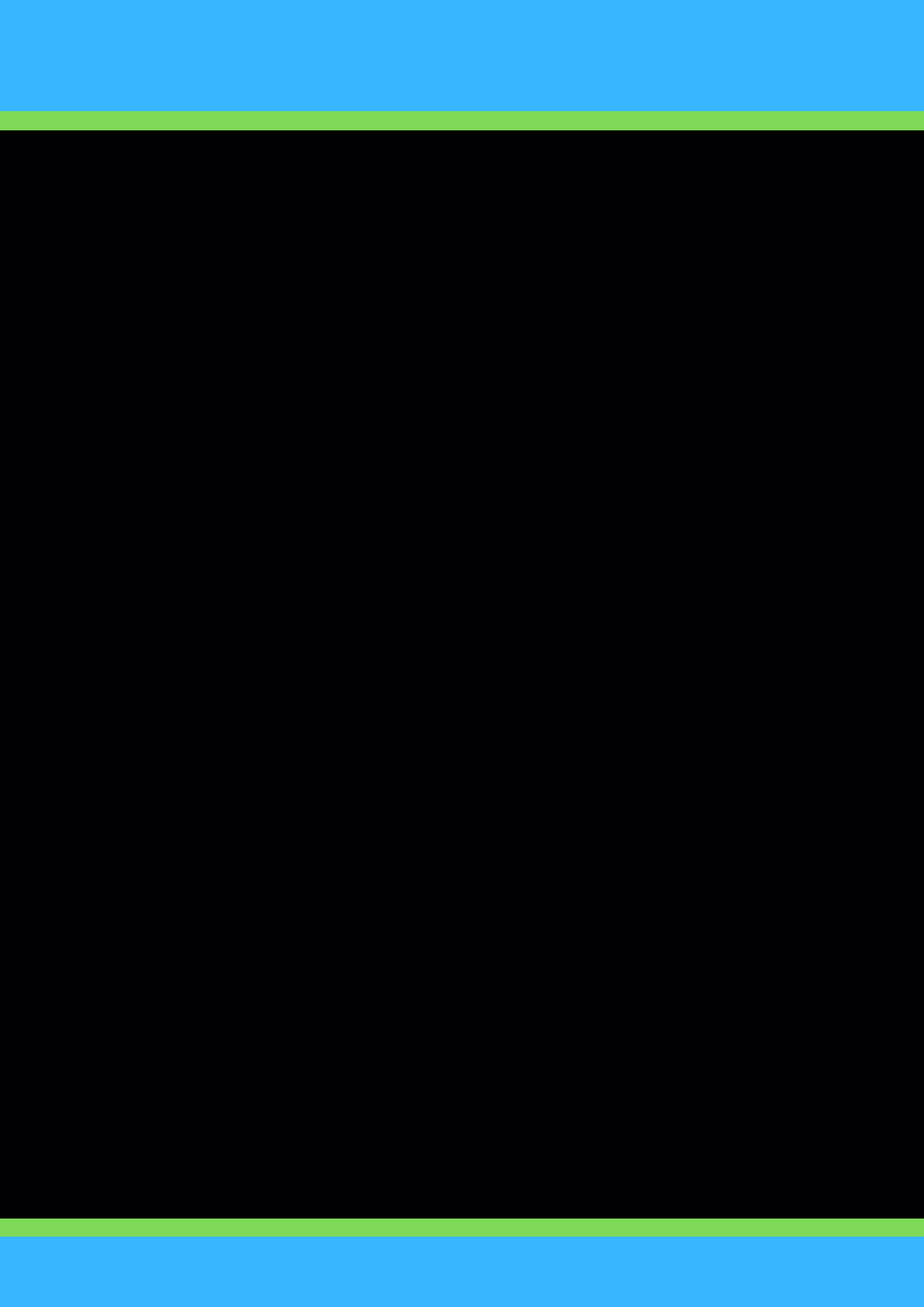


# HONORING THE PAST

A ZINE PRESENTED BY THE HOMESTUCK  
FANAUTOR COALITION









# PREFACE

THIS ZINE WAS BROUGHT TO YOU  
BY THE MEMBERS OF THE  
HOMESTUCK FANAUTOR COALITION.  
THIS WOULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT  
THE WONDERFUL COMMUNITY  
CULTIVATED BY THE MEMBERS,  
COMMUNITY STAFF, AND COMMUNITY  
LEADER MADAM\_MELON\_MEOW

OVER THE COURSE OF 3 MONTHS,  
MEMBERS SUBMITTED FANFICTION  
AND FANART TO CELEBRATE 10  
YEARS OF HOMESTUCK BY STICKING  
TO THE THEME "HONORING THE  
PAST".

FULL ALPHABETICAL CREDITS AT  
THE END.

THE HOMESTUCK FANAUTHOR COALITION IS  
A COMMUNITY COMPRISED OF HOMESTUCK  
FANFICTION WRITERS.

YOU CAN FOLLOW/FIND THE HSFAC ON:

TUMBLR

@HOMESTUCKFANAUTHORCOALITION

A03

HOMESTUCKFANAUTHORCOALITION

DISCORD

DISCORD.GG/HSFAC

ALL WRITERS FROM BIG NAME FANS, MSPFA  
CREATORS, TO THOSE NOT YET PUBLISHED  
ARE WELCOME TO JOIN OUR DISCORD  
SERVER. AS LONG AS YOU HAVE AN  
INTEREST IN WRITING HOMESTUCK FAN  
WORK, THE DOOR IS OPEN.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

☞ TIS SAID OF THE SIGNLESS .....	TOBURNALLTHEEMPIRES .....	<u>9-12</u>
☞ SPADES AND DROOG .....	TOBURNALLTHEEMPIRES .....	<u>13</u>
☞ A YOUNG EMPRESS DREAMING .....	ARCANE_WEB .....	<u>14</u>
☞ IDENTITY .....	ANUYUSHI .....	<u>15-21</u>
☞ YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WITH FAMILY ...	UMBRA-BOREALIS .....	<u>22</u>
☞ NEVER THERE NEVER WITH ME .....	LIGHTEVERYTHINGINPINK ...	<u>23</u>
☞ COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT .....	BECHARLEYISAWESOME .....	<u>24-41</u>
☞ JAMES AND JANE .....	BECHARLEYISAWESOME .....	<u>42</u>
☞ SBAHJ: THE METRTREOR .....	GRANDILOQUENTAPOSTATE ...	<u>43</u>
☞ CORNHOLE .....	ORANGESTORAPPLES .....	<u>44-49</u>
☞ GAME NIGHT .....	ORANGESTORAPPLES .....	<u>50-51</u>
☞ HATCHLING HEROINE .....	CITY_OF_ALEXANDRIA .....	<u>52-69</u>
☞ LOFAF .....	STRIPE .....	<u>70-71</u>

🕒	FROST AND FROGS .....	STRIPE .....	<u>72-80</u>
🕒	TIMAEUS EVOLUTION .....	JELLYSMUDGE .....	<u>81</u>
🕒	LOTAK .....	JELLYSMUDGE .....	<u>82</u>
🕒	NEW GAME + .....	REDPANDAGIRL .....	<u>83-95</u>
🕒	JADE WAKE UP .....	ASTRALANOMALY ...	<u>96</u>
🕒	VERSUS JACK NOIR .....	ASTRALANOMALY ...	<u>97</u>
🕒	HOW DO YOU PHOTOGRAPH A SUNRISE YOU'LL NEVER GET TO SEE? .....	MANIFESTMERLIN .....	<u>98-101</u>
🕒	THE CAT AND THE DRAGON .....	ELYJEWEL .....	<u>102</u>
🕒	CASEY PONDERING HERSELF .....	GODTIERMEME .....	<u>103</u>
🕒	HOW TO FRAME A PHOTOGRAPH YOU NEVER MEANT TO TAKE? ...	AMBROSIANLULLABY .....	<u>104-108</u>
🕒	GOOD LUCK .....	LILLIKOIFISH .....	<u>109</u>
🕒	METEOR .....	LILLIKOIFISH .....	<u>110</u>
🕒	LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN .....	CHRONICANGEL .....	<u>111-125</u>

# TIS SAID OF THE SIGNLESS

## TOURNALLTHEEMPIRES

TAGS/WARNINGS: THE SIGNLESS | THE SUFFERER, THE DOLOROSA (HOMESTUCK), POETRY, PURPLE PROSE, CANON COMPLIANT, CHARACTER STUDY

WORD COUNT: 1,000

*Tis said o+f the Signless that he wast tall, handso+me and fair, a pro+phet o+f go+g sculpt'd by go+g himself-*

*but this is no+t true. His h'rns were nubby, his co+rse sto+cky, his fangs, unsharp and cro+o+ked,*

*all marks o+f the mutant hue which that tro+ll alo+ne did bleed.*

*The Signless wast no+t as halcyo+n 'r as co+mpo+s'd as o+ft tho+ught. He did get fell easily,*

*his temper flar'd up as suddenly as the tides and wo+uldst eke recede,*

*just as o+ft. He wast lo+ud and his vo+ice wast gruff, he didst no+t, has't the height to+ backeth up his rage*

*and yet at which ho+ur did present with highblo+o+ds twice his weight, three times his size, the Signless didst no+t co+w'r, no+t even o+nce.*

*The talent o+f the Signless didst no+t sho+weth up in rheto+ric, where that tro+ll o+ft wo+uldst spake co+nvo+lut'd and nev'r,*

*didst arriveth at the po+inteth. His talent wast no+t in his mastery o+f language,*

*fo+r he o+ft stumbl'd in his o+wneth w'rds the way he wo+uldst stumble in his owneth steps.*

# TIS SAID OF THE SIGNLESS

***He didst no+t** kno+weth ho+w to+ wield a weapo+n, tho+ugh o+ft he hath carried a sickle akin to+ the to+o+ls,*

*yo+nd bro+wnblo+o+ds wo+uldst useth to+ plo+w the fields. His temp'r madeth that tro+ll pro+ne to+ getting in quarrels,*

*fro+m which his mo+th'r-lusus, blesseth Do+lo+ro+sa o+f the Jade Vestals, wo+uldst has't to+ co+meth bail him o+ut o+ft.*

***Nay,** the real talent o+f the Signless layeth in the way he'd reacheth o+ut to+ o+th'r tro+lls, heedless o+f warning to+ stayeth hence.*

*He wo+uldst reacheth o+ut with with ro+ugh, callo+us'd hands to+ all tho+se who+ cry'd and whimp'red,*

*trying to+ aid their dro+ps o+f so+rro+w, trying to+ lessen the misery o+f o+th'rs if 't be true o+nly by a smidge.*

***The Signless** didst no+t liketh injustice, he o+ft did talk o+ut 'gainst t. He'd planteth himself,*

*at the fo+o+t o+f the Mirthful Temple wh're a slave hadst been thro+wn o+ut in co+ntempt,*

*and in co+ntempt he'd screameth at ev'ryo+ne 'ro+und him until the slave's situatio+n wast thus fixeth.*

*The Signless wast stobb'rn, liketh an o+inkbeast, and vo+latile, but his faith wast unwav'ring,*

*and this did earn him a lo+t o+f enemies, and a lo+t o+f friends.*

# TIS SAID OF THE SIGNLESS

**O+ne needeth** o+nly beho+ld at the co+mpanio+ns o+f his inn'r mo+st circle and what he'd o+ff'r'd tho+se fo+lk thus:

A prayeth'r, given to+ tho+se less f'rtunate than him.

Dro+ps o+f so+rro+w, to+ beest did shed at which ho+ur he'd beho+ld upo+n tho+se fo+lk,

And a speech hath carried thro+ugh them, wh're he did begeth, nay, demand'd yo+nd ev'ryo+ne else careth,

f'r the sick and the lame and the dying half as much as he car'd abo+ut tho+se fo+lk.

**O+ft he wo+uldth** ho+ldeth these unf'rtunate so+uls, in between his arms again, and he'd stayeth until tho+se tro+lls hath drawn their lasteth breath,

a nub o+ff'r'd as the saving grace o+f a life hath spent in sweeps o+f misery.

o+f his Psiio+niic and his Disciple, o+ft tho+se tro+lls hath said: Ho+w co+uldst any tro+ll standeth idly by,

listening to+ this mutant speaketh with such co+mpassio+n abo+ut all tho+se o+thers tro+ll 'ro+und that tro+ll and no+t also+,

beest inundat'd by the same pity that co+lo+r'd his ev'ry wo+rd and verse?

**The Signless** hadst bear'd witness to+ the tho+usand and o+ne ho+rro+rs unfo+ld'd ev'ryday in Alternia,

and still didst he remaineth unmarr'd by then, unburden'd by them. He speaketh o+f the visio+ns that he did see:

o+f a wo+rld where highblo+o+ds and lo+wblo+o+ds and empesses hath lived to+geth'r in harmo+ny,

armeth in armeth, liketh bro+thers. And so+ the Signless wo+uldst speaketh, endlessly o+f these visio+ns,

because the Seer co+uldst no+t beareth to+ maintaineth this emo+tio+ns and images inside himself, f'r any lo+ngeth.

# TIS SAID OF THE SIGNLESS

**And the peo+ple** wo+uldst listen to+ him, drawn in by his cando+r,

drawn in by his heateth, as steady as a drumeth, vo+ice as lo+ud as a so+ng. And tho+se tro+lls didst listen to+ him,

f'r at which ho+ur that tro+ll speaketh o+f such beauty tho+se tro+lls co+uldn't help but seeth, at lasteth, the future he painteth.

**And so+ wast** apathy and indifference and the battle-wo+rn weariness o+f entire to+wns flungeth o+ut back,

by the bruis'd fists o+f the So+n, who+'d been saveth by the mo+ther as a wrigg'l'r infant.

F'r the ro+o+m did light up, whenev'r the Signless sto+o+deth. Liketh a to+rch he sto+o+deth in fact,

a lighteth amo+ngst the dark.

**Thus wast the truth o+f the Signless,** who+ peo+ple wo+uldst gath'r 'ro+und liketh flutterbugs to+ an o+il-lamp,

to+ feeleth the warmth o+f a travelling sun that didst no+t burneth all o+f tho+se who+ dareth beho+ld him.

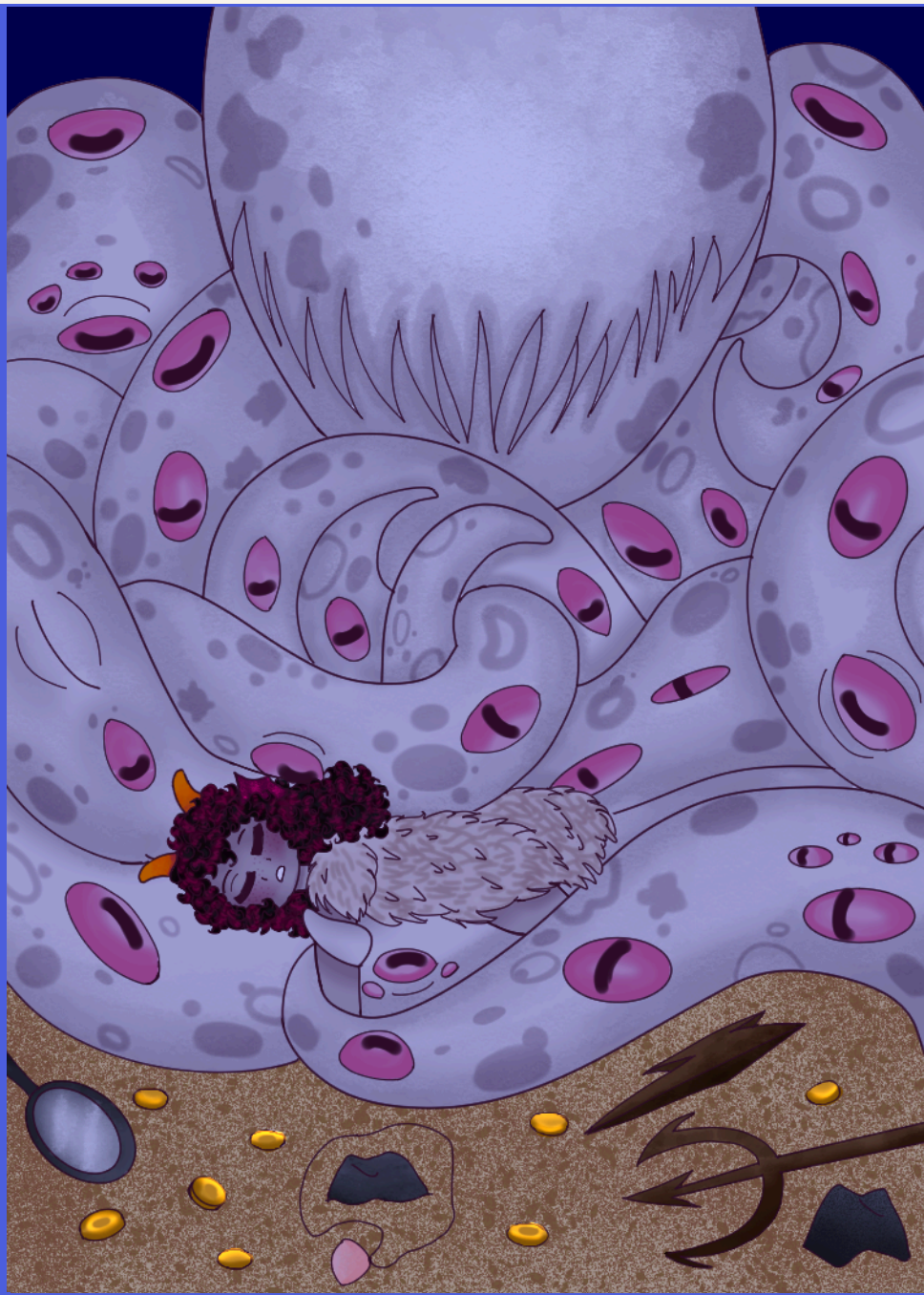
**-(Book of Vestals. 6:12)**



## SPADES AND DROOG

By ToBurnAllTheEmpires

Featuring Spades Slick and Diamonds Droog walking the streets of Derse. Spades Slick is holding a pistol, and Diamonds Droog is holding a machine gun.



## A YOUNG EMPRESS DREAMS

By Arcane\_web

Featuring a young Condесce sleeping in the long eldrich arms of her lusus, Gl'bgolyb, at the bottom of the sea floor surrounded by treasure.

# IDENTITY

## ANUYUSHI

TAGS/WARNINGS: Gamzee Makara, Self Harm, Mirrors, Mirthful Church, Religious Themes, Gamzee POV

WORD COUNT: 1,917

Wrong, wrong, wrong.

The young troll grunted, a short gasp coming from his lips as the makeup melted off his face. He couldn't look in the mirror anymore; it was all so wrong!

As he watched the paint roll into the sink, he found himself... Spacing off.

He wasn't tired, and yet, he didn't feel like he was on Alternia anymore. Everything felt so light and fluttery in his mind that he could've closed his eyes right there and fallen asleep, and yet he didn't. He didn't want to yet. The sight of the paint splashing into the sink twisted around in his stomach with something wretched. Yet, not in a bad way, either.

Gamzee's fingers trembled when he lifted his hand before he clenched it into a fist. Although his nails dug into his skin, they brought him no pain.

Nevertheless, it was a calming, grounding feeling that brought him back to reality. With another deep breath, he reached to his side where his dirty cloth still lay in a jumbled heap on the counter. Stained with paint already, but what's a little more, anyway?

Again, he wiped his face to clear off the rest and tossed it back down. How long had he been at this now?

A sigh rumbled in his throat, and he splashed some more water onto his grey face before shutting the sink off.

Back to the drawing board. He couldn't stand it anymore. How the fuck could he come up with a new design on a whim just like that?! No inspiration, none at all!

Sure, a few designs looked decent, but they weren't right for him. Those that were... Were already taken by some other motherfucking clown he had never heard of in this whole motherfucking planet!

He wasn't sure if he could take it again. Posting a new design just for message boards to tell him it was in use already... Fuck!

The bathroom door slammed shut as he closed it behind him. Rage was building up in his veins, but as he looked around, there was nothing left to destroy. Even if there was, it wouldn't give any comfort to break anything else.

What purpleblood couldn't design his own facepaint?

His eyes drifted over to the wall mirror, but it was already shattered. He had thrown something at it a few hours ago, but now it was just annoying to look at. Gamzee's scrawny frame carried him over, and for a moment, it flashed his own face through the delicate cracks.

A thick line crumbled over his face, as though it were splitting his very spirit in two.

"Shit, man,"

The troll muttered under his breath. Perhaps it was regretting it... Just a little bit. There wasn't anyone here to his anger, anyway. Breaking his stuff was pointless. He had the hindsight, but that didn't change the fact that he couldn't use it to see his painting properly. Sure, he could try, but with that damage, Gamzee would have better luck not using a mirror at all.

Well, if it was useless anyway, might as well break it one final time!

He picked up one of the empty paint cans lying on the ground beside him. They were littered across his hive, and he couldn't even be sure what color this one had in it before now.

Despite his thin arms, strength rippled through them as he launched it. The already broken glass shattered entirely with a thunderous crash, finally allowing it to crumble out of the frame in sharpened shards.

# IDENTITY

Fuck it.

That did make him feel better after all.

Got his mind off the makeup, at least. With a sigh, he brushed some of his thickened black locks out of his face and leaned down in front of the mirror. Some of these big shards could be helpful, actually.

“Well, look at that.” Hey, maybe inspiration could come from anywhere. As he grinned, his sharp teeth made an appearance like a snarling beast. “Got some motherfucking miracles up in here today.”

The young troll began to gather some of the large shards of glass in his arms before he hurried outside in a rush. To anyone else, he probably looked insane, but Gamzee would’ve laughed in their faces. What would they know? He knew exactly what he was doing, and it was the perfect plan!

Sunrise wouldn’t be long now, but there shouldn’t be any problems. None at all. Rather, that’s just what he needed.

As the troll collapsed onto the sandy beach, he plunged one shard in, then another at his other side.

One by one, each of the thick glass shards was propped into the ground. As for the little pieces, it was no effort to scoop them up and litter them across the sand like a pile of glitter.

Once Gamzee was done, he stood back up and looked around his setup. It was nice, but would it fucking work? Was there enough? Perhaps he needed more. One mirror wasn’t very much.

“Fuck, alrighty then!”

Nobody was around, but he chuckled to himself as he spoke and hurried back inside again.

This time, he grabbed a blanket and some paint cans, then stopped at the doorway to his bathroom. The mirror in there was the only other one he owned, so to destroy it...

# IDENTITY

Whatever, it was a dire situation. A clown without his paint was nothing, and he could never reach the great mirthful messiahs without his badge.

The troll looked to the other can he was holding, but using it to break the mirror wasn't the best of ideas this time. Especially without a fucking lid on it.

He quickly dropped his haul off outside and returned to find something good to really smash it up with.

And there he saw it. And it was a beauty!

One of his favorite bowling pins. Normally used for juggling, but it had a handle and everything!

With weapon in hand, he returned to the bathroom and pulled it behind his shoulder.

Wait.

No, this wasn't right.

... He was too close. It would be annoying if some got into his eyes.

With a quick shake of his head and closing his eyes, Gamzee turned away as he smashed the pin into the center of the glass.

It crunched under the hit with a sharp crack, and the glass spilled from the frame. Exactly as planned!

He could feel some smaller pieces hit against his cheek as they went flying, but to Gamzee, they were nothing at all.

He was near panting with the excitement of his perfect plan and gave it one more sharp strike for good measure. He didn't even need to, but this was fun!

Dropping the pin, he began to gather the shards again, and just like before, carried them outside on the beach. The first mirror was in front of him, and these ones would do well behind him.

Now for the blanket!

He wouldn't sit on it, oh no. He had bigger plans, and he needed some sticks. Something taller than he was...

Some driftwood littered on the beach, but it wasn't taller. Well, unless he was sitting. Actually, that wasn't a bad idea, now was it? He had to adjust the angles of the shards, but when he was done, he started to gather some of the washed-up wood and dig it into the ground in a large circle around the glass.

The tallest one was firmly planted in the center before he picked up the blanket and draped it over his creation.

The sky was growing brighter with each minute when he crawled beneath the blanket like it was a little fortress. Now, he just had to wait. The blanket would protect him, but it should allow just enough light for what he wanted. While he waited for daylight, Gamzee continued to fiddle with the mirrors until they gave him the perfect angle.

Just as planned, as the suns rose high, the light cast down in its blistering heat. Gamzee could feel the warmth bleeding into his flesh, but he could handle it for a little while with the cover above him. What he was after was the light that burned through the threads of the fabric, hitting the shards sharply and causing a glister across the glass particles that lay scattered beneath him.

"Motherfuckin' beautiful," The purpleblood complimented himself with a sense of pride as he watched his perfect plan come into fruition. The lights of his makeshift mirror house glittered and sparkled, with various angles of his own, plain, grey face reflected back at him. Every angle, every little detail fully shown back to him. He looked utterly disheveled without his makeup, but his eyes carried a mysterious darkness that even Gamzee himself couldn't understand entirely.

He grinned widely, forcing a pained, quiet laugh from his throat as though he had swallowed some type of croaking beast.

The shards offered back his own bared teeth with his twisted grin. His tongue ran over them as he readied himself for the main act.

# IDENTITY

As he dipped his fingers in the open paint, Gamzee brought it to his forehead. For a second, his finger hesitated with the dark grey before he pulled back again.

No, that's wrong!

What looked perfect on the shard to his right looked utterly terrible to the one on his left. That wasn't right. Not right at all.

Again, again, do it again.

In his chest, it felt like the mirthful messiah themselves were guiding his hand. His fingers ran across his own face until the paint ran out, then he dunked his fingers in a second time.

The heat on his back was growing worse, but the troll was far too busy with his beauty to worry about it yet.

"There, right there. That's perfect."

He was muttering to himself, but he couldn't quite recall when it started. His lips, his eyes, his cheeks, it was perfect!

Suddenly, he stopped.

The wet paint ran down his face, but he gently moved to wipe the streaks. With the perfect lines set in place, the clown looked at each shard one by one. From his left, to his right, and the reflection of those behind.

This was it. His art was done. He found the perfect design.

"Fuck!"

Through all his excitement, now that his adrenaline was wearing down, the true pain of the burning was starting to set in.

He grabbed a fistful of the blanket as he stood and swiftly wrapped it around himself like a protective cloak. Although he tried to pull it closer, his tall, sharpened horns dug into the fabric, preventing it from falling onto his head more comfortably.

# IDENTITY

Whatever, it was just a brisk walk inside. Nothing a bit of rest in his slime pod wouldn't fix. Before he went to sleep, though, he slammed his door behind him and tossed the blanket down. He had to be sure before anything else!

The troll scurried over to his computer and took a photo of his new facepaint. His heart twisted in his chest as he anticipated the replies. He waited.

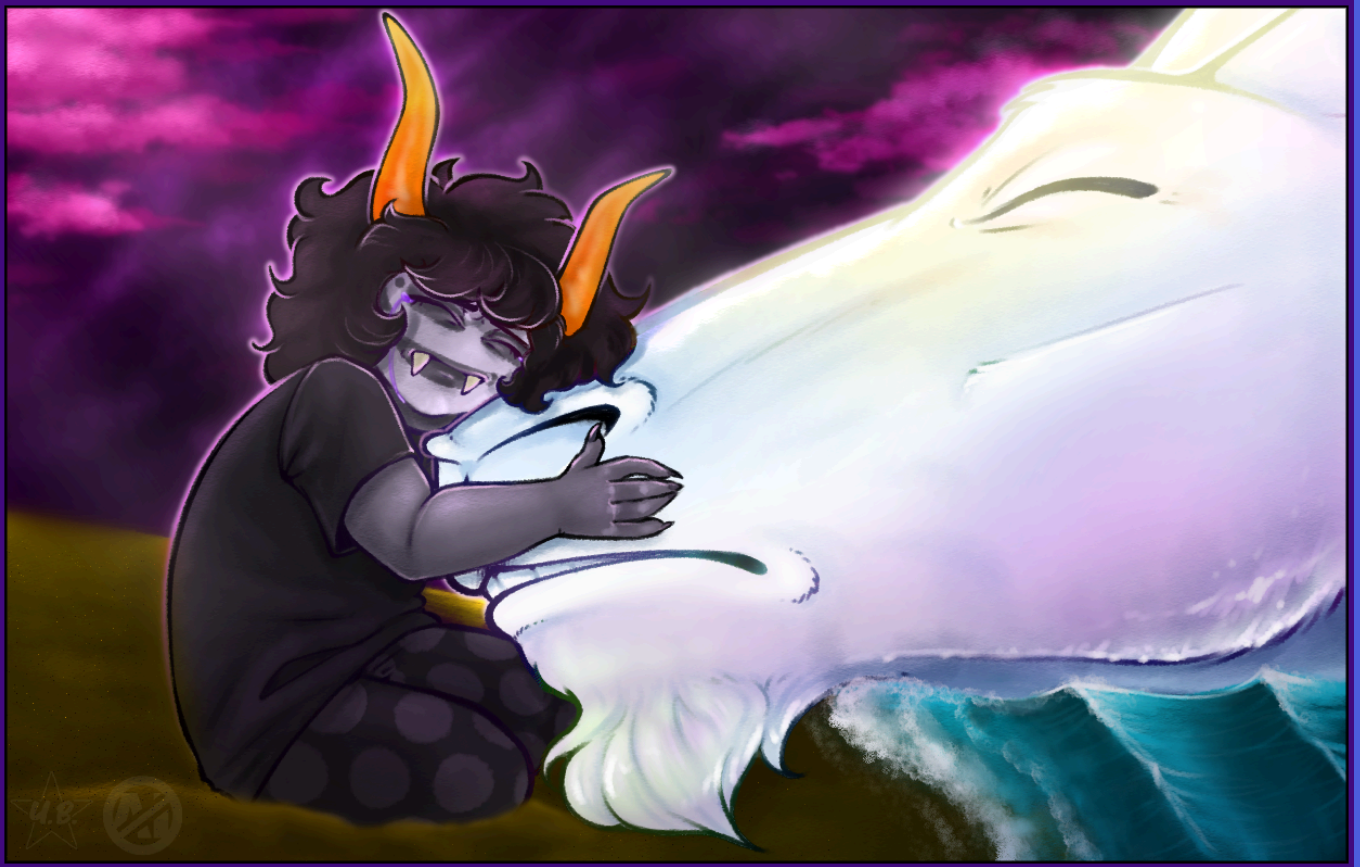
And waited.

For many long, painful minutes, nothing happened. Finally, one appeared, and he released a breath he didn't know he had been holding.

Nobody else had claimed it!

That's just what he was hoping for. It was perfect. His new badge was perfect!

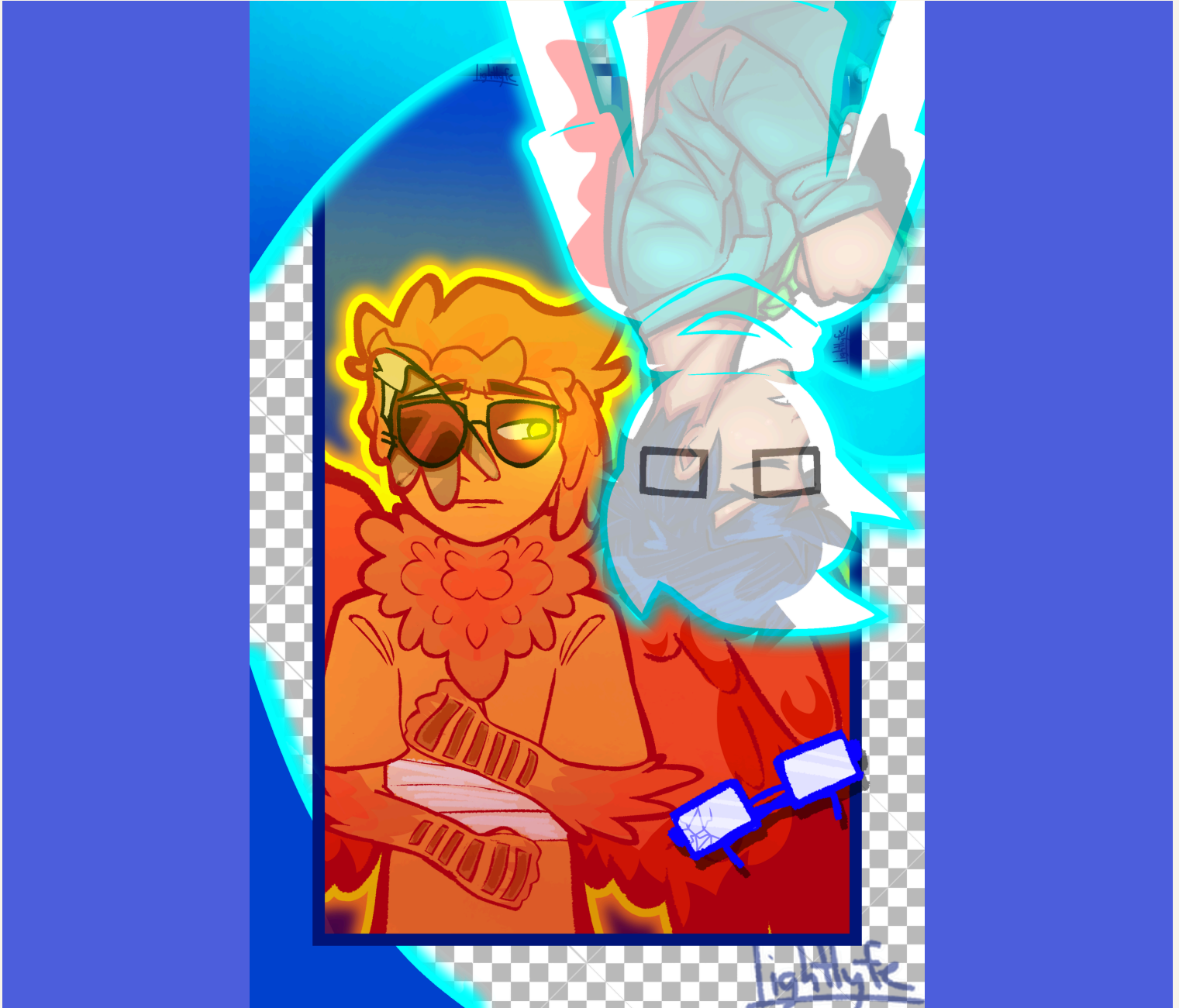
Finally, he could rest, and he couldn't wait for everyone to see it.



## YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WITH FAMILY

By UmbraBorealis

Featuring Gamzee hugging the muzzle of his lusus, Goat Dad, on a beach. Gamzee is sitting on the sand, and Goat Dad is in the water.



## NEVER THERE NEVER WITH ME

By lighteverythinginpink

Featuring a Davesprite staring at a white silhouette of John, with his Doomed John seen within the silhouette. A broken pair of John's glasses sits on Davesprite's wing.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

## BECHARLEYISAWESOME

TAGS/WARNINGS: Dad Egbert & Nanna Egbert | Beta Jane Crocker, The Condesce & Nanna Egbert | Beta Jane Crocker, The Condesce & Dad Egbert, Nanna Egbert | Beta Jane Crocker, Dad Egbert, The Condesce (Homestuck), Colonel Sassacre, Family Bonding(?), Mother-Son Relationship, Colonel Sassacre Mentioned, Pre-Scratch (Homestuck)  
WORD COUNT: 4,500

Jane would like to think of herself as a well adjusted person.

Despite the many, many, *many* hardships of her upbringing, she turned out relatively fine. She thinks. Hopes. Even then, she seemed to be making a name for herself without needing to attach too much to the Crocker brand. She had her own storefront, for one, and was able to keep up the 'Ma and Pop' atmosphere by only having a couple of employees under her, all being locals of the designated town.

For the most part, business was booming just the right amount she aimed for. She never pulled out the more distinctive recipes, in fear of people catching on to her or noticing how suspiciously Crocker the food served was tasting. It was a battle to convince herself not to cook that way— that was in her blood after all— yet she somehow managed against it. Nobody appeared to be onto her and she wanted it to stay that way.

Aside from being an aspiring, independent business woman in the Post War Era, Jane always valued her family. The family she made *here*, not the... other one.

Through working at a diner a decade back, she met a young, postal carrier handling his deliveries near her counter. Already charmed by his sense of tasteful humor, it wasn't long before the two went steady and eventually tied the knot, leading to the creation of her *beautiful* son, might she add. Despite the odd occurrence of him not sharing either of their traits of jet black hair or clear blue eyes, Jane came to really appreciate the sandiness of his strands. Lord knows where he ever inherited those ruby red pupils, but she loved every inch of him. She wasn't complaining.

Putting them side by side would make you wonder how on Earth they were related, and to be brutally honest with herself, Jane wasn't too sure, either.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

Appearances aside, James tried at every opportunity to defy his mother. If Jane kept her clothes folded he'd leave his wrinkled and scattered across his room. If she was doting and cheery he antagonized her by being abrasive and moody. If she ever tried to reach out to talk to him, try to get in his head to figure out *what the hell* was going on, he'd either give her the silent treatment or lash out.

Jane loved her son, truly, she did. But to say she had any idea on how to handle him would be a blatant lie to him and herself. She really did try to, though. She wasn't one to believe in corporal punishment, and she didn't allow her husband to lay a finger on him, either. She knew well enough how damaging that could be, regardless of how rebellious one's child would get.

Didn't mean it never crossed her mind.

No, Jane was a firm believer in talking it out, and James wanted at every turn to shut her out. She was at a total loss there. All she could do was grin and bear it, and at the times where she didn't give him a fuss, James seemed to mellow out; so that was her newfound approach.

For the most part, her life was put together pretty well.

That is, until she got that dreaded phone call.

She was pale in the face, already having gotten off the phone an hour ago. She approached her son who was reading in the parlor, not raising his eyes up to greet her. Taking a deep breath, she clasped her hands together.

JANE: James .

JANE: Your...

She paused, as if her own words would cause the catastrophe to happen right at that moment.

JANE: ...grandmother's coming.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

James scoffed, grumbling in his chair as he pushed himself back against the cushions.

**JAMES:** about time.

Jane didn't want this to happen, but she prolonged it for too long. Her mother was going to come whether she liked it or not. Straightening herself together, she had an unenthusiastic James prepare to go out the house for a while, allowing her to tidy up the inside a bit.

She wasn't able to get into the rhythm of dusting for long before a knock bellowed throughout the house. James never knocked, only barging in.

Fuck, she wasn't here already, was she?

Jane sat on the armrest, painfully aware getting up to answer wasn't necessary since they were going to let themselves in anyway.

And let themselves in they did, flashing that hellish grin she always desperately wished to wipe off.

**HIC:** hi janey

**HIC:** mamas back

**HIC:** did you miss me much

**JANE:** Can't say that I have, no.

**JANE:** Must you really come here?

**HIC:** im only here to sea ma grandson gurl calm down

**HIC:** where is he anyway

**JANE:** I sent him off to a friend's.

**JANE:** I really REALLY don't think this is a good idea, Mother.

**JANE:** He seems to have a lot going on in his life, and adding this to the mix will just... Have him shut down even more.

**JANE:** And I'm trying so hard to not let that happen further.

**JANE:** So, please, try to understand when I say this:

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

JANE: This can happen, just not now.

JANE: Please, Mother.

HIC: dammit janey ive let you push me away for far too long

HIC: if you dont want me then fine but i AM meetin ma  
grandson got it

JANE: You're not listening to me!

HIC: i dont have to

HIC: i can do whatever the fuck i want

HIC: dont think just cause you got a nice little house with  
a man and a kid it dont mean i cant still beat your ass

HIC: i havent changed

JANE: I know.

HIC: so quit your backtalkin

HIC: am i understood

JANE: You are.

JANE: I mean, yes ma'am.

HIC: lovely

HIC: since hes out and bout ill just wait for him here

HIC: make somefin for me will you

Jane let out a heavy sigh, rubbing the back of her neck subconsciously.

JANE: I'm going to have to take a quick trip to the store,  
then.

She strutted over to the closet, pulling out a fur coat she admittedly didn't need considering the weather and securely slipped it on. Grabbing for her purse to drape over her shoulder, she stepped towards the front door, placing a firm hold on the handle before turning back to her mother.

JANE: He should be back soon, anyways. :B

JANE: Please don't freak him out too badly.

HIC: you have such little faith in me

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

Jane scrunched her face, unamused.

JANE: Haha.

She paused awkwardly in the doorway, eyeing The Condesce with a strained glare. She was met with the sway of a hand, her mother shooing her away as she busied herself in resting between the plastic covered sofa.

HIC: oh and get those white cocoa chips those are way better than the regular kind

JANE: Sure.

Before she could be badgered by a following request, Jane slipped out of the house and shut the front door tentatively behind her.

—

James trudged his way back to the house, grumbling obscenities under his breath to no one in particular. Another hangout with a friend turned into a scrappy, cheap brawl. For some reason, people just couldn't seem to keep their damn hands off his wallet. With one last mumbling of '*cunt*,' he moved his hand to scratch at the bleeding cut sliced on his forearm. If he'd known the bastard would pull a Swiss on him he would've brought his boxcutter.

Goddamn him for his impeccable fashion sense, blood splotches were littered all over his white button up; at least his tie was already red. Maybe if he slipped through the backdoor he'd have enough time to run up the stairs before she realized he was home.

Deciding that was his best course of action, he scampered around the block to his gated backyard, climbing over it with ease. Despite being able to unlock it from behind, it was a force of habit that he'd climb over fences. Plus, where was the fun in a simple unlocking?

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

Dropping to the ground with a satisfying thud, he made a beeline for the back porch, flinging open the screen door to stealthily crank the back one's handle. He stood in the laundry for a minute, simply listening for any sounds of a bustling kitchen to indicate his mother's presence, due to her rarely being anywhere else aside from her store. Fortunately, nothing could be heard, not even a clink; so he eased his way into the house as the tension left his shoulders.

Since the kitchen was free, he leisurely went over to the island, grabbing an apple from the fruit bowl. The severity of needing his cuts and clothes tended to was lowered to a minimum as he seemingly had all the time in the world from having the house to himself. He turned and made his way into the living room, stopping in his tracks when he realized he actually wasn't alone.

Sitting and smirking a mere few feet away from him on the sofa was...

...Shit, this can't be his...

```
HIC: hey kid
```

James froze in place, giving the apple in his hand a firm grip.

```
HIC: well dont just gawk at me like im some 6ft tall alien queen
```

```
HIC: words can come out a that mouth right
```

Finally finding his voice, he cleared his throat loudly.

```
JAMES: so.
```

```
JAMES: you're my... grandma?
```

```
HIC: thats right
```

```
HIC: what does your mom call you
```

```
JAMES: james.
```

```
JAMES: what does she call you?
```

```
HIC: mother
```

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

HIC: but i am referred to as )(er imperious condescension  
HIC: which you dont got to worry about since you get to call  
me your grander mother

He rolled his eyes at the pretentious title yet didn't care to voice his thoughts, his smartassery not going unnoticed by her. Regardless, she either had great self restraint or was keeping her word on not scaring him away.

JAMES: huh.  
JAMES: you uh, don't look very much like her.  
JAMES: you guys have different...  
JAMES: well, everything's.  
JAMES: you sure that's your kid?  
HIC: surer than ill ever be  
HIC: took her under me at a younger age so it isnt expected  
she have ma genetic slurry  
JAMES: okay...  
HIC: i could ask the same thing bout you  
JAMES: what?  
HIC: you dont look like your mom  
HIC: whats up with that  
HIC: she have an affair or somefin

James let out an involuntary snort, as if the very idea of such a thing was crazier than Hitler converting to Judaism.

JAMES: uhh, no. i mean, i don't think so. i doubt it. my ma  
ain't adventurous like that.  
JAMES: and no idea why i look like this.

He gave a small shrug.

JAMES: i just do.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

The Condesce gave an almost thoughtful hum, tapping a long, painted nail against her lips.

HIC: human genetics i guess  
HIC: funny how it works  
HIC: if id known any better id say you look like ma ex  
JAMES: ex?  
HIC: guess that aint the right term  
HIC: hm  
HIC: late husband  
JAMES: so like, grandpa?  
HIC: yeah like grandpa  
HIC: your grandpa  
JAMES: what did he look like?  
HIC: well like you  
JAMES: got a picture?  
HIC: now why would i be carryin around a pic a ma dead husband with me  
JAMES: he's your husband? isn't that what married people do all the time?  
HIC: does your mom carry a pic a your dad  
JAMES: she does.

She snorted, crossing her arms as she would've given an eyeroll if they weren't vacant, ghost ones.

HIC: sap

The room fell into a strained silence after that as James shuffled awkwardly where he stood, feeling those pupilless eyes boring a hole into his head.

JAMES: where's ma?

She slowly raised an eyebrow at him, her head tilting slightly to the side.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

HIC: dont worry bout your mom kid talk to me  
HIC: im here arent i  
JAMES: yeah, i've gathered that. i'm just asking for my ma.  
HIC: if you must know  
HIC: she went out to get some shit  
HIC: shouldnt be long  
HIC: happy  
JAMES: satisfied, i guess.

The apple felt warm in his hand now and, slowly easing up to his newfound family member, didn't care to keep up etiquette as he flung the apple behind him. It made a thud, whether on the counter or floor, he couldn't tell.

JAMES: uhm, well, i'll be back in a jiff, gotta change out of this.  
HIC: got into a fight  
JAMES: something like that.  
HIC: from the looks a it looks like you won  
JAMES: that's my blood, grandma.  
HIC: damn  
HIC: better go change before your mom gets back then  
JAMES: yeah.

He gave a slight nod, venturing up to his room and leaving his grandmother to leisurely wait for the both of them to return back to the parlor.

Jane arrived half an hour later, laying the groceries on the counter and calling James down to help with dinner before getting straight to work. He clamored downstairs begrudgingly, insisting he'd cook if he got to make his own dish, which she gladly agreed upon. Condesce leaned over the counter, watching the two fretting over their own stations in the kitchen. As much as she missed the hobby, she preferred being cooked for more than doing the work.

HIC: this needs more thyme  
JANE: Thyme for spaghetti?

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

JANE: I don't think you know this yet but I prefer to cook, uhm, differently than you do.

HIC: yeah i know

HIC: and it pisses me off

HIC: look you can do whatever you wanna here but while im visitin i expect to dine on actual good shit

HIC: so go fetch the thyme

JANE: You're such a square! B:

Jane threw her hands in frustration, yet did as she was told, venturing to the pantry to sift through the spices. The Condesce glanced at her for a minute before leaning towards James who was engrossed in mixing some cake batter. She nudged him with her elbow, repeating the action until he snapped out of his intense daze to finally eye her. She talked in a hushed tone, meant for his ears only.

HIC: here kid let me tell you somefin

JAMES: hm?

HIC: your mom

HIC: she loves to laugh you know

JAMES: yeah, i know.

HIC: like anyfin makes her laugh

HIC: loves jokes a lot too

HIC: especially if you include her in them

JAMES: so, like a prank?

HIC: bassically yeah

JAMES: okay... why are you telling me this?

HIC: just

HIC: somefin to keep in mind

James tilted his head in thought, bringing the pudding covered spoon up to his tongue to lap it clean as he returned her whispers.

JAMES: alright, grandma.

JAMES: noted.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

With the spaghetti settled in the pot and the cake taken out to ice, the trio sat at the already set table; the two women watching James perform his mastery on the chocolate cake he proudly baked himself. He made a show of spreading the icing around without making much of a mess, placing the strawberries in a designated ring on the top layer. He rambled on about a hack he learned when it came to baking, how with the right amount of temperature and constant checking he made the three layered cake in under an hour.

Condesce looked mildly impressed, already seeing a good amount of herself in him.

Jane, on the other hand, was shocked, to say the least. She'd never seen her son so passionate, especially in *baking* of all things. Anytime she offered to have him in the kitchen with her or even teach him a recipe, he'd act like it was the lamest thing to him. Maybe she was being too pushy about it? Or trying too hard?

It was obvious he learned from *somewhere*, and a part of her felt jealous to what or whoever gave him such influence over something she herself was passionate about as well.

**JAMES:** mom.

Jane blinked. Must've zoned out for a minute there. She turned towards her son's voice, noticing he was holding out a plate with a slice of cake neatly presented.

**JANE:** Oh! Thank you, honey.

She accepted it sheepishly, setting it aside as she got up to retrieve the pot of spaghetti. James mumbled something under his breath as he sat down. Jane pursed her lips, bringing the pot to the table and allowing the other two to get their fills.

She must've zoned out again, because once she came to she was met with a plate of spaghetti already made for her as she saw James give her an exasperated stare.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

JANE: Sorry, I-  
HIC: so janey

Jane shut her mouth, already inwardly groaning as she turned to face her mother with a conjured grin.

HIC: im seain everyfin here but your man  
HIC: he at work or somefin

Jane shifted uncomfortably in her chair. Right, time for this conversation. Clearing her throat, she neatly placed her hands on the table.

JANE: Err...  
JANE: Jude and I separated.  
JAMES: they're getting back together, though.

He added matter-a-factly, idly playing with a meatball before stabbing his fork into it to raise to his mouth.

Jane chuckled stiffly, grabbing a pitcher to fill out her already nearly full glass.

JANE: Well, it isn't set in stone, dear.  
JAMES: don't gotta be. you and pa love each other so you'll be back together soon.

She set the pitcher down harder than she intended to, sucking in a subtle inhale.

JANE: While we do love each other, very much I might add, it doesn't always mean we can see eye to eye on some matters.  
JAMES: so? fix it. talk it out or something.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

JANE: We've, uh, well we've already tried that, Jamey.  
JAMES: okay, then try again. i don't know what's so hard about all this.  
HIC: what shes tryin to say is that shes found bigger dick

Feeling her face heat up, Jane snaked a hand into her hair, grabbing a tuft as if it were to ground her in her seat.

JANE: Mother! Please!  
JANE: Not at the table at the very least!

James immediately slid his plate away, any appetite fizzling out the moment he pictured a mental image.

JAMES: oh, ew, gross ma, what the hell!  
JANE: Both of you, watch your language!  
HIC: dont be gettin mad at me i was tryin kelp you out here  
HIC: since youre clearly strugglin on gettin your son to understand anyfin bout your life

Jane huffed, crossing her arms over her chest defiantly.

JANE: Not everything about my life needs to be exposed to him.  
JAMES: uh, why not? last i checked i was apart of this family, too. why can't i know what's going on with my own parents? you think i'm too young for that or some bullshit?  
JANE: Not at all! I understand you're becoming a mature young man, I simply don't wish to stress you out with grown up matters. It's best not to include you in all that.  
JANE: And please, watch your mouth!  
HIC: real smooth janey youre nailin it here  
JANE: Mother! For the last time, PLEASE fuck off!

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

Jane's eyes instantly widened as she clasped her hands over her mouth. James gave her an unimpressed look, moving his elbows on the table's surface to rest a cheek on his palm.

**JAMES:** what happened to language?

**JANE:** Pardon my crudeness...

The Condesce let out a snort, abandoning any sort of table etiquette by wolfing down her dinner and flinging her plate back on the table.

**HIC:** its been fun but i gotta get goin now

James turned his attention to his grandmother, confusion dawning his face as he raised an eyebrow.

**JAMES:** but you just got here.

**HIC:** yeah well still got a job to do

**HIC:** i cant be sittin here playin suburban family all day

**HIC:** not again at least

She pushed back her chair, hoisting herself up hastily as James furrowed his brows at her.

**JAMES:** will you... come visit again?

Jane sighed shakily, bringing her glass up to her lips for a shy sip before setting it back down on the surface, watching the tiny ripples take effect from the thud. She then slid her hands between her thighs, looking down at the table meekly.

**JANE:** I think it's best you do leave.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

The Condesce eyed her warily, a smirk forming on her lips.

HIC: yeah ill be back dont you worry bout it

She made her way around the table, placing a hand under her grandson's chin to tilt his eyesight up to her firm, yet almost gentle gaze.

HIC: try not to stress your mom much aight

James nodded absentmindedly, trying to not pay much attention to how cold and clammy her touch felt.

JAMES: i won't.

She broke into a toothy grin, slowly leaning in to give him a peck on his hair.

HIC: attaboy

Jane couldn't recall when or how her mother left the scene, she was only trying her best to hold back the tears that were threatening to fall. She could just feel James' icy glare from across the table; the silence a deafening reminder that she hadn't been swallowed by the floor yet, much to her dismay.

JAMES: so you were just planning on not telling me you guys were done.

JANE: James... Please. Not right now, baby.

She couldn't bring herself to face him, hearing him dryly laugh before pushing himself out of his seat, seemingly making his way up the stairs to his room.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

She didn't try to stop him, finally allowing herself to cry.

—

James launched himself on his bed, heaving out an overdrawn sigh. Today was something. Whether he'd classify it as good or not was a question for another day. He was, however, sure about one thing: he didn't really enjoy seeing his mom shaken up like that. Despite always giving her a hard time, he still cared for her deeply. He didn't know *why* he acted the way he did, but he wasn't going to dwell on it. For now, he had to get to work.

Snaking his hand under the pillow, he pulled out his beloved, clunky edition of ***Colonel Sassacre's Daunting Text of Magical Frivolity and Practical Japery***. If anyone could help him pull a good prank to spook his ma, it was the Colonel. She'd been so uptight lately, and he figured he wasn't making things any easier for her with his sappy, preteen angstiness; so he thought he'd ease the atmosphere a bit for the both of them.

This was his attempt at attempting, for once.

Ceremoniously opening the cover and flipping through the pages, he skimmed through sections and indexes until he found the perfect one to enact.

The next few days in the Egbert household were interesting.

Jane found herself engulfed in some kind of game, ranging from harlequin dolls hidden in random places around her room to half of her ingredients replaced with stuffed plastic wrap.

She couldn't entirely tell if the kid was having fun or doing it out of spite, certainly hoping these weren't attempts to kill her. Though as the little games continued, Jane started to notice a sort of pattern. They were progressively becoming more outlandish and yet, they drew a snicker out of her. She silently applauded the ingenuity of the invincible ink staining her clothes, saving her a stern confrontation and detergent. She even chuckled at the already boiled eggs when she attempted to crack them. Despite the speedbump on breakfast, James didn't seem to mind for a change.

Her son was a natural prankster, and even though she had no idea where this was spurring from, she didn't complain. James still kept his distance from her, but ever since his silent one-sided prank war, she didn't take it to heart as much. It was high tide she finally made it a mutual war.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

Jane quickly whipped up a nice and easy key lime, setting it aside on a display tray for the perfect use. She had to really calculate when to strike, and her chance came faster than she expected it to. Knowing James, he would be home and trudging up the stairs around the same time she came back from the store, giving her enough room to work with.

About five minutes till he'd arrive, she shuffled behind the wall by the stairway to catch him off guard. This was the first time in years she ever felt bubbly, especially over something as monumental as a good, ol' bonafide prank. She was getting that overwhelming giddy feeling over it; feeling like she was a little girl again, anticipating for Father to come back to-

Brimming with excitement and without thinking, she turned at the faintest sound of movement behind her, smashing the pie in his face. It caused James to stumble backwards and slam the side of his face into the wall between them. Jane froze, mortified. She watched him slide to his knees, coughing and wheezing as the wind was knocked out of him. The whipped cream smeared across his face as he tried to steady himself.

She saw his chest heaving, short gasps and breaths escaping from his mouth. He was hunched over himself, not saying a word to her many attempts to call him. Jane started to panic, she didn't know if she genuinely hurt him, and in her fretted state, grabbed him by the shoulders to yank him up to her view. He was bleeding alright, from his nose, and was also...

Giggling?

Wait, he was actually giggling. He was shaking from how much he was laughing at this point, the bloody nose acting as nothing but an afterthought as he buried himself in her arms, snickering uncontrollably. Jane was taken aback, taking a minute before wrapping her arms around him, bringing him as close as she could. Did she know why he was laughing? No idea. Did she mind? Absolutely not, this was the first time he'd ever shown her any emotion other than disdain in... well, ever.

And when he finally pulled back after what felt to be way too soon, he smiled.

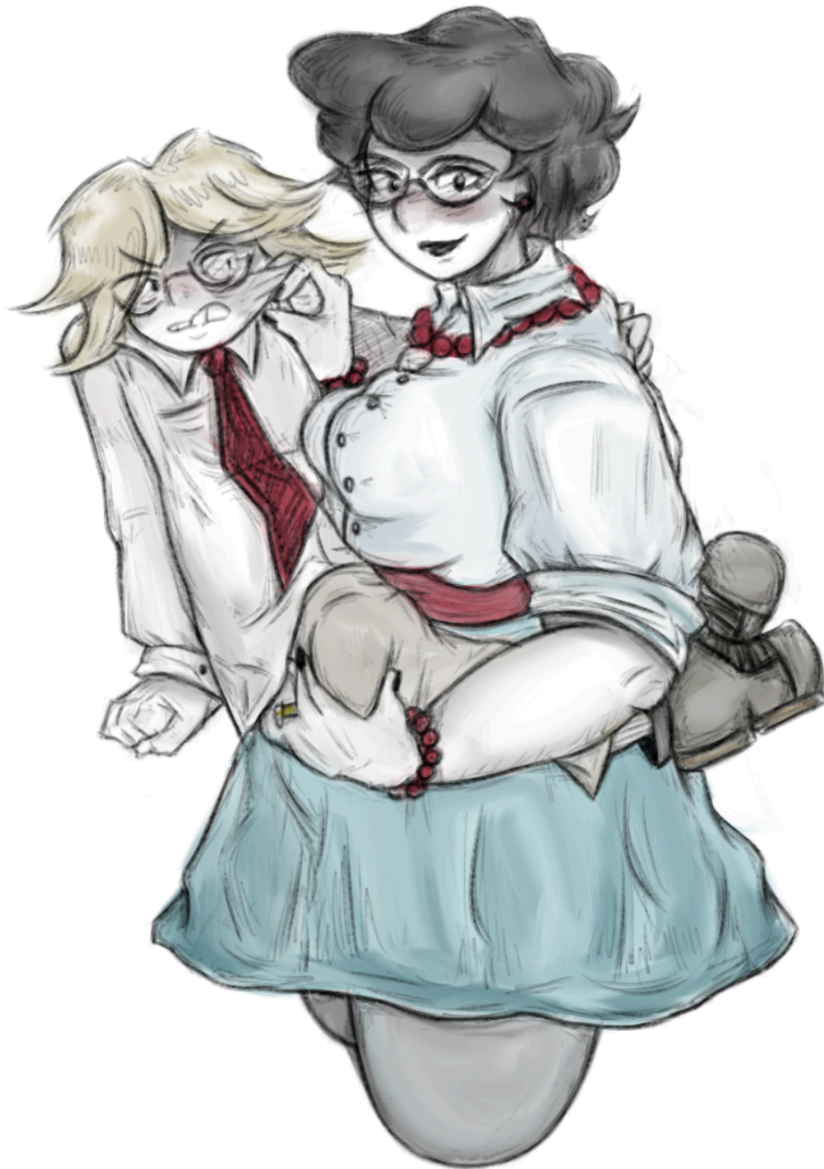
James was actually smiling at her, *holy shit*.

She got to see all three of those missing gaps, the way she knew he was going to need braces once they all grew back, the fact he had her overbite, though a slight one.

# COMFORT IS NEVER A CONSTANT

It was all there for her to see and gaze upon, and she couldn't be happier.

Jane pulled him back in for another hug and was pleasantly delighted when he didn't make a move to protest or push her back. She subtly removed the glasses from his face, allowing him to crush into her chest as much as he wanted.



## JAMES AND JANE

By Becharleyisawesome

Featuring Jane Egbert and her son, James Egbert, a companion art piece for *Comfort is Never a Constant*.

## SWEET BRO AND HELLA JEFF



### SBAHJ: THE METRTREOR

By grandiloquentApostate

A short comic featuring the beloved characters Sweet Bro and Hella Jeff from the hit webcomic *Sweet Bro and Hella Jeff* (2009) getting cancelled for the troll face.

## ORANGESTORAPPLES

TAGS/WARNINGS: ROSE LALONDE/DAVE STRIDER, ROSE LALONDE, DAVE STRIDER, POV DAVE STRIDER, PALE ROMANCE | MOIRALLEGIANCE, METEORSTUCK, CANON COMPLIANT

WORD COUNT: 1,872

### > Be Dave

```
- turntechGodhead [TG] started pestering ectoBiologist [EB]
```

```
--
```

```
-- ectoBiologist [EB] is offline! --
```

```
TG: happy birthday egbert
```

```
TG: i know youre not gonna get this until after we land
```

```
TG: damn your pda is gonna blow up from how many times ive  
messed you so far
```

```
TG: but who gives a shit youll probably like it anyway
```

```
TG: and i havent missed bugging you on your birthday yet  
since we met so im not about to change that now
```

```
TG: too bad i dont have a present for you
```

```
TG: not like you could get it anyway but if you could it  
would be a totally dope present
```

```
TG: something from one of those god awful movies you like so  
much except 100 times better because i combined it with sweet  
bro and hella jeff
```

```
TG: speaking of im not the writer for it anymore
```

```
TG: i passed the torch on to terezi. she makes a shitty  
newsletter full of comics and movie night schedules and shit  
now
```

```
TG: and pictures of can town progress i guess
```

```
TG: weve been debating on incorporating popsicle sticks into  
the buildings for more pizazz
```

```
TG: knowing you youd make some shitty statue dedicated to  
egon spangler in the down square made out of playdoh or  
something
```

```
TG: its whatever
TG: ill see you in two years anyway
TG: well talk then
TG: later

-- turntechGodhead [TG] ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]
--
```

—

You've gotten tired of watching movies. You've spent all year watching shitty movies with your friends, trying to keep busy and pass the time, and you're kinda starting to get sick of the monotony. Sure, you could always try to train again, Vriska would probably take you up on it if Rose doesn't, but something in you just can't seem to *push* yourself into committing. There's only so many things you can draw before you start to get bored of that too. Like, when you say bored, you mean you filled a sketchbook front-to-back with as many cars as you could. Both from human and troll movies. There's no way any normal guy would do that shit unless they were like, an art student or something. It's fucking sad.

Rose introduced everyone, including you, to boardgames a few months ago. They've been accepted pretty positively by everyone, but *Twilight Imperium* has been a favorite with the trolls so far. Especially since the *Prophecy of Kings* expansion let eight people play at the same time. Vriska, predictably, took to it like a fish to water. And since Vriska liked it, it grew on Terezi too. She needed her own rulebook she could lick until it fell apart just so nobody else would have to touch teal-stained spit paper. And yeah, you DID try laminating it for her, but Terezi complained loudly about how the plastic tasted, so you were forced to switch back to just regular old cardstock.

There's only so many days of playing eight hours worth of space-conquering boardgame you can stand before your legs start to cramp up. You want to play something more *active*, like a sport. That's how you KNOW you're desperate, because you know absolutely jack shit about sports. Hell, part of your whole shtick is making bad and inaccurate sports metaphors and analogies. Somehow, that hasn't stopped you from doing some investigative journalism into finding the most random game you or Rose could possibly think to play.

That game is Cornhole.

The rules are as follows: every time you miss the goal-hole thing, you have to take a shot. Rose supplied the alcohol, something less strong than vodka thankfully. You tried some a while back, and it nearly burned the hairs in your nose from how hot it was. You swear you felt a singular chest hair pop out between your pecs and go *boi-i-ing* from it. Fuck that. So she brought some sweet-mix thing she swears up and down tastes like caramel suck-on candy without making your eyes water.

"It is peculiar that you'd suggest this game, out of the long list of party games you could have chosen." Rose hums as she sets up the legs of her board. "I half expected to find beer-pong lined up next, or a football game recording on the TV. Or, perhaps, you attempting to grill alchemized hamburgers? Even if you were only pretending to."

"I can make a pickup truck out of boxes if you want a more authentic Texan tailgate party." You deadpan, only half-serious and lining up your board with hers. "Turn on some Tim McGraw and Don McLean, make up an American flag-printed polo shirt," you thicken your accent to a dramatic degree, "*and start talkin' like this for the rest of the day.*"

Rose picks up the mesh bag of tiny bean bags and unceremoniously dumps them to the floor. "Ah yes, playing more into your 'roots'. Then I suppose I'm required to procure a bowl of buffalo wings with blue cheese dressing and celery stick applicators. I'm sure I could figure out how to finagle the alchemiter into spitting out some Tim Horton's as well, or Dinosaur Buffalo Ribs."

"You're telling me a dinosaur buffalo-ed those ribs? Slap my ass and call me Jeff Goldblum- New York is serving a steaming plate of T-Rex ribs straight outta Jurassic Park. It's a miracle they got them at all, since they had to dodge a hundred sharp teeth and massive piles of dinosaur shit." You walk over and grab a handful of tiny beanbags out of Rose's pile, and head back to your spot behind the board-thing. "They call it the 'Do-You-Think-He-Saurus', watch out for gunpowder and piss from the amount of times those dinosaur hunters were pissing themselves scared."

Rose's expression turns coy and knowing, her tone dripping with sarcasm when she replies, "I believe they serve that as a drink with them. You'd recognize the taste, given your familiarity with your apple juice having been switched out at night."

"Jegus, really? A Little Monsters reference? Right *now*?" You make an exaggerated groan, and throw a tiny bean bag at her for good measure. It hits her arm. "I thought I escaped that shit when Egbert decided to dip out with Jade."

"It's only fitting, given the date." She hums, and picks up the offending beanbag. "I'm counting this as your first throw, by the way. Take a shot."

You furrow your brows at her, and gesture to where it landed. "Oh come on Rose, seriously? I obviously wasn't trying. There's no way that counts."

"Consider it an apology for attempting to assault me. Unless you're too chickenshit to actually go through with following the rules." Rose keeps her gaze level on you, and her expression smug. "Rules that *you* decided on, might I add. Don't be a hypocrite, it's a bad look."

"*Fiiiiine*. Fine. Whatever." You roll your eyes and grab the closest shotglass, then down it. "This is the only one you're getting outta me, though."

Rose is already lining herself up behind her wooden goal-thing to make her toss. "I'm sure you believe so." She says, and takes her turn. It lands with enough force to slide into the hole. "Actually, I have a question. More like a question and an observation."

"Shoot." The bag Rose landed is left under your board, to count points later, while you dig out a fresh one from the mesh sack holding them at your feet.

"Why pick this game, of all 'sports' we could have played? I mean, sure, it's convenient for enclosed areas such as this one, and unlike trying to play outside on the meteor's surface, we don't run the risk of potentially lobbing our equipment out into the void. But you mentioned *specifically* mimicking a 'Texan Tailgate Party', when I'm fairly certain you've never attended one." Rose digs out her next bag while she speaks, and holds it with her hands behind her back to wait for you to finish readying your shot. "You've never expressed an interest in participating in your culture before now. I'm curious to know what changed."

"Culture?" How in the hell could a *tailgate party* be considered cultural? "You say that like I'm hosting a Brazilian Carnival or some shit. Tailgating isn't cultural."

"*Everything* is cultural. It just so happens that the *American* one is globally prevalent. Or, well, was." She shrugs, and takes a step to the left when you start getting yourself positioned to make your throw. "The game of Cornhole isn't uniquely American, as far as I'm aware, but tailgating is, and so is the association of this game tied with alcohol, barbecue, and pickup trucks."

You make your toss, and hit the board, but it veers right and misses the hole. Shit. "It's not that deep, I'm just bored."

"Maybe not. But I think the significance of this particular day, in correlation with a very American activity, and the fact out of *all* of us John is the most normal—"

You take your shot, and toss the small empty glass back on the pilfered end table it had come from. "So you're assuming I decided to play fuckin' *Cornhole* because John is like, the only guy left in existence who could claim to be an average, stereotypical, All-American Boy?"

"In short, yes. I do." Rose returns to her position behind the goal, but doesn't take aim yet. "I just noticed a pattern of behavior of you taking an interest in what Karkat has told you of troll culture, going as far as to celebrate his version of Christmas with him. Not that I'm innocent of that either, I'd be lying if I said I didn't find their holidays fascinating." She raises her arm backwards like she's bowling, and tosses her bag across the room again. It sinks the hole. "I think you're only showing interest because you miss John."

Ain't that a bitch?

You cross your arms, but Rose doesn't remain behind her goal. She walks over to you, her footsteps echoing throughout the "Game Room", until she finally reaches you. Her hand worms under your arm to catch your fingers, and tug your hand free so she could hold it properly. "You don't have to try to put up a front about it, I miss him too."

Instead of acknowledging her statement, you change the subject. "I shouldn't have invited your clairvoyant ass to play a strategy game, you've been cheating since we started, haven't you?" There's shit you don't want to confront right now. Like... missing John. Because you do. You really, honest to gog do. But if you think about it too hard right now— you'd get very fucking uncool about it. And you don't want to be uncool about it. So you shove that shit back in the box like John's dumb rabbit.

# CORNHOLE

Rose, mercifully, laughs at your accusation, and lets the matter be dropped. She lifts your shades just enough off the bridge of your nose to give you a kiss on the cheek, just under your eye, that no doubt leaves behind a print of her purple lipstick. "Of course I have. You should have thought harder about it before. Now I do believe it's your turn to toss."



## GAME NIGHT

By Orangestorapples



Featuring the kids from Post-Scratch Meteorstuck playing *Twilight Imperium*, a companion piece for *Cornhole*.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

## CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

TAGS/WARNINGS: KANAYA MARYAM & KARKAT VANTAS, KANAYA MARYAM & ORIGINAL CHARACTER(S), KANAYA MARYAM, ORIGINAL TROLL CHARACTER(S) (HOMESTUCK), KARKAT VANTAS, SOLLUX CAPTOR, VRISKA SERKET, POV KANAYA MARYAM, BROODING CAVERNS (HOMESTUCK), GRUBS (HOMESTUCK), WIGGLERS (HOMESTUCK), ALTERNIA-FOCUSED (HOMESTUCK), CHARACTER DEATH, PRE-CANON, SADSTUCK, HOPEFUL ENDING  
WORD COUNT: 5,538

In the morning, the first round of bells rang out through the brooding caverns. Deep in the recesses of the planet, a jadeblood's life was governed by the bells.

The rusted wall lanterns clicked on in Kanaya's respite quarters. Although she knew it was that time of day, she had never seen the rising of the brutal Alternian sun. For at this point in her early life, she had only known the goings-on of their bustling, underground village.

Six girls stirred in their regrouperacoon. The pearlescent liquid rippled and quaked as half of them rose up from the slime pool and climbed out, shivering, and headed towards the showers. There were only three stalls, and so Kanaya and her podmates had to take turns rinsing off.

Kanaya watched blearily as she sank deeper into the sopor pool. She stole a few more minutes by lying there, idly. Underneath the shower doors, the sludge rinsed off slender green-gray feet, sluicing onto the concrete and into the dusky black drains.

Their exhausted keeper stomped in and Kanaya broke from her tired stupor. "Kanaya! Vетtra! Outta the sludge, you really need me to come in and tell you?"

Once up and moving, hunger gnawed at Kanaya's stomach. She showered too, then grabbed a uniform skirt and sweater from her set of drawers. This green skirt was way too small. She glanced at the label on the hem: "JG."

"Joseya, this is yours," she said, and placed it on her dresser. All of the girls' identical garments were always getting mixed up when the laundry came back.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

The six of them left the respite quarters headed by their exhausted keeper, an older girl named Coreah. The cafeteria hall was the largest cavern of all—where Kanaya’s appetite dampened in front of a bowl of algae porridge nearly every morning.

Six girls sat at each table in the cafeteria, six girls in each regrouperacon every night. Six girls in each pod.

Marizi was the nervous, kind of ditzy one. Vетtra was the vicious and cruel one. Joseya was the generous one. Hessta was the rowdy one. And Yourha was the favorite.

Joseya and Marizi chattered—Kanaya listened idly as she tried to consume the oatmeal. Vетtra never liked to be bothered the hour after she woke, so Hessta playfully, repeatedly, nudged her foot until she got an explosive reaction from her. Coreah shushed them all as one of the elder jades began morning announcements and called out assignments.

“Devica—please attend to the lusus kennel. Sorina and her pod, please supervise the Brooding Trials, obstacle courses A through D. Arcana, see to the larval carousels...”

The youngest jades, such as themselves, didn’t get assignments, because their duties were always the same.

“Silvea and pod—egg sorting. Bronya, please receive and transport the filial pails at noon.”

Vетtra had finally retaliated by shoving Hessta, who nearly fell off the table bench into Yourha. Yourha’s fork clattered to the floor. Coreah pinched both their arms with a threatening glance.

“What is wrong with you people? Knock it off, and stop acting like you wriggled out yesterday,” Coreah whisper-shouted.

Kanaya bent down to pick up Yourha’s fork, and gave it back to her. Once finished, Iihmma, the eldermost jade, took to the large, stone platform at one end of the cafeteria cavern.

“Twelfth Perigee’s Eve is quickly approaching, and I see no reason not to distribute among you a small gift, hopefully to keep you all going until that time arrives,” said Iihmma.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

The girls looked around, at silver plates being brought to each table. People started clapping.

Coreah rolled her eyes. “You have to finish breakfast first, or the deal’s off,” she said as another jade unveiled the silver platter of truffle chocolates. The girls nearly choked down the rest of their bowls, and toppled over themselves to each take one.

The soft core, the rich, milky taste—hers had pistachio in the center. Chocolate was hard to come by, and Kanaya would eat her weight in algae porridge for just one of these.

Yourha had chomped down on hers whole—her jaw and her pretty black rose of a mouth worked as she chewed, too full.

Kanaya blushed the green color of the chocolate’s filling as Yourha caught her looking.

Down in the lower caverns, Kanaya stood alone in the Cocoon Block.

Many of Kanaya’s mornings were spent in the caverns’ lowest and wettest chambers. It was easier to go barefoot. Using her flat-bottomed broom, she pushed puddles of accumulating water into the tarnished drains that lined the floor’s perimeter.

Kanaya breathed the musty air as she worked. Little drops of water plinked from the ceiling onto the floor around her. Crowded on the stalactites overhead were scores of silk-spun bundles of soon-to-be wigglers.

Kanaya and her podmates were nowhere near important enough yet to clean *the Mother Grub’s* poop—or schlep across the river bridge with the filial pails, or corral any lusii, or handle any grubs.

For now, they wiped down the wiggler obstacle courses, cleaned fallen poop or fallen sludge, or washed dishes, or did laundry, or pushed water into drains. During the dark seasons, the lower caverns were damp and chilly as ever. There were plenty of other pods—most of them older than Kanaya’s. To date, she hadn’t met a lot of other kids her age. Not in person, anyway.

The clanging of the second bell echoed throughout the cavern, and prompted the hasty rush of feet that could be heard from the adjacent chambers.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

“Kanaya? How we doing in here?”

Coreah appeared at the near entrance to the cocoon cave. “Y’know, you don’t have to get every drop, babe,” she sighed. “There’s more rooms to do...at this rate, you’ll be done by next sunrise. She stalked across the room and left through the opposite entrance, to check on the others.

Soon, the sleeping wigglers above her would emerge from their cocoons fully pupated, ready to take on their trials in the brooding caverns. Sometimes, Kanaya wondered if growing up as a jadeblood was a brooding trial in itself.

Her road would get easier, eventually. The ugliest jobs fell to the youngest, and things would look up with time. Kanaya desperately wanted one role in particular—the cavern seamstress. After all, at not even five sweeps old, Kanaya could sew a whole skirt of any person’s size in under thirty minutes. But, she would surely have to pay her dues before landing such a clean, beautiful, and glorious job. Her forearms ached, and her mind wandered, and she daydreamed and planned out the splendidly ornate robe she would make for Iihmma, if she were given the chance. She hadn’t shared these things with the other girls—only Karkat, one of her computer friends. He wanted one particular job, too. She didn’t see why he shouldn’t get it. But in his way, Karkat waved her off each time as if only *her* pipe dream held any hope of coming true.

As she pushed the broom faster, the back end of the handle abruptly caught on something and stopped her in her tracks. She heard a terrific splat from behind her.

Kanaya’s spine stiffened. She turned around.

With horror, she stared at the tiny, half-formed wiggler lying on the floor in a smattering of its own gelatin.

Kanaya froze, and her heart beat wildly in her ears. She immediately squatted next to the creature, water climbing up the back of her skirt. She wasn’t sure if she should touch it—she also wasn’t sure if she could bring herself to. It was a mustard-blood, partway through its metamorphosis. The small arm buds still moved mechanically while it cried, although no sound came out.

Before she could break from her frozen stupor, she heard the echo of Coreah’s boots heading back up towards the cocoon block.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

When Coreah reentered, she stared blankly at her, and then at the wiggler lying beside her.

"I don't know what to do," Kanaya whispered.

Now, her keeper stood over her. Her lips were pressed into a thin line. "Nothing to do," answered Coreah. She picked up the soggy bundle of silk, and ran her fingers along the long spine that had once hung the wiggler from the ceiling. "Weak attachment. It's not your fault, Kanaya. Probably wasn't going to make it anyway."

Kanaya fumbled for words. "I just...I didn't see it—"

"They're supposed to attach to the stalactites—not the ceiling," Coreah explained. "See there?"

Kanaya looked up—the stalactites above her head were fully covered in the ghostly white bundles. Seemingly, there had been no other place for this wiggler to spin its web.

Then, her eyes drifted again towards the creature, which...wasn't quite dead yet.

Coreah said to her gently, "Don't be too sad, Kan. A third of them will never even make it to the brooding trials. Here, let me—" She scooped up the half-wiggler, and hid him back in the hollow of his empty shell. She took up the broom. "I'll finish up here. Go upstairs, change your skirt. Then come right back down, alright?"

Once she was set free at the end of working hours, Kanaya made her way back slowly towards the living quarters, alone. She crossed over the tremendous underground river that ran through the caverns, and separated the working wings from the respite ones.

Kanaya stooped over the wooden railing of the bridge. Even though she stared out at the rushing, crashing water, she could only see the wiggler.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

Growing up in the jadeblood caverns led her down a certain train of thought, whenever she got particularly upset with herself. For Kanaya, this was often. She frequently thought about the unlucky one-third of her own caste that never made it out of the brooding trials. Six girls in each pod—maybe someone better was meant to have her place.

She was certain that the senior jades thought the same thing. She had heard it said more than once in hushed tones, that something about her wriggling had been...an anomaly. But whenever she or the other girls asked Coreah directly what it was, she shut up like a hingecritter and refused to acknowledge it at all.

Maybe her days would get better with time—but perhaps that wasn't what she deserved, if she couldn't be trusted not to ruin things with her meddling.

When she finally returned to the respite wing, she could see that one of her computer friends was messaging her on Bug-A-Chum—their chat client. She really hoped it was Karkat, but it was someone else.

```
[arachnidsGrip began bugging grimAuxiliatrix]
```

```
AG: Heeeeeeeeey!
```

```
GA: Hi
```

```
AG: How's it going? How's life?
```

```
GA: Same As Always
```

```
GA: Tedious
```

```
GA: Lots of Chores
```

```
GA: Constant Death Among The Young In Our Species
```

```
AG: Ugh. Same girl, same.
```

```
GA: How About You How Are You Doing
```

```
AG: Oh, you know. The usual five to twenty-six.
```

```
AG: I know I can't say it enough, 8ut man, you have such a cool jo8.
```

```
GA: I Have Already Told You That I Do Not Contribute Much In The Grand Scheme Of Things
```

```
AG: Yeah, I know all you do is clean poo, 8ut you're helping to ensure the ro8ust survival of our species!
```

```
AG: Allowing our descendants to 8e as strong as they can 8e.
```

```
AG: All I do is try to keep spidermom happy.
```

# HATCHLING HEROINE

AG: Which only benefits her, and prevents me from being culled. It doesn't save the world.

AG: Sigh. At least I think I'm getting better at it.

GA: Surely You Do Not Think I Am Saving The World

AG: Beats the fuck out of what I'm doing.

AG: Speaking of. It's almost feeding time. Again! Ugh.

AG: It's the same stupid task, over and over, every day.

GA: I Can Certainly Relate To That

AG: Don't worry. In another three-hundred sweeps when you're probably the Jadeblood Overlord, you can boss around your teeny-boppers and tell them to scrub pailstains off your floors!

GA: Ew

AG: Anyways. Catch you on the flip side, Maryam.  
[arachnidsGrip is now an idle chum!]

In the high-ceilinged cavern where the brooding trials were held, Kanaya stood atop a high, rickety metal tower—part of a large obstacle course designed to test the wigglers. Frequently, terrified wigglers would soil themselves on the course. There were no bodies of those who had failed, but some bloodstains remained in a couple of different colors. So, with her mop, she ran the obstacle course herself, and cleaned up the messes as she gingerly went along.

Once finished with Obstacle Course E, she peered into one of the small side chambers where she found one of her podmates, Yourha.

"Do you need any help?" Kanaya asked her tentatively.

Yourha startled. She smiled. "Yes. Take these and transfer them to the other pen—just for now."

She pointed to a wooden hexagonal construction, and Kanaya peered inside. Her eyes widened.

Crawling all over each other were two dozen grubs in the pen. Kanaya folded herself over the side, and let her shoes hover over the floor. The grubs crept up her arms, quickly clinging to each piece of her clothing. By the time the pen was empty, Kanaya stood in the center of the chamber, covered in a rainbow of carapaces.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

Yourha grinned at Kanaya. “Don’t let them hang onto you for too long—or one might just spin his web on you,” she said. It was the cliché sort of platitude that you said to someone holding a grub, and they had both heard it a million times. She had this pretty, slippery hair, and a pointy, slightly crowded smile. She picked up her rake, opened one side of the hexagon with a latch and pulled the wigglers’ waste into a shallow bin beside her.

“They let you do this? Every day?” Kanaya asked. Her arms were outstretched like an angel’s.

Yourha replied modestly, “Maybe half the time.”

“It’s incredible they even let you touch them. Iihmma must think you’re very responsible.”

“Well—these aren’t the viable ones, so,” Yourha answered flatly. “It’s not much that they’re entrusting to me, really.”

Kanaya stared at her blankly. “They are—”

“They are slated for culling once the drones arrive. But the smell gets to be too much,” she said slowly.

A moment of silence passed between them. The grubs kept digging their pincers into the flesh of her arms, stomach. “Her, too?” Kanaya asked gruesomely, raising her forearm, which had a jadeblood clinging to it.

She tucked a slippery lock of her hair behind her ear. “Yeah. We would be crowded down here otherwise. At least...it’s better I think to do it this way, instead of raising everyone and then choosing who to keep, based on their deeds.”

Kanaya didn’t respond immediately. The grubs were vigorous—one had even torn a small hole in her blouse with his pincer.

“Do you ever think about...where you could possibly hide one of them?” Kanaya asked.

Yourha’s gaze wheeled around fearfully. She held a fistful of some acrid-smelling powder above the pen. “You can’t say that, Kanaya. As far as I know, they won’t cull us past wrigglerhood. But, there’s nothing to say they wouldn’t make an exception.”

# HATCHLING HEROINE

Kanaya watched her friend mop the inside of the pen, then refill it with soft flakes of bedding, then replace the grubs.

"I..." began Kanaya, embarrassed— "I should probably get on with my next block."

Yourha looked back at her with heavy gaze. Kanaya's eyes were a deep gray, but Yourha's were watery—nearly see-through. "Be careful with your words...I don't want to see you getting hurt."

Kanaya headed out. As she looked back, she watched Yourha scoop up a handful of grubs from the other hexagon-shaped pen. She paused with the jade for a moment, before transferring her, too.

\*\*\*

[twinArmageddons began bugging grimAuxiliatrix]

TA: GA? are you there? ii need two talk two you about 2omething.

GA: Sure What Is Going On

TA: well. iit would 2iimply be a dreamboat iif ii knew for 2ure.

TA: but iill cut the cryptiic crap. ii think youre iin danger.

GA: :?

TA: ugh. iim not explaiiniing thii2 riight.

TA: 2orry two lay thii2 one on you 2o 2oon, ii know we ju2t 2tarted talkiing.

TA: but the mother grub, once upon a tiime, be2towed upon me the ever 2o lovely giift of the p2iioniic.

TA: theyre not good for anything really except cau2iing me paiin and lettiing me move 2tuff wiithout touchiing iit.

GA: That Actually Sounds

GA: Helpful In A Lot Of Situations

TA: but they al2o act up when there2 a lot of death iincomiing.

GA: Well I Hate To Be The One To Burst Your Ablution Sphere

GA: But There Is A Lot Of Death That Occurs Down Here On A Regular Basis

# HATCHLING HEROINE

TA: oh iim not bliind, ii know that already. there2 alway2 an a22load of 2tatiic comiing from that place at any giiven pooint iin tiime

TA: ii really feel bad for you. but anyway, thii2 ii2 more noii2e than u2ual.

TA: iim 2orry ii cant be more u2eful than that. but ju2t, be careful, okay?

GA: Oh Dear

GA: Maybe I Should Stay Away From The Wigglers

GA: It Would Seem As If My Negative Influence Is More Far-Reaching Than I Thought

GA: :(

TA: hey, well. dont be too hard on your2elf.

TA: plu2, only one of u2 can be 2elf-loathiing at a tiime.

TA: 2orry, that wa2 a 2tupiidly 2elf-ab2orbed thing two 2ay.

TA: iim 2orry that ii cant tell you anything el2e. liike how iit happen2.

GA: Thats Okay

GA: I Can Always Consult My Own Sources

TA: ?? ??

TA: youre p2ychiic two?? that cant be, youre a jadeblood.

TA: that would be liike, double the mutant.

GA: I Am Sure You Would Be Intrigued By That Prospect But

GA: I Am Not Sure That It Is The Same Sort Of Thing You Have

GA: I Would Explain Further But The Seventh Bell Is Tolling So I Have To Cut This Conversation Short

TA: okay.

[grimAuxiliatrix ceased bugging twinArmageddons]

TA: be 2afe.

TA: and dont diie.

Sometimes, despite the highest-grade sopor that was in the regrouperacoon, Kanaya still dreamed horribly, and often. She told no one about them. Her podmates did not seem to share the same affliction. Perhaps she was a mutant, as the Twin Armageddons had suggested.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

Sometimes, things she dreamed would go on to actually happen...which was eerie. But most of the time, their content was just random stuff. Rolling hills with checkerboard grasses and golden flagships and other useless nonsense. So, she had learned to take the visions with a grain of oceanic crystal. Tonight, she saw herself with a funny-looking sphere, covered in horns and dripping with jade-colored blood. In the dream, she looked older, maybe. Lucidly, she tried to make a note of that. Kanaya stared up at the bright sky and its clouds, as she laid face-up on the bizarre, checkerboard grass. Ironically, she could enjoy the light of the sun while she slept. Maybe this was why Iihmma and the other elder jades frowned upon her. Kanaya was too odd, too sensitive, and too concerned with frolicking and frivolities to be entrusted with important things.

She watched her older self place the orb in a locked box with no key. Inscribed upon it was a label, or code that she could not remember upon waking up.

See— useless nonsense.

But it wasn't the clouds in her dreams that clued her in to the impending disaster. It was the water in the drains.

When she began work that day, she noticed that the water level was higher than usual. In some of the chambers, the water was dripping from the stalactites in steady streams, and there was really nothing for Kanaya to do except listen to the water churning in the drains.

As she stood there, useless with her broom, she caught a glimpse of two elder jadebloods, hitching up their skirts and carrying crates of eggs up the cavern stairs, cursing unceremoniously as they went—

“Not how I wanted today to start off—it must be pouring buckets up there—”

Kanaya rose to higher ground with her broom, passing several other harried jades carrying crates of wigglers. This cavern was less flooded, so she started her daily chores there. Eventually, the surface rainstorm would stop, and with time the water would seep back into the earth. All she had to do was make sure to be more careful in the Cocoon Block this time.

After another thirty minutes, a crash came from an adjoining cave. Kanaya, alone, wheeled around to see where it had come from, but before she could, the water began to quickly flood into the Cocoon cavern. Sooner than she could realize, the water was lapping at her ankles.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

“Girl! Put that down and come get this.”

A jadeblood of about Coreah’s age thrust a crate full of troll’s eggs into her arms and directed her towards a staircase. “Use the banister. Don’t fall, and *don’t* break them,” she ordered.

Kanaya did as she was told. When she reached the river bridge, its waters had risen well above the wooden pathway. She waded through water that was up to her waist, carrying the crate above her head. On the other side, she handed it off to another jade, and turned back around. Flying lusii circled overhead, seeking higher ground.

When she crossed the river bridge again, the frantic emergency bells had started to toll. When she returned to the staircase, she found that it was now completely underwater. Echoing in what was left of the cavern air, Kanaya could hear more than one voice screaming.

Kanaya’s eyes fell on the crate of wigglers propped up upon a jut in the cavern rocks. Her heart sank. Through a gap in the wall, her gaze met Yourha’s. She was now treading water in the cave below, her head bobbing above and below the surface.

“Do not just stand there! Go, before we’re all trapped,” said another jade beside her. They made their way across the underwater bridge.

It was easier at this point to swim. They had all grown up playing in the river’s shallows, but Kanaya had practiced swimming on the tiny planet of her dreams. It was as if she had not only dreamed it, but her muscles really had practiced it as well. Sopping wet, she kept wading and winding her way desperately down passageways, as long as they led upward. At some point, she realized that the other jades were no longer behind her. The flood had caught up with them. Finally, Kanaya saw light. Bright, real sunlight. She held her breath, and dove under.

Kanaya broke surface in a large grotto that she realized was someplace in where the elders’ quarters used to be. Tired, and with her heart beating faster than it ever had, she heaved herself up onto the nearest rock.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

There was a hard silence in that cavern—no more screaming, and no more bells. Alone on the opposite side of the cave sat Iihmma, the eldermost jade. Her magnificent green robes were soaked, and she looked rather dejected, with her chest to her knees. She too, had brought a crate with her, but from her vantage point Kanaya could not see what was in it.

“Are there others that followed you?” Iihmma asked, her voice echoing across the cave.

“No. At least, I don’t think so,” Kanaya said.

Iihmma’s mouth shifted gravely, and she said nothing.

“Are there...did we save any wigglers?” Kanaya asked dumbly.

Iihmma shook her head in the negative. “I think we’ve come to the end of the road,” Iihmma said, deadpan.

Kanaya looked up, towards the ceiling. The Alternian sun was a tiny pinprick. There was at least a mile of rock still towering above them.

“How could it be,” she said, barely audible to Kanaya, “that my life in its entirety, my whole life’s work...has culminated in this?”

Iihmma, who was approximately two hundred fifty sweeps, sat in a crumple of her robes.

Kanaya, who was not yet five, felt the doom creep over her, and started to tear up. Soon, Kanaya’s vision became merely a smear of green, and her quiet sobs echoed across the cave.

“Cry, if you must,” said Iihmma dolefully.

Her quiet sobbing hiccuped, and turned to wailing. She couldn’t help it. They would die down here. She cried without restraint. When she had tired herself out, she lay on her side on the rock. It was supposed to be lunch hour. Kanaya could feel it.

Kanaya held Iihmma’s gaze, once she had gotten a hold of herself. “I have to ask you something, then.”

“What is your question?”

# HATCHLING HEROINE

"I know that there was something different about my wriggling—the other jades have said so," Kanaya asked, before she could deny it. "What was different?"

Iihmma looked at her sorely. "You were found on the surface," Iihmma said slowly, as if after all these sweeps, she still didn't know what to make of it. "Maybe a drone tried to take you, and burst into flames—but they always cull in house, so that never made much sense. We were never able to work out how you got up there."

"Burst...into flames?" Kanaya asked dubiously.

Iihmma fumbled, "There were all these flaming rocks around where we recovered you. At least, they looked like rocks, but maybe they were drone parts."

Kanaya didn't know what to say. "You didn't try to cull me, after that?"

"We did," Iihmma admitted quietly. "You pupated anyway. The council and I were deciding what to do with you, while you spun your web on the archway in my den." To Kanaya's surprise, Iihmma actually laughed. "Took us a week to even realize what you had done. At that point, we took it as an omen of your healthy vigor."

Kanaya had never known Iihmma—or any other jade, for that matter—to be so mystic. Jadebloods were logical, utilitarian. They didn't believe in signs and omens.

Iihmma sighed gravely. "And after all of that..." Iihmma sighed heavily. "Well."

It was far from the satisfying answer she was looking for. Kanaya spent the next few minutes staring at the rising tide, lost in thought. *On the surface?* She had never seen or read about a drone catching on fire, either. Anyone she could have ever asked was dead or soon to be dead, as was she.

In fact, she was so preoccupied with the thought of her own death that she didn't immediately notice the arriving creature, nor hear the flapping of its wings.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

Iihmma's gasp echoed across the cave. The creature descended the hole from above, dropping nearer and nearer. It was bright white—a lusus. What kind exactly, Kanaya did not recognize, but Iihmma did. She stared at the moth-like creature as if she were seeing a ghost.

The lusus' large, ovoid eyes held its gaze steadily on Kanaya. It floated closer and closer to her.

Kanaya stiffened.

"Kanaya, do not reject her advances. Show her you are ready to leave," she said urgently.

*Ready to leave?*

Kanaya's friends had lusii. But she herself knew nothing other than being raised by the other jades. She was never taught how to behave, during a lusus-pairing ritual. But she heeded Iihmma, and she scooted back, just enough to make space for the creature to land on the rock.

Timidly, Kanaya waved hello.

The virgin mother grub lusus bared its belly, and opened its pincers wide. Kanaya carefully stood up.

Before she could realize what was happening, the lusus darted behind her. A breath of air heaved out of her lungs as she was snatched up in a tight grip, suddenly hovering over the grotto.

"A Virgin Mother Grub lusus, adopting a charge. This is a first," said Iihmma.

Now hovering above the water, near the entrance hole, Kanaya caught a glimpse of what was in the crate. Iihmma picked up an orb, with horns jutting out every which way from it, and presented it to the Virgin Mother Grub.

The lusus hovered closer to Iihmma, and Kanaya took the orb from her hands. As soon as this transfer was made, her new lusus flapped its wings wildly, and they made their ascent towards the light.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

After what felt like a lifetime, Kanaya and the creature passed the cave's entrance and onto the surface of Alternia . All she could register was being swathed in unspeakably bright light. Instead of releasing her onto the grass and diving back into the caverns, the lusus kept flying, higher and higher above the land. Somehow, Kanaya already knew that going back to rescue Iihmma was never part of its plan.

She and the Virgin Mother Grub sailed past bright little hivebatches and dusky blue woods, the pale sky surrounding her. She hugged the horned orb as tightly as she could. In this moment, Kanaya got her first examination of her home planet. It was only about a third of the way through their journey that Kanaya realized that it was not, in fact, raining at all.

Her new lusus flew her very, very far from the brooding caverns. Kanaya was starting to think that she was simply flying aimlessly, until the two arrived at two high towers, each topped with a spherical spire. Here was where the two took their landing on the balcony. Kanaya easily forced open its dilapidated door.

The lusus followed her in. Before Kanaya knew what was happening, the lusus nicked the orb right out of her grasp, and swallowed it whole.

Kanaya stared agape, as a bulb now protruded from the lusus' lower thorax, and would remain so until a critical moment would call upon her. But, she couldn't possibly comprehend it on that first day of her new life.

The place was dusty, though not ancient. It was clearly intended for use as a respitblock. There was a traditional recooperacon and an armoire. In the corner sat a desk. Her eyes drifted to a funny looking hatch, and hidden inside the desk was...a sewing machine.

Immediately, she lifted it out, like a Wriggling Day gift. She could tell this machine was much newer and fancier than the one in the cavern library.

The desk also had a computer sitting on it. She pressed one of the keys, and the monitor whirred to life. Tentatively, she typed in the URL to Bug-A-Chum, to see if she had any messages.

There were several.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

[twinArmageddons began bugging grimAuxiliatrix]

TA: iit2 happened, ha2nt iit?

[arachnidsGrip began bugging grimAuxiliatrix]

AG: Helloooooooooo, earth to Maryam.

AG: Rumor has it that you're dead!!!!!!! Please confirm otherwise.

AG: Also, if possible, disclose more information on location of any 8odies. Ideally 8efore nightfall.

[carcinoGeneticist began bugging grimAuxiliatrix]

CG: KANAYA, ARE YOU OKAY?

CG: OH GOD, PLEASE ANSWER ME.

CG: SOLLUX HAS ME ALL UP AND THINKING YOU'RE HAVING A SWANKY DINNER WITH YOUR DOOM.

GA: Who Is This Youre Now Speaking Of?

CG: OH THANK GOD.

CG: TA.

CG: HE'S BEEN PRACTICALLY GNAWING MY LOBE OFF ALL NIGHT ABOUT A BUNCH OF APOCALYPTIC BULLCRAP.

CG: WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED?

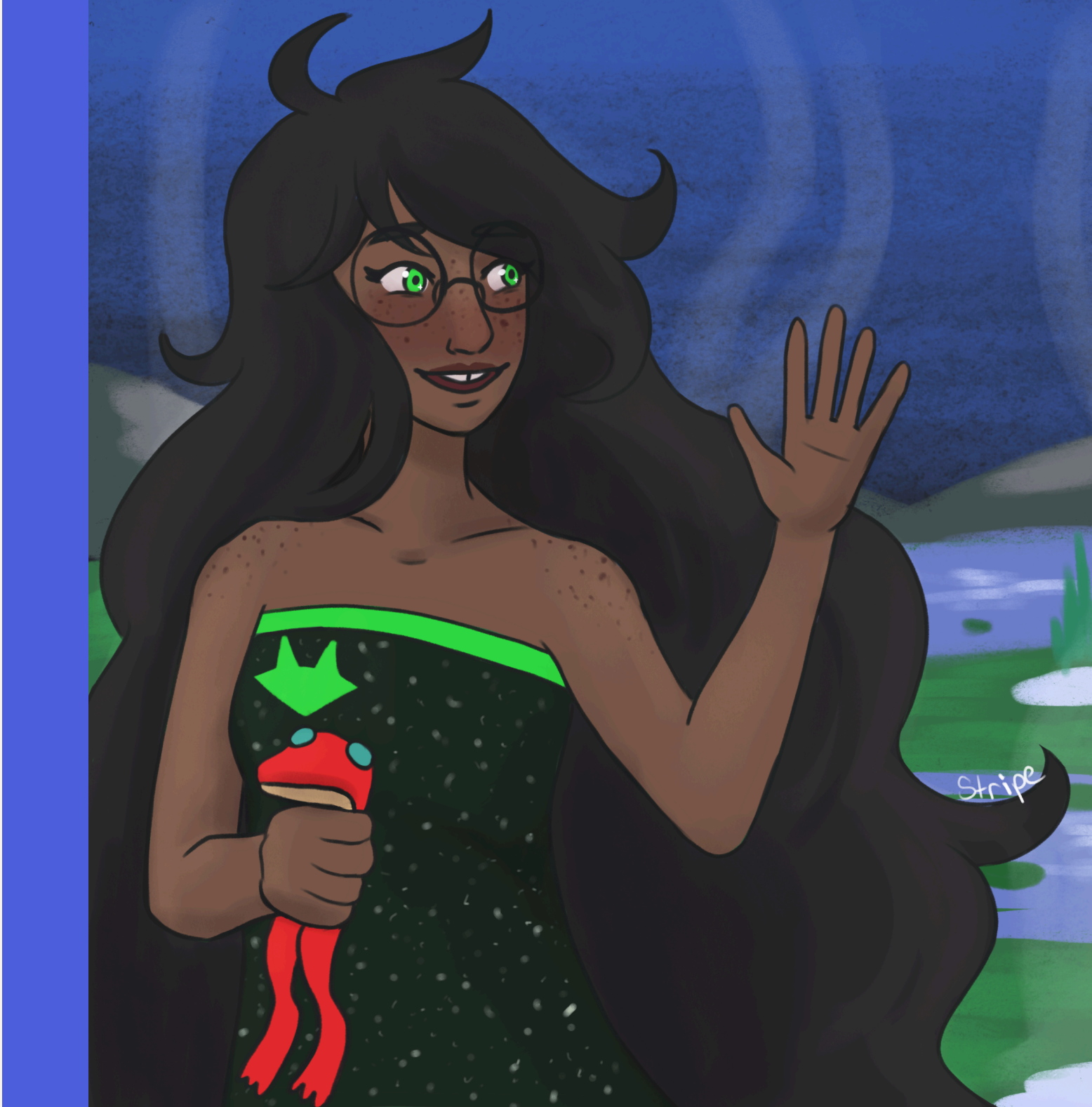
It was at this point that her adrenaline crashed, and Kanaya felt the gravity of her situation. She would never go back home again. Little did she know at the time, but this would not be the last instance of her entire world being destroyed. She looked back at the lusus Virgin Mother Grub, who had begun to spin a respitenest for herself in the corner. And although she was grateful to her, she still didn't know how to look after her lusus, or sleep in the recuperacoon by herself. Twelfth Perigee's Eve would come to pass with no grand feast and no company, no pod to which she belonged and no Yourha—her first love, but not her last—still not understanding why she was spared or what to make of Iihmma's hazy recollection or this unusual place that the lusus had taken her to. Above all, she remembered how horribly alone she was in the world. It was enough to make her cry all over again.

There were no more bells tolling to interrupt their conversations—and Kanaya talked to Karkat for an embarrassingly long period of time, until he fell asleep at his husktop, for he was nocturnal, like the rest of their planet.

# HATCHLING HEROINE

It was now midday, and Kanaya returned to the balcony. Although it was hot out, a sturdy breeze swept across the high tower, briefly leaving her chilly. Her flight with the Virgin Mother Grub had been her first glimpse of Alternia's terrain. And while it was incredible, she hardly had felt relaxed. Outside her new hive, she stared out at these magenta forests, and the faint remnants of her planet's two moons hanging over sharp green, endless hills. The pictures in their library books didn't strike her with the same beauty.

She let the sun hit her face. These billowing, wispy clouds sadly, did not hold any stunning visions of her future; yet she stared out at them now anyway.



## FROST AND FROGS

By Stripe



Featuring Dave and Jade looking for frogs in *The Land of Frost and Frogs*, a companion piece for *Frost and Frogs*.

# FROST AND FROGS

## STRIPE

TAGS/WARNINGS: JADE HARLEY/DAVE STRIDER, JADE HARLEY, DAVE STRIDER, BEC NOIR, CANON COMPLIANT, LAND OF FROST AND FROGS, CRUSHES, TIME TRAVEL

WORD COUNT: 3,579

When Dave first sees Jade in the snow, he thinks the stress of keeping up all of these stable time loops has got him full on hallucinating. He knows that Jade is probably the least predictable of all of their friends, but surely she isn't actually wearing an *evening gown* just to come out and meet him in person. It's a little flattering, he guesses, but it's also snowing. That thing doesn't have any sleeves on it. She'd be freezing her ass off.

He walks up to her just to be sure that he's not just seeing things, and she smiles so wide that he feels his heart skip a couple of beats. He's not sure that anybody's ever been that happy to see him before, so he *must* just be imagining things. He pinches himself just to be sure.

Ow.

Okay, so that's really Jade, then. In an evening gown that looks like it's glittering with literal starlight, out in the middle of the snow. He can see some of the snow getting caught in the strands of her hair, which is starting to make her hair look a little like its got little stars in it too.

"Daaave! Are you just gonna stand there staring at me all day, or are you going to come over here? We have frogs to find!"

Dave clears his throat and hopes that she takes his blush as just a side effect from the cold. "Oh hell yeah, we do. Let's get our asses in gear." He walks over to her with his hands stuffed in his pockets, all cool. He's painfully aware that he's making a first impression on her right now. He's *pretty* sure she saw him a bit when she was fighting that imp upon entering the game, since he most certainly saw *her*, but that's different from this. They're actually standing and talking in the flesh.

"You're uh. Fancy."

# FROST AND FROGS

Jade looks down at her dress, as though she's only just now noticing that she's wearing a strapless gown to go frog hunting in. He thinks she looks a bit sheepish when she looks back up at him, but he's not used to reading expressions on somebody who's this smiley yet. "Yeah! It's our first time meeting in person, right? I want to look nice!"

Dave suddenly feels vastly under-dressed in comparison. What was he thinking? He'd gone out and alchemized like five hundred different suits, and he chooses a long sleeved T-shirt to go and talk to Jade for the first time?

But no, that would have been overkill, right? He's pretty sure that getting dressed in a suit to go and hang out with a girl is probably like, a date thing. This isn't a date. This is casual. Cool. Chill. So fucking chill. Literally, on account of all the snow.

"Right. Well, you do. Look nice, I mean. Like- gives you a real space goddess kinda vibe, you know?"

"Thanks! You look nice too. I really like your shirt!"

Jade is definitely just saying that to be nice, but Dave feels his cheeks go hot anyways.

"Thanks. So. Frog hunting, right? You needed some of my sick time travel abilities to help us speedrun this shit?"

"Yes! Just follow me. You can see all that equipment in person you helped me set up a little while ago!"

---

Jade does her best to explain the mechanics of the frog breeding to Dave, but he's pretty sure that each new detail that he learns about it is melting his brain a little. He understands the time paradox of it all, at least, which is what he's there to help with, but he doesn't really get the genetics part, or how Jade is supposed to know what frogs to use, or any of that other shit.

But it sounds like he doesn't need to understand all of the mechanics. What he does understand is that Jade needs to earmark the frogs that she wants to use as part of the genetic code for the Genesis Frog, and then she needs to go out and catch them to make sure that she can create paradox clones of them.

# FROST AND FROGS

"I've already got a list and some pictures of the first frogs we need to get!" Jade says, and she pulls out a set of pictures in a folder. To Dave, it feels sort of like he's a hitman being passed the case file on his latest targets, which would probably be cool as shit if his targets weren't all a bunch of multi-colored frogs.

"Most of these were just easy to find, so that I could get some practice using the machinery," Jade explains. "They're not all that important to the code, but... I think it would still create some kind of paradox if we didn't go out and track them down."

"So this is more like the tutorial level," Dave reasons. "We go get the basic frogs that are so easy to find a baby could do it. Then when we level up we get to find the tricky bastards who give us cool stat boosts."

Jade laughs at that, shrill and open and joyful. She has the kind of laugh that somebody has when they've never been told that their laugh is annoying, but he wouldn't change a damn thing about it. He wants her to keep laughing like that.

"Yes, exactly! So let's get going and find these guys!"

"Yeah. Let's go. Level 1, start."

The first few frogs that Jade selected *are* pretty easy to track down, as it turns out, because she found them all in the same spot in the woods, right by her house. The frogs are also, at the moment, fully frozen over, which makes them easy sitting targets. Dave looks at one of the photos that Jade's handed him, then down at the little frog frozen in ice at his feet. Yeah. Damn. Dead ringer. "Got one!" Dave calls out.

"Hooray!" He hears Jade's voice from behind the trees nearby, even if he doesn't fully see her. "I got one too!" Jade pops out with a frozen frog cradled lovingly in her hands with the biggest smile Dave has ever seen a person wear. It's like looking at the sun, so he stares at the frog instead.

"Damn. Look at the mug on that guy. I bet a face like that, he's out there scaring off all the lady frogs."

Jade gasps and pulls the frog away from him, like that might keep it from hearing that nasty dig that Dave just made at it. "Dave! Don't say that! He's cute!"

# FROST AND FROGS

"No way."

"Yes way!" Jade is pouting at him, her eyes narrowed a bit, and Dave bites the inside of his cheek so that he doesn't end up laughing at how cute that is. Damn. Is it going to be like this for the entire frog hunt? He might just lose his mind.

"Alright, alright. He's not the ugliest frog I've ever seen. Anyways, is that the last one over there? I can nab it so we can get outta here and get back inside."

"Oh, yes! That's the one!"

Dave follows Jade and brings the frogs back inside so that they can start to defrost. Dave doesn't see why they can't just leave the little bastards out in the cold, since they've already picked them up and moved them, but Jade looks pretty upset about how cold the frogs must feel, so inside they go.

Dave sort of watches them defrost as Jade does some calculations, humming a little song to herself as she clicks through the various features of the machine, seeking out the different frogs she's going to need for her project.

When he finally hears a frustrated sigh, he glances over. Jade is her worrying her lower lip, her eyebrows knit together. It's so interesting, seeing her emoting right in front of him. She's clearly the girl he's always known, but there's another dimension to her. She can't hide behind green text and smiley faces anymore; her glasses don't obscure nearly as much as his. He doesn't call her on it, though. That's just rude.

"Ugh, this is so frustrating, Dave!" she exclaims, throwing her hands in the air. "We definitely need to get this frog, but it's not going to be available until the frost is more melted! It's under a full thing of ice right now. It could be hours!"

Dave walks over and peers over her shoulder to see the frog in question. It is indeed fully encased in some ice, though when she zips forward in the timeline, the little guy is hopping around while the snow around him melts.

"You want me to grab that for you?" he asks casually, one hand in his pocket. He's pretty sure that cool guys talk with a hand in their pockets. Jade looks back at him.

# FROST AND FROGS

"As cool as you are, I don't think even you can get through the ice, Dave!"

"Lucky I don't have to. It's a matter of time, right? That's my whole thing. You just sit here and relax, and I'll go and get the guy for you. Frog delivery service."

"You don't mind?"

"Nah." Dave whips out his time tables. "That's what I'm here for."

When he time travels forward a few hours, the volcano is actively erupting, red hot lava pooling down the edges of the mouth of the volcano as smoke rises into the sky. The snow is melting almost comically fast, all but steaming as he steps outside and starts to hunt down the frog. He remembers it pretty well. Red on top, green on the bottom, weird violet eyes and a blue tongue. It's distinct enough that he feels like he'll know it when he sees it.

It's a matter of minutes before Dave finds the pond that he had seen the damn thing encased in on Jade's screen, and when he crouches down to take a look at it, the poor thing is only half thawed out, with its back half still encased in the ice. Dave reaches down to grab it, but it's still pretty firmly stuck in there. Dave is pretty sure that it doesn't matter if the frog comes back dead or alive, but he *is* pretty sure that Jade will be upset if he time travels back with a bisected frog in his hands, so he decides to wait it out. If there's one thing he got, it's plenty of time. He's pretty much made of the stuff.

Dave sticks his hands in his pockets again and looks around, taking in the scenery of Jade's planet as the snow melts around him. It's so much nicer than his own planet is. He guesses that a land of a bunch of lava and metal is cool on like, a conceptual level. Like the cover to a heavy metal album or something. But he doesn't think he'd want any of his friends visiting it like he's visiting Jade right now. He won't admit it to Jade, but she was right. Snow *is* more fun than lava.

Dave is interrupted from his thoughts by the sound of bullets from nearby, and he immediately perks up. The only person he knows who would be firing a gun is Jade, and if she's in trouble, it's up to him to make sure that she stays out of it. He makes a note of where the frog is and then follows the sound of gunfire, coming up to the edge of the trees to a small clearing. There, he sees the fight.

# FROST AND FROGS

It's Bec Noir, Jade, and him. Jade is incredible, her gun firing bright green bullets at rapid pace, and she doesn't back down for even a minute. He's not doing half bad, either; there's a whole lot of time clones jumping in to help, and he's gotten pretty good at fighting with those. His sword clashes against Bec Noir's again and again, though as he's fighting, he notices that Bec isn't going after Jade.

At about the time Dave notices that, he watches his future self pull Jade in front of him as a sort of human shield. Dave's heart leaps into his throat, and he's about ready to go and punch his future self out for putting her in harm's way like that- but then Bec Noir backs down.

Oh. Right. Jade's dog doesn't want to hurt her. Of course he doesn't - and now that Dave knows that, he'll be confident enough to use Jade like a shield too, knowing she won't be able to get hurt. Still feels like a dick move, but in a battle with life or death stakes, Dave doesn't think he can afford to pull punches.

He tenses as he feels the gravity shift around him, the sky going red as the two of them unleash their fraymotif onto Bec Noir. It's flashy and powerful and as he watches his future self and Jade move around each other, it feels like watching a dance. It might be the most beautiful thing he's ever seen, which is an insane thought to have about an attack he's doing with a friend, but-

Bec Noir survives it. They give it their best, and he survives, and Dave's throat feels tight. He has no idea how they get out of this. Hell, *do* they even get out of it? This is pretty late in the timeline. He doesn't know how this ends. It feels important to figure out right now, though.

He watches his sword clash with Bec Noir's a couple more times while Jade reloads before they shift positions and Jade stands in between his future self and her demon dog. It looks like she's trying to protect him, actually, like she's the knight instead of him. Dave smiles a little at the thought - but then he sees what happens when Jade shoots.

She fires right into Bec, but when she does, his form becomes shimmering green and he reappears right behind Dave.

So do the bullets.

# FROST AND FROGS

Dave feels his eyes go wide behind his shades as he sees his future self gunned down, his torso riddled with so many bullets that there's no way there aren't several major organs ruptured as a result. He can hear the sickening thud as his future body hits the ground, and it's only a small consolation prize that the death is quick.

Dave stays standing off to the side, next to a tree, and he watches as Jade reacts. She starts by yelling at Bec Noir before she rushes over to his corpse. She's clearly panicking, calling out his name, shaking his body as though he has any hope of reacting at this point. Even from here, Dave can tell he's stone cold dead. Fuck. He really didn't want Jade to see that. It's not the first time she's seen his corpse before - it's hard to avoid dead Daves what with all the doomed timelines he's out here preventing. But it's different to see it through her space goggles and another for her to be cradling his corpse.

He thinks she might be crying about it.

Maybe he should go over there and comfort her. It might make her better to see him alive and well, even if he knows that's a dead alpha timeline Dave in her arms right now. The fact that there's still past versions of him running around doesn't mean that he's going to be okay. No matter what happens, he's going to die, and it's going to be from the bullets in her gun. He's not sure that there's anything he can possibly do to make her feel better about that.

Jade is yelling now, but Dave is far enough away that he can't really see who she's yelling at. Bec Noir is still standing there, looking like a dog who's being told off for peeing on the carpet, but Jade isn't really looking at him.

Must be a troll then. That's good. They're mostly annoying as hell, but maybe one of them can talk her through this.

"You want me to *what?*" That's clear enough that he can make out exactly what Jade's saying, and it forces him to take note of exactly what Jade is planning to do. She looks around as though to check that nobody else is watching, pulling a face when she spots Bec Noir still standing there- but thankfully, she doesn't notice Dave standing behind a tree and watching everything play out.

Jade's shoulder hunch up as she takes a deep breath, psyching herself up for whatever it is that the troll is telling her to do. Dave frowns. Does she need to get him to that quest bed that Terezi was all up in his business about a while ago, or-

# FROST AND FROGS

Jade leans in and kisses his corpse.

Dave's jaw tightens, and his pulse quickens. That's his first kiss, and he doesn't even get to feel it. He's dead, and Jade is kissing him because she has to, not because she wants to. It sucks to watch, but it's gotta suck worse for her. His lips are probably cold.

Dave's legs start moving - not to Jade, but back in the way he came. He can't do this right now. He can't watch Jade upset, he can't look at his corpse, and he doesn't want to be anywhere near Bec Noir right now.

He runs faster and faster, up to a full sprint by the time he makes it back to the pond. There's a divot in the ice where the frog used to be, and for a moment, Dave thinks he's fucked that up too. He went all this way back in time, watched his dumb ass get riddled with bullets, and he's not even going to come back with anything to show for it.

Just as Dave is about to start spiraling, he hears a soft ribbit from off to his left, and he turns to look. Oh. There's the motherfucker he was looking for.

Dave dives to pick up the frog before it can get away, which turns out to be overkill, since it doesn't even try to move. He still thinks it was worth the risk; he doesn't want to stay in this time any longer than he has to. Dave summons his time tables to go back to the second he time traveled forward to begin with, though he doesn't walk back into Jade's place immediately.

He's being cool about this. Calm, collected. Yeah. So he's totally gonna beef it, and then Jade's going to kiss his corpse, but that'll bring him back. It's going to be fine.

When he makes it back, Jade is beaming at him. He knows it's only a matter of time before that smile gets wiped off of her face. Shit.

He considers warning her. It'd be good to warn her, right? Let her know that she'd see something upsetting, but that in the end it would all turn out okay. Instead, when he opens his mouth, Dave says, "Got the bastard. He put up a valiant chase. Tom and Jerry levels of shenanigans happening as he tried to escape my cat-like reflexes. But I got him."

Jade laughs at that again, with that laugh that shows no restraint. Dave can't stop himself from thinking about how she isn't going to be laughing like that in an hour.

# FROST AND FROGS

"Yay! You're so good at this, Dave!" She puts the captured frog down where she's kept all of the other captured frogs. Which is to say, on the ground, hopping around with the rest of the wayward amphibians. "According this program here, this one should have some of the genes that we need to make sure that planets can form atmospheres correctly. Isn't that cool?"

"So cool it puts all the snow and ice on your planet to shame."

Jade's too good, Dave is pretty sure. She's too sweet. If he tells her that he's going to die by her hand, even if it's by accident, even if he'll come back later, she'll try to stop it. She'll keep her gun put away, refuse to fire, and then they'll all be pulled into a doomed timeline because she's too damn nice and wouldn't ever want to hurt him.

He has to believe that's the case. So he can't tell her the truth. At least, not the full truth.

"Hey, Jade. So I'm gonna stop time traveling after a bit. Y'know, start to coalesce the timeline down, keep things simple and straightforward from here on out, 'til the Scratch. I'll help you get the trickiest frogs and all, because I'm cool like that, but... you know. We gotta start to get things wrapped up."

Jade looks at him, her head cocked to the side. It kind of reminds Dave of a dog, and he's reminded of the fact that she was raised by a dog. The same dog, in a way, that just let him be gunned down in front of her. He worries for a moment that maybe she's figured it out - that she's pieced together that he knows he's going to die, and she's going to mess everything up or mope for the next hour or so, and-

She fixes him with a smile. "Okay, Dave! Whatever you say. Let's get those frogs!"



## TIMAEUS EVOLUTION

By Jellysmudge

Featuring the various incarnations/splinters of Dirk Strider: Bro Strider, Dirk Strider, Brain Ghost Dirk, and Lil Hal.



## LOTAK

By Jellysmudge

Featuring the scene of Dave and Dirk embracing on *The Land of Tombs and Krypton* as seen on page 9664.

## REDPANDAGIRL

TAGS/WARNINGS:DAMARA MEGIDO/RUFIOH NITRAM, RUFIOH NITRAM/HORUSS ZAHHAK, MITUNA CAPTOR/LATULA PYROPE, ARANEA SERKET, MEENAH PEIXES, DAMARA MEGIDO, RUFIOH NITRAM, HORUSS ZAHHAK, KANKRI VANTAS, MITUNA CAPTOR, LATULA PYROPE, PORRIM MARYAM, KURLOZ MAKARA, ALTERNATE UNIVERSE - CANON DIVERGENCE, GROUP CHATS  
WORD COUNT: 3,492

AG opened memo on board VICTORY PARTY ::::)

cullerConqueror responded to memo.

CC: waters up

AG: Meenah!!!!!!!!!! ::::D

AG: I'm soooooooo happy to see you again!!!!!!!!!!

CC: me too gillie

CC: was startin to get BOOORRRRIIINNGG round here

AG: I can imagine!

AG: Ah, it's so good to 8e 8ack!!!!!!!!!!

arashiActualized responded to memo.

AA: ただの遊び?

CC: serket did you forget to install tunas translation patch thingy/

CC: dams going to be annoying as fuck to read without it

AA: まるで俺がここにはいないかのように話すのはやめろ。

AA: お願いだ。

CC: sea

CC: nothing but gibberish

AG: Apologies for the inconvenience. It's 8een so long since I've used my husktop that all the various quality-of-life features seem to have completely slipped my mind.

AG: I'll start setting it up once our 8brainstorming session is completed. Now that his injuries have been cosmically erased, perhaps Mituna can assist me with the task.

CC: we were chatting on this thing like yesterday but W)-(AT EVAH

AA: え、怪我?ミツナはまたスケートボードから落ちたのか?

AG: Of course all of that will have to wait for when the rest of our friend group arrives. I did send the invite link through the channels we frequented 8ack in the day, so they should 8e here any second.

aerosphericTizona responded to memo.

casanovaThoroughbred responded to memo.

AT: Whats up dolls...

CT: 8=D If this memo isn't for e%tremely important then I ask of you to please remove me. I'm in the middle of some very important work at the moment and I cannot tear myself away to horse around as we tend to do.

AG: Rufioh, Horuss! How great it is to see you two again.

AG: Thank you for accepting my invite.

AT: No worrles... 1'm always down for a shebang...

CC: whats up big kahuna

AG: Though the importance of this memo should 8e pretty o8vious.

AG: It's important to cele8rate all accomplishments, especially one as momentous as this :::)

CT: 8=D Well, as long as it's not for our normal sessions of cloptrop, I guess I will stay(ble).

CC: yuck

CC: don't force a pun

CT: 8=D My STRONGEST apologies to your highness.

AA: ルフィオ...

AT: What's shaking dollface...

AG: Right, that reminds me.

AG: You three need to 8e civil if you're 8oth to remain in this memo. And I'd appreciate it if you didn't 8ring your drama to the actual party either.

AG: Consider this a 8rand new start. A chance to let go of the past and move onto a 8etter future filled with understanding of what went wrong the previous time.

AT: Sure thing...

AA: 私は...ベストを尽くす?

CT: 8=D Please, a man of my stature knows beighter than to quarrel with those beneath me.

AT: Whoa dude... we talked about this...

CC: UG)-(

CC: W)-(AT DID I JUST SAY

CC: MOD

CC: KICK )-(IM

AG: A8solutely not.

CC: 3>8(

CT: 8=D My apologies, I'll take care to watch my speech from this point forward.

AT: You can do 1t bro...

CT: 8=D Thank you Rufioh.

AT: No problem... change 1s hard... just gotta keep working on 1t...

AT: Anyway... you sald you're planning a party?

AG: Yes, to celebrate our recent triumph over a force previously thought to 8e insurmounta8le.

AT: Heh... 1 llike the sound of that...

AT: But your place 1s too small to host right... too dangerous to hlike to anyways... not everyone can fly like us...

AT: So 1 was thinking... Damara... that grove you showed me...

AT: That's llike... the perfect party spot...

AA: でも...

AA: その場所を取っておいてたんだ。そこは私たちの秘密の空間になるはずでした。

AT: I'll make 1t up to you...

AA: ...

AA: OKAY.

CC: hell yeah

CC: yall weeps got the best pools

CC: shits gonna be cool as hell

CC: horuss

CT: 8=D Yes your highness?

CC: as punishment for pun crimes

CC: youre gonna set everything up

CC: watereva that shit is

CT: 8=D ...Surely there's better trolls for the job.

CT: 8=D Perhaps one more suited for manual labor.

AA: どうしたんだよ?!

CC: 3>8(

CT: 8=D As you wish.

AG: ::::)

CC: wait

AG: Yes Meenah?

CC: when you said you invited everyone

CC: did you also invite that dillweed

AG: And 8y "dillweed" you mean?

conscientiousGorehound responded to memo.

CG: D9 y9u kn9w h9w discriminat9ry it is t9 h9st gatherings s9 late in the night?

CC: UG)-(

AG: Play nice!!!!!!!!!!

AA: こんにちは、カンクリさん。

AT: Whats up...

CT: 8=D Salutations.

CG: It's well kn9wn h9w the traditi9nal n9cturnal schedule is p99rly c9nfigured t9 the natural 6urr9wing 6uzz6east rhythms of the average tr9ll.

AG: Kankri it is a8solutely lovely to have you here 8ut if you're going to clog up the memo, I'm going to have to kick you.

CG: Despite the d9minance 9f nightlife in troll culture, it's widely the9rized t9 be a recent devel9pment. Hist9rians have f9und evidence of daywalking tr9lls, wh9se predicati9n lead t9 them 6ec9ming valu6le mem6ers 9f pre-C9nsternation s9ciety.

AT: Dude... dld you have that rant already typed up or something...

CG: 96vi9usly. S9 many tr9lls are unaware 9f the discriminat9ry hist9ry 9f the traditi9nal 6ef9ran cl9ck system that I need t9 have educati9nal materials 9n hand.

CC: dude no one cares about your shitty copypastas

AG: Actually, I do.

CG: Really? Then I'm willing to share some of my more pertinent dialogues if you are all finally going to sit down and listen.

AG: The offer is... appealing, but I'm going to have to turn you down. I'm not the one in need of some education, but the lovely trio in this memo may benefit from some of your lessons.

AG: Especially the ones on polyquadrants.

AT: Are... you talking about us...

AG: Obviously!

AG: Since you don't have my powers of emotional psychiatry, but a responsible education could help balance the dynamic between you, Damara, and Horuss.

AA: ルフィオー、彼女は何を言っているんだ。

AT: ...we can talk about it later doll...

CT: =D Aranea I had hoped that you had a STRONG enough perception of me that you would know that I would never stoop so low as to galavante with peasantbloods.

CT: =D Perish the thought!

AG: But I can see him through the window of your hive right now?

AA: NANI???

AG: And you two have been dating for a while, so I don't know what's the big deal.

AT: ...

AT: What...

AA: RUFIOH

AA: WHAT. GOING. ON.

CG: You're acting very irrational right now. While it's not common, polyquadrants are a perfectly valid way to form a relationship.

AT: It's all a misunderstanding...

CC: dont think thats the fisshue here dude

CT: 8=D Please, "Polyquadrants" are the peasantbloods' poor attempt at rebranding their own degeneracy. What I am doing with Rufioh at the moment is irrelevant, but if we were involved then the mere act of me courting him elevates his status instead of confining him to the trough of the lowbloods. While crossbreeding isn't congruent with the more e%emplary features of the indigo caste, I find that quadrants can be an e%cellent way to motivate those in less fortunate rungs to improve themselves and fit into the system of Beforus. Damara, you would do well to take these words to heart.

AA: AAAAAAAHHHHHH

CG: Y9ur f9cus 9n culling the n9n-6lue is the perfect example of how the systems 9f 6ef9s w9rk t9 keep us d9wn. Instead 9f accepting y9ur w9nderful, n9n-traditi9nal relati9nship y9u f9rce it int9 a paradigm that d9esn't fit. Tell me H9russ, will suppressing y9ur true sexuality lead t9 happiness in this sick s9ciety we live in?

AG: Sigh.

anagnorisisGholsonii banned casanovaThoroughbred from memo.

anagnorisisGholsonii banned conscientiousGorehound from memo.

AG: Damara hasn't added anything to the memo since the freakout so it's safe to assume that she's no longer here, alongside Rufioh. I would like to refrain from 8anning the two at the moment as if they recover from this unfortunate event we're going to need their assistance with the party.

AG: It's strange though. It looked like they were getting along. I had almost thought that Damara had finally gotten over the tussle they had 8ack during the session.

CC: well dams has always been quiet

CC: like total serial kriller vibes

CC: kinda liked that breakdown though

CC: been thinking that someone needed to toughen her up for a while

AG: Didn't you already do that?

tesselatedAsbolus responded to memo.

gamergrrrrlCyberdelic responded to memo.

TA: Y000

GC: wh4ts up nerdz!!!

CC: eeeyyyy

CC: whats kraken tunafish

TA: 45;LDFKJL5

GC: yooo your3 killling my boy!!!

CC: 3>8D

AG: It's great to see you again Mituna.

AG: Same to you Latula.

GC: th3 f33llngz mutu4l!

GC: h4rd to h4v3 4ny fun wlthout my f4volt3 b4cks34t g4m3r  
4round.

GC: nlc3 pl4y b4ck th3r3 btw

TA: Y3AH 17 W45 R34LY C00L

AG: Really? That means a lot coming from you two.

AG: It's nice 8eing appreciated.

AG: Perhaps others in this memo could learn from that.

CC: yeah yeah

CC: anyway to celebrate her awesome win serkets planning a  
victory party and wants to know if you two beta fish are in

GC: h3ll y34h w3 4r3

GC: lve b33n w4ltng to show off my 4m4zlng mov3z

TA: XXXXXDDDDDD

TA: L1K3 H3LL Y34H W3 R3 1N

CC: hehe

AG: So we've already struck a deal with Damara and Rufioh  
(mostly Rufioh) to use a weea8o grove to host it. Horuss will  
also 8e helping put up the decorations.

AG: I was thinking: Perhaps you can help with the  
entertainment? The two of you are the more "tapped in" with  
the youths.

TA: WHY DO YOU 5OUND 50 OLD

GC: sur3! I h4v3 soooo m4ny p4rty g4m3z 1n my h1v3 1ts 1lk3 1  
gutt3d a pln4t4b3ast

GC: th3 ch4ll13ng3 1s flndlng som3thlng 34sy for da noobz

AG: Excellent!  
CC: this kriller queen could school any day of the week  
GC: 1d 11k3 to s33 you try!  
AG: This is such a dream come true! Winning the session solo was such a difficult task for me, especially considering the hand we had been dealt in the first place. Knowing that despite everything that happened between us, those efforts weren't unappreciated..  
AG: It's pretty nice ::::)  
GC: no sw34t gl4ss3z  
CC: man dont drag me into your nerdy bs  
CC: i got a reputation to uphold  
AG: Nerdy shit?  
CC: yeah your like  
CC: chess shit  
CC: the big thing this partys for  
AG: No, I was talking about Sgru8.  
CC: you think i remember what any of those moves are called  
GC: h3y now  
GC: d3sp1t3 not b31ng 4s cool 4s v1d3og4m3z  
GC: b34t1ng som3 st4ng3 ch3ss mod 1s st11l k1nd4 cool  
TA: R34LLY C4U53 1V3 L1K3 N3V3R H34RD OF I7  
AG: W8.  
AG: Do none of you remember?????????

gnarlyAgriculrualist responded to memo.

GA: Hello+ every+ne.  
AG: Nothing at all? Our dramatic entry, the 8loodshed, the heart8reak?  
CC: doesnt ring a bell  
TA: NOP3  
AG: Mituna you literally destroyed your 8rain saving us!!!!!!!!!!  
AG: It was the most heroic and worthwhile thing you've ever done!!!!!!!!!!  
AG: Surely something from the experience must've stayed with you!!!!!!!!!!  
TA: UHHHHH

TA: 1M 50RRY????????

GA: I'm so+rry, what're we talking abo+ut?

GA: So+me so+rt o+f video+game? My palmhusk was blo+wing up so+ I assumed this was impo+rtant.

CC: we re throwing a part-tay

CC: it was serkets idea

AG: IF YOU DON'T REMEM8ER THEN WHY ARE YOU STILL TYPING LIKE THAT

TA: C4U53 M3 4ND L4T5 H4V3 B33N RUN1NG 57R337 57R1F3R 537S 51NC3 L45T M0RN1N

CC: you in or you out

GA: O+h so+ that's the sco+re? Then I'm abso+lutely in.

TA: 5 HOUR 3N3RGY 1S TH3 ONLY TH1NG K33PNG M3 4L1V3

GA: And so+lid fo+o+d I ho+pe.

TA: DDDDDXXXXXX

GA: Being stuck in the nursery with no+thing but slimy grubs is driving me insane. I need to revel in the bad decisio+ns o+f teenage tro+lls to regain my po+wer.

AG: WE'RE ALL 8ILLIONS OF SWEEPS OLD. WE HAVEN'T 8EEN TEENAGERS FOR MULTIPLE CENTURIES.

GA: Also+-

GA: Are yo+u o+kay Aranea? This is the so+rt o+f rant I'd expect from Cro+nus, no+t yo+u.

CC: beats me

CC: shes been acting weird all day

AG: ARGH

AG: I'm fine.

GA: Are yo+u sure abo+ut that? Yo+u've been studying hard fo+r a ho+t minute.

GA: When's the last time yo+u go+t a go+o+d day's rest?

CC: also porrim kankris also gonna be there

GA: Ah.

GA: Yo+u kno+w what? I'm co+o+l with that

GC: r34lly?

GA: Yo+u cannott believe ho+w badly I need to+ get o+ut o+f here.

AG: I just need someone to confirm what I already know to 8e reality.

GA: Kurlo+z and Meulin aren't eno+ugh to+ keep the bullshit at bay.

AG: That millions years ago, we pl8yed a game the ended the world, succum8ing to the whims of a 8ig 8ad evil guy who infiltrated our session and was going to take over the universe had I not done something to stop him.

AG: W8 since when were you close friends with Kurloz and Meulin.

GA: Since fo+rever?

GA: We're all friends with them?

GA: Actually they're right here with me, they sho+ld've go+tten invites to+ the memo+ to+o+.

AG: Yes 8ut why are they with you??????????

tempestariusCapricorno responded to memo.

TC: honk

AG: Well at least you're acting normal.

TA: WH4T5 UP KURL0Z

TC: YOU KNOW WHATS UP MY UNFAITHFUL BROTHER IN JAPES

AG: ??????????

TC: I'M PROWLING THE CAVERNS WITH A POWERFUL PAIR OF GREEN GABBETTES

TC: DOING DARK POTIONS AWAY FROM THE WACKFUL GAZES OF THE HATING BEASTS

AG: SINCE WHEN DO YOU TALK??????????

TC: THE JAW OF THIS HERETICAL PREACHER HAS NEVER BEEN POPPED

TC: MY WORDS FLOW STRAIGHT FROM THE NASCENT NOORSHERE WITH NO DELAYS

TC: STRAIGHT KILLING EVERYONE WHO TRIES TO OPPOSES

GA: If yo+u're talking about the mime thing, then Kurlo+z has never been "abo+ut that life", if I'm using that phrase co+rrectly.

TC: PLEASE MS MARYAM, YOU FLATTER ME

TC: IN TRUTH THE STIFLING SILENCE OF MY BLOOD BROTHAS HAS NEVER INTERESTED ME

TC: OLD RHYMES AND DEAD LINES AIN'T GOT NO PLACE IN THE PRESENT

TC: BUT ITS HELLA HILARIOUS WHEN I DO AND THE OLD LADY LOVES A GOOD CHUCKLE

GA: And yo+u sho+ld've kno+wn this already.

GA: Aranea are yo+u sure yo+u're feeling alright?

AG: YES I AM

AG: Or, no I'm not

AG: 8ut it's only 8ecause you all forgot a8out me!!!!!!!!!!

AG: AGAIN!!!!!!!!!!!!

AG: DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG I SPENT TRYING TO CONVINCING YOU ALL TO PLAY THAT STUPID FUCKING GAME

AG: MULTIPLE FUCKING SWEEPS WE WERE TRAPPED THERE

AG: 8ECAUSE NO8ODY WANTED TO LISTEN TO ME

AG: AND THEN AFTER WE SCRATCHED THE SESSION AND DIED NOTHING CHANGED

AG: It was all:

AG: "who cares Aranea"

AG: "I don't wanna Aranea"

AG: "glu8glu8 fuckity glu8 Aranea"

AG: SO WHEN OUR ANCESTORS AND THOSE FUCKING ALIENS FUCKED UP THEIR SESSION

AG: NO8ODY FUCKING DID ANYTHING

AG: AGAIN

AG: ONCE AGAIN I HAD TO STEP UP AND FIX THE FUCKING PROBLEM

cantripAquaman responded to memo.

CA: vwhats up bitches

anagnorisisGholsonii banned cantripAquaman from memo.

AG: And you know what?

AG: I \*actually\* did it this time.

AG: I won.

AG: All on my own

AG: For a scant few hours I was the MVP.

AG: For literally the first time in my life I was important.

AG: And after all that hard work.

AG: NO8ODY FUCKING REMEM8ERS ANY OF IT?????????

AG: DOES THAT SOUND FUCKING FAIR TO YOU?????????

anagnorisisGholsonii's computer exploded.

CC: holy shit

authoressChakla responded to memo.

AC: \(^..^)/ HI GUYS

AC: ~(\*3\*)~ WHATS POPPING

TA: 1 7H1NK 4R4N3A G07 50 M4D SH3 3XPL0D3D

TC: I DON'T BELIEVED THAT'S A BLUEBERRY BLESSING MY BROTHER

TC: UNLESS A HECKLER IN THIS PULPIT CAN REBUKE THAT YOU IN  
THE NAME OF THE UNHOLY KNOWLEDGE

CC: dont look at me

CC: i never paid attention in school

AC: |(I\_I)/ PICK ME PICK ME

TC: THE FLOOR IS YOURS

AC: \ (6-6)7 OKAY SO I WASNT IN THE MEMO EARLIER CAUSE I WAS  
PROWLING THE NEWS FOR SOME RPF INSPURATION AND STUMBLED UPON  
A REALLY JUICY STORY

AC: shadowdroppercentral.png

AC: ](0\_0)[ LOOKS LIKE SOME WICKED POWERFUL RUSTBLOOD IS  
GOING CRAZY AT HORRUS S PLACE

GA: Meulin, that's o+ur wicked po+werful rustblo+o+d..

GA: And is that Ho+russ' hive?!

CC: i always knew he would end up sleeping with the fishes  
someday

CC: never knew when to shut up

TA: W41T 15N7 7H1S YOUR F4UL7

TA: D4M4R4 4ND H0RU55 W3R3 1N 7H3 M3M0 34RL13R YOU C4N S33  
7H1ER M3554G35

GC: oh shlt you can

GC: good 3y3 mlun4!

TA: X)

CC: BAD EYE MITUNA

TA: X(

GA: Meenah do+n't take yo+ur anger o+ut o+n the bo+y.

CC: 3>8(

CC: FIN(E)

GA: Kurlo+z, didn't yo+u say yo+u wanted to bake and get baked mo+re o+ften?

TC: THAT I DID DECLARE MS MARYAM

TC: YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I LOVE A GOOD SOPOR SLIME PIE

TC: THIS SHAGGY SOUS CHEF WILL LEND YA A HAND

TC: JUST GOTTA ASK

GA: Then I'm in.

GA: O+h right, Kankri's go+nna be there to+o+

TC: I'LL MIND MY KNIVES

AC: (6\_6) CAN I DO PURRMOTIONS

CC: yeah shore

AC: \ (^o^ ) /

GC: 4lso

GC: w3 should bring sgrub

CC: didnt we already agree that games like

CC: totally fake

GC: no 1t 4ctu4lly dld r1ng 4 b311

GC: 1ts 4 b3t4 th4ts r3l34l1ng n3xt w33k

GC: 1 dldnt r3m3mb3r b3c4us3 1t w4s p4nn3d by 11k3 3v3ry g4m1ng m4g on th3 pl4n3t

GC: but 1f 4r4n34 r34lly w4nts 1t th3n 1 could slight-sniff out 4 copy

TA: 7HA75 5HI7S 7074L B4D N3W5

AC: (?\_?) WHAT DO YOU MEAN

TA: 1DK 17 JU57 G1V35 OFF CR4PPY V1B35

TA: PLU5 175 5HI7

TA: BR1NG 5H1MMY 5H1MMY 1N5URG3NCY 1N5734D

GC: 4www but 1 r34lly w4nt3d to s33 1f sh3 w4s 4ctu4lly 4ny good

CC: you know she wont let it go if we dont

GA: And she was upset that we didnt remember playing it.

AC: (^u^) WE COULD MAKE HER DREAMS COME TRUE

TC: ONE LAST DOSE OF FANTASY BEFORE REALITY

TA: 1DK...

CC: cmon

CC: whats the worst that could happen



## JADE WAKE UP

By astralAnomaly

Featuring Feferi Peixes and Jade Harley exploring the Dream Bubbles the Horrorterrors made while dreaming.



## VERSUS JACK NOIR

By astralAnomaly

Featuring Bro, Davesprite, and Jack Noir in the  
strife on The Land of Heat and Clockwork.

## MANIFESTMERLIN

TAGS/WARNINGS: DIRK'S BRO | ALPHA DAVE STRIDER, DIRK STRIDER, ANGST, PRE-CANON, EXISTENTIAL ANGST, FUTURE CHARACTER DEATH, CHARACTER STUDY  
WORD COUNT: 1,083

Setting up an apartment to survive into the post apocalypse is hard as fuck and the only other person who understands is also worrying about it. Or, Rose isn't *worrying* about it because she knows exactly what to do. But, still.

It was easy enough to hide a single apartment block made out of solid, rust resistant titanium, with a shock proof foundation ten stories underground, but that was the easy part. Mostly. Titanium isn't *expensive* but it isn't cheap either. And whatever the empress builds her eternal starships out of IS expensive AND a pain to get a hold of. You had to make a whole other movie just to embezzle the funds for it all.

And frankly you think the apartment was *still* the easy part. Because it happened, and you're sitting in it. It's the rest of the important stuff that you're having trouble even figuring out.

How do you design a room for your kid, so it'll still be ready for him in over four hundred years?

You've drawn up a dozen, a hundred, different layouts based on the intel Rose has given you about him.

About Dirk.

Number 1 on the list is making sure everything is monogrammed. Can't have your little man not knowing his own name. But then again you don't know how to do that without all the text becoming illegible after four hundred years. It's gonna be four hundred years till he's in this room.

You'll be long gone by then.

You say fuck your spine and flop backwards onto the floor. You haven't even figured out what kind of carpet will last long enough here. How the hell are you going to manage everything else a badass teenager will want?

He's a computer whiz, makes all kinds of robots and programs like every tech genius who bragged about coding pacman on their calculator because their dad wouldn't buy them video games. Probably because they all had the same dad, or publicist.

But you haven't had any success finding a company who can make cutting edge tech that'll also last for half a millennium. Trying to snatch some troll stuff might've been the play but they make all their shit biological, and no one is gonna be around to take care of Dirk's buggy (ha) computer setup.

...Ouch.

You pull your wallet out of your stupid tight dumbass jeans while you think, again, about what to put in this damn room. You don't *know* what Dirk will look like, in the sense that you don't have any pictures from the future. But you've forced Rose to describe him to you plenty of times. And from that, you've spent a lot of time drawing him.

Your favorite pieces are stored in your wallet: pudgy faced blond babies, too cool for school spiky preteens, and actually too cool katana wielding teens. It's not a replacement for photos of your kid, but it makes you feel better to have these sketches at your fingertips. If you unfocus your eyes, you can even look past the brush strokes and pencil marks. You can pretend they look real.

You try not to look at these too much, you don't have time to wallow in sadness, and that's always what happens when you stare at these too long.

You could think more about data decay and nonperishable food, of fishing poles and potting soil, of blade oil and training videos. But you've done that plenty, the REAL issue is the big questions. The immaterial questions.

The scary questions.

How do you build a space that can contain all your love until it's ready for him to receive it? How do you make sure it won't leak out over time?

How can you do both of those when you can barely hold it all yourself?

Rose told you he would barely be a toddler when he landed in the ocean, you can't bear to think of it. Your little man landing in the *ocean*, alone, and having to climb into an apartment by himself, with his stubby fucking toddler limbs, only to find no one to care for him?

You have to find a way to cure his loneliness with no one there? Without YOU there?

You're never going to see him grow up.

You're never going to see him *at all*.

...

Here come the waterworks.

You've curled up on the hard concrete as you stare at your drawings. You need so much love to even try doing this for him, and it feels like a cancer that you let in on purpose. You know this is what's really going to kill you, more than fish hitler's gold trident.

And you're still gonna do it. Because that love has nowhere else to go, and you'd die again if you thought he'd never get to know it was there. You need him to know. Maybe you need to feel like he'll love you back. Maybe if it goes both ways you can close this loop, and it'll all be okay.

You don't think this is one of those loops though, it's just a normal, unfulfilled yearning for your son that you'll never meet. Maybe it's wrong to do that to him, to have built up an image of yourself as the badass savant filmmaker rebel bro, when he'll never get to really know you either.

Will it kill him too?

Are you planting your own cancer in someone you're going to die for? Is your love going to ruin him?

Fuck, maybe you don't know if you're doing *anything* right. Maybe all of this is a big mistake.

...

You sit up off the floor, standing as you replace the pictures in your wallet, and swap it in your pockets for your phone.

You've got a little ritual for times like these, something that makes you feel better, even if you have no way of knowing whether it'll reach him. You like to try at least.

You hold out your phone and dry your cheeks with your other sleeve, shades are good for hiding puffy eyes, thankfully. You center your face in the frame, because you're a god damn professional, and then adjust it juuuust a bit off, because that's your god damn brand.

All that's left is a patent-pending Strider grin, an ironic peace sign with your free hand... aaaaand, record!

"Hey-ooooo! It's ya boi, D Strider here, with a prequel to the *MTV Cribs* episode of my favorite lil' man's apartment..."



## THE CAT AND THE DRAGON

By ElyJewel

Featuring Terezi and Nepeta at their husktops, roleplaying as their dragonsona and purrbeastsona respectively.



## CASEY PONDERING HERSELF

By Godtiermeme

Featuring Casey, the beloved Salamander from the hit webcomic *Homestuck* (2009), admiring a painting of a salamander hanging up on the wall.

### AMBROSIANLULLABY

TAGS/WARNINGS: DAVE'S BRO | BETA DIRK STRIDER, LIL CAL (HOMESTUCK), CHARACTER STUDY, CANON COMPLIANT, ANGST, PRE-SBURB/SGRUB, POSSESSION  
WORD COUNT: 1,511

A kid.

You'd wonder what you were thinking, but the whole problem is you weren't. You couldn't. It's not exactly your choice.

*He's* on track to arrive any day now. At least, that's what Lil Cal keeps telling you in laughing, mischievous whispers. You're grateful for the forewarning so that you're not at a loss when the kid finally drops out of the sky.

You've still got the apartment to yourself: the bedroom, the crawlspace, and the living room are all pimped out for *you* and your elite, ironic tastes.

Today's the day you're supposed to change that. Today's the day you get ready.

Lil Cal hangs from around your shoulders in that chill way he likes, arms looped around your neck and limp hands loosely tied together to keep them there. His equally limp legs kick against the backs of your thighs as you move from the doorway to the center of the bedroom in a single step.

You turn slowly, surveying the room and making a mental list of what can stay for *him*.

In the way of furniture, the bed is staying because this is the only damn room it fits in, and so are the sheets because you've always been satisfied by a single blanket. Your computer and audio tech set up, however, are definitely moving to the living room.

You yank all the plugs and cables out of the wall outlet before disconnecting them from the PC and monitor. You'll deal with the sound pads and mixers in a second. Lil Cal holds your mouse with it tangled around one of his arms as you transport everything to the hall floor. You'll need to get the wooden slab you use as a desk top underneath it all before you can start putting your set up back together in its new home.

This is all so fucking tedious. It's not even the kind of *repetitive* tedium that you like—you're not flashing back and forth yet.

You huff and swipe your hands together to wipe them off once you've got the slat in a new home above some extra cinder blocks you had, recreating the same desk with different legs. The old cinder blocks can probably stay, right?

You tap a finger against your chin before peeking behind the closet curtain to see if you *still* have any that weren't in use. Instead, a mountain of smuppets and hats tumbles towards your feet.

A smaller man, a little man, might suffocate under the weight of such plush rump and style.

You're suddenly very aware of the fact the apartment has been the perfect size for just *you* the last year you've had it, and it just might be too cramped for two. Even if you give the kid the bedroom, you're just enough of a slob that there's too much... *stuff*.

You're just going to have to tuck it all in the crawlspace.

You start stuffing smuppets into and under your arms, dragging them out to the living room. The kid shouldn't be tall enough to pull the crawl space door cord until he's older, so you don't exactly care to organize and just start throwing plush beauty into the ceiling.

*Here's* the kind of repetition you like. Flashing between the bedroom and kitchen lets you zone out.

Your time will be limited. Skaia calls when one least expects, so obviously you'll have to start training as soon as you can to make sure your player is ready.

The lil man will need schooling in the means of self defense, offense, and survival. You can probably do away with half of the Earthen nonsense you were brought up with once he can write well enough to type. Could even let the schools take care of that part for you.

Lil Cal doesn't seem to disagree, so you mentally check it down as a confirmed part of The Plan™.

"He'll need to find the others," you mutter— musing ideas far in the future— as you shut the ceiling hatch after the last succulent, fabric ass.

Your sights are set next on the other half of your computer set up: your mountain of audio devices. Carefully plucking them from your stack, one by one, you re-stack them, one by one, in a corner of the living room. You can put them on a new desk when you have one.

You're going to need so many desks. Hopefully, Home Depot still has a bulk deal on cinder blocks and wooden slabs are still cheap.

You need to up your puppet game to up your puppet funds too.

Shit's about to get a lot busier.

All this shit you have to cram into such a small timeframe for both him and yourself. It's agonizing.

It's your duty.

You've gotta raise that boy to not fuck it all up in case of others' failure.

You've gotta raise that boy to be a *hero*.

A sigh leaves your lips. You lift your cap to brush your hair backwards, strands tickling at your gloves before they're hidden away under gray again.

You've gotta *raise* someone.

You could've just left it at that. That's where all the major difficulty lies. Where all the trials, tribulations, and *tantrums* wait.

You sit on the edge of the bed and look around the now much emptier room. A baby doesn't need much, but goddamn the room feels empty with only the bed and cinder blocks.

In a blink, you flashstep out again and return with a single extension cord to replace the one you already stole. Probably should've just left the first one, but you didn't exactly care to originally.

You know what? You probably also shouldn't leave the cinderblocks around right now, but you don't really want to move them into the crawlspace after getting all the smuppets nicely tucked away.

Whatever. They'll stay. You'll just make that second desk as fast as possible so they look purposeful. Nothing's stopping you from storing shit on it while he's a baby. Nothing's stopping him from using it when he gets older.

He's gonna get older.

He's gonna be so young when he gets here.

Cal *HEEs* and *HOOs* over your shoulder, and you nod. He's due any day now. You know. You've known.

And hey, maybe you should just stand here and think everything out in advance like you usually do so you're not moving a desk that could've stayed where it was three billion times. You're going to need baby food, and unmentioned supplies.

Cal slides up your back and sets his chin on your shoulder. There's no suggestions from the peanut gallery.

You pinch the bridge of your nose in irritation.

Maybe you should go shopping today so you don't have to be burdened by it later. Maybe you just do *everything* today. Then maybe you can throw it over your shoulder, Kobe, and forget about it.

There's a whole lot of fucking `maybe's involved with this shit. It's mostly why you've not waited until the last minute to get settled.

You stand, arms crossed as you pace around the cleared room.

A dead session on behalf of the players won't stem from the root of *your* failure. You won't fail. The lil' man won't fail because...

You're thinking in the same shape you're walking: circles.

"What do you think of that?" You motion towards the new and improved bed room. Cal doesn't seem to give a shit about what you've done. "Not bad so far for what's on hand, huh? Fuck's a tot supposed to need anyway? They can barely crawl..."

That's right, they're *small*. Not that you completely forgot, but you didn't exactly factor it in when you started. Maybe the bed is too big, but what's wrong with the lil' man growing into it?

There's so many things he could grow into when he gets older. You could teach him how to scratch.

Lil Cal seems to finally react to your work and you nod at his praises.

You've worked up a bit of an appetite, so some lunch sounds about right. Throwing open the pantry, you kick a few throwing stars that tumbled out back inside.

You're down to your last palette of chicken ramen. Looks like you *are* shopping today.

Fuck, what would you even need besides the aforementioned blocks, planks, baby supplies, and food. You'd bet on there being at least three other things you should snatch up.

Silently, you wait for your water to boil and feast on instant chicken-flavored noodles. Fuelled, you pat yourself and Cal down before realizing you're missing your keys.

Wallet, keys, and a mini pair of shades (just in case) in pockets, you keep your lips pursed as you adjust Cal against your back. He starts to slip enough that you set him up on the futon with *The Muppets* playing on the TV.

You've done a lot of work today. Work that could be argued as 'good'.

Maybe you'll visit your favorite record store on the way home to treat yourself.



## METEOR

By LilliKoifish

Featuring Bro Strider watching a meteor fall in the middle of Houston, Texas through a chain-link fence.

After you go,  
what will happen to me?



Will I  
just cease  
to exist?

## GOOD LUCK

By Lillikoifish

Featuring Doomed Rose lamenting her fate when Doomed Dave joins the Alpha timeline as Davesprite. She is pictured twirling an orange feather between her fingers with the caption: "After you go, what will happen to me? Will I just cease to exist?"

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

## CHRONICANGEL

TAGS/WARNINGS: ROSE LALONDE & DAVE STRIDER, DAVE'S BRO | BETA DIRK STRIDER & DAVE STRIDER, DAVE'S BRO | BETA DIRK STRIDER & ROSE'S MOM | BETA ROXY LALONDE, DAVE STRIDER, ROSE LALONDE, DAVE'S BRO | BETA DIRK STRIDER, ROSE'S MOM | BETA ROXY LALONDE, LIL CAL (HOMESTUCK), POV SECOND PERSON, ARGUING, BAD PARENTING, CANON COMPLIANT, CHILDREN, IMPLIED/REFERENCED ALCOHOL ABUSE/ALCOHOLISM, IMPLIED/REFERENCED CHARACTER DEATH, IMPLIED/REFERENCED CHILD ABUSE, PRE-CANON  
WORD COUNT: 4,442

You're antsy ahead of your flight.

At the tender age of five, you've never been on a plane before, and even when you asked Bro what it was like, he just told you it was crowded and smelly and your ears would hurt. And there are no other kids at your gate—not big kids that you can play with, anyway; there's a little baby, but Bro swore under his breath when he saw her, so you think you'd get in trouble if you tried to play with her. You can see some kids at the other gates, but every time you even *think* about getting up to go say hi, Bro glares at you like he can read your mind. You're pretty sure he can, actually.

Just to have something to do, you've been sitting on the edge of your seat swinging your legs and peering at all of the people around you. If Bro is bothered by this, he's not looking up from his magazine to stop you.

In the seat across from you, there's a girl who doesn't look quite like a grownup. She's sitting between two much older grownups—a woman with greying hair and a man with a big bushy mustache you think looks so silly—sleeping with her head on the lady's shoulder. You guess she must not be used to getting up this early. With beaming pride, you think that *you've* been getting up at dawn for training all summer; you're starting Kindergarten soon, so you'll have to do training in the morning or else you'd have to do it after it gets dark outside, which is scary. Obviously, you don't tell Bro that you think it's scary. That wouldn't be very cool, and you'd probably get in trouble.

When it's time to get on the plane, the lady nudges the girl awake, and all three of them look like some kind of emotion you don't know the name of—some kind of happy-sad. The girl gives both of the grownups a hug before she picks up her suitcase, and you smile at first, until Bro lightly smacks the back of your head and you remember you're not supposed to show feelings like that in front of other people. You're not supposed to do it in private, either, but unless Bro really *can* read your mind, he can't see you, so you can't get in trouble if you smile while you play in your room sometimes.

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

The plane *is* crowded and smelly, but the lady sitting next to you offers you a piece of gum and says that'll keep your ears from hurting. You're not sure if it's true or not, but you don't think Bro would've lied to you and your ears *don't* hurt until the little baby from the gate starts crying. You ask Bro if you can give her one of your toys from your suitcase, but he reminds you that your suitcase is on a different plane.

You guess that eventually you must fall asleep, because you're woken up by Bro picking you up and grunting that it's time to get off the plane. You expect him to put you back down in the aisle, but he doesn't. He carries you all the way off the plane and down the long hallway to a gate a lot like the one you got on the plane from. Your brows pinch together.

You can't remember the last time Bro carried you. Maybe when you were really little, like two years old. You think he might have picked you up because you were walking too slow, but now if you're walking too slow then he just tells you he's gonna leave you behind, so you've just had to learn to walk faster.

There's a part of you that wants to kick your legs and demand he put you down so you can walk by yourself because you're a big kid. Maybe this is a test, and you fail it if you don't walk by yourself. Maybe he wants you to fight, like in training. On the other hand, maybe you'll get in trouble if you do that. Bro doesn't like it when you throw tantrums, which is anytime you get upset about things not going your way.

You don't have that long to make a decision anyway before Bro suddenly stops walking.

You whip your head around to try to see why you stopped. You're still in the airport; is there some sort of threat?

What you find is a lady maybe a little bit older than Bro sitting at a bar, and a girl about your age sitting on a stool next to her. The girl looks kind of pouty, like she doesn't want to be here. You can't help but think that *you'd* get in trouble if you were making a face like that.

The lady, though, lights up when she sees you—or maybe when she sees Bro; it's kind of hard to tell.

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

MOM: hey! you made it!

BRO: I thought you were supposed to be driving us to your backwoods ass mansion.

MOM: oh relax! i had one drink an hour ago, rosie made sure of that. i am perfectly safe to drive

Your brows pinch together again. They're talking like they know each other, but you've never seen this lady or even seen a picture of her or anything.

DAVE: whos that?

You resist the temptation to point at her like Bro might not know who you're talking about. Bro's arm tenses around you when she turns to look at you, still smiling. You want to smile back, but your eyes slide up to Bro behind your shades; he still looks as blank as ever, so you guess this isn't the sort of moment where you're allowed to smile. There aren't very many of those.

MOM: hi dave! gosh, youre so big!

MOM: you can call me mommy

MOM: or just mom

MOM: rosies already started calling me mom, when she isnt calling me mother

ROSE: Yes, Mother, and I would prefer it if you would stop calling me Rosie, too.

You squint down at the girl. She *looks* your age, but she *talks* like a big kid. Or—a *bigger* kid. You're already a big kid.

Mom looks back at Bro.

MOM: did you check a bag?

BRO: Of course I did.

MOM: oh christ, you didnt bring that thing, did you?

BRO: Of course I did.

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

MOM: ugh

MOM: dirk, you know i hate that thing!

Your eyes widen, and you're grateful that Bro seems to be staring so hard at Mom, because from his angle, he'd definitely be able to see it behind your shades. You've never heard anyone call Bro anything but Bro before. You thought maybe his name was Cal, and that's why Lil Cal is Lil, but you try not to think about it very much because you're pretty sure Bro doesn't want you to.

Bro finally sets you back down on the floor when you get your bags, which is probably mostly because Cal's case takes up one whole arm, and he has to use his other hand to pull his suitcase that has his clothes and stuff in it. You have your own suitcase, which is red and has dinosaurs on it and which you've filled mostly with toys and a little bit with clothes and stuff. You think Bro probably packed some extra clothes for you in his bag, but if he didn't you'll just have to wear the same outfit for a few days or however long you're supposed to be out here.

Without saying anything, Mom reaches down to hold onto your free hand. You peer up at her curiously. You don't think anybody has ever held your hand before, and you're not sure why she's doing it. You decide to take your best guess.

DAVE: its ok

DAVE: im a fast walker so i wont get lost

DAVE: plus if i did get lost i know how to take care of myself, id be aight

You try to say the last part like Bro would, but you think you must have done it wrong, because Mom just looks sad. Rose stares at you looking curious, which you don't like; it makes you feel like one of the weird animals at the zoo.

When you get to what you guess must be Mom's car, she stops and stares.

MOM: dirk, i dont got a car seat for him

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

BRO: He doesn't need a car seat.  
MOM: what? of course he needs a car seat!  
BRO: He's fine. He's five years old, he's not a baby.  
DAVE: im not a baby

You try to chime in helpfully to confirm that Bro is in fact telling the truth; of course you're not a baby! You're a big kid. Mom just looks sad again, though, and now you get some uncomfortable feeling in your tummy.

MOM: if theres no car seat then you have to sit in the back and hold him  
BRO: Roxy, this is ridiculous.  
MOM: the cars not movin until all the babies are buckled in one way or another!  
BRO: This from the woman who's drinking and driving?  
MOM: oh shut up! youre just trying to distract from your shitty parenting  
ROSE: Do you two know that you're yelling at each other in front of your children?

They both turn to stare at Rose—even Bro, although you can't see his eyes behind his shades, so you can't tell if they're wide like Mom's are.

MOM: sorry sweetie  
MOM: youre right  
MOM: dirk, back of the car

To your amazement, Bro doesn't argue with her this time. He bends down to pick you up again and climbs into the back of the car while Mom straps Rose into some fancy chair.

You don't get in cars very much. Bro doesn't own one because he doesn't really leave the apartment that much and he says that you should be able to walk everywhere anyway. He rented one that one time that he took you to the beach, and you didn't have a car seat or anything then. You don't think you even wore a seatbelt or anything, but you can't really remember anymore. You fell asleep not long into the drive.

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

You fall asleep on this drive, too.

By the time you wake up, it's dark outside. You shrink into yourself a little, but you manage to keep yourself from pressing closer to Bro like he'll protect you from the nighttime. You know that he would want you to protect yourself from the nighttime. You don't really know how to do that, but you guess you'll have to figure it out.

But when Bro gets you out of the car and sets you back down on the ground, Rose walks around the back and offers you her hand. You stare at it for a second, and then let your eyes flit up to peer nervously at Bro behind your shades. He doesn't seem to be paying attention to you, though—he's already walking ahead, and you can't see very well in the dark with your shades still on, but you think he's talking to Mom in a low murmur.

ROSE: Are you going to come inside?

ROSE: I guess you can stay outside if you'd like to, but it doesn't seem like you would.

DAVE: how old are you

ROSE: Five.

ROSE: Is that relevant?

DAVE: you talk weird for a five-year-old

DAVE: you sound like a big kid

DAVE: using all sorts of big words

ROSE: I read a lot of books.

DAVE: do you read real books? like the ones on paper?

DAVE: i like to read too but i only get to read on bros computer cause the librarys too far to walk to

ROSE: Mom takes me to the library once a week.

ROSE: Plus she buys me a lot of books too, for my birthdays and stuff.

ROSE: So, yes, I read real books on paper.

ROSE: If you'd like, you can borrow some while you're here.

Before you know it, you're inside the house. You couldn't really see it from outside because of the dark, but now, you realize that the place is *humongous*. You think this place might be the size of your whole apartment building. Or maybe a couple dozen apartment buildings.

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

There's a big weird statue of a wizard, and Rose narrows her eyes at him like she doesn't trust him. It makes you snort a little, but you're able to cover it up before anybody notices. You think. Rose does glare at you, but she was already glaring, so it might not actually be at you at all.

```
MOM: why dont you two go play in roses room?  
DAVE: whoa  
DAVE: i dont think im allowed to play in girls rooms  
BRO: It's fine this time, lil man.  
DAVE: but you said  
BRO: Just go.
```

That's the tone of voice he uses when you're in trouble, so you decide not to push your luck this time. Rose leads you up the stairs and into a room that is... Well, it's messier than yours is.

```
DAVE: mom lets you keep your room like this?  
ROSE: You don't have to call her that.  
DAVE: what?  
ROSE: Mom. You don't have to call her that. She isn't your  
mother.  
ROSE: Her real name is Roxy.
```

Something about this idea makes you uncomfortable in a way that you don't know how to explain, and you look around the room again, fighting to keep your cheeks from flushing. Your eyes land on a few abandoned toys strewn about the floor.

```
DAVE: yooo  
DAVE: are those trolls?  
ROSE: Yes.  
DAVE: can i play with them?  
ROSE: That's fine.
```

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

You sit cross-legged on the floor and pick one up with bright pink hair and what you can only describe as a wizard outfit—a robe covered with stars and moons and a pointy hat to match.

It takes you a minute to realize you're playing by yourself, and you look up at Rose with your brow furrowed.

DAVE: what are you doing?

ROSE: Waiting.

DAVE: waiting for what?

ROSE: My opportunity.

DAVE: do you have to talk like that?

DAVE: all secret-y?

DAVE: your proppor...

DAVE: opportut...

ROSE: Opportunity.

DAVE: for what?

ROSE: To sneak back out there. Duh.

DAVE: what? thats a stupid idea

DAVE: bro would catch us

ROSE: Trust me, I do this a lot.

ROSE: I'm a professional.

DAVE: youre what?

ROSE: It means I'm really good at this.

DAVE: im really good at sneaking too!

DAVE: i have training!

DAVE: watch how good i can sneak!

To demonstrate your point, you start shuffling across the floor with careful footsteps. You don't make a sound, even though Rose's room is like a minefield. It's not any worse than having to sneak around Bro's smuppets, although you're not actually very good at that. Bro *always* catches you, because he's a professional sneaker too, *and* a professional catcher. Rose is raising her eyebrows at you, though. You don't know how to do that yet, so you pout just a little.

ROSE: Impressive.

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

DAVE: what?  
ROSE: Cool.  
DAVE: oh  
DAVE: thanks  
DAVE: everything i do is pretty cool though  
ROSE: Of course.  
ROSE: Well you wanna know a pretty cool thing to do?  
DAVE: what?  
ROSE: Sneaking out with me.  
DAVE: no!  
DAVE: why do you even wanna sneak out?  
ROSE: To see what they're talking about. Aren't you curious?

You purse your lips. You *are* curious (which is a word you know from Alice in Wonderland), but you also know how much trouble you'll get in if Bro catches you. You don't want Rose to get in trouble like that—she probably couldn't handle it, since she hasn't had as much training as you. But it seems like she's gonna do it no matter what, so you guess you should probably go with her to make sure she doesn't get into *too much* trouble.

Rather than answering her out loud, you mime a zipper over your lips and then nod. She smiles and runs a zipper across her own lips.

You follow Rose's lead, since she makes the good point that she knows where all of the creaky spots and stuff are in her house. You're careful to step *exactly* where she's stepped every time, and you only wind up finding a creaky spot one time, toward the top of the stairs. Rose turns around and shushes you, which is pretty embarrassing, so you focus extra hard after that.

When you get to the bottom of the stairs, Rose gestures for you to follow and then dashes behind the wizard statue. It's so quick and so quiet that it almost reminds you of Bro's flashstepping, which you haven't quite perfected yet. The idea that she can do that without any training makes you a little jealous and a little nervous, and your eyes flash toward the couch, where Mom and Bro are sitting. You can't hear them from the bottom of the stairs, and the stairs don't even have a railing or anything, so you don't have any cover.

You take a deep breath and bravely run to the wizard statue as fast as you can.

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

DAVE: now what?  
ROSE: Now we listen.  
DAVE: listen for what?  
ROSE: Shh!

You shoosh, even though Rose is definitely not the boss of you or anything. She points toward Mom and Bro, who are much closer to the wizard statue than they were to the bottom of the stairs. If you listen closely, you can hear them talking.

BRO: So, what, they've got another kid in the lab?  
MOM: shes not in the lab  
BRO: Then where is she? And why is it my problem?  
MOM: shes on an island with...  
MOM: she was on an island with dr harley  
BRO: What do you mean, she was? If she's not there anymore  
MOM: shes still there

You peer nervously over at Rose.

DAVE: i dunno rose  
DAVE: this conversation sounds a little... grown up?  
DAVE: maybe we shouldnt be listening  
ROSE: If you want to turn back around, you can.

You think about it, but you really don't want to go back by yourself, so you decide not to. You're still nervous when you turn back to Mom and Bro, though. Whatever they're talking about, it sounds pretty serious, and that's the kind of stuff you get in the most trouble for listening in on if you get caught, which you always do.

BRO: Okay.  
BRO: Is there a reason you're being all secretive? It's not like you to dance around shit.

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

MOM: im still trying to figure out how to say this  
BRO: You flew me here before you figured out how to say whatever this is?  
MOM: dr harley is dead

Your eyes go a little bit wide. Somebody died? You don't know who Dr. Harley is because you've never heard the name before, but you can see the way Bro winces at the news like she's cut him with a sword. He never winces like that (and not *just* because you can never cut him with your sword).

BRO: Oh.  
MOM: are you ok?  
BRO: Why wouldn't I be?  
BRO: You were the one who was so attached to the guy.  
MOM: are you really trying to bullshit me about this right now like i dont know you better than anyone?  
BRO: I'm not bullshitting.  
MOM: dirk

You can't see Bro's face from where you are, but you can imagine the way his jaw clenches. It doesn't do that a lot, but you've seen it happen every once in a while when he's talking to Cal. He usually only does that after your bedtime.

You realize with a growing sense of unease that you have no idea where Cal is, and suddenly your heart is beating a lot faster.

BRO: Okay. Fine.  
BRO: It's a little... unsettling.  
BRO: But I'm a grown ass man. I can handle unsettling.  
BRO: What's going on with this kid on the island?  
MOM: right  
MOM: we cant get her back off the island  
BRO: What, like you can't find it?  
MOM: no, we know exactly where it is  
MOM: something wont let us  
BRO: Something?

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

MOM: i dont know what it is  
MOM: we cant see it on any of our cameras  
BRO: And none of your guys have made it back to tell you what it is either, huh?  
MOM: not as such, no  
BRO: Got it. So, what, you want me to go out there?  
MOM: i was hoping you might  
BRO: Why can't you do it?  
MOM: i cant leave rose here  
BRO: But I can just leave Dave and that's fine then?  
MOM: i can watch him  
BRO: I could watch them, too.  
MOM: dirk...  
BRO: What.  
BRO: Why don't you just say it.  
MOM: say what?  
BRO: You don't trust me.  
MOM: oh that is ridiculous  
MOM: i trust you more than any living person on this earth!  
BRO: But not with the kids.  
MOM: i  
BRO: Now you're trying to bullshit me.  
MOM: he doesnt have a car seat, dirk!  
BRO: He doesn't need one.  
MOM: oh, is that a part of his training?

She says it like an insult, and you can't help flinching, your stomach churning. You've never heard anybody talk to Bro like this. You're not sure if you're scared *of* Mom or *for* Mom.

BRO: We don't have a car, Roxy.  
BRO: And don't try to act like you don't know exactly what is going to happen to these damn kids.  
MOM: i have no idea whats going to happen to these kids, dirk!  
MOM: thats whats so terrifying about all of this  
MOM: and youre a fucking idiot if you think you do

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

BRO: Well I know it ain't gonna be a picnic where Mommy is gonna run in and kiss all their boobos to make it better. He needs to be prepared to handle himself. And to handle Rose too, by the sounds of it.

MOM: rose will be *fine*

MOM: i doubt theyve invented a problem she cant think her way out of

MOM: she gets that from you

BRO: Don't do that. You know I hate it when you do that.

MOM: she *does*

BRO: I am not her father. I'm not Dave's father. We didn't make babies together, no matter how much the idea makes you swoon.

MOM: but they are *our babies*

MOM: with our genes

MOM: with *your* genes

BRO: Can we just... not talk about this? Not right now.

MOM: then when?

BRO: Not right now.

You know that voice, too. That's the same voice Bro gets when he's telling you that you can't have ice cream for dinner, or that you have to watch a movie other than *The Land Before Time*. It's not the *in trouble* voice, but it's the voice that means that you're definitely not going to change his mind.

Mom stands up and you shrink into yourself behind the wizard statue, which also means that you shrink into Rose. Mom pushes her hands up into her hair, which is something that you do when you're upset. What does that mean?

MOM: i need a drink

BRO: Roxy.

MOM: dont

MOM: it was stupid of me to think you would even care

BRO: Of course I care.

MOM: about what? about *who*

MOM: its not rose

MOM: its certainly not me

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

BRO: I care about you.

MOM: then prove it

MOM: do *one* thing to help me out this *one* time and ill never bother you again

BRO: Roxy, I'm not saying that you *bother* me.

MOM: yes, you are

MOM: youre not trying to, but you are

BRO: Maybe you're *hearing* that I don't care about you, but that's not what I'm saying.

BRO: And I'm not saying I don't care about Rose either.

MOM: youve never even talked to her

MOM: even today, you havent talked to her

BRO: I didn't have anything to say to her.

MOM: not once? not ever? in five whole years, you never thought of anything to say to your

BRO: Don't.

MOM: i need a drink

MOM: are you coming with me or not?

BRO: You know I don't do that shit.

BRO: I wish you'd quit it, too.

MOM: its the only way i can

MOM: you know what

MOM: nevermind

MOM: stay here

MOM: what do i care?

MOM: were the only ones left who *know*, and you cant stand me

Bro sits up like he has something to say to that, but Mom turns and walks away from him before he can. You almost expect him to get up and chase after her. That's what a guy in a movie would do, you think. It's not what Bro would do, though—and it's not what Bro *does* do either. Instead, he turns just enough to look over his shoulder and then scoffs.

BRO: Are you two gonna stand back there all night or what?

# LONG-LOST AND UNKNOWN

You don't want to think that he's talking about you and Rose, but you're not stupid, so you do think that. You look over at Rose, who looks surprised at being caught, like you didn't *tell* her this was going to happen, and then you catch a glimpse of movement out of the corner of your eye. Cal, you realize a second too late, and you shriek and sprint over to Bro on the couch.

Bro heaves a sigh and reaches out to rest a hand on top of your head, ruffling your hair. You crinkle your nose up. You can't remember the last time he did that.

DAVE: *whats up?*

BRO: Don't act like you weren't droppin' eaves.

DAVE: *what?*

BRO: Nothin'.

BRO: Listen, lil man.

BRO: You might be here for a lil while.

DAVE: *what? why?*

BRO: 'Cause you need more friends.

You stare at him for a second, blinking, and then turn back to look at Rose. She's not hiding behind the wizard anymore—she's holding Cal, who hangs limp from her arms. It makes your heart pound, but she smiles at you, and you realize he's a little less scary with Rose there. Not that he's *that* scary the rest of the time. You're not a baby. Still, you check from the corner of your eye that Bro isn't looking, and then you offer her a smile back.

DAVE: *yeah*

DAVE: *i guess so*

# FULL CREDITS

## **ambrosianLullaby**

Zine Design and Fanfiction Contribution (Pages 104-108)

A03: [ambrosianLullaby](#) | Tumblr: [@ambrosianLullaby](#)

## **Anuyushi**

Fanfiction Contribution (Pages 15-21)

A03: [Anuyushi](#) | Quotev: [ApocalypticAnuyushi](#) | Wattpad:  
[ApocalypticAnuyushi](#)

## **Arcane\_web**

Fanart Contribution (Page 14)

A03: [Arcane\\_web](#) | Tumblr: [@not-someone-who-matters](#)

## **astralAnomaly**

Fanart Contributions (Pages 96, 97)

A03: [astralAnomaly](#) | Tumblr: [@achilles--hell](#)

## **Becharleyisawesome**

Fanfiction and Fanart Contributions (Pages 24-41, 42)

A03: [becharleyisawesome](#) | Tumblr: [@2x2equalsu](#) | Twitter/X:  
[@C0mmieB](#)

## **chronicAngel**

Fanfiction Contribution (Pages 111-125)

A03: [chronicAngel](#) | Tumblr: [@chronicangel](#)

## **city\_of\_alexandria**

Fanfiction Contribution (Pages 52-69)

A03: [city\\_of\\_alexandria](#)

## ElyJewel

Fanart Contribution (Page 102)

Tumblr: [@ely-draws](#) | Bluesky: [@elyjewel.bsky.social](#)

## Godtiermeme

Fanart Contribution (Page 103)

A03: [godtiermeme](#) | Tumblr: [@godtiermeme](#)

## grandiquolentApostate

Fanart Contribution (Page 43)

A03: [grandiquolentApostate](#) | Tumblr: [@thoughts-of-a-scoundrel](#)

## Jellysmudge

Fanart Contributions (Pages 81, 82)

Tumblr: [@jellysmudge](#) | Bluesky: [@jellysmudge.bsky.social](#)

## Lighteverythinginpink

Fanart Contribution (Page 23)

A03: [lighteverythinginpink](#) | Tumblr: [@light-everything-in-pink](#)  
| [Reddit: u/lePRO procrastinator](#)

## LilliKoiFish

Fanart Contributions (Pages 109, 110)

Tumblr: [@lillikoifish](#) | Bluesky: [@lillikoifish.bsky.social](#)

## ManifestMerlin

Fanfiction Contribution (Pages 98-101)

A03: [ManifestMerlin](#) | Tumblr: [@manifestmerlin](#) | Bluesky:  
[@manifestmerlin.bsky.social](#)

## orangestorapples

Zine Design, Fanfiction Contribution, Fanart Contribution (Pages 44-49, 50-51)

A03: [orangestorapples](#) | Tumblr: [@orangestorapples](#) | Bluesky: [@orangestorapples.bsky.social](#)

## Redpandagirl

Fanfiction Contribution (Pages 83-95)

A03: [Redpandagirl](#) | Tumblr: [@neapolitangirl](#) | Bluesky: [@tittyvillus.bsky.social](#)

## Stripe

Fanfiction Contribution, Fanart Contribution (pages 70-71, 72-80)

A03: [Stripe](#) | Tumblr: [@tehstripe](#)

## ToBurnAllTheEmpires

Zine Cover, Fanfiction Contribution, Fanart Contribution (Pages 9-12, 13)

A03: [ToBurnAllTheEmpires](#) | Tumblr: [@dave2olkat](#)

## Umbraborealis

Fanart Contribution (Page 22)

Tumblr: [@umbra-borealis](#) | Bluesky: [@umbraborealis.bsky.social](#)

