even started… waiting… outside the Lab yesterday—“

“Till I told ‘em to get lost, that is.”

[Oh God slight eye glow of doooom—]

{[Nope—!]}  

“Did you kick their asses?” Undyne… somehow eagerly asks us from behind my left shoulder. Ears beginning to ring, I miss some of Sans’s reply.

“—didn’t use ‘em though. And a bit of blue magic. Nothin’ serious.”

A long… cold laugh. “But I wish they gave me an excuse to use more.

“The way they act?

“I’d force ‘em to feel the pain they’ve caused, if I could.”

A reply with no hesitation. “Why didn’t you then? No one could stop you.”

[Dewey you’re into violence all of a sudden?]

Chara seems… too excited about Sans giving these “reporters” a bad time.

I agree with them completely.

“Sans?” Papyrus tentatively asks.

“Trust me: I would’ve. ‘Xcept I have to save up my magic for tomorrow night. If it weren’t for that…”

Papyrus groans in pain. “Please Sans. You’re… you’re hurting me,” he begs.

[Oh God no!]

{Chaaarrra? Whaaat’s wroooong?}

{Please Sans why are you doing this they didn’t do anything wrong it was the reporters’ faults PLEEEEEEASE STOOOOOP!}

{CHAAARAAAA WHAT’S WRONG!?!}

“Please Sans. You… you can’t afford to do this.” Dewey follows Papyrus’s example. “We all know you think these guys deserve a bad time. And I’m not going to argue with you on that.

“They do. They really, really do—”

{Dude Chara—I’m with you on this one—I didn’t think Dewey would want those guys to get a bad
“—but we have to use all our power to bring Gaster back tomorrow. You have to save up your magic.”

“Well,” Alphys slowly adds on, “more like tonight and tomorrow morning—on second thought I don’t actually know the time on the surface anymore—I stopped keeping track of time like that on the second day down in the True Lab—but yeah: you’re right.”

“Wait what?”

“Please look at us human.”

I rotate my chair to the left to face Papyrus, and I hear footsteps behind me, presumably as Dewey, Alphys, and Sans change positions so they all face me. “Yeah?”

“We were looking for you so we could update you on the CAD-and-CAD machine. When we leave this place, we will be going our separate ways for a little while.

“Tonight, Alphys and Sans will be riding down to the True Lab to perform our last set of checks on that CAD-and-CAD machine. And Dewey and I will help prepare you and your room for the reconstruction process.”

“My room?” I repeat.

“We’ll install DT-extraction devices in your room, similar to what we had you use a few days ago,” Alphys explains, rummaging around in a bag. “They—“

She hands me a flat, roughly elliptically-shaped panel the size of half a sheet of paper, made of the same fabric and metal material as the contacts on the dT Extractor, “—will look—feel—like this. Paps and Dewey will be sticking these to as many surfaces in your room as possible. And the DT they collect will be Boxed to the CAD-and-CAD machine downstairs.

“The determination in your soul is really concentrated, so we don’t actually need to use all the protocols we came up with to extract it from you. Originally, we were going to sew some panels into your clothing and bedding. Because they would have the most direct contact with your skin while still being noninvasive. but… we realized that was unnecessary. The two of them will be sticking them to the surfaces closest to you, so closest to your bed.”

“Okay. Will you guys be going down there after?” I ask Papyrus.

“Yes, actually. The four—“

“Bro? You’re forgettin’ to include will—“

“[[Will?]]”

“Yes.” Papyrus answers at once. “Believe it or not, his family has had a long history working with the Inertia Society. His parents were… and still are… some of our most staunch supporters!

“Though they were understandably shaken when they found out about our conduct during the Determination Study…” he trails off.

“That makes sense.
“But yo duuuude!”

[Will’s like, bouncing up and down on Undyne’s bed.]

“Gneh heh heh!”

“I know right!?”

“I’ve been, trying not to give that away yo.” Will manages to sound sheepish. “But I’m probly not doing a good job, since I’m telling Pauline lots of stuff she’s never heard before out of context yo—but still I can’t believe you want me to help yo!”

“The five of us will be hooked into the DT coupling machine in an identical manner to Alphys,” Papyrus affects Alphys’s professional tone as he continues, “when she extracted determination from you. It’s just that our souls will have a more direct hand in the machine’s operation.”

Like, what are you gonna do?!”

“To put simply,” Dewey explains from in front of me, applying a slight pressure on my left lower arm as he talks, “we’ll be using our memories as the blueprint for Gaster’s body and our determination—”

“Wait wait wait hold up.” I emphasize. “OUR? Determination?”

“It’s not all that much, but monster souls do contain determination. But it’s like a drop in the ocean compared to the other forms of magic.

“And well… you know why we can’t use it…”

“[Oh…]”

“Basically our magic will be focused toward the reconstruction processes,” Dewey continues, “providing most of the guidance for the machine. But our determination, including yours, will help reconstruct Gaster’s soul. We need to be there to… channel… our desire for him to live, into the machine.”

“And besides: this little guy’s great and all, but it needs living monsters to run it. To guide magic through it.

“Physically, it can replicate Gaster’s body down to the last detail but…”

Sans’s tone becomes solemn in an instant.

[I… I don’t know how to explain this… but… Sans stopped smiling.]

Confused… okay maybe more than confused, I ask, [Whaaaat?]

Surprise and… sadness… flows off of Chara and into me. Wow… just…]

“A machine can’t replicate the primal desire to live inherent in living things. Human OR monster. And sometimes not even living beings can do it.”

The only way I can think of to respond to this revelation is a soft “Mm-hmm.”

“Tonight, the five of us will ride down to the True Lab and interface with the CAD-and-CAD machine,” Papyrus, somehow, grandly announces. “But before then, we will have dinner.
Together.

“And after dinner, we will medicate you—“

“[[Wait the f—]]”

“We have to do it,” Alphys rushes to reassure me. “We’ll be giving you a combination of green and blue magic derivatives. They’re two of the solvents in the solution we’ll be administering to you right before we go down to the True Lab. We’ll also be giving you anesthetics, to ease any pain you may feel. That’s why we asked you if you were allergic to any medication. So we’d know if we had to adjust our formula.”

“Makes sense.”

“What’s the solute gonna be Alph?” Sans asks. “Ya never told us.”

“Well, I created it in such a way that it could be administered with any of the powdered drink mixes we have, so it would taste better. But I suppose the solution can be mixed with any drink without affecting its properties. It’s magic, so it doesn’t matter what physical substance the solution is mixed with, as long as the solution was made properly in the first place.

“The completed solution can be mixed into whatever drink you want,” Alphys finishes.

I suddenly blurt out, “You guys have hot chocolate?”

{Whaaaaat?}

[Come on I know you like it too—]

{Yeah… truuuue but—}

[Your welcome.]

“Yeah!” Alphys seems to cheer up, “we do! I… just have to find it.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve made any.”

Papyrus wraps his phalanges around my left wrist and pulls me to my feet. “We must not wwwwaste time! Dewey and I will assist the human. The rest of you can find the hot chocolate and prepare the extraction solution.”

“HEY!”

“[[FUCKING HELL UNDYNE!]]”

“UNDYNE!? Don’t scare the human like that!” Alphys protests.

“Oh come on Alphy. She’s not scared of me! I wanted to make sure she remembered I was here.

“I was gonna ask what I can do to help! Because all of you have the sciency stuff all figured out. I think.”

“And me too yo!” Will pipes up. “I haven’t used any of my magic at all since you guys told us about Gaster so… I can’t do any magic stuff to help you but…”

“Well…’
“You can use my computer to collect as much motivational video game and anime music as you can online. And you can look at my collection, of course.

“And you should rest until tonight, Will,” she says in a friendlier tone. “Get relaxed however you can. I know this is all… reaaaaally over your head but… we’ll be there to guide you through it.”

“How much music do you need yo?”

“Uh… I don’t know,” Alphys sounds like she’s performing mental calculations simultaneously as she talks, “several hours worth—?”

The whooshing noise of a spear… appearing… nearby. “THEN LET ME AT YOUR COMPUTER THEN!”

“Yeah!”

“[[Awwww Will’s Undyne impression thooooough!]]

“Hey! Hey yo! Undyne put me doooown!”

Papyrus squeezes my wrist as we walk by the chair and diagonally across the room toward the door. Over his… shoulder… scapula? He calls out, “I’ll text all of you when Dewey and I have finished installing the DT extraction devices! Then, we will meet in the main dining area—“

“Actually,” Sans cuts him off, “I have a date with the Freudians before dinner.”

“[[Oh God no!]]”

“They wanted to ask Pauline some questions ‘bout anthropomorphism so…”

“Whyyyy?”

“[[Nope!]]”

The deep, pleasant laugh I’ve come to know… and love… from Sans. “Awh come on kid why that face? They’re not gonna ask ya ‘bout your instinctual sexual urges or anythin’. They wanna ask me ‘bout how you perceive us monsters.”

“[[‘That’s not helping!’]]

Papyrus rushes me out of the room before Sans can delve more deeply into the… implications… of Freud… in front of everyone…

*A couple hours and one dinner later…*

“So you keep forgetting Toriel’s not a human then?” Gerson recaps as I drain my glass of water.

I admit somewhat sadly, “Yeah…”

“Mwah hah hah! That’s all right. Long as you don’t compare me to your old man’s old man, we’re good!”

“Truuuee.”
“Uh… hello?” Alphys calls uncertainly from my left at the far end of the table. She taps her glass several times.

The room falls silent, and every room broadcast on the video screens on the walls also falls silent… but not before Undyne shouts “SHOW ME YOUR MOVES!” too loudly…

{[Undyne out of all times to make a Smash reference you do it NOOOOW?]}

Alphys clears her throat—makes the sound of clearing her throat—does Alphys even have a throat?

“I wanted to alert you to what we’ll be doing tonight. I’d give a long speech but… all of you know that’s not my specialty.”

A brief pause before continuing: “Pauline has volunteered her determination toward the greatest project our civilization has ever done.

“Besides the creation of the CORE, of course.”

Monsters shout out around me: “You bet your life—oh wait too soon…”

“Humble as always Alphys!”

“Hell yeeeeaaaaah!”

“In any case, I want you all to know… regardless of what happens tonight, I…”

[Alphys don’t cry don’t cry don’t—she’s crying.
[But just a little.]
{Oh no…}
[She might make us cry…]
{I know!}

“I’m terribly sorry for not spending more time with you guys over the past several months—or the past several years, depending on who you ask.

“It’s just…

“The other six humans aren’t around anymore, to help me get everything off my chest, you know?”

A heavy silence before she says, “I… I know we all miss them so much.”

Reminiscent mutterings. “Yeah… Simon was the mature one.”

“No. Adam was the mature one!”

“David would have made a great CAD-and-CAD user.”

“Steven could have been my lab assistant. Hell—he could’ve had his own lab.”

“Tailor could have kept morale up for my team…”

“Kari could’ve taught my family to use guns right and not imitate every action hero they see!”
“And…” Alphys raises her voice again after several more seconds of comments, “as we all know, a significant portion of the population is still… reluctant… to send their children here for apprenticeships, even twenty years after Gaster’s death.

“Even more so after my… research… failed.”

Quiet muttering for only a few seconds.

“I… I want you to know… regardless of what happens… at least the results of this project will help us understand a lot of things.

Like our motivations for studying science.

“Like what we’re willing to risk for the sake of the Underground.

“And, of course.”

Knowing very well what she will say next, I confidently join everyone else in the room as we recite in unison, “Our values. Our reasoning. Our mastery of the world around us.”

[Alphys is walking toward us.]

[Hold out your hands.]

I oblige, only to touch a… warm, smooth glass. From her place on my left, Alphys guides me to my feet. With her right hand grasping my left hand and wrist, she raises my glass in the air. “Knowing all that, I would like to propose a toast.

“May the thought of Dr. Wingdings Tesla Gaster standing at his rightful place at the head of this table fill us with determination!”

The room erupts in cheers of “DETERMINATION!” as I touch the glass to my lips and drain it over the next couple minutes… forgetting that Alphys dosed it with magic and anesthetics until Chara reminds me, when it’s three-quarters of the way empty. {It doesn’t even taste like medicine —}

[I think it’s cause it’s magic. It doesn’t have a taste.]

It doesn’t take me long to down the glass of hot chocolate completely. I sit for a little while, continuing to marvel at its thickness and its sweetness.

At least, until Chara makes an observation: [I think Alphys put sleeping pills—sleeping syrup? In the hot chocolate.]

{So THAT’S why I’m tired--?}

[I guess--]

{It shouldn’t be this strong. How are…?}

I hardly notice as my feet lift off the floor, though I don’t feel anyone holding me by the back of my shirt.

[ Magic…?

[Or they gave you a lot…?]
Their speech begins to slur. [Maybe it’s ‘cause of the anesthetics…?]

[I don’t know man…]

I barely remain conscious as the others guide me back to my room and tuck me in bed, crowding around me.

The last voice I hear before I fall asleep proper is Sans asking in my ear, “You save kid?”

“Just…”

He stammers: “Just in case we fail?”

“[I just did.]” Chara and I manage to mumble.

*A few… hours later…*

I… stand… somewhere. I don’t sense any open space around me and yet, I feel like I’m standing in a completely silent room. I somehow sense walls around me… or, am I in a wide, open space? Are there walls pressing in on me, or am I overwhelmed by the vastness of the empty space?

It takes me a while… or is it no time at all…? to notice a firm pressure on my left—right—on one arm. “Hi.”

I start… or do I just stand still? “Chaaarrraaa?”

A soft voice in one of my ears. [Yeh. It’s me.]

“Oh…”

I don’t know what to say. “Now you know what my dreams are like…?”

[Yeah.]

Chara’s… very interested. [I… like, can’t see anything. I think… but sometimes I think I can… it’s confusing.]

They trail off.

“Yeah… my dreams are like that. Sometimes I think I can see light. Maybe even color sometimes but…”

[I know. I’ve seen enough of your dreams from the outside to know that.]

The intent to shake my head slightly… but whether it actually happens is another story. “Ehh.”

I realize that Chara’s placed their hand on top of mine… and stepped closer to me. Our… shoulders touch… warmth softly emitting from their body.

The warmth of determination.

We stand there for a while, unsure of what to say.

[It’s quiet.] They finally comment.

“Yeah.”
It’s like my room in the middle of the night when everyone else is asleep… except there aren’t any cars… or neighbors listening to weird CDs that sound like police scans…

My observations remain true for a few more… seconds…?

Minutes…?

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB8o_VdvFpk

Then…

Then, from directly next to me—on both sides—

From behind me—

From the… ground… under my feet—

From inside my own head—

From everywhere—and from nowhere…

I hear…

A voice.

“Entry number seventeen.

“Dark…

“Darker…

“Yet darker…

“The darkness keeps growing.

“The shadows cutting deeper.

“Photon readings… negative.

“This next experiment seems very…

Very…

“VERY…

“Interesting.

“What do you two think?”

A Tense second—Eternity? silence? follows.

It ends when Chara and I start swearing and screaming and generally making freaked out noises…

**Stop the music.**
I shoot out of bed, the covers flying off of me with a yelp—several yelps—that aren’t mine?

Chara’s here.

They also sat up in bed, apparently.

[“Aaaaaaah!

“Wh-wh-wh-what just ha-ha-ha-happened?!?”] they stutter.

I am about to answer when they grip my shoulders, their head pressed against one of them. Their hair tickles my upper back. [“That… that wa-wa-wa-wasn’t… exactly what I r-r-r-rememb-b-b-ber…”]

“What the…” I repeat over and over… either that, or just “Whaaa…?”, as Chara continues to stammer into my shoulder, their arms hugging me tightly.

Eventually, they scoot slightly away from me and wrap their right arm around my waist, taking my left hand in theirs.

They continue: [“Wha… what the hell just happened?

[“Wh-wh-wh-what the hell happened down there?”]

With a pang, I remember that Chara isn’t even out of elementary school… and that they… volunteered… for the experiment alongside me, for all intents and purposes.

What else can I say but “I don’t know…”

[“The fuck did we…?”]

“I… it…” I struggle to recall the details, praying they don’t slip away, “sounded like…

“Like science…?” I say weakly, hoping I’m remembering the dream correctly.

“Yes… it did.”

We sit there a few more moments before…

“Knock knock.”

Chara disappears from their spot on the bed: “[Aaaaaaaaah!]”

“[[FUCKING JESUS!]]”

“Uh…”

Sans… didn’t expect me to swear at him… it sounds like.

“I saw your readouts. It looked like you were awake. So I’m here to take ya to the others.

“That is… if you’re ready.”

I don’t answer.

“Can I come in?”
“[Okay,]” we answer in a small voice.

Sans’s slippers slap against the floor as he walks toward me. After a couple seconds, he stops, his phalanges resting on my right arm, the familiar pressure of his magic more faint than normal, but still noticeable. “How are ya feelin’?”

“Uh…”

[[Where do we start!?!]]

“Why’d ya wake up like that?”

My body jerks: [[Wait wait wait what the fuuuuuuck he knew—knows?!]]

“Uh…”

“Bad dream?” he says more gently.

“Uh… yeah…

“How did you know?”

“Simple.

“I have ‘em a lot. Paps does too. Most monsters do.

“All the vibes comin’ off your soul… I’ve felt ‘em a lot.”

Chara and I think over his statements: “[[Yeah—I forgot you could do that.]]”

“Can ya tell me what it was about?

“That is, if ya wanna tell me at all?”

“It…

“I…”

Chara and I strain our memories. “It…”

After a few intense moments, I surprise myself by reciting Entry 17 back to him, creepy pauses and all, Chara taking control of me when I stutter, ensuring that I don’t miss a word.

A few agonizing moments of silence when we finish.

“That’s good.”

Sans sounds more than relieved. “Not what I thought he’d do but…”

[Oh maaan I thought I’d never be so happy to hear Sans laugh thooouugggh…?]

{Same!}

“Okay: ya heard ‘im. Ya heard everythinn’ he said.

“That’s good.
“Real good.

“And even better: ya said it word for word.”

Sans lets go of my arm. “It’s been a long time since ya last ate. That goes for all of us.

“Ya wanna come over for breakfast? Brunch?”

“Food?” he eventually settles on.

“Yeah sure. Just… I’m gonna use the bathroom.

“I… need to be alone for a while.”

“Course kid. I’ll be waitin’ outside your room then.”

*A few minutes later, when Chara and I try to figure out what Entry 17 is later…*

**Loop until the end of the chapter.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHwIICxOCCI

… “—a long time. It’s kinda far—”

Sans chuckles. “Okay it’s hella far—from your room but… we’ll teach ya how to get there.

“We wanted to meet here. For old time’s sake.”

After turning down a hallway and walking a few steps, we stop. “We’re here.”

The rapping of metal on metal. A rush of air by my face and hands. Alphys’s breathy voice, from the room beyond. “Pauline! You’re awake! Thank Tesla!”

Sans eases himself into the room in front of me, extending his left arm behind him while I hold his wrist. “Heya Alph. Ya holdin’ up?”

“I’m doing… a lot better than I thought. I’m really hungry but… besides that, I’m fine!”

Sans whistles: “Daaaaamn.”

“I’m not using my magic yet, but it’s just as strong as it should be.”

Sans readjusts his arm so we walk side by side. “Hold out your left hand. I was thinkin’ if we aligned all these tables and cabinets you could trail ‘em to reach the dining table—“

[Wait wait whoaaa whoaaaa what!?!]

{Chaaaraaa?}

They seemed… panicked… and yet… somehow… reassured. [Oh shiiiiit he’s not having any of that at aaaaaall.

[That’s good.]

{WHO’S not?}

[You know who—]
{ No way—}

[Try me.]

{Gaster?} I answer hesitantly, after several seconds.

With a light laugh, Chara answers, [Who else?]

“You should be able to walk the rest of the way to the table kid.” Sans lets go of me and walks a couple steps to one side. “Just… stay there a sec.”

Some grinding noises to my left. [He’s like… moving the tables so they like, form a straight line.]

A couple more squeaks of wood on metal: “Go for it.”

I trail the tables for a few feet, until my left hand hovers in empty space. I continue walking forward, hands out in front of me, until I bump another table. My right arm grazes a chair. I pull it out and am about to sit in it when Sans calls out from behind me, “Hold on.”

I wait, wondering why he won’t let me sit down.

“We went over this, dad.”

A mix of gentleness and sternness I have never heard… one that Chara has never heard either.

“Ya can’t just stand there.

“Pauline has to know what ya sound like, so ya don’t have to tell ‘her every time ya talk.

“That, and so she doesn’t confuse ya for someone else.”

A short chuckle: “Somehow.”

“And besides,” Dr.,” Alphys seems less, anxious, now. “You… you don’t have to be afraid.

“She knows who you are.

“Just…”

Alphys seems to have run out of words to say.

“Do what you said you’d do, in the Unified Theory papers.”

A rustle of cloth from across from me.

“Don’t worry,” Alphys says gently. “She knows the Inertia Society handshake.

“And don’t worry about being a skeleton either.”

“Yeah.” Sans adds. “you don’t have tibia afraid. She’s used to it.

“Go for it.”

I hold my hands out in front of me, palms facing outward, waiting for… for Dr. Gaster… to… initiate the handshake.

After an agonizing moment, where I can feel the nervousness pouring off of him in waves, Gaster
clears his throat… somehow… and begins to speak.

**Listen from 0:25 to about 1:00.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsxUFJYEYDM#t=00m28s

“S-s-salutations.

“I am Dr. Wingdings Tesla Gaster: King Asgore Dreemurr’s Royal Scientist, founder of the Inertia Society, and author of the Unified Theory Papers, the document detailing the protocols for formally educating humans on our civilization.”

{Is… is he why everyone says thank Tesla?}

[Kind of.]

Chara stops, seemingly collecting themselves. [No.

[I KNOW he is.]

Gaster continues, “You must be Pauline, correct?”

[I never realized how much I missed his voice until now.]

“Uh…”

{Fuck how do I sound formal we’re meeting Gaster in our fucking pajama pants!??}

[Uh… yeah… you’re on your own dude.]

{[SAAAAAANS THIS IS AAAAAALL YOUR FAULT!!!]}

“Yeah I am.” I reply simply, when I finally manage to figure out what to say…

“It is an honor to finally meet you in person.”

Gentle, skeletal hands press against mine, extremely long phalanges gently separating, then intertwining with, my fingers. “I… I cannot begin to express my gratitude.”

[No no no no Gaster don’t cry you’ll make me—us—everyone—cry!]

“I… I owe my entire existence to you.” His voice cracks.

[Oh well. There we go.]

Chara begins to quietly cry within my thoughts.

“Come on dad.” From behind us, Sans’s voice cracks in turn as he tries to joke. “Don’t cry. You’ll make us cry.”

[Well.] Chara sniffs, [he’s already done it so…]

“G-G-G-Gaster? S-S-S-Sans?”

Alphys stammers. She’s clearly begun to cry as well. “It’s ok-k-k-kay. Out of all m-m-monsters, you guys have the r-r-right to cry!”
Gaster squeezes my hands tightly. “I cannot begin to thank you. My gratitude is simply beyond comprehension. I would have to thank you countless times to even begin to…”

He trails off.

“I mean… Sans and Paps and everyone thinks you’re really important so…”

I restart. “I mean, I hate Alphys’s determination experiments but…

“I did this for your sons. And ‘cause I thought you guys deserved to have this.”

“And for that, I am eternally grateful.” Gaster seems to have calmed down somewhat.

“However… as of the present moment, you give off the irrefutable impression of… of confusion.”

His tone has softened considerably, as compared to how he sounded not a minute earlier. “Come. Sit while I gather my thoughts.

“You are entitled to a rigorous explanation.”

After a few seconds, when it becomes apparent that Gaster won’t let go of my hands, even after I try tugging them free, I manage to sit down, our hands still grasped together across the table.

Almost to himself, he quietly notes into the tabletop, “You are not disconcerted by my presence.”

[He like, nodded his head—skull. I don’t know why he’s talking to the table but…]

“Excellent.

“Truly excellent.” He seems to assure himself.

“I knew you possessed the soulological, mental, and experiencial capacities to perform the task I presented to you but…

“Only now is it apparent that…

“Only now can I truly…

“My perceptions in the Void…”

He trails off.

[He’s looking at us—so he’s not looking at the table—or his hands.]

“Do not interpret my succeeding statement as a display of doubt. I am merely exercising statistical caution, which you have been thoroughly educated on.”

Firmly and proudly, Gaster says, “I am 99.99 percent confident that I am glad I chose you.”

Chapter End Notes

Yep!
It's happened!
It's finally happened!

GAAAAAASTER'S BAAAAACK BOOOOYS!

Wow...

Here's the link to my canon Gaster voice! Listen from about 0:28 until about 1:01.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsxUFJYEYDM#t=00m28s

Here's the link to Ace Waters' remix of Once Upon a time!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHwIICxOCCI

Let's just say when I found this song, I immediately imagined it playing during the last scene. It was that evocative.

NOW!

Cue the collective upcoming Dadster feels!
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

I had to make this chapter long, because I owe you all an explanation for the... end... of the previous chapter...

Cue Gaster follower headcanons and more feels!

To be fair, every chapter from now on will have feels in one form or another but... ehh.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

30

As Chara’s dizziness and disorientation wash over me, I contemplate how their presence has become more tangible over time.

We have become intertwined, in multiple ways.

{[… … …]}

I—we—tense up, but instead of screaming at the top of our lungs, we only say one word.

"{[What?]}"

"Wh-wh-wh-whaaat?" Alphys stammers. “Y-y-y-y-you… c-c-can’t b-b-b-be s-s-serious.”

"… D-d-d-dad? Ya mean…”

[That’s… new.]

[Sans NEVER stutters…]

"I suppose a single explanation constitutes a wholly inadequate solution, to address what I—"

“{[YOU THINK!??]}”

“Before we begin, however…

“Alphys?” Gaster's soft voice echoes off the wall to our right. "Notify the others of our… congregation. I would not put it past Papyrus to check your room, only to worry himself unnecessarily over you wandering off. Or formulating the assumption that the medication administered to you possessed… adverse side effects… the diminishing of your rational thought being foremost among them.”

"Oh! O-o-of c-c-course!"

High-pitched clicking sounds from behind me as Alphys talks. "I’m t-t-t-e-e-exting everyone. I said w-w-we were in the d-d-d-dining room.
"The, o-o-o-o-riginal dining room."

[Gaster nodded.]

"Thank you Alphys. That should suffice as of the current moment."

Gaster leans forward slightly in his seat. "Now, while we wait for the others to arrive, I have prepared some questions regarding your… condition. Though the time I spent in the Void granted me ample opportunities to observe you, I desire to compare those observations to your sensorial and soulological reality, now that I have met you face-to-face—"

"Um—actually it’s not face-to-face but—"

"[Saaaans…]" Alphys, Chara, and I groan, while Gaster laughs lightly.

"Uh… I guess…?" I hesitantly agree with Sans aloud.

"Interestingly, you raise a valid concern, Sans."

"Really?"

[Whoa I never thought I’d see Sans so confused before…?]

[Whyyyyy?]

[Guess we'll fiiiiiiind ooooout…?]

"My intention," Gaster continues, "is to collect information pertaining to your, perceptions, regarding the anthropomorphic nature of monsters—"

[Wait whaaat?]

"—considering that you have met very few of us. And even then, you have only met the most,"

He pauses, searching for the right word. "Humanlike, among us." He eventually says.

"And," a hint of concern enters his voice as he lets go of my hands, only to reposition them so he gently cups them, "whether our family must alter our behavior, or mental and or soulological processes, in order to aclamate you to this environment. Surely, you must have contemplated the dilemmas surrounding our corporial forms. For we are skeletons: you must have pondered the pressing issues of how we eat, speak, and wear clothing, when we lack your…"

He lets go of me. [He's like, gesturing some more--]

"Your squishy insides, as Papyrus has taken to calling them."

"Uh… yeah… I have—do…" I correct at the last second, eliciting equally hesitant and confirming noises from Sans and Alphys.

{Why’d you—}

[‘Cause it’s true—you DO think about it a lot…]

{Fine…}

"I must address this issue, even if in passing, before I elaborate on my, existence, over the past…"
"A few uncertain, then frustrated sounds. “Sans? How many—""

"Twenty surface years." Sans answers without giving Gaster time to finish. "Well—more like nineteen surface years and six months—give or take—but—"

"I requested that the others be present because it is only fair that you become acquainted with members of the Inertia Society specialized in diverse subjects, is it not?"

"Yeah true." I agree.

“‘Cause like, I honestly don’t know what your guys’s deal is… besides studying magic.”

As I finish talking, I hear a pair of knocks at the door.

{"Only one pair?} Chara and I wonder.

{Well Sans’s already here so…}

"Knock knock." Gaster initiates the knock knock joke.

{What?}

“Dad what the hell are ya—?”

"Who's there?" The monster at the door faintly replies from across the room.

"I have."

[Wow that’s laaaame.]

{True.}

"I have… who?" Apparently, whoever knocked on the door is equally confused.

The click of the door swinging open, even though I don't hear anyone walking over to open it. [Yep—that was DEFINITELY Gaster’s blue magic.]

"I have waited far too long to experience this moment, my friends."

"A short silence before—

Multiple sets of footsteps rushing past me and around the table—

My chair being roughly pushed askew—

Several monsters talking all at once.

**Listen to about 0:16.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nr7ybRlaprA&t=284s

"ALPHYS! SANS!"

A new voice, directly to the right of Gaster’s seat. “By Tesla don't scare us like that EVER AGAIN!"

{Whaaa?}
"Murry!" Alphys light footsteps rush down the length of the table.

To the right of Gaster, pounding fists…? on… flesh…?, screaming, and crying into fabric.

"Whaaaa?" I repeat aloud.

"Murry where were you!? I… I th-th-thought y-y-you'd—" Alphys seems so excited that most of her words have failed her, and have been smothered by fabric.

"You thought I'd be here sooner? Heeeel noooo!

"I was catching up with Dewey. He was really worried about me.

He laughs. "SO worried that he wanted to inject green magic into me as soon as I saw him."

"If your d-d-d-dad being freed from th-th-the Void can't make m-m-me worry,\" Dewey points out from to the right of Gaster’s seat… his voice also muffled by fabric, "then n-n-n-nothing will. He had to drag me out of my room just to get me to show up. I w-w-wanted to spend the rest of the day w-w-with him but…

“He wanted to meet you, Pauline."

“Really?" I ask.

“Yes: Murry literally dragged me—"

“No—I mean about ditching us to hang out with him—\“

“I WAS gonna talk to him about his stutter, his and Alphys’s, but I was SOOOO hyped about seeing you."

Murry’s curiosity is apparent, in spite of his informal choice of words.

“I saw how busy he was, getting documents and facilities prepared for you, Pauline. And I felt ALL the stress he’s been under. Him AND Alphys.

“Alphys?

“You and your dad stutter more than I remember. Did you and Dewey—"\n
"WH-WH-WH-WHAT!? Saw what!?" Alphys's interrupts, her voice rising a couple octives.

"I was on the verge of explaining our predicament," Gaster continues, accompanied by the scraping of more chairs. "Murry, Annie, and I—"

From directly next to the Curies, a sudden surge of blue magic racks at my chair, and Dewey and Murry make surprised noises. "Dad please don’t give us any more of this crap why did you have to come here all by yourself—I can’t believe you didn’t come talk to me before you did!" Papyrus half-screams, half-cries… In the position Dewey and Murry were sitting in only a couple seconds ago.

{[Dude did you just throw them out of the way?]}

[What do you think?]

{Yeeeees…?}
"I am entirely cognizent of that now, Papyrus." Gaster's voice breaks. "I should not have neglected my duties, as a father AND as a scientist. I have become too accustomed to observing you and Sans from a distance. And we can neither superimpose our fields of knowing on to each other, nor can we immerse ourselves entirely into each other's fields of knowing, as I—"

**Listen until about 7:18.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffe2xUC3YI0&index=92&t=0s&list=PL-XY_ZW7lhmcsgqxaOljMk9hcpi6qLNct&t=07m03s

A pair of knocks on the wall behind us, even though the door is, presumably, still open. "Dr. Gaster Sir?" a, seemingly female, voice asks from directly behind me, but from across the room.

"Annie? I have reiterated this to you multiple times: asking for permission to enter any room, via knocking or any other method, is entirely unnecessary. You are welcome to come and go as you please.

"You and Will are members of our family in all but name, after all.

"Now that we have returned from the Void, the arrangements we designed prior to our accident may be used once again."

"I know." Annie hurriedly apologizes, walking across the room toward our table, "but—"

"Dude we heard Murry's feels yo!" Will simultaneously says as he walks into the room. He stops directly behind me and puts his hands on my shoulders. "We wanted to let you guys get that out.

"Pauline! I'm gonna introduce you to my hella cool sister now!"

"Okay…?"

I stand from my seat and turn around so I face Will. "Oh," he quickly tells me, "put your palms out yo."

He moves to one side as I do as he says. Claw-tips brush my fingers. They remind me of Alphys somewhat. "Hi.

"I… I know Gaster's probably already said it so… just know I'll do what I can to say thank you. Actions speak louder than words and all that. It's probably all we can do anyway."

Unsure of how to top her remark, I wait for her to continue talking.

"I'm Annie Asimov Moore. Like the computer science Moore."

As we press our palms together, I recall, "Oh yeah that guy—"

"DAAAAAAD! BY TESLA—!"

"{{FUCK!}}"

"SHE KNOOOOOOWS WHOOOO HEEEEEEE IIIIS!!"

"Let's be real here Paps," Annie teases, "you're excited over nothing. She's smart! And she's from California! Silicon Valley's—"
I groan, {"Fucking hell if I had a dollar for every time someone’ mentioned that..."}

"He's like, from Intel!" Annie continues, unperturbed by my comment.

"So you're named after him?" I ask, as Annie walks past me.

"I'm sitting on your right. And Annie's sitting on your left yo." Will whispers in my ear. "Sans is on Gaster's left now."

"And Alphys is at the right end of the table. And Paps is on Gaster’s right. And Dewey and Murry are... getting off the floor and they’re sitting next to Paps..." Annie adds.

"Thanks dude."

"No problem yo! I told Annie she has to learn to describe that kind of stuff 'cause you'll probly need it a lot. So yeah!"

“But yeah—I’m named after Gordon moore. And Isaac Asimov—he was a really famous scifi writer.”

“Oh yeah—I read some of his stuff in high school ‘cause I saw the laws of robotics on TV Tropes.”

"Sans?" Alphys asks. "Where's Undyne?"

"I told her to go cook somethin' REAL nice. And to be REAL careful so nothin’ catches on fire."

“Gneh. With so many limitations placed on her, I can’t even begin to formulate a hypothesis about what she'll make!” Papyrus wonders. “I mostly cook spaghetti with her—"

[Whoa Paps why'd you jerk upright in your seat like that what happened?]

He clears his throat—makes the sound of clearing his throat. "I'm so sorry."

“I'm diverting our attention from what you wanted to discuss, dad."

“What were you talking about when I—we—came in?"

"I fully intend to recount our experience in the Void."

“And, as Sans and Alphys heard earlier, how Pauline entered the Underground."

"Go for it G!" Murry encourages.

[Ugh he’s too old for that— ]

A deep breath—a sound like a deep breath—before Gaster begins to speak.

“The Void.”

His hushed, haunted tone immediately frightens me, so I sit up straight in my seat.

I cannot even begin to describe it, as cliché as that sounds. Surely, it is a magical construct of some kind, at the very least, but—"

[He shook his skull.]

"—I cannot draw any conclusions beyond that, never mind that my entire being was wholly
immersed in it, so theoretically, I should possess sufficient knowledge to do so…”

[He's like, looking at everyone one at a time. But mostly Alphys and Paps and Sans.]

"As strongly as I may yearn to adequately convey the true nature of the Void to all of you… I am afraid that I am simply unable to do so. Not even submerging all of your souls in my field of knowing would suffice…”

I wait for him to finish.

“In light of this setback, I will describe more tangible events in their stead. For Pauline’s sake.”

A brief pause: “Certainly you must remember our… accident.”

Quiet "Yeahs." from all around me… and from Chara.

"Murry, Annie, and I had planned to conduct experiments in the CORE, experiments which required us to reconfigure the CAD-and-CAD arrays we had suspended within it.

We had planned to conduct two varieties of preliminary tests simultaneously: tests regarding tapping into nearby surface computers, and tests analyzing the composition of the Barrier in further detail. Recall how magic bipasses human security measures almost entirely, considering that they operate under alternate physical principles."

"Makes sense." I prompt him.

After a moment of collecting himself, Gaster continues, “I had taken several moments to consult Murry and Annie, in order to gain their approval to move forward with callibrating our equipment.

“They had agreed.

“We had barely finished interfacing with our computers, which we had magitronically-connected to the Barrier when…”

Trailing off, Gaster's body shudders, and his hands begin to shake. "Our computers malfunctioned at the last second. All had gone according to plan until the commencement of our experiment. We had barely registered that our computers, and our souls, had successfully integrated with the Barrier."

Everyone sighs. "Our CAD&CAD machines crashed into the colomn of magic we had contained within, and channeled through, the CORE. There was, no hope of escape for us. Our cautionary measures… they proved wholly inadequate when faced with such colossal concentrations of magic, in such close proximity.

“Fortunately, Sans, Papyrus, Dewey, and Alphys had chosen to observe our experiment from afar, from elsewhere within the CORE… but in spite of their distance from the explosion…”

"Oh my God," I breathe.

"Yeh." Sans shortly acknowledges.

"We got out.

“Barely.”

He laughs… and Chara and I wish that he hadn't. "Teleportation: real good for that kinda thing.
Awfully lucky it worked too, ‘cause that was the first time I ever used it."

"Everyone felt it."

I ache when I hear Dewey’s hollow voice.

"Our grief.

“Our sadness.

“Our loss.

“We…

“We h-h-hurt.

“We all h-h-hurt.

“Our s-s-s-stats dropped like stones for weeks a-a-a-afterward.

“E-e-e-every member of th-th-the In-n-n-nertia Society… e-e-e-eeveryone in the Underground…

everyone went through it. No one w-w-was imm-mm-mmune.

“E-e-v-v-e-en the Dreemurrites mourned."

Chara suppresses my customary whisper of “{Daaaaaamn…}"

"Now that you mention it…"

Will's voice, barely audible at my side. "That explains what happened to my parents, when they got the news.

“They barely talked.

“They cried a lot though."

"Even Allen?" Gaster asks, his voice inflecting upward a little in surprise.

"Both Allen AND Touring cried yo."

He sighs, sounding completely unlike his age. "Dad cried more than mom did.

“He brought one of your computer science books with him everywhere he went, sis."

He leans across me to talk to Annie. "And Touring went through your stuff AAAAAALL the time.

“Your school projects?

“Your toys?

“Your lectures?

“Your audio journals?

“Your photographs?

“EVERYTHING."
Will’s arm brushes my body as he adjusts his position, until he's leaning forward in his seat. “My parents look at your stuff a lot too, Gaster.

"I don't think they've ever gone a day without watching one of your speeches or one of Annie’s home movies. Or one of each on the same day."

"What?" I can't help but mutter under my breath.

"{Fucking Jesus twenty years of that…}"

"When you… f-f’fell in, Gaster, you inter-r-r-r-rupted the CORE's magic emissions.

“Th-th-th-there, th-th-th-that, that was the first time it had ever h-h-h-happened."

"The empty space above the CORE,” Papyrus recounts, with a mixture of sadness and awe, “on ground level, burst into flames.

“Every color of magic poured onto the sidewalks and pooled at every doorstep in Hotland.

“And I remember being thoroughly confused, because on that day, I swear I saw red liquid and red flames.

In hushed voices, Will and I say "Determination."

"Precisely.” Gaster confirms.

“Pauline?”

“Mm-hmm?”

“The contents of the Plaque have been read to you in their entirety, correct?”

“Yeah why?”

“Do you recall the panel explaining how a monster soul can only be extracted with an incredible power?”

Uncertainly: “Yeah…? Why?”

“The currents of magic running through the CORE constituted that power.

“After crossreferencing Alphys’s research with our experiences, I know now that what little determination resided within us barely managed to prevent our souls from undergoing complete distruction.

"The column of magic tore our corporial bodies and souls asunder—"

Gasps of disgust and morbid curiosity from everyone. "Do not be mistaken. The CORE disappated our physical forms so quickly that we were given no opportunity to experience ANY manner of pain.”

[That doesn’t help at all!]

“Uniform amounts of our souls were carried along any magic which eminated from the CORE. Though arguably poetic, it would not be inaccurate to say that every time someone turned on a light, connected their consciousness to a computer, or placed an item in a Dimensional Box, a
fragment of our souls would be transmitted across the Underground, alongside that power.

"Essentially, our consciousnesses were spread across the Underground through the magitronics the monsters employed."

“So,” I can sense the gears turning in Will's head, “you were everywhere all the time. And you guys saw everything! But we couldn't see or sense you yo, because you were so fragmented.

“The magic from the CORE’s been alive this whole time.”

The surreal nature of Will's observation doesn't take long to hit Chara and I. We basque in it until Murry interrupts, “You got it!"

“But there are still lots of things we have to explain about the nature of our existence.

“Whatever the hell THAT’S supposed to mean.

“But you’re right: we were spread out across the Underground. So we saw everything, all at once. Our fields of knowing were continuously being enlarged and filled in.”

After making a couple contemplative sounds, Annie supplements, “It was like everything was… transparent.

“We saw EVERY room in EVERY building.

“And the contents of ALL of those rooms.

“And we saw EVERYONE, and EVERYTHING they did—“

{[“WAIT WHAAAAAT!”]} Everyone except the CORE accident victims shout various statements of shock and confusion… and wishes Annie hadn't elaborated on their state of being.

[Wooooow I've never heard Sans nope so hard before…]

{True…}

“And since we existed everywhere at once, the scope of our fields of knowing included every monster’s, and I guess the six humans's’, fields of knowing as well.” Annie elaborates. “But the thing was, we realized it’d be really squicky and nightmare fuelly and creepy to look at them, so we agreed to stay out of them.”

“That,” Murry butts in, “and there’s only, one…? maybe two…? times in a monster's life when they willingly let someone see—experience—the contents of their field of knowing. And even THAT’S being generous.

“The fragments of our souls were always in contact with each other, ‘cause of the magic the CORE circulated throughout the Underground. AND when monsters used magic—from the CORE or not.

“Each of us became a hive mind, made of those fragments. Each fragment was self-aware and independent. We could still communicate and think properly. Distributed computing—"

{[“[Heh?]”]}

“Murry?” Gaster seems amused by his sudden use of technical jargon. “Allow Annie to explain this concept. After all, her expertise in human computer science, theoretical and practical, was precisely the reason I hired her. And she updated her knowledge while in the Void.”
“Okay!” Annie seems to be psyching herself up. “Distributed computing is when you have lots of computers working on solving the same problem. They each have their own memory, and they can only communicate with the others by sending them messages. I think our situation was more like parallel computing, ‘cause all the computers have a shared memory—”

[She shrugged.]

“—or maybe it was a little of both.”

[She shrugged again.]

“When it comes to the soul, you, can’t really use language like that, ‘cause it’s to… RIGID. Lots of human stuff is like that.

“So blame Murry for bringing it up—”

“HEY! I said it ’cause I thought Pauline would know what it was! ‘Cause she knew about the Moore’s Law dude—”

“Like, I thiiink…? I learned about it…? I like, read this one book in freshman year of high school about nannomachines. They were stupid but they could solve difficult problems together… the developers released them into the wild to solve reproductive and intelligence problems so… yeah--”

“Excellent.

“Truly excellent.

“Your comprehension of this subject is exceedingly reassuring.”

Palpible relief in Gaster’s voice. “Therefore, you may not perceive what we are about to explain as being utterly,”

He grasps for the right word.

“Alien?” Annie suggests.

“Trippy?” Murry seconds.

“Both terms you have suggested are appropriate.” Gaster decides.

[Oh nooo—that’s baaaad.]

{What is?

{What could be worse than the determination Study?}

[Gaster calling something trippy.]

I don’t have to verbally agree with them.

“Eventually, we noticed marked differences between what we saw across each fragment.” Gaster continues.

“Sometimes, one fragment would observe a monster performing an action in one manner, while another fragment of our soul would see that exact same monster perform that action differently.
"Successively and or simultaneously."

"{What?}"

"Furthermore, oftentimes, we saw that in these instances, the Underground remained the same, save for the action we had just observed—"

"So like quantum mechanics and shit—" I recognize his description.

"So you’ve studied it."

[What? Sans no no no no no stop staring at us—]

{Why’s he all formal again?}

[I don’t know but it’s creepy!]

{FAIR!}

[Don’t say anything…? Dooooon’t saaaay aaaaanyyyythiiiiing…?] Chara begs.

"Yeah—like, in sophomore year of high school I read a lot—"

[Shit.

[Sans is leaning in—AAAAAND the handwich has a third layer now.]

{[Ow.]}]

[Dude stop pressing down sooo hard!]

"Have you learned about quantum physics?

“And its related fields?”

We are caught completely off guard by Sans's seriousness… and that he’s whispering directly in my left ear.

“Yeeeees…?

“Like—" I hurry to respond, “lots of people think there are parallel universes where everything’s happened already. Like, there’s a universe for everything.”

Sans wants to gauge how much I know… for some reason.

“And there are universes where only one thing’s different and there are universes where everything’s different." I finish.

[Sans nodded.

[Pleeeeaase get oooof of me…?]

[AND STOP DOING THE EYE GLOW OF DOOOOOM!]

“Gaster?”

Sans has turned away from me slightly.
“Did you see timelines where only ONE Thing changed, as compared to ours?

“AND timelines where EVERYTHING changed, when compared to ours?

“And everything in between?”

Chara and I can’t help but sigh in relief, in our thoughts and aloud, as Sans leans away from us and removes his hands from the handswich.

“Yes, actually.” A slight upward inflection in Gaster's voice as he responds.

“We articulated our observations in a… statistically and practically-less elegant manner than your own.

“After…

“After…”

He seems to have completely lost his train of thought. We wait for him to talk again.

“When recalling our experiences in the Void, time is irrelevant, in every sense,” he realizes suddenly…

He… doesn’t sound like he’s taken this revelation well.

“And… when you take the condition of our souls into account—how they had become scattered across time and space—"

“More like SHATTERED across time and space.” Murry corrects.

"Yes.” Gaster says shakily.

“That is precisely what transpired, when we fell into the CORE.

“Our souls became shattered across time and space.

“We experienced time passing in every… timeline… we encountered. Our souls gradually fragmented the longer we were immersed in our, predicament.”

“Time became…

“Inflated.”

Papyrus struggles to comprehend what Gaster described.

“Infinitely long, even—”

“{Fuck!}"

“—for you would experience more and more time in a timeline, and every variant of it, the longer your souls existed there.

“Because whenever a monster made a new choice, they would create new timelines, one for each variant of the choice they could have made. And where the only difference between them was THAT choice.”

"PRECISELY!"
“Awww—Gaster patted his sons on their skulls. And now he has an arm around each of them.”

“Awww!”

“I am entirely confident that attempting to quantify the number of timelines we had observed would prove both fruitless and overwhelming.”

Though Gaster seems to have, aged up by… I don't even want to guess how many years… his zeal remains. He seems more than happy to have the language necessary to articulate his experiences, and even happier to have an audience present to listen to him.

“We all saw this,” Annie chimes in, “but I thought about it the most.

“I saw so many worlds where everything was the same…”

She seems on the verge of tears.

“Everything was the same…

“Except I didn’t exist.”

She softly begins to cry proper.

“Everything functioned perfectly without me.

“That terrified—

“No.

“To say that that terrified me would be… wrong.

“In every sense.

“Because I can’t describe what it felt like.

“How can you use one word to describe something you felt nearly-infinite times?”

We sit in silence, waiting for Annie to stop crying, or, at least, for someone to continue the conversation.

“The first time we ever derived comfort from, and found solace in, our captivity…” Gaster says quietly, “finally came when we exercised control over our souls. We learned to limit the scope of our fields of knowing, to direct our attention exclusively toward timelines we consciously desired to observe.

“When we had all achieved this heightened state of soulological sensitivity, we resolved to monitor timelines exclusively branching off our own, in order to watch over our loved ones.”

“And by the time we learned to do that,” Murry continues, “we saw everything you guys did, after we died.

“And…”

A few footsteps, walking from left to right in front of me, and then a brief squeal from Alphys at the right end of the table.
"You did so well, Alphy.

"We were—are—proud of you. You handled everything with as much grace and dignity as you could.

"Even the Dreemurrites knew it."

Alphys takes several shaky breaths. "Pauline?"

I don’t answer immediately. "Alphys?"

"I…"

"I d-d-don't kn-kn-kn-know how to…"

"We…"

"You m-m-may have g-g-g-guessed…"

"We had t-t-t-to plan the funeral-l-l-ls."

"Even th-th-though there w-w-w-was no d-d-d-dust to collect."

"M-m-m-m-monsters spread the dust of dec-c-c-ceased loved ones on items imp-p-p-portant to them.

"B-b-but we c-c-couldn’t…"

"Mm-hmmm." I complete her thought for her.

"So instead, we s-s-sealed that room shut."

"To, ach-ch-chieve the same effect."

"So when we r-r-revived Gaster and the others, we w-w-went back th-th-there."

"the six humans who were killed." Annie continues with Murry’s explanation,

"the research on determination."

[Where to start with her face…]

"Everything that came of it…"

"We saw it all.

"Short of your guys’s innermost thoughts, we saw everything."

An anticipation-filled silence.

"The thing was..." she says in a hushed tone, “not looking at your fields of knowing… that made our plan of finding the timeline we wanted REALLY hard in the end.

"'Cause we had to find one we felt comfortable… manipulating—"

{"Whaaat?"} I can't help but interject.
"You heard correctly," she confirms.

"This timeline branched off the one where we fell down… all those years ago.

"It’s the same one, except for some… significant differences."

I make an ascenting sound.

"Eventually, after we withdrew our soulological presences from so many timelines, we figured out that we could harness the power in our souls.

"We existed in a…

"A space—

"Well not a space— but—" she abruptly stumbles over her words.

After a couple seconds, she continues, the tiniest bit more composed.

"We existed in a state where our souls weren't bound to a physical host. Or, even to a particular physical space.

"Casting magic turned into a matter of thoughts.

"Consciousness-aided design in its purest form.” She notes in wonder.

She pulls apart the handswich, tightly grasping my hands in hers. I turn in my chair to face her.

"We could just… move—"

Her hands twitch slightly between mine. "—our souls a certain way…

"Remember how to make a certain gesture…

"AND WE’D MAKE SOMETHING!

"But they weren’t tangible things.”

From the way she pauses, I can tell she’s struggling to describe what happened, but that she wants to try doing so anyway.

"Not as you would know them, Pauline.

"Not as ANY of you would know them.

"The things we made were… mental constructs… but to US, they were tangible things.”

She pauses, and I allow her descriptions to sink in.

"We imagined THIS Lab!” she exclaims with unrestrained joy.

"We recreated it in that space—in our own thoughts—around—near—inside us.

"We didn't need to eat or sleep, 'cause we had no physical forms to maintain. We could work anytime, for as long as we needed—or wanted—to.”

"{{Duuuuude!}}"
“We created it to… to comfort us.”

As quickly as it appeared, her joy is replaced by…

I can’t tell what emotion it is, but as I hear her speak, a heavy weight seems to press down on my body—AND my soul.

“To ground us in some tiny semblance of reality.”

A broken laugh: “Whatever THAT’s supposed to be for us anymore.”

“And while we did that,” she continues after another pause, her words speeding up gradually, “we figured out that we weren’t just limited to WATCHING over the Underground.

“We learned to interact with things down here.

“We exert control over machines, to keep them running, so no one had to worry about them.

“We eased information transfer, so everyone could access what they needed—and wanted.

“We did everything we could—short of dropping files crammed full of our knowledge directly into monsters’ computers.

“We just stayed out of everyone’s fields of knowing, so we didn’t affect their actions directly.”

“We saw that the Barrier enclosed the Underground in a huge magical capsule, embedded deep in the earth.” Murry recalls in wonder. “We learned how to move it around, by force of will—“


“DAMN RIGHT!” Murry exclaims. “That’s how you guys got the computer parts you needed for CAD-and-CAD templates. We moved the Underground around in this timeline, so you all could get what you wanted. We sent stuff into the Underground through Waterfall, from surface landfills —mass storage facilities—defective stuff from factories—places where no one’d care if stuff disappeared. And we’d help you guys look for the info you needed to fix what we gave you.

“We kept it safe on the way down—well we TRIED to anyway…

“That’s how Undyne got her books on Malcolm X. How Sans got ALL the physical and digital copies of his video games. And—"

A squeal from Dewey as Murry says, “—how the Inertia Society got all the human academic journals they could ever want. We just manipulated the timelines, so everything was the same, except you’d get the issue of Computers and Human Behavior you’d been looking for, Dewey.

“Come on—we AAAAAALL know how hyped you are about that,” Murry teases. “Let it all out.”

Dewey begins to incoherently squeal in excitement, yellow and purple magic rising into the air, pulling on my chair and making my skin tingle. [Awww everyone’s smiling—and Alphys and Annie are trying not to laugh—DAMN IT WILL DON’T FILM HIM!]

We wait for him to finish.

When he does, Murry continues, “And ‘cause time was no object, we could do everything we needed to do.”
“as integral as this information may be for all of you,” Gaster eagerly adds on, “it does not explain our end goal.

“Make no mistake.”

His voice becomes firm. “My desire to discover a method for freeing monsterkind had not faltered in the slightest.

“Selfish as it was, I…”

Just as quickly as it appeared, Gaster’s professionalism and formality vanishes. Now, desperation flows from him.

“I longed to use this power to reconstruct my body and soul, to return to the timeline we had all shared. I had attempted to do so many, many times myself, but I never succeeded.

“I had finalized my new objective by the time you nearly completed your fated determination study, Alphys.

“We resolved to locate a timeline where the Barrier could be broken without further violence.

“A timeline where the six humans who had already been killed could be given physical form once again.

“And a timeline where the next human who did eventually fall into the Underground, and accompany us to the surface, would suffer minimal psychological trauma.”

I can’t help but feel excited alongside Gaster.

His eagerness… it radiates from him.

In this moment, I realize why everyone, Dreemurrites included, mourned him.

Why the Inertia Society respects him so highly.

Why Sans places so much stock in his guidance.

Gerson’s reverent recitation of one of his speeches… the comparisons to Aristotle, Leonardo da Vinci, and Nicola Tesla… Gaster is deserving of them all.

“To achieve our new objective, we scoured the variants of our home timeline for Humans who could be thrust into the Underground without completely deteriorating psychologically. Humans whose education would aide them in understanding what they faced while traversing the Underground, no matter what that education may be, and or where they had acquired it.

"Accordingly, we searched for high school and college-age humans who possessed personalities and interests which complemented each of you.

“And humans who would not necessarily mind being here, for various reasons.”

“You dropped me down here?” I ask after several moments: not because his explanation confuses me… but because the level of detail he went to finding someone disturbs me.

“Kind of.” Annie admits.

“There were lots of people to choose from. And all of them were equally qualified. Your disability
didn't affect your selection at all, for good OR bad.

“In the end, after watching the timelines, we learned that that as long as we broke the Barrier, gave the six humans their bodies back, and caused little trauma to the seventh human, gender or disability status or race or socioeconomic status didn’t matter.”

“Obviously the laws of magic had to be the same in the timeline variant we chose to look at,” Murry answers a question I was about to ask. “The candidates had to come from timelines where the Underground existed, but one where they couldn’t have known ANYTHING about the Underground.

“Not even through rumors or myths.

“We didn’t want that information to affect their decisions.”

I slowly confirm aloud, “I… yeah. Sounds about right. It’s still crazy but…”

I don't bother finishing my thought.

“So in these timelines, the surface developed in the exact same way as the timeline you—we—all came from.” Dewey seamlessly merges into Murry's explanation.

Murry confirms his observation with an encouraging “Yeah!

“Well, except for a couple things.” He clarifies. “These are the significant differences Annie mentioned before.

“For one, the candidates had to be determined.

"REALLY determined."

“We saw the cumulative affects determination had on the timelines over the course of our… experiment,” Annie picks up where Murry left off.

“So…”

She stops short and doesn’t talk for several moments. “What happened?” I ask.

Annie doesn’t answer for several more moments. “Let’s just say,” she answers slowly and cautiously, “that ALL the signs you guys associated with determination… we saw them in action. We had seen enough timelines to know it existed AND how it operated.”

Even though I’ve only known her for a few minutes, Annie's discomfort and caution unsettles me.

“The candidates had to be able to come here under their own power, by accessing the Underground with their determination.”

“So Simon and the others must’ve been really determined then, even though they weren’t cemented in it,” I observe, and Annie agrees.

“The Underground isn’t technically under any one place. You couldn’t burrow through the earth to find it. Only those determined enough to enter it can do so. It’s like a pocket dimension.

“The fact that we chose you was… essentially arbitrary, Pauline.” Annie states frankly. “We could have chosen ANY timeline with a fitting candidate, but we chose this one.”
“I mean like, if there were soooo many people to choose from that makes sense,” I point out.

“And you know how Gaster said our determination was the only thing that stopped the magic from the CORE from killing us?”

I reply with a soft “Yeah.”

{I have a bad feeling about this…}

“Gaster was more than right.

“Our determination did more than keep us alive. It drove our advances: soulological AND methodological.

“Even after all the time we spent trapped in the Void, none of us figured out how time works, or how space works, or how consciousness works.

“But we didn’t have to know any of that.

“Our experiences confirmed your theory, Alphys! We defied the Dual Awareness Principle!

“We’re monsters who harnessed determination without melting—well technically, we may or may not have already been dead, so we didn’t have bodies left to melt, but…”

“I sup-p-p-pose that’s t-t-t-true,” Alphys agrees simply.

“Our methodology differed from yours because we came up with different ways to describe determination.

“Instead of conceptualizing and operationalizing determination as OUR will to live, we drew on the second way you defined determination. I’m still surprised that you didn’t go with THAT one instead.

“We defined determination as the resolve to change fate.

“That’s how we ensured that you survived entry into the Underground without suffering trauma of any kind, Pauline.

“For all intents and purposes, this timeline differs from the one where we came from because you had the power to be able to come here.

“We just sped up that process.”

{… … … I know I should be freaking out right now but…}

[You’re not.]

{And I know the fact I’m not freaking out should freak me out but—}

[It’s not.]

“Why did you guys say that the candidates had to be ones who wouldn’t have minded ending up down here?”

“You know why.”
Sans’s voice becomes firm again. “You wanted to come here, grim as that sounds. Maybe not consciously, but you wanted to… cut loose.”

“So,” Papyrus softly realizes, “Gaster and the others drew on your resentment with not being able to live the independent life you so desperately wanted.

“They made the choice for you, knowing that you would not have been bothered by it as much as most other humans.”

I sigh resignedly. “Yeah. That’s… that seems about right.”

“You,” Alphys says into the silence, “don’t look all that surprised.”


“I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about not living with my parents, in the universes for books and TV shows I liked.

“Even when I was in elementary school.

“Pokémon, Harry Potter, and Xenoblade.

“A little.”

“Escapism’s not bad,” Dewey points out.

“Well—if you’ve been doing this for so long I… I guess it is. But…”

A laugh… and I don’t even mind it anymore… as out-of-place as it sounds. “I guess it worked out for once.

“You wanted to live in a world run by RPG mechanics.

“And here you are.”

“Like, I realized that if I was a Pokémon trainer, I HAD to be able to walk around on my own, so orientation and mobility would be even more useful.

“And you’d have to be able to get around places you’d never been to before, and learn from your mistakes.”

I pause for a second. “But my mom…”

I don’t even mind that Chara has taken control of my body. Under their power, I take several breaths before continuing.

“She didn’t believe in learning from mistakes—she HATED mistakes! She fucking overreacted every fucking time, and she hated it when I talked back to her—never mind SHE was a bitch too.

“At least if you’re gonna bitch at me about not swearing, don’t be a fucking hypocrite and swear when you’re pissed off. And if you’re gonna yell at me about how playing the Pokémon TCG or writing fanfiction is a waste of time and won’t get me a job, then at least let me yell at you about coming into my room whenever you fucking want—it’s MY room! It’s MY space!

“You want me to be independent but you won’t even let me choose how to spend my own fucking money!
“You didn’t let me stay in the dorms for college! If I did that, I could’ve learned to be independent! But NOOOO! I’m fucking stuck at home and you drive me to school! It’s fucking demeaning! How could you—!?"

A much shorter silence than Chara and I expected, broken by one statement.

“You may not believe this but, we still think you can help us.”

Papyrus is encouraging me.

“even if… even if the source of your determination isn’t… completely healthy… I… I hope you know that.”

[Woooow that gneh heh heh is saaaad… Paps no no no no--]Chara begins softly sobbing again. It sounds like Papyrus has followed their example.

“You’re not the only one around here who’s felt trapped. And angry. And hopeless.

“You may have realized early on that us monsters have coped with, and still cope with, many forms of mental illness, according to humans.

“AND the most current version of the DSM.

“A tragedy like Gaster’s death… that does TERRIBLE things to beings like us. Our magic weakens and… what little determination we hold inside us dwindles… and, eventually, fades away.

“THAT is how a monster falls down due to grief.

“We’re all traumatized.”

Just as Chara and I assume Papyrus has finished, he begins speaking anew.

“And… and war becoming the center of our entire existence, though we lacked anyone to fight, did not help matters either.”

He seems to have stopped crying for the moment… and we both wish he had not done so.

“Gaster’s passing hurt us so much, we…

“We just…

“We just wanted to forget everything.”

Clarity in his voice no one wanted to hear.

I gasp softly.

“Our culture has undergone a mass suppression of memories.”

"'Cause thinking about Gaster literally hurt you." I bluntly point out.

“Now I know why Allen and Touring watched all those speeches yo.

“They were trying not to forget you, Gaster.

“And YOU too, sis.
“It hurt them but… they were trying to fight back.

“I think it had to do with their determination.

“'Cause they wanted to remember you.”

“So THAT’S how everyone forgot about them,” I offer the inverse of Will’s statement.

Chara and I, in unison: [“They didn’t wanna feel the pain anymore.

[“They didn’t wanna be reminded of what they’d lost.

[“Their determination erased the memories that caused them pain, so they could keep living.

[“So they forgot your sister, and Gaster, and Murry, ever existed.”]

“THIS,” Sans abruptly rises from his seat, placing emphasis on every word, “explains why you knew nothing of us before you came.

“Humans hated us so much they purged us from their minds.

“AND their history.”

My chair shakes… and it sounds like more objects around the room are moving on their own as well. I tense, as Chara takes control of my body… preparing to react to whatever happens.

“All.

“Because.

“Of.

“Their.

“Damned.

“Determination.”

An eternity passes before my chair, and everything else in the room, stops shaking, Sans finally sits down again, and someone speaks.

“Guys?” Dewey softly asks.

[He’s got his head in his hands.]

“Get Undyne over here.

“We…“We might as well eat while we get ready to tell Pauline about magitry. After all: you were soooo excited to tell a human about that back in the day, Gaster.

“She will be a… welcome distraction.

“We…”

I’m only slightly surprised by Dewey sounding like he’s on the verge of tears.

“The Inertia Society needs us.
“Now that Gaster’s back, we HAVE to fulfill the first objective of the Unified Theory Papers in earnest. We can’t afford to waste any more time.

“Working through our emotions about what we’ve just heard… we have to let that happen on its own.

“We shouldn’t bottle everything up anymore.

“It’s not healthy for anyone.”

“You are very much correct Dewey,” Gaster's enthusiasm seems to have returned, “on all accounts.

“I wrote the Unified Theory papers to solidify the protocols surrounding the assimilation of a human into our culture, magitry being one of the subjects requiring the most intensive study.

“I require ample time to prepare.”

His chair scraping against the floor. “In the interim, Sans? Papyrus? Alphys? Do locate the Demonstration Crate of Stuff—"

[“{Dude Gaster that doesn’t sound like you at all!}”]

“It's literally called that,” Alphys giggles a little as she stands up as well. “Because everything inside's, difficult if not impossible to name, under human conventions. Gaster and my parents and Annie, they were working on rewriting human computer and electrical terminology when we last met in person, so… yeah: it’s still called the Demonstration Crate of Stuff.”

“I shall call Undyne to bring over the celebratory food! Spaghetti or otherwise!” Papyrus’s loudness comforts Chara and I more than we care to admit as he stands.

“Call Gerson as well.” Sans walks around the table with the others. His formal tone has yet to fade away completely. “We have to prove to Pauline that not EVERY Inertia Society member is a drunkard.

“Or obsessed with Freud—”

“{[Aaaaaaah! No!]}”

“Agreed!” Papyrus exclaims as he walks out the door with everyone else.

“I just realized,” Annie's magic brushes my cheek as she turns her chair so she faces my left side, “I never got to properly introduce myself before. Or our parents. Or Alphys's parents. Or Undyne. We should have just enough time to do that while they go get the food and the—”

A crash directly to my right: “BY TESLA! WILL!” Murry shouts, sprinting around the table.

Thudding and scraping sounds from near my feet. “Murry shouts, sprinting around the table.

“I'm okay yo!” Will reassures… unsuccessfully… from under the table. “It’s just that, I realized! My basic magitry test’s tomorrow—”

“{[SHIT!]}

“AND I haven't studied yet—!”

“{[SHIT!]}”
Delighted laughs from Dewey, Murry, and Annie. “Oh come on,” she teases her brother. “When Gaster's done with you, you'll know more than your teacher could teach your class in a Dreemurrite year! A hundred Dreemurrite years!

“Okay— I’m 99.99 percent confident that’s an exaggeration but—you know what I mean.”

"Hey Pauline! Cheer up man."

[Dude like, Murry’s the older? Version of Papyrus thooooough—]

[I know right?

[Thank Tesla for him.]

“I was just thinking, about what Dewey said. About not bottling up emotions.

“We shouldn’t be the ONLY ones doing that.

“We’re telling you everything about US, so feel free to tell us EVERYTHING YOU think and feel, no matter WHAT it is.

“Cause even if you say something that hurts us, we’ve… we’ve all felt much worse.

“You’ve heard some of that already, from the Dreemurrites.”

“[[Mm-hmm.]]”

“And NOTHING can beat us seeing timelines where we didn’t exist.”

I don’t know how to respond: [[He’s right.]]

“And it didn’t sound like you could have no filter at home, so we’ll let you do that here.”

{"True."} I furvently agree.

And besides: we could ALL use the extra stats all that shit-slinging’s gonna give us. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, and all that.

“I say that ‘cause monsters being empathetic isn’t all bad.

“Cause if one of us gets stronger, we’ll ALL feel it!

“We noticed, right before we came back… Sans and Paps and Alphys… they’ve all gotten stronger by knowing you… AND all the shitty tabloid people!

"So yeah: get hyped. High five!” Murry shouts in my face, as Will finally crawls out from under the table.

[Uh—he’s got both hands held out in front of him palms first and he’s standing next to us—so—]

Chara guides me so I face Murry. We perform two high-fives at once… or is it a more energetic version of the Inertia Society handshake?

"You and Will are SOOOO lucky. ‘Cause you'll get to see and hear and sense AAAAAAALL the good stuff.

“A human’s FIIIIINALLY gonna see what we've been planning for all these years!”
He whoops. "By Tesla I LOOOOOVE being in the Gasterocracy!"

[Does Murry’s enthusiasm—?]

{Hell yeah it fills me with determination—why wouldn’t it!?}

[Just making sure.]

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately, UltimaAlmighty's channel has been taken down, but his videos are mostly readily available online for viewing.

Here's the link to the page on distributed computing. I viewed it the first time on April 20, 2017.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distributed_computing
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

If you're unfamiliar with the card game Magic: the Gathering, read the endnotes. If you want to know my thought process behind the properties of magic relative to physical processes, read the endnotes. Otherwise, ignore them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

31

"I got it! By Tesla I'm good! I've successfully stabbed my name into this sheet of paper! This is why they call me Spear of Justice—!"

"Undyne. Please, by Tesla—this isn't what Pauline—"

"But Gerson—!"

"Mwhah hah hah! Really you little urchin? You still get riled up so easily, even after all these years?"

Gerson's a little wistful. "I never thought you'd want to learn braille but, I guess spending time with Pauline has widened your horizons!"

Undyne slams a hand against the table. "OF COURSE! Why WOULDN'T I be excited? GASTER'S BACK! HE'S GREAT! He got me to care about science!"

"{[Eh!]}" I concur as I slurp down the… spaghetti—raymon that used to be spaghetti…?

"COME ON!" Undyne suddenly shouts in my face. "I didn't hear you! You're too damn quiet!

"Alphy has the same problem. She doesn't go all out, even when she should. If you're happy for me, BE HAPPY DAMN IT!"

"I am I am!" I try to brush Undyne off, just so she doesn't make me go deaf, while I continue to slurp down the raymon. {How the hell did she even make ramen with—?}

[I don’t know—I can’t cook! And like, a lot of the time when she makes spaghetti something catches on fire, so I guess that’s why she made it…?]

"So like, you've known Alphys since you were kids?" I ask her after a few seconds. "And your parents knew her parents?"

"Yeah! Duh."

Undyne has calmed down… barely.

"My parents helped Asgore understand all the science stuff Gaster told him about the CORE. They were some of his most-trusted advisors. They lived next to Dewey and Murry and hung out with
them a lot, before Alphys was born.”

"What were they like?"

"Nerds."

She barks out a laugh. "Huuuuuge nerds. They were kinda quiet, Like Dewey, but they were awesome.

“They introduced me to Alphys through him, you know.”

[Whoa Murry calm down stop patting Undyne on the back so haaaaard…]

"Hell yeah they were nerds!” Murry enthusiastically begins as I hear liquid being poured out… he's probably filling his bowl with more raymon.

"Like, they were REALLY into Gaster's work. But they supported Undyne’s interests, even though neither of them were athletic.

“Cause when she was younger she liked sports. A lot—“

“Yеееееah that doesn’t surprise me,” I interject.

“—and when she grew out of THAT and got in to military history,” he continues, “they taught her how to read academic research. They were just as hyper as she was—just about different things.”

"And they were Gerson's proteges when it came to human theology," Dewey adds as he sets down his… fork? Spoon?

"Whenever he got ahold of a new theology book, they’d be the first ones to hear about it.

“Bibles.

“Torahs.

“Kорans?” He pronounces slowly. "Everything.

“Even the more… extreme stuff.”

"Extreme being…?" I ask him to elaborate.

"Malcolm X," Dewey states simply.

"{[Oh.]}"

"Where do you think she heard about him from?"

Although Dewey doesn't intend to sound accusatory, I stop in my tracks anyway. "I guess…” I concede, trailing off weakly.

A pat on my shoulder from Undyne, one which anyone else would consider hard. "I wish you could see how ashamed you look right now. But it's okay. I should've told you earlier.”

She laughs again. “And when I mean EARLIER, I mean back at my house.”

She pauses for a few moments… collecting herself…?
“According to Dewey, my parents went through a phase where they wanted to learn EVERYTHING about Malcolm X.

“So they did.

“OBVIOUSLY that includes his religious beliefs.”

I tense up. {So Undyne was raised Muslim??}

“And no—they didn’t convert.”

I relax.

“I haven’t either.”

I relax more.

“But they DID ask Gerson to teach them about religion, so they could understand what they’d read a little better.

“So he did.

“He taught them theories about religion: why humans form them, what it means to them, the kinds of symbolism they use, and what they mean. And the three of them passed on that stuff to me.”

Chara and I wait on the edge of our seats.

“The most important thing my family learned,” Undyne’s normally-rough voice has softened to a gentler tone, “was how religion gives humans something to believe in beyond themselves.”

I stop.

{She’s right.

{Religion being the opiate of the masses…}

[What’s that mean?]

{It’s a… long story.}

“They told me how important it was that I have something like that. OVER AND OVER AGAIN.”

I summarize, “So you weren’t raised religious.”

“Me and Gerson and my parents read LOTS of different religious texts at home,” Undyne answers. “’Cause they thought every religion had SOMETHING worth learning about. But we never adopted any of the customs we read about. So I’d say no.”

“Mm-hmm.”

”And at some point they got in to human politics. Like, hella into it! They horded so many human newspapers from the United States! All the way back to only Tesla knows when!

“Most of them were about the…

“World Wars.” She pronounces slowly.
“And… communism.”

"And the Civil Rights movement." I finish.

"Yeah.

“I've known about that ever since I was a kid—" She stops mid-sentence. "Ever since I was younger." she corrects.

"They learned to paint just so they could hang that portrait of Malcolm X in our house. We joked that he was the older brother I never had. So much that we celebrated his birthday like he was part of the family. We share a birthday, actually."

"Whoa." I breathe.

I am about to ask her when it is, but she tells me herself. "May 19th. Malcom’s birthday was May 19th… um."

A few frustrated ngahhhhs later, she huffs, "Crap Dewey when is 111X again in human years?"

"1925."

"Yeah! That's it!" Undyne returns a little to her former self. "1925."

“Though technically speaking,” Dewey cuts off Undyne before she can continue, “Malcolm’s birthday is in late 110X.”

“I was born exactly fifty years after that—"

"Wait whaaaat!?"

A chair being knocked to the floor and—

"{[Ghghghghgh…]}” Chara and I make more surprised gurgling noises as scaly arms wrap around my body, and Undyne laughs roughly in my ear. "Oh COME ON! It's great you think I'm younger than that and all, but seriously! I’m not THAAAAAT old—"

"Uh…” I can't help but interject.

"I think she's not buying it 'cause a human born in 1997 could say that someone born in 1975 was old.” Murry emphasizes as Undyne releases her grip. "Even if it’s not really true. Remember—she's only eighteen…"

"If you say so.

"You know punk?"

Undyne, firmly.

“If you knew how old we all were you wouldn't be able to talk to us normally anymore. You’d think of us like parents, NOT like friends from high school. We don’t want that. And neither do you—“

Before I can protest: [“True.”]
“Monsters don’t think of age like you do. If I was a human, I’d be several years older than you. But that’s being conservative.”

[She’s like, using a spear to point at Gerson but she’s holding it farther away from us than usual. Good.] Chara mentally sighs in relief.

“I mean think about Gerson! He was alive when Newton published the first version of Principia Mathematica for Christ’s sake—”

My first reaction: a confused and surprised “{Heh?}"

"Undyne!" Gerson interrupts. "Don’t use those expressions around her. And not just because it doesn't make much sense for you to use them. Remember: when your parents weren’t invoking Tesla, they were invoking Malcolm! Or other figures of his religious bent besides!"

"Yeah you're right old man. But I did it 'cause I've heard Pauline use them you know? So she shouldn’t be—"

She suddenly stops speaking, seizing the front of my shirt and hauling me out of my seat so I face her. "Are you uncomfortable?"

Somehow, she sounds both concerned and aggressive at the same time.

"No." I hurriedly reply, both touched and freaked out by her worrying over offending me.

She settles me back in my seat more slowly and takes a few steps back toward her chair.

"Sorry about that. When monsters talk about sensitive stuff, they get really worked up—"

“More than usual?” I ask, and we laugh.

“Exactly! Gerson would know.”

She laughs. “When he started telling everyone about how he wanted to collect human religious texts—”

Everyone at the table guffaws. "Mwah hah hah hah! Everyone threw a fit! Monsters all across the spectrum decried me!

“Gerson! Why are you brainwashing us with human religion?” he mock-asks.

“Gerson! Humans don't even acknowledge us in their sacred texts!” he says, in an over-exaggerated, obnoxious, academic voice. Chara doesn’t even have to control me when we respond with an “{[Ugh.]}” as soon as he has finished speaking.

“Gerson! If God—or the gods—or a computer programmer—created man in their own image, then where does that leave us, eh?” He uses a fast, firm, angry voice to ask his third rhetorical question.

“{[That’s true isn’t it?]}

“Etc, etc.”
"In any case, that's not what we're here to discuss, isn't it? But if you want me to tell you more, don't hesitate to ask! It's not like you'll be getting in the way of anything I'm doing. I'm soul-deep in a book almost every day anywho. In the meantime, we'll—"

The door crashes open: "[[AAAAAAH!]]"

"GNEH HEH HEH! I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster, have returned with the Demonstration Crate of Stuff!"

"[[Eh!]]"

"I hope we have not interrupted anything important." Papyrus near-shouts as he walks closer, brushing my left arm as he stops next to me. "And even if we have, I am afraid we must cut it short, because we are about to make your head explode with science!"

Will whoops from his seat to my right.

"And blow our eardrums out!" Murry snarks before I have the chance as my bowl skids past my hands toward Papyrus’s voice, the sounds of glass sliding on wood and clinking against more glass filling the air. Once the bowls have moved to the far left side of the table, I hear a crashing sound directly in front of me.

"BEHOLD!"

Everyone stops what they're doing to give Papyrus what he wants. {What are we looking at?} [The Demonstration Crate of Stuff…?]"Oh th-th-thank Tesla." Alphys breathes, her claws brushing my right shoulder as she walks up directly behind me. "I w-w-w-was holding the Demonstration Crate of Stuff from below a-a-a-and…"

She shudders… and I can't hold back a giggle. "I'm never doing that again!

“Um… h-h-heeeyaa Will? Can you scoot over so I can sit next to Pauline? So I can describe—“

“Yeah sure yo!” Will stands up and moves over to the seat next to Alphys.

"In all seriousness though," Annie walks past me and around the table, "this crate's important. It's got the most relevant… demonstration… stuff… in… it…" she trails off awkwardly as Chara snickers.

[Heh it’s redundant.]

{I know—!}

"Gaster came up with the idea of making these kits a long time ago. He’d bring them around the Underground to show everyone how magitry worked. And he kept adding stuff as he got feedback so… you're lucky. This has been several decades in the making."

"Annie?" Gaster asks in his soft… squee-worthy voice, barely managing to contain his excitement. “If I may, before we begin, while you and Sans empty the Demonstration Crate's contents, I was
curious…"

As he speaks, he walks over from his place by the door and around the table until he sits across from me again. "Pauline?

“Papyrus resolved not to ask you this question, so I will ask it in his stead: have we encroached upon anything important?"

I'm about to say no, but instead, I say ["UNDYNE’S SOOOO OOOOLD!"]

{Wait wait wait wait wait what FUCK! I didn't—!}

[You were thinking it—so I just got you to say it now!]

[That's not how it works!]

[Who says—?]

{I DO!}

Dewey suppresses a laugh, his trademark professionalism cracking. "That sounds about right. She was talking about her parents and how she shares her birthday with Malcolm X."

Somehow unperturbed by my Chara-induced rudeness, Gaster muses, "I see. From my observations I have already become acquainted with your… conflicted view of him, and the… issues… he embodies for monsterkind."

Metal clinks near me, and my skin begins to tingle, and a metallic taste fills my mouth.

"Specifically the el-Shabazz family's stance on human-monster integration," he continues.

Flatly, I reply "Oh."

I sigh, remembering Papyrus's… avoidance… of the issue back at Undyne's house… which I suppose is her family's house. "Like, I get it—she like, wants monsters to be separate from humans. And she wants to prove that monsters are smart enough to not need human technology—"

"Not just technology." Undyne interrupts. "Your ideas too.

“Like your politics. Your religions. Your morals.

“They barely apply to us.

“So we might as well go without them. Or if we DO have to use them, we have to change them so they suit us.”

I don’t answer.

“We don’t agree on everything. But we still don’t fight over the same things as you. Or for the same reasons."

"Uh-huh." is the only way I can respond as more chairs scrape away from the table around me.

"I speculated that you would have sided with Undyne more fervently. After all, you are aware of Malcolm X's ideology and thus, must sympathize with the el-Shabazz family’s reasons for adopting his principles to an extent," Gaster says. “Especially regarding self-defense."
"A little—I don't know… just…"

I sigh. {I hate having to choose sides.}

[I don’t think you have to.

[I think—

[NO.

[I KNOW they know you hate that. They can feel it.]

A few seconds of silence.

"dad? Sans asks, breaking it.

“I know we have LOTS to say ‘bout these issues. I’m real tempted to go at it again, like we used to. ‘Cause it’s been a long time since I’ve talked ‘bout this with anyone.

“You and Paps’d ALWAYS say I had lots of good ideas… but that it seemed like I didn’t know which ones I believed in.”

Deep nostalgia, even though Sans is describing arguments he had with his family.

“I know what I believe in now.”

A hint of firmness has entered Sans’s voice… which makes Chara and I anxious. We fully expect him to continue talking, and that he’d sound like how he sounded when we all learned about how humankind had harnessed their determination to forget about monsters. Our interest peaks.

“But I digress.”

He… seems… to have returned to normal. {Damn it I wanted to hear him talk about the meaning of life!}

[Same.]

“We unpacked everything you need. We’re ready when you are.

“Will: can you see from there?”

“Yeah yo! I’m good to go!”

{{Awww he rhymed!!}}

We wait another couple seconds. The anticipation and the tension kill me.

"Gaster?

“You wrote the Unified Theory Papers to teach humans about our magitronic development.”

Sans laughs. “That is, before you added AAAAALL that other stuff.

“You chose a smart human for a reason. And you’ve been preparing for this moment for centuries.

“The floor’s all yours.”
"And I have already talked you up to her!" Papyrus adds. "Continuously! I have been doing so ever since my brother and I met her outside Snowdin Town! There is no conceivable way you could have failed to see that!"

Seemingly in Response to his sons' words of encouragement, Gaster slowly rises from his seat. He rubs his hands together, producing a variety of clicking sounds. I'm caught off guard by it for a few seconds, before I remind myself that he's a skeleton…

"Indeed. I have devoted innumerable lifetimes to envisioning this moment.

"Will?

"Pauline?

"I urge both of you, but especially you, Pauline, do not feel obligated to tolerate my rambling. Interrupt me if you are in the slightest need of clarification. Surely you must have realized that I am rather passionate regarding my work, magitry in particular. If given the slightest provocation to discuss my research, I become transported, not unlike the behavior you have observed from Alphys."

I laugh: "True.

"But yeah—sure." I confirm for him.

"{I'm like that when I talk about Smash… and Xenoblade… and rap music… so…

"{You’re not alone dude.}"

"Excellent."

Gaster seems to be reassuring himself.

"First, I must inquire into two matters: your knowledge of electricity, and your knowledge of magic."

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDhQ8DarZHQ

*at least one animated lecture later…*

… … … "So the magic goes through that thing?" I ask, Will bouncing up and down in his seat eagerly.

"Correct." Gaster confirms.

"The period of my life I spent in the Void allowed me to confirm that the column of magic we created, channeled by the CORE, originates at the bottom face of the Barrier, miles below our feet.

"Essentially, the magic comprising the Barrier seeps into the environment. It permeates the air you breathe. The ground you stand on. The natural resources present within the Underground. And with time, it eventually filters through the ground and returns to the Barrier.

"Each substance possesses a proclivity toward containing certain forms of magic in specific concentrations, but in general, objects which are less dense conduct magic more readily. Magic may travel through them with greater ease."
“Mm-hmm—it’s like how they use copper to make wires ‘cause it’s conductive and they use plastic to insulate it ‘cause it doesn’t conduct electricity.”

"So that's how our light bulbs work yo!” Will observes from beside me. "The magic burns up the insides and makes light 'cause it’s not that dense. But the outside of the light bulb is more ethermetrically-dense and less magitronically-conductive, so it stops it from coming out!"

"Yeah!"

If Alphys didn't seem animated when discussing science before, she does now.

"Each form of magic interacts with the environment in a different way, and reacts with physical processes differently. This is only entirely true if you don’t account for the density of the substance, obviously. Because less dense substances make a reaction happen faster! And the inverse is true for ethermetrically-dense substances.

"Like how orange magic makes transferring energy faster! That's how we get it to everyone's homes so quickly! And orange magic rises, like heat. It works best in hotter environments. That's why the CORE is in Hotland, so deep underground. And it has to keep moving all the time, or it doesn’t work nearly as well.

"And light blue magic slows physical, ethermetrical, and soulological processes. It’s sensitive to increases in magical stimulus, which is the inverse of orange magic. That’s why you take damage if you move too fast when someone attacks you with light blue magic.”

Will, Chara, and I, in unison: “[Like Simon, when he was in the Ruins.]”

"Exactly.

“And blue magic interacts best in systems involving precise movement. We use it in our industrial processes, to smooth them out. We induce machinery with blue magic to make it run in a more controlled way than orange magic.

“It’s hard to cast and control, because you have to know so much about the system you want to affect, but when you do, it’s really something!”

Will, Chara, and I, in unison: “[Like Sans—]”

“Like hell he knows his stuff!” Papyrus agrees, matching Alphys’s eagerness. “But this isn’t about him: this is about ethermetry!”

I wait for him to continue.

“Yellow magic is our equivalent to electricity! After years of impirical research, we discovered that yellow magic interacts with a wide variety of densities and masses of objects, and that it became especially useful when channeled through wires! Yellow magic is conducted through wires in electricity's stead!”

"{[Whoa!]}

"{It all makes sense!}”

"How do you get the yellow magic to go through the wires?” I ask. “'Cause your batteries aren’t exactly the same as ours.”
A sudden… stony silence.

{Was it something I said?}

"How much do you know about psychology?" Dewey asks out of the blue.

{Wait what—?}

I begin to reply, only for Murry to interject, "And knowing about Freud doesn't—"

"I KNOW that knowing about Freud doesn’t count," I cut him off.

I rack my brain. "Uh like… what do you wanna know?"

"Does nature versus nurture mean anything to you?" Dewey asks.

"I think…? so."

"Where'd you hear about it from?"

"Does it matter--"

"Yes." everyone at the table responds in unison… in harsh tones.

"From Magic: the Gathering. It's a card game. The developers like, equated some real-world concepts with certain colors of magic. And blue magic’s associated with intelligence. And nurture, I guess."

"And nature is represented by the color green." Papyrus pipes up.

I'm surprised: "You remember me talking about Magic?"

"Of course I do! In fact, I have devoted my spare time to learn the ideology behind the game. Because if a game is named Magic, it is our duty as monsters to learn it and share that knowledge with others! Although it is impractical to do so among one gathering of monsters. I suppose the developers assumed we had the resources—"

{[…]}"

"Uh—" I'm more than taken aback by his logic.

{[I guess…?]}

"What he means," Sans tries to, amend, "is that we learned how the game designers personified each color of magic. Each of ‘em’s associated with certain personality traits. Certain philosophies. Certain perspectives on…"

Sans chuckles, sadly, and I'm caught off guard by it. "Well I guess I can't call it human nature can I?"

Everyone says in unison, "Mm-hmm…"

"{[Oh.]}"

"But WHY are we talking about this?" I try to steer us back to our original train of thought.

"It's interesting how humans have created a… facsimile… of how soulology functions, in game
form.” Dewey answers. “Over time we realized that concepts are coded to each color of magic like in this game.

“Remember how green’s kindness?” he asks.

“Yeah…?”

“The designers of Magic: the Gathering were right: green magic is associated with healing, and conventionally-motherly instincts. We associate it with protecting others, just like they do.”

"David’s shields." I recall, from Alphys’s accounts in the True Lab.

"Mm-hmm." Dewey seems a little more than encouraged by my observation.

I don’t have to verbally acknowledge what he’s said. They can feel my understanding. “So some of the concepts from Magic: the Gathering match how magic actually works?” I tentatively ask.

“Yes and no,” Murry answers, much less upbeat now. “The color pie in Magic: the Gathering’s a lot less complicated than how we’ve worked out soulology to be like, since the associations we’ve coded to each color are more flexible, and there are less of them. But soulology is less complicated ‘cause we don’t have a color pie. There aren’t colors of magic that are allies or enemies, as the game designers call them. Even if some colors of magic behave in inverse ways. You’ve seen this already, in light blue and orange magic, in patience and bravery. That’s the most obvious case.”

"Purple magic, perseverance, is an exemplar of this complexity,” Papyrus’s seriousness barely surprises me.

“Perseverance implies stubbornness. A one-track mind. And DAMN any obstacles in your way. Just like the color red in Magic: the Gathering. Because Mark Rosewater associated red with freedom, and doggedly working toward a goal.”

“Though,” Papyrus… talks while reading off his phone…? “Mark Rosewater has made out the color blue as being equally obsessive! just toward knowledge, and not anything beyond that.”

“Yeah I remember reading about that online,” I confirm.

"Purple magic’s usefulness derives from its hastening of motion in a single direction,” Gaster clarifies. "It is rather flexible, interacting favorably with a wide spectrum of materials. But it cannot function when travel in non-linear paths is required."

"Yo that’s how our batteries work!” Will steals my observation out of my mouth. "You induce magic in the parts and construct the battery so the yellow magic goes where you induced the purple magic so—"

The knocking of… metal—plastic?—against wood and… a chair falling onto the floor. [What was that?]

[Uh… Gaster pulled Will over the table into his lap and he’s hugging him really tight right now…? And Will’s… making weird faces…?]

Chara snickers. [Oh maaaaaan I wish you could see Will he’s sooo confused…?]

Considering Will’s loud, insistent, muffled grunting, I’m unsure of whether to “Awww” or shudder. I verbally and mentally do both in quick succession. [Gaster calm dooown!]
"PRECISELY!"

Gaster's out of breath, and for once, I don't question it.

I can feel Gaster's wide, wide grin in his magic flowing through the room. Chara still tells me about the open eagerness on his skull anyway. It’s like the one time I plugged in the rice cooker at home while my hands were slightly wet, because a shock—

NO.

It’s yellow magic acting as electricity. Like the magic Sans cast on me on the day I consented to have my determination extracted for research purposes.

"Over the first several decades, if not the first century, of the Inertia Society's existence, our members studied magic's properties. Like human scientists testing the conductive, insulating, and with time, semiconductive properties of a myriad of substances. It was inevitable that my colleagues turn their energies toward how to harness it to perform useful work."

"Ehm, dad?"

Papyrus speaks up, hesitant to interrupt his father's excitement. "why aren't you calling the ambient magic in the air ether yet? Surely it won't confuse the human—"

"{[Heh?]}

"I intended to inform Pauline of the existence of ether after gradually introducing her to increasingly complex magitronic and ethermetrical concepts. Though I suppose I have little reason to delay introducing her to it.

"Ether and magic are one in the same. Ether merely refers to magic when not harnessed by a system: whether that system is a monster’s soul or a machine. Ambient magic in the air, emitted by the Barrier, is called ether. Ether was a term initially appropriated by physicists to describe the propagation of light and sound, from one place to another. It is also an Aristotelian classical element, though Aristotle—"

"EDISON DAMN IT!"

{I forgot Gerson was here.}

[Same…]

"Please give Pauline time to breathe! You've gone from zero to a hundred in a second!

“She's not as good at picking up new information as you, Wingdings.” Gerson says in a much less exasperated tone. “She may have studied scholarly work, but she hasn't done it nearly as long as you have. You have all the time in the world to enact what you wrote in the Unified Theory Papers. You don’t have to rush through anything."

The Royal Scientist quietly hums in reply. "Your concern is certainly justified, Webber.

“I just…

“I am…"

Gaster stammers, his excitement rising with every word, even while he fails to form a coherent sentence.
“I cannot contain my enthusiasm! To assert that I am eager to share the contents of the Demonstration Crate with Pauline is inaccurate in every sense!”

Gaster’s excitement has spilled over.

A… relieved… yelp from Will… or at least, that’s what it sounds like, because he sounds less muffled. Gaster's hands reach across the table and envelop mine. I sense his weight shifting so he leans forward in his seat, hands pressing on mine firmly. "Am I correct in my assumption?"

Gaster leaned down to talk closer to my height.

“Do you understand ether's role in magitronic energy transmission? And I implore you to answer honestly. We cannot inform you of magic’s properties properly if you feign complete understanding for the sole purpose of sparing our emotions.”

"Uh, I guess…?" I slowly answer. "The ether in the air is the medium the magic goes through—Or something—well it has to not go through it but—"

Gaster lets go of me. "You are correct: the ether in the air acts as a medium. Your explanation will suffice for the moment."

"I reckon," Gerson muses, "that you should get out some of those batteries right now! She'll iron out all the kinks herself. You just need to give her the tools she needs to learn through experience."

He old man laughs, and Chara and I suppress giggles. "After all, she followed your train of thought about quintessence! And she's taken physiology! Diffusion metaphors are well within her knowledge."

"If you insist," Gaster replies, nervously.

“Annie? Remove all the orange modules from the Demonstration Crate.”

"Yo!"

{So THAAAAAT'S where Will got it from!}

[Yep!]

"Sans? Remove the light blue ones."

"On it."

"Papyrus? Extract the wires from their casings."

"GNEH HEH HEH! Of course!"

"Alphys? Zero the modules’ magitronic capacities."

"Ok-k-k-kay Gaster. R-r-right away."

"And Undyne?"

"Hey G!?”

{Ugh… she didn’t just call him that…}
"Ensure that our green modules are sufficiently induced. While taking the proper safety precautions into consideration, of course. If necessary, replenish their stores of green magic."

"YOU CAN COUNT ON ME!"

"I will lead you aside while they prepare the demonstration," Gaster tells me as he stands from his seat… Will grunting and dropping to the ground as he untangles himself from Gaster's lap. Apparently, after he hugged him, Gaster continued holding him there during our conversation.

"You could've warned me about the reverse tackle hug yo!"

Will seems ruffled… but just a little.

A soft laugh from Gaster as Chara and I… and from the sounds they're making, everyone else… tries not to squee over the cuteness. "I am sorry.

"I wished to…"

"You…"

"You must know, what I have told Gerson still stands. You never witnessed this demonstration firsthand. Thus, you and the human are approaching this subject on equal terms in that respect."

A large bony hand on my head. "This demonstration should take approximately ten minutes to configure. I would do it myself but…"

A short, nervous chuckle… and more of Chara and I suppressing squee's. "Surely you must know how excited I am. I would be unable to properly configure the magitry involved! The magic emitted by my soul would cause the magitry around us to overheat!"

"Yeah I feel it." I affirm as Gaster and I walk over to the left side of the room so we stand against one wall.

"You mean you're really feeling it!"

{Sans's and Paps's Shulk impressions thooooough!}

{Sans's has gotten better.]

{Yep!}

"Soon, you will understand why I so firmly believe that us monsters have constructed a quality of life of a higher callibre than that possessed by humans on the surface, in post-industrial nations."

"What ya should be askin' is if the kid already sees it," Sans corrects, as he rummages through the Crate.

"Kinda," I admit. "Like you all have smartphones and electricity and stuff."

"I will demonstrate how we have made our quality of life possible," Gaster's enthusiasm is
infectious, “in the hopes that we will have the honor and pleasure of exhibiting the CORE to you. This will take time… several weeks, conservatively. I must modify the contents of the Unified Theory Papers to accommodate your, condition.

“Nevertheless…

"You could say," he says… mischievously, "that these notions fill you with determination."

"{[HELL YEAH IT DOES!]}"

*several minutes of listening to technical jargon that I understand… more than I expected… later…*

… … … … "Does this make sense: that the orientation of the modules is trivial, for their density determines the magic’s path?"

"Yeah. The yellow magic will go right then down then up—for now. It doesn’t matter where you put them—hell you could put them all across the room and they’d still work."

"And the light blue magic in the insulation will contain it yo."

"Yes." Gaster urges us onward as I slowly walk from right to left along the side of the table, hands trailing along its surface. “And how does the Core Circuit relate to the light source we have shown you?"

"The magic in the Core Circuit comes from the battery—“ I try pointing toward the right side of the table, “—like how the rod has a thingy in it that absorbs the yellow magic from the CORE and uses it to make light. The air is the battery—basically.” I continue to summarize as my fingers lightly brush the wires laid along the tabletop.

"And the magic will pass through the ether without disseminating out into the environment because…?" Annie presses us.

{I don't feel like I'm in school at all…}

Chara laughs long and high and hard. [Dude? You’d KILL for your science classes to be like this!]

"'Cause the purple magic determines where it goes. And there’s purple magic in the modules in the Core Circuit so that’s why it doesn’t leak out. And there’s a module with purple magic in it at the tip of the rod so the yellow magic around us doesn’t go anywhere else so…”

As I reach the end of the table, a pair of claws grips my shoulders from behind. I jerk in their grip a little. "And," Annie asks in my ear, "what will happen when the yellow magic from the CORE traverses through the ether into the rod?"

"It will—"

"Will."

She reprimands her brother, her voice not directly sounding in my right ear anymore. It echoes off to the left now. "LET HER DO THIS!"

Her sudden shouting surprises everyone.

“I KNOW you understand this—you got this down a long time ago.”
She emphasizes, “But PAULINE has to get it. It’s important that she mentally constructs the magity setup herself. She has to know how it feels to understand it, so it’s harder for her to construct spacial relationships when the circuit’s not in front of her the whole time.

“I KNOW from your talks with the Skelebros that you HATED Physics Honors,” Annie directs toward me, “’cause the diagrams were confusing. ‘Cause you were learning about things you didn’t know existed till you heard about them in class. And they weren’t things you could experience for yourself either. You just had to take your teacher’s word for it.”

I’ve barely replied with a firm “mm-hmm” before Annie continues talking. “But THAT’S not the case here. This demonstration was MADE to be interacted with.”

“So if you’re confused,” she says more gently, “you can feel the circuit again—it’s no problem.”

Loosening her grip on my shoulders, Annie turns back to me. "So what happens when the yellow magic enters the rod?" she asks again.

"The inside’s really conductive so it’ll make light when the yellow magic goes through it. And the outside of the rod will stop it from coming out 'cause it's an insulator and it’s more dense."

"So when the yellow magic eventually eats through it we…?"

Sensing we’re near the end of my, part lesson part interrogation, I answer, "You take off the module with the purple magic in it and put a new inner layer inside—"

"EXCELLENT!

“TRULY EXCELLENT!”

“[[HOLY SHIT!]]"

**Stop the music.**

Annie being shoved aside, even though I don’t feel anyone touch her. She yelps… and giggles? as my legs are swept out from under me, and I fly through the air to the right.

After a fraction of a second, I land on my feet with a thud, my back against a wall. Gaster's delighted laugh sounds from… not as far above me as usual, as a sleeve brushes my right arm, bony fingers—phalanges—gripping it so tight I'm afraid that it will break. All the while, Annie continues to giggle from her place at the left end of the table.

"You have no reason to fear. I am here. I have caught you.

"I…

"I…

“It was beyond reckless of me to cast my magic in this manner.”

Instantly, Gaster has shifted from almost-manic excitement to shyness.

I could have…

“You deserved…"

He trails off, voice cracking.
"Awwww. Wingdings?" Murry reassures him as he walks toward our new position. "She's okay! Come on. You're showing her your life's work! Of course that'd make you happy."

"Here's what I have to say on this." Dewey advises. "It's okay to cry. You're happy! You shouldn't hold that in.

"But save the REAL tears for the CORE.

"When you take Pauline there for the first time, you can cry as much as you want."

After a moment of Gaster's quiet, gradually-deepening breathing, he replies, "Yes.

"Both of you are correct."

He relinquishes his hold on me. As the slightly rough fabric of his lab coat contacts my skin, I hear the clatter of bones against the floor and feel his weight shift downward.

Gaster has knelt down to my height beside me.

"Although you may presume that I have stated this a sufficient number of times, I am afraid that I cannot agree with that assertion."

"Stated what?" I ask.

"The statement that I am beyond glad I chose you.

"I cannot reiterate that enough," he repeats more quietly in my right ear. "But as of this moment, that is not my concern.

"I have delayed this portion of the demonstration for far too long."

Reaching to the right slightly, he sets a chest-height, wrist-diameter rod in front of me. I hold it tightly in both hands, just below the module containing the purple magic on the top. After a few moments, Gaster asks calmly, "Shall we begin?"

"Sure."

"Undyne? Remove the light blue modules curbing the circulation of yellow magic through this room. And prepare the green modules, in case the light source malfunctions—or if Pauline reacts adversely to such a sudden influx of energy."

"YES SIR!" she calls out from across the room, where Gaster and I waited for the Core Circuit demonstration to be configured.

I hear several loud, hard clicking sounds.

Not a moment too soon, a deep humming sensation shakes my bones. The scent of ozone, like what I smelled outside, slowly fills my lungs, and a metallic taste, like earlier, when everyone was opening the Crate, plays on my tongue. The rod becomes warm—

NO.

That's not warmth.

That's contact with magic.
NOT in an attack.

NOT in a bullet or a Gaster blaster.

In a MACHINE.

"Inducing different forms of magic into various substances," Dewey explains, "controlling that induction, and producing reactions that do useful work, are the basis for all our magitronic devices. Our computers are powered by the yellow magic circulating through the room they’re in.

“We use monsters' ethergraphs to configure a computer's power supply, to ensure that the amount of yellow magic powering them reflects the monster’s soulological sensitivity. It’s like how you have to touch your phone with a certain amount of pressure to make it type. So as their stats increase, their computer and other magitronics must be upgraded to reflect this reality.

“As long as a device is exposed to air, it charges. In theory, we never need to plug them in. We still have analogue chargers though, ‘cause they’re reliable and easy to make.”

"Whoa!” I gasp as the warmth of yellow magic fades from the rod.

"Now that you know this, I want to ask your permission to let us configure your devices," Annie walks closer, laying a claw on my left shoulder.

"Who knows? Your determination could give you even less of a reason to plug your stuff in,” she notes in wonder.

"Awesome!” I can't properly express how impressed I am in words.

"That’s settled then," she affirms. "Then, can you give us your BrailleNote and iPhone?"

I fish my phone out of my bag and hand it to her. "The BrailleNote's in my room."

Gaster stands to his full height and adjusts our hands and arms so I hold onto his left wrist. "Well, in the meantime, Alphys? I recall that you have some auspicious news for Pauline?"

"Yeah!

“We… uh… found a way to download JAWS onto our computers—"

"{WHAAAAAAAAAT!?!}"

It's Alphys's turn to laugh in delight. "Exactly! We were surprised too, but we installed it on Sans's laptop! So—"

"Come on Alphy! You can see how happy Pauline is!” Undyne butts in. "Let's get over to Sans's room and try it out! Then she'll never have to use that crappy little phone again!"

"My phone’s not crappy! I could've had a larger phone but I wouldn’t have been able to hold it!"

Again, Undyne's aggressive way of ensuring my well-being is… disconcerting…

*several minutes of explaining to Will that JAWS is an acronym and isn’t a reference later…*

… … … "NO! I refuse to let you sit on his bed, because for all intents and purposes, he has turned it into a second bookshelf, for some Tesla-forsaken reason! SANS! This is unacceptable!"
"Oh come on Paps: it could be worse.

“At least she CAN sit on my bed—"

"[[Oooh!]]" the Curies, Chara and I hoot as Papyrus sets a laptop in front of me, flipping it open.

“—‘cause I didn’t turn it into an Animus.”

"[[RIP!]]"

"Anyway, to turn this on, you undo this cover—" he guides my fingers to a plastic cover on the left edge of the laptop, which I flip open. It adheres to a spot directly adjacent to the covered area, leaving a recessed section of metal bare. I find the power button, on the upper-left hand corner of the laptop, and press it.

“The port you uncovered, there are two types of sensors inside. One type draws power from the magic being transmitted here from the CORE. And the other scans for my ethergraph. They’re making sure the battery contains enough magic so my laptop’s in sync with my soul.”

"Speaking of the battery, your laptop is taking significantly-longer to fully activate than what I observed while in the Void," Gaster settles down beside me. "Sans?

“How…

“How drastically has your magic changed while I have been away?”

Sans doesn’t answer.

“Because…

“Because from what I remember, the censors you have installed should be optimally-configured to suit your ethergraph. And accordingly, the battery should contain sufficient stores of yellow magic to accommodate your soul. Recall that although I refused to examine your field of knowing, I was still able to see your stats and your ethergraph. And—

“OH NO!!!"

Gaster's elbow slams into my arm and shoulder as his hand shoots out, snatching up the laptop. I tentatively ask, “It smells like something’s burning…?”

"Ehm, as a matter of fact yes." Papyrus clarifies from behind me. "Sans's laptop has… it is burning. Burning and melting. But mostly melting—"

“[[FUCK!!!]]” I jerk away and stand, cautiously touching the spot where the laptop sat only a couple seconds earlier.

“—but you have no need to worry, for it has not spread far beyond his laptop and consequently, poses no danger to you!”

“[[That’s Toooootally making ME FEEL BETTER!]]”

Under Chara’s control, but only for a moment: [“Is his stuff okay?”]

“This magitronic malfunction has only damaged the exterior and the battery.” Papyrus loudly reassures me. “The solid state memory chips storing his files are completely safe!
“If you wish to test out JAWS, you must use Alphys's laptop until both of these components are fixed, however.”

"Your magic has magnified in strength greatly… it seems much stronger than I remember from before." Gaster muses. "Or maybe the fragmented nature of my existence in the Void has clouded my memory. Or perhaps Pauline’s presence overloaded the battery. That hypothesis seems well within reason, for determination’s potency is orders of magnitude beyond any other form of magic.”

"Sounds about right." Sans agrees. "Now that you mention it, I should CAD-and-CAD some insulation modules, for all the magitronics Pauline’s gonna be handling. It’s as good a time as ever. I should’ve thought of that before we brought you here…"

“How ’bout you Undyne and the Curies go give JAWS a test run on Alphys's computer? Fixing this’ll take time."

"Hey maybe you can go read Alphys's fanfiction!" Undyne stomps over, seizing the back of my shirt… only to begin… shouting indignantly…?

"Why do you keep doing this!? What the hell’s wrong with you! PUT ME DOWN!"

"I'll get ya outa here so the crap on the floor doesn’t burn ya—"

The familiar grip of blue magic on my body, causing me to rise into the air a couple feet. "I'll get ya out the door. Then grab onto Undyne's arm when I set ya down. Okay?"

"Sure." I consent, my body turning around, Undyne grumbling a few feet away, presumably also in midair. After a few seconds, and my arms and legs bumping into walls and furniture, I land on my feet outside the door, Undyne's strong hand gripping one of mine. "Come on punk. Let's give the Gasters some breathing room."

Snickering noises from around me. "Edisondamn it Undyne!" Papyrus indignantly shouts from behind us, while the Curies and Chara all snicker quietly. “NOOO!”

"I'm so proud."

"EDISONDAMN YOU TOO SAAANS!"

"Let's go! Before I'm contaminated by his puns! And the cancer air from all that burning plastic!"

“TRUE!” I agree, as she pulls me down the hall, my shoes scraping against the floor—

One shoe—

The other shoe—

My shoes came off.

Chara yells in protest for me to tell Undyne to go back for them… but I’m too busy preventing my body from flailing around in Undyne’s grip to hear them, let alone care.

Chapter End Notes
Here's the music for this chapter, from the Glitchtale OST!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDhQ8DarZHQ

This music captures the situation I'm in perfectly: it feels erudite and calm... even if Gaster is ANYTHING BUT CALM while he's talking to me.

Here are some resources about the color pie of Magic: the Gathering. I've linked the five most recent articles explaining the philosophies of the five colors of magic, called mana. They don't perfectly align with Undertale's colors of magic, but that doesn't matter. The characters use it as an analogy, one that's... actually very important for the explanations of soulology from now on. The dichotomy of nature versus nurture is mentioned in these articles.


I know the characteristics underpinning each color of magic in this timeline are vague, but they're shaped by being's experiences. They'd be vague by nature. This fact is very very important to keep in mind for later chapters.
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

If you're unfamiliar with how circuitry is constructed, and or the background of the video game ChronoTrigger, read the first part of the endnotes, before the asterisks. Otherwise, ignore them. If you want some background on the pacing of the story from now on, read the part of the endnotes after the asterisks. Otherwise, ignore that.

Though, I WILL say this. The following terms are important for this chapter, and for the chapters to come.

In Visiontale, in magitry, the units for measuring the flow of magic are called impacts, whereas in real-life electrical engineering, current is measured in amps.

In magitry, power is measured in degrees, not volts.

In magitry, resistance is measured in Tourings, not Ohms.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

32

As the days and weeks pass, I grow more and more accustomed to how the monsters conduct business, learn, work, and have fun. Gaster, Annie, and Murry devote much of their time to tutoring me, guiding me through monsters’ history, technological and social. That, and explaining Dreemurrite culture’s relationship to human history.

“Our year does not correspond to your Gregorian calendar,” Gaster explains as we walk through the lab. Every couple minutes, we stop, and he guides my hands to a braille sign, asking whether it has been properly made. “On macroscopic scales, we utilize it for the sake of convenience, to synchronize with the surface when it is most pertinent. After all, symbolically, units of time derived from observing the movement of the Sun and stars, are… hollow for us. Insulting, even.”

“Mm-hmm—sounds about right.” I grasp his meaning immediately. “Then how do you keep time and stuff?”

“We use an identical hour-minute-second system to your own. We have yet to create units of time originating from soulological, ethermetrical, and or magitronic processes. Our months have seven weeks. And there are seven months in a year. 343 days in total.”

As we turn a corner, I ask, “So your year’s shorter than ours?”

“Yes and no,” Gaster corrects as we stop partway down the hall. “There are twenty-two days in the year that we…”

He trails off, seeming to search for the correct term. “Ignore.” He finally says, after several seconds.
His tone has changed from conversational to serious in an instant.

“In a manner of speaking, we, skip over, these twenty-two days. When tallying business or school days, we do not count them. It is a… period of observance… to put simply. Like an extended national holiday. Each monster spends these days however they see fit. Before my accident, I resolved to devote every waking moment of that time to my sons.”

The rap of metal on metal, as the door clicks open, the now-familiar scent of ozone, produced by what I know now is yellow magic, wafting out for a moment. After we take a few steps inside, I take my seat alongside one long edge of a lab table.

“This period of observance is at the end of 201X.” Gaster walks to one end of the table as he speaks, pulling out a chair. “We call it the Interlude. The Interlude at the conclusion of 201X… it will be the first I have observed since my return.”

The rustle of fabric against plastic as Gaster… opens something…? At his seat. “And it is interesting that since my death, monsterkind has taken to spending the Interlude as I have always spent it. Even monsters whose relationships with their parents and friends are strained take advantage of these three-odd weeks to present an olive branch to them.”

The click and soft squeak of a metal container swinging open. “Allocating the Interlude to such activities has become one of our kind’s most widely-practiced and widely-revered traditions. Very few ideas have spread so quickly as spending the Interlude in this manner. Only the widespread adoption of magitry may be comparable to it.”

\{Why’s Gaster so… sad all of a sudden?\}

Chara doesn’t answer.

“Why did everyone change what they did during the Interlude?” I ask, reaching forward as the metal container slides down the length of the table toward me.

Gaster doesn’t have to answer in words, for I can sense his magic ebbing next to me. By now, I can even quantify that decrease: his attack and defense both drop from 71 a piece to around 65 or 66, and as we continue to sit in silence, they settle around 60.

I don’t press him.

As the box stops in front of me, I touch the rows of modules nested inside, and I begin configuring them in what everyone calls the Core Circuit, a type of array used in essentially all magitronics. In most magitronic devices, and in the initial stages of most magitronic engineering prototyping projects, the researcher creates as many Core Circuits as needed, the types of modules and amount of wire stringing them together being dependent on the power required.

When I finish, Gaster clears his throat. He seems to have stopped… brooding…? Now.

“you must be wondering why I brought you here again. For you must have noticed that while we have traversed most of the lab over the past two Gregorian months, we never return to the same facility twice.”

“Yeah—the magic in here’s like… really strong. So is THAT why we’re here again?”

“Correct. I have brought you here again because we are on the verge of teaching you an immensely important concept, a concept which necessitates an uninterrupted flow of yellow magic which you can detect without assistance of any kind. And I wished to test how much you remember from the
past six odd weeks—"

Chara and I groan, but not before Gaster chuckles, magic passing over my shoulders, as if he laid one arm across them. “No no I do not mean to test you in the academic sense. I will not deduct points from you just because your wires are not completely enclosed, and your purple modules are not aligned immaculately.”

Chara and I laugh… and then proceed to groan. “I can’t believe Murry put that on a Cards Against Humanity card!”

“Annie has always chided him on his… less than immaculate magitry work…”

We laugh again. “But that is beside the point.

“Your first task is to construct a circuit utilizing 10 degrees of yellow magic, powering as many 1-impact filaments as you can, without modifying the green and light blue modules we have provided for you. These are the only restrictions present in this task.

“This is a somewhat more open-ended iteration of the exercise you completed with my sons several days ago. As they made clear during the demonstration they facilitated, as of now, we expect you to be capable of completing the tasks we set forth for you without burning through wires.”

“Mm-hmm,” I affirm, slightly nervously.

“I wish you the best of luck.

“And may the excitement of learning the next concept fill you with determination.”

“Okay.”

*s several minutes of repeatedly calculating the magitronic equivalent of resistance later…*

… … … {Well at least I kinda remember my junior year Physics Honors class ‘cause doing this in parallel’s working out nicely.}

[Meaning you remembered what Ohms were when Annie mentioned them—]

{Hey: Ohms sound funny how could I forget about them!?}

[And the magitronic unit of resistence being named after her mom helps too. But like, separate the wires—they’re all tangled and they’re thin so—]

{Okay okay I got it.}

{Hey: don’t get all annoyed at me—if it weren’t for me you wouldn’t be doing this right now.}

*s several minutes of annoyance over misplacing components later…*

… … … [If you’re wondering where that one fucking filament went, it’s like, a few inches to your left—there it is.]

I groan exasperatedly, and based on the faint, rhythmic pressure of blue magic on my body, and Chara’s descriptions, I realize that Gaster is trying his best to suppress a laugh.

After several seconds, he fails.
He walks over to the corner and stays there until he has calmed down.

*a few minutes of checking every connection ten times over later...*

… … … {This should be it—}

[Yeah: It’s the same as regular electric circuits in parallel, but after factoring in the density of the wires—]

{Seven 1-Amp—impact—filaments are being lit, not five.}

[Yeah! I think. Well what are you waiting for plug in the things!]

I expose the battery to air by removing it from its protective casing in the box. Laying a hand on it, I ensure that it is reacting properly with the power coursing through the room transmitted from the CORE, by monitoring its temperature against my skin.

Not for the first time, I marvel at Sans’s and Gaster… but mostly Sans… discovering this technique. Initially, when they began teaching me magitry, they were both dismayed, for they realized that many magitronic and ethermetrical procedures were visual in nature. Never mind that they have little reason to be visual, due to monsters’… amorphous… senses.

Several of Papyrus’s conversations, recounting his father and brother’s frustration, come to mind as I use the BrailleNote’s stopwatch to count the oscillations of yellow magic through the battery. {Good—they’re normal. So it SHOULD work. So we don’t have to like… ask for a new one—or alter it ourselves.}

{AAAAAAND we don’t have to tell Sans that all those times he did magitry while blindfolded—}

{AAAAAND that one time he stabbed the table—}

[Allegedly—]

{ALLEGEDLY—stabbed the table—}

[We don’t have to tell him that what he did was for nothing.]

I have already strung the wires through the proper light blue and green modules, so all that is left to do is to connect them to the battery.

When I’m finished, I touch the filaments cautiously, waiting for the seven of them to become induced with power. It only takes a few seconds for them to hum under my fingers. ”{[Yaaaaas!]}”

“Yes indeed!” Gaster joins in my enthusiasm. “You remembered the proper density modifiers without assistance. You built a magitry circuit without burning through wires. AND,” he emphasizes, “you proved that the modified responsiveness test that Sans created is indeed viable for the visually-impaired!”

[{{“HELL YEAH!”}}]

“But that is not what I brought you here for…”

“What is it then?” Chara and I are more than surprised. “Like, isn’t the responsiveness test thing like, crazy enough?”

Gaster takes my hand in his, so we disconnect the battery from the wires together. “Under the
present circumstances?

“No.”

We tense a little at Gaster’s more serious, firm tone.

“Your work affirmed for you how the ethermetrical density of a material affects a circuit’s conductive ability. That, and the degrees of magic stored in its power source.”

“Yeah…?”

“What I want you to do for this next demonstration is to wrap the wires around your fingers—“

{"Whaaat?"}]

“While you wrap the wires around your fingers,” Gaster continues as if I never spoke, “I will connect increasingly more filaments to the ends of the wires. And will do so until the power source has been expended—“

“But— “ I emphasize “—I’M being hooked up to the wires—”

“Precisely.”

I don’t even object to Chara taking control: [“But I don’t run out of it ‘cause I’m always making it so—”

“Precisely.”

“And like, don’t we have to extract my determination before we can use it?” I ask.

“NO.

“The reason why the procedures you mentioned are entirely unnecessary,” Gaster explains in a clear, ringing voice, “is because determination is orders of magnitude more sensitive and powerful than yellow magic. Recall how even at rest, your determination—or the determination present in the room at the time—overstimulated the ethergraph recognition sensors in Sans’s laptop—“

“How could I forget!?! My determination—“

“The cumulative determination in the room,” Gaster corrects me.

“The determination in the room set it on fire! How could I forget about that!??”

“I am not implying that you HAVE forgotten this incident. Rather, I desire to draw comparisons between that application of determination, and what I want you to do.

“In spite of the diffusion of determination through such a barrier as your skin being inefficient, your contact with Sans’s laptop proved sufficient to transfer your determination through the circuits and into the battery. This overstimulated the battery. Simultaneously, the determination overstimulated the sensors by calibrating them to a level of sensitivity requiring more power than they were designed to tolerate.”

“’Cause they were designed for SANS’S soul—not mine.”

“Precisely.
“Your determination traveled through the wires, where it was used in combination with yellow magic to power his laptop. Simultaneously, the battery drew power from the CORE to comply with the sensors’ requests, even to the point of destroying them.

“This demonstration differs from what occurred to his laptop, for I want you to INTENTIONALLY power the filaments with your determination. Until now, we have not endeavored to explain to you why determination defies ethermetrical law. And I know from my time in the Void, that you have experienced determination’s other anomalous properties in the field.”

[“Mm-hmm.”]

“During this demonstration, you will witness determination’s true power, because I will not tell you how many filaments I am connecting to the wires. We will begin with the seven you have already configured, and I will notify you if you must disengage yourself.

“Disconnect them at any time if you are feeling even the slightest bit of discomfort.” He insists.

“Yeah sure.”

[You don’t seem all that surprised by this…]

{I mean at least I built this circuit so… I’m like… doing an experiment with a thing I made…?}

“Are you ready?”

Before I can object: [“Yes.”]

Under Chara’s control, I wrap the seven wires around my fingers and wrist until they press firmly against my skin.

I have barely finished doing so before intense light and heat begin emanating from a spot in front of me. Gaster races to connect enough filaments, from the constant clinking of magic-infused glass on itself nearby. Other than the slight warmth of the wires on my skin, I don’t feel any different. Curiously, I sit and wait for more filaments to—

“STOP!”

Currents of hastily-conjured blue magic surround my hand, the wires rip from my grip, and the familiar smell of burning magic-infused material fills the air. “What happened!” I ask in concern as Gaster gathers up the filaments.

“It is just…” he seems slightly out of breath, “your determination… I knew you possessed a considerable amount of it but…

“Your stats…”

“When we last checked them, your forty-three HP… your nineteen attack… your eighteen defense… they do not reflect…”

“They don’t reflect what?” I repeat, but he keeps talking, like I’m not even there.

“What I have seen… that result is only possible if…”

[He shook his skull.]

“No.
“It cannot be.

“The anomalous nature of your soul…”

“Alphys’s observations after your determination extraction…”

He eventually stops talking. I sense his stats rising up to 70 again… and then they continue to rise beyond that point. His chair scrapes out as he positions my hand on his wrist. As we leave the room again, he muses, “Now, I have a more concrete sense of how to proceed from here.

“But before I can begin those procedures, I must apologize to you retroactively, Pauline.”

“Apologize for what?”

“Over the proceeding weeks and months, my colleagues and I have sorely underestimated you.”

{{[Uh…]}}

“{{[How?]}}”

“We must reconfigure the materials we had intended to teach you, and the magitry we intend to teach you to configure… for their complexity, and the power they require, do not reflect your true soulological state. For your stats do not reflect the TRUE power of your soul.

“I am 99 percent confident that we will complement your learning with lessons into CAD-and-CAD—”

“{{[WHOA!}}

“{{[But CAD-and-CAD’s really hard ‘cause you need to be really focused AND really strong and —]}}”

“You ARE strong,” Gaster reiterates as we turn a corner. “And your concerns regarding concentration are only minutely relevant: for your determination will compensate for your lack of experience focusing your magic. As it has already done innumerable times.”

After a couple minutes of walking, Gaster stops in front of my room, holding the door open for me. “Thanks.”

AS I swing the door shut, I hear Gaster mutter softly.

“This subsequent sequence of experiments will be very…”

“Very…”

“VERY…”

“Interesting…”

*several days of hearing Gaster walking around outside my room agonizing over whether to talk to me when he thinks I’m asleep later…*

… … … “Yeah: these are hollow. When you hold them, they’ll fill with determination. Then you can use them as a power source.” Annie finishes as she hands me several tiny composite-material cubes. “They’ll be several times more powerful than yellow magic. And Gaster’s real hyped about connecting them to your devices. To ALL our devices.”
I sip my drink, grasping the modules, each one as large as my thumbnail, in my free hand. “What are you guys gonna use these for?”

“Experiments with CAD-and-CAD yo!” Will butts in from across the table. “Duh! My sis thinks that if you put DT modules in magitronics, it’ll make consumer-level 3D printers even more powerful and easy to use! Monsters could make really cool stuff in less time, with less training! The DT would focus the user’s magic, kinda like what Simon and Tailor and the others did. AND it’d let them do what my sis did in the Void: making whatever they could think of, without having to know every little detail and intermediary step!”

Realizing the enormity of Will’s statement, I place the modules on the table again. “By Tesla that’s true! Could you use determination to make computers that could access the human Internet as good as if they were on the surface?”

“If someone knew what they wanted to access? Maybe…” Annie trails off. “But…”

{{Uh-oh.}}

“Determination’s…”

“Weird.”

She laughs. “To put it lightly.

“In the Void, I felt almost completely disconnected from time and space. I didn’t have a physical body, so my soul was free to do whatever I could think of.

“I don’t know if monsters… with…”

The air around us becomes agitated: [Annie’s like, thinking REAAAAALLY hard right now.]

{Is that why her magic’s all… intense?}

[Yep.]

“I don’t think,” she starts speaking again, much more slowly than before, “a monster with a physical body could handle determination, even if it was being used as a power source in a machine—which is much less direct than what happened in Alphys’s research. In order for a monster to be able to handle determination, even indirectly like this, it’d take…

“A lot of power.

“To control that determination precisely enough that it does what the user wants it to do…”

“THAT’D take even MORE power.

“And integrating ALL that into the CAD-and-CAD process without hurting the user, OR damaging the CAD-and-CAD machine, OR the surroundings…

“That’d take sooo much discipline. Even more than what me and Gaster needed to do our experiments.”

“But you still didn’t answer Pauline’s question for real though…” Will… gently prods his sister away from her tangent.

She sighs after several seconds. “We’re gonna use these for an experiment.
“If everything goes as planned, that is.

“We’re beginning the planning stages for fulfilling the second objective of the Unified Theory Papers: to break the Barrier without taking any more lives.”

Chara doesn’t even have to force me to ask, but they do it anyway: [“What are you planning on using my determination for?”]

“I wanted to ask you if we could siphon off your determination: while you sleep, and while you’re idle. The modules I showed you, we’re planning on installing them in new CAD-and-CAD machines, utilizing all the 3D printer technology humans have developed on the surface since our deaths, and then some.

Gaster thinks that with that technology, and your determination, we’ll…

“We’ll…

“We’ll be able to…”

“What’s wrong?”

Annie takes several breaths. The purple magic surrounding her tugs on me slightly, pulling my chair toward her.

“If you consent, we’ll be using your determination to help create artificial human souls.

“If it works, then we’ll be able to break the Barrier whenever we’re ready.

“And who knows? Maybe…

“Maybe we’ll be able to create new bodies for the six souls we already have. So they can be brought back to life.”

I respond quickly. “It makes sense… and it’s not like you’re taking samples from me in a weird way—“

The Moores laugh in unison. “Well we kind of are yo…” Will points out. “But at least we’re asking you first. ‘Cause lots of humans haven’t done that. And lots of humans STILL don’t do it. Yaye for human cloning!”

“In a way, yeah,” Annie turns my palms face-up as she talks, handing me more modules. “Carry these modules with you all day when you’re walking around. And we have tubs of them we’ll be putting in your room, and in all the rooms you go to a lot. They’ll absorb determination naturally. We’ll collect them when they’re full.”

I can’t help but fixate on Annie’s reaction to Will pointing out that her and the Inertia Society are carrying out human cloning experiments, for all intents and purposes.

Meaning that she didn’t react at all.

Chara and I can’t help but react in the same way.

“When you take a shower and change clothes put these modules down in any of the tubs in your room. We’ll take care of it from there.”

“Thanks for telling me all this without freaking out like sans did—does—when he does important
stuff—you know what I mean.”

The Moores laugh again: “No problem.”

Annie walks around the table until she stands to my left. Standing from my seat, I extend my new cane to its full length. “We’ve finished just in the nick of time too, ’cause I heard that Dewey had something planned. ‘Cause it’s… a holiday on the surface right now. But him and Gerson don’t know whether you celebrate it or not. And they didn’t wanna ask Gaster to tell them ’cause that’s weird… and besides: workplaces can’t ask about your religion so… we’ve gotta go over to his room.”

*several minutes of confirming the date on the surface with everyone around me repeatedly later…*

"You really thought we wouldn’t know it was Christmas?" Murry snarks back at me as I scoot closer to him on Dewey’s bed. “I mean like, we’ve been planning this forever! We thought this would be fun for you and Will. ’Cause like, Will’s never gamed on a real console before—"

In disbelief, I gasp “Noooo…!"

[Will come on don’t blush—Pauline hasn’t heard you’re embarrassed yet…]

{Awww!}

Will laughs sheepishly. “It’s true yo… I’ve never even touched a real gaming system before. I still barely remember which humans developed which consoles…”

“Duuuude its not as bad as me—I keep forgetting the Nintendo 64 is a thing…?"

“It’s not like I HAVEN’T played a video game before—me and my friends have LOTS of them on our computers! But we play them using emulators, so it doesn’t feel the same—"

In unison: “[Duuuude…]"

On my own: “Yeah like, the first game I ever bought was Pokémon X on the Nintendo 3DS. It wasn’t my first Pokémon game—that was Pokémon Black 2, but like… playing it on my computer didn’t feel… real…?”

“That makes sense yo! ’Cause like, even if the game LOOKS the same and SOUNDS the same, it ISN’T the same, ’cause it’s not on the right console.”

Much louder than I intended: “YES! EXACTLY!”

Some plasticy sounds nearby: “Sans dug this out of storage and thought you guys’d like it,” Murry explains. “He’d be here to present it to you himself but he’s… preparing something for later.”

[Put your hands out.]

I do as Chara says, and I begin touching a… a controller?

“What… is this?” I ask… only for Murry, Annie, and Chara to gasp. Simultaneously, Annie and Chara ask, “[You don’t know what that is?]”

“{Noooo…?”}
I don’t understand their confusion at all: {“Should I?”}

[Of course you should! That’s a SNES controller! It was the first controller to have the X, Y, L, and R buttons on it!]

I’ve never heard Chara nerd out about… ANYTHING… so insistently before…

“I guess…” Annie barely succeeds in holding back her surprise. “I mean, you’ve technically held a SNES-ish controller. The GameCube controller is really similar to it. The way the bottom is shaped so it matches the shape of your cupped hands… that’s been done on almost every controller since the SNES controller came out. That’s why people loooove playing Smash Bros. on the Gamecube controller.”

“Wait: so you guys have a SNES?”

A sharp tinge of orange magic on my face. “What: you thought we’d only have the controller?”

Murry… has… leaned in very close to me.

Chara and I shrink back: and not just because his gesture is sudden.

The… intensity… in his statement startles us.

“The SNES is on Dewey’s desk. And Sans even went and found all our games too. There’s only one that we wanna show you though. ‘Cause…”

He chuckles. “I don’t think you’d be able to play F0 or Super Mario World so… there was only one option left after that.”

I tense up… then subsequently wonder why I’m so stiff…

Chara’s excited…

VERY excited…

{Dude why you so hyped?}

They don’t answer.

At least, not until someone hands me a case similar to that of a DVD, and they start hyperventilating. “This game’s called ChronoTrigger,” Dewey explains. “It was released on March 11, 1995 in Japan, and five months later in North America.”

“At least, in THIS variant of the timeline Murry, Annie, and Gaster had originally come from.”

I tense up again… and not out of excitement. If Chara had been physically present, they would have gripped my shoulders hard from their place on the bed next to me.

“In their HOME timeline, ChronoTrigger was released on March 11, 1995, in Japan AND North America.”

I can’t help but ask: “WHY are you telling me this?”

No one answers.

“Is ChronoTrigger’s release date like, important for you guys or something?”
“Murry told me about Ian, and how he played ChronoTrigger in high school.” Dewey says carefully, still avoiding my question. “You’re really in to RPGs, so that’s why Sans wanted to show it to you.”

“And Murry told me about you playing Pokémon yo!” Will’s hyped again. “All those challenge runs thoooooough! I’ve been playing Alphys’s emulator for Pokémon Red and… and… and…”

Chara sighs happily. [Oooooooh maaaaaaan Will’s so happy…?]

“It’s soooo coooooool!”

“Duuuuude!” I affirm as Will begins recounting his experiences.

*a couple minutes of Will being hyped over the 8-bit music later…*

… … … “But I lost the first rival battle so Edison keeps making fun of me!”

“Wait wait hold up you named your rival Edison?” I can’t help but clarify.

Since Will and I started talking about Pokémon, everyone has migrated onto the floor, the SNES between us. I run my hands over it gingerly, marveling over how a system so old could still be in tact after more than twenty years.

“Edison’s an asshole.”

I start at the sharpness in Annie’s voice. “He’s like, the one who made electricity something you have to pay for,” she continues. “Tesla wanted it to be free…”

“Hey Annie? Save the Current Wars bullshit for later. I hope I don’t have to be more direct about it. Unless ya wanna know the alternate outcome—“

“[[AAAAAAAAH! EVERY TIME!]]”

[Sans why you do this?]

“So you walk in here, and interrupt Will’s ranting about Lance being unfair… by making electrical current jokes?” Annie… fumes… I can’t tell if she’s actually flustered or not…

[She DEEEEEFINITELY IS.]

“Yeh. Not like I disagree—he IS unfair.”

Everyone, in unison: “[[You think!??]]”

Sans walks across the room and sits next to me, gently taking ChronoTrigger from its place on my lap. Chara’s soul… quivers… as he does so. “Dewey texted me sayin’ he showed you guys this.”

“Yeah,” I turn my head slightly toward him. “Murry told me you got it out of storage for me. How did you even get it in the first place? ‘Cause like, it would have had to fall down into Waterfall completely in tact…”

The atmosphere in the room changes completely.

Everyone’s stats plummet by a few percentage points. After a tense silence, Sans amends, “Yeah:
“You’re right.

“It DID fall down here.

“And you’re right: it WOULD’VE had to fall down without breakin’.”

“I’m still surprised ‘bout that.”

Sans’s voice becomes wistful in an instant.

“It could’ve shattered beyond repair: the SNES AND the game but…”

“But what?”

“They didn’t.”

Though his statement is obvious, I don’t comment on it.

“We’ve kept this thing clean and functioning for two decades. Adam and Kari played it, when they were here, before they were killed.”

I gasp.

“ALL of us have gone through it once.

“SOME of us have played it several times.”

He chuckles proudly… and under Chara’s control, I jerk away from Sans. [NO SANS WHY THE DOUBLE EYE GLOW OF DOOOOOOM!?!]

{FUCK IF I KNOW—WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME!?!}

“I’ve reached EVERY ending.

“Found EVERY item.

“Seen EVERY secret.

“EVERY year I’ve had it.”

Sparks crackle around me as Sans picks up the Super Nintendo… and Chara rambles about Sans using his blue magic on the console. {Wait—so he one hundred-percented the game EVERY year since he got it!?!}

[Yeh!]

Chara’s… both impressed and terrified.

Sans stands from his seat. “I’ll plug it in. We’ve got a couple hours to kill before Dadster gives his first Fireside Chat since he fell down.”

*a couple minutes of logistics later…*

……… “This is an earphone adaptor. When ya play, I HAVE to plug this in. And I have to make sure the extra sounds work. ‘Cause Paps and I… we’ve been reworkin’ them for ya since last month.”
“You guys modded this game for me?”

“Nah: not for you.”

Before I can stop Chara from forcing me to say it: [“Well thanks dude…”]

Sans laughs shortly. “Kari loved the music. So much that around her one-year anniversary of being reanimated, I finished up a project I’d been doing on-and-off for several years.

“I rearranged lots of the music from the game—“

[“WHAAAAAT!?”]

“Yep. I installed new hardware that could handle newer music files. The old processors are inside—they’re there for when someone wants to play the game without any mods.

“And recently me and Paps added in lots more sounds, just for you—“

A disbelieving [“WHAT!”] from everyone.

“We found and made sounds for walking, running into walls, as much stuff as we could think of. And I got some of our friends to record all the dialogue—“

I’m not even surprised when Chara takes control of my body to reply: [“WHAAAAAAAAT!?”]

Everyone whoops and shouts in excitement. “Dude!” Will exclaims. “How’d you get all that done so fast!? Pauline’s been here for like… a month and a half…? And it’s already done! And since you’re showing it off it’s not buggy!”

“I started modding the game the day after we met,” Sans explains… eagerly.

“I played through it all again—“

[“Like, AGAIN AGAIN?”]

“What. Do. You. Think?”

Every word, sharply punctuated verbally AND with magic. With every word, I flinch, under Chara’s control.

Sans’s sudden Passion… more than surprises them.

It SCARES Them.

“While I played, I voiced every piece of text I found: the item names, locations, flavor text, everything you’d need to know if you wanted to play it by yourself.”

And,” Sans says with pride, “You know that guy Frog I talked about at my place?”

Before I can object to Chara answering: [“Yes.”]

“I recorded his dialogue. I—“

“SANS!”

[[Dewey??]]
“Are you going to let Pauline and Will play, or are you gonna recite the game by heart?”

*a couple more minutes of settling in and learning random facts about ChronoTrigger’s development later…*

“But like, why are you asking me if I want to leave the cat alone?”

“’Cause it affects the ending you get—“ Sans barely gives me time to ask my question.

“Wait what?” Will and I ask in unison.

“Seriously. Ya might not know this, but there’s thirteen endings in the SNES version—“

Again, Will and I comment simultaneously: “Fucking hell what!?”

“Each of ‘em’s different, dependin’ on your choices. And I modded in the 14th ending from the Nintendo DS port—“

Everyone at once: “[WHAAAAAT!?]”

“So what do you two wanna do ‘bout the cat?”

{He modded a new ending into the game and he’s like, not even gonna talk about it!??}

[What—you want him to spoil—]

[No but—]

[So he’s not gonna talk about it—]

[NO—I mean he’s not gonna talk about HOW he did it!??]

[Yep.]

[WHY!??]

A mental, verbal shrug: [I don’t know—ask him!]

“I don’t know what to do! This is soooo hard yo!”

“Truuuuue…? If we leave it alone that’s… probly…? bad…?”

“Is it a stray cat? ‘Cause if it is, we have to find it an owner yo!”

“Truuuue…”

“Let’s walk around and ask if anyone knows who owns it.”

“Good idea Will.”

*a couple hours of rocking out to all the fucking music later…*

…” … … “Kid? You’ve gotta come to the lobby of the Lab soon. You don’t have to change—“

“Nonsense Sans! The human looks like she just rolled out of bed!”

[“No I didn’t!”] Chara and I protest.
“I know that. But no one else does.

“Please! By Tesla: if you’re going to walk out there in pajamas, at least walk out there in pajamas that don’t look like COMPLETE shit—“

“Whoa whoa Paps calm down!”

{Woooow Sans is so surprised and flustered you wouldn’t believe—]

{Uh… I can…?

{… That… just happened.}

“I’m serious Sans. This is the first time anyone from the public’s seen Pauline since she first arrived here. You’ve kept almost all the media away from the building for more than two Gregorian months. You make Reed and Wrighte leave their cameras in a separate room while they hang out with her!”

I know…” Sans replies as we walk into my room, and I begin searching for a clean set of clothes. “It’s just… the Unified Theory Papers…”

He sighs. “There’s lots of confidential stuff goin’ round here. And yeah: Reed and Wrighte are trustworthy but…”

I find the shirt to complete my set of clothes and walk behind one of my new bookshelves to change. The Skelebros walk slightly toward the door as I do. “If you really trust them, then why go through all this trouble then?” Papyrus insists. “They’re our biggest allies in the press. They’d never—“

“They’d never what?”

I’ve barely finished putting on my new shirt when I stop in my tracks.

“They’d never say anythin’ to anyone they shouldn’t?”

Chara, in a small voice: [Wow: there’s no eye glow of doom?]

{Really?}

[Yeh.]

“Paps: you know that’s not true.

“Wrighte’s REAL eager ‘bout us. Fanatical, even. It scares me, how hyped up he gets when he covers us.

“Us, AND Pauline.

“How do ya think he’ll react to THIS?”

“But he’s had weeks to process that Gaster’s back, Sans. He MUST HAVE calmed down by now. He has to—!“

I step out from behind the bookshelf and walk out the door again, Sans sighing as we turn left down the hall. “I hope you’re right bro. I hope you’re right.
’Cause if you’re not, everyone’s gonna get REAL riled up. Monsters’ll knock down our doors, wantin’ to ask questions. Pauline and Will shouldn’t have to deal with that.”

“Gneh. I know.” Paps agrees as I press the button to summon the longivator. “I’m not objecting to Wrighte covering the Fireside Chat. I just hope he put up a notice on Undermail’s website reminding everyone to act civilly.”

“I know. And he did: right before we left Dewey’s room. I’ll give ‘im credit for THAT, for sure.”

As the longivator continues to bump along, Sans adds, “But there’ll be monsters who aren’t so cautious. I hope dad’s ready for ‘em. He’s takin’ a huge risk, havin’ the Fireside Chat open to the public.”

We step off the longivator, Papyrus in the lead. “I know, Sans. But we…

“But we have to trust him.”

Sans, Chara, and I together: “[Mm-hmm.]”

“It’s been decades since he’s seen everyone, in person. I think he’s doing this so…”

“So he can affirm that he’s really here.” He says, choosing each word with care.

We walk in silence for a minute, my cane occasionally hitting the heels of Papyrus’s boots. As we turn down an ever-increasing number of hallways, I struggle to keep up with Sans’s pace. I slide my left hand down his arm, closer to his wrist, which is what I do when I hold onto someone who is substantially taller than me. {Is it just me or do I feel shorter than usual?}

[I think you’re right: we DO seem shorter than usual.]

[But I think…]

My head turns to one side, fixed on… on Sans.

Chara is going through the motions of looking at him with my body, even though it’s completely pointless.

[Yep.

[I’m 99 percent confident that Sans has gotten taller. But I don’t know by how much. A couple inches, at least…?]}

“Yeh. I get it.” Sans eventually answers. “If I haven’t said it enough over the years, you’ve got so much more faith in monsterkind than I do.

“I agree: it’s important that Dadster sees everyone in public, and not over livestream.

“Still…”

To Chara and my relief, Sans slows his stride, so Chara slows my pace to accommodate. We wait for him to finish his thought.

“It doesn’t change a damn thing.”

[Stop stop stop stop!]
My legs freeze in place, my body brushing the back of Papyrus’s armor.

“I’m not letting my guard down for a second.

“I’m—“

A jolt of yellow magic runs down Sans’s right arm and through my fingers.

More than startled, I let go of Sans, Chara manipulating my hand so I reach over to a spot on my left side, at elbow height, where I feel a Gaster blaster. I move it so it floats at my waist, on the left side.

—giving her this.

“And I’ll make sure I can see everything.

“I know that room better than my metacarpals, Paps.”

[Oh noooooo DOUBLE EYE GLOW OF DOOOOM!]

{Shit shit shit shit shit shit!}

{{Twice in one day?}}

{{HOW!??}}

“And if anyone even THINKS about hurting her, OR Will, OR Gaster…”

We emerge from the hallway into the lobby. The excited hum of monsters almost drowns out Sans’s words, as we walk toward the dais Undyne prepared earlier.

Emphasis on ALMOST.

“They.

“Will.

“Have.

“A.

“Bad.

“Time.”

… … … It only takes a couple minutes… and one impromptu rendition of… of some anime theme song I’ve never heard of that Alphys apparently loves… for the crowd to quiet down. From my seat at the back of the dais, I recall the progression of the program the Curies planned out.

The footsteps I hear, walking closer and closer to the edge of the dais, and the crowd below, are Dewey’s.

From several feet in front of me, he clears his throat before he begins speaking.

“H-h-hello everyone.

“First, I would like to wish you all a merry Giftmas Eve. I am grateful that so many of you have
taken time out of your festivities to come spend the night with us.”

Cheers… and not a few shouts of “#ForeverAlone!” in reply. From his seat next to me, Will can’t help but giggle. Chara and I soon follow.

“Anyway,” the Inertia Society sociologist continues, “the Inertia Society opens its doors to you all tonight for a very important reason.

“Well, more like a couple very important reasons,” he hedges.

“Over the past couple months, the Inertia Society has begun carrying out the directives written in Dr. Wingdings Tesla Gaster’s final completed piece of research.

“The Unified Theory Papers.”

He pauses briefly before continuing. “In order to keep in line with these directives, the Inertia Society has spared no expense in teaching the human, Pauline Ugalde, all we can about our culture. We hope that by the end of the month, we will have the honor of giving her a tour of the CORE.”

Monsters whisper eagerly: “How will they tell her what it looks like?”

“The CORE’s amazing! A complete clusterfuck, but amazing!”

“So they’re letting her do magitry work? Isn’t that… hella dangerous?”

“How could she understand magic? She can’t use it…”

“She needs that stick to walk around. She can’t use that kind of aid to navigate the phenomenon which is magic. How can they teach her—”

“In addition,” Dewey continues after a few seconds, “Pauline has consented to aiding us in achieving the second objective of the Unified Theory Papers: devising a method of breaking the Barrier without any further loss of life. Tonight, my colleagues and I are proud to present our method for achieving this objective in its entirety for your scrutiny.”

After a short pause, Dewey finishes, “Therefore, without further ado, I am honored to welcome the following monsters to the stage.”

His yellow magic sparks around him, and his purple magic tugs at his colleagues, urging them forward.

“Our Head Ethermetrist, Murrie Durkheim Curie.

“Our Primary CAD-and-CAD Researcher, Annie Asimov Moore.


“And our First, and some would say only, Royal Scientist, Wingdings Tesla Gaster.”

Chapter End Notes

Here’s the link to the Wikipedia page on the SNES, which I accessed on June 23, 2017:
Here's the link to the Wikipedia page on ChronoTrigger, which I accessed on the same day:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrono_Trigger

Here's the page I used as inspiration for building the magitry configuration mentioned in this chapter, which I first accessed on June 20, 2017:

https://www.swtc.edu/Ag_Power/electrical/lecture/parallel_circuits.htm

Specifically, Ohm's law, \( v = ir \), where \( v \) is voltage, \( i \) is current, and \( r \) is resistance, was used, except with some modified terms. The formula \( p = vi \), where \( p \) is power, \( v \) is voltage, and \( i \) is current, was also a source of inspiration for the task I was trying to complete. I haven't created concrete numbers to account for the principles mentioned in the last chapter, meaning the inverse relationship between density of materials and the amount of magic they can store. I might do that in the future.

ChronoTrigger having different release dates in the timeline Visiontale takes place in, as opposed to the timeline where Gaster and colleagues came from, doesn't change much because it doesn't matter when it came out, just that my friend Ian played it and talked about it to my friends and I in high school. ChronoTrigger still entered my life in the same way.

The dates being mentioned is important... very important... and not just because most everyone in this timeline, including myself, is a Nintendo fan.

ChronoTrigger is VERY important for later.

*******

Horray for the first significant time skip in the whole story! Expect more of them in the future, because writing out Chara and my routine day by day isn't nearly as necessary anymore.

In the days leading up to the first time I posted this chapter, it occurred to me that there weren't many more structured events left for me to write about, meaning events which occur before the endgame. Therefore, there aren't many chapters between now, and when I go to New Home at last.

Plot twist: this is what I thought when I posted this chapter the first time. I ended up being totally wrong...

Regardless, the chapters, and in-story days, counting down to the feeeeeels are numbered, people.
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Prepare for more rioting, ethical dilemmas regarding science, and feels!

Also prepare for awesomeness, as well as (finally!) backstory for the Gasters and the Moores in this timeline!

If you want to know, or don't know, what the "Uncanny Valley" is, read the endnotes. If you want to hear about my voice choices for the new characters, and or the calendar employed by the citizens of the Underground, read the endnotes. If you are curious about the.. mathematical and or rhetorical concepts... used in this chapter, read the endnotes. Otherwise, ignore them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

33

[Wow…] Chara observes with genuine surprise. [I never thought I’d hear so many nerds crying all at once.]

{Same. And it sounds like you’re gonna cry again too.}

[Mm-hmm. It’s so… surreal,] they say the word slowly, [to see everyone reacting to him. And they all reacted so fast. It’s amazing! It’s like magic.]

{Yeah… it’s literally magic. Well determination’s more like how we—humans—think of magic but…}

As the three Inertia Society members Dewey named walk by my chair, each touching me on the shoulder as they pass, I soak in the vibes from the crowd and listen to their reactions. Most of them assume they are hallucinating. Some of them are confused. The rest are…

The rest are sobbing uncontrollably.

“I knew he’d be back!”

“I been dreaming of this moment for years! Literally!”

“I knewe it! I just knew it! He was alive! All along!”

“So THAT’S why there was no dust at the scene. He wasn’t really dead.”

“My weird nightmares… they were about Gaster…”

“My flashbacks out of nowhere… YOU were in them, Gaster.”

“I forgot about him—”
“I can’t believe—“

“How could I have…?”

“The human did it. She really did it.””

Paps kept his word.”

“OH MY FUCKING GOD IT’S HIIIIM!”

That remark was… much louder than the others.

{Heh?}

[By Tesla they came!]

{WHO did?}

[The Crew—!]

[Ugh—]

[Seriously Robin Laura Amy and Grillby are in the front row. And come on—YOU’RE excited!]

{DUUUUUDE!}

“OH MY FUCKING GOD IT’S HIIIIIIIM! GAAAAAAASTEEEEER!” someone close to us shouts again. Only now do I recognize the voice as belonging to Robin. {Jesus it’s been… how long…? Since I’ve hung out with them all?}

[A couple months—Gregorian calendar months…?]}

{Daaaaaaamn!}

The crowd shouts joyously for a few more minutes, Until Gaster intones, “P-p-p-please. Everyone. C-c-calm down. I… I implore you… this is t-t-t-too m-m-much…”

[He’s… wincing in pain--]

[What?]

[He’s in a LOOOT of pain.]

[What happened to him!?

[They’re casting lots of magic at him—near him—around him…?—all the things…?]}

{OH yeah… ‘cause that’s how monsters’ voices work…}

[They don’t MEAN to hurt him. They’re really excited—they can’t help it!]

The crowd takes only a second to fall silent.

“Thank you.

“I know you must have innumerable questions regarding our… appearance… here tonight. Those among you who were born after my passing… you, in particular, must thirst for answers.
“And this is before I have even scratched the surface regarding the Unified Theory Papers. Fortunately, we have all the time in the world to explain ourselves.”

[He’s gesturing at Alphys.]

“First, I will step aside so that Alphys Durkheim Curie may elaborate on the soulological and methodological logistics of what the Inertia Society calls the…”

“Determination study.”

{That… sounded soooo much dooooomier than it should have—}

[I don’t think you’re the only one who thinks that.]

“This information is vital to understanding even the faintest notions of the nature of my absence, and how Pauline factored into my return.

“And in any case, this information is…”

“We should have…”

He sighs. “Considering the nature of our experiments, you have the right to know.”

As promised, Gaster steps away from the front of the dais, turns around, and walks back toward my seat, sitting down several feet to one side of me. Alphys walks forward to take his place.

“O-k-k-kay,” Alphys hedges in response. “H-h-h-here we g-g-g-go…”

*several short speeches later*

… … … “That’s what we’ll be doing.” Annie finishes. “So over the next few months we’re gonna collect Pauline’s unused determination and integrate those new modules with what we already have. Like what Pauline and the others did to bring the three of us back in the first place. They’ll be able to produce orders of magnitude more power than our normal ones.

“Then after reconfiguring our CAD-and-CAD machines, we’ll experiment with incorporating the determination modules into our computers. So we can access the—“

“So we can watch Twitch!” someone shouts.

“Eventually? Yeah. But more than that man,” Murry confirms. “We might be able to stream on REAL Twitch! And not just some knockoff—“

A chorus consisting of ‘Not cool man!” and “Seriously duuude?” and “I’m telling Mettaton!” in reply.

“I know I know I’m just joking.” Murry laughs it off. “But in all seriousness, with all of us back, and a steady source of determination, all the experiments we kept on the backburner ‘cause we didn’t have the technology to do them, or they weren’t possible with our then-current research, we can do them now. The Inertia Society can fulfill its original purpose—“

“‘Original purpose?’” a spectator near the back repeats, followed by several more.

“You know what we mean.” Annie responds… a little too quickly. “Our objectives are stated at the beginning of the Unified Theory Papers: to educate any humans who come into contact with our culture, to break the Barrier with nonviolent means, and to facilitate the integration—“
“But what about the amalgamates!??” an audience member shouts.

“I kn-kn-kn-know I hurt a l-l-l-lot of m-m-m-monsters in the p-p-p-past,” Alphys stutters from beside Annie. “But… but I’ve accepted that. They’re watching the Fireside Chat right now. So they can see—“

“How do we know you won’t capture more of our friends and family?!”

“How can we be sure no one else’ll get force-fed your damned determination!??”

“The participants in the Determination Study were willing volunteers,” Gaster reiterates on Annie’s other side, somehow managing to keep a cool head.

Chara and I profoundly respect him for that.

“We notified the families repeatedly that they were not obligated to consent to handing over their loved ones if they so desired. And we warned them early and often that considering the… origin… of the substance we were administering to them, they could suffer adverse effects. Further, we alerted them to the remote possibility that the patients could be reanimated and accordingly, that they could become sufficiently-conscious to make the choice to withdraw themselves. To the best of my knowledge, they did not intentionally—“

“And what!? Now that they’re hurt will you replace them?”

“Will you use your Asgore-foresaken technology to recreate exact copies of them?”

“You REALLY think we won’t accept them, as they are now?”

“YOU are the ones we can’t accept!”

“monsters were never meant to return from death like this… this isn’t right.”

“SHOW THEM TO US!”

“STOP!”

“{{Paps?}}”

“EVERYONE!” he shouts again, from the right edge of the dais. The crowd quiets unevenly.

“My colleagues and I have already had preliminary discussions on measures we could take to… extricate, the amalgamates’ component monsters from one another. I suspect that determination is the key to doing so. After all, determination bound them together in the first place.

“And again, now that we have a steady, consenting source of determination, such experiments are more than just empty speculation. Actually, it was my idea that we allow the amalgamates to watch the proceedings tonight. I’d say that their soulological and psychophysiological states are confused and jumbled right now but…

"Gneh heh heh: that’d b an understatement. Your presences would completely overwhelm them. At least under this arrangement, they can see all of you, and be reassured that you are all eager to see them again.”

He walks closer to the center of the dais. “Please. I… I know that your emotions are running high tonight,” he pleads. “But…”
He takes a breath and sighs. “Think of what they would say. If they could… if they could be here, in the flesh, to see your behavior now. They would not want—“

The crowd soon drowns out Papyrus’s words.

“How dare you put words in our loved ones’ mouths!”

“For all we know they really did die… and you just cloned them!”

“P-p-please…” Gaster’s voice breaks. The only reason I know that he is speaking is because I can perceive the tiny changes in the environment around me: thermal, haptic, and soulological, produced by his soul. “I… I know these realizations are beyond painful… but you must believe us! Truly, the amalgamates are still the monsters you—“

The crowd shouts over him: “If they really ARE our loved ones, and not just clones, why aren’t they here!?”

“You TRIED cloning them, but you failed!”

“Hiding the evidence, huh?”

“Creating life using a machine?”

“You did it again, didn’t you!?"

“YOU CLONED MORE MONSTERS!”

“LIKE HOW YOU CREATED YOUR ‘SONS’!”

“LIES!”

“DAMNED LIES!”

“STATISTICS!”

Only an instant later, monsters begin rushing the dais.

It doesn’t take long for a crowd to surround me. Hands—paws—claws—whatever they are—they grab at me, shoving me toward the edge. The Gaster Blaster skids up my body so it floats in front of my face and fires a flurry of shots, but the crowd doesn’t disapate at all.

{How many monsters are even here!?}

[A lot.

[A hundred?

[Two hundred?]

My feet slip off the edge of the dais, the crowd holding me in the air, by touching me and with magic. Nearby, I hear Will screaming and Annie hurling prophanities, accompanied by bursts of orange magic.

[Load your save file!]

[Why!?]
[You know why! You can go back so you can tell Gaster about this. So less monsters will be allowed to come here! So he can—]

{But Papyrus said—}

[I know!]

{Gaster wanted to see everyone. This was a risk he was willing to take. He KNEW this could happen.}

{And I’m… I’m scared.}

{Can I even load if I’m scared?}

Silence from Chara. Their thoughts frantically rummage through the contents of my memories, searching for… for one of them—

When I saved, that morning, before I met with Annie.

They focus all of their attention on it, until it fills their thoughts AND mine. I almost feel the pressure of the metal chair under me, and the tugging of Annie’s nervous, purple magic on my body and soul, as she hands me the determination-induced modules for the first time.

Chara’s concentration intensifies, our souls writhing with the effort.

Nothing happens.

Hands… claws… whatever else… tear at my clothes. I gasp as some appendages draw blood, as bullets and other concentrated projectiles and constructs made of magic rake across my body.

{We don’t have healing items?} I ask weakly.

Chara, flatly: [Our bag’s gone.

[Again.]

[Oh.

[I get it.]

[Get what?]

{They want me—us—dead… REAAAAAALLY bad. And passion makes monsters’ magic stronger.}

{So…}

[You aren’t surprised…]

{Why WOULD I be?}

[How can you think this. Our HP’s at like… twenty—eighteen. And dropping.]

[I don’t know.] my mental voice is flat. {Our souls are weaker, like what happens when a monster’s around a human.}

[You aren’t scared you might die…]
Ehh. I don’t know. We’ll end up in that room with Annie again.} is my shrug-worthy reply. {Like you said. I won’t really die. It’s just that I can’t load my save file—

[NO.] they say sharply.

[I don’t think we’ll go back to that point.

[I don’t think we’re determined enough to load AT ALL.]

Play as many loops as needed until the next note.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnfRcP3vqbE

The next few moments seem to occur in slow motion.

I sense a tingling on my skin—

Yellow magic.

Powerful yellow magic.

The hold the hands—claws—appendages have on me loosens, as I slip out of their grasp.

The crowd, which had been roaring in my ears until now, quiets, until only a few… curious… whispers… remain.

I begin moving through the air, feet-first, my body straight as an arrow and stiff as a board.

I can’t even jerk in fright and surprise as the almost-deafening, whining and crashing of Gaster blasters fills the air. With every laser they fire, I’m pulled along faster and faster—

Pulled along?

They’re not using yellow magic exclusively.

They’re using yellow AND purple magic.

Time seems to return to its normal speed as the crowd begins roaring again. Roaring and… cheering? Chara and I scream as we zip across the room, seemingly over the heads of the crowd. I brace myself, expecting to crash into a wall.

After a second, my feet hit something… but it’s not a wall.

The surface Chara and I collide with is much… softer?

“GOTCHYA!”

It takes me an eternity to recognize the voice. Chara and I can’t believe it.

“{[Alphys?]}

“You bet every ounce of determination you’ve got it’s me!” she yells in my ear. “Get behind me and hold on. We’ve got a few encounters to clear before we get to the others. But with the help of these new hybrid-magic Gaster blasters and your determination, it should be easy! If you let me access your field of knowing, that is.”

Chara doesn’t have to control me, because I would have agreed of my own free will, but they do it
anyway: []“Of course!”

“Just… by Tesla, don’t let go.”

In shock, Chara barely manages to orient my body behind Alphys, using my fingers to grip her shoulders for dear life.

Only when Alphys starts running do I realize that we are in mid-air, not on the floor.

The next few seconds… minutes… are a blurr. The static of Gaster blasters sounds from nearby as Alphys and I part-run, part-leap, through and over the rioting crowd. Several times, when we launch into the air, I hear the Gaster blasters’ almost-deafening noise coming from underneath us. Arms jerking back and forth, monsters nearby yelping in pain after each motion, Alphys’s screams pierce the air as she clears a path for us.

[Wow! I never thought Alphys could hit someone sooo haaaard!]

{Noooo way!}

[Yeah way! She’s like, using purple magic from the Gaster Blasters’ to throw everyone aside and to jump really high. The Gaster Blasters under us are helping us jump.]

{So she’s rocket jumping—}

[I guess—if you think so…]

Eventually, we touch down, Alphys telling me to let go of her. “You’re standing in front of a wall so… yeah: just turn around so your back’s to it and hang out. Almost everyone’s here. We’re waiting on Sans—he’s getting Laura and Amy ‘cause—”

The hissing and crashing of a normal Gaster Blaster above my head… the… rending of metal several feet to my left…? and a more-than-a-little-gratifying “Fuck!” from Robin, also to my left, interrupt Alphys. From my hours of magitry, the smell which I now know is burnt fabric reaches me, and two thudding noises rattle the floor beside me.

They are quickly followed by a third thud… an impact that shakes the floor beneath my feet so violently that I’m about to fall over.

I begin falling over.

At least, my body WOULD HAVE begun falling over, if it weren’t for the blue magic surrounding me, freezing me in place, body tilted back, toes slightly lifted off the floor.

“SANS!” we all shout.

“Alphys?”

Chara shudders when they hear his voice: [I thought he’d be more tired after doing that!]

{Doing what!?}

[Bringing Amy and Laura over here and… tearing out part of the floor and ceiling and turning them as a wall to shield us?]

“What the hell was that?”
“I… I saved her—“ Alphys begins to reply.

“Alph? I’m serious.”

From his place on my left side, Sans cuts Alphys off. The floor starts shaking again… and Chara starts whispering [No no no no no not more eye glow of doom We don’t need that—

[Whoa.]

[What?]

[His eye lights are gone.]

[I… don’t think that’s ever happened before…?]

“Answer me,” he presses.

Alphys takes some deep breaths before replying.

“Yellow and purple magic.

“I… I guess I just cemented myself in yellow and purple magic.”

“And,” she talks more confidently, “considering that my stats just jumped to 64 attack and 20 defense from twenty-five attack and nine defense, I guess you could say that I’ve just gotten a boost in endurance and magical ability.

“And because I chose to save Pauline, I’ve been infused with a pinch of bravery too!

“Well, maybe A LOT more than a pinch.”

We all take a moment to soak in Alphys’s words…

At least, until a burst of orange magic washes over us… and I remember how I’m at twelve HP out of forty-three…

From behind, someone grabs me roughly by the shoulders and pulls me backward and to the right, closer to the wall. “This is urgent.” Annie whispers hurriedly in my ear. “You know those modules I gave you?”

“Yeah?”

“And how we think determination can amplify monsters’ magic?”

Yeah…?“?”

“Give them to us. We’ll be right beside you. Me—Alphys—Sans—we’re gonna draw strength from each other by sharing our fields of knowing. And we need you to be here ‘cause we want YOU to permit us access to your field of knowing too. We need all the power we can get.”

Before I can retort: ‘Don’t worry—Murry’s green magic’s gonna act as an aura, so it’ll heal us if we get hurt. That includes you!

As I reach into my pockets and hand the tiny cubes to Annie, I tell her, “Makes sense. I let Alphys into my field of knowing a couple minutes ago, so…”
“I don’t know what the hell’s going on here,” Robin confesses from behind me, “but if this means we get to watch more asskicking from the Gasters, and new asskicking from the Curies, fine by me.”

[He’s like, holding out Nice Creams--]

“Take these—“

Chara guides my body so I turn toward Robin and take four of the healing items.

“I can’t fight like you guys. I’m kinda like how Dewey was, till he got cemented in justice. I’ll toss ‘em to you guys when you need them though. I brought food for the afterparty so… might as well use it. And I started experimenting with making them heal HP over time as well as all at once so.

“SANS! ALPHYS! DEWEY! GIVE ‘EM A BAD TIME!”

“[Fucking hell this isn’t Smash Bros!]”

[He knows: he’s hyping ‘them up. ‘Cause that’ll make their magic stronger.]

{Oh shit you’re right!}

“Will do Crusoe. Will do.”

[Uh… Sans seems… a little too happy to do this…]

{…}

The whine of summoning Gaster blasters fills the air. “Sure: you can have Pauline…

“OVER MY DEAD BODY!” The noise and the makeshift wall don’t even muffle Alphys’s words.

“AND YOU BETTER LISTEN TO HER!”

{Wait what?}

[Undyne’s here!]

{{Thank Tesla!}}

“Her conviction trumps yours by a thousand times! If you don’t think she’s worthy of fighting alongside the Royal Guard then… then you’ll have to go through me!"

“And.

“Me.”

Hammer blows powered by blue magic and unflinching conviction, assaulting any souls that happen to be close enough to sense them: friend or foe.

**Stop the music,**

*an indeterminate number of impassioned attacks later*

… … … “—the largest public disclosure since Dr. Gaster announced the ‘birth’ of his first son—“

“—rekindling debate over their legitimacy—“
“—lobbying the Dreemurrite court for extra Royal Guard protection—“

“—sufficient personnel, but they were soulologically-overwhelmed soon after the rioting broke out —“

“—Snowdin residents have implemented a curfew—“

“—resigning in response to Undyne’s support of the Inertia Society—“

“—calling Alphys’s cementing ‘unnatural,’ seeing as the human aided her—“

“—William Asimov Moore undergoing psychophysiological and soulological therapy to treat his injuries after this latest riot—“

“—safe, undisclosed location, away from prying eyes—“

“—much worse, tibia honest, Mettaton. I mean, she ain’t shocked ‘bout them tryin’ to kill ‘er. Guess that should be worryin’ for us. But yeh: you’re the only journalist I trust right now. YOU, and the rest of Undermail. Thanks for keepin’ the public informed.”

“Of course Sans. Is there anything else you would like to say before we sign off tonight?”

“Pauline’s still gonna tour the CORE, when the time comes. Nothin’s gonna change that.”

“Thank you for your time tonight, Sans.”

“Any time, Mettaplier. Any time. Good OR bad. But ‘specially the bad.”

“Well you just heard it here, everyone: the Inertia Society is still carrying on with the goals it set forth in the very first ittiration of what would become the Unified Theory Papers, released to the public 201 surface years ago. I will bring you the latest developments as soon as I can.

“But keep in mind, my dear viewers: the human and monsters you see before you are more than just the focus of a story. They’re my friends. Their well-being comes before reporting the latest scoop.

“So, stop hounding me about getting Edison-damned stories out as often as a twenty-four-hour television network on the surface. Because that’s not what I am. And I intend to keep it that way.

“If you continue harassing us with these phone calls and emails,” Mettaton lowers his voice, “I will alert Sans, who has taken it upon himself to be the Inertia’s primary media contact in the wake of Pauline’s arrival in Hotland. After I request the disclosure of any relevant phone numbers, email addresses, and ethergraphs, of course. If you didn’t know what he is capable of before, you SHOULD damn well know it now.

“So, unless you want a bad time…”

From our seat next to Mettaton, Chara and I shudder. The furniture… and the walls… and the metal under our feet… shake for several seconds.

“Anyway, I am Mettaton Plier, reporting from the Inertia Society headquarters, and this has been Live Report. Take care of yourselves out there darlings, and may the thought of seeing the end to this violence fill you with determination.”

As of the end of Mettaton’s latest breaking news update, it’s been… four—five—according to Chara, who looks at the clock for me, six… hours… since the riot finally ended… or moved
elsewhere, depending on who you ask. The conveyor belts in Hotland have been almost entirely shut down, and access to the lab has been strictly monitored. It will continue to be strictly monitored until both the violence stops, and the threat of violence has disappeared.

I’ve watched hours upon hours of news reports, some from Mettaton, others from Reed and Wrighte, who bravely ventured outside to gather testimonials from the citizens. They tend to consist of two kinds of testimonials. The first kind usually sounds like an overeager Pyrope rambling almost incoherently about Gaster and how they finally have the chance to watch him create magitry in person. Alternatively, an Aaron makes well-meaning, yet creepy, bodybuilding analogies regarding Alphys’s cementing, and my hand in it.

The second kind either involves Sans, Chara, and I trying, and usually failing, to not swear over Royal Guard members condemning Undyne… or a group of damned Dreemurrrites chanting “Hey Gaster, on this day, how many monsters you kill today?” as close to the lab as the Royal Guard will allow, picket signs included. I even take the time to tell Chara where the chant came from: the Dreemurrrites appropriated a slogan protesting the Vietnam War.

Sighing heavily, Mettaton sets his camera on the floor. “Again: I am more than thankful you let me stay here tonight, Sans. Me, and the chief Undermail staff.”

He laughs… just a little nervously. “When I saw you right after the riot ended I expected you to shake us down for weapons—and then a lot more, for good measure—“

“Heh heh heh heh. And can ya blame me?”

“No no, not at all! Which is why I’m surprised you let us in so readily.”

“Ya risked life and limb for us in Snowdin. How could I forget that?”

He sighs. “I… I doubted ya. Real hard. ‘Cause… you’re a star. A YouTube star. Ya wouldn’t expect someone like that to have so much…

“INTEGRITY—“ he says firmly.

[He’s like, gesturing for Sans to stop--]

“Oh no! I’m not worthy of THAT!” Mettaton stops him before he can continue. “I’m just doing what’s right. Now I know about Steven, and how HE behaved with such integrity. You can’t compare—”

“Really?”

Everyone’s souls jerk in surprise when he speaks. The firmer notes underlying Sans’s tone still disconcert us, even now.

“ONCE, you lacked integrity.

“That rings true no more.”

We sit stock-still, waiting for him to elaborate.

“I define integrity as the power to withstand all pressures.

“Steven did so beyond his last breath.

“You acted as HE acted.
“Thus, you MUST possess integrity.”

We wait for Sans to continue.

“I… never would have thought of my actions like that,” Mettaton hesitantly says into the weighty silence. “But coming from YOU, it’s all so clear!”

Sans chuckles. Chara and I are immediately put off by his tone. He seems… amused—?

NO.

He’s CONFIDENT.

“Do not thank me: I merely described your conduct via two of Euclid’s axioms.”

Before Chara and I can ask him to explain his logic, Sans does so himself.

“First: given two constructs, one equal to the other, they equal each other.”

“So,” thinking aloud, I speak through my process, “you think Mettaton’s actions—”

“NO.” he cuts me off sharply. I flinch, not entirely under Chara’s control.

“The constructs are the definition of integrity and Steven’s actions.

“Steven’s actions embody integrity.

“Thus, they are equal.”

Several seconds? Of silence that no one knows how to break.

“Second: two constructs equal to a third equal each other.” He continues.

“YOU know this axiom as the Transitive Property, Pauline.”

I let out a long, soft, excited gasp, under Chara’s control. {Finally: a thing I know!}

[Me too!]

[[At least we’re not THAT stupid.]]

“Now, the PAIRED constructs are Mettaton’s actions and the definition of integrity.

“The THIRD is Steven’s actions.

“You KNOW the definition of integrity equals Steven’s actions.

“And how Mettaton’s actions equal Steven’s.

“Thus, Mettaton MUST possess integrity.

“To disagree is…”

An agonizing pause, where Chara and I slowly work through his explanation. [{I take it back—we really ARE that stupid…}
“ILLOGICAL.” Sans decisively finishes his thought.

The metal around us humms with power for a split second… and Chara metaphorically whinces, withdrawing into themselves. {Thaaaat’s, like, the most complicated way he could’ve said that MTT’s like, moral and stuff, EVER!}

[Yeh!]

If Chara could speak aloud, their voice would have sounded like a terrified squeak.

“I suppose,” Mettaton hesitantly replies, seeming to try to find language to equal Sans’s formality… even though we know it is futile. “Journalists don’t just hound political figures for dirt on the latest scandal. They uncover the truth. Enlighten the masses. Give a voice to the powerless.

“Regardless of what anyone says, and how much they are vilified for doing it.

“At least, this is what they SHOULD do, if they’re any good.

“I’m not disagreeing with you—I just think that journalists need MORE than integrity.

“But you’ve OBVIOUSLY thought about this much more than I have, so,” he laughs nervously, “nothing I could say will change your mind.”

[Sans nodded—AAAAAAND there’s the eye glow of doooom.]

{Yep! Sounds about right!}

“I have to respect your personal space, first and foremost. Yours, and everyone else’s. I’d be more than cruel for asking Will and his family for interviews right now.”

Mettaton sighs again, the table creaking under my hands, faint whisps of yellow magic floating off of him and brushing my face and arms. “Darling, I know I’ve asked this before, but I should have asked it again before I started filming. How are you holding up? I know you are not in the most, stable condition but…”

[He shrugged--]

“—humans are strong. You’re… you’re taking this a lot better than the Moores are. I’m shocked you’ve even stayed up with us so long… you must want to drop dead and sleep for a week after this is all over.”

I hesitate before replying, hearing Will and Annie softly talking in the next room, occasionally punctuated by two other voices: Allen and Touring, their parents. “Ehh: I mean… I’m not surprised so many monsters wanna kill me.

“Again.

“Everyone does.

“And I’m not surprised that soooo many monsters are pissed at me.

“Again.

“Everyone is.”
I,” Mettaton hesitantly adds, “have to agree. If I’ve got this right, then your determination is the only thing keeping you awake, even while your body BEGS for sleep?”

“Yeah.”

“So,” He laughs sadly, “you don’t have nearly as much to worry over as we do.”

“Oh: I wish.” I can’t help but shoot back as I take a sip from my drink. The gentle tingle of green magic washes down my throat, my HP gradually rising upward from twenty-five one point. “I just… it’s not like I wasn’t scared—I was. I couldn’t have used my determination to help me ’cause you can only do that if you want it enough… AND if you can like, get over everything you’re feeling.

“Which I didn’t.

“All those monsters being so angry, it made me feel so weak. Like…

“Like what happens to you guys when you’re around lots of monsters who feel something really strongly.

“And besides: I knew why they wanted me dead, so…”

We sit in silence for a few seconds. Eventually, I turn my head toward where I last heard Sans’s voice. “Why’s everyone arguing about you and Paps?”

“Not just us. Alphys and will.”

It took Sans… a long time to answer.

“But I’m not the one to tell ya. Not like this."

He stands from his seat and walks around to my side of the table. “Come on. Ya gotta meet the rest of the Moores. Then we’ll regroup. And ask Gerson to make us drinks—"

“Sans! I’m shocked at you! You know she is underage, even on human standards!”

“[{Wooooooow…}]” Chara and I proceed to shame Sans.

“Oh come on I didn’t mean that. After all, would the Paradox even effect ‘er? There’d have to be a ton of light blue and orange magic to—“

“Oh by Tesla can you please just get everyone out of here and back to the dining room before you soil Gerson’s name and make him seem even more unjustifiably shady?”

Sans chuckles. “Don’t have to. He’ll do it ‘imself…”

*multiple unsuccessful attempts at figuring out what’s in the Paradox later…*

Allen; listen from 0:44 to 4:15:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJmpUs40Hso&index=3&list=PL7l3f2gYDgl3eHEuHmG7zhIeP7y5-an#t=03m44s

Touring; listen from 4:05 to 4:55:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?
"I’m the one who figured out that green magic acts as a resistor in a magitronic circuit!" Touring proudly announces. "The unit for resistance in a magitronic circuit is named a Touring for a reason."

Several monsters start clapping, and I follow suit. "{[Duuude!]}"

[Wooooow Gaster: who knew you’d be the one to clap first?]

{Wow… I mean Touring deserves it but still…}

“And I also created the primary magitry components controlling the mechanisms policing the flow of ether into the CORE from its origin at the Barrier," Touring continues. “Me AND Allen… but mostly me.”

Annie and Will whoop, and everyone starts clapping again. “so really,” Annie slyly notes, “when you go down there, SHE’S gonna be the one helping you around, not Gaster—“

“Well Gaster did the most work out of all of us so…” Murry defends from on my right, “yeah: good luck with that.”

I turn to face Touring, who sits on the opposite side of the table directly across from me. “So… that CAD-and-CAD machine we used to bring back Gaster… you have more than one?”

“She’s making, nervous air-quotes?…]

“—to, ‘tamper’, with a monster’s birth.

“Will was our second child. He was born on the first day of the third month of 175X—“

“So October 16, 1989—” Dewey clarifies for me, from on my left side.

“Yeah I know—”

“Just making sure.”

“Anyway,” Touring continues, “the CAD-and-CAD machine didn’t come into play until…

“Until we…”

She sighs. “We saw it immediately, when Will became fully-formed. We put our very best efforts into… creating him. We hadn’t used magic for a week beforehand.

“But…”

“He had no arms, Pauline.”

I can’t help but reply with a “What?”

“We didn’t know what to do.” From his seat to the left of his wife, Allen speaks flatly, as if I had
never interjected. “We’d heard of human children being born with… with malodies like that but… but not monsters. We didn’t know where to turn.

“But the Gasters were there, to witness the birth. And… and Gaster kept a cool head!”

Allen’s burst of passion… and cracked voice… and efforts to hold back tears… disarm me.

“He offered to… to design mechanical arms for Will.”

I breathe, “This explains a lot—“

“Wait.” Will interrupts me from his seat to Touring’s right. “So you… didn’t know my arms were like, mechanical yo?”

{“[What do you think!]?”}

“So that’s a no,” Will answers his own question. “Hey mom—can you get up yo?”

“Of course,” she obliges, Will walking over to stand in Touring’s spot.

Claws gripp my hands, extending my arms to their full length—

That’s Will.

Will’s placing one of my hands on… each of his shoulders?

“Feel where the spiky bits end and where the metal plastic stuff starts?”

“Yess…?” I’m taken aback by his… sudden display of… trust.

Of… disclosure.

“That’s where Gaster attached my arms to me. They grow as I grow ‘cause my magic affects them almost as much as the rest of my body! They’re like if I had normal arms, but better!”

“Duuuude!” I remove my hands from Will’s shoulders and hold his hands as Touring continues talking again, sitting down in her son’s previous seat. “Will was homeschooled, like Annie had been, for the first couple years. And we had intended it to stay that way. ‘Cause we wanted him to be able to see Annie, even while she went to work for Gaster. Theoretically, he could still see her every day, before, while, and or after meeting with Dr. Gaster for diagnostics and responsiveness tests.

“But…”

“But what?” I ask.

[You know what happened.]

{Oh…}

“So,” Allen finishes, trying to fill the silence, “our family has had a long history with Gaster and his family, long before the first day of 147X, when Annie was born.”

Chara and I, in unison: {[July 10, 1961.]} 

“In fact, we were there when Sans was born.”
“More like in the other room,” his wife corrects, “waiting with the Curies, but—“

[She shook her head.]

“—you get it.

“We watched Gaster struggle to raise his sons, all by himself.

“We watched him struggle to balance work and his family life.

“And OF COURSE, we watched him constantly contend with the… allegations and controversy… surrounding Sans’s and Papyrus’s births.”

“What allegations?”

“You heard the protesters earlier.” Gaster reminds me from the head of the table. “Accordingly, you have already acquired rudimentary knowledge of some of the… dilemmas… I had grappled with for the two-and-a-half decades proceeding my death.

“And… what I must grapple with again, now that my family and the Moores’s family have reunited…”

“Uh… the…” I grope for the right words. {I can’t remember…}

Without warning, I ask, in words that aren’t my own, [“You mean the cloning right?”]

[You might’ve forgotten. But I didn’t.]

{I—} I begin to reply.

[I know you don’t mean to hurt him. But still: I’d think you’d remember something like that.]

“Yes, actually.” Gaster confirms. “Recall from your studies how two monsters must channel magic in order for a monster child to be born. By applying Alphys’s research, we know now that the miniscule amounts of determination in monsters’ souls allows them to give birth to children. Their desire to live, when channeled into the process, spawns a monster child.”

“So let me guess: since you’re telling me it again that’s not really true.”

[Gaster nodded.]

“Correct. What we taught you was true until… hmm… 1970, according to the Gregorian calendar.

“156X.

“The first day of 156X, to be precise.

“You must have wondered, after learning of this process, how Sans and Papyrus were born.”

Before I can answer, Mettaton pipes up, from the opposite end of the table to Gaster. “And no: their second parent isn’t dead.”

Chara and I groan and cringe after a second.

“Yeah I’ve thought of it. I wasn’t thinking of THAT… I think… I don’t know… but what I was thinking wasn’t that…” I stumble over my words, unsure of how, or if, I can make up for my
morbid thought.

“The Moores have alluded to it, for they have mentioned how Will’s, condition, was the fourth time a CAD&CAD machine played an integral role in a monster’s birth.”

I wait silently for Gaster to continue.

“I so desperately desired to have children.

“However, I…”

Barely managing to hold back tears, Gaster says, “I was utterly alone. By that time I had been the only skeleton left in the Underground for decades, in fact. Since the Inertia Society was founded, so long ago. The remainder of my kind had either been killed during the tumultuous years directly succeeding the erection of the Barrier, or they had been overcome by our circumstances and had fallen down.

“Thus, I assumed—justifiably so—that once I fell down, for whatever reason, my kind would cease to exist.”

Gaster begins to cry proper. “After years of throwing myself into my research, and intensive thought into our preexisting knowledge of soulology, I had an idea. I knew that although I, like any other individual monster who so desired, could have children without assistance, the aging process would be greatly accelerated. Thus, why monsters have children with a partner. To… bear the burden alongside another.”

Somehow, Gaster sobs harder. “Though fully capable of doing so, I…

“I could not…

“I knew I would not survive the decade, if I created Sans and Papyrus alone.

“And… if I was to raise them in accordance with human customs, I could not allow them to grow up without a parent or parents who possessed a greater-than-comprehensive understanding of such matters. Though I knew monsters who could have taken up the role, and performed it well, I did not want my children to suffer the consequences of being the only skeletons left in the Underground, with no one to protect them or act as a role model for them.”

“Thus, I utilized the same CAD-and-CAD technology used to create the components of the CORE. Rather than inputting architectural plans into the machine, and locating an architect to interface with it, I connected myself to the system for inputting the required blueprints, AND the system requiring a monster’s presence, necessary to imbue the finished product with magic.”

Entranced, I sit completely still. Gaster’s voice is still cracked, but he has all but stopped crying, and his words are full of resolve.

“This process cannot be replicated by a machine. By nature, magitronics, and similar objects created to harness magic, require a… living component, to operate and or to exist. Thus why computers of many varieties are powered by a monster’s soul—“

“But the yellow magic from the CORE—“ I begin to interrupt.

“You are correct.” Gaster firmly states. “The yellow magic transmitted by the CORE supplies monsters’ magitronics with energy.
“But you must simultaneously realize that the magnitude of that power is dependent on input from a monster’s soul. Because a monster uses their soul to interface with magitronic devices, such devices rely on their presence to operate. That, and the Barrier is composed of human souls.

“When operating a CAD-and-CAD machine, a monster must imbue the object they desire to create with magic, for magic originated from living beings.”

“I did that for you…” I realize. “I did that for you, when I let everyone use my determination. But we got you out of the Void—we didn’t make you from scratch.”

“Precisely. My case was much more complicated but… yes; you served the same purpose as I had, but under greatly-magnified circumstances.

“Rather than half the burden falling on me, and the other half falling on a partner, a vast majority of the soulological burden of creating my children fell on a machine.

“And as the result of my preparation, on July 10, the first day of 156X, I created Sans.”

He pauses… presumably to allow me to absorb this information.

“And in my subsequent magic-deficient state, I humored Dewey, and gave him leeway to name him.”

He chuckles nostalgically. “Sans teeth, sans hair, sans everything… I never realized that his birth would coincide with a pun of that caliber.”

I groan… and Chara metaphorically-pokes me. [Why are you cringing. And what’s so funny!?] {Ugh… freshman year high school flashbacks… it’s a reference—}
[To WHAT!?] {Shakespeare.}

“However… it was entirely justifiable that he choose such a name. Us skeletons are essentially humans… sans… most of these components, after all. For a human, we are monsters, sans most of what would make a human… human. As well as the aspects which would make a monster seem inhuman. For the vast majority of monsterkind, we are at the absolute bottom of the uncanny valley, regarding appearances and relatability, as Television Tropes and Idioms has taken to referring to it.

“Exactly 540 days—or eighteen thirty-day Gregorian months—later, Papyrus was born, and before I began the process, I notified Dewey that I would give him complete control over naming him.

“At that time, Sans had just succeeded in two tasks which would have taken the majority of monsters several more Dreemurrite months to complete: writing his first complex sentence, and computing his first mathematical calculation requiring multiple operations. He performed both of these tasks on paper crafted from the grass by the river which winds through the Underground. Paper Dewey invented, so us monsters could copy and preserve human documents in a more resilient form, in an age before computers and scanners rendered such laborious efforts trivial.

“Paper which we utilized to journal our thoughts immediately-succeeding my labor. And the paper which we have utilized to record our research, including the Unified Theory Papers.

“The species of plants we have chosen to undergo the manufacture of this kind of paper are not
similar to the papyrus reed in any way, but…”

He chuckles again. “It is the thought that counts, as they say.”

Chapter End Notes

Here is the link to the TV Tropes and Idioms page explaining the Uncanny Valley. I accessed this page for the first time on July 1, 2017.

http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/UncannyValley

As for Allen and Touring, their voices come from Man Who Speaks in Hands, an Undertale comic that I listened to in the weeks leading up to me beginning Visiontale, dubbed by Studio Cat Bird. Even though their voices are good, Gaster's voice wasn't what I had in mind for this timeline's version of him. When Visiontale Gaster was first introduced, I mentioned that he had the voice of the Gaster from Ask Frisk and Company, but the personality of the Gaster from Man Who Speaks in Hands, for good reason.

Alphys Takes Action is a very interesting idea for a boss fight. I loved the idea so... it was only fair that I inserted an annotation linking to that theme when Alphys was cemented in bravery, perseverance, and justice. What she says when she confirms what forms of magic she has cemented herself in, and her stats of 64 attack and 20 defense, are a tribute to the introduction of, and the act of checking her stats, during that fight.

Here are the websites I used to help me understand Euclid's axioms. I accessed both of them for the first time on March 30, 2019.

https://www.storyofmathematics.com/hellenistic_euclid.html

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Euclid

Specifically, I had Sans rephrase Euclid's fourth and first axioms, respectively.

Time to address the speculative, immersive, and annoying-to-calculate dates for this timeline's calendar!

As Gaster said, there are 343 days in the Dreemurrite year: seven months of seven weeks of seven days. However, when the system began to be used in 1814, there was no set start date, for reasons which will be mentioned soon. Suffice to say, in modern times, the year begins on July 10, and ends 343 days later.

That gap of time between that 343rd day and July 10 is... important, as Gaster said, in the last chapter.

Now you all know when the Inertia Society was founded... and how old most of the "contemporary" cast is... meaning Sans, Paps, Will, and Annie are oooold... at least, when compared to me...

Out of the characters discussed thus far, Sans and Annie share a birthday: July 10th, in human surface years. Papyrus was born on January 1, 1972, or on the 29th day of the
fourth month of 157X.

Undyne was born on May 19, 1975, which is the 20th day of the 7th month of 161X.

I'm proud of how I conceived of this calendar. After all, though the Gregorian calendar, with 12 months of 30, 31, or 28/29 days, is all well and good for us, it relies on the motion of the earth around the sun, and the moon's phases, and how the earth's rotation creates the moon's seeming changes in size for observers on earth.

Yeah... cycles like that wouldn't mean anything to beings who have never seen the sun, those who have only read about the sky and sun and stars from old surface textbooks... and later on, photographs and video. Also, seven is an important number for them, so it makes sense that they'd design units of time around it.

I was also able to flesh out this calendar because I found a web site where you can calculate the date X days from a certain date, and perform other useful time and date functions

[Thank Tesla!]

From now on, when appropriate, I'll write dates in Dreemurrite years in the following format. Keep in mind, this is similar to the non-American format for writing dates, which is day/month/year. The months don't have names yet... but they will eventually.

day of month/number of month/year

Therefore, Undyne's birthday is:

20/07/161X.

Papyrus's birthday is:

29/04/157X.

Will's birthday is:

01/03/175X.

The date which is relevant for most Undertale fans, is Sans's birthday... which is:

01/01/156X.

As for why July 10 is the first day of the Dreemurrite year? It's not explicitly explained in-story, to my knowledge.

We've been using his name as a euphemism this entire time, and it's Gaster's middle name.

July 10th is Nicola Tesla's birthday.

Specifically, he was born on July 10, 1856. In Dreemurrite years, he was born on the first day of the first month of 42X, or 01/01/42X, using the method the characters in my AU would use to write the date.

Make of that what you will.
[Conspiracy theorists go!]
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Finally! Backstory on Sans’s, Paps’s, and Alphys’s childhoods!

That, and more feels and ethical dilemmas... although there's an ethical dilemma in every chapter now, so...

[Get used to it.]

If you want to know about my thought processes for my music choice for this chapter, the various... aspects... of the characters' backstories, my plans for the rest of the story, and the... references... that the characters make, read the endnotes. Otherwise, ignore them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

34

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qZVNNITypE

“{Wait whaaaat!?”

“Again?” Papyrus asks incredulously. “How many times must you do this!?”

“Like what else am I supposed to do!?”

“This isn’t even the first time,” he replies. “We’ve told you so many things about us that I would think—!”

“Weeeeeell…?” I cut him off, “yooooooou’re wroooong! Like, how would I have known that you literally had one parent? And not ‘cause your second one was dead? Like, I had—have—friends who had one parent but—“

“In that case,” Papyrus amends, “your reaction is less jarring but…”

[He shrugged—woooow Paps that’s a first—]

“--gneh. By now, I should have a swear jar for this—but instead of having you put in one gold every time you swear, you put in one gold every time you flip out over a thing!”

“Let me guess: ya think I’m old. Me and Pap—“ Sans begins to say.

I finish his thought for him: “I mean I called UNDYNE old!”

“Heh heh heh heh. Point taken.”
“One gold for the plot twist jar, if you please—“

[“You can’t be serious—“ ]

The unmistakable crinkling of paper being set down on the table answers my question. I stand from my seat, protesting to Chara all the while: {Hey—why are you making me—!?}

[I don’t wanna pay him! You really want there to be a swear jar for when we freak out!?]  

{Nooooooo…?}

[I got this!]

Under Chara’s control, I turn toward the others: {[“Dude—someone get the pen!”]}

“Oh heeeell noooo I’m not getting involved in entangling alliances!”

[Murry?]

[You’re dead to me.]

{Same.}

“WAIT!” Papyrus shouts. “Why are you still writing things down!? The human stopped flipping out!”

“Like you said: one gold for every time you flip out—“

Basically everyone in unison: {[“THAT’S NOT WHAT HE MEANT!”]} 

Papyrus, Chara, and I, before Sans can reply: {[“NO—I AM NOT PAYING YOU TAXES!”]}

“Well WHAT ELSE can I take?”

“That’s true!” Alphys bursts out laughing. “Because we can’t even be certain of death anymore! Only taxes!”

“DAAAAAMN IIIIT!”

Papyrus… sounds like he’s either laughing, laughing so hard, he’s crying, shouting in defeat, some combination of the three… or all three…

All the while, Sans scribbles rapidly on the sheet of paper… tearing it slightly multiple times in the process. After a couple more seconds, he drops—flings? —the pen.

“Mark my words: you haven’t heard the last of this…”

Everyone takes several seconds to contemplate the agreement they have entered… and the taxes I’ve forced everyone to pay.

“When I asked ya how old ya thought I was,” Sans breaks our collective reflection, “back in Waterfall… I was curious ‘bout what you’d say. ‘Cause monsters’ voices don’t reflect their age.”

“I mean…” I struggle to articulate my thoughts, “I, I don’t know how old I thought you were! Like, I assumed you were young ‘cause you knew about gaming and stuff, and like, Toriel didn’t know
about games, and like…”

“You aren’t wrong in that sense,” Dewey chimes in.

“I’m not?”

“Monsters’ ages are only for the sake of record-keeping, like Undyne told you. Socially, Sans and Papyrus are relatively young, on many accounts. Monsters mark age in terms of soulological development. Like the cementing. That’s why me and Murry are so happy for Alphys! She was born exactly five years after Sans but she was only cemented now—“

“[Holy shit.]”

“In human terms,” Murry thinks aloud, “Alphys is pretty young, and not as mature as her numerical age would suggest. Definitely a couple years above drinking age—hell we use cementing as the mark for when a monster can drink—“

“Not like anyone uses it,” Annie perks up. “Seriously—I had lots of friends growing up who like, cheated the system…?”

“So yeh: that part of the menu at Grillby’s ‘bout non-cemented monsters not bein’ allowed to order drinks—“ Sans begins to clarify.

“Dewey!” I laugh. Duuuude! You can drink now! Legally!”

“[Eh!]” Everyone shouts in agreement and celebration.

[He’s… blushing…?] The sociologist laughs as well. “Yeah. As they say, that would be funny, if it weren’t so sad.”

[Sans don’t look at Alphys like that! That’s soooo wrong—]

{… Whyyyyy??}

[He’s, like, planning a thing--?]

{{Oh Fuck no!}]

“I think Grillby’s makin’ somethin’ for ya in the other room Alph, to help ya get over the bullshit outside—“

[She’s like, blushing really hard—]

“I… I d-d-don’t know whether t-t-to be thankful for th-th-that or w-w-worried… b-b-but…

“I think…? I appreciate it…?” Alphys attempts to respond to Sans’s… encouragement.

“Heya that’s the spirit—“

“Oh…” Alphys groans at Sans’s alcohol—spirits—pun—

“Edisondamn it…“

{Dude—why’s Paps, like, headdesking?}

[’Cause he can’t even…?]
{Yeeeeeaaaah… I’m with him—}

I don’t even object as Chara forces me to put my head down on the tabletop for several seconds.

The conversation pauses until I’ve lifted my head up again.

“Point is,” Murry huffs, “Alphys is over 21, in human years. I’d bet she’s at least five years more than that, at the very least. Can’t say for sure though.”

“At least we have something in common with normal monsters for once,” Alphys quietly says. “Even if that good is… drinking away our problems with everyone else. For once we won’t be ridiculed for…

“Actually, I think it’d be easier to say what we HAVEN’T been ridiculed for.”

“What do you mean?”

No one answers.

If I don’t ask, then they won’t talk about it.

I HAVE to ask.

“Is it about the Determination Study?”

Silence. {Oh God no not again…}

“Yeah,” She replies slowly. “But that’s only a small part of it. Gaster’s the one who knows it all.”

[Oh man… get ready ‘cause this is gonna be a story…]

{Why?}

[Gaster’s like, staring at us really hard and everyone’s leaning in to hear him.]

{Oh. It’s one of THOSE things.}

“Sans’s and Papyrus’s births were the culmination of decades of research regarding our efforts to shape monster society to more closely mimic human society. For if we raised our children utilizing identical methods as those utilized by human parents and their children, my colleagues and I believed that they could hasten the older generations’ integration into surface life. By that time, we theorized that they would have adapted human habits as their own.

“We surmised that such familiarity would ease the minds of the humans we met. That if we succeeded, our behavior would reassure them that monsterkind had, indeed, progressed in all senses of the word, that we had not descended into barbarism upon our imprisonment.”

I comment at once: “I mean that’s fair. Like, I was surprised you like, did so many things like humans do. Which is good—’cause I don’t know what I would’ve done if you guys didn’t.”

“I raised my sons according to human timescales as much as could be managed, meaning they grew up around a twenty-four hour day, day-night cycle. I ensured that they possessed sufficient mathematical confidence to convert Gregorian dates to Dreemurrite dates, and vice versa, with ease from a young age. And I emphasized to them how monster lifestyles differed from human ones.”

“I still remember dad telling us stories about monsters being confused about human hygenics and
circadian rhythms yo!” Will adds.

“In the 170s?” I emphasize. “The MID 170s?”

[Everyone’s nodding really really hard.]

“Yeah! It’s… like what Dewey said: that would be funny, if it weren’t so sad…” Will says sheepishly. I giggle a little at his sudden change in mood. “I mean I got it, ‘cause I knew that ten A.M means morning and most humans work during the day ‘cause they can’t see good at night and you guys didn’t invent street lights until the 1800s but still. Allen said that lots of monsters didn’t understand that, when they lived on the surface. Even after two hundred surface years down here some of them still think it’s weird!

“My dad still does—“

[Allen’s laughing silently—]

I start as orange magic contacts me in quick bursts, each like a playful jab in the shoulder. [Not anymore,] Chara comments unnecessarily.

“He said monsters didn’t even have clocks in their houses for a long time, ‘cause why have a clock that uses hours and a calendar that uses days when you can’t see sunrise and sunset and noon and midnight?” Will asks, mostly? rhetorically.

Not for the first time, I marvel at Will’s insights… and then remind myself that he only SEEMS like a kid because of his speech patterns.

He’s… 26?, in human years… but most likely, he’s barely a teenager, on monster timescales. Maybe even younger.

“One of the most difficult concepts to enforce among monster families was that humans determine legal seniority via age rather than merit, or other indicators which vary between individuals,” Gaster continues. “Our efforts proved particularly challenging among deeply-entrenched supporters of the monarchy. Even among Inertia Society members whose families had histories within the organization spanning across decades and generations, the old ways were rarely eliminated entirely.

“One of the few redeeming qualities hardline Dreemurrites have found in my behavior is my belief in such customs, and ascribing tremendous value to them.

“The rates at which humans reached psychological maturity, and the varying durations over which such maturity developed, differing from one individual to another, resonated with us. Even so, we deduced early on that monsters age in an erratic manner, compared to humans. The Curies have copious firsthand experience with this matter.”

“Here’s the thing.” Murry explains, the warmth of orange magic tingling against my forehead and right side of my face. “Gaster mentioned Sans learning to read and write and do math ‘cause those are better ways of measuring maturity for monsters. We get down the cognitive and theoretical side of that a lot faster, since it’s a matter of being immersed in our parents’ fields of knowing. Proportionally, we learn it at a much younger age than humans.

“Magic-based concepts take the longest to learn, since they’re a holistic process. Soulological conditioning’s one of those things that monsters can only go through by being around other monsters. Like how humans can only learn certain social skills through interaction with other humans.
“The only thing that takes longer to learn is how to anchor a monster in a human’s thought processes, and for them to realize that these processes guide humans’ perception in every way, whether it’s similar to how monsters do things or not.”

As if on cue, the entire room and I recite in unison, “[[Their values. Their reasoning. Their mastery of the world around them.]]”

Sans laughs. “It took the Inertia Society a while to realize that magic and the laws of physics don’t mix. But not ALL the time.”

[He shrugged.]

“Or maybe they work in tandem. We’re still not sure.

“The best example’s gravity: ya have to know how it works so ya can defy it usin’ blue magic. Lots of monsters find stuff like physics and chemistry real hard for that reason. Why use a machine to perform a chemical reaction when ya could do it yourself?”

“But Alphys, my brother, and I could perform mathematical and physics calculations far more effectively than monsters whose exposure to human methods wasn’t nearly as immersive, because Gaster and Dewey taught us to perceive things how humans did!” Papyrus explains. “Actually, they forbade us from using magic until we could calculate the force needed to lift an object, or move it in a direction, or many other tasks we would perform regularly, for that matter.

“These computations are much too complex to perform in real time. And as you were taught in high school, they don’t describe real-life interactions perfectly. but knowing that they existed, that these equations simulated tangible forces, and that they governed our soulological interactions, increased the precision of our magic immensely! Because we knew which aspects of the physical world we had to overcome in order to exert our fields of knowing over them!”

“{Duuuude!}” is all I manage to say… at least until Chara mentally pokes me in the ribs. {Fine fine I’ll say more! Jesus…}

“That’s true,” I begin to say. “’Cause if you know about gravity and chemical reactions and stuff, you know that you have to deal with them wherever you go. Whatever magic you’re using. The only way anyone can, like, ignore them, is with determination.”

“Sans and Papyrus were among the first generation of monsters to immerse themselves in human experience from birth. Among a not-insignificant percentage of the population, my family became the exemplar of such an upbringing, in fact. I homeschooled them until I deduced that they possessed sufficient soulological precision and human knowledge: academic and social.

“By the time they entered school, in your… hmm… sixth grade… their twelth year, they began learning the skills necessary to expand their human and monster-oriented educations proper. By then, the Inertia Society had conducted the prerequisite research to adopt human academic practices to suit monster students, many of those techniques being considered radical or experimental by human educators at the time. Our trial programs with charter schools and mobile on-demand courses had mostly come to a close.

“By 166X, a sufficient number of Inertia Society members had undergone the necessary training to become teachers, adapting their classes and schedules to accommodate their varied student bodies. The school my sons and Alphys attended is walking—belting—distance away from here, as a matter of fact.”
“{Heh?}”

“The conveyor belts,” Alphys reminds me.

“By Tesla, I just realized!”

As Alphys speaks, her purple magic jerks on my body, soul, and chair, lifting me off the floor and shaking me in midair for a second.

“You haven’t left the lab since you got here, haven’t you!?” My chair, body, and soul move sharply in time with her words.

“Uh…” I rack my brain, trying to recall a time I’ve left the lab, my train of thought being constantly broken by Alphys casting magic on me and my chair. I agree with Alphys after several seconds: “Yeeeeeeaaaaah… noooooo.”

“Remember the conveyor belts you used to get here?” she asks.

“How could I forget?”

“We were some of the first students to use those kinds of elevated conveyor belts to get to school! Because until then, the city planners placed them on ground level. When there WERE conveyor belts, that is. Till we started school, there weren’t that many of them at all.

“We should show you the rest of Hotland some time!” Alphys suggests excitedly, shaking my chair and body anew. “I… I think you’d love it. We can show you around before we take you to the CORE.”

“I’m gonna hold ya to that Alph.”

“Not like I’d forget!”

[“{Shit no—not more paper!}”] I don’t even object as Chara shouts in my voice.

“Why not?”

[Sans—why is this sooooooo funny to you?]

“Ya learned about enumerated powers,” he snarks, pen continuing to scribble too rapidly for anyone’s liking, “didn’t ya? The power of the purse, as they call it? There’s gonna be PLENTY of plot twists there to tax…”

I… and from the sound of it, several other monsters around me, groan, “Ooooooh maaaan what have we done?”, or variants of it.

**Stop the music.**

“Guys?” Allen asks.

Everyone groans in acknowledgement.

“Are we done regretting our life choices?”

I answer “Yes.”

A few monsters groan “no…”. 
“Well we’re not gonna get to all the important stuff any faster if you do this,” he points out.

{Aww—he’s trying to be the reasonable authority figure —}

[True.]

Rustling and creaking sounds from around me. [Wow—the headdesk virus spreads—]

Before I can ask: [Almost everyone headdesked. But they stopped doing it.]

“Anyway…” Allen makes the sound of clearing his throat, “as I was GONNA say…

“Sans, Papyrus, Annie, and Alphys stood out in different ways.” he muses. “Them, and ALL the monsters who went to school starting in the mid 160s. Each of them approached their education from a different angle.

“Papyrus embodied the volatile aspects of magic, how it ebbs and flows with a monster’s psychophysiological state. The more intuitive side. He wasn’t the best at applying human knowledge from the outset, but he could do quite a bit when he put his mind to it. He drew on the positive vibes from the monsters around him. He brought out the potential of everyone he met. And when he DID figure out something, he did it well.

“Why do you think he was hired as a sentry after Gaster died?”

“I never thought about that…” I admit. “’Cause it’s not just that he’s strong—it’s that he knows if HE’S strong magically, everyone’ll become like that, ‘cause they can feel it.”

“HELL YES THAT’S TRUE!”

I’m only SLIGHTLY surprised by papyrus’s… affirmative reaction.

Everyone else?

Not so much.

Annie mentored Alphys in her human-oriented education.” Touring says with pride, once everyone’s calmed down… a little. “Teaching her about engineering and the other hard sciences. Even before the Inertia Society reformed the school system, Annie excelled there—“

”DAMN RIGHT SHE DID!” Murry interrupts him. “She was the best in her science classes! She was basically at the top of her class during all of school! No one doubted she’d work for Gaster as soon as she was done. Hell—she started working for him while she was still in school.”

“Gaster you guys don’t have grades right? ‘Cause Dewey said you don’t have colleges.”

“We organize subjects loosely by the number of prerequisite subjects, yes, but you are correct: there are no grades, defined as sequences of classes. We evaluate student work by judging the quality of work, as well as the process they utilized to formulate the final product.”

“AND,” Dewey laughs a little, “LOTS of practical exams.”

“We utilize placement tests to determine a monster’s knowledge in a subject,” Gaster continues, “particularly for human-based ones. Courses requiring psychophysiological and or soulological knowledge, in tandem with human knowledge, require the most rigorous exams of all. These
placement tests constituted the exception to the rule. However, thanks to their upbringing, our children passed them with relative ease.”

“Let’s just say stuff like gravity bein’ a force that doesn’t work STRICTLY up and down isn’t well-understood by most monsters.” Sans points out. “Believe it or not. During the practical exams I took advantage of that. The proctor for my very first exam, she didn’t know ‘bout that aspect of gravity. So she was surprised when she saw me cast magic like that. SHE couldn’t do it ‘cause she lacked that knowledge. Her stats were at least five times greater than mine. But that didn’t matter.

“I told dad ‘bout it. That, and other related incidents. Of supposedly senior monsters bein’ unable to cast magic as precisely as kids my age. Annie did too. Lots of reports came in. Inertia Society members bein’ able to manipulate matter in one way but not another. Purple magic users bein’ able to move objects in straight lines, but not in true 3D paths through space. Green magic users bein’ able to heal only certain kinds of wounds.

“He was intrigued. So he conducted the set of studies which led to the Dual Awareness Principle bein’ discovered.”

“All ‘cause of you?”

“Not just ‘cause of me but yeah: my time in school was part of it. He convinced parents to send their kids to Inertia Society run schools, ‘cause with that education, they could cast magic more versatile than their stats’d suggest. Me and Annie and lots of our peers proved that.”

“Actually, we adopted video game and tabletop gaming terminology to describe monsters’ psychophysiological and soulological attributes after several years of schooling,” Papyrus eagerly adds on. “We realized that monsters’s stats and the colors of magic they are cemented in are influenced by a variety of factors. Not least among them being their life experiences! Sans’s instructor may have had more time to hone her skills in a practical setting, but she had not refined them as methodically or rigorously as Sans and myself and our Inertia Society peers. The knowledge of the forces that we had to overcome while casting magic… knowing our limits, and how to exploit the laws of physics… those gave us and anyone who dared to learn about human science that much of an edge!”

“What about Alphys?” I ask. “You guys said she was hella smart—but like, she wasn’t cemented back then, soooo… what was her deal?”

An uncomfortable silence. Chara emits uneasiness. I stop myself from asking them what’s wrong, because I realize that everyone will tell me soon enough.

They always do.

Dewey and Murry both sigh. “When she was born we didn’t notice anything wrong. Actually she learned to speak read write and do math far faster than Sans and Paps. But she…”

Dewey sighs again before continuing. “When she began interacting with more monsters for longer periods of time, she’d start stuttering. We tried helping her but… only now do I know that at the time, humans’ methods for dealing with those with speech impediments weren’t helpful at all. And unfortunately, psychophysiological development wasn’t as rigorously-studied as you might think at that point in time, so we had no idea where it was coming from.”

Murry sighs again. “When she started school, her teachers loved her. She was so eager to talk. She was SO smart! She figured things out faster than basically everyone else. You know how we said Annie was BASICALLY at the top of all her science classes?”
“Let me guess: Alphys was better than her?”

Murry and Dewey squeal with delight. “Not even in science exclusively either,” Dewey’s magic streams from him indiscriminately. “At that time, I was interested in the arts and literature. She wasn’t half bad in those classes either. She LOVED to learn!

“That is, when she wasn’t overwhelmed by everyone around her.”

His magic stops abruptly. I sit upright, the sudden absence of magic disconcerting me.

“She couldn’t handle as much soulological stimulus as the monsters in her classes.

“And her stuttering… no one knew how to react. Kids her age’d get… freaked out by how she couldn’t, like, keep up with them in conversation, even though she was so much smarter than they were. Stuff like that hurts monsters SO much more than it does humans. They weren’t soulologically-developed enough to see exactly how badly they were hurting her. Most of them wouldn’t have even made the connection between their treatment and the condition of her soul.

“Her teachers would ask her to repeat herself, ‘cause they were so impressed. They wanted everyone to hear what she had to say! But that’d only fluster her.”

“Was she scared of talking in front of the class?” I ask.

{The only experience I have with this was in a book I read one time in elementary school. It was… basically exactly like this.}

“Yes and no.”

Murry’s firmness is a wake up call.

“She wasn’t scared of speaking in front of the class—actually, the only times when she spoke clearly were the times she volunteered to do it. It’s just that she couldn’t project her soul out from her corporial body nearly as far as her peers, or for nearly as long. And being asked to speak spontaneously, that gave her no time to prepare, to concentrate her magic to the point where she could be perceived by monsters her age, who weren’t as soulologically-sensitive as her instructors.”

Chara and I, simultaneously: “[AND ‘cause she was still a kid, so she wouldn’t have been able to do it yet.]]”

Barely-suppressed magic humms in the air around me. I don’t need Chara to describe everyone’s agreement: I can feel it, in the sharpness of the energy everyone exerts.

“It didn’t help that she was exposed to significantly-less magic at home, ‘cause Dewey wasn’t cemented yet. The only reason she wasn’t stunted further was ‘cause of being around the Gasters and Undyne.

“None of us knew what to do and… well: you can figure out the rest.

“Her struggles stunted her psychophysiological growth so much that she couldn’t cast magic in an appreciable amount. She could interact with magitronics but that’s about it.”

“So she couldn’t cast magic but she still worked for you!” I turn toward Gaster. “DAAAAAAAMN!”
Everyone confirms my suspicions with equally-enthusiastic manifestations of magic against my body and soul.

“The majority of monsters didn’t agree with his decision, to hire me.” Alphys eventually says, her voice almost too weak to perceive.

The enthusiasm in the air dies at once.

“I was useless, they said.

“If I couldn’t cast magic, then I wasn’t even a monster, they said.

I… my…”

She makes a couple more hesitant sounds.

“My parents had raised me wrong, they said.” She finally finishes her thought.

“{[Fucking hell…]}”

Alphys sniffs. “That’s why Royal Guard members are resigning. Because they don’t like Undyne spending time with monsters like me. Because Undyne’s parents were well-respected. Because they stuck to tradition when it mattered, even though they were so close to the Inertia Society.

“Because they didn’t give in to their ways.

“Not when it counted.

“Because Undyne was… she was…

“She was born how monsters were meant to be born: lively and strong, with strong magic, without any help from a machine.

“Even if that meant her parents couldn’t live through the human equivalent of her youth. Actually, she was around your age when…”

“What?” I ask reflexively, even though I already know the answer.

“Mm-hmm.” Allen says softly. “Surely Dewey’s told you about the Underground’s fall from grace after Gaster’s death?

“How monsters lost the will to live, because they had placed all their hope on him, to return us to the surface?”

I wait for him to continue: even though I still don’t fully understand how it works, I KNOW that he can feel my desire to hear more.

“Booker and Betty…

“They…”

“Gaster was…

“He was one of the few monsters, if not the ONLY, monster, in the Inertia Society they trusted completely.”
Allen’s voice and magic wobble, as if he is about to cry.

“He was the ONLY monster they trusted to get us out of here.”

As I assumed, Allen begins to cry.

“He was proof to them that monsters didn’t need human technology to succeed—“

“But you mooched off our Internet—“

“They knew that. But they also knew that we had expanded on human achievements. We did more with the same information. With enough time, we could have come up with even more new things without help from humans but…“

“They…” I trail off, hoping I’m wrong… but I’m greeted by a solemn silence. “They fell down sooner than they should have.

“Or they were already weak at that point from giving their energy to Undyne and Gaster dying made it worse.”

No one confirms which one of my answers is correct. In the silence, Allen eventually stops crying, at least for the moment.

“I can FEEL how many questions you have, Pauline.” Annie says sternly. “ALL of them about Alphys.

“How could you guys say this?

“How could everyone do this to her?

“Why didn’t anyone DO something!”?

I don’t verbally reply.

“I know you learned about this in high school: it was the 1970s. Lots of behaviors were acceptable back then that’d get us fired now.

“Failing to accommodate and respect people with disabilities… that’s easily one of them.”

I sit up in my chair. “papyrus—THAT’S why you said all those things to me! About thinking killing me was a form of mercy! ‘Cause I was too weak to do things on my own! Is that why Toriel was so overprotective of me? Is—“

“Pauline!” Papyrus interjects. “You know I never intended—“

“Why’d you say it then?” I shoot back. “Gaster—if you really taught Sans and Paps to respect humans why didn’t you tell them how to treat handicapped people? HOW—!”?

“I am afraid Papyrus is correct,” Gaster replies. “When they were born, the surface was very much intolerant of those who seemed… abnormal… on their standards. I know from examining the contents of your high school education that you are aware of how humans treated those with mental illnesses, or sufficiently-severe physical handicaps.

“I am 99 percent confident that until this moment, you have assumed that monsters’ inherent empathy minimizes such differences.”
I try to answer, but Chara holds my mouth shut.

“However, it produces almost the exact opposite effect. Such differences become more apparent. The confirmation of a difference existing within an individual, but lacking the knowledge to properly identify it… that produces unspeakably poor treatment between monsters.

“And furthermore, there is a difference between possessing theoretical knowledge regarding a subject, and possessing empirical knowledge on that exact same subject. Yes—to you, his behavior seemed—and certainly was, by modern standards—insensitive, but he only acted in that manner out of good intentions. Keep in mind that none of the humans who arrived here before you possessed any physical or mental disabilities, to the best of our knowledge. Accordingly, our knowledge on such matters remained entirely in the theoretical realm until we met you, and were FORCED to provide accommodations.”

[“It’s still fucked up,”] Chara and I speak with the same voice.

“It’s like all the people in middle school and high school who kept asking me how I walked around and did my homework and used a computer—and if I had someone there reading out what it said on the screen—“

Magic of various kinds rises into the air.

I tense, stopping mid-sentence. [By Tesla I’ve never seen everyone so—FUCK! SANS—ALPHYS—not the Gaster blasters—!]

{SHIT!}

I wait on the edge of my seat, half-expecting Gaster to launch into an eloquent and blistering tirade… but nothing happens.

The blistering tirade would not have scared me nearly as much.

[They’re… holding back.]

{Why?}

[I don’t know. I kinda—]

Chara’s next thought vanishes into thin air.

My chair lifts off the floor, with me still in it.

Chara seizes control.

I try reaching out to feel who grabbed me, or maybe, even to use the edge of the table to ground me, so I can stand from the chair.

Our efforts are in vain: I sit erect, hands clasped in my lap, legs locked together, not of my own volition, as footsteps ring against the floor.

Force presses down on my body and soul, as if someone is gripping me by the shoulders from behind, but instead, the pressure encompasses —

NO.

Someone IS standing behind me.
Someone is gripping me by the shoulders.

[‘I’ve heard of people being grabbed so tight that they’d get bruises from the person who grabbed them… but I didn’t really think it was real…?] 

[Oh: it’s real,] Chara’s voice shakes with fear. [We’re… reaaaally gonna need ice after this is over…?] 

A current that I immediately recognize as yellow magic flows through me, causing my eyes to water, and my chest to throb, the pain rising and falling in time with my heartbeat.

“We share in your pain.”

I jolt in my seat… or at least, if I could move, I WOULD have.

SANS is behind me. [No wonder Chara’s so freaked out!]

{FUCK!}

“Each word doubles it.”

Each word—hell, each syllable—falls like a hammer blow on my body and soul.

“Briefly, the veil before your soul lifts.”

My chair rotates in midair, until I face Sans. His hands are still on my shoulders.

“Before you came, you seldom spoke of your hatred for such questions, no?”

The blue magic gripping my body and soul intensifies.

[{{FUCK!}}

[{{How does he know?}}]

Chara and I, with one voice: “[{{How the hell do you know!}}]”

From the suppressed gasps… and swearing… I hear from everyone else behind me, I know that I’m not the only one who’s surprised.

“Simple.”

[{{I have a feeling that this isn’t gonna be simple at aaaaaall…?}}]

“As you spoke, you conjured two constructs at once.

“First: the questions you spoke of.

“Second: your anger toward these humans’ lack of tact.”

I am about to answer, to say that he is right but…

“You agree.”

“[{{Yep! I—}}]” Chara and I begin to answer.

“Your soul’s sharpened focus speaks for you.” He cuts me off.
Again, he anticipated my response, even though I hadn’t spoken. {[How—!?]}

“Even now, you relive your outrage toward their crude ways.”

Again, Chara and I are about to respond, but…

“Your mounting agreement, inverse to your soothed soul, ends my proof.”

From the way the magic in the room recedes, it seems like everyone else has calmed down for the most part alongside me… for the moment.

Chara and I fully expect another statement, but it doesn’t come. [Dude?

[I think we’re good—he said he was done--]

{Like, I didn’t think he MEANT it—}

[No…? He DEEEEFINITELY means it…?]

As I compose my thoughts, the blue magic surrounding my body lessens in intensity ever so slightly, and Sans’s grip on my shoulders loosens. Chara and I relax and sigh in relief, mentally and audibly.

“I guess,” Chara and I cringe over the informality in my tone, “it makes sense that you could figure out what I was gonna say, ’cause, like, you could feel what I was feeling while you were talking. ‘Cause like, without that you like, couldn’t really do that.”

No response.

“But yeah—I hated having to tell this stuff to people—even my teachers, and at least THEY had a REASON to know, ‘cause they had to make sure I could access all their stuff.”

No response.

“And even THEN, if they asked just ‘cause they wanted to know, and not ‘cause they needed to know, it pissed me off.

“And it was always surprising for me when people said sorry before they asked and made sure they weren’t being rude—"

“They treated you as an end.”

Sans’s blue magic, and grip on my shoulders, tightens again.

Somehow, THIS statement seems sharper than all those that came before.

Chara and I, with one voice: “{[What do you mean?]}

“Those who confessed to the rudeness of their questions…

They treated you as an end,” he repeats.

I am about to ask him to clarify, but he continues: “I abhor those who failed to do so.”

His hands reposition on my shoulders, sliding slightly off of them and toward him. [Dude?

[I know we’re still sitting down, but like… HOLY CRAP!]
In a mental, frightened squeak: [I’ve never seen Sans stand up so straight before.]

More to themselves than to me: [Yep! He’s DEFINITELY taller! I’m not crazy! I think —]

I begin to shudder, even before Sans begins speaking.

“ALL. Beings —

“NOT. ONLY humans—

“Should treat THEMSELVES…

“and ALL. OTHERS…

“As.

“ENDS.

“NEVER.

“As.

“Mere.

“Means.”

{[I have a feeling he’s quoting something again…?]}

A silence that weighs down on me more than Sans’s magic.

ALMOST.

“In reference to your… comment,” Gaster speaks timidly, his voice wavering, “it should be unnecessary for me to go into detail regarding the treatment of those who deviated from the perceived norm during my sons’ formative years. The…

“Asylums,” He says, sadness overflowing from his voice, “and other related facilities. The unspeakable ‘treatments’ such humans suffered under. Many were misdiagnosed as well.

“Throughout the majority of my sons’ lives, humans on the surface refused to tolerate deviances of ALL kinds.” Conviction and… resentment… press on my soul as Gaster speaks. “And monsters also exhibited such behavior.

“The exemplar of this manner of stereotyping comes in the form of monsters’ treatment of Alphys’s entire family.”

The atmosphere in the room becomes ice-cold.

“For you must understand why such complaints arose around Alphys. Our access to your media, though limited, hammered home a particular set of values.

“Erroneous?

“YES.
“Biased?”

“Very much so.”

“Centralized around the United States and Europe?”

“UNDENIABLY so.”

“But they were a unified set of values nonetheless, one that many monsters followed and or admired. This will be explained in time, but know now that only after my passing did the Barrier settle under locations not below western nations with any semblance of regularity. Only through accumulated strokes of luck, and, once it became sufficiently-reliable, hacking your Internet, did monsters become influenced by non-Western morals and values.

“Accordingly, a certain subset of the population, one not nearly as miniscule as you may initially assume, posits that Alphys’s stunted soulological development and speech impediments derive from her parents.”

“But why!?” I ask without thinking. “Why the fuck—!?”

“You know why.” Gaster says firmly.”Homophobia ran rampant on the surface. We internalized that behavior, saw it as normal. Even if only a minority of monsters displayed it with such intensity, it became commonplace all the same. We rarely, or never, conceptualized it as conduct to… call out. simply because we had never conceived of it before. Never mind that our notions of…

“Of what you humans refer to as gender,” he says coldly, “rarely describes our society with sufficient accuracy. Only through humans did monsters conceive of the concept of gender, and all of the burdens accompanying it.”

[I… don’t think he’s wrong.]

[But I don’t get it! Dewey and Murry did a great job raising Alphys! She’s so smart! And nice! And she fixed all that stuff for you!]

[I know right?]

[I just… it’s so…]

Chara sighs. [Even after all this time I still don’t understand any of it…]

“Now, imagine the backlash when monsters discovered how I birthed Sans and Papyrus,” Gaster continues, his conviction rising, “and that as such, I would be forced to raise them alone. I have already begun receiving mail from the same monsters who ridiculed me before my passing. They have even begun thrusting the same arguments in my face, as if I had never fallen down.”

“They do not think it possible to balance work and home life.” Mettaton summarizes. “The classic dilemma of leaving the work force to raise children, and returning to it several years later, only to find that there isn’t a place for you. Except here, monsters either disapproved of Gaster having children, or Gaster not finding a partner to shoulder the burden alongside him.

“Even after he’s said in countless interviews that he intentionally decided to have children alone, to test the limits of our CAD-and-CAD devices. That he did not wish to burden another monster with his experiment. That no other monster alive faced his dilemma. So inevitably, NO ONE could understand him.
“And if any of you are curious, I scoured the Undernet and our newspaper archives for every story I could find about you before I met you for the first time, Gaster. So I knew what to expect. So I could write about you accurately.”

“That’s true…” I muse. “’Cause you were the last skeleton left. And everyone else… wasn’t…” I trail off awkwardly.

“I knew you’d get it,” Mettaton encourages. “Now imagine the implications of the CAD-and-CAD machines creating life. Or in Gaster’s specific case, reversing death.

“Imagine what these monsters must WANT from Gaster.”

Chara and I do as he asks, and come up empty.

“That their loved ones be resurrected.”

“…”

“[By Tesla!]”

“All the monsters who fell down in the wake of our imprisonment underground?

“They want them back.”

I am about to respond. “And they think Gaster can bring them back.” Mettaton cuts me off.

“But the Void—“ I begin to point out to Mettaton.

“THEY DON’T CARE.”

I reel for a second, trying to figure out who spoke.

[EVERYONE said it.]

[All at once.]

“GASTER… came back.

“They. Did’t.

“GASTER… doesn’t DESERVE to live.

“They. Do.

“WHO will end our imprisonment?

“You.

“WILL.”

{No wonder I don’t recognize anyone’s voices.}

{[They’re blended together.}]

Everyone’s magic humms in the air. I sense my attack and defense dropping, their collective anger, and resentment, and passion crashing over me—
It’s not THEIRS.

It’s the CROWD.

Everyone who rioted outside… those who opposed Alphys’s birth… those who opposed sans’s and Papyrus’s creation… THESE are the remarks they have said.

THESE are the emotions they have experienced.

They’re replicating them for me.

I breathe sharply, shocked by the weight of their magic being cast on me. I don’t know what to do. I can’t object to what they’re saying, even while I realize that without Gaster, I’d have no chance of leaving the Underground.

Simultaneously, I recoil from Dewey and Murry. Even while I know that their actions were a product of the time period when Alphys grew up…

I can’t help but hate them, even just—

Maybe more than a little.

“Pauline?”

I continue to sit in thought.

“Pauline.”

Touring is calling to me.

I take a few seconds to reply, waiting for the magica round me to disappate. “Yeah?”

“Know this: we’re not gonna pretend these accusations don’t hurt us. Hell—you probably know how much they hurt us just by sitting here and feeling our souls.

“I know about the promise murry made to you, when you met him for the first time. About being emotionally-open, like us.

“Don’t feel like you have to hold back. You’re pissed off: so tell us about it! If you’re upset, tell us. It’s better that way. Better than us walking around, feeling your feelings, and not being able to do anything about them, ’cause we don’t wanna hurt you by forcing you to tell us.

“It’s better we know why,” she says more gently, “so we can figure out a way to help. It’s counterintuitive to what you’ve been taught—I know that for humans, complaining actually hurts them most of the time—but trust me: this will help you.”

I contemplate her words for a moment, before agreeing. “If you insist…”

I allow Chara to take hold, combining my roiling emotions with their determination. I allow them to control my words, to speak every thought that crosses my mind, manners and filters be damned.

[I “I hate this.

[I “I fucking hate how this is a thing.

[I “I fucking hate that those monsters’ve been treating you like shit for so long.
I hate how Murry and Dewey—you guys could feel what Alphys felt but you didn’t know how to fix it!

I hate that I feel uncomfortable around you guys, just ‘cause my family’s Catholic. Even though we have gay friends that we’ve known for a long time—but I don’t think that even matters ‘cause gay people can’t get married in the Catholic Church, so they already don’t give a shit about them.

I hate that I think you—Gaster—raising Sans and Paps by yourself is wrong.

I hate that I think you—Dewey and Murry—raising Alphys is bad—even though I’ve known you guys for such a long time now and how nice you all are and how smart Alphys is.

I can’t help it.

I KNOW it’s wrong—or that lots of people would say that it’s wrong…

But I can’t help it.

That’s how my family was—is—probly still is.

I wanna say sorry for saying this to you guys.

And for hurting you ‘cause of it…

But I can’t.

What would I even say?

It wouldn’t even feel real!

Like yeah—I hate that me saying all this is hurting you guys, but how would I make up for that? I don’t even know which of these religious things I really believe in, and which ones I’m saying I believe in just ‘cause my family believes in them.

I don’t even know if I’m saying I believe in all this… progressive stuff… just so other people won’t hate me for not believing them… like yeah—logically I have no reason to hate you guys…

But… part of me still does.”

My train of thought collapses… or maybe it collapsed long ago, and Chara and I continued it out of cowardice.

You know what?”

It takes me an eternity to register who spoke.

“As much as you hate that you believe all this contradictory stuff,” Murry? continues, “I THINK it’s a lot more telling that you hate the thought of having to apologize to us… than for having all these, what you’d call biggotted, beliefs.

Beliefs that you were, to some extent, FORCED to have, from the sound of it.”

I’m… more than surprised.

He’s not mad.
{I think.}

[You’d KNOW if he was mad—it’s almost impossible for monsters to hide what they feel.]

“Really?” I ask for clarification anyway.

“Yeah,” Murry replies. “You hate that this is something you have to apologize for, even though when you learned these values, you were just a kid. It’s great that you know this—being aware of implicit bias, and all that. But that’s more of a psych thing—that’s Dewey’s expertise.

“And yeah—I’d be lying if I said that this… doesn’t hurt me.”

His voice cracks, but only for a second.

“You wanna apologize for thinking all these contradictory things,” he composes himself quickly, “even though you have no idea how.

“Even though people COULD call—and most likely—WOULD call that apology fake.

“You wanna make up for what you’ve said in a way that, does us justice. Maybe there’s a better way to say that, but…

“The fact that you’re saying it AT ALL means a lot to me.”

No one expected him to react this way.

[I wish you could see how surprised you are right now.]

“I can’t think of anything that’d help you do that—not like you were asking—“

I laugh. “True.”

“But I do have ONE idea,” He offers.

Before I can ask, Chara asks for me: [“What is it?”]

“Keep doing what you’ve been doing.” Dewey and Murry’s voices seem to blend together, their magic surrounding me completely.

Again, Chara speaks for me: [“What?”]

“You’ve already done so much by accepting us as we are,’ Dewey says. “That, AND telling us how you feel. Even if you hate it.

“You’ve already shown us so much kindness by agreeing to help us break the Barrier, and by becoming integrated into our culture. Even if you don’t know how to make up for what you’ve said, you’ll probly figure out what to do. You’re working off incomplete information right now, after all. There’s no rush.

“Even if that means that you have to acknowledge that you can’t apologize in a way that you feel is genuine, even though you feel bad about THAT too.”

“Couldn’t have said it better myself,” Papyrus is, very much aware of my dilemma.

He gneh heh hehs. “I thought you would cut either of them off, Sans.”
“{Same.}”

“Especially after your, ehm…”

Papyrus pauses, his light blue magic rapidly fluctuating in the air around him.

“I’m surprised you wouldn’t have anything to say about this, especially after your, analysis, of Mettaton’s actions.” Papyrus finally finishes.

“I agree with the Curies’ remarks.” He replies at once. “They—“

“REALLY?”

As soon as I hear Alphys’s parents’ reactions, I can’t help but laugh. {Hey—why are you making me laugh?}

[‘Cause they're sooooo fucking surprised—]

[I know that! But—]

[Come on it’s fine!]

“Wow,” Murry’s shock is palpable, “We’re both good enough for the resident philosopher, I guess. And that’s saying something! Like, Paps?”

“Gneh?”

“What’d Sans say about Mettaton —?”

“That he had integrity —“ Papyrus and I begin to answer.

“Whaaaat!? Noooo!” Murry and his partner gasp in unison. {[Dude —Dewey you NEVER swear!]}

[That’s how you KNOW it’s bad —]

[Exactly!]

“Crap —I wish I could’ve been there for that speech! Duuuuude! Like, that sounds insane!”

“I think,” Mettaton’s voice rises several notes—an octave, “intense, is the word you’re looking for…?”

[He shrugged.]

“But if YOU think it’s fine,” Murry’s voice rises in pitch, and magical intensity, in kind, “then, like…”

“What right have you to argue?” Dewey finishes Murry’s thought. [Murry nodded.]

Murry laughs uncertainly. “‘Cause based on the sound of that, like, interrogation? You did on Pauline, I have a feeling that if I TRIED to argue I’d get TOOOOOOTALLY fucked over—?”

Everyone at once: “Truuuuue…?”

“Since you’re going to learn how the CORE works,” Allen seems composed, somehow, “we’re gonna need honesty and full disclosure from you. Like what you just did. ‘Cause you’ll be the first
human who’s EVER heard the theories we’re gonna tell you.””

Mm-hmm.” I affirm.

After a short silence, Annie speaks up: “Hey mom? Dad? I think we’ve left The Crew—“

“{{[Ugh—]}}”

“—and Undyne alone in the other room too long. They must be hella worried about us. I left the Cards Against Humanity box with them, ‘cause I told them we couldn’t be sure when we’d be done explaining everything. And ‘cause I wasn’t sure if we’d be bringing up anything confidential so I told them they couldn’t be here. So who knows what’s going on over there?”

“I don’t hear them yo.” Will corrects his sister, as I cock my head to one side slightly, listening for their voices. “They’re probably being quiet for us. They’d sense if we were doing important stuff so—”

“Oh yeah—’cause monsters’ fields of knowing can be in places they’re not in.” I recall.

“Their presence seems welcome as of now.”

Chara’s soul quivers. {Why’s he still all formal and stuff!?}

[Fuck if I know! Why are you asking me!] Chara snaps. [I don’t get it either! We stopped talking about the meaning of life a long time ago! He SHOULD be all normal again!]

{Emphasis on SHOULD…?}

I turn toward his voice. “Duuuuude same. Like—“

“GERSON!

“The Oedepis Complex should’ve WON, DAMN IT!

“I thought you were in to that!”

“Mwhah hah hah! Really you little urchin? Normally I would agree, but you know that ‘a possible Muslim’ is clearly true! Because out of these six things, monsters do not require oxygen, I am not the biggest fan of most brands of chocolate—“

“{{[Booo!]}}” everyone responds.

“—we don’t have unrestricted access to Facebook and Netflix, and friends is obvious! I couldn’t live without any of you—”

“{{[Awww!]}” everyone reacts again.

In the next instant, everyone freezes.

It takes me… and from the sound of it, everyone else… only a second to realize that we’re eavesdropping on a Cards Against Humanity game in progress. Everyone part-groans, part sighs, part-laughs, as we listen to Gerson and Undyne bickering in the next room. “{{[Awww!]}}” Chara and I say again.

“That’s weirdly sweet…” I comment… Alphys’s bout of snickering indicating that she agrees with me.
“Mmm.”
[Saaaans?
[Why are you so amused!??]
{Why are you —!??}
“They played in silence to respect our privacy.
“Impressive.”
I stop to ponder his observation… but only for a second.
‘We began our new game at an opportune time.’ Grillby’s voice echoes through the walls. ‘We should ask them if they want to play.’
“I’ll do it!” Amy enthusiastically offers. “Not like they’d say no, but… we’ll see. It shouldn’t take long. Robin! You’re card czar!”
A hard slam on a table, accompanied by some footsteps walking down the hallway toward the dining room. “Dude Grillbs—get some cards for everyone else.” Robin asks.
‘How many?’
From the silence that follows, I know that Robin is at a complete loss. “Too… much… math… nooooo! It burns!”
“There are… uh…” Laura pauses, “twelve… Of them in there. And we’re using seven cards per player so… eighty-four…?”
‘We should divide the box in half and start over. And play two games simultaneously. There would be too many cards for Pauline to remember all at once otherwise.’
I call out, “True!” to everyone in the other room.
‘Or maybe we can use five cards instead. Humans only being able to hold only four to eight bits of information in short-term memory, and all that.’
“Sounds good!” I call out to Grillby again.
“Listen up bitches: if you ask me to read the card more than once, you can’t answer the prompt!”
“Have you no decency sir?” Sans asks almost too quietly for me to hear, and under Chara’s control, I start giggling. [Even I know what that is!]
{REALLY?}
Yeah! It’s that one dude who dissed that dude who thought everyone was communist!]
{Eh!}
“Man this is bullshit!” Robin reads from the other room. “Fuck blank!”
“Everyone?” Amy calls to us from her place in the doorway behind me. “Get over there before Robin gets pissed. He’s our second rules lawyer now. Apparently. But not our second tax collector.
We only need one of those.

“At most.”

“I’LL GIVE YOU TEN SECONDS--!”

Under Chara’s control, even though I would’ve said it without their help: [“Real seconds or sports seconds?”]

“REAL SECONDS!”

She begins to walk toward me—

“{AAAAAAAH!”

“SANS! Why the hell did you teleport the human over to the door! And she was standing only ten feet away from it, at that! She easily could have walked to the door, even though she has never been in this room before! And you didn’t even give any prior warning! Out of all—” Papyrus begins to shout, as we begin filing out of the room.

“Because Robin demands it, of course.”

{{i… don’t know what’s creepier: when Sans is all formal for real, or formal and amused…?}}

[SAME! These things don’t belong together! Stop it!]

“EDISONDAMN IT SAAAAAANS!”

I don’t even mind that Papyrus has caused me to lose a tiny bit more of my hearing.

As we walk out the door, Chara suddenly says, trying and failing to suppress laughter, [Dude by Tesla I just realized! I can read the cards to you so you don’t have to choose them at random!]

I gasp. {Whaat!?}

[You heard me!]

{Oh my God you’re right!}

[You wanna do it?]

{FUCK YEEEEEEAAAAAH! We can have a rando player this time who’s not me!}

[Does the thought of everyone getting back together and fucking around for a while fill you with determination?]

{Hell yeah it does!}

Chapter End Notes

Everyone’s back together!

Cue more weird and lewd humor from Robin.
Some clarification: when I refer to the "170s," and when Gaster refers to the "160s," we're referring to the Dreemurrite calendar decades. The 160s would have been between 1974 and 1983, and the 170s would have been between 1984 and 1993.

Here's the YouTube link to the Another Medium cover I used in this chapter! It's track 8 of "Fallen: An Undertale tribute." As you can probably tell, I'm using many tracks from that album in this story... I might as well say that Fallen is the de facto for Visiontales...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qZVNNITypE

I used this version since it's calming, and yet still conveys the futuristic connotations of the original, by playing at a constant, rhythmic pace. It complements the societal developments the Inertia Society puts into place, and the scientific discoveries they make, very well.

(sighs) Here's my thought process for Alphys's backstory, as well as I can explain it...

It was inspired by 1: some very very deep headcanons, and 2: a study now commonly called the Monster Study. Here's a link to a YouTube video explaining its... purpose...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZ3l1jgmYrY#T=03M08S

Listen from about 3:05 until about 4:55.

Yeah... the Monster Study provided ample inspiration for Alphys and how she developed her speech impediment, and her stunted soulological and psychophysiological development...

As for the parts about Dewey and Murry being blamed for Alphys's setbacks?

It was just inevitable.

Let's just say, when I realized that monsters would have been consuming media which was homophobic and ableist, and that us humans hadn't yet realized the moral implications of both of them...

Yeah.

That was... horrifying for me, to say the least.

They only would have known such behavior was damaging decades later. Everyone would have been subject to such conditioning... even the Curies. Even though measures which set standards for human experimentation already existed, the public hadn't yet begun treating those with disabilities of all kinds in... a not-as-crappe way.

Next, some realizations about the overarching plan for Visiontales:

Initially, I thought that conservatively, if I didn't end up straying away from my original idea along the way, Chara and I WOULD and SHOULD arrive in New Home at the beginning of the fifth chapter after this one. There weren't that many in-game plot-related events left to write about, even though there were several months of time left to kill.

You'll see that I was wrong about this estimation...
What succeeds this chapter is almost certainly one of the most well thought-out chapters, if not the most well thought-out chapter, of the whole story. Actually, I thought of the beginning and end of the story before I thought of the rest: the next chapter included.

One last note:

About the part where Sans says everyone should treat everyone as an end, and not as a mere means?

He is paraphrasing? THIS quote:

“Act so you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end, and never as a mere means.”
-Immanuel Kant

If you want to learn about Kant, watch this video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bIys6JoEDw

Kant will be VERY... VERY... VEEEEEERY... important for later on in Visiontale.

Not in the next chapter... not in the chapter after that... but overall, and relatively-soon, in terms of in-game plot events.

DON'T. FORGET.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

The chapters from now on are the most well thought-out of the entire story. Accordingly, I have a request to ask of you all, one which applies for every chapter from now on.

If feasible, use the music annotations. They're important to set the tone.

Why am I asking this for this particular chapter, you may ask?

"I cannot fight.
"I cannot think.
"But, with patience, I will make my way through."
—A sign in the CORE

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

35

… … … “{[Hell yeah!]}

“I’m surprised you kept the Oedepis Complex card for so long and didn’t play it on someone else!”

[Dude Alphys—why are you sooo happy about that?]

“I mean like, I’m shuffling my hand and putting down the one on the bottom so… ehh: I don’t know—it could happen.”

“And you woke up so damn early too!” Robin near-shouts from his seat across from me at the table. “’Cause seriously it’s like, six A.M in California right now!”

“I don’t even know what time zone we’re in anymore… and like, you guys mostly work around my schedule, so…”

Another verbal shrug.

“I’m trying to set my sleep schedule so it’s the same as Japan time!” Alphys begins to ramble as Chara reads out my cards, and I discard the ones I don’t want to use anymore… or the cards that no one in the current play group will EVER pick… “And it’s been going great! I can teach you soulology stuff and still have time to watch all the anime live streams when they come out! Either that or hacking into the anime-streaming web sites—“

‘You mention this a little too casually for my liking,’ Grillby somehow manages to sound uncomfortable, even after his soul is filtered through his text-to-speech device.

“I mean,” Alphys counters, “the Inertia Society’s been hacking human computers for a long time. Even when Gaster was helping us, it was the only way we could get certain information. It still is,
“Alphys?” verbally, Dewey gently prises his daughter away from her discussion before it goes on for too long. “I got a text from Sans. Pauline, the Moores, the Curies, and the Gasters have to get ready soon. The rest of you have to stay. There’s one more thing we have to do to celebrate your birthday. And I guess it’s another thing to celebrate Paps’s birthday too.”

“Which I still don’t get. I mean like my birthday’s, like, four weeks…? after his…--”

“It’s for convenience’s sake,” Laura explains. “Celebrating birthdays in clusters is kinda common. Especially if they’re close together—“

“But mine is so long after his—“

“For monsters above a certain age, four weeks feels more like four days,” Robin suddenly seems much less boisterous. “Like, we can live for hundreds of years and aren’t considered adults at a set age so…”

He trails off, knowing that I can finish his thought.

“But what are we doing?” I begin to ask. “You already made us cake like the one from Portal. Multiple times. And Paps figured out how to make that awesome Magic card reader that made brailling them, like, feasible…?”

“You’ll have to see.”

‘But Dewey. She can’t do that—’

“{{GRILLBY!}}”

[what the hell happened to him? I thought he was the reasonable one!]

{It’s YouTube’s fault!}

‘I didn’t mean to offend you. I was only joking. For the most part—‘

“I know I know I just didn’t expect that!”

‘From the looks of everyone else’s souls, you’re not the only one who’s surprised. I’ll put away the cards. Have fun! Have Papyrus send us pictures—‘

“But why wouldn’t you come? You’re—?” I ask

Dewey reiterates. “Sans only said you, the Moores, the Curies, and the rest of his family are going. This is our life’s work, not the rest of you.”

“I agree, standing from my seat. “Tell him I’ll be ready soon.”

“He just texted—” Murry’s voice becomes slightly muffled, as he looks down at his phone, “—that he’s—wait wait why the hell are you waiting outside in the hallway Sans—oh heeeeeeeeeell nooooooo you’re not doing that!?!”

“What?”

Murry sighs exasperatedly. “Just get changed before he gets all fixated on every little thing you do. Like he ALWAYS does when he gets excited.”
We all shudder… but especially Chara.

*Several minutes of arguing with Chara in the shower ‘cause not knowing what to wear… later…*

… … … [“Where do you think we’re going?”] Chara asks from beside my bookshelf. I push my dirty clothes into the Dimensional Box which leads to the washing machine, on the floor below ours.

“I don’t know but we’re going out. I mean Alphys said she wanted to show me around Hotland a while ago so…”

[“True.”]

Chara walks over to me and hands me my bag. [“Your phone’s charged all the way. I was holding it so it’d charge—”]

“Thanks dude—“

[“No problem.

[I’m just…”] they stutter, but not because they don’t know what to say. [“I wanna know where we’re going! I’m so excited! Dude—like, I’m really feeling what Alphys is feeling right now!”]

Though they have every right to feel excited, Chara’s been asking about where we’re going for the past ten minutes.

[They know full well that I can’t answer their question, so why do they keep asking?

{I want some quiet time before the craziness which is… everyone.}

At this Moment, I remember that Chara’s elementary school-aged. Their excitement reminds me of the same general mix of loud and obnoxious as the younger kids I had to endure at parties back at home. {Ugh…}

[What you think I can’t hear you!?]

I try to make up for my behavior, but Chara cuts me off. [“Look man it’s fine: you didn’t and still don’t really like hanging out with kids ‘cause they’re annoying and keep talking about the same things and annoy everyone and never shut up and always touch you when you don’t want to be touched—“]

“Yeah yeah I get it I get it—“

[“I mean you’re not wrong.

[“But you’re not annoyed at me,”] Chara points out the obvious. [“Well you CAN be but you know what I mean—“]

“Yeah I doo—I’m not ALWAYS annoyed at you.“

[“Point is, you like me.

[“That’s… rare.”]

Chara’s behavioral age has jumped from about eight? Nine? Ten? to around my age, if not older, in a matter of seconds.
“Not that many people liked me in school. I don’t even know if all my teachers did—“

“Dude like, it’s okay—“ I automatically begin to reply, only for Chara to interrupt me again: “I don’t know. It wasn’t normal.

“I KNOW it wasn’t normal.

“You felt that way too.

“You wanted to talk to people in a certain way but not everyone liked it.

“And you hated that.

“But… who knows?”

They suddenly seem very apathetic.

“You’re one of the few people who understands me.

“You LOVE that you’re not the only person who thinks how you think.

“And we’re both hyped to go out with everyone.”] Their tone lightens, as they squeeze my arm firmly, physically-vanishing from the room.

“So let’s get the hell out of here and see if Sans is ACTUALLY waiting for us—]

“[[Ugh…]]”

After a few minutes of walking and riding longivators, Chara and I finally arrive in the lobby of the Inertia Society headquarters. Cane in hand, I’m about to walk forward and look for the doors, so I can wait beside them, when a voice… stops me. “Hold on!

“Pauline!

“It’s Wrighte, from Undermail! Me and Reed wanna ask you lots of somethings!”

“[Heh?]”

Running footsteps from behind me, and fast bursts of magic.

I finally recognize his voice and turn around. “Duuuuude—it’s beeeen foreeeever!”

“I know right?” he rhetorically replies. “Me and Reed were just let in, ‘cause we heard you were gonna go out today.”

“Yeah!”

“We wanted to ask you for a favor.”

“What is it?”

“We wanted to film your reactions to Hotland. Mettaton and I are gonna commentate. You just have to—”

Chara takes control of my left hand. A pair of thin, oval-shaped objects land in my palm. “—wear these earphones so we can hear each other.”
“Okay.” I consent to his offer as I position them on my head.

“And we just got Sans’s permission to put a Go Pro cam-like thing on your glasses. A first person view kinda thing.”

“Yeah makes sense.”

“It was the least invasive thing we could think of. He’ll put it on when he gets here so can you hand me your glasses? Everyone’ll see what you would’ve been looking at if you could see. But mostly it’ll be a black screen. Every few minutes we’ll show the images but besides that that’s it.”

I oblige. “[Whoa that sounds cool!]”

“I’m not really the right one to talk about this, but everyone’s really interested in how you like…”

[He, looks like he’s concentrating really hard--]

“--do stuff.” He eventually says. “‘Cause…

“During the Fireside Chat monsters saw the 3D-printed signs and asked why they were there. And why they were bumpy. And had large print on them that they could read from really far away.”

“They don’t know about braille—“ I begin to ask.

“Of course not!” Wrighte answers. “At least, not all of them do. You literally haven’t left the Lab since you got here! And Wrighte and I can’t film you every time we come here. And even when we CAN, we usually don’t. ‘Cause we don’t wanna screw up

“And we’re scared we’re gonna have a…”

He gulps. “A bad time—“

“Heh heh heh heh.

“As you ought.”

“[[OH FUCK!]]”

“{[Murry!]}”

“Hi! Don’t mind me: starting off the most important day of my life with a jumpscare! ‘Cause OF FUCKING! COURSE!”

[Wow… I haven’t seen Murry this flustered since we played that ‘kids with ass cancer’ card that one time—]

{But he LITERALLY asked for it—the black card asked what caused America’s decline!]

[STILL!]

“What: ya thought I was gonna pass that up? That was a perfect opportunity.”

“STILL!”

“Curie?” Wrighte attempts to calm him down, “Just a suggestion: you four should leave before you start sounding like Papyrus more than you already do—“
“Four?”

“How is this detrimental in any way?”

{Well… there’s my answer.}

We walk out the door, Papyrus continuing to talk. “You should damn well know that I am not the worst monster you could emulate in terms of speech patterns!”

Wrighte calls “Good luck!” to me as the door shuts behind us, and we walk outside into the—

“{Oh fuck it’s hot!}”

{We talked about this—}

{Shut up!}

“Seriously though.” Murry properly begins talking to me on my right side, “who are you gonna hold on to? I know you have the stick of dooooom but… I don’t know if monsters’ll get out of the way ‘cause no one’s properly told them what it is yet. Not like they WOULDN’T know what it was but—“

“I never thought of that,” I admit, groping for his arm. I eventually grab onto a spot that is comfortable for me.

We begin chatting eagerly amongst ourselves, the quiet murmurs of the Undermail staff”s commentary underlying it all. At some point, Sans shortcuts my glasses to me, and I put them on.

After a few hundred feet, a voice echoes from in front of me: “Okay guys. Stop here.”

Everyone stops abruptly: “Hi!”

[“{ALPHYS!}”]

“Duuuude—I was WONDERING where you were—“

She laughs. “I was so excited, I couldn’t wait! Me, and Dewey.”

She doesn’t have to put Gaster on the list: his inclusion was implied.

“And guess who dragged me out of bed just to be here yo?”

“Dude Will—how are you up right now?”

“Like I said: I was dragged out of bed—“

“gaster!” I begin calling him out. “Why—!?“

It was my parents!” Will jumps to Gaster’s defense. “and my sister was there—she didn’t drag me out of bed though. But she DIIIID take pictures.”

“Guys whyyyy? That’s NOT okay—!” I retort.

“No regrets.” Is Allen and Touring’s quick reply.

Alphys clears her throat… and releases a quick jab of purple magic into the air, one that jerks my body upward in turn.
Everyone goes silent immediately.

“We waited out here on this side path instead of in front of the Lab ‘cause we wanted you to get used to the headphones. THAT, and so the commentators could explain the setup for the livestream before we start cutting out the picture. I have something to tell you before we go on.”

“Sure.” I prompt her.

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmciSu0nNzQ

“I know I did this when you first got here but… I think it’d be more meaningful to do it now. You’re knowledgeable in our culture now.

“About magic?

“About our culture?

“About our history?

“You know what WE know almost better than we do… because you have your experiences on the surface to supplement what’s happening down here.

“NOW, you know what we had to do to reach this point in our technological, cultural, and societal development.

“What we’re about to show you… it was made possible only after centuries of work.”

All three of Alphys’s cemented colors of magic rise into the air. I shift in place impatiently, hanging on her every word. Tangy electricity brushes my tongue, and like a magnet, she pulls me toward her, until our faces almost touch.

“Of experimentation.”

She takes my collar in both sets of claws, gripping the cloth so tightly I’m afraid she’ll tear my shirt clear off of me.

Of monsters following even the smallest sparks of an idea to their conclusion, whatever it may be.”

YOU GOT THIS ALPHYS!!!”

“[[Ahhh!]]

“MURRY!”

It takes a few moments to pick out Gaster’s startled voice.

{{Alphys’s magic is drowning him out!}}

“Please! At this rate Pauline will go deaf by the end of the month! Papyrus and Robin already subject her to an unhealthy concentration of loud noises without your input!”

“[[True.]]” Annie, Sans, Chara, and I agree simultaneously.

“I’m with Gaster on this one!” Alphys’s indignant, squeaky voice replies. “I was—you—“
She takes a couple breaths and composes herself.

“Well there’s no point in delaying it anymore.”

The magnet attracts me to Alphys’s side, my right hand wrapping around her left arm of its own accord.

Even before she begins speaking, I can tell by the way her entire being tenses between my fingers, at my side, and in the space around me occupied by her field of knowing, that she has agonized over her proceeding words for years, maybe even decades.

Just before she speaks the first word, the air humms with her yellow magic, amplified by the metal surfaces around us.

“On behalf of the Inertia Society, the Dreemurr royal family, and all of monsterkind, I, Alphys Durkheim Curie, am pleased to formally welcome you to Hotland.

“The most technologically-advanced region of the Underground.”

*Several minutes of awed, rarely-broken silence later…*

… … … “Yeah I remember that.”

“Well,” Alphys says in my ear as our group zips along a conveyor belt, “until now, I didn’t wanna talk to you about how Hotland works. Why we use these conveyor belts instead of paved roads to get around. Sure—right NOW, it seems obvious, but it wouldn’t have felt like that to you, at the end of the last surface year.”

“Yeah true.” I admit. “Like, I wouldn’t have realized that normal roads and sidewalks are HELLA annoying for you guys if you hadn’t told me. ‘Cause like, flying monsters not knowing where to go being a safety hazard…

“And like,” I continue to recall, “about the monsters who can’t walk normally and or fit in a car?”

Chara doesn’t HAVE to take control of my voice in this moment… but they do it anyway:

[“{Yeeaaaah—fuck that.}”]

“Because of all the things you mentioned,” Alphys’s professional tone surprises me, even now, “monsters can get around as efficiently, or even as fast, as if they were driving or using public transportation! And even faster, on a good day.

“Metal and concrete pillars hold the belts up. The main set are about fifty feet high. Monsters on ground level walk on either side of them. And even larger pillars form intersections where belts meet. Stairs and lifts help monsters get up here. And then they choose which belt to use.”

“So they’re like streets but with no traffic laws…” I observe, as Alphys extends her arm out behind her. She steps off the conveyor belt before me.

Everyone around me, and everyone in the streaming room in the Lab, laughs. “Kind of…” Wrighte faintly replies. “Trust me there are still traffic jams, just non-vehicular ones. I’d know from trying to meet up with colleagues in this damn place. Actually right now you’re passing one of Undermail’s distributing centers. Our main office is several belts away, branching off the main one we’re on right now. It’s inside a larger office complex

“Buildings like apartment or office complexes have decks at either end with belts built into them,
linking them to the main set, or to smaller ones. Or along the sides, if they’re large enough. Hell—
on the roofs of some shorter buildings, there are even terminals leading to the higher floors of taller
buildings next door!”

“Duuuude!…”

The commentators laugh again. “Yeah—it sounds crazy.” Dewey says, “but it’s not so bad. It’s just
efficient. We don’t have structures humans on the surface would call streets on ground level. And
we don’t have overpasses either. None large enough to carry vehicles, anyway. so it’s not like
they’ll fall on top of as many potential pedestrians.”

“[That’s not morbid at aaaaaall…”]

“And the best part is is that they’re not completely useless if the power’s turned off,” Murry
explains, sounding calm, on his standards. “Like what the Inertia Society and Royal Guard had to
do during the riots last month. Even if the power’s turned off, monsters can still use them. We’re
taking advantage of the vertical space since Hotland’s surface area’s hella small. We had to make
the most of what we had.

“If you want I can teach you how to get around on them and orient you to how they work.”

“Sounds sweet!” I exclaim as Alphys nudges me. “We’re getting off,” she whispers in my ear.

“It’d be a little hard for you though, cause the belts don’t move on their own: they only move if
they detect magic from a monster. They can’t detect determination—“

“[Wait what!?]”

“I mean your cemented form of magic’s determination and we made these before we knew about
it,” He corrects himself. “The belts’ll probly activate prematurely around you if someone walks by
you while you’re trying to get on.

“But what you CAN do is activate it manually. There are controls to activate the belts at either end,
on the side. They’re easy enough to find.”

“Yo: another thing though!” Will pipes up. “You could count conveyor belts to get to places. Like
to get to… wherever we’re going, you just have to count how many belts we rode. And most of the
big ones meet at right angles so… mobility’ll be easy yo!”

Someone whistles. “Damn. Who knew ya had it in ya? Ya have a good point. I hadn’t thought of
that—“

Essentially everyone in unison: [“{WHAT IS THIS MADNESS!?}”]

“They seem too chaotic for your liking.”

The Moores’ cheering stops.

[{{Fuck.}}]

“I only refrained from asking that we walk on ground level because of the way Alphys has
magically-bound you to her.”

[Nooooooo…? Don’t start with the references we don’t know again…? We don’t need that today.]

“Oh yeah—that,” I experimentally tug my arm and body away from Alphys, to little success.
“Thank Tesla for the manual controls…”

“I had a feeling you’d freak out about this.” Alphys projects her soul outward slightly more intensely, as we board another conveyor belt, the composite magic and metal surface humming to life under my feet at once. “Because they move pretty fast. And they respond to soulological stimulus. Which she can’t do reliably on command yet—“

“No to SANS’ S liking anyway yo,” Will and Annie interject in unison.

“I don’t think you have to worry,” Touring speaks from my other side. “Pauline learned to get around the INERTIA SOCIETY headquarters. Weren’t YOU the one who said that the first day she got there she did it without a cane for a decent chunk of it? At least the belts won’t get blocked by supply bins—”

Everyone sighs in relief. Since I first arrived in Hotland, I have knocked over and run in to too many inconveniently-placed supply bins to count.

“And until she’s soulologically-proficient, on YOUR standards AND OURS,” Allen adds from behind his wife, “she can use the manual controls. Although we have to braille the signs at the intersections. That’ll take time.”

“Fortunately I’ve taught some of the residents of Snowdin how to write braille!” Papyrus informs us as we begin descending the stairs carved into the side of a terminal. “They can design them for us and send us the CAD-and-CAD files! So all we have to do is print them. I don’t want a repeat of how long it took you to label everything in the Lab Sans—”

“No one does. And checking my work five times before and after I printed a sign didn’t help either.”

Sans chuckles, though he doesn’t seem all that amused. “I like this idea. Hey Mettaton: ? Have your viewers send us those files will you? And give them the list I sent you—all those sites about how braille works.”

“Of course!” Mettaton’s eager voice sounds in my ear as we walk along what’s presumably a sidewalk, the chatter of monsters surrounding me. “I’ll write it up and send it to you for your approval.”

We stop walking as Sans says, “Thanks man.” And begins… walking away?

{Where’s he going?}

[…]

{Chara?}

[Trust me: you’ll know.]

After a few seconds, Sans walks back toward us. “Thanks for being the crowdsource.”

“No problem at all Sans! I would have cobbled together the monsterpower necessary, even if you hadn’t asked. After all, my fans are dedicated. And over the past few months, you’ve seen how much they care. And that they care about FARR MORE than my latest fashion statement, darling.”

{He’s talking about me right?}
“I wish you could read everyone’s support for you in the chat! They’re simply extatic to see you out of the Lab. And I have to ask: how are you liking it?”

I begin to reply: “It’s hella cool! Hot but—”

“Sans?” Papyrus warns as we walk forward, “don’t. Even. Dare.”

“Why would I?”

“She said it herself.”

I groan, tempted to cover my face with my hands. {Fuck—he’s right…}

“The elevator’s in twenty feet,” Annie calls out from in front of me.

“{What elevator?}

[Sans walked over to press the elevator button earlier--]

{Okay…?}

I continue, “IT’s cool! It’s like the flat escalators at the airport but they’re everywhere!”

My shoes clink against the elevator’s metal floor, and we edge closer together so we can fit inside. The door hisses close behind us.

Mettaton resumes talking as—

Mettaton begins talking again as the elevator begins… descending.

“I should have Undermail write an article about it, making note of the best comments. Because I KNOW you’ll love them. “If for no other reason because Xenoblade memes’ve caught on.”

“Seriously?!”

“Oh; I’m serious.” Mettaton repeats… suggestively…?

I’m about to snark back at him, when someone clears their throat.

“Ehm… everyone?

Even the Undermail commentators fall silent.

“Yeah Paps?” I ask.

“I… I wanted to bring up… some important topics.”

Shuffling footsteps from everyone around me.

“First, Pauline: think about what you heard outside. Specifically,” he emphasizes, “how, it sounded. I want you to think about this VERY hard.”

Papyrus seems to have moved so he’s standing in front of me, rather than in the corner like before.
“I got you!” Alphys guides me until we’re standing in front of Papyrus. I recall the whirring of the conveyor belts on ground level, the omnipresence of monsters’ voices, the clicking, beeping, and whining of machines, magitronic and mechanical.

“Have you thought about how the ground level sounded?” Papyrus asks.

[“Yes.”] is my Chara-induced reply.

“Did you notice anything?”

[Paps by Tesla give us some personal space—]

“Uh… what was I supposed to notice?”

“Well… you heard the conveyor belts, didn’t you?”

“Yeah.”

{Duh.}

“And you heard all the monsters talking as they passed, right?” Papyrus continues. “In spite of the significant mechanical and magitronic noise the conveyor belts emitted?”

“Where are you going with this?”

“You could HEAR them.” he states, as if it’s as obvious as the earth orbiting the sun.

“Yeah so?”

“SO!?”

Papyrus responds with the passion and loudness I’ve come to expect from him. “SO!? Think about it human! Up there, you can hear the monsters around you! The conveyor belts aren’t drowning them out!

“In laymen’s terms: the conveyor belts make as little noise as mechanisms as large as them can make. This is even more relevant because magitronic systems make hardly any sound, with few exceptions. They are so efficient that you can hear monsters’ conversations as clearly as if the conveyor belts weren’t even there!”

True to his word, the enormity of Papyrus’s listed implications begins to dawn on me.

“The congestion of your highways; the incessant drone of traffic; the unbearable shriek of tires on asphalt; the completely uncalled-for revving of engines, they don’t exist here.”

A response, crafted ever-so-slowly: “You don’t have cars so you don’t have traffic—“

A now-welcome, but still out of nowhere, pair of skeletal arms wrapping around me, my face nearly smothered by a scarf smelling of tomato sauce, even after being washed. “HUMAN! I’M proud you’ve made these inferences!”

Reserved cheers from the other occupants of the elevator.

“BUT… this is only the first important thing I wanted you to do.

“The next thing I want you to do… is I want you to stand still and… perceive… what is around
you. I want you to use your soul to perceive any changes in the ambient ether around you.

“For you must feel it! You must’ve felt it as soon as you first arrived here in Hotland!”

“Must’ve felt what?”

Papyrus backs out of our hug enough so I can let go of him. I clasp my hands in front of me and stand still, eyes shut.

At least, I try to stand still, until I realize I can’t stay still, no matter how hard I try.

I continually shift in place, every movement magnified, every movement seeming to occur with no effort, as if…

As if…

As if I’m walking on air.

Like when I first arrived in Hotland…

It doesn’t take me long to sense what Papyrus wants me to sense.

The elevator floor below my feet, the air around me… my very soul… vibrate sharply, like Alphys’s purple magic.

A sharp tingling runs over my entire body, like the fizz of a soda against my tongue and the roof of my mouth, but it’s an all-encompassing sensation. The scent of ozone fills the air. The floor buzzes with power underfoot, like when Sans uses a particularly large amount of his… his yellow magic.

There’s a large amount of yellow magic around me.

Yellow, blue, purple, and orange magic.

Papyrus walks toward me again, leaning down so he is closer to me. “You feel it, don’t you?”

I’m about to answer, but he continues speaking. “No.

“I know you can feel it.”

The… hysteria…? Excitement…? In his voice, rising from deep within his soul, is infectious.

“I can see it, in the way your soul glows with an intense light.

“A light which is not your own.

“A vibrant yellow light.”

Now, his excitement bursts out into the open: “All of us are. Everything is! Everything is glowing a brilliant gold! Even an untrained human could sense such a massive amount of yellow magic!

“We are basking in the light of monsterkind’s greatest achievement.”

I nearly jump: in an instant, his voice has dropped to the magical intensity of a whisper.

{No way…}

[You think he’s lying?]
“Gaster?” he calls over his scapula.

[He nodded at him.]

{I forgot he was here—}

[Same. And I can SEE HIM…]

“It is time.”

{Time for what?}

“It is time that Pauline witness the true scope of your accomplishments. It is only fair that you guide her now.”

As the elevator dings to a stop, Papyrus moves away from me, Gaster’s light blue magic cutting an icy swath through the yellow magic around us. “Take my arm, human.”

Before he’s even finished speaking, I move so I am on his left side, folding up my cane and placing it in my bag, my fingers eventually grasping the joint connecting his humerus to his lower arm.

**Stop the music.**

We walk out of the elevator, the rest of our group following close behind. After a few steps, Gaster stops, gathering his magic so he can be heard over the—

Gaster gathers his magic so he can be heard over the nearby roar of machines…

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXvjtwWyFvc

“{No.

“{No way we can’t be—}”

[Oh: we are.]

I haven’t heard and felt Chara’s excitement so tangibly before. Not even the energy emitting from their soul when I met Sans compares to this moment.

“Pauline?”

The magic surrounding Gaster increases in intensity. I silently wait for him to continue.

“It is a momentous honor to stand before you alongside my colleagues today.

“What I am about to exhibit to you is my magnum opus, an achievement even greater than the discovery of determination!

“Even greater than the invention of CAD-and-CAD machines!

“Even greater than the conception of the Dual Awareness Principle of soulology.”

{That’s how you KNOW it’s important.}
“Nay. What you are about to witness outshines them all. Any and every monster alive today can tell you so. Whether they are a fervent loyalist or vehement opponent.”

“[We can’t be…]”

[Oh: we are.]

“I, Dr. Wingdings Tesla-da Vinci Gaster, King Asgore Rousseau Dreemurr’s Royal Scientist, and founder of the Inertia Society, wish to formally welcome you to the Central Operation Repurposing Ether.

“Or, as you know it, the CORE.”

I’ve barely processed what Gaster’s told me before he whisks me off toward the noise. As enthusiastic as she sounded, Alphys’s explanation of the belts in Hotland seems downright dry in comparison to Gaster and his exposition on the CORE.

At least, it FEELS like that, based off of the constant stream of yellow magic flowing from him.

“As I know you have heard from my sons, the CORE supplies the Underground with the magic required to operate our devices, by harvesting the ambient ether emitted by the Barrier. In such a high temperature and ether-concentrated environment as this, the mechanisms collecting and redistributing the ether perform their designated functions far more efficiently than if such operations had occurred aboveground. True to the principles we taught you during your first magitry lesson, orange magic, which expedites movement, operates optimally under circumstances where great energies abound.”

After a minute or so of walking, we stop, and I sense a wall to our right. He slides his arm out of my grip, placing my hand first on some warm, vibrating tubes, then some differently-textured metal?, Followed by some grooves carved at varying depths. I follow their curvature up and down the wall, snaking along the metal surface. “Between the years 131X and 146X, monsters throughout the entire Underground contributed pieces of sculptural, painted, kinetic, magitronic, and ethermetrical artwork to the various rooms within the CORE, during every stage of its construction. Specifically, the tubes, and their colors, complement the color or colors of magic of the greatest intensity within that particular room.

“As of this exact moment, we currently stand in a room predominantly containing blue magic: accordingly, the tubes in this room glow either a similar shade of blue or red. Unbeknownst to us at the time, determination manifests as red liquid. Virtually everyone saw such a color scheme as aesthetically pleasing, and thus, approved its use in many chambers of this facility.”

I remove my hand from the wall and hold onto Gaster’s arm again, and he continues walking. “That’s funny though that there’s red things in here and you only found out about determination now.”

We slowly walk up some metal stairs. “I heard,” Murry seems, conspiratorial… “that the red tubes represent blood. Human blood. ‘Cause if we were human, we could say that we put our blood, sweat, and tears into making the CORE—“

“Oh…” we groan, Sans’s laughing faintly from behind—directly in front of us.

“The symbolism’s there yeah…” Allen uneasily agrees. “Although it’s… a bit morbid…”

We reach the top of the stairs and walk forward a little longer, before Gaster stops again. “In front of you,” he intensifies his magic further so he can be heard over the din of machines around us, “is
a bridge connecting two clusters of magitronic consoles which monitor the progression of the ether through the CORE, two among many. They ensure that it traverses the most efficient path through the facility. Apparatuses containing orange magic diffuse the power along massive cables, in the ceiling and below our feet. Those cables end in purple magic-induced modules, which facilitate the yellow magic’s transport throughout the Underground.

“Detectors of a similar construction, mounted atop buildings or artificially-constructed poles, deliver the magic to devices in need of it, in a monster’s home or a public setting. And you are very much familiar with the end result of these configurations: yellow magic being omnipresent wherever it is needed. The paths the yellow magic must travel are set due to the nature of purple magic, and its single-minded dedication to a goal. Thus, we have no need for wires save in the most essential cases, like governmental or emergency service facilities.”

We continue walking, my feet passing over a groove in the metal. “The CORE is never fully operational—”

“What?”

[That… doesn’t sound right…?]

“The majority of the facilities are unused,” Gaster slows down his… I’m-not-even-sure-which monologue… to clarify. “However, we always prime them in case one fails. Or, more generally, in order to account for the expansions we must inevitably make as the Underground’s population and ether consumption rises.

“Case in point? The bridge I have decided to lead you on to, and the other bridges leading off of it, span the casm between several clusters of processing modules and redistribution-monitoring instruments. Only the one which marked the beginning of this bridge, and the one we will pass when we step off this bridge, are fully operational. The rest, though properly cared for and inspected for defects, lie in wait, in case we need to use them. Accordingly, the employees can alter the configuration of the bridges connecting the processing modules, and even the layout of the rooms, to create an environment more conducive to efficient ether processing.”

“So it’s exactly like the test chambers in Portal 2,” Annie observes as we step off the bridge. “’Cause we can make the layout whatever we want. Just like GLaDOS.”

“SANS! Why the hell are you laughing?”

“Simple.”

{{Oh no…}}

“We built Aperture Science. In spirit and Thermal Discouragement Beams, if not in function.

“Or deadly neurotoxin.”

“We are passing by some ether emissions in transit as we speak,” Gaster reassures his son as we navigate some twists and turns in the metal walkways.

Either that, or he’s most likely-unsuccessfully trying to turn the conversation away from the deadly neurotoxin jokes…

“Actually… hmm… this should not cause any indelible harm—“

I don’t even care that Chara takes control of my body: [“That’s TOOOOOTALLY reassuring!”]
“May I have your hand?”

“[[… Suuuure…?]]”

I let go of Gaster, who orients me so I stand at the railing at the edge of the walkway. He extends my right arm out over the side, edging my body closer to the railing gradually. “Monsters can sense the ether in transit here without having to approach it so closely. If you reach forward the slightest amount, you should feel it. I will position you optimally.”

I allow him to slowly move my hand forward, until it comes to a stop.

As soon as I do, I pull my hand back, a sudden shock-like sensation running down my arm. As Gaster suspected, it’s not particularly painful, just startling.

“You felt yellow magic, guided by purple magic, its movement hastened by orange magic. Sans explains from behind me. “If an object impedes it, it reacts.”

“Which I did.” I fill in the gap for him.

“Ether moves cyclically through this place. If you want to feel it safely, move your hand through it. Don’t just hold it out. That’s for the light blue magic. Call it a laser, if you want. Although we mostly use them as Thermal Discouragement Beams, for security purposes.”

I’m unsure of how to respond to Sans’s last statement, other than “{Okay…?}”

“Sans is right though yo: if they needed to,” out of nowhere, Will jumps in to explain, “the employees could make the lasers go across the bridges and keep intruders out. Or unauthorized employees out… I guess.”

**Stop the music.**

“Actually, I planned for that from the beginning.”

Touring, who’s been silent for a while, at last speaks up from the back of the group. “I realized that the CORE was vulnerable by design, even with its modulated layout. Obviously there are several entrances and exits that don’t require magic to operate.

“But still…

“I thought, if a human ever DID get here, the employees could alter the layout, to impede their progress. To buy time to let everyone escape. And humans’ inability to sense the danger would provide them ample opportunities to be trapped by the lasers, and eventually apprehended by Royal Guard members, trained to fight within this space.”

We walk through a doorway into a narrow, high-ceilinged hallway, the clamor of the previous room… space… wherever we were before… soon fading away. “And Kari went through here…” I recall, from my study of the Second Six Souls.

“She WOULD have.” Touring walks closer to Gaster and I as we lead the group down another hallway, still farther away from the chaos outside.

“Kari made it pretty far into Hotland.

“But…

“But the employees here freaked out.
“They…

“They disobeyed my orders.

“Mine, and Dewey’s, and Alphys’s.

“They activated the lasers and shut themselves in the most secure section of the CORE.

“Royal Guard members were given orders to fill her with bullets on sight.”

Touring’s melancholy weighs down my body and slows my movements. I resist the urge to curl up into a ball on the floor.

“She stayed in the Lab a long time, talking with the other souls.”

Touring somehow manages to remain mostly composed.

Emphasis on mostly.

“They gave her advice on how to get through.

“But she didn’t make it.

“She died with her revolver in her hand, still charged with yellow magic.”

“Where… where did she…” I don’t have to finish my question.

“It was right outside.” Wrighte tells me through my earphones. “That platform Gaster showed you?

“That’s where it happened.

“If she’d gone a little farther she would have made it to the center of the CORE.

“She could’ve activated any of the emergency exit protocols.

“She either could’ve taken the elevator to New Home or opened the door to the staircase leading up to the same place.

“She could’ve channeled the ambient ether and cast it to defend herself, if she felt like she couldn’t run away.

“But…

“But she was shot in the back, and fell over the side into the mass of machinery below, where the rest of the Royal Guards present finished her off.

“She died instantly.”

I stop, letting go of Gaster. I stand silently for a moment. {She… she died here.

{I walked by where she died…

“{By Tesla…}” is all I manage to say aloud.

Everyone’s magic ebbs somewhat around me, Gaster’s attack and defense dropping to below sixty —
Below fifty-five—

Below fifty…

Chara and I hold our breath, afraid of what will happen to him.

His stats eventually rise back up to fifty-five, after an eternity of waiting. When they do, he takes my hands in his, facing me, and… and…

He clasps my hands in his, turning to face me, kneeling so he is as close to eye level with me as possible.

“Kari would have been the first human to lay eyes upon the most integral, the most groundbreaking, the most ambitious, subsection of the CORE.

“However, monsterkind’s desire to romp free destined her to die.”

The… bitterness… in Gaster’s voice rolls off him in waves. With every word, my HP ticks down.

“At least…

“At least, YOU may witness the culmination of my decades upon decades of work.”

“The room we are about to enter,” he warns in a gentler tone, “is UNDOUBTEDLY sensory overload incarnate, but not in the manner you may initially suppose. It is not nearly as cacophonous as the rest of the CORE but… if you imagined that the rest of the CORE was chaotic before—”

He laughs… and so does Allen, Touring, and everyone else. “—what you are about to experience will alter your perceptions, I assure you. It is chaotic in its own way.

“Most importantly, it will constitute a soulological sensory overload. This room possesses the highest concentration of magic in the Underground.”

Gaster rises so we stand hand-in-hand on his left side. “Shall we?”

Everyone’s footsteps echoing behind us through a metal door, which slides open for us, is the only answer I need.

When I walk in the room, I don’t immediately sense the supposedly-massive ether levels Gaster warned me about. I hear a deep rumble nearby, but it’s not unbearably loud.

Chara and I feel… let down.

That is, until I try taking a step forward, and begin falling… my feet leaving the floor so I lie facedown, floating in midair.

“Oh crap someone get her!” Murry shouts from behind—below us…somewhere…

We’re not even sure of which direction we’re facing anymore…

The familiar grip of blue magic surrounds my body, and an equally-familiar “Gneh heh heh!” sounds close to my right—left—near my head…

“HUMAN!? I, Papyrus Michel-Chel Gaster, have grabbed ahold of you! You have no reason to fear. Although, I will be forced to hold your body rigid as long as we remain in this room, for the
concentrations of blue and orange magic ease and magnify movement of all kinds! Only those with strong magic can stabilize themselves here.”

”But I have determination,” I point out, turning my head toward Papyrus as best I can, who begins walking, holding my prone body aloft.

“The forces at play here are far greater than those possessed by the human soul! It is only because of our numerous handholds, ropes, and railings that none of us falls to our doooooom!

“The forces acting on this room are as strong as seven human souls!”

“Wait what?”

“Papyrus?” Gaster calls out from in front of us, “Stop in approximately thirty feet, on the right side of this walkway.”

He continues giving Papyrus directions as we walk. “—walk more slowly. These walkways suffer constant strain, from existing in the presence of such powerful—yes. Stop here.

“Everyone?

“Gather round and cast any magic you have which may root Pauline to the floor.

“Pauline?

“If you feel sufficiently-confident, please attempt to stand up.”

Papyrus sets me down on my back on the grated metal floor. It shakes rapidly under me as I manage to push myself onto my knees, and then stand. AS soon as I do, green, blue, and purple magic envelop me, counteracting the force exerted by the magic—ether—in the air.

At Least, until Sans says from next to me, “Guys I got this. Just… Gaster? Back me up okay?”

Blue magic envelops me. “As you were saying?”

“This,” Gaster talks as he walks toward me, eventually grasping my right hand in his left once more, “is the site of my last experiment.

“After rigorous analyses of the results of the multitude of experiments, case studies, and surveys conducted before it, Annie, Murry, and I resolved to conduct an experiment of our own here. The data which inspired me to design this experiment was collected between approximately 166X and 181X. Inertia Society members call this period the Soul Search: the first time monsterkind endeavored to investigate the nature of the soul, human or monster, in a methodical, scientific fashion.

“Aye. In the past, we had discovered disparate traits of the then-known six colors of magic by scouring primary source documents, interviewing monsters who had survived the War, and repeated instances of identical anecdotal evidence. However, my colleagues and I wished to discover any inconsistencies in our preexisting theories by studying the Barrier firsthand.”

“The First Seven Souls imbued the Barrier with their personal conceptions of magic.” Annie edges closer to Gaster and I. “The First Soul of Patience, from what the Inertia Society could gather from observing monsters who used it, seemed to believe that immediate action toward monsterkind was hasty.
“So they decided to imprison us down here, until humankind could figure out what to do with us.

“The First Soul of Bravery saw their sacrifice as, well, a brave one. That they had to act now, so that monsters could never rise up and make a comeback.”

“So them and the First Soul of Patience did it for different reasons but they still did it.” I observe.

“Exactly.” Everyone says.

“The First Soul of Integrity probably thought they were doing something honorable yo,” Will catches me by surprise. “They must’ve thought that creating the Barrier was moral, even though it was basically the same as burying a human alive. That’s MORE than just being hypocritical. It’s just IMMORAL.”

“And we talked about the First Soul of Kindness already.” Dewey reminds me of my first experience with a magitronic circuit, so long ago.

“The First Soul of Perseverance is, frankly, someone I empathize with far more than I dare to admit,” Gaster says sadly. “For they were a being of science. They believed in the forward progress of humankind so strongly that they were even willing to sacrifice their life in order to ensure that it continued, by participating alongside their fellow humans in the most bold experiment of all.”

“The First Soul of Determination’s the easiest to understand.” Alphys states the obvious. “They didn’t know how strong they were. Only that they wanted us to be trapped down here.

“So that’s what they did.

“As far as we can tell, they’re the reason why a human would need the power of their OWN soul and a MONSTER soul to cross the barrier. Only a being with that kind of power could overcome someone with such a strong will.”

A heavy silence… broken by power coursing through me NOT from the CORE.

Chara braces themselves.

“I beg to differ.

“The motives of the First Soul of Justice demand little thought.

“To them, we DESERVED our fate.

“They saw their crime as noble.

“TheyIR kind…

“won the War.

“Thus, their will took form.”

My skin stings as his yellow magic seeps out into the environment.

His resentment rises every second: “They do not bleed.

“Thus, I need not worry about the blood on my hands.”
“An eye for an eye.

“THEIR souls…

“FOR.

“OURS.”

My HP, attack, and defense lower with every word, and Chara… withdraws from me.

Sans sighs, long, slow, and with great effort, seemingly finished with his… his rant.

“For centuries, monsters never thought about the humans’ reasons for trapping us.

“Only that they surpassed us.

“So we might as well let ourselves fall down.

“The humans spared no pains to trap us.

“NOTHING. Could leave the Underground.

“We learned this when we tried sending letters through it, when it first appeared.”

Silence, only punctuated by the roar of machines around us, which now seems much less loud than before.

“heh heh heh heh heh.

“At least, we ASSUMED SO.”

He laughs some more, louder, more impassioned. Chara mentally flinches, completely taken aback by his reaction. I follow their lead… but only for a moment.

It takes me a couple seconds to realize that Sans’s laugh isn’t bitter or angry, like Chara and I initially assumed.

Instead, Sans’s laugh is…

TRIUMPHANT.

**Loop until the end of the chapter.**


“As was the case countless times throughout our history, Gaster had an idea.

“He thought about the progress we made over the centuries.

“How we had advanced FAR BEYOND the humans who had made the Barrier.”

Gaster’s soul quivers with eagerness at my side. {I think I—}

[You think what?]

{ I think I get it.}
Sans laughs again. [Oh man if only you could see Sans’s face…]

“He realized: the First Seven Souls NEVER could have guessed what happened to us.

“Or their own kind.

“They knew NOT of the final iteration of the Periodic Table.

“Or the invention of the TELEGRAPH.

“AND the patenting of the light bulb.

“And the invention of RADIO.

“Let alone television or the Internet.

“As far as THEY. Knew,” he emphasizes, “we were trapped.”

Sans leans toward me, the weight of the blue magic holding me upright increasing, “have you ever wondered how you can access the Internet?”

{[… … …]}

I gasp.

“[[OH MY GOOOOOOD!!]]”

PRECISELY!” Gaster rings his hands… even though I’m holding on to one of them. “Their life experiences bounded their conceptions of magic! They never could have anticipated the technological and social changes after their deaths! Only the First Soul of Determination had the power to impede our gathering of knowledge from the surface in any capacity. Actually, the determination present in the Barrier is the primary reason why our magitronics face any difficulties interfacing with surface computers at all!

“Thus, my hypothesis was that if we harnessed the power inherent in the Barrier, we could exploit their gaps in knowledge, so that our access to your Internet, as limited as it was at the time, could occur freely!”

“OH MY GOD OH MY GOD OH MY GOD OH MY GOD!!” I can’t help but repeat, reviewing the details of Gaster and Sans’s explanations in my mind. {[[IT MAKES SENSE!]]

{[[IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE!]]}

“[Magic is a matter of degrees!

“[[The First Seven Souls never could’ve known about that stuff so technologies that came after them are able to bypass the Barrier!]]”

If it weren’t for the fact that I can feel him doing it, I wouldn’t have believed it possible for Gaster to ring his hands any faster or exude any more magic. “YES!

“EXCELLENT!

“TRULY EXCELLENT!

My colleagues and I wished to exploit this flaw. This location’s massive concentrations of magic
made it ideal as both the centerpiece of the CORE, and, fifty years later, the site of my experiment.

“And, why Sans, Papyrus, Dewey, Alphys, Will, and their CAD-and-CAD machines, tapped into the ether emitted by this location.”

Oh My God…” I repeat again. “So you… you…”

“Yes; this is where we fell.” Gaster clarifies.

“Our experiment intended to test my hypothesis. It would have been the first of many experiments of its kind. However, as you know, Annie, Murry, and I fell into the abyss below your feet before we could ever report the results. The entirety of our experimental configuration disintegrated alongside us. And power to the rest of the Underground ceased for several minutes afterward, thus preventing the data from transferring over to our computers.

“We died before we could complete it.”

Gaster takes a couple seconds to reconfigure his magic.

He seems… keyed up.

“Pauline?”

I couldn’t have resisted Chara, even if I tried: [“Yes?”]

He takes a few more moments to gather his magic. “From your studies, and from what I have exhibited for you today, surely you must understand the significance of this room in relation to both the rest of the CORE and the Underground.”

[“I do.

[“Not all the way, but…

[“enough of it.”]

Do you understand how us monsters have harnessed the very structure which imprisons us here for our benefit?

“That we have managed to transform it into a symbol of our independence as a culture?

“That, by finding a flaw in the Barrier, that we proved the strength of our values? Our reasoning? Our mastery of the world around us?” he insists.

[“From what I know…

[“Yes: I do.”]

“With this knowledge in mind, I must ask: have you ever considered why I adopted the middle name ‘Tesla?’”

Finally, Chara’s confused: [Heh?]

{I know this!}

“He’s the wireless power guy! Ether’s like wireless power. That’s what the CORE’s for. You wanted to show me it so—“
Before I can finish, Gaster wrenches free of me—

“[[AAAAAH!!!!]]”

‘YES!

“YOU UNDERSTAND!

“YOU TRULY UNDERSTAND!”

My feet leave the floor, Chara making first confused, then happy, noises.

Skeletal arms wrap around me, my body closely pressed against a set of ribs.

A set of ribs heaving with sobs.

“You understand…” Gaster repeats from directly in front of me, the blue magic surrounding his soul pulling me even closer, until my head rests on his left scapula. I turn my face toward the left side of his skull, where he continues to cry, light blue magic tears rolling down my arms and the back of my shirt.

You…

“A human…

“I have…

“I never imagined…”

Chara and I can’t make out what he’s saying anymore.

It sounds like the commentators… and most of the group who accompanied me… have followed Gaster’s example. After a while, someone calls out to us.

“Get ahold of yourself G!”

It’s Murry.

Chara and I don’t cringe at his slang for once.

“You’ve been waiting for how long to talk about this stuff?

“Like, since, 1814! In human years! Ever since the Dreemurrite calendar started, by Tesla!

“You got this.

“You’ve been preparing for this for…

“For…

“Actually now that I think about it I don’t wanna know.

“I know it’ll be hard but…

“Calm down okay?

“Calm down so you can say everything you’ve prepared before you start crying us a river.
“’Cause remember? When I told you this would be your moment?

“Right now, you have the RIGHT to cry.

“While you’re ALSO doing that, you have a job to do.

“You get me?”

Gaster’s shaking slows. He seems to stop crying. Light blue magic stops soaking my clothes.

“Good,” Murry says in a soothing tone. “Now?

“GO FOR IT.”

“I… I never imagined I would see the day a human would stand before us, and behold the extent of our accomplishments.” Gaster’s voice still sounds raw and cracked, but also more coherent.

“Let alone that this same human would grasp their significance.”

“But you chose me though.” I don’t hesitate to point out. “You said you looked for humans who could handle this stuff.”

“You are correct.

“But…

“But I realized that I could only control for so many variables.”

“All this time, you had a choice.” Allen tells me firmly, walking toward us. “We never forced you to do anything.

“You could’ve listen to what we had to say, or not.

“You could’ve brushed us off at any time.

“You could’ve…

“You could’ve decided to ransack the Lab and kill us, at any time.

“And we couldn’t have stopped you.

“But you didn’t.

“you listened.

“You gave us the time of day every damn day.

“And you treated us with respect. The whole “everyone’s-an-end-not-a-means” thing.

“You may not have gotten everything the first time… or the second… or the third… hell—there’s still LOTS of stuff you don’t get… but that’s not what matters.

“What MATTERS… is that you listened.”

“I guess,” I hesitantly agree.

“I KNOW you think you haven’t done very much.” Alphys seems to have thought on this subject at length as well. “And you’re right: you haven’t done very much at all. Nothing any more rigorous
than your high school courses, anyway.

“Yeah—you volunteered your determination but…

“But that’s nothing, in comparison to what you did TODAY.

“All that the Inertia Society, but more specifically Gaster, has ever wanted was a human to talk to about our achievements.

“A human who could understand how hard it was for us to create multiple scientific fields from scratch!

“You might not believe this but… but you’re the kind of person Gaster’s longed for for so long.

“Sure: he could’ve talked about this with any monster he wanted.

“And they would’ve gotten it.”

Alphys’s magic rises passionately. “But you’re a HUMAN!

“You’re a human who did all these things!

“YOUR response is what Gaster’s yearned so strongly for.

“YOUR response is what Gaster wants to receive from the rest of humankind.

“You may think you haven’t done very much, but Gaster never wanted very much at all! All he wanted was to meet a human who could behold the grandeur of our accomplishments and understand why we’re so proud of them.

“All he ever wanted was to meet a human who could understand why we believe this is the ultimate example of monsters expanding upon human knowledge.”

Claws gripping my shoulders from behind… and I’m not even surprised as to how Alphys is floating aloft. ”And you’ve done that.”

We stand silently for a moment, listening to the whirr of the machines around us collecting ether from the Barrier, destined to power every magitronic device in the Underground. The magnitude of Alphys’s praise slowly sinks in, while I try to reconcile it with what I’ve actually done.

“What you’ve done means the world to him.” Alphys says in more subdued tones. “To US.

“And I…

“I hope you understand that.

“That no matter what happens next, we won’t forget that you did THIS for us.”

{I don’t know what to say.}

[You don’t have to say anything.

[They feel what you want to say.]

Still holding me, Gaster takes some deep breaths, his magic slowly falling back down to normal intensities. “On that note,” he says formally, “I, Dr. Wingdings Tesla-da Vinci Gaster, am more
than happy to inform the Inertia Society, the Dreemurr royal family, and all of monsterkind, that as of this moment, thanks to Pauline Ugalde, we have officially imbued a human with the knowledge of our culture most pertinent to our eventual coexistence with the remainder of humankind on the surface.

“With this success in mind, it is with pride that I announce that we have now achieved the first directive of the Unified Theory Papers.

“And that efforts to achieve the second directive: to devise a method of breaking the Barrier without any further loss of life, will formally commence immediately.”

Chapter End Notes

Here's the URL for RichaadEb's "Another Medium" cover!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmciSu0nNzQ

Here's the URL for Malcolm Robinson's "CORE" cover!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXvjtWWyFvc

Here's the original URL for "Lighting the Dark!"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAk42LQSM4M

As much as I wanted to split this chapter into two parts, I also wanted to emphasize the spectacle surrounding this occasion, so that's why this chapter is so long...

Yes: ever since Gaster came back, science and feels happen in tandem. I know correlation doesn't equal causation but... seriously--Gaster you make science worthy of tears.

{[Respect.}]

No shame...

The sequence of events where Alphys exhibits Hotland to me, and then when Gaster exhibits the CORE to me, was one that I had planned relatively early on. It isn't difficult to imagine why it's momentous: I'm the oldest human to fall down, and I'm probably the only one who could grasp the full implications of the CORE's existence and fully appreciate the work it took to build. After all, I have spent several months in the underground. The same goes for how the CORE contributes to the monsters' very high standard of living.

The conveyor belts are just a logical extension of what was already in the game.

Monsterkind is very proud of Hotland, the CORE, and the scientific and social developments surrounding them. I wanted Alphys's exhibition of Hotland and Gaster's exhibition of the CORE to be a spectacle, so that's why I tried finding music which fit that atmosphere. I wanted Hotland and the CORE to feel...

ALIVE.
As for the realization about the Barrier?

I only stumbled across it a couple days before the publishing of this chapter for the very first time. Let's just say that when I did, I knew that it was critical that I include it, and that I find a song which suited that situation.

BY TESLA, REMEMBER IT FOR LATER.

Lighting the Dark is from the AU called Altertale, where Gaster replaces Asriel. I realized that the triumphant mood of this track fit the revelation it accompanies perfectly, so that's why I used it.

As background for Gaster comparing the CORE to Tesla's speculations on wireless power, here's the page on Tesla, from Wikipedia. I retrieved it on 07/31/2017.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikola_Tesla

Moments like this: where the protagonist, Frisk or otherwise, takes some time to appreciate how monsters have made the most of what they have in the Underground... that's something many fanfics lack. I know Frisk is only a child in the vast majority of fanfics, but seriously the CORE's insane! I don't understand why no one's thought of a theory explaining how it works, let alone how the monsters have a standard of living equivalent of developed nations on the surface, when a stereotypical culture revolving around magic is usually portrayed as being from the 19th century or earlier, at best...

My ethermetrical, soulological, psychophysiological, and magitronic theories had to account for how both individual monsters' magic manifests and how it manifests when harnessed by a machine. They had to coincide, because otherwise, both theories fall apart.

That... proved difficult.

However, this chapter demonstrates how both aspects are intimately connected and how they work in harmony.

"Magic is a matter of degrees" indeed, Gaster...

If nothing else, this fic will be known for explaining the properties of magic, and how the CORE works in an internally-consistent way, one which doesn't require too much deviation from the original lore.

There's only ONE theory that rivals this one in importance.

As creative as some of the fan theories I've seen are, Toby made Undertale's lore a certain way for a reason. People don't usually account for the selectivity of information about the surface the monsters would have had, as well as how they still would have had to research magic, despite the fact that they can use it instinctively. Toby alluded to both, via the Waterfall-as-surface-conduit and Alphys's research.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

If you're interested in the specifics of the Dreemurrite calendar, my music choices, or the... lectures... the characters give, read the endnotes. Otherwise, ignore them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

36

The walk out of the CORE passes by in a haze. A hyperventilation-filled, breathy, and frankly wonderful, haze... meaning that Gaster is the one hyperventilating, and for once, I don’t mind the constant soulological stimulus. {He deserves this…}

He can’t stop talking as we take an alternate route back to the elevator. Chara first reminds, and then annoys me, about how monsters don’t have to breathe like humans do. The only reason he stops talking at all is to replenish his magic, and even then, he does so VERY rarely.

“I cross-referenced my inferences about the permeability of the Barrier with the observations my colleagues and I aggregated while in the Void—“

{[Here we go again…]}  

“—and we came to the conclusion that the Barrier’s movement draws upon humankind’s most pressing issues within a particular geographic region. The collective field of knowing of the humans above us determined our location.”

“So like, a collective consciousness,” I draw the comparison, struggling to keep up with Gaster.

“Indeed. We hypothesized that the First Seven Souls originated from western nations. For we spent the vast majority of our time underneath North America and Europe. And only when the United States began…”

He stops speaking for a moment, his magic quieting.

“When the United States began displaying an increased interest in world affairs…” he finally says with disapproval, “beginning in the last quarter of the first century on the Dreemurrite Calendar, did the Barrier appear underneath other countries.

“These soulological processes afforded me access to media of the time, of all kinds. In particular, newspapers and magazines provided us ample information about American and European politics, culture, and countless subjects besides. Regarding this exhibition, the most relevant event which we learned of secondhand was your newspapers coverage of Nicola Tesla’s exhibition at the 79X World’s Fair—“

“You mean the 1893 World’s Fair?” I correct.

Converting the Dreemurrite date to the appropriate Gregorian calendar date takes hardly any
conscious effort, now.

“That is what surface historians call it, yes.”

“Excuse me, everyone?”

We quiet down immediately when we hear Mettaton speaking from my earphones. “Pauline? I wanted to warn you, there’s a simply massive crowd outside! Royal Guard members have cordoned off an area fifty yards across. Access to the conveyor belts will be strictly monitored until you go back to the LAB.”

“Also any civilians who DO go into that area can’t use magic. I just posted an impromptu news update underline,” Wrighte adds as we pile into the elevator. “Basically if anyone tries hurting you or damaging the CORE you guys and the Royal Guard have the right to use force.”

He laughs with… ordinarily-out-of-place-but-now-it’s-completely-justified pride. “Meaning Alphys’ll break someone’s face.

“AGAIN.”

Alphys chuckles nervously as the elevator continues to ascend. “I didn’t think you’d phrase it like THAAAAT… but yeah: you’re right, Wrighte.”

Faintly, Sans and the rest of the Curies snicker from their spot in the corner, and Chara and I soon follow.

“If anything, it should be the Gasters—“ Alphys corrects.

“Meaning just Sans—” Papyrus interrupts.

[Everyone’s nodding.]

{I mean I guessed as much…}

“I didn’t wanna be that blunt but yeah.” The journalist admits, the elevator gradually slowing to a stop. “But it’s implied so…”

Gaster shifts around so we face the elevator doors. “With these security precautions in mind,” Gaster calls behind us, “Sans? Papyrus? Alphys? The three of us will surround her. Everyone else will bring up the rear.”

The faint pressure of blue magic quickly fades into existence as Sans slides into place on my left side, the elevator doors dinging open.

I notice the noise—

No.

Not noise.

Someone whistles: [“Daaaaaamn. That’s a looooot of crying scientists.”] Sans and Chara note at once.

{Was that—?}

[Yeh: that was Sans. Trust me on this one…?]
“What the hell are you talking about?”

[What me and Sans said… There’s lots of monsters with the Inertia Rune on their clothes—I don’t think they’re ALL scientists, but probly lots of them are—they’re laughing and high-fiving and screaming and hugging and crying and… taking selfies…?]

The various intensities and colors of magic nearly overwhelm me as we begin walking up the stairs to the top of a terminal.

Then, I recall the innermost room of the CORE… and realize that as much of an auditory and soulological overload as the crowd is, the center of the CORE is WORSE.

I SURVIVED the center of the CORE.

I SURE AS HELL can survive THIS.

I manage to make out individuals in the crowd as they call out to us: “Good job Gaster!”

“So that’s what Pauline’s been doing this whole time? Getting one-on-one lessons from you?”

“Damn it Dewey why you do this to us?”

A decent amount of the remarks are… much less pleasant.

Some of those remarks are… less profanity-laden than others.

After a couple minutes of enduring them, I barely manage to contain my urge to shout some replies.

After a few more seconds of particularly-impassioned protest, magic begins rising into the air around me.

[Oh God—Gaster looks piiiiissed…?]

{Yep! That’s how you KNOW it’s bad!}

I tense… or rather, Chara makes me tense up.

The next couple steps I take… don’t touch the floor.

Currents of yellow magic hum under my feet… and I KNOW they aren’t coming from the magitronics. [Sans?]

[How haven’t you, like, FLIPPED OUT YET!?!]

{Why are you asking me!?!}

[He, like, looks like he wants to chuck someone through a wall—]

{I know! And can you blame him?

[[I’m really feeling it!

[[Why the hell hasn’t he, like, DONE it YET!??]]

Stepping onto—or rather, sensing the conveyor belt activating under my feet, even though I’m not touching it—as Chara’s soul hums in thought. [Wait.]
{Wait what?}

[The only thing I can think of,] they slowly say, [is that he hasn’t gotten his shit together yet.]

We step off the belt. I’m still lost: {Where are you going with this?}

[Come on—how the hell could you have forgotten his, like, monologues? over the past few months?]

[How could you think—?]

[But you remember how he, like, would wait for a gap in the conversation to say his thing?]

{Yeeeaah…?}

[And after he said it, the conversation would, like, die down ‘cause no one would know how to argue?]

{More like no one felt like they COULD argue but yeeaaah…?}

Annoyed that they have to spell it out: [He. Doesn’t. Think. It’s time yet.

[As pissed off as he is, he doesn’t know EXACTLY what to say right now.

[But when he DOES…]

I shake as we pass by… a speaker? Hung up on a wall? [Tesla help us all.]

“Dude.” I prompt… no one in particular round me… “why can I hear Mettaton’s voice up there—“

I try pointing toward the speaker? As we walk closer to it, “—and not just in my headphones? I thought this was being livestreamed underline.”

“There are TV screens and speakers mounted outside. They’re public gathering places,” Mettaton tells me as we step on yet another conveyor belt, presumably leading back to the Lab. “We repurpose our public space in different ways from humans. I haven’t seen this many monsters watching them since the Fishbock Fiasco of 199X—“

The crowd continues to shower us… but particularly Gaster and myself, with enthusiastic praise. “Gaster! Please don’t go!”

“You did well human!”

“I never thought I’d see the day a human’d see this…”

“She’s so smart!”

“Stay determined! Both of you!”

“We love you G!”

“Oh by Tesla let me through! Hey! I made arrangements with—Edisondamn it—!”

An… irritated… female? voice… slowly approaches us, her words somewhat obscured by the crowd. The only reason I can “hear” her is because abrasive stabs of purple magic contact my body and soul, becoming more noticeable by the second.
“Let her pass.” Sans commands… and the weight of dozens of monsters’ fields of knowing pressing on my soul from all sides subsides in a matter—

NO.

Not in a matter of seconds.

In A second.

AT MOST.

As the conveyor belt stops at a terminal, and the space around us clears, I hear… soft… footsteps? several pairs of soft footsteps? Walking? toward me.

“Auhuhuhuh. Aren’t you overdoing it? You’ll scare away the customers—I mean guests—I invited to the afterparty!”

“[[Wait what?]]”

“What afterparty?” Murry suddenly seems… very very interested…

[Dude no!]

“I never heard anything about this…” Papyrus hesitantly adds from directly behind me.

[Muffet put one of her hands?—legs?—I can’t even—on her—where her mouth would be—]

“That’s not what I heard from Gerson—“ she begins to say, in a more hushed tone.

Chara, several other monsters, and I, assuming the worst: “[[OH HEEEEELL NOOOO!!]]”

Muffet laughs again. “He’s not as much of a party animal as everyone makes him out to be, derie. He just loves the company of other monsters over some drinks. And… rambling to them… about surface theology. All at once.”

[Uh… you’re not making Paps feel any better…?]

“And from what I heard back there, you’ll be able to handle his analysis of human religious texts just fine. I don’t have the patience for it myself.”

“So we’re going back to the Lab?” I ask, stepping off the conveyor belt.

“No,” Papyrus says in my right ear. “Muffet’s store is a few belts away from here. We’re going to branch off the main path soon.”

“We’ll be there in a count of… of five hundred,” Muffet supplies. “Not five hundred steps. Five hundred Seconds.”

“I don’t really do that—I just remember how long it’d take me to walk somewhere and realize when I walked too long.”

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtCWQHCi8jM
*Several minutes of Muffet being annoyed at my Inertia Society education’s supposed “lack” of economics later…*

… … … [Wow! This… isn’t nearly as huge a party as I thought…]

{{Thank Tesla.}}

“Dude Gaster who hired the band?”

“The same monster who permitted Muffet to speak to you in the first place—“ he begins to reply.

[“Of fucking course.”] Chara responds in my voice. [“Cause this cover of Guardia Millennial Fair’s SOOOO GOOOOD…?”]

Gaster leads me through the room, extending his left arm out behind him as we squeeze between two tables. “Alongside the group who accompanied you to the CORE, Gerson, Undyne, and several other high-ranking Inertia Society and Royal Guard members are in attendance. And, with my sons’ insistence, your friends from Snowdin.”

[“{Eh!}”]

“Though they have specifically requested that you sit with my colleagues tonight, on the grounds of innumerable observations regarding how they are utterly unworthy of sitting with you, now that you have attained such an elevated quantity of knowledge… and other such objections.”

Chara and I, as one: [“{Meaning Robbin said that he didn’t wanna feel fucking stupid around me—and he didn’t think he could handle all the nerdiness—which is saying something.}”]

Gaster… doesn’t answer. [He’s… nodding very, very, very slowly —never mind he’s nodding faster.]

{Yeeeaaaah… I had a feeling…}

“Papyrus? Clear that table for us, if you would be so kind?”

“OF COURSE!” Papyrus shouts not-entirely-unnecessarily from in front of us.

Gaster stops walking and lifts my hand off his arm, placing it on the back of a chair. As I seat myself, he pulls out the chair across from me. Sans sits to my left. [Dude—tell him to move!]

{YOU’RE being paranoid—!}

[NO I’m NOT!]

{He just wants to make sure no one pulls any bullshit—}

[I KNOW! But he can do that from OVER THERE—!]

{Where!? You can’t even POINT—!}

[You know what I mean—I want him to sit as FAAAAAR AWAY AS POSSIBLE AT THIS TABLE!]

“Need I summon Undyne?” Sans asks in my ear, as Chara yells “at this table”. Both of us tense up slightly.
He didn’t sound formal when we were in the CORE.

Why NOW, out of all times?

“Uh… yeah suuuure…?”

“Wave.” He requests.

I do so.

After a few seconds, several chairs…and some glass…crashes to the floor behind me.

“NGAHHHH! There you are punk!”

“UNDYNE!” I stand and turn around, Undyne giving me a tight…but thankfully short…hug…which I return to the best of my ability. She sits in the chair to my right as I sit down again. “The CORE’s awesome right?” she jumps into the conversation immediately.

"It was, A LOOOOOT…” is all I manage to say. “Like, seriously—where do I start?’’

“Well go big or go home right?’’

[“True!”] Sans, Papyrus, Chara, and I agree.

“Gerson’s making drinks at the bar. I’ll yell for him. He’s making something for you—“

“Has he no decency?’’ Sans asks…in an uncalled-for formal tone.

“NO! NO COMMUNISM HERE!’’ Chara doesn’t expect me to interject.

“Who do you think Gerson is Sans!? He’s not—“

[She’s pointing at him—]

“—THAAAAAAAT shady! He’s interested in peyote but—“

[“Lovely.”] Papyrus, Chara and I snark.

“—but seriously he’s not stupid! He’s just interested in human barkeeping and drugs!”

”I thought he was into religion…”

”That too! I mean how do you think the Freudians get drunk? He brings the drinks!”

I clap: [“{Eh!}”]

“By now he’s probably found a way to synthetically replicate peyote as well—“ Papyrus snarks from Undyne’s other side.

“PAPYRUS!” Gaster gasps.

Papyrus keeps talking. “—or hell—he could be growing some in his backyard—!”

“How could you ever imply—!” Gaster continues to protest.

“Gneh heh heh! Come on dad: you DAMN WELL KNOW he’d do it, if he could!”
“I suppose you are correct.” Gaster finally admits, as a monster stops at our table.

“What do you wanna drink?” Muffet asks. “Normally I would tell you to get up and get them yourselves but the line at the bar’s a complete clusterfuck. And Boxing the orders to the guests isn’t going as smoothly as I thought it would.”

“Something—“ I begin to say.

[“Something with chocolate in it—“] Chara hijacks my body.

{Hey!}

[I WANT CHOCOLATE!]

[I wanted Sprite!]

[Fuck you—this is MY afterparty too!]

{You didn’t even do anything!}

[I had to watch Gaster cry his eye sockets out!]

Before I can interrupt: [I had to sit through all that and couldn’t even help him.]

{ … … …}

“Of course!” Muffet confirms. She takes everyone else’s orders… even going so far as to ask Sans if he wants ketchup in a chilled glass…

He does… and Muffet isn’t even weirded out anymore.

“Gerson will Box your drinks to you shortly.” She notifies us as she begins walking away. “Then he’s all yours.”

**Stop the music.**

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fa7FGG2VDSM

“… … … “So that’s why monsters are so fascinated by these kinds of religious figures and communities,” Gerson finishes talking for the moment. I push my glass into the Dimensional Box on the table. After about ten seconds, it emerges again, filled with fresh ice and Sprite. As he did when he started his lecture? Slightly-drunken rambling?, he waits for me to take a couple sips from my glass before continuing.

“I mean it makes sense.” Chara continues grumbling for iced hot chocolate all the while. “‘Cause you think humans don’t—wouldn’t agree with your guys’ morals—“

“Mwa hah hah! Exactly! At least someone of your generation has a damned brain—!”

“Seriously dude?” I can’t help but object. “Like, you’re making everyone my age sound stupid!”

“I’m not denying that! Even YOU have thought about it.
“How much you hated people—your at-the-time best friend—using acronyms over text, since it felt less genuine—“

“No no,” I correct him. “I just thought it was stupid—“

Under Chara’s control: [“AND I hated it. It felt like me being good at writing didn’t mean ANYTHING anymore.

[“But yeah—I called Snapchat stupid so BASICALLY you’re not wrong.”

I pause briefly: “Anyway go on…?”

“But you’re not done!”

[“[Heh?]”]

Gerson old-man laughs again. “I can tell: Gaster’s rubbing off on you—“

The Gasters laugh.

“You’re getting used to monologuing—“

“If I didn’t do it already before I showed up here—one time in junior year of high school my teacher told me after class I talked for too long during discussion—“

“That just meant you had lots to say!” he encourages. “When I meant young people of your generation don’t have a damned brain, I meant that they don’t think through what they want to say as long as they should. And in a classroom, there’s groupthink—“

[“Ugh—“]

“—to consider as well, so it’s a lot to juggle. Whether social media has anything to do with how your classmates thought about things, I can’t say—and I don’t think ANYONE—human OR monster—has the right to.

“What I can say for SURE is that you’re not like the Edisondamned Socratesians who go to the same bars I do. They’re obnoxious! Usually at this point in the conversation they’d ask what I REALLY MEAN by “morals” or “religion”.”

“Yeah… they do that…” I faintly recall Socrate’s method of teaching from my surface schooling. “They, like, question AAAALL the things…?” I hedge, hoping that someone will confirm that I remember the concept correctly.


{Good: I remember the thing right… enough.}

“How do they know what they’re asking is really a question?”

The entire table laughs, even Chara. “I’ve considered that a couple times before, but I’ve never managed to come up with an argument that I thought would stick.” Gerson admits. “Maybe I’ll give it a shot—“

We all—to varying degrees—suppress laughter at his unintentional? pun. “—the next time the Multidisciplinary Translationism group meets—“
“If so, recite it for me first,” Sans’s eagerness disconcerts me—

No.

CHARA—

NO.

GERSON is disconcerted as well.

The faint, but nonetheless constant, force of Gerson’s light blue magic, which has been washing over my soul this entire time, Fades abruptly. As it does, he says, “I’m surprised Sans. I don’t think you’ve jumped at the chance to talk about theology and any shape or form in years! If at all!”

Sans’s weight, but mostly his magic, shifts beside me: he’s leaning in slightly, attention completely focused on Gerson.

“Pauline’s presence has…”

We all wait for him to choose his next word, curious about which one he’ll pick.

“REVIVED…

“My interest in this subject.”

[Oh no—!]

[What—?]

[He’s getting his shit together!]

Gerson laughs. “Mwa hah hah! About time too! I’ve only been sitting on all these books I’ve been meaning to give to you for HOW LONG NOW? Five years? You can finally put all that soulpower to use by passing on your philosophical knowledge to the rest of us!

“WITHOUT scarring anyone for life!”

Sans makes an amused sound.

“Oh, dude?” I ask. “What were you saying earlier about… translationism?”

“I’m glad you asked!” Gerson replies. I don’t have to direct my question toward someone by “looking” at them: the recipient can sense my intent.

His enthusiasm to talk about a scholarly subject is a stark contrast to his former work as a member of the Royal Guard. I don’t think…? He’s thanking me for changing the subject…?

“Translationism is the practice of trying to, well, translate, human belief systems into forms more relevant and relatable for monsters.”

He old-man laughs. “OBVIOUSLY this doesn’t work out most of the time. Nearly ALL human institutions crumble when superimposed over a society like ours. I dabble in theological translationism on the side—”

“You call that wall of books in New Home’s library on the side?” Undyne and papyrus ask in unison.
“Yes!”

No one expected him to reply like that.

“If I made translationalist theology my livelihood, I would have a whole LIBRARY’s worth of books!”

We don’t answer: we don’t have a rebuttal to offer.

“ANYWAY…” he huffs, “anytime a monster discusses human institutions or practices, and how THEY THEMSELVES do them, or why they DON’T do them, they’re engaging in translationism!”

I don’t know how to reply verbally, but I AM significantly more interested.

“For instance!” Gerson seems to sense my interest, for he sounds more energetic now, “What I’ve been rambling on about for the past fifteen—“

“Nineteen,” Sans corrects. “with tangents.”

“NINETEEN minutes!” Gerson continues without missing a beat. “About humans’ fascination with the End of Days or End Times or Last Day or Judgment Day. And yes—before anyone at this table corrects me on my terminology, for now, I can group all of them into the same category. They ALL relate to the same thing.”

We all wait for someone—

SANS—

We all wait for Sans to correct him.

To our collective surprise, he does not.

“Whatever you want to call it doesn’t matter. I myself call the END OF THE WORLD the Judgment Day. Even though it’s confusing for religious humans on the surface, because they use this term to refer to something else, which ALSO happens to occur during the END OF THE WORLD!”

[“Oooooooh! Tell me more!”] Chara and I exclaim.

“Mwa hah hah! I’m glad you asked!”

{{[Drunk lecture time!}}

{{[If he’s not ALREADY drunk…]}}

“For your sake, I’ll talk about the END OF THE WORLD! in a way you’re familiar with. This is based off what you’ve told me about your upbringing, so feel free to stop me if you’re lost, or offended, or both.”

“Yeah sure.”

“Followers of countless religions hear about the End Times, or their own religion’s own version of them.

“Just to clarify.” He sobers up temporarily, “you were RAISED Catholic, if I’m not mistaken?”
“Yeah—why?”

He old-man laughs. “That helps me a lot then!

“Now I know how to talk to you about the END OF THE WORLD!”

[“Sweet!”]

“You would have been exposed to the idea of the END OF THE WORLD!, but not most of the thought behind it. Other denominations of Christianity put a heavier emphasis on the END OF THE WORLD! Scholars call the study of the END OF THE WORLD! Eschatology. I’ll use Christian eschatology as an example.

“Some Christians believe the End Times may come at any time, and that humans who weren’t faithful will be forced to suffer through many tribulations. On the Judgment Day, which happens at the very END of the End Times, every human’s actions will be weighed when they stand before their god.”

“Yeah… sounds about right…?” I confirm. “Like, I learned THAT much—“

“Hell! Even those who have no religious affiliation refer to the concept of karma. A bastardized version of it,” he grumbles, “but nonetheless…

“When someone says that they’ve done something, and a seemingly-related beneficial or detrimental action follows it, people say it’s fate! Or destiny! That they deserve what they get!

“I would go into a discussion of free will and its relation to theology, ending on how it’s relevant to our culture —if it IS at all —but—“

[He shook his head--]

“—I think I’ve gone on for long enough. I’ve been around for a LONG time, and even I think I’m not the right monster to talk about that. I haven’t read much into philosophers who didn’t focus primarily on theology.

“And who am I kidding? Undyne? You look like you’re about to sock me in the face!”

“Oh come on old man!” Undyne shouts back. “I’m not gonna do that!

“But you’re right.”

**Stop the music.**

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5utjkhqnQs

She calms down in an instant.

“My parents DID talk about that stuff sometimes.

“And how…

“About how lots of humans and monsters believe they’ll be judged for their actions when they die.

“And hell —how lots of monsters think they’ll be judged for their actions when we go free.”
“Or how important it is that EVERYONE be judged for their actions at some point in their lives.
“But I don’t dwell on it much. My beliefs haven’t changed, even after finding out about your—“
“She’s pointing at us—
“—determination. I think that it’s reinforced them, actually.
“I can’t say the same for most of my friends and comrades. They’ve gone through a…”
{You KNOW it’s bad when UNDYNE doesn’t know what to say—}
“Rough spot…
“After they learned about Alphys’s research.”

Sans tenses again: I don’t even need Chara’s prompting this time, when I tense my body and soul, prepared for…
Prepared for a rant… or worse.

“Some might call it a crisis of faith,” she whispers.

“And this isn’t even limited to friends from a certain religion either!” Her magic returns to a more… in-character… intensity. “I have friends who aren’t part of a monotheistic religion, like Christianity or Islam, who are having as hard of a time coping than the ones who follow religions of the Book!

“NONE of us can wrap our souls around the idea that someone can warp reality to their whim so easily.

“Because whoever can… they’re BASICALLY a god.”

I don’t have to reply in words.

“And what’s worse is that mortals like me and my friends wouldn’t even have the power to STOP someone like that! Knowledge is power, and all that.”

“But someone who’s determined, like, isn’t. And like, they just have to WANT a thing for it to happen.” I offer the inverse to her point.

Undyne laughs roughly. “You know how I KNEW the Determination Study was affecting everyone so badly?”

I don’t have the power to resist Chara: [“How?”]

“Lots of Royal Guard members have been coming to my house in the middle of the night, crying, because a substantial portion of the participants in the Determination Study were Royal Guard members—“

I reply with a soft “Fuck.,” because I can’t think of any other way to respond.

“One of the first ones, they were holding a stack of religious texts, with notes in the margins on almost every page.
“Still crying, they took out their sword and stabbed at each of them, till they all fell apart.

“Lots of them were Bibles.”

Part of me wishes that Undyne won’t finish her story.

“In each one, lots of the Book of genesis was highlighted in red.”

Unable to tune her out, I shudder as Undyne says, “The first thing they did was tear out the page that said “Let there be light.” On it from each one.”

“And set it on fire right in front of me.

“Along with EVERY OTHER book they brought with them.”

A sinking feeling pulls at my body and soul. I don’t resist as first a few tears, then many more, begin to fall, tinged with my determination.

“Did they speak?” Sans asks.

“They did.” She replies promptly.

“They asked me how they could believe in God, knowing that there was someone out there who could do the same things as Him.

“Someone who could defy death like it was nothing.

“How ANY god would allow something as horrible as the Determination Study to happen at all!”

Rough bursts of orange magic grate against my soul as Undyne’s tears fall onto my hands. She grasps at my right hand, and we hold onto each other tightly. “They came to me ‘cause they thought I could help them,” she says in my ear.

“’Cause my parents had asked the same types of questions, after you fell down, Gaster.”

[He nodded.]

{I don’t blame them.

{It’s not like I haven’t done the same thing as all of them.}

“And they DID lots of the same things.

“I couldn’t think of anything to say.” Her bitterness continues to weigh me down. “And I HATED myself for that.

“The only thing I could think of was to help them burn their books. I don’t know how long we stayed up crying together.

“They fell asleep on my dining table. And I talked to them when they woke up.”

We all wait for her to continue. Beside me, Sans’s soul is taught.

**Stop the music.**

**Loop until the next note.**
“I told them it doesn’t matter how determined someone is.”

Somehow, this statement feels like blasphemy, but I don’t have time to process it. She continues, “Eventually something will make them not WANT to use that power anymore.

“NO ONE can mess with reality forever!

“NO ONE can defy death forever!”

If Chara were physically present, they would have shaken violently.

They don’t even have to tell me about how Sans is nodding along with her words, speeding up gradually as she continues to speak.

I feel it in the way his magic pulses beside me, rising and falling in time with his movements.

“IT’S NOT RIGHT!

“EVENTUALLY, EVERYTHING will catch up to them!

“EVENTUALLY, they’ll run into SOMETHING they don’t know how to deal with!

“The world always balances itself out. It’s just a matter of chance! It’s just the Law of Large Numbers, like the Curies always say!”

“Eh!” the Gasters and I respond.

[I get it—’cause I can math now!]

“I…

“I think that’s why humans trapped us down here.”

I never thought I’d hear Undyne sound so…

Vulnerable.

Her passion seems to have evaporated as quickly as she mustered it.

“They saw our existence as a crime.

“Like YOU said, Sans.

“So they wanted to…

“PUNISH US.”

Her tears begin to fall again. [Undyne’s looking at us.]

[I can feel it.]

“THAT’S why I wanted to kill you.” She says with brutal honesty I’ve never heard from her before, not even at her house in Waterfall. “Because I thought that your death could…

“BALANCE OUT…
“Everything that’s happened to us.

“But you’ve known that for a long time. ‘Cause you’re not even surprised about this.”

I don’t have to reply in words.

“After talking with you these past few months, I KNOW this stuff won’t make you mad. Not as much as it did when we were at my house, anyway.

“You understand why I wanted to kill you.

“You still don’t like that—and ME, a little.

“But you understand me, AND my ideas, a lot better now.

“Hell—you even admitted you’d do the same thing, if you could.”

“Mm-hmm.” is all I manage to say.

“And that’s all that matters.”

She reaches out and touches my left arm just below the elbow.

Recoiling, I’m very, very confused.

“Look: you’re even carrying that scar well!”

“I forgot I even had it.”

She laughs: “Yeah: I don’t blame you. I never explained WHY I gave it to you. If you REALLY hated me, you wouldn’t have wanted me to do it. Maybe you would’ve even attacked me back.

“On that day, it didn’t even look like you felt any pain. Or if you did, you didn’t think much of it.”

“It beat me spraining my ankle in the eight grade—’cause SOMEONE leaving their backpack in the middle of the hallway and the stick of doom not finding it ‘cause it was too close to my foot for it to hit it—“

Everyone cringes.

“Point is,” Undyne continues, “all your injuries from those magity experiments—physiological and soulological, you’re carrying them well.

“You’re more accepting that you’ll get hurt.

“You still fear pain—it’d be rash if you didn’t.

“‘Cause even I fear getting hurt and hate going through pain. ‘Cause it’s not even mine sometimes.”

As I’m about to ask: “Like when I lost my eye—“

“{What!?”}

Undyne turns my chair so I face her. She takes my right hand, placing it on the right side of her face, relative to me.
True to her word, I feel a piece of fabric under my palm. She holds my hand there for a few seconds, manipulating my fingers.

[It’s adhered to her face.]

Once she senses that I understand that she wears an eyepatch, she orients my chair so it faces the table again.

“On the day someone’s accepted into the Royal Guard, they receive a ceremonial wound from whoever mentored them.

“And during that ceremony, any wound someone gets is PERMANENT.”

I assume that Undyne won’t elaborate any further… but I am very much wrong.

“Theyir body AND soul are both effected, so casting magic with that part is a little harder. Not enough to disable them for good—OBVIOUSLY—she attempts a joke, and everyone laughs a little, “but enough so that it’s a constant reminder of their fealty.”

“So only determination can heal it,” I extrapolate. “So Asgore—?” I begin to ask.

“NO—he didn’t take my eye out!” She laughs, to my surprise. “He wouldn’t have been able to live with himself if he did!”

I’m about to apologize, but… “Come on punk: DON’T be sorry! Till I told you, you didn’t even think monsters getting injured physically could affect their magic! But it can! For monsters, our bodies and souls are basically the same!”

“Yeah that makes sense,” is all I manage to say, as undyne continues, “He was GONNA give me the wound on my face. I wanted it to be obvious, ‘cause I was gonna be Captain—“

“Yeah—’cause like, if you DIDN’T have it somewhere where everyone could see, it’d be like, HELLA cowardly…?”

“Exactly!” Undyne’s enthusiastic again.

Which is a relief.

“But when he was about to do it, someone was…

“Careless…” she says, her meaning all too clear, “with their magic.”

She makes a cracking and squelching noise, which makes all of us squirm. “So the Great Disclosure Riots wasn’t the first time someone’s attacked me over my support of the Inertia Society. Trust me: I’ve gotten hurt a lot in my life. But NOTHING hurt like THAT. Alphys helped me through it. Thanks to her I’ve been more careful since then.”

I have no need to respond in words.

“But all that—that’s not what I REALLY wanted to talk about.

“You know what it is?” she asks me.

I’m about to answer, but…

“Gaster’s trying to get us out of here so humanity can pay for what they’ve put us through!”
Undyne answers my question, her passion returning.

Thank Tesla.

“So they can see how far we’ve come. So they can see how we’re not the same culture as the one they thought they snuffed out so long ago. Then they’ll be sorry they trapped us!”

I sense her soul tensing in preparation from beside me. “I don’t care if I don’t believe in all the right things. Hell —my parents didn’t! They loved Malcolm X! And even then they couldn’t bring themselves to do everything he said.

“Actually, even the most religious of my friends don’t adhere to absolutely everything. Not like most humans do either. It’s translationalist theology.”

Gerson and I make affirming noises.

“There are SO many times in my life that I ONLY got through because of my friends. so I wanted to be there for them in return.

“I’ve also been through lots of times where my friends and comrades WEREN’T there for me. Especially since the Determination Study failed. It’s one of the worst kinds of pain you can feel. I don’t want ANYONE to feel that way. And besides: it’d be hypocritical to assume my friends would wanna help ME if I didn’t do MY share for them.

“So I don’t care if anyone calls me a heretic.

“Or a gentile.

“Or an infidel.

“If my fellow monsters think I’ve helped them, then what your PRIESTS and RABBIS and IMAMS think doesn’t matter!

“EDISONDAMN THEM!”

[Whoa…]

“But there is one thing from surface religions I do believe in for sure. One that every monster can agree with. Even the progressive ones.

“I believe that Eventually, SOMEONE will strike down everything and everyone who’s done us wrong!”

Everyone around me responds to her passion, just like she promised.

“Isn’t that what the Delta Rune means? That someone who’s seen the surface will make the Underground go empty?

“Like YOU always say Gerson! The reversal of fortunes! The meek and humble inheriting the earth! The last being first! And lots of examples from other religions that you HAVE to tell Pauline at some point!”

He old-man laughs with pride.

“The Barrier’s made of the consciousnesses of the First Seven Souls. They’re still hurting us! Even after all these years.
“{[True…]}” Chara… everyone else at the table, and I, hesitantly say at first, then with more conviction. “{[TRUE!]}”

“YES!” Papyrus is the first to wholeheartedly agree on his own. “You have a ppoint! The Barrier is made of their souls, isn’t it?”

“You are correct, both of you.” Gaster supplements.

“Someone has to make them pay for what they’ve done.” Undyne says, her voice cracking. “Someone has to tell humankind about the prison that’s been under their feet for all these years.

“They HAVE to atone for their forefathers’ sins.”

A chill runs down my spine… and Chara withdraws away from my soul again.

“Undyne?”

We can ALL sense the firmness in Sans’s tone and the currents of yellow magic humming around him.

Okay—you know how a little while ago I said Sans was STARTING to get his shit together?

Yeah why?

In a squeaky voice: He’s done!

“UNDYNE?” he asks again, louder this time.

“How are you gonna weaponized your words today, Belthasar?” she answers. Everyone, including Sans, giggles at her reference… but only for an instant.

“I need not do so.

[Whoa… I’ve… never seen Undyne this surprised.]

“You can’t SERIOUSLY agree with EVERYTHING they said, right?” she protests.

He doesn’t answer. Not verbally, at least. The humming of his magic grows a little more… urgent.

THAT… is answer enough for all of us.

“They said that stuff out of anger! They weren’t thinking straight!”

“From what you told me,” Gerson backs her up, “it DEFINITELY sounded like they were acting out of impulse. Like you, when you were younger, when you’d tell your parents you’d never wanna see an ethergraph again: you didn’t REALLY mean it. You—“

“It wasn’t like that!” Undyne insists. “Just ‘cause they were angry doesn’t mean they couldn’t have made that choice. Why would they ask me to help burn all those books if they DIDN’T mean it?”

Several weighty moments of silence. Cyclically, Sans’s soul vibrates, the term “like gears turning in someone’s head” given soulological form.

After several more weighty moments, his magic settles, at a point higher than the peak of ANY of his previous oscillations.
Then, his magic ringing, it ricochets off all of our souls. He laughs: high, bright, and clear.

Out of reflex, I clamp my hands over my ears. If it weren’t for the fact that he had spoken a couple seconds ago, and that we all shudder in surprise at once, I wouldn’t have recognized his voice at all. It seems like I’m not the only one who’s disoriented by the sudden change.

NONE OF US knows why he’s so… amused…?

“We derived alike premises.”

We were ALL wrong: he’s not EXCLUSIVELY amused.

He’s IMPRESSED.

“Their soul felt so unstable,” Undyne continues explaining herself, energized by his praise. Only now do I realize that I’ve never heard Undyne lost in thought before. “But it didn’t feel WEAK. In the morning, when I finished talking to them, and got them to lie down on my BED—it felt REALLY DAMN Strong!

“My help… denouncing their faith… those things didn’t weaken them.

“They EMBOLDENED them,” she emphasizes.

“As I assumed —“ Sans begins to say.

“How the hell could —?” Undyne asks, only for Sans to cut her off, magic poised, a hammer ready to strike us with his response: “Their choice cemented them.

“SURELY, In integrity or justice.

“They. Did. Not. Fall. Down”

No premises, no references, no nothing.

He has placed ALL his confidence in this statement.

Undyne —and everyone else —can’t object.

{All the books had lots of stuff written in them. This monster must’ve had them for a long time.}

[And they didn’t have to go to UNDYNE to get rid of them.

{But they WANTED her to see—}

[Or they thought undyne was the only one who would understand.]

{{So they PLANNED it.

{{[He was impressed at Undyne for figuring that out.]}}

After several seconds: [She—and Gerson—they nodded.]

“When you put it like that, it’s all so clear.” Undyne slowly agrees. “They told me that they knew that the pain over losing all those books wouldn’t last.

“That NOW, they could devote their energy to what REALLY made them happy.”
Her and Gerson in unison: “What would REALLY give their life meaning.”

“Sans? With all due respect, I—“

Everyone starts: we all forgot Gaster was here.

“—am thoroughly surprised that you would agree with Undyne and this monster so readily and so completely.”

Everyone in unison: [“{True.}”]

“I propose this hypothesis after contemplating the methods you have discussed and implemented with Pauline over the proceeding months. You have stated repeatedly how you despise claims which are…

“UNSUBSTANTIATED.

“Your decisiveness… it is in stark contrast to your methods.” Gaster presses.

{[You know Gaster’s confused when he doesn’t talk for, like, ten minutes…]}

Another second passes, before yellow magic begins to rise from the depths of Sans’s soul beside me.

“Humans have applied logic to faith as long as both subjects have existed.

“Webber?”

A slight rise, then dip, in light blue magic: the soulological equivalent of a slight nod from Gerson.

“I vouch that EVERY monster has engaged in informal translationalist theology.”

We ALL know that he is referring to himself secondhand.

“Monsters from ALL backgrounds have asked why we endure such a cruel fate.

“WHERE they direct their question matters not.”

From my other side, Undyne’s magic reacts somewhat, only to recede again. I barely have time to notice the change, when Sans’s magic begins washing over me, and ME alone.

“Though broken, I wonder how your faith colors our critiques.”

I don’t reply.

Why SHOULD I?

He deduced my religious history and explained it in only a few words, even though I haven’t commented on it today… or at all.

THAT… MUST have been the telling piece of evidence.

The way I tensed when Gerson confirmed that I had been raised Catholic, shook when I heard Undyne recount her comrade ripping up the Bibles, how I couldn’t help but share in their pain when they asked how any god could allow the determination Study to happen—

Never mind: he has PLENTY of evidence to support his conclusion. He had input from my body
AND soul to consider.

“Your learning COMPELLED you to ask this question. No?”

I don’t answer.

Why should I?

He’s only “asking” me so everyone else can understand his argument.

“I wonder how you perceive our efforts to free our kind, when we failed to protect the Six Souls.”

Ever so slightly, his voice softens.

After several seconds, or is it longer: [“Yes.

[“Yes I have.”]"

No. He’s not making an argument, not as of now. He wants answers. If he wanted to make an argument, he would have finished the “wondering” long ago.

More spills out… and mentally, I make a weak effort to stop Chara from speaking with my voice: [“Why DIDN’T you stop them? WHY didn’t you go with Kari? WHY didn’t ANY OF YOU go with THEM!? You just let them die!

[“You guys SAY you respect humans but you STILL let everyone die!”]

I brace myself for a response.

Papyrus gneh heh hehs sadly. “I was wondering when you’d ask us about that.

“In a morbid way, I was curious about what you’d think, of the monsters who assisted in the capture of the Six Souls.”

I can’t think of a response.

“As terrible as those deeds were, they were necessary. Take this as an excuse, or fact, either one is true.

“We could not have achieved our goal any other way, even if we wanted to!

“And even if we could, we didn’t have the proper resources.

“We couldn’t do it without Gaster.

“Or the requisite research from the surface.

“And…”

What anyone else would call a gulping sound, like he’s holding back tears.

“Or without YOU, human.

“There are many monsters, myself included, who believe that killing the Six Souls was necessary, AND that we should respect humans as individuals.

“There are many monsters, including myself, who hold both sets of beliefs, no matter how greatly
they contradict.

“There are many monsters, including myself, who continue to lie to themselves about how they can coexist…”

[Everyone’s nodding.]

“To assert that I have not done the same would be a lie.”

Sans’s resigned tone make my body and soul ache.

“I have begged EVERY god to end my suffering… to protect my family… to save us all.

“Countless times, I have argued to them that only THEY wield the means to do so.”

[[HOW is THIS contradictory?]]

As if in answer, the air begins to burn against my skin—

NO.

Against my SOUL.

“I DESPISED my efforts.

“I KNEW they shan’t accept me.”

His voice breaks for an instant.

“THEY SHAN’T HEED A MONSTER’S PRAYERS!”

My glass leaves my hand, in spite of my death grip on the handle.

I don’t have to ask what happened to it.

His magic focuses on Gerson, sitting on Sans’s other side.

“Their gods command them to be FERTILE.

“To MULTIPLY.

“They promise that they shall equal the stars in the sky.”

Sans’s yellow magic spikes.

Glass—and his closed fist—slam into the tabletop.

The glass promptly shatters, and the table cracks… and the metal floor beneath us buckles slightly. Magic poised, his words strike us again and again, Chara’s soul shaking with sobs they can’t let out.

“THEIR.

“GODS.

“FAILED.
“US!”

It seems like Sans has followed Chara’s example, except his tears are very much explicit. It sounds like they, and his comments, have been a long time coming.

“Gaster?”

“Someone who rules life and death SURELY should have granted you your rest!”

No one answers. I know that Gaster has thought about this for longer than all of us will ever live. If HE doesn’t have an answer, then…

“A MONSTER would have SHARED IN your pain.”

Only when I feel phalanges burning with magic gripping my shoulders do I realize that Sans has stood from his seat… and that he’s turned me to the side to face him.

“NO.”

In a single word, Sans’s attitude has changed. Laced with his conviction, his magic rings high, bright, and clear.

“WE.

HAVE.

“NO.

“GOD.”

He shifts his focus away from Chara and I.

Thank Tesla.

He’s still gripping my shoulders, though.

He directs his somehow-amplified formality at Undyne alone.

“UNDYNE?”

Her lack of a response scares us more than anything Sans could say… except for the fact that again, his voice sounds so different that I only know that he is the one speaking due to context.

“Your comrade has sought solace elsewhere.”

His honed confidence, the same honed confidence he wielded when he proved that Mettaton possessed integrity, has returned.

SHARPER THAN BEFORE.

{No.

{That CAN’T be the reason he sounds different now.

{This is… deeper.}

“AS.
Over the ensuing weeks, Murry makes good on his promise to orient me to Hotland. Every few days, we ride the belts to various locations, to test their accessibility for visually-impaired people. By the end of the fifth month of 201X, I can walk to the CORE, Muffet’s shop, and several other locations independently, on the conveyor belts or on ground level. I’ve even learned to use the system of boats which connect Hotland to the rest of the Underground.

During this period, one phenomenon remains constant: to check that the signs have been brailled correctly, fans of Mettaton’s, recruited to check them when I’m not available, run into us… literally. “They blindfold themselves so they can’t cheat,” Murry explains one day as we walk alongside a blindfolded Aaron. “And they restrict their fields of knowing so they perceive things like you. Stick of doom and all. YEAH—it’s weird, but it works so—“

[He shrugged.]

“—I’m not complaining.

“Yet.”

{{[Uh…]}}

“I mean that works…?” I try to coherently respond to Mettaton’s fans’, dedication…?

“Long as they don’t fall off the belts or something—“

“[Awww…]” Chara and I cringe at Murry’s morbid joke… and valid observation…

We board the main longivator. I ask, “Hey Murry what’s the date? ‘Cause like, a Woshua said Mettaton’s doing something soon.”

“It’s 49/05/201X. Mettaton’s doing his big thing on 01/06. ‘Cause ChronoTrigger’s gonna be 21 tomorrow—“

[“Duuuuude!”]

I would have acknowledged the date without Chara taking control of my voice, and they know this… but they do it anyway.

By now, I can walk through the Lab without assistance, from my cane or Chara. I use echo location and the breeze passing by my body to detect the openings where the hallway turns. I also rely on soulological stimulus to detect the ethergraphs of anyone passing by, or, if I need to enter a room, of whoever is waiting for me inside. That, time-distance, as I explained to Muffet, and or sensing the energy emanating off of magitronics.

I have learned to recognize certain locations by how my soul interacts with their latent energy. As promised, Gaster has devoted some of my daily lessons to CAD-and-CAD, alongside what he had originally planned.

If all else fails, I also hold a hand in front of my face in case I run in to a door, and or as Sans calls
them, “Those Edisondamned supply bins…” [I can see and even I think they suck…] Chara says whenever they have the chance… which is at least a few times a week…

When we arrive in the dining room, Muffet’s silky purple magic glides over my body for an instant. Then, her voice calls out to me: “Oh hello dearie! You’re back early! Just like I asked!”

“Yes I did good today.” I summarize as I find a seat, Murry taking one a few feet away. “Why’d you ask us to get back early anyway?”

“Ahuhuhuhu. What: I can’t drop in to visit? Even Sans’s security protocols aren’t that strict—“

“Shhh.” Murry shushes. “He’ll hear you. He’s got tabs on all of us!”

“Like the government?” I have to snark.

“You mean like YOUR government?” he corrects. “At least OUR GOVERNMENT can’t teleport to wherever you are and scare the living shit out of you!”

I don’t even object to Chara’s hijacking: [“You don’t sound like a guy from Ancient Aliens at all!”

“I’m PROUD of it, EDISONDAMN IT!”

That… was the LAST thing ANY OF US expected Murry to say.

[“But Sans isn’t the government!”] Still in control of my body, Chara points out the obvious.

“Don’t say THAT!” Murry sounds like we’ve made the worst mistake of our lives. “Then it won’t be true anymore!”

[“Okay: NOW!, you sound like a guy from Ancient Aliens!”] Chara and I reiterate. I do so completely of my own free will.

“Regardless of the guaranteed coup in our future, I have some news I KNOW you’ll be interested in hearing, Pauline.” Muffet continues when Murry’s finished raving.

“What is it?”

“I hired someone for accessibility technology consulting services at my bakery because one of the spiders has gone blind. They’ve begun suffering cementing pains—”

I shudder alongside Murry… even though I don’t even know what she’s talking about. “What’s that?”

Muffet makes a sassy sound: “By Faraday’s lisp why are you asking ME!? Ask the REAL scientist!”

[Dude she’s pointing at—]

[I KNOW!]

I wait for Murry to fill me in on the details. “TLDR—“

I was right: he WILL explain what Muffet means without me having to ask.

“—whoever this is, they’re cementing themselves in…
“Hey Muffet—“ he turns to her, “—what color—“

“COLORS. They WERE cemented in two of them, until yesterday.”

“FUCK what!?“

It sounds like Murry’s jumped out of his seat.

[Yep: he did.]

“But that’s HELLA rare!”

“Exactly.” Muffet confirms. “At least, it’s rare among non-Inertia Society and or Royal Guard members. But it’s not unheard of.”

“And like, HELLA traumatic—“

“Not necessarily,” she interrupts. “Only very IMPORTANT and SUDDEN things cause a monster to be cemented in a third color of magic.”

“BUT,” Murry emphasizes, turning to me, “they usually ARE traumatic—“

“Wait—THIS explains how so many of you guys,” I direct at Murry, “can use three colors.”

“It’s well-known that if a monster cements themselves in a third color, it’s a drastic change,” Muffet gathers plastic bags in front of me as she talks, “one that causes their personality to fluctuate wildly, as their ethergraph struggles to reach a new equilibrium.”

I freeze: the LAST monster I expected to hear such integral information from was MUFFET, but I suppose this is common knowledge for monsters.

I haven’t had a reason to formally learn it yet.

“ONE of those states corresponds to their old ethergraph. The REST represent many NEW ethergraphs. This change shakes them to their very core. If these fluctuations happen during a traumatic event, they have even less time to adjust. When they DO settle down, they’re ALMOST, if not ENTIRELY, unrecognizable.

“YOU’D know much more about this than me, Murry. After all: you’ve seen it for yourself.”

{[Alphys!]}

“Yep! Alphys cementing herself in bravery, perseverance, and justice, when she saw you in danger, is the ULTIMATE example of cementing pains! There’s LOOOTS of old scholars’ tales about Inertia Society members failing experiments, and flipping out, and ruining their lab or house with the third color they just got, all ‘cause they failed.

“TLDR—again—whoever this monster is, something HELLA important and sudden happened to them so their soulological perception and psychophysiological state’s HEEEEELLA unstable right now—“ Murry finishes.

[“Duuuuuude that suuuuuucks!”]

“And don’t even get me started if one color is replaced with another color. It’s even MORE rare,“ his mood has calmed down instantly… and this disarms me completely. “And it makes them even MORE different.
“I’ve seen THAT too.

“Almost EVERYONE in the Inertia Society has.”

A silence where Murry… and Muffet… both contemplate yet ANOTHER event that I don’t fully understand…

Unlike what usually happens, Chara is equally confused.

“But what does this have to do with ME?” I finally get around to asking.

“Well… their particular cementing pains are manifesting as a loss of sight—“

“RIIIIIP…”

“Since humans’ primary sense is sight, monsters use sight, in whatever form that takes for them, to perceive what is around them. It could be a side effect of the First Seven Souls and the way they constructed the Barrier. Or the Inertia Society’s anthropomorphism campaign…”

She laughs. “But I’m just a humble baker. What do I know—“

“Uh—turns out? A loooot!” Murry steals my observation out of my mouth.

“What’s your point?”

“Well… I wanted to ask you about accessibility technology. I was wondering if I could take some pictures and videos, so I know what they look like.”

I barely manage to stop myself from interrupting her: “Dude of course!”

“Then, I’ll obtain some identical equipment for my employee. AND, I want to make audio recordings about your devices. This spider, I’ll give them paid leave so they can receive the proper training without having to worry about their financial situation. Their cementing pains could go on for only Tesla knows how long? And only when their sight comes back will we know which color of magic they cemented themselves in. They have to learn to use their devices with aspects of their field of knowing they would have no reason to use otherwise.

“And of course: once this training’s finished, if their sight STILL hasn’t returned, they’ll have to learn to cook without sight as well, and you may have useful advice in that area, even if you can’t cook.”

“Like,” I correct, “It’s not like I CAN’T cook…? I just, like, HAVEN’T cooked in forever…? And I don’t—didn’t—LIKE to cook…?”

“Hmph. I think you’ll have a change of heart when you meet my consultant yourself.”

Muffet stands and walks toward the kitchen, to our left.

From inside: “Toriel?”

**Loop until the end of the chapter.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unOvRqZ6M3U

After a couple seconds of bustling and the clink of pots and pans from inside, I hear soft footsteps leaving the kitchen.
From the doorway to the kitchen, the unmistakable mix of soothing green magic, and the gentle warmth of orange magic, envelops me: “Indeed! It is I: Toriel: your first ally and guardian.”

The quick, irregular, and jerky fluctuations in Toriel’s magic which I have come to recognize as tears.

“It is…”

“It is so wonderful to finally see you again, my child.”

Ever since Gaster brought me to the Underground, I’ve never felt so happy to hear someone’s voice.

Without Chara’s help, I jump up from my seat and run toward Toriel… at least, until Chara takes control of my body, and I veer to one side. I skid to a halt, Toriel pulling me into a hug. “Be careful my child! Gaster has yet to clean up this room as much as I requested!”

“But like, we NEED these tables!” Murry protests from behind me.

“Has Gaster lost so much of his common sense that he has CONSCIOUSLY CHOSEN to install stovetops in the center of your tables!?”

Toriel’s only a LITTLE concerned.

”A crapload of people eat here!” Murry’s undeterred. “And Grillby cooks our food at the table like a boss! And those aren’t stovetops—they, like, contain the flames. This isn’t a Mongolian barbecue place!”

Everyone in unison, including Toriel: [“Yet.”]

Toriel laughs heartily as we walk back to the table. She takes the seat next to mine. “Muffet? You had no need to make these! And so many of them either. I easily could have made something—“

“Nonsense!” Muffet exclaims. “I wanted to celebrate your arrival in my own way. The more I cook for you the more time you have to aide my as-of-now visually-impaired employee. And besides: I think your arrival warrants a change to my menu anyway.”

“But why are you here!?” I ask.

“I would think you would have figured it out as soon as Muffet called for me! You are a smart one,” she says fondly. “Gaster has yet to stop saying so to everyone he comes across! Him, and every Inertia Society member. They are simply ECSTATIC that you have done them such a huge service!”

“I mean—like, he taught me how the CORE worked—“

“Shush! You should be proud of what you’ve done, my child! You have the right to brag! In fact, over the past several months, I have seen proof of your impact on monsterkind everywhere.

“After you left for Hotland, I spent several days with Grillby, ensuring that the town returned to some semblance of order after the riots. During that time, I…”

Her tears stop flowing: “I decided to make good on my promise.
“As soon as I expressed my desire to own a computer, he, alongside several dozen other residents, raised enough funds to purchase me the most state-of-the-art model available. They procured the parts from Alphys, and I had them delivered to my home. With their assistance, I assembled and installed it in my living room.”

She laughs again. “It was only a matter of time before I, logged on, to the Undernet and found all of the things everyone has said and written and sung—!”

[“SUNG?”] Chara and I repeat.

“Believe it or not you’re a popular topic in the Hotland and New Home music scene.” Murry muses as he reaches for one of the pastries in the tiny bags. I’d know: me and Shakur hang out with some local artists—“

“Duuuude it’s been FOREEEEVER since I’ve seen them!”

“I know right? They only take monsters to the main stops along the river and there’s tons of other boats but still. They’re busy most of the time.

“Anyway—they told me how monsters like, namedrop you and Gaster and quote you and stuff —”

“[{Dude—what the fuck?}]”

Toriel and Muffet laugh in unison. “I… must second that statement…” Toriel hesitantly says. “Profanity and all. I do not see you as the wax-philosophical type. You must know by now that you are not nearly as,”

She searches for the right word. “eloquent,” she finally decides to say, “as Gaster."

“Oh heeeeell nooo I’m not!”

[Oh heeeeell noooo you’re not!]

“Oh heeeeell no she’s not!” Murry, Chara, and I cut her off in turn… which prompts another pair of laughs from Muffet and Toriel.

“Your reactions to the CORE’ve become famous,” Muffet notes… mischievously? “Everyone’s used the audio from your reaction to Gaster’s… realization… about the Barrier… alongside footage from many other events relevant to monsterkind.

“And alongside many events… LESS… relevant to monsterkind.”

“Like…?” I’m curious… and also dreading what Muffet will tell me.

“Like my employees receiving a raise. Or students passing exams—”

[“DUUUUUDE!”]

“—and if I remember correctly, the Moores posted this kind of content when they discovered Will passed his second biannual round of placement exams, granting him access to his school’s component Soulology classes. Soulology is a field of study heavily-based in your soft sciences, primarily sociology and psychology,” Toriel surprises me with her knowledge. “Recently, the Inertia Society has restructured the curriculum so monsters must learn these fields first, before they even exert their field of knowing over an object at school.
“Soulology draws heavily on the symbolic interactionism school of thought in sociology. Although we are stretching its boundaries by applying its tenants’ theories to more than just children…”

She trails off, allowing me time to let me absorb this information. “If I had a dollar for every science thingy you guys’ve made up…” I grumble, only half-joking.

“Symbolic interactionism is very much real,” Toriel says, which I respond to with a quick “I know I know—Dewey’s told me.”

“Our amateur and not-so-amateur—“

[{{Woooow Toriel…}}]

“—sociologists, psychologists, and soulologists came to the consensus that due to its theories relating language to concepts, symbolic interactionism was the most fitting theory to apply to this field. After all, monsters have not always measured strength and durability using attack and defense.

“Until the early 170s, we had no such measures at all. But when this time period began, we realized that we could sense the strength of a monster… and I suppose that of a human… by examining their soul. By… CHECKING… what was visible. This period fell in the middle of the Soul Search.”

“But why’d they change though? Like—did LITERALLY EVERYONE start playing video games or something?”

Toriel doesn’t answer.

Everyone in the room sits silently, their souls’ emitting less intense magic than before.

[…]

“Human news media had brought sufficient attention to video games that their existence trickled down to monsterkind.” Toriel finally says. “Attack and defense and HP used to be derogatory terms. But once the Inertia Society discovered their applicability to monsterkind, their use became commonplace.”

“Hmm.”

“You could say that as of right now,” Muffet attempts to smooth over our… awkward silence… “that my visually-impaired employee is suffering a temporary drop in their stats. They are redistributing themselves. When they at last cement themselves, their stats will not only rise back up to their original levels, but they will be even greater, due to their training.”

“Makes sense.”

“Hey Pauline wanna try one of these… fluffy pastry things?”

[{{Woooow Murry trying to make us less serious thoooough…}]

[It’s what he does best.]

Before I can answer, he pushes a couple tiny bags against the backs of my clasped hands, Chara protesting about the invasion of personal space. I unzip one of them and pinch the… fluffy doughnut…? between two fingers, placing it on my tongue.
“How are they?” Muffet asks, before breaking into another laugh. “You have no need to answer dearie.”

I recognize the flavor of the doughnut immediately, even though it’s been several months since I’ve tasted it. [“{Cinnamon butterscotch,}”] Chara and I breathe.

“Indeed my child, it is cinnamon butterscotch. Grillby, Muffet, and I collaborated to create this recipe. I sold these doughnuts to raise the funds for my computer. For that, and to hire the monsters necessary to move all of my belongings to Hotland—”

[“WAIT YOU MOVED OUT!?”]

“Yes. Actually, my home in the Ruins is being demolished as we speak. I sent my essentials here via Dimensional Box. So do not worry: I will not be living out of a suitcase for long.”

[“Oh thank Tesla.] Why are—“

Toriel shushes me. “Gaster and I will explain why I have moved here when it is appropriate, resourceful one. Until then, I have bookmarks to remove. I have been collecting them in preparation for when I saw you again.

“I know Gaster will be concerned over this,” her attempt at mischief is admirable, “but I want to orient you to the location of my room. You can bring your BrailleNote and laptop there.”

Eagerly, we stand from the table. [Does the—]

{How could you fucking think that Toriel being here WOULDN’T fill me with determination!?
{FUCK YEAH IT DOES!}

Chapter End Notes

Here’s the link to Guardia Millennial Fair!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtCWQHCi8jM

Here’s the link to Corridors of time!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fa7FGG2VDSM

Here’s the link to The Last Day of the World.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5utjkhqnQs

All of these songs are from ChronoTrigger. As of early May 2019, I’ve OFFICIALLY watched my first blind playthrough of the game, so I’m retroactively adding ChronoTrigger songs and jokes to Visiontale!

If you know the plot of the game, keep it in mind.

Here’s the link to Crime and Punishment, from the Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood OST. In March? of 2018, I finished watching the series for the first time, but only in March and April of 2019 did I look in to the soundtrack.
All of these songs fit their respective circumstances well. Guardia Millennial Fair's celebratory (this version is more extravagant than the original, but still sounds like pop because of the drums). Corridors of Time's contemplative. The Last Day of the World and Crime and Punishment are... feelsy. The latter is much more intense and insistent than the former.

About the discussion Gerson starts, about translationist eschatology? I edited it heavily since the last time I posted this chapter because of a class I took in spring quarter 2019: Apocalypse Now. The name should be self-explanatory.

Keep in mind that the explanation Gerson gives, and everyone's views on it, are being written by an outsider to religion. Everything I tell the characters about my experiences, and everything they infer about them, are true.

Let's just say that the observations the characters make, about their experiences with religion, are a result of thinking about how monsters might perceive human religion. They are also a translationist take on my own views on religion, because both of them aren't at all optimistic.

They're interesting, but not at all optimistic.

Also, about the new information I learn about magic from Muffet and Murry?

Keep it in mind as well: regardless of whether you're familiar with ChronoTrigger's plot or not.

Here's the link to the cover of "Once Upon a Time" used in this chapter! It's the first track off of "Fallen: An Undertale Tribute," compiled by the Materia Collective.

https://materiacollective.bandcamp.com/track/home

If you want some context about symbolic interactionism, here's a link to a video about it on Khan Academy. I retrieved it on August 4, 2017.


Yep! Toriel's back!

also, I finally worked out the specifics of how the Dreemurrite calendar works.

The year always starts on July 10, according to the Gregorian calendar.

The seven months have seven weeks of seven days. The weeks begin on the day of the week July 10th was on, so if it was on a Friday, the weeks for that year start on a Friday.

Here are the dates marking each month. If the year has a leap day, the end date of the fifth month, and both the start and end dates of the six and seventh months, occur a day later.

01: July 10-August 27
02: August 28-October 15
03: October 16-December 3
04: December 4-January 21
05: January 22-March 10 (on leap years), January 22-March 11 (on non-leap years)
06: March 11-April 28 (on leap years), March 12-April 29 (on non-leap years)
07: April 30-June 16 (on non-leap years), April 29-June 17 (on leap years)

01/06/201X is March 11, 2016.
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

More medical ethics, feels, and the Underground FINALLY!!! has a proper name!

Also a nickname for Mettaton...

If you're curious about the origins of the Underground's name in my AU, check the endnotes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

37

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bn21x4CtHcg

[“By Tesla by Tesla by Tesla by Tesla Mettaton’s thing’s today!”]

I’m not even annoyed that Chara’s repeating themselves more than necessary. “Duuude I’m so hyped!”

Chara and I sit on my bed, my laptop between us. Each of us wears a pair of earphones. We’ve put the braille “DO NOT DISTURB” sign on my door. Sans can’t even make the excuse of not being able to read it because I know he can read braille now…

Since yesterday, Chara and I, the rest of the Inertia Society, as well as basically everyone in the Underground, has speculated about the nature of Mettaton’s announcement. He’s provided no details underline, which seems strange, because he advertises his content everywhere. “He wants to learn braille just so he can make tactile billboards for all the monsters learning it… because in his own words, he needs to promote himself across every platform he can.” Toriel comments the day before.

Her snark is so out of nowhere, and yet, entirely accurate, that everyone applauds… even Gaster.

“Will’s gonna come after so he can, like, explain any visuals, and like, ramble about stuff,” Chara reminds me as they adjust positions. “The livestream should start soon.”

“Like he said 1:00… and it’s like—“ I use my computer to read out the time, “—by Faraday’s lisp it’s 1:30! Where the fuck is he?!?”

“This isn’t like him at all!” Chara states the obvious. “He’s NEVER late! He—“

“Helloooooo Undernet! And welcome to Game Theory—!”

We hear a welcome… and tardie… voice in our earphones… saying a phrase I haven’t heard since before I appeared in the Underground.
“[OH HEEEEELL NOOOO!!]"

“Well, more like a very special edition of Live Report.”

Chara and I sigh in relief. “[At least he didn’t imitate MatPat any longer than he had to…” we mutter.

“Before we get started I would like to bring up TWO things.

First off, I’d like to apologize for being late. We tried our hardest to get set up on time but —“

Chara and I, in unison: [“But STILL! Mettaton’s NEVER late!”]

{Who the hell could be SOOOO important he’s willing to go SO FAR out of his way?}

“I started the livestream late today to accommodate my special guest. He’s much busier than I am, and always HAS BEEN. And always WILL BE.

“Without further adieu,” Mettaton’s voice shifts to the right slightly in my earphones, “I am very eager to welcome him onstage.

“Dr. Gaster?” he calls out.

“Yeeees!” Chara and I shout. Even the insulation in the walls doesn’t stop me from “hearing” every Inertia Society member in the rooms around us cheering.

Gaster’s footsteps move from right to left until both he and Mettaton stand in the center of the stereo field. “It is a pleasure to enjoy your company and share your studio, Mr. Plier—“

“Plier? What kind of a name—” I begin to wonder aloud.

Then it hits me. “NOOOOO…”

[“Yeah his name is Mettaton Plier.”]

“So…” I have to point out, “oh…”

We say in unison, {“[Mettaplier…”]}

Chara and I groan… but not for long.

Based on the agitated yanking of magic on our bodies, we know that several other monsters outside also understand the reference…

“And please: do not feel so compelled to address me in such a formal manner.”

[“(Gracious as ever.”)]

“Gaster is acceptable. Or Wingdings. You have invited me on to deliver an address on YOUR show, after all.”

He laughs. Chara and I… along with essentially everyone around us in the adjacent rooms… openly squee over the softness and amusement in it. “Colloquially speaking, your house, your rules. Considering my tremendously-increased Undernet presence since my return, deriving from my assistance in amending the various video series containing voiceovers for soulology and magitry tutorials underline, even the most auditorily-challenged of monsters could recognize my
“I suppose you have a point,” Mettaton admits. “You’re building your brand doing what you do best, which is making science less… incomprehensible… for us Earthbound Ones.”

[“He made a ChronoTrigger reference!”] CHara rushes to speak before the livestream cuts them off.

I make an excited sound in agreement. “Like, ChronoTrigger’s, like, EVERYWHERE now, soooo… and he’s, like, been hanging out with us for a while. So If he DIDN’T make one THAT’D be more surprising.”

“And in ways you never intended either.” Mettaplier… Continues. “Turning filaments into Auditory fanservice, am I right?”

Gaster laughs again.

**Stop the music.**

“Now that we’ve gotten that out of the way… I know everyone’s DYYYYYYING to know why you’re here. The chat’s going wild with speculation! I know I could have made this announcement alone but…”

Mettaton’s voice… echoes less, now. As if he’s leaning in closer to the microphone.

“Pauline: I know you’re watching.”

{“Heh?”}

[“Stop talking to us through the computer! IT’s like Big Brother all over again!”]

“I see your name in the live chat. And all the excited comments you’re machine-gunning at us—“

“CHAAAAARA!!!”

[“What —you would’ve typed them yourself —I’m just doing it ‘cause it’s faster!”]

“STILL!”

“I know you simply ADOOOOORE Gaster’s voice—“

{“[HEEEEEEEY! STOOOOOP!!!]”} CHara shares in my embarrassment. I bury my head in my hands for a couple seconds. I would’ve done it even Without Chara’s influence.

Everyone else watching… doesn’t share in our embarrassment at all. I distinctly hear Papyrus yell “HELL YEEEEAAAHH WE DO!!!” from in his room down the hall.

“But who doesn’t? This skeleton right here turned SOULOLOGY into SOBS by Tesla!”

Mettaton’s voice echoes less, like it did before. {[Dude PLEEEEEASE stop calling us out on-stream…]}

“And DAAAAAMN can he give a speech! I know I’m not the first to admit it but,”

He verbally swoons. “It was grand—.”
Chara and I… and essentially everyone in the whole building at once: “[[YOU THINK!?]]”

“Maybe a little overblown but…”

Mettaton laughs in delight. “You had centuries to prepare it. Longer, even. Your performance surpassed anything I could say on the matter. And if you can turn such a complex subject into a spectacle —”

[He shook his head.]

“—then you are TRULY worthy of every word of praise monsterkind has showered on you. And many more.

“This is coming from someone who has had very limited interest in soulology, or ANY of the fields you’ve been teaching Pauline, for that matter.” He admits bluntly. “Never mind that I take advantage of them every hour of every day. I’m much more immersed in surface culture as of now. I always HAVE been.”

[He shrugged.]

“But who knows? That could damn well change soon. And if you managed to make ME into a nerd, then only Tesla KNOWS what you’ll do next!?”

[“Awwww Gaster’s blushing!”] Chara squeals. I follow suit… until I start cringing at the intensity of the magic being cast at me from everyone else on our floor… or is it everyone in the building? They’re ALL reacting in the same way… with little regard for anyone’s soulological sensitivity.

“But we’re not here to do that.”

He pauses.

“Wingdings?” he says cautiously.

[Gaster nodded —]

“Yes?”

{He forgot to say his response aloud—?}

Clarifying over my question: [Yep.]

“I scheduled this edition of Live Report, as you requested.”

Mettaton begins walking off to the left side of the stage. “After all, you insisted that I broadcast this announcement for maximum exposure—“

“So this isn’t METTAPLIER’S thing…” I muse. “It’s GASTER’S.”

“The floor’s all yours.” The Undernet star encourages, reaching the leftmost extremity of the stage, and my headphones.

“Thank you Mettaton.” Gaster wastes no time. “I shall keep my announcement brief. For I have a deadline to adhere to.

**Loop until the next note.**
“As you know, my colleagues and I have formally begun setting the second Unified Theory Papers’ directive in motion. We began completing the formative stages in the fourth month of 201X.

“On the day of the Great Disclosure Riots, in fact.”

He pauses. “Wait—those determination modules in all the containers… they’re using them now?”

I think aloud.

[“I guess.”]

“I wished to make a brief appearance here to give this announcement, for it is one near and dear to my soul. To ALL of our souls.

“It is a running joke among monsterkind that although Dewey Durkheim Curie and King Asgore Rousseau Dreemurr possess a deep wellspring of knowledge to draw upon as inspiration for our calendar, they could not devise unique names for the months if their lives depended on it.”

“True…” Chara and I agree. I hear laughter from the occupants of the other rooms. Chara joins them. After a second, I swear I hear someone —

Never mind.

It’s Papyrus.

I’d recognize his sharp shout of “FUCK!” anywhere. Even more than the clatter of bones and bang of his metal armor hitting the floor.

{I HAVE wondered why they’re not named so…}

[Same.]

“Recently, it struck me to discuss the matter with Dewey. In short, he realized that now that the details of the Determination Study have been released to the public, its contents constitute one of the most culturally-important wellsprings of knowledge we have ever tapped.

“And the list of possible contenders to that title is beyond brief. EVERY monster can agree on that.”

Gaster’s… recollections and melancholy are more than abrupt. Similar emotions envelop me from the other monsters at our watch party, and I feel them almost as intensely as if they were my own, even though I have no idea of why they feel this way.

“Obviously, each of the Six Souls immersing themselves in our lives constitutes the vast majority of the incidents on that list,” Gaster’s voice has lowered to a whisper. He’s not in crying territory yet… but that could change at any time.

“They affected us in a myriad of ways. Even with my experience coordinating logistics across countless eons in the Void, I could not enumerate the number of ways they impacted us.”

I nod. Simultaneously, I imagine nodding my head —

NO.
I’m sensing Chara nodding as well, as if I had somehow nodded my head twice simultaneously.

“Though the extent to which my gesture will do their contributions to soulology and psychophysiology justice is debatable, I will do it all the same, for I am entirely confident that for all my knowledge, there is nothing I could offer to them that could begin to compensate for the pain they have suffered for our sake.”

In an instant, Gaster’s voice has become firm and clear: not in the same way as Sans, but Chara and I can definitely hear and sense the resemblance. {{Well now we know where he got his speech genes from…}}

“Starting today, each month in the Dreemurrite calendar shall be named for the trait associated with each of the seven colors of magic, in the order the Six Souls fell underground, and in the order which we discovered them. Our calendar will contain seven months of seven weeks of seven days, as before, with a twenty-two-day Interlude, as it was before. Our first month shall be named Patience, the second Bravery, and so on. The abbreviations for these names are P, B, I, K, E, J, and D. N will designate a day during the Interlude.

“We will continue to write dates with the day first, month second, and year last, in accordance with the surface, the United States outstanding. As that country has in… a multitude of matters regarding weights and measures.”

“{{Dude we get it —the Imperial system’s stupid and we write dates different from you guys but COME ON!”}}

“With this naming convention in mind, this day, the first day of Justice 201X, marks the 20th anniversary of my passing, along with that of Murry Durkheim Curie, and Annie Asimov Moore.

“That,” he seems to be… bracing himself…?, “and the 21st anniversary of the release of the video game ChronoTrigger —“

We all cheer. Based on the intense, rapid pulses of blue and yellow magic crashing over my soul, which threaten to knock me off my bed… and or across the room… Sans is celebrating this fact much more enthusiastically than everyone else.

“Furthermore,” Gaster… seems slightly distracted…

{Is he reading the live chat?}

[Yep.

[And Mettaplier thought I was typing lots of stuff in the chat…

[Dude Sans —CALM THE FUCK DOOOOWN!]

{Uh… this is a ChronoTrigger thing so I don’t think —}

[I don’t care —he STILL! Needs to calm down!]

“Before we are collectively inundated by my colleagues’, and Sans’s, enthusiasm —“

“Thank Tesla he —“

[“DO YOU SERIOUSLY THINK HE WOULDN’T ACKNOWLEDGE ALL THE MESSAGES!?]}
“—I would like to note that the first day of the Interlude will be designated as 01/N/202X. We debated whether designating this period using the number of the year proceeding or succeeding it seemed more appropriate. Considering that we spend this time preparing for the new year, and contemplating the year that has just passed in an environment separate from it, we decided upon the latter.

“To end my announcement, I shall say the progression of the months for you, so the symbolism of this calendar may be clear.”

He makes the sound of taking a breath, as he focuses his magic. Though I’m not physically OR soulologically present in Mettaton’s studio, I can feel Gaster gathering his resolve, as he begins to speak.

“Patience.

“Bravery.

“Integrity.

“Kindness.

:Perseverance.

“Justice.

“DETERMINATION.”

With the last month in the progression, a weight seems to lift off of his body and soul. We soak in the enormity of his action. {You call naming months a thing to debate?}

Chara’s soul hums uncertainly before they answer: [I guess so.]

“Therefore, with this new configuration in place…”

Gaster’s leaned in toward the camera.

“Pauline?”

{“Why’s he talking to us through the computer again!?”} I can’t help but ask.

“I know you have been wondering what I have been doing since I exhibited the CORE to you. Expect an answer from me by the 21st of this month.”

After a few seconds of silence, Mettaton walks back to center stage. “G-G-Gaster I…

“I d-d-didn’t…

“This s-s-s-seems…”

Chara and I rack our brains for a time Mettaton ever stuttered on camera.

We both come up empty.

“This is… this is an incredible change the Inertia Society’s proposing.” Mettaton can’t maintain his composure.
“Not nearly as incredible as the Holistic Integration Movement. That campaign spanned… hmm… approximately a century. And collectively, ten of those years consisted of creating the necessary research methodology and materials. And this only accounts for the formal lifespan of the movement, for within my soul, it never truly ended.”

“I…

“I never imagined that we would ever apply its tenants so soon after adoption…” he says, essentially to himself.

Gaster seems to be… recollecting something… something from long ago.

Even more distant than his time in the Void.

Mettaton gives him time to do so.

“Well, in any case, I am grateful you took time out of your busy schedule to announce this in person.” Mettaton struggles to express his gratitude.

“Mettaton?”

Gaster’s firmness makes us sit up in our seats.

He sounds… like SANS… again, or maybe, does Sans’s firm tone take inspiration from Gaster?

“I would have gone to any lengths to ensure that my schedule accommodated your own. Especially after considering your fighting alongside Sans, and your exemplary reporting: during the Great Disclosure Riots, AND during the period which has transpired since then. For you are part of our family now, Mr. Plier.

“Or,” Gaster’s mood lightens almost immediately, “as many in the Lab and the Chat have begun referring to you, Mettaplier—”

Chara and I groan again… and everyone around us in the other rooms follows suit.

“Oh I knew you would make that joke…” Mettaton isn’t offended in the slightest. “Actually, I’ve been waiting for you to say it ever since we first met.

“On that note, I am Mettaton Plier, this is Dr. Wingdings Tesla-da Vinci Gaster, and this has been a special edition of Live Report. Catch Live Report at its regular times, at 9 AM, 2 PM, and 7 PM, five days a week.

“Thank you everyone. And stay determined.”

………

Even though Gaster explicitly told me about his, intentions, to explain the second directive to me, Chara and I still manage to forget it. We spend the next few weeks traveling throughout the rest of the Underground: eating at every restaurant we come across, buying nerdy Paraphernalia from every game store we come across, and feeling weirded out by every meme mentioning me we come across. We have barely enough time to catch up with the “Crew,” being everyone I met in Snowdin besides the Skelebros. Apparently, Sans talking about them with most everyone in the Lab caused the name, and the accompanying cringe, to spread…

Thank Tesla that halfway through the waiting period, Alphys and Undyne have the idea to start
calling us the Party instead… “Because you guys are like a party in an RPG! We ALL are!” she exclaims one day, as we look through her laptop at all the games she’s emulated over the years. “I haven’t gone as deep with all the ChronoTrigger stuff as Sans, but I’ve still tried looking for games that feel and play the same way.”

She laughs a little. “I haven’t managed to find one exactly like it yet. But monsters HAVE made lots of RPGs since then. And a lot of them have accessibility features now, like audio description and compatibility with screen readers. They even have puzzles and game mechanics that rely on magitronic and soulological elements—“

“Dude sweet! Complicated, but sweet!”

She places her laptop on my lap. “There ARE a couple game demos I think you’ll like. You’ll be able to interface with these games well enough, as long as one of us is there. Actually, the developers of the games I downloaded, I asked them if I could write down your feedback so they know what to change for next time. And they said yes.”

“Dude—why wouldn’t I?”

The remaining two weeks pass by in what feels like two days. The day that Alphys decides to drop Gaster’s news on me, the Moores, Shakur, and I are in the middle of watching music videos posted underline. “This one is an homage to punk rock bands’ rebellious tendencies tralala. Ending the establishment and all that. They’re burning images of some surface and Dreemurrite figures. Or Zealdian figures, as some of us call them. Some… unsavory politicians.”

“I know who they’re burning…” I can’t help but say. “Even being stuck down here with your shitty Internet hasn’t stopped me from knowing that. I fell down after this became a thing…”

“I am merely making their machinations more manageable to make sense of, Pauline.” Shakur chuckles. “For Will, I mean. For he has yet to learn about your…”

“Politics…” their words scream of air quotes, “in any detail.”

“But he’s an asshole yo!”

“Wait wait what!?” Everyone starts at Will’s sudden swearing.

“Duuuude!” I exclaim on reflex.

“I mean come on—EVERYONE thinks so! Even the Zealdians do! Actually dad told me lots of them want to build a wall to keep HIM out!”

[“Gonna need that Burn Heal!”] I don’t even complain as Chara takes control of my body.

Will, followed by everyone else, bursts out laughing. “Yo yeah I know right! It’s so bad that there are memes about him replacing Dalton in ChronoTrigger—“

[“Ugh.

[“Yep: sounds about right.”] again, Chara comments using my voice, though I would have made the disgusted sound with or without them. [“You wouldn’t even have to change that much. Just find someone who could voice-act him—“]

“Not like you would WANT to,” Will snarks back.
“Anyway,” I turn to face Shakur, focusing my soul on them soon afterward, “you and Will said something about Zealdian? politicians?” I try my best to pronounce the name.

“Yes trala,” they reply smoothly.

“What’s Zealdia?”

“You don’t know?”

Their surprise… and shadow of indignation… is completely unexpected. “That some citizens—a significantly-larger percentage of our populous than I first presumed—most of them being Inertia Society members—call our monarchy Zealdia—”

[“WAIT SINCE WHEN!?“] I swear, my voice seems to raise in pitch several tones, so it sounds more like Chara.

{What the hell does that mean?} I ask… but Chara isn’t listening. They’re reeling in surprise. [Zealdia!]

[Why the hell didn’t I!? think of that!??]

“Yes—they’re right yo. Lots of Inertia Society members are calling it that. Me and my family are, and I’m the only one who’s played the game! They only know it ‘cause Sans started using it in—“

[“So this was HIS idea?”] Chara’s outburst happens so quickly that I don’t even have time to react.

“Pauline? Who ELSE would name our state after a place fraught with time travel—?” Shakur’s… only a little less serious than I expected.


“And hella advanced technology using magic that no one else—“

[“That too.”] I don’t understand why Chara’s still taking control of my voice.

“Point is,” they continue, “I’ve heard he’s started designing a new coat of arms to go with the name. If I didn’t know any better, I’d call him subversive—“

Someone clears their throat from in the doorway, and their purple magic yanks on my soul, their anxiety binding my soul to theirs.

It’s Alphys.

“Um… Pauline? Can you, Allen and Touring come with me?”

“Of course.” Touring sounds professional again in an instant. “Annie? Bookmark this page for later will you? I’ll let you know if it goes long.”

“Sure,” she affirms.

I stand from my seat in Will’s room, walking toward the doorway, where I sense Alphys’s soul. I reach out, waiting to feel her scales underneath the fabric of her lab coat. When my fingers at last brush her body, I withdraw my hand again. I don’t have to hold onto her arm anymore: by now, sensing my sighted guide’s soul is sufficient in most cases. we begin to walk, everyone else following close behind.
“Where we going?” I ask.

It takes a few seconds for Alphys to answer. In that time, the magic surrounding her soul wobbles uncertainly. “I’m gonna show you what we’ve been working on for the past several weeks. Well—more like WHERE we’ve been working on it ’cause all we have to show for our work is just some diagrams but…”

She stops herself. “You’ll see.”

After a couple more minutes of walking, we stop at the end of a hallway. [Alphys’s scanning her hands on that creepy glowy hand thingy—]

{So we’re going down to the True Lab—}

[Yeah.]

We pile into the elevator and wait in silence for the doors to ding open. From my magitry and soulology training, I recognize the… the scent… I smelled the first time I came here: it’s burnt magitronics and… determination. The air hums more intensely with magic than before… or am I merely more soulologically-sensitive when I first visited? I haven’t been here since Integrity of this year.

Alphys leads us through the True Lab, her soul calming ever so slightly along the way. Eventually, she opens a door. I grab on to her arm temporarily, as she extends it out behind her while entering the room. [Holy crap that’s a lot of papers!]

Before I can ask for clarification: [There are diagrams everywhere! And…]

I squint: Chara is taking control of my eyes, even though it’s pointless…? [How many of these are written in pen?]

{What?}

[There’s lots of diagrams on the walls that aren’t written on a computer—they’re written in PEN. And…]

As if Chara is leaning in to look at the writing more closely: [I don’t think ink’s supposed to glow like that…]

“This is my family’s—and the Gasters’—new office. And yours too now, Allen and Touring. Sit down everyone.”

Alphys has barely finished before I walk forward, hands gently bumping the edge of the table. “That’s the long edge of the table,” Alphys clarifies. “There’s a free seat at the end, to your left.”

Sliding my hands down the edge, I reach the end of the table and backtrack slightly so I find the chair. As I sit down, I reach out and touch the table.

“Holy shit—there’s SO MANY papers!” I can’t help but remark.

Alphys sits down across from me. “Yeah… we’ve been almost too busy to clean up. Not all of those are mine, by the way. Most of them are the Gasters.”

The Moores and Shakur take the seats down the length of the table beside me.

“The Gasters couldn’t make it ’cause they’re working on the… concrete answer… they promised
“Alphys doesn’t waste any time.

“But I thought—“ I begin to protest.

“WE thought they’d be able to make it too,” she apologizes. “But they wanted to experiment with some equipment. They came up with some ideas earlier to day that they wanted to test now. So I’LL be the one giving you a concrete answer. But I won’t have anything… concrete… to show for it,” she trails off awkwardly.

Confused at Gaster’s choice of words, I silently wait for Alphys to continue.

“I’ll keep it as short as I can. Might as well rip off the bandage.

“You know those metal canisters of DT modules we’ve been putting everywhere?”

“Yeah why?”

“And how we said we’d be using those modules to make some new CAD-and-CAD machines?”

“Yeah…?” I prompt.

“And how we were going to make human brains using those CAD-and-CAD machines?”

She gulps. I don’t prompt her verbally. Instead, I focus my soul on her somewhat more intensely to indicate that I’m listening.

“We started making those CAD-and-CAD machines a couple days after the Great Disclosure Riots.

“Since you first consented to giving us your determination, we’ve been conducting research and testing into both creating the CAD-and-CAD machines we’ll need to create the souls, and the structure of the brain. Specifically, the parts which pertain to consciousness.

“The designs of those machines have been finalized since your birthday. Our neurological research is still going on, but we HAVE started making prototype souls.

“We’ll start doing that in earnest within the next couple days.”

A moment of absolute silence. Even the chatter of amalgamates close by stops. Alphys’s relative calm is anything but reassuring.

“[Fucking hell…]” Chara and I breathe.

“They won’t have any memories or anything,” Alphys continues, much more confident this time. “They won’t even have stats similar to what you have now—because they don’t have to. What matters is that they’ll have ethergraphs, and that their ethergraphs will contain concentrations of determination comparable to the average human. And they’ll have just enough cellular activity to be called alive by most medical standards.”

“Makes sense.” I reflexively reply.

“So Asgore won’t take’ Pauline’s soul after all?” Allen asks the question I’m most afraid of asking.

Alphys sighs. The magic surrounding her soul ebbs, dropping from 71 attack to 60. “That’s the thing: we don’t know.

“Gaster’s told us that in every timeline he’s seen, Asgore’s NEVER accepted an offer to break the
Barrier without any further violence. Not of his own free will. And THOSE timelines didn’t have to get through all the…

“Politics… he has to go through now.”

I appreciate Alphys’s efforts to mask her… disgust… but they don’t help in the slightest.

“What happened?” I ask.

“It’s not just one thing,” Touring’s purple magic pulls at my right wrist: I turn my head in that direction and focus my soul on the space directly to my right. “Lots of monsters are conflicted about the Unified Theory Papers. Some of them don’t think we should have to get Asgore’s permission to use the souls we make to break the Barrier.

“Others want you to be the seventh soul, regardless of everything you’ve done for us.”

[“To balance everything out,”] I recall Undyne’s wording, with help from Chara.

“But, Gaster also said that this timeline’s so different from everything he’s seen that it’s worth trying something different.”

As she speaks, Alphys rises from her seat, tugging me forward toward her with her magic. She takes my hands. Her magic radiates from her sharply.

“PAULINE?”

I go still.

I don’t think I’ve EVER heard Alphys sound so stern as long as I’ve known her.

“Gaster proposes that you go to New Home and bring these souls as an offering to Asgore. You’ll convince him to take THEM instead of YOUR soul.

“You’ll also convince him to give you the Six Souls back, so we can fulfill as much of the second directive as possible.

“Because after doing our research, we KNOW that we can give the Six Souls their bodies back. It’ll take lots of trial and error, but it’s not like we haven’t done plenty of that already.

No one reacts in words for several seconds.

“I speak for all of us when I say this: even after all the research I’ve done over the past few months to help you create these CAD-and-CAD machines, I’d say that this sounds crazy,” Touring laughs in disbelief, “but I can’t anymore, can’t I? You guys brought back Gaster after all. You have much more information and resources to work with this time around.”

“Mm-hmm.” Alphys agrees. “But this is… as Gaster calls it, only the ideal scenario.

“He hypothesized that there’s a…

“A…

“He didn’t want to give it a number but…

“The odds of Asgore accepting this offer are… lower than he would like.”
“Then why tell it to us then?” I ask.

Alphys answers at once: “It’s because I have to lay out all the possibilities for you. The ideal scenario is the one we want to happen. It’s not necessarily the most likely one.

“Gaster… and Sans… and Papyrus… basically everyone who’s been working on this… thinks that Asgore will refuse your offer. We have some ideas as to WHY he wouldn’t do it, but we can’t narrow it down to just one. But whichever one it is, it doesn’t matter.

“Everyone who’s been working on this thinks that, sans a miracle, Asgore will try taking your soul.

“We realized that we have to use the time you have left with us to help you. To prepare you.

“To prepare you for the, worst-case scenario.

“We’re gonna prepare you to fight Asgore. So that when you’ve weakened him enough, you can ask him again to take the artificial souls, and you’ll be on equal ground, negotiation-wise.

“And if he doesn’t go quietly then…”

The silence of the True Lab is deafening. Chara mentally squirms around. I clasp my hands together tightly in my lap. Everyone’s magic fluctuates around me. I’m acutely aware of every rise and fall in power.

“This circumstance is precisely the situation I so desperately sought to steer away from.”

Shakur breaks the silence.

“You are sending Pauline to her death, all of you. You are disrupting the natural order of things, all of you. Humans aren’t meant to be… be given new bodies like our computers are given new parts. I cannot agree with this decision.”

“Why not?” I ask, more curious than offended about why Shakur may object to the plan.

“Believe it or not, I share some sentiments with the Zealdian old guard. Creating life is… it’s…

“Humans and monsters were never meant to do so. Mixing magic and determination in this way? It makes a mockery of life and death.

“I would almost prefer it if you created human embryos, and subsequently scientifically sped their growth. And THEN harvested their souls once they had developed—“

“Ugh!” I can’t help but gasp in disgust.

“What?” Everyone else in the room gasps.

Shakur continues like I never spoke. “At least this kind of modification is one we are familiar with trala. It is one that humanity has yet to use, because of their… opinions… on experimenting on their own kind, but nevertheless: there is ample research on inserting genes into embryos. There is ample research on embryonic development. You would possess a more precise perception of how long to wait to harvest the souls. There would be much less guesswork. Much less—“

“So you want them to grow test tube babies?” I summarize, bewildered by what I’m hearing.

“That language is crude, but yes, trala.”
Is Shakur short with ME… or Alphys, for bringing up this plan with them in the first place?

“Consider that if you DO succeed in recreating a human brain, it will not come into being gradually, over the course of years of growth, as does the brain of a fetus. Relatively speaking, its consciousness will come into existence immediately. An integral part of human development is cognitive development. Without that, those brains will…”

[They’re ringing their hands…? Tentacles? I don’t even…]

“Those brains will enter this world confused and disoriented.

“And in all likelihood, frightened.

“For if on creation, the souls you make are comparable in strength to the average adult human, does that not mean that they would possess the soulological capabilities of the average human, to sense magic use? Could they not sense you? Running their experiment? They’ll sense your intentions.

“They will know they’re destined to die.”

A weight settles over my entire being.

“Humans may not be as attuned to their souls, but it is a fact that when a human loses the will to live, by losing a loved one for instance, without someone to support them, their health declines. The strength of their body and soul deteriorates. Usually, they can bounce back from such a loss, but…

“Some don’t.

“They may even fall down.

“They may not fall down in the same manner as monsters, but regardless—“

“Here’s the thing.” Touring sharply interrupts, standing from her seat to face Shakur. Orange magic flows off her in streams. “We’re gonna monitor the souls the whole time to make sure they’re stable. That they come into the world right. And if we make just brains we won’t have to… to watch those embryos grow during each trial, knowing that the trials they’re part of may fail and that they’ll HAVE to die: their body, brain, AND soul.”

Her voice cracks, and her magic fluctuates rapidly. “I don’t want to see that. None of us do.

“And besides: by making just brains, we should know if they were made correctly sooner. If they come out wrong then… then we can end them more quickly. So we’ll have more time to get it right next time.”

Touring sits down again. Alphys and Allen stand from their seats and crowd around her. After a few moments of sobs, much quieter than any of us expected, she finally collects herself well enough to say, “I know it sounds cruel. Hell it is cruel. To… to just go through human lives like that. Like lab rats. But…

“But…”

She laughs humorlessly. “For all intents and purposes, we’ve already done it before. So no one should be surprised we’re doing it again.”
“Once the process is finalized, we’ll create these souls as close as we can to the time Pauline leaves for New Home.

“So they won’t live in agony too long.

“And… and I think that’s the best anyone can ask for.” She finishes, sniffling. Confused, my hands scrabble across the table. {Why--?}

One hand grasps the side of a cardboard box. The other pulls a couple tissues out of it, passing them over to Touring. To Chara: {Of course that was you…}

“Shakur?” Alphys tentatively asks, almost too softly to perceive.

No one answers… but no one outright cuts her off either.

“I… I know you’re angry at me. At all of us, for suggesting this. I don’t blame you if you go to the press and badmouth us. NONE of us would.

“Before you start thinking over that, I wanted to tell you that there’s more to this plan. MUCH more. And I think you’ll agree with enough of it that… that you won’t…”

Each of us mentally fills in the gap: so Shakur won’t go to the press and badmouth Alphys and her colleagues.

“It’s about how we’re gonna prepare Pauline to fight Asgore. Or his supporters, if they plan on protecting him. Some of the more… extreme ones… will at least TRY to do it.

Believe it or not, this part of the plan is the one which will be easiest to figure out, because it depends on Pauline’s own knowledge and not… translational ethics…

“Please,” she pleads. “Please stay. I… I KNOW you’ll approve of this. You’re one for a good underdog story.”

Shakur gives a tense laugh. “You’re not wrong there trala. I may not like your plan, but I don’t hate you SO much that I’d release confidential information to the press.

“I’ll stay.”

Everyone relaxes slightly.

“But be warned: I’ll make sure you’re treating Pauline with the respect Gaster promised, and the respect Sans so highly values. I will be sure to continually inquire into your plans. I will even change my schedule so I may come here every day, to talk to her myself.”

“Of course.” Alphys agrees without hesitation. “If that’ll set your mind at ease then…”

**Loop until the end of the chapter.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbVt041PAWA

Alphys takes a breath. “Here’s the thing: we can’t train you with a purely-physical weapon because Asgore’d be better at it than you, no matter how much you train. It’s not practical. And besides: you’d need physical training for that. Training that I know you don’t wanna do, training that I know won’t help anyway ‘cause we can only do so much with the time we have.”

“[True.]”
“Instead, we’re gonna teach you to fight in a way you’re familiar with. To cast magic in ways YOU’RE familiar with, but in ways ASGORE isn’t. Remember: magic is a matter of degrees. Asgore may know the main characteristics of each color of magic, but he doesn’t know how YOU perceive them, let alone how they’d manifest for you. We’ve been using the data from all the game demos I showed you to create your training regimen—”

[“So YOU GUYS made those games?”] Somehow, Chara and I’m not even offended that they collected my data without asking.

“Most of them yeah. Each one’s focused on a certain soulological task. It’s not like we’re the FIRST ones to make games that use the soul as a controller. And this is only ONE of the considerations we have to account for.

“On top of all that we have to make sure you won’t take too much damage. ‘Cause even if we teach you to dodge it won’t be enough, because your soulological sensitivity can’t make up for your blindness entirely. And Asgore’s so much stronger than you: he survived the War, by Tesla! He KNOWS how to counter humans’ fighting styles.

“And kill them.

“So you’ll need armor. And a lot of it too.”

Alphys begins to pace around the table. “You know what Mjolnir is right?” she asks out of the blue.

“[Heh?]”

“It’s the set of armor worn by Master Chief in the Halo video games,” Alphys explains. “It amplifies the wearer’s strength, speed, durability, and cognitive capabilities, by connecting their brain to a computer.

“Toriel and Sans were thinking: if you’re gonna fight Asgore, you’re gonna need every advantage you can get. We’ll design it so it can withstand Asgore’s attacks, so you’ll suffer minimal soulological and physical harm.

“And so you’ll have enough firepower to kill him quickly, if it comes down to that.”

I have no need to agree with her verbally.

“We haven’t made any prototypes yet, but what Toriel was thinking was that we tap into your soul and transform your determination into the forms of magic you’ll need, like what the Second Six Souls did. Like green magic, to shield you. Because you don’t have enough green magic in you to heal yourself. And besides: using magic to heal like that isn’t your thing. It’s not how you are. You’ll have to harness it from a machine.”

“True…”

{I didn’t expect this…}

[Me neither…]

“So it’ll be like Undyne’s,” I recall, and Alphys’s magic dips downward and quickly returns to normal: her soul reacted as if she was nodding.

“So you’re basically making me a set of armor like in Xenoblade?”
“And weapons too—”

Chara rips my excitement out of me in my reaction: [“That’s fucking awesome!”]

Alphys laughs with genuine delight. “I knew you’d like it! Toriel and Sans thought you would too!

“After you visited the CORE for the first time, I gave Undyne some ethergraphy equipment. I told her to turn it on whenever she was with him, to collect data about Asgore’s soul. Especially when they spar. So we’ll know how strong he is, and how strong we’ll have to make the armor. ‘Cause it’ll have to withstand substantial physical and soulological harm. ’Cause trust me: he’s a pretty nice guy, but he can hurt you. Very badly.

“And we need to update the formulas which calculate soulological strength anyway so… yeah: this setup was perfect.”

Alphys stops pacing: she’s standing directly behind me, now. Chara and I tense. “Believe it or not, the Inertia Society’s been prepared for this for a long time—“

This time, I’m not the only one who’s confused. Allen steals my words out of my mouth when he asks, “But how could you prepare for something like this?”

“I… I can’t even… that’s… this isn’t surprising to me but still!” Touring gasps.

[Alphys’s looking at Shakur.]

“I must mirror the human’s sentiments trala. Yes: I think you thought this out very well.”

They hesitate before continuing, their magic rising up slowly as they prepare to speak again. “I cannot simply forgive how you plan to create these artificial souls. Simultaneously, I have one more reason to sleep soundly: I know that Pauline will be protected. And that is all that matters, I suppose.”

“The Inertia Society was created as a body independent from the Zealdian government so we could change with the times, on the surface and in the Underground. Gaster and my parents knew that human society would change. So they wanted a group of monsters around who could handle that change.

“And, if it turned out that something happened on the surface and down here that contradicted the Unified Theory Papers… even if that something was Asgore…

“If we ever had to kill Asgore just to break the Barrier then… so be it.”

With resolve and magical strength backing her words I never imagined she had in her, Alphys says proudly, “I’ve been preparing for this for my entire life. We all have. If I have to apply our science to giving you a fighting chance against Asgore…

“If I have to violate the principles of combat everyone was taught to abide by ever since they could form a bullet and hit someone with it…

“THEN SO BE IT!”

“Now THAT… is determination.” Shakur’s admiration is palpable. “I could never make that choice. Very few monsters could. Hell I think even fewer humans could. You are serving a worthy cause. Monsterkind needs more individuals like you.”
“What you said just now,” Touring’s… observant, “it sounds like something Sans would say.”

“I know.” Alphys is… proud of her accomplishment. “Before I came upstairs to get you guys I was trying to figure out how to explain this how HE would explain it. ‘Cause I’m SURE he would’ve… gotten all formal right now, if he was here.”

We all “mm-hmm” in agreement.

“Assuming he wouldn’t have been like that ever since you all got here.

“I bet that by the time he’s done with Mjolnir, he’ll be all formal all the time,” she muses. “He’s falling into it more and more now.”

[“That’s… not creepy at all!”] I don’t even object to Chara’s response using my voice, and everyone except Shakur… laughs nervously?

“Honestly?” Allen’s voice squeaks significantly less than I initially assumed, “I’d be surprised if you recognized his voice when you first heard it. ‘Cause a couple times, I’ve heard him talking in another room, or felt his magic, and I haven’t recognized him. Not immediately. Only when we’re in the same room together physically can I be sure he’s the one talking.”

Him and Touring laugh again. “And sometimes not even then,” they say in unison.

Shakur stands from their seat. “I would like to stay but I have some commuters to transport to New home. Goodbye Pauline.”

Chara takes control of my body so I stand from my seat and face Shakur. Shakur wraps an… an appendage… around my shoulders, and I hug them back. As we let go of each other, Shakur says mischievously, “Asgore: you have absolutely attacked the antithesis of weakness. The Inertia Society shall do whatever it must to free our kind. Even if it means striking you down.”

They walk out of the room, laughing heartily. “Asgore?

“Beware the Man Who Speaks in Hands…”

“Or more accurately, beware the Bearer of the Hero’s Badge—“

[“Hero’s Medal,”] I correct.

They laugh again. “I know trala. I’ve been corrected about that plenty of times. And not just by Sans. Many Zealdians have insisted that regarding item names, the Super Nintendo translation of ChronoTrigger should be Zealdian canon—“

“So Sans and our friends AREN’T the only ones who call it Zealdia!” I point out.

Everyone laughs. “He’s promoting it persistently,” Shakur jokes. “By Cyrus, I swear he asks for more Zealdian crest ideas every time he goes out—“

[“THAT’S A THING!??”] I don’t even care that Chara interjected.

They nod vigorously. “Point is, NONE OF US will let Asgore lay hands on you. I am sure of it. Now, you and the Tourings can go upstairs and finish all of the music videos I audio-described.”

Hand gripping a few folds of Shakur’s cloak, I walk out of the room, everyone else trailing behind us. [Does the thought of Sans being all creepy—?]
{Uh… I don’t think THAAAAAAAT would be the thing that’d fill me with determination…?}

[Okay—how about,] they try again, [does the thought of minmaxing your stats like you did when you prepared for the final bosses in Xenoblade and ChronoTrigger fill you with determination?]

{Yep.}

[And it would TOOOOOOTALLY fill everyone else with determination too, if they were strong enough to handle it.]}

Chapter End Notes

Here's the link to the ChronoTrigger main theme!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDZ2W0GpP_E

It's grandiose in the right way, so I HAD to use it. I also may or may not be on a ChronoMusic kick right now...

Here's the link to the extended version of Unfinished Battle, from the Xenoblade Chronicles OST. In the game, Unfinished Battle only plays once--it doesn't even loop.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbVt041PAWA

It just screams decisiveness and action.

Here's the link to the page about Mjolnir I referenced. I retrieved this information on August 5, 2017... AKA 27/P/203X, if you're into that...

http://halo.wikia.com/wiki/Mjolnir_Powered_Assault_Armor

"Hello my name is Mettaplier! And welcome to [insert game name here]."

Now, you know the names of the months!

That, and how Gaster's plan to break the Barrier makes this fanfic different from... virtually every other Undertale fanfic I've read...

*sigh...*

The first time I posted a completed version of this chapter online, It hit me how... cruel and messed up... this plan is... what Shakur says... all of it... all of it's cruel and messed up...

This may not be the headcanon I'm most proud of for being the most detailed, but it's likely the most realistic, and provides a window into how monsters perceive human ethics and politics... and exactly how different it is from what Americans consider liberal or conservative.

In much happier news...

Congratulations: the Underground in Visontale OFFICIALLY!!! has a fucking name!
You have NO FUCKING idea of how annoyed I felt when I realized that in every Undertale fanfic I've read/fan comic I've listened to, THE UNDERGROUND AS A STATE DIDN'T HAVE A NAME!

From now on, the Underground will be called Zealdia. Supporters of Asgore will still be called Dreemurrites, though.

As for why I chose the name Zealdia?

I solidified that name in late May of 2019. It's a combination of two location/monarchy names in ChronoTrigger. To anyone who's played the game/watched a Let's Play of it... the interpretations the cast and I give in the chapter as to WHY Sans chose to name the Underground Zealdia are directly inspired by ChronoTrigger's plot.

If you haven't played the game yet, look up these names at your own risk...
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you will learn how I will fight Asgore without stabbing him to death slowly and agonizingly with the Worn Dagger. That, and you will witness one of the weirdest moments in all of Undertale... warped by the political landscape of this timeline...

Also, if you were wondering when Burgerpants, Bratty, and Catty were going to appear, you don't have to wait anymore!

I highly recommend that as soon as you finish reading the chapter, you read the part of the endnotes within asterisks. If you're familiar with how Shulk operates in Super Smash Brothers, or with the lore of Xenoblade Chronicles X, you can ignore that part of the endnotes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

38

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx55-ngn8n0

“Robin where the hell—?“

“SHUT UP AND WALK FASTER!”

{I don’t like this!}

[Me neither!]

“If you REALLY wanna know where we’re going—“

“Uh, yeah: I DO!” I retort.

His orange magic compels me forward. “We’re going somewhere you haven’t been yet—for some Edisondamn reason—to meet a friend of mine for a Live Report watch party!”

“That doesn’t help!”

[Well you better figure out how to change his mind really fucking fast ‘cause we’re about to walk by a Mettaton statue in… three! Two! One!]

{What?}

We abruptly stop walking, Robin gripping my wrist tighter. “Behold! The Mettaton fountain! And —BY FARADAY’S LISP WHAT THE HELL’S WRONG WITH YOU DUDE?!”
Before Chara or myself can respond with a confused noise: “He didn’t clean up the fucking water!? WHY!?”

“What’s leaking?” I ask, letting go of Robin and slowly walking after him. “is it the fountain—?”

“YOU THINK!?”

{It’s THAAAAT bad?}

[…. …. Yeeaaaaah…]

He sighs. “I can yell at him about this later, ‘cause that’s not what we came here for let’s go—!”

Before I can stop them, Chara forces me to confirm “YOU CAN’T BE SERIOUS!”

“YEP! We’re going to MTT Resort!”

“Heh?” I ask under my own power.

“Exactly what it sounds like. It’s a… Mettaton-themed hotel! Or a place that Mettaton made… him-themed…? Somewhere his fans can hang out? All three? But Who fucking cares!?”

I follow Robin’s… too eager for my liking… lead into a nearby open door, most of my movement guided by his orange magic yanking me into the room beyond. Some catchy music plays from the speakers above our heads, and monsters chat around us. “Hold up—hold onto me, for real this time — ‘cause this place’s crowded and Mettaton hasn’t moved the tables…

“Amateurish!”

I oblige… after complementing him on his Dunban impression.

After a couple minutes of walking through a crowded room, WHICH Chara tells me is the lobby of the MTT Resort, headbanging and soulbanging to the catchy music all the while, we stop walking, entering a smaller, less crowded room instead. I ask no one in particular, “Why do I smell food?”

Listen from 3:35 to about 3:45.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5qze8tRhQo#T=03M35S

“Welcome to the MTT Burger Imporium: home of the Glamburger. Sparkle up your day! ™”

Someone calls out to us as soon as we walk in the room?

{What the hell—?}

[Crap I wanted to say it!]

[You’re gonna walk into the counter right… about…—ROBIN STOP STOP STOP!…]

{What counter!??}

“Dude Burgy what’s up!?”

“{Heh?}”

“Oh. Robin. You’re… awfully excited today—“

{Wow he sounds tired—}
“Of course I am! I brought Pauline—or should I say Shulk—’cause she hasn’t been here yet! And I thought: before the shit hits the fan she better have a Glamburger right?”

Burgy? Laughs, not amused at all. “I mean she won’t treat me like shit at least—“

“And in the meantime you can tell her about the Shitty Walmart Stories scandal from a couple months ago!” Robin continues talking like he didn’t even hear Burgy. “I mean you must’ve noticed MTT’s acting less like a bitch now?”

I don’t even object to Chara’s interference: [Wait Whoa Robin caaaaalm dooooown!]

Burgy humphs. “I guess. Ever since the beginning of Integrity he’s… apologized… for treating me like dirt. Right around the time the human—I mean you—came to Hotland, Shulk.

“Maybe it was ‘cause of you. Maybe it was just for ratings. Who knows?”

[He shrugged.]

“Well if you’re gonna be here might as well go invite Bratty and Catty over too.”

“Great! Where’s the least crappy table?”

Burgy laughs genuinely at Robin’s continued snark. “How about I take your guys’s orders outside? It’s crowded here. And besides: Shulk has to learn what I sound like, and what my magic feels like. And that involves actually being able to hear and perceive me so we can have a meaningful conversation.”

He walks around the counter until he stands on my left side. “That sound about right, little buddy?” he asks, just above forehead height.

I never realized I could put so much gratitude into a single “Yeah” until I answer him, but there’s a first time for everything.

“How about I whip up the usual for you Crusoe? And I’ll… make something special for The Visionary? Does a sampling of everything we have sound good?”

“Uh, sure I guess.”

Burgy walks back around the counter. “I’ll be done in a few minutes. If I’m late blame the Edisondamn customers—“

“Shhhh! Don’t talk shit about them yet! Wait till your shift’s done!” Robin jokes… mostly… as we walk toward the nearest wall. We skirt the restaurant, Chara and I laughing all the while. He holds a door open for us as we walk outside to a table overlooking the street. He sits next to me on my left. “I think you’ll like Burgy. He’s your age, in human years. And I am too—“

“[WAAAAAIT WHAAAAT!?]”

He laughs. “What! You thought I wasn’t?”

[“WHAT DO YOU THINK!”]
He makes an indifferent sound. “I guess you can’t really tell based on my voice. Or my magic either.”

“{[That explains a lot—]}”

Robin laughs lightly. “Seriously how old did you think I was!? Why do you think I didn’t know who Adam Smith was? I haven’t learned it yet!”

“Oh…”

“The Inertia Society prioritizes monster education. So it’ll be a while before I learn human subjects. Let alone college-level stuff. That’s why hanging out with Gaster’s been…”

He trails off before continuing. “It’s weird to think that he’s affected me so much, but I only learned who he was a couple months ago! I never heard of him before Paps said his name on that livestream. And he’s been watching us this whole time, and helping us. Hell—if he HADN’T helped me at least a few times while he was stuck in the Void, I’d be surprised.

“And well: Burgy’s gonna have a lot to say about—oh here he is! And Bratty! HELOOOOO!” he calls out, adding in a burst of orange magic for good measure. “Sup catty?”

“Oh by Tesla! It’s like, Robinson Crusoe!”

I start at hearing her? voice.

{Wooooow sheeee’s—}

[Like what not-teens think teenagers sound like?]

{… Uh… yeeeeeaaah…?}

[Yeah.] they confirm.

“We’ve been like, wondering where you’ve been—“ someone else says.

{Who’s that?}

[Bratty.]

“—’cause you like, never come to the Nakh Academy livestreams to like, hang out anymore!”

“You mean Khan Academy right?” I can’t help but butt in… only for everyone to laugh.

“No silly!” Bratty sits across from Robin, briefly directing her soul toward me. Her orange magic draws a line down my face, from my left temple to the left side of my jaw. “Nakh Academy’s, like… YouTube livestream school! But like, without the terrible YouTube comments…? We like, ask stuff in the chat from home and like, the teacher responds in realtime.”

“Dude that’s cool.” I admit, as Burgerpants slides into the chair across from me, setting a tray down between us.

Insistent green magic nudges at the right side of my face, so I turn my attention—physical and soulological—in that direction. Catty’s sitting down on the short edge of the table by herself. “Dude like, Bratty? Why’d you like, have to mention the terrible YouTube comments first? You could’ve, like, started with the cool usernames! The teachers are, like, happy to call us by our underline names!”
“Or the names of our favorite characters from stuff!” Bratty adds.

“Like how Sans calls you Shulk!” everyone says at once, laughing.

“I WAAAAAS gonna ask about that…” I direct at the table at large, “but like, I got it…? ‘Cause he calls Alphys Lucca…?”

{Do Bratty and Catty—?}

[Finish each other’s sentences all the time?]

[Yeh.]

Burgy taps the edge of the tray closest to him twice sharply. “Do you want me to tell you which food’s where on that tray?”

“She’ll do fine.” Robin tears the paper off his Glamburger. “I mean Gaster nearly had a soul attack when she knocked soup on the floor the first time—“

“And on him—“ I try to interject, but he continues talking.

“—but she’ll be fine!” He laughs again. “She’s got it! But for real—save the Starfait for last they’re really good. You’ll know it when you perceive it.”

“Sure.”

I trail my hands over the set of plates, finding the Glamburger directly in front of me, a… pointy sandwich… behind it and… “What’s this?” My fingertips lightly brush the contents of a plate in the upper-righthand corner.

“It’s stake. In the shape of Mettaton’s face.” Burgy answers begrudgingly?

“{Uh…}”

“I HAD to sho it to you. Just so you know it exists. Not ‘cause I think it’s good. Everyone has to look at it and eat it once, I think.

“Anyway,” he seems much less disconcerted now, “the Starfait’s in the upper-left corner. And that pointy thing you touched behind the Glamburger’s called the Legendary Hero. It’s a sandwich shaped like a sword—“

“Duuuude!”

“They can be shaped like lots of different swords, if I remember right,” Burgy explains as I pick up the Glamburger. “But I’m not a real gamer so not like I’d know—“

“I’m gonna see if I recognize it.” Robin leans over, the tray becoming lighter as he takes the Legendary Hero off of it.

At my side, Robin’s magic drops in intensity. His attention entirely shifts, so it completely surrounds… the sandwich?

“Nooooo.” He whispers, in awe?
“What—?” I begin to ask.

“Yeah dude,” Catty somehow manages to sound both informal, impressed, and quiet all at once. “Like, I’m sooo happy I know what that is…? I JUST saw it on stream at school yesterday. ‘Cause our teacher was doing a playthrough of—”

I don’t even have time to react to the fact that Catty is learning about ChronoTrigger at school, because Bratty and Robin cut me off.

“IT’S THE MASAMUNE!” they exclaim, entirely overshadowing Catty’s magic. Robin sounds like he’s on the verge of either screaming as loud as his soul can manage, crying with joy, or both.

“Nooooo waaaaay!” I shout back.

“Duuude I should get some to go for the rest of the Party!” Robin nearly yanks the sandwich toward him. {… … We’re… gonna have to replace that…}

In Chara’s voice: [“DOOOOO IIIIT! JUUUUUST… DOOOO IIIIIT!”]

**Stop the music.**

Burgy laughs. “Knock yourself out.”

I start eating the Glamburger. After taking a couple bites, I ask “So like you work here?”

“I’ve been working here for three years as of two days from now, little buddy. And All of it except the past couple months’ve been complete shit.”

[“Here we go…”] Robin and Chara say in unison.

{It’s like what Gaster always does when he wants to monologue isn’t it?}

[Yep.]

Burgy gathers his magic. “Well: at least I don’t have to explain too much. ‘Cause we’re the same age, in human years. And my parents raised me according to the Holistic Integration Movement. And considering where you lived and went to school I bet you’ve heard the same things. Hel—they went so far as to start nagging me about what I’d do after college. When I was thirteen—“

[“What the fuck!?”]

“Yeah! You must know about the ‘tiger mom’, or dad, parents who take control of their kids’ lives, just so they can make their futures as…

“Bright,” he says with air quotes even I could see, “as possible. Parents who only care that their kid goes to a nice college and meets someone nice and starts a nice family and has a nice job—“

“I know I know—”

“Sorry for getting on your nerves, little buddy.”

He barks out a laugh. “But since you’re annoyed at me for bringing it up that means it MUST HAVE be true for you.”

“Yeah…” I admit.
“Anyway, my parents were like that. When I turned ten, they told me, Willis Scott JR.: when the Barrier breaks, we want you to be prepared for life on the surface. So we want you to do well in school so humans may let you into a good college so you can get a good job.”

We don’t even try to hide or shorten our cringing: verbal, physiological, and soulological, at his descriptions.

“When I was six they enrolled me in one of those Inertia Society schools. At least the students were nice. And the classes didn’t suck. That’s where I met Robin—“

[“Eh!”]

“Yeah! We sat together in translational literature class. We laughed every time the teacher mentioned Robinson in Robinson Crusoe! And we even wrote a parody! But Robin was the main character and he was stranded in the middle of Los Vegas without any money and not a deserted island—”

[“[… … Uh…]”]

“You haven’t read it yet?” He seems surprised. “From what I’ve learned about human schools you should’ve read it by now!”

“Noooo… I haven’t…?” I confirm.

“Robinson Crusoe’s like, actually really relevant to monsterkind, ‘cause it like, talks about what it means to be civilized…” Bratty explains.

“And it’s like, the first true English novel or something.” Catty adds.

“Soooo…” I struggle to find a way to ask what needs to be asked, “THAAAAAAT’S why your last name’s Crusoe?”

“Yep! My family changed their last name when I got cemented. ‘Cause they loved the joke so much. And the parody has lots of hits… it’s underline if you wanna read it—“

{That shameless plug thooough!}

“Duuude hell yeah!”

Burgy—Willis? Continues, “At least I can say no matter how shitty my life’s been, I don’t hate science or math or translational literature. My teachers got me to love school. I felt safe there. And valued there.”

“I’ll give it to Gaster: he got REAL SMART monsters to help him set this all up,” he says with gruff respect.

“Dude—that’s how I felt at school too.

“When it was good.”

“As much as I’d wanna hear about that—and I do—we have lots left to cover.”

Burgy guffaws. “We have to get to the talk—“

{“AAAAH BY TESLA NO!”}
“—about cementing—”

Chara and I sigh in relief immediately.

“Oh nooooo,” I respond after a second, fearing for the worst.

“My parents sat me down and lectured me about how they wanted me to cement myself in purple and blue magic—“

[“WHY!?”]

“Cause THEY had learned it and ‘cause they were the most useful—“

[“DUDE THAT’S NOT HOW IT WORKS AT ALL!”]

“I KNOW!” he shouts back. “But did they CARE?”

Before I can answer: “If they did they SURE HAD a shitty way of showing it. The only reason they were happy about my good grades at school was ‘cause they thought it meant I’d be cemented in purple magic.

“The last time they lectured me, you know what happened?”

I don’t even try answering, because I already know part of it.

“I was cemented when I was sixteen! In ORANGE MAGIC, by Tesla! And I was cemented in light blue magic a couple months after that. And it only happened ‘cause I got up the courage to run away from home—“

“What?” I softly ask on reflex.

He laughs again. “Yep! I ran away from home at sixteen. Took everything I could carry and moved here, from Snowdin. Took me weeks to find somewhere to live. Thank Tesla that Zealdia doesn’t have nearly as many problems with crime as humans do, so I could sleep out on the street without too much trouble.

“That, and I followed horror movie logic the RIGHT way.”

I set aside the fact that Burgy called the Underground Zealdia… and that he’s interested in horror movies, for a less intense time.

“And it took just as long to find any job that’d accept me. ‘Cause apparently,” his voice rises, “the only way you could get an acting job around here till a couple years ago was if you sold your soul to Mettaton!”

As Burgy continues to rant, I’m fascinated. He’s like the dissatisfied high school and college students on the surface, even after factoring in his running away from home. The main difference is that he had the guts to actually make a new life for himself, never mind what anyone said.

The only difference is that by living in the Underground now, I’m not only separated from my parents, but everyone I knew… and I don’t have the option of returning to them.

“So I thought: maybe if I work for Mettaton I can get experience and make my own YouTube channel or something. Earn enough money to have a nice camera 3D-printed for me. And a greenscreen. Yeah! All that stuff! ‘Cause it wasn’t like I had that many expenses: I was buying food for one, and I could go to the library to use the Undernetfor free. And thank Tesla that the
magic powering my devices is basically free.”

[“Damn right,“] we all say in unison.

“So I could save most of my income for what I wanted.”

He suddenly stands from his seat. “But you know what happened?” he asks in my face.

I put down my Glamburger and am about to answer when he says “HE HUMILIATED ME!” His magic rakes at my face in alternatingly hot and ice-cold streaks.

“He was never straight with me about when to come to work. There’d be times where I’d come in and I wouldn’t even receive the call to show up until halfway into my shift.”

Before I can reply: “He’s made me wear ridiculous outfits to celebrate human holidays.”

Before I can interject: “He’s made me wear ridiculous outfits just for the hell of it.

“And he’s made me sit there and listen to CDs full of songs about how horrible I am—“

“What the fuck!” I’m appalled. “How could he—?”

“Oooooh, I don’t know: maybe he got it from your YouTubers! All those rigged prank videos!” he draws his air quotes so sharply that I’m afraid they will draw blood. “All those montages of people falling down and hurting themselves and everyone laughing at them. It makes me sick.”

Before I can retort, Chara clamps my mouth shut: [He’s not angry at US.

[He’s angry at humanity.

[And you’re a human…

[And you’ve never heard this rant before.]

“And the only comfort I gathered came from watching those ‘Shitty People of Walmart’ stories.” Burgy seems to have calmed down somewhat. “Those stories about retail employees and what they have to trudge through every day, just to make minimum wage. So at least I knew that even when we got free, there’d be plenty of humans I could relate to. And at least I could give them something to not be angry at when I went shopping.

“Mettaton was an asshole! I don’t care that he doesn’t have one! HE! WAS! AN! ASSHOLE!” he emphatically insists.

“At least, till around the beginning of Integrity of this year.”

I strain to perceive his magic, leaning forward. “When I came to work, he was there. And… and he called me Willis! Not Burgerpants!”

“Heh?”

“It’s a loooong story…” Robin… doesn’t sound like he wants to elaborate. “It’s like his own Fishbock Fiasco—“

“Oh…” I understand Robin’s hesitancy immediately.

“But anyway: he called me Willis. And he asked me how my day was going so far!
“I thought something was up. But I didn’t wanna make him mad so I said it was okay.

“But we… we went into his office in back and…”

I sense his disbelief even before he begins to speak. “He said this.

“Willis, I know you think I’m just pulling another prank on you but…”

He laughs shortly. “And he was right: I DID THINK he was playing a prank on me. You can’t blame me for that.”

I don’t respond in words. Instead, I focus my soul on him, imagining drawing a circle around him, contracting it slowly as he speaks, until only he is inside of it.

“After that, he said this.

“Willis, I know this won’t make up for what I’ve done but… I’m sorry. I’m sorry for how badly I’ve treated you. I’m sorry for the degrading outfits and the flippant work schedules and those awful CDs!

“I thought my soul was out of wack! Only when he burst into tears did I believe him. And when he told me he’d come to his senses. He told me about you. How he realized: since you were gonna help the Inertia Society break the Barrier, he’d have to clean up his act.

“And of course those ‘Shitty People of Walmart’ or McDonalds stories didn’t hurt either. He didn’t wanna be grouped in with them—“

I don’t even have time to object to Chara’s [“Wooooow…”] using my voice.

He sits back down. “He realized he couldn’t treat me like shit without consequences. Unlike lots of humans on the surface…” he adds as an afterthought.

“So we sat down and talked about my work hours. My pay. What I thought we should change around here. That he was considering a service where I Box customers’ orders to them if it’s really crowded. Or reducing total working hours. Or changing my schedule so there were fewer workdays but with longer hours. We literally went underline and looked at research about what human workplaces and schools do to make their employees and students happy.

“And he reduced his number of daily Live Report sessions from four to three, so he could check on me every day.

“THANK YOU—“

{AAAAAAH WHY’S HE HUGGING ME—!?}

[Uh… it SHOULD be obvious—]

“—for all this.”

“But I didn’t do anything—“ I begin to counter.

Loosening his hold on me slightly, he talks over me :No no! Don’t say that little buddy! You’ve done a lot!

“You got Mettaton to admit he fucked up! That just ‘cause he’s famous doesn’t mean he can treat everyone around him like shit! He was a prime example of not every monster being sunshine and
rainbows and Gaster levels of considerate and selfless. Humanity NEEDS to know this.

“They need to know that THEY did this.”

I don’t respond: verbally or soulogically.

I know all too well how human media has adversely affected monsterkind.

“Willis you’ve like, been ranting about this for forever.” Bratty interrupts.

“Yeah like, you have the right to do it, ‘cause like, you haven’t met Shulk before—“

[She calls you it too!]

“—but still dude.” Catty adds. “She’s getting a bit annoyed. She agrees with you, but like, she’s still kinda annoyed.”

“But like, it’s like, really nice that you’re here though, Mr. Visionary!” Bratty exclaims. “‘Cause we like, wanna know what it’s like…

“On the inside…” she says in a mock-conspiratorial whisper, after a dramatic pause.

“Inside where?”

“The Lab of course!” Bratty and Catty answer simultaneously.

“‘Cause like, we haven’t seen Alphys in like, forever!”

“Ever since she became the Royal Scientist in like, 182X—”

“Holy shit…”

“Yeah!” Catty confirms. “She like, hung out with us all the time at the garbage dump.”

Bratty: “And her parents like, taught us to preserve stuff and stuff.”

Catty: “But like, we hadn’t heard anything about her since the Determination Study ended—“

“Well more like we WANTED to see her, but we didn’t wanna get thrown out or shunned by our families…?” Bratty points out, still in the same informal tone.

I reply with a quiet “Mm-hmm”, imagining myself nodding: in response, my magic fluctuates in the same controlled way.

Catty: “We like, only heard about what she was doing when Gaster got back!”

“Bratty: “But like, not in person!”

Catty: “When she took you to the CORE! That like, was awesome! Like, Alphys hasn’t changed at all!”

“And Mettaton was there too!” they recall in unison… before proceeding to teenage girl scream.

“He’s like, my robot husband—“ Bratty begins to swoon.

“Bratty? He’s MY robot husband—“ Catty rebuts.
“NO: he’s MINE—!” Bratty cuts her friend off.

“You can have Gaster—“ Catty… offers?

“But he’s married to his job—“

The whole table replies with an obligatory [“Eh!”] and applauds Bratty’s comment.

“I mean like, COME OOOOON —you know this!” Catty explains. “He’s like, literally been planning to bring Shulk here for like, literally forever!”

[“True.”] Chara and I fervently agree.

“He was like, SOOOO dedicated that he spent all that time in the Void thinking of how to get back to his sons. And that’s like… SOOO sweet! I think I’m gonna cry!” Bratty elaborates.

“Me too!” Catty seconds.

“DUUUUDE!” Robin… seems on the verge of tears just talking about this, and Chara frantically chants [No Robin not now not now not noooow!]

“Well you better get eating. ‘Cause the special edition of Live Report’s at eight!” Robin reminds me as I pick up what’s left of the Glamburger. ‘And in the meantime let’s grill Burgy—“

“Oh no: don’t call me that. Call me by my Undernet name: Salt! It’s if you put sodium and chlorine together—“

[“Yeah I know—“] Chara and I begin to reply.

Salt claps. “Congratulations: you’re not chemistry stupid!”

Before I can reply: “And yeah—I know how much you hated chemistry in high school—but you STILL got an A! Even after having to learn how to draw chemical bonding diagrams! I USUALLY call myself Sodochlo—“

[“‘Cause sodium and chlorine,”] Chara and I interject.

“Yeah!” Salt’s more than encouraged. “I do it to test out if the person I’m talking to’s a translational idiot or not! ‘Cause trust me: I had LOTS of classmates who were translational idiots…”

I finish the Glamburger and start eating the… Stake Shaped Like Mettaton’s Face… Chara noting, [I STILL don’t know what this is made of…] as I take the first bite

*One stake with a mysterious past later…*. 

… … … “Come on it should be starting now!” I complain in the general direction of Robin’s laptop.

“I’m really feeling it, girl!” Catty agrees.

Bratty seconds, “He was like, only late when Gaster was—“

“Helloooooo Undernet! Welcome to a special edition of Live Report! I’m your host, Mettaton Plier, and you won’t believe the story I have for you tonight.
“And it’s especially fitting because I see that Shulk’s in the live chat—!”

All of us in unison: [“EDISONDAMN IT METTATON!”]

“—again! This story is EXTREEEEEMELY relevant for you.


“I’m sorry I haven’t been on social media over the past week, darlings. I’ve been pouring my soul into this project. I hope you like it.

“I INTENDED to give some commentary on the Inertia Society’s work on achieving the second Unified Theory Papers’ directive before I showed it to you, but unfortunately, I don’t exactly know what they’ve been working on.”

He laughs. “And even if I DID know what they were planning, if I so much as talked about it in my sleep with no one else at home Sans’d shoot or stab me on the spot—“

We all shudder because Mettaton’s… probably right.

[“That’s if you’re lucky.”] Chara snarks using my voice.

“On that note… Blooky? Is our equipment ready?” he hurriedly asks, everyone at the table giggling at his attempt to change the subject.

After a few seconds, I hear a faint, “Yeah… I guess so. Unless you want me to change them…” from the right side of the stereo field of my earphones.

“No no I think they’ll suit us just fine. Thank you Blooky.”

“Wait nooooo…!” I breathe. “That can’t be—“

“Yeah.” Robin confirms. “That’s Napstablook. Mettaton’s cousin. He makes his music for his news segments and YouTube shows. You’ve probly heard his music at least ONCE. He, like, helps run our version of Soundcloud.”

“Duuuude I met him in the Ruins!”

“DUUUUUDE! NIIIIICE!”

{Uh… they’re acting like I’m friends with a celebrity—}

[You… kinda are…?]  

“Undyne?” Mettaton walks to the left side of his studio and calls out, “HIT IT!”

I nearly jump out of my seat as Undyne bangs the keys on a piano.

“BY FARADAY’S LISP NO! I mean play the song!”

“I know. Just messing with you Mettaplier. This is for you punk!” She shouts. “You ready Dunban?”

All of us in unison: [“DUNBAN?”]

“GNEH!”
We all make hyped noises at hearing Papyrus’s voice. "[WHYYYY…? Is Sans giving everyone Xenoblade names…? And ChronoTrigger names?]"

"METTAPLIER!!! Sing your soul out! For that get-out-of-the-woodshed-free card for when you inevitably endanger Zealdian security and slander our government!!!

]"Wooooow Undyne…”] Chara and I snark… and everyone else follows suit.

Mettaton stops walking.

After Undyne plays a few notes on the piano, he begins to sing.

“Oh my love,
Please run away.
Monster king,
Forbids your stay.

“Humans must,
Live far apart:
Even if,
It breaks my heart.”

{Why does this sound like a soap opera? Or an Asian drama?}

“They’ll put you
In the dungeon.
It’ll suck,
And then you’ll die a lot—“

Everyone at the table snarks, saying something to the effect of [“{Thanks dude…}”]

“Really sad,
You’re gonna die.
Cry cry cry,
So sad it's happening—“

“[{Oh thaaaaanks duuuude!}]” we all yell at the laptop.

“HOOOOW…? Is this supposed to be a thing I should get excited over…?” I ask the table at large.

“Oh I hope,
That Gaster finds
A way back,
To humankind.

For us all,
As well as you.
Otherwise,
What you must do.”

Mettaton’s tone has shifted in an instant. Rather than sounding… comically sad… he now sounds genuinely hopeful.

This shift shuts me up quickly enough…
“Is to stand
Before Asgore,
Our freedom,
Is what You’re pleading for.

“Really sad,
We can’t have both.
I still can’t
Believe it’s happening…”

We all go still, his…

We all go still, his GRIEF washing over us.

“All my fans,
I beg of you;
Think about,
What we will do:

“In some weeks,
Our people send,
Our friend,
To a cruel death.”

Now, Mettaton sings his song passionately. Insistantly.

He sings with… with a sense of urgency.

“I DON’T CARE,
What YOU’VE been told.
“You know that,
“She’s JUST nineteen years old.

“I refuse
To let this fly,
If I can help,
“It, it’s NOT happening.”

We respond with copious applause. How ELSE would we respond to off-genre, cheesy-but-feelsy protest songs?

*an hour of periodically yelling at Chara to stop singing the song badly on purpose later…*

… … … “Hmm: I cannot say that Mettaton’s… choice of words… surprises me.” Gaster comments much more briefly than I expected, as we walk through the True Lab. “He has become almost as intimate with us as if he were my third son over the past couple months, after all. Though I must admit: the genre of music he chose to manifest his protest… unbalanced me. Regardless, I wholeheartedly appreciate his support for our cause.”

Murry calls out from behind us, “Cue more memes! And feels! And feelsy memes!”

I mean,” Alphys quickens her pace so we can catch up to Gaster, “I met him in the middle of 180X. When we met at a… human fan club. My parents thought he was kinda weird—“

“Still do.” Murry snarks from the back of the group as Gaster opens a door. “I thought he was
WAAAY too over the top for you.”

“And I personally saw his… promotion of his brand… as a violation of privacy. Not OUR—“Dewey emphasizes from in front of me, “privacy.

“His OWN privacy.”

[He shrugged.

“And then Web 2.0 happened… along with social media and content creators being sponsored by anyone and everyone, and then I felt foolish for making fun of him.”

“I mean like, you couldn’t have known,” I point out as Alphys and I walk farther into the room. “Like no one could’ve. Hell—Gaster you SAW it and you probly couldn’t have.”

“As much as I would thoroughly enjoy discussing the finer details of your Internet, and its gradual transformation into yet another method whereby your kind spends their hard-earned money on products they desire to own either for the sake of social acceptance, or because companies have gradually manipulated their desires to be in accordance with—“

“{Wooooow…}” is my gut reaction.

{“True.”}” Everyone agrees… too quickly…

“You’re making me not want Amazon Prime when we get free yo…” Will siems… genuinely disappointed.

“In any case, Pauline?

“I will not mince words with you.”

When I hear Gaster’s blunt tone, I stand up straighter.

[That’s… not normal…?]

“I have prepared your genuinely concrete answer for you.

“Walk forward approximately three meters. I have placed your concrete answer on a slightly-raised platform. I would like you to… walk back to us and… exhibit it for us.”

“Okaaaaay…?”

{That’s HELLA vague. Even for Gaster—}

I let go of Alphys, unfolding my cane. It doesn’t take long for the end of it to… hit something. {It’s the platform thing--} 

{I know I know I would’ve—} 

[Just making sure…]

I step onto the platform, which is about four inches off the ground. After walking forward a few more steps, my cane hits… whatever Gaster said would be on the platform.

I reach out with my free hand and touch a composite magic and metal material.
“‘Walk forward once more,’” Gaster calls out from behind me. “And collapse your cane.”

“But I’m gonna—“

“You MUST walk forward.” Gaster insists. “You are safe, I assure you. You are standing approximately half a meter in front of your concrete answer.”

With a little help from Chara, I obey. I walk forward…and only notice that I have walked into my “concrete answer” when I try to continue walking forward and bump into…something.

I raise a hand to my face, feeling a smooth, plastic surface pressing against it. I back away, but, something… pushes against my back.

I reach behind me.

I touch… more smooth, plastic material.

I’m… inside something…

I’m inside the thing Gaster wanted to show me.

“Um, are you okay?”

Alphys’s concern gnawing away at me, I answer “I guess…?

“But like…”

I struggle to articulate my question correctly: “Like, Dude?

“Am I, like… in a box?”

No one answers.

Tucking my cane under one arm, I lift my hands up, until both my palms press against the surface in front of my face, pushing it slightly.

My hands don’t pass through.

Lowering my hands to my sides, I reach out in front of me—

I clasp my hands together—

The surface isn’t there—

My hands are at arm’s length, but they don’t touch the surface I bumped—

I can’t feel my hands.

The texture…it’s… wrong…?

It’s… plastic… metallic? Flexible.

{Since WHEN was I wearing gloves?}

[… … … I think that’s the wrong term…?]

Chara’s NEVER sounded so baffled before.
“Are you okay?” Alphys’s anxiety tugs on my soul again.

I don’t immediately reply verbally with a no. Instead, I am about to say a tentative “Maybe…?”, but Alphys cuts me off: “Unfold your cane and walk back over here.”

Chara forces me to take my cane out from under my arm, holding it in both hands, undoing the elastic band securing it shut. After several clicking sounds, it extends to its full length, its tip pushing against the floor.

I position my cane in my right hand, turn around, step off the platform, and begin walking toward her voice.

{Am I still in the box?}

[… … … It’s not a box.]

{And what’s that… rattling…? Sound when I walk?}

[… … The “box”.]

{But you said it’s not a box.}

Focusing my attention on Alphys’s soul, I turn toward her. {Why are my footsteps all… clangy?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

Distracted, I only stop walking when Alphys sharply calls “Stop!”

She takes my left hand in both of hers, startling me with the strength of her grip. “Do you know what you just did?” she asks, stepping close, her voice echoing upward slightly toward the ceiling.

Only now do I notice that the place where we hold hands is… lower on my body than usual. Usually, our hands are at my elbow height.

Now, I have to… lean down… to reach her. Not much, but still.

[Yes—she’s looking up at you.]

Struggling to explain what just happened, I slowly say, “I… walked into—”

“Walked into what?” she’s… desperate… for an answer.

“A box…?”

“And HOW did you walk into metal box?” she asks more urgently.

“I walked in through the back…?”

“And when you did you felt WHAT? In front of you?”

Alphys’s interrogation is beyond disconcerting.

“I felt plastic…? And when I tried walking out of the box that way it didn’t work…?”

“And when you reached behind you you felt?”

“More plastic…?” I repeat.
“The interior layer of the same metal and plastic composite you felt before you equipped the armor.” She… tries to clarify.

“Whaaat?!“ I gasp.

Everyone laughs, in excitement and delight. Someone taps me on my left shoulder, Alphys letting go of my hand simultaneously. Turning in that direction, I notice a… weight? On my head…?

If Chara had a corporeal body, they would’ve jerked violently, turned around, and run the fuck away as fast as their legs? My legs? Could carry them.

[How is Sans stacking his mandible on top of your head?]

I reply with a flat mental “[What?]”

[Yeah.]

Somehow, their response is even flatter than mine. [Like, he’s stacking his mandible on top of your head… even though we’re floating a couple inches off the floor…?]

{We’re floating? It doesn’t feel like it.}

Chara completely ignores my question.

The sensation of tilting my head upward, even though I don’t? actually move—?

[Wait.]

Chara’s… looking up at Sans…? [He’s leaning down so he can do the stacking…?]

{How much…?}

As if calculating: [Some…?]

[Like, you know how you get annoyed at people who say that being five-and-a-half feet tall’s short?]

Even though I already know the answer: {He’s that tall now?}

More calculations: [About…?]

Words tumbling out of them: [But I’m probly wrong…?]

Phalanges gripping my right hand, slowly peeling my fingers off of the grip of my cane: “You’ve no need for it.” I remove the strap from around my wrist under my own power.

After handing him my cane, he grips my hand again, Sans positions my arms so I’m crossing them in front of me. I run my fingers over my sleeves.

They’re both encased in material.

The same flexible composite comprising my gloves.

While I rub my hands together, alternating between skin and metal, he wraps his knuckles against the surface in front of my face.

I assume that his hand will pass through and touch me.
It does not.

Magic narrowly channeling into my left ear from above: “Shulk?”

I make a slight sound in acknowledgement.

“Forgive my seeming misuse of the term—“

[“What term?”] Chara asks for me redundantly.

“Welcome to your skell.”

Before we can respond: “You parse this term’s meaning. We needn’t burden you with jargon.

“We saw an exact copy of Xenoblade Chronicles X’s skells: mecha behavior, cockpit, and all, as… wasteful.”

*Several minutes of face-palming, where none of the facepalms actually touch my forehead later… *

… … … “Even after all these months we wouldn’t be able to explain how it works to you!” Alphys laughs as I continue rubbing my hands first against my own pockets, then against the metal comprising the skell. “We induced the innermost layer with blue magic. It’s suspending you inside. Not even your feet are touching something solid.”

“So how can I feel me walking on the floor?”

“The skell taps into your soul.”

I didn’t expect Alphys to have an answer prepared… for some reason. “The material responds to your thoughts. So if you wanna hold something like your cane, which’ll appear mostly outside the armor, it’ll happen. But if you wanna get something out of your pockets it’ll be like it’s not even there. It’s basically like a selectively-permeable Dimensional Box, but instead of the user being outside the Dimensional Box and controlling what goes in and out, they’re controlling what can enter it from the inside.

“It responds to your field of knowing. Right now, it’ll feel awkward and disorienting. But soon, it’ll be seamless!”

“A few weeks ago, I realized!” Papyrus explains exceedingly-complex soulology in the only way he knows how: by shouting at me loud enough that again, I understand Gaster’s concerns about me going deaf. “If we induced this material with determination and trace amounts of the other forms of magic, you could tap into them! Because the determination would amplify the effects of the others! Now, you’re soulologically-sensitive enough to take advantage of these technologies. And Asgore can’t inhibit your magic because he does not know what determination feels like.

“But you may be wondering, Papyrus Michel-Chel Gaster: how the hell will I kill Asgore with ONLY a skell? Don’t I need some shiny badass weapon to go along with it?”

[“Uh… kiiindaaaa…?”]

[…]

[Like, I wasn’t GONNA ask but now that he mentioned it, kiiindaaa…?]

Before we can coherently answer, Papyrus demands “SHULK! HOLD YOUR HANDS OUT!”
I oblige.

I recognize its curved, compact profile, and overly-large shoulder buttons immediately.

I’m holding a… cordless Gamecube controller… in my hands. I push its buttons and click and rotate its control sticks rapidly to make sure it’s even real.

“NOW!” Papyrus demands. “Channel your inner shitty For Glory Link main and spam B!”

{Woooow Paaaaps…}

[What?]

{It’s a Super Smash Brothers thing.}

[… … But why is pressing B shitty?] I slide my right thumb to the left until I feel the B button on the controller. Simultaneously, Chara and I wonder why it’s so small in comparison to the A button…

Only after I’ve pressed it several times do I realize what I’m hearing.

“[WHOAAA!]”

“Gneh heh heh! Yes human! We have designed complex CAD-and-CAD interfaces around the knowledge within your soul, knowing that your gaming experiences would create these Gaster blasters! Sakurai chose to map many characters’ projectile attacks to the B button by default, for some Tesla-foresaken reason.

“Due to this design choice, you associate this button input with projectile attacks! And the vast majority of projectile attacks are associated with yellow magic! Ergo, this button input casts yellow magic!”

“[Duuuuude!]”

An enthusiastic laugh from behind me. I am about to spin around, but Chara holds my body rigid. [It’s Sans—]

{Really?}

[Yeah—till I looked at him I didn’t think it was his voice either] —

[[FUCK—IT’S THE THING ALLEN AND TOURING WERE SAYING!]]

“You called such premises improper this morning.”

Chara squirms: [Why are you sooo amused by this…?]

“Your resolve failed.”

I laugh at the contrast between his language and his tone. {Duuuuude—this is great—}

[No it’s not—it’s freaking me oooout!!!]

“We tried to find other strong associations to map to the other inputs but… it hasn’t worked out very well,” Papyrus admits sheepishly… completely neglecting to address Sans’s… amusement?
“But we ALSO realized: why draw on associations from across the entire Super Smash Brothers for Wii U roster, when the character you know best is your main!? So we decided: we should draw on THEM instead!

“SANS! Hand me the other controller and configure the alternate CAD-and-CAD inputs!”

“NO.”

Chara’s giggling uncontrollably: [By Tesla Paps’s fucking face…?]

“No?” No one has to describe Papyrus’s… disbelief? For me. “What do you MEAN no?”

“FIRST, admit that your mocking of my speech cannot apply in ALL cases without contradiction —”

[{{Uh… in English please…?}]

“EDISONDAMN IIIIT!”

Papyrus humphs. Anyway…

“Shulk?

“I need you to jump in the air once for us while holding the controller.”

Feeling stupid, Chara compels me to jump in the air once.

A near-instantaneous rushing of blue magic behind me, and the short, sharp click of shoes on the tiled floor as Sans shortcuts across the room, followed by the clinking of rummaging through metal and plastic. {He’s not in slippers—}

[Would YOU wear slippers around all this stuff?]

{… But he used to do it all the time—}

[Not anymore.]

“Shulk?”

I turn my head, and direct my soul, toward him.

“May I give you the treatment?”

“Uh… mm-hmm…?”

“Outstretch your hands.”

I obey.

The Gamecube controller disappears, a controller with a more rounded shape replacing it. I close my fingers around it, more reassured by the rubbing of the dual control sticks against my thumbs and the less intrusive shoulder buttons than I care to admit. “This seems more to your liking, no?” Sans asks.

[“Yes—no?”] Chara and I flip-flop.
“Yes,” we finally settle on.

“NOW.

“Press B,” he commands.

I do it under my own power.

I hear a… familiar squeaking—

NO.

It’s a beeping—?

NO.

It’s a…

WHINING sound.

a noise I haven’t heard in months… since before Gaster brought me to Zealdia—

NO.

Since I watched Shulk’s Super Smash Brothers for Wii U reveal trailer with Sans, back at Toriel’s house.

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM_jxjbtANs

{“Noooooo.

{“NOOOOO WAAAAY—”}

[No way what?]

{“THE MONADO AAAAAATS!!”}

[What?]

{It’s a Shulk thing!]”

Without prompting, Chara controls my body, as I gather my legs underneath me and jump.

Only when the Wii U pro controller flies out of my hand, and Gaster cries “Oh by Faraday’s lisp someone slow her fall!” does it hit me that I’ve jumped… very high…

Multiple instances of blue magic tug on my body, pulling me downward, until I’m lying on my back. “Oh by Tesla…” I mutter.

“Stringent conditioning. Alter induced blue magic to match weight…” Sans scribbles down notes as he stands somewhere near my head.

““Oh no Pauline are you okay I knew we should’ve tethered you to something for this first test—“ Murry’s mouth runs a mile a minute, and although I’m touched by his concern, he’s almost certainly overdoing it.
“But she’s fine.” Touring gently comforts him. “Can you stand for us? And cancel the Monado art so it doesn’t affect your movement anymore?”

“You hit me in the face with the controller yo!”

His metal? Fingers brush my hands as he hands it back to me… but not before he mashes the trigger buttons and the control sticks. I hold down the B button for a second, until it vibrates slightly and squeaks shortly, indicating that Jump Art has ended. I push myself onto my knees, and then stand, facing his voice. Before I can say sorry: “Dude—it’s all good! You couldn’t have stopped it. And besides: this is for science!”

“From my observations, you seem in a sufficiently-stable soulological state to continue with the next test.” Gaster tries to hide his worrying, and fails miserably. “However, only you know the true extent of your… discomfort… after performing the first post-treatment test and being exposed to such a rapid induction of magic.”

“I’m okay.” After taking a second to condense Gaster’s reply into, more contemporary English, I reply.

“If you insist.

“Stand with your back against the short length of wall in this room.”

I walk forward, the edge of my hand at forehead height to stop me from running into the aforementioned wall. I turn around when I’ve reached it.

“Now that I have positioned you in preparation for the second post-treatment test,” Gaster instructs from the opposite end of the room, “I must ask: how proficiently can you walk in a straight line without your cane?”

“Uh… not very…?”

“I got it!” Alphys volunteers.

Clicking her claws together a few times first, she begins humming… a very familiar and catchy melody. Everyone joins in soon after.

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62hZkw-_uC8

{Edisondamn it—I don’t need ChronoTrigger’s battle theme stuck in my head!

{ AGAIN!}

[At least it’s not SANS’S fault this time.]

{That doesn’t help!}

I complete the pre-treatment test, Alphys putting her arm out to stop me from walking into the opposite wall. “Okay: now, turn around and go back over there. But before you do, press B twice.” I oblige.

I hear a vibrant beeping sound, and I can’t contain my excitement: “SPEED!” I exclaim, obligatory British accent included. I run to the side of the room where I began. Each stride feels at least twice
as long as my normal ones.

Everyone laughs in delight. “Hell yes it is!” Papyrus exclaims.

He directs his soul away from me briefly. “Sans?

“Don’t even think about levying your plot twist jar tax.”

[Woooow his fucking face…?]

Before I can ask: [Dude Sans like, doesn’t give a—]

The rapid scribbling of paper… and I know that this time, it’s not the sound of recording observations about my skell. Papyrus, Chara, and I, in unison: [“OH HEEEEELL NOOOOO WE’RE NOT PAYING you taxes!”]

“But that’s not all! As you have guessed by now, we have figured out how to soulologically replicate the Monado Arts! Unfortunately we couldn’t reduce the severity of the drawbacks, but you’re well aware of them all, after all of your research into the game!”

“NOW, my parents know that Jump Art doesn’t make you lighter,” Will jokes.

“It doesn’t.” I say.

Simultaneously, Sans interjects, “It does not.”

{… I… didn’t expect Sans to answer…?}

[Same…?]  

*several corrections to everyone’s knowledge of Shulk, not all of them from me, later*

…… … Alphys finishes for the moment: “We’re not gonna teach you to do the math but… basically attack is a combination of a few differently-weighted physical and psychophysiological factors. The physical includes the average mass of an object a monster can manipulate and how long they can manipulate it within a given cross area of their field of knowing before their concentration fails.

“Psychological factors are weighted more heavily than the physical ones. The data about his soul we’ve collected is actually higher than it will be if or when you fight Asgore, because he’ll be scared and under a lot of pressure.

“Point is, is that after doing the math, factoring in his eighty attack, your twenty defense, the skell, and your… physicality, we calculated that Asgore does between six and eight damage per bullet that hits you, or for every sixty frames you’re in contact with his trident, which is a magically-induced object—”

“Sixty frames?” I repeat.

“We found that using fighting game terminology to measure time for performing soulological actions was easier to understand than actual time.” Dewey answers… from his position in the corner of the room as far away from me as possible…

*A while of having flashbacks about dying in stupid ways while playing Smash later…*

“And if I remember right,” Murry paces around me, “Monado Shield reduces damage by a third so,
the range for damage you’ll take from Asgore is actually between four and a little less than six. Like all the other Monado Arts each of those buffs will only last sixteen seconds at a time but… ehh: that should be enough."

“Shield! has saved me soooo many more times than I can count. That’s what it’s for.”

*Several repetitions of Alphys casting Flame Toss on me and measuring the damage I take later…*

… … … “I have learned more about human hard and soft sciences over the past month than I have in the past ten years,” Toriel laughs, still seeming overwhelmed. At her touch, I step out of the skell, a thin coating of green magic running over my skin. “Fortunately, Gaster has been a very patient teacher. If he could essentially rewrite the Unified Theory Papers to accommodate you, he could certainly do so for me.

“If I recall the calculation correctly, Monado Buster will increase all of the damage you deal by forty percent. Actually, considering Asgore’s psychophysiological state, it may even effectively become a fifty percent increase, at the very least.

“I want you to hit me as hard as you can, my child. I am fully ready and braced to take the damage. Do not worry about hurting me. As much as we thought about using an inanimate target, we realized that we could not: because you will be fighting a being with a real soul, we were obligated to train you in similar circumstances.”

*several minutes of everyone being excited over my damage output bare-handed later…*

… … … “Smash is honestly the least useful out of all five arts, ‘cause it only knocks back an opponent. So use it only if you think knocking him back’ll be more useful than just dodging.” Touring explains the intricacies of the last Monado Art as dryly as the stereotypically-boring college lecture.

“Smash’s mostly an emergency measure,” Allen repeats in less boring terms. “Cause if you don’t take full advantage of the knockback, Asgore could inflict damage on you and disorient you by knocking you away from him, and into objects or into the ground. Your skell isn’t fully equipped to handle that kind of force right now. We’ll do the best we can to fix that, but if it turns out that we can’t, then…”

**Stop the music.**

Despite the deluge of information everyone’s poured on me over the past… couple hours… according to Chara… I’m still invested, and eager to learn more. The skell feels more comfortable by the minute, so much so that unless I explicitly aim to touch its interior or exterior, it feels like it doesn’t exist. “Our aim was to make something that’d require minimal soulological training and provide maximum protection. Really all we needed to do was make something which could protect you from the physically-harmful aspects of Asgore’s attacks, since he uses fire magic and all. The soulological harm he could do to you is a lot, yeah, but…”

Annie trails off as I continue to walk up and down the length of the room. “You’re a human. Your determination renders quite a bit of the normal precautions we’d take redundant. And maybe they’d even be detrimental. Since we’d be burdening you with equipment too heavy for you to carry without physical training and… if you were injured you’d have no way of getting it off safely without assistance. This armor’ll shatter around you before you take damage like that.”

… … … It isn’t long before the entire group decides that they’ve infodumped me enough for the day. “So when we aren’t aiding Muffet, Undyne and the Gasters shall teach you the ways of
soulological combat in a hands-on environment,” Toriel and I walk toward the door. “And the Curies and the Moores shall aide you in developing the requisite soulological sensitivity and control.”

“And we’ll be training together yo! For both things!”

“Duuuude!”

“Yeah! My parents think I’ll be cemented soon… so they want me to train with you. I’ve been around during most of the same crazy things as everyone else, and I’m younger, so my soul’s more malleable. Your determination’s probly gonna activate my magic.”

“That’s true.” I ponder as we continue to walk.

“I am confident you will catch on quickly. However, I warn you: it will require much self-discipline, my child. We all know you are quite emotional, much like us monsters. You must manipulate your determination precisely, and under pressure no less. You must reign in your emotions to use the interface we have created most effectively. And it is obvious to you now that this contradicts most of what monsters value in strong magic users.”

She sighs. “I am sorry. I must be rambling again.”

“It’s fine,” I hold onto her arm, marveling at the seamless integration of my intent and the skell’s permeability. I squeeze her wrist slightly. {Maaaaaan it’s like I don’t even have gauntlets on!}

[Yeah it’s weird looking at you inside the skell and out. It’s like you’re two different people at once…]

Thank Tesla that everyone stays silent during the elevator ride back up to my floor.

When I enter my room, I exit the skell, leaving it by the wall to the right of my door. Only when I am about to sit down on my bed does anyone break the silence.

A sharp rap on my helmet from behind, followed by a equally-sharp knocking on my desk, which is also directly behind me.

“Shulk?”

Chara and I shake violently for an instant, then freeze: {{By Tesla when Sans sounds like that, a thing AAAAAALWAAAAAYS happens!}}

I turn around, facing him, stepping closer in response to the faint tugging of blue magic on my body and soul.

I am about to ask him what he wants, but Chara holds my mouth shut. A second or so later: “You cannot be serious…”

{Why’s Toriel so shocked?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

[Nooooo…

[Noooo waaaaay he diiiidn’t—!]

{What is it?}
They don’t answer. {Dude—why the hell won’t you tell me what’s going on!?}

Again, I am about to ask for clarification, when I hear a rare and unnerving sound.

The click of bone on metal.

Before I can ask for clarification a third time, Sans lifts my left hand from my side. In quick succession, he presses a cylindrical piece of metal into my palm, and closes my fingers around it.

{Dude—whatever I’m holding’s soooo heavy….?}

Before I can move my hand and arm into a more comfortable position, he lifts it up so my fist is in front of me, palm down, and not at my side. Before I can properly struggle to hold… whatever he’s given me… for too long, he supports the cylinder from below with his right hand.

After a few seconds, he lifts my right hand from my side. His left hand under mine, he loosely curls my fingers around a thin, flat rod, a couple times wider than one finger. He manipulates my thumb so it gently rests on the rod’s point for a moment.

Under Chara’s control… or is it under my own power?, I go still.

[Don’t deny it.
[You KNOW what you’re holding.] (confirm)

After removing my thumb from the point, Sans slowly, deliberately, slides my hand down the rod. Ever so gradually, the rod becomes wider and wider, until it expands outward into a hollow ring—

Delicately, he taps my fingernails against a circle of glass filling the metal ring, until a sharp pulse of blue and yellow magic washes over my soul, quickly rising, then falling again.

{What’s he nodding to himself for?}

Chara doesn’t answer immediately. [He nodded ‘cause he saw that you figured out what the sound was.] (confirm)

They’re still… frustrated at me…? However.

After several seconds, rhythmically punctuated by the tapping of my fingernails on the glass, Chara says clearly, [The central piece is made of multi-layered glass. And each layer is constructed differently.]

It’s only a matter of a few seconds until Sans positions my right hand on the same cylinder as my left. My fingers close around it, except my fist is palm-up.

Lifting the rod up, I brace my hands against my right shoulder, as if gripping a baseball bat. Somehow, the weight doesn’t bother me.

I don’t even flinch as Sans takes my shoulders and turns me around. From behind me, he layers his left hand on top of my left fist from below and extends my arms out. Eventually, after some adjustments, we hold it at shoulder height, slanted upward.

{Why’s he so excited?}

Chara doesn’t have to explicitly think their answer.
I almost certain that I know why.

They’re right, that I’m denying the fact that I know.

Magic begins rising from within his soul, faster and faster, until it stops, ringing at a fever pitch around us.

Everyone else releases quick bursts of irregular, unrestrained magic from their places standing in the doorway.

We all tense, dreading his next action.

At last, he seems to collect himself, the nearly-unbearable whining of his magic against our souls pausing for an instant.

“BEHOLD THE POWER OF THE MONADO!!!” he screams, with unrestrained fervor and… enthusiasm.

When he finishes, metal rapidly slides and scrapes on metal, and the unmistakable metallic tang of yellow magic, and spice-like burn of determination, assault my tongue.

Chara was right.

Ever since I found out that Sans recreated weapons from video games and movies, and he showed me the Monado replica he had made back in Snowdin, I had wondered why he hadn’t talked about it again in the succeeding months.

I guess I have my answer, now.

He made a Monado replica which he felt sufficiently-satisfied with, one which he could be proud to show off to everyone else.

Chapter End Notes

**********

First off: about the Xenoblade references.

The shorter one first: in Xenoblade Chronicles X, the player uses a skell, a mecha with a cockpit. Sans is using the term skell because I would’ve known this term by the time I appeared in the Underground. The equipment I’m wearing isn’t a mech, but... ehh.

The following information is only completely factual for Super Smash Brothers for 3DS and Wii U. As of December 7, 2019, it is no longer true.

The Mono Art are a mechanic in Xenoblade Chronicles, which are also present in Super Smash Brothers for 3DS and Wii U. In Smash, Shulk can only have one Mono Art active at a time. Each art improves one aspect of his character, while debilitating him in another aspect. An example is how Jump Art increases Shulk's jump height, among other benefits, while it also causes Shulk to take more damage.

You cycle through the arts by pressing the B button, and each of the five arts
corresponds to a certain number of button presses before stopping. While cycling, each Monado Art corresponds to one of five tones, each one rising in pitch, and when you select an art, a distinct sound plays.

Each art lasts for 16 seconds. You can cancel the art by holding down the B button for one second. After using an art, and then using a second art, whether the player has canceled the first or naturally waited for it to end, it takes ten seconds for a previously-used art to become usable again.

**********

Here's the Xenoblade Chronicles medley! It's from Super Smash Brothers for Wii U.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM_jxjbtANs

Here's the remastering of ChronoTrigger's battle theme that I found, made by Time Rock Orchestra.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62hZkw-_uC8

Honestly, I couldn't find a cover that I liked more than this one. It's essentially exactly the same as the original, except with better quality instruments.

Yeah: the copious Xenoblade spoilers and content warnings exist for a reason... it was because of the last... half... of this chapter.

Here's a link to Shulk's page on the Smash wiki. I retrieved this information on August 8, 2017.
https://www.ssbwiki.com/Shulk_(SSB4)

Now, there's only one more important moment from the game left for me to experience before I go to New Home.

The dinner with Sans.

Relative to the goal of reaching New Home, at least, we're nearing the end, everyone.
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

I know this might seem meaningless by now but...

Prepare for feels.

I mean it.

With this in mind, I insist that you read the endnotes as soon as you finish the chapter. Considering the subject matter involved, all of you are entitled to knowing about my thought process while writing it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

39

The month of Determination passes by in a blur. When I’m not overseeing Muffet’s visually-impaired employee, who I learn very late into our sessions is named Roll, through awkward MegaMan jokes, all my friends take me to the Underground’s “most interesting places,” as Laura and Amy call them. Places that could never exist on the surface. Places that travel television show hosts would kill to see.

Places that only exist because of magic.

Eventually, Chara has the idea that I ask Salt, Bratty, and Catty, to come over and hang out at the Lab. When Robin’s not talking everyone’s ears off about how “fucking awesome” Gaster is, we’re making jokes not too dissimilar to the ones my friends and I made on the surface: meaning jokes laden with dark humor, sarcasm, and multi-layered references. They tell me stories about their school days, and they even devote a week to recording an audio book version of The True Robinson Crusoe, or, as Chara calls it, [the weirdest fanfic I’ve ever read… and you KNOW by now that that’s SAYING something.].

Shakur has all but become the Inertia Society’s private boat chauffeur, since they’re the only one the Gasters trust to take me to Snowdin. “Because they’ve seen your lack of sea legs!” Papyrus explains one day, late in Determination. “They know how to guide you.”

More seriously, he reminds me, “And well, they know about your background as much as we do. No one else could understand why you’re traveling around so much.”

Will, Sans, and I oversee Laura, Amy, and Robin’s first playthroughs of ChronoTrigger… all of us finding it exceedingly difficult not to force them to play in a certain way.

Meaning that I’m not the first one to rant once the three of them leave the room after their first gaming session has ended.

“ROBIN! YOU STOLE MARLE’S PENDANT? AND WHAT FOR!”
I don’t even object as Chara controls my body, so I follow Will’s lead in scurrying toward the door of Sans’s room. ([Fuck this shit I’m out!])

“They don’t know better yo!” Wil squeaks. Again, he surprises me with his insights. “You’re being too hard on them! They’re like, going through it blind—in the normal way AAAAAND in Shulk’s way—so like, they don’t know what’s right or wrong!”

“EVEN SO!”

[He KNOWS all that already—dude you’re making it worse!]

“It’s just a game yo—they can do whatever they—“ Will tries to amend.

“He loaded their save file to witness the second outcome!”

“But WE loaded OUR save file when me and Shulk played—“

“Because my audio descriptions lacked polish.

“They loaded their save file for their own sake—“

“People do that ALL THE TIME in games dude!” I jump to Will’s defense… while Chara goes completely still. “Like, when I played Xenoblade there was an item that an enemy only dropped ten percent of the time, so I saved in front of the chest they dropped and opened it over and over again till I got what I wanted. Like yeah—I was a tryhard—and yeah, they’re KINDA doing the same thing…”

No response. “Like, I STILL think that having saving in a game about time travel’s HEEEELLA laaaame, ‘cause like, it makes death meaningless.”

Again, no response from anyone.

“And like, you told me that if you die during the final boss fight, you get a different ending, but like, that doesn’t make sense, ‘cause like, you can just load your save file…?”

No response from anyone, for a third time.

“So like, all the fights to the death and people being pissed off at your choices is like, kinda pointless…?”

No response from anyone, until… “This month, I began work on a game mode which averts such Gameplay and Story Segregation, as TV Tropes and Idioms calls it.

“The player cannot load their save file at will, for instance. Instead, the game saves after milestones like level and tech-gaining, and when the player ends a session.

“AND,” Sans emphasizes, “Revives shan’t exist—“

“What do you mean?” Will and I ask in unison.

“You cannot revive dead characters— “ Sans begins to explain.

“So it’s like a Nuzzlocke yo?” Will clarifies.

“YES.”
“But like, what if your party dies NOT during the final battle?” I ask.

“Then any party members who remain shall take their place—“

“But what if you don’t have any?” I’m quick to ask. “What if you have three or less party members?”

“Then the future refused to change,” Sans quotes.

“But you can’t have replacement party members with you. ‘Cause you can’t walk around with more than three party members at a time. ‘Cause the old dude—“ Will begins to object.

“GASPAR—“ Sans corrects.

“Gaspar,” Will answers, “says you can’t—“

“AT MOST, three beings may enter or leave the End of Time.

“If you bring fewer than three beings, Gameplay and Story Segregation does not apply. You may have a party of less than three in battle, after all.”

We all stand numbly for a second.

“You never wondered how the WHOLE party of seven gathered around the campfire?”

{[… … … Why… didn’t we think of that…?]}

{Are we stupid—?}

[Nooooo…?] Chara’s… not reassuring me at all. [He’s just too Edisondamned smart…?]

Sans laughs: ringing, clear, sharp, and confident. Chara tenses.

“As such, the party may travel as one.

“Each death shall change the story, just as Chrono’s death changed it.

“Thus, ALL deaths shall matter.”

*Later…*

I schedule the other activities around my soulological training, theoretical and practical.

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRFCtDtLEuU

Every day, some combination of the Curies, Moores, and Gasters, meet with Will and I, to teach us how monsters fight. How it’s much more involved than comparing stats. It involves estimating the weighting of the factors influencing an opponents’ stats. I gradually learn to associate certain behaviors and attacks with different proportions: three-fourths power and one-fourth precision, half and half, or someone who relies more on the precision of their magic to fight rather than their raw power.

“From what you have observed,” Gaster raises his left arm in the air while I hold onto his elbow, light blue magic coursing through him, “you know full well what kind of a fighter Asgore is.”
“He uses more power than precision.” I answer. “And if I HAD to guess the weights… I’d say…

“At least two-thirds power, and one-third precision…?” I throw out my guess.

Gaster replies with a “Mm-hmm.

“His magic operates on a macroscopic extent, for even with his utmost concentration, he cannot affect a target any smaller than a human. Nor can he exert his influence over an object in a nuanced manner.

“To describe his behavior soulologically, you will realize that if you move quickly, you will inhibit his ability to detect you soulologically, rather than his ability to form an attack. You drastically reduce the probability of his intended attack targeting you successfully.”

“But you don’t have to change your strats too much at all.” Allen reassures me. “Just run around like we’ve showed you. That’s why we’ve been teaching you to sense where monsters’ attacks are. So you can keep your distance, AND so you can make it hard for someone to lock on to your soul and hit you with their attacks.”

“Even if he notices that your stats are changing, and hell—even if he figures out HOW you’re doing it,” Annie adds on, “he couldn’t stop you. Even if he disarmed you—which he can’t—he couldn’t use either of your controllers ‘cause they’re powered by determination. And your determination attracts them to you like a magnet, so the only way you can let go of either of them is if you do it voluntarily. Only someone with greater determination could disarm you, let alone wield either of them.

“And if he somehow manages to break either of them, they’ll release all their magic and… and…”

She sighs. “If that doesn’t kill him then nothing you could do would’ve.”

I don’t reply verbally.

I let go of Gaster’s arm and draw the Monado from its place at my waist. I walk into the corner of the room, and, while facing the wall, I perform the soulological sensitivity exercises the Curies, Moores, and Gasters created for me. I cycle through the Monado Arts, altering the Monado’s position as I do so, increasing the speed of the cycling over time. Eventually, I integrate the button inputs from the modified Wii Nunchuk in my right fist until I can utilize a Monado Art and Mjolnir’s magical attacks simultaneously.

“But how do I fight someone stronger than me yo? I don’t have any badass armor or anything.”

“And you don’t have determination.” Allen reminds his son.

“Yeah… that too, but that’s obvious yo. We’re not strong enough to have any in the first place.”

“You do the exact same thing we’ve been teaching Pauline: figure out your opponent’s attack component weights and exploit them—“

“But what if I’m fighting someone with really precise magic instead? That means they can hit smaller targets! So running away won’t help!”

“You’re forgetting something important,” his mother says firmly. “All that concentration takes effort. Attacking is like projecting your magic out when you talk.”

“But painful.” Will and I say in unison.
“Precise magic use is much more exhausting. The attacks someone makes will be weaker, but more accurate. To survive against someone with an attack stat weighted toward precision, you’d have to tire them out. You can’t let them concentrate long enough to make an attack that’d hit you.”

“But what if I’m fighting someone who can hit a small, moving target accurately with strong attacks? So they can do all the things?”

Everyone takes a few moments to contemplate his question.

“I know very few monsters who can do that without tiring out really fast,” Annie says slowly. “The only monster I can think of who CAN is Undyne. And even THEN, she hasn’t actively focused on either, ’cause she hasn’t had a need to. She can use both, but not as well as someone who specializes in one component weight.”

“Tesla help you if you EVER fight someone with strong, precise attacks who’s trained both skills extensively, who ALSO doesn’t tire out. ‘Cause if you DO, there’s only one suggestion your dad and I have.”

[RIP—] Chara begins to say.

“Get on your knees and cry,” the Moore parents say in unison.

Until you’re cemented, this kind of knowledge is the only thing that you can rely on if you ever fight monsters stronger than you.”

As the Moores continue to chat, I run my fingers over the modified Wii U Pro Controller in my right fist again. We realized, after several trials, that making the ZR button on the right side of the Wii U Pro Controller explicitly trigger-shaped facilitated faster, more effective use of yellow magic. We exploited my association between the trigger shape and first-person shooters, and, in turn, shooting someone with projectiles. Conversely, I use the R button, above the ZR button, to create a shield, composed of green magic, which is cast around and out of the Monado, the blade being used as a point of reference. To determine the direction of the shield or Gaster blasters, I tilt the analog stick on the top, positioned underneath my thumb.

The controller translates my gaming experiences into the colors of magic mapped to its inputs via more methods than just button shapes. The placement, texture, size, and sensitivity of the buttons provoke different reactions. Purple and blue magic activate to varying degrees when I use the Monado Arts.

**Stop the music.**

“Human?” Papyrus walks toward me as I cancel Jump Art and transition into Speed Art, turning to face him. “Yeah?”

“Do we need to make any more adjustments? Because Gaster and I, we’re free all day, and we have business to take care of down here for a while. So—“

“I… don’t think so,” I rack my brain for any feedback to give. “It’s perfect. Thanks for doing all this.”

“To be honest, even if you could see, I still would have insisted that someone make this for you. Because the alternative,” he sounds worked up… and Chara and I prepare for a rant, “is to walk into Asgore’s throne room in SHORTS!”

The absurdity of Papyrus’s statement hits me at once, and all Chara and I can do is reply with a
Everyone laughs at Will’s obligatory reference. “Do you think you can wear clothing like that inside your skell?” Dewey asks, walking toward Papyrus and I. He gently takes the Monado, hilt-first, in his hands, canceling Monado Speed and handing it back to me. I place it behind my back again. “Because it can only adjust the temperature by so much. You NEED shorts.”

“These clothes are fine—“

“How about your shirt?” Murry interrupts from near the door. “Can you move around in it?”

I wiggle my shoulders and arms a little. “I guess…?”

“I NEED an answer now. ‘Cause if you want anything changed, I…”

Murry stops before trying again: “I… I need to…”

He stops and… takes several moments to properly project his magic?

“If you think ANYTHING needs to be changed, ANYTHING at all, tell me now. ‘Cause I’m…

“I’m gonna be really busy tonight.

“We ALL are.”

Everyone makes agreeing noises in reply. “But I’m serious: is it okay?”

“Yeah it’s fine.”

“GOOD. ‘Cause Toriel was asking. I’ll tell her to make more.”

He turns around and begins walking out of the room, Chara taking control of my body so I follow him. “Hey Annie? Will—you gonna stay down here?”

“I’m gonna catch up on Mew Mew: Kissy Cutie ‘cause they’ve made like, three—“

“SEVEN—“ Annie corrects.

“SEVEN!? DUUUUDE—SWEET! And like, it’s been a while since we’ve watched real TV together.”

“Fair enough. How about you Allen?”

“I’ll catch up with you and Touring soon. I need a shower.”

“You good Dewey?”

“I plan to unwind with some reading. I found something Lucca and Glenn’ll appreciate.”

“Cool. See you guys later. I think.” Murry calls over his shoulder. As we begin walking down the hall in the True Lab, Touring calls out, “Wait Murry! You’re forgetting something!”

Hurrying after us, she asks again. “Murry? Are you gonna—?” Touring nag.

“Sorry. Tell Glenn I’m asking Pauline now okay?”
“Tell him you’re asking me about what?” I ask as Touring presses the button for the elevator.

“Glenn told me to tell you he’s sorry he couldn’t come today ‘cause he’s been busy.” Touring seems to be reading off her phone. “I think. His text is written how Glenn talks in the SNES version of ChronoTrigger—”

[“Ugh—“]

“—so at this point reading a text from GASTER would be easier—“

[“Wow—“]

“—but anyway he has reservations at MTT Resort tonight at nine. He wants to have dinner, just the two of you. ‘Cause one: the food’s expensive so he can’t afford more guests, even with all the money he’s horded since you got here, and 2: you haven’t been there yet.”

“Okay.” I step out of the elevator and begin walking toward my room.

“And,” Murry reads more texts, “I’m 99 percent confident that he told me to tell you not to come in the skell. You’ve been using it for all of Determination. Give it a break for tonight.”

“Okay. When should I be there?”

“He said he’ll be at MTT Resort by eight. So by then, I guess. He’ll find you.”

“Okay.”

[That’s… not creepy at all…]

“What time is it?”

“It’s,” Murry checks his phone, “like, five-thirty. If you shower and leave now you’ll have plenty of time to hang out with Salt before Glenn starts planning on making an RPG encounter out of him noticing you—”

“MURRY!” Touring’s covered her mouth in surprise. “We all know it’s true, but don’t SAAAAAY IIIIT!”

“Oh COME ON—you’re laughing—“

“I AM AND I HATE IT!”

Chara and I snicker as we reach my room. As I close my door and begin rummaging for clean clothes, Chara materializes, putting an arm around my shoulders as they do so. [“The restaurant in MTT Resort has the most expensive food in the Underground! I think!”]

“But the MTT Burger Imporium’s there—“

[“That’s not a REAL restaurant!”]

“Uh… how expensive is it?” I tuck my clothes under my arm and begin walking toward the door again.

[“Like surface fancy food expensive.”]

“Like kobe beef expensive—“
I stop. “Like, fancy Japanese cows they massage so their meat’s more tender and they make sure they’re happy all the time so their meat’s not stiff—?”

“Yeah… it’s weird… but good. It’s like,” I emphasize, “THEEEE fancy food. That and lobster. And caviar. I had some for my thirteenth birthday.”

As I leave my room, Chara disappears. [Does the thought of eating fancy food you’re not paying for fill you with determination?]

{Dude—why WOULDN’T it!? Free food’s ALWAYS worth!}

*several minutes of bantering about horror films later…*

… … … [—can’t even see her! How the hell—]

{ ‘Cause I imagine what she looks like!}

[But you don’t know what she looks like how can you—]

{She’s possessed by a FUCKING DEMON! I don’t HAVE to know what she ACTUALLY—} I repeat Chara’s statement, bewildered by how they don’t understand. {And the sides! The Exorsist’s scary ‘cause of the girl’s voice when she’s possessed—the dudes who made the film cared about the sound design FOR ONCE! I never thought I’d be soooo happy to hear Paps shout THE POWER OF CHRIST COMPELLS YOU!!! As loud as his soul will allow in my life!}

[I guess you’re right: The Exorsist’s the scariest horror movie I’ve EVER watched! Like—]

As I step off a conveyor belt I… run into someone, Chara abruptly stopping their current train of thought. “By Tesla I’m sooo sorry,” I apologize.

The monster doesn’t move.

I arc my cane so I can find an empty space near them to walk through, but the cane’s tip hits them again. I continue sidestepping, hoping they’ll eventually move out of the way but… they don’t? [He’s doing it on purpose.]

{Seriously?}

Annoyance pours off Chara in waves. [Tell him to move again.

[LOUDER.]

“Can you please move?” I ask.

“You can see my soul—”

{What?}

“—so you don’t need that stick.”

“I—“ I begin to explain.
“Can’t you see my soul—?” they—he—begins to ask again.

“No—” I stammer, “that’s not how—”

**Loop until the next note.**

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-megalo-mashup

He grabs the end of my cane, and I try pulling it free. “You can see me. So you can—“

“Hey GIVE THAT BACK!”

I continue tugging my cane toward me, the elastic stretching out so the segments separate from each other. I walk forward, pulling myself along the length of my cane hand-over-hand, so I can reassemble it, and pull it out of his grip so I can put it back together.

He doesn’t let go.

“—see me. You’re even more vile than that human-loving pile of puke calling herself a scientist. Her family line should’ve died off decades ago.”

As he talks, he begins bending my cane downward at an angle.

“And don’t even get me started on that impostor Gaster. You might as well have made him a human body to live in—he loves humans THAT much—“

Now, not only do I have to take it back from him, I have to ensure he doesn’t—

I hear a sickening crunch, a sound I haven’t heard since I was thirteen, and in eighth grade.

One day, in eighth grade, while walking out of class, someone bumped my cane at just the the wrong angle…

I bend down, scrabbling my hands across the floor around my feet in search of the half I was holding but… [He took it.]

Lunging forward, I intend to find him, so I can take the cane back from him, but…

I hear… grinding plastic, and taste and smell acrid smoke?

Before I can ask: [You’re right.] Chara says coldly.

[Your cane didn’t fall off the terminal.

[Jerry broke it into tiny pieces.

[And now he’s BURNING IT.]

I shake with anger: “HEY YOU FUCKING—!” I start shouting at him. {Dude—I have to call Sans and—!}

A yanking sensation on my waist and shoulders, and the sliding of a strip of fabric across my body. I don’t even have time to react to try to grab it. [He used purple magic on your bag.]

{FUCK—MY PHONE!}

[He’s looking through your stuff. We have to get it back before he destroys anything else!}
[I’ll help you fight him off. I’d help you run away, but we BOTH know he won’t let you leave. This terminal’s too small for you to get past him safely. He could unbalance you and…]

I understand Chara’s concern immediately.

Newfound anger and power runs through my body and enters my soul.

The tang of yellow magic coats my tongue, and determination rushes through me.

Not MY determination, but CHARA’S.

The next second seems to pass in slow motion.

A knife appears in my left hand, its blade burning hot. I can feel the magic pouring off of it from a couple feet away. [“LEAVE. Or I’ll gouge your eyes out.”]

“But you can get out of here just fine. I don’t—“

I scream in a voice that’s NOT my own.

I sprint forward, slashing the knife with conviction that’s NOT my own.

The blade burns with determination that’s NOT my own.

I dodge attacks with an ease I have never felt before, placing my feet with a… CERTAINTY… I never knew I possessed.

Chara and I BOTH want to hurt him.

I have a nagging feeling that I should be angrier at Jerry than Chara, but I dismiss it.

Each blow from the pommel and flat of the knife blade, and from my own limbs, hits their target without fail. Before I received my own Monado, My formal self-defense experience was cursory, at best. I learned some basic techniques in seventh grade. However, I did not learn how to use a weapon.

I feel MORE than comfortable using the knife and my body. It feels… fluid.

NATURAL, even.

It’s only a matter of time before he collapses into a kneeling position on the ground.


Somehow, even at knifepoint, AND without talking, this monster seems… hateful and apathetic.

[“GIVE. IT. BACK!”] I repeat, jabbing him with our determination, for good measure.

He doesn’t move.

I press the edge of the knife blade against him. [“NOW!”]

He stands, and I allow him to slowly lead the way toward one edge of the terminal while I continue pressing the knife to him. [“ONE wrong move, and you’ll be dead where you stand.”]

The magic around his soul gives under its weight.
He’s right where I want him.

He bends down, shoving the bag in my face. It smells burnt, but it is in tact. [Your phone’s still there. And it looks okay.]

After slinging the bag around my shoulders again, I reorient us until I face backward, relative to my position when I initially arrived at the terminal.

[“If you insult ME, OR the Party, EVER AGAIN, I’ll Wind Slash you to ribbons.

[“YOU.

[“HEAR.

[“ME?”]

“Whatever.”

{{Hmm.

{{He didn’t brush us off as much as I thought.}}

I lift the knife off of Jerry, taking care that he won’t run away, or worse, attack me, as I do so. Concentrating, I move it horizontally in front of me, from left to right, like drawing a line across a sheet of paper. As I hold my right hand out, palm-up, moving it along the same path, a thin, plastic cylinder materializes in my fingers, the weight growing as the knife moves further and further to the right.

After a couple more seconds, I stop, dropping my right hand to my side. I hear the welcome clink of plastic on metal, and note the sensation of rubber pressing against the crook of my left arm. I grip the newly-formed cane in my right hand, looping the strap around my wrist, testing its strength.

It holds.

Reaching forward, I grab him tightly, turning him around so he is facing away from me. I push him forward as hard as I can. [“I spare you,”] I spat.

I only begin walking again once I sense him walking away in the opposite direction as me.

After a couple minutes of riding conveyor belts, I notice that the leftmost pocket on the front of my bag has become heavier.

I stop by the side of the terminal and reach inside. [“Sixty gold… more than I remember.”] I observe, still speaking in Chara’s voice.

As my fingers close around the gold, I sense… a deeply-rooted rush of power within my soul.

In my mind, I suddenly invision the number 1… then two… then three… ticking up until it settles on thirteen.

Then, I invision the number thirty-five.

My attack stat.

However, it only stays at thirty-five for a second, because as I watch, the number forty-eight
replaces it.

My defense stat of thirty similarly increases up to thirty-five, followed by my HP increasing from eighty-five to... ninety-nine.

My breathing quickens as I check my stats, marveling at how much they've increased in a matter of seconds.

HP: 99/99
AT: 48
DF: 35

I continue walking, repeating my new stats over and over, mentally and under my breath.

{"Ninety-nine health. Forty-eight attack. Thirty-five defense... that's sooo much."}

[And if someone hurts you again, I'll help you get more.]

{"Sounds good,}" I reply with no hesitation.

[We should... probly call Sans though...?]

{When we get there...?}

[... ... When we get there.]

**Stop the music.**

... ... "—gonna binge-watch some action movies." Salt finishes his story as we take another round around the lobby of the MTT Resort. "Assuming that this, incident, of yours hasn't ruined the mood."

"I didn't know you were into that—"

Bratty interrupts me: "SHULK: like, I wish you could see his SD card collection—"

{{Whauw whauw whaaaaauw...}}

Catty interrupts Bratty: "There’s like, dozens of them in his room—"

Bratty: "All organized by—"

Catty: "By release date—"

"NOOOO! Catty! Like, they’re like, organized by the date we could first watch them Underground, silly!"

"It makes more sense for us," Salt turns a corner. "I mean why put Night of the Living Dead—which came out in 154X—in that timeslot if we only got it on tape for the first time in 184X?"

"I guess," I’m not sure of what to think of his logic.

Any attempt I ever could have taken at thinking it through is interrupted by a sharp burst of magic directly behind me, and an unmistakable command: "SHULK."

"FUCK!" Salt wrenches free of me and spins around. I follow suit. "Duuuude Sans!"
Before Salt can continue: “We must talk.

“In private.”

Salt’s magic begins to rise around him, but… “You three must stay. To affirm her descriptions,” Sans orders.


Before he can continue, power wrenches on my soul, my feet thudding against hardwood in the next instant. Even as I begin falling sideways—

It doesn’t happen.

“Should we record this on our phones?” Bratty and Catty ask in unison.

A rise, fall, then second rise of blue and yellow magic that needs no clarification.

“You… might wanna sit on the floor Shulk,” Salt follows his own advice, sitting in front of me. “Assuming Glenn will let you doooown…?”

After a second, Sans’s magic slowly disappears, until I am lying on the floor on my side. Bratty and catty sit next to each other behind me, and Sans sits near my feet.

“I removed your phone battery. No one may surveil you via—“ Sans begins to explain, but Salt somehow manages to cut him off. “You think someone would hack Shulk’s phone—”

“This monster WAITED for Shulk. We cannot ensure her privacy.

“Begin when you see fit, Visionary.” Sans? Glenn? encourages. {[WHYYYY?? Are we all calling him Glenn now?]}

“You know that you are on record, no?” he asks.

[“DUH!”] Neither me nor Chara understands his formality.

“You know that you may ask us to stop recording at any time.”

{Wait.

{He’s saying consent form stuff! Like from the Determination Study!}

{{The interviews!}}

“Yes, I understand.”

“AND, you know that we shall send our records to Undermail?”

“Yes.”

“Very well.”

To begin, confirm the current date, time, and place.”

“Today it’s the… forty-eighth day of Determination, in 201X. I’m at the MTT Resort, in Willis ScottJr.’s office. And it’s… a little bit past eight—“
“It is five before eight,” Sans corrects.

“What happened to you?”

“Like, I was walking here, to MTT Resort, but then I ran into a monster by accident. When I asked him to move out of the way, he didn’t.

“Even though I asked him lots of times,” I hastily clarify. “And then he broke and burned my cane.”

Everyone’s souls tense.

“What do you recall about this monster?” Sans asks.

Thank Tesla that audio recordings can’t capture soulological states, because he seems like he’s on the verge of hurling a heavy object—or more likely, the nearest object—through a wall.

“Like, he could use purple and orange? Magic, ‘cause he burned my cane and took my bag away without touching it. I didn’t see his stats, but I saw that his name was Jerry.”

*Several tense minutes of questioning later…*

“I think you guys should skip travel to the restaurant,” Bratty suggests as she stands from her seat. “Like, in case someone notices that you came in here…? I don’t think anyone would care that you’re showing up early—“

[“’Cause Glenn.”] Bratty, Catty, Salt, Chara, and I say in unison.

“Mm-hmm.” I agree, turning my phone on again, the battery back in its proper place.

“You three cannot stay here. While we go to dinner, I shall take you to Undermail’s office, so you may hand them our recordings.

“FRITZ?

“Tell them I shall speak to them later.”

“Yes Sir.”

{Huh.

{Interesting ChronoNickname choice…?}

[I mean like, you DO save Fritz’s life… and he DOOOEEEES give you discounts ‘cause of that…

[And you BASICALLY did that for Salt—]

{But Fritz was gonna get his head chopped off—Salt wasn’t dying FOR REAL—!}

[YEEEEEEEEAAAAAH…? But when you showed up Salt was dying on the INSIDE!]

{… … True.}

[SO IT WORKS!]

{… … … I guess…?]
[But dude Fritz—like, why’d you call Sans “Sir”? Sans isn’t a knight! He’s not like Glenn in THAAAAAT way!]

[DON’T! ENCOURAGE HIM!]

“You know,” Salt—Fritz—helps me up so I stand on Sans’s left side, “I SHOULD be surprised that you guys are still going out, BUUUUT…

“I’m not. ‘Cause you’re doing this for a reason. A really DAMN GOOD reason too.”

No response.

“Good luck, Shulk.”

“You too,” I reply, power yanking on all of our souls at once. In the next instant, my feet leave the floor, only to land on tile. Soft piano music plays in the speakers overhead.

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1LIsrFdEuU

Sans places my free hand on the back of a chair directly in front of me. Soul still tense, he stands behind me as I sit down, shifting slightly. As he does, I hear a… clinking sound…? “Good. No one has perceived you. Or rebuked us for arriving early.”

He walks around me, taking a seat directly across from me: “Like, we AAARE sitting in the corner behind HELLA plants—“

[Ficuses—]

{The fuck what?}

[We’re sitting behind hella ficuses—]

{THE FUCK WHAT??}

“—and like, it’s still busy out…?”

Sighing heavily, his magic fluctuates as he nods. “When Gaster took you under his care, I dreaded the day a monster harmed you due to your blindness ALONE.”

Chara takes control of my hands. I’m confused until they explain, [There’s water in front of you.] Scooting my chair as close to the table as I can, I pull the glass toward me, taking a long draft from it before commenting, “Yeah, you’re right. Like, the riot in Snowdin was more ‘cause everyone was mad at the Inertia Society. And the Great Disclosure Riots happened ‘cause everyone was mad at Gaster… and I, like, happened to be there…?”

No response.

[“I’m surprised too. That it took this long for someone to attack me when I was by myself.

[“And now that I think about it, Jerry taking my cane and my phone, so I couldn’t get away or call for help… he wouldn’t have done that if he hadn’t thought it through first.”]

No response.
“And it seemed like you know him.”

As I speak again, I shudder in surprise: that time, I spoke under my own power.

Sans does not respond in words. Instead, his soul begins to pulse, a current of magic running faintly through the metal under my hands.

“Far too well,” he replies coldly with barely-restrained magic.

“He attacked me twenty-one years ago today.”

“In the same place?”

“No.

“Though that matters not.”

The table… and my chair… and the floor beneath my feet… begin to rattle. “And the Royal Guard ignored your distress.” He states, anger rising.

“Yeah—“ I try to confirm.

“No one approached you after—” he reiterates.

[“Yeah—no one—“] I—we—cut him off, hoping he will finish.

“NO ONE AIDED YOU—“

I don’t even care that he’s physically incapable of spatting the words—it sounds like he is doing so anyway.

“No—I think I was alone—“

“Someone attacked you in broad daylight.

“You suffered through a HATE CRIME,” yellow magic charges his words, and the metal around us, “AND THEY DID NOTHING!”

Chara and I were both wondering when he would allow his magic to spill over.

NEITHER of us expected him to stand up, his chair crashing to the floor.

We’re both surprised that it doesn’t fly any further.

Again, I hear the clinking of metal. {What’s—}

[It’s…] Chara begins to answer… but they trail off.

{What is it?}

They don’t answer.

To our surprise, Sans’s feverish state does not last. Just as he says “nothing”, his magic peaks, burning against my skin, only for it to fade as abruptly as it appeared. With tremendous effort, he calms himself. He rights his chair and slowly sits down.

It takes a few more moments for Chara to answer my question.
[IT'S MAGUS’S AMULET! FROM SCHALA!]

[What—?]  

[He’s wearing MAGUS’S AMULET around his neck!]  

{NOOOOO WAAAAAAAY—!}  

[Yep.]  

To themselves… but of course I hear them: [It’s been forever since he’s worn one…]  

“NO.”  

I am about to ask Sans for clarification, but…

“I shan’t waste any more time, so this night may serve as a reprieve, as I intended.

“I shall tell you of a project my family, the Curies, and the Moores started this month.”

I wait for him to continue.

“This month, we chose the files we intend to send to your loved ones. To affirm that you live and inform them of your work.”

**Loop until the end of the chapter.**


If it weren’t for the fact that I hear a soft [“What?”] escape my lips, I wouldn’t have known I had reacted at all.

Chara lifts my hands until they’re positioned on the tabletop. I lean forward in my seat as Sans takes my hands in his. His weight shifts as he leans forward in kind.

He sighs. “We found many ways to contact your family and friends. Gaster prepared statements explaining your purpose.

“We read reams of transcripts and watched hours of video.”

Chara and I fully expect a list of statements. As Sans tenses his soul, we realize that we will not be disappointed.

“When you learned of determination.

“When you harnessed it to revive Gaster.

“When you met him.

“When Papyrus fought you.

“When your first visit to the CORE.
“Playing Magic: the Gathering and Cards Against Humanity with the Party.

“YOUR WHOLE CHRONOTRIGGER PLAYTHROUGH.”

He laughs: “Spats with Will and all.”

Chara and I laugh in kind.

It takes me a while to realize the implications of Sans’s list of statements. “You’ve been filming me!”?

[He’s been filming us?]

“We had to display the files’ realness, to assuage their fears of us staging them.”

“makes sense.” I concede.

“In fact,” Sans says with pride, “today I added photographs and video of your drills with the Monado: WITH and WITHOUT your skell, to our archive—“

[“DUUUUDE!”]

He chuckles again. “We added copies of the Unified Theory Papers and its appendices, of course. So they may learn what YOU learned and witness Zealdian culture for themselves.

“We explained the Inertia Society’s history via their documents: scientific, cultural, and personal. From its founding, Gaster instilled the importance of recording its history.

“In line with this task, tomorrow, we shall record and livestream your meeting with Asgore—“

I gasp violently.: “I’m meeting Asgore tomorrow?”

Sans doesn’t answer. Even without any soulological cues or descriptions from Chara, I know he’s looking away.

“We did not want the date to loom over you—“ he begins to explain.

I was right: he’s not facing me physically, or even focusing his soul on me.

Numbly, I recall everyone’s behavior over the course of the day, and the days that came before it. No one ever told me when I would meet Asgore.

Murry and the Moores… they said they would be busy tonight. Did they say this because they intended to prepare for my fight with Asgore tomorrow?

I am about to grasp for more observations, but in a matter of seconds, Chara takes full control of me. Their fear, grief, and melancholy overtake me completely, until they drown my soul in them.

I am utterly powerless, as their intent overshadows mine, and THEIR emotions and actions manifest: inwardly and outwardly. Under their sway, my—our—magic rises in intensity, until I can feel it crackling against my skin. They say the observation that’s stuck in my throat: [“So you took me out to dinner tonight ‘cause Asgore’s gonna kill me tomorrow—“]

“We do not know—“

[“OF COURSE you know! You guys said Asgore won’t even—“]
“MOST LIKELY,” he emphasizes, “Asgore shan’t—“

[“But GASTER said—“]

“Gaster is no prophet—”

[“BUT STILL!”]

I begin? Chara begins? to sob.

My body shakes as determination burns against my skin, and I feel my—our—magic shedding from me, like the layers of an onion. My soul—our souls? seem too weak to keep me conscious.

My—our—stats begin to fall

HP: 99—98—97…
AT: 48—47—46…
DF: 35—34—33…

[“Why is this happening!?]

[“We did EVERYTHING right!]

[“I put in all this effort, but nothing changed!”]

With each plea?, my—our—stats drop faster and faster.

[“I’m too young to die.

[“I haven’t done everything I wanna do yet!]

[“IT’S ALL WRONG!]

[“IT’S—!”]

Words poised on the tip of my—Chara’s—tongue, our HP hovering around forty—thirty-nine—thirty-eight—, our attack declining to twenty—nineteen—eighteen, our defense settling on thirteen—twelve—eleven, I am—

Chara is about to continue, but…

Blue magic shakes my body, the table slanting away from me.

As it crashes back down onto the floor and becomes level again, I feel a surge of yellow magic through my feet and pressure on my shoulders, and hear the weighty thud of boots on tile.

The subsequent clatter of bone on tile shakes us out of our rattled, jumpscare-induced state. Not even the imminent firmness of his magic on my entire being disconcerts us anymore.

Quiet, but firm: “We cannot predict Asgore’s choice.

“Gaster admits that his eons of research in the Void shan’t aid him now.”

[“If Gaster doesn’t know what to do, then how do you and Paps know—?”]

“We do not know either.” He interrupts sharply.
“Papyrus wished to alert you on the DAY OF the meeting, to slow your soul’s drop in strength.

“NOT tonight.”

Burning insistently against Chara and I: “Such deceit sickens me.

“Thus, I MUST state…

“Your parley and or duel may end in failure.”

The hammer falls with every syllable… and we welcome every blow.

“Even so…

“ONE fact rings true.

“You know our truth.”

Until now, we never thought anyone could channel such strong conviction into a single sentence.

“He MUST know this truth: never mind how.”

I do not notice that our tears have dried until Sans’s left hand gently brushes a spot below my left eye. The contact burns, but Sans’s magic seems to be held in check by our newly-calmed state. As our breathing slows, and our stats slowly rises back to its previous condition, he stands up, taking his hands off my shoulders. As he walks back to his seat, Chara muses, [You know how Gaster always kneels down when he talks to you?]

I don’t respond at first.

{Let me guess: Sans did that.}

Chara doesn’t respond: their silence is answer enough.

As Sans takes his seat again: “With the knowledge that this is your last meal, what do you want?”

I don’t know whether my half-cringe, half-laugh is mine or Chara’s. [“Where am I— on death rowe?”]

Sans laughs… and any cringe Chara and I felt at us laughing before disappears entirely. [I don’t like how funny you thought that was…?]

{Same…?}

“But like yeah—I’m serious: I don’t know what I want. I didn’t look up the menu before I got here.”

“You needn’t do so.”

The click of plastic on bone, then of plastic on wood, in front of me. “Fate shall decide.”

I reach forward, a pair—trio—

A much-larger-than-I-expected… pile of dice of different sizes… sits beside my glass.

“Uh… okay. Are we gonna order real drinks?”
No response. {I’m guessing that’s a yes…?}

“I’ll roll first…?”

I pick up a twenty-sided die, sighing with relief that the faces have braille on them: still no response.

“Live or die. Make your choice.”

{{Uh…

{I don’t know what that was—}

{{THAT’S NOT OKAY!}}

*Two? Three? hours of hoping neither of us ever rolls a one… and none of our prayers being answered… later…*

It’s only a matter of time before Sans pays for our food and stands from his seat. “Before we leave…”

Chara compels me to stand up and reach out at elbow height. He places a cold glass between my hands. “Grillby, Mettaplier, and I procured iced hot chocolate with echo flower extract—“

“But it’s hella expensive—!”

“Correct.

“The contents equals the price of the meal it succeeds. Seditives and all—“

“Seditives?” I repeat.

“We added them upon Lucca’s request.”

I nervously laugh. “Yeah… sounds about right…”

“Before you drink it, I have three requests.”

[Please by Tesla no—don’t talk about the meaning of life again…]

{I don’t think he will—?}

[YOU DON’T KNOW THAT!]

“FIRST: pack your skell when you wake. Toriel has prepared its contents.”

I wait for the second request.

“SECOND: when you wake, use the elevator leading to the CORE to travel to New Home. When you reach it, walk to the end of Y Axis—“

“How will I know where it is?”

“You cannot miss the sign.”

He pauses, solidifying his magic?
“THIRD: when you wake, do not look for us. We shall leave the lab before dawn to prepare.”

I fluctuate my magic in the affirmative. Adjusting the glass in my outstretched hands, he declares, “May applying the knowledge we gifted you fill you with determination.”

We clink them together in a toast.

As heavy as it is, I finish the contents in only a few gulps. Sans shortcuts us back to the Lab soon after.

Just like the night before I helped bring Gaster back, the sleeping pills act inordinately quickly.

They act so quickly that I barely manage to keep my eyes open as Sans explains that he is going to Undermail headquarters, to deliver Reed and Wrighte his recordings about Jerry’s attack.

Only Chara’s control allows me to change in to the last pair of pajamas I’ll ever use.

I’m practically already asleep when Sans returns. He kneels down next to my bed as he embraces me: physically and soulologically. “Sleep well, Shulk.” He gently says in my ear.

I’m too sleepy to notice that I reply in a voice that’s not my own.

[“Good night, Glenn.”]

Chapter End Notes

Before anything else: about Sans calling Jerry’s attack on me a hate crime? I made sure that I was using the term correctly before including it. I found the definition on the FBI’s website. I accessed this information on June 18, 2019.

https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes

Here is the definition, for your reference.

"Traditionally, FBI investigations of hate crimes were limited to crimes in which the perpetrators acted based on a bias against the victim’s race, color, religion, or national origin. In addition, investigations were restricted to those wherein the victim was engaged in a federally protected activity. With the passage of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, the Bureau became authorized to also investigate crimes committed against those based on biases of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or gender."

Here's the link to Megalo Mashup. The credits are in the description for the song.

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-megalo-mashup

Here's the link to the cover of "It's Raining Somewhere else" from where else? It's from Fallen: An Undertale Tribute, compiled by the Materia Collective.


Just... I'm not sure where to start in praising this song. The violins drip with emotion.
The musicians added sooo much nuance to their performances. The notes are strong when necessary, and delicate when necessary too.

Oh yeah: about Sans (or should I just start calling him Glenn now?) calling Burgerpants/Salt Fritz now?

Trust me--it didn't just happen for no reason... the situation Chara and I describe ACTUALLY happens in ChronoTrigger.

(sigh) Now, on to the serious stuff...

I've agonized over what I wanted to write in this chapter multiple times because I wanted it to be realistic, or at least, more fleshed-out than usual. I realized that in every Undertale fanfic I've read, no one has explored the implications of Frisk walking to what they believe is their imminent death, and a child or preteen walking to their imminent death, no less! It doesn't matter if Frisk has the power to load their save file: I can't see that lessening the impact of this fact.

Considering the tone/purpose of this story, it was only fair I discuss it.

After you consider the fact that I am forced to feel/act on Chara's emotions... yeah: this situation was made even MORE complicated to write to my satisfaction...

About Sans's... monologue? about his mods to ChronoTrigger, and how I said recently in earlier endnotes to keep the plot of ChronoTrigger in mind for later chapters?

Yeah: start doing that now, in earnest.

Lastly, I have a note on the chapters which follow.

The chapters to come are the ones I've thought through the most, and they have the headcanons that are both the most detailed and the headcanons that I'm most proud of. These headcanons are the ones that set Visiontale apart from every other Undertale fanfic.

I'm sure of it.

It also helps that when I've looked for music, I've spent most of that time looking for music for these chapters. The songs I've chosen for the following chapters are by far my most well thought-out choices, so please: use the music annotations when you can.

I've even posted something special on Soundcloud for the occasion.

You all know what's gonna happen in the next chapter. It should be obvious by now.

Next chapter, the citizens under the Dreemurrite/New Zealdian government will tell me the Undertale... or I suppose in this AU, it would be called the Visiontale.
Chapter Summary

We're finally here.

I highly recommend that you read the endnotes. That way, you'll learn my thought processes for the reading of the Visientale, choosing the music for that scene, and more. Considering the subject matter, it's only fair that you know what I went through to write this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

40

[“Wake up.”]

{Huh?}

[“Wake up.”]

I grunt, noticing that someone’s tugging on my sleeve under the blanket. Chara pulls the blanket off of me. [“I noticed you were awake. So I got our stuff ready.”]

I sit up, the bed’s weight sagging on the left side as Chara sits down next to me. [“Toriel left a piece of Butterscotch Cinnamon Pie on the table. And Alphys left a cup of that edible raymon. And there were four Legendary Heroes, two shaped like the Masamune, two shaped like the Monado —”]

“Eh!”

[“And two Sea Teas from Gerson. I THIIIIINK…? They’re Sea Teas…?”]

Chara laughs. [“Not like you’ll need them—Speed! Art Buffs your speed enough—“]

“Awww you did the accent!” I can’t help but fangirl squee.

[“Dude I’ve heard you say the Monado Arts like that for all of Determination, and like, EVER SINCE WE MET—”]

“Fair.”

“And I put the clothes you’re gonna use now on the table so you… wouldn’t have to find them.”

I silently acknowledge Chara’s preparations. Sliding off the foot of the bed, I smooth my blankets and walk toward the door and my desk, finding my folded change of clothes on the corner. Tucking them under my arm, Chara and I walk toward the bathroom. [“Hey…”]

Chara seems even more nervous than me.
“Yeah?”

[“Can I… take a shower after you?”]

“Sure—I don’t see why not.”

After an hour? of Chara and I progressing through our daily routine, including Chara struggling to find a spare toothbrush, I strap on my shoes and pick my cane off the desk. Tucking it under my arm, I unplug my phone, laptop, and BrailleNote from their chargers, setting them neatly on my desk. {I… won’t be needing these anymore…}

Turning to face the door, I walk toward it, only to angle toward the wall to the left side of it, my fingers trailing the surface of my skell for only a second before I pass through its rear plating. As I enter it, Chara presses one hand against my back before disappearing. [You remember where—]

{How could I forget where we’re supposed to go?}

Chara doesn’t answer immediately. [Just making sure.

[I’ll… help you. So we can get there faster.]

Though I have tred this path dozens of times by now, I slowly and carefully walk out of the Lab, each step taking me closer to… to Asgore. As I’m about to walk out the door, Chara asks, [Isn’t the livestream supposed to start now?]

{I think so. It probly has by now.}

**Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkq8vwBV8Zc

Chara and I are especially careful as we travel through Hotland to reach the CORE. We have walked this route a couple times per week, ever since I first visited in the month of Perseverance, but we count conveyor belts and wait for the auditory and magical cues signaling their movement anyway, knowing that if we become disoriented now, it would only delay the inevitable.

Besides: this is the last time I’ll ever walk these conveyor belts. I have to appreciate the genius of their design, and the way of life they promote, while I still can.

When we reach the CORE, we stop by the elevator leading down to it. “I can’t believe it’s been almost five months—”

[SURFACE months—]

“Yeah yeah—“

[Gaster was soooo happy. Everyone in the Inertia Society was. It was like Giftmas—]

“[[But without the riots.]]”

[Last night, I was thinking about all the files Dewey and Sans wanted to send to your friends.

[How do you think they’ll react to the soulology stuff—?]}

{They won’t fucking get it—}
Chara laughs: [True.

[They don’t have Gaster to help them. And they won’t be able to see it. Hear it.

[FEEL it.]

As they say [feel it], I can’t help but focus my soul and attention on the CORE’s currents of yellow magic flowing through my body and soul, upward through my feet. [Well?

[The elevator to New Home’s right here. I thought it’d take us longer to get here but…]

They trail off. [Usually, the walk from the Lab to this elevator takes fifteen minutes.

[We got here in TEN.]

{Even after we tried slowing down…

{It FELT like it only took two minutes.}

[Hear the air conditioning next to us?]}

I fluctuate my magic in an internal nod. [That’s a bathroom. Wanna go before we take the elevator.

[It takes like, forever… for the elevator to go up, soooo…]

I nod again.

After several more minutes of delays, I finally press the button to summon the elevator, only for the doors to ding open immediately. They must’ve left it down here for us.

[Anyway get in. The floor buttons shouldn’t—whoa!]

Before I can ask for clarification: [They’re in braille!]

As the elevator doors close, Chara takes control of my body until I turn around to face them. I walk to the right, my hands trailing the metal wall next to the door. It only takes a second for me to understand: “Yep: that sign’s in braille.”

I run my fingers over the plastic plaque attached to the wall. There are two arrow-shaped buttons embedded in it. Next to the arrow pointing downward, it says “CORE”, in braille and raised large print.

Next to the arrow pointing upward are the words “New Home”, written in the same forms.

I press the latter button.

The elevator slowly begins to ascend. [Sit down.

[We’ll be here a while.]

My back to the door now, I walk to the rear of the elevator, exiting my skell. I sit beside it, hands clasped. [They didn’t REALLY need to braille those. There’s only two places to go. There’s emergency buttons—but still.]

{But they DID IT, so kudos.}

Chara muses, [It must be new. The braille’s all crispy. And the plaque’s still shiny.]
Their soul humms with muted magic, deep in thought. [Notice how quiet Hotland was? And the Lab?]

[I mean Sans said everyone’d be busy—]

[I know, but not just that—like, I didn’t see anyone in the Lab when we left. No lights under the doors. No machines running. Nothing.]

Slowly, Chara considers, [It’s like EVERYONE left.]

[I guess…?]

[And I didn’t see anyone outside in Hotland either—]

[No one?]

[LITERALLY no one. It was just us. You HAD to have felt it: there weren’t any souls around us.]

I consider: {Yeah—you’re right. Where did everyone go?}

Chara doesn’t answer for a long while. [To New Home.

[Where ELSE would they go?]

[Anyway,] they seem to shake themselves off, [the elevator’ll stop soon. The door’s in front of you—]

{Heh?}

[The elevator has two doors. So we have to wait for the second door in front of us to open—not the one behind us.]

I enter my skell again and do as Chara says, the elevator gradually slowing and coming to a stop. The second set of doors dings open in front of me. I unfold my cane and step outside.

I notice the breeze immediately. “It’s not hot—“

[Hotland’s hot ‘cause of the CORE fucking with the environment. New Home’s… like California, I guess.

[From what I know from you.]

I begin trailing the wall next to the elevator. [Yeah yeah—and stop at the end of the wall—the sign’s there.]

I do as I’m told: when my cane stops wacking the concrete, I expect it to swish through empty air, but instead, it hits metal. Turning to face the wall, I reach forward, until I find a pole—series of metal poles—planted along the same path as the wall. {I guess if they wanted to make sure the stick of doom would hit the sign THAAAT badly… then suuuure…? This works…?}

I find the sign at my face level: a metal plaque with the following directions.

Y-Axis ahead
North: Dreemurr District

Underneath the text is a raised arrow pointing forward.
{I… guess that’s our answer…?}

It’s Chara’s turn to fluctuate their magic in the affirmative.

As I begin walking: [Don’t worry about going the wrong way—it’d be really hard to go the wrong way.

[And you don’t have to trail the side either—there aren’t any monsters to bump into and there’s no sidewalk to walk off of—]

{What?}

[Like, there’s no cars so there’s no sidewalks—]

{Oh yeah… I forgot.}

*A couple minutes of pondering later*

… … … {Where are we going?}

[Just walk straight. You’ll know when to stop.]

{For how long?}

Chara repeats, [YOU’LL KNOW.

[Trust me: I know you haven’t been here before but SERIOUSLY: you’ll know. You can’t miss it.]

{How long’ll it take?}

Chara verbally shrugs. [I don’t know but it’ll be a while. Maybe…

[At this rate? An hour—]

I groan. [Probly more. Stop after a half hour?]}

I groan again. [Twenty minutes?]

{… Fine.}

*Twenty minutes, but what feels like an hour, later…*

… … … [Wow—you walk fast—!]

{I mean in high school I HAD TO—if I didn’t I’d be late for class—}

[Yeah true—WAAAAAAIIIIIT!!!]

Chara’s… inspired?

They compel me to reach behind my back, my fingers closing around the hilt of the Monado. Eagerly, they will my thumb to press the button embedded in the hilt twice.

The unmistakable vibrant beeping of Speed Art activating plays.

I think we can get there in half an hour and not forty minutes if we activate Speed! Art on time every time it refreshes.]
Dude—this feels wrong—}

[Why?]

[‘Cause I’m supposed to use the Monado when fighting Asgore—}

[YEEEEEAAAH—but this’ll help you get to him faster! And no one ever said you COULDN’T use the Monado outside battle.]

[… … … I suppose…?]

[Stop for water soon?]

[Sure.]

*Several activations of Speed Art later…*

… … … I walk to one side of the street, finding a short wall. I sit on it, marveling at how I can feel its composite concrete and magic surface under me, even while piloting the skell. To access the Dimensional Box, I press one hand to the interior of the panel of metal covering my chest. A cold thermos appears between my fingers. I take a couple sips, observing how my HP is still at ninety-nine. {Wait— I just realized— where’d the water come from? I don’t remember anyone saying they’d give—}

[I packed it. ‘Cause I knew the walk would be long.]

I don’t have to thank them in words.

After savoring the sensation of the water sliding down my throat: [You ready?]

{We’re not in a hurry—}

[We… kind of are.

[The sooner we get there, the sooner we can…

[Get this over with.]

{“… … That’s true.”}

I stand, unfolding my cane and sending the thermos back to the Dimensional Box. I continue walking.

*A few dozen Speed Art activations later…*

… … … At our second stop, I ask, {Where’d everyone go?}

[Everyone’s inside, watching the livestream.

[Some of the Party should be there—]

[Where?]

[The Dreemurr District—]

{But WHERE in the Dreemurr District are we going—!?}
[You’ll know when we get there.]

Frustrated, I stop asking.

*Significantly-fewer activations of Speed Art as compared to the first leg of the walk later…*

Chara’s estimation for how long it takes us to reach… wherever we’re going… ends up being a couple minutes too short. As they say [Almost there], the smooth pavement under my feet changes to… to cobblestone… or something like it. My cane grates against the floor, almost too loud for me to perceive… voices.

I perceive voices ahead.

After a couple hours of silence, I finally perceive monsters’ magic, and the voices they create, again.

I continue to walk straight, shadows passing by me as I walk forward, and I sense walls on either side. [You entered the archway.]

{What archway?}

It takes them a while to answer. [This building in the Dreemurr District, it’s in a courtyard. Go straight till you find a door.]

[Oh: and when you do, get out of the skell and take off your shoes]

{Why?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

It only takes a minute for me to find the door. Transfering my cane to my left hand, I open it and step inside.

The monsters’ whispers intensify as I walk inside. Back against the wall on the left side of the door, I exit the skell and remove my shoes, as Chara requested. As I place them at the foot of my armor, a monster… walks…? Hops…? up to me. “It’s been a long time since I last saw you… i’m glad you could make it ribbit.”

I gasp softly. “WAAAAAIT… it’s YOOOOUUUU!”

A gurgly laugh. “Reed and Wrighte have interviewed me quite a bit so they could learn my opinions of you ribbit. Because I was the first civilian to meet you. So my first impressions about everything were important to them ribbit. Everyone wanted me to welcome you here. I was the first monster you met, besides Toriel ribbit.”

A… sticky… and earthy… surface brushes my hands clasped in front of me. Excitedly, I fumble to participate in the Inertia Society handshake. “You know, after all this time I never did tell you my name. Even though I know you’d NEEEEVER confuse me for some OTHER froggit—“

[“Duuuude—“] Chara whines using my voice, to my confusion. [“I’d know you AAAAAANYWHERE!”]

He laughs again: “Of course. The Inertia Society’s helped you remember voices using soulological cues as well as auditory ones. You have half the excuses for forgetting me ribbit, at most.”

Utterly befuddled by Chara’s prior outburst: “True,” I reply, entirely of my own free will.
He introduces, “My name is Glenn—“

Magic bursting from me in disbelief: {“NOOOOO—!“}

He hops in place in front of me: only now do I notice the tinkle of metal and rustling of leather. “The rest of the party had a feeling you wouldn’t believe me.”

A long, leather object brushes my arm. It doesn’t take me long to realize that I’m holding a belt, with a sheath attached. “By Tesla—I swear to you that these items accurately represent Glenn’s outfit in ChronoTrigger.

“Sans—“

He stops himself. “Well YOU have taken to calling HIM Glenn now—HE wouldn’t have stood for anything less.”

[“True…”] Chara replies with my voice without hesitation.

“Have…”

I grasp for questions to ask him, as I hand him his belt back. “Has your name ALWAYS been Glenn?”

“Yes, actually. But it didn’t always have a second N ribbit. I changed it twenty years ago today.

“‘I do not know whether I am nearly as honorable as Glenn—the Guardian one OR the Zealdian one, but I will try my best ribbit.’

When he finishes talking, he sets a slip of… thick paper… in my hand. “Your Inertia Society friends left this for you. The version posted downstairs on the wall is in print ribbit.”

I orient the paper so it is upside down and press it against the front of my shirt. Using my palms and wrists to hold it in place, I read its contents aloud.

“Howdy. I’m in the garden. If you have anything you need to get off your chest, please don’t hesitate to come. The keys are in the kitchen and the hallway.”

“Do you need me to help you—“ Glenn begins to ask, but I reply before he can finish.

[“I got it—this place is JUST LIKE Toriel’s house. There’s NOOOOO WAAAAAY IN HEEEELL I’d forget what her house looked like.”]

“If you say so,” Glenn seems a little doubtful. “Pick up the keys and then wait for me. Shout for me if you need help.”

I fold up my cane and place it in my skell’s Dimensional Box… protesting the entire time within my thoughts. {Wait wait wait!}

[What—you KNOW this place!]

{You said it’s like Toriel’s house?}

[Yeah! So you KNOOOOOOW where the keys are.]

{But it’s been forever!}
Even as I doubt myself, I walk straight for a distance, eventually hearing the noise around me bounce off the walls of the stairwell. I turn left and walk toward the kitchen. As I enter it, my left hand lifts from my side, my fingers only brushing the countertop for an instant before they grip the first key.

Turning around, I walk out of the kitchen and orient myself so the stairwell is on my left. Walking straight, I eventually sense the walls of the hallway on either side of me. After a couple feet, I stop and turn my body to the left slightly under Chara’s influence. My right hand reaches out, my fingertips just barely touching a table before they close around the second key. [Glenn’s hopping ——]

{Yeah—I hear him…}

“Follow me to your seat ribbit. the Froggit says from behind me.

I turn around and walk close behind him in a… slow stride… that’s not my own.

When Glenn tells me to stop, I turn so my back is to the front door, instead of sitting with my back to the hallway, for some reason. “There’s a chair behind you ribbit.”

I sit down, Glenn squelching down beside me in a second chair, laying a webbed appendage on my right hand. “Are you ready ribbit?”

“Ready for what?”

“We started preparing for your arrival before dawn, on the surface where we are—“

“Yeah—Sans—the REAL Glenn? —told me yesterday—“

“Beyond that, we’ve gotten up before dawn every day this month—“

“Holy shit—!”

He chuckles at my surprise. “The Inertia Society, and every monster we came across, would not settle for anything less ribbit. Today is a VERY important day for us, the forty-ninth of Determination.”

I am about to ask why, when Glenn shushes me. “They’re starting.”

**Stop the music.**

Again, I am about to ask what’s going on, but my mouth won’t open. My body goes still, and the whispering that’s happened ever since I came here finally quiets down, until only silence remains.

A solemn silence, entirely devoid of magic.

After a few moments, I hear a sound in front of me that I have only heard during band and choir concerts in middle and high school. Even then, I have never heard them up close.

The repeated playing of an A on a piano, followed by the plucking and whining? of violin strings.

The musicians are tuning their instruments.

After a few more moments of silence, the violins and piano begin to play a slow melody…

**Loop until the next note.**
“A long time ago, a human fell into the Ruins.

“Injured by its fall, the human called out for help.

“Asriel, the king’s son, heard the human’s call.

“He gathered a vanguard of monsters to accompany him back to the castle.

“Upon their departure, Asriel asked for the human’s name.

“The human answered…

“'CHARA.

''My name is Chara.'”

I gasp. {NOOOOO…}

“Over time, Asriel and Chara became like siblings.

“The King and Queen treated the human child as their own.

“and the Royal Scientist, Dr. Wingdings Tesla-da Vinci Gaster, reeled at the chance to show off monsterkind’s greatest accomplishments.

“Our VALUES.

“Our REASONING.

“Our MASTERY of the world around us.”

“{By Tesla…’’

[They put him in,] Chara whispers, their magic almost too weak to perceive.

[They remember him now… so they put him in.]

“At last, he and the Inertia Society put the Unified Theory Papers to good use.”

{“You were…”}

“It was hoped that with time, Chara could help monsterkind break the Barrier.”

Also whispered: {“So you were gonna…”}

“It was hoped that with time, Chara could become a proper member of the royal family.

“It was hoped that with time, Chara could become a proper member of our society.”

{“They—Gaster…?}

{“They wanted you to do what I did.

{“I did what they wanted to do to you.”}
“The Underground was full of hope.”

The monsters pause for a brief moment. In that moment, dread and melancholy presses in on me, from all sides.

“Then…

“One day…

“Chara became very ill.”

{“No,”} I plead.

“They had only one request.

“To see the flowers planted in their best friend’s garden.

“But there was nothing we could do.”

{“No no no no,”} I repeat more frantically.

“The next day…

“The next day…”

Everyone seems almost too saddened to continue… but they do so.

“The human died.”

{“Huh?”}

“Wracked with grief, Asriel absorbed the human's SOUL.

“He transformed into a being of incredible power.

“Asriel crossed the barrier and found the garden Chara spoke of.

“There, he found a bed of golden flowers.

“He carried Chara onto them.”

The monsters’ magic becomes… sharper. Their sudden change in mood scares me to no end.

“Suddenly, SCREAMS RANG OUT.”

{“No no no no please no—”}

“A group of humans saw Asriel holding the human's body.” They declare, resentment rising.

My breath catches.

“They thought he had KILLED Chara.”

I scream {“NOOOOO!”} My magic looses from me without restraint.

How many of the books falling off the shelves, chairs crashing to the floor, lights shaking above me, are MY doing?
“The humans attacked him with EVERYTHING they had.”

Their words are attacks in and of themselves.

“He was struck with blow after blow.”

I cringe, my HP dropping with every word.

“Asriel had the power to destroy them all.

“But he did not fight back.”

Their tone quiets almost as soon as it had intensified.

Before I can voice my confusion: “Clutching Chara, Asriel smiled, and walked away.”

In the brief pause after they speak, their emotions intensify again… just as I thought they had calmed down.

“Wounded, Asriel stumbled home.”

DESPAIR.

THAT… is the emotion they are pouring over me…

THAT… is the emotion I am drowning in.

“He entered the castle and collapsed, his dust spreading across the garden.”

The beginnings of a sob rise in my chest.

“The kingdom fell into despair.

“The humans had ONCE AGAIN taken EVERYTHING from us.”

{“It all makes sense,”} I begin to cry in earnest.

“The king and queen had lost TWO children in ONE night.”

Exhaling sharply, my whole being convulses. The enormity of their statement hits me harder than any attack I have ever felt.

Balanced on the edge of my seat, I begin to sob. As I collapse off of it and onto my side, entirely overwhelmed by their magic, the monsters around me chant louder.

“So the king decided it was time to END OUR SUFFERING!

“Every human who falls down here MUST die.

“With enough souls, we can shatter the Barrier forever.

“Their conduct shows that in this world, it’s KILL…

“Or BE KILLED!”

The intensity of their magic remains, even while their anger transforms into…
Optimism?

Optimism, and resolve.

“It’s not long now.

“KING ASGORE WILL LET US GO!

“KING ASGORE WILL GIVE US HOPE!

“KING ASGORE WILL SAVE US ALL!”

It ALL makes sense.

It ALL makes some twisted form of sense.

Everything everyone’s told me about Asgore’s inclination NOT to take the souls we created.

Killing me being considered an act of mercy.

The Inertia Society’s eagerness to take me in and make me one of their own…

It ALL makes some twisted form of sense.

I can’t help but agree with the monsters: after the countless tragedies they have suffered, they deserve FAR MORE than just their freedom.

I am barely coherent enough to notice that their magic has softened for the most part, dropping to the equivalent of a whisper.

“You should be smiling too.

“Aren’t you excited?

“Aren’t you happy?

“You’re going to be free.”

**Stop the music.**

**Listen to the whole performance before continuing.**

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/the-visiontale-dramatic-reading

My soul entirely under Chara’s control, I can’t help but walk away from the… vigil… in tears.

My soul entirely under Chara’s control, I enter Chara’s—

Chara and ASRIEL’S—room.

They relinquish their hold as I collapse on the nearest bed and sob for only Tesla knows how long.

Exhausted in every sense, I lie back on the covers and fall asleep, even though I only woke up a couple hours ago.

*Only Tesla knows how many hours later…*
I wake up on my stomach, someone’s—

Chara’s—

Chara’s arm is draped across my upper back.

I turn onto my side, knees drawn up. [“He gave Azzie all the credit.]

[“GLENN was the one who found me in the Ruins… HE told Azzie to come see me.

[“But he let Azzie take credit for it…

[“And Paps learned to play the violin after all.

[“I thought he was joking about that before…”]

Before I can ask: [“At Undyne’s house he told us he wanted to learn to play the violin.

[“He was there, during the vigil.

[“He was playing the violin.

[“He was sitting NEXT to Marle—SHE was the one playing the piano.”]

The words of the monsters’ chant come flooding back. {“No no no no no—”

Chara squeezes my shoulder. [“I’m here. It’s okay—“]

{“BUT YOU’RE DEAD!”} I cry. “How—“

{“YOU. KNOW. WHY.”

{“BUT—“

Chara grabs me by the shoulders, pushing me upright into a sitting position so we sit across from each other. [“YOU. KNOW. WHY,” They repeat. [“It’s one of the first things I told you when we met.”]

{“I—“} I begin to reply, hiccuping.

[“I KNOW you remember it.

[“What did I say?“]

I take a shaky breath.

Their frustration jabs me in the chest: [“I’m here,”] Chara leans closer to me, until our faces almost touch, [“because YOU ARE FILLED WITH…?”

{“Determination.”} My voice cracks as I finish the phrase.

Chara releases their grip on my shoulders. [“It’s ‘cause I’M filled with determination.

[“It’s ‘cause when I died, I did the same thing as Gaster.

[“I entered the Void.
[“Toriel—mom—carried my body back to the Ruins from here.

[“And my soul was scattered across the Underground, like Gaster’s.”]

I sit silently for a moment. {“That’s true—Toriel WOULD HAVE been your mom.”}

Chara doesn’t confirm my observation in words.

{“So Asgore’s your dad.”}

Again, Chara replies with an affirmative fluctuation of their magic.

{“And you’re helping me kill him.”} I hate to say aloud.

Chara doesn’t HAVE to respond.

{“You knew Gaster.

{“You knew him this WHOLE time.”}

Chara is quick to correct me: [“Yeah—I knew him almost as long as I was here, but he didn’t tell me what he told you.

[“He WANTED to tell me but…”]

They laugh. [“Mom wanted me to have fun. To be a kid. She said my translational education could wait.”]

They collect themselves. [“I…

[“I met him four weeks after Azzie found me in the Ruins.”]

They laugh again. [“He was SOOOOO excited! He kept asking me stuff!

[“How old I was…

[“Where I went to school…

[“What my…”]

They trail off, but resume talking after only a brief moment: [“my REAL parents… were like.

[“What I was learning in school when I came here.

[“And he was taking notes the whole time! The only reason we stopped was ‘cause mom wanted him to take a break and eat something! He couldn’t stop talking! And flicking his paper and pen with his magic.

[“He had to pull it out of the wall a few times—he was THAAAT hyped—!”

{“DUUUUUDE—!”}

Another laugh: [“And he jumped out of his seat when I asked about it! And he threw his chair into the room next to us! He was SOOOOO annoyed mom and dad hadn’t taught me anything about magic yet…?”]

{“YEEEEAAAAAH… sounds about right…?”}
“He stayed the WHOLE day. He showed me how his magic worked. And he got Azzie to cast some of his own blue magic on some books, to make them float. And some orange magic on some more books, to set them on fire—“

{“Uh—okay—”}

{“—and some green magic on me, when I hit my knee on the table when I was running away from the books that were on fire! Gaster wanted to take me to Hotland but dad thought he was tiring me out—”}

{“YEEEEAAAHH… I can see that…”}

{“He came back the next day and took us to Hotland. He carried us AAAAAALL THE WAAAAAY THEEEEERE—!”}

{“YEP! Sounds about right!”} I interject.

{“And THEEEEEEN we met Sans and Papyrus—!”}

{“DUUUUDE—!”}

{“—And like… they were SOOOO COOOOOL! And Alphys and Dewey and Murry—they were SOOOOO smart! And Dewey said he’d figured out what school stuff I’d missed. He said he’d teach me and Azzie himself! Him AND Gaster!

“We went to Hotland every day and Sans and—“}

Their soul runs at a mile a minute.

I don’t want to ask this question but… if I don’t ask it, I won’t know otherwise. If I don’t somehow interrupt them, I’ll never have the chance to ask it.

{“Chara?

{“What was it like in the Void?”}

{“You mean what IS it like in the Void?”}

Before I can express my confusion: magically or verbally: [“I’m still there.

[“Kinda.

[“My SOUL broke like Gaster’s, but my body didn’t.

[“I was in the Void, but I didn’t see what HE saw.

[“At least, not till Simon fell down.”]

I go completely still.

[“I felt what he felt, and knew what he was thinking, but I couldn’t talk to him.

[“Well—more like I TRIED to talk to him, but I don’t think he heard everything I said.

[“With Tailor it was a little better. I could control her body enough so she could fight, even with a broken hand.
[“Till Doggo killed her.”]

My left hand and wrist ache with a pain that’s not mine.

Have I EVER shared in Chara’s pain before?

[“Everyone else was like that, but I could control each of them a little more than the last. I could control Adam and Kari the most.

[“I…”]

Their soul hitches with a single sob. They allow themselves that one sob before they choke out, [“I helped Kari through the CORE.”]

I let out my own—

Am I sharing in their tears again?

[“I never went there, when I knew Gaster. I didn’t know that much soulology or magitry stuff when I died. He taught me a lot slower than he taught you.

[“But I still had to help her.”]

[“Could you see what Kari saw? you said you didn’t see things like Gaster did—”]

[“I saw what Kari saw, and then what I saw when I was alive, and what the first five humans saw when they fell. Seven fields of knowing in one. But not EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE in EVERY timeline—“]

[“So you saw different timelines too—“]

[“Yeah.

[“You know how Gaster made sure he ONLY looked at timelines like his?]"

[“Yeaaaah?”]

[“I didn’t do that.

[“After Kari was killed, when the Determination Study started, I started seeing the other timelines. But most of them were different from this one.”]

Confidentially, Chara near-whispers, [“They wer WEEEIIIRD.

[“Like, in one of them, Sans and Paps have opposite personalities—“]

[“The fuck what—?”]

[“They swapped personalities—“]

[“The fuck what?

[“So Sans,”{ I struggle to understand their description, {“is like Paaaaaps…? And Paps is like Saaaaaans—?”]}

[“Uh-huh—“]
I shudder. {“Ugh…”}

{“And in another one everyone was like, edgy and stuff—“}

{“Meaning…?”}

{“They’re…”}

Chara snaps their fingers. {“I KNOW!

{“Everyone talked like they were playing Cards Against Humanity all the time and they talked like Robin all the time—“}

I cringe harder. {“By Tesla—”}

{“But everyone ALREADY does that here!”} Chara insists. {“Like—Grillby probly does it the most—“}

{“True—but still!”}

{“And there’s another one, where Sans is king of the Underground—“}

I can’t help but laugh, slightly nervously: {“Uh… excuuuuuse me…?”}

{“Yeah!”}

{“So Sans being the government is a thing there—“}

{“Kinda…? But without the creepiness…?”}

{Thank Tesla—“}

{“AMEN!

{“And mom’s captain of the Royal Guard and…

{“Me and Azzie are still alive…”}

A silence neither of us knows how to bridge.

{“And lots of different humans fell underground. There’s one where Kari’s name is Clover and she has a gun with rubber bullets inside and not airsoft thingies—“}

{“Huh… interesting.”}

{“Yeah!”}

Until now, Chara’s been talking as fast as Gaster when he’s excited… sparse breaks to replenish their magic and all. {“But that’s not the point.”

{“The point is that I saw something weird in the Void.

{“In a few—

{“NO.

{“In A LOT of timelines, the seventh—eighth—the human who had the seventh soul inside them
—was the same.

[“They’d fall into the Ruins where you fell.

[“They’d watch Toriel HADOKEN!!! Flowey—“]

{“LOL—”}

[“—and they’d meet Sans and Paps—“]

{“EH—!”}

[“They’d do what YOU did.

[“They heard EVERYTHING I said. And I could control them perfectly. And they could save and load like you.”]

I’m completely entranced by their description. Their voice and magic drip with… longing.

[“Sometimes Frisk would make lots of friends.

[“Sometimes they’d get scared and kill monsters who attacked them.

[“Sometimes they killed everyone they saw… at least.

[“I still don’t understand it.”]

They steel themselves to speak: [“The golden flowers I wanted to see… they were in FRISK’S garden.

[“Azzie took me to THEIR house.

[“I think my determination made it so the Barrier was under their house that day.

[“In the timeline I came from, Frisk never fell into the Underground.

[“In the timeline I came from, Frisk didn’t even know it existed.

[“In the timeline I came from, until the day I came here, Frisk was my best friend.”]

Chara takes a little while to collect their thoughts and focus their magic. If it weren’t for the fact that they were sitting in front of me, I’d make some comment about them following Gaster’s example for telling long stories, but it’s unnecessary.

[“I’ll keep it simple, I guess.

“I hated my classmates.

[“I hated talking to them ‘cause they were SOOOO sttupid. I’d say something and they wouldn’t get ANY of it!”]

I’m tempted to make a comment about how I had similar experiences in middle and high school, but…

[“The boys hated me ‘cause they didn’t want me to play football with them, JUST ‘cause I was a girl.
“And the GIRLS hated me ‘cause I was too mean and rough, like a boy.

“They said I might as well use whatever bathroom I wanted, ‘cause I’d already used the boy’s bathroom enough times—“

“What?”

Chara seems… prepared… for my confusion. [“Okay—you know how you knew mom was a girl and Sans was a guy ‘cause of their voices?”]

“Yeah…?”

“And you know in eighth grade, that one kid from the flute section you didn’t know was a guy or a girl—?”

“I THIIIINK…? they’re a girl—?”

“You THINK—“ Chara emphasizes. [“But you didn’t. The only way you would’ve known was if you asked.”]

Blunt determination driving their words: [“What do you think I am?”]

“Uh… whyyyy—?”

“IT’S IMPORTANT.”

“Well…”

I stumble over my words, unsure of what kind of an answer Chara wants: [“Those kids said you were a girl—”]

Their magic rings as they reply, [“I’M NOT—”]

“So you’re—“ I begin to answer.

“I’M NOT A BOY EITHER.”

Their anger and frustration tears at me. I’m unsure of which of my emotions regarding my… wrong answers… is stronger: my confusion, or my shame.

“The way I think of it’s probly bad, but it’ll HAVE to work.

“You know how when you play Pokémon you have to choose if you’re a boy or a girl?”

I don’t answer.

“If I designed the Pokémon games, I’d make it so you’d only have to put in your NAME.

“AND you can customize your character. They wouldn’t design characters for you to pick from.

“AND you could wear whatever you want.

“YOU hated having to choose between playing as the boy or the girl too, ever since you played Pokémon Ruby in high school—“

I don’t have to answer in words: I’ve talked with them about this issue when Will began his playthrough of Pokémon Red.
“You didn’t want people treating you different just ‘cause you were a girl.

“’You didn’t FEEL like a girl… but you didn’t wanna play as a boy either ‘cause THAT didn’t feel like you either.’"

A magical affirmation.

“At the end of the school year before I fell into the Underground, Frisk moved to a house a few streets away from mine. Their parents came to the school to check it out, to see if they’d like it.

“The summer before the school year I fell into the Underground, AND during that school year, we hung out almost every day.”

Nostalgia drips from their voice. [“They didn’t talk much. They COULD, but they didn’t. They only talked to me, their parents, and our teachers. And sometimes not even our teachers.

“When they were with me, or anyone else they talked to, they were like Gaster, ‘cause they used their hands a lot. Like how Gastergestures when he talks—Frisk did that A LOT.

“When they saw or heard something they liked, they couldn’t stop talking about it, or wanting to see it. They’d do ANYTHING to get to it. They’d get… [“FIXATED,”] they try the word out on their tongue, “on it.

“So most of the time they couldn’t keep their hands to themselves. They’d reach for things out of nowhere. Even if they touched some other people or things along the way.[“

Kids made fun of them for it at their old school.

“And at MY school too.

[“That’s why their name’s Frisk—well they SAY it is. It’s not their real name.”]

{“What IS their name then?”}

“I don’t know.

[“Their parents said Frisk LIKED the name! So me and my parents called them that.”]

{“What were they like?”}

[“You know how Alphys was REALLY smart, but she was scared of talking most of the time?

“Frisk was like that.

“They hated being around big groups: of kids Or grown-ups. They liked being alone.

“Just like me.

“The kids in my class scared them so much Frisk almost never talked to them. They HATED it when kids or grown-ups asked them to talk out of nowhere.

“And when people wanted them to talk when they weren’t ready, that hurt them the most.”]

{So Frisk IS—WAS—like Alphys… but worse…?}

“We played and talked together somewhere quiet. And I ALWAYS waited for them to talk before
I talked.

[“On the twenty-fifth day of Integrity, when I turned nine, Frisk’s parents got me a bike—”]

[“Duuude niiice—!”]

[“—so I could go to Frisk’s house faster. And the arcade. And Frisk had one too.

[“And on the third day of Kindness when Frisk turned ten my parents and me got them a Gameboy —”]

[“DUUUUDE NIIICE—!”]

They laugh: high, bright, and clear. [“Yeah! We’d play it every day. We tried making Tetris in real life—”]

That… doesn’t seem right…?

[“But… the block things fall down in real time…”] I struggle to articulate my confusion. P’I… don’t think that’s how it works…?

[“Yeah… it didn’t work. But it was fun anyway!”]

Chara’s voice suddenly turns hard. [“But Frisk didn’t even have their Gameboy a week when some kids saw them playing it at school.

[“They wouldn’t leave them alone.

[“Frisk even asked them to go away!

[“They SHOUTED!

[“Even when they were happy they NEVER! Shouted!”]

Their determination cleaves my body and soul into pieces: [“They didn’t listen.

[“They BEAT Frisk.

[“And SMASHED their Gameboy.

[“And stopped them from calling for help.”]

I cringe, recalling Jerry’s attack. [This explains why Chara acted the way they did.

[I was a second Frisk.]

[“So I stopped them.”]

Chara laughs harshly. [“By the end, one kid had two teeth knocked out.

[“Two had black eyes.

[“A fourth had a broken nose.

[“A fifth needed help to walk—his foot wasn’t BROKEN… but it hurt like hell to walk on it.

[“And the sixth had two broken fingers and a broken big toe.”]
They did that all by themselves?

That… doesn’t seem—

No.

Of COURSE it’s possible…

‘Cause determination.

But…

How would you even break someone’s big toe???

“I got suspended—”

“I mean duh—“

“Yeah yeah.

“But the first day I was gone, I heard stuff from Frisk’s parents.

“They said Frisk wouldn’t work.

“They sat in my seat and didn’t wanna get up.

“They didn’t talk at all. Not even their favorite teachers could get through to them. Only my parents could.

“When they asked them what was wrong, they wrote my name on a piece of paper.

“The teachers explained I couldn’t come to school ‘cause I hurt all those kids. They thought it was bad for me to be near them.

“Frisk said they didn’t wanna be at school without me.”

I have the nagging suspicion that this isn’t… the normal turn of events in this situation… but…

“The teachers thought Frisk was being stupid… but our parents told them how different they were around me. How I gave them time to talk.

“They said that frisk talking to me AT ALL made them SOOO happy. And how I hadn’t gotten in to ANY fights ever since I met them.

“I heard lots of grown-ups say this wasn’t normal.

“But Frisk’s parents ALWAYS told them about how scared Frisk was, after they were hurt. And they were SURE that those kids would’ve hurt them more, if I hadn’t been there.

“Yes—it was bad I had to hurt so many of them just so they’d leave frisk alone, but it was also bad that I had to do it in the first place.

“They said that if those kids didn’t listen to Frisk when THEY asked them to go away THAT many times, then how could a GROWN-UP have helped?”

“Shit.”}
And I KNOW you’re remembering all the rules about bullying at your middle and high schools. How even if a kid hurt their bully in self-defense, THEY’D get in trouble too.”

A magical affirmation.

“And they even surrounded Frisk so they couldn’t get help!

“It took a long time, but the grown-ups—even the shitty ones—said it was better that we were together.

“So two of our teachers came to my house in the morning to give us our work. And after school they’d come and check on us. We were always together.”

**Loop until the end of the chapter.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hm8KBTPxE_g

“So you guys were homeschooled?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“For how long?”

“We were gonna stay home till the end of the school year. Then they were gonna figure out if we could go back to school or not the next year.

“Two of our teachers—our math and science teacher and our English and music teacher—came to see us every afternoon. They were JUST LIKE Gaster and Dewey. They didn’t think we were stupid just ’cause we were younger than them.

“They talked about video games with us—”

Chara laughs… and for once, they actually sound ten. “Mr. Oncay talked about the stories in video games with us. ALL the games on my NES! Zelda 2: Adventure of Link, Kid Icarus, MegaMan!”

I am obliged to say (“MegaMan!”) in the same hammy voice as them… because Super Smash Brothers.

“We complained about them not having voices like in MOOOORTAAAAAL KOOOOOMBAAT!!! ’Cause we both wanted to know what they’d sound like! And he said that’s ’cause WE’RE the main characters: NOT Link or Pit. Yeah—we controlled them, but WE did everything.

[We… projected everything on to them,”] they say slowly. The phrase seems… foreign… to them.

I contemplate this observation for a moment. (“Yeah I get that—but I liked Xenoblade ‘cause Shulk talked! Xenoblade was the first RPG I ever watched and played where the characters had voice-acting.”)

“That’s why I love Xenoblade! Even though Shulk talked the player can still like him!

“I bet Frisk would’ve LOVED it.

“And Mr. Ruviaro taught us math. He told us that video games are just math problems that you PLAY: not, like… write—“]
{“Yeah… I guess that’s true. I never thought of that.”} I agree.

{“The point is that we talked about games with them. Mr. Ruviaro taught me to play piano. ‘Cause I wanted to know how to play the MOOOORTAAAAAL KOOOOMBAAAAT! Theme—“

{“Duuuuude sweet!”}

{“Yeah—like, I’d use Frisk’s piano. And one time I learned to play the Tetris theme after listening to Frisk play Tetris for a few hours. THAT was the first theme I ever learned to play. Mr. Ruviaro said I was dedicated for doing it, ‘cause I did it without sheet music. People would find that interesting.

{“They’d say I ‘was a real character.’”}

I freeze. {CHARACTER—CHARA…

{THAT’S where they got it from?}

{“Then Frisk said it wrong and only said ‘Chara’, like the beginning of character.

{“But we thought it was lame so we said ‘Chara’ like how I say it now ‘cause it sounds like a Street Fighter character—“

{“I… guess you’re right…? But I wouldn’t know— I haven’t played Street Fighter— I only know Ryu ‘cause he’s in Smash.

{“‘So Chara’s not your name?’} I ask.

{“No.

{“I stopped using my real name, like what Frisk did.”]

Chara pauses before continuing, collecting themselves again. {“After Giftmas I saw the issues of Nintendo Power at the store and saw ChronoTrigger was coming out—!”

{“DUUUUDE NIIICE—!”}

{“So me and Frisk saved money. We did all the chores and sold our old stuff. I even sold my NES and every game on it—“

{“HOLY SHIT ALL OF THEM?”

{“I let Frisk borrow it and play all my games first. Duh!

{“We lived really close to a game store. I walked there to get the SNES ‘cause I didn’t wanna damage it on the bike ride to Frisk’s hhouse.

{“Before it came out we got all our work done. And our parents and Mr. Oncay and Mr. Ruviaro said we could spend the next week playing it.

{“I got up really early and packed lots of stuff for a sleepover. My clothes and candy and all my money. Then I bought everything and started walking to Frisk’s house.”]

They stop. They don’t HAVE to explain what happened next, but I don’t stop them from doing so: “I wasn’t even that far away from Frisk’s house when I fell into the Underground!”}
Before I can ask: ["A FEW BLOCKS—!!"]

["What?"] I gasp.

["I think…

["I think I know why it happened.

["I think it was ‘cause I wanted to play ChronoTrigger. ‘Cause I wanted to go somewhere else for a while with Frisk.

["‘Cause we wanted to escape.

["But only I did.”]

[“That Super Nintendo that Sans has been modding the whole time… IT’S YOURS!”] I realize.

[“Yep!

[“And he played it A LOOOOT—”]

{"Yeah—‘cause like, didn’t he say that every year he’s had it, he’s played through every ending?"}

[“YEP!

[“He was the FIRST ONE to get ALL the endings! AND to 100 percent it! I was the second one to do both.

[“Alphys LOOOOOVED Lucca! And all the other character designs! And Undyne loved the music. The first song she ever learned on piano was the song that plays when you go to Guardia Castle—“]

{"DUUUUDE SWEEEEET—!”}

{"—and the second song she learned was Frog’s Theme—“}

I whoop in excitement.

[“Mostly ‘cause Sans wanted to know what it’d sound like on the piano.

[“Sans got SOOOO in to it that he started calling me Chrono.”]

I freeze again.

[“And Azzie started calling himself Magus—“]

{"And Sans started calling Alphys Lucca?

{"And Undyne Marle?”}

{"YEP.”] is Chara’s determination-charged reply. [“And no—HE didn’t start calling himself Glenn.

{"MAGUS started calling him that.”]

{Sans has been doing what he did with Chara… the nicknames aren’t a new thing at all.}
“Sans thought the time travel stuff was REALLY cool. But he didn’t like saving ‘cause it was more OP than the REAL time travel—“

“DUDE—that’s what I’VE been saying—! Is that why he, like, wants to make that hella sad mod?”

“I guess…

“We talked a lot about how saving is time travel. And how weird it’d be if Chrono could time travel like that, and ALSO use the gates.”

[“He wouldn’t be able to die.”]

“So HE’S—you’re—the reason saving is the way it is!”

“YEP!”

“All ‘cause ChronoTrigger was Sans’s and Paps’s and Alphys’s and Azzie’s first video game—“

“Duuuude—you set the bar SOOOOO FUCKING HIGH—!”

“I know…

“Everyone loved it so much Gaster did his experiment in the CORE on the anniversary of ChronoTrigger coming out. ‘Cause he thought it might make a difference. ‘Cause he said that the Underground moved around weird right before I came.

“And he thought it was only fair that I was there to see it.”

“Wait.

“ChronoTrigger came out in late 180X.

“And you got it on the day it came out.

[“So you fell into the Underground in Justice of 180X, so 1995.”]

They don’t have to affirm that I am correct: the quiet of their soul speaks for itself.

“And you were nine when you showed up here and you turned ten while you were here…

“So you were born in 1985.”

More quiet affirmation from Chara.

“And Glenn said he changed his name twenty years ago today. And today’s your… death anniversary.

“You died in June of 180X… so in 1996.”

Chara doesn’t have to confirm that my calculations are correct in any medium.

“So you never got to play Pokemon—“

“I don’t think Pokémon existed yet …”

“But you played Street Fighter and stuff—“
“That’s why I think it’s SOOO cool that Ryu’s in Smash! Frisk loved Ryu. I tried finding them a headband like his but—“

Chara stops themselves. “Sorry I’m rambling like mom—“

“Dude it’s all good. Your house, your rules.”

“And besides: we’ve been here for a… long time.” They point out the obvious.

“I think…

“We should go see dad—

“Asgore—now.”

“I packed you a spare change of clothes. The bathroom’s in the same place as at mom’s house. I meant for us to stop here anyway.”

“Okay. You gonna shower too?”

“Yeah. And I’m gonna change. And I’m gonna bring some stuff with me. There’s a locket from Magus I wanna wear when we see Asgore.

“Even… even if he doesn’t see it.

“And before you ask Dad still washes my clothes. He still cleans this room. Like how Sans kept my SNES working so long that Adam and Kari could play it…”

The sadness of these facts hits me as I walk out of Chara’s room into the now-empty house. It only takes a few seconds for me to locate my skell by the magical currents emitted by its plating. Brushing its exterior, the spare change of clothes—and toiletries?—appear in my outstretched hands.

“It’s the same shape as the amulet Schala gives Magus, but smaller. And you can put stuff inside. He had one too.

“And SANS.

“He was wearing it last night.

“And Alphys and Undyne and Gaster and paps ALSO have them. Paps was wearing his during the vigil.”

As I enter the bathroom, Chara asks, [Dude—I don’t want us to take as long as we did this morning. I don’t wanna keep dad waiting.]

{“Of course.”}

*One miraculously-short pair of showers later…*

… … … Somehow, Chara and I only take forty-five minutes to shower, change, and finalize the healing items in my skell’s Dimensional Box. Retrieving the keys from where I left them on Chara’s bed, I leave their room and enter my skell. [I’d tell you not to use your cane but I have a feeling lots of monsters are gonna be outside. You’re gonna have to wack them with it to get them to move.]
The pair of keys in my left fist, I walk downstairs, stopping when I lightly bump into the massive chain. Unlocking it easily, it falls to the floor with a clatter. {“Why the hell is this even HERE!?!”}

Chara’s… holding back a laugh?

[It’s a… long story…]

I step over it and walk forward until I sense a wall in front of me. It’s exactly like Toriel’s basement: huge door and all. Shifting to the left slightly, I brace my right arm against the door’s stone surface, gripping the handle tightly. I manage to heave it open… subsequently squinting as light floods the room. {“AAAAH!”}

[Dude you can’t see why are you—]

{DUDE—I can see light!}

[I KNOW but—]

Chara stops themselves.

[WAAAAAIT.]

Chara seems… to have reached an epiphany? [Oh man—all the bad stuff about seeing happens to you but none of the good stuff—that SUUUUCKS!]

We take a moment to laugh… a little too hard… before walking out of the house. {“DUUUUDE—why didn’t I think of that before?”}

As I take my first couple steps into the… very bright sunlight, Chara reminds me to induce the seven artificial souls, stored in their own separate Dimensional Box, with magic.

I press a button just below the left side of the lower lip of the transparent visor over my face. All seven colors of magic flow under my fingers after a second. [Does the thought of figuring out what’ll happen to us fill you with determination?]

{Like—even if it doesn’t I have to save SOMEWHERE right?}

[True.]

Chapter End Notes

Here’s my reading of the Visiontale.

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/the-visiontale-dramatic-reading

My AU’s cover of Undertale is from where else? Fallen: An Undertale Tribute.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLqTxa0pBQA

I retrieved the information on selective muteism on June 25, 2019.
Here's To the Last Battle, From the Xenoblade OST.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkq8vwBV8Zc

Somewhere, someone described this song as epic and melancholy. Those emotions describe my walk to New Home perfectly.

Here's the link to Shulk and Fiora: AKA the song I linked to when Chara talked about them and Frisk/everyone playing ChronoTrigger.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hm8KBTPxE_g

Yes: Glenn, the Froggit in the Ruins who explains sparing/mercy, is plot-relevant. He found Chara: NOT Magus. I'm sooo happy that he's back.

I conceived of the events in Asgore's house between approximately November of 2016 and January 2017. I realized that in the context of a real culture, the Undertale would be significant. Think about it: Asriel and Chara would have been as famous as surface world leaders. Their friendship would have had massive significance. Accordingly, their deaths would have been equally devastating, like how people in the United States remember where they were on 9/11. Witnessing the vigil will be one of the last facets of my integration into Zealdian culture.

Time to discuss my complicated experiences with Frisk and Chara's character interpretations!

I was exposed to the concept of the gender identity spectrum the summer before my first year of college, right before Undertale came out. I'll be blunt: when all you have to identify someone is their voice, the idea that someone's neither male nor female, when they probably definitively sound like only one, throws me off. The worst part is that I don't want to ask because I might offend them. Even if they're not offended, I still feel bad. Chara's explanation is oversimplified, and they're most likely missing some important parts, but they're trying to use analogies I'd understand. They're no expert.

Second: moving on to how the death anniversary vigil is my way of processing my experiences with grief.

The summer before I started Visiontale, and even until now, I've had several family members and family friends fall ill with life-threatening diseases or fall down. Somehow, I couldn't muster up the emotion to feel sad at those funerals without hearing a sob story first because I didn't know them well, if at all. What's worse is that after taking my first college communication course in fall quarter of 2016, I learned how most of the remarks people say at funerals don't help the grieving families at all. Some may even make them feel worse. At these funerals, or while discussing a relative's cancer treatments, they'd say sorry and that everything will be all right, or, if they're at a funeral, they'd say that they're in a better place. These remarks ignore the grieving family's emotions. No one can tell them how to feel. As my communication textbook put it, if you can't feel sad when a loved one's died, when do you ever have the right to feel sad?

Though it may sound callous, I don't say these things to them. I know that they have
the right to feel sad, that I could never know their loved one as well as them. I'd say that if they needed emotional support or someone to talk to, I could be that person. However, I'll never say that I'm sorry that their loved one's died, or that they're in heaven now so they shouldn't feel sad.

Case in point? In July 2015, I attended Pokemon Symphonic Evolutions, a Pokemon orchestra concert, when I found out Satoru Iwata, the president and CEO of Nintendo, had died. My mom didn't understand why I felt so sad. She told me that she didn't want me to feel sad and to stop crying. My cousins have played Nintendo games as long as I can remember. He made the hardware we played the games on possible, so, I felt like he was part of our family. To me, she wasn't letting me grieve the death of a loved one.

The vigil is how I'd want funerals to be staged. In a place the deceased loved, surrounded by people who genuinely cared. I wanted to process the grief I've genuinely felt, and how my family and friends have reacted to my grief. I wanted to celebrate the lives of the people I've attended funerals for in a way that matters more than gathering people in a church to hear a priest ramble about the next life.

The game's version of Undertale is far too grand for my purposes. This cover is emotional AND intimate: it's performed by a group small enough to... fit in someone's living room.

Now, prepare yourselves for detailed lore, spectacle, and diverging from canon!

It SHOULD be obvious that I'm not saying ANY of these things lightly.
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

The headcanons presented here are some of the ones I've worked on the longest and am the most proud of.

If you want to have the full experience, use the music annotations. If you want to read about my... tumultuous... process for creating the relevant headcanons, read the endnotes.

Regardless, enjoy.

Our Judgment has come.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

41

*A few footsteps later…*

[Dude?]

{"Yeah?"}

[It’ll take us a while to get to Asgore, so there was a thing I wanted to talk about—]

{"What is it?"}

[The Exorcist—]

I shudder. {“Go on…?”}

[I WAS GONNA talk about it while we were walking over to hang out with Sans yesterday, but Jerry—]

{"Ugh—“}

[—showed up.]

{"Yeah?”} I prompt.

[Like, that movie was sooo goood ‘cause it had a normal person, and they were like, sooo eeeeviiili—!]

{"Duuude yaaaas—!”}

[—and that’s why it was soooo scary—!]

[Dude! Yaaaas!]
[And like, the kid is sooo different from the demon—]

{“like, duh…? That’s why they had that other person voice him—so he sounds different from Regan on purpose—“}

[I know but still! It’s sooo good!]

{“And like, aren’t you, like, only a little older than Regan—?”}

[No—I’m a little younger than her. I was ten when I died, and Regan was, like, twelve—]

{“Really?”}

[Yeah—]

{I thought she was, like, eight—?”}

[Noooo… she’s twelve…?]

[But like, I thought that scary movies had to have blood and stuff—!]

{“Truuue—“}

[—and I didn’t know movies like The Exorcist were even a thing! They made OLD YELLING DUDES! scarier than—]

They stop abruptly.

Under their control, I slow almost to a complete stop.

Around me, I hear soft footsteps of all kinds… cautious wingbeats… slow slithering… all of the sounds moving away from me on either side.

[They’re clearing the way for us.]

Before I can make a snarky comment about parting the Red Sea: [There’s a huuuuuge crowd—]

{“Really?”}

Bewilderment: [What do you think all the sounds are?]

{“I—“} I begin, and ultimately fail, to articulate an answer.

[You don’t feel their souls. Do you?]

I concentrate, searching for the currents of magic inherent to a monster’s field of knowing: as Chara promised, I find none. {“They’re not using magic.“}

[Mm-hmm.

[I only know they’re there ‘cause I can see them.]

Before I can ask: [Don’t worry about walking off the road: it’s really wide, and you’d bump into someone before going the wrong way. If anyone saw, they’d make sure you were going the right way.]

Several more seconds of crunching footsteps, and my cane arcing across gravel. {“Where are we
Several seconds pass, and I assume that I won’t receive an answer.

At least, until…

[Somewhere… special.]

Uncertainty. [Mom and dad said we couldn’t go in. We played out here a lot, so we could try to look inside. They said we’d learn after we got cemented but…]

They sigh. {Of COURSE they didn’t get to learn. They didn’t live here long enough.}

As we continue walking, monsters continually parting to let us pass, I ask {“How many monsters are even HERE?”}

A calculating moment: [I don’t know. But it’s a lot. I don’t think I’ve seen this many in one place —]

{“But the riot in Snowdin—“}

[More—]

{“Hotland—?”}

[A LOT MORE,] they emphasize.

[There were monsters on both ssides of the road as soon as we left dad’s house—]

{“Duuuuude—!”}

[Yeah!]

A hint of apprehension. [And they’re so quiet.

[Monsters are NEVER! quiet!]

As we continue walking, the slight breeze blowing past us… changes. In front of us, it grows louder and echoes off of—

It echoes off walls standing to either side of us, some distance away.

The minute movements of the monsters around us become louder, bouncing off a ceiling erected in front of us, high above our heads. [They left the doors open--]

{“Doors?”}

I approach the building? In front of us, my footsteps echoing inside it before I enter.

All at once, the movement of the monsters to either side of us stop completely: the crowd extends right up until the entrance, and everyone has fallen truly still.

If it weren’t for Chara’s descriptions earlier, I wouldn’t even have known that they were there.

In a matter of seconds, my footsteps transition from the gravelly pavement to a more solid surface, the sound sharpening, my cane arcing across the grooves separating the tiles from each other.
A thought occurs to me… or is Chara passing it along? {I’m walking on a marble floor.}

Fascinated by the sound, I continue walking as straight as I can, my cane striking objects—

**PILLARS—**

My cane strikes the pillars holding the ceiling up along the way. [Just keep going the way you’re going. The doors at the other end aren’t open as wide as the ones we just walked through but that doesn’t matter—there’s still plenty of room.]

{“Mm-hmm.”}

Focusing on the space in front of me, my left hand at forehead height, palm down, so I don’t bump into any stray obstacles, I admire the atmosphere. {“This is the quietest place I’ve ever been to in Zealdia.”}

I am about to take another step when nearby, a bell begins to chime.

**Loop until the next note.**

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-for-your-every-action

Startled, I tilt my head upward, realizing that the bells are above me, hanging from the ceiling. {What is this—church?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

I wait for the bells to fade away before I start walking again, more slowly than before. [Okay—we’re halfway through. We’re not that far from Asgore.]

I relax. [You’re doing fine. Everything’s fine. Everything’s fine.]

They’ve never used this exact phrase before. Why are they reassuring themselves NOW?

[Everything’s fine.] they repeat more urgently.

{“To be fair they’re gonna be helping me talk to Asgore—or beat the shit out of him. It makes sense that they’re scared.” If they WEREN’T scared, THEN! I’d freak out."

[We’re two-thirds of the way through now. Only five—ten? minutes and we’ll get to Asgore.

[Everything’s fine. Everything’s fine.]

Chara is poised to repeat their new? Mantra again, but…

*“HAULT!”*

I’m stuck between wanting to shout a cuss word, spasm, and freeze in place.

Instead of doing merely one, I end up doing a combination of all three. I begin to jerk in surprise, a swearword on the tip of my tongue, but before I can perform either action, I freeze in place, Chara’s determination taking hold of me completely.

*”CEASE ALL MAGIC.”*

One of my feet still in midair, my body tense, and soul ready to object, Chara hurriedly whispers,
[TURN IT OFF!]

{Turn off what?}

[THE THINGY FOR THE SOULS!]

{But—} I begin to protest, but Chara talks over me. [You HAVE to!]

Before I can ask who is talking to me: [Does it matter? If a deep authoritative voice says not to cast magic, YOOOOOOOU STOOOP!]

Chara compels me to fold up my cane and put it in my dimensional box.

They compell me to reach for the button controlling the enabler, which they press using my finger as quickly as possible. When finished, I fumble for the controller which creates my shield on my own, ensuring that none of the buttons are being held down somehow. They lose patience in this regard as well, focusing all their energy into my thumb and index finger next, as we touch them, but not hard enough to activate their magic.

Lastly, I reach behind me, taking the Monado in my left hand. Responding to my touch, it hums mutely with power: none of the Monado Arts are active.

I—Chara—we both? —relax, relieved for the moment, now that we have finished completing the order we were given.

Monado secured behind me again, hands at my sides, I—we—wait.

From the opposite end of the room, the thud of heavy boots rings out: each stride measured, each footfall deliberate.

A far cry from the… CASUAL…. way I had entered a couple minutes prior.

Overwhelmed by this monster’s stride, it takes me a few seconds to realize that each step is accompanied by a soft clinking sound?

{Are they wearing a chain?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

{They ARE!} I confirm. {It sounds like yours! But smaller…?}

Every couple steps: [No…] they say in disbelief.

{What—?} I try to ask, but Chara isn’t listening. [No no—]

{Who—?} I try asking again, but Chara ignores me. Their soul shakes minutely and rapidly with panic: [Why? Why are you HERE!??]

Before Chara can say another word: {“WHAT’S GOING ON!?”}

NO.

I didn’t shout at them.

If Chara hadn’t been gluing my mouth shut, I WOULD HAVE shouted at them.
The footsteps slow drastically: whoever talked to us—me—is only a few meters away, now. [WHY IS THIS HAPPENING? WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS!?!]

The footsteps stop, only a couple meters away, the chain? Shaking one last time before settling into place. At that same moment, Chara’s magic plunges in strength: [What happened?]

Now, I must strain to notice them, let alone understand their thoughts. Similarly, the monster who spoke to us refuses to project their field of knowing. Even so, I sense their soul in front of me, pressing insistently on mine.

Soon enough, they begin to speak, their magic emitting from them in controlled pulses in time with their words. In the tiny pauses between each word, no magic emits from them.

This disconcerts me most of all.

*"At last, you have arrived.*

*"Your task lies close at hand.*

*"Soon, you shall meet Asgore and decide our fate."* I’m more confused than scared: {How does he—?}

In a small voice: [How could he NOT know?]

They—

HE—

He takes a step toward us. By closing the distance, even by such a small amount, the pulses of magic emitting from him intensify greatly.

*"Since you arrived, you learned of our triumphs and failures.*

*"You learned our values.*

*"Our reasoning…* 

*"Our how we mastered the world around us."* {That’s the thing Gaster says! Well not exactly but—}

Chara doesn’t respond.

*"You even react as WE react."*

The owner of the voice pauses, taking another step forward. {He’s right. ‘Cause I have their empathy now.}

*"Knowing this, you shall learn of our oldest custom."*

Another pause: I KNOW he’s preparing to make an important statement. I don’t need to sense his magic to know that.

*"The Judgment."* he proclaims, the words falling like hammer blows on my entire being.

Now, I share in Chara’s panic: {That’s not ominous at all…!}
“When a monster fully cements themselves, their peers discern who knows them best.

THIS MONSTER becomes their judge.”

They measure the Cemented’s growth in ALL ways.

In time, they measure their moral effect on their peers.

"Only THEN do they see their subject’s field of knowing.”*

{[So THAAAAT’S why everyone kept asking us to see our field of knowing! ‘Cause the Judgment’s supposed to be the only time when they CAN!]}

My head and chest begin to throb, in time with the pulses of magic emitted from his soul. My being buzzes with anticipation.

"In wartime, the STRONGEST monster became the Judge.

“ALL monsters sought their council and found solace in their power, in ALL its forms.”*

In the pause that follows: {When he means ALL monsters, does he mean LITERALLY all of them?}

Frustrated at my slowness: [What? Do? You? Think?]

{Was Asgore alive back then? ‘Cause if he was…}

Chara’s lack of a response is all the confirmation I need: {So Asgore didn’t lead the monsters during the War.}

{The JUDGE did.}

"The Judge sought monsters of great virtue and strength via their Judgments.

"Only THEY fought humankind.”*

Bluntly: *"You KNOW no one donned the title.”*

The silence that follows is suffocating. {If the monsters figured out who the Judge would be—would’ve been—would they even BE here?}

I’m thankful to share in Chara’s contemplation. [I wanna say no… but I don’t think I can.]

His tone lightens ever so slightly. *"Upon our defeat, we revived the Judgment, sans the Judge.

"Their power remains in TWO forms.

“FIRST: within the Judgment Hall, the current judge holds absolute power.”*

We wait for the second exception. {[Whoa—that’s… a bit much…?]}

"SECOND: the Cemented affirms their place via combat with their judge.”*

The voice pauses again. {Makes sense except the combat part—}

[So THAT’S how everyone learned to fight!]
Utterly lost: {What?}

[The Judgments—they’re like fights in an RPG! THAT’S why all those monsters we saw early on fought the way they did!]

This fact hits home for me far too slowly for Chara’s liking: [Why do you think Alphys said that she was teaching you to fight, but without all the rules she learned growing up?]

I don’t have to reply in words: I understand, so THEY understand.

*“NOW, I shall measure your effect on our kind via a method of MY design.”*

Anxiously, Chara and I await the explanation.

The voice enunciats, *“Execution Points.*

*”Or EXP:”*

I manage to break free of Chara’s control holding my mouth shut just long enough to gasp in shock.

Chara’s presence withdraws away from me?

*“When one being hurts another, they gain Execution Points.*

*“When they gain ENOUGH Execution Points, they gain a LEVEL OF VIOLENCE.”*

I jerk in place: { THE FUCKING FLOWER—!} I begin to recall.

[I thought you forgot—]

{I DID!}

{But not anymooore…?}

{SO THAT’S what LOVE stands for!}

Though faint at first, magic begins to rise from deep within the soul of the owner of the voice, as if he is steeling himself.

*”When you cause pain, you perform TWO acts.*

*”FIRST: you share in that pain.*

*”SECOND: you distance yourself from it.*

*”This distance equals the pain you cause.*

*”As you cause more pain, this distance rises.*

*”As this distance rises, you share in less pain, from ANY source.*

*”As you share in less pain, you cause it with greater ease.”*

Agonizingly, I work my way down this monster’s list of statements: Initially, I am overwhelmed by the information I just heard, but I quickly realize that each statement seamlessly leads—

It’s not a LIST.
It’s a proof—

NO.

{It’s a syllogism.

{Each thingy is a premise in a syllogism!}

This knowledge solidifies what I heard immediately. I can’t help but react aloud to my realization. Momentarily, I overpower Chara. I gasp, in a combination of excitement and triumph: {“Yes!

{“I got it!

{“I FUCKING GOT IT!

{“FUUUUUUCK YEEEEEEEEAAAAH!”}

As I basque in my accomplishment, I hear a sound—

NO.

It’s a laugh.

A long, soft, amused laugh.

When I hear it, Chara seizes control again. Their disconcertment overpowers my prior emotions instantly.

*“Good.”*

The amusement I just heard has vanished completely. Instead, his voice rings with unrestrained, undeniable decisiveness.

*“Shulk?*

*“STEP FORWARD.”* he commands.

{Shulk?

{He called me SHULK?

{NOW? Out of all times?

{But this is such a formal thing!}

Confused and frustrated at the contrast: {Just… WHYYYY!?

I want to ask more questions, but I can’t.

Instead, Chara forces me to take a step.

Chara forces me to take a SECOND step.

Chara forces me to take a THIRD step.

They are about to stop, but…
Closer,” he sternly commands.

Chara forces me to take a FOURTH step…

A FIFTH step…

A SIXTH step…

As Chara relaxes my body…

*Closer,” he sternly commands.

A SEVENTH step…

An EIGHTH…

As my foot touches the ground during my NINTH step…

*“CLOSER.”* he sternly commands.

It takes all our willpower not to reply with an incredulous [“SERIOUSLY?”]

{How far apart ARE we!?}

[We’re not…?]

Shakily, Chara forces me to take a TENTH step.

As they ready me to take an eleventh—

*“STOP.”*

We are more than happy to oblige.

It quickly dawns on me that I’m standing so close that I could reach out and touch him… and he

could do the same to me.

Chara and I relax, in spite of the proximity. At least, until…

*“KNEEL BEFORE ME.”* he commands.

We regret relaxing at once.

I WANT to question him. I WANT to ask why I have to kneel, but I can’t.

With all their strength, Chara compels me to obey.

The owner of the voice takes a step toward me… if we weren’t close enough already. Chara and I WANT to lean away but…

We can’t.

We are being held down—

We are being held down by BLUE MAGIC.

The floor beneath me begins to shake, and the space between the two of us begins—
The space between the two of us begins to crackle with YELLOW MAGIC.

*“NOW.*

*“You shall be JUDGED.*

*“NOW.*

*“You shall be judged for your EVERY ACTION.*

*“NOW.*

*“You shall be judged for every Execution Point YOU. HAVE. EARNED.*

*“And I.*

*“Sans Rene-Kant Gaster…*

*“SHALL.*

*“BE.*

*“YOUR.*

*“JUDGE.”* *

Chara forces me to withhold my reaction. As we kneel on the marble floor, magic completely surrounding us, I realize that I could have? Should have? Realized Sans was talking to me a long time ago.

{The way he talked—the Inertia Society shoutout—saying without with his name—} I rapidly list.

[And the SYLOGISM, BY TESLA!]

[I was getting there—]

[How did the syllogism NOT give it away!? NO ONE ELSE talks like that!]

[I know—] I admit.

[And he called you SHULK!] Chara screams. [You’re doing such a formal thing… AND HE CALLS you SHULK! WHO ELSE would even think of DOING THAT!?]

Before I can concede defeat: [AND PULL IT OFF!?!]

[Okay fine!] I squeak. [You’re right!]

[Saaaaans?]

[Chara?] As usual, when I ask why they’re panicked THIS time, they don’t answer.

[Why are you dressed like that!?] They rant?, as if they never heard me.

They talk faster. [Yeah you’re doing an important thing but still why the robes—!] That… explains it!
That’s… not normal…?

Chara’s panic becomes my own: {Whaaaat?}

[He’s not wearing a hoodie! He ALWAYS wears—wore—a hoodie! Well he’s still wearing a hood but—]

{What the fuck—?}

[Yeah! I don’t think I’ve EVER seen him NOT wear a hoodie since I died!]

{Was he wearing one yesterday?}

[Yeh!]

{At the fanciest restaurant—?}

[Do you think anyone would’ve told him to leave ‘cause of THAAAAAAT!?!]

I don’t answer.

Chara quickly whispers, as if they are… afraid of being overheard. [They’re almost wrist-length, more than patella-long dark blue robes. There’s gold around the cuffs—hood—all the edges—]

{Uh-huh—?}

Chara talks over my prompting. [—and black boots. And a gold and blue eye pendant around his neck.]

{So THAT’S the chain thingy I heard earlier!}

[Yep!] they squeak.

{But yesterday he was wearing Magus’s amulet—}

[Uh-huh—]

{So why isn’t—?}

[HELL IF I KNOW!] they snap. [And that’s not all.]

I have no idea of what to expect anymore.

As if leaning closer to speak in my ear: [He has a pin shaped like a…]

They consider their imminent description. [Yeah. That sounds about right.]

[He’s using a pin shaped like a puzzle piece to keep the robes on. He put it where his heart would be.]

{I have a feeling there’s symbolism there that I don’t understand…?}

The briefest of pauses. [And since when was he a foot taller than us—]

I intend to spasm on the floor, but I don’t actually move. {WHAAAAAT!?!}

[—in our skell? Or…]
They perform some quick calculations? [Is that more than a foot—?]

I want to make a panicked noise: mentally and aloud, but I can’t. Chara channels all of their determination into gluing my mouth shut.

[No.

[He’s wearing heels— ]

Before I can ask: [—but even without them he’s probly…]

More calculations: [Around six foot five or six—]

Again, before I can ask for clarification: [He’s taller than he was yesterday. By a few inches. At least.]  

Chara seems to have finished their frantic measurements for the moment. {Heels?} I repeat.

[Yeah! They’re like, at least an inch tall, maybe two?]

Before I can ask: [NO—I don’t fucking know how he made it work—HE JUST DID!] they snap. [Considering what just happened I think he OFFICIALLY has the right to wear whatever he wants!]

{True…?}

[‘Cause now we know why everyone restricted their fields of knowing—!]

{‘Cause he said so—}

[Yep!]

{I mean, he DIIIIID say to only use magic if he said so—}

[Mm-hmm—]

{And as long as he’s here he can do whatever he wants—}

[Mm-hmm!]

{But why’d HE restrict his field of knowing?}

An uncertain noise. [So you wouldn’t be able to recognize his magic.]

My body and soul go still.

[You know how you could only feel his magic when he was talking? No one’s ever done that around you before, ‘cause they WANT you to know who’s talking to you.

[Not like you could’ve done it, but he didn’t want you to know who he was before he was ready.]}

Before I can ask: [He KNEW you’d listen to him, just by feeling how strong his magic was. And that you wouldn’t talk back, ‘cause you wouldn’t wanna argue with someone that strong. So when he DID tell you, it wouldn’t matter that you knew who was talking to you.]

I want to argue against them, but they’re right.
[WAIT.]

I wait anxiously for their realization.

[I haven’t told you about the blue and yellow eye glow of doooom—]

{No! YOU HAVEN’T—!}

[Yeh!] Chara squeaks. [It’s happening. It’s been going on since we got here. And it’s happening in both eyes. But I guess that’s implied now—]

{Yeah—‘cause you said a long time ago that it used to happen only in his left—if he’s facing us it’s his right—eye}

[Uh-huh—?]

{But seriously—how could you just skip over his voice! THAT’S what I’m freaking out over right now!}

{BY CYRUS, WHY! DOES HE SOUND DIFFERENT!?}

[I TOLD you WHY!—it’s ‘cause his magic’s different now! AND it’s stronger. You literally didn’t know who he was till he TOLD YOU!]

{Yeah…} This time, Chara shares in my fear: not the other way around.

[Monsters’ voices come from their soul. So that means SOMETHING must have happened to his soul.]

[[But what?]]

[I don’t know!] they lash out. [Maybe ‘cause you’re the first human to go through the Judgment—]

{Frisk didn’t—?}

[I don’t think so. He didn’t tell them all the backstory: just about Execution Points and Levels of Violence. And THEN he’d check their stats—]

{Did he know you were there?}

Chara’s train of thought stops in its tracks. A deep sense of dread falls over them. [No. Why?]

{‘Cause like, since he’s looking at MY field of knowing—}

Chara’s soul jerks in affirmation.

{—and you said MY field of knowing is part of YOUR field of knowing—basically—}

A faster spike of magic from Chara.

{—so we SHARE one now.

{Basically.}

A magical response equivalent to a ear-splitting whine.

{So he’s gonna look at MY soul AND yours soon—either that, or he’s doing it right now.}
In that moment, Chara’s dread forces out all of my other emotions. Even so, I press on.

{So THAT means…}

The significance of my statements weighs me down, compelling me onward.

{He…}

{Can…}

{Hear.}

{Us.}

{Right.}

{Now.}

Chara’s magic all but vanishes, and for a long moment, I contemplate how their presence has NEVER diminished in strength this far before.

As if in response to my contemplation, I begin to shake—

NO.

CHARA is shaking.

In the Void, they’re experiencing a combination of sensations. Unlike what usually happens when we share sensory experiences, I don’t—

I spoke too soon.

All at once, Nausea, dizziness, and disorientation overtake me. {“Chara?”} I ask…

Am I falling, or am I being grabbed—

NO.

Sans has seized hold of Chara’s soul and begun shaking them, like seizing hold of someone’s collar in one hand, and their shoulder with the other. {“CHAAAAARAAAA!”} I scream. Entirely focused on my soul—OUR souls, desperate to sense their presence attached to mine, my physical and physiological awareness of my surroundings disappears completely, save one sensation: the slight movement of my lips as I call their name.

{“Chara…”} I plead.

They don’t answer in words. Instead, their presence draws closer to me. Warmth—

NO.

DETERMINATION—washes over me, along with the sensation of a set of ribs pressing against my back, a pair of hands clinging to my clothes for dear life, a set of arms wrapped around my ribs, a chin resting on my shoulder, and one clammy cheek sticking to one of mine. If it weren’t for Sans’s blue magic encompassing me—us—completely, I would reach behind me to check whether someone was physically present, latched on to me with all their strength. They press even closer to me, as the blue magic holding me upright fades away.
As soon as it fades away completely…

*"Rise,"* Sans sternly commands.

Shakily, I obey, entirely under my own power.

Now, I understand what Chara meant. The magic emanating from his soul seems more concentrated. The sensations induced by his magic over the course of his speech make complete sense: each syllable felt heavy because he imbued them with blue magic, and they crackled against me because he charged them with yellow magic.

This does not explain the additional burning sensation, however: an intense, spice-like pain on my entire being, not just my tongue.

All we can do is await his verdict.

He doesn’t keep us waiting long, because…

*"You impressed me, Shulk."*

I have barely begun making a confused noise, when…

*"Though you lack training in rhetoric and logic, you grasped my proof with ease."*

I struggle to grasp what he just said: never mind that as of today, I’ve heard him speak this way for months.

{“I, learned about rhetoric a little bit in high school, in tenth grade…?”} I struggle to recall. {“But besides that? Yeah—truuuuue.”}

From his place an arm’s-length away from me, he shifts slightly. *"Gaster asked me NOT to teach you these subjects."*

Before I can ask why: *"From the outset, he found my methods…*

*"STRINGENT."* he emphasizes.

After making a nervous sound: {“Yeeaaaah, I can see that.”}

*"He called your success under such…”*

He hesitates—

NO.

He’s not pausing because he DOESN’T know what to say.

He ALWAYS knows what to say.

He’s… quoting Gaster… and does not approve of what Gaster said at all.

*"PRESSURE… from me, a…”*

{Two in a row?} I can’t help but comment.

*"MIRACLE."*
His emphasis on the word unnerves Chara to no end.

"I agreed.

"Each day, your boundless energy defied logic."

As he finishes speaking, my intrigue transforms into Chara’s panic.

His magic abruptly spikes in intensity: "The schedules I created ALWAYS befit TWO souls.

"NOT.

"ONE."

I try to back away, but Sans’s magic roots me to the floor. Chara screams incoherently within my thoughts, their stabs of determination drowning out Sans’s words.

Almost.

"SHOW YOURSELF!

"CHAAAAARAAAAAA TRIGGER DREEEEEEEMUUUURR!!!"*

**Stop the music.**

A soul- and ear-piercing scream that I can’t help but mimic.

A violent wind yanking me forward, dragging me along helplessly. A grating sound, like the tearing of a sheet of paper, echoes in my head, as I land prone on the floor. Again and again, power yanks on me: freeing a hair from a scalp, or a fingernail from a hand.

Am I falling, or —?

NO.

CHARA is falling. THEIR body—

NO.

Their SOUL —is being yanked on, and dragged forward —

NO.

Their soul is being yanked out of the Void.

At last, they come to a stop with an unceremonious thud.

Physically muffled by the floor, but soulologically clear: [“FUCKING JESUS!”]

Clothing rustles to my right, along with… along with the slightest clink of a chain.

{Their locket.}

Only when slender fingers intertwine with mine, and a small, sweaty palm sticks to mine do I believe that they are truly present. Their grip seems more… substantial… than every other time they have appeared. Though muted, their determination burns on contact, but now, it must pass through their physical body to reach me.
“Shulk?” They try the sound of the name on their lips.

{“Chara —shit—I mean Chrono?”}

“SHUUUUULK!” they shout with enthusiasm, throwing their arms around me.

I pull them closer. “CHROOOOONOOOOO!” I shout excitedly. {So THAT’S why Sans called them Chrono —they started everything! Like Chrono meeting Marle—and hell—Chrono getting out of bed that day!}

After a few seconds, I carefully and reluctantly untangle from Chara. {“But dude: how are you even HERE?”}

Chara stiffens. In spite of their physical presence, I still feel their emotions, movements, and magic as acutely as before.

They begin opening their mouth, ready to respond, but…

*”You KNOW how.”*

We forgot Sans was here.

Somehow.

{He can’t mean —}

[He does.]

[{{DETERMINATION.}}]

Aloud, Chara asks the question I’m too confused and afraid to ask: [“How?

[“How’s that even possible?”] Sans doesn’t answer.

[“But me and Shulk didn’t want me to be here.”] Chara points out before anyone can stop them.

No response. Our collective minds work: {You didn’t wanna be in the Void?}

[No—I didn’t CHOOSE to leave! I got pulled out of the Void.

[I couldn’t even fight back.]

Bewildered, I think of a reply, but before I can transmit it to them…

*”I changed your fate.

*”As YOU changed SHULK’S, Chrono.”*

{“What do you mean—changed my fate?”} I repeat. {He’s being more confusing than usual.}

[“You mean when I helped her.”] Chara responds immediately.

No response.

[“If it weren’t for me, only Tesla KNOWS where Pauline would be now!}
[“How is me helping her bad?”] they ask, desperate for any kind of answer.

[“You controled Pauline against her will—“*]

Neither of us expected Sans to reply so quickly.

[“I NEVER—!”]

I cringe, bracing myself for Sans’s screamed retort.

It does not come.

Instead, he says coldly, [“If so, then explain her response to—“*]

[“She would’ve TOLD me if she didn’t want—”] Chara begins to interject.

[“She did not.”* he swiftly counters.

I edge away slightly as Sans focuses on me exclusively: [“You value your free will most of all.

“They stripped you of it.

[“YOU FAILED TO DEFEND IT!”*]

Shaking violently, I lift off the floor, his premises pounding on my being, the force behind them jarring my bones.

[“WHY did you not—!?”* he begins to ask.

{“Cause I…”} I begin to reply without hesitation.

As quickly as I started: {I can’t come up with anything.}

Panicked now: {Why can’t I come up with anything!?

{He’s right! I didn’t like it when Chara controlled me without telling me first, but…

{I just didn’t do anything.

{Yeah—I felt weird about it the first—

[“You KNEW they wished to strip you of control, in the Ruins—“*]

{Holy shit what—?”}

[He can hear us.]

I am about to explain that their presence did not feel wrong, but…

[“Even so, you withdrew from it.

[“WHY—?”*]

His questions won’t stop.

{“You REALLY think I’d fucking know!?}
"I just didn’t," I repeat weakly.

He turns his attention toward Chara again: "You sensed this, Chrono.

"STILL, you abused—"

["I HAD to control her all the time! What she learned on the surface wouldn’t have helped her. If it weren’t for me she would’ve made things worse or hurt someone."]

No response.

["Like with jerry—I helped her fight him off. IF it weren’t for me she would’ve gotten hurt, or worse!""]

No response.

["I told her how determination could help her. If it weren’t for ME, she wouldn’t have known about her save file.

["She would’ve thought that if she died…”]

Still, no response.

["And I helped her talk to Papyrus, even after him and Undyne nearly KILLED her! SHE wanted to KILL HIM!"]

Their determination wavers; they could cry at any moment, now. ["I didn’t WANT him to die! Not in house in bed in the middle of the night. IF we HAD to kill him, I’d wanna do it in a fight!

["What: you WANTED me to let her do it ‘cause she chose to?

[“How’s THAT fair!?”]

A split second of silence, until…

"He acted solely out of passion, then.

"Thereafter, He did not deny his cruelty.

"He held no grudge against her.

"He did not fear death in the line of duty.

"Undyne imbued him with the Royal Guard’s values.

"He—"

{"Wait: so you let him train with them even though he could die if he joined? Why would you —?"} I begin to ask, until…

I lower onto the floor, the weight of years of memories pulling me down.

"I advised him when he asked.

"I ensured he held full knowledge of his choices.

"Unlike YOU, Chrono."
Chara’s soul jerks in indignation at my side. They prepare to counter, but…

**"SHULK?"

**"Though you knew NOTHING of Chrono, you obeyed them without question.

**"CHRONO?"

**"You failed to give Shulk full knowledge.

**"You treated her as you treated Asriel AND Frisk—"**

I gasp. {How does he—}

Words charged with conviction: **"OF COURSE I KNOW."**

[“I thought my Frisk came after me—”] Chara begins to amend, but…

**"Explain why they did not KNOW you, then."**

[“I was trying to help them survive: WHEN would I have told them about ME?”]

**“You urged them to kill—”**

[“Asgore said any human who fell down here must die!“] Chara’s desperation reaches a fever pitch. [“What—you WANTED me to get them killed!?”]

We both expect a reply, but surprisingly, we don’t receive one.

[“I tried to help Frisk and not hurt anyone LOTS OF TIMES!

[“But it almost NEVER worked!

[“Sure—I—we—it happened A COUPLE TIMES, but Frisk died a lot. ‘Cause Someone ALWAYS wanted to hurt them!’”]

I manage to interject, {“UNDYNE—“}

[“YEAH!”] Chara seems emboldened by my contribution. [“We had to do SOOO much just to be ALONE with Undyne, and NOT have her try to kill us. ‘Cause undyne saw Frisk as a threat! At least she was kinda right, ‘cause Frisk could see. They could’ve killed her, if they wanted.

[“Sometimes, they DID.”]

We do not receive an answer.

At least, until…

**"OF COURSE Frisk did not object.

**"You FORCED them to obey!"**

Now, I have enough time to react: {“What?

{“So,”} I struggle to repeat what I just heard, {“you used your determination to make it so they couldn’t talk back?”} }
["I HAD to! When they tried doing things themselves, most—“"]

*"You warped them, AS YOU WARPED ASRIEL!"*

Before I can ask… *"Chara FORCED him to feed them buttercups and take their soul."

{"The vigil! When they said you DIED—"} I begin to piece together, but…

["I didn’t FORCE him to do ANYTHING! I just told him—“]

*"You wished to see Frisk again."* Sans finishes, not at all phased by Chara’s frantic tone.

*"Asriel became your SECOND Frisk."

Readying a reply, Chara’s soul tenses, but…

*"YOU DARE TO LIE TO ME!?"

["He KNEW the kids who beat up Frisk deserved what they got! He WANTED to—“]

*"You squandered our future."*

Somehow, after only Tesla knows how long we’ve been arguing, Sans’s magic finally stutters: he can barely maintain enough control to manifest his magic in words.

Chara’s determination rises to take Sans’s place: [“SQUANDERED IT!?”] they repeat. [“I wanted to SAVE you—!”]

*"YOU DIED FOR NOTHING!"

[“NOTHING?”] Chara throws back at him with contempt. [“I did what Chrono did. HE risked his life to save everyone!”]

*" As QUEEN ZEAL used SCHALA, YOU used ASRIEL.

*"She used Schala’s strength for HER ends, heedless of her pain.

*"YOU acted as SHE acted.

*"You convinced him he had no choice.

*"YOU!

*"HAD!

*"A!

*"CHOICE!"

I shake in perfect sync with Chara, as they begin to cry. [“I KNEW Frisk would’ve been devastated to find out I was dead.

[“I didn’t just wanna break the Barrier—I wanted to tell Frisk about YOU!”]

A silence brimming with Chara’s determination.

[“By that point I thought I had nothing to lose.”]
I am beyond surprised that Sans hasn’t interrupted Chara yet.

At least, until…

A strained laugh: *"Of COURSE you failed to see what WE had to lose.
*"The days we drowned in Guardia’s plights…
*"The nights we dreamed of Glenn’s valor…
*"The tears we shed over Chrono’s selfless deed…”*

I have to strain to perceive his words, and not just because they overflow with bitter tears: *"They mattered NOT to you.”*

The space between us sparks with yellow magic anew.

Mustering their strength: [“Go see Asgore,”] Chara tells me.

[“It’s the last thing you have to do.
[“I HAVE to be there to help you, but my BODY doesn’t have to.”]

Hesitantly, I retrieve my cane from the dimensional box, extend it to its full length, and start walking away.

Mentally, Chara leads me toward the opposite end of the room. [The second set of doors isn’t THAT far away.]

Under their control, I reach my left hand behind me, and I hear the energetic beeping of the Monado: Speed Art activated. [They’ve never done THAT before. They’ve ALWAYS let ME control the Monado.]

I can hear my footsteps echoing off the wall in front of me, now. Only a few—

I sprawl forward, one of my feet slipping on the marble floor. Chara’s determination takes hold of me, steadying me—

I’ve regained—

I begin to fall forward again—

NO.

They tried to run forward to help me, but they fell.

Feet kicking uselessly, body tilted forward, I slide backward, away from the door, even as they run toward me again, hands outstretched. They focus all their energy—

We fly backward, bodies held rigidly upright, entirely encased in blue magic.

Sans stops yanking on us as our feet hit the floor in unison. [He didn’t even turn around.]

Chara’s flat tone scares me more than any whispered squeal ever could.

As soon as they finish, I notice a trio of sensations on my body and soul: the weight of blue magic pressing on me from all sides and into the floor, yellow magic crackling against my skull and my
skin, and an unrelenting, deeply-seeded heat coursing through my being.

In the next moment, my posture straightens and soul tenses, prepared to—

NO.

Sans is straightening his posture and tensing his soul. He’s focusing on me with all his strength.

From an arm’s length away, I hear the squeaky, wet, echoing sound of a wine bottle being uncorked—

NO.

It’s the sound of unscrewing the lid of a metal container with a rubber seal: the same kind of container used to store my determination modules.

I hear a thick, dripping sound. It doesn’t matter that I’ve never heard it before. As I sharply inhale, my throat and lungs begin to burn, like the rest of my body and soul.

Determination is being poured out of its container.

As I make this realization, Chara’s hand seizes mine. Their intent pierces my soul, overtaking me completely. Their—our—souls strain in concentration.

I slowly reach out my free hand, brushing their fluffy pillow.

The slight caustic scent of cleaning fluids in their bathroom stings my nostrils.

Snatches of the words Chara said directly outside Asgore’s basement door begin flashing through our minds in a blurr.

Sensations we experienced the last time I saved my save file: directly before and while I did so.

All at once, the sensations stop.

I withdraw my hand.

Again, I inhale sharply, confused by the lack of cleaning fluids.

I strain to hear words that are in the past: not the present.

My awareness has jarringly returned to the present.

Again, Chara musters their concentration.

As they do, a memory forces its way into my—our—souls.

A step into the Judgment Hall: driven into the marble floor with blue magic, electrified with yellow magic, and burning with determination.

Hyperventilating, Chara channels our magic into loading our save file again and again, but no matter how many details they recall, we do not experience them as vividly as their first attempt.

As they do so, Sans finishes the container of determination.

As the container empties, Chara grabs my Wii U Pro Controller, thumb poised over the shield button. Simultaneously, they funnel their intent into me. I lunge for the Monado slung across my
back, the immediate need to activate Speed Art—

Phalanges ripping the controller from Chara’s hand, never mind their death grip—

I know what breaking magitronic components sounds like. I’ve crushed parts from failed simulations in my hand before: for catharsis, AND by accident.

THIS sounds like paper crumpling.

{You can’t just—}

My thought vanishes into thin air, as a burning vibration resonates from deep within my body and soul. They both vibrate faster and faster, burning a little more with every movement. At last, after a second—ten? Of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I notice that the rest of the Monado’s blade has begun to bend downward?

More accurately, as I touch it with my free hand, it dissolves against my fingers, tiny fragments of metal falling through them, until—

At last, after a second—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I—

My right arm jerks up from my side, fingers clawing at the end of the Monado. Spine erect, Monado in front of me, the flat of the blade—

I’m bending it.

I’m snapping it in half.

I snapped it in half.

{How the hell did I do that? I’m not—}

At last, after a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I—

My right arm jerks up from my side, fingers clawing at the end of the Monado. Simultaneously, force rips at the fingers on my left hand, prying them away from the hilt. It takes several seconds for me to shake the blood flow back into them, and by that time, I’ve barely registered that I am holding the Monado again, one piece in each—

{What happened?

{The Monado’s not supposed to feel this… loose?

{It’s never this light.

{How’d it break in half?

{I didn’t let go of it. So how—?

At last, after a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.
Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I—

A current of yellow magic so strong I can barely—

I can’t.

I hurriedly drop the Monado, the heat and power coursing it through it proving too much for my body and soul to handle. As I do so, it falls through my fingers, each piece… liquefying…?, As they slide through the gaps. My entire being buzzes, as I turn to Chara, about to ask—

After a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, Do I—

A current of yellow magic so strong that I—

NO.

The Monado burns in my grip: not due to heat, but due to determination.

I HAVE to let go of it.

Tensing, I wait for the clink of the blade falling—

Squeezing my eyes shut, I clamp my hands over my ears, as I begin to hear a piercing whine. I relax as it lowers in pitch somewhat, but I tense as it rises again. I shake as a hissing and crashing sound all but overwhelms—

My hands lift from my ears of their own accord. Futilely, I strain to lift them back up again, to prepare for another loud sound, but, instead, I cup my palms at chest height. They fill with dust—

NO.

I’m not holding dust in my hands.

I’m holding rough grains of plastic and metal: I’d recognize the smell of burnt-out magitronic components anywhere.

{That was a Gaster blaster.}

{“SANS—?”}

At last, after a second? —ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I—

I raise the Monado until it is horizontally in front of me, the flat of the blade facing upward. The rest of my body freezes, as I hear a high-pitched whining sound, which soon lowers in pitch, only for it to rise again. A hissing and crashing sound follows, accompanied by a flash of light, neither of which I can bear. However, no matter how hard I try, I can’t lift my hands to cover my ears, or squeeze my eyes shut.

It takes much longer than it should for me to realize that the Monado is much lighter: {The blade’s gone.

{The HILT’S still here—but everything else is gone.}
{That Gaster blaster…}

{"SANS—"}

At last, after a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I—

The Monado flies out of my hand, heedless of my grip around the hilt. My body hums with power, as blue magic tears at the space in front of me. With each pulse, I hear a screeching sound. {That HAS to be Sans.

{But how? You can’t just—}

After a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I—

My fists lock around the Monado: one around the hilt, the other around the tip. Try as I might, I can’t—

Sans is layering his hands on top of mine, holding them fast. As he pulls his—our—hands apart, his magic passing through me, we—he—wrenches on the Monado, and it falls to pieces. Even the sections of the Monado that I’m being forced to grip tear like paper.

{He wasn’t even trying.

{He wasn’t even trying.

{HE WASN’T EVEN TRYING!

{HE—}

At last, after a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I—

I’m not holding the Monado anymore: not in the way I’m SUPPOSED to hold it. Now, it lies on my palms, the flat of the blade facing upward. I can’t curl my fingers around it: they’re being outstretched?

I freeze: a sharp point grazes my right palm, magic struggling to flow from it without breaking. Just as I register that it is touching me, it lifts off of—

Sans’s soul shakes, as he labors to concentrate his magic. in front of me, I hear a sound I know far too well from training: the sound of a bone piercing metal. Only when I feel both the surface and point of the bone, and the edges of the hole in the Monado, pressing against my palm at once, do I believe that he’s impaled it.

Grinding like nails on a chalkboard, as he pulls the bone free and compels my palm to shift over to the left by a few centimeters. He stabs the Monado again, the magic driving the motion simultaneously stabbing my soul.

As he stabs the Monado a third time, the bone passes through the metal with slightly less resistance than before, but still, his frustration? Injests into me as he strikes.
He pulls the bone free.

A current of blue magic rushing past my face, and a clatter: {he flung it HOW far—?}

At last, after a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, Do I—

I’m not holding the Monado anymore: not in the way I’m SUPPOSED to hold it. Now, it lies on my palms, the flat of the blade facing upward. I can’t curl my fingers around it: they’re being outstretched?

I freeze, the hilt of the Monado lifting off of my left hand, a spherical object? taking—

NO.

My hand turns over, so my palm is facing downward, the sphere continuing to—

Blue magic compels my hand to press downward, each of my fingers on top of one of Sans’s phalanges. They conform to match his grip, curled—

Sans’s—our—hands tilting downward and to the right slightly, and metal lightly tapping on metal. My right hand, immersed completely in blue magic, grasps at nothing, until my fingers brush the flat of the Monado’s blade facing upward. Again, our hands tilt downward, and again, I hear the light tap of metal on metal.

This time, however, I feel the point of the Masamune slide between my fingers to contact the Monado.

Resigned, and slightly disappointed in myself: {Of course.

{What ELSE did I think it’d be?

{Of COURSE it’d be the Masamune.}

My hands flip over, my palms face upward, and the Monado lies on top of them. As my physical contact with Sans ends, I am compelled to perceive a thought: sharp, precise, and confident.

*This shall suffice.*

I jerk violently as Sans slashes the Masamune downward, his motion accompanied by currents of blue and yellow magic, and determination. The Monado splits down the middle, one half falling to the floor, the other remaining on my palms.

I can move my hands again.

Sluggishly, I run my fingers over the Monado: I begin to ask {“How?}, but I stop.

The magic crowding in on my body and soul from all angles is answer enough.

After a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to activate Speed Art, do I—

I’m not holding the Monado anymore: not in the way I’m SUPPOSED to hold it. Now, it lies on my palms, the flat of the blade facing upward. I can’t curl my fingers around it: they’re being
I freeze, the hilt of the Monado lifting off of my left hand, a spherical object? taking—

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Sans’s—our—hands tilting downward and to the right slightly, and metal lightly tapping on metal. My right hand, immersed completely in blue magic, grasps at nothing, until my fingers brush the flat of the Monado’s blade facing upward. Again, our hands tilt downward, and again, I hear the light tap of metal on metal.

This time, however, I feel the point of the Masamune slide between my fingers to contact the Monado.

Resigned, and slightly disappointed in myself: {Of course.

{What ELSE did I think it’d be?

{Of COURSE it’d be the Masamune.}

My hands flip over, my palms face upward, the Monado lies on top of them, and my physical contact with Sans ends.

I writhe in time with Sans’s soul, as he drives the Masamune’s point down into the Monado: once, twice, thrice, each motion more fluid than the last.

After he makes the fourth hole, my hands fall to my sides abruptly, and a Gaster blaster—

NO.

SEVERAL Gaster blasters—fire directly in front of me, followed by the tinkle of metal fragments falling to the floor, and a burst of burning energy emitting from Sans’s soul.

{THAT’S why the Masamune’s here.

{The Masamune’s here for real. It’s metal: NOT determination.}

At last, after a second?—ten? of movement, they come to a stop.

Only when I grip the Monado, prepared to—

I’m not holding the Monado anymore: not in the way I’m SUPPOSED to hold it. Now, it lies on my palms, the flat of the blade facing upward. I can’t curl my fingers around it: they’re being outstretched?

I freeze, the hilt of the Monado lifting off of my left hand, a spherical object? taking—

NO.

My hand turns over, so my palm is facing downward, the sphere continuing to—
Blue magic compels my hand to press downward, each of my fingers on top of one of Sans’s phalanges. They conform to match his grip, curled—

Sans’s—our—hands tilting downward and to the right slightly, and metal lightly tapping on metal. My right hand, immersed completely in blue magic, grasps at nothing, until my fingers brush the flat of the Monado’s blade facing upward. Again, our hands tilt downward, and again, I hear the light tap of metal on metal.

This time, however, I feel the point of the Masamune slide between my fingers to contact the Monado.

Resigned, and slightly disappointed in myself: {Of course.}
{What ELSE did I think it’d be?}
{Of COURSE it’d be the Masamune.}

My hands flip over, my palms face upward, and the Monado lies on top of them. My physical contact with Sans ends.

I writhe in time with Sans’s soul, as he drives the Masamune’s point down into the Monado: once, twice, thrice, each motion more fluid than the last. Each time, he poises my right palm to feel its point, and the edges of the newly-made hole, against my skin.

He accompanies each stab with what a human on the surface would call an impassioned scream. Each one is a massive, burning weight charged with electricity, hurled into my body and soul.

To my surprise, he doesn’t impale the hilt of the Monado or break the glass ring which typically visually displays the active Monado Art. Instead, he repositions my hand at the end like before and begins slicing my sword into pieces. The segments, each one with one stab wound: no more, no less, begin to pile up in midair on my right side, my right hand compelled to touch the pile every time he adds a piece.

He continues to punctuate each swing with an impassioned scream.

At least, until he stops.

{He’s finished—}

NO.

The tips of his phalanges, burning with power, briefly touch my palm, as he drops the piece of the Monado comprising the point into it. I spasm, as a Gaster blaster fires directly in front of me.

The very slight pressure of the piece against my palm vanishes, replaced with a rough metallic and plastic powder.

Again, and again, and again, he places a segment of the Monado in my hand, only to vaporize it.

{But the hilt—}

I don’t even have the chance to finish my thought.

Phalanges pry the fingers on my left hand off of the Monado’s hilt: I’m surprised that he didn’t break any of them. Even as I wonder why he didn’t stab the hilt with the Masamune, I hear—

NO.
I straighten, my hands dropping to my sides, my left heel pivoting into the floor, as if—

NO.

I’M not the one performing this motion.

It’s SANS.

{He’s letting me feel what he feels.

{But why—?}

Glass, plastic, and metal give weigh, as Sans crushes the Monado’s hilt underfoot: Art-activation mechanism and all.

Simultaneously, a burning vibration resonates deep in my body and soul. They both vibrate faster and faster, burning a little more with every movement.

At last, after a second—ten? of movement, they come to a stop. {That happened right before he did all this.}

{But WHY?}

A weight begins to settle over me, and it isn’t magical in nature.

However, before I can give in to it, my whole being tenses—

NO.

That’s STILL Sans.

He’s concentrating his magic.

It only takes me—and Chara—

I forgot they were here.

Before I can ask why they didn’t stop Sans: [I couldn’t.]

I can barely make out their thoughts over the all-encompassing hum of Sans’s magic: [He FORCED me to watch.]

Chara’s thought fades away into nothing.

**Play until the end of the chapter.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_9JFqe3Ueo

*“It’s a beautiful day outside.”*

[“no…”] Chara… begs.

Sans continues as if he never heard them, his conviction and magic rising with every word.

*“Birds are singing.”*

Chara continues to beg. [“Not now!”]
**“Flowers are blooming.”**

[“Not this!”]

**“On days like these—”**

[“SANS I’M BEGGING YOU!”]

**“—kids like you…”**

I begin shaking… and not just because I’m scared for my—our—lives.

We—

NO.

The Judgment Hall and its contents drown in the suffocating pressure of blue magic, the constant buzz of yellow magic, and the deeply-seeded burning of determination.

Chara begins to sob.

As loudly as they cry, as much power as they pour into their pleas, Sans drowns them out.

**“—SHOULD BE BURNING IN HELL!!”**

---

Chapter End Notes

Yes: Sans’s canon voice changed.

Again, here's Chara's canon voice! Again: thank Tesla for Undertale: the Narrator's Musical!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K276nkB293A

The Megalovania cover I remixed.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNYsIHGBJzw

My remix.

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-for-your-every-action

The Megalovania remix I linked to at the very end of the chapter.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_9JFqe3Ueo

I’ve found no fanfics where Chara knew characters besides Asriel, so I wanted to explore that. My headcanons for Sans’s and Chara’s relationship have changed drastically over the years. Like everything else in Visiontale, they're... complicated...

My ideas about the Judgment have changed the most, and have been in development, for the longest, out of all my headcanons. I started thinking about the Judgment relatively early on while writing Visiontale, possibly around the same time I conceived
of my version of the New Home feelstrip. Essentially, it all started when I asked myself: Sans, why do you judge Frisk… and by Tesla, why are there church bells! When I watched Marriland’s Judgment the first time, the bells gave me chills. Combined with people comparing the Judgment Hall to a church and… yeah. I realized that in the context of a real culture, the Judgment Hall, and whatever happens inside it, would have significance. This headcanon likely codified my style of making Undertale headcanons in the first place.

I’ve read a couple stories about Sans’s position as judge. If I recall, only one, It's Time for Judgment, posted on this site, gives a detailed explanation as to why the position exists at all. No stories explain why Frisk/the protagonist is judged other than Sans wanting to Gaster blast some sense of morality into them. I also realized the implications of EXP/LOVE, and how each of Sans’s judgments reflect his perceptions of human nature. Combine this with the fact that gaining EXP by psychologically harming others is a natural extension of Undertale, and that in this timeline, Sans created the system, and voila! Moral nuance!

I wanted Sans to have his time to shine, and not just while slamming someone’s face into the ceiling. I wanted him to be as dignified as you’d expect while performing a ceremony as important as the Judgment, since it’s short and strangely sparse in Undertale itself. That’s why Sans’s changes outfits. When I realized that Sans judges you in a hoodie and slippers, the dignity of it was ruined.

He’s also trying to intimidate Chara so… yeah.

**TLDR: I thought that Toby and Undertale fans hadn’t fleshed out the Judgment enough, so I wanted to give it more meaning.**

As for Chara? I wanted a truly sympathetic Chara… but as time went on, I realized that that wasn’t completely possible. Combine a love of gaming, Frisk being bullied, psychological issues, and an eternity in the Void, and Chara’s headcanons result. As knowledgeable as Chara is about the Underground, they’re still a child, so… yeah. They probably wouldn’t have realized that the Frisks they were seeing weren’t multiple instances of their timeline’s Frisk.

I found the Megalovania remix which inspired me to make the one I linked to in late February or early March. I loved how much more dignified it sounded compared to The Choice. I remixed Laura Platt’s Megalovania cover in an identical way as that remix. I’d link that remix here but it’s been taken down.

As for Metalovania? I resisted listening to it the first few times I saw it in my YouTube suggestions feed.

Obviously, I failed.

This is my favorite cover of Megalovania…! It’s the only one where the singer sings at full tempo! When I realized how fitting the lyrics were for Chara and I, that... cemented... that notion...

Basque in the glory that is Judge Sans!
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

As of 10/10/2017, I've been writing Visiontale for a year.

I can't believe I'm still doing it... and that it's not even done yet...

I've finally got this chapter down just right, or at least, as close as I can manage as of now. If you want to read about my... conflicting emotions... while writing this chapter, read the endnotes.

I'M NOT WORTHY!

The bad time has come.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

42

Listen until 0:16 the first time, then loop normally until the next note.

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-metalovania

Deafening noise fills my ears, our screams mixing with the harsh hiss of static. I fly into the air, my fingers ripped from Chara's grip. With every breath, an almost fizzy, metallic taste fills my mouth, nostrils stinging with every gulp of air I do manage to--

I stop moving as quickly as I started.

I am about to breathe a sigh of relief, but a magical force crashes into Mjolnir, rattling it, and I even jostle around inside, the magic holding me in place wavering. Searing pain blooms in my head and chest in waves, each one accompanied by... by the sound of a Gaster Blaster.

A Gaster blaster's beam is colliding with me.

Repeatedly.

I'm... being shot... with a Gaster blaster repeatedly.

After a couple seconds, I experience an instant of free fall, so I assume I'm—

Jagged objects jab me from all sides.

They penetrated my armor, even though I didn’t hear it break.

I go limp.

However, after a moment of silence, I return to consciousness.
In a standing position.

Gripping Chara's hand as tightly as before.

Except the hiss of Gaster blasters continues to fill the air.

“How--“ Chara begins to ask… only for their hand to wrench free of mine again.

They stop mid-sentence, and I… begin to run, to duck and weave and perform physical feats I
never learned to do.

All the while, I faintly sense Chara's reassuring presence in my head.

*“You assumed my strongest attack remained constant.”*

I slam face-first into a jagged object--

A bone.

I slam face-first into a bone.

Several bones.

When I fell earlier, I fell onto and through a layer of floating bones, positioned several feet above
the floor.

Those bones bypassed Mjolnir's magical defenses as if I had permitted them to enter like a normal
object.

The bones enter Mjolnir's interior, dissolving as they make contact with my skin, leaving pinpricks
of pain in their wake.

I… black out… again.

As I do, a thought echoes in Chara's head, in an unusually calm and detached tone.

[He's loading.]

We black out proper.

Once I sense the warmth of Chara's hand in mine, we hold onto each other tighter. “How--!?”

I share in Chara's panic.

From what they told me, saving feels painless and takes only an instant.

They’re relieved that this is still true.

Then, confusion washes over us.

[The load.

[How—why----do we remember it?]]

I have no response.

“Because of you.”
Sans's blue magic locks my arms above my head and my legs vertically together. The concentrations of determination spike in Chara's soul as they try to free themselves, their limbs thrashing, their breathing labored and pained, but to no avail. Completely unable to move, he shoots us with Gaster blasters before releasing us. We fall into the bones hovering above the floor a second time.

I—we--black out.

When Chara and I come to, the clack of bones sounds from all around us. “[Get behind me.]”

I don't hesitate.

Grabbing Chara's wrist, they extend their left arm out behind them and begin to half-run, half-drag me across the room, bones in hot pursuit.

“I should explain how I found you.”

Chara and I continue to run.

“I hypothesized that determined humans defy death by healing wounds and rewinding time.”

Mid-jump, I hear a dismayed shout of pain from Chara. Their hand slips from my grip, and my legs slam into a wall of bones, followed by the rest of my body. I—we--fall to the floor.

I—we--die.

Sans loads.

As soon as we appear, Under Chara's guidance, we sprint in a direction, bones and Gaster blasters' beams whizzing past us.

All the while, Sans continues to speak in relatively measured tones, as if...

As if he's talked about this a thousand times before.

He has.

“Frisk failed to truly tap this power.

“For they never edited their save file.”

A Gaster blaster collides with me, my feet swept out from under me as I fly backward into a hard surface. Chara's hand once again slips away, our physical contact and their soulological control over me fading.

We die.

Sans loads.

Chara exerts more effort in controlling my movements this time. Their thoughts become my thoughts, and their movements become my movements. As we continue running, Sans continues talking.

“Now you may witness determination's true power.”
We can’t help but wonder, {[Everyone can see this?] as we run in between two sets of bones. Both of them abruptly change course until one cluster approaches us from either side. In our efforts to squeeze between them, Sans constricts the space available to us until we have no room to move.

We die.

Sans loads.

Chara wastes no time in positioning me behind them again, choosing to run in a different direction from before.

“Gaster corroborated my hypothesis.

“A determined being constitutes a massive anomaly in the time-space continuum.”

In spite of their renewed effort, in the process of dodging an attack, I lose my grip on Chara’s hand again.

I try running of my own accord, but I collide with bones with nearly every step. The combined effort of listening to Sans’s attacks, gauging their behavior, and finding the safest route through them, overwhelms me almost instantly.

Acting on my observations, knowing he can see every step I take, proves impossible.

He taught me to fight, after all.

As for predicting his future attack patterns?

Forget it.

In my attempts to avoid bones approaching me from three o’clock, I back into a second cluster of bones at seven o’clock.

I had not moved quickly and precisely enough to avoid them.

Like I ever stood a chance in doing so at all.

I die.

Sans loads.

Only a few seconds pass before Chara separates from me to minimize the damage we take.

“In Frisk’s presence he saw timelines jumping left and right.”

I lurch to the left as I hear the grating of bones nearby, but a couple graze my right side. My HP ticks down incrementally… very rapidly.

It continues, even after the attack disappears.

I have never taken damage continuously before.

Chara… has.

“Stopping and starting.”

The clattering of bones rushes toward my face. I backpeddle hurriedly, but not quickly enough, for
several bones clang off of Mjolnir's exterior before entering it proper.

Even now, I can sense that Chara is barely keeping up.

Their... prior knowledge... of Sans’s fighting style is only hindering them now.

“Until suddenly, everything ends.”

As much as I want to shut out Sans's words, his magic prevents me from doing so. Humans may perceive monsters' voices as sonic phenomena, but they can't ignore them, for monsters' voices interface directly with the soul instead. Chara and I have the nagging suspicion that even if we were as determined as before, we would still hear Sans's... explanation.

His words continue to echo—

A Gaster blaster’s behind me.

By the time I recognize the sound of it winding up, its beam has already collided with my soul for several seconds.

As Chara screams in dismay, too far away and too occupied to help me, the Gaster blaster... and several others... deplete my remaining HP.

I die.

Sans loads.

This time, somehow, Chara and I manage to hold on to each other for several seconds longer than before. Chara’s hope enters my soul through our touch.

[[We can do this.]]

Our relief is short-lived.

We become separated again before long.

Chara’s hope disappearing is a punch to the gut.

“That's your fault.

“Isn't it!?”

The constant noise of Sans's attacks ceases for a moment, and I can hear Chara sobbing, even as we struggle to hold our own, both of our HP stats draining all the while. “Sans you can't--” Chara begins to plea.

As they speak, their presence returns, and I eagerly relinquish control of my body to them again. Their... our... hope returns... for--

Bones press into my—Chara’s--our--chests and backs.

We die.

Sans loads.

Chara begins to pull me backward… but they fall--
Sans yanked them away from me.

Purposefully.

“You can't understand how I feel.”

Chara's arm brushes mine for an instant.

I lunge for it, my fingers grazing their sleeve before I—they--fly in another direction.

In midair, my body jerks, my arms and legs bending and retracting toward my torso at random intervals, presumably to avoid colliding with Sans's attacks. Chara fails to do so on a few occasions, however. A Gaster blaster fires nearby, but they mentally pull me out of the way just in time, for I avoid most of its magic. Even so, my skin… burns.

“Knowing that any moment, everything will reset.”

I sense our stats dropping. Only now do I notice that Chara's attack and defense, identical to my own, slowly tick down by the second.

Even Sans’s words damage us, apparently.

That’s not damage.

Only monsters' stats drop like this--

I fly into the path of several Gaster blasters.

Chara didn't--couldn't--help me dodge in time.

[He's separating us…

[So I can’t help you.]

I can’t help but understand the logic behind his choice.

Chara’s the only reason I managed to hurt Jerry at all. They’re my... catalyst... for doing harm.

Without them, it doesn’t matter how knowledgeable I am about the Underground. The skills I learned on the surface are all but useless here. My only advantages were my... Chara’s... our shared determination, and their descriptions.

Without it, I am truly powerless.

We die.

Sans loads.

I notice immediately that we both have reduced stats: forty-three attack, thirty-two defense… and a maximum of ninety-two HP.

“When Gaster passed, I scoured the Soul Search for answers.

“My efforts led nowhere.”

I manage to sense the hair-raising presence of a Gaster blaster behind me and pull us out of the way in time.
“I resigned myself to my fate long ago.”
We avoid a second Gaster blaster, then a third. Our relief forms a positive feedback loop.
“Reaching the surface no longer appealed to me.
“Not without him.”
Despite the complete soulological overload around us, we sense Sans’s… melancholy. It runs so deep that even his attacks induce us with it, when we at last fail to dodge one.
Our positive feedback loop ends abruptly.
[Why bother fighting back when he knows everything about us?]
Chara's right.
“Only you and Frisk remember the resets.”
He’s right.
“Our ChronoTrigger time travel theories came true.”
[He's right…]
Somehow, in the heat of battle, even as Gaster blasters rend the armor from my feet, Chara manages to have this thought.
We die.
Sans loads.
Chara’s fingertips have barely touched mine when I begin tumbling head over heels.
Their frantic screaming begins anew.
“I saw no reason to give my all.”
I crash through formations of bones floating in midair, each one splintering with a crunch as they pierce my skin. Just as I begin wondering when the bones will end, I slam into a pillar--the floor--the ceiling--something flat.
We die.
Sans loads.
Chara controls my body again, but not as... confidently as before. As they roughly pull me down to avoid a sheet of bones, Sans laughs harshly.
“Does this excuse my laziness after the Determination Study?
“Hell if I know.”
With one sharp tug on my body—the soulological link between Chara and I, Sans tosses me across the room.
He snapped our mental link.
Chara’s determined presence within my soul vanishes for an instant.

After several moments of freefall—what feels like freefall, but what is actually Sans using his telekinetic powers, he suspends me in midair. I tilt so I am face-down… positioned face-down—I can’t orient myself relative to anything.

Legs locked together, arms bound at my sides, I can’t even extend an arm and use the pull of gravity to orient myself.

Where is Sans’s voice coming from...?

He says with conviction: “I can’t afford not to care anymore.”

Chara’s shock runs through me.

I can’t help but feel relieved that Chara and I share emotions again.

We remain suspended in mid-air for a second.

About halfway through his sentence, my body jerks backward… but I become confused, because I can neither feel my arms or legs nor hear Sans. I try moving, but I still can't feel my body, or hear my clothing rustling around me.

[I can't see!]

I let out a scream as Gaster blasters deafen Chara and I once again. Somehow, I am… moving… even though I don't remember beginning to move.

My body stiff as a board, I careen through the air.

Chara's determination within my soul vanishes. Where it existed, only an empty void remains.

Their control over my body is gone.

Genuinely gone.

I collide with an attack.

I die.

Sans loads.

I fly into the air for a second, only for all sound and haptic feedback to fade away, numbness replacing them.

They both return soon enough.

Not like it matters.

“Even so, I hope we may still be friends.

“For I understand your situation.”

Bones whoosh past my feet, so I try jumping over them, but I barely leave the floor.

“Maybe...
“We may return to how it was before.”

The Judgment Hall falls silent again, at least for me, as I fly—

Sans is teleporting me.

He’s deafened me and blinded Chara.

He’s disorienting me, me and Chara.

He’s disorienting us so we can’t fight back. The teleportation is only exasperating it.

In the instant before I... reappear... I somehow manage to follow this chain of reasoning, but one question still remains.

How?

Sound and the sensation in my limbs return for a split second. I try pulling them toward me, but they remain stiffly straight.

Any sadness in Sans's voice and soul vanishes. I can sense it in his attacks. His passion burns against my body and makes my ears ring.

”No.

“No!

“How could anything be the same!?"”

My body goes numb, and the Judgment Hall seemingly falls silent again.

My hearing returns for an instant, only for it to cut out again just as quickly, as I fall—

Sans dropped me again.

He knew I never could have sensed the attack below me, and even if I had, I never could have deduced its pattern from my position, let alone dodge it in time.

That’s why he did it.

To exploit my blindness.

I die.

When Sans loads again, I turn around and run as fast as I can, hands in front of me to avoid hitting the pillars around us.

I only manage to move a few feet before my feet skid, and I pitch forward, losing my balance.

Sans's unbalanced me.

Purposefully.

I fly backward, back toward the… the fight.

“If I had not acted, you would have consumed more timelines, Chara.”

Sans's… voice breaks… for the first time today.
“Building and testing my machine cost me everything.

“Everything save my morality.

“Unlike you.”

[You can't do this!” Chara pleads.

I second their statement. The tightness in my chest and my erratic breathing are the only signs that I'm crying. “We can still be friends!”

“Sans please!”

Chara has followed my example.

In unison, we cry out, verbally and mentally, mustering up the last of our determination.

{{"LET US GO!"}}

The Judgment Hall goes silent for me, but only for an instant.

It returns in time for Sans to say firmly, “Not yet.

“First...

“You must learn restraint.”

The tip of a bone brushes my jaw. Another grazes my ribs on the left side--my ribs on the right side--my forearms--

I die.

Sans loads.

As soon as he finishes loading, he says: “And that day's today.”

Suspended in midair, a thought echoes in our minds… one that makes Chara squirm.

At first, I'm confused about who Sans is referring to… but that fades away as soon as I hear—sense--what he says to us.

*"You feel your sins crawling on your back."*

Chara gasps from below—above--I'm not even sure which direction's which anymore.

We try moving again in vain.

Our attack stats drop to twenty-one, and our defense stats drop to twenty-six.

“[Please Sans you can't--]”

*"You feel your sins weighing on your neck."*

Each of our maximum Hp stats drop from eighty to seventy-five as he speaks.

More than just my—our--pphysical selves are in pain.
It's our souls.

Sans is—

He’s been draining the strength of my… our… souls this entire time.

I only realized it now.

Our stats reach sixty-five HP/seventeen attack.twenty-two defense respectively.

"You feel karma coursing through your veins."*

Sans's words grate on our ears and souls.

Our stats drop to forty-five HP/fourteen attack/fifteen defense respectively.

[“Sans why!?”]

The burning pain in my body and soul intensifies. Chara and I scream our throats raw, until our vocal cords bleed, and then some. If we remained silent, our only option left would be to cry, but no tears come. Not anymore.

Chara and I scream our throats raw, until our vocal cords bleed, and then some, because it is all we can do.

Sans grips on our souls… or on the determination within our souls… with greater force until my chest seems on the verge of bursting.

The phrase “crushing any chance at resistance” never could have been more true... and literal.

It's only a matter of time before our stats reach twenty HP, ten attack, and ten defense, only to drop even further.

Only now do Chara and I notice that our bodies are caked in blood, covered in cuts from head to toe, each one burning as if someone had poured salt on them. Even our souls seem... broken... but not like a death. As he siphons determination from us, the determination that remains prevents us from enjoying the reprieve which is falling into unconsciousness.

IT wouldn’t even surprise me if he’s... preventing us from falling unconscious somehow, so we can feel every last point of damage Chara has... we have... inflicted on everyone.

I would have done the same, in his place.

Eighteen maximum HP. Eight attack. Eight defense.

*“Now you may feel my weakness.”*

Ten maximum HP. Five attack. Five defense.

We realize simultaneously: you can't fight someone who will never be wrong.

Five maximum HP. Three attack. Three defense.

I can't help but share Chara's sentiments of utter defeat.

{I don't wanna die like this…}
Chara replies weakly: [We're not gonna die.
[Remember?]
Three maximum HP. Two attack. Two defense.
[One.]
Chara repeats flatly. I strain to sense and decipher their thoughts.
[One HP.
[One attack.
[One defense.
[He was like that when you fell.
[When Frisk—
“I—
“We--killed him in the other timelines.
[He...]
Chara and I wait for each of our stat distributions to lower completely.
Two maximum HP. Two attack. Two defense.
Stop the music.
They don't.
The overwhelming weight of Sans's magic, and the pain coursing through us, let up slightly. Chara and I manage to concentrate on our surroundings enough to hear a... strange noise.
Floating... wherever we are, I cannot decipher the noise, even as it... as it moves closer.
Chara identifies the noise before me. They don't explicitly say it, but I understand them regardless.
They're footsteps.
Fast, frantic footsteps.
As they gradually become louder, I—-we--hear a shout.
A near-hysterical, almost unrecognizable shout.
“Sans.
“Please!
“STOOOOOP!”
Loop until the next note.
The hiss of Gaster blasters fills the air again.

I speak in Chara's voice… not like I disagree with them. Even if I had decided on what to say on my own, I would have expressed similar sentiments.

We shout a reply in unison: “PAPYRUS GET OUT OF HERE!”

{That can't be him!}

[Ooooooooooh: it is.]

Bones whooshing around us, and more footsteps, faster now.

Footsteps continuing to approach us.

“Please you can't!” Chara continues to beg. “He'll kill you!”

Heavy breathing below me, and to one side… it seems like.

{He wouldn’t--!}

[Really?]

Chara’s bewilderment catches me off guard.

[You think Sans cares?

[You think he wouldn’t hurt Paps right now?]

I don’t answer.

[Even after what he’s done to us!] they insist.

I don’t have to speak to agree with them.

The fact we agree on this… makes me sick.

As Papyrus continues to run, he continues to talk.

“I don't care.” he spats.

He… runs around… in circles… below us.

“I'm not doing this for either of your sakes.”

More running, back and forth.

“I'm doing this for the monsters who yearn for, who deserve, an explanation for what you've done.

“A real one.”

Disbelief from Chara shocks me out of my confusion. [He can't be--]

{Can’t be what?}
Papyrus takes shallow breaths as he clarifies, continuing to move: “I'm not here because I don’t approve of what Sans has done to you.

“And what he Is still doing to you.”

{[Thanks dude...]}  
He raises his voice. “You hear that, Sans?”  
Papyrus grunts in pain.  
“I approve of your actions.”

Orange magic… rises into the air around us, tingling on my skin. {[That can't be…]}  
Papyrus's footsteps grow faster. [He's dodging--]

{What no way--!}  
[Why else would he be--]

{No!}  
{I mean that orange magic’s his right?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

{What?}  
They don’t have to confirm it for me in words.

{Sans’s’s attacking him?!}  
Chara remains silent.

“Even I think Chara and the human must suffer the consequences of their actions.”

Papyrus gasps as blue magic begins to surge around us. I hear the floor crack nearby.

“And I agree that only someone who knows the extent of determination's power should wield it.

“Even I’m not that foolish.

“I may be an optimist.

“And I may see the good in everyone...

“But I’m no fool.”

Yellow magic sizzling against the floor as Papyrus barely manages to dodge Gaster Blasters.

“Chara?

“Sans is right.

“I know your intentions were good. I just know it!
“But I also know you used your knowledge of our culture to do harm.

“You… you hurt so many monsters.

“And... and humans.”

The crunch of bones... smashing into each other.

“Pauline?

“You let Chara persuade you into using violence.

“You gave in to your base impulses.

“And if by some miracle violence truly was the only way, what you did was...

“Excessive.”

{Who would’ve thought Paps’d say something like that...?}

[Well as he said he’s not thaaaaat stupid...]

Papyrus runs in silence for a second before boldly shouting, “What I cannot agree with is your use of the Judgment, Sans!”

Chara’s soul jerks as they mentally take back their last statement.

{[No Paps no don’t say that!!]}

Chara and I can taste the acidity of yellow magic crackling in the air, a manifestation of Sans’s emotional intensity. “You dare to speak to--“

Papyrus cuts him off without any hesitation: “Yes.

“I do.”

Papyrus gneh heh hehs, bitterly and in triumph, all at once.

He challenges: “Go ahead.”

He stops moving.

Even as Sans’s attacks collide with him, he refuses to dodge or retaliate.

All the while, Chara, the spectators within the Judgment Hall, and I, sense his pain: every HP lost, every splinter of bone loosed, every ounce of pressure bearing down on his joints.

He... eggs Sans on:

“KILL ME!”

{He can’t be thaaaat stupid...}

Chara’s on the verge of tears again. [Papyrus STOOOOOOOP!

[Please--Sans won’t—he can—he’s already angry don’t make it worse!]
He’s crying angry tears... or at least, he sounds like it.

“No one can stop you now.”

[He ain’t wrong...]

After gasping for breath for several seconds, he seemingly collects himself. Voice and soul dripping with venom, he says, “But as soon as you leave this place, EVERYONE WILL BE OUT FOR YOUR BLOOD!”

Chara and I have to mentally stop for a second to comprehend what Papyrus has just said.

[[Whoaaaa didn’t see that coming.]]

The clacking of Sans's bones intensifies, and the floor continues to crack. The pillars make similar noises. [He’s crushing the pillars.]

Somehow, Chara seems... unsurprised.

[Sans’s crushing the pillars into dust as easily as you’d crush a piece of paper in your fist.]

“I can't believe you’d corrupt the Judgment like this!”

Bursts of orange magic materialize erratically, only to vanish after an instant, overpowered by the unmistakable searing pain of yellow magic.

“I thought you out of all monsters would know that this isn't what the Judgment was meant for!”

A cluster of Gaster Blasters fires nearby, and I… scrunch up into a ball, surprised that I can even move at all.

[They're not firing at us.]

[I know.]

I know Sans is firing them at Papyrus.

Each one fires a single shot, as Sans retorts “YOU'VE NO RIGHT--!“

Papyrus's blue magic tugs at my and Chara’s souls, easing the pressure on our limbs and pulling us away from the fight ever so slightly, but we revert to our previous positions just as quickly.

Papyrus continues, faster now, as if Sans never spoke: “The Cemented's judge is supposed to tell them how the Cemented has treated everyone around them, for good or ill.”

Papyrus shouts, orange magic intercepting several Gaster blasters, flames roaring to life below us. Despite our proximity to them, we remain unharmed.

They’re supposed to weigh their experiences against what they’ve learned.”

Papyrus has barely finished speaking when Sans answers, “Have I not done so?”

“NO!”

Neither of us have ever heard Papyrus so...

Outraged.
“YOU HAVEN’T!

Papyrus tries to move us again, casting a greater concentration of blue magic than before, only for it to cease abruptly and for him to yelp in pain.

[Not him too…

[Don't make him feel it too…] Chara implores softly.

“They examine the Cemented’s soul for the good of society.

“Not so they can sling their every misdeed at them!

“With no recourse for fighting back!”

{{He ain’t wrong...}}

Sans takes no time to answer. In the same voice he he used when he compelled me to kneel, he demands: “Tell me the War has ended, then.”

{{Heh?}}

He demands: “Tell me the war ended upon the Barrier’s creation.”

Don’t change the subject!”

Sans continues as fervently as before: “A determined monster deserves the title of Judge.”

He demands: “Tell me I’m wrong.”

“We can’t help but agree with Sans.

Papyrus stops running mid-stride... and begins to breathe more heavily from below us. His breath hitches as he struggles to gather the strength to speak.

He fails.

[Not him too…

[Please…]

{Thaaaaat’s why he’s sooo pissed?}

[And why he’s dressed all coollke?]

Clearly in pain, Papyrus manages to speak: “So you're going to pin the blame of an entire war and several timelines worth of misdeeds on two humans?

“When only the latter is anywhere near true.

“And that’s only true for one of them!.”

{{Paps no why’re you doing this to yourself!??}}

If it weren’t for our inability to move, Chara and I would throw up; Papyrus’s disgust is that tangible.
"YOU WOULD DO THE SAME!"

"I know."

AS quickly as it appeared, his disgust vanishes, resignedness tinging his voice and soul instead.

He pants more heavily. As he says this, to our surprise, the... intensity... of Sans's magic, fades slightly.

"I know I would.

"Any of us would, if given the chance.

"You’re the only one who can act on it, that’s all."

Sans's magic fades more rapidly.

"After all, I nearly killed the human for the 'greater good'.

"As you saw.

"As everyone saw.

"And you stopped me because I was being...

"Unreasonable.

"It’s only fair I repay you in kind."

[Sans nodded.]

More calmly, Papyrus points out, “Considering your knowledge of this room, and everyone in it, you should already know why I am here.”

[He nodded again.]

“Not because of the atrocious deeds done to us by humankind.

“Not to address the burden the humans unavoidably bore for their kind by falling down here, as unfair as that is.”

Sans's magic has dissipated almost completely now.

Chara and I barely have time to acknowledge what Papyrus says next.

He begins to make several shocking inferences in quick succession.

We wholeheartedly agree with each one.

“You agree with my sentiments, fully and in part.

“Even so, you agree with them.

“And that’s what matters.

“You are not using the true extent of your power.
“Magical, moral, or political.

“To do so, you would have stripped me of my right to speak and to cast magic.

“And strictly enforced them.

“And, if I dared to speak out against you...

“If I dared to fight back?

“You would not have tolerated my… defiance… whatsoever.

“You would have made an example out of me.

“You would have broken my will to fight, as you have done to Pauline and Chara.

“Without a second thought

“Maybe, you even would’ve killed me.”’’

He gneh heh hehs again sadly. [No no Papyrus not this again why--!?!]

{I don't know…}

“I’m right.

Aren’t I?

“Judge Sans?”

Chara and I start at Papyrus's use of the title. {So he thinks Sans's right.}

Chara doesn't have to answer.

Sans's magic has completely vanished.

After what seems like an eternity, the Judgment Hall truly falls silent.

[He nodded.]

Stop the music.

Loop until the next note.

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-feelstrousle

Papyrus approaches me. Orange magic brushes my shoulders and head like the gentle pressure of fingers. “I would touch you but… the feeling of bone on your skin must be traumatizing now.

“For both of you.”

We are more relieved by Papyrus's voice than either of us care to admit, verbally or mentally.

The rustling of cloth and the clink of metal nearby. Papyrus's left hand touches mine, and after a few seconds, I realize that I am lying on my left side in midair… and that the only reason Papyrus is even able to hold my hand is because he is raising his left arm over his head to reach me.
After several more seconds, I—

Sans slowly lowers me to the floor.

Papyrus steadies me as I sit on his left side. We sigh in relief as I hear the plop of Chara's shoes on the floor some distance away.

Sans has also lowered Chara to the floor.

They begin walking toward us.

After a few seconds, Chara sits down beside me.

Papyrus stands quietly to one side as Chara and I marvel at the solid floor below our feet, and its failure to... be seemingly yanked out from underneath us.

When we’ve finished, Papyrus touches my hand again, helping first me, then Chara, to stand, repositioning himself in between us in the meantime.

Holding our hands, Papyrus turns to… to face… someone. Probably the rest of the monsters in the Judgment Hall.

Only a moment passes before he begins to speak in a... barely-held-together voice.

He begins to speak carefully, as if any word could... set off... everyone... or Sans.

Mostly Sans.

“I know that what you have seen today has been, traumatic.

“Unbelievable.

“Earth-shattering, even.”

He pauses. [He shrugged.]

“Gneh heh heh... who am I kidding?

“Words cannot describe what has happened here.

“Language cannot describe an event the speaker cannot remember.

“Let alone understand.

“Especially when they lack the experience necessary to even have a chance at understanding it.

“Language cannot describe an event that has happened countless times.

“An event the speaker had been a part of.

“An event they created memories of, in the moment.

“And yet...

“An event they cannot remember at all.”

He pauses.
Softly: “You realized this early on.

“And were overwhelmed.”

Verbally ripping the bandage off: “At least, at first.”

Leaning forward slightly, Papyrus invokes, “You believe it now.

“You believe it all.

I can see it in your eyes. And in your souls.”

Another pause.

“I know all of you are remembering something.

“Many somethings.

“My brother's words have… awakened… memories you never knew you made.

“It's certainly happening to me.”

Papyrus's body shudders in our grip. He takes a breath before continuing.

“Even while he has told you of the true extent of determination's power, some of you must be wondering how he came to wield any conventional magical strength.

“Especially after he has disclosed how his soulological and psychological state has...

“Deteriorated... seemingly beyond repair... over the past twenty years.

"Some of you have.

“For quite a while, actually.”

Monsters begin to whisper.

“Over the past several months, ever since the Unified Paper Riots in Bravery, amateur soulologists have gathered anecdotal evidence of Sans's uses of magic, to determine how he came to wield the colors of magic he does.

“For as he mentioned before, those of you born after 182X do not know how Chara cemented him in integrity.

“It would not be the first time a story from our family has become a... taboo subject.”

The crowd continues to whisper.

“For quite a while, actually.”

Monsters begin to whisper.

“Only a select few monsters know how Sans cemented himself in justice.”

[[No not again…]]

{Wow no one's even surprised--}

[Well Sans’s letting him talk.

[And would they wanna piss off Sans?]
I don’t answer.

[Exactly!]

Just as Chara and I expected, after a short pause, Papyrus opens his inevitable story with exactly the kind of revelation we've come to know.

“I am one of those monsters.

“I triggered the traumatic experience which cemented him in his third color of magic.

“I was the first monster... human... being... he ever cast it on.”

A multitude of emotions begins to flood over my and Chara's souls. Curiosity, fear, anger, sadness… resignation. {There's so many monsters here…}

[Yeah… probly more than when you met Paps at Grillby's. And that's just everyone in person.]

I completely forgot about the livestream.

There are monsters watching history... one of countless histories... unfold from the comfort of their homes.

“It was your eighteenth death anniversary, Chara.”

"[{Lovely.}]

“I woke up early, so I could be even more diligent than normal, as you would expect. Both of you would not know this, but on that day, most monsters try to spend the day doing as much good as they can for their fellow monster.

“Or, I suppose, for their fellow human... humans... now.

“The Inertia Society believes in this most of all.”

{[So that's why Glen worked his ass off…]}]

“Back then, I thought the best I could do was go on patrol and watch for humans.”

He gneh heh hehs. “Yes: even after befriending the Second Six Souls, I thought the best thing I could do to serve my kingdom was lead a seventh human to their deaths.”

He contemplates, “Maybe I thought that they weren’t truly dead, because of Alphys's soulological preservation process.

“Maybe Asgore's campaign in response to your death, to Gaster’s death, affected me more than I gave him credit for, Chara.

“All I know as that on that day, I barged into Sans's room, as usual, and urged him to wake up! That today would be the day the seventh soul came to us! That I had to be the one to capture them.

“That if I did, that would… reassure... everyone… that the remaining Gasters weren’t so soft on humans anymore.

“Now that our father was dead.”
“You took a while.”
Chara and I start at hearing Sans speak.

He adds: “And I ignored you.”
Papyrus replies: “With good reason.

“You were in a rut after all.

“You were receiving most of the flack from everyone for our work on the Determination Study. Hell when someone wasn't complaining to Alphys or Dewey they were bitching at you!”

“Heh heh heh heh heh…”

{[No Sans noooooooo…]}

“You mean those monsters who disapproved of our 'human-loving roots'?”

“Gneh heh heh.

“Who else?”

{[No Papyrus not this again not you too…]}

“After a couple minutes of railing at you I managed to get you to talk.

“When you did said you wanted to sleep in.

“I don't wanna deal with those damned Dreemurrites today,’ you said.”

He sighs. “And I ignored you.

“As I always did.

“I yanked the first blanket off you, but you curled up in the second one. I kept insisting that today, out of all days, you should not be lazy! I reasoned if the Dreemurrites saw us working so hard, maybe they’d stop talking to you so... callously. I even told you so!”

He recollects soberly, “I should have stopped when you looked at me and your eye sockets were empty.

“I should have stopped when you said, 'I've given everything for monsterkind every day since Gaster passed.

“'Is that not enough?

“'You can't force me, Paps.’”

Sans interjects before he can continue: “But you continued to lecture. All the usual advice about hard work strengthening the soul.

“Only now would you know why I said that.

“My work reconstructing Gaster's soul was in its seventeenth year. I assumed every time we obtained a human soul, every time I consulted a human for advice, I...

“I...”
“But it didn’t work.” Papyrus gently finishes. “Not as much as you hoped.”

Sans doesn’t have to reply.

“Combined with the treatment we endured while preparing the monster-testing stage of the Determination Study…”

Sans has no need to finish his sentence.

“Yes.

“Knowing that, I… I understand your reaction to my... lecture... now.

“When you finished speaking, I…

“I felt a pain in my body and soul.

“Much like what both of you must have felt right before I came here.

“Exactly like the pain I feel right now, actually.”

The monsters spectating whisper faintly amongst themselves again.

“The pain spread and became stronger by the second. I tried to tell Sans to stop, to put an arm around him to reassure him, to leave the room, but…

“I couldn't.

“My limbs and mandible felt like lead.

“Like…”

Papyrus’s struggle to articulate his experiences hangs in the air.

“It was like someone had shackled me with massive weights.

“Like someone was dragging me down.”

Encouraged, he speaks more confidently.

“Like someone was dragging me down with weights so heavy that after a while, I didn't have the strength to stand.

“Weights that sapped me of the will to stand.

“Weights so heavy my spine felt like it was being crushed.”

Decisively: “Like I was feeling my sins crawling on my back.”

Some monsters gasp… and as Chara and I watch, we sense the pain Papyrus describes… spread throughout the crowd. Some monsters thunk to the floor in response, racked with that exact same pain.

More frantically, Papyrus continues, “I sank to my knees, pulling my scapula more closely to my spine.

“I don't know why but… I thought by making myself smaller, I would…
“It…
“I thought it’d make the pain stop.
“That I…
“That if I made myself the victim then…”
He trails off.
Sans says, almost to himself: “I felt your pain.
“And believe me: I tried to stop.”
“But you didn’t.”
“Mm-hmm.
“My anger shaped my magic.”
Papyrus, and everyone else, waits with baited breath for more.
“Part of me didn’t want to stop.
“Nothing I told myself could convince me to stop.
“Nothing and no one could’ve stopped me then.”
“Justifiably so.”
Chara and I start in surprise as Papyrus agrees with his brother.
“By this point, I had been kneeling, skull bent low to nearly touch my sternum, for only Tesla knows how long. Eye sockets focused on my lap, I saw the surface of my bones glow gold.
“I did not understand what this meant at the time.”
His next sentence is a slap to the face.
A slap to his own face.
Bitterly: “But I damn well should have.
“I had tried to stand. To… look you in the face. To summon the willpower to speak but… I could not.
“Not until I felt a… presence… above me.”
Papyrus's voice drops to an… awed whisper.
“I couldn't recognize you at first. Not until I located your patience and integrity.
“And when I finally sensed them I thought nothing was wrong.
“Even though to find those colors of magic, I had to... wade through... a third color.
“Maybe my… familiarity… with it fooled me into a false sense of security.
“Somehow.”

Apprehension leaks into my soul from Chara. I try to ask them about it, but they mentally shush me.

“I felt your hand on my mandible. You gripped it firmly and tilted my skull upward until we were eye socket to eye socket.”

Chara and I have heard Papyrus run the gambit of emotions, but, vulnerability is new to us.

“You were sitting on the edge of the bed, looking down at me. Our height difference wasn't too great but, it didn't feel like that. I was the one who felt small then.

“When I looked, I saw your right hand in your pocket, and your left on my mandible, your phalanges glowing blue. Even then I couldn't understand what had changed.

“At least until I finally met your gaze.

“As I watched, your left eye, which had been glowing blue, changed color.

“As I watched, it began to glow gold.

“It grew brighter and brighter, until it glowed the most intense gold I had ever seen.”

We all wait in anticipation for Papyrus to continue.

“Even... even brighter than Gaster.”

Some monsters gasp softly.

“But it didn’t shine anywhere near as brightly as today. And not just because only one eye glowed back then.”

{So that’s where it came from...}

“Looking back on it, I’ve realized something.

“That I deserved to feel that pain .

“And the pain I feel right now.

“And I know exactly why.”

Papyrus's voice cracks. “It's because that day wasn't the first time I ignored your needs in favor of my own.

“Far from it!

“Hell as long as I can remember I've gotten you to do things for me!

“I never asked you what you wanted.

“Even when we became as old as human adults I still did it.

“That day was just the most severe case.”

Papyrus shouts, “Do you know how I know this?”
Sans doesn't answer.

“It's because I inflicted so much pain on you!

“More than all of those damned Dreemurrites combined!

“It's because I've gained so many Execution Points.

“It’s because I thought the pain you felt was a fair cost to pay...

“In exchange for my happiness.”

Papyrus begins to cry in earnest. “For all I know my behavior’s why you made that system in the first place.”

He hiccups for a while, until, he falls silent with a gasp.

After a few more moments, he takes another breath.

Soul quavering with fear, he calls out.

“Permission to speak.

“Judge Sans?”

A silence where we all wonder why Papyrus has changed the subject.

As everyone reels from Papyrus’s sudden change in mood, we flinch as Sans responds.

A firm “Permission granted.”

“I stand before you today to beg that you heed some requests.”

An agonizing pause where I can sense every channel of magic flowing through the air.

“I beg that you suspend judgment, so Pauline and Chara may fully resolve the issue of the Third Seven Souls.”

Silence.

“I propose that now, you release them so they may prepare to meet Asgore.

“Only when the fate of the Third Seven Souls has been determined will you judge whoever is left.”

Orange magic rushes into the air anew, even as Papyrus struggles to speak through another bout of tears.

“When that time comes, I will not interfere.

“I swear it on my life.”

A reflective silence follows.

At last, Sans speaks, formally and deliberately.

“State your last request.”
"There’s three of them?"

"You think he wouldn’t know?"

"Good point--"

"There’s always three of the things you know this!"

"This."

Papyrus lets go of us and... begins walking forward.

"I wish to atone for my sins."

He continues to walk.

"Until the issue of the Third Seven Souls has been resolved, I, Papyrus wingdings Gaster, consent to being judged."

The crowd around us talks louder. I even catch snippets of conversation.

"--even if he doesn't have any guts."

"--supposed to be like this."

"--your funeral man. Your funeral."

"I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster, consent to being judged for my every action."

"No…” I breathe.

Chara sidesteps toward me until our hands intertwine again. “I wish it weren't true…”

It doesn't surprise me that Chara doesn't sound their age.

"I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster, consent to being judged for every Execution Point I have earned."

The crowd becomes louder.

Baffled.

Fearful.

Impassioned.

Discontent.

Chara and I sense the orange magic surrounding Papyrus grow in intensity as he slows his pace.

At last, he stops, standing before Sans.

As we shift positions so we can hear him better, we welcome its warmth on our bodies. Through his magic, we sense Papyrus mustering up the strength to shout over the crowd.

“And you, Sans Wingdings Gaster, shall be my judge.”

Stop the music.
[He's gonna kneel on the floor like we did.]
It seems like everyone has fallen silent to witness yet another first for monsterkind.

At least, for the moment.

[He did it.

[He--]

The orange magic around Papyrus tears away.

In its place is… blue and yellow magic.

In the instant Chara is about to finish their sentence, the blue and yellow magic spikes in intensity, until the floor underneath our feet shakes, and our skin burns-

The space surrounding us—

We remain untouched.

There is blue and yellow magic nearby, but it is not being cast on Chara and I.

Neither color of magic is directed at Papyrus, Chara, or myself.

Not exactly.

When Chara told me “When a deep authoritative voice tells you to do something you do it,” it didn't sink in, because I had never experienced it. Not knowingly.

Not when the order in question is infused with magic.

In the instant Chara is about to finish their sentence, sans shouts a command.

***"GET DOWN!"***

Chapter End Notes

It's official people. From now on, refer to Judge Sans by his title... or else. When I roleplay as Sans in my comments, I will be roleplaying as him so... yeah.

Here's Metalovania!

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-metalovania

Here's the link to my Disbelief remix.

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-disbelief

Here's the link to Feelstrousle.

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-feelstrousle

Long story short: the No Mercy Route is my favorite route due to Flowey's
exposition... and Sans. I realized that the sound of Sans's bones poking Frisk to death... actually created a vivid soundscape for me, just because they played so often. Them, and the Gaster blasters. Then, I realized a Sans fight in a world without a turn system would be a clusterfuck... and it would be I don't even want to know how many times harder. I tried to capture the clusterfuck-inducing aspects as best I could by having choppy narration and vague descriptions because... seriously how would I even perceive the fight? Everything that could make it harder happened... except that here, Sans can load even if we manage to hit him... which we don't, because he has complete control over our movement. We can't run away because shortcuts... and the flickering during his fight is... actually much more disorienting than I described here. That will be explained soon.

I've thought about how to write this fight for months... ever since the end of 2016. The extremist, determined Sans didn't arise until around May of 2017, maybe sooner. When I couldn't take it anymore and spilled the Judgment theory beans to my boyfriend, he told me, in effect, to "make it sound like a battlefield..." so I did... and then some. This chapter is why I put a ChronoTrigger spoiler warning at the very beginning of the story. Sans comparing the resets to ChronoTrigger's time travel will also be explained soon.

As for why I subjected myself to the bad time? Let's just say it's... punishment? for doing and or saying all the things I regret most... or at least, I intended it to be that way. It's me negating everything that made the Sans fight doable: the fact that you can reset... and that you can see what you're doing. It's my morbid curiosity regarding the No Mercy Route being written down for all to see... because in my head, the No Mercy Route is the most vivid.

Disbelief Papyrus struck a chord with me as soon as I heard about him. Visiontale Papyrus is essentially Disbelief Papyrus, but with more politics and genuine disagreements between him and sans. Their fight is the culmination of my work making Papyrus into a more believable and realistic character. He's how I want optimistic people to be: cautious, and yet deadset on what optimism they do have.

As for Judge Sans? He's Error Sans, except he's directing his extremism toward a more tangible target. Considering America's... history... with extremism, I channeled it into his views. I wanted a lucid Sans willing to use violence, a Sans who, unlike in Undertale itself, doesn't always use his powers for good, a Sans whose emotions overwhelm him, but not to the point of insanity,. I wanted Sans to hold a position only he deserves. He's as powerful as he deserves to be, as powerful as his station demands, as intimidating as his station demands, as zealous as his experiences demand. A sans who cares, but not for all the right reasons... but for enough of them.

The music choices were essentially wish fulfillment... because Disbelief is sad in its own way, Feelstrousle is even more sad than that, and Metalovania is "bad time" incarnate! I'd gush about how good Caleb's vocals are, but you can hear them for yourselves.

Think about it: in Sans's place, you'd want justice to be served to those who've wronged you, even if it is violent and outside the law. We're just conditioned to desire justice through the "usual" channels. Sans just internalized his upbringing more thoroughly because he saw versions of him living happily on the surface by Tesla! I wouldn't blame him for... delivering karmic retribution... upon Chara and I... and whoever else he thinks deserves it. I'd say more but... it's spoilers...
Me me realizing the war never ended late at night changed everything forever. That notion is what drives Judge Sans.

As of 10/13/2017, I'm a little less than halfway done editing the audio drama for chapter 41. I'll post the link to it when it's done.

As for what will happen in the next chapter? If you've been monitoring the Dreemurrite political climate, you'll appreciate it. If not, it's... out of left field. However, in its own way, it fits in perfectly.
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Visiontale officially has over 190,000 words now! Despite that, we still haven't reached Asgore yet...

Oh well.

As of the first posting of this chapter on 11/30/2017, my finals end in a week so...

{[[DETERMINATION!]]}

After almost seven weeks of silence, because a skeleton of work, I'm back!

I'm still working on the audio drama for Chapter 41. I'm considering splitting it into two parts so it's easier to edit/upload. If I do post it in multiple parts, I'll post the Soundcloud link to it when it's done.

Anyway, CUE POLITICS!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

43

"GET DOWN!"

{[Wait what the—?]}

Why’s Sans shouting at us?

Before we can react, let alone begin answering that question, our bodies slam against the marble floor, my knees digging into a groove between two marble tiles. As a monster's piercing screams echo off the walls, I clamp my hands over my ears instinctively.

"NOOOO!

"STOOOOOP!"

Startled, lying on my stomach, my hands scrabble across the floor until they brush Chara's shirt and pants. I scoot closer and closer to them, until our bodies press together, and we wrap our arms around each other. We sense the rapid fluctuations of the orange magic surrounding Papyrus’s soul not too far in front of us.

Only a brief moment after we hit the floor, the cracking of stone… and more shrill screams… fill the air.

"NOOOOOO! STOOOOP!

"NOOOOOOT HEEEERE!
"LEEEET! MEEEEEE! GOOOOOO!!"

Chara grips me tighter.

The floor shakes with every chunk of marble that reigns down. We shudder and shrink in on ourselves as the blocks of stone fall closer and closer to us. Though they have not told me, I know Chara has squeezed their eyes shut.

I follow suit.

As abruptly as it started, the crumbling slows, then stops.

[No.]

[No way.]

Just above our prone bodies, the pull of blue magic rakes across us, and an intense… burning… fills the air.

[I thought you…]

[He’s--]

[What?]

Out of place calm: [He's rebuilding it.]

[But there's sooo much!]

Their calm shatters as soon as it started.

[How--!?]

A moment of confusion.

Chara doesn't know what to say.

They've said all they can say.

As if their panic transforming into calm wasn’t disarming enough, after a moment their body begins to shake with laughter beside me.

[By Tesla I'm stuuuuupid!]

[How could I forget?]

[I know how he's doing it.]

In a mental voice that's… not my own… or Chara's… we say: 6[Determination.]6

More grinding sounds as Sans reassembles what had been destroyed. The magic eminating off the crowd's souls, and the mixed emotions conveyed through their magic, subside, until all that is left is a soft tingling on our bodies. Through it, we sense their awe and uncharacteristic calm.

Eventually, even that fades, until only a strangely empty, magic-less silence replaces it.

The… ordinary… silence, completely absent of the temperature, haptic, and soulological feedback
I have learned to rely on, unsettles us.

Everyone has stopped projecting their souls out into the room for some reason.

An eternity passes before the silence is broken.

*Loop until the next note.*

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-fanaticism

The silence is broken by the thundering of yellow magic crackling through the air.

Though loud, sudden, and jump scare-inducing for Papyrus, Chara, and I, it pales in comparison to what we sense next.

My stomach churning, bile rising in my throat, power rips through the Judgment Hall, a vice-like force grips every soul and shakes it down, the contents of each one spilled out into the open for… scrutiny.

*"WHO HAS DONE THIS?"

*"SHOW YOURSELVES!"*

It doesn't take long for a crowd to roar in reply.

"WE HAVE!"

Footsteps and wingbeats and slithering noises approaching us from all sides. Pushing and shoving and… a monster's muffled screams.

The same screams as before.

Not too long after they fade away, the screams slow, then cease, followed by a thudding sound.

[No that can't be!]

The ether in the air vibrates ever so slightly as a nearby monster readies themselves to speak.

When they do, their voice quivers, but only slightly, as they struggle to make themselves heard… as they struggle to project their soul beyond their physical body so we can sense their presence.

We shake violently when we hear that monster's voice.

"I have.

"Judge Sans."

[NOOOOO!!!]

[Whaat!]?

[It's Touring--!]

[Wait whaaat!?]?

[Yeaaah it's Touring! They tied her up and duct taped her but they let her go and--]
But I thought she was friends with Sans!

She is but I don’t think that’s it--

Touring’s soul shakes with fear, but she manages to keep it in check. She stands her ground. Somehow, her stats don’t fall.

"Yes.

"I came here to speak to you--"

[She’s pointing at where the broken stuff was.]

"--but I didn’t plan THIS!"

A silence where the weight of the magic around us squeezes the air from our lungs.

"But Touring.

"Why?

"Why’ve you come here?

"How could you have done this!?!"

An excruciating pause.

"It’s about the Judgment, isn’t it?"

Tense silence.

"It’s about THEIR Judgment--"

[Paps’s pointing--trying to point--at us.]

"--and mine.

"Right?"

Another excruciating pause.

A quiet, sad laugh. "What else?"

"Please. Let me explain why I’m here. And why they--"

[She’s pointing at the monsters behind her--us.]

"--damaged the Judgment Hall.

"Then," Touring’s purple magic spikes as she tries to keep her emotions under control, "you may do with me what you wish, Judge Sans."

Silence.

Touring stumbling through what sounds like, what was intended to be, a well-thought-out speech.

"Look I… I don’t disagree with you."
"What I disagree with’s the institution you're part of."

Another excrutiating pause. We brace for another outburst, or at the very least, an eloquent and brief rebuttal.

Neither of them comes.

Instead, the blue magic cast around us fades away.

"Very well."

The yellow magic sparking against our bodies vanishes just as quickly.

"Rise."

The three of us waste no time in doing so, Chara nudging me so I face Touring.

Her pace quickens a little. "I'll make it quick.

"Don’t get me wrong. I know monsterkind needs laws. 'Cause we’re not perfect. Hell the psychophysiological nature of our sols might make us even crazier than humans in some ways.

“I don’t mean the Inertia Society should make more regulations.

"I mean we need REAL laws."

 Silence.

"I've said this a thousand times before."

 Silence. [I thiiiiiiink…? heeeeeeere's listening…?]

{Why wouldn't he be?}

An uncertain noise. [If she's here it's gotta be preeeeeeeetty baaaaaaaad--]

{Why's it gotta be baaaaaaad?}

[Well like at the least it's not good.]

Candidly: "I don't wanna get rid of the Judgment."

"Far from it!

"'Cause it reflects how WE do things."

-[[She ain't wrong--]]-

"'Cause it’s our way of showing how a monster’s matured. And how the knowledge they’ve gained from cementing themselves helps them become part of our community.

"No.

“I think the Judgment Hall needs to go."
"She's spinning around pointing at stuff."

"The Judgment Hall’s based on architectural plans from three hundred years ago!"

"[Hoooly crap!]]"

"And yeah I know it was built a century ago but…"

Touring has seemingly aged by several decades—a century—when she next speaks. "For us a century's not that long at all."

She pauses, Chara and I wondering how a hundred years isn't a long time.

"And in all that time we've gotten less and less religious every day."

[What?]

"Everyone has.

"Humans and monsters."

[Heh?]

- {Yeah she's right.} -

[I mean John Green probly said so at some point so… ehh…?]

"If the current generation of monsters can't relate to the symbolism behind something as…"

She gropes for the right word. "Integral… to our society,

“Then…”

Sudden passion: "THEN WHY USE IT!?"

Silence.

Touring stops spinning. "There're sooooo many things from the surface that haven't helped monsterkind at all! Only harm them.

"It's just that no one agrees on what they are."

Before we can process her outburst and change in subject, she begins to list items: "Mustard gas.

"The atomic bomb.

"Wire-tapping.

"Government surveillance, of all kinds.

"Cyber crime.

"Democracy."

"What!?" Chara, Papyrus, many other monsters, and I, interject, but Touring continues to talk as if we never spoke.

"Even the most progressive monsters know we're not ready for that yet." she says… gently.
Her voice strains as it rises: "And yet, we've been told it's this,"

She struggles to articulate her thoughts again. “This, magical cure-all, for hundreds of years!"

The three of us have no need to agree with her aloud.

Of course we know this is true. How could we not?

I've discussed American history with Chara and the Inertia Society as long as I've known them.

Touring's words spill out, as if--

As if she's afraid she'll be silenced at any moment.

"How can we vote for our laws and government officials when monster education's so skewed toward outdated, state-written history?"

[She's looking at us!]

"Like the Plaque!" Touring insists. "Pauline. Chara: have you guys thought about why the Plaque's even there!?"

"How we can teach THAT to our children and yet advocate for freedom of information at the same time!?"

I don't answer.

We don’t answer.

How can we answer?

We haven't thought about it. We never had reason to talk about it.

Bitterness: "The only reason the Plaque's still there's 'cause we've grown too attached to it.

"We haven't learned yet: not everything we’ve made’s superior to humans."

"There're lots of things you guys got right."

"And I mean it."

How can Touring go from being on the verge of tears to Undyne levels of passion to cold resentment to blunt honesty in the span of a couple minutes?

This thought preoccupies me so completely that I find it hard to listen to Touring, who is suppressing her emotions as much as she can. Even so, purple and orange magic bloom to life around her, and we welcome it.

She insists again: "Monsters need to be educated first.

"In HUMAN affairs.

"In the RIGHT human affairs."

"And superstitions like religion… they're AREN'T the right things.

"Gasterite culture has no use for those things."
She has barely finished speaking when voices ripple across the room: "The Gasterocracy!"

"Exactly."

Chara and I start as Touring receives an… almost inaudible response.

"You want to tear down the Judgment Hall?

"Now?"

She responds with no hesitation: "Yes and no, Judge Sans."

Touring’s fear has all but disappeared. "We wanted Pauline's Judgment to be the last one here.

"And it’s true.

"I DO want to tear this place down!"

Frantically: "But I didn't wanna do it now! You have to believe me they--!

"Don't dig any deeper to dredge up the dregs of magic in devotion to this endeavor, trala."

"[{SHAKUR!?}]"

A short pause, as the boat valet walks forward.

Sans catches his breath in surprise.

"Since you've slated this space as a soap box, Judge Sans, I second Touring's request to speak."

6[{[[Daaaaaamn she's--they're--gooooooood.]]}]

[Wow: I never thought I'd see Sans stare at Shakur for soooooo looooonng and soooooo haaaaaaaaard…]

They don’t wwait for him to answer.

They begin smoothly: "I know the scope of what you know overshadows ours a thousand-fold, Judge Sans,"

[[Wooooooow Shakur's not flattering him at aaaaaaal!]]

T[Seriously you think they wouldn't they damn well need to soften him up!]T

[[{Yeah but still!!}]}

"--so you surely must be privy to THIS concept."

They say clearly: "Religion as the opiate of the masses--"

[What’s that?]

I hurriedly reply: {Don't ask—}

[Seriously?]

{It's a looooonng story.}
"Yes."
"In that case, you must know why monsters, young and old, prize the Plaque so highly trala."

I lean toward Shakur, eager for their explanation.

"The Angel Who has Seen the Surface… THAT is our religion.

"THEY are the opiate for the masses.

“One of many.

"The Inertia Rune and the Delta Rune derive meaning from the methods of finding this Angel they represent respectively. Surely you must have pondered this notion?"

[He nodded—]

{{[Took him long enough.]}}

"The Angel, Inertia Rune, and Delta Rune exist for the same reason."

Softly: "Because they offer hope."

Nervous, buzzing anticipation from the monsters around us, feeding off our own emotions.

"One offers hope through science, and technology, and testing the limits of what exists. It desires to create something new, many somethings that are new.

“With enough intelligence and late nights staring at a circuit and--"

They enunciate, "Determination--"

6[{{Eh!}}]6

"--they would succeed.

“They MUST succeed.

“Any of them could be the Angel, if they just thought hard enough or worked hard enough or channeled enough of our pain.”

An information-absorbing pause.

"The other offers hope by being in touch with one's emotions, and faith, and what already exists.

"Doing more with less.

"Having faith that if something better is to come along, we can’t hasten its arrival.

"We have to be patient.

“But when that opportunity arrives, we shouldn’t let something so burdening as rationality or logic get in the way.

“Pauline? Chara?"

We turn toward Shakur’s voice.
“It may seem simplistic, but there really are monsters who think like this trala. I would delve into the deeper meaning of these supposedly diametrically-opposed opinions, but I’m afraid I’m not the proper monster to ask.”

Silence.

{I mean they're right I guess.}

[I didn't know that—]

{What?}

[Yeah I never learned this—]

{But—}

[I guess I didn't live long enough to learn it.]

A[You learned it just by living here.]A

As calmly as ever: "But mind you: none of us charge the ‘OTHER side’ or any other side for being unreasonable trala.

“Neither do most Gasterites or those who you know as Dreemurrites see each other as enemies.

“In fact,”

Wistfully: "I bore an Inertia Rune once. Not too long ago.

"Gaster sewed the Delta Rune to his lab coat, in centuries past.

"For in centuries past there were Inertia Society members who treated science and technology like religion.

“There still are.

"And there are those who cling to the Dreemurrite court because they think it’s the only thing monsters truly made themselves.

"And there are too many equally-valid points of view besides these that I can’t even begin to do justice to trala."

Another silence, punctuated only by the faint whispers of monsters.

Everyone shudders and stops mid-sentence as Sans replies: *"The Judgment is an opiate, then?"

"Yes trala." Shakur seems completely unfazed by Sans's cold retort. "Actually, now that you have revealed the revelation that humans and sufficiently-determined monsters can manipulate time to their whims, there is little, if any chance for there to be a meaningful afterlife, let alone reason for any of us to believe in one."

Everyone, even Touring, murmurs in agreement.

"No.

“To some, the Delta Rune elevates the Judgment to the status of a religion.
“And if it wasn’t one before, you’ve officially garnered the respect inherent to one trala.”

Shakur walks toward us, until their cloaked limbs wrap around Chara and my shoulders.


“Both of you must know by now that the Delta Rune forms a triangle. The winged circle forms its topmost point. And the trapezoid comprised of three triangles forms its base trala?"

"Yeeeeeeah...?"

"Well has anyone ever told you what each component signifies?"

"Noooooo...?"

Some emotion masked behind their normal soothing tone: "That doesn’t surprise me at all.

“To put shortly: the leftmost triangle represents the Inertia Society, for left-handed individuals are often associated with cleverness, and creativity...

“And to some, radicalism.

"The rightmost triangle signifies the state. The Dreemurrite government, as you know it. The stability of the monarchy. A counterweight to the Inertia Society, if you may trala.”

They pause as I visualize the Delta Rune. They continue after a moment.

"The triangle nestled between them is the populous, seemingly supported by those on either side. Balanced on its tip, and yet, prevented from falling by those around them.

"In this position they are protected from whatever may harm them.

“To some these triangles seem to resemble a scale, though it is somewhat separate from what humans call a scale trala.”

Shakur is about to continue when Chara interrupts.

"The top of the triangle.

"That's the Judge, isn't it?"

I freeze.

"The circle’s not connected to anything cause they don't answer to anyone.

"And that’s 'cause they're above everyone else.

“Even the king.”

Chara's voice, body, and soul shake as they state: "Cause their power sets them apart. EVERYBODY knows that.

“And EVERYBODY knows power is knowledge for the Judge.”

{What? Isn’t the opposite—}

"’Cause the Judge has to do sooo much stuff to get so strong so they know more about magic and
the soul and...”

Fear and understanding completely out of place for their age... and yet, I’m not surprised by it anymore.

"And what’s moral and what’s not...

“Than we do.

"And we AAAAAAAALL know knowledge is power."

Shakur's silence requires no clarification.

Reeling from the profoundness of Chara's speech, I find it difficult to concentrate on Shakur.

"You have a way with words, Chara.

“"You’re right, as circular as that sounds.”

They take a breath. "No one doubts that in wartime the Judge wields great power: magical, moral, and political.

“And upon reflection I find my past bashing of those who claimed the war had never ended foolish. I can’t be the only one who’s done this.”

Ever so faint murmurs of agreement from the crowd, Chara, and myself.

If Shakur hasn’t made it clear enough: “The war hasn’t ended trala.

“"And because the war hasn’t ended we SHOULD grant someone the title of Judge.

“"We should’ve done so as soon as the Barrier came up trala.”

Silence.

“"We should AT LEAST concede that Judge Sans deserves his title and the power it entails.

“"I think he deserves even more power Than that.”

They chuckle. “After what we’ve seen how could he not?”

A silence where no one needs to speak to agree with them.

“"And besides: who are we to doubt him?”

No one answers.

“"But this is not why I’ve humbled myself before you, Judge Sans.

“"I do so to make an observation.

“"What I think is that we need more than just material security.”

Silence.

""We need someone to look up to."
Silence.

"We need someone to reign in society."

Silence.

In a continuous stream of words: "We need someone to determine what is right and wrong.

"We need someone who will take our ideas of right and wrong, crime and punishment, what we value, what we despise... and act on that knowledge.

"We need someone who knows how we’ve acted in the best of times, and in the worst of times.

"Someone who’s seen each of us at our most selfless and our most selfish.

"Someone who’s seen each of us gain the whole distribution of values of Execution Points.

"And that kind of autocratic power will serve us well when the Barrier breaks, or if we ever go to war again."

Barely-contained desperation and desire. “And even if we don’t go to war again I think we need a truly unshakable constant in our lives.”

Awe, fear, and... reverence... as Shakur lets go of us.

[They’re... bowing toward Sans.]

"And who better to fill all these roles than the Judge?"

**Stop the music.**

I have no need to reply.

I understand their reasoning, even if I don’t agree with all of it.

Just as I am about to speak, somewhat confident I’ve thought of a sufficiently-profound reply...

*Stop the music at 2:47.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnDJdwp_Gq8

A monster shouts from behind us. "NO!"

Another monster agrees: "He deserves so much more!"

A third, angrily: "You can’t say what Judge Sans can and can't do!"

A fourth: “Shut up he's the one in power here!"

"NO the Judge isn't like that he’s—"

Another: "Why can’t Judge Sans depose Asgore?"

A scream, presumably from a Gasterocracy member: "Judge Sans and Dr. Gaster and Sir Papyrus should rule!"

Chara and I aren’t even surprised anymore. We wait for the inevitable.
"—forbid that! Practicing religion's an explicit right!"

"—a religion based around our culture, why not Judge Sans?"

"—the power to alter the government! You're disrespecting the king!"

"—voting! Touring's right! We have to vote--"

"—can't support tyranny! The French didn’t! Why should we?!"

"—abuse his power! What's stopping him from killing anyone he wants?"

"Judge Sans knows he haaaas to!"

"He HAAAAAAS to be the Angel!!"

"He can teach us everything!!"

"You're stupid!"

"No YOU'RE stupid!"

"Give me liberty or give me death!"

"Kill or be killed!"

"Break our inertia!"

"LIES!"

"DAMNED LIES!"

"STATISTICS!"

Right on cue, the inevitable comes.

Purple magic flings monsters up in the air, sending them crashing into pillars. They fall back down, bowling over monsters on the ground. Orange magic sets clothing alight, the all-too-familiar scent of burned fabric wafting toward us. Feverish gunshot-like bangs ring out, not too dissimilar to Kari, when she cast magic, in her last moments.

In the distance, we hear the all-too-familiar hissing and crashing of Gaster blasters.

Somehow, Chara and I do not panic. We stand amidst the chaos, waiting for... something.

All of a sudden, wind blows past us—

No.

It is ether.

The ether in the air is... rushing past us. It pushes on us so we lean in the direction it blows, but we do not fall.

As it rips at our clothes, monsters... cry out in protest?

“Duuuude what’s going on?”
"What gives!?!"
“My magic!”
"Who could’ve done this!?!"
"This is impossible!”
"This is madness!”
"MADNESS? THIS! IS——!"

All at once, any and all complaints die down.

Chara and I stand completely still as the thud of heavy boots echoes through the room.

The floor shakes as those heavy footsteps enter the midst of the crowd.

Eventually, Judge Sans stops walking and begins to speak, every word a hammer blow. If it weren’t for our fear of moving out of turn, we would clamp our hands over our ears and squeeze our eyes shut. His conviction, manifested via short bursts of magic, sears our souls anew.

*"Must I cite my first act as Judge?"

*"Only I may cast magic here.””

Papyrus, Chara, Touring and I can't help but comment.

-”[Ooooooooh shiiiiit!]”-

More muffled protests: "Hey man what gives?"

"Who the hell do you think you are!?!"

"I fucked up...”

Sharply, to the whole crowd: *"Have you leave to speak?"”

We repeat, quieter this time: -”[{Oooooh shiiiiit.}]”-

Various replies of “No” in varying tones: suppressed anger, exasperation, sheepishness and... fear.

The complaints die down, but not completely.

Disconcerting calm: *"Papyrus’s Judgment shall commence."

*"You shan’t cast magic again.”*

Silence where the weight of the blue and yellow magic and determination around us forces Chara and I to our knees.

Murmurs of “Yes,” and a few moments of silence as the descentors’ voices fade away.

The issuing of a familiar command.

*"Papyrus."
"Step forward."

Bones rattling, chest heaving, Papyrus obeys, walking the same path Judge Sans just walked, the magic in the air subsiding moment by moment.

Several nerve-racking moments of silence after Papyrus reaches him.

He shudders as he kneels for a second time, the magic cast on the crowd vanishing as his patellas click against the marble floor.

An awed mental whisper: [Papyrus's soul is glowing blue.

[I can't look at it it's too bright.]

As Chara observes him, blue and yellow magic grip his soul, snuffing out his orange magic.

Judge Sans intones: "Now.

"You will be judged."

Monsters begin to whisper again.

"You will be judged for your every action."

The whispers grow louder, and the crowd's magic slowly intensifies. [No no no no no didn’t you hear what he just said!??]

"You will be judged for every Execution Point you have earned."

The rustling of wings and legs and the scraping of claws against the floor, behind Judge Sans.

"And I—"

Mid-proclamation, several monsters yell in unison.

"GRAB HIM!"

Affirmative shouts in reply.

Chara and I fall forward onto the floor, and Papyrus whooshes through the air to land on top of us.

"NO!!!"

He promptly pushes off of us and sprints back toward his brother, Chara dragging me along as we follow him.

A knot of monsters shout in protest in front of us.

"Seriously!?"

"You can't do this!"

"Magic’s our right!"

"Who’re you to—"

A flash so bright I have to squeeze my eyes shut... immediately followed by a chorus of familiar
voices.

"Judge Sans!

"Oh b-b-b-by T-T-T-Tesla you're h-h-h-hurt! What c-c-c-can me and my dads d-d-d-d-do for you?"

"Judge Sans!

"I don't know what you need me for—but if it's healing items or ice packs but mostly ice cream I got you!

"Cause fucking hell you need them..."

"Judge Sans...

"I... I am terribly sorry. My emotions... they completely overpowered me! I never should have reacted so readily to the psychophysiological states of my fellow spectators. My yellow magic—"

"That can wait."

Everyone stops talking at once.

Ever so slightly less put together: *"Listen."

*"Before my determination fails."

As he takes a shaky breath, bursts of magic from the crowd surrounding Judge Sans escape toward us.

*"Alphys. Touring."

*"Secure the Lab. Halt the belts and lock the CORE."

"Y-y-y-yes Judge Sans!"

"Right away, Judge Sans."

Papyrus yelps in pain and surprise, and Chara and I flinch as his bones rattle beside us.

*"Gaster."

*"Route all non-vital magic here."

"With all haste, Judge Sans."

Chara pushes me to the side, a tendril of purple magic shooting past us.

*"Curie? el-Shabaz?"

*"Procure civilian aid."

Alphys’s parents say in unison, “With pleasure, Judge Sans.”

Undyne, solemnly: "I give my body mind and soul in service to you, Judge Sans."

Papyrus abruptly hauls me into the air and sets me down closer to him. "Damned bullets. By
Faraday’s lisp stop attacking him!”

Orange magic surrounds Papyrus, Chara, and I, monsters shrieking as they touch it.

More urgently now: *"You two.*

*"Wait in Asgore's basement."*

"But for how long this could—!"

*"When I have restored peace—"*

"BUT—!"

*"CHARA."

*"PLEASE."

Shaking with fresh tears, Chara takes my hand. "Only for your sake, Judge Sans."

Even as the crowd’s magic heightens in strength, we still manage to hear one last command.

*"Papyrus?"

*"Do your duty."*

Judge Sans receives a whispered, resolute reply.

"To atone for my sins, Judge Sans."

Papyrus pushes Chara and I forward, an object slamming into my chest. Chara grabs it and positions my fingers around the Monado’s hilt.

"I'm sorry I could not drop it in your hand human—"

"It's fine!"

I grip Chara’s left wrist, their left arm extending out behind them. Just as we begin to move, the burning of determination rushes by us, and monsters’ attacks intensify.

The monsters who apprehended Judge Sans can cast magic again.

Bullets clang against Mjolnir’s exterior, and the sizzle of yellow magic plays on my tongue. As it grows stronger, stinging the cuts on my body anew, excitement rises in Chara’s soul.

*"GO!"*

We oblige.

I activate Monado Speed, Chara’s presence guiding me through the crowd. As we proceed to jump over and sprint through the ensuing riot, Gaster blasters and formations of bones cover our escape, monsters yelling in pain as they make contact.

We vault into the air, a voice rising behind us.

We are more than relieved to hear it.
*Me? Spare YOU?*

**"You defied me.**

**"Why should I spare you?**

**"I shall defend my title.**

**"Even if it kills you!"**

The implications of that promise prove more than sufficient to motivate Chara and I to run out of the Judgment Hall as fast as we can.

**If it’s still playing, stop the music.**

Our footsteps and the beeping of the Monado are drowned out by the hiss of Gaster Blasters and the screeches of monsters foolish enough to try attacking us. All I know is that at some point, urgency shoots through Chara’s soul and into mine.

-“[STOOOOOOOP!]”-

My shoes skid on the gravel, my right hand reaching out under Chara’s power as we wrench open a heavy door. We squeeze inside, a Gaster blaster firing just behind my head, several monsters scattering as its beam emerges into the air. Just as I’m about to reach for the handle and close the door, Chara pushes me forward so my arm is nowhere near it.

It slams shut with a crash.

Monsters pound on it, each blow on the metal punctuated by Gaster blasters, the clattering of bones, and screams. “That wasn’t me—“

“I know—“

“Like seriously the door’s glowing sooooo blue I don’t wanna look at it. I think I’m gonna go blind —“

My left hand squeezes the Monado, activating Monado Speed. We walk forward a few more feet before beginning to descend some stairs.

When we reach the bottom, Chara guides me to the wall beside the stairwell, where I sit down heavily. After Monado Speed wears off, and I catch my breath, they convince me to unequip Mjolnir. They take a bottle of water out of it. “Like can we share—“

“Oh heeeell nooo—!”

“Dude there’s not enough for both of us.

“And seriously we literally just died like... I don’t even wanna know how many times.

“Either we share water bottles and it’s okay ‘cause we don’t live long enough to get STIs or we DOOOOOOO live long enough and we get free health care--”

I consider before huffing “Fine.

“But don’t fuck up.”
After I take a sip and cap it, I pass the bottle to Chara. Just as they open it again—

“AAAAAAAAH!”

A fleck of water splats against my face.

S[I toooooolld yooooooou! You should've asked if they wanted help first!]S

T[Oh come on why not do it now? They’ve rested and they’re not dead so--]T

E[Okay that joke’s bad even for us. What the fuck happened to your moral fiber?]E

D[Yeeeeeeyah! He’s right! That’s mean! Even if it IIIIS true!]D

A[Chara’s right: the smart thing’s to share water bottles now and deal with the STIs later.]A

K[Uh guys? Get the lights. Like I know Pauline won’t care but Chara will. It’s only fair.]K

Chapter End Notes

Here's the original URL for Bone of Patience.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcxIjI7pTFE

Here's the URL for Ace Waters's Megalovania!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnDJdwp_Gq8

Yes: the Second Six Souls are heeere booooyys!

That, and very complicated political/sociological/theological headcanons!

I tried my very best to not make Touring's and Shakur's viewpoints opposites of each other, because they're not. They're just two different ways of achieving the same goal. That's why I had Shakur point it out. That, and I honestly can't see all monsters seeing technology/science and religion/faith as being opposites, even if they were imprisoned in the early 1700s...

Yeah: Will saying his parents supported the Gasterocracy turned out to be important after all! That, and the existence of the Inertia Rune/Undyne wearing it on her armor. Let's just say my thought process behind devising the various viewpoints monsters could hold regarding the role of technology/science/religion/faith in their lives is... complicated... I'll write about it in full soon.

What I can say now without spoilers is that basically everyone thinks Judge Sans deserves his title. The points of contention lie in what role he plays other than representing monsterkind in times of war, judging monsters and humans, and keeping the peace. Some Dreemurrrites think he is worthy of worship, and the more extreme Inertia Society members and Inertia Rune bearers think the religious undertones of the Judgment should be removed, seeing as the religions the Judgment is based off of are human-made.
More on that soon...

Regardless, yeah: Judge Sans is officially the ruling power in the Underground. Make of that what you will.

Also be careful what you say... ’cause what's freedom of speech?

As for the music choices, I chose Bone of Patience because it seems... well... fanatical... in a way Spear of Justice isn't. It's resolute and uncompromising in ways Spear of Justice isn't. The beat reminds me of the sound of boots marching against the floor. In fact, my original idea was that while it plays, Judge Sans would have a much longer outburst than he does here.

The first phase of Ace Water's Megalovania feels both... determined... and in control, due to being in a higher key than the original Undertale's Megalovania, and having fewer and slower drums. That, and the additional guitar solo near the end and the church organs clinched it for me... because seriously the Judgment Hall is basically a church! The organ is mandatory by Tesla!

This Megalovania represents Sans setting aside his objections to Chara and my actions and realizing that maintaining order out-prioritizes all else. Judging Papyrus, though important, must wait. In the meantime, he must exercise every ounce of power he has to defend us, and the innocents in the Judgment Hall.

His greatly-increased power: magical, moral, and political, and control over it, manifest via the higher pitch. The dignity behind his newly-acquired title manifests via the slower, more rhythmic drums and church organ awesomeness.

Yeah: bad times for everyone, whether they bear the Inertia Rune, the Delta Rune, or neither. If anyone defies him, then... well, as that one famous Undertale comic, "Neutral Route Judgments are Underrated," once said, "GET OUT OF MY CHURCH!"

I'm curious about your thoughts on Touring's, Shakur's, the spectators', and Judge Sans's courses of action in this chapter, because that could lead to... interesting discussions regarding the common good and morality and other philosophical topics I can't name off the top of my head.

I'm curious about that, and what you all think of the Second Six Souls officially being characters in Visiontale now.
Chapter 44

Chapter Summary

After two months of silence, theory-editing, and movie-watching, I'm back!

If you want backstory on this chapter, read the endnotes.

Regardless, here's the key for the dialogue notation from now on.


Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

44

“Wait wait wait what the fuck who the hell are you people!?"

An observant, Shulk-like voice, but missing the vast majority of his British accent. A[Okay. That's good it wasn't a “Whaaat!?” like it usually is--]A

An energetic, peppy voice. T[And she's like, not freaking out in the “Holy shit I'm crazy and I'm hallucinating 'cause I'm slowly bleeding to death!” kind of way so… yeah I'm with you on that one--]T

A slightly high-pitched, reassuring voice. D[But you were right Steven: she still assumed we were people--]D

A chorus of voices: 6[Racist.]6

A… sheepish reply to the snarky banter…

Chara snickering as someone… he?

SIMON.

They're laughing as Simon talks.

A level, male voice: S[Let her rant first. Remember what happened to Tailor when she first woke up? She like… nearly burned me to death!]S

“[Lovely-]"

D[I thought you'd let up on the body horror humor Simon! And you're sposed to be the patient one who doesn't say anything stupid and doesn't act before they think…]D

Chara scoots closer to me on the floor. “Come on. Breathe…”
They pause. “Breeeeeeathe,” they insist.

I oblige, inhaling and exhaling deeply several times over.

I obey them without hesitation.

I've grown so accustomed to their presence... guidance... that even now, after I've become aware of how intrusive they have been, I obey them without question.

“KEEEEEEEP breathing…”

I appreciate their efforts to calm me down… but they still fail to shake off the relative calm of everyone else.

Though everyone else's lack of reactions disconcerts me, I continue breathing.

“Breeeeeathe… and don't say your life's flashing before your eyes or something 'cause we aaaaaall know that's bullshit--”

[Ugh...]

I groan… and everyone else follows. E[Seriously Chara? You're making us look bad!]

E[And besides: that didn't happen to you.]

E[And it sure as hell didn't happen to us--]E

How could he...

STEVEN.

How could Steven make such a vivid, candid... haunting observation, completely out of the blue?

He just talked about his and his friends' deaths as casually as I would ramble on about Shulk.

His comments shock me and are almost more of a gut punch than everything Judge Sans has told me.

Almost.

A[Let her be all crazylike for a little longer. Then we'll explain everything.]

A[Tastefully.]A

I completely ignore this guy's—

Adam's—

I completely ignore Adam’s weak attempts at being funny.

Almost.

In spite of myself, I snicker for a moment.


“Get all the crazy out... 'cause when that's all over we have a tooooooon of explaining to do-"
They've turned their head toward me as opposed to talking to… whoever's in front of us.

A girl giggles. “Fuck off Kari.”

K[Sorry.]K

I collect myself as best I can, following her lead in trying not to remember the obligatory pun…

I fail.

We all fail.

*Loop until the next note.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIJ3DC2xgAI

… … … “So you guys've been stalking me this whole time?”

“6[Yeh.]6”

K[Basically every time you've made an observation that you never could've made without Chara telling you... or hell most of the time even if they DID tell you—

K[That was us.

K[Every time you would've freaked out but you stayed calm...

K[That was us.

K[Every time you made some crazy observation you freaked out about afterward ‘cause you couldn’t believe you came up with it...

K[That was us.

K[Sometimes.

K[Whenever Chara said something you thought they couldn't have known 'cause they're like... eleven or something... even though they never finished fourth grade...

K[That was us.

K[Most of the time.]K

“When you assumed that the Underground was a different world, not a different place... THAT was them.

“Mostly.”

“So you're like... alive—“

Chara and I being caught off guard by a stinging rebuke. A[We're CONSCIOUS.

A[Not ALIVE.

A[The last time any of us was alive was when Kari got shot by those Edisondamned Dreemurrites in the CORE at the beginning of Kindness 195X.
A[That was like... five-and-a-half-ish surface years ago...?]

D[So that means the Determination Study started at the beginning of Kindness 196X.]

“Uh... yeah,” I verify the date. “Huh. Right before Giftmas-“

A[Um, actually it's three weeks BEFORE Giftmas but,,, eh. Who's counting?]A

{{[Uh you are...?]}}

T[Dude I love how you call it that--]T

“I mean why wouldn't I?”

TK[That's fair.]Tk

K[Aaaaaaanyway... basically the Determination Study started at that time. And as you know the monster testing stage happened at the very end. Like, it started at the end of Determination 199X and ended in the middle of Patience 200X--]K

“Holy shit that's not that long at all!!”

K[Yeeeah...]

K[Hmmm... they never told you the timetable for everything did they?]K

I don't answer... Kari's... question.

K[I guess that's fair.

K[It wouldn't have mattered that you knew when everything went to shit.

K[Only that you did.]K

None of us need to agree in words.

“So you've like, been controlling Chara like how Chara's been controlling me?”

6[Yeh.

6[It's more complicated than that but yeh.]6

“So like,” I reply carefully, “you've been down here for almost two surface years?”

6[Mm-hmm]6

Tailor, strangely wistfully. From what little I know about her, she seems... out of character.

T[I keep forgetting about that. That the surface year's longer than the Dreemurrite year. Well technically it's not but... you know what I mean. The only reason we know time's passing's 'cause of the clock on the wall and our computers--]T

“Computers?”

E[What you thought Alphys'd leave us down here without anything to keep us busy?]E

“Uh...”
We have everything we need down here: ether to sustain us, our own generators, our computers, privacy partition things, everything.

“I mean…” I try wrapping my head around it, “I guess but… still.

“You guys've been down here for almost two years… and you… couldn't--can't--leave.”

A couple of the Souls confirm my suspicions.

“By Tesla…” I breathe.

It could've been worse.

It was Adam's idea to stay down here, in stasis.

’Cause back in the True Lab we talked about what we'd do down here, till Asgore…

Delicately:

“Needed” us.

Simon doesn't sound anywhere near his age.

He doesn't sound ten or eleven or... however old he should be, physically or psychologically.

No.

He sounds… terribly old.

He sounds so mature that when he speaks, my heart aches with every word. Every word seems so out of place.

He SHOULDN'T sound like this but… how could he not?

He sounds exactly like how Gaster sounded while recalling his experiences in the Void, or rather, what his experiences were not. Explaining what his life was NOT like back then is infinitely easier than pinning down what it WAS like.

He sounds like Papyrus, while he struggled to describe the nature of the resets, or rather, what they are not.

I asked everyone whether they'd wanna be conscious when Asgore... took us outside... to break the Barrier.

Whether we'd wanna feel ourselves... melt away... and eat away at it…

Whether we'd wanna know what it felt like to… touch… another human's soul. But I guess Chara already knows what that's like.

I immediately relate to the Souls' struggle to put their soulological experiences into words. From my discussions with Dewey, and Papyrus's commentary in the Judgment Hall, finding accurate and genuine language to describe any experience involving the soul has eluded everyone for hundreds of years.

Even Gaster, who has had eternities to perfect his eloquent manner of speaking, sometimes describes himself into a corner. Instead, he resorts to projecting a minute portion of his field of knowing toward anyone else in the conversation, for his emotions and thoughts convey what he intended to say more succinctly than any obscure adjective or noun or Latin phrase.
Seven someones who haven't been alive in more than three hundred years. Even less alive than us.

Whether we wanted to feel the determination in our souls fight to keep us alive… when we haven't really been alive in a long, long time.

I'd go into our discussions on whether our desire to live's a thing when we're technically dead already but… ehh.

I sit, entranced, as Adam continues to talk. As much as I want to tune him out, I can't. His points are as valid as they are horrifying.

That, and his voice is more monster than human.

His voice has no physical component.

The air around us remains still and doesn't vibrate as the sound waves comprising his voice travel through it to hit my eardrums and stimulate my temporal lobe. Any surface recording equipment in the room would only register silence, save my talking. Surface cameras and microphones would need special filters to pick up and interpret soulological impulses.

The tug of purple magic, and the, unsteady… contact, of Adam's field of knowing against mine, conveys what I need to know.

My unease toward his soul clinging to mine, and his soul remaining in place in spite of it, tells me what I never wanted, but have no choice but to know.

A pair of nervous and completely out of place laughs. After a while we realized: we've been through hell together. Monsterkind's understanding of the Barrier and psychophysiology and soulology advanced by leaps and bounds while we were around.

If it weren't for us, the Inertia Society'd be much worse off.

And besides: we weren't in a hurry to go anywhere. We might as well spend the days, months, years, we had together.

He's right.

Should my readiness to agree with his morbid and stark point scare me or reassure me?

It'd be just like normal, back in the True Lab.

Even the part when everyone stopped talking to us--

"How's that anywhere near 'how things were'!?"

Simon replies smoothly… which unnerves me to no end. Cause like in the True Lab, we can talk all day without disturbing anyone. We'd turn off our vocal recreation equipment at night. We turned it on just now, when Paps told us you'd be coming down here 'cause we thought it'd be weird for you to talk to us telepathically.

That and everyone stopped talking verbally. They didn't have to move their lips while talking to us.

We didn't have to. So why should they?
S[They talked to us how monsters used to talk, before the Holistic Integration Movement started: via direct interfacing between souls and fields of knowing.]S

He's not wrong.

I consider his explanation. “Yeah… you're right.”

K[What: no “Whaaaat!” about Paps contacting us before you got here?]K

I sigh. “Ehh. I don't even know anymore. I mean Sans—“

The Second Six Souls and Chara cut me off: “6[Judge Sans--]6”

“I mean Judge Sans told Papyrus to do his duty,” I correct. “which is like, really vague, so…”

K[Yeah he was talking about us.

K[You know that bugout bag, from a hella long time ago?]K

“You mean the ‘if zombies come I grab this and get the fuck out' bag?”

The room erupts with laughter. A[Yeah true.]A

E[Yeah that bag had a phone in it. He called us. Everyone in the Determination Study chose him 'cause… wel… Paps was hated the least.]E

My understanding and resigned sigh surprises no one.

D[No one'd suspect him.

D[And well… we wanted him to do it.

D[If anyone was going to accompany us to our then-inevitable deaths for the greater good we wanted it to be Papyrus.]D

“Lovely.”

D[So yeah: Paps called us as you guys got the fuck out of the Judgment Hall-]D

“How'd you even hear him!? We like, stopped being able to hear stuff almost as soon as we started running! I was scared Pauline wouldn't hear my Monado Art switching cue thingies.”

T[He texted us.]T

A moment of incredulity.

{Are you for real?}

T[You think I'd make that up!?]T

{[... Uh... noooooo...??]}

T]He sent us orders only we’d understand. Not even Judge sans knows them.]T

Stop the music.

The sensation of someone leaning in toward me and lowering their voice, orange magic tingling
against the front of my shirt and my face. T[You wanna know what he said?]T

“[[Uh…]]”

T[Aww come on it's not thaaaaat weird.]T

Chara and I aren't convinced.

T[He told us…]T

A deterring “[Noooo…?]”

T[He toooooold us--]

Both of us, in unison: “[[No no no no nooooooo…]]”

[HE TOOOOOOLD UUUUUUUS…]

Tailor seems to pause for dramatic affect.

I give up on trying to interrupt her.

“[[*defeated sigh…*]]”

I don't even question how she can even take a breath when she doesn't have physical lungs.

I start as she whispers in what sounds like the most gravelly voice she can muster.

T[Hello Adam.]

T[I want to play a game.]T

Play until the end of the chapter.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhSHXGM7kgE

“What the hell-“ I begin to ask, only for several voices to interject.

Chara, in my ear: “Come on. We all know you know what it means.

“We all know you read about the Saw movies in high school.

“It's Jigsaw's catchphrase.”

A[Um, actually it's just one of them…?]A

“One of them.”

A[Paps used it 'cause for one: he was with us when we watched the Saw films and compared Judge Sans to Jigsaw--]A

“Whaaaaaat!?!”

S[We'll explain later--]S

“Fuck that I wanna know why nooooow!“
Trust me: it's worth the wait.

"But—"

Even I'd wait on it

"Fine..."

Second, well… we… this is only relevant for us but not for Paps so…

You know how you and Chara got fucked up when Undyne fought you 'cause Chara said you didn't have working eyes for them to control?

“yeah...?”

And how Chara said that determination can't give you your sight back?

“Yeah...? I always thought that was weird...”

And how Alphys said that determination's the form of magic based around doing the impossible?

“Duh!"

“And how everyone's been saying 'Magic's a matter of degrees?'”

“Why're you guys telling me this stuff? How could I forget?”

Well… what if we said that all those things aren't mutually exclusive?

It's true that what magic someone casts depends on their life experiences.

And yes: determination does the impossible.

But we realized.

What's “impossible” for each person's different.

So each person'll overcome impossible things differently.

I stop dead.

Why’d you think defying death is called “loading” a “save file”?

It's 'cause everyone who studied determination… and everyone who was determined, knew about games.

So when Alphys said magic-induced DMT let us do all the stuff she ASSOCIATED with defying death… it LITERALLY did that.

As for RPG mechanics being a thing?

That's 'cause gaming and magic go together.

[I mean think about it! The first video games were digital versions of tabletop games like D&D and stuff! And they had magic! And stats!]
How else would magic manifest if stats like HP and AT and DF were what we ALL thought of when we thought about magic?

[Humans AND monsters?]K

Why do you think save points stopped being in set places?

[It’s ‘cause of you and Xenoblade.

[Chara’s knowledge of save points came from ChronoTrigger, where they appear in only certain places.

[You can save wherever you want in Xenoblade.

[And since you were most determined, you made that real.]E

It doesn't stop.

[And well… there's also the fact that most of the forms of magic the monsters and us can use are shaped by the experiences of the First Seven Souls.

[So that's why bravery's fire.

[And why justice's like, projectiles and stuff.]

“True.”

Just when I assumed the information has stopped flowing, Chara proves me very, very wrong.

“The more similar a monster or human's experiences are to one of the First Seven Souls, the stronger their magic'll be. And the more similar their magic'll be to theirs.

“Why'd you think Undyne's shields stopped us from moving?”

I am about to answer when Chara literally steals my words out of my mouth, quoting what I would have told them.

“It's ’cause her sense of justice was stronger than her notions of kindness.”

What they say next, I had not inferred, however: “She was more similar to the First Soul of Justice than the First Soul of Kindness, ’cause she thought giving you a shield was FAIR, not KIND.

“And her idea of being 'kind' was helping you to face danger.”

[And the forms the colors of magic take depend on what the First Seven Souls DIDN'T experience just as much as what they DID experience.

[If not more so.

[Like, they didn’t know about teleportation.

[Teleportation's so rare ‘cause only Judge Sans went through the scientific and cultural training that'd let him do it…]T

[That's why monsters need training to focus their magic. So their conceptions of how something works plays out how they intended. So they know how their concept of how stuff works is affected
by the laws of physics.

D[Or not.]

A[They're-we're-still breaking the laws of physics. But we still have to know about how things USUALLY work.

A[That if someone's grasp of telekinesis defying gravity isn't solid enough their stuff'll fall down when they try to make it float.

A[That no matter how well they know how telekinesis works in Carrie they still have to know what acceleration is, and that acceleration due to gravity's 9.8 m/s^2 or 32 ft/s^2.

A[Or if someone doesn't get that matter can't be created or destroyed… on macroscopic levels… then they won't be able to cast attacks properly. 'Cause they don't know how their attacks will interact with the environment or the reactions they’re replicating by doing it.

A[For monsters knowing literally is half the battle.]A

K[So that's why only Sans has Karmic Retribution--]K

“Heh?”

K[His damage over time.]K

D[And well… his stat dropping thing's… unique as well.

D[That was the first time we saw something like that, even after Chara told us about all the other timelines.]D

“So, he must be REAAAAAALLY similar to the First Soul of Justice…” I muse.

K[Mm-hmm.

K[And since that form of magic's so strong, and he's the only one who has it, we're almost certain the First Soul of Justice had it too.]K

Steven, in a disarmingly gentle voice. E[The Occum’s Razor version’s that every form of magic's based on the experiences of the First Seven Souls in every way.

E[What they KNEW...]

E[What they DIDN’T know]

E[And what they NEVER could have known.]E

It makes sense.

How did I never consider this?

Gaster even alluded to it, all those months ago, when he exhibited the CORE to me.

E[As for the things they DID know?]

E[NO matter what they thought in life they agreed on enough things.

E[Everyone knows that kindness is protecting your own from harm… whatever that is.
E[And that bravery means doing things in the face of danger and when no one else has the courage to act and doing impulsive stuff for the hell of it.

E[They're conflicting ideas but that doesn't matter.

E[What matters is that THEY thought they were all true.

ESo kindness manifests via healing and shields.]E

D[But for Undyne, her concept of justice… tainted… her concept of kindness. SO that's why you couldn't move when using her shield.]D

Kari begins to talk once I've absorbed this information, mimicking Adam and Gaster's… infinite age increase.

K[Justice is… not like that.

K[Even more than magic already is, justice is… subjective.

K[I think it's the most subjective form of magic of all.

K[’Cause think about it.

K[Someone's conceptions of justice form from the moment they can understand speech.

K[Everyone they know.

K[Everything they see.

K[Everything they do.

K[Every piece of media they consume…

K[Everything affects them.

K[For humans it's simplistic to say that media affects behavior so directly but…

K[For monsters, whose knowledge of the world inside and outside the Barrier and hell, even how magic works, is shaped by media and human thought processes.

K[So…

K[yeah.]K

How technology affects you... how you affect technology... how you affect technology AND technology affects you...

Technological determinism... the social construction of technology... the social shaping of technology... I've talked with Shakur about the ways technology and everyone who uses it effect each other... or not... for more hours than I ever want to count.

K[So Yeah: Judge Sans and the First Soul of Justice are… pretty damn similar.]K

DA[And Extreme.]DA

K[And extreme.]K
I can't process all the information they're dumping on me fast enough.

What could I even ask at this point that would convey how swamped I feel?

“What's your point?”

S [You remember Roll's cementing pains?]

We all cringe at the thought of them.

S [And how cementing in a third color of magic only happens if something really important or traumatizing--but mostly traumatizing--happens?]

I don't even laugh at his strange and or redundant language.

“Yeah...?”

"Cementing pains aren't just physical. For monsters physical pain and psychological pain are the same thing.

"If they feel enough psychological pain it’ll show in their magic. In their attacks AND actions and personalities.

"Cementing in a third color of magic's already really damn painful.”

I silently prompt Chara to go on.

"As for replacing one of the three colors with something else?"

They don't give me time to answer. "That... shakes a monster to their core.”

Do I reaaaallly want to know why Chara's explaining this in such detail?

I don’t.

Of course I don’t!

Still... I WANT to know.

I can’t help it.

S [Well... ever since you showed up Sans's patience magic has been going away.]

S [It was being replaced with determination.

S [haven't you wondered why he's had no chill over the past few months?]

I am about to answer when everyone answers for me.

"6 [Of course you have.

"6 [We aaaaaall have.]6"

S [That, and his magic's been getting stronger.

S [And 'cause his magic's been getting stronger his emotions’ve been getting more…
"So his magic changed ‘cause I fell down?"

"Yes and no.

"Cause you fell down, his… thoughts… on morality and stuff… they...

“CEMENTED themselves.

"And THEN he changed.

“And 'cause HE changed, his magic changed too.”

A[This matters 'cause this explains your most pressing question right now.]A

The seven of them recite: “6[[How Sans got so strong.]]6”

I can't refute them.

I don't bother answering verbally.

Adam starts talking without missing a beat.

A[There're several factors which influence humans' stats. We call them physicality, experience, and psychophysiological state.]A

I inwardly... practically externally... thank Adam for conveying information to me in the only way I know how.

Via lecture.

A[A human only needs a positive psychophysiological state to harness determination and cast magic.

A[That and they need to be in the Underground. Or I suppose for all those people who lifted cars off loved ones or whatever, they need to be geographically near the Underground…

A[And they need the right life experience so defying death manifests via saving and loading.

A[So their physicality doesn't matter.

A[You don't have to see to know how a save file works.

A[You're proof of that.]A

E[For monsters the amount of determination they can handle depends on their physicality.]E

They’ve practiced this.

Considering that they’ve sat down here during all the resets, they must have rehearsed this pitch... explanation... countless times.

D[And their physicality's affected by their magical strength.]D

S[But their magical strength's dependent on their life experiences and their psychophysiological state.]S}
I've finally composed myself.

It's my turn to drop some bombshells.

“Judge Sans knows about video games 'cause he played ChronoTrigger so he can defy death by saving and loading.

Chara, lucidly. “And Gaster coming back gave him a reason to care.”

“Yeah I guess you're right.

"He had a reason to care.

“So his psychophysiological state got better.

“And 'cause his psychophysiological state got better his magic got stronger.

“And since his magic got stronger he… became… more physical.”

Chara and I, as one voice: “[So he didn’t melt.]”

A harsh chorus, magic grating against my body and soul.

6[It was much more than that.

6[Determination's the purest form of magic.

6[The other six forms are… imperfect… forms of determination.]6

Alphys even acknowledged this, when she explained her and Dewey’s interviews with the Second Six Souls, at the beginning of the Determination Study. She made this discovery before they expanded its scope to include monsters.

How could I forget?

How could WE forget?

6[That feeling…

6[Knowing that his choices mattered, 'cause you didn't wanna reset...

6[That boosted his confidence.

6[That, and now, he knows WHY you didn't load during the Great Disclosure Riots.

6[You didn't wanna relive it again.

6[Your fear… it drove him forward.

6[THAT, and his confidence, made him stronger.

6[Which made him more physical.

6[So he became more determined...
The amount of determination he could hold increased.

It makes sense.

It’s... confusing... but it makes sense.

They speak when I’ve finished putting two and two together.

So when you walked into the Judgment Hall, he realized you were at his mercy.

That, and he FIIIIIIINALLY put his stat increases from the past several months to use.

When he saw you, he realized he was so different from how you knew him before…

To you, he might'az well be a different monster.

The fact he could make you do anything he wanted, 'cause Chara couldn't help you…

That must've been enough.

THAT… must've pushed him over the edge.

THAT… must've given him enough power to save.

THAT… is how he was able to override you

THAT… must've filled him with determination.

"Holy shit it's a positive feedback loop."

"Cause when you have 1HP, 1 AT, and 1 DF, you can only go up from there."

An unsteady laugh.

They’re not wrong... mostly...

"You—we--helped him regain the power he would've had if Gaster hadn't died.

"And a shitload more besides."

Only a moment's reprieve before Steven talks in measured tones.

And when he realized Chara was around?

That must've spurred him to unlock that stat draining thing.

'Cause his sense of justice made him think he had the right to determine who was strong and who was weak.

Who was right and who was wrong.

Who had caused irreparable harm to another, and who had not.

Who had gained a lot of Execution Points, and who had not.

Who has become worthy of punishment, and who has not."
“HE created Execution Points and Levels of Violence.”

Chara, flatly: “Just like how Jigsaw determined who was worthy to live with his traps.

“Cause when you've watched your friends die hundreds of times at the hands of someone who you didn’t think deserved the power they'd been granted…”

The ether drains from the room. I exhale sharply, gulping for air. In the same moment, Chara and the Second Six Souls struggle to find the words to express their… observations.

After what feels like an eternity of thinking: “6[That'd really get to you.]6”

A[And after all: as we've heard from Chara, most of the time Judge Sans took it upon himself to judg Frisk.]A

[The got into philosophy and stuff, during the Determination Study.

T[But we thought he was just screwing around--well not exactly but you know what I mean.]T

Fear and… morbid curiosity… on Chara's part. “I never thought he'd go that far… let alone that it’d become part of how he cast magic.

“ON Paps AND us…”

6[No one did.]6

“But if someone's experiences shape how magic works for them…” I think aloud, “and if stuff that the First Seven Souls didn't know about gets lumped in to how magic works…”

“Then…”

“Then…”

EK[“Yes.

EK[“You are right.

EK[“Judge Sans filled a hole in the First Seven Souls' conceptions of magic.

EK[“And because HE created them, HE determined how they work.

EK[“He still is.”]EK

“So Paps was right.

Mostly.

“It's crazy but…

“Well none of us can really say that anything’s crazy anymore can we?”

Chara concludes frankly, “”Right now, anyone who hurts an Inertia Society member’s gaining Execution Points and Levels of Violence.

“And any Inertia Society member who thinks his beliefs are antiquated and the only way to fix things is to tear down the Judgment Hall...
“And taking it out on everyone by attacking him, OR anyone else?

“They’re ALSO gaining Execution Points and Levels of Violence.”

Flatly: “HIS concepts of morality determine who gains them or not.”

Flatly: “And how much someone's stats increase when they hurt someone.”

Flatly: “And how distanced they become when they hurt someone.

“And how much damage they take... how much pain they feel... when he casts Karmic Retribution on them.”

I cut to the heart of the issue: “So everyone's guilty.”

“6[[Yes.]]6”

Heavily: E[And his... INTEGRITY... won't let him stop till everyone's been brought to justice.]E

K[Till order's been restored.]K

S[Till it's safe for you guys to meet Asgore.]S

K[He's making up for all the control over his life he lost when Gaster died…

K[When we started falling down here…

K[When the Determination Study went wrong…

K[When he found out about the resets…

K[When he lost control of his emotions and cast Karmic Retribution on Paps that first time--]K

But magic comes from emotion--“

T[Not exactly.

T[Remember what Paps said?

T[Motives AND emotions power magic.

T[Motives determine HOW that magic's cast.

T[And emotions determine how strong that magic'll be.

T[And yes we know it's hypocritical that he's letting his emotions control him when the reason he's doing it's 'cause of his emotions overruling him before but...

T[That's just how it is with monsters.]T

S[You might've caught on to this or not but… control of someone's emotions isn't really a virtue for monsters.

S[Not even in the Inertia Society.

D[Hell when Gaster and Dewey started opening Inertia Society-run schools they had to tell everyone that they weren't… stunting… them magically.
D'[Cause at the time everyone thought only emotions were the key to harnessing magic.

D[It took a loooot of work to convince everyone that someone's life experiences affect how they cast magic too.]D

K[His Karmic Retribution?

K[His stat draining?

K[His… disabling… other monsters' magic?

K[That's motivated by JUSTICE.

K[NOT determination.

K[He's making up for when Chara started making us fall down here.

K[Or rather, when Chara changed the Barrier so it’d... find... people like them.

K[People like Frisk.

K[People Chara wanted to be.

K[People Chara wanted Frisk to be

K[People they thought Frisk would be, if they’d stayed together.

K[His sense of justice is what's driving his magic, not his determination. His determination only directly gave him the power to save.

K[His determination's allowing him to cast his magic in this form because no one knows how emotions or the soul truly work. It’s making up for his lack of knowledge.]K

I do not notice that I am bent forward so far my forehead touches the concrete floor, and my body lies prone before the Second Six Souls until Kari finishes speaking.

Even as I do this, I also continue sitting upright as before.

I do not move from my position, or even gasp in surprise, as I realize that I am merely experiencing what Chara is experiencing.

Their slow, labored, deliberate movements as they stretch their body out, completely prone on the concrete floor...

The coarse concrete branding their skin...

Their ragged breathing and racing heart...

The... burning sensation... of their sins crawling on their back.

Their muttered verbal and soulological apologies and explanations and… prayers… to only Tesla knew who.

I should not know who they were referring to, but I did.

It is much too late for me to take that knowledge back.
I knew.
Everyone knew.

[Please forgive me, Judge Sans.
I know you know why.
[The Second Six Souls.
I broke their every bone.
I lashed them till their flesh tore from their bodies.
I ran them through again and again, even while they lacked the strength to stand.
I walked them to their executions.
I brought them here.]

Their voice breaks, but their soul remains steady and firm.

[I do not hide from my guilt.
Instead, I wish to repent.
Instead, I wish to atone for my sins.
I stand before you so you may weigh my deeds against your morals, which you have refined after centuries of enlightenment, of suffering, of pain.

[You bore every moment alone.
I give my body mind and soul in service to you Judge Sans, because that is all I can give.]

Is Chara praying?
Even though they must have been exposed to Undyne’s parents’ beliefs, they don’t seem like the religious type--

NO.
They’re merely stating the truth.
THEIR truth.
The truth for the current situation.
They’re stating THEIR feelings, and THEIR hopes, and THEIR dreams.
They’re stating their feelings, and their hopes, and their dreams, but they’re doing so in the only way that seems right as of now.

To them, the Judge is more than a representation of monsterkind adapting to the times.

To them, the Judge is more than just a tortured soul, who taps into their suffering by measuring others’ hardships against their own.
To them, the Judge is more than monsterkind’s mouthpiece and collective consciousness and unconscious in one body, speaking and acting because no one else has the right to speak and act on behalf of the whole.

NO.

To them, the Judge is a friend.

An exceedingly powerful, jaded, and seemingly-distant friend... but a friend.

Chara wants to know what Judge Sans thinks of them, even after all they have done, even after his outburst, in the most official way possible.

They may not agree with the system, but they must comply with it, at least this one time, to affirm that they agree with its use now. To affirm that they understand why Judge Sans has taken his current measures, that they are a necessary evil--

No.

They’re trying to make him happy.

Even after he has killed them only Monado knows how many times... even after they have discovered the extreme lengths he would take to protect his people... even after they have learned how he developed his extreme view on morality... even after he has hurt me...

Chara still wants to make him happy.

Acknowledging his hardship and how it has made him stronger than everyone else... admitting that he, indeed, is the only one who has the right to determine what is moral and what is not among monsterkind... having to open their eyes to a reality where he is in such a position of absolute power...

Realizing that they are very much responsible for making him how he is today...

If that will make Judge Sans happy, then why should they not do it?

[When the issue of the Third Seven Souls has been resolved, I, Chara Trigger Dreemurr, consent to being judged.

[I, Chara Trigger Dreemurr, consent to being judged for my every action.

[I, Chara Trigger Dreemurr, consent to being judged for every Execution Point I have earned.

[And you, Sans Wingdings Gaster, shall be my judge.]

A silence where the weight of yellow magic on Chara’s soul bears down on them.

An eternity passes before the weight of that yellow magic lifts, replaced by the gentle pressure of blue magic on their head and shoulders.

They rise, several gentle breaths filling the room.

Simon reassures them… or is he trying to keep all of us calm?

S[Judge Sans will fight to the last health point before loading his save file.
He might have no chill, but he has no chill 'cause he's protecting us. 'Cause right now, the six of us are in as much danger as you.

They don’t reply.

He can hear you.

I can feel it.

He’s here, even if he’s not talking.

He wouldn’t leave you guys down here if he couldn’t see you.

Anime-esque enthusiasm that I never could be more glad to hear: You'll get this sorted out.

I just know it!

Equally upbeat snark: Buuuuut, he has the safety of monsterkind to worry about right now.

I'd know, 'cause he just made the most serious pun about providing for the common defense I’ve ever heard in my life.

“Seriously?”

You think I’d make that up!?

No one answers.

And before you ask no he won't like, invade your soul or something.

We have no choice but to have our souls open to him 'cause like… all we have are souls.

“[True.]”

That, and 'cause he knows you better than you know yourselves. He wants to make sure you're not having tooooooo much of a nervous breakdown.

“[Lovely.]”

That’s what they’re calling it now?

The Undernet is. And Undermail. And Mettaton.

So yeah: all we have to do is wait.

Wait for what?

An unwelcome silence after the flurry of explanations everyone has been throwing my way, filled by the not-too-distant metallic taste of yellow magic on my tongue, the welcome grip of blue magic on my body, and the rhythmic pulsing of determination down my spine.

“We'll know.”
“6[[We're sure of it.]]6”

Stop the music.

Chapter End Notes

Here’s the uRL to Justice extended, composed by Master Sword and My New Soundtrack for undertale Yellow.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIJ3DC2xgAI

Here’s Hello Zepp, the main theme for the first Saw film, which has been remixed for every Saw film since.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhSHXGM7kgE

Yeh! The Second Six Souls are here! It's taken me soooo looong to write this chapter because of fall quarter finals, Giftmas vacation, audio drama craziness, and beginning the winter quarter. That, and the backstory in this chapter's... complicated...

Long story short: by explaining that the experiences of the First Seven souls determined how magic worked, which includes what they had not gone through, I filled a plot hole that's bothered me for a loooong time. When I had Gaster explain that the FSS' experiences allowed monsterkind to access our Internet, it didn't occur to me at the time that I could apply that principle to the concepts associated with each color of magic.

The same goes for how I figured out determination doing the impossible and Chara being unable to block Undyne's spears for me aren't mutually-exclusive. I don't know how to see. I haven't been able to see since preschool. That experience wouldn't have helped me. Chara couldn't have used their life experiences to block the spears because what we saw and we considered important while we saw differed.

As for which concepts were associated with each color of magic, and what motivates magic being cast? That's why I said a looong time ago that the color pie for Magic: the Gathering would be important. TLDR: each of the five colors of magic are associated with both stereotypically-positive and negative concepts. I reasoned that the seven colors of magic in Undertale would follow a similar principle. I realized that Magic's system would have appealed to monsterkind for this reason. Therefore, Magic: the Gathering also shaped how magic works in the Underground, or at least, it provided a model for understanding how it works.

In short: a motive is bound to a color of magic. That color is the strongest. The color or colors those motives power, if they're not the same, are lower on the hierarchy.

An example: poison damage can manifest as purple or yellow magic. The motivation of the caster determines which form it takes, as well as their damage output, physical/psychophysiological effects, etc. Judge Sans happens to cast poison damage, AKA Karmic Retribution, using justice as a catalyst. Determination allows someone to cast a form of magic of any color without knowing the intricacies of the environment where they're casting it, but it manifests in a form based on their experiences.
As for comparing judge Sans to Jigsaw? Let's just say that when Jigsaw came out in October 2017, I remembered how I compared Papyrus to Jigsaw in Chapter 8. I even told him about it. I realized that his concept of morality, boiling it down to tangible, physical concepts... his life-changing experiences... he would have empathized with Jigsaw. Maybe, he would have known about him, because of Adam. That, and I watched all the Saw films except the last one because the seven of them were going to leave Netflix in January 2018...

Yeah: Execution Points and Levels of Violence are even more controversial than I've already made them out to be because they are bound to... polarizing... concepts of morality! Specifically, I realized Judge Sans holds Kantian morals: a good deed is only good if it's done out of good will and no other motive. That's how everyone can accrue EXP.

As for Justice and Hello Zepp? I used them because they happened to fit their respective moods very nicely. The fact that I enjoy them both doesn't hurt either.

Next chapter, if all goes well, I will finally reach one of the final plot points from Undertale itself, and it will progress in mostly the same way as in the game.

I just realized how long it's been since that's happened...

Don't be surprised if it takes another two months for me to update, because I haven't thought through this moment as much as I would like. That, and I will have to write narration befitting yet another remix exclusive to this AU, a remix that I have only grown to enjoy relative recently, meaning at the end of the summer of 2017.

At least, I already have an idea of some of the dialogue Chara and Judge Sans will say.

[*A strange light fills the room.

[*Twilight is shining through the Barrier.

[*It seems your journey is finally over.

[*You are filled with...

[*DETERMINATION.*]
Chapter 45

Chapter Summary

As of this chapter, Visiontale's surpassed 200,000 words.

I can't believe it.

That, and we're about to reach a plot point in Undertale itself.

It's about time...

If you want to read about my music choice for this chapter, and other miscellaneous thoughts about what happened in it, read the endnotes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

45

… … … "So he beat the ever-living shit out of them?"

"Well they were still alive at the end but… yeah.

“I think he would've killed them, if he could. But he just cemented himself in blue magic. He didn't even know what he did till I told him."

"But still thaaaaat's why you—we--almost killed Jerry?"

"He—they--there were three of them--they didn't look like Jerry…"

"It was close enough.

“They attacked me not too far from there, on ground level.

“Ehh.”

My shoulders move slightly as I sense Chara shrugging. “Nothing good’s ever come out of me being around Jerry. In ANY timeline.”

They make a disgusted sound.

"Sans tricked them, into letting their guards down.

"He asked them to spare him.

“Cause they were mad at ME.

“Not him.

"It was ME they wanted to hurt.
“Not him.”

"And he attacked them when they said yes?"

"Mm-hmm.

"He had his hands out in front of him already, so it wasn’t that hard to pull off.”

A harsh laugh. "It was like those action movies. You wouldn't have known monsters were physically weak then.”

Matter-of-factly: “He struck that Aaron.

“That Aaron flew into a wall, face-first.

“That Aaron’s two Woshua henchmen—henchmonsters? Minions—they got their faces slammed into that wall till they couldn't stand.”

With every word, blue magic grips at my soul, squeezing it slightly. My body rocks back and forth with every pulse which settles over us.

I wince. Chara soon follows.

Despite our discomfort, it doesn't stop.

E[That's not me I can't cast magic on you guys. Not like this. It'd take too much effort.]E

I know.

I'm not surprised.

“What happened to YOU!?”

"Sans suspended me behind him and above his head.

“Cause if they wanted me, they'd have to go through him.”

“Mmm.”

I nod.

I don't understand why I nodded.

I didn't intend to nod.

A[You didn't mean to nod.

A[But HE did.

A[‘Cause he's here too.

A[Remember?

A[For monsters a strong soulological presence's exactly the same as two humans being in the same room.]

He’s right. Even after my months of learning, the idea that a monster can be… in a room, without
actually being… IN, a room, bothers me.

"Gaster was sooooo mad when he found out.

"He got sooooon maaad he nearly recked Reed and Wrighte on TV—“

“Holy shit!”

“He nearly attacked Asgore on TV—“

“Holy shit!”

"That was the first time I saw the Gaster blasters.”

S[But it wasn’t the first time the UNDERGROUND saw the Gaster blasters.

S[That was… a loooooong time ago.]S

“I didn’t even know Gaster could use yellow magic.”

“I didn’t either—“

“So thaaaaat’s where Judge Sans got it from?’

“Maybe.”

An awkward silence.

"You cemented Judge Sans in integrity?"

"Mm-hmm.

"AND determination.

"I made him, Pauline.

"We both did.

"All eight—

“No.

“Frisk did too.

“They never met him in this timeline. But he saw the Frisks I helped in the other timelines. And he saw me interact with them indirectly, using his machine.”

{6[“You’re right…”]6}

“WE made him. The NINE of us did.”

Their statement weighs on us for a while. In the silence, I swear I hear—

No.

I feel it.
The air, my body, mind, and soul, vibrate with a reply.

A magical reply.

Therefore, I perceive it as a voice.

*Correct.*

Resentment and… regret…? That’s not my own, or Chara’s.

We all shudder. Mjolnir rattles behind me. Yellow magic crackles against my skin.

S[No no no no you can’t do this you need to focus on what’s OUT THERE—not IN HERE!]S

T[True!]T

E[I know I’m not in a position to say this but you have to calm down Judge Sans! You can’t waste any more magic on us!]E

The resentment fades from our souls. We breathe a little harder than before. We wait several more seconds for the yellow magic to fade.

Eventually, it does… hesitantly.

"And besides: the only way he could've killed them was if he went all Scanners on them—"

The Second Six Souls and I "Euuuuu!" and "Ooooh!" in both disgust and morbid excitement.

A[Believe it or not how psychic powers work in movies like Carrie’s pretty close to how magic’s cast—mechanically not causally.

A[Scanners got it aaaaaaall wrong.

A[Carrie like, uses her hands to control her telekinesis. Hell maybe movies and books where characters cast magic with their hands influenced monsters’ experiences so they’d do it like that too.]A

E[Nope. Papyrus did it, during your fight, as an example. It wasn't as, uh, elegant, as Carrie's but… ehh: whatever works.]E

T[And you know shit just got real when you don't have to use your hands at all.

T[We'd know, 'cause that's how it is in the Judgment Hall right now. Judge Sans doesn't have to use his hands to control his magic anymore. 'Cause that's how it was, during your... uh...]T

A frustrated noise. T[Fuck I don't know what to call it.]T

I ponder her problem for a few moments, where all I can think to say is "Yeeeeah..." in agreement.

Everyone else follows suit.

K[But Tailor's right. Judge Sans only needs soulological awareness to cast magic now.]K

She says in wonder, K[The Dual Awareness Principle of soulology at its finest.]K

I don’t have to ask her to elaborate.
I’ve experienced her observation all too well.

K[He doesn't even need to "see" something to cast magic on it first, 'cause if he doesn't know what
to do or what something looks like he just has to stat check everyone till he finds someone who
does—]K

"But that's like hella shady!"

S[Trust me Chara: we know.

S[You're right. It IS shady.

S[Soulological privacy is—]S

A[WAS—]A

S[WAS a right under the DREEMURRITE government.

S[But not here.

S[Not right now.

S[Not under the Judiciary.

S['Cause if Judge Sans had to choose between Inertia Society extremists and Dreemmurrite
extremists hiding out in Temmie Village knowing they couldn't be tracked or stat checking
everyone...]S

Simon doesn't have to tell me which option he chose.

As if responding to what he said, my water bottle rises a few inches off the floor before bobbing up
and down in midair. It lands gently in the same spot again after a few seconds.

{[Jesus!]}

Some oments pass before everyone—

Only Kari and Steven start laughing.

Everyone else… makes weirded out and disconcerted noises.

EK[Duuuude!]EK

E[How'd that scare you you guys've felt worse!]E

{{"Seriously!"}}

K[You guys reeeaaaally need to chill—]K

{“Fuck you man.”}

A[Ehh. I’ve heard worse. Simon called me a Republican one time. We didn’t talk for a week…]A

……… "But where the hell would we even--!?"

A soft whining sound plays from in front of us. After a moment, a squishy surface presses against
my fingertips.
I don't move.

D[There's your answer.]D

I still don't move.

Not even Chara moves.

We sit there, uncertainly, until blue magic loosely surrounds my hands, guiding them along the surface. I reach out, palms gently pressing into a memory foam mattress.

We shudder slightly in surprise.

"There's a cot down here?"

T[Yeah. The Inertia Society's used it before. Knock yourselves out.]T

Blue magic guides me into position on the cot as Chara settles down beside me.

I don't need the guidance, but I don't object either.

I don't even feel weirded out about sleeping in regular clothes.

“What time is it?”

6[Uh…]6

D[We don't know. The clocks down here’re acting weird. The time zone keeps changing a lot.

D[But… I thiiiiink you’ve been down here for a couple—a few--hours.

D[And based on the fact that you left Hotland in the morning California time, it’s… probably afternoon there.]D

A[Just wake up when you wanna wake up. By the looks of things we’ll be down here for a while ‘cause it’s a clusterfuck up there.]A

I grab the nearest pillow, turning on my stomach. Chara scoots closer until our arms touch.

In my ear: [“I know it's probly not my place to say this but...

["Knowing that that there's something in this world you have control over... fills you with determination—"]

I jerk away from them. "Wait hold up!"

Exasperation and snark: [“I'm not talking about you.”]

My body and soul vibrate, the thrumming of magic ringing in my ears. The space around us seems to... reshape itself.

The deep thrumming of determination vibrates through my soul.

Blue magic holds it in place, first containing, then stopping the vibration.

Yellow magic crackles against and around me.
Chara and I recoil from the contact.

Is that what it felt like, when I saved?

No.

This is... worse?

No.

This is different.

More focused.

More concentrated.

STRONGER.

MUCH stronger.

In spite of everything, it doesn't take long for us to fall asleep.

Maybe, I only hear what comes next because of my position directly below the Second Six Souls. I’m submerged in all six of their fields of knowing, after all.

I hear Judge Sans' reply to Chara's statement.

*Sleep well.*

*All of you.*

*File saved.*

*HP fully restored.*

… … … We don’t so much smell the change as hear it.

6[GUUUUUYS!]

6[WAAAAAKE UUUUUP!]

6[BAAAAACOOOOON!]6

*Incoherent mumbling*

{[Heh?]}

Overly loud sass: T[YOU HEARD ME!]T

Chara pulls the blanket off of me as they readjust positions. “Whaaa? Hooow…?”

A… crackling bacon-filled… silence…?

[“Jesus by Faraday’s lisp how the hell are you cooking bacon down here!”]

Green magic skirts my body and soul. David laughs. D[I made sure Tailor didn’t burn you to death!]D
Our excitement at eating real food diminishes a little. “{{Lovely}}”

K[But seriously though Grillby just boxed us some bacon so—your welcome.]K

{{“Duuuuude Grillby thoooooough!!!”}}

K[I know right?]K

E[From the reports Undermail’s putting out he’s putting in work. At least, the reports from a couple hours ago said so—the Undernet’s down—mostly.]E

“Wow.

“Well Mettaplier said that me or Gaster’d break the Undernet—“

T[Well get over here and eat. We can’t eat this sooooo—]T

{{“Waaaaaaaiiiiit yeeeaaaaah you’re riiight!”}}

{{RIP…}}

Adam can’t stop laughing.

{Dude how’re you choking you don’t even have lungs!}

We return to our positions from before, our backs against the wall by the stairs, as Steven serves the bacon.

[“Seeing the Second Six Souls happy…

[“And that Grillby has instilled some sense of normalcy, ‘cause bacon…

[“Fills you with determination.

[“And hunger.

[“But mostly determination.”]

6[“Uh…”]6

I almost hear the wobbly beeping sound of Judge Sans saving his save file, such concentrated magic courses through the room. I shudder again… but almost immediately stop as a piece of bacon pushes against my lips.

“duuuude!”

[“It’s me don’t worry.”]

“Stiiiiiill!”

A[“Just eat the damn bacon.”]A

{{Fuck you Adam.}}

… … … “They’ve gotta be pretty important then—“

6[Uh… yeeeeeaaah…]6
We don’t know who they are. And that’s saying something ‘cause we think we know everyone. But they’ll be here soon.

“But why?”

Cau’se Reed and Wrighte can’t do it. They wooooooould do it, but they’re doing badass journalist things right now.

[“Hmm…”]

Seriously though it’s fucking amazing! I wish the Undernet’s work so you could watch the feed they’re broadcasting cause they’re amazing!

Chara pokes my thigh as they sit down, back from the bathroom. “I still can’t believe there’s a bathroom down here—“

Hey dude we couldn’t either but there is so… yeah! Lucky for you guys. I think Toriel got it built ‘cause of you and they meant to have you and Azzie use it or something but--

A knock on the door.

We freeze.

[Not again!]

Hello Adam.

“I want to play a game.”

[That’s still creepy—]

Just open the damn door.

Chara and I oblige.

I wait a few seconds as the monster walks inside. The door shuts itself behind them—him. He doesn’t waste any time.

“Hi. I’m Bob.”

I don’t know what to say.

“Hi Bob.”

Judge Sans sent me here to tell all of you what’s been happening. He deemed this section of New Home safe enough for me to come so, that’s why I’m here.

“Well, he deemed it safe an hour ago, but he waited until you were awake.”

[“Yeeeeeaaaaah…”]

I can’t wrap my head around the discrepancy between Bob’s somewhat deep voice and his name.

It takes a few moments for us to reply.

“Okay that’s fair.”
We walk downstairs and sit in our usual spots. Bob sits in front of us.

“Suffice to say it’s not as chaotic as you might think up there.”

We begin to sigh with relief before Bob cuts us off.

“But make no mistake: it’s still bad.”

His soul tenses. {

“He’s halted the belts in Hotland and the CORE’s completely locked down.”

“Well we were there when he said to do that so—”

“Trust me: just getting everyone to follow THOSE orders was… a handful.

“And everyone in Hotland’s been told to shelter in place. The elevators to New Home are completely shut off. Judge Sans decides who to teleport up there.”

S[Oh by Tesla it’s like a dictatorship going into crazy security measures mode all over again!]S

“It gets worse.”

6[{{Should’ve guessed.}}]6

He continues without missing a beat. “Snowdin’s magic has been almost completely cut off—“

6[{{“Whaaaaaat!?”}}]6

“Don’t worry: vital services are still working well enough. Just the vast majority of residences are without lights and heat. But the businesses are in somewhat better shape.”

We sigh in relief. Bob doesn’t stop us this time.

“New Home is mostly normal. There’s just restricted magic consumption and a curfew. And no one can go into the Dreemurr District without a complete soulological scan.”

“The Dreemurr District?”

“The part of New Home with Asgore’s house, the Judgment Hall, etc—“

“And before you ask? Yeah: Asgore named it—“

“I knew that much…”

“Just making sure…”

I poke Chara.

They poke me back.

Bob waits until we’ve finished poking each other.

“The Ruins are relatively quiet. Some of the unaligned—non-Inertia Rune, non extremist Delta Rune bearers—Royal Guards are watching the exit.”

Bob leans toward us. “Chara? You’ll be happy to know Glen’s leading them—“
Bob laughs. “He just cemented himself in orange magic an hour ago—"

The Second Six Souls exchange excited banter for a little while. Bob waits until they’ve finished. Waterfall is in the worst shape.”

We stop dead.

“After several rounds of questioning Judge Sans has determined that Inertia Society and Dreemurrite extremists have used Waterfall’s restrictions on magitronic devices to plan the riots you’ve experienced during your stay in secret. Every single one.

“And… several more besides.”

Bob sighs. “Even my fellow Temmies participated in planning and executing them. They can be a little…”

Delicately: “Exciteable.”

Chara [“Mmms”] in agreement.

{Temmies?}

“Boat use is being strictly monitored. Only certain groups are allowed to move through the Underground. And Judge Sans determines who takes who, where they can go, and by what route, to minimize contact between possible… insurgents.

“This is partially because the purple magic-induced wires running through Waterfall have been badly damaged—“

“--and even as we speak Hotland’s magic consumption will be reduced within the hour, so all the extra can be directed toward Waterfall for emergency services.”

Adam steals my questions out of my mouth.

A[How!?!]

A[How’s this even!?!]

A[How’s like, the Purge not happened or something?]

A[Even more than it already has!?]A

A prompt reply: “Trust me: it IS happening. At least in Waterfall. And some isolated parts of Snowdin and New Home.

“Some monsters think that now that the normal procedure for the Judgment has been completely overturned, they have the right to cause chaos.

“To riot.
“To steal.
“To vandalize property.
“To make death threats against Asgore and the Judiciary.
“To try carrying out those threats.
“To attack Inertia Society and Dreemurrite monsters alike.
“Today, monsters have done all these things and more.”

His voice breaks. “I… I never thought I’d see monsters lose control like this.

“Not again.

“The last time was… was decades ago.

“When you fell down, Chara.”

We wait for him to compose his thoughts.

Bob catches us completely off guard as he begins laughing heartily.

“Some monsters think they’re above consequences.

“However… I disagree.

“Or more accurately, JUDGE SANS disagrees.

“Put simply: right now, he’s wielding the power inherent to the title of Judge.

He’s using it how it was meant to be used.

“In times of crisis.

“In a situation where the lives and safety of monsters are threatened.

“When monsterkind is at war.

“There is a reason monsters sought solace in the Judge’s power: magical, moral, and political.

“It’s because the Judge was meant to be monsterkind’s last defense, in case anyone ever pushed us that far."

“But he said—“

Bob replies simply: “You assumed only HUMANS could spur the Judge to take power.”

He’s right.

“You’re not the first to argue that his position’s undeserved in these circumstances either.”

He’s… not wrong about that…

“Monsters have tried to… PERSUADE him… of that, plenty of times already.
“All of them have met the same fate.”

We prepare for the worst.

“He’s told them THIS.”

“Within the Judgment Hall, the current judge holds absolute power.” He quotes.

[I thiiink I get it…?]

[You probably do.

[No fuck that you DO get it. I’m the one who’s confused.]

“And yes: he has left the Judgment Hall since you came down here. He’s had to.

“But he didn’t leave the Judgment Hall until he made a certain decree.

And if his first rebuttal doesn’t work, he cites that decree.”

Bob takes a breath. “Until—“

before he can continue, he gasps in surprise.

Blue and yellow magic and determinations surge around us.

I-we—completely forgot he was here.

Our souls shake with the weight of Judge Sans’ words.

*Until Asgore has made his choice, I shall hold the title of Judge.

*I shall act as such.

*You shall treat me as such.

*I shall enact bad times as such.*

Flashes of magic emit from Chara’s soul in excitement. [What did I tell you? He knows his stuff.

[You might think he’s being… authoritarian… right now… but monsterkind needs someone like him, to… discipline them.

“Like what Simon said: monsters have no chill ‘cause they don’t value emotional self-control. They’d… they’d do anything they wanted, if they could.”

“Mmm.”

“But still.”

[“I expected as much.”]

Chara receives an… amused… chuckle in reply.

Everyone except Chara shudders profusely.

Including Bob.
“... ‘It’s safe for you to leave now.’”

Bob sighs. “And not an execution too soon.

“I’ll come with you, to see Asgore. So Judge Sans has a pair of eyes on the ground. In case the livestream breaks.

“Or it gets sabotaged.

“Or in case he has to redirect the power from our servers for... other purposes.

“Only Tesla knows what’ll happen now.”

I place my newly-filled water bottle in my dimensional box. Adam’s nervous purple magic rakes across Mjolnir, checking it one last time. A[Everything’s fixed. Judge Sans must’ve repaired it while we all slept. It’s like new. Better even.]A

My cane leaves my hand and taps my leg. E[You won’t need your cane. Just leave it here. It doesn’t matter where.]

E[We’ll... we’ll clean up when you leave.]E

I shake slightly as Steven’s soul softly bumps against mine. He sounds on the verge of tears.

E[It’s an easy walk. Just leave this room and walk along the left wall. And keep walking that way till Chara tells you to stop.]E

“Okay.”

I cycle through the Monado Arts and perform my training regimen one last time, everyone cheering as each art activates. When finished, I set it at my left side.

David’s green magic brushes my cheeks and forehead. D[Your HP’s back to eighty-five. Yours and Chara’s. You guys’s AT’s back at thirty-five and your DF’s back at twenty-eight.]D

K[I mean I couldn’t see him letting them keep those stat buffs anyway.]K

E[[True.]]E

T[But remember: Asgore’ll most likely be holding back. Or weakened soulogically. Or both. Take advantage of that. And even if he is holding back and soulogically weak his stats are reeeaaaally high so... give it all you have.]T

D[And even if you do get hurt you have healing items and he doesn’t. You have Chara’s strength to draw on if you need it. It’ll...]

D[It’ll make it go by faster.]D

E[He at least deserves that. It beats some random Frisk poking him to death with one of Toriel’s worn daggers.]E

[“Mm-hmm.”]
S[But take your time getting there. You’ve waited almost six Judiciary months for this. What’s a few minutes—or hell an hour—gonna do?]

I turn around and start walking toward the stairs, holding onto Chara’s left elbow. Bob pads beside us.

A[And you guys? It’s not cowardly to take advantage of the Monado Arts. It’s smart. Hell your smarts got you here!]A

“But I also had Chara and you guys—“

A[Not for all of it.

A[You figured out the date.

A[You absorbed all that info about the Determination Study. Not us. We couldn’t... really help you there.

A[Actually we… didn’t really want to help you there.

A[You stayed at Toriel’s house for the longest out of all of us. Even longer than me!

A[Give yourself some credit dude.]

“Ah, I guess.”

I slowly walk up the stairs.

D[I know it’s gonna sound cruel but… I think the best thing you can do is kill Asgore. Or at least hurt him till he can’t fight anymore.

D[’Cause Asgore didn’t make sure Waterfall was secure. He took the Royal Guard on their word.]

K[You’re serving the Judiciary by doing this.

K[And if that doesn’t convince you, think about it this way.

K[Didn’t John Locke say that if a ruler didn’t do their job the people had the right to overthrow them? And replace them with rulers who actually gave a shit about them?]

{“Weird time to be giving me sophomore year of high school history flashbacks but yeeeeeaaah, I gueeeees…?”}

K[You’re making that happen.

K[Even if Asgore doesn’t die this’ll still send a message. That there needs to be a check on his power.

K[Whether that’s a ballot box or Judge Sans’ Gaster blasters is up to him.]

I reach the door.

E[I know it feels wrong.

E[To go against what everyone on the surface has said.
E[About violence not being the answer.

E[But think about it like this: if Asgore doesn’t listen, you’re not breaking a moral code or anything.

E[You’re just upholding the principles Gaster wrote in the Unified Theory Papers, in the Amended Second Directive.

E[To break the Barrier with minimal loss of human life.

E[Gaster hoped this wouldn’t happen. But he prepared you for it.

E[You’re just following his orders.

E[They’re not the set of orders he’d like you to follow but…]

Steven doesn’t have to finish.

I leave the basement, pushing the door shut behind me. I begin to walk the path Steven described.

Simon calls out as I stop feeling the shade of the left wall of the basement over my head.

S[You’ve weighed all your options.

S[You’ve prepared yourself in every way: physically, mentally, soulologically, morally.

S[You’ve realized the consequences of your actions.

S[Good and bad.

S[For you and for everyone else.

S[But you’ve waited long enough.

S[You have to act now.

S[But still: in battle, you have to be patient.]

The shadow of an arch looms over my head and blocks out the sun. We pass underneath it.

T[Bravery isn’t just beating up a bad guy or standing up for someone who’s too scared to speak for themselves.

T[It’s knowing when to act when no one else does.

T[And following through on it.

T[Even if you don’t know exactly what to do in the moment.]

I stop walking as soft dirt squishes underfoot. The delicate, sweet scent of… of…

Of plants—

No.

Flowers—
I’m smelling flowers.

We stop for a moment to appreciate the smell.

It’s been soooooo long since I’ve smelled a real flower.

T[Hell that’s how it’s been for you the whole time!]

T[But you kept working at it.]

T[Even when you were scared, you stuck with it.]

T[And even when you did chicken out at least you admitted you fucked up. Even if it took a while. And even if you didn’t admit all of it was wrong.]

T[Still, it was a brave thing to do, to listen to Chara’s advice when it mattered.]

I mull over Tailor’s words of wisdom.

Chara nudges me slightly.

I’ve mulled over Tailor’s words of wisdom for a little longer than I expected, apparently.

We continue walking through the garden.

E[You might not have as much integrity as a saint…]

E[You might’ve contradicted yourself—hell we aaaaaaaaaall know you did. A lot.]

E[You might’ve done things which go against what you learned on the surface… and not felt sorry about it…]

E[You might think you don’t have enough moral fiber for this…]

E[But you have enough.]

E[Gaster knew that much.]

E[And that’s all you need.]E

The dirt path hardens and becomes concrete or stone again. Our strides become springier, longer, and more decisive than the last. I let go of Chara’s arm for a moment to re-initialize the flow of magic to the Third Seven Souls, safe in their dimensional box.

D[Being kind and being nice aren’t the same thing, you know.]

D[Just because you’re kind doesn’t mean you’re a whimp.]

D[I mean look at Undyne!]D

We laugh.

D[It just means you do what’s best for people.]

D[Even if it seems wrong in the moment.]

D[It’ll work out in the end.
Even if they don’t follow through on what you’ve done, you still did a service to them. Or tried to.

But it only counts if you did it to reeeaaally help them and not for some reward.

In this life, or the next?

A torrent of magic hits us, but we remain standing.

“We’re at the Barrier.”

“Almost.”

We continue to walk, in spite of the magic pushing and tugging and lifting and restraining my body.

It’s the First Seven Souls.

Chara slows down.

I slow down.

“I’ll watch you from here.” Bob whispers in my ear. “Good luck.”

Chara and I leave him behind and continue walking forward, slower now.

I shouldn’t have to tell you this but I’ll tell you anyway.

The Asgore fight’s gonna be long.

Whether it lasts a minute or an hour you have to persevere.

You know why?

I don’t know how to answer.

The other Souls don’t know how to answer.

Chara doesn’t know how to answer.

Even Judge Sans is lost for words.

Because you’ve reached the endgame.

We stop walking.

You’ve finished all the sidequests you wanted to do.

You finished grinding for all those items you’ve been hearing about since the beginning of the game.

And obtained them.

You’ve figured out what strategy you’re gonna use.

You’ve reconciled with the fact that you’re probably never gonna go back to any of the areas you visited ever again.
The final boss is right in front of you.

Time to apply what you’ve learned.

Time to make Gaster proud.

Someone gasps in front of us.

“No.

“I thought they were lying to me.

“I can’t believe my eyes.

“My child?”

I run my hand over the enabler button, my fingers landing on a depressed button to the left of it. I press it, releasing the seven containers holding the Third Seven Souls from their dimensional box. They land beside us on the stone floor with seven sharp bangs, one after another.

Even though we have no idea of what to say, Chara and I speak as one, as if we have been preparing to give this speech for our entire lives.

In Chara’s case, they speak as if they’ve been preparing for this moment for decades, just like when Gaster first introduced himself to me, so long ago.

“You have one chance to step aside.

“We won’t let you imprison the Second Six Souls any longer.

“Simon, Tailor, Steven, David, Adam, and Kari deserve so much better.

“Don’t get us wrong.

“Monsterkind deserves someone like you.

“But they deserve someone better.

“Much better.”

As we continue to speak, Kari dispenses their own advice.

What is FAIR and what is JUST aren’t the same thing.

You know this.

Not everyone will think this is fair.

But everyone can agree that confronting those in power on behalf of the people…

Airing their grievances…

Speaking and acting on behalf of those who don’t even have a voice…

They can all agree that THAT… is justice.

You may not think you’re acting justly, but trust us: you are.
[I swear, by Judge Sans’s eye glow of dooooooom, that you’re doing what is just.]

[“On behalf of Judge Sans Wingdings Gaster, the Inertia Society, and all monsterkind, we present the Third Seven Souls, for the purpose of fulfilling the Amended second directive of the Unified Theory Papers.

“[To break the Barrier without any further loss of human life.

“Accept them, and you will be spared.

“[This is your final warning.

“[Stand against us, and you stand against Judge Sans.]”]

Asgore’s breathing hitches. His soul shakes in front of us.

Even so, he doesn’t walk over to the Third Seven Souls.

“Chara…

“Please.

“You don’t have to do this.”

Chara releases themselves from my grip.

[“Dad.

“I’m sorry.

“I really am.

“But if we don’t do this, someone else will.”

They step forward. I follow their lead. They struggle to remain composed.

“You’re killing a blind person!

“You’re killing Gaster’s student!”]

They seem on the verge of tears.

“You’re killing my friend.”

Even I can see the shame written on Asgore’s face.

Even I can see his head bend low, and his hand fall to his lower back.

The monado appears in my left hand.

When I grip it, I don’t feel its reassuring ridges and smoothness against my palm or between my fingers.

No.

I feel the cylindrical grip of a trident.
A magical trident.

The light blue and orange magic from its points rush down my arm and through my whole being, granting me strength, even as my past deeds weigh on my shoulders, literally and figuratively.

Chara steps to my left side and lays their right hand on top of my left hand, so we grip the Monado’s hilt together.

The sensation of Chara’s hand on mine, my hand on the Monado, and my shared experience of Asgore gripping his weapon doesn’t even phase me anymore.

Only now does the advice from the Second Six Souls hit me.

As it does, the magic cast on me from the Barrier seems to vanish.

Chara’s soul envelops mine.

I welcome it.

Hand-in-hand, soul-in-soul, we take a step toward Asgore.

**Stop the music.**

Chapter End Notes

Yeah: Judge Sans is in power now. To all the Asgore-as-competent-ruler fans? I'm sorry. I'm considering writing a story about his experiences reigning in the clusterfuck which is the post-Judgment Underground but... ehh: that'll come later.

Here's the link to The Night Before the Decisive Battle, from the Xenoblade Chronicles OST.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7z49VNt3IM

I wanted a song which conveyed the importance and enormity of my confrontation with Asgore. I also wanted a song that conveyed the right amount of melancholy. The Night Before the Decisive Battle conveys those emotions perfectly. The fact that the same notes repeat over and over, but that those notes always climb higher and higher... it makes you feel like you’re accomplishing something... and yet, that you’re not forgetting where you came from, because each sequence starts on the same note. It took me a while to realize that I should use it, but when I did... the ending sequence where the Second Six Souls encourage me just... came together.

Yes: the Temmies are anarchists/extremists/terrorists, depending on who you ask. Let's just say that earlier on in my planning, they were meant to appear earlier, where Touring appears. Temmies were meant to try to bomb the Judgment Hall at that point, not her. It started out as a joke, but... I made it work, somehow.

I can't believe I found a way to fit Temmies into this timeline but... it happened.

Asgore?
Let's do this.
Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

I ended up finishing and posting this chapter three-odd weeks after I said I'd post it. Suffice to say, if I had worked more diligently, I could have released it sooner but... college happened. That, and having a hard time describing the Asgore fight.

Regardless, I am proud to say that Visiontale has officially met and surpassed yet another in-game milestone.

If you want to read about my struggles writing this chapter, read the endnotes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

46

Hand-in-hand, soul-in-soul, Chara and I take a step toward Asgore.

Then another...

Then another...

Then another.

I can’t bring myself to do it.

I have prepared for this moment for only Tesla knows how long. I overcame my loathing of exercise for the most part, just for his sake. You’re like a skinnier and nerdier version of me now, Undyne called it. Chara even learned Super Smash Brothers terminology, just so they could help me. We even both grumble about why Shulk mains had an abbreviation for everything.

I slept for five hours a night for a month, just so I could cram everything I wanted to do into each day, not knowing when I’d have to face him.

I have left many vestiges of my surface life behind. I have learned to recognize humans and monsters by their ethergraphs. By the time Toriel moved in to the Inertia Society headquarters, I had learned to use my computer and phone with the soulological interfaces rather than typing by hand. Hooking into a CAD&CAD machine and deducing the amount of determination I need to channel into it to create an object is second nature to me now.

I have abandoned many marks of status and seniority: my education, my wealth, my technology… even my age.

I have to keep reminding myself of what month and day it is on the surface, and that if I had never fallen down, I would have been enjoying the summer before my sophomore year of college.

I’ve even faced the reality of my own death… and the “good” it will supposedly do for Asgore's people.
At least, I've tried.

Through all that, Chara had no choice but to tag along, watching me interact with the humans and monsters they knew so well, befriended, and yes, betrayed, in their near-infinite past lives.

Despite the fact that I have devoted one month—

No.

We have essentially spent our entire time in the Underground together preparing for this moment, Chara and I.

Even as I recall Alphys’s insistence that initiative would be one of my few advantages against Asgore, and that I shouldn’t throw it away, I can’t bring myself to make the first move.

I can’t bring myself to attack first.

Luckily, Chara, the Second Six Souls, and Judge Sans all understand my hesitation. Instead of forcing me to move any closer, Chara lets go of my hand. They gradually manipulate my body so my knees are bent slightly, shoulder-width apart, right hand gripping my controller, my left curled securely around the Monado.

After I settle into this fighting stance, one that I have performed countless times over the past month, Chara and Judge Sans slowly speak in unison, mentally and aloud.

I am almost certain that Chara has said this—

No.

They have.

They HAVE said this countless times before.

To Frisk.

The only question is how does Judge Sans know it?

I suppose it’s only fair that he knows it: he has seen the contents of our souls, after all.

That, and he’s here, in every way but in the flesh—in the bones?

It doesn’t matter now.

They speak with one voice, as if they have said this a thousand times before.

**Play until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EX-4mz5WuY

[***"A strange light fills the room.

[***"Twilight is shining through the Barrier.

[***"It seems your journey is finally over.

[***"You are filled with…
My grip around my weapons tightens and becomes more… firm. My back straightens, and my shoulders square. My head tilts upward as from their place next to me, Chara looks up at Asgore and speaks softly, but resolutely.

“Dad?”

“I’m so happy I got to see you again.

“But I can’t let the Judiciary down.

“And Pauline doesn’t deserve to die.

“I’ve known her for too long to give up on her now.

“She deserves better.

“I’m sorry.”

A stretched-out moment which seems to last an eternity.

I wait for the perfect moment to release the tension built up in my body and soul. We welcome and dread when that moment finally comes.

A magic-filled wind rushes by my face, and for a moment, we panic.

At least, until my training takes hold of me, just as Gaster said it would.

In one swift motion, I drop my arms to my sides, withdraw my shoulders closer to my body, and take a step back, making myself a smaller target.

Asgore made the first move after all.

He… swung his trident.

I erect a field of light blue magic around Chara and I as a precautionary measure to give me time to activate Speed Art. I tell myself, and Chara tells me: {{This is a match of Super Smash Brothers.}}

As strange as this sounds, this mantra calms us down. Yes: Smash doesn’t involve real pain, but the base premise is the same. It’s a matter of learning patterns, and deducing how those patterns interact with me, and interfere with my patterns. Reading your opponent, predicting their behavior, and exploiting their psychological state, while resisting their attempts at doing the same to you.

Somehow, Chara mirrors my movements, though they lack Speed Art's buffs.

With a pang, I remember they’re not—

[I have Azzie’s locket. Remember? It doesn't have as much defense as Mjolnir but, it's good enough.]

The determination emitting from Chara brushes against my body and soul. The ground vibrates ever so slightly with their every step. Either that, or I register their every step as if it were a memory of my own, tredding the same path.

That’s why they’re so close to me.
They are trying to remain in the area of effect of Speed Art so they can reap its benefits.

As promised, it doesn’t take long for me to decipher Asgore’s fighting style. Gaster was right: his magic is focused far more on power than precision.

[And remember: I’ve fought Asgore through Frisk more times than I can count.

[This isn’t new to me.

[You’re the new part]

When my first activation of Monado Speed times out, I switch to Jump art, noting that Asgore can’t stop moving fast enough to avoid taking damage from the light blue magic around me.

[Switch to orange magic—you should start doing damage to him. For real this time.]

I oblige.

Sixteen seconds of us vaulting high over Asgore's attacks. Even Chara manages to do so. We occasionally graze the ambient magic surrounding Asgore's trident. I take some damage, but not enough to concern me.

As for chara? Not so much.

{You need to heal soon.}

Jump art wears off as I touch the ground again. Based on the input I receive from Chara's soul, I know that we’ve landed to one side of Asgore.

We face the side of his body opposite to his trident.

[He's open!]

I thrust the Monado forward, toward Asgore’s side. It meets some resistance, then vibrates in my hand.

It hit him… or at least, the magic projecting out of the Monado’s blade hit him.

I didn’t hit him hard, but that doesn’t matter.

I landed my first attack.

I landed my first real attack, not produced by area-of-effect magic or projectiles.

I can’t help but feel proud of myself.

Chara, the Second Six Souls, and Judge Sans can’t help but feel proud as well, to varying extents, in their own ways.

Chara backpeddles hurriedly as Asgore whirls around on his heel to face us. The whoosh of his trident sounds far too close for comfort.

I switch to Speed art again, and with their guidance, back away several feet, punctuating my footsteps with Gaster blasters. Each one ticks down his HP ever so slightly.

This instance of using Speed art seems to occur according to plan. I just have to avoid his trident,
and tick down his health with projectiles. It’ll take a while to pull off, but—

At least, Chara and I assume our plan is working until Asgore switches tactics.

The air grows hot with magic nearby. The urge to run, regardless of where, the urge to move, even if it’s ill-advised, overwhelms me. Every twitch of my limbs causes my body to shake roughly. My hand and feet move far too much, much more than I intend to move them.

{It’s orange magic.}

Asgore can use orange magic… or is it fire magic?

In this case, orange magic and fire magic are not one in the same.

I back away, light blue magic arcing from the Monado’s tip and forming a protective field around Chara and I. Chara debriefs me. [Just follow my lead okay?]

{Okay.}

Magic swirls around us, alternating between intense heat and biting cold, producing jerky and sluggish movements in quick succession.

{{Yeah.

{{That’s light blue magic.}}

Chara calls out in a high, clear voice: ["Orange, orange, blue. Blue."]

I grasp their orders immediately: {That’s his attack pattern.

{He’s casting magic on his trident now. For real this time.

{But why is it so telegraphed?}

Again, Chara calls out: ["Orange, blue, orange, blue."]

I stop mid-stride as Chara quickly says [His eyes flash with the color of magic he’s gonna use.]

Chara shouts for a third time: ["Blue, blue, orange. Blue."]

[He can’t help it. He's not precise enough to do it without any tells.]

{or—}

In unison: {He thinks I can’t see the color.

[He thinks you can't see the color.]

{Yeah!}

{You’re right—}

Chara interrupts themselves: [Orange, orange, blue, orange.]

The column of orange magic surrounding and projecting out of Asgore’s trident whooshes past my body and warms the surface of Mjolnir. I may not have used magic as long as anyone else, but even I can sense where it begins and ends. I enter the midst of the orange magic and run along its
trajectory, away from Asgore. On a whim, I swipe the Monado behind me in the hopes that it will bat the trident away and give me—us—some space.

It works.

Somehow.

We’re all a little more than surprised.

After a couple more sequences of orange and light blue magic, we assume I’m safe, because I’ve learned how Asgore fights: he channels magic through his trident, like what I do with—

Mid-stride, determination grips my body and soul.

Chara has taken control of me… but why?

Scortching heat, only marginally dulled by Mjolnir, fills the air in front of me.

That’s a fireball.

I jump backward as a fireball speeds toward my face.

It turns out we were wrong.

Very wrong.

Again.

The fireballs reign down around us, so I have to activate the green magic I’ve been loaned several times, just to avoid taking severe damage. However, even so, Asgore depletes my HP several chunks at a time, one after the other.

I’m at forty-one HP out of eighty-five now. Chara is much worse: thirty-four out of eighty-five.

This is… much lower than we’d like.

[Activate Shield art and your green magic so we can heal!]

They don’t have to tell me twice.

I oblige.

Chara steps close, tapping their knuckles against Mjolnir’s left side. As the green magic erects a green barrier around us, the Monado begins floating in front of me. Because Mjolnir’s magic conforms to my intensions, my determination is converted to blue magic, which is cast on the Monado, Freeing up my hands so I can heal. Reassured that it’s nearby and within reach, I reach my hands into my dimensional box, a pair of Legendary Heros appearing between my fingers. Chara takes one of the healing items from me, and inside Mjolnir, I touch the Monado-shaped sandwich to my lips and tongue, about to bite out of it.

It leaves my hand and vanishes almost instantly.

Despite the fact that I’ve eaten monster food for just over five Dreemurrite months, I am still confused about how I was able to eat it when I didn’t feel it touch the inside of my mouth and throat at all.
I shake myself. I shouldn’t question it.

Not yet anyway.

[You ate the Legendary Hero. You recover forty HP. Your attack increased by four.]

{Eh!}

[Well don’t stand there let’s go!]

We compose ourselves before I orient myself so I face the fluctuating magic emanating from Asgore’s soul. He’s at… 3600 HP out of 3500: not as low as we hoped, but it could be much worse. At least we’ve managed to damage him at all.

It seems like it’s about time that I take advantage of those attack buffs.

Ensuring that my green magic and Shield Art are deactivated, I raise the Monado, switching to Buster art. I spawn Gaster blasters around us in a loose dome. Without Chara’s guidance, I slash the Monado in front of me, wondering whether it will connect or not.

A tremor runs through me as Asgore’s trident clangs against the Monado.

Asgore parried my attack.

{[“Shit!”]}

After several tense seconds of sparring, Chara and I come to a realization around the same time. One prediction of Gaster’s is officially wrong: he assumed that after a few minutes, Asgore’s attack and defense would drop, due to his emotional state, due to his frankly horrible state of mind. Having to kill a blind person would do that to anyone. Him… Papyrus… Sans… their entire strategy, and my entire training regimen, revolved around this fact.

They were wrong: Asgore still has eighty AT and 80 DF.

Alphys was right: he IS strong.

Even so, though my grip on the Monado feels shakier than before, it doesn’t fall from my hand.

Asgore isn’t determined enough to take the Monado from me.

Considering what Chara and I have gone through, it’s no wonder that this fact, morbid as it is, boosts our confidence.

When Buster art ends, I switch to Speed art, Chara’s control of my movements becoming more nuanced. My swings become faster and less uncertain. I allow my soulological conditioning to guide me, so I can sense the general pattern of Asgore’s attacks. I gather just enough information to assess whether to perry his attack or back away. Chara takes care of the specifics. The strength channeled into every swing is all my own.

Asgore parries the Monado once.

Twice.

Thrice.

[Quice? Frice?]
{That’s not even a word!}

[Welp. Won't have to use it again anyways…]

On the fifth attempt, we finally see success. My arm and body swish past Asgore’s trident. The monado, which I suppose belongs to Chara and myself now, rings against metal.

{Asgore’s wearing armor.}

[Well duh!]

In the next moment, as I back away from Asgore again, he gasps. His magic dips in intensity.

Chara and I both feel it.

I damaged Asgore, both his armor and the magic emanating from him comprising his soul.

I failed to penetrate his armor, but I still dealt enough damage to him to bypass its magical and physical defenses.

I chunked off a hundred HP from him… and Buster art isn’t even activated anymore.

Earlier, when I hit him, I dealt 20 damage.

{He’s… weakening a little.}

[more like a lot. Look at his stats.]

I do.

80 attack, 77 defense.

{That defense drop made THAT big of a difference?}

We continue to clash weapons, Chara helping me activate my green magic to act as a shield when I can’t swing the Monado fast enough to perry. It seems to last for hours. We manage to cram a couple more Legendary Heroes down between swings. I don't manage to hit Asgore’s armor again.

He’s gotten my pattern down now.

{He just won’t stop.

{Even though his stats are going down… he won’t stop.}

Eventually, I grow tired enough that using the Monado as a hand-to-hand weapon becomes detrimental.

[It’s too dangerous for you to fight hand-to-hand. We were too reckless! You—we—need to heal!]

I shudder as Asgore’s trident slams into Mjolnir, pain spreading across my ribs on my right side.

{Good plan.}

I activate Shield art and my green magic, but afterward, Chara takes control of my hand so I press down the trigger for yellow magic. We press the trigger down again and again, until Gaster blasters surround us on all sides, all of them aimed outward, forming a protective radius around us. They form a wall standing as tall as us, and then some.
If Asgore comes within a five-foot radius of us, he’ll take massive damage.

Massive damage he can’t block… because each Gaster blaster does negligible damage by itself.

[You don’t have that much food left.]

{Yeah I know.}

The Gaster blasters fire several times as Asgore tries to overpower them with his fire magic. They dissipate his attacks before they reach us.

As Gaster and Papyrus planned.

[How about you eat the Instant Noodles to top off your HP?]

{Yeah sure but how ‘bout you? You like, have… uh… fucking Jesus you have only 25 HP left!}

[I’ll drink a Sea Tea. I need the caffeine—or whatever Sea Tea is anyway.]

[You can—]

{But I don’t need it I have Speed! You need the healing!}

I mash the trigger button on my controller, Gaster blasters appearing to replace the ones which have faded away. Chara considers my suggestion.

[Yeah give me those!]

I oblige.

I’m relieved… and also disconcerted… that we actually have time to physically eat and drink all our healing items this time.

Asgore’s reactions are slowing down, and his maximum defense has dropped to seventy, from seventy-seven a couple minutes ago. He has only seventy attack now, when his maximum attack earlier was eighty.

Chara has forty-five out of eighty-five HP. I have maximum HP again.

All we have left is the pie.

Only when a surge of energy flows through me,, Chara announces that I’m at full health again, and that their speed has increased, do I realize how weak and demoralized we have felt over the past…

I don’t even know how long we’ve been fighting Asgore hand-to-hand, let alone how long we’ve been fighting him overall.

Well, I guess that’s not true any more.

[He’s at low HP! Well it’s not low—he’s like… at less than fifty percent HP right now—but stiiiiilll! His stats are going down by the second! You got this! I know you can do the rest by yourself!]

Chara’s right: Asgore has about 2200 HP out of 3500 now… and dropping, because of the few remaining Gaster blasters.
[He’s really slow now. That doesn’t mean he’s weak but still he’s not as strong as before.]

Chara mentally jabs me in the ribs with their elbow. [Come on I know you’re not deaf yet!]

[Go for it! You’re almost there!]

I wonder for a second how Chara has lost so much HP over the course of the fight. The locket has twenty defense, which, considering its size, is definitely impressive, and they have countless timelines of experience to guide them.

In this moment, several sensations and thoughts rush into my mind: the heat of Asgore’s fireballs, missing me, but burning Chara. The ambient magic around Asgore’s trident racking Chara’s soul, as they continue to stand in its path, even as I jump or sidestep it. The shock of Chara’s feet hitting the ground after jumping at least ten feet in the air while under the effects of Jump Art, without the benefit of Mjolnir’s protection and shock absorption.

{Noooooo…}

When dodging Asgore’s fireballs or his magic, they guided me so I would take minimal damage, even if it was at their own expense.

Especially if it was at their own expense.

Not even the fact that Chara’s giving me moral support to help me beat up their adopted father can overshadow their behavior.

They consider my safety more important than their familial ties to Asgore.

I shake myself… or rather, the Second Six Souls all reprimand me, in their own unique ways, all at once.

I can’t hesitate any longer.

In one motion, I activate Speed art, closing the distance between Asgore and myself. I slash the Monado, accompanying each strike with bursts of orange or light blue magic, to deter Asgore from coming any closer. Between alternating bursts of orange and light blue magic, I rapidly toggle my green magic on and off, to shield us from his attacks and give us time to reposition ourselves.

Chara’s right: he is slower. He’s not completely exhausted yet, not by any means, but I can feel it. His soul… the magic surrounding it is less vibrant than before. It grows dimmer by the second.

I continue attacking.

1800 out of 3500.

1700 out of 3500.

1600 out of 3500…

Then everyone screams at me, verbally and mentally. In particular, the conviction in Chara’s and Judge Sans’s voices stuns me… but not for long.

[*6[“Time for a chain attack!”]6*]

They don’t have to tell me twice.
I unload everything I have on Asgore: Gaster blasters surround us and fire in a constant stream. Orange magic surrounds the Monado as I activate Buster art, hopefully for the last time. Even when Asgore parries my attacks, I sense his HP decreasing, and his magic fading. I don’t even bother dodging as often anymore: Edisondamn it if I get hit now. I still have the Pie left. Now, I actually have time to eat it properly. Hell my attack is higher than when I started, and not just from the two Legendary Heroes I’ve eaten.

My base attack has increased to forty from thirty-five… just over the course of this one fight, and Chara’s defense has risen from twenty-eight to thirty-three.

Asgore only has his stamina to keep him going now, and even that fades with each passing moment.

1000 out of 3500.
900 out of 3500.
800 out of 3500.
700 out of 3500.

[“We can definitely do this!”]

I allow myself a twinge of pride: Chara’s Shulk impression has improved immensely since we first met.

While controlling my body, I allow Chara to activate my orange magic again and switch into Jump Art.

We vault high over Asgore’s head.

As we reach the top of our jump, Chara screams, verbally and mentally.

[“NOOOOOW!”]

I seem to hang in midair for an instant as I cancel Jump art and switch into Smash art for the first time this entire fight.

Who knows? Mjolnir’s magic responds to my thoughts… and I suppose, Chara’s thoughts as well. If we want to hang in midair for a second, then by Faraday’s lisp, it will happen.

We plummet toward the ground.

We scream as I drive my body into Asgore’s backplate, and the pommel of the Monado into the back of Asgore’s helmet.

They give under my weight. Somehow, I’ve managed to dent them both.

In what sounds and feels like slow motion, Asgore pitches forward in front of me. I hear the heavy thud of Asgore’s trident hitting the dirt… a surprisingly-large distance away.

Asgore finally falls to his knees… which is when I finally register how much HP he has left.

425 out of 3500.

**stop the music.**
As Asgore’s armor and body fall before us, and my blade, carving a ditch into the dirt, a set of footsteps rushes across the room, and a voice calls out to us.

A voice that I never thought I’d hear again, let alone here.

A voice that makes Chara… and the Second Six Souls… quiver with excitement.

“Stop!

“Haven't you done enough?

"I implore both of you to stop!"

I start in surprise.

Knees bent, Monado still raised, I stand stock-still. None of us can believe our ears, even if some of the beings spectating on the fight don't have any.

Chara's and the Second Six Souls' excitement reach a fever pitch. They can't stand still any longer.

[6][“MOOOOOOOOM!”]6

Chara seems completely reinvigorated as they run around me--

Blue and purple and orange magic bloom to life around Chara, hurling them through the air toward and… in to Toriel.

S[Toriel! Even I think we’ve waited too long to see you again.]S

T[If I could run up there and hug you I totally would!]T

E[Usually me and Adam and Simon are the calm ones but… seriously I can’t believe I’m seeing you again!]E

D[Now you know how we took good care of Pauline and Chara. I’m the one who made bacon for them.

D[Your welcome.]D

A[You know how everyone says smart people don’t have a soul, or don’t follow their emotions?

A[Even I think it’d be smart to listen to them now.]A

K[It’s just sooooo unfair that we can’t be up there for ourselves. But who knows? Thanks to Pauline and Chara… we might be able to see you ourselves really soon]K

She doesn't seem to mind that Chara has rammed into her and nearly bowled her over… and that the Second Six Souls continue to talk simultaneously. She helps Chara stand up straight before stabilizing herself.

Once they're both settled, she wraps Chara in a firm hug. “So it is true: you have been guiding Pauline ever since Gaster brought here to our timeline, my child.”
“Mm-hmm.”

“That is a tremendous responsibility to place on a child’s shoulders. Even if you have lived thousands of lives across as many timelines. To me you are still a child. And placing someone’s life in your hands like that…”

[“The Six Souls helped me.”]

A light, genuinely-childlike laugh. [“’Cause when Pauline first landed in the Ruins and I was telling her what the first puzzle looked like Adam said my descriptions sucked.”]

I can’t help but start snickering… then outright laughing. Everyone else follows suit.

K[I mean it was more like you didn’t know the important bits to describe. That’s not your fault.]K

[“Yeah but stiiiiill!”]

“Adam! How could you expect Chara to do well at something they’ve never done!?”

Adam’s cocky act vanishes under Toriel’s scrutiny. A[Oh come on mom Chara sucked reaaaally baaaad!]A

As everyone talks, green magic washes over Chara, probing at their wounds, lingering over the cuts and burns and bruises. After healing Chara’s physical wounds, the green magic penetrates deeper, until it thinly covers Chara’s soul, repairing the damage wrought by the various magical attacks they have endured over the course of the day. With each patch of broken skin healed, every clot of blood vanished, every point of HP restored, Chara and I sigh in relief. The Second Six Souls chatter animatedly amongst themselves, and eventually, they begin recounting their blow--by-blow commentary of the fight… until Kari begs everyone to calm down.

A[But like, as I was saying: they like, didn’t know how to say where things were! And they didn’t tell Pauline Sans was a skeleton so she like… cussed at him! The first thing she said to him was “Fuck!”]A

Everyone laughs. Among all of us, Toriel laughs the hardest, to our collective surprise. Our laughter abruptly ends as Kari reprimands harshly: K[Adam. Don’t talk about Pauline like that. It’s disrespectful. Even if it is true.

K[Considering what’s happened to her and Chara, that’s the last thing she needs to be reminded of.]K

Firmly: K[And remember: Pauline’s not the only one who has to be treated with respect around here now.]K

{Kari why are you…?}

Chara doesn’t answer, but as Kari finishes, I tilt my head upward. I assume that Chara made me do it. I cock my head to the side, as if… as if listening for something.

Someone.

A thankfully quiet moment as Adam composes himself: A[What I mean is, is that even with all seven of us helping we struggled really hard. It probly made things worse a lot of the time.]A he corrects nervously.
A[I’m sorry Pauline. I shouldn’t have brought that up. Eve if it did actually happen, I shouldn’t be joking about that. Sans—]A

[“Judge Sans—“]

{Chaaaaara?}

{Why are you correcting him?}

A[Judge Sans—he was—you were—only the second monster Pauline actually talked to after all. It’d make sense that she’d freak out.]A

{Adam?}

{Why are you stumbling over your words like that? Even I know that’s not normal.}

[Same. And it seems like this isn’t the first time either.]

[Something must’ve happened while we were asleep…]

{{What happened to you guys?}}

"Pauline, I am sorry for startling you earlier. I should have told you to come here as soon as I arrived. But please: come here so I can heal you."

{"You think I wouldn’t?"}

{"Hey don’t sass my mom!”}

6[Yeah don’t sass our mom!]6

With the gentle touch of Toriel’s green magic against my body and soul to guide me, I begin walking over to her under my own power.

“Both of you are in dire need of treatment. Pauline? The healing items we gifted you were only meant to sustain YOU for the duration of the battle. We never could have known—“

She stops

“No.

“I never could have known Chara was there. It is more than likely that the Gasters and the Curies knew. When I was consulting everyone about your training regimen, I worked off the assumption that you would require an amount and strength of healing items sufficient for one person.”

Chara makes room for me in their hug when I reach Toriel.

She takes several deep breaths. "But I digress. This is not the time to be talking about this.

“I cannot overstate how relieved I am to know you are safe, my child.”

A light, bewildered laugh. “Or I suppose it would be more accurate to say my children now!”

{"True.}”

6[Awwww!w]6
I scoot slightly closer to Toriel. Significantly muffled, she continues: “Though I am unsure of whether I should feel reassured or disturbed that you and Chara were able to apply your soulological training so…

“Well not necessarily easily. Readily seems much more appropriate.

“You must have felt so afraid, my children.”

[“It could’ve been worse.”]

I stop in my tracks. Not even Chara is this… tactless.

[“’Cause if I panicked, Pauline wouldn’t have stood a chance.”]

{Okay I was wrong. Thank Tesla.}

It’s not a lack of tact: it’s just the truth.

[“Even with all her training Pauline wouldn’t have been skilled enough to fight Asgore in a fair fight. I would’ve told her to spam Jump! And Speed! and spam the Gaster Blasters and camp really hard, if it weren’t for the time limits on them.”]

Green magic passes through Mjolnir. as Toriel heals my bruises, I grunt as her magic runs over my ribs.

Toriel sighs. "Yes. That is true. In hindsight I should have advocated for that strategy, during Determination. It would have saved both of you dozens of Health Points lost and injuries incurred.”

"Mm-hmm.”

6[Mm-hmm.]6

A little more firmly than before: “But still: you did exactly what Gaster and Alphys told you to do. Their tactics worked as well as they could have, considering your… condition. Physically and psychophysically.”

Her words drip with worry: “But why Chara? Standing in the path of so many attacks—“

Chara’s sleeve brushes against the side of Mjolnir. When Chara next speaks, they seem above me, near my shoulder height. Toriel must have picked them up.

[What’d you think I was gonna do?]

We all flinch at the harshness in Chara’s tone.

[I’m not stupid. There was no point in me not taking any damage if Pauline ran out of HP.

[I had to stay close to her to leech off the Monado Arts’ buffs. I had to be fast enough and tanky enough to give her accurate directions.

[The Monado Arts let me see everything. From her point of view.]

Their harshness dissolves in an instant: [If I didn’t, both of us would’ve gotten hurt.

[Really badly.]
"Stop the music."**

They laugh a little. [“And besides: I would’ve let the Judiciary down if I let that happen."
[“And if she got hurt a little more than she did he would’ve killed me]

The Six Souls and Toriel laugh… and not because Chara’s remark is particularly funny.

No.

They are uneasy laughs and nervous laughs.

{Seriously what the fuck happened while we were asleep!?}  

We all take several moments to process this information.

{Holy shit I was right: Chara you did take a bullet for me. Lots of times.}

Toriel, seemingly to herself: “Alphys, Gaster, Dewey… I never should have doubted you. The three of you are experts in your fields for a reason.

"Or more precisely, I never should have doubted Judge Sans. He led the research and development on Mjolnir’s construction, after all. And that experience has definitely served him well until now.”

6[Mm-hmm.]6

A second more of warm hugging before Toriel withdraws her green magic away from our bodies. I notice how even though the soreness in my arms has disappeared, after the effort she has taken to heal us, it is all we can do to stand upright.

Daaaaamn we’re tired.

She steps away from us smoothly. Her sudden change in mood snaps us out of any sense of comfort we might have gathered from her presence. Her voice becomes more brisk. “There is another reason I came here.”

She turns around and begins walking away slowly. [“What is it?”]

Over her shoulder: “I have a request straight from Judge Sans.”

{[“Huh?”]}

We follow her, Chara guiding me along. Even now, my hands remain on my controller and the Monado, in case I have to use them again. Only after a couple minutes of walking do I register Asgore’s labored and unsure footsteps behind us along the gravel path through the garden.

“He requests—

She stops herself.

“No.

“It is much stronger than a request.”

She corrects herself: “Judge Sans DEMANDS your presence at once.”

Chara and I don’t waste any time: {[That’s not ominous at all!]}
Right on cue, the gravel under our feet seemingly vanishes out from underneath us.

We fall through the air, out of seemingly nowhere.

After a moment of false freefall, our shoes land solidly on the marble floor of the Judgment Hall.

Not a second after we land, a strident voice calls out to us... and we immediately clamp our hands over our ears. Even the Second Six Souls try withdrawing their fields of knowing away from us to distance themselves from the magic powering that voice.

Like it would do us any good: because the voice is magical, it can't be drowned out by any means.

Though sudden, overwhelming, and soul-shaking, we recognize the voice at once.

Chara, the Second Six Souls, and I have never felt so glad to be yelled at in our lives.

*“HALT!”*

**Chapter End Notes**

Here's the URL for the Asgore cover.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EX-4mz5WuY

Here's Fallen Down Reprise.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGBMTAGzWPs

Linguistic struggle explanation time!

Despite the fact that I've portrayed more abstract manifestations of magic before, this fight was difficult to write, mostly because I couldn't settle on how to recreate and adapt Asgore's attack patterns to suit this AU. I reasoned that since he was a skilled fighter, he would not be telegraphed like in the game, so I characterized him switching tactics as him adapting to my strategy. I also had a hard time finding appropriate language to describe the amount of damage I was dealing and being dealt. It's like how humans can only describe pain on a ten-point scale: we have only so many words to describe pain. Considering that soulological pain is an abstract, fictional concept, I struggled in describing the damage I was causing to Asgore's soul.

Finding ways to describe the fight without breaking the flow of the narrative was also difficult. I wanted to give off the impression that my soulological training had become second nature, so I no longer needed to consciously think about the magical stimulus I was feeling. That, and as of now, this fight is the culmination of my and Chara's time being together. I trust Chara with my safety, Chara officially knows how to give meaningful directions, they have sufficiently-nuanced control over my body, and they know when to trust me to make choices.

There's also the moral dilemma of Chara helping me to beat the living crap out of Asgore. However, as much as I like to ramble on about morality in these endnotes, I can say that the morality feels weren't the focus in this chapter. Maybe they will be later... as of the initial posting of this chapter on 25 April 2018, I haven't planned out
the next chapter yet.

I have to say though, that this fight was one of my most anticipated moments... at least, before the Judgment theory took over my life. I knew that this fight would have to be a spectacle, so I wanted every element: the writing, the pacing, the music, to reflect that.

The cover of Asgore I used was one of the first songs I confirmed I wanted in Visiontale. I had tried looking for another cover which captured its dynamism and replicated its variety of instruments, but I hadn't found one. I knew I wanted this song to be in the soundtrack after listening to the Heartache sample section. It's much more energetic, and yet, more rhythmic, than the original, because of the drums. While listening to this section, I'd imagine Chara and I dodging Asgore's flashing light blue and orange attacks, and Chara calling out the colors to the beat. That action was so evocative that at first, I tried to time the writing to the music, so if you read it at a certain speed, you'd read Chara's directions in time to the drums but... that didn't end up working out. Oh well.

As for Fallen Down Reprise? I have also looked extensively for covers over the past several months. In my ideal cover, the main melody would have been performed with a violin, and the entire song would have been played by real instruments... but I guess that kind of cover doesn't exist...

*sigh...*

Funny story actually: for a long time, early on in worldbuilding, I wondered what I'd have Toriel say to me when she appeared. I thought about this again after the Judgment was finalized, because this would have been the first time Toriel would have seen Chara up close.

In spite of all that prior thought, over the course of writing the first few complete drafts of the chapter, I had forgotten about most of it and almost made this scene shorter than it deserved...

[Whauw whauw whaaaaauw.]

One last note: about the last word of this chapter...

You know how Judge Sans has been keeping the peace for the past several hours in-story, ever since we left?

When he promised he'd defend his title of Judge... even if it killed everyone?

You'll see some of the consequences of his attempts in the next chapter. Not all of them, because they're not the focus, but still.

Also: you know how Toriel roasts Asgore in front of everyone, in the True Pacifist ending?

Now, imagine those same arguments being said by Judge Sans.

Yeah.

*shudder*

That's going to be a fun chapter to write. At the very least, it will force me to confront
my... feelings... on Asgore.

[The thought of seeing how Judge Sans--]

No.

I just realized: Chara and I aren't the most determined. The save point-style endings don't refer to us. I can't end the endnotes like that anymore.

[6][The act of wielding your power as Judge: magical, moral, and political, without restraint, fills you with determination.

[6][File saved.

[6][HP fully restored.]}6]

Asgore? Prepare to have a bad time.
Chapter 47

Chapter Summary

After more than two months of writing, struggling to do Asgore justice, and agonizing over Judge Sans's dialogue, here's the next chapter.

If you want to read about my process for selecting the background music, my feelings on Asgore, and my headcanons about Judge Sans, specifically regarding why he acts and speaks the way he does, read the endnotes.

Oh yeah: as of the first posting of this chapter, Judge Sans's/Alphys's/Annie's birthdays are in a few days, on July 10. It's also Nikola Tesla's birthday, and the start of Patience 204X on the Dreemurrite/Judiciary calendar. Several days before this chapter was posted for the first time, I realized that if I was using that system, I would have been living through the interlude between 203X and 204X. Ever since I first published that headcanon, so much time has gone by that I can count the number of years I've been writing Visiontale using the calendar I created. As of this October (the last week of Bravery 204X), I would've been writing Visiontale for two Gregorian years (our calendar), and almost two Dreemurrite/Judiciary years...

"[6[By Tesla...]]6]"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

47

*“HALT!!!”*

*Play until the next note yaaaas!*

https://soundcloud.com/user815390209/visiontale-soundtrack-i-am-determined

{{6[OH FUCK!!!]6}}

I don’t even question Chara as they activate Speed Art, grab my hand, and begin dragging me out of the room as fast as they can. [Nope! I don't wanna be here! I don't wanna be part of this!]

{Same!}

Mid-stride, yellow magic surges through us. Our souls lurch as the determination powering Speed Art drains out of us completely. *"I SAID HAULT!!!"*

{{Not again!}}

Blue magic seizes hold of us, and in spite of our… prior experiences… with blue magic, in our panic, we try to break free. A[I mean we all saw this coming.

A[But if we had bodies we still would've done it.]A
In a what-would-normally-be-funny squeaky voice: S[True!]S

K[Why'd you guys think you could run away!? Why!? Just…]K

A verbal facepalm: K[Aaaaaah!]K

Kari’s right: the first time, we refused to follow orders, even though we knew we would have a…
bad time… if we disobeyed them.

Knowing that, why did we disobey this time?

[[How could we be so stupid?]]

*“Empty your pockets.”*

He’s still yelling at us. Of course it’s not going to end now…

Retrieving the Pie from the dimensional box, I step out of Mjolnir and set it down a short distance 
away from my feet, my body and soul jerking in time with Chara’s movements. To my left, the 
chain on their locket clinks rapidly as they whip it off their neck and fling it to the floor.

[Toriel put her stuff on the floor too--]

[But he didn’t—!]

[She’s still got her phone—]

E[If you were her would YOU want him to use his magic on you?]E

No one answers.

[E[Exactly!]E]

*“Lay down your arms.”*

I set my controller and the Monado down as soon as he finishes speaking. Then, I set my hands on 
my head, in what I can only hope is plain view.

K[Chara and Toriel are doing that too.]K

I’m only confused for a moment before Chara and the Second Six Souls explain in unison: [6][So 
we can’t cast magic.

[6][Not like it matters but still…]6]

It takes Asgore… a bit longer… to set his trident heavily on the floor at his feet.

A relieving moment of silence—

No.

He’s… waiting.

Even before I fell into the Underground, I learned to read the mood of people—monsters—
whatever… even when they don’t talk. Sometimes, their intent is just palpable.

I don’t hesitate as we sink downward, until Chara, Toriel, and I kneel on the floor before Judge
Sans, even though we were never explicitly told to do so.

Well… I suppose Chara intended to kneel… and that is enough of an incentive to make Toriel follow suit. Since our souls are still intertwined from fighting Asgore, I have no choice but to do as they do and feel as they feel. Based on the heavy thud of metal on marble behind us, it sounds like Asgore has finally knelt on the floor. \[\{Duuuuude why’d it take you sooooo looong!?!\}\]

After a moment, a command brimming with yellow magic sears our souls and burns against our skin. Chara, Toriel… everyone else in the Judgment Hall, and I, all cringe in pain at once, even though we know this command is not directed at us.

\*\*“Asgore Rousseau Dreemurr.

\*\*“STAND AND DELIVER!”\*

From my position on the floor, my body spasms. Toriel seems less startled, but not by much. Though he is close behind us, Asgore’s bewilderment seems completely drowned out by the multitude of emotions felt by the monsters around us: surprise, admiration, fear… and respect.

Just as Chara and I are about to make some witty remark about how if a deep authoritative voice says to do something, you do it, Asgore slowly, laboriously, rises to his feet… and not just because he is still wounded and spent from our fight.

No.

Using his blue magic, Judge Sans grips Asgore's soul with an iron fist. Blue magic washes across the entire Judgment Hall, each object seemingly suspended within it. Simultaneously, the all-too-familiar burning sensation of yellow magic fills the air. With every breath, our throats burn and souls throb, and we can’t help but recall the HP, strength, and will-sapping power of Karmic Retribution. Based on the pain we sense from several other monsters around us, it seems like we were only the first ones to feel that power since—

Why did I bow my head?

I never—

\{Why am I face down?\}

\{Again?\}

It takes me a moment longer than it should to realize why I’m face down on the floor: \{It’s Chara.\}

They’re prostrating themselves.

Through our pain and the overwhelming presence of Judge Sans’s magic, I can’t help but snark, \{Well I did tell you that prostration’s like, the highest form of respect you could give someone back in the day…\}

Before Chara can reply: \*[Fear not.\*

\*[\([Fucking Jesus what!?!]\)]

As if in response: \*I mean you no harm.*

We're hearing Judge Sans’s thoughts again, like in Asgore’s shady basement. This is the first time
we've communicated soulologically face-to-face since we left. The last time we did, he… summoned Chara…

T[He can hear what we’re thinking remember?]T

{{Oh… fuck you're right!}}

[That’s not Karmic Retribution we’re feeling. Well it is but it’s not 'cause of us.
[I mean YOU no harm.] Chara emphasizes. [He means US.]

Momentarily, we receive a familiar order: *“Rise.”*

We begin scrambling off of the floor as quickly as we can.

At least, until Chara trips on their own feet and begins to fall.

We can’t help but groan. {S[You JUST had to fuck this up…]S}

Chara gasps as A sharp pain takes hold of my right wrist, my right arm going rigid. Blue and yellow magic and… determination… drives into our souls. Fear grips Chara, and by extension, me, for an instant, until I realize what’s happening to us.

I’m feeling what Chara’s feeling.

No one’s holding onto MY wrist.

Judge Sans grabbed Chara’s wrist before they could fall. {But he was—!}

{He shortcutted over here didn’t he?}

6[Yeh.]6

Just as quickly, Chara’s feet plant themselves firmly on the floor again, supported by blue magic—the same aura of blue magic that surrounded them before. It's just that now, it's much more gentle.

Chara fidgets, bracing themselves for a short and biting critique of their actions. I inch closer to them and prepare to grab their wrist again, in case we have to run. {{[Awwww he’s gonna be soooo piiissed…?]6}}

However, the seemingly-inevitable list of the ways we have defied his orders does not come.

Instead, Judge Sans begins chuckling.

No one expected this.

His mood has cycled through soul-splitting authority, concern, and gentleness, in a matter of seconds.

Judge Sans’s voice rings, firm and low and clear, as we vibrate with his every word: *“Chara?”*

No one dares to answer.

A few more moments pass, and he has yet to speak again.

Prodding: K[He wants an answer guys.]K
“Y-y-yeah?”

Amused: *“You surprised me.”*

Chara tries to reply, but can’t even form a coherent sentence. After several attempts, they manage to ask, [“H-h-h-h-how?”]

They receive an answer much more quickly than any of us expected: *“You did not protect Pauline.”*

*“Rather—”*

“No…? They diiiiid…?” I interrupt.

{What’s he implying?}

“They DEEEEEEEINIIIIIIITEEEEELY diiiid…?”

He cuts me off before I can continue: *“I beg to differ.”*

A deceptively-simple statement: *“You acted out of good will, Chara.”*

As usual, we reply with the first thought that comes to mind: “[{What do you mean?}]”

Judge Sans wastes no time in giving us the explanation we want and need. From his tone, it seems like he has waited a long, long time to give it.

A weight seems to lift from his shoulders as he takes a breath and says, *“Humans and monsters should do good out of good will alone.”*

[… … Uh… you’d think he would’ve said something longer…]

{Yeeeeeaaah truuuuue.}

In spite of its brevity, Chara struggles through his explanation. [“So… you think me doing it ‘cause we’re friends is wrong. I don’t know why but—”]

A customarily-short answer: *“Correct.”*

[“You think I did it ‘cause it was the right thing to do.

[“I think.”]

They receive no answer.

Chara continues talking, throwing explanations against a wall until one sticks: [“how does that surprise you?

[“I’ve been helping Pauline the whole time.

[“You saw that… during our Judgment.

[“So how are you surprised by this one thing?”]

He takes a step toward us. Static and heavy fabric brushes my body, and patellas click against marble. We receive another formal reply, much closer to our eye level this time. The closeness scares us, but not for long.
Gently, but with emphasis on every word: *“You heard me.
*“Good people do good out of good will alone.”*

We gasp. {“So you think Chara’s a good person.”} I venture a guess.

*“No.”*

“[What?]”

*“Chara never strived to be a good person.”*

I recall, {“You said anyone can be good if they try.

{“So you think they weren’t trying hard enough.”}

No answer. {“But when we fought Asgore, they tried—”}

*“No.”* is Judge Sans’s sharp retort.

“[What do you mean?]”

Emphatically: *“They succeeded.”*

He used the same tone when he condemned Chara for their actions, in the other timelines as well as this one.

How can the same level of passion be applied to such a different situation?

How has his opinion changed so completely?

Chara, shyly, unsure of how they should feel about his verdict. In spite of living only Tesla knows how many lifetimes through Frisk, they are still eleven at heart. They’ve never talked about this before.

[“You think I did a good thing for the right reason.

[“And you think I’m really trying to be good this time.

[“You don’t think I’m a good person yet… but you think I CAN be.”]

Phalanges close around the top of Chara’s head. After a couple moments, Sans wraps an arm around their shoulders and pulls them close. To my surprise, Chara’s body and soul relax almost immediately. Only a moment passes before he does the same to me.

As the tension in my body and pain in my soul slowly subsides, every last trace of Karmic Retribution vanishing, I am certain that what I am feeling is all my own.

Under the principle that actions speak louder than words, it is obvious that we have received our answer.

Softly: *“Chara?”*

They do not hesitate this time: [“Mm-hmm?”]

*“Your prior conduct—“*
“But why would you forgive me!?”

He cuts Chara off. *“Once I have restored peace, ask me again.”*

[“Uh…”]

We nod. [{“Okay.”}]

Sans seems to collect himself before he stands, turns away, and begins walking past us. {So he DIIIIID see Chara get down on their knees before…}

Chara turns around to face Asgore. A slight tug of blue magic orients me in the same direction and stabilizes my body. His intent to help and protect us is evident in the nuances in his magic, in the way he allows us to move without feeling any pain. He stops only a couple feet away from Asgore, nearly all of his field of knowing focused on him.

[He won’t do it again.]

{His magic—}

A stinging retort, more painful than any Gaster blaster charged with Karmic Retribution: [You really think he hasn't learned by now?]

[How can you think he'd drop his guard like that again!?!]

I don't answer. Instead, Chara, the Second Six Souls, and I, chant in unison, mentally and aloud. I don’t even question how any of us know what to say.

[6][“The act of wielding your power as Judge: magical, moral, and political, fills you with determination.

[6][“File saved.

[6][“HP fully restored.”]]

A moment of crackling silence where no one dares to speak. At least, until Asgore tries to break it. His magic is so repressed that it barely projects beyond his body. Even though we are standing only a few feet away, we strain to hear him.

"What is the meaning of this?"

No answer.

Again, Asgore speaks, growing more bewildered with every word: "I do not understand."

We tense up as the faint, but unmistakable, metallic taste of yellow magic plays on our tongues. {{Noooooo…? Noooooo don’t dooooooo thiiiiiiis…?}}

{How's he not noticing this?}

[No he’s noticing it—]

{Then why’s he still—!?!}

[Hell if I know! He… when he’s nervous that’s just how he is.]
Asgore speaks for a third time: "Sans—"

[You know that hand thing people do when they want you to shut up?]

[Uh… yeeeees…?]

[That’s what Judge Sans just did.]

[Oh daaaaamn!]

A stern command: *"You’ve no leave to speak, Dreemurr.”*

We can’t help ourselves: [{“Oh shiiiiiiit…”}]

“Even if that may be the case,” Toriel points out cautiously, “he must know why he has been summoned here. He at least deserves that. After all, you have done so for every other monster who has endangered the Judiciary, Judge Sans.”

We stop in our tracks.

Since when was Toriel so… formal?

{I mean I know she used to be queen but still!}

Chara’s fear resurfaces again. [Why’s she backing him up?]

{I don’t think it’s that.}

{I think she’s trying to stop him from flipping out.}

Yellow magic and determination hum in my ears, rising and falling. Several times, it spikes, and Chara, the Six Souls, everyone else in the Judgment Hall, and I whince, anticipating another outburst, but nothing comes. Eventually it falls to a seemingly-stable level. The humming dies down. {He’s calmed down right?}

[Yeah how do you know?]

{His magic—}

[Yeah his eyes aren’t flashing all crazilylike. He’s calmed down.]

[For now.]

6{For now.}6

He finally replies: *“Strong emotions cause monsters to lose control of their magic."

*“Some have refused to obey orders."

*“Some have even caused grave harm.”*

“6*[Holy fuck Bob was right…]*)6”

Though quiet, Asgore replies almost immediately: “You must know that I am no stranger to this pattern of behavior. I have seen it more often than I dare to count.

“What I do not understand is…”
Asgore seems lost for words. He picks up again after a couple seconds. "How is it that in spite of
the intensity of their emotions, no one is casting magic here?

“I can sense what they feel. But it hasn’t manifested magically”

As usual, he receives no answer.

Asgore insists: "You must feel it too."

No answer.

“Surely your current behavior has not assuaged them!”

No answer.

"I know you feel what they feel. It is our nature. Not even you can block it out.

“why are you acting this way!!?” he finally asks.

Only an instant passes before Asgore receives a cold, beyond-lucid reply: *"You know why.

*"Only I may cast magic here."*

[6[[Oh shit!!]6]

In a squeaky mental voice: {Well… not like I thought he’d say anything else.}

{It’s just like the first time we got here all over again!}

[Yeh!

[I mean we all know he technically doesn’t have to say it but he still wants to show off his power
sooooo…]

To our surprise, Asgore continues, ever so slightly more confident, as if he had never been
reprimanded: "You are not…"

He struggles for the right word. Rapidly, light blue and orange magic flickers into and out of
existence around him. “Even after everything I’ve seen and heard and felt today I did not believe
it…

“But it is true.

“You are not yourself.” he decisively says.

He struggles to speak over the blue and yellow magic surrounding his soul. “I have never seen you
lash out like this. And I am not trying to imply that you have never taken anything seriously.

“It’s just…

“The last time you acted this way was…”

He gathers himself: “Was when you first proposed the Determination Study to me.”

Everyone mutters in agreement.

6[[[Sounds about right…]]]6
Still no answer.

At this point, Chara and I are unsure of what would be more reassuring: an all-out, magic-fuelled command for silence, or a barely-controlled retort, magic leaking from every word.

Somehow, he has yet to be silenced.

The fact that Asgore continues to receive no answer scares us to no end.

He continues. I can hear him shudder, his voice shaking with every word. "I have never seen you act so cold.

"COMPOSED, yes, but never so cold."

Toriel, in a similar shaky voice: “I cannot believe I am sayin this, but I must agree completely with Asgore."

“We DESERVE an answer. And I am referencing everyone: not just Asgore and myself."

“It should not be—“

Asgore talks over her, hurrying to speak his mind before he is inevitably shut out: “I just do not know how or why you have changed."

“If you can at least tell me that…”

[A[Just say something damn it you’re freaking us out!]A]

[{{Yep!}}]

Even after pouring their hearts out to him, Judge Sans refuses to give Asgore or Toriel an answer.

Simultaneously: “Please—!”

Another harsh reply: *“See for yourself.”*"

We can't help but agree with Asgore: {{Daaaaaamn thaaaaaat’s coooold!}}

{How can they see anything if their magic's being suppressed?}

{They still can—it’ll just be really hard. Judge Sans isn’t gonna give them any leeway. Why would he?}

Asgore and Toriel manage to calm themselves and focus their magic, until it coalesces and slowly extends out into the rest of the room. Using their fields of knowing, they perform a stat check on the monsters present.

Eventually, Asgore’s magic probes Chara’s soul, pausing particularly long on their few remaining injuries before retracting again. Though only a few minutes have passed since our fight, Chara can’t help but relax slightly as Asgore’s magic caresses their cheek.

I flinch when his magic reaches me, but I follow Chara's lead soon enough. I can't help but give in to his concern. {Why does he care so much? He literally just tried to kill me.}

{I know I should be pissed at him but…}
Through his soulological contact, I invision his stats.

Asgore Rousseau Dreemurr
HP: 205/3500
Attack: 42/42
Defense: 42/42

Monsters have trusted him for centuries for a reason.

[We didn’t do that…]

[You mean with his stats?]

[What do you think?]

[I know.

[[His magic's being suppressed that much?]]

[Some of his stat drops are from when he fought us but yeah. His maximum stats are lower now. He can still use magic. But he’s scared. And confused. [But mostly scared.]]

[But his HP—]

[Karmic Retribution.]

I stiffen. {Sans—}

[6[Judge Sans—]6]

{Judge Sans has been casting it on him this whole time?}

Toriel’s stat check is the first to reach the soul of Judge Sans. She gasps violently. Asgore and CHara soon follow. [Holy shit!]

{What!?}

[LOOK!]

Chara’s soul deftly focuses my field of knowing in the right place, and together, we perform a stat check.

Judge Sans Wingdings Gaster
HP: 6498/6498
Attack: 195/244
Defense: 160/184

Wielding the power I deserve fills me with determination.

“[[OH FUCKING HELL BY FARADAY’S LISP WHAAAAAT!?!?]]”

[No wonder they’re freaking out!]

Chara and I lean forward to catch what Asgore says. He seems to withdraw into himself and chooses each word before he says it.
He speaks as if any word he says could—

Of course anything he says could set off Judge Sans. We know this all too well. His fear and caution is completely justified.

“So it’s true: you HAVE gained your old stats back. And then some—“

“6]]6[[Understatement of the fucking century!]]6”

“I knew you were strong but…

“By Tesla… what’s happened to you?”

”[[Yeah I have to ask that too!]]”

“Chara? Pauline?”

Even as I reply, the Six Souls scold me for not thinking it through more: {“Yeah?”}

{ Oh my God he’s talking to me.}

“Before you saw his stats, I know you must have tried to figure out what they were, based on what you have…”

{Yeah I don’t know how you’d describe that either…}

“—FELT… firsthand.”

“Yeah I have. I tried doing it without a calculator…? But I couldn’t… and like… the numbers I got were waaaay too high…?”

Asgore hums in agreement. “I have compared them to the distribution dictated by the el-Shabaz Principle as well—“

{ He knows the thing!}

[Well duh!]

6[Well duh!]6

“—and you are right: they are inordinately high.

“But you must know that regardless, what you saw conforms to their model. AND methodological principles. If nothing else you have witnessed the one cardinal rule that all monsters agree is true. Regardless of translational political alignment.

“Given a situation involving monsters, if you have the option to describe it in extreme terms, do it.”

I laugh a little, recalling the translationist statistical models Dewey and Gaster taught me. {Everyone told me he couldn’t math!}

[I… thought he couldn’t math too…]

{But you said he knew—!}

[I know he knows what it is! I just didn’t think he’d use it…]
Asgore continues, “But you still haven’t answered our question, Sans.

“By Tesla, what’s happened to you?”

Judge Sans takes a step toward him, and Chara, the Six Souls, and I can’t help but sympathize with Asgore. Given his current state, the last time Judge Sans stood that close to someone, Chara and I were on the verge of being Gaster blasted to death.

[Judge Sans… his hands are sparking with his cemented colors of magic. But Adam was right—he’s not using them to control his magic anymore. He just took them out of his pockets so dad could see.

[Dad’s back’s against the pillar behind him. His legs are together and his arms are bound at his sides.]

{Like we were…}

[He’s glowing blue and gold… like we were… during the fight.

[And he… Asgore… can’t cast magic anymore.]

With every word, a pulse of blue and yellow magic and determination crashes over and into Asgore, each one falling upon his soul like a hammer blow.

*“You know why.

*“I am determined.”*

Asgore, in a whisper so quiet that we have to walk forward several steps, just so we can hear him: “Why?

"Why did you break them?

“Even if you found fault with Chara, they—“

The hammer falls once more: *”They abused the power to save.”*

“Even so,” Asgore's confidence builds with every word, “you caused Chara unnecessary harm. They—“

[“Wait.”]

I start.

"[You mean “them” like me.]

{What do you—}"

"[Not Pauline and me.

"[So you think what I did was okay but what Pauline did wasn’t?]"

Asgore seems not to have expected Chara to speak to him: “Chara I do not—“

"[No. You did.

[“You tried to kill her before—I saw you!”]
Bitterly: [“'Cause she was supposed to be the seventh soul.”]

“Chara—"

"[Why didn’t you take them!? It would’ve been so easy! We probly wouldn’t even be standing here if you did.]"

“Because if I took them, I would have let our people down.”

The magic sparking between us vanishes.

No one expected Asgore to have an answer ready.

Systematically: “First: if I took the Third Seven Souls, the hardline Dreemurrites would have decried my use of artificial souls. You know this, because of the Great Disclosure Riots."

"How could I forget?"

[6[Dude whyyyyy--?]6]

{Well what else was I supposed to say!?

"I am not implying that you have, Pauline. I am laying out the facts, for everyone here. That is all."

"I guess."

When Asgore next speaks, it seems like he has turned away, back toward the Judgment Hall at large: “At the same time the most desperate of monsters would have abhored my lack of commitment to my promise—“

"[That every human who falls down here must die?]"

Asgore doesn’t have to answer Chara in words. His melancholy seeps over us, in spite of his efforts to hide it. The Karmic Retribution being cast on him even slows and fades somewhat in response.

Asgore was right: try as he might, Judge Sans is not immune to the psychophysiological states of those around him. As we watch, his attack and defense decrease by several points each.

Asgore collects himself: “The Inertia Society would have tried to use their control of the souls against me. They’re keeping them alive, after all.”

Chara and I gasp: he's right.

“If they weren’t satisfied with me, even if I accepted the souls, they could kill them off remotely, at little cost to them, because they control the technology to make more. It would take time but…

“We have all the time in the world.”

"Yeah…” Chara and I hesitantly agree.

"And beyond that, any of these… protesters… could have found me and killed me. Unlike your politicians, I make a genuine effort to make time for my subjects, to get to know as many of them as well as possible. To spend time with them that truly matters. I have the Royal Guard to protect me but…”

He sighs heavily. "Today, out of all days, I do all I can to be completely open to my subjects."
Security measures be damned.
"But I never could have anticipated this."

“What happened?” I ask.

“Pauline.”

I didn’t expect him to compose himself so quickly.

“Yeah?”

“Remember: Judge Sans is still an Inertia Society member.

“Besides Undyne, would the Royal Guard want the Inertia Society in power?”

{He knows about her armor!}

[Well she’s been using it for like, several months!]

“Probly not… so they DIIIIIID ditch you!”

“If they hadn’t, THEY would have killed you on the way to the Barrier. Not me.

“The ones who didn’t decide to protest, anyhow.”

"{[Protest what?]}"

Without hesitation: “Me.”

I stop.

Everyone does. The monsters spectating on our conversation all react in their own ways. Judge Sans's stats drop by a few more points.

“But why!? I thought only Inertia Society members would wanna kill you.”

“That is true.

"But yes: there are Dreemurrites’ve who wanted to kill me as well. For a long time now. Far longer than Inertia Society members have ever wanted to. Ever since the Holistic Integration Movement began, early in the second Dreemurrine century.

“The closest anyone has come to carrying through those threats was…”

He can't bring himself to say it.

""When?""

Everyone jolts in surprise: Judge Sans was the last one we expected to ask.

He asks again, more insistently this time: ""Asgore.

""They wished to kill you when?"

Asgore replies confidently: "This desperately? And on this scale?"
"Bravery 200X. When rumors about the Determination Study began leaking."

The silence that greets Asgore is enough of an answer.

“There is only one thing that these extremists have in common.”

Agitated, we wait for the answer.

"Chara?

“Pauline?

"I know you’ve heard this before. But I know it will be more meaningful if you hear it from me."

He enunciates: “Regardless of their reasons, many want the Judge to be in power.”

Asgore was right: none of us are surprised.

“As for why, the Dreemurrites have seen me as weak, and soft, and too tolerant of humans.

“And the Inertia Society sees your efforts to quantify such an abstract concept as morality as one of our kind’s greatest achievements, Your Honor.’

*“You… truly…?”*

Chara, the Six Souls, and I are confused for several moments. It doesn’t immediately register to us that Sans has spoken. He has never sounded so surprised and uncertain, since he became determined.

An uneasy laugh: “I would not be saying it if I didn't believe it or if it weren't true. You would have known if I was lying!”

“[{6[Truuuuuuue…]}6]”

"The Inertia Society’s argument is simple: why not have someone who is living proof that monsters are superior to humans lead us?

“Someone birthed by our technology? Someone raised by our finest methods? Someone educated by the teacher which is experience??

{[What does he mean?]}

“Or rather hundreds, if not thousands, of lifetimes worth of experiences.”

{[Noooooo…

{[No way…]}

A gasp from in front of us: *“You… you heard Shakur and Touring.”*

“Yes. Every last argument, rebuttal, supposed lie, damning of lies, and statistic, Judge Sans.”

K[Who would’ve thought…?]K

Asgore just used the title.

He’s lowered himself to our level.
He’s obeying Judge Sans’s decree from earlier, and not just because he has seen our bad time.

No.

He respects that decree.

He genuinely respects it.

Stark confusion and surprise that is not our own floods our souls. The blue and yellow magic enveloping the Judgment Hall vanishes completely, leaving a mundane silence behind. As unsettling as this silence makes us feel, we wait it out. We know that we will receive a reply in time.

*"You shall step down."

"Yes." Asgore answers firmly. "I agree with the Inertia Society, that by refusing to accept the Third Seven Souls, I am depriving Pauline of her naturel rights.

"I agree with the Dreemurrite extremists that using artificial souls to break the Barrier is abhorrent, because they were created as an experiment, and not as true living things.

"I even agree with humans who think the same way, in regards to experimentation on human embryos.

"Yes: it is abhorrent that our kind has been forced to research this subject, just so we may be free."

Asgore’s armor clinks as he walks forward. The crowd around us softly gasps. [He bowed. Like Shakur earlier.]

{I had afeeling—}

"Accordingly," Asgore musters up all his dignity, "I agree that only a monster with knowledge of all relevant points of view, and the necessary training, wisdom, and power, has the right to tackle these issues."

Again: the dull thud of metal on marble. [He knelt on the floor again, didn't he?]

[Yep.]

Everyone holds their breath as Asgore proclaims, "I, Asgore Rousseau Dreemurr, formally resign my position as king. In my stead, I decree that the Judge shall take power. Until our kind is safe, secure, and stable, he shall wield his power: magical, moral, and political, without restraint.

“May the prospect of doing what I could not fill you with determination, Judge Sans."

A split second where the crowd basques in Asgore's last decree as king.

Sans's disbelief washes over everyone. {I mean you'd think he’d be happy about this.}

[I don't think it's that. He probly can't believe what he just heard.]

S[Can you blame him?]

S[Asgore just gave up all his power by Tesla!]

T[I might not be into politics, but even I know this is a big deal.]
E[Asgore placed his full confidence in Sans. 'Cause he knows that he'll pull through.]E

A[I don't think you can say that for sure.]

A[But I know Sans will figure out what to do. He always does.]A

D[If Adam’s certain about it, it can’t be that far off. I think we should take heart from that.]D

[Dad gave Judge Sans all his power ‘cause he thinks Judge Sans can use it better than he can.]

{Yeah I know. It freaks me out but…}

{The Underground’s survived for three hundred years without democracy. What's a few more months or years gonna do?}

Somehow, throughout all this, Kari remains silent. I assume that she'd have the most to say. Politics is her thing, after all.

However, before anyone else can reply, the silence is broken by three noises.

The first is Kari’s shocked gasp.

The second is a high-pitched laugh.

The third is a set of six blood-curtling screams.

“He he he he he!

“You REALLY think you have the power to bend this timeline to your will?

“How can you think that when you can’t even control yourself?

“He he he he!

“You really ARE an idiot…”

*Stop the music.*

Chapter End Notes

Here’s the original link to the Undyne cover used in this chapter.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nvlKRof2wY.

This song is also the 73rd track off of (what else?) Fallen: an Undertale Tribute, released by Materia Collective. That album might as well be the soundtrack to Visiontale by now... which wouldn't even necessarily be wrong.

Time to get the complicated part out of the way first.

I don't like Asgore.

Part of this is because we barely see him in Undertale itself, and even when we do,
he's either trying to kill Frisk, or Toriel's calling him out for his past actions. We only see him acting genuinely kind toward us at the end of the True Pacifist route.

Also, this might seem out of place, but Asgore's attitude reminds me too much of real-life politicians. He knows that killing all the children is wrong morally, but he does it anyway. He uses the death of a seventh child (frisk) to motivate his people. The way he makes the conflict seem so... black-and-white... bothers me. I also don't like him since we never see him actually do his job well, besides caring for his subjects emotionally and hearing about him mentoring Undyne. We never see him enact policies besides the call for souls. We only hear about him through other characters.

I tried my hardest to make Asgore competent, while keeping his... more oblivious and or stubborn tendencies... sufficiently in tact. After all: he wouldn't have remained king for so long without a still-high base level of competency.

Now time to get to the fun stuff!

Yes: Judge Sans is all over the place. However, there's a reason why he's acting this way. He says it himself: *"Strong emotions cause monsters to lose control of their magic."* Monsters express themselves through their magic. Also, Asgore points it out when he says that monsters can't help but be impacted by the emotions of everyone around them. They're inherently empathetic. Because Judge Sans's soul is so strong, he's more sensitive to everyone's emotional states. Like humans, their emotions manifest through their actions, voices, what they say, etc. However, everything a monster does is only possible because of their magic. Therefore, Judge Sans is acting so... erratic... because of his emotions manifesting through everything he says and does. That, and as said a couple chapters ago: emotional control is not a virtue among monsters. Because his soul is so strong, it's only fair that he's more expressive, and that his emotions change so quickly. He has more magic available to him to use to express himself.

I never had the chance to explain why Judge Sans speaks the way he does before now. I essentially copied the way he speaks in the Judgment Hall, when his text-scrolling noises don't play. There, he speaks in shorter, more blunt sentences. I wanted to amplify this effect, so that's why he doesn't use the passive voice (he doesn't say is/was/are etc), and why with few exceptions, he doesn't use any words that are longer than two syllables. I wanted to embody how strongly he believes in his morals. His sense of justice is so strong that it even manifests in how he speaks: he wants to be as candid as possible, so he speaks in a way which supposedly prevents anyone from misconstruing what he says. He doesn't want to hide his intentions using his words. He also speaks relatively little because he wants every word he says to carry weight. He doesn't speak just for the sake of it.

Also, it somewhat fits with Sans's adherence to Kantian ethics. He doesn't want to deceive anyone because if everyone did that, no one would able to do what they have to do, since everyone would always be lying to each other...

Accordingly, I chose the cover of Undyne I did because it's calm, collected, and in control. It alludes to power, which mostly lies just underneath the surface. When it does come into the open, whenever the electric guitar becomes louder and more distorted, it's still restrained. Even though Judge Sans isn't always calm or collected, he's certainly in control... or, at least, he feels like it. When the song becomes louder, it feels... oppressive, just like the level of control Judge Sans has exerted over his
surroundings, and everyone around him. This song essentially says "Don't make me use any more of my power. You're already overwhelmed by what I'm doing now. Which is nothing. What makes you think you can handle any more? Don't fuck with me"

On a mostly-tangential note: I know this song plays when you first meet Undyne, when she's still wearing her armor, but seriously! This cover is waaaaay too subtle for Undyne.

One last note: whatever you're thinking about the very end of the chapter, yep!

Guess who's back?
Back again?
Flowey's back!
Tell a friend!

You know what this means.

flowey is the next one to have a bad time.
Chapter 48

Chapter Summary

Guess who's back?
Back again?
Flowey's back!
Tell a friend!

If you want to read about my thought process for writing the chapter, and or choosing background music for it, read the endnotes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

48

**Start reading only when the guitars and drums start. Loop until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wdc_cDaUNQ

{No.}

{It can’t be.}

[But the last time—]

“[[I forgot he existed!]]”

*…*

“he he he he! What’s wrong? Your infinite wisdom’s not doing it for you?”

Everyone braces for another screamed reply, but it does not come.

Instead, Judge Sans replies in a quiet voice that does not match the intensity of the magic comprising it. Chara and I have to walk closer several steps just to hear him.

”’You.’”*

{Woooow he reaaaally hates him—}

[Ooooh you have noooo idea…]

Another cackle. “A monster of few words, I see. I guess that’s what happens when you stop caring about ANYTHING or ANYONE around you for a few centuries.”


As I try doing the math, counting how many Judiciary months are in a hundred surface years, I notice that there is slightly less… gloating… in… FLOWEY’s tone. “Huh. You really HAAAAAVE
learned how things work around here!”

The rustle of leaves and stems… and the grind of metal… approaching me—us—ever so slowly. S[Hey… anyone wanna try getting us out of here? I think you’ve had enough time to figure out what to do…]S

“I’ll admit: I’m impressed.”

T[Yeah—get us the fuck out of here! Now!]T

He sounds… uncomfortably close to me.

“I didn’t think you’d wanna help them.

“I mean, we AAAAAAALL know how much you value your free time. Doing what YOU want. And not relying on anyone—”

“Yeeeeeaaaaah… truuuuue.” I admit.

[He’s pointing at me--]

“You AND Chara.”

Flowey sighs… and, at the same time, yellow magic sizzles into existence around us: faint, but unmistakable. {Sans is seriously letting him talk? Why!!}

“You’ve got Pauline wrapped around your little finger, don’t you? No wonder you convinced her to hurt Jerry so easily!

“But you two have even more in common than that. ‘Cause both of you LOOOOOOVE showing off how smart you are… how strong you are… and putting down anyone who tries to say you’re wrong. By any means necessary.”

I hate that he’s right.

Somehow, Chara hates it even more than me.

Even so, we can’t refute what Flowey says.

“Pauline?

“You’ve wanted to prove that you weren’t weak for a long time! On the surface and down here. You even said so, during Integrity—“

{[“Grillby’s—“]} we begin to recall.

“Exactly!

“Admit it Pauline: you wanted to hurt Jerry. Chara would know. They’d feel it.”

No one answers.

The rustle of leaves, as if Flowey’s leaning forward. “Chara’s been sharing your field of knowing for HOW LONG now? They probably knew what you wanted before you did.”

Chara doesn’t answer.
An exaggerated sigh. But it’s just too bad. Neither of you finished the job.

“’Cause if you had, I might’ve gotten quite the show!”

[He’s pointing at Judge Sans--]

“You’ve changed almost everything in this timeline! Even the smily trashbag—“

“[What the fuck?]"

Confidentially: “Chara knows what I’m talking about. Frisk has heard them say it more times than any of us can count.

“Even after seeing the…”

Flowey seems to stop, contemplating how to continue. Oh what’s the phrase?

Sharply: “I know!”

With emphasis: “After seeing the expression they were wearing.”

Chara and Judge Sans tense beside me.

“Even with YOUR power you wouldn’t be able to count how many times they’ve said it, Judge Sans.”

He guffaws. “I’ll admit it: YOU are a REAL piece of work.”

More screams, as Flowey drags the Second Six Souls closer to us. E[I don’t care what you have to do—get us out of heeere!]E

The yellow magic pricks more noticeably against my body as Flowey continues to monologue. “Draining Pauline and Chara’s stats is already a fate worse than death!

“Denying them a chance to plead for mercy?

“Reconstructing Chara, only to tear them to bloody pieces?

“OVER?

“AND OVER?

“AND OVER?

“That was the LAST thing I expected.

“It wasn’t like you!”

Chara, the Second Six Souls, and I are completely caught off guard by Judge Sans’s retort. He seems…

CONFIDENT.

COLLECTED.

TRULY in control: of his surroundings and of himself.
"Of course!"

"Clearly, I am not that Sans."

"[[6[Oh shiiiiit!]6]]"

Flowey wastes no time: "Really?

"Before THESE TWO gained control of the timeline, you didn’t even try killing me until there were only a handful of monsters left!"

{What?}

"I broke your will—!"

Chara and I start as Judge Sans cuts Flowey off: "”As I broke yours?”"

[“Oh daaaaamn!”]

"Hmm."

Flowey’s turned so he faces me more squarely. “That’s true.

“You don’t know about that.

“But Chara does.”

Chara doesn’t answer.

“Becoming friends with everyone?

“Solving their problems flawlessly?

“Finding their companionship amusing for a while?

“Being curious?

“Being curious about what would happen if you killed them?

“Telling yourself that you didn’t want to do it… but that you HAD to know what happened!”

Another cackle. “We AAAAAALL know you felt that way. If not here, then with Frisk. You two did EXACTLY what I did. And more.

“Because you and Frisk fought the smily trashbag only Tesla knows how many times, in how many timelines? You even managed to do what I couldn’t.”

Chara doesn’t answer.

And if you don’t believe me, then ask him.”

“After all, as of this morning, He’s seen everything you’ve done, every method you’ve used to kill every monster, in every timeline you’ve been in.

“So he knows how often you killed HIM.”
Chara doesn’t answer… but in the silence that follows, Kari whispers, K[Judge Sans nodded.]K

{I had a feeling—}

The containers holding the Second Six Souls scrape across the floor several more feet. “But back to you, Judge Sans.

“You’ve embraced your newfound power quickly!”

He becomes more excited by the second. “Stat-checking everyone, even if you have to invade their soulological privacy?

“Using their knowledge as your own, when you didn’t know what to do?

“Jumping at any chance you had to show off your power?

“It’s shocking, coming from someone who hates humans and monsters being treated as means to an end.”

Chara and I… and everyone else… gasp.

{He’s right.}

“[Oh no…]”

{Chara?}

Flowey continues: “To me, it looks like you’re losing control of your actions. And not because your soul’s more in tune with ours. Or ‘cause you empathize with us more.”

“[“Oh no—“]”

“{WHAT’S WRONG!?”}

“It’s almost like… you CHOSE to use your power like that!”

[“No!”]

“Oh yes.”

Flowey seems… strangely lucid. {I don’t like thiiiiis—}

D[You know what you guys should do? Cut us loose! That’d be nice!]D

“No.

“More than that.

“It’s almost like… you ENJOYED using your power like that!”

Another exaggerated sigh. “But who am I to say? You’ve hurt SOOOOOO many monsters from all sides, so I can’t even say you’ve been biased. Hell—you’ve even had to dust some.

“All for the common defense, of course!

“I would never imply that you did it because you lost your temper or anything…”
Flowey goes from lucid to eager in an instant: “But for all your obsessing over morals, you kept doing it! Suuuuuure you TRIED to talk them down, but after a while, you barely gave anyone time to beg for mercy before you bashed their heads in on the closest flat surface.”

We shudder. “[Too sooooonn—]”

“In fact, you COULD say that you… DISTANCED YOURSELF… from everyone you hurt.”

A hurt gasp: *“No.”*

Another cackle: “You said it yourself!”

Flowey recites: “When you hurt someone, you distance yourself.”

*”6[No.]6”*

“The more you hurt others, the more you distance yourself.”

*”I never—“*

Flowey talks over Sans: “The more you distance yourself, the less you will hurt.”

*”Only those who—!”*

“Thus, you hurt others more readily.”

He seems to relish every moment as he finishes: “It’s YOUR system, not mine.”

A weight drops in my stomach as I recall Sans’s behavior. {I WAS wondering why he was yelling at us before—}

[And why he was all crazy when we got here.

[He… gave in… to that power. The power he gained from his Levels of Violence.

{But he fought it. So that’s why he calmed down and saw—felt—how we were freaking out—}

[He always felt it. He just… got over it.

[But not in a good way.]

Gleefully: “Under your own logic, you must have gained LOTS of Execution Points and Levels of Violence!”

Everyone shudders violently as a cluster of Gaster blasters manifest above our heads, firing into the air. Marble cracks, and Chara and I prepare to dive onto the floor and shield ourselves from another explosion. *”HOW DARE YOU—!”*

Flowey laughs, high and long and loud, as he says, “You’re proving my point right now! If I told you this earlier, you wouldn’t have done this. SUUUUURE you would’ve been angry. But expending so much power for no reason?

“I’m just telling the truth.

“During my first few resets you said I had to be honest with myself.
“I’m just doing what you told me! You’re going back on your morals, just because you wanna hurt me.

“Do you wanna be in control THAAAAAT badly?”

The floor shakes as blue magic pours into it, blocks of marble tearing free. Each rattle accompanies Judge Sans’s reply: *”Try me.”*

Several tense seconds of silence before Flowey replies, somehow even more excited than before.

“THAT’S WHAT I LIKE TO SEE!”

The Second Six Souls scream again as their containers scrape against the floor, then begin banging into each other. A[Yeah that’s it! Cut us loose! Shortcut us back to Hotland! Anything!]A

K[Burn him alive! I know Gaster blasters don’t really do that but still!]K

T[KILL HIM DEAD!]T

S[Kill the weed! Crush his stem! Bash him in!]S

“You REAAAAAAAAALY think I’d let you free them so easily?

“He he he he he!

“That’s all the proof I need.

“Even after gaining AAAAAAALL the power you deserve…

“Even after finding SOOOOOO many reasons to care…

“Even after becoming determined!

“You haven’t changed at all.

“You really ARE an idiot…”

**Stop the music.**

The clacking of bones fills the air, and everyone cringes in pain as yellow magic crackles into existence. In unison, several clusters of Gaster blasters fire. My and Chara’s souls and guts wrench as blue magic yanks on them. Our hearts race and breathing hitches as—

That isn’t my racing heart.

Those aren’t Chara’s shallow breaths.

No.

We’re feeling what Sans is feeling, never mind the obvious physiological differences. We can’t help it. His desperation and his energy are leaking out into the environment, and into our fields of knowing. If he is truly the strongest monster in the Underground, then his emotions are comprised of the strongest magic as well.

Therefore, it is only natural that we feel as he feels.

The banging of metal, and more agonized screams.
K[STOP!]K

D[YOU’RE HURTING US!]D

A[You can’t be reckless now. PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER!]A

S[Flowey’s—]S

Simon’s voice becomes muffled. If he had a mouth, Flowey would have clamped a leaf—some vines—over it. “Don’t ruin the surprise. Even with all that power, you’re STILL the same indecisive, hypocritical smily trashbag as before.”

Flowey seems to pause, preparing for a well-crafted speech.

At least, until Chara and I are dragged by our collars several feet, kicking our legs in confusion. We yell, and I assume that Flowey is casting magic on us, but this is not the case. Flowey is also yelling in surprise. His leaves and stems creak as they bend away from us. “Hey what gives!? Who —!?"

We stop after a few seconds as someone’s familiar arms wrap around us.

“I apologize for startling you, my children.”

“[TORIEL!]”

“I am as surprised as you are. I did not anticipate becoming cemented in purple magic so soon. Let alone that I would be able to control it precisely enough to summon you to my side without causing any collateral damage.”

[“Eh nice!”]

“This is especially surprising considering how… tense and afraid I feel. And I fully acknowledge that this does not describe my current psychophysiological state adequately. It is just…

“I know that both of you feel the same. And not just because of your souls’ being restructured to bare more similarities to ours than to your fellow humans.”

[“Mm-hmm”]

“If I am truly to be cemented in my third color of magic now, I am comforted to know that my desire to protect you triggered it.”

We don’t have to agree in words. The relaxing sensation of green magic, the warmth of orange magic, and now, the firm hold of purple magic, all being cast on our bodies and souls through her touch, is answer enough for us.

After a moment, in a much shakier voice, one that makes my heart and soul ache with a pain usually reserved for monsters, Toriel begins to speak.

**The first time, listen to the first 20 seconds before reading. Then, loop normally until the next note.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmUeqMnWmDY

“Flowey.
“I… I remember you.

“I remember you clear as day.

“You visited me, in the Ruins… only Tesla knows how many times?”

{That’s true—}

“I… I took you in as my own, and you were always so eager to learn from me. You nearly hurt yourself scouring my home for books you had yet to read.

“We would converse for hours. And I thought that you were so…

“INSIGHTFUL.”

{Didn’t she call us that back at her place?}

[Something like that yeah.]

“I even wondered WHY you bothered, because you seemed to know more about…”

A strained laugh. “Every subject that interested me.

“Now, I know why.

“You inquired into the books I owned because you desperately wanted to find material you had yet to read.

“And what I taught you: of Dreemurrite and human history, and translational philosophy, and cooking: you retained that knowledge from your previous…

“RESETS.

“And you continued visiting me because you desired to exhaust every possibility. To observe every difference: big or small.

“To… satisfy your curiosity.”

{Holy shit she’s right…}

Flowey wastes no time: “So that means you remember killing me. And me killing you. It must be eating you up inside—“

Kari, from somewhere behind Flowey: K[Hey lay off! She—]K

A rough, shrill scream of pain that makes everyone squirm. {What the fuck’s he doing!?}

As Kari stops screaming, Gaster blasters punctuate every word of a command: *"UNHAND HER!"

Flowey growls: “Don’t even bother.

“You see those harnesses?”

He pauses. [They’re behind Flowey. There’s one for each of the Second Six Souls.]

“They’re constantly checking my stats. As long as my HP is above 0, they’ll stay locked. If you
tamper with them, they’ll shut off their ether supplies and kill them.”

My entire being seems to shudder as Judge Sans prepares to reply, but Flowey somehow cuts him off: “And don’t tell me that I don’t know what I’m talking about.

“You taught me about ethermetry and magitry only Tesla knows how many times?

“Unless you’ve forgotten about that too.

“Technically, I was the first being to undergo Gaster’s Dreemurrite holistic integration.

“Not Pauline.

“Not Chara.

“ME.”

S[KICK HIS ASS!]S

I can’t necessarily disagree with Simon.

The floor underneath us shakes again, and Toriel grips Chara and I tighter. After taking a short breath, Chara says, [“The thought of proving Flowey wrong—“]

“Even if you DO free them, think about your Level of Violence! How much pain I’ve caused you! Or, at least, how much pain you THINK I’ve caused you.

“How many Execution Points do you think you’d get if you killed me!?

“Who KNOWS how much control over yourself you’d have left? You’re already close to losing it! I know you feel it.”

“[{What is he—}]”

“Go on.

“Take a look at him Chara.”

They oblige.

It only takes a second for Chara’s trembling hand to go still in mine.

Flatly: [“Look.”]

Judge Sans Wingdings Gaster
Level of Violence: ?/?
Execution Points to next Level of Violence: ?
HP: 6498/6498
Attack: 244/244
Defense: 55/184
Now, I shall strip you of your will to live.

“{That wasn’t there before…}”

Flowey, softly: “Pauline?
“You wanna know WHY that’s there?

“It’s because of Chara. And all the timelines where their thoughts about role-playing game stats affected the Underground. Or timelines where EXP and LV already existed.

“I know this ‘cause the smiley trashbag’s told me everything! He’s poured his heart and soul out to me more times than even HE can count.

“So I knew what’d happen as soon as he summoned you here, Chara.”

Deviously: “Viewing the contents of your soul? Becoming determined? Remembering all my resets?

“It changed him.

“So it changed EVERYTHING.”

He’s right.

No wonder he knows about exploiting the First Seven Souls’ conceptions of magic, and was able to capture the Six Souls so easily: all he had to do was watch the livestream.

“All those times you convinced Frisk to kill someone?

“And they saw how strong they got?

“And they stopped questioning you?

“That did it for him.

“Execution Points and Levels of Violence are quantifiable now, Chara. It doesn’t matter that we don’t know what the cap is. All that matters is that there IS one.

“It won’t be long before he makes the hard cap on Level of Violence real.

“No even HE can stop it. ‘Cause he’s filling in a gap in how EVERYONE thinks of magic: not just the First Seven Souls.

“And he wants to find proof of how much I’ve hurt him.

“So THAT desire, shaped by his experiences, powered by his determination, will fill in that gap.

“And we won’t even know when it’s done until we check his stats and see the hard cap.”

The magic crackling around us vanishes.

“We ALL know what reaching the absolute does to a human.

“And you’ve told me about seeing timelines where you gained Levels of Violence. And how you didn’t wanna end up like that.

“But in THOSE timelines, you weren’t determined! Not like this.

“So who KNOWS what’ll happen to you now!?”

Hissing between his teeth: *”Free them.”*
“Make me.”

Blue magic surging into existence. The crumpling of leaves, the creaking of metal, the cracking of marble, and the same command: **“Free them.”**

Unsteady breathing that I don’t recognize, and nervous… laughter…? [That’s Flowey—]

{Noooo—}

[Trust me on this.]

“Yeah. About that—“

Reflexively, we cover our ears as yellow magic crashes down on us: **“TELL ME!”**

“I can’t!”

We stop dead.

“I don’t know the solutions.

“I know how the collars were made, but not the solutions. I just plugged in the formula—“

**“HOW DARE YOU—!”**

“I’m serious! You’d see if I was lying wouldn’t you?”

My stomach drops… that, and Sans’s stats. {He nodded didn’t he?}

Chara doesn’t answer.

“If you really wanna free them that much, just kill me! Ends justify the means, right?”

**“YOU DARE TO IMPLY—?””**

“And don’t even THINK about loading your save file. ‘Cause it won’t change anything!”

A magic-less silence.

“You know why?

“It’s because you’ve negated the whole reason why being determined gives you unlimited power!”

[{{“What?”}}]

If he hadn’t been doing it already, Flowey relishes in our confusion. “Even if you DO load your save file, I’ll remember!

“Pauline and Chara will remember!

“Everyone watching the livestream will remember!”

Everyone gasps. He’s right.

“You know why?”

“[[Oh no…]]”
“It’s because you told everyone how determination works! You even restricted your save file to Pauline and Chara! So everything and everyone around them stayed the same, even while you killed them.

“And even if you reset, we’ll still remember!

“Because you and your friends told everyone about how determination allows beings to do the impossible!”

"*[[The Great Disclosure Riots!]]*"

“EXACTLY!

In a too-young voice: D[So… we’re gonna die?]D

T[For real this time?]T

Bluntly: “Oh yes you will.

“But here’s the thing: even though the smily trashbag and Chara both know what’s gonna happen, neither of them—!“

Orange magic rises in front of us. “Chara.

“Pauline.”

[“Asgore?”]

“Arm yourselves.”

[“… Okay…?”]

“And… and Toriel?

“We must stand with them.

“I know that we have not seen eye to eye for the longest time, but… we both know that they all need us: the Second Six Souls, Pauline, Chara, and Judge Sans.”

[She nodded--]

{Yeah I know—}

“I have defended my children for a long time. This is—“

The purple magic holding Chara and I close to Toriel suddenly vanishes, my body and soul completely submerged in blue magic. I gasp as my feet leave the floor, and Chara’s hand rips out of my grasp. Before I can react, I shudder as the clang of metal rings through the air, the shock traveling up my legs. My right hand curls into a fist of its own accord, and simultaneously, my left hand closes around another familiar object.

Judge Sans teleported me inside Mjolnir and armed me.

I quickly touch the panel controlling the Dimensional Box: he gave me the last item in my inventory too.
As I withdraw my hand, I hear Chara’s light footsteps and the clinking of a chain: they’re wearing their locket again. [“What do you wanna do then?”]

Toriel, both quickly and precisely: “If Execution Points are truly in proportion to the harm caused, and Flowey’s resets have harmed everyone in the Underground, I suspect that no matter what the maximum Level of Violence is, Judge Sans would attain it if he killed him.”

[“So You wanna split them up.”]

Asgore squeezes Chara’s—

No.

He squeezes MY shoulder firmly. “Yes: each participant shall gain an amount of Execution Points equal to the harm they believe Flowey has done to them, which is deducted from the final total. In this way, Judge Sans shall not bear the burden alone.”

A gasp: *”Asgore you—“*

Toriel, decisively: “None of us take this lightly, Your Honor.

“It is just… you have suffered long enough.

“After all: it is not mandated anywhere that ONLY the Judge must provide for the common defense.

“Only that they must.”

I don’t need Chara to tell me that Judge Sans nodded in response.

As I face Flowey, Chara seizes control of my body, roughly taking my controller and the Monado from me. Simultaneously, they tighten my grip around two new objects, one in each hand.

I recognize the contours of the objects immediately: I’m holding two knives made of determination, identical to the one we used to threaten Jerry.

That’s how they’re going to fight.

As I hear the scraping of metal close by, Chara ceases their control: Asgore must have picked his trident off the floor.

E[We’ll back you up!]E

Toriel calls out to him: “Nonsense. It would be more than unfair to ask that of you. None of you are psychophysically stable.

“I… I am hardly stable myself.

“But still: I have one request.

“And Tesla: do not stand in the crossfire.”

A buzzing fills the air… and Chara’s body and soul tense beside me.

Friendliness pellets.
Footsteps rush over to us, and a bony arm settles across my shoulders. “I’ll help as well, Judge Sans!”

“[[PAPYRUS!]]”

“Gneh heh heh! This would not be the first time I have provided Judge Sans with soulological aid. Do not worry! I, Papyrus Wingdings Gaster, promise that I’ll devote all my strength to protecting you!”

Much more soberly: “I know HE would, if he could.

“But I also know he wants to get all his pent-up feelings out. Hell—that might explain why you hurt Jerry.

“Because you had a chance to prove how strong you were, and damn the consequences.”

We don’t answer.

“I support Judge Sans’s decision. He should not have to split his attention. You can handle yourselves.

“And now, you have me and my impractical RPG sword!”

[“But Paps that’s the Masamune from home—!“]

[“Nooo waaaay!”]

[“—I don’t’ think you’re—!”]

“And that’s where you’re wrong Chara! As of today, this Masamune has officially seen combat! I am honored to—“

Voices erupt around us. Wings beat. Monsters slither against the marble floor. Footsteps of all kinds approach us from all sides. “We’ll help you Asgore!”

“I remember now. I remember everything!”

“That fucking flower!”

“He was my friend!”

“What did we ever do to him?”

“I’ll be the support character who sits in back like a coward!”

Everyone readies an attack, a blast of green healing magic, or handfuls of healing or stat-boosting items. [“You don’t have to hold back this time.”]

Before Chara can finish, Papyrus shouts, “THIS SIMPLE FACT… IT FILLS YOU WITH DETERMINATION!”

Every object, every surface, the very air itself, vibrates as power runs through them, on the brink of being released. In unison, every last monster and human in the Judgment Hall says “*6[[File saved.]]*

“*6[[HP fully restored.]]*6*”
*Stop the music.**

Over the buzzing of the friendliness pellets: “About your whole plan?

“I’ll admit: it’s clever! REALLY clever!

“But not clever enough!”

“Because,” Flowey seems… eager again… “if you REAAAAAALLY wanted to protect everyone from me, you reaaaaaally should’ve destroyed your cameras first!”

A moment when everything seems to stand still.

[The livestream.

[Remember?

[Everyone in the Underground’s watching it right now.]

I can’t put two and two together.

Chara, more panicked this time: [Flowey can see the rest of the Underground—well the public areas anyway— ‘cause there are video screens on the walls.]

Chara’s words slowly dawn on me: {So he can see where everyone is. And there’s the camera on Mjolnir still.}

[He would’ve had all the time in the world to figure out where everyone was. While we were in the basement. So yeah: he can basically see everyone now. Judge Sans must’ve ordered Mettaton to put them up before the first time he left so he could check on everything. And he must’ve left someone here to do that for him, when he DID leave.]

{But how’s this bad?}

Chara, screaming as the floor begins to shake, and a whining sound, and the harsh hiss of static, grow louder and louder, and higher and higher, around us. [“HE’S GONNA—!”]

Somehow, Flowey’s cackle is still discernable over the noise.

“HE HE HE HE HE!

“Oh yes Chara!

“You’ve forgotten about the Dual Awareness Principle so soon?

“You can’t do ANYTHING to stop me!

“AAAAALL OOOOOOOOF YOOOOOOUUUUUR SOOOOOOOUUUULS AAAAAAARE MIIIIIIIINE!”

Chapter End Notes

Here’s the URL for Engage the Enemy again!
Suffice to say, getting the pacing right for this chapter was a bitch. That, and deciding on what songs to use as background music. At some point, the order of the two songs was reversed. I even considered not using any music for the first half. Eventually, I settled on this order because Engage the Enemy seemed to fit with the first appearance of Flowey since the first chapter. That, and his dialogue felt like a Xenoblade cutscene...

As for Melancholia? The sharpness of the instrumental fit with the situation, especially towards the end. Normally, in Undertale fanfics, people emphasize how violence isn't necessary at all, how every use of violence is unjustified, and how when Frisk does hurt someone, they do so under Chara's influence, or in an act of passion. However, in this case, I wanted to create a scenario where violence was necessary, and where everyone involved full well knew the risks of using it. The lyrics, though... repetitive and delivered poorly more often than I'd like, fit with Sans's situation nicely. Either he becomes a version of himself he hates (Dusttale Sans, which is one of my favorite versions of him), or Flowey regains control of the timeline and kills his friends. The one time he has the chance to do something about Flowey, he has to make an impossible choice...

Speaking of that choice, the harnesses Flowey uses to capture the Second Six Souls are based on a mechanism in Saw III. A brain surgeon has a collar around her neck with shotgun shells attached to it, connected to her patient's heart rate monitor. If he flatlines, she moves too far away, or tries tampering with the collar, it will detonate. I was even thinking of making a direct reference to Saw III in Flowey's dialogue, because he would've known about Sans's thoughts on the franchise after talking to him during his pacifistic resets, but I decided against it.

As for Asgore's solution to the Levels of Violence problem? It's basically classic RPG logic: everyone who contributes to the fight is rewarded. Regarding what Toriel says, it's an in-story version of the realization I made about the Execution Points scaling in Undertale, during the No Mercy route. The player gains Execution Points in proportion to how much harm the monster they killed did to them. The monsters in the Ruins yield so few Execution Points because they do little damage to the player, whereas Sans causes the player to reach the 20th Level of Violence because he killed them... only Tesla knows how many times?

As for how Flowey describes me?

I drew on all the times people have told me all the things I had to change about myself. I'll admit it: if I had been able to play Undertale, my first time, I would've killed plenty of monsters. At the very least, the main bosses would've been killed. I even would've killed Papyrus, because the first time I watched Marriland play, I wasn't convinced that Papyrus was one of those mostly-harmless villain types until his date, and even then, I was wary of him. Mettaton was self-centered, and Muffet is basically a robber barren. I would've killed Flowey, and I wouldn't have considered it such a huge moral dilemma.

On a much lighter note, the next chapters... won't be nearly as planned out as the rest
of the story, since I've been holding off on thinking about them for the longest time. On the other hand, they'll be fun to write (and not in a painful way, like the Sans fight).

Chara and I shudder.

Also, it would've been awesome if the next chapter had been the 50th chapter, because more milestones. However, I realized recently that it's good that the next chapter will be the 49th one, because there are 49 days in a Judiciary month. It's auspicious for my AU, which is even more flavorful.

I know it'll take a while to perfect that chapter but...

When it does come out, you'll see why I wanted to write a story where he came back for good.

We're ready for you...

AAAASRIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIEEEEL DREEEEEEEEMUUUUUUURR!!!
Chapter 49

Chapter Summary

If you want more context into the Xenoblade and ChronoTrigger references in this chapter or my background music choices, read the endnotes. If you want any information about the near future of Visionscape, also read the endnotes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

49

{[Aaaaaah!]}  
Somehow, Chara and I have reached the point where silence is more jumpscare-worthy than sound.

The floor stops shaking underneath us, and magic stops flowing through our souls. We each take a couple steps to make sure that nothing has changed. We tightly squeeze each other’s hands, marveling at how we are still able to do so. [Thank Tesla you’re okay—]

{Yeah. How ‘bout you?}

[I’m fine I guess. Basically full health. And you are too. So—]

A few sharp, rapping noises on the marble floor not too far away.

We stiffen, determination beginning to run through Chara’s fingers intertwined with mine. My thumb nestles onto the button on the Monado’s hilt, prepared to activate a Monado Art. Waiting for Chara’s word, I prepare to activate Monado Speed, to either run away from or fight whoever made the noise.

The sharp rapping sounds approach us faster than before, as fast as a brisk walk. About ten feet away, they slow, then stop. As the monster shuffles in place a little, Chara’s conjured determination slowly recedes.

That’s… different.

Their breath hitches beside me. Like a breeze flowing through the Judgment Hall, Chara’s field of knowing refocuses itself, until their attention is exclusively directed in front of us.

[No]

{What?}

“[No way.]”

“{What!?”}

A voice interrupts us before we can continue.
A high, clear laugh rings throughout the room.

“I knew learning to sew would come in handy someday.

‘’Cause now I can wear all the stuff I made.”

I shake, my hand falling out of Chara’s grip. I know that I only feel this way because of them. I can’t help but recall memories that only Chara actually made.

A chase through the streets of New Home barefoot—

sparring with cosplay swords with Sans and Undyne—

Screaming so suddenly and so loudly that the curtains catch on fire—

Sprinting through Hotland, a fancy cloak flapping behind them with every step—

Trying to cast magic with a sword or a staff, never mind that soulology doesn’t manifest that way for everyone…

ALL BECAUSE OF ChronoTrigger.

A couple more steps toward us. The figure sighs happily.

“Finally.

“I can walk on my own two feet again.

“I can actually hold things in my hands.

“I was SOOOOOO done with being a flower…?’”

{“Noooo…”}

“Really Pauline? You guys never got around to this?”

In a smug… but not too smug… tone, in Chara’s direction: “I expected better of you, Chrono.”

{“Chrono?”}

{Chara.

{Oh my Goooood how did I not think of that?}

More subdued: “Even now, after you’ve gotten so strong, I still recognize you.

“I’d know you anywhere.”

Several more steps toward us, until a—

Until a soft paw brushes my hand. “Pauline?

“Have you ever wondered WHY Chara’s called Chara?”

Before I can answer: “And it’s not just ‘cause of Frisk saying they’re a real ‘character’. ”

Another high, clear laugh. Their—
His enthusiasm is contagious.

“You could’ve figured it out SOOOOO easily. I know you’re smart enough for THAT. Maybe you already have.

“Or do you wanna hear it from them?”

Chara tenses, about to reply, with their words and their magic, but… but he doesn’t give them time to respond.

His voice rises in volume and intensity, emotional and magical: “Admit it Pauline: you know who I am. You can feel it!”

Chara seems on the verge of tears, but they’re not sad.

Far from it.

“It’s ME!

“Your best friend!

An unbearable whining pitch rings in my ears, and I squeeze my eyes shut. All the while, pulses of power rise from within my—

No.

Within CHARA’s soul.

It’s laughter.

Genuine, giddy, CHILDLIKE laughter, and screams of joy I have never heard before.

Even as the monster talking to us screams, I can still hear Chara’s laugh, high and bright and clear.

“ASRIIIIIIEEEEL DREEEEEEMMUUUUUURR!”

**LOOP UNTIL THE NEXT NOTE!!!**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEWOTdVnnZ8

Fire erupts around us, but I don’t even flinch: nothing can match the intensity of Asgore’s fire magic. With one attack, he—Asriel—cast more of it than Asgore did during our entire battle, but his attack doesn’t hit us. It comes close, but not close enough.

The instant after Asriel screams his name at us seems to last forever.

{“What! What the fuck!”}

[“Yeah!”]

{“But—but—but—“}

[“I know you’re gonna ask how.
[“But that doesn’t matter!
[“All that matters is that he’s here! You FINALLY get to meet him!”]

Briefly, I focus on Asriel’s voice, and the sheen of his soul.

Asriel Dreemurr
HP: 9999/9999
AT: Infinite
DF: Infinite
A legendary being composed of every soul in the Underground.

{“Excuse me!?!”}

Somehow, Chara doesn’t even comment. Instead, they say in an anime rival’s voice: [“Yeah! I haven’t told Pauline about you.

[“But that’s only ‘cause she already knows how strong you are!

[“After all, I taught you everything you know!”]

A wave of magic knocks me back and away from Chara, but it only takes them a moment to sprint back to my side and grasp my right hand tightly. They take my controller in their free hand. I try activating Speed Art, but the button does not depress. My thumb doesn’t move.

They won’t let me press it.

[“Isn’t that right, Magus?”

{Magus?}

“So NOW you call me strong?

“Now that I’ve realized one of my wildest dreams?

“I’m him now! I’m a mage capable of bending time and space to my whims!

“Now watch as I unleash the power that’s rightfully mine!

“STAR BLAZING!!!"

Marble crashes down around us. At last, I activate Speed Art, Chara using the Gaster blasters to blow away any debris.

{Did he just go all Xenoblade on his attack names?}

[Hell yeah he did!]

{What is this!? Anime?}

[WHAT DO YOU THINK!??]

"You know Chrono?

“I know you’ve seen what’s supposed to happen. You and Frisk fought me in the other timelines, after all.
“Sans told me everything: about every use of his machine, about every reality you had power over, so many resets ago.”

{Oh my Gooood that’s true ‘cause he’s Flowey so he would’ve talked with everyone!}

“But whatever you’re thinking, IT’S WRONG!

“Why would I wanna destroy this world?”

“{Destroy?}”

“It’s not just ‘cause you’re here. And Pauline’s here. And everyone’s happy…

“It’s ‘cause there’s SOOOOO much I never got to see!

“And there are SOOOO many things YOU haven’t gotten to see either!”

{I guess that’s true: ‘cause none of this would’ve happened if I hadn’t fallen—

{If Gaster hadn’t found a version of me who lost their will to live that he could replace.}

“Like THIS!

“CHAOS SABER!!!”

A shwingging, metallic sound… like a sword being unsheathed in a cartoon.

Make that two swords.

A numbness spreading up my arm before I can react. The Monado clangs onto the floor, but I have no time to pick it up, as the swords slash across Mjolnir.

Chara lets go of me, their light footsteps racing across the floor as they come to my defense. My HP seems to decrease in slow motion, even though I know that Asriel’s attack reduced it in only a couple fell swoops.

Knives ring against Asriel’s swords, as I brace myself, beginning to fall backward. I’m not even surprised that I can’t load: if Asriel has absorbed every soul in the Underground, of course he would be more determined than us.

What surprises me is how when I fall to the floor, my HP does not completely drop to zero. It hovers at one—

No.

Just below one… and dropping.

Then, all at once, the pain in my body and soul fade away. Energy rushes into me again. Lying on my back, I flex my arms and legs, unable to believe my senses, even more than usual.

My HP has completely replenished.

My attack and defense have both risen by three points, to forty-three and thirty-one respectively.

I vividly felt how my soul was on the verge of dissipating into the ether. By all rights, Asriel should have loaded his newly-acquired save file to continue taunting us, but I just know that he
wouldn’t actually kill us by saving over our deaths.

In fact, since Chara is so completely soulologically-connected to me, when Asriel depleted my HP and shattered my soul, their soul should’ve followed suit.

Our souls should have been broken into a thousand pieces…

[“But they refused.”]

It doesn’t take me long to stand up again. The Monado flies into my hand, crackling eagerly, waiting to be swung. [“Asriel! How could you do that to us!? She couldn’t—!”]

“Why wouldn’t I attack her? You’re both standing in my way!

I know what’s supposed to happen now: you’d help Frisk defeat me!”

The swinging of swords again. This time, I’m ready: Chara hands the controller back to me, their determination and field of knowing surrounding and controlling my right arm like a second set of muscles. A knife in each hand, they stand so close to me I can feel the determination radiating off of them like body heat. Green magic solidifies around us as several round shields, Chara controlling their movement. I slash the Monado broadly, using Smash Art to give us some space by knocking Asriel back.

“It doesn’t even matter that you’re both here, instead of just you, Pauline. I’ll STILL do what I’ve always wanted to do for all these years, through all of my resets!

After I defeat you, and gain total control over the timeline…

“I just want to reset everything!”

{“What?”}

[“LOOK OUT!”]

Whining sounds come closer and closer from above, an explosion sweeping my feet out from under me. Jagged stone coats my body, and coppery blood fills my mouth.

I’m sure that my soul will shatter this time…

[“But it refused.”]

Somehow, when I stand up and lift blocks of marble off my body as if they were weightless, I notice that my attack has risen another three points, and my defense has risen by two points. Not a moment too soon, Chara’s familiar, warm hand presses against mine, closing my fingers around the Monado once more.

{“Why the hell would you wanna do that? Then we’d have to do everything all over again!”}

An anime laugh in response: “EXACTLY!

“That’s EXACTLY what I wanna do!

“Cause if I reset, you know what that means?

“You’ll be just like everyone else!”
My limbs jerk as impossible bolts of lightning arc around us. My whole body hums with yellow magic: I haven’t felt so much yellow magic flowing through me since I last visited the CORE.

Asriel’s right: he DOES have the power of seven human souls…

“If I’m in control of the timeline, you won’t know when a reset’s happened.

“You’ll forget who I am! Every time!

“But I’ll know EVERYTHING about you!”

[“But that’s impossible!”] Chara retorts, as they push me out of the way of an attack. [“We’re just like Judge Sans! We know how determination works! You can’t take that away from us!”]

“Oh: and that’s where you’re wrong! There IS a way!

“It’s simple.

“If I want you to forget hard enough, you WILL forget!”

Asriel’s swords stab the floor between Chara and I. I pull them close so they might benefit from Jump Art’s increased jump height. We land several feet away, hands physically and magically bound together.

“All your progress.”

Marble rains down in small chunks around us.

“Everyone's memories.”

I flatten myself against the floor as a pillar collapses nearby. It does not mask Chara’s scream of pain and fear.

“I’LL BRING THEM ALL BACK TO ZERO!”

{“NO!”}

A force tugs on my soul, focus completely honed in on the place where I heard Chara’s voice. Like reeling in a fishing line, my magic pulls on… something… until Chara slams into me.

They don’t waste a breath: [“You’re cemented in perseverance!”]

{[“Eh!”]}

{And your leg’s okay!}

{[Eh]}

{“There’s no fucking way I would’ve let you die.”}

[I know but it’s still cool.]

“Your knowledge of our kind really HAS come in handy. You’ve done something not even Chara’s done, in all the timelines I learned about.

“But even with that power, it won’t be enough. I’ll still take control of the timeline! You’ll still lose your memories!
“Then, we’ll do everything all over again!”

{“All over again?”}

{I… I…}

{“No.

{“I KNOW I couldn’t do that.

{“What Sans did… that was already enough.”}

“Sans wanted you to remember every reset. So you did. But it won’t be that way when I’m in control.

“Ignorance is bliss, as they say.

And the best part is… is that it’ll be true in every way!

“You'll do ALL OF THIS!

“Again!

“And again!

“And again!

“And again!!”

{“There’s no way in hell—!”}

“THAT’S THE POINT!

“You hate losing so much, you’ll go through every single one of my resets…

“With the same drive as the last!

“And Chara’ll even help you do it, ‘CAUSE THEY HATE LOSING TOO!”

{If I just deny it it’d be worse than not doing it.

{Yeah he’s right—I hate losing. }

[Well how ‘bout we show him what you’re really capable of?

[You see how he has infinite attack and infinite defense?

[That’s just ‘cause he’s so much stronger than we are that it might as well be infinity.

[But he can’t be ‘cause infinity’s not a number.

[And you know from my playthroughs of ChronoTrigger that the biggest number you can have for HP—]
[Is 9,999.]

[And that the cap on attack and defense—]

[Is 999.]

{He’s thinking of magic like how it is in ChronoTrigger and he’s basically roleplaying as… as Magus right now, so that’s why his stats are like that… even if it’s not really true.}

We dodge another rain of fireballs. {So we CAN lower his stats—}

[Probably.]

[What I DO know is that we can raise ours. Hell we’ve already done it. When we fought my dad.]

[But to do it on purpose we’ll just do what YOU always did before a boss fight in Xenoblade.]

{Embrace the anime hamminess?}

[Heeeeell nooo!]

[I mean we’ll get all hyped up and rock out to the boss’s battle theme!]

As Chara says “theme”, the floor begins vibrating underneath us. Asriel continues to taunt me, seemingly unaware of our conversation: “And if you’ve somehow gotten over that, it’s still true that you want a “happy ending”!

“’cause you think your friends deserve so much better!

“’cause you finally found a reason to give yourself for something!”

As Chara promised, our attack and defense slowly climb, creeping up by one point each for every word I speak: {“How’s this a bad thing!? You guys deserve better than the shit we have on the surface! Only an idiot’d think you guys should stay down here! I’m happy I helped everyone!}

Two points per word: [“And everyone treated Pauline like family, like they did me.”]

Three points per word: [They cared about what she had to say.]

Four points per word: [When she wanted to talk about something, they thought about how to reply instead of just brushing it off.]

Five points per word: [If you think your resets’ll change that…

[“YOU’RE WRONG!”]

The vibrations under my feet grow gradually louder. Confused, I strain my ears to pick up the sound, which grows… more distinct… with each passing moment.

It’s a bit of sound, looping over and over… but it takes several tries for me to make it out.

{No.

{Nooooo waaaaay.}

The music becomes loud enough for me to hear, somehow drowning out Asriel’s impassioned shouts, all in an instant. “HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING! HOW ARE YOU—!?!”
Chara doesn’t even give me time to comment as they take control of my body.

In one voice, with the slightest tinge of a British accent: [{“THE FUTURE DOESN’T BELONG TO YOU!”}]

**Stop the music.**

**Loop until the next note!!!**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohQtCZClDpc

Magic stored within the Monado jolts down my arm as we run at Asriel, using Jump Art to vault high above his head. However, instead of falling, we suspend in midair, my legs working as if still on the floor.

It’s like all my monster encounters and my fight with Papyrus all over again.

Except this time, Chara and I have more or less complete control over our movement, bodies, and souls.

A long laugh from below us: “So both of you have FINALLY unleashed your true power?

“No THAT’S what I like to see!

“Both of you may witness the pinnacle of my abilities!

“GALACTICA BLAZING!!!”

Projectiles so shiny that they streak by us in a metallic, high-pitched blurrr. They come close to damaging us… but not close enough. Hand-in-hand, I activate Speed Art, Chara guiding us so we run up and down the pillars: [Like Faith does. ‘Cause she can run up walls—and she doesn’t even have purple magic!]

Every few seconds, Chara tugs at my soul with their determination, orienting my body in a seemingly-random direction. After the first time, I realize that they are directing me to use my purple magic in the direction we’re facing.

“It’s SOOOOOO ironic, isn’t it? Your determination, the power that let you get this far… it’ll be your downfall!”

[“You mean MY determination!”] Chara leaps onto another pillar. [“I was the reason Pauline could save and load.”]

{“Yeah if it weren’t for them I would’ve had perseverance and that’s it! And hell—I couldn’t even use magic most of the time I was here.”}

I switch to Shield Art and crouch on the side of a pillar—

No.

Chara and I crouch on the ceiling as they control my right hand to toggle green magic on and off around us. [“The only reason you’ve managed to do anything is ‘cause of your magic!”]

[Okay prepare to attack him—our stats are high enough now.]
“SURE you had the resets, but that just let you do trial and error over and over again! You don’t have to be smart for that: you just need time!”

{“Yeah it’s the Law of Large Numbers! But for time travel!”}

“THAT’S WHAT YOU THINK!?” Asriel rails at us as we run along a pillar. My legs tense under me as Chara commands [When I’m done talking, do it.]

“You won’t be so cocky after this!

“HYPER GONER!”

The air displaces around us, currents ripping at Mjolnir, the Monado, and my grip on Chara. The ether around us rushes away from us, beams of magic aimed right at us. [They’re like Gaster blasters—but more weird-looking.]

{Long as they don’t have KR we’re good.}

[They don’t—]

{Good!}

Chara lets go of me and takes a deep breath, their determination rising from the depths of their soul until it arcs from their fingertips. [“You have no idea of what Pauline’s been through. She did more on the surface than you did during ALL your resets! And she’ll prove it to you!”]

I don’t need a more obvious cue than that, but Chara somehow manages to give me one.

[“NOOOOOOW!”]

I activate Speed Art, jumping off the side of the pillar where we stand above Asriel… or it could be thought of as pushing off of it like a swimmer off the side of a pool, Chara close behind. [And I thought Asgore was a big target…]

Head pointed downward, I imagine the constant firmness of the floor below my feet, purple magic holding me straight.

“A frontal attack? Really?”

A loud, arrogant, anime rival’s laugh as Chara’s feet hit the floor below me. Hard. “You call that smart? Even YOU should know that would never work!”

The rapid clink of knives on swords as Chara conjurs them again.

Asriel is talking to my back.

“You can’t even hit me from there!” Asriel continues to taunt, Chara making tiny adjustments to my body as I fall. “You can’t even swing a weapon like that. You’d have to change—“

{“I don’t have to!”}

My shoulders shake as magic envelopes them, Asriel’s every word directing power through them.

Right now, I’m right above him… but when I land, I’ll be behind him… or at least, the Monado will be behind him.
As my left shoulder grazes the top of Asriel’s head, determination shoots from Chara’s knives below me, each one slashing Asriel’s sleeves open. [“SLIT! EDGE!”]

In one motion, I activate Buster Art, noting as Asriel’s defense plummets, until it is cut in half. What I don’t expect is for his defense to fall to one third—

One fourth—

One fifth—

One sixth—

One eighth—

One tenth—of its original amount of 999. It’s still high, but my attack surpasses it.

Chara attacked Asriel from the side, so they inflicted defense down, just like in Xenoblade. Asriel only took one damage from their first use of Slit Edge, but he took full damage from the second.

That, and Asriel likely never expected Chara to actually hurt him. That’s why his defense decreased more than it would have in Xenoblade itself. If Asriel had been an enemy in Xenoblade, they would have halved his defense, and no more.

My chance has come.

I don’t waste it.

Still upside down, I sprint backward, until Chara seizes control, preventing me from moving any more. In this moment, my balance is as solid as if I had been upright. Now behind Asriel, I swing the Monado.

[“BACKSLASH!”]

Asriel’s field of knowing caves underneath the Monado’s blade… and I shudder, my soul recoiling as it responds to Asriel’s soul taking damage.

As I land on the floor on my side, I can’t help but marvel at the damage I have done. Backslash’s damage doubles if executed from behind, and Slit Edge lowers someone’s defense by fifty percent if performed from the side.

Suffice to say, Asriel’s surprise, Chara’s successful attack, Backslash’s double damage, and Monado Buster’s increased damage multiplier more than compensate for his defense being so high. At the very least, we managed to hurt him. {Only eighteen-ish more of those to go…}

As Chara rushes toward me and takes my hand again, I stand. {I would’ve broken… like… AAAALL the bones without Mjolnir…}

[And I did—when Sans attacked us.]

{Yeah Azzie sucks, but he can’t be worse than Sans.}

{[No one can be.]} By the way, I don’t know if Sylas meant this, but I’d say they were right.

Asriel whirls to face us. “That was a lucky hit! You only managed to do that ‘cause Chara helped you!”
Before I can react, I reply in Chara’s voice.

[“What: you thought we were just gonna stand there and take it?”]

[Hell yeah! We got him!]

[The attack… AND the burn!]

To our dismay, asriel just laughs. "ENOUGH messing around!

“It's time to purge this timeline once and for all!"

**Stop the music.**

With every word, the magic surging through our souls is sucked out. The magic giving Mjolnir its protective qualities vanishes so I crash to the floor. The blue magic levitating me is gone—

Along with Mjolnir itself.

As Asriel drains the magic from us, Mjolnir splinters to pieces, and the Monado cracks, its blade separating from the hilt.

The magic in the room seems to vanish—

No.

I can’t feel it.

Chara can’t feel it either.

Neither of us can even access our magic, let alone cast it.

Asriel destroyed our capability to cast and detect magic, specifically our ability to project our souls beyond our bodies. Not even Sans could do that. It’s as if I un-learned all of my training, in a matter of seconds.

Just like Monado Purge from Xenoblade, which removed auras from enemies. Our ability to detect and cast magic might as well be an aura, in soulological terms.

“Don’t you understand? Up until now, I’ve only been using a fraction of my REAL power!”

Chara’s hand goes limp in mine. I don’t have to sense their soul to know that their attack and defense have dropped, down to below what they were when the fight started—hell, to lower than it was when my training with the Curies and Gasters ended.

“Let's see what good your determination is against THIS!!!”

**Loop until the end of the chapter.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ce54HgvoN_Y

It’s like Flowey all over again, as projectiles surround us from all sides. We don’t die, but we come close.

“… Even after that attack, you're still standing in my way?”
Somehow, yes.
Chara’s soul writhes, but no magic comes to their aid.

“Wow… you really ARE something special.
“Somehow, even after I amassed all this power, both of you are still here.”
“As they say: the only HP that matters is the last one.”

I jolt. Chara’s voice seems so… feble—

No.

It’s because they can’t project their soul beyond their body, and because they do not have any magic to project. At least when we fought Sans, we had that going for us.

Now, they sound…

Ordinary.

Even our collective death a few seconds later is not accompanied by a burst of magic from our souls.

We just die… or rather, we feel the sensation of dying, but return again at full HP. [Even now, they refused.]

We do not stay that way for long.

{Not like it matters--}

[We’ll find a way. Me and Frisk did.]

Asriel, in a… hamless voice: “I can feel it.

“Every time you die, your grip on this world slips away.

“Every time you die, your friends forget you a little more.”

Asriel has leaned down to our level to talk to us. He knows we can’t fight back. Hell—he even knows that we’re used to feeling this way by now.

We know what being defeated feels like.

Bluntly, without the anime-esque qualities from before: “Your lives will end here, in a world where no one remembers you any more.”

“So you’re gonna make everyone forget everything we did? Not just us?”

To me: “No.

“They’ve ALREADY forgotten you.”

“What?”

“By absorbing their souls, I’ve absorbed their power. I’m strong enough to alter how magic works to suit me.”
We don’t answer.

He’s right: he’s absorbed basically seven human souls. He has enough power to overcome all the barriers set in place by the First Seven Souls, by monsterkind’s centuries of research, and by Chara and my presence.

“You keep saying how magic is a matter of degrees. And how knowledge is power.

“Well? I’m the ultimate example of that.”

{He’s right.}

[Well at least we’ll forget at the same time.

[So neither of us has to feel the other person forget us.]

I don’t have to agree in words. Even if Chara can’t feel it, they know me well enough for that.

“Both of you are still hanging on?”

Casually: “That’s fine.”

He’s right. He has all the time in the world. Asriel’s in no hurry to wipe our memories.

“Soon, you’ll forget everything, Pauline.

“Still, your smarts’ll serve you well in your next life! THAT at least I have no reason to change!”

{That’s true—even if he wipes my memories he’ll just wipe my memories of the Underground—not my life before it. At least I won’t be a total idiot…}

[I mean neither will I. At least we’ll relearn all the soulology stuff quickly every time.]

{But I don’t wanna learn it again.}

[I know.]

{We’re even more fucked when we were when fighting Sans.}

[I know.]

{How is it that I can still hear you?}

{’Cause I started looking at your field of knowing—absorbed it into—made it mine—I still don’t get it—as soon as I saw—sensed—whatever—you when Gaster dropped you off here. That was before you knew ANYTHING about how magic worked.

[I became part of you as soon as you fell down, so Azzie can’t take that away.]

{Will we feel it?

{When we forget everything?

{Or will it just happen?

{’Cause if we can’t sense or cast magic we shouldn’t even be able to feel it right?}
I don’t know. I guess…

[Azzie has us in the palm of his hand. We’re in his field of knowing, but we just can’t feel it.]

{At least he’ll feel the pain of us forgetting—}

[Everyone will—]

[Huh?]

[^Cause he’s absorbed everyone. He feels what we feel, so THEY will too.]

{So everyone’s gonna suffer.}

[Yeah.]

{So we basically Backslashed and Slit Edged everyone?}

[Yeah.]

[Why?]

[What are you thinking?]

{‘Cause if he’s really using everyone’s power, then he’d know about how we can talk like this—}

[But he doesn’t ‘cause all he’s doing is using everyone’s souls to make him stronger.]

{And to learn about how Shulk’s Monado Arts worked in Xenoblade—}

[No he probly played it at some point after you fell down here, as Flowey. He’s had forever to do it—]

{True. So yeah he’s stronger not smarter. When Sans became determined he got smarter too—‘cause of our Judgment—}

[And Azzie hasn’t looked at our fields of knowing—]

{Probly ‘cause he feels like he doesn’t have to—}

A hint of encouragement: [Yeah! ‘Cause he’s doing the anime rival battle thing!]

{You mean he’s not gonna cheat ‘cause if he did the fight’d be boring.}

[Yeah!]

{So since he’s being an arrogant douchebag—}

[Hey he’s still—]

{How the hell can this guy be your friend he attacked me! Hell he attacked YOU! How—}

[Trust me: he IS my friend. And he knows it.]

{But he wants to erase—}

[I know.]
[So—]
[I know. Just... I don't blame him for wanting to do it.
[But still he's wrong.
[’Cause he's not the only one who knows how this works.
[It’s just that I remember it better.
[’Cause me and Frisk always win this fight. I... I think we’re just destined to win it.
[This might sound crazy but I think no matter who I get paired up with... whoever’s in Frisk’s place, whoever takes my place in whatever universe... that person and whoever’s in Frisk’s place are always destined to win this fight. No matter WHO’s in Azzie’s place there.
[So WE WILL win. And Azzie won’t get to reset.]
{But how?}
[You know how.]
With no hesitation: {’It’s ‘cause we can still affect his soul.}
[That’s what me and Frisk did. We had to take away his determination—]
{How’d you do it!? Shit-talking him?}
[No…
Okay well kinda.
[We have to take away all the souls he absorbed. So the Second Six Souls, all the monsters, and the seven we were gonna use to break the Barrier.]
{So we have to separate them from him?}
[Yeah basically.
[By making them remember us. Then they’ll fight back! Mentally.]
{So we’re gonna shit talk—}
[CONVINCE—]
{Convince everyone to stop fighting us?}
[Yeah.]
{But how!? We can’t—!}
Exasperatedly: [We don’t have to use magic!]
[It doesn’t matter that we can’t use magic anymore.
[What matters is that we know how it works.
[And that they can hear us.]

[Even if we can’t cast magic we can still talk to them. They can hear us—they have to—they’re inside Asriel! We’ve basically been yelling at everyone this whole time!]

{And ’cause they still have empathy—}

[Yeah! Even if we can’t feel our own souls or fields of knowing, THEY can! If we had to learn about magic first before they could feel our fields of knowing then, well…

[Judge Sans never would’ve felt my soul controlling you from in the Void. I wouldn’t be here.]

{True.}

{So what are we gonna do—shout at him?}

[Duh. It’s all we CAN do.

[On the count of three—]

{You can’t be serious—}

[This isn’t the stupidest thing we’ve done and you know it.

[It’s either THIS, or we end up like Sans.

[But worse.]

{But who are we gonna talk to first?}

[I know who.

[I’ve done this lots of times.]

“Come on! Show me what good your DETERMINATION is now!”

{He doesn’t hear us.}

[Just as I said. I bet we’ve only been talking for a few seconds.

[On the count of three… we’ll yell at someone!]

{Okay!}

[One.]

[Two.]

[Three!]

A deep breath completely devoid of magic: [“HEY SIMON!

[“Who you gonna make a cosplay for next!?]

[“Cause we AAAAAALL know you wanna make a Frog cosplay for Undyne…

[“To go with her Masamune from Sans!”]
**Stop the music.**

Chapter End Notes

Here's the looped version of Hopes and Dreams that I used!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEWOTdVnnZ8

Here's the extended version of You will Know Our Names that I used!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohQtCZCllDpc

Here's the orchestral cover of the Game Theory theme, Science Blaster, that I used!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ce54HgvoN_Y

Thank you to the creator for letting me link to it.

Long story short: I wanted this fight to have as much spectacle as the original: anime-like screaming, Chara summoning Xenoblade music to hype us up, shouting our attacks, and all. I wanted the fight to be a genuine fight, unlike in Undertale, where Frisk doesn't have to defend themselves by "fighting" Asriel. Maybe, I could have used ChronoTrigger music in this chapter, considering that Chara and Azzie roleplay as the characters, but... ehh.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!