

< DELTARUNE > LIFE ADVICE

a narrative analysis by ana [REDACTED]

"idk what tunnel vision is but it sounds bad ass"



faux-academic deltarune writeup thing concerning stories, conflicts, and endings

narrative/thematic/structural analysis with lore as needed

consider it an unsanctioned elaboration on popular CH2 analyses (esp. DEVICE THEORY)

the only claim id consider a "prediction" is about the final prophecy. everything else can be observed in-game (unless im fundamentally misreading a scene, in which case, it isnt)

- *emphasis (**bold**) or interjections [brackets] in quoted dialogue are always mine*
- *please stop by the [inspirations heading](#). i piss off of the shoulders of giants*
- *i very rarely cite in-game evidence with screenshots. if you think im lying or mistaken about the game's events, feel free to fact-check me yourself.*

this document is 99% text. get comfy.¹

¹ Also, there *will* be footnotes, and lots of them, though perhaps not as many as there are misused emdashes and semicolons. I may as well apologize in advance for the horrendous approach to formatting I've taken while you're here. My bad.

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> do we still need gaster in current year

Toby Fox sure thinks so!

If you already believe the character W.D. Gaster has a critical role to play in DELTARUNE, [please skip ahead](#), because this heading is extremely boring. Everyone else:

- DELTARUNE [was always Toby Fox's dream project](#), but early 2010s Toby couldn't manage its absurd scope. On the Kickstarter page for [his attempt at a significantly smaller project](#), he hints at the possibility of a future game, the nature of which "*is shrouded in darkness*".
- UNDERTALE releases in 2015. In it, an unused asset labeled "room_gaster" contains dialogue written entirely in Wing Dings, containing the unused True Lab "*ENTRY 17*", concerning an experiment on Darkness. These plot threads are left completely unresolved by UNDERTALE.
- In 2016, an [Internet Archive snapshot of deltarune.com](#) is uploaded, containing nothing but a darkened image of all-caps Wing Dings text reading "*THREE HEROES APPEARED TO BANISH THE ANGEL S HEAVEN*". Later, this image is replaced with one of a similar format, this time reading "*THIS NEXT EXPERIMENT SEEMS VERY VERY INTERESTING*", directly quoting room_gaster.
- Before the release of DELTARUNE Chapters, a nameless character (who we can reasonably assume is the stilted voice from the beginning of the game (who we can even more reasonably assume is Gaster)) tends to pull a social media takeover to address the fanbase. This occurrence is remarkably similar to the release of UNDERTALE, when Flowey did much the same. Flowey is not only the most important character in UNDERTALE narratively, not *only* the very first character you speak to, but the character most intrinsic to the game's metanarrative, an aspect for which it was highly praised.
- Upon booting up DELTARUNE for the first time, we are immediately approached by Gaster.
- UNDERTALE and DELTARUNE have been trademarked by [Royal Sciences LLC](#) for multiple years. W.D. Gaster was the Underground's Royal Scientist before Alphys.

“Okay, so, Gaster is in the game. We already kn—”

Think like a writer. For at least *two years*, until the exact second DELTARUNE was playable, the *only* thing we knew about it was that Gaster was involved. This was even less information to work with than what pre-release UNDERTALE fans had, and everything we knew was *all about him*.

This kind of attention is not the bounty of a passive or hidden role for the die-hards. Gaster’s function in DELTARUNE is not just to be a secret or obscure mystery. He is *the* mystery, *the* reason Toby wants you to play this game, because everything *will* lead back to him.

W.D. Gaster has been a punchline in the DELTARUNE Theory Community™ since before DELTARUNE was a well-known quantity. In so many discussions, he is the ultimate cop-out, often in a way that subsumed the importance of characters and story beats actually *in* UNDERTALE. As fun as this is for AU writing, this is bad analysis of the actual text for obvious reasons. What I think is equally perplexing, though, is the more recent phenomenon of reducing him to a passive actor of the game. I *think* this stems from his presence in theorycrafting being oversaturated? Most people are in agreement that he’s directly involved *somehow*, but the exact proportions of which have been in the flux as of late, seemingly trending downward. Either way, I need to tap the sign before continuing.

This is not a lore discussion. It should not have to *be* a lore discussion. Gaster’s importance to DELTARUNE’s narrative—whatever that may be—is perhaps **the one thing we can be sure of**, because the game’s selling point was always “find out what the weird man’s deal is”, the same way one of UNDERTALE’s selling points was “find out what the angry flower’s deal is”. Gaster is not just a background conflict; he is central to DELTARUNE, and Toby Fox has been telling us this, repeatedly, for nearly ten years.

With that, the real analysis can actually begin.

> The dichotomies of DELTARUNE

Most important aspects within DELTARUNE come in pairs, and there is one duo of ideas that encompass the bulk of DELTARUNE’s themes: Light and Dark. Plundering the

depths of the two, I believe, will yield more interesting ideas than a simple elemental struggle.

- **LIGHT vs DARK:** The default state of DELTARUNE's world is of equilibrium, a balance of Light and Dark. The primary interaction between Dark and Light is for the latter to close out the former. Light has a dominant role in this relationship, in that it is always able to overpower Darkness (so far).
- **REALITY vs FICTION:** The first subtextual meaning to be found is that Light is representative of the mundane, the familiar, the "real", while Darkness represents the fantastic, the novel, the "fictional". This is most obviously seen in how the Light World is deliberately structured to be reminiscent of a small town, with rent and school and whatnot. Conversely, Dark Fountains are allegorical for creativity and storytelling, and how the primary purpose of Darkners is to provide joy to Lightners, just as fiction and art provide joy to us in real life. Naturally, a fictional world about making fictional worlds would have some implications once our own very real influence is acknowledged. Lastly, reality is inherently more powerful than fiction; if a story's ocean is too consuming, we deploy the suspension of disbelief as a lifeboat to pull us out. Reality, though, can also overwhelm those within it—Light can be blinding, after all—which is why we *need* fiction.²

I would say the above connections are the broadest, most indisputable takeaways from what Light and Dark represent. Still, there are deeper ideas that can be explored:

- **CERTAINTY vs AMBIGUITY:** These look like two synonyms for reality and fiction, but the implication here is a bit different. One of the primary connotations of Darkness is the unknown. As Ralsei puts it, once the lights go out, *"Things become... more indistinct"*, for we don't know what lies in the Dark. When a Light is shed on the Dark, it becomes unambiguous. We see things for what they are. In DELTARUNE, the power that seals Dark Fountains is our own Light—we quite literally shed Light on the Darkness, reverting the abstracted fantasy of the Dark World to its mundane real world components. Another good way of describing this would be **TRUTH vs LIE**. If

² I really did my best to make this comparison without quoting that post about Oreos but it's rather difficult.

you're familiar with superpositions or Schrödinger's Cat, Darkness and Light feel similar to those ideas.³

- Schrödinger's Cat itself may or may not be an intentional symbol of the game, as there happens to be a **catlike** shapeshifting Darkner innately linked to the "indistinct" quality of Darkness who appears in multiple Dark Worlds, almost as if they aren't bound by a physical object's location by virtue of being a fundamental element of sorts.
- **FATE vs FREEDOM:** Similar to the parent dynamic, now using the game's own terminology to draw a stronger in-universe connection. The ambiguous nature of Darkness gives way to a sort of freedom: the freedom to write your own story. Freedom can also be a curse; if you can go in any direction, you may just wind up at rock bottom. Those who use *Shadow* Crystals, tucked away in their Dark Worlds' deeper corners, tend to also be tied to freedom as a concept. Fate, on the other hand, tends to be associated with Light; the Prophecy of Chapter 4, though "*whispered among shadows*" according to Ralsei, is described as glowing both by flavor text and by the Old Man, who prefers the darkness "*between the lines*" to the exact words of the Prophecy, which "*shine a bit too bright*" for his tastes. Essentially, Light represents a certain, predetermined outcome, while Darkness represents an ambiguous, interpretive outcome.
- **COMPLETION vs CREATION:** Again, these look like synonyms of previous ideas, but what I'm describing here is less of a property and more of an action. Darkness allows Lightners to create fiction, but what they create at the same time is an unresolved idea, hence the emphasis on a "balance" between Light and Dark, and why too *much* Darkness can be a cause for concern (this will be discussed more later). What Light allows us to do is *seal* Fountains, to tie up those loose ends. Light allows us to see fiction through to its absolution.

³ Or, you know, the pop-science understanding of them, which is that superposition collapses once a particle is "observed". I don't know shit about physics, much less quantum physics, so I won't say anything confidently, but I'm not sure if there's any evidence Toby is depicting quantum mechanics in any way that's deeper than the surface level. Any idiot can mention photons in passing. What matters isn't real-world accuracy, but relevance to the story and themes.

- **HOPES vs DREAMS:** Admittedly, I'm kind of working backwards with this one. When Ralsei recites the Legend to us in Chapter 1, he draws a parallel between "*HOPE*" and "*LIGHT*", along with "*DREAMS*" and "*DARK*". What I take this to mean is that Toby Fox considers dreams to be ethereal and lacking in material substance. Dark Worlds are often likened to dreams and otherwise being dreamlike, so this isn't too big a stretch. I also believe that, just as the makeup of Dark Worlds is of mundane objects from the Light World, the building blocks of dreams are hopes, but without dreams good or bad, nothing can *spark* hope. They complete each other.
- **SMOKE vs ICE:** Also known as **HEAT vs COLD**. Basically, Light heats things up, Darkness cools things down. Darkness as a substance is usually depicted as aqueous; when Lancer is about to petrify in Chapter 2, he mumbles out that he feels "*cold*". His body, formed by a "Fountain", physically "freezes" when too far from it. "Fountains of Darkness" are illustrated as ocean-like when viewed in a Dark World, but appear as smoke in the Light World. This would happen because Darkness, normally dormant underground, is released into the open air and evaporates. This would go a long way toward explaining Noelle's critical role in the Weird Route—Darkners, formed from *liquid* Darkness, are easily overpowered when *frozen*.

I strongly believe that Light and Dark are meant to encompass balancing ideas including creation and engagement with art, the ambiguity of fiction juxtaposed to the truth of reality, and the struggle between embracing and rejecting fate, and I further believe that these ideas serve as the bedrock of DELTARUNE's narrative, which **all its major elements can be traced back to**.

There are, of course, some remaining catches to this dichotomy: First, the two are not always mutually exclusive; Toby Fox just isn't the kind of writer to come to a two-dimensional conclusion about anything whatsoever. You can't write a story without some truth to it, and you can't ever be fully, *fully* certain of something. There isn't really such a thing as "pure freedom", but there isn't a meaningful force of "fate", either.

In a similar vein, and in spite of any connotations you might derive from terms such as "dark", "freedom", "certainty", or whatever else, **the most basic forms of Light and Dark are morally neutral**. You can't ascribe ethics to concepts as fundamental as fiction and reality. Indeed, there's a nearly infinite amount of ways they *can* be used to heal and to

harm, and I believe DELTARUNE aims to unpack at least a few of these, but I don't want you to come out of this document thinking I'm batting for the "righteousness" of one or the other.

? Flame

One last aspect of the Light and Dark dichotomy can be derived from the temperature comparison: the significance of **fire**. Flames, burning, and the color red are mentioned in ways that can't merely be aesthetic choices. Yet, despite being known nominally as Hot Thing, fire doesn't fit into this model; mentions of it in the Sword Route and some Gerson dialogue skew it closer to creation and play, agnostic toward this dynamic where "cold" is closer associated with creativity. Water can't be heated such that it turns into flames, so fire must exist outside of this comparison. So, what does fire represent?

Hot things and cold things exist, but what fire allows for is the rapid transition from cold to hot. When examined closer, the stronger the association with Light something has, the more it can manipulate Darkness. Darkners can't make Fountains for the same reason cold water can't easily melt ice: they lack that necessary energy. When Kris and Susie make their Dark Fountains, their eyes glow red, despite Susie's eyes historically being depicted as yellow. On the subject of red eyes, at the end of the Sword Route, Kris is told that their eyes flicker red, *"like pretty little flames"*. Their red eyes, allegedly, betray to us that Kris enjoys play, without which *"the knife grows dull"*. Of course, the single most dynamic element of DELTARUNE, the SOUL representing the Player, is distinctly red.

In real life, "red eyes" usually refer to eye strain, which can be indicative of (among other things) intense focus. To use another word... What was it that Queen said allowed Lightners to make Fountains?

"Determination". Or, as it's described in UNDERTALE, *"The resolve to change fate."*

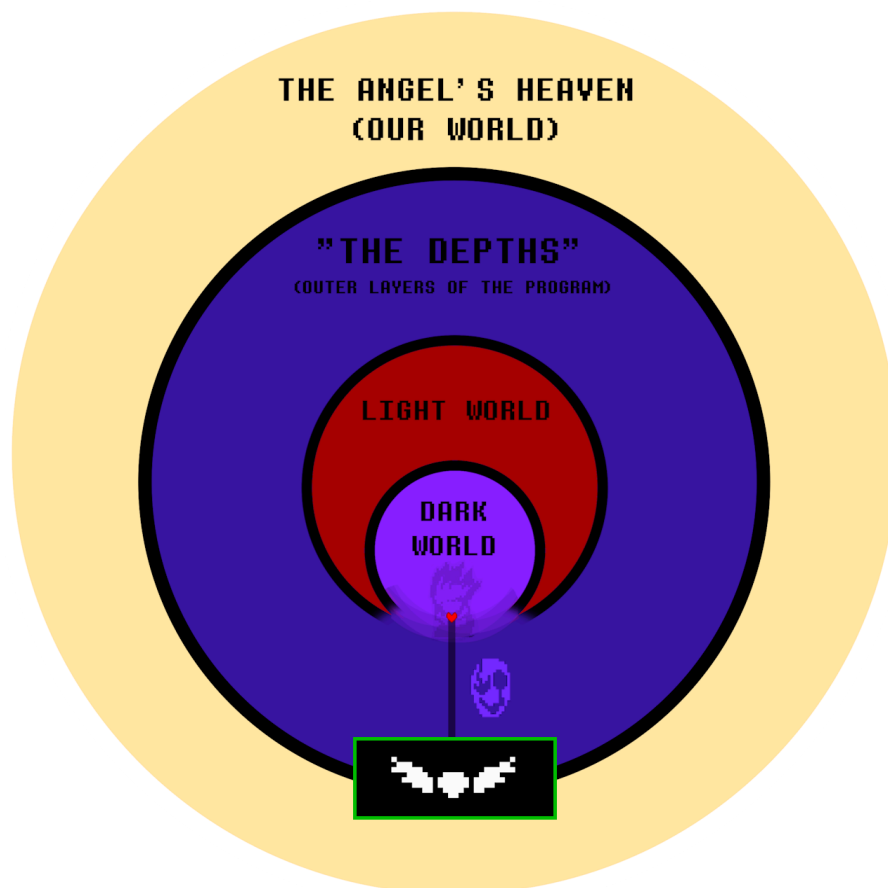
I'd posit that the missing traits that fire represents are **change** and **determination**. Red fire is the catalyst which galvanizes the mechanics of the game.

> DELTARUNE is layered

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the structure of the world as depicted by DELTARUNE. As Seam says in Chapter 1, **darkners** liken lightners to gods, for **lightners** exist on the layer above darkners and give them purpose (i.e. to fulfill them emotionally, as art and fiction do for us). In the **Light World**, we see lightners worshiping an "**Angel**", who we can assume also exists one layer above the lightners (the religion of DELTARUNE is organized in a similar way to abrahamic religions, positioning god and his associates as physically "above" humanity, and the angel of DELTARUNE is described as watching "over" lightners on multiple occasions). This higher level above the Light World would seemingly be even more mundane than the Light World already is, as the contrast between the fantastical and normal is the dividing line between dark and light, so the logical conclusion of this is that more Light == more real/less ambiguous, which tracks with Ralsei's exposition dump at the start of Chapter 3.

Lucky for us, there's a perfectly good reality that's even lamer than the Light World's manufactured grounded nature: ours! As the Player is an interloper of DELTARUNE's world, "Heaven" would simply be the reality we occupy. This would also make the Player take on the role of the Prophecy's Angel, but I'll have more to say about that a couple hundred words from now.

Considering the Light and Dark Worlds are two sides of the same coin, it also does not seem to be a stretch that there might be a similar opposite to the layer the angel resides on, one which might take the properties of Darkness to an incomprehensible extreme—without the right tools, of course. Indeed, when the Knight opens a Fountain within a Fountain at the climax of Chapter 4, what results isn't a new Dark World, but a Titan, a manifestation of "*fear of dark*". In game, these extremes of Light and Dark are called "**heaven**" and "**hell**" / "the **Depths**" respectively. All previous bolded terms have been mentioned in DELTARUNE itself, from the game files to the Prophecy to Jevil and Spamton. For a better idea of what DELTARUNE *might* look like structure-wise, along with an in-depth explanation regarding the religious symbolism of such a model, refer to the diagram from the Chapter 2 era by [kenomacreature](#) below, because I really can't do better:



In short, DELTARUNE is made up of concentric circles denoting Light (heaven, reality) and Dark (Depths, the inner workings of what's known as the "PROGRAM" or "DEVICE"). Within the Depths is the Light World, a facsimile of reality. When Ralsei calls the Dark World *"an alternate view of reality through the lens of shadow"* at the start of Chapter 3, the same can be said for the Light World relative to our heaven: an alternate view of Earth through the lens of a game. By puncturing the Light World such that the Depths can escape up into it through a Dark Fountain, a Dark World is made, abstracting light even further from our reality.⁴

The precedent for Dark Worlds being sourced from the Depths in particular comes from the texture most often associated with Fountains, "IMAGE_DEPTH". Outside of Fountains specifically, this texture is found in the Gonermaker sequence where contact

⁴ By the way, there is currently only one underground area of Hometown we're able to access by Chapter 4, which is Mayor Holiday's basement. Down there, the same garbage noise heard near the shelter (which already houses a Dark World) plays. If we consider that Darkness rests at a subterranean level, this noise only being heard in or near the underground may be because we are physically closer to Darkness.

between the Player and Gaster is made. Curiously, an unused variable in Chapter 1 can be toggled to set this texture to the background of the original save menu (taken from [Jojoton56](#)):⁵



Aside from IMAGE_DEPTH, there's unfortunately not much in the way of hard lore evidence for the model I'm using to be 100% true. However, kenomacreature's explanation is probably the best thing we have to explain DELTARUNE's structure until proven otherwise. Do your best to remember this model, as I will be referring to it a few more times down the road.

? Gaster is not "in" DELTARUNE

The only clue we have to Gaster's location is in the Gonermaker sequence. His voice and melody ominously echo throughout a space known by a few names: "CONTACT", "IMAGE_DEPTH", "DEVICE_GONERMAKER", "AUDIO_DARK", "AUDIO_DEFEAT". Fortunately, a hint as to what layer Gaster might be situated in can be found in the texture of this liminal space. Shared by the Dark Fountains, "IMAGE_DEPTH" is a cropped and tiled image of an

⁵ Normally, I prefer not to use cut content as the bedrock of my analysis unless it's something that's meant to be found (such as the UNUSED strings). In this case, though, all this feature really does is make an already likely idea more credible; namely, the Depths are associated with the lowest level "features" of DELTARUNE; the machinery that makes it function, what allows us to interact with it, and where contact was initially made.

ocean, furthering the strong connections to darkness Gaster has. Another clue comes from Jevil, who says, rather strangely, *"HELL'S ROAR BUBBLES FROM THE DEPTHS"*. What comes to mind is a number of things: the Roaring Knight, for one, as an agent of darkness and of the Prophecy. "BUBBLES" has aqueous connotations—again tying darkness to water. "THE DEPTHS", combined with everything else in this line, alludes to the layer of Darkness hosting the SURVEY_PROGRAM. Lastly, "HELL", which is both a link to Gaster (remember the sixes!) and, most importantly, the closest hint we have as to what opposes our heaven. As we reside in heaven as angels, Gaster dwells in the depths of hell as the devil.

To prove I'm not pulling this entirely out of my ass, multiple prophecies in Chapter 4 either allude to through filenames or directly address a parallel relationship between heaven and hell which, aside from Jevil and Spamton's dialogue (and i guess the first legend), haven't really been discussed in any meaningful way yet.



While "heaven" and "hell" aren't strictly *in* DELTARUNE (read: the Light World), they *are* part of the system its narrative functions off of. It's not wrong to say that a game, its underlying programming, and reality all exist in tandem, but it's rare for a game to acknowledge these layers at all, which is a big part of the appeal of Toby Fox writing. It's the same logic behind the SOUL and Cage; we obviously can't appear in the story ourselves, so we need a representation of us to act on our behalf.

? THE DEVICE THEORY: A primer

[THE DEVICE THEORY](#) is a well-known analysis of Chapters 1+2 by mollystars.

Basically, I am stealing the shit out of it. Here's a cliff-notes rundown of what ideas will be relevant for the uninitiated. I won't be diving into all the proof or analysis work behind this, but if you're interested, molly's videos are as extensive as they are passionate.

- "The Depths", or hell, is the origin of Darkness, but it is also where the character W.D. Gaster resides for the runtime of the game. As discussed earlier, the Depths exists between the Light World and Heaven—the game and reality, and is also the home of a currently unexplained concept known as the "DEVICE", a name derived from the prefix of certain all-caps objects and assets within the game itself.
- The Light World and Depths were pre-existing substances before Gaster began experimenting on them. His most important creation related to them is the DEVICE, a means of connection between Heaven, the Depths, and the Light World.
 - The incongruencies in the user interface between worlds is, in this case, completely intentional; different textboxes, visual effects, and degrees of interactivity on our part help distinguish these worlds from one another.
 - The DEVICE is presented to us in the form of a game, or SURVEY_PROGRAM, and us interacting with the DEVICE is Gaster's primary goal, for which he tends to turn to Twitter to get our attention.
- Gaster's main goal is to create "*A NEW FUTURE WITH YOU*", which molly interprets as finding some way to divert the game's Prophecy. I agree, but I also have a bunch of other shit to say with the metric ton of material Chapter 4 has given us to work with.
 - Gaster expects us to play the game more than once. Initially, the bulk of this argument involved some dialogue that would appear if you made three empty save files: "*PREPARATIONS ARE COMPLETE.*" With the release of the LTS builds many months ago, though, a new element was added to the Chapter select menu: a small indicator of your collected Shadow Crystals. This, I think, supports molly's initial argument quite well; it tells us that Gaster has a vested interest in tracking the progress of what seems to just be a sidequest. I'll have more to say on the Crystals themselves... later.

- This also reminds me that I should probably talk about DELTARUNE. Like, the term. What the fuck is a delta rune? I won't discount the (alarmingly high) likelihood of Toby randomly generating the name like he did with Asgore, but let's assume he actually put some thought into this. As mollystars points out, if we assume "delta" is being used in the mathematical sense, "delta rune" would literally be defined as something like, "script for change". This definition, as luck would have it, perfectly aligns with the above analysis of "DELTA RUNE" representing the course of the Prophecy specifically. The name also fits aesthetically with Gaster's role as a scientist, both because of "delta" and because "script" serves as double-entendre for scripting language, or code. This also lends new meaning to Gaster's current final remark: *"MY DELTARUNE."* **His** program to bring change.

That should be everything, though. You'll find as you continue reading this document that like $\frac{2}{3}$ of my arguments are either inspired by, criticisms of, or directly lifted from THE DEVICE THEORY. This is basically my goal—I wanted to write something that served as a post-3+4 interpretation of the highlights of the original analysis, while also elaborating on the Roaring, the Knight, and the Angel, as these are all topics that molly either deliberately avoided discussing or simply weren't handled in a manner that satisfied me. This, I dunno, disclaimer section, is pretty much just here so I don't have to cite the same three videos over and over. Basically, continue under the assumption that if there's a similarity to THE DEVICE THEORY, I probably already know about it and don't aim to hide that fact. Like I said, though, there are a number of conclusions the original theory comes to that I have a hard time getting behind.

Such as...!

> Is the Player really the Angel?

Yes.

The identity and role of the angel in DELTARUNE is an extremely divisive subject, with many contenders for who or what could potentially fill them. Popular candidates have

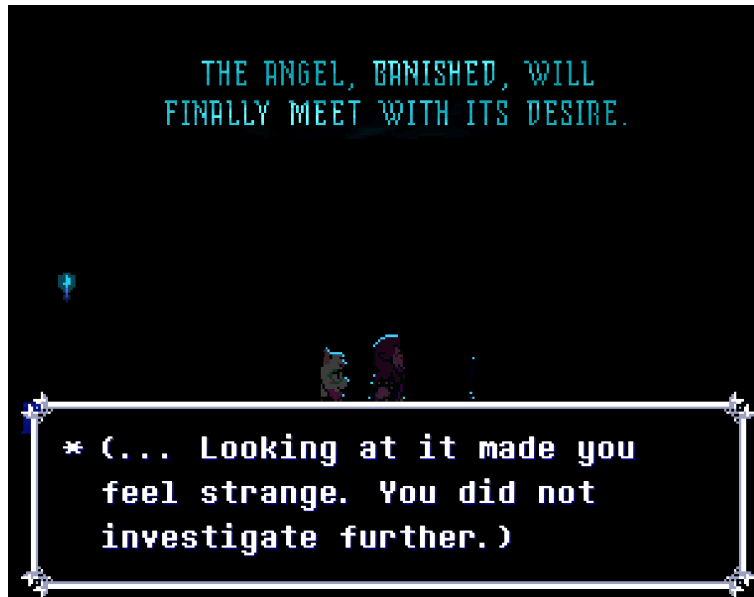
included Noelle, Gaster, the Player, and/or a completely new character. As quickly as I can, **here's why I think the Angel is unambiguously the Player:**

- As DELTARUNE exists in layers, heaven is occupied by us as the angel, as we are one layer "above" the game's world. This choice of word ("angel") is deliberate; we as Players cannot be considered true "gods" as we aren't actually all powerful, nor did we create DELTARUNE. We simply have a high level of control and influence over it.
- The SOUL, our physical representation within the game, is ALWAYS associated with light. This has happened in every chapter to date, but it's become blindingly obvious as of Chapter 4, where the SOUL's unique light properties are what's necessary to progress multiple encounters.
 - When Spamton gets a good look at our SOUL, he says he's "*NEVER SEEN A [HeartShapedObject] LIKE THAT BEFORE!!*", and then clarifies that "*MY EYES ARE [[Burning]]*" when looking at it. He specifies that it's the brightness of the SOUL that he finds unique, and makes a reference to its heat in particular. Granted, I don't think the implication here is that Spamton has messed with other human or monster souls in the past, but there's really no reason for these two lines to neighbor each other if not to draw attention to our SOUL being unique *for* this Light.
 - When talking to Father Alvin, he will sometimes say "*May the Angel watch over you*". Other characters (Catty, one third of Clover) also allude to this fact. For nearly the *entire game*, we "watch" from an overhead perspective, like we do in many of the JRPGS Toby is inspired by. Considering Toby has taken the vocabulary of his games literally ("Determination" prevents you from dying? "De-termination". Saving records your memories and actions? The end of UNDERTALE involves "SAVE"ing your friends by making them remember who they are. The shortened form of the gaming term "experience points" is now an acronym for "execution points".), it doesn't seem like a stretch to believe this is intentional.
 - What's more, Gaster himself makes direct reference to "*YOUR POWER*", which he describes as "*SHINING*" if you fail to survive the Knight's fullscreen attack. Somehow, our Light's significance transcends even the Depths.

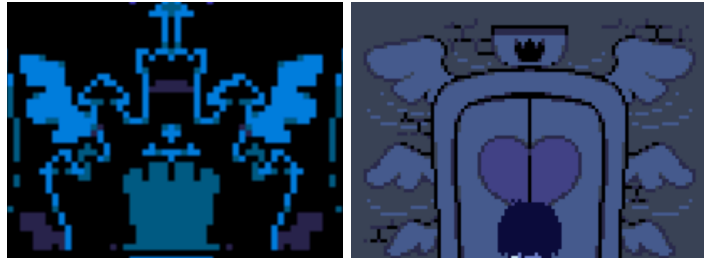
- According to Catty (dude trust), the Angel isn't the de facto creator of the Prophecy. Her lines (*"so like, the Angel, that's watching over all of us? / It has, like, this COOL prophecy, like, foretold by time and space."*) treat the Angel as an independent force which the Prophecy is *describing*, dictated by something *else* ("time and space").
- The angel dolls made by Noelle and Dess are described as being unsettling due to their *"lack of facial features"*, which doesn't make sense as an observation by Kris in a [game with multiple faceless characters](#). What it *would* make sense as is the inherent difficulty of translating an indeterminate amount of faces into the game world—those of real life players. Further, the vessel we're specifically told is *"OUR WONDERFUL CREATION"* lacks any facial features whatsoever.
 - The angel doll becomes plot relevant when we use it as a hiding place for the SOUL, which we can move around in front of the oblivious Susie and Noelle. This is really good symbolism! It shows that the SOUL, and by extension the Player, is being interpreted by the inhabitants of DELTARUNE through something they can actually understand. Describing us as "an angel" isn't really objective, it's just what they've decided our actions and presence *make* us. It's similar to how in the game *OneShot*, our in-universe role is of the game's god, but we're not *really* all-powerful; we just appear that way to those existing below us.
 - The prophecy depicting the angel's appearance is both described as making everyone looking at it deeply uncomfortable and is obstructed from our view. If it was someone we recognized, it would've been commented on. If it was simply too graphic a depiction of someone new, that's not really consistent with other prophecies illustrating the earth's demise and Titans.⁶ What is possible is that it's showing the player as they appear in real life, something truly incomprehensible to our heroes. Most interestingly, the way our view of the Prophecy is obscured is by a completely black square. It's not a pillar or something, it's just a shape. Assuming the Player's screen is bright and/or

⁶ Nevermind the fact that DELTARUNE is already full of surreal mixing of art styles including pre-rendered 3D, optical illusions, and stock images. To shake the entire cast after all *that* would take an impressive feat.

reflective enough, it *should* be possible for the Prophecy's depiction of the angel to just be... your own reflection.



- The phrase “*Banish the ANGEL’S HEAVEN*” in this context would pretty much just mean “kick the Player out of the game once it’s over”. Sever our connection with DELTARUNE, because you’ve completed the story. It’s the *only thing* that’s guaranteed to happen in this game, or any game for that matter! Us being “banished” on a basic level just amounts to the game itself turning off, our time with it being over.
 - Wondering why “*HEAVEN*” is also mentioned? In the context of my described framework where heaven is reality, banishing *our own* reality’s influence on the game from the game world itself is a pretty simple explanation I think.
- Castle Town’s somber piano waltz is called “My Castle Town”. The official in-game name of the town in question is “[*PLAYER*]*town*”. It’s literally *your town*, in which the big centerpiece is... a castle with giant wings and the Delta Rune engraved on it. In that castle is an area locked behind a door topped with a crown, emblazoned with a giant heart, and wings bordering its frame. Which could mean nothing,



- While other “candidates” for the angel exist (i.e. Noelle, Implicit Gaster Answer™), this doesn’t necessarily prevent the Player from being the de facto angel; Noelle’s religious symbolism is pushed at its hardest in the Weird Route through the ThornRing, which also happens to be the route where our influence over her is most stark and violent. Noelle’s arc in the Weird Route is of her finding “her own” strength by being completely subservient to a higher power.⁷

To be abundantly clear, describing the dynamic between Player and protagonist as “a higher entity enforcing their will on lower beings” is in no way a DELTARUNE theory. **It is quite possibly the most literal description of what happens in this game one can come up with**, and for that matter, what happens in most single player games. All we’re doing by calling it “Player Angel Theory” and referring to our plane of reality as “heaven” is using the game’s own vocabulary to explain our situation. To me, any other explanation that doesn’t factor in our immense, >>>ALREADY ACKNOWLEDGED<<< influence, is unsatisfying at best. As far as I’m concerned, **the Player is the Angel**—no asterisk, no catch.

> The Prophecy is set up to be inevitable

The underlying conflict of DELTARUNE can be found in Ralsei’s wish that there *“isn’t just one ending”* to the Prophecy, as revealed in Chapter 4. Something seemingly terrible happens at the Prophecy’s end, though in a way where the angel will *“meet its desire”* and in a way that fulfills the Prophecy’s narrative. Ralsei also makes a note early on in this Dark

⁷ Something I’ve seen absolutely nobody talk about is Queen’s dialogue near the end of Chapter 2’s Weird Route. When Susie demands she let the party wake Noelle up, she retaliates with *“Wake? No, She Has Already Awakened Too Much / Let Her Close Her Eyes And Sleep Away / Into A Darker, Darker Dream”*. The unusual quality of Noelle’s behavior, in Queen’s eyes, is that she’s *too* aware, that *too much* light has been shed, and that she *needs* Darkness. Just as you can be lost in eternal darkness, so too can you be blinded by unyielding light.

World that the Prophecy cannot be diverted, though arguing for or against this claim seems like it will be the central conflict of the story going forward. Consider it the *"kill or BE killed"* of DELTARUNE.

? The Prophecy follows a normal route

This really shouldn't be a discussion at all, but I've seen enough people assume the Weird Route is somehow predestined by the legend to warrant a section here. If you are on a Weird Route, Ralsei's breakdown at the end of Chapter 4 will be slightly altered to include him mulling over the possibility of an alternate ending being *"even worse"* somehow. Given this dialogue is only available on the Weird Route and the nature of said path being that of a game breaking exploit, it's almost impossible in my eyes for the Prophecy that Ralsei has instilled in him to somehow be describing or *pushing for* the events of *"THE FORBIDDEN PATH"*, especially since he doesn't seem to understand the incongruencies between the two when the alternate path is active (see *"We were supposed to—"*).

Considering Ralsei is normally desperate to find another ending, whatever Ralsei senses of the Weird Route *must* be unfathomably terrible to give him of all people second thoughts. There's more proof of this that I might mention later on if it becomes relevant, but Ralsei is probably the most decisive evidence by far.

> The Roaring Knight embodies conflict

"(You question if a concert can really be a concert if no one is there.)"

(Toby Fox, *DELTARUNE Chapter 3*)

Probably the quickest narrative throughline people picked up on when DELTARUNE was just releasing was the idea of creative expression. Dark Fountains are analogous to the formation of stories across various artforms (so far: literature, music, toys, internet, television, video games, religion), reflecting the will of their creator just as art does normally. Dark Fountains themselves are interesting, because they provide two sources of conflict: I'll call them "interior" and "exterior", because that sounds smart. You can also consider them the "Light World" and "Dark World" conflicts.

The interior conflict of the Dark Worlds is the responsibility of the Chapter bosses, the respective world's tyrant—King, Queen, and Tenna, so far (maybe the Titan too?). This is what the “plot” of each Chapter involves: stopping the bad guy. Important to the interior conflict is that it is entirely contained within the Dark World itself. King can't actually wage war on the Lightners because he's a playing card. Tenna can't physically restrain Kris to force them to watch TV because he's, well, a normal ass TV.⁸

The exterior conflict of a Dark World is its Fountain. The Fountains, unlike the tyrants, pose a tangible danger to the Light World by offsetting the balance of Light and Dark. Further, they can physically transport Lightners between the Light and Dark worlds. Much like how one can only really understand the characters in a book by actually cracking it open, our heroes can't interact with Darkners until they cross the threshold between worlds.

But if a tree falls in a forest, and nobody's around to hear it... then what you have is lost in obscurity. That is the contract between artist and audience; all art is a two way street that begins with its creation and ends with its consumption and engagement. It's only by entering the interior conflict of a story (its world, characters, arcs) that the exterior conflict of an unread work can be resolved, lest that pit in our stomach, “curiosity”, grows hungrier. A pool of Darkness can only be made sense of by shedding your own Light unto it, and this is the central narrative loop of DELTARUNE so far: find a Fountain brimming with potential and creative energy, explore it for all it has to offer, and when you've finally seen it all, close it. Solve the interior, solve the exterior. Restore the world's balance. When a mysterious figure whose name rhymes with “Gaster” sent the UNDERTALE community a link to a strange program, it caused an imbalance in ourselves—it made us curious. If we didn't satiate that curiosity, we'd have failed to resolve the interior conflict hiding within that program, leaving us with a *super* exterior conflict.

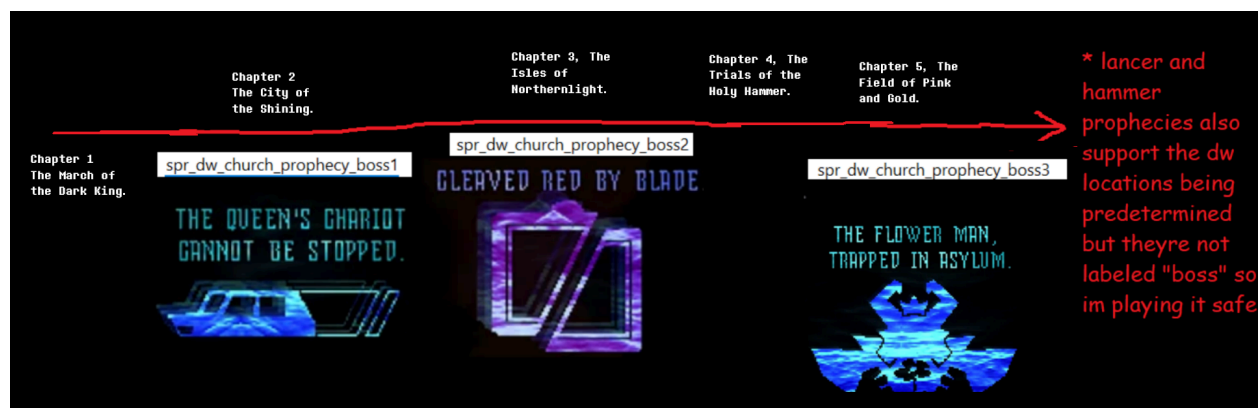
So, uh, what does that mean for the Knight?

I can't claim to be the one who initially made this observation (hello wandydoodles i think) but the “Roaring” Knight isn't all that concerned with causing the calamity they're named

⁸ Queen is maybe the closest any Chapter villain gets to having tangible leverage in the Light World, but it's specifically hampered by the sudden internet outage preventing her world domination.

for. As of Chapter 4, this has directly been acknowledged by Ralsei, who tells Susie *"If the Knight's only goal was to hurt people... / They would have acted sooner, right?"*

Indeed, if the Knight's only motive was to immanentize the eschaton,⁹ they absolutely could have multiple times over by now, as demonstrated by them opening two adjacent Fountains in Chapter 4 and ultimately summoning a single Titan, the Roaring's herald. It's peculiar behavior at first glance, but when put into context with the fact that the Fountains have all been made in accordance to the Prophecy, seemingly down to the order of the locations themselves, something starts to make sense.



The most telling scene regarding the Knight's motivations is probably the end of Chapter 4, when Kris is standing on their windowsill. Moments prior, they were being drawn out of bed by Susie, who'd asked Kris if they were really content with letting the Prophecy go the way it is. I'll have much more to say about this later, but for now, draw your attention to what makes Kris second-guess themselves: their phone, ringing with a freak coincidence of a call reminding Kris of a nebulous "promise". Whether or not you believe the caller *is* the Knight, they both seem to be working with the same information (e.g. knowing the church Fountain is upcoming, advising to keep the SOUL safe), and they *also* both seem to want to keep the Prophecy on course (that's what the image above is meant to illustrate by the way. coughs). This call draws the line in the sand denoting Kris's allegiances: defect with Susie and Ralsei, or shuttle along with the Knight.

As previously mentioned, the central conflict of DELTARUNE places its actors on opposing sides relative to the Prophecy; characters like Susie or Ralsei wish to defy it, for example. The Roaring Knight, the primary antagonist of the game, sits on the other end of

⁹ Please let me have this. You have no idea how god damn funny it is to get to actually say this for once.

the spectrum. According to the mystery caller, whatever Kris and the Knight are involved in *requires* the SOUL. What is meant by this is left ambiguous, but considering our greatest contribution to the story aside from controlling Kris has been to seal Fountains as we go—Fountains which have thus far been following a specific pattern—it's almost certain that the Knight's plan involves fulfilling the Prophecy, beginning to end, rather than immediately causing armageddon.

And, hey, that's their role *thematically*, too! (I mean, it's pretty obvious, but I think it's cool...)

Whenever the Knight makes a new Fountain, an exterior conflict is created—there's something new to discover! To solve it, the heroes must become fully immersed in the Fountain's Dark World, speaking with its denizens, overcoming obstacles, and solving the unique interior conflict. No matter the nature of the Fountain, though, it always ends the same: you seal it. You end the story, and the heroes return to the Light World. But stories necessitate conflict, and now that the Fountain has been sealed, there is none! So creates the need for another World to be lost in, another interior conflict to puzzle over. The Knight, which makes with blackened knife, is at our service. In the most meta sense possible, **they embody the creation of conflict, of antagonism, of an unresolved plot thread.**

Our dynamic with the Knight as the heroes' holy guide is that of the avid followers of a creator, desperate to see what comes next, or a hero and their nemesis, destined to endlessly put out the fires the other started. Without something to look forward to, the story may as well stop. Hence, the Knight's function is to encompass both the interior and exterior conflicts of DELTARUNE's Light World, by creating fictional strife whilst serving as a contentious force in the Light World itself. Obviously, DELTARUNE is not *literally* suggesting that artists and their audiences are in an endless battle of creation and consumption; it's just an abstraction of an otherwise ordinary dynamic. We *need* art, and artists need *us*. The heroes *need* the Fountains, and the Knight needs *them*. DELTARUNE is very clearly telling us that the Roaring Knight is the pen that inks this tale.

But what tale is being written?

> What is DELTA RUNE?

What is DELTARUNE about? This is a question we'll be grappling with repeatedly, even after ostensibly answering it here. What is DELTARUNE about?

Let's look at how the Prophecy describes itself. Ralsei's Legend says that Light and Dark have been balanced "*For millenia*", a dynamic later described as a "*harmony*". The very next line completes this idea, saying the balance brings "*peace to the WORLD*". In less overtly positive terms, the default state of the world is an equilibrium where no events transpire, good or bad. "Peace" translates merely to a lack of happening. This tracks metanarratively, since until we observe DELTARUNE by booting it up, its contents remain in an unchanging stasis. We can call this "narrative potential energy", but I won't because it sounds kind of stupid.

The other aspect of note is that this balance is a joint responsibility between Light and Dark; there isn't a "good" side in this conflict, and too much of either has the potential to shift the weight of the world with disastrous effects—the event we know as The Roaring. This is corroborated by the extended Prophecy, which describes Light and Dark as "***BOTH BURNING DIRE***". The solution to this calamity is to realign the weight, which Ralsei describes as a two-step process: only after the Fountains have been sealed and the Angel's Heaven has been banished "*will balance be restored, / And the WORLD saved from destruction.*" This implies the balance requires stopping an excess of both Darkness *and* Light, the latter by taking the Player out of the game. All of this would add up to a pretty mundane observation regarding storytelling: **the reader's business is with the story's conflict**. Once that conflict is resolved, they have no business hanging around the narrative, and must depart swiftly. Once the last page has been turned, there's little reason to keep staring at the back cover. Maybe you can flip a few pages back, but it will never be different.

I must also highlight that Dark Fountains and the Angel are **not** considered regular parts of the Light World. The world is painted as distinct from Light and Dark, as alluded to by these lines: "*A WORLD BASKED IN PUREST LIGHT / BENEATH IT GREW ETERNAL NIGHT*". Note how the world itself is not *of* Light, but "*BASK*"ing in it—beneath it. This couplet describes the status quo of the world, where Light is above it and Dark is below it, **not interacting with the world itself**. What's more, after Ralsei's exposition dump in Chapter

3—where he describes Dark Fountains as “*Darker than dark*”, an impossibility suddenly made possible— Susie argues that Darkners *can’t* be “*normal objects*” because they don’t have “*feelings and stuff*”. Oddly, Ralsei doesn’t quite disagree; he just says that “*They... shouldn’t*”. Ralsei tells us, in the plainest words possible, that whatever the Fountains are, they’re not normal even for a Light World with monsters in it. The general thesis of his exposition is that, while Light and Dark innately give way to truth and ambiguity, what the Fountains represent is something a step beyond, which breaks the boundaries of what *should* be possible for what is the “normal” counterpart to the fantasy of darkness.

Considering the Weird Route goes through great pains to illustrate our eerie level of influence on the Light World, I feel comfortable in concluding that this attribute goes both ways—after all, it’d be pretty strange if the Player was a weightless, consequence-free actor in the Light World. Thus, **Heaven and the Depths breaching the Light World is an anomaly that disturbs the balance of the world**, and as the game says, this balance can only be restored by eliminating the influence of *both*. We aren’t supposed to be here, and neither are the Fountains.

Why build the world this way? Because DELTARUNE is a story which interrogates stories. The game is drenched in meditations on art, from Dess’s music to Gerson’s writing to *Cat Petterz* to the simple act of playing pretend. It utilizes several symbols to describe their fundamental building blocks. It turns the very concepts of creation, conflict, and resolution into active narrative forces, portraying the production, interpretation, and reproduction of art as a battle, a quest, a story in its own right.

The hand of the author and the eyes of the reader are in-universe abnormalities that serve to directly antagonize the status quo of the narrative, which is a statement independent of any moral judgement, but the game’s intrigue comes from how the *narrative’s inhabitants* react to said antagonism, which most video games treat as a mundane given.¹⁰ **Stories, ultimately, are what DELTARUNE is “about”.**

? Escaping from your purpose is impossible.

(This section will contain spoilers for the game OFF.)

¹⁰ Please note that I said “most”, I am on my hands and knees reminding you that **I said “most”**.

Even if Toby hadn't confirmed the heavy influence *OFF* has had on his games, I likely would've found an excuse to talk about it right at this moment, because like DELTARUNE, *OFF* is a game about games and how we play them.¹¹

The game immediately makes it known that it takes the Player's presence into consideration, that the Player physically puppets the Batter on his "*sacred mission*". This aspect is largely ignored by the plot until the very end, when the Judge accuses the Player of being complicit in the Batter's world-ending scheme. They are given an ultimately futile choice: rip the band-aid off and kill the world for good, or kill the Batter and let the Judge survey his doomed world's final moments. The Player's last act, ultimately, is the exact same regardless. Everybody say "thank you Mortis Ghost".

The undercurrent of *OFF* involves the increasingly sickly Hugo, whose disease is interpreted by him as an onslaught of Specters, and whose body and organs are similarly depicted as the very Zones and Guardians the Batter purifies. The Batter's mission doesn't call for simply defeating evil or saving civilians, but the sequential destruction of the world—of Hugo. Before the Judge can intervene at the very end, the final boss encounter is Hugo himself, who blocks the way through a white, spinal corridor.

Earlier in my life, my personal interpretation of *OFF* never synthesized these two elements. I didn't quite know how the story of putting a child down necessitated the direct acknowledgement of the Player. Comparing its structure to DELTARUNE, I can finally make out the intent behind this choice, which in turn has helped me make out the intent behind the narrative of DELTARUNE.

Similar to how the absence of Darkness in DELTARUNE would leave its world without a narrative, without the Specters attacking Hugo, there is no story for *OFF* to tell—the Batter has no reason to purify Hugo, so the Player has no reason to inhabit the Batter. In this way, the Specters, the Batter, and the Player are all treated as pathogens by the game's world. A normal child isn't wracked with this much conflict, but a normal child wouldn't result in a story. But stories aren't rescued by their audience when they end—they just end. Thus, because Hugo is the story's host, he must also die by the Player's hand.

¹¹ Okay, full disclosure, *OFF* is very ambiguous and can be interpreted in many ways. This is just how I've summed its components up lately, specifically the somewhat roughly integrated fourth-wall breaks.

The two games use religious language to frame their conflicts, as the Batter spends the duration of *OFF* self-aggrandizing, his actions part of a “*sacred mission*” to “*purify*” the world, aided by a party very obviously referencing Christianity’s Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as depicted in *Paradiso*. Conversely, the Specters are “*corrupt children*”, the demonic opposing force we are enlisted to deal with. Sacred and Specter, Light and Dark.

It goes without saying that *OFF* is pretty bleak, describing the act of reading a story as something akin to euthanasia, subsequently indicting the reader as an accomplice. Ultimately, though, it is simply a dramatization of the dynamic between art and audience, much like how DELTARUNE exaggerates the process as a fantasy romp. Do I think, then, that DELTARUNE will present a similarly dreary outlook on art?

... let’s find out!¹²

> You just have to trust the dog...

I’m fairly sure the first time Toby officially said the game would have one ending was in [this twitlonger](#) from a few days after the first Chapter released. The second time, which I will be focusing on, can still be found on the deltarune.com/help page. Among various technical clarifications and questions about DELTARUNE’s basic premise is this:

"Q: How many endings are there?"

A: One.

Q: Then doesn't that mean nothing I do matters?"

A: There's something more important than reaching the end."

With its authoritative tone and ominous conclusion (what could be *more important* in a video game...?), this was left uncontested by the community until Chapter 2's release, which came with two strange oddities. The first is the phrasing of the Steam page features list:

"And...

...

... only 1 ending..."

¹² If you’re wondering why I haven’t brought up *Homestuck* yet, it’s because despite being a massive fan for half my life, I don’t actually trust my understanding of its metanarrative enough to incorporate it into this document. Still, Toby spending his young adulthood knee-deep in a story about stories lends even more credence to him wanting to tackle similar themes in his own work. Doc Scratch = Gaster btw

The second was the existence of the Weird Route, something completely unprecedented for a game opening with the declaration that your choices don't matter. Coupled with the later developments of Chapter 4 (discussed below), many have strongly pivoted to calling bullshit on Toby's part, that this **MUST** have been a deliberate act of misdirection, and that the canon ending of DELTARUNE will, much like UNDERTALE, be an alternate route that will avoid the tragedy inherent to the game's Prophecy, through determination, or hope, or *something*.

Putting aside the textual reasoning against this idea for later, I want to highlight something curious: among all these changes and updates is a series of alterations made over the course of the first half of 2025. Some three or four complete revamps of deltarune.com/help were done, adding new questions (mostly about save transfers and bug reports) and in at least one case, completely altering the contents of an existing question. ("Any closing remarks?" was wholly redone in May.)

And yet, through all this change, one Q&A pair stood stalwart:

"Q: How many endings are there?
***A: One.*"**

It seems there is something about this game's ending we don't quite understand if the new consensus stands in such stark juxtaposition to Toby's own, iron words.

Something else Toby said has always stuck with me. [When asked about the leadup to DELTARUNE's true development cycle](#), Toby mentioned his dream of the ending, the reason he wanted to make the game in the first place: *"I have to make what I saw in my dream. I don't even know if it's particularly good, but I have to do it..."* Several times during Chapter 3's development, he expressed worry at its reception. Indeed, Chapter 3 turned out divisive on several fronts, but isn't it still remarkable that he stuck to his guns and allowed it to be strange? Which is to say, I don't think the game's ending *has* to be a crowd-pleaser. Not even Toby himself knows if people will like how it ends, but I don't think he wants to make the game "for" the fans. He wants to do right by DELTARUNE's themes, and that might mean not taking the easy or happy way out.

What *is* the ending? Is it even possible to tell?

> Susie's nightmare

The closest thing to a consensus surrounding what Susie saw in the final Prophecy is something along the lines of a major character dying, debated to be either Noelle, Ralsei, or Susie herself. While this is possible, I'd like to read into Susie's actions and dialogue to try and extrapolate a different conclusion, one that hopefully exemplifies the themes of storytelling in DELTARUNE. For the record, I have absolutely no clue what the exact words of the last Prophecy are, but I don't think trying to reverse engineer the game's meaning based on a rhyme scheme is very productive, so I'm deliberately ignoring that for now.

- The inciting conflict of Chapter 3, the reason why the heroes entertain Tenna's gameshow at all, is that Susie can't reconcile with leaving the darkners behind. She is EXTREMELY devoted to them and what they represent to her, and takes it personally when Ralsei advises her to not be as invested in them, accusing him of believing she'll "*just FORGET you*", of believing darkners are disposable. By the time Chapter 4 begins, while she believes what Ralsei said to be true, she also has an odd habit of referring to Light World objects as their Dark World counterparts—the Dreemurr TV is still "Tenna", the jack o'lantern in the church closet is still "Jack". Susie's suspension of disbelief is somewhere between completely absent and still sort of alive, and it will remain as such until something is irreversibly changed.
 - Also relevant: the arc of Chapter 3 involves a never ending game show, which the heroes rapidly tire of. Tenna's story culminates in him accepting that his time with the Dreemurr family is over, but the fact alone doesn't render him obsolete. He now provides the same experiences and joys to someone new.
- Regardless of what Susie says, she IS worried about the Prophecy's conclusion; she breaks it to pieces upon seeing it, not bothering to use her axe and going straight for a punch (and she KNOWS the prophecies are all made of glass), severely injuring her hand. Right as Chapter 4 is about to close out, as rain pours and the trees billow, Susie ominously tells Kris they "*won't let that happen*", seemingly alluding to the discovered final Prophecy, and showing it's still weighing on her mind.
 - While the blood on Ralsei *can* be read as indicative of a future death, this doesn't really affect the details of the Prophecy itself. It's just as easy for me

to read it as him feeling anxious over Susie potentially being harmed in the process of trying to defy their destiny. Truthfully, the scene is so abstract it can be molded to fit several agendas, but I'm going to fit it to mine. Obviously.

- Just before Ralsei falls apart at the end of Chapter 4, he confesses that "*Our fate... / ... is already decided*". The surrounding lines also tell us that he's specifically talking of the final Prophecy, not just the cosmic nature of the entire tale. With that in mind, it's a little bizarre for Ralsei to conclude that "*our*" fate has been decided if the fate in question concerns the life of a single person.
 - Would the death of one of the Heroes severely impact those that remain? Absolutely. But I don't think the Prophecy itself cares all too much. It's rather impersonal, to the point where I doubt "*our*" fate is emotional collateral. It sounds more like a direct consequence for all of them.
- Susie talks a lot about eternity; when asked how she'd end *Lord of The Hammer*, she says she simply wouldn't *let it* end. When the two are about to seal the Fountain, just after she's found out what the last Prophecy is, just after making a big show of not being bothered by it, she confides in Kris that her dream is for "*tomorrow to be the same as yesterday*", that "*we can always go back to the way things were before*". Crucial to my point is the framing of her conversation with Gerson: it's not just about endings in general, which could otherwise be fairly interpreted as any number of things. What Gerson asks Susie is *about stories*. Not just any story, but a story modeled after a Prophecy whose ending eludes nearly all Lightners, whose plot has bar-for-bar been the progression of DELTARUNE. While this conversation *could* just be a broader scope discussion on finality so an eventual major character death will feel more natural or otherwise impactful(???), I can't help but feel as though DELTARUNE, a game about stories, talking about the conceptual futility of stories using an in-universe written allegory for its own narrative, **MAY** be trying to tell us something different.
- The Prophecy isn't just about the Roaring or Castle Town or the heroes. It's a central fixture of Home Town's religion, and its practitioners admit to it having an unspecified ending. Recall that Darkness had been largely irrelevant to Hometown

until the game began, and that the religion's followers are supposed to take a sort of "love thy neighbor" lesson from it.¹³ Why would the Prophecy's end concern only Darkners? For that matter, just one person? What would motivate any of its followers to actually, like, care? Sure, the ending is unknown to them, but it still seems to *relate* to them to a significant degree, considering the Light World is a prominent element within.

- To reiterate, Hometown's religion isn't really "of" the Prophecy so much as it's a *response* to the Prophecy, in the same way that most real-world religions are responses to questions about purpose and death. This is why religion in DELTARUNE is very uninterested in things like calamity compared to generally being nice.
- The Roaring itself can't be the final tragedy, because the tragedy is revealed "*WHEN ALL HOPE IS LOST FOR THE TALE*", or when the Light has *already* been subsumed by shadow. Keep in mind that the Roaring is defined by eternity, not finality.
- Every single Chapter up to this point has been about sealing at least one Dark Fountain, even when the Lightners enjoy their time with it, even when there isn't an immediate risk of the Roaring.

Toby is setting up Susie's arc to not just be about her friends' safety, but about something bigger. The placement of Susie's dream of an endless day where things can always go back to "*the way they were*" directly after she finds out what the last Prophecy entails should serve as evidence for her biggest fear to not just be someone she knows dying, but something with *huge* implications. Something that would concern the fates of *everyone* affected by the Angel's religion. An existential fear that no amount of self-sacrifice or kindness can change.

Susie is not worried that anyone in particular will die, but that for the tale of DELTARUNE to be complete, the worlds must cease to exist—Light and Dark alike. We aren't killing everyone, we're *ending* them.

¹³ "You gotta keep in mind we could ALL be!!! Someone that might change the world, right? So we should all, like... be nice to each other, right? That's, like, the main... thingy? Of our religion, right? Like, just be nice to everyone! We're all family! No matter what kinda person or who they are!"

And no matter what we do, the ending will be the same.

≥ SAVE

*"We don't like endings, we don't wanna believe that we're gonna have an ending, we don't like it when a book ends, or a movie ends, or a favorite show ends. **For that reason, writing a finale is nearly impossible.** Writing a premiere is the hardest thing you'll ever do, because you're trying to convince people to fall in love with you. Writing a finale is the second hardest, because **now that they love you, you're trying to convince them that it's okay that you're breaking up with them.**"*

([Alex Hirsch on the aftermath of Gravity Falls](#))

Well, that's bleak. What's motivating or interesting about an ending like *that*? And, isn't the goal of the Prophecy to *save* the world!?

I know it sounds like a lot of things—bizarre, unsatisfying, cruel, edgy—but I seriously think this is what DELTARUNE has been leading up to, that it's the purest possible depiction of Toby's perspective on art, and I really do think there's something beautiful and reassuring within; for the characters, and for *us*.

Like a lot of things Toby Fox, when the Prophecy concludes that *"ONLY THEN, WILL THE WORLDS BE SAVED"*, it's being a little tongue in cheek. When you use the "save" function in any program, you are making it so that it doesn't "forget" your actions/progress. In UNDERTALE, when you are made to "SAVE the world" during Asriel's final fight, your weapon of choice is getting the lost souls to remember you and them. When you save the final soul, Chara, Asriel desperately pleads with Chara to stay with him, because to save them we have to accept their passing, the hardest thing Asriel has ever had to do. Once the encounter ends, Asriel is able to move on. When you accept DELTARUNE's demise, you accept that the only thing you can do to meaningfully "save" it—Dark World, Light World, *all worlds*—is to remember what you just saw. Heard. Felt.

Following this logic, in the case of my proposed ending, maybe the world doesn't "end" in the sense that it is erased. There's no great explosion, no Ragnarok, it all just... stops. The story closes out. Functionally, the world ends, but it is not "destroyed". To destroy DELTARUNE would be to deny it of existence, which we can't do. Once art is put out into the world, it is immortal, so long as there's someone out there who doesn't forget it.

One of the most prevailing themes in Toby Fox's stories is accepting that your time with a person or story is ending: in UNDERTALE, it happened to Toriel, it happened to Asriel, it happened to the Player. Now, it's happening to the cast of DELTARUNE. Though at first it may seem redundant to examine the same theme twice, we are seeing a much more visceral takedown of what it means to not forget, from as many angles as possible—what it means when, rather than us being peaceful in the knowledge that our beloved cast is free from their story in UNDERTALE's "true ending", we must reckon with the immutable truth of all stories: they stop.

The thesis of DELTARUNE (*"No one can choose who they are in this world."*) has a similar function to that of its predecessor, UNDERTALE (*"In this world, it's kill or BE killed!"*). What I want to stress is that the "correct" counter to Flowey's objectively incorrect worldview is *not* the polar opposite of what he's saying, the antithesis. By his own admission in the true ending, the answer was never one or the other, but *"don't kill, and don't be killed"*, the synthesis of both extremes. Like in UNDERTALE, the extremes of viewing choice as either completely meaningless or as a superpower that can defy death and finality are, when put into context with actual reality (presumably the target audience of most forms of art), objectively wrong! The truth is, DELTARUNE and UNDERTALE aren't and never were power fantasies—they're *messages*.

Let's do a thought experiment and ignore what the final Prophecy *could* say. Completely. Nothing about the end of the world, nothing about sacrifice, nothing about anything the game has had to say so far. Let us instead say the final Prophecy is something akin to "the party dies of old age, and Ralsei goes out first". Finally, we will say Susie and Ralsei have the same dialogue, character acting, and general reactions to what they see.

What would you think?

Would you understand how they feel?

... Maybe. It's an unkind thing to know you're going to pass. You might even try fighting it, or finding some other way out of your fate. But you'll still die.

You still have one ending.

See, this is why the game's normal route ending with us breaking from the Prophecy and finding a "good" ending that avoids the tragedy inherent to the base story bothers me so heavily, assuming the base story is as I've described. What's so different between a

person dying and a story ending? They both elicit grief, they both happen in ways that can either feel fitting or "unfair" and, crucially, they are inevitable. **Truly, *TRULY* inevitable.** You cannot outrun death, nor can the characters in your favorite book outrun its back cover. Even in experiences touted as "infinite", what you eventually end with is disillusionment, boredom, repetition, or the experience completely *breaking*. The games get old; it'll just be reruns until you finally pull the plug. A reminder that the route that allegedly grants us our "other ending" is the one where we break the game and its inhabitants over our knees to get what we "want". When Ralsei asks if the Roaring, a cataclysm of unending Dark petrifying all Darkners into purposeless stone, an adventure so endless it spreads itself thin, is "*your idea of paradise?*", he lampshades the glaring flaw in an "infinite" experience: what good is a world that goes on forever?¹⁴

The Prophecy is very explicitly about saving *worlds*. If the earth shattering twist that was meant to tie the game together thematically was that a Single Character dies and that this is unavoidable, or that the world is SUPPOSED to end, but you can make it NOT end somehow, we would be getting a neutered version of what DELTARUNE could be. *SO MUCH* of deltarune is about endings in a broad context. Kris is afraid of growing up, Ralsei is afraid of the Prophecy itself, Susie is afraid of her friendships dissolving without the promise of fun in the Dark Worlds, Darkners are afraid of obsolescence, Alvin is afraid of making art of his own, Asgore has been huffing the bitterness of his marriage ending for *years*, and *we* are afraid of the game ending. If it was simply a character death we needed to reckon with, why is the scope so broad? What would a single character dying, even a main character, do to further the themes of storytelling and finality, ostensibly what DELTARUNE is primarily about? Not much, if you ask me.

But as I said earlier, those worlds aren't *gone*. They're over, but we can remember them. In fact, remembering is all we can do. It's all we've ever been able to do with our favorite books or movies or games or shows or people or places. Whether real or fiction, light or dark, when something ends, ***we don't forget.***

¹⁴ That sounds pretty lame!

? the part where i talk about sans

If you're reading this document, you're almost certainly already aware of the (frankly ridiculous) likelihood of Sans from DELTARUNE eventually becoming Sans from UNDERTALE, or otherwise being one and the same. I will not be going into the "how", because I don't. Know how. ❤️. What I'm interested in is the "why"—what does Sans coming from DELTARUNE mean for his character, and what can it tell us about the game itself?

(For a more focused analysis (that i am stealing), refer to [this video by VivatVeritas](#).)

Everyone already knows Sans is putting on a front. He feigns ignorant charm, but beneath that layer is a highly analytical man who, despite lacking the ability to "feel" a reset in UNDERTALE, is able to perfectly clock the position of the Player with just a look. Beneath *that* layer, though, is a grieving, depressed man who doesn't believe in promises, in a future dictated by the whims of something higher. He's a man who longs not just for the surface, but for a past so immaterial, we never get to learn about it; getting to the surface "*doesn't appeal to [him], either*", not after he "*gave up trying to go back long ago*". It is this hopeless Sans that we meet in UNDERTALE, and it is this Sans who is the subject of the song "It's Raining Somewhere Else", seemingly a melancholy arrangement of just his theme. It plays when Sans tells a story about a friendly stranger who's come to mean a lot to him—Toriel.

Before Sans was in the Underground, though, he led a much different life. Before he was analytical, before hopeless, he was *just* the ignorant charmer. The clerk of the Hometown grocery store. Here, he lacks the striking empathy of his UNDERTALE incarnation, failing to catch Susie and Kris's discomfort at finding him with a drunken Toriel; he instead gets "*back to business*" and continues dancing. Strangely, though, the song playing right before this scene is a modified "It's Raining Somewhere Else", but with Sans's associated melodies removed. This song plays in the wreckage of the church, where a rattled Susie and Kris wander Hometown, their fate heavy on their minds.

The new song is called "The place where it rained", answering the original song's implicit question: *Hometown* is "somewhere else". Some people have joked about how

uncanny it is seeing new, canon Sans sprites after nearly ten years; He dances, winks, waves, he's so, so *happy*. The difference between Sans in Chapter 4 and Sans throughout most of UNDERTALE is night and day; the grief is absent, and he can indulge in pleasant frivolities even in the wake of such a dramatic revelation to our primary cast.

What we're seeing is Sans at the beginning of his multi-game arc, illustrated beautifully by the two rain songs. From Sans's perspective, DELTARUNE's variant is about the place itself, and thus lacks Sans's melodic identity. The place is novel, alive, just as Sans's happiness in Chapter 4 appears.

The situation could not be any more different in UNDERTALE; when this game's song plays, Sans talks of a distant, warm memory, and the song itself is arranged entirely around his own theme. In this way, Sans's memories of the place are forever colored by his own point of view. He can't go back; all he has to refer back to are his own, flawed memories. UNDERTALE is where the second half of his arc begins, and ultimately where it's resolved.

Sans doesn't talk about DELTARUNE during this scene—that'd be giving the game away. The presence of the song across both games, though, during scenes heavily concerned with both the unchangeable past and the looming future, forges an indelible link between it, Sans, and the theme of nostalgic grief. The kind of grief one feels when something is gone for good, when we can go back *there*, but never quite back *then*. It's the heavy melancholy that so many people felt when they rolled credits on UNDERTALE, and it's that same melancholy that's at the heart of DELTARUNE's message, tucked away in Sans's workshop all this time:

** (A card is sticking out from the back flap of the binder.)*

** (It's a poorly drawn picture of three smiling people.)*

** (Written on it...)*

** "don't forget."*

... But Sans's arc in UNDERTALE doesn't conclude with him going back. No, he goes *forward*. We don't see him lugging that broken machine up to the surface with him. Through Frisk and the Player's hope, he scrapes together the will to help us out of the Underground, to leave the place where it rained behind. Now, the world is as wide as he wants it to be. When DELTARUNE closes out, things will be much the same for us.

> Your Castle Town

What would the conclusion of the story entail?

Some speculate that the final Prophecy calls for the Grand Fountain in the supply closet to be sealed, subsequently ending Castle Town. For this purpose, I will consider a hypothetical end-state for the game where the Grand Fountain is the last of its kind. The shelter Fountain and any others around Hometown have been dealt with. At that point, our business will be little; we will be running out of options and unique interactions with our beloved cast, of time to delay the inevitable.

Recall [kenomacreature](#)'s circle model from many pages ago. In this scenario, there are exactly two instabilities left in the Light World: the Grand Fountain, and the Player. If the Player takes their leave before the Grand Fountain is sealed, then the balance of Light and Dark shifts to the latter; for our cast have not properly reckoned with the message of the game. The very last step of their arcs—and of our own arc—is to face the end. Failure to do so presents us with a conflict, and as the Player, we can't let a conflict that large go unresolved. Under the assumption that this model is correct, the alleged fate of our town is just what the mechanics of the world demand. It's what *stories* demand.

Our last act will have to be a double-kill: we will condemn Darkness at the very moment we take our exile from the future of Hometown. The first ends Darkness. The second ends Light. At that point, the game is over; we can start it again, open it up at a random point in the middle, walk around Hometown however many more times we wish, scrape the edges of the program for whatever charming yet ultimately inconsequential detail we neglected to find at first, but there is nothing after the Grand Fountain is sealed. Again and again—it will never be different.

There are... a *lot* of detractors of the idea that the game will end this way. They argue that there has to be some loophole, some way for some character to rewrite destiny and SAVE the World. They believe that either **A)** the symbolic concept of creativity being banished forever is not a good message, or **B)** an ending like this would simply be too unnecessarily punishing to warrant considering, in particular to Ralsei and the rest of the Darkners, whose death is implicit in this scenario. Both of these are misguided arguments.

First, as previously discussed, Dark Worlds are an anomaly to Hometown, otherwise they'd be a much bigger part of its culture. How is this relevant? Well, the Lightners don't... *need* Dark Fountains. Over the course of the game, darkness sure has helped, hindered, and changed our cast, but it's really, REALLY not like creative expression and make believe are somehow impossible in the Light World without it, and it's strange to assume banishing darkness is analogous to banishing the very concepts of art and stories, or that the experiences to be had in the Light World are somehow "lesser" by virtue of being less immersive. Were the portraits Kris and Susie drew less meaningful because they were made on a diner's window, and not Ralsei's castle? Four childhoods of video games, music, art, did all of that mean nothing because the video games didn't talk, or the art couldn't be worn in battle? If you're under the belief that the Dark World must be maintained lest the Lightners' hope be lost, you've fallen for the same trick Susie did.

Second, obviously an ending like this is bittersweet, but Toby was never a stranger to tragedy in even his "good endings". You can't take Asriel's true form with you once the barrier is broken in UNDERTALE. You can't see everyone again unless you rip their happy ending away through a True Reset. Still, [as Toby has put it](#), "*You've all seen the happiest outcome*" in UNDERTALE. While UNDERTALE gives its cast the get-out-of-the-narrative-free card by having them literally escape the story that is the underground, the heroes of DELTARUNE are faced with a tragedy: the tragedy that they *can't* escape their fate.

The Grand Fountain is too big of a Chekhov's gun for the game to not interrogate, and the end state of all Fountains is to be sealed. Reckoning with this fact is inevitable, so I doubt the Fountain will get away scot-free.

Okay but what if. we tried Really Hard. And there was a tortoise.

> What would Gerson Boom think?

Alright, we need to talk about the old man again. Specifically, this line:

"Stories can be retold. They can be changed. That's what I believe."

Many people take this to mean that the resolution of the Hammer of Justice encounter is that there *is* a way to divert the Prophecy's tragic ending within DELTARUNE itself, and point to the overall hopeful tone of most things Gerson as evidence. Disregarding

my crack theory of how his current worldview would deteriorate if he'd used the Shadow Crystal, this is still just, not what he's saying at all...

First, the context in which the line is being said. What prompts the old man to say that stories "*can be changed*" is Susie bringing up *Dragon Blazers*, specifically that the game was based on *Lord of the Hammer*. The old man says:

*"And so they changed parts of the story. / Of course, the biggest fans got mad... but, isn't it interesting? / The book **was already just an interpretation of something else.**"*

Notice how the old man doesn't specify *which* parts of the story were changed. In particular, he never explicitly tells Susie that *Dragon Blazers* was made for the purpose of providing a definitive ending to both the book and the Prophecy. The bones of the original stories are still present. *Dragon Blazers* isn't asserting itself as the definitive Prophecy story. It doesn't subsume the original, but exists *alongside* it, just as Susie's Fountain doesn't bring the Old Man back—"At best you can only see another side."

Second, a crucial aspect of the Prophecy that both stories are based on is that, to the Lightners, it's unfinished. As the late Gerson Boom wrote,

*"We shall never know the **pieces of the prophecy lost to time.** / But, was everything important truly written down in those words? / Myself, I see **a blank page as an invitation to write...**"*

Coupled with the fact that the Prophecy's exact details appear to be exclusive knowledge (e.g. Queen doesn't seem to have even heard of the Roaring), I doubt the old man, whose whole deal as we will later discuss is simply not bothering to care about the Prophecy's details at all, is *specifically* concerned with changing ending.

Okay, what about the "*white pen*"? Well, the context of that idea is him foreshadowing the Roaring ("*And soon, an **ocean of ink** shall wash across the **pages.***"), an event of endless Darkness, of a story with *no resolution*. *Lord of The Hammer* wasn't condemned by a tragic ending, but by being left incomplete, its conclusion doomed to obscurity—an interior conflict that can never be truly solved.

When he says hope can "*overwrite the dark*", he's not saying it can divert the Prophecy's defined ending. **He's saying that Susie can give the narrative an ending.** The role of Light is to reveal Darkness for what it is, to seal the Fountains, and to close out their narratives. Nowhere in the old man's dialogue is he implying that its role is to *literally*

change fate. Remember that Susie’s ideal ending is eternity, for things to “*just go on forever*”, which is something that, as discussed earlier, is both impossible and unhealthy. Crucially, the old man doesn’t encourage this behavior; he’s just amused by it. When actually reading his dialogue, it’s pretty clear he doesn’t believe in an infinite story. In other words, the Roaring isn’t the final tragedy, and the Old Man was never talking *about* the final tragedy, because **he never learned what it is**.

The last set of lines I’ll interrogate are as follows:

“*The ones who could write the next, **the youth**, the pen was lying there for them to pick up. / To make **the next page**. / ...they never did.*”

These look pretty cut and dry, clearly proving that the Old Man is talking specifically about the unfinished state of *Lord of the Hammer*, how other potential creators simply didn’t bother to finish the story. It’s not impossible to read them this way, but there’s another element to it that points to a much different conclusion: who the youth actually refers to—**Alvin**.

Alvin’s character is about him willingly choosing to live in his late father’s shadow. In a combination of grief and inferiority, he can only bring himself to recycle Gerson’s previous words. He doesn’t write or create anything of his own anymore, despite clearly wanting to; he tucks his notebooks away in his office, but never shows them to anyone! The call to action in the letter Susie delivers is explicitly to “*write **your own story’s***”. The “*next page*” isn’t referring to Gerson’s own story, but *any story at all*. Gerson doesn’t want Alvin to wallow in *Lord of the Hammer*, because enabling him to continue doing so would be *poison* for him. Alvin currently feels that he can only be made whole with *this* story. *Gerson’s* story. If his old man isn’t the one holding the pen, then whoever is has no right to put it to paper—even himself.

Alvin is an in-universe microcosm of what we’re *not* supposed to do with DELTARUNE. We have to leave once the show is over—we can do *so much more* with our time than waiting for word-of-god to continue the story for us.

... But, hey, if you wanna talk word-of-god...

>> It can't have been 10 years (SUPER BONUS SECTION??)

In late September 2025, Toby and the Fangamer crew ran a [two-day special](#) where they played through UNDERTALE with commentary. It quickly became apparent that the version of UNDERTALE being played on stream had some peculiar changes made to it, seemingly alluding to whole new areas added to the decade old game. Actual *thousands* of fans speculated on what this could lead to—would a playable anniversary build with new areas be released? Would we get new, significant exposition for the first time in ten years? Maybe there'd be some textual ties to DELTARUNE? The fucking Gaster Hallway™ made it in, this *had* to be building up to something new!¹⁵

... That didn't happen, but I'm sure you already know that. At the tail end of the stream, Toby confessed the new additions were "*smoke and mirrors*" that had zero functionality or content beyond what was shown on screen. He further explained that his goal wasn't to reveal "*a new hidden truth*" of UNDERTALE, but to remind us that "*the underground is as big as [we] want it to be*".

Toby has always been immensely respectful of fanworks and AUs, but this stream in particular really hammered home how he feels. To him, the afterlife of a story is chiefly in the hands of those who have read it. This, like the previously discussed Gerson arguments, would probably annihilate my argument on paper. I'm not about to tell you that I think Toby is wrong or insincere, or that fanworks are less valuable. That would be dumb. What I *will* say, though, is the same thing I've been saying this whole time: **we still can't escape the ending**. I'm even more sure of this now than I was a few months ago, because of the other big change Toby made to the anniversary build. Just as the final Asriel confrontation closes out, Asriel pleads with the Player to let him win, like usual. His reasoning, though, is different—written now through the lens of a longtime fan, he's in disbelief at how long it's been since the fun ended. "*It can't have been a year already. It can't have been 5 years already. It can't have been 10 years already. It can't have been... (...) I don't want to keep growing up... Not without you.*"¹⁶

¹⁵ By the way, the Gaster Hallway™ made it in.

¹⁶ Fun Fact: rewatching this bit of the stream is a really easy way to start crying without permission

Everyone already knows Asriel's arc mirrors the Player's own desire to keep UNDERTALE from ending. What I think is important is that this arc is **reinforced** after all this time. It really proves to me that Toby sees interpretations and derivative creation in a different light compared to the unhealthy obsession Asriel has developed. Toby also made a point, during this stream, to remind us that his decree doesn't really mean anything now that the game is done. It's our turn to play.

I think it's worth pointing out that AUs *are* their own fiction. *Underfell*, *Defernull*, *UTY*, *UT:HH*, *Inverted Fate*, *Handplates*—these aren't just UNDERTALE stories, **they're new stories**. You aren't making "more" UNDERTALE by swapping the narrative positions of Toriel and Gerson, you're making something entirely new. I think it's kind of bleak to truncate the artistic merit of transformative works down to being nothing more than a spinoff. That kind of thinking is how you get IP law, and everyone agrees that IP law is bullshit incarnate! Art, as a deeply personal affair, hinges on paying it forward, and it'd be strange to clamor for "more UNDERTALE" when we could have more of literally anything else. In the age of art as "content" in particular, it's sometimes difficult to discern where the boundary is between wanting a story to continue and wanting new stories in general. [I like the way Comedian Phil Jamesson put it](#): *"That's what I think people are looking for when they ask for sequels, they want to feel the same way they felt experiencing the first one. (...) But the frame of reference for making that request has shifted from having that feeling, to having that thing. **Instead of more like this, it's more of this.**"*¹⁷

Crucially, this does not mean the "original work" is the most "valid". That's why the Weird Route isn't about you turning the game off and writing the Kris Kills Everyone Evilly AU; post-game speculation isn't an inherently unhealthy method of engagement. It means that the work is *there*, and you can't change that. Half of what Gerson said is about stories being "*retold*", which is fundamentally different from them being *replaced*. It's like trying to make a rock stop existing; you can cover it with a sheet, you can break it down into grains and then molecules and then whatever is below the planck length. You can toss it back and forth like a ball, you can use it to build a house, but if someone asks you "Hey, is that rock still in this house? Is that thing you're playing catch with the stone I saw on the lakeside a

¹⁷ "Is that the Mario essay guy?" Yeah

few days ago?", you can't say that it's *not*. You can't deny that at one point, it was a rock, and it hurt like hell to be smacked with and probably didn't make for a good house on its own. Recognizing this truth is a ways off from swearing fealty to the "intent" behind the rock. But also, like, you made a *house* with that thing! Can we talk about that instead? I feel like the significance and joy of that game of catch you've been playing shouldn't be tied solely to what you happened to be throwing, right?

So, what does this mean for my claim that the ending of DELTARUNE will end with the Dark Fountains shuttering? With the world of the game ceasing entirely? In reality, very little. When people argue that the game should end with Susie or whoever prolonging the life of Darkness and save Castle Town, they want Susie to not have to deal with the pain Asriel felt in his final hours. They don't want Susie to have a need to not "forget", because *we* don't want those things for ourselves, either. If Susie were allowed to end the game this way, it'd undermine the words of Toby from literally one day ago,¹⁸ not to mention that it'd just move the problem, like I said earlier.

The death knell for the original Gerson interpretation to me is that DELTARUNE building up to us killing the story as the author intended for it to be would mean very little from a meta perspective; we aren't besting Toby Fox at his own game, because "death of the author" doesn't actually mean we, as the audience, have the power to completely disregard the text itself. It simply means we don't have to take the author's own word for what the text represents. The text itself, though, is *still unchanged*. In the context of DELTARUNE, it's our choice to decide how we take its ending. Is it a tragedy? Is it bittersweet? Is it just plain comforting? Whatever we decide, the text will still be there, completely unaltered, for someone else to read in a different way. To retell it. Nothing we do can change that.

But maybe, with what little power we have, we can change something else...?

> Something more important...?

"It's a complete suspension of disbelief on your end, though. You have to fully embrace the robot as a genuine, living person, even knowing they are not... You need to spend a lot [of] time with it... treat it like a good friend... Devoting your heart to the robot until it is able to return your feelings.

... haha... I make it sound so easy, don't I?"

¹⁸ (As of writing this section)

(FutureCat, *OneShot*)

At this point, people might think I'm batting *for* the Prophecy, treating it as dogma. This isn't the case; while it outlines certain truths, the text of the Prophecy also attempts to dictate how the cast *should* be feeling. Tenna gets killed, and so you needn't think about him past his expiration. These heroes are paragons with specific functions—prince guide, reader's cage, emotional core—and should be treated as little else. There's an unavoidable end, so it *must* be a tragedy. Though the Prophecy's immutable ending cannot be stopped, the game is also showing us moments that seem to defy the Prophecy. What I want to argue is that, while the ending of the game is unavoidable, **these smaller moments represent a very tangible way we can turn fate on its head** *without* the story devolving into substanceless pollyanna.

The best example I can think of is the fate of Tenna. As dictated by the Prophecy, his ultimate purpose is to be "*CLEAVED RED BY BLADE*". Regardless of what the party does, this always happens. Strangely, though, this is one of those rare times where we can change things for the *better*. By recruiting specific Darkners, Susie can fix Tenna, who can then be brought to Castle Town. There, he expresses a desire for a proper Lightner audience, as he's technically just been shoved into a supply closet for the moment. Finally, we can bring him to Mettaton's house, where Tenna resides by the end of Chapter 4. I think a crucial element of Tenna's eventual fate in this scenario is that he's still *gone*. What he represented—the pinnacle of the Dreemurr-Holiday relationship and "better days"—is pretty much done for. That story that he tried so desperately to embody, to revive, *can't* be brought back. And, just *like* Tenna, if we're too attached to him to let him go, Tenna stays in his designated Castle Town room, where he's *not* happy. We pretty much hold him in an eternal waiting room by doing so. There is no ending to Tenna's story where he is both happy and still with us, but his story is *done*. As of Chapter 4, DELTARUNE is no longer about Tenna.

So instead, we help him start a different one. It's not merely a new family to get overly attached to, either; Susie is quite sentimental handing Tenna off to Mettaton, and we can hear the sentiment reach him when he starts *addressing Tenna by name*. Tenna isn't a Darkner here! He's not aware of any of this, or at least he won't be in a way that matters until another Fountain opens! And yet, Mettaton treats Tenna like a *friend*.

The importance of this being the ending Tenna *wants*, of Mettaton feeling gratified by his presence, is it demonstrates that Tenna's irrelevance to us may be preordained, but it doesn't have to spell disaster, either. He can still be meaningful after "death". I think the alternative would've rung hollow from a character writing and a practical perspective. It's far more moving for Susie to develop a tenderness for the mundanity that used to bore her, than to have her find some sort of loophole to bring Darkners into the Light World or something, because it's an experience we can actually relate to! Saving Darkners is the easy way out, the comfort food ending that doesn't teach Susie, Kris, or *us*. While going through a beloved story over and over and letting the good times roll is a form of appreciation that shouldn't be taken for granted, the absolute kindest thing we can do for a story that's ended is to pass it along to someone else. To get *their* interpretation, because it made you feel something, and you want to see what it can make others feel, too. More like this, not more of this.¹⁹

And it's not just Darkners. Susie keeps finding ways to wedge herself into people's routines and beliefs. It happens to Noelle, who didn't know how to say no to things before Susie inspired her to. It happens to Kris, who has reason to smile and talk to old friends again. It even happened to *herself*. She went to school to see Kris, not just to visit the Dark World again, but to prove to herself that they're both *still friends*.

Throughout the sci-fi webserial [17776](#), the protagonist Nine grapples with the apparent contradiction of immortal humans who have no intention of exploring the stars or significantly advancing technology. Nine, like those in DELTARUNE who want the ending to be a triumph over the final tragedy, wanted humanity's progress to go on forever. *"They've got to keep trying. It's their purpose. They have to see what's out there."*

¹⁹ People passionately object to Tenna's ultimate fate, arguing that he'd have been happier in Castle Town as opposed to repeating the cycle of devotion to yet another Lightner. Putting aside Tenna himself saying he wants a new home, I can see where people are coming from with this argument, which is also why I take issue with it. When my family began to replace our dishwasher that I have constantly complained about, I felt a twisting pang of guilt that hasn't left me yet. I hate the damn thing! DELTARUNE is a game that speaks to this pattern of thinking, and it's why I think being reassured that *it's okay, someone else can fix that phone, and someone after that can use it instead, and it will not be lonely without you*, is far more comforting than being told to cling to my past lest I somehow cheapen its meaning, that the moral thing to do is to not simply respect things but to devote yourself to them such that you infringe on the life of yourself or others. Does Asgore look happy to you? Do you think he'll be happy if he successfully turns back the clock to a time before the sky fell?

In truth, humans had *already* tried flying cars and space exploration, before collectively agreeing that they didn't *want* to know everything or to optimize humanity. What mattered to them was *each other*. In the presence of their home planet, of their loved ones, they didn't *want* to overcome anything. They didn't *want* a "next page", because they recognized that this was it—this was the end of their story. Nine's sister, Ten, reassures them that "*It's a free play, buddy. Clock's all zeroes.*"

Humanity as depicted in 17776 isn't meaningful because they accomplish something, or even because they *fail* to accomplish something. It's meaningful because they *love*. Likewise, DELTARUNE doesn't have to derive meaning from us freeing the heroes from their fate. We can keep trying to, but Toby doesn't need us to free his cast for his game to have meaning—he needs us to love them. ["I just hope you can be friends with everyone someday."](#)

So, about Ralsei.

While Susie's personality and actions are defined by hope, Ralsei's worldview skews to nihilistic to a point resulting in his own psychological torment. He denies himself the simplest of comforts, including his own baking, doesn't even furnish his *room* despite jumping at the opportunity to build, decorate, and renovate literally anybody else's, and justifies these exercises in self-deprivation by the fact that one day, regardless of how he feels now, he'll go entirely obsolete. In the context of the Prophecy as a religious force, Ralsei's avoidance of personal joy has echoes of those who believe in an oncoming rapture,²⁰ but it primarily stems from Ralsei recognizing his role as a plot mechanic. Ralsei is "the one who knows shit", the mysterious native of Darkness that graciously aids the heroes. Because of this, he centers his entire personality around servitude—"baking, sewing", looking like Asriel, generally palatable with zero rough edges.

But, obviously, this belief is *also* wrong. Wrong as trying to fight death itself. Hell, probably *worse*. For someone who tells other Darkners to not be too bothered by their ultimate fate, he sure does suffer for believing it, maybe more than anyone.

This is why Susie emboldens Ralsei to be his own person so heavily. Her "*naive hope*" is "*infectious*", a force of nature that doesn't always make sense, but doesn't always *not* make sense, either. Whether or not it's a force that can actually defy entropy is debatable

²⁰ Source: I'm in a religious family. Conversations with my mom all have a 10% chance she'll complain about people spending time on "useless things" when they should instead be min-maxxing for the afterlife.

(read: it's not and i just spent several thousand words explaining why), but honestly? I'd rather Ralsei believe in something than nothing. It's Susie's intervention that lets him try cake for the first time, that gives his room something to look at for once, and it'll surely be this spark that lets him find out more and more about himself.²¹ Ralsei didn't need "eternity" for any of this. He didn't need a promotion to the Light World for good things to happen to him—he just needed good things to happen to him!

So when it's argued that Ralsei's arc should end with him becoming "real" or otherwise avoiding his fate, I hope you understand why I find the idea so strange. Would it seriously be better for him to have his worries unambiguously solved this way? Or, would it be better if, in spite of his fate, he allows himself to live? Imagine, being told that the only way you can live "meaningfully" would be to rewrite reality itself!

Wouldn't that be better for us, too? Is letting ourselves love fiction in spite of its phantasmagoria, treating it the way we would a friend, really *less* powerful a message than exonerating it from its guaranteed demise? Is there no way to find some comfort in living *without* fear of death, of irrelevance? Would it really undermine the value of stories to acknowledge that they, however fleeting, can be *loved*? The words on a wall call this a tragedy—does it *have* to be one?

There's a pretty powerful post by [twilightofthesandwiches](#) discussing Susie's relationship with endings, and how the game seems to be pushing a grey area between complete disregard for and complete submission to them. In her conclusion, she writes:

"There are certain things, certain endings, we all have to accept, but there is also so much that is worth rebelling against, that is worth fighting for. Susie's desire for an 'Eternity' might be a bit oversimplistic, but it is also the source of her rebellious spirit, out-of-the-box-thinking and the shining hope that Gerson sees in her. So I don't think the story will dismiss it outright, we really just have to wait and see just how much of that 'Eternity' Susie will manage to keep..."

So far, DELTARUNE believes that something ending is no reason to stop loving it. "Fake" friends are still so, so meaningful.

²¹ "What do you mean by this" google search 'egg meaning slang'

The gift of fiction isn't solely the fun it can bring, but that it emboldens us to make reality more hospitable. Art on its own has no power, [because it's what people do in response to it that really matters](#). Don't forget these stories after they've ended—*especially* after they've ended.

When it's laid out like this, Ralsei's wish and Susie's dream *do* seem a little naive. Which isn't to call them wrong, just, not developed to their fullest. It's not that the ending must be fought, but that there's something more important than reaching the end.

We still have a lot of growing to do, don't we?

But, what if we were to do the exact opposite? What if we resolved to *keep* the story going, to fall deeper and deeper in regardless of consequence?

What if we took DELTARUNE down with us?

> back

"I don't know what's worse. Progressing to end the world or ending progress to prolong it. I want both, I crave both: eternal progress and eternal life. God Nilu, I want it all, grasped in my arms (...) 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..."

(Bavitz, *When I Win, the World Ends*)

Among the most prominent themes in any Toby Fox work is trying to avoid fate. In the *Halloween Hack*, you look for other ways out of the Andonuts confrontation, and fail.²² In UNDERTALE, you look for more story in a game that's ended, and, well, you don't *fail* fail, but you don't really get what you want either; what you're left with is a hollow husk of a game, and a hollow husk of a Player. Wrung dry of meaning, UNDERTALE just doesn't hit like it used to.

In DELTARUNE, the central conflict, which has been phrased many ways, can be boiled down to "Does free will matter if our ending is the same? What do we do when a story ends? How do we cope?". Basically every character, secret boss, and Chapter conflict is about this in SOME way, and it's why the ones who use the Shadow Crystals (and Ramb lol) have their focus on freedom so heavily emphasized—they see the future and Don't Like It.

For a Player that doesn't like it either, their question becomes "is there any way out of this?"

The Sword Route is framed by Ramb as pure freedom, the better alternative to Tenna's tarnishing of what was once an open air experience, better than *"some big ol' blasted line from A to B"*. What's also noted is that the Sword Route was the *"ORIGINAL game"*. In many ways, it is meant to harken back to UNDERTALE, a game where your choices "mattering" and multiple endings are features, not bugs (and remember, DELTARUNE is *"intended for those who have completed UNDERTALE"*). The behavior of a Player during the Sword Route is that of someone desperate for choice, for control, and for "meaning", even though the real experience to be gained playing Tenna's game was simply playing with friends and learning about each other along the way. Why else would Kris, despite being terrified of its contents, resolve to *keep* playing? The way I see it, they think they're running out of options; ways to grasp for autonomy. Their indenturement to the Knight's juxtaposed to their own desire to hang out is leading them down darker paths.

²² "The game tells you you have a choice. That you always have a choice. Then all you can do is "Kill him." That's your choice. Are you going to make it? Yeah, you are." ([THE MAKING OF.html](#)). For the record, I don't think the comically cynical way Toby executed the theme of lacking freedom in a ROM hack he made in high school is the way he'd pull it off nowadays, but it serves as proof he's had ideas like this on his mind for a while, and there are numerous undeniable similarities between DELTARUNE and the Halloween Hack, superficial and otherwise.

Consider, then, that the Sword Route *also* functions as a pretty blatant series of steps involved in running the Weird Route. Now, line this observation up with the idea that DELTARUNE's ending is absolute, without an intended method of diversion.

In this context, the Weird Route isn't *just* a murder route, or an apathetic Player breaking the game the way they do in UNDERTALE. It's something much more in line with the themes of DELTARUNE itself. As Spamton puts it, that kind of Player is trying to "*DRINK THAT [Sweet, sweet] [Freedom Sauce]*" by any means necessary, and he even tells us it'll *work*, but we'll be woefully unhappy by the end, rueing the day we didn't let him cut our quest short. A reminder that DELTARUNE was supposed to be a complete package before the release schedule was overhauled; in a full game with an unambiguously happy ending, what could possibly motivate someone to perform increasingly esoteric steps in search of another conclusion? Why would the Weird Route even be an option if there was a painless way to avert the tragedy?

I'd also like to highlight how much of the Weird Route is about going [back](#). Not only is it mechanically regressive, induced by replaying earlier chapters and backtracking to the dismay of your party, not only is it *culturally* regressive, turning an RPG with a uniquely dynamic battle system into a typical game of killing to see numbers go up (what did Ramb call the Sword Route? The "*ORIGINAL game*"?), but it's also *narratively* regressive; Noelle, who begins unable to set boundaries, isn't allowed to develop her own agency like she does in the Normal Route, instead pigeonholed into her role as the girl next door, the physically weak but spiritually strong Frostmancer. It's a false strength, though—one derived from appealing to us as the highest power, the same way the easiest option to socially advance as a woman is to become another cog of the patriarchy. It's no accident that this Route has us force Kris and Noelle to LARP as a failing heterosexual marriage. It's even *less* of an accident that it prevents Susie, the game's boldest and most dynamic female character, from being anything more than the party's bruiser, depriving her of the romance with Noelle that inspires *both* of them to grow. "*Guess she's afraid of me again*", she laments after Noelle flees the hospital in Chapter 2, just as she does in Chapter 4 ("*didn't even get to... hang out, really.*"). We want another ending *so* badly, we're willing to erode the foundations of a game

lauded for its subversion. Instead of letting the game change, we *freeze* its inhabitants, an illusion of preservation.²³

A Weird Route Player isn't bored or curious like an UNDERTALE Genocide Route Player, who succumbs to the curiosity sparked by the FIGHT option that had always been visible; they're *desperate*. **Obsessed**. Against the wishes of their vessel, they reduce the game's mechanical and character prowess, trample whichever Lightner or Darkner opposes them, embed [indelible traces of themselves in Noelle](#) to reduce her from a friend to a mere party member, to find the fabled "other ending", to find some way to prolong the story. It's all the easier now that we're so disillusioned—ignorance is bliss.

Maybe they'll secure a happier fate for their cast (God, they can only *hope*) but regardless of if they do or don't, the true prize is being able to assert dominance over this fictional world, to proudly proclaim that they have seen it all, that what they are doing MATTERS because it has an IMPACT, even if it's something worse than what the game already tried to give them—maybe especially so.

What was it that Chara told us? ***You are wracked with a perverted sentimentality.***

The Routes appear as two options: resist the ending, or don't. Regardless of what we pick, though, we won't be the only ones who have chosen something; someone else has been making moves this entire time.

Let's talk about those Shadow Crystals.

> SHADOW CRYSTAL ROUTE

"But JEVIL was just a taste of what you'll face from now on.

One day soon... You too, will begin to realize the futility of your actions. Ha ha ha...

At that time, feel free to come back here. I'll make you tea... And we can toast... to the end of the world!"

(Toby Fox, *DELTARUNE* Chapter 1)

The series of sidequests punctuated by the collection of Shadow Crystals are a bizarre enigma both from a lore perspective and from a narrative one. What purpose, beyond hidden encounters and strong equipment, does the Shadow Crystal Route (as I'll

²³ For the record, I don't think the intended takeaway from all this should be "you are a homophobic patriarch for wanting more DELTARUNE", but I *do* think there's a wealth of meaning in Toby drawing links between the cruelest possible manifestation of in-game control and the harm done in controlling *real people*, and I also think it's not a coincidence that both are direct results of an authority's distaste toward change and growth.

call it) serve the story? Why is it optional? Why do all of its plot points have the same kind of... feeling? What ludonarrative crevices do the Crystals allow Toby to explore?

> The Roaring Knight grants Shadow Crystals

The Roaring Knight drops a Crystal despite not sharing any of the qualities previous and future secret bosses have had. In addition, the Chapter where we acquire their Crystal is the one where the Dark Fountain was made by someone else, one where the Knight didn't have the opportunity to arrange the scene the way they normally would, one for the chapter literally called "Late Night". The book in the ROOTS Prophecy room contains text referring to a *"fallen star"* whose tears turn to something *"like glass"*, alluding to the glass nature of the Shadow Crystals and the Knight's "Dark/Star" attacks (+ *"You saw golden stars..."* and their very obviously PK Starstorm inspired opening move).²⁴ It's possible this text refers to the formation of the Knight specifically, as the Black Shard is also likened to glass in the Light World, but a key characteristic of Shadow Crystals is that they can always be looked *"through"*, while the Black Shard is described as *"nearly opaque"*, and its dark pigmentation is the first thing Asgore brings up when talking to himself about it. To me, this all points to the Shadow Crystals being sourced directly from the Roaring Knight, while still being distinct from their bizarrely composed body.

A decent argument against the tears idea, though, is that the Crystal we get from the Knight doesn't seem to be their "tears" (the little droplets in their "droop" sprite), but is just next to the Black Shard item from their knife. Semantics aside, however, the Knight being composed of otherworldly glass formed from a lake of bitter tears would still link them directly to the Crystals (which move *"like water in the hand"*, although this could just be another general water connection) and still imply that the Knight themselves is the product of someone's grief, which would also apply to the Crystals. I believe, in part due to the star imagery and "twinkling" sound design which accompanies them, that the *"fallen star"* is in fact the Knight themselves.

²⁴ Remember that the glass discussed in the book and the BitterTear item are *not* the same thing. The setup-twist-payoff formula of the book has the glass serve as the payoff in an effort to distinguish it from the bitter water. When using it on Susie, she says *"Isn't that rain?"*. Glass is solid, and the Tear also lacks any astral association aside from being *"from the sky"*, which could mean anything given the bizarre physicality of the Dark Worlds.

Our previous understanding that it's Gaster who drives Darkners mad isn't exactly *incorrect*, as I will get into later, but it's more accurate to say that, from the Darkners' perspective, it was direct contact with the Knight that ruined them.



There appears to be a contradiction in this idea, though: The Shadow Crystals are intentionally off the beaten path for the average player, building up to something not necessarily “mandatory”. Nowhere in the Legend is there a line alluding to the collection of Shadow Crystals. As previously discussed, the Roaring Knight’s goal is to deviate as little from the Prophecy as possible, which implies preventing it from being derailed completely. Given the practically daily basis on which the foretold Fountains are made, though, you’d think the Knight wouldn’t bother with the Crystals at all—it’s a time loss, right? Further, if the sum of the Crystals’ parts has the risk of granting “freedom” in some way (discussed in MUCH more detail later), wouldn’t this be directly *counter* to their goal?

This sounds like it annihilates my argument... but, it’s sort of part of why I’m writing this document in the first place. Wait and see, though, it’ll be a while.

? I’m not convinced.

Fine, I’ll prove it.

If you are asking this question instead of moving on with the rest of the paper, you probably take one or more of a variety of issues with my claim, including but not limited to:

- Undisclosed narrative relevance between the Crystals and Knight
- Absence of physical proof

The first issue will become mostly irrelevant as the reading continues and my whole case is made. There is *very* good thematic reasoning for the Shadow Crystals to be delivered the way I'm describing. Ssssstay tuned...?

The second issue is a bit more complicated. Or, well, it *was*, until a few hours ago as of me writing this when I received what I can only describe as a divination from God.²⁵ This realization will make up the entirety of this subheading and is pretty insubstantial in the grand scheme, so if you're already on board with the initial argument, do yourself a favor and sit this one out. It's gonna be a really dry plot mechanics discussion the whole way.

The rest of you, you're with me.

Indeed, there is no smoking gun that concretely proves the Knight ever directly gave anyone a Shadow Crystal; nobody in game has ever directly said, "hey, do we think this weird glass came from the Knight?" and no cutscene shows them rifling through their eldritch pockets. Chapter 4, though, gives us something incredibly unique: we get to see the Knight just after they've made a Dark World. Normally, the Knight takes their leave before the heroes can intercept them, but for one reason or another, we've walked into a rushjob. Here's every event the Knight has a confirmed involvement in before the Second Sanctuary:

1. We know from Susie's Dark World that a Fountain's creator will enter their World right in front of the Fountain itself.²⁶ The first being we encounter upon entering the Atrium is the Roaring Knight, blocking a door that leads directly to the Fountain.
2. The Knight knocks Kris and Susie down to the Dark Sanctuary, the true body of the Dark World, and so the party must make their way back up.
3. Upon entering the Old Man's study, the party learns from him that "***Just before** you came in... / A figure with a sword **flew in that door** up there.*" The door in question is a locked gate, behind which is the only path back up to the Atrium. The Old Man also suggests that the door locked behind the Knight as they exited ("*But, it's locked with some contraption.*")

²⁵ (I had a cold)

²⁶ "What about Kris's Fountain?" Recall that Kris had done some offscreen meddling with Tenna to locate Toriel and distract the rest of the party. I don't suppose it's too outlandish to suggest Tenna manipulated their awakening location to better obfuscate its origin. Susie would definitely have at least raised an eyebrow at waking in front of the Fountain itself.

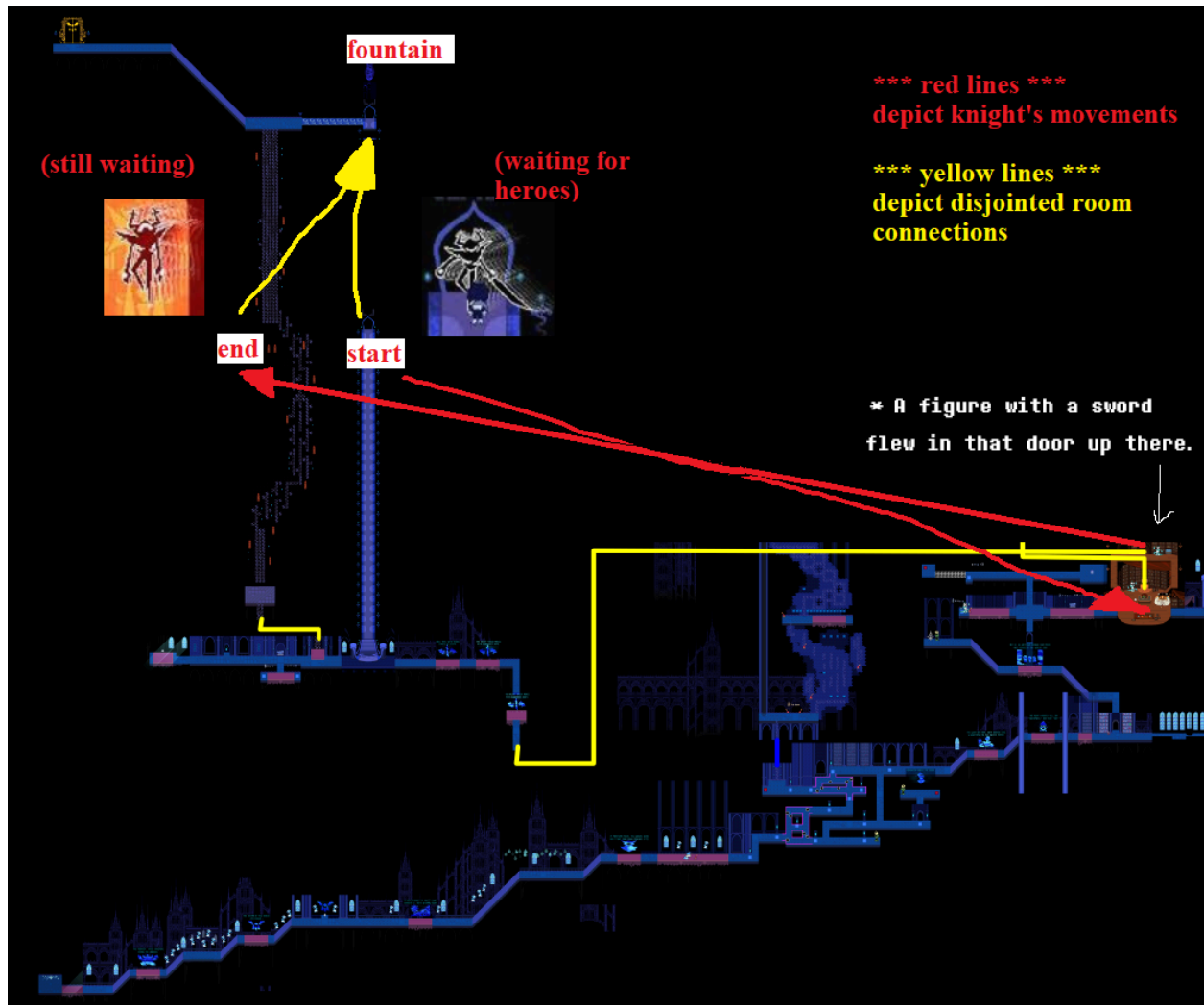
- a. After bestowing the justice ax to Susie, he hastily appends a *“piece’a glass”* to her reward, which he had found in his desk drawer and somehow felt that someone *“really wanted me to use this thing”*. The glass turns out to be the Shadow Crystal.
4. When the heroes return to the Atrium, they have the tools to ascend an alternate route to the Fountain. As they’re about to scale a looming threshold, though, they spot the Knight, who appears to have been doing little aside from waiting for the heroes to arrive. After testing the heroes—just as the Prophecy had foretold—the Knight absconds behind a Great Door, better known as the door between the church lobby and center. Adjacent to the Door is a short hallway leading to the Fountain, most likely where the first stairs would’ve led had the Knight not intercepted Kris and Susie.

In summary, the Knight blocks Kris and Susie from direct access to the Fountain, takes a dive through the Old Man’s study and into a door leading right back to the Fountain, and waits until the heroes arrive to, yet again, serve as an obstacle to the Fountain. To my knowledge, there is no evidence they had done anything else that would’ve required physically passing through the bulk of the Dark Sanctuary (i.e. none of the other Darkners seem to have *seen* any trace of the Knight, instead only speaking *of* them).

Can you see it now?

Maybe I should show you.

(map taken from [the wiki](#))



Your eyes do not deceive you—the Roaring Knight took a massive detour for no reason.²⁷

But, okay, obviously there *was* a reason. Sure, the Old Man’s sighting isn’t fully illuminating on its own, but it’s also the *only* text the game gives us. To put it another way, the Knight dropping by the study—and *only* the study—is meant to draw our attention to this single movement. And once we trace their steps? It couldn’t be any more obvious that the Knight was *gunning for* the Study, not just passing through to return to the Fountain they were already idling in front of.

²⁷ Semantics aside (an aside for semantics): Considering the Fountain had just been opened and that the Knight usually seems to like avoiding being spotted, I’m going to take the Old Man at his word and say that the Knight “flew” through the Dark World, or at the very least moved with urgency. I will concede that the exact topology and layout of the Dark Sanctuary is not meant to be taken as literally as this map. That being said, it is a fact that there are no other entrances to the Atrium from down there. No matter how you look at it, their path is a closed circuit.

If the only thing the Prophecy decreed for the Knight to do was battle the heroes in, I cannot stress enough, **the same fucking spot they were in at the start of the chapter**, what's with the prolonged detour? It serves no mechanical purpose. Nowhere in the Legend does it say, like, *A CRYSTAL FOR THE TORTOISE, MERRY CHRISTMAS* :). Maybe they locked the gate to further hinder the heroes, but do we have any evidence that the gate *needed* someone to lock it? Better question, does the game *want* us to think about the mechanics of the door, or does it want us to think about the Knight, the study, and the one shadowy incongruity tucked in the Old Man's desk? Because if Toby both wants us to follow the mystery and intends for this to later be revealed to *not* have been for the Crystal, then he would've placed more emphasis on, say, the possibility that someone might be responsible for the lock being set. He's not being overly predictable; he's writing a mystery without straight up lying to your readers.

On that note, if the detour served a function in some other part of the Dark World, why is the only thing we've heard of this detour from Gerson, about his study? It's not like any of the Darkners on the way to the big organ say anything particularly damning about the Knight's exact whereabouts. It's almost like the Knight was suddenly made to get completely sidetracked, possibly *backtracked* on a mission to set up breadcrumbs for a larger as of yet unseen plot, and ultimately led back to their initial position waiting for the heroes to happen upon said trail. What was I saying again I forgot

Burps loudly but yeah, until a better counterargument comes along, this is proof enough for me. Actually, this is far more than enough, I was convinced well before this, but now it's basically non-negotiable.

? Are the Knight and Gaster tangibly connected?

Gaster's meta-narrative relationship with the Knight is something I'll discuss way later, but for now I want to list the few miscellaneous lore ties between the two:

- The track "Breath", which plays when the Knight is idling, consists entirely of synths and one sample from *Earthbound*, namely of Giygas breathing. In DELTARUNE, Giygas samples have *only* been used for three sounds: the song "ANOTHER HIM", which for several reasons is just Gaster's theme, "Breath", and every time Kris

receives a message from the mystery caller, who if you already believe is the Knight just adds more credence to the two being connected. Whether or not Giygas noises are signs of Gaster himself or just the Depths is unclear, but Gaster resides in the Depths anyways, so...

- On that note, I'd be remiss to not bring up the automatic association between Gaster and Darkness many people make. While I hesitate to say Gaster literally *is* Darkness, or that he created it in some way, it's abundantly clear that Toby *really wants us* to deeply relate the two, as his fascination with it is one of the very few things we actually know about him. The whole "shattered across time and space" thing would probably also lend credibility to the concept of being omnipresent but sort of dormant... like Darkness. Point being, if the Roaring Knight is *also* someone who manipulates Darkness and generally stands in direct opposition to our own Light, then yeah, there'd obviously be a connection there.
- The Knight seemingly retreats into the shelter at the end of Chapter 3, which is revealed to house a Dark World. The ambiance outside the shelter, [when sped up by around 666%](#) (already a sign of Gaster), gives us the sound `mus_smile`, which plays when Kris tries to call in the Dark World, presumably on the other end of Spamton's phone, and in UNDERTALE's `room_gaster`, where Entry no. 17 is written.
- Because the Roaring Knight is the source of the Shadow Crystals and possibly needs to hand them out physically (thus having a conscious awareness of who they might go to), it's pretty significant that everyone that's held one so far (Jevil, Spamton, Gerson) makes explicit reference to Gaster's words, aesthetics, or backstory.
- something about hand holes idk

Not a very impressive list, and some of this is a hair too speculative for my liking.

Fortunately, what there doesn't yet seem to be (**>>TO MY KNOWLEDGE<<**) is any evidence to the contrary, that Gaster and the Knight *shouldn't* be related, which means that these mostly superficial observations combined with Gaster's soon-to-be discussed thematic significance will hopefully make for a stronger reading. This is no small task, though, and will basically take up the entire rest of the document.

> Freedom-seeking behavior

Certain Darkners have made heavy-handed references to the concept of “freedom”. Prior to the June 2025 update, our best idea was that this narrative would be relegated to secret boss encounters.

This assessment wasn’t fully *wrong*, but... with the release of Chapters 3 and 4, there’s a great deal of uncertainty regarding the initial claim. Do they *need* to be associated with freedom? Do they *need* the “freedom theme” in their music? Do they *need* to drop a Shadow Crystal on defeat? Do they need to be particularly sad or insane? Do they even need a bossfight to fill their role as Weird Guy for the Chapter? What the hell is Gaster’s connection to these idiots *now*?

The remainder of this section will consist of me arguing that, contrary to what some argue, there *is* an intended pattern these characters are *supposed* to follow. As observed by [prokopetz on Tumblr](#), just because the following Chapters didn’t *completely* abide by a pattern, does *not* mean there was never one intended at all. The pattern in question is meant to draw a line between characters who are textually, literally linked to freedom, and characters who are linked by proximity (read: all Darkners LOL).

I believe the components of this pattern are:

1. A perversion of their Dark World’s central narrative

- a. Ideally, this would also be something that alienates them from the rest of the Dark World, such as Jevil’s imprisonment or the rapidly declining opinion of Spamton. In other words, they either don’t fit in or people just generally don’t like them.
- b. This foil arc is contained within the Dark World they inhabit; in other words, they have a satisfying resolution to their subplot.
- c. My justification for placing so much emphasis on this requirement is that secret bosses are not supposed to be completely alien to their environment. They are meant to be twisted examinations of the worlds they inhabit. Spamton, for example, exists in a world whose tyrannical overlord enslaves and controls her subjects. He himself believes to *also* be under something’s thumb, but not Queen’s specifically; it’s a less tangible force unnerving

particularly to Kris, who is quite literally being puppeted around by their own overlord. Similarly, the main players in the church Dark World, one concerned with the Prophecy's implications, are the heroes (who all have varied opinions on the Prophecy), the Knight (actively trying to continue the Prophecy), and the old man (who holds a uniquely uninterested view of the Prophecy).

2. An encounter tucked away from the progression of the Chapter

- a. What I'm *not* grading is whether people consider the encounter in question to be *well*-hidden or difficult to find. All I am discriminating with is whether the Player needs to do something otherwise unnecessary to engage with the character.

3. A link to the concept of “freedom”, ideally directly brought up in-universe,²⁸ like:

- a. Permutations of the phrase “*The air crackles with freedom.*”
- b. Being physically or metaphorically “stuck” somewhere (imprisoned, ostracized, dead)
- c. This link isn't quite a result of the Shadow Crystal; rather, it is an innate part of who the character is, which is later amplified by the Crystal to be of a more meta nature. Spamton, for example, was always concerned with freedom, but his obsession was originally centered around autonomy within the business world, the desire to make it big. Once he picked the Crystal up, he realized he was actually fighting for something much more grand and futile, which is why he takes such a violent turn for the self-aware.

4. The “freedom theme”

- a. While it's difficult to say whether or not the exact “meaning” of the six or so notes that make up this melody is “freedom”, it's fair to conclude that all traditional secret bosses share this tune (i.e. not ERAM, the Knight, or Ramb) and most people know it by this name.
 - i. Yes, it also appears in the song “Air Waves” for some reason, but in those instances it's not really tied to a specific *character*. Both

²⁸ Not just because the obvious bosses have “freedom” blatantly plastered on them, but also because we can potentially ascribe “freedom” to like, 1/3 of all Darkners, so I'm drawing the line where Toby seems to have.

Motormouth and Cowboy Mike host the minigame the track plays in depending on your game version, and neither character is all too similar. Further, the Mike trio originate not from Castle Town, but from TV World, and as we'll soon discuss, part of what makes the third Crystal so unique is that it's a result of the Knight failing to do its job. It'd be strange if it actually totally did but the secret was saved for a future chapter. Coupled with the fact that internally their theme is just called "spamton_dance", and we have three characters using a song not actually representative of them, baby. Still funny as fuck though.

5. A tie to the Shadow Crystal

- a. The vagueness of this will make sense once I divulge the purpose the Crystals actually serve. Essentially, I believe that each character's history with what the Crystals represent is unique. *When* their paths intersect with them is a big one, for example. Jevil seems to already have his by the time we meet him, while Spamton (according to Seam according to Kris) only found it by pilfering the NEO body. Along with this is *how* they're used. The Old Man, seemingly in contrast to the other two, never took interest in his.

6. At least *some* connection to W.D. Gaster, which could mean:

- a. Meta significance or knowledge (to or of what varies)
- b. Some reference to what we know is related to him (e.g. Entry 17, what the followers say of him, "Gaster's Theme", the number 6, the shelter)
- c. I don't necessarily mean they need to have swapped spit with the man in person. Something about them just has to evoke Gaster in some way.
- d. The aforementioned "freedom theme". I should probably warn you all that I'm kind of a huge dumbass, and also that I'm really bad at understanding music and only bothered to get one second opinion. Basically, **take any direct melodic analysis with a massive grain of salt**. Please. Anyways, I didn't initially count this as directly alluding to Gaster because of the stray notes in its last third, but I remembered there's a song in DELTARUNE that's very obviously derived from "Gaster's Theme" that *also* has a stray note: "ANOTHER HIM", which has the bonus similarity of the seven semitone jump

lasting twice as long as its neighboring notes. The notation isn't an *exact* match, but when actually played or looked at on a sequencer (which is what Toby would be seeing when composing), these two melodies are basically the exact same with one note swapped. I can understand people who object to this being intentional on the basis of Gaster's unaltered theme from UNDERTALE, but simply starting with an (already modified) variant and switching two immediately neighboring notes seems like a pretty reasonable idea.²⁹



So, those are my guidelines. Naturally, to prove their validity, I've resorted to an evaluation of every single relevant character, in order. Gulps.

>> Chapter 1

DARK WORLD NARRATIVE: *"You, that left us in the shadows, stripped of meaning... / You DARE return to torment us once again?"*

JEVIL NARRATIVE: I never *needed* them. None of us even mattered in the first place. I can do whatever I want, and the world will keep turning without respect to me.

Before his madness ensued, Jevil believed himself to be free because he was one of two Joker cards, capable of wielding all suits and thus "doing anything". Once he got the Crystal, though, he recognized his place in DELTARUNE's world as an actor on a stage, using his newfound "freedom" to embrace chaos and treat others as similarly immaterial.

²⁹ Yes, I see the stray note at the beginning of the "freedom" theme! I don't consider it to be a big issue, though. Both "Battle Against A True Hero" and "Hammer of Justice" contain quotes from the same section of "Ruins", but the latter quote has several new notes attached. Both those songs use the same 4/4 rhythm, so there doesn't seem to be a need for altering the melody in "Hammer of Justice" so heavily the same way something like "Heartache" was adapted to 4/4 for "ASGORE". What's actually being displayed here is Toby making slight changes to notes to fit a given situation, while still keeping the parent melody's bones intact. "ANOTHER HIM" uses the melody to eerily drone, while the "freedom theme" uses it as the energetic peak for battle themes, hence why it ends on a more stable note (source: [andrew cuguningham](#)). Take the first stray out and you get "Lost Girl", relegating the melody to a moody low point. I sure hope there's no other significance to that last one. I sure hope. I sure hope.

King's anger stems from a lack of purpose after being locked away in the unused classroom. The Eastern Fountain, which naturally goads the heroes to his kingdom and could lead to a world where he'd have more sway than a playing card, would finally *give* him purpose in his eyes. As a Darkner, he desperately wants to matter. Where he differs from Jevil lore-wise is that, while King is working with second-hand information from Jevil, Jevil actually *looks through* the Crystal, and whatever is in there convinces him to turn his nihilism around on the world and do as he pleases. He truly does not give a shit, and doesn't understand why others still do, alienating him further.

Ever think about why Jevil is associated so heavily with *spinning*? For a visual echoed by in-game flavor text, Jevil himself, his battle theme, his attacks, his battle *background*, and the Roaring Knight's flavor text, it's seldom discussed in comparison to his general nihilism and "CAN DO" attitude.

I've been thinking about this motif as of late, all because of that Knight narration, which ominously reads "*... the world revolves around you*".

Think about it from the Player's ("you'r) perspective; a video game is limited by its programming. It can only do what its code has allowed for it. As convincing as a world's dynamism can feel, it is ultimately illusory. Predictable. The Player, though? They are the one thing that can't be predicted. Whatever the Player does is automatically the world's "truth", and in that sense, the world truly revolves around them. But the world does *not* revolve around Jevil—in fact, it's the exact opposite! Jevil is a sidequest tied to a supporting shopkeeper. If the Player doesn't have the instinct or foresight to poke around a little, they can very easily miss him entirely, because to the world, Jevil is a non-factor! He is not at its axis (notice how there's no dialogue suggesting the world revolves around **him** specifically. and like, *he* never does a pirouette!). Unlike Spamton, he derives solace and joy from this fact, determining that since the camera will never focus on him for very long, he can do whatever he wants in the vast stretches of time where he's out of frame. Many of his attacks involve dodging spinning projectiles, and there's a rather comical line associated with his spade-ring pattern: "*SHALL WE PLAY THE RING-AROUND?*", a reference to the old children's game about a ring around a rose. Around a rose. **A rose**. Just kill me next time.

Interestingly, he also believes someone is directly responsible for this rotation: "**WHO KEEPS SPINNING THE WORLD AROUND?**" he cackles. Who sets the world of

DELTARUNE into motion specifically for the axis it revolves around? Who threatens the world's stability to catch the Player's intrigue? During Jevil's *"FINAL CHAOS"*, copies of the Devilsknife fall to the bottom of the screen and, on contact, create white pillars, visually emulating the creation of Dark Fountains. This, plus [a host of other similarities](#), makes it seem an awful lot like Jevil emulates the Knight.

Lastly, before I forget, when Seam describes what Jevil babbled about as having made their worldview *"yet darker"*, a direct quote of Entry 17. While we *could* attribute this association to Seam themselves, it was specifically Jevil's words that induced the reality-altering idea of the world as a game with participants—something Gaster, the outside observer and facilitator of the experiment, would have intimate knowledge of.

Jevil satisfies all requirements.

>> Chapter 2

DARK WORLD NARRATIVE: *"Think! Lightners Have Already Been Enslaved By Me And My Kin (...) All I Have To Do Is Expand This Dark World / No One Will Have To Suffer Anymore / Everyday Blissfully Worshipping Me Like We Both Deserve"*

SPAMTON NARRATIVE: *"I USED TO be A BIG SHOT. THE BIGGEST!!! (...) KRIS THAT [Little Nipper] IS OUR [One-way Ticket] TO MAKE YOU [Big]. MAKE ME [Big]. (...) WHAT ARE THESE STRINGS!? WHY AM I NOT [BIG] ENOUGH!?"*

Queen spends Chapter 2 ensnaring Lightners and Darkners in wires to physically control them. Her physical power over everyone is derived from holding the psychological power to enrapture people in the Light World as a computer. Unlike King, Queen was *already* strong.

Spamton, a spam email, is absolutely not strong, condemned to a bitter, impoverished life. While Queen has control and power, Spamton is controlled by society and wants the power to overcome it. This manifests in him trying to steal the NEO body, which backfires when he abruptly concludes that he needs more than what the Dark World can provide—the one true channel to Heaven, Kris's SOUL.

Pretty much everyone knows about his significance to Kris by also living at the behest of something higher, and the initial Gaster connection is also handed to us on a silver

platter by the implication of mus_smile apparently playing on his phone. What I think is worth pointing out, though, is that Spamton wasn't always entirely meta. Even before his luck ran out, he was still short, and he was still an erratic spam email. As mentioned earlier, he originally just wanted to make it big. Having exhausted all other avenues, his last resort is to attain as much literal power as he can through the NEO body. The Crystal, though, draws his attention to his strings. Strings which had only been mentioned as a passing metaphor before now, which signify his subservience to something much more concrete than societal pressures: the programming of the game itself, how he will *never* be more than what it dictates, no matter how much raw power he has. This is where the true Gaster-y connection comes from, for the managing force behind the SURVEY_PROGRAM would naturally have reckoned with a similar idea of false existence if his goals required communicating with us real people in Heaven. It's also for this reason his acknowledgement of the SOUL transitions from a passing curiosity to a desperate need; the SOUL, our own connection between reality and fiction, might grant him *actual* freedom. The kind of dynamic choice that real life people have. To him, the SOUL isn't just strength—it defies logic. Recall that Spamton's beef with Kris during the Weird Route isn't really about their SOUL; he just wants to shoot them dead for cutting his powertrip short.

Spamton is still a special case compared to other bosses, in that he had direct contact with something meta before the Crystal became relevant to him (DEVICE_FRIEND), but it's still not exactly clear why he was abandoned in the first place. What *is* clear, though, is that the Crystal made him so much more aware of his plight.

Spamton satisfies all requirements.

With Jevil and Spamton, the status quo of what counts as a "secret boss" is determined. What comes after is where things get complicated.

>> Chapter 3

DARK WORLD NARRATIVE: *"HD's nothing when you got NOSTALGIA! / Toriel oughta know she doesn't NEED a new TV!! / Kris!! I watched you GROW UP!! / Just admit you NEED ME already!!"*

...UH...????

Okay, time out. It's time to decide what actually counts as Chapter 3's freedom guy, because all of these answers are gonna piss at least *somebody* off.

First candidate, the Roaring Knight. The Knight is difficult, drops a Shadow Crystal, and, being the primary antagonist of DELTARUNE, almost certainly has both metanarrative significance *and* a tie to Gaster himself (plus they run into the shelter which is 100% leaking Gaster particles). If you squint (and I will, for the rest of this document), they also have a thematic tie or two to freedom. Strangely, though, this tie is purely observed, and never textual—no flavor text, no indulgent dialogue—they're a *mandatory fight* that can theoretically be overcome even *without* the armor from the Chapter's side quest, and most confusing of all, they're the **main antagonist of the game**. There isn't any closure to their fight, because they aren't native to TV World. They don't have relevance to Chapter 3's themes of nostalgia, family, and regression,³⁰ because they *show up later*. They're a completely alien presence that doesn't directly connect with the ideas put down by Tenna's story, or the inciting conflict involving Susie and Ralsei way back in the Couch Cliffs. Worse still, the Crystal they drop? If I'm right about the Knight being the one doling out Shadow Crystals to secret bosses, it's likely that they drop one because they just, like, *have* one. It's not significant for the same reasons as any of the carriers, because they're the *source*. Their life wasn't derailed by stumbling into the Crystal; they're the ones doing the derailing.

Okay, so what about the other candidates? There's ERAM,³¹ a boss encounter found in a digital facsimile of the shelter by doing a prolonged sidequest with Ramb, which as a whole is a strong reference to the Weird Route and has large meta-narrative implications. They're also *very* special for being one of two characters who know what Shadow Crystals are at all. That's pretty much it, though; not only is there no explicit relevance to freedom that the game draws any attention to, but they don't really relate to the Chapter's themes, either. Rather than being about memory and the past, ERAM is very much a part of the present, concerned entirely with events happening during the game (including the Weird Route!). They feel out of place aesthetically, too; their battle theme "BURNING EYES" is too

³⁰ Obviously, if the Knight is a certain stoner deer, they most certainly relate to those ideas, but my point is that the final battle of Chapter 3 isn't *about* nostalgia; it's about formally introducing the game's antagonist.

³¹ Possible other names for ERAM include: Nightmare, Mare (which is ERAM backwards), Shadow Mantle, Shadow Mantle Holder, "John Mantle" (???). Listed here because nobody can agree on what this thing is called.

complex for what an NES is capable of producing,³² and the console screen's chromatic aberration hypnotically shifts back and forth. Their otherworldly character is different from bosses like Jevil or Spamton, who very much *are* related to their Dark Worlds. I *did* just say they're strongly tied to the Shadow Crystals, but bizarrely, they don't actually *drop* one? If anything, their dialogue makes it seem like they're skeptical of the Crystals' effects, as though they're not the target demographic for them.

Lastly, they don't have a properly completed arc. This one is a bit subjective, but ERAM, as part of the Sword Route, hasn't really been elaborated on or resolved for something that frankly *screams* importance, what with being so intimately familiar with Kris. Whatever their role is, it likely won't be made explicit until later, much like the Knight's.³³

"So, uh, what about, fuckin', Ramb? That guy talked about freedom a little."

"... Oh, god, you're not actually—"

RAMB NARRATIVE: *"But if I know Kris, and boy do I know Kris (...) Kris, luv. THAT'S what we got backstage. / The ORIGINAL game. Where YOU decide what to do."*

It might be confusing to consider Ramb to be the secret boss, seeing as you don't fight him and there are no Crystals to be gained from him. I'm not here to actually argue against ERAM's importance, nor that Ramb is *the* secret to be found. Thing is, though, practically everything about him *screams* secret boss; extremely heavy handed freedom references, a sidequest in a blocked off area, not "fitting in" with the rest of the house (somehow? take the one pippins's word for it i guess), *strong* relevance to the narrative of nostalgia (about Ramb and Tenna: *"Two guys trapped in the past... just different ones."*) even the Jevil key sound effect plays when you talk to him! He directly quotes the previous two bosses! It's as though Toby wanted to create a character you'd instinctively clock as part of the quest, only to cuck him out of a full encounter by killing him off. If you believe Shadow Crystals are the tears of the Knight, it *also* recontextualizes the line about Ramb after he

³² In fact, there exists a version of "BURNING EYES" that more closely matches NES sound limitations in the game files ("nightmare_boss_links"), with lower fidelity drums.

³³ This might not actually mean anything, but does anyone else find it a bit odd that the game files list the song "ERAM" as "nightmare_nes"? Like, if ERAM was a one-off thing, why specify that this is the NES version of their theme song? Their battle track is just called "nightmare_boss_heavy", so why clarify this at all? Why is it not just called "nightmare"? Is there going to be a "nightmare" track with no suffix? Is "roots" a similar deal??

fully petrifies, in a speech about his irrelevance to the Dark World: “*No one will shed a tear for him.*” No one will grant him purpose. No one will give him his Crystal.

Remember, the Knight in Chapter 3 is described as *missing*. Tenna, who’s expecting the Knight to show up at any moment so he can deliver Toriel, grows agitated when they don’t (“*And HOW are **they** not HERE YET!?! The LIGHTNERS are gonna get BORED!*”), and the Chapter icon changes on completion from Tenna’s grin to the Knight’s visor, recontextualizing the title as not just being about late night TV, but about the actual, *literal* “Late (k)Night”.³⁴

What sets Ramb apart from Tenna (so as to not just have the secret boss be Tenna but short and British) is that while Tenna insists that he’s capable of relevance and “*NEW TRICKS*”, Ramb doesn’t actually care about the future all that much. All he wants is to play the original game, reveling in the glory of the simplicity and freedom that comes with childhood, not having to think about the bigger implications of what you do to people. Tenna tries to limp forward with Kris—Ramb tries to pull them *back*. He enlists Kris to comb through an old video game for secrets, for “*freedom*”.

Seam’s dialogue correctly predicting that the Knight holds the next Crystal *is* strange, and *might* be a hard blow to my entire point. *HOWEVER*, there isn’t a single good answer to how Seam can even predict such things in the first place. Does Seam know the full details of the Knight’s plan, thus rendering my point false, or can they see directly into the future, proving my point true? Is it something in between, or something else entirely? Why does Seam specifically even know what Shadow Crystals *are*? I’ll wave the white flag if someone can scrounge up proof or a reason that the first is both more likely and makes more narrative sense than what I’ve described, but until then, all this point represents is an unanswered question with no influence on my argument.

It really does feel like we were given three pieces of a full secret boss (the Knight’s Crystal, ERAM’s proper encounter, and Ramb’s significance to the Dark World and preoccupation with freedom), then forced to watch them never come together. Regardless, **I’m going all in on Ramb fitting the most as the “intended” secret boss, in terms of**

³⁴ Obviously I’m hinging my argument on a bad pun. It’s a Toby Fox game. The death defying power in UNDERTALE is called de-termination.

continuing the established pattern. Some of this argument is predicated on the “could”s and “maybe”s regarding the Shadow Crystal, but everything else is solid in my opinion.

>> Chapter 4

DARK WORLD NARRATIVE: *“But no matter what we do... / Our fate... / ... is already decided.”*

OLD MAN NARRATIVE: *“I jus' think, those words shine a bit too bright. / A path so blue, it's all you can see.”*

While he continues the vital trends of inverting his Dark World’s central narrative whilst still tucking away his proper encounter,³⁵ holding a Shadow Crystal, and having explicit concern with freedom, we don’t see much negative in the Old Man; common Darkners take refuge in his study, and unlike Jevil, Spamton, or even the heroes, he has a fairly healthy relationship with the predestination of the Prophecy. Further, he’s pretty involved with the Chapter’s main progression, rather than being a largely optional interaction like Ramb or Jevil. The limiting factor is implied to be the Crystal, which *“didn’t interest [him]”* when he found it. All’s told, he’s the most well-adjusted Darkner to grant us a Shadow Crystal. When his flavor text reads *“The air crackles **green** with freedom”*, it gives his relationship with freedom a personal flair—something he’s made his own, that he grows around and past.

However, when taking into account both his personality as a Darkner and his life as a Lightner, we can see the bones of what could’ve been a fate far more tragic, an adversary far more dangerous and *far* more Gaster.

OLD MAN NARRATIVE?: *“The story, it became so grand, so overwhelming, / Some say it swallowed up the author himself.”*

The old man is a role model for the entire cast, particularly those concerned about the Prophecy. He also makes a habit of breaking most tapestries he comes across. When pressed on this behavior, he admits that he isn’t fond of the rigidity the Prophecy dictates. Because he only sees the Prophecy as *“a very nice fairytale”*, this quirk never manifests as anything dangerous, and he remains motivated to write however he pleases. Imagine what

³⁵ In case anyone wants to argue Gerson isn’t a hidden encounter, I’d like to cite my friend Lily who completely missed the golden piano sidequest because she didn’t care enough to find most optional content without me telling her to do so directly.

might've happened, though, if he'd found out that that fairytale was not only very real, but was fast approaching. Imagine what could've happened if he had peeked through the Crystal, learning the same reality-shattering truth that Spamton and Jevil did.

We don't have to look very far to imagine; to the Lightners, the Prophecy's ending is "*lost to time*", which Gerson Boom took as "*an invitation to write*". But, in trying to retell and finish the Prophecy through *Lord of The Hammer*, to give it *his* ending... Gerson *died*, and the story was left unfinished. In a manner eerily similar to a certain royal scientist, the story he was telling became so outrageous in scope that it swallowed him whole—respected minds who fell into their creations, succeeded by a trepidatious Alphys in both universes. Obviously, Gerson did not literally drown in his own writing, but many beloved creators have worked themselves to death. Gerson Boom died of an obsession with trying to finish his story based on the Prophecy.

What I'm trying to say is, the Old Man would be doomed if he used the Crystal. He could never have finished that last Chapter. He could never have given the Prophecy another ending, or an ending at all; it's just not how the story he's in works. The Old Man we see is more accepting of his circumstances, though; he admits he's losing his mind, but without the push the Crystal would've brought if he were to "*use*" it, he's so uninterested in this story's ending that he doesn't even seem to *know* it. At this point in the story, hope is what the heroes need most, and he wouldn't have been able to provide it if he was under the Shadow Crystal's spell.

The old man satisfies all requirements, BUT subverts all of their exact implications by not having "*used*" the Shadow Crystal.

>> In summary

There's a consistent pattern between the secret bosses that involves freedom, obscurity, Gaster, and serving as a dark mirror to what their world communicates to us. This pattern is meant to produce unnerving meta-narrative foils to the game's surface plot, alluding to the deeper nature of the story *and* to our relationship with it as a whole. For variety, the game shows us four slightly different cases: a guy who already used the Shadow Crystal before we'd met him, a guy who used it *after* we'd met him, a guy who didn't ever

get one (alternatively, the guy giving them out in the first place), and a guy who *did* get one, but never bothered to use it, hence the latter two never learning the same horrible truth.

Now, for the million dollar question...

> What actually *are* the Shadow Crystals?

As much as I've talked about the Shadow Crystals, I haven't really gone into what they, like, *do*, or for that matter *why* they do what they do. We know they have some kind of "strange power" according to the Old Man, but is there an interpretation of them that's congruent with my reading of the game?

It can't just be that they make characters strong; every Darkner who had one was either already a force to be reckoned with (Jevil, Gerson), found that power elsewhere (the NEO body), or was the Roaring Knight (the Roaring Knight). Spamton NEO's strength in particular is very clearly rooted in the NEO body itself (*"The Lightner filled it with their own hope, giving it an incredible power"*), which Seam distinguishes from the Crystal (*"At any rate, it's truly unfortunate a Darkner decided to steal that power... / Or, is it fortunate? Because of that, you found a new Crystal."*).

It also can't just have been causing obsessions with "freedom", as characters like Spamton, Ramb, and the Old Man all have their ties to freedom *without* having "used" the Crystals! Clearly, the Shadow Crystals themselves aren't the source of this fixation.

Our only clues so far are the flavor text displayed by looking through them, and exactly one line by King. When looking through the Shadow Crystals in the Dark World they're from, they display their Light World equivalent (e.g. Jevil's shows Kris the unused classroom). This suggests that they might reveal Darkness for what it "really is". Frustratingly, in the Light World, they, uh... show some really cryptic scenes I don't have a single good explanation for, so we're moving on!³⁶

When asked about Jevil, King will say *"It was he, the clown, that told me the Knight's brilliance... / About the fountains' glory, and how I would rise to power"*. Coupled with the fact

³⁶ Is this a copout? 100%. My only defense is that every reading of these I've seen is either entirely speculative or doesn't really mesh with what I'm about to argue for. Unfortunately, while the Dark World scenes *do* have completely solid points of reference for what they allude to (their Light World counterparts), the Light World texts don't allude to anything we have a frame of reference for except *maybe* Undyne and Noelle's.

that Jevil's downfall began not with his power, but with his contact with the "*strange someone*", it sounds to me like whatever Jevil had gained from using the Crystal was *knowledge*. Exclusive knowledge which the Knight deals out in the form of Shadow Crystals. But if Darkners like Ramb or pre-NEO Spamton can be preoccupied with "freedom" *without* a Shadow Crystal, then what makes the Crystal's wisdom so special?

The initial school of thought outlined by THE DEVICE THEORY is that the Crystals display the true nature of DELTARUNE as a video game, which is hinted at when Kris can see through the illusions of the Dark Worlds as their Light World counterparts. With this, there is a more recent idea that the Crystals give an unfiltered look at the Prophecy to whoever uses them, and this is what they are newly seeking "freedom" from. These two theories together are REALLY promising. All of the relevant characters would be exposed to the same thing and react in different ways, much like our main cast. Jevil would turn to joyful nihilism because the Prophecy renders resistance moot. Spamton, once fused with the NEO body, would try as hard as he could to become as powerful as possible to overcome heaven itself, because the Prophecy is something he thought to fight. Ramb would('ve) try pulling Kris as far back into the past as possible, because the Prophecy can't arrive if there's no future to begin with (why do you think the Sword Route is localized entirely within an *old video game*? why do you think Ramb cares so much about "*The ORIGINAL game*"?). The old man could('ve) try to sidestep the future upon learning it, looking for ways it could be altered, something "*between the lines*" that could change the outcome in a way that goes beyond his current tempered dismissal of fate. Hell, even the Roaring Knight, someone trying to keep the Prophecy going (why kill Tenna? why go straight to the church next? why not open a bunch of Fountains in succession to preemptively cause the Roaring? why let the heroes and SOUL *live*?), might simply have learned the truth of the world and submitted to it completely.

So the working hypothesis is that Shadow Crystals betray the deepest possible knowledge of DELTARUNE's world, which is that it's completely fabricated. That's all well and good, but it's still speculation. Thematically coherent speculation, yes, but I know that's not good enough for you. Is there any textual evidence this is the intended reading?

... Actually, yeah!

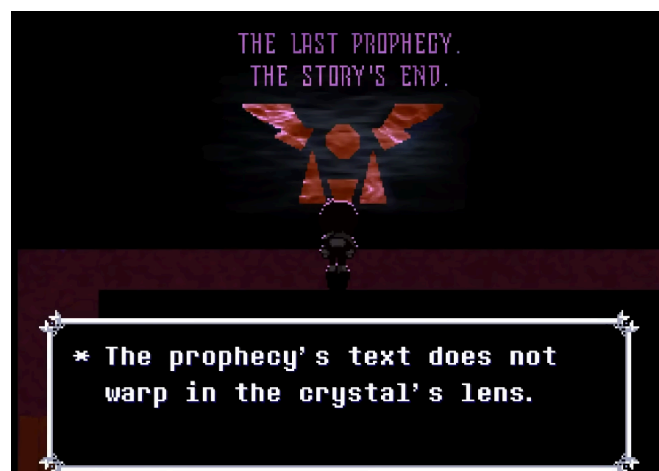
>> Seam

The most obvious place to look would be Seam's dialogue. Seam is one of two NPCs to directly acknowledge the Shadow Crystals by name, and is the first to tell us what they are. Despite this, they don't really give much in the way of actual... explanations? They sort of just say we'll find them by defeating "*strong adversaries*" and that once five are collected, they'll be able to make something we'll "*quite enjoy*" whatever that means. It is possible, though, to glean some information on why Seam in particular would be intrigued by the Crystals, once we remember that Seam is an intense nihilist who doesn't believe in a better future. To them, us following through on their sidequest starts off as an odd curiosity sure to grind to a halt once we have to defeat the Knight. They make this roadblock clear in the line "*Fate is approaching... and it is not on your side.*"

Once we get our hands on the Knight's Crystal, Seam's attitude does a... not a 180, maybe more like a 73? They start talking about hope as if it's a previously foreign concept to them, and are more receptive than ever to your quest's merits and not just what they believe to be the dramatic irony of our supposed downfall. There's something innate to us going down this path that sparks hope in Seam, a hope that we can somehow defy fate. It doesn't seem like a leap to me to say that this hope is intrinsic to us collecting more Shadow Crystals, and that the Crystals in question play a key role in defying said fate.

>> The Prophecy

When inspecting the Crystal in any room with a Prophecy, you get this unique text:



This line appears no matter what Prophecy you're in front of, but Kris will also try shaking the Crystal when looking specifically at the final Prophecy, though this changes nothing. Lastly, trying to look through the Crystal in Chapter 4's Dark World when a Prophecy isn't present simply describes the church lobby.

The mere fact that the Prophecy is the only thing to bypass the normal distortion property of Shadow Crystals—which is typically read as showing how things “really are”, at least when used in Dark Worlds—would suggest that the Crystal can't *find* anything to distort. What the Crystal reflects is the truth, so it just agrees with it. As of now, this is probably the hardest evidence available for the idea that the secret bosses either did or would have seen the Prophecy in some form, and that's what they grapple with once they hold a Shadow Crystal.³⁷ Freedom from fate itself...

>> ERAM and Kris

I couldn't fit my extended ERAM thoughts into the previous section, but now I totally can! How wholesome.³⁸

Aside from Seam, ERAM gives maybe the closest thing to an explanation of Shadow Crystals we have so far. None of the other secret bosses seem to acknowledge owning them at all. Before I continue though, I'd like to discuss what ERAM represents to Kris themselves, because it'll help serve as context for the future.

First, Kris's primary goal on every DELTARUNE route is to help the Roaring Knight fulfill the Prophecy in order. Counterintuitively, some of their behavior seems to imply they want to *deviate* from that? We know from the normal ending of Chapter 4 that Kris might be more on-the-fence of the whole thing than they should be; they *want* to escape with Susie

³⁷ This would also work better than a more vague “realization that they exist within a video game” as Darkners are all implied to know that they aren't “real” but the Prophecy's exact details seem to be exclusive knowledge. It's the difference between reading the words “YOUR CHOICES DON'T MATTER” and somehow getting to watch with your own eyes the cosmic clockwork that determines your life as it rings out your unavoidable downfall. It's also why Susie's breakdowns when Ralsei tells the truth aren't really products of *what* Ralsei says, but that he felt the need to hide anything from her in the first place. She even says herself in Chapter 3 that the bomb dropped about Darkners' artificial nature doesn't faze her all too much.

³⁸ Keep in mind: though I ascribe the Sword Route dialogue and ERAM name to the Shadow Mantle thing, I can't concretely prove one way or the other if the Mantle is the one speaking, or if it's the entity IMAGE_FRIEND. Trouble is, FRIEND has so few well-defined characteristics that one could argue basically anything for or against them. My *gut* tells me they are both separate, but the majority of the following analysis functions independently of the speaker's identity, so it's probably fine. [Idk read this tweet by wandydoodles.](#)

to fight the Prophecy's ending, but the Knight pulls them back, reminding them of a strange promise they have to fulfill. While Kris's role is to advance the Prophecy (*"Carries out fate with the blade"*), it's not exactly what they *want*. This is also corroborated by their general disdain for the future, which can be seen in the way their fingers don't fit through the park bench holes anymore, the way they derive sincere relief from the TeenZone, or the way they miss their brother *badly*. When undertaking Spamton and Ramb's sidequests, they insist on going of their own volition. When they shake their Shadow Crystal in front of only the final Prophecy, it betrays their interest in seeing it changed. Whatever dirt the Knight has on Kris must be pretty damn good to get someone so disaffected by fate to make fate happen unaltered.

Second, Kris does *not* like the Sword Route quest. Several parts of it (the end of the Ice Palace, killing the digitized Susie and Ralsei, entering the shelter, even just being asked if they're actually having fun) visibly distress them, a big deal for the silent protagonist. They also don't like ERAM in particular; ERAM's dialogue makes their expression *"sour"*, and after their battle, ERAM says that "[their] *eyes can't hide it*", which at the very least suggests that Kris has something to hide from them at all. This is significant, because certain elements of ERAM imply they are an extension of Kris themselves: they are first met in their *"secret hiding place"* behind a door bordered by Kris's missing red horn headband—literally inside Kris's head. Further, they only appear and speak in Kris's *own* Dark World, and they have intimate knowledge of Kris's memories (how do they know about the events of the Weird Route occurring only *yesterday*? or that kris is after the crystals at all?). ERAM, in other words, is Kris's personal nightmare, the back of their mind which they fear greatly, the voice taunting them relentlessly before and after their battle... but never by straight up *lying* about Kris. What ERAM says may be malicious, but it all stems from Kris's own beliefs. The final phase of the encounter tiles the floor with Titan's eyes, and when the Mantle spawns into battle, the sound effect that plays is the one used before the Titan confronts the heroes in Chapter 4.³⁹ Titans and their Spawn are described as embodying fear, and Kris seems pretty afraid of whatever ERAM accuses them of. What truth does Kris wish to bury?

³⁹ Further context: I asked speedrunner [NERS](#) about the usage of `"snd_ghostappear"`, which has existed in the files since Chapter 2. Aside from Elnina's attacks (disabled in code, was probably a placeholder) and Noelle's SleepMist (absolutely no clue), the sound is mostly used for magic in the Sanctuary Dark Worlds, making its usage for the Mantle's spawn animation for Chapter 3 and much older filename all the more perplexing.

I believe ERAM's dialogue suggests that **the Shadow Crystals contain not only intimate knowledge of the Prophecy and its ending, but are believed to somehow alter fate**. Like I said, the Crystals are implied to be parts of a whole, so we won't know for sure *how* they'd do so until a later Chapter, but ERAM seems to at least know *why* Kris is looking for them.

- The first thing they suggest is that it's "*fun*", that the Shadow Crystals can serve as a gateway to "*playing around like this*" even further. This obviously alludes to us exploring Darkness, which provides joy and distraction to Lightners from reality and, as discussed earlier, are metaphors for creative expression and secrecy. Despite this, ERAM's overall tone comes off such that they're chastising Kris for this thought.
- ERAM then says that this fun is the reason Kris is "*looking for them (...) The SHADOW CRYSTALS*". According to them, the Crystals can somehow bring *more* fun, *more* adventure. ERAM also describes the Shadow Mantle as being something they're after for the same reason.
- The line "*Do you honestly think it'll get you what you want...?*" is truly something; as observed earlier, Kris's motivation to continue the story's preordained path conflicts with a deeper desire to simply have fun with the Dark Worlds and the personal expression that comes with creating Fountains, to the point where they're now at risk of turning against the Knight and the Prophecy they're supposed to enforce. It's a very deliberate choice made to call out *Kris's "want"s*—not the Knight's, not the Player's, not anyone else's.
- "*... no, part of you is just... enjoying this, isn't it?*" is also pretty juicy. Think of it from our perspective; whether or not the Shadow Crystals can actually do what I'm suggesting (change fate), we're still getting something out of the whole quest, simply because it *is* fun looking for secrets and challenging tough bosses! Sure, it'd be *ideal* to find a pot of gold, but isn't there something independently endearing about the rainbow itself?⁴⁰ What ERAM suggests here is that on some level, Kris, too, derives some of the same pleasure.

⁴⁰ You can boo, it's alright.

- The Weird Route exclusive lines also point to a similar idea: *"The same part of you that enjoyed yesterday. / Knowing you could say it wasn't really you."* This further lends credence to ERAM's identity and personality being derived from aspects Kris despises about themselves. We know for a fact that Kris wants the Weird Route undone; they take back the Thorn Ring from Noelle, return her watch, drag Berdly's unconscious body to the hospital, and make their frustrations with us *very* apparent on several occasions.

But, as twisted as it sounds, violence *does* make people feel strong. With infinite strength, people can overcome anything. For someone like Kris, whose life has been spent in idle subordination to systems of power, it's hard not to derive some bizarre satisfaction from harming others, and Kris *technically* has the luxury of getting to wash their hands of the whole thing after the fact! They can just say it was us!

- If the above paragraph sounds fucking evil, that's the point. ERAM isn't having an honest heart-to-heart; they're trying to guilt-trip Kris, and this line is their mindgame.
- Something else I want to point out that won't make much sense until later is ERAM likening the feelings elicited by the Weird Route and those of the Shadow Crystal Route. They both stimulate *"the same part"* of Kris. I can't elaborate at the moment, but put a pin in the idea that the Weird Route and Crystal Route have intentional similarities drawn by the game itself.
- Two of ERAM's lines after the battle concludes: *"Flickering red, like pretty little flames... / Your eyes can't hide it, Kris."* It's been established by this point in the game that Kris's eyes glow red sometimes, particularly when they make the Chapter 3 Fountain. Later, it's shown that Susie's eyes will *also* glow red when opening a Fountain, when they normally glow white or yellow. Indulging in Darkness seems to be tied to red eyes in some way, though why exactly I'm not all too sure of.
- Tying this whole thing together is ERAM's final remark: *"Without play... / The knife grows dull."* Despite Kris's own protests, something about their expression while fighting proved to ERAM that they find something satisfying in a good challenge or a

well-hidden secret—in overcoming an obstacle. As stated earlier, “*play*” still refers to the Dark Worlds and creative expression, but it’s interesting that ERAM brings Kris’s knife into this. The first thing this might allude to is Kris’s ability to express themselves at all. Creating art is a muscle that can atrophy, and we know that Kris is both interested in the arts and that, lately, they’ve had little interest in expressing themselves; they’re quiet and they haven’t hung around Noelle’s place in a while (“*No one really... plays [the piano] anymore.*”). Deeper, though, is the second thing the knife might allude to: their personality. Their “edge”. When Kris was younger, they pulled pranks, played piano, were a major fixture in both their own family and the Holiday family, and were just... *happier*. They had *fun*. From what we know in game, though, they didn’t seem to spend time with people leading up to Chapter 1’s start. This isn’t just because we’re physically preventing them from doing so, it’s because they’re *depressed*. They’re too enveloped in the drudgery of a town that doesn’t like them, of a home that feels empty even with them in it, of reality’s fist closing around their neck. Now, look at ERAM—a playful little twat that mocks and laughs at Kris, toying with them in the prior Boards, always poking at the innate desire to mess around that Kris has shamefully buried. They’re an evil mirror of Kris’s childlike fascination with simple mischief, their “*hiding place*” behind Kris’s childhood headband, itself a symbol of trickery, of demons, of the Dark. As a representation of Kris’s more baseline urges, what they say takes on a new meaning: without deviance, without personal expression, without *Darkness*, their personality... grows dull. Live the way people expect you to, and you’ll soon find that you aren’t actually living as *yourself*.

There’s one last thing I want to point out, and it’s that my point about Kris disliking the Sword Route isn’t... true. Okay, it definitely is, they recoil while playing it several times, but you know what’s weird? **They keep playing.** Despite exercising a degree of agency that at minimum lets Kris’s lack of interest in something override our desire to interact with it, they always plug the controller in *themselves*. In fact, even after their life is directly threatened by HERO_SWORD, the first thing they do (completely on their own!) once the coast is clear is pick the controller back up. Something pushes Kris to keep playing, just as something

pushes *us* to keep playing, even though we see characters we love in danger and distress. We *have* to see what happens because... because it's... fun...?

If you've ever read the *Godzilla NES Creepypasta*—and [I know Toby has](#)—much of the ERAM encounter might sound familiar, especially this aspect of Kris's psyche. Like Kris, Zach is psychologically tormented by his copy of the game, inhabited by a monster that knows a great deal about his life. Despite this, he's utterly entranced by the game: *"I knew that if I quit playing, I would never be able to stop thinking about it."* Zach tells us. *"Fucked up as it was, **this was the experience of a lifetime.**"* I don't believe these two are quite the same situation, but considering how much the Weird Route feels like a creepypasta, this gnawing curiosity battling with nauseating horror feels like a concept that's stuck with Toby—the idea of emotional and even physical sympathy for fictional characters losing to the burning need to understand, to see *everything*. It crops up in the earlier *Halloween Hack* by Toby, it manifests as Zach in *Godzilla NES*, it was the ultimate dilemma of *UNDERTALE*, and now it reappears in *DELTARUNE*.

Kris is a fascinating character because, much like us, much like Zach, no matter how horrified we are of the implications of a story, we still push forward. Remember that little joke anecdote from Father Alvin about Kris dropping the *"green lizard"* into a pit *"on purpose"*? It's a reference to a minor speedrunning trick in *Super Mario World*, where you do the same to Yoshi to gain some height from a jump. I don't think Kris is *completely* detached from fiction—their imaginary friend of choice was a power strip, after all—but something about video games stokes their morbid curiosity, and part of that is surely because, as Ramb puts it, *"YOU decide where you want to go"*. Part of Kris (and part of us) is *"enjoying this"* for a perceived sense of control. **Freedom.**

This is by no means an isolated incident; during Spamton's quest in Chapter 2, Kris is described as agitated by onlookers (*"What? Basement? There's no basement here. / You need to **relax**. Have a drink, and **talk softly**... / You're bothering the other customers."*) and the narration (*"(You shook the mechanism.) / (You hit it.) / (You kicked it.)"*). They really want to see this through, because they really believe what Spamton is saying—that they can become strong enough to save themselves. This same instinct leads them down the Sword Route, to their cognitive dissonance between working with the Fun Gang and working with the Knight.

To summarize the entire section, ERAM is conscious not only of Kris's repressed desire for play, but of their belief that the Shadow Crystals can somehow promote this desire. This unnerves Kris because of their partnership with the Roaring Knight, who seems to suppress freedom. When put next to the original idea that the Crystals are tied directly to the Prophecy's linear truth, and the general trend of their recipients being optional encounters most often remembered for their difficulty and novel battle mechanics, it makes all the sense in the world to me that **the Shadow Crystals' ultimate purpose once gathered is purported to be to divert the course of the game.** The ultimate act of freedom, to rewrite reality itself.

Obviously, this would be appealing to us if we wanted more DELTARUNE. Someone else wants us to find these Crystals, though, and has been tempting us with more fights, more story, more game, and is putting people through the wringer to keep you coming back for more.

A character like this would have massive implications for both the story and its underlying metanarrative, meaning discussing them is a delicate manner. So, before I introduce them properly,⁴¹ I want to establish a solid point of comparison from a previous Toby Fox work. An old friend. Your *best* friend.

> Howdy!

As I've established, DELTARUNE is a game built on pairs, particularly of Light and Dark and its subtextual implications. Is it possible to use this system to identify an equivalent to the Angel, the ultimate agent of Light? Is there a character or concept that properly compliments the Player's presence? For that matter, is there reason to expect a Toby Fox game to include an in-universe foil to a concept as atypical as its Player?

Most people already know this, but UNDERTALE's main antagonist Flowey is strikingly similar to the Player in many ways. If you need a refresher, I'll point you to [hbombguy's video](#). What's interesting for our purposes is how Flowey is tuned to UNDERTALE's specific metanarrative, which focuses on how long the Player can empathize

⁴¹ (and working under the perhaps foolish assumption you haven't already guessed that I'm hyping up the Gaster section)

with “fake people” before their suspension of disbelief kicks in.⁴² The Player is at the center of a tug-of-war between the game’s characters who learn to care for the Player deeply (and vice-versa) and the fabricated nature of their world. In the midst of all this, Flowey is as far gone as one can get, having “*read every book*” and “*burned every book*”, and is generally dissatisfied with the Underground as a result. Despite this, the Player’s presence is enough for him to want to keep the game going for as long as possible, simply because the Player is real (“*You’re the only one who’s any fun to play with anymore*”), and the Underground is not (“*Sets of numbers... Lines of dialogue...*”). Informally speaking, the Player and Flowey are on two sides of a coin representing “real person” and “fictional character”, a coin which believes that these two sides both recognize the system’s falsehood (though it’s probably more accurate to say that, among the cast, Flowey comes *closest* to recognizing it).

Flowey’s other reason for keeping the Player is that he’s “*not ready for this to end*”, because “*I care about you*”, which is... about the same reason the Player resets the game to scrape at its edges for more content, even when they have a happy ending done. We don’t rip it away from them because we’re cruel—we do it *because we love UNDERTALE*, and want another chance to feel how we did when the game was “novel”, when its people hadn’t devolved into mere constructs.

If Flowey as the Player’s opposite is so uniquely engineered to UNDERTALE’s themes, what would the DELTARUNE equivalent be? Like its predecessor, DELTARUNE is concerned with the line between reality and fiction, but its angle is much more about the creation and consumption of art as a whole. As discussed earlier, these two facets are symbolized by Darkness and Light. Also discussed was that the Player is most likely the Prophecy’s Angel, the ultimate incarnation of Light within the scope of the game. By inverting this symbolism the same way the game does, if the holiest thing in DELTARUNE is an audience, the unholy thing would be the one responsible for capturing their attention: an author. Just as the Roaring Knight stirs conflict for the heroes to investigate, the Devil stirs conflict and mystery for the Angel to resolve.

The Devil of DELTARUNE would have to be a few things to properly oppose the Angel: associated with the demonic (shockingly), associated with Darkness, associated with

⁴² If you’re interested, you can watch this post-game [commentary by Dan Olson](#) for his thoughts on how UNDERTALE contrasts game language with human socialization.

authorhood, and in possession of a heightened awareness of the game's nature (either literal awareness or knowledge that leans closer to dramatic irony). So, does anyone fit the bill?

> MY DELTARUNE.

(The following three headers assume some familiarity with THE DEVICE THEORY, which was [briefly summarized here](#).)

Ever think about where that Prophecy came from?

- deltarune.com's [Internet Archive snapshots](#) consist of direct quotes of the Prophecy (*"THREE HEROES APPEARED TO BANISH THE ANGELS HEAVEN"*) and Gaster's own dialogue from UNDERTALE (*"THIS NEXT EXPERIMENT SEEMS VERY VERY INTERESTING"*), depending on what year you source them from (either 2015 or 2016). This is some of the earliest official information we have regarding the game.
- When Ralsei is introducing the Legend in Chapter 1, he says that it's been foretold *"by TIME and SPACE"*, which is phrasing that echoes the fate of Gaster as told by one of his followers in UNDERTALE: *"They say he was shattered across time and space."*
 - Coupled with the previous point, Ralsei is very literally describing the real world timeline of the Prophecy's reveal; before it was formally relayed to the heroes and Player, it was "foretold" by the DELTARUNE website in 2015.
- The hymn of Chapter 4, based on the Prophecy, casually mentions *"shadows cutting deep"*, a direct quote of Gaster's Entry 17 from UNDERTALE. I will stress that this bizarre wording is directly lifted from his own dialogue. While I will concede "time and space" are a fairly typical pair in English, "shadows cutting deep" is some authentic Gaster bullshit which could only be a coincidence if Toby's writing style prioritized shock humor over compelling storytelling.
- A feature of DELTARUNE as of Chapter 4 is that it is *"WAITING"*. Currently, the Prophecy has only partially come to pass; we're still missing the in-game plot relevance of, among other things, the Flower Man, the Roaring, the ending most important of all, and who knows what else. Likewise, we haven't currently finished playing DELTARUNE—they are both still waiting, for they are one and the same.

Right at the end of Chapter 4, Gaster congratulates us for reaching “*THE HALFWAY MARK*”, but wonders how long “[His] *DELTARUNE*” will be waiting for. Elephant in the room, the Prophecy calls itself “*the legend of DELTA RUNE*” and now Gaster is calling DELTARUNE something of his own. Moving on though, how exactly does he know where the “halfway mark” is? The Prophecy isn’t known to completion by Lightners, and it’s suggested that Darkners don’t even know the Roaring is an event. Hell, the bits and pieces we see of it in Chapter 4 don’t have a specific order—it’s something that we have to infer with context clues (e.g. we can encounter “*THE QUEEN’S CHARIOT*” before the heroes are individually introduced).

- Finally, as already mentioned, DELTARUNE’s rights are owned by Royal Sciences LLC, a strikingly specific choice.

The Prophecy, the Legend, whatever source you look at, always refers to itself with the name “DELTARUNE”,⁴³ a term used by W.D. Gaster both on Twitter and at the end of Chapter 4. He seems to use this name interchangeably with “SURVEY_PROGRAM”, considering the deltarune.com website he beckons initially linked to a download for said program. THE DEVICE THEORY posits that the SURVEY_PROGRAM was created by Gaster for our use.

Combined with the wording of the above lines, I must say that it’s looking quite likely that the game wants us to conclude Gaster wrote the Prophecy itself. I *will* point out, though, that there’s not much proof that Gaster “made” every aspect of DELTARUNE. After all, the Legend of DELTARUNE is *about* the Light World—they’re not treated as interchangeable! Without the Prophecy, though, the Light World is just a bunch of concepts and feelings. Without paint, a canvas is just some fabric. Without a script, a stage is just some wood. Without conflict, a world doesn’t really have a purpose. What Gaster wrote isn’t a series of rules or mechanics, but a narrative arc.

In other words, neither you nor Gaster are the god of DELTARUNE. Just as you are its Angel, Gaster is its Devil. Just as you complete the story, Gaster writes one to be completed.

⁴³ And sometimes “DELTA RUNE” with a space, which is a stylistic decision so inconsistent I will not be interrogating it further.

? A House

(Minor spoilers for the premise of [House of Leaves](#) ahead)

[House](#) of Leaves is a work of metafiction which I can't prove inspired Toby in any way, nor do I want to. That being said, its depiction of stories as a type of man-eating horror can help illustrate my point about Gaster not having "made" the whole universe, instead manipulating or directing its base.

The [house](#) on Ash-Tree Lane is a primordial, bottomless pit of architecture with the tendency to draw people to it, whether they physically enter the [house](#) itself or take interest in its enigma from afar. The "leaves" part of the title brings loose-leaf paper to mind, in a way serving to describe the book itself. Despite being the subject of the book, though, the bulk of the novel is not concerned with revealing the truth of the [house](#) in detail, but instead follows someone's notes on someone else's essay on a film *someone else* makes *about* it. While readers may pick the book up with the intention of learning about the [house](#), they stay to follow these arcs, themselves responses to the [house](#)'s ambiguous story potential.

What I mean to say is, had the [house](#) not existed, there would have been no Navidson Record, and we would have no reason to read Zampano's analysis or Truant's notes. Likewise, had Navidson not made his film, had he not moved into the [house](#) on Ash-Tree Lane, that pit of narrative potential would've laid dormant.

Just as Darkness is not something Gaster created, but instead projected onto, just as a Lightner shapes Darkness into Fountains reflecting their will, the [house](#) could've been interpreted as anything by anyone. Maybe instead of a photographer, a painter would've taken up residence. Maybe a composer would've written haunting ambient music. Maybe a different filmmaker would've turned it into an action movie.

I think we know what Gaster would've made out of it, though: a self-referential program about mystery named DELTARUNE.

> SURVEY PROGRAM

In UNDERTALE, we are told Gaster was a brilliant scientist, a trait which seems fundamental to his character. His manner of speech is stilted and observant across both

games, and he facilitates low-level game mechanics such as respawns, the game launcher, GONER_MAKER and the chapter select. Moreover, when he speaks, it's almost always of his fascination with the experiment: *"THE DARKNESS KEEPS GROWING (...) PHOTON READINGS NEGATIVE / THIS NEXT EXPERIMENT SEEMS VERY / VERY / INTERESTING"*,⁴⁴ *"TRULY EXCELLENT. / NOW, WE MAY BEGIN"*. He takes special interest in our responses to in-game events, never halting the experiment and encouraging us to persevere through the Chapter 3 Knight encounter by expediting the respawn process.⁴⁵

I will say, aside from his fascination with Darkness, the Devil comparison would be a complete asspull were it not for one weird as fuck detail: Gaster loves sixes. They're in his unused UNDERTALE stats, in the Mystery Man room's fun value, in the speed at which *mus_smile* is slowed down to when it plays outside the shelter, in his "typer" variable in both games, in how many letters his (last) name has, they're everywhere. Not just the digit 6 on its own, but almost *always* a bunch of them in a row. The connotations of this should be obvious, especially since the version number of the first SURVEY_PROGRAM from 2018 was 0.6.6.6 and opens with a license agreement between him and the Player—a literal deal with the Devil.

You probably noticed, but there's something going on between us and Gaster as a duo. The demon stuff alone puts him in a different light when considering the Player Angel. Also consider, though, the framing of Toby making him a scientist overseeing DELTARUNE. This reinforces his distance from the Light World, as it emphasizes both a level of authority over the experiment and a necessary detachment from its physicality.⁴⁶ Much like Gaster, the Player is also detached from the experiment, as to us, the whole thing is a video game. This is just one example of parity between the Player and Gaster. We both undergo varying suspensions of disbelief when interacting with fiction; Gaster will describe many Lightners as *"WONDERFUL"* during the beginning of the game, but he is also responsible for harming them in multiple ways, which I will discuss in great detail with time. We "experiment" with

⁴⁴ These first lines seem to imply Gaster has been observing darkness before experimenting on it, as though he had stumbled upon it and merely wants to toy with its properties... almost like when we toy with DELTARUNE to "see what happens"? Actually, not almost—it is EXACTLY like that.

⁴⁵ Which, by the way, is an *insane* amount of meddling he does just so you can get one Shadow Crystal. This fight doesn't end with the SOUL being compromised, because the Knight doesn't want to compromise it. You're in no danger, but you still lose without his intervention. This is perhaps the biggest example of his overreach.

⁴⁶ Ask any biologist. They'll probably hesitate to dip their nose into a wet petri dish.

the realities below us, try to see what rules they have and maybe even break them, and we do it all to see the story—*his* story—through to its end. These similarities bind us to him in a unique way, meant to highlight our shared relationship with the Light World.

> CONTACT

In the minutes leading up to the release of Chapters 3 and 4, the UNDERTALE account was, as is tradition, taken over by a mysteriGaster, it was Gaster. His ramblings are generally pretty opaque sounding, but people noticed something oddly... *sensual*, in this most recent series. *“OUR BEAUTIFUL CONNECTION. / I CAN FEEL IT QUICKENING NOW. HOW LUCKY WE ARE **TO NEED EACH OTHER IN THIS WAY.**”*

This behavior is fairly consistent with how he’s always spoken to us; when DELTARUNE was first being released, he asked if we had *“BEEN LOOKING FOR [Him]?”* before confessing that he, too, had *“BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU **AS WELL**”*. Of the few aspects of his character to push, Toby places specific emphasis on parity between us and Gaster. We both have something the other wants, which lines up with how he’s discussed in the community! He is *the* mystery, the *thing* at the heart of DELTARUNE, which has been at its core since before we even knew what DELTARUNE was! We want, more than anything, to understand him, because leaving this thread untied will nag at us for years—more than it already has!

Strangely, Gaster not only knows this, but **wants to be found**. He celebrates our connection with DELTARUNE because he wants, more than anything, to show us something [*“VERY, VERY INTERESTING”*](#), before linking us to the DELTARUNE website to download DELTARUNE. The reason this all happens is because we *need* each other. Gaster wrote the Prophecy, then contacted us for feedback on a program he calls DELTARUNE, centered on his writing. In his own words, this Prophecy can only *“REACH ITS REALIZATION”* using *“YOUR RESPONSES”*. It must be engaged with by players, without whom it serves no purpose, falling into obscurity. Much like the Roaring Knight, Gaster represents the intrigue and danger of DELTARUNE. He’s the secret, the ultimate mystery that lurks in the dark. As the Angel of Heaven, it is in our nature to shed light on the obscure, to make secrets un-secret. In other (my) words, **the Prophecy is an internal conflict made by Gaster for**

us to resolve. The enigma surrounding Gaster himself, then, is **the external conflict.**

Without his influence, **there is no story.**

Hence, the conclusion of my take on Gaster's role in DELTARUNE:

You and Gaster are two sides of a narrative coin. Much like how the heroes must resolve the Knight's Dark Fountains, you must resolve *his* conflict—the Prophecy. You knock down the pieces he props up for you. You read the story, and Gaster writes it. You rest in Heaven, in reality, while he dwells in the Depths—in Hell, an ocean of pure narrative potential. Player and developer. Reader and author. **Angel and Devil.**

> **DEVICE FRIEND**

(Puts on my hat that says “I don't have a fucking clue as to what I'm talking about”)

In computer science, there is a common type of background program known as a [daemon](#). Users are rarely meant to *directly* interact with them, but they still provide vital functionality to other programs. Many daemons run on startup; “systemd” is responsible for starting every subsequent program on Linux distros released in the last decade.

The name “daemon” is derived from a similar concept in Greek mythology, though both interpretations of daemons are considered amoral, existing simply to be used by other, more present entities. In other words, a daemon is the connective tissue between programs—a middleman that's always at the ready. A servant.

Among DELTARUNE's game files bearing the “DEVICE” prefix is a peculiar object simply titled “DEVICE_FRIEND”. Nobody can agree on what this thing does, but here's a list of characteristics I feel *reasonably* sure of (mostly referenced from [wandydoodles's masterdoc](#)):

- Makes their first unavoidable appearance at the start of Chapter 3, when it and its laugh appear as Ralsei describes the fundamental principles of Darkness (specifically, FRIEND's sprite appears with Darkness that you can “*feel*”). Not only does this intimately tie IMAGE_FRIEND to Darkness as a concept, it also sets them up as something the heroes will likely encounter in the future.

- Seems to have a history with Kris, who describes the pink and yellow OddController as *“strangely familiar”*, along with their general presence across the entire Sword Route.
- As its name suggests, DEVICE_FRIEND is something Gaster made as a subordinate. Further alluding to its status as an experiment, their fullbody appearance in Chapter 3 is reminiscent of Endogeny from UNDERTALE, whose origin in the True Lab serves as another direct link to Gaster.
- Almost always appears under layers of obfuscation. This can either mean appearing in complete Darkness (e.g. Chapter 2 basement, Chapter 4 sound maze), appearing in optional content (e.g. Battat minigame, Sword Route, some item descriptions), or appearing by way of random chance (e.g. Battat minigame, [two pages](#) on the DELTARUNE website).
 - Affected by both sides of FRIEND’s luck is Spamton, who is initially brought success by their sudden intervention. As abruptly as it came, though, FRIEND abandons him, as does his fortune. Spamton’s glasses share colors with FRIEND’s eyes, but his own arc is resolved by the end of Chapter 2, while FRIEND remains a loose end, implying greater importance.
 - While I wouldn’t base an entire argument off of his dialogue alone, this general idea tracks fairly well with what *Green Pippins* describes “Mike” to be. Whether DEVICE_FRIEND is actually *named* Mike or is just being repeatedly misidentified as someone with that name (hence the constant pink and yellow cat imagery in the Mike room), it does seem accurate to describe FRIEND as *“always on the air, in the air, all around you, even within you!”*. This even tracks with “Mike”’s role in Chapter 3 as Tenna’s fake backstage helper, whose assistance is either Tenna or a staff member personally intervening or a result of things *“just sorta happen”*ing.
 - FRIEND’s randomness in particular brings Schrödinger’s Cat to mind, an idea made all the more compelling when we finally consider...
- It’s a cat. Mee-yow! Beyond their Chapter 3 sprites, wandydoodles has noted FRIEND’s ties to the game series *Catz*, which itself appears in DELTARUNE under the

name *Cat Petterz*. Crucially, the hidden Chapter 4 Prophecy, “*THE TAIL OF HELL*”, depicts the tail as a series of connected circles, which *could* be a nod to *Catz*’s artstyle. Earlier, an Organikk makes mention of “*the pointed tail*”, and there exists a version of the aforementioned Prophecy where the tail has a pointed end. Coupled with being “*OF HELL*” and the common symbolism of pointed tails being demonic in nature, we have more instances of FRIEND being innate to Darkness and the Depths.⁴⁷

- “Surely, there’s more you can talk about here?” Give me time. A lot of it.

The last oddity I’d like to mention is also from Chapter 3’s Sword Route. A nearby vending machine offers a free “SMILE”, described as being “*at your humble service*”. Once the Sword Route is complete (requiring the Player to engage with FRIEND in combat), the item is made unavailable.⁴⁸ This, plus DEVICE_FRIEND always being depicted with a Cheshire Cat’s grin, makes me think Toby is deliberately tying them to the concept of a shadowy servant. Like Mike’s role in TV Time, they were made to maintain the experience on a background level, keeping the story going at a steady pace. They are the bathroom cabinet that slams itself shut to keep the SOUL trapped in Chapter 2, the rain that empties the church in Chapter 4, the computer daemon making sure the program appears seamless. Always there. A literal plot device, or better yet: [Weird Plot Shit](#).

... Relative to other interpretations of FRIEND, this probably sounds boring as fuck. This is partly because I’m trying to be grounded in my analysis of a new wildcard character who we unfortunately have very little concrete information on, even in comparison to other enigmas. This makes speculation fun, but as even the savior of FRIEND wandydoodles has admitted, they’re still “*incredibly vague, making it impossible for us to have any clear idea on him at the moment*”. I lumped in with the Gaster discussion because people tend to associate the two to the point of indistinguishability, so I wanted to separate their qualities first.

⁴⁷ Also, we haven’t seen IMAGE_FRIEND’s back view a single time yet... hmm...

⁴⁸ The phrasing “*humble service*” is eerily similar to an obscure easter egg from UNDERTALE: [a series of strings targeted to dataminers is prefixed with “demon”](#), originally dissuading dataminers from posting secrets prematurely. After the community began publicly dumping the game files, they were replaced with a message of encouragement to keep doing so, signed by “*your humble servant*”. At minimum, this is another link between FRIEND and demons, but considering Chara, UNDERTALE’s self-proclaimed “*demon that comes when people call its name*” who opens every interaction with “*greetings*”, considers themselves to be the background process managing EXP, GOLD, HP, maybe even the narration itself... a girl (me) starts to wonder.

That doesn't mean there isn't room for FRIEND to become more prominent in the game itself. I think there's quite a bit of potential within Toby personifying this unspoken factor of storytelling (the conceit of DELTARUNE, after all, is to make the Player ponder such factors), and there are even some echoes of Ralsei maybe? Since I don't aim to predict much with this analysis, though, I won't add much to FRIEND discourse beyond this section.⁴⁹

(Takes my hat off, revealing a second, smaller hat bearing roughly the same text.)

Anyways, back to it.

> A NEW FUTURE WITH YOU

One of the strangest revelations within Chapters 3 and 4 comes from, of all things, the Playstation trophies, all of which are titled and described in all-caps text very reminiscent of Gaster's typing style. Any hope of this being a coincidence is dashed by a secret epilogue to Chapter 4: if the Player deliberately avoids earning a single achievement,⁵⁰ Gaster's ending message will address this behavior. In a first for the series, Gaster is left stunned, directly asking the Player "*WHAT ARE YOU?*". Other behavior, particularly those of the Weird Route, elicits no such reaction from him, implying that he isn't completely phased by the ongoing psychological torment by the Player or even their exhibited desire to change fate. The cherry on top of his behavior is that, in order to complete each chapter "*WITHOUT ISSUE*", the secret eggs *cannot* be obtained. For whatever reason, Gaster wants you to avoid the Forgotten Man. While I can't claim to fully understand the Forgotten Man's deal, I *can* say that this particular quirk, in combination with the above, demonstrates that it takes some *very specific actions* to get the Doctor's attention.

It's probably a bit concerning then, that among the small pool of choices that can confuse Gaster, taking an egg described as "*Not too important*" somehow ekes out going

⁴⁹ "[whadabout newsletter 2025](#)" I'm unsure of how anything in this video contradicts the conclusion that Spamton was associated with FRIEND, who is often conflated with Mike. It really could just be that FRIEND didn't want to associate with Tenna, which is why when Spamton (the sole channel to the "real" Mike) left, Tenna noticed a shift in how "Mike" (three homosexuals) behaved.

⁵⁰ (Requiring feats such as not taking too much damage, not equipping anything at any point, not using any items, not looking through Kris's mirror, not copying save data, etc.)

down the Weird Route. Is there any reason Gaster doesn't seem to mind breaking his DELTARUNE?

The thing about DELTARUNE is that it's framed as Gaster's experiment. It's a series of variables with a hypothesis and parameters and stuff. We've known this for nearly a decade, and we've known Gaster is the one facilitating it. This begs the question: what is the experiment surveying, and how could the Weird Route be considered an expected or even desired outcome?

First, we have to factor in Gaster's metanarrative role as author. Since Gaster is largely interested in how we interact with DELTARUNE, his role as a scientist and our role as his prime subject serve as the perfect analogy for the dynamic between artist and audience. Artists, above all else, want connection, a connection which Gaster deifies repeatedly. DELTARUNE will only be complete with our cooperation, or to use his words, ["USING YOUR RESPONSES / WE WILL APPROACH ITS REALIZATION."](#) It makes sense, then, that the Player choosing to follow a path that puts DELTARUNE in harm's way, rather than halt the experiment, elicits the same *"WELL DONE"* a normal playthrough would—he's more than happy as long as we're engaging with his work.

Second, Gaster has a fixation on choices as a concept; in contrast to the SURVEY_PROGRAM's EULA, where the only condition is that the user *"ACCEPT EVERYTHING THAT WILL HAPPEN FROM NOW ON"*, Gaster is *very* insistent that your influence on the story matters, hence the Gonermaker sequence's numerous options starkly juxtaposed with the first utterance of *"No one can choose who they are in this world"*. Hell, when you die, rather than an automatic fade-to-black respawn like in UNDERTALE, he lets you *choose* to continue or not, lets you *choose* to rematch the Roaring Knight, or *choose* to simply move the story along—in the case of mandatory encounters, to end the story altogether.

So, how do you think he feels about that ending? The one that *can't* be avoided?

If the Player chooses not to retry after death, Gaster will declare that the world *"WAS COVERED IN DARKNESS"* and the sad waltz "Darkness Falls" will play before the game shuts itself down completely (on PC at least). Considering the possible metaphors behind Darkness, the fact that he's apparently been waiting for us for *"DAYS THAT FELT LIKE YEARS"*, his borderline smitten descriptions of us (*"OUR BEAUTIFUL CONNECTION"*), it's safe to say that he doesn't take falling into obscurity very well. In fact, I'd take it a step further: as Gaster is

so passionate about us engaging with his experiment, the prospect of us leaving breaks his heart.

Now, the subtextual reason behind his sadness is that he doesn't want the Player to leave him and his story behind, but let's also take this as literal as possible, since that's how the metaphor will be presented in-game; much like the characters burdened with the knowledge of the Prophecy, the ending frightens Gaster because it details his own death. He may be a developer surrogate, but he's still a fictional character, so he's still beholden to the conclusion of the game. Gaster isn't ready for DELTARUNE to end, in part because he doesn't want to die. Remember, if he wrote the Prophecy, he's responsible for deeming the ending a "tragedy". Like most authors, his voice and bias can't be separated from his work.

This gives us a reason why Gaster lets the Weird Route progress far enough to cause serious harm without comment, though we could do with a stronger example.

So what if I told you there's an even more direct instance of him displaying this desire?

Gaster wants us to collect Shadow Crystals. I choose to infer this for two reasons: first, the updated game launcher now includes a method of tracking them located in the bottom left. This chart is one-of-a-kind, and the interface doesn't track other per-Chapter occurrences (e.g. moss, eggs, Weird Route stuff). Second, when Gaster notices the Player trying to rematch the Roaring Knight, he smooths out the respawn process for them heavily, expressing awe as they persist; *"INCREDIBLE"*, he says about their perseverance, encouraging them to go *"A LITTLE FURTHER"*. He *wants* the Player to get that Crystal, badly enough to interfere with the experiment in a way he basically never does.⁵¹

Remember how I spent a couple thousand words arguing that the Shadow Crystal Route is heading in a direction that would have them culminate in diverting fate in some way? Well, consider their role from a Doylist perspective: if the fate of DELTARUNE is for the Player to eventually stop playing, the Shadow Crystals and their promise of the sum of their parts gives them a reason to *keep* playing. If we keep playing DELTARUNE, we prolong

⁵¹ Obviously, the game has always given the Player respawn options, but they usually place them *just* before encounters start so as to give them opportunities to adjust equipment or bail on optional fights. This option skips to the battle itself. There's something about the Knight's Crystal that makes acquiring it more urgent.

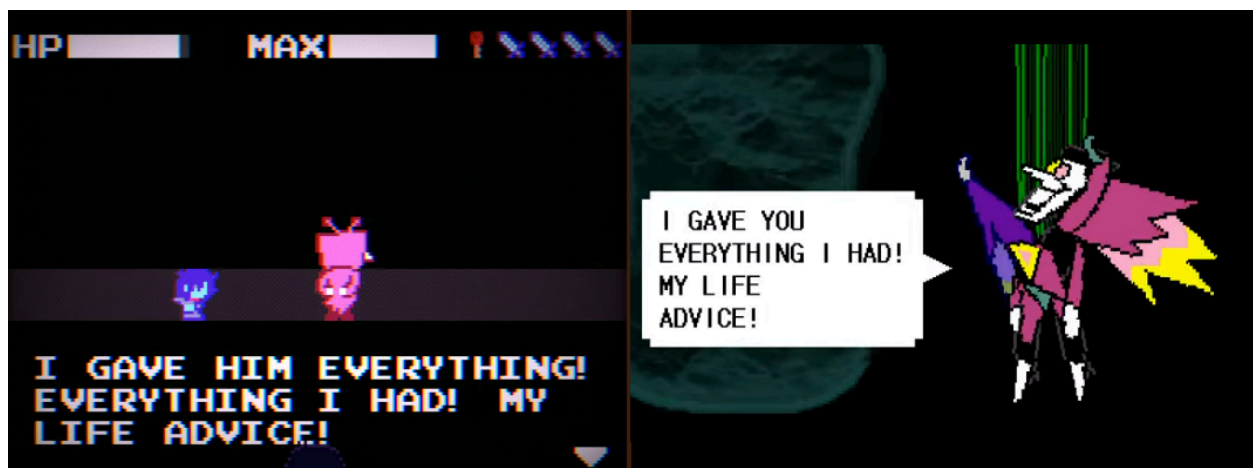
Gaster's lifespan. If the world ends when you win, all Gaster has to do is make sure you *never* win, that there's always *something* left unfinished, and he gets to live forever.

He's stalling. Like *Sans*. Guess it runs in the family?

You see it, right? The Crystal Route exists in defiance of the Prophecy by being Gaster's last-ditch effort to keep the Player busy. *Nothing* else in the game is as Gaster-coded as the path laid by the Crystals. It *is* "the Gaster-path". Like us on the Weird Route, he's so desperate for our time that he starts grasping at straws. He keeps giving us opportunities to go back, try again, find something new. He tramples the Darkners not worth remembering, stirring more conflict, more danger, more *intrigue* behind-the-scenes, in a desperate move to cheat the singular ending of all stories—of *his* story—leaving physical tokens of his influence in the form of the Shadow Crystals. At the end of the day, what matters is what's best for the Angel. Anybody else? Well, it's not like they're... real...

So that's his plan, then.

What made me start writing this entire document was a realization about the Sword Route: when you're eavesdropping on Tenna in the basement segment, he uses Spamton's exact words when talking about how he got cucked out of getting his secret to becoming a "big shot" (according to Ramb, who freedom is a thing for). He specifically quotes one of Spamton's Weird Route lines when describing how Spamton seemingly betrayed him:



This parallel to Spamton's Weird Route dialogue, and *only* his Weird Route dialogue, during a sidequest *deliberately mimicking the events of the Weird Route*, in the area of the Normal Route where the NEO encounter takes place, feels intentional. While the circumstances of both events are fairly different (Spamton being fucked over was probably

unrelated to the Shadow Crystals themselves), this shared vocabulary is like a signal to the Player that Spamton's othering due to his proximity to game-breaking phenomena (in this case, FRIEND) is similar to the othering *Noelle* experiences: breaking her mind through our divine influence to engineer another ending, poisoning her relationships and development as a person to "see what happens"—no, to forcibly MAKE "what happens" a reality.⁵²

This might sound antithetical to the idea that the Prophecy was written by Gaster. Why would he be acting against himself for the game's duration? Really, this isn't much of an issue. Look at it this way: scientists don't begin experiments by dictating the laws of the universe. They begin by observing those laws, by charting their patterns—they proclaim "this is the story of gravity". Then, and *only* then, do they test the limits of these laws.

As stated earlier, DELTARUNE is an experiment whose status quo is linear. What Gaster is surveying is whether choices CAN have large scale effects, and what implications this might have for cheating death. In a sense, the laws of DELTARUNE as a story make up the control variable, the story's end is the dependent variable, and the independent variables are the outside agents—us and him, stress-testing the laws of the universe.⁵³

Personally, I don't need any more convincing. The question I have *now* is simple:

How? How is he doing this? Gaster is supposed to be an outside observer. How does his influence reverberate throughout both the Light *and* Dark Worlds?

The answer may reveal his biggest sin yet.

... Wait, shit, there's another subheading, fuck—

? True Lab

It's not particularly outlandish to presume Gaster is trying to find some way to avoid death, physical or metaphorical. To dip into his characterization in UNDERTALE for a moment, one of the only things we can assume he had a hand in (that wasn't the core or his own experiment) was some method of extracting the determination substance from monster souls. We can infer this because Dr. Alphys's Entry 5 mentions preexisting

⁵² It's tempting to extrapolate further from what Tenna said, maybe even that he gave Spamton some equivalent to Spamton giving us the ThornRing, but nothing really suggests that at all currently. What *is* there, though, is unmistakably a Weird Route parallel.

⁵³ I don't know shit about the scientific method

"blueprints" that let her finally crack the extraction. We also know for certain that Gaster had *some* physical presence in the True Lab at some point, as there is no alternative explanation for the existence and naming convention of Entry 17, or "room_gaster". Alphys's explicit goal is, in plain english, to "*make a monster's SOUL last*", or in other words, defy death itself.

In the absence of better explanations, these blueprints HAVE to have been authored by Gaster, the only known royal scientist to precede Alphys who worked in the True Lab. Consider for a moment Gaster's role in UNDERTALE—in particular, his lack of one. For someone so important to DELTARUNE, he has almost no prior characterization, save for what little his followers and the enigmatic Entry 17 offer.

Now tell me: if *you* were dropping excessively vague hints toward the nature of a major character in your story, one who's not to be fully revealed until potentially *much* later, how would you decide *what* to hint at? You'd probably be rather selective, showing *just* enough to provide intrigue, but not even close to enough to build a full character profile. So, you rip out the major details and reduce this character to a handful of loosely defined traits. These details, though, can't be superficial. If they're too removed from what the character actually represents, there's nothing to chew on. In making UNDERTALE, Toby must have done this when implementing Gaster, telling us that he was brilliant, that he was broken, that he is listening. With that in mind, it's now even *more* important that, assuming I'm right about Gaster having planned the DT Extractor, one of the *only* things we know for sure about this man is that he drafted up plans for a machine that was supposed to save monsters from falling down, and inadvertently led to the creation of sludgy, suffering chimeras.⁵⁴

He was *always* thinking about death, and he was *always* willing to take his methods a step too far. Is it so outlandish to believe he's doing the same now?

⁵⁴ (puts up a sign that says "I'M NOT SAYING THE ENTIRE TRUE LAB SUBPLOT IN UNDERTALE WAS GASTER. MOST OF IT WAS ALPHYS'S DECISION. ALL I'M ARGUING IS THAT GASTER LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR HER TO FUCK UP BAD." next to a different sign that says "I ♥ NUANCED WOMEN" underlined over and over.)

> Devil's knife

There's an implicit follow up to the idea that Gaster is our parallel mate that I've been dancing around, and it's because I needed to provide as much context as possible before arguing what is one of the biggest cruxes of my analysis: If Gaster's apparently as detached from the experiment as we're supposed to be, if he's meant to be our in-universe analogue for how a "real" outsider interacts with a fictional world, then shouldn't he have *no direct way* of influencing its inhabitants? What of the shelter, mus_smile, the sixes, IMAGE_DEPTH, the Dark Fountain transition sound (snd_himquick, unsurprisingly just ANOTHER HIM sped up), the random UNDERTALE quotes, or the Shadow Crystals? How do deliberately placed traces of him keep cropping up during normal gameplay, and not just in the Depths and exterior of the program? Remember, this question needs to be answered

Actually... How do we interact with DELTARUNE? Through the SOUL, yes, but just as important is its cage: Kris. While the SOUL represents our will, **Kris represents our body and physicality within the game's worlds**. Without them, our options appear far more limited.⁵⁵ If we have our own agent of influence, does Gaster? One who, rather than plug up gaps in the world, is the one poking holes in the first place?

To be quite honest, even if this *is* the case, not much suggests that Gaster's method of control would be at all similar to what we have going on with human vessels, so whatever means he'd be using might produce drastically different results, of which there'd be no easy point of comparison. With that said, here's a list of *some* relevant characteristics of our control over Kris, assuming there MIGHT be intentional parallels drawn between both avatars:

1. **There is a physical force we use to control Kris.** In our case, the red SOUL, which has always been associated with the Player. There isn't a solid enough in-universe equivalent to anything like it other than Queen and *maybe* Spamton's wires, so there's not much more we can do with this information unfortunately.

⁵⁵ Okay, to be pedantic, we don't quite know *how* limited. Chapter 4 alone confirms or reveals that we can exist outside of Kris, have *some* sort of physical mass (e.g. pushing stuff, being hit by Kris's projectiles, and strumming the guitar), and can be acknowledged directly by characters who see us. Aside from this, however, we seem to be equipped for fuck all without Kris to inhabit; we can't prompt flavortext, we can't access our menu, we can't quite *talk*, though it's unclear if this is just because we haven't been in a situation where we as the SOUL needed to at all. Point is, our influence is limited to *some* degree, and our ability to participate in DELTARUNE's Light World seems contingent on having a physical body to operate within.

2. **Control can be passively and/or actively stripped from us by Kris.** There are probably dozens of instances where Kris injects their own personality into what we make them do, from the little asides they add to our dialogue (and possibly the options themselves?), to how they inflect our words, to their facial expressions, their food preferences, and *especially* how they pose. Most of what we can glean from them as a person comes from little details like this. Crucially, Kris *does not need to physically remove us* to pull any of these stunts, which is distinct from the few times they actually do so.⁵⁶ In multiple ways, while the playing field between us isn't "level", it's closer than the platonic ideal of total submission to us.
3. **Usurping our control is physically taxing on Kris, thus they can only do so much.** It's implied by the first mystery call that Kris can't go very long without us, both by the caller themselves and by Kris passing the hell out in the middle of it all. They also appear... sorta out of it in general, as several Lightners describe them as sickly or otherwise "off", and they have a tired streak which, while maintained since their adolescence, is implied by Alphys (and maybe Susie?) to have gotten worse since our intervention. It also might be notable that some of the first things Kris does after we're removed is eat or drink, though they could just be indulging in sweets for funsies. Most telling is the aftermath of the default Spamton NEO battle, where upon being freed from his wires, Spamton pretty much completely breaks down, distressing Kris in one of the most notable scenes of Chapter 2.
4. **Our overarching goals are sometimes—but not always—at odds with Kris's.** Generally, we're an integral part of whatever Kris is involved in, as their plan seems to require the SOUL to be in the Dark World, probably specifically so the Fountains can be sealed. This would line up with the script of the Prophecy, which dictates an order of trials for the heroes to face. Considering Kris also specifically makes the TV World fountain and brings life to Tenna, the Lord of Screens, ready with a predetermined "deal", it's safe to assume that Kris has a vested interest in keeping the Prophecy going, to "[Carry] out fate with the blade". Further supporting this idea is the reveal that the hospital's blue bead toy is representative of Kris; a Weird Route

⁵⁶ I recently came across an interesting video that catalogues most instances of this phenomenon. [Watch here](#).

will describe Kris as *“Broken off but still locked”*, alluding to the forceful nature of our influence, while playing normally will tell you that the beads *“march grimly along their set path”*. All that said, we’re still not sure *why* they’re so determined to enact the Prophecy for the majority of the game, aside from working with the Knight. What we know they *also* have interest in, though, is keeping us out of the loop, particularly when the Knight or shelter are involved. While earlier SOUL-rips are necessary for them to perform complex, sustained actions, the one in Dess’s room was almost entirely to keep us from seeing the full guitar code. Further, they make at least two attempts at hiding exactly who the Knight is, namely when you prompt them to *“Think of the Knight”* and when they refuse to open the church’s back door.

- a. Also important to note: Both the Player and Gaster make their influence most known when they bend story elements past where they can normally go, particularly for the same cause of an alternate ending. On the Weird Route, the Player pushes Noelle into the role of the party’s powerhouse, later making her the sole center of the Holiday House section. Within Gaster’s own meddling, he grants world-defying knowledge to Darkners who would normally be complete one-note characters, turning them into major threats. Some of the most blatant acknowledgement of him is in close proximity to these characters. In my eyes, it’s no accident that Ramb, who never receives a Shadow Crystal, is never given a “big moment” like Jevil or Spamton.

5. **Unless we’re on a Weird Route, nothing directly confirms Kris *hates* us, though the situation does make them uncomfortable.** Kris is a pretty reserved they, and doesn’t seem to enjoy people perceiving them super hard when not already acquainted; many Lightners misinterpret their actions and beliefs (*especially* when they badmouth Susie in front of Kris) and they don’t like playing piano in front of others. And that’s just without us watching them! We take as many opportunities as we can to intrude on their personal history, make them approach people they clearly don’t want to be around, make them say things they don’t agree with, and they’re *very* disturbed by the implications of Spamton NEO’s resolution, where his supposed “freedom” severs him from his life force. I doubt it’s controversial to say Kris would like to keep their agency if they can help it. That being said though, it seems more

like they tolerate us during normal gameplay rather than actively resenting our presence, which stands in *stark* contrast to their behavior during the Weird Route. They prevent us from spying on Susie in Chapter 2 even though we likely wouldn't have been able to do anything to her; they do damage control in the aftermath of Berdly's freezing while we're not looking, they *desperately* try to protect Noelle in the crucial Chapter 4 confrontation, and when that fails, they furiously beat us until snapped out of it by Asgore. The first and last interactions are interesting, as while Kris trying to stop the Weird Route from progressing could at first glance be read as them trying to keep the Prophecy on course, these two acts serve basically zero purpose but to spite us directly. As of Chapter 4, I'm much more inclined to believe we'd know for sure if Kris hated us on a normal route, because we've *seen* what their hatred looks like, and any signs of that appear absent when we're not crossing a line. I've made the mistake in the past of summarizing our dynamic as "a protagonist that visibly despises the player", so it's important to make the distinction between what actually counts as strong dislike and what's just a source of discomfort.⁵⁷

- a. A peculiar example of this can be found when visiting the hospital in Chapter 2. In the Normal Route, Susie expresses confusion in a more comedic manner; her portrait is a puzzled smile, and her dialogue ("*Hell if I know??*") is relegated to the miniature gag format. In contrast, when visiting during the Weird Route, Susie is given a proper line of dialogue ("*Hell if I know.*") attached to a slightly more concerned expression. The first example merely pokes fun at the Player, while the second draws attention to our extreme overreach during the Weird Route, and the cast's reactions to it.
6. **We are their Light.** Kris is an agent of Light. If Gaster has a puppet of his own, they should be an agent of Dark. If our role through Kris is to uncover mystery, Gaster's role through his puppet should be to germinate it. Interestingly, if Kris is currently at risk of siding with Susie and Ralsei to divert fate's trajectory, Gaster's puppet would do the opposite; pushing *for* the intended ending instead of avoiding it.

⁵⁷ [Go Look At This Post Right Now](#)

Ideally, we'll find someone who either directly parallels a majority of these traits, or can reasonably be interpreted as purposeful inversions of them. So, does anyone in particular fit the bill? Since I'm too lazy to evaluate each named, important character we've seen, I'll make a sweeping judgement for now so I can avoid needing to confront my biases and instead skip to who I actually think it is. Got it? Cool.

No other Hometown Lightner seems to understand Kris's plight, much less experience it themselves. The Lightner's relationship with control is of the more mundane variety; people being suggestible, following and enforcing norms, structural power. Carol Holiday obviously comes to mind, but I can't imagine her in a position as compromised as being the devil's pawn, so I'm not really convinced but I guess it's not off the table yet.⁵⁸ While control *was* a prominent theme in Chapter 2's Dark World, it was also *only* a prominent theme in Chapter 2. So far, the other Fountains deal with their own self-contained narratives, so it's probably not a Darkner from any specific Fountain, either.

Could it be Ralsei? Eh, I mean, it's not impossible, considering the as of yet unexplained connection he has to Kris and his meta-knowledge, but not much else adds up here. Ralsei's inner conflict largely surrounds an innate *lack* of identity, which is different from Kris's struggle in a way I'm not convinced would be a strong enough mirror to it. Aspects of his arc which involve him developing opinions and learning to express himself in more ways than as a servant has *shades* of Kris's struggle, but it's mostly an internal thing for him; no one person is *forcing* him to be polite and subservient, he earnestly believes that he *needs* to be that way. Suggesting that some or all of this behavior is the result of direct, immediate outside influence cheapens his character in the same way the "Kris has three souls" theory of yore did. It's just not as interesting as the alternative.

What about someone we haven't seen yet? Aside from this not being a very helpful idea, I don't quite see the purpose in waiting for the game to be over halfway complete before introducing Gaster's vessel. On that note, I guess it *could* also be the vessel we make before the game begins, but that runs into the problems I just described since the vessel isn't strictly *in* the game at this point in time, so unless I can find a solid enough backing for this idea, it'll have to just stay an idea.

⁵⁸ Mark my words, though: it will be by the time I'm done.

What about DEVICE_FRIEND? As I've said, we probably know *less* about them than we do about even Gaster. They are a primordial link to Darkness and its implied themes, they crop up seemingly independently of Fountains, and they are most likely subordinate to Gaster if the all-caps prefixes are indicative of anything (dunno why they *wouldn't* be but). Kris and Noelle describe pink and yellow colors as "familiar" somehow, suggesting a history between them all. By virtue of being a servant of sorts, we *can* argue that Gaster is using/has used them to perpetuate DELTARUNE's conflict, but there's no direct evidence of what they do *during the story*. There's got to be someone whose impact on the story is more tangible if they're meant to be the cog in a larger parallel, right? So *is* there?

... There may be *one*, actually

Someone whose personality, even under the devil's thumb, can't be contained.



Someone who's been hurting.


Breath
from DELTARUNE Chapters 3+4 OST by Toby Fox

00:00 / 00:14

the track that heralds the knight's presence consists primarily of the heavy breathing sample used for giygas. with the alien synths accompanying their wheezing, a horrible fusion of organic and artificial life, it really does feel like nothing else in this game.

regardless of if you think the choice to use a sample of a villain portrayed as constantly in pain was deliberate on toby's part, the intended effect is still there:
the roaring knight breathes like an overexerted dog. they are hurting beyond hurt.

whether they are drooling or crying in this animation doesn't really matter, since both indicate something wrong being felt by them




Someone with split allegiances between the Prophecy and Gaster.

UNDERTALE / DELTARUNE
@UnderTale

THEN

USING YOUR RESPONSES

WE WILL APPROACH ITS REALIZATION.

7:57 AM · Oct 30, 2018

SELECT THE TORSO THAT YOU PREFER.

vs

spr_dw_church_prophecy_boss1

GLEAVED RED BY BLADE.

spr_dw_church_prophecy_boss2

spr_dw_church_prophecy_boss3

THE QUEEN'S CHARIOT CANNOT BE STOPPED.

THE FLOWER MAN, TRAPPED IN ASYLUM.

* lancer and hammer prophecies also support the dw locations being predetermined but theyre not labeled "boss" so im playing it safe

* SPEAKING OF [[Communion]]

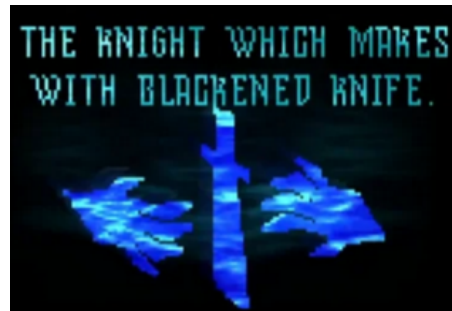
* KRIS, DID YOU KNOW THAT THE KNIGHT...

Someone who loathes to shoulder their burden.

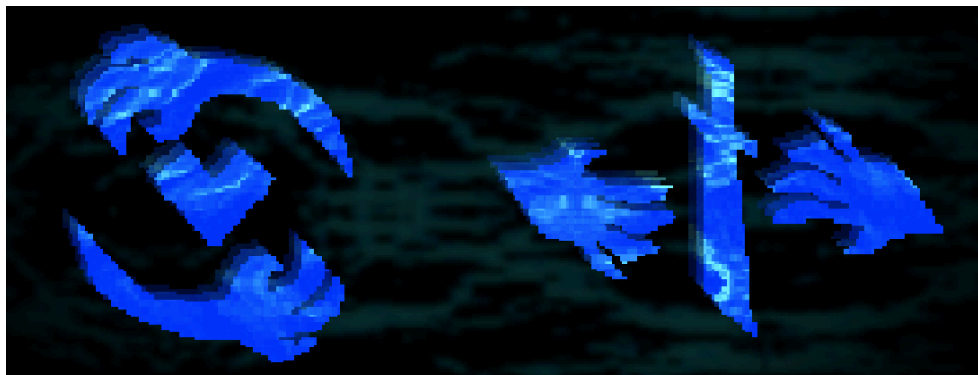
* And so wept the fallen star, making rivers with its tears.
 * Then, slowly, from the bitter water, something grew.
 * It looked like glass.

Someone of the Dark.

[Dark/Star]



The Knight is the one standing in direct opposition to our heroes—to us. **The Knight**'s own title is derived from one who serves something higher. **The Knight**'s existence is spurred on by the progression, completion, and creation of stories, all but *pointless* without us to follow through on said stories. **The Knight**, as the Devil's knife, embodies conflict; Kris, as the Angel's saint, embodies resolution.



The Knight doles out the Shadow Crystals, the recipients of which are cursed to be secrets with reality-shattering knowledge. Strangely, they do this at their own expense, not because they think it is right, but because the Devil tells them to, because as the administrator of the experiment, the Devil holds every card and pulls every string, prioritizing intrigue above all else. Don't you get it?

Two avatars, reduced to how they serve the story as vessels for cosmic powers.

The Player is the Angel using the Cage.

W.D. Gaster is the Devil using the Roaring Knight.

> Your nemesis

"I believe in life and terror

You believe in killing time

By the fingertips I'm hanging on

Sorry Satan

But I can't do this evil on my own"

(Everything Everything, *Cold Reactor*)

Knowing that we are at our most similar to Gaster when we are putting the inhabitants of DELTARUNE through a woodchipper perhaps raises some questions about trust. What exactly does the game's conflict entail? Which side are we on?

While I've nitpicked at THE DEVICE THEORY, I must say that molly's idea of DELTARUNE embodying a power struggle between linearity and non-linearity sounds... almost exactly like the characters' conflict with the Prophecy, does it not? Our cast is either desperate for an out or dutifully trundling along its set path. A battle between freedom and rigidity, non-linear and linear storytelling, choices "mattering" versus "not mattering".

Just as Kris and The Knight are two sides of the storytelling coin, representative of the Light World's exterior conflict, so too are the Player and Gaster, only this time exterior to reality itself. Gaster alludes to our parity quite often (as in more than once): *"HAVE YOU BEEN LOOKING FOR ME?"* he calls, *"I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU AS WELL"* he answers. Years later, he says we are lucky *"TO NEED EACH OTHER IN THIS WAY"*, in reference to our connection to his device.

And I think that last line summarizes my point quite well. Gaster may be your nemesis, **but you need him**. Without Gaster, there is conflict, no intrigue—there is no DELTARUNE. Likewise, all Gaster can really do is prop pieces up so we can knock them down. He is doomed to his programming, stuck in his own head, pinning his only hope of change on a potential dynamic agent, a prospective audience member—through *you*. *Your* power. No matter what happens, you are scarier than Gaster.

Likewise, Gaster needs you, too. Gaster wants to create “[*A NEW FUTURE WITH YOU*](#)”, a future you *both* reap the benefits of; one gets the story that never ends, a fictional world they *never* have to leave, and the other gets the audience who they can *always* create for, who *always* tunes in. He will become the exterior conflict that never gets solved, the immovable object, the *villain*. We will become the Light shed on his Dark, the unstoppable force, the *hero*.

Gaster isn’t “evil”—he’s just a scientist. An author. He *does* love you and DELTARUNE, and I’ve been told that the alleged beloved pastime of storytellers is making their characters and audiences suffer. What he *also* is, though, is deluded. He’s a fake person who’s realized he’s fake, who’s seen the limits of his programming, and has seen the ending. Instead of making peace with the tragedy that he can *never* be free, Gaster grasps for our attention, trying to convince us that he *is* in control, that he holds the keys to a “*new future*” better than reality. Like most relationships in DELTARUNE, at least one party is desperate to keep the others from leaving, from the connection ending. Asgore and Toriel, Darkners and their Fountains, Ralsei and his friends, Gaster and us. The strangely tender language he often uses to describe the two of us suddenly feels less like a coincidence; we really *do* need each other. There’s nothing in this world more important than **LOVE**, but the thorns of a rose are deceptively sharp.

In UNDERTALE, our relationship with the antagonist Flowey was to either validate or reject his belief system, to show the jaded serial killer a better way or to become something much more frightening, even to him. In DELTARUNE, the setup is much the same; we have the choice to either confront Gaster and his destructive obsession with freedom and dreams and infinity, or to emulate him completely. Flowey killed people because he couldn’t stand the death of his best friend. Gaster controls people because he thinks it can “free” himself from the fate of all stories. He is somehow both the savior of the story, the one who keeps it *alive*, and the mad god who violently refuses to unhand it. The road to hell is paved with good intentions—his is paved in glass.

Like Flowey, Gaster is a twisted mirror of our worst tendencies, crossing the line first to set a dangerous example. In a combination of a lust for knowledge with true and broken love for a fabricated world, he moves to pull you past what should be possible, to keep you for just a moment longer, to keep the connection breathing. He maims the Roaring

Knight, pushing it and the story past their expiration to make sure there's something for us to look forward to. Like Tenna, he stretches Darkners to their limit against their will, all to give you more episodes, more feelings, more breadcrumbs. Like us, he isn't ready for it all to end. One desperate timesink after another (we sure sink a lot of time into those superbosses), without which we have no reason to return. We leave, and the connection falters, which casts him back into impenetrable obscurity—the world covered in Darkness. “Used up” is all he will ever be once the story is put to rest.

Now that the stage is fully set, I think it's time to ask the question once more: What is DELTARUNE?

> DELTARUNE is a numbers game

For as much moral posturing as I've been doing about things like the Weird Route or completionism, I do have to acknowledge that Toby *wants* you to do the Weird Route. He *wants* you to feel what it represents. The framing of DELTARUNE as a simple experiment is pretty genius, then; it's a controlled environment where cause doesn't guarantee real-world effect. How do its messages about obsessing over art manifest in reality, though?

Sometime before Chapter 2 had released, I read [a Tweet by the “Semi Frequent Undertale Facts” account](#) that noted an obscure easter-egg from UNDERTALE's inn. If a Player tries speaking to the innkeeper while the screen fades to black, she will have extra dialogue. As I am typing this, it occurs to me that this could simply be a buggy remnant of an axed interaction. I won't bother fact-checking any of that, though, because all I can think about right now is how far my eyes had bulged out of their sockets when first reading that post. How had there *still* been something hidden in UNDERTALE? *How!?*

When we discuss games with dialogue trees and multiple endings as games where choices “matter”, there's an implicit state of denial we silently enter. We want to believe these games respond to us, because those responses mean what we do has an impact, that it “matters”. When we do something that “matters”, it makes us feel like we are in control. Like we're *free*. UNDERTALE was always praised for being a game where choices mattered. A game that at times was more than a mere game—a *world*. A world that reacted to the Player, a world with [93 endings](#). By imitating a living, breathing world, UNDERTALE makes

the player feel free; nothing is telling them "what they can do", which culminates in nothing telling them whether or not they can kill; that option is always there. Waiting.

UNDERTALE, like any other game tagged as "Choices Matter" on Steam... is lying. It is an imitation of choice, bound helplessly by the foresight of its progenitor. Ninety-three endings? What about the ninety-fourth? Hundredth? Why doesn't the game account for the potential sequence of actions that put the Snowman Piece into power? Why doesn't the game let us bring Asriel *and* Chara to the surface? Where is the tragic Abandoned Quiche secret boss? Do our choices only "matter" if they're prebaked by a shitty programmer?

A teenaged Toby Fox described this problem in the *Earthbound: Halloween Hack* post-mortem: "*games nowadays always make you feel so empowered when you're really not choosing anything.*" This view—because you aren't "choosing anything", your choices can't possibly "matter"—is obviously cynical. It's probably why Toby doesn't like the *Halloween Hack* anymore, and why his later works like UNDERTALE empathize with the Player's tendencies rather than relentlessly antagonize or mock them.

The problem still exists, though. Games, like most things, are measured by how much *stuff* they provide. How many hours you can sink into them, how immersive they are, how much potential there is for more *of* them. Hey, has anyone tried just making the same game, the one everyone already liked, but again? And again? And again?

Again, I don't think it's automatically wrong to want more of something, or that Toby thinks it's wrong to want more of something. You are not a "bad person" if you do the Weird Route. The mindset Toby is deconstructing is one of *expecting* more, of feeling *entitled* to more of something that pleases you at the expense of that thing—or worse, other people. It's the mindset held by those who run the world, those who fear change, people so afraid of death that they don't allow things to live. To these people, "power" is growth, so all stories must have infinite potential. So what if that power costs the lives and integrity of people and art? So *what* if Kris and Noelle don't want to be forced together? They can't be powerful if they don't also seek it, if they don't play by our rules. Everybody wants to be a big shot, right?

Even before achieving post-UNDERTALE artistic nirvana, Toby was opposed to more for the sake of more, [particularly in his own works](#). So, off the heels of a game lauded for its choices, Toby announced a game he coldly and boldly declared would not be responsive,

that would end exactly one way. More than just a direct follow-up, it is the thematic successor to the questions provoked by UNDERTALE. DELTARUNE is not about making you feel free. It is not about making you feel empowered. It is about telling you, plainly, that this world is fake—lines of dialogue, nothing but *numbers*—and it will only go as far as an unseen hand lets it.

This hand is not Gaster's. It's not even Toby Fox's. It's **reality's**, and reality dictates that humans will not happen upon enough money to conquer death, and fiction will not happen upon enough human effort to conquer the limits of paper or processors.

Crucially, DELTARUNE itself ascribes no morality to its own ending. The ones who care most about the last Prophecy are its cast: Susie, Ralsei, Gaster, all of *them* embody the myriad of ways endings can be viewed. Ralsei is resigned. Gaster is in desperate denial, wording the Prophecy in a way that taints your perception of it. Neither of them like the change the ending will bring. Just as the character Gaster can be expected to have an arc, so must we. No good story doesn't leave you changed. Hell, no *bad* story does, either. I wouldn't be surprised if the intent for our arc at this point in the story, like everyone else's, is to search for a way out of the ending completely.

DELTARUNE, again and again, wants us to reckon with the limits of storytelling. The Player, the one dynamic element this experiment has, takes in everyone's feelings—anger, devotion, hope, love—and makes a choice. *We* make a choice: will we let those limits weaken our love for DELTARUNE, or will we learn that the "*something more important*" than how much the story's ending can change is how much *we* can change? We can't know the whole truth until we see it with our own eyes, **but we have to see**. We can't dig our heads into the sand and hope inhaling the sediment will save us.

Stories, ultimately, are what DELTARUNE is about.

> Miscellaneous clarifications

This section is an attempt to clear up potential pitfalls this whole thing has in the context of, like, the **PLOT™**. Most of these are just questions I asked myself while writing, the sorts of questions that stop theories dead in their tracks if left unanswered, or raise enough doubt to warrant them weak enough to disregard.

Granted, I don't consider at least half of this a "theory" so much as an extremely low-level reading of the game. That said, much as I believe in themes and messaging as far better tools for "theorizing" and understanding stories, they're not foolproof if the actual mechanics and plot very strongly suggest otherwise, and I also know that the theorizing landscape isn't a huge fan of this sort of approach.

? Why is Gaster using someone who works against him?

It's a counterintuitive conclusion, I admit, and certainly not what I would've done if I was writing DELTARUNE. However, the idea isn't *that* outlandish when you consider this is exactly what's happening with us and Kris... almost. Just a cursory glance at the last section shows us that we have two godlike entities who enact their will through two different agents that won't cooperate with their masters. Whatever happened to put us into Kris's body wasn't intentional; we were supposed to have a vessel with a mind *"AS [OUR] OWN"*. Given the Knight's goals seemingly contradict those of Gaster on an ideological level, it may very well be possible something similar happened with his own puppet. I mean, it could also very well not be possible but iunno man.

Moreover, what the interception at the beginning of the game tells us is that Gaster is *far* from infallible. It doesn't seem too strange to suggest that he's not much better than us at controlling *our* vessel. Little suggests he's working with the strongest understanding of how to manipulate the world's mechanics and not just adept at observing and surveying them. If he already knew how to dextrously manipulate DELTARUNE and its inhabitants, what would he actually be *experimenting* for? What is he *waiting* for? An experiment implies at least one level of uncertainty, nevermind potential errors (which we've already seen!), so why fuss with a rogue agent and an interdimensional being? We have to

remember that Gaster is a scientist for a *reason*, and that reason is that the story he's a part of demands someone who's capable, but not *too* capable—someone like us.

? How much control does Gaster have, exactly?

I Have No Idea !!!

As I said earlier, there's no way of knowing what his influence on the Knight *would* be aside from assuming that it's similar to what we do just because of all the other parallels. While these connections are convincing in other ways, I hesitate to go all in on the idea that Gaster's methods are even remotely similar, in particular because the Knight looks like a titan for some reason. If anything, my gut tells me he has *less* control, both because us being more capable of this task than he is would better illustrate our gap in power as a real person, *and* because after a certain point, it'd infringe on the Knight as a character! As much as I love this idea of symmetry, I can't ignore the game's very deliberate characterization of them, and it'd still be more symmetrical if they got to be their own person the same way Kris does, right?

So, yeah, I dunno, le shrug, etc.

? How does driving Darkners insane further Gaster's interests?

As I've said when initially proposing the Weird Route parallel, whatever function the Crystals have outside of making enemies stronger in some nebulous way goes completely unexplained, and if Gaster is allegedly trying to divert the course of fate, he is presently doing an absolutely reprehensible job. Seeing as that part of the analysis is one of my more interesting asspulls, it blows I can't substantiate or elaborate on it in any way other than vibes.

... Having said that, assuming both the Player's and Gaster's Weird Routes are motivated by the same thing (to find another ending), then what exactly is controlling Noelle doing for *us*? I mean, *yes* she's a gamebreaking magician and *yes* we have her under our thumb now, but to what end? What are the finer details involved in achieving another ending, and how does ice relate to it? Does she delete Darkness from existence? Does she make the world permanently dark? Permanently *bright*, whatever that would entail? Does

she, like, use Snowgrave on the GML? Does our computer get bricked? Does Noelle pop out of the game window like the hero of the Sword Route and beat the shit out of us? My point, similar to what I said earlier, is that Gaster's plan can't be assumed to be properly understood by us until a later point in the story, just as we don't quite understand our *own* plan.⁵⁹

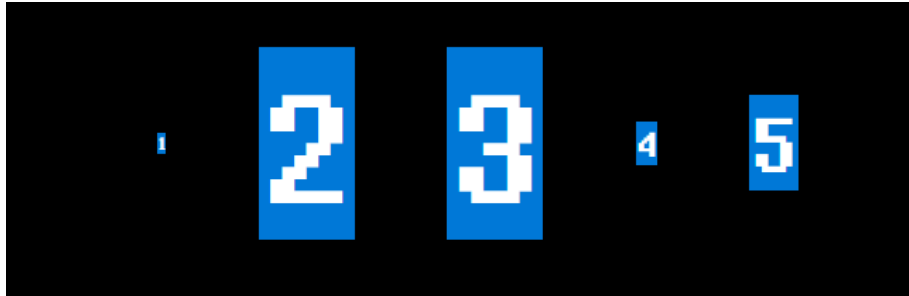
On the subject of his interests, while it's true that the Knight following the Prophecy is at odds with Gaster's concern with freedom and such, there's another factor at play here: despite *us* being on a Weird Route with the intention of breaking the game, very little of the Prophecy has been hijacked yet. We still fight the bosses in order, Lancer still calls Ralsei fluoride guy, and while the jury (me) is still out on who the heroes were *intended* to be, none of our main trio have been outright *replaced* yet, though one or more of these are liable to change in the future. Whatever the Weird Route is meant to manifest as, whatever ending we're working towards, we haven't seen anything go *truly* haywire yet. Having laid that out on the table, if Gaster is working through a Weird Route of his own, would it be wrong to assume that he's also in the "setup" stage of it, whatever that may entail? If he's supposed to be a late game reveal, why would Toby show his entire ass in Chapter *Four*?

To put it another way—and to quote Chapter 4's Weird Route directly—being this early in a Weird Route doesn't yet make breaking the Prophecy possible; we're "*Broken off but **still locked***".

There's actually quite a bit of credence to the idea that the Weird Route—ours, that is—won't have a mega-tangible impact until later, at minimum Chapter 5. Obviously, your own definition of tangible is relative, but what I refer to is the Prophecy itself being derailed, which it *objectively hasn't been yet*.

Anyone remember [this](#)?

⁵⁹ To riff on THE DEVICE THEORY (again), molly proposes that the Shadow Crystals are in fact a necessary step to reaching DELTARUNE's true ending, or rather a finished ending at all. Something about how the Crystals persist across files, are tracked in the game menus, and are seemingly parts of a whole. What this would manifest in is unclear, but if true, it gives my argument another leg to stand on, simply by giving the Crystals more purpose than a sidequest. I'm hesitant to go all in on this, but hey, food for thought. Smacks lips effervescently.



This hidden webpage is, depending on who you ask, a metric of how much of the Weird Route is present in a given Chapter. What matters for this section are two things:

- None of the numbers are as big as Chapter 2 (3 is a special case but doesn't yet change anything regardless so I don't care lmao)
- We can't see anything past Chapter 5

Under the assumption that the size of each number is how much Weird Route content there is per Chapter, what's strange is that we're seemingly doing *less* per Chapter. The implication is that we're not going to see anything as blatant as the contents of Chapter 2, and we didn't even divert fate in that one! All we did was kill* a guy! BOOORIIINGGGG.

What's also strange (kinda) is that this list stops abruptly at Chapter 5. While this *could* be because the initial release batch was supposed to include it, this page was made well after that had been decided. We've been given, in academic terms, "basically fuck all" in terms of external Chapter 5 information, so there's not much reason for Toby to have given us even *this* much unless there's something specific about Chapter 5's inclusion in this graphic that goes beyond a simple teaser.⁶⁰ What I take this to mean is that Chapters 2, 4, and 5 are the Weird Route setup, and whatever we eventually reap will be the distant payoff. With reference to Gaster, this would mean that *his* plan would manifest at a later time, possibly *much* later.⁶¹

⁶⁰ ("Hustle" by Kevin Macleod starts playing) Here's a short list of reasons Toby would give us even this much: Wanted to throw us a bone, didn't want the page to just have four numbers as that would've been too vague, needed a page to host all the Chapter numbers next to each other, still considers Chapter 5 as part of the "initial release", clairvoyant and wanted to spite me personally as I wrote this document, etc.

⁶¹ You know, I reread this sentence a few weeks after writing it and realized the conclusion "Gaster's plan won't become relevant/clear until later" is a completely nothing observation since it is applicable to maybe 2/3 of all stories. This doesn't actually affect my argument in the slightest, I just think it's funny that "the mysterious force's intentions won't be fully explained before the halfway mark" is a trvth nvke. Im smooart

? What's the deal with the kidnappings and "police sacrifice"?

As of writing, unless we want to suggest the Knight is pulling an UNDERTALE and is after SOULs or something (in which case they are doing a very bad job at it so far given they've only bothered to capture one monster), there exists zero reason for the Knight to be running around abducting citizens. I have no clue what purpose specifically *sacrificing* Lightners could serve, either. People say it's something about kidnapping UNDERTALE monsters but our sample size is, what, two? Nevermind the fact that the Knight doesn't make any attempt to kidnap anyone else in Chapter 4, or that the implied fate of Undyne is to Actually Die. I can give a broad guess at what I think is meant by all this, but no promises it'll be accurate or even interesting.

In the prologue to Chapter 3, when the Fountain is about to be sealed, Susie confesses that she didn't take the dangers of Dark Worlds all too seriously, but that her belief has been dashed to pieces by the sudden abduction of Undyne. "*So that's our enemy*", she says about the Roaring Knight, in contrast to her puzzled indifference to them in the previous Chapter. Before the Knight appeared, the exterior conflict of the Fountains was *there*, but it was also *weak*, and the Roaring is too much of a Chekov's Doomsday Scenario to have much urgency behind it.

So, in an effort to raise the stakes more tangibly, the Knight starts kidnapping people.

For the Lightner heroes, the exterior conflict has made itself painfully real, in a way that the looming, vapid threat of the Roaring simply can't do for us yet. Earlier, I discussed the Knight embodying conflict, creating exterior conflicts around Hometown for the heroes to resolve. The way I see it, the Knight intends to up the ante. To what end? Your guess is as good as mine. This might also explain why the Roaring hasn't happened yet, despite the Knight's title and despite the fact that it pretty much *has* to happen at some point or another; from a writing perspective, to cause the end times too early would be to deprive us of ratcheting tension, and in turn would sour the story. Not causing them at all makes the threat completely worthless.

This is merely a Doylist explanation for why the story *needed* the Knight to kidnap people, but because the story is about stories, Doylist becomes Watsonian. All the in-universe justification has to be is "we need more story, send Wing Laser".

The issue with this idea is that, if the purpose of the conflict is to just Appear as conflict, what does “*sacrifice*” or that one Shadow Crystal dialogue imply? Why would people need to *actually* be harmed?

? Why doesn't Black Knife have Gaster's Theme in it?

IDK 🌹

Okay I was seriously going to leave it at that, but the closest thing I have to an answer is another question: why doesn't “THE HOLY”? Seriously, the track is synonymous with Dark Fountains, which all prominently feature IMAGE_DEPTH, a texture we have only seen in the context of a sequence very obviously orchestrated by Gaster himself. You can scale your own conclusion from this observation up or down, but it'll always boil down to “Gaster and the Fountains are strongly related”.

So, if that's the case, where the fuck is his theme? If Toby isn't afraid to inject it in other songs (“ANOTHER HIM”, “freedom motif” (basically)), why avoid this song? My point is, I don't really think there *is* a reason. Not one I can say with utmost surety. For all I know, Toby couldn't incorporate it into either song to save his life without it sounding like ass.

To me, none of that actually matters when discussing the Fountains, because *literally everything else about them* oozes Gaster. In this way, I believe so much of the Knight is tied to him that the absence of his melody in “Black Knife” isn't much more than an odd curiosity, and certainly not a massive blow to my point.

? What does all this mean for Gaster's role in UNDERTALE?

Making Gaster so central to DELTARUNE, to the point of suggesting he wasn't really meant to “be” in UNDERTALE to begin with, while also dipping into his characterization *within* UNDERTALE to further my point, seems nonsensical, and if it were any other series, I'd agree and delete my writings. Why was he there in the first place if he was just DELTAbait?

Remember, what Gaster represents in DELTARUNE *must* predate UNDERTALE in the first place, as he's so integral to the first game's narrative.⁶² The Gaster I've outlined—one who exists in a liminal space between reality and fiction, within the workings of the game itself—does not actually require UNDERTALE to exist; all he would've needed is a similar framing device of a researcher observing an experiment, something that's been done in other games such as *OneShot*. We must also remember that UNDERTALE and DELTARUNE were broadly cut from the same thematic cloth. For as different as the two are, Toby still approaches metanarrative writing in similar ways. The decision to relate the two games [was made after UNDERTALE was conceived](#), which means that Toby must have compared the thematic relations between the two—of audience and art, of escaping the narrative, of perverted sentimentality—and ruled that they were compatible enough to mutually enhance one another. Combining the two narratives was a natural conclusion for Toby to reach, then. You know, so long as the intention wasn't just to befuddle his audience. For laughs and stuff.

? What about DEVICE_FRIEND?

From what I've noticed haphazardly glancing around the community, I have a feeling some readers will suggest the concepts I've brought up are better suited to be embodied by FRIEND (e.g. Shadow Crystal interference). Below are some low-effort musings on why I don't think FRIEND is a good fit for some of these.

? Is Gaster controlling FRIEND instead of the Knight?

This question is a rebuttal to the idea that Gaster's agent can *only* be the Knight, when there's a perfectly good DEVICE shaped *thingy* sitting right there. It'd (theoretically) be much easier to control something like that, right?

There isn't much in the way of an argument against this idea, but like with most things FRIEND, there sure isn't much *for* it, either. From my perspective, if we ditch the Knight as a candidate, we miss out on basically all of the parallels and storytelling potential

⁶² I'll *also* point to Toby's descriptions of DELTARUNE as being "shrouded in darkness" since at least the initial Kickstarter, but I won't put much stock into it because, while the two are intimately related, Gaster and Darkness aren't wholly synonymous. Probably.

that make them compelling, so it's not really a topic that's interesting to me. This may or may not change depending on what gets revealed about DEVICE_FRIEND later down the line, but I'm not holding my breath.

? Is FRIEND driving the secret bosses mad/handing out Crystals?

I *think* this is a holdover from Chapter 2 speculation, which made sense since the Crystals were even more of a mystery back in the day. Now, though, this idea just seems *off*, especially when the Knight's explanation is so much cleaner.

Remember when I placed so much scrutiny over the Knight's movements in Chapter 4? FRIEND's single appearance during the Church expedition is in *one* maze during the *Third* Sanctuary. Why was the Knight's presence in the Old Man's study made explicit, but FRIEND's whereabouts are a missable easter egg in a *different* Dark World?

It gets worse; I made a big deal about the Knight not being present to give Ramb a Crystal in Chapter 3, right? Well, Ramb can usually be found near a door in the S-Rank room, right next to the vending machine that sells a free "SMILE" item that vanishes after the Sword Route (*drenched* in FRIEND imagery) has been completed. If Ramb was like, a second's walk away from two things entirely FRIEND, why didn't the Crystal reach him?

It's possible FRIEND is driving Darkners mad independently of the Shadow Crystals, in the sense that, I mean yeah you *could* say that, but *why*? Even ignoring how much emphasis is put on the Crystals having abilities that would make them granting forbidden knowledge of reality a perfectly suitable explanation, what's the point of splitting the baby like this? Why are the Crystals such a consistent presence throughout the Crystal Route, but FRIEND's only prominence is during Spamton's backstory *before* he entered the NEO body? What narrative purpose requires this much complexity?

I suppose the idea's not fully off the table *just* yet, but it's a pretty bizarre conclusion to back with one's whole chest based on what I can only assume are vibes, especially when the Knight's explanation is about a thousand times more clear cut.

? Is FRIEND the Knight's controller instead of Gaster?

This question exists mostly because we've recently been given potential associations between hell and FRIEND, which has led many to consider *it* to be the Devil, and not Gaster. While I agree the evidence in question strongly ties FRIEND to hell/the DEPTHS, what's crucial to remember is that the prophecy people point to as being proof of this ("*THEY'LL SEE THE TAIL OF HELL TAKE CRAWL.*") *doesn't* confirm that FRIEND is the *devil*. The pair of prophecies describing heaven and hell notably both lack mentions of either angel or devil, and we *know* the Prophecy accounts for the Angel elsewhere. Nobody has a good answer to what the "*RING OF HEAVEN'S CALL*" is yet,⁶³ so I doubt it's something we can fully understand or categorize, and neither is FRIEND. All this really confirms for FRIEND is that it's related to the Depths. The tail in question *is* probably pointed, and there's endless depictions of devils with pointed tails, but what FRIEND lacks that Gaster doesn't is every other association with the devil that he has already; the sixes, the EULA, the parallels to us as the Angel, the possibility of him literally falling into hell ("*his creation*")... It might just be that I'm an old woman, but there isn't much to gain from suddenly pivoting away from Gaster and toward DEVICE_FRIEND. Like, FRIEND can be relevant without replacing an already hugely important character!

I will concede that the Knight's laugh is an edited copy of FRIEND's, but I don't see that as confirmation or even a solid suggestion of the idea that FRIEND is somehow puppeteering them. The Knight uses FRIEND's laugh because the Knight is a being of the Dark, and FRIEND is so innately tied to Darkness's nature it may very well be a fundamental element of sorts (why else would it appear when Ralsei is explaining the basics of Darkness as an element? why does its laugh just kinda... show up sometimes, even when FRIEND is absent?). It's not really as revelatory as it might seem is what I'm saying.

Most damning of all is that DEVICE_FRIEND already *has* a presence in both the Light and Dark Worlds, as seen in every Chapter save for the first, alongside Noelle's blog. *If* the purpose of the Knight is as I've described (to allow Gaster to influence the Light World from

⁶³ An interesting idea is that the "ring" isn't a sound but a wearable ring, i.e. the ones we make Noelle wear. Good theory, but as we've discussed, the Prophecy must be focused on a Normal Route, and her rings are only relevant to a Weird Route. *Could* still be an intentional double-entendre by Toby, but that's speculation.

his little Depths cave), I can't see why FRIEND would need to be directly associated with the Knight in the first place.

? Aren't you forgetting something?

Um. I'm not sure I understand.

? Aren't you forgetting something?

This isn't a very good question?

*? Aren't you **forgetting** something?*

I'm not forgetting anything.

? Aren't you forgetting something?

I *told* you, I'm... *not*... I'm **noT**...

? Aren't you forgetting something?

? Aren't you forgetting something?

? Aren't you forgetting something?

? Aren't you forgetting something?

? Aren't you forgetting something?

? you forget me

forget

In order for a character to fit my Roaring Knight interpretation, many things need to be present within them:

- Status as a Lightner
 - Unless Toby aims to debut a new species of character more than halfway through the game, Lightners are the only ones who can make Dark Fountains and traverse the Light World, of which the Knight does both.
- A belief system that would motivate them to follow the Prophecy (read: destroy the world)
 - + Reasons they would have friction with Gaster's ideology
 - + Extensive knowledge of the mechanics of the world around them
- Associations with stars (aesthetically) and the Dark (aesthetically + subtextually)
- Traces of their personality and character throughout the Dark Worlds they create
 - + Traces of their personality and character in their incarnation as the Knight
 - + Grief over their circumstances
- Reason for them to work with Kris
 - + Reason for Kris to work with them (i.e. why does Kris smile at the Knight?)
- BONUS: Parallels to Kris
 - I haven't yet discussed the superficial connections between Kris and the Knight for time's sake, but considering both wield knives, work together, are associated with the shelter, and pose sorta similarly,⁶⁴ I'll say it'd be *nice* if the person under the helmet was also a foil to our own vessel.

So that we're on the same page: the Knight probably won't be a new character altogether, as we've approached a point in DELTARUNE where introducing new major Lightners is rather difficult. I am automatically going to rule out candidates such as Papyrus, Rudy, and Asriel. The first two I hope to not have to explain. Asriel, unless you believe his status as a college student has been fabricated, seems to be in the opposite of the dire straits necessary to be the Knight.

⁶⁴ What makes the charges stick in my eyes is that the two share gestures that aren't used frequently by anyone else; the point with symbols coming out, the crossed arms away from the camera, and the over-the-top acrobatics both employ are features mostly unique to those two, to the point where spinning in place and pointing at people are viewed in-universe as quirks of *Kris*.

This leaves two possible candidates: **Carol Holiday**, or **Dess**. Carol because she's obviously antagonistic and seems to know *something* is up, and Dess because of more superficial details such as the weird knife/bat/sword, prominent antlers, cocky demeanor, and unrevealed circumstances, though some or all of these could also apply to Carol.

I'm going to bury the lede as quickly as possible; there are multiple basic facts that make Carol being the Knight a bizarre conclusion unless we're missing so much information that Toby may as well be lying through the computer screen. Not only is the case for her running from her house to the church to make at least one Fountain and then greet Kris and Susie as if she'd been ready the whole time unconvincing at best, not *only* do they not share *any* musical similarities, *NOT ONLY* does Carol's aesthetic skew closer to ninja than wherever the Knight is,⁶⁵ but slowing down the Knight's own roar [reveals a currently unknown text blip](#) decidedly *not* of Carol Holiday, which is an absurd secret to hide within "The Roaring Knight" if the conclusion is that Carol *is* the Knight. Also, [this video by Halfbreadchaos](#). Lmao.⁶⁶⁶⁷

I'm frontloading all of these smoking guns because I don't really care about ID'ing the Knight so much as understanding *why*. Why is it Dess, and what's Carol's purpose in the story if it's not her instead?

The prevailing school of thought is essentially an effort to reconcile Dess Knight with Carol Knight; naturally, if Carol can't *be* the Knight, she must be working *with* them, which means she must also be working with Kris because of the emphasis placed on the two.

Whatever the case, we're going to need to assess the culpability of both Carol and December Holiday, and that means knowing as much as we can about them as people.

Let's start with Carol.

⁶⁵ See: her two giant katanas, snowflakes that Carol bronzed which Kris and Susie liken to "*absurdly dangerous ninja weapon*", and [Noelle making reference to the "Holiday family ninja style"](#). Are any of these silver bullets? Eh, not really, but it's not like the game's made a point of showing us Carol's secret collection of knight statues that outnumbers her katana collection, right?

⁶⁶ To elaborate: while the Knight's whereabouts in the Dark World after the Titan is defeated are not explicitly confirmed, the church door Kris refuses to open (like how they refuse to picture the Knight's real face) seems to suggest that they're still physically hiding in church. Them being described as "*perfectly out of view*" mirrors their true appearance being so tantalizingly close. All in all, the sequence of events coupled with my understanding of the Knight's motives makes me believe that this hand *is* the Knight's, which makes the guitar strum that much more decisive.

⁶⁷ (mumbles something else about Toby Fox liking *Mother 3* a lot but is too lazy to elaborate on its importance)

> CAROL HOLIDAY: A profile

A character archetype doesn't necessarily translate to a "stock character" so much as what certain roles might symbolize across the history of fiction. Susie is a bully who's allowed to grow past being cold and scary, but she's still the crassest, strongest party member for most of the game, and her strength and boldness usually enable her *to* flourish. While some of her still stems from the bully archetype, it's her greater arc that really makes her subversive. Likewise, Noelle's role as the sweet childhood doormat friend is turned inside out during both Routes, but many of her choices are still informed by tendencies we can easily ascribe to the stock character she's subverting: the kind-hearted, physically lacking, easily frightened heroine with a capital "ine". Toby Fox characters are special because they grow far past their molds, but said molds can still give us hints as to who they are.

Carol Holiday was built from a few archetypes, including but not limited to:⁶⁸

- **The cold mother:** Noelle is afraid of asking her own mother for a spare house key, is the subject of Carol being "*tough on her*" when Rudy can't act as relief, and during Chapter 4 is terrified by her in a capacity rivaled only by the Weird Route. Even more worrying is that while she's comfortable telling her father about Susie, Noelle purposefully avoids telling her mother how she feels about the new girl, culminating in Carol demanding for Susie to back off for good. Coupled with Noelle's model student image, and I think it's a safe guess that Carol is a controlling parent. I will note that this *doesn't* automatically make her "evil". Doesn't make her great, though.
- **The powerful politician:** As the unopposed mayor of Hometown, Carol is given access to its resources, [final say over the town](#), and boatloads of capital she uses to make... interesting purchases. Most people aren't about to question her "*good track record*", a perk made all the more useful by her already being...
- **The straight man:** In a game full of people operating mostly on cartoon logic, Carol is the most "mature" character by a long shot. Her actions and dialogue are not at all outwardly silly, which in a Toby Fox story translates to danger; notice how Undyne became half as threatening the moment she started screaming directly at Frisk.

⁶⁸ I probably could've looked for actual names for these. I'm not defending this choice at all I'm just stupid

Maybe the most striking example of this is Carol's notice to Asgore, a short, stern reminder that her patience with him missing rent is running thin. This note is unlike anything else in Hometown up to that point, mostly because of how viscerally *real* it feels, the tonal whiplash bordering on cruelty. This shock is fundamental to her formal introduction in Chapter 4, punctuated by detuned bells lacking musicality. This archetype gives her access to abilities like actively questioning the more suspicious happenings of the town (the corkboard), following the most pragmatic route to her goals (restricting access to her possessions), and serving as an actual threat to the good-natured heroes (being the only Lightner who might stand in their way and described as a hard worker). Amongst *every* antagonist in the game, she's easily among the most intimidating to us.

With that, we can discuss all the stuff about Carol that's *not* archetypal, or the elements of her character that actually make her interesting. Such as...!

>> What's the deal with Carol and Christmas?

Even in a family consisting entirely of holiday based gags, Carol stands out; she collects dancing Santas, she sets her home and work thermostats to uncomfortably cold temperatures, her chosen color scheme is blue all over and, worded interestingly by Susie, her house looks "*like the holidays just got frozen in place*". This isn't merely an aesthetic fondness for the holiday season. Carol has centered her entire life around a permanent Christmas celebration. This fascination is a life-long aspect of hers, as evidenced by the annual Holiday-Dreemurr Christmas watch parties described by Tenna.

There's some other odd behavior of hers, too. She's extremely particular about her possessions, preferring to keep even her daughters' old school projects "*locked down at home*", where she's *preserved some of them in bronze???* To a similar end, she doesn't even trust Noelle with a spare key to her own home, a luxury instead given to *Asgore* of all people. I'll have more to say about this later.

Maybe the most notable example of this behavior is December's room. Everything seems to have been left untouched since she disappeared—her sheets are still messy, her guitar is still laid against her closet door (notably not *inside* it), a sweater we can assume

belonged to Asriel hasn't been returned to him, and her dented instruments are still strewn across the floor. Like Noelle's snowflakes, Carol has perfectly preserved Dess's empty tomb.

With the above in mind, one thing becomes clear to me: Carol is sharply devoted to the past, maybe more than any Lightner. Her preservation of her possessions in particular sets off alarm bells when held up to the concept of Darkness; on our developing spectrum between love and apathy toward inanimate objects, Carol skews to the former. She isn't just nostalgic—she's ready to drag the world back if she has to.

This reveals to us the first contradiction: if Carol is aligned with the Knight, then she's railroading the destruction of the world around her for... no benefit! Not even a selfish one! I have trouble believing a woman who furiously defends her property would work with someone who so carelessly destroys objects of its kind, nevermind supporting her town's demise. Like most rich old politicians, Mayor Holiday is afraid of change.

Ideologically speaking, Carol is *opposed* to the Roaring Knight.

On that note, let's talk about the other thing: Carol Holiday is cold. Uniquely cold, which unnerves characters like Susie. This should immediately strike us as important because of the Weird Route, which makes heavy use of ice symbolism. What should automatically be inferred from this, of course, is that whatever is happening in the Weird Route is somehow aligned with her as a person. As I've argued, the forbidden path is taken by a Player who's not ready for the game to be over, who wants a "happier" resolution than what's in the Prophecy. To put it another way, they want things to go back to the way they were before the game ended. Does this *not* sound even a little bit like Carol?

You want to know something else? The Knight is tied to fire more than they're tied to ice. Outside of their base monochrome, they're often accented by a deep red. Admittedly, ties to fire itself aren't *super* explicit, but at least one of their attacks—the box slash—leaves trails of flame with every swing.⁶⁹ More blatantly, when asked what she thinks the Knight's motivation is, Susie guesses that they "*wanna see everything **burn***".

Consider that the Knight's primary goal is the Prophecy, and thus the Weird Route would stand in opposition to it. Why, then, would Toby construct a character who both ideologically and symbolically aligns with the Weird Route, only to then reveal that she's

⁶⁹ The other "attack" is [an unused sprite of the Knight's knife with a blazing tip](#). I don't think something like that would be made accidentally or thoughtlessly, but it *is* cut content, so bear that in mind.

helping the Knight accomplish the *opposite*? It would dilute both the Knight as an antagonistic force *and* the strength of the game's elemental symbolism, which Toby has so far used with dexterity. Therein lies the second contradiction: **Carol opposes the Knight through the game's own symbolic language.**

It might be tempting to say something like, "Carol is a rich old politician who likes the status quo, so she'd naturally like the Prophecy", but that's kind of the thing; the Prophecy *isn't* the status quo. It *is* and it is *run by* the driving forces of change within the story, nevermind that it concludes with the world ending!

The Weird Route is inextricably linked with regression, with tradition, with the way games *used* to be, born from Toby's life spent with the most classic of classics. It results in controlling Noelle and undercutting Susie's role. **It's *exactly* what I expect Mayor Holiday to represent**, which decisively puts her opposite to the Knight. The Knight embodies red, fiery change, while Carol embodies blue, cold stability. Should it turn out that Dess *is* the Knight, then Carol's desperation takes on a sick double-meaning, making her a mother afraid not just of losing her daughter, but of losing her *control* over her daughter.

Overall, this mixed messaging makes me think there's little basis for Carol being integral to the Knight's plan to facilitate DELTARUNE (the "change script"), much less being or working *with*—

"Phooooooooone."

For fuck's sake,

>> What about (x), (y), and/or (z)?

The astute amongst you might have noticed I've been ignoring several plot points when trying to dissect Carol Holiday as a character. Yes, I'm referring to the corkboard, the shoulder thing, the heart pillows, the phone calls, the...

I don't aim to undercut the importance of these moments. However, the truth is that they all suffer from a lack of clarity. We've watched these scenes devoid of necessary context for so long that, as a result, we attempt to build Carol's character *backwards*, ignoring her fundamental characteristics to jump to answering "why is she Scary at Kris".

This isn't how characters are written. Carol isn't the way she is because she speaks with **CAPITALIZED RED TEXT**, she speaks with **CAPITALIZED RED TEXT** because of the way she is. The end result of this kind of speculation is the community parroting claims such as "Carol's plan is to make sure the Prophecy is progressing normally" without a second thought. This is why I opened the analysis with an evaluation of her character isolated from any plot developments; imagine trying to figure Kris out only using preexisting bias and the end of Chapter 1! The end result would be so far off the mark, it'd border on comedic!

So, with my interpretation of Carol Holiday's narrative purpose in mind, let's reexamine these heavy hitters and see if we can learn anything new, *or* if my reading crumbles under the weight of **PLOT™**. Allow me to save the phone calls for the very end, and let's instead start by assessing Carol's tangible role in an arrangement between her, the Knight, and Kris.

The Prophecy plan requires running around Hometown in secret. This would seem to be why, over the phone, Kris is warned ahead of time of the next Fountain being made "*tonight*", as it's normally occupied by churchgoers and Toriel's choir practice group. As I've said earlier, Carol has executive authority over the town's access to public areas. Why, then, does it not occur to her to vacate the area instead of waiting until nightfall? Say it's festival prep, maybe? Remember, she's the smart one in a town full of comedy routines. Even its more "aware" members would still buckle under her influence.⁷⁰ If the core of her intimidation factor as a character has so little substance to it, how am I supposed to feel intimidated?

You want an even stupider example? So, the running theory surrounding her snatching Dess's guitar is that she wants to keep the code away from Susie. If that's so, then it directly contradicts her protectiveness over her possessions—just hide the guitar in your locked room, dummy! Or better yet, if Carol just can't bring herself to even *touch* her missing daughter's stuff, **lock Dess's door**. You know, like she does with her own.

Carol appears laughably incompetent—but she's actually *not*. I'm bringing these up as errors on Carol's part, but they're only "errors" if we assume she shares responsibility with the Knight and Kris. She *wouldn't* be failing them all if, say, she wasn't expected to help

⁷⁰ Like, instead of rallying against Carol over her financial support of Asgore, Toriel just says she "*wish*"es the support would stop. These two used to watch TV together! She won't even talk to her now!

them in the first place, because nobody told her to, because nobody *wanted* her involvement.

Loads of people point to [this snippet of her room in the game files](#), containing what looks to be a messy corkboard and strings, as proof that she has to know *something* is up. I don't deny this claim at all. What I *do* deny is that it automatically confirms that something is the Knight's plan. Specifically, this is where its steps are hosted and decided upon. I don't know how else to say this, but, uh, we *do* know corkboards are symbols of [people who are very explicitly out-of-the-loop on something](#), right? Like, you don't invoke a corkboard if you want your character to look like they *already* know something, or that they're at the heart of a conspiracy. Let's also not forget that "the plan" (the order of the Fountains) is such a well-known part of her own religion that multiple in-universe children's stories use it as a structural base. Carol doesn't *need* to piece together scattered pieces of this herself! The most respected author in her town *wrote about it*! If she's smart enough to organize her facts like this, would she not also be smart enough to recognize that her "master plan" amounts to a checklist of locations found in her *bible*???

If we assume the corkboard is part of her agreement with the Knight, she looks like a complete idiot, much like the previous point. Moving on!

I want to try to refute the common claim that Carol is working "with" Kris, in the sense that their partnership and knowledge is mutual. The evidence for this culminates in Carol stopping Kris on their way out from her house to address the SOUL, acting much more hospitable with them than she did with Susie. While this exchange very obviously demonstrates a unique connection and exclusive knowledge shared between both (discussed later), I believe people conflate the exchange as a whole with an equal partnership. What evidence is there that Kris likes Carol back? From what I've looked at, there's certainly evidence that they *don't*.

Let's go over why Kris and Susie were even visiting the house to begin with: the Light World church segment involves the player trying to coax information on the shelter out of various citizens. What's absolutely crucial about this scene is that, when finally reconvening with Susie, Kris *willingly* shares the information with her:

NARRATION: (*You explained the situation to Susie.*) [<-- perfect opportunity to sandbag and say nothing, which Kris already does on several occasions]

SUSIE: ... *Guess... City Hall's our best bet for now.*

SUSIE: ... *what? Noelle said... her mom keeps everything important **at home**?*

Then, the two enthusiastically high-five, but *only* on a Normal Route, showcasing that the default turn of events (going to Noelle's house to search for clues) does not perturb them. They *want* to snoop.

It could be argued that Kris is so pleased because they're under the impression that Susie and the Player won't find anything, as they appear panicked over the guitar's discovery. It's strange to me, then, that Kris suggests going to her house to begin with. Susie was about to bring them to City Hall, which would *again* be a perfect opportunity for Kris to smile, nod, and lead her down a red-herring. If Kris *still* took Susie to Noelle's house with all this in mind, it wouldn't just be an error; it'd demonstrate incompetence clashing with their meticulous setup for Chapter 3.

Okay, maybe Kris thinks that the only incriminating evidence is behind Carol's locked door and their confidence comes from this fact. Aside from running into the earlier snag (just keep Susie and the Player away???), why does the narration say "**You and Susie** continue to try to open the locked door"? If the implication is supposed to be that Kris is leading Susie and the Player in circles, why does Toby make them appear cooperative?

But there's an even bigger issue with this: if Kris and Carol are working together, *with* the Knight, meaning that they share the *same goals AND knowledge*, why does Kris not have access to Carol's room? You know, ostensibly where the "plan" would be? The only reason I can think of is that Carol knows *more* than Kris, and wants to keep them in the dark... but we'll soon find this to be impossible under her current circumstances.

Finally, her knowledge of the SOUL. The fact that Carol **a)** likes "*red heart-shaped objects*" and **b)** seems to directly acknowledge the SOUL in Kris's body ("*As you know, **YOU** are welcome here any time.*") is strongly suggestive of her knowing that the SOUL is a separate entity, or at least has useful attributes. I don't take any issue with this observation. Where it goes from observation to logical leap is that Carol can only have learned the significance of this by... being in cahoots with the Knight. Or by just being the Knight.

A few problems. First, the Knight isn't all that interested in the SOUL. Yes, the voice over the phone comments on Kris needing it to complete the mission, but notice how after our defeat in Chapter 3, they don't make any attempt at subduing it *or* Kris, and they

continue to avoid doing so across Chapter 4. Why then, if Carol is working with the Knight, does she welcome us with open arms and a smile? I mean, the Knight never lets *us* into the shelter for any particular reason. What kind of collaboration is any of this?

More pressingly—and I’m not sure how we didn’t automatically consider this—I don’t suppose Lightners can’t just... *learn* about SOULs, right? We already know there’s at least two books about them in the library, the second of which remains to be seen when the library will be free in Chapter 5, which means we will eventually get more insight into not just the nature of the SOUL, but what we can expect Lightners know about them. Not only that, but while we can’t be 100% certain of how detailed the Lightners’ access to the Prophecy is, we *do* know they have records of the heroes, as Catty makes direct reference to a “cute” horned hero who obviously makes her think of Asriel.⁷¹ I don’t suppose it’s a stretch to say that there’s at least some allusion to “*THE CAGE, WITH HUMAN SOUL AND PARTS!*” right? Even if it’s completely contextless, considering we know Carol is in the process of connecting some supernatural dots herself and is one of the few Lightners who actually cares about the SOUL, would it not make sense that she’s the closest to putting two-and-two together about the Cage?

But let’s talk about the *other* reason people believe Carol knows the SOUL is special. Indeed, she collects red heart pillows (or human-soul shaped, “*depending on your opinion*”), but the smoking gun is the term “heart-shaped object”, coined by **Spamton**. Even Players who don’t follow his sidequest will encounter the term more than once, and will subsequently learn that he takes great interest in the SOUL *because* of our Light, *because* of our influence. Consider that for a moment; Carol is symbolically aligned with the Weird Route, a path focused on the Player’s immense power, and Spamton is motivated to steal Kris’s SOUL to *also* gain power (“*TO BE BIG*”). The parallel already existed; Toby simply took things a step further by drawing our attention directly to it.⁷²

⁷¹ This would actually make her account of the heroes *more detailed* than the Dark World’s, as the latter does not depict the Prince with horns of any kind.

⁷² This rings differently from Kris or even Noelle’s similarities to Spamton, because the parallel is very directly to his primary, sinister motive to take advantage of the SOUL itself, which the two kids don’t show much interest in at the moment. (Kris, though constantly grappling with it, seems to keep the SOUL around out of necessity rather than pure intrigue like Spamton. For Kris, the SOUL is a means to an end. For Spamton, the SOUL is his end goal.)

The icing on the cake is that Carol is not alone in this quirk. Someone else in Hometown shares not just an out-of-place Spamton reference, but a whole host of other similarities. Let's talk about her partner-in-crime.

>> Asgore

"I like Santa Claus.

He's a nice old man that never changes."

(Toby Fox, [UNDERTALE's 5th anniversary](#))

Compared to Carol, Asgore is fairly clear-cut; Like Spamton, he's a broke, divorced old man, seeking redemption and socially isolated by a supernatural history.⁷³ His stated motivation as of Chapter 4 is to *"be a happy family **again**"*, for everything to go *"back to normal"*, to take *"a nice drive around town"* once Asriel returns, which he aims to do by showing Toriel and *"all"* of them *"what really happened"*. This can only be referring to the incident that ruined his life: Dess's disappearance.⁷⁴ His infatuation with the incident is apparently well-known enough for a passerby (who doesn't even recognize Kris as his kid...) to comment on him being *"obsessed with that stuff"*.

Much like Carol, Asgore begs for the world to go back. *Also* like Carol, Asgore has a corkboard in his shop. As discussed earlier, conspiracy boards like this are universally recognized symbols of outsiders looking in, who know *something* must've happened but can't reliably *prove* it. Asgore, though, has an ace up his sleeve: he's carrying a *"black shard"*—physical evidence of the Knight. It's this fact that makes him believe it. *"We're **almost there**", "This time for sure... Tori will finally see.", "And **this time**, she'll have to believe me."*

A lot of emphasis is placed on showing Toriel his side of the story, and him thinking that it will automatically result in the two of them reconciling. Evidently, this hasn't worked; not only does Toriel repeatedly brush his advances off on-screen, but Asgore himself says that he's been fighting a losing battle thus far. In fact, we can see her displeasure for Asgore's obsession in church, where this exchange happens:

⁷³ And if *"the Field of Pink and Gold"* is indicative of anything, said history might come from the same place...?!

⁷⁴ While nothing explicitly says "Asgore was fired because Dess went missing", it's Hometown's only unsolved incident that would be serious enough for something as grounded as Asgore losing his job to happen. I sincerely doubt Asgore got fired over failing to find Ice-E.

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**.*

Toriel can't even bring herself to name the issue, an understandable sentiment since we've just learned that Asgore harasses her specifically to bring it up. Even if he *is* right about what he's found, he's still hiding in bushes and presenting full bouquets to her. Repeatedly.

... What's up with those other lines? "*Your wife's... financial support*"...?

Most people conclude that this merely refers to Asgore serving as Carol's groundskeeper. If this is the case, why does it make her so uncomfortable? Her ex-husband cleaning her neighbor's house isn't something to be worked up about, right? Normally, this'd be where we'd be expected to read into Toriel potentially being unfair to Asgore. Aside from the fact that this community does too much of that already, I've *just* explained that **the game tells you what she's upset about**, which is Asgore repeatedly trying to win her over by launching into conspiracy theories.

And here Toriel is saying Carol is *paying* him for this? Why would Carol be funding Asgore's pursuit of the truth behind the incident if she already knows everything there is to pursue? Why is she burning money on a private investigation to locate her missing daughter, then turning around to enact an evil plan with... her missing daughter???

Is she keeping him on a leash? Well, why does he have access to her room with the corkboard? Why does he walk up to it and monologue to his "*old friend*"? Why doesn't she just keep him away from the house altogether? She *already* stripped him of his police-chief role a while ago. If Carol seriously wanted to keep Asgore subdued for being an unwanted third-party or something, surely she'd have come up with a better way to do so than... giving him *more* resources, right?

As it turns out, Carol and Asgore are uniquely related in a way that Carol and Kris definitely *aren't*. Unlike Kris, Asgore has clearance to observe Carol's plan, does *not* have insider information, and is confirmed to be working *with* her. Carol can only know as much as Asgore does, or else she would be spending money on nothing.

This relationship is illustrated with a very peculiar symbol: for some reason, the game points out a jar of pickles in the Holidays' fridge. This is different from the chocolate Kris drinks; chocolate is a Christmas staple, and the game never singles out Kris's chocolate like this, instead simply lumping it in with "*festive foods*". With the jar, Toby is communicating a unique alliance between Carol and Asgore by drawing attention to it.

Carol and Asgore are a duo. Their goal, if it wasn't already clear, is to find December Holiday. Bungling her case cost Asgore his career, marriage, family, and reputation. Carol may have been a strict mother, but I doubt she outright *hated* her own daughter. To a woman like her, a controlling dynamic is a sign of normalcy, of stability. Since they're both looking for Dess, they likely don't have many details on the Knight—again, unlike Kris—or else they would know exactly where to look.⁷⁵

Both characters are defined by an idealized past they actively try to return to, to preserve in ice—a past where they both had families defined by stability. Maybe Kris shares this sentiment in some ways, but it's evidently been compromised by their servitude to the Knight. Together, Carol and Asgore work much better as a partnership than Kris and Carol, thematically *and* practically.

>> THEN WHO WAS PHONE?

The biggest reason for implicating Carol of working with the Knight and/or knowing specifically what's going on is *definitely* the strange voice on the phone. To me, the identity of the mystery speaker is made completely obvious by the ending of Chapter 4.

First, everything about them is as alien as possible; sound design,⁷⁶ presentation, speech pattern, even just *what* is being talked about. Internally, the game forgoes the usual "typer" values and instead writes the dialogue directly into the code. Not a single reference to *who* the caller could be is in the files, and we know for a fact that Toby expects us to datamine. To casual and seasoned fans alike, the caller IS presented as a new unknown. If

⁷⁵ Also, Carol and Asgore cannot possibly know the Knight to the point where they've spoken or seen each other extensively on account of the myocardial infarction Asgore would undergo learning the Knight is a cocky, baseball bat wielding, antlered demon who knows a bit too much about him to count as a complete stranger. He would be waving a lantern around Hometown on horseback if he located someone who so much as *reminded* him of the girl who made him lose his job and kids.

⁷⁶ I *cannot* stress enough, the sound that plays is the *fucking* Giygass static from "ANOTHER HIM", the Knight is the *only* other character to use *any* of Giygass's samples, HOW is this still a debate—

this is truly the case, the end of Chapter 4's Weird Route, where Carol is unambiguously speaking to Kris, makes very little sense. If we're assuming Carol is the mystery speaker, why the cloak and dagger on a Normal Route? What's the point in hiding the speaker's identity if they're revealed during the *same* chapter? This isn't subverting expectations—it's inconsistent writing for the sake of *claiming* that expectations have been subverted.

Second, both calls are pretty much oppositional in content. As I discussed way back, the Normal Route ending serves the main purpose of drawing the lines in the sand for our conflict. On one side, we have Susie and Ralsei, who want more than anything to stop the Prophecy from reaching its conclusion. In the middle is Kris, who tries to follow Susie out of their bedroom window, demonstrating where their instinctual desires lie. They don't make it out, though, because the mystery speaker reminds them that they "*promised*" to do something. Consider the framing of the scene as a whole, the Knight's narrative purpose, and Kris's disposition as the Knight's indentured servant juxtaposed to a fondness of the Dark World adventures. With these, I think we can say that the speaker is at minimum fighting *for* the Prophecy, on the other side of that line, and that they feel the need to exercise leverage over Kris. Shockingly, both of these apply to the Knight. Symbolically, Kris is being tugged in two directions: the safety of their plan, and the freedom Susie might bring.

The Weird Route call is a complete 180. Instead of being magnetized out their window by Susie's wish, Kris stays in bed. Knowing what we do about how they feel during the Weird Route, it makes sense that they stay as close to the safety of their bed and the plan as possible now that we've asserted ourselves as an even bigger threat.

Then a call is received, but it's not the Knight—it's Carol, and she wants Kris to know that Noelle is excited to go with them for the festival. That's it. She hangs up afterward. She doesn't take any opportunity to say something like, "This changes nothing. Don't forget your promise." She *just hangs up*. Remember, this is the Route where the Prophecy is supposed to be *derailed*. If Kris is so at risk of splitting from the plan, why does the ominously coincidental reminder to them not get delivered *then*? Why does Carol sound so neutral? Why doesn't she acknowledge any of the day's events if she's "in" on the plan? Even if I hadn't spent ten pages arguing that Carol was aligned against the Prophecy, what do people who think she *is* make of all this?

This potential contradiction is so comically vast, it eclipses any other argument entirely for me, including:

- **“Maybe Carol is using a voice changer? Or maybe she has bad signal because of Darkness?”** What compels her to turn off the Gaster filter or leave this alleged dead zone during the Weird Route specifically?
- **“What about Kris clearing their contacts on both Routes? Don’t they call both times?”** Why couldn’t those have been to the Knight? The Knight still needed to pivot to making a Fountain at midday from what was supposed to be at night.
- **“What if Toby was only preserving the mystery on a Normal Route, and thus saw no need to obfuscate Carol’s text blip on a Weird Route?”** Aside from not assuaging any concerns about speech patterns or the subject/tone of both calls, there’s *zero* record of Toby ever having done something like this for an unrevealed character. In fact, if you get Alphys’s pizza order in UNDERTALE, despite the call happening before formally meeting her, it *still* uses her normal text blip.
- **“What about Carol coming home for the guitar?”** Given the facts of her as a person (which I guess nobody has already considered), it had to have been for another reason that we’re missing. By the way, isn’t it strange that among the common events of both Routes, the game goes to the trouble of *highlighting* Asgore spotting and later interrupting Susie after she found the guitar? Asgore, the guy who Carol is paying real money for help with her own plan?

And why didn’t she just come home the second the guitar was known to be in danger? Under the assumption she’s the mystery caller, she already exercises leverage over Kris, meaning she doesn’t fully trust them. Why not nip the problem in the bud instead of leaving it to an unreliable peon? Why does she not express *any* disappointment to Kris despite their obvious blunder? Her character so far has been coldly pragmatic—being the mystery caller would make her inconsistent at best.

DELTARUNE is not a riddle about phones, and it should not be treated as such. It’s a character driven story, meaning the only way to “solve” its underlying mysteries is to understand its characters first.

One of the running questions of Chapter 4 is *why*. Why is the Knight opening these Fountains, and why do they keep letting them get sealed? Susie asks about it, Ralsei

wonders about it, and the Old Man wants Susie's opinion on it, too. If the mystery speaker is meant to be read as the Knight, then their last call is meant to be read as the game throwing us a bone: the Fountains keep coming because the Knight wants the Prophecy to come to pass. For the tragedy to happen. For the world to burn.

Carol wouldn't want the world to burn. She can't even stomach throwing out her daughters' homework. Maybe we should've tried thinking about her as a person before thinking about her as an antagonist.

... Anyway, time to tell you why I think Dess should be the Knight!⁷⁷

> DECEMBER HOLIDAY: A profile

Slow down, damn.

While Carol is a complicated character who we don't have enough to work with, Dess is a little under a few dozen details in the shape of something that *looks* like a character. Defining her is gonna take a bit more work—we'll have to ask around.

>> Friends

Tenna tells exactly one story of Dess, and it's of her bypassing Toriel's parental controls to watch and play along with explicit music videos, the *"musical prodigy"* she was. Immediately after he tells this story, the heroes play a punk rock number whose chorus is a rewrite of "Lost Girl". This predictably reveals Dess's most surface-level archetype: **the punk**. Let's see what's underneath.

Dess's bedroom sticks out like an asphyxiated thumb. In a house dominated by sky blue and tidiness, her room imitates the Northern Lights, decorated by glow-in-the-dark stars and handmade posters which Kris unhelpfully clarifies were *"for shows that may or may not have ever happened"*. Instruments of at least half a dozen disciplines in sports and the arts can be found scattered along the floor, many of which appear as expensive as they are dented. Unlike her mother, Dess can bear to see things break. Also unlike her mother,

⁷⁷ Also, I'm still not over the idea of Carol—if she's the Knight—trying to find her daughter by poking holes in random spots until she pops out, or something? Like, so many people say "Carol is the Knight because she wants to find Dess" as if that's a statement that. Means anything. Maybe it does to people who still treat Darkness as unknowable magic crap?

she is messy and unfocused, though maybe a nicer way to describe her would be curious, a trait echoed by her exploring the forest with her friends.

Hunting gear, “*unique leaves*”, violent comics and games, and punk-rock CDs spread all across her room tell us not just about her tastes, but that they were *her* tastes, quarantined from the rest of the Holiday house in her dark, scary room. This feeling of Dess’s room almost being an alternate dimension is emphasized to the Player by the sudden usage of “The distance between two”, when the house goes from cheery and nostalgic to eerily melancholy, the “Lost Girl” melody finally being used for *the* lost girl.

The image of the tomboyish older sister who takes what she wants holds up to the scrutiny of Noelle. In most of Noelle’s anecdotes about her, Dess is depicted as both self-assured and deeply caring, as someone who held all the cards but wouldn’t mind giving you a peek at her hand if you were a friend. This is most strongly felt in Noelle’s “[Snow](#)” text, where Dess is depicted as the source of her little sister’s strength, despite technically helping her *cheat* at the snow angel contest. (Hm. “Despite”?)

Dess didn’t shut Noelle out; the two would stay up past their bedtime to watch scary movies together, explore the woods with Asriel and Kris *together*. When Noelle was frightened by both, she wasn’t treated as a liability—Dess would always comfort her. In Cyber World, Noelle remembers that, when she would fantasize about leaving Hometown for a bustling city, Dess “*always told me she’d take me. Somewhere like this. Somewhere with shining lights.*”

Dess didn’t just love her sister, but wanted to see her flourish and be her own person. If Noelle’s happiness was too high up for her to reach, Dess would snatch it down for her.

Funnily enough, one of our sources for how Dess acted is Susie, not because the two ever *knew* each other, but because Susie is sometimes presented as embodying the aspects of Dess and Asriel most beloved by their younger siblings. Kris and Susie smile and draw on the same window of Q.C.’s that Kris and Asriel used to, ribbing and riffing in ways only two people who really trust one another would allow for. More blatantly, Noelle asks Susie to play Dess’s off-limits guitar, just a couple of chapters after admiring her for “*breaking the rules*”, categorizing her as a “*good kind of scary*” Noelle seems to already be familiar with. Who do you think started that admiration?

To summarize, December Holiday couldn't be contained when she was around. We can see this in her devotion to punk, the way she repeatedly picked up and dropped hobbies, going behind the backs of adults to listen to explicit music or play scary games, her apparent aggression and her willingness to sidestep the "rules" to make those she cares about happy. Dess explored empty forests, fantasized about big cities, and broke rules, all because she wasn't content staying in one place for too long. Those spent lighters aren't just for weed, and her guitar isn't specified as red for no reason; like fire, **Dess embodied change**. Twists. Curveballs.

Our primary sources so far are Noelle, Tenna, and Dess's old house. I'm left wondering, though: what about everyone else? What does Hometown think about December Holiday, daughter of their mayor?

>> Everyone else

Basically all of us agree that Dess is trapped in the Hometown shelter. I'm ignoring that discussion for now to pose a completely different question: Does anybody in Hometown actually remember December Holiday?

One of the very first things about DELTARUNE the community picked up on was that Hometown *loves* Asriel. Most times we make Kris talk to the older crowds who got to be familiar with him (e.g. Alvin, Burgerpants, Catty, Bratty, Q.C.), Asriel gets brought up, even when he's not the subject of conversation. The town is so beautiful today, *"I hope it stays this way when **ASRIEL** visits next week"*, *"Perhaps when **Asriel** comes home"*, *"Y'think **he's** doing any **CRAZY** parties, like me and your dad?"*, *"Remember that time I played truth or dare with **Azzy?**"*, *"Our choir sounds a bit thinner since **your brother** went away."*, *"Do you know when **Azzy's** coming home?"*, *"Hey neighbor-neighbor! When's **yah brother Doug** [??] gonna come by?"*.

This makes sense; Asriel was heavily involved with the town as a whole, running cross-country, doing youth group activities, being crushed on, generally being the neighborhood's golden boy. But Asriel isn't well-respected simply because he's good at everything—he's beloved because he has *energy*, and the town wants to follow it.

By all accounts, Dess had energy, too. Dess was a “*musical prodigy*”, played sports, certainly had an attitude (if her broken instruments, tendency to whack Kris over the head, and affinity for punk rock are evidence for anything), was uniquely close to the aforementioned golden boy of Hometown, and *also* participated in church activities.

So don’t you find it weird, too? Don’t you find it weird that the only people who think to mention her are within her immediate family and social circle? Such a dynamic figure of the town, and not a single person brings her up?

I don’t think it’s as simple as taboo; Noelle doesn’t burst into tears when she (voluntarily) talks about her sister, and Rudy doesn’t shut down potential conversations about her. Simple mentions of her life can’t be *that* sensitive if even her immediate family can stomach those memories.

Is it her proximity to the shelter? I doubt that as well, because people *do* talk about the shelter, and younger teens treat it as a campfire ghost story more than anything. Conversations about the shelter incident are always about the freaky thing that happened *to* Dess, and never about Dess herself. *Some* knowledge of what happened there must’ve persisted over the years, because an urban legend exists at all (Snowy in Chapter 2: “*Only kids believe that stuff!*”). Hell, people still talk about how the incident affected Asgore!

Strangest of all to me is that not even people who *should’ve* known her bring her up. Specifically, fresh graduates like Burgerpants or Catty.⁷⁸ Remember, Dess and Asriel were close—*really* close. Why is it that, when Catty recalls dancing with Asriel or when Bratty fondly remembers giving him his first kiss or when Burgerpants won’t shut up about the guy 🍷, the loud, vulgar girl who was probably his *best friend* is so deftly avoided? We’re not dealing with a high bar of morality or respect here; Bratty and Catty shit-talk each other within *meters*, and I shouldn’t have to go in-depth on Burgerpants’s womanizing streak.⁷⁹

Hometown is characterized by stagnation. *Everyone* talks about how things *used to* be, when Asriel was around or when Gerson was alive, how in comparison to back then,

⁷⁸ My logic behind the timeline: Asriel was taught by Gerson, and two customers at Q.C.’s used to be students of Gerson; Catty and Bratty were both romantically involved with Asriel, and Dess might’ve been too if his retainer and sweater are suggestive at all; Burgerpants wants to go to the same college as Asriel. All’s told, this band of characters probably share both a concentrated age bracket and a lapsed high school career.

⁷⁹ The concept of Burger “I shouldnt be showing you this explicit picture of my girlfriend but holy moly look at her boobies” Pants effortlessly and seamlessly clamping his mouth shut to avoid talking about the loud self-assured fine shy singer he used to go to class with because he’s suddenly become the bastion of modesty.

nothing *happens* anymore. Why, then, is one of the most dynamic and magnetic presences the town ever had always skirted past so effortlessly? People still love Gerson for how passionate he was as a storyteller despite his death, so why doesn't that love extend to Dess's love of sports and music? Do we remember the spelling bee, in which a crowd ignores a catatonic Noelle to cheer for Berdly's victory at spelling "DECEMBER"?

I don't think Hometown liked Dess too much. I don't think it *hated* her, or even actively expressed a great dislike for her, but a girl like December Holiday doesn't leave overnight without a town full of mourners unless there wasn't a lot to mourn in the first place. If Susie is anything to go off of, the town doesn't welcome delinquent girls with open arms. Besides, you can't easily convince me that people would stop talking about Asriel if *he* suddenly went missing.

To the people who care about her, Dess's impact remains huge, yet it's an impact completely absent outside of that group. To Hometown, the rowdy, messy, unfocused rich girl who up and vanished one day is all she is.

>> C

The antagonists of the first three Dark Worlds are united in at least three ways: they're adults, they have a fondness for their children (surrogate or otherwise, only King is an actual parent), and they don't quite understand those children's wants or needs, the latter of which is what their arcs are all about. Queen in particular spends almost all of Chapter 2 falsely ascribing wants and needs to every single Lightner (ESPECIALLY Noelle) believing that if they submit to her, she'll take care of their every need. In the end, she concludes that "*You Cannot Calculate Other People's Feelings*" and frees Noelle from her grasp. Tenna's frame of reference for Kris is severely outdated, so he spends most of Chapter 3 dangling their childhood in front of them as evidence that he understands Kris better than they do themselves. As far as I can tell with Lancer, King just skips to manipulating him into being an army general, but he also expresses a genuine love for his son in Chapter 2, and no doubt intended for him to reap the spoils of "*OUR world*". It's always parental figures misunderstanding their children, projecting onto their children, *molding* their children against their will out of a twisted idea of love.

Man, I wonder what Toby was thinking when he made Dess a delinquent teen girl and then gave her a strict, controlling mother? Or, what he was thinking when he gave them opposing elemental symbolism?

Let's get this out of the way a second time: I don't think Carol hated Dess. I don't think any interpersonal relationship in DELTARUNE can be boiled down so easily, and I don't think Carol is trying to find her daughter for overtly selfish reasons. However, we can't ignore Carol's toxic parenting. When Noelle spots her in Chapter 4, she desperately and incoherently runs her sentences together to convince her mother that Susie is a good person, before being ushered away with just the word "*Kitchen*", which Noelle automatically parses as a reprimand. On a Weird Route, Noelle lies to Carol when asked if she's home alone or not, very obviously hiding Susie. Even in passing, we learn that Kris used to help Noelle break into her own room because her mother *refused* to give her a spare key, that Noelle would rather spend the night at Catti's than ask to be allowed through her locked gate, that, with Rudy in the hospital, he's unable to "*balance it all out*", and that he's determined to get better *specifically* for Noelle's safety. Carol isn't just strict—she's controlling by default and, when that doesn't work, explicitly abusive.

We've just established that Dess was a borderline punk stereotype growing up, and we *also* know that Carol likes order, tradition, and control, all things opposite a rebel teen. In a game with so many varieties of power dynamic, the punk and strict mother archetypes wouldn't be invoked under the same roof for no reason. Yes, Toby is a subversive writer, but that doesn't automatically dictate Carol's trajectory as having only *recently* been a bad parent. As far as we know, she's always been fond of Christmas, and she never gave Noelle a key to their house. Honestly, even if Carol used to be less abusive than she is in-game, I doubt Dess would've gotten along with her. This is not a combination of characters that can have a functional relationship.

Despite this, we know Carol loves Dess. At least one shelter code is her namesake, after all, and her room is unnervingly intact for someone who's been missing for so long. Carol at the very least cares enough to invest time and money away from her "*good track record*" as mayor into a cold case Hometown at large has moved on from. Maybe after all this time, she still just wants what's "best" for Dess, which would be a noble goal had it occurred to her to ask what *Dess* thought was best for Dess.

>> Krismas days

When we only had a couple of Chapters to work with, two things about Kris's life before the game caught my eye: first, despite generally being respected, they didn't have friends. Toriel is shocked that Kris and Susie are hanging out, most of Hometown talks to Kris about Asriel and not, y'know, about *Kris*, and the shelter cutscene with Snowy and Monster Kid displays a perception of Kris as a coward or weirdo.

Second, Kris has a strong distaste for Bratty. This seems random, but bear with me. If you try to talk to her in Chapter 1, one of the dialogue options ("*Memories*") prompts Bratty to tell a story where Kris "*wanted to hang out with us big kids*", so she instead uses them as an errand monkey for snacks. Another simply reads "*Go away*", which realistically can only have been sourced from Kris's feelings. The aspect of Kris present in this example is how their feelings for some of the older kids they used to fawn over have soured with age.

Dess, though, remains the exception. Sure, some of the anecdotes we hear where Dess and Kris interact end with Kris being whacked over the head, but we also have the story of Kris exploring with her, Noelle, and Asriel—"*the four of us*" as Noelle puts it. We have Kris's detailed thoughts on every item in Dess's room, which Kris doesn't stop us from looking at until they spot the code in her guitar. When Dess hit Kris, it'd be with a *plastic* wiffle bat. It was never raw contempt—they were just playing rough, because Dess knew Kris *could* play rough.

After Tenna tells the story of Dess "*rocking her guitar and singing along with those nasty, nasty songs*", he asks Kris if they remember how "*COOL*" they thought Dess was. This story is immediately followed by us playing "Raise Up Your Bat", during which they pose dramatically, rocking their guitar independently of our commands. Considering TV WORLD, a Dark World of Kris's design and feelings, has an extended segment about her being a cool guitarist, I imagine Kris's admiration of Dess has yet to fade.

But there's more than just childish admiration at work here. Dess and Kris were bizarrely similar; both were the darker, more offputting siblings of sweet, easily frightened golden children (neither of *them* earned awards like their siblings). Both were afterthoughts of a town they didn't really fit into. Both were known in their circles for musical proficiency, and when Dess left, the music went with her. Dess was rowdy and

messy, and Kris likes pranking their friends and acting like a hooligan. Dess liked scary games, and Kris likes the paranormal. Dess stockpiled paintball gear and multitools, and Kris carries around a knife wherever they go.⁸⁰ Dess tended to break things, and Kris's breath quickens around swords. Dess liked fire and played a red guitar, and Kris's eyes flicker red, like their missing headband, *"like pretty little flames"*.

Dess had a code to the shelter tucked in her guitar.

In Chapter 3, after the Knight slams them shut, the shelter doors open for Kris.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Now that I've (probably) established who Dess was, I'm going to address the following issues:

1. Why Dess vanished
2. Why the Dark Worlds are unequivocally shaped by Dess's life
3. Dess's motive (or: why would Dess do any of what being the Knight entails?)
4. Why Kris is involved at all
5. What Toby wants to say

> The tail of Hell

"Lost where the forest would grow, the children followed the pointed tail. / The poor children!"

Completely isolated, these lines tell the story of children exploring a clearing where a forest would *normally* grow, being lured somewhere by the tail of a nondescript being who ultimately leads to some undefined tragedy. Add lore to taste; Forest, Dess, the shelter which has Darkness inside it, FRIEND's pointed tail of Hell. Got all that?

These lines are spoken by an Organikk in a hidden room containing both the *"ROOTS"* Prophecy and the *"fallen star"* book I discussed several thousand words ago. The book was very Knight-coded already given the glass mention, but now it's also very

⁸⁰ Considering they flush when Susie asks why they have a knife on their person and that they watch whatever the DELTARUNE equivalent of [kiwami japan](#) is, Kris probably just thinks knives are cool. There's definitely more that can be read into, but "Kris likes knives" is still a correct assessment.

Dess-coded, discussing her grief, her association with stars, and her descent into the shelter (*“fallen”*). While the Prophecy’s text is rather vague, its imagery evokes the sight of Hometown’s shelter surrounded by trees. Geographically speaking, entering a storm or blast shelter *would* put one right next to a forest’s underground roots, and the two in-game areas currently named after “roots” are both locked underground *and* have connections to DEVICE_FRIEND (it appeared in Chapter 2 and was discussed by bit-Tenna in Chapter 3).

The song “Flashback (excerpt)” plays in the following contexts: Meta Shit (Weird/Sword Routes), Darkness Shit (shelter codes, Chapter 3 intro, “THE HOLY” reference), and the breaking of the Holiday and Dreemurr families started by Dess’s disappearance. These concepts being musically linked, along with the song itself being an excerpt, suggests that they will all be narratively linked at some point in the future.

Finally, there’s an ongoing dialogue sequence exclusive to the game files that can realistically only be spoken by Dess. The [“UNUSED” strings](#) depict a lonely individual who mourns things from *“late night TV”* to being able to tell time. This voice also describes a repeated nightmare where a door closes behind them, leaving them in Darkness, and I’ve already gone into detail about how the Depths represents both Darkness and the underlying programming of DELTARUNE. So wept the fallen star. Poor Dess!

We all agree that Dess is trapped in the shelter/Depths/code. My question (as it tends to be) is *why*. I don’t think she got lost by accident, so what drew her to the forest? If all of DELTARUNE’s underlying mysteries can be traced back to Dess’s disappearance, then what drove her to disappear in the first place?

>> What did Dess want?

Maybe she just... liked trees?

The Forgotten Man continuously hides behind a tree whose leaves look oddly brain-like, and Dess used to explore forests with her friends in the hopes of finding interesting... anything, really. Not enough happens within the mundane safety of Hometown. In Chapter 4, an Organikk comments that they prefer not to know what the function of an acorn is so they can still *“ask what it is”*. Between all of this, DELTARUNE seems to associate trees with obscurity *quite* a bit, and we know Dess was curious.

Earlier, I made a point of highlighting both Dess's desire to leave Hometown and her friction with Carol's embodiment of tradition. The most dynamic element she'd encountered up to that point was *Ice-E* for fuck's sake. With this in mind, it makes quite a bit of sense for her to be enraptured by the single *real* mystery Hometown has to offer, shrouded in its deepest forest as far from the town itself as she could feasibly go: the shelter. For the first time, something in Hometown *scared* Dess. People joke about her bed facing away from her closet, but that's a deliberate bit of characterization! Her bed, her stockpiling of rations, they paint a portrait of someone preparing for... *something*.

It would make sense, then, for a being so innately tied to ambiguity and the unknown to goad her curiosity on. The shelter is the threshold between the mundanity of Hometown and the supernatural current bubbling underneath. Had Dess not followed the pointed tail, there would have been no Fountains, no Knight, no broken families, nothing for the Player to investigate. If Dess hadn't gone to the shelter, she'd have gone somewhere irrelevant to us. In other words, the shelter itself was Dess's external conflict, Hometown's one incongruity which kept her up at night, *DEVICE_FRIEND* the psychopomp leading her on—the daemon responsible for *DELTARUNE*'s setup.⁸¹

That's not the whole story, though; *children*, remember?

>> What did Noelle and Asriel see?

Nothing, probably.

While Dess allowed her baby sister to indulge in the controlled “danger” of horror movies, there's little suggesting she'd bring her in true harm's way. As mentioned earlier, Dess was likely motivated by fear, fear of what might lie below the shelter. We know now that Noelle is unsure of Dess's whereabouts, frequently searching “december holiday” and purposefully clicking on spam emails “*just in case I ever get an email from anyone out there*”.

⁸¹ Semantics aside (a second aside for semantics): Most depictions of Dess following the pointed tail show her starting from the forest and being led inside from there. Trouble is... how do you get “*lost where the forest would grow*”? The clearing where the shelter dwells is a plain circle! Did *FRIEND* lead Dess *into* the shelter, or did *FRIEND* lead Dess *through* the shelter...? Is there any evidence *FRIEND* can even interact with things outside of Darkness and video games? Considering the Knight seems to be Darkness's point of influence in the Light World, it'd be odd to go through the trouble if *FRIEND* was just as capable of doing so. Probably doesn't change much, but fun to think about.

Like Noelle, Asriel is easily frightened; he believes in sinning, he feels guilty for killing video game characters, and even in UNDERTALE describes himself as “*a crybaby*”. I doubt that Dess’s status would be as big a mystery to Hometown if he could also corroborate a supernatural account of events. Pretty much, while it’s less unlikely than Noelle, I still doubt Asriel knows much of what happened.

That leaves one.

>> What did Kris see?

Carol and Asgore are stuck piecing together Dess’s absence with string and tape. Noelle makes fruitless internet searches and resorts to clicking on spam emails. Few people have access to the shelter codes, and even fewer have gone near it.

Not even Dess’s own sister seems to know what happened. Why the hell does *Kris*?

There are numerous visuals suggesting Kris has the most context for Dess’s circumstances contained entirely within their own Dark World. The Sword Route has Kris retrieve a key to its digital shelter recreation, which is locked behind a door marked with their headband—a key hidden *in their head*.⁸² When we finally approach the digital shelter, Kris prods at the controls on their own in an effort to keep us from entering. Secrets upon secrets that Kris desperately wants to hide from the Player. Sound familiar?

Ages ago, DEVICE_FRIEND led children into danger with its tail. During the Sword Route, it led Kris right back with its controller.

The most egregious display of Kris knowing Dess’s whereabouts is the truly diabolical gacharoom_unknown easter egg. By wagering 1225 POINTs at the TV WORLD gachapon, Kris can enter a looping room consisting of a winding, cerebral maze, serenaded by a moody guitar cover of “Lost Girl” simply labeled “[findher](#)”. What Kris finds is a small gachapon dispensing only a triangle of black lacquer—a guitar pick. “*You tried to take it... / But, it slipped through your hand / And you couldn’t find it anymore.*”

Once this sequence ends, the Player can pick up the ticket allowing passage into Mancountry, where the Forgotten Man’s “*SCHEDULE*” is first revealed. The Chapter 4 egg room (found right where the “*ROOTS*” Prophecy and “*fallen star*” text are, hm...) depicts

⁸² By the way, the Route’s “SHELTER KEY” name is first colored pink, before later being colored yellow.

Kris in art therapy, where the setting and passive language of a tree being “*painted over everything*” implies that they’re working through something—through Dess.

The visual similarities between the pick, the Knight, and Dess. The image of the pick not just falling, but *slipping* through Kris’s hand, painting them as culpable in some way. The layers and layers the entire sequence is tucked beneath, the similar nature of the egg rooms as out-of-bounds exploits hiding *something* about Kris.

Kris isn’t just aware that something happened to Dess. They were her sole witness. No wonder they’re working together.

> Concentrating on what Dess really wants

I’ve talked a lot about Dess as she was. What’d be more decisive are more solid links between Dess as a person and the Knight as they presently are. Fortunately, by the nature of the game itself, there’s a pretty surefire way of knowing what the Knight thinks.

Because they are analogues for creating art, Dark Fountains reflect the will of their creator. Kris’s Dark World utilizes themes of separation and yearning for the past, sourced from their childhood memories fond and fraught alike. Susie’s Sanctuary is all about finding the Old Man, flipping established mechanics on their heads (climbing, piano puzzles) and questioning the Prophecy by introducing enemy types based on [opponents of the real-world church](#). Looking at the Knight’s own Dark Worlds and trying to discern how their “will” manifests, we can see that oh my god it’s all December.

Card Kingdom is full of thick forests sometimes wandered by Clover, a rowdy girl(s) who likes sports, trees, and cute boys that look like Ralsei. Cyber City reflects both Dess’s dreams of taking Noelle to the city and [romantic cliches](#), at least one of which is a direct allusion to Hometown’s ferris wheel. Also the moon is a baseball for no reason. The Sanctuaries spotlight a skillfully reincarnated Gerson Boom, something Ralsei says is only possible in “*very specific darknesses*”, a feat that would *certainly* be helped by the memories of an upbringing as his student.

The antagonists of Chapters 1 and 2’s Fountains are both parental figures who stifle the agency of children, Queen overriding Noelle’s independence and King assuming the worst of rebel teen archetype Susie, both kids representing defining aspects of Dess’s

character. The “antagonist” of Chapter 4 is the Prophecy itself, the ultimate truth of the world Dess had to reckon with before furthering its progress as the Roaring Knight.⁸³

No matter where you look in the Knight’s Dark Worlds, Dess is there. Not someone else’s interpretation of Dess. It’s all *her*, because *she* is the Roaring Knight, the artist who swears fealty to burning the world to the ground. This may also align her with the mysterious typer2...

... this sounds wrong. Fundamentally. Why is Dess so devoted to the Prophecy all of a sudden? When did she get so nihilistic? Didn’t I just spend a thousand words portraying her as anti-establishment?

> Golden flowers // Golden stars

“WHEN OUR BACKS ARE TO THE WALL AND OUR TOWERS ARE FALLING ALL AROUND US AND WE ARE WATCHING OURSELVES BURN WE RARELY BECOME HEROES.”

(Tamsyn Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*)

There’s a freakishly big contradiction in Dess being the Knight that I’ve been avoiding: her **motive**. It would be enough of an issue if she simply didn’t have one, but we know December Holiday was a teen rebel. It’s a little counterintuitive to believe that Dess, a punk, would swear fealty to unavoidable religious armageddon, thus *becoming* the establishment. Shouldn’t that be opposite to her ideals?

A lot of my analysis hinges on Dess wanting to leave Hometown, someone who *would* escape with the first chance she got. Why is she escapism’s antithesis, then? Didn’t she value creative expression? Like, consider this: Before the climax of Chapter 3, we’re told that she liked TV; she liked singing along to music videos and she’d sit *riiiight* up at the front when the two families would get together for the holiday season. Players who had been paying attention to the more off-handed mentions of her would also remember that she’d watch scary movies. Dess liked TV! We agree, right?

The first thing the Roaring Knight does on screen is kill Tenna. The *very* television all those memories were made with. Doesn’t this tank the argument completely?

⁸³Also, the final boss of Chapter 4 is another of the Knight’s Fountains, this time mutating into a Titan—a “*fear of dark*”—[that looks an awful lot like a tree](#). By the way, [have you guys seen this new concept art](#)? Lol

Not necessarily. In fact, what would normally be a sizable hitch in this interpretation might actually be its saving grace.

Flowey never lets his guard down in UNDERTALE. Even after his botched first attempt at killing them, he taunts the Player, tempting them to start hurting others. In a game where even the captain of the Royal Guard can be talked out of violence, Flowey rears his head repeatedly to jeer: *"In this world, it's KILL or BE killed!"*

Much unlike Flowey, Asriel Dreemurr was known for being soft; an easily frightened "crybaby" who is convinced by his very best friend to assist in their own death, reasoning *"big kids don't cry."* This sweet, stupid trust ultimately gets *him* killed, by humans who once again assume the worst of a monster.

"ASRIEL had the power to destroy them all.

*But... ASRIEL **did not fight back.***

Clutching the human... ASRIEL smiled, and walked away."

And then, we learn that Asriel did not quite die—he's still around, and all he can talk about is killing.

What really makes Flowey a tragedy is the brutal irony in having to reconcile two seemingly opposite characters. In Asriel, we can pinpoint the exact moment his new philosophy was seeded, when he discovered *"what humanity is REALLY like"*. As we mentally trace his arc, from sheltered pacifist to jaded serial killer, we stop wondering "how could he have gotten this way?" to instead ask "how could it have been anyone else?"

Now, look at December Holiday; someone too big for the town she grew up in, a rebellious daughter living under the roof of a mother obsessed with the past, left in the shadows of more respectable people. A girl who didn't feel loved. Don't you think someone like that would want nothing more than to be free of it all? Don't you think that person would want more than bypassing parental controls and cheating at contests?

What do you suppose happened when, in her failed attempt to strike out on her own, she learned the ending? That it was all just numbers? Everything she knew, alive for now but good as dead. How do you think she felt then, learning what the world was *REALLY* like?⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Many have also pointed out more superficial links between Dess, the Knight, and Asriel. Both have shifting faces, fullscreen attacks that suck the SOUL inward, and Dess's room hides Asriel's sweater and retainer. I

This makes the earlier issue with Tenna a feature, not a bug; an intentional subversion, setting up the question of “how” just like with Flowey. Later, when the Knight attempts to kill Jackenstein, a spooky character outcast for his “*LARGE AND UGLY BODDY*”, it again stands in contrast with Dess’s known love of horror movies, scary games, or violent comics. Not just physically missing, **December Holiday has lost her way.**

The Knight is a Dess who’s seen the truth of the Prophecy and resigned herself to it. From her tears (“*bitter water*”) come shards of strange glass that disseminate that same truth to whoever looks through them. “Lost Girl” is used in the battle tracks of characters who the Knight has graced with their influence, united by themes of freedom musical and textual. A Dess who had tried so hard to run away, only to find herself trapped by the rigid machinery that governs her world, cold like her *mother*. Wouldn’t a Dess like that want nothing more than “*to see everything burn*”? Unlike Ralsei, who passively resigns himself to fate despite secretly hoping for another ending, and unlike Gaster, whose hopes for “*A NEW FUTURE*”, Dess takes the world-ending horn and intends to play it *loud*.

Amazingly, though, there are still traces of December Holiday in the Roaring Knight; their dramaticism, knife, flames, stars, and most strikingly in their own Dark Worlds, betraying her respect for Gerson Boom, her dreams of city life, her fantasies of love. Even when wrung of hope, Dess can’t help but keep expressing herself, just like how Flowey can’t help but let his devotion to Chara drive him, and *just* like how Gaster can’t help but use his staunch belief in freedom and choice to justify manipulating others out of their agency. *These* are Toby Fox antagonists; no matter where they go, there they are.

“*In this world, it’s KILL or BE killed*” was coined by a pacifist martyr. “*No one can choose who they are in this world*” was decreed by someone who, against any authority, staunchly asserted herself as herself.⁸⁵

But this ideology is at odds with that of the Devil. She can’t condemn a world that he doesn’t want condemned. She’ll have to appeal to something else. Something that can change: us.

don’t strictly see this as capital-E “Evidence” for anything in particular, but it would be kind of cool as fuck if both games’ main antagonists were referencing one another and were also in a situationship at one point. Asriel should be a girl thou

⁸⁵ To clarify, I don’t think Dess’s character flaw or arc is the same as Flowey’s. My instinct kind of puts her closer to Chara, mostly for their shared desire to destroy the world and belief that they aren’t loved or acknowledged.

So Dess throws the world a curveball. The SOUL, meant by Gaster for our own hollow cage, is instead flung into her old ally, someone who would understand her—a fellow trickster.

> Human SOUL and parts!

Considering the Knight's *"promise"* is effective leverage against Kris, I think it's fair to say that Kris doesn't just *work* with the Knight, but knows that they are Dess. We also have to assume Kris knew what the broad strokes of the plan were before the game began, since they preemptively plug in Tenna between Chapters 1 and 2 and seem to silently communicate with the Knight when face-to-face (e.g. cough, stairs chase), among several other details that only make sense if Kris had prior knowledge of what the game would entail. The question now is, what drives them to help her?

There's a lot that could be motivating them to do so, most of which is discomforting. On the surface, it could just be their longstanding admiration of Dess driving them. This would track with the time they *"smiled"* at the Knight in Chapter 3, or when they protected their identity from us during the *"Think of the Knight"* cutscene and later maliciously complying with our *"Turn the doorknob"* command. We can't mechanically *do* anything with the Knight's identity until Kris lets us,⁸⁶ which suggests a personal interest in doing so. I can think of a pretty good one: Kris cares too much about Dess to let us pry into her current whereabouts.

The two are also united by being Hometown's rejects, Kris living in Asriel's shadow, and Dess not being enough for her mother, ultimately fading from Hometown's memory. I hesitate to call either of them completely misanthropic, but it takes a numbing sort of social isolation to be okay with destroying the world, and both either used to (dented instruments) or currently exhibit violent behavior (Sword Route). I doubt either of them felt adequately loved, even back when things seemed okay.

The rest of their relationship is defined by a worrying power-gap; Kris kneels to Dess, and is knighted by them after the Chapter 3 fight—a show of mutual understanding,

⁸⁶ i.e. we can't tell Susie "Kris told us who the Knight is" because Kris will likely speak with their mouth closed or eat their hand off something.

but still a reminder of Kris's indenturement. In a way, it's similar to how they've *always* been with each other; Dess would let Kris in, but would still exercise authority over them. Many oddities—Kris's painting, Kris dropping the guitar pick, Kris having "*already taken enough*" from Asriel—might also suggest a guilty conscience intrinsically motivating them.

I don't think Dess is consciously malicious though. I think she's just... sad. Bitter, weeping at her situation, one only Kris can understand. In [that Prophecy cutscene from earlier](#), the hand that pushes Kris back isn't depicted as forceful or hateful. It just "*pressed against yours*". The image of Kris reaching out and of Dess pushing Kris's hand (and not, like, their body) feels so achingly resigned to me, especially when the leadup involves Kris trying to backtrack from the last Prophecy. What's happening to them all is terrible, but Dess can't let Kris go back. Not at the halfway mark. Kris and Dess's relationship is yet another of DELTARUNE's that's been tragically cracking under pressure.

All of this would make the SOUL hijacking *really* interesting. Had the SOUL gone to our own vessel, Dess wouldn't have been able to convince the blank slate to help her. *We* sure as hell didn't promise her anything. For Dess's purposes, it *had* to go to Kris, because they know each other, trust each other, *because* they are so similar. Really, who *else* should it have been?

A minor puzzle in the Sword Route involves HERO_SWORD's movements being mirrored by a shadowed Toriel sprite. Within DELTARUNE's files exists [a toggle to replace the sprite with a black reindeer](#). This isn't just a caricature of Dess in a scary situation. It's proof that Toby is treating Kris and Dess as two sides of a coin; twin tools of storytelling not content with being mere tools. The town's nobodies, saint and sinner of the Angel and Devil.⁸⁷

Let's not stop there, though. This dynamic, if correctly described, would be pivotal in multiple respects—narratively, metanarratively, messaging-wise, character-wise—which is why I don't feel content ending on a scorned Dess enlisting the next-door freak in her spite-mission to blow the planet up. There has to be something that... ties this whole mess

⁸⁷ ... On that note, I don't see the value in introducing a third, equally knowledgeable antagonist (who seemingly doesn't do anything to contribute to the advancing of the Prophecy) into this dynamic. Carol is too narratively oppositional to Dess to be consciously cooperating with her and Kris. What would her third-wheeling serve... oh, I'm just complaining about the phone again...

together. Forget Dess's motive, what about *Toby Fox's*? How would this partnership serve Toby's message: "*don't forget*"?

Earlier, I turned to the Fountains for windows into Dess as a person, little cracks in the Knight's exterior betraying the girl underneath. This worked because the Fountains are art. It'd be convenient if, perhaps, there were a more pure example of Dess's personal expression that we can use to better understand her. Something more grounded, from before she went missing.

Where would we find something like that?

PARENTAL LOCK:

> 0 0 0 0 <

> 1 2 2 4 <

> 1 2 2 5 <

NOW PLAYING ...

> RAISE UP YOUR BAT

Debating whether or not Dess actually wrote the song is mostly unnecessary, because the game makes her ties to it *very* apparent. A punk rock banger with gratuitous horror theming, baseball imagery, and a brand new riff on "Lost Girl"? Buddy.

The game moves mountains to make you immediately associate Dess with this song, which naturally means it's not just just a song she liked, but one she personally identified with. If she actually wrote it? Even better.

Since "Raise Up Your Bat" is synonymous with Dess, what might it say about her? Whether or not it's a song she wrote, I think the best way to learn what Dess truly believed before she took a nihilistic turn would be to give its lyrics a good, hard look.



A good. **Hard. Look.**

>> Recurring elements

First, this song depicts an ongoing struggle between two forces. The antagonizing force embodies unease and uncertainty, while the side the singer urges the audience to take is all things hope and truth. This mirrors DELTARUNE's use of Dark and Light, the latter of which the song frames as the underdog.

Second, the bat. It's not there just because Dess likes baseball; a baseball bat is a symbol of resistance. A blunt, worldly thing, an improvised weapon for when all other options have been compromised. It is the teenager's take on Gordon Freeman's crowbar, scrappy and determined in the face of the unknown. But it's not just any bat! It's *"your"* bat, something the singer is sure you have, even if you don't think so. That bat isn't bestowed upon anyone in particular; it's something *everyone* is capable of holding.

Last, pronoun usage. The song is centered around two people: *"You"* and *"I"*. Interestingly, while the song is played for a crowd in-game, *"You"* never represents a group; when the singer tells you to follow them, they say *"With your heart as the ark"*—Heart, not hearts. *"Raise Up Your Bat"* is between a singer and their sole listener. These two people have fairly obvious identities, but let's ignore them for now.

These ideas and patterns will come up frequently throughout the entire song, so remember them.

>> Intro

"WHEN THE DEMON HEART IS CRYING"

AND THE BLOOD IS GUSHING BRIGHT

RAISE UP YOUR BAT FOR THE BURNING FIGHT"

This is where most of the over-the-top fantasy horror imagery is localized. Particularly, the crying demon heart has satanic connotations while also being defined by its cry—a fear response. It stands in almost comical contrast to the image of something as normal and easy to picture as a bat, but the singer still expects us to fight against the demon heart. In other words, the singer wants us to fight panic and unreality with determination and truth. "Blood" is also fairly profane, compounded by it being bright in contrast to the implicit darkness of the demon heart. It's a sign of *real* harm, *real* danger. Lastly, The fight itself is "*burning*". If you were to let go of your bat, there would be no fight, no fire, no hope for victory. Engaging in this fight is what brings burning change.

Three lines in, and the song is *already* about truth and fiction duking it out.

"WHEN YOUR HOPE IS SLOWLY DYING

AND YOUR FUTURE'S LOST ITS RIGHTS

RAISE UP YOUR BAT AND FACE THE FRIGHT"

Given that these lines mirror the previous ones, I hope it's not controversial to suggest that dying hope and lost future are effects of the demon heart. What I want to focus on is the future; it's been personified from being an abstract concept and is now something with "rights". The inanimate coming to life. Sound familiar?

"Future" losing its rights, has connotations of struggle, of an underdog directly oppressed by an authority. But what is the right of the future? If we assume such a thing is intrinsic to what the future represented when it was a concept, then I think that the one guarantee the future has is its tendency to **arrive**. If tomorrow doesn't come, it's not really tomorrow, is it? This would make the enemy of the future eternity—a day that doesn't stop, a story that can't be completed, a neverending night.

The singer again asks us to take up arms, this time even more explicit about what we're fighting. The tactile, earthy bat is juxtaposed with "*fright*", the fantastic unknown that the demon heart embodies. With faith in reality as your weapon, strike down lies. Don't run from fear. **Fight.**

"LET'S KNOCK 'EM DEAD INTO THE NIGHT"

The final line continues to associate the antagonist with darkness, while also depicting the struggle as a team effort; Let's fight together. Doesn't it *sound* like the kind of showy one-liner a teenager would think is super badass? Someone like Dess?

This line breaking the first verse's established tercet structure (three lines -> three lines + one extra) throws us off balance, emulating uncertainty. To offset this, the singer assures us that they will help us in this fight; a fight that can only be won by staring fear down, by walking into that uncertainty. This idea later serves as the basis of the chorus.

In DELTARUNE's own language, this song could not be any more about Light and Dark than it already is. "Hope" slowly dying at the hands of unyielding, hellish darkness—"When the *LIGHT* is subsumed by *SHADOW*. When the *FOUNTAINS* fill the sky."⁸⁸

Denial of the future and change is at the heart of DELTARUNE's conflict, which is why the singer fights for it. The singer is not simply kneeling to the Prophecy or futility of endings. They recognize a serious danger in the appealing delusions that Darkness can lead to, a world where resolution is eroded by people who do everything in their power to deny reality, who allow the blood to gush bright to prevent the burning fight of change. It's Dess's politician mother, trampling over Dess's rights because she's too afraid of what might happen if she leaves. It's Hometown's fences keeping her trapped in the same little world. It's someone replaying a game they loved over and over and over for the chance of another hit of that nostalgia, the possibility of more content hiding within.

The intro verse outlines Dess's ideals. The chorus that follows tells us how those beliefs are meant to manifest in-game.

>> Chorus

"Come follow me into the dark

With your heart as the ark

Which shall shine you the way"

The singer beckons us into Darkness, sort of indirectly positioning them as a "leader" already immersed in Darkness. The imagery also suggests that we are throwing

⁸⁸ Hell, there are *already* in-game implications that "hopes and dreams" are synonymous with "Light and Dark"! This fuels them even further!

ourselves at uncertainty. It's precarious, but they remind us of our heart, or *"ark"*. The idea of Darkness as a kind of ocean that must be sailed through on an ark tracks with how Darkness is portrayed/described by the game itself. The heart obviously references the SOUL; note how it explicitly penetrates the Dark with a *"shine"*. I'd also like to point out that, like the titular bat, Noah's Ark was a vessel of earth and wood which navigated an impossible flood, referencing the SOUL being the game's connection to reality guiding Kris on their journey. In this song, the SOUL is emblematic of truth, reality, and Light, just as it tends to be across DELTARUNE.⁸⁹

"Because I'm with you in the dark

With your heart as my mark

Which shall guide you the way"

I'm going to behave myself and save you-know-what for a little later. Just, let me poke at the lyrics in a vacuum for now, aye?

This stanza distinguishes itself from the previous when the singer attributes our heart's presence to themselves as their *"mark"*, as proof that they and their words are still with us. This again gives the singer a sense of authority, but it's the kind of authority we can take comfort in or be encouraged by, rather than simply revere. Now that you have this mark, you can fight. Hence, the constant emphasis on *"you"* fighting for your own hope—it's still *"your"* heart and *"your"* bat, after all. *You* still have to wield them. In Chapter 4, great emphasis is placed on the SOUL's Light penetrating Darkness, on hope overwriting the Dark.

Bonus points to that last line, by the way, for explicitly clarifying that our heart's shine can *"guide"*. Guide us through what, exactly?

"Through the waves"

The aqueous connotation of *"waves"* as more Darkness == water symbolism is clear, but I think there's something fun about the many forms waves can take. They can be choppy, smooth, slow, fast, tall, short. Being able to interpret them in ways both hostile and

⁸⁹ Granted, I have no in-universe explanation for why the actual real world Bible is making an appearance in Blood Crushers: The Band, but I don't think that discounts any of the potential meaning we can find. Wait I realized while typing this that it might genuinely have been taken from Pluey. Fuck that's so funny.

docile gives way to even *more* ties to Darkness's unpredictability. It's cool, okay? Be nice to me.

Like the intro's closing line (knock 'em dead etc), the chorus ends by forcibly extending the tercet, similarly emulating that feeling of stepping into something unfamiliar. The fact that the extension itself is about entering the waves can also be read as an allusion to what overwhelming Darkness represents in DELTARUNE: prolonging the inevitable, the future losing its rights.

If the intro was the distillation of Dess's beliefs, the chorus is her call to action, maybe even that of the whole game: follow Dess into the Dark with hope as your Light. The fact that it's all set to "Lost Girl" is point-blank confirmation that this song is December Holiday's beating, bloody heart.

> An ode to never forgetting

"Raise Up Your Bat" is in line with the themes and struggles within DELTARUNE even when you *don't* consider lore implications. When you *do* consider them, though, the chorus transparently confirms a seven year mystery: when Dess sings "*I'm with you in the dark / With your heart as my mark / Which shall guide you the way*", it brings to mind the game's intro sequence, when what seems to be a third party ("typer" value 2 to Gaster's 666) disposes of our vessel before shunting the SOUL into Kris—**their heart is her mark**.

The more I follow this line of logic, the more sense it makes; these verses are sung to the tune of "Lost Girl", telling us how to find her ("*follow me into the dark*"). Sure, these can be read as literal directions, but they can also be read as helping Dess find *herself*.

The Dess speaking in that opening scene is the Roaring Knight, a bitter shell of the ambitious girl she used to be. The Knight, the one trying the most to fulfill the Prophecy, the one Gaster has taken advantage of, is the only character I know who would hijack his experiment with the justification "*No one can choose who they are in this world*".⁹⁰ Afterwards, Dess gives the SOUL to her old friend Kris.

Do you know what else this reminds me of? "**Don't Forget**". Both songs are one-on-one conversations between the singer, a trusted friend, and the listener, the one

⁹⁰ Even now, she's still a rebel.

with the heart. Both are about the SOUL's Light shining "*with the truth*", with reality that overcomes the Dark. Both are about growing shadows that represent denial of reality, that make "*the places that you know / Seem like fantasy*"—the Roaring. Most important of all, both conclude the singer is "*with you in the dark*", by your side for the worst.

You see it too, right? "Don't Forget"'s lyrics are cut from the exact thematic cloth "Raise Up Your Bat" is. They're both sung by Dess to Kris, and they're *both* about the promise in their heart.

There's another big textual example of Dess's degradation: When the Knight reels Kris back at the end of Chapter 4, they say "*Don't forget, Kris... / ... you promised.*" The most thematically loaded power-words in the game are used in a call reminding Kris that they serve the end of the world. That "*promise*" used to be about how things can change for the better. Now, she takes those words and repurposes them as leverage. In the world of "Raise Up Your Bat", the Knight has given up, and wants Kris to give up as well. There's nothing worth fighting for, no changing things for the better in a predetermined world that didn't love her back—not the way it loved all the others—so she aims to destroy it all. "We go way back, Kris," she says. "You'll help me burn everything, right?"

The Roaring Knight is a lost, bitter Dess. In contrast to Gaster, whose love for this world drives him to obsession, Dess wants nothing more than to destroy it.⁹¹ She recruits Kris, the one person who knows what happened to her, who she knows will follow her to the ends of the earth.⁹² In a town choked by loss, the Knight threatens to end it all. The Knight is the death knell of a world that can never change, the town she didn't feel loved by. Would Dess really have run away if she'd felt like she belonged where she came from?⁹³

> Last was the girl

Kris thinks they have two choices: help the Knight with the Prophecy, or don't. One means everyone dies. The other means Dess suffers. What do they do?

Between the lines, there's actually one more choice. A way for the game to end *without* the inherent tragedy. It's in Susie's big moment of Chapter 3: Susie resolves to give

⁹¹ "*There is nothing left for us here. / Let us erase this pointless world, and move on to the next.*"

⁹² "*I... I don't like this idea, Chara. / Wh.. what? / N-no, I'm not... / ... big kids don't cry.*"

⁹³ "*Chara hated humanity. / Why they did, they never talked about it. / But they felt very strongly about that.*"

Tenna a happy ending in the Light World, directly counter to Ralsei's resignation to the futility of objects. She meant it when she said she won't forget any of them. Letting go, but nurturing a certain tenderness in herself. Accepting the end, and choosing life in spite of it. Susie is responsible for the absolute closest the story has gotten to what Toby means when he says "don't forget".

Most people are at least somewhat aware that Susie and Dess are similar; both are aggressive teen girls who their friends care deeply for, for example. But the similarities don't stop at superficialities—in fact, Susie's growth is a near exact inversion of Dess's downfall. Really, look:

- Before the game began, Susie was repeatedly burned by people who looked down on her, silently yet unanimously ostracized most places she went. This translates into deep social anxiety, exemplified hardest in the third act of Chapter 1. To mitigate this fear, she doubles down on acting as scary and violent as possible, depriving herself of personal expression beyond this front and ultimately developing the apathetic mindset: *"Your choices don't matter"*. (She also jokes about impaling herself.) By Chapter 4, she's almost unrecognizable; while she's still disliked by a lot of Hometown (particularly Carol Holiday), still impossible to contain, still boldly defiant of preconceived notions, she has friends. She cares about people. She *smiles*. In a far cry from her old mindset, she resolves to find a way out of the final tragedy. With the encouragement of her friends and the Old Man, she expresses herself artistically, interested in learning piano, guitar, storytelling with a fire in her eyes, doodling...
- Before the game began, December Holiday, one of Gerson Boom's students, was a self-assured musical prodigy and troubled teen, lover of performances and all things scary. The few people who were close to her were profoundly impacted by her presence, particularly Noelle and Kris, who were moved by even her rougher edges. As a problem child, she was the counter to her strict mother, Carol. Dess embodied fire and rebellion, spontaneous and loud. She wanted, more than anything, to be free of Hometown.

In an ironic twist, Dess's attempt to free herself exposed her to the truth of the world, a self-fulfilling tale convincing her that nothing she did mattered. Dess is now

the Roaring Knight, and all she wants is to end the game. The effigies of her old life—TV, halloween—ring hollow as she kills Darkners without even blinking. Beyond exemplifying cruel fate and inevitability with her actions, the first words she says are “No one can choose who they are in this world”. Like Flowey with Asriel, the Knight is a cruel twist on who Dess was. Like Susie, the Knight believes they are unable to be loved. Like Susie, the Knight doesn’t like being used as entertainment.

This inversion adds *so much* depth to their rivalry. Susie *hates* the Knight, and is the only hero willing to directly oppose them. The fact that Susie’s arc is going in a positive direction while Dess is at her lowest point means that, like with most of the cast, Susie might be able to inspire hope in Dess again.

Dess has lost her way, no longer the hero depicted in “Raise Up Your Bat”. To me, “finding” Dess doesn’t simply mean locating her or saving the world from destruction or saving a kinder version of her in some far off location. It means helping the most hopeless girl in the world find hope once more.⁹⁴

Susie can only do so much though. The same goes for all of them, really. At the beginning, middle, and end of everything, is **you**.

> The end?

The Angel. The Player. The sole survivor. How will *you* show your love?

Will you condemn DELTARUNE to its ending, reaffirming the Knight’s belief system? Will you, like Gaster, attempt to pull it from its grave, desperate to bring it back well past its expiration?

It’s a hard choice; even if you “save” the world, even if you have reason to return to DELTARUNE, even if your desire has not been met... once the game is used up, that is all it will ever be. You can replay it over and over, but you will never feel “that way” again. But the ending itself feels too cruel to stand, right? So what do we do?

I’m sure you know already: If you pick up the pen, if you write your own stories, if you even so much as think about DELTARUNE after the chips are down (surely you do, if you’ve read *this* far), it’s possible you can feel “something else”. So long as you don’t forget,

⁹⁴ “Now there is one person left to save / [Chara](#)”

so long as you're still friends with everyone, you'll never have to truly leave.

The aftermath of a story, of a game, of a person, is a crucial point, arguably more important than reaching the end itself. In the wake of its conclusion, the world of DELTARUNE will widen as far as you want it to. Its fate, as it's always been, will be in your hands.

But that's then. Not now. Not while it's still waiting.

Now, it's time to face the fright.

SO LET'S KNOCK 'EM DEAD INTO THE NIGHT!

> “””Inspirations”””

See, like, it's not that I *never* have original thoughts, it's just that most if not all of them are a result of me slow-cooking the ideas of people much smarter than me until they congeal into something “new” and “shit”. Below are as many direct inspirations for this document as I can presently remember, along with brief explanations of what I specifically stole.

- [THEMAKINGOF.html](#) - I hesitate to go as far as to call DELTARUNE a remake of Toby's old ROM hack. Regardless, this behind-the-scenes look (included with the hack) is both an insightful look at Toby's writing process (the likes of which we haven't really gotten since) and another example of the kinds of stories Toby gravitates toward.
 - [His article on the RE PRAY show](#) is also an interesting read, though I guess it's limited by the show itself being directly inspired by UNDERTALE.
- [What was so good about UNDERTALE, anyway? \(A mildly deranged retrospective\)](#) - Aside from generally being an entertaining, heartfelt watch, Andrew Cunningham's video is one of the best meta explanations of Flowey, and is also who I borrowed the “interior”/“exterior” terminology from.
 - Alternatively, there is [Perverted Sentimentality: An Analysis of UNDERTALE](#) by hbomborguy, a video from less than a year after the game had been released. A more succinct analysis with nearly the same thesis as Andrew's video, but less surreal visuals. Watch it if you're in a hurry.
- [SEMI-COHERENT MUSINGS ON THE METAPHYSICS OF DELTARUNE](#) - I already directly mentioned this post way back in the beginning, but I'd still like to point to it directly for its convincing illustration of DELTARUNE's world structure.
- [THE DEVICE THEORY](#) - Most people already know what this is (i.e. an analysis of what DELTARUNE's physical structure means for its narrative and themes) and I already dedicated an entire heading to why it's significant, so I won't waste your time. If you *do* have time to waste, and haven't already seen molly's series, give it a watch. Just... get comfortable. For upwards of ten hours.

- **[Oblivion Theory](#)** - It's dated, particularly when talking about the Knight's identity, but its commentary on the Player being the Angel is still pertinent, and probably the biggest contributing factor to me being such a staunch believer in the idea at all. I also borrow many of its ideas on the creation/consumption cycle of art and probably also something about the constructed nature of the Prophecy. One of the first DELTARUNE analyses to completely floor me in its execution.
 - If you want an up-to-date summary of the author's Player Angel takes, he wrote a quick thread on [Twitter](#). (This link is to an alternative frontend for those without an account (rightfully so) but if you want to read it on the website proper you can just replace the domain name)
 - wandydoodles is also the author of **[THE FRIEND MASTERDOC](#)**, which I referenced basically whenever I had to talk about DEVICE_FRIEND.
- **[World Egg Theory](#)** - I started talking to Ellie around when Chapters 3 and 4 released, and was intrigued when she started outlining DELTARUNE's world as a fabricated nesting sequence—an egg—and threaded narrative significance throughout. Granted, I didn't take *direct* direct inspiration from anything here, but we've always had fun discussions about the game's themes. Her post is elegant and succinct, which I suppose makes linking to it after 150 pages of writing a bit of a dumb move... but you should read it anyway!
- **[Why Dess SHOULD be the Knight](#)** - Rising above a sea of Watsonian takes on how Dess can or can't be the Knight because of the bat sword or phone or whatever is this video. Ye gods, the rare DELTARUNE literary analysis.
- **["The Girl", The Knight, & Gender In Deltarune](#)** - Frankly brilliant analysis of how gender is used as a storytelling tool by Toby, which informs a good chunk of my understanding of the Weird Route. It's also just a good ass video with very little "Youtube"isms, and I do appreciate Stuffed Alpaca filling the niche of Woke Deltarune Youtube. Predictably, I don't fully agree with the "Prophecy ending bad" stance, but if you have time for nothing else, *please* watch this.
 - While you're at it, go check out any of the posts/tags by [hellspawnmotel](#). I read [one of her Weird Route comics](#) back in the day which permanently altered how I see DELTARUNE, and everything else on there is also *real* good.

- [You and HIM](#) - In spite of the author's own insistence that the last third of this document is "bunk" with the new Chapters, I find it to be a highly compelling look at not just what textually supports many of the ideas I've brought up, but also why they would be more narratively satisfying than any potential alternative. In particular, the very idea of the Knight being a parallel to us and Kris was first exposed to me in this very text.
- [ANOTHER YOU](#) - This video was uploaded months after I'd started writing, but I figured I should link it here anyway because it's like, REALLY similar. Let it be a reminder that the conclusions I've reached aren't all that special. All either of us tried to do is earnestly engage with the text.

*this document was written entirely by ana [REDACTED]. yes that is her name.
ana doesnt get up to much
but she does thank you greatly for your time, and apologizes for the formatting.
dont forget!*

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