

# Who Is Carol Holiday?

Among the reveals in the new *DELTARUNE* Chapters was the introduction of Carol Holiday, sparking debates and theories trying to fit her into the plot as we knew it then. Like with most things, time has tempered our understanding of the game, and our dialogue with the work is the most refined it's ever been.

Yet despite the wealth of new ideas, I seldom see people talking *about* Carol when they're not arguing over if she's the Roaring Knight. In practice, most people instead talk *around* her; she's a bit of a nuisance to discussion, shelved or pigeonholed by fans as "probably something Knight related" before they move on to meatier topics. As a result, the discourse surrounding her has failed to evolve in the past full year. She's either the Knight for reasons widely regarded as poorly argued, or she's identified as vaguely sinister and no further discussion takes place. Outside of niche circles, serious analysis of Carol Holiday remains stillborn.

Some have said this is because there isn't "enough" to think on, that she hasn't really said anything yet—she's only had one big scene, after all—which is precisely why I'm writing this essay. No, there's *plenty* the game has given us to work with, and throwing in the towel is doing her and the game a disservice. If people would put in the work they have with Gaster or SpamTenna Divorce Medias, this would become apparent very quickly.

So, here it is. This essay will cover a lot of ground, but at its center is Carol Holiday and the ethos behind her inclusion in *DELTARUNE*.

*Portions of this essay are adapted from my writing in DELTARUNE: Life Advice. While I elaborate on my beliefs in much greater detail there, my goal with this work is to focus on Carol Holiday herself without the barrier of over a hundred pages of context. Emphasis in quotes is always mine.*

---

## CAROL is COMPETENT

The first nugget of information *DELTARUNE* gives us about Carol is that, though she's not very personable, she's efficient in her mayoral duties.

The mayor's charisma is about zero.

No, it's negative.

But she works hard and has a good track record, so she runs unopposed.

Thaaaaaat's politics. Rarely.

When considering Hometown's general demographic, this mundane fact stands out specifically *for* its normalcy; To a town full of walking comedy routines and one-dimensional gag characters, Carol Holiday is regarded as unappealing. Certainly, in the context of her formal introduction, she's unlike anything the game's presently thrown at us. She's coldly adult.

This does *not* mean Carol hates fun or would scoff at the make-believe worlds the Dark Fountains amplify—she collects dancing Santa figures and carries a katana with her to work, and her primary occupation has ostensibly been a town carnival.

Oh, I'm sorry. You're looking for the mayor.  
She's very, very busy preparing for the festival.

What I mean is that Carol is a pragmatic individual who doesn't tolerate cartoon logic; she's somehow responsible for Hometown's crime rate of zero. If she wants something done, she wants it done *well* and without bullshit, as exemplified by her warning sent to Asgore which, in contrast to the surrounding events and Asgore's personality, reads as frightfully grounded and curt.

No rent received. Again. Stop giving away flowers. Start selling them.  
You have one month. - C

## CAROL is COLD

In the same conversation you learn Carol's work ethic, you can also be told this:

Not only does she act icy, she always keeps her office's AC on full blast.  
That chill I feel... is...  
Is this what politics feels like?

This gag is later reused for her house's thermostat, and her personal color scheme—again extended to her house, littered with snowflakes—is blue, blue all over. Where the joke crosses the threshold from "quirky" to "vaguely unsettling" is her first major scene, about which Susie says:

The hell was up with her mom?  
Everything was going great until she stepped in.  
Then the room dropped like 5 degrees...

So, great, she's cold. Why?

Better question, actually: Why the hell does she love Christmas so much?

Carol's affinity for the holiday season easily eclipses those of her family, demonstrated by her dancing Santa figures, the holiday branding bleeding into what seems to be an autumn festival, and her Nine Thousand Trees. When Susie describes Noelle's house as *"like the holidays just*

got frozen in place”, I take it to be confirmation the engine behind Hometown's gaudy Christmas iconography is Carol herself.

But your ears perked up at “frozen in place” too, right? Indeed, Carol is known for keeping things in stasis.

- She bronzes her daughters’ homework (a joke likely borrowed from the out-of-touch parenting portrayed in *Homestuck*).
- If you leave a dancing Santa running before you exit the residence, Carol will tell Kris to turn it off before they leave because “*It saves batteries*”.
- She keeps any and all sensitive possessions “*locked down at home*” and refuses to give even her own daughter a spare key.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Dess’s room is considered off-limits; Noelle warns Susie not just to avoid the guitar, but to avoid sitting by her former bed. Rather than box her old possessions, tidying the place up, or returning Asriel’s sweater and retainer, Carol tries to keep her daughter’s room the way she left it, even against the wishes of others (i.e. Noelle).
  - Bizarrely, she doesn’t bother to just lock Dess’s door to keep guests out, which is how Susie can reach it so easily in the first place.

Carol's possessions are valued by their age; Her katana is “*ancient*”, Noelle's watch (most relevant on a *Weird Route*, *hmm*) is “*Maybe an expensive antique*”, and Noelle treats her expensive house and caviar dinners with a level of enthusiasm I assume is only possible for someone who's seen it a thousand times:

**NOELLE:** Here's my house! Umm, sorry, **it's not much**, but...

**SUSIE:** The hell!?! It's huge!

More than just opulence, this habit speaks to Carol's sentimentality. Like many Toby Fox characters, Carol has issues with letting things go, acting selfishly to sidestep loss. How's her husband been doing, again?

Preservation, tradition, and nostalgia are fundamental to Carol's character, and are best exhibited not just in her snooty rich woman archetype but in her prominent **ice imagery**. I find Carol's ice associations to be extremely telling, because it has its own special *Route* which just so happens to tackle themes of preserving tradition, aversion to change, and the violent, selfish pursuit of the two. We should be linking Carol with the messaging of the *Weird Route* by default.

## Why ice?

I reference *DELTARUNE*'s elemental symbolism a lot, so I think a quick guide for how I conceptualize it is in order.

- **Darkness is aqueous** in its natural state. (IMAGE\_DEPTH, "Fountains", "geyser", "ink")

- **When exposed to air, it turns to smoke**, much like evaporating water or steam which accompanies a discharging geyser.
- Darkners incongruous with a Dark World turn to stone, a process **Lancer describes as “cold” feeling**.
  - It's probably for this reason Noelle's ice magic is uniquely capable of eliminating Darkners. (who, by the way, make the same sound when FROZEN as when they get petrified)
- To turn Darkness into a world, Lightners must channel Determination to control the formless Dark, much like how fire allows for speedy, controllable heat. Determination and fire are consistently linked across both *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE*; it is described as a *“burning feeling”* by Undyne, Kris and Susie's eyes *both* turn red before making Dark Fountains, and Kris's "BURNING EYES" (*“Flickering red, like pretty little flames...”*) betray a sort of intense energy Kris is partial to. Without Determination, without fire, liquid Darkness remains inert. The knife grows dull.
  - Our red SOUL is the driving force behind the game's continued existence and, crucially, progression. Your SOUL demarcates options, momentum, and our investment in the game itself. It's a SOUL whose Light is so unique, it makes Spamton's eyes burn *“LIKE [[DVDs of ANY movie at Half-pr1ce!]]”*. Thus, independent of Darkness's frequently discussed metaphorical link to creation, **red fire in DELTARUNE represents change**. It is the catalyst that allows Darkness to transition from a formless ocean to a world, that allows us to wake *DELTARUNE* from its dormancy.

This symbolism, far from constituting bonus fridge facts, is the language with which the game speaks. The Weird Route has us taking a game known for being subversive and turning it into a literal power fantasy with the slogan “BECOME STRONGER”, your party degrading from characters to lists of attacks and abilities. It's what gamers like Ramb might call *“the ORIGINAL”*—the way games were always meant to be. It's what happens when you break bonds to make yourself stronger. Or, in other words:

ME? ... FRIENDS?  
 EAHAEHAEHAEHAEH!!!  
 KRIS! YOU AND ME. ARE ALREADY [Friend Request Accepted]  
 WE DON'T NEED ANYONE ELSE!!!

At the end of his sidequest, Spamton starts gunning for the SOUL in a last ditch effort to secure "freedom". His interfacing with the NEO body, rather than relieve him of his woes, made him more aware than ever of the fate he was trying to run from, the nature of reality itself as a pre-programmed story. His gambit—get big and see past the Dark using the SOUL—is a bit nonsensical when you think about it. The problem he's faced with can't be resolved by just, throwing more force at it until it yields; you can't "beat" entropy. Spamton is a morally bankrupt

salesman, though, so this is in fact exactly what he believes will happen. To Spamton, might makes right, whether that "might" be of bucks or brawn.

This makes the choice to have him usher the Weird Route along all the more fitting! During it, we seek power in places we've already been, backtracking and scraping around for stragglers to freeze, our SOUL transitioning from our connection to the game to a banner representing our strength and dominion over *DELTARUNE*'s fake worlds.

The incentive to do the Weird Route in the first place is first hinted at by Spamton himself. Something about the Weird Route might(!) grant us the freedom Spamton spent his life yearning for, but only as a Pyrrhic victory:

YOU THINK MAKING [Frozen Chicken] WITH YOUR [Side Chick]  
IS GONNA LET YOU DRINK UP THAT [Sweet, Sweet] [Freedom Sauce]?

WELL, YOU'RE [!\$!] RIGHT! BUT DON'T BLAME ME  
WHEN YOU'RE [Crying] IN A [Broken Home] WISHING YOU LET YOUR OLD PAL  
SPAMTON  
[Kill You]

If the Route continues, Ralsei will say this of the Final Tragedy:

I... I want to. I want to believe again.  
I want to believe... it can change!  
That there isn't just one ending!  
But...  
What would that be...?  
If there was something else, what would it be...?  
**And how do we know**  
**It wouldn't be something even worse?**

The Prophecy, the inescapable script of the universe, might seem very much in opposition to change as a concept, and it'd have to be wrong for being so backward. However, the reality is that the Prophecy—the game's entire narrative arc represented diegetically—represents one huge, ultimately impartial change to the world of *DELTARUNE*. Before it, Hometown grew stagnant and tired. The town's religion isn't really about "following" the Prophecy to the letter, it's about how people should conduct themselves in its context. In essence, it's an extremely typical religion; there's facts about the way life works, and here's what you should think about it. Death, for example, is a problem fundamental to all life, but cultural attitudes to how one should consider it vary wildly. Far from being an oppressive establishment, a holy order carried out by its iron fist, the Final Tragedy is just an observed law of matter—**it is the reaction to this rule that has the potential to create systems of oppression**, why the rulers of Dark Fountains all

try to keep their influence, and why in contrast to other Dark Worlds, Chapter 4 (about Prophecy) is "a Kingdom without King or Prince" and instead "a Dark Knight!"

Prior to the climax of Chapter 4, Susie actually seemed pretty on board with the new direction the Legend gave her. The reason the Prophecy poses a threat—the reason Susie chooses "eternity"—is because she's not ready for the change the Final Tragedy demands, so she'd rather it never come to pass. She wouldn't have an ending.

Which culminates in Susie's wish after reading the last Prophecy:

When the sun comes up again...

**I want tomorrow to be the same as yesterday.**

And the next day

To be just the same as that.

That in the end

We can always go back to the way things were before.

This won't turn into a discussion of what exactly the Tragedy says, but it doesn't actually need to. The preceding passages prove just fine that the Weird Route is a carrot on a stick, the *possibility* that the ending of *DELTARUNE* can change, and the lines we'll cross to see it with our own eyes. Barring datamining and pop-culture osmosis, it appeals mainly to Players who find the Tragedy, y'know, tragic. It's the kind of thing someone who struggles with loss and letting go would chomp at the bit for.

So, someone like Carol Holiday.

The Weird Route prolongs *DELTARUNE* for the sake of prolonging it, to delay the inevitable. For this reason, ice—the game's symbol of stasis—is its primary motif. If Carol is so tied to ice, I have to assume she's equally tied to the Weird Route's messaging, that her fascination with the SOUL is more in line with Spamton's desperate bid for power, aligned with the worst ways we can use the SOUL. Regardless of the Final Tragedy's nature [or if it can be "averted"](#), I doubt Carol would like what it decrees, because Carol spends most of her effort trying to keep things from ending in the first place.

## **ENTER: Toriel**

It would be foolish to analyze Carol Holiday without looking at Toriel, especially with how much there is to see. Much unlike Carol, Toriel Dreemurr wants to move on; she doesn't want to get back with Asgore, she welcomes Sans and recognizes this as a shift in the household dynamic, she's excited for Kris to eventually enroll in college, and—most interestingly—she aims to dump Tenna. While Carol believes in clinging to the past, Toriel seems to embrace change, traits most visibly contrasted when she throws out the centerpiece of the Dreemurr and Holiday family gatherings, meanwhile Carol keeps Dess's room exactly the same as it always was.



Funnily, this extends to their elemental symbolism; while “magic” isn’t a factor of the Light World, the two are strongly tied to fire and ice, right down to the palettes of their homes.<sup>[2]</sup> This might sound crazy, but I think writing two mothers and then giving them not just contrasting personalities but one of the most classic varieties of oppositional symbolism in literature is maybe setting up a major altercation between the two. In fact, what meager dialogue we have from Toriel about Carol implies there’s some unresolved tension:

**TORIEL:** I am grateful for your wife's...

**RUDY:** Carol's.

**TORIEL:** Your wife's... financial support to him.

**TORIEL:** I just wish she did not support his, er...

**TORIEL:** His... you know what.

Notice how, in spite of their historic closeness, Toriel *refuses* to call Carol by her first name, and then politely criticizes her. This suburban vague-tweet provides just enough textual support to all the metaphor and characterization work for me to find it difficult to write any of it off as coincidental.

Want more? Allow me to draw your attention to the town’s problem child. No not that one. No not that one. N

Susie has a warm dynamic with Toriel, being one of the few adults who believes in her. This is comically opposed to Carol’s opinion of Susie, immediately soured by mucking around Dess’s room and generally being an anti-authority twat. The game takes care to have Susie mention the chilling effect Carol has on the surroundings, almost as if it’s trying to say the Scary Dragon With Burning Eyes doesn’t mesh with the cold. Crazy.

Contrary to what some may believe, Susie is widely disliked and/or written off by Hometown. I think two town elders, both mother figures whose relationships with Susie are juxtaposed, would represent some solid town-wide tensions—about Darkness, about the government, about

the populace, about a lot of things. One could accuse this of being empty speculation, to which I would counter by calling it a mountain of setup primed to crash down on the narrative. Unless Toby is, as many have called him, a complete trickster, there's no version of DELTARUNE which doesn't address these threads that I can call competently written.

## CAROL is CONSPIRATORIAL

Carol's obviously got some skeletons in her closet. Her collection of "*red heart-shaped objects*" is likened to human SOULs, her and Undyne's visits to the shelter, and we certainly can't forget Red Text "*YOU*". The consensus seems to be that Carol knows something is up with Kris's SOUL and, as a result, likely has other details on supernatural happenings like Darkness, all of which she learned by being in direct contact with the happenings in question.

To be clear, "Carol knows more than the average Lightner" is an open-and-shut case; I won't deny it, and I don't intend to, because it's true. What I *will* question is **how much** she knows and **where she got her information**. I have reason to believe Carol's sleuthing on Darkness and SOULs has been just that: sleuthing. More than that, **I think the information she does have is incomplete**.

Best illustrating my point is this corkboard-and-strings setup in her bedroom. We can be reasonably sure it's not your average to-do list because of the scattered documents/writing/photos(?) and the messy red strings running between several of them.



When Toby Fox (and, most people, actually) invokes a conspiracy board like this, it's meant to signify that someone *lacking* in knowledge is attempting to figure things out. I've seen people assume Carol's board is some kind of "plan" that Carol has—if anything, a board like this would indicate Carol trying to puzzle out someone *else's* plot. **This is not what someone who is "in on something" looks like.**



So, okay, what is she trying to learn? The instinct is something Darkness-related, but the game gives us a more specific answer: Kris's SOUL, a symbol of particular importance to the Weird Route. The pillows' narration curiously specifies Carol's pillow collection is of "*heart or human-soul shaped pillow[s], depending on your opinion*". Whose opinion? Who has an opinion on this?

The emphasis the game places on her interest in it and her keen allusion to our presence in Kris's body rightfully raise eyebrows, but the SOUL and the Cage holding it aren't forbidden knowledge; everyone in Hometown knows there are heroes ("*They have like, swords and stuff???*") just as they sing about "*the beauty of the soul*". Catty's improvised summary (which points out Ralsei's horns despite them not being shown on The Prince's tapestry) suggests there are finer details to the Prophecy we *still* lack access to while the Lightners apparently *do*.

Alongside opaque religious scripture, though, are normal books found in the town library. "Book 1 about SOULS" serves entirely to show us how little the average Lightner knows about SOULS—it's a debated topic without a solid answer. Considering the books upstairs have foreshadowed lore reveals of a similar ilk ("*It's a book about Monster Funerals*") and Carol is Hometown's only Lightner with a special interest in SOULS, is it such a stretch to suggest there will be a second book? Maybe one that starts with "One school of thought surrounding the SOUL is (some bullshit that'll happen in chapter 5)" or "Many have noted its appearance in our Prophecy, leading some to believe (some bullshit that'll happen in chapter 5)" or something?

For the record, just as I don't think Carol shook hands with the Knight and learned the amazing/tragic reason Kris has to harbor an extra-dimensional being in their gut, I don't want the takeaway from my babble to be that Carol, like... *happened* on someone's bespoke SOUL

dissertation. Both of these reduce her character to the result of happenstance. What I'm arguing is that Carol had some reason to doubt the world around her, and made an exorbitant effort into learning exactly what with the (abundant) resources at her disposal. One could argue Carol has to have more specific knowledge because of the phone calls, but I don't think the presence of creepy, technically still unidentified messages negates any of what I've said, especially with the corkboard in mind.

If you, as an *UNDERTALE* fan, think the version of Carol I'm outline sounds a bit familiar, it's supposed to; everyday schmoes trying to peek behind the supernatural curtain is [a pretty well-worn archetype](#).<sup>[3]</sup> Toby himself isn't a stranger to (relatively) underpowered characters with capabilities born from simple observation. It's the concept for his most popular character ever, actually.

Monsters in *UNDERTALE* tend to have an intuition for when the Player has manipulated SAVE files, describing a hard-to-place familiarity with Frisk almost as if they had been friends in a past life or something. Sans, on the other hand, lacks these instincts, and the Player's behavior confuses him greatly:

heh, the old whoopee cushion in the hand trick...  
wait a sec... have you heard it before or something?

haven't i done a great job protecting you? i mean, look at yourself.  
you haven't died a single time.  
hey, what's that look supposed to mean?  
am i wrong...?

Amusingly, he can only deduce the Player is a time-traveler through a system of mind-games:

did you...  
... just say "i'm a stupid doodoo butt"?  
wow. i can't believe you would say that.  
not only is that completely infantile...  
but it's also my secret codeword.

Unlike Toriel, Undyne, Asgore, or whoever else, Sans has to figure this out the boring way: **research**. Quantum physics, hypotheses and study, "our reports" of an anomaly. Because he cares about it all more than the average person, he *looks* like he knows a lot when he reads the Player like an open book.

Likewise, Carol *looks* like she has some forbidden knowledge about the SOUL, or like she knows exactly what the Prophecy means, has a vested interest in "fulfilling it" and learned all this when she went on sabbatical to the shelter. This thinking, however, does not withstand simple character analysis, and so my argument for this section remains that **Carol is an**

outsider attempting to piece together supernatural phenomenon with strings and duct-tape.

## ENTER: Asgore

If we're on the subject of Carol's armchair detective work, we should probably also talk about the actual detective she's been paying to help her.

Because Asgore in *UNDERTALE* was the king of monsters, his *DELTARUNE* counterpart had a similarly respected and masculine role as chief of police. Separating the two is Asgore's removal from the police after an unspecified incident. Given there are slim pickings for unsolved mysteries in Hometown, I hope it's not controversial to say Asgore's downfall was related to the town's one big cold case: December Holiday. An incident in defiance of logic, shrouded in darkness. The kind of thing you'd need a conspiracy board or two to keep track of.



There's something very peculiar about the way Asgore's release from the police force is described. A nearby Lightner claims he "*lost everything after he... You know*", which is. A bit of an odd verbal dance around him having failed a case, right? I guess I can see why he'd be fired for that, so I'm probably thinking too hard about it all. I *would* leave it there, but what actually piques my interest is the way *Asgore himself* recounts his folly:

This time for sure... Tori will finally see.  
... see what really happened.  
... that **I just wanted to... protect everyone...**  
And this time, **she'll have to believe me.**  
... they all will.

"I just wanted to protect everyone". What an odd thing to say about having failed to locate a missing person. Protect everyone from what, exactly? Why did that outweigh protecting Dess? It sounds weirdly voluntary, as if he'd made some kind of conscious decision people decried, a choice he's tried defending over and over to no avail.

For the record, no, I don't actually know what the fuck Asgore's talking about here, your guess is as good as mine. What I *do* know is that it reads as more than a bungled investigation or incompetence; against the better judgement of others, Asgore *did* something, and it cost him his badge, his family, his reputation, and god knows what else.

Some fun *DELTARUNE*-centric trivia about Asgore is that he has a soft spot for superheroes and cowboys. The kind of character he enjoys along with his (former) profession speaks to a very simplistic interpretation of justice: the Good Guy defeats the Bad Guy, and the world is right again. The bounty is hunted. It's a Hallmark Christmas miracle.

When Asgore mumbles to himself in Carol's room, he speaks from this mindset; all he needs to rebuild his nuclear household is to show Toriel what "*really happened*" and "*We'll be a happy family again*". By then, every moment he spent isolating himself from Kris and harassing his ex-wife will *surely* be forgiven, it'll all *surely* be "worth it". Forget reflecting on his flaws or making amends with the people he's hurt, because Asgore intends to solve everything entirely by himself in one righteous act of uber-heroism, because Asgore doesn't believe in the slow, unintuitive cooperation that actually *fixes* things.

Now, I know what you're thinking, and yes, you are exactly right—this is exactly like Spamton. In fact, beyond even their similar arcs (jobless, friendless, heartsick men who embark on lonely quests to Make Things Right), the game seems to make direct reference to this parallel when Asgore tells Kris he wants to take "*a nice drive around town*". Hell, giving Spamton's FrayedBowtie to Noelle prompts her to say it "*reminds me of asgore*". (Thanks Peni <3)

You know who else the game deliberately ties with Spamton? Carol and her SOUL pillows, referred to by Noelle as "*red heart-shaped objects*".

Indeed, as previously discussed, Carol's fixation on the SOUL echoes Spamton's own, a strange trait to share given no other characters actively pursue the SOUL if they mention it at all, *and* for the added layer of Weird Route associations. I remind us of this fact to set the stage for Carol and Asgore's working, tense relationship.

## Cowboy and Samurai

I like Santa Claus.

He's a nice old man that never changes.

([5th Anniversary Alarm Clock dialogue](#))

Earlier, I showed this exchange from Chapter 4, about Carol financing... *something* of Asgore's.

**TORIEL:** I am grateful for your wife's...

**RUDY:** Carol's.

**TORIEL:** Your wife's... financial support to him.

**TORIEL:** I just wish she did not support his, er...

**TORIEL:** His... you know what.

It's later implied Asgore's "you know what" is somewhat common knowledge.

That Asgore guy... It's a shame he lost everything after he... **You know.**

Now he has to sell flowers to make ends meet, but... What? He's your father? Sorry.

Well, I hope for your sake he **quits being so... obsessed with that stuff.**

Strangely, Asgore himself acts cagey about exactly what he's doing, speaking as if this is life or death for him.

Ah... yes. Carol and I have been... working together.

She's been funding my flower store, and in exchange...

...

You know, it's funny. Gardening was always my hobby.

Never my job. So, selling what I grow has been tough.

Flowers... are for people you love.

Giving them away... just seems natural, doesn't it?

I might look a little silly, but it's worth it.

**It will... all be worth it.**

We can deduce Asgore's obsession can be considered shameful *and* that Toriel in particular frowns upon it, yet Carol is funding it directly. The choice prompting the previous example ("Outfit") would, on the surface, suggest he's simply being paid to clean the Holiday residence. If that's really the whole story, though, why does everyone involved treat the situation like some massive taboo? On paper, all Asgore would be guilty of is being compensated for less-than-glamorous custodial work. What would *Toriel* of all people have against that? No, it's more likely that the unsavory dealings are about the big thing Asgore has been blamed for: failing to bring Dess back to safety.

From where I'm sitting, Carol (realistically the only person who could've initially fired him) is willing to support his flower shop, but she expects a return on the investment. Given the implication that Asgore has tried and failed multiple times to dredge up a convincing case on her payroll, I think she's running out of patience with him, and threatens to pull the plug if he can't find something new about her daughter.

But! She also has patience to lose! Asgore is a liability in this scenario, yet he's kept around. Remember, Carol doesn't operate on cartoon logic; she could stop encouraging his investigation or keeping his store afloat, but she doesn't. Is this some gambit to keep him on a leash, or distracted from some truth of Dark? Maybe, but I think the simpler explanation is that she finds his experience useful, that he might be able to produce something earth shattering ("*this black shard.*"). I'd go as far as to say Carol trusts Asgore, enough to turn a blind eye to his constant harassment of Toriel.

This bizarre trust can be seen illustrated in Carol Holiday's fridge. Uh,

While Sans is dancing with Toriel in Chapter 4, we can peek in the fridge to find a ketchup bottle standing "*defiantly*" where it previously wasn't. The metaphor here is pretty obvious, but it's not the first of its kind. Earlier, you can also check the *Holiday* fridge:

(The fridge is packed with festive foods.)

(... and **a jar of pickles.**)

Not only does Asgore have a jar of pickles (seemingly *only* pickles) in his own fridge, he apparently hits Sans up for free pickles on the regular. Short of saying the two are sleeping with each other, I can't deny it looks very much like the two share a present closeness, which we should be taking note of! We should be taking note of it, because it explains how Asgore ended up *here*:



Clearing a common misconception: Kris doesn't have keys to Carol's room, as the narration reads "***You and Susie*** continue to try to open the locked door in front of Noelle" with very little indication the details are being fudged. If there was cause to believe we were being deceived by this line, **we'd know.**

It's a sink. You could wash your hands here.

... but, isn't the sink in the bathroom better?

(The image changes... the helmet begins to come off.)

(Suddenly, you tried extremely hard to picture Jockington.)

(You turned the doorknob.)

(...)

(... You didn't do anything else.)

Either way, I hope the time I spent establishing Carol's protectiveness hasn't gone to waste, because I'm about to cash in; it is comically suspicious Asgore can enter this room and monologue about how he's gonna #MakeThingsRight, compounded tenfold when he begins with "*We're almost there, aren't we, **old friend?***"

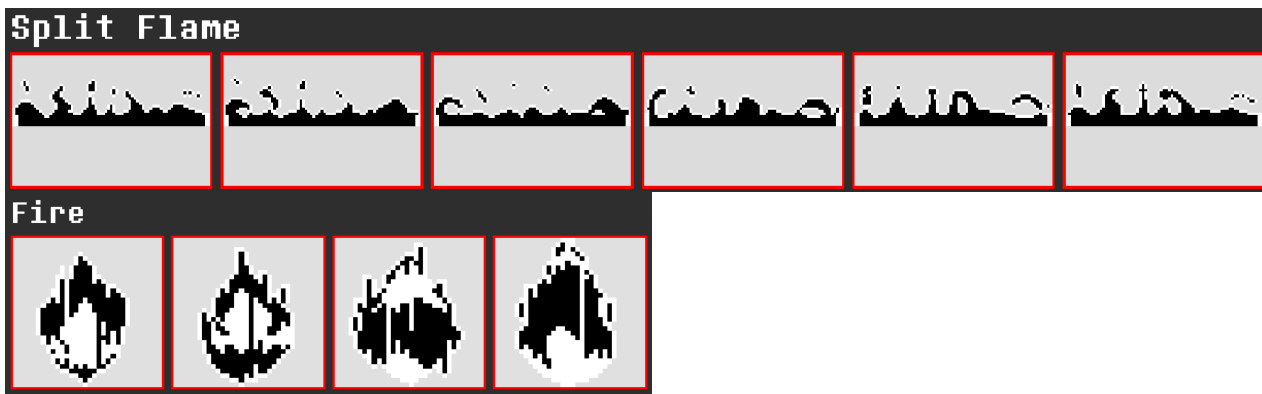
When it comes to people Carol is allied with, you basically *have* to have Asgore near the top of your list, or she looks like a complete idiot for dumping money on a guy who at best contributes nothing and, at worst, actively impedes her progress. It would atomize her potential as a threat.

Speaking of threats!

## ENTER: The Roaring Knight

Let's disregard any lore and plot discussion for a second to instead do some basic character analysis and see how Carol might feel *about* the Knight. What about these two suggests mutual understanding, and what suggests, perhaps, the exact opposite?

We know Carol is unambiguously ice-coded. If you disagree, you are willingly ignoring the text of *DELTARUNE*. Got it? Here's the problem.





Okay, but maybe it's a purely visual th—

**SUSIE:** I... can't think of anyone as messed up as them.

**SUSIE:** Making fountains... kidnapping people.. like...

**GERSON:** Why do ya reckon they're doin' it?

**SUSIE:** ... Huh? I... I dunno. Maybe they just...

**SUSIE:** I mean, maybe... they just wanna see everything **burn**.

Fuuckk

The Knight—whose knife is "blackened" as if burnt, who's frequently accented with red, who has a bank of flame-based assets—is associated with fire maybe a *little*. Arguing it and Carol are in opposition because One is Fire and One is Ice would be getting the cause and effect backwards, but I don't actually need to do that, because the closer we look at the Knight and Carol as characters, the wider the chasm between the two becomes.

The defining way the Knight sets themselves apart is their wanton destruction of Darkners. Already, this is opposite to Carol's instincts, but what really hammers home the issue for me is *who* gets attacked: Tenna, representative of the Holiday-Dreemurr golden days, and Jackenstein, a prop for the festival Carol spends most of her time planning. The latter could be a really fucked up coincidence, but the first? The entirety of Chapter 3 is about memory, nostalgia, and Tenna fearing his abandonment, all framed in a way that centralizes the families. His death is both ordained by the Prophecy (something I don't think Carol is aligned with) and the violent end to the memory lane road trip comprising TV World—and it was probably Dess who killed him! At this point, it'd be kinder to cut Carol's head off when the alternative is a metaphor this blunt.

This leads directly into my main point about the Knight: like the Prophecy, they are primarily a force of change. This sounds unintuitive with the Knight as the primary antagonist, but recall Hometown's status quo is of stagnation and boredom. As Undyne puts it, "*Nothing EVER happens in this town!*".

Now, introduce the Knight and Fountains. Adventures bring fresh purpose to a directionless cast of teens.

Kris, isn't this world just... BETTER?  
We make so many... friends here. Y'know?

Susie then attributes this feeling directly to the Knight:

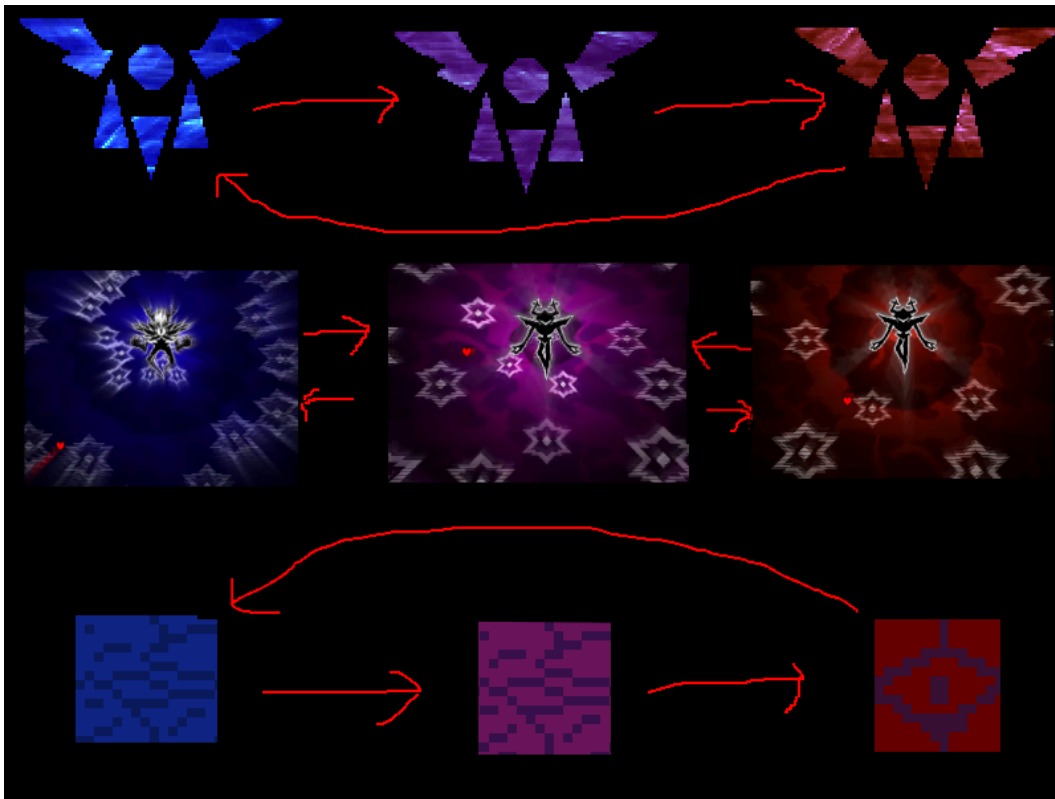
Since they started showing up,  
Everything's gotten a lot more interesting, hasn't it...?

After Undyne is kidnapped, though, the tone shifts, and Susie's disdain for the Knight only grows deeper and deeper as the game continues.

The Roaring Knight...  
... The one who's making the dark.  
The one who's trying to destroy the world...  
... so that's our enemy.  
(...)  
But now... someone's taken Undyne... into the shelter.  
The real shelter.

As mentioned earlier, Susie is initially very positive toward the Prophecy, rallying behind her new titles. When the change becomes too much to bear too quickly, though, she turns against it, resolving to not "*let it happen*".

You see it, right? The Prophecy *and* The Knight encompass change in its entirety, the frightening and the liberating. It's why the Knight is always accented with fiery reds, why the Final Tragedy shifts the Dark Sanctuary glass tapestries from glittery cyan to red, and why the Knight's final attack shares this color gradient—they are the avatar of conflict, of carrying out fate.



With that, I think it's time to talk about the phone calls.

## Dudee your penis is ringing l;ol

In the past, I've explained why I think the mystery caller should be the Knight—*just* the Knight, nobody else. I stand by what I said in *Life Advice*, but I also don't feel compelled to painstakingly litigate the same issue twice. Fortunately, [the Twitter thread by user ridgysole](#) is much more organized than my attempt. Here's an abridged excerpt, though the thread has even more supporting examples:

*"Constantly, the running thoroughline is the Knight Susie, and the Kris in-between. At the start of the Dark Sanctuary, we see the Knight appear, guarding the fountain. On one side, Susie, instructing Kris to stop the Knight and defeat their enemy. On the other side, the Knight, who Kris neglects to attack when they reach it. Instead, despite Susie's prompting, they wait for the Knight to dish out a definitive blow and progress the story as it's meant to.*

*And all of this really culminates in the final phone call. Deltarune Chapter 4 ends on a central tension surrounding the Final Tragedy and whether it can be averted. Kris gets up from the bed to face the window when they hear Susie posing a question. And, at this moment, the caller calls, almost as if to provide an answer. The context of this final scene illustrates to us what the "promise" is - it's to see the Final Tragedy through. **Kris, standing in the window, is torn between Susie, who wishes to avert this outcome, and the caller, who they made a promise to to see this outcome comes to pass.***

Chapter 4 constantly presents the Knight and Susie on opposing sides, **two forces who's desires Kris is caught between**. The final scene presents this the most directly, showing that the Knight must be the caller, because this is simply put, the story that the chapter is telling."



Attributing the promise to a character who isn't the Knight ignores the Chapter's narrative, the underlying questions of what the Knight's goal even is and why Kris is going along with it. What I find separately baffling, though, is the idea the caller could be Carol, whose characterization screams and screams that she *isn't* "pro-Prophecy". Even ignoring the deep characterization problems this conclusion presents, the game makes a point to depict a call between Kris and Carol that shares none of the mystery caller's features during the Route most aligned with threatening the Prophecy. Considering the typical context of the call being Kris's split allegiances between Susie's eternity and the Knight's will, I can't reconcile my reading of Carol somehow also telling Kris to Do Prophecy. Shockingly, if you follow the characters of a character-driven story, a lot of so-called ambiguities end up resolving themselves.

## Ok but where is "right there" (extremely optional)

For me, the thematic and character-based arguments against the common mystery caller completely eclipse this issue of Carol "coincidentally" arriving home early, because I value the narrative over things "making sense". The median fan overwhelmingly believes otherwise, to the point where "I'll be right there" preemptively shuts down rebuttals. As the year has gone by and nuanced Carol discussion is shelved, I find this mindset incurious most of all.

Confusion over what looks like a freak coincidence is understandable, though, so I do have an alternative explanation prepared. It hinges on these two facts:

First: Despite claiming the church Fountain would be "*tonight*", it's instead made maybe in the afternoon while the sun is still up. (Hometown looks very distinct during nighttime.) Considering the dubious mobility of the Knight in the Light World (what's up with the closets? why is Kris still so cagey about their identity? why does the Knight laugh at Susie's deduction?), I don't think a

change like this happened willy-nilly, and I don't think Toby's sense of time is so warped he accepted what appears to be the evening as "tonight". **The Fountain was made ahead of schedule, and Kris's phone call would've been the only way for that to have happened at all.**

Second: On both Routes, the game goes through the effort to point out that before Carol confronted Susie, Asgore spots her with the guitar. During a Normal Route, the logistics are pretty foggy, giving plausible deniability to Asgore sitting being purely for comedic effect. However, Susie helpfully spells out the exact order of events during a Weird Route, where Asgore's inclusion is entirely *not* comedic:

When I went to the living room with it...  
... Your dad **caught me** and started talking to me...  
Until, ugh, Noelle's mom showed up, SUPER PISSED.

To the people who decry the potential "coincidence" in Carol's arrival being separate from Kris's phone call, what do you make of Asgore's inclusion? Would that not be coincidental in your scenario? If his only purpose is to do nothing but foreshadow his actual relevance with the Black Shard and suggest a connection with Carol which is ultimately overshadowed by her connection to Kris, why bother mentioning Asgore had **caught** Susie? This decision, like Kris clearing their call history even when we don't see them make any calls that Route, was only made to retain continuity during an abridged alternate playthrough when the typical opportunity for a reveal would somehow be compromised (and given [the website](#), I have a hunch there might be more happening than a simple fade to black).

Is the whole thing written in a confusing manner? Yes, absolutely. Has Toby used sleight-of-hand for storytelling purposes? A thousand times yes, in fact I'd say he is quite well known for doing so. I'm not sure if this would even be the most egregious case in *DELTARUNE*. Is mine a perfect explanation? No, but neither is the consensus, and at this point you have to weigh the options:

Do you sacrifice the clarity of a minor "mystery" to meaningfully develop two of your villains in different directions, serving the story in ways that are both effective and economic, or should the nature of this "mystery" be exactly as it appears at the cost of splitting the motivation and narrative role of your antagonist across as many as *three* different characters, kneecapping their relevance as individuals? This isn't as simple as two very similar characters (Kris and Dess) working together, because Carol and the Knight are so designed in fundamental opposition to one another, certainly also because the Knight *is* Dess.

## WHAT IS A HERO?

???: Your population is six billion nine hundred million humans right now, and it's still growing by ten every four seconds. So why do you make such a big fuss over the loss of

just one of you?

**MADOKA:** If that's how you think, you really are our enemy.

(*Puella Magi Madoka Magica* episode 9)

You're probably familiar with self-fulfilling prophecies, and how *DELTARUNE* is undoubtedly set up to contain one:

(A glass tapestry rings above you. Strangely, no matter how you turn to look...)  
(... its perspective never changes.)

**SUSIE:** Didn't know the prophecy was supposed to be this accurate.

**RALSEI:** It... it is, Susie.

**RALSEI:** Everything it says... will come to pass.

Perhaps by the time we got here... it would change.

But... but no matter what we do...

Our fate...

... is already decided.

This means each step of the Prophecy must happen at some point or another for it to be complete. The implication, of course, is that it requires the gathering of three heroes.

Something interesting about the first and third heroes, the Cage and the Prince, is that their demands are open-and-shut; the Cage is a human, and the Prince is royalty from "DEEPEST DARK", wherever that might be. "THE GIRL", though, is different. For a girl to be *the* Girl:

1. She must have "hope crossed on her heart"
2. She must find "love", or rather, love must find its way *to* the Girl

The first is interesting on account of being entirely subjective. Unlike the other heroes, the girl is judged by character—what does it mean to have hope? What acts and traits do Lightners consider "hopeful"?

The second has prompted speculation about the SOUL, about L.O.V.E. the acronym, but let's take it at face value for a moment: The Girl has to find "love" in order for the Prophecy to progress. This means that, if she doesn't find "love", the journey cannot reach its destination until that fate "comes to pass".

Recall my argument that Carol, contrary to popular belief, does *not* want fate to arrive. If Carol can sideline "the girl" hard enough, love won't reach her. If that won't happen, neither will the ending. This means that, if Carol can simply sell people on a very specific idea of what the Girl *should* be, she can steer them away from what she *is*. Yes, this would mean Carol will somehow have to either have access to a similar conclusion about the Prophecy or come to one herself, but is that really even off the table with her well-kept conspiracy and the religion

itself being up to interpretation? Moreover, does the story we already have about the Weird Route and finality in general not *strongly* point in the direction of what Carol is afraid of? It just isn't an unsolvable issue for a story like this.

The ambiguity gives Lightners free reign to deliberate what being "hopeful" actually means. What actually counts as "light" in Hometown is fairly subjective, given Carol is perfectly willing to let Noelle and Catti hang out despite the latter being into the occult and demons. In fact, while Noelle is the archetypal girl-next-door to the only human, she's *also* more into scary subjects, an interest she largely keeps to herself! Indeed, while no one in particular strongly considers themselves "heroic" (just that they "could" be), Noelle is uniquely put on a pedestal for being, as Catti puts it, "*the light laughing in the night*", and the image of her purity as something to be protected. Protected from whom?

Lightners still idolize the Prophecy, believing the heroes are saviors and that "any one of us" could be them. They seem to understand the importance of the Girl, reflected heavily in their matriarchal social order; most positions of power are held by the town's women, with Carol happily at the top. This gives her the unique ability to influence what the Girl can or cannot be.

However they came to it, Hometown already *has* an established notion of what *isn't* considered "hopeful". What Hometown considers disingenuous, impure, dark. We know this, because it's Susie. Others in town may act callous, elitist, downright *cruel*, but they—Undyne, Alphys, the class, Bratty, Catty—all agree that Susie is damaged goods, and for what? For asking questions. For being places she isn't "supposed to" be. For being crude. For standing up for herself. Do you think it's a coincidence that Dess, anti-authority and a deliberate foil for Susie, is completely forgotten by Hometown? Do you think it's a coincidence that the Roaring Knight, just like Susie, carries the symbolism of fire?

This isn't some divine right of kings shit, either. **This is social control.** When Catty claims anyone can be a hero, she isn't lying! If anyone in Hometown were to step up and demand change, they would be heroic simply because the Prophecy is *about* change! But because Hometown's conception of a "hero" is socially constructed, because people like Carol are *afraid* of that very change, they—intentionally or not—created a world in which problems literally *shouldn't be solved*, or else the Tragedy reveals itself. From Carol's point-of-view, it's not even about keeping specifically Noelle safe; **it's about making sure girls like Susie are never safe.** That love will *never* find them, making dissent impossible.

Also notice how, because the Prince and Human are both left ungendered and without any stipulations for personal conduct, they don't actually have to be very good people to "count" in Hometown's eyes, leaving only its women under scrutiny, while the men can simply wear royalty as an aesthetic. Notice how "flower king" Asgore is kind of awful, yet still protected by Carol. As we'll soon find out, a lot of the men in *DELTARUNE* kind of suck!

Carol's not trying to benefit from the Prophecy's outcome, but **trying to stall its progress**, wearing a blindfold to the truth that the wheel always turns. If the wheel turns, what happens to her? Where will she go? But the Prophecy she's taking advantage of is self-fulfilling. In her entitlement, in trying to make sure her status will *always* be relevant, Carol might just make something worse.

## IT'S A MAN'S WORLD!

**RUDY:** Hey, I'm happy your dad brought me flowers, but...

**RUDY:** Roses!?! What is this, man? Beauty and the Beast?

**RUDY:** That ain't gonna work, man! We're both beasts!

You might have noticed a certain *je neigh say cough* bubbling beneath the previous section. This might lead you to wonder if a feminist lens truly works on *DELTARUNE*. I'm here to say: it'd be really weird if he wasn't, all things considered.

There's always been cause for feminist readings of *DELTARUNE*, now more than ever with "THE GIRL"'s central role in the Prophecy. Stuffed Alpaca has [a video on how DELTARUNE has been handling gender](#) which I greatly encourage you to watch, but I wouldn't be here if I didn't also think his analysis fell short. Yes, because he continues to render Carol and her motivations as a question mark, but he also barely touches on a topic I've been haunted by for months. Toby Fox's stories aren't just incidentally feminist with well-written female characters and a few manly men—**they fundamentally take issue with what we can recognize as masculine hegemony**.

- King is a scorned militant who believes the world owes him one for having "abandoned" him, forcing his subjects and his own son to support his cause against their will. He likes calling women wenches, in case you were stuck on the kind of guy we're dealing with.
- Tenna—"the **king** of only"—micromanages his employees to quell his own insecurities, which boil down to his irrelevance to the Dreemurrs after an era of being the center of attention. For this reason, he takes particular offense to his show being called "old", and fervently claims to not have burn-in.<sup>[4]</sup> Like Spamton, Tenna wants to be **BIG**.
  - On the other hand, Ramb seems to prefer being dated. In fact, he *hates* Tenna's revamp of the "original" game, bemoaning the lack of "freedom". In actuality, he idolizes a facsimile of the Weird Route's power trip narrative, where characters are monsters with no more attributes than hitboxes and attack patterns. Kris is briefly interested in this freedom, but gradually grows more and more afraid of what it asks of them. As [frostoops on tumblr \(blog contains NSFW\)](#), brilliantly observes, the sword route has Kris pilot a Link-esque interpretation of their being. For a long time, Link embodied a stoic hero, a pure blank slate for players to embody—always a man. What does it say about Kris, when they constantly recoil at what their avatar does? What

does it say about Ramb, who urges them to keep playing for "some *REAL fun*" with a game solely about power, insisting it's what they "really want", that he "knows" Kris?

- Spamton, seeking power and fortune, isolates himself from his peers, turns to violence on every Route, and encourages Kris and Noelle to buy the ThornRing "*FOR EVIL*". His language is overwhelmingly meat-headed; he talks about women (including Noelle) as if they're collectible prizes, he makes frequent reference to hitting the gym and workout-ready bodies, he likes automobiles, he likes getting **BIG**, and is clearly the American cultural concept of Loud TV Salesman distilled into the most disgusting creature you've ever seen in your entire life. Like Ramb's assumptions about what Kris enjoys, Spamton asking over and over if they wanna be a big-shot reads almost as him pressuring Kris into the chauvinistic boys' club of entrepreneurship and capital.
- Queen, by contrast, *does* have power and relevance. What she wants is more of it, and to not have to give up what she already has. She enslaves her subjects "*In Glowing Rapture*" of her wires and screens and considers her limited understanding of people to be "*Absolute*", but is willing to spare those who aid her conquest. When people call her a "girlboss", it's because she successfully emulates the oppressor—disregarding opinions, coercing labor, and opposing any resistance to the growth of her empire of spectacle.
- Asgore has lost his job, his wife, and his status as Hometown's protector. His methods to show everyone what "*really happened*" involve avoiding Kris's present wants and needs,<sup>[5]</sup> stalking his ex-wife, and refusing to ask for help or work through his own flaws, all so he can become the the head of the Dreemurr house again. "*A happy family*". This, aside from just harming people, bars himself from his own self-actualization (read: getting with Rudy).
- Berdly tries extremely hard to be overly masculine to the point where he seems almost physically incapable of listening to Noelle at any juncture. He also generally feels entitled to women's admiration, as grotesquely exhibited by his gold statue with nipples he doesn't have.
- Burgerpants
- I'm going to refrain from elaborating *here* because it really warrants an essay of its own, but I have to wonder if *DELTARUNE*'s first spoken role going to a tortured scientist type with the theme song "ANOTHER HIM" who ominously calls the world "*MY DELTARUNE*" and whose writing has made its way into the local church hymns as if to position himself as holy father of the world is. Y'know. Intentional.

Similar types of character can also be found in Toby's other work. As he appears in *Earthbound: Halloween Hack*, Dr. Andonuts felt alienated from his wife and son Jeff due to his own closeted homosexuality. His downward spiral continued when, after his wife died, he shipped Jeff to boarding school to avoid being a "bad influence", focusing only on his work as an inventor. When the party of *Earthbound* seeks his help in defeating Giygas, Toby interprets Andonuts as "excited that he's doing something useful to validate his existence", as he'd spent his life not being there for his loved ones. If he had felt able to be vulnerable with his wife and son, he

wouldn't have pinned his entire being on his inventions. Instead, his continued failure to be a "proper" husband and father leads to his degradation into the monster at the end of the game.

Really now, I just think it's a hell of a lot more interesting if, in addition to all his other things, the reason you're fighting the antagonist is because of an inferiority complex he developed due to his own repressed sexuality interfering with his relationship.

([THEMAKINGOF.html](#))

Years later, Toby would write the story for *The Greatest Living Show*. The protagonist, a woman entranced by the ringmaster's show and beauty, is preyed upon by the ringmaster himself, who mutilates her for use as one of his puppets. The lyrics place great emphasis on the nature of his predation as a practiced, lucrative process. It's a song about bright dancers who for some reason "reek of cologne", about a ringmaster whose terror *is* his beauty, about being chewed up and spat out for his performances as the men in the audience drunkenly clap and cheer, night after night:

Braving through the sight  
To the seats replete with **shaking heat and fright**  
**High he stands**  
Twisting puppets on **his throne**  
(...)  
Bring the stage alight  
**As I slip into the corset of night**  
In the wings  
While **he traps me in his sight**  
(...)  
Men in masks  
They laugh  
In brandy and glass  
Through their spectacted grins  
**As I'm falling limb from limb**

([The Greatest Living Show english lyrics, commented by Toby Fox](#))

All these characters act and think in ways best described as patriarchal, and I don't simply mean that they're men who harm women, or that their flaws exist "because" they're men, or that if/when Toby writes a man we should immediately peg him as the bad guy of the moment because Toby is a man-hating-feminist. What I want to emphasize is the element of class: these are figures whose power is sustained by exploitation, by reducing people to the resources that can be extracted from them—the foundational principle of patriarchy. Maintaining this system isn't an innate instinct, but a choice. Anyone of any background can choose to push their community under the bus for the sake of mobility.

The characters described above either succeed at consolidating power with the tools of patriarchy at their disposal (Queen, the ringmaster) or are worried they'll lose something by not being powerful *enough* (Andonuts, Spamton, Tenna, Asgore). Should they realize the error of their ways, they relinquish the power they gained by buying into the system, because they recognize such power can only be sustained through continued suffering at their hands.

Individualism, lust for power, resistance to change, and obsession with legacy are the makings of history's great men, and it'd be absurd to argue these traits featuring in Spamton or Asgore or Queen is some ahistorical coincidence. **Toby Fox likes to critique the patriarchy**, and when he invokes toxic masculinity and the violence at its foundation, he's doing so on purpose. If you don't think his writing is "that deep", I'm sorry you feel that way.

Now, go back to the Weird Route. More than just mechanically regressive, the Weird Route is culturally backward; Susie, widely regarded as one of the most refreshingly well-written female leads in recent gaming, is alienated from Noelle at every turn, boxed into her scary bruiser role. From Chapter 2 in the hospital...

**SUSIE:** So, uh, the hell were you two doing?

**NOELLE:** O-oh, u-um, n-nothing, Susie!

**NOELLE:** I was... I was just about to go home! U-umm... see you!

SUSIE: ...

SUSIE: Guess she's afraid of me **again**, huh...

... to Chapter 4 outside church.

Damn... that whole thing was a disaster, huh.

... and this is gonna sound dumb, but...

... You know what else kinda bites?

... didn't even get to... hang out, really.

All three of us, I mean.

Normally, Noelle is the place in the Light World where Susie can reap the lessons learned in the Dark World, where she can break down her bully persona and feel less isolated in Hometown—she's her refuge. When Susie inevitably falls out with Kris and Ralsei (for, uh, all their lies), it will be Noelle, similarly burned by Kris's avoidance, who she will turn to. On the Weird Route, though? No such refuge exists. Her only relief will be her role in the illusory adventures of the Dark World. No one else will take her.

Meanwhile, Noelle and Kris are forced into the roles of a heterosexual marriage. Kris is the head of the house, making all the financial decisions and being filled with power. Noelle, the actual workhorse of the Route, is given no choice but to listen to Kris, lest she's left without their direction, with only herself—and her self is just too meek and helpless on its own. While

"getting" the FreezeRing and being mistaken for a couple, Noelle speaks to Kris in language I'd argue sounds intentionally like a struggling husband and wife bickering over a splurge:

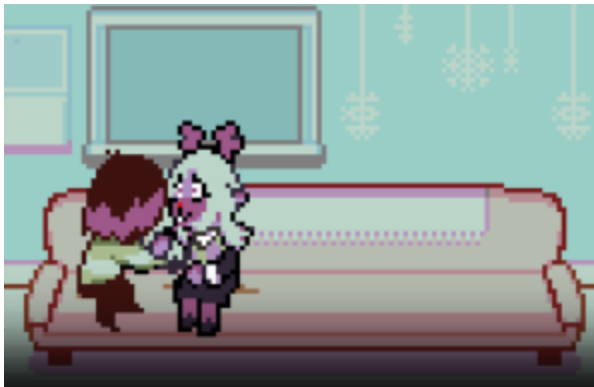
Kris, c'mon, **you know we can't afford that...**

Wh... what?

Kris, I just told you, we... **we don't have the money.**

Instead of helping Noelle develop her own boundaries and agency—the way Chapter 2 *usually* goes, when she stands up to Queen—we tell her to close her eyes, follow our directions, and we'll make her strong for it. This is punctuated by a wedding ring designed to hurt the wearer and a scene where we force Kris to corner Noelle, further isolating her. (And it's really not worth trying to argue that the scene couldn't possibly bring assault to mind.)

We act like Spamton, or Asgore, or Queen, all in pursuit of power and a sense of control. The bonds you break may make you stronger, but...



The Weird Route is the cold, lonely peak of *DELTARUNE*'s depiction of patriarchy. With that said, look again at Carol.

## CAROL is... (1/2)

The two most obvious Carol-haters we have on hand are, conveniently, extremely similar: neither Susie or Dess (who both played the same guitar) are particularly pro-authority *or* feminine in presentation. Aside from there being very little reason to invoke the strict mother / troubled tomboy archetypes without also exploiting the inherent conflict between the two, the scant bit of textual evidence to comb through would suggest Carol has tension with rebel-types:

- Both have a history of damaging instruments, and the ones Dess dented are explicitly "expensive".
- Both have red/fire symbolism; Susie apparently has eyes "*burnin' up everything*" and is called a dragon, while Dess's guitar is red and "Raise Up Your Bat" features fire imagery. Dess's room also stands out like a sore thumb, lacking the nauseating Christmas iconography the rest of the house does.

- As mentioned, Dess at least identified with anti-establishment movements and snuck around parental controls to play vulgar music. The extent to which she'd properly *act* on her beliefs is debated and also not within the scope of this essay but, like, do the math.

On a fundamental level, Carol is at odds with these two because they threaten the stability she cherishes. Susie in particular represents the ability for Hometown to move on, for Noelle to find her own agency, for Kris to let down their walls, for things to be different. If people are given a way out of disaffection, they won't have to put their lives in Carol's hands. This, coincidentally, is the M.O. of another of the game's antagonists.

If her cartoonish wealth, surrogate motherhood, and on-the-nose references to Hometown's festival didn't already give it away, Queen is basically a goofy Carol caricature. This becomes relevant when, in "nominally well-meaning but still shitty parenting" fashion, Queen claims to not have bad intentions behind enslaving her populace:

I Just Want To Make Everyone Smile  
And If I Become An Evil Villain To Accomplish That  
Is That Bad?

It's Okay  
You Do Not Have To Answer  
You Would Be Wrong

One might be tempted to chalk this up to her Darkner-isms, but it's more accurate to attribute her personality to being the denizen of Internet World. Unlike King and Tenna, Queen has already succeeded as a ruler—what she wants is to succeed harder. "*Lightners Have Already Been Enslaved By Me And My Kin*" after all. More telling are her motherly traits seemingly being magnetized to Noelle. She repeatedly infringes upon Noelle's agency, which she spends her arc for that Chapter mustering the guts to affirm.

You think listening to YOU makes me happy!?  
No!  
I'll never be happy! Not if I'm controlled by you!  
Why can't you understand that!?

But, by Chapter 4, Noelle still has to be reminded she can set boundaries for herself, and completely falls apart with just a few words from her mother. This is for the same reason Susie gives for why Berdly "*still hates [her] in real life*": Queen was the dry run for a deep-seated problem Noelle has to overcome.

A point of divergence between Queen and Carol is a much more sinister plot-line which oh-so-conveniently takes center-stage in the Weird Snowgrave It Snew Route:

We're just neighbors so, I mean...

We just... ended up seeing each other a lot. That's all.

Okay, but like in the photo, you're like...

Kinda like... riding a Ferris wheel together.

Fahaha, yeah, it was kind of just... You know. Forced.

I don't buy for a second this "forcing" was somehow Kris's fault, even if the anecdote eventually becomes about their prank. We haven't forgotten that, in the short list of people Noelle can set boundaries with, *Kris* is first in line, right? We haven't forgotten Catti also asks Kris to "protect" Noelle from Susie, right? We haven't forgotten one of the facets of the Weird Route's horror being taking advantage of Noelle's longstanding trust in Kris to push her away from Susie, *right?*

(Sometimes I feel like...)

(Kris and Dad are **the only ones I can say no to...**)

With reference to, again, Queen's stranglehold over Noelle resembling Carol's manipulation of her and, *again*, the overwhelmingly heterosexuality of Kris and Noelle's Weird Route relationship, you have to do some serious legwork to convince me this wasn't a product of surrounding pressures. This is all but confirmed at the end of Chapter 4, when Carol calls Kris with the express purpose of making sure their festival date is actually going to happen. In the moment with full context, yeah, it's stomach-dropping, but that's only because we know *why* Noelle is suddenly going out with Kris. To Carol? At minimum, it's maybe a bit confusing, but she's not about to complain. At it's height, Carol interprets the object of her zealous desire (the SOUL) as outright *helping* her.

In terms of "why":

- As previously mentioned, Carol wants to keep the wheel from turning.
- Continuing the conservative undertones of the Weird Route, Noelle and Kris being the "default" choice in Carol's eyes is inherited from the unstable straight marriages she and her friends are in. She's pushing them together because it's what she did to herself, and Carol values nothing if not tradition.
- Queen's stated motivation for dragging Noelle through her plan is that she sees strength in Noelle which hasn't awoken yet. Normally, Noelle finds this strength by standing up to Queen, denying her the opportunity to capitalize on the power she may have. During the Weird Route, it's *us and Kris* who can unleash Noelle's terrifying strength, by convincing her to surrender to what's expected of her. While I'm unable to say if Carol has discovered some supernatural exploit unlocked only by enduring some Mitski shit, shackling yourself to someone for the sake of a stable life is perhaps the most classic criticism of marriage as an institution, and thus exactly what I'd expect out of her.

Another difference between Carol and Queen is that, while the two both seem to fawn after higher powers, they're into different ones. Queen, like King, is infatuated with the Knight, though it's ultimately revealed she doesn't understand what the Knight does or wants. Carol, though, is onto something bigger: **Us**. This isn't enough to be a solid prediction, but if Spamton is anything to go by, Carol wants the SOUL for power. This, at last, leads us the Cage themself.

## ENTER: Kris

Because of the widespread misconceptions regarding Carol's allegiances, exactly *what* Carol is doing with Kris usually gets lumped in with whatever the Knight is doing with Kris, which most agree is to follow the Prophecy. In light of my own analysis, the question of what Carol and Kris's relationship is if not "work-related" reemerges.

When Carol reaches out to Kris, the narration is as follows:

(You felt something like ice on your shoulder...)

I'm going to analyze this outside of my established glossary of symbols, because you can already fill in the blanks about how this would fit. It strikes me that "ice on your shoulder" doesn't immediately register as frightening discomfort. I think it's obvious Kris is deeply unsettled by Carol, behavior which contrasts their smile when using the HoldBreath act against the Knight. When I remember Kris's displays of emotion during a Normal Route are subtler and more spaced out, while I wouldn't say they *like* the Final Tragedy or their duty as the Cage, they don't consider it completely alien or terrifying. It reads more as resignation to me. The story is completely different during the Weird Route, though, their fear palpable and growing exponentially with every step we take.

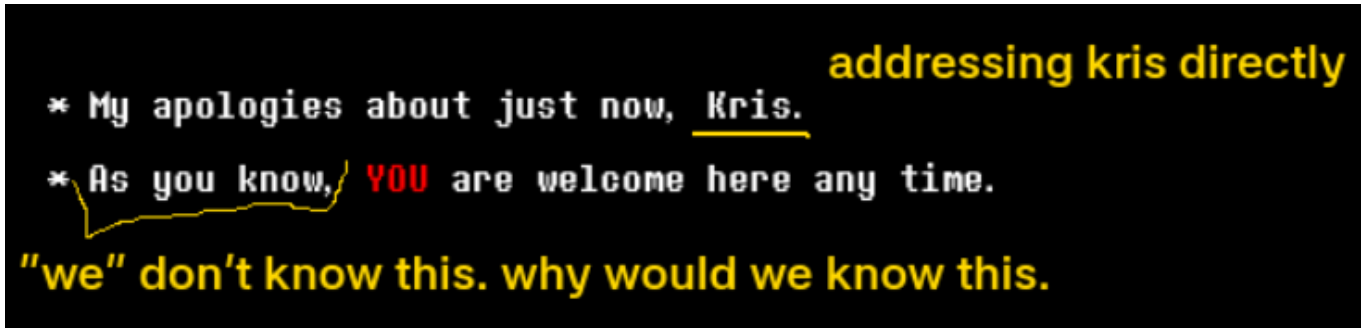
With this in mind and the likely context of Dess (a childhood friend) being the Knight, it makes plenty of sense for Kris to just not trust Carol. It's funny, because I don't think Carol fully trusts them, either.

Recall the Santa figure dialogue—figures which, mind you, Kris has a history of purposefully draining of power. While presented as a gaff, it illustrates the incongruity between Kris and Carol, and how it's strikingly close to that between *Dess* and Carol. Namely, Kris is a little shit who does what they please, just as Dess makes her displeasure clear through underhanded tactics (sneaking around, breaking things). They're messy, and Carol isn't.

I made a big deal out of Asgore's movements in the Holiday residence earlier, and part of the reason was to contrast it with Kris. I think it's interesting how Carol is very blunt with Asgore while still letting him look around her room, yet refuses to give Kris access to a room many speculate contains the "plan" to enact the Prophecy, despite coming off as more "polite" around Kris. Moreover, even after absolutely fuming in every direction upon seeing Susie with the guitar, she still maintains the cordial veneer. In the context of the ice-on-shoulder feeling, I don't

buy that Carol was genuinely relieved to see Kris after a bad moment, let alone after they nearly bungled a mission so badly she had to personally intervene. No reprimand or ominous threat, because Carol's not speaking to Kris in the context of the guitar; she's speaking in the context of their SOUL, hence the bright red text.

I've seen people suggest Carol is speaking "to us" during this sequence, and I'm not sure I fully agree. Indeed, "YOU" is double entendre, but the rest of the remark doesn't check out unless it's Carol talking to Kris *about* the SOUL.



This looks less like two allies taking silent inventory of their Plan(TM) and more like Carol saving face, because she wants Kris to think they're safe around her. The logic here is of cornering a prey animal; "YOU are welcome" is framed as sinister because it's a trap Kris is being lured into, not because it's referring to a big bad "conspiracy" they all take part in. Whatever Carol wants to do with Kris and their SOUL is likely exploitative, so she *literally* keeps them at arm's length.



Where exactly this will lead during normal gameplay, I'm unsure. The Weird Route, however, presents a dire trajectory.

Earlier, Ridgy's thread pointed out the framing of Kris caught between their window and their phone. I've previously described Kris as "indentured" to the Knight, but I'm more inclined to believe they really are of two minds about the whole dilemma, given (among many other things) how personal and almost childish of a word "promise" is.

But during the Weird Route, Kris doesn't even try to leave their *bed*, and Susie is nowhere to be found. The horror of the scene is that Carol, embodiment of everything the Route represents,

calmly destroys the refuge they could've taken in putting their head down and keeping their promise to the Knight. From Carol's perspective, things might actually be going *better* than expected; not only is Noelle suddenly going with Kris to the festival (sudden enough that she "*just wanted to confirm*" well past midnight), but Susie becomes a less complicated issue without Noelle to bat for her. Thus, daughter and her childhood friend of yore finally get together, and order is restored. A happy family.

This is what I believe to be the heart of Carol's role in the story, how her fealty to tradition poisons everyone around her in the name of how it "has" to be, and how it affects Kris's own agency. Many clamor for Kris's relationship to gender identity to be "actually" addressed, and this is how I know people aren't thinking about gender in *DELTARUNE* hard enough, that they aren't thinking about *Carol* hard enough. if you're wondering how it could be could be expounded upon beyond optional riddle-rooms, here you have it! A conservative, authoritative mother takes advantage of a child's body to perpetuate traditional family, forcing them to play the husband of her daughter, the shy, blushing bride. If you also believe that, I dunno, Kris was a vessel made in one very specific man's image (as described by [kenomacreature](#)) you'll find these two ideas coexist *extremely* well.

A nostalgia rattled old woman who thinks she knows best. A fraying conservative who's afraid of change. The coldwater falling from the top of the sky. Carol Holiday is...

## CAROL is... (2/2)

TEG: (...) Do you think that as gamers and people we have become addicted to numbers / money / experience in general?

TF: The addictive quality of "numbers increasing" is what drives a lot of games. But some of the most important things in life can't be accurately represented by numbers.

### [\(INTERVIEW: TOBY FOX OF UNDERTALE\)](#)

I don't actually think Carol is a "bad" person. I don't think she's a particularly "good" one, either. This is, historically, Toby's favorite kind of character to write. Beyond being problematic to believe in, "irredeemably evil" is a boring thing for a character to be. Surely, there's something a *little* sympathetic to her.

What mustn't be forgotten is that Carol wants Dess back in her life, and that she *did* love her daughter. Why else would she keep buying her expensive instruments? Why else would she have left Dess's room so untouched, so untidy? Why else is one of the shelter codes her birthday? Dess may have been a nuisance for being against order, but her absence is easily the source of even greater instability. Carol wants, more than anything, to go back. It's clear as day in her love of Christmas; isn't it fitting for her to identify not just with a commercialized husk of a tradition, but one that's culturally bound to nostalgia, to believing in the unbelievable?

Indeed, Carol and Queen are convinced they "know what's best" for their children, but they're obviously, fundamentally mistaken. What Carol actually wants is what a lot of bad parents want out of children: to vindicate her own life. To be like her, to think like her, to carry on her "legacy" and to that end, remain her children forever. It's been done for centuries. It's stable.

It's one of the forms of torture we've quietly accepted as the norm. When renowned material feminist Sophie Lewis suggests we "abolish the family", she's speaking of social structures that gives people no choice but to rely on their relatives, to surrender their financial, legal, and personal agency because the alternatives are too risky to contemplate. It's suffocating, being completely dependent on your parents. In *DELTARUNE*, it's apparently painful for the adults involved, too. Asgore obviously not cut out for the nuclear family and even more obviously wants to get with Rudy, and Carol genuinely believes there isn't another option for her or her children.

What strikes me about Carol is a deep loneliness she refuses to confront. She's not really well-liked, she doesn't seem personable, she buries herself in work. I've criticized her idealization of tradition, but there's a reason so many submit to oppressive systems: it's easy, and change isn't. When I note how Carol likes stability, the implication should naturally be that the possibility of being hurt trying to break out of tradition *frightens* her. It shouldn't, obviously, but it does, in no small part due to how much can go wrong.

[fallencalf on Tumblr](#) has been able to read many of Carol's unpersonable traits as neurodivergence, noting that characters excuse her lack of charisma *because* she's a hard worker; to make up for her faults and idiosyncrasies, she doubles down on "normalcy" and tradition, believing it's the only way to make peace with an unfair world. In the face of being left behind, she's built a fortress—out of money, out of respect, out of the tried-and-true. Afraid of being vulnerable, she digs down until the earth can warm her. In a game about art and stories, power is maybe the simplest escapist fantasy of them all.

It's not enough for Carol to like Christmas, so she turns her house into an endless, grotesque celebration. It's not enough to let her daughters grow away into her own people, so they must remain *her daughters*, forever. It's not enough for us to like video games because they're interesting, so we grade how long they are, how much *stuff* they have, whether they're good the way games are "meant" to be, whether they're good like the *originals*. And when it's not enough for us to enjoy *DELTARUNE* for what it is, it springs a trap, tempting us to *keep* extracting value from it—even if it hurts.

Carol Holiday wants safety to a regressive and hostile degree. A politician wearing rose-tinted glasses who is the enemy of change. A woman who, more than anything, hates when things don't go her way.

... it doesn't make sense, this paradox, the paradox of motherhood. To cradle a baby, loving them for the potential they promise, the better version of yourself they'll grow to be, yet

wanting them also to remain a baby forever, yours to nurture, yours entirely... a realized orb of mercy... You have no children. Perhaps you can't understand.

[\(When I Win the World Ends\)](#)

---

## Last words

At the time of writing (June 2), we have gone two months without a substantial status update on DELTARUNE—not a newsletter, not a tweet. Going off of past development history and Toby's notice that he won't have much to say throughout PC/console testing, this isn't quite a shock. However, given the previous release's final testing push of about three months and the lack of "external factors" pushing or pulling the release date, I'd say Chapter 5 is imminent; I don't know how soon, but we're in the home stretch.

This makes my decision to start an essay only a couple days ago, delicately speaking, kind of stupid. In some indeterminate amount of time best described as "soonish", all this effort could go down the drain. Maybe I was wrong about everything, and Carol is a Prophecy-popping mastermind, or maybe she's some other thing none of us had thought about, or maybe I was right in some way. No matter what, though, the incoming information will give answers that likely overshadow the need to fans engage with my insane madwoman's imagination to better understand Carol.

But I don't *only* publish these essays to make myself sound smart. I do it because I love talking about *DELTARUNE*! I love it more than anything in the world. I want to talk about Carol because it's *fun* trying to understand her, and it would have been *more* fun if even half the effort put into analyzing other aspects of the game could also have been spent on her for anything that wasn't only Knight or SOUL related. The implicit truth to Carol's sidelining in fandom discussion is that, because people aren't accustomed to female characters with complexity, their instinct is to assume they *aren't* complex. It doesn't occur to them that dissecting Carol could be more than perplexing homework, could have the same appeal as proving Spamton is always going to be relevant.

I wrote this to prove Carol can be interesting in her own right, that there's a reason she's in *DELTARUNE*. I really love Carol Holiday. I love how much depth her inclusion gives the game. I love what Toby is doing with her, I love what he *has* done with her, and I hope I can inspire at least some of you to love her as well.

---

*If you'd like to send me (ana) a question or something about my writing, you can email [hyuck.goof@gmail.com](mailto:hyuck.goof@gmail.com)*

Thank you Peni ([@yumeni\\_kasuga](#)) for catching numerous grammatical errors and for bouncing ideas around with me about all things DELTARUNE.

Thank you [fallencalf](#) for being an enjoyer of feminism in DELTARUNE and for telling me about really obscure Dess lore. Seriously, why has nobody brought Spamton's Fantasyship Ring up?

Thank you baldur ([kenomacreature](#)) for always having had some of the most refined analysis in the business.

And thank you, the reader, for getting through this. <3

---

1. "(Noelle... wasn't stuck outside the gate again, was she, Kris...?) / (... Carol... damn, I keep telling her to keep a key at City Hall...)" ↔
2. In fact, while Toriel is known for cooking and baking as a display of kindness, Carol seems to leave meal prep to Noelle (and maybe Rudy). ↔
3. I don't consider TVTropes to be scholarly or even very good, but it at least has a giant catalogue of variants of this trope, so I'm leaving it here. See also: [Awesomeness by Analysis](#) and [The Unmasked World](#). ↔
4. "burn" BRAVO TOBY 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥 ↔
5. "... Oh. I'm sorry. / I forgot if you don't like hugs like that." ↔