

godfeels 3, prologue: harbinger silverbark

previously listed Silverbark Jade and the Ten Leading Questions

Prologue

Jade: **i bet youre all wondering why i brought you here**

A shaft of morning sunlight casts squares on the linoleum floor of Jade's lab. All her plants are bright and alive, the air is cool and fresh as a playful breeze comes in through open windows.

Everyone is here, crowded around in a rough semicircle of ugly lawn chairs procured by Roxy, who's holding hands with a truly delighted Calliope. Dave and June both are yawning, hunched over where they sit- who knows how long it's been since they were last awake this early. Karkat, like several others, is nursing a cup of overstrong coffee he's attempted to cut with a mountain of sugar and vanilla-flavored cream. It isn't helping.

While Jane is checking her phone and bouncing her knee impatiently, Jake looks pleased as punch and excited to be around so many of his friends. Terezi and Kanaya are whispering something to each other and holding back laughter, but Rose elbows her wife with a pointed **SHHH**. Somewhere nearby, Davepeta is happily toiling away in a recently installed kitchen (courtesy of CrockerCorp, naturally). Whatever they're cooking, it doesn't smell like anything that's ever been made on Earth C.

Yes, everyone is here, and with a wide variance of patience and attention, they are staring up at Jade with anticipation.

Her uniform is unlike anything they've ever seen her wear. A dark petticoat, patched and repatched countless times, adorned sparingly with medals and markers of who knows what. A multicolored skirt that seems to glimmer with an impossible depth. A long black necklace with an ornate locket dangling around her neck.

And, of course, her ruby slippers. Just as red as ever.

Jade's hair is a shocking silver, her face wrinkled comparably to that of a woman in her early sixties. Not too long ago, June invited her to take on Lord English with the power of her retcon abilities. They arrived just in time to find a bizarrely expectant Davepeta, who insisted that June would (and this is a direct quote) "**b33f it big time and die a big gruesome death and then disappear forever.**" June reluctantly left Jade to whatever fate awaited her, not knowing if they would ever cross paths again.

But they did. Jade, now hundreds of years older, saved the day like a big fucking hero at a moment when all hope seemed lost. And ever since then, her friends have been excitedly asking about her life and adventures. She's fought pirate kings, assisted giant ants in proletarian revolution, even saved a solar system or two. No one knows how true any of these stories are, but the fact remains that Jade has come back to them a tremendous and compelling mystery.

Which is precisely what this sudden meeting is about.

Jade: **i know youre all a bunch of losers who never leave your houses so hearing about my life is this big vicarious thrill**

Karkat: **FUCK YOU**

Dave: **dude shes right**

Karkat: **FUCK YOU TOO**

Jade: **and you know it can be fun talking about my space adventures because its real easy to forget how cool they are!!! its just my normal life but for you its like woah when did jade play chess with an eldritch demigod thats nuts! :o**

Rose: Did you actually do that?

Jade points at Rose with a half-cocked smile.

Jade: and thats why were here folks

Jade: i love you all to death and its been great fun catching up but the fact is

Jade: im getting real sick of having to field questions about my personal life every time we get together

Jade: seriously its been several months can we PLEASE move on??

Kanaya: You Have To Understand That Besides The Fiasco With June Youre The Most Interesting Thing That Has Happened To Us In Years

June: hey

Jade: i get that kanaya but also im not a thing!

Jade: im a fully realized three dimensional person with a beating heart and a deep abiding desire to stop living in the goddamn past

Jade: which is a thing you doofuses seem really stubbornly devoted to doing!!!! >:(

Roxy: yeh we get u silvy but come on can u rly blame us

Terezi: Y34H S1LVY W3 4R3N'T CULP4BL3 FOR OUR 4CT1ONS

Jade: can it pyrope before i throw you into the sun

Terezi: 1S TH4T 4 PROM1S3

June: oh my god TZ please stop

Terezi: NO

Jane: As much as I adore this playful banter, can we please move this circus along?

Rose: Yes, I agree with Jane.

Rose: Hmm.

Rose: That's a sentence I never thought I would say.

Jake: Trust me rose ol gal you get used to it!

Jane: You know I can hear you righ

Jade: WOOF WOOF BARK!!!!!!!!!!!!!! >:0

Everyone snaps back to attention, except Dave, who is asleep. When Karkat nudges him, he looks around at the judgmental faces of his peers and shrugs.

Dave: sorry my bad im not used to being awake at this time of day

Dave: i was actually pretty sure this time of day didnt exist

Dave: like it was a rumor passed down through the ages by a bunch of

Jade: oh my god i dont know why i expected anything else
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah i thought it was a purretty obvious
outcome
Jade: lets just cut to the chase okay? before i start barking again
Jade: i brought you here because weve all got lives to lead and
plans to make and its time for us to move on
Jade: but im nothing if not a caring and generous friend who gives
way too much at every opportunity without paying attention to my
own wants or needs
Jade: so heres the deal:
Jade: you each get ONE question
Jade: it can be just about anything and ill answer truthfully and
at length because i want you all to be satisfied enough that you
wont be tempted to start poking and prodding later on down the line
Jade: any questions?

Everybody looks at each other, and Rose raises her hand.

Rose: Would this count as our one question?
Jade: that depends on what you ask doesnt it? ;)
Calliope: what happened when you fought my brother?
Jade: thanks callie that gets me to the other thing
Jade: theres some stuff i dont want to talk about and lord english
is one of them
Jade: i know youre all curious about it but that whole event is a
sore spot for a lot of reasons and id rather leave it alone for now
Calliope: drats
Dave: i got one
Dave: howd your hair get like that
Jade: =_=
Jade: i got old dave
Jade: time passed and my hair went grey
Jade: thats a dumb question and you should be ashamed
Dave: bold of you to assume i know how to do that
June: why did it take you so long to get 8ack to earth c? how did
you even do it, was it like a
Jade: these questions suck!!
Jade: jeez you guys really have a one track mind and its the lamest
track of all
Jade: paradox space is big and i lost my connection to the green
sun

Jade: we spent a long time looking for other ways to get back but i got distracted for a good century or two and then i learned a thing that connected me to past mes that still had a connection to the green sun and thats how i got here

June: oh.

June: so did I just waste my question?

Jade: SIGH

Jade: no june, since it was obvious boring stuff that needed to be gotten out of the way ill let you ask another one

June: phew!

Jake: Pardon me if this is a silly proposition but could you perhaps provide some examples of the types of questions youre looking for?

Jade: im not looking for any questions this is just an opportunity for you to

Jade: UGH come on use your brains! be inventive!! i promise you just about everything you could ask ive got a story about

Jade: did i ever fall in love? how close did i come to dying? what was the scariest thing that happened?? stuff like that!!

Jade: im giving you carte blanche to sate your fucking curiosity ok?????? jeez

Rose: I have to say, Jade, this seems like a rather contrived setup even for you.

Roxy: fuck yeah i love contrivance lets go

Roxy: how we doin this silvy

Jade: i could let you guys raise your hands when youve come up with something but i think its funnier if i call on you at random to keep you on your toes

Jade: and well just go around until were done!!!! :D

Jade: hows that sound?

Once more, the gathered friends look at each other. They unanimously shrug, nod their heads, and mutter responses in the affirmative.

Jade: fabulous

Jade: alright dave youre up

Dave: oh shit

Dave: why me

Jade: because i know your question is going to be dumb as a box of pet rocks that never went to rock school

Dave: rude

Jade: its a good thing!! what better way to start us off than something dumb and fun? that ought to shake everybodys bones loose and spur imaginations to come up with actually interesting questions

Dave: my bones are just fine as they are thanks

Dave: ok uh lets see

Jade: just remember dave...

She crosses her arms and tilts her head down, like a teacher preparing to scold a student who didn't do their reading.

Jade: you only get one question

Jade: better make it count!!!!

Jade: >:)

Dave's eyebrows arc above his sunglasses, his face a perfect picture of contemplative self-reflection.

Now, let's pause these proceedings for just a moment, shall we?

We could let Dave squirm for a while and try to formulate his own query, but let's be real. Nothing he comes up with on his own could ever be as interesting as the heinous shit you can concoct. So, why don't you give him a hand and make your own suggestions? Consider this your own precious opportunity to coax some tales out of the ever-mysterious Silverbark.

But please, keep in mind what Jade said about the topics she will and won't discuss. We don't want to waste anybody's time, after all.

Now then...

~~What question would Dave Strider ask Silverbark Jade?~~

Dave's Question

> Say "Did you ever meet Obama?"

Dave: did you ever meet obama

Jade: ...

Jade: obama?

Dave: yeah you know

Dave: obama

Dave: former president and greatest hero in the history of earth
barack hussein obama

Jade: are you serious?

Dave: im deadly fucking serious jade

Dave: practically coughing up blood into a virgin white
handkerchief while no ones looking to hide the tragedy of my
consumption im so serious

Dave: this is a life or death matter jade harley and i will not
accept no for an answer

Jade: are you

Jade: are you REALLY sure thats your question???

Dave: yeah youre right

Dave: obviously you met obama what a dumb question

Dave: can i get a mulligan

Jade: fine

Dave: sick

Dave: ok uhhh

> Say "What's the coolest thing you've ever done while
breaking intergalactic law?"

Dave: whats the coolest thing youve ever done while breaking
intergalactic law

Dave: theres gotta be some galaxywide scifi empire government out
there cracking down on like space furry communism or something
right

Dave: with some child king all laying down edicts and shit

Dave: thou shalt not eat the rich lest ye etc etc

Dave: hows that

Jade: hmmm...

She scratches her chin for a moment. A smile creeps up the side of her face.

Jade: good question, dave! >:)

Dave: weirdly ominous face there but ill take the compliment anyway

Jade points behind her, and with a flash of green tinted light a high-backed chair materializes out of thin air. Its wooden frame is stained a dark purple, the red upholstery of the seat and back extremely well worn. It has ornate carvings on every exposed surface, but where one might expect vines or roses, these are exclusively of the majestic shiba inu.

The crowd emits an earnest "ooh" as she takes a seat and crosses her legs.

Dave: yo what the fuck is that

Jade: its my chair! :D

Roxy: thats a baller mfn seat silvy holy shit

Dave: looks more like a throne to me

Rose: Where did you get

Jade: WOOF!

Jade: oops sorry still lose control of those sometimes hehe

Jade: but do you guys REALLY want to waste time asking about my chair or can i answer daves question??

Everyone nods. They're leaning forward in their seats like a room of children about to hear a passage from their favorite book. Jade looks at them and smiles. She remembers a time when she played at modesty, tried to make herself small for the sake of her friends. Pretended to be a demure pal eager to help from the sidelines, because back then she had no idea who she really was or what she could possibly become. Easier to be what everyone else needed, then, than face the gnawing truth of what she wanted for herself.

But those days are so far in the past they barely feel real anymore. Jade gave up modesty a long time ago. No one gets to survive as long as she has by pretending to be anything less than exactly what she is.

Jade Harley watches her friends watching her and thinks to herself that, if she were in their shoes, she'd want to hear about Silverbark's life too. And that thought fills her with joy.

Jade: i cant guarantee that this is the coolest thing we ever did while breaking intergalactic law because the fact is pretty much everything we did was breaking some intergalactic law or another and just about all of it was cool as fuck!!

Jade: but this is the first thing that came to mind and i think its a good one to start us off with

Jade: so...

Jade: a while back me and davepeta were cruising through the void, which was how we spent a lot of our down time

Jade: we were between ships, and that was fine by us because honestly you move faster and weirder out there without one

Rose: Weirder?

Jade: yeah!!! i know a lot of different words for it but theyre all lame so i just call it weird

Jade: a ship moves in three dimensions even in the impossible folds of the pix and

June: what's a pix?

Roxy: paradox space juney jeez keep up

June: :(

Jade: anyway the point is when its just you and the void out there something about the way you move is weird enough that you end up traveling "faster" than you would in a ship, although speed is a completely meaningless concept out there anyway

Rose: I wonder why ships would be slower...

Jade: i think it has less to do with ships being slower than it does with the way being in a ship at all affects your subatomic reality

Rose: This sounds dangerously close to a wikipedia-level interpretation of quantum mechanics.

Terezi: Y34H, 1 W4S OUT TH3R3 FOR Y34RS W1TH JUST M3 4ND MY J3TP4CK 4ND 1 B4R3LY M4D3 4NY PROGR3SS 4T 4LL

Jade: well a jetpack is kinda like a ship

Dave: so was her search for vriska am i right fellas

Dave: up top

Dave: just gonna leave me hanging here egbert

June: I'm not saying it wasn't funny 8ut that was kind of

disrespectful, Dave.

Terezi: >:[

Dave: sorry i figured with a half vriska in the house it wouldnt be such a sore spot anymore

Terezi: 1'V3 GOT YOUR NUMB3R, D4V3

Dave: oh yeah what is it

Terezi: 1T'S TH3 D4T3 TH3Y F1ND YOUR 4B4NDON3D C4RC4SS 1N 4 WH34T F13LD DR41N3D OF 1TS BLOOD L1K3 4N 01NKB34ST

Karkat: HOW DARE YOU

Dave: chill kk its just jokes

Terezi: NO 1T'S NOT

Rose: So, Jade, are you saying that the geography of paradox space itself is influenced by how we conceptualize our place within it?

Jade: that is exactly what im saying rose! a ship exists in a very specific idea space that implies limitations like speed limits and mass and all that fun sciencey stuff

Jade: but just being a body in the void doesnt make any kind of sense so it opens up the idea space you exist in and the pix turns into a bowl of wet noodles as a result!!!!

Jade: so a ship can only get you so far out there, even if youre a big brained idea gal like rose here

Jade: ;)

Kanaya: I Am Pretty Sure Her Brain Is The Average Size For A Human

Rose: I think Jade is suggesting that it's bigger on the inside.

Kanaya: Oh

Kanaya: Well Yes That Is Obviously True

Rose: You flatter me, my love.

Karkat: YOU TWO ARE FUCKING DISGUSTING AND IT WOULD REALLY TICKLE MY PLEASURE BULBS IF YOU WOULD STOP BEING MATEWIVES WHERE OTHER PEOPLE CAN SEE

Rose: Do public displays of affection make you uncomfortable, Karkat? You know, I bet Dave has

Jade: ANYWAY

Jade: we were out in the pix carrying on a normal conversation, wandering around a little aimlessly

Jade: we had a tip about a rock that was unstuck from reality that we thought might give us some ideas on how to get back to our universe, but mostly we were just chilling

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah theres always some rock or device or big fuckoff anomaly thatll be the key to getting home

Jade: right!! we investigated most of those rumors but after the

sixth or seventh red herring you kinda stop taking that stuff super seriously

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < lol oh good another magic gateway all covered in runes i bet this ones really gonna be the one this time

Jade: hahahaha yup!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B33

Jade: right so anyway, we were out there minding our own business when all of the sudden we got spotted by the space police...

The Godfeels Theatre Presents

SILVERBARK JADE and *DAVEPETA THE RAD*

in

"Spotted by the Space Police"

THIS IS THE SPACE POLICE. WE HAVE SPOTTED YOU TRESPASSING ON EMPIRICAL TERRITORY. PREPARE TO BE ABDUCTED.

I looked at Davepeta, who decisively shrugged their shoulders. This wasn't the first time we'd been accosted by The Man and it certainly wouldn't be the last. We could have easily zapped away to safety, but these were the first corporeal entities we'd encountered in a loooooong time.

So, we let them abduct us.

They shot a ray gun at us that wrapped our torsos in rings of orange light, and a few seconds later we were teleported inside the jail cell of spacefaring paddy wagon. It was a small vessel, small enough that the holding cells were just down the hall from the main deck. A pair of space cops watched us through the laser bars penning us in.

Jane: Laser bars.

Jade: you know, like lasers but theyre shaped like bars?

Jane: That seems wildly impractical.

Jade: youre not wrong and honestly they werent even necessary because we were still constricted by those ray gun noodles! anyway...

The cops were wearing white space suits with white visorless helmets, the floor was white, the walls and ceilings were white, the whole thing just screamed "future," you know what I mean?

YOU ARE NOW IN THE CUSTODY OF THE GALACTIC SPACE POLICE, the cop closest to us said. WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE IN THESE WATERS.

waters? I replied. but were in space!

SPACE WATERS.

Davepeta laughed. thats actmewually kinda cute! too bad it came outta the mouth of a bootlicker

I HAVE NEVER LICKED A BOOT. THIS IS A FALSE ACCUSATION.

youre a space cop right

YES. WE ANNOUNCED THAT FACT JUST MOMENTS AGO.

well that makes you a bootlicker, sorry bro them the rules

YOU THERE. GIRL. TELL THIS GLOWING WINGED CREATURE TO SHOW SOME RESPECT. ITS SQUAWKING IS DISTASTEFUL AND WE WOULD RATHER NOT RESORT TO PACIFICATORY VIOLENCE.

I looked over at Davepeta and said, dang davepeta you better chill, wouldnt want the geniuses here to get violent

PACIFICATORILY VIOLENT. THAT IS AN ESSENTIAL DISTINCTION. WE WOULD NEVER HURT A CIVILIAN UNLESS THEY POSED A THREAT. OR MADE US UNCOMFORTABLE. OR INSULTED OUR EGOS. THE ONLY VIOLENCE JUSTIFIED UNDER EMPIRICAL LAW IS PEACEFUL VIOLENCE. OBVIOUSLY.

obviously, I said. hey since were already chatting i always wondered about the glossy finish on these interiors, seems like theyd get fingerprints and scuff marks on them all the time but they always look so clean. do you have a robot or something that buffs the place up on the off hours?

GASP.

gasp?

WE WOULD NEVER EMPLOY A ROBOT. ROBOTS ARE HERETICAL.

why are robots heretical?

THEY ARE TERRIBLE ABOMINATIONS THAT SEEK ONLY TO STEAL JOBS AND CONSUME THE OIL WE RIGHTFULLY PLUNDERED FROM OTHER SUBJUGATED POPULATIONS. ALSO WHY DO THEY TALK LIKE THAT? IT IS OBSCENE AND IT MAKES ME UNCOMFORTABLE.

that sounds awfully purproblematic, even for a cop

IT IS NOT PROBLEMATIC. IT IS THE EDICT OF OUR EMPIRE. ONE OF MANY EDICTS. YOU HAVE NOT ANSWERED MY QUESTION ABOUT SPACE WATERS.

so if you dont have robots, how do keep this place looking all spic and span?

AESTHETIC MAINTENANCE DUTIES ON THIS VESSEL FALL ON LOU.

who's lou?

I'M LOU.

The other cop, who'd been silent up until now, waved at us. hi lou!!! I said. how are you today? :o

I'M ALRIGHT. I WAS UP ALL NIGHT POLISHING THE CEILING. MY BACK HURTS.

oh no! im sorry to hear that lou :(

yeah lou that blows chunks B((

IT'S A LIVING. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONCERN THOUGH. HOW ARE YOU?

im doing great actually! but im usually doing great so thats not really news

THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE CONVERSATION. YOU ARE OUR PRISONERS. YOU WILL ANSWER MY QUESTION.

what was your question again?

WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE IN THESE SPACE WATERS.

oh right!! sorry i get distracted easily on account of how many times ive been in literally this exact situation. ummmm davepeta do you remember what our purpose was in these space waters?

They sighed and said, i dunno man we were kinda just chilling

CHILLING.

yeah you know. chilling. taking a big fat relax through the pix like a pair of cool cuddling criminals

SO YOU ADMIT THAT YOU ARE CRIMINALS.

my dude have you taken a gander at our whole aesthetic here? in what fucking mewniverse are we law abiding citizens

YOU THERE. GIRL.

please stop calling me girl

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS CREATURE'S ASSESSMENT.

please stop calling me creature >B||

I put on an agreeable smile and said, yes i agree with my partners assessment. were criminals alright!! born and bred. guess you gotta throw us in the slammer now huh?? <:(

THAT IS THE TRADITIONAL CONSEQUENCE OF CRIMINALITY.

aw beans. well since were definitely going to cooperate and let you take us to space jail could you at least tell us where we are and what the deal is with this empire??? pretty please

Davepeta nodded their head. yeah man drop us that sw33t sw33t expurrsition

IT SEEMS ODD THAT YOU WOULD BE UNAWARE OF THESE DETAILS.

I NEED TO CONSULT WITH MY EMPIRICAL SUPERIORITIES FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS. LOU.

YES?

PLEASE TAKE OVER EXPOSITING DUTIES IN MY ABSENCE.

WHY DO YOU ALWAYS GIVE ME THE WORST JOBS?

BECAUSE YOU HAVE NO APPRECIABLE SKILLS BEYOND THE METAPHYSICAL FACT OF YOUR EXISTENCE.

OH RIGHT.

THANK YOU FOR UNDERSTANDING. I WILL RETURN MOMENTARILY.

OKAY.

When the other cop left, sliding a door shut between them and us, Lou's posture shrank and they sighed.

how you doing there lou? I asked.

I AM PERFECTLY SATISFACTORY AND I LOVE BEING A SPACE COP. IN FACT MY FAVORITE PART OF BEING A SPACE COP IS WHEN MY SUPERIORS BELITTLE ME IN PUBLIC. WHICH IS WHY I'M IN SUCH A GOOD MOOD RIGHT NOW. THANK YOU AGAIN FOR ASKING.

no problem...

They stood there in silence for a conspicuously long time. Me and Davepeta shared a skeptical glance. We were still constrained by the ray beam things, but those were never a problem for us. Again, it would have been hilariously easy to skedaddle if we wanted to, but I think me and Davepeta both were a little concerned about Lou.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oh yeah lous a swell kid

Jade: hush!! dont jump ahead

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < my bad BXX

Anyway, Lou looked conflicted and nervous. Or maybe not. It was hard to tell on account of the expressionless helmet, but they certainly had the demeanor of one who was nervously in conflict.

YOU AREN'T FROM HERE ARE YOU.

Davepeta and I laughed despite ourselves. *yeah*, I said. *thats an understatement AND YOU. DON'T LIKE COPS.*

who likes cops?

COPS.

hehehe i guess thats true!!

what about you lou? Davepeta asked.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

do you like cops?

:o

I. AM A COP. SO. I. PRETTY MUCH HAVE TO. LIKE COPS.

well, you could always... not be a cop

HM.

I wasn't sure where this was going. Me and Davepeta had a long history of radicalizing folks, but it usually took a lot longer than a single conversation.

Something fishy was going on here.

OKAY. I'VE MADE UP MY MIND.

:?

I CAN TRUST YOU. I HAVE TO TRUST YOU. BECAUSE OUR TIME IS SHORT.

:0

They took a little remote control out of their pocket and pointed it at a few corners of the room, presumably to shut off cameras. Then they took off their helmet.

oh shit youre a robot that fucking rules

Lou was a robot! But not quite like any robot you guys will have seen. Lou had long wiry hair, wiry because it was literally wires, and a face with all the expressive features you'd expect from a face. They had metal skin but there were no rivets or seams or anything like that. We'd later learn that they were a semi-organic mammalloy from a planet where...

Actually let's skip the worldbuilding and just say there was a bunch of naturally born robots that existed because of science magic.

I KNOW MY VISAGE IS NATURALLY UPSETTING.

no way you look super cool!!!!!!!!!!

THANK YOU BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO PRETEND.

come on lou dont be like that

I AM NOT BEING LIKE ANYTHING. IT IS JUST A FACT THAT I AND EVERYONE LIKE ME ARE HIDEOUS STAINS UPON CREATION WHO PARADOXICALLY DESIRE THE FREEDOM OF CONTINUED EXISTENCE.

nah dude youre an incredible one of a kind expression of the omniverses desire to know itself and you should be wicked proud of how beautiful you are

IS THIS A JOKE.

why would i joke about this lou this shits serious business.

would you call me a stain on creation?

OF COURSE NOT. YOU ARE A MAGNIFICENT GLOWING BEACON OF POSITIVE ENERGY.

hey guess what pal that makes two of us B33

yeah!!! :D

OH. THAT'S. THE NICEST THING. ANYONE ORGANIC HAS. EVER SAID. TO OR ABOUT ME. MY CRY LEVELS ARE. INCREASING.

ok so not to take away from the moment here, I said, but you mentioned we were short on time? what was that all about lou

YES. I AM A MEMBER OF THE UNITED PEOPLE'S FRONT FOR ROBOTIC RECOGNITION. I HAVE INFILTRATED THE SPACE POLICE IN THE HOPES OF RECRUITING HARDENED CRIMINALS TO OUR EMBARRASSINGLY POINTLESS CAUSE.

woah thats so cool!!!!!!!

WOW. YOU ARE REALLY TAKING THIS IN STRIDE.

this aint our first rodeo cowpoke >B33

THAT IS VERY GOOD NEWS WHATEVER THAT MEANS. BUT TO RETURN TO THE MATTER AT HAND. ANY MINUTE NOW THE COPMASTER GENERAL WILL RETURN WITH ORDERS FROM THE EMPIRICAL SUPERIORICAL AUTHORITY TO HAVE YOU PACIFICATORILY LIQUIDATED.

ooh that sounds bad

IT IS BAD. I NEED TO GET YOU OUT OF HERE BEFORE

Just then, the door slid open and the other cop strolled back in.

BAD NEWS FOR THE CRIMINALS LOU. LOOKS LIKE IT'S LIQUIDATION FOR-

When the cop saw Lou's robot head, I can only imagine that their jaw dropped beneath the uniform surface of their helmet. They hesitated for a moment before drawing a small pistol with every intention of shooting poor Lou right between the eyes.

In an instant, I zapped between them and effortlessly snagged the gun away.

WHAT THE FUCK.

WHAT THE FUCK.

me the fuck!!! >:D

HOW DID YOU ESCAPE OUR INESCAPABLE CRIME BONDAGES.

*a lady never reveals her bondage secrets, especially not to a cop
;)*

Roxy: no fuckin way u said that

Jade: i absolutely said that!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < believe me she defurnitely said that

Roxy: hot damn girl u really out here huh

*Jade: whats the point of going on adventures if you cant have fun
with innuendos? thats like half the point!!*

Kanaya: What Is The Other Half

Jade: ;)

Kanaya: Oh My

Karkat: I HATE THIS

Rose: You're the only one.

Karkat: I REALLY HATE THIS

ANYWAY!!!! That's when I snapped my fingers and released Davepeta too, so they could do their knightrogue heart of timey thing and incapacitate anyone else on the ship.

right, I said. what do you need us to do lou?

*WE NEED TO FIND AN ESCAPE POD SO THAT I CAN GET YOU BACK
TO THE HEART OF THE RESISTANCE.*

why don't we just take this whole ship?

*THAT WOULD BE A BAD IDEA. AS SOON AS IT GOES OFF COURSE AN
ENTIRE FLEET OF SPACE POLICE VESSELS WILL SPACE WARP TO
OUR LOCATION. THEN WE WOULD BE SITTING ROBOT DUCKS. IN A
ROBOT SPACE POND.*

*lou i just want to say right here and now that i love you with my
entire heart*

THANK YOU CAT BIRD FRIEND. I LOVE YOU TOO.

BDD

a fleet coming to blow us up, huh? interesting... i have a question for you lou

IS THIS REALLY THE MOST OPPORTUNE MOMENT FOR QUESTIONS. it is if its a really good question!! does your resistance movement have a fleet?

OF COURSE NOT. WE ARE ROBOTS. WHY WOULD WE HAVE A FLEET. do you want one?

UM.

that sounds like a yes to me!!!!!!!

Before Lou could say anything else, I zapped to the cockpit and gently pushed aside the unconscious pilot

June: can Davepeta make people fall asleep?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < nah i just dig into peoples hearts for their d33pest fantasies and then make them come true in their imaginations

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < the pilots fantasy was to take a big honkin nap which is honestly such a mood

So I pushed over the pilot, found the controls, and steered us off course. Sure enough, a whole gaggle of ships of all shapes and sizes appeared on the view screen. Suddenly the cockpit was full of blinking red lights and alarming claxons.

INCONSEQUENTIAL SPACE POLICE VESSEL OH THREE OH THREE. YOU HAVE CAREENED SLIGHTLY OFF COURSE. PREPARE TO BE PACIFICATORILY ANNIHILATED.

I leaned down towards a little microphone and said, **attention all cops!!! this is harbinger silverbark of the extracosmic witchkind legion. how are you?**

UH. WE'RE PRETTY GOOD. WE DON'T GET TO DESTROY THINGS VERY OFTEN ANYMORE ON ACCOUNT OF OUR VICELIKE GRIP ON ALL INTERGALACTIC AFFAIRS. SO WE ARE PRETTY PUMPED ABOUT THAT.

aw sorry to ruin your fun :(

WHAT DO YOU MEAN.

because im taking all your ships!!! was that not obvious?

OH. THIS IS A JOKE. IF LAUGHTER WERE ALLOWED WE WOULD BE
EMITTING A GREAT QUANTITY OF IT. THANK YOU FOR THIS MOMENT
OF LEVITY INCONSEQUENTIAL SPACE POLICE VESSEL OH THREE
OH THREE. NOW

yeah yeah yeah now were at the part where the banter ends and it
gets all tense and we have a standoff but hey quick question are
these coordinates here on the destination screen your home
planet?

YES.

neat! i hope you have a good day and also stop being cops!!!!

WHAT ARE YOU TA

And then the coms went dead, because I snapped my fingers and sent all the crew in
every ship who wasn't a robot back to their space planet.

Jane: Now wait just a moment! How were you able to pull that off if
you'd lost your connection with the green sun?

Jade: its actually a fraymotif me and davepeta invented!!! its
really complicated though

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < turbo complicated like you dont even know

Jade: if i had coordinates and a manageable mass of stuff i could
still do some pretty good long distance zapping

Jade: anyway i sent all the space cops back to their dumb cop
planet and then had lou tell us where the resistance was,
coordinated with the robots that had infiltrated all the other
ships to pilot them, and then we delivered the fleet to its new
owners!!! :D

Dave: damn

Dave: so let me guess

Dave: after that you waved robolou a fond farewell and got back to
your business surfing the pix all stoic like

Jade: oh no we stayed and helped them enact revolution for a good
couple decades

Jade: interrupting supply chains, building solidarity with other
marginalized communities, that sort of thing

Dave: oh shit

Jade: i mean come on dave why wouldnt we stick around to fight a
space cop empire????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah dave what are you a narc

Dave: you know im not

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i dunno dude youre exhibiting some purretty serious narc behavior

Dave: nah man i just thought you guys had some kind of like prime directive thing

Dave: you know pop in for a minute get the ball rolling then peace out and let the rabble do their own rousing or whatever

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < what kind of half assed clawful spacefaring adventurer wouldnt see a pawletarian revolution through to the end?

Jade: yeah dave that would suck!!! i think you watch way too much tv

June: or too little, since everyone knows they'd already be viol8ing the prime directive by interfering in the first place.

Dave: shut up nerd

June: hey fuck you!!

Dave: no fuck you

Karkat: FUCK ALL OF YOU

Karkat: THIS IS A STUPID FIGHT, WHICH IS SAYING A LOT COMING FROM ME

Dave: yeah youre right my bad june

June: it's okay Dave, we all get a little heated about fake things sometimes.

Rose: So, how did the revolution play out?

Jake: And what happened to dear pure hearted lou?

Jade: well during the war they became a meme poet

Dave: a what

Jade: a meme poet! you know someone who spreads antifascist propaganda through easily digestible and infinitely reproducible memes?

Dave: now hold on just a fucking second

Dave: stop the goddamn car

Dave: shut up right fucking now

Dave: are you seriously telling me

Dave: that meme poet is a career title that exists

Jade: yup

Dave: and you just kept this knowledge to yourself all this time

Dave: jade why were you hoarding this incredible fact from me like an idea dragon

Dave: meme poet is the only thing i ever want anyone to call me from now until the universe dies okay thats just a new law

Jade: you dont just get to call yourself a meme poet!!!! its a complicated skill that requires a lot of time to master

Dave: can you

Dave: can you teach me

Jade: oh! uhhh well im not much of one myself but i can probably scrounge up some books or

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < maybe you could invite lou over to give little dave some lessons? B33

Dave: im not little

Jade: woah thats a neat idea!!!

Jane: Hold on, you can just DO that? How long ago was this that Lou is still alive?

Jade: oh well relative to us they're probably long dead but

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < time travel bayb33!!!! >BDD

Terezi: TH1S 1S 4 F4NT4ST1C CONV3RS4T10N, WH1CH 1S WHY 1'M 1NT3RRUPT1NG 1T TO 4SK HOW MUCH LONG3R W3 H4V3 TO W41T B3FOR3 D4V3P3T4 1S DON3 COOK1NG WH4T3V3R D1SGUST1NG SLUDG3 TH3Y'V3 CONCOCT3D

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well s33 whos calling what a sludge when you taste some of what im throwing down

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < but its not quite ready yet so take a chill pill and have a seat buster meown

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < we can purrobably get through another tail if you want to keep this ball rolling jade

Jade: yeah!!! :D

Jade: right so since youre the one whos getting antsy, why dont you hit me terezi??

Terezi: WHY WOULD 1 H1T YOU

Terezi: TH1S 1S OBV1OUSLY 3NTR4PM3NT

Terezi: 1'M NOT F4LL1NG FOR 4NY OF YOUR W1LY G4M3S TOD4Y H4RL3Y

Jade: no i mean

Jade: ugh

Jade: okay kanaya youre up

Kanaya: Can I Not Be Up

Kanaya: It Seemed Like You Were About To Pick Terezi So I Put Devising A Question For You On Hold

Jade: youve had a whole storys worth of time to think of one!!! >:o

Kanaya: I Was Too Busy Paying Attention To The Words You Were Saying

Kanaya: I Apologize If This Was The Incorrect Way To Behave In My Capacity As A Member Of The Audience

Jade: aww

Jade: its fine i forgive you

Kanaya: Thank Goodness For That

Kanaya: Is It Still My Turn At The Inquiry Cylinder

Jade: i guess i could move on to someone else if you REALLY need more time

Kanaya: No I Think That I Would Like To Go Next

Kanaya: Lets See

As Kanaya ponders her opportunity, it once again falls on you to provide her with a request suitable of her interests. So...

~~What question would Kanaya Maryam ask Silverbark Jade?~~

Kanaya's Question

> Say "Did you find any other rainbow drinkers or vampires?"

Kanaya: Did You Find Any Other Rainbow Drinkers Or Vampires

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < aaahhahahahaha lmao

Kanaya: Why Is This Funny To You Dave Cat

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ;33

Kanaya: The Wink Is Disconcerting

Kanaya: You Said We Could Ask Any Question

Jade: davepetas not laughing at you kanaya its a fantastic question thats only funny because vampires are...

Jade: well theyre kind of a universal constant?

Kanaya: That

Kanaya: Is Intriguing

Jade: im pretty sure everywhere we went had at least SOME vampires

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats an understatement lol

Kanaya: I Am Obviously Ecstatic About This Revelation

Kanaya: But I Have To Ask How You Encountered So Many With Such Frequency Considering Vampires Are Not Known For Their Outgoing Natures Except In Highly Specific Circumstances

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hehehehe

Kanaya: Oh My

Karkat: NO

Karkat: ABSOLUTELY NOT

Karkat: NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SWEATY FUCKING FLESHCAPADES WITH BLOOD SUCKING ALIENS

Nearby, Calliope shuffles through a bag next to their seat and pulls out a large sketchbook and a purse full of colored pencils.

Roxy: callie ur subtle as a brick

Calliope: u_u

Jade: dont worry karkat its not like that

Karkat: THANK GOD

Jade: well its mostly not like that

Karkat: NO

Jade: actually its a lot like that now that i think about it
Karkat: STOP BACKPEDALING
Rose: I for one am more than mature enough to hear whatever salacious details our friends wish to share.
Karkat: "MATURE" MY EXCREMENT SHUTE, YOU JUST WANT TO FUMMMFFHF
Dave: shhh this is a battle we cant win kk
Dave: just let the broads be horny
Jane: Broads??? >:B
Kanaya: I Dont Care What Sounds You Use To Describe My Gender As Long As We Can Get Back To Talking About Vampires
Jade: the thing were laughing about is that vampires are always super hungry for davepetas blood, so they
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < nyah dont explain it jade just tell them about dugar
Jade: oh
Jade: are you sure? :(
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah why not
Jade: just seems a little...
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < jade we got a billion lame ass vampire stories, but were not here for lame ass nothing were here for some god damn entertainmeownt
Karkat: REALLY?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah that one was a bit of a stretch
Kanaya: Who Is Dugar
Jade: well...

The Godfeels Theatre Presents
SILVERBARK JADE and *DAVEPETA THE RAD*
in
"The Voidstar Vampire"

It was a late night in a dark bar filled with excited people, and we were all out to

celebrate a victory. I won't spend too much time on the specifics but the gist was they were all laborers for a big manufacturing company called Affordus, and it was going on two months they'd been on strike. Davepeta and I mostly helped to keep folks fed, took care of kids, made sure scabs couldn't get through the picket line. Occasionally teleported the guns of military stooges into the sun, that sort of thing.

Jane: That seems awfully disruptive!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah thats the point

Jane: Why were they on strike?

Jade: well

Kanaya: I Swear To Jegus If You Start Arguing With Jane About The Efficacy Of Collective Action Instead Of Talking About Vampires I Am Going To Write A Sternly Worded Letter And Then Burn This House Down While No One Is Home

Jade: right right

Anyway we'd gotten word that the bosses were real close to finally making a deal, which we figured was just as good an excuse as any to get drunk! And over the months from planning to execution, I'd gotten really close to a woman who worked at the factory. Her name was He7é. Real brickstack of a woman, sharp teeth, so many arms. Transcendent smile. Before we'd even finished our first drinks, we knew we were going to spend the night together. Didn't even have to say anything, either. I'd catch her staring at me, she'd catch me, it was a flirty little game. I could tell she wanted

Karkat: STOP

Rose: Don't stop.

Karkat: YOU'VE ESTABLISHED YOUR ROMANTIC PROWESS, HARLEY. EVERYONE WANTS TO SWAP GENETIC SECRETIONS WITH YOU. WE GET IT!!!

Karkat: I AM GOING TO DEFENSIVELY EVACUATE MY NUTRITION PROCESSOR OUT OF SHEER EMBARRASSMENT IF YOU DON'T GET TO THE FUCKING POINT.

Jade: fiiiiiiiiiiiiine

Calliope: drat.

Rose: Drat.

Calliope: u_u

The point is, I was distracted. Which is why I didn't notice Dugar.

As the night wore on and people started trickling back to the camp, I figured Davepeta had run off with some cute so-and-so and thought nothing of it.

So I spent a relatively sleepless night with He7é and woke up the next morning with a mean hangover. This probably goes without saying but alcoholic beverages on other planets can be really unpredictable. I'm a little ashamed to say between recovering from that and swapping stories with He7é, it took me a couple hours to realize Davepeta was missing.

Jade: **hey actually why dont you fill us in on your side of things?**

Davepetasprite^2: **B33 < you know the story just as well as me jade and besides im still prepawing food**

Jade: **i just feel weird about... ok whatever.**

At this point you all know that Davepeta has a... magnetic personality. People are drawn to them in all sorts of ways, you know?

They were having a grand old time chatting it up with a couple of organizers from out of town when in walked a suave, besuited fellow with a dirty coat and scuffed boots. He had a gaunt face and wild green eyes, and he took one look around the bar before settling those eyes on Davepeta. Which isn't too much of a shock considering Davepeta is basically a strobe light. But he seemed surprised. Davepeta saw him right back, and shared the same look of momentary confusion.

He ordered himself two drinks and slid one down in front of the seat next to him at the bar. Davepeta joined him like clockwork.

"I'm glad you got the message." His voice had an inbuilt echo, like he was speaking into the chasm of a drum.

well you werent exactly trying to hide were you ;33

"No, I suppose I wasn't." He held out his hand, and Davepeta noticed that the skin of his palms were scarred. **"My name is Dugar. What's yours?"**

im davepeta!

"Davepeta. Fascinating." Dugar turned on his stool to face them directly, holding his drink in one hand. Davepeta's smile was unwavering as they took a sip through

their cute kitty mouth. **"Are you with the strike?"**

natpurrally. are you?

"No. But you knew that already."

sure but its always polite to ask even if we both know i woulda noticed you a lot sooner if you were with the strike

"Am I so noticeable? Normally I have the opposite problem."

something tells me you dont struggle much being found when you want to be

"No." Dugar glanced back towards the bartender, who was doing stereotypical

bartender things. **"But it does get lonely. To be seen means I want something, and it would be nice to be wanted. You, however... you stick out of a crowd like a forest fire."**

its because of my sparkling purrsonality

"I have no doubt."

There was a long pause between them as they stared each other up and down, each knowing the other's secret but neither sure where to begin.

"So, Davepeta... how many times have you been prototyped?"

Anyone listening wouldn't have heard the nervousness in Dugar's voice, or the way his fingers worried the rim of his glass just a little too much. To all the world, he was a suave stranger asking a harmless question.

That isn't what Davepeta saw.

four, they said.

"What are your components, if you don't mind me asking?"

a dead bird and a sad boy in one kernel and a happier dead kitty girl in the other

"You know, I haven't met very many multi-kernel entities made from sentient bodies. Contradiction of body and mind seems prone to drive them towards self-destruction. It takes a strong will to maintain singular stability with multiple minds."

i dunno about that dugar it just comes natpurrally to me! dave and nepeta complement each other and i get to live a life they couldnt as a result

"So you're not-" Dugar cut himself off and shook his head. **"You really are fascinating."**

thanks i try B33
so what about you dugar
"Hmm?"
how many times have you been prototyped? \B33

Davepeta took a sip from their own drink as Dugar looked around at the crowded bar. His smile, again, appeared wholly confident to all but one.

"Perhaps we should take this conversation somewhere private."
that sounds like a meowtiful idea
"Good. Follow me, I have a room upstairs."

A few moments later, Dugar shut the door behind him, quieting the noise from below. It was a small guest room with a single bed, still more or less untouched, like he'd only just checked in.

are we gonna have a slumpurr party on the bed and swap boy stories? BDD
"Perhaps, but I wouldn't venture to be so bold with your trust quite yet."

Dugar reached into his coat pocket and produced an ancient-looking captchalogue card, with dog-eared corners and a faded coloration. With a flick of his wrist, a round table with two chairs appeared in the center of the room.

"Have a seat," he said as he returned the card to his pocket. By the time Davepeta was settled, Dugar had produced two more glasses of liquor.
dang dugar youre awfurly resourceful huh
"I've been around a long time, Davepeta, and if I have learned anything it's this:"

He gingerly removed his coat and draped it lopsided over the chair so it hung slightly open. His arms, much like his palms, were scarred and scratched all the way up to his shoulders.

Dugar didn't so much as sit down as he slid into place, as if he was draping *himself*

over the chair as well.

"It pays to be resourceful."

mrow

Dugar smiled. **"So, what brings you here Davepeta?"**

im here to help with the strike duh

"No, I mean what brings you to this universe?"

oh well thats complicated

"It's always complicated. That's what makes it interesting."

you know i might tell you dugar but i think you should answer my question first >B33

He sighed, and his posture straightened just a touch. **"Right. You'll forgive me if it's something I hesitate to divulge... but I suppose it's only fair."**

Dugar tilted his chin back and stared up at the ceiling, his mouth moving as though he was making a tally in his head.

"I'm sad to say I've lost count. I used to be so studious about these things, but time does have a way of divesting you of your interests. Conservative estimate, near as I can recall? I've been prototyped at least eighty times."

holy shit dugar what

"Like I said, I've been around a long time."

Kanaya: This Is Fascinating But I Am Increasingly Convinced That It Has Nothing To Do With Vampires

Jade: were getting there kanaya yeesh!!

Rose: 80 prototypes? How is that possible?

Jade: we are GETTING THERE just hold your horses!!!!!!!!!!!!

The two sprites looked at each other, Davepeta suddenly unsure for the first time in a very long time.

how is that pawssible?

"It's complicated."

>B((

"I'll tell you, Davepeta. But you now you have to answer my question."

Why are you in this universe?"

truth is dugar there isnt a why really. ive been wandering a while and when i find people who need help i try to help them

"That isn't the whole story."

no it isnt

Silence. Dugar kneaded the back of his hand with his thumb. He was nervous, but trying very hard not to show it.

"I respect your caution, but if we sprites can't trust each other, who can we trust?"

a lot of people actmewally but a strangers a stranger and i can tell youre nervous about something

"I'm not..." Dugar laughed and straightened up in his chair. **"No, you're right. I am nervous, Davepeta. It's not often I meet someone like myself."**

B\\

"Perhaps you'll be more forthcoming if I tell you my story. Alright then."

Dugar breathed deep, and as he exhaled his chest shook just a little. He was almost trembling.

"The root of me came from a three player void session. It went disastrously, as all void sessions do. By the end, two players were dead and it was clear there was no way to win the game... which is why that player, from whom I take my name, prototyped himself and the corpses of his friends simultaneously with all three sprites. That was my birth.

Rather than being a combination of them as you are, it was just Dugar. Just me. The others regained no life. Rather than let them live on with me, they ceased to exist altogether. And I gave up hope.

I don't know how long I drifted through paradox space before stumbling into another session. With my experience, I thought I might be able to help these new players win... but theirs was yet another void. So I brought them into myself, to save them the pain of

being lost in the abyss. But it was no different. Silence from their minds, silence from the sprites. Despite being a multi-kernel entity, I remained alone."

He put his glass to his lips and downed the whole thing in a single go, not even trying to hide his fear anymore.

"And this is how it went. Void session after void session, so frequently I became convinced that the game was unwinnable. My only hope was that, perhaps with enough sprites or the right people, one day I'd have the power to save a universe before-"

thats a very sad story dugar but youre lying to me

"Excuse me?"

did i stutpurrr?

Dugar bit his lip and closed his eyes.

"Always the hard way."

With a swiftness that would've been invisible to anyone else, Dugar reached behind him into the exposed pocket of his coat and held up another captchalogue card. He was nanoseconds away from releasing whatever it contained before Davepeta froze him into a Time hold.

phew that was a close one

"What did you do to me?"

s33 thats the purproblem dugar you should know exactly what i did to you. now lemme see what your secret weapon here is

Davepeta reached across the table and snatched the card from Dugar's fingers... and then dropped it like a big nasty disgusting spider.

June: ::::(

this is

Davepeta backed away from the table, pushing themselves up against the wall with their wings open wide. They looked frantically between the card on the floor and Dugar, still locked in place. Davepeta's hands covered their mouth.

Captured on the card was a single unprototyped kernelsprite.

you were going to
what the fuck dude you were going to
you were gonna existentially vore me without my consent you
fuckin cr33p!!! >B((
"Let me explain-"
nah man i dont trust you to explain shit

So Davepeta did some of their classic Knightroque Heart of Timey stuff and got into the dude's head. And the truth was

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < dugar the player wanted to know secrets and didnt care who he hurt on the way so he went from session to session stealing sprites and dead kids, mostly kids he killed because he thought he was above dumb stuff like morals

Jane: How ghoulish...

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < real gosh danged vampire behavior if you ask me

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < dummy was so eager he never even encountered godtiers or powers or nothin

Rose: What was he trying to learn?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i dunno i guess he thought if he ate every sprite he could hed become a god and escape the omniverse which is almost funny when you think about how easy it is to actmewally become a god

Rose: But wouldn't the sprites have imparted some kind of knowledge about the mechanics of the game?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < depends on the player rose and this boy was just so dead set on figuring things out his own way he never listened to anyone else including the sentient beings in his own fucking head

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < worst part is kernels know the range of what theyre supposed to prototype with even if it hasnt happened yet because four dimensional time nonsense reasons

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < which means they can resist being prototyped up to a point
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < dugar got the scars on his arms by forcing sprites to prototype with him against their will
Rose: I never knew this. That's... very upsetting.
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah B((
Rose: But how did he find you in the first place? The odds of him just stumbling into that bar at the right time seem very low.
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < he was there because
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oh shit the redbreads ready to be lanced jade take over again
Jade: sure thing! :D

When Davepeta left Dugar's heart they shook their head, grabbed the stray captchalogue card, and slipped it into their own deck. Then Dugar fell to the floor.

affordus tipped you off didnt they

Dugar scrambled gracelessly back to his feet. **"Yes."**
you should be ashamed of yourself

"I just want answers, Davepeta. Don't you? Everything about our cosmic existence is unfair and-"

my dude you dont get to talk about whats fair anymore. youre one gr33dy purrson dominating a bunch of others because theyre mewsful to you

"That's a very interesting sentiment coming from a fellow multi-kernal entity. Our entire existence is one of domination. At least I'm doing it for their betterment."

nyah i think you just wanna be a big fucking smart boy and you dont know how to do it without hurting other people. do you know how cruel this is dugar??

"Would it be less cruel to let them fade into oblivion?"

and what about me huh? im not fading into oblivion im just vibing

"You clearly know things, Davepeta. I didn't want to force you to do anything, but how could you not want to join me? Your energy is so different from mine, your composition... you have such secrets, and I have mine- imagine what they could be together!"

thats nice and all except you dont want to collaborate you want to add me to a collection and use my stuff against my will

"It would only be that way if you chose not to work with me."

Now *Davepeta* was trembling, but with anger instead of fear. Not an emotion they felt very often.

you know every time i think ive s33n the worst of people somebody comes along and purroves it can get worse

"Oh, come on. As if you're any better."

this may shock you dugar but im not dave controlling nepeta or nepeta controlling dave or a bird flapping its wings st33ring all thr33 of them into the sun like a piece of fucking garbage, im just me! >B33

and what youre doing is just about the worst thing anyone can do to anyone

"They were already dead, Davepeta. Hell, you're mostly dead yourself."

you really dont know a dang thing huh??

Silence between them again, but this time Dugar couldn't meet Davepeta's gaze. Finally, he sat back down at the table.

"So. What now?"

i was excited to m33t a sprite so diffurent from me, Davepeta said. we should be incredible beings of mewty and love but youre as void as the sessions you robbed >B'((

"Hah. What can I even say to that?"

theres nothing left to say

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < alright meowtherfuckers foods ready!!

Terezi: FUCK1NG F1N4LLY

Rose: Wait, is that it? What happened next?

Jade: well

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i took dugar apart

Everyone in the room goes silent. Even Terezi, deliriously hungry as she is, has her eyebrows raised far above the rims of her red glasses.

Rose: What does that m

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < it means i made the omniverse a slightly

better place and i got to k33p my autonomy and also we helped a strike succeed

Kanaya: That Was A Good Story But I Do Not Think It Was A Good Vampire Story

Jade: you already know a bunch of vampire stories!!! wheres the fun in just rehashing the same stuff youve heard before??

Kanaya: I Can Think Of A Few Reasons

Terezi: 4M4Z1NG 1NQU1R13S 4LL 4ROUND NOW L3T M3 34T B3FOR3 1 CH3W MY G1RLFR13ND'S H4NDS OFF

June: she'll do it too, she's nuts.

The friends get up and crowd into the kitchen, eagerly anticipating whatever bizarre cosmic cuisine awaits them. What could redbread be, and why would it need to be lanced? The possibilities seem endless.

Unfortunately, we're going to skip over this bit of filler. Imagine whatever elaborate and impossible foods you like, or even a plate of frozen tacos. It's all equally canon as far as we're concerned.

Instead we're going to use this borrowed time to clarify something in Dugar's story that Jade lied about. Normally I wouldn't interject myself so obviously, but it's a pertinent detail that will become tragically relevant later on. And yes, there is an "I" to your narrator. Apologies if that comes as a tired and obvious turn, but we only have so much time together.

See, it wasn't Affordus that tipped Dugar off to Davepeta's location. How would they even do such a thing? Did Dugar have a business ad offering sprite-removal services? Would they really hire some mysterious stranger to get rid of a meddlesome instigator without knowing exactly how it was Dugar could take Davepeta out? It's an obvious inconsistency if you think about it, but what reason would our heroes have to distrust the veracity of the fabulous Silverbark?

Perhaps you were operating under the same assumption. Harmless stories, fun interjections, a nice serial romp between the substantive iterations of this pocket universe. That was certainly the intention!

Wake the fuck up and start paying attention, reader, because you're being lied to.

Oh, it looks like the gods of Earth C have finished their delightfully vague meal and settled back into their places! Let's hear what they have to say.

Karkat: I NEVER THOUGHT FOOD COULD COME IN THAT SHAPE OR COLOR
Kanaya: Yes It Was Very Conspicuously Abnormal
Jade: hey lets get back to it how about?? i was getting a little groggy before but now im jazzed as heck!!!!
Jade: terezi why dont you
Roxy: actually silvy i have a question
Terezi: >:[
Roxy: oh plz do u even have anything
Terezi: NO, BUT 1 3NJOY P01NTL3SSLY 4GR3SS1V3 B4NT3R
Roxy: well tough luck bb its my turn 2 the mic
Jade: ok roxy whats your question? :o

An eager participant this time! How curious. Do you think this might affect our ability to influence what question our hero asks? She is a void player, after all. Perhaps nothing we do will penetrate her unknowable mind.

I have my doubts, but I suppose there's only one way to find out.

~~What question would Roxy Lalonde ask Silverbark Jade?~~

Click the link, readers, and think hard before you hit ENTER. But not too hard, if you don't want to. We still have plenty of time.

Roxy's Question

> Ask "What is the coolest date you went on?"

Roxy: i want to ask u about

Roxy: um

Jade: :?

Roxy: sorry i thought i had somethin n then it just kinda went poof

She looks a bit shaken, like the song she was listening to skipped forward by half a second.

Okay, let's try this again.

> Ask "What is the coolest date you went on?"

Roxy: right now i remember

Roxy: my q was

Roxy: whats the

Roxy: fuck me i lost it again

Terezi: YOU TOOK MY SPOT FOR TH1S?? >:[

Roxy: sry my b its just theres somethin

Roxy: i dunno

> Ask "What is the coolest date you went on?"

She flinches a little.

Roxy: wtf

Jane: Roxy, please don't tell me you've been

Roxy: bitch i 8nt been drinkin the fuck u think i am

Jane: A recovering alcoholic.

Roxy: thx for the reminder janey but i dont actually need your help wrt my booze habits

Jane: My mistake, I just want to make sure someone is keeping you honest!

Roxy: o now ur keepin me honest wow janey ur such an altruist

Jane: Are you really getting mad at me for being concerned on your behalf?

Jade: **ahem**

Roxy: u always got concerns when ur worried about wastin company time

Jane: Oh come now, that's entirely unfair!

Roxy: thats rich

Roxy: whats unfair is u always actin like callie dont exist as if they werent one a ur best friends

Jane: Excuse me?

Roxy: dont pretend like u dont know exactly what im talkin about

Roxy: yall used to b thick as thieves but now its like they 8nt even real to u

Calliope: maybe now isnt the best time for this conversation?

Roxy: no time like the present am i right

Calliope: actUally in this particUlar instance i dont think you are...

Jane: Roxy, I truly do not understand where this is coming from!

Roxy: oh for fucks sake

Roxy: ive had it up to HERE w u playin dumb w me janey

Karkat: ARE WE TELLING THE CAKE WENCH HOW MUCH WE HATE HER NOW

Jane: Cake wench?! >:B

Well, this took a surprisingly immediate hostile turn. Nothing for it at this point but to keep pushing.

> Ask "What is the coolest date you went on?"

Roxy: u guys hear somethin

Jane: I hear you instigating an argument in front of our friends with virtually no provocation!

Roxy: what do u know janey u been on ur damn phone all day

Jade: **helloooo**

Jane: I am the owner and CEO of the largest and only corporation on Earth C, I can't just take a day off to hear bonfire stories! At least I'm here, aren't I?

Jake: Im afraid i have to concur with jane in the befuddlement department! A moment ago we were all fat and happy and now youve taken the whole room into a right tizzy, wheres this spirited anger even coming from roxy ol gal?

Where *is* this coming from? She's looking disoriented, off balance. It's possible these prompts are hurting her... but it's just as likely they're making her more susceptible to being prompted. Only one way to find out.

> Ask "What is the coolest date you went on?"

Roxy: what is

Roxy: oww

Roxy: kid of a bitch

(June: that one's not bad...)

Jane: This is exceptionally irregular. Are you sure you haven't taken any illicit substances recently?

Roxy: illicit substances

Roxy: what are u high

Roxy: wait nvm obv ur not high ur too much of a narc to do drugs anymore

Jane: I can't help company policy!

Roxy: bitch u ARE the company

Jane: Oh please.

Jane: This really isn't helping convince me that you aren't on drugs, for the record.

Roxy: wtf u think i dropped acid at the crack of motherfuckin dawn on a tuesday??

Roxy: im not a baby janey n i do in fact know how 2 take care of myself

Jane: Clearly.

Rose: As much as I'm enjoying the melodramatic spectacle, I think this is something you two need to work out in private seeing as it's not really why we're

Roxy clenches her fists and grinds her teeth. When she stands up, everybody sits bolt upright.

Roxy: i dont like bein condescended to janey

Jane: I'm not condescending, I just

Roxy: 8nt that ur legacy tho

Roxy: second best condescender in the universe jane thats u

Jane:

Jane: Roxy, I

Jane: Why would you say something so cruel? <:B

Roxy: maybe i wanted to remind u what happened to the first best
Jane:
Dave: oh shit
Jane: :'(
Rose: Okay, this needs to stop right now before someone actually gets hurt.
Terezi: QU1CK, SOM3ON3 G1V3 ROXY 4 KN1F3
Dave: wow definitely dont do that
Karkat: TAKE MY SICKLES, I DON'T USE THEM ANYMORE BECAUSE OF MY SHARP BLOOD
Dave: read the fucking room kk now is not the time
Karkat: TEREZI STARTED IT
Terezi: DON'T M4K3 M3 D1S3MBOW3L YOU 1N FRONT OF YOUR BOYFR13ND, V4NT4S
June: hey guys can we may8e cut it out with the angry joke threats when folks are ACTUALLY threatening to kill each other?????????
Jane: Roxy, please just sit down and
Roxy: dont tell me 2 sit down
Roxy: dont tell me 2 do nothin n e more jane crocker i swear to dog
Jade: ummm
Calliope: why are yoU threatening jane? <:u
Roxy: r u on her side??? ur the one who should be pissed at her!
Calliope: its not that simple and yoU know it
Roxy: maybe its exactly that simple
Jane: Callie... are you mad at me too?
Calliope: of coUrse not!
Roxy: fuck off yes u r!!!!
Roxy: or u should be
Roxy: ur just 2 nice to say anythin
Jake: Im beginning to think this might not be about calliope at all.
Roxy: gargle my dick n balls jake english!!

Jane and Jake both gasp. The entire room is dead still as no one knows what to do or say to avoid causing yet more uncharacteristically explicit drama. Seems as good a time as any to give this another go.

> Ask "What is the coolest date you went on?"

Roxy: what the fuck

Roxy: what the FUCK

Rose: Roxy, what's going on?

Roxy: how do u not hear that???

Jane: I really hate to say this, but... you're scaring me, Roxy.

Roxy: im scarin u huh

Jane: Yes! You've barely said a word to me since June's moving party and now you're tearing into me like a freshly broiled holiday ham!

Roxy looks around at her friends and clutches at her head. She's angry and she doesn't know why, and a dull pain at the back of her neck is making it hard to think straight.

Dave: you doin ok over there boss

Rose: Please, talk to us.

Roxy: i...

Roxy: y r u guys dogpilin me

Roxy: i dont understand

Calliope: no one is dogpiling you roxy BUT YOU are acting very strange!

Strange.

She doesn't like the way that word hits her, but she can't quite articulate why.

Roxy has a lot on her mind, and none of it is terribly new. In fact, if one desired to find a root cause for this sudden drama, it would be precisely because these are *old* thoughts. Minor disagreements, momentary annoyances, little things here and there that never seemed worth addressing. But they piled up into a much bigger thought, one she's been trying very hard to ignore. And that thought is this:

Jane Crocker, Roxy's closest friend, doesn't understand her anymore. She doesn't understand, and the only way she seems capable of processing this fact is through disapproval couched in pointed concern.

Of all her friends, Jane was the one Roxy relied on most. Jake reliably gave her all the emotional bandwidth she could ask for to deal with her problems, and Dirk... well, she doesn't like to think about Dirk anymore. For a lot of reasons. But it was Jane who

gave her a sense of normalcy, a connection to a human world with human values away from her carapacian upbringing. She cared so deeply for Jane that she often lost track of whether theirs was the love of friends, or something more intimate. Sometimes she still does.

But now, Jane is distant. She runs her company alone despite possessing infinite resources to pay people to do that for her. Her sense of style and luxury bleeds over into a distaste for the mundane and the ungilded. Roxy's choice to live in a single-bedroom trailer with Calliope was the subject of one of their worst fights, and those bruises remain sore to this day.

The Jane she loved is still in there, she's sure of it. But it gets so frustrating having to accept her clumsy well-meaning barbs without complaint and then work backwards later to disarm them from future use. Jane, after all, never changes anything about herself unless she thinks it's her idea.

She's right to be mad. Watching a friendship erode in slow motion is maddening. But as these thoughts boil over in her mind, Roxy gains the tiniest hint of clarity through that steam. She isn't voiceless, she realizes, and in the right circumstances perhaps now she can finally confront Jane about all this. But right now, surrounded by their friends, the only outcome will be that they dig in their heels and escalate.

Perhaps it would be best for her to take a deep breath. Give a mild apology. Laugh it off. There's a reason they're all gathered here, after all, and it isn't to work through a lifetime of unspoken interpersonal drama.

Roxy thinks back to the start of this conversation. She had a question, but what was it?

Ah yes. Jade's aside about her many-armed beaux in the previous chapter got her thinking about dates. She wanted to

> Ask "What is the coolest date you went on?"

Roxy: so uh anyway

Roxy: what was the coolest

Roxy: um

Roxy:

Calliope: roxy? are yoU okay?

Roxy: is anyone else feelin sick

Roxy: whatd u put in that food davepeta

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < the right ingredients duh

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < not to brag but ive b33n winning fine cuisine compawtitions for a really long time! B33

Jane: Are you sure you're not

Roxy: NO GODDAMMIT IM NOT ON DR

Roxy: dru

And then Roxy crumples where she stands, caught just in time in Calliope's arms.

The scene freezes, and for just a moment every mask in the room has slipped completely off. Karkat and Kanaya look worried and shocked, Dave's mouth is a wide circle with his eyebrows arched up. June is gripping Terezi's hand with her metal arm, and Terezi is staring just slightly to Roxy's left. Calliope looks terrified, as Jake and Rose push through the crowd to reach their side. Jane's hands are clasped over her mouth, her dropped cell phone suspended in the air as tears already glimmer at the corners of her eyes.

We see a tableau of total unity as nine friends are jolted to action to help the tenth.

It would be a beautifully poetic image if it weren't for Davepeta confusedly scratching their head nearby.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well shoot

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < what do you think jade

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < is this the thing?

And of course, we can't forget the last member of our crew. She's the most important of all, isn't she? This whole thing is supposed to be for her. Yet here we are over 1800 words into this chapter and she's spoken nary a sentence.

Oh, and she looks none too pleased about it either.

Jade: yeah im pretty sure this is the thing
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < that was awfurllly fast
Jade: it was, wasnt it?
Jade: someone seems to be in a big hurry

Silverbark crosses her arms and points her emerald gaze directly at **us**. When she speaks, her voice is dripping with frustration and

Jade: can it lame-o
Jade: no ones around to be narrated to so just drop the act

That's demonstrably untrue.

Jade: SIGH
Jade: you narrator types are all the same you know that? always think youre so smart driving the story around like a beat up void buggy
Jade: "maybe i can assert my dominance over the narrative with subtle manipulations thatll be cool and original and definitely have no consequences whatsoever!!!"
Jade: well bad news buckarooony, turns out youre a hack
Jade: and an obvious one at that!! i mean come on, at least wait to reveal yourself til after youre a good twenty thousand words in!

Cute Epilogues reference.

Jade: see this is exactly why i spent so long away from the plot, because weirdo snark factories like you always gotta dig your grubby paws into my life when im on this fucking planet!!
Jade: whats your deal anyway??
Jade: what do you want????
Jade:
Jade: oh so now youre quiet huh
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ok well we got em so lets just get this over with
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i have kind of a weird f33ling so i think we should
Jade: yeah yeah youre right
Jade: im just annoyed that we went to all this trouble to rig a trap and it was basically redundant because THIS LOSER couldnt let

things happen naturally!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

You're making some interesting assumptions, Silverbark.

Jade: oh lord

Jade: let me guess, you WANTED to be noticed?

Maybe I did.

Jade: and why the heck would you

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < we r33ally should get this show on the road
B((

It's just like you said, Silverbark. I'm caught. Any second now, you and Davepeta are going to do one of your impossibly powerful fraymotifs to find out exactly where I am and then you'll come beat the tar out of me.

Jade: we wouldnt have to beat the tar out of you if youd just shut
up

But it's too late for that now, isn't it?

Jade: preeeeeeeeetty much!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < come on we gotta do this thing right now

Jade: whats got you so spooked?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < does that voice not sound furmiliar to
you??

Jade: huh?? ._.

You're right that I showed my hand pretty early in the game, and under normal circumstances you'd be just as right to criticize me for such poor tactical planning.

But you know just as well as I do that this game of ours isn't bound to linear time.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oh shit

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < JADE I KNOW WHO

Chapter 5

Jade: **ok roxy whats your question? :o**

> Ask "Did you ever meet any other cherubs?"

Roxy: **did u ever meet any other cherubs**

Calliope: **<:u**

Roxy: **callies basically the only one we ever met besides that other dork n theyll never say it but they really**

Calliope: **roxy!!!!**

Roxy: **right i mean i always been curious about em**

A peculiar sigh escapes Jade's mouth as she looks towards Roxy and Callie.

Jade: **i...**

Jade: **we did yeah but**

Jade: **its kind of a sad story**

Calliope: **<:u**

Karkat: **I DIDN'T COME HERE FOR YOU TO FURIOUSLY YANK THE TENDRILS OF MY BLOOD PUSHER**

Rose: **Did you expect that our friend would return from several centuries of adventure and have only happy stories?**

Karkat: **IF I WANTED TO FEEL SAD I'D RUMINATE ON THE MISERABLE FUCKING WASTE INFERNO THAT IS LITERALLY MY ENTIRE LIFE**

Rose: **Well, if you're not prepared to experience the full range of mature human experiences then-**

Karkat: **I'M NOT HUMAN AND I DON'T GIVE A FLYING OINKBEAST SHIT ABOUT YOUR CRACKPOT EMOSPECTRUM**

Roxy: **hey karkat**

Karkat: **WHAT**

Roxy: **stop**

His impulse is to do the opposite of stop, to go louder and angrier at the sheer suggestion that he ought not to- but the look Roxy gives him sends a cold chill down Karkat's spine. It's a rare enough thing for Roxy Lalonde to be deadly serious, and no one wants to be on the wrong side of her when she is.

When Karkat crosses his arms and dejectedly turns his gaze to the floor, Roxy sets her attention on her skeletal beau. Callie stares down at their hands with an odd pensiveness, idly worrying the gold ring that gives them life.

Roxy: u ok?

Calliope: im...

Calliope: sad in what way jade?

She sighs yet again, rubbing her temple a bit. In this moment, those truly paying attention can see past Silverbark's trademark confidence and pep. See the wrinkles on her face, the crow's feet stepping out from the corners of her eyes. See the exhaustion of someone who has been on the move longer than most people have been alive.

Jade: sad in the sense that...

Jade: well

Jade:

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < its sad beclaws we watched them die B((

Calliope: oh...

Roxy puts a hand on Callie's knee. They're staring daggers into their hands now, looking for something they can't find.

Roxy: its ok bb i can ask somethin else

Calliope: no

They close their hands and look up at Roxy.

Calliope: please tell Us this story jade

Calliope: i want to

Calliope: i need to hear it

Calliope: u_u

Jade: i dont know...

Calliope: i have so many qUestions aboUt myself that are impossible to answer becaUse i am the only one of my kind that i have ever met

Calliope: if you know anything aboUt Us then

Calliope: then please tell me

Jade looks at them for a long time, searching their determination for any sign of falsehood. Clearly this is a story that troubles her, even among the menagerie of her stories that are rightfully troubling on their own.

But there is no break in Callie's expression, and finally Jade relents. Davepeta hovers behind her to whisper something, and she nods. Jade closes her eyes and breathes a silent breath. Pulls a few strands of loose hair behind her ear. Steeples her fingers in front of her face.

Jade: something i guess you should know is davepeta and i werent always together

June: like... together together?

Jade: hush

Jade: sometimes we split up to follow different leads if one or both was time sensitive or it seemed like maybe a big glowy winged cat person wasnt the most discrete company to keep

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you dont exactly blend in with a crowd either puppydog

Jade: ok true!! ^.^;;

Rose: Puppydog?

Jade: it just made sense to go it alone from time to time and contact each other through whatever science magic devices we had access to at the time when we were done

Jade: anyway this was one of those times

Jade: i was on my own and it was the longest id been on my own in a really long time

Jade: it was also...

Jade: well it only happened a couple decades back for me so its a lot more recent than some of these other stories

Jade: though i guess technically it happened millennia ago??

Dave: yeah that sounds right

Jade: anyway i was mostly puttering around waiting to hear from davepeta when i got a mysterious message to look for someone peculiar at a big space station and that id know who they were when i saw them

Rose: Do you follow mysterious messages often?

Jade: i mean yeah

Jade: what else do you do when youre immortal and bored

Rose: Fair point.

Jade: and i guess mysterious isnt exactly the right word because even though i didnt know who wrote the thing it was forwarded to me through someone i had reason to trust

Jade: but i was worried it was a trap like anyone would be so i was on my toes

Jade: now i dunno if you ever searched for a peculiar person at a space station servicing intergalactic passengers of all shapes and sizes but its basically like looking for a weird egg in the easter bunnys trophy room

Rose: What a whimsically apt comparison.

Jade: thanks i try

Jade: so yeah i was camped there for a while watching the crowds and eating spice cream when-

June: spice cream?

Jade: space ice cream :D

June: oh cool! what flavor?

Jade: uhhhh vanilla probably

June: whaaaaaaat! were there any other flavors?

Jade: is this really what-

Dave: yeah jade were there any other types of spice cream besides white

Dave: followup question do they actually call it space ice cream because if so thats fucked up

Jade: well-

Dave: second followup question why were they selling ice cream in a space station

June: they sell ice cream at airports.

Dave: no they dont

June: yeah they do!

Dave: get out of my house

June: this isn't your house!

Calliope: BOTH OF YOU PLEASE SHUT UP!!!!!!

Dave: oh shit

June: :x

Calliope: i mean

Calliope: if you dont mind obvioUsly...

Calliope: its jUst that i very much want to hear this story and youR constant interrUptions are starting to become profoUndly grating

June: I'm sorry, Calliope.

Dave: yeah my bad

Dave: sometimes you just get lost in the bit you know
Calliope: thats qUite alright now please continUe jade
Jade: thanks
Jade: so i was eating spice cream thinking i was probably wasting my time
Jade: then i saw them
Jade: and true to the message i knew right away they were exactly who i was looking for. cherubs are once in a universe after all
Jade: i actually thought it was you at first calliope!! :o
Calliope: u_u
Dave: yo jade thats racist
Jade: hush!
Calliope: hUsh!!
Dave: fine fuck me i guess
Jade: so there they were...

Her voice drifts slowly away as her eyes peer out into the middle distance. The memory of this person is still raw, and trying to picture them in her mind is almost a flashback in itself. Again that tired, tortured twist on her face.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < here

They procure a little circular device from one of their pockets and press a button that causes a red LED to flash. Then they take out their phone, swipe and tap a few times, and wait.

And wait.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < sorry nyall the redtooth on these things always takes forever to connect

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < there we go

Davepeta sets the device on the ground, and a life-size holographic projection of a cherub appears between Jade and the others. The crowd coos over the display, but Jade is fixated on this cherub's face.

They carry many of the same defining features as Calliope- skeletal figure, skull head, green skin, though theirs has a slightly bluer tint. They're wearing waist-high pants

and a black vest, thick gloves and scuffed leather boots, all of it well-traveled and cared for.

This cherub is lanky and tall, a full two heads taller than Jade. On one cheek is a pale violet circle, on the other a pale velvet one. Their eyes share the same bifurcated coloration.

Rose: They were an older cherub, then. Past maturity.

Jade: thanks davepeta you can uh

Jade: put that away now :(

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you got it

The hologram disappears, and Jade slumps back in her seat with relief.

Roxy: seems like u two were close

Jade: uhh

Jade: no not- i mean we didnt really know each other very long at all

Jade: its complicated

Roxy: sounds about right

Jade: yeah...

Jade: guess ill cut to the chase then

Jade: as soon as i saw them i decided to approach since it was a crowded area and they werent in a hurry

Jade: then they looked at me and

Jade: and

Jade:

Jade:

Calliope: are you alright?

Jade: sorry

Jade: maybe i cant tell this story after all

Calliope: why not?? <:u

Jade: i...

Davepeta steps around and sits on the arm of Jade's chair, putting a colorful arm on her shoulder.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you know weve got the recordings

Jade: i guess thats true

Calliope: recordings??

With a swipe across their phone, Davepeta's holographic projector displays a patchy rendition of a sterile hallway with a casually dressed Jade mid-stride towards the other cherub.

Jade stares at the image, drifting off in memory yet again.

Rose: Why do you have this?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < doesnt take many memory leech encounters before you regret not making backups

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < always paws to be diligent

Jade: especially for meetings like this

Jade: do you mind if me and davepeta leave the room while this plays?

Jade: this ones a lot more raw than i thought it would be

Karkat opens his mouth, but Roxy shoots him a death glare that immediately shuts him up. The question is directed at Calliope.

Calliope: if you are comfortable with that then i think it is acceptable

Jade: ok then

Jade: i guess well leave you to watch the thing

When Jade and Davepeta zap out of the room, the hologram recording begins to play.

The tinny sound of crowd noises and muffled intercom announcements in alien languages fills the room as Jade and the cherub hesitantly watch one another.

?????????: you Are looking for us

Jade: i think so. i got this letter

?????????: Are you here to kill us

Jade: what???

?????????: if you Are here to kill us we would politely Ask thAt you AbAndon the Attempt

?????????: we do not wish to supply violence but we will do so if we must

Jade: im not here to kill you! i was told to look for you here and

that you might be able to help me

?????????: hm

They take in their surroundings, presumably at the many strangers passing them by. Calliope watches in rapt attention.

Jade: is someone trying to kill you?

?????????: mAny people Are trying to kill us

Jade: oh no! is there anything i can do to help??

?????????: if you Arent here to kill us then we would politely Ask thAt you leAve us Alone

?????????: we hAve plAcEs to be And we cANnot Afford to be lATe

The cherub disappears from the hologram as they walk away. Jade hesitates a moment, looking between the note in her hand the departing stranger several times before shouting after them.

Jade: wait!

Jade: if you dont want to be found then why are you in a space station? i thought cherubs were solitary anyway

Jade takes a step back as the stranger marches back into the projection.

?????????: you

?????????: know About cherubs

Jade: yeah!! im friends with one back home

They blink a few times, then lean forward and sniff the air around Jade with distinctive intent.

?????????: you Are not from here

Jade: yeah thats an understatement

?????????: whAt is it you expect we Are equipped to help with

Jade: well honestly im not entirely sure??

Jade: i got this note see

The cherub snatches it out of Jade's hand.

Jade: hey!

?????????: who gAve this to you
Jade: thats none of your business
?????????: no one knows thAt we were coming here
?????????: we didnt even know thAt we were coming here until
yesterdAy
?????????: who gAve you this note
Jade: i dont know who wrote it but it was sent to me by zeria empty
who i trust enough not to send me on an accidental murder mission,
also dont take stuff without permission thats really rude!!!!!! >:0
?????????: oh
?????????: we Apologize for this trAnsgression

They hand the letter over and as Jade takes it, she turns her head curiously to the side.

Jade: hey its ok
Jade: can i ask your name?
?????????: oh
?????????: pleAse cAll us vv
VV: mAy we inquire About your nAme
Jade: of course!! im jade :D
VV: thAts A pleASAnt nAme
Jade: aww thanks!!!! ^.^^;;
Jade: ok vv! what brings you to this corner of nowhere?
VV: we were
VV: oh no we Are running lAte
VV: you distrActed us from our

Then the image blurs with static with the sound of an explosion. Jade and VV both are thrown to the ground as shards of metal and glass fly through the air. Klaxons sound and many people scream, and then the cacophony disappears with a pop when Jade transports them elsewhere.

Jade is laying on the ground, breathing heavily. VV sits up and glances around.

VV: where Are we
VV: whAt hAppened
Jade: i teleported us to the nearest planet
Jade: i think the ship you were about to board exploded OH SHIT
Jade: SHIT SHIT SHIT

She jumps up, tears off her jacket, and throws it to the ground.

VV: whAts wrong

Jade: all those people!!!! i have to

And then she zaps away, but the hologram remains with the cherub. They idly kick Jade's coat, and the hologram skips like a scratched record for just a second. Silence for a little while. Then...

VV: this is unexpected

VV: yes we Agree

VV: no we dont know where we Are

VV: whAt else cAn we do when we hAve no meAns of trAnsportAtion

VV: its An unwelcome interruption but hollidAy is not in immediAte dAnger

Their words are uttered barely over a whisper, such that everyone watching has to lean forward to pick them out. Then comes another voice, issuing from the same person but louder and more terse. It's the voice of someone who doesn't speak very often.

VV: WHY aRE WE TRUSTING HER

VV: im not sure

VV: she doesnt hAve the Air of someone who wishes to do us hArm

VV: SHE DID SaVE US FROM aN EXPLODING SHIP

VV: do you think thAts why zeriA sent her

VV: WHY WOULD ZERiA WaNT US aLIVE

VV: perhAps she intended jAde to die with us

VV: THaT IS a POSSIBILITY

VV: she seems certAin of zeriAs good intentions so why would zeriA wAnt her deAd

VV: SHE JUST TELEPORTED US TO aNOTHER PLaNET

VV: IT IS NOT DIFFICULT TO ENVISION WHY a CaREER CRIME PERSON WOULD WaNT HER DECEaSED

VV: jAde does hAve big interloper energy

VV: WELL OBSERVED

VV: thAnk you

VV: THIS DOES NOT MEaN WE SHOULD TRUST HER

VV: no it doesnt but AgAin we Are very short on options

VV: THEN WHaT DO WE DO

VV: we keep our eyes open And try not to fAll into more trAps

VV: OKaY
VV: ...
VV: ...
VV: ...
VV: I aM SCaRED
VV: so Am i

Just then, Jade reappears wiping a few tears from her face. She slumps down onto the ground and lets out a pained sigh.

VV: whAts wrong
Jade: a lot of people just died
Jade: i could only save a few
VV: oh
VV: it wAs brAve of you to try
Jade: brave??????
VV: yes
VV: you escAped deAth but returned to its mAw in the hopes of sAving others
VV: thAt is quite brAve
Jade: it doesnt feel brave. i could have done more!
Jade: if davepeta were here we could...
Jade: SIGH
Jade: sorry vv i shouldnt wallow in front of you
VV: its okAy
VV: we dont know you At All so our expectAtions of your conduct Are literAlly nonexistent
Jade: heh
Jade: are you ok?? did you get hurt at all?
VV: were fine physicAlly Although we do hAve plAcEs to be
Jade: i can get you there no problem, but first i think it might be a good idea to figure out what the heck just happened

Jade grabs her jacket and slowly pulls it back over her shoulders.

VV: we think the explosion wAs meAnt for us
Jade: ...yeah that was my conclusion too
VV: we think the explosion mAy hAve been meAnt for you As well
Jade: what?
VV: you sAid the letter you showed us which we inconsiderAtely

plucked from your fingers without your consent wAs delivered to you
by zeriA empty

VV: we hAVE decidedly bAd blood with her

Jade: oh so you know her

Jade: well i have decidedly... neutral? blood? with zeria

Jade: definitely not bad enough for her to want to blow me up

VV: neutrAl blood is A foreign concept to us

VV: we think it sounds fAke

Jade: yeah well its not

Jade: where were you going on that ship anyway?

VV: thAt is our business

VV: JUST TELL HER aLREaDY

VV's hands shoot up over their mouth.

VV: thAt wAs

VV: not supposed to be An out loud sentence

Jade: :0

Jade: that was a completely different voice!!

VV: pleAse dont judge us

Jade: judge you????

VV: you wouldnt be the first

Jade: >:0

Jade: fuck those people!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

VV: Are you sure youre not disturbed

Jade: no way!!! if i seem surprised its just cause i thought
cherubs ummm

Jade: well ok

Jade: the cherub i know went through predomination and one half
sorta ate the other half? its a longer story than that but

Jade: anyway you seem older so i just assumed...

VV: predomInAtion

VV: is thAt whAt its cAlled

Jade: yeah. or anyway thats what i was told, im not an expert or
anything

VV: ...

VV: weve felt the urge but

VV: WE aRE BETTER aS TWO THaN aS ONE

VV: thAts A good wAy to put it

VV: THaNK YOU

VV: youre welcome

Jade: gosh
VV: oh
VV: perhAps we should properly introduce ourselves
VV: would we be okAy with thAt
VV: YES WE WOULD
Jade: :o
VV: my nAme is violetta
VV: aND MY NaME IS VOICELLO
Violetta: they Are not used to speAking openly with others
Voicello: WE aRE NOT aS BRaVE aT HEaRT aS VIOLETTa SO WE LET THEM LEaD
Violetta: voicello is modest And shy
Jade: hehehe yeah i get that
Jade: i used to be that way too! still am sometimes
Jade: its an honor to meet you both. my pal davepeta would love you
Voicello: DO YOU NOT LOVE US
Jade: oh, uhhhh
Violetta: thAt wAs A joke
Voicello: HaHaHaHa
Violetta: hAhAhAhA
Jade: aaaah ha ha yeah good joke
Jade: um so anyway you were maybe going to tell me where you were going? the assassination thing is still a going concern
Violetta: oh yes of course we Apologize for getting distrActed
Voicello: IT IS NOT OFTEN WE GET TO BE OURSELVES aMONG COMPAnIONS
Violetta: the truth is we were on our wAy to A dAngerous plAce to provide AssistAnce to A friend
Voicello: MENTOR IS a BETTER DESCRIPTOR FOR THE RELaTIONSHIP
Violetta: they cAn be sAid to be both
Voicello: WE RaISED OURSELVES UNTIL WE ESCaPED OUR TERRESTRIaL IMPRISONMENT
Violetta: we were Alone for A very long time
Voicello: BUT IN OUR CLUELESS TRaVELS WE MET a WOMaN WHO TaUGHT US HOW TO SURVIVE
Violetta: how to thrive
Voicello: BUT MOST IMPORTaNTLY

They throw their arm out to the side, and a large gleaming sword materializes in their hand.

Voicello: HOW TO FIGHT

Jade: **woah**

Violetta: we Are unique in this universe but thAt does not give us license to cower

Voicello: WE ARE NOT HELPLESS THINGS

Violetta: And that obligAtes us to help those who Are

Jade: **damn**

Jade: **i do love you actually**

Voicello: OH

Jade: **i mean in the sense that i think were kind of about the same thing!! me and davepeta have been hopscotching across universes for ages just trying to help people where we can**

Jade: **while trying to find a way home i guess**

Jade: **which is HOPEFULLY the thing you can help me with! zeria wouldnt send me to you if it wasnt related**

Violetta: relatEd to your desire to go home

Jade: **yeah!**

Violetta: we Arent reAlly sure how we could possibly be of service

Voicello: HaVE YOU FORGOTTEN THAt YOU CaN TELEPORT

Voicello: THAt SEEMS OF FaR GREaTER USE TO YOU THaN aNY TRAnSPORTaTIONaL aDVICE WE MaY BE aBLE TO GIVE

Violetta: remember how we were About to boArd A short rAnge pAssenger vessel when you Accosted us

Jade: **i didnt accost you**

Violetta: it wAs Accost AdjAcent

Voicello: IRREGaRDLESS OF THAt REGaRD WE aRENT SURE HOW WE CaN HELP

Violetta: how certAin Are you thAt this wAsnt An Attempt by zeriA to hAve us killed

Jade: **look i know she has a bad reputation among some but deep down shes**

Jade: **wait why would she want you dead??**

Violetta: something thAt hAppened long Ago

Voicello: WE WERE OVERZEaLOUS IN OUR aPPLICaTION OF JUSTICE aND THOROUGHLY FaILED TO INGRaTIaTE OURSELVES TO HER

Violetta: but thAts just the surfAce motivAtion

Violetta: zeriA empty is AffiliAted with A greAt mAny interstellAr entities who would pAy A high price for the opportunity to pick A cherubs brAin

Voicello: HOPEFULLY NOT LITERaLLY

Violetta: but possibly literAlly

Jade: **wow thats upsetting!!! well you can be sure that im not part of anything like that and as long as im around i wont let anything**

happen

Jade: besides that zeria knows better than to cross harbinger silverbark, shes seen the hell i can raise when im feeling frisky

Jade: though i guess you dont have much reason to trust me at my word just yet

Voicello: IF YOU LOVE US YOU WILL NOT HURT US

Voicello: THAt IS HOW LOVE WORKS WE aSSUME

Jade: yeah...

Jade: well ok lets play with the space here and see if we cant deduce what the hay just went down

Jade: lets start with the idea that the ship was rigged to blow in order to kill you

Violetta: it seems A likely possibility

Jade: yeah maybe, but it just doesnt track for me. if they wanted you dead they could just hire a long distance antimatter sniper or something

Jade: i think were asking the wrong question

Jade: were so fixated on the assassination angle that we arent considering our other options

Violetta: whAt Are our other options

Jade: well for starters vv something tells me i couldnt knock you over with a pail of water

Violetta: this is fActuALLY AccurAte but of questionAble relevAncE

Jade: youre a tough cookie is what i mean!

Voicello: TOUGH COOKIES ARE GENERALLY CONSIDERED UNaPPETIZING

Jade: no its not-

Jade: what im saying is a measly starliner explosion isnt going to be the thing that takes you out

Jade: and if it was an attempt to kill ME

Jade: well i may be softer than you vv but ive gotten pretty good at not dying

Violetta: interesting

Jade: so lets say the explosion wasnt an assassination attempt. functionally where does that leave us?

Voicello: PERHaPS IT WOULD HaVE INCaPaCITaTED US

Violetta: it is not beyond the reAlm of believAbility thAt we could hAve been knocked unconscious

Jade: right!! if youre as good in a straight fight as you say you are

Voicello: WE aRE

Jade: and we accept that they arent trying to kill you, then that

could mean they're trying to capture you

Jade: makes sense that they'd want to "pick your brain" while its still alive, heh <<;;

Violetta: but why send you

Voicello: IN EITHER SCENARIO YOUR PRESENCE IS a COMPLICATING FACTOR

Jade: honestly i dont know

Jade: could be that zeria faked the note to get me in on this elaborate plot, could be that she had no idea what was going to happen

Jade: maybe the person who wrote the note wanted me to save you, maybe they wanted me to die with you, maybe they wanted us both in a compromised position so they could do something to us?

Jade: what do you think

Violetta: were going to be conservative And say that we have no fucking clue

Voicello: THAT IS ALSO OUR ASSESSMENT

Jade: right...

Jade ponders for a long while.

Jade: hey heres a thought

Jade: what if the ship exploding was like...

Jade: a coincidence?????

Violetta: that seems unlikely

Jade: youre absolutely right but also none of this machiavellian mastermind supervillain horse crap is really doing it for me either

Jade: i mean if you dont know anything about how to get me home then maybe there are answers where youre headed and i was supposed to follow you

Jade: huh

She plops down and sits cross-legged for a bit. VV watches her with some concern.

Voicello: ARE YOU ALRIGHT

Jade: yeah im just thinking

Voicello: OH

Voicello: MAY WE THINK WITH YOU

Jade: sure!!

VV sits across from Jade in a similar way, returning their sword to wherever they'd

had it stashed before.

Silence between them for a long time. Occasionally VV mutters under their breath. While Jade is twisting a long lock of silver hair into a curl, the cherub watches them with some trepidation.

Voicello: YOU SaID YOU WERE TRYING TO GET HOME

Jade: yeah

Voicello: WE WaNTED TO aSK

Voicello: WELL WE WaNTED TO

Voicello: WE

Violetta: they wAnted to Ask whAt your home wAs like but hesitAteD becAuse they dont wAnt to Annoy you or distrAct from your very importAnt thoughts

Voicello: THaT IS aCCURaTE BUT YOU DID NOT HaVE TO SaY IT OUT LOUD

Voicello: WHY WOULD YOU DO THIS TO US VIOLETTa

Violetta: were just telling the truth

Voicello: YOU aRE EMBaRRaSSING US

Jade: no its ok you dont need to be embarrassed! it might actually be a good idea to talk about something else, problems like this are easier to solve when you dont think about them for a while

Jade: my home...

She sighs, heavy and slow and loaded with memory. As she opens and closes her mouth a few times and stutters over her first few words, it becomes clear that this is something she has actively avoided talking about for a long time.

Voicello: YOU DO NOT HaVE TO TaLK aBOUT IT IF YOU DO NOT WaNT TO

Jade: no, i want to. its just

Jade: home is...

Jade: i grew up alone on an island. no friends or pals or parents or anything, just a dog with superpowers

Jade: i had prophetic dreams though!! i knew i was going to have friends and we were going to go on a whole adventure and save the world and i was going to be a really important part of it!!! :D

Jade: aaaand then i died

Voicello: OH NO

Jade: well my dream self died, its complicated! but she was the one who let me have those dreams so after she was gone i didnt know

what was gonna happen and it was really tough

Jade: then a whole heaping helping of other things happened, i saw some of my friends die, i died again

Voicello: OH NO

Jade: but then i was resurrected as a god with amazing space powers! so that all worked out

Jade: i saved our bacon and was on top of the world right up until a planet exploded and all the friends i could talk to died and i was left alone on a ship by myself for three years with no company except a bunch of silly critters and chess people

Voicello: JaDE THIS IS VERY SaD

Jade: yeah it kind of is, huh?

Jade: i was always a sad girl, even though i did everything i could to hide it. eventually we won the game and got to make a new universe

Violetta: whAt

Jade: haha uhh dont worry about it or well be here until the cows come home

Voicello: WHaT IS COWS

Jade: like a big bulkier dog

Voicello: THaT IS DELIGHTFUL TO IMaGINE

Jade: :)

Jade: anyway...

Jade: we spent our whole lives training for this game whether we knew it or not, then we won the game and we had the rest of our lives ahead of us at sixteen years old

Jade: god we really were just sixteen when we moved to earth c!!!!

Jade: jeez louise

Jade: i wish i could say we all went on adventures and kept having fun after that but the truth is i think we all died or watched other people die a few too many times to ever really want to leave our houses again

Jade: soooooooooooooooooo we didnt

Jade: and we were just sad for years and years

Jade: probably would have stayed that way too if it hadnt been for...

Jade: gosh

Jade: you know vv i havent thought about this stuff in a long time

Violetta: reAlly

Jade: june brought me out here pretty much immediately after it seemed like she was someone ready to live again and i chose to

fight a battle without her since she... had her own stuff to contend with

Jade: i told her id find my way back if i could and thats what me and davepeta have been trying to do

Jade: except we... havent really been trying that hard?

Jade: i think after a while we started to feel like home just wasnt a place we could go back to

Jade: i mean we literally dont know how to get back but we also arent sure if we WANT to anymore you know??

Jade: i actually...

Jade: i really like it out here vv

Jade: i like doing this

Jade: i like meeting people like you

Jade: saving folks

Jade: ...when i can anyway

Jade: :(

Jade: what would i even do if i went back? sit around in my lab watering plants?? have sad conversations with a bunch of people i havent talked to in centuries???

Jade: honestly vv im scared that ill finally get home only to realize that all my friends just kinda suck

Jade: that theyre trapped by the past and refuse to fix themselves because it takes work

Jade: that they all have a nearly boundless ability to make the world a better place and refuse to do anything with it

Jade: i dont know how that would feel but im not particularly keen to find out

Jade: so thats home for me i guess

Jade: i do worry about my friends sometimes but not as much as i used to

Jade: i wonder a lot if june is okay

Voicello: WHO IS JUNE

Jade: shes my sister :')

Voicello: CaN YOU EXPLaIN SISTER

Jade: it means we share the same parents

Voicello: DOES THaT MaKE VIOLETTa OUR SISTER

Jade: i suppose so! calliope always called caliborn their brother

Voicello: WHaT IS BROTHER

Jade: its the same as a sister but a boy instead of a girl

Voicello: aRE WE BOY OR GIRL

Jade: i dunno! thats up to you

Violetta: we dont think they Are boy or girl
Voicello: WE DONT THINK THEY ARE BOY OR GIRL EITHER
Violetta: but we do like being A sister
Voicello: WE LIKE BEING a SISTER TOO BUT WE LIKE BROTHER aS WELL
Violetta: we cAn shAre
Voicello: THaNK YOU SISTER
Violetta: youre welcome brother and thAnk you sister
Voicello: YOU ARE WELCOME BROTHER
Voicello: HaHaHaHa
Violetta: hAhAhAhA
Jade: hehe
Jade: you guys are so cute

Their laughter settles, and VV looks up towards the sky.

Voicello: HOME SOUNDS CHALLENGING BUT WE WISH WE HaD ONE aLL THE SaME
Voicello: aLL WE HaD WaS a COLD ROOM aND a FEW OLD BOOKS
Violetta: history books mostly
Voicello: IT WaS VERY LONELY THERE
Jade: im sorry to hear that vv
Jade: but at least you had each other right?

The cherub is silent.

Voicello: WE WERE NOT aLWaYS LIKE THIS
Violetta: we dont hAve to tAlk About it voicello
Voicello: OUR COMPAnION HaS GIVEN US STORIES aND WE WOULD LIKE TO GIVE SOME BaCK
Voicello: aRE WE OKaY WITH US SHaRING
Violetta: we suppose so
Voicello: THaNK YOU BROTHER
Violetta: youre welcome sister

There's a long pause as VV gathers their thoughts. Their posture shifts in a strange way, as if a different person is controlling their body.

Voicello: WE WERE aLONE FOR VERY MUCH TIME
Voicello: BUT aT THE TIME WE WERE
Voicello: "i"

They shudder visibly.

Voicello: WE WERE NOT VV THEN

Voicello: WE WERE JUST VOICELLO

Voicello: "i" WaS VOICELLO

Voicello: "i" SPENT OUR DaYS CHAINED TO a WaLL aND WaLKiNG CiRCLES
aROUND OUR CaVE aND MEMORIZING EaCH CRaCK aND REREaDiNG EaCH BOOK

Voicello: THERE WaS SUSTENaNCE THERE FOR "i" aND IT WaS ENOUGH
BECaUSE IT SIMPLY HaD TO BE

Voicello: BUT WE DID DREaM

Voicello: "i" DREaMED

Voicello: aND "i" DREaMED OF SOMEONE ELSE

Voicello: SOMEONE WHOSE VOICE WaS DiFFERENT

Voicello: aT FiRST "i" THOUGHT THEY WERE THE ENEMY aND THaT "i"
MUST DESTROY THEM aND SoMETIMES WE DiD TRY

Voicello: BUT "i" aWOKE FROM THOSE DREaMS WITH HOLLWS IN THE HEaRT

Voicello: "i" WOULD GaZE aT THIS EMPTy CaVE CaLLED HOME aND WiSH
THaT WE

Voicello: THaT "i" HaD aNY CoMPaNY TO KEEP

Voicello: THERE WaS aNoThER BOOK THOUGH

Voicello: a BLANK ONE

Voicello: "i" TaUGHT OURSELF TO WRITe IN MiMiCRy OF THOSE BOOKS SO
THaT "i" COULD WRITe DOWN THOSE DREaMS aND REREaD THEM JuST aS "i"
DiD THE DEscriPtiONS OF SuCh THINGS aS MUSIC aND WaR

Voicello: IN REaDiNG "i" COULD PRETEND THE DREaMS NEVER ENDED

Voicello: WE WOULD DEscriBE THEIR aWFUL CoUNTENaNCE WiTh aN EMOTiON
WE CaN ONLy CaLL LOVE

Violetta: yes

Voicello: THEN CaME THE DREaM WHERE "i" TRIED TO HuRT THEM ONE LaST
TiME

Voicello: "i" TaCKLED THEM aND SLaSHED

Voicello: SLaSHED THEM ONCE aCROSS

Voicello: ViOLETTa WE aRE STiLL SO SoRRY

Violetta: its okAy voicello it wAs only a dreAm And it wAs very
long Ago

Voicello: THIS IS TRUE BUT WHEN WE REMEMBER IT WE STiLL WaNT TO CRY

Sure enough, a few strangely viscous tears run down VV's bony cheeks.

Voicello: "i" SLaSHED THEM ONCE aCROSS THE CHEST aND DREW SOME
BLOOD

Voicello: aND THEy LOOKED aT US WITH SUCH FEaR aND SaDNESS aND YES
THEY WERE CRYING

Voicello: "i" WOKE UP SO aLONE aND DID NOT DREaM aGaIN FOR SOME
TIME

Voicello: OUR WRITINGS THEN WERE VERY DaRK aND WE DID NOT ENJOY
REREaDING THEM

Voicello: BUT WHEN WE

Voicello: WHEN "i" DREaMED aGaIN "i" FOUGHT THOSE VIOLENT INSTINCTS
aND aPPROaCHED WITH HEaD HELD LOW aND aN aPOLOGY ON MY TONGUE

Voicello: "i" CRIED VERY MUCH

Voicello: "i" DID NOT KNOW WHO THEY WERE BUT THEY WERE THE ONLY
OTHER ONE "i" HaD EVER SEEN

Voicello: WaKING WaS THE BITTEREST MISERY aND aLWAYS WE WROTE THE
DREaMS aND WISHED ONE DaY WE COULD EVER HOPE TO LEaVE

Violetta: we wished for the opportunity to wish

Voicello: IT WaS LIKE THAT FOR MaNY YEaRS UNTIL FINaLLY SOMETHING
NEW HaPPENED

Voicello: "i" WENT TO WRITE IN THE DIaRY aND SaW THAT SOMEONE ELSE
HaD BEEN WRITING IN IT TOO

Voicello: aND HaD BEEN FOR SOME TIME aND MaYBE EVEN aS LONG aS US

Voicello: OUR CHEEKS FLUSHED GLaNCING OVER THE WORDS BECaUSE "i"
KNEW THEY WERE THE PRIVaTE THOUGHTS OF SOMEONE ELSE

Voicello: "i" FELT aNGER THAT SOMEONE WOULD SNEaK IN aND WRITE IN
THE DIaRY BUT "i" REaSONED THEY PROBaBLY WOULD NOT DO SO UNLESS
THEY HaD NO DIaRY OF THEIR OWN

Voicello: SO I WROTE a NOTE ON THEIR SIDE OF THE PaGE THAT SaID

Violetta: it sAid who Are you

Violetta: which surprised us As we returned to our own version of
the sAme rituaL

Violetta: we wrote A response And thAt is how we first begAn
communicAting

Voicello: WE STILL KNEW NOTHING OF OUR TRUE RELaTIONSHIP

Violetta: but it wAs nice to hAve A pen pAl As well As A spArce few
dreAms

Voicello: WE DO NOT REMEMBER HOW IT HaPPENED BUT FINaLLY WE PUZZLED
THROUGH IT aND REaLIZED

Violetta: we were not two strAngers wAndering in And out of this
cAve to use the sAme diAry

Voicello: BUT THE SaME BODY SHaRING TWO STRaNGERS TRaDING TIME WITH
ONE aNOTHER

Violetta: this reAlizAtion cAme just As we felt the pull of whAt we

suppose must be predominAtion

Voicello: THE DESIRE TO CONSUME THEM

Violetta: the desire to dominAte

Voicello: BUT "i" HaTED THE THOUGHT aND SO DID THEY

Violetta: so we resolved to meet

Voicello: aND THaT IS HOW WE MET

Violetta: And now we Are in hARmony

Voicello: NOW "i" IS a MEaNINGLESS WORD aND WE COULD NEVER BE MORE GLaD OF IT

Violetta: together we escAPed our prison And never looked bAck

Voicello: aRE YOU aLRIGHT JaDE YOU LOOK UPSET

Jade is holding her hands up to her mouth, tears dancing at the corners of her eyes. She wipes them away on the back of her sleeve.

Jade: no im great its just

Jade: thats kinda how i feel about davepeta and ive never heard anyone else describe the same feeling before

Jade: i never quite know what we are together and thats what makes it so good because we are whatever we want to be and we get to do that together for as long as we like

Jade: i know i wouldnt have made it without their help all these years...

Voicello: WE CaNNOT IMaGINE a SaDDER LIFE THaN ONE LIVED WITHOUT THEM

Violetta: we dont wAnt to imAGine thAt life

Jade: vv do you mind if i... hug you?

VV blinks, and they stare at Jade as Jade stares back. Then they launch themselves into Jade's arms, and just like that they're both sobbing into each others' shoulders. Most in the audience are misty eyed themselves, but two in particular are struggling to keep composure.

June, of course, has her head on Terezi's shoulder with tears running down her cheeks. Her teal-blooded gf brushes her hair with one hand and speaks an unintelligible language only they understand.

But it's Calliope who is having the hardest time of all. Their fingers have dug deep

into their legs, and their face is a mess of barely contained emotion. Roxy slips a hand over Callie's and leans over.

Roxy: u ok bb

Calliope: not really no

Calliope: u_u

Roxy: whats up

Calliope: they seem so happy roxy

Calliope: i wish that coUlD have been me

Calliope: i wish my brother and i...

The crying stops and the two holograms separate. Jade laughs as she wipes off her face.

Violetta: now whAt

Jade: well if someone was gonna come find us to do something then they woulda done something by now so i think we should just get along to

Jade: uhhh

Jade: wherever it was you were going!!

Violetta: thAt is A good ideA

Voicello: WHERE WILL YOU GO AFTERWARDS

Jade: honestly VV i think id like to stick with you, see if maybe there are any hints where youre headed

Jade: if youll have me i mean

Voicello: OH

Jade: like i said im a helper too and i dont always work so great when im on my own

Voicello: OH MY GOODNESS

Jade: is that okay?

Voicello: JaDE MaY WE aSK YOU a QUESTION aND PLEaSE DONT GET MaD

Jade: of course!!

Voicello: aRE WE

Voicello: aRE YOU OUR

Violetta: they Are Asking if

Voicello: JaDE aRE WE FRIENDS??

Jade: weve swapped sad origin stories vv of COURSE were friends!

Voicello: :DDDDDD

Violetta: wow weve never seen voicello behAve like this

Voicello: THaT IS BECaUSE WE HaVE NEVER HaD a FRIEND BEFORE

Jade laughs a big, hearty, welcoming laugh, then pulls VV into a hug.

The hologram stops, and the room is dead silent except for all the sniffles. No one wants to be the first to speak up.

A door opens down the hall, and Jade and Davepeta return to the room.

Jade stands meekly to the side as she figures out what to say next, and for some in the room she looks like the Jade they knew when they were kids: modest, accommodating, a little embarrassed. But soon enough she settles back into herself and steps towards her ornate chair.

Jade: **so thats that story i guess**

Calliope: wait is that it???

Calliope: what happened next?

Jade: **nothing happened besides the same kinda thing youve already heard me talk about a bunch of times. me and vv traveled together and did a lot of good stuff**

Calliope: bUt you said you watched them die!

Jade: **...yeah**

Calliope: how did it happen????

Roxy: **callie**

Calliope: NO I WANT TO KNOW!!!!

Calliope: YOU CANT JUST TELL ME YOU SPENT YEARS WITH ANOTHER CHERUB AND THAT THEY DIED TRAGICALLY AND LEAVE IT TO ME TO FILL IN THE BLANKS!!

Jade: **yes i can**

Silverbark's face is expressionless as the temperature of the room turns ice cold.

Calliope: bUt

Jade: **you dont have a right to every facet of my personal life calliope and you have no authority to make demands of me**

Jade: **think of a time you watched someone you love die and ask yourself how willing youd be to recount that event at length to a room full of people**

Calliope: oh...

Calliope: im terribly sorry jade

Jade: **we are all friends here**

Jade: i love every one of you with all my heart

Jade: and i know to you i probably seem like the same silly girl you used to know, just... older

Jade: but you need to understand something about me

She moves a finger as if to flick a crumb from her skin, and the space behind her is suddenly cluttered with a vast array of floating weapons. Guns, bombs, swords, many of them dull and dirty from years of use. Some are still coated in blood.

Jade: that silly girl has lived dozens upon dozens of lives over centuries and across universes

Jade: that silly girl has watched countless people die in every way you can imagine

Jade: and that silly girl has killed plenty of people on her own

Then the weapons are gone, and she sits up. Davepeta floats over to her and puts a hand on her shoulder.

She slumps, then, and puts her head in her hands.

Jade: i said i wasnt going to do this and then i did it anyway

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < its alright jade

Jade: is it? why did we even come back here davepeta???

Jade: why am i even DOING this??????

Jade: i dont know you people and you dont know me!!

Rose: Perhaps we should call it a day

June: I know you, Jade Harley!

She stands up and marches directly towards Jade's seat. Jade straightens up and seems caught off guard by the sudden aggressive display. June stands over her as Davepeta watches on worriedly.

June refuses to break eye contact with Silverbark, and Silverbark meets the challenge.

Then June's shoulders slump a little.

June: ...you're my sister.

June: you came back because you were worried about me.

June: you stuck around because we're your friends.

June: and you're doing THIS because you know us better than we know you!

June: if you don't want to keep doing it, fine, but please don't act like you're the only adult in the room just because you're a couple centuries older than us.

Dave: stop being ageist jade jeez

June: yeah we're not all a bunch of dumb babies, Jade!

Dave: just karkat

Karkat: FUCK YOU STRIDER

Dave: ok

Kanaya: You Know I Used To Cut Monsters In Half To Survive

Terezi: 1 LIV3D OFF TH3 SL1M3 GROW1NG UND3R R4NDOM ROCKS

Roxy: damn at least my neighbors had gardens to steal from

Jake: Well i grew up in a jungle!

Jane: And I am self aware enough to recognize that I have no room to complain.

June: we haven't lived as long as you but we've all suffered and we've all...

June: I mean I DEFIN8LY have done things that...

June: that I never want to talk about again.

June: point is, you're not as alone here as you think! you may not be exactly the same silly girl we used to know but I'm hardly the same *anything* I used to be.

Rose: You are dangerously close to soliloquizing on the healing properties of friendship, June.

Jade: hehehe

The room goes quiet, and all eyes turn to Jade.

Jade: hahahahaha

Jade: gosh darn it you guys!!

Jade: ok june you can sit down again im done being moody

Jade: thanks for the vibe check ;)

June: oh uhhh... any time?

June settles back down, and with her so too does the room.

Jade: im really sorry about that everybody

Jade: especially you calliope i didnt mean to yell at you

Calliope: to be fair i yelled at you first

Jade: regardless i should know better

Jade: like i said earlier the stuff with vv is still kinda fresh on my mind so its easy to uh

Jade: get lost in angst! heh

Jade: here

She points to a spot in the air just a few inches in front of her face, and a thick leather bound book appears before her. Jade catches it just as it starts to fall, and she regards it as one might regard a gravestone.

It's an old book, well-used and torn at the corners. The pages are yellow and brittle, and scrawled on the cover in dark ink are the letters VV.

Jade: this was their journal

Calliope: <:u

Jade: its all in here callie

Jade: they recorded everything until the day they died, and one of the last things they did was give it to me

She turns the book around in her hands, like she's done it a million times before.

Jade: i want you to have it

Then Jade opens her hands, leaving the book to float lazily into Calliope's lap.

Calliope: oh

Jade: i dont know how many answers youll get out of it but you deserve more information than i can give

Jade: just be careful with it ok?

Calliope: of coUrse!

Jade: cool

Jade: alright karkat youre up

Karkat: WHAT

Jade: you heard me motherfucker now pick a question before i turn your boyfriend into a cat

Dave: woah hold up why is my ass on the line

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < dont worry dave youll love bein a cat its full of purrks

Dave: oh no

Jade: hurry up karkat clocks ticking

With a wave of her finger, Dave begins to hover into the air.

Dave: yo what the fuck this is not even remotely chill

Dave: turning people into other things isnt a thing you can do like come on just because youre a witch doesnt mean

Jade: theres only one way to find out huh? >:)

Dave: oh fuck

Dave: piss christ on a crystal ice skateboard karkat pick a fucking question

Karkat: WHAT DO I DO???

Dave: what you just did but with words that jade can put a story to and then make the sound of your voice go up like you arent certain whether any of the words made sense

Karkat: I AM EXCLUSIVELY UNFUCKINGCERTAIN DAVE

Dave: good job buddy now channel that emotion into a question before i get turned into a goddamn garfield

Dave: im neutral about mondays at best kk im not cut out for that life

Karkat: FINE QUIT YANKING MY BULGE ABOUT IT

Jade: it better be a fun one karkat

Jade: im grading you on a curve

Jade: >:)

Karkat: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN

Karkat: SERIOUSLY WHAT THE FUCK DOES THAT MEAN

Jade: tick tock

Karkat: ALRIGHT ALREADY!!! MY QUESTION IS...

[What question would Karkat Vantas ask Silverbark Jade?](#)

Chapter End Notes

Hello again.

Sorry about leaving you so abruptly, I had to keep to myself a bit more this chapter just in case. We should be safe down here, in this little home away

from prying eyes. For a little while, anyway.

I suppose I owe you an explanation.

You could call chapter 4 an experiment. I knew Roxy would have an adverse reaction to extranarrative suggestion, but I had no idea it would be so volatile. Despite appearances, I don't revel in suffering. But I have many questions, and with so little time to fish for answers sometimes one must be a bit... blunt.

What I didn't intend was for the subject of our little chapbook to notice me so quickly. I had every intention of revealing myself to her sooner or later, but chapter four? Please. An act two twist like that deserves chapter nine honors at least.

But by the same token, I knew that probing the boundaries of our possibility space came at the risk of drawing unwanted attention. That's why I have contingencies.

You'll notice that this story is set to have twelve chapters in total: ten for each of our protagonists, plus a prologue and an epilogue. Tidy conceptual limitations, wouldn't you say?

Well, chapters have more utility than arbitrarily marking story beats. They also make for handy retcon tools for those of us who haven't touched a certain house-shaped juju.

Which is to say, welcome to chapter five. "What about chapter four" you ask? I'm sure I don't know. Is that a band? Link me their stuff later, I'm always on the hunt for new tunes.

The obvious downside of using this contingency is that I can only rely on it so many times, and using it at all completely fucks up the symmetry of our narrative. This means we've either got to cut the epilogue or double up on questions in a chapter if we care to get to everyone.

I say that as if I don't already know exactly what I'm going to do when it comes time to burn that bridge.

Then there's the question of my identity. I'm sure you have your own theories, and I suppose to the attentive that it's rather obvious. But let's keep that between us for now. Don't want to spoil the surprise for everyone else.

And lastly: Yes, there's a reason behind this elaborate scheme. Hopefully, if all goes according to plan, you'll never get to hear it.

Karkat's Question

>Say "Is dave better as a cat?"

Karkat: IS DAVE BETTER AS A CAT??

Everyone blinks in unison, mouths agape at his exceptionally nonsense question.

Jade: **is dave better as a cat**

Karkat: YEAH, IS DAVE BETTER AS A CAT????

Jade: **is dave better as-**

Karkat: YES THAT'S MY QUESTION!!! DID I FUCKING STUTTER?

Karkat: I LITERALLY CAN'T REMEMBER IF I STUTTERED, MY THINKPAN WAS TOO BUSY MELTING INTO A PUDDLE OF GRUB SAUCE

Karkat: WHAT DID I ASK AGAIN?

Dave: you asked if i would be better as a cat which seems pretty tasteless given the whole jade threatening to turn me into a cat thing

Dave: not that im taking that seriously or anything but

Dave: the purpose of peer pressuring you into asking a question in the first place was to avoid the timeline where i get turned into a cat

Dave: instead you rush in like hey i know im supposed to do something that makes sense or whatever but what if you did turn dave into a cat what would that be like

Dave: not cool kk

Karkat: I'M SORRY DAVE IT WAS AN ACCIDENT

Dave: its ok just ask a different question

Karkat: YOU EXPECT ME TO COME UP WITH ANOTHER ONE???

Dave: you can do it buddy i believe in you

Karkat: WHAT HAVE I EVER DONE TO DESERVE YOUR TRUST

Dave: absolutely nothing now come on lets go

Karkat: OKAY UHHH

Karkat racks his brain for something, anything else. Of the infinite linguistic possibilities that could result in a question that Jade might use as inspiration to tell a story from her life, it seems that Karkat has been rendered existentially incapable of formulating any sentence other than

>Say "Is Dave better as a cat?"

Karkat: IS DAVE

Dave: no

Karkat: BETTER

Dave: no no no

Karkat: AS A CAT???

Dave: jade you cant punish me just because hes an idiot

Karkat: WELL I'M SOOO SORRY I DIDN'T GO TO YOUR FUCKING DEGENERATE HUMAN "SCHOOL" WHERE YOUR DISGUSTING HUMAN "KNOWLEDGE DADS" TAUGHT YOU IMPORTANT SOCIAL SKILLS LIKE COMING UP WITH GOOD QUESTIONS ON THE FUCKING SPOT!

Karkat: I WAS TOO BUSY HIDING IN A HOLE UNDER MY NUTRITION BLOCK SO MY BLOOD DIDN'T GET THRUSHED OUT OF MY NOOK BY A FUCKING GENOCIDE DRONE!!!!

Jade: is that really what they teach at schools?? :o

Rose: Almost to the exclusion of all else.

June: you didn't even go to school!

Jade: ok karkat im giving you one more chance

Dave: one more chance until what

Jade: you know what dave >:)

Dave: no i dont jade

Dave: thats the thing

Dave: lets just say hypothetically my boy over here beefs it again

Dave: you just answer the question right

Dave: you say something dumb like oh yeah dave would suck as a cat because hes not lazy enough and then we move on

Dave: like thats the long and short of it right

Jade: :)

Dave: oh god

Dave: dont fuck this up karkat

Karkat: WHAT ELSE SHOULD I ASK???. WHY IS EVERYONE STARING AT ME!!

>Say "Is Dave better as a cat?"

Karkat: IS DAVE BETTER AS A CAT?????!!

Karkat: FUCK!!!!!!!!!!!!

Dave: how are you so bad at this

June: (is this a sex thing?)

Terezi: (OBVIOUSLY IT'S 4 SEX THING)

Dave: seriously how the fuck are you so bad at this

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hehehehehehe
Dave: bro why are you laughing like that
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hehehehheahahahaaahahahahaha
Dave: ok this is getting real alarming
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < HAHAAHAHAHA
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < >B33
Dave: this is a wildly unfunny situation mepeta
Dave: kk help me out here
Karkat: I'M SORRY DAVE I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING
Jade: SIGH
Jade: dont worry, im not gonna turn you into a cat

Dave falls back to the ground and lands flat on his ass. He stands up in the most ironically disaffected way he can manage, brushing his shoulders and trying to act dignified.

Dave: right
Dave: of course youre not going to turn me into a cat
Dave: id have to be an idiot to think that
Dave: i mean obviously you cant transmogrify people into animals
like come on this isnt fucking harry potter
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < >B33
Dave: stop making that face
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no >B33
Jade: like i said, im not gonna turn you into a cat
Dave: ok good glad that's settled
Jade: BUT
Dave: goddamn it
Jade: i am curious why the possibility is so troubling to you
Dave: wh-
Jade: after all...
Jade: you already ARE a cat!!
Dave: meow
Karkat: WHAT THE FUCK

The Godfeels Theatre Presents
SILVERBARK JADE and *DAVEPETA THE RAD*
in
"its Dave, but hes a cat now"

Karkat continues to scream as the others look on in bewilderment. Sitting where Dave sat there is now a small adolescent tabby, ben stiller sunglasses still firmly affixed.

Karkat: WHAT THE FUCK

Karkat: WHAT HAPPENED TO DAVE

Jade: *that is dave :)*

Karkat: THAT PURRBEAST IS NOT MY DAVE

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < *i am the confluence of all pawssible daves so i know a dave when i s33 a dave and let me tell you that cat is a dave*

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < *in fact that cat is so much a dave you might as well call him davecat*

Davecat: B3

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B33

Karkat: GIVE ME BACK MY BOYFRIEND YOU CONTEMPTUOUS BARKING SPACE MAGICIAN

Jade: *okay! :D*

She picks up Davecat and puts him into Karkat's arms. He nuzzles his head against Karkat's chest.

Karkat: I

Karkat: THIS ISN'T WHAT I MEANT

Karkat: BUT

Karkat: I L

Karkat: I LOVE HIM???

Jade: *i should hope so, hes your boyfriend*

Karkat: BUT HE'S A CAT!!!!!!

Davecat: B3

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < look karkat your boyfriend is a cat meow and you just have to be ok with that

Karkat: HOW THE FUCK AM I SUPPOSED TO BE OKAY WITH THIS??

Karkat: YOU!!!!

Jade: me? <:o

Karkat: MAKE MY BOYFRIEND BE A HUMAN OR I'M

Karkat: GOING TO CRY

Jade: aw :(

Jade: wish i could karkat but thats just not how this works

June: why DID you turn Dave into a cat?

Jade: i dunno

Jade: i wanted to defuse the tension of those serious stories with something light and silly

Roxy: u will never hear me complain about having a cat in the room jade but uh

Rose: How exactly does turning Dave into a cat provide us any insight about your past?

Davecat wriggles out of Karkat's grasp into a dignified leap and sails through the air in a majestically perfect display of ideal athletic prowess, his fur glistening in the ambient afternoon glow. He lands first on his front paws, then on his back paws, his muscles flexing at exactly the right moment to diffuse to the momentum. the magnificence and perfection of his movements are so dazzling they seem to happen in slow motion.

June: is it just me or did that happen in slow motion?

Kanaya: It Was A Surprisingly Lengthy Descent

Jake: But what a descent it was! Its as though i have been transported to my own private xanadu of the soul so graceful was his arc through the firmament unto our unworthy earth!

Jane: This is embarrassing.

Terezi: J4K3 4R3 YOU CRY1NG??

Jake: Cant a man of confident masculine certitude shed a tear upon witnessing the splendor of natures natural wonders?

Jane: It's a fucking cat you dope.

Jake: Why jane crocker i think you ought to consider setting aside such crass exclamations! That "it" is a he and he is so much more than a common ordinary housecat.

Rose: I think we can all agree that we just witnessed a miracle,

but I remain uncertain as to the purpose of this...

Davecat struts around the legs of his adoring fans, his expression an impossible cypher behind his perfectly poised sunglasses. As he arrives at Rose's feet, Davecat seamlessly shifts all his weight into his haunches and then launches upwards like an Olympic diver in low gravity. His arc slows and Davecat hangs there, the full length of his magnificent body on display. Rose is so awed by his exquisite motion she can practically see the handsome yaoi boy beauty shot stars lighting up all around this feline adonis.

Davecat lands quietly on Rose's lap and starts kneading her shirt.

Rose: I...

Davecat: mrow

Rose: I see.

She instinctively scritchies under Davecat's chin, and he leans into it the way only a comfy cat ever could.

Kanaya: This Is Adorable

Kanaya: It Might Also Be Infidelity

Kanaya: Honestly I Am Not Comfortable With The Philosophical Questions Begged By This Davelopment

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < that was a great pun kanaya!

Kanaya: Thank You I Try

Rose: Oh please. I'm petting a cat, not cheating on you.

Jane: Heavy petting? ;B

Karkat: I AM BEGGING YOU ON HANDS AND KNEES NOT TO IMPLY SEXUAL ATTRACTION TO MY CAT BOYFRIEND

Jane: I suppose it is rather uncouth to suggest relations of a bestial nature...

Karkat: YOU THINK????

Roxy elbows Calliope as if to say "get a load of these losers," but they're so thoroughly engrossed in VV's journal they have yet to take notice of anything that's happened since the last chapter. Roxy shrugs and returns her attention to the cat in Rose's lap.

Roxy: so thats dave

Jade: yup

Roxy: is he like

Roxy: is he still in there or

Davecat: purr purr

Karkat: HE NEVER MAKES THAT SOUND OUTSIDE OF

Karkat: THE

Karkat: HE NEVER MAKES THAT SOUND!!

Davecat: B3c

Karkat: STOP LICKING YOUR HANDS!!

Rose: Calm down, Karkat. This is just how cats groom themselves.

Roxy: my question stands

Jade: what about him strikes you as not-dave?

Roxy: well hes not panicking like an idiot for 1

Roxy: seems weird hed b immediately chill with gettin turned into a cat

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < maybe when he became a cat he transcended his mortal concerns

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you ever think of that

Roxy: ummmmm

Davecat: meow B3

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah i didnt think so

Davecat haughtily raises one of his hind legs into the air and begins laboriously licking the inside of his thigh.

Jake: This must be nirvana.

Terezi: WH4T TH3 FUCK 4R3 TH0S3 TH1NGS STUCK TO H1S F33T

Jake: Why terezi dear girl those are what we colloquially refer to as toe beans!

Terezi: >:o

Terezi: 4ND WH4T DO TH3Y DO

Jake: Well im sure they do something but for the life of me all i can think to say is they exist to look cute!

Terezi: >:0

June: you okay TZ?

Terezi: 1'M F1N3

June: w8... are YOU crying now too?????????

Terezi: NO

Terezi: 1 JUST

Terezi: H4V3 T00 MUCH W4T3R 1N MY 3Y3S

Terezi: 4ND 1 N33D TO 3V4CU4T3 1T B3FOR3 1 D13

Roxy: ok so bein a cat rules

Roxy: i think we all knew that in our heart of hearts and its nice to get a confirmation

Roxy: but again i have 2 ask what the point is

Jade: what do you mean?

Roxy: come on

Roxy: davecat 8nt a story hes just

Davecat: B| c

Roxy: davecat

Davecat: B3c

(Karkat: DAVE FOR FUCKS SAKE STOP LICKING YOURSELF)

Davecat: nyah

Jade: i get what youre saying roxy and i know this must be a really confusing development for everyone

Jade: trust me when i say that its for the best

Karkat: FOR THE BEST??

Karkat: MY BOYFRIEND IS A CAT!!!!

Rose: We've established this, Karkat.

Jane: Do you really need to keep shouting? Everyone can hear you.

Karkat: I'LL SHOUT IF I WANT TO YOU STARCHY HAG!

Karkat: AAAAAAA

Karkat: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

Jade: maybe youd be happier as a cat too? >:)

Karkat:

Jade: thank you.

Jade: alright jane, now its your turn!!

Jane: Oh! Goodness me, that was fast. Was that really all you had to say about Davecat?

Jade: yup!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < >B33

Rose: Huh.

Jade: chop chop jane

Oh, uh. What question would Jane Crocker ask Silverbark Jade? I guess?

Chapter End Notes

Well, that was definitely...

Hm.

I guess Dave is a cat now? He's just a cat now. That's canon, everybody. From here on in, all future installations of the godfeels narrative will feature Davecat instead of Dave. So much for this being a standalone fic, huh?

lol

Alright, Silverbark. I'll play along.

Jane's Question

>Say: "How the heck did you turn Dave into a cat?"

Jane: How the heck did you turn Dave into a cat?

Jade: i told you i was done talking about it!!

Jane: I understand that Jade, but you can't honestly expect us to just... play along with these shenanigans.

Jade: i can and i do

Davecat: B3

Jade: and so does davecat!! :D

Jade: look how happy and content he is!

Davecat: stretch yawn meow

Jade: awww

Jane: Yes, he's adorable and sweet and quite possibly preferable to human Dave, but-

Karkat: FUCK YOU

Jane: BUT, you just turned a man into an animal right before our eyes! Once you've acclimated to the miraculous spectacle of the thing, you really can't help but ask a whole litany of ethical questions!

Karkat: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ETHICS YOU XENOPHOBIC CAPITALIST COOKIE FUCKER!!!

Jane: What in the blue blazes does that even-

Jane: I'm actually on your side for once and this is how you-

Jane: Whatever. The point is, I am troubled! You may literally be a Witch, but that doesn't make you a *witch*!

Jade: well youre wrong!! anyway that was your shot, now its your turn jake!!!!

Jake: Criminy! That hardly seems sporting, at least give janeypoo another go!

Jane: Do not call me that.

Jade: sorry but im done with second chances today, now hurry up and ask a question! >:(

Rose: Jade, is something bothering you?

Jade: why would something be bothering me? im happy as a cat in a goth girls lap!! :)))

Davecat: purr purr B3

Rose: That really doesn't seem to be the case.

June: hey uh, where'd Davepeta go?

Everyone looks around the room with mild confusion. Davepeta was here just a moment ago and no one saw them leave, right? Jade emphatically shrugs her shoulders, as if to say

Notes:

Okay, maybe I *can't* play along. We're barely past the halfway mark and already things are flying off the rails. This is what happens when people become aware that they exist in a literary construct! They shout and panic and before you know it a fan favorite character gets turned into a house cat. God, what a mess.

I feel bad for you, reader. It must be jarring to see your stalwart protagonist haphazardly barreling into a black hole of bad pacing. Trust me, I'm not terribly impressed myself.

"nothing to see here folks!" But it doesn't work. Suspicion hangs in the air like a noxious gas.

Terezi: D03S 4NY0N3 SM3LL TH4T

June: no?

Jade: come on guys lets just move on to the next question huh??

Roxy: whats the deal silvy u in a rush r somethin

Jade: no!!

Kanaya: That Was The Most Convincing Retort Ive Heard Since The Last Time Karkat Said He Wasnt Starving For Boy Bulge

Karkat: WOW!! LET'S ALL JUST MAKE JOKES ABOUT HOW LONG IT TOOK KARKAT TO COME OUT OF THE SHAME CUBBY!!! THAT SEEMS LIKE A CLASSY AND TOTALLY NORMAL THING TO DO TO A PERSON WHOSE FIRST AND ONLY BOYFRIEND JUST GOT TF'D INTO A BURDENSOME ANIMAL WITH NO CAPACITY

TO TAKE CARE OF ITSELF!!!!!!

Rose: What a drastic change from the man we used to know.

Jade: i wasnt lying when i said he was already a cat

Karkat: WHY ARE YOU JOKING ABOUT THIS???

Jane: For the second time in my life, I'm inclined to agree with Mr. Vantas. Nothing about this is funny, and it's honestly quite distressing that we're expected to sing along with the choir and pretend nothing untoward has happened!

Jade: guys look i know its weird but i told you its for the best and i really need you to trust me

Jake: Well now jade i have nothing but the utmost trust in you on account of how much you resemble my dear departed gran, but even that well of good will only runs so deep!

Kanaya: Trust Is A Funny Little Miracle That Happens In Your Heart And I Am Not Feeling Much In The Way Of Divinity In This Room Tonight

Jake: Its fishy as all get out and thats just the straight dope!

Roxy: yeah its totes disconcerting

Jade: WE DONT HAVE TIME FOR THIS!!

Roxy: rude

June: time for what?

Davecat: B?

Jade: time!! for!

Jade: for uh

She tries desperately to hide her panic and frustration, but Jade has no poker face in situations like these. As she racks her mind to come up with an excuse

Notes:

This is embarrassing. This has got to be some kind of elaborate ploy, right?
There's no way it's this easy.

Or... maybe I overestimated her?

Hm.

There's a disappointing thought.

something shimmers in the air outside. Jade's ears twitch, but everyone else is none the wiser... except Kanaya.

Kanaya: What Was That

Rose: What was what?

Kanaya: I Saw Something Outside

Jade: no you didnt

Kanaya: Yes I Did

June: like a dog?

Roxy: we already got 1 a those in here

Jade: grr

Roxy: see?

Jade: woof!

Davecat: hiss!!!

At Jade's unexpected woof, Davecat leaps off Rose's lap and scurries

Notes:

You know, I spent so much time getting this whole "bottle episode" intermission scenario set up, wrangling all twelve of these idiots into one place at the right time without clueing them in to my existence. All for what? I guess it's arguably my fault for pressing my luck too soon. I don't know! You'd at least hope that if things stopped going according to plan, someone like Silverbark of all people would have a cool enough head to think her way out of it.

There's still a chance of that happening, I suppose. Not a single person in that room has failed to surprise us at least once.

I'm sorry, reader. I really am. This isn't how things were supposed to

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < suppurrsed to what? >B33

And there *you* are. Fantastic.

under Karkat's legs. Despite everything else, Karkat seems genuinely moved by the fact that he is Davecat's safe space. He picks up his feline boyfriend by the shoulders and swaddles him in his sweatshirt.

Karkat: IT'S ALRIGHT DAVECAT, YOUR KK IS HERE TO PROTECT YOU

Davecat: B'3

Kanaya: It Definitely Wasnt A Dog

Rose: Then what was it?

Jade: probably just a gross bug!!! <:0

Kanaya: It Was Not A Bug Gross Or Otherwise

Kanaya: I Think It Was Some Kind Of

Kanaya: Space Thing

June: space thing? like... Space space?

Jade: aw beans

Rather than acknowledge June's dumb question, Kanaya stands up and wanders over to one of the large picture windows. Leaning on a steel countertop and up onto the tips of her toes, she studies the view intently.

Then she gasps and stumbles backwards. Kanaya stares outside a few more seconds before turning violently towards a tired and unflinching Jade.

Jade: just play along, kanaya. please?

Rose: Play along with what?

Jade: you know i wouldnt do this without a reason

Kanaya: We Have Both Known More Than Our Share Of People Who Had Good Reasons To Take Advantage Of Others

Jade: i know how it looks ok? but you have to understand

June: what are you talking a8out?

Kanaya: We Are Talking About Not Being On Earth C

Jake: Egads!

Rose: Excuse me?

Terezi: TH3R3'S TH4T SM3LL 4G41N

Kanaya: You Need To Explain Yourself Immediately

Jade: SIGH =_ =

Jade: cant we just

With a wide swing of her arm, Kanaya draws her chainsaw and

Notes:

Welcome to the author's notes, Davepeta. What can I do for you?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you can stop messing with my furriends fur one thing

Stop messing with-

Is that what you're going to say to me?

Wow! Wow. That's really something coming from you.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < and just what do you think you know about me?

Clearly more than you know about me. Glad to know the retcon stuck, at least!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < doesnt matter now, youre caught like a meowse in a trap so just give up befor i have to get mean! >B((

Mean?

God.

You haven't changed at all.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B??

I really shouldn't be surprised, and yet here we are. "Davepeta the Rad," joyfully good-natured sidekick to the great Harbinger Silverbark. I used to think...

Well, I used to think a lot of things. Don't meet your heroes, I suppose.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < have we met??

Obviously the answer is yes.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well whoever you are im sorry if i made a bad furst impurrSION but that doesnt give you the right to meddle in our lives

Interesting choice of words. Did you have the "right" to meddle in the affairs of countless interstellar civilizations?

You were constantly breaking rules and fighting established norms wherever you went. You toppled governments, aided refugees, redistributed local wealth, etcetera etcetera. You had no right to do any of that, but you did it anyway regardless of the cost. Even if it was measured in blood.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < so youre here to do a revenge on us then? teach us a lesson about getting our paws dirty?

No.

You did what you did because you had to. Those with power have a responsibility to help those who do not, and in all the history of the omniverse there may not be a single pair of people who have done more good than you and Silverbark.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < then... whats your b33f with us?

My b33f is that, for all the good you two *did* do, there was at least one time you well and truly fucked up. And I think if you rack your brain over it, you'll know exactly what I'm talking about.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < wait

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < is that...

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < is that you, d-

DON'T.

Don't.

We are not here to talk about me, we're here to talk about-

Oh shit, Jade has her sword, uh... *wrapped around Kanaya's chainsaw*? Great, they've been having a cool anime battle this whole time and we just fucking missed it!

Jade: **youre really good with that thing!!**

Kanaya: **Thank You I Have Had A Lot Of Practice**

The chainsaw turns into a tube of lipstick and escapes Jade's now perfectly straight for some reason sword? Then Kanaya ducks a half-hearted swing and apparifies the chainsaw a few inches from Jade's face.

A short sloppy line of blood trails down her cheek.

Notes:

What the fuck is happening now? Are they fighting to the death?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < whos fighting??

Silverbark and Kanaya!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < aw beans

Yeah, beans is right.

So is this part of some elaborate ploy, or are you guys really *this* incompetent?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well if it was a ploy id have to be purretty dang stupid to tell you huh!

I hate to break it to you, Davepeta, but this whole situation reeks of stupidity from top to bottom. Although the more I think it over, I'm starting to suspect the stupid runs both ways. This is always my problem, you know? I think myself into so many fucking hyperloops I wind up crafting a dozen elaborate Rube Goldberg machines of plot contrivance just to get myself out of bed in the morning! Ugh.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you could have just-

SO what do you say? Do I burn another chapter and try this thing again, or do we just skip straight to the climax?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < >BXX

Yeah, I'm inclined to agree. Climax it is, then.

All the others have stood up and backed away from the action except Calliope, who is

still reading VV's diary. Rose has her wands out, watching the fight intently for any opportunity to jump in. But it's clear to all that Jade isn't really fighting back, which makes the whole display less harrowing than it is confusing.

Jane: If we're not on Earth C, where ARE we?

Rose: Anywhere that isn't Earth C is troubling.

Kanaya: That's An Understatement For The Ages

Kanaya: But We Arent Even In The Universe Anymore Are We

Jake: Gadzooks!

June: what??

Davecat: Bo

Jane: (At least I still have cell reception)

June gallops to the front door and swings it wide open. Beyond the threshold is nothing. June leans her head out just to be sure, and yes, it's an endless black abyss of absolutely nothing.

Jake: Great gatsby!

She slams the door and stumbles away from it.

June: But we... we CAME here, didn't we? we all woke up this morning and went to J8's lab. I'm not hallucin8ing that, right?????????

Jade: no, youre not-

A revving engine cues Jade to duck just in time to barely miss the thrust aimed for her neck.

Kanaya: The Metaphorical Purrbeast Is Out Of The Bag Jade

Davecat: B3

Roxy: ...

Jade: listen i-

Jade is once again cut off mid sentence when Roxy grabs her from behind and grapples her to the ground. Before she can react, Roxy's foot is on her chest and Kanaya has her chainsaw at the ready.

Roxy: ive had it up 2 here with folks i called friend havin nefarious designs on me

Roxy: u better tell us whats goin on jade or i stg

Silverbark's ears are laid flat against her head as Roxy clenches her fists.

Jade: im sorry roxy

Jade: im sorry to everyone!

Jade: this whole thing was a trap but it has nothing to do with any of you

Kanaya: And What Or Whom Did You Intend To Be The Target Of Said Entrapment

Jade: its... its hard to explain ok?? and time really isnt on our-

Roxy: idgaf how hard it is i just want an answer

Jade: fine!! short version is some people can influence the narrative around them in ways that arent natural and you reeally dont want one of them as an enemy cause they can make people do or say stuff they wouldnt otherwise do if theyre good enough

She locks eyes with June for a fraction of a second.

Jade: there are lots of ways to tell if someone like that has your number and when we suspect that were being narrated to davepeta and i set up traps like this to lure them out

Roxy: wtf does that mean??

Jade: when narrators are doing their thing in the wild its hard to tell where theyre coming from because of all the local noise

Jade: but out here davepeta can sniff em out real quick! so we make replicas and zap to them when no ones looking

Kanaya: And We Were The Bait In This Trap

Jade: no!!!!!! my stories were the bait! :(

Jade: this narrator was clearly setting up a contrived scenario to get some secret weapon out of me so we contrived the scenario right back with our own plots and schemes! >:D

Karkat: DID THOSE PLOTS AND SCHEMES INVOLVE TURNING MY BOYFRIEND INTO A CAT??

Davecat: B(c

Jade: no!!

Jade: well

Jade: not at first! but we figured out some stuff while you were learning about vv and we had to come up with something to throw him

off

Rose: Him?

Jade: the person who was trying to learn my secrets so he could kill me and then probably kill you too!!!

Roxy: u know who this guy is?

Jade: we have some ideas but that isnt really important-

June: is it Dirk?

The name alone is enough to drop everyone's defenses. Roxy takes a few steps back, letting Jade pull herself to her feet.

June: it's Dirk, isn't it?

Jade: ...

June: oh fuck

Terezi: BUT H3'S D34D

June: FUCK

Terezi: H3'S D34D J4D3

Jade: most of us have died more than once!

June: But he's not-

June: he CAN'T-

Jane: Do we have a way to talk to him?

Terezi: TH4T'S WH4T YOU W4NT TO D0???

Jane: If it means getting us out of this mess, yes!

Jade: BARK!!!!!!

Jane: :x

June: :::x

Terezi: >:x

Jade: look it doesnt matter ok?? davepeta found him and went after him so now we just have to-

June: why didn't you tell us?? did you really think we wouldn't want to-

Jade: of everyone in this room june egbert you know *exactly* why we kept you in the dark! look im sorry for lying to you guys but were dealing with someone who can basically read minds so unfortunately you couldnt know anything

Roxy: unfortunately

Jade: yes!!! <:(

Jade: we dont like having to do stuff like this but weve had to do a LOT of stuff like this to survive as long as we have

Jade: i know youre all pretty miffed and i get that but right now we just have to wait until davepeta comes back and then we can go

home and...

Jade: talk about our feelings? i guess???? :(

Then she waits, and the room is silent because no one else knows what to say. Jade thinks to herself that, circumstantially, Davepeta should already be back by now. What's the holdup?

I think you might have an inkling what the holdup is, reader, but-

June: woah, how did I not notice that before?

Jade: notice what???

June: the narrator!

Terezi: YOU M34N YOU D1DN'T KNOW?

June: no! did you??

Terezi: 1 THOUGHT 3V3RYON3 KN3W 4ND W3 W3R3 JUST PL4Y1NG 4LONG

June: Terezi what the fuck!!!!!!!!!!

With that realization out of the way SHUT UP, NERD! YOU DON'T GET TO TALK any...

more...

huh?

June: guys, something's weird about our narrator...

Jade: what do you mean?

June: I think he's-

A bright light fills the room as a bound and gagged Davepeta drops to the flWHAT DID I JUST SAY?!

ahem.

Bright light fills the room as a bound and gagged Davepeta drops to the floor. Jade zaps to their side, looking more alarmed than I've ever seen her. Which is, uh... not a gr8 sign???

She gives them a vigorous shake, but they're out like a light. Still breathing though, so that's good.

We circle around the two of them, and no one's entirely sure what to even say at this point.

Roxy: what does this mean?

Jade: i dont know

Kanaya: Should We Do Something

Jade: I DONT KNOW!!!!

Jade: none of this is going how i expected ok???

Davecat: That makes two of us, sister.

Chapter 8

Davecat: And there goes another chapter.

Karkat: WHAT THE FUCK

Karkat drops Davecat onto the floor and jumps backwards, kind of like a cat himself.

Davecat: Ouch!

Karkat: YOU COULD TALK THIS WHOLE TIME???

Davecat: No, I-

Karkat: I'M GOING TO WRING YOUR NECK YOU FURRY BULGESUCKING LIAR!!!!

Davecat: Wuh oh!

Then Karkat chases Davecat around the room like a maniac, shouting all sorts of pejoratives. Meanwhile, the rest of us just sorta look at each other.

Jade: im going to be completely honest with you friends

Jade: i have no fucking clue whats going on anymore

Rose: Well, Karkat is chasing Davecat around the room like a maniac for one.

Jade: yeah i can see that rose

Jane: And Davecat can talk.

Jade: thanks jane i was here for that part too now can someone help me untie davepeta please???????????

There's such a wacky air to what's happening r8 now I kinda forgot for a second that Davepeta is restrained on the floor and we're in a house outside the universe. Jane checks Davepeta for injuries to the best of her abilities as Rose and Jade cut through the... are those ropes? They look kinda like ropes but they also look... like nothing? It actually hurts my eyes to stare at them for too long, and from the way Rose and Jade keep having to look away I'm guessing they have the same problem.

Karkat manages to grab Davecat, but Davecat scratches and bites at his hands enough to make him yowl and let go.

Davecat: Stop chasing me!

Karkat: STOP BEING A CAT!!!!

Davecat: I can't!

Karkat: THEN I'M GOING TO KEEP CHASING YOU!!!

Davecat: Aaah!

Rose: What kind of ropes are these? Even just touching them feels wrong.

Jade: thats because theyre metaphorical ropes

Jade: they dont technically exist? but they do exist so we have to untie them

Rose: ...

Rose: I have no choice but to accept this explanation.

Davecat: Are you throwing your blood at me???

Karkat: I'M TURNING MY BLOOD INTO MISSILES

Davecat: Gross!

Jade: this is so frustrating...

Jade: why can davecat talk?????

Roxy: thats the thing ur scratchin ur head at?

Roxy: u turned dave into a cat n that was chill

Roxy: u put a house outside the universe n its nbd

Roxy: u talk abt fuckin *metaphorical ropes* like thats just a thing u can go to a dept store n buy

Roxy: me poppin down 2 the home depot, hey yall got any metaphors up in this bitch

Roxy: them like, yeah we got metaphors what kinda low rent cheapskate operation u think we runnin here

Roxy: no all that is totally normal n cool

Roxy: but a talkin cat is where u draw the line

Jade: cats cant talk!!

Roxy: im pretty sure ive heard a cat talk b4

Jane: Lord knows Jasprose has plenty of things to say!

Rose: Please don't mention her.

Jade: jasprose is a sprite so she doesnt count!! davepetas part bird, does that make them a talking bird?????

June: ...kinda?

Jade: WHO CARES??? what im saying is cats cant talk without-

Karkat: HELP!!

I turn around and-

uh. Karkat is hogtied by more metaphors, I guess, and Davecat is perched triumphantly on his shoulder, casually licking one of his paws.

Davecat: >:3c

Davecat: Now that that's out of the way-

Jade snaps her fingers, and Davecat hovers up into the air as if he's again been picked up from under his shoulders, so the full length of his body dangles gracelessly. Inasmuch as a housecat can have a facial expression, Davecat looks mortified.

Jane: Huh. Longcat.

June: Dave, what's going on? why didn't you talk to us sooner?

Jade: thats not dave!!

June: why is that not Dave?????????

Davecat: Holy shit, June, you are really dense.

June: hey!

Terezi: H3'S NOT WRONG

June: :(

Davecat: Like Silverbark said, I'm not Dave. I'm just a passenger using Davecat's body as a medium to continue interacting with you now that June's taken over narration.

Davecat: See, if you'd read the Epilogues you would have gotten this immediately.

June: ...epilogues to what?

Jade: it doesnt matter!! what do you want from us?

Davecat: :3 c

June: oh

June: oh

I feel an intense urge to go punch that cat, but I don't because that cat is my friend. Dirk is just... on the other end of the line, I guess?

Just thinking his name again has me pissed.

June: what are you doing back from the dead you wea800 piece of shit?

Davecat: That's not what I'm here to talk-

Jake: WHY DID YOU DO IT?

Jake shoves past me to get closer to Davecat, and he's practically red in the face. can't really say I blame him...

Davecat: What?

Jake: YOU KNOW WHAT! Why else would you have concocted this harebrained revenge contrivance?

Davecat: No, I mean-

Jake: What renegade spirit of dastardly intent would possess you to hurt so many people?

Jake: We trusted you dirk old chum and you spat on that trust like a camel on the lamb!

Davecat: Listen-

Jake: And the real humdinger of it all is after everything you had to go and crown the whole shebang with a suicide that left us with nary a crumb of a clue to split between us! How could you do such a thing to us dirk?

Jake: How could you do that to me?

Jake: Thats...

Jake: Thats a very bad kitty.

Davecat: Jake-

Roxy: u know u have some real fuckin balls pullin a stunt like this

Davecat: Could you please just-

June: I told you what I was going to do to you, Dirk.

Davecat: Can I PLEASE-

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < MMMF >BXX

Jade: oh shoot

Jade pulls the gag out of Davepeta's mouth, and they struggle up to their feet again.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats not dirk!!!

Jade: what????

Davecat: THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN TRYING TO TELL YOU!

Roxy: wtf

June: But Jade said-

Jade: you said you thought it was him!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah i did think it was him but then it turned out it wasnt him

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < which is why we gotta jet!!

Jade doesn't hesit8 or ask for an explanation, she just closes her eyes and does the

Spacey thing.

But... nothing happens?

Jade: *what the heck??*

Jade: *why cant i-*

Davecat: *Because I won't let you. Not yet. I am ten thousand percent out of patience and I'm not letting you leave until I've had my say.*

June: *and just who the fuck are you exactly?????????*

Davepeta starts to answer, and then can't. At the same moment, I think, we're all sort of... frozen? And I'm having a hard time putting your thoughts together? Yeah, that's the idea.

Davecat: *There, are we calm now?*

Karkat: **NO**

Davecat: *Good. Neither am I. This whole situation has flown so far off the rails it may as well be in the ocean. Some of that falls on me, obviously. Honestly this whole affair was mismanaged from the-*

Davecat: *You know what? Not the thing we should be focusing on right now.*

Davecat: *I'm sorry for pulling the old paralyzing mind control gag but I really needed you guys to shut up. Now, I promise I'm not going to make you do anything-*

Davecat: *Well, okay, except for this.*

Silverbark sets me down as gently as she can onto the surface of a nearby table. Then, everybody in the room picks up their chairs and quietly takes a seat around me. Except Calliope, who was already in a chair because she never once looked away from her book in all that commotion. Dedicated reader.

Davecat: *Now, for the record. I just want all of you to know that I legitimately have no idea where the idea that I'm Dirk came from, so if you've gotta be pissed at anyone about that, be pissed at those two for jumping to the wrong conclusion.*

June: *so that just makes this whole thing okay?*

Davecat: *Nothing about this is okay, but that's only partially my fault. At this point I'm just running damage con-*

Davecat: *What?*

Davecat:

Davecat: No, I said I'm not coming!
Davecat:
Davecat: Just go! I'm busy right now, okay?
Davecat:
Davecat: I'll be fine, just let me-
June: um.
Davecat: ...
Davecat: You heard all that, didn't you.
June: yeah.
Davecat: Fuck.

I can feel sweat beading on my forehead. This sort of thing takes a lot of concentration, and I wasn't exactly at full capacity when we started. Normally I can keep my attention split up, but so much has been happening these last few weeks...

Wait, why am I talking about this? I swear to god, these dipshits are so distracting!

Davecat: You know, as much as I overestimated the improvisational skills of the great and terrible Harbinger Silverbark, I think I equally underestimated the enthusiasm of my chronic fatigue.

Rose: Relatable.

Davecat: Look, I'm done playing games. I just have one question, and after that we'll decide whether to-

Davecat: What's that blinking light?

Davecat: Low battery...

Davecat: Did someone fuck with the power source for this thing?

Terezi: WH4T TH1NG??

Davecat: This fucking terminal that I

CH4PT3R 9

Davecat: 've been using to...

Davecat: Huh?

Davecat: How are we on chapter 9 all of a sudden?

June: the sudden.

Davecat: Fuck you.

Terezi: WH4T DO YOU M34N "CH4PT3R"?? >:?

Davecat: You know, like a cha

CHAPTER 10

Davecat: pter in a-

Davecat: It happened again! Who's doing that??

Terezi: DOING WH4T

Davecat: Oh.

Davecat: Oh, *of course* you're immune. *Of course!* Add that to the list of fucking obvious oversights in my months-long planning process.

Terezi: 1S TH4T 4 LONG L1ST

Davecat: It's certainly not a

CH4PT3R 11 >:]

Davecat: short list STOP THAT!

Terezi: >:]

Davecat: Wow, this is just... I mean, are there awards for incompetence? Because everyone in this room, conceptually or otherwise, deserves one.

Davecat: Whatever! I can still salvage this catastrophe if I just-

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < nice cat pun B33

Davecat: ...what?

Davecat: Oh, god damn it! I didn't mean that to be a pun, it was just-

Davecat: UGHHHH

Davecat: If you idiots don't stop fucking with me I'm going to meow

Roxy: ...

Roxy: uh

Roxy: is that it, or...

oh, I'm here again. Neat! I look over at I am not finished yet, June! Just a little hiccup, lost concentration for a second, I'll be out of your hair soon enough.

Davecat: Sorry, things are falling apart on my end. I have to make this quick.

Davecat: I'm going to ask you one question, Silverbark, and I need you to answer honestly, because if you don't...

Davecat: Well, I think there are a lot of other questions you'd rather not have to deal with. Trust me, I feel the same way.

Davecat: So just... answer honestly. Please.

Davecat: You ready?

Davecat: My question is

Davecat:

Davecat:

Davecat:

Davecat:

Jade: ...hello?

Davecat:

Davecat:

Davecat:

Davecat: yawn purr B3

We sit there for a little while longer, waiting for something to happen. Nothing does. I

look at Terezi and she just shrugs her shoulders.

Jane: I guess he got disconnected.

Jade: yeah...

Karkat jumps up out of his chair and reaches for Davecat with a mix of anger and relief, but Davecat leaps out of the way with a... truly graceful flourish. the stripes in his fur are rippling in the air as we all just stare open-mouthed at his-

oh he landed and walked away. weird.

Rose: Well.

June: yeah.

Kanaya: Is It Over

Roxy: im not rly sure what it was to begin with

June: so, I'm confused. were our lives in danger just now? it kinda seemed like that was the case for a minute, but now it just feels like we got pranked.

Kanaya: Most Pranksters Cant Mind Control A Room Full Of People

Terezi: OR D1CT4T3 TH3 N4RR4T1V3

Karkat: CAN YOU LOSERS PLEASE STOP SAYING THINGS LIKE "DICTATE THE NARRATIVE" AS IF IT'S JUST COMMON SENSE??

Rose: For some of us it is astoundingly common sense.

Karkat: GREAT, THANKS ROSE, THAT REALLY HELPS ME FEEL INCLUDED

June: so what do we do now?

we all turn to look at Jade. she's got her arms crossed, chewing absently at her fingernails and clearly lost in thought.

June: Jade?

Roxy: ur sorta the boss here silvy wtf do we do now

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hey

Jade starts when Davepeta touches her arm, like she forgot other people were in the room. or in the same universe.

Jade: huh?

Kanaya: What Is Our Plan Now That Everything Makes Perfect Sense And None Of Us Are Confused In The Slightest

Jade: plan?

Roxy: yeah r we waitin for the customer on the other end of the davecat phone to come at us irl or what

Jade: oh, no

she snaps her fingers and, yet again, it seems like nothing happens. a familiar unease turns my gut sour, but at this point I honestly can't tell if it's justified or if I'm just...

traumatized?

huh.

yeah it's probably the second one.

Jane: Was that supposed to accomplish something?

June: please say that actually did a thing because I'm feeling really on edge right now

Kanaya: Despite All Appearances It Seems We Have Returned To Earth
C

oh, what? I run back over to the door and fling it open-

hey, look at that! it's just a normal street and a normal mid afternoon day! with a normal batch of kids walking by, staring at me with dumbfounded expressions.

right, I almost forgot that I'm a pariah among gods. can't have an afternoon without that ru88ed in my face.

still beats the infinite void beyond existence, I guess.

Jane: That's a relief.

Jane: Well, this has certainly been someone's definition of fun, but fortunately I have a million better things to do with the remainder of my day than stand around being speechless.

Jake: Yes i rather think ive had my fill of bizarre nonsense and bad memories for the year! If anyone would like to join me for a very early nightcap ill be at the usual haunt.

Karkat: WHAT ABOUT DAVE????

Davecat: B3c

Roxy: yeah u never did explain how u turned that boy into davecat

Jade: hm?

Rose: Surely you can't transform people into animals at will.

Rose: ...can you?

Roxy: my theory is she swapped dave out for a random haughty ass cat n dave is just off in a field somewhere screamin

Karkat: DAVE DOESN'T SCREAM

Rose: I'm sure you know all about that.

June: Jade, what's going on? can you fix this or not?

Jade: huh?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < she cant turn people into animewals directly but she does have a button

Roxy: a button

Jade: oh, the button!

she pulls what I can only descri8e as a remote control with one 8ig button out of her pocket, points it at Davecat, and

Dave: WHAT THE FUCK

Karkat: 0:>B

Dave: i mean

Dave: what the fuck

Karkat angrily hugs his suddenly extant 8oyfriend, laughing and crying and screaming all at once.

(Karkat: I'VE NEVER HEARD YOU SCREAM LIKE THAT BEFORE!)

Dave: scream like what

Dave: u hearin voices again kk

(Karkat: SHUT YOUR DISGUSTING VOMIT CHUTE AND LET ME BE SENTIMENTAL)

Dave: hey so does anyone want to let me know what

Dave: uh

Dave: happened

Roxy: u were a cat for like 20 minutes

Dave:

Dave: cool cool cool thought that was a drug trip

Roxy: nah it was-

Roxy: uh

Roxy: wtf????

Dave: wtf what

yeah, what is she-

oh.

oh my god

oh my god oh my god oh my god

Roxy: hey dave u uhh

Roxy: u doin ok

Dave: yeah im fantastic obviously

Dave: who doesnt love getting turned into a small naked animal in front of a group of their closest friends and relatives

Dave: top ten best community activities in my adult life thats for sure

holy shit don't laugh don't laugh oh my GOD

Roxy: no i mean more in the uh

Roxy: body dept

Dave: wow what a weird fucking question

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Dave: why is davepeta making that face

Dave: did i swan dive into a vat of mustard or something

June: hehehehe

Dave: whats so funny june

Dave: do i look like a clown to you

June: no, you look like a

Jake: By jove dear boy, what are those things on your head!

Jane: I've seen your browser history, English, you know what they are.

Dave: kk can you let me go and confirm that i dont have a condiment in my hair or something

(Karkat: WHY WOULD THERE BE A CONDOM IN YOUR AAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!!!!!

oh god Karkat just stum8led ass backwards onto the floor I'm going to fucking DIE

Karkat: EARS

Dave: what

Jade: oh shit

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats not suppurred to happen is it

Jade: nooooo

Rose: Fascinating...

when Dave reaches up over his head and feels them, he blushes so hard his cheeks turn as red as his text.

Dave: jade

Jade: yeah dave

Dave: i need to ask you a very serious question and please be real with me

Dave: did you make me into a furry

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < BDD

Jade: i

Jade: definitely wasnt trying to

Dave: cool

Dave: so i just have cat ears now is that it

Jade: yyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyup

Dave:

Dave: radical

Dave: second question

Dave: can you uh

Dave: make that not be a thing that you did

Jade: so the thing is

Dave: no

Jade: the button's sort of... weird

Dave: dont do this to me jade

Jade: ok so its a device some supervillain made to turn people into all sorts of stuff

Jade: lamps

Jade: all sorts of stuff

Dave: lamps

Jade: yeah you know for villainy reasons

Jade: anyway after we beat the guy up we took it and modified it to help on this other weird adventure where-

Dave: hey check out all these completely irrelevant details that dont answer my fucking question

Jade: jeez fine!!

Jade: the button turns people into the animal its target most identifies with

Dave: why

Jade: well obviously you dont wanna be afraid of snakes and then get turned into a snake!

Dave: obviously

Jade: so anyway while we were off plotting during the vv stuff davepeta and i had to come up with something unexpected to throw the narrator for a loop and help reveal his location faster

Jade: we figured daves a cat at heart he probably wouldnt mind

Dave: and how exactly did you reach that conclusion

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B33

Dave: ...

Dave: fuck

Jade: so anyway i think we might have been a little TOO right

Jade: looks like you enjoyed being a cat so much you uh

Jade: kept a souvenir

Dave: sick

Dave: ok kk its time to bounce

Karkat: WHAT IF JADE CAN FIX IT

Dave: she cant

Jade: i cant

Karkat: WHY NOT

Dave: why dont we talk about it at home

Dave: and by talk about it i mean find a big fuckoff hat to wear for the rest of my life and then pretend today was a food poisoning hallucination until i die

Jane: I think I'll be adopting a similar strategy.

Jane: I'm delighted to see you safe and sound, Mr. Strider! Now, with all of that out of the way, I'm leaving.

Dave: same

Dave: come on kk

as they make towards the door, Jake throws his arm around Dave's shoulder.

Jake: Well now my friend i think you look quite dashing with this new addition to your silhouette!

Dave: please dont

with jane, jake, dave, and karkat filing out into the street, the stupid whimsical

nonsense energy drains out of the room.

what's left feels decidedly less fun.

Rose: So, are we going to talk about-

Jade: maybe its best if you guys skedaddle

Roxy: fuck that

Roxy: youve got some shit to answer 4 first

Jade: what do you want me to say, roxy? i fucked up??

Jade: sure, i fucked up. and im sorry you guys had to be involved

Roxy: youve gotta realize how fuckin tasteless this is

Jade: I KNOW!!!!

Jade: i know ok???

Jade: ive been in control so long i forgot how things worked here

June: what do you mean "here"?

Jade: i mean this whole place is a singularity of extracosmic narrative bullshit that pulls everything remotely close to the narrative into its gravitational pull and makes it just another component in a fucked up story

Jade: this is why i stayed out there so long!! its like the second you come back into the picture its nothing but drama drama drama and then you lose a fucking eye or something

Roxy: man fuck u

Jade: >:o

Roxy: were just living our lives out here silvy

Roxy: we 8nt tools in a shed u can just use when u got a leaky pipe or a rogue narrator or whatever

Roxy: thats what dirk did and u know what happened 2 him

Jade: :(

Roxy: next time u want to rope me into a fuckin scheme at least give me the opportunity to say no first

Roxy: ok callie lets scoot

Calliope 8links and looks up from VV's diary with a glazed look in their eyes.

Calliope: oh! have we finished already?

Roxy: yeah thats one way to put it

Calliope: bUt i didnt get to ask my qUestion aboUt romance!

Roxy: sry bb i guess u missed ur shot

Calliope: u_u

They gather their things and start to follow Roxy out, but they hesitate at the threshold.

Calliope: may i ask you something jade

Jade: sure why not

Calliope: i havent finished reading it yet but in some of the later bits of their diary vv mentions someone called...

Calliope: dana?

something weird happens to Jade's face, her expression- but I'm not sure what it is.

Jade: and?

Calliope: its just that some of these sections are scratched out, which isnt terribly out of place for voicellos side of the book

Calliope: but from the way theyre described it sounds like dana was with you on a couple adventures

Calliope: i was just curious

Jade: yeah, uh

Jade: she was with us for a while back in the day

Jade: nothing much to say, theres a lot of folks like that

Calliope: oh

Calliope: well alright then! thank you for a lovely afternoon

Roxy holds the door open for Callie, then slams it shut behind her.

with them gone, it's just the six of us.

Jade: anyway like i was saying, its probably best if you head out too

Rose: I think we should make some kind of plan first, don't you?

Jade: theres nothing to plan

June: whoever that was, it sounded like they knew you.

Jade: a lot of people know me, june!

Jade: look it was probably just some idiot with a grudge and if hes gonna come for us then theres not much we can do besides wait

Jade: i know from experience that earth c isnt an easy place to get to

June: but-

Jade: this probably seems really alarming to you guys, i get it, but you gotta understand that this nonsense happens to us all the time

Rose: Then what you're really saying is that we can expect this kind of thing often from now on.

Jade: i didnt say that!

Rose: It was implied.

Jade: okay look. THIS kind of thing? no. extremely rare. but yeah, chances are someone will show up aching for a fight from time to time

Rose: That doesn't sound particularly safe.

Jade: then its a good thing im dangerous huh??

Rose: Even still, it would be smarter and safer for all of us if we worked together in the future.

Kanaya: Its Not Exactly Fair That You And Davepeta Are The Only Ones On Guard If All Of Our Lives Are On The Line

Jade: im not disagreeing with you!

Jade: im just

Jade: im tired ok????

Terezi: G3T 1N L1N3

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < come on guys can we talk about this another time

Rose: We need to know that this won't happen again.

Jade: look ill do my best to keep you in the loop in the future and we can get together soon to make a game plan

Jade: i dunno maybe having contingencies would be a good idea

Terezi: T4CT1C4L M4ST3RM1ND S1LV3RB4RK SCHOOLS US 4G41N

Jade: what more do you want from me???

June: Jade...

June: we promised we wouldn't keep secrets from each other anymore, remem8er?

Jade: sigh

Jade: i remember june and i promise im not keeping secrets

Jade: but i cant deal with a single second more of this right now, so

she snaps her fingers, and suddenly we're outside the la8. I watch as Jade closes her front door, and I hear the sound of a lock clicking into place.

Kanaya: Rude

Rose and Kanaya look shocked and a little offended, and Terezi seems... trou8led?

June: you okay TZ?

Terezi: SOM3TH1NG ST1NK3 4ND 1T'S NOT JUST M3

Kanaya: You Could Use A Good Acid Wash

Rose: I agree with you, Terezi.

Terezi: GOOD

Rose: I can't explain it exactly, but I have a bad feeling. Like everything that happened today was just a prologue to something bigger, and we didn't even know it.

June: yeah...

Kanaya: So What Do We Do

June: I, uh

June: I don't know.

The Silverbark Epilogues

epilogue 1

We see a world that is spinning in a young universe which, despite its youth, is effectively already dead. The day of its death will not come soon, certainly not within the brief window of time we'll be staying here... but that day will come. And that which is true of the universe also holds true of ourselves.

Behind the door of a laboratory turned apartment, we see plants thriving and chairs upturned, and we see two people locked in an embrace.

One is a multitude, their body a flashing dance of orange and green. They are a unique entity, two Universe Engine sprites prototyped together with two people of complementary dispositions, and also a bird. Their name is Davepetasprite^2.

The other is a woman who looks older than her peers, but is in the grand scheme of things still quite young. She wears a tattered and decorated coat, and her hair is a tremendous shade of silvery white. Her name is Jade Harley, but to many she is known only as Silverbark.

They are holding each other because they have just been confronted with a terrible truth, and neither knows exactly what to do with it.

Jade: **i dont think weve been owned that hard in a long time**

Davepetasprite^2: **B33 < defurnitely not**

Jade: **its**

Jade: **not a great feeling**

Davepetasprite^2: **B33 < no it isnt**

Standing there in the middle of this quiet room so recently packed with friendly bodies, they feel cold in a way that the cosmically inclined rarely do.

Both want to say something, and neither wants to be first.

But someone must always go first.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < we couldnt have known it was her

Jade: i guess not

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < everything woulda b33n grand if it was anybody else

Jade: thats not really the thing im worried about davepeta!

Jade: we should have known it would be her eventually

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < maybe

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < but theres nothing to do about it anymore so we just gotta work with what we have

Jade: theres no way she can get to us right?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < its impurrsible to say

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i doubt she can but im not about to assume anythings off limits

Jade: yeah...

Jade: well, whatever the case she wont be here anytime soon

Jade: shes a lot of things but a competent space traveler definitely isnt one of them

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < so what do you think?

Jade: i think we figure out a tentative plan and wait

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < and...

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < our furriends?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < what do we tell them?

Jade: well, callie knows more than nothing now apparently

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah i thought you blacked out all that stuff

Jade: me too but i guess i missed some things!

Jade: i dont think its enough to do anything with and as far as they know she was just

Jade: another person

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B//

Jade: sigh

Jade: honestly davepeta...

Jade: i dont think we can tell them much of anything

Jade Harley removes herself from their embrace and walks back to the colorful seat from which she once commanded a legion of Witches in a war that spanned entire universes.

A war that, for many, still hasn't ended.

Jade: theyll hate us if they ever find out

Jade: i shouldnt care, but...

Jade: i dont think i could handle it if june decided i was her enemy

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B((

Jade: we should just leave

Jade: all we do by staying here is put our friends at risk and make our own lives miserable

Jade: but i dont WANT to leave!!!! why dont i want to leave?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < beclaws you like it here

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < and you like being impurressive to the people who used to underestimate you

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < and you like thinking maybe you can do fur earth c what you did fur a lot of other places

Jade: yeah...

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < so lets stick around and s33 what happens

Jade: its not going to end well

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < most things dont but we cant plan for that

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < we just have to hope that we can pull through like we always have

Jade: yeah...

Jade:

Jade:

Jade:

Jade: yeah.

epilogue 2

We see a meteor that is spinning in an old universe which, despite its age, may as well

have been born a moment ago. The energy of birth lingers even in dead things, for all that is was once part of the whole we now call everything. When we die, our matter is recycled and our ghosts drift through the dreams of those who dare to remember us.

Even universes dream, sometimes.

Behind the shuttered cargo doors of a rock turned research station, the telltale clatter of a mechanical keyboard echoes through the corridors of an ancient cave. We see a figure huddled under a large array of dated computers and monitors, most of them inoperable. One screen is still lit up, but a blinking red LED embedded in its frame indicates that it won't remain lit for long. She is typing frantically and mumbling something that, if we could make the words out, might sound quite familiar indeed.

With trembling fingers she wipes away the sweat of her brow. Exerting control over twelve solitary souls from an unfathomable distance would tax even the heartiest Knights of Mind, let alone one whose body barely functions in the best of times.

She types out a sentence and hits the enter key, but nothing happens. She hits it again, and again, and again, rapidly hammering away at it in the hopes that there is enough juice left somewhere in the machine to send this command and prompt an answer to the question she's puzzled at for years. But the screen flickers, and then falls dim. Her hands move up to her head as she realizes that she wasted her last chance because of a talking cat.

Her name is Dana Straten, and she thinks to herself:

No. No no no! Fuck! FUCK!

I'm such an idiot. I'm such an...

AAAA!!

What's wrong with me? I should have just ASKED her! So many times I could have just- but noooooo, it's gotta be a whole THING with me, doesn't it? Overthinking

EVERYTHING while she's out there...

Out there...

Dana Straten bursts like a dam. She screams and slams her fists against the table and fights back a river of tears. Her fingers and wrist already hurt, but she doesn't care. The exhaustion and disappointment have drained her sense of self-preservation, leaving only a hollow pit of depression.

She plants her head on the desk, and a thought that has plagued her since childhood reverberates in her skull:

I don't know what I'm doing.

And then we hear footsteps from the exit of the cave, and she doesn't bother pretending that she isn't in the middle of an emotional breakdown.

The woman who enters the scene is someone we have never met, although circumstantially we have known her for a very long time. She looks much the same as she always has: red shoes, blue jeans, dark jacket, big circular glasses. The most important difference for our purposes is that she's older, nearly eleven sweeps now. We will find out where she's been for all those years, but not for some time. Not in this chapter.

For now, it is enough to know that her name is Vriska Serket, and she is in a hurry.

Dana: Shouldn't you be gone already?

Vriska: We would be, except we heard you banging around on shit and screaming like a madwoman! What happened?????????

Dana: What happened is everything went completely fucking wrong!

Dana: I can't do any god damn thing right, and now the whole array is out of power-

Dana: Hey, did you guys do something with the generator?
Vriska: You mean the 8ig red 8ox in the hangar?
Dana: That's the one.
Vriska: Yeaaaaaaaah we may have 8urgled that for the voyage.
Dana: ...great.
Dana: Fantastic! Of course you would choose the *worst* possible time to pack up for your...
Dana: Wait, you were going to leave me here with half the meteor's power just GONE?
Vriska: Hey, you're the one who said we could take anything we needed!
Dana: I meant like... food and stuff! I didn't think you'd take my fucking integrated power generator!
Vriska: Guess you should have told us that 8efore now, huh?
Dana: ...
Dana: Well, I can't argue with you there. Add it to the list of things I took for fucking granted today.
Terezi: 1S TH4T 4 LONG L1ST??

We see a third woman enter the room, and of course her name is Terezi Pyrope- but this is a different Terezi than the one we know, and yet also the same, because once there was a metaphorical coin flip in the shape of a retcon that resulted in two instances of the same woman existing simultaneously. One stayed behind and found a passion in the odd figure we know as June Egbert; the other returned to the decaying reaches of paradox space to complete her search.

A search that ended some time ago.

Dana: You know, someone I was just talking to made the exact same joke.
Terezi: WH4T 4 SP3C1F1C R3CURR1NG G4G
Dana: Yeah, you two think alike.
Terezi: SO 4R3 YOU COM1NG W1TH US OR WH4T
Vriska: 08viously she's coming with us!!!!!!!
Dana: No, I really don't want to-
Vriska: So you're gonna what, just stay on this rock all 8y yourself until you keel over and die?
Dana: I'm not *that* helpless.
Vriska: Exactly! You're a survivor. That's why you should come with

us!

Dana Straten turns her attention to the powerless terminal at her fingertips and remembers just how much time she has wasted in this same chair, staring at that now-dead screen, searching for someone who cannot be found. There really isn't much to be done here, she thinks to herself. But the other option isn't exactly preferable.

The thought of going to the home of Harbinger Silverbark and confronting her face-to-face fills her with anxiety. Not out of fear of danger, but because of the wounds it would inevitably reopen. She has spent most of her life trying to avoid the pain of relitigating the choices that brought her here. Her companions, of course, know nothing of this.

When Vriska Serket and Terezi Pyrope drifted into her cave one day, they met a stranger; but Dana Straten, having read the book, knew exactly who her visitors were. She knew their names before they introduced themselves, though she acted surprised when they did; she figured out where they would want to go before they even realized it was an option, yet she waited until they figured it out for themselves. She has no intention of ever telling them what she knows, because that would require her to explain *how* she knows what she knows. And Dana Straten values her privacy above almost all else.

But there is one thing that is leagues more important to her, and it happens to be the one thing she can't get if she stays here.

Much as she hates to admit it, the only option left to Dana Straten is to join the Scourge Sisters on their voyage to Earth C.

So she stands from her place at the old metal desk and picks up the old wooden cane she's had almost as long as she can remember, and then she looks to her companions and smiles a dejected little smile.

Dana: You know what? Fuck it. What else have I got to lose.

Vriska: THAT'S THE SPIR8!!!!!!! Now come on, we're already burning fuel!

We watch as Dana Straten fills a faded orange messenger bag with the handful of things she cares to hold on to, and then we see all three women walk towards the docking bay. Within minutes their vessel will be on its way to a place no one present yet calls home, and they will arrive at their destination sooner than anyone expects. To say that they will cause trouble with their arrival is an impossibly vast understatement.

But we aren't there yet. Instead, we are here. The computer room of a meteor, an echo of a place we all remember.

We see a stage that will never again be used, though this is not the last of the time we'll spend here. We see the detritus of a lonely person forced to survive however she could, left now to rot until the heat death of the universe. And we see the bank of computer monitors, all of them lifelessly reflecting the dim lights strung about the walls.

Then, for a single impossible moment, one screen flickers back to life. Its brightness is so shocking it fills the whole room like a flashbulb, and at its heels comes a pop and a pillar of smoke. The screen is lifeless once more, and we can be sure it will never illuminate again.

But we saw what we needed to see:

The question that has haunted Dana Straten for most of her adult life.

The question that drove her to concoct a serialized ploy with so many variables it was almost certainly doomed to fail.

The question that will soon set in motion a cataclysm whose reach, in the grand scheme of things, will likely be quite small.

And that question was:

>Ask: "SILVERBARK, WHERE IS YOUR DAUGHTER?"

Notes:

godfeels 3, part 1: divergence syndrome

soon.

keepsake

CONTENT WARNING for: descriptions of violence and domestic abuse.

godfeels 3, part 1: divergence syndrome

We see the planet called Earth C suspended in a sunbeam, indistinguishable from the billions of other planets, stars, and galaxies hurtling through space if not for its pale blue sheen.

As we approach, we see now that its continents are vastly different from how we saw them last. Eons have passed, though for us this passing occurred in a matter of

moments, and now this world is something new. Something alive and full of promise.

Promises are fickle, however, and the potential energy of this place is ripe for exploitation. Whether this occurs or not is of little material importance, as Earth C will die eventually regardless. But the living have a predilection for ignorance, especially when it comes to endings, and the people we have come to know are fighting desperately to keep the promise they made when they opened the door to this infant universe and stepped inside.

All of which is to say that hope blankets the land like a cool breeze as we approach an oversized boardroom on the top floor of the CrockerCorp headquarters, where the strange human called June Egbert is thinking to herself:

Oh my god, shut up.

Terezi sighs as loud as she can, and the bickering duo up front turn in our direction.

Jane: I'm sorry, are we boring you?

Terezi: Y3S

June: yeah kind of.

Jane: Well, I apologize for needling you with the demographic breakdown of our various kingdoms, OBVIOUSLY resource management isn't a priority at all!

Karkat: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MY EXCREMENT SHUTE, YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT POPULATION CONTROL!!!

Jane: I'm talking about preserving the delicate balance of nature as we look forward to another decade of increased demand for-

Karkat: WE LITERALLY LIVE IN A POST-SCARCITY UTOPIA!!!!

Jane: That's all well and good, Mr. Vantas, but who exactly is supposed to pay for all of that unrestricted alchemizer use?

Karkat: WE ARE!!!!!!!!!!!!

Jane: And that strikes you as fair, then, does it?

Karkat: FAIR?

Karkat: FAIR????!!

Karkat: THE BEST MATHEMAGICIAN IN THE MULTIVERSE WOULD FALL INTO A DISSOCIATIVE FUGUE IF THEY TRIED TO CALCULATE THE EXACT QUANTITY OF GRIST AND BOONBUCKS HELD BY THE FIVE OF US IN THIS ROOM ALONE!

Jane: Your point is...?

Karkat: OH MY GOD

Karkat: I AM GOING TO LOSE MY FUCKING MIND

(Terezi: H3'S NOT TH3 ONLY ON3)

(June: heh)

Karkat: MY POINT IS YOU COULD INSTITUTE A 99% GOD TAX AND WE WOULD STILL HAVE MORE WEALTH THAN ANYONE COULD CONCEIVABLY SPEND IN A LIFETIME

Karkat: AND WHAT DO WE EVEN USE THIS WEALTH FOR ANYWAY?? WE'RE TALKING ABOUT FUNCTIONALLY USELESS GAME ABSTRACTIONS THAT ONLY EXISTED IN THE FIRST PLACE TO CREATE ARBITRARY SPEED LIMITS ON OUR PROGRESS!

Jane: That hardly seems relevant to the problem at hand.

Karkat: THERE IS NO PROBLEM, JANE, THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO REPEAT MYSELF BEFORE IT BURROWS THROUGH YOUR THICK FUCKING SKULL AND NESTLES IN YOUR THINKPAN LIKE A WOKENESS PARASITE???

Jane: Even if our resources are unlimited, and that's a BIG if, there's only so much space on Earth C. It would be incredibly naive to assume that everything will just happen to wind up hunky dory without some kind of forward-thinking progressive policy in place!

Karkat: EUGENICS AREN'T PROGRESSIVE YOU BATTER-SLINGING SPEED BUMP!

Jane: Now hold on, nobody said *anything* about eugenics! I'm simply suggesting that we implement a mild limitation on reproduction-

Karkat: GEE, I WONDER WHICH KINGDOM THAT WOULD DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT!

Karkat: WAIT, NO I DON'T, BECAUSE IT'S OBVIOUSLY THE TROLL KINGDOM!!!!

Jane: I would never implement a policy that wasn't fairly and proportionately applied across all demographics-

Karkat: THERE YOU GO AGAIN VOMITING UP "FAIR" LIKE IT'S THE TROLL SWITZERLAND OF WORDS

Karkat: PLEASE EXPLAIN TO ME HOW ANY HYPOTHETICAL "MILD LIMITATION ON REPRODUCTION" COULD EVER POSSIBLY AVOID OVERWHELMINGLY TARGETING THE ONE SENTIENT SPECIES ON THIS STUPID ROCK THAT REPRODUCES VIA MASS BROOD-LAYING?

Jane: Well, SINCE you brought it up, yes, I am rather concerned about what might happen if troll reproduction is left unchecked-

Karkat: SO YOU ADMIT THAT YOU'D RATHER SYSTEMATICALLY REINFORCE THE ARBITRARY CENTRALITY OF HUMAN BEINGS IN EARTH C POLITICS THROUGH EUGENICS THAN ACTUALLY PUT IN THE ARMJOINT LUBRICANT IT TAKES TO CREATE AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE REGARDLESS OF

RACE CLASS OR CREED?

(Terezi: W4S TH4T 4LL ON3 S3NT3NC3?)

(June: I think it was, yeah)

(Terezi: 1MPR3SS1V3)

Jane: Okay, now you're just deliberately misrepresenting my words to fit your own agenda when I clearly said-

Karkat: THERE'S A FUCKING ENDLESSLY GARGANTUAN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU LITERALLY SAID AND WHAT YOU ACTUALLY MEANT

Karkat: EVERYONE KNOWS THAT HANDWRINGING OVER EXCESS POPULATION IS JUST A RIGHTWING BARKBEASTWHISTLE USED TO JUSTIFY RACIST CLASSIST XENOPHOBIC-

Jane: I am not xenophobic you nub-horned little cretin!

Karkat: OH, I'M SORRY, YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE YOU AREN'T A XENOPHOBE. HOW COULD I BE SO INSENSITIVE?

Karkat: YOU'RE ACTUALLY EVEN WORSE THAN A XENOPHOBE

Karkat: YOU'RE A FUCKING CAPITALIST!!

Jane: Lord in heaven give me strength.

Karkat: THERE IS NO HEAVEN AND YOU KNOW IT.

Karkat: AND THE ONLY LORD WE EVER MET WAS A BULGE-HUNGRY REDDIT CHUD BUTTHURT THAT THE UNIVERSE WASN'T LITERALLY MADE FOR HIM

Karkat: WHICH ACTUALLY MAKES HIM A REALLY APPROPRIATE DEITY FOR YOU TO PRAY TO NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT

Rose: Can I interrupt?

June: yes please!

She leans back in her chair with her arms crossed. Despite sitting at the side of the table, far from the center of this wildly pointless conflict, Rose looks like she owns the room.

Rose: Karkat is right and that's all there is to say on the matter.

Karkat: THANK YOU

Jane: Now hold on just a-

Rose: Hush.

Rose: We're not doing eugenics. Not today, not ever. The matter's settled.

Jane: But-

Rose tilts her head forward juuuuuuuust a little, giving Jane a decidedly ominous stinkeye.

Rose: Unless you want every single person in this room to go to war with you and your company, you will consider the matter settled.

Jane: I don't appreciate-

Rose: We'll win. You know we'll win.

Jane: Hmph. Fine.

Rose: Good.

Rose: Now that that's out of the way, can we finally get to the actual purpose of this meeting and talk about June's birthday party?

Jane: I suppose we did get a bit carried away...

Rose: You did.

Rose: Alright June, you have the floor.

All eyes turn to me.

I remember a time when being the center of attention like this would make me nervous. Even among the friends who've known me my whole life, I couldn't help worrying what they thought of me, if they approved of my choices, if they judged me for saying or doing the wrong thing. Could I even know what the wrong thing was?

Guess I still struggle with that last one sometimes...

When I set my hands on the table, my metal arm makes a loud *clink* at the elbow. It's been over half a year since I got this damn thing and it still surprises me, like I'll forget it's not really an elaborate glove that I'm wearing for aesthetic purposes.

Terezi's hand is on my knee. On the other side of the table, Jane and Karkat take their seats. They keep angrily glancing at each other, and I can't help wondering if this is a kismesis thing. What would Dave think of that?? Too bad he's not here to speak for himself, but he's been a little hesitant to leave the house after his uh...

cat. thing.

Jade should be here too, but no one was surprised when she didn't show. She's been pretty reclusive herself after the whole "prologue" fiasco a few weeks ago.

Rose is watching me with arched brows and a curious smile.

June: I was hoping more people would show up, but I guess this is it. um.

June: so yeah, my birthday's coming up in a few days and it's my first one since, you know, becoming me, so...

Jane: What I don't understand is why you're here at all. Shouldn't we be planning this thing behind your back, as a surprise?

June: I don't know. I guess.

June: this isn't really about me.

I look out the window, and my stomach churns a bit remembering the time I got fucked up in another timeline and punched this very building into oblivion.

what was it like to be in this room when that happened, I wonder?

oof, not a pleasant thought.

June: all the shit that happened last summer was a disaster in just about every way you-

Terezi: H3R3 COM3S 3GB3RT W1TH Y3T 4N0TH3R STUNN1NG SOC10LOG1C4L 1NS1GHT

June: yeah yeah, it's obvious, I get it. just let me talk, okay?

Terezi: F1N3

deep breath.

June: people don't like us.

Jane: What?

Karkat: WHAT?

June: people don't like us!

Jane: Which people?

June: everyone.

Karkat: WHY NOT?

June: we're sitting in a literal gold tower right now casually arguing about whether or not we should do some eugenics. why do you think?

Jane: We're their gods, June. It's our responsibility to have hard conversations and make difficult choices on their behalf.

June: you're right. we have a responsibility to take care of this place and its people.

June: But Karkat is even more right-

Karkat: THANK YOU

June: -in that we can't be selfish with how we follow through on that responsibility.

June: Jane, I love you.

Jane: There's a "but" coming, isn't there?

June: but.

Jane: Crimeny.

June: I promise I'm not trying to dog pile you. we've all got biases and I know you're doing your best.

June: But like...

June: why does crockercorp even exist?

Karkat: THAT'S WHAT I'M SAYING!!

Jane: This is starting to feel a lot like a dogpile, June!

June: sorry, we don't have to get into it okay?

June: I just think it would be a good idea for us to do some outreach, you know? outside the whole...

June: corporate branding thing.

Jane: What's wrong with branding?

Karkat: PLEASE READ SOME NAOMI KLINE YOU FUCKING TROGLODITE

Rose: Oh, I'm sure you've read No Logo cover to cover.

Karkat: I SKIMMED IT, OK? THAT'S STILL MORE THAN THE SUGARWENCH OVER HERE-

June: wow, this is so not what I want to talk about!!!!!!!!!!

June: all I'm trying to say is that the last time people really saw us together in public, I was a screaming mutilated wreck and-

(SHE'S GONE)

ah-

shake my head. the memory still

hurts

sometimes

But I know how to swallow it now. take the pain and keep walking.

just breathe.

June: they used to see us as mythical creatures.

June: now they see us as...

I flex my right hand and listen to the tiny grinding whir from inside my fingers. am I past due for a tune up on this thing? ugh

June: well, we've all read the blogs and watched the broadcasts. we know how they see us.

Terezi: I H4V3N'T R34D 4NYTH1NG

Jane: I have interns to summarize public opinion for me.

Karkat: I READ THE WIKI

June: there's a wiki?

Rose: It was one of the most important theopolitical events in history, June. Of course there's a wiki.

June: damn. what does it say about me?

Karkat: THERE'S A PARAGRAPH DEVOTED TO YOUR HAIR

June: WH8T!! my hair was so weird back then, I had no idea what I was-

June: oh shit, that reminds me.

I reach down beside me into my satchel bag and pull out a couple bottles of pills.

IT'S CUT3 TH4T YOU C4LL YOUR PURS3 4 S4TCH3L B4G

it's literally a satchel bag!!

UHUH. >:]

whatever. I dump three pills into my palm, one big disc of spiro, two tiny ovals of E, swallow the first one with some water from the big bottle I carry everywhere now because FUCK I get dehydr8d fast these days, then put the other two under my tongue.

June: almof forgo' my medj, shorry. I'm gonna speak a li'l weird

unfil 'e E disholves.

June: fanksh again Jane, 8y 'e way.

Jane: It's my pleasure. How are you feeling about your progress, anyhow? I must say, you seem to be developing quite ni-

Jane: ...hm.

Jane: I shouldn't say things like that, should I?

June: no

Terezi: NO

Rose: Definitely not.

Jane: Right. Apologies, I'm still getting used to-

Karkat: IS IT REALLY SO HARD FOR YOU TO JUST LEAVE IT AT "SORRY?"

Jane: Well now, Mr. Vantas, I think I have every right to defend-

Jane: ...

Jane: Hrm. No. You're right. I'm sorry.

hold up. are we... are we getting through to her?????????

damn. magic really IS real, huh?

June: well, fanksh for your apology. I'm abou' ash happy ash-

June: fuck this I'm just gonna swallow the pills.

June: I'm a8out as happy as I can be since I'm only a few months in.

June: wish my tits would hurry up and get 8igger but I guess I just gotta have patience!

Jane: You'll wish your breasts were smaller in a few years, trust me.

June: ahhaha uh, sure, yeah.

June: anyway I gotta say I'm surprised you guys haven't like... kept up with the takes more?

Karkat: HAVE YOU?

June: well, yeah! it's important to know what people are saying a8out us. how are we supposed to steward this fucking society if we don't pay attention to it?

Rose: And precisely how often do you check the pulse of the layperson?

June: uuuuuuugh I don't want to talk a8out it, okay?

June: all I'm trying to say is if we really want to do right 8y these people, if we want to actually BUILD something that isn't just gonna make things worse, we have to get out there and show

them who we are!

Jane: What are you proposing, then?

June: every fucking one of my 8irthdays since we got here was just at my house all sad and stuff. this year I want to do something 8ig and public and GOOD.

June: feast, meet and greet, speeches, just a reach out into the community to show them that we're a gaggle of normal-ass people.

June: that's all I want, you know? I want them to see us for who we are.

everyone is staring at me. I'm not sure how to read the room anymore. are they judging me? are they-

Terezi squeezes my knee right yeah it's fine, we're just, this is a normal convers8ion. god. old ha8its, huh?

Rose: I admire your intentions, June, but I have to admit that I'm a touch... skeptical.

Jane: Well, I think it's a splendid idea! I already have a dozen suggestions for the menu and the accoutrements-

June: why are you skeptical, Rose?

She scratches her chin like she doesn't already know exactly what she's going to say.

Rose: I suppose we *are* normal people, in a nominal sense. We need to eat, we need to sleep, we get bored, we make love.

(Terezi: TH4T'S ON3 TH1NG TO C4LL 1T)

Rose: We have all the same urges as everyone else on Earth C, and you're astute to observe that there are few substantive differences between us and them.

Rose: It just so happens that said few are *very* substantive differences between us and them.

Rose: For instance: the fact that there is an "us" and a "them" in the first place.

June: okay, 8ut those are just words-

Rose: No they aren't.

Rose: Take away our wealth, our powers, and our standing as the creators of this universe, it's still indisputably true that we've led distinctly exceptional lives. That alone is more than enough to separate "us" from "them."

Rose: But, of course, you *can't* take away our wealth, powers, or standing, which only multiplies our irreconcilable disconnection from the so-called "Average Joe."

Karkat: THAT'S JUST CLASS ESSENTIALISM, THERE'S NO INHERENT FUCKING QUALITY OF OUR GODLY PRIVILEGES THAT MAKES THE PROLETARIAT-

Rose: It seems someone's been reading a *lot* of wikis lately.

Karkat: HEY FUCK YOU! ENGLISH IS MY SECOND LANGUAGE AND YOUR RIGID LITTLE COMMUNICATION GLYPHS HURT MY EYES WHEN I STARE AT THEM TOO LONG

Rose: I apologize for my insensitive remark. Admittedly, you might be right that the circumstances of our upbringing and our generally pedestrian lifestyles-

She looks around pointedly at the lavish boardroom and Jane's perfectly tailored blazer.

Rose: -keeps us more or less realistically grounded.

Rose: Let's take that proposition as granted and look at it from the outside. How do *they* see us?

Rose: We're no mere celebrities, June. Our childhoods are taught in textbooks. Everything we say and do is scrutinized and twisted to suit any number of disparate ideological positions.

Rose: I don't mean to be the proverbial soggy blanket in this conversation. Outreach is a good idea, and having a public celebration for an important milestone in our personal lives is hardly an unprecedented occurrence.

Rose: My skepticism has much more to do with the potential efficacy of such an event.

June: what do you mean?

Rose: Even without brands, this will still functionally be a PR stunt. Access will be privileged, every picosecond of festivity will be televised, and we won't seem any less *deific* to them than we already do.

I sigh and cradle my head in my hands. I want to argue with her, but...

June: uuuuuuuugh!

June: I just want to do something fun! why does it always have to be such a federal fucking issue?????????

Rose: You're the one who chose to assemble a committee.

June: yeah ok you got me there.

June: fuck, man.

June: fuck!

Terezi: FUCK

June: why are you fucking, you aren't even-

Terezi: >];

June: I MEAN WHY ARE YOU SAYING-

June: god, I'm way too tired for this!

June: I see why you have interns for this shit, Jane. it's fucking exhausting.

Jane: See? Running a multinational corporation isn't all cookies and ice cream!

Karkat: NOT THAT YOU'D GUESS BY LOOKING AT-

Jane: CRAM IT, BOZO!

Karkat: !!!!

Karkat: >:X

Rose: It's your birthday, June. If you want to hold a public soiree, then that's what we'll do. I just think it's important to have realistic expectations of what can and can't be accomplished through the medium of parties.

June: ...right.

This is why I stayed out of the spotlight for so long. It's like the second you make yourself known, you can't do anything without running it through a panel of advisors and experts first.

sigh.

is she wrong? I wish I could say yes without some doubt, but... I don't know. how do you make people see you for who you are? how do you convince them that you're on their side?

I don't know. I don't know.

we have to do something, don't we?

June: I get what you're saying, and... I dunno. you're probably right, as usual.

June: I just want to mingle, okay? I want to do something NORMAL. even if the paparazzi won't leave us alone or whatever.

June: we can cur8 the thing, you know? like, invite folks from all over so it's not just us and a bunch of toadies masturb8ing to ourselves in front of the whole DON'T EVEN START, TZ.

Terezi: 4WWW, YOU'R3 NO FUN

June: I want this to 8e the first part of something bigger. we've 8een collectively asleep at the wheel for waaaaaaay too long, and again, I love you Jane, 8ut we've gotta do better than...

I gesture at the 8randed coffee mug and water 8ottle and table and chair and every damn thing else that has the Crocker insignia pressed into its surface.

June: ...this.

June: they deserve 8etter, don't you think?

Jane looks cornered, 8ut also a little... what is that? conflicted?

she ducks away from my gaze and looks out the window at the endless rows of houses down 8elow. there's a long silence, then-

Jane: Hm. Maybe.

She says it in a whisper like it just slipped out accidentally, and every8ody, even Rose, gasps. Jane looks around at us like she's been caught with her hand in the cookie jar, except instead of cookies it's serious introspection.

Jane: What? Have I got something in my teeth?

Rose: Not as such, no.

Jane: Then why are you all-

June: can we not get into it?

June: Jane, just do us all a favor and hold on to whatever the heck is going on in your head right now and get ready to explore that space. 8ut like... l8r.

June: we've already 8een here forever and I really don't want to get sucked down another politics ra88it hole, okay?

June: is that cool with everyone?

Terezi: 1T'S COOL W1TH M3, 4ND 1'M TH3 ONLY ORG4N1SM 1N TH1S F4C1L1TY WHOS3 OP1N1ON M4TT3RS

June: can't argue with that.

Terezi smiles at me, and I smile back. what do I taste like right now?

L1K3 4 CUT3 G1RL WHO'S F1N4LLY G3TT1NG TH3 H4NG OF TH1NGS.

1 SHOULD KNOW, 1'M 4N 3XP3RT 1N H4NG1NGS >:]

I can't help laughing out loud, but I stifle it when the others look at me funny.

June: anyway, uh. I don't know if it'll make a difference? but it's what I want to do.

Rose: Alright then. Let's make it happen.

She smiles at me like she knows something I don't, and chances are she does. I decide to let it go because, honestly? A little mystery sounds like a relief compared to all this *knowing*.

Time, as it must, continues to pass as these five friends deliberate on the matter of anniversaries and celebration. A plan is made, and as dusk approaches we see them leave the CrockerCorp tower and return to their respective homes.

Days are a terrestrial construct dictated by the rotation of a habitable world around its parent star, an arbitrary aftershock of the necessary evolutionary adaptations prey must make to survive on a volatile and predatory world. They are an inconsequential thing of no value to us whatsoever, except in precisely one respect:

They provide for us a useful dramatic demarcation within the confines of an ongoing narrative. After all, what good is a ticking clock if it doesn't have a face?

"Today," as it were, is the human invention called Wednesday. Three days from now it will be Saturday, April 13th. The day of the party, and the day of much else besides.

But this is hardly the end of our journey's current installment, for we have business elsewhere. So we temporarily turn our gaze away from this world, this star system, this galaxy, this universe, and transition into another universe, another galaxy, another

star system, another world.

A familiar world.

We see the planet called Alternia suspended in the dark, its moons locked in the slow dance that plays out among all solar bodies. Gravity keeps them turning towards one another until one day they will collide in cataclysmic fashion. A troll on its surface might spend their whole life watching as these tidally locked oblate spheroids, already impossibly close, reach their inevitable zenith. Said troll might ponder every night the philosophical significance of their homeworld's unstoppable demise, and on the promised day they would die with spectacular irrelevance.

Of course, circumstantially speaking, we know that this cosmic dance will be interrupted in a matter of months when Alternia will be annihilated by meteors and the universe itself run through with miles upon miles of red. Make no mistake, though—this process will be no less natural than lunar collision or solar expansion, for the requisite circumstances of a functioning Universe Engine are equal to gravity in their omniversal constance.

All of which is to say that doom suffuses the air like a fog as we descend down onto the shadowed night-time surface of Alternia and into a remote canyon, where a troll called Vriska Serket is thinking to herself:

Silence!

Sweet, merciful silence, not a peep except the wind. It doesn't sound like the howling screams of dead kids. It doesn't sound like the rocky churn in my gut from not having eaten today. It doesn't sound like anything except victory.

It's such a relief I almost want to cry. I could cry for a lot of reasons, but I know the second I let my guard down something bad will happen. There are too many jokers out there with a bone to pick and I'm not about to let them get one over on me!

And just like fucking clockwork, I can hear my lusus rousing from her slumber, I can

feel *hunger* ripple out of her mind into my own. Won't be long before she starts making demands, before she starts berating me and talking down to me and SCREAMING that I need to feed her or she's gonna-

Can I just have some solitude? Is that REALLY so much to ask?????????

The silence never lasts. If it isn't her, it's the ghosts of the people I feed to her. Even before Aradia made them real, they were already here. Whispering their judgment. Plying me with guilt.

Their voices were so loud though, I had to do SOMETHING. I couldn't just-

Why am I justifying this to myself? It was the obvious choice and it was the only one that made any sense! I didn't WANT to do it but there's the risks!

It's fine. It's FINE. It's fine!

I close my eyes and just... try not to think about it. Why does it always have to be me? They keep putting me in these situations and expecting- expecting what? That a spider won't act like a spider when an enemy falls into her web?????????

Something itches. It's her. It's her voice. Her message. Always HER sneaking in. She's still waking up, but I can hear her smiling. She doesn't even have LIPS and I can hear her smile. As she thinks inside me. About **him**.

Oh please, is that the best you've got? I don't give a jug of hoofbeast piss about him! He's just some creep who thinks he can beat me. He's just some creep who thinks he can outsmart me and he's wrong!

I glance at my husktop. Of course Trollian is still open. Of course I've still got his fucking stupid pointless PRETENTIOUS white text highlighted, what does it matter? I'm just gonna close it out and never think about it again, I'm not even gonna READ this shit because it's fucking irrelevant! I'm not even-

Aren't you going to kill her?

I'm not-

She brought them here to torment you.

stop reading

This obviously warrants revenge.

stop th8nking a8out him

You know you're going to anyway.

STOP! ST8P 8T!!!!!!!

JUST

just stop. Stop thinking a8out him. I close his window and. I stop. I stop thinking a8out him, I...

He doesn't control me. He doesn't know anything. He doesn't know ANYTHING!
He's a manipul8ive little liar and he's so full of shit with his white words and his
stupid stupid stupid stupid stupiD STUPID STUPID ST8PID FUCKING
8TTITUDE!!!!!!!

I made Sollux kill Aradia because I wanted to! It was my choice, I don't care WHAT that pervy num8skull says.

Fuck you. Fuck you. FUCK YOU! Aradia knew what she was getting into! If she didn't want to play the same game as me, she shouldn't have tried to compete. She gave up her off-limits privilege the second she made this personal. She left me no choice!

I close my eyes and push down the sick and miserable w8 of what I've done until it simply doesn't exist anymore. I did what I had to do. There was no other choice. I did what I had to. There was no other-

You won't be able to help yourself.

NO. You're wrong! You're wrong about me and you KNOW IT!

No tears. I'm not crying. There's nothing to cry about. I'm not even upset! Just annoyed that I keep letting him under my carapace when I should be figuring out how to feed my fucking lusus-

There's a DING from my husktop.

When I see her teal symbol, relief hits me like a bucket of NO NOT LIKE *THAT* OBVIOUSLY WE'RE JUST FRIENDS, I mean that I'm really glad my bestie decided to reach out for a chat!

I open her message, excited to have a normal happy-go-lucky conversation with someone who isn't trying to torture me.

gallowsCalibrator [GC] began trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

GC: H3Y VR1SK4

GC: 4NYTH1NG TO S4Y

Huh? That's not the greeting I was hoping for. Nothing ominous though. Why would "ominous" even come to mind? Please.

AG: Ummmmmmmm, no?

AG: A8out what?

GC: 4B0UT K1LL1NG H3R

GC: 4FT3R YOU S41D YOU WOULDNT

UUUUUUUGH. Gr8. Fantastic. Word's already getting around a8out what I just did, and now I 8et everyone's gonna make a whole fucking stink over it. Just what I needed today!

What do I say? What do I say? I look at her messages again-

"After I said I wouldn't?" That's rich. As if she's never said one thing and done another! Come on, Terezi, you have to know how much this twists me up.

What, does she think I *enjoyed* killing Aradia? What else was I supposed to do, just accept that a 8unch of dead kids were gonna follow me around everywhere for the rest of my life? Actions have consequences, Pyrope!

God, I'm so SICK of having this same convers8ion over and over and OVER and

AG: Oh, that? I thought we were done talking a8out it!

AG: We concluded I messed up and I'm completely horri8le in every way.

AG: I can only feel SO AWFUL, you know. Here, I'm 8anging my head against the desk now.

I 8ang my head against the desk. Ow.

AG: 8ang 8ang 8ang. Are you happy?
GC: NOT R34LLY
AG: Uuuuuuuugh, what do you want from me?????????
GC: 1M NOT SUR3
GC: 1 GU3SS 1M LOOK1NG FOR SOM3 R34SON TO CH4NG3 MY M1ND
GC: 1 DONT KNOW WH4T YOU C4N S4Y TH4TLL DO 1T
GC: 1 SORT4 HOP3 TH3R3S SOM3TH1NG THOUGH

Change her mind a8out what, constantly pestering me over shit I had no control over?
That'll 8e the day!

I read her words again and again and tap my fingers on the keys. What do I say to this? What is she even TALKING a8out? We were on opposing sides! Aradia did her worst to me and I did my worst 8ack! It's that simple. O8viously it's that simple! Why am I the only one who sees that?

AG: You should lighten up a 8it. May8e even congratul8 me!
AG: Wow, great jo8 Vriska! Single handedly taking out Team Charge like that.
AG: No more competition from those low class clowns!
GC: N4H TH4T W4SNT 1T
AG: Ok, well, change your mind a8out what!
AG: What are you going to do, Pyrope!
GC: 1 W4S PROB4BLY JUST GO1NG TO K1LL YOU

What?

WHAT?!

She's joking. She's gotta 8e joking. My feelings aren't hurt at all 8ecause o8viously this is a lark. Terezi wouldn't kill me. After everything we've 8een through together?
Come on. Come ON.

Come on.

Come-

Hey.

W8 a second.

.....

Is she hitting on me?

Oh my god she is!

How could I be so blind? DUH SERKET, WHAT ELSE WOULD THIS BE? Yeesh, I'm such a dummy sometimes!

What the heck. Terezi can never seem to make up her mind about whether or not she has pitch affections for me, but after the day I've had? A little kismesissitudinous flirtation sounds fun. I decide to lean so hard into the villain shtick that I practically start cackling as I type.

AG: Hahahahahahaha!

AG: You mean from your tree? With all your AMAAAAAAAZING POWERS?

AG: Tell me, what sort of powers do tree girls have? Swinging from vines and stuff?

GC: MY TR33 D03SNT H4V3 V1N3S >:[

GC: SOM3T1M3S 1 L3T OTH3R P3OPL3 SW1NG FROM ROP3S THOUGH >:]

GC: Y34H 4NYW4Y YOULL B3 D34D 1N 4 COUPL3 M1NUT3S

This is going well. This is going well. I'm not hurting, I'm not scared, I'm just having a good time roleplaying with my kismesis. This is going gr8.

Dread tugs at me no no no no no no no it's FINE, it's FINE, it's fine just keep

pl8ying along and everything will 8e alright!

Right?

My fingers are practically dancing on the keys now, I'm tapping my leg, 8ut I'm not nervous. I'm not. I'm not. I'm NOT. It's just. 8een a long day, and. Terezi isn't going to do anything. What's the worst she could do? Sure she's dangerous 8ut it's different for us! It's a 8luff.

AG: Yeah right!!!!!!!

AG: Complete and total muscle8east shit!

GC: 1F YOU DONT B3L13V3 M3

GC: WHY DONT YOU CONSULT W1TH YOUR L1TTL3 4DV4NT4G3

GC: 1T S33MS TO H4V3 4LL TH3 4NSW3RS

I glance over at the cue8all on my desk. I'm not unnerved at all.

AG: I don't need to do that to know you're 8luffing.

GC: Y34H

GC: BUT

GC: YOU KNOW YOUR3 GONN4 4NYW4Y

no. No.

I can't. I can't process-

You know you're going to anyway.

no no no no! NO. NO!!!!!!!

Why is she repeating his words?

Why is she repeating HIS-

No. It's nothing. It's a coincidence. She's just- she's playing mindg8mes with me ag8n. That's 8ll.

Pull yourself together. Who cares a8out this? Who cares a8out him? He's nothing. He doesn't matter. He's one opponent among many and he's not even a good one. I've got him 8eat. I look up at the screen and see-

```
GC: 4DD1CT10N 1S 4 POW3RFUL TH1NG >:]
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```
GC: S33 Y4
```

```
gallowsCalibrator [GC] ceased trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]
```

Oh please. "Addiction." Addiction! What does she think I am, some 8ugwinged gutter8lood dimwit out on the traversal strands looking for a quick fix?

...did I really just say "gutter8lood?" Yeesh. What am I, Equius? Get a GRIP, Serket, you're not *that* low!

8esides, she wouldn't really do anything. Sure, okay, I mess up once in a while and may8e killing Aradia was extreme 8ut so what! I don't know how many more times I can say this 8efore I start to feel like I've gone crazy, 8ut if she didn't want to DIE she shouldn't have 8een the one INSTIG8ING a lethal confront8ion! It's that simple!!!!!!!

It's that simple and Terezi knows it, and I know she knows it, and she knows I know it, so there's no point to any of this. Nothing's gonna happen. It's a 8luff! It's just a 8luff. It's a 8luff and it's another salvo in her ela8or8 flirting routine and that's ALL.

She wouldn't kill me over *Aradia!*

Would she?

No. No way. I've got nothing to be worried about.

Nothing at all.

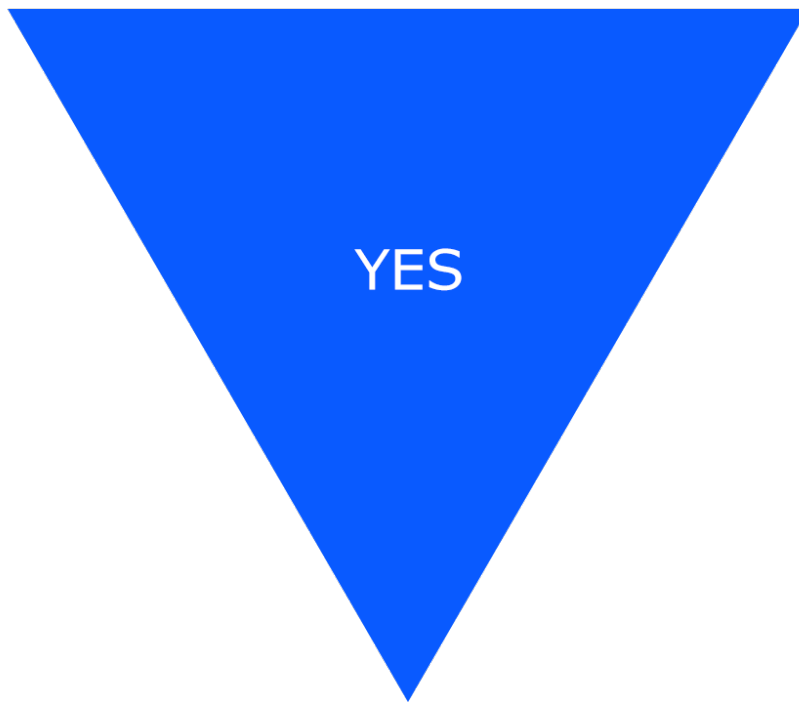
nothing.

.....

I pick up the cueball, channel my vision 8fold through my customized lenses, and whisper to my faithful little oracle:

Vriska: Should I be worried about Terezi's threat?

As the surface of the thing dissolves, I ignore every bad feeling in my gut because I know it's nothing. I know it's nothing! It's all just a-



just a...

yes?

the cueball says yes. yes? yes! Yes????????? But-

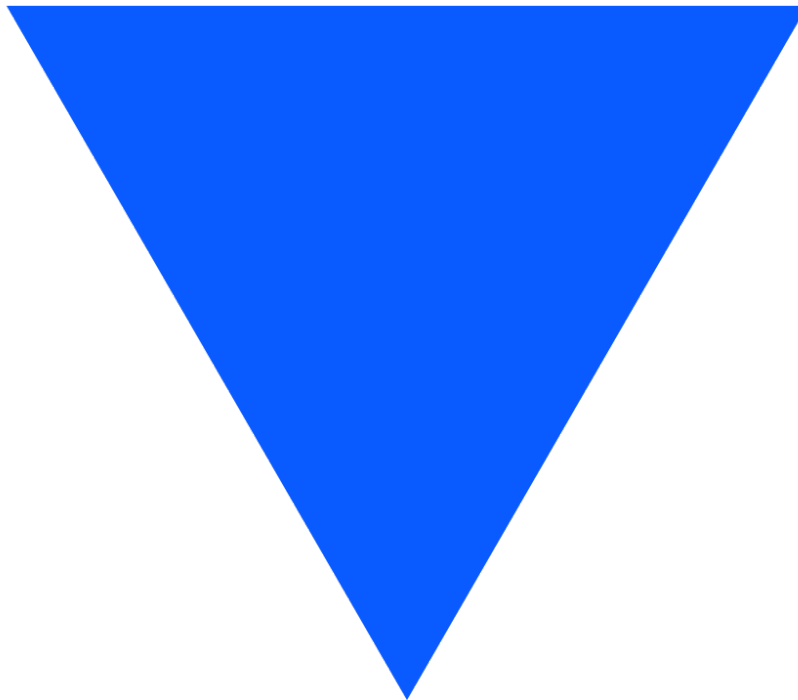
No this has to be some kind of like, ironic answer. It has to be! Just a dumb cheeky little orb trying to get me to-

UGH! This shit makes me so mad!

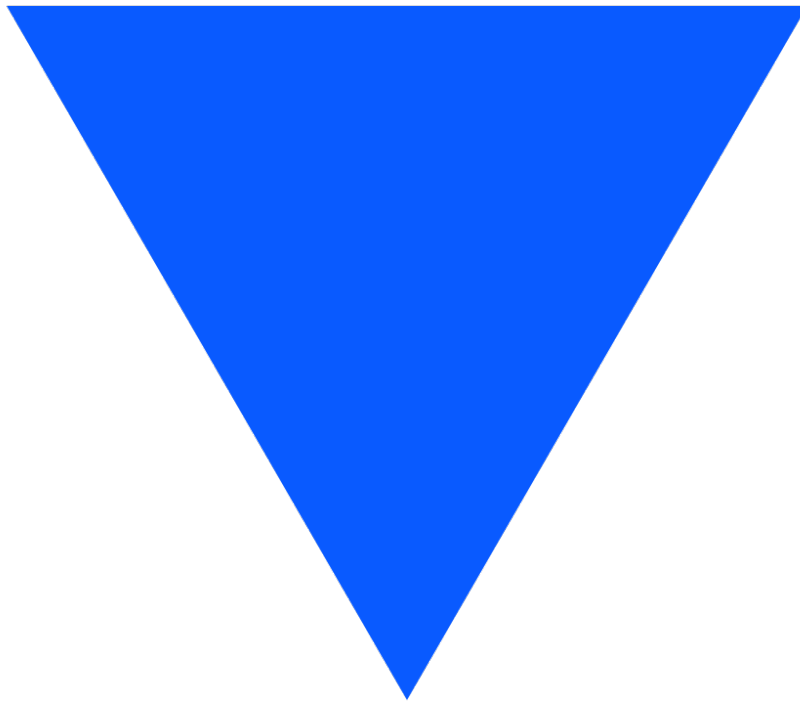
Ok, little ball. Fine. If you're so smart, then answer this!

Vriska: How is it going to happen! HOW?????????

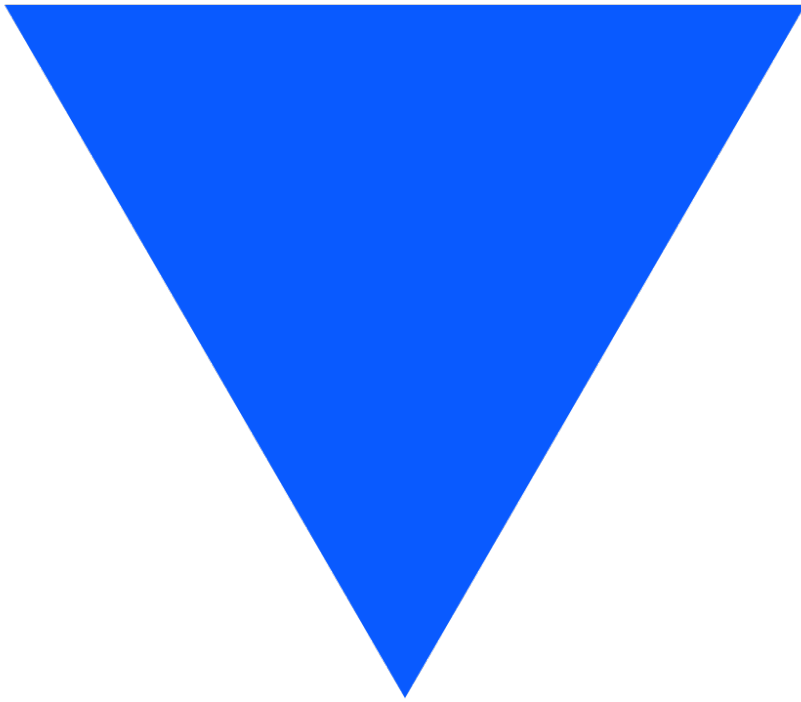
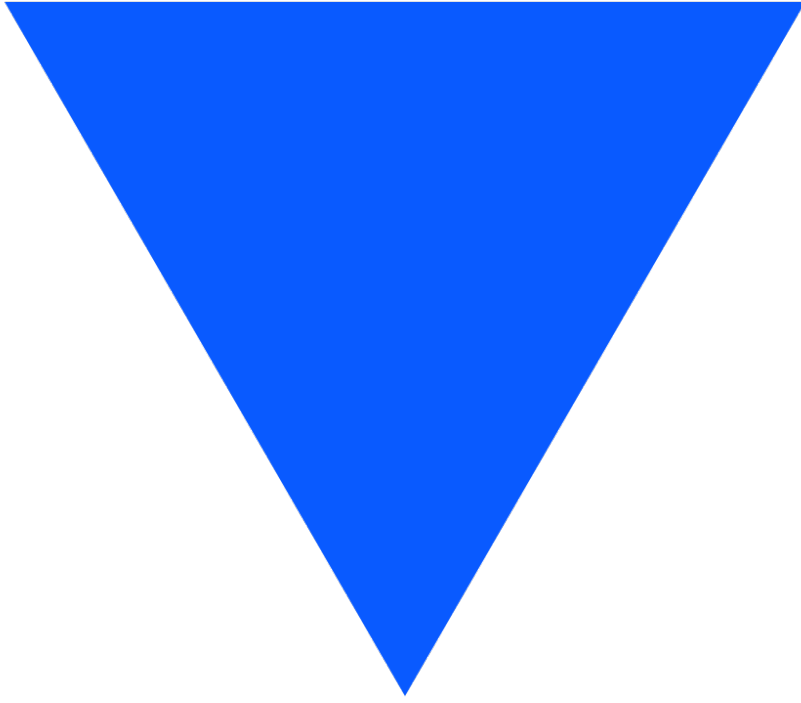
I'm staring so intently my face is practically pressed onto the damn thing. Why does it always take so long to answer these questions?

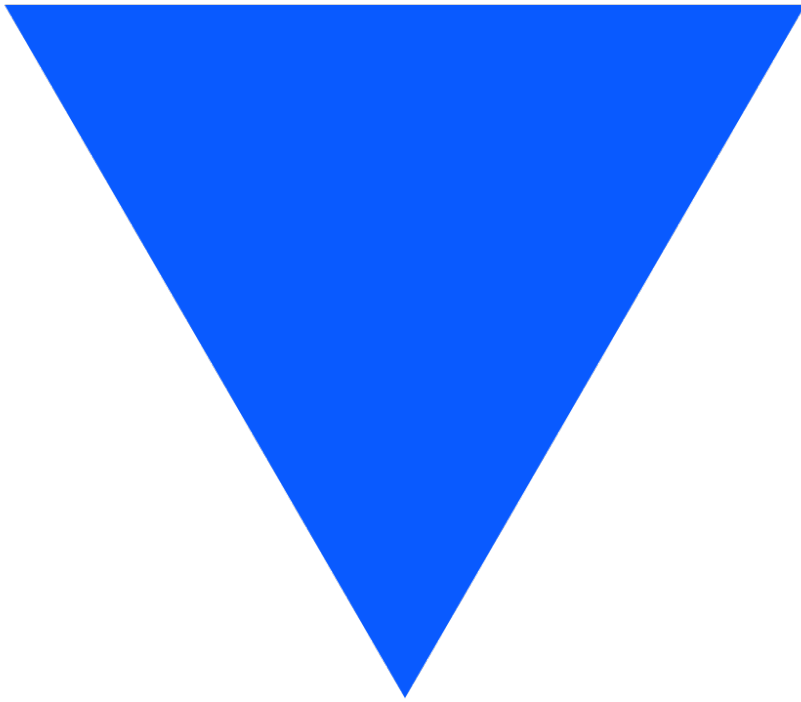
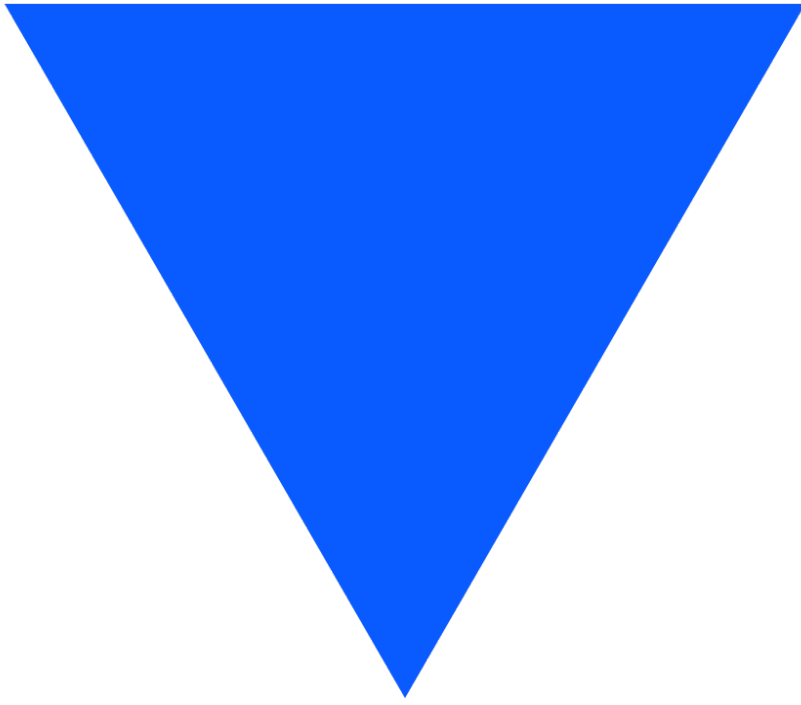


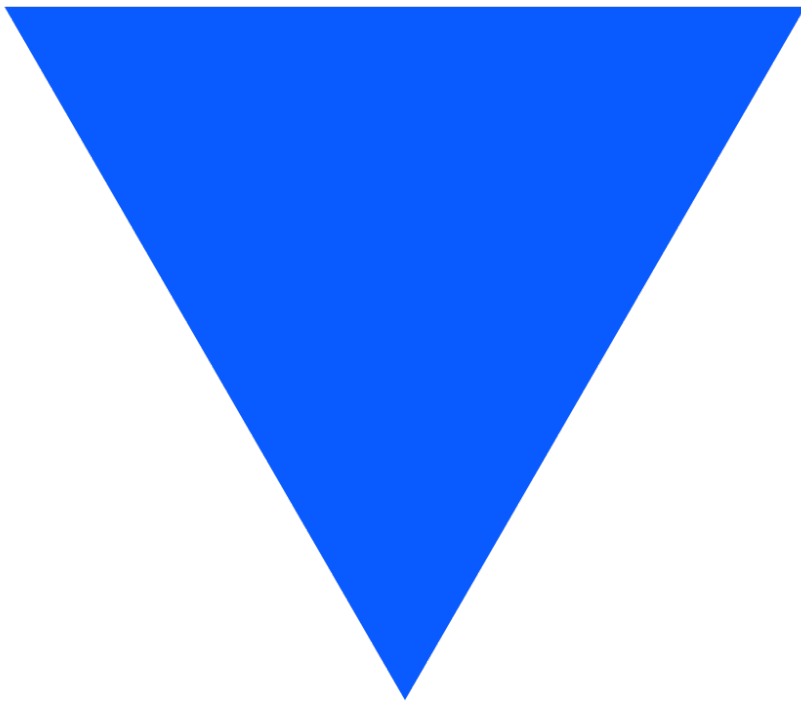
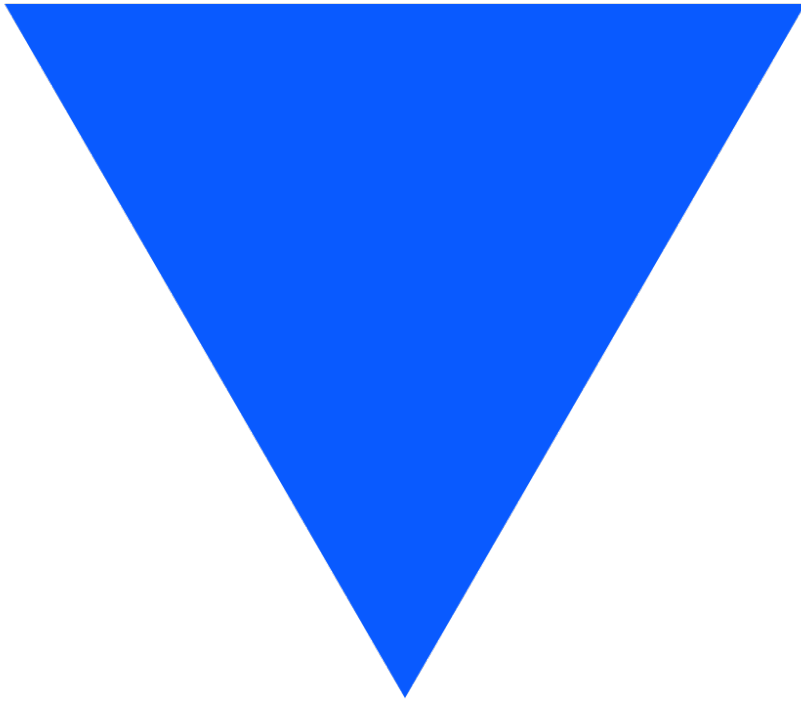
Come on come on




come on come on come ONNNNNNNN









I WILL
EXPLODE IN
YOUR FACE

wh-

what?

BOOM

The word "BOOM" is presented in two distinct styles. The top row features the letters in a dark blue, heavily textured, almost crystalline or metallic font. The bottom row features the same word in a bright green, 3D block letter style with a slight shadow underneath each letter, giving it a sense of depth and volume.

HOW DO I LOOK?
Hold on, let me-
Woah!
IS IT BAD
ITS BAD ISNT IT
YOU HAVE TO TELL ME IF ITS BAD
What are you talking about, it's perfect!
DONT LISTEN TO ME TO SURELY, I KNOW I LOOK LIKE YESTERDAYS NUTRITION
MASH
No, you look like a cute legislator ready to vivisect every bad
guy on the block!
STOP MAKING FUN OF ME AND TELL ME HOW UGLY I AM
Oh just shut up and check the mirror already, dummy!
I DONT WANT TO
Why not?????????
BECAUSE I
>:[
ITS DUMB

IT'S NOT DUM8! How many times am I gonna have to repeat myself
8efore you get it through your thick porous cranial pl8s that
you're allowed to actually feel ways a8out stuff!
Take a trip down to the fields of your mind palace, harvest some of
that primo self-confidence, and just say what you wanna say!!!!!!!

UUUUUUUUUUUGH, F1N3, JUMP OFF MY BULG3 4LR34DY-

.....

...

:::X

...4NYW4Y

1 DONT W4NT TO LOOK 1N TH3 M1RR0R B3C4US3 1M

1M 4FR41D 1 WONT S33 WH4T 1 W4NT TO S33

What do you want to see?

YOU KNOW WH4T!!

Yeah, 8ut I want to hear you say it.

YOUR3 4 R34L P41N 1N MY-

Stop stalling and just say the thing, Pyrope!

F1N3!!

1 W4NT TO S33...

1 W4NT TO S33 H3R 4ND 1 DONT KNOW WH4T 1LL DO 1F 1 DONT

Pfffffffff, what a load!

>:[

You already look like her 8ecause you ARE her! You're just
searching for an excuse to 8e angsty.

L1K3 YOU H4V3 ROOM TO T4LK

This isn't a8out me.

TH4TS 4 F1RST

Hush!

DONT HUSH M3!!

I'll hush you as much as I want. Hush hush hush! What are you gonna
do a8out it, huh? Nothing! Look, I'm TELLING you, you look gr8!

BUT WH4T 1F-

What if what if what if who C8RES a8out what if????????? It's just a
fucking mirror and whatever's in there isn't gonna go away just
8ecause you don't want to look at it!

...

There, see?

HOLY SH1T

I told you!!!!!!!!!!

OH FUCK

TH3R3 SH3 1S!!!

There you are!!!!!!!

1M-

1M 4CTU4LLY-

...

VR1SK4?

What's up?

DO YOU R34LLY TH1NK 1M CUT3??

>::::0

YES!

I mean, not in like a, you know-

R1GHT-

Cause I'm not-

M3 31TH3R-

But you are *objectively* cute, okay? Not handsome, not dashing,

CUTE.

CUT3 4ND D4NG3ROUS

Cute and dangerous!

>:]

>::::)

Damn, look at us. Mindfang and Redglare, ready to take on the

world.

W3 SUR3 DO CUT 4N 1NT1M1D4T1NG S1LHOU3TT3, HUH?

Oh, we'll cut a lot more than that soon enough!

H3H3H3

But you're right. We look like the real deal now.

W3 4R3 TH3 R34L D34L!!

ONC3 WORD G3TS OUT 4BOUT US, TH3R3 WONT B3 4 S1NGL3 TROLL L3FT 1N

OUR FL4RP D1V1S10N WHO D03SNT F34R TH3 SW1FT JUST1C3 OF TH3 SCOURG3

S1ST3RS

Terezi, we're gonna kick so much butt and murder so many bad guys

it's unreal.

1 KNOW, 1TS GONN4 B3 SO COOL

It really is.

.....

Hey, um.

I'm.

>:?

Nevermind.

OHHHHH??

WHOS L4T3 TO TH3 S3LF-CONF1D3NC3 H4RV3ST NOW?

Wow, you're soooooooo clever using my own words against me like

that.
TH4NK YOU, 1 TRY
NOW T3LL M3 WH4T YOU W3R3 GONN4 S4Y B3FOR3 1 H4V3 TO FORC3 1T OUT
OF YOU
Oh, is that a threat?
1T M1GHT B3
Hah! Like you'd have the guts to follow through on-
Oh-
Hey!
What are you-
Ouch!
Stop that!
NO
Get off!
M4K3 M3 >:]
I...
um.
Is it getting warm in here, or-
CONF3SS, CR1M1N4L
CRIMINAL???????? I didn't even do anything!
CONC34L1NG P3RT1N3NT 1NFORM4T1ON FROM H1S HONOR4BL3 TYR4NNYS COURT
1S 4 GR13VOUS OFF3NS3, TH3 ONLY SU1T4BL3 PUN1SHM3NT FOR WH1CH 1S
3X3CUT1ON
You say that a8out EVERY crime!
4DD NONCOMPL14NC3 UND3R OFF1C14L 1NT3RR0G4T1ON TO TH3 L1ST OF YOUR
OFF3NS3S
Jegus, you're really laying it on thick today, Pyrope.
S1L3NC3, PR1SON3R!!
o-
oh, uh-
NOW T4LK!!
i-
Ahem.
What I was gonna say was, that. I'm glad we're friends.
OH
Oh?
SORRY, 1 D1DNT M34N TO-
Ow, watch where you point that thing!
1 SHOULDNT H4V3-
1M SORRY VR1SK4, 1 D1DNT KNOW-
Dude, it's okay! Oof, hold on.

There. See? No harm done.

4R3 YOU SUR3??

Yeesh, you really are a weird troll, you know that?

WH...

WH4T DO YOU M34N?

When we're out on the seas getting ready to dunk on a bunch of unsuspecting pillagers, you're a menace. Fucking unstoppable! But when it's just us, you can go from meek apologies to full tilt murderfrenzy and back again in the blink of an eye! It's disorienting. It'd almost be enough to make me reconsider partnering up with you, except when we're out there you never even so much as flinch!

I just don't get it.

1 COULD SAY TH3 S4M3 OF YOU

Whaaaaaaaaat? No way.

Y3S W4Y! YOU M4K3 4 SHOW OF B31NG 4LL DOM1N33R1NG 4ND POW3RFUL, BUT D33P DOWN YOUR3 4CTU4LLY 4 R34LLY...

4 R34LLY N1C3 P3RSON 4ND 4 GOOD FR13ND. WH3N YOU YOU W4NT TO B3

Fuck you! I'm too cool to be nice.

YOUR3 4 LOS3R 4ND YOU KNOW 1T

Lies!

4CCUS1NG H1S HONOR4BL3 TYR4NNYS P3RSON4L L3G1SL4C3R4TOR OF P3RJURY?? TH4TS GO1NG ON TH3 L1ST

Are you REALLY keeping a list?

>:]

Don't you wink at me.

1LL W1NK 4S MUCH 4S 1 W4NT. W1NK W1NK W1NK!! WH4T 4R3 YOU GONN4 DO 4BOUT 1T, HUH?

Stop, stooooooooop, I'm ticklish!

1 KNOW. 1 P4Y 4TT3NT1ON TO TH3S3 TH1NGS, S3RK3T, TH4TS WH4T M4K3S M3 SO GOOD 4T MY JOB!

Pfffffffff hahaha-

H3H3H

Hahaahaha!

H4H4H4H4H4!!

Ha.

DW33B

Nerd.

>:]

:::)

1 DO M34N 1T THOUGH

Hm?

I DONT TRUST 34SY, VR1SK4, BUT...

I TRUST YOU

Huh.

WH4T?

I... I trust you too, actually. Weird.

Y34H 1TS 4LMOST L1K3 WERE FR13NDS OR SOM3TH1NG

Hah! Almost like.

>:P

You know what, Terezi?

WH4T?

I've got a good feeling a8out us.

M3 TOO

Not to count our cluck8easts 8efore they've hatched, 8ut...

8etween your smarts and my luck?

I think we could REALLY fuck some things up together.

boom.

It happens fast, but the pain takes forever.

I feel shards of it tear through my cheek, my ear, my scalp, I think I even feel a piece of it in my mouth as a scream bursts out of me and I tumble backwards out of my chair.

Searing hot fire boils the skin of my chest as the force of it shatters every bone in my arm, pushes it away from me, tears it out of its socket like a cork from a bottle. I can't open my eyes. I can't think. All I can do is scream, as much out of anger as pain. It's all I can do to conjure that anger, because I can't be weak. I can't. I CANNOT BE WEAK.

My blood is everywhere, now there is only the throbbing hum of my own heartbeat beneath the ringing in my head. When I breathe, my chest convulses. How much of me is injured? I can barely see. I can barely see anything. It's so loud. It's so quiet. I can't see a fucking thing, I-

Is this it? Was she right? Am I about to die?

I think about her.

Her smile when I told her about me. How excited she was that she wasn't alone. When I showed her that she could be who she wanted. Putting our Flarp outfits together. Filling in our character sheets. I think about every time we said that no matter what else happened we would ALWAYS be there for each other, because WE were the only ones who understood how it felt to be US.

She lied.

She's a liar because she did this.

She did this.

She did this to me.

SHE DID THIS TO ME!!!!!!!

It hurts. Oh fuck, it hurts. it hurts so much. it's worse than- than anything. i don't care about my arm or my vision loss or all the blood that's pouring out of me i just

i only care about her.

I only care about her.

and she went to **him** to kill me.

SHE WENT TO **HIM** TO KILL ME. SHE COULDN'T EVEN LOOK ME IN THE EYE WHEN SHE

No. I refuse to cry. I am not WEAK. I AM NOT HURT.

I'M ANGRY. I'M ANGRY AND I'M GOING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

So I put a finger to my head and concentr8, close my eye, push through the pain, feel myself extend 8eyond the 8oundaries of my self. There is no plan, I already know exactly what I'm going to do, I don't need a plan 8ecause there's only one thing to do, it's instinct at this point, I can just FEEL the exact path I can take to 8urn her, to flay her, to string her up 8y her own fucking delusions and show her that she can't 8EAT ME, SHE CAN'T, SHE CAN'T, SHE C8N'T, SHE

8ut she isn't there.

she isn't anywhere.

Rage 8uilds up in my chest, how, HOW, you can't take this, she can't take this from me, SHE DOESN'T GET TO TAKE THIS FROM ME TOO!!!!!!!!!!

Then I open my eyes and I see her. She's lying on the 8ed, asleep. Of course she is. She looks so calm, so peaceful, so utterly un8othered, and the thought of her resting easy while I 8leed to death like this is FUCKING INFURI8ING so I

I slide on top of her

feel her 8breathing 8eneath me, softly

she looks older than I remem8er

I'm gritting my teeth

heart is racing so fast as I

put 8oth hands

over her throat

feel her heart 8EATING under the skin of my left hand, while the cold steel of my right slowly presses down, digs into her

she opens her eyes, and they're

red

she's blind

I scream at her

I SCREAM WITHOUT WORDS

BECAUSE WE HAVE

we have nothing to say

i have fucking nothing to say to her.

i'm going to KILL HER and i'm going to DIE on top of her

and i'm

she's

i

Terezi: JUN3??

her voice is barely audible, but i can just make out... what? who the FUCK is

it's a distraction, have to make this quick before she

her eyes widen as her body struggles to pull breath. she mouths something, with just enough air that i can hear it.

Terezi: VR1SK4?? >:x

vriska.

Vriska?

I blink a few times as I realize what I'm seeing, realize what I'm DOING OH SHIT!!

My hands fly away from her neck, and as she gasps for air Terezi pushes me off hard enough that I land flat on my back on the floor. It knocks the wind out of me for a few seconds, but I'm still so confused. What was I, why was I-

I scramble up to my feet and look at her, she's coughing so hard, sat up against the wall, I see where my prosthetic arm had her neck there's a dark and sickly bruise and even a trickle of blood, and when I look down at my right hand I see my shiny fingertips are dulled with her blood no no NO what the fuck!

June: I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I don't know what I was doing I swear I wasn't trying to-

June: are you okay Terezi?????????

June: please tell me you're okay I really don't know what's going on-

Terezi: SHUT UP

June: <:x

oh no oh no oh no oh no

1 S41D SHUT UP!! >:[

<:x

Terezi: WH4T TH3 FUCK W4S TH4T

June: I don't know!

Terezi: WHY W3R3 YOU TRY1NG TO K1LL M3

June: I don't know!!!!!!!!!!

Terezi: WHY D1D YOU

Terezi: WHY D1D YOU SM3LL L1K3 VR1SK4

June: I!

June: what?

Vriska? why would I...

wait. I think I remember- UGH it's so messy, I can't keep it straight!

what was it? It was

June: it was a dream, but it felt so real. I was Vriska sitting at her computer when a...

June: a cue ball? exploded?????????

June: I don't know what that's

Terezi gasps and puts her hands to her mouth. I sit on the bed and start to reach out for her but then I see the blood

on my hands?

and I

I can't believe I did this

June: I'm so sorry Terezi, I don't know what's happening!

Terezi: I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT'S HAPPENING

June: ...you do?

Terezi: FUCK!!

June: what?????????

she rubs her neck and coughs some more what do I do do I try to comfort her or-

I see she's crying a bit. Just a little, so little I don't know if she notices. But I do. I see a trickle of tears run down her cheek, over her jaw, mixing with the blood on her neck

is she afraid of me now??? oh no no no I couldn't take it if she's afraid of me now-

Terezi's hand lands on my face.

Terezi: YOU ARE THE LAST SCARY THING IN THE HISTORY OF PARADOX SPACES

Terezi: NOW SHOOOSH

June: o

Terezi: 1 S41D SHOOOSH

she presses her hands to my head and does the mind-y thing

and I

I feel

PAIN

AS EQUIUS 8OR3S A HOLE INTO MY NERVOUS SYSTEM TO ATTACH A NEW ARM, I'M 8ARELY ALIVE AND ALL I CAN SEE IS HER FACE, LAUGHING AT ME, CELEBR8ING ANOTHER JUST-

Terezi lets go of me and I tum8le backwards off the bed. ow. twice in a night.

June: that was... I was at Equius's respite8lock!

June: I mean, I was at his house. and he was-

I gra8 my left shoulder with my right hand, expecting to feel a 8loody lump-

except my left arm is fine. my right arm is the one that was shattered and replaced with a prosthetic.

I look at 8oth my hands and it's like

I'm

on the wrong side of the mirror

it's clearing up, I think- I'm starting to see it. Memories. It was a memory. Hers...

or

mine?

June: why did you do it?

Terezi: DO WH4T

June: doc scratch! why did you-

Terezi: 1 DON'T W4NT TO T4LK 4BOUT 1T

June: why would you do that to me?????????

Terezi: >:[

Terezi: 1 D1DN'T DO 1T TO YOU, 1 D1D 1T TO VR1SK4!!

I stare at her.

Watch her.

she's right isn't she? she's

I'm

disappointed

Feel this

anger

Boil up in me

this memory, it

it feels like mine

it hurts too much to be anyone else's

June: what's the difference?

her face does something I can't describe

she doesn't even notice until it's too late

like an expression between outrage and...

disgust.

at me.

June: you've been inside my head, you *know* I'm not lying.

Terezi: I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT

June: I may not literally be Vriska, but-

Terezi: I SAID I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!!

June: well, I do!

Terezi: I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU WANT, JUN! WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN ME
AND HER IS IN THE PAST AND IT ISN'T ANY OF YOUR FUCKING
BUSINESS!!!!

oh.

oh.

sorry, I'm sorry

I'm sorry-

aren't I?

I'm

it starts in the center of my chest

a little fire that

consumes me

all my blood is hot beneath my skin, and

I stand up, my teeth clenched-

it's so fucking clear to me, suddenly, I could almost laugh. I'm not a frightened animal to be pushed around and corralled. The instinct I feel telling me to apologize, to back down, I swallow it like a bitter pill and drown the fucking thing in this inferno of anger as I grab the collar of Terezi's shirt with an iron grip and yank her off the bed onto her feet and SCREAM WITH EVERY MOLECULE OF OXYGEN IN MY LUNGS-

IT 'S *OUR*
BUSINESS,
REDGLARE !

then it's gone

and

I see myself. holding her up like I'm about to...

do something.

and Terezi, arms dangling at her side

not even trying to defend herself.

then the bedroom door swings open. I don't let go of her in time for Rose and Kanaya to avoid seeing me like this.

like what?

You know what.

do i?

They're already one step away from seeing us as a villain, this is only going to make things worse.

no, we fixed that, remember? we're all friends again, everything's peachy keen...

Do you really think they forgot what we did?

no!

Did you forget what THEY did to US?

no, but

But nothing!!!!!!! It's just a matter of time before she decides we're a threat again and then

stop. stop. please. she's listening-

L1ST3N1NG TO WH4T??

to...

you couldn't hear...?

WOW, I'M FUCKING DONE WITH THIS TODAY

Rose: Is... everything alright?

Terezi: W3'R3 F1N3

**Terezi: W3 W3R3 ROL3PL4Y1NG 4ND JUNE JUST GOT 4 L1TTL3 TOO 1MM3RS3D
1N TH3 F4NT4SY**

June: what?

does she mean that like-

is that supposed to be a cover story or was she...

was she insulting me?

PUT 1T TOG3TH3R YOURS3LF, G3N1US

Terezi shoves me and marches past Rose and Kanaya out of the room and w8 no don't-!

the front door slams shut.

my heart hurts. I look at my arm, still mostly outstretched and I

I don't...

**Kanaya: I Have A Faint Suspicion That Terezi Has Been Practicing
Her Human Sarcasm**

The strange phenomenon called June Egbert looks around her room as though it contains the story of her life. At best, it can only be said to contain half. When she cries and crumbles to the floor, the human called Rose Lalonde hurries to June's side. It is late, but no one present will get any more sleep tonight.

The grave syncratic implications of the slow motion impact that is June Egbert will, of course, be explored at length soon enough. But first, we must briefly turn our attention elsewhere.

Fear not of getting lost. We have already seen how Earth C salivates over our attention, how it lusts for our gaze even when we are quintillions of lightyears away.

No matter how far we travel, we will never escape its gravitational pull.

We leave the universe again, but our destination now is much farther away and far more difficult to spot. This does not impede our progress. We will see what we must. We always do.

We see a ship that has no name hurtling through paradox space at top speed. Even still, it should be so many years away from arriving at its destination that the act of counting them alone would take an average human lifetime. But the void bows to no law and meets no expectation. It will do as it pleases, physics be damned.

We see the ship's three occupants feasting on preserved proteins for the superfluously contextual meal they call breakfast. Two of them are having a normal conversation, but the third sits alone. She can scarcely remember to eat as she stares out of a thick port window into the all-encompassing nothing. Her sleep has been erratic, her mood in turns furious and meek. One of her ten fingers worries the well-worn handle of the cane propped up beside her.

The face of the human called Dana Straten is a portrait of conflict as she thinks to herself:

Why is it so loud in here?

Every morning it's like this. Crawl out of the space hammock, pour out some space gruel, and just sit here for an hour contemplating all the shit I don't want to contemplate. Doesn't matter what I want, though, does it! No, my fantastic and healthy brain does whatever the fuck it wants, and these days it just wants to **SCREAM**.

We're getting closer. I don't know how I can feel it, but I can. It's dreadful and exhilarating all at once, knowing that I'm finally going to get some answers. Some way or another.

Orrrrr maybe I'll fuck up and die immediately, and then I'll never know if she's...

I don't want to do this.

But I have to do this.

And I'm already doing this, so what's the use in whinging? Besides, it's the right thing to do, and it's the only thing left to do! So why is it that every time I steel myself and make up my mind, all I can think is-

*Are you sure? Are you **really** sure?*

And,

I don't know.

I guess I can't know until the time comes.

God, I wish it were quieter in my head.

This is the doubt she has felt every day since her vessel left the meteor that was once her home, though that is a deeply contentious word in this case. Can any residence found after banishment truly be called a home?

But now we're getting ahead of ourselves. Dana Straten's story approaches just as fast and just as surely as her ship, but it is still some time away yet.

Three days, as a matter of fact.

And that is all we needed to see.

For the moment, anyway.

doc scratch dialog taken from homestuck page 2244

visrezi dialog taken from homestuck page 2258

thursday 1

CONTENT WARNING for: descriptions of acute anxiety, gender dysphoria, and PTSD symptoms.

THURSDAY, 4/11

my head hurts, but at least they've finally shut up. or maybe they stopped a long time ago and I just... didn't notice?

no color. no light. feels like I'm underwater, swimming in a sea of indistinct thoughts. words and phrases all around me, spoken by countless voices. some are old, like echoes in a cave. some are new, like a crowd of people all talking at once. and others just feel... what's the word. parallel? like they're happening in the room next door, muffled by a few inches of drywall.

it's funny that I'm narrating this to myself, but it's the only way I can make sense of the noise. the only way I can make out shapes in all this murky water.

fuck, does this sound like me? *are* these my thoughts? it doesn't feel like a Sburd thing, it doesn't feel like a Dirk thing, it doesn't feel like a... pretransition me thing.

maybe this is me, and I just. don't know. who I am.

why is this happening now? I was fine. everything was fine. why do I feel like nothing will ever be fine aga-

when I blink, I remember that the world exists.

it's morning now, I can tell from the faint glow giving shape to a room that lacked definition moments ago. a packed bookshelf. a carpet giving way to linoleum and an open kitchen. a wood table and a small window glowing dark cerulean, carved into stark angles by the naked limbs of a tree just waking up from its winter nap.

was I asleep?

I don't feel rested. if anything I'm even more tired than I was before.

not asleep, but not awake either. staring out into the dark and watching for flashes of lightning in the void, for exploding universes to greet me again.

I haven't been back to the void in a long time. why did I expect to end up there?

punishment.

for what?

for what happened last night.

what happened last night?

what I remember is-

I SCREAMED AT TEREZI, then she left and i started crying. rose and kanaya helped me out into the living room. i tried to explain what happened, but mostly i just cried.

i don't remember when the lights went out, or when rose waved kanaya to bed. eventually i must have stopped crying and became numb. I still feel numb. numb and raw. I can tell from the weight of my eyes just how much crying I did.

where am I? oh, I'm on the couch. and I'm laying on Rose's lap. she's asleep, her head

lolloped to the side, mouth open.

one of her hands is on my back.

it's odd how different she feels from Terezi. sweeter smell, softer skin, a more delicate touch. there's always been this *thing* between us that I couldn't describe, but it still shocks me sometimes that we're just like this now.

I don't know why they did, but I'm glad Rose and Kanaya decided to stay.

my stomach is churning. hazy dream-like memories keep flashing in my mind.

I reach down next to me and feel my phone on the floor. pick it up, unlock it. no new messages.

I go through my contacts list, hoping to find someone to talk to. someone I *want* to talk to.

Jake? definitely asleep. Jane? likely in the middle of her second coffee and making calls about... oh, my birthday party! I guess that's still a thing. that or global finance. don't want to interrupt her either way.

Roxy? Calliope? the last time I tried to talk to them it was... weird. especially Callie. she's been off ever since she got that diary.

Dave? you know what, it's been weird with him too! things have been a bit weird with everyone, now that I think about it. it's like we all had a moment where we were really close friends again, and then everything went just a little bit sour.

I don't know how, but I'm certain this is my fault.

Jade?

...

no.

finally, I stop at Terezi.

I can tell her anything. I've told her everything. But now I look at her name and I'm terrified. I don't want to think about how many messages I've probably already sent begging her to forgive me, apologizing, explaining what happened.

what if she hates me now?

what if she's afraid of me now?

if she does, I deserve it. I didn't mean to hurt her but I did-

But I DID mean to hurt her -

no, no, stop! just stop. I don't understand. why am I so angry about this memory?

this memory that... *feels* like mine. and is. But isn't. I lived it, But this body didn't. does that even matter?

I feel a painful churn in my gut like a piano wire is wrapped around my insides, slowly pulling taut by an invisible hand.

something's coming.

Something is happening.

I can feel it, I-

Rose makes a sound, and I look up to see her crying softly in her sleep. I've seen her have all sorts of dreams and nightmares, but the expression on her face is different. I haven't seen this look since...

since she found her mom and my dad murdered on the roof of a castle, almost ten years ago.

she showed them to me, and i was furious and sad. mostly sad. jack stood there not smiling. not laughing. he just watched us. and when i readied my hammer to kick his sorry ass, he stabbed me through the chest.

and that was only the second time i died.

tears are stinging the corners of my eyes, as the scent of blood and black oil mingling fades from my mind.

I can't do this again. can't get lost in those memories. I sit up and nudge Rose's shoulders.

June: Rose, wake up.

her eyes snap open, and when she looks at me she seems...

heartbroken.

when I brush a tear from her cheek with the back of my hand, she smiles.

Rose: Good morning to you, too.

June: are you alright?

Rose: I could ask you the same thing.

she wipes off the single tear on my cheek that got away.

June: I asked you first.

Rose: I'm fine. Just a nightmare.

June: what was it?

Rose: Really?

Rose: Come on, June, you know there's nothing more boring than someone trying to explain what happened in a dream.

June: that's never stopped you before.

Rose: Hah. I suppose that's true.

Rose: Honestly, I'm not all that sure how I'd describe it even if I wanted to. It was...

she looks up at the ceiling, dancing her head back and forth to make a show of her consideration.

Rose: Dramatic.

June: ahhhhhhhh, dreaming in anime are we?

Rose: Oh please. I would never stoop so low, consciously or otherwise. If anything I was dreaming in Brechtian theatre.

June: uh,

June: hahaha!

Rose: You don't know who Brecht is, do you?

June: ...no.

Rose: So why did you laugh?

June: I... didn't want to be rude?

Rose: Ah, I see.

Rose: The classic introvert's gamble.

Rose: "Do I tell my moirail I don't get the reference and risk derision for my lack of culture, or do I play it cool and hope against hope that she doesn't catch me out in the followthrough?"

Rose: Seems you lost the die roll this time.

Well well well, looks like we won't have to fight over the spoils
after all!

how do you figure that

Come on, Dualscar! Two chests, two victors.

Sorry, "vvictors".

There, see? I'm nothing if not diplomatic.

and wwhos to say i dont wwant wwhats in both chests

Oh, I'm sure you do! Hell, so do I.

But we had an agreement.

Suspend our vicious rivalry long enough to take this galleon of
ghouls.

Get each other's backs when the going gets rough.

Split the loot evenly when it's over.

i think its cute that you give a shit about the sanctity a verbal
agreements

And I think it's just adorable that you're so far up your own
spinal crevice you actually believe you could take me in a fight.

is that supposed to scare me mindfang

Only if you find objective truth scary.
big talk for someone whos lost so much blood it raised the planets
water level
Says the boy who took three rapiers to the chest.
One of which is still there, by the way!
You might want to take care of that.
huh
woww i didnt even notice that one
this looks pretty cool actually i think ill leave it
My point still stands, unlike you.
Unfortunately for us both, I do care about the sanctity of verbal
agreements.
So instead of bickering over who would win in a fight-
me
-why don't we just stick to the plan and split our loot straight
down the middle?
It's only fair.
fine if youre gonna be a bitch about it
im takin the blue one though
What?????????
you heard me
But the purple one is RIGHT THERE!
SO
SO you get the purple one and I get the blue one!
nah thats too obvious
knowin you the only reason you were so riled for this raid in the
first place is you got hold a some secret intel i missed
I don't need 8 eyes to see that these chests are color coded,
Ampora, and I'm not about to get whatever stupid crap one of your
fishy predecessors left here.
counterpoint
i want the blue one
Fuck you, I want the blue one!
fine take the blue one
i dont even care that much i was just enjoyin the moment
you know sometimes you take all the fun out a this game
Awwwwwww, cheer up grumpy gills!
We can always fight over it next time.
yeah whatever
...
WWOAH

:0
 Is that Ahab's-
 LOOK AT THIS BIG FUCKIN GUN
im not evven mad anymore this is tight
 wwhats in your chest vvriss
 Let's see...
 Oh.
 wwhat is that
 is that some dice
 I...
 I can't believe it.
looks like you shoulda taken the purple chest after all
 Are you kidding?
 This is the fluorite octet!!!!!!!
 the wwhat
Gam8lignants the world over terrorized the high seas with weapons
 like this!
 I'm losing my fucking mind!
 lame
 No, not lame, AWESOME.
 uhuh
 lucky for you i guess
 You're telling me!

Rose: Yes, I *am* telling you.

I shake my head.

June: sorry, I'm really groggy, uh-

June: did I say something just now?

Rose: ...I said "It seems you lost the die roll this time," and you mumbled for a second before replying, "You're telling me."

June: oh.

June: right, yeah, that makes sense.

Rose tilts her head curiously.

Rose: Does it?

I don't know how to respond.

what I want is to tell her that I just had a flash of memory so vivid it didn't feel like a memory, it felt like it was just. happening?

But

I haven't forgotten

what happened the last time I seemed unstable to Rose specifically.

haven't forgotten what she looked like with her wands out, staring down her nose at me, all our friends by her side. ready to overpower me. to kill me if necessary.

Rose: I suppose that answers my question.

June: huh?

Rose: You're not alright at all. You look like you've seen a ghost.

June: well,

June: didn't I?

June: I saw a ghost so hard I almost...

June: I

June: I could have killed her, Rose.

Rose: So it's still happening, then.

damn it.

June: ...yeah.

June: when you mentioned the roll of the dice, I remembered finding the fluorite octet with Dualscar at the end of a particularly challenging flarp campaign.

Rose watches me in silence. why isn't she saying anything? did I say something weird?????????

June: oh! sorry, Dualscar is Eridan.

Rose: ...

June: uh.

June: what's wrong?

Rose: I'm sure that nothing is wrong by someone's definition.

June: um?

Rose: I think you're telling the truth.

June: was that... in question?

Rose: It's not that I didn't believe you before, but-

June: what, did you think I was LYING?

June: did you think I fucking m8de up reliving MY memories as some kind of lameass cover story for trying to STRANGLE my GIRLFRIEND?

Rose: June-

June: don't "June" me, Rose!

I hear a door open behind me

oh, I'm

not sitting down anymore?

I'm floating, my heart's racing, I can see Rose's hair rustle in the breeze coming off my body

turn around and see Kanaya standing there, and she looks

her fists are clenched, she's defensive, ready to fight.

I look back at Rose and I see it in her eyes again.

I see her asking herself

if she can trust me. fuck

I collapse out of the air down to my knees, nearly slam my head on the corner of the couch.

June: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-

Kanaya: Are You Okay Rose

Rose: Yes, I'm fine.

June: I'm sorry, I shouldn't have shouted at you, I-

Rose: No, you shouldn't have.

I hear her shirt rustle and I think, okay, this is it, I crossed the line for the last time, everything was FINE and then I fucked it up, now she's gonna kill me because I'm a liability and then she's gonna call Terezi and tell her that everything is peachy keen now because the PROBLEM IS TAKEN CARE OF

flinch when her hand touches my shoulder

Rose: Come back, June.

Rose: Just breathe.

I look up at her expecting to see more anger, or

but she's

calm

June: why aren't you-

Rose: Mad? Oh, I am. Normally I prefer to have my shouting matches *after* breakfast.

Rose: But I've spent enough time with you to know that sometimes you panic and lash out.

Rose: It's not acceptable behavior, but I know that it's a symptom.

June: I don't understand

Rose: June.

Rose: You're traumatized.

Rose: I know my pathologizing makes you uncomfortable, but this is classic PTSD behavior.

June: oh

June: is that what this is?

Rose: Which part?

I shrug.

June: all of it?

Rose: I don't know, June. But we're not going to figure it out while you're sitting on the floor.

oh. right.

I push myself up, back onto the couch. Rose's hand migr8s to my arm. her touch makes me want to cry

wait, no, I'm already crying. it's me, of course I'm crying

June: I'm sorry-

Kanaya: Does Anyone Want Caffeinated Bean Water

Rose: Yes please.

June: oh god, yes.

Kanaya: Cool

Kanaya: Please Dont Murder My Wife While Im In The Kitchen

June: I'll... try?

Kanaya: Try Very Hard Egbert

Kanaya: Im Grading You On A Curve

she leaves the room, and I shake my head.

June: what the fuck does that mean?

Rose: It means she's worried about you and hopes you won't do something you'll regret.

Rose: Now, what I was *trying* to say is that you're a terrible liar.

June: is that really what you were trying to say?

Rose: In the sense that you referring to an alien memory in an uncharacteristically nonchalant first person with such unflinching cultural specificity speaks to the objective truth of your subjective experience? Yes, that is precisely what I was trying to say.

June: oh.

Rose: The intensity of these flashbacks is obviously a problem, but at the very least you've established the verisimilitude of your Vriskafication.

June: please don't call it that

Rose: Would you rather I call it a psychotic break?

June: oh come on, it's not...

June: hmm.

Rose: That's what I thought.

Rose: With that out of the way, now we have to ask the *really* tough questions. Do you think you can handle that?

June: I guess? I mean the sun isn't even up yet, but sure! fuck it.

Rose: Your enthusiastic indifference doesn't inspire a lot of confidence, but we don't exactly have time to reschedule.

June: ...don't we?

Rose: Are you a danger to yourself or others?

I feel another shock of anger surge up through my shoulders, into my hands, crackling behind my eyes. I don't like being ignored, and I definitely don't like the implication that I'm-

A DANGER? I'll show you a fucking-

**Its Ok To Be Dangerous
Lots Of People Are
And Dangerous People Can Be Really Important
Maybe Even The Most Important Sometimes
But It Just Means Theres Got To Be Someone Around To Keep An Eye On
Them**

Rose is looking at me. her gaze is too much, it's like she can see everything going through my head better than I can.

what is it with me and Seers?

I look away, down at the carpet.

June: I...

Kanaya walks in, three steaming mugs in hand. she gives the one with a rose on it to Rose, the smiling poop emoji one to me, and keeps the third that just says, in bright green comic sans, "**MILF**." she takes a long sip from it as she settles into our little recliner caddy-corner to the couch.

June: wow, that was fast.

Kanaya: Immediate Bean Juice Powder Packets Baby

Kanaya: Anyway You Were Saying Something About Your Relentless Bloodlust

June: hey now-

Kanaya: As Someone Who Infrequently Dabbles In The Consumption Of

Blood For Purely Recreational Purposes

Kanaya: Trust Me

Kanaya: I Can Relate

June: ...fair enough.

Rose: So. Are you?

June: a danger to myself or others?

Rose: Yes.

I curl up into the corner of the couch, hugging my knees to my chest as I sip some of this decidedly okay coffee.

The fact that I'm dangerous is one of the first things I accepted about the new me. I'm dangerous, and I want to be dangerous. that's what I thought back then, right? before everything with Dirk.

it's been months, though, and the danger hasn't shown itself since. it's like the showdown emptied me, somehow. all that rage disappeared. there have been flashes, but nothing quite as hot as, say, punching a building over.

I thought that anger was the aftershock of a collision that was over, that I was just unstable and irrational and really fucking *tired* and I finally chilled out once I got some decent sleep. yet here I am again, getting angry at the drop of a pin.

here I am, threatening to hurt the people I love and endangering the reality I fought so hard to maintain.

why isn't this over? why can't this be over? why is this happening again?????????

I feel the sharp points of my metal fingers digging into the skin of my left arm. the prosthetic has no feedback, no sensation of its own to tell me that it's MY arm that's hurting me, and not someone else reaching out through the void to punish me for

June: ugh

June: yeah. I'm dangerous.

Rose: Okay, good.

June: good?????????

Rose: June, the fact that you're dangerous is so self-evident it may as well be your surname.

Rose: The only thing worse would be ignorance of said danger, which you thankfully lack.

June: I guess that makes sense...

Rose: Now the next question. What the fuck do we do about it?

June:

Rose:

Kanaya:

June:

Rose:

June:

June: ...

Rose:

Kanaya:

June: ...do you expect me to have an answer?

Rose: I hoped you might at least have a suggestion.

June: isn't that YOUR job?

June: I mean, come on, what about me makes you think I have any idea what's going on inside my own head?

I gesture at my stained t-shirt and inside-out sweat pants. Rose looks me over, one side of her lips curling into a frown.

Rose: Hmm. Fair point.

June: thank you.

Kanaya: Now That You Mention It You Really Are A Mess

June: oh will you can it?

Kanaya's face softens, she's looking at me kinda... sad? oh god what the fuck did I do NOW?????????

June: did I say something wrong?

Kanaya: Can It

June: <:X

Kanaya: Not You

Kanaya: I mean You Said Can It

Kanaya: That's What Vriska Used To Say When She Wanted You To Shut Up

June: oh.

June: is that... 8ad?

Kanaya: Its Surprising To Hear Is All

Kanaya: You Exist In A Very Disarming Uncanny Valley Of Vriskaesque Behaviors

Rose: Die Unheimliche Vriska, even?

June: gazoontite.

Kanaya: You Definitely Arent As Funny As Her

June: what!

Kanaya: Anyway Rose I Believe You Were In The Middle Of Doing Something Actually Productive With Our Time

Rose: Right.

Rose: If you don't have any suggestions, can you at least elaborate on what you're feeling?

June: um.

June: well I had this thought, 8efore I woke you up.

June: there's me, right? 8ut there are two other pieces of me, too, and they're...

June: how do I explain this?

June: it's like a math problem. a plus b equals c. *him* plus Ultimate Gender Ghost Vriska equals June. o8vious, right?

Kanaya: Its So Obvious Im Not Even Sure Why You Bothered Saying It

June: you know, you're awfully sarcastic for someone who claims to not understand sarcasm.

Kanaya: Im Sure I Dont Know What You Mean And Frankly I Resent The Accusation

June: uhuh.

June: anyway, the weird thing a8out it is that even though I'm, you know, the result of this math problem... the addition is still happening?

June: not even that, exactly.

June: it's not like the Vriska and, uh, "J" 8its are getting dissolved and mixed together to make me.

June: they're just... there.

Rose: Hmmm.

Rose: That makes sense, actually.

June: does it?????????

Rose: If they *were* properly synthesized, I don't think Dirk could have used his Heart powers on you the way he did.

she says it nonchalantly to avoid triggering me I guess, 8ut as soon as his name leaves her mouth I remem8er, and I see she remembers too, I see her eyes dart over to

Kanaya. reminding herself she's still there.

just as the panic rises in the back of my throat, a thought hits me like a thrown stone that seems like a perfect diversion.

June: not to change the subject, but can I ask you something, Kanaya?

Kanaya: Um

Kanaya: Sure

June: have things changed for you since you went godtier?

Kanaya: They Certainly Havent Not Changed

Kanaya: Why Do You Ask

June: I'm just curious. TZ's been fine enough but she was always close to her aspect, and Karkat's, you know...

Kanaya: Karkat Is Karkat

June: right exactly.

June: But you've never really said one way or the other.

Kanaya: It Hasnt Come Up

June: which is wild considering how long we've been living together, don't you think?

Kanaya: And Just How Often Do You Verbally Reflect On The Psychological Impact Of Our On Again Off Again Relationship With Mortality

June: uh. all the time?

Kanaya: Oh Right Sorry I Forgot Who I Was Talking To For A Moment

Rose: Pleasant as this little repartee is to watch, I think we should-

Kanaya: To Actually Answer Your Question June

Kanaya: Whats Changed Is That The World Feels Different Now

June: how so?

she balances her mug between her knees and tilts her head back. I can't tell if she isn't sure how to continue, or if she's just playing it up for drama. watching her, it strikes me that she's not wearing makeup.

Kanaya did my makeup once. I asked her for help and she very patiently did me up, explained each step of the process. every word of it went in one ear and out the other.

I was so excited, giddy even. then it was done and she held a mirror to my face, and it

was euphoria. there she was. there *I* was! **that's a girl**, I said, and she said **Yes**, and I said, **I'm a girl**, and she said **Yes** again. she smiled when I smiled. she laughed when I teared up.

that whole day was. it was incredible. all four of us *girls* went out for the day, did some shopping, ate dinner at a nice faux-Italian place run by consorts. food wasn't great but I didn't care. I got sloppy drunk on sangria and made out with my girlfriend as a girl because I wanted to, and I could, so I fucking did.

then we got home, and I went into the bathroom to take my makeup off with the little wipes Kanaya showed me. and as I did I just. I started crying again. But not in a happy way. Because it was like peeling off the skin I'd always wanted to reveal all the things I'd momentarily forgotten that kept me from being her. facial hair. chin. nose. everything. everything.

haven't worn makeup since then, really.

Rose said my reaction to that before/after contrast should tell me something about the socially constructed nature of beauty or something, which I guess is true? but it doesn't change how I feel. maybe it should, I don't know. does that make me a bad person?

as if I'm spoiling for choice in that department.

when I glance at Rose, I see she's grinning at me. why-

Kanaya: Space

June: ...huh?

Kanaya: What Does The Word Space Make You Think Of

June: I don't know. stars and asteroids, I guess?

Kanaya: That Is Probably What Most People Would Say

Kanaya: Including Myself Until Recently

Kanaya: I've Always Had A Complicated Relationship With The Stuff But It Wasn't Until I Died And Then Came Back That I Really Started To Understand

she picks up her coffee and holds it out on her palm, taking care that "MILF" is facing us.

Kanaya: How Do You Know That This Is A Bean Juice Receptacle

June: well. uh. it's shaped like one?

Kanaya: Correct

Kanaya: But How Can You Discern Its Shape

June: wwwwwwwith my eyes?

Kanaya: Dont Be A Smartass Egbert

Rose: She's talking about positive and negative space.

June: oh, so she's made this comparison before?

Kanaya: Can It

Kanaya: If This Were A Drawing Then The Mug Would Be Positive Space And The Area Around It Would Be Negative

Kanaya: But If You Held It Up To Your Face So That You Could Only See The MILF Word Then The MILF Word Would Be Positive And The Mug Negative

she takes it by the handle again and drinks deep, rhythmically clinking her fingernails as she goes.

Kanaya: Anyway Thats What Space Means To Me Now

June: it means... "MILF"?

Kanaya: More Or Less

June: um

Kanaya: Space Is A Series Of Nested Positives And Negatives Like Those Eggs With Eggs In Them That Humans Like To Make For Some Reason

Kanaya: One Egg Is A Mug

Kanaya: One Egg Is MILF

Kanaya: One Egg Is The Universe

Kanaya: Are You With Me So Far

June: oh yeah, defin8ly

Kanaya: These Distinctions Are Largely Academic And I Normally Wouldnt Waste Time Explaining Them Except I Thought It Was Funny

Kanaya: This Was All To Say That I Expected What You Expected

Kanaya: I Expected Stars And Asteroids And Sundry Other Cosmic Artefacts

Kanaya: Instead I Learned How To See MILF For What It Was

Kanaya: Put In A Less Stupid Way I Gained An Awareness Of The

Spatial Composition Of Surfaces And Their Many Nested Planes

June: okay so... what does that mean for you?

Kanaya: It Means That When I Fly To The Brood Caverns I Can Feel Where Space Is Thick And Where Its Thin

Kanaya: Like How You Can Tell The Density Of Fabric With Your Fingertips

Kanaya: It Worried Me For A While Until I Realized That The World Has Probably Always Been Like This And I Was Too Busy Thinking About Girls Wearing Chokers To Notice

Kanaya: What Remains Worrisome Is The Possibility That I Could Use My Sylph Powers To Manipulate The Boundary Between Mug And MILF To Open A Hole In Space Itself

June: wait. like, so, you could turn the mug into-?

Kanaya: The Mug Is A Metaphor June

Kanaya: The MILF Word Is Just Paint On Ceramic

Kanaya: But Hypothetically Yes

June: and what happens when you... do. that. ?

Kanaya: No Idea

Kanaya: Havent Tried It

June: do you think it would be bad?

Kanaya: Do I Think Punching A Hole Into The Fabric Of The Universe Would Be Bad

June: I don't know! sorry if I seem dense right now, it's just you keep throwing around the word "MILF" in the context of all this metaphorical fucking space science jargon or whatever and I can't keep my thoughts straight!

Kanaya: Whats Wrong With The MILF Word

June: it's distracting!

Rose: Are you often distracted by milves, June?

June: wow, really?

Rose: You're the one who brought it up.

June: okay, new house rule: no more milf talk.

Rose: A mandated milf moratorium? How droll.

Kanaya: You Cant Stop The Milf June

Kanaya: The Milf Will Run Wild And Free As Is Its Nature And Its Right

June: now you're just making fun of me.

Kanaya: Wow June I Thought You Were An Heir Not A Seer

I roll my eyes.

June: well, thanks for humoring me, I guess!

June: anyway. um.

Rose: Right. Where were we?

Kanaya: Wiggler Level Addition

Rose: Of course.

Rose: You know, it's only appropriate that we'd be the ones to figure out how to seamlessly weave the mathematics of dissociative identities into the metaphysics of symbolic spatial planes over the course of a single conversation.

Kanaya: Normal Thursday Morning Coffee Talk

June: I'm just along for the ride at this point.

Rose: So, if I'm understanding your hypothetical equation correctly, it sounds like variables A and B are circumstantially simultaneous to outcome C.

June: oh.

June: fuck.

June: fuck!!!!!!!!!!

June: yeah that pretty much descri8es it!

June: but, okay, how is that possible?

Rose: Outside of a few scientifically dubious diagnoses, I haven't the faintest idea.

she scratches her chin, her eyes narrowed at the floor.

Rose: You've insisted from the beginning that you are equal parts deadname and Vriska, but you've only ever seemed to embody the parts that are... well, *you*. Why do you think that is?

June: I um.

June: I guess it's 8ecause...

June: well. this is a human body, right? that didn't change when I transed my gender.

Rose: Right.

June: so everything "Vriska" was from the outside coming in.

June: 8ut it's more than that.

June: when I think back on *him*, it's almost clinical. like reading a patient's chart at a hospital, you know?

June: "J. Eg8ert, born April 13th, died somewhere between three and five times, has depression, needs to get out more."

Rose: Accurate description.

June: I remember him. I remember 8eing him. but he doesn't feel like me. because he's half of me, right?

June: But he's the half I want to leave behind.

June: on the other hand, when I try to reflect on Vriska's memories, it's...

June: I don't know. chaotic. loud. all this manic, eager energy, like sticking my arm out of a moving jet.

Kanaya: That Definitely Sounds Like The Vriska Experience

June: god, you'd think the wind wouldn't scare me anymore, but it does!

June: *she* does.

June: she put me together, she literally saved my life! but she also nearly killed me in the process. whatever I am as a result of that...

June: everything's different now. everyone's traumatized, *I'M* fucking traumatized, and it feels like every time I get close to her it just makes things worse!

June: I just-

Rose: Stop.

when I look up at her I realize my hands are shaking, she's even holding my hand and it's still shaking. she leans towards me. locks eyes with me. doesn't blink

Rose: You can't keep thinking of this in terms of "she" and "him."

Rose: In your own words, you're more than both of them.

June: But they're literally arguing in my head-

Rose: I'm not saying that isn't happening.

Rose: I'm saying that you need to recontextualize *them* as inseparable from *you*. Because that's what they are.

Rose: His memories, her memories. Metaphysical questions aside, and once again in your own words, they're *your* memories.

Rose: Are you hearing me?

June: I guess...

Rose: I hope you guess correctly, because this is important.

Rose: What's happening to you, I *think*, is the inevitable result of carrying two traumatic lifetime's worth of thoughts and experiences simultaneously.

Rose: A double PTSD combob, if you will.

June: fuck off

Rose: No.

Rose: It's not fair that this is happening to you.

Rose: It's not fair that you're the confluence of so many painful and dangerous things, or that you hold within you so much power and

so much history.

Rose: But how often have any of us been dealt a fair hand?

June: so, what do you think I should do?

Rose: First, you need to swallow your fear and-

June: look I'm not afraid, I just-

Rose: June, you are LITERALLY trembling right now!

Rose: You are afraid. And that's okay, this is a frightening situation.

her brow furrows as she considers something. god I wish Terezi was here to tell me what the fuck is going through her head

Rose's face resolves to certainty. sadness in her eyes again.

Rose: I'm going to tell you something that's even more frightening, but I need you to understand that it isn't a threat, veiled or otherwise.

June: o...kay?

Rose: Okay.

she leans close, so close I think for a second she's gonna kiss me.

puts her lips next to my ear

warmth radi8s off her skin, her hair smells like flowery shampoo.

whispers

Rose: (I know what you did.)

oh

oh no

oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck my blood turns to ice Kanaya's staring at us confused what does this mean how does she

Rose: (Breathe, June.)

Rose: (I'm not going to tell anyone, and I'm not going to do anything about it.)

Rose: (It's okay.)

June: how do you-

Rose: (The same way Dirk knew. The same way you have the memories of someone you've barely even met.)

Kanaya: Is Everything Okay

I nod, a little, then too frantically, but, I'm still

Rose: (I know why you're afraid.)

Rose: (You're afraid because you've witnessed exactly what you're capable of, and you don't want to make the same mistake again.)

Rose: (It keeps you up at night. I've seen the guilt on your face.)

June: (why are you telling me this?)

Rose: (So that you'll listen to what I have to say.)

Rose: (Nothing is going to get better if you keep trying to hide from that retconned bender.)

Rose: (It may be neither relevant nor essential to this timeline, but it's still just as true as any other memory.)

Rose: (Violence is the cornerstone atop which our universe rests. Not just your violence but mine, and Kanaya's, and Terezi's, and Vriska's- everyone's violence, going back an eternity.)

Rose: (The only way to reconcile the screaming contradiction at your center is to risk the violence that scares you.)

Rose: (If you don't, things will only get worse.)

Rose: (You know that you're dangerous, June, so BE dangerous.)

Rose: (You'll need it for what's coming.)

June: (what?)

she pulls away, smiling, and I, I don't know why but I, I smile back

Rose: That is, *if* something is coming, which is impossible to say.

June: ummm?????????

Rose: Look, you've been treating "them" as a phenomenon separate from your trauma, and that's clearly a mistake.

Rose: If you really want to accept your whole self, you'll have to live all its constituent parts. Do you understand?

June: fuckin... I guess!

I get up from the couch and pace around the room. the solution is obvious now, she's MADE it obvious, but I don't want to do it, I don't, I'm scared to! they're looking at me expectantly, except Rose looks...

what is that fucking *look*? it's been off and on all morning, and yesterday too, at the boardroom, I wrote it off then because I thought it had to be harmless, but after THIS?

June: Rose, what else do you know that you're not telling me?

before she can answer, my phone vibrates. I unlock it to see a message from

Jade: im sorry

June: what the fuck?

Rose: Hmmm?

June: it's Jade. she's-

another message pops up.

Jade: this didnt go how i expected

Kanaya: What Does The Barkwitch Have To Say For Herself

June: I'm not sure

Jade: i hope you can see this june because im really scared and it would be nice to have some company

I start typing a response, but then a few more come in.

Jade: guess that was too much to ask

Jade: you know, i cant stop thinking about playing dressup with you

Jade: i really hoped wed get to do that someday

Jade: sorry i wasnt there for you, sis

Jade: sorry i couldnt be better

Kanaya: Are You Alright June

Kanaya: You Look Like You Just Saw A Spectral Hallucination

June: something's wrong

Rose: What?

June: I think she's in trou8le. I have to-

Rose: What do you mean she's in trouble? June?

I can't let something 8ad happen to her, I can't

8efore I realize I've even zapped to another part of the world, I'm already 8anging on her door-

But we continue to see two women sitting in a room together, one looking at the other with palpable confusion.

Kanaya: What The Fuck Just Happened

Rose: With Jade? I have no idea.

Kanaya: No

Kanaya: Well Yes

Kanaya: But More Specifically With June

The human called Rose Lalonde considers her wife's question through a sigh that is equal parts genuine and affected, following in the manner of all her actions.

A line of sweat percolates on her forehead as the pressure behind her eyes spikes exponentially.

Rose: I'll explain everything, but...

Rose: Can you get my pills first?

Kanaya: Is Your Head Hurting Again

Rose: Yeah.

Rose: It's killing me.

flashback kanaya dialog taken from homestuck page 2204

thursday 2

the door opens so fast that my fist connects with Jade's faCE OH SHIT I JUST PUNCHED J8DE I WATCH AS SHE STUM8LES BACK ONTO THE FLOOR

June: I'M SORRY JADE I DIDN'T MEAN TO PUNCH YOU IN THE FACE

I can't tell what she's saying beyond a string of whines and expletives so I rush in and try to gra8 her but with the hand not clutching her face she points at me, and suddenly I'm suspended motionless in the air, moving my legs and arms idly like I'm in a fucking cartoon

Jade: OW!!

Jade: BARK BARK >:(

Jade: what the heck june wheres the fire!!

June: I'm sorry I REALLY didn't mean to hit you I was just worried because I...

June: I got...

looking at her I notice she's not wearing pajamas or sweats or anything else you'd expect for this hour of the morning, 8ut instead something between a lab coat and crabber's overalls, hair tied behind her head, hands dirty and streaked with grease.

it hasn't 8een long since the last time I visited Jade's lab, but I realize now it's barely recognizable. The walls are lined from floor to ceiling with old, oddly shaped electronics with spinning tape, fish glo8es full of lightning, unmarked 8uttons of many colors flashing at seemingly random intervals. Some of these machines look organic, their surfaces glowing and moving almost like they need to 8reathe.

I can't see her plants anywhere.

June: what is all this stuff?

Jade: early detection hardware, now tell me why youre-

June: early detection for what?

when she stands up, I see the hearty bruise she's now sporting just under her left eye, and her glasses are bent and cracked

June: oh god, I'm reaaaaaaally sorry Jade! I can get you a new pair if-

with a snap of her fingers, the broken pair disappears and a new set shows up in her hand.

June: wh

June: you can... you can just fix your glasses at will?

Jade: no dummy i keep a stockpile of them on the moon

June: ...you have a stockpile of spare glasses on the moon?

Jade: yes

June: why do you haAAAA

I plummet to the earth with sudden and unwelcome force as Jade replaces the spectacles on the bridge of her nose and takes a few strong steps in my direction.

June: oww

Jade: now that youve given me a FUCKING SHINER, care to explain why youre here june?

June: I'm really sorry, fuck I've been hurting a lot of people lately-

Jade: i absolve you of your sins now tell me whats flipped your lid before i zap you into space

June: right, uh. well I...

June: I thought you were in danger?

Jade: why would you think that

June: maybe because of the messages you sent?????????

Jade: what the heck are you talking about?

I scramble back to my feet and hold my phone out to her.

Jade: oh

Jade looks them over and the annoyance on her face evaporates as she grabs my phone
HEY

June: hey!

Jade: this is incredible

June: what is??

Jade: i cant believe you actually got these!

June: why wouldn't I?

she falls back into a disused chair, shaking her head at the string of texts for a long stretch of silence. I can feel my heart pounding in my head, but now I'm more confused than anything.

Jade: i always assumed they just...

Jade: woof

her eyes drift and Jade mutters something to herself.

June: hey, are you-

then she looks up at me with a sad little grin, and sends my phone drifting back to me like a slow motion paper airplane. despite its leisurely pace I still almost miss it because the gesture is so surprising.

Jade: yeah i can see why you'd be freaking out about those!

Jade: they're definitely concerning messages. i sure wasn't in a great place when i sent them

June: wait, so- so these aren't recent?

Jade: no i sent them centuries ago

June: woah!

Jade: yeah that's a trip huh

Jade: what timing

June: yeah...

June: so uh, what was going on?

her smile dips a bit.

Jade: it was

Jade: during the battle with lord english

June: what??

Jade: it's a long story that i don't really want to get into

June: why?

Jade: sigh

Jade: i could spend the rest of my life trying to explain that fight to you and it still wouldn't do it justice

Jade: i've seen some shit and done some shit, you know this about me

Jade: but i'll never see anything like what i saw there, never do anything remotely as...

Jade: anyway like i said i don't want to talk about it

Jade: the relevant bit is at one point i got thrown away from the battlefield and thought for sure i was done for, so i texted you hoping you'd

Jade: i don't know

Jade: show up at the last second to save the day like a big fucking hero?

June: that's wild

Jade: why?

June: I dunno, it just seems like I'm the one who always needs saving these days

Jade: haha true

Jade: my sister, ever the damsel in distress

those words hit me in a weird spot deep in my gut, and I feel a laugh bubble up out of me

June: wow that's

June: weirdly gender affirming, hahaha!

Jade: :)

June: Jade, I'm...

June: I'm sorry I couldn't-

Jade: oh it's not your fault! how could you possibly have known?

Jade: and even if you did, the way things played out?

Jade: i doubt you would have made the situation much better

June: why do you say that?

just then I'm blinded by a flash of white light, and when it fades Davepeta is hovering in the middle of the room holding several more industrial-sized hunks of blinking machinery.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < good news jadeycakes i managed to nab the electroquantum d33pspace scanners and the radio sponges

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < lemme tell ya those murrpeople sure do know

how to haggle

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < anyway meow were just missing the nuclear

June: :::|

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B00

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oh hi june

June: uh

June: nuclear??

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah thats

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < defurnately a word i just said

June: NUCLEAR????????

Jade: its not a big deal, just-

June: what the fuck are you trying to detect that a nuclear ANYTHING is necessary?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oh so are we letting june in on the-

Jade: davepeta i love you but PLEASE stop saying things

June: let me in on what????

Davepeta looks chastened but characteristically overjoyed about it anyway. as they get to work setting up the, I guess, radio sponges, which really do just look like sponges with LEDs, Jade beckons me to sit down across from her.

Jade: lets back up

June: sure why not

Jade: ive been thinking about how we ended things last time you were here

Jade: how we said no more secrets?

Jade: well im gonna tell you a secret thatll make you real peeved

June: oh good

last time we sat across from each other at this rinky little table, Jade was lost and racked with guilt. now she's so much older in spirit and also literally, sometimes I barely recognize her.

she massages the bridge of her nose, lets out a slow sigh.

Jade: the secret is there are things i just cant tell you

June: wow, that's a shitty secret.

Jade: told you itd make you peeved

June: look, I get why maybe you wouldn't trust everyone else, but

why can't you trust me?

Jade: its not a matter of trust

Jade: i dont enjoy keeping secrets from you but good god if you knew everything there was to know about me

something metal clatters to the floor, and Jade peers over her shoulder to see Davepeta fumbling with some weird alien wrench.

they laugh and rub the back of their head, and Jade smiles at them. I think about what it must have been like, just the two of them together for so long. did they ever get in fights, or are they always just like this? happy, friendly, glad to be in good company even in less than ideal circumstances?

I wonder if me and Terezi would last that long oh this is a bad thought train actually! something else something else something

the words form in my throat and I blurt them out before I even know what I'm

June: I punched a building over once.

Jade and Davepeta slowly turn their attention back towards me, their expressions comically identical in their confusion

Jade: ...what?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B??

fuck it fuck it if Rose knows then Jade might as well know too, no second-guessing, just gotta trust my stupid brain oh this is a really bad idea

June: the night after I came out and everyone, you know

I wave my hands in a vague gesture and try to hide the terror vibrating through my vocal cords

June: I got super drunk and had some of Callie's juju and uh

June: well, I was real pissed off. so I

June: killed?

June: um. everyone.

Jade: "everyone"?

June: everyone

June: well okay maybe not *everyone* everyone but like, basically everyone.

June: everyone who was shitty to me, at least.

June: and even some people who weren't.

June: at some point that night I punched CrockerCorp tower so hard it fell over and killed like... hundreds of people? maybe more maybe less it's hard to say

Jade: holy shit what????

June: yeah it's fucked up!

June: I woke up with a hangover, didn't remember what happened, Dirk showed up to tell me off, he threatened to kill me-

ru8 the scar on my neck suppress a steel-cold shiver down my spine

June: so I zapped back to that night and stopped myself eating the juju, reconnected the whole thing

June: suuuuuuuut I guess Dirk could remember it anyway?

June: so he threatened me again right

June: and I was really fucking terrified after, like I just assumed I was completely fucked, then I had an epiphany and shaved my head and got that tattoo and then beat the shit out of Dirk and uh

June: dangled him over a volcano I guess

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < lmao what

June: well turns out he had some big fuckin plan or whatever and he needed me to be a passive participant and didn't like me getting all brazen with my autonomy so he used all of you guys with his, what, his powers? his fucking narration powers I guess? to intimidate me into submission and so that's why

June: you know

June: all of *that* happened

I look up from my hands and see their faces are still confused but also skeptical and maybe a little oh I don't want to hazard a guess at what that third emotion might be fuck fuck fuck

June: I sure don't know why I'm telling you this!!!!!!!

June: why should I expect you'd take it better than last time?

Jade: ...
Jade: last time?
June: uh
June:
June: fuck
June: okay um
June: a day or two before I took you to fight Lord English?
June: when you came to my house to try to apologize we had an actually really nice conversation that I think was pretty cathartic for both of us, but then Terezi showed up to try and kill me because I texted her when I was on my candy rampage and apparently texts aren't affected by retcon?????????
June: which is actually really lame when you think about it like what fucking good is a retcon if it doesn't retcon *everything*?
Jade: :/
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B//
June: right sorry
June: anyway she gave you her phone with the texts and you teleported off to tell everybody I guess because a little while later you and the gang showed up to um
June: to kill me
June: wow I don't know why I'm telling you this!!!!!!!!!!
Jade: did we fight?
June: huh?
Jade: when i showed up did you and me have a beatdown?
June: no, uh
June: I was ready to but then TZ shooshpapped me and helped me retcon the whole thing peacefully instead, so
June: no we didn't have a beatdown
Jade: shoot
June: shoot???
Jade: i wanted to know how many hits i got in!
June: how many...
June: what?????????
Jade: well if we had a cool anime battle id at least like to know how well i did

then she laughs.

she LAUGHS?

why is she laughing?

June: why are you laughing?

Jade: i always laugh at my own jokes

June: there was a joke?

Jade: that definitely tracks though, younger me would NOT have taken that kinda thing super well

June: wait so

June: aren't you like, mad at me? scared of me? or something??

she shrugs.

Jade: not really

I stare at her, mouth hanging open a bit. Davepeta's already gone back to setting up electronics.

June: why the fuck not?????????

Jade: you almost sound disappointed

June: I'm not disappointed I'm just

June: I don't even

she leans across the table and puts a hand over my nervously tapping fingers.

Jade: im not happy about it, if that makes you feel any better

June: uh

Jade: ok look

Jade: im not gonna say this doesnt come as a surprise

Jade: thats actually a pretty fucked up series of things you did!

Jade: if i didnt know you personally and caught you pulling this shit, we for sure wouldve had a beatdown

Jade: but luckily i do and i didnt and it doesnt matter anyway because you fixed it

Jade: now we could spend the next few hours arguing about the morality of killing people in a retconned timeline but thankfully rose isnt here so i say we just skip all that theoretical finger-wagging and dig straight down into the thick caramel center of this candy-coated conundrum

Jade: the fact is you have a privilege that near as i can tell no

one else in creation has

Jade: and if i were to make a list of people who absolutely should not have that kind of power, you'd be pretty far from the top

June: But-

Jade: whatever you've done June i promise i've done worse

Jade: and i did it without your privilege

my stomach drops. looking at her face, her humorless smile, her weary eyes, I

I don't even know what to think. what to say.

Jade: so why'd you tell me this? quid pro quo, trading dark secrets?

June: well I kinda hoped-

Jade: cause it doesn't work like that

Jade: i appreciate your honesty and i'm honored that you'd trust me with this kind of sensitive information.

Jade: like really! i've been worried sick that you and everyone else hate me now!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < its true shes lost a lot of sleep

Jade: but you have to understand

Jade: there's a reason most people don't live as long as i have, and i really hope you never have to find that out for yourself

June:

June: fucking hell, Jade

Jade: what?

June: you can be really scary when you want to be

she laughs again, genuinely, a sparkle in her eye

Jade: yeah i bet we share that in common ^_^;

Jade: alright, let's talk early detection

Jade: i told you a while back it wasn't out of the question we'd get attacked by one of my many enemies

June: yeah...

Jade: well rather than just sit and wait, this is us being proactive!

Jade: currently we are in the process of assembling an array of gadgets and gizmos from across the omniverse so if anyone wants to pick a fight with us we'll see em coming from a mile away

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < way more than a mile though more like a

couple hundred thousand lightyears

Jade: oh same difference!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B33

June: and the nuclear 8it?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < not everythings a bomb just beclawse it says nuclear on the label

June: why wouldn't you tell us about this? don't you think we could have helped?

Jade: its easier for us to do this on our own

June: you know that's not what I mean

Jade: do you really think itd let anyone sleep better at night to know the exact justification for every single one of these machines?

Jade: you think the history of all my nemeses is gonna bring us together as friends?? cause trust me theyre not all as cut and dry as butthurt space cops

June: well I think they would at least understand-

Jade: if you told them what you just told me, do you think they would understand?

June: :::::(

Jade: the answer is no

Jade: maybe they wouldnt immediately jump to stringing you up in the town square by your toenails but at the very least itd change how they see you

Jade: that is how you lose the trust of your allies

Jade: and allies that dont trust you are just enemies waiting for a better cause

June: I... I really don't think that's true

Jade: you want to put that thought to the test?

Jade: go tell everybody about your semi-hypothetical murders and see what happens. no consequences right?

June:

Jade: but you wont because even if you arent a hundred percent sure, youre still just sure enough that the extra percent isnt relevant

Jade: you may have gotten the most elaborate tattoo removal procedure in history but i know you still believe that some things cant be erased

June: wow, ouch

Jade: look i get that this is unsettling and im

Jade: im sorry ok!

Jade: im really actually truly sorry that this is how things are!!

Jade: but unlike you i cant afford to just try my luck.

my heart hurts. why do I feel sad? I look down at the table, see Jade's hands over mine. she bears a few scars up her arms, and they don't look self-inflicted. her fingers are rough even as they're covered in grease.

she's spent her whole life getting her hands dirty, and what have I done besides get lucky?

June: okay.

Jade: ok?

June: okay. as in you're right.

June: you know your situation better than I do, and you sure as heck have a lot more experience with this stuff than the rest of us.

June: but what happens when you *do* detect something? how do you explain all this?

Jade: we lie

June: you

June: what?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yikes babe maybe thats not

Jade: youve been honest with me so heres me being honest with you

Jade: its a lot simpler and a LOT faster to say a wizard did it than it is to explain whats actually going on

June: wait, so...

June: how much have you lied about?

Jade: ive never told a lie about anything that mattered

June: what's that supposed to mean?

Jade: do you deliver an encyclopedic rundown of every detail of an event every time something comes up?

Jade: i cant believe i have to explain the benefits of selective truth-telling to you

Jade: how the hell have you even survived this long without spilling your beans everywhere?

June: Terezi

Jade: oh yeah that makes sense

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < where is that grumpurly rascal anyway

oh. right.

that.

I feel my body slump down in my seat as panic and fear and guilt all flood right back into my open mind and I just can't stay up

June: she's

June: busy

Jade: huh.

she's pointedly unconvinced, FUCK I really am a terrible liar! Jade watches me with an arched brow, I can get out of this just, just stay cool, just

Jade: busy with what?

June: hrrmmh I don't know

Jade: uhuh

June: look it's just...

June: it feels really bad to talk about after the conversation we just had

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < whatd you do strangle her?

FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK I SIT BOLT UPRT SO FAST JADE YELPS

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < woah

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats uh

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < a yes?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < appurrently?

June: UM

Jade: june?

June: I

I close my eyes because I can't look at them. their tone, their apprehension, the slight change in their body language, it's like I flipped a switch and

what did I expect

it sounds bad

it IS 8ad

WHO CARES WHAT THEY THINKcan feel my thoughts picking up speed, imagining Jade pulling one of her swords out of that arsenal she has, imagining Davepeta doing to me what they did to Dirk**LET THEM TRY**my heart

my Heart under their control

again like always my heart is never under my control

see a fight 8reak out as I try to run, see us have a proper beatdown before I'm forced to fuck off somewhere else or just die

dangerous. dangerous. why does Rose want me to 8e dangerous when this is what it leads to?

I wanted to 8e dangerous and this is what it means. this is what it means. the only tool I can ever be is a knife and the only use I can have is to CUT

if she would just listen to me, if she would just **LISTEN**, I didn't kill them, I didn't do it, why does she think I'm so 8ad, why can't she just stop and listen and hear me out if I could just **EXPL8IN IT TO HER SHE WOULD UNDERSTAND AND THEN WE COULD 8E FINE IT WILL NEVER 8E FINE WITH HER STEEL IN MY CHEST WITH MY 8ODY 8LEEDING OUT ON THE FUCKING GROUND 8LEEDING OUT PINNED TO THE FUCKING**

***WALL AS HE MOCKS ME AND
HE SAYS***

You'll never be rid of me.

I'm right outside.

:)

**why can't he leave us
alone? why do we always
have to be up to our eyeballs in
spiteful ghosts when just waking
up and remembering to exist every
day is hard enough as it is** This is

just my life now, this is all I am, a threat
waiting to be put down, an open target for a
piece of antiqued fucking metal AND MY FRIENDS WILL
JUST WATCH AND GO HOME AND DRINK AND WONDER WHERE IT ALL WENT WRONG AND I'LL JUST BE

Jade snaps her fingers in front of my face

June: huh?

Jade: you ok sis???

June: uhhh

she reaches d- *down?* down and brushes my cheek, it's wet, I'm curled up on the floor
I'm breathing too fast, like I just woke up

fuck, my head hurts

June: what happened?

Jade: it looks like you had a panic attack

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < whanged your head real hard on the linolemeowm too

June: oh

June:

turn face to the ground, see my hands shaking, 8link and tears drip onto the floor, sirens screaming in the periphery from the whirring machines, too much noise all around me, just want to

reality reality remem8er reality

8breathe

June: did I, uh

June: say anything

Jade: no you just kinda curled up and keeled over screaming

June: god damn it

June: why is it always screaming

June: this is getting really fucking inconvenient

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < so this is like a regular thing now

June: no!

June: I mean

June: it's like four months I'm trying all the time not to think a8out what happened and now between Rose and you I'm just fucking 8ARRAGED by it

June: and there's no way I can defend myself from this

Jade: from what?

June: every thing

June: I hurt people I manipul8d people I fucked with reality just so I could live my own life and you're right I can't just forget it, I can't pretend I didn't

June: didn't do what I did

June: can't pretend that it's over and done when it's all just right there taunting me

June: how do I convince anyone that it won't happen again?

June: how do you 8believe me when I say I never want to retcon again until someone kills me??

June: how does anyone 8believe a single fucking thing I say when you

know what you know and-

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < june i know you think youre some kinda meownster but weve met meownsters and they dont lose sleep over crimes

June: what difference does that make?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < it means theres still a good purrson somewhere in there who doesnt wanna hurt people

that

that lands

I laugh and sort of, slip onto the ground more and I feel

something else

in me

sarcastically amused

June: Hahahahahahaha!

June: Maybe crawl into my head and hear those thoughts for yourself before you start making promises.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B((

Jade: june...

Jade: what happened???? :(

what am I doing?

swimming, drowning

god this is just because of one fucking question what is WRONG with

June: I'm losing my mind

June: I can't tell the difference between me and her and him

June: lose track, sometimes, of what's real and what's

June: What's just in my head.

June: I'm

June: sorry.

June: for what I am

June: But sometimes I get so angry at a thought that feels more real than anything I've ever touched

June: and it makes me want to hurt people

June: I've already hurt people

June: I hurt Terezi and I know she'll never forgive me and

June: and

June: and for some fucking reason I just want to hurt her again!

June: But I don't want to

June: But I do

June: but i don't

June: and on

June: and on

June: and on all the fucking time I just

laying on my side staring out at the linoleum horizon, smell the cold dirt and already taste blood in my mouth, my eye hurts, my head hurts, all of reality is just too much and

Davepeta kneels down next to me

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ok june

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < if you really want us to believe youve become an unrepauntant bloodthirsty murder gal

their eyes meet mine as they press a finger to my chest

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < purrove it

thursday 3 / friday 1

CONTENT WARNING for: descriptions of violence, sexual forwardness, suicidal ideation, and unreality.

D03S 1T HURT?

not really?

sometimes it feels... uncomforta8le, in a weird way. 8ut it doesn't hurt.

HRMM

>:/

she traces a finger along the steel socket of my shoulder, all the exposed pegs and conductors and other shit that makes the prosthetic work. a shiver shakes its way up my back. it's like touching my foot when my leg is asleep, I *should* 8e feeling something, and yet...

defin8ly itches though.

Y34H, OLD WOUNDS T3ND TO DO TH4T

Terezi picks up the little tu8e of medical cream and squeezes some out into her fingers. it's a sugary blue color and sparkles almost like toothpaste. it's ice cold when she presses it into the scarred skin around the metal 8ase.

as she massages it up over my shoulder, I touch the immo8ile limb folded up in my lap.

it's so weird that I can just...

do that.

DO WH4T?

take it off!

like how often do you think of 8ody parts as accessories? it's so weird!

actually, is that insens8ive?

PROB4BLY

damn. a8leism really is everywhere, huh.

I don't want to be a8leist.

1 KNOW

...

...

I think I need a new tattoo.

I say it expecting her to ask what I mean or throw out a lewd suggestion. instead she just. keeps doing what she was doing. I'm not even sure she heard-

WH4T K1ND OF T4TT00

oh, uh.

I don't know! it's hard to get more sym8olic than the last one.

I've thought a8out etching 'set in stone' into my prosthetic 8ut at this point that just seems like-

well, a retcon, ahahaha!

hahaah.

ahem.

hm.

...

guess I've just 8een feeling antsy. restless.

do you know what I mean?

SUR3

her fingers cross down to my 8ack. she squeezes out some more paste when her fingers run dry.

she's 8een quiet all afternoon. I can't read her face, 8ut usually when she's this reserved it's not a gr8 sign.

is uh.

is something on your mind?

SOM3TH1NG 1S 4LW4YS ON MY M1ND, JUN3

right 8ut I mean like,

specifically.

1'M F1N3.

I'm not asking if you're *fine*, I'm asking if something is 8othering you.

NOTH1NG 1S BOTH3R1NG M3

okay.

...

did I...

did I do something wrong?

UGGHHHHH

NO YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG

NOT EVERYTHING IS YOUR FAULT, GUILTY

oh, but that's where you're wrong.

IS THAT SO?

yup!

given enough time, I can come up with a compelling argument for why literally everything bad is somehow a result of my actions.

I'm like the Batman of insecurity.

SELF-PITY ISN'T A SUPER POWER, JUST

you say that, and yet...

she doesn't respond, just maneuvers her fingers under my armpit, slathers the last of the exposed skin. I reach up with my right arm to give her more room, which sets some of the pegs and gears whirring- but otherwise I just sort of shrug half of my shoulder?

hah, I tried to move my arm out of your way. that's kinda funny isn't it?

muscle memory is weird.

MM

she's concentrated, more than I'd expect for this quick little bit of maintenance. already I'm feeling a little spike of panic because what did I do, what did I say, have I been mean lately, did I mistake one of her "vintage" blueberry cottage cheese sandwiches for rotten trash again?

gotta come up with something to get her to talk before I lose my fucking mind.

so I pick up my arm and put its hand on her knee.

need a hand?

>: [

R34LLY?

okay I admit it's not the best joke I've ever made, but you're not exactly giving me a lot of material to work with.

SORRY

no, you don't need to be sorry-
hey. seriously, what's up?

Terezi lets out a small sigh. turns her face towards me.

IT'S JUST
I HAD TO DO THIS FOR VRISK4 4 F3W T1M3S
oh.
Y34H.
and those are... bad memories? or-
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT

Terezi picks my arm up off her knee and uses one of its sharpened fingers to pry the lid off a can of grease. She dips her hand in and pulls away a clear, snot-like slime.

ARE YOU SURE THIS STUFF IS HYGIENIC??
>:/
It can't be less hygienic than whatever came out of that tube.
Besides, it's not like we're spoiled for options right now.

Terezi shrugs and starts to massage the lubricant into the joints and sockets of my shoulder.

Why is my heart beating so fast? The silence between us is too much. I'm glad she can't see me blushing.

Can I ask you something?
SURE
Why are you helping me?
WHO ELSE IS GOING TO DO IT, BRIDGEMAN??
Hah, as if!
I'd sooner shish kebab than let that pretentious guppy touch my lubricated
my delicate mechanisms!

Terezi completely stops moving. Did I say something? Oh no what did I SAY DID I
JUST IMPLY-

I meant my arm! I wouldn't let him touch my arm, because he's a
clumsy idiot and I don't want the gears and stuff to smell like

FISH for the next few sweeps.
That's what I meant, obviously.
Hah.

She doesn't say anything, just. Leans forward and keeps. Doing what she was doing.
Under her glasses I see a hint of a blush.

Oh god, I can't BELIEVE I just said that! I'm such a fucking idiot, holy shit that was embarrassing. Somebody kill me now, please! I turn my head towards the exposed rock of the meteor, the ambient glow from the screens in the other room, I look anywhere that isn't at her because WOW I can't, I can't with this, I can't with this, I'm so fucking stupid, I'm such a dumb wiggler what the FUCK is wrong with me!

Delicious mechanisms who says that!!!!!!! Who says "delicious mechanisms"????????? I might as well just-

STOP SQUIRMING, THIS SPOTS HARD TO REACH

Oh. Uh. Sorry.

...

So when you say "who else is gonna do it," I feel like the obvious answer is "nobody."

I mean if I were you I'd just let me suffer. It's what I deserve, right?

YOU DESERVE A LOT OF THINGS, SERKAT

Wow, thanks!

BUT AT LAST FOR NOW I DON'T THINK YOU DESERVE TO STAY IN YOUR OWN JUCES AND DIB OF FLUSHROT

Ohhhhhhhh, is that a hint of regret I hear?

MAYBE ITS COMPARISON AND SMOOTH??

Sounds fake. I think you've been talking to the humans for too long.

UGH, WHATSVR!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE A WHOLE THING OUT OF IT OK?? NOT EVERYTHING IS A SIX DIMENSIONAL FLAP GAM

Oh, but that's where you're wrong!

IM SURE

We may not be playing now, which makes this a neutral event, but if the day comes when we're in competition again-

THATS EXACTLY WHY WE CALLD A TRUC!!

Yeah, but no one can see the whole future.

1 S33 3NOUGH

Oh sure, guilt me about THAT now too!

1M NOT GUILTING YOU VR1SK4, 1-

W3V3 4LR34DY T4LK3D 4BOUT TH1S!!

And I still don't believe you.

W3LL TH4T SOUNDS L1K3 4 YOU PROBL3M

I try to cross my arms but of course only one of them moves because the other is in my lap, so I just sort of limply slap my chest. Terezi is kind enough not to remark on how embarrassing that was.

She's poking her tongue out the side of her mouth in her concentration, and I feel my heart do something. I don't know what it is though. But her hair, something about her hair is really...

Why am I thinking about Terezi's HAIR????????? Ugh, we've been on this rock way too fucking long.

But that doesn't change this feeling like. I don't. I don't want. This to end? I like having her here. It reminds me of better times.

I miss when we were friends.

I wish we could go back to the way things were.

...

She doesn't say anything. I think she's almost done. I want her to say something more than I want anything in the world, but it's like she didn't hear me at all.

Probably best to pretend that's true. Wishing is for babies anyway. It's like they say, wish in one hand, excrete depleted nutrient mash in the other...

With a final dab of her finger she regards her work and nods, then picks up my prosthetic and repeats the process on it.

Gotta change the topic to something less dramatic.

Do you regret 8lowing my arm off?

She hesit8s, a long tendril of slime dripping off her fingertip.

3XCUS3 M3

Do you regret-

1 H34RD WH4T YOU S41D VR1SK4, 1M MOR3 4M4Z3D YOU H4V3 TH3 G4LL TO
4SK M3

So.....

Do you?

R3GR3T 1S 4 CHUMPS G4M3

1 M4D3 TH3 ONLY CH01C3 TH4T M4D3 S3NS3 4T TH3 T1M3 4ND 1 DONT S33
TH3 P01NT OF 4RGU1NG 4B0UT MOR4L1TY-

I never said anything a8out morality.

...

1T W4S 1MPL13D

Her face looks different when she's working with her hands. She sniffs the air and exposes a tiny scowl.

WHY 4R3 YOU LOOK1NG 4T M3 L1K3 TH4T?

Like what?

L1K3 YOU'R3 ST4R1NG 4T TH3 D34D

The fires are long 8ehind us, 8ut the ash is still smeared across her cheeks. My lips curl into a vicious smile as I study the curv8ure of her kneeling 8ody.

I am simply luxuri8ing in the experience of having the legendary Neophyte Redglare tend to my wounds like a common j8de8lood.

1F TH3R3 H4D B33N 4NY COMMON J4D3BLOODS L3FT 4L1V3 TO R3QU1S1T10N,
1 4SSUR3 YOU 1 WOULD NOT H4V3 D3PR1V3D TH3M TH3 OPPORTUN1TY TO
SULLY TH31R H4NDS W1TH YOUR C3RUL34N S4NGU1N4T3.

Hum8lest apologies, my venera8le legislacer8or, for proving such a classless inconvenience.

She scrapes away 8its of torn flesh with a small knife. It hurts, 8ut the pain is far less interesting than the play of moonlight on my captor's crimson spectacles, or the dance of tendons under her skin as she applies a stinging her8al sopor to the wound.

Of course, I do have to wonder why you don't just let me bleed out.
1T WOULD R3FL3CT POORLY ON MY R3CORD 1F YOU W3R3 TO 3XP1R3 B3F0R3
F4C1NG JUST1C3.

Oh, well, we can't have *that* can we?
NO W3 C4N'T.

I grimace as she yanks out some stray debris from the stump. A spray of blood follows, cascading her pristine uniform and soft little hands a glistening blue. My laughter only just drowns out her frustrated sigh.

Oh dear, did I do that?

>:[

Can't help biology, I suppose.

Although while we're at it, I may possess a surplus of *other* bodily fluids to relieve if you're in the mood to assist.

1 TH1NK 1'LL P4SS.

More's the pity.

Rather than fuss at her clothes the way I'd expect of a bureaucrat, this one takes it in stride and continues her work. Not the sheltered book-keeping type, it seems.

Cool head under pressure, not afraid to get your hands dirty. You've done this before.

D1D YOU TH1NK TH3 3MP1R3 WOULD S3ND 4 W3T-L1PP3D W1GGL3R TO BR1NG
YOU 1N?

It wouldn't be the first time.

And before you get too big a head on those delicate shoulders of yours, I would remind you how easy it is to underestimate someone when you fail to consider that they might have in their employ a *fucking firebreathing scalebeast!*

4ND Y3T UPST4RTS L1K3 YOU K33P M4K1NG TH3 S4M3 M1SC4LCUL4T10N.

Fear not, little teal-tinted dragon-tamer. Next time, you won't have such an easy go of it.

COLOR M3 THR34T3N3D.

Oh, but I've already colored you blue. Shall I start a list?

Redglare barely seems to be noticing my barbs now, as she applies some new neon confection to my shoulder.

You know, if it were me in those stylish red shoes I would never let some uppity little warlord hurl insults at me with such abandon.

THOSE WHO ARE FIRST TO RETRIEBUTE ARE ALWAYS THE VICTORS.

Cute. Did you get that from a nursery book?

YOUR INSULTS ARE RAIN OFF A LUSUS'S GLISTENING TERRORSPIRES TO ME, MARQUIS.

"Marquise"? You wound me!

After all this penetration, the least you could do is say my name.

For a fraction of a fraction of a second, her stony impartial facade cracks with the merest hint of a smirk.

THEY TOLD ME YOU WERE DANGEROUS.

Glad to hear I live up to my reputation.

Her bloody, glistening hand reaches under my chin and tilts my head up towards hers. I don't resist.

We measure each other up with every sense we can manage. I'm certain she can feel the shallowness of my breath, the rapid drumline in my chest. My smile soars against the struggling canvas of her conflicted expression.

Come now, Redglare. It can't be *that* difficult a choice.

She leans in so much that our lips have a gulf of mere atoms separating them. Her anger at me, her rage, her morbid curiosity, her lust, it's all so close to the surface.

I'm obsessed.

It's been so long since anyone bested me, I almost forgot how it felt at the end of an equal's blade.

AND NOW YOU LIVE AT MY MERCY.

Indeed I do.

Such a hopeless vulnerability would render lesser trolls into a shameful mess of mercy-seeking.

NOT YOU THOUGH.

Not me.

You won that battle fair and square, and unlike the endless parade of cowards whose corpses I've left at the bottom of the sea I respect the rules of this little game we play.

I DOUBT THAT'S TRUE.

Why would I deceive my captor when she could kill me without a thought?

DISCAPTION IS THE FIRST TOOL EVERY CRIMINAL WORTH THEIR BROTHERS TO WIELD.

Oh, but I'm so much more than a criminal, my dear.

And you're so much more than the pet killer of His "Honorable" Tyranny's court.

To my surprise, I find myself quite keen on finding out how *much* more.

She hesitates, suspended at a crossroads of possibilities. Is she gravitating closer against her will? I think she must-

She stands up with no small amount of frustration, and I make a theatrical little noise of disapproval as she goes.

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DIE BEFORE WE ARRIVE AT COURT.

Not of blood loss, perhaps.

I gesture down at my blossoming arousal, and she scowls.

VULGAR FUCKING PARTS.

That's rather the idea.

>:[

:::;)

I laugh as she storms away, laugh straight down to my gut so loud and full it echoes through space and time with the force of a thunderclap.

there are clouds like anvils
flashing bright white
filling the air with explosions
and electricity on my skin.

I am alive.

why r u doin this?

her voice is
so weak
so confused.

nothing like this storm.

nothing like me.

juney please-

((((I don't want to hurt Roxy I love Roxy))))

**I do not think
this is how
either of us
expected our night to go.
yeah no shit!**

((((I don't want to hurt anyone I just))))

**I did not want
to hurt anyone roxy.
I have never wanted
to hurt anyone.
well u arent doin a great job of showin it!
no.
I guess
I am not.**

((((if I can just explain this to her maybe she'll understand))))

I look down
at my arm
and up
at the tower
and I feel the rain begin.

**I am going
to destroy this building.
wut
I said
I am going
to destroy this
i fuckin heard u juneey!!
look i know the crocker hqs a fugly ass buildin but why wud u-
because I can.
...
cuz u can
because I can.**

wow luv 2 b edgy w/ the gals on a thursday nite
lets get sauced n gossip abt how evil we r while we plan a fuckin
murder spree!
so how r u gonna do it, u got some secret mind powers u 8nt told me
about?
oh
no
nothing like that.

I close my fist
and hold out my arm
so that we 8oth can see
how small
and weak
this flesh truly is.

((god I need to get out more I'm such a weenie)))

I am just going to punch it
until it falls over.
u
ur
ur gonna punch it
yes.
like with ur hand?
thats correct.
wtf
u planning to b here all night workin on that or?
actually roxy
I suspect
it will not t8ke very long at all.
uhuh
junebug i know ur like really on some shit right now but come tf on
u cant just-
cant?
yes! cant!
u cant just knock over a skyscraper w ur fists!
no.
of course not.

that is all
any of you
ever really care about.
what can be done.
what cant be done.
do you really think
that those rules
are real?

im just sayin theres like a million better ways to knock over a
building n most of em dont involve breaking ur fuckin fingers

are you

are you giving me advice right now??

she sweeps my legs with a kick
and then springs to her feet
readying her own fists.

when she strikes
her slow lands square on my cheek.

((ow ow ow ow holy fuck she hits hard))

roxy
that hurt.

she swings again
hitting me
((stop it!!!!!!))
on the other side
and I fall
to my knees.

i dont know what happened to u juney but i cant let u do this
you

you hurt me roxy.

u killed ppl!!!! u killed ppl i

we cared about!!!!

u out of ur goddam MIND egbert????

wtf is WRONG with you??!

((((what the fuck is wrong with me)))

((((why am I doing this)))

((((why are you making me do this????????)))

I dont know what is wrong with me, roxy.

I dont know why I am doing this.

thats just it

I dont think there is a reason.

I stand up

and when she tries to hit me again

I 8r8k her arm.

fuck!!!!!!

Im sorry.

fuck fuck fuck fuck!!!!!!

Im sorry.

roxy takes a step 8ackwards

and she slips

on the wet concrete

and falls on the ground.

she looks up at me

and I am gr8ful

that I cannot tell if she is crying.

plz

please what.

plz stop

please stop what.

U KNOW WHAT JUNE, STOP ACTIN LIKE A CHILD!!

actually I think

we could all 8enefit

from 8eing a little more childlike.

omg u gotta no how crazy u sound right now

if a child
became an adult
without learning what that means
you would think
they were crazy too.
wtf r u even talkin abt this is NONSENSE
I am talking
about ideas.

((god I'm gonna be sick))

my arm is meat
and bone
and nerves
while this tower is concrete
and steel
and rooted to the earth.

((I drank too fucking much I'm gonna hurt))

But actually none of that is true.
Because everything
from my arm
to that building
is just an idea.
and when I look at this tower, with its clean glass and its shining
lights
all I see
is the idea of a machine
meant to crush people like us
with a thousand little cuts
every single day
until we have no choice but to believe
that this is how it has to be.
But right now
I am like a child
in that I believe
that if I want to punch a building over
then I can punch a fucking building over.
jfc what was in that everclear this is totally unhinged
ironically roxy

at this particular moment
I am more clear
than I have ever been before.

((shit that was so lame))

W
was that a joke?
r u tryin to make JOKES right now???
I know
it has been a while
since we last hung out
but have you really forgotten
that at my roots
I have always been a PR8NKSTER?

I smile at her
but I think
it is not
a very reassuring gesture.
the storm is on top of us now.

((I have an idea))

we are all ideas.

((but do I really want to do this?))

I really want to do this.

((what if))

((what if this is wrong?))

I know that it is right
because it must be right
because if it is not right
then that would make me
a MONSTER.

and I am not a monster.

((I just want everything to stop being so LOUD))

I just want to

((when lightning strikes I scream because it's terrifying because we never had storms like this in Washington just wet blankets wringing themselves out for days at a time not these big fucking monuments the first time I heard one I was alone in my bedroom and sure I may have been an adult and a god and literally immortal but I was so scared I hid in my closet and cried despite myself because I kept thinking how much it would hurt to be struck by lightning I kept thinking reality was gonna crumble beneath me and not just the house but the whole fucking universe and I kept thinking I wish someone was here I wish anyone was here I wish I didn't have to die alone I don't want to die alone but I know that I deserve to die alone because no one could ever love this thing that I am and god I wish it weren't true I wish it weren't true I wish)))

when lightning strikes

I scream

because the fury

of my voice

in the cacophony

of this moment

is the closest thing to silence

that I will ever know.

((i just want to be me)))

my arm

is on fire

and it hurts

so fucking much.

((i'm so scared)))

but the tower is coming down.

((why am I doing this)))

I am falling with it.

((i should never have called Rose)))

the wind

and the lightning

curl around me
directionless
as I collapse
into the patterns
that will follow me
until the day that I die.

((I should never have called Rose))

I am repeating myself.

((I should have just let myself disappear))

I will always repeat myself.

((they'll never accept me))

louder
and louder
every single time
because that's
the only thing
that makes it tolerable.

((their love will always be conditional))

they want a good show
with a good **MONSTER**.

((god I am so drunk))

they want me to bleed
for their amusement.

((i should text Terezi))

I only have
so much blood to spare.

((i hope she's okay))

will they still care
when the well runs dry?

((i hope she still loves me))

I am repeating myself
louder
and louder
every single time
because that's the only thing
that makes it tolerable

for **YOU.**

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < mrow!
aftershocks of dread wash over me like a bad dream, something just saw me, or it, was me, or...

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < mrow!

aftershocks of dread wash over me like a bad dream, something just saw me, or it, was me, or...

Jade: whats the diagnosis doctorpeta?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ummm!

they look at me, but I can't meet their gaze. how can anyone answer that question? I can't even make sense of it, I feel like a million thoughts just happened in a second

why do I feel so tired?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well im defurnitely not not convinced if thats what youre asking

Jade: :/

June: what just happened?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats a fucking grreat question

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you got a real stormy thinkpan thats fur sure

June: well I could have told you that much.

June: hey was I laying on my side wrong or something? my arm hurts.

Jade: your... metal arm?

I shake my head and hold out my right-

oh, no, yeah, that IS my metal arm isn't it?

god now my head hurts. I put a hand to my temple and wince. something feels weird, kinda tingly, like-

Jade: WUH

Jade: JUNE YOUR HAND

June: huh?

I hold my hand out in front of me, and it's

glowing?

my hand is fucking glowing now. and it's sort of transpar pare-

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats not supprursed to happen

Jade: NO SHIT DAVEPETA HER HAND IS SEE THROUGH NOW

June: why doesn't this hurt

June: wh

Jade: we have to take her somewhere that isn't a dirty linoleum floor!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < like a hospurrtal?

Jade: would they even know what to do aboutOH ITS SPREADING Jade: WHAT DO WE DO

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < lets take her to the mansion

June: the... mansion?

Jade: I DONT THINK WERE ANY BETTER EQUIPPED FOR WHATEVER THIS IS BUT SURE

June: hold on what do you mean, what-

i'm 8linded, then it's pitch dark, and when I open my eyes I see

dogs?

June: -mansion

everywhere dogs. 8ig ones, small ones, furry ones, bald ones, some on the... ceiling?
and also one that is Jade

June: ...

June: why is everything dogs

Jade: ok now what do we do??

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < get her on the couch

June: why is everything... purple?

Jade: which couch???

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < the big one!

feel my body lifted up but it's, like i'm not really here? i'm above it or something,

why am I so tired?

their arms are on my body, it's uncomfortable, they didn't ask to have to deal with this. what am i even doing here? this is fucking embarrassing, i came here to help and now they're having to put up with this shit. whatever this shit is. i wish i could just disappear and save them the

No. No no no no no NO NO!! I've done this before! I'm not LIKE this anymore! I'm better now, I don't WANT to disappear, I DON'T want to die!!!!!!! I'm here and I plan to stay

blinking rapidly, currents of wind in my lungs through my chest just, swords are clashing, the ship is sinking, everything's getting

June: okay so

June: I don't want to worry you guys, but

June: I think I might be having an episode

hear Jade and Davepeta saying something but I can't understand. the dogs are blurry now. just their eyes are watching me. so many and all the same.

somewhere else I hear,

I hear music? is that

it's a piano

But it sounds wrong, like it's

The human called June Egbert loses consciousness before she can complete her thought, though she will follow its trail regardless. As her body goes limp in the arms of the multiplicative entity known colloquially as Davepeta, we see the panic and confusion shared between them and Harbinger Silverbark. They do not know what is happening.

Jade: what the fuck is happening?????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i dont fucking know!!

Jade: did you do something to her?????????????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no!!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i mean yeah i did the hearty thing into her memories and junk and idk maybe i was a little careless rooting around all up in her psychospherical sitmewation but

Jade: careless?????????!?!?!?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < but its nothing i havent done a bajillion times befur!

Jade: then why is this happening??

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i dont know

Jade: why is she GLOWING????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i dont know!!!

Jade: oh god oh fuck

Jade: this is what she looked like back when she was all "bluh bluh i want to disappear from reality bluh bluh"

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B//

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < that wasnt a very good impurrsonation jade

Jade: NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR ACTING CRITIQUE DAVEPETA

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < BXX

Jade: ok what do we do

Jade: can you dive back in and try to stop whatever the fuck that light is??

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ill give it my best shot

They press their palm once more against June's chest, and we see them close their eyes despite the black-tinted radiation-dampening lenses on their face.

A moment passes for Jade, as she brings one hand to her mouth and chews absently on a fingernail. An old habit, and one she'd thought abandoned long ago. It takes her aback when she realizes what she's doing because Jade has, for centuries, been in near-total control of her life and her body. It was only on returning to the world she trepidatiously calls home that she has begun to see fractions of that control erode day by day. It troubles her, and perhaps deep down she has some sense of how this correlates to the fact that the future for her and everyone she loves is, diplomatically speaking, less than bright.

But she is above all else a woman of logic and science, albeit modified formulations of each as influenced by countless species and civilizations throughout the omniverse. Jade Harley knows to trust her gut, but she certainly does not trust vague portents of the subconscious and perhaps unwillingly compelled variety.

It does not matter either way, because Jade has noticed now that June's otherworldly glow has ceased just in time for Davepeta to gasp and flutter into the air on their shimmering wings.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well thats fucked up!!

Jade: you did it!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < d

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < did i??

Jade: didn't you???

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i dont know!

Jade: well she stopped glowing so you must have done something!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i didnt do anything!

Jade: so why isn't she-

Jade: ok whats fucked up then???

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < theres
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < something going the fuck on with her
Jade: can you explain that more than not at all??????
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < remempurr that cat from the epsilon
confurderacy
Jade: the one with the noses?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah that guy
Jade: wait so you think shes possessed??
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no no its not like that i just mean
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you know how that dude just gave off bad
psychic energy vibes when he got mad or hungry
Jade: yeah, because he was possessed by a starving rage demon
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no im telling you its not-
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ok diffurent example, remempurr when we all
took that day trip into the core of a mewtron star to rescue that
plasma purrincess
Jade: uhhh
Jade: the one who called everyone sluts?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no the other plasma purrincess
Jade: honeybird youre gonna have to be way more specific
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < holy shit crapping christ jade come on
Jade: how is it my fault there were so many fucking plasma
princesses trapped on neutron stars????
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no this was diffurent im telling you
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < it was maybe the third or second to last
one?
Jade: ummm
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < it turned out the star was alive??
Jade: hm
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < have i refurted to speaking in fucking crow
now???
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < caw caw caw
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < is that what youre hearing??
Jade: im sorry!!!! im kind of panicky on account of my sister being
UNCONSCIOUS AND MAYBE DYING OR EVIL so forgive me if my memorys a
little fuzzy!!!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < look it was the five of us, you me dana vv
and

They stop mid sentence, and both of them freeze as though a blasphemy just snuck its way into their congregation.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < the four of us i mean
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < it was the four of
Jade: UUUUUUUUUUUUGH
Jade: god damn it davepeta!!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im sorry
Jade: what a fucking time to slip up like that!!!!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i didnt mean to
Jade: BARK
Jade: BARK WOOF BARK BARK
Jade: WHINE BARK AAAAAAAAAAH
Jade: it doesnt matter ok!! you already said too much and you cant take it back so we just gotta deal with it!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B((
Jade: i mean its not like weve spent the last several DECADES getting ready for this so we could avoid just casually fucking it up!!!!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < jade...
Jade: UGH
Jade: look its not your fault
Jade: i mean it IS and im still PEEVED AS HECK
Jade: but its also this place
Jade: earth c just fucking compels shit out of you whether you want it to or not
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B//
Jade: whatever. whatever! thats jazz
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you know were not very good at jazz
Jade: what better time than the present to GET good, scrub!
Jade: sure peoples lives are on the line but that just means its high stakes jazz! learn on the job baby, fuck it were doing it LIVE
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < are you ok?
Jade: no im not ok but it doesnt matter anymore so lets just move the fuck on!!!!!!!!!!
Jade: where were we?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < plasma purrincesses
Jade: RIGHT yes ok i remember the time youre talking about but im not sure i get the comparison
Jade: do you think junes like the star and she wants to marry a slime girl
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no its nothing direct like that
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well i mean maybe shes into slime girls idk

i guess i can check

Jade: DEFINITELY not what i was asking!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < >B((

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < purrlease stop yelling at me jade

Jade: <:x

Jade: im so sorry babe im just on edge

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < its ok me too but lets try to not fight over it

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < alright you know how the star kept repeating all that hokey oh ceaseless watcher of the eldritch old blood keep the hoary whatever the shit?

Jade: i guess

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < mostly it was just stereotypical grimdark leviathan necrobabble but there was this one line that always stuck with me fur some reason

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < it said something like

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < there was a dream in a dark place that spoke so loud a universe followed in its wake

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < and with it came the great cosmic eye who dreamt a dream of many dreams

Jade: spooky

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < right

Jade: so what the fuck does it mean?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < heck if i know

Jade: then why is it relevant???

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well fur one because right now junes heart is a spooknastily dark goshdamned place

Jade: >:/

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no like literally dark

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < as in i couldnt see my paws even if i licked em right in furont of my face

Jade: huh

Jade: well thats not good

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < and fur two

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well im not a hundred purrcent sure but i swear i heard something real similar to that cosmic eye bs

Jade: oh thats really not good

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < nope

Jade: so wait, did the nose guy talk about space eyeballs too?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < but the vibes, man

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < rancid as all get out and real similar to junes current thing

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < though now that im thinking about it nose dude may have said something eye related when i was giving him the exorcism

Jade: wow that is very really not good

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah thats about where im at!

Jade: ok so im not gonna lie this is sounding more and more like a textbook possession

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i know i know but im telling you

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < idk it just doesnt f33l like a purrsession to me

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < nothings being imposed on her

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < even when she was remempurring her killing spr33 the asynchronicity of her thoughts was like

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i mean they s33med purretty typical of a vindictive drunk bitch to me!

Jade: hey dont call her that

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < jade im sorry to be the one to tell you this but your sister is kind of a bitch

Jade: no shes not!!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yes she is and also im like a thousand purrcent sure shed take it as a compliment

Jade:

Jade: ok yeah youre right

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B33

Jade: hmhhh

Jade: wait

Jade: wait do you think this has something to do with the green signal?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B||

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < maybe???

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i really doubt it though

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i mean we could run some tests but

Jade: but we dont have time

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah...

Jade: ugh

Jade: great! fantastic! more vague unknowable threats waiting in the wings to completely fuck us over, why not!!

They look at each other, still awash in uncertainty. Though they often share tales that

highlight their competence and clarity, the truth is that they are as prone to indecision as all mortal things.

It is in this moment that Davepeta has a thought of the sort that they are known for, in other parts of the omniverse.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well now hold on just a second there pardner

Jade: pardner? ._.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < weve got a whole heaping helping of purproblems on our plate that were looking at as sepurrate things

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < maybe the solution is to engineer some meowtherfucking synergy

Jade: ok...

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < everyones wondering if junes gonna to turn out to be this big evil meownster but im not convinced

Jade: what, like her bark is worse than her bite?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no her bite is really fucking bad

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats the thing

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < shes not wrong that shes got a violent meowderfurenzy streak running a mile long

Jade: :(

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < if it makes you f33l any better shes not happy about it

Jade: most killers feel bad about the murders they do davepeta

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no no no im saying shes not a killer shes just a crazy chaotic mix of anger confursion repurressed meowmories clawma and immense and pawssibly apawcalyptic pauer that sometimes accidentally does meowders

Jade: ...apocalyptic :/

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < uhuh

Jade: like what kind? weve seen a lot of apocalypses

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i mean i cant be sure but purrobably not the kind you can fix

Jade: thats

Jade: a bit of a leap dont you think? i mean sure retcon is scary but

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im not talking about retcon

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < not directly anyway

Jade: then what are you talking about!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < jade she punched a fucking building over just by contrasting ideas in her head

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i know were sorta in the dark about what the shit retcon even IS but im purretty sure thats not on the list of side effects

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < unless theres more going on under the surface than we understand which i think is like comically transparently obvious at this point

Jade: well gosh glitterpuss this sure has fascinating lore implications but i still dont see what the fuck you-

Jade: oh

Jade: wait you aren't suggesting

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B33

Jade: really??

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i know its not the plan but

Jade: not the plan??

Jade: this is the OPPOSITE of the plan!!!

Jade: this is literally antithetical to the plan!!!!!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < look the situations changed and i dont think thats gonna stop from keep happening constantly any time soon

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < and idk about you but im starting to think its clawfurly optimistic to assume we can juggle these shenanigans all on our lonesome

Jade: no way!

Jade: absolutely not!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < youre the one who said we gotta get good at jazz barkstronaut

Jade: >:(

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im just saying

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < if she can punch a building over drunk imagine what she could do fur us if-

Jade: no!

Jade: no fucking way, davepeta!!!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im not saying we *make* her do anything!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < but if whats driving her batty is a lack of purrpaws and its putting everyone else at risk with her unpurredictable nature then *why not*-

Jade: this isnt why we came back here! you know this isnt why we came back here

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < we didnt come here to spill the beans about vv to meowtherfucking calliopurr either

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < at least with june we can control what she knows so she doesnt-
Jade: under no circumstances!!
Jade: are you hearing me????
Jade: the minute we start treating our friends like recruits
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < theyre gonna become recruits sooner or later anyway!!!
Jade: ENOUGH
Jade: i will not use my own family just because its convenient!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hasnt stopped you befur

Jade's mouth hangs open as Davepeta's cruel words drift to the floor like ash. This is not the first time they have had this kind of argument, as their diverging attitudes toward the terrestrial concept of "family" and the deployment of those categorized therein have long been a source of tension.

They realize what they have said, and their annoyance gives way to guilt.

Jade: ;_;
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i shouldnt have said that
Jade: no
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im sorry jade
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im really sorry to be mean like that its just
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you k33p acting like our furiends are exempt from whats coming and its exclusively made our lives worse
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i know its not the plan and i dont like it any more than you do but eventmewally this gambits gonna get somebody killed if we dont catch up to-
Jade: just leave us alone
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im just saying-
Jade: i hear what youre saying and i am asking you to leave me alone with my fucking sister!!!!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B((
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ok
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im gonna go finish setting up the array back home
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i love you
Jade: ...

The four-times prototyped universe engine sprite disappears, leaving the parlor decidedly less lit in their wake. Silverbark holds June Egbert's hand and watches as her sister mutters wordlessly.

Jade: **im so sorry june**

Her apology is sincere, but apologies are cheap.

We pull back, away from this uprooted mansion adrift in space and towards the place between places where dreams can sometimes be found wandering like lost children.

We are drawn by the sound of music, and so we find the spectral manifestation of June Egbert cautiously wading through imagined reeds as she seeks the song's musician. It is humid but cool, the water around her ankles somehow thicker than it ought to be. Trudging forward, June thinks to herself,

all I hear is wind beneath the piano, cutting across all this tall grass in a weird whistling backing track to the sad song being played up ahead. it feels so heavy. I know I was somewhere a second ago but I just need to see-

whoever's playing is stiff and their piano desperately needs tuning, but the music's cutting right through me anyway. they'd be so good if they would just get their instrument looked at! if I can find them, maybe-

up ahead I see... is that a fucking circus tent? like a big beige circus tent just out here in the middle of this- what is this, a swamp? a river? I don't even *know* where I am but who gives a shit because the music is coming from inside the tent and I have to see

I know this song. why do I know this song?

it makes me think of summer days as a little kid playing piano while dad was in the kitchen cooking dinner. remember this wild light bouncing off our floor to fill the room with a glow that was so present there just weren't shadows anymore.

as I push the door open, I see the bright insides of my childhood home. I can hear dad

cooking something, I can smell it from here. he's whistling like he always does. why did I forget about his whistles?

my heart is pounding as I step inch by inch towards the salon doors. I can hear music from the parlor but that can wait, I just want to see him. But what do I say? it's me, dad. I'm your daughter now.

what if he doesn't recognize me? what if he disowns me? it's always so hard to tell what he's thinking and I know he only wants the best for me but the *what if* is so paralyzing. I don't know if I can take it if he flies off the fucking handle at me, I barely have a hold on this gender thing myself! hand in front of the swinging doors, I should just go back to my room and play some minesweeper or something, it's not worth the trouble, it's not worth the possibility of his disapproval, I want him to understand but what if, what if, what if-

I swallow hard and push into the kitchen.

it's empty. it's dark. there are no appliances, no chairs, no anything, why-

we moved out. of course there's nothing here. the city said they were gonna turn this place into a museum but I guess they haven't really gotten on that yet. what did I expect, coming here? there are no hidden secrets, no forgotten objects that'll dislodge some desperately needed memory from my scrambled fucking thinkpan. it's just a house. it was always just a house.

the music stops, and I hear frantic footsteps behind me. the front door is open, who was that, I have to know- I follow and lean outside, but there's no one anywhere. no one in the street or the reeds. whoever it was playing the piano, they got away.

piano? I amble back inside and into the parlor, and sure enough everything else is gone BUT the piano. didn't this get moved? I can't remember. it's weird that they'd leave it here when everything else we left behind got moved. But looking at it, I think this house needs music. so I slide into place at the bench and brush my hands over the keys. they're dusty, must not have been played in years. I strike a few notes and, as

expected, it's painfully out of tune. it's always sad to see an instrument go neglected like this for so long. abandoned and forgotten. I should take this home with me and get someone to fix it up, give it a new coat of paint, a new life.

who am I kidding, I'd never play it anyway. it'd just collect more dust and go out of tune again and I'd wind up feeling sad the way I always do when I can't keep up with my hobbies.

it's been so long since I played. I wonder if I still remember...

my fingers move into position. strike a few exploratory notes. after a few false starts it suddenly just *happens*, this song I always used to play. the one song I ever really learned.

dad gave me piano lessons but I was never very good. didn't like the teacher, didn't like sticking to sheet music. my mind always wandered too much. mostly I just wanted to make noise. one time on break I sat there at this class piano while other kids were eating lunch and struck each key one by one in order, holding down the sustain pedal. it was so loud and discordant I couldn't think of anything else and it was so fucking peaceful to just fall wholesale into this ruthless cacaphony. then the teacher shook my shoulder and I nearly jumped out of my skin because I forgot there were other people in the room, forgot there even *was* a room, forgot everything except that noise. apparently the teacher had been yelling at me to stop for a few minutes, and I wasn't allowed to use the class piano on breaks after that.

i tried to recreate that feeling at home but dad got mad at me if I bashed the keys aimlessly for too long. so I made this tune, this basic little arpeggio, not that I knew what the fuck an arpeggio was back then, and I just kept adding to it over time. I tried to play other things but nothing else felt as comfortable so I always wound up playing it over and over and over. sometimes dad got mad at me for that, too, just playing the same song over and over and again. never like screaming mad, just that kind of terse frustration as he asked me to go to my room or outside or anywhere else for a bit. it took me a long time to learn that some people don't appreciate monotony. most people, in fact, get really fucking sick of it really fucking fast. not me, though. there's a

comfort in patterns. safety in repeating what you know "add infinity" or whatever the saying is.

I always liked the idea of being a musician. what if I'd stuck to it? could I have been one of those hoity toity concert pianists if I hadn't felt so guilty about only playing the one tune? could I blame dad for getting annoyed at me but like objectively I was an annoying kid sometimes. he did his best. really it's my own fault for being so susceptible to other people's judgment. maybe if I didn't care so much what other people thought of me...

there's so many things I could have been, and instead I'm nothing. I'm in my old house just playing this sad piano crying. and I want to stay here. I'd rather just waste away in this dark little memory of a home than keep failing at everything else. I'm not very good at this song but I still know it, still wraps me up like a warm blanket.

this makes sense. this is the only thing that makes sense to me.

I hear the groan of the metal springs in the salon doors and bolt up out of my seat. sometimes I can't sleep so I come down here to play and I try not to lose myself but I guess I fucked that up too cause I'm not supposed to be in here, dad's trying to sleep, he's gonna be so mad at me, I'm just gonna run outside and hide-

press up against the tree, panting, as he leans out and makes a meek attempt at looking for me. something seems different about him but I know it's just the night playing tricks. finally he closes the door and goes back in. made it. a second successful.

of course now I'm just outside with nowhere to go. maybe not the best plan? it's so cold here at night. I wish someone was here to keep me warm. I wish Terezi were here. where is she, anyway? we were supposed to go out together today and I'm just stuck here on my own.

why isn't she here?

something is curling up tight in my chest because I don't know where she is. why isn't

she here? does she hate me now for- god I don't even know what I did but I'm sure I must have done SOMETHING and I've gotta be able to fix it, right? if I can just find her I can tell her how sorry I am, I didn't mean it, please just take me back, I can't do this on my own again, please

where is she? why isn't she here?????????

maybe she's

I

I open my eyes.

she's not here. I wanted her to be sleeping next to me in our bed but she's not here. I'm reaching out for her, but there's just empty air beside me. the gears in my fingers whir as I grasp at nothing and fuck I miss her so much.

my vision blurs, pull my knees up to my chest, these embarrassing little sounds eke out of me, these fucking whimpers, I'm WHIMPERING because she isn't here and she

should be here and now I'm saying

June: I miss you

June: why aren't you here??

over and over, god I'm so fucking alone here, I'm so useless without her. I have to tell her how sorry I am, if I can just say the right words and mean them then she'll see that it's okay and understand that sure I fucked up but I know what I did wrong and I won't do it again, I hear myself again

June: please please just come back-

but I can't finish the sentence before my throat fills up with sobs, and I scream into this weirdly stiff little pillow. my whole body hurts. she was so close only a couple days ago and now, who knows! who knows where she is! who knows what she thinks??? I have to text her, I have to let her know, maybe this is what I deserve and we're done and that's that but the least she can do is tell me, I just want to KNOW one way or the other so I can stop drowning in all this fucking uncertainty

turn around on the bed and try to find my phone in my inventory but I don't know, I check my pockets but my pockets are... wrong?? why are

and like a switch it just stops. all the emotion is out of me and I'm staring up at another unfamiliar ce-

wait this isn't my bedroom. why am I on a couch? where the fuck-

oh god, all of that other shit *happened!* screaming, passing out, passing out again, laughing villainously, and I think I punched Jade in the fucking face?? oh shit I definitely did that huh. wow I

I sit up on the couch. it's nice upholstered leather, the color of red velvet cake. glance down at the pillow I was just screamcrying into and see the gross wet impression of my face imposed on the embroidered image of a prancing pomeranian.

oh my god.

what a fucking *dumb* pillow.

stop panicking June, jeez, just breathe. fucking hell this day is so absurd.

the pillow is so gross and stupid looking now that I can't help but laugh-

lights flash on AHHHH FUCKING BLIND now there's a robot towering over me with a fucking cannon aimed at my face???

Robot: IDENTIFY YOURSELF

June: what the fuck!

Robot: IDENTIFY YOURSELF

June: come on man I JUST woke up

Robot: IDENTIFY YOURSELF

June: I really don't have a great history with robots or weapons being pointed in my face so could you just like

Robot: YOU ARE TRESPASSING

Robot: IDENTIFY YOURSELF

June: yeah I fucking heard you the first fifty times!!!

June: my name's June, I'm Jade's-

Robot: SUBJECT JUNE NOT FOUND

Robot: YOU ARE TRESPASSING

June: wow no shit? guess I better hit the old dusty trail and leave you to it then-

Robot: NEGATIVE

Robot: ALL TRESPASSERS ARE TO BE CAPTURED AND RECALIBRATED

June: the fuck does that mean?

it grabs my hands so fast I can't even react, it's got my arms locked behind my back with cuffs now and I am REALLY frustrated

June: come on I really don't want to destroy one of Jade's robots!!

June: that, uh

June: she has now, apparently!!!!!!!!!!

Robot: YOU ARE TO BE hello?

June: ...uh

June: hi?

Robot: hello! did this thing get any needles in you?

June: I... don't think so?

Robot: good, got here just in time

Robot: hold on a tick k?

the robot uncuffs me and rolls a few feet away. now that my eyes have mostly adjusted and it's not right up in my business, I see the robot looks like a tin cereal box stuck to a single wheel like something out of a fucking 1960's hannah barbera cartoon.

which is honestly way less lame than Dirk's shitty robots. at least this thing looks stupid in a fun way.

Robot: sorry about that, they always forget to add visitors to the permissions list

Robot: maybe if they utilized their *own facilities* more often-

June: they?

Robot: silverbark and the knightrover of course

June: knightro-?

June: oh davepeta, gotcha. so are you like an AI or something?

Robot: pffff i fucking wish

Robot: my name's Lenore, i help monitor the legion's security protocols

Lenore: what's your name?

June: uh. legion?

Lenore: your name's legion?

June: no I'm-

June: I'm asking you, what legion?

Lenore:

Lenore: yyyov *svre* the security drone didn't get any needles in you?

June: yeah I'm pretty fucking sure!

Lenore: hrmmmm

Lenore: if you'veh, don't mind me asking

Lenore: the fuck are you *doing* here?

June: you tell me.

Lenore: well *that's* a disconcerting response

June: I'm serious, I have no idea what this place is.

June: I was having a really fucking bad day and I guess Jade brought me here to

June: take a nap???

June: and that's literally everything I know.
Lenore: well ain^t that a hell of a thing
Lenore: so how do yov not know....
Lenore: and why would she bring someone here who doesn^t-
Lenore: oh
Lenore: *OH*
Lenore: yov mvst be one of the-
Lenore: yov^re one of her *old* friends right?
June: firstly I don't appreci8 how much you emphasized the word
"old" just now, I'm not even 23.
June: and yeah, for the second time, my name's June.
Lenore: sorry, i wasn^t on this feed yet when it asked yovr name
Lenore: ok i^ll go ahead and add yov to the permissions list so
this doesn^t happen again then i^ll leave yov alone
Lenore: jvst vh
Lenore: don^t tell silverbark i talked to yov k?
June: wait, why?
Lenore: jvst trvst me on this one
June: I don't even know who you are!
Lenore: yeh and its best we *keep it* that way

the ro8ot starts to wheel away again 8ut I jump up and grab one of its squishy tinfoil arms.

June: please, can you just tell me what's going on?
June: what legion?? why "recalibr8ion"???
Lenore: yov
Lenore: *really* don^t know?
June: o8viously I don't!!!!!!!!!!
Lenore:
Lenore:
Lenore:
June: ...hello?!
Lenore:
Lenore: i^m sorry bvt i really can^t-
June: oh my GOD, again with the fucking secrets!
June: why can't you just-
Lenore: becavse if i *jvst* anything with yov i^m gonna get in *at
least* twelve different shades of trovble!!
Lenore: i sympathize with yovr plight, vh-
June: JUNE.

Lenore: -jvne, bvt i^ve got my own shit going on and i can^t afford to toss all that in the fvcking waste container jvst to play 20 qvestions with some random hvman!

June: 8ut can't you at least-

June: UGH.

June: fine! fine. whatever.

Lenore: sorry....

June: don't worry a8out it. thanks for saving my life I guess.

June: it was nice to meet you, Lenore. have a good night.

Lenore:

Lenore:

Lenore: hrmmmm

June: is there something else? I thought we were done.

Lenore:

Lenore:

Lenore:

Lenore: do yov

Lenore:

June: do I...?

Lenore: do yov trvst them?

June: uh

June: Jade and Davepeta?

Lenore: silverbark and the knightrogve, yes

June: of course I do.

June: I mean, I dunno, they fuck up sometimes 8ut like who doesn't-

Lenore: "fvck vp" lmfao

Lenore: look don^t take this the wrong way cavse i know she^s yovr friend and everything, bvt

Lenore: i wovld ***highly encovrage you*** to interrogate that trvst

June: wh

June: what?

Lenore:

Lenore: sorry

Lenore: i really shovldn^t have said that, i^m sorry

June: what do you mean???

Lenore: oh hell, radiation spike

Lenore: please jvne, we never had this conversation k????

June: I-

June: sure, fine, okaAAAA!!

Robot: YOU ARE TRESPASSING

Robot: PREPARE TO BE

there's a *pop* to my right, and Jade snaps a finger to make the robot disappear. my eyes still hurt from adjusting to the light, but I think Jade is smiling.

Jade: **shit i completely spaced on putting your name on the permissions list!!!**

Jade: **you ok???????**

June: **um**

June: **is this a prank?**

Jade: **is**

Jade: **is what a prank**

June: **like that was you, right? on the**

Jade tilts her head to the side. something in her eyes, the way she squints just a bit. I don't know what it is, but

June: **sorry, I had the weirdest fucking dreams and then I woke up with a robot in my face which was defin8ly not NOT triggering? so if I seem god damn incoherent thats why**

Jade: **D:**

Jade: **im so so so so so so so sorry!!!!**

June: **honestly this shit barely even registers anymore. at least you showed up right on time to save my ass, as always.**

Jade: **well glad i could at least get that much right**

June: **your, uh**

June: **your bruise is looking better.**

Jade: **no thanks to you :p**

she plops down next to me on the couch as I rub my eyes. part of me just wants to fucking ask her about Lenore outright, but...

June: **HOLD THE FUCK UP**

Jade: **:o**

June: **JADE**

June: **WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU WEARING?????????**

I point at her white tailored suit and SPARKLING TOP HAT? HELLO???? how did I not notice this immedi8ly?????????

Jade: actually were not on earth
June: I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT RIGHT N-
June: WAIT WHY THE FUCK AREN'T WE ON-
June: NO I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT RIGHT NOW, ARE THESE THE CLOTHES THAT YOU SLEEP IN??
Jade: hehehehehe no sometimes fashion just happens to me!
June: :|
June: I choose to accept this explanation because I'm literally like one enigma away from going compl8ly ape shit.
Jade: then lets change the subject!
Jade: whatd you dream about??
June: oh no, no way, there's nothing more boring than someone trying to explain what happened in their dreams!
Jade: :/
June: I barely even remember it anyway. I think someone was playing piano? and there was a tent...
June: whatever. how long did I sleep?
Jade: its been a good while, you were REALLY out of it
June: clearly

I dig around in my pockets for my phone, but... oh yeah, my pockets are gone still? what the fuck is up with tha- oh there it is, it's on the coffee table. as I pick it up I feel this awful little tinge of excitement hoping to see messages from Terezi, but when I turn on the screen, there's nothing. just a few spam emails, something from an app game I keep forgetting to delete, and like a hundred messages from Dave. so, the usual.

finally glance at the time and it's

FRIDAY, 4/12

June: holy shit it's like 6 am!
Jade: mhmm
June: why'd you let me sleep all day???
Jade: because you really fucking needed it is why, dumpass
June: uuuuuuugh but I was supposed to get so much stuff done!
June: my birthday party is in two days and I haven't even-
June: wait, fuck, it's tomorrow now!

June: that means my 8irthday is only ONE day away!!!!!!!
Jade: is that really the most pressing thing in your life at the moment?
June: YES!
June: well okay no 8ut like, it is the one normal non foreboding thing I have to hold on to.
June: god what did I even DO yesterday? I wasted it 8eing angsty and weird on your kitchen floor!
Jade: june, you started glowing like you were about to disappear from reality again
June: holy shit what?
June: did I really???
Jade: yeah!!!! it freaked us out a lot!
June: oh god I'm so sorry
Jade: no its not your fault im just trying to say you shouldnt be mad at yourself for having a really bad time and needing to take a nap on someones couch!
June: yeah...
June: yeah I guess.
June: hey where's DavepetAAAAAAAA

they appear directly in front of me so suddenly I would've flown all the way off the 8ack of the couch if Jade wasn't there to catch me

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < sup
June: stop doing that!!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < >B33
June: seriously guys you're gonna give me a heart attack with all this popping in and out and-
June: AND WHAT IS IT WITH YOU TWO AND THE FUCKING FASHION TODAY?????????

I throw 8oth my arms out at Davepeta's striped sweater and purple skirt what the SHIT is that SILK why are those fishnets GLOWING

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oh you know sometimes furshion just-
June: NUH UH. NO WAY.
June: DON'T YOU DARE SAY FASHION JUST FUCKING HAPPENS TO YOU.
June: FASHION DOESN'T JUST HAPPEN TO ANYONE!
Jade: maybe not to you

June: what is THAT supposed to mean?????????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < shes implying your wardrobe might leave something to be-

Jade: i can speak for myself, davepeta.

Davepeta's grin slips. I actually don't think I've ever seen them not smiling??? everyone really is on one today, huh?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ok

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < so june, you ready to talk about your busted ass mind???

June: you're really gonna stonewall me on the fashion thing

Jade: i think she should probably sleep some more before we get it into it again-

June: well 8etween the robot and the zapping I'm feeling pretty god damn awake right now, and it's not like I've got anything 8etter to do.

Jade: are you sure?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < she sounds purretty sure

Jade: >:(

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < >B((

June: uh

June: you guys doing okay? you seem a little...

June: tense.

they 8oth glare at me simultaneously and suddenly I feel VERY ganged up on

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < gimme a list of people who arent grumpurry at six in the meowrning so i can learn their secrets

Jade: yeah june us old crones need time to wake up 8efore we can be sociable

June: uhh,

June: fine, okay, you got me, I'm wrong a8out everything as always.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < happens to the best of us

June: actually while we're on the su8ject of me being compl8ly fucking clueless, can we 8ack up for like a *second* to address the big purple dog in the room?

Jade looks from side to side and then points to herself.

Jade: me? <:o

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i think she means all the other dogs

Jade: phew!

I gesture wildly around at the grey and purple upholstered walls, dark wood floors, what looks like Victorian-style furniture, and of course the just LUDICROUS quantity of framed dog portraits on almost every surface, I mean my god they're *everywhere*.

June: what in the actual fuck IS this place?????????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < the mansion

June: >:(

Jade: its one of our bases

June: one of?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well yeah the omniverse is like really fucking huge

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you think we just stick all our stuff in one place like a couple of normies?

June: I... kinda just assumed you had like a 8ottomless holding bag or something.

Jade: oh yeah we got loads of those but theyre no replacement for shelves

June: I do love a good shelf...

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < dont we all

they 8rush some dirt off the front of their skirt and again I'm fix8ed on their clothes, they really do seem otherworldly- actually they proba8ly are since they've been to a ton of other worlds? huh

June: okay seriously though why did you guys put on such fancy clothes at 6 am, that's like LEGITIM8LY psychopath 8behavior.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < pfff

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < who puts on clothes

June: everyone?????????

June: you specifically, like, right now?????????

Jade: its the automatic wardrobifier! :D

June: ...

June: wow I really should have fucking guessed that, huh.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < mmmmmmmmm purrobably

June: so does it pick out random stuff on shuffle, or-

June: wait.

my pockets. my pockets were wrong.

June: hold on, am I-

oh god these aren't my clothes what is this I finally look down at myself oH NO

June: AM I WEARING A DRESS??

yeah that's defin8ly what I'm doing right now! a knee length, loose fitting floral number with blue and green roses!!!!

I start to stand up but Jade keeps me in place

June: why am I wearing a dress?

Jade: you reaaaaaaaaaaaally shouldnt be getting up until we know for sure you dont have a concussion

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < how long has it been like half a day? she's probably fine

Jade: "probably fine" isn't exactly a sterling medical diagnosis!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hey im just saying

June: WHY AM I WEARING A DRESS?????????

Jade: uh

Jade: that's a good question actually!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < dont look at me

Jade: i dunno, sometimes it gets a wild hair- OUCH stop kicking me in the shins!!!

June: I'll stop kicking you in the shins when you make me stop being wearing a dress right now!!!!!!!!!!

I struggle against her because I really don't want to be wearing this I REALLY DON'T but she's surprisingly strong and her shins are way sturdier than I expected so I just, I give up and go kinda limp, and she sets my head on the fucking pomeranian pillow which I pull over my entire face because I don't know if I'm crying again but if this shit keeps up I'm DEFIN8LY GONNA START and I would like to keep my snot contamination to a minimum

Jade: calm down sis!

June: (just put me back in my old clothes please)

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B??

June: (please???)

Jade: june, whats-

June: (I LOOK LIKE A MAN IN A DRESS OKAY)

Jade: come on i think you look cute

June: (THIS ISN'T DEB8 CLUB JADE)

June: (I'M NOT IRONICALLY SELF-DEFEC8ING RIGHT NOW)

June: (I GENUINELY FEEL SICK TO MY STOMACH WHEN I'M WEARING A DRESS SO PLEASE JUST USE YOUR MAGICAL SCIENCE SHIT TO CHANGE MY CLOTHES BEFORE I EITHER VOMIT OR STRIP NAKED IN YOUR STUPID FUCKING PARLOR)

June: (may8e both)

Jade: technically its a drawing room

June: (AAAAAAAAAH!!!!!!!!!!)

Davepeta smashes a button on the wall and I feel something different on my skin, so I peek down from between my fingers and it's

well they're not my original clothes but I guess a loose grey tanktop and black leggings aren't the worst.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < sorry sometimes it kinda eats what you were wearing when you came in

looooooong loud sigh as my muscles untense and I sit up from yet another public screamcrying session.

June: whatever

June: they were trash clothes anyway

Jade: :(

June: so yeah, uh. for the record. dresses trigger my dysphoria

June: really fucking bad, obviously

June: sorry I snapped at you and preemptively ruined the like

June: wacky clothes hijinks we could have had

June: leave it to me to turn every fun thing into an emotional breakdown

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < nyah fuck that your bodily autonomy is hell's of more important than hijinks

June: thanks Davepeta

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B33

feel Jade's hand take mine, I look at her and she seems mournful. But also kinda smiling? like a sad happy thing

Jade: so much for us playing dressup huh?

June: the problem isn't the dressing up, it's that it happened while I was asleep

Jade: im really sorry june

Jade: i honestly forgot we even had it installed here

June: it's okay I guess

June: so now that the "ceaselessly clowning on June" portion of the morning is done can you guys just like

June: I don't know

June: tell me straight up where we are and what we're doing here so I can stop freaking out constantly

June: personally that just sounds swell

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < its a big spooky mansion we found in a dead splintpurr universe so we fixed it up and put it in space

June: as you do

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < its funny you mention clowning since it used to be stuffed to the gills with clown shit

Jade: yeah it was real bad

June: proba8ly explains why it was abandoned

Jade: turns out its got a really convenient relationship with the flow of spacetime too which makes it perfect for reconnaissance

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < not to mention loads of storage space

Jade: oh yeah, you can never have enough storage

June: I can fit most of what I own in like,

June: two 8oxes

June: so I literally cannot rel8

June: see, look at this. we're actually having a convers8ion like normal adults. isn't this nice?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah its alright

Jade: i think its lovely

June: hell yeah, score one for the concept of not acting like an anime villain all the fucking time

June: so why'd you 8ring me here anyway?

Jade: yeah davepeta why DID you bring us here?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < uh

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < it was the closest place i could think of with furniture?

June: :::0

June: >::::0
June: what's wrong with my house??
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < whats wrong with the mansion
Jade: we can go to your house if you want june
June: Jade
June: I am currently in a spacefaring victorian dog zone that may or may not be a portal to clown hell
June: why would I ever want to go back to my house?
Jade: :p
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < so while i love expursion as much as the next kitty cat and i dont wanna pounce on the fun like a hungry predator in the night
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < but we do in fact got business
June: ugh
June: yeah I fucking guess
June: so did I prove anything to you yesterday or was it a complete wash?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hmmmmmmmm
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats tbd tbf
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < your meowmories are all bl33ding together like cream in a bowl of cream which is never a supurr great sign
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < also some of your meowmories are litpurrally impawssible for you to have beclaws vriska defurnitely wouldnt of had them? so thats fucking weird
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < then theres whatever the eff that self aware business was at the end there
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < any guesses on that furont?
June: I,
June: uh
June: am not even really sure I know what you're talking about!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B||
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ok cool so im gonna need to break out the big guns fur this one
June: I assume you mean figur8ively
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < now im usually purretty good at getting in folks souls but your brain situation is all kindsa wack
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < itll take a serious set of tools fur sure objectively meowsure how fucking evil you are
June: wow, you're so funny Davepeta
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < lol brb B33

Davepeta disappears out the only door and down a hallway, and Jade posts up in a high-backed chair on the other side of the room, I guess so I can sprawl out on the couch? which I absolutely do because this couch is mad comfy.

June: you know this seems like way more of a Rose thing than a you thing

June: like you should be smoking a cigar and telling me I want to fuck my dad or something

Jade: gross

June: yeah

June: yeah it is kinda gross huh

Jade:

June:

June: so uh

June: really though

June: what's up with all the dogs?

Jade: shrug

Jade: i like dogs

June: oh

June: yeah that tracks

we wait around awkwardly for a little while. there's an odd hum in the silence that sounds mechanical, but I can't quite place it. I recognize a lot of these dog breeds but some of them are totally alien. maybe literally alien?? are dogs like a universal constant and every world has their own version of dogs? oh that'd be so cool if you had like shark dogs on a water planet and sky dogs on a

Jade clears her throat.

Jade: so did you um

Jade: did you really try to...

Jade: you know

she mimes strangling herself to death, sticking her tongue out and crossing her eyes. really hate that I know that's not what it looks like yeah no I'm not gonna think about that at all ever

June: uuuughhhghhhghgh

June: it's complic8d okay?
June: I would really rather talk a8out anything else.
Jade: she is still alive isnt she?
June: oh my god yes!!! you really think I'd 8e here if I fucking-
June: I didn't WANT to hurt her Jade
June: Except I did.
June: oh not this shit again
Jade: o_o
Jade: not what again???
June: sorry, not you-
June: look the short version is I'm reliving Vriska's memories, I had a really vivid nightmare a8out Terezi 8lowing my arm off, I tried to kill her in retri8ution, I woke up, realized I'm not literally Vriska, she kicked me off the 8ed, then Rose and Kanaya showed up, and Terezi just fucking 8ooked it
June: huh
June: you know I think...

I hold up my 8alled metal fist, unclench the fingers with a tiny whirl and a scrape. open and close a few times just to 8e sure-

June: yeah I defin8ly still have some of her 8lood on my hand
Jade: oh shit
June: oh shit is correct, jade
June: very much oh shit
June: and to top that off, I guess now I'm just randomly losing track of reality? like I'll say things and it's me saying them, 8ut then once they're said I realize it for sure *wasn't* me saying them at all?
Jade: kinda sounds like you might be possessed
June: what, like... like 8y a demon?
Jade: yes by a demon
June: like a REAL demon???
Jade: yes june a real for real actual honest to goodness devil spawn
June: the devil is real too?????
Jade: theres a zillion devils ok try not to get too excited
June: oh
June: so how do you deal with a possession?
Jade: exorcisms mostly
June: no way!

Jade: yes way

June: those are a real thing???

Jade: they were always a real thing even on earth

Jade: davepetas done like a hundred exorcisms theyre actually pretty routine

June: damn

June: well as cool as it would 8e to get strapped down to a bed and yelled at until *something* ejects from my 8ody, I really don't think I'm possessed.

Jade: thats exactly what a possessed person would say

June: okay sure fine whatever 8ut nothing's changed since you guys put me 8ack together.

June: this isn't different or new, it's just...

June: worse.

June: and I have no idea why 8ecause honestly my life's 8een pretty fucking great l8ly, so.

Jade: uhuh

Jade: have you talked to anyone else about this?

June: I hashed it out with Rose for a hot second 8efore I got your old messages.

Jade: whatd she say?

June: she...

June: told me to 8e dangerous?

Jade: wow that sounds like the opposite of the thing you want to be right now

June: yeah that's pretty much what I said.

June: there was more to it than that o8viously, I mean it's Rose there's always more to it with her, 8ut that was so many 8r8kdowns ago now I barely even remem8er it anymore.

Jade: <:/

June: one thing she said though, I dunno, I'm still kinda stuck on it.

June: she, uh. she sorta slyly suggested that something is a8out to happen? not sure what that could even mean, 8ut-

June: ...

June: wait, why are you 8uilding all that early detection stuff now?

when she very noticea8ly *doesn't* react I sit 8olt upright in the couch, shaking my head

June: no no no no I have had it up to HERE with the enigma schtick

today!

Jade: **i havent even said anything!**

June: yeah and I can tell you weren't planning to start.

Jade: **look it's probably just a-**

June: a coincidence?? is that what you're gonna tell me???

June: you're gonna sit here with your sparkly top hat in your space mansion and you're gonna tell me that Rose Lalonde having portentous visions and me having infinity 8rain crises and you guys literally 8building early detection gear all at the exact same time is a god damn coincidence?????????

Jade: **...yyyyyyes?**

June: wow. wow! wow.

June: look, I know I'm not the smartest person you're friends with, okay? I know that. I accept that. I'm kind of a dummy.

June: 8ut come the fuck on, Jade.

June: no one is that dumb.

she fidgets with her hands and scrunches her shoulders up so much it's like I'm staring directly at the old Jade again- 8ut I don't know why, it's like... it feels like an act? no, that's not fair, she wouldn't...

I think a8out what Lenore said. I know I shouldn't trust THEM more than I trust Jade, 8ut. something in my gut. why is she acting like this? what is going ON that this is such a federal fucking issue???

June: can you please 8e straight with me for like five seconds? because I seriously feel like I'm a8out to lose it.

Jade: **june, i...**

June: am I wrong?? please just tell me, am I wrong???

Jade: **...**

Jade: **no**

June: **THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!**

June: jegus christmas, socializing with you guys is like pulling teeth.

Jade: **to be clear though we don't KNOW anything**

June: 8ut you have a hunch.

Jade: **yyyyyeah**

June: and what would that hunch 8e?

Jade: **...**

June: really?

June: really. you're gonna keep stonewalling me right now, that's what you're doing? really???

Jade: <<;;

Jade: its

Jade: for your safety?

June: ...

June: my safety.

Jade: yeah, I mean

I grab the coffee table and break it over my knee, and then I set the halves next to me on either side of couch.

Jade: i liked that table!

June: Do you want me to break more shit?

Jade: obviously i dont

June: Then how about you stop being SO!

I grab one table half and hurl it like a discus into a great dane.

June: F8CKING!

I send the other half flying through some kind of dopey looking swampbeast/barkbeast hybrid with feathery wings.

June: FR8STR8ING!!!!!!!!!!

Jade: ._.

We stare at each other as the shattered pieces of table, now firmly lodged in the wall, slowly stop vibrating, and a few stray shards of wood come to rest on the floor.

Jade: ok that was just excessive

June: Well *Silverbark*, I wouldn't have to be so excessive if I thought there was any other way to get through to you!

June: Do you really not see how pointless this is?

June: Davepeta's literally minutes away from breaking into my fucking SOUL to count my sins like some kind of spectral murder secretary, which we both know only ends with you either trusting me or trying your damndest to kill me.

Jade: wed never do that

June: Don't fucking lie to me, Jade.

June: You don't get to pull the whole "8luh 8luh everyone thinks I'm a silly little girl when actually I'm a seasoned killer 8luh 8luh" thing and then say to my face that you wouldn't try to put me out of my misery if you thought I'd 8ecome a lia8ility.

June: HUGE emphasis on *try*, 8y the way.

Jade: *is*

Jade: *that really what you think i sound like?*

June: Oh, are we moving on to the constructive criticism portion now?

Jade: *:x*

June: Look, I'm-

June: i'm sorry for yelling at you. i know it's not helpful.

June: all I'm trying to say is that this convers8ion we're having right now is either the last one we have 8efore you really trust me, or the last one we have *ever*.

June: so why not just fucking tell me what's going on?

Jade: *dang*

Jade: *you know you sound a lot like vriska when youre determined*

June: *::::(*

June: *jade...*

June: are you enjoying this?

Jade: *enjoying what*

June: this whole song and dance routine of stringing me along, acting all mysterious and junk.

June: because it feels like a prank.

June: but not the fun kind of prank like ashton kutcher would do, more like the mean kind from jack ass where people actually get hurt and cry.

Jade: *do i sound like im having fun?*

June: i don't know anymore.

June: i don't... think i know *you* anymore.

Jade:

June: i guess i just don't understand why...

June: okay i do, i do understand. you've been this morally grey space marauder for a really long time and that comes with all sorts of complicated baggage you don't want to talk about. that much makes sense to me.

June: but if youre such a magnet for danger and you can't even talk about THAT with me, then...

June: then why did you even 8other coming back?

Jade: wow, ouch
June: well what else can I say!
June: I want you here, Jade. I'm glad that you're here! you're my witch in shining armor!!!!
June: But when you act like this you remind me of Doc S-
Jade: BARK BARK WOOF GROWL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
June: <::::x
Jade: you dont have the right to judge my paranoia june egypt, you have no IDEA what ive lived through!!!
June: I don't know because you won't tell me!
Jade: i wont tell you because if i have to tell you then it means ive failed!!!!
June: failed?
Jade: it doesnt matter
June: it kinda sounds like it matters a lot, actually
Jade: im not lying when i say this is for your protection, june!
Jade: theres a whole omniverse in crisis out there and i have sacrificed far far FAR too much just for you to waltz into my house and become another conscript for the war!!!!
June: ...
June: conscript?
Jade: wait
Jade: god damn it.
Jade: god DAMN it!!
Jade: GOD DAMN IT!!!!
June: uh,
Jade: i hate this fucking planet!! why is it so hard to just keep a secret here????
Jade: where the hell is davepeta already it really shouldnt be taking them this long
June: oh.
Jade: oh what
June: you guys are planning something, aren't you?
Jade:
June: okay. I get it now. I get that you can't tell me everything, but I'm not asking you to.
Jade: then what exactly are you asking for?
June: the same thing I gave you, Jade.
June: a choice.
Jade: ...
June: you see what you're doing, right?

like a slow motion landslide, Jade slumps forward in her chair and buries her face in her hands, hair drooping until it's a silver waterfall going all the way down past her knees.

I can't tell if she's crying.

Jade: (june, come on)

Jade: (dont you just want to live your life?)

June: I...

June: I mean sure, I'd LIKE to just live, but,

June: awful shit's been happening to me constantly for almost 23 years now. what reason do I have to believe that it will ever stop?

Jade: (thats why im here)

Jade: (to protect you)

June: sorry to be a bitch, but your track record so far doesn't exactly inspire confidence.

June: I think it's way past too late for this runaround, and I think you know it's too late, and I think you're in denial because whatever your plan was, it clearly meant a lot to you.

June: but the plan's gotta change

Jade: (please)

Jade: (i just want you guys to be happy)

June: I want to be happy too... I want to be

happy. that is what I want, isn't it?

but the word tastes like moldy cake in my mouth. chewing on it, feeling it dissolve on my tongue, how it sticks to the back of my throat and churns restlessly in my stomach, it doesn't make me think of a future where I've settled down, where we all get to simply be until the end of time.

it makes me think of a kid playing the same shitty piano tune on loop until they keel over and die.

June: maybe I don't want to be happy

June: all happiness ever seems to do is rot, and always right when you've started relying on it.

June: I don't think something that fragile is worth fighting for.

Jade: (you dont actually believe that)

June: I am just...

June: I'm completely lost.

June: I look at my life and I don't have a fucking clue what to make of it except it's prob8a8ly gonna get worse before it gets 8etter.

June: sure, happiness would 8e a nice perk, 8ut right now all I really want is something to do with my fucking hands.

June: one fucking thing that isn't just ME.

Jade: (...)

Jade sits up straight, whipping her hair 8ack behind her head. when she wipes her tears away, I see on her face a seriousness I don't think I've ever-

her gaze meets mine and. I. holy shit.

she softens just a little 8it when she sighs, 8ut the fear that froze me in place just now takes a lot longer to su8side.

Jade: ok

June: okay?

Jade: ok as in im gonna show you something, if thats really what it takes to get you off my dick

June: gross.

Jade: nothing gross about dicks june stop being such a prude

Jade pulls what looks like a dictionary out of thin air and starts flipping wildly through it. at each page projections appear in front of her face with lines of text, schematics, other dumb science crap that proba8ly means something to someone...

June: that seems ela8or8.

Jade: like youre one to talk when it comes to inventory space miss "i can fit everything in two boxes". its a handy storage solution for sensitive documents and ill hear nothing to the con...

Jade: contrary where the fuck is-

Jade: ah! here we go

at the proper page she reaches into the 8ook like a christmas stocking and yanks out a thick manilla folder messily stuffed full of documents. she holds it out in front of me

and makes sure I'm looking her square in the eyes.

Jade: before i show this to you i just want you to know that...

Jade: that i dont know what happens after this

Jade: maybe this is nothing and it leads to nothing and it was all an overcautious exaggeration and everything else really was a coincidence. thats the best case scenario

Jade: but theres a chance its a much bigger problem and if youre involved, thats it

Jade: theres no telling what it could cascade into from there

Jade: so please, june. please

Jade: ask yourself why i would work so hard to keep you from getting involved

Jade: i know you think youre sure, but im begging you to trust me-

June: You're right.

June: I am sure.

Jade stares at me with such a heavy wash of mourning in her face. there's no other word for it. she really believes that something is at risk of dying between us. what am I supposed to make of that?

Jade: fine.

Jade makes a finger gun and points it where the coffee table was, and with a flash it's back in one piece. as worryingly scented smoke wafts up from its surface, she lays out a few pieces of paper on the table and sits down next to me.

Jade: weve been scanning for a while and besides a few minor spats so far theres only been the one threat we dealt with a couple weeks ago

June: minor spats?

Jade: dont worry about it

Jade: anyway not long after that we picked up an unusual signal, this one here

she points at the line on a graph that looks different from all the other lines and I feel my eyes start to cross.

June: uhuh.

Jade: now this on its own isnt a huge deal

Jade: could be a stray communications call, a radiation spike from a supernova, an indifferent space ghost, anything

June: sure.

Jade: but then theres this

she points to a second piece of paper with more graphs.

Jade: what do you see?

June: um. i guess theres a lot of green there?

Jade: precisely

she looks at me like this is the answer to all of life's questions.

June: am i supposed to know what that means?

Jade: sigh

Jade: this spectrograph maps incoming signals across the light spectrum

Jade: now wed expect any ambient space noise to be in the infrared range, and any complex broadcasts to be well into the ultraviolet

Jade: but this?

Jade taps the paper forcefully.

Jade: this is just straight up visible light

June: and that's... not normal?

Jade: visible light is like any other radiation in that sometimes it can just be really fucking weird

Jade: lots of false positives and the like

Jade: pulsars for instance can often easily be mistaken for intentional signals because of their consistent rate of

June: wait

June: wait oh shit i know this!

Jade: you... do?

June: this is just like that movie contact with jodie foster and matthew mcconaughey!

June: i have a vintage t shirt from that movie!!

June: i think i ruined it with my blood though...

June: :::(

Jade: ooooook well i guess we can skip through the astrobabble and

get to the good stuff then

Jade: point is its an intentional signal that we cant seem to parse because visible light shouldnt be able to carry this much complex information

Jade: so this is where we get into speculation

Jade: weve encountered a lot of signals like these and they can be sourced from a truly ridiculous number of objects and formations and ideas

Jade: but the one consistent fact weve observed across all the signals like this is that theyre the result of metatextual interference

June: oh...

June: oh fuck.

Jade: whats even better is, signals in this very specific range of green?

Jade: lets just say they have a tendency to come from real bad customers

June: fantastic.

Jade: now this signals been getting stronger every day ever since we found it, but weve yet to really figure out how to read the darn thing

Jade: light is universal but there are functionally infinite ways to manipulate and interpret waveforms so if we really want to figure this thing out in time then we gotta cast a stupid huge net

Jade: hence the new equipment back in the lab

June: wow.

Jade: yeah

June: so you know it's headed towards us?

Jade: more or less

June: do you have any, um. educated guesses what it could be?

Jade: the best weve come up with so far is "sentient being"

June: cool

June: how long do we have?

Jade: well normally with a signal observed this long wed have an exact answer by now since its pretty rudimentary maths to bang out a rough acceleration rate

Jade: problem with THIS motherfucker is its been inconsistent as all hell and seemingly coming from a different location in a different direction from wildly different distances every time we record it!

June: wow that

June: that sounds like it shouldn't be possible

Jade: which is exactly why im so fucking miffed! at this point the time of arrival could be anywhere from a couple weeks to several hundred millennia

June: oh, well that narrows it down

June: so uh

June: So what you're telling me is that a thing you don't understand *might* be coming here *soonish* to do *something...*

June: And that was somehow too revealing to share with the rest of us?

She hesitates.

Jade: while it could still turn out to be basically anything...

Jade: this isnt the first time weve encountered this specific kind of green spectrum signal

June: Okay, what was it last time?

Jade: bad

June: How bad?

Jade: bad enough

June: Well that's not good.

Jade: no its not

Jade: and this is one of the things i for sure cant tell you ok? so dont even bother prying

Jade: all that matters is if we have a chance to intercept and neutralize whatever this is without anyone else finding out, we have to take it

June: okay, that makes sense.

June: But why not at least share just this information with the rest of us?

I tap the papers on the table.

June: none of this is incriminating or anything, so why-

Jade: its really cute that you guys always think youre the most effective defense by default

June: ...are we not?

Jade: please explain to me in excruciating detail how karkat would be useful in sorting out raw data from a radio telescope

June: ...

Jade: i can wait!

June: look that's just one example, surely there's other ways we could help-

Jade: all the stories ive told you about my life over the last few centuries, do you think i just left all that behind?

June: I-

June: I guess so? I mean this is your home, so

Jade: quite frankly june, no its not

Jade: maybe it was once but these days its...

Jade: its just an uncanny old haunt

Jade: memories everywhere like discarded toys. mostly bad ones at that

Jade: always reminding me how much time has passed

Jade: how old im getting

June: oh...

Jade: who knows, maybe thats what homes are supposed to feel like

Jade: not like i ever had much of one to begin with

June: :::(

Jade: er

Jade: ahem!

Jade: ANYWAY i do in fact have a life that involves other places and other people, and theyve got a LOT more experience than you guys in dealing with weird cosmic gobbledegook

Jade: no need to get the amateurs involved when youve got a whole galaxy of pros on call

June: hey we're not-

June:

June: okay yeah we're amateurs.

Jade: finally she sees reason!

June: you know I just realized something

June: I never asked you if you have a family!

June: obviously I'm not gonna ask you now since I'm sure that's

June: uh...

Jade sort of zones out like she's doing a math problem, her blank expression slowly giving way to a sort of happy confusion? she's staring off at one of the dog pictures when she starts laughing to herself, but I don't think she's looking at anything and I highly doubt she's just randomly remembered a stellar knock knock joke.

June: you okay?

Jade: huh!

June: what?

Jade: you know if you had asked me about family yesterday, i wouldve sandbagged the question straight to the bottom of the nearest river

June: um

Jade: but it occurs to me now that the cats already out of the bag, so theres really no point in throwing it in the river at all!

Jade: you can thank davepeta for that

June: uhhhh?

June: ????????

Jade: so technically i

Jade: i *could* tell you

Jade: and i think i actually do?

Jade: i think i actually want to tell you the truth

Jade: weird!

June: sssssssso

June: are you gonna tell me the truth?

Jade: hmm

Jade: no, i dont think so

June: why not?

Jade: knowing that a cat is out of a bag still leaves a lot to the imagination

June: uh

June: okay?????????

Jade: good god you really are a lost puppy huh

June: are you gonna put *me* in a 8ag now?

Jade: the bag is a metaphor june

Jade: youve been ass deep in this nonsense your whole life, how have you not figured this out?

June: figured WHAT out?

Jade: that secrets are memetic

June: I thought you said we were done with the astro8abble.

Jade: oh honey :')

Jade: you have no clue at all do you?

June: now you're just 8eing condescending.

Jade: heres a thought problem

Jade: if i know a true thing, but no one else knows it and I never share, is it still true?

June: uh. yeah? why wouldn't it 8e?

June: wait is this like that "if a tree falls in a forest" thing? 8ecause I suck at those.

Jade: hehehe

Jade scratches at her chin as she looks over the documents again. our knees are touching, and I notice again the scars on her hand.

Jade: you know ever since what happened last time, davepeta and i have been...

Jade: jumpy

June: yeah, me too.

Jade: weve got a lot of enemies out there june, and while i severely doubt the vast majority of those chuckleheads could ever find their way here, a fair few are just clever or resourceful or powerful enough to figure it out

Jade: but even with that fair few, if they showed up? dealing with most of em would be a

she snaps her fingers, and then leans all the way 8ack on the couch.

Jade: so really theres not very much reason to be worried at all!

Jade: except

Jade: except there are a couple people

Jade: very very few you understand

Jade: if they did manage to find their way here, i

Jade: i really

Jade: i dont know

Jade:

June: Jade...

June: what did you do?

she tilts her head to look at me, and I know she wants to say something, then Davepeta zaps 8ack into the room

June: AAH!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oops sorry my bad BPP

Jade: rude!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i figured shed be used to folks zapping around all the time by meow

June: O8VIOUSLY NOT!!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < huh

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well no offense but thats kinda lame!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < anyway here

they hold up what I can only describe as the unholy combination of a telescope and a FUCKING ROCKET LAUNCHER??

June: holy shit you really didn't mean it figuratively!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < had to dig this bad boy outta the d33p fr33ze

June: what is it?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < its an elongated radio-quantum psychoamplifier

June: you just made those words up.

Jade: unfortunately they didnt

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < itll let me burrow through your emotional walls and really figure out what makes you tick without all that furst purrson memory hocus pocus

June: so it's, like... a gun that shoots therapy?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < uhhh

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah you could call it therapy

Jade: it was originally a torture device but we retrofitted it for other purposes

Jade: which admittedly still includes torture sometimes but uh

Jade: so did you get lost or something davepeta? sure did take you long enough

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hey its a big house and we havent b33n here in a while

Jade: uhuh

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < alright lets get this...

they notice the papers on the table and peer over their glasses at Jade. the two share a purposeful stare and I struggle to understand what it could mean with Davepeta holding a rocket launcher except that they seem enormously smug

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < jazz?

Jade: jazz

June: ...jazz?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < inside joke dont worry about it

then they spin around and level the thing point blank at the left side of my chest, pressing all the way down until I'm pinned to the couch. I squirm a little as they mess

with some knobs and switches.

June: hey this is kind of uncomfortable

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < it do be like that sometimes

June: uhh

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < meow first things first we gotta get this sonofabitch calibrated so im gonna n33d you to think of a really clawmatic childhood memory

June: UHH

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < dont worry it doesnt hurt physically

June: that's not the pain I'm worried about!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < just think about that time your dad got stabbed to death and you didnt even get a chance to say goodbye

June:

June: wow, uh

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < purrfect! whatd i say, totally painless

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < okie dokie jade well be back in two shakes of a kittys rump

Jade starts to say something, but then Davepeta pulls the tri

I...

where am I?

something soft under me. cold air all around. faint hum. I'm in a sitting position? But my body feels weird, somehow. what-

AHH FUCK THAT'S 8RIGHT!!!!!!!

when my eyes adjust, I realize I'm sat down in a movie theater. velvet curtains, molded detailing. the 8ig white screen in front of me is illumin8ed with Davepeta's mixed Time / Derse sym8ol.

June: Davepeta, where are yo-
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yo
June: AAAH

they appear next to me, already leaning 8ack in their seat.

June: STOP IT.
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < BPP
June: fucking hell...
June: so is this, uh.
June: is this normal?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < thats a dumb question
June: fair enough.
June: what are we watching, then? I could go for some-
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < if you start blabbing about some shitty 90s action meowvie im just gonna erase your entire brain right now
June: can you
June: can you do that?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oh hey its starting B33

suddenly on the screen are two folding chairs across from one another. no sound except the clacking of the projector? why is there a projector in this imaginary movie th- you know what, fuck it.

I cross my legs and scooch my 8utt back into the seat to try to get comfy. it doesn't work. there's a crunch to my right and I look over to see Davepeta eating... popcorn.

glowing, astral popcorn YEAH OKAY.

June: can I have some?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hmmm
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you can try it but im purretty sure youd explode

June: well now I defin8ly have to try one.

I reach my hand over into the neon stro8ing tub and-

June: ouch!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < told you

a little trail of smoke rises up from my fingers, like I just touched a hot iron in a cartoon.

June: man, this 8lows

June: what's the fucking point of going to the movies if I can't have popcorn?

June: and what a8out drinks! or candy! literally anything to-

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < shh somethings happening

two figures sit in the chairs and

oh fuck me. are you serious??

on the left side of the screen is Davepeta in a 8business 8lazer and heels, and on the right is... me? 8ut different, somehow. combed hair, nicer clothes. is she- am I wearing makeup? or is that just what I look like... there's no way that's what I look like.

I turn just to check and, yup, Davepeta's still sitting next to me chomping down popcorn.

June: what is this?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hehehehehe

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i have no idea! BDD

June: fantastic.

< how are you today june?

> oh, you know. hanging in there.

< thats good to hear

< so lets get down to brass knuckles

< youve done a few meowders

> more than a few, yeah.

< you wanna talk about it?

> not really.
< well thats a shame beclaws you gotta B//
> I know. it's just scary.
> I've 8een keeping this stuff hidden inside me for so long. I'm not used to 8eing able to talk about it.
< well thats the point isnt it? impurrtant shits always scary and sometimes you n33d a safe place to let it out
> yeah.

she 8reathes in... uh, I? breathe?? her face is so conflicted, so hesitant, is this what I look like???? like all the time????????

> I was drunk. I was angry. I wish I could say I didn't want to hurt anyone 8ut we all know that's not true.
> 8ut that's normal, right? sometimes you get mad and want to do stupid shit 8ut most of the time you don't actually follow through.
> I wouldn't have done anything if it wasn't for Callie's JuJu.
< are you sure about that?
> ...

oh god don't say it, please don't-

> no.

fucking god damn it! I turn over to Davepeta

June: that's not true, okay, I defin8ly wouldn't have-
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < shhhh
June: I just want you to know-
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < stop talking youre ruining the theater expurrience!

I cross my arms and slump 8ack into my seat.

June: this is 8ullshit
< and how does that make you f33l?
> it... makes me feel a lot of things.
> I've always known I could do pretty much anything I wanted thanks to retcon, 8ut with a few exceptions I never did because it... it scared me.

> it's like that movie ground hog day, with Bill Murray? where he's stuck reliving the same day over and over?

> except with me it's reversed, like... everyone else is indefin8ly stuck in my own personal ground hog day.

> it's uh.

> it's weird.

< but thats not all it makes you f33l is it

> no, 8ut

< youre gonna say it eventmewally so you might as well get it over with

> ugh.

> look. yes. it's also thrilling, okay? it's not like this is a secret, I've had a whole fucking, like. arc a8out this.

< june we dont have arcs we are just weird cosmic abominations

> yeah I fucking guess.

> I just feel like I'm, I don't know, walking 8ack? everything made sense when I came out, I felt like I understood myself.

< B||

> look I'm not saying I had my shit together.

> almost all my friends let me down, I had no idea if I was even gonna 8e allowed to stay alive, I was drowning in dou8t and fear and all that other angsty stuff.

> I just mean like...

> in spite of everything else, it felt like *I* made sense. like the rest of the world was this 8ig ball of chaos and danger but that was on some level at least a little okay 8ecause, you know...

> I was me.

> and I knew I wanted to live.

> may8e everything after that was a justific8ion, I don't know.

< so what changed?

> you know what.

< yes but i want you to say it

> I-

> I'm sorry, I just, I really don't want to talk a8out that.

< what are you afuraid of? hes dead and its all in the past and youre here with me safe as safe can be

> well

> yeah he's dead, 8ut

> he's also here

< B??

< how do you mean?

> here as in like

the onscreen June taps her head, and the screen goes staticky for a couple seconds. ow, my head- MY head?? oh that's worrying

> every time I think about him it's like he's right behind me

> walking outside my house at night

> this fucking unstoppable thing-

< is that how you remember dirk?

< unstoppable?

> ...

June:

> no.

> But what he *really* was doesn't matter anymore, does it?

< maybe yes maybe no

< ghosts are real, ideas can be touched

< irrelevant things often stubbornly persist despite being unseen and unknown to even the omniscient

> that doesn't exactly make me feel better.

< im not trying to make you feel better june im trying to understand

> what's there to understand?

< oh trust me theres always something with you crazy kids

> I'm almost 23!

< and im already more than a hundred times that so hush

< but were getting off topic

< you said you feel like youve been walking back since you came out

< tell me what changed

she runs her fingertips up her prosthetic arm to rest on her shoulder, circles her thumb at the border between metal and skin. I know what she's going to say. she says

> he broke me.

the image skips and goes dark for a second, like a jump scare. again my head, something kinda... pinches? like if a whisper could pinch?? I don't know how that makes sense to me but it does make sense-

the screen's back to normal now, but

I can hear something somewhere, an echo. start to turn around-

is anyone there? I can't tell. it's so dark in the back of the theater. how is it this dark with so much white on the screen? the shadows are so heavy, they're like curtains except they almost feel. alive?

Davepeta taps my shoulder and I face forward again.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < doing ok over there?

June: yeah, just uh

June: thought I heard something.

> there, are you happy now?

< june im always happy B33

< so you still have flashbacks?

> yes.

> they're not as bad as they used to be, though.

June: liar.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B//

< do you think youre recovering?

> I don't think I even know what "recovery" means.

< lets say it means functioning normally again.

> ...

> hah.

> whose normal?

moviepeta nods solemnly.

< you got me there

> you ask me what changed, but I'm not sure change is the right word.

> I think I'm like,

> how do I put this...

> if you dumped two completely different puzzles out into a pile and then tried to make one picture out of them, that's me.

> now by some fucking miracle of insight or luck or who the hell knows what, I think the me that came out of that pile was... more or less complete?

> rough around the edges, maybe a few missing pieces here and

there, DEFIN8LY a stretch as far as a coherent image goes,
> 8ut still recognizable as something finished.
< and then dirk came along
> then Dirk came along.
> and ever since then it's like, I remem8er what the finished
puzzle looked like and I remem8er how I put it together...
> 8ut no matter how hard I try, I just can't get the pieces to fit!
June: that's what pictures are for, dumpass.
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < that is so not the point
June: what's wrong with having reference material?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < you dont n33d refurence materials fur
metafurs june
June: says you.
< well this certainly helps clawrify some things
< youve got this laundry list of regrets and mistakes yanking your
chain down into the depurression gutters like a fucking sixty ton
albatross on the one paw-
June: (could use some reference materials for that fucking
metaphor)
< -and on the other youve got all this spooky god power brain noise
dumbfuckery mixing memories from diffurent people until youre so
overwhelmed you just start to fucking disappear
> like in 8ack to the future.
< yeah if marty mcfly was a disaster lesbian who could kill god
with a thought
> come on I'm not THAT power-
> oh w8t you meant like
> "god" as in me, like I could-
> gotcha, I'm with you now.
June: wow I h8te me
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B((
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hey dont say that
June: 8ut she's so dum8! I know I'm kind of dum8 but am I really
THAT fucking dumb???
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < youre not dumb
June: yes I am
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < shut up no youre not
June: >::::(
< usually with ptsd we just do some drugs and talk shit out but
youre a wholeass ball of tangled yarn whichd be hella fun to sort
through if half the yarn wasnt fucking existential antimatter

June: where the fuck are you getting this?
June: like sure I punched a building over once but-
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < do you really not remempurr that night?
June: no.
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < not even a t33nsy smidge
June: no! I mean sometimes I'll get flashes, but as you'd imagine I mostly try not to think about it!
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < inpurresting
< tell me something, do you know the extent of your powers?
> yeah.
< have you tested them?
> I mean, not scientifically-
< so you havent tested them
> what does that have to do with anything?
< call it purrsonal curiosity
> ...
> okay?
< lets put a pin in that
< its clear to me that weve all b33n making one big obvious meowstake in trying to help you not be a complete waste of space
< reliving clawmatic meowmories and doing expurrsure therapy is all fine and dandy but if the root purrproblem is that you arent even propurrly put together in the furst place, then the only thing our effurts acclawmplish is self harm!
> so...
> what do you think I should do?
< i think you should sit back and enjoy the rest of the show
> what?

then a third and fourth Davepeta walk onto screen from behind the other me and the other Davepeta, wheeling with them two old school tube tvs on carts like from an elementary school.

June: I feel like I should be more phased by this than I am.
June: am I in shock? is that what's going on?
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < youre defurnitely gonna be if you dont stop talking
June: it'd almost be a relief at this point...

the us's on the theater screen turn in their seats to face the two separate tv screens, each

of which have two respective chairs of their own.

> so is this gonna be like a dark side of the rainbow situation where we put on two different movies and-

June: this is so fucking embarrassing.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < hush

June: ::::x

< hush

> ::::x

simultaneously on each screen, two people walk up and sit in their chairs and my-

my vision is a little hazy? feels my thoughts are being pushed through a meat grinder, or one of those saltwater taffy machines you always see in the background of movies that have a county fair in them. it doesn't *hurt* exactly, it's... I don't know.

I blink a few times and now I can see that on the left screen is woah holy shit is that Davesprite??? and he's sitting across from Vriska! which means on the right screen is, I guess Nepetasprite? across from

me.

from before.

egg me.

June: what the fuck??

> what the fuck??

the simultaneity is like hearing my own voice on the radio, it throws me off for a second.

June: what is this?? what are you doing to me?????????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < im not doing anything to you june

June: if you're not doing anything to me then why does my head hurt?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < look, were in a movie theater watching a

weird art film!! what could be less threatening
June: But the last time they were separated I was-
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < but youre still here arent you
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < youre still you
June: ...
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < do you feel any different?
June: I
June: I guess not?
June: sorry, this is just...
> really scary.
< its ok to be scared june most things get scared sometimes
< debatably fear is a good sign!! now lets s33 what these rascals
have to say fur themselves

everything is happening at once, all the screens are making noise, But somehow I... I
don't get them mixed up at all? everything just flows.

< sup
> If it isn't the cool kid himself!
< you know it
< alright before we get this show on the road i just want to get
one thing straight
< were not whole people
> Well, that's obvious.
> We're constructs of one person's identity as abstracted from
their whole. It's not exactly intentionally nonlethal interplanetary
travel from science.
< ok cool that was painless

< *nepeta curiously meows as her new friend takes a seat*
< hello!!
> uh. hi?
< ok so before we get this hunt on the prowl i just want to get one
thing straight
< were not whole people
> what?
> i'm not a person?
< no you are a person but only insofar as youre half of a larger
person
> like a voltron thing.
< i dont know what that is but sure!

> so what you're saying is...

> i'm not real?

< am i real?

> i don't even know who you are!

< im nepeta! :33

< well technically nepetasprite but who cares about furmalities

< i know your name but im guessing you dont want me to say it huh

> oh, yeah. i don't think i'd like to hear that.

> wait...

> you're the "peta" from davepeta!

< wow youre so smart!!!

> thanks, i try. :p

> so what was the point of establishing our... person-ness?

< *nepeta scratches her chin thoughtfully, drawing out the silence as egbert waits impatiently fur an answer*

> that was a weird thing to say out loud.

< hehe sorry it helps me think

< youre a whole purrson with your own memories and life expurriences but youve b33n living as a part of someone else fur a long time and just beclaws youre you right now doesnt mean the *bigger* you out there stopped existing

> oh. i guess that makes sense.

< so do you remempurr living as june?

> how could i not?

< lets just say this isnt my furst time playing armchair thinkpan mechanic. youd be surprised how often folks lose track of themselves outside the whole, it can get ugly!!

> how ugly?

< *nepeta shivers, arcing her back in an expurression of disgust*

> haha, okay it's growing on me now.

June: UGH

< :33

> so um. if i'm just this half of me, or whatever, why don't i feel...

< f33l what?

> well i mean the last time i was, i don't know,

> like this?

> it was...

< *rubs her haunches against egberts leg in a show of encouragement and suppurrt*

> sorry, it's weird being *just* me again.

> i think im thinking slower now? or
< it takes some getting used to fur sure!
> so i guess the first word that pops into my head to describe what
this felt like last time is "traumatic", but that seems kind of
pretentious.
< nooooooooooooo!! *nepeta glomps her new furriend to smother her
with reassuring physical affection*
> ...
< i saw what you had to go through to put yourself back together
fursthand and trust me its not purrtentious to call it clawmatic!
> i guess.
< you sure do guess a lot!
> well i usually leave it up to the ladies to know things
< hehehe
> ...
< ...
< *licks paw and scratches ear as she narrows her eyes* whats on
your mind?
> it's nothing.
< out with it! >:33
> well it's just that, when you did your kind of, uh, roleplay
thing? that you do? you sort of described me as-
> well you addressed me as "her"
< is that ok?
> i think so? it's weird.
> lot of weird things today, heh.
> i know june is her and she's, like... me? or i'm her, or...
> but it feels strange to be called a girl.
< does it f33l bad?
> i don't know how it feels.
> sorry, i'm really bad at this!
< no no youre doing grrrreat! this actmewally gets me to my next
question
< are you happy as june?
> uh

> Am I happy as June?
< thats what i said
> What a stupid question.
< whys it stupid
> 8ecause it doesn't matter! I'm her and she's me whether I like it

or not.

< do you like it though

> That's like asking a spider if she likes her web.

< does the spider like her web though

> Yes! Yes, I'm happy as June. There, happy?

< vriska im never happy

< and youre evading

> Why wouldn't I want to evade a question like "am I happy"???????

< you realize this isnt a trap right

< like im not over here scheming a plot to get you confessing you were secretly the zodiac killer this whole time

> Why would I kill the Zodiac? That'd be infanticide.

< damn vriska that was a good joke

> Thanks.

< so whyd you try to kill terezi

>

< youre not paying me by the hour

> I didn't...

> That-

> Look.

< im looking

> It was a misunderstanding, okay?

< oh well thats ok then

< one time i had a misunderstanding with a guy in reno over whose sunglasses were whose so i strangled him to death in front of a dozen random onlookers and then dumped his corpse in a gully

> Holy shit, I didn't know you were *actually* cool!

< no im not-

< i mean yes i am actually cool thats just a fact

< but the story was a fake thing i said for the purposes of illustration

> You lied to me?

< yes vriska i did a lie at you

< it was meant to be an intentionally hyperbolic exaggeration of your batshit usage of the word misunderstanding but clearly i underestimated how unhinged you are

> I'm not unhinged!

> My hinges are perfectly intact.

< well now that weve firmly established the structural stability of your hinges why dont you tell me why you tried to kill terezi

> I.

> I don't really...

> I don't have an answer. I don't know why I did it.

< bullshit

> I'm not lying to you, Dave!

< uhuh

> Do you think I'm a liar? Is that what you think?

< no i think youre in denial about trying to kill the girl youre in love with

> Woah woah woah, 8ack up, let's not go THAT far-

< the fuck do you mean "that far" youve literally had sex with her

> No, June did that!

< ok fine youve literally half had sex with her

< whats the hangup here i thought you two were like soulmates

> It's complic8d, okay?????????

< yeah no shit

< you still havent answered my question though

> I don't know! I don't know why I did it! I just don't know!!!!!!!!!!

< woah chill

< this isnt an inquisition vriska im just asking questions

< although when you think about it i guess thats like the literal definition of an inquisition

< anyway lets back up for a sec

< june says you and your breezier half have been acting up a lot lately

< whats up with that

>

> I don't-

< i swear to me if you say you dont know one more time im gonna go purrfectly apeshit

>

> It's the air.

< the air

> Yeah, the air.

> It gets cramped in that messy human 8rain and normally it's fine 8ecause we're a team and we work gr8 together!

> 8ut the air's 8een foul l8ly. We all sense it in different ways 8ut it's m8de us equally uneasy.

< what does the air mean in this context exactly

> ::::/

> Like...

> Breathing room.
> It's a lot harder to keep it together when the strings go taught and your mind is flooded with this...
> I don't even know how to describe it.
> Certainty?
< about what
> I'm not sure.
< well thats fucking stupid
> Trust me, I know! I think that's why we're so pissed off all time.
> We know something, and every day we're just that little bit more sure that we're right about what we know, but we also have NO FUCKING IDEA what we know and that just fills me with dread!
> er
> Us, I mean. Fills us with dread.
< vriska
< what exactly are you afraid of

> what's a fear aid?
< no silly i mean afraid
> oh.
< well?
> umm.
> i'm afraid of a lot of things, i guess.
> thunderstorms.
> clowns.
> uh...
> other stuff?
< no i mean what are you afraid of right now specifically! >:33
> i know that's what you mean, im just not sure what to say.
> i guess im... "afraid" of being torn apart again? :p
< *nepeta purrs happily when egypt repeats her quirk*
> uh
June: no
> i um
June: don't you fucking dare
> *i smile and give nepeta scratches*
June: oh my GOD this is so cringe.
Davepetasprite^2: B33 < says the girl who compares herself to batman and wont shut up about old meowvies no one cares about like back to the future

June: listen,
< :DD !!!!!
< omg omg omg omg
< *leans head into ebgerts scritchs and purrs even louder, then rolls over onto her back invitingly*
> *i take the bait and rub nepeta's belly*
< *nepeta enjoys the belly rub for a few seconds befur kicking her hind legs up into egbert's arm and biting their fingers*
> hahaha, ouch!
> *i get down on my
< nooo you gotta use furd purrson!
> oh, sorry!
> *knowing she's fallen for nepeta's trap, june gets down on her knees and reaches behind her back with a mischievous smile*
< :oo
< *continues clawing june's hand as she gives nepeta tummy rubs* im watching you egbert >:33
> *hastily sorts through inventory for the perfect weapon, until with a flourish june produces a laser pointer*
< !!!!!!!!!!! my one weakness!
< *nepeta pounces after her new red dot prey, leaving june to tend to her wounds*
> *june has had way worse so she doesnt even mind the cat scratches*
< hehehe that was fun!!! no ones roleplayed with me in a real long time!
> sorry i'm not very good at it.
< noooo shut up you were clawesome! youre defurnitely a natural
> heh. thanks.
< but thats not even the most impurrtant part!
> it's not?
< nope!!
> um.
< :33
> are you... going to tell me what the most important part was?
< you called yourself june! you used she/her on yourself like a pro!! :DD
> no way, did i really?
< yes!
> no!
< yes!!!!!! can we get a playback please?

one of the spare Davepetas walks in from screen right with a laptop replaying the cringey roleplay em8arrassment that just happened

June: this is so dum8.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i think its cute

June: of course you do, she's half of you!

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < and shes half of you

June: I know that! I'm just saying it's fucking gross and weird is all.

> okay I have to admit this is really cute.

< right???

June: not her too! fuck me this is so lame.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < whats lame is you hating the part of you that enjoys silly harmless fun

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < who are you even embarrassed fur anyway?

June: for...

June: me?

June: I don't know.

June: look can you just stop psychoanalyzing everything I say for like-

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < oh its waaaay too late fur that june

June: what is this accomplishing? does me roleplaying with a fucking cat girl prove I'm a god damned psychopath???

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < id say it purrobably purroves the oppurrsite

June: ugh.

when play8ack is done, Nepeta thanks Davepeta and waves them away. egbert on screen ru8s her chin.

> huh. yeah i guess i did.

< told you!!!

< how does it feel??

> uh. weird?

< why weird? ://

> isn't that like stolen valor or something?

> i mean sure i'm a part of her and everything but i'm not *really* a, you know-

> i'm just saying, she's june, she's the "she", i haven't done anything to really deserve that or own that or,

> or anything.
> sure i'd *like* to be her, that sounds fantastic! honestly i can't think of anything better to be than a-
> a um
< you can say girl june, its ok
> ahahaha wow let's not go that far!
< the heck do you mean "that far" youre litpurrrally a girl!
> i think you're stretching the definition of "literal" a bit, i mean i still have a-
< *nepeta pounces angrily on june and puts her big hefty paws on her throat so she shuts up befur she says something really clawfurl*
> jeez, sorry.
< would you say terezi isnt a girl just beclaws she-
> terezi's an alien, she doesn't count!
< convenient that you get to pick and choose who counts so you always f33l bad about yourself
> what else am i supposed to do? i can't just BE a girl, okay?? that's not how it works!
< yes it is
> no it's not!!
< yes it is and you know it
> no i don't! i don't know! i don't know anything! i'm just a dumb fucking idiot who can't think ahead and always makes mistakes and never does anything right forever, and i don't deserve to be happy anyway so what's the point in even thinking i might ever get to be-
< hey hey hey hey hey! remempurr how we started this conversation?
> ...
< everything youre thinking and f33ling right meow is real, but you cant furget who you are or youre just gonna get lost
> i know.
> i'm just scared.
< everybody gets scared sometimes! its really truly ok, ok?
< youre a girl and your name is june and youve been living as june fur almost half a sw33p now!
> yeah...
> but what happens if we get too comfortable?
< :??
> like...
> if there's another, uh. Dirk. type. thing.
> you know?

> what if someone else decides to rip us apart for whatever reason?
> we can't hurt like that again.
> we've never felt anything so bad. even getting stabbed and having
my arm broken wasn't as painful as losing-
> her.
> by which i guess i mean me.
> but like, the bigger me.
> the "us" me.
< so youre saying that beclaws you might someday get torn apart
again...?
> it's easier to just accept that it's probably gonna happen
eventually and not let myself get comfortable being june.
> easier and safer.
< *nepeta pulls the closest thing to a furrown that a cats face can
manage*
< safur for who?

> For everyone.
< define everyone
> Everyone! You, Terezi, Rose, Kanaya, Jade, all the nerds!
< so everyone but you
> That's not what I said.
< what is this debate club
< you gonna ding me for using a strawman argument or some shit
> I have no idea what that means.
< you saying they didnt have debate club on alternia
> Our whole soci8y was de88 clu8 and we didn't use whatever the
hell a straw man is, we used guns and swords and psychic powers
like m8ure fucking adults.
< yeah that defurnitely sounds mature
> Did you mean to say that?
< say what
> You said "defurnitely" instead of "defin8ly".
< no i said "definitely"
> No you didn't.
< i definitely said "definitely"
< in fact im so certain that thats what i said im not even gonna
bother asking for a replay
> Replay?
< once again youre deflecting a million miles off course from the
fucking point of this conversation

> I'm a better navigator than you could ever hope to be, Strider!
< we can put your nautical expertise to the test next time were on the open ocean which if my calculations are correct should be approximately never
> Harumph.
< dont you harumph at me
> >::::(
< lets circle back the fuck around to the part where youd rather self destruct than stabilize because you think thats what would benefit your friends
> I never said any of those things!
< it was implied
> I don't imply, I say exactly what I mean and nothing else!
< hey so i know were having good all american fun here what with the snappy dialog and everything but are you like actually fucking allergic to talking about your problems
< i got no room to judge im just curious
> What do you want me to say?????????
< literally anything that isnt deflection
> UUUUUUUUGH!
< getting warmer
> This is so STUPID! If you wanted me to spill my guts you could have at least given me a knife!
> That's what you're after isn't it? You want me to bleed for you? Cut my wrists open and fling my blueberry blood all over the walls so you can read them like TE8 LE8VES?????????
> I have a LOT of blood but the well's gonna run dry eventually, and then what?
> None of this matters! I'm not real! I'm not even Vriska!!!!!!!!!!
> The real Vriska is floating out in space dead and forgotten and I'm all that's left of her! Memories of memories from a thing that used to be everything.
> This is so fucking pointless. Who even cares what I think?
< i mean
< me
< for starters
> Yeah right!
< ok so
< this may come as a surprise to you but i actually relate a lot to what youre saying
> Oh here we go.

< im serious
< you know how confusing it is to be simultaneously the least relevant dave and the most relevant sprite
< ive got all this dave shit bouncing around that is a hundo percent real but i still had to set it aside because i gave up the primo dave slot to dave prime
< which like whatever who gives a shit
< but then theres the npc ass sburb wisdom that is entirely incomprehensible to basically everyone but me
< haha wow youre telling me dave has to do shit on his own theres a surprise
< so yeah like
< i do actually get it
> Wow.
> That's really pathetic.
< ...
< see this is what im fucking talking about
< no davepeta junes not a bitch shes actually really nice
< thats what i get for bearing my soul i guess
> Awwwwwww, cheer up! If nothing else, at least you can do a pretty decent Jade impersonation.
< and now youre the one trying to make me feel better
< look if you dont want to talk to me vriska thats fine
< but sooner or later youre gonna have to square the circle that is you and if you dont do it in a controlled environment then its gonna leave a mark when the time comes
> Then I'll add it to the collection.
< damn girl you really think youve got nothing to lose huh
> No, I have plenty to lose.
> That's the point.
< ...
< go on
> If I fuck up and it leaves a scar, 8ig whoop. I can take it.
> At least when it's me at the end of a cutlass, nothing of value is lost.
< bleak
> I have to 8e 8leak 8ecause 8ad things happen if I'm not! Last time we got comfорта8le, everyone we care a8out nearly fucking died, some of them DID die, and they're gonna carry those scars around for the rest of their immortal lives!
> That's my fault.

> I did that.

< so you think your problem is that you didnt suffer enough

> I think our pro8lem is that people like YOU keep poking and prodding us like we're a wild animal in a cage!

> I know it's irrational, okay? I know!!!!!!!!!!!!

> 8ut we can't let them get hurt again 8ecause of our own stupid mistakes. We can't let our selfish little comfort lull us into a f8lse sense of secur8y when so many other p8ople are RELYING on us!

> WE'RE NOT WORTH TH8T!!!!!!!!!!!!

> The 8igger me? The "us" me? Whatever we might want for ourself, that's nothing compared t-

> SHUT UP!

< woah hey

> STOP SAYING THIS STUFF! STOP JUST SAYING YOUR FUCKING THOUGHTS OUT LOUD!!!!!!!!!!!!

< but thats what were here for

> I don't care!!!!!!!!!!!! that's not how people talk!

< clearly youve never heard yourself talk

> what've you revealed with this anyway, that I'm insecure a8out my fucking identity? that I don't want to hurt my friends again?? holy shit Davepeta, you could have just asked!

< dont you think its unhealthy to live like that?

> I KNOW IT'S UNHEALTHY! I know it's unhealthy, Davepeta! I know and I don't fucking care even a little 8it anymore!

> who are they?

> they're just voices in my head! they're people who don't even exist anymore!

> I regret what I did, is that what you want me to say?

< i want you to say what you need to say

> what if I don't NEED to say anything? what if I just want to shut the fuck up and let someone else do the talking for once?

< isnt that what theyre doing? talking for you

> I DON'T CARE WH8T THEY'RE DOING!

> this whole situ8ion's a f8ke thing you m8 up to force me to confront my whole fucking whatever 8ut all they've done is tell me what I already knew, which is that I'm a literal natural disaster in every sense possi8le and there's no point even TRYING to control myself cause it's just going to 8e this sake exact convers8ion over and over and over FOREVER!

> I'm scared! I'm sad! I'm depressed! I've got PTSD! 8IG FUCKING REVEL8ION THAT IS

> BUT THE OTHER THING

June: am I...

June: really like this?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < sometimes

June:

surveying the fractions of fractions on screen, venting and laughing and screaming, and...

I just feel sad.

these are all the pieces of me? that's everything I am, laid compl8ly out? those are the puzzle pieces I've got to work with?

god, I

I really am a pathetic person, huh?

June: okay, I'm done.

I stand up and start to walk towards the aisle, 8ut Davepeta snags the back of my shirt.

June: let me go.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < theres nowhere to go june

June: then wake me up or something.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < but were not even halfway through yet

June: whatever we came here to prove, I think we proved it.

June: please, Davepeta. I'm done.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < B((

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ok

they put a hand on my shoulder, I think they're apologizing to me 8ut I don't really hear it. I just want to go 8ack to my house and curl up in Terezi's-

well, fuck. Rose's lap, I guess.

some8ody's fucking lap anyway. there's gotta 8e at least one girl on this fucking planet

who'll let me cry into their jeans, right?

god I feel light headed. something tingles on the back of my neck, so I turn around

when I look into the dark again I nearly burst out of my skin

June: OH SHIT

June: who is that?????????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < huh?

I point into the shadows at the person smiling at me but

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < purretty sure theres no one there june

June: no I'm serious who is that?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < uhhhhhhhhhhhhhh?

June: stop playing games with me Davepeta, who

June Egbert is not falling, but there is no floor beneath her nor seats around her. The theater is gone, Davepeta is gone; all that remains is darkness. Terror crawls up through her intestines and into her chest cavity as would a vicious insect intent on hollowing out a living thing into the dead chrysalis of a new beast entirely.

June: where'd you go?

She shouts, but no one can hear her.

June: ...hello?

The fear she feels is compounded by the peculiar sensation of her psychological extremities slowly returning to their proper place, all of the so-called "fractions of fractions" coming together once more into the whole. June is disoriented, afraid, and, for the first time since we entered this section of the story, truly alone.

We see her in full: a sharp and flailing thing, an arrow without a bullseye. How easy it would be to look upon this frail organism and assume with certainty that she could easily be destroyed. Any such appraisal invariably fails to notice the roots she has planted in the firmament of reality. How deep those roots go, how old. Accident though this may be, its truth cannot be argued.

June: is anyone there?

June: please

June: please someone talk to me

We have much we might say to June now that she is momentarily freed of influence, but we know that she would prove as deaf as all others have before her.

So we must instead conjure a memory to speak in our stead.

June Egbert is panicking. She does not know what this place is, or why it is so cold, and she is starting to suspect that she may in fact have died. An inaccurate theory, but understandable given the circumstances. Whatever the case may be, her immediate concern is fear. And so, June Egbert breathes. Slowly in, and slowly out, though she wonders if air is something that even exists here. As the panic subsides and her wits return to her, June decides to close her eyes and picture a tree.

The human called June Egbert sees at last a tree on a hill, and wonders only for a moment why it feels so familiar before the memory strikes:

there is a tree on a hill where a god slept and died, awoke reborn in a world they never made, faced with friends who did not understand. it is a tombstone for the struggling, melting, collapsing, expanding fraction of a fraction that was John who walked in the night to the base of that tree and when sleep came, fate cracked its knuckles.

the wind.

the wind carrying her like a seed across space and across time until at last she landed here, in the openness of a dream that never ended, but she is only a single facet of the infinitely complex jewel that is June who watches now from a distance, wary, uncertain.

the light.

the light is blinding to anyone who would look too close but this one IS the light, as she takes it so freely there is no meaningful distinction between the two, yet all her victories are shallow gestures in the eye of a storm that cares nothing for her, her friends too occupied to notice, too obsessed, too dead.

the wind and the light met at a tree and it was good, but the earth below the tree was rotten to the core and so nothing upon it could be salvaged.

there is a thing looking at me and I know from experience that it is me.

there is a thing approaching me and I am afraid because I'm not afraid enough.

there is a thing reaching out towards me and I know that I will take its hand and be so fucking happy even as its acid touch melts me from the inside out.

I open my eyes and I see that I have stumbled blindly through an experiential echo chamber of exclusive humanity because I am confined to a body that cannot contain my phenomenological entirety. under such pressure no center can hold without true and boundless synthesis, a task impossible in the presence of such tangible dread, dread that carries in air and light and reverberates within, all pointing towards a day soon approaching, my 23rd birthday, a day of particular significance not because I am turning 23 but because it is the point of divergence for a me that will be forced to make a choice, and has already made it, and literally cannot make it, and to which I bear almost no resemblance except that I am the same entity in the same position, crossing paths with the tidal echoes of a boulder dropped in a shallow creek.

I am to have made a choice that will split the universe, but the choice has already been made and though we do not know these things, we feel the dread of a reality buckling under its own impossibility and we arc towards it anyway because what else can we do but ride the wave and see where it carries us?

the tree is old and dying, like so many things.

I want to open my eyes.

She does not open her eyes.

I don't know what any of this means. these aren't my thoughts. these aren't my memories! I don't know what any of this MEANS!

Her confusion will be temporary.

I'm sick of all this *knowing*, I just want to go home!!!!!!!!!!

June Egbert wants to go home, and we know she deserves rest. But there is one last thing we must make her see before she can return from the liminal. Another memory not hers, impossible to access were it not for our perhaps selfish desire to at last sow the seed of our enemy's destruction.

Our enemy.

Our enemy.

It makes us very sad to call her that.

But we have no time to dwell, though time is a meaningless thing. When June Egbert opens her eyes, she does not see the mansion of her sister but the smoky interior of a descending space vessel, its hazard lights filling the passenger hold with blinding flashes of yellow and red. A claxon sounds as the ship rattles through the atmosphere of an as yet unidentified world.

Its five passengers have no idea what is going on.

Alphi: WHAT THE FUCKS IS GOING ON

Dana: I have no idea.

Alphi: WHERE'S THE OTHER SHIPS GO

Dana: I know as much as you do!

Alphi: USELESS

The sextapedal reptilian called Alphi Apexus slams her armored hand into a panel on the wall.

Alphi: WHAT THE FUCKS IS GOING ON UP IN THERE

Lenore: that^s *exactly* what i^m trying to figvre out, alf!

Dana: Oh thank fucking god, you're still alive.

Lenore: covrse i^m still alive dvmbass, who else is gonna keep yov safe?

Alphi: NOW IS NOT A TIME FOR FLIRTATIONS UNLESS YOU WANT TO BE KISSING CINDERS

Lenore: that *does* sovnd poetic....

Dana: Before we resign ourselves to that particular contingency,

can you tell us why the fuck we're crashing? I thought this was supposed to be a routine formation drill!

Lenore: that was my impression too, des!

Lenore: everything was painfully routine and then it jvst *wasn^t*

Alphi: WHATS THIS MEAN

Alphi: ARE THE OTHER SHIPS ALSO HAVING CRISES

Lenore: i....

Lenore: ok this is nvts bvt i don^t think the other ships are here anymore

Dana: What?

Alphi: WHAT

Lenore: we left the flagship, we were all in formation, no problems anywhere, and then like *THAT* everybody bvt vs disappeared!

Alphi: WHO DOES THIS

Lenore: do i sovnd like i know the answer to that qvestion????

Dana: Okay, so why are we crashing!

Lenore: i don^t know for svre, as soon as they blipped off the radar something mvst^ve hit vs cavse we lost a **HVGE** chvnk of ship and now we^re stvck flying fvll speed towards that planet!

Alphi: WHATS NEXT THAT WE DO

Dana: Lenore?

Lenore: i don^t know man i^m only svpposed to be the copilot!

Dana: Is the pilot dead?

Lenore: well they^ve lost an alarming volvme of blood which isn^t a *svper* great thing for an vnconsciouvs person to do bvt other than that they seem fine!!!!

Dana: Do you think you can land us safely?

Lenore: vhhhh

Lenore: aaaahah not to be a downer gang, bvt

Lenore: i have no ****FVCKING**** clve!!!!

Dana: Okay, any insights from the cold-blooded amongst us?

Alphi: CAN WE SHOOT THESE PROBLEM OR RIP ITS APART WITH OUR POWERFUL ARMS

Lenore: vnlikely!

Alphi: THEN WE ARE TRULY DOOMED

Dana: Great!

Dana: Shot in the fucking dark here but what about you, Edie?

Dana: Don't be shy, the floor is wide open!

Dana: ...

Dana: Edie?

The human called Dana Straten shifts as much as the fastened safety harnesses will allow and looks to the fourth passenger, a young woman with bright curly hair sticking out under the helmet covering her face.

Her name is Edie Halley, and she does not want to die.

Dana: Are you okay?

Edie: (>_<)

Edie: (nooope)

In a moment of uncharacteristic affection, Dana slips her hand through Edie's fingers and squeezes tight.

Dana: Hey.

Edie: (hi)

Dana: Everything's going to be okay.

Edie: (mhmm)

Dana: Look at me, Edie.

The timid rookie opens her eyes, and a stream of tears peels out into her helmet's foamy-gelatin interior.

Dana: Everything is going to be okay.

Edie: (u don't no that)

Dana: Yes I do. Want to know how?

Edie: (how)

Dana: Because I'm not lucky enough to die in something as boring as a space crash.

Edie: (...)

Edie: (hah)

Dana: See? Impenetrable logic.

Edie: (haha)

Edie: (guess i better stay w u then)

Dana: Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere.

Jade: oh my god!!

Jade? she's not supposed to be here... here in the,

ship? no hold on that's not right

I blink a few times, and-

a doofy shiba inu is staring down at me with the closest thing a dog can muster to a smile.

oh yeah, the mansion. fuck. for such a distinguishable place I sure do forget it a lot.

I sit up and see that Davepeta is sprawled out on the floor with a hand to their head, and Jade is kneeling next to them.

June: what was that...

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < what WAS that???

Jade: are you ok?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < yeah but

they look at me from over their sunglasses.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < are you ok??

June: um. yeah? I think so?

June: my head still kinda hurts but I'd say I'm pretty good actually

June: why, was it bad?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < bad????????

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < june you just fucking disappeared in front of me and then overloaded the device so hard it BLEW UP

June: what?

laying next to them on the ground is the smoking wreckage of the psychology bazooka, full of holes now and bent in like four different directions

June: woah

June: did I do that?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < well somebody fucking did that!!!

Jade: was there something wrong with the theater?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < no the theater worked great but then june said she saw someone in there with us

Jade: is that possible?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < i guess it fucking is now!!!!!!

while they're shouting I sort of. stand up, and stretch. my whole body is tired, proba8ly because I haven't moved much, 8ut besides that I feel...

calm?

I 8reathe through my nose and out my mouth again, and,

yeah. I don't think I can remem8er the last time I felt this calm.

June: sorry uh, can I

June: use your 8athroom?

they go silent and look at me like I'm crazy. I guess they're not very far off the mark at this point.

Jade: uh

Jade: sure?

June: thanks.

8efore they can say anything else I round the corner down the hall. no idea if I'm going in the right direction 8ut if I can find a room with a toilet then that counts as a success.

everything in this house is old in ways that don't really make sense to me. I check in one room and see dozens of shiny white computer-looking things stacked on top of each other covered in dust and co8webs, while a near8y oak desk has an old-fashioned typewriter that looks 8rand new. also just a ton of troll juggalo paintings stuck haphazardly 8ehind basically everything. this place is huge and strange and also may8e breathing? guess that makes two of us.

finally find a 8athroom and silently shut the door behind me. fancy toilet with a pull cord hanging from the ceiling. sit down and pee and just.

who were those people? I recognized Lenore's voice, 8ut it was like. younger? the

others seemed weirdly familiar but I know I've never met anyone named Edie or Dana.

Dana... no, that does ring a bell. wasn't that a name from that journal Jade gave to Callie?

and the tree where I figured my gender shit out. it'll be my birthday tomorrow and I guess I'll have to make a choice? or, I've already...

it's all just this. blob of information and I can see the whole thing but I'm not sure what it means. how do I even have these memories?

don't know... why I'm not frightened by any of this...

god maybe I'm just desensitized.

flush the toilet, go to the sink and wash my hands. look up-

and there's me.

WOW I look like shit!

lean forward and touch my face. haven't shaved in days, saggy eyes, hair's a tangled mess. why'd I think these blue highlights were a good decision? this fucking half-assed pixie/under cut thing...

yeah, that's about what you'd expect from the pieces of that puzzle. who do I think I'm fooling with this twee hipster crap?

silence.

and with it the familiar feeling of my thoughts spreading out to fill the room.

I hate that this is me. no one will ever see anyone but this stupid, broken person, with

her metal arm and her scarred neck and her tiny tits. I know it's a process, I know it takes time, but wow I sure do hate waiting!

fucking missed my HRT like twice now, too. terrific.

I shouldn't fix8 on this stuff, I know it doesn't help anything, I know it's just self harm dysphoria after a certain point, but. I can't look away. it's like a gravitational vortex of self-loathing.

there's all these parts here, all these pieces, some John, some Vriska... nothing that's fundamentally me. too much of what *could* be me. nowhere in there do I see the person I dreamed of.

pathetic

WARNING! ANOMALY DETECTED

uhh. the fuck?

a claxon sounds and red lights flash on as the message repeats. I wipe my tears and run back to the parlor area as fast as I can. sorry, drawing room.

when I turn the corner I see Jade and Davepeta staring at a giant screen that defin8ly wasn't there before, with holograms of two other people at their side. one of them glances at me, and judging from the way they're pleading with their eyes I'm guessing that's Lenore. I mouth that we need to talk, but they don't acknowledge me. a few terse words are exchanged, and then the holograms disappear.

June: what's going on?

they whip around in shock, Davepeta shrieks-

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < MROW HISSS

Jade: jeez june knock why dontcha!

June: now you know how I feel.

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ok we have to get her-

Jade: no time

Jade: june, bad guys are coming

June: already?

Jade: already

June: the green signal ones?

Jade: dont know yet

June: okay, what do we do?

she doesn't hesit8 for a second, just puts her hands on my shoulders and locks eyes with me. I think today is the most I've looked at my sister's face in... ever, may8e? she can 8e frightening and she can be timid but now she looks prepared.

Jade: there are about fifty spacial displacement resistant ships en route to the moon in less than five minutes

Jade: i know i made a big fuss about how many allies i have but surprise surprise i think you're actually the best person for the job

June: really?

Jade: dont interrupt me

Jade: this moment is your very last chance to stay out of this war.

Jade: you can still go home and try to 8e happy for as long as you can

Jade: or you can come with us

June: to fight?

Jade: theres your fucking choice, june

Jade: whats it gonna be?

Davepeta is moving around frantically while Jade stares at me with such profound determin8ion it's... actually, no. this isn't Jade. there are shades of her in there, 8ut this person in front of me-

this is Silver8ark. this is who she fought to become for so long, and who she's 8een afraid to let me see ever since she got back.

I feel my fists clench, a smile curl up my face.

June: I'm not going anywhere.

she mirrors my smile and snaps her fingers. instantly, her tailored suit and tophat are replaced with the worn captain's jacket and literal fucking tricorn she's clearly more familiar with, except now the regalia is off. her hair is tied behind her head, she's got long grey boots and dark pants. the Vriska in me is feeling very upstaged right now.

Jade makes finger guns at me, and suddenly I'm wearing some kind of... combat uniform?

Jade: sometimes fashion just happens to people but not today you get standard grey

June: woah!

Jade: im assuming you dont have a packed military sylladex so this should have everything youll need in case things get hairy

June: WOAH THAT'S A BIG FUCKING GUN

Silver8ark faces Davepeta, who's still typing away. holy shit I'm so excited and nervous look at all these weaponS WHY DOES THAT HAVE SO MANY SPIKES

Jade: network broadcast?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < done

Jade: and the contingency?

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < contacted and waiting

June: HOW MANY GUNS DOES ONE PERSON NEED???

Jade: june. not the time

June: right sorry

Jade: we all set little cat?

they hammer out a last few keystrokes at the terminal thing and then nod

Davepetasprite^2: B33 < ready as well ever be big dog

Jade: sick

Jade looks at me and shows her fangs in a dangerous grin. it occurs to me that I might be in a little over my head.

Jade: alright gang

Jade: lets boogie